

PIRATE TO PIRATE

DARRAGHA FOSTER

ILLUMINADO CONSTANTINE WALKED INTO THE CAFETORIUM with his ever-present smile brightening his darkly handsome Spaniard appearance. He scanned the room for a place to sit. That's when he saw her.

He stopped dead in his tracks.

The sight of her took his breath away.

His arms and legs went numb.

His spine tingled.

His vision blurred until all he could see was her face.

The hard plastic utilitarian school chair next to her was vacant.

The angel turned in her seat, seemingly drawn to his magnetic presence as he bypassed a grouping of his contemporaries—fellow custodians—and took the empty seat next to her.

Their eyes met briefly as they exchanged polite greetings.

The moment lingered between them like a thick blanket of fog, hiding everything else from view, sweetening the heavy air.

He held out his hand. "I am Illuminado Constantine."

The angel smiled. "Nice to meet you. I'm Saber MacLean."

Illuminado shifted his weight to hide the rise in his faded Levi's. "You are new?"

Saber nodded. "I was hired this morning as a long-term substitute teacher to cover for a teacher taking an extended emergency leave."

Illuminado's interest piqued to a higher level. "Hennessey? Mark Hennessey at Lanfaire Middle School?"

Saber smiled. "Yes. He left for Guatemala yesterday morning. Seems his son is in a bit of trouble down there. Married a local gal and is refusing to come home."

"You can't stop love. Hennessey will be unsuccessful. I know Latin people and they love very deeply," Illuminado replied.

"Are you from Central America?" Saber asked. "Your accent..."

"I am from Spain. The Iberian Peninsula," Illuminado replied.

"You're a long way from home."

"Ah, home is where the heart is. You know—I work at Lanfaire, as well. I am the night custodian."

"Do you clean my room?" Saber asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Anything I should know? No paperclips left on the floor and staples in the recycle bin, right?"

Illuminado shot a dark, sultry look at Saber. "Thank you. Take care of your custodian and he shall always take care of your needs, too. Many teachers—they do not understand this."

Like a dry river bed in a flash flood, Saber felt a chilling wash of wet heat course down her spine, through her nipples and belly, finally coming to rest in that sensitive place between her legs. His dark eyes and sexy accent were as good as foreplay.

"I'll do my best to make sure my room is left in good order at the end of the day, Mr. Constantine."

"Call me Illuminado," he replied.

Saber smiled—and blushed. "Illuminado."

"Saber. Saber MacLean," Illuminado said softly. "I am very happy to know you."

Together with fifty or so other school district employees, Saber and Illuminado were gathered together for the annual blood-borne pathogen training. The rule of thumb: *if it's wet and it's not yours, don't touch it.*

They exchanged interested glances and small talk, as the nurse-trainer droned through her lesson. "Who can site an example of when to use protective gear?"

Illuminado chuckled. "When making love," he replied softly.

The nurse shook her head as the good old boy custodians, coaches, noon-duties and teachers in high-risk for exposure settings broke into laughter. "Thank you for that, Mr. Constantine. Now, anyone else...?"

A barrage of replies hit the nurse. She knew they'd all had the training before. It was a pretty simple lesson. Who wouldn't glove-up?

As the meeting concluded, Saber felt a stab in her stomach that reminded her of middle school unrequited love. She'd fallen into a warm, happy place sitting next to Illuminado and did not relish the thought of heading back to her empty classroom to prepare lesson plans. At least they worked in the same school. "I guess I'll see you at the school, Illuminado. It was nice meeting you today," she said, extending her hand.

Illuminado took Saber's hand and raised it to his lips. His kiss was quick and soft, yet more penetrating than an injection. "Today I again learned that to do my job, I must wear protective gear. But as I said, there are wonderful times to use protection as well."

Saber swallowed hard. The lump in her throat wouldn't go down as she whispered, "Such

as when making love.”

Illuminado smiled. He knew he had Antonio Banderas good looks and a voice that sent American women into spirals of ecstasy. With a simple eye movement he could make a woman want him. It was a Spaniard’s way. It was something men from Costa Del Sol had in spades. “Are you offering?”

Saber knew better.

She knew better, but she wanted him, and damn it, she wanted him now. “Your place or mine?” The stereo-typical pick-up line sounded as corny as she knew it was. Unfortunately, it fit. Shades of on-the-job sexual harassment and broken school district policies!

The room had nearly cleared.

Illuminado and Saber remained seated, whispering to each other.

The nurse-trainer interjected as she packed up her gear. “Lovely. I’ve taught twenty six blood borne pathogen trainings and have never walked away with so much as an offer to get a cup of coffee. You two sit next to each other and sparks fly. Tell you what, if it’s wet and it’s not yours...”

Illuminado and Saber laughed as they replied, in unison, “Don’t touch it.”

The nurse picked up her training kit and walked briskly from the cafetorium.

Illuminado took Saber’s hand in his. “My shift starts soon. Will you be at work today? Perhaps preparing your classroom for tomorrow? I know Mr. Hennessey left in quite a rush.”

Saber nodded. “I’ll be burning the midnight oil. I’ll drink lots of black coffee tomorrow morning so that I can keep ahead of my students. They’re not expecting me, that’s for sure.”

Illuminado smiled. “Some surprises are very good. Your new students will love you.”

Saber rose from her seat. “What’s not to love, right?”

Illuminado nodded in agreement. “May I walk you to your car?”

“Gonna carry my book bag, too?” Saber asked picking up her backpack from the floor.

“Not on a first date. Maybe our next,” Illuminado teased.



It was well-after three-thirty when Saber and Illuminado pulled into the parking lot of Lanfaire Middle School, he in his late-model long bed Chevy pick up and her in the brand new PT Cruiser daddy bought her when she graduated from college.

“Do you have your keys, yet?” Illuminado asked.

Saber nodded. “I met the school secretary this morning. She gave me the room keys and my passcode. She seems very thorough.”

“She’s very good. A custodian’s best friend is the school secretary.” Illuminado walked Saber to her classroom, then set about beginning the evening’s muck-out after seven hundred students.

He enjoyed his job. He took pride in keeping a safe and tidy school. And he liked the night shift. An empty school became his playground. No...it became his ship of dreams.

Illuminado had the blood of a pirate in his veins. As a descendent of Benito de Soto, acts of piracy were a part of his DNA. And he ran a tight ship.

When he mopped the halls, he mopped the decks of his forefather's ship, *The Black Joker*. When he found coin or jewels strewn about, the lost and found box became his treasure chest. The climbing structure in the indoor play shed was his Rock of Gibraltar.

The work wasn't difficult, the pay and benefits were great and his imaginings made his nights go quickly as he swabbed the decks and swept away debris in search of buried treasure.

Illuminado had a new treasure map to follow, too. Room 207 was where "X" marked the spot.

However, he had a schedule to keep—and room 207 was off the map in uncharted waters until after his dinner break at sixty-thirty. He'd baked a paella and brought the whole pan with him to work. A fortuitous act, if ever he'd made one.

He picked up the telephone at the secretary's desk as he dusted the office and buzzed Saber's room.

"Miss MacLean," Saber answered.

"First time you've answered the phone in your new classroom?" Illuminado asked.

"Yes. But I suppose it won't be my last. What can I do for you Mr. Constantine?"

"Dinner in the staff lounge at six forty five. Will you be hungry?" he asked.

Saber took a hard breath. She was hungry, all right. Hungry for something other than job interviews, resumes, text books and sensible shoes. It wasn't forbidden for her to have a love affair with another school employee. Not even the school board could stop true love—or the reasonable facsimile—from happening. How could she resist the advances of a handsome Spaniard who knows how to clean and sanitize? Lord only knows what the man could do with duct tape! "All right. What's on the menu?"

Illuminado chuckled. *You are on the menu, Saber MacLean.* "Paella, of course. My mother's own recipe carried to America in her little handbag. I was a teenager, always hungry, and knew that once we were settled, mother would bring out the clay pot and make it for me. It is a food of celebration."

"You came over as a teen?" Saber asked.

"We came from the Iberian Peninsula when I was fourteen. My family home is in the shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar. I still have family in Andalusia region, Spain."

"Here be monsters. *Ne plus ultra. Go no further*, warned the Romans," Saber replied. "The Rock of Gibraltar was once hailed as a pillar of Hercules and the ends of earth. To sail beyond it meant certain doom."

Illuminado laughed. "This is true. Many offerings to the gods have been found on Gibraltar. They hoped to still the seas and tame the beasts that lay beyond. Of course, the

only true monsters are those in our minds—and they can be quite fierce.”

“I’ll see you in a few hours,” Saber said.

“I look forward to your tasting my paella,” Illuminado replied. He hung up the phone.

Saber cradled the handset of her phone for a few moments, feeling the heat of his gaze upon her through the wires and electronic nodes of the phone system. A hot Spaniard with burning charcoal eyes, a sexy accent—and a job. She replaced her handset and continued cutting out laminated room decorations. A pirate theme. The kids would respond to writing prompts on posters emblazon with famous pirates. At least they’d look at the posters. Maybe they’d learn something, too.

Illuminado pulled his cleaning cart to the staff lounge and parked it. He had a full shaving kit at the school in his locker. He quickly washed his hands and face and brushed his teeth. He changed out of his coveralls and into a jean shirt and jeans. He smoothed his thick dark brown hair back into a neat pony tail.

He switched the staff oven onto 425 degrees and slid in his clay baking dish full of paella. He dimmed the lights over the sofa and coffee table area and set out two plates, two forks and two ice-cold bottles of water from the vending machine.

He patted his forehead nervously. “Necesito una vela,” he mumbled. “Where are the damned candles?” There were birthday cake candles in the silverware drawer. They’d have to do. Not very romantic, but when having one minute to set a mood, any candle would do.

“Illuminado?” Saber called.

“Si, Seniorita. Te aguardo aquí,” he replied softly.

Saber giggled. “Gracias, Senior.” She paused as she entered the break room. “Oh, my. Candlelight and what is that heavenly aroma?”

“My paella. Please, be seated.” Illuminado motioned toward the sofa.

“So, tell me about growing up in the shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar,” Saber asked.

“Tell me how you got the first name of Saber,” Illuminado replied.

“You first.” She opened her water bottle.

“I shall speak while I serve our dinner, how’s that?” Illuminado began. “I have stood at the top of the world. From the top of the Rock of Gibraltar you have Europe at your feet. Africa fills one horizon, while the gates to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic are on either side. One understands why the Rock and its sister Mount Hacho in Morocco are called the Pillars of Hercules and are sacred sites in myth and legend. When I marry, it shall be at the top of the Rock, God’s most holy site.”

“You’re getting married?” Saber asked, hoping the disappointment she felt didn’t reflect in her voice.

“Not yet. First I must find a bride.”

Relief! “What did your parents do on Gibraltar?” she asked.

“Mother worked for the Brits as a bookkeeper and father ran the tram to top of the Rock.

I grew up speaking both Castilian and English. But my heart is Spanish.”

“It sounds very romantic. Why did your parents move here?”

“First, tell me of Saber MacLean,” Illuminado commanded softly, reaching a serving spoon into the clay pot.

The room filled with the scents of baked rice, saffron and olive oil as he scooped the decadent dish onto their plates.

“I’d better give you an explanation for my name now, because I think I may go into some kind of rapturous state after taking the first bite of your paella. Chicken? Sausage?”

Illuminado smiled. “Rabbit. And mussels and shrimp.”

“Rabbit?” Saber questioned.

“I told you this is my mother’s recipe. Don’t worry. Rabbit is the other white meat. With a name like Saber, you aren’t afraid of trying something new, are you?”

“My mother and father were championship fencers. I grew up at the point of a rapier. I’m Saber after their art. Of course, father was Scottish and I thank God everyday they didn’t name me Claymore. And I’ve eaten rabbit before.”

Illuminado poked his fork into the rice. “I love the color of the rice. Such a perfect golden yellow saffron makes it. Please, take a bite, my woman of steel.”

Saber slid her fork into the golden mound of rice and finely chopped vegetables, her mouth watering. The first bite sent cascades of flavor throughout her body. “Oh, my God.”

“Is good, no?” Illuminado teased.

“Oh, my God,” Saber repeated.

“Mother would be pleased with your reaction.” Illuminado took a bite of his paella, and suddenly felt the urge to join in Saber’s prayer. “Jesus Cristo. Es delicioso.”

“You can say that again,” Saber replied. “So, Illuminado, other than your mother, there is no Mrs. Constantine.”

“Correct. And I assume there is no Mr. MacLean?”

“Only my father.” Saber agreed.

“Well, then we shall have to have a third date,” Illuminado replied.

“Third?”

“I consider the training our first date. I looked at you and...well...I became my own Rock of Gibraltar. You know, I am Spanish, and we live and love passionately.”

“Oh, my. Well, I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“You stir in me feelings I have not had for a very long time,” Illuminado continued. “I do not want to frighten you, but I must get to know you.”

“Well, then we’ll have to have a third date, won’t we?” Saber replied.

Illuminado sat back. He studied Saber’s gentle motions of fork to plate and fork to mouth. He wanted to be that lucky fork, encircled by her soft lips; tasted by her warm tongue. She held her plate against her chest. Oh, to be rim of that plate, resting again her firm bosom.

“Saber,” he whispered.

“Yes?”

I want to rip your clothes off and make love to you like no man has ever made love to you before. I can give you orgasms better than how my paella tastes. “I need to finish work now. How much longer will you be in the school tonight?”

Saber withheld a crestfallen pout. *Why doesn't he just rip my clothes off and do me over the coffee table?* “I’m leaving at ten. I’ve got my lesson plans finished, but I want to finish decorating my room.”

“Ah, what is your theme?” Illuminado asked.

“Pirates.”

“You like pirates? That’s good. Very good. I know a pirate,” Illuminado paused. “I’ll be in your wing in about an hour. I get off at ten, so I’ll walk you out to our car.”

Saber reached for their dishes. “I know a pirate, too. And I’ll see you in an hour.”

Illuminado stopped her by gently placing a hand upon hers. The electricity between them held them in place; froze them in time. He encircled her hand in his and raised it to his lips. “I’ll clean up. Thank you for having dinner with me. You go to your classroom and make your pirates happy. They like attention, you know.”

He touched his lips to her hand. It wasn’t enough. He wanted more of her.

Saber sighed as Illuminado turned her hand over and planted a kiss on the pulse-point of her wrist. Her eyes rolled back and she felt her female parts blossom with readiness. Her hand still in his, she leaned forward, lifting her chin. They were so close she could feel his heat against her cheeks. One slight movement and their lips could touch. “I need dessert before we go back to work.” She breathed the words into his mouth as their lips met.

The electricity of their joined hands arced as their lips touched. As their tongues softly swirled together, the power generated between them could have lit a small city for a week. There was no sweeter or more fitting a dessert to a dinner of paella.

“Thank you,” Saber whispered against Illuminado’s lips. “I’ll see you soon. Sweep quickly.”

She backed away slowly, then turned and left the break room as calmly as she could. As soon as she knew she was out of sight and earshot, she left loose with a maniacal giggle of pure delight.

Illuminado felt drugged. Drugged by the embrace of an angel. *Muerto e ido al cielo. I am dead and gone to heaven. She is heaven. I could love this woman.*



Saber heard a soft hum coming from the corridor. It was a familiar tune. A sea shanty. A pirate’s song.

She closed her eyes and willed her bottom to stay in seated. She wanted to peek out the door. To see him as he breezed her way. She hadn't been playing hard to get—and there was no reason to start doing so now. Saber just thought perhaps it might be more fun if she waited for him to come to her.

She closed her plan book and tucked it safely into her top desk drawer. Her window blinds were drawn.

She began humming the same piratey tune as Illuminado moved closer to her classroom.

"Custodian," he called as he always did before entering a classroom at night where a teacher might still be frantically working.

"Do you always announce yourself before entering a classroom?" she asked.

"I'm not entering a classroom, in truth. I'm boarding another ship. By the looks of it, a pirate ship," Illuminado replied.

"Like my décor?" Saber asked.

"I do. Very much. I am a pirate, too."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes. I am a descendent of Benito de Soto, born in 1800. Spaniard and pirate." Illuminado paused. "He was a very defiant, hard-headed man. Rather than allow somebody to hang him, he stood on top of his coffin and calmly reached for the gallows and adjusted the noose around his own neck. It is said he smiled to the gathered crowd and exclaimed "Adios Todos!" as he jumped from the cart to his slow painful death. Even as he met death, he was braver than most men are in life."

"And I am a descendent of William Kidd. In sixteen ninety-nine my foremother, Mercy Sands Raymond, was enriched by Captain Kidd after giving him aid. Enriched, it seems, in ways more than with the gold and jewels he placed in the folds of her extended apron. She bore him a son whose descendant is me! It seems we're both pirates."

Illuminado emptied her recycle bin without skipping a beat. "So it seems, indeed. No wonder fire sparked between us as we embraced. We are well-suited to each other, lady pirate. And here I thought you were just a lovely schoolmarm."

Saber burst out laughing. "Schoolmarm? Oh, my God. That word indicates I am strict and old-fashioned!"

"No offense intended. You are neither strict, nor old-fashioned. At least that I'm aware."

"When I bring out my ruler to slap your hands, then we'll see how strict I am," Saber replied.

Illuminado's smile grew even more intense. "What must I do to be slapped?"

Saber walked to her classroom door and closed it. She turned off one bank of lights. "You need to ask, that's all."

"And if I don't ask to be slapped with your ruler, will you make me walk the plank?" Illuminado asked.

Saber approached Illuminado with the full intent of bedding him on the round braided rug in the reading corner of her classroom. She through her left arm around his neck and pulled him down into a long, hard kiss while her right hand went to the rise on the crotch of his coveralls. "Shiver my timbers," she murmured, dropping to her knees.

Casting reason aside and allowing lust and passion to consume her, Saber reached up and tugged the zipper of Illuminado's coveralls down. She reached inside the sedate gray cloth and coaxed his hardness from his dark blue boxer briefs.

"I want to walk your plank," she sighed, running her tongue along the shaft of his smooth, thick member.

Illuminado sucked in his breath and entwined his fingers in the tight curls of Saber's red hair. He exhaled with a soft, "Argh."

Saber stroked the shaft of his penis into her mouth, using her hand to heighten the act.

Illuminado slipped out of his coveralls, then replaced his hands atop her head.

One touch of her mouth against his penis and he knew he was going to burst. *I can last so much longer than this! She makes mad with desire. Crap! I'm going to come already!* "Aye, Dios Mio, Saber. I'm going to..."

Saber pulled her lips from his swollen head and stroked him to orgasm. "Thar he blows," she giggled.

Illuminado quaked in his boots for a moment before coming back down to earth. He looked down into the angelic face Saber. "I can make it last much longer, Saber. I..." he paused, seeing a look of 'who the hell cares, just do me' in her eyes. "It is my turn to pleasure you," he whispered.

He dropped to his knees and took Saber into his arms, pinning her against the braided rag rug. He tore at her clothing, eager to consume her.

He kissed his way down her body, taking great delight in exploring her nooks and crannies, hills and valleys. Saber had a fine, healthy woman's body; round in all the right places. He'd never cared for thin women. Saber's flesh beckoned to him like a tapas bar. A nibble here. A nibble there. He was saving his appetite until his lips could feast on the beautiful region between her thighs. He slid two fingers into her. She was ready. She was wet for him.

He moved his hungry mouth to her red tufted mound and buried his tongue between her labial lips. Her swollen clitoris rose to meet the tip of his tongue.

She tasted sweet and fresh. He inserted his tongue into her vagina and moved the bridge of his nose across her clitoris as he pleased her. He could taste her passion and feel her building climax against his lips.

Saber reached for his head. "Illuminado...please...make love to me."

"I am," he replied.

"No, now. In me. I want you inside me," she begged.

He didn't want to move his mouth away from her. He wanted only to feel her orgasm

against his lips. “I need you this way. Come for me,” he whispered before returning to his feast.

Saber obliged him by grabbing his head and pushing it sharply against her pelvic region as she climaxed. He didn’t pull away. He lapped at her increasingly sensitive clitoris until her back arched and her hands pulled the rag carpet’s ends up into tight balls.



Exhausted and satiated, Saber and Illuminado lay wrapped in each other’s arms on her classroom floor. A poster featuring etchings of famous pirates wafted gently in the breeze created by the room’s air-conditioner. “Our ancestors mock us,” Illuminado said.

“No, they are applauding us,” Saber replied.

Illuminado rose. “I’ll see you at ten.” He helped Saber to her feet and kissed her passionately.

“Until then,” Saber replied, reaching for her errant clothing as Illuminado zipped his coveralls and left her classroom.

Hidden behind proper and fairly conservative work attire, the throbbing in Salem’s mound teased and tormented her. She felt like putty. Weak as a kitten. She was sure she could purr if she tried, too.

She shuffled a few papers around her desk, unable to concentrate. Not a good sign. She’d certainly slept with handsome men before—and once or twice in college she’d even had the odd one-night stand—but this was different. This was on the job—and so very naughty. With the most incredibly good-looking, sexy man she had ever seen in her life. What would an affair with him be like? This was going to be a great year. A job, a steady paycheck, the ability to use her degree—and Illuminado. Her custodial pirate.

Illuminado had fallen in love quickly before. That was the way of his people. Love was everything to them—and sometimes it could flame up and burn so brightly that nothing was left but white hot ashes. He knew, deep in his soul, that he and the lovely Saber MacLean, were destined to be together. His mind was already made up. Now, how to convince the lady that his intentions were honorable?

This was more than man to woman—this was pirate to pirate.



Ten o’clock.

Illuminado was in the custodial closet near the back entrance of the school securing his equipment when a firm pinch on his rear end caught his attention. “Saber, how nice of you to drop by my closet,” he said, pulling her inside the four by six storage area. She kicked the door

closed with her foot as her arms flew around his neck and their lips met.

Illuminado pushed Saber up against the door and lifted her.

Holding her aloft with one strong arm he unzipped his fly and tore away her panties. No other foreplay was necessary. Breathing was all the stimulation they needed.

With one solid thrust, Illuminado buried his penis inside Saber. It was a long, hard upright screw against a door surrounded by mop heads, brooms and plastic garbage liners. They moved slowly against each other, each movement of groin to groin deliberate and breathtakingly pleasurable.

Saber relinquished fear, control and common sense as Illuminado made love to her upside the door. As she felt his hot release deep inside her, she opened herself up to an astonishing orgasm.

Mutual. Simultaneous.

Amazing.



“I need to see you again, Saber MacLean. Away from this place,” Illuminado whispered as he encircled Saber with his arms at the door of her car. “I need more of you than just this. You fill me so well. I am filled by you.”

Saber managed a weak nod of her head. “Yes. Yes.”

Illuminado continued, “You know, from the first moment our eyes met, I wanted you. I have never felt such a strong attraction to a woman before.”

“I understand. I’m not promiscuous, and I’ve never done something like this before—especially not at work! You just...I wanted you, too. I think we could have met anywhere, and still ended up making love,” Saber replied.



They had exchanged loving moments before exchanging telephone numbers, yet it seemed inconsequential. Their ships had formed an armada. To quote a famous movie pirate, they had *made an accord*.

After a few months of dating Saber MacLean, Illuminado wanted their relationship to be made permanent. But to ask Saber MacLean to be his wife, he knew he needed to enlist the aid of others who loved her...her students.

It was one week before spring break. The students were antsy; the staff, more so.

It was time.



Saber's classroom door was blocked from the inside. Never a good sign in middle school. She pounded her fist on the door. "Open up!" she called.

"Say the magic words, Miss Mac!" a student called back.

"Please unblock the classroom door before the assistant principal notices I'm in the hall and my students have locked me out. I do need this job, you know."

She heard a heavy scraping across the floor as the students unblocked the entrance. "Come in!" they called.

Saber opened her classroom door and stopped as the flash of a red light hit her face. "What's going on?"

"Treasure hunt," the students replied.

"No, today is Social Studies and spelling," Saber replied.

Saber looked around her classroom. The students had not only strung up red, twinkling Christmas lights, they'd moved the furniture around. "You know, you can't mutiny. What I say goes."

A student approached her, tugging a pirate eye-patch down over his left eye. He handed Saber a note.

She unfolded it and shook her head. It was a treasure map. "X marks the spot, huh?"

"Isn't that how it's supposed to work?" the boy replied.

"And I suppose I need to decipher the clues on this rather clever map and find the treasure before you'll get on with today's lessons?" Saber asked.

"That's right, Miss MacLean. We're under strict orders of the captain not to acquiesce to your instructions until you've found the treasure."

"And whom, might I ask, is your captain?" Saber asked.

"Captain Constantine," the student spokesman replied.

"I should have guessed he had something to do with this. Look...if I play along are you going to figure out how to tie it all in to our social studies curriculum?"

"Of course," the student replied.

Saber looked at her watch, then at the map. "I have to go outside according to this. I can't just leave my classroom unattended."

Each student in the room held up a bright pink hall pass. "We're going to the library. It's all arranged."

Saber shook her head. "Your captain has thought of everything, hasn't he?"

A girl opened up her backpack and removed a three-corner hat. "Put this on," she instructed.

"I am not going to wear a pirate hat," Saber replied.

The girl looked crestfallen. Saber's heart melted and she donned the black felt hat.

The entire class rose and walked by her, out the door, single file, their little pink passes held aloft. There was no talking in line, no pushing, no shoving. It was perhaps the most orderly

line-up of middle school students she'd ever seen. And Illuminado had arranged it. For her.

Saber looked at the map. From her classroom she was to take seventeen steps forward and three to the left. That would lead her to an outside door.

She followed the trail.

After twenty steps she stood before an envelope which had been taped to the wire-mesh door window. She opened it. Silver and gold confetti spilled out of the envelope, along with a small pebble. Like pea gravel. An odd clue.

Saber opened the door and took thirty seven steps to the right. This put her in the middle of the covered play shed. Another envelope awaited her.

It was heavier than the first, and an odd bulge in the paper told her that something more than pea gravel was inside. She pressed the shape of the object through the envelope, breaking through the paper. "It's a toy airplane. What is going on?"

A little tag had been tied with a string to the fuselage. She read the single word written on the tag. "Will." Saber looked at the map. The next forty steps took her through the play shed and into the teacher's courtyard. "Will who? Will I what?"

The teachers had a picnic table in their courtyard. A large, fairly realistic ball and chain graced the tabletop. Surrounding it was more of the silvery-gold glitter. "A ball and chain. All righty then."

The map took her inside.

Another envelope awaited her in the empty cafeteria set out on a chair in the middle of the room.

She ripped it open. A 3x5 card fell out, baring a single letter. "U." Saber tried to make sense of the clues as she proceeded on the final leg of her treasure hunt.

"A rock. A toy airplane. Will. A ball and chain. U." She opened what she hoped was her final door and climbed the three steps upward. She was in the back of the stage in the auditorium, having walked all the way around the school.

A nautical-sounding bell chimed from beyond the back curtains of the stage. She peered out.

A group of students stood on the stage, in a cardboard pirate ship.

One of the girls in the group giggled as Saber came onto the stage. Illuminado walked out from stage right. "X marks the spot," he whispered. "Climb aboard your ship."

Saber smiled. "Permission to come aboard, sir."

The boy at the helm nodded.

Saber stepped over the three-inch rise of the nicely-crafted stage prop and took a seat on a little bench near the stern. An old-fashioned sea chest, painted with gold glitter awaited her.

"What clues have you found on your journey?" Illuminado asked.

"Ah, yes. The clues. Before I list them, my compliments to your wrangling of my class. How did you get them to keep a secret?"

Illuminado smiled. "I'm a pirate. They love pirates."

"All right. I have a rock. An airplane. A word, a letter and a ball and chain. I have no idea what it all means."

"Open the chest," Illuminado whispered.

Saber looked at the ball and chain she'd hauled in from the cafeteria. Illuminado...this is..."

"Open it, Saber," he replied.

The costumed and play-acting middle schoolers twittered in the background.

Saber opened the sea chest. A spotlight hit the contents. There were kids at the controls. Illuminado was directing quite an epic production!

She sucked in her breath and held it as the contents of the chest became visible.

Tickets. Airline tickets. Two of them.

Saber opened the flap on one of them. Delta airlines to New York. New York to Madrid. Madrid to Gibraltar. "Spain?" she asked.

Illuminado smiled. "Si."

Saber read the ticket details. "These are first class—and for next week! Illuminado..."

"Open the other items. Open them, Saber. You have already put this all together in your heart."

Saber reached into the chest and withdrew a velvet-encased drawstring bag. Inside the bag was the clear outline of a ring box. She didn't open the bag immediately.

The anticipation in the air was so thick it could be cut with a knife—but she waited. Waited and considered.

If this is what it now very clearly appears to be, is it what I want?

If it was not a proposal of marriage from the incredibly sexy Illuminado Constantine, then what could it be?

Do I even want to get married?

He's going to want children. He said as much over dinner two weeks ago.

Do I want children? I may teach them, do I want any of my own? Do I want his children?

All eyes were upon her. She was nervous enough without having the eyes of her class glaring at her in a non-classroom setting. Waiting for her to open the bag.

She slid the polished white ring box out from the velvet. A large "X" marked the lid.

"X marks the spot," she whispered before opening the box.

Inside the box was another note, neatly folded up.

She set the box aside and unfolded the note. It read simply, Look at me.

She looked at the other clues. A rock. Another name for a diamond. A name for Illuminado's choice of venue for a wedding. The Rock. At the top of the Rock. Will. U. Will you marry me? Will you fly to Spain and marry me on spring break atop the rock of Gibraltar? *Then go*

BDSM with me and the ball and chain.

Saber giggled. She knew the ball and chain represented one aspect of marriage—but she liked her idea better. She and Illuminado hadn't yet explored the darker aspects of love making. Of course, if she looked up at him, as his note commanded, then she might be sealing her fate and end up having many years with which to explore such things.

I am descendent of a woman who stood up to a pirate and came out wealthy for her initiative and backbone. Why is it so hard to look at him?

"Saber," he said softly.

She raised her chin, and looked at Illuminado. And the brilliant diamond engagement ring in his hand.

He took her left hand in his, and slipped the ring onto her finger. "Do we have an accord, mate?"

Saber looked at her left hand. The ring's weight was going to take some getting used to. "We have an accord. Pirate to pirate. Man to woman."

Illuminado kissed Saber, whispering against her lips amidst the applause and joyful cries of the students, "Husband to wife."

"*Ne plus ultra.* Go no further," Saber said placing her lips against Illuminado's ear. "At least not in front of the crew."

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