



THE PIRATE'S DARK REVENGE

By

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ISBN 1-58608-996-x
New Concepts Publishing
www.newconceptspublishing.com

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Prologue

In a ghastly dance of nature, the winds teased the dark swirling sea, prodding her violent nature, daring her to erupt with her icy fingers of death. Streaks of blue lightning illuminated the black horizon, revealing masses of sinister clouds resembling Satan's own minions.

Not even the fierce gales could drown out the agonizing screams of the dying, their cries reaching out across the night in damnation of their betrayers. Fire erupted, a macabre inferno that cast a hellish light on the grisly scene of death.

The night trembled with the explosive fire of countless guns, sending clouds of smoke to choke the life from those who could still breathe in the acidic air. Another thunderous explosion cracked through the night filling it with the sound of timber splintering into millions of pieces. The ship's golden figurehead was sent spiraling into the shadowy depths of the sea.

Dark emotionless eyes watched as the frothy black water swallowed the figure.

Chapter One

Rebecca woke with a start. Gradually, layers of murky fog peeled away from her consciousness until she became aware of her surroundings. The gentle rocking of the boat helped to sooth her tattered nerves. She had arrived in the Caribbean three days ago, and every night since then she'd had the same dream.

Leaving the warmth of the bed, Rebecca slipped on a silk wrap and went above. The deck of the *Sea Brat* was cool against her bare feet, and the soft tropical breezes caressed her skin as gentle as a lover's touch.

She reached down between her breasts to touch the cool metal of her grandfather's ring. Briefly she wondered if *it* might have something to do with her strange nightmares, but she quickly dismissed the idea as absurd.

When she'd arrived in Jamaica to settle her grandfather's affairs, she'd been given the *Sea Brat* and the ring. That had been all of her grandfather's earthly possessions. Grandpa had been an old salt, the sea was in his blood like it was hers. The Ashtons had been seafaring people for hundreds of years, and like so many before him, the sea had finally claimed old Captain Ash.

Tears pooled in her green eyes to roll down her cheeks. Captain Ash had been her last living relative, and now Rebecca Ashton was completely alone in the world.

The memories flooded back ... the call informing her that the *Sea Brat* had been found abandoned at sea, her frantic flight to the Caribbean, and her stubborn inability to accept the obvious.

They had done a complete sweep of the boat, but had found no trace of any foul play. The conclusion had been that old Captain Ash had partaken of too much rum and fallen overboard, but Rebecca was still not convinced.

It's the Ashton Curse. Rebecca imagined her grandfather's voice issuing that dire warning.

"What utter nonsense." Rebecca reaffirmed her disbelief in the family curse. Sure many members of her family had died at sea, but that was not really surprising when you consider they had always been seafaring people. She herself was an archeologist specializing in underwater excavations.

Rebecca reached for the chain that held her grandfather's ring. It was the ring that didn't make any sense. She knew it was her grandfather's because he had taken it out once to show her, but he never wore it. Captain Ash firmly believed that the ring was linked to a pirate's curse on their family. He had always kept the ring locked away in a box, but when the *Sea Brat* was found, the ring had been discovered on the deck.

Taking the chain from her neck, she attempted to study the ring under the bright light of the moon. Molded in gold was a sword crossed with a rose and on the back were the words, *Dark Revenge* and the initials *J.S.*

Rebecca shook her head. *A pirate's curse, what baloney.*

A nagging sensation kept intruding into her thoughts. She could not feel that cold, open

void that should be there if he were truly gone, this alone made her wonder.

Had his obsession with the curse had something to do with his disappearance?

Even if there were some truth to this pirate's curse, she didn't have a whole lot of clues to go on.

She replaced the chain, then took a moment to just breathe in the fragrant sea air and gaze in wonder at the beauty of Kingston Harbor beneath the full Caribbean moon.

As a scientist, Rebecca relied heavily on tangible fact and was not given to flights of fancy as her grandfather had been. To waste so many years of your life searching for phantoms was not Rebecca's style, and this was why she'd defiantly attached the ring to a chain and hung it around her neck. The curse was ridiculous, and she'd prove it.

"It be a lovely sight to be sure." The deep male voice seemed to come from everywhere at the same time.

Startled, Rebecca took a step back and would have gone overboard if not for the boat's rail. By the light of the moon she could make out few details of the man who was boarding the *Sea Brat* by way of the dock. He had deeply tanned skin with longish black hair, and he wore a bandanna atop his head as a pirate might have done hundreds of years ago.

Her thoughts raced, and she instinctively backed away from the intruder. *What could she use for a weapon? Was this even real or just another dream?*

"Me deepest sorrows for bringing a fright to ye, lass," he said with a smile.

"What do you want?" Rebecca feigned anger, though the only emotion she could really identify was fear.

"There's been tales that this vessel be for sale."

The man took a few steps closer, and she could now make out more details. He was strikingly handsome in a very rough sort of way. His eyes were so dark as to be indistinguishable from the night. The moon reflected in them as it did in the black waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Rebecca found it nearly impossible to look away from those hypnotic eyes, but at last the warning bells of her subconscious penetrated her thoughts. "How can that be? I've only just arrived in Kingston and have made no definite plans to sell. Besides, it is the middle of the night, do you expect me to believe that you are here to buy a boat?"

"Believe or not, lass, it be the truth," he told her, gracefully lifting his right hand as if he were taking an oath.

"Well, you heard wrong, Mister, now I'll have to ask you to leave."

Rebecca noticed he'd made his way closer to where she stood. Terror gripping her heart, she groped around for something, anything that she could use to hit him with if he should decide to attack her.

A strong gust of wind tugged at her wrap, whipped at her long auburn curls. Looking down she found that her robe had fallen open to reveal the golden ring that rested between her breasts.

His eyes scanned the contours of her body, which were outlined very revealingly by the thin material of her nightgown. Rebecca felt herself grow hot with embarrassment under his intense gaze.

Again their eyes locked, and she found it impossible to pull hers away. She could feel herself sinking deeper and deeper into their depths.

"Now, Rebecca, if me intentions be to attack ye, methinks I could have done so already." His voice came to her as if from far away.

"What do you want from me?"

"Perhaps that be for ye to discover, fair lady."

Rebecca felt a strong arm encircle her waist, and he took her hand firmly in his. She could not scream ... she could do nothing, for those seductively sinister eyes paralyzed her.

From some far-off place her ears caught the sound of soft music, and the strange man led her into a graceful waltz on the deck of the *Sea Brat*.

"Who are you?" Rebecca asked in an attempt to force reality into focus.

Beneath a thin black moustache he smiled, revealing two rows of dazzling white teeth with the exception of one gold tooth. "Think about it, love. Ye know who I am."

He held her tight as they twirled to phantom music beneath the light of a full moon.

This can't be happening, it has to be a dream. Rebecca told herself this over and over again as they continued to dance. She had not the slightest desire to wake or to resist when she felt his lips claim hers and his tongue invade her mouth.

It was as if someone else possessed her, and this person wanted this man. Wanted to be here with him under the moonlight, wanted to feel his arms around her and to make love to him right out in the open.

He let out a deep throaty laugh. "Do ye want me, little Rebecca?"

"Yes." She heard herself answer but at the same time wondered where the answer was coming from.

"Would ye die for me?" he whispered in her ear.

"Yes," she heard herself answer again.

"Mayhap ye will, love."

"Take me now, make love to me now!" Rebecca's voice held an urgency that came from somewhere deep within her. She had simply stopped trying to hold onto rational thought.

For the first time the eyes that had held her transfixed released their grip slightly. Their darkness raged with battling emotions.

Rebecca felt herself falling to the deck and then feather light kisses on her lips.

She desperately tried to keep her eyes open, instinctively knowing that she must, but she found it an impossible task. She fell deeper and deeper into oblivion.

* * * *

The harsh tossing of the *Sea Brat* penetrated her deep slumber, but it was the roughness of the deck against her skin that sent her mind into full consciousness. Rebecca's aching muscles screamed in protest when she tried to move.

Her eyes flew open and were met by black, threatening clouds. A storm was brewing, and the sea had grown rough. The night before came back to her, and it was like being splashed in the face with iced water.

Had it been another nightmare, only this time she had walked while in a slumber? In the midst of the dream had she lain on the deck to sleep?

With effort, Rebecca got to her feet, but the sight that met her eyes sent her reeling once again. In all directions there was nothing but the sea.

This was impossible! The *Sea Brat* had been firmly docked in the harbor and had been for some time. She had checked it herself on her first night aboard. It would have taken the force of hurricane winds to send this boat out to sea, and then it probably wouldn't have been in one piece.

There was only one answer, her dream had not been a dream, and her intruder had set her out to sea. But who was he and what purpose would he have to do that?

Those were questions she would deal with later because right now she was in some real trouble. A big storm was brewing up fast, and Rebecca had no idea where she was. There was no land in sight.

Below deck, Rebecca found her grandfather's radio and switched it on, only to be greeted with heavy static. Knowing she had to try anyway, Rebecca picked up the radio's transmitter. "Mayday, this is the *Sea Brat*, mayday."

The static continued uninterrupted. Rebecca shivered, and an unbidden sense of doom settled over her.

Someone was walking over her grave.

She had no idea where the thought had come from, but she quickly pushed it aside. She was in serious trouble if she couldn't raise someone on the radio. If she set her course east, she might possibly come across one of the many islands that dotted the Caribbean, but maybe not in time to avoid getting caught in the storm that was creeping up.

"Hello down there!" a male voice called from above.

Rebecca froze, remembering her intruder of the night before.

Quietly, she searched through the galley until she found a large knife. Hiding the weapon behind her, she started up to the deck of the *Sea Brat*.

Emerging from below, she came face to face with another stranger. The man stood on the deck watching her, his features pasted with a mixture of amusement and anger. He was dark skinned and wore his long black hair in dreadlocks.

"Hey, mon, what ya doing out here on a day like this?" he asked.

"Who are you?" Rebecca demanded, still keeping the knife behind her back and out of the stranger's sight.

"Mon, don't be like this." He lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "I'm Chey, yer grandfather be a friend of mine. Saw de *Sea Brat* was gone and thought I best find ya before ya was a victim of ole Davy Jones' Locker like ole Ash."

It was at this point that she noticed the man's boat secured to the *Sea Brat*.

What if he was a pirate and she was his next victim as her grandfather had been before her?

"What do you know about my grandfather's disappearance?" Her voice held more than a hint of suspicion.

"Oh, I guess de old man was looking for *Isla de Niebla* and the *Dark Revenge*." Chey shrugged his shoulders. "He was obsessed with that ole legend."

"What is *Isla de Niebla*?"

"Mist Island," he answered.

"Go on ... where is this island?"

Again Chey shrugged his shoulders. "'Tain't on de maps, maybe it don't exist."

Chey appeared to be sincere enough, but there had been a flicker of something in his eyes when he had spoken of the *Dark Revenge*.

"I don't believe you! I think you know more than what you say."

"Let's be getting de *Sea Brat* back to Kingston, then I'll tell ya what I know. But it isn't much," he warned.

Chapter Two

The *Sea Brat* was secured once again to the docks but still felt as if it was being tossed around like a toy. Rebecca and Chey took shelter below while they waited for the storm to pass.

"What do ya know about the family curse?" Chey asked her.

"I know it's nonsense," she told him.

He continued to stare at her with those dark eyes that could dance with amusement at the same time they seemed to be warning her of something just beyond her grasp of understanding.

"Okay, okay," Rebecca relented. "What I know is that all the Ashtons are cursed to die at sea, and that Captain Ash believed that the ring had something to do with it. The story that his own grandfather had told him was that it had been stolen from a pirate over three hundred years ago, and that it must be returned to the pirate's grave to break the curse."

"Ole man Ash believed that pirate was on the *Dark Revenge* when it sailed out of Port Royal in the summer of 1692. Mon, that ship and all that were on it disappeared and were never heard from again." Leaning back in his seat, Chey spoke as casually as if he were discussing the weather.

"What about this mysterious island?"

"Ah, like I said, if it does exist, it may be tied into all this. Legend says that this island was where the *Dark Revenge* made berth, the captain's hideout I suppose. Many have searched for this island because it is believed that all the booty the *Dark Revenge* took still remains hidden there."

"But no one has actually ever found this island, right?" Rebecca was skeptical.

"Who knows, mon?" Chey shrugged. "Anyone who has ever gone looking for it has never returned. The island is said to lie in the middle of a dead zone, that's an area of the sea that is no good. It's something like the Devil's Triangle."

"Oh, that is ridiculous!" Rebecca smiled.

"Like or not, it be all I know," Chey told her.

"Will you help me find this island if it *can* be found?" Rebecca was unconvinced of the island's existence at all but thought it was as good a place as any to start looking for her grandfather.

"You be crazy, girl. I don't want no part of searching for *Isla de Niebla*." Chey smiled, but she could tell he was dead serious.

Rebecca decided not to push the issue, for she had plans on searching out the island herself. It shouldn't be too hard. If her grandfather had been searching, he would have had the coordinates marked on a map, and the map would be someplace on the *Sea Brat*.

Rebecca would not let on to Chey what her plans were, for he would surely attempt to stop her. "I'm sure the place doesn't really exist anyway."

Chey let out a deep throaty laugh. "You ain't pulling the wool over ole Chey's eyes one bit, crazy girl. You're gonna try and retrace your grandfather's last voyage ... alone."

"He is my grandfather, would you expect anything less?"

Chey just shook his head and smiled.

* * * *

The storm had cleared, leaving behind a balmy night in its wake. Rebecca found that she couldn't sleep, her plans to set sail for the fabled *Isla de Niebla* kept running through her mind.

Just as she'd suspected, her grandfather had a map, and, according to it, the island was located in the waters southeast of Port Royal.

Finally giving up on sleep, Rebecca left her bed and slipped on a light dress. There was no sense in tossing and turning all night, she might as well take a walk on the beach. It was a shame to waste such a lovely night in any case.

Rebecca had only been to Jamaica once before in her life, and that was when she had visited her grandfather a few years before. Her parents had drowned during a hurricane that had hit Florida when she was very young. Miraculously, she had been saved, and Captain Ash had come to Florida to take care of her after he had learned of the unfortunate fate of her parents.

Her grandfather had taken to calling her a sea brat, and from that time on, his vessel had become known as the *Sea Brat*, named for her.

Childhood memories of her grandfather kept replaying themselves over and over again until she realized that she had made her way to the beach with no recall of the walk from the harbor.

Had Captain Ash's foolish obsession with the pirate's curse been his undoing after all? Rebecca settled back in the sand and let her mind wander. The sea had taken all that she had ever loved in one way or another, but to believe it was a curse was just a little too much to swallow.

A heavy sadness entered her heart, and suddenly the dark waves that licked at the shore pulled at her, inviting her into the depths of that dark water.

All that had ever meant anything to her lay at the bottom of the sea.

Rebecca shook off the thought, wondering where it had come from.

"Don't let's do something so foolish, at least not yet." The deep, silky voice came from the darkness behind her.

Rebecca jumped up to face the stranger, ready to flee.

He stood there, barely a dark outline silhouetted by the moon.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

His only answer was dark laughter, but he stepped forward, and the silvery light illuminated his handsome features.

"Okay, this is just another dream," Rebecca muttered. "I really never left my bed, and I am, at this moment, sound asleep."

Taking another step back, she willed herself to either wake up or turn and walk away. It was too late, those hauntingly sensual eyes were already taking control of her.

His hand caressed her face, her shoulders, but his eyes never strayed from hers. "Ye know me, don't ye?"

Rebecca could not speak.

"Your soul knows me, your heart be mine, and your body yearns for me touch."

She knew the truth of his words but did not know how it could be or why it was true, that somehow her heart and soul knew this man. "I love you," Rebecca whispered, realizing at the same time that she uttered the words there was no doubt in her heart she truly did love this man, whoever he was.

He nodded.

"No! No! No!" Rebecca struggled to regain some control of her thoughts. "You are no more than a figment of my imagination. I've conjured up some phantom lover because I have been alone too long and under too much stress." Rebecca spoke forcefully but still found herself unable to break the spell he'd cast on her.

He made no effort to respond to her outburst but leaned down to lightly kiss her lips.

Rebecca's throat constricted painfully. She was feeling such profound pain and loss that the mere effort of breathing was nearly impossible.

Trembling at his touch, Rebecca surrendered to her emotions. Her tears flowed freely because, though she wanted nothing more than to spend eternity in his arms, she instinctively knew that it could not be.

"It has always been your decision," he whispered before taking control of her lips once again, taking her senses to a place that had only existed in fantasy. "Come to me, love, and take your place beside me for all time." He lifted her easily into his arms and carried her as if she were no more than a small child.

Nothing existed for her outside of his captivating presence, she heard nothing but his words, felt nothing but his touch and saw nothing but those dark, erotic eyes. Not even the cool water of the sea could extinguish the fire that burned within her.

She began to choke, and no longer was her vision filled with the handsome features of her dark phantom, but with water--seawater.

Someone was shaking her, she was coughing and struggling to breathe. She was on the sand with Chey who was trying to get her to breathe again. Within a few seconds she was able to take painful breaths on her own.

"You little fool," Chey yelled. "What were ye trying to do, you crazy girl?"

Rebecca shook her head, not understanding what he was talking about. "What do you mean?" It was agony to force the words out from between her blue lips.

"Ye be so obsessed with that foolish curse that ya be trying to fulfill the thing." Chey was still in a bad temper.

"What happened to the man that was here?" Rebecca asked as her eyes scanned the beach for any sign of the dark stranger.

"What ya be talking about, crazy girl? I didn't see anyone but you face down in de water."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, I don't even remember going into the water. I was with some guy here, and it was the second time I've seen him." She was regaining some of her spunk, and it came through in the forcefulness of her voice.

Chey just stood there shaking his head.

"How did you find me anyway?" Rebecca stood and attempted to brush some of the wet sand from her dress.

"Mon, I be standing on de deck of my *Bessie Mar* and saw you walk to the beach. I be getting a bit worried when ya was gone for a while," he explained.

Rebecca just stared at him.

"Girl, what ya thinking to go in de water alone in the night?" Again, Chey held up his hands in a gesture of total confusion.

"There was someone here with me, and there was someone on the boat with me last night." Rebecca tried to muster as much conviction as possible, but even she herself was not completely sure that she wasn't losing her mind.

"Hey, mon, if this was to convince me to go with ya to look for de island, you've done it.

No way can I let ya go alone, not with dis crazy mind ya have.”

Rebecca smiled. “Chey, I have known you for less than twenty-four hours, and you’ve already saved me from being lost at sea and from drowning.” She paused as she linked her arm with his, and they began walking back to the docks. “I can’t think of anyone else I’d rather have at my side than you.”

* * * *

The calm turquoise waters reached out to the horizon, meeting with the deeper blue of the sky. There wasn’t as much as a patch of land in sight. Chey and Rebecca sat together on the deck studying Captain Ash’s maps. They were two days out and still couldn’t find anything.

Chey had seen the map before, and Captain Ash had shown him where he thought the island was. As close as they could figure, their current coordinates were very near to where the *Sea Brat* had been found drifting.

“Mon, dis map say we should be seeing de island by now,” Chey commented as he once again picked up the binoculars and scanned the horizon.

“We’ll just stay the course, maybe grandpa was off a bit on his locations.” Rebecca joined him in searching for any sign of land.

Chey looked doubtful. “I be thinking it’s time to turn back.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot, the Dead Zone, right.” Rebecca smiled.

“Don’t be making laughs, crazy girl. Lots of good sailors have gone missing in dis area. Your grandfather be one of them.”

Determined, Rebecca steered a course right into the Dead Zone. Not only did she not believe the curse had any foundation, but people didn’t just disappear. If there was in fact an island, possibly her grandfather had somehow made it there. She had to know for sure what happened to him.

Moments later, Chey handed her the binoculars. “There is something out there, mon.”

Rebecca scanned the water and was not totally surprised to see a little speck of land in the distance. “It really does exist.” Her voice held the excitement of a little girl who had just found a new toy.

Rebecca set their course straight toward that speck on the horizon. “This is not too far from where they found the *Sea Brat*, there is a chance Captain Ash made it to that island,” she called to Chey from the helm.

“Mon, something not be right here,” Chey commented as he continued to watch the speck of land getting bigger and bigger.

“What do you mean?”

“Take a look see at them black clouds, mon. Didn’t de weather report say it would be clear skies today?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Weather out at sea has its own whims.” She was too excited at their find to worry about a few clouds.

A dark shadow had cast itself over Chey’s features, this gave Rebecca a moment’s pause.

“Come on, Chey, we live in the 21st century. You are not going to let an old myth put a scare into you, are you?”

“Hell yeah, mon. Haven’t ya heard a word I been saying? No one has ever returned from *Isla de Niebla*.”

Rebecca brought their speed down deciding to let the *Sea Brat* drift up to the island slowly. She knew very well there could be reefs surrounding the island that could promptly bring them down if they were not careful.

“Chey, please understand, this is my grandfather we are talking about. If there is even a slight chance he is alive, I need to check it out.” Rebecca’s green eyes misted over with tears, the emotion she had been holding back for days beginning to break through.

“Yeah, I know.” Chey smiled impishly. “But ya still a crazy girl.”

Above them the sky had turned gloomy, fingers of rolling black clouds seemed to reach down to the sea as if they made ready to capture those who dared to enter these waters.

Rebecca shook off the dismal thought.

The water had become choppy, causing the *Sea Brat* to lurch violently.

To Rebecca, the world seemed to have slowed to a crawl, the events unfolding as if life itself had been put into slow motion. Her heart filled with terror as she began sliding from the deck. A giant wave rose up out of the water--a huge hand scooping her off the deck and into the raging sea.

Chapter Three

Rebecca felt herself sinking into the swirling waters of the Caribbean Sea, and the only thing that ran through her mind was that her grandfather had been right, the sea had taken them all.

The instinct for survival took hold of her, and she let her thoughts go blank as she struggled to swim up.

Something had wrapped itself around her ankle and was pulling her back into the depths. Kicking her leg, she tried in vain to free herself from whatever had a hold of her.

Lightning erupted on the surface, illuminating the water with a blue, ghostly light. What she saw in that instant, doused her with a horror she had never known before.

Below her was the dark outline of a ship's mast, and drifting up from the dark caverns of that dead ship were rotting corpses. The grip on her ankle tightened, and it began to drag her deeper into the watery grave.

Again the water was aglow with that horrid blue light, and the water that surrounded her seemed to crackle with the electrical energy absorbed from the lightning. This time, Rebecca didn't dare look below her but renewed her fight for freedom. As if on cue, the vise around her ankle was gone, and she frantically fought to reach the surface of the water.

An eternity passed before she finally emerged from the water and took several agonizingly painful gasps of air. In that moment, all that mattered was the sweet fresh oxygen filling her lungs.

"There be a wench in the water," a voice she didn't recognize called out from somewhere above her.

Rebecca turned toward the source of the voice, her mouth dropped open. Not far from where she'd broken the surface was a huge ship of a kind that no longer sailed these waters, its mast was bare of sails as if it were getting ready to weigh anchor.

A blanket of utter confusion wrapped around her. The *Sea Brat* was nowhere to be seen, but the island was still visible in the distance. There was no evidence of the storm that had accosted them moments before. The sky was clear, and the blue Caribbean waters sparkled like a sea of jewels.

She took all this in within an instant of hearing that voice. Too confused to even think, she just wanted out of the water. "Hey!" she yelled to the odd looking man peering down at her. "Can you help me out of the water?"

Another man was at the ship's rail, he was bald with a ghastly appearance that might have frightened her under normal circumstances, but right now she was too disoriented to be afraid.

"Cap'n says to bring her up," the man said loudly to his shorter, scruffy looking companion.

The pair flung down a rope ladder, and Rebecca wasted no time in swimming to it. It was as if her limbs were weighted down, and she found it extremely difficult to navigate her way to the top of the ladder.

The two men helped her over the ship's rail, and as soon as her feet touched the worn wooden deck she felt her legs give way and the sky began to spin. A comforting coverlet of darkness enclosed her and then there was nothing.

* * * *

Rebecca became aware of a gentle rocking that seductively tempted her to surrender to that dark world of nothingness once more. Struggling against the oblivion that threatened to overtake her, she forced her eyes open.

Her sight was blurred, and she found that she couldn't focus on anything. There was a slight flickering of light dancing just beyond her vision.

As the seconds passed, blurry objects began to take on actual shapes and definition.

It appeared she was in a small, nearly bare room. On a crude wooden table burned an oil lamp, beyond that there did not seem to be anything else other than the pile of straw she lay on. The coarse woolen blanket that covered her carried the scent of a hundred unwashed bodies.

Rebecca quickly threw the blanket off and tried to stand but soon found the task to be much more difficult to accomplish than the thought had been, so she pushed herself into a sitting position and leaned back against the wall.

Her thoughts whirled around in her head so fast that it was difficult to grasp one single rational idea.

What had happened, how did she get here?

She remembered the wave sweeping her overboard, but after that her memory became misted, and she was left with little recall and a distinct feeling of dread.

The wooden door on the other side of the cabin creaked as it swung open. In the shadows stood a large man with a grotesquely disfigured face. Rebecca quickly fought off the feeling of revulsion she was sure must show in her eyes.

He was very dark, probably of African descent she decided, but one side of his face was scarred beyond recognition as human. The man had obviously been severely burned in some mishap, but with so many advances in medical technology Rebecca was surprised he would still appear so disfigured.

"Who be you?" a deep, monotone voice crept out from scarred lips.

"I'm Rebecca Ashton. Can you tell me who you are and what vessel this is?"

"Who I be is no matter. You be on the *Dark Revenge*, Siren."

Smiling, she felt sure that Chey had to have arranged this as some kind of a joke. No wonder he had finally agreed to come with her on her search, this was probably his way of teaching her a lesson.

"A pirate ship, I take it." Rebecca could barely retain her laughter. She had to give it to Chey, everything appeared to be very authentic. Briefly she wondered if she should play along for a bit or demand to be taken back to the *Sea Brat*.

"Aye, a pirate ship, but ye had to know that."

"Since I nearly drowned, I don't think I was paying a great deal of attention to what was happening. Where is my boat, the *Sea Brat*?"

The man shook his head. "It were only ye in the sea, poppet. No ship."

"That's impossible, and I really think the joke has gone on long enough, I would like to talk to Chey."

"There be no Chey. Just de ole Jester, that be me."

"Okay, what about your captain, can I see him?" Rebecca had decided that enough was enough. A little joke was one thing, but she had come out here to search for her grandfather.

He gave her what passed as a smile. "Poppet, ye can't go about half clad." He motioned toward her.

Looking down, she realized she was still wearing the same shorts and blouse she'd had on earlier.

But what was the big deal?

A deeply amused laugh floated from the shadows behind the old man.

"*Pirates, fair lady!*"

The rough male voice was familiar to her, but she could not quite grasp the memory.

"Do ye think ye would reach the captain's quarters without being accosted, in view of your lack of dress?"

The owner of the incredibly hypnotizing voice stepped forward from the shadows until the glow of the oil lamp illuminated his dark features.

Rebecca gasped, scrambling to her feet. *It was he*, the phantom lover who visited her during those insane episodes where she had thought she was losing her grip on reality. She was more convinced than ever that it had all been a joke, and they were quite amused at her expense.

"Okay, people, this has gone on long enough. I hope you were quite entertained, but it is over." She glared at them. "You can take off the makeup now," she said to the man called Jester.

Jester's intense glare came to rest on her, and she was a little surprised to see genuine anger in them, but her phantom lover simply continued to give her a lopsided grin. She walked over to him and looked up into his face. "And you, Mister, I should call the police for you attempting to molest a woman in the middle of the night, even if it was part of the joke."

His dark eyes danced with laughter. "Ye, fair maiden ... are completely mad."

Slowly he focused those amazing eyes on her face, his gaze moving down to her neck where her grandfather's ring hung suspended on a golden chain. Quickly, his expression changed to one of confusion.

Reaching down, he gently lifted the ring to examine it. The move was so unexpected that Rebecca did not even react. Dropping the ring, he studied his right hand with something close to amazement. "Me mates have a mind that ye be a mermaid, or a sea witch, but meself can take no note of such."

"Nice touch..." Rebecca gave him a charming smile, "but I would really like to have the *Sea Brat* back now."

With one hand, he motioned for his first mate to leave them.

The door closed, and he stepped closer to Rebecca. "Now, fair lass, ye be telling me how ye came to have that ring."

"This is my grandfather's ring."

"Nay, that be me ring that were just on me finger but a short time ago."

Rebecca's lips parted to speak, but no words would come to her. She very slowly began to realize that the reality of her situation might not be what she had thought it was.

It all felt so real, but how could it be? Was she at this very moment lying unconscious somewhere, hovering between life and death, or even worse, was she in truth eternally resting at the bottom of the sea and this was the throe of death? The alternative seemed much too bizarre to contemplate.

"Who are you, and what year is this?" she asked.

His dark eyes locked with hers and he gently caressed her cheek with one rough finger. "Ye have the pleasure of being in the company of Captain Jonas Shelton, lass." His smile was

both sensual and menacing at the same time.

Leaning even closer, he brought his lips next to her ear, and she could feel his hot breath sending waves of yearning rushing through her body. "The year be 1692."

Rebecca felt her world trembling and splitting apart. Her mind reeled at what his words meant while at the same time her body burned by his mere nearness.

She backed away from him, knowing that she would need to put some distance between them if she were to think clearly. If she could believe what he'd told her, she must have somehow stepped back over three hundred years in time.

The how and why of this was totally beyond her, except maybe ... she was here to right a wrong. In her own reality, this man's ghost was haunting her. *It must be because of the ring.*

"How did ye come by me ring?" he asked again.

Rebecca grappled with her own thoughts.

Was this just an illusion she had created, or had she somehow transcended time?

Finally, she decided the best thing to do was speak the truth. She took the chain from around her neck and handed it to the pirate, he reached for it, but his eyes still questioned her. "The ring belonged to my grandfather whose distant ancestor came into possession of it. I believe it is yours," she blurted out.

"Ye speak in riddles, what are ye saying?"

"I come from the future ... from the 21st century." Rebecca paused, unable to accept her own words. Even to her ears they sounded too fantastic to be real. "My grandfather disappeared at sea while looking for the legendary *Isla de Niebla*. I was out on his boat when I was washed overboard by a large wave. I came up and found myself here," she finished, taking a deep breath in an effort to calm herself.

The pirate laughed out loud. "Ye be a bit addled, aye, lass?"

"No, I'm telling the truth. I thought that if I gave you the ring back, I would go back to my own time. But it doesn't seem to be working," she added, more for her benefit than his.

"The *Dark Revenge* be a *she beast* of a vessel, though there be not much chance of her getting ye back to the 21st century." He again laughed at her completely insane idea. "The best she can do is get ye to the nearest port."

Rebecca's blood was nearing boiling point. "I am not touched, and I am telling the truth."

"Hmmm." There was a pause while the pirate appeared to study her face. "Even if ye be telling the truth, I still can't take ye back," he said with a smile.

She realized that there was a simple truth to his words. No matter what had happened, she was here now and had no idea how to reverse it. Her analytical mind scanned all aspects of her situation, concluding that if indeed she had gone back in time, it was no accident. There was something still undone.

"Maybe I am here to stop whatever happens to this ship." Rebecca voiced her thoughts aloud.

Suspicion leaped into the captain's eyes. "Indeed! What perhaps would that be?"

Wrought with confusion, Rebecca shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not sure, no one knows what happened to the *Dark Revenge*."

"Methinks ye be a spy for the Royal Navy, aye?" A dark shadow descended over his handsome features.

"I'm no spy, believe me, I am just as confused about why I am here as you are."

Rebecca drew back as she saw anger boiling up in his eyes. He stepped forward, and in

one swift motion pulled her into his arms. "Nay, lass, I am not so confused. That scallywag cousin of mine sent you to spy on me, or murder me, aye."

Trembling as much from his closeness as from fear, Rebecca shook her head in denial, but before she could utter a word in defense, he brought his mouth to her opened lips.

His kiss was demanding and angry, Rebecca struggled only to have him pull her closer.

Finally he drew back but did not release her. He looked down into her flushed face with amusement. There was no longer even the slightest trace of anger in his gaze.

"Aye, my good cousin is aware of me weakness for a delectable tart, but no matter. Ye will be me prisoner until the *Dark Revenge* makes land."

Releasing her, Jonas made to leave the cabin, but her voice stopped him. "Please, help me understand why I am here, help me save your ship."

She detected the slightest moment's hesitation, but in the end he shook his head.

"Madam, if ye not be a spy, ye surely be insane. Methinks we can be of no help to ye."

They both caught the sound of a great commotion above them, the door flew open and there stood the huge, bald pirate who Rebecca remembered helping her aboard. He wore no shirt, and his britches fit as if they had been made for someone half the man's size. Tattooed on top of the man's bald head was the crude image of a shark.

"What be afoot, Hammerhead?" the captain asked.

"A Crown's vessel be afloat and coming up on us."

The captain threw a glowering look at Rebecca before running from the cabin.

She followed unbidden.

Creeping from the lower deck, the sun hit her eyes and sent fragments of pain through her head. She blinked until she was able to see clearly. Far off in the distance she could see the white sails of a galleon. The vessel fired on them, but it was so far away the gun's explosion sounded more like a hollow pop.

The captain was next to his first mate at the helm. "Move, ye scurvy dogs," he yelled. "She'll not catch us."

There was a bustle of activity as all sails went up. Rebecca was astounded by the speed the *Dark Revenge* picked up, leaving the large warship far behind them.

Feeling the sensation of being watched, she turned toward the captain and saw he was carefully scrutinizing her. With the grace of a panther, he was beside her and leading her to what she assumed was his cabin. They entered, and he slammed the door behind them.

Though there were large windows that allowed one a fantastic view of the sea, the cabin was dark. The furnishings were crude but adequate. A large four-poster bed had been secured to the wooden floor, while several chairs lay skewed around the room.

In the far corner of the room sat a large table, which looked as if it passed for a desk as well as a dining table. He casually strolled to the table and poured some amber liquid into a silver mug. From the aroma she could only conclude that it was a rudimentary version of rum.

With one hand he motioned to the rum decanter, implying an invitation to have a drink with him. Rebecca shook her head, declining. The captain shrugged his shoulders and replaced the cork.

He walked toward her, giving one of his habitual lopsided grins. She noticed how much taller than her he was, though that meant little as she had always been referred to as *petite*.

"I been thinking on yer story ... and methinks ye need to recant and be giving me the factual version." He was close to her now, still smiling.

Rebecca found herself wondering if the man ever really got angry. She had seen little

about him that suggested anything but a casual amusement toward life. "I've told you the truth," she answered.

"Oh, but have ye, lass?" He stared at her, mocking her with his eyes. "Methinks that yer friends were out to bring ole Captain Jonas to the hangman's noose."

Rebecca brought a hand up to run through her tangles of red hair, knowing she must look a sight. For some reason the knowledge made her feel very uncomfortable in his presence. "I honestly don't know anything about that."

With a look that seemed to burn right through her, his gaze swept from her face to the mound of cleavage that escaped her low-cut blouse, continuing to her bare legs.

She desperately wished that there was a blanket nearby that she could use to cover her exposed flesh. What had seemed to be cool and comfortable in the 21st century left her feeling naked in the present.

"What manner of dress is this?"

Rebecca had no idea what to say so she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "Many women dress like this in my time ... when the weather is warm."

He arched one brow in sardonic amusement. "Methinks with me devilish disposition, it be an unfortunate fate to be born so early."

Blushing at the sexual implications in his voice, she changed the subject. "Please help me figure out how to get back." Rebecca spoke in a sweetly feminine voice, instinctively knowing he would be much more useful to her as a friend than a foe. At the sound of her voice she saw the look on his face change from one of amusement to one of hunger. There was conflict as well.

Rebecca wondered if it went against some strange pirate's code to take advantage of an insane woman, but she doubted it.

"Methinks it be best if ye go back to yer cabin."

That was it, he said no more. After ringing a bell that hung outside his window, Jester came to take her back to her prison.

Chapter Four

The stale air of the cabin crowded in on her, and she found the heat within the room was becoming unbearable. There were no windows, so she could only tell it was day by the light that filtered in under the cabin door.

For the past two days she had remained locked in the cabin, her only contact being with Jester when he would bring her food and ale. At times he would look upon her with sympathy, but most often he seemed to have the same opinion of her as his captain.

She longed for a bath and had asked Jester about enough water to bathe, but he would simply grunt and shake his head.

Today had been different. This time when Jester opened the cabin door, the same two men who had helped Rebecca board the ship accompanied him, carrying in a wooden tub full of water. Jester dropped a gown and what passed for soap onto the pile of straw.

"Cap'n says to wear this today," he told her before all three men left, shutting the door behind them.

Rebecca quickly undressed and tested the water with her hand. It was tepid, but at this point she didn't care if it had ice in it, she just wanted to get clean.

Submerging herself in the cramped tub, she used the soap to scrub her body from head to toe. She had forgotten what a luxury it was just to feel clean.

Leaving the tub, she was crestfallen to see that there was nothing to dry off with. Unsure what to do, she stood there, dripping onto the wooden floor. She was clearly too wet to even try and wrestle into the tattered old gown provided for her.

Rebecca found herself wondering how a ship full of pirates even came to have a gown on hand but dismissed the thought immediately when she grasped the fact of just how they might have come by it.

Lost in her thoughts, she didn't even hear the door open and could not stop her scream when she heard his dark, smooth voice. "Have they sent here a witch to enchant me?"

She futilely attempted to cover herself with her hands but quickly abandoned the endeavor and grabbed the gown to hold in front of her. "How dare you come in here without knocking!" Her voice shook with anger and embarrassment.

His laughter permeated the room. "My Lady, ye forget that ye are me prisoner and I be no gentleman, but a pirate with a serpent's nature."

With one foot he kicked the door closed behind him and started toward her. Jonas didn't bother to mask his intention, and in a desperate attempt to stop him, she leaned down to scoop water from the tub, sending it flying into his face.

He didn't even break stride but ripped the dress from her grasp and with his hands on her shoulders he held her back so that he could see all of her.

Rebecca froze, her eyes as wide as a helpless and frightened child.

A torrent of emotion played across the pirate's face, and she could see his conscience was doing battle with his lust.

"Are you an innocent lass?" he asked in a low whisper, his longing evident in his voice.

Rebecca was at a loss of what to say. At twenty-five, she was no virgin, but not really what one might call experienced either.

This was the 17th century, what could she say to him?

If she told the truth he would think her a woman of loose morals and would most assuredly take her here and now on her bed of straw. If she told a little white lie ... he may not force himself on her, but ... she could not deny her body's traitorous longing to lie beneath him.

What in the world was wrong with her?

She was this brute's captive, and he was a no-good pirate. Her purpose was to get back to her time and find her grandfather, not dally with a guy--even if he was a very hot guy.

Logic prevailed, and she forced herself to speak the words that would stop him from consuming her body, and soul. "I have not known a man."

He groaned angrily, and she could see the conflicting emotions playing across his face.

"I'll not be hurting ye, lass, I just have need of a little morsel ... just a wee taste."

His voice shook with pent-up passion, and he slid a hand from her shoulder to the soft fullness of her breast. Rebecca's heart beat furiously in response to his thumb bringing her nipple to life. Pulling her close to him, he gently caressed her back. Making his way lower, his touch sent ripples of delight through her body.

Rebecca trembled, her own enflamed passions threatening to overcome caution. His lips and tongue played upon her neck, setting her on fire wherever they touched her skin. She knew that her moans betrayed her desire, but she was as if possessed.

Jonas' lips were so close to her ear that she could feel his hot breath as he whispered, "I could take ye to paradise, lass, and aye, ye want it as I do."

How could she deny that she did want him? She had wanted him from the moment she had been touched by his essence on the *Sea Brat*, and now she was here with him, not a specter but a man.

She could not deny it to herself, but she must deny it to him. "No! I cannot!" she spoke in breathless gasps.

She felt his body stiffen, but he said nothing, instead he roughly pushed her away. "Dress, lady, as we come into Port Royal today. There we will part company."

The harsh words were slung at her as he was making toward the door, he did not so much as spare her a glance.

In his absence, Rebecca felt chilled. The captain had left behind in the wake of his passion a cold void that Rebecca could not comprehend.

Why was she so drawn to this one man?

It was not as if she had not known love and sex in her life, though not in one single instance had a man been able to send her spiraling into an inferno of passion as he had done with a few simple touches.

Sighing, Rebecca managed to squeeze into the worn, red velvet dress. It was not only too tight but very long. She concluded that the previous owner must have been several inches taller than herself. As a result, to move about she had to constantly hold up the hem with one hand.

The captain had plans on dumping her off in Port Royal, but she knew beyond a doubt that she could not let him. Some intuition told her that if she lost track of the *Dark Revenge*, she would lose all hope of ever returning to her own time.

From what she had gathered in her short conversations with Jester, it was spring, and the *Dark Revenge* disappeared in June. She didn't have a lot time to figure out what happened to the ship and the souls aboard, and if she failed....

A dark feeling of foreboding shrouded her, if she failed Captain Jonas would disappear into myth, and who knows what would happen to Rebecca Ashton.

To prevent this outcome she would have to find a way to stick with this ship. Possibly she may still be able to convince the pirate that she was telling the truth, but she doubted it. After all, if someone had come to her with a similar story, would she have believed them or thought they were crazy?

Only a short time had passed before Jester was there to escort her out of what had amounted to her cell. When first stepping on deck she was hit with a wave of dizziness, forcing her to grasp Jester's arm in order to steady herself.

Rebecca found the light and fresh air a little overwhelming at first, but after a few moments she relished the sweetness of the warm breeze and sunshine. Scanning the faces onboard, she recognized no one, not even seeing the two men who had pulled her from the water only a few days before.

Had it only been a few days? To Rebecca it seemed like months ago.

"Where is the captain?" she asked

"He be occupied, poppet. He said to tell ye he be sorry, and that ye tell the old snake, he be wise to his tricks."

Rebecca shook her head. "I don't know what he is talking about, tell him he is wrong about me."

It was obvious that Captain Jonas was still dead set on thinking she was sent by some deceitful cousin or relative to do him harm. Unless she could convince him otherwise, it would be impossible for her to stay with the *Dark Revenge*.

"Please, can I speak with the captain? It is urgent," Rebecca pleaded.

She had to try and convince him that she was telling the truth.

Stopping once they had reached the docks, Jester tried to smile through his deformity, and Rebecca felt her heart go out to the old pirate.

"The cap'n already be ashore. Mayhap ye will come across him, if ye know the ways of pirates."

Dismayed, Rebecca looked around her. There was no resemblance to the Port Royal of her own time. Though she recognized a few landmarks, for all practical purposes the town was primitive.

Though not the same place of her time, it appeared to be as busy as a beehive. There were people going here and there, and off in the distance, the belligerent yelling of a man, whom she assumed was a pirate. She stood motionless, unsure of what to do or where to go. How would she ever find him in this dusty maze of taverns and inns?

Jester proceeded to walk past her, grunting as he did so, which she took as a signal to follow him. She felt some endearment toward the pirate, for he was obviously doing what he could to help her so long as he did not incriminate himself.

Playing along, she stayed a respectful distance behind him so that it could be claimed that she followed him without his knowledge. She soon found that keeping up with Jester would be more of a feat than what she had imagined as she picked her way through the trash laden streets and men that cast their looks on her with a lusting gape.

Through the rapidly descending darkness, she spotted Jester entering a building, which would have been ancient in her own time, but in the here and now seemed relatively new. Above the entrance was a weathered sign identifying the tavern as the Sow's Cask.

Rebecca stood outside for a few moments before following him in. Just after entering,

she stopped in her tracks for the lighting was so dim she could make out nothing but shadows.

When her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, she scanned the interior of the room searching for someone from the *Dark Revenge*. At first, there was not a soul that she recognized.

Distraught, she moved forward and continued to study each person's face. No one seemed to take any notice of her at all, which she thought of as a little odd until she remembered that she must resemble a common wench with her old red dress and her tangles of red curls flying about her shoulders.

She had nearly given up, thinking she must have misinterpreted Jester, when she spied the captain in the far corner with a mug of rum in his hand and a small, blonde wench on his lap. He had one arm draped over her shoulder where he was shamelessly fondling the woman's breast.

The irritation Rebecca felt at the sight of him with the wench was far too sharp for her liking. Pushing her way through the crowd, Rebecca came to stand next to him, and with one hand propped on her hip, gave him a scathing look.

"Captain!"

He looked up, and she could see he was laughing at her, but he said nothing to acknowledge her presence.

"Captain, please ... I must speak with you." Her voice was louder and a bit more forceful. He well knew she was there, he'd probably seen her from the moment she'd entered the building, but he was out to toy with her.

"Do I know ye, wench?" he said with a barely concealed laugh.

Misery and loneliness rushed into her heart. In that instant she felt truly alone in her predicament.

With a sense of self-preservation, she turned her feelings to anger. She had had about enough of this pirate's arrogance. Here she was trying to save his hide, and he was toying with her.

With her green eyes flashing fire, she let her temper fly. "You know exactly who I am, so don't play games with me. You will hear me out or you and your entire crew will be dead soon. Now get rid of this wench so that I can speak with you." By the time she had finished her voice had become shrill and demanding.

The blonde woman stood up and got in Rebecca's face. "Who do ye think ye be, wench? Go get yer own!"

Pushing with both hands, the woman sent Rebecca flying into a group of men who immediately began to pull at her dress and fondle her. Struggling against the sudden onslaught of male attention, she nearly gagged when one man with rotten stubs for teeth attempted to kiss her.

All at once there were no hands or arms supporting her, and she fell hard against the wooden floor. Looking up, she immediately saw what had caused them to release her.

Jonas had drawn his pistol and had the barrel against the head of the man with rotten teeth.

The room had become so silent that one could hear the sound of their own breathing.

"Aye, ye be letting the wench be now!" Captain Jonas spoke softly, but the deadly note in his voice could not be missed.

Scrambling to her feet, Rebecca stared in awe at the affect Jonas seemed to have on the tavern's patrons.

The old sea dog backed away carefully, turning, he quickly left the Sow's Cask.

As soon as Jonas lowered his pistol the room's occupants returned to a buzz of drunken lunacy. Cold, hard eyes stared at Rebecca. "Ye be having me bloody ears now, wench, so ye be telling me the why of ye following me and souring me good time."

"Captain, I have to talk to you, it's very important," Rebecca pressed, despite his ill mood.

Taking her by the arm, Jonas led her out of the tavern and through the torch lit streets of Port Royal. He was practically dragging her, as it was difficult for her legs to move swiftly enough to keep up with his pace.

"Where ... are you ... taking me?" she asked as she tried to walk fast enough so that she wasn't pulled to the ground in his haste.

"Mayhap I be taking ye to a place where no one will catch the sound of me wringing your lovely wee neck," he growled with a rare show of ill humor.

At last they entered the King's Arms, an inn that appeared to be a much nicer establishment than the one they had just left.

Without stopping to talk with the old man who was standing behind a desk in what passed for a lobby, Jonas led her up a set of stairs to the second floor and into a room which was lavishly furnished compared to what she had grown accustomed to in the past few days.

"Now ye may speak freely, madam," he told her in a tired voice as he poured rum into a crystal glass.

Finally she had managed to capture his undivided attention, but words failed her. Rebecca simply stared at him with blank, timid eyes. She was getting the very distinct impression that there was more to Captain Jonas than a mere pirate.

"What say you?" he asked again as he handed her a glass of the dark brown drink. "Mayhap ye were scheming to get me alone." He smiled wickedly as his eyes danced with amusement.

Rebecca downed the rum and handed him back the glass. "You sure the heck don't lack self-confidence, do you?"

"Ye do have an odd way of speaking, lass. Where did ye say you hail from?"

"I come from Florida," she told him shortly.

"Ye come from a bloody Spanish lair?" He arched a single brow in confusion.

Rebecca shook her head. "Remember, I told you I come from the 21st century. In my time, Florida is part of the United States."

"What the bloody hell be that?"

"It's a long story and probably not one you would readily believe anyway. What's important is the why and how of me being here."

"And why might that be, lass?"

Exhausted, Rebecca lowered herself to a plush covered settee and began her story. She told him everything, every detail that she could remember.

"Now that I have returned the ring, I can't imagine why I am still here, except that it must have something to do with what happens to the *Dark Revenge* in June," she finished.

He watched her silently for a few moments, and she could see the battle raging within him. He seemed suspended somewhere between hysterical laughter and alarmed confusion.

"Ye seriously believe this tale, lass?" He gave her a gentle smile.

"I know it sounds insane, even to me it does. I'm still not entirely sure that I am not lying in a hospital bed somewhere, in a coma, while I dream all this up."

Grinning maliciously, Jonas sat next to her and leaned in very closely. "Aye and in ye

own time I be a bloody cursed ghost that be haunting ye?"

"I find nothing funny about this," she told him as she tried to scoot further away. The last thing she needed was to get caught up in a situation like the one that had happened earlier in the day.

A vague memory suddenly jumped into her head. An earthquake would hit Port Royal, she distinctly remembered doing a report on it in high school.

What was that date?

She knew if she could predict that date, he would believe her when it happened.. Finally the date came to her, and she quickly volunteered the information. "An earthquake will hit Port Royal on June 7th of this year and most of the town will sink into the ocean." She gave him this juicy prediction while at the same time wondering if his foreknowledge of the event would create some kind of paradox.

At this he did laugh out loud. "That, perhaps, was not a good thing to say, for now if it does not come to pass, I'll be knowing ye are either addled or a spy."

"I did a report on it in school, believe me it will happen, so make sure you are not here on that date."

They were both startled by an abrupt knock.

Jonas opened the door and stepped out. Shutting the big, heavy door behind him, he left her there alone.

A few moments later he returned, but all traces of his good humor had vanished.

"I'll be going out for a time as I have some matters to attend. Methinks that ye have no place to go here, so I'll be having a bath and food brought up. Ye may sleep here," he told her with a frown.

"Will you be back?" she asked anxiously, wary about letting him out of her sight.

A touch of dark humor returned to his eyes. "Does the fair maiden wish me to return?"

"Yes." She spoke without hesitation and without realizing how he may take her words. It was too late to take them back, and she absolutely couldn't take the chance of him disappearing on her.

"Then be sure, I'll be back." He tipped his hat to her as he was leaving.

An hour later she had bathed and eaten her first good meal in days. She reclined on the feather bed, content and drowsy.

There was something about Jonas that had been bothering her all night, but she had been unable to put her finger on it. Just as she was dozing off, it hit her, and she suddenly found herself wide-awake.

It was the way he spoke sometimes! Different than the others she had heard. It was as if he was an educated gentleman who had been displaced in this pirate's world. He could trade the pirate's cloak for a gentleman's with ease.

At last she fell into peaceful sleep.

* * * *

She was completely unaware when Jonas crept into the room.

He studied her soft angelic features illuminated by the moonlight that found its way into the room through the partially open window hangings. She was a beautiful creature for sure, but was she insane, or worse ... sent by his enemies to destroy him? Perhaps she really was from a future time and some curse had thrown them together?

Jonas yearned to take this woman to his bed, and it was draining him of all his strength just to resist her. From the moment he'd seen Rebecca in her strange, revealing clothing he had

craved her with an intensity that he'd never known before now. This witch of the sea had enchanted him somehow, and he must find a way to break the spell.

The messenger who had come that evening had brought him bad tidings, and he had to sail in the morning. It had to be then that he slip from her grip and leave her behind.

He lay on the bed beside Rebecca, draping one arm over her protectively as he dozed into fitful dreams haunted by eyes as green as emeralds.

Chapter Five

Stirring from her deep slumber, Rebecca opened her eyes, squinting against the early morning light. Through her grogginess she realized she was alone in the room and that he had not returned as promised.

She tried to sit up, pushing away the light blanket that covered her. She had not had it on the night before so he must have returned and placed it on her. But why was he gone already?

Scrambling from the bed, she slid into the old leather shoes she had been wearing since leaving the ship and hurriedly made her way down the staircase to the reception area where the same old-timer was sitting where he had the night before.

"Excuse me, sir," Rebecca said breathlessly. The man looked up at her from a book he had been studying. "Can you tell me where Captain Jonas has gone?"

"He left some little time ago but has paid the lodging for a fortnight and said to tell you that he hoped you would forgive his abrupt departure but there was pressing business."

"Yeah, I'll bet," she muttered.

"Excuse me, madam?"

"Sorry, did he say anything else?"

"I think naught." The old man stared at her as if she was the strangest creature he had ever seen.

Running from the building, she did not even bother to return to the rented lodging.

How dare he just leave me like that? Didn't I tell him how important it was that we stop whatever is going to happen?

Rebecca was fuming but did not have long to dwell on her anger. As soon as she reached the docks she saw that the *Dark Revenge* was pulling away from Port Royal very quickly.

Ripping the gown from her body, she stood on the docks clad only in undergarments. Taking a deep breath, she jumped into the harbor and began to swim out to the ship. She had only been in the water a few minutes, but it felt like she had been swimming for miles, her arms and legs were becoming weak.

She was getting closer to the *Dark Revenge* but maybe not quickly enough. With only twenty yards left to go, she had no choice but to stop and rest, hoping that she had strength enough to stay afloat.

In the distance there was frantic yelling, but she could not make out the words. Jonas was leaning against the ship's railing, furiously motioning and screaming something.

It was then she saw that she'd swum right into the domain of a predator.

The shark was circling, coming closer with each passing second. Though only a small shark, the only thought she had was that she would die at sea.

A scream froze in her throat. Far off there was a splash, but nothing penetrated her thoughts but the harsh blow the shark delivered to her midsection with its snout.

Panicked, she began to scream, forgetting all the training she'd had on shark attacks. In the next second there was a blinding pain in her leg, and she felt herself being yanked under the water.

In the instant that she felt the shark release her leg an eerie calm wrapped around her, and she swam for the water's surface. If she were to become this shark's lunch, she would not make it an easy task.

She was losing a lot of blood, and it was a struggle to keep a hold on consciousness, she knew if she blacked out that would be the end of her.

Just as she broke the surface of the water, Rebecca felt the beast bump her once again, but Jonas was next to her, and his strong arm steadied her in the water.

The shark had retreated for the moment, giving them just enough time to make it to the *Dark Revenge*. Rebecca was so weak with the loss of blood that she could barely grasp the rope ladder in her hands. Jonas was forced to pull her up as well as himself.

* * * *

Once safely on the warm wooden deck of the ship, Rebecca slipped into unconsciousness.

"Ye be standing about like a lot of daft scallywags," Jonas barked. "Fetch me some rum and linen."

He had stopped the bleeding and dressed the wound as best as he could, but Rebecca still lay pale and unmoving. It was a mere flesh wound, but the lass had lost a lot of blood, and this worried Jonas more than he cared to admit.

"Captain, should ye return to Port Royal with the young maid?" a weathered and toothless deckhand asked with a touch of malice in his voice.

"Nay, she be sailing with us." Jonas' voice betrayed his fatigue.

Dagger Dave stepped forward, glaring at the captain with his one good eye while a patch hid an empty socket where his other eye should have been.

"Captain, we thinks this wench be bad luck to have aboard the *Dark Revenge*, we thinks we need to put her ashore."

Jonas was alert, knowing that the situation could lead to mutiny if it wasn't handled swiftly. "The wench sails with us! Let any mate that forgets the *Dark Revenge* be my vessel step forward and challenge me now." Jonas had drawn his cutlass and was set back in a stance ready to do battle.

All the men aboard eyed each other to see who would brave a battle with the captain, that is, all except Jester who had gone to stand his ground beside Jonas. No one moved, no one was of a mind to have their torso slit in half, for besting the captain in a battle of blades was highly unlikely.

Some moments later, Jonas sheathed his weapon. "The wench has news of a plot against the *Dark Revenge*, and it must be discovered. The lass be me prisoner until I says different."

There was a sudden buzz of conversation between the pirates. The captain's actions made sense, and they now regretted their challenge.

Jonas scooped Rebecca up in his arms and took her to his cabin.

He had told his crew only half truths as he did not really believe Rebecca's story, but he had had to give them some excuse for keeping the woman on board. He was not even sure himself why he was keeping her, except that with every passing moment he'd spent in this woman's presence, he felt more bound to her, and a fierce need to protect her.

* * * *

When Rebecca opened her eyes she found immediate comfort in the warm glow of the lantern, relishing the softness of the quilts that surrounded her. This was very obviously not the same room that she had been confined to when she had previously been aboard the *Dark*

Revenge.

"The bloody, addled lass returns to us at last." Jonas sat next to the bed on a large wooden chair. In one hand was a cask of rum that he had obviously been very much enjoying.

Rebecca became aware that she was completely naked beneath the quilt, and she blushed scarlet. "Where are my clothes? Who undressed me?"

Jonas chuckled. "Ye could hardly be put in me fine bed in wet garments now, could ye? As ye still are a fair and untouched maiden, ye can be sure it were me that removed them." Jonas motioned to himself with his free hand.

Regardless of knowing that what he said made sense, Rebecca still felt her face grow hot with embarrassment as she thought of herself naked, vulnerable and at his mercy. She tried to move, but pain shot up from her left calf.

"Remain still, lass, that shark did a bit of damage to ye."

Pulling the covers from her legs, she tried to assess the damage, but all she could see was a mass of makeshift bandages on her calf. "How bad is it?"

His sleepy eyes examined her, she could detect both amusement and anger in their gaze. "Ye be lucky, ye will probably keep the leg, but sure to be some scarring." Jonas took another swig from the cask. "That be a foolish thing you did."

Rebecca turned away, ashamed of doing something as stupid as swimming for the *Dark Revenge*, but knowing she had had no choice. "You should not have left me."

Jonas stood up and paced back and forth, seeming to waver between the urge to thrash her or ravish her. "Do ye not know I am a pirate? No young lass of any measure would chase after a pirate," he bellowed. "Nay, you must be bloody insane, love, for if ye were not, ye would know how dangerous a pirate could be and would have been grateful that ye be left in Port Royal."

She just shook her head in resignation, giving up hope of this brute ever believing her, but how could she blame him? Even in her own time she would be put away and labeled *crazy*.

Jonas seemed exasperated with her apparent lack of understanding and angrily slammed the cask of rum down on a nearby wooden table. "Mayhap it be time ye be taught about the likes of pirates?" Jonas snatched away the quilt that had hidden her body from his sight.

Letting out a cry of surprise, she tried unsuccessfully to grab the quilt before he had time to toss it to the floor.

For a moment, Jonas just stared at her.

Her body grew hot beneath his lusty gaze and was again awash with that same hungering that was becoming all too familiar when she was with this man.

Kneeling beside the bed, he clasped her full breast and brought his hot tongue down to tease her nipple into full erectness. Rebecca brought her hands up to push him off, but he easily brushed them aside.

His hot, wet tongue licked at her flesh as his hand crept between her legs to find her clit, teasing her until she shivered with desire. His long fingers probed her swollen pussy lips, thrusting into her already wet cunt.

She couldn't stand it anymore. Rebecca knew she was lost as she sunk deeper and deeper into a firestorm of fervor.

His mouth took possession of hers, and they came together with such urgency and need that for her, nothing else existed outside of this moment. Jonas' tongue licked at her lips and danced with her tongue while his fingers thrust in and out of her throbbing pussy.

Abruptly, Jonas pulled back and growled as if he were in the midst of pure agony. "Ye

be such a wicked little siren, do ye know what I could do to ye?" he whispered in her ear.

Rebecca no longer cared what he did to her as long as he sated the fire he had ignited, satisfy her hunger as only his lovemaking could. The pain in her leg retreated to the back of her mind as she delighted in the sweet sensations Jonas had awakened in her.

Her fingers trembled as they struggled with the buttons of his primitive shirt. Frustrated, she ripped it open, sending buttons flying to the floor.

He pulled back, startled by the extent of her excitement. Her green eyes were glazed over with hunger and whimpers escaped between her full, red lips. She sought the hardness of his bare chest, and he savored the feel of her hands caressing his skin.

It was more than he could take, he would have to get out of here or the blood of her maidenhead would be forever on his conscience.

He made a move to leave the bed, but she grasped his arm.

"You cannot do this to me and then leave me." Her words were laced with a need that was consuming them both.

"Ye have not an understanding of what ye ask!"

"Yes, I do!" Rebecca pulled at his arm.

Conflict raged within him, he wanted her like he had never wanted anything else in his life, but at the same time he felt it his duty to preserve her innocence.

Seeming to come to some resolution, he gently spread her legs, kissing and biting playfully at the inside of her thighs. He took extreme care not to aggravate her injury, though controlling the urge to savagely ravish her body was nearly impossible.

Rebecca was on fire, her only thought was not only for this man to fill her body with his hot lust but to fill her essence with his own.

She gasped, shivering with pleasure as his darting tongue found her pussy lips and parted them. Her hands clasped the bedding beneath her as she thrashed about wildly, consumed with wave after wave of erotic sensations as his tongue thrust in and out of her cunt. An electrifying tingle spread from her pussy to every point in her body. It literally took her breath away, and she was gasping for air.

After catching her breath, Rebecca laid back, her passion sated for the moment, unable to believe that she had gotten so much pleasure, and he had not even undressed.

Jonas left the bed abruptly, and the chill that filled the void where he had lain just an instant before was unsettling.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I be in need of some cool air, lass."

"You don't have to leave it like this, I want you to enjoy it too."

He laughed darkly. "Think not that I had no pleasure, lass, but it can be no more than I've already had." With that he was gone, leaving Rebecca to stare at the door he had disappeared through.

How can he be a pirate?

She was practically begging him, and he had walked away? Rebecca struggled with her confusion.

What if there was someone else? Was it this rather than a sense of honor that kept him at bay?

Chapter Six

Far off on the horizon was a speck of land that took on definition as they drew closer. Watching their approach from the deck, Rebecca could not shake the feeling that somehow this island had everything to do with what was happening to her.

Its location had to be the key, this Dead Zone that Chey had spoken of had to be some type of portal to different times and dimensions.

"What does the name of this island mean?" she asked Jester.

"*Isla de Niebla*, Mist Island, but Ghost Island it should be."

Rebecca looked at him questioningly.

"It may be de only place on the Spanish Main with so much mist that it is nearly invisible some days. That be why de cap'n took to the place."

With mention of the captain a cloud of melancholy descended on her. He had left her there in that bed two nights ago, and she had not seen him since. Obviously, he viewed her as too much of a temptation--a temptation that he must resist for some unknown reason.

Though there was an ache in her chest that told her it had to be some woman he saved himself for, in her saner moments she had to admit he must have more sense than she herself did. What would happen if she fell in love with this man? It would be a romance doomed from the beginning.

In her own time, Jonas was long dead, even if she could manage to avoid the disaster she felt sure would befall him and his crew soon. And for Captain Jonas Shelton, Rebecca Ashton would not even exist for over three hundred more years.

The realization that what Jonas was doing was in all reality probably the best thing for both of them did little to lift her mood. She could not help but wonder why the thought of him could have so much influence over her emotions.

Her leg was throbbing, and she longed for a modern hospital and pain medication, but she had to make do with primitive first aid and rum. They had anchored, and the boats were being lowered. Rebecca was only able to climb down the rope ladder to the boat with a great deal of help from Jester.

"Why are we here?"

The pirate just grunted and continued to row them to shore. She had already learned that when Jester did this, it meant, *If you want to know, ask the captain.*

Once they had reached the shore, Jester pulled the boat onto the beach and helped Rebecca climb out of it. Leaning heavily on the pirate, she tried to make her way through the sand but found that her leg throbbed mercilessly.

Frustrated with their lack of progress, Jester finally picked her up and carried her. He took a path from the beach that led deep into what at first appeared to be a jungle choked with palms and ferns, but before long they had come to a clearing.

Here Jester gently set her back on her feet.

Rebecca could hardly believe her eyes. They had come upon a beautifully manicured garden which skirted an elegant Colonel mansion. "What is this place?" Rebecca asked in

disbelief.

"It be Niebla, de captain's home, this be his island."

Rebecca's mouth dropped open. "But he is only a pirate!"

Jester made no comment, and again Rebecca knew that her questions would have to be directed to Jonas--that is *if* she was given the opportunity.

A lady with dark hair and dark eyes came through the door and instantly took charge of Rebecca. "The captain says you need some fixing, I can get you well soon." The older lady was obviously native, but she spoke English very well, if with a heavy accent. "My name be Mary, I take care of the ills and mishaps here as well as the captain's house." She smiled warmly.

"Nice to meet you." Rebecca returned the woman's smile.

As Mary was leading her to her room on the second floor, Rebecca tried to take in as much of the house as she could even though it was difficult as she was in so much pain.

She was completely astounded at the elegance that was so evident all around her. Jonas Shelton was obviously much more than a simple captain of an obscure pirate ship.

Mary opened a set of double doors to the suite that would be hers. It consisted of a large sitting room with a fireplace, a bedroom with a beautiful four-poster bed and a dressing room. She was pleased by the view of the sea she had from her window.

"It be good if ye rest, I will return to care for ye leg." Mary led Rebecca to the bed where she practically forced her to lie down.

True to her word, Mary returned quickly and began taking the bandage from Rebecca's leg. The older lady clucked her tongue in disapproval but said nothing as she proceeded to wash the wound and lay compresses on it that had been soaked in some native herbal ointment. Before long, her leg was again wrapped in clean bandages.

"The captain says ye like to swim with sharks." Mary clucked her tongue again. "Not a good practice, not in the least."

Rebecca smiled. "I did not know the shark was in the water when I went for a swim," she assured the housekeeper.

"It be well if ye rest now," Mary told her as she was leaving.

"I would like to see Jonas if I can."

The housekeeper looked at her in an odd way. "The captain has already sailed, he had urgent business." Rebecca reacted as if someone had punched her in the stomach, and it drew some sympathy from the housekeeper. "My apologies, miss, I thought you would be aware."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, why would I be? Does he often bring ladies here and drop them off?" Again she was given an odd look, which she assumed was the result of speaking in a way that the woman was not used to.

"The captain often brings home young ladies," Mary spoke with regret.

"Well, I didn't really doubt it." Rebecca attempted a smile so that the older lady would know that she held no ill feeling toward her. "When will he return, do you know?"

"It ought not be too long, miss."

Rebecca nodded and did not attempt to stop Mary again as she left.

Now what?

Had she lost her opportunity to cheat fate out of the *Dark Revenge*? Had she lost her chance to return home?

Rebecca had never thought there would come a time when she would miss the busy Miami freeways, but she almost did now. What she wouldn't give for a few modern conveniences right now, like a cell phone with Mr. Jonas Shelton's ear tuned in at the other end.

* * * *

Time passed agonizingly slow for Rebecca. She had been confined to her rooms the first few days, but as she began to heal, Mary had been more agreeable to letting her roam around. After two weeks it was obvious she would have some scarring, but she was able to walk normally.

Rebecca lacked no physical comfort conceivable, at least for the 17th century. Jonas had seen to everything, including having trunks full of clothing brought to her room. The trunks contained beautiful gowns of silk, brocade as well as velvet.

That was not all. At the bottom of one of the trunks she found a silver box that contained jewels. Rebecca was sure she had been given use of his pirate's plunder, and it just didn't feel right dressing in the garments and jewels.

She wondered what had happened to the poor lady who had owned this stuff, for she was sure it was a single person as the gowns were all the same size. They were small, but fit much better than the red gown she had worn before.

Rebecca felt slightly odd wearing the clothes and letting Mary dress her hair in the most current and sophisticated style. It seemed as if she were playing dress up. Of course she knew it was necessary, she certainly would not find a clothing store more to her liking anywhere nearby.

During times like this Rebecca would ponder her situation. It would occur to her that she was really wrapped in a straightjacket and tucked safely away in some institution somewhere while she experienced a world that only she could see through the haze of lunacy.

This was often on her mind as she made her way to the beach each day to watch for signs of the *Dark Revenge*. Each time she would return disappointed. It was easy to become discouraged.

At last she realized that she might as well make the most of it and explore the house and island for some clue as to what was going on.

The house was a mystery, at least for a pirate. She would not have wondered about it if it had been located just about anywhere but a remote Caribbean Island. It was as if someone had picked up a New England manor and transported it half a world away to this island. The mirage was complete, right down to a lavish library and a gallery filled with old paintings.

Rebecca had no problem recognizing many of the people in the paintings, there was King James I and James II and even Mary Stuart. Set away from the group of paintings that portrayed many of the British royalty, hung another painting.

This painting was of a startlingly beautiful petite young woman with very dark hair and eyes. She wondered who this was, as it was no one Rebecca recognized from history. Were these her clothes that she wore each day? They seemed to be about the right size.

Aggravated with her lack of progress, Rebecca managed to slip away one morning after breakfast. She knew Jonas had left orders that she was not to go any further than the gardens, but it had now been nearly three weeks with no word of where he was or when he would return. She was not only becoming restless but worried.

What if something had happened to him? She found the thought left an ache in the pit of her stomach. *What would she do if she found herself stuck in the 17th century for the rest of her life?*

Horrifying images of what destiny had in mind for the *Dark Revenge* kept creeping into her thoughts no matter how often she slammed the door on them. They would be there to intrude as they were now. Deep in thought, she made her way along a well-worn path.

Rebecca had no idea how long she had walked as she had lost track of time, as well as

direction. She forced her thoughts back to the present and was just beginning to think it would be wise to turn back when the path gave way to a cove. Coming out of the trees, she was surprised to see a little fishing village. For some reason she had thought the island was deserted except for the house.

There was a dock, a few business establishments and several huts scattered along this section of the island. It was obvious that *Isla de Niebla* was more than just the spit of land which she had first thought it to be.

Near the docks was a small building that appeared to be a tavern, the sign above the entrance reading, *The Sea Witch Inn*. She decided that this was where she would start, knowing if there was one place to get a little information, the local tavern would be it.

It did not dawn on her how out of place she would be until she entered the building. In her finery she was in definite contrast to the local fishermen and the two or three pirates that were the Sea Witch's patrons.

No sooner had she entered the dim building than Rebecca realized her mistake. She doubted she would get any information if she stuck out like a sore thumb, and to make matters worse, she had no money to even make a pretense of ordering a mug of ale.

A tall, bearded man whom Rebecca took as the owner, lumbered to her side. "Might I be of service, young lass?"

Smiling, she blushed appropriately. "I apologize, I was in need of water, but realized I forgot to even bring a farthing."

The old man smiled and just about knocked Rebecca off her feet with the strong odor of rum. "Ye be the poppet at de house?"

Groaning inwardly, she nodded. She had wanted to remain anonymous, knowing her association with Jonas would keep them hushed up.

"Not to fret, poppet, here, have some ale." The man had poured the liquid into a mug and was quickly cleaning a table as he spoke.

"You're so gracious, sir." Rebecca played her part of lady well.

"Aye, me lady, naught be too good for ye." He smiled.

It was difficult to keep from pulling a face when she tasted the drink, the rest of the patrons chuckled at her reaction. At least she was living up to their expectations, she thought.

"Ye be of a different cut than the usual the ole captain brings to Niebla." The bearded man smiled maliciously.

Rebecca eyed him innocently, as if she hadn't a clue of what he was talking about. "Pardon me, sir."

"Pay no heed to me ramblings, young miss....," he waved his arms as if he were waving away his thoughtless words, "...ye be a fine lady."

She fished for something that might entice the man to talk some more. So far, the only information she had been able to get was that Jonas Shelton was a womanizer, which was something she had already figured out. "I daresay that is a compliment to the captain," she said before attempting another sip of the ale.

"Aye, the captain be a fine man, he be in need of a fine lady." The man nodded.

Smiling in response, Rebecca hoped the tavern owner would elaborate, but he didn't. She could think of little else to say so she thanked him for his hospitality and left, feeling even more frustrated than she had when she entered.

She had taken only a few steps onto the path when a man strode up beside her. "Pardon the intrusion, my lady, mayhap you would be kind enough to let me escort you to the house?"

Though the man seemed to be dressed much like many of the pirates and seamen she had seen, there was something markedly different in his manner. He was much too refined to fit the role, and this put her on her guard for some reason.

Rebecca had learned a few things about pirates, and one of those things was that their eyes were rarely empty. They were a hot-blooded bunch, mostly. If they were not in a bloody fury, they were calculating, devious, or merry and drunk, but she had never seen one with eyes so empty and cold as this man's eyes. His skin appeared much smoother than one would expect of a man who spent many of his days beneath the sun when he was fortunate, or fighting the gales when he was not so lucky.

No, something wasn't right here.

"Sir, I do not think it appropriate as I don't know you." Again, the little actress came out to fill the role of a lady.

"Of course, my lady, I be Richard, a good friend of the captain's," he told her as he tipped his hat.

Once more, warning bells sounded. Not once had she heard one of them use just their given name. She gave no hint of her discomfort, but she did pick up her pace.

"Sir Jonas would never forgive me if a mishap should befall your ladyship." The man clasped her arm as if to help her, but his grip was firm.

Alarmed, she glanced up at him. "Sir Jonas? I never heard that name before," she said nervously as she attempted to pull away from him. The man was put off for a fraction of a moment. She could tell he was suddenly wondering if indeed the captain, and Sir Jonas were one in the same.

Taking the opportunity to pull away from him, she began walking rapidly down a path she knew led to the beach. At least there she would be in the open.

He soon caught up with her as she was leaving the cover of the trees, and before she could run he had a hold of her arm again. Rebecca let out a scream as he swung her around to face him.

"What do you know of the captain?" he demanded.

"I know little of him, as I am but a simple tavern wench he picked up in Port Royal," she spat out, her green eyes flashing with anger. "Now take your hands off me."

"You speak lies, and, if you are but a tavern wench, it will mean little if I take my pleasure with you."

The man's evil leer frightened her even more than his anger had, but she knew she had to play her cards right or she might be in some real danger. Rebecca forced a seductive smile to her lips. "Mayhap, sir ... for a shilling."

A look of disgust crossed the man's face, and he spat at her. "Ye be a true harlot," he told her before throwing her roughly to the sand.

His words infuriated her, but she was glad to see the backside of the man as he walked away. She hurriedly got to her feet and ran the rest of the way to the house. No sooner was she through the doors when Mary pounced on her.

"Miss Rebecca, where did you go off to? I was frantic. The captain would be very angry if he discovered you gone when he returns." The woman rambled on until Rebecca held up her hand.

She attempted a smile. "No harm done, Mary. I was exploring is all." The relief on Mary's face was almost comical. "Oh, miss, I beg you not to wander again, it could be dangerous."

"Dangerous? Why?" Rebecca was suddenly curious and took note of Mary's sudden evasiveness.

"There be many dangers out there for a lady."

There was no doubt in Rebecca's mind that there was much being kept from her, and it could very well have cost her life today. "Mary, when is Jonas going to be back? It is imperative that I speak with him."

The woman held up her hands in a gesture of helplessness but asked, "Why so urgent?"

She decided that being straightforward with Mary would bring more results. "I must leave this island if he does not return soon."

Mary shook her head in disapproval. "You are distraught, I will bring you some warm rum to help you become calm."

Thanking Mary, Rebecca went to her room. She was becoming increasingly disturbed, it was evident that she was getting nowhere fast, and the mystery continued to deepen.

Walking to the window, she stared out at the sea. Where could he have gone ... and why?

She took a light supper in her room, feigning a headache that Mary was more than willing to believe. She needed to be alone ... to think.

After slipping on a silky, white nightdress, Rebecca escaped into the warm, balmy night. Wearing a nightdress out was scandalous for a 17th century lady, but for Rebecca it was still too restrictive. How she'd love a T-shirt and a pair of cutoffs right now.

At her favorite place on the beach, Rebecca reclined in the sand. The moon was once again full, and its silver light sparkled off the dark waters.

Had she really been gone from her own time for nearly a month? She must surely be listed as dead now.

"Who ye be searching for, lass?" a deep voice whispered near her ear.

The hand that covered her mouth quickly stifled Rebecca's scream. She swung her head around to stare into Jonas' laughing eyes.

Once she recognized him, he removed his hand so she could speak.

"Jonas, where have you been? I have been so worried, how dare you leave me here like that?"

"No need to fret, lass, I have been near," he said as he knelt close to her.

"Not near enough, I was nearly attacked today." Even as Rebecca spoke the words she cringed at how needy they sounded.

"I was aware of your perils, lass."

"What?" She was shocked and could think of nothing else to add to the question.

"Ye handled it well enough, methinks." Jonas smiled wickedly, clearly awaiting the storm that was certain to erupt.

"You were there ... you saw?" she asked in an amazement that bordered on rage. He nodded and quickly caught her hand that had come up to deliver a blow to his smug face. "You brute! I was scared to death you know." Rebecca jumped up to leave, but he reached out and pulled her back to the sand.

She was taken back by the tenderness she glimpsed in his eyes. "I have followed ye, it was necessary to discover if ye were one of me enemies."

"And?"

He leaned close to her. "Me fair lass was quick-witted enough to prevent me having to give myself away by slaying the snake."

Tears streamed down her cheeks. Not until this moment had she realized just how empty she had felt without him and how terrified she had been that something might have happened to him.

Taking her into his arms, Jonas gently kissed her tears away. All the loneliness and confusion of the past few weeks began to melt away into a certainty. He was a brute, a blackguard and a pirate, but she had somehow fallen in love with him.

Rebecca wondered about this briefly. Was it possible to fall so deeply in love in such a short time? She knew that it was, and she also knew that a part of her soul had loved him even as he had haunted her on the *Sea Brat*.

She draped her arm around his neck and brought her lips to his, nearly panicking when she felt him stiffen and pull away.

Groaning, it took everything he had to keep from ripping her nightdress from her body. How he wanted her, every fiber of his body screamed to taste of this woman. The time away from her had done nothing but make him crave her more.

"Jonas, I need you," she whispered urgently.

His tongue came out to lick his lips. He was uncertain--torn between his need for her and his even deeper love for her.

There it was, he knew now the real reason behind his self-denial. She meant too much to use and discard, and discard her was eventually what he would have to do. How could there be room in his life for a woman ... one woman?

There was real pain in his eyes as he shook his head. "We cannot love, ye deserve better. Ye be a lady."

"No, Jonas, I need you, I want you," she whispered as she kissed his lips lightly. "To hell with tomorrow and yesterday, just make love to me right now."

She had pushed his will beyond endurance, he could take no more. He was, after all, a pirate. "The devil can take me for this, woman, but I will never know a moment's peace again without tasting your sweet flesh."

He had torn her nightdress away before he had even finished speaking. Hot, blinding desire had replaced the longing in his heart. Jonas let her remove his clothing one piece at a time while he devoured her soft skin with his hands.

Gently, he rolled her onto her back, and, reclining on his side, he gazed at a woman bathed in moonlight.

This is how he would always want to remember his witch of the sea, a mermaid of the moon and sea--sent to him from across time.

Again he tasted the sweet honey of her lips, but this time without restraint. There were no more thoughts, no more words, for each was caught up in their unbearable need for the other.

Trembling in anticipation, Rebecca needed his touch, his kisses, and his love nearly as much as she needed the air that she breathed. The roughness of his hands against her bare skin was strangely erotic, and her hunger for him erupted into a blaze of passion.

His agile fingers sought out her aching pussy, playing with her clit until he brought her to the edge of orgasm, but without letting her go over the edge. Again and again he would bring her to this point until she trembled uncontrollably with the need to slake her hunger.

Lying beneath him, she could feel his hard cock against the inside of her thigh, and she longed for him to fill her pussy. Wrapping her hand around his cock, she began stroking him, building his passion until his groans gave evidence that his need matched her own.

The tip of his cock rested against her clit, and slowly he began to rub it against her,

building her up to that moment when he would finally join his flesh with hers. Just as she was sure she could take no more, she felt him slip inside of her, filling her up.

Rebecca could not hold back her squeals of pleasure as he thrust his cock into her, arching her hips she met his fierce passion with a hunger that equaled his own. She longed for every inch of him to be buried deep inside her pussy. Wrapping her legs around his hips, she pulled his cock in even deeper.

He began to move with violent urgency, his incredible size caused some pain, but it was delicious pain. With each thrust he sent her fever higher. Her pussy clenched around his cock as he brought her closer to orgasm each time he plunged into her. Rebecca's whole being felt as if it would explode with hot, scorching delight.

Just when she was sure she could take no more, he cupped her face in his hands and continued to plunge his cock into her pussy as he gazed into her eyes. She let herself be lost in those pools of darkness as her body was wracked with the most explosive orgasm she had ever experienced.

She shivered as waves of pure ecstasy filled her body and soul, and just as she thought she would never again feel anything quite as delicious, he brought her to the brink once again. This time, it was the feel of his hot cum filling her cunt that brought her to orgasm with him. Only his mouth over hers kept her from screaming out his name.

Chapter Seven

A warm breeze drifted in through the open window, filling her room with the exotic scent of tropical flowers. Rebecca opened her eyes just enough to see that soft sunshine heralded in a new day.

She had little time to contemplate the events of the night for a weather-darkened hand reached out to caress her bare shoulder. Jonas' lips left a trail of kisses from her back up to her neck until he had her earlobe in his mouth, teasing it playfully with his tongue.

Sighing deeply, Rebecca thought that she would know complete contentment--if only this could be real ... if only she could know that her grandfather was safe somewhere in time.

"Love, I need to show you something," Jonas whispered softly.

Rebecca rolled over to look into his smiling face.

Does he know his own appeal, how he can make me desire his touch by his mere presence?

She did not think that Jonas was aware of just how sensual he was, but Rebecca was not fool enough to think that other females were not as affected by it as she was.

"What do you have to show me?"

"Soon enough, love." Jonas moved from the bed, and his eyes danced with glee at the stricken look on her face. "I must be going. When ye be ready, take the staircase to the chambers below the house, I will find ye there." Snatching his clothes from the chair where he had carelessly flung them, he dressed.

"Jonas...."

When he was once again clothed, he leaned over and took her in his arms to cut off her protest with one last kiss before leaving.

Rebecca became all too aware that whenever he left her, she felt chilled. A strange ache filled her heart, for she knew that their destinies could not join as one, not for longer than a brief instant in time.

Leaving the bedroom, she discovered that Mary had already brought up fresh water for her to bathe. After refreshing herself with a quick bath, she dressed in a day gown made of lightweight material that was as casual as she could get away with. During the past few weeks, Rebecca had gained a new respect for the women of days gone by. These poor women were stifled with layers of material, no matter the temperatures they had to endure.

She found Mary in the dining room laying out a full English breakfast. When she first sat down she had thought that she could barely eat a bite but was surprised that she really was hungry. "Thank you so much," she said, giving Mary a smile.

"A pleasure to serve you, miss." Mary beamed with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Is the captain eating today or does he always skip out on breakfast?" Rebecca wondered if Mary knew what Jonas was up to.

"Bless ye, child, ye do have an interesting way of talking." Mary appeared to be amused by the way she spoke, but this was something Rebecca had grown used to. She had an extremely difficult time shedding her modern speech and had given up on it.

"The captain has not been at the house but last night." Mary smiled knowingly, and this brought a blush to Rebecca's cheeks.

Rebecca decided to let the matter drop but was determined to find out what she could from Jonas when she saw him next.

"How do I get to the chambers beneath the house?" she asked.

Mary's eyes widened in surprise. "How do ye know of them?"

"The captain asked me to go there."

"Ye must be special for him to tell you about that." Again, there was that smile. "When ye be done I will take ye to them."

* * * *

Mary had shown her a staircase that was hidden beneath a floor covering in the library. The stairs were very steep, and there was only a rickety wooden rail to hold onto as she descended them. The housekeeper had refused to accompany her into the tunnels but had given her a lantern to help light her way.

"I'll not be going down there," she'd said, holding up a hand to indicate there would be no argument about it. "Legend says the labyrinth beneath this island is a route that evil spirits take to the underworld, I'll not be taking my chances."

Rebecca knew that it would do little good to attempt to coax the other woman so she had accepted the lamp and descended alone.

"Go to your left--not to the right. You'll be finding a nasty pirate's dungeon if ye do," Mary called to her from the top of the staircase.

"Thanks for the warning." Rebecca's voice carried and vibrated off the earthen walls.

The light she carried did little to ward off the darkness, and in the distance she could hear water dripping and the scurry of rodents. The thought of rats had always made her skin crawl, and now was no different.

It was obvious that the tunnels directly beneath the house were manmade, but she soon found herself emerging into a natural cavern with another tunnel leading out of it. Stopping abruptly, she felt the sure knowledge that someone was watching her. Turning, she peered behind her but could see nothing beyond the glow of the lamp.

Ghostly thoughts added to her apprehension. What if she was to get lost, unable to find her way out? Would she wander aimlessly in the dark, destined to traverse this maze through eternity?

Taking a deep breath to boost her courage, she entered the next tunnel. The glow of the lamp did little more than add to the menacing atmosphere by casting ghostly shadows on the tunnel's dark walls. It seemed as if she had walked for miles, though she was aware that she had only been in the second tunnel a few minutes.

Focusing on the ground to avoid plunging headlong into some hidden drop-off, Rebecca did not see the dark figure that loomed ahead of her until she nearly walked into it.

Her screams echoed through the hollow tunnels, and she would have dropped the lamp if Jonas had not swiftly reached out for it. The light reflected in his dark eyes--eyes that were dancing with humorous delight.

"You ... you jerk!" Rebecca's angry words spilled forward before she had time to realize he would have no idea what she was saying, though she was quite sure that he had caught the drift of it as he was now smiling widely.

"Pray tell, love ... what is a ... jerk?" The laughter in his voice did little to cool her anger.

She glared at him. "I don't know if I could think of an equivalent in your ancient language."

"Ancient language is it?" He laughed. Jonas took her hand in his and was now leading her through the tunnel. "The sea witch is still determined to be of a distant, faraway time. Is she not satisfied with the time she is in right now ... with me?" he added softly.

Rebecca stopped abruptly, forcing him to turn around and look at her. "I am telling the truth, Jonas, and I am not insane. You will see soon enough." She couldn't help the heavy sadness in her voice as she spoke.

His only response was to lean down and place a kiss on her forehead. Rebecca felt exasperated, for he still obviously thought she was crazy.

With no more words between them they continued through the darkness, sometime later they came to another cavern--this one much larger than the first. It was brightly lit with several glowing lanterns.

Rebecca gasped at the many wonders before her eyes. The light reflected off so many jewels and golden treasures, their brilliance lent a dream quality to the cavern. "I guess I don't have to ask where it all came from?" she commented with more than a hint of cynicism.

"Ah, fair maiden, I am naught but a pirate, as ye well know." Jonas brought her hand up to his lips and kissed it gently.

"Is this what you wanted me to see?"

He shook his head and led her over to a crevice in the rock wall where he took out a small wooden coffer. "What ye must see be in here." He pointed to the box. "First I must tell ye a tale, it is one that few others have heard."

Rebecca remained silent, waiting for him to begin.

A faraway look entered his eyes as he began. "Me mother was a lovely French actress, her name was Josephine." Jonas paused long enough to pull out a cask of rum he'd stashed. He took several swallows and offered it to Rebecca who took a swig, hoping it would ward off the chill of the cave. "Me father fell deeply in love with me mother the first time he seen her perform and persued her relentlessly until she finally agreed to wed him." Jonas had sunk to the floor and sat with his back against the stone wall, Rebecca did likewise.

"That's a beautiful story," she said, "but is it so unusual?"

"What be unusual about this tale is who me father was."

Rebecca waited as Jonas closed his eyes, letting his thoughts drift back in time.

"Me father was an exiled prince, and this was the reason for me mother's reluctance. She knew the trouble it would cause if he should ever come out of exile."

"Who was your father?" Rebecca prodded.

"Me father was Charles Stuart ... King Charles II," he answered.

"No way." Her eyes widened in astonishment. "That would make you..." she let the words drop off as their significance was too much to believe.

"Ye be correct, love. I be the rightful King of England and not that William of Orange."

"But..."

He put a finger to her lips to quiet her questions. "Fear not, love, I be having no desire for the throne, let the Orange have it. I want nothing more than to live out me life with the sea on the horizon. I have known naught but a pirate's life for nigh on twenty years since Sir George's passing."

"But Charles II had a queen," Rebecca again interrupted.

"It be true, but this was not until me mother had been murdered. She be not only a lowly

actress but a French Catholic. They could never hope to restore Charles to the throne with a Catholic queen, so they got rid of her. Not me father, but his ministers." Jonas paused to catch his breath and to indulge in more rum.

"Fearing the same fate that befell me mother would visit his son, me father sent me to live with an aging knight named Sir George Shelton. That be when I was a young child, me father handed me over to Sir George along with this coffer. He told me it be me key to the throne." His words trailed off, and he took another drink.

"I never saw me father again. Sir George be a kindly old gentleman, who also be childless, he made me his son and heir. He told me it be not a fair trade for a throne, but it would keep me alive."

"He seems as if he was very wise." Rebecca smiled. "This is an incredible story, and one I have to tell you ... never comes to light."

"Which is as I want it," Jonas put in. "After James was deposed, it somehow became known to William and Mary that I existed, they be after me since."

"But why, if you do not even want to be king?"

"They be taking no chances, I be guessing. Their marriage lines are in here." He pointed to the wooden coffer. "This be what they want, along with me own blood."

It suddenly dawned on her who may be responsible for the disappearance of the *Dark Revenge*. "That man yesterday, was he sent by them?"

"Aye, to be sure. That be why I be making me bed here."

"Where's your ship?"

"It be berthed on another island, as the scoundrels have managed to discover this one."

"That was the urgent business that brought you back?"

"Aye." He lifted the cask for another swig of rum.

Exasperated, Rebecca grabbed the bottle and placed it behind her back. "Enough rum, you drink far too much rum for your own good. We have to figure out how all this fits together and what we can do about it."

Jonas leaped to his feet and drew his cutlass. "Urrr ... ye be pining for a fight, matey, to be taking me rum."

Rebecca spied another sword a short distance away in the midst of an array of other weapons. She quickly rolled away from him and clutched the sheath. Jonas paid no attention to her for as soon as she rolled away from the rum, he picked it up.

"Drop that cask!" she demanded as she drew the blade from the leather sheath.

He swung around to stare in astonishment, but his surprise quickly faded to be replaced with laughter.

"On guard, sir," she said, stepping back into a fencing stance.

Tossing the cask aside, he brought the blade of his cutlass across the sword she held, the clash of metal rang through the cavern. He laughed. "Ye be a foolish wench."

She, of course, could not fence, and he swiftly had her backed up against the wall.

"Give up ye blade, madam, or ye will be forcing me to cut away your gown." His voice was tinged with laughter, but his eyes shone with a smoldering passion that threatened to ignite at any moment.

Rebecca released the sword, and it fell to the ground with a loud clank. His arm fell to his side as his blade followed hers. He moved close to her, pressing her tightly against the cool stone wall. His lips sought out hers, and she brought her arms up over his neck and wrapped her fingers though his long hair.

"I be in need of your sweetness again, love." His hoarse voice revealed his lusty intentions.

Rebecca's own blood was sent racing to a sweltering heat, and she could do no more than sigh.

Lifting her skirts, he effortlessly ripped away the material beneath it that put a barrier between him and what he wanted.

While his skilled fingers found her clit and proceeded to send ripples of delight through her, she used her tongue to dance with his and teasingly lick at his lips and dark mustache.

Just as she was sure she could endure no more, he freed his cock and with one quick movement he lifted her up and impaled her with it.

The sheer feeling of his rock-hard shaft filling her nearly brought her to the point of complete ecstasy, but she managed to wrap her legs around his waist. With her back against the wall he moved within her, pounding her with such urgency that Rebecca's pussy tightened around him, pulling him into her with her own searing desire. Her body was wracked with an earth shattering orgasm that pushed him over the edge.

With one final thrust, she felt his body stiffen as he pulsed within her, taking her to the point of another sweet release.

Jonas buried his face in her hair and continued to hold her close. "I regret ye will be without undergarments, love." His voice was soft and still trembling.

"I doubt I will miss them, the sacrifice was well worth it." She lifted her lips to his and kissed him tenderly.

As easily as he had lifted her, he now guided her gently back onto her feet. She smoothed her skirts, and he promptly refastened his trousers. Jonas then took her hand in his once again. "There be something else I be wanting to show you."

Once again he led her down a tunnel, different from the one they had entered. This one had a definite incline, and just as Rebecca thought she would run out of breath, they emerged to the outside world and into a thick grove of palms.

When they had cleared the trees, Rebecca was taken back by the beauty of the scene before her. The sun was beginning to make its descent into the sea, telling Rebecca that they were now on the western side of the island. It was a small cove completely surrounded by cliffs.

"It's beautiful here."

"It is more than that." He motioned toward the rock cliffs.

On closer inspection, Rebecca saw that in many places on the cliffs there were grotesquely carved faces that resembled masks. "How interesting, what are they?"

"They be the guardians of the underworld. The natives believed this cave to be the entrance to the netherworld."

"So we have just come from the land of the dead?" she said with some amusement.

He sat in the sand and drew her down with him. "Aye, I feel like I have been reborn now," he said tenderly.

A lump formed in her throat, and she was forced to look away in order to keep him from seeing the tears that stung her eyes. How bittersweet were her emotions for him and how tragic that she should have to sail across the sea of time to find the one man that she truly loved. It could never be for them, she knew this, but he did not yet believe it.

The winds played with her long, red tresses, and when she looked back at him he could plainly see the pain in her eyes.

"What ails ye, lass?" he asked,

She gave him the answer he sought. "I love you."

Again, his eyes reflected wicked laughter. "Ye love a pirate?"

"Yes."

Agitated, he stood up and began pacing in the sand. "And the fair lady cannot be loving a mere pirate, and this be a worry to her?"

Rebecca shook her head in denial. "I would love you no matter who you were, it's just that I know we will have such a short time together."

"The answer to said problem is simple, love," he said as he sank down on his knees before her. "Stay here with me, ye can become me first mate."

"I want to so badly," Rebecca sobbed, "but I can't."

Pulling her close, he kissed her forcefully. "Why can it not be?"

Rebecca brought her hands up to gently push him back. "You still don't believe that I am not from this time, do you?"

He brought his hands up in a gesture of helplessness. "'Tis impossible, love."

Rebecca shook her head in denial of his logic. "No, it's not. I don't know how it happened, but it did."

"Listen to me, lass." He pointed to the high bluff above the cliffs. "If ye ever set sail on the winds of time, I'll build ye a lighthouse there so ye be knowing where to find me."

They both froze as the distant sound of cannon fire reached them.

"What was that?" Rebecca asked, suddenly filled with dread.

"Methinks it be Jester and the *Dark Revenge*." Jonas was on his feet and dragging Rebecca to hers. "Ye go back through the tunnels, and I'll swim around the rocks," he said rapidly while pushing her toward the cave entrance. Just as she turned to leave, he grabbed her arm and quickly brought his lips over hers in a fervent kiss. "Ye be warned, do not go up to the house until I come for you."

Rebecca watched him run toward the beach and wade into the sea, and no matter how hard she tried, she could not shake the sense of doom that had now cast a shadow over her.

Following Jonas' instructions, Rebecca felt her way through the darkened tunnel until she came to the large cavern. Here she grabbed a lantern and followed the second tunnel. Her return trip seemed much swifter, and before she knew it, she was standing at the bottom of the stairs that led into the house.

She sensed an eruption of commotion above her, but all sounds were muffled, and it was difficult to distinguish what she was hearing.

Rebecca stiffened at the sound of a woman's terrified screams, knowing it could only be Mary. She started shaking with apprehension, realizing she had to go up, no matter what Jonas had told her. Mary was in trouble, and she couldn't just hide down here while someone was hurting her.

Placing the lantern on the ground, Rebecca gripped the wooden handrail and mounted the stairs. Jonas' voice kept repeating his warning in her head. *Ye be warned, do not go up to the house!*

Rebecca forced his words away. She had no choice but to go against his wishes, though even before she lifted the hinged door in the floor she knew it was a mistake.

The library was empty, and Rebecca quickly replaced the floor covering which hid the door. She could still hear Mary's cries, but now they were further away, out in the gardens.

Creeping through the library, she searched for some type of weapon. There seemed to be nothing more dangerous than a fireplace poker.

Damn, she thought. *He is a pirate, you'd think you could at least find a pistol.*

She concluded that the poker would have to do, and with it in hand, Rebecca stealthily made her way to the front of the house. She had nearly gotten to the double doors that opened out to the front gardens when she heard the click of a pistol close to her ear.

Rebecca froze.

"Discard your weapon, madam." The owner of the voice spoke in a distinct British accent, and Rebecca had no illusions that it would be a pirate.

She let the poker fall to the floor but made no further move. A hand roughly pulled her around, and she found herself facing an officer of the Royal Navy. The man's appearance was immaculate, from his precisely kept brown hair to his sharp blue eyes. There was not even a speck of dust on his crisp uniform.

"Sir, what is the meaning of this intrusion?" Rebecca forced some authority into her voice.

He smiled. "Intrusion indeed, madam."

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked again, this time leaving no doubt of her anger.

"I am here on official business of his majesty, King William. As well, madam, I am confident you are aware that you are in the home of the pirate, Jonas Shelton?"

"Indeed, Commodore, I believe you have made a mistake. You are in the home of *Sir* Jonas Shelton."

"Commodore Wellington, if you please," he told her with a smirk. "I am aware that he is *Sir* Jonas Shelton, but he is still wanted as a pirate."

Rebecca contemplated how much the commodore knew. Was he in on the conspiracy or just following orders? She wondered if the man would be so willing to arrest Jonas if he knew that the pirate was his true king.

"As you can see, *Sir* Shelton is not here," Rebecca said, hoping it would be enough to convince the man to go away.

"I had come to that conclusion, madam, but coming across you has made my job immensely easier." The commodore began leading her to the doors.

"What are you doing with me?" Rebecca screamed.

"You, my lady, will be our bait."

"What would make you believe he would come for me?"

"The man would be a fool not to come after a lady such as you, and the one thing Captain Jonas is not, is a fool."

"I assure you he will not be foolish enough to take your bait." Rebecca spat out her heated words.

"On the contrary, if I am correct ... you are his one weakness."

* * * *

Rebecca watched sadly as the island grew distant. Her eyes filled with tears at the sight of the awful destruction that had been wreaked on the little fishing village by the *Mary Stuart's* cannons.

At least Jonas' housekeeper had been saved as the result of Rebecca's appearance. The commodore had decided to leave Mary to deliver the news of Rebecca's capture. He'd made it clear that she would be tried as a pirate and hung.

Rebecca closed her eyes to block out the sight of the island. It was a catch 22, if she had listened to Jonas she wouldn't be on her way to the gallows, but Mary would be. She could only hope that the person hearing her case would be just and realize she was no pirate.

Chapter Eight

The world beyond the walls of Fort Charles sped by, while life for Rebecca had come to a standstill. She had been a prisoner of the Royal Navy, forced to wear chains throughout her journey to Port Royal. Though she no longer wore chains, she was very much aware of her prisoner status.

Commodore Wellington had drawn the line when it came to locking her up in a cell full of scoundrels. Instead, he had opted to confine her to the officers' quarters in a room that was not much better than a cell.

Though she was locked up, Rebecca was thankful for the room that afforded her a beautiful view of the harbor, and she sat by it for hours hoping to sight the *Dark Revenge*.

So far, the Governor of Port Royal had not gone as far as ordering her execution, since she obviously did not fit the image of a pirate and the people might not look too kindly on her murder. In any case, she was much more valuable alive than dead. They had much bigger fish to fry.

Part of her prayed Jonas would come for her, but another part of her hoped he would not take their bait. She would rather they hang her than to watch Jonas swinging from the gallows.

Rebecca rose from the simple, wooden chair and began pacing the floor once again. Today was the 6th of June, tomorrow, much of what was Port Royal would be gone. The city literally sunk into the sea when the earthquake of 1692 struck. She shuddered at the misery that was sure to descend on so many people. The one thing she was sure of was, when it happened, she had no desire to be on the second floor of any of these buildings as she was now.

A commotion broke out below, and the noise intruded on her thoughts. Rebecca peered through the window, hoping to see what all the ruckus was about. She could only see uniformed men running about the fort.

There was little time to wonder about the frenzied actions of the men as two uniformed guards burst through her door. Each took her by an arm and escorted her from the room.

"What is this?" she asked, angrily trying to shake off their grip.

"The *Dark Revenge* has been spotted, and as a precaution the commodore has ordered that you must be locked with the rest of the prisoners," one of the men informed her.

The insides of her stomach began to roll. What chance did the *Dark Revenge* have against a whole garrison?

They entered the dank prison of Fort Charles, and the odor covered them like an invisible blanket. Rebecca gagged and attempted to breathe through her mouth.

The older of the two men who were escorting her smiled apologetically. "Apologies, miss, but if you choose to be a pirate's mistress, you must pay the price."

"Indeed, sir!" Rebecca glared at him, yanking her arm from his grasp.

They slammed shut the thick iron bars that locked her in a cell. She noted that the cell had only one other occupant, though Rebecca paid little attention to the old man who dozed against the far wall.

On the other hand, the cell next to them contained several men of all descriptions, some were even missing a leg or an arm, and all were crude and dirty. One such man with long,

stringy black hair and an eye patch had put his face between the bars that separated them.

"Poppet, come over here and stick yer hand through and give me a feel!" A foul odor accompanied the man's words.

Rebecca turned her back on him and studied the sleeping man in her cell. He was old and did not appear to be any threat. She took a few steps closer to give him a more thorough examination--there was something disturbingly familiar about the figure.

Two steps closer, she couldn't believe what she was seeing. *It couldn't be!*

"Grandpa! Captain Ash!" Rebecca exclaimed loudly. The old man stirred and peered up at her, but he closed his eyes again and endeavored to slip into sleep once again. Her voice brought him awake. "Grandpa, is it you? Wake up!"

Rubbing his eyes, he got to his feet and stared at her, as if unsure of what he was seeing.

Stepping closer, she took him into her arms. All traces of sleep faded from his eyes as recognition struck him. "What are you doing here, girl? How did this happen?"

"I would like to ask you the same thing, we all thought you were washed overboard and dead," she informed him.

"Washed overboard all right, but not quite sure about dead," he said in a gruff voice that portrayed his obvious disgust with his situation.

"The same thing must have happened to both of us," she concluded.

"How did you get to be a prisoner?" he wanted to know.

Rebecca related her story as best she could, including her feelings for Jonas, minus what one would not like a grandfather to know.

The old man was amused. "So my little girl has gone and fallen in love with one of the most dreaded pirates of the Spanish Main, and now they have you locked up because he has come to rescue his maiden?" Chuckling, he shook his head in disbelief.

"Grandpa, there's nothing funny about this situation!"

"You always were one to find mischief no matter where it be."

"Grandpa, we have another big problem."

A smile spread across his weathered face. "I don't know how our problems could get much worse.

"Tomorrow is June 7th," she whispered in his ear so that the others would not overhear. "The earthquake of Port Royal," she added.

The light of understanding entered his tired, blue eyes. "We have to get out of here," he said with urgency.

"I know, but how?"

"With any luck, your young man will find us," he offered.

"That's exactly what they want him to do, they are using me to get him to the gallows."

"I don't doubt it." He laughed.

She was suddenly curious. "How did you get to be here, Grandpa?"

"Well, my story is not nearly as exciting as yours. I was washed overboard same as you, but when I came up, it was the *Mary Stuart* that fished me out of the water. They took me for a pirate who had been sent adrift, and I've been here ever since."

"So you never got near the *Dark Revenge*?"

"No, never got the chance, but as you did I guess you've broken the family curse, eh?"

"Not exactly," she admitted. "I returned the ring, but we are still here." Her hands went up in a gesture of helplessness. Captain Ash had no ideas to contribute, but Rebecca did. "I figure it has to have something to do with the fate of the *Dark Revenge*. We are somehow tied to

it.”

“I think you are on the right track, the key may be preventing the untimely end of the *Dark Revenge*,” he mused.

“I know, but the problem is, how do you change history--especially if you are not quite sure what that history is?”

* * * *

Rebecca peered out the window for the hundredth time since she had been locked in the cell the day before. There had been no sign of the *Dark Revenge*, though it had supposedly been spotted. She had no idea what time it was, but that fateful hour was drawing near ... the time when the earth would tremble and the ocean would swallow many of them up.

She didn't belong here!

This wasn't her destiny!

These were thoughts her mind cried out, but her heart was not so sure. She knew Jonas was out there somewhere, she could feel him--*but what was he waiting for?*

Then it dawned on her what he might be waiting for. Maybe he was taking a chance on her story, planning to let nature do what he knew would be impossible for him to do.

The *Dark Revenge* was out there all right, but it wasn't planning on coming into port, it was bracing down for a possible tidal wave, and she suspected that even at this moment, Jonas was already ashore, waiting for his opportunity.

Oh, she should have given him more details of the places to stay away from.

He was taking a big chance on whether she would survive the earthquake--or even if he would, but possibly there was no other choice.

Rebecca tried to remember as many details as she could as to what areas were hit the hardest and what happened to Fort Charles. She knew Fort Charles had survived with some damage--fortunately it was on high ground and would not sink into the ocean. She realized that Jonas would probably recognize this as well and keep to high ground himself.

Rebecca drew a deep breath as she felt the first faint rumblings beneath her feet. The trembling was slight and probably would not be noticed by those not waiting for it.

“Come, Grandpa, quickly. Stand by this wall,” she called out frantically.

They held each other tightly as the earth groaned and erupted in a violent rage. The crumbling mortar drowned out the screams of the men near them. Rebecca closed her eyes and prayed that the falling debris would miss them.

The shaking went on for several minutes and when it finally did subside, she found that she was too terrified to even open her eyes. Her grandfather's voice brought her mind back from the safe place that it had burrowed into. “It is okay, girl, we are still breathing.”

The second she opened her eyes she reeled at the destruction. Though history can be learned through words, the horror of such a disaster can never accurately be understood--she knew that at this moment like she had never known it before.

Chapter Nine

The exit of the building had collapsed under tons of debris, and at first she was sure that the two of them had also been buried alive, but light filtered in from above them. There was a large gap leading to the outside world.

"Help us someone!" Rebecca yelled loudly. "We're down here, help us please!" The moments passed by excruciatingly slow, and she again called out her plea for help. This time--to her surprise--she heard her name called.

"Rebecca! Where are ye?"

Her heart leaped with a mixture of relief and joy. Jonas was out there, safe and searching for her. "Down here!" she called out.

An instant later he was peering through the gap in the rubble above them. It was a large opening, but they would need help in hoisting themselves out.

Locating a solid piece of the building to brace against, Jonas reached his arm down into the cell as far as he could. With the help of her grandfather lifting her up, Rebecca managed to grasp his hand and was lifted out.

"Please help him too," Rebecca implored.

Again, Jonas reached down for the old man, this task was much more difficult as he was a lot heavier than Rebecca had been.

At last, he managed to help the old man to freedom but possibly at the expense of pulling his own arm out of its socket. Jonas sat back on the pile of stone and rubbed his arm as if to ensure it was really still there.

The group made their way off the dangerous pile of debris and to safety. A few people were mulling about, but no one accosted them, in fact, no one paid them any attention at all. All were too caught up in their own abject misery and need for survival.

As soon as they were clear, Jonas took Rebecca in his arms and kissed her deeply. He pulled away, and where there had been relief on his face, she could detect simmering anger.

"Foolish woman, ye could have been killed. Why did ye not heed my warning? Why did ye not tell me of how much destruction this earthquake would bring?"

"You didn't believe me anyway, remember?"

"Well, perhaps I do now, let us get out of this blasted hole." He grasped her hand and began dragging her behind him.

Rebecca pulled back. "Wait! My grandfather."

Captain Ash had an apparent injury to his leg and was limping along behind them.

"Your grandfather!" Jonas was astonished.

"He isn't dead. The same thing happened to him that happened to me, but they found him and put him in there."

"Interesting." Jonas looked from Rebecca to the old man with the white hair and beard who resembled just another old and worn-out pirate.

A sudden thought struck Rebecca, and she folded her arms across her chest and stood her ground. "How could you just let me stay locked up in that building when you knew an

earthquake was going to destroy this place?"

A mischievous smile lit his features. "I wasn't here by no accident, love. I be on me way in to free ye when the ground started shaking."

"So you still didn't believe me? You weren't waiting for the earthquake to hit in order to free me?"

He shook his head. "Nay, lass, it hadn't even came to me mind until it happened."

"You believe me now?"

"Do I have a bloody choice?" His voice was grave.

"Let's go." Rebecca started walking. "Let's hope the *Dark Revenge* fared as well as we have--since you didn't warn them."

"Wenches!" Jonas grumbled. "What possessed me to rescue one?"

* * * *

Jonas had tied a boat to a rock on the beach some distance from the harbor. They were all relieved to see that it was still there and had not been washed out to sea as so much of Port Royal had been.

They had left the area as soon as possible but not without seeing the evidence of Port Royal's annihilation. The trio took cover in the palms for several hours before making an attempt to take the small boat out to sea.

It was night by the time they thought the ocean settled enough to set out. The dark waters were choppy and still unstable. More than once Rebecca braced herself to hit the water when a large wave tossed them about.

Fortunately, the *Dark Revenge* had weathered the disaster well and had crept closer to shore in search of their captain. Rebecca did not breathe easily until they were all safely on board.

Exhausted and unable to process any more thoughts, Rebecca had found her way to Jonas' bed and fallen into a deep sleep. She knew nothing more until an insistent pounding at the cabin door awakened her the next morning.

"Open up, you rascal! Where's my granddaughter?" Her grandfather's ornery voice forced its way into her sleep-sodden mind.

"Aye, aye!" Jonas hollered, dragging his body from the comfort of the bed to open the door.

Captain Ash rushed in, his gaze falling on Rebecca who lay on the bed fully dressed, as she had been too tired to remove her clothing. He glared at Jonas. "There'll be no fooling around going on."

Jonas smiled in spite of the rude awakening. "Old man, ye be a mite late to save ye granddaughter's virtue."

Ash lunged for his throat, but being younger and more robust, Jonas avoided him easily.

"Grandpa, please!" Rebecca's voice rang out.

The old man stopped and looked at his granddaughter who was leaving the bed in order to stand between the two most important men in her life.

Rebecca rested one hand on her grandfather's shoulder. "Grandpa, I am a grown woman and can take care of myself. We may be in the 17th century, but we are not from this time. You know what I mean?" she prodded.

Ash grumbled something that was inaudible. Then the old man got in Jonas' face and stared him down. Jonas took an involuntary step backward.

"You hurt my little girl, I'll be sinking your fool ship myself!"

The pirate narrowed his eyes but made no reply.

Rebecca was no longer paying attention to the squabble. At her grandfather's words, a flash of memory shook her to the core. She closed her eyes and could almost see the scene play out before her.

In her dream there was a terrible storm, and they were being fired upon. She now remembered the details of the day she had gone overboard. The ghostly image of a ship resting at the bottom of the sea like some long forgotten corpse and the ghoulish specters pulling her under, angry ... wanting her to share in their cold, wet grave.

Rebecca swayed on her feet and felt her face lose all color.

Jonas reached out to steady her. "What be ye ill, love?"

"Where are we going right now?" she asked anxiously.

"*Isla de Niebla*."

"No!" She shook her head. "We can't go back there, they'll be waiting for us."

"We must go back," Jonas insisted. "Me booty and me mates' plunder be there."

"They'll be waiting there," she insisted. "The *Dark Revenge* was sunk not far from the island, I remember seeing it below the surface when I went over on the *Sea Brat*."

"She is right," her grandfather put in.

Jonas looked from one to the other, seemingly unsure what to believe. "They be too occupied in Port Royal to bother with the likes of me," he concluded.

Again Rebecca shook her head in denial. "Possibly they have a fleet waiting there for you also, the same as they had waiting in Port Royal." She could see he was wavering and wasted no time in pushing the edge she had gained. "No matter how they do it, they do it there, and sometime this month. This I know for a fact."

A thousand emotions flew across his face, but in the end it made no difference. "No matter the danger, I cannot abandon Mary or me other mates."

Rebecca looked away, for she understood that it was her very presence in history that had caused the demise of the *Dark Revenge*. If it had not been for him going to rescue her, possibly he would have already made his escape from the island and have sailed to some distant land and safety.

The commodore would have never known where to find him.

* * * *

The stifling cabin was too much to bear in her present state of mind. For her grandfather's peace of mind, she had agreed to share the cabin he occupied but had found that she just could not sleep.

All was still and silent on the deck above. A black velvet sky twinkled with a million shining stars. The slightest wisp of a breeze cooled her skin and flooded her with the tangy smell of the sea.

So caught up in her own thoughts, Rebecca barely noticed the beauty of the night. She dreaded what the next twenty-four hours would bring for they would surely make *Isla de Niebla* within that time. The certainty that doom awaited them scratched at her insides.

Rebecca leaned against the railing and gazed intently into the black, glassy waters. What secrets lay beneath its mysterious surface? She trembled with emotion, unable to hold back her tears any longer. If only the sea could whisper its secrets to her, tell her how to cheat destiny from the man she loved.

Strong arms encircled her waist and pulled her tightly against a warm body. "Ye could go over," he whispered.

She turned to look at Jonas and was struck by the gentleness she detected which was in such contrast to who he was. Turbulent emotion swirled within his black eyes, saying so much to her that words could not express.

Neither of them could find the words, so they let their touch say what they could not.

"Wait here," he said softly.

She did as he asked, and a few moments later he returned with a music box. Setting the object on the deck, he opened it. Rebecca was delighted by the sweet music that filled the night.

"Would you dance with the likes of a pirate, fair lady?"

They held each other tightly and swirled to the haunting melody.

For the two lovers, the outside world no longer existed, there was only them and the starry night. Softly caressing her back, he found the clasps of her gown and freed her of the stifling material. Cupping her breasts, he squeezed her mounds of flesh, his thumbs teasing her nipples until ripples of sensation rushed through her body and she trembled with need.

Jonas stepped away and gazed at her, his eyes reflecting the passion that burned within him. Hastily he removed his clothing. Rebecca could not help staring at the sight of the muscles rippling beneath his tanned skin as he moved.

Reaching out to touch him, she let her hand trail down to his cock, which stood erect and ready. His moans of approval aroused her even more, sending hot juices to flood her pussy.

"If ye want some too, ye better stop," he warned before pulling her into his arms.

The fire of his touch drowned out all but the unadulterated sensation of his lovemaking, his mouth devoured her tender lips as he gently laid her down. With a touch that was both ravenous and gentle simultaneously, he spread her legs to accept cock. She could not suppress her cry when she felt the heat of him join her own flesh, filling her cunt with his huge shaft.

On this night their lovemaking was not only filled with the swelling obsession that comes with blossoming love, but also with the desperation of knowing they may lose each other forever.

This time his lovemaking was not so gentle, his apparent need of her driving him to savagely invade her, taking what he needed, harshly thrusting into her. Rebecca's hunger matched his, and she clawed at his flesh to take even more of her.

The sizzling heat between her legs exploded and fragmented throughout her body. With one final thrust, Jonas stiffened and sent his stream of hot cum deep inside of her. Reluctant to part, they lay beneath the moonlight, relishing the rapture of being in each other's arms.

* * * *

Black storm clouds gathered above the sea, massing together with evil intent. Rebecca's heart constricted with fear. All day she had felt it, a malevolence that pervaded the very air.

There was a storm building, and the *Dark Revenge* was headed straight into it. The knowledge of what awaited them was deeply imbedded into her soul, and it filled her with terror.

She had tried numerous times to convince Jonas to change course, but without success. He felt it would be a betrayal to his crew, as their bounty was tied to the island as well as his.

Though on the surface he had come to believe her, deep inside she knew he still held doubts. Jonas just could not bring himself to believe her fantastic story, not really. Rebecca knew that even if he truly accepted what she said, his pride would not let him allow the British to invade his home. They had already wreaked enough havoc on his life, how could she ask him just let them attack the island?

The hours passed and still she remained at the rail, searching for the signs that would hail in their destiny. The night was approaching and would join with the storm-ridden clouds to

bring them into a darkness they might never emerge from.

Captain Ash came to stand next to her, his own fear of the future far overshadowed by his concern for her. There were no words to reassure her, but he tried nonetheless. "We must accept what happens, maybe there just is no way to change the past."

"I know." She gave him a weak smile.

"Mon, you crazy girl! Don't do what dey be expecting!" The voice came out of nowhere, vibrating so loudly through her head, she felt her brain would burst.

She turned to her grandfather. "Did you hear that?"

He shook his head. "What?"

Rebecca didn't take the time to explain, she knew who it was. They had somehow found a way to send his thoughts to her over the expanse of time. She had to find Jonas and somehow convince him to change course.

Rebecca took off at run and nearly collided with the first mate. "Where's the captain?" she asked breathlessly.

"He be in his cabin, poppet," he said, motioning toward the captain's quarters with his thumb.

Rebecca came through his door so excited she could barely breathe.

"Jonas, change course."

He stared at her through eyes as hard as granite. Would he deny her this one thing?

Jonas shook his head. "I cannot!" His voice was harsh, but she did not miss the sadness within his words.

"Come in from the west," she tried to explain. "They are expecting you to come from the east, so circle around and come in from the west. You will have the advantage of surprise."

The hardness left his eyes to be replaced by quiet speculation.

The silence between them stretched on until Rebecca was sure it would suffocate her.

A hint of a smile touched his lips. "So be it."

Rebecca breathed a sigh of relief, and for the first time in days she felt a ray of hope.

* * * *

The gales tossed the *Dark Revenge* about violently, the frequent bursts of lightning the only illumination they had. The ship traveled stealthily through the dark, gaining fast on *Isla de Niebla*.

"Ahoy, mates!" the watcher in the crow's nest cried over the sound of the wind. "They be there, hidden this side of the cliffs."

Rebecca's stomach twisted at the news. If they had come in from the other direction, they would never have seen them until it was too late.

Jonas took his place at the helm, the *Dark Revenge* gaining quickly on the other vessel. "Rebecca, get below!" he called out in a voice that left no room for argument.

Jonas cranked the ship's wheel, bringing it around starboard.

The force of the sudden shift of direction sent Rebecca sprawling to the deck, her grandfather grabbed her arm, trying to pull her up, but found himself flailing on the ground beside her.

"Fire!" Jonas yelled above the gales.

The ship's guns erupted in a procession of explosions. In the time it took to reload, the *Mary Stuart* had returned fire, and Rebecca felt the timber shudder beneath her as they were hit.

"Fire," Jonas bellowed again. "Send her down to Davy Jones!"

The thundering guns were deafening, and Rebecca put her hands to her ears to try to

block it out. An orange glow lit the night as she struggled to her feet to see the *Mary Stuart* ablaze. The screams of the men could be heard even from the *Dark Revenge*.

Rebecca glanced over at Jonas and was taken back by the sight that greeted her eyes.

The flames danced eerily on his face, and the wind whipped at his long hair. His black eyes were as cold as the depths of the sea, and she could detect nothing in them but the glee of his dark revenge. His mother's murder had not gone unanswered.

For a split second, Rebecca felt a reluctance to go to him, wondering if he really was the man she thought him to be, or whether his demons had torn at his heart until he was truly what he appeared to be--a black-hearted pirate?

How could she have known that this moment's doubt would bring her more sorrow than she had ever known?

An unexpected burst of wind tilted the *Dark Revenge* sideways. Rebecca grabbed desperately for anything to hold onto, but there was nothing.

Lightning split the sky, radiating a ghostly, surreal light on the picture. Rebecca felt the cold fingers of the sea reach out to pull her into its bowels.

The last thing her eyes saw before being swallowed by the dark waters was the look of agony in his stricken eyes.

Chapter Ten

The sea had lost its chill, instead it covered her like a warm, inviting blanket. She gave herself up to the comfort of nothingness, blissful numbness.

"Crazy girl!" Chey's voice was there, pulling her away from the warm blanket, but she resisted. "Mon ... you blew it, girl. You broke no curse. Didn't ya figure it out? It was never a pirate's curse." His words had taken on a singsong quality--an uncanny warning.

The water heaved from her lungs, and she was gasping, pulling in oxygen. The brilliance of the sun nearly blinded her, but it was not until her eyes adjusted that she felt herself sliding into near madness.

She lay on the deck of the *Sea Brat* as it bobbed on the waves. Chey, with water dripping from his hair and clothes, was anxiously staring down at her. "Mon, you gave me a scare," he said as a smile brightened his face.

She gaped at Chey as if he were a ghost and could not possibly be real.

He looked at her curiously. "What's wrong with you, girl?"

"How long have I been gone?" she wanted to know.

"You were down a bit, but lucky for you, crazy girl, I got you up in time."

Rebecca shook her head. "It can't be, I was gone a long time, like weeks. I was in the past aboard the *Dark Revenge*, attacking the *Mary Stuart*. My grandfather was there."

Chey just stared at her.

"Where's my grandfather?"

"Don't ya remember, mon? He disappeared from the *Sea Brat* while on his way to the island."

Struggling to a sitting position, Rebecca looked toward the island set against the blue of the Caribbean like an emerald set in an ocean of sapphires. Even from this distance she could see the white sand beaches beckoning to her with the promise of a paradise.

She became conscious of the fact that she was indeed wearing the same clothes she had been wearing the day she'd gone overboard. She grappled with that idea. The day she'd gone overboard was apparently this same day.

She desperately sought out the scar on her calf left by the shark, the scar was indeed there. "You see," she pointed excitedly to her leg, "I was attacked by a shark, and Jonas saved me. Here are the scars."

"I'm sorry, girl." His voice held a note of sincere sympathy. "I can't say if you had them scars before or not."

Rebecca shook her head violently. "It can't be, it was all so real." She was nearly sobbing.

Grave alarm had entered his eyes. "I am thinking you need a doctor, girl."

She was not so sure he was wrong. Had she lost touch with her sanity, had it all been hallucinations brought on by the lack of oxygen? How could the pain in her heart be so sharp if she had really fallen in love with a man that didn't exist?

"He exists, he has to!" Rebecca cried.

Chey arched his brow. "Who?"

"Jonas Shelton, I met him and sailed with him."

Chey smiled in spite of the seriousness of the situation. "He existed all right, over three hundred years ago. He was the captain of the *Dark Revenge*, and that was his hideout." Chey pointed to the island.

Rebecca felt helpless, but her frustration quickly turned to anger. "Why didn't you know all that awhile ago?"

He shrugged.

"Things are not adding up. Where is the storm that was here when I went into the water?"

Chey lifted his hands as if to convey his own confusion. "It be very strange, mon. When I brought you back up, the clouds were gone. Like they were there one instant and just gone the next."

"You see," Rebecca got to her feet and pointed a finger at him, "that isn't normal, something isn't right here."

Chey shrugged again. "This is the Dead Zone, nothing would surprise me here."

"Even time travel?"

He chuckled. "That might be a big chunk to swallow."

"Chey, I heard you calling to me just before the attack, and again when I was in the water. You were saying some weird stuff about it never being a pirate's curse."

"Okay, that be it, mon, we are getting you to a doctor."

"I know it was you, I heard your voice."

I was calling your name when you went under," he explained.

A lump formed in her throat, she could not truly believe that she had dreamt the whole thing up.

Chey had gone to the helm and was bringing the boat to life. Rebecca noticed they were still headed for the island. "I don't want to go there anymore," she choked out. Somehow she knew she could not face whatever reality awaited her on *Isla de Niebla*.

"It is the closest place to find a doctor," he called back at her.

"I thought you said no one ever went to that island because people disappeared out here all the time?"

"And they do at that, but the island has been a popular resort for years, known as the Pirate's Lair."

Rebecca was really angry now. "You told me it was basically deserted.

"Are you crazy, girl, or did you just hit your head when you went over?" Chey sounded exasperated.

As they drew closer she could plainly see the *Dark Revenge* docked in a very modern port and concluded that it must be some type of museum now.

"That is the town of Niebla." Chey pointed. "We can find a doctor there."

Rebecca caught her breath, for she remembered the place as a tiny fishing village, and now it was a good-sized resort community.

"There is a large house here from the time of Jonas Shelton," she stated.

"There is, it is now an inn they call the Pirate's Lair."

If she had been dreaming or hallucinating, how could she have known this?

Had she read about this island and the *Dark Revenge* some place and it had somehow invaded her subconscious and come to her in the form of dreams?

Once reaching the island, Rebecca stepped onto the wooden dock and stared at the little harbor resort. There was a hotel, shops, restaurants and even a place to rent diving equipment. It was all so different than what she recalled, but at the same time so much of it was exactly the same. It was very hard to believe that she had dreamt so accurately of a place she had never been.

"Let's go find an M.D.," he urged her softly.

"No, I want to go to Niebla House," she said firmly.

He did not reply but stared at her blankly.

"The Pirate's Lair." She smiled to ease his mind.

He shrugged. "Okay, mon."

The path to the house was exactly where Rebecca remembered it, and she wasted no time in leading the way. When they emerged into the gardens, she could almost feel as if nothing had changed, it was nearly exact to her memory. "It's the same," she commented.

"It was restored to its original state," Chey informed her, still watching her as if she was a glass doll that could shatter at any moment.

Chey opened one of the double doors for her, and they entered. This is where the changes became obvious. What had once been the hall was now a lobby.

"Can I help you?" asked an older woman who stood behind the reception counter.

Rebecca found her words were caught in her throat, the woman looked a lot like Mary, but obviously was not.

The woman smiled and introduced herself. "Hi, I'm Netty. Can I help you with something? A room maybe?"

"Yes," Rebecca muttered. "Two rooms please."

"Just one room," Chey broke in. "These old places give me the creeps, if ya know what I mean." He laughed nervously.

"How long will you be staying?" Netty asked, looking up from the computer she was working on.

"I'm not really sure," Rebecca offered.

"That's okay!" The woman smiled, reassuringly. "What name do I put it under?"

"Rebecca Ashton."

Netty froze and looked up at her with something close to disbelief in her eyes. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, why wouldn't I be?" Rebecca was beginning to feel irritated with the whole situation. It wasn't enough that she questioned her own sanity, but even her name seemed to bring about odd looks.

"Okay." The woman shrugged. "Do you have a credit card?"

Rebecca realized that she had left her bag back on the boat. "Oh, it's on the *Sea Brat*--in my bag!"

"No problem, mon, I run for it," Chey offered.

After he'd left, the woman finished with her reservation and then showed Rebecca into the drawing room where she could wait for Chey to return.

On entering the room, Rebecca scrutinized it carefully. It was exactly as she remembered it, with one exception. Above the fireplace was an oil painting, a portrait of a pirate. Her heart leaped at the sight of him, the artist had captured those turbulent dark eyes with precision. She clearly remembered every contour of his face--the intimacy of his lips.

Somewhere deep inside, Rebecca knew she had not dreamed up this man, it had all been

real ... as real and solid as the floor she stood upon at this moment.

But what did this all mean?

Netty pointed toward the portrait. "Quite a handsome fellow, aye? His name is Sir..."

"Jonas Shelton," Rebecca finished for her.

"Oh, you know his story?"

"Not really." Rebecca shook her head. "What is his story?"

"Sir Shelton was the most feared pirate of his time, this was his home. He and his crew used this island as a hideout and later as a residence."

Rebecca gave the woman her full attention, curious as to what happened after she was yanked back to the present. "What happened to him?"

"Oh, he was greatly feared by the Spanish and the British alike. Though he was British himself, some say he had a vendetta against the Crown." Netty stepped closer to the fireplace and gazed up into the face of a man she had never known but knew so much about. "Some say he spent his life searching for a woman that didn't exist, a ghost perhaps." She glanced back at Rebecca with a strange look on her face.

Rebecca could only wonder what feelings she betrayed, the woman's words had set her heart thumping in her chest.

"There are tales of him sitting in the room upstairs and just staring out to sea for weeks at a time, and when he was not doing that, he was at sea ... searching."

"What a sad story." Rebecca gave the response Netty was expecting, but the sorrow in her heart was all too real.

"Yes it is. On the bluff overlooking the sea near his gravestone, is a lighthouse he erected for her. It is said that he did it in hopes it would guide her back to the island and him."

"His gravestone?" Rebecca forced the words from her lips as if they dripped poison. Though it was irrational to think of him as alive after three hundred years, the thought of his grave brought the fact into the harsh light of reality.

"Oh, there be a stone up there with his name on it sure enough, but his bones do not lie beneath it."

Rebecca's gaze fell from the painting to the woman as she waited for her to continue.

"They say one day he just gave up his search and walked into the sea. He could no longer endure his broken heart and took his own life."

Rebecca's throat was so tight that she could barely breathe.

"But legend has it that he did something very strange before he died, he gave a ring to an old shipmate of his, and asked that it be passed down through his children. He was convinced that it would help him find his beloved."

Rebecca suddenly became conscious of the golden ring that rested against her skin beneath her shirt. "So he never found this woman, and he never married?"

Netty shook her head. "As far as what is known he never married, but people say that to this day his ghost still searches for his lady. Some say the woman he searched for had been lost at sea and this sent the captain into insanity. Others just said he was plain insane and the woman never existed at all. Who knows, but it's very extraordinary that her name was Rebecca Ashton." She glanced at Rebecca to see what her reaction would be.

"What a strange coincidence." Rebecca laughed uneasily.

Netty seemed to come back to the present and put on a strange smile. "Since you share her name, I took the liberty of giving you the room that was hers, who knows, maybe the fact that a Rebecca Ashton has come to the island will be enough to let his soul finally rest."

Rebecca had the creepy feeling that Netty was very serious, and the thought was disconcerting. It was apparent that the woman took this ghost story far more seriously than one might expect.

Standing in the doorway, Chey cleared his throat to bring their attention to his presence. He held out the bag to Rebecca.

"Thank you, Chey." Rebecca smiled.

"Oh, great!" Netty was suddenly all business. "Let's finish checking you in then." The woman walked ahead of them.

Chey held back a bit so that they could have some privacy. "I don't like this, I don't want you to stay here," he whispered.

"It will be okay." Rebecca's voice held a great deal more confidence than it had a while ago. Now she knew she was not insane. What she had experienced had been real somehow ... somehow she had gone back into the past and changed the reality of this timeline.

In this timeline, it was not the *Dark Revenge* that lay at the bottom of the sea, but the *Mary Stuart*. She had somehow managed to save the ship and her lover's life.

But had she really done him a favor or herself? Had she saved him only so he could take his own life because of his loss ... of her?

Chapter Eleven

Rebecca sat at the window looking out at the vast expanse of ocean, just as she had in those days when she had waited for Jonas to return to the island.

But he had never really left the island then, had he?

At times like this, when she found herself lost deep in memory, she could almost feel his essence in the room with her. Did his spirit truly haunt this island as legend claimed, or was what she felt simply wishful thinking?

For days now she had sat by this window, her heart crying for some sign that he lived on- -if just in spirit. She was answered only by a bitter emptiness. Tears streamed down her face, and for the thousandth time she wondered how she would ever go on when her life had in truth ended three hundred years ago.

"Jonas, are you here?" she sobbed aloud.

Again she received nothing but the chilling silence of the grave.

There were times when she felt betrayed. Not only had fate conspired to take her lover from her, but her grandfather as well. How was it possible that he had stayed behind while she was ripped back to the 21st century?

Then doubt would cast its dark shadow on her. Was it really possible that she had read the story somewhere, and because her name was the same as that long ago Rebecca, her subconscious had put her in the story when she had blacked out?

Was Chey correct in thinking it all really was just a figment of her imagination?

Was she slipping into a world of her own creation, into insanity?

When the doubts began creeping in she tried to be logical, to analyze, as she was trained to do. Maybe she should leave this island, go back to Miami, and check herself into the best hospital available.

The thought did little to help her feel better, and even when she attempted to be optimistically objective, she still could not quite believe she had dreamed him up.

What was the answer?

Could fate be so cruel as to play such a trick on them? Why hadn't she been able to stay?

Maybe she should explore the island, or go take a look at the lighthouse? Aside from going to her spot on the beach, Rebecca had not ventured from the Pirate's Lair.

She was letting herself waste away in despair, but honestly believed there was nothing to live for.

Chey was anxious for her sanity, she could tell that he often fretted about what he should do. Rebecca was aware that she could not stay here indefinitely, but just for a while longer. This is what she would tell Chey when the subject came up for their inevitable need to return to Kingston.

Ridden with guilt with Chey putting his life on hold, she had urged him to take the *Sea Brat* back to Kingston until she was ready to leave. He wouldn't hear of it, afraid of what she would do if he left.

She took a deep breath and with quiet resolve came to a decision. She would explore the

island and look for any sign that some part of him had stayed behind to wait for her. If she found nothing, she would leave the island and seek psychiatric help.

If she did find something ... she really did not know what to do then.

She decided to cross that bridge when she came to it, but for now she would go in search of him. The easiest place to start would be the lighthouse.

Leaving her room, she found Netty at the front desk and asked her for a flashlight. Rebecca informed the hotel manager that she wanted to explore the island and was unsure if she would be back before dark, as it was already late afternoon.

The easiest way to reach the bluffs was by walking along the beach and then climbing the steep trail that would take her to the top. The cool ocean breezes were refreshing after spending so many days in her room looking out through the glass. The afternoon was waning and cast a stunning orange-red glow onto the landscape.

She tried not to think of Jonas, only to make it through each moment as it came. After reaching the base of the trail, Rebecca looked up at the lighthouse standing majestically against an expanse of orange blue sky. Her heart ached as she remembered his words that day.

If ye ever set sail on the winds of time, I'll build ye a lighthouse there, so ye be knowing where to find me.

Had those words been an omen?

The trail to the top of the bluff was much steeper than it had first appeared to be, but she didn't really mind, it gave her something to do, some purpose to take her next breath. Reaching the top, Rebecca swung around to look at the sea--the view was spectacular.

It was right to have come here. If he had made this lighthouse to guide her here, the least she could do was come and look at it.

At the thought of Jonas, Rebecca felt a lump in her throat once again.

The lighthouse sat in a state of crumbling decay, a sign on the door warned of the building's condemned status. A large, rusty padlock secured the entrance to keep trespassers out, and she wondered how long it had been since the lighthouse had sent out its welcoming radiance.

Not far from the lighthouse was the gravestone. She did not want to see it. To look onto his name carved in the cold stone would make it all too final.

Against her will, her feet moved as if on their own. Once in front of the stone, she squeezed her eyes shut, putting off the inevitable for just a few more seconds.

The moments dragged on, but as she knew she would, she finally opened her eyes to stare reality in the face.

Sir Jonas Shelton

June 21, 1702

Ten years he had waited for her return. What must his life have been like? What should a woman feel to have a man love her with such devotion?

Rebecca could not answer that as she not only felt her own painful loss but remorse for the pain she must have caused the only man she had ever really loved.

The wind ruffled her long curls, whipping her hair in front of her eyes. At that instant, it was as if someone breathed on her neck--a hot, moist breath.

Jumping, Rebecca swung around, expecting to find someone standing behind her, but she was still alone. In spite of her earlier resolve, she began to tremble. "Jonas!" she called out above the sound of the wind and the waves crashing against the cliffs.

The moments passed, but there was nothing. Deciding that it must have been her

imagination, Rebecca walked to the far side of the cliff that she knew overlooked the cove with the hidden cavern entrance.

Time had put its mark on the carved faces within the rocks. They were still noticeable, but the sea and the weather had not left them untouched.

The trail on this side of the bluff was much steeper and more than once she nearly plummeted to the bottom. At last, bruised and scratched, she reached the sand.

The sun had nearly completed its descent, making it necessary to switch on the flashlight before entering the darkening palm grove. The mouth of the cave stood menacing, its opening filled with a impenetrable, inky darkness. Rebecca's steps faltered, and fear wrapped over her.

The entrance to the underworld, the land of the dead.

What if he was waiting for her down there, waiting to take her to the grave with him?

Was she ready to die to be with him?

She closed her eyes and remembered the sound of his voice, his touch, and the feel of his lips on hers.

Yes, she would die for him.

She opened her eyes and started forward, again the strange feeling of foreboding stopped her. She did not fear Jonas, instinctively knowing that the menacing feeling had nothing to do with him.

Rebecca pushed the feeling out of her thoughts and moved forward. The tunnel was just as she remembered it, but then again, why shouldn't it be as she remembered? In her reality, she had been here only a few short weeks ago.

Once reaching the large cavern, Rebecca realized how inadequate the flashlight would be, as it did little to light up the cavern. The first thing that struck her was that it was empty except for a few piles of odds and ends.

Someone had found the pirate's treasure, Rebecca mused.

It didn't really matter--what Rebecca was looking for was hidden within the rock wall. She easily found Jonas' hiding spot and reached in, desperately hoping she would not find a rodent or some other type of creature waiting for her within the hollow space.

Her hand touched upon the cold surface of the wooden coffer, and she pulled it out. Opening it, she peered inside. The contents were the same as before, but with one difference. There were two rolled pieces of parchment.

She opened the first one carefully so as not to damage the old paper. It was the marriage lines of Charles II.

So his secret had been hidden and safe all these years. Rebecca smiled to herself and replaced the parchment. The second one was nearly as old as the first, and when she unrolled it she saw it was a letter addressed to her. With her heart beating furiously within her chest, her eyes devoured the letter's contents.

Rebecca,

My love, I know that if ye are anything but a dream, someday ye will find this letter. Ye will know where to look. I find it strange to write a letter to a lass who has yet to be born for three hundred years.

We were not given the chance to say our farewells, or to tell ye, lass, of my undying love. I will never stop searching for ye, for I know ye are here in your own time. I can almost feel ye standing next to me at this moment. I know ye be out there somewhere in time and wish only that I could live for three hundred years so that I could see ye precious face once more.

The lord has had his laugh on me. I have all the treasure a mate could want, but the one

treasure I desire eludes me.

Ye would want to know that ye grandfather faired well. He married him a wisp of a girl and had some fine lads, good seafaring boys. He never forgot ye, lass, he be telling all who will listen of his lovely granddaughter who lives in the distant future. The world looks on these two captains as mad, but we be knowing the truth.

I love ye, Rebecca, more than me own life.

Rebecca could not stop her tears, there had been so many of them and still they flowed. She ached for all that she had lost and wondered again why she had lost it.

Through her pain a smile touched her lips. At least her grandfather had led a happy and full life, quite a feat for a man of his age. That mysterious, long ago ancestor had been her own grandfather. What a strange circle of events.

Scratching at the edge of her misery was the distinct echo of scuffling feet sliding across the earthen floor. She stopped moving, not daring to even blink. The scuffling noise grew closer, louder.

Whatever force had kept her rooted in one place was broken, and she frantically looked around the room, searching for the source of noise.

Something was different than it had been before she heard the noise. The darkness seemed denser, more ominous. Abruptly, she was no longer looking at a dark cavern, the scene had changed, the cavern again filled with treasure that gleamed in the light of a hundred invisible lanterns.

She peered across the immense vastness of time onto a scene of phantoms, ghostly actors who would play out the final act. She was looking into the past at herself, right there with her back against the wall, and Jonas with his cutlass in hand.

Rebecca blinked, but still the specters of that long ago time remained.

But it was not so long ago for her.

The phantom Rebecca dropped her sword at the appointed time, but now the play took on a new twist. Jonas' sword did not follow hers to the ground like it should have, instead, he had it held against the flesh of her throat.

The scene had been flipped to slow motion, and before her eyes Rebecca saw Jonas sink the blade into her throat, and then the gurgling sound of blood escaping the gashing wound.

Jonas turned his head slowly in the direction where she crouched against the wall. She found herself paralyzed by the evil leer on his face and eyes full of madness.

As she looked on, unable to pull her eyes from the spectacle, his flesh seemed to peel away, leaving only a skull with the grin of death.

"No!" Rebecca screamed. "It's a lie, he wouldn't do it!" She closed her eyes tightly to shut out the ghastly image.

Silence prevailed, and it was several minutes before she dared to open her eyes.

The phantoms were gone, but still something was amiss. Rebecca hastily returned the coffer to its spot in the crevice while she kept a vigilant lookout. Something still wasn't right. The darkness was too thick--too oppressive--as if it were alive.

She became aware that the darkness was indeed gathering, massing together to form a shape. It was forming into a colossal figure, separate from the natural darkness of the cave.

The darkness of the looming presence was as complete as the shadows of death.

Her tongue felt as if it had swelled to triple its normal size, and no matter how she tried, she could not bring forth a scream.

With flashlight in hand, she made a dash for the tunnel, maneuvering as quickly as she

could, not daring to glance behind her for fear of what she would see.

Emerging into the night air, she was breathing so hard she was in danger of hyperventilating. Once she was free of the trees and in the open cove, she collapsed onto the sand, exhausted.

All this was more than she could take. If this was a world of her own creation, she belonged in an asylum.

"Hey, mon, you crazy girl. What's up?"

Rebecca sat up and spied Chey in a small boat just offshore.

"What are you doing out there?" she called out.

"Mon, what do ya think I been doing, I been looking for you." Chey pulled the boat onto the sand and took a seat on the ground next to her.

"I seen ya come down here, and I said to myself, mon, how's that crazy girl gonna get back outta there?" He shook his head as if he was still in disbelief of her actions. "And ole Chey here, he not be one to be climbing down de rock walls, so I went and got me a boat."

A dire look came over Rebecca's features. "Chey, something's wrong here, I mean *really* wrong."

"You be meaning something different that you being crazy." He chuckled.

"I'm serious, Chey! Something's just not right."

Chey's expression turned somber. "Let's be saying here for a minute that you not be a crazy girl--let's be saying that ya did change history. What be the meaning of that?"

Rebecca shrugged, unsure where he was going.

"All them people that shoul'da died, didn't. Ya went and cheated fate. Mon, fate may be one easy going dude, but what about death?" He stopped long enough for the thought to sink in. "Mon, think about it. Maybe it never was a pirate's curse, maybe it was death's curse. Ya may be on that dude's shit list."

Rebecca smiled widely. "Oh, come on. Death is a natural process, it has nothing to do with some phantom creeping around waiting to take us away."

"Tell me, crazy girl, how ya be knowing that? What do we know about the angel of death?"

Rebecca had to admit, with what she had already experienced, she wouldn't doubt anything.

Abruptly, Chey's mood lightened. "No worries though, since ya be a crazy girl anyway, it be all in your head."

She grimaced. "Thanks for the comforting words,"

Chapter Twelve

Rebecca sunk down in the tub of steaming water. The heat worked wonders, pulling the tension from her muscles. She let her mind go blank, all she wanted was to unwind and forget for a few minutes.

She found she was so relaxed that the far off sound didn't click in her brain initially. The soft, haunting melody came from nowhere but everywhere at the same time. It floated in the air, surrounding her.

Becoming alert, her eyes flew open. The music pulled at her, threatening to drag her down in a vortex of madness. The soft music brought back the memory of dancing in Jonas' arms on the deck of the *Dark Revenge* on their last night together.

She sat straight up, the music gone. "Jonas," she called, her voice reverberating off the walls of the small bathroom.

Her answer was the sound of the leaking faucet sending drops of water into her bath.

Of course, she had not really been expecting an answer. Nearly every moment of her time here, her heart had cried out for him ... and still he had not answered.

She had to accept that he was gone.

Draining the water, Rebecca left the tub and wrapped up in an oversized towel, too fatigued to think about it anymore, all she wanted was to sleep.

Collapsing on her bed, she fell asleep almost instantly.

In her dreams Jonas was there, peering down at her sorrowfully. She lay on a bed of water, floating peacefully on the calm sea. Offering up her hand, he pulled her to her feet.

She went into his arms, and they danced, gliding gracefully atop the smooth water. The moon lit their way as they danced through the night, swaying to the ghostly tune.

Rebecca looked up at him through a haze of unshed tears. "Why haven't you come for me, I've been waiting for you?"

He shook his head sadly. "I love you." His voice was soft, echoing from all directions. His mouth was on hers, so real, so warm, kissing her with a hunger that not even time or death could sate. She responded to his kiss, the feel of his hands on her flesh taking her to the edge of heaven.

He released her unexpectedly. Bringing her hand up to his lips, he kissed it lightly. His sad smile ripped at her heart. "Godspeed, lass." The finality in his voice gripped her with fear.

"No, Jonas--oh, please don't leave me," she cried.

He was already fading, she could no longer feel him.

Rebecca awoke to the sound of her own weeping, aware of the residue of his spirit in the room. He had gone, but she could sense that he had returned to tell her goodbye. The realization swept over her like a bath of acid, eating away at her being wherever it touched.

His soul was letting her go.

Through her sorrow, there was confusion. His spirit had been so much stronger, before--on the *Sea Brat*. His presence had been solid and real--now it was like he was far away, struggling to make contact.

Was death reining him in?
She remembered him on the beach in Port Royal, his words came back to her in full
force.

It has always been your choice.

Would she have to join him in the grave to bridge the gap of time--the distance of death?

Was death luring her ... enticing her?

Did he say goodbye because he knew?

Rebecca shivered, the air in the room had become icy.

In his despair, Jonas had walked into the sea. Would she have to follow him into the sea
to find him?

Chapter Thirteen

Rebecca was at a loss for what to do, logic telling her that the best thing was to go back to Miami and try to pretend none of this had ever happened.

Life back home would seem extremely bland after her experience with Jonas, but it would be sane. She'd been here almost two weeks, and if it were true that what she experienced was not a dream, there still did not seem to be a way back to the 17th century.

If on the last night he had made contact with her he had been trying to say goodbye, maybe she should heed his warning and leave. Determined, Rebecca decided to tell Netty at breakfast that she would be checking out soon.

She found the woman at the front desk with her nose buried in a book. "Netty, I just wanted to let you know that this will be my last night. I'll be sailing out in the morning."

"Oh, you're leaving us so soon?" Netty frowned.

"I've been here far longer than I should have really," Rebecca said, in an effort to reassure herself as much as Netty.

"It'll be sad to see you go, but I'll make you a real treat for dinner tonight."

Rebecca thanked the woman and left, intending to take a stroll on the beach.

The tangy sea air brought back vivid memories of her days on the *Dark Revenge*--the days of adventure and the nights of loving a man who she had no right to love--no right to even know.

The world had appeared so much brighter than it did right now, everything about *Isla de Niebla* seemed filled with shadows. Maybe it was best to get away from here.

Rebecca smiled at the sight of Chey running up the beach toward her.

"Hey there, crazy girl, ya looking better today."

"Thanks, I feel a little better. I think we should be leaving tomorrow--it's time."

Rebecca's voice betrayed a great sadness. For the first time that Rebecca could remember, Chey had nothing to say--he just turned away and looked out to sea. "You've been such a good friend to me, I don't know how I could ever repay you." Rebecca started walking, and Chey fell into step beside her.

"Hey, mon, what would friends be for?"

The two of them walked in silence. Rebecca retreated into her own little world, thinking of how empty life seemed and wondering if it would always be that way.

"Why the sudden change of heart?" he asked out of the blue.

"I don't know," she shrugged, "I guess I feel as if Jonas has given up on us."

He shook his head. "Mon, ya be talking about a dead guy."

Rebecca smiled. "I know you don't think it's real, but it doesn't really matter. It was very real to me, even if it was all a dream."

"Well, crazy girl, use ya head for a minute."

Rebecca frowned, not understanding him.

"If there be one thing in the universe that outlasts time and death, what would that be?"

"Love, I guess," she answered.

He laughed. "Mon, you finally be getting it."

Rebecca looked away. "That may be true, Chey, but it cannot bring the dead back to life, and it cannot put you in a time that you don't belong in."

"How you be knowing any of that, and how do you know where you belong?"

"Oh, come on, Chey, I may be a little on the bizarre side, especially lately, but I know what the limits of life and reality are."

He shrugged. "And ya also believe you be in love with a dead guy."

She turned and playfully punched him in the arm. "That wasn't a fair comparison."

No more was said on the subject, but Chey's words stayed with her nevertheless. They made a certain kind of sense.

What did we really know about the limits of reality? And it was true that love did seem to be the one thing that could endure both time and death.

* * * *

Each item Rebecca put in her bag was a painful reminder of the fact that she was going away from this place, away from any chance of ever seeing him again. It took every ounce of willpower she possessed to keep from changing her mind.

She had to keep reminding herself that staying would not change anything. The world she lived in was a world where Captain Jonas Shelton did not exist anymore--and had not existed for over three centuries, except in legend.

Staying on this island and chasing phantoms would not bring him back--she had to accept that.

"But maybe love would?" The unbidden thought threatened to crack her resolve.

Rebecca zipped her bags shut and placed them near the door. She was ready, after tonight there would be no looking back. With a heavy heart, she went downstairs to partake of the special dinner Netty had prepared for her.

The table was set beautifully, and the room was lit with the soft light of candles. Rebecca wished she had asked Chey to join her tonight, she was growing tired of dining alone.

She had to admit that the lime chicken and rice was fantastic, but after the first couple of bites she could no longer taste the food. All there was for her was the bittersweet taste of heartbreak.

If only she had never set eyes on that man, never heard his voice--never touched him. She would be happy to leave and get back to her life then.

Rebecca could only handle a few swallows of the wine as it seemed to leave a bitter aftertaste in her mouth. She felt her eyelids growing heavy. She must have been a lot more fatigued than she had thought, the candlelit room swayed and began to spin.

What was wrong with her?

She tried to stand, thinking she needed to go to her room and lie down for awhile. She took two steps before she saw the floor rushing up at her.

* * * *

The first thing she became aware of was pain. The dull ache in her head let her know that she was still alive. She opened her eyes to slits, there was some light coming from another room. She tried to move, but the effort sent splinters of pain through her head. It felt very much like a whopper of a hangover, but she had only taken a couple of swallows of wine.

The wine was drugged--it had to have been.

It appeared as if she were locked in a barred cell within the dungeon.

Had there been a dungeon below the house?

Yes. She remembered Mary telling her about it.

The barred door creaked as Netty opened it and stepped in.

"What's this about?" Rebecca forced the words from her dry throat.

"Your friend was trying to talk you into leaving, and you must stay at the Pirate's Lair, Jonas has been waiting for you for a long time."

"Jonas is dead," Rebecca said, hating the very words.

"Yes, and when he comes for you, you'll join him in death."

"You are crazy!"

"Am I?" Netty laughed.

"How do you know any of this?" Rebecca asked as she tried to get to her feet. The room wavered, and she was forced to lie back down.

"Jonas Shelton has been my life." Netty's dark eyes shone with madness. "As all generations of my family, I grew up hearing his story and made it my business to know him."

"You are obsessed with a man that died three hundred years ago."

"And so are you, my dear." Netty's laughter was unnerving. "You are my gift to him, and I guess it is really a gift to you as well."

Rebecca felt a spark of anger ignite within her. "You do not know him if you think this is what he would want. I knew him, I loved him. He was not a monster."

She saw confusion and indecision play across the other woman's face.

"I knew him. Why do you think I am here?"

"Oh no, I'm not buying it. You are just trying to stop my gift to Jonas."

"Are you going to kill me?" Rebecca asked, giving up on any attempts to reason with the mad woman.

"Don't be absurd. I'm not a murderess." Netty shook her head as if the thought was the craziest thing she'd ever heard.

"Then what?"

"I'm just going to keep you here until he comes for you, that's all. If there's any killing to be done, he'll have to do it."

"He won't." Rebecca was adamant.

"Can you be so sure of that?" Netty leaned down and was very near Rebecca's face. "How can you know that what a person is in life is what he also is in death?"

The sudden flicker of memory began to burn in Rebecca's mind. Jonas' ghost had come to her on the *Sea Brat* and on the beach in Port Royal, both times she had been put in extreme danger. Only Chey's timely appearance had saved her.

Had Jonas really tried to lure her to her grave, or was his ghost attempting to pull her back to his own time?

Netty's deep laughter echoed through the damp rooms of the hidden prison, she had not missed the spark of uncertainty in Rebecca's eyes. The woman's eerie laughter echoed through the catacombs long after she was gone.

Rebecca had no idea how long she had been down there, but she was so thirsty that she knew there was no choice but to trust the water the woman had left her. She took several sips of the soothing, lukewarm liquid and then glanced down at the bowl of soup sitting on the tray.

Her stomach knotted, there was no way she could keep down food right now, even if she had trusted it enough. Returning the glass to the tray, she went to the barred door to examine her surroundings. There were other cells just like the one she was in.

"Hello, is anyone else here?" she called out weakly, not really expecting a response.

"Crazy girl, you okay?"

Her heart leaped at the sound of Chey's voice. "Yes, I think so. How did you get down here?"

"Mon, I came looking for you, and she told me you had went out and never come back. I be sure she seen I didn't believe her, and the crazy bitch hit me over de head. I woke up here."

"What are we going to do now?"

"Look for anything that can be used as a weapon."

Rebecca scanned her cell, which was frustratingly void of anything dangerous. On a second look about, she noted a chain anchored to the stone wall. "There's a chain, but it's attached to the wall."

"It's old, should pull free easy like."

Rebecca picked up the heavy chain and began to tug on it. Again and again she pulled, but it wouldn't give way.

"Keep going, girl, it'll give," Chey encouraged her.

She continued to work it loose, and finally it pulled free. "I got it!" she yelled excitedly.

"Not so loud, we don't want the nutcase to hear you."

"Now what?"

He laughed. "Mon, you be a smart lady, figure it out."

Rebecca became silent and waited for the sound of Netty's return.

* * * *

Hours later, she finally heard the faint sound of footsteps--scuffling across the floor. Rebecca crouched in the corner as if she were sick, but hidden behind her was the chain.

The bars groaned when Netty opened the door. She held another tray, and, placing it on the ground, she picked up the one from earlier in the day.

"You really should eat," she said, clucking her tongue.

Rebecca jumped at the woman, swinging the chain with all her strength. She hit her mark, and blood spurted from Netty's gashed head as she staggered to the floor.

Grabbing the keys that hung from the woman's wrist, Rebecca left the cell, shutting and locking the door behind her.

Leaning against the rock wall, she breathed a sigh of relief. "I did it," she yelled to Chey.

Making her way down the corridor, she peered into the cells searching for her friend. It suddenly dawned on her that she had not heard him respond, in fact, she hadn't heard anything from him for hours.

She examined each cell, becoming increasingly puzzled when he wasn't in them. "Chey, where are you?" Her puzzlement turned to outright terror when she reached the last cell and understood that they were all empty.

She was crazy! He wasn't even here.

Retracing her steps she tried not to look in her cell when she heard Netty moaning, instead she picked up her pace and began running.

At first she ran blindly ahead with one thought recurring in her mind.

She'd had a conversation with someone that wasn't even there, she had gone as mad as Netty was.

Stopping to catch her breath, she peered around to see if she could tell where she was. Just a few yards ahead was a staircase, the light of one lantern lighting the landing.

Even before she put her foot on the first step she saw that the staircase was in an advanced state of decay. Carefully, she held on to the rail and stepped lightly.

Reaching the top, she was relieved to see that Netty had left the hidden door to the library

open. After stepping into the open air she thought she would faint with relief.

She searched the library for a phone, but there wasn't one, so she headed for the lobby. She wasn't even sure who to call or if they had a 911 system on the island. She spied a long piece of paper taped to the desk with a list of numbers printed out--the constable's number at the top.

With shaking hands she picked up the phone--there was no dial tone.

There was no time to wonder about the dead phone. She ripped the piece of paper with the constable's number from the desk and climbed the stairs to her room. Her cell phone would be in her bag.

When she turned on her phone, it would not pick up a signal. Crying out in frustration, she ran from the room.

Outside in the garden, she tried again. The sound of the phone ringing on the other end left her feeling weak.

"Hello," a tired voice came on the other end.

"Hello, there's an emergency at the Pirate's Lair, we need someone here--now."

"Hey, slow down. What's the problem?"

"Just hurry, please." Rebecca hung up before the man could toss any more questions at her.

She stayed in the garden while she waited for them to get there, still unreasonably terrified that Netty would somehow get free.

On such a small island her wait was short. Just a few moments later, two plain clothed policemen came running up the path.

"What's wrong?" an older, graying man asked her.

Rebecca spilled out her story--as much of it as she thought would be believable anyway. When she was done, she noticed that the men were looking at her strangely.

"Miss Ashton, Netty has been dead these past twenty years. She can't be down there."

Rebecca shook her head in violent denial. "No, she's not dead. She is down in that dungeon right now, locked in a cell. She needs medical attention.

"Oh, she's dead all right, she jumped from the top of the lighthouse." The younger of the two officers spoke with a smug attitude.

Rebecca smothered her fear with outright anger. "I don't give a damn what you say, there is a woman in that cell."

"Go check it out, Tom, see what you can find." The older officer was clearly the superior.

"Sure," Tom said sarcastically.

After he had gone, the older man introduced himself as Constable Bryant.

"Poor Netty was a sad case," he started to explain. "She was obsessed with that old pirate legend, convinced that Captain Shelton haunted the island. I think it finally just took her over the edge."

Rebecca didn't respond, how could she?

When Tom returned, he was shaking his head. "There's no one down there, the place looks like it hasn't been used in hundreds of years."

"That's impossible!" Rebecca cried out. "She has to be down there!"

"No one is there, Miss Ashton."

"It can't be, I've been staying here. Why would I be staying here if no one was here?" she rambled.

"This place was a bed and breakfast, but it's been closed down since Netty died. She was the last of her family," Bryant informed her.

"You see," Rebecca said hopefully, "how could I stay here if it were closed down?"

"Why wouldn't you be staying here ... it's your house," Bryant said in a dry, humorless voice.

"What..."

"You must know, Miss Ashton, that Shelton willed this house to you."

Rebecca shook her head. "How can that be?"

The policeman shrugged his shoulders. "You'll have to take that up with the solicitors in Kingston, all I know is that it has always been willed to an Ashton."

Rebecca swallowed hard, Jonas had willed it to her over three centuries ago. He knew she'd come back here. What could have been his purpose behind willing it to her?

"Are you feeling all right?" Constable Bryant asked.

"No I don't think so."

"We have a doctor on the island, would you like me to send him over?"

"No, I'll be okay. I think I just need to rest, but thank you anyway," she added, hoping they would believe her and go away.

The two men left reluctantly, she knew they thought her insane and hallucinating. She was no longer sure they were wrong.

Rebecca waited in the gardens until the men were gone and then took off on the trail to the docks.

"Chey!" she called as she boarded the *Sea Brat*. "Where are you?"

The boat was deserted, in truth it looked as if no one had been there at all. Something just wasn't right here. She left the boat and made her way back down the docks to the Port Master's office.

When she burst through the door the man behind the desk looked up at her. "Can I be helping you?"

He had very much the same look as Chey, with long black braids and a ready smile.

"I'm looking for my friend who has been staying on the *Sea Brat*, have you seen him?"

The man shook his head. "No one has been near that boat since you docked here."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, that's not possible. He's been staying there. It's the same man that was with me when I docked."

A worried look entered the man's eyes. "Miss, you were alone when you docked. No one be with you."

"Nooooo!" she shouted. Her stomach pitched, and she could feel vomit rushing up her throat. "A restroom ... please," she choked out.

The man quickly got up and pointed to the direction of the restroom. Rebecca ran toward the room and shut the door behind her, leaning against the wall, she waited for the sick feeling to pass.

Her life had turned upside down into some kind of waking nightmare. She could no longer tell what was real from what was not and felt as if she were Alice lost in some dark Wonderland.

"Jonas, please help me," she cried softly.

But was he even real, or was he just another phantom she had created to populate her world of lunacy?

Once the wave of nausea had subsided she went to the sink and splashed cold water on

her face. If the man on the other side of the door thought she was crazy or on drugs, would he call the constable? She hoped not as she would have a hard time explaining that she was looking for a friend that didn't exist after she had just sent them looking for a woman who didn't exist.

"Mon, you a crazy girl, listen to de medicine man." Chey's voice was clear, as if he had leaned over and whispered in her ear.

The nausea returned, and she began to retch. She couldn't take this anymore, she had to get out of here. It was essential that she got a hold of herself or they would lock her up long before she could ever leave *Isla de Niebla*.

She splashed some more water on her face and ran fingers through her hair to straighten it a little. The image that stared back at her from the mirror still resembled someone who was lost to madness. Steeling herself, Rebecca left the bathroom.

The port master looked over at her with some concern. Rebecca ignored it and went to stand in front of his desk. "How much do I owe you? I'll be sailing soon."

"When would you be planning on leaving, miss?"

"Soon," she answered quickly. "As soon as I've brought my stuff back ... maybe an hour."

"Oh, you won't be going anywhere this night." He laughed.

"Why not?" she asked cautiously.

He pointed out the door. "The mist be coming in."

"Mist ... this time of year?" Rebecca felt fear gnawing at her insides. She was becoming sure that for some reason she wasn't going to be allowed to leave the island.

The guy shrugged. "This is Mist Island. The mist comes here whenever it gets a mind to."

There was a knock at the door, and Constable Bryant stepped in.

With the feeling of a cornered animal, her stare traveled from the policeman to the port master.

"Sorry, miss."

The man held up his hands. "I was thinking you be ill and need a doctor."

"He's right," Bryant put in. "You do not look well at all."

"I'm fine," she insisted. "I just need to get back to Kingston."

The constable stood next to her, putting a hand on her shoulder as if to reassure her. "It couldn't hurt to have the doc take a quick look at you. In any case, the mist is rising, and you won't be able to sail out tonight."

"I have to leave," Rebecca cried, stepping away from him.

He grabbed her arm firmly. "Come on, Miss Ashton, talking to the doctor is a much better option than having me lock you up for your own safety."

Rebecca gave up and let the officer lead her out of the building.

Perhaps he was right, she did feel sick, and seeing the doctor may be what she needed.

Chapter Fourteen

The constable led her down a narrow lane that opened up to the lawns of an ultra modern building. She turned to the constable and asked, "Won't the doctor be out this time of night?"

"He was, Miss Ashton, but I called him and let him know I had an emergency case for him, he was kind enough to meet us here."

An elderly Jamaican man met them at the double glass doors, unlocking them. He wore blue jeans and a white doctor's coat over a colorful print shirt that featured birds of paradise.

"Thanks for coming in, Doctor Worrell," Bryant said as they stepped through the door.

"It be okay, Constable." He gave Rebecca a kind smile.

She tried to return the man's smile but could barely lift the corners of her mouth.

"I hear you're not feeling so well, young miss."

Rebecca looked away, saying nothing.

"We'll be okay now, I'll call you if I need you," Doctor Worrell told the policeman.

Constable Bryant put an arm around Rebecca. "Don't you worry, Miss Ashton, ole Worrell here is the best doctor in the Caribbean, he'll be having you feeling right as rain in no time."

"Oh, them be honey words." Worrell laughed and turned to Rebecca. "This lawman must be wanting some discounts."

Rebecca relaxed once Constable Bryant left them. It wasn't so much that she didn't like the man, but at the moment she felt threatened by his authority.

"Come on, girl, let's get you examined."

Rebecca followed the doctor from the waiting room into a sterile examination room. Shivering, she rubbed her arms attempting to bring them some warmth. She had never really cared for the scent of disinfectant that pervaded the air of hospitals and doctors offices.

The old doctor did all the usual procedures, checking her temperature, blood pressure, and having her stick out her tongue so he could check her throat.

"You appear healthy enough, miss," he told her as he sat on a stool and folded his arms.

Rebecca wanted to blurt out that she was okay and that she didn't need any help, but it wasn't true. She needed a friend more than she ever had in her life, and his warm eyes brought her some peace.

Chey's voice had said to listen to the medicine man. No matter what or who Chey was, he hadn't steered her wrong yet even if he were a figment of psychosis.

The floodgates of emotion burst open, she just couldn't hold it back any longer. Bringing her hands up to cover her face, she began to cry. "Doctor, I don't know what is real and what is not anymore. I can't even be sure that you are real."

"Whoa, girl, what you saying?"

Taking a deep breath, Rebecca wiped the tears from her eyes and began her story from the time she had heard the news of her grandfather's disappearance. When she'd finished, all traces of cheer had left the doctor's face, and he was gazing at her with a stern intensesness.

"I sure hope that you haven't been rattling that story off to everybody."

She shook her head. "I think the constable got bits of it when he came to the house, but not the whole thing. That's why he thinks I am acting so irrationally."

The doctor let out a good-natured chuckle, shaking his head. "If that story not be irrational, I wouldn't be knowing what irrational is."

"I don't know if it's real or not, but that is what I experienced. Maybe I do need to be in a hospital," she added in a low, timid voice.

"Hmmm." He eyed her curiously.

"There is one thing that is confusing ... if this is all imagined, why did Jonas Shelton leave Niebla House to me in his will? Why would he leave it to someone he could not have possibly known would exist?"

Doctor Worrell picked up a file that had been sitting on the counter, and, flipping it open, he studied the contents carefully. "Well, miss, it be looking more like that ole pirate willed it to the Ashton family and you just be the first one that came to claim it."

"How do you know that?" Rebecca narrowed her eyes.

The old man smiled. "Well that ole Bryant be no dummy. He had the information faxed from Kingston, with whatever Miami had on you too. He be a bit worried when you called him about Netty."

Rebecca sighed deeply. Every time she thought she had a piece of evidence to collaborate the events as she remembered them, it seemed to fade away.

"That be a story all right. Do you have anything at all to back it up?" he asked as if he had been reading her thoughts of a moment before.

Rebecca shook her head, she couldn't think of one single thing to prove her story ... except.... She took the chain from her neck and held it out to the doctor. "I have this ring, and I was told of a legend that says his lost lady was Rebecca Ashton."

"Yeah, there be that, but could be coincidence," he said as he took the ring and held it up to the light, looking it over. "This be the ole pirate's crest sure enough and his initials, but how would I be knowing you didn't find this at the Pirate's Lair?"

Rebecca jumped from the table, suddenly excited. "There is a record of this ring being found on the *Sea Brat* when the vessel was located without my grandfather on it--and that is before I came to the island."

The doctor still appeared to be skeptical.

Rebecca suddenly felt deflated. "Look, doctor, before this had happened to me I would have totally agreed with everyone's opinion if I'd heard a story like this ... but I swear there is more to this world than you would believe."

The doctor handed the ring back to her, and she promptly replaced it on her neck.

"In your story, you gave the ring back to the pirate," he reminded her.

Rebecca realized that was true, she had given the ring back to Jonas, but when she'd been yanked back to this time, she still had it. "I don't know, maybe it is because he gave the ring to my grandfather's descendants in hopes that it would reach me someday ... and that part of the timeline still has not changed."

"Do you really know much about that pirate?"

"Well, I should--if I'm not crazy, then I knew him." She felt agitated.

"Hmmm ... that pirate was a scoundrel, mean as they came and very fond of rum. Never mind that ole silly romantic tale, he was pure mean--a shark."

"No." She denied the painful words. "He was a good man. Yes, a little fond of rum, but good anyway."

"Netty was a bit obsessed by him too and look where she be." He pulled a sour face.

"Maybe he changed for some reason," she offered.

"Hmmm ... maybe."

"Hey, there is something. This on my leg, it was from a shark attack." She pointed at her bare calf.

The old man lifted her leg to take a look at her scars. "They sure enough look like it could be from a shark, but didn't you say your job be diving at shipwrecks? Got to run into sharks sooner or later."

"Yeah, but I was never attacked by a shark while working. You can get a hold of the institution I work for, they can tell you."

Finally, she thought, *there's something I can prove*. She no longer doubted herself, everything that had happened had been real, she was sure of it.

He was quiet, still looking at her ... wondering. She could see there was a fight between logic and possibility.

At last he spoke up. "I think you is probably crazy, but I'm going to take a chance that you ain't."

The doctor got up and went to the door, motioning for Rebecca to follow him. He turned off all the lights and they left the building, the doctor locking the doors behind him.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"I'm gonna show you something."

She continued following him through the darkening streets. The mist was gathering, covering the ground like an eerie blanket. "The fog has never come when I've been here, don't you find it a little strange?" she asked while they walked.

"It's not fog, it is the mist that escapes the underworld when the gates are opened. It's always been here, always will be."

"That's a little superstitious for a doctor." Rebecca spoke her thoughts out loud.

"Ain't no superstition but the truth. You should stay in when the mist comes, bad things can happen."

Rebecca looked for any sign of humor that would indicate the old man was having fun with her, but he seemed totally serious.

They had left the little village and were following a trail into the trees, in due time they came to a little house that reminded her of a Cape Cod cottage.

Once inside, the doctor led her to a back room and swung open the door. Inside, candles burned, and there were all sorts of strange objects that resembled something out of some voodoo movie.

She frowned. "What is all this?"

"What this be is very dangerous and very illegal--that what it be."

"Why?"

"Ever heard of an Obeah man?"

"No, what is it?"

"Well, I be an Obeah man, it's something like voodoo."

"Wow! How interesting. Why is it illegal?"

"People be afraid of what they don't understand. You see, I be a doctor, but a man of medicine in more than one way." He laughed. "Now you see why I may not think you so crazy?"

"Can this stuff help me?" she asked anxiously.

"Maybe so ... maybe so. Don't know yet, but I will be thinking on it. Yeah, see, poor ole Netty ... she was my girl."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Rebecca cut in.

The old man waved his hand. "No worries, it was a long time ago. She was obsessed with that ole pirate and the legend of a girl with red hair. I could never figure it out."

"Do you think that Jonas' ghost haunts this island?"

He was thoughtful but finally answered, "Yeah, I believe so."

"And you think that he somehow caused Netty's death?"

He nodded.

"Like I told you, I have experienced some very bad things here myself, but I don't think he had anything to do with them."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"I just know, I feel it in here," she said, pointing to her heart. "This Dead Zone Chey spoke of, and these mists, all that don't seem to have anything to do with Jonas. What about that stuff?"

"It's true, lots of bad vibes round about here, always has been."

"Maybe it has something to do with all this," she suggested.

"Maybe it does." His words were thoughtful.

"So what now?" she prodded.

"I don't know, let me think on this problem, and I'll talk to you tomorrow." The old doctor appeared to have gone somewhere in his head and was only half there.

"Okay, I'll wait to hear from you then."

He nodded.

Rebecca went to leave, but his voice stopped her.

"You best not go wandering around in the mist, best go straight to the house."

Leaving the cottage she retraced her steps back to the village. The fog was so thick now it was difficult to find her way around. She wondered if she should stay on the *Sea Brat* instead of trying to make it back to the house. It was the strangest weather she'd ever seen, but the storms were strange here too.

Feeling her way along the path, she was finally able to make it back to the house. Shrouded by mist, it stood silent and dark. She stopped and stared up at it. Did she really want to spend the night in the spooky old house alone after all she had experienced there?

Remember ... this was his home, and it's really your home now. The thought offered some comfort.

Rebecca entered and quickly switched on several lights. It had not seemed very frightening before when she had thought Netty was in the house, but if she had known the truth she would have been terrified.

She took a new look at the house's interior and thought it odd that it was so clean. She guessed someone hired by the estate must come in and clean it regularly since it had closed down.

Rebecca found the kitchen well stocked and wondered why until she found a note attached to the fridge from the solicitors in Kingston. It said that they had been informed of her arrival and took the liberty of stocking the house with food. It was dated the day after she had arrived on *Isla de Niebla*. The housekeeper had informed them of her arrival she suspected, though she didn't recall seeing a housekeeper.

Pangs of hunger scratched at her stomach, and Rebecca realized she was starved. She

made a quick sandwich and took it to the dining room to eat.

The dense fog outside her window made her feel uncomfortable so she walked over to close the drapes. There was a strange glowing in the fog, far away on the bluff.

The lighthouse!

She knew it was condemned, and it shouldn't be lit, but there it was--beckoning through the mist.

Fear rooted her to the floor while she continued to watch the light, feeling compelled to go to the lighthouse and investigate. What if there was some clue as to what was going on up there?

Stay out of the mist.

Doctor Worrell's warning came back to her.

She had almost decided to close the drapes and forget about it when she heard something outside.

"Rebecca..."

The voice was far off and muffled, but it was Jonas' voice she was sure. Her heart leaped at the thought of seeing him again, even if it was only what remained of him in this world.

Rebecca found the flashlight that she had used before and stepped outside. She could see nothing beyond the mist, except for that distant glow.

"Rebecca..." the voice came again, and this time there was no mistaking it as Jonas'.

"Jonas, where are you?" she called out into the night.

She walked in the direction of the beach where the voice had come from. When her feet hit sand she knew she'd come to the water, and there was no place left to go except up the beach toward the lighthouse.

Rebecca started toward the light, calling Jonas' name as she walked. When she reached the base of the lighthouse she heard him call her name again, this time sounding like it was coming from the lighthouse itself.

She stood on the beach undecided. A sixth sense told her not to go up to the lighthouse, but her heart urged her on ... if only she could see him once more.

A noise in the water caught her attention. It was distinctly different to the sound of the surf--like something emerging from the water.

She could just make out the shape of a man coming toward her slowly. She froze, unable to move a muscle as it got closer and closer.

Soon she could make out the features--it was Jonas, but he looked as if he had been under the water for months ... he looked dead.

A scream tore from her throat, and the figure stopped just as his feet left the water.

Is this where he walked into the sea?

He was grotesque, there was little flesh on his bones, and where his eyes should have been were dark, hollow sockets. Gripped with terror, she could do nothing but tremble at the sight of him.

"Do ye love me, lass?" the creature asked in a raspy, gurgling voice.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Do ye believe that I love ye?"

Rebecca squeezed her eyes closed to shut out the sight of him, but she answered with her heart. "Yes."

"Then look at me, lass, look at me with yer heart."

Rebecca slowly opened her eyes, and her heart melted in her chest. He stood before her

as handsome as she remembered him. She started to cry. "Jonas, oh God, I love you."

He brought one hand up to caress her cheek. She barely noticed the chill of his skin and was filled with joy just to set eyes on him at last.

"Would ye join me in my watery grave?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she answered with barely a thought.

"Do ye think I would hurt ye?"

She shook her head, knowing he never would.

"Do not believe I am up there, love," he said, pointing to the lighthouse.

"I will wait for ye through eternity, love, but yer time not be yet." He smiled sadly.

Rebecca nearly choked on the lump forming in her throat. She knew that if it took death to be with him, she would do it, but he was telling her no.

"Lass, do not be deceived, I am not up there."

Rebecca again looked to the lighthouse and when she turned back he had gone.

Her heart dropped to her stomach.

"Jonas, please don't leave," her voice traveled through the dark.

The lighthouse was now dark, there was no sign of the glow it had been emitting only moments before.

He was telling her that whoever had been calling her to from the lighthouse, it wasn't him.

Chapter Fifteen

When she returned to the house, she found the doctor waiting for her in the drawing room. He'd lit a fire and was sitting in a chair close to it. "I was just warming my ole bones, they can't take the mist these days." He smiled, but it was quickly replaced with a cross look. "I thought I told you to stay out of the mist."

Rebecca rushed to explain what had just happened. She was convinced more than ever that none of this had anything to do with Jonas. "He was warning me," she finished.

"Hmmm ... after you left I was thinking and praying. I am starting to think the same thing. What if it ain't that ole pirate ... what if it was those angry souls from the *Mary Stuart* ... what if it be death himself?"

"What do you mean?" Rebecca asked, remembering that Chey had said something similar.

"Well, if you did go off and change things ... many of them men that died shouldn't have died. You get my drift?"

Rebecca nodded, she did understand, but the alternative was unthinkable. "It was either them or the *Dark Revenge* ... and it can't be the *Dark Revenge*, it just can't be."

"Just wait a minute." He held up a hand to stop her. "What if ... by changing the timeline you unbalanced nature and what if death is an entity, you know ... like the angel of death?"

Rebecca said nothing, fascinated by the possibility.

"What if you have to go back and save them men of the *Mary Stuart* ... and face death head on ... without cheating?"

"But how? I would go back in a second if I knew how."

"You be a specialist in shipwrecks, why do you think all them men died?"

Rebecca shrugged. "It could have been anything. I know the ship caught fire."

"Why didn't they use their small boats?"

"I don't know, but you are right that at least some of them should have gotten away."

"So, it be your job--dive at the wreck of the *Mary Stuart* and find out."

"Alone?" She was astonished.

"Oh, I'll go out there with you, but these bones be a little old for diving."

The more she thought about it, the more she wondered why exactly no one escaped the *Mary Stuart*. Was death out that day and was going to take someone, regardless of who?

"Even if I find a clue to what happened, how's that going to help us change anything?"

The old man cocked his head to the side. "Well, it might not, but we can't change a thing sitting here talking about it."

"Okay, I'll do it, but you do realize that if I do manage to change the timeline somehow, it may change everything from the way it is right now?"

"Yeah, girl, I'll be hoping so." His smile was full of sorrow.

Rebecca realized that the doctor was thinking of Netty and how much different things might have been.

* * * *

The deep blue skies of the Caribbean were marred only by the occasional wispy cloud, the mist had burned off and left them with a gorgeous day.

Rebecca was not sure if this was good or not. Before--whenever things changed--they were in the middle of one of those weird storms.

Doctor Worrell gazed out to sea as Rebecca maneuvered the *Sea Brat* in the direction where she remembered the *Mary Stuart* going down. From offshore the island was awe inspiring, like something from a picture book, but beyond its beauty was a menacing atmosphere that she just couldn't shake.

Funny she had never felt like this when she was back in that long ago time with Jonas. It was only something she'd noticed since she had returned to the present.

"Just out of curiosity," she said loudly over the engine, "when did all the nasty legends start about this place?"

The old doctor appeared to be in deep thought, his forehead wrinkled as if remembering was a strain. "Well ... I never heard of anything before that pirate's time so I guess it would have been sometime during his life the legends got started."

She found the information disturbing for some reason, though it held well with what she thought herself. When she was here with Jonas it was a beautiful and peaceful place, now it seemed to be a place of evil and death.

Could it all have something to do with what happened that night?

Rebecca took the *Sea Brat* around to the blind side of the cliffs until she thought they were somewhere over the *Mary Stuart*.

With her flippers on and her tanks ready she could not prolong the dive any longer. She had to admit to herself that she was scared stiff of what she would find below the surface of the water.

"If I'm not back up in fifteen minutes, call for help on the radio," she told the doctor.

"I'll do that, girl, you just be careful, you hear."

"Thanks for everything," she told him with a smile.

"Go on now, let's get it done."

Rebecca went in, and, though the water was darker here because of the cover of the cliffs, she could see what remained of the galleon on the seabed. It was mostly a burned out shell, but there were obviously quite a lot of artifacts still lying about. She quickly found what she was looking for ... the boats. What was left of them were in a position that indicated the crew had never even tried to use them.

Why?

The rope that once held them had long since been eaten away by the salty water, but had that rope become tangled by the fierce gales that day, preventing them from being released?

Rebecca imagined where the ropes would have been. She closed her eyes and pictured the ropes tangled. When she opened her eyes, she untangled the imaginary rope to free the boats.

She was startled when the boats moved as if they had just worked free. Rebecca blinked, there were ropes there--where there hadn't been any a moment before.

She knew the ropes should not have been there, they couldn't have withstood three hundred years underwater. The ends of the ropes spread out in the water like a huge spider. Near them, a black, murky shadow was taking shape, gathering darkness to itself.

Rebecca's eyes grew wide, the water around her grew alarmingly cold.

It was that thing from the cavern!

She tried to swim away, but the murky water seemed to spread out in all directions. She could feel the rough texture of the rope wrapping around her, pulling tighter and tighter.

From out of the water a hand took hold of her, pulling her out of the tangle of rope. As suddenly as it had appeared, the darkness retreated.

Chey was there smiling at her, and she understood that she had been given a reprieve.

"Don't screw it up, crazy girl, remember not to cheat death but beat him. Most of all ... believe in Jonas, believe in love." His words reached her without his lips ever moving. Chey then lost all resemblance of being solid and appeared to meld with the water, becoming one with it.

Rebecca let her body drift slowly to the surface--when she broke through she was in the midst of a raging storm and the *Mary Stuart* burned, sending out hellish light over the water. Her heart sang out with joy, but shuddered with fear simultaneously. She was back, but only yards from the *Mary Stuart*.

"Hey! Why are you swimming around in the water?"

She saw the red of the uniforms aboard one of the small boats, and she knew she'd been successful in saving some of the *Mary Stuart's* crew.

Rebecca let the men pull her into the boat, this time not surprised at all to see she was wearing the gown she'd worn the night she'd gone over. She'd been sent back to almost the precise moment she'd left.

She looked around and saw many other boats on the water all filled with men. There was no way of knowing how many were lost, but at least many of them were saved.

Far off she could see the shadowy silhouette of the *Dark Revenge*, and her heart sang with joy. She would not reach the *Dark Revenge* on this night, but she would reach it. As long as they both lived at the same time, there was a chance.

* * * *

Rebecca, along with the castaways, floated through the night and well into the next day. The sun was hot, beating down on her heavily gowned body. Her mouth was parched and craved just a few drops of water.

She wondered what their chances were of being discovered before perishing at sea. She asked a couple of the men, but neither appeared very sure of their odds. With the earthquake only days before, could the navy spare a thought for the ship's crew?

Obviously, she couldn't hope for the *Dark Revenge* to come along and rescue them. Jonas would have no notion that she was with these survivors--he would think that she lay at the bottom of the sea.

The hours dragged on, and Rebecca was ready to start peeling off clothing. She was burnt to a crisp, her creamy complexion lost to the fury of the sun.

The boat rocked as one of the men jumped up. "It be the *Triumph* out there," he cried joyfully. The seamen began waving their arms and screaming. Rebecca clamped her hands tightly on the edge of the boat, fearing it would capsize. The ship had seen them and was moving fast in their direction.

Rebecca was the first to be brought aboard, followed by dozens of *Mary Stuart* survivors.

Waiting for her were the sharp, blue eyes of Commodore Wellington. "If it isn't Miss Ashton. I am relieved that you did not perish in the earthquake."

She smiled weakly. "Thank you, sir."

"Pray tell, Miss Ashton, how did you come to be with the crew of the *Mary Stuart*?"

Rebecca had to think fast. What reason could she give for being near the *Mary Stuart*?

She decided that the best course of action was to stick as close to the truth as possible. "I was aboard the *Dark Revenge*, sir, and was washed overboard during the storm. I must have drifted over toward the *Mary Stuart*."

"Indeed, madam, do you realize I could have you hung as a pirate?"

"I'm no pirate, sir."

"Follow Neely." He pointed to one of his officers. "He'll get you some food and water. I regret that we have no clothing appropriate for you, but perhaps you could wash your gown out." Rebecca needed no further direction, she was dying of thirst. Wellington's voice stopped her. "When you are finished, I would have a word with you."

Hours later when she'd had her fill of water and rested, she dressed in her freshly laundered gown and made herself ready to face Commodore Wellington.

She was shown inside his cabin and seated in a large comfortable chair.

The commodore wasted no time in tackling her for information. "Miss Ashton, if you hope to save yourself from the gallows, you will have to help us catch Shelton."

She smiled sweetly. "I couldn't do any such thing, sir."

"A lovely young lady such as you would rather swing from the hangman's noose than turn on a devil of a pirate?"

Rebecca was thoughtful, wondering how best to handle this. One thing she knew, she had to stop the bloodshed--there could be no more on her hands. Of course there was no way she was going to help them catch Jonas, but what she really had to do was get this man off Jonas' back.

"Tell me, Commodore, what do you know about Captain Shelton?"

He laughed without humor. "I know he is but a lowly pirate."

"If that is so ... have you not wondered why the Crown would be after him with so much enthusiasm? Why so much interest in this one pirate when there are surely many others along the Spanish Main that would cause a great deal more trouble?"

"What might you be suggesting, Miss Ashton?"

"I was pondering why the Crown would have so much interest in Shelton?"

"He is a nuisance to the safety of the seas, a blackguard if you will."

"Oh, but don't you suspect that he is more than that?" She smiled, letting her words sink in.

"Madam, speak if you have something to say."

"What I am saying is that there is a good reason why his death is so important to the Crown, and it has little to do with him being a pirate."

"Go on," he said, drawing his brows together.

"The reason I will not help you murder Jonas Shelton is because I would be committing treason, sir. He is the true heir to the throne."

The commodore erupted with laughter. "Madam, that must be the most addled tale I've ever heard, it is in fact, treason."

"No, sir, I've seen the marriage lines myself ... he is the legitimate son of Charles II, but he has no wish to claim the crown ... only to live his life unmolested."

"Miss Ashton, you do not believe I will accept that pirate is the true king?"

"No matter, I've seen proof. In the case of his untimely death, he has made arrangements that the proof should be brought before parliament. Anyone who is involved, including William and Mary, will be tried for treason."

Wellington's self confidence fled. "Are you sure?"

“Yes. Can you not see now why he is so important to the Crown?”

“I do admit that I am puzzled by the Crown’s insistence on this pirate being caught and executed as soon as possible.” He was silent for a moment before continuing. “He’ll sail for Tortugas,” the commodore said almost to himself.

“Will you still go after him?” she asked.

“I’ve not decided,” he answered shortly.

Rebecca got to her feet. “May I take my leave, sir?”

He waved her away, appearing to be preoccupied in the problem at hand.

Chapter Sixteen

The *Dark Revenge* had been sighted, and the *Triumph* was gaining quickly. Commodore Wellington stood at the deck, watching the ship getting closer. The guns were ready, it was now only a matter of getting close enough.

Rebecca was frantic. "Commodore Wellington, would you fire on Charles' son?"

Wellington turned to her, a look of doubtful resignation in his eyes. They were close enough that Rebecca could see the crew of the *Dark Revenge* making ready to do battle.

Rebecca stood close to him. "Commodore, please don't do it," she begged.

A sudden gust of wind nearly knocked her off her feet, and the commodore was forced to take her in his arms to steady her. "Run up the white flag," he yelled.

"Commodore?" Neely stood beside them.

"Do it," he ordered angrily. "It is a matter of state business."

"I'm sending you over to him with a message." He paused as he peered at the *Dark Revenge*. "Tell that pirate to disappear ... and Godspeed," he added softly.

"Commodore, will you keep his secret?"

He nodded slightly and then walked away with his hands behind his back.

Rebecca was lowered to a small boat, and she began rowing in the direction of the *Dark Revenge*. She could hear the excited shouts coming from the pirate crew, and she rowed that much faster.

She missed him so much that she ached. The knowledge that they would be reunited in a few short minutes thrilled her beyond belief.

A rope was thrown down for her, and she grabbed hold of it and climbed aboard as swiftly as she could.

"Where you been?" asked the pirate called Hammerhead.

"I've come to see the captain, where is he?"

Hammerhead pointed to the helm.

Rebecca's heart leaped sharply at the sight of him. He stared at her blankly, there was no sign of emotion or even recognition. She wanted to rush to his side, but something held her back. "Jonas," she spoke softly.

Hard, sinister eyes cut through her. "Aye, lass, it has been a spell," he said, cocking his head to one side.

"They found me after I washed over," she explained.

"Did they, and just happen to hunt us down so that they could let ye go?" He spoke the words through clenched teeth.

"No, if you'll let me explain."

He said nothing, seeming to look right through her.

"Jonas, talk to me, please! When I went over I was yanked back to the 21st century, it was awful. I've been trying to get back ever since."

He smiled wickedly. "That be unfortunate for ye, this may hurt a mite in that light. Lock her up!" he bellowed to his first mate.

Rebecca's mouth fell open. What was wrong with him? That's when she noticed the spyglass in his hand. Had he seen the moment when she fell into Wellington's arms? Was he back to thinking she was a spy?

Jester made no move to follow Jonas' orders, instead he peered at his captain as if he had gone mad.

"Aye, the lot of ye be bent on mutiny?" Jonas roared, his normally composed manner was cracking.

Grasping her arm gently, Jester led her away reluctantly. She soon found herself in the same cabin she had been locked in the first time she'd boarded the *Dark Revenge*.

"My sorrows, poppet," he muttered.

"It's okay, Jester." She smiled to lighten the mood.

The old man shrugged and left, locking the door.

Rebecca was at a loss for what to do. One thing was sure, he would not listen to her right now, she had never seen murder in his eyes before this day.

A few moments later the door swung open, Jonas stood in the doorway large as life. Rebecca took an instinctive step back for there was indeed a murderous rage in his eyes.

He glared at her. "What say you?"

In that instant Rebecca could find no words. What could she say to him in the face of so much anger, and he looked as if he almost hated her. "Jonas, please talk to me, tell me what I've done wrong."

"Ye betrayed me, lass, ye be a spy and that scallywag's wench."

"No, Jonas, that's not true ... I swear! I've been trying to find my way back for weeks now, but I couldn't. When I did I came up out of the water by the *Mary Stuart*, they actually saved me."

"Mayhap, if ye had not been occupied with a lover, ye could have gotten back!" His voice had raised a notch.

"No, you have it all wrong," she cried.

Jonas' sudden uncertainty was evident, but he brushed it aside. "What me own eyes seen would differ with that."

She shook her head. "It wasn't what it looked like."

His hand snaked out to grab her, pulling her roughly to him. "Methinks yer lover sent ye over here as a ploy--a distraction to bring me down."

"No, if you would only listen. He let me go to give you a message. I told him the truth about you, Jonas." She could see he was visibly shaken, but she pressed on. "I told him the truth to play on his honor. I did not think he would be a man that would hunt down the true heir to murder him. I told him so he would leave you alone."

"And what be his message?" He was so furious now that his words were spoken softer than a whisper.

"He said to tell you to disappear and Godspeed."

"That be so?" Jonas brought his face down close to hers. "Perhaps, my fair lass, ye will be telling me how ye enticed the commodore to display such bloody honor?"

"I just told him the truth." Rebecca was becoming frightened. She'd never seen him so angry, in fact, he had rarely even displayed ill humor.

He grabbed her arm, and his fingers squeezed tightly. "Did ye lay with him, lass?"

"No, Jonas, damn it!" Rebecca slipped into her 21st century vocabulary. "I saved your life!"

"As I've saved yours, lass. So we be square." He spoke softly, but she was not deceived into thinking his fury had abated. "Jester!" he called out loudly.

His first mate appeared as if he had been waiting to be summoned.

"Keep her locked up while we berth in Tortugas. I'll be busy with a sweet lass in me bed," he said with a leer. "If ye be lucky, a wench will be putting me in good humor and I won't be sending ye over the plank." He threw Rebecca from him and left, Jester locking the door behind him.

"Jonas!" she called after him. "Damn it, don't you dare!"

She began shaking the door violently. "Get me out of here."

Time ticked away slowly, and Rebecca was itching to burst through that door. That man was a no-good blackguard of a pirate, she should never have gone through the trouble of coming back.

She heard the lock click open, and Captain Ash came in the cabin, carefully shutting the door behind him. Rebecca went into her grandfather's arms, hugging him tightly. "We are in Tortugas, we'll slip away before they catch us."

"No way, I'm going to wring his neck!" She was already starting for the door.

"Oh, I don't know ... you got him in hopping mad--whatever you did put a bee in his bonnet but good," Captain Ash told her.

Rebecca strolled out of the room, right past Jester and the rest of the crew.

"Miss Rebecca, ye can't go." Jester was trying to catch up with her.

"Oh, you watch me," she spat out. "Where did that scallywag go?"

"Don't be going after him, lass," Jester warned. "He be hotter than a vat of lit powder. He'll rethink it and be back."

"Is that so?" Rebecca grabbed the pistol her grandfather had in his belt. "Well, Captain Shelton doesn't know what mad is ... yet. I'll show him a thing or two. Now is someone going to tell me where he is, or am I going to stand in the street and yell out the bloody pirate's blasted name?"

"Methinks the Trade Wind." Jester scratched his head. "There be a wench he sees there--but not now methinks," he added quickly.

Rebecca was already on her way off the ship.

"Rebecca!" her grandfather yelled after her. "Come back here with that pistol!"

She didn't answer.

"Do you hear me, girl!"

Rebecca hit the dock, and the ringing of laughter from the *Dark Revenge* followed. They were amused by this lover's quarrel, but she was not.

She found the Trade Wind easy enough. Rebecca went through the door and didn't waste any time. She stomped loudly on the floor and yelled, "Captain Shelton, where is he?" With a wild look in her eyes and a pistol in her hands, no one looked much like toying with her.

A wench that was serving drinks pointed up the stairs. "Third door to the right."

Rebecca didn't bother knocking but stormed right through the door. With her auburn hair in untamed disarray and her green eyes flashing with fury, she could have truly been the mythical siren that he had been so fond of calling her.

Her gaze first flew to Jonas who stood next to the window. He wore nothing but his britches, and even in her anger she could not help but notice the pure male perfection of his bare chest.

She then stared at the woman who sat on a chair next to the bed.

Chapter Seventeen

She was pretty, in a sulking sort of way. The wench was wearing only undergarments. Rebecca raised the pistol, first at the wench and then moved it to Jonas. "How could you?" She glowered at the man who held her very heart in his hands.

He held up his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "Pirate, love. Remember?"

Stinging tears sprang to Rebecca's eyes.

"How could ye?" he asked.

Rebecca could only shake her head.

She walked over to where he stood and held the pistol to his throat. "I'll send you both to the grave."

"Did he feel good to ye, lass? Was his kiss like mine? Could he make ye scream like I can?" His words were spoken softly, but she could still detect the anger. "Did he partake of me sugar?" He had clenched his teeth together, obviously working himself into a frenzy again.

Rebecca couldn't speak, the tears flowed uninhibited.

Jonas lifted his hand and gently pushed the pistol away from his throat. "Might we continue this conversation without the pistol?"

Rebecca's turbulent gaze rose to peer into his eyes, her heart shattering into a million pieces. She was trembling with the effort it took to keep from sobbing.

"You are a fool, Jonas Shelton!" Her lips trembled as she spoke. "Since the day I laid eyes on you, no man has touched me but you. I love you so much it hurts ... and I still love you."

He inhaled sharply, his eyes clouding with uncertainty.

"But," Rebecca continued, "who am I to stand in the way if the captain should want another wench?"

Turning away from him without saying another word, she ran blindly from the room.

"Rebecca!" Jonas called after her.

She ran through the street, blinded by tears until she made it back to the *Dark Revenge*.

"Make ready to sail, you scurvy dogs!" she yelled as she pointed the pistol at whoever was near.

The pirates stared at her in stunned disbelief.

She could see that the entire crew was still aboard, they would not have gone ashore until needed repair and maintenance had been performed.

"Step up now!" she screamed. "Who will be the first to feel the wrath of this pistol?"

The men scrambled to untie the ship and run up the sails. Rebecca stood at the helm, guiding the *Dark Revenge* away from the dock.

From the deck she could see that a member of the king's navy had stopped Jonas and was questioning him. They appeared to be having a very heated argument about something. She assumed the man must suspect Jonas of being a pirate.

She saw Jonas break away from the questioning officer and hit the docks running and stopping short when he saw the *Dark Revenge* sailing out of port. His mouth dropped open.

"Why, that mutinous wench be sailing away with me bloody ship! Wench! You get that blasted ship back here or I'll wring ye bloody neck!" he yelled out.

Rebecca smiled at the sight of him yelling from the dock. "Slow it down, let him catch us!" she yelled to the crew.

Hammerhead had gone into fits of laughter.

The captain commandeered a small boat and was now chasing the *Dark Revenge*.

"Rebecca!" he yelled. "Bring me bloody ship back, or be warned, ye'll go to the sharks!"

He caught up soon enough, and Rebecca yelled for someone to drop the ladder.

Jonas came aboard, glowering, he stalked toward Rebecca. He drew his cutlass, and Rebecca grabbed the one that was being offered to her from one of the others.

The blades clashed loudly.

"Methinks that ye be a mutinous wench," he told her.

"You're a scallywag of a pirate," she yelled back at him.

Their blades continued to collide as she tried to hold him back.

"Witch!" he shouted.

"Blackguard," she countered.

Rebecca lost her blade tripping over something behind her--she fell to the ground. Jonas had his blade to her chest. "Mutiny must be punished," he admonished. "Take her to me quarters!" he bellowed loudly.

Jester gently took Rebecca by the arm to lead her away, but they both froze when they heard the hard click of a pistol's hammer.

Jonas swung around to face the wrath of Captain Ash. "You'll be keeping your blasted hands off my granddaughter," Ash bellowed.

"Aye, old salt, the wench may be your granddaughter, but she be my woman." Jonas strode away without looking back at the old man, motioning for Jester to follow, bringing Rebecca along.

The captain was close behind them, and, after Jester deposited her in the room, he left. Her gaze flew to the door where Jonas loomed in the door, cutlass still in hand. His eyes mirrored his anger ... and something else. He took two steps toward her--slowly. Rebecca stood up and backed away, staring at his face. "Ye be in a spot of trouble, wench."

Rebecca's eyes flashed defiance. "And what would you do, sir, slice me in half? Send me to the sharks?"

"Remove yer garments!"

"I will not!"

He was within a few feet of her now and coming closer. "Lass, ye'll be removing them items or I'll cut them from you." A dangerous smile had spread across his face.

"You've had your fun today, Captain, I'll not be second to a tavern whore."

He shook his head, still smiling. "Nay, lass, ye soured me good time again, but ye'll not do it another time."

The pirate was next to her--so close she could feel the heat emanating from his body. "Methinks you'll do just fine." He looked down at her, his eyes half closed.

Rebecca shook her head. "You would have been with someone else. There's no sense in denying that I love you because you know I do ... but I'll not lay with you."

Jonas' features softened slightly. "Aye, fair maiden, the man ye love be a pirate." With one hand he lifted her chin to peer into her eyes.

Rebecca's heart quickened as she became all too aware of his nearness. How many

nights had she longed for his touch, loved him so fiercely that she would have died for him?

"Methinks this pirate has a wicked hunger for you," Jonas whispered, his voice etched with consuming need.

Her traitorous body sizzled in anticipation of his touch while her mind continued to struggle against her passionate need of him.

His laugh was soft, setting her blood burning. "Aye, the sight of ye in that man's arms nearly sent me mad, lass, mayhap I would have taken another to me bed, but alas it didn't happen." Jonas set the cutlass down and wrapped his hand through her tangled hair. Tilting her head back, his lips came down on hers, his words coming out between his kisses. "I'll always be a pirate, lass ... will ye still love me?"

His mouth trailed from her lips down to her throat, and her heart beat furiously, screaming for more. "I will love you through eternity, but..." Her words were cut off by his invading tongue. She moaned, unable to continue her struggle.

He pulled away, looking at her through smoldering, hungry eyes. "If ye will love me forever, love me now, lass."

Rebecca's arms encircled his neck, pulling him closer. What did anything matter but to be in his arms, to feel his touch, to revel in his kisses?

His deft fingers unfastened her gown, it slid to the floor. Rebecca trembled like a little bird in his arms, not from fear but from pure uninhibited passion.

His smoky eyes peered into hers. "Me love be yours forever, lass--stay with me?" His voice shook with the effort of restraint.

She smiled. "Forever, you black hearted pirate."

Groaning, he attempted to lay her down on the floor, but her hand held him off. Her gaze hungrily devoured the hard contours of his muscled body. Caressing his chest with her tongue, she went lower until she reached his magnificent cock that stood stiffly at attention for her. She showered him with light kisses that sent shivers through his body.

His head flew back, and he let out something that resembled a growling moan. "No more teasing, woman!"

He lifted her up and carried her to his bed. Spreading her legs, his fingers found her wet pussy--she was ready for him, her clit taut and swollen with desire.

But it seemed he wasn't quite ready yet. He grabbed her chin and forced her to look him in the face. "Do ye love me, lass?"

"Yes," she gasped.

"Say it," he demanded, his voice shaking.

"I love you, Captain Jonas Shelton!" she cried out.

In that instant he thrust deep inside her pussy, filling her with his enormous cock. "I love you, Rebecca Ashton." His voice shook as he thrust in her again and again. Every part of her body burned with sensation, and she lifted her hips to him to meet his, and as she did she felt her juices spilling out to cover his cock.

His breaths coming in hard gasps, Jonas pulled out and shot spurts of hot cum onto her tingling clit. Weakened with spent passion, he collapsed onto her. The weight of him lying on her, his cock still pulsing against her thigh, only added to the contentment of the moment.

A sudden thought must have brought some life back to him, for he lifted his head to look at her. "The next man that dares touch ye will be run through with me blade."

She put her finger up to his lips to quiet him. "No other man could ever be my pirate, and it is you that I love."

Chapter Eighteen

Fear of letting the other out of their sight for even a moment kept the lovers closeted in the cabin throughout the night and through most of the next day. Rebecca's heart was complete, her soul knew peace only when she was in his arms.

Jonas stirred from the bed when a loud clamoring on deck wafted into the cabin.

"Cap'n!" Jester shouted. "Make haste!"

Jonas struggled into his trousers and threw his shirt on without bothering to fasten it. Rebecca followed suit, dressing as quickly as possible.

On deck she was hit with a blast of exhilarating sea air. Jester was on the bow with a spyglass up to his eye. "Cap'n ye need to take a look, it be looking like we have a wicked strange storm up ahead."

Jonas took the spyglass and peered through the small opening. "What the bloody hell kind of storm would that be?"

Rebecca could see a blotch of pure black mass in the distance moving toward them fast. "It's not a storm," she stated, her voice quivering with apprehension. Both the first mate and the captain threw curious glances in her direction. "Gentlemen, that thing you see up ahead ... is death. He's looking to balance nature."

"Turn her about, mates!" Jonas bellowed.

Rebecca put her hand on his arm and shook her head. "We can't cheat death, we must beat him or he'll pursue us relentlessly. We must meet him head on!"

"What addled talk is this, love?"

"Full ahead!" Rebecca yelled.

Jonas looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"We have to, Jonas, don't you see?"

The dread Jonas felt was apparent by the look on his face. "What if it takes ye back to where ye came from?"

"I belong with you, here, but we must battle death to win that right."

"He cannot take you if it is not your time unless you let him," she called out to the crew. "Think of what is dearest to you in this life and hold your ground."

She spied her grandfather near the rail, gaping in astonishment at the black mass coming at them at an unnatural speed.

"Grandpa," she cried. "Come and stand with us." The old man moved to stand next to his granddaughter. She turned to Jonas. "Hold me, please!" He immediately took her into his arms and held her tightly, his chest against her back. The inky, swirling darkness loomed huge in the sky, meeting the ocean, it turned its waters black.

It swallowed them, bringing a gloom so complete that it was impossible to see anything but the consuming darkness. The heart wrenching sound of a million dying souls filled the air with their agony.

"You cannot have him yet!" Rebecca screamed. "He is mine for a while longer!"

Beneath their feet the *Dark Revenge* groaned, shaking as if it was splitting from the inside

out.

"I have conquered time to love him, and I will beat you!" she yelled into the void of blackness that had enveloped them, all along aware of his warmth and his arms tightly wrapped around her.

Instantly, the darkness was gone, in its place was the most breathtaking sunset she had ever set eyes on. The ball of fire sent vibrations of color over the sky and sea.

"It's gone!" she cried out with delight. "We've beat him back for a while."

Jonas squeezed her tighter, as if wishing he could meld them together as one.

Rebecca pulled away long enough to hug her grandfather who looked at her through tears of pride. Turning, she put her arms around Jonas and kissed him tenderly. There was so much happiness and love in her heart she thought for sure she would burst.

"Would you be a pirate's wife?" he asked with a crooked smile.

"Aye, Captain!"

Rebecca caught the sound of deep, familiar laughter, and looked around frantically for its source. Her gaze strayed to a large, billowing cloud in the sky. "Chey," she breathed. The image of Chey's dark face and long braids was inlaid in the cloud.

"Who?" Jonas asked

Again, she heard Chey's humorous laughter.

I see you have de helm now.

"Yes," Rebecca whispered.

Fair winds, Rebecca.

"Thank you, Chey."

"Who ye be talking to?"

"A friend," she answered. "A very good friend."

"Me be seeing no one." He arched his eyebrow.

"You can't see him unless he wants you to," she explained.

"Indeed, pray tell me how that be working."

"I think he may be an angel, or maybe cupid." Rebecca smiled and took his hand. Jonas stared at the clouds above the water line. "What's wrong?" Rebecca asked.

Jonas shook his head. "I been thinking that ye will be staying away from the sea when the storms come in."

She laughed. "I agree."

With that, the lovers sailed away into a future of blissful obscurity.

The End