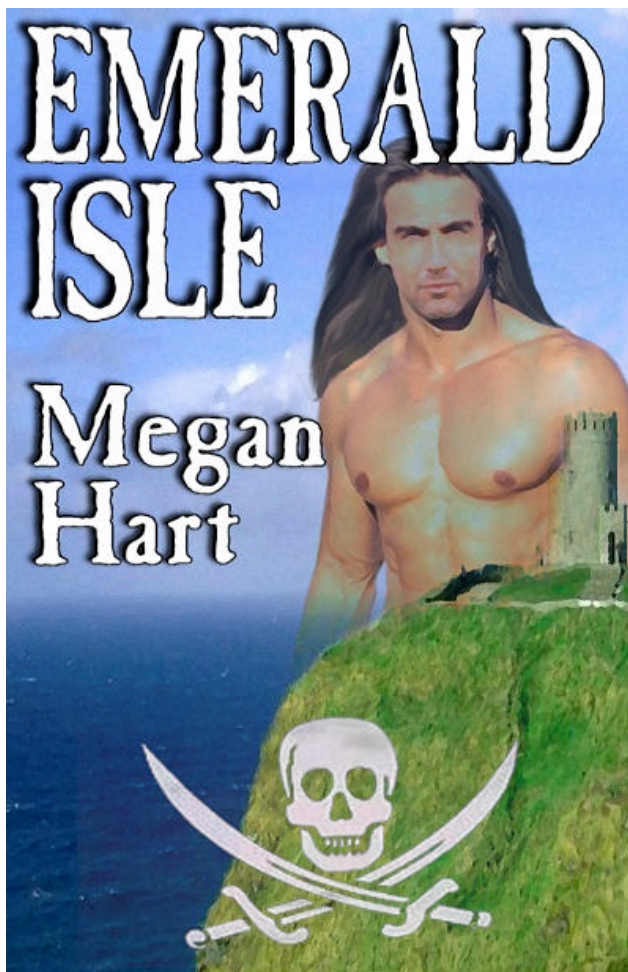


EMERALD ISLE

Megan
Hart



EMERALD ISLE

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“Nora, love—”

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“All the more reason for me to come along. Remember what happened the last time we went into his fae world.”

“Right.” His laugh rumbled through her. His fingers caressed her more.

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EMERALD ISLE

BY

MEGAN HART

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EMERALD ISLE
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

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For pirate lovers everywhere!

*And for DPF... 'cuz he'd wear the pirate
shirt if I asked him to...*

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“Surrender the emerald, *leannán*,” purred the husky female voice in Eleanor’s ear. “And I won’t serve your lover to the sharks.”

Eleanor looked to the edge of the plank, where Robin stood, trussed and blindfolded. Even his legs had been tied so tightly he could barely shuffle.

“*Póg mo thóin!*” Eleanor spat the only Gaelic she knew in the other woman’s face. “Kiss my ass.”

“Very well,” her rival replied with a casual shrug. “Say goodbye.”

“Robin!”

Eleanor woke, screaming, as she’d done for the past three nights. The bedclothes had tangled around her ankles. Her night rail clung to her body with sweat, and her hair had come loose from its braid. Untidy curls feathered across her cheeks, and she pushed them away impatiently as she fought to free herself from the blanket’s grip.

“What is it, love?” Robin’s voice curled around her in the darkness,

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and in the next moment, so did his hands. He gently extricated her from the tangled covers and pulled her back against him, spooning her. “Another nightmare?”

She nodded, though he couldn’t see her in the dark. “The same one.”

He chuckled. “She fed me to the sharks again?”

“’Tis not funny.” Eleanor turned in the circle of his arms to press her face against his chest. “I didn’t give her the emerald, and she killed you.”

“But you did give her the emerald, love. And she didn’t kill me.” His lips brushed her forehead and he smoothed his hands down her back to cup her rear through the thin material of her night rail. He snugged her closer to him with both hands on her buttocks. “Don’t worry about it, *mo chroí*, my heart. We’ll find it—and her—and we’ll get it back.”

The tension coiled in her body as a result of the dream began to leach away under his touch. “She put her hands on you. I didn’t like that.”

He chuckled again, low in his throat. The sound reverberated in his chest, against her cheek. “She brought me no harm, love.”

Eleanor frowned. “’Twas not harm she wished to give you.”

Even now, the memory of that...that...Amazon touching Robin made Eleanor grit her teeth. “Grace O’Malley is a posturing, mannish hoyden!”

His fingers had been inching up her night rail while she spoke, and when his bare flesh touched hers, she sighed. He palmed her rear, his rough palms pleasantly scratching her soft skin.

“Gráinne Ni Mhaille is a well-respected pirate,” Robin murmured as he worked his magic with his hands. “Her name is renowned.”

“She’s a vicious, greedy bint,” said Eleanor, slipping her hands around his neck to pull herself up toward his lips. “She’s got no right to

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our treasure.”

His lips brushed hers. “She claims a portion of all commerce in these parts. ’Tis part of the code, love.”

She parted her lips to allow his tongue to dip inside while she slipped a knee between his legs. “She didn’t take only part, she took the whole damn thing!”

“To be fair, love, she didn’t know the emerald was magic.”

The tips of his fingers tickled between her thighs, brushing the edges of her nether curls. She nudged her knee higher, opening herself to his touch. Her nipples peaked and liquid heat pooled in her cunny. Her clit rubbed against his bare stomach, for Robin slept without clothes.

“Why do you keep trying to defend her?” she demanded. “She stole from you! More than just that emerald, which, I might remind you, we carried with us halfway ’round the world. That emerald was—”

“Going to lead us to the leprechaun’s treasure. Yes, love. I know.” His mouth possessed hers again, his tongue stroking hers. He curled his fingers more, brushing her curls again and finding her heat. He rocked her with infinitesimal movements against his belly, the firm muscles and crisp, curling hair teasing her clit into full erection. “Forget about that for the moment, *mo chroí*. I have another treasure I wish to find.”

“Do you?” She smiled as his lips ran over her cheek and along her jaw, then down the slope of her neck to pause at the base of her throat.

He nipped and nibbled her there, as she gasped and arched against him. The slickness of her juices let her slide against him, creating a delicious push-pull of friction that made her thighs quiver.

Robin pushed her gently back against the pillows as he worked the buttons of her night dress. His fingers nimbly unhooked each one without hesitation, opening the material until she lay bare beneath him. His mouth traced the path of the opening buttons, down the slope of her breasts. He took one nipple between his lips and suckled it until she

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moaned aloud, then moved to the other. He flicked the taut bud gently with his tongue before taking it between his lips.

Her head tossed on the pillow and she was lost in the sensations. “Robin...”

He left a trail of wet heat by sliding his tongue down her belly. He tickled her navel, making her wiggle. Then he slid down further to find the upright nub of her clit. He kissed it. She jumped with a moan. He licked it. She writhed. He laughed, and the puff of his breath on her flesh made her sigh again.

“God’s teeth, Nora, I love it when you make that noise.”

She made it again, and this time it trailed into a whimper when he bent to stroke her smoothly with his tongue. Long, flat licks interspersed with small, circling flutters soon had her heart pounding so hard bright lights flashed in front of her eyes.

She lifted her hips to meet his mouth, rocking in rhythm with every touch of his lips and tongue. He slid a finger inside her, then another, and she cried out.

“I want to feel you around my cock,” he murmured, every word causing his lips to brush teasingly on her clit.

Her orgasm surged within her like the sea readying itself for a storm. She crested and rode the waves of pleasure, then rose again, yet higher...higher...

“Break for me, love,” Robin whispered.

She did, plummeting and rising again so swiftly she was left breathless. Her body tensed and released, her cunny spasmed, and her back arched against the bed. She cried his name followed by a wordless murmur of ecstasy.

In the next moment she felt his body on hers, and then his penis stretched and filled her. He moved steadily, his pace like waves licking the shore, advancing and retreating.

Eleanor hooked her legs around him and ran her nails down his

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back to rest at last upon the muscular cheeks of his ass. She caressed the warm flesh, urging him into her.

He buried his cock inside her willing tunnel, then withdrew and slid inside again to the hilt. His rear flexed and released under her hands. She lifted her hips to meet his thrusts, whispering his name and being rewarded with an answering groan.

He shifted himself a bit higher to press his pubic bone against the direct source of her pleasure. The steady, gentle pressure the position granted with each thrust meant she sailed toward another climax, smaller but no less exquisite than the first.

“Meet me there,” Robin whispered against her lips.

“I’m there,” she replied with a smile that became a gasp as her climax filled her.

He thrust again, his body shuddering, and groaned long and low. Her cunny’s clenching masked the throb of his cock, but she knew he’d reached his release well, and knowing he’d spent himself inside her sent a few final flutters of pleasure through her.

He kissed her forehead, then her mouth, still seated firmly inside her. “The only treasure I truly need is betwixt your thighs, wife.”

She laughed. “Ah, husband, love might make the world turn. ’Tis coin that fills our bellies. Surely you’d not wish me to go hungry?”

He growled, nipping her lips, then rolled off her. “No. I know how unbearably grouchy you get when you’re not fed properly.”

She dug her knuckles into his side. “Hush your tongue.”

“Don’t fret, Nora. We’ll get the emerald back. And find the treasure. And give up pirating life for one on shore. An honest living, love. You and me and all the wee ones.”

Emotion thickened her voice. “I truly don’t need gold and jewels to make me happy, Robin. Being with you is enough to bring me joy for the rest of my days.”

His arms slipped around her and pulled her close. “You’ll have

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both, love. Me and the treasure. I vow it.”

And she believed him...because he'd never lied to her.

* * *

I love the sea breeze in my face, Robin thought as the chill, salt-laden air lashed his long braids. The ocean was lover, friend, mother, child all wrapped up together. Its majesty and beauty never failed to move him; its fury never ceased to awe and amaze him. He'd never wanted anything more than life on the sea, with a ship beneath his feet and adventure ripe for the plucking.

Things had changed. He shaded his eyes and moved closer to the cliff edge, searching the ocean below for the ship he knew had to be cutting the waters. Now he had a wife. He never wanted to live away from the sea, but he no longer wanted to ride it to steal from others.

His Nora had adapted wonderfully to life as the wife of a pirate captain. She didn't get seasick and never complained about the lack of variety in their rations. The crew had loved her and accorded her a respect bordering on worship, for though his Nora had been born and bred a lady, she'd taken up the handling of all the crew's necessities without argument. She repaired garments, seasoned the food, made sure every man had his share of rest and sustenance. Her lilting songs lifted every heart, and though Robin had known many sailors who believed there could be only bad luck for ship with a woman aboard, none of his crew had harbored such superstition.

Except one. Barnabus, the betrayer. He'd sold them out for no more than the price of a flask of whiskey and an undiscerning whore's company. He'd shared the story of the leprechaun's emerald with a sailor enlisted by another pirate's crew, telling the other man how the jewel was fabulous enough to set up an entire crew for a lifetime.

The other man had told his captain. Gráinne Ni Mhaille, or as the English called her, Grace O'Malley. A fearsome wench who ruled the sea around Clew Bay, she'd done what any pirate would have done.

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She'd set out to steal the emerald.

Robin didn't blame her. He'd have done the same. Had done, in fact, though never to the pirate queen herself. And if it had been merely a jewel, he'd have let it go.

'Twas no mere jewel. It was a leprechaun's jewel, tied to the promise of wealth beyond imagination. He'd found the little, green bastard in the Caribbean and stolen the first treasure marker, a coin that had led him to an island. He'd lost the gold, but come home with a better treasure in the end—his wife.

Unfortunately, Gráinne hadn't been satisfied with only taking the emerald. She'd also captured and conscripted his ship and crew. She'd shown Robin and Nora some mercy, at least, out of respect for a fellow captain, but she wanted to take no chances of easy retaliation. She'd put Robin and Nora ashore in Galway with enough coin to buy them a week's lodging and food.

He could still hear the wench's laughter as she strode away, calling over her shoulder, "They might say many things about the pirate queen, but never let them say she is without mercy!"

It's that mercy that'll be her downfall, at least in this case, he thought, still watching the waves below. The sheer face of the Cliffs of Moher would give a man little enough purchase to climb, but he was fair certain that somewhere on their rocky sides was the entrance to the trove.

He'd tracked sightings of Gráinne and her crew for weeks, noting stories of any aberration in her routine. When she'd been spotted along the coast of the Aran Islands and then to the coast of West Clare just a few days later, he could think of only one explanation for the sudden change of course.

"My bloody emerald," he said aloud, still watching.

Wit and thriftiness had allowed him and Nora to travel here and secure lodgings. It pained him to see her working when she'd been

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meant for looking lovely, but she insisted she didn't care. Wiping tables and tending the fire at the inn earned them a free room, while his help in the stables gave them food...and time to scout the cliffs for signs of Gráinne and her ship.

And there it was. One of her many swift galleys, scourges of the Irish Coast. He watched this one cut through the water like a hot knife through butter. The rocky, narrow shore at the bottom of the Cliffs of Moher didn't have much on it. So when he saw Gráinne throwing anchor just off shore, he knew he'd discovered where the emerald had led them.

* * *

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"Nora, love—"

"Robin, love." She put her hand over his mouth. "Hush. I'm coming."

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“I’m not taking any chances,” she told him. “If the emerald takes you to a place like the coin did, I’m not letting you go in there alone.”

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous, love.” Robin snuggled her close against his body and nuzzled her neck.

Her nipples tightened against his chest as his teeth grazed her sensitive flesh. “Of that sea-worn hag? Of course not.”

He chuckled, sending flames of desire coursing through her. “Are you sure?”

“Under normal circumstances, no.” She lifted her head to look at him, then kissed him. She was only partly lying. The pirate queen was sea-worn and though her age was indeterminate, she was far from a hag. “But if the emerald leads you to a place like the one we found before, it won’t matter how much I trust you. You wouldn’t be able to help yourself.”

“And you want to be there to help me instead?” His lips grazed hers. “How considerate of you.”

She reached down to pinch his nipple hard enough to make him yelp. “No other wench, pirate captain or no, is going to put her hands on my husband.”

“And what of the crew, love? Need I remind you these men are likely to consider rape no more than their just due even without the benefit of fae aphrodisiacs? There will be more of them than of me.”

She sighed and tucked her head into the curve of his shoulder. “Don’t go without me, Robin. Promise.”

He sighed, the deep breath making his chest rise and fall beneath her. “I won’t make a promise I don’t intend to keep.”

She muttered a curse and made to roll off him, but his hands pinned her on top of him. “Don’t be angry, love.”

She struggled ineffectually in his grip. “I *am* angry! I don’t want you going in there alone, and not only because that bloody, wee bastard might have put another lust spell on it! I don’t want you going in there

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alone against a whole crew! 'Tis dangerous!"

"Shh, shh, love." His attempts to soothe her made her struggle harder. He pinned her arms at her sides and rolled her beneath him. She couldn't move.

She glared up at him. "Get off me."

He bent to kiss her. She refused to open her mouth. He teased her lips with his. She set hers in a thin, grim line. He moved his mouth along the curve of her jaw to her ear, flicking the sensitive lobe with his tongue before capturing it gently between his teeth. Her nipples tightened again, though she refused to respond. Robin's hand came up to cup one breast, his thumb passing over the taut peak. The sensual caress echoed between her legs, which she kept clamped.

His mouth moved from her ear to her neck and the curve of her shoulder, bared by the scooped neck of her night rail. He nipped her collarbone as he fondled her nipple, rolling it with his fingers.

Heat and hardness pressed on her clit with only the barrier of her cotton gown between them. Robin rocked his pelvis, then nudged one knee between her legs to force them open.

He was too big and too strong...and the things he was doing to her with his mouth and hands almost made her forget she was angry...

She tensed her thighs, but too late. He'd parted her legs and slid between them. When she put her hands against his chest to push at him, he captured both wrists with one large palm and held them above her head.

Now she was well and truly caught. Wiggling only served to rock her body harder against his and cast her night dress into further disarray. Eleanor arched her back, but that only pushed her breasts higher upward—right into Robin's waiting and willing mouth.

Still holding her wrists, he put his mouth to her left nipple. He teased it through the cloth of her gown, wetting the material and blowing his breath across the fabric. Heat, then chill. The delicious and

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tantalizing combination almost drew a moan from her, but she stifled it by biting her lip.

I'm angry with him!

It was becoming more and more difficult to remember that. He sucked harder on her nipple before moving to the other one to give it the same treatment.

He moved off her slightly, and his free hand caressed her hip. His fingers curled, inching her gown up over her thighs. Baring her to him.

"Don't you dare," Eleanor warned, but got only a chuckle in return. "I'll scream!"

"Go ahead and scream. I'm sure Seamus and Aggie will run to your rescue." He inched her nightgown higher. "'Tis not as though they've never heard me making you scream before."

"Oh!" She gritted her teeth, but couldn't deny the truth of his words.

He kissed lower, down over the curve of her hip. The position made it awkward for him to keep her arms pinned. His grip loosened a bit. "If you really want me to stop, love, I will."

Before she had the chance to reply, he slid his tongue down her belly and straight to her clit. Any protests she'd been meaning to make disappeared under her moan of pleasure.

"Yes?" His tongue stopped its subtle movements. His hot breath caressed her. "You want me to stop?"

"No, Robin!"

She couldn't even find it in herself to be angry at his answering chuckle. He let go of her wrists, and her hands found the top of his head. She wound her fingers in his sun-streaked hair, relishing the texture of it on her palms, belly and thighs.

Robin bent back to tease her clitoris with his tongue, using the tip to make small, precise circles, then the flat of it to lick her more firmly. No matter how many times she'd had his face between her thighs,

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Eleanor would never tire of this. Robin used his mouth to make love to her more thoroughly and skillfully than many men would have been able to manage with their pricks. Every lick and nibble, every stroke, every carefully directed puff of breath, all had her quivering on the edge of orgasm within moments.

He could have sent her over the edge right away, but Robin preferred to prolong her pleasure. Maddeningly, sometimes. Now, for instance, when he slid a finger inside her to stroke her internally in time to the movements of his tongue.

Eleanor lifted her hips to give him better access, which he took immediate advantage of by adding another finger. He spread them, gently stretching her and rubbing the spot just behind her pubic bone. He fastened his lips on her erect bud, pulling it gently.

Her thighs clenched and relaxed as the first orgasmic contractions began deep in her womb. 'Twas as though she could feel the blood from every part of her body rushing through her veins straight to her center. Her heart pounded and pulse throbbed; light flashed in front of her vision as she let out the breath she'd been holding.

Robin withdrew his fingers and placed one last kiss on her swollen center. He slid his mouth up along her body, capturing her mouth and delving inside.

"Tell me what you want, love."

"You," Eleanor breathed, clutching his rear to pull him closer. "Inside me."

"As you wish."

He filled her with one smooth thrust. They both groaned. He'd propped himself on his hands to enter her, and Eleanor put her hands on his broad, muscled chest. Her fingertips found the pebbled points of his nipples, hard like her own, and she rolled them between her fingers.

"Ah, love—" Robin's words became a moan as she pinched a bit rougher.

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He began to move in slow, even strokes and a steady pace she responded to immediately. Her orgasm hovered, the sensation of all her blood flowing to that one point not diminishing. Eleanor matched his thrusts, pressing her clit upward to rub against his belly with every move.

“So slick,” Robin murmured. “Neptune’s Trident, Nora, ’tis like sinking into butter.”

She laughed breathlessly. “How many times have you put your jolly roger into butter, I’d like to know?”

He bent to kiss her. “Never, love. I’m only guessing.”

She kissed him, holding onto his back and raking her nails down his skin. “It’s all for you, Robin.”

His pace quickened. He buried his head in her shoulder. His chest rubbed her breasts, tantalizing the nipples. His pelvis rocked against hers, and her cunny trembled around his length.

“I want to feel your pleasure,” Robin said against her neck. “You’re so hot, and wet, and tight around my cock. Let go for me, Nora. Let me feel you, love.”

With a low cry that soon escalated into a whimper, she gave him what he’d asked for. She let go. Her climax rushed through her, suffusing every digit, every limb, every hair with pure ecstasy. Her entire world became Robin, the hardness of his cock inside her, the tickle of his pubic hair against her throbbing clitoris. The sound of his moan sent waves of pleasure crashing over her.

“Nora!”

She answered with his name, this man she loved. The pure force of her love for him filled her as fully as her orgasm, flooding her entire body with emotion so strong it made tears spring to her eyes. They leaked down her face to puddle near her ears, but she was smiling, not sobbing.

He lifted his head at the touch of wetness. “Nora, love, are you all

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right?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" She laughed through her tears, her voice shaking as another series of shudders rippled through her.

He thrust harder once, twice, and once more, finally. His heat filled her, and she felt the pounding of his heart against her chest as he sank on top of her.

For a short time, the only sound in the room was their mingled breathing. Eleanor didn't have the strength to speak. Robin rolled off her, but kept her cradled in his arms. She pillowed her head on his chest, feeling his skin cool as the night air dried the sweat. She shivered and pulled up the covers to shield them.

"If we never find the emerald, I wouldn't care," she told him after a while. "Wealth is lovely, Robin, but 'tis not worth so much risk."

"When I made you my wife, I promised to take care of you." Robin's voice was quiet. He stroked her hair. "If I'm to give up pirating, love, we need something to carry us through. I don't mind working, but I don't want my wife to labor. I want to buy you a house overlooking the sea, where you can sit by the window and look pretty."

Eleanor sat up. "Robin Steele! Don't you know anything about me? I've never wanted that! I've never wanted to be only a decoration! 'Tis why I was running away in the first place!"

"Love—"

She cut him off. "Don't you 'love,' me. I want more from life than to be some man's china doll, set up on the mantelpiece and made only to look pretty. I didn't fall in love with you or consent to be your wife for you to risk life and limb going after a treasure you think will take care of us the rest of our lives. Money is nice, Robin, but 'tis nicer when you've earned it."

He sat up, too, his scowl evident even in the dimly lit room. "I'll have earned this treasure, Nora. What's so wrong about me wanting to take care of you? To keep you from trouble?"

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“Nothing.” She sighed, wanting to reach to touch his face but holding back. “And when we got the emerald, I was as willing as you to seek what it promised. But now Gráinne has it, and getting it back is too much risk. She’ll fight you for it, Robin. Is it worth the chance you could be hurt, or even die? She let us off once. She won’t be so generous again.”

“And ’twas her mistake she let me go,” Robin retorted. “She’d have to know I wouldn’t let her just take what was mine without seeking retribution. She knows the way of the sea better than that.”

“She was merciful,” Eleanor spat. “She had you on that plank and gave me your life in exchange for the emerald! There was no question in my mind which I’d choose, and I’d do it again if I had to. Always. Money is nothing to me if I don’t have you.”

“Nora, love—”

“No, Robin!” She pulled away from his touch. “If you’re going to try to convince me of your reasons for finding the emerald, I don’t want to hear them. Don’t you remember what happened to Winston?”

Even now, the memory made her shudder. Her former fiancé had drowned in quicksand, weighed down by the sack of gold coins he’d found in the leprechaun’s lair. His greed had killed him.

“That won’t happen to me, love.”

“You don’t know that,” Eleanor cried. “I’m sure Winston didn’t think he was going to die when he stepped into that quicksand!”

He tried to soothe her, but she was having none of it. She shrugged off his touch and shrank back against the pillows. He made a disgruntled noise.

“What do you want, Nora? Want me to become a bloody sheep farmer? Do you want me to work in Seamus’ stables for the rest of my life, mucking out stalls to keep you fed and clothed?”

“At least ’tis honest work!” The moment the words left her lips she regretted them. “Robin—”

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“Belay that. You’re right. Pirating is no honest work.”

The lilt of his brogue thickened in his anger. He got up from the bed and began to dress, his movements fierce but controlled.

“I didn’t mean—”

“You did mean it. And you’re right to mean it. I’ve spent a good portion of my life thieving, Eleanor. I don’t regret it, but I do admit it. I’m wanting to make a change. I believe that emerald and what it will lead me to is mine by rights. I intend to get it back. After that, I’ll bloody retire to whatever you want me to be, but I’ll be damned if I spend the rest of my life slaving in so-called honest work when I know I can provide you with more.”

“Don’t make this about me. If you want that treasure, want to risk your life for it, don’t use me as an excuse! Admit it’s for you!”

“There isn’t anything I do that isn’t for you, Nora.” Robin shoved his feet into his boots, then grabbed up his coat and hat. Next he buckled on his pistols. In the light from the fire, he looked imposing and dangerous. He’d let his beard grow again over the past few months, and it framed a mouth gone grim and thin-lipped.

“Gráinne Ni Mhaille stole that emerald from me, and I intend to get it back. ’Tis my hope you’ll be here waiting for me when I do.”

“Robin—”

“I’m doing this for both of us, and for our wee ones, should the Lord bless us with any. I won’t have my wife and children scraping out an existence and living in squalor, never knowing where the next meal will come from, or if the winter’ll see them with shoes on their feet. I won’t have my wife and children living like my mother did with me.”

She wanted to say more, to call him back, but Robin’s voice stopped her.

“I know you may not think this is honest work, but ’tis no crime to take back what was yours to begin with. The pirate queen took what was mine. I’m going to get it back.”

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Before she could say anything else, he'd stormed from the room. The door rocked in its hinges from the force of his slam. Eleanor pulled the covers up around her, chilled from more than just the night air.

"Be safe," she whispered to the empty room. "Damn you, Robin Steele, for your stubbornness!"

* * *

The woman has to be a grandmother already, Robin thought as he watched Gráinne barking orders to her crew. The gray hair and lines on her face attested to that. Yet her back was straight and her voice strong. He'd heard she gave birth to her last son while at sea and under attack and, watching her, Robin didn't find that story difficult to believe. The woman was an Amazon, a warrior, as fierce a pirate captain as any he'd ever known.

But she was also arrogant enough to think him too afraid to come after what she'd stolen from him. Robin had made quite a career of piracy, both along the Irish Coast and in the Caribbean. He'd captained several ships, including the one that had gone down with all his crew aboard. He'd done well, amassing and losing small fortunes, but he'd never gained a reputation for either blood thirstiness or destruction. He'd never earned a nickname like "Black Steele" or "Captain Blood," never had legends told about him. He was a competent pirate—a business man, not a showman. He'd lived the life knowing and not caring that his name was not going to live on in the history books as a scourge of the seas.

That relative anonymity had pleased him. Now it worked for him. Gráinne had let him go, perhaps from mercy as Eleanor had claimed, but more likely because she didn't think she had any reason to fear recrimination. Especially not on her home seas. She was Gráinne Ní Mhaille, after all, Pirate Queen of Connaught, who'd wagered with good Queen Bess herself, and won.

Captain Robin Steele wasn't much compared to that. He counted on

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that lack of reputation to help him now. She'd never suspect he'd actually come after her, alone against her and a full crew.

Robin took advantage of the night's cover to hide behind one of the large boulders at the cliff base. The tide was low, but the water still swirled and crashed around his legs, trying to pull him into the depths just beyond the rocks. The sea was a harsh mistress, who took what she wanted and raised seven kinds of hell when she didn't get it. Robin wasn't about to taunt the sea tonight. He stayed close to the rock, letting the water tug at him but not moving.

The woman isn't even subtle, he thought as he watched her row toward the shore in a dinghy crewed by five sailors. A lantern at the front of the small boat lit their way, and her ship was as brightly lit as a country squire's gala. She obviously feared no local interference in her plans.

Robin waited until the dinghy pulled up to the narrow, rocky strip of beach at the cliff base. The Cliffs of Moher rose above them hundreds of feet, their craggy vertical surface forbiddingly steep. It had taken him hours to climb down the narrow, crumbling path to get to the bottom. In many places, he'd had to crawl nearly straight down, hands and feet scrabbling for purchase in the cliff face before he could find another spot wide enough to stand on. But he'd made it. Now he watched as the pirate queen, standing, lifted her hands toward the cliffs.

Something glinted, then glowed. Green light seeped through her fingers, and she laughed loud enough for Robin to hear her even over the crashing of the waves. She gestured as one of her crew anchored the dinghy to the rocks. They clambered out, five burly sailors and one surprisingly petite woman.

She shouted something to the crew and lifted the emerald above her head. The green light grew, reflecting off the cliff's barren face. At first, nothing appeared, but as he watched, a thin green line began to glow in the rocks. It made a rectangle. The shape of a door.

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Gráinne walked up to the line and passed her hand over it. Her crew backed her up. She held up the emerald, and the doorway's glow responded, but she couldn't seem to be able to figure out how to open it.

"Bloody wee green bastard," Robin muttered with a grin. "You've hexed it shut."

Gráinne waved the emerald again. This time, words appeared in glowing green light above the door's top edge. The Gaelic lettering was difficult for him to see from his vantage point, and Robin took the chance of slipping from behind the rock to get a closer look. The water closed over his head for a few moments as he swam, surfacing near the dinghy and holding onto it to rest himself while he watched the pirate queen and her crew.

"*Is leor nod don eolach.*" Robin read, then chuckled. "A hint is sufficient for the wise. 'Tis a riddle, you wench. Don't tell me you can't figure it out."

This close he could hear her over the sea's complaining.

"A hint," said Grannia as she turned to her men. The emerald's green glow lit her grin. "I think we all know what that means."

Her men winked and nudged each other, guffawing.

"Belay it!" she cried and held up the emerald again. "*Oscail an doras.* Open the door!"

Silently, a space opened in the cliff. Blackness greeted them. Proving her reputation for fearlessness, Gráinne stepped through without hesitation, the emerald hoisted high. Robin saw its green glow light up the passage. Gráinne's curse got the rest of her men moving. Robin swam to the shore, moving as fast as he could without revealing himself.

They weren't even looking. They didn't expect anyone to have followed them. He slipped into the darkness behind them, listening for their footsteps. The glow from the emerald had dimmed; perhaps the

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passage turned, or they'd gone so far already the light had faded. He put out his hands to the sea-slick walls and felt his way along.

Shouts up ahead made him pause. Silence. He moved forward another few steps. The tunnel did, indeed, curve. He inched his way beyond the turn. From ahead of him another glow reached his eyes, but not green this time.

He grinned. Just like the last place. Robin followed the tunnel walls, each step bringing him closer to the brightness. He listened carefully for any signs Gráinne and her crew were waiting to ambush him.

By the time he got to the end of the tunnel, his clothes were beginning to stiffen against his skin as they dried. The air in the passage was cold and clammy and made him shiver as he peered from the tunnel's edge into the leprechaun's lair.

Unlike the tropical paradise he'd discovered with Nora when they'd followed the pull of the gold coin, this place was as barren and sparse as the cliffs outside. Jutting black rocks covered every inch of the cavern, including the ground. And yet, despite the utter lack of vegetation, the cavern was the loveliest place Robin had ever laid eyes on.

Jewels glittered on every surface. Rubies, emeralds, diamonds, gems of every color and size. Shining sapphires as big as a bird's egg nestled next to chunks of agate and amber.

This place had no fake sky the way the one in the Caribbean had, though, with all the jewels scattered across the ceiling, the effect was nonetheless of a star-strewn night. An unseen light source made all the gems sparkle and reflected off them to make the entire space glow with a brilliance that could blind a man who wasn't careful to shield his eyes.

Robin squinted, hand up to do just that. *The first of the wee bastard's tricks*, he thought. Blind any trespassers with promised glory, so they don't bother to move forward. In the next moment, his thought

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was proven correct. One of Gráinne's crew stood, frozen, his hand on one immense ruby sticking out from the wall. Blood poured from his eyes, nose and ears. His mouth gaped in silent agony.

Robin gave him wide berth. This was not the treasure, only a glamor to keep the greedy from venturing further. He kept moving.

The cavern widened as he moved cautiously, listening for those who'd gone ahead. Every once in a while he heard an echoed shout that told him he was going in the right direction. By now the place had grown so much he could no longer see the sides of it, or the ceiling. The glow still suffused the space, giving him light enough to see, and the floor still glittered with broken gemstones. He ignored them and kept walking.

The floor became black sand that sucked at and clung to his still-damp boots. Footprints dented it, and he followed them. The cavern narrowed again, and the gems became scarcer. Another trick, he saw when he came upon another of Gráinne's crew in the same condition as his mate.

"Brilliant wee bugger," Robin said aloud, looking around. "Make us think 'tis our last chance to get the treasure."

He knew better, and apparently so did Gráinne, for she'd continued to lead the way through one more tunnel. This one ended in a large cavern lit with more of the same diffuse light.

How much time had passed since he'd entered the tunnel? It didn't feel like hours, but Robin knew well how time passed in the fae realm. Not like it did in the mortal world. Had he been here days? Would Nora be worried?

The screams distracted him, and he jumped, looking around for the source. A woman's voice—but furious, not scared. Gráinne?

Just ahead of him was a small pool of black water, fed by a trickle from a cluster of large boulders. The scream had come from behind it. He made his hasty way there. What he saw made him stop dead in his

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tracks.

Gráinne stood on top of a big, flat rock, her sword in one hand and a knife in the other. Her shirt and vest had been torn in the back, exposing a good part of her skin. Her eyes blazed with fury, her grayed hair had come undone from its braid. Her crew members were leaping at her, their gibbering and lewd grins making their intentions clear.

The moment Robin stepped beyond the boulder barrier, he understood why. His cock rose into a sudden, painful erection, so fierce he had to stop and put his hand on the rocks to keep from falling. All at once, he could smell her: woman. Female. Goddess. His nostrils flared and all he could think of was plunging his aching flesh into slick heat, sating his lust, spewing his seed...

"Bloody bollocks," he cursed, wrenching upright and shaking himself. "Magic, Robin, 'tis what's got your prick at full mast. Naught more."

"Away with ye, ye bloody great bastards!" Gráinne hollered, swiping at the three sailors with her sword. "To hell I'll send you if you touch me again!"

"Ah, shut your gob," cried one. "Open your legs instead!"

His comrades laughed.

"Aye," cried another. "Spread for us, Gráinne! Show us you're not the dried up, old twat you pretend to be!"

Gráinne spat down into his face. "As if I'd care to lie beneath the likes of you, Finley! I've seen what you piss with, remember?"

Finley growled and danced forward, but Gráinne slapped him back with the flat of her sword. "Bugger off!"

She didn't seem particularly afraid. Furious and perhaps a bit amused. Robin had to admire the woman's courage, but then he supposed a woman used to captaining an entire crew of men had to be able to defend herself.

The third man hadn't said anything, concentrating his efforts on

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sneaking around behind her. He leaped up on the rock with a yell. Gráinne turned, knife flashing, but 'twas too late. He'd grabbed her about the waist, pinning her sword arm. The knife flashed again, slicing his arm, but the pirate grabbed her by the back of her hair while the other two men jumped up on the rock.

"Feargal, you great bloody git! Let me go!"

"Grab her, Francis," cried Feargal, struggling to hold her.

The woman might be a thief and a rival, but there was no way Robin was going to stand by and watch her be raped by members of her own crew. With an echoing shout, he sprang out of hiding, wishing he'd been able to bring his pistols. He'd left them tucked into a crevice, wrapped in oilcloth to protect them from the spray and rising tide. He did have two blades, however, which he whirled with both hands over and over in a figure eight pattern designed to intimidate as well as defend.

"Where the bloody hell did he come from?" cried Finley.

Feargal grunted. "Who cares? Finish him!"

Francis ran at Robin with a grin so wide and eyes glinting so gleefully Robin didn't doubt the pirate intended to fuck him and then kill him, if not the other way 'round. He stood his ground, knives stilled for the moment.

With a roar, the man launched himself at Robin, who side-stepped the attack. "Hard to run with your cock like a shaft of iron, eh, mate?"

Francis had slammed into the boulders and fallen. He got up, shaking his head, fury like a dark cloud on his face. "You'll pay for that, bucko."

"I think not," was Robin's mild reply, as he neatly side-stepped the man again.

Neptune's balls, his own prick was chafing fiercely inside his pants, but at least he knew this sudden arousal for what it was—magic.

"Listen, mate," Robin said. "You don't need to do this. It's the

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bloody leprechaun who's done it. You don't need—"

With another roar, the man had launched himself again. This time, his flailing fists caught Robin on the shoulder. But Robin's left-hand knife tore through the pirate's sleeve and nicked the skin. Blood spurted. The pirate cursed, holding his arm.

"Difficult to think about fucking when you're leaking that way," said Robin. "Best patch that up, boyo."

He looked over to where the other two men had pinned Gráinne down. Finley watched as Feargal shoved his trousers down to his ankles and poised himself between the pirate queen's legs.

"Ah, now, mate, you don't want to be doing that," Robin cried, running toward them.

He didn't need to bother. Gráinne proved, once again, she could take care of herself. Though her arms had been pinned at her sides, she bucked upward with her hips, throwing off her attacker. With a triumphant scream, she rolled over and stabbed Feargal in the chest. He gave a burbling cry and began to twitch. She got to her feet and shoved the stunned-looking Finley off the rock. He struck his head on the ground and lay still.

"You next?" Her bared teeth were more feral than female. She held up the bloodstained blade. "Come on then."

"No, madame. I'm interested in the treasure to be found in this cavern, not the one betwixt your thighs." Robin kept his eye on the still-bleeding pirate, who'd bound his arm with strips of his shirt, but had sunk, ashen-faced to the ground.

"The mast in your pants tells me otherwise," said Gráinne. "And 'tis just as unlikely for me to give up the fae man's treasure as it is for me to give you my own. So bugger off."

"I can't do that," Robin answered, moving closer, his own knives ready. "That emerald belongs to me, and I'll have it, if you please."

"It does not please me, laddie," said Gráinne with a smirk. She

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brushed her hair back from her face.

"Mayhap 'twould please you better should I let them have another go at you?"

Gráinnie laughed. "You act as though I needed your help."

"Mayhap not, but I gave it," Robin pointed out.

She came closer and put her hand to his cheek. "I know you."

"Get your hands off him!"

Robin was pleased to see the woman, could indeed, be startled, but he was just as stunned. They both turned.

"Nora!"

"You keep your hands off him, you strumpet!" Nora brandished a pistol Robin didn't recognize. "And you, you scurvy seadog! What do you think you're doing?"

"This is your woman?" Gráinne asked mildly. "She's a real fireball."

"Shut your gob," said Nora smartly. "And give me the emerald, else I'll blow your brains to bits."

"She won't," said Gráinne.

"She might," said Robin conversationally. He shrugged. "She looks well and sorely furious to me."

"I am!" Nora waved the gun again. "You bloody bastard."

"Ah, *leannán*. Don't take on so. 'Tis no way to treat your man." Gráinne grinned.

Nora didn't return the smile. "Give me the emerald."

"I don't think so, *leannán*."

"I'm not your sweetheart." Nora carefully cocked the gun. The sound seemed very loud in the cavern. Even Robin's heart beat a bit faster in anticipation.

"You'd best do as she says," Robin advised. "She's not a pirate."

"And what does that mean?" Nora demanded, her eyes wavering from her target for a moment.

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“It means you don’t live by the code, and therefore can’t be trusted,” said Gráinne.

Nora’s face grew stony, but while she was not a pirate, Gráinne definitely was. The older woman took immediate advantage of Nora’s slip of attention. She leaped off her rock, hollering, knife flying.

Nora ducked. Robin was quicker. He bent his shoulder and rammed into Gráinne as hard as he could. Her breath whooshed out of her and she began to topple. At the same time, though, she brought the hilt of her weapon up under his chin.

“Look at the stars,” Robin managed to say through the taste of blood in his mouth, and then darkness overtook him.

* * *

Robin groaned and wriggled beside her. Eleanor shifted her weight to release some of the tension in her arms. He’d been asleep for so long, dead weight against her, that her limbs had gone numb.

Finding the entrance to the cavern would have seemed like blind luck had she not been searching so hard. The grass on top of the cliff was wild, thick and green, luxurious. The perfect place to hide an entrance to a fae realm.

Seamus from the inn had told her what to look for. “Ye seeking Ricky of the Tuft, lass? Ye might find him on top of the cliffs. Find the fae circle.” He’d laughed. “If ye dare.”

She’d dared, and hadn’t bothered to tell the innkeeper she wasn’t interested in Ricky of the Tuft, but instead some wee green man and a pirate queen, a stolen emerald and her husband.

The mound had looked innocent enough, and hidden so well in the verdant growth she’d nearly tumbled headfirst into it. The tunnel inside was narrow, steep and treacherous, but the thought of Robin kept her going until at last she’d ended up coming out into the cavern, where she saw Gráinne and Robin fighting.

She didn’t know how they’d managed to find their way inside, but

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judging by their clothes it had been a much more arduous journey than her own.

“Nora?”

“I’m here.”

“Neptune’s balls,” Robin said. “I think the sea bitch broke my bloody jaw.”

“Be glad I didn’t do worse.” Eleanor tried to make her voice harsh, but failed.

“Where are we?”

“Tied up in the cavern while that hoyden and her minions gather the treasure.”

Robin made a disgusted noise. “They found it then.”

“Oh, aye. They found it.” Eleanor grumbled. “Vast hordes of it, if you can tell anything by their cries. This after she threatened to castrate any of them who touched her again.”

She shifted. The sand under her bottom was soft but cold. The pirate queen had tied them up, back to back, wrists bound between them. The ropes had loosened over the hours she’d been tugging at them, but Robin being unconscious had meant she could do little more.

“Did they hurt you?” he whispered fiercely into the darkness.

“No. She kept them from that.” Eleanor shivered at the thought of what those rough men were capable of even when not crazed by the fae lust spell.

“Because he’s put it here, too. Just like in the Caribbean.” Robin took a deep breath that lifted his shoulders. “My cock is like rock.”

She laughed at the play on his name. “Indeed.”

Robin wiggled more. “But even despite that, love, I’d not have touched her.”

“I know that.”

She did, too. Eleanor moved against him. Her nipples had peaked against the linen of the shirt she’d borrowed from him. She’d also

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nicked a pair of his trousers, and the seam at the crotch rubbed against her with every wiggle.

"I've been sitting here in the dark for hours listening to you breathe," she murmured. "And smelling you. Even if not for the leprechaun's magic I'd be in a frenzy of wanting."

He groaned and tilted his head back to touch hers. His long hair drifted over her shoulders, tickling her cheek. She turned her face to let it caress her lips.

"I've oft dreamed about having you bound." Robin chuckled wryly. "But not quite like this."

"You haven't," she breathed, the thought suddenly exciting her beyond imagination.

A few muffled shouts from Gráinne's crew made Robin mutter a curse. Eleanor grinned into the darkness.

"Who? Them or me?" she replied to his choice of words.

"You," Robin said. "And then I'll take care of them."

She laughed. "You'll have to get free of these ropes first."

"I can't think of any better reason to do it." He moved against her again. "But the question is, love, how?"

She moved her wrists, where the ropes were still tight, then wiggled her back. The ropes around their bodies had loosened, as had the ropes around her ankles.

"Press hard against me and we can rise up."

Robin laughed. "I always rise up when I press hard against you, love."

Another round of shouts and clangs, closer this time, made her shake her head. "Don't you think we should concentrate on getting free before they finish with the treasure and come back for us?"

"Right, love. Here we go."

The pressure grew against her back, and Eleanor pushed her feet against the ground, forcing herself against his back and using the

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leverage to slowly stand.

“Brilliant,” Robin told her. “I knew you’d come up with something.”

Now they stood, back to back.

“We should be able to turn and face each other now.”

They did, hopping inelegantly in a circle until they were chest to chest.

“What now?”

Eleanor cocked her head to listen for more sounds from Gráinne’s crew. “Let me try to pull free.”

She bent her knees, trying to duck down through the ropes tying them together. She got as far as his waist before the rope no longer stretched enough. It had caught on her shoulders and at her head.

“Won’t work,” she said.

Robin’s voice was rough. “That works for me.”

She rubbed her face against his hardness, desire coursing through her veins. The leprechaun’s magic was part of it, but most of it was him. Her Robin. Her husband. Her love.

It wasn’t the most appropriate time for lovemaking. Her body didn’t care. She moved up along his body again, the ropes making her keep close. His erection nudged her stomach.

“This isn’t the time,” she said.

“I know.” Robin’s voice sounded like a smile. “Blame it on the wee green bugger.”

“What now?”

“If you move around a bit, maybe I can reach your wrists.”

She tried. He helped. But the uneven ground and their bound feet made for imbalance. “Robin!”

He managed to break their fall by twisting to the side, but her wind still got knocked out of her. She ended up on top of him.

“I think the ropes are loose enough now.” His voice was strained,

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whether from the fall or arousal, she couldn't tell.

She inched her body up along his until she could reach his face. She brushed her lips along his. He responded by capturing her mouth with his. His tongue delved inside, stroking.

"We don't have time for this, Robin."

"You're right, love."

He kissed her again and suddenly she felt his arms around her. "You're free!"

He chuckled, his hands roaming. "How much time do you think we have?"

"Long enough, I think, if you can be quick."

"The way I'm feeling, I'll have to be quick."

He untied her swiftly, his mouth devouring as much of her as he could reach. Cheeks, forehead, chin, neck, jaw, lips, down to the curve to her collarbone, nibbling. Down lower, to the first swell of her breasts as he flipped her onto her back and dove between her legs.

Thank Neptune the sand's soft, she thought as her shirt rucked up and her trousers came down. In the next second, he entered her. She bit back a scream.

Yes, it was the magic that made them so mad for one another, but not solely that. She was always ready for him, always eager. Always wanted him.

Even now, knowing that at any moment Gráinne and her crew could come back for them only made the heat between them hotter. He thrust in smooth, even strokes, filling her, holding her against him. His kisses burned along her skin. His tongue left wet paths on her skin. She bit at him and dug her nails into his back, urging him harder. Faster.

"Nora!" Robin's cry echoed around her, plunging her into ecstasy.

Her orgasm crashed over her, fierce as an ocean storm. She surged and crested with it. She shattered beneath it, then merged again in the aftermath.

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Breathing hard, Robin shuddered his own release. He gathered her into his arms, holding her tightly and kissing her breathless.

"Neptune's balls," he whispered. "I could take you again right now."

"Magic," Eleanor whispered back.

"I know it," Robin replied, moving inside her again. "But it's also you, love."

"Isn't this a pretty sight?" Gráinne's voice and the light from her lantern made Eleanor turn. "I've half a mind take a turn at him meself, lass. I'm as on edge as a virgin on her wedding night, only not as scared. Something about this place."

Robin covered Eleanor with his body until she could pull her clothes around her. The two of them got up. He put his arm around her.

"We've done naught to you," Robin said. "Just take the treasure and leave us alone."

Gráinne shook her head. "Sure, and I could do that, could I not? Let you go to haunt my footsteps again? I don't think so, laddie. I might not have much time left in this world, but what I do have, I intend not to spend looking over my shoulder for the likes of you."

"You'll spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder because of what you do," Eleanor said.

Gráinne opened her palm and held out a handful of jewels. "Not with these, I won't. I'm going to take this treasure and retire from the sea. 'Tis time I dandled grandbabies on my knees instead of swashbuckling."

"So you'll kill us?" Eleanor cried, astounded. "In one breath you speak of children, while in the next you condemn us to die?"

Gráinne shrugged. "Yon lad is a pirate, same as me. He won't rest until he's taken what I took from him."

"Not true," Eleanor argued, but a look from Robin stopped her. She frowned. "Robin?"

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“She’s right, Nora.” Robin straightened his back. “But I ask you give us the choice.”

The pirate queen gave him a shrewd look. “Become food for the fish or hang from the mast?”

“I was hoping for abandonment,” Robin told her.

Eleanor’s looked at the other woman. “What?”

Gráinne looked her over. “Laddie wants me to leave the pair of you here to starve to death. We’ll block the entrance up after we go. Leave you a pistol with two shots for when the pains get too fierce. Ahh, a true lover’s death.” She peered more closely at Robin. “You really want to see your lady fair suffer so? Does she get cranky when her belly’s empty? Seek ye to fill her womb with your seed a few more times before you leave this earth?”

Eleanor looked at Robin for an explanation, but his eyes had locked on Gráinne. “Aye, lady captain. I do. I love this woman more than my own life, and would be glad of whatever time with her I’m granted, no matter how short.”

Gráinne’s face softened for a moment. “Ah, lad, you remind me of me of someone I once knew.” For an instant ’twas as though tears glinted in her eyes, but the light was so dim and shifting Eleanor couldn’t be sure. “I’ll give you your abandonment.”

“Neptune’s blessings on you, lady captain.” Robin inclined his head, his arm tight around Eleanor’s shoulder.

“Ahoy!” shouted Gráinne toward the rest of her crew. “Avast and away, you scurvy swabbies! Carry what you can and let’s be gone. I want the stink of this place out of my nostrils.”

She turned back to Robin and Eleanor. “I’ll be sealing up the doorway on the way out, not to mention ’tis likely you won’t be able to open it without the emerald anyway. I know how the fae work. But just in case, I’ll be filling it with rubble. At any rate, you’ve got water. Plenty of air. ’Tis not too cold. You could live a good fortnight before

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madness drives you to take the bullet.”

“You’re too kind.” Eleanor glared.

Gráinne only smiled. “Ah, me lovely, kind is one thing I’ve never claimed to be. Foolhardy and sentimental on occasion, and merciful when it suits me. But never kind.”

“Ready to go, cap’n,” said Francis. He’d bound his arm with strips of cloth. His pockets bulged, as did the sack made from the remnants of his shirt.

Gráinne nodded. “Funny how the promise of castration can even overpower a fae fuck glamor.”

The crewman looked chastened, his sheepish grin revealing missing teeth. “Begging your pardon, cap’n. We couldn’t help ourselves.”

“God’s teeth,” Gráinne replied. “As if I don’t know it meself. If the thought of taking all of you didn’t make my stomach sick, I’d have gladly done it. You, on the other hand,” she said to Robin, “would’ve been a delicious treat. Or even you, lass, should I have fancied tasting Sappho’s nectar.”

Eleanor frowned and started to retort, but Robin’s hand on her arm stopped her.

“And under other circumstance, the pleasure would have been mine,” said Robin gallantly. “But my heart belongs to this lady.”

Gráinne threw back her head, her laughter echoing around the cavern. “I didn’t want your heart, laddie, only your prick. Never mind. ’Tis well. Passions of the flesh are well and good, but they can’t keep you fed or clothed. What I’ll take away with me today will do that, and tenfold.”

“Indeed.”

Robin’s smug smile infuriated Eleanor, for though she’d argued he didn’t need to chase after the pirate queen to get back the emerald, he had. And now, for what? Nothing, in the end. And he was courting her like a young swain to an elderly but generous dowager patroness.

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Gráinne flashed Nora a smile. “Anon, gentle lady. You should’ve stayed in your place.”

“My place is at Robin’s side.”

Gráinne shrugged. “And there you’ll be when you’re both dead as well. Good luck with that.”

Eleanor almost launched herself at the older woman, but Robin’s gentle touch held her back. She watched in fury as Gráinne slung several bulging sacks over her shoulders and hefted a small cask brimming with jewels.

“Anon, my lovely lad and lassie,” she said with a jerk of her chin toward the crewmen. “You’ll find the pistol high up on that crag. Two shots. Finley, tie them hard enough to keep them occupied for a bit, but no so hard they’ll not get free.”

Finley did so quickly, then gathered his own booty. Grannia smiled and shouted orders to her crew, then led them away through the standing rocks.

“I hope you have a plan,” Eleanor said when the pirates had disappeared.

Robin’s deep chuckle made the fine hairs on the back of her neck rise. “Always, love. Always.”

* * *

Finley had been a bit too generous with his rope tying, but nevertheless they’d freed themselves. By that time, Robin’s stomach had started growling. His wrists were chafed. And yet the first thing he did when they wiggled free of their bonds was to take Nora in his arms and kiss her thoroughly.

She responded, her tongue dipping into his mouth where he stroked it with his. “What’s your brilliant plan?”

He pulled away, arms still around her. “You trust I have one?”

“Of course I do.” She smiled, far less angry than he was expecting.

He grinned and kissed her again. “You don’t believe we’ll be

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trapped inside here to starve to death?”

“No.” She stood on her toes to kiss him again, softer this time. “Though I’m sorry we’ve lost the treasure again.”

“But we haven’t, love.” Robin grinned at her, running his hands over her tangled hair. “Do you not remember what happened to us the first time?”

She tilted her head to look at him, an eyebrow raised. “Winston took the coins with him into the quicksand.”

“But what else, love?” He took her hand and led her toward the place Gráinne and the sailors had been plundering. “What was she carrying when she left?”

“Sacks filled with jewels.” Nora thought for a moment. “A cask, also filled.”

“And look where they got it from.” Robin pointed to the overlarge trunk, its lid gaping, but the interior empty. “Does it look familiar?”

Nora began to laugh, stepping closer to run her hands along the lid. “The trunk. Just like the one in the other place.” She laughed louder, closed the lid and said, “Shepherd’s pie with a side of steamed greens.”

The smell of the food made his stomach grumble even louder when she pulled out the tray. “The magic trunk that gives you whatever you want. Gráinne wanted the treasure, and that’s what she got.”

Nora held the food to her nose and sniffed, her expression ecstatic. “And anything that come from the magic trunk—”

“Can’t be taken out of the realm.” Robin laughed. “Methinks the lady captain will be quite disappointed when she gets back on board and finds her bags empty and the entrance permanently closed off.”

Nora joined his laughter. “You’re bloody brilliant, Robin. But how did you know?”

“Because there is no way the wee green bastard would’ve made it that easy.” He grinned, reaching into the trunk and pulling out two mugs of ale. “And because I knew there was no way you’d climbed

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down those cliffs to get in, so there had to be another door we could use to escape. And because I know Gráinne Ní Mhaille has had so many triumphs 'twould not occur to her that she might possibly fail."

Nora knelt next to the steaming meat pastry and pulled it apart, exposing the succulent chunks of meat inside the crust. She waved to disperse the steam, then scooped a bit of gravy onto a hunk of brown bread. She gave a low moan of appreciation when she popped it into her mouth.

"Delicious," she murmured. "This, at least, is real enough."

"In here, yes." Robin sat next to her and helped himself. "And when we've sated this hunger, we'll look for the real treasure."

"And what of the other hunger?" she asked him archly. "The magic's as strong in here as it was before. Or mayhap I simply want you for my own reasons."

He leaned over to kiss her. "Insatiable wench."

She put her arms on his shoulders and wound her fingers through his hair, tugging it. "Insatiable means unable to be sated. I think you should at least attempt to sate me, Robin, before you make such a judgment."

The food was forgotten as he pulled her onto his lap, pressing her down on the erection that had never really gone away since he'd entered the cavern.

"If we could put this air into a tincture, we'd need no treasure. We'd only have to sell it to young women with old husbands, and old men wed to young wives." He rocked her gently against his cock, loving the way her breath caught in her throat. "A potion to provide ever-present tumescence."

She laughed low in her throat and brushed her lips along his jaw. "I think 'tis better we don't. Nobody would ever get any work done."

"But imagine how merry everyone would be." He slid his hands to the curve of her buttocks, cupping the firm globes.

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His mouth sought hers, and he teased her lips with feather-light flicks of his tongue before plunging inside to taste her. The rich taste of lamb and spices mingled with her own fresh flavor, sending his cock surging even harder against her. His trousers chafed uncomfortably, the pressure making him shift. Nora pressed her center to him as her breathing got faster.

“I can’t get enough of you, Nora.”

“Nor I, you.” She sighed, letting her head tilt back to thrust her breasts upward toward his waiting mouth. “I want you inside me, Robin.”

He groaned at the thought and captured one erect nipple through the cloth of her shirt. He moved her hips, rubbing her against him, before pulling the shirt up and over her head. She wore only a sheer binding cloth beneath, and that was quickly unwound. Again he dipped his head to take one nipple and then the other between his lips, suckling.

She moaned. Quickly he shifted her, laying her down on the soft sand floor and covering her breasts with kisses while he loosened his trousers. His erection sprang free as he kicked off the garment and tugged off his shirt. His tongue lingered in the shallow cup of her naval while he nudged her trousers down past her hips and found her clitoris with his tongue.

“Robin!”

He knelt between her legs, mindful of the sand beneath them and not wanting to scrape against it. He sampled her, the sweet warmth of her juices an aphrodisiac that made his already straining cock throb.

When the first flutter of her climax tickled his lips, he paused his stroking tongue to press it flat against her. She arched upward, crying out, convulsing under his mouth.

When she relaxed, he moved up along her body and slid the tip of his prick along her slick folds, seeking entrance into her moist tunnel. Nora opened her eyes, her cheeks flushed and her mouth smiling. She

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reached for him, pulled him closer. He slid inside her.

They both moaned. He propped himself on his arms so as not to crush her, then began to move. Slow, steady thrusts he knew would please her, adding a small twist of his hips each time to stimulate her center. Her cunny enfolded him, enclosed and engulfed him. He'd never been with a woman who could take all of him the way his Nora could. She hooked her ankles around the back of his legs and dug her nails into his back, urging him on with wordless cries.

His pace quickened as his balls tightened, filling with his seed. Nora quivered around him, her soft cry letting him know she'd reached another climax. Robin's cock felt huge, like it had taken over his entire body. In a way, it had. There was no other sensation than the slick inferno of Nora's cunt gripping him, or the weight of his testicles moving as he thrust.

She scored his back once more with her fingernails, her cry echoing all around him and sending him hurtling past his last resistance and into orgasm.

He thrust inside her once more, to the hilt, hard enough to move them both along the sand. "Nora!"

After a moment she began to laugh, and he lifted his head. "What's so merry?"

"I'll carry the evidence of this for some days," she said. "In the brush burns on my back."

Quickly he gathered her up, cradling her and brushing the sand from her skin. "I'm sorry, love."

She shook her head, snuggling close to him for a moment. "'Tis no worry. I'll survive. And any time they twinge, I'll remember this and want you all over again."

"By Neptune, I love you." He kissed her.

"And I love you." She kissed him, then looked around. "But I think I shall go and avail myself of that water now. Then we'll finish our

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food, for I'm fair starving. And after that, I propose we find the real treasure and get ourselves out of this place."

"Agreed." He kissed the tip of her nose and brushed her hair off her face. "To all of what you just said."

"You are not the only one who can make plans," Nora replied and chucked his chin before getting off his lap.

"But that's what I love about you," he called after her as she walked toward the pool of black water. "You're so bloody brilliant!"

* * *

Bodies clean and bellies filled, Eleanor and Robin set to work looking for the real treasure.

"It won't be as obvious as that trunk," Robin said.

Eleanor looked around. "I must say, I enjoyed his other paradise more. This place is neither inviting nor pleasant."

She looked upward. "In fact, the only nice aspect of this place is the light. Imagine if it were as dark as a real cavern would be."

"Fae light," Robin scoffed. "Bad for the eyes."

She slipped her arm around his waist. "Oh, I don't know. 'Tis extremely flattering."

He kissed her. "Are you telling me you only find me handsome in dim light?"

She laughed and shook her head at his obvious fishing for a compliment. "Of course. In the light of day, 'tis too easy to see all your faults."

He growled, but then laughed. "Fair enough."

"Where should we look first?" Eleanor scanned the cavern walls. In this part, they were closer together, the ceiling lower. "It could be anywhere. If 'tis even in this part. And without the emerald to guide us—"

"We don't need the emerald. And 'tis here. The other parts of the cavern were rigged to trap the greedy or impatient. Any who make it

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this far are worthy of finding the treasure, should they not be fooled by the magic trunk and seek the true bounty.”

“And we weren’t fooled.” She grinned at the thought of Gráinne’s screams of fury. “She must’ve discovered the truth by now.”

“Aye.” Robin laughed and hugged her. “And she’ll have no one to blame but herself.”

“That doesn’t solve the problem of finding it now.”

Robin nodded, and she took in the sight of him. He’d rebraided his long hair and tied it with a hank of leather string. His short beard framed the mouth she so loved to kiss. He’d pulled on his trousers and shirt, but left the collar unlaced to reveal tantalizing glimpses of bare, muscled chest...

“If you keep looking at me that way, I’ll be forced to make love to you again.”

She smiled. “I’ll hold you to it.”

He moved to pull her into his arms, but she found the strength to resist him. “Powerful magic, Robin. I’m sure he puts it here to keep us so distracted we forget to look for the treasure.”

“You’re right.” Robin grinned unabashedly. “Bloody green bugger.”

“Look for the treasure,” she said sternly. “I’d like to see the sun again.”

“Aye, aye, cap’n.” Robin grinned and sauntered away.

She watched him go, admiring the way the muscles of his rear bunched and rolled in his tight trousers...she shook herself. Powerful magic, indeed! With a chuckle, Eleanor began looking around.

In the end, ’twas deceptively simple. Robin had described the glittering gems lodged into the stone walls on his way into this cavern, but Eleanor knew enough about gemstones to remember an important fact. Jewels did not shine or glitter until they’d been cut and polished. Diamonds and rubies, emeralds, sapphires, all looked much the same

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before the hand of the jeweler revealed their glory.

"Those jewels are only more fae glamor," she said aloud. "Real jewels aren't so pretty. 'Tis the rocks," she said aloud, looking around. They were everywhere, scattered on the floor, overflowing crevices, jumbled in piles. "Robin, the rocks!"

He stopped where he stood, bent to pick up a dull gray stone. He rubbed it with the hem of his shirt until it gleamed faintly red "'Twas all around us the entire time."

"Gráinne was so focused on seeing what she thought was treasure, she failed to see the truth." Eleanor laughed aloud and ran to hug him, dancing.

"Bloody brilliant woman," Robin murmured, kissing her. "Let's get back into the sunshine, love."

Together, they gathered as many stones as they could fit in their pockets and in the sack made from Robin's shirt. They left many lay where there were, mindful of how greed had ended Winston Dandrew's life. Even so, the number they took would ensure their comfort for the rest of their lives, as well as their children's.

Children, Eleanor thought suddenly with a secret smile. *Yes. Someday*. She slanted a glance at Robin, imagining a lad with her dark hair and Robin's easy smile. A lass with curls the color of Robin's wheat hair and her green eyes.

"What are you smiling about, love?"

She patted her bulging pockets. "The future."

She led him to the opening that led to the surface. "'Twill be quite a climb."

"Are you up for it?" he asked.

"I made it down. I'll make it back up."

He grinned and kissed her. "I'm going to buy you the most comfortable house you've ever seen, with servants to cater to your every whim."

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“I don’t need servants. Not so long as I have you.”

He kissed her again, so fiercely it took away her breath. “I’ll climb up first and reach down for you.”

He did, clambering up the rocks as nimbly as a monkey. As Eleanor waited for him to wedge himself into the opening and reach a hand for her to grab, something caught the corner of her eye. A wide band of gold glittered in the dark sand. She picked it up. A ring, just the size to fit loosely on her middle finger, and carved with symbols she didn’t recognize. Perhaps Gráinne had dropped it. It looked like the sort of primitive ornament the pirate queen would favor.

“Ready, love?”

“Ready!”

She reached for his hand. His fingers clasped her wrist and hauled her upward into the tunnel. There were few hand or foot holds, but the space was narrow enough they could lever themselves upward by pressing their backs against one side and their feet against the other.

At least, they could at first. As long as the tunnel sloped gently, and they could take breaks. At last they reached a point where the passage took a sharp turn almost directly up. Brush and grasses grew along the sides, proving the sun reached it. They were very close to the top. And yet...

“I’m not sure I can manage,” she panted, ashamed of her weakness, but unable to help it.

Her legs quivered with exhaustion from hours of hard use, and every muscle ached. Her back, already scraped by the sand during their lovemaking, now felt rubbed to rawness. Every inch she moved upward took more effort than she was sure she had...and at any moment she feared she’d begin sliding backward. At this point, that fall would mean injury, if not death.

“Empty your pockets,” Robin said. “You’re carrying too much weight.”

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“But—”

“Empty them, Nora!” His voice was firm. “I’ll not have my wife tumble down to her death for the sake of a pocket of rocks.”

She nodded, grateful and disappointed at the same time. With weary, trembling fingers she dumped her pockets. Together they listened to the clatter and thud as the gems tumbled down the shaft into the darkness below.

“Can you make it just a bit further, love?”

She nodded, tears of weariness threatening to blur her vision. With the gems gone, her legs still ached, but her body felt so much lighter. “Yes.”

“Good. Because we’re almost there.”

They inched their way upward a bit more, wedging themselves tightly against the passage.

“I can smell the sea,” Robin said. “And it must be night, for I believe I can see the winking of the stars.”

She’d grown so accustomed to crawling through pitch blackness that, even when she strained her eyes, she couldn’t see anything but black. “I’m so tired, Robin.”

“I know, love. Just a bit more.”

Eleanor forced herself to gather strength. She heard him exclaim, but the sound of her breath had grown so loud in her ears she wasn’t sure what he said. She pushed upward with her legs, and the pain in her back became agony as the raw skin tore against the rocks.

“Robin!” she screamed as she felt herself giving way. Falling. Her body tensed in preparation, trying to grab onto any outcropping, any hold—

And he caught her. Together they slid a few feet before his legs slammed tight against the tunnel wall and stopped their fall. His hands gripped the shoulder of her shirt. The soft purr of ripping cloth caught her attention.

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“I’ve got you!” he cried, his grip tightening on her body, fingers digging into her.

She slipped another inch then stopped. Sobs of terror burst out of her, but she stifled them quickly. She couldn’t afford to be shaking now. She reached upward, clutching at his wrists.

“Shake out my pockets, love.”

She didn’t argue, though the thought of losing the rest of the gems made her sick. The stones scattered over her, catching in her hair and on her clothes before most of them fell down the shaft.

“I’m going to pull you up with me, love. One step at a time.”

They moved together, pushing and pulling. Now Eleanor could smell the sea and realized she could see the Robin silhouetted above her in starlight. She gasped the fresh air gratefully.

“I’m at the top, love. I’m going to climb out, then reach for you. Can you hold on until then?”

Smelling the air and knowing they were so close gave her strength. “Yes.”

“Good.”

She heard him scramble out of the hole. Then she saw the dark shape of his head looking down at her. “Reach up and grab my hand, love.”

She did, her shoulders screaming as she stretched the abused muscles. Robin grabbed her wrist. She moved her feet, pushing upward. She was almost out.

At the last moment, the edge of the hole began to give way. She slid down, Robin following. Dirt and rock cascaded over her, gritting in her eyes, clogging her nose, choking her throat. The bag of gems they’d made from Robin’s shirt fell forward, striking the side of her face and making her cry out. She reached up, blindly, trying to grab hold of anything that would save her. She found his braid.

“Hold on!” Robin’s voice gave her strength. He stopped her fall,

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and then he was pulling her up and out, her body scraping agonizingly against the sides of the tunnel, but Eleanor didn't care.

The bag fell past her and disappeared, but in the next moment she was safe in his arms, with grass all around them and the sea breeze washing over them. She sobbed in relief, never so glad to feel solid, unyielding ground in her life.

"I've got you, love," Robin soothed her, stroking her hair. "I've got you."

They lay like that for some long moments while the moon rose in the sky. At last she sat up, every movement stiff...but at least she was capable of moving at all.

"We lost it all," she said.

"No, love." Robin sat up and curled her to him. "We still have each other, and 'tis all that matters."

He reached into his pocket. "And I've got a few stones left. Surely they'll provide us with a few weeks' bread and ale."

She managed a laugh, reaching up to touch his face. As she did, the ring she'd found glinted in the moonlight. She looked at it, turning it one way and the other.

"Robin?" She got to her feet, holding out her hand first toward the land, then toward the sea.

"Yes, love?"

As she turned, her hand like the needle of a compass, the tingle on her finger made her laugh out loud and shake her head. "I don't think we're done just yet."

He stood and took her hand, peering down at the ring. "Where'd you find this?"

"Down there." She laughed again, giddy from the combined effects of fear and overwhelming weariness.

"'Tis covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics." Robin stroked the metal with his thumb. "'Tis burning you, is it not?"

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She nodded, a giddy grin on her face. "What do you say, Captain Steele?"

"I say, Mrs. Steele," said Robin, pulling her into his arms for a kiss, "we find an inn and feed, wash and lay ourselves to rest for a good long night."

"But after that?"

He looked toward the sea, then back at her. "I say, fancy a visit to Egypt, love?"

"As long as I'm with you, I'll go anywhere," Eleanor replied. "Because any place where you are is home to me."

And together they looked out to the ever-changing ocean, and wondered where it would take them next.

MEGAN HART

Megan Hart began her writing career in grammar school when she plagiarized a short story by Ray Bradbury. She soon realized that making up her own stories was better than copying other people's, and she's been writing ever since.

Megan began writing short fantasy, horror and science fiction before graduating to novel-length romances. She's published in almost every genre of romantic fiction, including historical, contemporary, romantic suspense, romantic comedy, futuristic, fantasy and perhaps most notably, erotic. She also writes non-erotic fantasy and science fiction, as well as continuing to occasionally dabble in horror.

Megan's goal is to continue writing spicy, thrilling love stories with a twist. Her dream is to have a movie made of every one of her novels, starring herself as the heroine and Keanu Reeves as the hero. Megan lives in the deep, dark woods with her husband and two monsters...er...children.

Learn more about Megan by visiting her website:
<http://www.meganhart.com>.

* * *

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