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Fearful Passion

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Prologue

The twilight shone across the planks of the deck. The helm of the ship chopped through the icy waters as the chilled winds blew them along. The night was quiet except for the creaks of the ship and the waves of the sea hitting the sides. Mist sprayed up over the sides of the ship to glisten the deck. Men walked around constantly checking to make sure everything was in place. The silent man in the lookout peered out into the night, squinting his eyes to see through the bleak darkness. He tasted salt on his lips when the breeze blew across his face.

Suddenly, his eyes grew wide as he stared to the north. The clouds parted enough to allow moonlight to shine through. Another boat was heard crashing through the waves coming fast up the side. The man started to shout to the deck, but stopped. What little blood the cold had not drained had now decided to leave in fear. His pale skin watched as the ship emerged into the light. A black flag waved on the ship's mast and the skull and crossbones threatened certain death.

Chapter 1

Caroline stepped off the rickety ramp of the ship onto the cobblestone ground. Her eyes scanned the city she'd be spending her summer in. England was nothing she expected. The roads were muddy and her skirts were turning soggy. The buildings looked run down and the people were just as rough looking.

"Caroline? Is that you darling?" a voice came from across the road.

Caroline came back to the present and saw her aunt coming towards her. She was plumper than Caroline last remembered, but of course she hadn't seen her in nearly five years. Her jet-black hair now had streaks of silver in it. Caroline placed her purse on the ground in order to brace herself for the oncoming bear hug. If nothing else, she at least remembered this onslaught.

"Aunt Pamela, it's so good to see you."

As Caroline had predicted, the five years didn't ease the grip on Pamela's hugs.

"I'm so glad you decided to come see me. Let's get your luggage onto our coach and we'll get out of this ruffian place," Pamela said. "Thomas, retrieve Miss Caroline's luggage from the ship."

A man appearing from nowhere bowed before them both and headed toward the ship. Pamela crooked her arm into Caroline's and led her toward the coach. Caroline remembered her purse and turned back to retrieve it. A very handsome, rugged looking man was standing with it in his hand looking either for the owner or the quickest way to get away without being seen. His black hair shone almost blue in the bright sun against his dark skin. He was absolutely beautiful to Caroline. He looked at her and smiled showing off his brilliantly white teeth. Her heart fluttered at his smile. She felt she was the only one in the world with him at this moment. Then, he started towards her, the purse in his hand. When he reached her, he was at least a head taller and his muscular body just beckoned to be touched.

"This must be yours, my dear lady," he said, his blue eyes staring into hers.

She took the proffered purse brushing his hand in the exchange, "Thank you ever so much, Mr.?"

"Joshua Hamilton, at your service."

"Thank you, Mr. Hamilton. I'm forever grateful," Caroline smiled.

"Caroline dear," Pamela came up and put her arm around her niece. "Hello, Mr. Hamilton. I see you've met my niece, Caroline. We really must be going now."

"I'm sure," Joshua replied casting a menacing eye at Pamela. "It was very nice meeting you, Mrs. Caroline."

"Miss. I'm not married," Caroline threw in.

“Well, good meeting you Miss Caroline. I’d keep that purse close in these parts. Not many are as full of gentleman honor as I am,” he smiled taking her hand.

He leaned over and brushed his lips across her knuckles. She smiled and gave a semi-curtsey as her aunt pulled her away. She glanced back over her shoulder to see him one last time, but he was gone. Her heart fell with disappointment that he wasn’t watching her. Safely encompassed in the privacy of her coach, Aunt Pamela began fanning herself with her kerchief and patting herself.

“Are you alright, Aunt Pamela?” Caroline asked coming out of her trance.

“Oh Caroline, please stay away from that man. He’s a vagabond that one. He may look the gentleman in view of society, but that man has a very nasty reputation. Your father would have my head if I allowed you to get mixed up with that man and ruin your reputation before he has a chance to marry you off to a high class gentleman,” Pamela cried.

“Don’t worry yourself, Aunt. I have no intention of being married off or ruining my reputation,” Caroline said.

“Oh heavens, child. Why don’t you just find you a good man and settle down? Is there something you’ve got against them or do you just like making your father agitated?” Pamela asked.

“I don’t have anything against them and I most definitely don’t like upsetting Father. I refuse to be married to someone I don’t love. When I find the right one then I’ll settle down. It’s my life not my fathers,” Caroline stated.

“Oh well, maybe you’ll change your mind over this summer. You might find someone here and perhaps he can straight out that silly notion. We have plenty of nice gentleman around here you could chose from. You’d have your pick too with that long brown hair and those big amber eyes. Not many women here can compete with that,” Pamela confided.

“We’ll just see when he shows up, Aunt Pamela. Please don’t pester me all summer,” Caroline said.

“Me? Pester? Well you should be ashamed for even considering. I don’t pester dear child. I advise. You’ll be kind enough never to refer to me as pestering,” Aunt Pamela said all huffy.

Caroline closed her eyes, refusing to be drawn into an argument on the manners of a lady. She knew she’d hear enough of them during the summer. She really didn’t want to begin so early. Pamela figured she was just resting from her trip from the Americas and they finished the ride in silence.

Joshua smiled as he watched Miss Caroline sway towards the carriage. She was very beautiful. He just wanted to run his fingers through that silky brown hair of hers and those

eyes - amber like a wolf's. He imagined himself with his fingers locked in her hair and her wolver eyes calling out for more from him.

"Mr. Hamilton?" a voice came from behind.

Joshua shook his head out of his daydream and turned around. He saw a coarse looking man standing at the foot of the ramp.

"You must be Mr. Cartee I presume," Joshua replied.

"I am. If you'll follow me to the Captain's quarters I believe we have some business to attend."

"Straight to the point. I like that about my businessmen. Lead the way."

Joshua followed Mr. Cartee to the deck of the ship. Then, he followed him through the door, down a flight of stairs, and then down a short hallway. Finally, they arrived at the door and went in. The room was very refined for a ship. There was a desk to the left, a round table and three chairs in the center, and a nicely sized bed to the right. The desk was strewn from one end to the other with papers and pencils and a compass. There were maps all over the table. Mr. Cartee rolled the maps up and placed them on the desk. Then, after a few minutes searching, came up with a book and one of the ink quills. He motioned for Joshua to take a seat.

"Would you care for any wine before we get started?" Mr. Cartee asked.

"No thank you. Let's just make this quick. I have other business to tend to," Joshua replied hastily.

"Very well. We're going to need to ask for more money if we are to continue to do business."

"How much more? The contract is already for 1500 pounds," Joshua asked.

"We're going to need 2000 pounds."

"What? That's outlandish. We had an agreement on the 1500 pounds. Why do you want more you greedy scum?"

"It's just that there have been three incidents of pirates this week. It's getting to where merchants are sending their goods inland now. No one wants to send them overseas with the risk of losing everything so high. I have to be able to pay my men, sir," Mr. Cartee complained.

"I can understand that, Mr. Cartee. However, you can't bankrupt the ones being loyal to you. I can afford to pay 1700 pounds but not a cent more. As much business as I give you that should be sufficient," Joshua stated.

"Yes, sir. You do give us much and you have stayed with us. It's just with the men worrying about pirates they're thinking of mutiny if not paid more. With no crew we can't

sail. Can you please at least make it 1800? I hate to ask but I have many men on board and not very many vendors left, Mr. Hamilton.”

“I can see where a short crew could put a damper on things. Well, Mr. Cartee you’ve caught me on a good day. You tell me everything you know on Miss Caroline, the female passenger you had on board and I’ll give you the 2000 you originally asked for.”

“That would be wonderful. I don’t know much about her. She pretty much kept to herself while on board. We picked her up when we docked in Maryland. Her last name is Welbourne. Her family is apparently wealthy and one of the upper class. She’s visiting her aunt for the summer. Very sweet girl, but definitely has a mind of her own. One of my men had too much ale one night and decided to get a little too friendly with Miss Welbourne. Well, she didn’t take it too kindly. She kneed him right in the balls and kicked him in the butt when he fell down. The rest of the men got a crack out of it and threw him overboard to cool him off. She’s a rowdy lass that one.”

“Thank you very much. I’ll see to your payment. Although I am a gentleman, I have other things in mind for that catch,” Mr. Hamilton allowed. “It was good talking to you, Mr. Cartee. I’ll be in touch.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hamilton.”

Joshua shook his hand as he walked out of the room. Now to find out if any of the invites to parties were ones that Mrs. Pamela Albright would be attending and would be sure to bring her niece, Miss Caroline Welbourne. Not only was she beautiful, she was wealthy. He was sure he could tame that temper of hers if put in the right position. A grin came upon his face. He lingered on the picture of her in his mind. That traveling dress did nothing for her. Hopefully she wasn’t as modest as an old woman with a neckline up to her chin. If it were, he’d have to send her a dress or two and insist she wear them if only for his pleasure.

He took off in the direction of the local working class’ pub before heading home. He had another business venture as he had told Mr. Cartee.

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When they reached Pamela’s house, the coach came to a jerking stop waking Caroline up. She blinked against the sunlight and glanced around through the window. The house was two stories with a big wrap around porch. The gardens were to the rear, but there were a few trees and flowers lining the front. The footman came around and helped her get out of the carriage. She bent to pick up her luggage but Thomas was at her side at once picking them up for her. Pamela came beside her and motioned for Caroline to follow her.

“I’ll give you a quick tour and then show you to your room,” Pamela smiled.

Caroline followed her through the big double doors and entered the front hallway. The house seemed immaculate, yet warm in it’s surroundings. She could sense there wasn’t much life in the house, but that it was cared for with love. She felt safe and comfortable inside the walls. Pamela pointed as she walked.

“The sitting room is to the left and the kitchen is toward the back. The dining room is to your right. The study is next to the parlor. That’s pretty much the downstairs. Follow me.”

Caroline peeked into the three front rooms and looked up the staircase her Aunt was taking. The floors were a light colored hardwood. The parlor had shades of red throughout. The dining room had a grand chandelier over the table, but that was it. The study was small with a desk and a chaise in front of a fireplace. She quickly hurried up the stairs after her Aunt. There were five bedrooms total and three of those had their own washroom. The other two had an adjoining one.

“This will be your room for your stay. Feel free to make it your own. There are extra bedclothes in the closet. There is a woodpile next to the fireplace. I doubt you’ll need it since its summer. The summers here usually aren’t unbearable. There is a lot of rain as you could tell from the streets at the dock. You might want to take a short nap; we were invited to the Williams for dinner tonight. I told them you were coming to visit and they insisted on meeting you. They’re a really nice family. I believe they have a daughter about your age and a son a few years older. The daughter’s name is Anne and the son’s name is Hugh. He’s a very charming, handsome young man,” Pamela said.

“Aunt Pamela, this isn’t by any chance a matchmaking dinner is it? I told you I came to relax not to get married,” Caroline replied.

“Oh you don’t have to marry him just yet, just get to know him,” Pamela said.

“I’m not looking to get to know any men either. I’ll go to dinner only because there is no way you’re going to let me stay home, but do not push or even expect anything to happen tonight,” Caroline said.

“Alright, alright. I’ll go downstairs to the kitchen and have them send you up some sandwiches. I know you must be famished. Then you can unpack and take a little nap. We’ll leave here by six. That will give you at least two hours to unpack and sleep since it’s only three,” Pamela said.

She turned around and closed the door behind her. Caroline looked around the room. There was a queen size bed that looked very much inviting, a beautiful wooden dresser with a mirror that was worn around the edges as if an antique, and a porcelain water pitcher atop it. She felt very much at home in this room. She walked to the window and looked out at the view of the garden. Pamela had a maze of walls covered with bright colored flowers and vines and huge trees. She turned around and walked to the wash room. There was a folding screen hiding the toiletry area. It had brilliant colored birds all over it with great wingspans. There was a sink with a small mirror above it and a vanity next to that with a bigger mirror and an assortment of makeup. Caroline smiled knowing she’d probably rarely use any of the makeup. Her whole room seemed charming in that everything was meticulously placed.

She turned around, headed back to the room, and picked up her first suitcase, plopping it on the bed. She started putting her things away and placed one of her dresses on a hook on the back of the door. It was a deep green color with a low, but not too low,

neckline and the sleeves hung off the shoulders a bit. Just because she wasn't looking for a man didn't mean the men couldn't look for her. After she had unpacked, a servant girl brought up the sandwiches and placed them on the dresser. She didn't feel really hungry until she started eating them and then realized she hadn't eaten since breakfast this morning on the ship. After filling her small stomach, Caroline lay down on the bed and relaxed. Before long she was fast asleep in the warm, soft bed.

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Pamela knocked on Caroline's bedroom door. When no one answered, she opened it and walked on in. Caroline was still asleep and they would be leaving in an hour. Pamela walked over to the window and slung open the drapes. Caroline groaned and threw her arm over her eyes.

"Caroline, dear. We're leaving in less than an hour and you haven't even begun to get dressed. Get up and hurry along. I'll be waiting downstairs," Pamela said.

Caroline groaned again in reply. Pamela walked out and closed the door. Caroline moved her arm to make sure she was gone then rolled back over. Another knock came on the door a few minutes later and another serving girl popped her head in.

"Mrs. Pamela wanted me to make sure you were up, Miss Caroline."

"Fine, I'm awake. I'll be down in a moment," Caroline replied.

The girl closed the door and disappeared. Caroline threw the covers back and sat up wiping her eyes and ran her hand through her hair. Then, she got up and headed to the wash room. She did her toiletries and walked back into her room. Pulling her dress off the hanger she proceeded to put it on. She smoothed out a few wrinkles from being in the luggage and straightened the sleeves so that her drooping neckline was still modest. Caroline walked back into the washroom and sat before the vanity. She looked in the mirror and sighed at her sleepy eyes. Picking up her brush, she set out to put some order to her unruly hair. She looked down at the makeup and decided she should wear a little tonight to try to cover her tiredness. She added a little color to her eyelids and a faint red to her lips. Pinching her cheeks slightly, the rose color brightened her up.

She got up and went back to her room to look at her full complexion and make sure she was presentable. Her long brown hair flowed over her shoulders and down her back. She still had that youthful glow in her face, which her father always said made her look beautiful. A pang of loneliness went through her. She already missed her father and the only one she knew here was her aunt and she only through letters. Her mother had died when she was ten, during childbirth with her little brother. He also had not made it through. Her father had never remarried saying her mother was the only one for him. She remembered seeing the pain in his eyes every time Caroline had done something that reminded him of her mother. She knew he loved her, but she thought the main reason he wasn't really pushing her to stay at home was so he wouldn't have to be reminded of her mother.

Then, there was this mysterious man she met at the dock. Caroline was hoping she'd see him again. His dark hair and bright blue eyes had captivated her and she wanted to get

to know him no matter how much her aunt was against it. She put a drop of perfume down between her breasts and another behind each ear. Then, she checked her reflection once more and opened the door to go downstairs. Pamela was already waiting impatiently in the carriage. When she saw Caroline walk out of the house it all vanished.

“Oh my dear. You look as beautiful as my sister did. Your mother would be so proud to know how you turned out. Let’s get on now. They’ll be waiting on us.”

Caroline climbed up into the carriage with the help of the footman, her skirt rustling with every move. She rested her eyes on the way over there, just thinking of her father. They arrived at the William’s house in no time. They were rushed inside as the rain began to start. They left their parasols at the door and went on in to the sitting room. Mr. and Mrs. Williams greeted them as they entered. They doted over Caroline until her face blushed. Finally, they introduced her to Anne and Hugh. She had seen Hugh when she walked in and had wanted to laugh when his jaw dropped. He wasn’t bad looking, tall, dark hair, green eyes, and a cheerful face. He just didn’t seem to appeal to her though. Anne was very pretty. She had medium length blonde hair, blue eyes, a very slender build, and creamy white skin. She must be nineteen at the most.

After making introductions to the hosts, they pulled Caroline along to meet the other couple who was there. They were an elderly couple, probably close to seventy in Caroline’s eyes. They were introduced as the Raines, Lawrence and Elsie. Finally, the introductions were finished and Caroline took a seat next to Anne. She feared Hugh might be older than she, but from the way his eyes kept raking her body, he might attempt something right there. Plus, she really didn’t want to lead him on. Anne pulled her into conversation about the Americas and she tried to tell Caroline something of England. Hugh wanted to get up and go talk to her. She would make a beautiful trophy and her eyes told him she’d be an animal in the bedroom. He’d use her like he did his other women and then when he tired of her, he’d push her aside. It had always worked in the past. He saw no reason why it wouldn’t work this time. Besides, what woman could resist him?

He stood up, but was quickly stopped as Joshua Hamilton walked in through the doors. Joshua shook hands with Mr. Williams and kissed Mrs. Williams’ hand. He made his way up to the Raines and said hello. Then, he spoke to Pamela and patted Hugh on the back. When he made it to Anne, he glanced at Caroline and then turned quickly back to Anne. When it came time for Caroline, he took hold of her hand and kissed her knuckles like he had at the dock.

“It’s so good to see you again, Miss Caroline. I didn’t expect you to be accepting invitations with you fresh off the ship,” Joshua said.

“Yes, well, my aunt thought it would be best. She thought it would give me a chance to make a few acquaintances from the beginning,” Caroline said.

A servant walked into the room and announced dinner was ready. Everyone stood up to go. Hugh made an effort to get to Caroline to escort her, but was intercepted when Joshua took her arm. Instead, he graciously took his sister’s arm and Pamela’s on each of his own. Caroline smiled at him and then looked back to Joshua who was looking straight ahead. They followed the hosts to the dining room and seated themselves.

Joshua sat next to Caroline and Anne on the other side of her. Since Hugh couldn't be seated next to her, he sat across from her and Pamela sat across from Joshua to keep an eye on him. The waiters brought out soup and some white wine as the first course. Then, the conversation began again, mainly of politics or gossip. Caroline knew nothing of anyone so just politely listened. Hugh took the opportunity to be noticed.

"Miss Caroline, what brings you to England?" Hugh asked.

"I just came to visit with my aunt and have a little vacation. Mainly I just came to relax," Caroline replied.

Caroline was getting very warm being so close to Joshua. Her heart sped up every time he looked at her. There was no help for her once he flashed his smile again. Dinner finally finished and the men went to the study for their cigars and brandy and the women went back to the sitting room. More gossip continued and Caroline was starting to get very tired. The events of the day were really starting to take their toll. She looked out the window and noticed the rain had stopped. She politely excused herself and stepped out on the back patio that led to the gardens. She walked on through the flowers until she reached the fountain in the middle. She sat down on one of the benches beside it and twirled her fingers in the water causing the small goldfish to investigate. It was so peaceful in a garden. It seemed there was something magical encompassing it and blocking all the chaos of the world out.

"Miss Caroline, it seems we had the same notion. I was beginning to feel lightheaded amidst all that smoke," Joshua said standing right beside her.

Caroline started at having her peace interrupted, but calmed down when she saw Joshua.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. I just didn't realize you were here until I was already upon you," Joshua apologized.

"It's alright, Mr. Hamilton. I just didn't hear you approach," Caroline replied.

"Please, call me Joshua. Might I sit with you?"

"I don't know. I've been warned about you. I was told my virtue was at stake if I associated myself with you," Caroline smiled.

"Ugh, my pride has been wounded. I would never harm a beautiful woman's virtue, that is, unless she consented," Joshua smiled raising his eyebrows.

"I don't have anything to worry about then, since I won't be consenting to anything. Where are you from, Joshua? I can't place that charming accent of yours. Surely it's not English."

"Well, my parents were English, but they moved to Scotland with my father's business when I was young. I guess I might've picked up a thing or two from my neighbors down there," Joshua smiled.

“Is it true the Scotsmen wear skirts there? I’ve always heard but never seen,” Caroline asked interested.

“Aye, they do,” Joshua said thickening his accent for her.

Caroline laughed and her whole face lit up. Joshua paused, stunned, and stared at her. The moonlight was shining silver on her brown hair, her eyes were hazy from being tired, and her cheeks were all rosy from the cool night air. She looked like a beautiful nymph sitting next to the fountain.

“Why do you keep looking at me like that?” Caroline asked awakening him from his reverie.

“Do you realize how beautiful you are when you laugh? Your whole face lights up. It’s breathtaking,” Joshua whispered.

“Thank you, but I am far from beautiful. I have many flaws, Joshua.”

“None that I can see right now,” he replied.

Joshua leaned in to kiss her. Caroline’s heart fluttered from the effect his lips had had on her knuckles that morning.

“Caroline,” Pamela called, “It’s time to go.”

Caroline caught her breath just inches from Joshua’s bright blue eyes, “I have to go.”

Joshua sighed, “Very well. I’ll see you again.”

Caroline stood up to go. Joshua stood up and grabbed her hand and pulled her against him. Then, his lips were on hers and Caroline couldn’t breathe. His lips were so soft on hers and she could sense his hunger. Suddenly, she was afraid and struggled to get away from him. He held on to her hand and looked into her eyes, seeing the fear, before releasing her. She ran to her Aunt and calmed herself by inhaling deeply and smoothing out her dress before meeting her.

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Caroline changed into her nightgown and plopped across her bed when she got home. She sighed as she recalled the evening. She thought it was going to be a bore and then Joshua came in. She had tried to act normally, but one moment she was hoping he’d try to kiss her and the next she was running from him. It wasn’t the kiss that scared her so badly, lord it was nice, she had just never had the other feelings so powerful before. He was a womanizer and it would take a lot of time to get him out of her head. Those sparkling blue eyes were entrancing and those lips were so soft and when they pressed against hers.... She had to stop this. She was going to drive herself insane. She finally rolled up under the covers and fell asleep.

Chapter Two

Caroline woke up the next morning feeling rested. She hadn't had to worry about keeping an eye open or heaving to and fro. However, her dreams had been full of Joshua. She had tossed and turned trying to get away from him and in others she had given in. The only thing about her dreams were she didn't feel regret afterwards. She didn't know if her dreams were a sign or just her wishful thinking. Either way, she had woken up in a sweat. She got out of bed and peeled her wet nightgown off over her head and then went to her washroom to clean up. When she finished she put her pale yellow dress on with the tiny red flowers around the neck. The neckline wasn't too low, but it was a long way from high. She pulled her stockings on and walked to the door to head downstairs.

"Mistress Caroline," a short, tubby servant girl called. "Brunch and tea will be ready shortly. Your aunt is in the parlor."

"Brunch? What time is it?" Caroline asked.

"It's nearing noon. Mrs. Pamela thought it best you sleep as much as possible this morning so you could catch up on your rest. She did invite Mrs. Williams and Mistress Anne to brunch though. They should arrive soon."

"Thank you," Caroline replied.

Caroline walked to the parlor to see her aunt. Caroline pushed open the door and walked in. Her aunt was sitting on the couch knitting. She looked up when Caroline came in.

"Good morning, dear. I figured you needed the rest. I really shouldn't have pushed you to go last night and I'm sorry," Pamela said.

"It's alright, Aunt Pamela. It was nice. Thank you for letting me sleep. The voyage here was nerve wracking. You'd think those sailors had never seen a woman before," Caroline griped.

"Did they treat you indecently, child? I'll report every last one," Pamela said sitting up straight.

"No, they were fine," Caroline smiled thinking of the man they had thrown overboard.

In truth, she had enjoyed the trip. The ocean water was so peaceful and the men were very charming unless they had too much ale in them. She tried to help around the ship but they wouldn't allow it. They said it was no business for a woman. She had scowled at their chivalrous attitude, but had realized she probably couldn't have helped anyway.

The serving girl knocked on the door and announced that Mrs. Williams and Mistress Anne had arrived. Caroline and Pamela rose to greet them. They each gave them a hug and let them enter the room. After they had seated themselves, Pamela motioned to bring the tea. The serving girl closed the door behind her.

“Traci, dear, does Hugh have his eye on anyone particular these days? He’s such a handsome young man,” Pamela stated.

“No, no one as of now. I think he just likes flirting with them all,” Mrs. Williams laughed. “Boys will be boys. I did notice a few glances for Miss Caroline here from Mr. Hamilton last night. What do you think of him Caroline?”

“He’s very good looking, but I hardly know him. My Aunt has warned me about him though,” Caroline smiled as she saw the exasperated look on Pamela’s face.

“Warned you? Pamela, what nonsense have you been putting in this girl’s head?” Traci asked.

“Well,” Pamela said trying to cover herself, “he has a reputation as a lady’s man. I don’t want my niece getting mixed up with someone of that nature.”

“That nature? I don’t know where you get your gossip from, but Joshua is a very well standing young man. He’s always polite and if he has a love affair, no one knows of it unless the young lady tells, but any lady would not compromise her reputation and if anyone does tell you have to question their motives,” Traci said.

“Well, Aunt Pamela, he doesn’t seem so bad after all. Maybe I won’t shun him on the street if I should see him,” Caroline said sarcastically.

“Caroline, you do exaggerate my words. Why don’t you and Anne go out to the veranda and speak? I’m sure you don’t like all this gossip,” Pamela said.

“No, it doesn’t bother me at all. I’ve got to learn about people before I can make the choice to associate myself with them,” Caroline smiled.

If looks could kill, Caroline would be burning on a stake right then. She finally had figured her aunt out. She was going to try to set her up with Hugh and anyone that showed any interest other than him, she would cut them down in Caroline’s mind. Now that she understood her motives, she could avoid being misled. She had to give it to Pamela though she was sly.

“How old is Mr. Hamilton, Mrs. Traci?” Caroline asked.

“Oh, he’s probably close to thirty. As a matter of fact, I believe he’s exactly thirty this year. By the way, how old are you if you don’t mind my asking?” Traci asked.

“I’ll be 22 in a month. August 23,” Caroline replied.

“Oh we’ll definitely have to throw you a party then. You’ll be able to meet a few people beforehand and then we can have the party. Anne’s is August 24 so we can have a double if it’s all right with Anne,” Traci said.

“Oh yes. That would be wonderful,” Anne replied.

“I don’t want to be any trouble though,” Caroline argued.

“It’s no trouble at all. We love to entertain,” Traci said.

“If you’d like to, I won’t argue then,” Caroline gave in.

“Well, it’s settled then,” Traci said.

“Caroline, why don’t we go for a walk outside? The sun is out and there is this little shop down the street,” Anne offered.

“All right,” Caroline smiled.

They excused themselves and grabbed their parasols in case the rain started again. Then, they headed out of the door and into the street. They walked down the sidewalk looking into the little stores.

“So Caroline, how are you enjoying England so far?” Anne asked.

“I haven’t had much chance to sightsee since I’ve been here, but I hope to,” Caroline replied.

“Well, we’ll have to see what we can do about that.”

Both girls stopped and turned around. Joshua was standing there smiling at them both.

“Mr. Hamilton,” Anne said.

“Good afternoon Anne, Caroline. I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation. Have you really no plans yet as to sightsee?” Joshua asked.

“Not as of yet. Was that an invitation to play tour guide?” Caroline asked.

“If you would accept it knowing my bad reputation and all.”

“I’m very sorry for that. It seems my Aunt got her gossip messed up. She’s only looking out for my reputation. Can’t have people thinking the wrong things about me and I’ve not been here a day. Do you think you’d ruin my reputation?” Caroline asked.

“I would be the utmost gentleman in your company, unless you make the first move,” Joshua replied grinning. Maybe I ought to be asking if you’d ruin my reputation.”

“I don’t think you’d have to worry about that. I try to be on my best behavior,” Caroline said.

“You try? Is that a challenge?” Joshua asked.

“I believe we need to head back Caroline. It looks like it might rain any minute,” Anne said.

“I’m sorry Anne. Of course. Mr. Hamilton we really must be leaving,” Caroline said.

“Please let me give you both a ride home. Will your mother still be at Mrs. Pamela’s house, Anne?” Joshua asked.

“No, she probably has gone home by now. It’s on the way back. I can walk,” Anne replied.

“Nonsense. I’ll drive you both. My carriage is right across the street. Follow me,” Joshua said.

They followed him to his carriage and he helped them climb up before heading to the William’s house. He got down and helped Anne out and walked her to her door as Caroline waited. When he climbed back in he made sure to sit as close as possible to her. The carriage went on through the street to Pamela’s house. He must’ve hit every pothole on the way there causing Caroline to hang on to him for dear life. When they arrived, he got down and helped her down.

“Thank you for the ride, Joshua,” Caroline said.

“Accept my invitation for tomorrow and we’ll call it even,” Joshua grinned.

“All right. I’ll accept,” Caroline said.

“Wonderful. I’ll pick you up at nine tomorrow morning. Is that good for you?” Joshua asked.

“That’s fine. I better get in before the rain starts.”

“May I bother you for a kiss for all the trouble I went to today?” Joshua asked.

“I thought my acceptance for tomorrow made us even?” Caroline asked.

“Well, you didn’t seem to mind my kissing the other night.”

“I was tired and my defenses were down. It won’t happen again, I can assure you,” Caroline said. “Good evening.”

Caroline released herself from his embrace and walked up the path to the door. Without turning she opened the door and went in. Joshua stared after her. He’d wait, but every woman gave in eventually. This one would tomorrow. He’d see to it.

It was all Caroline could do not to collapse when she got inside the door. She had wanted him to kiss her so bad, but then again she hadn’t wanted him to. He confused every part of her. Her mind was saying no, but her body was screaming for him. It remembered his touch and craved more. As she stood with her back against the door with her eyes closed her aunt walked in.

“Caroline, was that Joshua Hamilton that dropped you off? Where’s Anne?”

“Yes, Aunt Pamela, Joshua did drop me and Anne off. He took Anne home first because we thought her mother would be back there by now,” Caroline replied.

“Yes, she left an hour or two ago. You still shouldn’t have been alone with him. Even for that short a distance,” Pamela griped.

“I’m sorry, but Joshua has invited me to take a tour with him tomorrow. We won’t be alone; there will be plenty of people around.”

“Caroline, you can’t go out with him. I still don’t trust him. Traci Williams always looks for the good in everyone. You can’t have possibly told him yes,” Pamela complained.

“I did and it’s done. Aunt Pamela you mustn’t worry about me so much. I’m a big girl and can take care of myself. Please stop worrying or you’ll have an ulcer,” Caroline said.

“I can’t help it. You’re just as carefree as your mother was,” Pamela said.

“My mother was a very sensible woman and I don’t appreciate you talking about her like this. Now, if you’ll excuse me I’m going to the library and see if I can find anything interesting in your collection to pass my time until dinner.

“Please don’t. I’m only looking out for you the way your mother would have, but I forget you’re not the little girl I once knew. You’re a grown woman and make your own decisions and I don’t want us to be fighting the whole time you’re here,” Pamela said.

“I’m sorry. It’s just when I first got here you treated me like I was still sixteen. I’m sorry if I treated you cruelly,” Caroline apologized.

A tear came down Pamela’s face and she quickly wiped it away. Caroline smiled at her.

“Please don’t cry. You’ll have me crying as well,” Caroline said.

“I’m sorry. You just remind me so much of your mother and I miss her terribly. I guess I just tried to make you fill her shoes when it came to someone I needed to fuss over. However, you do fill her shoes in that she never listened to me either. If she had, she’d never have married your father and I wouldn’t have you here with me now. She loved your father dearly and it hurt me to think he was going to take her away from here. She was all I had,” Pamela said.

“Don’t worry, Aunt Pamela. Mother loved you dearly. She told me so. She said she was always sending you letters or presents and every chance she got before I was born she came to visit you. She hated it when she got sick because she couldn’t come see you. Then, when she passed away, I thought of taking up writing you, but I had only met you the one time at mother’s funeral. Mother had always read me your letters, so I thought I knew you, but when you came to the funeral, I was so scared to speak to you. You had her all while you both were growing up and I had only had her for a few years in my opinion. I was furious at you and loved you all at the same time. Then, when I grew a little more, I realized

I shouldn't be furious with someone that my mother had loved so much. That's when I began to write to you. I was hoping to bridge the gap I had caused when mother died," Caroline said.

"I'm very glad you did too or I would never have known how wonderful you had grown up to be. Your mother would be very proud at how you've turned out. Your father did a wonderful job. Have you written to him since you've arrived?" Pamela asked. "I'm sure he's worried about you."

"I sent him one from the dock when we arrived to let him know I had arrived safely, but I'll write him again now. I miss him, but it's nice having a woman around," Caroline smiled.

"It's nice having some youthfulness around this old house too," Pamela said. "I'll have the maid call for you when dinner is ready."

Pamela went upstairs to her room and Caroline walked on into the study. She sat at the desk, pulled out some paper and began to write to her father to tell him of her trip so far and how much she missed him. Afterwards, she sat down to a quiet dinner with Pamela and then went upstairs to bed.

Chapter 3

The next morning Caroline left her room and walked down the stairwell to meet her aunt for breakfast before Joshua came to pick her up. Pamela was coming out of the parlor as Caroline reached the bottom. They walked to the dining room and sat at the table as the maid brought the trays out. They ate in contented silence. They had healed their wounds and would now forget them. There was no use dwelling on the past any longer. After a short while, they began sharing their memories of Caroline's mother until the butler came in to announce the arrival of Joshua. Caroline smiled and got up and hugged her aunt before walking out of the dining room. She grabbed her bonnet from the side table where she had laid it before going in. Joshua was waiting in the hallway by the door. His face lit up when he saw her.

"Here, let me help you with that," Joshua said reaching for her bonnet.

He adjusted it on her head and then tied a little bow under her chin all the while trying not to gaze down into the low neckline of her dress. Caroline smiled and put her arm in his crooked arm and followed him out to the carriage. The sun was shining for a change and there were no rain clouds in the sky. She climbed in with his help and adjusted her skirts as he climbed in behind her. He had a driver today so he could be free to talk and point out things to her. The driver started the carriage and they pulled out of the driveway into the street. Not everyone was busy in the streets yet, but there were a few bustling about.

"What did your aunt say when she heard you accepted my invitation?" Joshua asked.

"She was fine with it. Why? Were you worried she'd sway me against you?" Caroline asked.

"Of course not. She just doesn't seem to like me very much," Joshua replied.

"She's just leery of you. You're very forward and she's afraid you'll steal my heart away and we'll run off together and she'd have my father to answer to," Caroline laughed.

"Well, I might not be able to steal your heart away, but I'll definitely try," Joshua said.

Caroline blushed and looked away from him, "You are very forward. What makes you so sure I'd let you?"

"I said I'd try to, but I'm a very persuasive man. You might better keep your guard up. Besides, you would never have accepted my invitation if you didn't like me in the slightest. That gives me hope," Joshua said.

"Well, I'll have to remember not to accept any more of your invitations. I wouldn't want to be leading you on," Caroline said.

"I'll let you make that decision at the end of our day. But for now, I intend to give you a wonderful day," Joshua said.

They rode through the city and Joshua pointed everything out to her and she got postcards from little shops to send to her dad and to her friends in America. Joshua bought her a bottle of perfume that they both said smelled wonderful.

"I hope you don't mind, but I had my cook prepare us a picnic to eat in the garden at my home," Joshua said when lunchtime rolled around.

"That sounds lovely. I'd like to see your home," Caroline smiled.

Her cheeks were flushed from the wind and she looked tired. Joshua gazed at her noticing the haziness to her eyes from weariness and the rosy cheeks and thought how beautiful she was. They arrived at the front of his home and the stop jostled him back. He hopped down and reached up to help her down. He put his hands around her waist and lifted her down. Instead of making her uncomfortable, he immediately let go of her and motioned for the front door. The outside was beautiful. It wasn't as big as her aunt's house, but it was still rather large. It was only one story and had lots of trees and flowers everywhere. When he opened the door to walk inside, he held it open for her and opened his arms to show her the house.

"Well, this is it," Joshua said. "How do you like it?"

"It's very nice. Mind if I look around?" Caroline asked.

"No, of course not. I'll even be the guide. Follow me," Joshua said.

They walked through the house and he showed her the dining room, the parlor, the kitchen, the guest room, and lastly, his bedroom. He opened the door to his room and walked in. He had a four posted bed with velvet blankets, a dark wood washstand and a dark wood chest.

"What do you think? Very bachelor isn't it? I just don't have a knack for decorating," Joshua said.

"It's very nice, but it could use some pictures or something. It's very plain," Caroline said.

"And you talk about me being forward," Joshua smiled.

"Well, you asked how I liked it," Caroline defended.

"I know. I was only teasing. Why don't you come sit next to me? I won't bite. I swear," Joshua said.

"I'd rather not. Why don't we go see if lunch is ready?" Caroline offered.

"All right," Joshua agreed getting up from the bed.

He walked towards the doorway but grabbed Caroline's arm as she started to walk through it as well. She stopped and turned, startled. He moved her to where her back was against the wall.

"What are you doing?" Caroline asked her eyes showing fear.

"I'm not going to hurt you, but I can't forget that kiss we shared. I just want to know if it caused as many sparks with you as it did for me. Nothing more. I just want to kiss you again," Joshua said.

Before Caroline could refuse, his lips were on hers. She closed her eyes and allowed her body to melt against him. He moved his lips in slow motion opening and closing around hers. His hot breath felt wonderful against her skin. His fingers moved up and down on her arm and the other hand massaged her neck under her scalp. She could think to do nothing else but put her hand against his chest. She felt the hard muscles underneath his shirt and sighed. He leaned in closer and testily slid his tongue across her bottom lip. She started and her eyes flew open. He was looking at her reaction with his own sparkling eyes. She calmed down and let him slide his tongue in and slowly massaged it with hers. When she opened her eyes again to look at him, she saw more than just a kiss in his eyes. There was pure desire and hunger flaming in them. She moved both her hands to push him away. She couldn't let things get out of her control. Joshua stood back and looked down at her.

"What is it?" Joshua asked.

Caroline's cheeks flared red and she ducked her head away from him. She wrapped her arms around her waist as for comfort and stared at the floor at her feet.

"Didn't you like it?" Joshua asked.

Caroline looked up then and smiled, "Yes, it's just..."

"I didn't mean to force you into anything, but you drive me mad. You allowed that one kiss in the garden and have been playing coy games since. Every other time I tried to kiss you, you turned away or even ran away," Joshua said.

"I'm sorry. Maybe you should stop trying to kiss me then. I'd better head home," Caroline said.

"No, not until you tell me why you keep running from me," Joshua said.

"You can't hold me against my will. I'll scream," Caroline said the fury flaming in her eyes.

"I won't hold you against your will, just tell me," Joshua said, his eyes pleading.

"I was afraid of the feelings it offset in me. Is that what you wanted to hear? That I'm afraid of you? I'd like to go home now," Caroline said.

"You don't have to be afraid of me. I'd never make you do anything you didn't want to," Joshua said.

“I’d just like to go home now,” Caroline said.

Caroline walked out of the bedroom and out the front door. She climbed up into the carriage and told the driver to take her home. The driver looked to Joshua before leaving. Joshua leaned back against the wall folding his arms across his chest and nodded his head and the driver pulled off.

Caroline was all thrown out of sorts. She was furious at him for making her admit that to him and furious for him making her feel so childish. Yet, she couldn’t erase the kiss from her mind. It made her feel so wonderful and warm, but he was a very arrogant man who was accustomed to getting what he wanted. Maybe her aunt was right. Maybe she should stay away from him.

The weeks went by and it was time for Caroline and Anne’s birthday party. Pamela was helping out with the decorations and everything although Traci was organizing it. Caroline had met a few more people since she’d been in town and her and Anne had become fast friends. She hadn’t spoken to Joshua the entire time. When he came to see her, she had them turn him away. Anne said he had spoken to her once wanting to know what was going on, but she had just told him Caroline had said she didn’t want to be bothered. They had met on the street a few times, but Caroline always managed to elude him. She wished she didn’t have to, but she just didn’t want to talk to him.

Right now she was caught up in the bustle of excitement about the party. She had gone out with Anne and they had both bought a new dress for the occasion. Caroline’s was a little more daring though she had the bosoms for it. It was velvet red with a low cut neckline and straps that hung off the shoulders. The waist of it showed off her figure wonderfully and the skirt didn’t have as much taffeta underneath it so it didn’t poof and bother her when she sat down. Anne’s was white with a square neckline but the waist also showed off her figure nicely.

“You know mother invited Mr. Hamilton don’t you?” Anne asked.

“Well, I guess I’d have to talk to him sometime I suppose,” Caroline said.

Her heart had fluttered at the mention of him, but she didn’t know if she was ready to speak to him again. She guessed she’d have to tonight if he approached her. There was no use causing a scene. She would just have to think of what to say to him. Without thinking, she dropped a drop of the perfume he had bought her down between her breasts. Then she sat down at the vanity and rubbed a drop behind each ear and on each wrist before putting make up on. Anne finished getting dressed and sat next to her.

“What happened between you two? You haven’t spoken to him in a month,” Anne asked.

“Please forgive me Anne but it’s only between the two of us. He didn’t accost me or anything or hurt me, physically anyway,” Caroline replied.

“I understand. He has been after you though. He certainly doesn’t know why you’re not speaking to him,” Anne remarked.

“He does, but he doesn’t know my reasoning. It’s just not meant for us to be together,” Caroline said.

“Why not? He’s crazy about you. Do you not return his feelings?” Anne asked.

“I do. Very much. That’s the problem, Anne. He stirs up all these emotions that make me want to melt against him, but I don’t know. There’s just so much passion there that it scares me. Do you understand?” Caroline asked.

“I only wish I did. I’ve never felt that before,” Anne replied.

“It’s just confusing, frightening, and wonderful all at the same time,” Caroline replied.

“Girls, people are beginning to arrive. Hurry along now,” Pamela called through Anne’s bedroom door.

Caroline stood up and straightened out her skirt. Her silky brown hair fell in tendrils all over her head. She fluffed them one last time before heading to the door.

“Ready?” Caroline asked.

“Let’s go,” Anne said standing up.

They walked out the door and down the hallway to the stairs. Anne peeked around the corner to see how many were there already. The room was filling quite fast.

“There are so many people down there,” Anne said.

“Well, let’s get down there before a lot more come,” Caroline said. “Just walk like you own the place, oh wait, you do.”

Anne laughed and her nervousness calmed some. She reached for Caroline’s hand and they walked down the stairs together. Halfway down, Caroline stopped and almost tumbled when Anne kept going. She had spotted Joshua in the crowd already and their eyes had locked. Caroline’s heart sped up immensely. Anne’s eyes followed hers and saw Joshua. She tugged Caroline causing them to break their stare.

“Don’t worry,” Anne whispered. “I’m right here with you.”

They walked on down into the crowd and greeted all the guests and accepted the congratulations on their birthdays. They walked over to where Traci and Pamela stood.

“Girls, you look magnificent,” Traci said.

“Thank you. This party is wonderful. You’ve really outdone yourself mother,” Anne said.

“It really is great,” Caroline said. “Thank you for including me in all this.”

“It’s our pleasure. It’s been so long since we’ve entertained and now we had two reasons to. Happy birthday Anne,” Traci said.

She handed her a box and Anne opened it. Inside was a small diamond necklace. Anne’s face lit up and she hugged her mother.

“Oh, it’s beautiful,” Anne cried.

“Here, let’s put it on you,” Mr. Williams said coming up behind her.

She jumped around and hugged him. He took the necklace from her and put it on her. She quickly showed Caroline and then ran off to show her other friends.

“Your father was sorry he couldn’t be here on your birthday but he sent you something and asked me to give it to you tonight,” Pamela said.

Caroline took the small box and opened it with curiosity. A gold bracelet inlaid with garnets lay inside. Caroline gasped when she saw it. It was beautiful.

“I told your father the color of the dress you had found and he bought the garnets to match it,” Pamela said.

“He shouldn’t have done this,” Caroline said.

“He wanted to give you something very special on your birthday,” Pamela said. “And these are from me.”

Caroline took the other box and opened it, “The matching earrings. Thank you so much, Aunt Pamela.”

She dove at her and gave her big hug. Tears were coming from her eyes. She put the earrings in her ears and then Pamela helped her clasp her bracelet. Caroline hadn’t notice the music starting until Hugh came over and asked her to dance. Caroline smiled and agreed. She placed her hand in his as he led them to the dance floor. They danced to a moderately fast song. When it was over, she thanked him and started to walk off the dance floor. Instead, she ran into Joshua.

“Hello, love,” Joshua said.

“Hello, Joshua,” Caroline replied looking up into his face.

He took her hand and twirled back onto the dance floor. She grudgingly let him, though her heart defied her and beat rapidly. She glanced around the room instead of at him. Anything to take her mind off of it.

“You’ve been avoiding me,” Joshua said. “Why?”

“You know why Joshua. You humiliated me,” Caroline said.

“You know I didn’t mean to do anything to hurt you. I care too much about you and you’ve been hiding from me. What can I do to make it better?” Joshua asked.

“There’s nothing you can do. I think it’s just best if we don’t see each other anymore,” Caroline said.

“You can’t mean that. I feel your heart about to beat out of your lovely chest and I know you liked that kiss as well as I. Just give me a chance,” Joshua said.

“I don’t want to,” Caroline pleaded.

Joshua stopped them and tilted her face up to look at his, “You do want to, but you’re scared to. You’re wearing the perfume I bought you. You do think of me even if you don’t want to admit it. You shouldn’t be afraid of love. You should let it move you.”

“I’m not afraid of love. Only of you,” Caroline said, tears filling her eyes.

He released her then and she walked away to the powder room to clean up her face before meeting the rest of the guests. Anne came into the room.

“Are you ok? I’m sorry I couldn’t intercede. I didn’t see him until you left. Do you want me to have father remove him?”

“No,” Caroline replied. “That would cause a scene and I don’t want to do that on your birthday.”

“But it’s your party too. You’re not supposed to be upset,” Anne said.

Caroline finished up and they walked back to the party. They looked around to see where Joshua was, but saw no sign.

“Maybe he left when he realized how upset you were,” Anne helped.

“I hope so,” Caroline replied.

Almost immediately, two gentlemen walked up and swept them out to the dance floor. They danced through the night until they were exhausted. There was no more sign of Joshua and Caroline was glad. Maybe he would leave her alone now. She didn’t know if that was a good thing or not, but it was for the best. The night was about over and Caroline walked out into the garden to get away from all the commotion. Her head was reeling with all the dancing.

She sat down on one of the benches and touched a flower that was beside her. She plucked one out and placed it in her hair. The wind was blowing a nice breeze and her hair was flowing behind her. She heard a twig snap behind her and quickly turned around. A small scraggly man was standing there smiling at her. He definitely wasn’t dressed for the party. He had on ripped pants and a filthy shirt. The thing that caught her eye was the cutlass and the pistol at his side.

“Hello, princess. The captain asked us to stop by and tell you he’d like to speak with you,” the man said.

“What captain? I’m not going anywhere,” Caroline said standing up and walking back to the house.

“He said you’d refuse. You’re a stubborn one,” the man said.

She backed up into something hard and cautiously looked up. A giant burly man stood there behind her with his arms crossed glaring down at her. She gasped and stepped away.

“Get her, Ron,” the small man said.

The big man, Ron, grabbed a blanket from behind his back. Caroline went to scream but the small man gagged her. Ron threw the blanket over her and she struggled to get away from it. She bit down and tasted something very bitter in her gag. Before long, she couldn’t move, much less struggle. She felt very tired and fought against the urge to close her eyes and sleep. Unfortunately, the drug was more powerful and soon she was asleep. Another man came out from behind the bushes and stood to the side.

“We have her, Captain,” Ron said picking her up and placing her over his shoulder.

“Good. Let’s get back to the ship before anyone notices she’s gone. Be careful with her though. She’s very precious,” the Captain said.

They walked back to the ship with Caroline thrown over his shoulder. No one was in the streets to see where they were going or what they had in the blanket. They walked through a forest to get to their ship. It was docked right at the shore. Men were walking around it just waiting. The captain waved as they emerged from the trees and the men were relieved it was him. Ron carried Caroline up the plank and onto the deck.

“Where do you want me to put her?” Ron asked.

“Put her down in my cabin. I’ll deal with her when she wakes up. That drug shouldn’t wear off for at least another two hours or so. Let’s set sail and get as far away from here as we possibly can before she wakes up. Let’s head back to the caves,” the captain said.

Ron walked to the door to head down below and ducked as he went through. The captain watched after them until they disappeared and then he set about getting his crew in motion.

A few hours later, Caroline awoke to a splitting headache. She still had a foul taste in her mouth from the drugs. She held her head and tried to sit up but just ended up laying back down. The door opened and a silhouette slipped in. He lit the lantern on the shelf beside the bed and kneeled down.

“Joshua,” Caroline said.

“You’re awake. How is your head?” Joshua asked.

“I think I’m dying. Where am I? What are you doing here?” Caroline asked.

“You’re not dying. Here drink this,” he said giving her some water.

Caroline took a sip of the water and placed it next to the bed.

“What is this horrible taste in my mouth?” she asked.

“It’s something that just let you sleep for a while,” he replied.

The door opened again to allow a head to poke in.

“Captain Joshua, we’re approaching the caves.”

“Thank you, David,” Joshua said.

The head disappeared and the door closed once more.

“Captain? What is going on here? What caves?” Caroline demanded.

“I am Captain Joshua of this vessel. You are now in the hands of my pirates,” Joshua said.

“Pirates? You can’t possibly be a pirate. You don’t look the part,” Caroline said. “Is this some joke to make me talk to you?”

“This is no joke. You are now my prisoner and you’ll do as I say. I tried to be nice and civil amongst society, but now you’re on my turf and I’m not as nice here as I was there,” Joshua said.

Caroline’s adrenaline kicked in and she stood up to face him. Worry creased her face, but she wouldn’t allow her voice to quiver.

“What do you want from me?” Caroline asked.

“You have to ask that? I thought I’d made it clear,” Joshua replied.

Fear traced her face and then was quickly dissolved.

“You’re scum and you’ll never take me to your bed,” Caroline retorted.

“Never say never, my love. I suggest you hang on to something,” Joshua said.

“What?” Caroline asked.

Before she knew what happened, the boat lurched forward as it struck the land. She was flung into Joshua’s arms and had to hold on in order not to fall. Joshua looked down at her and smiled. Then, he leaned down and kissed her hard on the lips. Caroline hit his chest over and over for him to let her go, but he didn’t listen and pulled her close until her arms were trapped between them. Finally, he let her go and stood her away from him. Then, he walked back out of the room and locked the door behind him so she couldn’t get out. She

still ran to the door and tried it though. A few minutes later, the door knob started to shake and Ron came walking in.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way. No more drugs. This time I’ll hit you to knock you out or you can come along peacefully. Which is it?” Ron asked.

Caroline’s eyes grew wide. If Ron hit her, she’d probably be unconscious for eternity.

“I’ll go peacefully,” Caroline replied, “this time.”

Ron walked towards her and picked her up and slung her over his shoulder.

“What are you doing you big oaf? I said I’d go peacefully,” Caroline screamed.

“I know and I didn’t hit you. This is to make sure you don’t run off,” Ron said.

Ron walked out with her over his shoulder and headed to the deck. Caroline lifted her head to look around. The pirates were unloading cargo off the ship and going off through a tunnel. Caroline didn’t know where they were. She heard them say they were headed for caves so she figured this was an island somewhere and all islands had inhabitants, so there was a chance she might be able to escape. She looked and saw Joshua talking to a sailor and pointing him down a tunnel. When he saw Ron, he walked over to them.

“Take her to my quarters,” he told Ron. Lifting Caroline’s head to look at him, “You might want to take a nap and get some rest. I won’t be in to bother you for a while.”

Ron laughed and headed down another tunnel.

“What are you laughing at?” Caroline asked him.

“The Captain is going to have his hands full with you. You’re stubborn and feisty,” Ron replied.

“The Captain isn’t going to lay a hand anywhere near me,” Caroline retorted.

“I wouldn’t say that now. When Captain Joshua wants something he usually gets it no matter how much he has to fight.”

“Well, he’s not getting me, that’s for certain,” Caroline said.

“Missy, I haven’t known you long, but from meeting in the garden and then again in the room, I know you don’t change your mind when you set to it. Although you might be dead set against him, you still better be careful around that one,” he said.

“We’ll just see,” Caroline said.

Ron came to a door on the side of the tunnel. When he opened it and sat Caroline down, she turned to look at the room. It was carved out of the rock. It was magnificent. There was a giant bed against the wall on the left side, a chest of drawers against the back wall, pillows were strewn all over the floor for seating and a giant rug was in the middle.

There were candles lining the shelves all around the room. A makeshift shower was on the right side of the room with a small water basin next to it. She wasn't sure how the water must work and she didn't want her mind to wander in that direction.

"I suggest you take the Captain's advice and get some sleep. We never know when we're going to ship off again and sleeping on a ship is nothing like on solid ground," Ron said.

He turned to walk out the door and shut it behind him. She heard him lock it too. Instead of trying the knob, she went to the water basin and splashed water over her face and down her arms. It was incredibly hot in there with all the candles. She walked around and blew most out before taking Ron's advice and lay down on the bed. Before long, she was asleep.

Chapter Four

Joshua came in a few hours later and saw her asleep on the bed. Caroline waited until she heard him start moving around to open her eyes slightly to see what he was doing. He went behind a dressing screen and began to change out of his suit from the party. Caroline's cheeks turned red from watching this, but she couldn't tear her eyes away from him. He came out from behind it in a plain pair of pants and walked to the wash stand. He took a rag and cleaned all the dust from the unloading off of him. Caroline watched him as her heart started beating fast. His body showed muscles everywhere and his skin was dark from being in the sun. She closed her eyes quickly as he started to turn towards her.

"Caroline," he called brushing the hair off her face.

Caroline moaned like she was waking up and rolled over onto her back and looked up. She jumped into a sitting position like he had startled her.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Joshua calmed.

"Then, why did you kidnap me?" Caroline asked. "I didn't want to see you anymore and I told you that."

"You would never see me in the first place. Why are you so scared of me?" he asked.

"Well, for starters, you're a pirate and you've kidnapped me," Caroline retorted.

"I mean before you knew all that. At the party you said you were scared of me, I want to know why. What feelings are you afraid of? Passion?" he asked.

"It's none of your concern," she replied.

"It is my concern, woman. Can't you tell I'm in love with you?" he asked getting agitated.

"If you're in love with me you have a crazy way of showing it by kidnapping me," she retorted.

His eyes blazed up, "I thought this was the only way I could get you to talk to me. I had to leave tonight and I wanted you to come with me so we could work everything out."

"There was nothing to work out. I told you I didn't want to see you again. Did you take that as a sign to kidnap me and think that if you had me under your control I'd fall all over you?" Caroline said.

"Your mind might say that, but your heart and your body are saying you want me as bad as I want you," he replied.

Caroline opened her mouth to protest, but his lips were quickly on hers. She tried to

fight him, but he was stronger than she was. He laid her back against the sheets and Caroline continued to struggle until he moved away from her.

“I can’t do this,” Caroline cried.

“Why not?” Joshua asked.

“Because I’m afraid,” she replied.

“Afraid of what? I’m not going to do anything unless you tell me I can,” he said.

“It’s not that. Joshua, I’m a virgin,” she blurted out.

“I know,” he replied.

“How did you know?” Caroline asked incredulously.

“I figured that was what you were afraid of when we started all of this. You might be a tease, but you don’t normally let things get out of your control,” Joshua replied.

“Around you I have no control. I just want to abandon myself to you and that scares me. I’ve never been dependent on anyone other than my father and never intended to, but with you it’s different,” Caroline said.

Her eyes were starting to water at this confession. Joshua wiped them away from her eyes.

“Please don’t cry. I didn’t mean to upset you, but I wanted you to admit that to me, to admit that you love me. You’ll never have to be afraid of me,” Joshua said. “Let me kiss you and don’t pull away.”

His lips were upon hers in a tender kiss, but slowly he became more and more hungry. Caroline was afraid, but she didn’t pull away from him. Now that everything was out, she started to calm down when the feelings surfaced. Joshua spread himself out beside her on the bed and rubbed her neck as he kissed her. She felt her heart flutter and testily touched his lips with her tongue. He took this as a sign to go further and he slid his tongue into her mouth and massaged hers with his. Caroline let out a groan and froze when she did.

“It’s ok. It lets me know you’re enjoying it. Plus, I like it when it comes from you,” Joshua smiled.

Joshua went back to kissing her and slid his hand down her arm to her waist. Then, slowly slid it up to her breast. A knock on the door interrupted them and Caroline jumped away from him. He sighed and angrily opened the door and allowed one of the sailors to bring in a tray of food and wine for them. Then, the sailor quickly left the room.

“Since the mood is pretty much broken, would you like something to eat or perhaps to drink?” Joshua asked.

Caroline nodded her head. Then, she stood up and walked to the tray. There was a wide assortment of fruits, bread, and a few slices of ham. She took the bread and made a sandwich with the meat and sat down against a few of the pillows on the floor. They ate in silence with Joshua watching her and Caroline averting his gaze. Joshua pulled the tray of fruit onto the floor with them as Caroline finished her sandwich. He then poured them both a glass of wine and sat back down.

Another knock came at the door. Joshua let his head drop down to his chest and tossed the rest of the melon he was eating back on the tray. Ron was standing in the doorway and Joshua motioned him into the room and closed the door behind him.

“Captain, the men are wondering when we’ll be setting off again,” Ron asked.

“We’ll set out again first thing in the morning. Is that all?” Joshua asked.

“Ron, is there another room where I can sleep and have some privacy?” Caroline asked.

Ron looked from Joshua and back again. A small smile crept into his face. Joshua looked at her incredulously. Then, seeing the determined look in her face he backed away.

“That won’t be necessary. You will sleep here,” Joshua said.

“Will you be sleeping elsewhere then?” Caroline asked batting her eyelashes.

He stared at her before finally answering, “Yes, I will be sleeping a few rooms down in case anything should happen during the night. Get your rest because you set out with us in the morning.”

“Why do I have to go? I surely can’t get off this island without a boat,” Caroline argued.

“That’s true, but there’s no stopping another boat finding our little cavern here and you alone in it,” Joshua said.

“Oh, you mean other people like you? The kind that kidnap young women and try to seduce them?” Caroline asked smiling.

“They may not try to seduce you. They might just take what they want. Get to bed with you,” Joshua said pushing Ron out of the room and closing the door behind him.

Caroline slouched when she was finally alone. She was terrified of what might’ve happened if Ron hadn’t come in. She didn’t know what to do. There really wasn’t anything for her to do. She climbed into the bed and cried herself to sleep.

Later that night, she heard the door to her room creak open. She opened her eyes slightly and peered into the dark room. She couldn’t see anything because there were no windows in the place and she had blown the remainder of the candles out before going to sleep. She thought perhaps the door had just not been shut well and a breeze blew it open. She closed her eyes and snuggled deeper into the sheets.

Then, she heard the footsteps. She quickly opened her eyes and scanned the room, trying desperately to see who was in the room. Before Caroline could find any shape, a huge hand covered her mouth. She fought against it and managed to bite the hand and scream out for help. It was only a small sound that came out before the huge mass flattened her out on the bed and held her hands above her head with one of his own. He shoved a rag in her mouth with the other and then was quickly pulling up her skirts. She felt his hot breath against the top of her breasts and smelled the stench of whiskey. Her eyes teared up against his weight crushing her and the fear of the pain that was sure to come.

She felt his fingers skim across her through her panties and she squeezed her eyes closed. His fingers found what they were searching for and dove into her making her cry out through the rag because of the dry friction. She felt him move around below her and then she felt what she had dreaded. Her door slammed open just as the intruder was about to shove inside her. Tears streamed down her face and she froze against the inevitable.

She felt the man being shoved off of her, but she just lay there balling up inside of herself. She wrapped her skirts around her as tightly as she could. More people ran into the room carrying candles until the room was well lit up. They all looked from Caroline and her fetal position to the mass of flesh rolling around on the ground. Finally, they heard a gunshot go off and they all stepped back as the mass lay still. Soon after, the man on top rolled off and stood up. It was Captain Joshua and his chest was all bloodied, but he wasn't the one who had been shot. They looked to the ground and Ron lay motionless with a bullet through his heart and his pants halfway down.

"Give me a light and get this trash out of here," Joshua said.

One of the men gave him his candle and then helped the rest of the men drag Ron's lifeless body out of the room and down to the ocean. Joshua moved over to Caroline and put a hand on her to roll her over. She shuddered from him and screamed out as if a delayed reaction. Joshua grabbed her and held her to him to calm her. She fought against him until the sobs overpowered everything else. Then, she sat there and cried until she had no more energy in her body to even cling to him. Joshua laid her back down on the bed and went and filled the tub with warm water and added a few soothing salts to it. Then, he threw a robe over the changing screen and helped her up off the bed.

"Just relax in there and I'll wait outside the door. If you need anything call for me. When you're finished just let me know at the door and I'll come in and tuck you into bed. You won't need to worry about Ron anymore. He's not going to be able to get to you and hurt you ever again," Joshua comforted.

"Joshua, will you stay with me tonight? I'm frightened," Caroline whimpered.

Joshua went and wrapped his arms around her and held her tight, "If that's what you want. No one is going to bother you tonight. I promise."

He let her go and turned and walked outside the room. When he was outside, she undressed and eased herself into the tub. The heat felt wonderful and helped calm her down. She hoped she'd never have to experience that ever again. She was glad Joshua had come to her aid, but if it hadn't been for him she never would've been put in that situation.

She had always wanted adventure, but now that she had a chance for it, it seemed too overwhelming for her. Maybe Joshua would take her back to England now that this had happened. She hoped so.

Thirty minutes later she got out of the tub and dried off. She wrapped the thick, terry cloth robe around her and secured it tightly before walking to the door and opening it. Joshua, true to his word, was sitting on the ground across from her door making sure no one would bother her. He smiled up at her as she opened it and stood up, brushing himself off.

“Did it help any? I know it was a scary encounter. Are you all right?” he asked her.

“It did help a little. Thank you,” Caroline said.

While he walked in through the doorway, she grabbed a few of the blankets off of her bed and put them on the ground for Joshua. He grabbed a pillow from the pile they had been sitting on and put it on top of the blankets. Caroline got in the bed and snuggled up under the covers as far as she could. When she heard Joshua finally get still, she thought to ask him about taking her back.

“Joshua?”

“Yes?” he replied.

“Will you take me back to England now?” Caroline asked.

“I can’t,” he replied solemnly.

“Why not? Joshua, you’ve spoken all you need to say to me and now I want to go home,” Caroline pleaded.

“I’m sorry. I can’t take you back yet,” Joshua sighed.

Caroline’s eyes welled up, “Why not?”

“Stop your crying you’ve been through enough tonight. Go to sleep,” Joshua commanded.

Caroline hid her face into her pillow and sobbed silently. What else could he need her for? He said what he needed to say. What else could there be? Soon, the events of the evening took their toll on her and she fell asleep. Joshua lay there silently until he could hear her sobs no more. Then, carefully, he sat up and crawled to her side. Her face and her pillow were stained from crying, but she was asleep. He reached over and pulled her hair out of her face and tucked it behind her ear.

“I’m sorry, Caroline. I am a pirate and must do what I must. I love you and I hope you will understand,” he whispered staring at her sleeping form.

Then, he pulled the covers closely over her and crawled back to his pallet. He lay tossing and turning in restless slumber over his conscience, over the main reason he had taken her from everything she knew.

Chapter Five

Caroline awoke to an empty room. Joshua's blankets and pillow were folded up and placed in the corner. She saw a box lying on the table across the room and decided to get up and investigate. She threw the covers off of her and wrapped the robe around tighter against the morning chill. Then, she walked over to the box. On the top was written: For You. She opened the box to find a dress. It was tan colored with a dark brown corset like top. She quickly tried it on and it fit perfectly. She was amazed. She turned around when she heard a knock at the door.

Joshua walked in, "Good you're up. I see you've found your present. We have a sailor on board who sews rather well. I won't give you his name because it will hurt his pride. He took the measurements from your dress that you originally wore and altered this one to fit you. From the looks of it, he did a very good job."

"Yes, he did wonderfully. Thank you," Caroline replied.

"How are you feeling this morning? Calmer?" Joshua asked.

"Yes, still slightly shaky though," she smiled.

"I'll bring you some breakfast and then we can board, unless you'd rather eat while on the ship?" Joshua asked.

"Are you taking me back to England then?" Caroline asked.

"We discussed this last night, Caroline. I cannot take you back. I will not speak of this again. Now, head to the ship. You'll eat your breakfast there if you're hungry," Joshua said.

"Joshua," Caroline called. "Take me home. I want to go now!"

He walked out of the room and down the hallway. Caroline ran to the door.

"Do you hear me?" she cried.

Joshua turned around and stalked back to her. Getting in her face, he stared into her eyes.

"I'll take you back when I'm ready to, but until then, you do what I say and never talk to me like that again. Do you understand? Now, you can follow Byron here to the ship or he can drag you kicking and screaming. Your choice."

As if on cue, Byron walked up from out of the corner. Caroline took a step back when she saw him. Joshua turned around and walked off. Caroline ran after him.

"Joshua, I'm not finished with you!"

He turned around and grabbed her arm and jerked her around taking her towards Byron. He took her from Joshua and threw her over his shoulder.

“Lock her in my cabin. I’ll be there shortly,” he replied. “Don’t let anyone in there with her.”

Byron took her, still thrown over his shoulder, towards the ship. Joshua watched after them and then turned to finish what he had to do this morning. Then, he headed towards the ship and boarded. The crew began pulling up anchor and rowing out of the cavern until the wind could catch their sails. As soon as Joshua made sure the ship was sailing smoothly and checked on all the men, he decided to go below and check on their precious cargo. Hopefully, she had calmed down by now.

He walked down the steps and the hall to his cabin. When he knocked on the door, there was no answer. He pulled his key out from under his shirt where it hung on a chain and unlocked the door. He opened it, slinging the door wide. Caroline threw whatever her hand could reach at him which was a small plate. She folded her arms around her stomach as a sense of security when she ended up missing him.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he asked.

“Well, I was trying to hit you, but apparently I’m not a good shot,” Caroline replied.

“Look, this trip is going to take a while so you can either bide your time here or we can throw you overboard, your choice. If you think you can behave, I’ll leave the door unlocked and you can walk on deck, but if you’re going to be stubborn and uncooperative, then you can remain locked in here,” he said.

Caroline looked at him through fierce eyes. How dare he talk to her in this manner! She would show him in the end. She’d have him thrown into jail as soon as they reached land again. To think, she ever had any feelings for him. The bad thing that Caroline tried to shove to the back of her mind was that she still had feelings for him.

“Would you like a drink and something to eat? I see you didn’t touch the porridge we brought you for breakfast,” he said.

He rang a bell and had one of the men bring them a few sandwiches and some chilled water. Then, he motioned for Caroline to move to a seat at the table. She quietly obliged, but refused to let him touch her. He sat down opposite her and drummed his fingers on the table. Caroline wouldn’t look at him. She kept looking around the room or picking at her nails which soon would be sore from it. Finally, the man brought in the tray and placed it between them on the table. They ate in silence as the ship made its way through the waves of the sea. When they finished, Joshua stood up.

“I’m going above to check on the men. Would you like to come and get some fresh air?” he asked her.

Caroline nodded her approval and stood up to follow him out. Joshua stopped at the doorway and motioned for her to go first.

“After you, my dear. I wouldn’t want to get a knife in the back or anything,” he said.

“You mean like you stabbed in mine?” Caroline asked smiling sweetly up at him as she walked past.

Joshua raised his hands to wring her neck but grabbed the air instead. She was already walking down the hallway towards the stairs that lead to the deck. As soon as she stepped through the door to the outside, she was hit by the smell of the sea and tasted the salt upon her lips. She stepped to the side to allow Joshua to come up and stared at the vast amount of water as she moved her hair out of her face. No ships were in sight. She had hoped they would be near land or close enough to another ship for her to scream for help, but no such luck.

Instead, she contented herself with watching the crew and gazing over the side of the ship into the horizon, thinking of what her aunt and father must be feeling with her missing. She vaguely heard Joshua shout some orders, but her mind was elsewhere. Caroline looked out over the water and then thought of her mother. She had always loved the ocean. Joshua walked up behind her and touched the small of her back to draw her eyes toward him.

“A penny for your thoughts,” he smiled.

“Is that all you want?” she replied.

Joshua’s smile faded and he looked out into the water. The ride was very smooth with a slow breeze blowing them along. The sun was bright and starting to warm Caroline’s skin as she stood against the railing. She turned from Joshua and went back down the room, refusing to stay close to him at all. She didn’t hear him tramping after her, so she figured she would at least have a few moments to let her guard down and relax. She walked into the room and closed the door behind her. There was a wash bowl next to the table with a pitcher of water next to it. Caroline poured a little of the water into the bowl and took the washcloth lying next to it. She dipped the cloth into the cool water and began to rub her face and neck to calm herself down. Then, she lay down on the bed and closed her eyes. The swaying of the ship finally put her to sleep.

A few hours later or so, Caroline couldn’t really tell, but it was starting to turn dark outside. She opened her eyes thinking she heard something creak. Then, she remembered she was on a ship, but something was moving around inside the room. She quickly sat up and spoke.

“Whose there? Show yourself,” she said.

She heard a match strike and then someone’s face lit up as they tried to light a lantern.

“It’s only me. I told you, you have nothing to fear from Ron anymore,” Joshua replied.

“It’s not Ron I fear,” Caroline smirked.

Joshua stared at her as he lit a cigarette before putting the glass over the lantern. Caroline glared back at him until he moved his eyes away to his smoke. He was quiet and

barely distinguishable since the lantern was turned low. Caroline didn't move. She was ready to jump at the slightest sign of assault. Instead, Joshua just sat there and puffed on his cigarette.

"Since when do you smoke?" Caroline asked.

"Since I met you," Joshua replied. "It calms my nerves."

"Well, if you had left me alone you wouldn't be so nervous," Caroline retorted.

Joshua sighed and put the cigarette out. Then he sat back and stared at her with his arm hanging over the back of the chair. She finally lowered her head under the scrutiny and picked at her fingers again. He stood up and moved his chair closer to the bed and put his hands over hers to make her stop.

"You keep that up, you'll have them bleeding. There is no harm going to come to you so there is no need to be nervously twitching. We'll take you back as soon as we can. Right now we have things to do. When we finish, we'll take you back. Alright?" Joshua asked.

Caroline looked up at him with hope in her eyes, "Why don't you just drop me off at the next sight of land and I'll find my own way back home. I won't tell anyone it was you who took me."

"No, I can't risk harm coming to you in the process. Also, if you hate me as much as you say you do, then why not tell them who I am? That would definitely be in your best interest, but definitely not mine," he replied.

"Joshua, I won't tell anyone about you. Your secret is safe. Can I at least write to my father to let him know I'm alright? I'm sure my aunt has told him of my disappearance by now. Let me write him," she pleaded.

"Alright then," Joshua said patting her hands and getting up to retrieve paper and ink from his desk drawer.

Caroline jumped up and hugged him. Then she looked up in his eyes. Joshua wanted so badly to kiss those lips and make her his right there, but he refrained. Instead, he moved her away from him and walked out of the cabin to go back up on deck. Caroline watched after him and felt ashamed. She didn't know why, only that her heart had been screaming for him to kiss her and the voice in her mind was slowly starting to drown away. She turned to sit down at the desk and write a letter first to her aunt to let her know she was alright. She didn't know what else to write to them except that she was alive and unharmed. She couldn't give any other information than that. She wrote an identical one to her father and sealed and addressed them both.

She left them lying on the desk and stood to stretch. It was getting stuffy in the room so she decided to go back up for a bit. She walked up the stairs and out into the fresh air. There was still no sight of land or another ship. She finally gave up trying to see one and sat down on one of the crates aboard the deck. She gazed over the railing into the water and watched the fish swim by. Joshua noticed her sitting there and quickly walked down to

the room. He sat down at the desk and opened the letters she had written to make sure she hadn't slipped in anything. Then, he set them to the side and wrote his own letter to her father.

Dear Mr. Welbourne,

As you can tell, your daughter Caroline is alive and well. She will be returned to you in this same manner. However, we must come to an agreement before bringing her back at all. We're holding your daughter ransom for the sum of 100,000 pounds. Until we receive this, we will take care of your precious daughter. Please procure the amount as swiftly as possible. Someone will contact you in one month to make the trade.

Joshua put the quill back into the ink and reread the letter. It would do. He let the ink dry before folding the paper up and placing it into an envelope with Caroline's letter to her father. Caroline came walking in the room after the letter was put in the envelope. He laid it on the desk and turned around to face her.

"Checking up on me are you?" she asked.

"One can never be too careful," he replied smiling. "Especially when a woman is involved. I'd better go up and check on our course."

He stood from his chair and brushed past Caroline to the door. Then, he disappeared down the hallway. Caroline moved to close the door behind him and turned back to the desk. She had seen him writing when she first entered the room. She sat down at the desk and opened the envelope, sliding a small letter opener under the seal he had placed on it. She pulled her letter out along with the one Joshua had written. She unfolded his and began to read it. A few minutes later, Joshua came back down and opened the door. Caroline sat at the table looking up at him, his letter in her hand. He slumped his shoulders and closed the door behind him.

"A ransom letter? You're holding me for ransom?" Caroline asked glaring at him.

"It doesn't mean my feelings about you are false," Joshua replied.

"Feelings? Are you out of your mind? I thought I might've been falling for you for just a split second there and then I learn you have an ulterior motive and all of this has been a way to just keep me calm and obedient while you write to my father for money in exchange for his only child. Some way to get in good with the family, Joshua. What were you going to do? As soon as you received the money would you actually try to marry me or throw me over board for the sharks? Either way you wouldn't have allowed me to go back to my father knowing your identity. Now would you?" Caroline asked.

"Caroline, it's not like that. I'm a pirate first and these men have risked their lives in order to bring you on board for me," Joshua replied.

"Risked their lives? What about my own life? You never cared about me did you? You only meant to get my ransom. How did you find out that my family was wealthy? Was it my aunt? Is she in on this as well?"

“No, she isn’t involved in this. I learned it from the captain of the vessel you came to England on. He’s a friend of mine and I asked a few questions of you when you arrived. You know what though? I don’t have to answer anything to you. Now that my secret is out, I don’t have to be nice anymore either. If I wanted to and didn’t really care about you I’d throw you in the gallows and let you stay down there with the crew and let them have their way with you. Or,” he said moving closer to her until they were almost touching, “I could have my way with you right here and now and stop this constant frustration you leave upon me.”

Caroline cowered away from him and down cast her eyes from his. She hadn’t expected this type of reaction from him. She was actually afraid he might do as he threatened. She didn’t know how to gauge how serious he really was. He pushed her back onto the bed and fought her as she struggled to get up. He placed his whole body on top of her to weight her down. He pinned her hands above her head and all Caroline could do was twist her body which was doing more harm than good. He brought his mouth roughly to hers and forced her lips to part so he could slide his tongue in. He rubbed his arousal against her to let her know how serious he really was. Caroline was frightened more than anything but she also felt herself grow hot and wet with the anticipation. Joshua felt her stop struggling and it seemed as if she might be enjoying it. He knew it could only be his mind toying with him. He opened his eyes and looked down at her. Her eyes were squeezed tight and tears were running down the sides of her face to wet her hair.

His heart caved in on him and he pulled away from her. He hated himself for doing this. He did care about her and this was certainly no way to show it. Instead, he had frightened her out of her wits and violated any trust she was beginning to have in him. Suddenly her words came back to him. She had started to fall in love with him and now he had messed everything up. He looked back at her and she still lay there so frigid and crying. She hadn’t dared open her eyes when he moved away to see what was going to happen.

“Caroline, open your eyes,” Joshua said.

“No, just get this over with,” she replied squeezing her eyes tighter.

Joshua couldn’t help letting out a slight laugh at this, “I’m not going to do anything to get over with. Open your eyes please and look at me.”

Caroline opened her eyes slowly and looked up at him. They were filled with tears and they were still running down her face. He wanted to wipe them away but knew she would flinch away from him if he did. He was the cause of them and the last thing she would want would be for him to touch her.

Joshua stood up, “I’m not going to touch you again. When I walk out of here, I want you to lock this door. I’m going to get drunk and there will be nothing to stop me from barging back in here and doing to you what my dreams have been full of since I laid eyes upon you. Do you understand?”

Caroline nodded her head and he stared at her for a moment more before turning to walk out the door. He heard her quickly shut the door behind him and lock it. He walked down to where the men were eating dinner and looked for the barrels of ale they had

brought with them. Caroline listened for his foot steps to walk away and then she lay back down on the bed and curl herself into a ball. She began to cry profusely and soon had cried herself to sleep.

Before long Joshua was two sheets to the wind and sat at the table with his crew singing loudly and severely off tune. He tried to drink himself into a sickening slumber, but his mind kept returning to Caroline. Finally, he gave up his reverie and stumbled up the stairs to the deck. He sat down on a crate behind the wheel and stared out into the darkness. Then, he glanced up to the stars and fell back off his crate onto the deck. He lay there staring at the stars when he realized he was on top of his cabin and he could hear Caroline's muffled sobs. He tried to stand up, but it was of no use. His limbs were like jelly. Instead, he rolled over and listened to the torment he had put the woman he loved in. Before long, he passed out and that was where he stayed the rest of the night.

Chapter Six

Caroline awoke the next morning to knocking at her door. She slowly stood up and went to the door to ask who it was. When one of the crewmen answered and said he had some food for her, she opened the door. He brought it in and left it on the table. Caroline thought to inquire of the Captain's whereabouts but thought it best not to. Instead she sat down at the table and tried to force a few bites down. When she had finished, she pushed the plate away from herself and lay back down on the bed. She really had no desire to go up on deck. Joshua was probably up there and the men probably knew what had happened. She had no intentions of facing any of them right now. Over the course of the day Joshua never showed himself. Caroline didn't know whether to be relieved or worried.

She felt the boat hit something and just seemed to be rocking back and forth. She decided to face everyone and go up for a look but Byron was standing beside the door when she opened it. He looked down at her with his arms crossed and she had to take a step back to look up at him.

"What are you doing here?" Caroline asked.

"I have orders for you to stay in your room until we get back to sea," Byron claimed.

"So we've docked then. There's too many ways for me to get off and run away right?" Caroline asked.

"Just get back in your room please," Byron said.

"Alright," Caroline said and turned to go back in her room, but instead she swirled right back and ran around Byron to the door leading to the deck. She busted through the door before Byron had a chance to catch up to her. She took off running to the ramp leading to civilization and people who would help her get away. Unfortunately, Joshua was standing at the ramp with a man looking to be of importance.

"Where are you going darling?" Joshua asked grabbing hold of her arm tightly and pulling her to his side.

Caroline looked up and glared at him with fire blazing in her eyes. He gave her a look that if she said anything he'd kill her right here in front of everyone.

"Who is this beautiful creature? Is she possibly part of your trade today?" asked the stranger.

Caroline grabbed hold of Joshua's arm as if he might actually allow this man to buy her. Joshua looked down at her and grinned.

"Well, as much as I'd like to sometimes, this little one is mine. We were married at the last dock we arrived at," Joshua replied.

"Oh, forgive me then madam. I am truly sorry. You're still honeymooning I presume then. Please, allow me to make up for my rudeness and have you stay at my inn for

a few days. I'm sure your blushing bride here would love to have a day or two upon land. Am I right ma'am?" the gentleman asked.

Joshua looked down and she was definitely blushing. He figured it was more from the fury of being intercepted and held so close to him than of the way this conversation was heading.

"Most certainly, sir. Thank you so much for your kindness, Mr.?" Caroline replied smiling back up at Joshua.

"Oh, this is Mr. Trevor. I don't know if we will be able to this time dear. We do have appointments elsewhere you know," Joshua glared.

"Oh, a day or so wouldn't hurt anything. Do let us stay," Caroline pouted.

"I do insist upon it, Joshua. If you do not, I will be sorely angered with you," the gentleman answered.

Joshua knew what Caroline was up to and now she had fixed it to where he was in no position to decline it. Well, he'd see just how much she would take in a hotel room alone with him for a few days. If she had any notions of trying to escape while there, he'd quickly wipe them clean from her mind.

"Alright, darling. Two days at the most though. We do need to be on our way," Joshua consented.

"Thank you, dear," Caroline said and gave him a hug.

"Why don't you head on back down to our room and I'll be down there shortly," Joshua motioned for Byron to come near her.

"Anything for you," Caroline smiled.

She quietly went back down to the cabin and waited to hear Joshua's footsteps marching down the corridor. She knew she had him trapped and he couldn't get out of it. That was the advantage in living in high society; you knew how to manipulate people to do what you want them to do. She would take these two days to figure out how to escape and get back to America with her father. She had to get away and she would think of a plan. Finally, she heard the heavy footfalls of an angry man. Joshua burst into the room and stood in front of her as she sat at the table. Her eyebrows arched up in innocence as she just stared right back at him.

"What was the meaning of all that?" Joshua asked, his face turning red from holding his fury in check.

"Well, it started out as an escape attempt, but since you intervened, I thought I'd try another route," Caroline answered.

"Do you realize what you've actually done?" Joshua asked, seeing that she truly didn't.

Caroline's brows crossed in confusion.

"You've put yourself in a private room, alone with me, for two nights. Do you think you'll have any chance to escape that?" he asked.

Caroline's eyes almost closed as she glared at him, "You better not think of laying a hand on me. You might've gotten the best of me while we were in this small room, but in a larger one, I'll be able to get away from you and I'll scream."

"Scream all you want, Mr. Trevor has given us a private cottage out in the middle of nowhere. So you can scream, holler, and fight all you want, if I do decide to try anything."

With that Joshua grabbed a few things and turned and left the room. Caroline looked after him and growled.

"Grrr! I hate you Joshua Hamilton! I hate you!" she screamed after him.

Byron closed the door behind him as he walked out and was grinning to himself, women. He might could sit back and see the flames shooting between those two, but he could also see the electricity. Would Joshua still go through with the ransom or not though? A few hours later, Joshua came back into the room and Caroline stood up defiantly.

"There's no need to go all heroic now. I was just telling you that the carriage has arrived to take us to the cottage," Joshua toyed.

He motioned his arm for her to go out the door and then he shut it behind him and followed her out. She squinted when she came into the sunlight and walked across the deck to the ramp. There were hundreds of people all around busily selling their wares or just walking about browsing. Joshua grabbed her arm and put it in his in order to escort her to the carriage and also to dissuade means of escape. She completely ignored him as he did so and walked complacently to the awaiting transportation.

Once inside they were quiet as Caroline looked at her surroundings. The city looked well kempt and flourishing. There were tons of people so if she were to jump from the carriage and run for it, she might just be able to mix in with the people and get to a hiding place before Joshua realized what had happened. As if reading her mind, he looked up at her.

"Try anything and we'll make sure you regret it. I have eyes and ears in every port that we ever stop in," he said.

"Whatever makes you think I'd try anything," Caroline asked sweetly.

"I've learned to know your terribly bad habits. Especially since one of those ended us up staying in Mr. Trevor's cottage for two days. Now stop playing sweetly and act normal. I know you're a devious monster behind those beautiful lashes," Joshua replied.

"Well, you must've rubbed off on me then," Caroline replied.

"Must you always get the last word in?" he asked.

“Yes,” Caroline answered.

Joshua sighed and turned his attention back out through his window. Caroline went back to hers. It was already nearing evening when they left and the driver had told them they should reach the cottage by late that night. Caroline kept dozing, but every time they’d hit a bump she’d jerk awake. She was trying to stay awake long enough to see Joshua doze off and then take her chances, but she couldn’t seem to stay awake either. Finally, Joshua looked over at her and saw her fighting sleep. He took his coat off and made it into a makeshift pillow and laid it on her side of the carriage. She smiled at him and lay down on the bench and finally went to sleep.

An hour later Caroline was jostled awake by the sharp stop of the carriage and the horses screaming. She sat up immediately and tried to figure out where she was. She finally remembered being in the carriage and thought they must be at the cottage. Apparently Joshua had already gotten out. She was about to step out and see where he was, when another face appeared in her window. This man was roughened and dirty. She gasped when she saw him.

“There’s a nice looking dame inside here too,” the man said.

“Pull her out and let’s have a look,” another voice shouted.

The man opened the door and reached for Caroline, but she jumped to the other side. He stepped inside and grabbed her wrist but Caroline lay over and started kicking him with her heeled shoes. She kicked him in the stomach but it didn’t seem to have much effect since he had an especially pudgy middle section. Eventually, he managed to get her out and stand her up on the ground.

“Caroline!” Joshua yelled.

“Joshua!” Caroline replied seeing him with his hands tied behind his back with another man holding onto him.

Caroline struggled against her assailant and tried to run to Joshua so she would feel a small bit of reassurance, but the man wouldn’t release his grip. The driver was held by another man. There seemed to be at least seven in the group of bandits. A big burly man came walking towards her and stood a good foot taller than she. She looked up into his face defiantly as he reached up to brush her hair out of her face so he could get a good look at her. He rubbed his hand down the side of her face as he finished his inspection.

“She’s a beauty,” he replied.

Caroline looked up and spat in his face. The man holding her jerked her back to hit her, but the man stopped him. He just stood there laughing as he wiped her spit off with the back of his hand. Then, he himself slapped her across her face. Caroline’s head jerked and she felt the tears instantly spring to her face. Her head was spinning from the impact. She would’ve fallen if not for her captor.

“Leave her alone!” Joshua yelled.

The driver managed to squirm himself free and took off running towards the woods.

“Stop him!” yelled the burly man.

A gunshot was heard and the driver lurched forward and fell to the ground. Caroline let out a slight scream and bit her bottom lip to hold it back. She tasted blood from where she had been hit.

“Loot the body and then dispose of it. The rest of you, let’s go,” the burly man said.

They moved Caroline and Joshua through the woods following the supposed leader. Caroline’s head was throbbing and she was stumbling. Finally, the man holding her got tired of her clumsiness and picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. Joshua watched but didn’t say anything. Instead, he just followed along behind them. There wasn’t anything he could do right now to help himself, much less her. If he could only get word to his men aboard the ship. That was near impossible though. He had to get loose somehow and make a run for it. He could get his men and then come back for Caroline. The only problem was that he would have to leave her alone with them. She was tough, but he could guess how she would favor against all of these men. No, he’d have to find some way to get them both free at the same time.

They marched on through the woods until they came to a clearing. There were a few fires burning and more men roaming about. Joshua did a quick count and guessed there were probably fifteen men total. The man carrying Caroline disappeared into a tent and then Joshua and his captor came in right after them. Caroline had been dumped on the floor in the middle of the tent and Joshua was shoved down beside her. He would’ve touched her to give her some level of support, but his hands were tied behind his back. She was moving about slowly and looked up at him. Her lip was starting to swell. The man must’ve hit her harder than he first suspected. Caroline tried to manage a smile to tell him that she was alright, but it hurt more so she just nodded slowly at him.

Relieved, Joshua began to take in his surroundings. There was a cot on the ground by the left wall and a small, round table to the right. That was all that decorated the tent. Soon after they arrived, the burly man came in. He went and sat down at the table and filled a glass with water. Then, he looked to the two captives.

“Welcome, what brings you to these woods?” he asked.

“First of all,” Joshua began, “Who are you?”

“I am Michael, leader of this small group of bandits. Now, answer mine.”

“We were heading to a cottage that’s around these parts. A friend allowed us use of it for a few days since we are newly married,” Joshua began.

“Really? Congratulations. Or from the feistiness I’ve seen in that woman’s eyes, my condolences. What is your name?” Michael asked.

“I am Joshua. This here is Caroline. As you could tell from our meager possession we don’t have anything to give you in order to spare our lives, but what can be done to spare my wife’s? I’m sure we could come to some sort of agreement,” Joshua asked.

“So you’re a business man huh? Just exactly what is your line of work?” Michael asked.

“I happen to be just starting out in the trade business. Sailing from port to port looking for things that are in need elsewhere, but, like I’ve said, I’m only just beginning,” Joshua said.

“Where do you keep your finds?” he asked.

“They stay on my boat under guard of my men,” Joshua replied. “If you would allow me and my wife to go free, I will give you what is on board there. We do have a small supply of silk, foods, and a barrel of weapons. You may have all of that if you just allow us to go free,” Joshua bartered.

“How can I be sure you have these things? You certainly didn’t have any proof with you,” Michael said.

“Well, I have no proof but my word. That’s all I can work with right now, but know I would not put my wife’s life in danger in order to save my own,” Joshua replied.

“Alright, I will allow you to go to your ship, but I will send a few of my men with you. We will hold your wife here until you return to ensure me that I don’t lose either way. If you don’t return, your wife will then be mine. In all the ways a woman can. Do you understand?” he asked.

“Clearly, but I will return. How am I to know that you won’t touch her while I am gone or allow anyone else to touch her,” Joshua asked.

“You have MY word,” Michael said. “For tonight, though, you shall stay in a tent in our camp and then in the morning, you, Joshua will go to your ship. You must be back by nightfall tomorrow night or the deal is forfeit and the woman is mine,” he said. Then, looking at the two men standing behind them, “Take them to the captive’s tent and stand guard.”

The two men picked Caroline and Joshua up and took them out of Michael’s tent. Then, they walked down through the camp to the other side and shoved them into an empty tent. A few seconds later a woman dipped into their tent and untied their hands and started administering to Caroline’s lip. Caroline winced against the attention, but allowed her to clean it up.

“Michael really did a number on you. What did you do to him?” the woman asked.

“He had some wrong ideas about me and so I spit in his face,” Caroline replied.

“That wasn’t very smart. You don’t know how temperamental he can be. Do anything to make him mad and you’ll regret it,” she said finishing up Caroline’s lip.

Then, she stood and ducked back out of the tent and left the two alone. Joshua moved over to Caroline and checked her lip. She smiled up at him as best she could.

“Are you alright?” Joshua asked.

“I’m fine. It just stings,” Caroline said.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get to you to help. I was kind of tied up literally,” he replied trying to lighten the mood.

“I know. It’s not your fault,” Caroline said.

“It is though. If I had never kidnapped you, then this would never have happened. You would be sitting pretty in your aunt’s home safe and sound,” Joshua growled.

“To tell you the truth, my aunt’s house was getting kind of boring until you showed up. Up until this kidnapping of us both, it’s been the most exciting time of my life,” Caroline said. “Only the whole ransom letter threw everything for a loop.”

“I’m truly sorry about that, but the men were insistent. They said if you weren’t going to return my affections, then they wanted something out of it,” he replied.

“I never said I didn’t return your affections, it was just the circumstances and then learning the truth of who you were. Oh never mind now. It’s all out on the table and there’s nothing we can do to get out of this. You might as well take the ship and leave tomorrow,” Caroline suggested.

“I am going to the ship tomorrow, but in truth to get my men and then we’ll be back for you. If he tries to lay a hand on you, then he’ll,” Joshua was cut off by Caroline pressing her lips to his.

When she pulled away, he caught the back of her head and kept her lips pressed to his. He started to harden the kiss but her sore lip protested and he released her. She lay down next to him and placed her head on his chest and they slowly fell into sleep.

Chapter Seven

The next morning, two men came in and roughly woke up Joshua which in turn woke up Caroline. They yanked him up and pulled him out of the tent. Caroline tried to follow, but they wouldn't allow her to leave the tent. They sat Joshua down in front of Michael and released him. He seemed to loom over Joshua as though trying to intimidate him.

"You will take Chris, Craig, and Shane with you to your ship. Don't try anything funny or these men will kill you and your men aboard your ship. Then, you can only guess what we'll do to your pretty little wife. Get the goods and be back here by nightfall. If you're not back by then, well, let's just hope you're back shall we?" Michael said.

"I will be back. You can bet on that," Joshua replied.

The men hoisted him up off the chair and shoved him toward four horses and a wagon awaiting them. They all mounted and then started off back towards the docks, Joshua in the middle of them to dissuade any attempts of escape. Caroline was peering out of the tent flaps, but wasn't allowed to come out. Michael saw her and smiled. She quickly ducked back inside and scooted to the far wall away from him. He never entered though. Later, the woman who had come in to administer to Caroline's wounds came again with a tray of food and water. She hadn't eaten since yesterday and even then it was very little. Her stomach had been making loud protests all morning.

As soon as the woman left, she ravenously began eating and managed to gulp down a bit of the water in between mouthfuls. Soon she was happily sedated and shuffled up to the tent flaps to peer out. Her guard was still sitting beside the opening and glanced at her when she poked her head out. She looked up at him and smiled.

"Is there any way I might could go behind those trees and use the ladies room?" Caroline asked sweetly.

The man moved his arm in a swift motion to allow her to go. He stood up and followed her to the trees. She began to squat down and looked back at him.

"Are you really going to watch me actually pee?" she asked him.

The man huffed and turned around. Caroline acted like she was going to squat and then took off sprinting through the woods. Unfortunately, Michael was returning from one of his escapades and she ran right into him. He grabbed her arm forcefully and jerked her around and walked back with her. Her arm was starting to hurt and she could feel the blood leaving it because his grip was so tight. When they reached his tent, he released her arm and she quickly rubbed her other up and down it to return the blood flow. He pulled a chair away from the table and pointed at it.

"Sit," he said.

Caroline obediently sat and continued to rub her arm. Michael took another chair and sat it across from her.

“Where do you think you were going?” he asked her.

“Just for a nice little stroll,” Caroline retorted.

He reached back and hit her face, “Answer me correctly.”

Caroline slowly sat back up, her eyes watering, “I was trying to get away.”

“Did you and your husband decide all this last night? Once he was away he’d get away from my men and you were to run off and meet him somewhere? Is that how it was supposed to happen?” Michael asked.

“No,” Caroline replied. “We didn’t plan anything last night. I just saw an opportunity to run away and jumped it.”

Michael hit her again and this time Caroline fell out of her chair to the floor, “Stop lying!”

Caroline sat up crying, “I’m not. I swear.”

“You’re very bold for a woman. It seems we’re going to have to teach you some manners. Who knows if your husband will even come back, even if he does he may thank us for this or else he’s going to have a hard time trying to tame you,” he said.

“What do you mean? What are you going to do? You promised you wouldn’t lay a hand on me until Joshua got back. You gave your word,” Caroline said holding the side of her face.

“Ah, but the word of a bandit doesn’t mean much, my dear. Keith,” Michael called to outside the tent.

The man entered and stood awaiting orders.

“Take her to her tent. I’ll be in to deal shortly,” he said.

“What the,” Caroline started as Keith came towards her. She tried to fight and keep him away, but finally he became angry and hit her knocking her out. Then, he lifted her up over his shoulder and took her to the tent.

Joshua rode along with the men back towards the docks. He didn’t try to escape in any way. He knew that these men knew these woods a lot better than he did. So he quietly rode along until he could smell the salt air. They pulled to the side of the road and dismounted their horses. Then, Joshua led them to his ship. They walked up the gangplank onto the deck and Byron walked up to meet them. He looked curiously at Joshua’s companions and then back at Joshua. Joshua’s eyes darted to the men and back to Byron and then to Byron’s pistol at his side.

“These men need to see our wares. They’re interested in a trade,” Joshua said.

“Sure thing, Captain. If you will follow me,” Byron said motioning for them to follow.

Joshua began to follow him, but the man closest to him grabbed his arm to stop him, “We can wait up here. If your man wouldn’t mind bringing a few barrels up.”

“Byron, would you mind?” Joshua asked.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” Byron said and then turned to go down the few stairs to the cargo area.

A few minutes later, he returned heaving a barrel on his back. He quickly deposited it at their feet. Then, he motioned to another crew member to bring him a crowbar to pry the lid off. The man quickly grabbed it and headed towards Byron. Once all eyes were focused on the barrel, the man brought back the crowbar and slung it to meet with one of the foreigner’s head. There was a sickening crack and then the man hit the ground. The other two quickly whirled around to face their opponents, pulling out their weapons ready to fight. The whole crew appeared surrounding them and Joshua moved towards Byron. The two men finally dropped what was in their hands and stood solemn. They knew it would be a losing battle for them if they tried against all these men. Two of the crew brought forth rope and tied them up and threw them down the cargo hold. The dead one they just threw over the side of their ship.

“Would you care to explain, Captain?” Byron asked.

“These men work for a man who stopped us on the road and raided our carriage. They’re also keeping a hold on Caroline until I bring back all of our goods on this ship. If I’m not back by nightfall, then she will be considered his. We have to go back and get her. I’m not leaving this town until she is leaving with us,” Joshua shouted. “Who is with me?”

“We’ve all seen how you look at that woman. Aye, we’ll help you save her,” Byron replied.

The rest of the men shouted in agreement. Soon preparations were being put into order to head back to Michael’s camp. Before long, everything was organized and the two remaining men that brought Joshua were hoisted out of the cargo hold.

“You will take us back to the camp and if you try to run, I’ll kill you personally,” Joshua threatened.

Both of the men silently obeyed and stood solemn awaiting further orders. Byron had acquired a cart and loaded up a few barrels onto it and then they were on their way. Joshua wanted to hasten to the camp, but Byron made him slow down. If they returned too soon, then Michael would know things hadn’t gone well. They were already one man short of the original three that brought Joshua. They’d have to be careful.

Caroline came to inside her tent. Her head was pulsing, but nothing seemed to be broken, just a little tender. She started when she realized Michael was sitting in the shadows of her tent. He just watched her, never saying a word. Caroline stared back with as much contempt as she could muster.

“What are you doing in here?” Caroline asked.

“I told you that you needed to be punished. You’re too bold a woman. Women are not suppose to be so outspoken against a man. They are suppose to be humble and obedient to every man’s will,” Michael said.

“Are you sure that giant didn’t knock you on the head too?” Caroline asked. “I don’t think you’ve been out in the world too much. Women have come a long way since the time of the dinosaurs.”

“There it is again. Such strong hatred toward men,” he replied.

“Not toward men, toward you. What do you expect after you kidnap me and my husband and then send him off saying if he doesn’t return by dark that you’ll have me? That will never happen whether he returns or not, but he will return,” she said.

“I could have you right this instant whether you liked it or not. Maybe it would tame your soul a bit too to be overcome by a man. Maybe your husband just wasn’t the man to take control in matters. I would be doing him a favor,” Michael said.

He stood up from his seat and walked towards her. Caroline stood her ground. Michael rubbed his hand down the side of her cheek and raked his thumb across her lower lip. He moved in to kiss her, but she jerked her head back. He grabbed the back of her head and took a grip on the hair in his hand.

“If you bite me, I will hurt you badly,” Michael threatened.

Then, his lips were ravaging hers and Caroline felt her stomach lurch. She instinctively started to bite down, but his grip on her hair jerked her and she cried out. Michael took this chance to insert his tongue into her mouth and toy with her own tongue. Caroline went still and didn’t move. She thought of Joshua and prayed that he would come back. Even if he did though, he wouldn’t be able to save her from this.

Michael’s hand moved down her neck to the strap on her dress. Slowly he slid it down and Caroline froze. She quickly jumped away from him, but he still had her hair tight in his hand. Her body moved away from him, but then fell to the ground. Instantly he was on top of her and staring into her face. Caroline whimpered as her sore head hit the ground hard. Michael tore her dress down to her waist exposing her breasts. Caroline tried to cover herself but he grabbed her hands and held them away as he lowered his mouth to her nipple. Caroline screamed for him to stop but he just became rougher. Then, he ripped the rest of her dress and tossed it away from her. She lay naked before him and tears were streaming down her eyes. He ran his hand down the front of her stomach until it met with her soft curls below. Then, he roughly began to probe, exploring her. She lay very still and stared at the ceiling trying to imagine herself in another place. She squeezed her eyes against the pain

as he inserted his fingers inside of her and cried out. He was not being gentle in the slightest. Then, he grabbed her hand and placed it on the bulge in his pants.

“Feel that? That’s what’s really going to feel good. You’ll be begging me for more once I’m finished.”

Caroline doubted that very seriously, but was too numb to object. She closed her eyes and prayed to god that this man had no diseases and would at least be somewhat careful with her. She knew he probably would not though.

“Please don’t,” Caroline cried. “I’m a virgin.”

“Your husband said you were newlyweds, but he hasn’t even had time to consummate anything yet? Poor devil. All the better for me though,” he said. “Don’t worry, I’ll take my time.”

Caroline heard him take his pants off and braced herself for the worst. Once again his weight came upon her and felt him fumbling below. She felt him press the tip to her. She squeezed her eyes as tight as possible.

Joshua heard Caroline scream out as they began to surround the camp. He quickly left the men and ran towards the tent. When he burst into the flaps, he saw Caroline lying naked underneath the bulk of Michael and he immediately rammed into him and knocked him off of her. It was easy to take him, since Joshua had caught him off guard. Joshua immediately pulled a dagger from his side and held the man’s head back as he slit his throat, Michael not even having a chance to yell for help. Then, Joshua reached down and stabbed him repeatedly. Only when he heard Caroline’s whimpers, did he stop and look back at her. She was still lying naked but had rolled into a ball and he could hear her heavy sobs. He crawled over to her and touched her shoulder; Caroline screamed again and balled herself up even more. Joshua gathered her into his arms and held her tightly, rocking her back and forth.

“It’s me, Caroline. It’s Joshua. He’s dead. Michael’s dead. You’re safe.”

She opened her eyes and looked at him and then flung her arms around him and cried her heart out. When her body had stopped shaking and her sobs had softened, he reached for her dress and used it as a blanket around her and picked her up in his arms. Then, he held her close and stepped out of the tent. His men had already unarmed the rest of the men and had them in a group in the middle of the camp. Joshua stood tall cradling Caroline’s head on his shoulder.

“Michael is dead. I should kill every last one of you for allowing this to happen. The women are free to go if they chose. For the rest of you, consider yourselves lucky my men do not castrate you and leave you to die. I suggest you respect these women a lot more and find yourselves a good place to live, far, far away from here. Byron, let’s go,” Joshua said and started towards the cart.

He carefully placed Caroline in the cart and climbed up beside her. The rest of the crew kept their weapons aimed on the small group until they were out of sight. Byron drove the cart and Joshua held tightly to Caroline as the small group headed back to the ship. When they got back to the ship, Joshua carried her down below and laid her carefully on the bed. He thought she was asleep and so he turned to go, but he felt a hand stop him. He turned around and saw her eyes open watching him.

“I knew you’d come back,” she whispered.

He knelt down beside the bed and brushed her hair out of her face and rubbed her cheek, “Of course, I did. I wouldn’t leave you there. Get you some sleep, my darling. I’ll be right outside,” Joshua said. He leaned in close and kissed her forehead, “I love you.”

Caroline was already fast asleep by the time he reached the door. He stood there staring at her and hating Michael for what he had done to such a serene angel. He’d make it up to her though. No matter what it took, he’d make it up to her.

Chapter Eight

Caroline awoke the next morning and went to stretch her bones. She let out a whimper when she tried to move because she was sore. Joshua was immediately in the room and looking around for an intruder. Caroline pulled the covers all the way up to her neck when she realized she was still naked underneath the blankets. Joshua looked at her and went to her side.

“Are you ok this morning? Can I get you anything?” Joshua asked.

“Some clothes would be nice? And maybe a bath?” she asked and tried to give a smile.

“We’re about to touch land and I’ll find you a nice room with an indoor bath. You may have your privacy and rest. You’ve been through enough that no woman should ever have to endure,” Joshua said brushing her hair away from his face. “Until then, I still have your dress from the party. I’ll bring it to you.”

He left the room and returned shortly with her green dress. He laid it across a chair and stepped back out of the room. She stood up carefully and shuffled to the chair. She donned the dress and found a brush lying on the table. She quickly brushed through her locks and then opened the door. Joshua was standing there waiting on her. He walked into the room carrying a tray of bread and wine. Caroline ate quietly and kept her head tucked down knowing Joshua was watching her. When she finished, she pushed the plate away and pretended to see something interesting in her hands.

“Why won’t you look at me?” Joshua asked.

“Don’t be silly. I’m not avoiding you,” Caroline said looking up and smiling, but then immediately ducked her head back down.

Joshua leaned over and lifted her chin to look at him. She kept glancing away although he held her chin. Finally, he made her look at him and she saw the compassion in his eyes. Her eyes filled up with tears as she looked at him. He moved his chair closer to her and held her head against him.

“Joshua, it was awful. I was so scared. I didn’t know if you’d be coming back really or not. I tried to escape after you left. Michael caught me and accused us of planning the escape. Then, he hit me a few times before having me carried to my tent. Then, he came in when I came to and...and” Caroline cried.

Joshua held on tight to her, letting her emotions come out. He hated all of this had to happen to her. It was his entire fault. If he hadn’t taken her in the first place for his selfish desires then, she’d still be safe and sound in England, living her life in society. Now, she had all bad memories associated with him and he would never be looked at fondly again in her eyes. He held her tightly and rocked her back and forth calming her. He rubbed her hair down her back and kept it out of her face as she cried. He felt the bump of the ship hitting land and sat Caroline back away from him. He reached for a cloth that lay on the

table and dabbed her eyes and wipe the tears away from her cheeks. She sniffled and tried to compose herself.

"I'm sorry I dumped all that on you. I just needed to get it out. Tell someone who wouldn't say it was my fault that I was raped. Joshua, do you think I could get pregnant from him?" she asked with fear in her eyes.

"No, darling. I got him off of you before he could plant his seed. He'll never harm another woman or sire any children now. You're safe from that thought," he said holding her in his arms once more.

Byron knocked on the door to tell Joshua that they had docked. Joshua thanked him and stood up from the chair.

"There's fresh water in the pitcher if you'd like to freshen your face before we head up. I'm going to go up and see to a few things before we find an inn," Joshua said.

"Alright," she replied.

Joshua followed Byron out. Caroline stood up and went to the pitcher and placed the cloth they had been wiping her eyes with into the water. Then, she squeezed it out and ran it over her face. The cold water felt good against her skin and she wiped her face and down her neck. Then, she wiped down her arms, sending shivers through her. Joshua came back down a few minutes later and retrieved her. He had found an inn and already bought lodging for two nights. He'd give her time to rest and recuperate from her ordeal.

Caroline followed him out of the room and up to the deck. She reached for his hand as walked down the ramp into the city. People were out bustling around, but it didn't seem as crowded as the last port. Caroline heaved a sigh of relief. She didn't want to see a lot of people. She felt like they all knew what happened. The inn wasn't very far from the dock. Joshua ushered her in and showed her upstairs. She walked to the room he pointed to and stepped inside it. There was a bed to the left, a dresser to the back wall and toiletry area to the right. A tub had been placed in the room and a note saying to ring the rope when she needed hot water.

Joshua brushed her arm, "I'll be in the next room. If you need anything, just knock on the wall. I'll come right over."

Then, he left the room. Caroline closed the door behind him and sat down on the bed. It was so soft and the room seemed to be cleaned recently. The tub was the thing she was most thankful for however. She got up from the bed and walked to the bell, tugging on it. A few minutes later, three serving girls came up with hot pales of water on each shoulder. They carefully sat them down and began pouring each one into the tub. One of the serving girls came forth to Caroline.

"My mother says to give this to you. She saw you come in and thought you would like something to make your body smell as sweet as your face."

"Thank you very kindly. Tell your mother I appreciate it very much."

She took the proffered soap and smelled the rose scent, smiling as she remembered the first night Joshua had kissed her in the William's gardens. That seemed like ages ago since she had been in their home. It had been at least two months now since she was in a familiar place. For now, she was just glad to be on land and alive. When the girls left, she lowered herself carefully into the steaming water and sighed as the heat cleansed her soul as well as the water cleansed her body. She took a sponge the girls had left behind and scrubbed her body with the soap. It felt good to scrape away all the dirt from her skin.

When she got out, the water had turned cold, but her body felt refreshed. She stepped out of the water and dried herself off and then slipped into her green dress again. A knock came at her door and she walked to it asking who was there. Joshua answered her and she opened the door to admit him.

"I thought you might like to go downstairs with me and get something hot to eat. I know you must be tired of the fruits and bread that we have on the ship," he smiled.

She smiled at him and nodded her head. He took her arm and wrapped it around his and led her downstairs to a table. The innkeeper came over and got their order and left for the kitchen. A few minutes later, one of the serving girls came with some glasses of wine for them. Caroline asked them if the innkeeper was their mother. She nodded her head proudly. Caroline made sure to thank her for the soap when she brought their food. Then, they ate in silence. When they finished the mother came and cleared away their dishes, leaving them to their wine.

"Would you like to go back upstairs now? You can finally rest on something that doesn't move in the night," Joshua said.

They stood up and walked back up the stairs. Joshua deposited her at her door and then turned to go to his own room. Caroline stopped him.

"Please stay with me," Caroline whispered.

"I'll stay with you for a little while until you feel comfortable to be alone," Joshua said and opened the door for her.

"I meant stay the night with me," Caroline said softly. "I don't want to be alone. I'm not asking for sex just some company. I'm afraid to be alone."

Joshua gathered her into his arms and held her, "I won't go anywhere. If you want me to stay I'll sleep on the floor."

She went and lay down on the bed, handing a blanket to Joshua. He went to take it from her, but she held onto it. He looked at her quizzically.

"You don't have to sleep on the floor. You can sleep with me. We're both clothed," she said shyly.

"Are you sure?" he asked her.

She nodded her head and he climbed into the bed behind her with his back to her.

“Joshua,” Caroline said in the dark.

“Yes, darling?” he asked.

She started to whimper, “Hold me.”

He quickly turned over and wrapped his arm around her until she was cradled against him. He felt her quietly sobbing, but didn't want to stop her. He knew she needed to cry to get it out of her system. He didn't want her to keep it all bottled up inside. Before long, she was asleep in his arms. Unfortunately he couldn't get comfortable in any way. Every time she moved she rubbed up against him, driving him mad. It was all he could do to force himself not to be aroused. Finally, she settled though and he was able to breathe slowly once more. He adjusted himself so he could get comfortable and then he was asleep as well.

Chapter Nine

Caroline woke up before Joshua did the next morning and opened her eyes. She had forgotten he was in the bed with her, but his warmth was greatly appreciated against the cold of the room. He was a very handsome man, her captor and protector. He may have kidnapped her to begin with, but he had given her the adventure of a lifetime. She may have been hurt in the process, but it was nothing time wouldn't be able to heal. He came back for her though. That was the most important factor. He did seem to care about her an enormous amount. Joshua had felt her move but wouldn't open his eyes, not yet. He wanted to savor the feel of her against him. Her soft body cradled against his felt wonderful.

Caroline felt him stir and held her breath. She didn't want him to wake up just yet. She wanted to watch him a little longer. His hair was hanging in his eyes, so she softly brushed it aside. He lazily opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," she replied. "Did you sleep well?"

"Once I finally got to sleep. You wiggle like a worm in your sleep," he laughed.

"I do not," Caroline said and moved to get up.

Joshua tightened his arms around her and wouldn't let her get up, "Not just yet. I enjoy being this close to you."

Caroline smiled and lay still next to him, "What are we going to do today since we have a whole day on land?"

"Whatever your heart desires," Joshua replied.

"Well, my heart desires that we get up and get moving. I'm not the type to lie in bed all day when I'm sight seeing."

Joshua groaned as she got up and took her warmth with her. She went to the water basin and splashed her face and ran a brush through her hair while Joshua watched her from the bed. He kept grinning at her and she just smiled back at him avoiding his gaze.

"You're as beautiful in the morning as you are any other," he said.

"I think not. My hair is about as unruly as a spoiled child. Now get up and let's go out," she replied.

Joshua finally stood up and ran the brush through his own hair and wiped all the sleepiness out of his face with the ice cold water.

"Alright, let's go then," he said motioning towards the door. "We'll get some breakfast before we go out."

Caroline took his hand and followed him down the stairs to a table where they ordered some eggs and bacon. When they finished, Joshua gave the lady a few coins to pay for it and they walked outside into the bright sunlight. They walked up and down the street popping into the little stores here and there. When they reached a dress shop, Joshua stopped her.

“As much as I like seeing you in that elegant dress, it might be a little too nice for the ship. Let’s find you something a little more practical. Whatever you wear you’ll look beautiful so let’s work on making you comfortable,” he said.

They walked into the store and Caroline looked around until she found a plain yellow dress with a modest box neckline. It went down in a V at her waist and fit her amazingly, showing off all the curves in her body. He also bought her a shift to sleep in so she wouldn’t mess up her dress. Then, they left and went back to the inn for lunch.

“I’ve rented a carriage to see the countryside in. This time we’re taking a few men along although I’m sure nothing will happen here. Would you like to see the country?” Joshua asked her.

Caroline shook her head and they got up from the table. They walked outside and down the road a little ways to the carriage shop. Joshua gave the man the money and helped Caroline up into the seat. Then, he climbed in behind her. They rode along the town looking at the different stores and the seller’s carts. They rode on until they were outside the town and started seeing more and more trees. Two men were riding a short distance behind them on horseback scouting the terrain. Caroline didn’t seem to notice them though. Joshua had his arm around her and was pointing little creatures out or little cottages that lined the hillsides.

Joshua stopped the carriage after a while and got down to stretch his legs, helping Caroline down in the process. He told the men to watch the carriage as they walked around. Caroline heard water running from somewhere and she enlisted Joshua to go with her to find it. They walked into the woods for a little ways and found a small, clear pond. Caroline smiled and leaned down, using her hands as a cup to drink from the water. The water was cool and refreshing.

“Turn your head,” Caroline said.

“What? What for?” Joshua asked.

“Just do it,” Caroline replied.

Joshua turned around and waited. Then, he heard a splash in the water and whirled around. He only saw ripples in the water and Caroline was no where to be found. He did notice her clothing lying on the bank. Finally, her head emerged from the water and she laughed at his stunned look, wiping the hair out of her face.

“Are you coming in or not?” Caroline asked.

“You’re crazy you know that?” he asked her as he started to remove his clothing.

He kept his pants on and jumped in. Caroline giggled as he swam to her. He ducked up under the water and Caroline moved around looking for him. Then, he jumped up behind her and grabbed her around the waist. Caroline shrieked and struggled to get away from him. Instead he held her tighter and laughed. Then, he released her. Caroline turned bright red and swam away from him.

“I’m sorry, darling. It was just too tempting to catch you in nothing but your skin. You’re so enticing and a great tease. You knew I wouldn’t be able to keep my hands off of you with you naked in here with me,” Joshua argued.

“I had no such notion. I just didn’t have anything to swim in and I couldn’t very well jump in in my dress. I’d sink straight to the bottom,” Caroline said defensively.

“I promise I won’t assault you, but I would like to wrap my arms around you. Nothing more,” Joshua said.

When she reached him, he wrapped his hands around her small waist with her back to him. Slowly, though, he slid his hand up to right below her breast. Caroline bit her lip to stop from gasping as he finally cupped her breast in his hand and toyed with the nipple ever so softly. She leaned her head back onto his shoulder and closed her eyes. Michael’s face popped into her mind and she struggled away from Joshua to put distance between them.

“Captain,” one of the men shouted from the trees.

“Yes, we’re here, but turn around man,” Joshua yelled back as Caroline dove beside the bank to hide herself.

“It’s getting late, sir, and we should probably head back. Too many things can lurk unseen in the dark,” he said.

“Very well, we’ll be there shortly,” Joshua replied.

The man left and Joshua pulled himself out of the water and put on his shirt. Then he reached for Caroline’s dress and used it to cover her as she too came out of the water. He turned his back as she quickly dressed.

“Why did you push me away like that?” Joshua asked her as they walked back to the carriage.

“You promised you wanted nothing else, but then you move so fast,” Caroline fussed. “I don’t know. It’s just when I felt your hands on me, all I could picture was Michael atop me again like a beast. I just couldn’t handle it.”

“I understand,” Joshua replied.

“No, Joshua. That’s just it. You don’t understand and you can’t. It’s just something I have to work through on my own,” Caroline retorted.

Joshua helped her into the carriage and climbed in beside her and they headed back to town. Caroline did the best she could to manage her hair before they reached the town as it had started to dry and curl in places.

“Stop it, it looks beautiful this way. The curls around your face enhance your natural beauty. I know I can’t understand what you went through, but I want you to know that he did rip my heart out when I heard your screams and then saw what was happening. He might have hurt you physically, but that tore me apart in every other way” Joshua said stopping her hand and holding it in his.

They reached the inn and went upstairs to freshen before dinner. Joshua went to his room and Caroline went to hers. She combed out her hair, but decided to leave the curls instead of trying to smooth them out. Then, she fumbled with the neckline on her green dress to make it low, then grew conscientious and fluffed it back up. Joshua knocked on the door and walked in. She really did look stunning with the curls framing her face as they were doing. She put her arm in his and they walked down to dinner. They were silent as they ate and sipped their wine. When they were finished, the innkeeper came and cleaned away all their dishes and Joshua paid.

They decided to go for a walk before turning in and headed toward the docks. They walked for a while just listening to the waves crashing and the seagulls calling to each other. Caroline caught a chill and Joshua took off his coat and gave it to her. She smiled up at him and they walked on.

“Why did you become a pirate?” Caroline asked, breaking the silence.

“The money and the adventure. Why else would someone become a pirate?” Joshua asked grinning.

“Have you ever thought about quitting and just doing your trading business that you have set up in England?” she asked.

“Especially when things are starting to get hot on our trail, but I think I would miss the sea if I did. My men always know they can quit this and come work for my England business, but they just don’t want to leave.”

“So why not hire someone to do your office work and you command the ship under the trade business. You’d still be on the sea, but it would be legal. You wouldn’t be running all your life.”

“I know you think pirates are worthless people and I’ve given you nothing to prove otherwise, but we only steal if the other ship can afford. We do not take things from the poor,” Joshua said.

“It still doesn’t make it right,” Caroline argued.

“No, but it’s a lot more fun than bartering,” he replied.

“You’re hopeless,” she sighed.

“Are you trying to make an honest man of me? Thinking I might settle down then?” Joshua grinned.

“What if I am? Would you consider it?” she asked.

“Depends on if you’d be there with me in the end or would you try to set me up with someone else?” Joshua said slyly.

Caroline glanced at him and Joshua stopped her to the side. He brushed her hair out of her face and rubbed his hand down her cheek.

“If it were you, I’d settle in a heart beat,” he said.

Then, he leaned down and brushed his lips against hers. She slowly opened her mouth to allow him entrance and to encourage him. He deepened the kiss and pulled her against him. Then, she stopped him and stepped away.

“We should really head back to the inn. It’s getting very late,” Caroline said.

“You’re right,” Joshua replied and turned her back towards the inn.

They walked back and stepped inside. The room felt warm from the fires. Outside it was turning cold as winter slowly approached. They walked up the stairs and stopped at Caroline’s door. Joshua moved to head back to his room, but she stopped him.

“Please come in,” she said.

Joshua nodded and followed her inside. Joshua sat down on the bed as Caroline lit a few candles to light up the room. He stood up and walked towards her. Caroline looked up at him and wrapped her arms around his waist. He held her there for a while and then lifted up her chin and placed his lips on hers. Caroline met him hungrily and Joshua clutched her hard to him as the kiss deepened. He stopped her and looked down in her eyes. There was fear in them, but also something else. Lust maybe?

He picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed. Then, he laid her down and stretched out against her. Caroline began to shake, but Joshua looked down in her face and brushed the hair out of her eyes, comforting her.

“Are you sure about this? I’ll get up and leave now if you don’t want to,” he said.

Caroline shook her head and Joshua went back to her lips. His hand slid from her chin down her neck and Caroline shuddered. Then, he went a little further and cupped her breast. Caroline gasped as Joshua started massaging it. His tongue slid into her mouth to quiet her.

“Can I take your dress off?” he asked.

Caroline nodded her head and stood up. She turned around so he could help her with her buttons. She thought her heart was going to beat out of her chest. Joshua noticed

her shaking and stood up behind her. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed the side of her neck.

“We don’t have to do this if you’re not ready,” he said.

“I want to,” Caroline replied.

She pushed him back on the bed and slowly let her dress fall with her back to him. His breathing deepened as she stood there. She folded her arms over her breasts and turned around. His breath caught in his throat as he looked at her beautiful form. He stood up and wrapped his arms around her to show that he liked it and held her until she stopped shivering. Then, he bent and picked her up and laid her back down on the bed. He slowly moved her arms away from her breasts so that he could see them. His gaze swept her entire body.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said as his hand rest on her stomach.

Tears filled her eyes both from being scared and feeling beautiful in his arms. He kissed her mouth. Her skin felt hot against his palm. He ran his hand over her nipple and it hardened under his touch. He twisted it in his fingers until she moans again. Her back arched as her own desire was growing. He slid his hand downward and she stopped him with her own hand. She took his hand and slid it down with hers and gasped when his fingers opened her. He played with her with one hand while his other still massaged her breast and his tongue massaged hers. Her back began arching more fiercely and she was crying for release. He moved his finger inside of her to see if she were moist and ready.

He quickly took his pants off and carefully moved himself to where he was just above her and placed the tip of his head to her. Her eyes were glazed over and she was begging for him. Slowly, he entered her. He pushed himself the rest of the way in and waited inside her until she relaxed slightly, then began moving slowly in and out of her until she began panting. As the hunger increased in them both, he began thrusting harder until Caroline cried out. Tears ran down her face but her back arched into him as her body convulsed. Finally, as her body started spiraling downward, Joshua thrust more until his own orgasm shook him. Then, they lay together shuddering in each other’s arms.

“Are you alright my love?” Joshua asked wiping the tears from her face. “Did I hurt you too bad?”

“No, it only hurt a little,” Caroline cried.

Joshua held her to him and she sighed against his warmth. He leaned down and kissed the side of her neck and her shoulder.

“I can hardly keep my eyes open now,” she said.

“Go ahead and sleep. I’m not going anywhere. We both could use some sleep,” he said.

Chapter Ten

Caroline awoke the next morning to an empty bed. She grabbed Joshua's pillow and wrapped her arms around it, inhaling his scent. Finally, she decided to get up and see if she could find him. She quickly got dressed and went downstairs. She looked around the dining room, but saw no sign of him. She stopped a waitress walking by.

"Goodmorning Mistress. What can I do for you?"

Caroline asked, "Have you seen the man I'm with?"

"The handsome fellow? Sure, he left pretty early this morning. Said he'd be back shortly. He had a few things to attend to."

"Thank you," Caroline replied and headed back up the stairs.

What could he possibly have to do? Her heart sank at the possibility of what her mind was telling her. Would he still mail that letter to her father after all that had happened between them? She reached her room and closed the door behind her. She sat down upon one of the chairs in the room and anxiously awaited his return.

About half an hour later, Joshua returned and opened the door. Caroline still sat in her chair watching him as he came through the doorway. Joshua smiled at her and closed the door behind him.

"Where have you been?" she asked as sweetly as she could.

"I had a few errands to run. Have you eaten anything this morning? I can have it brought up if you'd like," Joshua replied.

"I've had a loss of appetite this morning. What kind of errands did you have? Send off any mail?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact yes. What's wrong?" he asked confused.

"Did you mail the letter to my father? You've gotten what you want and now you're ready to get rid of me. Was that your plan all along? Play on the heart of the poor little rich girl, take what she could give, and then ransom her off for more?" she asked, contempt in her eyes.

"What are you talking about? I would never do anything like that. Caroline haven't you realized yet that I'm in love with you? I don't want to ransom you off and never see you again. I want you with me the rest of my life," he replied. "How could you think anything like that after all we've just done?"

"How could I not have it worrying on my mind? All of this that has happened since you abducted me from England has made my head swirl. How am I to know if you're sincere or if it's all another ploy?" she asked.

“If you can’t think to trust me after last night, then I think I had better take you on home then. It seems nothing will ever change your mind about me, will it, love? I’ve tried my best to show you that I actually care about you, but you could care less. We’ll leave dock as soon as we can get our things together and our business here done,” he said turning on his heel and walking back out of her door.

Caroline fell on the bed after he was gone and sobbed into the pillow. She was so confused. She didn’t know what to believe anymore. She wanted to stay with him and believe he really truly loved her, but could she trust him? He had twisted her trust at every turn, but the look in his eyes when she told him she couldn’t trust him, hurt her like a knife. She had genuine sadness in those eyes, not just a show. She had to figure this out and decide what she wanted to do. If only everything had started out differently. Joshua came back in just as she was heading out to find him. He flung open the door and she jumped back.

“We’re setting sail now. Unfortunately, we have to make another stop before we reach your home. It will take us three months to reach it by sea. I apologize in advance,” Joshua said.

Then, grabbing a map off of his desk, he stormed back out of the room and up to the deck. Caroline wanted to follow him and throw her arms around him and tell him how sorry she was, but she wasn’t quite sure she had anything to be sorry of just yet. She decided against following after him and sat down at the table, her head in her hands and sobbed quietly.

Later during the night, she had moved to the bed and fallen asleep. Joshua had been about to storm into the room like earlier, but when he heard the silence, he carefully opened the door. He saw Caroline asleep on the bed, her face stained with tears. He wanted to go to her and comfort her, but he knew he was the reason for them. She wouldn’t want his company if she thought he was just using her. He wasn’t using her though. He loved her so much. It felt like a knife had tore through his heart when she accused him of just using her. Why couldn’t she realize the truth and just love him back? He thought she had there for a moment, but apparently it had been all for naught. He silently closed the door and left the room.

The next weeks were strained. Caroline couldn’t stand hiding away in her room after the first few days. She came up to the deck and looked out over the ocean. She tried to speak with Joshua, but he would never look at her and kept busy while she was on deck. He didn’t want anything more to do with her. Her heart wrenched in her chest every time she saw him. She did love him and wanted to believe he loved her, but she just didn’t know anymore. After a month had passed, Caroline realized she had a problem. She hadn’t received her flux this month. She was well past when it should have arrived. She paced back and forth in her room trying to quickly refigure the days, but she had been correct. She was going on two weeks late.

She sat down to figure out what this would all mean. Should she tell him and see what he would do or keep it to herself and let him go? This really complicated her whole decision. Her stomach growled in response. She left her room in response to find some breakfast. She went to the kitchen and found some bread and an apple. As she ate, she thought until she had come to a decision. She would keep it to herself. She knew this man

was not one to be tied down and she didn't want him hating her the rest of his life. Yes, she would definitely keep it to herself. As she had made up her mind, Joshua came into the room searching for something to eat. He stopped when he saw her sitting alone at the table.

"Good morning," she said to him. "I have some extra bread here if you'd like that."

"Thank you," he replied and stood across from her to take the bread.

He made to leave, but Caroline motioned for the chair next to him. He looked down at it and then back at her.

"Are you sure? There's no one here to see me take advantage of you," he replied sarcastically.

"Joshua, I'm sorry for a lot of things that have happened since I met you. I'm even sorry I've become such a burden upon you, but know this I am not sorry for meeting you or of what happened between us at the inn. Do you understand?" she asked getting up and walking out of the room.

Joshua stared after her, "Caroline, wait."

She paused, without turning around, "There's nothing else to be said." Then, she walked back to her room in silence, sadness filling every inch of her.

By the next week, she was waking up and running to the chamber pot. Her stomach heaved with every wave the ship crashed through. Joshua walked in to bring her some food and caught her finishing up this morning. She looked up at him and her face had broken out in a sweat. He quickly put the food on the table and got a washcloth and wet it in the basin and wiped her face. Caroline allowed him to do so only because she had no energy to stop him.

"Are you alright? What is wrong?" he asked concerned.

"I think I'm just getting a little seasick is all," Caroline replied.

"But you've been on this ship for a few months now, you haven't gotten sick before," he reasoned.

"Maybe it's just being on the water prolonged and feeling the waves heave up and down," with these words Caroline leaned over once more the pot.

Joshua continued to wipe her neck and face and when she had finished, he lifted her up and placed her in the bed.

"The next land we see we'll stop for a day or two until you're well enough to continue," he replied.

"No, no I will be fine," Caroline said although some solid land sounded good to her.

“No, we will stop. We could all probably use some time on solid ground. Do you think you might want something to nibble on?”

“No,” Caroline said. “I don’t even want to think about food right now.”

“Alright, well you just rest then. We should be reaching land by nightfall,” Joshua said. “I’ll come retrieve you when we arrive.”

Caroline couldn’t argue. She just closed her eyes and fell back to sleep. Joshua rubbed her face once more with the washcloth and then stood to head back up. He shut the door behind him and walked back up the stairs to the deck. A few hours later, Caroline woke up but this time didn’t have to run to the chamber pot. She was actually hungry. She noticed someone had put a fresh plate of food on the table and she went over to inspect and began eating.

Joshua came in shortly after, “We made it ahead of schedule, so now we have time to find a nice inn before nightfall. I’m glad to see you have some appetite now. Maybe it was just a little queasiness.”

“Yes, that must be what it was. A little time on land wouldn’t hurt though,” Caroline said.

“Well, are you ready to go then? Byron will escort you to the inn,” Joshua said.

“Will you not be coming?” she asked.

“Byron will be the perfect gentleman for you. I prefer to sleep on my ship,” he replied.

Then he walked out of the room and Byron appeared at her door, “Are you ready to go mistress?”

“He’s still mad at me I suppose?” Caroline asked.

“I don’t get involved in Captain Joshua’s affairs. I do not know what transpired between the two of you, but you have most definitely put the Captain in a sore mood. He has not had a nice word for the whole crew since we arrived back on the boat from the last town,” Byron commented.

“I’m truly sorry, Byron. I don’t know how I can make amends. Let’s just go on to the inn. Maybe if I’m out of his sights for a few days, he’ll calm down.”

They walked out of the cabin and up to the deck. Then, they walked down the gangplank to the dock. Byron placed his arm out for Caroline to use to steady herself as they walked through the town. When they reached the inn, Byron paid for two rooms and ordered some things to eat for them and they sat at a table. Caroline just picked at her food when it came, but Byron ate his hungrily.

“Joshua told us you weren’t feeling well. Are you still feeling under the weather? Would you like to go on up and lie down?” Byron asked.

“No, I’m fine. I was just thinking,” Caroline replied and brought a bite of food to her mouth.

“Mistress, if I may overstep my boundaries for a moment I’d like to ask you a question,” Byron said.

“No, please. You won’t be overstepping anything,” she replied.

“Are you with child?” he asked.

Caroline stared dumbfounded, “What would make you ask that?”

“I’ve heard you sick in the mornings for the last week and then the rest of the day you seem fine. I also noticed you haven’t had to use any rags for your flux since we’ve been onboard. You should’ve had to have them by now.”

“You’re very perceptive. How did you know the signs?” Caroline asked.

“I have three sisters who have all had plenty of babes. I could tell from a mile away,” he replied smiling.

“You won’t tell Joshua will you? I don’t want him to know,” Caroline pleaded.

“Your secret is safe, but I think the Captain has a right to know. You should tell him.”

“I can’t though. Can’t you see that? I don’t want to tie him down. I don’t want him to hate me and the baby for the rest of his life,” Caroline replied.

“I don’t think he could hate you Miss Caroline. He seems to love you very much and I believe you love him too.”

“I do, but I can’t trust him. How do I know he still isn’t using me for ransom, Byron? How can I trust him when that was what he intended in the beginning?”

“He’s not using you for ransom. He only wrote that letter in the first place to appease the rest of the men. He would never have mailed it. He would never use you like that,” Byron said.

Caroline looked at him trying to decipher everything she just heard. Apparently she was the one who had been foolish and now she had harmed the bond between herself and Joshua.

“I think I will go up and lie down now, Byron. Thank you for keeping my secret,” Caroline said and headed up the stairs to the rooms.

She walked into her room and laid herself across her bed. She put her hands on her stomach as if asking for help from the growing child inside her. Byron knocked on her door a little while later to make sure she was ok and if she needed anything. She leaned up and hugged him and kissed his cheek in gratitude. Joshua walked in on the scene and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion.

“So, that’s what it was all about. You had tired of me and have found someone else to play your mind games on. Is that it? I’m not letting you do the same to my best friend as you’ve done to me these past months,” Joshua fumed.

He walked towards Caroline and intended to slap her across her face and teach her a lesson. Caroline smelled the whiskey on him before he even came close to her. He raised his fist as he reached her, but Byron caught it in his hand.

“You do not want to harm her, Joshua. What you think you saw was a mistake. She was just thanking me for helping her. Nothing more,” Byron said.

“You expect me to believe that? This, this,” Joshua dove towards her as if to strike at her again.

“You will not harm her. Go back to the ship and sleep this mess off,” Byron said.

“Why are you being so protective? She is your little whore now isn’t she?” Joshua asked.

“No, she’s not Joshua. I’m being protective because she’s with child!” Byron yelled.

Joshua stopped and stared at him as if he spoke another language.

“Your child, Joshua. I’m sorry Caroline. He needed to know,” Byron said.

Joshua looked at Caroline and fell to the ground. Tears ran down her face as she watched his drunken state.

“My child?” Joshua asked sobering up quickly.

“Yes, Joshua,” Caroline replied.

He stood himself up and walked to her. Caroline flinched but didn’t move. Byron watched closely.

“Our child?” he asked again.

“Yes,” Caroline said putting her hands on her stomach to protect.

Joshua grabbed her and hugged her tightly, “I’m going to be a father!” He quickly moved her to the bed and sat her down.

“I’m so sorry for those hateful things I just said. I was furiously jealous when I came in and saw your arms around Byron. Please forgive me, darling. Can I get you anything? Anything your heart desires it’s yours,” Joshua said. “Are you hungry? Thirsty? Comfortable?”

“Joshua, I’m fine. I don’t need anything. I was so scared to tell you. I didn’t know how you’d react, whether you’d hate me or what. Please tell me you don’t hate me,” Caroline cried.

“Hate you? How could I hate you? I love you so much. When I thought you were in the arms of another man I was furious. It cut my heart into a million pieces,” he said.

“I would never be in anyone else’s arms but yours, Joshua. I love you too and I was a fool to not trust you.”

“How long have you known?” Joshua asked her placing his hand over hers on her stomach.

“Only a few weeks,” Caroline replied.

“Tomorrow we find a priest and we get married. Then, I take you home to your father to tell him the wonderful news and I jump at your every whim,” Joshua replied.

“Why are you marrying me Joshua?” Caroline asked.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean are you marrying me because of the baby or because you love me?” she asked.

“I’ve been thinking of every way possible these past few weeks I could make you trust me and marry me. Now we have the perfect reason not only for love, but for our child. Our beautiful, wonderful child that you carry inside you,” he replied. “Oh, Caroline, I love you and I want to marry you. Say you’ll be my wife.”

Caroline smiled, tears refilling her eyes, “I’ll marry you.”

“Thank you dear god. Thank you. He kissed Caroline passionately on the lips. He laid her back on the bed and began kissing her furiously.

Caroline murmured something and Joshua sat up, “What’s wrong? Can we not do this with the baby? Are you alright?”

“I’m fine and we can do anything we want, it’s only you’re on my hair,” Caroline replied smiling.

“I’m sorry, my darling.” He stroked her face and they began kissing once again.

After their lovemaking, Joshua propped up on his arm and stared down at his sleeping angel. His eyes roamed over her body and stopped at her still small belly. Soon it would be bulging big with his child inside. He placed his hand over it and felt Caroline’s soft skin and warmth. Caroline opened her eyes and watched him. Then, she moved her hand over his and smiled up at him.