

ELLORA'S CAVE *Legend*

LYLA SINCLAIR



## Captain's Price

Lyla Sinclair

*Captain's Private Journal, May 30, 1790*

My heart pounds hard in my chest as I think of her – the lass awaiting me, naked in my cabin as I commanded. She was discovered masquerading as one of my seamen, yet I am still appalled at myself for demanding such a lewd price for her passage. But when I looked into her eyes – wide, but somehow beckoning – I was filled with a need deeper than any I'd ever known.

For her. For Julianna.

Can I truly touch her and taste her and satisfy my lust on her without taking the maidenhead meant for another? I am a man of impeccable self-control – an asset that has redeemed my family and ensured I'll not become my wayward father. Then what has taken hold of me? Each moment, the urge to go to her and steal away all that rightfully belongs to another man grows more irresistible. I must touch her. I must hold her. I must drive myself into her...

*I must not.*

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Captain's Price

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# *CAPTAIN'S PRICE*

**Lyla Sinclair**

## Chapter One

I stood trembling on the deck at my moment of truth, having no one to blame but myself. After weeks of success in my masquerade—only *one* short week from my destination, I'd done the unthinkable.

I'd acted like a female.

And now Captain Drew Price—who'd taken no notice of me up to this point—stared down at me as though I were some bizarre creature that had flopped up on the deck from the depths of the ocean.

As I attempted to force down the fear threatening to overtake me, I focused on the fact that at this proximity, I could finally see the color of his eyes. At home, I might have been able to create the shade with my paints if I'd mixed blue and green and gray. His eyes were the color of the ocean.

I watched a muscle twitch in his bronzed jaw. His sun-touched chestnut hair blew in the gentle breeze as everyone on the ship went deadly quiet, waiting for his verdict. Onboard, the captain is judge, jury and executioner.

Captain Price ran a tight ship and tolerated no misbehavior of any kind from his men. And what was I? Not truly one of his men, yet not a paying passenger. My bravery suddenly abandoned me and my eyes dropped to his long, lean trousers.

My untimely unveiling had been caused by that clown they called Jeebers—though I felt certain his mother hadn't bestowed that name upon him. He'd sneaked up behind me as I was swabbing the deck and attempted to pull down my breeches. Before I'd had a moment to think, I'd squealed, turned and slapped him across the face. The moment I made contact, I realized my mistake.

This was just one in a long line of pranks from the other seamen, since I was a “new boy”. I’d played my role to perfection through everything, until now...until *this*. I could have hit him with the mop or simply grabbed at my breeches, but no. I’d slapped him.

Afterward, Jeebers had stared at me in shock, holding his palm to his cheek. Everyone on the deck went silent until a voice called out, “He’s a woman!” or something of the sort. The ship’s occupants began stepping closer to examine me, both the seamen and the whores, the latter of whom were part of the cargo being transported to America.

And as one voice after another confirmed the assertion, I watched Captain Drew Price leave the helm and walk toward me with measured steps, his eyebrows lowered, his lips pursed, as though our all-knowing, all-confident captain was giving himself time to decide what to do if the shouters turned out to be correct. When he stopped in front of me and peered into my face, I hoped he couldn’t see my lower lip tremble.

“Boy...remove your shirt,” he commanded after several long seconds.

“I cannot, Captain,” I replied, no longer bothering to change my voice or manner of speech.

I watched his eyes grow stormy as he pulled his sword from his sash and pointed the blade at my chest. An instant later my shirt hung open and the bindings on my breasts dropped away.

Sounds of shock and excitement rippled through the crowd. I grasped the fabric and pulled it together to cover my breasts. I’d never felt so humiliated or so afraid. All my internal organs seemed to quake as I tried not to glance to the right, where my poor little maid Bess stood, also attired in boys’ clothes and surely scared to death of what would befall us.

“You...Maggie, is it?” The captain motioned to one of the older whores standing nearby. “Unbind her hair.”

I forced my eyes back up to his, wondering why the hair was necessary when he’d already bared my breasts. I caught a moment of uncertainty in his gaze and guessed

this could be another play for time. I'd put him in a circumstance he'd never encountered—or possibly even heard of—and he was trying to determine what in the world to do with me...or *to* me.

Maggie made quick work of my hair, removing the cap, unpinning the strands and loosening it until my auburn ringlets fell around my shoulders like a cape.

Another set of exclamations reverberated through the crowd. Weathered old Jeebers, gape-mouthed and wide-eyed, reached toward me and took a strand of my hair in his hand, gazing at it as if it were a handful of Spanish doubloons. He quickly dropped it when he heard the captain's voice.

"Turn this barrel on its side," Captain Price said. I was filled with dread as I watched a couple of men turn the heavy barrel over and secure it with straps. I'd only seen this done once before. And on that day, a sailor was whipped bloody for thieving from one of his mates. Was my act so egregious?

I turned my head slightly so I could see Bess. She was trembling and tears were flooding her eyes. She'd been my maid and companion since we were girls, but because I was the youngest in my family, I'd treated her as the little sister I'd never had. She was completely loyal to me. What if she threw herself down at the captain's feet and begged for mercy for me? I couldn't have that. I'd gotten her into this horrible situation. She needed to go one more week undetected.

I gave her my most steely look and the slightest shake of my head. I knew she understood when she wiped her eyes inconspicuously and turned her head to gaze off into the distance. I prayed she had the strength.

They laid me roughly over the barrel and secured my hands with leather ties. I swallowed and summoned all my courage. The captain leaned over, propping his hands on either side of me. I was surprised by the action, but even more so by my body's reaction to it. He smelled different than the other men, a combination of soap and spice and ocean breeze that caused me to suck in a deep breath and hold it for several seconds before releasing.

The front of his trousers brushed the back of mine, and I had the scandalous urge to push my backside into him. His lips were against my ear and he spoke quietly, for my ears only.

"I suppose you are too idiotic a female to grasp the gravity of what you've done. Do you understand that my men expect me to turn you over to them so they can run their hands through that devil's hair of yours and stick their cocks up your twat?"

I was shocked at the coarse language, but horrified at the idea of those filthy, foul-smelling men laying any part of themselves against me.

"No," I said meekly. "I didn't know." But I did know that rules onboard were quite strict and certain customs adhered to without fail. Was this one of those customs? Tears filled my eyes. I blinked them back until they became a sickly swirl in my gut. If Bess saw me fall apart...

"I assume by the way you speak, you're not simply a whore trying to get free passage."

"No, sir."

He blew out a disgusted breath. This situation would indeed have been simpler if I were a whore.

"There is one other option," he said quietly. "If I clearly mark you as mine, and give the word, my men will accept it. What is your preference?"

I glanced around at the crew. Several were licking their lips as though I were a long-awaited meal. Jeebers panted nearby. I nearly heaved at the thought of his toothless mouth on mine.

Or there was the handsome, sweet-smelling captain, whose nearness had already made me feel —

No. I'd promised myself to another. Another who was the entire reason I'd undertaken this journey. Whatever happened with the captain, I certainly could not enjoy it.



"You," I said simply.

He breathed in deeply. "Are you...*untouched*?"

I thought I knew what he was asking. "I've never been with a man," I said.

"Damn it to hell, woman. The last thing we need on this boat is a bloody virgin."

I heard his sword again, and suddenly my bottom was cold. My breeches were in two pieces at my feet. The sky grew darker, the wind colder on my naked skin...or was it just my imagination?

"Do it, Cap'n!"

"Fuck her and let us 'ave a turn!"

Could there be a more humiliating position for a woman than facedown, bare bummed for the world to see?

Captain Price pushed his pelvis against my buttocks and I was shocked to feel his naked member slide between my thighs. A shiver of excitement passed through me at what was about to happen. No, not excitement. Surely. I was confusing my fear for excitement.

"Act as if you are in pain...or enjoying this, one way or the other," he said into my ear.

His cock glided through my thighs again from behind, and the tip made contact with the nub between my nether lips. I was startled by the sensation. I gasped. Even the slick dampness from my own body was surprising and pleasurable.

He began thrusting, sliding through my lower lips, repeating the motion time after time. A jolt of pleasure shot through me each time he hit that nub.

"Oh...oh!" I cried out before I was aware of what I was doing.

The screams of encouragement from the crowd were soon drowned out by the sound of blood rushing past my ears and a series of grunts from the captain. I realized everyone else thought he was inside me.

His hands grasped my bare hips, his fingers digging into my skin as I felt the pressure build between my thighs. A part of me didn't want this to end. In fact, that part of me wanted him to enter my most important and holiest of places and pound me like I'd seen the whores on the ship get pounded every day since we set sail. I'd gotten quite an education in the previous weeks.

I cried out again, in pain from the fingers that were surely digging holes in my skin and in pleasure from his appendage, which was bringing me to the brink of...something...

The pressure built inside me until it was like a roar, a wild animal calling for its meal...or its mate. I was about to burst. I was about to die. And it was magnificent! My hips began undulating and I realized my body was trying to align itself to his for entry. I was too desperate to be shocked at myself. I wanted more.

"Storm! Cap'n, storm!" I heard someone yell. And I became aware of rain hitting my back. A crash of thunder shook the barrel. The captain was suddenly away from me and calling out orders to his men. I suppose I should have been afraid of a storm at sea, but in that moment, all I felt was abandonment and disappointment.

Two of the whores kindly untied me. One of them wrapped me in a shawl.

"James!" the captain called to his first mate. "Take the woman to my cabin and tie her to my bedpost."

He turned to Bess. "And *boy*," he said to her with one raised eyebrow. "You'd best go down and wait in the cabin next to mine." Bess looked as if she would faint, but hurried to follow as I was led below by the first mate.

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour or so after the storm died down, the door opened and the captain strode in with Bess trailing behind. Still dressed as a boy, she kept her eyes glued to the floor as if not looking at the captain would make her invisible. She stood quietly near the door.

Captain Price didn't spare her a glance. His eyes were intent on me as he stopped next to the bed, legs splayed, arms crossed over his chest.

"What's your name?"

"Julianna Bur —"

"It's time you explain yourself," he interrupted, my full name apparently of no consequence to him.

"I needed to get to Portsmouth. I didn't have money for passage and didn't think I could pretend to be a...um..."

"Whore?"

"Yes."

"But you thought you could pass yourself off as a *boy*?" He motioned toward my partially covered body as though it was a ridiculous idea.

"My plan was successful until today," I said defensively. "I chose the *Redemption* — which is a ludicrous name for this ship, by the way — because I thought the crew would be too distracted by the more *obvious* women to notice a —"

"Beautiful woman dressed in boys' clothes," he finished for me.

I wasn't sure how to respond to that. It was silly to feel flattered by his description, under the circumstances, but as he stared blatantly at me, I felt a flush coming on. "I was careful," I replied weakly.

The captain shook his head as though I were the most foolish female he'd ever laid eyes on, which only confirmed my feelings about myself at the moment. But then I noticed his gaze was riveted to the front of my body, where I was holding the shawl together over my breasts with my unbound hand. Heat coursed through me at the thought of how nearly naked I was on his bed.

He reached down and pulled my hand away, lifting it toward him. As he examined it, surely noting the redness it had developed over the past few weeks, embarrassment washed over me. I realized I'd rather he'd been admiring my breasts.

When I tried to pull away, he held fast and turned my hand palm up. He rubbed a thumb over one of the blisters. I winced. He reached into a drawer in his writing desk and pulled out a dagger, using it to cut the bindings off my other wrist.

"Ladies do not do sailors' work on my ship," he said, frowning at my hand.

"Oh, I'm not a lady —"

"You're certainly no barmaid. You speak as if you were raised at court."

That was an obvious exaggeration, since I'd been raised in the country, but it still pleased me for some silly reason. "My father has been fortunate in business pursuits. He hired tutors. He wanted to be sure I was fit for..."

A fresh anger overtook me at my father's lack of care for my wishes. My only purpose as his daughter was to be used as a bargaining chip. Nobles sometimes find their coffers low and are forever greedy. A comely daughter with a nice dowry could buy a man a baron or an earl, or maybe even a marquis, along with a whole new status for the family...if that father had no care for his daughter's hopes, dreams or loves.

Captain Price watched me for a moment, but when I didn't finish my explanation, he let the subject drop and released my hand. "Regardless, you can't be allowed to stow away on my ship."

"I didn't stow away! I've worked hard!" I said angrily. I wasn't sure if the anger was directed at him or at my father for putting me in a situation in which I felt I had to flee instead of waiting patiently for my intended, as I'd planned to do.

"Well, you certainly can't work side-by-side with the men now," he said. "And we're at least a week away from port."

"Perhaps I can work in the galley?" I thought it was a stroke of genius. The cook was an old man, surely not a threat to my virginity.

"My crew is one of the best at sea, but they are also some of the most superstitious seamen I've ever known. The cook is the worst of the lot."

"I don't understand what that has to do with —"

"They believe a woman on a ship is bad luck."

"But..." I tilted my head toward the cabin door, indicating the thirty-some-odd women on the other side of it.

"Whores don't count, of course."

"Oh, of course," I said sarcastically. Funny how men constantly made and changed the rules to their advantage.

"And why is it so important that you get to Portsmouth?" the captain asked.

"Jeffrey is there," I said. "He was going to send for me after he made his fortune."

"And what sort of man would allow his beloved to travel unescorted across the ocean?"

"It's not his fault," I cried. "We've loved each other since we were children, but my father had other plans for me. He was insisting I marry to his advantage soon. Jeffrey..." I let my voice trail off because I noticed that the captain's jaw tightened when I mentioned my intended.

Captain Price's eyes traveled slowly down the length of my body, stopping at my shockingly bare thighs.

"You'll work off the remainder of your fare here in my cabin." His voice was hard, as though he were talking to an unruly sailor. "It's been a long trip. I could use some female entertainment."

"But surely you don't mean—"

"You'll remain unclothed in my cabin and entertain me in any way I see fit." He must have noted the panicked look in my eyes. "I can take anything but your maidenhead. *That* you can save for your undeserving Jeffrey."

"But I can't—"

"Unless you'd rather your companion take your place." He turned and gestured toward Bess.

"But he's a boy," I said.

“He’s as much a boy as you are. Your maid, I’d wager. So will it be you or her?”

I noticed a sudden quickening of Bess’ breathing. She smiled shyly. “Anything for you, miss. I’ll take your place here and everything will be set to rights.”

The captain smiled at her enticingly and as he did, I was overcome by such anger at Bess that I wanted to pull her hair from her head. Never had I been violent toward her and I should have been grateful for such loyalty. Why did I feel as if she were trying to steal something away from me?

“No! She’s little more than a child,” I said, telling myself that protecting Bess was my only motivation. She was three years younger than I, just barely eighteen.

“We have an agreement, then,” the captain said. “You entertain me in whatever ways I require and your passage and hers will be considered paid in full...and I won’t throw either of you overboard.”

Bess gasped at this, but I saw the mischievous gleam in his eye and knew he was teasing.

And my heart skipped a beat.

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*Captain’s Private Journal, May 30, 1790*

As I sit here, just a few feet away, I must say my bed has never looked lovelier. No linen has ever been woven—even from the elaborate silks of the East—that is more luxuriant than my current bedcover. The one that lies dozing on her stomach, her face turned toward me, her elegant auburn hair splayed out like a fan of ringlets.

I found her onboard today masquerading as a seaman and was forced to make a show of the situation for the men’s benefit. I can’t ever afford to appear soft with this lot. Some of the best seamen can often be the most unruly, in my experience.

But, in truth, there were many ways I could have rectified the situation. I *chose* that one. The one that allowed me to bury my face in her radiant hair and press my cock against her lovely round bum and slide into her sweet warmth.

In truth, I knew the moment my eyes met hers how badly I wanted her. Before the clothes were removed, before her hair was let down. She has an allure that is all her own, beyond the window dressing necessary for most females.

In those few seconds I told myself the action was necessary, considering her public unveiling, and that I had every right to satisfy my lust on this lying wench.

However, watching her now in innocent slumber, I'm remorseful for my actions. I believe that, indeed, she is naïve—and foolhardy—enough to set off on this voyage to be with her “true love”. A ridiculous thing, perhaps, but when faced with the choices she claimed to have had, I would have done the same.

Fathers make poor parents, in my experience. Selfish, uncaring and disregarding of any interests save their own.

So now I'm in the odd predicament of needing to protect my stowaway, and yet the temptation to run my hands through those lovely locks and place my mouth on her burgundy lips is nearly overwhelming.

When I entered my cabin after the storm, I certainly didn't plan to make such a lewd bargain with her, yet as I stared down at her wide eyes and sumptuous body, my desire—no, my raw lust—completely overwhelmed my good intentions.

Perhaps when we get to port, I should ask this Jeffrey character how it feels to have a woman love you to the extent that she puts her own person in jeopardy. I should like to know that feeling.

Bah! I've obviously been at sea too long if the sight of a comely chit can reduce me to such romantic drivel.

## **Chapter Two**

I was surprised to awaken and realize I'd slept like a top. The hard labor I'd been at for three weeks was definitely more than I was accustomed to. In fact, I only awakened because of the knock on my door. I slipped under the bed blankets and called out for the knocker—hopefully Bess—to enter.

It turned out to be the cook, directing several of the new boys as they hauled in a bathtub and buckets of water—no doubt from one of the rain barrels, freshly filled from the storm. I pulled the covers up to my chin and watched in embarrassment as my former shipmates prepared a bath for me. They kept their gazes averted, except for an occasional curious, wide-eyed glance.

“Enjoy,” the cook said caustically as they walked out the door.

His words melted away as soon as I looked back at the tub and saw the steam rising from it. A bath! How I'd longed for a bath! I scrambled off the bed and soon was soaking in the tub.

I stayed in—washing, relaxing, then washing some more—until the water was tepid and I felt the grime of the past few weeks was finally off my skin. A towel and dressing gown had been left on a nearby chair, so I quickly made use of them then snuggled into the captain's warm bed.

Unseemly as this was, there wasn't much else I could do in my current situation. He was the captain. I was his prisoner. Or we'd made a bargain, depending on how one looked at it.

As I lay there, I wondered what he would expect of me. I thought of the actions I'd witnessed between the whores and seamen and, as disgusting as it had been to watch the ill-kempt couples molesting one another, the idea of doing those same things with the captain was...



My body grew as hot as if I'd stepped into a fresh bath again. Obviously my time onboard had begun to pull at the threads of my moral fiber. I quickly replaced the captain with Jeffrey in my mind, but I couldn't imagine having the wild physical encounters with Jeffrey that were typical on this ship.

I could, however, imagine them with the captain.

Choosing this ship had been a mistake. I hadn't been able to remain in disguise, I'd totally corrupted myself and I was having impure thoughts about a man who'd had the audacity to bare my body to a ship full of people.

And now I was to "entertain" him. What would Jeffrey say if he knew? Surely I could never tell him, but he'd been my best friend for as long as I could remember. How could I lie?

The door opened. My heart quickened as Captain Price entered. Long, lean yet broad-shouldered. I couldn't swallow.

When he saw me, his expression was that of surprise. Not at seeing me, surely. He was the one who ordered me to stay here. He just stood and stared at me for several long moments until I couldn't bear the tension any longer.

I cleared my throat and forced myself to swallow.

"Does something surprise you?" I asked.

His eyes held a dreamlike quality. I wished I were privy to his thoughts. "Yes, it's just that you're incre—" He stopped in mid-sentence, straightened and regained his captain's visage. "You're incredibly covered, considering the bargain we made."

"I was wet and chilled from bathing. The dressing gown was left next to the towel. I assumed I was allowed to use it."

"While I was out," he said. "But now I'm here."

"Please, Captain, I feel quite uncomfortable lounging about your cabin with nothing on."

"Innocent that you are," he said, as if he were gauging my true innocence as we spoke.

"I'd hardly call myself innocent now, after everything I've witnessed aboard your ship."

"You don't approve."

"How could I approve? It's like Sodom and Gomorrah. And after my time onboard, I no longer even find it shocking to go below and see your crew and the...*women*...fornicating."

"So you are a woman of the world now, however unintentional. Unshockable."

"Quite nearly so, I should think." I had no idea I was strolling right into his trap.

"Let's put that to the test then. Remove the gown and lie back on the bed."

"But I..." I tried to form words of protest, but nothing more came to mind.

"I believe we struck a bargain, Miss Julianna. Unless you'd like me to call your maid..."

"She's practically a child!"

"Yet I didn't get the impression she was entirely unwilling to take your place. I suppose we can find out." He moved toward the door.

"No!" I nearly shouted. I told myself I was simply passionate about protecting Bess, but in truth there was another kind of passion that had overwhelmed me just before I called out. I didn't want to name it because to do so would mean I was having more yearnings that were disloyal to Jeffrey. Yet, deep down, I certainly knew jealousy when I felt it.

His hand still on the doorknob, he stopped and turned toward me. He watched me expectantly.

Slowly, I stood and pulled the gown off my shoulders. I took a deep breath for courage, dropped it to the floor and scrambled onto the bed and under the blanket.

He chuckled as he walked over and plucked the blanket off me, tossing it onto the floor.

I felt like a trapped animal. My heart raced. My chest rose and fell as quickly as if I'd run a race. I tried to lift my eyes to meet his but they only made it as far as his chest, which, oddly, was heaving like mine.

"Tell me, Julianna," he said as he rested a knee on the bed. "How did you feel when you saw what the men and women were doing together on this ship?"

"I told you. I thought—"

"I know what you thought. How did you *feel*?" He sat down on the bed next to my bare thigh. My innards began to quake with fear...or perhaps excitement.

"I'm not sure what you mean," I replied. And I truly wasn't.

"I mean," he touched the heel of my foot with one finger then allowed the digit to slither up the inside of my leg to my knee. "Did you have any *needs*?"

I stared at him blankly, still not knowing what he was getting at.

"Did you ever have the need to touch yourself...there?" He nodded toward the deep auburn patch of curls between the tops of my thighs. "To give yourself pleasure?"

I finally understood. "Certainly not! I would never do such a thing!" I sat up and hugged my knees, trying to feel more protected from his blatant scrutiny.

"Never?"

As his sea-swept gaze bore into me, I had the insane need to blurt out the truth. "Once...when I was very young. My stepmother caught me. She tied my hands every time I went to bed for a fortnight afterward. It's a vile, evil thing to do...touching oneself."

"According to your stepmother."

"Yes."

He caressed the skin on my arm with the backs of his fingers then moved his hand down to my thigh again.

"There's certainly nothing vile about you," he said, his deep ocean eyes gazing into mine.

My heart lurched and I struggled to understand what it meant that I was so susceptible to his charms.

"Lie back."

I followed his instructions but my body was as tense as a deer in a hunter's sights.

"Spread your legs for me," he quietly commanded.

I swallowed hard then slid my heels a few inches away from each other.

He rewarded me with a slow kiss to the inside of each ankle. A hot shiver shot through my body.

"Now...place a finger on the nub between your nether lips."

"But it's a sin," I said, wishing to heaven it wasn't.

"Only on dry land," he replied. "On my ship, it's downright sacred."

I didn't believe him for a second, but I had made a bargain. As I moved to do his bidding, he kissed his way up from ankle to knee. When my finger connected with the little nub, a jolt hit me so hard, my leg muscles twitched involuntarily under his lips. I stifled a sigh, but it came out as a squeal deep in my throat.

"Let it out, Julianna. Let me hear your pleasure."

He sucked at the skin just above my knee. I gasped.

"Now dip your finger into the recess below the nub and see if it's damp."

When I moved my finger down, I encountered a veritable puddle of liquid. "It *is* wet! How did you know?" I exclaimed.

He chuckled and lapped at my inner thigh with his tongue. I moaned and wiggled. "It's a common reaction when a woman feels desire," he said.

*Desire! No!* I shut my eyes and tried to picture my Jeffrey. He wouldn't appear. "I can't feel desire for you. You are not my intended!" I said.

"Desire doesn't always follow the rules, my little stowaway."

"I wasn't a stowaway. I worked —"

He sank his teeth into the front of my thigh. My argument was cut short by my groan and I was reminded of the pleasure-pain I'd felt on deck when his fingers dug into my hips. "Keep working," he said as I gladly went back to sliding my finger around on my nub. But this time, the sensations were so much more powerful because of the wetness of my finger. My traitorous digit dipped inside me once again and returned to making circles between my eager nether lips.

Suddenly he placed his mouth at the top of my thigh, a whisper away from my hand, and sucked forcefully on the skin there. The sensations collided and my body began to convulse. I lost all control of my actions as I shuddered more violently than when I was sick with the chills. The pleasure was so intense, I yelled, "Ooooooh!" and nearly fainted.

When I came back to myself, I realized I had one hand between my legs and the other wound into his hair.

I released both simultaneously, shocked that I'd reacted as a common whore. As the captain removed his lips from my thigh, shame overwhelmed me.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, unsure as to whether I was apologizing to the captain for pulling his hair or to Jeffrey for being so unfaithful in my desires. I wanted to hide myself away in the darkest corner of the hold and sleep with the rats where I belonged. Then another thought came crashing through me. "You won't tell anyone about this, will you?"

He watched me thoughtfully for a moment. "What happens in the captain's bed remains here," he replied. He kissed the auburn mound between my thighs, causing me to gasp. "You smell heavenly," he said. "But that's a delicacy for another time...and I need to go up on deck and make sure Henry isn't steering us into a reef."

I didn't know if there were any reefs to steer into, but I had learned in my time onboard that the captain trusted his helmsman completely. I felt sure he was trying to

get away from me. He went over to his desk, picked up some sort of book and a quill, and left the cabin.

I know I should have been grateful he hadn't required more of me, but instead I was overcome by a sense of loneliness.

Loneliness for Jeffrey, of course. It had to be. I vowed not to let my baser desires get the better of me again. Even if I had agreed to lend the captain the use of my body, I was not a part of this ship of sin. I could not be. My mind and heart would stay pure and I would think only of Jeffrey and our reunion.

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*Captain's Private Journal, May 31, 1790*

I'm sitting at the galley table while George, our cook, is taking his midafternoon rest. It was the only place I could think to go under the circumstances.

I'm still holding my little stowaway—or "work away" as I'm sure she'd prefer it—in my cabin, which is the only place I can store her safely from my lecherous men. However, I didn't consider who would protect her from their lecherous captain.

From the moment I looked into her immense brown eyes, I've been waging a battle between the part of me that wants to protect her and the part that demands I ravish her.

I keep telling myself I'm in control as I always am. Complete control is what my men expect of me, but more importantly, it is what I must have for myself. It's the one thing I've clung to that ensures I will never turn into *him*.

I like to think of myself as a self-made man but, in truth, I know I'm a John Price-made man. In his own perverse way, my father is responsible for my success, with his whoring and gambling and cuckolding that drove our family to ruin.

So, because of him, my decisions have always been simple. I ask myself, "What would my father do?" Then I do the precise opposite.

And what would my father do now?

He would seduce the woman in my cabin, and take her maidenhead with no thought as to how it would affect her life, with no thought of the man awaiting her.

Therefore, it is clear what I should do. And yet I feel compelled to go to her again. I need to see her. I need to touch her.

Can I walk this fine line? Can I find a way to quench my thirst for her without taking that which she holds so dear?

Of course I can. I am a man who is always, always in control.

## Chapter Three

I awoke late after having trouble going to sleep the night before. The captain never returned to our—or should I say *his*—cabin, prompting much speculation on my part as to where he could be. The waters seemed calm, the ship steady. I didn't see why he would be needed on deck.

But there were always the whores. Never mind that I hadn't seen the captain so much as look at one of them twice since we'd been on ship. I still felt the green-eyed snake slither through me and settle in my belly at the thought of the many willing women onboard.

I knew how lustful men were from my stepmother's ravings and my time on the ship. The captain certainly seemed to find me alluring, yet he hadn't satisfied his lust on me. Did he decide to go off and find more experienced company who could better finish the job? Anger overtook me at the thought.

Then I realized how ridiculous it was to crave a ravishing by the captain after risking my life to get to Jeffrey. What did this all mean?

*Sins of the flesh.* I should have steered clear of this unholy ship.

When the door finally opened, my heart jumped. The captain entered, hair damp, as though he'd just washed himself. But much more shocking was the fact that he was scandalously naked from the waist up. Or perhaps it wasn't the bareness of his chest that was so scandalous but the incredible virility that appeared to be stored within it. Water droplets from his hair traced a path from his wide shoulders, down his muscled chest to his slim waist. Oddly, I found his nipples every bit as fascinating as the men onboard seemed to find those of the whores.

When he came over to me, the need to reach up and run my palms over his taut, tanned skin was nearly overwhelming.



But as I tried to keep my hands in check, he reached down and plucked one from my lap. "Did you use the ointment I sent in to you?" he asked as he examined it.

"Yes, thank you," I replied. "Bess insisted on putting it on me herself."

"See, the redness is gone already." He looked quite pleased with the healing progress. "Keep using it and you'll be as good as new in a week or two." A cloud descended over his features. "Of course, you can take it with you when you leave the ship."

"Thank you," I said again, wondering if he felt the same dismay as I did at the idea that in a few days we'd reach port and never see each other again. Surely not. It was a silly female emotion, probably caused by the loneliness of being kept in this cabin all day.

I raised my head to meet his gaze. He seemed to be staring through my body, as if deep in thought. Then he came back to himself and grasped the blanket in one fist. Our gazes met. I didn't look away in embarrassed innocence as I should have. I stared at him openly, hungrily.

"You want more, don't you, Julianna?" he asked huskily as he inched the blanket off my nude body.

I didn't know what to say. Admitting my desires out loud seemed even more sinful than feeling them privately. "More?" I repeated innocently as the blanket slipped from my grasp.

He chuckled at my obvious pretense, but played along. "More pleasure. More of what you felt yesterday. When your fingers were between your nether lips..." He watched my face for a response.

I tried to remain still and passive, but his words caressed me like a warm hand.

"And on deck, when my cock was between your wet folds..."

I gasped...or whimpered, I'm not sure which, but it was enough to tell him what he needed to know.

In an instant he was sitting on the bed next to me, his clothed hip pressed against my naked one, his lips enveloping mine, his chest pushed against my breasts. I embraced him and held him tightly, and it was as if we'd done this a hundred times before, yet every contact was new and exhilarating.

As he kissed me, his hand moved to my breast and traced a finger over one, then the other. Suddenly he released my mouth and placed his lips on my breast, his hand squeezing it, his tongue toying with the tip. He began to suck and I felt the pull of desire from my breast to the nub between my nether lips. I squirmed and moaned, bucking my hips upward.

He released me and sat up, staring at me with that mysterious look again, stroking the hair at my temple.

"I need to feel my body against yours, Julianna."

"I know," I whispered, feeling the same desperate need.

He removed the remainder of his clothing and lay nearly atop me, but just to the side. I stole a glance at his cock against my thigh and it both tempted and frightened me. I'd learned much more clearly what men used those appendages for since I'd boarded this ship. But now I finally understood why the women would allow such contact and sometimes even seemed to enjoy it.

The captain caressed my hair as he kissed me again. Softly, slowly, torturously...

I groaned and ran my fingers through his hair, pulling him harder against me until his kissed strengthened. Yes, this was what I wanted, his tongue pushing against mine, his lips crushing my head into his pillow by the force of their passion.

But it wasn't all I wanted. I wanted him to take me. To force himself on me so I could feel the pleasure of his body in mine without guilt. It would be he who broke his promise, after all. If he simply moved over me and plunged himself within, I would be helpless to refuse.

At the thought of him inside me, my hips undulated of their own accord, just as they had on deck. He placed his thigh between mine and I ground myself upon it,

seeking release. I was driven mad by contact that brought me to the brink of ultimate pleasure time after time.

"Please," I finally begged, my pride and morals abandoning me completely.  
"Please...I need —"

"Shhh," he replied. "I know."

He reached down and parted my nether lips, pressing his thigh more fully against the nub inside. As he pushed against me, I felt the muscle in the top of his thigh tighten and cause the most fabulous shock. I began thrusting wildly against him as he pressed into me until my body shuddered its way to release.

I lay there next to him, exhausted and relaxed. He made no further move, except to wind his finger into one of my ringlets. I was disappointed that he hadn't chosen to take me, regardless of our agreement. Was I not tempting enough?

I put the thought out of my mind and allowed other musings to enter. The few times I'd been with the captain, I'd learned a great deal about my own body and its responses to his touch and my own. I was curious about one location in particular.

"Captain?"

"I think it's more appropriate that you call me Drew, under the circumstances," he replied.

"Well...Drew?" That instantly caused the situation to feel more intimate. No longer was it just a necessary bargain with the captain of the ship. It was more like an afternoon spent with a lover. I forced my thoughts back to my question.  
"That...place..."

"What place?"

"I don't know what to call it." I glanced downward.

He smiled knowingly. "This place?" he asked as he pressed a finger between my nether lips. The nub jumped involuntarily.

"Yes," I answered breathlessly.

His expression turned mischievous, even though he feigned seriousness.

"The French call it a *suclette*," he said, pronouncing it with a false French accent as *soo-klet*.

"I had a tutor. I learned French and I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, your tutor would hardly teach you something like that, would he?"

"No, but still. It doesn't really sound like French. What is the etymology?"

"Let me show you," he said. Then he slid down between my thighs, pulled my lower lips apart, placed his lips on me and suckled.

"Ooooooh, oh my!" I cried. Not even his most pleasurable ministrations had prepared me for the feel of his lips there, on my *suclette*. Yes, it all made sense now, even though I was still sure the word wasn't French.

Then I realized that if touching myself was wrong, allowing a man to put his mouth there must be a mortal sin.

"Stop," I said, pushing on the top of his head. "This can't be right!"

He lifted his gaze until it met mine. The twin seas in his eyes were lighter than usual, reminding me of when the sun shone down on the water and I thought I could see through nearly to the bottom. He seemed so young and full of fun. So different than the controlled Captain Price on deck.

"Hmmm...that wasn't right, you say?"

I shook my head seriously, fending off the desire to beg him to continue.

"Well, then, how about this," he asked. He lowered his head and spread me open even wider. The most glorious sensation began to snake around inside my nether lips, encircling my *suclette*, relaxing and tensing me simultaneously. It soon became clear that his warm, wet tongue was bringing me such pleasure, but this time I couldn't bear to stop him. I melted into the feeling, digging my fingers into his bedclothes as he swirled around and around.

Soon he was suckling again and I found myself raising my hips toward him for more. My hands found his hair. My fingers wound through it and clutched two fistfuls. His tongue went round and round again, more forcefully than the last time. "Yes!" I cried, pulling harder at his hair. I was dying for more of these incredible sensations.

He groaned and I thought I'd hurt him, but when he suddenly moved up my body, it was naked desire I saw in his eyes. They'd gone darker now, but I had only a moment to look into them before he kissed me and my eyes fell closed.

I tasted my own juices on his tongue as his hand squeezed my breast. He was half on the bed, half on top of me once more. I yearned for his body to cover mine and take me. Every bit of me.

"Julianna..." he murmured between kisses as his finger snaked downward and slipped between my lower lips.

"Yes," I whispered again as I thrust my hips upward. "Yes."

"Julianna..." His finger slid over my *suclette* and traced the rim of the recess below it, sending shockwaves throughout my body. It was too much. I began to shake, my thighs squeezed together, trapping his hand where it was. He circled the tip of his finger just inside me over and over again as I moaned and shuddered to my release.

It took me several seconds—perhaps minutes—to open my eyes. I was so relaxed I felt I was in a dream, but when I did open them, I found him staring at me with a shocked expression.

"I nearly forgot you were a virgin," he said breathlessly. "If I hadn't put my finger on you, I might have..."

My beautiful dream vanished as his words pulled me back into reality. Jeffrey. The reason I'd undertaken this mad, dangerous adventure. My true love for as long as I could remember.

I'd completely forgotten him in the arms of Captain Drew Price.

He quickly got off the bed and began to dress. The heat we'd created left with him and my skin felt chilled. The set of his jaw told me he was angry. At me? At himself? Or simply at our circumstances? I wasn't sure.

I pulled the blanket over myself and thought again about Jeffrey. Since I'd been inhabiting the captain's cabin, I'd had trouble conjuring up Jeffrey's face in my mind. Perhaps my parents were right and I would have adjusted to whatever man they chose for me and learned to care for him. After all, I'd already experienced ecstasy more than once in the arms of this virtual stranger.

But no. I'd been introduced to many men. My parents had seen to that. And only two had ever made me feel anything at all. Jeffrey, my childhood friend, and Captain Drew Price, my captor and seducer. And truth be told, my body had taken notice of Captain Price long before I was exposed as a fraud, each time I'd caught a glimpse of him at the helm. Standing tall and confident, his shoulders broad, his buttocks round and tight...

I shook my head to rid them of the sinful lust I felt for him. Desire of the flesh was not love. My stepmother had made that clear enough when she accused me of desiring Jeffrey in that way, but I knew I truly cared for Jeffrey in my heart. In fact, I had little physical need for him other than to be near him and receive an occasional chaste kiss. Desire was a sin. Desire was Satan himself. Desire was to be avoided.

Yet, as the captain reached for the door handle, the devil inside me battled to call out to him, "Come back and finish what you started!"

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain's Private Journal, June 1, 1790*

I don't know what's come over me. I feel bewitched, although, unlike my crew, I don't believe in such nonsense. Or at least, I didn't until I became mesmerized by this wanton little virgin.

I certainly feel as if I'm under her spell. And I'm afraid that no matter where I decide to be, I will wind up in her presence, and no matter what I decide to do, I'll...

I don't wish to finish the sentence because I shudder to think what I may be capable of with her. What nearly happened today was unthinkable to me. I almost lost all control. In her arms, I forgot she belonged to another. I forgot she was a virgin. I forgot I had decided she should remain that way. It was as if I was possessed by another. By the devil himself.

Or by my father.

Has his blood running through my veins finally overtaken me, body and mind? Am I more his son than I ever chose to believe?

Each time I go to my cabin, there she is, the temptress, her hair the color of a fiery sunset, her eyes wide with innocence, yet calling me to her. I feel one moment ecstatic to be in her presence, and the next angry at her for having promised her life to another.

But most of all, I have a hungry, aching need for her that I've never experienced before, not even as a randy, untried youth. I tell myself it is simply the fact that I've forbade myself from having her that makes her so alluring, but I know it is not so. I know with every fiber of my being that I want her for mine and I cannot have her.

Or can I? She responds to my touch. She wants more. She is not married to this young scoundrel who awaits her, not even formally betrothed. In fact, she's attempting to do this thing without her parents' permission, marrying below her station, from what I've gathered.

Would it be so wrong to seduce her away from thoughts of this young man? I am titled, after all. And regardless, I could certainly give her a better life than a boy off to seek his fortune.

But I am so much more worldly than she. That would be an unfair advantage. If I seduced her away from him, would she grow to love me as much as she claims to love him, or would she weep for him and cry out his name in the night and curse me for callously taking advantage of her innocence?

I want her more than I've ever wanted anything, but do I want her more than I want her own happiness?



## **Chapter Four**

The captain spent another night away from me. I waited for him, hoping he would return, wishing he would take me in his arms and...what?

I must have come down with some sort of shipboard fever. I was obviously possessed by an evil force, pushing me in the wrong direction, away from true love, toward lust and sin.

Finally I went to sleep, but not before determining that I would dream of my Jeffrey and see his sweet face again. However, once I drifted off, Jeffrey quickly turned into Captain Price, who began doing things to me that I could never imagine my Jeffrey doing.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of the captain coming in. Emerald green fabric was draped over one of his arms, so I sat up and rubbed my eyes to see it more clearly.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes," I answered, remembering how he'd come to me in my dreams, his mouth on my breast, his hand between my thighs... "No," I corrected when I remembered he'd usurped poor Jeffrey.

He raised an eyebrow but didn't ask for further explanation. "Perhaps you've spent too much time inside," he said. "It's a beautiful day. I'll take you for a stroll on the deck. Would you like that?"

A stroll on the deck sounded wonderful. Perhaps the ocean breeze could blow away some of this strange cabin fever that had overtaken me. Perhaps breathing in the fresh air could help me think clearly again.

"I would love to," I answered, then remembered my predicament. "But I have no decent clothes."

He laid the fabric out on the bed and I realized it was a lovely green dress in the latest fashion. "Where did you get that?" I asked, as I ran my fingers over the rich fabric.

"Remember Maggie? It seems she's a head for business. She managed to save—or at least obtain somehow—enough money to invest in a few dresses from a seamstress in London. She's made a deal with her and plans to open her own shop in America. Imported clothes are the preference among those who can afford it."

"Maggie? Truly?" Perhaps I'd misjudged some of the women onboard, assuming they were all stupid and incapable of forethought. Maggie's plan was obviously better designed than mine.

"Yes, she has quite a lovely collection in her trunks, but I thought this one would become you."

He'd taken time to choose a dress for me? My heart beat faster and I was torn between gratitude and confusion. The man who'd demanded I remain naked in his cabin, then lured me into sinful fornication—or nearly so—was now taking care in the clothing of my body?

I looked longingly at the dress. "But I have no undergarments," I said.

"I know." He smiled rakishly. "Now put it on and let's go for a walk."

I refused at first but the captain waited patiently, surely knowing he'd have his way in the end. Besides, I did so want to go up on deck.

Once there, I was rewarded by the warm sun on my face and a perfect sea breeze. I stood next to him looking out at the horizon and, for a moment, it felt as if all were as it should be. This was the farthest away from home and family I'd ever been, yet I felt safe there with him.

"I suppose we're a long way from England now," I said.

"Does that make you unhappy or glad?" he asked.

I looked up into his face and saw genuine interest in my answer. Suddenly, it was important to me that he understood.

"Both, I suppose. I miss people I knew...the life I knew. I miss my father."

Captain Price looked surprised. "I thought you were running from your father?"

"No, not from *him* exactly. From the life he had planned for me. There was a time when he was quite good to me. He was the sun and the moon, especially after my mother died."

"And you miss that time?"

"I miss it dreadfully. When I was a little girl I was his princess, his shadow. He let me follow him everywhere. He taught me to ride, to swim, even to shoot his pistol."

"And what happened between you?"

"I grew up. One day my stepmother said I needed to start acting like a young lady, and from then on my days were filled with embroidery and music lessons and learning French." I sighed at the loss. "Then people began commenting on my appearance and my father got the idea that he could purchase a son-in-law from the aristocracy. The one thing he wanted for his legacy that he couldn't earn himself."

"So he planned to sell you for a title."

"And no matter how many people remind me it is the way of the world, I know in my heart it's wrong. I am not property. And yet I still wish I could have my father's blessing and make him happy and proud." My eyes filled, but I opened them wide to let the breeze blow them dry. "*Still.*"

"I understand." He swept his finger gently across my face to remove a ringlet that had blown over my eyes.

"You're not a woman," I said accusingly. "What do you understand?"

"I understand what it's like to have mixed feelings about one's father." Sadness swept over his features, taking me by surprise.

"And did yours try to sell you off for a title?" I teased, hoping to lighten his mood again.

"No," he replied. "He had the title. He destroyed our family. Threw away all the security we had by birthright. All spent on mistresses and gambling while his family sank into poverty."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," I said. I'd never imagined the captain having a childhood...or parents.

"But there was a time I thought I was the luckiest lad I knew. All the other boys had boring, dreary fathers who were all business. Mine was full of fun and laughter...I was too young to realize then that it was the drink controlling him and he was naught but a clown to everyone else."

I understood his loss so fully that I wanted to express it somehow to him. "Captain?" I began. After being part of the crew for weeks, it was natural to revert back to his title on deck.

He placed two fingers on my lips. "Please call me Drew," he said softly. "And let's not exchange pity. Let it be enough that we understand one another."

This was sensible to me because if I didn't want pity—and I didn't—then he certainly didn't want to suffer through it either. "We understand," I said with a nod of assurance.

"And as for practicalities, I've managed to earn back most of the fortune my father lost." He looked me squarely in the face as though he were trying to glean some important information from me, but I was at a loss as to what he wanted.

"That's quite an accomplishment," I replied, but he didn't seem satisfied with my response. Then another thought occurred to me. "Is that why you named the ship *Redemption*? Because of your father?" I asked.

He took in a quick breath as though I'd surprised him. "Yes," he replied. "That is exactly the reason."

I'd never had a man look at me as if I were a revelation, but that was the feeling I experienced as he tilted his head slightly and stared into my eyes for an extra moment. Warmth spread from my chest up my neck to my face, and I hoped I wasn't blushing. He reached up and pushed the hair back from my face, his hot hand resting on my cheek.

When I could stand it no more, I averted me eyes. Then he placed my hand on his arm and took me for a little stroll around deck.

Of course, I couldn't help but steal glances at his profile. I envisioned my lips on his ear, my tongue tracing the curve of it, my lips sucking at the lobe. The breeze whispered through his hair, tempting me to run my hands through it, to curl my arms around his neck and to pull him to me for a kiss...but I resisted.

*For now.*

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*Captain's Private Journal, June 2, 1790*

There's been a development and I'm filled with hope—and ideas.

After spending time with Julianna on deck, I was more determined than ever that I had to have her, so I went to see her little maid Bess to gather information that might help me to that end.

When she told me Julianna's name was "Burton", I questioned her further and realized that I know her father! I've had business dealings with the man in the past. I know how to reach him. I know what he wants.

Of course, I could send him a letter telling him I want to marry his daughter without dowry—he's a greedy one. And he'd obtain his title without a penny leaving his coffers. Julianna would get his blessing.

Yet, I don't want to do it against her wishes.

The only obstacle in my way is her loyalty to this Jeffrey fellow. There's no doubt in my mind that she is still unwavering in her plan to marry him. Twice I baited her on deck. Once by mentioning my title, and she didn't even ask what it was though she'd like to please her father if she could. Then I mentioned my fortune and, again, there was no reaction. If she were considering me a prospect, surely her eyes would have registered a bit of excitement at one or the other.

But I believe her loyalty to this Jeffrey can be overcome. She's been so responsive to my touch. I am sure she wants me as much as I want her and I daresay she will soon grow to love me, once she lets go of this ridiculous childhood infatuation.

I've decided I owe nothing to this scoundrel—I prefer to think of him as a scoundrel, since I plan to take his intended from him. I'm sure I can make her happy and provide for her as she deserves. I'm sure she can grow to love me.

However, I only have a few days left, so I will have to settle for seducing her body away from him for now. I will tease and tantalize her until she begs to be mine in every way. I'll make her promise to be my wife, and then I'll plunge my cock into her welcoming warmth to seal the bargain.

It is a winning situation for everyone involved. Except poor Jeffrey, of course, but soon he will be nothing but a distant memory for all of us.

I'm as exuberant as a pup. I can't say I've felt this way in a long, long time, if ever. And it's all because of her.

My beautiful Julianna.

## Chapter Five

My dress swished around my feet as I paced the length of the captain's quarters. I tried not to bite my nails—an old habit my stepmother had punished out of me years before.

It had finally happened. I'd seen Jeffrey.

I'd come back from above deck lighter than air, feeling the walk had changed something with Drew. For one thing, I was actually thinking of him as "Drew" instead of "the captain", but there was so much more.

I saw him as a person. A real man, not just a competent—and lustful—sea captain. And as I'd strolled round the deck with him, I felt as if I were touring the gardens with a suitor. A *wanted* suitor, this time.

I thought I was beginning to understand him and had a longing to know the man in more than a carnal way. Several minutes after he left, I still had a smile on my face, thinking of him.

Feeling dreamy, I stretched out on the bed, laid my head on the pillow and shut my eyes. And that's when it happened.

I saw Jeffrey. Sad. Forlorn. So disappointed in me. So shocked that I could have forgotten him. *Forsaken* him.

I realized the more I allowed myself to feel for Drew, the more disloyal I was to Jeffrey. I was so ashamed. The two character traits I was most proud of in myself were loyalty and trustworthiness. I defended my friends against any insult. I never broke a promise.

So who was this fickle girl who promised herself to one man, then imagined a life with another? I didn't know her.

I had obviously become a victim of this disgusting ship and its charming, yet immoral captain. I had to remedy the situation before I lost myself completely. They had woven a spell around me and I was being drawn away from everything I knew to be right. I couldn't allow that. I had to get hold of myself.

When Drew finally came in that evening, I planned to waste no time in clarifying the situation for him. However, it proved to be no easy task, since he entered his quarters with a look of boyish enthusiasm. He began stripping off his clothes before I could gather my thoughts.

"You're still wearing the dress?" he noted after his shirt was off. "Let's get you out of that thing."

For some reason, I didn't protest, but once the dress was gone my nakedness served as a reminder of how far I'd gone astray. However, just because I'd promised my body to the captain for a few days did not mean I had to allow my heart and mind free reign. As he removed his trousers, I found my voice.

"Drew..." I cleared my throat. "Captain Price."

His face lost its shine as he went completely still. "Captain Price again, is it?"

"I've realized I'm losing myself on this ship. Losing all the things that I was proud to be. I've begun to have disloyal thoughts..."

He simply stood and stared at me in all his beautiful nakedness, the light fading from his eyes until they were as storm clouds reflected in the sea.

"It's just that Jeffrey and I—"

"Jeffrey," he repeated through clenched teeth.

"I'm not trying to renege on our bargain. I made a promise to you. I'll *entertain* you as you see fit, but you need not try to bring me such pleasure and I cannot let myself enjoy our time together. It's disloyal, as I said, and if there is one trait I've always valued, it's loyalty."



I watched a muscle twitch in his jaw for several long seconds before he spoke. "So you want to play the whore then?" he asked. "Satisfy our lust with no feelings attached?"

"Your lust," I corrected, although I knew it to be a lie.

"My lust then," he said sarcastically.

"Yes." I was shocked by his anger. I thought as long as I abided by the terms of our agreement everything would be fine. "Perhaps I could use my hands to...um...like the women onboard do sometimes."

"If we are abiding by our agreement, then it's not up to you to make suggestions," he said caustically. "Get on the floor. In front of me. On your knees."

The tone of his voice startled me. He commanded me as if I were an unruly seaman. I watched his face for some sign of softening toward me, but he was like a statue.

I moved from the bed to the floor.

"You're right," he said. "There's no reason to make this more pleasurable or less distasteful for you. You're simply fulfilling your end of a bargain in exchange for passage like the rest of the whores."

I flinched at his use of that word for me again. It wasn't the insult as much as the fact that he was so angry with me he would use such a cruel word. I nearly took back what I'd said, just to see him smile at me again.

"You're about to learn to suck a cock," he said harshly. I gasped. Although I'd seen the other women onboard do this, I'd never thought a man would expect it of me. "If you learn to do it well, *dear Jeffrey* will have something to thank me for. Open your mouth."

I hesitated a moment, then looked up at him pleadingly, hoping he wouldn't truly humiliate me in such a way. His stare was steely. I swallowed hard then opened my mouth slightly. He placed a thumb on my chin and pulled it open wider as he put the tip of his member between my lips.

“Trace your tongue around it.”

Tentatively I began making circles with my tongue—and I was surprised that I enjoyed the taste of him. I closed my lips on the tip and gave it a little suckle.

He groaned.

I had the sudden desire to satisfy him fully. I wanted to pleasure him the way he’d pleased me on his bed. I grasped the base of his member and allowed it farther into my mouth.

He groaned again and began to thrust his hips forward and back. As he slid in and out of my mouth, I rolled my tongue around him and sucked at his flesh. My actions shocked me and made me feel fabulously wicked at the same time.

Suddenly he wound the fingers of each hand into my hair and pulled me toward him, causing his cock to collide with the back of my throat. He released me and pulled me toward him again, nearly throwing me off balance. I had to grasp his hips to stabilize myself. Yet my nipples tingled and my *suclette* cried out for attention.

“Yes, Julianna,” he murmured. “Take me into you completely...I love to see those soft lips on my cock.”

His words excited me and I began to alternate my movements, swirling my tongue more quickly around his member then sucking with all my might. My eyes fell closed. I was making passionate love to his cock and I so loved the delight it gave him.

“Bloody hell!” he yelled out as he suddenly pulled himself from my mouth. Before I could see what was happening, I felt spurts of warm liquid hit my chin, my neck, then my chest. I opened my eyes and realized the liquid was coming from his cock.

When he finished, I stared down at my chest, fascinated to see his seed like fresh cream on my skin. I’d never imagined what “seed” would look or feel like. I couldn’t resist the urge to reach up with both hands and run my fingers over it. So warm and luxurious was the feel on my chest that, with the index finger of each hand, I spread it onto my nipples and rubbed it into the skin with little circular motions.

I looked up and saw him watching me as though captivated. Our eyes met.

"You are a lusty little wench, aren't you?" he asked as he grasped my wrist. "Come."

He pulled me over to the bed and I sat on the edge as I watched him lie down on his back in the middle. "Come. Straddle me like a horse."

I'd witnessed enough couplings on the ship to guess what he might have in mind.

"But you said I would remain a virgin."

"I don't want you to straddle my hips," he said. "I want you over my chest."

Though confused, I positioned myself as he asked, my thighs stretching wide to straddle the top of his chest and arms. Then he slid down a few inches on the bed and I was directly over his face.

"What are you doing?" I asked, quite startled.

"I have the urge for another taste of you. Ease yourself down onto me."

"But you don't mean—?"

"I *do* mean. If you slide your knees farther apart, you'll come down and your *suclette* will rest on my mouth."

"But it's so indecent!"

"No more so than when you were lying down. And you enjoyed that quite well if I recall. Regardless, this is what I require of you."

I did as he commanded and lowered myself. He opened his mouth and began teasing my *suclette* with his tongue.

A bolt of lightning shot through my body. It was too much. I popped up. He grasped my bum with his hands and pulled me back down to him. "Let me *suckle* your *suclette*, Julianna," he murmured, just before his lips enveloped me.

Oh, how he teased me with his torturous little movements! He swept his tongue back and forth across my *suclette*. He made circles and figure eights. *Mmmm...* What a delicious sensation!

Then he began to suck—but for a second or two at a time then he'd release me, just to do it again a moment later. *Suckle. Release. Suckle. Release.*

"Please!" I begged. "I need more!"

"Then take more, Julianna. You know your own need. You are in control."

Suddenly the lust demon took me over and I grasped the headboard. I began sliding that nub forward and back on his tongue. It felt fabulous to be in control.

Drunk with power and desire, I spread my legs farther to achieve more pressure and continued my ride with no thought to his comfort. Pushing down on his tongue, I slid over it again and again, each time feeling jolts of impending release. When no final release came, I ground myself into him, circling and thrusting and crying out mindless syllables.

Twinge after twinge of pleasure shocked through me, yet I still hadn't reached the pinnacle. The heat radiating from my body was nearly unbearable.

"Suck me! Suck me, damn you!" I finally screamed.

He grasped my buttocks to still me, fastened his lips onto my nub and suckled. I began to shudder immediately. "Oh! Dr—*oh!*" I cried out. I lost control over my muscles as ultimate pleasure jolted through me. My body writhed over him shamelessly. Reaching blindly downward, my hands found the pillow on either side of his head and squeezed into it like a falcon with its prey. I could hardly catch my breath.

As the sensations faded away, I tried to use the headboard as leverage to remove myself from him but I had gone limp, except for my thighs, which were still stretched taut. On my knees, spread wide as I was, they had taken some punishment and now felt like immovable objects, though they were trembling as leaves in a breeze.

"I can't move," I said.

Drew lifted me by my bum and I collapsed next to him on the bed.

"You seemed to find that quite enjoyable," he said, obviously gloating.

Guilt flooded back in. "I shouldn't have," I said. "Everything we're doing here is sinful and I am promised to another—"

"Julianna!" he said sharply. "You can choose to believe what you want to believe and you can do what you will with your life...but in this moment, you cannot look at me and deny the passion we have between us is something wonderful."

"I suppose not," I said, feeling defeated. But after several deep breaths, I found my determination again. I conjured up Jeffrey's face. "But I can refuse to let myself dwell on it. I can put it behind me when I start my life with Jeffrey. I've always been very strong of mind."

"Yes, I can see that," Drew said, as he got up and began dressing. "But some have another word for it. I believe it's 'stubborn'."

And with that he strode from the room, still buttoning his shirt.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain's Private Journal, June 3, 1790*

I'm sorry to say that I have another three days or so at sea with that daughter of Satan who's taken up residence in my cabin.

Save my father, no other person on this earth has had the power to make me feel such anger. At her? At myself? I am not certain. She has me in a jumble, which is not a familiar state for my mind to be in, making this situation all the more disconcerting.

Like a foolish boy, I went into the cabin full of confidence, ready to proclaim my love for her. I was determined that I could woo her, seduce her and romance her into wanting me completely. I was sure our passion could annihilate the memory of that stable boy she was pining after.

Apparently, I was deluded.

Oh, she responded to my touch all right. By God, she responded. I was so angry when she told me she didn't want to enjoy our time together that I treated her as a

whore and *still* she responded with passion. Looking down at her in all her loveliness, on her knees, her hair floating magically around her shoulders and resting gingerly on her nipples... Her burgundy lips enveloping my cock, her eyes closed as if in a kiss.

And yet, she always looks like an angel to me, even in such a carnal pose.

Is she too young and inexperienced to understand that passion like ours doesn't present itself every day? Sometimes it doesn't come along in an entire lifetime. Is she that naïve? Or is she so incredibly stubborn that she'd give this up for an unfortunate childhood promise?

I'm prone to believe it could be the latter and that we will both live to regret her decision. But perhaps I believe what I want to believe. Maybe this Jeffrey is the love of her life and I am simply her lecherous seducer.

But how do I erase the memory of her warm, wet tongue pirouetting around the tip of my member? The feeling of finally being inside some part of her? The thrill of knowing her mouth was eager for me, taking me into her fully, loving me?

No, not loving me. 'Twas my own foolish mind and body that mistook her actions for love.

And now she's driven me to the bottle. Yes. I, the man who vows not to become his father and refuses anything other than a small glass of wine with dinner, have confiscated some fermented spirits from one of my men and plan to finish it, disgusting as this concoction may be.

Ah, let's see, I'm stealing the innocence of another man's intended, I'm drinking myself into a stupor... Now if only I can find a game of chance to lose my money in, I will have transformed in to the old man completely.

*Cheers.*

## **Chapter Six**

After the captain left, I tossed and turned and flailed about on his bed as though half-crazed with fever. The moment he was gone, I missed him. Within the hour I desired him again. I ached for him. I wanted him to be my love, my future. But I'd promised myself to Jeffrey, and besides, Drew had never mentioned love to me. Or a future together. He spoke of passion, but what did that amount to?

When I placed a lifetime of friendship and caring together with a promise of a future together, then stacked it next to a few days of passion with no guarantee of what was to come, it was obvious which was most valid, was it not?

Then why did I feel so forlorn whenever Drew left me? And why was Jeffrey's face constantly fading from my memory?

Just before dark, my dinner was brought in, along with a tub which was quickly filled with steaming water, a precious commodity onboard a ship, although we'd had a generous amount of rain to fill the barrels on this trip. I'd already cleaned up a bit with the pitcher of water that was always kept full on the table. The hot water was no longer as enticing as it used to be. Not when compared to the heat of Drew's touch...or his tongue on my —

One of my fingers snaked down and planted itself between my thighs. It began to swirl and tease, much like Drew had done, although it wasn't nearly as enjoyable without him in attendance. I remembered how he'd told me that I was in control and allowed me to use his mouth to pleasure myself — at my own pace. He'd even followed my orders when I'd commanded him to suck.

I'd never known a man who allowed me control in any situation. The excitement of being the mistress of my own pleasure was incredible. And yet, a part of me still wished

Drew would come into the cabin and take me completely, giving me no choice so I wouldn't be culpable for my actions.

My entire life, I was so sure of my own mind, my own wishes. So sure that I ran away from the only home I'd ever known. But now my thoughts were restless and confused and I didn't know how to cure myself of this plague of desire.

I was startled from my musings when the door burst open and the captain swaggered through. I knew immediately there was something amiss. He was uncharacteristically disheveled and his gait was exaggerated.

He slammed the door shut and strode over to me. I pulled my hand from between my thighs, glad for the blanket covering me.

"Ah, there she is," he said as he came toward the bed. "My tormentor. Satan's bed mistress." As he gestured toward me, I realized what was wrong. He was deep into his cups. I was shocked. The captain I knew had always been clear-eyed and clear-headed. Completely in control.

Then the scandalous thought passed through my mind that perhaps this time, with his restraint relaxed by liquor, he would do it. He would have me completely. My breathing quickened. But that was so very wrong. How could I wish for such a thing? I pushed the thought out of my mind.

"Look at you." He shook his head in disgust. "Nestled comfortably in my bed. Sleeping contentedly while I suffer."

"I wasn't sleep—"

"I don't want to hear another word from your false lips," he interrupted. I noticed a slight slur. "You say one thing then act out another. You speak of Jeffrey in one moment then take your pleasure with me the next. I know what your game is now. You want to have your cake and eat it too."

I lowered my eyes, knowing he was speaking the truth.



"You want me to take you without having to give your permission so your conscience is clear." He pointed at me accusingly. "You would make me your ravisher!"

I jumped from the bed, trying to find words to defend myself when there was no defense. "I didn't...I don't want..." Tears filled my eyes because I knew now it wasn't only Jeffrey and myself I was injuring with my actions. I was causing suffering to Drew, and that seemed worst of all. "I'm sorry," I cried as I looked up into his eyes. His lids were set lower than usual and his pupils were dilated, making his gaze appear very dark.

He reached toward me and, with his thumb, wiped a tear from beneath my eye. "I don't know if you're more beautiful when you smile or when you cry," he said quietly. He raised his thumb to his mouth and licked my tear from it.

The intimacy of the gesture ceased my breathing momentarily.

But before I could recover, he grasped my arms, pulled me toward him and captured my mouth with his. His tongue swept around my lips then pushed inside, exploring me fully, making me forget that we did not belong to each other.

When I melted against his body, he took in a ragged breath and pressed his palm against the back of my head, deepening the kiss until I thought I would faint from loss of air. Yet I didn't want it to end.

He broke free and swept my legs out from under me, took a step and we were on the bed together, his clothed body pressing against my naked one.

Then he kissed me again, but it was not like anything before. He cupped my cheek and pressed his lips gently to my forehead. My eyes fell closed as the sweetness of the gesture tugged at my heart. Before I could open them again, he kissed each eyelid, my nose, my chin...

Unexpected tears broke through and huddled in the corners of my eyes as I realized I'd never felt so cherished.

Drew sucked at my earlobe and trailed his tongue down to the middle of my chest. Then he stopped and looked into my face. I watched his expression change from worship to deep, unadulterated passion.

He lowered his head again and I felt his tongue trail across my breast. He grasped it with his fingers and looked up at me. Then, without touching me with his lips, he put out his tongue and traced a circle around the tip, never breaking our shared gaze. A hot shiver snaked through me. Muscles throughout my body began to quiver. I needed him desperately.

And in that moment I knew he was right. No matter how much I loved Jeffrey or how long I'd known him, I would never in my life experience this with him.

I loved Jeffery, but I did not quake for him. My arms and legs didn't melt like butter with thoughts of him. We would never be able to please each other like this.

Was it truly so wrong to want to experience ultimate pleasure just once? Or to want to feel this beautiful man fully inside me?

He'd moved to my other breast and began suckling. I was overcome with need. I clawed at the buttons on his shirt until it hung open, the candle on the bedside table casting a glow on his bronzed, muscled torso.

"My God!" I said admiringly. I began to pull at his trousers, but he took over and made quick work of them.

He was immediately back on top of me, kissing me, fondling my breasts, his hard member digging into my abdomen then pushing against my lower lips.

Yes... He was almost there.

"My Julianna," he murmured softly into my ear.

"Yes..." I replied.

"My Julianna..."

Then he went completely still.

Something had happened, but I didn't want him to stop. I smoothed my palms down his back until they rested on his bum. I thrust my hips upward.

He grabbed one of my wrists and moved off me quickly until he was standing next to the bed. He released me and raked one hand through his hair, shaking his head as though trying to clear it. But he was obviously still affected by the alcohol since, when the ship tilted slightly, he had to grasp the bedpost to keep his balance.

"Please, Drew," I begged. "I need to feel you close to me. I need..." How could I explain what I wanted from him when I wasn't sure I completely understood it myself?

"No," he replied firmly.

I jumped from the bed and stood in front of him. "But I—"

"What do you want from me, Julianna?"

"I want...this." I motioned to the bed.

"Do you understand that if I take you here in my bed, you will no longer be a virgin? Are you still planning your life with Jeffrey?"

"I...yes...I don't..." How could I not go to Jeffrey when I was the reason he'd left his family to seek his fortune on foreign soil?

"If you are going to Jeffrey..." He seemed to be trying to force himself to think clearly, to weigh things out. I didn't want him to do that. Not this time. God help me, I wanted to take advantage of his inebriated state while I had the chance.

I threw my body against his, pressing my face against his chest. "I don't know what to do," I said. "I've never felt like this about anyone. I want you inside me. I want to please you."

He pulled my arms from his body and stepped away from me.

"You heartless wench! You devil! You tormentor of men!" he cried. "Who sent you here to torture me? My father?" He nearly lost his balance and I wondered just how much he'd imbibed.

"What are you saying?" I asked.

He grabbed my forearm. "You can tempt me to such passion, such emotion, then move on to your next victim? You want to share pleasure with me, but you still want to save your maidenhead for him, don't you?"

"Yes," was the only appropriate answer. I wished he hadn't asked the question. "But it's not for lack of wanting you...in every way."

He snorted and threw my arm away from him as if it were rubbish.

"I want you more than anythi—" I began.

"Then why do you cling to this notion of Jeffrey?"

I was mad with desire, yet an anger of equal intensity at my circumstances rose up inside me. "Is it so hard to understand that I want to be a woman of my word? That I don't want to abandon an old friend who sailed across the ocean to make a life for us?"

Tears of sadness and frustration broke through. I melted facedown on the bed and let them roll onto the blanket.

"No," he said quietly. "I've always insisted on being a man of my word." He sat down on the bed next to me then said nothing for what seemed an eternity. The silence between us frightened me. I realized I would rather have him calling me names than not speaking to me at all. He appeared deep in thought as he ran his hand down my back until it rested on my bum. I ached for his body against mine again.

I heard a quick intake of breath as though he'd had an idea. "There is a way," he said. "You claim you want me inside you?"

I lifted my face from the bed and met his gaze with a wistful expression.

He stood and went over to a cabinet. His back was to me and I couldn't see what he was doing. When he returned, he laid down on me, his chest to my back. I felt his cock nudging my bum apart, surprised at how slick it felt.

"We could share something all our own, Julianna," he whispered. His cock pushed against the tiny hole between my cheeks and a hot shiver rushed through me.

"I could be inside you here. It would be something only the two of us would do together."

He nudged a little harder and nearly broke through. I moaned while my *suclette* throbbed as though he was touching it instead of an entirely different part of my body.

"Tell me, Julianna."

"Yes," I said. "Yes..." I think I would have said yes to any request from him at that moment.

He stood and grasped my hips in both hands, pulling me until I was bending over the bed, feet on the floor. "There is more room for my hand this way," he explained. He moved his hand between me and the bed and placed a finger on my *suclette*, rotating it slowly. At the same time, he began to prod me with his member, pushing and releasing until he broke through the tight hole in my bum with the tip.

The thought of him inside me in this way sent a tremor through my body. I was aroused beyond words.

"Oh, Julianna," he murmured. "I'm inside you."

"Yes," I said again. "More."

He dipped his finger inside me for moisture then increased the pressure on my *suclette*. I pressed my bottom upward toward him and he pushed in farther.

I gasped and retreated from him, suddenly pained and frightened by the size of the appendage that was entering me.

"Shhh...it's all right. We'll take it slowly."

I relaxed again and his finger gained speed on my *suclette*, causing me to wiggle my bottom, knowingly teasing his cock.

He began to pump in and out, shallowly at first, but gradually going deeper until I had no more fear. I felt only pleasure.

"More now. Harder!" I demanded.

He groaned as he thrust in completely. I pushed my hips up to meet him as he drove into me again and again. One hand stayed on my nub. The other moved up to grasp my breast, squeezing and pinching my nipple. Hot jolts shot from one place he touched to another—from nipple to *suclette* to the most private of all places, which now played host to a hard and demanding guest.

I moaned then cried out louder, not caring who might hear.

“Yes, Julianna! We were meant for each other. I love fucking your tight little bum.”

“Fuck it...” I whispered, shocked at the feel of the word in my mouth, yet emboldened by it. “Fuck it harder!” I cried.

He grunted like an animal and began to thrust into me with all his might as every nerve ending he touched throbbed hotly. I felt my muscles tense, as did Drew’s body, then we lost all control and dissolved into the pounding, shuddering ocean of our release.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain’s Private Journal, June 4, 1790*

What have I done? What have I done? *What have I done?*

This is the question that beats through my brain with the throbbing of my morning-after headache. I wish I could say last night was naught but a black hole in my memory so I would feel no remorse at the crime I committed.

My God, I drank myself into an angry near-stupor then used my liquor-induced brazenness to take a gently bred virgin to my bed and sodomize her.

I wish it were only a dream—an immensely pleasurable dream—rather than a crude, impulsive act worthy of the man I swore I’d never emulate.

I’ve wanted her so badly from the moment I saw her...and every time I’ve seen her since. I’m drawn to her in a way that brings out my best intentions then releases my basest desires.

And I was so angry last night. Angry at her for not forgetting this Jeffrey the moment our eyes met. Angry at him for having the promise of her heart for the rest of her life. Angry at the fates that placed us in these circumstances. Then suddenly, I had to have something of her that he would never have. Something a farm boy would never dare to ask of a well-bred young woman he's no-doubt worshipped since childhood.

Something that would always be mine and mine alone.

So now, I wonder if my memory can be trusted through the alcoholic haze of last night. Did she really find pleasure in what we did or was I hearing what I wanted to hear? Were her cries those of pain? Anger? Fear? I felt sure she was experiencing the same passion and excitement that I felt at the time.

It matters not now, anyway. After the time she's had to think over what we've done, she will have decided it was the most sinful perversion and that I have escorted her down the road to hell.

She will hate me.

I cannot face her and see the accusation in her eyes.

## Chapter Seven

He didn't come back.

We shared a physical intimacy that I would never have dreamed I would allow any man, but he left me and didn't return. Not that night, after taking his leave quickly once he'd had me that way. Not the next morning.

I'd made use of the previously ignored bathwater after he left, assuming he was doing the same elsewhere and would return to me to sleep next to me at last. I waited for him until I could keep my eyelids open not a moment longer, then I dreamt of him coming to me and holding me in his arms. But it was only a dream.

By mid-afternoon I'd rolled the possibilities around in my mind so many times I was dizzy from it, and still I couldn't understand. Was he repulsed by me now that we'd done such a vile thing together? In truth, it hadn't felt at all vile at the time.

But the more I thought about it, the more certain I was that it must be the sort of thing a man only did with a paid whore. Surely no women of consequence or conscience would allow it. He was in his cups when he made the lurid suggestion, but what was my excuse?

*Evil lust. Evil desire.*

And the unprecedented need to feel a man inside me, to feel as though we were one being, if only for a short time.

I paced the cabin hour after hour and still he didn't come. And suddenly his words came to me. "You're in control, Julianna." Of course, he'd said them in a completely different context, yet the sentence emboldened me. I snatched the emerald dress from his armoire and threw it over my head, buttoning and lacing as best I could.



What did it matter if a bit of skin showed here or there anyway? The entire crew had already seen me nearly naked. I breathed deeply and opened the cabin door, making my way up to the deck before I lost my nerve.

I immediately spotted him at the helm. His hands were on the wheel but his eyes were already on me. He watched, stone-faced, as I approached. I moved rapidly, afraid he would call out for someone to take me below deck before I could speak to him.

When I reached him I was breathless.

He frowned at me. "Are you ill?" he asked. "Has something happened?"

"Yes...no...not like that, I mean." I fumbled my words like an imbecile. "Nothing you don't already know."

His body went rigid and his eyes left me, staring straight ahead into the sea.

"I should not have..." His voice trailed off. "I would not have..." He blew out an annoyed breath. "You understand I was quite inebriated last night—not a typical state for me, I assure you, and not a good excuse for bad behavior, of course..."

He sounded as if he blamed himself. As though he was trying to make an apology, but why wouldn't he look at me? He was disgusted by me and what we'd done. I was sure of it.

"No need to apologize," I said coldly. "Even in your state, you asked my permission. I was the sober one. It was my doing. I am obviously the whore you made me out to be. The lustful feelings came and I acted upon them without regard to decency."

He was looking at my face now, a puzzled expression on his.

"No, Julianna, you did nothing wro—"

"Cap'n!" someone bellowed. I turned to see young Johnny-boy, as they called him, sliding down the rope from the crow's nest. When he got to us, he was pale as a ghost and his eyes were as wide as if he'd seen one.

Drew stood instantly taller, his body tense and ready to take action.

"What is it, John?" he asked.

"Pirates! They're headed straight fo' us, Cap'n!"

"Then we shall prepare to—"

"No, Cap'n." The boy clutched at Drew's sleeve as tears welled in his eyes. "There ain't no preparin' 'cept to make amends wi' the Lord... 'Tis Krake!"

Drew and I took in sharp breaths simultaneously. Even I, a country girl, had heard of the dreaded Captain Krake. The stories made him out to be a demon with an invincible crew. Drew turned and looked at me as if for the last time and I knew something earth shattering was about to occur.

"Where's James?" he called out. His first mate had already been summoned from below deck. Drew met him halfway and they held a quick but intense meeting that I was not privy to at my distance.

I glanced around and saw several of the men on their knees as if in prayer. *Oh, God in Heaven!* This was bad.

Drew broke away from James and ordered them to their feet. The crew crowded toward him as if his nearness could protect them from the oncoming threat. "I know what is on your minds, lads, but you must put your fears aside and do as I say. No matter what you have heard, they are only men, even their gruesome leader. They are criminals, not gods, and certainly not demons. We have fought and won before and we can do so again. Or if God wills, we will not, but we will go down fighting as men, not as cowering children!"

I glanced around to find Johnny-boy and Timothy, who were indeed children of twelve and thirteen. They stood straighter now, listening bravely to their captain as they blinked away their tears.

Then Captain Drew Price began to call out orders as if he'd known this calamity were coming for days and had prepared a plan for it, though I knew that was not possible. As fearful as I felt, I was also oddly proud of him at the same time. He was a born leader and everyone on the ship knew it instinctively.

When every man had a job to do and was hurrying about the ship, Drew turned and strode back to me. He placed a palm on my face, his thumb caressing my cheek. His eyes told me of the seriousness of our plight. Then he dropped his hand to his side and addressed me as firmly as he had his men.

"Go get Bess and take her to my cabin. I'll be down in a moment to instruct you."

I asked no more questions, but simply did as I was told. Seconds after I'd explained what I knew to Bess, Drew arrived and hurried to his desk. After some quick movements, he strode over and handed each of us a pistol. Mine felt cold and heavy in my hand.

I wanted to throw it to the floor, but I knew this was no time for female hysterics. He needed me to be strong. I felt it as he looked into my eyes and I realized I'd never seen him truly afraid before. But I knew the fear wasn't for himself, but for me.

"Do you know how to use these?" he asked, his gaze intent on me.

"Yes," Bess and I answered in unison. Back before I was a commodity, when my father took me out shooting, I'd beg for Bess to come along and he'd oblige.

"I hope to God you don't need to," he replied.

I knew that if it came down to Bess and me, the one shot in each of our pistols would do little good against a band of pirates. What Drew was truly leaving us was a choice. If he and his men failed, we could choose to use the weapons on ourselves or face whatever horrifying fate the pirates would have in store. Then a new thought crossed my mind.

Would I want to go on living, knowing Drew was dead?

I knew the answer and I wanted to cling to him and beg him not to go, but that was silly and childish. He was a great captain and—I was certain—a great fighter. His men needed him on deck.

He walked to the door as if to leave, but suddenly turned and strode back toward me. Pulling me roughly to him, he kissed me with all the passion of a raging storm.

Then he looked hard into my eyes, harder than he ever had before, and said, "I will do everything in my power to bring you through this alive. If I lay down my life, know that I was laying it down gladly for you."

And he was gone.

Bess and I sat on the bed like statues in deathly silence. The captain's clock ticked away lazily on his desk as though it were just another day at sea. The waiting was unbearable.

Finally, I felt the ship slowing. The crew had obviously stopped trying to outrun the pirates and were ready to fight. I thought I would explode from the anxiety of sitting there, waiting.

Then the crash came and we were jolted so violently we had to grab on to the bedposts to keep from being thrown about. A second later there came a roar so great, it took me a moment to understand it was the voice of a pirate crew, all bellowing in unison.

But more horrifying were the sounds of battle that followed. Each time I heard a shot, a groan, a scream of agony, I imagined it was my Drew who'd been injured...or worse.

I was surprised to find myself standing, yet I knew what I must do.

"I'm sorry, Bess, but I have to go and help in whatever feeble way I can," I said.

"I understand," she said, strangely calm as she held the butt end of her pistol out toward me.

"I can't accept that from you."

"I know in my heart I can't take the life of another soul," she said. "And we both know it will do me no good in defending myself if the pirates win. I don't want to die by my own hand. I'll take my chances and see where life leads, even if it's..." She let her voice trail off.

I was so proud of my little surrogate sister in that moment. She wasn't crazed or panicked. She'd made her own decision and I could feel her resolve.

"I'm sorry about all of this Bess. I'm so sorry."

"You didn't force me to come. I made the decision, just as I'm making this one." She handed me her pistol. "Now go. Perhaps one of those pistols is destined to save your captain."

I hugged her and hurried off – likely toward my own death.

\* \* \* \* \*

On deck, chaos reigned. Swords clanged, men grunted and screamed. The air stank of smoke from pistols, which I knew had been used up first, since I no longer heard shots. I realized I might be the only one on deck with unspent ammunition.

But where was Drew?

I turned to the right just in time to see poor old Jeebers take a knife to the gut from a pirate twice his size and half his age. But I had no time for sentiment because that same pirate spotted me, yelled, "Hey there!" and came at me at a frightening pace.

As he reached toward me, I pulled my right hand from my pocket, pointed the gun at his middle and shot. His eyes grew large as he covered his stomach with one hand and collapsed on the deck.

I stared at him for a brief moment, expecting to feel remorse for taking a life, but there was none. Only one thought echoed in my mind and repeated in my throbbing chest.

*Where is Drew?*

I turned around and spotted him. And stopped breathing.

Drew was balancing on the ship's railing, a sword in one hand, a dagger in the other, engaged in mortal combat. Although his opponent's back was to me, I knew the moment I saw him who this monster was. His waist-length hair hung in thick, unwashed gray tendrils. In fact, everything about him, including his head and neck,

was thick to the point of being misshapen, as if he were the half-man, half-demon they claimed. Yet he moved lithely, his size no encumbrance at all.

There was no doubt this was the dreaded Captain Krake.

And I could see that he and Drew were equally matched swordsmen. Every attack, every lunge, every movement by one of them was effectively countered by the other. And it frightened me to the core that Drew could be sent plunging over the side or have his throat slit at any moment.

However, though his own men and ours believed this creature to be an immortal demon, Krake was flesh and bone like any other man. If only I could get round the side, I could shoot him and save Drew, but I was hemmed in by men fighting all around me.

I began to step around a barrel when a figure suddenly came toward me. As I pulled the pistol from my left pocket, his face grew clear and I realized he was more boy than man, not nearly full grown. He was holding a knife as though he knew how to use it, yet I couldn't imagine shooting him.

I raised the loaded pistol with my left hand as he came close and when he looked down at it in surprise, I clunked him on the head as hard as I could with the butt of the empty weapon in my right.

He fell down on the deck, groaning, but before I could take a step, someone grabbed my right wrist. On reflex, I turned and shot, just as my eyes took in the soot-covered face of a black-haired pirate.

He fell, and my heart collapsed with him as I realized I had no ammunition left.

I looked toward Drew just in time to see his sword fly through the air and land on the deck. He was now somehow blocking the pirate's sword with only a dagger blade. A surge of fear and determination shot through me. I glanced up, grabbed the rope hanging down from the halyard and pulled myself up by my arms. I swung back and then forward, toward the barrel, attempting to kick it, but the ship pitched the wrong way and my bare feet merely glanced the barrel's side.

I slipped and fell to the deck, the rope burning my palms, but I pulled myself up again and tried once more. This time the bottoms of my feet hit solid in the middle and the barrel tipped, suspended for a moment as the ship listed again, this time in my favor—and the barrel toppled over. As my arms gave out and I fell to the deck, I watched it roll toward its intended target...

A heavy weight crashed down upon me and I realized I was buried under a blood-soaked pirate. I struggled to push him off, caring about nothing but catching sight of my Drew—pray God—still alive.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain's Private Journal, June 5, 1790*

I am confounded. I am bemused. I am amazed. I cannot believe that I—along with most of my men—am alive to tell about this day. This day that we were attacked by the dreaded pirate known as Captain Krake and his unholy crew, who outnumbered us by at least two men to one.

And the way the day was won was even more incredible.

I had left Julianna and her maid below in my cabin with two pistols, knowing a confrontation was inevitable. When the pirates boarded, the size of their crew was staggering and I knew we were done for. All we could do was hope to take as many of the bastards with us as possible.

I killed three before their captain boarded. I'd never laid eyes on Krake before, but there was no mistaking him. I fought my way over to him, afraid if I didn't he might dispatch my entire crew with his sword alone. His fighting skills are legendary. I knew full well I could be walking toward my own death because, although I'm a skilled swordsman, killing is not my profession as it is his.

We fought. It may have lasted only a few moments, but it felt like an eternity. His sword seemed to move too fast for me, yet I was avoiding it and answering him blow

for blow, every second feeling as if it could be my last. I knew he would take advantage of the slightest misstep on my part.

He finally had me against the railing and I managed to jump up onto it, thinking I might gain some advantage from above, but the new position was of no help. Then I lost my sword and I knew it was only a matter of seconds until I was dead. My Julianna flashed before my eyes and I ached for what this would mean for her.

But suddenly I realized she wasn't a figment of my imagination. I was truly seeing her several yards behind my opponent. Fear coursed through me as a pirate grasped her wrist, but he fell to the deck, apparently shot by her.

Then the most incredible thing happened. I thought my eyes were deceiving me, especially since I could not focus on her while protecting myself from Krake.

But as I saw it—and my men recounted it later—Julianna pulled herself up by the halyard rope and somehow push a barrel over with her feet. Not an empty barrel, mind you, but one half-full of rainwater.

I'm not a religious man, but I would fault no man for claiming she'd executed a miracle. And the scene became even more uncanny when the ship tilted hard and the barrel began to roll toward us. Water poured out of it and reached Krake before the barrel did. One foot slipped. Still, he might have recovered if the barrel had not hit him directly in the backs of his knees. He flipped backward over it and I jumped down to finish him while I could.

But he was already dead.

His head had hit the deck in such an unnatural manner as to break his neck soundly. He lay there, his body crumpled and twisted strangely, his eyes open but unseeing.

Though the moment felt like a dream, I shook off the astonishment and readied myself to fight the next pirate, bolstered by a renewed sense of hope and determination. But when I looked up, I realized all of Krake's men were backing away, their eyes darting back and forth fearfully between their dead captain and his killer.



I heard one of them whisper “witch” and realized they truly did believe their captain to be a demon, and only an entity of equal power could have sent him back to hell.

*My Julianna.*

The situation was so ludicrous, I nearly laughed as they turned tail and scrambled back to their ship.

I hurried to Julianna and we met halfway. She allowed me to enfold her in my arms. “Remind me never to get you angry,” I said into her ear, forgetting for a moment that we weren’t destined for a life together.

“I will,” she said, and I allowed myself one moment to dream.

## Chapter Eight

I should have been exhausted. Moments after the pirates inexplicably ran away, I was busy with cook, tending the wounded as Drew and several crewmen prepared the dead for burial at sea. Bess was of great help, of course, having tended many injuries back on my father's estate.

Surprisingly we'd lost only six men, although their deaths were still difficult to accept since I'd worked side-by-side with them for weeks.

But most surprising was the crew's attitude toward me. Johnny-boy and Timothy each knelt at my feet and kissed my hand. Timothy called me an "angel from heaven". Even George, the cook, treated me with a strange reverence. One would have thought I was the holy mother rather than the desperate, lucky idiot I was.

As the hour grew late, George sent us to bed, claiming we'd done all we could for the night.

However, as I bathed myself from the basin on the captain's dresser, all I could think about was how close I had come to losing Drew and how life shattering the thought was to me. Now I knew the truth for certain. He was much more than a man who had incited my lust and invaded my body. Somehow he'd crept into my heart and stolen my soul and I could no longer imagine life without him.

Then I remembered he'd never offered a life *with* him. But it mattered not anymore. If a night or two were all I had left with him, so be it. I had to have him. I had to experience him in the way a woman was meant to experience her true love. At least I would have that memory for the rest of my life, come what may.

I dried myself and threw the dress on hastily, determined to find Drew and spend with him whatever time we had left.

The deck was unusually sparse and quiet, and the only one who seemed to notice my presence was Henry, who was at the wheel. When I looked at him questioningly, he took my meaning right away and tilted his head toward the back of the raised quarterdeck.

I walked around it to find Drew facing away from me, stark naked with a bucket of water, washing the remnants of the bloody day from his body. The water on his skin made him shimmer in the moonlight, much like the ocean behind him. I stood quietly and took him in for a moment, watching his muscles tense and relax as he moved, admiring his tight, round backside—the one I used to sneak glances at when he was the captain and I just a lowly “new boy”.

Then he turned suddenly and I gasped at being caught in such a lecherous activity. Several emotions played over his features too rapidly for me to identify. He grabbed up his trousers and pulled them on.

“Wait,” I said as he reached for his shirt. “Not yet.”

He dropped the shirt, a look of puzzlement on his face. We stared at each other for several moments. He continued to watch me quizzically.

Although I knew exactly what I wanted, now that we were face-to-face I was having trouble mustering my courage.

“Julianna,” he began. “I haven’t had the opportunity to thank you for what you did today. It was...”

“Luck,” I replied simply.

“Certainly luck played a role, but...” He raked his hands through his hair. “It was courage that brought you above deck and determination that caused you to...” He shook his head as if he still couldn’t believe what had happened. “Do you realize that if you hadn’t chosen to flee your father and masquerade aboard my ship, we would *still* have sailed that day, we would *still* have been in these waters today, and we would *still* have been attacked by Krake...and we would all be dead now.”

I closed my eyes to shield myself from his words. "Don't say that." When I opened them, all the love and passion I had in my heart for him rushed through me. Tears clouded my vision. "Don't say that you could not exist. Don't say that the world could go on without you." My hands balled into fists at the thought of what could have happened. "My world would have been shattered if you had died today and I can't imagine living my entire life without having known you."

His eyes glowed for a moment, like those of a hopeful child, then they darkened with passion as he grabbed me, pulling me with him into the shadows and pinning me against the back wall of the quarterdeck. He held my face in his hands and stared into my eyes with such intensity, I gasped in a shaky breath.

"I was naught but your seducer," he said. "Yet you were my savior, and now...this caring toward me I do not deserve."

I placed my hand on his chest and he stepped back as if to allow me to leave, but I pushed him down onto the crates just behind him. He sat, looking up at me in confusion.

I lifted my skirt, bared my naked limbs and straddled him, settling my bottom on his upper thighs. He looked up at me in shocked realization as my lips came down on his, my tongue pushing into his mouth. I wrapped my arms tightly around him and held his head immobile as if I were forcing myself upon him. God help him if he were unwilling now.

I circled my tongue around his and pushed it deep into his mouth until he groaned and took control of the kiss, pressing into me as I had him.

Reaching for him under my skirts, I began tearing at the buttons on his breeches, the hardness I felt underneath spurring me on. Just as I freed the rigid rod, I felt him tuck my skirts under my knees, murmuring something about splinters.

I giggled at the action, since I would have gladly suffered a hundred splinters for what was about to transpire, but the sound quickly turned to a moan as my *suclette* made contact with his cock. I couldn't resist rocking forward and back, relishing the

sweet, slick friction of our most sensitive regions gliding over one another. Drew aided me by lifting his hips slightly in rhythm with my movements. We continued as he pulled me in for another kiss, so deep I thought he would crush my lips with his.

My *suclette* suddenly exploded, causing me to twist frantically on his member and rock to and fro, crying out unintelligible syllables. I could not imagine ever tiring of the feel of my body against his.

I rested my head on his shoulder for a few moments, holding him tightly, my lips on his neck. Then gradually, as I recovered, my tongue snaked out and tasted his skin, trailing downward. I released him so my explorations could continue to his chest. I suckled one nipple, then the other. He took in a sharp breath each time and I loved the control I had over his reactions.

When I looked up at him, his eyes were closed, his head tilted back in ecstasy. But I wasn't finished. I realized Henry had probably heard my cries and knew what we were about. I also knew a crewmember could happen upon us, even at this late hour. None of that mattered. Nothing mattered except Drew and me and this moment.

I reached under my skirts again, but this time, I lifted his rigid member as I pushed myself up a few inches, placing his cock at my entrance.

His eyes popped open. "Julianna. You've taken your pleasure...well-deserved pleasure. You do not need to service me. You've paid your debt a thousand times over."

I placed a finger on his lips to quiet him. "This is not for you, Drew," I said, and I impaled myself fully on his cock.

He threw his head back and groaned, and held me tightly as the shock of pain seared through me then ebbed away. I began to move on him, slowly at first, rocking and circling my hips, trying to find the most pleasurable motion. Finally, I grasped the ship's railing behind him and began pulling myself up and down.

We moaned together as if dying and he grasped my buttocks, aiding me in my movements. We fell into a rhythm, he the horse and I his rider. Every time I plunged downward onto him, I thought I would die from the fabulous twinges of pleasure. Each

successive jolt seemed to radiate through my body until I could feel them in my arms, my legs, my fingertips...

Then my heart squeezed as I thought of what little time we had together and how perfectly matched we were, mind, body, soul. He grew tense under me.

"Julianna, my love," he said, and we began to shudder in unison. Tears filled my eyes as I wrapped my arms tightly around him and held on for dear life.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain's Private Journal, June 6, 1790*

Amazing that I was concerned about death yesterday, yet today I feel I could die a happy man. She came to me last night of her own free will, and like a wanton, she took me shamelessly on deck. And I love her all the more for it.

For the first time, we spent the night together in my bed. Over and over I reached out for her as she slept, sometimes merely to hold her close, several times because I could not resist her lush body a moment longer and had to have her again. Each time, she responded passionately.

I'd never dared to dream of a woman like her. Beautiful, courageous, forgiving, determined. She fills an abyss inside me that I never realized was so empty. I know now that I was only half a man without her to make me whole.

And here she is, dozing on my bed as I write at my desk, her lovely breasts rising and falling with each breath. My angel.

*Ha!* My *protector*, of all things! I have a feeling she could surprise me for years to come.

Once during the night, as I made love to her gently and sweetly, she whispered that she loved me. Can I hope it was the truth and not just a sleepy girl swept away by desires of the flesh?

I dare not question her about her future plans now, lest I be crushed by the mention of that farm boy's name again. I will go up on deck just long enough to tell James he is in command until we reach port, then I will enjoy the time I have left with her and hope for the best. I will also be hoping the winds are not overly kind to us today and I will have one more night of her in my bed.

The room smells of fornication, but feels of love.

When did I become such an unabashed romantic?

## Chapter Nine

"Land ho!"

I never thought I would be saddened to hear those words. My heart sank as the crew bustled about the ship, making ready to dock. I stared blankly as Portsmouth appeared, then loomed before me. I felt like a prisoner awaiting execution.

I should have been finalizing my plans for finding Jeffrey, asking the men where I could best obtain information on his whereabouts and where Bess and I might stay.

I had no heart for it. However, I had Bess to think about too.

The captain was at the helm. I approached him with a heavy heart. "May I have a word?" I asked formally.

"Certainly," he said. But he looked rather annoyed with me. I couldn't imagine why.

I took in a deep breath. "My stepmother claimed I had a special talent for sewing and embroidery. Perhaps I could find work in town...or perhaps Maggie...?"

"Why do you want work?" he asked. His eyes left mine and he stared stoically out to sea.

"I'll need some time to find Jeffrey," I replied, hoping he'd beg me not to marry Jeffrey and to be with him forever instead.

He let out a hard breath. "Jeffrey," he repeated. Several long seconds of silence passed as my heart pounded into my ribs, anxious for what he would say next. He looked into my eyes, his expression unreadable. "The *Redemption* owes you an immense debt of gratitude," he said. "Everything will be taken care of."

Soon afterward, we docked and he left the ship, instructing me to stay behind. When he returned he handed me a wrapped bundle, which turned out to be all the



appropriate undergarments as well as a good pair of shoes. My gratitude was completely overshadowed by the fact that he was supplying me with everything I needed to disembark and leave his presence, probably forever.

This time, Bess helped me get dressed and fixed my hair as best she could without the necessary implements. The captain had brought her clothing too, and she was incredibly grateful not to be forced to leave the ship as a boy.

I felt numb as I walked down the gangplank, escorted stiffly by Captain Drew Price. As we stood on the dock, Bess instinctively moved away so we could have a moment alone.

Finally, Drew spoke to me. "That carriage over there," he nodded toward one a few yards away, "is waiting to take you to a boarding house owned by longtime friends, Mr. and Mrs. Mason. There is a room waiting for you there. They've vowed to take care of your needs as if you were their own. Your reward has been deposited into an account for you at the bank."

I choked back tears of protest at how easy it was for him to rid himself of me.

"And this..." He held a folded paper tightly in his hands. "This is where you can find your Jeffrey. It appears he didn't go far. He's using those horse-handling skills Bess told me about to his advantage." He placed the paper in my shaking hand.

Somewhere between London and Portsmouth, Jeffrey had become a distant memory and I was no longer sure I wanted to find him.

"You have choices now, Julianna. Choices you didn't have under your father's care."

I nodded even though I no longer wanted choices. I only wanted Drew Price.

Suddenly he grasped my wrists in both hands and held them up toward him. My palms were squeezed together as if in prayer, the paper between them. He held on so tightly I almost cried out.

"Julianna," he gritted out, his brow creasing deeply. "I could beg you to stay with me right now. I could ask you to be mine forever. It's what I want more than anything..."

I opened my mouth, ready to say yes to any request.

"But I will not." He dropped my wrists and they fell limply at my side. "Because I would never know if I had seduced you away from your true love. I would never know if you loved me. And worse, I might see blame in your eyes when you realized you were foolish to succumb to me and would have been happier with him."

"But...I—"

He placed a finger to my lips. "You saved my ship and as reward, you are now the rarest of women. One who has choices. You can choose to stay with the Masons as long as you like. You can go looking for your Jeffrey, as you probably should under the circumstances."

Tears burst from my eyes and ran down my cheeks. If he truly wanted me, why wouldn't he beg me to stay with him, Jeffrey be damned? Or were his words just a ploy to relieve his conscience as my seducer?

"I have business in other ports," he said. "But I will return in three months time." He breathed in deeply. "If you are waiting for me, I will be overjoyed. If not, my crew will forever exalt you as the beautiful stowaway who saved the *Redemption*...and I will understand."

I looked down at the paper in my hand, wanting to cast it to the wind. But I owed Jeffrey some sort of explanation. I looked toward Bess and the waiting carriage but I didn't want to leave my Drew. Did he really want me? If I begged him now, would he keep me? Would he truly return?

When I turned back toward him, he'd left me and was walking up the gangplank. He crossed the deck and disappeared below.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Captain's Personal Journal, June 7, 1790*

I'm not a man prone to romantic ramblings, or at least I thought I wasn't until a week ago, but I would be untrue if I did not say that, today, I left my heart on the dock at Portsmouth Bay. Nor am I a praying man, yet I pray that she does not forget me and that she does not think so ill of me and my mistreatment of her on the ship—once she has the time to reflect on it—that she shuns the very memory of me.

I know not how I will make myself place so much time and distance between us, but I must. I need to be assured it is me she truly wants and that she is not simply obsessed with the intense sensuality between us.

I've sailed the oceans and visited exotic places. I've known more women than I can count, so I can recognize a treasure when I see it. I can discern the difference between love and folly when I touch it.

But can she? I truly do not know if she will cast her eyes upon her first love and all thoughts of me will fall away from her consciousness. Or if she'll choose to keep her promise to him, rather than fulfill the destiny that belongs to us.

If she chooses him, I suppose there *was* no destiny for us and I will have to accept it.

But how will I ever fill this empty space in my chest without her? My foolish heart is convinced she belongs inside it forever. And strangest of all, I cannot remember what my future plans were before I met her.

## **Chapter Ten**

I went alone.

Of course, it had taken me several days to recover from Drew leaving me there on the docks like unwanted baggage. Did he truly care for me or only use me, then make a coward's excuse to leave? I cried like a small girl, although I believe I've grown up quite a lot since starting my journey as a starry-eyed runaway.

And there was one thing I knew. Now that I'd experienced love and passion with Drew, there was no doubt my relationship with Jeffrey had been a childhood infatuation. And perhaps even an excuse to escape my father and his frightful plans for me.

Regardless, I knew I must face Jeffrey and tell him the truth. I could not live my life with him now that I knew I did not love him as a woman should love a man. He needed one who would feel passion for him the way I did for Drew. I hoped he wouldn't be too distraught.

Although the Masons seemed to have an inkling of the seriousness of my visit and tried to send a family member or Bess along with me, I refused, accepting only the loan of their carriage and its stoic driver. I gave him the address, which I'd learned was a boarding stable and smithy shop—Jeffrey had worked the stables with his father on my family estate. The Masons claimed Jeffrey owned the business and attached house, though I found it hard to believe he could have accomplished such a feat in such a short time.

When the driver passed the stables, I was surprised by the size and newness of the enterprise. The house attached was small but pleasant looking, and I was impressed that, although it might not be the fortune he had been seeking, Jeffrey had certainly done well for himself.

With a deep breath, I disembarked and walked to the door, steeling myself for the harsh thing I was about to do.

I rapped on the door three times. There was no answer. I knocked again, then stepped back and looked toward the stables, wondering if I'd have to go searching for him there. Just as I was about to try one last time, I thought I heard Jeffrey's voice from inside cry out, "Come in!"

I turned the knob and pushed the door open. As I stepped inside my eyes took a moment to adjust to the dark interior. The house appeared to be one large room, with a tiny kitchen and rocking chairs near the fireplace. I saw movement on a bed in the back corner of the room. Perhaps Jeffrey was ill and hadn't been able to get up to answer the door.

I was about to call out to him when he yelled, "Yes, I'm comin' all right, you little tart!"

*Coming. Not come in.*

Then a female—who I now saw on the bed on all fours, replied, "Yes, ride me hard, my wild stallion. Ride me 'til ya come!"

I should have averted my eyes or run away, but the scene in front of me was so unbelievable, I was frozen to the spot. Jeffrey was obviously situated well enough that he could have sent for me, yet he'd chosen to spend his time wooing doxies instead.

The doxy turned and saw me. "Oh!" she said as she struggled to cover herself with the blanket.

Jeffrey quickly pulled his breeches up his thighs as he called out, "I'll be right with ya, miss!"

Miss? Did he mistake me for a client?

I stepped outside. I'd never been so angry in my life. The nerve of him to lead me on and then forget me the moment he left England!

"Yes, what can I do for ya?" he asked as he stepped out, then he looked into my face and I saw recognition there. "Jewels?" He seemed stunned. "What are you doing here?"

I was even more enraged that he would use his special name for me after what I'd witnessed inside. "What am I *doing* here?" My voice was raised in a most unladylike fashion. "My father was about to marry me off to a marquis, so I ran away, dressed like a boy and took a job on a ship so that I could get to America to my *true love*!"

Jeffrey began to laugh. "Now be serious...is your father here on business?" He saw the anger in my face and looked thoroughly confused. "Truly? Who were you coming to see?"

"You!" I screamed. "I traveled across the ocean, working like a man and fighting pirates to get to you! And here you are making merry with strumpets!"

"That's no strumpet," Jeffrey said indignantly. "That's my wife!"

I felt as if I'd been punched in the stomach. I could have died on my voyage here and he had a—

"Your wife?" I repeated. "And you didn't think this was something you should inform me about?"

"Julianna, all those words we said back in England... They were children's fancies. It's been two years and a half, I'd wager."

I suddenly realized that the trip across the ocean and exposure to a life outside the estate had opened Jeffrey's eyes as widely as it had mine. "Bah! Never mind!" I said as I turned to go.

"Wait! Jewels!" He clutched my arm. "I don't want you to be alone in Portsmouth. If you have nowhere to go, I can set you up in a rooming house down the street." He lowered his voice. "The old man who took me on as apprentice left me a pretty penny when he died. I could afford a mistress, if —"

I grasped the skin of his upper arm between my thumb and forefinger and twisted, just as I'd done when we were children.

"Ouch!" he cried as he pulled away. "What was that for?"

"You know what it was for, Jeffrey Jameson! And I don't need your charity, or your lurid offers. I'm a woman with choices now!"

I strode purposefully over to the carriage and was inside before the driver could come down and open the door for me.

As I rode back to the Masons', I thought about how right Jeffrey had been. How young and silly we were back in our sheltered lives in England. How ridiculous I'd been to take such risks with my person over him!

Yet, if I hadn't, I would never have experienced the passion of Drew's bed—and a love so strong I would face imminent death at the hands of the most dreaded pirates at sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'd spent three of the longest months of my life with the Masons. Not that they weren't lovely people. But I was distracted from any enjoyment of them by the one thought that loomed in my mind day and night.

*Will he truly come back for me?*

I'd promised a reward to the boys who helped their fathers at the dock for the first news of the *Redemption* coming to shore. By mid-August, I'd taken to pacing my room nervously. My hosts seemed concerned about me, but my mind could not rest and my heart could not slow its pace until I knew for certain.

I'd purchased proper clothing, of course, and all month I'd made sure I was meticulously dressed and coifed for Drew's possible return.

One day in late August, I was sitting in the boarding house, reading one of the many books in the Masons' library, when there came a frantic knock at the door. I froze like an animal waiting to pounce as the maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Burton at home?" I heard a child's voice ask.

I hopped up and crowded the maid out of the way. "What is it, boy?" I asked.

"The *Redemption*, miss. She's comin' in!"

"Are you certain?" I asked, as I reached for my purse.

"No doubt, miss. She should be docked within the hour."

I threw him a coin and rushed upstairs, calling for Bess.

\* \* \* \* \*

Perhaps there are times a woman shouldn't look too eager to see a man, but I decided this wasn't one of them. In truth, I just couldn't stay away. I had to lay eyes on Drew and know he was safe and that he still wanted me.

I stood on the dock and waited as the *Redemption* came in. Dressed in ivory satin and lace, I held a matching parasol to shield me from the August sun.

As the ship came close enough, I spotted its captain, standing straight and tall, dressed more formally than I'd ever seen him in a blue waistcoat and jacket.

He was breathtaking.

I was a bit disconcerted, though, that he neither smiled nor waved, but stood like a statue on the deck. I wasn't even sure he saw me. But as soon as the gangplank was let down, he strode off the ship and stopped dead in front of me.

"You look well," he said.

"As do you," I replied. "I was concerned about the *Redemption* without me onboard to protect it."

He chuckled, and his smile was even more disarming than I remembered.

"In truth, you look more than well. You're a vision. I've never seen you...fully dressed." He whispered the last words conspiratorially into my ear and reached up to touch one of the ringlets purposely left loose on my shoulder.

But his hand stopped short before it got there.



I looked up at him in puzzlement.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"What does what mean?"

"You, here..." His vulnerability was evident on his face.

I suddenly felt quite powerful and mischievous. He'd left me to suffer for three months, after all. "What would you like it to mean?" I asked with a coy smile.

Another chuckle escaped him. "You are an evil, taunting wench, aren't you?"

"And you are a prurient seducer of virgins, who promises them nothing and abandons them in port," I replied.

"I promised I'd return, and I did."

"And what have you returned to do?" I asked.

He looked off for a moment, at nothing in particular as far as I could tell, then his gaze met mine again...serious, penetrating. His eyes seemed to darken as I watched. He swallowed audibly.

"I suppose I've come to ask...no, to beg that you be my wife. I have missed you so sorely, I no longer care for anything but you by my side."

"I—"

He shook his head and continued. "You would not have to live aboard ship or spend your life as a sea widow. I'm not a man who's married to the sea. It was a means to an end. I own several ships now. I've made back my family fortune. I'm a marquis, so that should please your father. I've found us a lovely home in Boston if you want to live in America but we can live in England if you prefer...you'll want for nothing..."

I'd never seen him so humbled or so desperate, even when we had pirates at our door. I pressed my fingers to his lips. "Drew, I had stirrings for you when I was still dressed as a boy and could only catch glimpses of you at the helm. I've thought of you every moment of every day since you left."

He clutched my hands tightly and blew out a deep breath. "And what of Jeffrey?" he asked.

"I went to see him." Drew looked alarmed.

"But only to tell him I was in love with another." I knew someday I'd tell him the rest of the story, but for today that was enough.

He didn't speak or move at first, except to allow himself to tug at the ringlet he'd found so tempting earlier. Then he put his arms around me and placed his forehead on mine.

"You are the dream I never knew I had," he whispered. "I am at your complete mercy, you know. Name your price. I will give you anything in the world as long as it is a wedding gift."

"You ask for my body, heart and soul?" I teased. "Indeed, the cost could be quite dear. You may not want to pay it."

"Name it," he said.

"*You* are my price, Captain," I replied. He smiled broadly for a moment, then his brow furrowed and he pressed his lips together. He straightened his spine as he always did when he spoke seriously to his crew.

"Julianna, do you understand the reward you earned for saving my ship can give you whatever life you please? No one can force a marriage on you. You're still so young. You have time to wait and marry any man you wish or even no man at all, if you prefer."

"But Drew –"

"You are not indebted to me. I would have given a handsome sum to any man who did as you did. You're a beautiful woman and will have many opportunities...many men who will desire you." He shook his head as if ridding it of an unwanted image. "What I'm trying to say – despite my desperation to have you – is that you are a woman of unlimited choices. You do not have to –"

I reached up and covered his lips with my fingers again—much more firmly than previously. “Drew,” I said. “I chose you when I went above deck, expecting to face death at your side. I chose you when I found you that same night and ravished you within earshot of your helmsman. And I chose you when I donned my most becoming dress and hurried here to greet you.”

He breathed in deeply as though relieved of a heavy burden and for the first time, I saw tears glistening in his eyes, but he seemed incapable of speech.

“I am a lucky woman with every choice in the world available to me,” I said. “And I choose you.”

“Then I am the most fortunate of men.” He lifted my gloved hands and planted a kiss on each.

I began to walk backward slowly, pulling him toward my waiting carriage. “And you are about become much *more* fortunate,” I said.

As the driver opened the door for us, whoops and hollers rang out from the deck. I tossed my curls and gave a shameless wave. I knew the crew was well aware of my prurient plans for their captain.

“Your stepmother would be scandalized,” Drew said as he settled onto the seat next to me. His eyes sparkled as blue as his waistcoat.

I smiled wickedly at the thought as I reached into his lap and began unbuttoning his trousers. “Then it’s a good thing what happens in my carriage remains here,” I said as I lowered my face to his lap.

“Juli—ah, *ah!*” he said as he tensed, then relaxed into my ministrations. “Indeed, I am a lucky, lucky man.”

## About the Author

Most days Lyla Sinclair can be found lying on a beach surrounded by nubile young bodies, all of whom are at her beck and call. Eyes closed, sun warming her scantily clad body, she dictates her most lurid fantasies to one of her young sex-slaves as she's massaged, manicured and lulled to sleep by a nude Spanish guitarist. These catnaps are important, since her nights are spent gorging herself on young men and chocolate (though she never, ever gains weight).

Lyla welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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