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What the Reviewers are saying:

Realism of the details in this historical time travel book are just enough and add the additional element of dimension. Through out, the story kept me hooked and provided excellent descriptions that allowed me to step into the unfolding romance. I would definitely read another book by **Tethys J. Killian**.

## Rated 3 1/2 Delightful Divas by Em Epe!

# Dedication

To my great friend, Sandy, it's been a hoot. Thanks for all your help with Master and Commander's Prey.

# MASTER AND COMMANDER'S PREY

*Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.* 

Carl Sandburg

### Chapter One

Be sure all your chicks are in one basket and all your eggs are in a row.

*Downtown Washington, D.C., present day.* 

Shiloh Montgomery-Moore was just picking up her purse from where she'd stashed it in the bottom drawer of her desk when the phone started ringing. She checked the caller ID in a state of frustration. The LED didn't help her any. *Unknown*.

Great. It was probably some salesman.

What part of the office closes promptly at six do you not understand?

Her gaze skittered to the clock situated in the corner and beneath the broad shelf of her area then to the wildly chaotic contemporary painting hanging across the room from her position. "Three minutes," she said on an angry sigh. Three short clicks of the clock before she could leave. Snatching the phone from the cradle, she drew in a deep breath before answering. "Miles, Layton and Thornberg, how may I direct your call?"

She ought to have said, 'can I take a message', since there were only a few employees left in the office. Her gaze drifted over the heavy, mahogany chairs in the reception area to the small expanse of hardwood flooring not covered by the Oriental carpet.

"Shiloh, it's Mom," the sad voice of Mabel Montgomery-Moore sounded through the ear-piece. "Junior is in trouble."

"What now?" Rolling her eyes, Shiloh inched closer to the end of her station. She didn't stop until the cord wouldn't reach further without pulling the phone off the counter.

"The bitch has filed for child support."

"Tell him to take the paternity test."

On that 'makes sense to me' response, Mabel attacked. "You're trying to get him in more trouble, aren't you, Shiloh? You were always jealous of your brother. I don't know why you do this. Why can't you love your brother? Why can't you love me? We're sitting here trying to do the right thing by Junior while you stir up trouble." Mabel whispered the ending, 'jealous brat', just loud enough for Shiloh to hear.

Yeah, I'm jealous of the twenty-seven-year-old guy living in my parents' basement and whose biggest aspiration in life is getting transferred to the day shift at the 24-7 minimart. Rather than engage her mother in the same lop-sided debate they'd had over and over again, Shiloh shook her head. "Mom, this isn't getting us anywhere."

"Shiloh, you need to help him."

And what exactly would you like me to do? "There isn't much I can do until paternity is determined." Toying with the loose button on her second-hand blazer, she shook her head.

"You can do something. This is your brother we're talking about, not some down-on-his-luck son-of-a-bitch who is about to get the needle."

Leave it to her mom to bring up her volunteer work with Project Amnesty. At least that work had some real weight. It wasn't like those people sitting on death row, guilty or innocent, got a second chance of life after they were executed.

Still, Shiloh knew this argument was like spitting in the wind. Until everybody stopped talking and started to listen nothing would get accomplished. "Mom, make him take the paternity test, then we'll go from there." Rejecting the urge to slam the phone down, thoroughly sick of saying the same thing over and over again, Shiloh listened to her mother breathe, take a drawn-out drag from her cigarette and then blow out what she knew was a stinky plume of smoke.

God, why couldn't they just shut up and listen for a change, Shiloh wondered, waiting for her mother to continue. Three huge breaths and releases later, she rolled her eyes when Mabel started to gag. Nothing like being bent on self-destruction, was there? Rather than remind her mother of her doctor's advice she give up the cancer sticks, Shiloh took the high road. "Mom, are you okay? Do you need me to call 9-1-1?"

A hacking, choking cough was her answer.

Tapping her fingers on the countertop, Shiloh snuck a peek at the

clock. Five minutes after six. She was going to miss her bus if she didn't get a move on. *What to do? What to do?* Finally hearing the cough subside, Shiloh quelled the urge to take a deep lungful of air for the woman suffering Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

"I'm... okay. Let me just get a... drink of... water."

"Look, I have to go to study group. I'll call you tonight after I get home." No, Shiloh knew she wouldn't. If she was lucky, she wouldn't spend her whole night but only half of it researching the impact of the Magna Carta on modern day law. She heaved a frustrated sigh remembering the professor everyone from faculty to students called Ha Ha Hensley delivered the assignment to his undergraduate class.

In reality, Ha Ha was the prof from hell. The weeder who separated the men from the pussy whipped wimps who really didn't want to take on law school.

With her heart pounding in her chest, Shiloh knew she had to pass this course and that grade now hinged on a research paper which ought to be deemed a guided tour of Purgatory.

Oh why couldn't she have picked the Nuremberg War Crimes trial out of the bucket Hensley used to pair his students for projects? That question was right up there on her list with how did she end up with the arrogant ass, Tim Cummings, as a study partner.

The self-assured jack ass was on a full ride and didn't give a damn about how he did in his course studies. He firmly believed his daddy's wealth would buy him a degree, then get him a job in the same law firm his great grandfather had founded. After which, he'd probably marry some ditz who had the intelligence of cotton candy yet whom he could dangle off his arm at charity auctions and Republican fund raisers.

God, she rubbed her forehead with her hand. Why me?

Unfortunately, she really didn't give a flying flip about King John and the document he signed in 1216. What did it matter? The long-dead monarch only ignored the writ and went about creating merry mayhem until he died in 1217.

Fuck, she was a law student, not some Joe Schmoe trying to get himself out of a parking ticket. What good were laws nobody paid attention to? What good did it do for her to study the charter?

If he could get away with laughing in the face of his barons, like her father and brother had done to the police with their antics, why couldn't

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she?

Because, nitwit, you don't have a choice.

"O...o...kay," Mabel gasped for air, still fighting off what Shiloh said was the next closest thing to asthma. "I...I won't be up after ten." A long pause dragged out between them. Only the sound of Mabel gulping down air broke the tension between them. It was akin to the cat-dancingon-a-high-voltage-line anxiety that had grown since Shiloh moved out almost four years ago. "Daddy might."

Of course her dear father would be awake. The man didn't understand that to keep your job you had to get up in the morning. He'd probably be parked in his favorite duct-tape repaired recliner watching video tapes of pro-wrestling and drinking himself into oblivion. Rather than tempt her father's anger, Shiloh took the easy way out with a quick clarification. "If I don't talk to you tonight, I'll get with you this weekend. Promise." The lie slid easily from Shiloh's lips.

"You take...care," Mabel muttered. "Give me a call. I need you to handle this."

Shiloh held her breath until her mother hung up. Mopping her face with her hand, she heaved an angry sigh. It was like talking to a wall.

She turned to gathering her purse and briefcase, ready to make the mad dash for her bus. Two minutes to make the corner Metrobus stop. *Argh.* 

"This could have been fixed a year ago with the simple addition of a condom," she whispered under her breath, her fury still in place. Hell, this whole problem could have been fixed twenty-seven-years ago by Jonathan and Mabel never having children.

Not that she regretted her life, just the chaos her family created. Neither would she wish her nephew had never been born, she didn't.

She loved Daniel. He was so sweet—pure. He was like her—an innocent soul literally dropped into the middle of hell on earth.

About to pick up her purse, she checked her hand in mid-move. Shiloh's step faltered when a bang sounded behind her. "Mr. Layton?" she called, wondering if one of her bosses was still in the office. As was his control-freak, suspicious penchant, she didn't doubt he'd stayed late, probably to make sure she hadn't stolen a pen or something equally ridiculous.

The man drove her nuts, but she figured his eccentricity had to do

with his advanced age. In his early seventies, Mr. Layton handled the firm's low risk cases. He also couldn't drive anymore because of his failing eyesight. He had a car service on retainer, and he called them at all hours of the day or night.

Thinking back over her day, Shiloh nibbled on her lower lip. She knew he hadn't left with Mr. Miles, who'd been in court all afternoon. There was no way in hell that the last senior partner, Mr. Thornberg, would offer Mr. Layton a cup of coffee let alone an offer to walk him to his 'rent a taxi'.

The two were like fire and gasoline. You couldn't put them in the same room without an errant comment igniting a verbal inferno. Her ears still rang from their last shouting match.

A ripe sigh broke from her throat. She ought to check on him just for her peace of mind. "Mr. Layton? Is that you?"

Imagining him caught in the throes of a geriatric seizure, she moved down the hall to his office door, forgetting all about needing to make her bus. Bangs. Thuds. She swore she even heard glass crash. With every step her concern grew until it leveled off on terrified.

Frantic, heart pounding, she shifted her gaze across the short expanse of hardwood flooring to her station at the receptionist's desk. Should she call for an ambulance? Should she call the police?

The company handbook didn't cover sounds of destruction happening after closing hours.

Gingerly, she reached for the rattling doorknob. "Mr. Layton, are you hurt?"

Shiloh snatched her hand back. *Stop waffling, Shiloh,* she ordered herself.

Without further hesitation, she flicked the door open with the twist of her wrist.

*Good God.* She felt her eyes widen, terrorized by the sight of hundreds of books and files swirling in the air. She took a step back when their pages fluttering viciously as they rode the cyclonic wind that had grabbed them up.

She couldn't move.

Fear paralyzed her.

A scream built in her throat.

A long, loud shriek of absolute terror shouted when Mr. Layton's

abridged dictionary lifted off his desk to aim straight for her head. She didn't have time to duck, or even think.

Shiloh couldn't name the next sensation, but whatever the prickling tingle was, she swore it was sucking her down through the floor. Her fingers dug into the door jamb with all her might.

*Lost,* she thought. She felt lost forever. Lost for all time.

\* \* \* \* \*

H.M.S. Predator, patrolling the Southern Caribbean Ocean - Spring 1806

"Gorblimey, Cap'n, come see's what I has found."

"What is it, Mr. Tomlinson?" Captain Jacob Wolfson of the *H.M.S. Predator* 

asked from his spot at the waist of the ship. With his legs braced wide, he absorbed the dips and pitches with the skill of a man who'd spent more of his life aboard a ship than off it.

Six months, he mused, searching the distant horizon for any sign of trouble, six arduous months in the South Caribbean Sea was taking its toll on him. Not only him but also his crew. The fine sailors were at their wits end. Such was the life of the men of His Majesty's Navy.

His new orders sounded rather blasé as well.

He and his crew of four hundred were to continue their patrols of the area, hunt down pirates and French privateers, specifically capture the French frigate, *The Bordeaux*.

That he hadn't seen a pirate or privateer in eight weeks made this a fool's errand.

"I think it be a dead man, Cap'n. I surely do. I surely do. Near on fell over him as I was making me rounds with the brush and bucket."

Jacob's gaze lingered on the horizon before he finally turned to stare at Tomlinson. For an old salt, and Tomlinson was that, he had the keenest eyes this side of the ocean second only to his captain's eagle clear vision. "Men die onboard a ship, Mr. Tomlinson."

"I ain't never seen this lad afore, Cap'n."

Tomlinson's statement got a hint of a reaction from Jacob. The perpetual frown creasing his forehead shifted to a scowl. "Stowaway or pressed into service?"

"Don't know," Tomlinson muttered. "Could have been hiding

down in the bowels since we left Port Royal, but I don't think so." He snatched his woolen cap from his head. He pointed the knit hat toward a coil of rope near the mizzenmast. "Don't know how the watch missed him, but there he be."

Jacob strode forward. He wove his way around a few of his men who had chosen to sleep on deck last night to view what had Tomlinson wringing his cap into a knot. "I see."

The hell he did.

His gaze stroked over the young lad curled up in a ball in the center of the coil of rope. If they weren't in enemy waters, even calm ones such as they were at the moment, he'd have had a good laugh at the boy's expense. He was sleeping in the most insane position with his head tucked further into the body of the coil, which wrenched his neck at an obscene angle. His legs stuck out like a representation from the *London Times* where fishermen caught mermaids.

His first instinct was to laugh aloud. And, harmless jesting often improved the men's morale, hearing their captain at ease did as well.

Unfortunately for the lad, stowaways were serious business. Gritting his teeth, he imagined insurgents making their way to the gun stores with the intent to blow the *Predator* to kingdom come. "Wake him."

"Cap'n? Ain't meaning no disrespect, but if'n he's dead, I wouldn't want to be bringin' bad luck down on us all."

Damn the superstitions of the crew straight to hell. What did Tomlinson want him to do if the boy was dead? Leave the corpse on the deck to rot? "Tomlinson, he's not dead. If anything, he is able to sleep through a major gun battle. He's not the first of his breed we've had aboard."

"Aye, especially if they'd been pressed or regretted the decision to join. Och, I remember the 'ead ache I awoke with when I found meself on the *Surprise*. Know'n I'd had too much ale was bad enough, but the worse of it was finding meself out in the Atlantic while dealing with the pain." Tomlinson flashed a rotted-tooth smile at his captain before he turned to fulfill his orders. "Alrighty, laddie, time for you to be up and about."

Jacob watched Tomlinson jostle the lad's shoulder with his filthy hand. Slowly, the unknown's lashes fluttered up to reveal a lush pair of bright blue eyes. He didn't bother to consider who this might be. Hell no. He had to protect the *Predator* and his crew. "What is your business aboard my ship?" he asked in a tone comparable to steel clashing against

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#### steel.

Propping his fists on his hips he waited for a reply. "I've no time to tarry, boy. You will tell me how you found yourself on my ship." He swallowed the gasp rising in his throat when his new crewman struggled to rise in the coil. The simple movement exposed a wisp of bosom. He gritted his teeth when the odd shirt *she* wore gaped to expose more of her creamy flesh above her odd fashioned camisole. He felt his manhood harden before he doused the sudden spurt of lust assaulting him.

Jacob considered not only what he'd seen but his crew's reaction to knowing they had a woman on board.

And he had thought the superstitious nonsense was high in the men's minds before with the proclamations they had to have a Jonas in their midst. He had rejected their blabbering statements about having a harbinger of foul luck somewhere on the three-mast Man of War with cautious shakes of his head. He believed a bit in bad luck, but not enough to set course for port which was his underling's cumulative opinion.

The crew merely grumbled about his uncompassionate nature, but he knew they still worried they were hexed. Jacob quickly added to the scenario playing out in his mind's eye the men's forced celibacy. Hell and damnation, this woman was going to tilt the *Predator* on its keel if they found out she was amongst them.

Not if, but when.

"Cap'n," Tomlinson started, his mouth gaping. A shake of Jacob's head stopped the able-bodied seaman before he announced the discovery to the whole ship.

"Bring him to the Great Cabin, Mr. Tomlinson."

"Aye, Cap'n."

Jacob turned on the heel of his boot and headed for his the room he used for strategy sessions and political meetings alike. *What in God's name was he going to do with her?* 

### Chapter Two

#### <u>Trouble ahoy.</u>

Shiloh stood rooted to her spot, still stunned from whatever had happened in the office. Moving her arm to rub the sleep from her eyes, she wasn't pleased when the man who had unceremoniously woken her pushed her hand down.

This was too crazy.

Everywhere she looked she saw boat decking, ropes and sea. There wasn't even a seagull or a cloud to break the stilted monotony of the horizon, though the sky was the clearest and bluest she'd ever seen. She didn't have any idea how long she stood there or even care until the man standing behind her jabbed her in the back to get her moving forward. "Hey," she cried when he gave her another shove. "Don't get pushy."

Figuring it was better to err on the side of caution, she moved toward a gaping doorway built into the side of a bulk head. Fear clawed at her heart as the tap of her serviceable pumps was drowned out by the decisive step of the other man's boots. They walked across the deck, then down the short flight of stairs leading her into near darkness. Only the light from a single lamp illuminated the area. "Where am I?"

There was no denying she wasn't in DC. Every sense shouted she was at sea. Beneath the snap of canvas, she could hear the soft shoosh of waves lapping against the hull. Salt air tickled her nose along with another god awful odor she didn't want to name. "Where am I?" she repeated her question when the oaf in front of her sent her a scathing glare.

"Shh." The guy behind her made that noise.

It wasn't any sort of freaky nightmare. No way. Too many of the tangents felt too real to be chalked up to falling asleep at the library table where her study group normally met. Vivid dreams aside, she clearly

remembered the facts of the office. Not only was it part of her training in law, the knowledge of when you attacked and when you held the rudder steady, she also understood that she'd never fallen asleep in study group. Mainly, the fact was, she clearly recalled never making her bus.

All she could do was shrug at his response. Until she figured out how she'd landed in this nightmare she was going to have to stick to the shadows. Yes, that made sense. She'd fly low under the radar until she found her way home.

Out of habit, she reached her hand up to rub the tension out of her neck. The guy at the front turned on her so fast she didn't have time to squeak let alone shout for help. Planted against the wall, she snapped her eyes from his scowling countenance to his strange outfit. Her eyes slashed upward to take in the chiseled planes of his face. Her heart began to crash in her chest and the heat of a blush rolled up her cheeks. Warmth filled her belly when he suddenly pressed closer to her. Darn it, he was handsome as well as outdated.

He smelled good too. Like the sea and the wind and something else she couldn't put her finger on. If she had to describe the scent, she'd say he smelled manly. A pulse pounded deep in her womanhood for a split second before she pushed the pesky throb aside.

Just wonderful, she was lusting after Captain Ahab. Forcing herself to calm down, she licked her dry lips. "What is your problem?"

"You," he told her plainly.

A furious glare pinned her to her spot, his body trapped her only means of escape.

Escape?

*Come on, Shiloh, how do you escape a ship? You have a better chance of running screaming from this nightmare.* 

Maybe that was it. She caught herself before she snapped her fingers. This could be some form of a delusion.

Mentally revisiting the last thing she remembered from the office, she knew the book hadn't hit her. It was the quicksand effect that had saved her from death by dictionary. Great, so at least she was clear that she hadn't gotten clobbered. It also did little to assuage her growing fear.

Psychotic break? It was possible. Her mother was prone to manic episodes, so maybe she was predisposed to them too. Granted, she'd had enough stress in her life lately to make any person crazy. "Sorry," she

muttered when he continued to stare at her.

"Apology accepted," he whispered.

His hot breath washed over her to waft her stylishly short hair. "Can... can... we continue?" *Can you do something other than glare at me*?

A funny expression shifted across his face and darkened his cobalt blue eyes. With a nod, he wrapped his fingers around her wrist and pulled her the rest of the way. "You are excused, Mr. Tomlinson."

"Aye Cap'n."

He didn't stop dragging her until she stood in a cabin. The entire rear wall was made up of windows with a long, mahogany desk situated below them. Several feet in front of the desk and nearly parked in the middle of the area stood another table with several chairs. A glass front bookcase was positioned on the left side of the room. The other side was taken up by a buffet where there was a silver tea service and several crystal decanters of liquor. Shiloh could use a drink of either, but she really wanted the liquid courage found in the latter.

"What is your name?"

"Shiloh," she replied before thinking better of her precarious situation. Another 'what if' hit her. Could some person have concocted this elaborate hoax for some evil reason?

Okay, Shiloh, now you aren't just thinking you're crazy, you're acting verifiably insane. Who in their right mind or even in their wrong mind, would cook up such a scheme for the likes of you? The answer was - nobody. She was nothing. A bit of algae in the vast sea of humanity. "Shiloh Montgomery-Moore."

"Are you related to the Montgomerys of Hampstead?"

Damn, if he didn't have the sexiest accent. British, but with a deep resonant tonal quality that was too hot for most women to handle. It went perfectly with his handsome face and stellar physique. The man had a pair of shoulders broad enough to grab any woman's attention. His outfit, however, was something out of an old swashbuckler flick. Flustered, Shiloh wove her fingers together and started to pray. "I don't think so. Why?"

"You sound Colonial, but not like any I've ever met." He strode to the buffet and poured out two glasses of brandy. Carrying the snifter toward her, he set hers on the table before he took a sip of his. The way those lips caressed the glass globe was almost indecent, and it wasn't

anything more than his lips hugging the rim.

"How do you explain this?" he asked after he leveled the glass at his waist.

"Sorry." What else was she going to say? Oh by the by, I was at work when something freaky happened? Well, why the hell not? He might know about the 'whatever' sucking her through the floor. "You see, I was at the office and all of a sudden this racket started in Mr. Layton's office..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jacob listened to her ramble for what seemed like forever but he knew was probably only a few minutes. His attention wasn't on her longwinded explanation but on her tiny, worried gasps for air. The shirt she wore left little to his imagination and her fast respirations had him thinking of her being flat on her back beneath him. By Davy Jones' Locker, he imagined kissing her, touching her, burying himself in her welcoming warmth.

Every once in a while, he'd watch her nibble on her lower lip or blink at him. With every small feminine move, his lust for her grew until he raged inside like a young sailor at dock after his first tour. "I see," he answered having heard the majority of what she said.

"You believe me?" She didn't sound as though she believed herself. Reaching for the snifter of brandy, she took a tentative sip, then another.

"I've heard of stranger occurrences happening. There is a place off the coast of Bermuda where whole ships have disappeared."

"The Bermuda Triangle. I read an article about it in a magazine not too long ago. Freaky."

How, or from when, she'd come was not Jacob's problem, that she was here was. For all he knew she could have fallen from the sky and in the end it made little difference. He'd had his fair share of pressed crew who had attempted to be quit of his Majesty's Navy in the past. Eventually they settled into the routine of the ship or made good on their escape. Where they were currently sailing there was no risk of her going overboard for the sake of freedom. Only a loon on his way to Bedlam would take that route. "Promise me you won't jump the rails."

"What?"

"Try to leave the ships by way of a swim to shore. Even if you managed the feat, you'd not survive long on land, Miss Montgomery-Moore. The slavers known to stop in this area would think nothing of gaining a purse from your sale. The brothels wouldn't mind having you either."

She gasped, her fingers turning white knuckled. "Are you serious?"

"I wouldn't lie to you. As soon as we return to a safe port I will have you taken from the ship. Do you have relatives in New York or Baltimore?"

"I was born in Baltimore," she responded, her face turning to the windows of the Great Cabin. He watched her blink fast and knew she was trying to wish away the tears gathering in her eyes. "How long?"

"My papers require me to be in the Caribbean and as far south as Brazil until my mission is completed. I suspect it will be another month to two before we will put to a major port. We will however supply along the way. Those ports aren't safe for a woman without means. They are mostly small colonial or aboriginal villages."

"Oh." Big, fat tears filled her eyes again.

Jacob hated her crestfallen expression but there was no help for it. He'd lived his life by honesty and he wasn't about to start lying now for the sake of a woman. "While on board, I will provide you with duties, but I ask that you keep your gender a secret." He held up his hand for silence when she opened her mouth to argue. "I've no concern that my officers will behave badly around you, but many of my crew are not as schooled. As well, it is in your best interest to remain quiet about how you came to be here."

"What's your name?" On her question she took another sip of her brandy.

"I am your captain, Jacob Christopher Wolfson, and you are aboard the 74 gun Man of War, *H.M.S. Predator.*" Jacob heaved a sigh. The alcohol dulled the light in her eyes. The tears were a problem. She was a woman trapped with four-hundred female-starved men. He was going to have to protect her which wasn't, in essence, an easy task. The ship's charter proclaimed rape and attempted rape a high crime, but there were members of his crew who would think naught of forcing themselves on her before they murdered her in cold blood. "My first mate and quartermaster will be appraised of your situation. If I cannot be with you, which will be often, you should stay close to one of them."

"Do I have another option?"

"I can clap you in irons until we make port, but I think you will

find the accommodations of the prisoner's hold lacking." He inspected her again. Not under the penalty of death would he condemn her to that rat infested terror. "There is one other option; I could place you in the care of the Ship's Surgeon. He could diagnose you with some hideous and extraordinarily contagious disease which would force him to put you in seclusion."

"Quarantine? I don't like the sound of that. Wouldn't that make the men even more suspicious?"

"Considering you only just joined the crew—certainly. Though there is always a chance you came down with the pox after you were snatched." Which was another problem. "We departed Port Royal better than a week ago."

"So?"

"You just appeared. That is the most curious point the men will focus on. Fortunate for you, you don't sound French. Then the men, not to say myself, would have marooned you on the nearest isle."

Shiloh shook her head. "I'm not following you."

"England is at war with Boney." Jacob sighed again. "You don't understand?"

Her eyes widened and her perfect rosebud lips formed an 'o'. She took in the setting again, before gaping at him. "What year is it?"

"'Tis the year of Our Lord Eighteen-hundred and six."

Jacob watched her face pale. Moving quickly, he snatched the dipping snifter from her limp hand before it dropped to smash on the floor. He placed it on the table before laying his hand on her thin shoulder. "Miss Montgomery-Moore, are you ill?"

"I don't know? Does time travel cause motion sickness?"

Jacob chuckled but there was nothing funny about their situation. If he was smart, he'd put her to shore sooner rather than later. His conscience wouldn't allow for it. He couldn't leave her alone to face the horrors of the untamed land the *Predator* was currently skirting. "Not to my knowledge."

"How many people have you met who've traveled through time?"

He wasn't believing her for one minute, but it wasn't in his best interest or the crew's to tell her so. "You are the first."

"That makes me feel better—not."

"I promise you on my commission, Miss Montgomery-Moore, as

soon as I can find you a safe harbor, I will. Then you can be quit of the *Predator.*"

"Thank you," she answered shakily.

Jacob kept thinking his way through the problem she posed. Even if he were able to beg God for a minor miracle and keep her secret safe while she was performing the tasks he gave her, there was no way he'd be able to keep her identity hidden when she was off-duty. He doubted that at her diminutive height she could even reach the hooks for a hammock in the crewman's quarters. "For the sake of your modesty and privacy, I will give you my cabin." Which would cause an uproar, but the men would not question him directly. They would talk behind his back about the young lad in their captain's quarters, and no matter how he sliced the cake, the gossip would make little difference.

"That's not necessary. I'm sure there is somewhere else I could sleep."

"Miss Montgomery-Moore, there is nowhere else with the privacy allotted my cabin."

"It sounds like this time I don't have a choice."

"No. The *Predator*, like all in her class, is a tight ship with little room to walk let alone hold a secret safe. It has happened with a few of the crewmen on rare occasion that they've held something close to the breast, but you are at a distinct disadvantage."

Shiloh frowned at him before her eyes widened even further. "I get it. My body will give me away."

"Exactly." And damn him to hell if his own fingers didn't itch to stroke her skin. The memory of her sleeping on the deck, then their brief altercation in the corridor, returned to harden his cock. She was an innocent and he intended to keep her that way.

He gritted his teeth, determined not to touch her. His brain conjured up an image of her sweeping into a grand ballroom, her person draped in pink satin and her hair swept up into a waterfall of curls meant to tease his senses and heighten his awareness of her and only her. "That will be all."

"You didn't give me any directions." She reminded him. "What would you like me to do first?"

He considered her for a moment before he moved to the door. Casting a gaze over his shoulder, a glimmer of a smile cracked his lips. "First you pay the devil."

\* \* \* \* \*

She was going to kill him if it was the last thing she did. The initial spark of undiluted terror when he said 'pay the devil' was far from what he meant. The whole while it took him to call his first mate and quartermaster to the room then explained her situation she had envisioned being put to task, Regency style. Exactly what that was, she hadn't a clue, but she didn't think it involved a whipping. She didn't learn the truth until the Quartermaster snorted before motioning for her to follow him.

He took her to a small cabin, told her to change her clothes into the ugliest rags she'd ever seen and put on boots that were so poorly made they had her feet blistered within five minutes.

After a few more indignant snorts once she joined him in the corridor, he marched her down several flights of steps to a place that made her want to wretch.

Whether it was her study in law or her self-preservation kicking in, she didn't know, but she managed to wrap her brain around the fact that this was very real. Little details, things she wouldn't have known if she wasn't an avid watcher of cable television channels specializing in history and a lover of glossy magazines, gained clarity. The logic she always employed in her life nailed the fact home.

Then, the Quartermaster delivered the order that set her temper on a slow boil.

He wanted her to paint tar onto a beam in the belly of the boat, or yacht, or whatever the hell this tub of floating timber was. After she'd only gotten about ten feet of the beam coated, she'd been railed by another man, Captain Wolfson's first mate, Daniel Blake. Oh, she despised that man to the very pits of her soul.

He'd come up behind her, scared the bejesus out of her, then told her she had to speed it up. The urge to tell him to rot in hell tapped at the back of her teeth but she managed to keep her mouth closed. The knowledge that until she figured out what had happened, she was stuck on this floating nightmare was ever present.

Sadly, she couldn't afford to lose her uncertain safety that was the boat. She'd thought about that for the first five feet of her task. The rest of the time until she'd been interrupted was spent on deep contemplations of what had happened to her.

There wasn't a handy explanation.

Now with her shoulders aching and another day of slaving away in the fouled water at the very bottom of the ship ahead of her, Shiloh knew what she wanted—out. A soft groan escaped from between her lips as she pushed open the door to the cabin she'd been given. "Thank you," she said to the boy who'd shown her the way. *And if you wouldn't mind, get the hell away from me,* she finished to herself.

"Cap'n told me to fetch you some supper. I left it on the table there."

Shiloh stiffly turned around to gaze at the boy before looking at the bowl of soup and the flat loaf of bread set beside it. Her stomach twisted into a tighter knot when she imagined worms digging their way out of the bread to swim in the broth.

Jeremy Whitcomb was about eight-years-old and as spitfire rebellious as she had not been at his age. Within a split second of meeting him, she realized he didn't have a clue as to the fact she was a woman. Chalking that up to his age, she almost ran her fingers maternally through his hair but couldn't bear the pain of raising her arm that far.

She also didn't doubt it was why Captain Pain in the Ass had asked him to escort her. Jeremy wouldn't blab because he hadn't figured out the truth.

Poor Jeremy appeared to have seen all the horrors of the world and then some. A ghastly scar rode his left cheek, and he had the hardest brown eyes she'd ever had the misfortune of meeting. Pity welled in her soul, but she didn't have the energy to ask the boy about his circumstances. Particularly, she wanted to know what asshole had slapped him smack dab in the middle of this hell. "Thank you."

"It's an honor, Mr. Montgomery-Moore. Cap'n says if I do a good job with you he'll give me an extra ration of grog."

"Grog?" What the hell? She knew exactly what grog was. Alcoholic and not meant for kids. Her rage rose again. Yes, she was going to kill Captain Wolfson.

"It's a part of the ship's charter, Mr. Montgomery-Moore. Tastes like the bottom of the barrel, but that ain't surprising considering how long we've been at sea. 'Struth, Cap'n is better at keeping his word then most. That's why my parents entrusted my training to him. Some day I

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want to be a Coxswain like my brother was."

Shiloh mopped her face with her hand. Coxswain? She didn't want to even imagine what the nasty title involved. "I'm sure you will be." Sure, and pigs flew on the full moon. The boy would probably be dead before he ever saw port. God, she was sure she was destined to keel over before young Jeremy. "Will I see you tomorrow?" Shiloh asked as she rubbed the ache from her shoulder. She cringed against the pain in her fingers.

"I ain't going nowhere, Mr. Montgomery-Moore."

"True." For the first time since she'd been prodded awake, she realized she could still smile. "Hopefully, I'll be in a better mood."

"The first day's always the hardest," Jeremy said with great authority. "You ain't got no need to be worryin'. I've seen mates bigger and meaner than you fall into the regiment. You just listen to Mr. Collins...

#### "Who?"

"Quartermaster be he."

"That's right." Shiloh recalled the bastard with a small growl of anger. At this point all of them were one big blur. And, she hated all of them for making her miserable. If her body hadn't ached so badly, Shiloh would have hugged Jeremy just because he epitomized resiliency. She did manage to wink at him. "I'll remember next time I see him."

"I also brought you a bucket of water and clean linen. It ain't much, but you'll feel all the better for washing the day's grime off your body."

"Thanks so much, Jeremy."

He blinked at her several times before making his way to the door. "Mr. Montgomery-Moore, you sure talk strange."

Shiloh bit her lip to keep herself from apologizing. It wasn't until the door closed that she let her shoulders slump. The whole contrition thing was a habit she'd never broken. A trait she picked up because it didn't stop her father from smacking her across a room, but did stop him short of beating her to a bloody pulp.

In the words of her bosses, she had the disease to please. It was too much an armchair psychology statement for Shiloh's liking, but her contrition and sympathy were genuine.

Then again her bosses didn't have a fricking clue about her. Their sole purpose was to verbally punch her in the gut when she made a

mistake or slam her down by complimenting her work ethic then saying she could have done better on some mundane task they'd given her to complete.

Mentally shaking herself out of her depressing thoughts, she walked to the bucket first. At least the water looked clean. Grabbing the hem of her borrowed shirt, she lifted it over her head. A long moan of pain echoed in the cabin. Damn if her arms didn't ache.

Tossing the shirt over the back of a barrel-chair, she eyed the ugly garment. It was no wonder the sailors called the clothes slops. They had the cut of a potato sack and reeked of body odor.

A cool breeze swept over her sweat soaked, dirty skin. Wishing she had her purse and her non-aspirin pain reliever, Shiloh forced her hands to wet the square of linen folded neatly on the leather seat. The urge to sit and cry overwhelmed her as she plopped down onto the floor. Beside her the wet rag lay in an ignominious heap, the water spread out from the cloth like a pool of blood oozed from a murdered man. *Work through it.* She kicked off the boots, cursed them for causing big blisters to form on her feet, and tried to valiantly get control of her emotions. Tar stained hands gripped the linen until her knuckles turned white. "Please, save me," she begged God.

On her plea the sobs she'd kept at bay all day broke free. "Please, I just want to go home."

No matter how horrible her family life, or how miserable her job and law school were, she just wanted to go back to a place with all the modern technology she was used to—all the normal things she hid behind.

What she wouldn't do for one good dose of the cable television? What she wouldn't do for a modern kitchen? God, she could just imagine searching the Net, and blogging about this fucking nightmare.

Microwave popcorn popped into her mind so fast, she cried harder. What she wouldn't do for her favorite snack?

Almost anything.

The sound of the door opening and then closing sobered her for a whole second, but the overwhelming need to just get all her emotions out there where she could deal with them wouldn't be denied.

"Miss Montgomery-Moore, are you hurt?"

The deep resonant voice of Captain Wolfson permeated the pity

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party she was currently enjoying. Rage completely eradicated her sorrow. "Damn it all. How could you have done that to me? How could you stick me down in that hole and make me slather tar all day? What did I do to deserve that?" She flinched away when he touched her cheek. "How dare you?" Her glare should have warned him away, but it didn't. He knelt beside her and gathered her in his arms instead.

Too tired to fight and too mad to think rationally, she scrubbed her face against his shirt.

His soft, exasperated sigh wafted her hair. "The reason I set you about paying the devil, Miss Montgomery-Moore, was because it is the least favored duty aboard this ship and the least likely where your identity would be discovered."

Damn it, she wanted to tell him to get his hands off her. She really did. In a screwed up way her brain equated him to being her anchor. "Oh," she muttered, her traitorous body melting against his, her fingers clinging to waist. The wonderful warmth of his strength soothed her even further. It also dulled the ache in her muscles until she'd calmed down. Partially, she liked how he didn't say anything while she vented her emotions. It was almost as if he understood she didn't need to talk, but cope with all the turmoil. "Please don't make me do that again. It was horrible. Disgusting."

Jacob sighed again. Brushing his hand across her hair, he strengthened his hold on her slight frame. "Tomorrow you will assist the ship's surgeon. The *Predator* has very few men ill at the present, and I think you will suit well with Doctor Anderson."

"Does he know what I am?"

"Yes. He will also instruct you in normal naval discipline and customs. This should help you settle into your new position and divert suspicion from your body."

Suddenly, Shiloh could think of a few positions she'd like to try out and none of them had to deal with swabbing the deck or paying the devil. A tiny spark of heat pulsed through her core. A sensation which was in no way going to serve her best interest. She needed to get out of there, and not just off the boat, but back to her own time. "Do you think I'll ever be able to go home?" She looked up at him, needing someone to tell her the truth, even if the truth was—you're stuck here, Shiloh.

"I wish I had an answer for you."

"Really, if you do know how, you would tell me, right?"

"Miss Montgomery-Moore, if I had any idea how to return you to your family, I would move heaven and earth and this warship to do so."

"Thank you," she whispered, her body getting even crazier for him. All the emotions culminated when he moved to release her. She didn't want to be alone with her depressing thoughts anymore. "You really don't have to leave. I'll sleep on the floor."

He didn't say anything for a long time, but he did casually brush his fingers up and down her back, raising goosebumps on her arms. "As much as I have acted the gentleman, Miss Montgomery-Moore, I am also a man with desires."

That was too incredible to comprehend. His turn of speech also made her lust grow for him. He was a nice guy in all the right ways. If she cared to realize what it was that attracted her to him, which she didn't, she'd say, he was her Mr. Perfect. The throb in her crotch grew when she inadvertently brushed her arm over his cock. *Damn*, she mused. *Double damn*, she silently continued when all her thoughts turned to being fucked by this man. "You want me?"

"I just said as much," he fairly snarled out his response.

"Well, you don't need to bite my head off." Pulling back, she snorted at him. The heat in his blue stare fueled the fire in the pit of her belly. Leave it to this man to get her started, and then turn all 'knight in shining armor' on her. Not that he knew he'd done so; it was the principle of the thing.

Jacob stood and gathered a fresh change of clothes from the built-in cabinet. He made it as far as the door before he said anything else. Hesitant, his fingers curled around the latch. "Goodnight."

A screech that would bust his eardrums built in her chest, but Shiloh managed to tamp it down. Rolling to her feet, she scrubbed her hands up and down her arms trying to rid herself of the chill that came from the loss of his body heat. "Same to you, *asshole*."

# Chapter Three

#### *Experts built the Titanic. Amateurs built the Ark.*

"She tells some of the most fantastic stories, Jacob," Donald Anderson, ship's surgeon, informed his Captain and friend. "Do you know that in the future they have vaccines to halt the progression of many diseases?"

"You believe her tale then?" He couldn't form an opinion on her time travel theorem. For the better part of a week, he'd tried to ignore her presence, but damn it was getting difficult. The fact he wasn't comfortable in his borrowed bed anymore than he was pleased to know she was sleeping in his made him irritable at the best of times. Most others times he popped off like a raving lunatic.

He could even state without doubt where he'd started this long, slow journey toward Bedlam. The night he'd found her weeping in his cabin. Since his fateful mistake of comforting her, the sensation of her every curve molded to his body was never far from his thoughts. By the Devil, he'd gotten hard while plotting the *Predator's* course and again when he noticed her walking the rails with Donald.

"I have no choice but to. She showed me such a place where they inoculated her against small pox. Did you know that this amazing therapy is made from cow pox? I always wondered why the dairy maids seemed nearly immune to the disease."

"That helps us little out here in the middle of nowhere," Jacob replied briskly. Irritated to begin with, he despised her for allowing Donald to see her body. It started a spurt of pure jealousy running through his system. He lifted his glass of sherry to his lips, trying to wash the foul taste from his mouth. "Damn her."

Donald peered at him for a moment. "You are in a rant of late. It wouldn't have anything to do with our guest, would it?"

"Of course it has everything to do with our guest. Do you know the stir she's caused even though her secret is safe? I nearly had to have Carmichael lashed because he treated her poorly." He almost saw himself forced into calling for a man to be whipped for an untoward comment. The truth was blatant and on the level of playing a dangerous game. If any of the men accosted her they'd be beaten to death. Indeed, he was playing a very dangerous game of chess where Shiloh was concerned.

In the back of his mind he recognized the problem was with him. He couldn't get that night when she'd leaned on him out of his mind. "Dammit."

"The code of genteel society is at war with the code of the sea, it seems."

"More than at war. This is the Battle of Trafalgar all over again."

Donald chuckled at his statement. "Perhaps, the battle is internal, dear friend. It's been near on two years since you lost Mary."

Jacob raised his scathing glare to Donald's pinched face. "I need not a reminder of when my wife passed away."

"Nor do you need a reminder that Miss Montgomery-Moore is an enticing creature."

"Your point?" Unbidden, his cock hardened when Jacob considered just how enticing she was in his arms.

"She is enamored with you."

Jacob snorted in derision. "How did you come to that ludicrous assumption? Every time we're in the same area of the ship she throws glares at me. 'Tis just luck that she hasn't been reprimanded for insubordination."

Donald agreed with the latter by nodding his head. "I'll tell you how I came to my conclusion. A look here, a whispered word there, tells me more than any glare could. You also must remember she is quite young."

Dear God, he hadn't even considered her age. "And what might be the count of her tender years?"

"Four and twenty. You remember that age, don't you, old man?"

By society's standards, Shiloh was a spinster. In his opinion, she was a fish out of water. A seductive sea nymph sent from god to make his

life a misery. "I remember you getting tossed out of a tavern for pawing the keeper's daughter, is what I remember."

"That's right, you were too involved with your mistress to ever consider taking a humble barmaid to your bed."

It wasn't so much what Donald said, but how he said it with an insulting hint of condemnation in his tone. "What in the blazes is that supposed to mean?"

"That's always been your problem, Jacob. Born high and mighty as the fourth son to the Old Earl. With no title to be had once your brothers were gifted and no land to come from your legacy, you turned to the Navy." Donald let his words sink in. "Unlike your brothers, you've never hunted the fairer flesh from the seedier side."

"I prefer not to have my purse lifted and a dagger thrust into my back." He preferred not to have his family name dragged through the slime too, which came with that particularly distasteful scandal. That repugnant privilege he'd left to his brothers.

There was also the issue of how he liked to control his mistresses. He enjoyed them bending to his will and serving him well. And, they never complained over his peculiarity since he always made sure they also found satisfaction.

In his mind, it was a winning bargain. They did his bidding in their abode and he paid all the bills. "I prefer to know the woman I will bed before we muss the sheets."

"I see, so you live out the dangers of the sea rather than the desires of the bedroom."

"You overstep your bounds, Doctor."

"Do I? Who do you think Miss Montgomery-Moore will divulge all your dark little secrets to? Me? I know all your secrets already."

"So you think."

Donald swirled the crimson colored liquor in his glass. "Alcohol is a wonderful thing when taken in moderation."

Jacob narrowed his gaze on Donald. "Somewhere in this conversation you must have something of substance to say."

"After the funeral, do you remember sitting in this very cabin drinking yourself into oblivion?"

"Vaguely." He was more likely to remember the crashing headache he'd had the next day.

"Then you don't remember telling me how you adored your dearly departed wife, and had forgiven her for her moment of indiscretion with Alexander."

"Damn you," Jacpb whispered, seething with the memory. The pain knifed through him. The thought of his sweet Mary sleeping with his next elder brother was as disgusting today as it had been two years ago.

"Or how she explained it wasn't your fault you weren't the master of the tussle but a king of the sweet act? You went on to report her personal opinion of your love making skills by saying that all mothers should send their virgin daughters to you for deflowering because you were so incredibly gentle. 'Twas a pity you never realized a woman full grown doesn't want sweet but fiery passion. I give you credit, Jacob, if any woman had said that to me, I'd have tossed her in her room and walked away from her—forever."

"She was my wife and was carrying my child when Alexander finally admitted to their affair."

"She was carrying his son."

"It made no difference to me." A dozen times he'd tried to make that statement stick. Legacy and protecting his family was all he'd thought about when the truth revealed itself to him. Unfortunately, he'd never quite stamped the fact home that his wife had whored herself with the last man on earth he'd expected, or that he would raise his brother's child to conform to propriety.

"I think it made a grave difference to you."

It had, but Jacob would never say so, not even when he was deep in his cups. Emasculated, that was what Mary had done to him. She'd ripped every shred of manhood from his soul and then stomped all over it. "I should have let her father have his will and marry her off to the Marquis of Ball." He drained his glass in a single gulp. He reached for the decanter, but stopped himself. Moderation had its place, an ideology Jacob was fast learning.

"The man was old enough to be her grandfather."

"He was also of an age where he wouldn't care if she traipsed across the countryside with a herd of young bucks sniffing at her skirts."

"Are you trying to tell me you blame yourself for Mary's affair?"

"Partly, but there was much blame to go around, Donald." Steering the conversation back to clearer waters, Jacob shook his head. The memory of Miss Montgomery-Moore sobbing in his arms returned to batter his already bruised ego. "What does this have to do with our guest, anyway?"

"She's a woman from another time, Jacob. A sexually open time."

"And?" he asked through gritted teeth. Coming to grips with his lust was proving to be a monumental task.

"She's not concerned with public scrutiny or the morals of our time. I say you take her up on her offer for a tryst."

"She offered me a tryst? When?" Jacob didn't believe his closest friend one bit. Miss Montgomery-Moore's relationship and his was equal to a match and a keg of gunpowder. A flick of the wrist and both of them would meet and explode. "Even if she had, I'd have rejected the notion outright as the worst idea I've ever heard."

"I think it is a winning idea. When we put to shore tomorrow for supplies there is no reason for you not to sneak away with her for an hour or so. She'd assuredly like some time to take a proper bath and since you can't stand the thought of another man escorting her, you'd be the perfect man to see she's safe."

Was he really so transparent that Donald could see his jealousy? Jacob didn't have time to contemplate whether or not he wore his heart on his sleeve. He needed to get Miss Montgomery-Moore off his ship and out of his thoughts. "Aye, safe from savages and other seamen," he replied, his body hardening with desire. *Who is going to keep her safe from me*?

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's really beautiful here," Shiloh commented. They were making their way through a tangle of vines and underbrush to a secluded spot where she could take a bath. An actual bath. Captain Wolfson even said if she wished, she could wash her clothes.

There was a God in Heaven.

A clean body and clean clothes were more than she'd hoped for since waking up in aboard the *Predator*. Still, she was starting to acclimate. Even ship-life was beginning to grow on her, albeit much of it repulsed her. It was nice to feel useful, and Donald did give her credit for work well done. The regimented side of her new circumstance was slowly becoming a part of her personal attitude too.

The only instances where she lost her patience was when Captain Wolfson was around, though. Maybe it was the way he commanded the

ship or how he treated his crew, but something inside her kept steering her toward him. At the same time, she tore herself away from the ridiculous emotions stirring in her heart. The whole enamored with the illustrious sea captain equated to a recipe for disaster in her mind.

*It sure did.* She imagined herself standing on the dock when they made Baltimore, being put ashore with only the clothes on her back then watching the ship sail away. If there was one thing she'd learned from Donald it was that Captain Wolfson had a displaced sense of loyalty.

Loyal to his duty and his orders.

Loyal to his ship and crew.

Loyal to a wife who'd screwed around on him with his brother then had the unmitigated gall to throw it in his face.

Just thinking of that bitch made her angry all over again, but this go 'round her rage wasn't directed at Captain Wolfson. No, she just wanted to scream at the top of her lungs because it was so humiliating.

Jacob Wolfson was a man of courage and deep convictions. He deserved better than to be embarrassed by his wife, reviled by his brother and snickered at by his contemporaries.

Donald had also told her if she meant to ease Jacob's torment, which she took to mean get him back on the proverbial horse after it's kicked you in the teeth; she was going to have to make the first move. She'd already warned him that seduction wasn't in her repertoire. Sure, she could send signals, but taking on a man as stubborn as Wolfson would probably leave her emotionally scarred. If he said 'nay', he meant it until his dying breath.

She wasn't sure she could handle his rejection or worst, him laughing at her lame-ass attempts to get him out of his uniform.

"Is something the matter?" Jacob asked her.

Realizing she'd fisted her hand, Shiloh forced herself to calm down. "I'm fine, it's just...you know...anticipation." She peeked at him through the veil of her lashes.

"I remember the feeling well."

Her heart gave a hard thud in her chest when he smiled at her. *This was bad.* How the hell could she even think of seducing him when all he had to do was smile at her to get her started? "Thank you for showing me out here. I probably would have gotten lost on the beach if you'd left me on my own."

His chuckle reminded her of another time she'd heard it. A couple of nights ago while she strolled the deck with Donald she noticed Captain Wolfson standing at his normal position on the quarterdeck. Whenever he was above boards, he appeared God-like, but especially when he was checking the course for the night. With the moonlight paling his deeply tanned face and turning his white breeches silvery, he was ethereal. That night he had chuckled at something one of the young boys had said. It was such a rich sound Shiloh had committed it to memory because it made her happy just to think about it. "Sorry," she apologized realizing he had stopped walking to stare at her. "My balance is off."

"You have very good sea legs."

Out of nowhere the picture of her legs wrapped around his hips as he plunged into her jarred her brain to a screeching halt. "Huh?"

"That sometimes transfers to the land after a voyage. The ground is no longer rolling beneath you so you suffer vertigo."

"At least it isn't some deadly disease."

Captain Wolfson threw his head back and laughed. Licking her suddenly dry lips, she felt herself smile in spite of her nervous tension. Once he sobered, he reached for her hand. "Thankfully, no, just watch your step. Fall right on a rock and the cause doesn't bring on the end, but the result is the same."

She'd like to participate in a different cause and effect with him, one involving their bodies, naked and plastered together. A fresh jolt of lust sliced through her core. *Dammit, get over it, Shiloh.* "I understand." More aware now, Shiloh kept her mind on following him. The feel of his hand engulfing hers kept shooting tiny sparks up her arm, reinforcing her desire, but she forced them away as best she could. "Have you come to this island often?"

"Every time we are patrolling these waters."

"I've never seen a more beautiful place."

"That's a pity." Using his arm to sweep aside a vine, he eased her up beside him. "If you'd allow me to show you the wonders of this island."

"It would be your pleasure?" She hoped she'd correctly finished his sentence. Even white teeth nibbled on her lower lip when his smile slowly drifted away. She couldn't deny the heat blazing in his magnificent blue eyes. The scowl marring his forehead delivered a clear warning—she was treading on dangerous ground. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be presumptuous."

"There is no need to apologize, Miss Montgomery-Moore."

She wished she could read his mind. Then again, he was probably calling her ten times a slut. Never, not even when she'd been in high school, was she so forward which was why she ended up missing both her proms. She wouldn't even ask a guy out. Her mother had cried nearly as hard as she had over the missed milestone of gown buying and hair styling. It was one of those 'mom breaks down in tears not because she hurt for her daughter, but because it drew the attention back to herself' episodes. In the end, she'd gotten over it by telling herself, 'it wasn't as if they could afford a corsage let alone a gown'.

"You seem distracted. Did one of the men say something to offend you?"

"Oh, no, I'm just tired." She had noticed a few common sailors sending her thorough looks, but they were the same ones who debated why she slept in the Captain's Quarters in whispers just loud enough to be heard. Worried her secret was slipping, she ignored them, thinking the problem they posed would go away. "It's been a long couple of days."

"Then let us get you about a rejuvenating bath."

Appreciating his uncharacteristic easy-going nature, Shiloh followed him the rest of the way to the waterfall fed pool. "I bet this is what the Garden of Eden looked like."

Jacob set down the bundle he'd carried along on the green grass. "I would wager money on that." He hesitated for a moment before he turned away from her. "If you need me, I'll be over there."

Shiloh's gaze ricocheted from his finger to the copse of trees he pointed at. "Aren't you going to wash?" Something snapped inside her. What part of her wanting him did he not understand? What part of seduce him don't you understand, she reprimanded herself. "You can take that side of the pool," she motioned with her head to the opposite shore, "and I'll take this one."

"After you are back aboard the ship, I'll take my bath."

Insufferable jerk. Hadn't she just told him to get over his antiquated code of morals? She had. He chose to not pay any attention to her pass. "Why are you acting like an ass? It isn't like I haven't seen a naked man before. For the record, Captain Wolfson, the male body is nothing out of

the ordinary in my time. We see naked chests, abs and butts everywhere we look and in most cases they're male."

He took her completely by surprise. He grabbed her upper arms and kissed her before she could blink. It wasn't even some blah blah blah kiss like her few boyfriends gave her. Hell no, there was an instantaneous connection between them. The same chemistry she'd felt from the first moment they'd met in the Great Cabin, and then again when he'd held her while she cried. Clinging to his broad shoulders, she opened her mouth when his tongue licked at her lips. "Oh God," she panted when his firm yet soft lips left hers to work their way across her cheek. Her fingers tangled in the soft strands of his sun-bleached hair as the fire in the pit of her belly grew. An ache pulsed through her feminine walls like none other she'd ever known.

"Tell me to stop." His whisper ruffled her hair and sent a delicious chill down her spine.

"Why the hell would I do that?" Rather than tempt his high and mighty moral code, she took the situation in hand, literally. Massaging his erection through his breeches, she groaned when he jerked her so her body was plastered to his left side. His thigh parted hers, bringing her core into intimate contact with his hard muscles. Beneath her palm his cock grew harder, throbbing for some special attention. "I'm not telling you again; I want you."

Rasping breaths blew over her. "Do you think you can handle me, Miss Montgomery-Moore?"

"I do, and the name is Shiloh."

It was all the incentive he needed. "Take off your clothes," he said suddenly and released her. "I want to gaze upon you."

She would have stumbled back into the pool if he hadn't caught her by her elbow. She didn't know which was hotter, the tropical sun filtering down on the pool or the blaze of expectation mirrored in his eyes.

Starting with her filthy shirt, she peeled it off her torso slowly to reveal her lacy bra. Stained from lack of a proper cleansing, she was almost embarrassed by the fact. She would have been if every inch of her body wasn't shrieking with lust for the handsome captain. She reached behind her and unhooked the clasp to slide the thin elastic straps down her arms. Gratified when his eyes remained trained on her breasts, she toed off her two-sizes too big boots to reveal her blistered feet. For the most part she didn't even notice the offended appendages anymore. It was only if she stepped wrong that she remembered she had a sore the size of Texas on her big toe.

"By God."

If he said or did anything to break the spell holding her captive, Shiloh swore she'd kill him. She quickly stripped off the rest of her clothes. Crazy wild sex she could take. Crazy over the blisters on her feet was not in the plan.

"Get in the water." He didn't say anything else. She almost wondered if he'd somehow forgotten to breathe. Instead he began disrobing.

The water felt cool and luscious against her skin. Sweeping handfuls over her shoulders and up her neck, she reveled in being clean until a splash from behind brought her around. "Damn."

A totally masculine chuckle sounded from him. It was then she noticed what he carried in his hand. Soap. She leaned back to wet her hair, an innocent move that jerked a growl from his throat when her back arched. "Thanks for reminding me of my second top priority."

"I would have brought a more fetching scent, but the men."

"It's okay. Wait, you buy soap?" For some unknown reason she couldn't imagine Jacob Wolfson doing anything as mundane as going to a market for personal hygiene products.

"You see, this time is not so different from your own."

"In ways," she allowed.

Admittedly, he had a fantastic physique. Muscles upon muscles with broad shoulders that tapered to a slim waist. A thatch of hair on his chest cut a line down his six pack abs. "Whoa," she whispered. Talk about being well endowed. Well, Jacob Wolfson had impressive hands down. It was almost a shame he hadn't been born in the twenty-first century because with a body like he had, he could have graced any centerfold. Almost, but not quite. If he had been born in her time, he'd have been surrounded by a group of giggling models and she'd be nothing to him.

"Don't be afraid."

"I'm not." Confusion tinged her voice. Noting the frown marring his brow, she shrugged daintily. "Why would I be?"

"No reason."

The pulse didn't throb anymore, it pounded with unrequited lust.

A need only he could fill and with the remedy he held just out of reach. "Would you wash my back?"

"That would be my pleasure, Shiloh."

The sound of her name coming from his lips was better than an aphrodisiac. Nerves tingling, she watched him soap his hands, her heart beating a vigorous tattoo in her chest. Then, when she thought she'd die from heart failure, he laid his hand on her shoulder blade. Anticipation soaked her core. "Please," she began. Taking the mushy lump from his grasp, she pasted a sly smile on her lips. Maybe she did have a slight advantage over the women of this time—her lack of inhibition. "Allow me to show you the way."

# Chapter Four

#### <u>There is something to be said for a modern woman.</u>

Jacob gasped on the first touch of her fingers on his hot skin. She was perfect, beautiful. "Vixen," he gritted out between his clenched teeth when she slid her hands over his back. They dove lower to brush a long path across his buttocks, then his thighs, up his hip, to stroke his stomach. He was about to tell her to stop the torture when her tiny fingers wrapped around his cock. Her slow caress up and down his shaft drove him mad. "By God."

"You like this?"

"You can see I do."

Gazing down on her pixie features, his climax imminent, he pulled up his discipline and a modicum of will power. With a quick grab of the soap he tossed it onto the grass. "Let us see how you like this."

He lifted her up with one strong arm to capture her taut nipple in his mouth. Suckling, he reveled in her sharp intake of breath. The little mews escaping her lips were an aria to his ears. At the same time he stroked his fingers across her femininity, parting the folds to find her sensitive nub.

His pulse banged in his ears when she tangled her fingers in his hair, holding his head to her breast. The woman didn't have an inhibited bone in her body. She was already rocking against him, her body mimicking the act. Her desire infectious and intoxicating.

Before he knew what he was doing, or even contemplated his argument with Donald, he slid her down until the tip of his penis stood a scant breath from entering her. "Perhaps this is more to your liking, Shiloh," he muttered. The iron control he exuded on the ship started to slowly slide away from his taut muscled body like rain ran off the *Predator's* sails.

With infinite care, he entered her, praying he could hold himself together long enough for her to find satisfaction. A memory of Mary screaming in horror from her first glance at his genitalia mocked him. The only time he'd lost control while bedding his wife did even more damage. She'd wailed like a woman who'd just been told she was about to face the axe and block. It cost him dearly too. An amethyst necklace and matching ear bobs was the price he paid along with a chunk of his ego.

"Don't stop," she ordered him.

Shiloh's appeal stroked over him, eradicating all the old painful memories. She quivered in his arms as inch by inch he filled her body. If it weren't for the passion hazed eyes staring at him with open desire he'd have stopped. "Am I hurting you?" He had to be sure.

"No," she moaned, shaking her head. "If you stop now, I'll hurt you."

Drinking in a deep lungful of air, he lowered her inch by inch until her thigh muscles started to twitch. The lack of her maidenhead didn't bother him. If anything it fueled his desire to make her his, to prove to her he was better than all her previous lovers. "Easy, lass."

He tried to be gentle with her.

She wouldn't let him.

She tugged his hair when he held her still, nipped his shoulder when he rode her with slow precision.

"Stop being a gallant ass," she cried. "I want you—now—hard. Come on. Give it to me."

Jacob accommodated her. Water lapped around them in a froth. It was as if a demon had taken possession of his body. The woman in his arms didn't seem to mind. She clung to him with all her strength. With her head thrown back to reveal the long column of her neck, he licked the droplets of water from her skin. All the while he plunged into her.

On the first tremor of her womanhood, the gush of his seed drew up his shaft. "Give it up to me, Shiloh," he rasped against her skin. "Give it to me."

Her scream of ecstasy surely rattled the earth on its axis.

Deep, driving contractions brought on his orgasm. Even after he was spent he continued to plunge into her, pouring out over two years of loneliness into her heat. In his mind's eye, he could see the somber morose

he'd suffered burn to cold ash.

"Thank you," he murmured, hugging her close. Mentally prepared for tears or berating statements of his lack of control, he sighed.

\* \* \* \* \*

It took her a few more minutes to calm her racing heart than it did him. Never, not ever, had she had an orgasm like the one she'd just enjoyed in his arms. "You're welcome." For the life of her, Shiloh couldn't fathom what he was thanking her for. "That was great." Finally set back on her feet, she tilted her head to the side in silent question when he scowled at her.

The question banged on her teeth, *what the hell is your problem this time*, but she swallowed the words. It did neither of them any good to prick his temper. "How about you show me how to wash my clothes?"

"Shiloh, when we get back to the ship make certain you tell Donald about your feet."

Stunned when he picked her up and carried her to the shore, her arms circled his shoulders. He laid her down on the grass. She winced when she saw just how bad her toes had gotten. Red, raw sores the same color as her chipped nail polish marred every toe on her left foot. "It's the boots. They're too big."

"I'd say," Jacob commented, squatting down in front of her, he lifted the offended appendage in his big hand to examine it. "You're fortunate they haven't turned gangrenous."

"I try to keep them clean, but it's hard." Since she only got a half bucket of water to wash with every other day, she tried to save a little for the task. Most of the time, she wanted to dump the whole of it over her head hoping the cold shower would wake her from the nightmare. "Whereas most of the crew can go without their shoes on deck, I can't." Well, all of the subordinate crew could. None of the officers would ever buck tradition like that, especially not the captain.

"Aye," he agreed. "This is foot rot."

Ugh. Talk about throwing a damper on what had started out as a great afternoon. "I'll be sure to see him." Ugh again, she could almost envision her toes falling off her body. Swallowing against the sudden churning in her stomach, she plopped back on the grass.

"Good. Rest here while I see to our clothes. You need to let your feet dry out."

"I can handle my own things."

He gave her a pointed stare. "Shiloh, don't argue with me." He softened his rebuke with a gentle kiss to her lips.

Heaving an exasperated sigh, she reluctantly nodded. "Fine."

\* \* \* \* \*

She thought he didn't want her to draw attention. He was out of his mind because the ointment Donald gave her for her feet stunk to high heaven. Every time someone passed by her in the corridor, they cringed or held their nose. The only good thing that came from the twice daily application of the salve was the stench kept the men away from her too. The few who had started to give her speculative glares prior to the resupplying of the ship were now intently staring at her before beating their hasty retreat.

It was Tomlinson, the man who'd discovered her on the deck, who had shown her a small bit of sympathy; he gave her a pair of heavy wool socks he'd purchased some time ago, but had never worn. "Ain't no use keepin' 'em hidden in my chest when you could use 'em, Mr. Montgomery-Moore."

Touched by the gesture, Tomlinson also helped her wrap her feet in clean strips of bandage then cautiously eased the socks on. "You got grit, Mr. Montgomery-Moore. You sure do. I've known many a man who 'as sat in his hammock, to moan and groan about the pain of foot rot."

Humbled by the kindness, that night Shiloh passed him her portion of rum without a second thought. The smile he gave her reminded her of Mr. Layton's.

It was only on rare occasion that she thought of the man who she presumed preceded her through the 'whatever' that had brought her to be on the *Predator*. Maybe, he'd escaped the 'whatever'. When she was alone in her borrowed bed, she prayed he had. Every once in a while, she'd think about her family, but it was too depressing to dwell on what might be happening on that front.

She also prayed for the crew and Donald, but mostly she begged God to see Jacob safe.

A bit disheartened when they returned to the ship and once again fell into the habit of her sleeping in his cabin while he bunked with the officers, Shiloh took to hugging the thin pillow to her chest. She also started to plan her future. If she couldn't get back to her time, what would she do?

For sure, she was too old to be a wife. All the romance novels she'd read in the past said she had one of two options. The first was a walk down the aisle to face the life of drudgery in her husband's home. The other was, she could become a household servant, which would probably be her lot in life. Then she'd have to deal with the house's owner trying to get her into bed. There was one other avenue she could follow, but prostitution was out of the question. She wasn't going to sell her body. "Donald, what do you think will happen to me once I leave the ship?"

He peered at her over the rim of his spectacles but only shrugged.

She returned to the book of Shakespeare's sonnets open in her lap. Tired of reading, she set the book aside when the bonging of a bell tolled above deck.

"Beat to quarters!" The shout rang out as drums drove their fast beat thrumming across the deck and through the ship. "Beat to quarters!"

"What on earth?" Shiloh wondered aloud. Donald didn't give her any time to twiddle her thumbs. He pulled her out of the chair she sat in and thrust her toward the area where he serviced the crew's medical needs.

The constant fast cadence of a drum continued and told her what was about to happen. "Another ship?"

"Aye, Shiloh. Just do what I told you and be brave."

*Okay.* Her brain drew a complete blank. What had Donald told her to do if the *Predator* ever found itself in battle?

Nothing came to mind.

Panic seeped into every pore of her body. "Give me a direction."

"Lay out my instruments for me," Donald commanded as he and his other assistant cleared the tables. "If the enemy boards us, you are to stay behind Mr. Wayne and me."

"I'm with you." With shaking hands, Shiloh pulled the bundle of surgical instruments from the cabinet where they were kept and laid them out on a clean piece of cloth. Hoping she remembered the right order, she turned just in time to see Donald pull his sword down and fix the belt around his waist.

She started to really pray then and didn't stop.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jacob watched the men remove the doors from the Great Room to

reveal the gunnery. Cannons, the master defensive weapon of any sevenfour gun Man of War were butted near the wall and stood before him. A memory of Shiloh's face caught in that moment of absolute ecstasy came to mind but he shoved all thoughts of her away. Truth be told, he only pondered his command of this ship.

"Look alive there," he told one of his young seamen. He took his hat from Tomlinson but didn't put it on until he was on the waist deck. Moving through the throng of sailors rushing to their stations, he climbed the short flight of stairs to the quarterdeck. "What is it?"

"I saw a sail on the horizon, Captain. I think she might be one of ours."

Taking out his own spyglass, Jacob opened it with the click.

"Four points from center."

Scanning the horizon, Jacob followed his lieutenant's finger to the spot where he'd seen the ship then moved to the right. He was just shifting his torso in the other direction when he saw it. Leaning slightly forward, he waited for the church pennant to straighten. "That's a frigate, and she's not coming to us, she's fleeing."

Jacob exchanged a glare with his first mate. "Follow her."

"She's striking her colors, Captain." A voice from above shouted down. Jacob glanced up at the man riding the sheets. "It's a Frenchie, Captain."

"Pursue," Jacob gave his command without any hint of emotion. Had they found their prey at long last? His orders screamed in his ears any pirate, all privateers, but especially find the *Bordeaux* and bring her to port. Jacob gave his enemy credit. Whoever the captain was, he'd always stayed a step ahead of the heavier *Predator*. Taunting him. Tempting his anger like no other ship had before. Well, Jacob mused, turning on the heel of his boot, if this was the *Bordeaux* the hunt and peck game they'd played was about to end. His gaze swept over his men. A few looked hungry for battle. There were others who appeared ready to jump ship. "Keep her in sight, but do not engage. I want her whole."

"Aye, Captain."

Jacob didn't stop his forward progression until he strode into Donald's surgical theater. With a sweep of his eyes, he took in Donald, Mr. Wayne, and then finally found Shiloh busily rolling bandages. "We won't strike until tonight." It was his best chance of taking the ship with the least amount of damage to the frigate.

"The cover of darkness strategy?"

"Aye, Donald," Jacob responded but gave no further explanation. "Mr. Montgomery-Moore, join me for a moment."

Jerking out a nod, he watched as Shiloh set down the roll of cloth in her hand before moving to where he stood. "Sorry," she apologized and a shiver raced over her.

He didn't say anything until he had her in his quarters. "Don't be afraid, Shiloh." His whole plan of explaining what she could expect to happen in the next twelve hours disintegrated when she hugged him close. Rubbing his hand up and down her back in a slow methodical motion, he stared over her head to gaze at nothing in particular. "You understand what you are to do once the battle begins?"

"Yes, Jacob, I understand."

He almost ordered her to stay here, where he knew she'd be saved from the bloody horror of the battle but couldn't. If, by off chance, the *Predator* was boarded, stuck in his cabin would be the worst place for her. "It's going to be loud, Shiloh."

"I know, Donald and Mr. Wayne already explained the chaos to me."

"Did they also tell you of the damage we could suffer?" Holding her closer when another shiver jerked down her body, he gritted his teeth against the thought of her captured by the French Captain. His Majesty's Navy had strict penalties for committing the crime of rape against a defenseless woman; the seaman was either marooned or faced death. He doubted Bonaparte's seamen would give Shiloh the same consideration. Feeling her nod her head, he sighed. "Good." He squashed the sudden urge to kiss her. "If anything happens to me, Donald has been given instructions on what do with you."

Her fingers curled into the back of his jacket and she breathed deeply. "Everything is going to be fine. After all, you aren't called the Wolf of the Sea for nothing."

A tight, strangled chuckle rumbled in his chest when he heard his nickname whisper from her lips. "Have they also been regaling you with stories of my few but exciting naval victories?"

She pushed away from him to wag an accusing finger at his face. "Oh no you don't. Donald told me you've never been defeated. That you

are one of his Majesty's greatest captains because you always get your prize. He says it is because you are a master of the strategy."

"No strategy is flawless, my dear." And, no captain was immortal. Mistakes happened. Men died because mistakes happened. With a growl rising in his throat, he cupped her head and pulled her into his embrace. "Shiloh, do not die on me."

Before she could argue with him, he kissed her deeply, his hands moving over her body, molding her to his frame. His tongue slid between her lips to mate with hers. Cupping her behind through her loose-fitting breeches, he slashed his mouth over hers again and again until he was mindless to everything but the passion.

"We must stop," he practically growled his sentence against her hair.

"How about if we celebrate after you capture this ship?" she asked, breathless.

"That is a wonderful idea." He grabbed her hands which continued to caress his clothed hips. "Later." He brushed her fingers across his lips. There wasn't a damn thing he could do about his erection. "Stay here for a few minutes after I leave."

"Okay."

He stopped once he'd reached the door. Turning, he stared long and hard at her, memorizing every line of her face. "Be safe, my dear."

"You too," she whispered in return.

# **Chapter Five**

*The meek shall inherit the world, if that's all right with everybody else.* 

Donald kept telling her their casualties were surprisingly light. Shiloh had a hard time buying that. No sooner had the deafening crack of the first cannon shot blasted through the air than all hell broke out.

A hell, she vowed, that had no end. The battle seemed to go on forever, the moans of the injured and dying continued long after Mr. Tomlinson relayed the news that the *Bordeaux* was theirs.

She used every ounce of her will to stay standing once he left. Donald working at a feverish pace had she and Mr. Wayne, the other men assigned to him, struggling to keep up as wounded were carried in. Some he immediately ordered removed whereas others waited in their hammocks for him to see to them.

Didn't they ever get a fricking break?

Obviously not.

Finally at mid-day, Donald ordered her to get some rest. She almost slid on the blood pooled on the floor but managed to catch herself before she landed in the puddle of blood and sullied wadding. "More sand here," she ordered, exhaustion ringing in her tone. With her stomach churning in a disgusted knot and her head clanging from all the noise, Shiloh sent the young boy, Jeremy, a small smile before stumbling out of the surgical theater toward her cabin.

Damn, what she wouldn't do for a nice hot bath. Her clothes reeked of what could only be described as destruction. Blowing out a breath, she turned into the corridor leading to her quarters when he appeared. Her heart jerked up into her throat before doing an about face and plunged to her feet. Jacob. She took in his bloody uniform. "Are you hurt?"

"Nay, mostly I wear the enemy's blood."

"Oh," it was the only thing she could think of saying. Distraught, her stomach clenched. Racing for the deck, which was closer than her cabin, she leaned over the rail just in the nick of time. If it wasn't for the strong arm around her, she would have collapsed.

"Easy," Jacob's smooth voice permeated her hazy mind. Shakily, she took the handkerchief from his hand. "Easy," he soothed her with words when she really wanted him to hold her, kiss her and tell her they were on their way home.

"It's just so much to take in," she croaked, her throat raw with acid and unshed tears. "Those poor men." Images, so many they didn't have a firm order, flipped through her mind's eyes in quick, debilitating succession. Memories of the horror hanging thick in the air paralyzed her. "I can't do this."

Steered toward the Great Cabin, Shiloh started to tremble so hard she felt about ready to shatter. "I'm sorry, I just can't," she reiterated.

Jacob poured her a snifter of brandy. "Shiloh, what you are feeling is normal."

She wished to God she believed him. A timid sip of the fiery alcohol later, she felt absolutely faint. "I'm okay. I'm okay." A cold sweat engulfed her entire body, and the ship began to spin crazily on a stormy sea her brain conjured up. And as many times as she tried to tell herself she would survive this hell, she didn't believe it. There was nothing normal or okay in her life anymore. "I just want to go home."

"We're on our way to Port Royal."

"How long ... will it ... take?"

"Two days if the wind stays at our backs. Fortune smiled upon us for the *Bordeaux* sailed for its final port of call when it ran from us."

Nodding, Shiloh took another sip of the brandy willing the stuff to numb her. "Thanks for letting me know."

The feel of his calloused fingers stroking her cheek didn't do anything to assuage her shock, but it reminded her she wasn't alone. He'd been that even keel she'd longed for and needed the first night. In fact she still did. Lifting her eyes to stare at his concerned expression, she tried to smile. "Congratulations. I knew you could do it."

He didn't smile in return, instead he glared at her. "Would you like a bath?"

"The men are already suspicious of me."

His hand fell from her cheek to settle on her shoulder. "Which men?"

"A few of the pressed crew. They keep staring at me when we pass in the corridor. At first I played it off pretty casual. I also thought the smell of that salve might have them glaring at me. I gave them a shrug and then faded into the background. One man, I don't know his name, started to really give me once-over-twice looks yesterday."

"He hasn't said anything to you though? Made a move to threaten you?"

"No. He just hangs out near the crew quarters or near the infirmary. It's almost like he's stalking me." She gave a nervous giggle. Something about this guy set off warning bells in her head, but she didn't know what. From outward appearance he was dirty, uneducated, but harmless. It was his eyes, she'd decided when last she'd seen him, that made her wary. "I'm probably overreacting." Which wouldn't surprise her considering everything she'd been through in the past week and a half.

The sound of Jacob's boots moving across the floor shouted in her skull, drawing her attention to the man she was fast falling in love with. "Shiloh, the next time you see this man, I want you to point him out to either myself or Donald."

"You can't think he'd try to attack me?"

He stopped directly in front of his desk to gaze out the windows. "I don't know what to make of him; but I know no man aboard this ship should have so much free time he can skulk in darkened hallways." Slowly spinning around to face her, he stared at her for a long minute. "About your bath?"

"Is it common practice for the captain to take a full bath after a battle?"

A wolfish grin graced his lips. His eyes darkened with desire. "There are times I've been known to indulge in a soak if the mood strikes me and we have a surplus of rainwater aboard."

Picking up on the invitation clinging to his statement, Shiloh relaxed back in her chair to swirl the dark amber liquid in its vessel. Mesmerized by the action, she took another sip of the brandy before setting the glass on the table. She almost felt human by the time the liquid

cut a hot path down her chest. She also knew what she was doing by taking him up on his silent offer—avoiding the obvious. Of course there were women in her time who used sex as stress relief, she just wasn't one of them. Still, if she was stuck on this floating nightmare for two more days, she might as well make the best of it with a man who fascinated her. "Would you mind if I shared your bath?"

"You scrub my back and I'll scrub yours, as you say."

"Something like that."

"First I must visit the wounded but then I'll meet you in my quarters."

Shiloh licked her dry lips. Her nipples hardened. Two days to port had sounded like an aria from heaven a few seconds ago, now it felt as if she was losing something very precious—him. Tears gathered in her eyes when he started to walk away. The image of her standing on the dock, alone and adrift in this world she didn't understand, rifled through her. She saw it, the ugly truth she refused to face—she *was* desperately alone. Even more so once the *Predator* sailed away from her—forever. She grabbed his hand when he passed. Forcing him to stay at her side for another moment, she felt her heart chug hard in her chest. "Sounds like a plan."

"I'll have someone escort you."

"That's not necessary."

"You can barely stand now." He tilted her face up to his with his fingers beneath her chin. "Shiloh...."

"I know, don't argue with you." Biting back on a laugh, she nodded her agreement. It was nice to think he might consider her more than just a slut. *Stop reading into his innocent motives,* she ordered herself. In spite of her silent command, she clutched his fingers. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"Being my anchor during all of this...whatever you want to call it." She waved her free hand in the air unable to definitively explain all she'd seen and heard.

"You are very welcome."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jacob strode for his cabin after he'd finally finished his duties to the crew. For the first time since they'd found her on board, he didn't doubt what he would do with her. No, those contemplations were well behind

him. It was convincing her that this was the best and safest path which had him worried. She'd balk, but there was nothing unusual about that. Few women wished to marry a man who spent more time at sea than at home.

Still, it was the logical conclusion to what was their brief relationship. He had not the time nor the energy to court her into agreeing, or browbeat her into seeing the sense in his proposal. This time, she'd have to trust him to know what was best for her, even if she hated him for making her face the cold reality of her existence.

He recognized the fact when he listened to her in the Great Cabin. The shiver of her voice, the despondency of her tone told him she understood her situation. He had to have her agreement before they docked in Port Royal. There, he'd find a captain to wed them. There was no way in all the seven seas he'd wait until they were in England to ask for her hand. He'd be damned first.

He'd not give his family the chance to harass Shiloh into submission, and then pay her a pittance of coin for her silence before sending her on her way. And that is exactly what they would do.

Beneath their station in life, that's what they would say to Shiloh because it was what they believed. Mary should have shown them the folly of their opinion.

Determined, he knocked on his door before entering. The sight which met his eyes enchanted him. Shiloh lay in the middle of his bed, her arms hugging his pillow, fast asleep. Her damp hair foretold she'd not gone to bed long ago.

Rather than go through a long and lengthy bath, which is what he would have enjoyed had he not been delayed by his first mate's report, he chose to take a quick wash beneath a bucket of water on deck. Beside, he'd much rather run his hands over her body, delight in her moments of bliss instead of her pointing out his battle scars.

Toeing off his boots, he stripped off his jacket and shirt next. A grumble from the bed brought him around. "Go back to sleep, my dear."

"I was starting to worry about you." She rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

"You've no need."

"I did anyway."

Instead of engaging her in verbal fisticuffs, Jacob finished

undressing. He slid between the sheets to gather her to his side. He brushed his hand over her hair, and then scowled. "What did you comb your hair with?"

She held up her splayed fingers.

Chuckling, he shook his head. "Don't you know the purpose of a locker?"

"I didn't want to pry or be called a thief should something go missing."

The feel of her gaze on his nakedness started a fire in his body and stirred his cock to life. "I keep very few secrets and even fewer treasures in my locker, Shiloh." He exited the bed and strode to his chest. He opened the lid with a flick of his wrist then pulled out the tortoise shell brush he'd bought for Mary during another voyage. Carefully unwrapping it from the paper he'd placed it in, he brought the delicate item back to her. "Here."

"It's beautiful," she whispered, her fingers traced over the highpolished back.

He watched her fingers curl around the handle, remembering the feel of her hand curled around his shaft. "You should have beautiful things, always." The sheet slipped down to expose her perfect breasts. "Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?"

Shiloh smiled but shook her head. "A few guys, but that was just a line to get into my pants. I told them to go blow." She peeked at him through the veil of her lashes. "Only you ever made me feel beautiful."

He gave up a sardonic laugh. "When, pray tell, did I have the opportunity to tell you that?"

"It wasn't what you said, but what you did that made me feel different—special—beautiful." She whispered each word until he had to strain to hear her.

Because he thought her so. Sitting beside her, he didn't hide his erection from her attentive gaze; instead he let her know he desired her. "Explain," he prompted when she fell silent.

"When you took me to the pool on the island. Remember, you washed my clothes for me. I never had anyone do that before. I mean my mom did before I could reach the controls on the washing machine. Still, it was so menial. I realized you wanted my feet to get better, but it was sweet."

"You think me sweet?"

"Yes."

Immediately offended, he scowled at her. "The hell I am."

"That's not what I meant." She gave him a playful swat to his shoulder with the back of the brush. "You are sweet to me."

He found himself agreeing. Her statement also boded well for the proposal he was about to lay at her feet. On an exasperated sigh, he watched her rip knots from her hair. "Give me the brush before you make yourself bald."

"It is a mess. I should just shave it all off."

"Not in this lifetime."

"I was joking." Her tone warned him he was irritating her.

"As was I," he amended. Making quick work of her hair, he set the brush aside. With infinite care, he tucked an errant curl behind her ear then brushed his knuckles along her jaw. His fantasy of seeing her walk into a ballroom, dressed to the nines and tens, brought a smile to his face. Aye, he would make her his wife.

First he was going to employ a new strategy. He'd make her so mindless with passion she'd agree to anything.

"Would you like to know how we celebrate in the twenty-first century?"

Her question stirred his blood into a frenzy. "Yes." He watched her climb out of the tangled sheet. She dropped to kneel in front of him. There was nothing gentle about how she wrapped her hand around him or the way she dragged her fingers down his chest in a slow, serpentine path until she weighed his scrotum. "Shiloh," he warned in a rasping breath.

Supported by his arms, he leaned his body back to watch her work her particularly fascinating magic on him. He moved to stop her when her pink tongue licked across the head of his cock. "Don't."

"You saved us all. I think the reward should fit your achievement. Don't you think?" Lust glittered in her eyes and she took the whole tip into her warm mouth. "Don't you?" she repeated when he didn't respond.

"What are you proposing, Shiloh?"

"Let's see. How about you do anything you want to. Tell me what you want me to do."

What you are doing is a fine beginning, he mused. "You show me what you are willing to do."

"I'll do anything once."

His cock throbbed for her mouth to be on him again. "Continue." He couldn't talk if he wanted to after his stilted command. His personal bent for control in the bedroom reared itself. Her talented mouth stroked him, her tongue tickling a path along the sensitive underside as her hand pumped. He was teetering on the brink of ecstasy when she took more of him in, then a bit more, until he groaned low in his throat. The sensation was more than he'd ever experienced.

Damnation. She didn't stop, not even when he gripped her hair to pull her back or he sucked in a sharp breath while his belly muscles clenched. Not his vixen. She wanted his seed.

And he gave it to her. Even after he was spent, she kept up with her ministrations. "Sweet Mary." Without a thought, he picked her up and settled her so she straddled his hips. "You know not what you do to me, Shiloh."

"I can guess," she teased him. "What's next? Hmm?"

Jacob laughed at her when she waggled her eyebrows. "This." He parted her slick folds with his fingers, thumbing her sensitive nub until her thigh muscles twitched. Inserting his pointer and middle finger into her, he slapped her behind when she moaned. "The men aren't far away," he warned her.

"That turns me on. The thought that at any minute a man could come walking through that door."

It made him randy too. "Do you like it when I ride you hard?"

"You know I do."

He added a third finger to the mix but pulled it out to rub it against her sensitive anus. "Are you this uninhibited?"

"We'll see."

Her gasping breaths fueled his desire. She was bucking against his hand when he tentatively pushed his way into her dark hole. As sinful as it was, she seemed oblivious to his invasion. Jacob laid a kiss to the erratic pulse pounding at the base of her neck. He plunged his fingers into her until her feminine muscles squeezed.

"Don't stop," she cried.

"I'm not," he rasped. Flipping her onto her back, he entered her in a single smooth stroke. His hand slid across her lips, stifling her bliss-filled screams. He plunged into her. She arched her back bowstring tight.

Her orgasm rolled over him, through him, like the storm-torn waves crashed against the side of the *Predator*. It was when she clawed deep scratches into his shoulders that he lost all control. Curling his hand around her collar bone he pounded her with all his might.

On his climax, he gritted out her name. With the forethought to brace his weight on his elbows, he drank in deep breaths. He laid a gentle kiss to her brow. "I like how they celebrate in your time."

A panting giggle washed across his sweaty body. "So do I." "Marry me, Shiloh."

"What?!"

# Chapter Six

#### Wrong place. Wrong time.

Shiloh felt like a heel for shouting her question. What was worst was his reaction to her unintentional slight. He was off her, dressed and out of the cabin before she could even explain that he'd taken her by surprise. His 'stay here', didn't even register in her brain.

Quickly donning her clothes, she waved her hand at her boots, before running after him. "Jacob?" she called. "Jacob?"

There was no way she could go to the 'no admittance allowed' area of the Officers' Quarters. Turning her head to the left once she reached the adjacent hall in the corridor, she pointed her finger toward the gangway leading to the deck. If it had been her who had received an insult she'd have gone to the deck to cool off.

No sooner had her foot hit the first stair than she found her back plastered to the wall. "Get off me," she shouted, her survival instincts kicking into gear. Pummeling her attacker, she spit in her assailants face when he laughed at her.

The slap he delivered to her face snapped her head to the side. "Now I gots you, my pretty."

"Oh God." *Oh God, help me,* was a better response. Shiloh stared at the man who kept giving her long, thorough perusals. "I'll scream." Her threat didn't even dent his determination.

"Then all me mates will have to wait their turn, won't they, lass?" He grabbed her breast roughly through the coarse cloth of her shirt. "You be a good 'un and I won't share you."

She cringed as he dragged his teeth down her throat. Trying to kick him, he blocked her moves easily. "Get off me!"

"There, there, my pretty. Gots to remember your place."

"Give me a minute and I'll give you a reminder of me you'll never forget." She forced herself to think straight. How many of those personal protection shows had she watched on television? Too many. Lesson number one—scream. She'd just opened her mouth to do that when her attacker went stock still.

"Allow me to refresh Mr. Dennison's memory of his position." Jacob's voice sounded in the darkened corner like death's whispering lament. Emotionless. Final.

Shiloh slowly slid down the wall when her attacker was jerked back, freeing her. She tempted her terror by peeking at Jacob. He could have been a knight in shining armor, his bare chest gleaming in the low glow of the moon filtering through the open hatch. "Sorry," she whispered, her apology filled with frantic panic.

"We'll discuss this later, Shiloh."

She almost bolted out of her skin when a tiny hand landed on her shoulder. "Jeremy." She hugged the boy to her. "Are you hurt?"

"Be glad he was set to watching you," Jacob informed her. Walking her assailant to the stairs, he turned the man around and shoved him up the passage. "Not only is my crewman as eagle-eyed as his captain, but as quick as a London pickpocket. He saved your life."

"Thank you," Shiloh managed to jerk the words out of her tight throat.

"Donald, see to Miss Montgomery-Moore."

A loud, communal gasp rolled through the corridor telling Shiloh how many prying eyes she had on her. "Doesn't anyone sleep on this leaky tub?" She sneered, her embarrassment palpable.

"Leaky tub?" Sarcasm etched Jacob's question.

"Wonderful example of maritime engineering," Shiloh quickly covered her insult.

"I'll hear your apology later."

"Thank God for small favors," she muttered as Jeremy helped her to her feet.

\* \* \* \* \*

His idea of later was when they made Port Royal two days later. Ever since the attack she was confined to his cabin unless she was escorted by one of the officers. Everyone of her guards stared daggers at her while

she walked the deck. None of them allowed her to approach their captain if they were above boards at the same time. Frustration inched over her skin until her nerves twanged with the least provocation. She'd open her mouth to argue only to get a finger to her chaperone's lips. Detesting the move, she merely closed her eyes, swallowed her anger and continued on her walk.

Even Donald took on the position of unwilling escort. Cold. Distant. He didn't engage her in conversation, which spoke more than any of the other silent insults handed her. No, he walked two steps behind her.

What had she done to deserve this treatment?

*Oh, that's right,* she realized as she was assisted onto a large row boat, *she'd had the hideous misfortune of being born with indoor plumbing.* Clamping her lips shut to keep from screaming at all the sailors how she hadn't asked for any of this mess, Shiloh stiffened her spine and stayed ramrod straight the entire short trip across the inlet.

Her refusal to speak had no effect on any of the men. They merely stared at her with a 'what the hell were you thinking?' expression on their faces. *Fuck you*, her brain spat the venomous curse when she was shown to a waiting carriage.

She put up with being shown to a manor house, didn't pay any attention to the posh interior of the place but held her anger in check. When she let loose on her rage, she intended to direct all her rants at one man. The man she'd fallen in then out of love with. Jacob Christopher Wolfson, royal pain in her ass.

Who the hell was she kidding? She still loved the bastard. That was his claim to fame she supposed. He was loveable even when he was on his pedestal.

It wasn't until she was taken into a bedroom by a crotchety old lady who Shiloh assumed was a maid or housekeeper, ordered to bath in the steaming tub, and then told to change into clothes more becoming a lady that she screamed. A long, loud screech of a woman pushed to her limit and shoved beyond it.

"That's enough, Shiloh."

His voice snapped her body around. "What the hell is your problem? You locked me up like some sort of prisoner. I'm treated like a god damned pariah, and then ordered to clean myself up. Here's a clue, bastard, I'm not your prisoner or your slave."

The look he gave her had her backing up. Tripping over the boots sloshing on her feet, she caught herself on the bedpost. "What are you doing?"

"Teaching you how to obey orders."

"You and whose army?"

"I need no army to show you the error of your ways, Shiloh." He grabbed her upper arm and steered her toward the immense copper bathtub. "Take your bath and don't think of running from me. There are many a sailor who would think nothing of raping you their first night in port."

"I don't need you to tell me the obvious."

"Then you should have listened to me while you were aboard my *leaky tub.*"

"Uh-oh."

"Is that all you have to say? Uh-oh?" Jacob grabbed the collar of her shirt and ripped it in two. "Get in that bath or I will bathe you myself." Levering her hands against his chest, she felt him shake with suppressed fury. Her gaze snapped to his. He glared at her. "Am I clear?"

"Crystal," Shiloh's retort didn't even dent his frosty exterior. "Bastard," she whispered under her breath.

She went too far. Seeing her death in his cobalt blue eyes, she kicked her boots from her feet. They landed with a thud against the wall before banging to the hardwood floor. "I'm going, all ready. There's no need to act like my father." *Or more the case, her master,* she finished to herself.

"I think there is a very good reason to treat you like a child. Do you know the fear you caused me? The fear you caused the men?"

"I did not."

"Shiloh, a man died because he dared to touch you. You think what occurred had no repercussions?"

"What? Why?"

"That is the law of the sea. Rape is a crime punished by marooning or death. It was not fortuitous for me to have the man set on an abandoned isle so he was put to death."

"Oh my God."

"Exactly."

She finished undressing, digesting his information. Personally, she

prayed he burned her slops. In a way, she could see herself burning in hell too. She'd not followed orders and was as guilty as the man who accosted her. "You touched me."

"And not one of the men would dare to say I did. That, *my dear*, is mutinous." His endearment came out as a slur.

Sick to her stomach, Shiloh swiped away the tear tracing a slow path down her cheek. Mechanically, she stepped into the steaming water. "Nobody told me." The excuse sounded lame to her ears. She could only imagine what the crew thought of her.

"That is no excuse. Aboard a ship there is only one way—my way."

"And you follow the law of the sea." How could she have been so stupid? Simple, she refused to understand why the captain was the highest authority on a Man of War. The revelation clocked her like a cannonball. He held every man's life in his hands—literally. In many ways he was the Man of War. A human representation of the anchor or the hull.

His strategy honed because he was a warrior fighting for every man on his crew. It was a complete circle. "I'm sorry."

"Now is not the time for our discussion. I must deliver my report to the governor. Until I return I expect you to stay in this room."

She waited until the door closed before uttering, "okay."

Wallowing in self-pity wasn't her style before getting sucked into the past, but it seemed the norm since. The comprehension of her crime made her scrub her skin all the harder with the rose scented soap. How many death row prisoner's cases had she worked on with Project Amnesty? A few, but she'd gone into each one believing the convicts should have one last shot at freedom.

It was a bitter pill to swallow. She'd cost a man his life.

"Good God, what am I going to do?"

It was the same old lady who had shown her to the room who peeped her head in to ask if she required assistance with her hair.

After thanking her and telling her no, Shiloh returned to her morbid musings. The same garish thoughts that had her imagining herself in hell as she finished her bath.

She couldn't stand the sight of herself in the dressing mirror. Being clean didn't help either.

Pathetic. She'd turned positively pathetic.

Shaking her head, she exhaled slowly.

It was because she was helpless. She had no skills. The modern ways that were suited for her time didn't equate in this one. Hell, she didn't even understand half the stuff she needed to survive in the early 1800s.

Her fingers traced the back of the tortoise shell brush lovingly. Wrapped in a thick sheet of linen, she sat at the vanity pondering her future.

Future?

She had no future. Fuck, it would have been better if Jacob had ordered her death right along with her attackers.

A tap on her door pulled her from her somber musings. "Yes?" she called.

"I will hear your apology now."

"Jacob, I...." Her gaze flowed over him. It was as if she was seeing him for the first time. Dressed in an immaculate chocolate-brown suit coat with white breeches and polished saddle-colored boots, he was even more handsome to her thinking. "If I had stopped to think...I wouldn't have broken your order."

"Apology accepted."

"Is there any way I can make this up to you?"

"Aye."

"What?"

"Use your imagination."

The vixen he'd awakened in her came to life. "Do we have anything to celebrate?"

"You tell me."

A little sick of his short-worded answers, Shiloh stood. The sheet of linen fell from her body. "You got the *Bordeaux* to port. I think that's worth celebrating."

"Is our impending wedding vows not worth celebrating?"

"I never agreed."

"Shiloh."

There it was, the warning tone she'd come to recognize as the last word he'd utter on that front. "Sure. Do you think you can handle me?"

"Most definitely."

"Do you love me?" *How could he*? She didn't deserve his love.

"Forever if you'd let me." He strode forward. Cupping her breast

in his hand, he flicked his thumb over her nipple until it tightened to a painful peak. He tilted his head to the side in silent question.

Her heart soared at his affirmation while the tremors of lust scorched through her pussy. Willing to do anything to make amends for insulting him, she heaved a breathy sigh. "I love you, Captain Wolfson."

"You'll need love and a lot of patience with me, lass. I'm a hard man."

She traced her finger down his frilly shirt front until she delved down his breeches. Stroking his cock, she steered her gaze to his face. He cupped her bottom and pulled her into his embrace. His erection firmly nestled against her belly, she breathed deeply of his personal scent.

A sly smile later, she winked at him. "I like it when you are hard on me."

"Then let's see if you like this." He released her so he could stride to the windows. He thrust open the curtains, then urged her to join him with a crook of his finger. "Place your hands against the glass," he ordered her.

Shiloh gaped at him, but did as he told her. It was hot, really hot to be put on display this way. Her gaze took in the garden below her. "What are you doing?"

A hard crack of his hand on her buttock informed her of the obvious. She wasn't to question his orders, but obey him without a thought. Bowing her head, she bit her lip when he slapped her again. Braced for the next hit, she gasped when he stroked her stinging ass. His hand moved around her hip to caress a path up her ribcage until he captured her breast. A groan rushed from her throat when the other hand laid a slap to her upper thigh then brushed away the sting.

He was so close to her clit, she wanted to beg him for release. To touch her there. To make her his.

Her pussy ached for his cock. "Please."

She clenched her teeth when he pinched her nipple harder sending a fresh wave of heat through her core.

"Mr. Reynolds survived eighty lashes with the cat o'nines. I think your punishment will be ten slaps to your arse. You will count them off."

Shiloh's fingers curled against the cool glass. She wiggled her hips against the hand he rested on her butt trying without much success to inch it toward her pulsing core.

There was no warning when the hand left her or when it came down. "One," she moaned. His grasp eased on her breast only to slide across her stomach. It stopped its slow descent at the soft thatch of curls at the juncture of her legs.

She bucked back against him.

Whack.

"Two." Her head snapped back on his next swat. "Three."

"You will do as you are told."

Tears stung at her eyes as she counted off the next three slaps. "Four. Five. Six." Her ass burned. His hand moved a minuscule distance closer to her clit. "God," she said on a gasp when the next slap stung especially hard. "Seven."

The throb in her core was driving now, clenched and waiting for release. Absently, she rolled her hips to the left and right, urging him on.

"Say it, Shiloh. I will do as I am told."

"I will...do as...I am told," she panted, her body conflicted between the heat of her desire and the sting on her ass.

"With conviction this time."

Damn it, just get it over with. "I will do as I am told."

Eight, nine and ten jolted her forward. Plastering her breasts against the glass, she huffed out huge lungfuls of air. "Damn."

She jerked, prepared for another spank.

A scream of sexual frustration broke from her throat when he moved away from her. "Jacob, please."

"You will stay there until I decide what next to do with you."

Clamping her mouth shut, she waited for his next move, his next order. The fire he'd started just wouldn't go away. *Please. Please. Please.* 

"Get down on your knees."

Without a word she slowly sank until she knelt on the floor. She heard the rustle of clothes being removed and almost shouted, yes, but stopped herself in time.

"When I give a command, you will obey without thought."

She didn't hear his approach, but felt his body heat when he eased her back up to a standing position. His big palms cupped her breasts. The pulse in her vagina grew stronger.

In the next instant, she felt his cock head pushing into her pussy. He held it just at the opening for a pulse before driving in until his balls

slapped against her clit. She spread her legs wider to accept him and rose up on her tiptoes to accommodate his height. "Oh my God."

"You like being punished."

Her breath rushed from between her parted lips when he eased out of her, only leaving the head of his cock nestled in her vagina. She'd never thought of punishment as being a turn on, but it was. She even knew why it was. "You'd never really hurt me."

"Of course not, but you have to learn your place, Shiloh. This time is very dangerous, especially for you. You can't go around spouting off and making rash decisions."

She wanted to tell him that it was pretty much that way in her time, but lost the thought when he started to plunge into her. Every muscle in her body quivered with anticipation when he stopped again. His cock teased at her slick folds as he rubbed the tip up and down her slit.

Out of nowhere, he spread her burning ass cheeks wide and toyed his fingers across her dark hole.

"Are you ready?"

He didn't give her time to answer, but eased his thumb into her ass. "Dear God in heaven," she whispered. Mindless to everything save the orgasm he commanded, she pushed back against him until his cock was fully imbedded in her pussy and his thumb firmly planted in her ass.

The slight pain was soon replaced with a hint of pleasure. Then he started to move the digit in and out until she was moaning for release. "Yes. Please."

It was a smooth ride for a few strokes. Her core pulsing for the hard plunges she longed for. "Damn you," she hissed when he pulled out.

"Patience is a virtue," he chuckled at her. He slammed into her pussy. "Is this what you want?" he asked, grabbing her shoulders to pull her against him.

"Yes. Yes. YES." Supported by only his hands, she bucked wildly when he started to pound into her. "I'm going to cum." The quivers culminated in a curl-her-toes-for-weeks pressure. Just when she knew she'd shatter, she felt her body go haywire. "Don't stop."

Tears traced down her cheeks when he didn't stop but he wrapped his arm around her shoulder blades. Her muscles clenched in the most earth shattering climax she'd ever had. The deep driving contractions swept through her until she didn't know if she could take anymore. "Cum for me, Jacob."

He did on his next thrust. On a whisper of her name, he wrapped his free arm around her dew-kissed abdomen.

"I really, *really*, like it when you are hard on me." Chuckling, Jacob agreed with a nod.

# Chapter Seven

#### You can run, but inevitably you can't hide from life.

"I was thinking," Shiloh whispered. Lying beside him in the comfortable bed, her head pillowed on his shoulder, she stroked her fingers through the fine sprinkling of hair on his chest. Every once in a while, she'd trace the scar he had on his side.

He remembered the day when he'd nearly lost his life like it had happened yesterday.

He'd been a young lieutenant, and thought he was prepared for anything. The unwarranted attack occurring in Port-au-Prince had taught him a lesson. It also had him on his guard. The lifting of his purse wasn't a horror, losing his life was. It showed him a blatant truth. He wasn't immortal. And his mortality kept him focused.

"Maybe I'm not supposed to know why I'm here. Maybe I'm like being lost in a parallel dimension only I was sucked back through time."

"Hmm."

"Jacob, are you listening to me?" She leaned up to stare at him. "What are you grinning at?"

"You," he teased her. "Do you always have to understand everything?" He did, but that was a matter of survival. Still, it was also the aspect of her character that drew him to her. She wasn't the normally flighty miss whose biggest concern was which invitation to accept or what gown to wear. "Isn't it enough that you are here in the arms of a man who loves you?"

"You're right, I'm just curious. You know?" She nibble on her lip for a moment, her expressive eyes dark with concerned. "Why me? And what about Mr. Layton? I keep wondering what my family and my friends are going through? Are they okay?"

"And, you have no way of discovering the answers to all your questions." Jacob heaved a sigh. "I might know someone who can help you let some of your worries go."

"Really?"

"Do I ever say something I don't mean?"

She giggled and shook her head.

"Come along, let's get you dressed. The sooner we visit Camille the sooner you can move forward."

"You mean the sooner we have something else to celebrate?" She leaned down and kissed him.

"Keep that up, and we'll not get out of this bed for the rest of the day." He gently moved her out of the way. "What has you tied in a knot?" he asked when she remained lounging against the pillows.

"I'm not sure I want the answers. What if something horrible has happened?" She was in tears by the time she climbed from the bed. "I never make any sense, not even to myself. An hour ago, I though I had lost you. Then I'm told I caused a man to commit a crime. My brain can't take much more of this."

"Everything will work out. Just have a bit of faith." Pulling on his breeches, he watched her wipe the tears from her cheeks with the backs of her hands. He was on his way to her side before he'd finished buttoning them.

"You're right." She fell into his arms. "I'm just worn out."

"You have every right."

"Thanks for being there for me. I don't know what I would do without you."

Her words reassured him that taking her to see Camille was the right thing to do. What he could only hope for was that if the voodoo priestess did have the answers to the questions Shiloh couldn't move past, and if she had a way of sending Shiloh home, his love chose to stay with him. "Take a walk with me."

"First you'll have to show me how to get into all these things," she said on a watery laugh. "I've never worn so much cloth in all my life."

"I'll call Mrs. Kinsey to assist you. I prefer to take clothes off you too much." He laid a kiss to her forehead. "I doubt I would be able to control myself. Once we arrive in England, we'll employ a full time maid."

"Thanks. I mean, only until I get the hang of this. I'm not high

maintenance." She picked up the corset from the foot of the bed. Her fingers worked down the whale bone ribbing. "I don't want you to spend money on me for the sake of you thinking I need something. I just want to be me."

"I'd have you no other way." He kissed her again before he went to finish dressing. "Trust me, Shiloh, if I had wanted you to make a complete turn about, I would have told you before now."

"Thanks."

\* \* \* \* \*

He felt like a child waiting for Father Christmas to arrive and deliver him presents. To see Shiloh dressed in finery whetted his appetite for her and piqued his curiosity. On this one aspect of society, he would compromise with her. She could walk around his townhouse naked all she wanted to, but outside the house, she didn't have that luxury. Though if she wished to go riding in men's trews, he wouldn't lose any sleep over it. She had asked him to let her be herself.

He was determined to see she did grow into the woman he suspected she'd one day become. Given time, she'd curb her independence to a degree, such as his own rake hell of a mother had. Lady Wolfson was purported to have been the one debutante every mother feared her daughter befriending and every young buck lusted to make his bride.

Some thought to break her spirit, which Jacob knew was impossible, others thought her a rare jewel who needed to be coddled. In truth, his father knew exactly how to handle Margaret Wolfson. She had her will and her own mind whenever she could and when she couldn't he rewarded her grandly with praise and loving. He treated her as an equal rather than his possession.

There were members of the *ton* who whispered it was one of the many reasons why his elder three brothers were womanizers. Their mother had given them too much independence as she reared them when she should have turned them over to governesses and stiff as starched sheets school masters. Jacob understood his brothers just didn't give a whistle's worth of spit about what they did.

"Captain Wolfson, your brother is here to see you."

Jacob scowled at his butler. "Thank you, Preston. Show him in." *Which brother?* 

#### Why?

A tendril of concern crept up Jacob's spine. Alexander and he hadn't spoken since his confession, not even at Mary's funeral. Paul and John wouldn't give him the time of day even if his soul was in danger. In their opinion, he was the absent brother.

In many ways it was exactly what he was. His duty didn't allow for close ties. "Alexander, what brings you to Port Royal?"

With a sweep of his eyes, he took in his brother. The man appeared ready for a grave. His complexion tinted yellow from jaundice, he stumbled into the room.

Jacob ran to grab him. Together with Preston they carried Alexander to the settee. "Good God, you need to lay off the drink, man."

Alexander's head lolled to and fro before they finally got him eased into a position where he didn't look like a deboned fish. "Father is dead, Paul and John too."

Shocked, Jacob slashed his gaze across the room before he took control of the situation. "Mother?"

"Nay, she was not at Weston House when the fire broke out. We lost everything. The house is naught but ruins and I've not the coin to rebuild."

Was Alexander asking for a substantial loan? "Tell me what happened."

"Nobody knows what started the blaze, some suspect it was mother because she'd grown tired of the carousing, but she was at the Hampton's ball. Others believe it was a servant who knocked over a candle or the chimney caught fire. The few of the staff who survived couldn't tell the constable much. All were abed when the fire began."

"Go on," Jacob prodded.

"I don't know how to rule the earldom. That was always going to be Paul's ordeal. Hell and damnation, I thought I'd have naught more to worry over other than my tiny parcel which you ran, and how to spend my monthly allowance."

"What are you saying?" The whole idea that his father was dead overwhelmed him.

"I need you to take the title. I'm nay good to the vassals as I am."

"Alexander, I can't simply resign my commission."

"You have to. I can't do this."

"Jacob, may I speak to you for a moment?" Shiloh asked from the entranceway.

"Oho, who is this pretty?" It took all of Alexander's strength to lever himself up to gaze at her. "Whatever he's promised you, I'll double it."

"You are a nasty drunk, Mr. Wolfson, and I wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole." Shiloh stuck her nose in the air.

"I like her, Jacob. I tell you what, I give you the title and a quarter of my allowance and I'll take the vixen off your hands."

"My betrothed isn't for sale." Jacob saw red. He fisted his hands at his side. One more insult and his brother's liver wouldn't be his biggest health issue. Jacob beating him to within an inch of his life would be.

Alexander burst out laughing. "You and her? That is rich, Jacob. What is she, a cold fish in bed? Or, maybe, you impressed her with your gentle handling? Come here, lass, let me have a good look at you. I promise you, I can bed you better."

"That's enough, Alexander. You'd do well to remember you are in my house." Out of his peripheral vision, he watched Shiloh speak in a low hush to Mrs. Kinsey. "Preston, call for Dr. Anderson. He's still aboard the *Predator.*"

"At once, sir."

"Don't move," Jacob ordered Alexander, knowing it would be nothing short of a miracle for the man to crawl across the floor let alone go any great distance with speed. Embarrassed to the gills, he strode to where Shiloh stood. With every step he took, he drank in more of her beauty. She was breathtaking in the quickly altered gown. Demure by most standards, the bodice offered barely a hint of her cleavage. The cobalt blue satin was a shade darker than her eyes. "I beg pardon, Shiloh."

"Don't worry about it. I've been around enough drunks in my life to know how they act."

"Did you need something?"

"I wanted to ask you if I looked sexy in this," she admitted with a shy smile.

"You are very appealing," he answered honestly. His fingers itched to take the gown off her.

"About our walk, if you need to take care of him, I'll understand." "We'll wait until Donald gets here then take our leave."

"Okay." She hesitated before going on. "Does it bother you?"

"My father and brothers' deaths?" When she nodded, he shook his head. "I haven't had time to think on it." He half expected her to launch into a long winded inquisition as to how he could be so callous as to not feel aught. When she didn't, he tilted her face up to his. "Have I told you how beautiful you are in your gown?"

A blush heated her cheeks. "There hasn't been time. Although we did go over sexy."

"My dear, you will dazzle the *ton*."

"There's only one man I want to dazzle, and that's you." She laid her hand on his chest. Toying with the edge of his cravat, she sent a seductive wink to him.

"You achieve that whether dressed on en shambles."

"It's cool when you talk like that. It turns me on."

"After you visit Camille, we'll see if you still appreciate my formal education." His cock appreciated every delectable inch of her body.

Her tinkling laughter filled the foyer. "I can't wait. Who knows, maybe I can teach you a thing or two."

"We'll see." Jerking her toward him with the crunch of her gown, Jacob lowered his head. He brushed his lips over hers once, then twice. "You are my vixen. Don't forget that—ever."

"No chance."

The sound of a body thudding to the floor brought both of them around. "Dammit," Jacob cursed under his breath. "Fool," he said on his next breath.

"He's dying."

"Yes, love, he is. Too much excess has done this to him."

"Just to let you know, I don't care if you are a lord of the realm or a pauper begging a meal from the garbage can. I love you, Jacob Wolfson."

"Thank you." Rather than release her, he led her to where Alexander lay in a heap on the floor. "I love you too."

"I know." She laced her fingers with his. "Are you ready to become Earl? I just wanted to know because I don't think he's going to live much longer?"

Jacob took in his brother's pallor again before blowing out a breath. "I can lord over my crew and my ship. I suppose the only question is can I perform the same duty on land." He was fairly certain he could. 'Twas the

adjustment that would take getting used to.

"I know you can."

It was her unshakeable loyalty which had him reaching for her. Holding her tight, he leveled his gaze on the windows. The sun was setting, the myriad of amber and scarlet soon turned to mauve and plum. The array glistened through the glass.

After they got through this night, he silently vowed he'd move heaven, earth and rearrange all the continents to keep her happy.

# Chapter Eight

#### Roll the dice and hold your breath.

Donald didn't tell them anything either of them didn't know. He informed Jacob Alexander wouldn't survive the trip home. Shiloh couldn't help but wonder if Jacob's stony countenance was his way of protecting himself from the truth.

Personally, she didn't like the candy-assed girly-man who only thought with his dick, but then again, her opinion was based on what Donald had told her and her only meeting with the lecher. It was her jaded bias against drunks like her father which sank the absolute detestation deeper into her.

She hadn't an ounce of sympathy for Alexander.

The man sitting across from her in the carriage was a whole other tangent. "Want to talk about what's got you glaring at the cushions?"

Jacob leaned back against the squabs. "I have much on my mind, my dear."

"You're allowed." Thinking he needed a little relaxation, Shiloh pulled down the shades on her side of the carriage before kneeling on the floor. "Care for a diversion?"

"Shiloh," Jacob warned her. "What are you doing?"

She didn't tell him. Instead, she showed him. Undoing the four buttons at the front of his breeches, she pulled out his cock.

"We don't have time for this."

"Call it an appetizer." She pumped her hand up and down his shaft until he throbbed for her attention. She peeked her tongue out to lick the head.

Jacob ended her playfulness by pulling her off him. "My dear, you don't know what you do to me."

"I have a pretty good idea." Shiloh ran her finger around the tip. "You don't like this?" she asked when he pulled her hand away a second time.

"You can see that I do. I would prefer not to meet a voodoo priestess smelling of passion."

"Oh," Shiloh knew nothing about voodoo except that she'd seen a few horror movies in her youth that dealt with conjuring black magic to steal a person's soul. Considering that, she decided Jacob probably knew what was best for them. "There's always the ride home."

Jacob's chuckle lacked the warm note of humor. "Aye."

With no other recourse but to wait until they arrived, Shiloh kept glancing at him. She'd seen him like this on board the *Predator*. Normally when he was considering where the *Bordeaux* had traveled. Donald and Mr. Wayne always warned her not to interrupt Jacob when he grew very quiet. As if, at that point in their young relationship they were even on speaking terms.

"Why are you smiling?"

"I was just remembering something."

"About your family in the future?"

"Actually, about you."

The carriage came to a teeth jarring stop ending their brief exchange. Jacob alighted first, and then helped Shiloh to the ground. "My goodness."

She could honestly say she'd never seen a place like this. A small house that was little more than a hut sat back from a creeping inlet. Spanish moss clung to the tree limbs casting eerie shadows from the torches lighting the path. About ready to run for the hills, Shiloh felt Jacob's hand settle on her lower back.

"Don't worry, Camille won't hurt you."

Gazing up at him through the veil of her lashes, Shiloh managed to nod. Her head had started to clang which only made the clog of fear choke her more when they walked up the path.

She did turn away when a beautiful dark-skinned woman decked out in a flowing white cotton dress and a full head wrap stepped out the door. Jacob held her steady.

"Cap'n Wolfson, I've been expectin' ya. Or should I call ya by ya'r title?"

Jacob didn't answer her question. "Madame Camille, my lady would like to ask you for help."

"She comes with many questions ta which I have but a single answer. The Veil."

Shiloh's brow puckered into a frown. "I don't understand."

Camille swiped her hand through the air, her long talon-like nails reminiscent of claws slashing out a person's soul. "It is with us, always. The Veil tracks its victim carefully, like the thief it is. Once it captures ya, there is no goin' back."

Struck dumb, Shiloh, shook her head. "I can never go back?" All she could think of was that fact. "Why?"

"Because, ya are deservin' of true love. A love ya canna find in your time."

Shiloh couldn't believe this. Flinching back when Camille again fluttered her fingers in the air, she wanted to get mad, or pitch a fit deserving of a three year old that'd been told they couldn't have their heart's desire. This was so unfair.

Not so much to her, because she'd found love, but her family had to be either at each other's throats or in the looney bin. "I'm sorry," she said, realizing everybody was staring at her. "This is just incredible." She rubbed the ache from her temples with the tips of her fingers.

Jacob's arms went around her. "Can you tell milady anything about what is happening in the future?"

"I cannot. They are very far away—too far for even the spirits to tell me of them."

"Did Mr. Layton come here too?" Shiloh had to know.

"No. Ya are the only traveler I can sense." Camille gave Shiloh a pointed stare. "Ya are alone."

"I'm not alone." She hugged Jacob tighter.

Camille flashed a bright smile. "Ya be on ya'r way. There is nuthin' left for ya here. Ya have a new life to create–together."

\* \* \* \* \*

#### London, Autumn 1806

Shiloh watched Jacob stride into their bedroom. It had been six months chalked full of changes. Alexander never even got the chance to board a ship. He passed away that fateful night when she'd learned of the Veil.

She wished she felt something for him, but couldn't muster any emotion except pity.

Jacob slid easily into his position as Earl. Both of them viewing the shift in circumstances as a clean slate upon which to build their relationship, and, eventually family.

She missed her family less every day, but she never quite forgot the time she'd been snatched from. "How was your day?" she asked when he ripped the cravat from his neck and tossed it over the back of the leather chair before the hearth. Unlike many of his set, Jacob didn't want her to remain in the Lady's Bedchamber. Instead, he asked her to be with him, always. "That good, huh?" she asked when he turned scathing blue eyes to the oil painting over the mantel. A mighty Man of War crashing against a wave churned up by a tempestuous sea.

He missed the feel of the deck beneath him and the salt spray hitting his face, but that was to be expected.

Rolling over on her back, she gave a big cat-like stretch. The move was purposeful and predictable. Her breasts stretched the material of her peignoir. She'd picked this ensemble to wear having heard from the staff how Jacob might be a fair man, but he was no architect.

He was also a major control freak, but was learning to be a bit more tolerant. Emphasis on 'bit'. She supposed it wasn't easy for him since his crew and the *Predator* had been his whole world. The earldom he was okay with, but the reconstruction of Weston House about drove him batty.

"Why did you not study architecture in your time period, Shiloh?"

Hearing the frustration in his tone, she giggled. "Ask me about the law, Jacob. I still remember most of it."

A wolfish smile flashed across his lips. "There is only one authority in this house."

"You?" Seeing the teasing light in his magnificent blue eyes and the bulge filling out the crotch of his breeches, she beckoned him forward with a crook of her finger.

"You," he corrected her with a wink. "Except in this bedroom."

"I know." She laughed as he leaned over her and laid a kiss to her knee, his hand moving swiftly up her thigh to tease her core. Shiloh shuddered with anticipation. "I gladly submit to your every whim."

"I love you, lass, whether you call the strategy or I do."

"I love you too, my master and commander."

# \*\*THE END\*\*

# Author Biography

An old salt of the writing industry, T.J. remembers the days when Harlequin Romance books were 50 cents. Those great old reads weren't her first love though. She's an Asimov junkie with a penchant for reading Andre Norton and George Orwell. Her imagination took flight the first time she watched Star Trek. Her first crush was Rod Serling.

When not working on her next story, she's busy editing work for Eirelander, updating the website or, in her rare decompression moments, she's leaning her head on her husband's shoulder. He may be watching television, but she's daydreaming.

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## **Author Notes**

#### Britannia Ruled the Waves.

Life aboard a Ship of the Line, otherwise known as a Man of War, was a tough one. Not only were the crews of these mighty tall ships exposed to horrible bloody battles, but were treated to the worst of weather and deadly diseases. Quarters were cramped, allowing for only a scant 14" of room for a man's hammock. Captains, First Officers and Quartermasters could and were on occasion cruel. On most Ships of the Line foodstuffs were of poor quality, and grog was nothing more than watered down raw rum.

It was the duty of the Master and Commander, the captain of the ship, to protect his crew whether they were pressed into service or otherwise. He was also charged with upholding the British Maritime Laws, the Ship's Charter and the stringent discipline imposed by the Royal Navy.

It should be noted that privateers, who were in essence pirates, carried a Letter of Marque and sailed with their own Ship's Charter. The Ship's Charters were not only a promise of how booty was shared or payment was rendered, but also contained a code of ethics. Punishments for mutiny along with acts of violence or violations against women were spelled out in the document. Men who committed the most heinous of crimes including rape were sentenced to either marooning or death.

The main purpose of a frigate or Ship of the Line in the Caribbean was to stunt France's trade with the United States and the tropical islands.

This story takes place at the mid-point of the Napoleonic Wars. At this time France had lost the Battle of Trafalgar, the sea battle that provided proof of Britain's naval superiority. It was only six years later, and three years prior to the Battle of Waterloo, when Britain found itself enmeshed in the War of 1812 against America.

It wouldn't be until the 1920s that Britain's dominance at sea would be challenged.

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