

SHARON CULLEN



WHEREVER YOU ARE


SAMHAIN

He's in the fight of his life for a love that defies the centuries.

The last thing Juliana MacKenzie remembers is sitting in a friend's kitchen. In Kansas City. In the twenty-first century. How did she wind up on a burning ship in the middle of the ocean—in the *eighteenth* century?

If that wasn't enough to get her heart started, some dark corner of her memory responds to the ship's enigmatic captain. A man whose touch ignites her senses even as he stubbornly holds her at arm's length.

It's almost too late when Morgan realizes his stowaway is not only female, but a woman from a life and a time he'd almost forgotten. Desire resurges like an undeniable tide—but he is not the man Juliana would remember. She has been unwittingly thrust into a dangerous world, and now she, too, is a target for the pirate who once enslaved him, who still hunts him across the seven seas.

Kidnapped by Morgan's worst enemy, Juliana finds herself drawing on inner reserves she never knew she possessed. No way will she let anyone—not even the man she is growing to love—choose her path for her. And no way will she let him offer himself in trade for her freedom.

Warning: This book contains hot pirates, a slightly confused modern day woman and an evil villain you'll love to hate.

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Dedication

To Megan, who read the “Mommy edited” version. And, as always, to John, who never gives up on my dream, who gently pushes and prods me when I need it and who cheers my victories alongside me. I love you.

Chapter One

Sizzling heat reached out to her. Retreated, teased, scorched.

A horrible shrieking sound filled her head. She tried to cover her ears but her arms wouldn't move.

Her eyelids were heavy. Weighted down. Her cheek was plastered to the floor, straw clutched in her fingers. Her gaze traveled the length of her arm to the rough wooden planks beneath. The screams—the horrible, unbearable screams—continued until they clawed at her brain.

Fire licked up wooden walls and rolled across a wooden ceiling, encircling her, trapping her.

Her mind was fuzzy but the panic that leaped through her was sharp. She pushed against the floor until she was on her hands and knees. Smoke burnt her throat and she coughed.

“Help.” Nothing escaped but a labored breath. Her arms gave out and she collapsed. “Please.”

Burying her nose in the hay, she tried to breathe the air closer to the ground, but the ferocious fire ate it up faster than she could inhale it. The screaming stopped, leaving nothing but the roar of the fire and the agonizing heat.

A large piece of the wooden ceiling fell. Sparks landed on her arms and singed the fabric of her shirt. Flames raced up the wood, greedily devouring it.

She stumbled to her feet. Her legs buckled and she fell hard on one knee. Horrified she watched the fire engulf a dead chicken, sheep and the corpse of what might have been a cow. Smoke billowed in waves, clearing enough for her to catch a quick peek before obscuring everything. Bales of hay. A pitchfork. A water trough.

Water. She lurched forward. The floor tilted at a crazy angle and she crashed against a barrel.

She stretched her arm, reaching for a smoldering blanket draped over a swinging half door. Inside the pen lay what looked like a burned sow and her babies. Juliana turned her head from the sight and swallowed the bile rising in her throat. Quickly she dunked the blanket in the trough and threw it over her head, tying the ragged ends under her chin.

She shuffled forward, her arms stretched in front of her. The roar of the fire was unbearable, the heat suffocating, her panic clawing. Abandoning caution, she rushed forward and immediately tripped, falling to her hands and knees. A sob tore through her. Tears blinded her vision. She could barely breathe. Suddenly a hand grabbed her upper arm and she was yanked to her feet.

“What the hell are you doing down here?”

She was spun around and shoved forward.

“Get up top. Tenders are waiting.”

Juliana dug her heels into the hay and reached for the deep voice, anxious to get out of there but terrified of being left alone again. “Wait—”

A push between her shoulder blades had her staggering forward. She rammed her shin into what appeared to be the bottom step of a set of stairs. Juliana grabbed the banister and pulled herself up one step at a time. She felt like she was in one of those dreams where she was trying to run but not getting anywhere. The more she climbed the closer the fire came to her back. She glanced over her shoulder for her rescuer but there was no one behind her. Had she imagined him? She tripped on the last step and sprawled face-first into fairly fresh air.

Rain pelted her skin like tiny arrows and hissed as it hit the fire. She heard people yelling and saw their silhouettes running through the gray smoke.

“Somebody. Help me!” She tried to scream but only a thin wheeze escaped.

The floor tilted again. Juliana staggered forward and grabbed onto a large pole. She looked behind her just as someone reached the top step of the hell she’d come from. Her rescuer. Oh, thank God. He was safe. She reached for him as an explosion rocked the floor. She lost her grip on the pole and fell backward.

“She’s a blowin’!” someone yelled.

The man yanked her up by her arm and placed her on her feet. She barely had time to glance at dark eyes glaring down at her, rain pouring over chiseled cheekbones and running in rivers over a solid chin before he lifted her off her feet and tossed her. She screamed as she somersaulted through the air, the sound of terror abruptly cut off when she landed in water.

It surrounded her, hugged her. Its cold, wet arms entrapped her, turning her around and around until she didn’t know what was up and what was down. Her mouth filled with brine and burned her raw throat.

She kicked her legs but the more she kicked the more the blanket wrapped around her.

A hand tangled in her hair and yanked her up. She broke through the surface and gasped for air. Her rescuer, the same man who’d thrown her over, let go of her. She kicked to stay afloat but the damn blanket got in the way and she went under again. With a curse he dragged her back up and shot her a disgusted look. She opened her mouth to thank him when a different set of hands reached down, grabbed her arms and pulled her over the side of a small boat.

She flopped on the floor, breathing deep, shivering. A booted foot jabbed her ribs. Pain bloomed in her side and she cried out.

“Move yer arse,” a voice growled.

She tried to stand, but the boat tilted and she stumbled into a man. The firelight flickered over his scarred face, casting it half in shadow, half in orange light, making him look like a ghoul. He pushed her off him and she fell the other way. Gripping the sopping blanket with one hand, she crawled over legs. Two men moved apart and she slid into the vacant spot.

Hands curled around the edge of the boat and her rescuer's head popped up. His shoulders bunched and flexed in the bright firelight. Biceps rippled as he pulled himself over, water pouring off a shirt glued to his sculpted body. Men cleared the way for him to make his way to the bow. He spoke to a few he passed, quiet, clipped words. The men nodded, their expressions grim. His gaze skipped over her before he lowered himself to the bottom of the boat and ran his hands through his long hair, squeezing the excess water out. He pulled his knees up and rested his elbows on them, letting his hands dangle between and focusing his attention on the towering ball of fire floating on the water.

"'Tis reachin' the magazine," the man beside her mumbled. A few men murmured their agreement.

No sooner had he said the words than the ship exploded. Night turned to day as flames raced toward the sky. Juliana screamed and covered her head with her arms as bits of fiery debris rained down on them. The ones who'd been rowing began to row harder, their expressions ranging from shock to anger to blank trauma. They were wet and bedraggled and every one of them was armed with knives and pistols. Strange-looking pistols. Old-fashioned pistols. Not the Smith & Wessons, Glocks, and Berettas she was used to seeing in her work as an investigative journalist.

Something inside Juliana turned cold. Colder than the seawater soaking her clothes. Colder than the wind whipping her hair into her eyes.

Her gaze moved to the man who'd rescued her but his head was tilted back, his eyes closed. Lightning sizzled close by and she flinched.

A trembling started deep within her and a small voice inside her said, *You're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy.*

So if not Kansas, where? And how? Everything took on a surreal quality, as if someone had taken the lens of a camera and turned it slightly out of focus. The men's voices came to her from a tunnel—tinny and distorted. She couldn't stop shivering and it had nothing to do with being cold.

Where was Emily Langtree? Where was the sunny kitchen she'd been sitting in while she spoke to Zach's mother? For that matter, where was Kansas? Because the last she remembered, she'd been speaking to Emily about Zach and eating sugar cookies.

Last she'd checked there were no oceans in Kansas. Or...pirates.

Pirates? Is that what these men were?

Obviously they couldn't be. Because pirates of the eighteenth century—pirates who carried antique-looking pistols and knives—didn't live in the twenty-first century.

And Juliana sure as hell didn't live in the eighteenth.

The bow of the boat bumped into something, causing it to rock even harder. Voices called out from the darkness. Thick heavy ropes dropped in front of her and the men grabbed for them. Juliana tilted her head up. And up. The dying fire hundreds of yards away illuminated rough wooden planks slick with green slime and scattered with barnacles.

The men began to climb what she now saw was a rope ladder. Their bare toes dug into the ropes, arms strained as they lifted themselves higher.

“Hand over fist, sailor. Let’s go.”

Juliana swung around. She was alone except for her rescuer whose dark eyes were hard and uncompromising. Waves slapped at the side of the small boat, threatening to capsize it. Intermittent lightning sliced through the sky.

Any minute now she expected to wake up from this nightmare, to find herself in her bed in Kansas City, her apartment bare except for the few boxes waiting to be shipped to her new apartment in Chicago.

Except deep down she knew she wouldn’t be waking up.

Something happened when she was visiting Zach’s mother. Juliana just wished she could remember what.

With a curse, the man pushed past her and started up the rope ladder, his steps agile, his movements fast and sure, his muscles working beneath the still-soaking shirt. Before she knew it, he was halfway up and she was alone in the boat on a storm-tossed sea.

“Wait!” She grabbed a rung in each hand and hauled herself up. The rope swung away from the side of the ship and for one terrifying moment she hung suspended over the churning sea before her rain-slicked hands slipped and she fell. Somehow she managed to land in the boat causing it to rock beneath her. She looked up but her rescuer had already disappeared over the side. She swallowed a lump of fear so large it choked her.

She grabbed the ropes again and slowly dragged her body up. Her muscles strained but she grit her teeth and ignored the pain. Her bare toes gripped the rough rope. Halfway up, the pads of her fingers started to bleed and her toes burned. Somewhere in the back of her mind she wondered what happened to her shoes.

Don’t look down. Don’t look down. It took all her willpower to keep from looking into the boiling waves below. She kept her eyes glued to the ropes and watched her hands reach for the next rung as her toes searched for purchase beneath her. One step at a time. That was all she concentrated on. Not where she was. Not when she was. Just one. Step. At a. Time.

An eternity later she reached the top. The last bit seemed nearly insurmountable and for a wild moment she thought about letting go and falling into the water to let the ocean swallow her up. It seemed the better alternative than to climb the last remaining distance to find what was on the other side. Instead she took a deep breath and, arms straining, pulled herself over the railing. She landed on her face and her head cracked against the hard, rough floor. The clean air seared her burnt lungs. Slowly she pulled her elbows and knees beneath her and pushed herself up until she was standing. She braced her hand on a railing before her trembling legs crumbled.

Lightning cracked, thunder rumbled and the rain came slashing down, but the weather made no difference to the dozens of men scurrying around the deck, pulling in sails and winding rope as thick as her wrist. They ignored the rain and the wind and the tossing of the ship.

Ship. Sea.

She turned to stare at the hulking form engulfed in flames, watched as the ship she'd come from wallowed in its death throes, fiery bits and pieces scattered across the ocean.

Oh. My. God.

That's where she'd been. On that burning ship. How? How did she get there?

The last of the ship slipped quietly beneath the waves.

A hand clamped down on her wrist. A man glared at her through the rainwater dripping off his brow. Not the same man who'd saved her life and not one of the men on the small boat she'd come from. This man was well-groomed but no less frightening with thinned lips and anger snapping in his eyes. She tried to pull free but he only held on tighter.

"Captain Morgan!" her jailor called out over the pounding rain and intermittent thunder, his hard gaze never leaving hers.

The long-haired man who'd rescued her was halfway to a set of stairs leading below. He turned and scowled.

"What do you want us to do about him?" The man's grip tightened on her wrist, making her wince.

The captain's eyes narrowed. "Do what you will," he said and walked away.

"No." She twisted her wrist but it was no use. His hold was too tight. "No. No, no, no, no." She used her other hand to try to pry his fingers from her wrist.

"To the hold then," he said, ignoring her futile attempts.

Juliana's knees trembled. Her vision faded as black dots danced before her eyes. "No," she whispered right before she sank to the deck, pulling the man with her.

The strange world she found herself in went black.

Chapter Two

“That’s ridiculous,” Lady Isabelle Parker said with a barely suppressed snort.

Morgan leaned a shoulder against the wall of the captain’s cabin and glared at the woman who’d swept away his worst nightmare with two words. She hadn’t listened to a damn thing he’d said, but why should that surprise him? Lady Isabelle Parker didn’t listen to anyone when she didn’t want to.

He uncrossed his arms, so damn tired he couldn’t see straight. Every time he closed his eyes he pictured his flaming ship sinking to the bottom of the Atlantic and heard the cries of the four men he hadn’t been able to save.

“A ship with Parker and Parker Limited cargo sank.” Isabelle spoke slowly, as if speaking to a child, which shot his anger through the forecastle.

“Isabelle, think on it, if it were your enemy, he would have sunk one of your ships. Yet my ship was sunk.” He pounded his fist against his chest for emphasis.

Isabelle laid a hand on his arm, concern in her blue-green eyes. “You make too much of this, Morgan.”

And she too little. “Do you have enemies willing to sink your ships?” he asked.

A shadow passed across her face, gone before Morgan could decipher it. She turned to her husband, Reed, who was sitting at the captain’s desk, watching the exchange silently. Reed frowned and shook his head. Morgan wondered what silent communication passed between them that they weren’t willing to share.

“Do you?” He directed his question to Isabelle, but included Reed with a flick of his gaze.

“No,” Reed answered. “Parker and Parker has enemies, yes. Some are finding it difficult to deal with a woman at the helm of a ship, but no one would go so far as to torch one of our ships.”

Morgan had worried about this from the beginning. Isabelle was a woman born before her time. Years ago, before Reed found her and made her respectable, she’d been the feared pirate Lady Jane. And Morgan had sailed beside her, just as feared. Now Isabelle wanted to make a name for herself in the shipping industry. An industry ruled by men who thought it scandalous a woman would enter their ranks.

“And you, Morgan? Do you have enemies willing to sink your ship?” Isabelle asked.

Automatically his left hand went to the puckered scar on his right forearm. Silence stretched between them, the creak of the ship loud and intrusive.

“We can help,” she said softly. “Reed and I can fight with you if that is what you need. You have but to ask.”

A tremor raced up his spine. Even if Morgan wanted to, he couldn’t voice the words crowding his throat. A knock on the door relieved him of the burden. “Enter,” he called out.

Thomas, Morgan’s quartermaster, stepped in. “Sir, if I may interrupt. What would you like me to do with the boy found in the manger?”

Wearied beyond endurance, Morgan rubbed his eyes. “What boy?”

“The one you saved from burning.”

His brows rose and his hand dropped to his side. He’d forgotten about the boy. “What of him?”

“I have him in the hold.”

Morgan stared at the young man who looked more boy than man with his bony shoulders and short hair. Yet he was a man, one who had earned his place as Morgan’s right hand.

Morgan sighed. Damn but he needed a bath to wash away the stink of the fire. Never mind there wasn’t enough water and soap in the world to get the stench of his burning ship from his nostrils. He needed sleep as well. A few hours of hard sleep would clear the cobwebs from his mind and allow him to concentrate.

“I didn’t recognize him as one of the crew,” Thomas added.

“Are you saying you think this boy is a stowaway?”

“Aye, sir. And I’m wondering if he may have started the fire.”

“You’ve never seen him before?” Isabelle asked Thomas, her voice sharp and commanding.

“No, ma’am.”

“How in the hell did a stowaway get aboard my ship?” Morgan asked quietly.

When no one answered he looked toward the ceiling. It wasn’t coincidence his ship burned while a stowaway was on board.

“Question him,” he ordered. “Discover his name and where he came from.”

Thomas nodded and left. Morgan cursed. Isabelle looked troubled. “A stowaway,” he muttered. Could this day get any worse?

Reed shifted and his chair creaked. “Why would a stowaway start a fire that would nearly kill him?”

Morgan didn’t have an answer but in his bones he knew the two were connected. “Stranger things have been done,” he said.

Reed shook his head in apparent disagreement. “I have to agree with Isabelle. The fire was an unfortunate occurrence. However, if you believe there is some threat to you and inadvertently—” Reed’s gaze cut to Isabelle, “—us, you should tell us.”

Was there a threat to the Parkers? Morgan didn't know. If Barun sent the stowaway to torch his ship then the vendetta was personal. However, Barun wasn't one to lose sleep over incidental casualties. Morgan had to believe that if Barun indeed found him, the Parkers were threatened as well.

"It is a possibility," he admitted.

Reed blew out a breath, clearly angry Morgan had put Isabelle in danger. "Then I'll have to insist that, for her safety, Isabelle retire to my ship for the rest of the voyage."

Isabelle opened her mouth, no doubt to argue she was perfectly capable of defending herself while sailing a ship, but just as quickly she closed it when Reed threw a quelling glance at her. Reluctantly she nodded. "Let me gather my things and inform the crew that Morgan will take over my duties as captain. I'll take a few crew members as well since the ship is already overly crowded with the addition of Morgan's men."

The silence left in her wake was charged with Reed's hostility. Morgan didn't blame the man. He'd lost thousands of pounds of profit with the sinking of Morgan's ship.

"I also agree with Isabelle. We can help," Reed said.

"Thank you, but no. This is my fight."

Choking.

She was choking. Couldn't breathe.

She clawed at her neck, the torn pads of her fingers ripping at the knot of the blanket.

Can't breathe. Can't breathe.

Can't breathe can't breathe can't breathe.

Air. She tried to draw in a breath but the air merely trickled into her lungs. She heard herself wheeze. Once. Twice. Glued by the salt of the ocean the knot was stiff beneath her fingers, her panic making it beyond difficult to untie. Little by little it gave way. She rolled to her hands and knees and dropped her head between her shoulders to draw in huge breaths.

Eventually, she lifted her head and rocked back on her heels, staring at...nothing. Blackness. Her heart picked up speed until it marathon-raced in her chest. Darkness. Walls surrounding her.

No!

Not this. Anything but this. She jumped to her feet. The damp, salt-encrusted blanket slipped to the floor, sliding down her legs to pool at her feet. Her hand touched rough wood. The tips of her fingers, already shredded from her climb up the rope ladder dug into planks. Splinters sliced through the torn skin but Juliana barely felt them.

Sweat dripped down her back, gathering at the waistband of her pants. She skimmed her hands across the rough wood, searching for an opening. Small whimpers she didn't bother to control escaped.

Light-headed, dizzy, she pressed her face against the wood and sucked her lips between her teeth. She hated the dark.

Her feet shuffled, making strange noises and she looked down, confused, until she realized she was pushing her way through straw. It wasn't completely dark. Weak light shone through small cracks. She crab-walked toward the largest crack, keeping both hands on the wall, and pressed her eye against it. Nothing but another wooden wall on the other side.

Her hands resumed their restless searching.

Surely there was a way out. She'd been put in here hadn't she? There had to be a door. Something. Something to get her out of here. If the walls weren't surrounding her, closing her in, she'd be able to think.

Think. Think. Think.

It was too hard, the panic too much. *Don't give in.*

She found a larger crack and cried out in relief. A door.

She pulled on the handle. It didn't budge.

No.

She pounded with the flat of her palms and opened her mouth to call for help. Nothing came out except a jagged breath of air. For the first time she noticed her throat burned. Water. She'd been thrown into water. The ocean.

A ship.

She remembered now. Disreputable men armed with weapons. A ship on fire. Being trapped in the fire.

She pounded harder.

She'd been talking to Zach's mom, Emily Langtree. She'd had to see Emily one last time before moving to Chicago to start her new life but so much stood between them. Zach's memory stood between them. The boy Juliana had loved with all her heart, the boy who left her inexplicably. Who'd never been found.

Her frantic pounding slowed, and her hand dropped to her side. She stared at the door in the very dim light.

She'd fallen. In the Langtree home. Had she hit her head? Was she unconscious?

Yes. That had to be it. She was unconscious, her mind taking her back to her childhood. To the closet in the barn.

She sank to the straw. It scratched her through her linen pants. Her fingers curled around fistfuls of it. Her head hurt. Her skin burned. The straw poked her hands and the floor beneath her shifted just like a ship would if it were on the ocean.

No, this wasn't a dream. This was real. She was on a ship, locked in a small room. Her nightmare come to life.

Her stomach churned, bile rose in her throat, and a cold chill raced up her arms. She surged to her feet and began pounding the door again.

“Emily!” At first the words came out gravely and thin but soon panic made them shrill. “Emily! Let me out! Please!”

Oh, God, oh, God. She needed out.

“Emmmmmlllllyyyyy!” The cry turned into a wail of desperation and ended on a sob.

Juliana pressed her back to the door and slid down until her knees were tucked under her chin. Something to her right squeaked and ran over her bare feet but she couldn’t summon the energy to care.

Rats. Big, fat, hairy rats with long, sharp teeth and ugly pink tails.

She pictured the rats crawling over her cold, dead body. She felt their little eyes boring into her, waiting for her.

The floor beneath her tilted and made her slide a few inches to the left. Her arms shot out for balance. She closed her eyes and tried to remember how she got here. She’d called Zach’s mother and asked if they could meet. They’d talked in the kitchen of the house that had been more a home for Juliana than her own dysfunctional home had been.

They’d eaten cookies. Juliana smelled the sugary vanilla scent of fresh-baked cookies and the pungent aroma of fresh brewed coffee.

At first the conversation had been stilted and Juliana had wondered if she shouldn’t have come. Zach, or rather Zach’s memory, stood between the two women who’d loved him the most.

She rubbed her temples as if the pressure would release the memories. Why couldn’t she remember anything after that? What happened? How had she ended up here, on a burning ship, in the middle of an ocean?

A tear of frustration slipped down her cheek.

If she could figure out how she got here, she could figure out how to get back. But where was here?

Footsteps sounded outside the door, the ring of booted feet against wooden planks. Juliana scurried to her feet and backed away from the door.

Metal scraped as if a large key were being inserted into a lock, and slowly the door swung inward. Light pierced her small prison and burned her eyes. She threw an arm up to shield her face from it.

A man shifted. The same man who’d brought her to the hold.

He was taller than she, on the thin side with short-cropped hair and the face of a boy, yet with muscles roping his wiry frame.

“What’s your name?” he asked in a British accent.

Suddenly she felt as if she were floating above the scene, separated from her body yet still feeling the sweat on her skin, the erratic thumping of her heart and the stiff straw beneath her feet.

“I know you are not part of Captain Morgan’s crew, so tell me how you got aboard his ship.”

She didn't answer, couldn't answer, because she had no idea how she'd gotten aboard his ship.

He took a threatening step forward. "My name is Thomas Hamilton, I am—was—the quartermaster of the ship you set fire to. I need to know your name and who sent you."

He thought she started the fire? Her stomach dropped to her toes and suddenly the idea of being in a different time wasn't nearly as scary as the thought of what these people could do to her if they thought she'd burned their ship.

"I didn't start the fire." Her voice was raspy from the smoke and it hurt to talk.

Another set of footsteps outside the door, heavy, methodical. Another man entered, so tall he had to bend over to get through the doorway and when he straightened his wide shoulders blocked most of the door, sealing off the light, making her heart stutter in her chest and her palms sweat.

She'd recognize him anywhere. This was the man who'd thrown her into the water. She tried to step back, but was already up against the wall. With two men in here, the small room became smaller and the panic crawled up her throat.

He turned halfway to Thomas, allowing more light to enter. Enough for her to see him.

His long hair was pulled back at the sides, the rest hanging past his elbows. He wore strange-looking pants that hugged the powerful muscles of his thighs and slim waist. His white shirt had full sleeves that ended in tight cuffs at his wrists. Knee-high boots completed the strange outfit.

He was speaking to Thomas in another language, French she assumed, when suddenly he stopped and stared at her with a predatory look, his massive body completely still but primed to move quickly. She dropped her eyes to his hands, hanging loosely at his sides. His long fingers were relaxed. A picture of those hands wielding a sword crossed her mind.

And where had that image come from? Men carried Blackberries and briefcases. Not swords or pistols or daggers. But swords and pistols and daggers seemed to fit this man better than a Blackberry.

"What is your name?" he asked, carefully spacing each word.

She swallowed, her throat working, but no words escaping.

He spoke to her in rapid Spanish, most of which she didn't understand. In the middle of his tirade he switched to yet a third language, and after several moments of angry speech his voice trailed off.

They stared at each other in the dim light with the ship swaying and the straw scratchy under her feet. She couldn't read his eyes but his face was hard, his expression thoughtful.

"I didn't set fire to your ship."

His head tilted, the thoughtful expression deepening. "Didn't you?"

She shook her head, unable to tear her gaze from his. That whole sense of the unreal descended on her, numbing her. More seconds passed. Seconds in which the large man stared at her with eyes that seemed to pick at her thoughts. Suddenly his face hardened, the thoughtful expression gone. With another hard look he turned on his heels and said over his shoulder, "Flog him."

Juliana gasped. “No.” She rushed forward.

Thomas reached for her. *Air. Air. Breathe. Breathe. Calm down. This isn’t happening.* Her body did that separating-itself-from-reality thing again. Surely they weren’t going to flog her.

Surely not.

Thomas’s arm wrapped around her waist.

“I didn’t do it,” she cried out, but the man was halfway down the corridor. She turned to Thomas. “I didn’t do it.” Panicked, running on raw terror, she shoved the heel of her hand into his nose. He stumbled back as blood spurted.

“Bloody hell!” He covered his nose with his hand but blood continued to pour down his chin.

Juliana ran out the door.

“Hell and damnation! Come back here!”

Juliana raced down the narrow corridor in the opposite direction as the man who’d ordered her flogged.

Flogged. How barbaric was that? Where the hell was she that men still flogged each other?

Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God. Don’t let him catch you. Keep running.

She stumbled. Her shoulder scraped the rough wooden wall and tore the fine silk of her ruined blouse.

“Stop, I say!”

She brushed at a stray tear with the back of her hand. Her legs trembled, threatening to give out, but she pushed through the weakness. Until a wall loomed before her.

With a cry she flung her arms out. Her torn and bloody palms smacked against the wall.

End of the line.

She leaned her forehead against the wood, her shoulders shuddering from unshed tears. The pounding of feet had her spinning around. Her eyes widened as the two obviously furious males came closer.

Thomas grabbed her wrist and yanked her toward him, his face still smeared with blood, his gaze hard and unyielding. “Bloody fool,” he muttered.

The captain leaned forward, brown eyes so cold and full of malice they made her shiver. “You may run all you want but there’s nowhere to go, whelp.”

“I didn’t do it,” she said. “Please believe me. I didn’t do it.”

He crossed his arms and leaned back. “Then who did?”

“I don’t know.”

“How did you get on my ship?”

“I…” She didn’t know that either. Oh, Lord, what was happening to her?

A corner of his lips lifted in a sardonic smile. “My orders stand. And you’ll get two extra for breaking my quartermaster’s nose.”

The breath went out of her. Her body went cold and something inside her died. This wasn't a dream or a hallucination. Somehow, somehow this was real.

Thomas yanked on her wrist and she was forced to stumble along behind him.

The captain was gone. She didn't remember seeing him leave.

They ascended a set of steps and headed down another corridor. There were more signs of life up here. Men with hard eyes and even harder bodies who stared at her as she passed. Men who spit at her and cursed in languages she didn't understand. She shrank closer to Thomas.

After another set of steps they emerged into the sunshine. She blinked against the brightness until her eyes adjusted and she saw they were on one of the top decks. If she remembered correctly—and she wasn't sure she remembered correctly—it was one hell of a drop to the ocean. An ocean she couldn't swim in because she didn't know how to swim. She had a choice. Flogging. Or drowning.

Thomas led her to one of several massive poles. Masts, as they were called in sailing language. Still holding her hands, he bent and pulled something out of a canvas bag. A long rope, unraveled at one end so nine or ten very long threads hung loose, each end knotted. She swallowed. This was what he was going to beat her with. The rope and the knots would cut into the skin of her back.

It was a no brainer. She much preferred to drown.

Sailors were beginning to notice. Some cast speculative looks her way. One man's gaze flickered away when hers met his. She didn't have much time. Already they were beginning to drift closer.

Thomas steered her toward the mast and when he released her hands she bolted.

Behind her Thomas cursed. Men were laughing and jeering. One stepped in front of her and bent his knees, his arms wide. He looked like a football player ready to tackle but Juliana was lighter on her feet and she dodged him, managing by the grace of God to make it to the railing.

Don't look down. She threw one leg over. Before she had time to throw the other over, she was grabbed by the shoulders and pulled back.

"No!" She struggled in her captor's hold. It was the same man who'd tried to tackle her.

"It ain't so bad," he laughed. "It'll 'urt for a moment or two." Everyone around him laughed as well. Juliana tried to kick him but he side-stepped.

"Now that ain't nice." He dragged her back to Thomas, who was glaring at her, his nose bigger than ever. It took Thomas and the other man to spread her arms wide. She fought with everything she had but her strength was nothing compared to theirs. She was pushed against the pole. The breath rushed out of her. Her arms were pulled tight around it, her wrists bound. She could hardly breathe and her arms were stretched to their limit.

She tried not to think of the sight she made, spread eagle on the mast of a sailing ship that shouldn't be in existence in the twenty-first century.

Dirty men crowded around, closing in on her, their stench gagging her as tears pooled in her eyes. This was really going to happen. Splinters of the wooden mast pressed into the skin of her arms. The wood was wet beneath her feet and the harsh sun shone down on her, heating her shoulders. The smell of brine and the scent of unwashed men nearly gagged her.

“Cat out o’ bag!” someone yelled.

“What say, mates? How many lashes d’ye think?”

“Ten,” one yelled, followed by a loud raucous of laughter and jeers.

“Twenty!” someone else yelled. A chorus of boos erupted.

The taunts vibrated around her.

“Nah, he’s a strong bugger. I say thirty.”

Juliana’s eyes snapped open.

He’s a strong bugger.

Flog him.

Him? She took another look at the men betting on her ability to stand upright while beaten with a rope. With her shoulder length hair, black pants and white silk shirt she looked like them. In fact, they all wore some sort of silk shirt and pants. With the exception of clean-cut Thomas, every one of them had long hair. The only difference seemed to be that she had all her teeth and had taken a bath sometime within the last six months.

“Wait!” she tried to pull away from the mast but the rope cut into her wrists. “Stop, please. You’re making a mistake. I didn’t set fire to the ship. I swear. I’m not what you think. I’m...” The men stopped jeering and were looking at her in surprise and anger.

The one who’d kept her from jumping stepped forward. “You set the cap’n’s ship afire?” His voice was low, laced with fury.

She was bound so tight to the mast it was hard to breathe, but her mind whirled. For some reason these men hadn’t known why she was being flogged and they definitely didn’t know she was a woman. A woman among a ship full of men who looked like they hadn’t seen a female in months. Who looked as if even if they had seen one they had no honor in them to treat her with respect and they surely didn’t respect her if they thought she set their ship on fire.

Thomas stepped into her line of sight. “Tell me who sent you. I’ll give you one last chance.” There was no warmth in his eyes, no remorse for tying a person, a human being, to a pole with the intent to beat him—or her.

Tell him. Tell him you’re a woman.

What was worse? To be flogged or gang raped?

He ran the roped whip through his hands.

“I didn’t do it,” she whispered.

His eyes flickered over her face and after a moment he nodded. "So be it."

She lifted her gaze to the crowd of men and immediately noticed a newcomer. A woman with a long, black braid draped over her shoulder but dressed like the other men. Her expression was not one of anticipation like most of the men placing wagers, but hard acceptance, her lips a thin line. She placed one hand on her hip while the other rested comfortably on a sword at her other hip.

Juliana didn't see Thomas raise his arm, but she heard the whip whiz through the air. The knots dug into her skin, ripping through the sensitive flesh on her back. She arched her body and pulled against her bindings. Pain erupted. Pain like she'd never felt before. It buckled her knees and set every nerve ending on fire.

Her screams echoed off the billowing sails, reverberated through the watchful crowd. And ascended to the heavens.

Chapter Three

Juliana slumped forward. She tried to breathe through the pain but there was no breathing through this pain. White-hot, the searing agony stole her breath. It engulfed her, took over her senses until her stomach heaved.

The second lash tore her shirt in half and ripped through already shredded skin. Juliana threw her head back and screamed again. If she could have found her voice she would have begged Thomas to stop, would have admitted to setting fire to the ship. Anything to stop the agony of her skin being torn from her body.

She gritted her teeth and ground her forehead into the mast.

Thomas loomed in front of her. His face faded in and out of focus. His voice came from far away. "Tell me who sent you."

She licked dry lips, trying to think of a name. Any name. She didn't remember her own at the moment.

The noise from the betting sailors rose until the wooden deck vibrated. Thomas stepped away and Juliana heard the rope fly through the air.

"Cease!"

The rope whizzed past Juliana's head and hit the mast high above her. In a great whoosh she let out her breath. Only the ropes lashing her to the mast kept her upright.

Forehead pressed to the weathered wood, she turned her head and opened her eyes. The woman she'd seen earlier strode forward. The men, who just moments ago were tossing around bets and laughing, fell silent but watched avidly. The slap of the waves against the hull and the clink of the sails above filled the sudden silence.

Aqua-colored eyes flashed fire as the woman yanked the rope from Thomas's hands. Afraid she would swing the rope at her, Juliana cringed and gasped at the tremendous pain of the slight movement.

Thomas stepped into her line of sight, next to the black-haired woman.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" The woman's voice was all hard fury.

Thomas took a hesitant step back. "Captain's orders, Cap'n. Ma'am."

One finely curved black brow inched upward. "Captain's orders?"

Thomas swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Captain Morgan, ma'am."

Both eyebrows shot up. "Captain Morgan ordered you to flog a woman?"

Thomas's gaze swung to Juliana. His mouth fell open and his eyes went wide with shock. "A woman, ma'am?"

The black-haired lady ripped Juliana's shirt away from her back and pointed to the sides of her exposed breasts. Juliana was in far too much pain to object. "Obviously, that is a woman."

She pulled her wicked-looking sword from its sheath and raised it high. Juliana flinched and closed her eyes.

Please, God, a quick end. Please stop this agony. She relished the thought of ending this torture and if she could find her voice, would thank the woman for killing her.

But the sword silently cut her bindings and without the support of the ropes, Juliana collapsed onto the deck, not caring that dozens of men were leaning forward, staring at her as if they'd just pulled an alien from the ocean. A wet sticky substance covered the front of her and she realized with sick certainty that she was lying in a pool of her own blood.

Hands touched her arm and with a cry, Juliana shrank from them.

"It's all right," the lady whispered in her ear. "No one else will hurt you."

She let the woman help her stand. Immediately her world went dark. Her stomach heaved and she threw up all over the deck. The woman held her gently, waiting for the spasms to abate. She began to shiver even though the wind was balmy, almost hot.

Hot wind.

Come inside, sweetheart. It's too cold to talk out here.

Emily Langtree. Zach's mom had said that when Juliana visited. It'd been cold. And now it was hot.

Slowly she straightened. The skin on her back screamed in agony, causing her stomach to churn even more but blessedly she didn't throw up again. Her vision faded and all she concentrated on was standing upright.

"Give me your shirt," the woman said to Thomas.

"My shirt?"

"Your shirt, damn it."

Thomas yanked his shirt over his head. Carefully the woman pulled it over Juliana, covering her bloody back and exposed breasts. Juliana whimpered. Every sigh of the wind, every dip of the ship on the ocean, every muscle twitch added to her misery until there was nothing but pain.

She wished the woman would put her out of her misery. Her rescuer turned to the unruly mob who now watched silently. "Back to work," she barked out, and the frightening men scrambled away.

Morgan sat at his desk with his sextant and map in front of him. He needed to chart their course to London, but his mind kept wandering to the past.

Barun.

The man was like a black cloud on Morgan's horizon. Death nipping at his heels.

He buried his fingers in his hair and hung his head to massage his aching temples. His hand fell to the scar on the inside of his arm and he rubbed it. Sometimes he still felt the hot poker searing his skin, still smelled the stench of his burning flesh.

Get the Parkers' ship to London. That was his plan. And then...

Morgan feared the "and then", because he had no plan. He was weary of constantly looking over his shoulder, of knowing Barun lurked in his future just as he lurked in Morgan's past.

He would never rid himself of his enemy and the thought tired him.

He'd escaped once but had no energy for a second time. He was thirty-two years old, had lived far longer than most men in his profession, and had nothing to show for it. Nothing to live for. No home. No family. Nothing but a lot of ill-gotten money he couldn't spend in two lifetimes.

With a tired sigh he crossed his arms on top of his maps and laid his head down. First he had to get Isabelle and Reed's cargo to London. And then—

The door to his cabin banged against the wall. Morgan grabbed the cutlass leaning against the desk and rose to a fighting stance in one smooth motion. Isabelle marched in, the young stowaway stumbling behind.

"I should have you flogged." Isabelle pointed her sword at him.

Morgan's cutlass dipped until the point hit the floor. "Pardon?"

She advanced and his curiosity gave way to trepidation. He knew that look. She was beyond angry, and if he was smart he'd get the hell out of there. But Isabelle rounded his desk, her eyes blazing, and trapped him behind it.

"Do you make it a habit to flog women?"

The softness of her voice and the fury in her eyes caught him off guard. "What do you mean?"

She reached behind her for the stowaway, but the boy recoiled and tried to hide behind Isabelle.

Isabelle pulled the whelp forward. With a show of defiance, he crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Morgan through red-rimmed eyes.

Morgan looked from Isabelle's angry face, back to the boy.

He stared at the outline of her breasts and his heart damn near stopped beating.

Her breasts?

What the hell?

He took a step around the desk. The woman's expression went from defiance to fear, and Isabelle stepped between them, her hand on the hilt of her sword. The fact that Isabelle felt the need to touch her weapon as a warning for him hurt more than Morgan would admit.

"I am ashamed to call you friend," she said. "After all we've been through, never once have you touched a woman in anger, never once have you hit a woman."

The mysterious woman closed her eyes, her body held carefully still as if each breath hurt. Morgan knew the sting of the cat-o'-nine-tails. He'd seen grown men cry like babies after the first lash and he'd seen men die from the after-effects. That a woman had suffered this at his hand made his stomach turn.

"You've changed, Morgan. The man I knew would never have done something like this."

"I had no idea." They were the only words he managed out of his numb mouth. He'd had a woman flogged. A woman.

He closed his eyes, fighting despair and self-hatred and felt himself slipping over the edge. Is this what Barun had reduced him to? Seeing spies in everyone? Blind in his paranoia?

He carefully leaned his sword against the side of the desk. The woman's terrified gaze followed his weapon. How had he not known, not seen what was before his very eyes?

"Please tell me you're speaking the truth," Isabelle whispered. "Please tell me you didn't know." She pierced him with a bewildered stare. "Tell me you would never have ordered her flogged if you had known. I'm tolerant of many things, Morgan, but having a woman flogged is not one of them."

"Good God, Isabelle, of course I didn't know. I would never hurt a woman on purpose."

He walked toward the mysterious female. The sight of her blood dripping from beneath the hem of her shirt onto his floor made him change course to walk a few paces away and run a weary hand through his hair.

"I'll take her to Reed's ship and care for her there," Isabelle said.

"No," he said.

She paused in the act of reaching for the woman and looked at him in surprise.

"I did this to her, I'll take care of her."

"Morgan—"

"I'll take care of her." He forced himself to look at the woman and what he had done to her. "I have to."

The woman was shivering. Beneath the tear tracks that carved furrows through the soot from the fire, her face was pale. Her eyes were wide, the pupils huge. Morgan knew the signs of shock when he saw them. Carefully, slowly, he reached for the blanket at the end of his bunk and held it out to her. She stared at the offering as if she didn't know what it was before tentatively reaching for it. Morgan didn't miss the wince of pain or the small whimper she tried to bite back.

She clutched the blanket to her chest, turning wide, blank eyes to him.

"Leave her with me, Isabelle."

The woman made a strangled sound, her terrified gaze going to Isabelle.

"I don't trust you, Morgan. I'm sorry..."

Isabelle might as well have taken the sword and stabbed him through his stomach. After all they'd been through, the words tore through him. Yet, he couldn't blame her. Three years ago he'd returned to his

best friend and sailing partner a broken man, unable to speak of the horrors inflicted on him. Slowly his silence and moodiness had eaten away at their friendship until it hung by one thin strand. Morgan feared he'd just broken that strand.

"I swear on my sword I will not hurt her." No, he needed to heal her. Needed to do this. To right this wrong.

Every so often a drop of the woman's blood hit the floor, each splatter an ice pick to his heart.

"I'll check on her before I leave." Isabelle walked out of the cabin and shut the door softly behind her.

Slowly the woman looked around, her gaze stopping at the wall of windows behind him and the vast ocean spread before them. She turned her blank gaze to him.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, not knowing what else to say.

Her fingers tightened on the blanket. She needed to get out of her clothes so he could tend her back, yet asking her to disrobe was out of the question. She began to sink to the ground, as if her legs couldn't hold her. Morgan reached for her, ready to catch her, but she recoiled and settled on her knees, her wide-eyed gaze never straying from his.

Morgan, too, sank to his knees before her.

In his lifetime as a pirate he'd had many people look on him in fear. Fear was a powerful weapon he'd ruthlessly cultivated to get what he wanted. But this woman's fear was far more than he could take.

He reached into his boot with careful, slow movements. She tore her gaze from his face to follow his hand, gasping when he pulled out a sharp dagger.

"Easy," he said softly. "I won't hurt you."

He turned the dagger and offered it to her hilt first. Again her eyes searched out his. The reddened skin between her brows puckered.

"Take it." He kept his voice soft. "It's yours. I won't harm you again, but if you should feel threatened, feel free to use it."

It was an attempt to show good faith yet guilt pricked him. Even if she tried to use it against him, he was faster, bigger and more powerful. He could easily strip the small weapon from her. He'd given her false hope and somehow that seemed worse than no hope at all.

Her fingers unfurled themselves from the blanket and she slowly reached forward to take the dagger.

"I need to get supplies in order to tend your...injuries."

She swayed. Morgan reached for her, but she batted his hand away with the hand holding the dagger. He pulled back before he found himself sliced to ribbons.

Fresh blood dripped to the floor and he had to swallow the bile rising in his throat. Funny, he'd seen damn near everything one human could do to another and never before had his stomach turned so.

"You need to be in bed. It's more comfortable than the floor."

She gave him a look that said if he thought she was getting in that bed, he was crazy.

“Fair enough.” He stood. She had to crane her neck to look up at him. Always keep your enemy in sight, it was a good motto to live by and it seemed she’d learned it well. “I’ll be gone a short while to get some supplies.”

Her eyes widened, the fear turning to terror. Disgusted with himself he grabbed his sword and left, smacking into Thomas who was standing in the doorway bare-chested.

“How is she?” Thomas craned his neck to look inside the cabin but Morgan drew the door closed. Thomas’s nose was swollen to almost twice its size and blood was smeared across his cheek. She’d fought hard. Strangely Morgan was proud of her spunk.

“Stand outside this door. Let no one in. And for God’s sake don’t let her out.”

When he opened the door to the cabin with the supplies in hand, Thomas was right on his heels. Morgan knew Thomas felt guilty for being the one to wield the rope, yet it wasn’t his fault. He’d been acting on Morgan’s orders and so the guilt lay on Morgan’s shoulders.

Morgan stopped and Thomas barreled into his back. “Where is she? Damn it, Thomas, I specifically left orders that she was not to leave.”

Good God she was in excruciating pain yet she’d found the fortitude to walk out? Had she jumped ship like Thomas said she’d tried to do before?

“No one left, Cap’n. I swear.” Thomas stepped around him and looked at the spot where the woman had been. There was nothing but splatters of blood on the floor.

They found her curled in a corner, her bloody back pressed against the wall. There were smears of blood on the wood behind her. How in the world was she withstanding the pain?

Thomas pulled in a breath and muttered, “Dear God.” He took a step toward her but she whimpered and pulled back. Fresh blood dripped onto the floor.

“Out, Thomas.” Morgan crouched in front of her and held a cup of laudanum-laced rum to her. “Drink.”

Her gaze flickered between Thomas, the cup and Morgan.

“Out, Thomas.”

“But, sir—”

“Out!”

She flinched. Thomas mumbled something and left.

“This will help the pain.” He offered the cup again.

She pressed her lips together in silent argument. Morgan sighed and raised the cup to his lips, pretending to sip and swallow. “See? No poison. Just a little willow bark for the pain.”

He shuffled forward, held the cup to her lips and the back of her head with his free hand. His dagger was clutched tightly in her hand, the blanket held firmly in the other. Her wide eyes watched him warily as she drank.

“Wh-what is that?” Her face twisted into a grimace.

“Rum laced with willow bark,” he lied. “Drink more.”

She let him feed her the drink, strangely relieved she was allowing him to touch her. When she drained it all, he moved back and watched her closely. Her gaze wandered over the cabin. After a short amount of time her eyelids began to droop. She fought to keep them open.

“How’s the pain?” he asked.

“Still hurts.”

“Give it time.”

She forced her eyes open. “What... What did you give me?”

She struggled to stay awake, her fear and anger helping in the fight, but the laudanum would clearly be the victor. “I told you. Rum and willow bark.”

“Liar.” Her eyes closed fully and she slumped forward, his dagger clattering to the floor. He caught her against his chest. Her hair clung to the stubble on his face and he smelled the stench from the fire in it.

“I won’t hurt you, little one,” he whispered, even though he knew she couldn’t hear him.

He lifted her, trying not to touch her wounds but finding it impossible. She moaned and her eyelids fluttered but she didn’t awaken. Morgan laid her on her stomach and retrieved the dagger to place beside her; within easy reach should she awaken. Slowly, he pulled her arms out of Thomas’s bloodied shirt. The one beneath was singed, burnt through in places and shredded by the cat-o’-nine.

He cut it up the back and pulled it off her. He was about to ball it up when he paused, then stared, disbelieving. What the hell? The buttons weren’t like the buttons he was used to. These were thin, transparent and smooth. Definitely made of something other than wood. His breathing hitched. Quickly he worked the shirt off her, only to find yet another one made with thin straps over the shoulders and lace along the top. He used his dagger to cut it off with shaking hands, slicing what was left of it up the back and peeling it away.

His stomach muscles tightened. His gaze strayed to her burnt outer shirt he had thrown on the floor. He lifted it by the collar. A small fabric tag was sewn inside with the letters DKNY stitched on them. He inspected the lacy undershirt and found a similar tag only this one said Victoria’s Secret in flowing letters.

He looked at the woman, his mind tumbling backward to a place he rarely allowed himself to go. *No*. His mind screamed the denial.

Trembling, he reached beneath her and tried to tug her trousers off but they were stuck on her slim hips and she groaned when he jostled her. Blindly, carefully, he searched for a buckle or a belt and found a

small metal tab on the side. He drew back, studied the tab as his heart galloped in his chest. This wasn't happening. Not again.

He removed her trousers and held his breath when he saw the undergarments beneath. Holy hell. White lace. Very, very tiny white lace that barely covered her nicely rounded derrière.

Morgan stared, his mind a mixture of thoughts and impressions he couldn't sort through. No wonder everyone thought she was a boy. With those slim hips and small breasts concealed under so many layers, added to the fact that except for Isabelle no one expected to find a female on the ship, it had been a natural assumption.

Someone knocked on the door. Startled, Morgan stuffed her clothes under the bed. The ship's surgeon, a jovial, short, squat fellow named O'Callahan poked his head in as Morgan flipped a blanket over her rump, concealing the finely laced undergarment.

"Cap'n. I heard my services were needed here." His sharp gaze took in the woman's back and his eyes rounded as he stepped inside. "The men said you'd had a woman flogged but I didn't believe them."

"I didn't know she was a woman," Morgan snapped and pulled the blanket higher, covering the sides of her breasts. "And I'll tend to her."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Sir. Captain. Your job is to guide the ship and the sailors on the ship. My job, what I'm trained for, is to heal."

Morgan's anger at the surgeon's condescending tone spiked. "No."

"Sir. If I could—"

"I said no, O'Callahan. Now leave us."

O'Callahan's eyes widened and his lips thinned. "I know we disagree on treatments from time to time—"

Morgan snorted.

"—but you must admit I am her best chance. Infection will set in and then—"

Morgan rose, his height towering over O'Callahan's and making the surgeon look up. "Out."

"But, sir, you must think of the woman and her delicate sensibilities."

Instead Morgan thought of the scrap of lace covering her rear end and wondered what covered the front of her. He thought of her clothes shoved under the bed and knew he couldn't let O'Callahan see any of that.

"Infection," O'Callahan sputtered.

"You cure infection by putting seawater on it."

"The salt in the water cures it."

"The water itself causes more infection."

O'Callahan straightened and cleared his throat. "There is no proof—"

"I don't need proof. I've seen it with my own eyes. Your so-called cures can damn a man to a watery grave." Let alone a woman.

"Well..." O'Callahan huffed. "Well."

Morgan pointed to the door. "Out," he said softly. He was damn tired of everyone arguing with him. First Isabelle, then Thomas, and now O'Callahan. He was the captain and everyone else would damn well do as he said. "I said out, O'Callahan, unless you'd like to see the inside of the hold as well."

The surgeon glanced at the woman one last time then left.

Morgan remained standing, flexing his fingers in an attempt to control his building anger. She moaned and he turned back to her.

She was a mess. Her fingers, the palms of her hands and the pads of her bare feet were torn and bloody. She'd been flogged twice Thomas said, so the damage wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been. And Thomas admitted he'd felt sorry for the lad and held back. But still, the woman would be scarred for life.

He washed her back with vinegar—a far better deterrent to infection than ocean water. Vinegar stung like a son of a bitch and he sent up a small prayer of thanks that she didn't awaken. Next he smeared a salve mixed with comfrey over the lash marks, then wrapped her torso in clean strips of linen. Another point the surgeon and he disagreed on. Morgan understood the benefits of clean bandages, the surgeon said it didn't matter.

Morgan put more salve on her hands and feet.

When he was finished, he leaned back and blew out a breath, not realizing until now how tense he'd been.

She'd want a bath to wash away the dirt and filth of the fire and the blood caked on her. He wished he could bathe her now, but they had to wait until the next rainfall brought fresh water. He prayed infection wouldn't settle in. A ship was not the best place to take sick. Their supplies were limited and clean water nearly non-existent. He'd done the best he could.

He pulled a chair close, sat and dug beneath the bed for the woman's clothes. He ran his fingers across the stitching on the tag. Victoria's Secret.

His gaze strayed to her. She slept with her arms bent at the elbows, her hands up by her head. It was hard to tell what color her hair was through the dirt ground into it, but if he had to guess, he'd say blonde rather than brown. And her eyes? He didn't remember the color. What he did remember, all too well, was the thin scrap of lace that covered her rear end—barely covered her rear end.

His thumb caressed the tag of her undergarment. Victoria's Secret.

Secrets.

Everyone had them, he most of all. He looked down at the button his thumb was rubbing.

Sharon Cullen

So what were hers? How did she end up on his ship?

Chapter Four

Heat. Pain. Pain as she'd never experienced. Like waves on the ocean. Ebbing. Flowing. Drowning her in its merciless clutch.

She was hot. So hot.

A voice—a man's voice—tried to soothe her, whispered in her ear. "Calm down, little one. Rest."

She shivered. Her teeth chattered and she tried to curl into a ball but her back hurt too much. Warmth. She needed warmth. A scratchy blanket was thrown over her and she huddled into it. Her mind drifted, merging past and present.

The round and round motions of the police cruiser's red lights made crazy patterns on the ground.

"Zach's missing. The police say he ran away."

NO!

Not Zach. He wouldn't leave her.

He'd promised.

She threw the blanket off. Sweat beaded on her forehead, dripped down her back. More pain. Endless pain. Why wouldn't it go away? A cold cloth was placed on her head.

"He ran away, Juliana. Zach ran away."

No. Impossible. Zach loved her. They were going to get married. He wouldn't leave. He wouldn't.

They were wrong. The police were wrong.

That terrible day faded and Zach's mother, Emily, stood before her, fifteen years younger but with lines etched in her face, grief carved deep into her eyes.

"You have to let it go, Juliana. This isn't healthy."

"I'll never let it go."

"Zach wouldn't want this. He'd want you to move on."

"How can you say that? You're his mother. Mother's aren't supposed to move on from something like this."

Emily reared back, the grief flaring to a deep-seated anguish. "Do you think I don't hurt as well? We both loved him, Juliana."

"It's only been three months. He'll come back."

Emily shook her head, tears threatening to overflow. "If he hasn't come back by now, he never will."

Juliana thrust her chin up, fighting her own tears. Never-ending tears. “He will and when he does, he’ll find me waiting.”

“You can’t waste your life on this, sweetheart. Please listen to me—”

“Never.” That had been the last word Juliana spoke to Emily Langtree for fifteen years. She kept her word. She waited for Zach to return to her, to the love they shared and the plans they’d made. He never did.

The scene switched again. Zach hovered over her, concern stamped on his face. She smiled and raised her hand to his cheek.

Why did you leave me? she wanted to ask, but the pain was back, stealing her breath, her thoughts. His face wavered. Her hand fell and she curled her fingers into a fist.

Let it go, Juliana. Let him go.

No.

Her body dripped with sweat. She turned and groaned in agony. Warm, caring hands gently turned her back.

“Shhh, little one. Don’t move.”

“Make it go away,” she whispered.

“Here, drink.”

She greedily gulped at the liquid. “More,” she said softly.

“No more.”

“Please?”

“Shhhh. Go to sleep.”

“Don’t leave me.” She grabbed the hand caressing her hair, suddenly afraid but not knowing what she was afraid of.

“I won’t.”

Let it go, Juliana.

No more pain. Deep sleep. Nothing but darkness. She sank into it, eagerly embraced the absence of pain. But it came back, like it always did. Her back was on fire and she clawed at the blanket.

“Hey, hey.” Soft words, calloused hands. The blanket disappeared.

“Zach?” She tried to open her eyes but they felt heavy, weighted, and if she swam to the surface, she feared the pain would return worse than before. “Zach,” she sighed. “I love you.”

Morgan twisted his head to get the kinks out of his neck. If he thought he was tired before, it was nothing compared to now. He’d slept sporadically, the woman’s cries and restlessness keeping him awake. There’d been a few times over the past several days when he thought he’d lost her. The fever had been high, higher than he’d ever seen. High enough that he’d called O’Callahan in to help, but all the quack wanted to do was bleed her and Morgan ordered him out of the cabin.

He'd given her the last dose of laudanum a few hours ago. Her eyelids were fluttering and soon she would awaken. He'd stopped the laudanum mainly because he didn't want to risk her reliance on it, but partly because he wanted to talk to her. Find out who she was, where she came from, who sent her.

For the past several days she'd mumbled incoherent words but one stood out strikingly clear: Zach.

She moaned and turned her head. Blonde hair fell across his pillow. He knew it was blonde because he found fresh water and washed it. After she muttered Zach's name, he had to know. Had to know the exact color. Just like he had to know the color of her eyes.

He brushed her hair away from her face. Her brow puckered and she turned into his hand. "Wake up, little one." Her lids fluttered.

"Hey. Wake up."

"Mmmm." She blinked and looked at him. Green. Her eyes were green.

Morgan pulled his hand away and leaned forward. "Welcome back."

She frowned. Her gaze darted around the room in confusion. She scooted up in bed and quickly gathered the blanket against her.

"Wh-where are my clothes?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"They were too damaged to save."

He'd kept the dagger beside her on the bed and her hand began to inch toward it. He pretended not to notice. "How are you feeling?"

Her fingers curled around the hilt. White-knuckled, she slowly drew it toward her. "Fine."

"I doubt you're fine. How does the back feel?"

"It hurts but not as bad." The dagger slowly made its way to her side. Her voice was rough with the smoke she inhaled. He found he liked the sound of it.

"What's your name?"

Over the last several hours her face had regained some color but it quickly drained. "I didn't set fire to your ship."

The reminder of the fire had his anger beating heavily against his ribs but he ignored it, knowing if he frightened her, he wouldn't get any answers. "Do you know who did?"

She shook her head.

"How did you come to be in the manger?"

For a moment her brows dipped in confusion. "I... I don't know."

Morgan's first instinct was to call her a liar. The fear in her eyes made him hold his tongue. Maybe she didn't know. "Where are you from?"

Her lips pursed and she looked around the room, her gaze pausing on the various pieces of furniture—the desk, the small table with a single chair, the locker shoved up against the wall, and the lanterns swaying with the roll of the ship.

"Where are we?" she whispered.

"Heading to London."

She swallowed. "In the Atlantic?"

Morgan went on alert. She should know they were in the Atlantic if she'd stowed away before they left Boston. "Yes."

"Wh— What year is it?"

Suddenly his heart sped up and his hands turned clammy. "1727."

What little color that was left in her face turned a sickly gray and the dagger she'd been clutching to her thigh trembled.

"1727," she whispered mostly to herself. "How?"

"How what?"

Those big green eyes turned to him and she shook her head.

"What's your name?" he asked again, suddenly desperate to hear it.

Her gaze slid to the windows and the fist clutching the blanket to her chest tightened.

"Your name," he repeated softer.

"Juliana," she said softly. "My name is Juliana."

Morgan sat back and stared at her. Juliana. Her name was Juliana. Juliana who loved Zach. Juliana whose eyes were green.

A hard knock on the door made her jump.

"Enter," Morgan said.

Patrick, Morgan's boatswain, poked his head in.

"What is it, Patrick?"

"You're needed up top, Cap'n."

Morgan heaved himself out of the chair, too relieved to escape the confines of his cabin and the woman named Juliana. He followed Patrick out the door, ignoring her as if she weren't there, hoping when he returned she wouldn't be. Because, suddenly, his life held much more danger than Barun stalking him.

Juliana closed her eyes, her heart beating a thousand miles a minute.

Please, God, when I open my eyes, let me be in my apartment in Kansas City. But when she opened them she saw a cabin. On a ship. In the middle of the ocean.

1727.

Not possible. Simply not possible. The last she recalled she was... Panic had her twisting the blanket in her fist. *Remember, Juliana. Remember.* Fire, water, a small boat. Rats. Being flogged.

She let go of the dagger and swiped at her tears. Oh, God. This was a nightmare. Worse than any nightmare she'd ever had and she'd had some doozies.

This couldn't be real. Ships and flogging and men who looked like pirates?

She shifted and remembered she was completely naked. Well, not completely. Her torso was tightly wrapped in bandages and she still had her panties on. What had Morgan thought of those? Certainly Victoria's Secret panties weren't available in the eighteenth century. And her clothes? Had he undressed her? What had he thought of her clothes? Had he noticed they were different?

She blew out a breath. "Listen to yourself, Juliana. You're acting like you really are in the eighteenth century."

She looked at a crudely finished table and chair. Her gaze skipped to the desk then the lanterns hanging on the walls. Okay, what if she were in the eighteenth century? How'd she get here?

She closed her eyes and massaged her temple. How? She'd been talking to Zach's mother, Emily.

Small pieces—snatches of conversation, impressions, feelings of deep sorrow, grief, despair, were the only things Juliana could grasp from that day. Nothing concrete, nothing that would tell her what exactly catapulted her from the Langtree's kitchen in Kansas—twenty-first-century Kansas—to a burning ship in the eighteenth century.

"Oh, Lord." What was she supposed to do now?

Find a way back.

But how?

Slowly, gingerly, she slid to the edge of the bed, making sure the blanket was wrapped securely around her. Black dots danced in front of her eyes and her stomach churned. The full impact of her predicament slammed into her. She was simultaneously horrified and terrified. It was too much—being flogged, possible time-travel. *Do not pass out, Juliana MacKenzie.* She wrapped her arms around her middle, stretching the healing skin of her back. She'd been flogged. Beaten. And the man who ordered her flogging had nursed her through a fever. At least she was pretty sure Captain Morgan had been the one who'd taken care of her.

A vision of those large calloused hands undressing her and healing her took her by surprise. She remembered his voice calling to her, reaching out to her through the pain and the darkness. He'd been gentle and kind. Had that been Morgan or someone else?

She couldn't separate reality from memories because intertwined with those visions were memories of Zach's face and Zach's voice.

She took several deep breaths. The pain in her back wasn't as sharp or as cruel as before but it was still there, a stark reminder of the horror she'd lived through. She never again wanted to feel that helpless or be at the mercy of someone as sadistic as Captain Morgan. Even if he had healed her.

Why? Why had he healed her? Why order her beaten then heal her? She vaguely remembered the woman, Isabelle, and the conversation between Isabelle and Morgan. And the disbelief when Isabelle left

her in Morgan's care. After that she was left with the fuzzy memories of Zach and the unbearable heat of her fever.

One thing at a time, Juliana. Stand, walk around, don't pass out. Baby steps.

She stood slowly, pushing away from the bed but keeping one hand on it as she raised herself. It took a few moments for the room to stop spinning. She realized she was clutching the dagger again. What possessed him to hand her a weapon?

Because you're no match against him. Of course. She'd known from the first moment she saw him on the deck of the burning ship with rainwater running down him that he was deadly with those dark, fathomless eyes and muscular body. Just because he tended her back and nursed her wounds didn't mean she could trust him. She'd keep the weapon close at hand.

She pushed away from the bed and took a deep breath, testing her strength and her ability to stand upright for more than a few seconds without passing out. The room didn't tilt and she took a shaky step forward.

She needed clothes.

Her hand on the wall for balance, she made her way to the foot locker at the end of the bed and lifted the lid. The hinges creaked and for a moment she had a flash of déjà vu. She paused and thought hard but all she could bring to mind was a trunk in a cluttered room and a strange mixture of fear and sadness. Frustrated, she tucked the memory away with all the other snatches of memories and knelt down.

From out of the trunk she withdrew a large white shirt with flowing sleeves and a tie at the neck. She put it on carefully, moving slowly so as not to reopen the healing wounds. Next she pulled out a pair of pants, but they weren't like the pants she normally wore. These would only come to a man's knees but for her they were more like capris. They buttoned at the bottom but she left them undone. They were crudely made and hand stitched, the fabric rough. What she'd give for Levi's right now. She stood a little too fast. Her head swam but she yanked the pants on anyway. They were too big around the waist and she had to bunch them in her hand to keep them from falling around her ankles, but at this point she'd take what she could get.

She noticed a book tucked into the bottom of the locker. She pulled it out and flipped through it.

February 11th, 1727—Winds calm, SSW, course 71°S-43°W. Fresh water low. Spotted sail to the nor'west 3 pm.

Juliana sat back on her heels. February 11, 1727. She fingered the thick pages. This wasn't your everyday notebook paper but yellow and stiff. Like parchment.

She leafed through the rest of the book but found more of the same written in what had to be a quill and ink. There were blotches here and there where the ink had been too thick, a few marks that looked as if someone had sprinkled water on it. Some food stains. She touched the dried ink.

Someone had written this, someone who ate and drank and dipped quills into an inkpot to record the day's activities. Someone who lived hundreds of years before she was born.

Carefully she closed the book and replaced it, more troubled than she'd been before.

She went to the small desk where a map lay open. The shape of Florida was huge in comparison to the rest of the United States and America dropped off into nothing past Ohio.

As if it was still uncharted.

She brushed her hand across the map. A strange-looking tool that looked to be the forerunner of the compass lay next to it and she touched it with the tip of her finger.

She pressed her fist against her stomach. Too many things added up for this not to be true yet how could it be?

How did she end up in the eighteenth century?

Chapter Five

Patrick pointed toward the northeast. Morgan lifted his scope, searched the horizon and cursed silently. “How long has that sloop been following us?”

“Just spotted ’im.”

“Colors?”

Patrick shrugged. “None we can make out, but she’s still too far away t’ tell.”

“Best guess?”

“Pirates.”

That had been his guess as well. Damn. He looked up at the sails of his ship. “How long have we been becalmed?”

“Half hour at most.”

Morgan swiveled around and searched for the *Eve*, the ship Isabelle and Reed were sailing. They were a few miles away on the *Adam’s* aft port.

“Make sail,” he told Patrick.

Patrick turned around and cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, “Maaaaake Saaaaaiiiiiilll.”

Immediately sailors began climbing the masts like ants on a stick full of honey. The huge cream-colored sails began to unfurl, from the main topgallant sail down to the foresail. From the yardarm to the blunt. Usually the sight of the wind billowing the sails and the feel of the ship lurching forward made his blood sing, but with no wind, the sails hung limp and his stomach clenched. The good news was that even if a small gust of wind came by, they would move.

Morgan checked the position of the sloop as Patrick turned back to him and stuck an unlit cigarette in his mouth. “’eard you’d flogged a woman.”

“I didn’t know she was a woman.”

One bushy eyebrow lifted. “Seems to me a man would know a woman when he saw one. She say why she was on yer ship?”

“No.” But he had his suspicions. Suspicions he wasn’t quite ready to face.

“You ask ’er?”

“She doesn’t remember.”

Patrick shot him a disbelieving glance. “You gettin’ soft in yer old age?”

“I’m still younger than you, you bilge rat.”

Patrick chuckled. "What you goin' t'do with 'er?" he asked.

Morgan sighed and leaned on the railing. That was a question he'd been circling. "I have no idea."

Patrick withdrew the cigarette and studied the unlit tip. "I 'ave a bad feeling about this 'un."

"The ship or the woman?"

He tossed the cigarette over the side. "Both," he said before sauntering away.

"Yeah," Morgan said to himself. "Me too."

She drifted toward Morgan, skirting the edges, keeping to the shadows. She didn't want to trust the man who had her flogged, but she had no choice.

She'd harbored a deep-seated hope that when she walked out of the cabin she'd miraculously find herself in the twenty-first century. What she found instead was a ship, scruffy men and a vast ocean stretching into infinity. She couldn't ignore her rising panic as she made her way around the edges of the ship, but she could push it away. Don't think about it.

She carefully stepped over a coil of rope and caught sight of Captain Morgan speaking to a very large, well-muscled man who, in her day, would fit right in with a biker gang. She hurried toward them, instinctively feeling safer now that she had Captain Morgan in her sight.

She found a convenient place to rest out of everyone's way, yet still close enough to Morgan that she heard the cadence of his voice.

The man he was speaking to intrigued her. He had a full head of gray hair pulled into a braid as thick as her wrist and a heavy beard that hung to his chest. He was a bow-legged barrel of a man at least a head shorter than Morgan with a twinkle of laughter in his eyes.

Their relaxed stance was evidence they were comfortable together.

The gray-haired man wandered off in a rolling gait that marked all men of the sea, leaving Morgan alone. He raised the telescope to his eye and turned toward the horizon. His long hair hung down his back, the color so varied it was hard to describe. She settled on caramel.

"You shouldn't be up yet," he said.

It took a moment for her to realize he was talking to her. Had he known she was there all along? Probably. He was a suspicious man who more than likely was aware of his surroundings at all times.

He turned to her. "How's the back?"

"Better."

"You're pale."

"I'm blonde. I'm always pale." She let her gaze wander over the water. She'd never seen the ocean before but had always pictured it as wind-tossed, the waves tipped with white foam. This was entirely different. Smooth as glass, it was inviting.

Captain Morgan leaned against the rail and tapped the telescope on a tightly-muscled thigh. "I see you've raided my clothes."

"I hope you don't mind."

He shrugged. "Isabelle probably has a trunk of women's garments around here since this is her ship. I can try to find you some shoes."

She stared down at her bare feet. The bottoms were sore from climbing the rope ladder but not nearly as torn up as she thought they'd be. Had Morgan doctored her feet as well?

He made a sound in his throat and pulled a dagger out of his boot. Automatically Juliana flinched.

"Take it easy," he said harshly. "Those breeches are too big for you and I can't have them falling down around your ankles." He marched over to a coil of rope, cut a piece off, and thrust it at her with a snarled, "Use this as a belt."

She quickly tied it around her waist.

Morgan leaned an elbow on the railing and kept tapping his thigh with the telescope.

"Why aren't we moving?" She stepped up beside him.

"We're becalmed."

"Be-what?"

"Dead in the water. No wind."

"Oh." She looked up at the slack sails because his gaze on her was disconcerting. "How long will it last?"

"Could be a quarter of an hour, could be weeks."

Weeks? Was he serious?

The horror she felt must have been written on her face because he said, "It probably won't be too long, though."

"What were you looking at?" She pointed to the telescope and he handed it to her. She focused it on a ship far away in the distance. "Friends of yours?"

"If I had to guess, I would say pirates."

The blood drained from her head and she had to lean against the railing to keep her knees from buckling. How much more could she handle? Burning ships, rats, flogging. Now pirates? "How do you know they're pirates?"

"The sloop's sitting high in the water for one thing, meaning it's not carrying cargo. Only one reason why you wouldn't carry cargo on the ocean. You're the Navy or you're a pirate."

She peered through the telescope but didn't see any difference in the way the ship was riding the water. "Will they attack?"

"Probably."

She was surprised her strong grip didn't crush the telescope. "But they can't move either, can they?"

Morgan pointed to a line of clouds gathering behind the sloop. “A storm’s brewing. Hope and pray the winds don’t hit them first.”

Juliana swallowed. “We’re sitting ducks, aren’t we?”

He lifted an eyebrow and his silence told her all she needed to know, but before she could contemplate his answer, he threw her another zinger. “You running from something?”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s the reason most people stow away though I have to admit, you’re my first female stowaway.”

Her instincts told her to keep her time-traveling a secret. They probably didn’t burn people as witches anymore but she’d keep quiet all the same. Better to go with the stowaway story until she got her bearings.

Morgan crossed his arms and eyed her narrowly. “You running from the law?”

“No.” She shook her head. “Not the law.”

He looked as if he didn’t believe her. “Who’s Zach?”

She jumped, so startled to hear him say Zach’s name she was speechless for several moments. “Z-Zach?”

“You mentioned his name a few times.”

Somewhere in the region of her heart a steady pain took up residence. Enough that she wanted to rub at it and make it go away.

Daniel had been right. Before her ex-husband left her, he’d hurled the accusation that she was still in love with Zach and she wouldn’t be happy with anyone else. Of course, she hadn’t believed him, but the more she thought about it, the more she wondered. Hence the reason for her call to Zach’s mother. A visit that somehow landed her here.

“He’s no one,” she said and the pain in her heart grew nearly unbearable with the lie. Zach had been everything to her.

Morgan studied her for so long she had to consciously tell herself not to squirm. “Keep to the upper decks,” he finally said. “It’s not safe any lower.” He walked away, leaving Juliana alone with her thoughts, a ship full of men who eyed her like a Thanksgiving feast and pirates on the horizon.

Juliana rested her elbow on the railing, put her chin in the palm of her hand and stared out at the ocean. If she closed her mind to everything, ignored the fear that constantly nibbled at her brain, she found some inner peace in staring at the water and feeling the warm breeze stir her hair. Somewhere deep down was a feeling of contentment, of finally finding a place where she belonged.

But that was ludicrous. Maybe she harbored an untapped love of the water but it didn’t erase the fact that she was a misplaced misfit—something she’d been all her life. Only this time she was really misplaced. Three hundred years misplaced with no idea how to get back.

So lost in her own thoughts, she didn't hear anyone approach and jerked when someone stopped beside her.

"I apologize," Thomas said.

"For?"

"Flogging you."

Seeing him this close without the veil of fear and pain, she noticed how young Thomas was, probably just past twenty. But his eyes, the gateway to his soul, spoke of a man who'd endured and witnessed what most men of her time would never experience. Probably never want to experience.

He looked worse than she did. His nose was red and swollen and both eyes were black. "I'm sorry for breaking your nose."

He grimaced and gingerly touched the bridge of his nose, but the grimace turned into a smile. She was surprised to see dimples appear on both cheeks. "You did a good job, eh?"

She found herself smiling back. The action almost felt foreign.

"How is your back?"

"Better."

He snorted. "You lie, but I thank you for it. My name is Thomas."

"The quartermaster," she said. "I remember."

"If you ever need anything, I'm at your mercy."

"You don't owe me."

"I do."

"I broke your nose. We're even."

"Not even close."

She wanted to argue but the guilt in his face and the horror of what he'd done mirrored her own and somehow, inexplicably, their combined horror forged a bond between them. "Thank you," she said.

"Where will you go once we reach London? Mayhap I can help."

Juliana bit her bottom lip. Mostly she thought of how to return to her own time and pushed away thoughts of what she'd do once they reached London. What if she couldn't find a way back? What if she was stuck here forever?

"I haven't thought that far ahead," she admitted.

"Then allow me to help, my lady."

She was profoundly relieved to have at least one ally in this strange journey and someone she could turn to once they reached London.

Thomas quickly straightened, his smile wiped clean by a frown. He nodded, turned on his heel and hurried off, leaving Juliana alone and confused, until she saw Morgan stalking toward her with a scowl that pulled his brows low.

"You should get some sleep," he said gruffly.

She stared up at the sky, surprised to see it was nearly dark. Her body felt heavy, as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders, and her back ached but she had no desire to return to the small, stuffy cabin.

"I'm fine." She moved away from the railing. It was just her luck that she stumbled over some sailing paraphernalia. The damn stuff was strewn everywhere. Morgan's hand shot out and grabbed her before she fell.

"You're exhausted," he nearly growled. "And your bandages need changing. You're bloodying my shirt."

He was right of course. She was being pigheaded when she should be grateful.

Morgan's fierce expression softened. "Let's go, *manasvinii*."

He turned to leave and Juliana followed, suddenly so tired she couldn't think straight. "What did you call me?" she asked his back.

"Proud woman," he shot over his shoulder.

When they reached Morgan's cabin, she sank wearily onto his bed. Her eyes closed of their own volition and she swayed with fatigue. Gentle hands cupped her shoulders and she opened her eyes to see Zach standing in front of her. She blinked. No, not Zach. Geez, she *was* exhausted. It was only Captain Morgan.

At his prompting, she lay on her stomach and tried not to feel his hair skim her arm. Tried not to feel those big hands as they raised her shirt. Who was this man who effortlessly commanded a ship of seamen? Who calmly spoke of pirates and yet handled her wounded back so gently.

"What's your first name?" she asked, giving voice to her curiosity.

Warm hands touched her even warmer skin.

"Morgan."

"That's your first name?" She closed her eyes.

"First and last." His voice drifted around her, through her.

"Morgan Morgan?"

He chuckled. "Just Morgan."

"That's my name, too."

His hands stilled for a moment before resuming their tender ministrations. "Is it?"

"My middle."

"Mmmm," was his only reply.

He worked on releasing her bindings.

"Are you a pirate?"

"Not anymore."

Her eyes shot open. "So, you were a pirate?"

"Yes."

The bindings gave way and he cleaned her wounds. She wanted to see her back, wanted to know if it was as bad as she feared. She lifted her head and tried to twist around but Morgan gently forced her back down.

"You'll reopen the wounds."

"Is it bad?"

No answer, which in itself was answer enough. She closed her eyes against the tears.

Crying, Juliana? Her mother's voice taunted her.

No. Her own voice answered, as it answered thousands of times before. But her mother's drunken, slurred laughter still rang in her memory. The sound always managed to make her feel small and unwanted and unloved.

Morgan sat in the straight-backed chair and watched her sleep. She'd tucked a hand under her cheek and her other hand was curled into a loose fist on her pillow.

Needing to feel the warmth of her skin, he reached down to touch her brow, to smooth away a lock of hair that had fallen over her cheek. However, before he made contact, he tightened his hand into a fist and pulled back.

He grappled with his mixed emotions, still feeling the zing of jealousy when she'd smiled up at Thomas and the way Thomas smiled back. The two had no business smiling at each other. Thomas needed to concentrate on his duties, Juliana on healing. And Morgan on... Hell, he needed to concentrate on his duties as well, but a certain female stowaway grabbed his attention and refused to release it. He shouldn't be angry at Thomas for doing the things he himself was doing. Yet he had been angry. Furious even.

He relaxed back in the chair, his body aching. His eyes grew heavy and he stopped fighting the inevitable. His mind drifted and he jerked his head in an effort to end the nightmare he knew was to come before it even began.

It overtook him as easily as sleep did.

Almost immediately he turned to crawl back through but the mirror wasn't there. Only endless trees. Miles and miles of trees. A person could get lost in those trees and not be found for years, if ever. A small brook ran close to his feet. The sky was a bright blue. More birds than he ever saw in one place flew over his head and the air was sweet and free of any noxious smells. He turned in a circle, wondering where he was.

When he was.

For the first time in his life, he was scared. All those stunts he'd pulled growing up were nothing compared to this.

What had he done?

He frantically looked around, convinced that if he searched hard enough salvation would appear and he could return to his life. But there was nothing except a few deer who peered at him before ambling away to drink in the brook. He swallowed hard and tried to think, but surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, his mind refused to work properly.

Morgan's eyes flew open. He surged off the chair and stared at the woman sleeping peacefully in his bed.

When he first visited her in the hold, he saw only what he wanted to see—a young man sent by his enemy. Ever since learning her name, he'd turned a blind eye to the truth. No more. He couldn't lie to himself anymore. But the truth was almost too painful to bear.

Juliana Morgan MacKenzie had found her Zach.

Chapter Six

Juliana.

Of course he'd known from the moment he undressed her that she was a time-traveler. Just like himself. That's why he tied her clothes to a cannonball and threw them in the ocean. But Juliana? The girl he'd loved so much it'd become a physical ache? The girl he'd left behind in the twenty-first century because he'd been so stupid as to fall through the mirror when his mother told him not to go through it.

The girl who wasn't a girl anymore but a woman before him. Here. In the eighteenth century.

Morgan squeezed his eyes shut. When he opened them she was still there, sleeping the sleep of the exhausted.

How? How did she get here?

The answer was simple—the same way he'd arrived here. The other answers were more difficult.

What was he going to do with her?

Morgan hadn't felt panic in a long time, but it hit him now like a fist to the gut, stealing his air, making him weak. He ran a hand down his face having no idea what to do.

I love you, Juliana. You know that, don't you?

Those had been the last words he, as Zach, had spoken to her. The night before he traveled to a different century. She'd stood in the driveway of his parents' home, looking up at him with those green eyes that always managed to weaken his knees and smiled. As always, her smile melted his heart. Not that a seventeen-year-old boy would admit to his heart melting.

I love you too, Zach.

Who would have known, who would have guessed, that was the end? Certainly not Zach.

Morgan wanted to shake her awake, to tell her who he was and ask her all the questions that had been plaguing him for fifteen years. Instead, he turned on his heel to walk out. Fresh air. He needed fresh air so he could think logically. Realistically. Don't say anything rash. Think before you speak.

"Don't go."

He stopped but didn't turn back.

"Stay with me," she said.

"I—" He cleared his throat and reluctantly turned around. "I have things to do. Up top. Sailing. Things." Did she know? Did she know he was Zach? He studied her expression, the eyes that were always a mirror to her soul, looking for some sign of recognition. Hoping?

Yeah, maybe even hoping. But there was nothing. Just the same expression he'd seen before—wariness and a knowledge that he was her protector no matter what he'd done to her.

Ah, God. He'd had Juliana flogged. How was he ever going to live with himself?

"Can I come with you?"

He was shaking his head before she even finished her question. "Not a good idea." He needed to be away from her, to think. To figure out what to do, where to go from here. Tell her he was Zach? Should he?

"Please," she whispered.

As it had that fateful night fifteen years ago, Morgan's heart melted for this woman. How in the hell did he not recognize her from the beginning? Now he saw the younger Juliana in the older version. The eyes gave her away—that green that would always remind him of her.

She was climbing out of his bed, pulling her shirt down and straightening the breeches still tied with the damn rope.

"Juliana—"

"I can't..." Her hands fell to her sides. Her eyes were sad. Her shoulders drooped. She was at the end of her reserves, pulling on the last of her energy. "I don't like the dark, Morgan. I don't want to be alone."

Of course. How could he have forgotten her fear of dark places? And he'd had her thrown in the hold for hours. What had that done to her?

"Come on." He headed toward the door. What kind of fool was he to take her with him?

To give her credit, she remained quiet while he checked the sails and consulted with Thomas and John, the night watchman. John who kept shooting glances at Juliana as she stood on deck and looked out toward the dark waters. Almost unconsciously Morgan took a step closer to her. Ships in this day and age were not a safe place for a woman and whether he liked it or not, he was her protector. John understood the threat and turned away.

For a long time Morgan stood at the bow, staring into the blackness of the night. His mind was as muddled as the bottom of the ocean, his heart as dark as the sky. He thought of things he hadn't let himself think about for years. Zach and Juliana. What he'd been and what he'd become. Zach had been everything Morgan was not. Good to his bad. Optimistic to his cynical. Hell, Zach had been downright holy compared to Morgan's life of sin.

Even if Morgan told Juliana he was Zach she probably wouldn't believe him. Even he didn't believe it. It was almost as if Zach and Morgan were two separate people.

He turned to her. "We need to talk."

By the light of the half moon, he watched her face grow paler. "Okay." Her hands rested in her lap and she began twisting her fingers.

Talk about what? What was he going to ask her? He couldn't exactly come out and say, "By the way, how are Zach's parents and his sister, Molly?" Nor would he allow himself to say, "I'm Zach." Two simple words that were much more complicated than that.

His dad would be nearing retirement by now and his sister... Christ, Molly was twenty-nine. His baby sister all grown up. Was she married with kids and a mortgage? And how was his mom? What was she doing these days?

He burned with the need to know. But how to ask without giving himself away?

Simple. He couldn't. He fisted his hands at his side and ground his teeth together. He had no right to be disappointed. He'd turned his back on his old life and forced himself to banish the memories in order to live the life he'd been dealt. Yet he felt he'd been given a second chance, a reprieve from the constant guilt of leaving Juliana the way he had. Here was the chance he'd only dreamt about in his darkest hours. Except the chance had come at a high price. For years he told himself he'd done what he did in order to survive and he pushed his shame to the darkest corners of his soul, but now the shame came flooding out. His parents would be shocked at what their son had done. And Juliana? She would be horrified.

Yet he still burned to know and thought he might be able to discover something of his family and her life. He moved closer to the stack of sails, sat on the edge and turned to her.

"Do you have family, Juliana? Someone I can return you to?"

She looked down at her hands and didn't say anything.

"Juliana?"

"I have no family." She didn't raise her head and her tone was flat.

Morgan sat back, intrigued. Of course a drunken mother and a father who turned a blind eye to his child's abuse did not a family make. It was his greatest regret that he'd left her to deal with her family alone.

"There's no one? No one you can turn to?" Like my family.

God bless his mother and father. From the moment Zach brought a bedraggled, seven-year-old Juliana home with him one hot summer day, his parents enfolded her into the fabric of their lives. When he allowed his mind to go back to those days, to think of his family and Juliana, he'd been comforted by the fact that at least they had each other.

"No one." She lifted her head to look out over the ocean, carefully keeping her gaze from him.

She'd wanted to be a journalist, he a police officer. The idea was laughable now, when he'd gone so far in the opposite direction. Hell, for a time he'd had a price on his head and wouldn't be surprised if Barun put another on him. There was that shame again, biting and cruel.

He hadn't accomplished his dreams but Juliana, she could have accomplished it all. She'd been driven to succeed, to escape from beneath her mother's thumb. And he'd been certain his parents would have

helped her. So what happened to her and her relationship with his family that she now had no one in the world?

She looked at him and smiled, the false sort of smile bestowed during a particularly boring dinner party while you were seated next to a particularly boring dinner companion.

She cautiously settled against the mast, careful of her wounds. "Tell me about your family."

"I have no one either," he said automatically and maybe a little defensively. It was the truth, strictly speaking. He had no one anymore. Not since the fateful night he'd left his family and Juliana.

"Pirates weren't born pirates," she said. "They had to have family at one point. Or is there some island where you're all hatched?"

"My family is dead." And that's what he needed to remember. If not dead then at least gone from him. Looking back wasn't doing him or Juliana any good except to distract him from the important things like staying ahead of the sloop still hovering over the horizon and deciding what to do with Juliana. Would she be better off not knowing who he was?

The rigging above creaked. It was such a common sound that Morgan gave it almost no thought until the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. The rigging wouldn't creak like that while they were becalmed.

He lunged toward Juliana, knocking her off the stack of sails as a dagger went flying through the air and imbedded itself in the mast Juliana had been leaning against.

"Morgan!" she shrieked. "What the heck? Let go of me." She struggled against him, but her hands and arms were pinned between their chests. He saw the flash of panic in her eyes. She struggled harder as small whimpers escaped her. He held on tightly knowing he was hurting her back but unable to let go.

"Quiet," he ordered in a low whisper.

Juliana quit struggling and to his relief, her body sagged against his.

"Are you hurt?" he whispered close to her ear.

She shook her head. A tremor ran through her, echoing inside him.

He let go of her and she rolled off him. With a flick of his wrist, he silently told her to stay put while he unsheathed his knife from his boot and rounded the sails at a crouch.

Chapter Seven

Furious, Morgan took off in the direction the dagger came from. He was more angry than he'd ever been before. Not because someone tried to kill him but because Juliana could have been hurt. He strained to hear anything out of the ordinary. All the lanterns had either been extinguished or turned low to conserve fuel. In their becalmed state there was no fear of another ship running into them but it also made it nearly impossible to see. Morgan heard the sound of running feet not too far off and gave chase. Whoever tried to kill him surely had been planted on this ship by Barun and therefore wouldn't know the ship's layout as well.

Unfortunately, whoever it was got too far of a head start and Morgan quickly lost him. He stood on the upper gun deck for as long as he thought safe, trying to hear where the person went. He could be anywhere by now. He could even have turned around and headed for Juliana. With that thought Morgan made his way back to her.

He found her sitting behind the sails waiting for him. He expected her to be a quivering mass of hysteria. Instead she appeared calm, as if almost getting killed was an everyday occurrence. John was with her as well as Patrick but both kept their distance.

"What did you see?" he asked them quietly.

"I was on forecastle," Patrick said.

Too far away. Morgan looked at John.

"I was on the upper gun deck," he said.

No help there. Of course the killer would have struck while no one was around.

With a nod from Morgan his men dispersed. Morgan yanked the dagger out of the mast and pocketed it. Juliana watched his every move.

"Let's go below deck." All the way down he felt her presence behind him like a black cloud following him.

She climbed onto his bed and sat cross-legged. His clothes were so big on her they nearly swallowed her up, making her appear smaller than she was. More a child than a woman and it reminded him that he needed to be extra cautious because she was much more vulnerable than the hardened men working this ship.

"Do you know who did this?"

He opened a cupboard door and unfurled a rope hammock that he attached to rings set in the walls. “No, but I’ll find out.”

“Who would want you dead?”

The hammock creaked and swayed slightly as he put it together. “That’s a long list.” Barun. Barun wanted him dead. And he’d sent an emissary to do the deed. Morgan only had a moment to look at the dagger, but he knew the type. This was definitely Barun’s handiwork and since he was fairly certain Barun wasn’t on this ship that meant one of his men was. Who? It had to have been someone from his own crew. It made Morgan sick that he could have brought the danger with him.

He didn’t much care about himself—long ago his safety had become a moot point—but he damn well cared if Juliana lived or died and he vowed the person who put her in danger would pay.

“I can help,” she said quietly.

“Not necessary, Juliana.” No way would he let her get close to any more danger. How he would keep her away since he didn’t know the face of danger, he didn’t know.

“But I want to help.”

“This isn’t your concern.” He climbed into the gently swaying hammock. He was mentally exhausted but physically wired tight. He tried not to listen to Juliana slide beneath the bedclothes or picture her curled upon his bed.

He stared up at the beamed ceiling. The light from the moon made shadows on the walls. The reflection from the water sent ripples dancing across the ceiling. And in the darkness he let himself wonder what could have been instead of what had to be. What would she say if he told her he was Zach? Would she be happy? Mad? Would she cry? Laugh in joy?

Tonight was a clear reminder that his life wasn’t about sunshine and laughter, but life and death. He was Morgan, an ex-pirate who’d plundered and killed, an ex-slave whose heart and soul had been taken from him.

Even if Juliana were to learn he was Zach, she wouldn’t want him. Not after everything he’d done and what he’d become. If he did somehow find the courage to tell her, she would surely be disgusted and horrified. Better she think he was Morgan, a man with no conscience, a man who didn’t think twice about killing, than for her to know he’d once been honorable.

The edge of the weather front approached the sloop. Unfortunately, the winds had yet to touch Morgan’s ship, the *Adam*, and it was obvious the other ship would reach them soon.

She shivered and rubbed the goose bumps traveling up her arm. Earlier she tried to ask Morgan about the dagger and why someone would want him dead but he stymied all queries. Even her journalistic expertise couldn’t get him to open his mouth. If he thought ignoring her would stop her questions, he was wrong.

Yet she wasn't comfortable questioning his crew and after a quick but thorough search of Morgan's quarters, hadn't been able to find the dagger. Not that seeing it up close would mean anything because she didn't know the weapons of this time, but she was an investigative journalist and she felt like she was making an attempt at least. Even if she was hitting brick walls.

Morgan stepped up beside her and looked toward the sloop. His hair was tied at his neck and hung down his back. He'd shucked the white shirt in favor of a red vest. Golden skin stretched over taut muscles and for the first time Juliana noticed a considerable scar on the inside of his right arm that stretched from the bend of his elbow to his wrist.

Who was this man? What was the story he guarded so possessively from her? And why were there times when he seemed familiar?

"The wind is going to reach them first, isn't it?" She tipped her head toward the sloop that seemed a lot closer than it had a few minutes ago.

A gust of cold wind shook the *Adam*, lifting the ends of Morgan's hair and sending a shiver of unease up Juliana's spine. It was the first breeze they'd encountered in almost two days.

"You need to do as I say," he said. "When they get close enough to board, lock yourself in my cabin. Don't come out until I come for you. I'll send Patrick if I can't make it myself."

Morgan gave her one last, searching look, turned and walked away. Juliana watched him go until he disappeared among the men crowding the deck. Oh, Lord. How much more could she take? When was this going to end? A strange urge to laugh bubbled up inside her but she pushed it down.

Damn it! She wanted to go home. Was that too much to ask? Was it too much to want to be in her own century, among her own things? She had no desire to be dragged through a battle on the high seas. Daggers flying through the air. Danger around every corner, lives snuffed out instantly. *This isn't my life!* she wanted to shout to these people. Didn't they see? Didn't they realize she didn't belong here?

Maybe she was crazy. After all, how many people honestly believed they'd traveled through time? But when she looked out over the decks, she knew it was very real. No one's dreams could be as vivid as hearing the rigging clang and feeling the ship pitch, or smelling the salt of the ocean and feeling the slight breeze through their hair. No, this was very real. Her aching back was proof. If you were going to imagine something, you wouldn't imagine being flogged.

Juliana made her way to the port bow where she would be out of the way. She pushed away thoughts of her old life to concentrate on the here and now. Activity on the deck of the *Adam* grew more fevered the closer the storm and the ship drew. Tense expectation and excitement crackled in the air. Clearly the idea of a fight was something the crew looked forward to because the anticipation shone in their eyes. She kept a keen eye on Morgan. Her feelings for him were evolving into something else. Something she wasn't sure she wanted to acknowledge. For the flogging alone she should hate him but she couldn't make herself. There was something about him that drew her. And the thought of him injured or dying terrified her.

It seemed to take hours to reach them, but when the storm hit it was still shocking. Cold rain sluiced down. The majestic sails billowed and the ship lurched forward. The *Adam* rode the choppy waves at a good clip, but the sloop was faster and the cargo the *Adam* carried slowed them down. A quick peek in the direction of Isabelle's ship, the *Eve*, told Juliana that Isabelle and Reed were having the same problem.

Off in the distance the storm was stronger, the winds faster. The flags on the unknown sloop whipped in the wind. Excitement raced through her and she turned her back to the sloop and scanned the deck for Morgan.

She quickly made her way to him. He was talking to Thomas and Patrick and she tugged on his sleeve. He waved her away with an impatient gesture. She stepped back and waited. The rolling of the ship was worse in the heart of the storm and several times she stumbled away. When she tugged again, he turned to her with a look of irritation that quickly changed to concern.

"What's wrong?" He took her elbow and guided her away from the two men. She sensed the tension and barely restrained expectation curling through him. He looked different now, with the cutlass hanging at his hip and pistols secured in straps crisscrossing his chest. From the way he dressed to the cold look in his eyes he appeared every inch the pirate he said he'd been.

"Look." She pointed to the sloop. "Their flags, Morgan. They're British. They're not your enemies at all!"

"Juliana, pirates fly the flags that best suit them. It's called their colors. Just because the sloop's flying a British flag doesn't mean she's from England."

Her excitement deflated. "Why fly any flags at all?"

"Because sometimes merchant vessels fall for the trick. In all likelihood, when they get close enough, the British flag will come down and either a red flag will take its place or a black flag."

She contemplated the sloop, now closer than ever. "Meaning?"

"The red flag means battle."

"And the black?"

Morgan sighed. "Be prepared to go below deck when I voice the command."

He walked away, calling out battle stations to his crew as he strode to the stern. Men raced to the cannons, others pulled their swords and cutlasses. Pistols were drawn, flints and powder checked. Juliana took up her position on the prow and resumed her watch with the faint hope that maybe he was wrong. Maybe this was a social visit in the middle of the ocean. Yeah, right.

The *Adam* rode the waves, rising and dipping, rising and dipping. She had to hold on tight and sometimes even two hands weren't enough to keep her from sliding across the deck.

With the winds came the rain, a steady downpour that soaked everything. Juliana was so cold she was shivering but she refused to move, nurturing the faint, foolish hope that if she stood watch, the sloop would sail on by.

Instead, it kept advancing.

The large ships were cumbersome, especially in the storm, but Juliana was still awed by the ability of the crew to maneuver such a huge monstrosity. They were coming at each other, bow to bow, managing the ferocious waves with a dexterity that amazed her. The other ship began to swing wide and with a cold chill Juliana understood why. Several large, menacing cannons were now facing them.

The British flag was lowered, replaced with a black flag.

Morgan approached, a grim look on his face and a cutlass gripped in his hand. “Juliana—”

“It’s death, isn’t it? The flag? Red means battle and black means death.”

Chapter Eight

A pained look crossed Morgan's face and Juliana wanted to cry out, *Not like this. Please, God, don't let us die like this.*

"It's time for you to go to the cabin," he said.

She studied the name engraved in gold letters on the side of the other ship. *Bhaya*. Just looking at it sent chills through her. "What does *Bhaya* mean?"

"Fear."

Of course. She wiped sweaty palms on the legs of her soaking pants and desperately tried to control her heartbeat. Morgan walked with her to the steps leading down to his cabin. Suddenly she was spun around. He gathered her into his arms and buried his face in her hair. Stunned, Juliana stood there with her arms at her sides and eyes wide. Before she could hug him back, which she desperately wanted to do—hold tight, never let go—he released her and stepped away. He looked into her eyes, his own flickering back and forth as if he were trying to read her thoughts. She stared back, too afraid to mask her fear, too worried for his safety to be coy.

"Morgan." She touched his face. The rain was now pelting them. The *Bhaya* sailed by vanquishing the little bit of sun pushing through the clouds. It was as if the massive ship had taken all of their light and warmth. The thought, almost like a premonition, made Juliana tremble.

"Go," Morgan said with a little push. "Don't come out until—"

The sudden roar of cannon fire drowned out his words. Juliana covered her head and screamed. The *Adam* rolled to port and Juliana had to plant her feet to keep from skidding sideways. Men, ropes, ammunition and other loose items slid past. For a heart-stopping moment she wasn't sure the ship would right itself, but then it did with a large splash. Men were yelling, slipping and sliding to get back to their posts.

Morgan pushed her again. "Go!" he shouted and sprinted away.

Smoke billowed from the *Bhaya* and for a moment Juliana thought the *Bhaya* had taken a direct hit, but the smoke was from its cannons firing on Morgan's ship and in fact Morgan's ship had taken the hit.

The *Adam's* crew returned fire in another ear-splitting explosion. The other ship was close enough that she saw men twirling ropes over their heads and grappling hooks sailing through the air before landing on the deck of the *Adam*, their pointed ends digging long furrows into the hard wood. Dozens of pirates

from the *Bhaya* swarmed onto the deck. She hadn't seen them coming, had no idea where they even came from but their presence turned her blood cold. The *Adam's* crew met them with fierce cries.

Standing a few feet from her, one of Morgan's men crossed cutlasses with someone from the *Bhaya*. Juliana jumped back to keep from getting sliced and almost fell down the steps. Neck muscles straining as they fought, they looked like they were on the set of a movie but their blood and their cries of pain were very real.

A dark-haired, dark-skinned man ran up behind Morgan's man. Juliana screamed a warning but it was too late. The enemy plunged his cutlass into the man's back. He arched and dropped his broadsword. His mouth opened but no sound came out. His surprised and pain-filled gaze met hers for a horrifying moment before he fell to his knees and collapsed face-first onto the deck. The cutlass protruded from his back and blood poured from the fatal wound.

Juliana covered her mouth in shock as the man thrashed, then went still. No! She'd seen him before, working on the deck, laughing with the others. He'd even smiled shyly at her once. He couldn't be dead. Juliana dropped to her knees and reached for him.

The sailor who'd dealt the deathblow put his boot on the dead man's back and tugged his cutlass out. The body jerked and blood dripped from the tip of the weapon. The sailor swung around and smiled at her.

Morgan knew the crew of the *Bhaya* had been surprised at the number of sailors on the *Adam*. Merchant vessels carried at the most fifty men. With the crew from Morgan's sunken ship, combined with the crew from the *Adam*, that number was almost doubled. But their hesitation didn't last long. The men of Isabelle's crew were not fighters and ex-pirates as Morgan's was. Together the two crews were ill-formed and they found themselves on the wrong end of a carefully planned and executed battle.

A quick glance toward the *Eve* told Morgan that Isabelle was trying to maneuver her ship into a clear position to fire on the *Bhaya*, but it took time and expertise in such weather. Morgan gave up any hope of help from that quarter as he parried another blow. He tried hard to block the sound of their voices—a language that took him back to his nightmares. Instead, he thought of Juliana in his cabin, counting on him to keep her safe. And he concentrated on killing as many of Barun's men as he could.

As soon as he saw the name of the sloop coming toward them, he'd known it was Barun's ship and a sense of inevitability descended on him. This confrontation had been in the making ever since Morgan escaped Barun's clutches. In his heart, he'd known his time would come and some part of him had been prepared for it. He just hadn't expected it now, at the one time he was preoccupied with other matters.

If only Juliana weren't on board—

A shout above the noise drew his attention. It wasn't overly loud and if his ears hadn't been attuned to Juliana's voice he may not have even heard it.

Blood ran at his feet while smoke from the pistols curled around his head. The rain melted the smoke and like an angel coming out of the shadows, he saw her.

A dark-skinned man with the light of battle in his eyes had his arm around her neck and a dagger at her throat. Morgan's stomach curled. He lowered his cutlass until the point rested on the deck. Around him the battle raged, but the scents and sounds dissipated and it was only Morgan, Juliana and the man who held her.

"Ah, Captain Morgan." The man's English was tinged with a Hindi accent. Rajiv Barun, brother to Morgan's most hated enemy.

He, Morgan, a pirate whom many feared, now experienced fear himself. A fear born of intimate knowledge of what Sanjit Barun had done and could do to him—and now he had Juliana. Morgan swallowed the slick knot of terror but it refused to go away.

"Rajiv." He'd always thought it ironic that Rajiv's name meant lotus flower in Hindi while his brother's, Sanjit, meant invincible. It was indicative of their relationship. Sanjit being the leader, the strong one, and Rajiv the pretty one, never living up to his brother's reputation but desperately wanting to. The look on his face indicated he believed his time was here to change the course of his life.

"I am here to collect a few of my brother's possessions."

Morgan refused to look at Juliana, refused to let Rajiv know how much she meant to him. Damned if he'd give the man another weapon.

Juliana struggled against Rajiv's hold. Morgan had a powerful urge to put his cutlass through the man's heart and end this now, but Juliana would be dead before he could move. Still his hand tightened on the hilt, a motion Rajiv didn't miss.

He smiled. "My brother wants his lance, *daasa*."

Daasa. Slave. The word threw Morgan back three years to the hole he'd lived in. To the dark prison cell. The hunger. The beatings and the demands of a man who was the definition of evil.

"I don't have the lance with me." The fucking bloody lance. He should have known.

"Where is it?"

Against his will, Morgan looked at Juliana. Her eyes were wide, her face pale. She'd grabbed onto the arm Rajiv had around her throat but she was no match for the man's strength.

The fighting around them had ceased. Barun's men held Morgan's at knife point and pistol point.

"The lance," Morgan said, "is in London."

Rajiv's arm tightened and Juliana gasped. "My brother requires the lance, *daasa*. I will give you two weeks to return it. And of course, my brother expects his slave returned as well. Meet us at Port Royal. I believe you know where to find us."

Morgan's free hand clenched at his side. His already tense body dripped with sweat. Two weeks? There was no way in hell he could sail to London, retrieve the lance and make it to Port Royal in two weeks. And he damn well was not leaving Juliana in Barun's care for two solid weeks.

"That's impossible and you know it."

Rajiv's dark eyes narrowed and he drew the dagger across Juliana's throat in a mime of what could happen if he wasn't there at the appointed time.

"Two weeks, Captain Morgan."

Rajiv's men closed ranks on Rajiv and Juliana, blocking his view of her. He lunged forward but was brought up short by a dagger to his throat. Rajiv's man grinned, bloodlust clear in his eyes. He wanted nothing more than to stick that dagger through Morgan's neck. Morgan's chest heaved with the need to go after Juliana, to rescue her from Barun's clutches. His gaze sought out his crew. They had been herded together like cattle and surrounded by more of Rajiv's men. Their weapons had been stripped from them. They were as helpless as he.

All he could do was watch as Juliana was handed over the side of the ship.

Morgan's crew, a bedraggled, filthy lot with oozing wounds, watched him, clearly as stunned as he they'd lost the fight. Absently, Morgan swiped dripping blood off a cut on his upper arm.

Thomas was the only one brave enough to approach. He placed a hand on Morgan's arm. The contact brought Morgan out of his stupor and with a cry of rage, he launched his cutlass. It somersaulted through the air, skittered and slid across the deck until coming to a stop alongside a coil of rope. Crewmen scattered in its wake.

"Round up the men," he said to Thomas. "Begin unloading the hold. Lower every one of the tenders and load them with the cargo."

"Where are we taking the cargo, sir?"

"To the *Eve*. If they don't have room, dump it. Where's Patrick?"

"Right here, Cap'n." His boatswain appeared at his side, his usually twinkling blue eyes dimmed. "It's sorry I am about the lass, sir."

Morgan ignored the fierce pain in his gut. "Take a scope up to the fore topgallant yard. Watch that ship. I want to know where it's going. Don't take your eyes off it."

"Aye, Cap'n."

Morgan turned to the closest crewman and snagged him by the collar as he tried to hurry away. "Find O'Callahan and get the wounded down below."

"Aye, Cap'n."

The *Bhaya* hadn't been gone more than ten minutes when Isabelle came storming up the side of the *Adam*.

“She’s gone.”

A look of confusion crossed her face. “Who’s gone?”

“Juliana.” He turned away from Isabelle, afraid of what she would see in his eyes. A murdering glimpse of rage. A shattered heart and soul.

“Talk to me.” It was the voice of a captain and ex-pirate speaking to him, not his friend. It was exactly what Morgan needed at the moment.

“It was Rajiv Barun, acting on Sanjit’s orders. He said he would exchange Juliana for the lance.” The sniveling, cowardly sonofabitch hadn’t had the courage to fight his own battle, but sent his brother in his stead. The raw fury inside Morgan formed a ball in his stomach until it was all that drove him, all he would think about. Fury. Sanjit Barun. And revenge.

“Barun?” Isabelle asked in surprise. “Your enemy is Sanjit Barun? When the hell did you meet up with him and, for God’s sakes, why?”

He searched the waters for the *Bhaya*, finding it a short distance away. Removing the cargo from the ship was taking too long, but lightening her load was a necessity if he had any chance of following. Damn the lance. No way in hell was he heading for London to retrieve it. “It’s a long story.”

“Fine, let’s start with the lance then. What lance is he talking about?”

Taking her arm, he propelled her away from the crewmen unloading the hold. “It’s called the Holy Lance.”

Her eyes went wide.

“I see you’ve heard of it.”

“Who hasn’t heard of the Holy Lance? Bloody hell, Morgan, you have it?”

He nodded, his gaze finding the *Bhaya* again.

“Men would kill to get their hands on that lance.”

He winced, the statement hitting too close to home. Most believed whoever held the lance could claim divine right as a ruler and was assured victory in war. Presumably, it was the sword that pierced Christ’s side to ensure his death. Some claimed it contained a piece of nail that held Jesus to the cross. When Morgan took it, he neither knew nor cared what it was. He merely saw it as a weapon and a tool to gain his freedom.

“Talk to me,” Isabelle said. “How did you come by the lance?”

“I don’t want the damn lance,” he yelled. Activity around him paused and he lowered his voice. “I just want Juliana back.”

Isabelle’s gaze searched his. “We’ll get her back.”

“There is no we. I’m going alone.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Isabelle, I can’t travel quickly with the cargo weighing me down. I have to load it onto your ship and you sure as hell can’t follow with nearly twice the cargo. Go to London and wait for me to return with Juliana.”

She stared at him with narrowed eyes.

“Please.” It was a word he rarely said.

Juliana sat in a chair with her legs pulled to her chin and her mouth pressed against her knees.

In front of her the man who’d taken her off Morgan’s ship was yelling at another, gesticulating wildly with his hands. The two would alternately stand toe-to-toe, screaming in each other’s faces and pacing away. She had no idea what they were saying. They were speaking in a foreign language. Hindi maybe, but she had no idea. All she knew was that a cold fear had wrapped around her. A terror that didn’t come close to what she felt when she woke up on the burning ship or took the long walk to be flogged.

The one who grabbed her on the deck of the *Adam* was named Rajiv. He was short with black hair and black eyes and a scar running from the middle of his forehead to his left ear and bisecting his eye, causing it to droop. The other was tall with thick black hair, black eyes and a runner’s physique.

Rajiv pointed at her and spoke rapidly, a staccato burst of words she didn’t understand. The other stood with arms crossed and a scowl, shaking his head. He interrupted Rajiv with a flick of his hand.

He was the leader, she could tell from his posture and condescending attitude. And apparently he didn’t like her presence on his ship because he kept shooting her disgusted looks.

Rajiv said something to him and the scowl dissolved into contemplation as he turned to stare at her. Juliana shivered when those dark, depthless eyes probed her. It was like looking into the eyes of a hawk who was about to pluck a defenseless robin from the sky.

He took a step forward and smiled. The flash of white teeth against his dark complexion transformed his face into something almost beautiful.

“What is your name, *sundara*?”

With the back of his hand he pushed away a lock of black hair over his eyes. In the twenty-first century, he’d be a model on the cover of *GQ* until you looked into his eyes and saw the absence of a soul.

“Maybe you didn’t understand.” He stepped closer, his voice like honey dripping over hot cornbread. “Your name, my lady. What is it?”

He lifted her hand and bent her pinky finger back until it almost touched her wrist. The action was unexpected and the pain so intense, she opened her mouth to scream but only a wheezing sound came out because her breath was locked inside her. She bent forward in an attempt to release the intense pressure and slid off the chair to land on her knees.

“Your name,” he said mildly.

“J-J-J-Juliana M-M-MacKenzie.”

He released her and she fell forward, catching herself with her good hand and cradling her throbbing hand close to her chest.

Her head was jerked back by her hair and she was lifted off the floor and slammed back into the chair. An agony of pain sliced through her healing back. She was too stunned to make a sound.

He gently picked up her injured hand, bowed over it and kissed it. "Sanjit Barun, at your service, my lady."

Juliana's fear was intense. He was an enigma, violent one moment, strangely tender the next. The combination was explosive and more than likely deadly.

He squeezed her hand and she saw stars. Through the fog of pain she had one terrifying, crystal-clear thought. She was going to die. She was going to die in the eighteenth century and no one would know or care.

His black eyes were luminous. His smile slight but, oh, so arrogant. She concentrated on his mouth, not able to look into his eyes because his eyes held...nothing.

"Put her in the hold," he said to Rajiv.

Another locked room with rats. With any luck, maybe he'd forget she was there and leave her to die a painful, but peaceful, death.

Juliana didn't even struggle when Rajiv took her elbow and helped her stand. She would much rather be alone in a dark room than bring more attention to herself by trying to run. She'd tried that once on Morgan's ship and knew the impossibility of it.

Her hand hurt and her back was bleeding but she walked beside Rajiv with her head held high as he led her through the maze of corridors, up stairs and down stairs. She kept her eyes open, looking for possibilities. She'd learned from the last time. This time her escape would have to be quiet, possibly at night when less people were around.

The sailors on this ship were different from Morgan's. Subdued, quiet. There was no laughter, no bawdy sea shanties as they went about their work. They were ghosts, shadows of themselves as they bent to their work, never lifting their eyes.

The room in the hold was bare except for an empty barrel in the corner. Rajiv pushed her in and slammed the door closed. That was it. No conversation. Nothing.

Juliana tried to move her finger but it was swollen to almost twice its size and pain shot up her arm. She leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes, the throbbing in her finger beating in time with her heart.

Instead of giving in to the panic trying to push its way through her pores, she closed her eyes and committed to memory the layout of the ship. Funny how in a few short days she'd already grasped an understanding of eighteenth-century ships. She would escape. She just had to figure out how and instead of letting her panic overtake her, she'd devise a plan.

She went over the conversation between Morgan and Rajiv. They'd spoken of something far more important than the lance. There had been an underlying conversation between the two she hadn't been able to decipher. For the first time since knowing him, Juliana sensed Morgan's fear. Whoever this Sanjit Barun was, he scared Morgan and that terrified Juliana.

A thin line of light invaded her darkness. She opened her eyes as the light grew wider and a dark, slim form slipped through. Then the light was gone, burning her retina so she couldn't see anything in the inky blackness except its afterimage.

Her heart accelerated. Her ears strained, listening for movement inside her prison.

And then she knew. He'd come back.

Fear leaped from her like a living thing and she slowed her breathing to better hear his movements. Minutes went by. Long, tense minutes in which Juliana was certain he heard the thudding of her heart.

The sickening sweet odor of his cologne closed in on her. His breath tickled her neck. The whisper of his touch feathered over her arm and she jerked away. The slight touch grew into a caress, a bold stroke. His hand moved upward, over her elbow, pausing for long moments at her shoulder before venturing up to her neck then disappearing only to reappear at her breast. Juliana moved away but he caught her arm in a bruising hold, immobilizing her. His hand moved back up to her neck. He explored her face. His breath came fast and uneven. Her chin, her cheeks, her eyes.

The feel of his skin against hers was hot, like the embers of the fire on Morgan's sinking ship. It burned. She still couldn't see much in the darkness but she knew where he stood. She could hit him like she did Thomas. Incapacitate him and lock him in here. She could escape. Jump over the side of the ship. Would Morgan be waiting for her? Had he followed?

Barun sighed and his hand dropped away. He took a noisy step back. The light was there again and he slipped through it. Gone.

Chapter Nine

He came the next day. She was sitting on the barrel, her knees drawn to her chest, her injured hand cradled close. She couldn't remember the last time she'd eaten or drank. Her lips were cracked and her mouth was so dry her tongue felt swollen.

"Are you thirsty, *sanam*?" He held a tin cup out to her.

Juliana grabbed for the cup. Precious water sloshed over the side, soaking into her pants. She pressed the cup to her lips and drank deep. The water burned as it went down. She gagged and it came back up. Saltwater. She was dying of thirst and he gave her saltwater. Her anger came from nowhere, overpowering her fear, clouding her mind. She was dying. So thirsty she would have licked a puddle if she could find one and he knew it.

With a cry of rage, she threw the cup. It hit his chest, splashed on his face and drenched his shirt. He took a step back and raised his hands out to his sides in surprise. Water dripped from his chin and slowly he raised his eyes until they met hers.

He backhanded her. She toppled off the barrel. Pain shot up her neck and down to her throbbing pinky. The whip marks on her back broke open. The barrel rocked precariously then tipped over, landing on top of her, pinning her injured hand. She cried out. Her world tilted, swam and grew dim.

Sanjit Barun stared down at her, looming over her like an avenging dark angel. Even though the small lantern dimly lit her prison, the burn of his gaze raked her. "You will regret that," he said softly. Then he left the room and it was dark once again.

Juliana leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, afraid to sleep, afraid she would wake to find Barun standing over her. The certain knowledge that he would return was like a living thing under her skin, an itch she couldn't locate to scratch. Every noise made her heart thunder. Her prison was black as night. She felt as if she were sealed into an overly large coffin. When that thought came to her, as it did more often than not, she found it difficult to breathe. Like her lungs were collapsing, forcing the air out, and she had to stop her thoughts, block her mind. Sometimes the rolling of the ship was the only thing that convinced her she wasn't buried alive.

She slept, she woke, she existed in a vacuum with nothing for company but her terror and the rats.

The rats didn't bother her anymore and if that didn't say something about her state of mind, nothing did.

She was afraid of the dark.

Mommy, let me out. I'll be good, Mommy. I promise.

It'd only been the one time and her father eventually found her but the damage had been done. He'd yelled at her mother. A huge screaming match with plates hurled at the wall and her father bellowing at the top of his lungs. In the end, he won the argument and Juliana had never again been locked in the barn.

The fight hadn't stopped the abuse though. It merely forced her mother to hide it and her father to turn a blind eye. As long as Juliana wasn't locked in the barn where the neighbors heard her screams, he didn't care.

"I'll be good, Mommy. I promise," she whispered through cracked and swollen lips.

Suddenly the scene in her mind changed and she was in the Langtree's kitchen, eating the soft sugar cookies Emily was famous for.

"Zach wouldn't want to see you like this, Juliana. He'd want you to be happy," Emily said as she clutched her coffee cup. "We won't ever have the answers. Things happen. Sometimes..." She looked away. "Sometimes we don't know people as well as we think we do. Asking yourself why will only make things worse. Accept that this is the way it is and move on."

Juliana took Emily's advice. Graduated from high school, left home, worked her way through college, following the dreams she'd shared with Zach. Only she'd done it by herself. She'd met Daniel, got engaged, married, had a career, a life.

Except she'd begun to wonder if maybe she hadn't moved on.

"I can't do this anymore, Juliana. You have issues," Daniel said on their last night together.

She hid her fear of abandonment behind a bravado she didn't feel. "What issues?"

"Zach." Daniel said it so softly she thought she misheard.

She lifted her chin, pushing away the age-old pain of Zach's disappearance. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Daniel's face flushed with anger. "Don't give me that. You're still in love with Zachary Langtree. I can't hold a candle to a dead man, Juliana. I've tried. It doesn't work."

"No." It was the only denial she could form. No. Daniel was wrong. Okay, yes, she might still harbor a love for Zach, but it was old and worn and she'd moved past it. She loved Daniel now.

"Admit it, Juliana, you love Zach more than you could ever love me."

"That's not true," she cried, terrified of the direction of the conversation, feeling her carefully built life slip away.

Daniel's anger faded, replaced with sadness and resignation. "I thought with time you'd forget him. I thought I could make you forget him." He laughed, but it was a tense laugh. "I should have known better."

And then Daniel dropped the bombshell that shattered her nearly as bad as Zach's leaving. "I'm moving out, Juliana. I met someone else."

“No.” The only denial she could feel.

“I didn’t mean for it to happen. But she...she loves me, Juliana. Me. Not some dead guy.”

She was too stunned to feel anger. The anger would come later. She’d only felt fear. And loss. A feeling she fought her way out of before and swore she’d never experience again.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Had Daniel been right? Did it matter when she was surely going to die a horrific death at the hands of a madman?

Think. Concentrate, Juliana. She rubbed her temples but her thoughts wouldn’t stay on one thing for long. She had to escape but she didn’t have the energy. Barun was slowly starving her except she’d die of dehydration long before she starved. *Should have escaped when you had the chance.*

Listlessly she turned her head and stared blindly into the darkness. She was dying. It had been hours, possibly an entire day since Barun gave her the seawater to drink. Her heart beat unevenly, her breath came too fast, her muscles cramped and she had a fever. All signs of dehydration. She closed her eyes wishing it would happen soon.

The door creaked open and she stiffened. He stood no more than a few feet from her. She would forever associate the smell of his sandalwood cologne with terror. Of course she couldn’t see him because he’d slipped through the door and shut it tight, sealing them in a void of silence and darkness.

His feet scraped across the floor and her eyes moved with the sound. He stood still for so long even the rats came out of hiding, their little feet scraping against the wooden floor. She pictured them sniffing his shoes, pawing his legs. Biting him.

The wait became too excruciating, the silence too much to bear. “What do you want?” Her voice didn’t sound like her own and it was hard to push the words past her cracked lips.

“Ah, my Juliana, I want you, *sanam*.”

He touched her hair and she jerked back.

“Your hair is beautiful. Like the sun.” He took a strand and stroked it.

Juliana’s breath came fast, uneven. She remained still, afraid to move, afraid to anger him.

“The women in my country are dark, with dark hair and eyes. You are...refreshing.”

His fingers skimmed across her eyes. His breathing grew ragged.

“Ah, my sweet, my *sanam*, your eyes are the purest green I have ever seen. There is no equal. I wish I had brought light so I may witness your tears. I am sure they are like the finest diamonds. Pure and clean.” He licked her cheek and she jumped, horrified. She tried to push him away but her arms were like dead weights. Her heartbeat was even more irregular and she was finding it hard to breathe. Dots danced before her eyes.

“Heaven,” he breathed and patted her knee. “You will be mine, Juliana. In time.”

As abruptly as he arrived, he turned and left.

Juliana blew out a breath and dropped her head against the rough wall. He was gone. Gone, gone, gone. Until the next time.

Her stomach cramped and she tightened her arms around herself. How much longer did she have to endure this torture? How long could he keep her in this hellhole before she either died or he dragged her out and did what they both knew he wanted to do to her?

Days? Weeks? Months?

Hours?

"Like hell," she muttered into the darkness. No way. Not without a fight. Whatever cosmic force drove her to this despicable time she wasn't putting up with it anymore.

She climbed down from the barrel, ignoring the protests of her roommates the rats, and the muscle cramps and torn skin, and began feeling the walls. When she worked for the Kansas City Star she'd gone to Leavenworth Prison and interviewed Raul Juan Pedro Pablo Lopez, convicted murderer. She'd been doing a piece on prison justice and Raul was the unspoken expert on contraband prison weapons. In the course of her interview, she learned that even toothbrushes could be sharpened to become knives. The inmates called them shanks and Raul made a lot of money creating and selling shanks to his fellow convicts.

At the time, it amazed her. Now it might save her life.

"Anything can be used as a weapon, Ms. MacKenzie," the tiny Mexican told her. "Anything."

"Well, Raul, I'm going to put your theory to the test."

It took her a while but she finally found a piece of crumbling wall. She pulled and yanked and tore the skin on her good hand. She had to rest a couple of times, nearly out of breath and her heart pounding so hard it scared her, but finally a hunk of wood came free with a wooden nail attached.

"Some prisoners spend weeks sharpening their weapons," Raul said.

She didn't have weeks. She may not even have hours, but she would sharpen it. Because no way was she going down without a fight.

The metal band around the barrel was loose. She managed to find the end of it and bend it out. Working furtively, stopping occasionally to listen and catch her breath, she sharpened her improvised shank. With enough force, it could penetrate skin. No, it *would* penetrate skin. She would make sure of it.

Now, where to hide it? Using her new weapon, she hacked off a long piece of her shirt and loosely tied the sharpened nail to her good wrist. Barun injured her right hand so she would have to use her left, but she could do it. Right now she felt like she could do anything and for the first time had hope. She pulled the cuff of her shirt down over the weapon, sat back on the barrel and waited. She was out of breath, her pulse was in overdrive but she was pleased with her efforts and empowered by her resolve to fight back. Or go down fighting. Either way, she was ready.

"Thank you, Raul," she whispered into the darkness, sure he'd heard her.

Because Raul died three weeks after their interview, killed by a shank he made and sold to another inmate for thirty-five dollars.

Morgan watched helplessly as a thick fog descended. He couldn't see his hand in front of his face let alone a ship miles away. The anger he'd been living with for the last four days grew with each moment he was away from Juliana.

He couldn't eat. Everything he put in his stomach came back up. He couldn't sleep because when he closed his eyes he saw Juliana's face, filled with the expectation that he would rescue her. Pictures of her broken body intruded on his thoughts, making him break into cold sweats. Would he find her alive when he reached the *Bhaya*? Was she, at this moment, being tortured? Raped?

Patrick appeared at his side, his footsteps muffled by the ever-increasing fog.

"Sorry, sir. There be nothin' to see from the yardarm. We lost 'em, sir."

Morgan nodded, having already figured that out. "Trim the sails, Patrick."

As he walked away, defeat ate at his every step. Barun would continue to sail in this mess. Morgan would never find him and Juliana would be gone from him forever. If this were his own ship and his own men, he would keep sailing, full sail, through the soup, taking the chance they wouldn't hit another ship or run up on the shore of an uncharted island.

But the *Adam* wasn't his ship and this wasn't his men's fight.

He ran a weary, shaking hand through his hair and strained to see through the dense fog. The lap of the water on the hull and the clang of the rigging against the masts were muted. The animals in the hold below moved restlessly, as if sensing the mood of the crew.

He stopped searching for an ocean he knew was under his feet but couldn't see and turned his back to walk away from the ship hiding on that ocean, lost to him.

Chapter Ten

The lock on her prison door jangled and light burst into the room. Juliana blinked into the brightness. Barun's heavy cologne clogged her senses. She slid off the barrel onto shaking legs, mentally measuring the distance between herself and the door, the door and Barun, Barun and herself.

This was it. The moment she'd been waiting for. All the despair, the disbelief and the terror faded in the face of her resolve. She was either going to live or die in the next few moments. Her only fear now was that she had the physical strength in her weakened state to do what needed to be done.

He kept the door open.

"Ah, *sanam*." He touched her cheek. There was a glow in his eyes that hadn't been there before. Determined not to be cowed, not to shudder at his gaze and not to whimper in fear, Juliana stared back. She was Juliana MacKenzie, former investigative reporter to the Kansas City Star. She'd interviewed hardened convicts, dope dealers and gang members. She could face Sanjit Barun.

"Tell me, beautiful lady, what is your relationship to Captain Morgan?"

She blinked, taken off guard. "I, um. I don't understand."

His smile flashed white. He could charm a snake out of its skin with that smile. "It is a simple question, my lady. What are your feelings for Captain Morgan? What are his feelings for you? Why does my brother feel you are something more?"

She tried to think what to say but she was lightheaded and her thoughts sluggish. "I was a stowaway. He didn't even know I was there until the ship caught fire."

Something flashed in Barun's eyes. "You may have started out a stowaway, but it has become something more, yes?"

"No." She shook her head and it made the room spin. She needed to act soon or she wouldn't have any strength left.

"You are lying." He stroked her cheeks with the back of his hand. "You could have much more with me, *sanam*. I could give you riches beyond your expectations, servants to wait on your every need. Power, my beauty. You will have power with me." He ran a finger along the length of her hair. "Beautiful, Juliana."

His thumb made lazy circles against her skin, causing her pulse to quicken in fear. He smiled, tracing the outline of her distorted lips with his finger and leaned toward her. She squeezed her eyes shut and felt for the nail tied to her wrist. His lips touched hers briefly. She schooled herself not to recoil in disgust.

His hand covered her breast.

She worked the nail out of its bindings.

Using both hands to grasp the sides of her head, he leaned in close. Determined to meet her death head-on, she forced herself to look at him.

Suddenly the ship shuddered. It listed to the side as if a giant hand were pushing it and the sound of groaning wood split the silence. Barun was thrown backward.

He grabbed her injured shoulder and yanked her off the floor. The pain made the room spin and her vision dim. She fought her body's urge to lean against him. He dragged her to the door and poked his head out, looking both ways. The corridor was empty. Above them men yelled. Barun unwound a length of rope from his belt and tied her hands behind her.

"Do not try anything foolish, *sanam*." He grabbed her elbow but her knees gave out and she began to sink to the ground. Barun half carried her to the steps.

Lightheaded, she stumbled up them. Her vision kept going out and her legs felt like they weighed a hundred pounds each. It took massive effort for her to raise one foot after another and when she stumbled, Barun dragged her. Not now. Do not pass out now.

A heavy fog had descended over the ship. The men running around looked like ghosts slipping through the veils of time. Features were indistinct but one voice that carried to her was not.

Barun cursed and tightened his hold on her arm. The cold blade of his dagger met the warm skin of her throat.

Morgan stood on the deck of the *Bhaya* with his cutlass raised.

After they'd trimmed the sails, he'd gone to his cabin to get drunk, convinced he'd lost Juliana for the second time in his life. But instead of drinking, he lay on his bed, breathing in her scent from the sheets, thinking of her until he fell asleep.

The only thing he could figure out was that the *Adam* and the *Bhaya* had run into crosscurrents in the fog. Then, perhaps by some divine intervention, the two ships broadsided. The crew of the *Adam* seized their chance and swarmed over the sides and onto the *Bhaya*.

Morgan searched through the mist, his mind muttering half-formed prayers he hadn't thought of in years. Where the hell was Juliana?

Two shapes emerged from the fog, mere outlines until the haze parted. Juliana and Barun walked through. Morgan's heart damn near stopped beating.

She was alive.

His relief was enormous until he saw Barun's knife at her neck and the condition she was in. She'd lost weight. Her face was pale. Her eyes were unfocused, her lips cracked and bleeding. At best she was dehydrated. At worst... He shook with an intense rage. He gritted his teeth and swallowed a growl.

“You’ve made a grave error, Barun.” In taking Juliana and in hurting her.

“’Tis you who have made the error, Captain Morgan. You were given the task of returning my lance.” He made a show of looking around the deck. “I see no lance.”

“You and the lance can go to hell.” His hand tightened on the hilt of his cutlass and he tensed for the attack.

Behind her back, Juliana pulled on the wooden nail. When she practiced releasing it in the hold her hands hadn’t been tied behind her back and she hadn’t been close to passing out. She blinked several times to keep Morgan in focus. Her body was shaking and she’d broken out into a cold sweat.

Morgan took a step forward. Barun tightened his hold, nearly cutting off her air and making her dizzy. The nail was caught on the binding and she couldn’t find the end of the binding to begin unwinding it. She stopped, took a deep breath, wriggled her fingers and tried to focus.

“Release the woman, and I will go with you,” Morgan said.

“The slave returns to his master?”

Juliana jerked her head up and locked gazes with Morgan. His look was guarded, his body tense. He bent and placed his cutlass at his feet. “Let her go,” he said quietly. “Take me instead.”

No. Juliana’s heart stuttered. She worked furiously to release the binding. Finally it fell away and the nail dropped into her hand. Her fingers fumbled and she almost lost it.

“I will not let her go,” Barun said. “She is mine. But, never fear, *daasa*. I will accept your offer and take you as my slave.”

The knife at her throat nicked her. Blood trickled down her neck. She closed her eyes and went limp.

Unprepared for her weight, Barun loosened his hold. She twisted and buried the wooden nail into his thigh.

Barun’s knees buckled. Blood spurted from his thigh. He fell with a cry, pulling Juliana with him. Morgan scooped up his cutlass and lunged for Juliana.

Barun’s men surged forward. Morgan’s men surrounded him, meeting the challenge. Morgan raced to Juliana and hunched over her, protecting her, exposing his back. Thomas appeared and fought off his attackers while Morgan gathered Juliana in his arms and stood.

Spitting curses in Hindi, Barun rose, stumbled and clutched his bleeding leg. With cutlass in hand, pistols strapped across his chest and the blood of battle in his eyes, Patrick came up beside him.

“Find someone to take her to the ship,” Morgan shouted above the noise. He transferred Juliana’s limp body into Patrick’s arms. Patrick was about to turn when Morgan grabbed him. “If things go bad, take the *Adam* and sail for London. Find Lady Parker and hand Juliana into her care. If you have to, leave without me.”

Patrick nodded again and Morgan let him go, shutting his mind to Juliana to concentrate on what lay ahead.

Blood ran in rivulets and rivers over the deck of the *Bhaya*. The cries of the injured mixed with the blast of pistols. Burnt cordite hung in the air. Morgan spotted Barun a few paces away locking cutlasses with one of his men. All around him Barun's men fell, but more took their place, a seemingly endless supply of fresh and rested fighters.

If Morgan could get close enough to kill Barun, the *Bhaya* crew might falter without a leader, but Barun's crew guarded their captain with ferocity and Morgan couldn't get close.

If he didn't retreat, they'd be overrun, the *Adam* taken and Juliana in more danger than ever.

A thick sense of defeat lay heavy within him. It went against his every belief to admit the loss, but he had to think of the others and he had to think of Juliana's safety.

He called the order to retreat. A cry of triumph rose from Barun's men and they fought harder, intent on eliminating as many men as possible.

The crew of the *Adam* scrambled over the sides of the ship, pulling the dead, dying and wounded with them. Morgan continued to fight to give his men time to escape, but it was a losing battle in every sense of the word. The *Bhaya*'s crew kept coming and soon Morgan was surrounded. He tasted his fear, sharp and tangy. His heart raced at the thought of being taken away from Juliana, a prisoner once again. Barun pushed through his men, his gaze intent upon Morgan.

Above the men's heads, Morgan saw his ship slowly pull away. Patrick had done what he'd been told. He'd taken Juliana away from harm. Morgan pushed her out of his mind. She was safe and that was all that mattered. The time had come for him to face his enemy and there could only be one outcome.

Death.

There was a large blast of cannon fire. The *Bhaya* pitched to port. The main mast creaked and groaned and slowly began to topple, bringing with it the hundreds of ropes holding the sails. Men ran, shouting to get out of the way. Morgan took the opportunity Patrick had given him and ran to the railing where he vaulted over the side. His arms windmilled as he sailed through the air. There was another roar of cannon fire.

Morgan grinned as he hit the water.

He pushed his cabin door open quietly even though every muscle screamed at him to rush in.

Patrick was crouched in the middle of the room, his hands locked together between his bent knees. He nodded toward the end of the bed. "Over there."

Juliana huddled on the floor, her knees pulled up to her chin, eyes wide, staring out the bank of windows into the gray sea.

"Has she said anything?" Morgan asked.

Patrick shook his head.

Morgan watched her, unsure what to do. An ugly purple and blue bruise discolored one eye. She held her hand close to her as if protecting it. Most certainly the welts from the flogging had broken open. But what other injuries were there? Because he was certain there would be more.

He approached slowly and swept a sweaty strand of hair away from her temple. Patrick silently left the cabin.

What if she were seriously hurt? What if she had internal bleeding? X-rays and CAT scans were still a thing of the future and internal bleeding meant certain death in this time.

“Juliana?”

She began to rock.

“Where do you hurt, honey?” He balled his hands into fists, wanting desperately to plant them in Barun’s face. Morgan had spent plenty of time in Barun’s care and knew the mind games the man could play. Torture could be more than physical. Sometimes the mental was far worse.

She’d lost weight. Starvation was a favorite weapon of Barun’s—weaken the prey until they were willing to do anything for a crust of bread and a cup of water.

“I’d like...” Her voice was barely a whisper and Morgan had to strain to hear it.

“What would you like, Juliana?”

“To be alone.”

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea. Your injuries need tending.”

She shook her head and tears began to leak out of her eyes. Damn it. If he hadn’t already been sitting, her tears would have buckled his knees.

“Please. I need space.”

He remembered enough about her to know she wanted to break down in private, but he wasn’t going to give her privacy. Instead, he carefully gathered her in his arms and lifted her onto his lap. She curled into him and clung as if she wanted to crawl inside his skin. The tears were silent at first, a testament to her strength and the fact she was trying hard to hold it together.

She wiped the tears away with the back of her hand but more took their place. They came freely, one after the other, and soon her body began to shake so hard his trembled as well. She sobbed. Heart-wrenching sobs that tore through him and made him want to cry with her.

Careful of her injuries and mindful she may have more than he was aware of, he stroked her hair and held her close, not even bothering to utter words that held no meaning.

After a time the sobs faded, followed by a bout of hiccups. The hiccups gave way to sniffles then deep, ragged breaths. He held still, afraid to wake her, afraid to move even though she needed medical care and water at the very least. Slowly he let his head fall back to rest against the foot of the bed. One of her hands was fisted in his shirt.

Chapter Eleven

Juliana stood at the stern of the ship and watched the wake the vessel left behind. It'd been a week since Morgan rescued her from the *Bhaya*. He'd been kind and gentle, giving her the room she needed to heal. She was able to move her shoulder without pain, the black and blue around her eye had faded to yellow. Her hand, though still stiff, hardly hurt and her dehydration was gone.

She didn't remember much after Patrick took her from Barun's ship, but she remembered every horrible minute on the *Bhaya*.

The feel of Barun's hands was still with her. His soft, musical voice rang in her ears.

Every day she stood in this same spot and searched the waters, waiting for the return of the *Bhaya*. She'd learned enough about Barun to know he wouldn't give up easily.

Patrick stepped up beside her. He'd been hovering since her return, as had Morgan and Thomas. Her triumvirate of protectors.

He rolled a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth but didn't light it.

"Do you ever actually smoke those things?" she asked.

"Against the rules. Fire."

"Ah."

He pretended he was puffing on the unlit cigarette while he stared off into space. "What's your family name, lassie?"

"MacKenzie." Juliana leaned her elbows on the railing.

He turned to her with a look of surprise. "It's a Scottish lass you are, is it?"

"A long time ago. My family's been in the...colonies...for a few generations." Actually, her ancestors were probably somewhere in Scotland at this very moment. Interesting. Maybe she could look them up when she returned to dry land and tell them she traveled backwards through the centuries to find them. She chuckled, but it wasn't all that funny.

"Once a Scotsman, always a Scotsman," the little man said.

They stood together in companionable silence for a time.

"How long have you known Morgan?" she finally asked.

"Well, let's see." Patrick gazed off toward the horizon. "I think I've known the lad about fifteen years now." He nodded. "Yes, sounds 'bout right. Met him and Jane when they boarded the *Megan Kelly*." He

looked at the tip of his cigarette and chuckled. “She would be Lady Isabelle now. She pirated under the name Lady Jane, and a fiercer lass you’ll never again meet.”

“Sounds like a good story.”

A stern, nostalgic look crossed his face. “That it is, lass, that it is. Jane and Morgan sailed these waters for years. Feared, they were.” He straightened and threw his unlit cigarette over the railing. It fell end over end until the waves swallowed it up. “That’s all in the past now. Isabelle, she married Reed and became respectable. Pulled us all along with her too, she did.” He shook his head as if he still couldn’t believe he was a respectable sailor. “Captain Morgan, he’s a good man.” He shot her a pointed look. “Had a hard life, he has. Deserves a good misses to warm his bed and give ’im bairns.”

Juliana laughed to cover her shock. Wed Morgan? No, she didn’t think so. She needed to get back to her time and Morgan wasn’t part of the twenty-first century. “You’re barking up the wrong tree there, Patrick.”

He gently patted her on the back. “I think not, lass. I think not.”

Morgan watched Patrick pat Juliana. She laughed at something he said and a wave of relief washed over Morgan. She was healing. He saw the physical side of it, but feared the mental may never happen. With that one laugh he’d been given hope. She still had her nightmares and he figured she would for a long time to come.

While he was happy to soothe her tortured soul, a part of him wanted her to call for Morgan when the nightmares became too much. Except it wasn’t Morgan she called. It was Zach and he found himself playing the role to quiet her nightmares.

The setting sun painted the sky lavenders and pinks. He inhaled the scent of saltwater and pushed the painful thoughts away. The whole world was stretched out before him, endless blue water that had healed his soul many a time. A seemingly never-ending sea that would be there long after he was gone.

“It’s a beautiful night.”

He looked down to find Juliana beside him. She stood so close the heat of her body warmed him and her scent drifted to him on the cool breeze. Her hair blew around her face, the last of the sun’s rays highlighting the blonde strands, making them appear silver.

Her gaze searched his before she rested her head against his upper arm.

They stood there for some time, silently communicating what they may never be able to put into words. After the light gave way to darkness, Juliana stood on her tiptoes and brushed his cheek with her lips. It was a quick kiss, a peck, but it stunned him nonetheless. For a moment he stood motionless, feeling the warmth of her lips against his cool cheek.

He pulled her closer, lowered his head and brushed his lips against hers. *This is not a good idea.* He blocked his mind from the thoughts. He didn’t care anymore. This was Juliana, the only woman he’d ever

loved and damn it, he wanted to kiss her. He cupped her face, closed his eyes and tumbled back fifteen years to a time when the only troubles he had was a geometry test he hadn't studied for.

Her breath caressed his neck. Her warmth surrounded him, drew him to her. She smelled of fresh sea air and woman. He was lost. Lost to a love he'd buried deep inside himself. To a love that had never gone away, never faded, never ebbed.

She was everything he remembered—warm and sweet, hot and demanding.

His hands slid down her face to her shoulders, her arms, and settled on her hips. He drew her closer until she rested between his thighs. Deep within he sighed, finally feeling complete. Juliana was here, she was his for now. She may not know it but he did and that was all that mattered in this moment. A memory to cherish, to take with him when she was gone.

Her arms wound around him. Her breasts pushed against his chest and he swallowed a groan of need. It could go no further than this, but for now he would cherish her as he hadn't been able to for fifteen long years.

The ship rocked, throwing them off balance, tearing her away from his arms. She stumbled back. He reached for her. Why did it seem as if everything conspired against them?

Her green eyes were wide and she covered her mouth with one hand. "Oh, wow."

Morgan's mind cleared and the full impact of his actions hit him. *Oh, shit.*

She reached a hand out, then let it fall to her side. "Morgan...I'm... That was. I kissed you as a way to say thank you. But I didn't think..."

He ran a hand through his hair and swore silently. His gaze landed on her swollen lips. Lips that turned his world upside down fifteen years ago and again a few minutes ago. He shouldn't have kissed her. Keeping his distance was becoming harder and harder but it was something he had to do. She had to go. He had to find somewhere safe for her to live when they reached London. Somewhere far from him where Barun would never find her. To stay would certainly kill her now that Barun was after her as well as him. Kissing her just made everything worse.

Her body stiffened and he knew she'd seen the regret in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said. "And thank you. For saving me."

She turned and walked away, her back straight, her hands balled into fists at her side, and Morgan knew a whole different kind of hell.

Chapter Twelve

“Juliana, wake up.”

“Go ’way.” She swatted at the hand shaking her shoulder and snuggled into the covers.

“I want to show you something.”

The pillow was pulled off her head and she blinked. It wasn’t daylight, but the middle of the night and Zach wasn’t in her bed as she’d been dreaming. She scooted up. The bedsheets tangled between her legs and hiked her shirt up to her waist.

“What are you doing in my bed?” She’d been dreaming about Zach. Again. Ever since her ordeal with Barun she’d dreamt of Zach. Sometimes she thought she was going nuts. A slow slide into insanity that scared the hell out of her because she couldn’t tell reality from her dreams. Heck, she was living in the eighteenth century, maybe she *was* going insane.

“I want to show you something,” Morgan said.

“In the middle of the night?”

He pulled on her hand. “Come on.”

The tender look in his eyes and the smile on his face reminded her of Zach when he discovered something interesting and couldn’t wait to show her.

Maybe that’s what confused her. At times Morgan reminded her so much of Zach it was scary. She touched his bare arm, felt warm skin. Alive skin. Morgan’s skin. Not Zach’s.

She scooted off the bed, pulling her shirt down at the same time. Morgan stood, his gaze going to her bare legs. Something flared in his eyes, a fire he quickly extinguished.

After their kiss she saw the regret in his eyes. It hurt because she’d needed his touch, his understanding. She’d needed him. But as soon as the ship pulled them apart, he’d pulled away.

She grabbed a pair of pants and struggled into them while he didn’t even attempt to look away. When she finished fastening her pants—honestly, when would the zipper be invented?—he grabbed her hand, snagged the blankets off the bed and led her out the door toward the top deck—or the poop deck as she learned it was called.

He climbed into a tender, spread the blanket out and lay down, motioning for her to join him. She hesitated, but not for long. His regret may have hurt her feelings but he would never hurt her physically. She trusted him and he was all she had in this world. She lay beside him and stared up at the thousands of stars twinkling down on them.

“They’re beautiful, aren’t they?” His soft voice drifted to her like silk caressing bare skin.

“Yes.” She breathed in the salty air and closed her eyes, letting her other senses take over.

“People living hundreds of years from now will look up and see the same stars we’re seeing now.”

She pictured herself on the porch of her apartment, looking at these stars. When she returned—if she returned—she’d never look at them the same again. Never see them without remembering Morgan. She felt a sudden, unexpected twinge of regret. She wanted to go home, but at the same time she didn’t want to leave Morgan behind. Yet it didn’t seem right bringing him to her time. This was where he belonged. He was born to this, knew only life in the eighteenth century and while she’d love to watch him experience the twenty-first century, it could never happen.

“They’re beautiful,” she murmured. “Thank you for showing me.”

The silence that followed was comforting. What she loved most about Morgan was he knew when she preferred quiet—which she preferred more than usual lately.

She was very aware that her ordeal with Barun scarred her. There were times when she wanted to tell Morgan everything, but she was embarrassed she allowed Barun that much power over her so she kept quiet.

Morgan rolled to his side and braced his head on his hand. “I brought you out here because I owe you an explanation. You deserve to know why Barun is after me and now you.”

Juliana held her breath. The knowing couldn’t change the past, but it would give her another glimpse of Morgan. It would allow her to understand, at least a little, what made him tick and what formed him into the man he’d become.

He studied a wrinkle in the blanket, plucked at it with his fingers. “I left my family when I was young. Seventeen.” He rolled onto his back, folded his hands over his chest and crossed his ankles. “At the time, I thought of myself as worldly. And stupid, but that’s an observation from hindsight.”

Juliana sympathized. After all, at seventeen she’d known it all too. Had believed everything in her life would turn out fine as long as she had Zach. In a way she’d been right. As soon as Zach left, everything had gone to hell.

“I met Isabelle in Boston. She was sailing to her aunt in London and I was working on the ship for food in my belly and a pillow under my head. Our ship was attacked by pirates a few weeks into the voyage. It was over faster than it started and the pirate captain left enough provisions for us to return to Boston. He took everything else though.”

Morgan’s first glimpse of pirating hadn’t been so much frightening as intoxicating. He’d heard stories, of course, and knew there was money to be made in pirating. More money than he would ever make as a sailor on a passenger vessel. But it wasn’t the money that intrigued him. It was the adventure, the freedom, the places he could go. The power.

What many in the twenty-first century didn't realize was that a pirate's life was much better than a sailor working on a passenger vessel. The food was better. The money was certainly better. And unlike private ships, pirate ships held to a democracy. The majority ruled.

It hadn't taken much convincing for Morgan to decide which side he wanted to fight on.

"Pirating seemed the thing to do." She repeated his words from a few days ago.

He turned his head to look at Juliana. He brought her out here to bare his soul. To show her what type of man he really was. His feelings for her, feelings he'd buried, were emerging and as he was once again nursing her back to health he knew this couldn't go on.

"It wasn't just the thing to do, Juliana. I wanted to do it. I liked the power. I liked that people feared me. I liked the money. No, I loved the money and I loved the power."

Her gaze met his, steady, unwavering. "You loved the adventure."

She knew him too well.

"Yes, I loved the adventure."

"There's nothing wrong with wanting adventure."

He sat up and leaned against the side of the tender. "You have this romanticized view of pirating. It's not pretty, it's not romantic. It's ugly. It's deadly. It's dirty and it's illegal. For years I couldn't step on English soil for fear of being tarred and feathered. Tarr'd and feathered, Juliana. They really do that."

"I know what tarring and feathering is, Morgan."

He ran a hand through his hair in frustration. She wasn't getting it. Where was the horror he expected?

"I've killed people. Innocent people." Faces that haunted him in the dead of night. There were too many to remember but he felt each of their souls heavy on his own.

"You did what you had to."

"I did what I wanted to."

She sat up as well and leaned against the other side. The tender was small and their toes touched. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you need to know what type of man I am."

"I already know what type of man you are. You're the type who rights a wrong, who has empathy for his men. Who takes a wayward stowaway and saves her life twice."

"That's not me." Yet he looked away, unable to meet her gaze. Everything he planned was falling apart. She wasn't listening to him. She didn't believe him when he said he was no good.

"How long were you a pirate?" she asked.

"A long time. Isabelle came with me. She had an agenda and I hooked on to her coattails so to speak. Eventually, Isabelle and I procured our own vessels by attacking some ships we had our eye on. We killed that captain."

He paused, waiting for her reaction and was surprised to feel her fingers curl around his, squeezing.

“After Isabelle married Reed, she wanted to settle down and become respectable. They offered me a position with their company but I wasn’t interested. I took a crew and set off for the South China Sea.”

He brought Juliana’s hand to his mouth to kiss her knuckles. The South China Sea. He never made it.

“Barun rules the Indian Ocean and to get to the South China Sea you have to sail through the Indian Ocean. I was cocky enough to think I could do it, but Barun captured my ship, looted and burned it. My crew was sold as slaves and I was thrown in Barun’s dungeon.”

And the nightmares started. He would never tell Juliana about the weeks he’d been chained to the wall of his dungeon while the rodents and insects crawled on him. He would never admit the heart-stopping fear he lived with day by day, hour by hour. Nor would he tell her of the broken bones, the oozing wounds, the fevers or the hunger. His food had been withheld. He’d been isolated, denied sunlight until he didn’t know whether it was day or night, if hours had passed or days, if days had passed or weeks.

Insanity had been close and he welcomed it. Anything to escape the cruelty. Then, miraculously, it stopped. He’d been dragged, bloody, smelly, unshaven and weak from the only home he’d known for months and put onto a ship. His job, along with many others, was to row one of Sanjit Barun’s war ships.

That was the worst kind of hell—being on the water, inside a ship, the place he loved most in the world, and not able to walk around, to enjoy the spray of the ocean on his face. All he felt was the roll of the waves but it wasn’t enough. Not nearly.

There had been times when he would have preferred the beatings, the isolation, the rodents and bugs, especially when one of the rowers died. They were often forced to row with the dead man until someone retrieved the corpse. Sometimes that would be hours, more often than not, days. The smell was nauseating. The flies were so thick you could barely see the body.

He thought only of escape and revenge. He would escape. He would heal. And he would hunt Barun and kill him.

His soul had been taken from him while he rowed for his life and he was fairly certain nothing, not even Juliana, could bring it back.

“Is that where you got the scar?”

For a moment he had no idea what she was talking about until he remembered the brand on the inside of his arm. It was hideous, reaching from the bend of his elbow to his wrist. He resisted the urge to rub it. Sometimes he still felt the poker scorch his skin and still smelled the acrid stench of his own flesh burning. “It means slave in Sanskrit. Barun wanted everyone to know that the pirate Morgan was his.”

He jerked when her tentative fingers outlined the series of straight lines and half circles connected by another line.

“I thought it was a burn,” she whispered.

He remained silent, not wanting to take her to the dark places in his mind where even he didn’t want to go. As much as he knew he should push her away, he would never do that to her.

“One day Barun summoned me to his cabin,” he said. Juliana kept her fingers on his scar and even though he knew it wasn’t true, he could have sworn her touch was like a cool salve healing him.

“The guards left us alone. Apparently, Barun thought I was too weak to harm him. Or maybe he thought I would never attack him on his own ship. What he didn’t know was that I refused to die in the hell he created for me.”

“That’s how I felt,” she said softly. “On his ship. I didn’t want to die a coward.”

Morgan flinched, hating that Juliana had suffered at Barun’s hands. Just another reason to kill Barun. Maybe the best reason of all.

“There was an old sword,” he managed to say. “On Barun’s desk. Encased in glass. I broke the glass with my fist and grabbed the sword.” He had only moments to act. The sword was ancient, the blade dull. Morgan stabbed him but Barun twisted at the last moment and Morgan only sliced his shoulder. Barun yelled for his men. Morgan slipped through the door and disappeared. “It was easy after that. If there was one thing I knew, it was ships. I avoided the manhunt by changing hiding places. We were still anchored offshore. After dark, I swam to land. Within two months I was back in Boston, knocking on Isabelle’s front door.”

Juliana was both awed and amazed at what Morgan had survived and what it took to survive in this time. Her feelings for Morgan...changed. Yet she couldn’t figure out how.

The weight of true love is measured not in distance nor in time, but in deed. Look ye into this mirror and find what ye seek. Step through and discover yer heart’s desire.

A flash of memory made her go still. Steep steps. Furniture covered in sheets. Boxes. Old chests. A tall mirror.

An attic? Was that what she was seeing? Somehow the verse seemed to be tied to the mirror. How? Why? It had been taller than her. Wider than her arm span. Bigger than any mirror she had seen before. There had been a carving of a woman. She’d been sad and Juliana remembered wondering what made her sad. Then... Nothing. Her memories stopped there.

A mirror. How could a mirror help her get home? And what good was that memory in the middle of an ocean where she highly doubted she’d find a mirror?

Morgan shifted and Juliana tucked the image and her questions away.

“Tell me about the lance,” she said. “The one Barun wants back.”

He explained the supposed significance of the Holy Lance. Could something that dated back to Christ’s time still exist? If she believed she traveled through time, which she emphatically did, then it was not such a stretch to believe in the Holy Lance.

“Maybe it is holy,” she said. “It saved you.”

“I don’t want the damn lance, Juliana. I just want to be free of Barun.”

She touched Morgan's cheek. Her heart ached for this man who suffered so much and who for once deserved peace in his life. "I know," she whispered.

There was a wildness inside him, a desperation that seemed to confuse him. He wanted to push her away, had tried with his stories of killing and plundering but she saw through the act. Inside this dangerous man was a human being who cried out for love and understanding and somehow she knew she was the one to give him that love. Maybe that's why she was here. To help Morgan. To teach him that even though he'd done some horrible things, he was still good at heart.

Morgan moved to her side of the tender and pulled her to him, rolling until they lay chest to chest, thigh to thigh, nose to nose. She felt every contour, every dip and valley of his body.

It felt good. Way good. Too good.

He pinned her in place with his strong arms as if he were afraid she was going somewhere when moments ago he'd tried his best to push her away.

She buried her hands in his silky, soft hair spread out beneath him like a veil. How many times had she wondered what it would feel like to bury her hands like this? She'd never been a woman who liked a guy with long hair but that was slowly changing. How was she to go back to her time, to the soft men who ruled corporate America?

"I want you to know something," he said.

"Yes?"

"I don't regret kissing you yesterday."

Her hands stilled. "I meant to thank you." It truly had started out as a kiss of appreciation. A slight buss on the cheek was all she'd meant to do. But it all too quickly turned into more, startling her in its intensity. She saw the shock in Morgan's eyes as well. Something passed between them during that quick kiss. Something others would probably refer to as chemistry. "We're from different worlds, Juliana."

"I know." Oh, how she knew. More than he could possibly understand.

"I'm not the man you think I am." He ran his hands through her hair, tucking it behind her ear. "I'm not the man for you."

She pressed her lips together, sealing in her protest. He was wrong. He was the man for her. And he was right. They were from different worlds.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "More than you'll ever know."

"We have now and sometimes now is all that matters. Sometimes the present is all we get in life. I learned that from Zach. I also learned not to waste what I've been given."

Her hips moved, not at all listening to the rational part of her telling her this was a bad idea. But damn it, she wanted this because tomorrow may never come and if it did, she may not be here, in this place and time and if there was one thing she knew, it was that she didn't want any regrets when it came to Morgan.

His eyes darkened and his breathing paused. The rigid outline of his erection pushed into her heated skin and fired her nerve endings. Yes, this was right.

His hands slid down her body and settled on her hips. Above her the rigging softly clanked, below her the animals moved about in the hold. The stiff, brine-scented breeze brushed through her hair. But none of that mattered. What mattered was the man beneath her, the need clearly evident in the dark pupils of his eyes and the stiff erection pressing into her pelvis.

Morgan lifted his head and brushed his lips against hers, a feather-soft touch that wasn't really a touch at all but a sensation that made her shiver in awareness. With his lips he touched her cheek, her jaw, the shell of her ear. She'd never been more aware of her body with such little contact.

"Ah, Juliana." His voice was more a release of breath with little sound to it. He blew lightly on her neck and she shivered, falling more and more under his spell.

She smiled and smoothed his hair away from his face. His gaze, when it met hers, was serious. "Don't," she said softly. "Not now. Not tonight."

"This is such a bad idea."

She pressed her finger to his lips. "Not now," she repeated. "Make love to me. Please."

He blew out a breath. "What you do to me. How can I deny you after all of this?"

She rolled off him and pulled him on top of her. He was a big man, much bigger than her. If he didn't want to be on top he wouldn't, but he came easily, nestling his erection between her thighs, pressing it into the aching center of her. She bit her lip in a bid to keep silent. They were hidden in the smaller boat but that didn't mean someone walking by couldn't hear them.

"Touch me," she whispered.

"Ah, God." With a groan he leaned his forehead against hers and closed his eyes. She was nothing but a ball of need, all nerve endings and sensation.

He put his hand on her breast. "Yes." She arched her back in a silent plea for more. His thumb rubbed her nipple, causing it to pebble beneath his hand. He lifted her shirt and dipped his head down, pulling the erect nub between his lips and suckling. With a stifled cry she held his head to her breast. Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. This was right. This was perfect.

His hips convulsed, pumped. He rubbed his erection against her. It was too much. Too much sensation, too much need built up inside her. Her hips moved in counterpoint to his. Inside the boat the silence was broken only by their labored breathing. Restlessly she moved her hands from his head to his hips, holding him in place. Small sounds escaped her each time he bore down on her.

Her toes curled, her body stiffened. She threw back her head and a keening cry erupted from her as her orgasm hit. Morgan tore his mouth from her breast and smothered her cry with his lips, drinking it into him. Before her body stopped convulsing he was tearing at her breeches, shoving them down her legs and off her feet. Then came his breeches, landing beside hers.

He entered her in one smooth stroke. She was so wet there was no barrier. Bracing himself on his hands he looked down at her and buried himself until he could go no farther. Her muscles were still spasming, milking him. He gasped and closed his eyes. The muscles in his neck stood out and he froze. After a few moments, when her body stopped quivering, he opened his eyes. They were deep, fathomless. He began to move, slowly pulling out, slowly pushing back in. So slow. So. Slow.

He grinned but it was fleeting, a flash of white teeth, gone before she was sure.

"My Juliana," he whispered.

"Yes." Yes. His Juliana. She liked the sound of that.

His tempo increased, his breathing deepened. Surprisingly she felt her body coil, preparing for another orgasm. She gasped and before she could prepare herself she came again, grinding her hips into his. Morgan arched his back, made a strangled sound and came inside her. His cock pulsed. Her muscles clamped down on him.

"Oh God, oh, God, oh, God," she repeated over and over.

Morgan's arms gave out and he fell on top of her, not even bothering to keep his weight off her. She wrapped her arms around his waist and held on, her breath coming too fast. His even faster.

After a few moments, he lifted his head and looked down at her. There was a wealth of emotion in his eyes but not regret. Good.

He rolled off her and gathered her to his side where she snuggled into him. She didn't want to merely crawl inside Morgan's skin, she wanted to become his pulse points, the blood that flowed through his heart and made him alive.

They watched the black sky turn shades of navy blue and deep purple, then lavender and dark rose. As much as she wanted to stay in the lifeboat for the rest of the morning, reality returned.

Someone walked past their hiding place whistling a sea shanty. Another called out. A few laughed. But inside their little world there was silence. Juliana refused to think of what the next week would bring. She'd overheard a few sailors say they would make London within the next ten days provided the weather held. She wouldn't think of that now. Not yet. Not when she was in Morgan's arms.

But her thoughts rarely cooperated and this time was no different.

"You're going after Barun, aren't you?" she asked.

A small pause. "Yes."

What about me, she wanted to ask. *Where do I fit into all of this?* Because suddenly her future loomed before her. "How?"

"How what?" he asked.

"How are you going to go after him? How are you going to find him?"

"I have something he wants."

"The lance?"

“Yes.”

The knot of fear in her belly that never really went away tightened. What if Morgan left her in London alone? What if Barun found her? She groped for Morgan’s hand, found it and squeezed.

“What’s wrong?” he asked softly.

“I don’t know anyone in London.”

“Ah, I see.” There was a moment of silence. “You can’t come with me, Juliana. Barun will be looking for me.”

She didn’t know which was worse, her fear of leaving Morgan, or her fear of encountering Barun again. If she stayed with Morgan, she’d definitely see Barun. If she stayed in London, she’d be alone. And Barun may still find her.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Why not, what?”

“Why can’t I stay with you?”

Morgan’s sigh was deep and his fingers twitched in hers. “Because a ship is no place for a lady. Because I can’t offer you what you’re seeking.”

Chapter Thirteen

There was nothing for a woman to do on a sailing ship in the eighteenth century. Juliana's attempts to help were thwarted by the crew until Morgan told her to stop trying. She was well aware that a woman on a ship was considered bad luck and she was also well aware she'd brought these men an inordinate amount of bad luck, so she kept to herself. And to the crew's credit, they left her be. Morgan said it was because they worked for Isabelle and were more receptive to women than most but Juliana saw him glowering at the few who wandered too close.

His reaction was in direct opposition to how he treated her. Not that he treated her badly. He spoke to her when spoken to. He was cordial and considerate. He always thought of her first and made sure she was comfortable and well fed but it never went beyond that. After their lovemaking she'd hoped for... Well, if she were honest she'd hoped for more but she'd been sorely disappointed.

She knew what he was doing. He was pushing her away because he felt he didn't deserve what she had to offer. He thought he wasn't worthy. She thought differently. The problem was she didn't know how to convince him otherwise. Every time she tried he shook his head and walked away. And because she had to view him from afar, she began to see the man he really was.

He was a fair captain. He didn't ask anything of his crew he wasn't willing to do himself. She watched, breathless as he climbed the rigging and scurried along the top of the yards with no safety harness or net to let the sails out. He helped caulk the deck by hammering oakum into the fibers. He patiently taught the new recruits how to splice rope. He laughed with the men, ate with them on occasion and sang their sea shanties as they went about their work. She saw the respect in the crew's eyes when he was near and the concern when he was unhappy with someone's work.

And as she observed she felt herself falling more and more in love with him. There were so many sides to this man—the respected leader, the competent sailor and the gentle lover—she wished he saw that as well.

He twisted her emotions into knots. Confused, bewildered and befuddled her until she couldn't think straight.

She wasn't naïve. She knew her days on the ship were numbered. They were approaching London far too quickly for her peace of mind and when they arrived she would have to find a way to return home. But that wouldn't be for several days yet so she pushed the thoughts away.

More than once she wished for a notebook and pen to write down everything—descriptions of the men, the smell of the sea, the feel of the deck as it rolled beneath her. The observations of a modern woman living in the past. Except for the part about Sanjit Barun, she didn't want to forget a minute of this experience. She always felt there was a book inside her waiting to get out and this would be the perfect one. Who but her would know it was real?

She also had an almost desperate need to put Morgan on paper. If she couldn't have him in reality, she would have him in fiction. But paper and a writing implement were hard to come by. In fact, the only paper she saw was the ship's log on Morgan's desk, but the log was sacred and untouchable so she forced herself to commit everything to memory.

As she strolled the deck, she spotted Morgan aft port raising a scope toward the horizon. She hesitated, leery of approaching because she'd been rebuffed so many times, yet she continued in her attempts. There was something inside her, some need that prodded her on, told her not to give up on Morgan.

His hair was loose and blew around his shoulders. He smelled of the ocean and sun and man and she knew he was why she was in no hurry to think about returning home. Morgan. A man she shouldn't have feelings for but did. A man who shouldn't exist in her world but did. A man who made her feel things she long thought herself incapable of with another man. But did.

She gazed toward the horizon and tried to see what he'd been looking at. There was nothing but a small speck where the churning gray sea met the blues and lavenders of the sky. "Is that a ship?" she asked. "Yes."

Juliana narrowed her eyes to get a better look but the ship didn't appear any different. It was more the churning feeling in her stomach that told her something was wrong.

She licked her lips and asked the question she didn't want to ask. "Barun?"

A slight pause. Enough that she knew the answer before he voiced it. "Yes."

She tried to breathe through the fear that suddenly reared. The nightmares had nearly stopped and she'd managed to push the memories of her time spent in Barun's care to the far reaches of her mind where they sometimes remained. Maybe she'd been too hopeful thinking she was safe on Morgan's ship, or maybe she'd been fooling herself. Either way reality was staring her in the face in the form of a two-masted ship.

"You said you blew holes in his ship."

"We merely crippled the ship, Juliana, not incapacitated it."

"You knew he'd follow us, didn't you?"

"It's what I would do." He paused and as if sensing her thoughts said, "I won't let him near you. I promise."

"What if you can't help it?"

“I promise you, Juliana, he won’t come near you.”

He could promise all he wanted but Morgan was only human. He had his own fears when it came to Barun, and Barun had already won two battles against him. She turned to look at him. “What if he gets you first?”

His gaze slid away. He had no answer, or if he did it wasn’t something he was willing to share which scared her even more. What did Barun do with escaped slaves? It couldn’t be worse than what he’d already done, could it?

“You can’t promise to keep me safe,” she said softly. The words hurt but she had to be realistic. This wasn’t some romance book where the hero swooped in and saved the day. That ship and the man sailing it were very real and very deadly. And Juliana knew, without a shred of doubt, she would do anything to keep from falling into Sanjit Barun’s hands again. Anything.

“Promise me something.”

He turned his wary gaze to her. He didn’t want to hear what she had to say. It was written in his eyes and in the tense set of his shoulders. And maybe he already knew. Maybe he already came to the same conclusion.

“Promise if he does capture me, you won’t let him take me. Promise...” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “I couldn’t stand it if I was forced to go with him again. I want you to kill me if he takes me.”

“No.”

“Morgan, please.”

He shook his head and took a step back. “Never. I will never let him touch you again. You have to trust me in this, Juliana. I would...” He swallowed. She could barely look at him his eyes were so tortured.

“You would what?”

“I won’t let him near you. I swear on my life I will not let him touch you again.” He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and opened them. “Trust me, Juliana.”

Morgan entered his cabin. He’d stayed up on deck long after he should have retired for the evening. He knew he was procrastinating, putting off the inevitable conversation he didn’t want to have with Juliana. Her words made his blood run cold, but it hadn’t surprised him. He had come to the same conclusion. Barun would not let her go easily and neither would he wait long to make her his.

Morgan understood her fear, had lived with its twin since his escape three years ago. He knew the terror of the mere thought of being in Barun’s care and never would he visit that upon Juliana.

He would protect her. He would lay his life down for her. But what then? He would be dead and Barun would still come after her. An obsession had been born on the *Bhaya* and Morgan knew the man enough to realize nothing short of death would stand in his way when there was something he wanted. And he wanted Juliana.

Could he do it? Could he kill her to save her?

She stood at the large windows overlooking the wake of the *Adam*. The night was almost sinister. The candles she'd lit to conquer the dark burnished her once pale skin a tempered gold. Her hair, always blonde was nearly white from the sun.

He'd spent the better part of the voyage avoiding her when all he wanted to do was touch her, lay her on the bed and stroke her, feel her skin against his and make her cry out. He'd convinced himself he was no good for her while she tried to convince him otherwise.

The truth was Juliana was far braver than he. Deep down he was a coward. He wouldn't tell her the truth because he feared her disgust at the man he'd become. He couldn't face her reaction and so he hid behind a cold indifference that for some reason didn't affect her but merely drew her closer.

And yet he still couldn't tell her he was Zach. Because he was afraid.

Giving in to the need he'd been fighting, he stroked her hair and placed a kiss on the top of her head. Here they were, in a race for their lives and all he thought about was himself.

Their only defense was to run. To use all his sailing knowledge to make this ship move faster than Barun's. If they got to London first he had a chance, a slim chance, of hiding Juliana away. If Isabelle reached London before them and if she was waiting for them. Those were a lot of ifs.

His hand settled on her stiff shoulder and he rubbed the tense muscles. "He can't get to you tonight, Juliana. He's far away and I have watchmen posted throughout the ship."

She leaned her head against his chest and he wrapped his arms around her. Together they watched the moon play off the waves.

With a nudge of his fingers under her chin, he tilted her head up. Her green eyes were a blank canvass, all emotion tucked carefully away where he couldn't reach her. He'd seen that look before, after he'd had her flogged. Her defense mechanism. A way to cope with the uncopable. And who could blame her?

"Ah, Juliana." *Come back to me*. It was too cruel to ask. Unfair to expect her to act as if their lives weren't in danger. Yet, he wanted his Juliana back for one last night. They were a day from London and no matter how he looked at it, this was their last night together. Whether Barun caught up with them or they made it to London, this was the end of the line for them.

He leaned down and kissed her, a soft kiss meant to bring some life to her.

He led her to the bed, laid her on the soft feather mattress like he'd fantasized about doing for days and climbed up beside her. Her eyes were open; she seemed to be watching him but there was no reaction. *Please come back to me*. He kissed her neck, her shoulder. Fifteen years of dreaming of her and she lay beneath him. He still had a hard time grasping the concept. His Juliana with him. Here. Now. He wanted to weep he was so happy and yet so heartbroken.

He'd had his share of women over the years, but none compared to Juliana. Every one of them he'd walked away from with a sense of something missing, an incompleteness that bothered him. It had just been sex, a physical joining to relieve the tension, and they had been nothing more than receptacles to receive his pent-up tension.

Juliana was different. With her, he finally felt complete. Soon she would be gone and he would be alone again, but tonight he wouldn't think about that. Tonight he would live for the present, not the past or the future.

"Morgan."

He smiled down at her. She was there, with him. Fifteen years ago they'd been teenagers fumbling in the dark, unsure, yet in love. They were different now, in all ways. And yet the same.

He looked deep into her eyes. How could she not know? How could she not see who he was? It hurt yet he didn't blame her. She wouldn't expect to meet Zach here. She didn't know the history of the mirror and he was positive she still didn't know how she got here.

He brushed her hair from her face. She looked up at him with trusting eyes, bright with unshed tears. Something stabbed at his heart. Betrayal. He'd done nothing but betray her and lie to her. He of all people knew what she was going through, how lonely and scared she felt and yet he still kept silent about his true identity. Yes, he was a coward of the worst sort.

"Make love to me," she whispered. "Please."

He wanted to stay there forever, never leave her side, never say goodbye. If he couldn't give her that, he would give her this last request. "Absolutely," he said.

Chapter Fourteen

Juliana finally managed to make it up the steps to the forecastle. It took some practice. She about fell on her face twice after tripping over the long skirts Morgan unearthed from some trunk of Isabelle's. What she wouldn't do for her worn, torn and holey Levis. But they wouldn't be lying in the bottom of her closet until two-hundred-odd years from now.

Today was bittersweet. Last night she felt Morgan finally and truly open up to her. Their lovemaking had been sweet and tender and she almost felt the emotions he kept bottled up pouring out of him. This morning he seemed a little less distanced yet they were set to reach England this afternoon.

If Barun didn't reach them first.

As soon as she stepped onto the forecastle, she immediately sensed the tension on the ship. It wasn't uncommon to see weapons strapped to the men. Most considered themselves undressed if they were without at least one. But today they were decked out. Pistols were strapped to their chests and tucked into the waistbands of their pants. Not one, but two cutlasses hung at their sides. There were no jokes or jests, no sense of excitement that they were finally, after all this time, close to making land.

Morgan made it clear it was a race against Barun to see who would make it first. The one thing she loved about Morgan was that he didn't hide the truth from her. He spelled it out carefully and completely.

The *Bhaya* stood off the starboard side, its form disfigured by the loss of its main sail. She and Morgan hadn't spoken again about her request but she sensed in him an acceptance. He would do what was needed to keep her from Barun's clutches. It was all she could ask even though it was too much to ask. She didn't want to die enslaved to another man. She'd rather die free and Morgan understood. Possibly he was the only one who would understand.

Dodging sailors, she hurried port side. England stood an equal distance away. So far. Too far. Even at full sail they might not make it. How had the *Bhaya* reached them with one less sail?

A large blast sounded from behind the *Adam* and with stunned horror, Juliana watched a cannonball fly over the bow, feet from her, and land in the ocean, sending a spray of water at least twenty feet into the air. Galvanized into action, sailors yelled orders to others. The cannons were prepared for firing.

Morgan suddenly appeared, taking the steps to the forecastle two at a time, his lips pulled tight, eyes fierce, weapons strapped to him. No longer was he the tender lover of the night before but a warrior.

He took her by the shoulders. "Are you all right?" He looked her over as if expecting to see a cannonball-sized hole in her. He pulled her tightly against him. "My God," he said. "I saw that shot go straight toward you. There was nothing I could do. Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine. They missed."

"They weren't aiming for us. It was a warning shot. They want us to heave to, bring her to a standstill."

"What will they do if you don't? Heave to, I mean."

He grimaced, the truth plain in his brown eyes. "The *Bhaya* will attack."

She watched the sailors on the various decks hurrying about to ready the ship for attack, climbing the sails in the hopes of gaining a little more speed. So many lives lost if the *Bhaya* attacked. Her gaze came back to Morgan. "You can't risk these men's lives to save mine."

"That's not the way it works, Juliana. If we're boarded, we're all taken prisoner." Morgan squeezed her shoulder. "Go below, lock yourself in my cabin."

She was shaking her head before he finished speaking. She would not play the damsel in distress. If something happened, she wanted to watch it unfold, not hide. She wanted to help and she wanted to be prepared.

The shore drew closer but it was taking a lot longer than she'd anticipated to reach England. The *Adam* had a bit of luck with the winds and the fact she was operating with more sails than the *Bhaya*. She managed to keep out of firing range, but the *Bhaya* continued to hover off the starboard side, inching closer. A shadowy menace.

Morgan and his crew coaxed every bit of speed out of the sails, used every bit of cunning and knowledge to outrace the *Bhaya*. Knowing once they reached English waters, Barun wouldn't dare attack.

A shout went up. The entire crew seemed to pause, their gazes trained port side. A third ship entered the deadly dance. The unidentified ship slipped between them, effectively cutting the *Bhaya* off from the *Adam* and another cheer rose up. Juliana joined in, surprise mingled with relief.

They made it.

The mysterious third ship kept her distance yet never wavered in her protection, and now the crew trimmed the sails, preparing to drop anchor in London, England.

The expression in Morgan's eyes when he approached Juliana, however, was dour.

"Isabelle's ship managed to give us time to make it to port," he said. "Once we drop anchor, I want you off this ship as swiftly as possible. Isabelle will be waiting for you on the docks. Go with her, she'll keep you safe."

A flutter of apprehension tickled Juliana's stomach. This was it, the moment she'd been dreading. She was leaving the ship and stepping into another country, in another century, leaving Morgan behind. To hide her shaking hands she buried them in her skirts.

His eyes were turbulent, troubled. She sensed his withdrawal, aching to reach up and touch his cheek, to feel the rough stubble of his jaw. Instead she sent a prayer to heaven he would stay alive.

"I want to thank you for everything. I..." Her words got stuck in her throat and she had to swallow. "I don't know what I would have done without you." She attempted to smile, but her lips trembled. "We started out rocky, but I think we can safely say we're...friends." Oh, how that word hurt because he was much more than a friend. But she sensed he wasn't ready for her to be more, and may never be. They'd made love, he'd saved her life, yet it didn't seem to be enough.

"I'll get in touch with you," he said, his expression closing off any emotion he might be feeling.

"Be careful, Morgan. Keep safe." She laid her palm against his chest where his heart beat.

He took her hand, placed a kiss on her palm and nodded. She watched him walk away, her heart thudding with each step. She couldn't let it end this way, yet her fear made the words she wanted to say stick in her throat. *You're in the eighteenth century, Juliana. You'll probably never see the man again. Just tell him.*

But he'd already disappeared from sight.

Juliana disembarked from the tender. Her sense of foreboding had little to do with finally reaching London. She turned to take one last look at the *Adam*, searching for Morgan among the men scurrying about the deck. She wanted to climb back in the tender and row back to him, but what then? He didn't need her. His mind was already on securing the ship and going after Barun. He was probably relieved to be rid of her.

A light touch on her arm drew her attention and she turned to Isabelle. Or Lady Isabelle. She didn't look at all like the woman who saved Juliana from a flogging. This Isabelle was the epitome of nobility in her long dress with all that black hair gathered at the back of her neck and an impressive emerald pendant at her throat. A carriage stood behind her with impatient horses stomping their hooves and tossing their heads. If Juliana had any delusions she was in the twenty-first century the horse-drawn carriage and Isabelle's attire shattered it.

And the smell. The smell of the eighteenth century was atrocious. Dead fish, unwashed humanity, rotting vegetation and just plain stink clogged her senses. Bedraggled and dirty, the people spoke English but it was an English she'd never heard and the ability to understand them far beyond her at the moment.

They drew a crowd. It wasn't the nice sort of welcome-wagon kind of crowd either. These ragged, dirty, hungry-looking people would happily slice her throat. Instinctively, she stepped closer to Isabelle

even though the carriage driver looked as if he could take them all on, never mind the four other men on horseback waiting for them.

“We need to go.” Isabelle guided Juliana toward the coach. A man, dressed in a uniform of scarlet and silver, opened the door of the coach. Juliana settled into the dark blue velvet seat across from Isabelle. Her dress bunched underneath her and made it difficult to sit. Suddenly she realized how much she had to learn in order to survive—from smoothing her voluminous skirts, to learning a new language. The coach door closed with a snap and after a yell from the driver they were off.

Juliana grabbed onto the seat. Shock absorbers, apparently, had not been invented yet.

Pushing the curtain aside, she peered out the window. The *Adam* grew smaller as they drew away from the docks. She couldn’t help but feel she was leaving a large part of herself behind.

Chapter Fifteen

Juliana stared into the flames of the fire, her feet tucked beneath her, nightgown pulled over her knees.

She hated London. A fine mist perpetually hung over the city, dampening everything and frizzing her hair. She hated the damn dresses and the smell of horses that permeated everything. She hated that the servants waited on her every whim, anticipating her needs before she did.

For goodness sake, she couldn't even refill her own teacup! She guessed it came from living with a mother who treated her daughter like her personal servant or maybe it was a sense of decency, of humanity, of thinking no one person was better than another.

Numerous times she tried to extricate herself from the Parker's hospitality, determined to find her own lodging and begin her search for employment. She wouldn't need a lot of time or money. Just enough to get by until she remembered how she got here and figured out how to get back home. But Isabelle wouldn't let her leave the townhouse without an escort and Juliana didn't want to hurt the Parker's feelings or appear ungrateful that she wanted to find her own place to live.

A log fell in the fireplace, hissing loudly and sending up sparks. She wanted to be back on the *Adam*, beneath the shining sun with the waves under her feet and the clouds above her head. She wanted to hear the sailors sing as they went about their work. She wanted to feel the wind in her hair and stare out at the endless ocean.

She wanted Morgan.

He was in town, damn him. She heard Isabelle tell Reed. Juliana had been walking past Reed's study, on the way to the library, when she heard Morgan's name mentioned. She stopped at the closed door and pressed her ear to it to learn Morgan was searching for Barun who was believed to also be in London.

So why hadn't Morgan been by? Why hadn't he made any effort to see her?

Someone knocked on her door. Juliana hesitated, wanting to be left alone but not wanting to appear rude. Reluctantly she stood and opened the door. A whirlwind in lavender and white swept in.

"Oh, good, you're awake."

The girl plopped onto the bed. Her skirts billowed around her. She batted them down. Bright blue eyes twinkled with a mischievousness Juliana didn't quite trust. Raven black hair with thick curls, the kind women in the twenty-first century tortured themselves with perms and hot rollers to achieve, fell over petite shoulders. She looked all of eighteen.

“Do I know you?”

“I apologize.” Her eyes twinkled even more. “My name is Sophia Parker. I’m Reed’s sister. What are you wearing to the ball tonight?”

Ah, Sophia. Juliana heard Reed and Isabelle speak of Sophia. It was always with a slight eye roll and a what-are-we-going-to-do-with-her tone.

“What ball?”

Sophia Parker blinked. “*The* ball,” she repeated, as if that explained everything.

Juliana fell into a chair by the fire, massaging her aching temples and wishing the last two days away. Life on the *Adam* had been much simpler.

“Apparently, Isabelle didn’t tell you about the ball,” Sophia said.

“No, she didn’t.” This was the last thing Juliana needed. Maybe Isabelle hadn’t told her because she wasn’t expected to attend. That thought lifted her spirits a little.

“There’s to be a ball tonight. Isabelle’s Aunt Sylvia loves to give them. We’re expected to attend.”

“Am I expected to attend?”

“Certainly.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Sophia appeared confused.

“Why do I have to attend?”

“Well...because.” Her ebony eyebrows furrowed. “Why wouldn’t you attend? Invitations are sought after.”

“Because I’ve never been to a ball before and I have nothing to wear.” Ah, the age-old dilemma. She didn’t know anyone and she didn’t have anything to wear and the boy she wanted to go to the dance with hadn’t asked her. In fact, he hadn’t even acknowledged her existence since she stepped onto London’s soil.

A light came into Sophia’s eyes. Instantly Juliana went on alert.

“Rumor has it you stowed away on Morgan’s ship,” she said.

“How do you know that?”

“Servants talk, I listen.”

Juliana bit the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing. She liked Sophia. The girl had backbone and didn’t seem concerned about rules and such. Maybe, just maybe, Juliana found an ally.

“Sophia, do you know how to sneak out of this house without being seen?”

Sophia stilled and the light inside her dimmed. “I might,” she said slowly.

“I need to go somewhere, but Isabelle insists I can’t go alone.”

“Where do you need to go?”

“The London Gazette. Could you take me without alerting the rest of the household?”

“I could.” A slow smile spread across the girl’s face. “If you tell me about stowing away on the ship.”

Juliana tapped her chin and seemed to think about it, although she'd already reached a decision. She needed a job and Sophia Parker seemed to be the only one willing to help.

"Deal. I'll tell you on the way to the Gazette."

A triumphant smile crossed Sophia's face and for a moment Juliana wondered if she'd made a deal with the devil.

Juliana slipped out the back entrance of the Parker house with a last cautious look over her shoulder. She felt like she was sixteen and sneaking out to meet Zach.

Sophia was waiting for her, all bundled energy, her smile bright, her eyes dancing. She was wearing a different dress than the one she'd had on an hour ago when Juliana asked for her help. This one was a little plainer with a lot less lace. A wide-brimmed matching hat shielded most of Sophia's face.

Sophia wound her arm in Juliana's and they set off. "We will walk," she said. "If we request a carriage the entire house will know we're leaving and I suspect you want our trip to remain between the two of us."

"Yes, thank you. But I don't want you to get into trouble for helping me."

Sophia waved a hand in the air and laughed. "Pshaw. I'm always in trouble for one thing or another. This is a minor infraction, I assure you."

Juliana smiled and just like that her day took a turn. She was actually doing something, taking steps to secure her independence. The feeling was liberating and for the first time since leaving the *Adam* she felt hope.

As they walked, she told Sophia of stowing away on Morgan's ship, how Morgan found her in the fire and had her flogged, thinking she was spying for his enemy.

"Does he still think so?" Sophia asked. "Of course he doesn't," she said, answering her own question. "You wouldn't be staying with Isabelle and Reed if Morgan thought you were his enemy. What changed his mind?"

Juliana hesitated. "I don't know." He just suddenly stopped thinking of her as the enemy. Until now it hadn't occurred to her to wonder why.

"He probably took one look at your beauty and decided you can't possibly be a spy." Sophia snorted in disgust. "Just like a man. They believe a beautiful woman has no mind."

They reached the front doors to the Gazette and stopped.

"Why are we here?" Sophia asked, staring up at the imposing stone building.

"Because I need a job."

Sophia's head snapped around. "Pardon?"

"I need a job. I need to earn money so I can live on my own and not have to rely on Lord and Lady Parker's generosity."

Juliana's gaze wandered over the congested street corner where elegant women entered and exited shops. It could have been a scene in any busy city except horses pulled carriages and women were dressed in gowns accompanied by footmen toting their purchases.

"You want to engage in...labor?" Sophia whispered the last word.

"Where I come from, Sophia, a woman earns her own way. She doesn't have to rely on a man to clothe her and put a roof over her head. I've never relied on anyone but myself. I want to do this." She shook her head. "No, I need to do this." But did she have the courage to do this? She had to if she wanted to retain her pride and self-respect. No way would she rely on the Parkers' goodwill forever.

Sophia pulled Juliana closer to the building, away from the foot traffic. She bent her head closer and whispered, "Is this wise, Juliana? Have you thought about this? What will happen if news that Isabelle's cousin is looking for a...a job...gets back to the Earl?"

The Earl was Reed's older brother and they concocted a story that Juliana was Isabelle's cousin from Barbados.

"Would that be a bad thing?" she asked.

Sophia nodded solemnly. "Appearance is everything in the world of nobility. A wrong move by anyone in the family can impact others. Being from Barbados, maybe you're not aware?" Sophia let the last sentence drift off into a question, kindly giving Juliana an out. Of course she realized what she was about to do was irregular but she assumed everyone would look at her as slightly odd. She never guessed it would affect the very people who had taken in a stranger and claimed her as one of their own. Yet what else was she supposed to do? Live off their kindness forever?

"I have to do this, Sophia. I can't rely on your brother's hospitality the rest of my life."

Sophia's hand tightened on Juliana's elbow. "You could marry. We'll find a nice husband for you."

Juliana wanted to laugh except Sophia's expression was completely serious. This was what aristocratic women did. They married—for money, for protection, for food and clothes. Her feminist self rebelled at such a notion—at her marrying for such reasons.

"No." There was only one man she'd even consider marrying and he'd cut her out of his life.

Sophia's hand dropped away and she straightened her shoulders. "I have always secretly thought women could be much more but never dared say it aloud. If this is what you want, then I will support you."

"Are you sure, Sophia? You can return home if you like, pretend you never brought me here. If it will make life easier for you, I would understand."

Sophia shook her head resolutely. "I will support you."

They entered the foot traffic on the sidewalk and headed toward the doors of the Gazette. "I would like to travel to your home and meet these women who support themselves," Sophia said.

Juliana's steps faltered. "I'm afraid that's impossible." And maybe even impossible for her.

People jostled past—women strolling as they chatted, men in hats with walking sticks. Horses snorted and young working girls rushed into stopped traffic to offer their wares. The twenty-first century indeed seemed like an impossibility when faced with all of this.

They entered the imposing front doors and Juliana had to wipe her sweating hands on her skirts. She'd interviewed with some of the top newspapers in her country, had worked for the Kansas City Star and was about to move to the Chicago Sun before she found herself here. She could do this.

A man sat at a desk, guarding the doors to the inner sanctum. Sophia and Juliana crossed the large atrium, their skirts rustling in the hushed silence as the man peered at them through thick glasses.

"May I help you, ladies?" his smile was ingratiating, kind, and it helped soothe Juliana's nerves.

Sophia hung back as Juliana stepped forward. "I'd like to speak to someone about a job." She fought the urge to twist her fingers into her skirts. This would be much better if she were in her business suit—in the twenty-first century.

The man frowned. "You are inquiring about a position?"

"Yes."

"We have no openings for housekeepers or maids, madam." He sniffed and shuffled a few papers on his desk before turning his attention to them, effectively dismissing her.

"I'm not interested in a housekeeper or maid position. I'm interested in a position as a writer."

His head shot up and his eyes narrowed behind his lenses. "What nonsense is this?"

Behind her, Juliana heard Sophia take a step back. "No nonsense, sir. I'm an exceptional writer."

He snorted and tapped his papers together. "Madam, this is a serious business. We've no time for the whims of a woman. I suggest you return to your husband and not tell him of this...this escapade."

Juliana stood rigid. Return to her husband?

Sophia grasped Juliana's elbow and whispered in her ear, "We should go, Juliana."

Juliana longed to shake off Sophia's hand and give this sanctimonious jerk a piece of her mind. Only the reminder that this wasn't her time and place and that she could easily destroy the reputation of the Parkers held her back. She turned on her heel and practically ran Sophia over as she left the building.

Juliana was quiet on the way home, alternately furious at the man's archaic beliefs and despondent she'd be in debt to Isabelle and Reed for the rest of her life if she didn't come up with something. She knew it wouldn't be easy; she just hadn't realized it would be impossible.

It's one place, Juliana. There are many more. But there weren't. Not really. No one would hire a woman to do what they considered men's work.

Fighting unexpected tears, Juliana yanked open the front door of the Parkers' townhouse. Penworth, the butler, almost fell through the opening. Without her usual friendly greeting, she ascended the stairs to her bedchamber, Sophia following along silently.

Once inside, Sophia sat on her bed and Juliana sat next to her. “What am I going to do, Sophia?” She fell on her back and rolled to her side to face her newfound friend.

Sophia fell back too and contemplated the ceiling. “Well,” she said. “I’ve already said I would find a husband for you. Although you are getting a bit long in the tooth.”

Juliana knew the girl was baiting her, trying to coax a smile from her, but she didn’t feel much like smiling. Everywhere she turned, everything she did was a learning experience and she was damned tired of it. She didn’t want to live in this hellish city or in this hellish time. She wanted her car, central heating, microwave dinners and comfortable sweatpants. She blinked, fighting her tears of frustration, loneliness and fear.

“I need to find a husband as well,” Sophia said on a sigh. “That’s what the Earl says. I’m one and twenty, Juliana. My time is running out and the Earl’s patience with it. Most of my friends have been married for years and have at least one child. Soon I won’t be considered a good match. On the shelf, as they say. But I don’t want to marry yet.”

Juliana had to blink harder to fight the tears that didn’t want to stop. If Sophia wasn’t a good catch, with her beauty and obvious wealth, what would Juliana be? Not only couldn’t she find decent employment, she was over-the-hill and unmarriageable. If only Morgan let her stay on his ship. The *Adam* was the only place that felt like home and Morgan the only one she didn’t feel truly lonely around. On the ship, she could be herself and the men accepted her. With Morgan... She sat up so suddenly Sophia almost rolled off the bed. “Hey, Sophia?”

“What?”

“What time is this ball tonight?”

Sophia’s blue eyes turned speculative. “Why?”

Juliana jumped up and held her hand out to her friend and ally. “Let’s figure out what I’m going to wear.”

Chapter Sixteen

He wasn't here.

Juliana stood on her toes and tried to see through the huge crowd. There was no way to tell with the hundreds of people crowding the ballroom but gut instinct, one she trusted when it came to Morgan, told her he wasn't here.

She dropped back on her heels and took a sip of wine. The melting wax of hundreds of candles and the press of overheated bodies made it unbearably hot. The windows had been thrown open, but Juliana was across the ballroom and the faint breeze didn't reach her.

At first, she'd been awed by the sheer amount of people enclosed in such a small space. The women wore brightly colored gowns, their necklines—or bodices as she learned they were called—cut shockingly low, even for Juliana who lived through thong bikinis and dresses that barely skimmed butts. She resisted the urge to yank her bodice higher. Even she was revealing more cleavage than she liked in Isabelle's altered gown. A softly feminine gown of royal blue.

Per the plan, she was introduced as Isabelle's cousin from Barbados and caught a few speculative looks from several older men. She couldn't shake the feeling that quite possibly one of those men could become her husband if she didn't figure out how she was going to support herself.

She'd suffered through a last-minute gown fitting with the hope that Morgan would be here. She didn't know what she'd say to him besides, quite possibly, begging to let her sail with him.

Ah, hell, she needed to admit it. She wanted to be with Morgan again.

She took another sip of wine and fought the onset of claustrophobia. She needed to get out, she needed fresh air, but the closest thing to escape was an open window clear across the crowded room.

Except she knew the rules. Shocked Juliana had never attended a ball before, Sophia took it upon herself to educate her in The Rules. A woman didn't go for fresh air alone, and if she went with a gentleman they were to spend no more than five minutes outside and always within sight of the doors. She was not to go wandering on her own or with a gentleman through the garden. She was not to dance more than twice with a gentleman. She was not to approach a gentleman and introduce herself.

Isabelle appeared at her side. "I loathe these things," she said with a grimace.

"It is awfully hot in here and there are so many people."

Isabelle nodded and tugged at her gloves. Juliana commiserated, her own hands sweating in the tight-fitting gloves. Another rule she'd learned. Men and women wore gloves so their skin wouldn't touch. Too risqué apparently, yet the bodices that nearly revealed women's nipples weren't.

"I saw you looking around the ballroom," Isabelle said. "Morgan won't attend tonight. He despises these things more than I."

"Oh." Had she been that transparent? "He told me he would contact me after he dropped anchor." She hated the wistfulness in her voice and the fact Isabelle was aware of her desperate need to see him one more time.

"I'm sorry," Isabelle said. "For what it's worth I think you are the perfect match for Morgan. But Morgan—"

"Doesn't want a relationship." Juliana sighed. "I know."

Isabelle touched Juliana's arm. "Maybe someday he'll realize what he's giving up by letting you go."

"By then it might be too late. If you'll excuse me, I need some air." Juliana walked away, embarrassed Isabelle had seen through her. She felt like a fish out of water, not of this time, bumbling through, trying to make the best of it. Even when her mother was at her disgusting worse, Juliana always believed that as long as she survived the present she would make it to the future. Now, she didn't even have that comfort. What awaited her was a blank page.

A low feminine laugh drew her attention to a spot a few feet away. Behind a potted tree, she glimpsed the pale pink of Sophia's dress. Surely, if touching a man without gloves was forbidden, hiding behind a potted tree with one had to rank right up there.

Before they entered the ballroom, Sophia's eldest brother William, the Earl, warned the girl not to pull any of her "stunts". He said he was damned tired of bailing her out of trouble, then added that someday she would find herself in a predicament even he couldn't extricate her from.

Sophia appeared chagrined, but Juliana didn't miss the gleam in her blue eyes. Neither did her brother because he grimaced and walked away, shaking his head in frustration.

Juliana rounded the potted plant and froze. Sophia was leaning toward Sanjit Barun, standing so close her dress covered his boots.

Juliana yanked her friend away. Sophia squealed and stumbled into the plant. Barun reached out to steady her but Juliana slapped at his hand. "You stay away from her."

He looked startled until his eyes met hers. Black hair shown blue in the light of the candles, white teeth gleamed with a predatory smile and his dark eyes narrowed.

Juliana's breath hitched again and she had to remind herself to breathe.

"*Sanam*, I despaired of ever laying eyes upon you again." The voice was smooth, yet grated on her nerves and brought back nightmares she had no desire to relive. "You left in such a rush the last time. We never had a chance at a proper farewell."

Sophia looked wide-eyed from one to the other, her elbow still clenched in Juliana's hand.

"You stay away from her. Do you hear me?"

He tilted his head, indicating the cane he held in his other hand. "I know well what you speak of, *sanam*. Next time I will be more careful." While his smile was benign, the steel in his voice was not and the implied threat sent shivers down her spine.

"I am not your beloved and there will be no next time."

He smiled, but the beauty of it turned Juliana's blood to ice. He reached out and caressed her cheek. From eyebrow to chin she felt his touch like fire but refused to move, refused to give him the pleasure of her response.

With a nod at Sophia, he slid past. Juliana pulled Sophia closer to her, not wanting any part of Sanjit Barun to touch either of them, and watched him limp away, leaning heavily on his cane, apparently still recovering from the injury she inflicted on his thigh.

Morgan pushed his desk chair back, propped his feet on the corner of the desk and tipped the bottle of brandy to his mouth to take a healthy swallow. Hours ago he'd given up on using a glass. He took another swallow and felt the fire settle uncomfortably in his belly. Disgusted, he slammed the bottle on the desk and ran a hand through his tangled hair.

A knock on the front door had his gaze going to the clock on the mantle. He thought about ignoring the summons but his men were out combing the streets with the order to contact him as soon as they found any information leading to Barun and only his men would beat on his door at two in the morning.

With a sigh he dropped his bare feet to the floor and pushed himself up. Bloody hell. He hadn't meant to get so pissing drunk, not when he had to deal with Barun. But he'd been thinking of Juliana, of making love to her, their time together on the *Adam*, and before he knew it, he was too far in his cups to care. The genteel knocking turned to a pounding, beating at his alcohol-soaked brain.

He uttered a curse as he swayed down the hall and yanked the door open. Isabelle swept in on a swirl of skirts with Reed close behind. Morgan closed the door behind the pair and eyed his best friend and her husband warily.

"For God's sake, put a shirt on. I can't properly yell if you're half-naked."

He didn't comment as he followed them back to his study. He picked his shirt up from the floor, shook it out and put it on. Out of defiance, he didn't fasten it.

Isabelle paced like a caged lioness in her emerald-colored dress. Morgan wondered where the two had been because Isabelle rarely wore dresses, especially fancy dresses like the one she was wearing now. But then, they were in London and she'd been trying hard to fit in for Reed's sake and the sake of their company.

Reed casually leaned a formal-clad shoulder against the doorjamb. In case Morgan decided to escape? He found he didn't like that thought too well and shifted his gaze back to Isabelle, who stopped pacing to stare at him with an angry expression.

"Barun was at the ball tonight."

Morgan dropped into the chair, the strength in his legs giving out. "What ball?"

She rolled her eyes. "Aunt Sylvia's ball. You received an invitation, but declined to attend."

"I did?"

"Yes. You did. You're drunk."

Barun was at Aunt Sylvia's ball. He tried to surge up from the chair but his feet got tangled and he fell back. "Juliana?"

The anger in Isabelle's eyes faded. "She's shaken, but fine. She pulled Sophia away from Barun, then threatened him." Isabelle walked to the desk and placed her hands on it, leaning over until they were almost nose to nose. "You. Are a fool."

Hell, he knew that. He'd been a fool fifteen years ago to leave Kansas and step through a mirror. He'd been a fool to think he could sail to the South China Sea unharmed. And he'd been a fool to give in to the temptation to make love to Juliana, knowing it could lead nowhere.

Isabelle leaned forward even more until he had to cross his eyes to focus on her. "That woman is the best thing that's ever happened to you. Why the hell are you avoiding her?"

He pulled back and averted his gaze. "You don't understand."

She pushed away from his desk to pace again. "I understand more than you think. I understand you're afraid to love. I understand Barun took something from you. A part of you."

"I intend to get my revenge."

Isabelle sat in the closest chair and faced him. The anger seemed to leech out of her until her shoulders were almost drooping. "Let it go, Morgan. I know what it is to want revenge and I also know revenge won't erase what Barun did to you."

He didn't want to hear this. He needed revenge. He needed the burning conviction that facing his enemy and walking away victorious would somehow make things right again. If he didn't have that, he had nothing.

He managed to stand and walk to the fireplace without tripping. Isabelle was wrong. Revenge was everything. "You weren't happy until you saw your father ruined," he reminded her.

"I wasn't happy until I met Reed."

"It's more than revenge, Isabelle, and you know it. Look what the man did tonight. He snuck into a ballroom full of people and confronted Sophia." The thought that Juliana had been anywhere near turned his stomach. Oh, yes, this was much more than revenge. "Only seeing Barun dead will I be happy."

By the stir of her gown, he knew she'd stood and walked toward him. She placed a hand on his shoulder and he fought the urge to shake her off. "I understand he's a threat, and I agree something must be done. But you must understand that what he took from you is gone for good. Let Juliana be the one to heal you."

He shook off Isabelle's hand and walked away, terrified Isabelle was right. That the revenge he needed wouldn't be enough.

Chapter Seventeen

The next day Juliana still couldn't get the image of Sanjit Barun out of her mind. He'd touched Sophia, laughed with her, wove a spell that pulled the girl into his web of terror.

Juliana shivered and rubbed her forearms. Morgan promised to protect her, had promised the man she feared most in this world would not get close. She'd believed in him and she'd been wrong. Her disappointment was acute, her anger smoldering. She trusted Morgan to help her but as she learned at a young age, never trust anyone but yourself. If she wanted Barun dead, then she'd have to be the one to see it happen. The idea made her twisting stomach turn even more. The thought of killing someone was alien to her. In her time she'd turn to the police, but these were violent times. Times when people had to watch out for themselves. By confronting Sophia, Barun had taken this to a new level.

What should she do? What resources did she have?

Isabelle.

Between Patrick and Sophia, Juliana heard enough stories to know Isabelle liked to champion a good cause and was one person you wanted on your side.

Juliana headed down the stairs and found Isabelle in the library. The day was overcast and threatened rain— what else was new?—and candles flickered in the corners, casting a warm, cozy, glow over everything.

Isabelle looked up and smiled. "Tea?" She reached for the bell to signal the maid. "You look troubled."

Juliana walked around the room, touching a knickknack here, fiddling with a floral arrangement there. She stared out the window. The maid arrived with the tea. Isabelle poured, milk first, then the tea. There was a ritual and a reason for everything in this time. It was exhausting trying to learn it all.

She walked over to the table, picked up the tiny cup and took a hearty swallow. She definitely needed the high-octane stuff right now. A Starbucks latte would do nicely. She replaced the cup in the saucer before turning her gaze to Isabelle. "What are you doing there?" She tipped her head to the papers strewn across the table Isabelle had been working at.

"The manifest from the two ships. It's been a nightmare. When Morgan unloaded the *Adam's* cargo onto the *Eve* things became lost. On top of that the *Eve* was already carrying cargo from the *Molly Victoria*." Isabelle shook her head. "It's a mess trying to sort everything out. Tomorrow Reed and I are going to the warehouses to determine what exactly we have."

Juliana barely heard the rest of what Isabelle said. “The *Molly Victoria*?” She had to force the words from her tight throat.

Isabelle nodded. “Morgan’s ship. The one that sank after catching fire.”

The *Molly Victoria*.

Molly Victoria Langtree was the full name of Zach’s sister.

Memories slammed into her so fast they made her dizzy and she sank onto the settee. Isabelle said something to her but Juliana wasn’t paying attention. She took a deep breath, transported to the future, smelling fresh-baked sugar cookies and hearing the creak of the attic stairs as she ascended. Zach’s house. She’d been eating cookies with his mom, talking about Zach, talking about letting go and moving on.

Never, ever go up in the attic, Mr. and Mrs. Langtree repeatedly said when Zach and Juliana were kids. In her mind, Juliana saw herself walking up those steps, her hand on the railing, hearing Mrs. Langtree’s voice as she answered the doorbell. And then she saw it in clarifying, horrifying detail.

The mirror.

Standing well over five feet tall, it probably weighed a good hundred pounds. Four dragons were carved into the smooth wood frame, each breathing fire, each clutching something close to its heart. She had leaned forward to see what they held, but it was apparent whatever the dragons held was long gone. A woman was carved in the top with long flowing hair wrapped around her body, staring into space with sad eyes.

Curious, she’d circled the mirror, studying it from all angles. A shaft of sunlight spilled through the dirty window nestled into the eave of the house, illuminating what looked like writing on the back. She had to squint to make out the elegant scroll.

The weight of true love is measured not in distance nor in time, but in deed. Look ye into this mirror and find what ye seek. Step through and discover yer heart’s desire. Stay, and live a lifetime.

Juliana had stumbled back.

The heavy glass shifted, became dull, then turned opaque. Her reflection began to swirl. The room tilted.

Behind her the old wooden steps creaked and that childhood fear of being caught made her heart thud.

“Juliana?” Mrs. Langtree’s voice echoed up the steps. “Are you up here?”

Juliana shot a nervous glance at the stairs. The age-old feeling of being trapped immobilized her for a moment. The top of Mrs. Langtree’s head appeared above the floor and Juliana took a step back but her heel hit the corner of an old trunk and she started to fall. Crying out, she windmilled her arms, sure she was going to crash into the mirror and break it.

But she didn’t.

She kept falling and the last thing she heard was Mrs. Langtree’s horrified cry.

Juliana's eyes flew open. That's it. That's how she got here. She time-traveled through an antique mirror. She was suddenly dizzy, all her questions answered even as more bombarded her. Why? Why travel here? Why arrive on Morgan's ship?

She looked at Isabelle who was crouched in front of her, brushing her hair out of her eyes. "Juliana? Are you ill?"

She had to blink several times. For a moment she thought she was going to pass out, but her eyes focused again. She opened her mouth to say something but no words came out.

Zach.

Had Zach traveled to this time and place and somehow befriended Morgan and told him about the mirror? How else would Morgan know to name his ship after Zach's sister?

It made sense and it answered all of her questions. Why Zach disappeared with no trace. Why Zach's family insisted she give up the search and the hope that he would return. Why as children they weren't allowed in the attic. They'd known. All along the Langtrees had known what happened to their son and that's why they'd accepted the police's explanation of Zach running away.

Anger broadsided her like a five-masted schooner. Morgan knew about the mirror because Morgan knew Zach, knew she loved Zach, and not once had he said anything. Not one single damn word.

Her breath came fast and furious.

"Juliana. You're frightening me. Should I call for a doctor?"

She needed a plan. Confronting Morgan and demanding information on Zach seemed like a good idea, but probably not very prudent. Was Zach alive, here in this century? Her heart thudded with excitement. Was she really so close to finding Zach after all?

"Juliana!"

Or. Had she already found Zach?

After the flogging she'd been delirious with fever, her mind playing tricks on her, making her think she was with Zach instead of Morgan but were those really the hallucinations of a high fever?

Juliana grabbed Isabelle's hand and leaned forward. "Tell me about Morgan. What do you know about his past?"

Isabelle rose and sat on the settee next to Juliana. There were questions in her eyes but God bless her she didn't ask them. "There isn't much to tell. Morgan is very quiet about his past. We met when we were young. I was fifteen, I believe he was seventeen. We were on a ship bound to London from Boston."

Seventeen. The age Zach had been when he disappeared.

"Does he have family?"

Isabelle shook her head. "None, but he's never said what happened to them. I've always imagined it was something horrific. He had that look in his eyes when I first met him. The one that says something bad happened but he would never talk about it. For the first few years after we met he had nightmares."

Juliana leaned forward and rubbed her forehead. Oh my God. “Tell me everything you can. Did he have a London accent? English?”

Isabelle seemed to think for a moment before shaking her head. “No. ’Twas one I’d never heard before and he would say strange words occasionally. Words I’d never heard but they weren’t in a different language. They were English-sounding words.”

Juliana’s skin tingled and she turned to Isabelle. “We have to find Morgan. Can you help me?”

Morgan sat at a corner table at The Scabbard, a tankard of ale within easy reach and a willing woman on his knee.

The ale he’d come in search of, the woman was an added bonus. Or so he thought, when all he wanted was to erase images of Juliana from his mind. Now, hours later, he wanted the whore gone, but couldn’t seem to remove her from his knee. That probably had a lot to do with his very advanced inebriated state.

He took a swig of ale only to find the tankard empty and signaled the barmaid for another. The woman on his lap slipped and grabbed his neck for support. She giggled and placed a sloppy, wet kiss on his cheek. He pushed at her, but she was like a barnacle he feared his mates would need to scrape from his body.

Blearily, through a thick haze of alcohol, he noted her once-red dress had faded to a dull orange. Her breasts were falling out of the tattered garment. Dirty, brown hair hung in her face. He didn’t even want to think what crawled in it.

Disgusted, he looked away. The Scabbard was one of the most dangerous taverns on the docks. Dank and dark, a smoky haze hung over the occupants. Your feet stuck to the floorboards when you walked. More than one patron was plastered to the floor, full-bodied.

It was the type of place that those without heart and soul congregated, a sort of hell on Earth, and Morgan felt right at home. He fingered the cutlass hanging at his side as his gaze swept the room, searching for trouble. Whether to get in to or out of, he didn’t know.

Patrick entered and stopped inside the open doorway, his own gaze taking a lazy tour. He spotted Morgan, saluted with two fingers, glanced at the lady permanently attached and frowned. He made his way to the bar, disappearing into the crowd and out of Morgan’s sight.

The barmaid arrived with his tankard, slopping some on the woman when she set it in front of him with a thunk.

The woman—he wished he could remember her name—squealed and shoved her breasts in his face. “Lick it off, guv.”

He pushed at her again.

The woman hanging on him spoke to a whore the next table over. She—whoever she was—wiggled her boney butt into his groin. It did nothing for him. It had less to do with the alcohol in his bloodstream and more to do with his thoughts of Juliana.

What was he going to do with her? He couldn't drop her off on the Parkers' doorstep and expect them to take care of her for the rest of her life. He had an obligation to protect her. After all, it was his family and that damn mirror that brought her here in the first place.

So what should he do? Find her a widower willing to marry her? If Morgan gave her a generous-enough dowry he could surely find someone to marry her. Maybe Isabelle's Aunt Sylvia would help her out. She loved to match-make and plan weddings.

It was a good idea. A solid idea. Juliana would be taken care of. Morgan would make sure to find her someone with money so she would never have to worry. Someone who was quiet and stable.

Someone the complete opposite of himself.

All around him, conversations faltered then died. Pulled from his thoughts, Morgan looked around. The woman on his lap stiffened and tightened her hold on his neck. He grabbed for his cutlass and tensed.

"Zachary Langtree!"

He jumped, knocking his knee on the bottom of the rickety table and causing the ale in his tankard to slosh over the sides.

Oh, shit.

The crowd of dirty men parted and Juliana appeared, striding through the men, dressed in her breeches and a shirt, her hair falling in soft waves to her shoulders. Isabelle marched along beside her and Reed, looking none too happy, trailed Isabelle, his hand on a brace of pistols tucked into his breeches.

The woman on his lap mumbled something incoherent and slid off to disappear into the crowd.

Juliana watched her go before turning her furious gaze to him. She placed both hands on the table and leaned over until they were nearly nose to nose. "You son of a bitch."

Chapter Eighteen

Juliana wrinkled her nose. Morgan gave a whole new meaning to the phrase “stinking drunk”. He reeked of alcohol, tobacco and sweat.

“You’re drunk.”

He shrugged. With the calculated movements of a man soused, he picked up his tankard of ale and took a long swallow, his gaze never leaving hers.

She looked at him closely, trying to find some hint of the boy she’d loved in the man before her. How many nights had she prayed to God for one more day with Zach, one more hour? Even while with Daniel she prayed Zach would return to her.

Instead, she found him.

His brown eyes were weak with drink but the pirate inside him stared back at her defiantly. There was no getting any answers out of him tonight. She pushed away from the table. It wobbled and Zach—Morgan—grabbed onto it to steady it.

She ran a hand through her hair in frustration. This was not the way she envisioned her reunion with Zach. She wanted to vent her anger, to scream her frustration, to question him relentlessly.

Morgan swayed in his chair, his beer clenched in one fist, his other hand caressing the cutlass at his side as his eyes roved the room behind her. She knew that look from the *Adam*. He was searching for trouble and if the present clientele was any indication, he would get it soon.

She turned to Reed and Isabelle and discovered Patrick had materialized from somewhere. “We need to get him out of here.”

Reed and Patrick moved to each side of Morgan, took an arm and foisted him up. The tankard of beer tilted, then fell, spilling its sticky, yellow contents all over the table, the floor and Morgan.

They reached the outside of The Scabbard without incident. The sweet smell of relatively fresh air hit them full in the face. Each of them drew in a deep breath, including Morgan.

That place gave her the creeps. The sailors on the *Adam* had been unkept and dirty, but they never made her fear for her safety the way the men in the bar did.

Morgan shook Patrick and Reed off, throwing them a dangerous scowl before falling in an ungracious heap on the cobblestone ground.

Morgan awoke to a dry mouth and a head pounding in rhythm to his heart. He rolled over and his stomach followed a moment later as he pulled the pillow over his head. The weight of the feathers felt like a brick wall pressing against him and he heaved the pillow away.

He cracked open an eye, then quickly slammed it shut. Some dumb idiot turned the sun on too bright. He ached all over, and what was that God-awful smell?

He sniffed and grimaced. He was that God-awful smell. Where in the hell had he been last night? He vaguely remembered a wobbly corner table and a woman glued to his knee. Lots of ale. But after that things got a bit foggy. He examined various body parts, trying to decide if he was in one piece.

Yup, everything there.

He gently probed his throbbing mind, trying to recall what day it was. Then it hit him. Slowly, he opened his eye again. Pain washed through him. A different kind of pain. A soul-ripping pain. Last night he'd devised a plan to marry Juliana off so she was safely tucked away. And so he could return to his life and pursue Barun.

For some reason thoughts of his revenge didn't hold the appeal they would have a month ago. He gingerly rolled over and eased up the headboard, groaning when his aching muscles and head protested.

How had he managed to make it home in one piece?

Patrick probably. He would have to thank the little man as soon as he found him. But finding him would require getting out of bed and at the moment that task seemed Herculean.

Morgan leaned his head back and closed his eyes. He tried to pick apart his plan, to find something wrong with it. It was still a good plan, even in the light of day. Sure he'd like to have Juliana at his side but that was impossible. He wasn't worthy of someone like her. Not with his past and not with the things he'd done weighing heavily on his soul. Besides, he needed to be free to find Barun.

There would be no more lying on the bottom of a tender on his ship, staring up at the stars and discussing life. No more standing on the quarterdeck and watching her stroll the forecastle with the wind in her blonde hair. No more seeing her dressed in his pants, imagining pulling those pants off and driving deep inside her.

He couldn't even think of making love to another woman. Not after Juliana's return.

With an impatient yank, he pulled the covers off and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He leaned his elbows on his knees and buried his hands in his hair. God, even his hair hurt. He rubbed his face before standing. It took a moment for his equilibrium to return but when it did he felt much better, more able to take on the world.

He turned and froze.

Juliana sat in a chair in the corner of the room fingering his cutlass, looking mighty, mighty angry.

"Feeling better?"

He tried to swallow but his mouth was too dry. "Somewhat."

Why was she in his bedchamber?

And then it hit him like a cannonball to the gut. Her yelling out his name at The Scabbard. Not Morgan, but Zachary. The furious look on her face, the anger and the hurt and disappointment clouding her beautiful blue eyes.

“I take it you’d like to get cleaned up before we talk?”

Oh, shit, damn, hell. She wanted to talk. He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “Juliana—”

“Not now. Personally I can’t stand the smell of you any longer.”

She stood, wiped shaking hands on her pants and left the room, her back straight, her shoulders tense.

Rich and full of vegetation and beautiful flowers, Morgan’s garden was an unexpected surprise. Drops of dew on the grass made it seem as if someone scattered diamonds across the ground and the sweet fragrance of roses and lavender filled the air. Juliana touched a velvety petal and for the umpteenth time since last night fought her tears, humiliation, anger and the host of other emotions threatening to pull her under.

Zach was alive. Zach was Morgan.

Her anger knew no bounds and she was fighting to control it. It didn’t help that he’d been passed out and she had to watch him sleep all the while wondering what she was going to say to him when he awoke.

While he’d been spread eagle in his bed, she took the opportunity to compare the man to the boy she used to know. He wasn’t much taller than he’d been at seventeen but he was broader across the shoulders and chest. Zach had been fit, but Morgan was built. His hair was also lighter and longer, yet it was the eyes she kept remembering. They were the same deep brown but held a wealth of knowledge no seventeen-year-old would possess. She kept asking herself why she hadn’t figured it out before and felt like a fool for not seeing it. Yet, another part of her argued that the man and the boy were so different, and the circumstances beyond bizarre, that there was no way she would have known.

A cloud passed over the sun and a breeze blew in. She crossed her arms, turned and paused. He was standing at the edge of the garden, the sudden wind teasing the ends of his newly washed hair. He’d put on clean clothes and smelled of mint soap.

His stance was belligerent, arms at his sides, hands clenched into fists, face unreadable, eyes hooded. He’d put up a wall between them and she knew she’d have to fight for her answers. That’s all right. She wanted a good fight.

“I thought it safest if you didn’t know.”

Her heart thumped a little harder at the stab of pain that went through her. He’d known. All this time he’d known who she was.

“You thought it safest,” she repeated. “What exactly were you protecting me from, Morgan? Or were you protecting yourself?”

“It was best you didn’t know.”

She laughed. The sound was harsh but she didn’t care. “You’ve been in the eighteenth century way too long if you think that explanation is going to fly. Now tell me the truth. Tell me why you’ve lied to me all these weeks. Tell me how the hell you’ve lived with yourself knowing how damn scared I was running around two hundred years in the past feeling like I was all alone. But I wasn’t alone, was I? Oh, no. I had big bad Morgan the pirate to save me, didn’t I? Except you’re not the man I thought you were.”

She stepped back, out of breath, so angry she could barely see straight. “You’re a bastard,” she whispered.

His face was unreadable, a mask. She wanted to slap his indifference away even as she realized he was protecting himself. There was no protection for her, however. Her wounds were open and raw. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I’m not that boy anymore. I kill people. I steal. I do everything I have to in order to survive this life I stepped into. I knew you’d look at me and see the boy I used to be and not the man I’ve become. I’m not a naïve child anymore. I don’t believe in honesty. I don’t believe in truth. I don’t believe any of that shit I believed as a boy.”

The venom in his words made her want to step back but she held her ground. He was right. He was different. Just as she was different from the girl he’d known. Their lives had taken different paths—admittedly his was more bizarre than hers—and they came out on the other side different people. But this need inside him to convince her he was evil and undeserving confused her.

“You think this is the place for kindness?” He waved his arm, indicating the garden and beyond. “Look what happened to you—flogged, kidnapped.” His voice broke on the last word and he cleared his throat. “This is a different world, Juliana.”

“You don’t have to tell me that.” She would bear the scars for the rest of her life.

His jaw muscles tensed. The silence seemed to stretch for an eternity.

“For what it’s worth, I tried to go back,” he said. “I searched for the mirror everywhere I went. I asked but no one seemed to know anything about it. Eventually I stopped.” He looked away. “What was I supposed to do? I’m thirty-two years old with no high school diploma. I can sail a ship rigged for the eighteenth century and I can kill people. Even if I could go back, what am I supposed to do with those qualifications?”

She heard his words but her mind only wrapped around one thought. “So there’s no hope? I’ll never go back?”

The hard lines of his face softened. “I’m sorry.”

She looked at the back of Morgan’s home. Zach’s home. But he wasn’t Zach. Not anymore. Here stood before her a man who’d done all the things he kept telling her he did and probably more. A man from a different time. A time she was now stuck in.

“So what now?” she asked.

He took a deep breath. “Now I find someone to take care of you.”

“Take care of me?” She took a step back, stunned.

“I thought I’d enlist Isabelle’s Aunt Sylvia to help find you a husband. I can put up a dowry.”

“Wait a minute.” She held up her hand to stop his words. “You’re going to sell me to the highest bidder?”

His gaze finally met hers but slid away. “It’s how things work here.”

“I know how things work here.” Sophia had gone into excruciating detail about how marriage worked in this time. “Let me get this straight.” She hurt more than she’d ever hurt before. Possibly worse than when she discovered Zach was gone. “You’re giving some man money to marry me.”

“Juliana—”

“Just answer the question.”

He sighed. “If you want to put it that way—”

“You are such a bastard. You’re right, you know.” She had to swallow because the knot in her throat was choking her. “You’re not the boy I once knew. You’re nothing like him. He was kind. He cared about other people. He wouldn’t sell the woman he once loved like she was cattle.” She lifted her chin even though the act of defiance was ruined by the tears slipping down her cheeks. “Thanks, but no thanks, Morgan. I don’t need your help.” She turned and walked away even though her legs felt like rubber and she prayed her knees wouldn’t give out. She felt like the world had been ripped out from beneath her. Even more than when she discovered herself on a burning ship in the middle of the eighteenth century.

“Juliana, wait.”

She whirled around. “No, Morgan. I’ve had enough of waiting for you.”

Morgan watched Juliana slip through the garden gate. He felt hallowed out, empty. A shell of himself. He was doing the right thing, damn it. She had to understand that in this day marriages were arranged and he could find her a nice, kind man. If she harbored thoughts of marrying him then it was best he shattered those right away.

“Cap’n!” Patrick pushed his way out the back door, running toward Morgan in his bow-legged sway. Morgan took one last look at the gate and turned to Patrick. “Diego picked up a rumor at The Scabbard. There be a ship anchored in a cove off the coast of Dover. He thinks it could be Barun.”

Morgan glanced at the garden gate again. He needed to find Barun but couldn’t end things this way with Juliana. The image of her standing before him—proud and shocked he was marrying her off—would probably haunt him the rest of his life. A stabbing pain ripped through his gut as if someone thrust a dagger inside him. He couldn’t leave things like this but finding Barun was more important. Keeping Juliana safe was most important of all. “Get someone to follow Juliana. Make sure she gets safely back to the Parkers’.”

In resignation he headed to the house, mentally preparing for his trip to Dover.

Chapter Nineteen

When Penworth opened the door, he was still pulling on his dressing robe. His hair stood on end and one cheek held the imprint of a pillow crease.

"I need to speak to Juliana," Morgan said before the shock wore off the butler's face.

"Master Morgan, it is too early to come calling."

"I don't give a damn what time it is." Morgan shoved his way past. His boot heels echoed on the parquet floor in the quiet of the dawn.

"Sir!" Penworth shut the door, sealing the entrance off from the weak sun just beginning to rise.

"Juliana!" Morgan's voice bounced off the walls and echoed along the corridors. He didn't care. For the past four days he'd ridden with a ball of dread in his stomach that grew unbearable once he reached Dover.

Something wasn't right. His sixth sense never failed him and it was screaming at him that something wasn't right. Where the hell was Juliana?

"What the hell's going on?" Reed came pounding down the stairs, shirtless, breeches half-fastened, pistol in hand. He stopped short and cursed. "Morgan."

"Where's Juliana?"

Reed grabbed him by the arm and shoved him into the library. "Are you drunk again?"

"No, I'm not drunk again." Morgan yanked his arm free. "Tell me she's here. Tell me she's safe."

Reed gave Morgan a confused look. "Of course she's here and of course she's safe."

Morgan ran a hand down his face his relief so enormous it almost buckled his knees. What the hell was wrong with him? Why was he acting this way? Of course Reed and Isabelle would protect Juliana. She was safer here than anywhere else, even at his side. He blew out a breath, suddenly feeling ridiculous.

"It's too early for social visits. If you were hoping to make a good impression on Juliana after all you've already done to her, you probably failed."

Reed was right. Barging into the Parkers' home and demanding to see Juliana wasn't the best way to go about this, but damn he needed to see her. All the way to Dover he thought of nothing but their conversation. And to make matters worse, when he arrived in Dover, there'd been no ship.

After questioning the residents of the small town closest to the shore, he learned there indeed had been a ship anchored there named *Bhaya* and it sailed away the day before. Obviously Barun knew Morgan and his men were coming after him and if he knew that, he also knew Juliana was vulnerable.

Convinced Juliana was in danger, Morgan raced to the Parkers', not even stopping to bathe away the dust and grime of four days of travel before arriving at their door. No wonder Reed thought he was drunk.

"I need to see for myself that she's safe and unharmed." Maybe then the hollow feeling in his stomach would go away. But even he couldn't fool himself. That feeling wouldn't go away and he knew why. He'd hurt her four days ago. Probably in a way beyond repair and he'd barely been able to live with himself since.

"She's fine," Reed said. "Angry as hell, but fine."

"I need to see her. I need to see she's okay." It was as close to pleading as he'd ever come and he'd do more if he had to.

Reed studied him, arms crossed over his bare chest. "I never thought I'd see the day the great Morgan fell to his knees for a woman."

"Bugger off, you bilge rat."

Reed merely raised an eyebrow. "I don't know what happened between you two, but she doesn't want to see you."

Hell, Morgan figured that much out by the look on her face when she stood in his garden, her emotions clear as day. The naked pain that flashed in her eyes had been nearly as painful as receiving the brand on his arm. He hadn't known what to say to her. Instead, he did what he always did when someone asked about his past; he pushed it behind a veneer of cold indifference. It'd been a mistake but years of habit were hard to break, even with Juliana. He knew now he could never hand her over to a stranger and he'd been a fool to mention it to her. Unfortunately the damage had been done and it was up to him to mend it. He just wished he knew how.

Reed uncrossed his arms. "I take it you didn't find Barun."

"His ship pulled anchor the day before. Someone tipped him off we were on our way."

"That means you have a spy in your crew."

Morgan paced. "Hell, I've known that. I can't figure out who though." He faced his friend. "I need to see her."

"Mate, I don't know what to tell you. If it were up to me, I'd stay out of the whole mess, but Isabelle... Let's just say you're not her favorite person right now."

"Get the hell out." Isabelle stood in the open doorway, tying a wrap around her nightdress. Reed placed himself between her and Morgan and Morgan half wondered if it was to protect him from Isabelle rather than the other way around. He'd never seen her quite this angry.

"How dare you barge into my home in this manner."

"I came to see Juliana."

"You can just turn around and go home, Morgan. Come back at a more civilized hour." She wrinkled her nose. "And after you've bathed."

"It's all right, Isabelle."

Juliana appeared next to Isabelle. The sight of her stopped his breath. She was here. She was safe. He checked the urge to hustle her out of the house, to lock her away where Barun would never find her. However, he wouldn't put it past Isabelle to have a pistol on her person or a cutlass hidden nearby and he sure as hell wasn't getting himself shot or sliced before he talked to Juliana.

Reed propelled Isabelle toward the door with a look of sympathy thrown Morgan's way. "I told you not to get involved in this," he said to his wife over her sputtered protests.

Juliana stood alone in the doorway. The dress she wore was too large. The shoulders kept slipping and the color washed her out. She crossed her arms. The dress slipped off her shoulder and she shrugged it back up. "What do you want?" She glared at a spot above his shoulder and he wanted to shift into her line of sight so she'd look at him.

"To talk." What he wanted was to take her in his arms and kiss her senseless. To hold her tight to make sure she was all right. To never let her go. If he learned one thing on his trip to Dover, it was that life without Juliana was dismal and he'd been a fool to think he could ship her off to a stranger and brush his hands of her.

"Please, Juliana. I..." He cleared his throat. "I had to ride to Dover as soon as you left the other day. This is the earliest I was able to come back. I don't like how things ended. I'm... I'm sorry."

She moved to the window seat and sat. She looked as if she hadn't been eating or sleeping properly yet her shoulders were back, her chin held high. Pride was the only thing keeping her going. She'd had a lot of time to think about the things he'd said and he regretted that. He should have never left without speaking to her first.

"I should have told you who I was."

"Yes, you should have."

"I'm sorry." They were the only words he could speak. Everything else was locked up inside him.

"When did you know?" she asked softly. "When did you know it was me?"

"I suspected when I saw your clothes. Zippers haven't been invented yet." He smiled, but it faded when she didn't smile back. "In your fever, you talked about Zach, which made me wonder." Wonder? Hell, it'd terrified him. "But it was when you opened your eyes that I knew."

He saw the condemnation in her expression but he was determined to come clean. To tell her the truth from here on out. He swallowed, knowing he had to say the rest. "I'm ashamed of what I've become. I'm different now. I'm not Zach and I feared you'd think I was the same boy who wanted to become a police officer. I didn't want..." He looked away, unable to look at her. "I didn't want to see your disappointment."

"Give me some credit, Morgan. We're both different. I'm not the same person I was fifteen years ago either."

"I see that." But her inner core was the same. Maybe she was a little tougher but inside she was still the Juliana he'd loved as a young man.

"And I don't believe you're different, either."

"Juliana." She frustrated him. How could he make her see? How could he make her believe that Zach was no longer?

She stood but didn't come closer. There was a wariness about her. He'd ruined the closeness they shared that night in the tender and now regretted it. "The person you describe to me. The person you claim to be is not the same person who tended my wounds and nursed me back from a fever. It's not the same person who rescued me from Barun's ship and was there for me those days after when I was trying to deal with everything that happened. I've watched you with your men. I've watched you with Isabelle and Reed. You're a decent man, Morgan. The only one who doesn't believe that is you."

His throat closed up and tears pushed against the back of his eyes. It'd been a long time since he'd cried. "I've done some horrible things."

"You did what you had to in order to survive."

He ground his teeth together. She was using his own words against him but damn if she wasn't right.

"You don't know how much I wish things had been different. That I hadn't gone through the mirror. That I'd stayed and we had lived our lives together."

She shrugged. "I've learned you can't look back. Regrets are useless. It's what you do with the present that matters."

Maybe it was easier for someone like her who didn't have to live with her regrets.

"When I'm finished with Barun I can look for the mirror again. Maybe it's resurfaced since I last stopped asking about it."

She looked at him, her blue eyes penetrating, thoughtful. "And then what?"

He cleared his throat and looked away. "You can go back." His gaze slid to hers but there was no expression there. She was learning to hide her thoughts from him and he wasn't sure he liked that.

"I guess it's better than being sold to a stranger in marriage."

He winced but didn't say anything. What could he say? She was right.

"And if you don't find the mirror?" she asked. "Will you stick with the plan and marry me off?"

The thought made him sick. Since his trip to Dover he'd been fighting the inevitable. No, since Juliana appeared on his burning ship he'd been fighting the inevitable. The trip to Dover confirmed it. He'd been fooling himself thinking he would be happy knowing Juliana was in a safe marriage. He realized now it only would have been safe because she would be beyond his reach.

"Maybe. What if I found a great match? What if... What if it were me you were to marry?"

Chapter Twenty

Something passed across her face. A fleeting look of regret mixed with anger and sorrow. "I don't think so, Morgan."

He'd expected the rejection and prepared for it but it didn't make it hurt any less. "Just listen to me, please. I have money. You'd never want for anything."

"Don't insult me. Not after everything we've been through."

"It wasn't an insult, Juliana. It's a fact. You need money to survive. I can give you that as well as my protection from Barun."

"I don't get this," she said. "Four days ago you wanted to marry me off to the first person who'd take your money. What changed?"

"Me. I changed. Or maybe I realized I was being an ass."

She snorted but he ignored her.

"I was riding to Dover, chasing Barun, but all I could think about was our conversation and how hurt you were. And when I tried to think of someone who would take care of you. Who would keep you safe, no one came to mind. There is no one I trusted with your safety. And the thought of handing you off to someone nearly made me sick. When we got to Dover and Barun wasn't there all I could think was that you were in danger. I was convinced he knew I was out of London and you weren't safe and I knew the only way I would be assured of your safety was if I were the one keeping you safe. I did some horrible things to you on the *Adam*. Things I will forever regret. I know what it's like to be in a foreign land, in a foreign time. I realize it might be too late to make amends, but I can help you learn how to live in this time."

"So I'm a responsibility. An obligation."

"No!" The woman had a way of turning his words around to suit her purposes.

"If not an obligation, what is it?"

"Protection. Security. Safety."

She crossed her arms again. "Seems to me I get in more trouble when you're around."

She was right. If it wasn't for him, she wouldn't have found herself in Barun's clutches. Yet he shuddered to think what would have happened if someone but him had found her. "We're two misplaced people, Juliana, with only each other. You're the only one who can know about me and I'm the only one who knows where you come from. If that's not a connection, I don't know what is."

She seemed to be waiting for something else. Something more from him yet he was damned if he could figure out what.

After a while she lowered her arms. "I'm sorry, Morgan, but I can't marry you."

For once Juliana didn't mind the constant drizzle because today it matched her mood. She sat on a stone bench in the Parkers' garden, protected by a large tree. In her hands was a shredded leaf.

"May I join you?" Isabelle appeared in front of her, wearing her breeches, a white shirt and a jacket.

Juliana shifted to make room and Isabelle sat next to her. Together they listened to the softly falling rain and Juliana continued to shred leaves she'd pulled from the tree.

"If you stay out here much longer, you'll turn into a prune and my tree will have no leaves," Isabelle said.

"I'm sorry." She brushed the torn leaves off her skirt.

"No need to be sorry. You tear leaves when you're angry, I attack ships."

Juliana smiled and Isabelle chuckled. "Reed keeps telling me to stay out of it, but I can't. You're miserable, Juliana, and I know it's Morgan's fault."

Juliana sighed, as torn apart as the poor leaves she slaughtered. A few hours after Morgan left, when Juliana's anger finally abandoned her, she realized her mistake. Yet days later, she still hadn't found the courage to correct it. Morgan was right. She needed money and protection and she couldn't rely on the Parkers' goodwill forever. She'd been a fool to turn him down and foolish still to want to hold out for a marriage based on love and trust.

Her trust in him had been shattered. And the love? Well, he hadn't said the words and ultimately that was the reason she turned him down. Damn it, was it too much to want love in a marriage? Was it impossible in this time?

It was becoming hard to see the rain through the tears gathering in her eyes. "I love him," she whispered. "But right now I don't like him very much."

"Ah." Isabelle smiled. "I find myself in the same predicament with Reed most of the time. They do make us angry, don't they?"

Juliana tried to smile but her heart hurt too much. Isabelle pulled a few leaves off the tree and started shredding them. She shrugged and smiled sheepishly when she caught Juliana watching her. "No ships to attack at the moment."

"Tell me about him," Juliana said.

Pieces of leaves fell to the ground as Isabelle looked into the distance. "Morgan and I sailed together for many years. He always had a fearsome reputation but in reality has a hidden spot inside him. I've never seen him hurt women or children." She paused and glanced at Juliana. "Well, except for the time he had you flogged, but in his defense he thought you were a boy."

The rain began to ease up and in the distance Juliana heard a few birds start to sing.

"After Reed and I married," Isabelle said, "Morgan went out on his own. It's not uncommon for sailors to be gone a few years. But after three I began to worry. Rumor reached us that he'd been captured. I wanted to find him but Reed and I had the business." She brushed leaf debris off her hands and skirts, the look in her eyes far away. "When he returned he wasn't the same man anymore."

"He told me about being a slave."

Isabelle looked at her in surprise. "He told you? He's never spoken of it to me. I deduced some of it on my own. The brand on his arm is Sanskrit for slave."

Juliana shuddered and crossed her arms over her stomach. She didn't blame Morgan for trying to forget his past. In this time it was all about surviving.

"He asked me to marry him," she said.

Isabelle turned to her with a bright smile. "Good for him! It's time he was happy and settled."

"I told him no."

"Juliana?"

Juliana looked up from the book she'd been trying to read. She was on the same page she'd been on an hour ago and was about ready to give up. "Yes?"

Isabelle stepped into her bedchamber and closed the door behind her, her expression guarded. Juliana closed the book and put it down. "What is it?"

"You have a caller."

"Caller?" For a moment she thought someone was on the telephone. Until she remembered there were no telephones here and caller meant visitor.

Her stomach clenched and her first thought was Barun, but she just as quickly dismissed the thought. Isabelle wouldn't calmly stand in her bedchamber if Barun were in the house.

"Morgan," Isabelle clarified.

Juliana stood on suddenly shaking legs and smoothed down her skirts with trembling hands. "He's here?"

"In the library. He's being civilized this time. He's freshly bathed and waiting patiently. However, I wouldn't test his patience. I think you should see him."

Juliana nodded. Her heart was in her throat as she made her way down the stairs. What was she going to say to him? By the way, the marriage proposal I turned down? Is it still on the table?

He was standing at the window with his hands behind his back. His hair was combed and pulled into what they called a queue but what she considered a ponytail for men. His expression was serious, his eyes probing as if weighing her mood. He bowed and in that moment he was very much the eighteenth-century man. "How are you?" he asked when he rose.

“Fine.”

“I brought you a present.” He indicated a wrapped package on a side table.

“A present? What for?”

“Have you forgotten, Juliana? Today is your birthday.”

She’d completely forgotten. In fact, she hadn’t been keeping track of the days at all. There seemed to be no reason when there wasn’t anywhere she needed to be.

Morgan placed the package in her hand and stepped back, putting his hands behind him again. “Open it.”

There hadn’t been many presents in her life. More often than not her parents forgot her birthday and Christmas was always hit or miss in her house depending on her mother’s mood. Daniel told her to buy whatever she wanted for her birthday and the one Christmas they spent together, they decided to forego gifts and work in a soup kitchen.

Morgan’s gift wasn’t wrapped prettily. The paper was coarse and brown, the whole thing held together by twine. She blinked her tears away because it was perfect.

Slowly she pulled the twine and pushed the paper away. Inside lay a book bound in red leather, her initials in gold leaf very discreet in the bottom right corner. When she opened it the pages were blank. She looked up at Morgan in question.

He shrugged as if he were uncomfortable. “You kept pestering my crew for paper and pen. I thought you might like your own journal. To write.”

The tears she’d been holding back leaked out of her eyes and down her cheeks. She hugged the book to her chest and cried.

Morgan’s eyes widened. “I didn’t mean to make you cry, Juliana. Please don’t cry.”

“It’s p-perfect.” She sniffed. “Thank you.” She cried harder, not for the journal, but for everything that happened. Everything she lost. Everything she found. It was suddenly too much and she couldn’t seem to stop the tears. Morgan eased the book from her grasp, pulled her into his arms and rocked her while she cried on his shoulder.

When she was finished, she took one final sniff and stepped away, mopping her wet cheeks with the back of her hand. “I’m sorry.”

“If I’d known it would make you cry, I wouldn’t have bought it.” But he smiled anyway.

She shook her head and took a deep breath. Best to get it over with. “I need to know if your offer of marriage is still open.”

He went still and for a terror-filled moment she wasn’t sure if the offer actually was still open.

“Do you mean it?” he asked.

“Did you mean it when you said you wanted to marry me?”

“Of course. What changed your mind?”

She reached over to the side table and opened and shut her new journal. "You were right. I have nothing and I need protection. Money at the least." She cringed at the awkwardness of admitting she was marrying him for nothing more than his money. This wasn't the way she dreamt of finding Zach.

"There's nothing shameful about it. It's done all the time."

She slammed the book closed. "Not where I come from. Not where *we* come from. I know it's foolish to want more and that's my cross to bear. I'm not asking for something you can't give."

She took a few steps away to give herself distance and to gather her quickly unraveling nerves. This was the decision she'd made and she would live with it.

"Is that what you think, Juliana? That I can't give you more?"

He looked hurt and she had to swallow her apology. There was nothing to apologize for. "You're giving me everything you can and I'm grateful. Please don't think otherwise."

"What is it you want from me, Juliana?"

When she wouldn't look at him, he stepped closer and lifted her chin with his hand. "Tell me what you want."

Once again she was going to cry. Damn it, she never used to cry like this, but lately it seemed her emotions were oozing out of her faster than she could plug the holes.

"Tell me, Juliana. What do you want from me?"

Her breathing came fast. His touch was warm but the look in his eyes hard. "I want your love," she whispered.

For a moment they stood frozen and slowly the hardness in his eyes gave way to something softer. "Don't you know you've had that all along? Through all the centuries between us I've never stopped loving you."

Chapter Twenty-One

“He’s like a damn ghost, slipping in and out of the city. No one sees him unless he wants to be seen. His ship mysteriously appears and disappears.” Morgan tilted his head back and blew cigar smoke into the air, watching as it formed a circle, danced away, then vanished.

Barun was like the bloody smoke ring. Vanishing as soon as you got near him. Morgan’s frustration reached new levels and his concern for Juliana grew by the hour. Tomorrow she would become his wife, his sole responsibility. How the hell was he going to protect her from a specter like Barun? He ground the cigar out, smashing it until there was almost nothing left. They’d received one piece of good news. Barun sent his brother back to India so that was one less person to worry about.

Reed was sprawled in a comfortable leather chair across from him, a glass of brandy dangling from his hand. They were in the Parkers’ study and the women were off somewhere planning the wedding ceremony. “What are you going to do?” he asked.

Morgan shrugged. “I don’t know what to do. I hate the idea of waiting for him to make the next move.”

“Any ideas where he could be?”

“None. The trip to Dover was a waste of time. It’s almost as if he wants to send me on these wild-goose chases.” Barun was playing with him, just as he had when Morgan was his slave. The man loved his mind games and this was the biggest game of all. With the highest stakes. “I’ll have to flush him out,” Morgan said, staring at the fire in the grate.

“How are you going to do that?” Reed took the last swallow of his brandy and set the glass on the floor by his feet.

“Leave London. Set sail with a crew, wait for Barun to follow, then ambush him.”

“Juliana’s not going to like that.”

No. She wasn’t. But he was out of ideas and he refused to spend the rest of their lives together looking over his shoulder. He surged off the chair and began to pace. “This needs to end. If I leave London, Barun will follow.”

“You have a spy among your men. How will you keep this plan quiet?”

“Pick only my best, most trusted men.” And pray to God it worked.

“Why not give him the lance like he wants?”

"I would if that were all he wanted." But Barun made it clear he wanted more. He wanted Morgan back as a slave and he wanted Juliana. The only way to stop him was to lure him away from Juliana and kill him.

"When are you planning on doing this?" Reed watched Morgan pace with half-closed lids, hands crossed over his stomach.

"As soon as possible. I'll wait a day or two after the wedding."

Reed shook his head. "Juliana really isn't going to like this. Have you told her?"

"Hell no, I haven't told her." He'd barely seen her in the week since she'd accepted his proposal. Isabelle's Aunt Sylvia had taken over the planning of the wedding and it included commandeering Juliana for fittings and whatever the hell women did before getting married.

Morgan had given Isabelle's aunt strict instructions that this was to be a small affair. Close friends only. After the way Barun infiltrated the last ball, Morgan didn't want the man to get wind of the wedding.

"When are you planning on telling her?" Reed asked. "I want to make sure I'm out of the house that day."

Morgan smiled. At Isabelle's insistence, Juliana was still living with the Parkers. Isabelle claimed they were going to do this right and since Juliana had no family, Isabelle and Reed would be her family.

"Please tell me you're planning on telling her," Reed said.

"The thought crossed my mind to just slip away," Morgan said in half-jest. It was a conversation he dreaded, but he couldn't leave her like that.

"Do me a favor," Reed said, more serious now. "Leave Isabelle out of this. Don't inform her of your plans."

Morgan stopped pacing and stared at Reed. Something else was going on here. He'd felt it a few times in the last weeks but had been too preoccupied with his own problems to give it much thought. "Why?"

"Because she doesn't need to be involved."

"It's more than that." Isabelle was the best there was with a cutlass and by far the best captain he'd come across. She would be an asset on this mission. Not that he intended on asking her. Reed wasn't exactly on board when it came to Isabelle's shadier activities.

Reed sighed and straightened in the chair, resting his elbows on his knees and staring into the fire. "It's the company," he said. "We're having difficulties with some of our clients. They don't want to do business with a company that has a woman in charge."

Morgan was beginning to understand. In fact, he had this conversation with Juliana. Women didn't work unless they were lower class and men didn't do business with women unless the women were prostitutes. Isabelle was a woman born before her time. She wanted to be in the thick of things, making the big decisions, sailing the ships. And the hell of it was, she was excellent at both.

"You're afraid if she hears what I'm about to do, she'll want to help."

Reed looked Morgan in the eye. "I can't lose her."

Morgan knew Reed meant more than Isabelle getting harmed and possibly killed. He was afraid if she tasted battle again, she wouldn't come back.

"I won't tell her." How the hell he was going to keep something this big from his best friend he didn't know.

A knock on the door had both men turning toward it. Isabelle poked her head in and smiled. "May I join you?"

She walked to Reed and tucked herself beneath his arm. Reed kissed the top of her head and Morgan read the worry in the man's eyes. Reed would always fear the allure of the ocean that constantly called to Isabelle.

She pointed a finger at Morgan. "I came to speak to you."

Morgan glanced at Reed, wondering if somehow Isabelle had already heard of his plans. Reed tightened his hold on his wife.

"Aunt Sylvia would like to throw a ball in your and Juliana's honor."

Morgan took an involuntary step back. "Oh, no. Hell, no." He hated balls.

"It's not that bad, I promise. It will be small."

"Small according to Aunt Sylvia?"

Isabelle's lips twitched. "I'll keep it under control."

"This is not a good idea." Morgan turned to Reed. "Tell her this isn't a good idea." Mostly because of Barun, but partly because he got the hives just thinking of walking into a ballroom with the upper crust of society staring at him. He wasn't cut out for that life and had no intention of ever being cut out for that life.

"Isabelle," Reed said. "This isn't a good idea. Remember the last ball? Barun somehow made it in."

"I thought of that as well." Isabelle disengaged herself from Reed. "But Sylvia mentioned the ball to Juliana before I could stop it." She turned to Morgan. "You should have seen the look on Juliana's face, Morgan. I don't think anyone has given her a ball in her honor before."

Damn. Isabelle was probably right. Parties hadn't been part of Juliana's life when she was growing up.

"She practically glowed," Isabelle said.

"Isabelle—" Morgan warned.

"She was so excited, Morgan. And we could make the place secure. With your men and some of mine, no one could get in here."

"I don't think—"

Isabelle took his hand. "I don't think you know what this means to her."

Shit. He closed his eyes for a brief moment in resignation. "If it's small," he said. "And there has to be enough men to cover all entrances and patrol the grounds. I want Penworth brought up to date. He needs to know what Barun looks like. We'll put one of my men at the door with him."

Isabelle smiled, went up on tiptoe and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, Morgan. Juliana will be happy."

"When is this ball being held?"

"Three days from now. It was the earliest Sylvia could plan it. I'll go tell Juliana now." She left and Morgan and Reed exchanged worried glances.

"Looks like your plans will be delayed," Reed said.

"Looks like." That gave Barun two extra days to live. Two extra days of haunting London. Two extra days to get at them.

The day of the wedding dawned dark and dreary, like every other day Juliana had been in London. Not for the first time she wished she were on Morgan's ship with the wind in her hair and the sun on her face, listening to his crew sing sea shanties as they went about their duties.

With shaking hands, she smoothed the fine silk of her wedding gown. It wasn't anything special by eighteenth-century standards. She learned from the modiste from hell that white was reserved for debutantes so she chose a deep peach that brought color to her cheeks.

The service would be short, with only a few in attendance. Juliana chose Isabelle and Sophia to stand up for her and Morgan chose Reed and Patrick.

"Are you ready?" Isabelle stood in the doorway, her mass of black hair pinned up yet looking like it would tumble down at the slightest breeze. Somehow the effect was alluring. She wore a dress for the occasion. A beautiful gold-colored dress that shimmered when she walked. "You look as nervous as Morgan," she teased, and Juliana smiled, too nervous for words.

Making her way down the grand staircase, she wondered at the fate that brought her two-hundred-some years to the past, to a place that held everything she was searching for and more.

She stopped and took a deep breath, suddenly scared. Suddenly understanding there was no more job at the Chicago Sun, no car and no air-conditioning. Her hard-won independence, her career, the home, her comfy clothes and time-saving appliances were all gone. She was living in the eighteenth century about to marry the man of her dreams who also happened to be the man of her past. Her heart did a little double skip of apprehension. Could she do this? Did she have a choice?

Isabelle stopped beside her and arched a brow in silent question. Juliana knew if she told her friend she was having second thoughts, Isabelle would sweep her away, no matter her friendship to Morgan. But Juliana wasn't having second thoughts. She took the quiet moment to reflect on what was and what was to be.

Her vision of life with Zach was much, much different than this. But this new vision, this new life seemed right and at this moment, the moment before she opened those doors and stepped into her future, she couldn't think of another place or another time she'd rather be than right here among ex-pirates and ladies and lords.

She smiled and nodded at Isabelle, who opened the doors to the library. Morgan stood by the fireplace. His hair was combed into a queue, his shirt was a brilliant white, his breeches dark gray, his coat a light gray. Yet a gold earring still winked at her by the light of the many candles and the look in his eye was all pirate.

Somehow her feet carried her to him. There was no music, no pomp and circumstance. It was just she and Morgan, their friends and a somewhat frightened-looking minister who clutched his Bible and whose gaze darted around the room.

She felt Morgan's hand in hers, the warmth of his arm as it brushed hers. She listened to his deep breaths and the shuffle of feet behind her. The minister's words were a drone in the distance. And then the words took on substance and meaning.

The minister turned to Morgan and said, "Do you, Zachary Morgan Langtree, take thee, Juliana MacKenzie as your wife? Do you vow to honor her through all the days of your life, through sorrow and pain, happiness and health?"

Juliana's gaze flew to Morgan's. He was looking down at her, a soft smile on his lips. She'd been trying hard not to cry but the use of his real name, the name he'd forsaken because he thought he wasn't worthy of it, brought on the tears. Morgan disengaged his hand from hers and wiped the tears with his thumb.

"I do," he said to the minister. He kissed her on the nose. "You deserve a last name at the least."

Chapter Twenty-Two

Juliana had been in Morgan's home before but it'd been the night they dragged him from The Scabbard, pissed as the British liked to say. Which she learned meant drunk and not angry. Naturally she hadn't had a chance to look at where he lived but she did now.

With a touch of apology in his voice he explained his home wasn't as elegant as Isabelle and Reed's estate but other than the size of the homes, Juliana couldn't see much difference. Yes, the Parkers' home was bigger but in all honesty she much preferred Morgan's smaller home.

Morgan exited the coach and reached in to help her down. She learned early on to take what help she could get with the voluminous skirts that were always ready to trip her up, but she was getting better at maneuvering around in them.

Dusk was quickly approaching and shadows partially hid his home. The windows glowed with candles lit from within. The place was neat and tidy on the outside, sitting right on the quiet, cobblestoned street.

"I don't have servants," Morgan said, again almost apologetically. "As soon as we're settled you can hire as many as you like."

She snorted, still looking up at the stone edifice of what was now her new home. "Right," she said. "Like I know the first thing about hiring servants."

Morgan chuckled and took her hand to lead her up the four steps to the door. He opened it himself and they stepped in. Someone had been here earlier and lit the candles, casting the entryway in a warm glow. It was so much like Isabelle and Reed's except on a much smaller scale that she wondered if Isabelle picked it out for Morgan. Juliana couldn't picture Morgan choosing furniture.

He pulled her down the short hall and pointed to closed doors. "The sitting room, the library and the study," he said, indicating each door in turn. "I usually use the study when I'm in town and keep the other rooms closed but you can open them up if you like. The kitchen is in the back. I do have a housekeeper who comes in while I'm in residence. She cooks too, but she doesn't stay here."

Juliana looked at the high ceilings, the marble floor, the small table that in her time would be a pricey antique, and the lit wall sconces. "How did you get used to it all?" she whispered. She'd been here just a few weeks and she still woke up in the mornings disoriented.

He shrugged. "A little at a time, I guess. Mainly I spend my time on the ships where I feel the most comfortable. City life isn't my thing as Isabelle probably told you. That's why there are no servants."

Was he going to keep sailing now that they were married? Was he planning to take her with him? She had no desire to be stuck alone in London while Morgan sailed back and forth to America on the Parkers' ships yet she didn't know what she wanted to do with this new life. Morgan told her a little of Isabelle's problems. The woman was a genius when it came to sailing and shipping, but was ostracized by the leaders of the industry because she was a woman.

Juliana wanted to be more than the lady of the house, yet truthfully she hadn't thought past the wedding. Now that it was over her questions hovered around her. What now?

But she didn't voice them. This was their wedding night and she wasn't going to ruin it with her anxieties.

Morgan looked down at her. "Have I told you how beautiful you are today? When you opened the door to the library and I saw you standing there..." His voice trailed away and he shook his head as if he couldn't go on.

He didn't have to say more. She knew. Tears popped into her eyes and she quickly brushed them away.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what my problem is lately. I usually never cry."

"It's been a long day and you haven't exactly been in your element lately. I should say I'm sorry, but right now I can't be sorry for something that brought you back into my life." He pressed his lips to the top of her head. "Ah, Juliana. You have no idea what your presence means to me."

She wrapped her arms around his waist. "I think I do," she whispered. "All these years I've waited and everyone said I shouldn't. They told me to give up on you and I wouldn't."

"You should have. You had every right to." His voice trailed away and she shook her head.

"I couldn't. I must have known. Deep down I must have known." She squeezed him.

He tilted her head up and kissed her. "I don't think I can wait much longer," he said against her lips.

"What're you waiting for?"

He groaned, grabbed her hand and hurried her back through the hall and into the entryway. The stairs were spiraled, made of solid, dark wood with a thick covering of carpet. "We could do it right here," she said breathlessly. "On the steps."

Morgan stumbled, fell forward and had to catch himself on a step. He groaned and hung his head. "Good Lord, Juliana. Warn me next time you're going to say something like that."

She shrugged. "Just saying."

He chuckled and tugged on her hand again. "Maybe later. Right now I want you on a bed without the ocean beneath us."

"I kinda liked the rocking of the ocean."

He groaned and tugged harder. They were practically running up the steps now. The hallway was dark, lit only by a few candles. Halfway down, Morgan pushed open a door. Juliana knew this room well.

She sat here for hours waiting for him to wake up from his drinking binge. There was nothing remarkable about his bedchamber other than the fact it was in the eighteenth century, but knowing Morgan slept here made it special.

He bent her backward and lowered her to the bed while her feet stayed on the floor.

She loved the feel of him. Loved the hard contours of his body, the silk of his hair as it fell across her and created an erotic tent around them. She ran her hands through his hair and he smiled down at her.

"I love you, Morgan."

"I know." His voice was husky. "I'm not sure why or how I deserve this but I know. I love you too, Juliana."

His erection pushed into her but he didn't move, even though she saw the need in his eyes and felt the tightly coiled muscles holding him back. She touched his face. "Make love to me," she whispered.

"I will. I just... Right now I want to look." His fingers skimmed the line of her jaw. "Sometimes I still don't believe."

She smiled. "I'm here. I'm not leaving."

He shook his head as if he didn't quite believe it either. Only time would convince him and she had all the time in the world.

He kissed her mouth but when she raised her head, eager for more, he drew away to kiss her chin, her jaw, the sensitive spot below her ear that made her gasp. "Damn gowns," he muttered and she laughed. Definitely the attire of the day made it harder to undress in moments like this.

"The buttons are in the back," she said.

"I know."

She tried to roll over to give him access but he held her down and simply but efficiently raised her skirts. The cool air felt good on her legs but his large, calloused hands felt even better. She shivered as he lightly stroked the inside of her thigh and she let her knees fall open.

If the female wore more clothes than seemed possible, the male wore just as many. Morgan pulled away for a moment to shrug out of his coat and vest, except they weren't called a coat and vest. At the moment she didn't give a damn what they were called as long as he was free of them. With trembling hands, she pulled his shirt over his head exposing the golden skin of his torso. She unbuttoned his breeches. Her hands brushed against his engorged erection and he sucked in a breath. When the last button was released, he cock sprang forward into her hand and she wrapped her fingers around him. Morgan groaned and dropped his head. Sweat was already beading on his shoulders and his hips thrust forward. He threw his head back, pumping into her hand. She watched the play of emotion on his face as she squeezed, then stroked, squeezed, then stroked. His breath came fast, jagged. The skin around his eyes tightened and he gasped.

"Enough," he ground out between clenched teeth.

She released her hold and ran her fingers down his leg. Goose bumps followed in her path.

He stroked her thigh, coming closer and closer to her center. Juliana moved so he would touch her but his fingers danced away, teased by coming back for a light touch, then disappeared again.

“Morgan,” she gasped.

“In time, love. In time.”

Her hips bucked and she whipped her head to the side, grasping handfuls of the bedclothes. His hands were on her hips, on the sides of her legs, one cupped her mound and she pushed her hips into it and gasped. “Yes.”

“Not yet.”

She groaned. “You’re torturing me.”

His smile was wicked, predatory. Exactly the type of smile she would expect from a pirate.

“Please,” she whispered. “Now.”

He placed a knee on the bed and climbed up until he was straddling her. His erection swayed and she licked her lips, wanting it, needing it like she’d never needed anything before.

He stroked it between her legs and she moaned, arching her back in a silent plea. Another stroke and another until pressure built inside her. And then he slid in. She was wet, ready. It was an effortless joining. Their gazes locked. He caressed her cheek and she put her hand over his.

“I know,” she whispered. They’d made love before, numerous times on the ship, but this was different. This time she knew who he was. They were married. They would never be apart again.

Morgan blinked. It could have been the light cast by the fire but she could have sworn there were tears in his eyes.

He moved slowly, pulling almost all the way out before sliding back in. Never changing his tempo, keeping a steady pace. He held himself up but the tendons in his neck bulged and his arm muscles strained with the effort. Juliana ground her hips into his, bringing him deeper. He gasped and increased his pace. The pressure inside her built every time he drove himself home. She made little sounds, unable to stop herself until her muscles contracted around him and she cried out.

Morgan pumped harder, pushing her into the bed until the ropes beneath squeaked and he threw his head back and groaned. She felt him pulse inside her as he came, felt each contraction and clamped down on him, milking out every last bit.

Juliana lay next to Morgan, her head nestled in the crook of his arm. The night was clear and a slight breeze blew through the opened window. A while ago Morgan rose and blew out the candles, leaving the fire as their only light. They both undressed before climbing beneath the bedclothes.

A gust of wind raced down the chimney. Flames flared to life. The fire crackled and popped, grew bigger then settled. For a moment she flashed back to the fire on the *Molly Victoria*. What would have

happened if Morgan hadn't found her? Not for the first time she had the feeling that fate had a hand in all of this.

"Tell me about the mirror." Juliana wriggled closer to him and waited, understanding he needed time to sort through his thoughts.

"The weight of true love is measured not in distance nor in time, but in deed'," he said softly.

"Look ye into this mirror and find what ye seek. Step through and discover yer heart's desire'," she finished.

Stay, and live a lifetime. Unspoken between them lay the last line.

He was right. He wasn't the same person now as he'd been then. She saw very little of Zach in Morgan and it was Morgan she was in love with more than ever. And truly she was okay with not going back—well, except for missing some modern conveniences like a washer and dryer and her Chi flat iron.

"I don't know how it works," he said. "I just know it's some sort of portal to the past."

"Why is it in your parents' house?"

The clip-clop of horse's hooves drifted through the open window and the faint smell of manure and spring floated on the air. She didn't know if she'd ever get used to the smell of animals on the streets. "It's my mother's," he said. "She's... Well, she's not from the twenty-first century."

"What do you mean not from the twenty-first century?"

She thought of Emily Langtree, the woman who was more a mother to her than the woman who'd given birth to her.

"She was born in Kansas. In the nineteenth century."

A few beats of silence passed. "You're saying you come from a family of time-travelers." She couldn't keep the skepticism from her voice even if she was one of those time travelers.

"My mother is. My father is a modern man, through and through."

"The police said you ran away and your parents just accepted it. I was so angry they would even think you would do something like that. But they knew. All along they knew." They all had known. Emily, Zach's father, his sister, Molly. And they never told her.

"It's not something you just blurt out to someone."

"No. I suppose not." She felt numb and angry, although she knew the anger was misplaced. Morgan was right. It wasn't as if Emily could have pulled her aside and said not to worry, that Zach was off having some adventure in another time.

"How long did you know about the mirror before you stepped through it?"

"She told me the night I left. I was going to turn eighteen the next week and it was customary to pass the...keeping of the mirror on to the next generation at that age. Fine job I did of it, huh?" He sounded disgusted with himself, as if he failed his family. Was that yet another reason he wouldn't go back?

Discussing Zach's departure was like opening old wounds she thought had healed but in actuality were as raw as the day she discovered he was gone. It was worse now, knowing everyone kept the true reason from her. She was angry at his mother for putting such a burden on her son, for tempting him to do something rash and irrevocable. She had to have known the lure of adventure would call to him and yet she still told him.

And he had gone.

As if sensing her thoughts, Morgan's arms tightened around her. "Part of me didn't believe her. I went upstairs to look at it. But then it began to do weird things."

"The glass kind of shifted. Swirled."

She felt his head move in a nod. "I remember wanting to touch it and the next thing I knew I wasn't in the attic anymore but at the edge of some woods. Immediately I turned to go back, but the mirror wasn't there."

They'd been so young but thought they were so mature with their dreams of college and marriage.

"I'm sorry, Juliana. For fifteen years I've wanted to apologize and suddenly the words don't seem enough."

Her gaze shifted from the fire and landed on a cutlass propped in the corner. She remembered that cutlass. Remembered holding it as Morgan slept off his binge. Remembered fantasizing about putting it to his throat when he woke up just to scare him because she'd been so angry. In her time cutlasses weren't propped anywhere and she definitely would have never thought of hurting someone with one. She'd come a long way.

"Maybe it had to happen this way," she said. "Maybe it was meant to be. You and me in this century." At seventeen years old Zach had been everything to her. Maybe, in order for her to grow up, she needed to live without him so she could appreciate the person he became.

"Tell me about my family," Morgan said toward dawn.

They'd slept off and on and made love more than they slept. Juliana's body was tired but her mind was going full tilt. This was still so new and it seemed every time she thought they'd run out of things to talk about Morgan would ask her another question or kiss her in just the right spot.

"I don't know too much," she admitted. "We parted ways when I went off to college."

"Why?"

She tried to form the right words to express that horrible time after Zach's disappearance. "It was difficult after you left." Earlier he asked how she'd dealt with his leaving and she told him she went on to college and became the journalist she always dreamed of becoming. "Emily kept telling me to let it go and I would get so angry at her. Of course now I understand it was because they knew what happened and it wasn't as if they could tell the police. In a way the police wrapped it up nicely for them."

"They didn't tell you," he said. It was a statement. Of course he knew his parents never said a word about Zach time-traveling but she answered anyway.

"No. I can't imagine how hard it was for Emily not to say something but I know she couldn't. I would have probably wanted to jump through the mirror to go after you."

"The mirror's a tricky thing. No one can figure out how it works or how it decides where to send people and once you've transported, the mirror disappears so there's no going back unless you find it again. I'm sorry you had to go through that." He kissed the top of her head and she covered his hand with hers.

"They still live in the same house," she said. "I talked to your mom that last day. Basically it was the same conversation we had years ago. She kept telling me to move on and I thought I had." Her voice trailed away. She never told Morgan about Daniel and felt guilty for it. She kept telling herself she would but didn't think her wedding night was appropriate. However she didn't want to keep secrets from him anymore. "I was married."

There was a long silence. Morgan breathed deeply, evenly.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner."

"Juliana, you don't have to explain yourself. You had a life to live and my mom was right. I wanted you to move on. I just... I guess I tried not to think of you married."

"It didn't work out. He said I was still in love with you and he couldn't compete against a dead guy. He was right, you know. At the time I didn't believe him but he was right. I was still in love with you. That's why I went back to see your mom. I wanted to prove Daniel was wrong."

"And instead you ended up here."

"And instead I ended up proving him right."

Morgan shifted. The muscles in his arms tightened.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'm not confusing you with Zach. I know the two of you are different. And yet you're the same whether you want to believe it or not. I fell in love with you, Morgan. What you are and what you've been."

"I know," he said softly. "It might take me a while to get used to the idea. Tell me about my sister."

She accepted the change of topic, knowing it was something they would be working on for some time to come. "I don't know about Molly," she said sadly. Growing up the three of them had been inseparable but after Zach disappeared Juliana and Molly grew apart. She always regretted their separation and had missed Molly. She hadn't heard from her in years.

"I'm sure she's probably married," Morgan said. "I might be an uncle."

Sadly they would never find out and Juliana felt a stab of pain at the family they'd both lost.

She lifted his hand and kissed the inside of his wrist. The sun broke through the night and bathed the room in soft lavender. Outside the birds began to chirp and Juliana couldn't help thinking a new day had dawned as well as a new life.

"I can't believe I agreed to this." Morgan frowned into the mirror as he attempted to tie his cravat. He hated these damn clothes and cursed this stupid century that hadn't yet invented the zipper and simple necktie. If he had a valet it would be much simpler, but he never had a need for one and the twenty-first-century side of him cringed at the thought of someone else dressing him.

He turned to Juliana. She was brushing her hair and he concentrated on her hands. Damn the damn ball anyway. This was his honeymoon, time he needed to spend with his wife because they didn't have much more time left.

Tonight, after the ball, he would tell her he was leaving first thing in the morning. The thought made his already aching head pound harder. She would be angry as hell and would demand to go with him and he would have to tell her no. She was safer in the Parkers' home where Barun couldn't get to her and Morgan would be able to concentrate better knowing she was safe. It would all be worth it in the end, knowing Barun was dead and they didn't have to worry about him again.

At this point Morgan didn't care about revenge. He didn't care about the lance or anything else. He just wanted Juliana safe and he wanted to live his life quietly by her side. He hoped he wasn't asking too much.

"You look a little pale," she said.

"Truthfully, I have a headache." He rubbed his throbbing temples and grimaced. She set her brush down and touched the side of his face. "Thank you for taking me tonight."

He leaned forward and kissed the tip of her nose. "I'd do anything for you, Juliana."

She smiled and he turned back to the mirror to avoid looking into her eyes, because in just a few hours she wasn't going to be smiling. He hoped by then this bloody headache was gone.

He yanked on the ends of his still-untied cravat. "If I had a valet this wouldn't be a problem," he growled.

She turned him around and took his cravat in hand. She was beautiful in a dress made of the same green as her eyes. Her cheeks glowed and her smile was radiant. Her hair was swept up off shoulders that still had a touch of sun to them.

While he stood patiently and she tied his cravat, he ran through the security he, Isabelle and Reed worked out. It seemed impenetrable but Morgan knew Barun well. He managed to slip into the last ball Juliana attended and Morgan was well aware no plan was infallible, but he couldn't find any holes in this one.

"You're thinking of him, aren't you?" She patted his tied cravat and stepped back.

Morgan looked in the mirror. "How the hell did you do that?"

She shrugged and pulled her gloves on. "You're avoiding my question."

He peered closer at the cravat. Damn but she'd done a good job. Better than any valet he'd seen.

“Morgan.” There was a warning in her tone and he turned away from the mirror with a sigh.

He made a point not to discuss Barun with Juliana because he wanted the wedding and the last few days to be about them. It didn’t mean he hadn’t thought about it or that he hadn’t taken precautions or his men weren’t reporting in frequently. He thought he was doing a good job of keeping it all from Juliana but apparently not.

He waited while Juliana gathered her things and they walked down the stairs and out the door. Once outside, she turned to him. “Don’t let Sanjit Barun ruin this night for us. Promise me.”

He glanced up and down the street, looking for shadows within shadows and the men he’d posted around the house and across the street. “I promise,” he said, hoping like hell he could keep this promise.

Juliana meandered through a deserted hallway in Sylvia’s mansion. Her excitement and anticipation long ago gave way to disappointment. What had possibly possessed her to think this ball was a good idea?

Isabelle said no one in their right mind would turn down an invitation to one of Sylvia’s balls. Of course, it didn’t mean they had to be nice to her, or accept her. It was obvious they didn’t care for her and Morgan or their recent marriage. In fact, most of them, upon being introduced to Juliana, sniffed and turned their nose up at her. She’d endured some form of the cold shoulder all her life, why she thought it would be different now she didn’t know.

Morgan had been right in not wanting to come. And where the hell was Morgan anyway? They’d been separated immediately upon arriving. Sophia had taken Juliana’s arm and tugged her away while Morgan went in search of Patrick. It was funny to see the wizened old man in a room full of formally dressed, uppity, titled people. But Isabelle and Reed insisted Morgan’s crew attend. And that, she’d heard whispered several times, was a disgrace. Except Juliana had the feeling the crew wasn’t here to party, but rather as protection. Beneath the formal clothes they scrounged up they were armed to the teeth and more on edge than she’d ever seen them.

She tugged on her gloves. She would get some air and much-needed peace and quiet, then she’d return to the ball and count down the minutes until she and Morgan could escape.

As she walked past a darkened room in search of a door to lead her outside, a hand came out and grabbed her around the waist. She opened her mouth to scream but another hand covered it. She struggled, her skirts hindering her legs as she tried to kick the person pulling her into the unused room.

Her back was brought up hard against a solid chest. The door closed behind them, cutting off the sound of the party and any chance she had of someone seeing or hearing her. Soft lips pressed against her neck.

“Did you miss me?”

She stopped her struggles and turned around. A decidedly wicked gleam lit her husband's eyes and decidedly wicked thoughts accompanied that gleam if the bulge pressing against her thigh was any indication.

"You scared me to death."

"I couldn't go another moment without touching you. When I saw you leave the ballroom I decided to follow."

She circled her arms around his neck, wishing they were anywhere but in a house filled with hundreds of people. Sylvia promised to keep it small, but her idea of small and Juliana's were vastly different.

"Where were you going?" He nibbled on her neck and she bent her head to give him better access.

"Out—outside. For some fresh air."

He made some sort of sound deep in his throat as his teeth scraped the sensitive skin below her earlobe. She closed her eyes. Oh, Lord, if he didn't stop soon she would be nothing but a puddle on Sylvia's carpet.

He pulled away and looked at her mouth before dragging his eyes to hers. "Having fun tonight?" His hands made lazy, slow circles over her back and she shivered.

"No. You were right. These things are boring and I'd much rather be alone with you."

The wicked gleam turned hot and her body trembled at the promises those chocolate eyes held. He kissed her again.

"Soon," he murmured between kisses.

"Promise?"

"Oh, yeah. I promise." He trailed a finger down her throat, across her shoulders, and into the bodice of her gown.

She licked her lips and let her head fall back, enjoying his touch way too much. Damn the roomful of people. This was their party.

"Are they treating you well?" he asked.

Two voices made their way down the hall. Morgan tensed and his head came up. His hands tightened on her waist and Juliana leaned against him. The voices grew louder, then faded as they passed the door and continued on.

Morgan pulled away from her. "Not the smartest thing to do in a house full of people," he said as he adjusted her bodice. "You didn't tell me if they're treating you well."

"And what are you going to do if they're not?" she teased. "Beat them up?"

"It wouldn't be proper to beat up a bunch of tight-assed ladies." He placed a kiss on her forehead. "I'd beat up their husbands."

She laughed and hugged him. "Thank you, but that won't be necessary. I can take care of myself. I've been fighting my own battles for a long time now."

She turned to open the door but he stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. “You don’t have to anymore, Juliana. You have me now.”

“As much as I appreciate it, Morgan, I can still stand on my own two feet.”

He opened his mouth to say more, then closed it.

“What were you and Patrick discussing when we arrived?”

The shutters fell over his eyes. Juliana knew that look well.

“You were talking about Barun, weren’t you?”

“Juliana—”

“I thought we were going to forget about him for tonight.”

“I can’t forget about him, especially tonight.”

“You think he’ll show up here?” While preparing for her wedding, and the blissful days after, she tried to push thoughts of Barun to the back of her mind. He was constantly there, a silent shadow, deadly, hovering. Never going far, always casting a pall over everything she thought, everything she did. But she tried her hardest not to let him intrude on the happiest days of her life.

A shiver of dread raced through her and left in its wake a trail of foreboding. The orchestra struck up a tune, reminding Juliana where they were and why they were here.

“Do you think he’ll be here?”

“Isabelle, Reed and Patrick and I have made this place as impenetrable as we can. I think he would be a fool to come here.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Do you think he will be here?”

He pressed his lips together and she could tell he didn’t want to answer. His silence was answer enough.

“Be careful,” he said. “And don’t go roaming unattended halls again.”

He was being cautious and protective. She didn’t fault him for wanting to keep everyone safe. Even so she had an uncontrollable urge to peer into the shadows of the darkened room to search for Barun. Of course he wasn’t here. He would be stupid to try to penetrate Morgan’s defenses at such a well-attended ball. Still she couldn’t help the shiver of unease racing up her spine.

“I won’t.” She frowned, noticing for the first time the way his brows dipped low and the touch of pain in his eyes. She traced a line down his temple with the tips of her fingers. “How’s your head? Still hurting?”

He grimaced. “Yes. But I’ll be fine as soon as I have you under me.” He grinned wickedly and she laughed, relieved he’d erased some of the tension inside her.

She stood on her toes and kissed his cheek. “I love you, Morgan.”

He pulled her into him and she rested her head against his shoulder. “I love you too. I think we better rejoin the other guests before people start talking.”

Reluctantly she nodded and he opened the door, stuck his head into the hallway and pulled her forward. Quickly she looked down to make sure everything was in place and together they walked to the ballroom. As soon as they entered, Reed pulled Morgan away to talk about a new ship he wanted to purchase for the company, leaving Juliana to wander the huge room of people she didn't know, who were here to celebrate her wedding, but really wanted to talk about her behind her back. People, it seemed, were the same no matter what century you were in.

She grabbed a glass of wine from a passing waiter and, spotting Sophia and Isabelle across the room, headed in their direction. She could always count on Sophia to put a smile on her face and lift her mood.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Morgan watched his wife walk away, noting the lack of excitement in her eyes that had been there earlier in the evening. His head was pounding furiously and absently he rubbed his forehead. He felt for Juliana. She had such high hopes of making her first real party and a celebration of their wedding a success. Although Sylvia's heart had been in the right place, the people she invited were no more interested in him and Juliana than they were the fishmonger. They came to see and be seen and to gossip. Unfortunately, Juliana was the brunt of their gossip.

He watched her grab a glass of wine and lift her chin. It was as if she were pulling her armor around her, insulating herself from the whispers behind her back. The kids in school hadn't been any nicer and she had a lot of practice ignoring them growing up.

He would give them another hour then take her away from here, back to his home—now their home—where they would lock the rest of the world away. And he would tell her he was leaving first thing in the morning. He grimaced and his headache flared. Juliana hooked up with Sophia and he saw her first real smile since the end of dinner.

"Any sign of Barun," he asked Reed.

"No sign," Reed said.

The heat from the hundreds of candles and the overwhelming odor of so many powdered and perfumed bodies in such a small space was making his headache worse. "I'm going outside to check the perimeter." Maybe fresh air would help as well.

"There's no need. I spoke with John a little while ago. Everything is quiet out there."

His stomach pitched. The wine he swallowed settled uneasily and he feared his headache was becoming something much worse. "All the same," he muttered. "I'm going out."

"Don't stay too long," Reed advised. "Or Sylvia will come after you."

Juliana stood at the edge of the party. A wallflower. She stifled the urge to wring her hands. No one was looking at her but the two ladies across the way were probably talking about her. She hated this. Sophia had been pulled away by some friends, leaving Juliana on her own. She tried striking up conversations but they were stilted and she knew the people didn't really want to talk with her. She was also nervous around so many people, convinced she would make a mistake and reveal she wasn't from this time. Of course her story was that she'd come from Barbados so that would cover any mistakes but what if

someone started asking questions about Barbados? Ugh. She should have taken Morgan's advice and cancelled the party.

She made her way to the corner of the room where a matronly woman sat with a smile on her round, pale face and watched the crowd, her toes tapping to the music. She looked up at Juliana and her smile widened. Juliana smiled back and relaxed a bit.

John, Morgan's trusty night watchman emerged from the crowd, obviously uncomfortable amongst the glittering people. She saw him come in and out all night. Each time he pulled on his collar and his gaze darted around the room as if he were scared of the people. She commiserated. She was scared too. Okay, not scared. But she certainly didn't like it any better than he did.

"Hello, John."

"Mrs. Langtree." The young man inclined his head as he stepped closer. "Um..." He paused and glanced around.

"Is something wrong?"

His eyes flicked this way and that before landing on her, then sliding away. "It's the captain, ma'am."

"Morgan?"

He nodded and took another look around, then bent so his lips were close to her ear. She smelled the distinct and nearly overpowering odor of rum and frowned. Morgan wouldn't be pleased the men were drinking. Not tonight.

"He's not feelin' well, ma'am. Said he needed you."

Her stomach muscles tightened. Earlier she could tell he'd been in pain but he said it was nothing more than a headache. Still, headaches could become miserable especially in this heat with the loud music and conversations competing with one another.

"Where is he?"

"Outside." John pulled on his collar. His face was bright red. "Said he needed fresh air, but he ain't lookin' too great, ma'am. I thought maybe I should come and get you."

"You did the right thing, John. Please, take me to him."

Patrick pulled Morgan into the same room Morgan pulled Juliana into earlier and closed the door tightly behind them.

"What is it?" Morgan asked, sensing Patrick's agitation. Leaving the ballroom helped his headache but it still pounded behind his eyes.

"I was havin' meself a little smoke outside, seein' as how Lady Isabelle's aunt won't allow us to smoke in the house and all."

"Yes, yes." Morgan knew Patrick had gone out for a smoke, he told him so the last time they spoke.

“Well now,” said the little man. “Didn’t I see Thomas Hamilton run up the steps, all out of breath and such as if he’d been running for his very life? So’s I stopped ’im and asked ’im what devil was chasin’ ’im. And didn’t he tell me the most interesting story?”

Morgan made a hurry-up motion with his hand because he still wanted to get outside and breathe fresh air in the hopes his headache would at least dull to a distant roar.

“He told me he found our John talkin’ to Barun. Just this evenin’, he did. Right before the beginning of this here party. Said the two of ’em were head to head, deep in conversation.” Patrick rolled back on his heels. “Real chummy like.”

Morgan’s head snapped up. “John?” Not John. John was one of his most trusted men. Morgan had picked the boy up from a Navy vessel years ago and saved him from the harsh, horrendous life of the Royal Navy. John was as loyal—more loyal—than any other man besides Patrick.

Patrick’s faded blue eyes told the truth though. Thomas wouldn’t lie and he wouldn’t repeat such a blasphemous story if it weren’t true. Patrick knew it too.

“Son of a bitch.” Morgan’s fists curled. “John’s in charge of the perimeter. If he’s as close to Barun as Thomas says then Barun could very well be here right now.”

Juliana hitched her skirts and followed John through the dark gardens of Sylvia’s home. When John stopped she quickly stepped around him, dropped her skirts and peered into the darkness. They were far from the house, in an area dense with trees. She no longer heard the music from the ball and only the moon lit their way. Why would Morgan come all the way out here when he’d told her to stick close to the house?

“Where is he?”

John pointed to a place where the trees were heaviest and the shadows dense. The moon glinted off a stone bench and the faint outline of a man on the bench with his head cradled in his hands, elbows on knees.

Morgan found Sophia in a gaggle of giggling girls who instantly quieted when he approached. He’d ordered Patrick to scour the perimeter for John. Reed had been sent to summon his carriage and Isabelle was collecting her and Juliana’s wraps. The only one missing out of the group was Juliana and the nagging feeling he’d had all night began screeching like a fire alarm inside him. It took every bit of willpower not to tear the place apart looking for her. He thanked God he told her to stick to the ballroom and not wander away again. She was here. Somewhere. She had to be.

“Where’s Juliana?” he asked Sophia.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I saw her last over there.” She pointed her fan to the far corner of the ballroom.

“When?”

“A few minutes ago. Why? Is everything all right?”

“Go to Isabelle,” he ordered. “We’re leaving as soon as I find Juliana.”

He walked swiftly to the corner Sophia indicated. The crush of people hindered his progress. Long past being polite, he began to push his way through but when he got there, Juliana wasn’t there. He cursed and his stomach tightened.

Juliana gasped and took a step back. That wasn’t Morgan on the bench. It was Barun. She turned to run and collided with John, who wrapped his arms around her in a tight bear hug, pinning her arms to her side. She cried out and struggled but her skirts wrapped around her legs, immobilizing her.

A plump, matronly woman sitting a few feet away glanced up at Morgan. “Are you looking for your lovely wife?”

“Have you seen her?”

She smiled up at him, flashing dimples in her pale, round face. “Why I believe I saw her leave with a red-headed fellow. It seemed as if he were nervous. When he spoke to Mrs. Langtree she grew quite agitated and left with him. Is everything all right, dear?”

Juliana left with John. Son of a bitch!

“Do you know which way they went?” he asked.

“I believe they used the terrace doors to go outside.”

God bless nosy women.

Morgan raced out the terrace doors and made his way to the deepest shadows at the side of the house where he took his dagger out of his boot and cursed his oversight in not securing another weapon nearby.

He headed toward the heaviest line of trees. If Barun was going to take her from here, he would do it in a place he wasn’t easily seen.

What the hell happened? How had he slipped through the nearly impenetrable line of defenses he and Isabelle and Reed set up?

Of course they hadn’t counted on John being the spy. Never John. The betrayal cut deep. If Juliana came to any harm, if there was one scrape, one bruise on her, Barun and John would pay with their lives.

Once Morgan reached the tree line he stopped and listened. The music from the ball was faint. Everything else was quiet. There were no insect noises and nothing from the street reached this far into the trees even though they weren’t far from the alley that backed up to the Parker’s estate.

Faintly he heard voices coming from his left. Too close to be from the ball, too far to distinguish. He moved in that direction, picking his steps carefully, keeping to the darker shadows. He controlled his breathing in order to hear better, but no matter what he did he couldn’t control the heavy beating of his

heart. He stopped short of stepping into a small clearing. The shadows cloaked him and he tightened his hold on his dagger. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end.

Juliana was in the middle of the clearing, her hands tied behind her back. John was beside her, gripping her arm in a bruising hold. A pistol was pressed into her side. Morgan ground his teeth together but remained still. Waiting for what he knew was to come.

Barun, dressed for a ball in black breeches and coat with a white shirt and cravat, stepped in front of Juliana and looked right at Morgan's position.

"I see you've solved the problem of making me search for you."

Juliana's head jerked up. Her eyes were wide with fear as she searched the tree line for him.

Even though he wanted to jump into the clearing, yank her from John's grasp and plunge his dagger into Barun's heart, Morgan forced himself to remain still. He couldn't move faster than a pistol ball and if he rushed John the man would shoot Juliana.

I want you to kill me if he takes me.

He pushed the words away. There was a way out of this. There had to be. He wouldn't lose her now, not after all they'd been through and what it had taken for them to be together again. He simply wouldn't allow it.

"I know you are there, *daasa*. There is no escape."

Morgan curled his fingers into a fist. Barun was looking right at him, right through the shadows cloaking him. It was this type of mind game that made Barun seem all-knowing. But Morgan knew he wasn't. Barun was bluffing, playing games with Juliana's mind the way he'd played games with Morgan's while being held prisoner.

"Step out," Barun said.

Morgan didn't move. Barun nodded to John and John cocked the hammer, shoving the barrel into Juliana's side. She winced but didn't make a sound.

There was no doubt now. Barun wasn't playing mind games. He knew Morgan was in the trees watching. He'd been followed. He and Juliana had been set up and he neatly walked into Barun's trap. More than likely Barun's men were behind him and he was cut off from the party. Bloody hell! Why hadn't he told anyone where he was going? Why had he run out of the ball without reinforcements?

A man materialized on each side of him. One stripped his dagger from him, the other held his hands behind his back. Morgan struggled but he knew it was useless. He couldn't run back to the ball and sound the alarm. They walked out of the shadows. Juliana locked gazes with him, her eyes huge in her pale face. The gown she'd carefully chosen for her first ball and for their introduction as husband and wife into society was now torn and dirtied.

Morgan struggled against his captors' hold. "You got what you want, Barun. Let her go."

"Not nearly what I want. But almost. Almost."

Morgan lunged, but the men behind him held tight and Barun merely laughed.

“It will be a pleasant day to see you in shackles again, *daasa*. There will be no escape this time.” He moved closer to Juliana. She flinched from him but John held her still and Barun touched her shoulder. Morgan’s anger churned inside him, eating at his good sense which was exactly what Barun wanted. Even knowing this he still struggled.

“I will think of you rotting on my ship as you row until your heart gives out.” His hand moved from her shoulder to her neck. His fingers twined through a curl. Morgan growled. “And you will think of me making love to your woman.”

Morgan broke the hold. He rushed John and punched him. The man hit the ground and Morgan spun around to face Barun.

“Run, Juliana,” he yelled over his shoulder. “Get out of here.” He wasn’t going to win this fight, not with three against one, but he could buy her enough time to escape and maybe get help.

“Get the hell out of here, Juliana! Now!”

She picked up her skirts and started to run.

Morgan tackled Barun and fell on top of him. He was yanked away. Someone punched him in the stomach and he doubled over. Another punch and he vomited. Behind him Juliana cried out.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Morgan doubled over in pain. What happened to the men he put around the perimeter? Where was the security he and Isabelle and Reed set up?

Barun nodded to John and he began to drag Juliana away.

“No!” she yanked her arm from his grip but he shoved his pistol into her side and she stilled. Her terror-filled gaze landed on Morgan. *I’m sorry*, he wanted to say.

John tugged on her arm. She dug her feet into the dewy grass. “Please,” she whispered but Morgan didn’t know if she was talking to him or John.

Furious, Morgan kicked out, landing a blow to the knee of the man to his right. The man cursed and punched Morgan on the side of the head. For a moment his vision dimmed and in those few seconds Juliana disappeared into the darkness.

Gone.

With a cry of anguish mixed with fury and fear, Morgan raced forward, dragging both men with him. Startled, Barun stepped back, but before Morgan reached him, his legs were swept out from under him and he landed on the wet grass, the breath knocked out of him. Another body fell on him, pinning him down.

“Cap’n?”

Morgan stilled. The man on top of him tensed. Morgan’s head was jerked back by his hair and a dagger suddenly appeared at his throat.

“Say one word and you die,” Barun whispered.

Morgan swallowed. If he didn’t say anything Patrick would walk into the clearing and see them, and Patrick was no match for these men. Morgan wouldn’t allow his best friend to walk into his own death.

“Cap’n?” Patrick’s voice was getting closer.

“Let me speak to him,” he said to Barun. “I’ll tell him to go away.”

His head was jerked back farther. Morgan felt his spine pop and stifled the growl of pain. The cold edge of the dagger bit into his skin and he hissed.

“Tell him to go away,” Barun said. “Tell him you and Juliana are going home. Anything else and my man will slice you open right here.”

Morgan tried to nod and licked his lips. “I found Juliana, Patrick. We’re going home. Tell Isabelle we’ll be sailing on the *Thomas* tomorrow. We’re heading to her home in Barbados. Tell her not to worry.”

There was a long silence. With every labored breath the dagger cut deeper into his skin. The man on top of him was breathing heavily. Barun was silent.

“All right, Cap’n. Have a safe trip,” Patrick finally said.

They waited for several long, agonizing minutes before the brute hauled Morgan up and punched him in the stomach. He doubled over in pain, the breath knocked out of him but grateful that at least Patrick was safe for now and carrying his message to Isabelle.

He was dragged to a carriage waiting in the alley and shoved inside. His captors climbed in behind him, but not Barun. Had he gone with Juliana? Was she locked in a carriage, alone with him?

Morgan lunged for the carriage door but was pulled back. The carriage lurched forward and the men began beating him.

With his hands tied, he had no way to defend himself. He tried kicking but one of the goons sat on his legs. He was punched in the stomach, the side of his head, his ribs, anywhere they could reach in the confined space.

What seemed like hours later, but was probably only a scant twenty minutes, the carriage finally stopped. Morgan was dragged from it, blood dripping from his face, his stomach muscles cramping from the blows. His knees buckled and he hung between the two men, head down, watching his blood drip onto the ground. Where was Juliana? Where had Barun taken her?

He lifted his head but even that slight action caused him so much pain that the world tilted. They were at the docks. If his nose wasn’t clogged with blood, he would have smelled the stench. The men lifted him over the side of a tender and dropped him in. He heard himself groan, felt the blood pour from a cut above his brow. He rolled over and retched but there was nothing left in his stomach.

“I can’t believe you did this to us.” Juliana worked her fingers over the intricate knots that tied her hands behind her.

John turned his face away and stared out the carriage window.

“Morgan has been nothing but kind to you.”

The lights of the city retreated. They were nearing the waterfront because the smell of rotting fish became stronger. She leaned forward until she was nose to nose with John. He smelled of saltwater and fear. He shrank from her, turned his face but she followed, refusing to let him look away.

“Tell me why.”

“Shut up,” he snarled. His teeth glinted white in the darkness, but she didn’t flinch. Her fear of John was nothing compared to the fear of what Barun was going to do to Morgan.

“Not until you tell me why. What has Morgan done to deserve this? He trusted you.”

He pulled his hand back as if to hit her and she stared him down, daring him. She didn’t care what he did to her. Not if it meant she could possibly get information out of him or convince him to help her. He

lowered his hand, staring at it as if he'd never seen it before. "Just shut up," he finally said but the words held no heat.

"I don't understand. Maybe if I understood—"

"You can't understand. You'd never understand." He looked around as if he were afraid someone else were in the coach listening.

"You were the one who threw the knife that night on the *Adam*, weren't you?"

He looked at her with his pale blue eyes and a tortured expression. Whatever he did, why he did it, ate at him.

"Were you aiming for me or Morgan?"

He licked his lips and his shoulders slumped. "Captain Morgan. Barun... He didn't know about you."

"And you set the *Molly Victoria* on fire?"

His already pale face turned gray. "Yes."

"Men died in that fire."

"You don't think I know that? I think about it all the time. Every time I close my eyes..." His words ended on a small sob. Tears glinted in his eyes and he quickly blinked them away.

"So tell me why."

"He has my brother." He looked around again, his fear a living thing between them. "He has my brother," he said softly this time. "And he said he'd let 'im go if I did this."

"Barun would let your brother go if you sabotaged the ship and brought him Morgan?"

He nodded. "He wanted you too. I didn't want to do it, but I have to save my brother."

They were getting closer. The lights from the ships bobbed in the distance. They didn't have much time left before Barun put them on one of those ships and they sailed away.

"Let me go, John."

"I can't." His voice was strained. He shook his head and there was real fear in his eyes.

"Barun doesn't need to know. Say I hit you over the head or something."

"If I don't bring you to him, Andrew gets killed."

"I can get to Reed and Isabelle. If we work together, we can stop Barun from doing this. We can save your brother and Morgan. Just let me go."

He swallowed and she could see he was thinking about it. Her hope was almost painful and she continued to press her point, knowing if she backed off now all would be lost.

"Morgan could die, John. Do you want another death on your conscience? Please," she whispered. "Please help me."

He lowered his gaze to her lap. She twisted around and showed him her bound hands. "Untie me, John. I'll do the rest."

"I can't," he said softly, regretfully. "I can't."

She jerked around and leaned forward. "You can. Do this, John. Just do it. Please. I'm begging you. Do you want me to get down on my knees?" She slid off the carriage seat and sank to her knees. Her ball gown billowed around her. The gown she took hours picking out for her wedding reception. The gown with grass stains all over it. "Please," she pleaded. "I'm on my knees, John. What else do you want? I'll do it. Whatever it takes to save Morgan's life, I'll do it. Please." The last word came out as a whisper.

He watched her steadily, silently. "Do you love him that much?"

"More than you will ever know. More than life itself. Don't let him die. I'm begging you, John. Please don't let him die."

The door to the carriage flew open. Juliana jerked back and John scrambled to the other end of the carriage.

"Well." Barun's gaze shifted from Juliana, still huddled on the floor, to John. "Well," he repeated. His eyes were a cold black, his mouth pinched like he'd eaten something sour.

Barun reached in and pulled John out. John's terrified gaze met hers. Juliana leaned forward. "Don't," she said to Barun. "He did nothing." *Why are you defending him? He set you up.* Because he was still her last hope. He'd been ready to crack, she saw it in his stooped shoulders and the regret written on his face. She might still have a chance, but not if Barun thought they were misbehaving.

John trembled while Barun held him up by the collar. "What were you doing in there?" he asked.

"N-nothing," John stammered.

"We were talking," Juliana said. "That's all. I was trying to convince him to let me go but he wouldn't. He refused."

Barun looked up at her. She was leaning out of the carriage, her hands tied behind her back. His gaze flicked to her bodice and his nostrils flared. She looked down and realized he was looking right down her bodice. She swallowed her disgust, recognizing an advantage.

"Please don't hurt him," she said softly, leaning forward a little more. "He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't let me go."

She glanced at John who was looking at her in confusion and hope. Barun let go of John and he stumbled before righting himself.

"Bring her to the boat," Barun said and turned to walk away.

"Wait," John cried.

Barun stopped and slowly turned around. "You have them both," John said. "I did what you told me to do. What about my brother?"

Barun laughed and clapped John on the back. John's hands clenched into fists and red crept up his neck to his cheeks.

"When we reach India, my son, you will see your brother."

Morgan was roughly pushed into a chair, his wrists untied, then retied to the arms, his ankles fastened to the legs. He stared straight ahead, refusing to give his captors the satisfaction of seeing his pain.

Barun entered, still dressed in his formal attire although it was wrinkled now and smudged with dirt and grime. He picked up some papers from his desk and studied them for long minutes. Men walked past the cabin's closed door, the sound of their voices floating in, then receding as they moved on. Gulls circled above, calling to one another as they waited for scraps of food to be tossed overboard.

The ship gently swayed in the warm breeze. Morgan forced himself to take shallow breaths to keep the pain at bay. Barun was playing a game with him and he had no choice but to play along. He had to remain lucid to do it though and if he breathed too deep he was afraid he would pass out again. His ribs were bruised, possibly broken. One eye was so swollen he could barely see and he had so many cuts that blood leaked out of him in various places.

Finally Barun straightened and looked at Morgan, his black eyes strangely vacant.

"I want the lance," he said.

"Release my wife and I will give it to you." A cut on his lip cracked open and began to bleed. Maybe, he could save her after all. However slim the hope, he latched onto it.

The vacant eyes took on a violent shine. "She is your wife now, eh?"

Ah, Barun hadn't heard that bit of information. "Release her and I will give you the lance."

Barun nodded to the man behind Morgan. He was punched in the jaw. The crack echoed in his brain. His head jerked to the side. Blood ran from a cut on his cheek. He shook his aching head and fought off the blackness threatening to pull him under.

"I want the lance," Barun repeated.

Morgan drew in an unsteady breath, his stomach muscles screaming in agony. "Release Juliana and I will give it to you."

Another nod from Barun and this time the man on Morgan's left punched him. Morgan was prepared for it but his head still snapped around. Blood flowed freely down his face and the coppery taste of it invaded his mouth. Gingerly, his tongue probed the inside of his cheeks.

"The lance."

"For Juliana's freedom." His words were becoming garbled. His face was beginning to swell.

The blow this time landed squarely in his stomach. He doubled over and vomited on Barun's floor. He was punched in the kidney before he had a chance to straighten.

This "bartering" went on. Morgan lost track of time as he fought to stay coherent. He had to concentrate just to speak a few words. No place on his body went untouched. Blood ran into his eyes. His kidneys cried out in pain. He'd even been kicked in the shins.

It took great effort to breathe through the pain. Each breath brought a fresh wave of nausea and darkness that he fiercely battled away. As long as Barun was in the room he was away from Juliana. That's all Morgan concentrated on, keeping Barun from Juliana.

Barun walked to a cabinet. Morgan watched him warily. His body tense, waiting for what was to come. Even that small action sent a wave of pain through him that made him want to groan. He bit the inside of his shredded cheek to keep from making a sound. He'd yet to cry out. There was some satisfaction in that at least.

Barun pulled out a bottle from the cabinet and poured a generous portion of something in a glass. Morgan tried not to lick his lips, tried not to let it show how thirsty he was. When was the last time he had something to drink? His tongue felt like it was stuck to the roof of his mouth and he swallowed blood.

The ball seemed like a lifetime ago but if he was judging the time correctly by the position of the sun, it was barely past dawn. Only a few hours had passed. He fought the urge to close his eyes and give in. If he gave in, Barun would leave and possibly go to Juliana. He had to stay awake.

Barun smiled at him and downed the entire glass. He refilled it slowly, the amber liquid making a slight glup-glup that had never sounded so sweet to Morgan's ears.

"My plans are to build upon my father's empire and make it bigger and better. With the lance I will achieve that." Barun leaned his shoulder against the wall and slowly sipped his drink. "Rumor has it the lance has special powers. Supposedly, he who holds it will rule all he chooses. I will be assured victory if I have the lance."

"I'll give you...the lance. Release...Juliana."

Barun set his glass on the very edge of his desk, right in front of Morgan's nose. Brandy. He was drinking brandy. Unwillingly, his gaze dropped to the cool liquid inside the clear glass. His throat convulsed in expectation. He pulled his gaze away. The room smelled of vomit and brandy and as much as he craved the liquid, Morgan's stomach rolled ominously.

"You don't seem to understand," Barun said. "I want it all. I want you as my slave, I want your wife as my woman and I want the lance to ensure my victories. There will be no compromise." He leaned forward. "There will be no bargaining."

Morgan reared back, the sweet scent of brandy and the sickly smell of vomit still in his nose. "Then...no lance."

Barun nodded to one of the men. Morgan tensed for another blow but the man walked out of the cabin. Morgan watched him go, a feeling of dread weakening his already depleted reserves of strength.

Barun walked around the desk and rested his hip on it. His thigh brushed the glass and it teetered before tipping over. Amber colored liquid pooled then dripped down the front of the desk. Morgan's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. His lips, parched and cracked, bled. Brandy would sting the cuts in his mouth, but, oh, how sweet it would be.

He counted the drips. One. Two. Three.

Barun crossed his arms over his chest and leaned forward. "I will take better care of her than you ever will, *daasa*. I can give her jewels and silk. I can wrap her in luxury. Power and glory will be hers."

Four. Five. Six.

"She means that much to you?"

Seven. Eight.

Barun grabbed a handful of Morgan's hair, yanking his head back, exposing his throat.

"You are nothing," he spat. Spittle flew from his mouth and mixed with the blood dripping down Morgan's face. Frustration burned deep in his eyes and Morgan couldn't help the smile that curled his lips. Barun released him so viciously that Morgan's head flew back, connecting with the back of the chair with a crack.

Barun walked leisurely around the large cabin.

Morgan trained his eyes on the brandy.

"Hair as bright as the sun, eyes as green as the rolling hills of Ireland."

Nine. Ten. The drips slowed.

"And her skin." Barun sighed in appreciation. "Her skin is as soft as the silk my country produces. Softer and warmer and infinitely more desirable."

Morgan strained against the bindings, his hands curling into fists.

Eleven.

A slight pause as a drop clung to the edge of the desk, hovering above the abyss, holding on against the gravity pulling it down.

It finally succumbed.

Twelve.

"Her lips so pink, her complexion so pale. There are others in your country with the same pale skin, the same golden hair, but none compare to Juliana." Barun swung around, his hands in his pockets. "Don't you agree?"

Thirteen.

"But of course you do. You wedded her after all." He sighed. "Ah well. I had hoped to be her first. But," he shrugged. "I will be happy with at least having her. And with the lance. The things I will do. The countries I will conquer."

Fourteen.

He continued to stroll, apparently forgetting his audience of one. "My father had dreams. He dreamt of ruling the Indian Ocean and he accomplished his dream. No one was more feared than Conajee and his fleet of ships. But me," he beat his chest with a fist and smiled. "I will do better. I will go beyond the Indian Ocean. Yes, the world will hear of Sanjit Barun. They will hear and they will tremble. And Juliana..." He

paused. Morgan shuddered. The man was obsessed with his wife and he didn't know what he was going to do to save her.

"Juliana will be by my side." Barun placed a hand on either side of Morgan's chair, leaned into his face and whispered close to his ear, "And she too will tremble."

The door to the cabin banged open and his heart came to a stop.

"You fucking bastard," he said between swollen lips.

Juliana stood in the threshold, her chin held high but a glint of fear in her eyes. Her dress was muddled and torn and there were rope burns around her wrists where her hands had been tied. Morgan pulled against his own ropes, his fingers clenching futilely.

She looked around the room, her gaze skipping over him, then flying back. She gasped. "Morgan?"

He couldn't answer. If he thought his pride had been stripped in that prison all those years ago, it was nothing compared to his wife seeing him bloodied, beaten, defeated, clinging to consciousness and tied to a chair. He looked away.

"What have you done?" She flung herself at Barun, diving over his desk chair, her fingers curled into claws. Her nails scratched furrows down his cheeks.

"Juliana!" Morgan tried to stand, forgetting for a moment his pains, forgetting he was tied to the damn chair. Pain sliced through his ribcage and he fell back with a groan.

Barun howled in pain and rage and struck out. He hit Juliana on the side of the head. She flew backward, landed on the chair and tumbled to the floor. Morgan strained against his bindings, half standing to look over the desk.

"You bastard," he said.

Barun looked down at Juliana with his hands on his hips.

She pulled herself up, her green eyes flashing fire. Slowly, she ran her hands down her skirts and a flash of memory swept through him of her dressing in that same gown for the ball, of smoothing the silk down in just the same way and of looking at him with all the excitement of her first ball. She glared at Barun. And slapped him.

"Juliana, no!"

Barun hit her with an open palm. Her head snapped back. Morgan lunged forward but the chair stopped him. The pain in his ribs made the room spin and everything go black for a heart-stopping second. The man behind him chuckled. Morgan shook his head, willing the darkness away. When he was able to see clearly again, an angry red welt marred Juliana's cheek.

Barun turned to him. One of his cheeks oozed blood where Juliana clawed him, the other held the imprint of her hand. "I will ask you one more time to tell me where the lance is."

The man was on the edge, teetering toward a madness both alien and frightening.

"Release her and I will take you to the lance."

They stared at each other for several more moments. Barun turned to the men who'd been beating Morgan but who moved to flank Juliana. He nodded and Morgan's heart faltered.

"No." The word was torn from his lips, but came out as a whisper.

One of the men grabbed her arms behind her back. Her breasts heaved and her eyes grew wide as Barun reached for her bodice and prepared to rip it off her.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Juliana tried to back away but the men behind her held her still. There was an unholy gleam in Barun's eye, a frantic light that scared her. He was enjoying torturing Morgan and her. She lifted her chin and refused to cower, refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing her fear. Because that was what he wanted. He thrived on their fear and the power he had over them.

"No! Stop! I'll tell you." Morgan strained to break his bondages. Juliana still couldn't believe the bloodied, beaten man tied to the chair was her Morgan. His face was swollen and covered in so much blood she didn't recognize him at first and when she had she'd been so furious she acted without thought.

His pain-filled gaze flickered to her and she wanted to cry at the unfairness of it all. She knew how much Morgan despised being back in Barun's clutches.

Barun turned to Morgan, his hand still on her breast. Her skin burned where he touched her and she felt as if she'd been branded by his evil.

"It's in my townhouse," Morgan said. "In the corner of my bedchamber."

For a moment she was almost as stunned as Barun. The lance Barun wanted had been in Morgan's bedchamber all along? She'd actually held it while waiting for Morgan to awaken from his drunken stupor.

Barun released her breast. "Take her away," he said.

"No." She struggled against his hold. "Morgan..." She wasn't leaving him alone with Barun again.

Morgan's gaze locked with hers. His eyes were almost swollen shut but she could have sworn she saw regret in them. Regret and love and sorrow.

"No," she said, louder this time.

He pulled his gaze from hers and turned to Barun. "Get her out of here," he said.

"No. Please—" The man behind her jacked her arm up. Searing pain ripped up her elbow to her shoulder. She cried out in agony. She was shoved in the back and stumbled through the doorway.

They only walked a few feet before he opened the door to a richly appointed cabin. He pushed her in and she fell to her hands and knees. Her head hurt and her shoulder throbbed. She was so dizzy and had to sit back on her heels until her vision cleared.

When she finally managed to stand, the room tilted and she had to catch herself on the bedpost.

Desperate, she stumbled to the door and yanked on the handle. It didn't budge. She pounded on it. "Let me out of here!" she screamed. She kept pounding and screaming, praying someone would hear and

open the door. Her knuckles and the sides of her fists were bruised and tender but she kept pounding until she had no energy left.

She slumped against the door and finally let her tears fall. Her terror, the horror, the grief, she let it pour out in huge sobs, not caring who heard. What did it matter anyway? Her chest felt tight. She knew it was the panic. The absolute fear that she and Morgan were in the clutches of a madman and Morgan might possibly die. Might be dead already.

She turned around and slid to the floor with her back against the door.

Oh, God. What if he were dead? What then? She lifted her head and looked around the room. Her sweeping glance took in the oversized bed, the area rugs decorated in deep jewel tones. She was in a gilded cage, wrapped in luxury but a prisoner nonetheless. A kernel of anger nudged at her grief. Anger at Barun for the happiness he had taken from her.

She stood on shaking legs and pressed her palms against the door until she regained her balance. Her anger grew, strengthened by the fear nearly consuming her. Together they were a potent combination, swirling through her, pushing her to do something.

You can't stay in here and cry, Juliana. Do something.

But what?

Kill Barun.

Her stomach muscles cramped. Could she do it? Could she take another person's life?

Her fear pushed at the anger, taking center stage for a brief moment and in that moment she knew. Yes, she could take a life, kill Sanjit Barun for taking Morgan from her, for beating him, for enslaving him all those months.

She couldn't live without Morgan. Didn't want to live without him.

She needed a weapon. She didn't know when Barun would come for her but some sixth sense told her it would be soon. She'd found a weapon in the hold with much less to work with.

She managed to make it on unsteady legs to the dainty desk only to find it was attached to the floor. Standard operating procedure on a ship. Frantically, she yanked open drawers, tossing them on the floor when they proved to be empty. Finding a letter opener was probably too hopeful. Barun was smart enough not to give her a ready-made weapon.

Not a problem. She stood in the middle of the room and looked around, her gaze skipping over the large furniture. Time was running out. He would be here soon with some disgusting plan to make her his. She would die before she let him touch her again. But first she would kill him.

Some part of her knew she wasn't thinking rationally, that the fear and anger she'd been pushing away took her over the edge into a deep hole she might never crawl out of.

She didn't care. Her only thought, the only thing that kept her going was the deep-seated need to kill Barun. She tried not to think about Morgan, about whether he was dead. To think that would destroy her, so she blocked her mind to him and thought only of killing Barun.

Her gaze fell on the straight-backed chair she'd pushed out of the way to get to the desk drawers. She picked it up, tested its weight. It was well-made and would have cost a fortune in her day, but she lifted it over her head anyway and threw it with all her strength against the floor. The wood splintered with a loud crack.

She cocked her head, listening for footsteps, for someone to open the door wondering what the racket was about. When no one came, she threw it to the floor again. It took three more times for one of the legs to break.

Satisfied, she picked up the splintered piece and leaned the chair against the table, balancing it on its three remaining legs and hoping like hell no one noticed. She hid the weapon in the folds of her skirts as heavy steps approached and stopped outside her door.

She trained her gaze on the door. Waiting. Breaths shallow. Her vision was now a pinpoint, focused on the door. The blood roared through her veins. Her skin prickled in anticipation. For the first time since realizing it was Barun on the stone bench and not Morgan, she felt alive.

The door swung inward and Barun stepped inside. She tightened her grip on her crude weapon.

They stared at each other. She hoped he didn't see the determination in her eyes, the killing fury that would take his life. She wanted to witness his surprise. She wanted to see the life drain from him. Only then would she be satisfied.

"Where's Morgan?" She was surprised her voice sounded normal with the fury bubbling inside her.

"Where he should be."

"And where is that?"

Barun stepped inside and closed the door behind him. Juliana didn't take her eyes off him. Didn't move except to take shallow breaths. Her palms itched to rush him.

He heaved a heavy sigh. "Juliana, *sanam*, when will you realize you are meant to be with me?"

"Never." Her gaze flickered to the congealed blood on his cheek. His other cheek still held the faint mark of her hand. Her satisfaction was great, but not as great as when he would take his last breath.

He indicated the room with a wave of his hand. "I did this for you, to show you what you can have with me, what I can give you."

"I want nothing from you." Except your death.

"What have I done that is so horrible? Put an escaped slave in his place? He is nothing, Juliana. The best place for him is on a ship rowing."

"You're wrong. Morgan has given me everything I've ever wanted." Air-conditioning, cars, telephones and faxes were well and good, but they were nothing compared to his love and acceptance. "If

he dies, I die.” She lifted her chin. She meant every word and the flicker of uncertainty in Barun’s eyes indicated he believed her.

“A slave is better than me?” His expression showed disgust and the way he spit out the word slave, as if it left a bad taste in his mouth, snapped her tightly controlled anger and tore through her fear.

With a cry of rage she lifted her weapon and rushed him. He raised his hand to deflect the blow. She swung again, using the leg like a baseball bat. Barun bent low and charged her, catching her around the waist and tackling her in a classic football move. She landed on the floor with a bone-jarring thud, Barun on top of her. Her weapon skittered away and she cried out in rage.

He rolled off her. She scrambled to her feet and bolted for the door but he grabbed the hem of her skirts and she was pulled up short.

No! It couldn’t end this way. This wasn’t what was supposed to happen!

Cold fingers dug into her skin and she cried out, struggling against him.

He pulled her through the cabin, opened the door and dragged her down the hall. She fought him as they descended the steps to the bowels of the ship, terror making her heart beat harder. She screamed and kicked and cried out for help but his men turned away.

They reached the lowest part of the ship where no light penetrated except for the lanterns along the wall. He pulled a key from his pocket, unlocked a door and shoved her inside. She stumbled and fell to her knees.

“When you can act the part of a lady you will be allowed back in the cabin. Until then you will remain here. If you want your slave so badly, you will be treated as a slave as well.”

The door closed with a loud click, dousing the room in darkness. She knelt there for the longest time, unmoving. What happened? What went so horribly wrong? Her body shook with the aftereffects of the adrenaline rush and still she didn’t move.

The door opened and she jumped. A man stepped in carrying a large bundle over his shoulders. He heaved his burden and it landed with a thud at her knees. The door closed and she was enveloped in darkness again.

The lump moaned and she gasped. Oh God, it was a person. Using her hands, going by feel alone, she touched it. Warm skin, sticky, matted hair. Her heart beat double time.

“Morgan?”

She moved her hands down his side, over his thighs and calves. It appeared nothing was broken but what the hell did she know? She was a reporter from the twenty-first century, not a damn doctor.

Morgan moved and muttered something incoherent.

She smoothed his hair from his face and her hand came away bloody. “Morgan? Wake up. Please.”

“J’liana.”

She gingerly touched his face, not knowing where or how much more he was hurt. "I'm here, Morgan."

"S-sorry."

She couldn't stop herself from touching some part of him even though it seemed every inch was covered in blood. "Sorry for what?"

"This."

She kissed his temple, closed her eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. He was alive.

"B'run?" he asked.

"He's not here right now."

He coughed then moaned. "You 'kay?"

"I'm fine." She needed water to clean his cuts. She needed bandages. She needed penicillin and sutures and while she was at it why didn't she wish for a freaking surgeon and a well-equipped emergency room?

He grabbed her hand, his grip surprisingly strong. "I'm fine."

"You look like hell." Not that she could see him. *Oh, God, please don't die on me. Please, God, don't let him die.*

"Did he...hurt you?"

"I got a few good punches in."

He made a sound that sounded like a snort. "Very proud...of you."

Her smile faded. "I thought you were dead." She swallowed the lump in her throat. "I thought..."

From out of the darkness his hand reached up and found hers. "I'll survive. I've suffered worse."

She remembered the stories of his time as a slave, rowing the ship, locked in a prison cell. Would he survive this? He was badly hurt and she didn't have the means to fix him.

"Tired," he mumbled through cracked lips.

"I don't know if you should sleep. I don't know much about these things."

He squeezed her hand. "I'll be fine."

His hand went slack in hers. "Morgan?" She fumbled in the darkness, feeling him, searching for his chest and pressing her palm to it. He was breathing shallowly, but evenly. She sighed and kept her hand there.

Juliana was fine. Barun hadn't hurt her. To survive the beatings, Morgan had escaped to a place inside himself, a place where memories of Juliana lived.

Now he was with her. Now he was able to give up the fight, surrender to his body's need to shut down.

The sound of children's laughter filled his mind. He was taken back to a place long forgotten, to an afternoon that changed his life forever.

"Aaargh, ye'll have to walk the plank, missy, if'n ye don't tell me where you hid the treasure." Twelve-year-old Zach pointed his stick at his sister Molly, pretending it was a gold-plated cutlass he'd taken off a pretend ship he'd pretend plundered.

They were in the neighbor's field bordering their yard. A long time ago—at least a month ago—they found a patch of dirt where, for some reason, no crop grew. It was really cool, like a hidden fort or something.

Molly was wrapped up in her jump rope, her arms pinned to her side, the bright pink handles trailing in the dirt. She shimmied her shoulders and the rope slithered to the ground. She stepped out of the ring it made and put her hands on her hips.

"Why do I always have to walk the plank? Why can't you walk the plank?" She crossed her arms and glared. "I'm tired of always having to walk the plank."

Zach's cutlass fell to his side, and he let out a patient sigh. "Because I'm the pirate and you're my prisoner and pirates don't walk the plank. Besides, girls can't be pirates anyway."

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. "Oh, yeah?"

Zach raised his stick and stabbed it into the air a few times. "Yeah."

"Who says?"

He lunged forward, stopping inches from Molly's nose. "The pirate book says, that's who. Whoever heard of a girl pirate?" He scoffed at the very idea. How stupid. Girls weren't pirates. He thrust his cutlass/stick at her. "So you gonna walk the plank or what?"

Movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. A bright patch of red hid behind a big green stalk. He took a step closer. A dirty white tennis shoe with a hole in the toe poked out. And then the last thing he expected to happen, happened. A girl stepped out of the flowers, her short blonde hair all messy, her red T-shirt faded and her jeans all holey.

"Hey, I know you. You're the girl that lives down the road. Julie, right?"

"Juliana," she said real quiet like. She looked kinda scared and for some reason Zach felt sorry for her.

"We're playing pirates. Wanna play?"

"Yeah, you could walk the plank," Molly said.

Zach scowled at her. Didn't his dumb sister see this girl wasn't the type to walk a plank? She was too...small. Or something.

"Sure," Juliana said, still being real quiet. Zach wasn't used to quiet people. In his family if you wanted to be heard, you yelled.

“Cool. I’m the pirate.” He pointed to himself with his cutlass/stick. “And Molly’s my prisoner. She knows where the buried treasure is and if she doesn’t tell me she has to walk the plank and die. Who do you wanna be?”

Juliana looked at him with wide green eyes, like she’d never played pirate or something. “I dunno. Whatever, I guess.”

Zach thought about what part Juliana could play. He stood on one leg while absently scratching a mosquito bite on the other.

“I know. You be the queen and I have to rescue you and then we get married.” His face got kinda hot thinking about marrying her. Juliana’s face was red, like she was sunburned. It hadn’t been red before.

Molly scoffed. “Pirates can’t marry queens, you dumb head.”

He swung around to his sister. “Why not?”

Ordinarily, he wouldn’t let Molly get away with calling him a dumb head. Normally he would tackle her to the ground and pin her there until she said she didn’t mean it. But he didn’t want to do that in front of Juliana.

Molly crossed her arms over her chest again and got that look that said he was such a...dumb head.

“Because queens have to marry kings. It’s the law.”

“Oh.” Molly was right. Queens didn’t marry pirates. What was he thinking? Because if queens married pirates then pirates would have to stop...pirating...and that was really dumb. Why would anyone stop pirating?

“Juliana!”

Juliana jumped and looked behind her. The voice that called her name was shrill and not very nice sounding. Zach remembered the kids at school said her mother was a drunk and mean. Zach felt sorry for her and he also had a strange feeling, like he should protect her from her mother. But that was dumb because kids didn’t need protecting from their parents. His own parents were pretty cool even though they made him do chores like make his bed and stuff.

“I gotta go,” she said, looking behind her again.

“Can’tcha ask her to stay?”

She shook her head. Her blonde curls got stuck on her eyelashes and her green eyes looked scared. She pushed the hair out of her face and before he knew it she disappeared into the flowers, as if she hadn’t even been there at all.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Juliana stroked Morgan's hair. Her body ached and exhaustion weighed her down but she didn't sleep. She was too afraid he'd die while she slept. By staying awake, he stayed alive. She knew she wasn't thinking rationally but she was beyond rational thought.

Earlier she felt the *Bhaya* jump to the wind like a horse released from the starting gate. She tried to ignore her panic, fought not to give in to it. Yet the questions wouldn't stop coming. Did anyone know where they were? How was she going to escape from a ship in the middle of the ocean with Morgan so hurt?

The hand buried in Morgan's hair balled into a fist, clutching strands of the thick mane. Her head fell back and she closed her eyes on a sob.

The ship picked up speed. She could tell by the rise and fall of the hull. She listened as men moved above them. Occasionally, the sound of laughter floated through the boards above her head. Voices raised in anger grew, then faded.

The sound of approaching footsteps had her tensing. Carefully, so as not to disturb him, Juliana lifted Morgan's head from her lap to stand. The blood rushed to her legs sending pinpricks of pain shooting through her lower extremities. The footsteps stopped at her door. A young boy, no more than twelve stepped in, placed a plate of food and a mug on the floor along with a lantern then retreated.

The light hit Morgan's face. Blood caked his cuts and bruises. His face was so swollen she almost didn't recognize him. His hair was loose and tangled and matted with dried blood.

"Morgan?" She shook him lightly and he groaned. "Morgan, wake up."

He struggled to sit up, pressing his arm against his ribs and wincing with each tiny move. She tried to help him, but he waved her away.

She held up the plate of biscuits. "Food."

She dunked a hard biscuit in the beer and held it out to him. He looked at their surroundings. The room was larger than she first thought and carefully cleaned out. There was nothing here. No straw, no forgotten barrels, no exit except for the door they'd been brought through. It was obvious Barun prepared this place to hold his captives.

"Where are we?" Morgan asked.

"On the *Bhaya*."

He took the biscuit she kept shoving at him and bit down, watching her with a narrowed eye. "I know that," he said, sounding more like the old Morgan. "I mean where are we headed?"

She shrugged. "I don't know."

He finished his biscuit and scooted back slowly until he was resting against the wall. His eyes drifted closed. He jerked his head, but eventually he lost the fight and nodded off.

Juliana took his hand and squeezed, willing her strength into him. Time passed and the steady up-and-down motion of the ship lulled her to sleep. However, even in sleep she had to touch her husband, afraid if she let go for even a moment he would slip away forever.

Another set of footsteps outside their door had her jerking awake. She scrambled to her feet, placing herself in front of Morgan. The door opened, a crack at first, then wider until John slipped in. He studied Morgan slumped against the wall unconscious, and turned tortured eyes to Juliana.

"I didn't know," he whispered.

She didn't feel sorry for him, not after what he'd done and not even for the reasons he did it.

"He wants t' see you." John's gaze fell on his former captain.

Juliana clutched fistfuls of her skirt, willing herself to breath. "Who wants to see me?"

"Barun. I'm to take you to him."

Her heart beat erratically and her stomach churned. As much as she didn't want to leave Morgan alone, afraid of him slipping quietly away from her, she couldn't ignore this summons.

She sank to her heels in front of Morgan, pushing his hair away from his face. "I love you." She brushed a kiss across his lips and one across his forehead before pressing her cheek to his. Tears pricked the back of her eyes but she blinked them away.

"We have to hurry," John said. "You don't want to make him angry."

Her anger flickered then died. They were on the ocean sailing to only God knew where. Right now they were at his mercy until she thought of a way to free them. She stood and with one last lingering look at Morgan, walked out of their prison.

John led her across the forecastle, up the quarterdeck and down a short flight of steps to the captain's cabin. Surreptitiously, she looked around but saw only endless miles of churning, pewter gray sea. Land was long gone and not another ship in sight. Some part of her had hoped and prayed Isabelle would come after them in a daring rescue attempt. But she was alone, a twenty-first century woman fighting an eighteenth-century evil with no weapon and no means of escape.

Far too soon they reached the door to Barun's cabin.

Before knocking, John turned to Juliana. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I didn't know."

"And that makes what you did acceptable? If you're looking for forgiveness, you won't find it here."

His blue eyes flared with pain and she felt an unwanted glimmer of sympathy. She placed a hand on John's arm. "Do you know for certain Andrew is alive? Did Barun provide proof he has your brother?"

He lowered his lids and when he raised them again there was determination in his eyes. "I had to do what I could."

Against her will, she understood. Barun was an evil man, using a combination of brute force, fear and mental manipulation to get people to do what he wanted. They were effective weapons, but Barun didn't corner the market on mental manipulation. Juliana learned at the knee of an expert. Her mother.

She smoothed her skirts and squared her shoulders then nodded to John.

When she stepped across the threshold, a strange combination of anticipation and apprehension settled in her stomach.

Barun waved her forward. "Sit down, please." He pulled a chair out for her and she sat, eyeing him skeptically as she folded her hands in her lap.

Barun paced behind the desk, chuckling to himself every once in a while. He waved his hand in the air, *a la* Vanna White, indicating an old sword lying across his desk.

The Holy Lance. A piece of history that promised great things to those who owned it. It wasn't shiny like Morgan's beloved cutlass. It had no engraved hilt or fancy scrollwork.

"I wanted you to see what my slave took such a severe beating for." Barun rested his hip on the front of his desk. "I also wanted you to see that no one, not even the revered Morgan, can hold out against me when I want something." Barun leaned forward until she could smell the rum on his breath and the heavy cologne seeping from his pores.

"I want you, Juliana. I want you by my side when I take my rightful place as ruler of the Indian Ocean. As I conquer new lands, I want you with me."

Tears of frustration burned the back of her throat. *Crying, Juliana?* Her mother's words mocked her, echoing through centuries, giving her the strength she needed.

You have your own weapon, Juliana. Use it.

She stared at the lance, hating it. Hating that a piece of metal held her life in the balance.

Barun watched her, as if trying to read her inner thoughts, dig into her brain and discover her secrets. If this man knew her secrets, discovered when and where she was born and lived her entire life he would tumble into a void far beyond the insanity he now lived.

He paced around her chair, tightening the circle with each rotation. She felt cornered, stalked. *Exactly what he wants you to feel.*

She knew what she had to do. Saying the words, however, proved difficult. "Why do you want me by your side?"

"Because, *sanam*, you are different from the women of my country. Your beauty far surpasses any I have encountered."

"What about Morgan?"

"What about him?"

"I'm married to him. I carry his name." *I may even be carrying his child.* The shocking thought came from nowhere and instinctively her hand covered her abdomen in an age-old protective fashion. Her mind raced with new questions and she began counting back, but the dates were all jumbled in her head. She definitely hadn't had her period while in the eighteenth century, but did the dates line up with the twenty-first?

What if she were carrying Morgan's child?

Barun was watching her closely and she schooled her features, hiding the shock she was feeling inside. This changed everything if she were. Suddenly everything took on new meaning and a much greater urgency because deep down she knew she was carrying Morgan's child. She'd been here well over a month and they'd made love enough times to conceive. With difficulty she pulled her attention back to the conversation.

"You can't ignore our marriage," she said.

"Morgan is a slave now. Your marriage is no longer valid."

She stomped down on her anger. No longer valid? Of course it was still valid. He wasn't God. He didn't have the authority to annul a marriage. She pretended to consider that logic, then gave him what she hoped was a sly look. "What kind of riches will you give me?"

Barun paused. She'd changed tactics too soon, hadn't pretended to think about it long enough. An error on her part.

"Anything. Everything," he said.

"Everything?" She laughed, but the sound was too shrill and she quickly cut it off before he recognized her anxiety. "What if I wanted the moon?"

He stepped up to her and took her chin in his hand. It took every bit of willpower not to jerk away, to look deep into the bottomless cavern of his soulless black eyes. "I will give you the moon, *sanam*."

She closed her eyes briefly and let the tears she'd been holding back leak out. "I'm tired," she whispered. "So tired, Sanjit. I just want this all to stop." That wasn't a lie.

He drew in a breath when she spoke his given name and his hand on her chin trembled. "I can stop it, Juliana. I can make it all go away. Let me help you. Let me take care of you."

She almost believed him. Almost succumbed to his smooth words and the determination and truth in his eyes. He would make it all go away. He truly believed that with him, her life would be complete.

She looked up at him knowing the tears made her eyes appear greener, more luminous, hoping it would work on him. "Will you? Will you really take care of me?"

His expression softened and for the first time there was real emotion there. A possessiveness that made her want to shudder in revulsion. She would be his, but she would always be a prisoner. Never free. "Always, Juliana."

She hated the sound of her name coming from his lips. "May I ask one thing of you, then?"

The possessiveness was met with triumph. She felt the trap closing and wondered who was being trapped.

“You have but to name it and it is yours.”

She took a deep breath. “I would like to treat Morgan’s wounds. I want clean water, clean rags, bedding and decent food.”

Barun’s hand tightened on her chin until she feared her jaw would crack under the pressure. She pressed her lips together to keep from crying out but tears of pain sprang to her eyes. He let go and walked around his desk to sit in his chair. He studied her for a long time, his fingers steeped under his chin.

“Why do you ask such things for a slave?” He spit the word out and his features twisted into such revulsion she was taken aback. What had Morgan ever done to this man to inspire such hatred?

“What good is he injured and dying?” She stood and walked around the room, feeling his gaze bore into her. She’d learned the art of lying as a child and she’d become an expert at it. She hadn’t had to lie in a long time and hoped she wasn’t too rusty.

“He’s a strong man, a strong back to row your ships.” She turned, leaned against a small table and crossed her arms beneath her breasts.

She was playing with fire. Knew it the moment she saw his gaze drop to her breasts nearly spilling out of her gown and he balled his hands into fists. She took a deep breath, the action pushing her breasts higher. Barun swallowed.

“Give me five days alone with him and he will be good as new. He will be a useful slave after that.”

“In those five days you will meet with me every day,” he said, his gaze still trained on her breasts.

She hesitated. “Meet with you how?” Not to have sex, please God, not to have sex.

He shrugged and raised his gaze to hers. He wasn’t nearly as taken with her breasts as she thought because there was calculation in his eyes and a smile across his face.

On the way back to the hold, Juliana leaned over the side of the ship and threw up.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Five days. Five days to heal Morgan. Five days to be his wife. Five days before she had to give herself to Barun. That was the bargain she struck. Five days for her body. She tried not to think about it but it was a constant loop in her head. *Five days, five days, five days.*

In return, Barun sent clean rags, clean water, bedding and decent food.

Juliana wrung the water out of the cloth. Morgan's face was a roadmap of cuts and dried blood. What did the rest of his body look like?

Somehow in the little time they had together, she'd have to make him better and find a way to escape the Bhaya. The thought alone was daunting and damn near impossible considering there was nowhere to go in the middle of the ocean. And what about the baby? Should she tell Morgan what she suspected? She shook her head, as if she were answering herself. No. He didn't need that pressure right now. Not when he needed all his strength to heal. He would worry and push himself to get better. It was best if she told him later. When they were free.

But what if they never got free? What if, after five days, she still hadn't thought of a way to get them out of this? What if she was forced to meet her end of the bargain?

What if Barun discovered she was pregnant?

Cold terror slithered up her spine and she shuddered, closing her mind to all possibilities except one. Escape.

It was up to her to save them all. The burden was heavy on her shoulders but she would bear it. For Morgan. And for their child.

He moaned periodically and she began to talk, mostly from nerves but also to calm Morgan when he became too restless or when she hurt him too much while cleaning him up.

His ribcage was black and blue and swollen. She ripped strips from her underskirt and wrapped them tightly around his ribs, hoping they were merely bruised. The worst damage had been done to his right knee. She had to swallow a few times to keep from throwing up again. His knee was swollen to twice its size and every time she moved it he moaned. If by some twist of fate she found a way to escape, how was Morgan going to climb the stairs or swim if he couldn't even bend his knee?

She sat back on her heels and dropped the bloodied, wet rag in the pink-tinged water. Her back ached but she still wasn't finished.

She spread the bedding out on the floor, making pillows out of the extra blankets. She should have asked for clean clothes, but was frankly stunned she received what she had. Never in a million years had she expected Barun to agree to her demands. Even the five days were four more than she'd hoped for. Something in the back of her mind told her Barun had given in too easily. Something was up but at the moment she didn't have the energy to explore what.

Morgan woke when she tried to move him to his new bed. Against her objections, he stood, his legs unsteady. Juliana grabbed him around the waist to help him balance. He leaned heavily on her, giving testimony to how much pain he was in. The fury boiling just below her surface bubbled to the top. She'd been thinking about escape these last hours but she hadn't discounted the notion of killing Barun. The thought was still foremost in her mind and right now, seeing how much pain Morgan was in, the need to kill Barun was almost overpowering.

"Sit down before you fall down," she said.

Morgan managed to sit and closed his eyes in exhaustion. How was she to get him whole again in five measly days when he needed weeks and far better medical attention than she had at her disposal?

He opened his eyes and looked at her in defeat and pain. She took his hand in hers and tried to hide her fear. He didn't know about her bargain and she planned to keep it from him.

"Tell me where it hurts."

He chuckled, then grimaced. "Where doesn't it hurt?"

"Is anything broken?"

"I don't think so."

"Ribs?"

He took a careful, deep breath. "Just bruised." Morgan looked around the room, at the small lamp in the corner, the blankets spread on the floor. "Where did you get all this?"

"Barun sent it."

He raised an eyebrow and looked at her skeptically. "Barun?"

She nodded, her eyes sliding away.

"Juliana?" He waited until she looked at him again. "Why would Barun do this?"

She shrugged, unable to meet his gaze. Saying she was going to keep her secret from him was a whole lot different than actually doing it.

"Juliana, what have you done?" he whispered.

"Nothing." She flipped her wrist to look at her watch, before she remembered she didn't have a watch. Barun said he would send for her after dinner and she wanted Morgan fast asleep before then.

She needn't have worried about Morgan. After standing for a few moments, walking to his makeshift bed and eating a good portion of dinner, he fell into a deep sleep.

She hated to see her beloved warrior so defeated. It was up to her to save them and that's what she was doing with this plan. Maybe. Truth be told, she had no clue what she was doing. Flying by the seat of her pants would be a better definition.

John came to collect her minutes after Morgan fell asleep, as if he'd been waiting for his ex-captain to nod off before opening the door. Like last time John stared at Morgan. Guilt rode heavy on him and she had no problem playing on his guilt for her own purposes.

"I'm doing all I can, John, but I need help," she said quietly so as not to wake Morgan. "We need weapons—"

"I can't." He was clearly horrified at the thought of helping them. It was a knee-jerk reaction to his fear of Barun. Juliana understood, but it wasn't any easier to accept and she refused to let it defeat her.

"Please, John. I know you feel bad for what you've done to him. You can atone for that by helping us now."

His gaze darted around the room as if he feared Barun was lurking in the corners, listening. It wouldn't surprise her if he was but it didn't stop her either.

She checked on Morgan one last time before exiting their prison and prayed he wouldn't wake up while she was gone.

John took her to the room she'd been kept in the other day, the luxuriously appointed gilded cage. She stopped before entering, her feet unwilling to take her all the way inside. What was this about? He promised her five days but she was well aware he didn't have to keep his promise.

"Why are we here?"

"He wants you to change." John nodded to a gown spread over the opulent bed. Made of a deep maroon silk with intricate gold stitching, it was by far the most gorgeous piece of clothing she'd ever seen.

She spun around to walk away. She would not do it. She would not wear that dress. Slowly Barun was making her into what he wanted her to be and she was losing part of herself each time. She refused to give up pieces of herself to that madman.

John caught her arm before she made it two steps. "What are you doing?" he whispered. "You have to go in there and put it on."

She shook her head, too furious to speak. But deep down she knew John was right. She'd begun this game and she had to finish it.

She looked down at her ruined gown now faded to a dull green and stained with grass and dirt and blood. Her first ball gown, the gown she wore to celebrate her marriage. The thought of substituting the dress Morgan bought for this dress was repulsive.

It's only a dress. A piece of cloth. And it was part of his game. *Play the game, Juliana.*

Defeated, she stepped into the room and John closed the door behind her.

She cried when she took her ball gown off, carefully folded it and lovingly placed it on the bed. She ran her hands down the torn and stained fabric, remembering when she put it on, watching Morgan try to tie his cravat while grumbling and complaining. Blinking back her tears, she turned to the red dress.

Barun knew women's garments. This dress didn't need the assistance of a maid and sooner than she would have liked, she was ready to go. How was she going to explain her change of clothes to Morgan? It was one thing to lie about the bedding and food but this was going to take some ingenuous explaining on her part.

John was waiting for her when she opened the door. Instead of turning right when exiting the cabin, he turned left. A few yards from Barun's room, he stopped and spun Juliana around by her arm. His fingers bit into her upper arm and she winced. "Barun's not a man to play games with, my lady."

"I'm well aware this isn't a game, John."

He released her arm. His brows dipped in confusion. "Then why are you doing it?"

She took a step back and held her arms out. "Look at me. I'm no better than his whore! This is what it has come to, John." She dropped her arms. "But it doesn't have to be this way. Help me. Help us."

He looked away, a muscle working in his jaw.

"Please," she whispered.

When he didn't answer she touched his arm. "You're a good man, John. I know because you're willing to do what it takes to save your brother. But at what price? Barun is going to kill Morgan and what will become of me? Is it worth it? Is your brother's life worth sacrificing so many other lives?"

He backed up a few paces. "I did what I had to."

Juliana stared at him for several pounding heartbeats of silence, then nodded once. "And I'm doing what I have to. Now, Barun is waiting for me and we don't want to keep him waiting, do we?"

John hesitated. It looked like he wanted to say more but instead he turned and walked down the hall. Juliana hurried to catch up. When they reached Barun's cabin they both hesitated. What she was doing worried John. Good. She'd use that to her advantage. She'd use whatever it took to escape. He looked at her a long time before finally knocking on the door and opening it. Juliana paused, glanced at John, then stepped through.

He was waiting for her, standing beside a table filled with a vast amount of food. Food she knew she wouldn't be able to eat.

Barun's eyes lit up as soon as he saw her but she was far from flattered. His look was predatory and it made her stomach cramp.

"You are beautiful," he said as he pulled a chair out for her. "Exquisite."

She took the seat so she wouldn't have to face him. Small victories. It was the small that would keep her going. That and being with Morgan at night. "Thank you for the lovely gown."

“A lovely gown for a lovely lady.” He took her hand and kissed her knuckles as he stared into her eyes. Juliana forced herself to look at him.

“It was a relief to get out of the other filthy gown.” Beneath the table her free hand tightened into a fist but she kept her expression serene.

He smiled and seated himself next to her. So close their elbows were touching. She didn’t move for fear of giving herself away.

“Eat,” he said.

Barun watched her closely as she put bite after bite into her mouth, chewed and swallowed, while he ate very little. Her stomach churned but she willed the food down, knowing as soon as she left his presence she’d throw it all up. She noticed more and more even the pitch and sway of the ship made her nauseous.

She put her fork down and sat back. “I can’t possibly eat another bite.”

Barun settled into his chair and lit a cigar without even asking her permission. Juliana thought of Patrick and the endless cigarettes he never lit. “Fire,” he’d said. Juliana knew firsthand how fire destroyed a ship and no doubt Barun did as well.

The cigar smoke curled around his head and drifted to her. Her stomach lurched and she swallowed, afraid she would be sick.

“Tell me, *sanam*, why the sudden change of heart?”

“Excuse me?” Her eyes watered and it was hard to see him through the smoke. Plus it took every bit of her willpower to force the food back into her stomach.

He turned the cigar and stared at the glowing tip. “At night, I do not sleep well and when I do not sleep, I tend to think.” He raised his dark, fathomless gaze to hers. “Mostly I think of you. Lately, I wonder about you.”

Juliana kept her gaze steady, tried to keep her heart from hammering out of her chest. He was playing with her, and unfortunately she had no idea in which direction this game had just turned. “And what is it you wonder, Sanjit?”

“Many things, my sweet.”

She leaned forward. The cut of the dress made it easy for him to see down her bodice. Something she was sure was deliberate. His gaze strayed to her bosom, then back to her face. No emotion. No flicker of lust. He was remarkably self-controlled and incredibly hard to read.

“You escaped me once, *sanam*. You were very determined to leave me. Going as far as injuring me in the process. I can’t help but wonder what is different. Why are you cooperating now?”

She hesitated. Which direction was the right direction to go? Play on her fear? Appear to be after his money? If only she could read his expressions or his body language. But he was deceptively sprawled in his chair, ankle crossed over a knee, cigar dangling from his fingers. No expression on his face except curiosity. Nothing in his eyes to indicate what he was thinking.

She adopted his tone and his body language and shrugged. "Things change," she said. "What I had once thought of as an opportunity isn't so much anymore."

"Meaning?"

She leaned back in her chair and folded her hands over her churning belly. "Have you ever seen two deer fight?"

He shook his head and took a drag off the cigar. The tip flamed bright red then dimmed.

"Once, when I was a child, I saw two bucks fight. They were impressive with their large racks. And very violent. They were fighting for supremacy over a doe. Whoever won got the female. They fought for a long time, their antlers crashing into each other over and over again. They were breathing hard. The doe had no choice. It mattered little what she wanted. You and Morgan are like those two bucks. Whoever wins gets the girl and the girl doesn't have a say. Obviously you have defeated Morgan. I know a winner when I see one."

He stared at her for a long time as he puffed on his cigar. It was hard not to squirm under his direct gaze.

"You have no feelings for the slave?" He reached over and took her hand. He placed it on the table before them and covered it with his. It took every bit of self-control to keep from snatching her hand back.

"No. No feelings."

"And you understand I can provide better for you than the slave?"

"Yes."

He turned her hand over palm up and shoved the burning tip of his cigar into her flesh. She screamed. Her body convulsed. The smell of burnt skin gagged her. She tried pulling her hand away but his hold was bruising. Smoke rose from her skin and her screams rose with it.

Finally, he pulled the cigar away. She leaned over and threw up. Barun sat back in his chair, watching her with expressionless eyes and puffing on his cigar.

Juliana's vision dimmed and through sheer force of will, she kept herself conscious. The stench of burning flesh and vomit overrode the aroma of the sweet smell of his cigar and caused her stomach to cramp.

"That is my brand," he said calmly. "From now on you will know you belong to me. Do you understand?"

She cradled her hand close to her stomach and curled her body over it. Tears poured out of her eyes, her sobs coming from deep within.

John was suddenly there, beside her. She didn't remember seeing him enter but he gently took her arm and helped her stand. Her legs shook and she had to lean on him as they left Barun's cabin.

"What the hell did he do to you?" John asked as soon as the door closed behind them.

She shook her head. "Up top. T-take me up top. Please."

Her knees buckled and he took the majority of her weight, practically carrying her up the steps. The pain was excruciating. She wanted to beg him to cut her hand off. As soon as they reached topside, she slid to the deck and sat with her head bowed, riding the waves of pain, waiting for the throbbing to ease. John fetched a bucket of clean water and put her hand in it. She didn't scream but she wanted to. She felt the ship tilt and everything went black. She awoke when John splashed her face with water.

"We can't stay here," he said urgently. "I need to get you back to the hold before Barun finds us." He wrapped a clean cloth around her hand and tied it into a makeshift bandage, and led her down to the hold. The trip was nothing but a path of pain and nausea.

Morgan was awake when she returned. Quickly she pulled away from John although it took all her strength to do it. John closed the door and she heard the lock turn.

"You shouldn't be up," she said, surprised her voice was strong.

"Where were you?"

She could lie, but found she didn't have the energy for it. Besides, she didn't want lies between them. Barun had taken enough away, she refused to let him rob them of their trust with one another. "I had dinner with Barun in exchange for supplies to heal you."

He made a strangled sound, his expression as close to frozen horror as she'd ever seen.

"Trust me. Okay? I know what I'm doing."

His gaze landed on her bandaged hand. He lifted it, sending a fresh wave of pain through her. Her vision dimmed again and she stood still, waiting for it to pass. Morgan, of course, didn't miss any of her reaction.

"What the hell did he do to you?"

She opened her mouth to tell him but the words wouldn't form. It was too horrifying. Slowly he unwrapped the bandage. His face paled at the perfect circle in the middle of her palm, red and raw and oozing.

"Oh, Juliana." He kissed her fingers, and looked up at her with tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

She touched his cheek with her uninjured hand. "It's nothing compared to what he did to you."

He let go of her, spun around and slammed his hand against the wall. "I feel like such a goddamn invalid. I can't even protect my wife." He rubbed his hands over his face and groaned. He dropped his hands and looked at her with a pain that went far beyond his injuries.

"Look at you," she said. "You can barely walk. You can barely see because your face is so swollen. Let me do what I can."

"I'm supposed to take care of you. Not the other way around!"

"You really are an eighteenth-century man, aren't you? Don't forget, Morgan, I didn't grow up in this time. I can take care of myself. I can take care of both of us."

He lifted her injured hand. The wound throbbed in beat to her racing heart. "Is this what you call taking care of us? This is just the beginning. It will get worse, trust me."

She had no doubt he was right and it scared the crap out of her, but she had to do what she had to do to keep them alive. "I'm working on John, trying to convince him to help us."

Morgan made a low sound in his throat. "John was the bloody traitor! He burned my ship, killed four men in the process and led Barun straight to us. I wouldn't trust him with anything."

"You haven't seen him, Morgan. He feels guilty, and I'm working on that guilt. I think I can turn him to our side."

He pressed his lips together and for the first time looked at her gown. He was pale before but now he was gray. "Your dress." The words were choked, forced out.

"Clothes aren't important right now."

"Tell me you haven't... He hasn't..."

"No." She took a step closer to him. "Never, Morgan."

"Then what are you doing? What games are you playing?"

"I'm walking the deck with him, having dinner with him in payment for the bedding, decent food and clean water. That's all."

"He'll want more. He won't be happy with that for long. Then what will you do?"

He was voicing her own fears and she didn't have an answer. "I'm all we have. You have to trust me with this."

"Damn you, Juliana, don't do this to yourself. To us. I love you. I'd rather you die than give yourself to that man."

"Trust me," she whispered. "Until you heal, until there's another way, this is the best chance we have."

He turned and paced away. Slowly she sank to the floor and gingerly held her throbbing hand close to her while Morgan walked. A long time passed. Her eyes were growing heavy, the pain diminishing to a dull throb. She wanted nothing more than to crawl into Morgan's arms and sleep.

She knew Morgan wouldn't like her plan, but it never occurred to her he might not like her after it was all done and over.

When he finally looked at her, his face was slick with sweat and he was breathing deeply. Where there had once been desperation in his expression, now there was fury. "I will get well," he declared softly. "I will heal and then I will kill the son of a bitch."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

“Did he hurt you?”

Morgan was leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest, bruised face closed from all expression. He’d been asleep when she left to go to Barun—or had been pretending to sleep, at least—and she’d hoped he would be asleep now. “No.”

“How’s your hand?” He pushed away from the wall.

“Getting better.” Lie. But this was what it had come to between them, lies and evasions. She was so tired, so weary of it. She wanted Morgan to hold her, was irrationally angry and emotionally drained. She’d pushed her body to the limit and then some and it was giving out on her. She was endangering everything but she couldn’t stop now.

He took her hand and unwound the bandage. Juliana swallowed her useless, stupid tears. Their time was up. Four days had passed. Barun would be coming for her tomorrow and she didn’t want to spend the rest of their time living in stilted silence, angry at Morgan.

He studied the burn on her hand, washed it with what little clean water they had left and re-banded it. “It’s not healing as well as it should,” he said, tying it closed. “You need to eat better.”

“There seems to be a lack of fruits and vegetables on this cruise ship.”

One corner of his mouth lifted in a semblance of a smile. “We should demand our money back.”

Tears sprang to her eyes and she blinked them away. This was what she missed, the camaraderie, the closeness. “I miss you, Morgan.”

“I’m right here.”

“Are you?”

He dropped her hand. “What do you want me to do, Juliana? Pretend everything’s okay? Pretend my wife isn’t sneaking out at night to meet another man?”

“It’s not like that and you know it. I’m doing the best I can, but I need you. I need you to help me. Support me. Tell me what to do.”

He looked away and blew out a breath. His chest rose and fell as if he were controlling his own tears. “I’m as lost as you are.”

The words cost him. Ate at his self-esteem, eroded his dignity. He should be the one rescuing them and he was helpless and hurt. Useless, he had to be thinking.

“Did he hurt you?” he asked again.

"No." Not this time and not since he branded her. In fact, Barun had been the perfect gentlemen when they were together but that didn't make her less on edge. It made things worse because she knew it couldn't last. Eventually he would turn on her again. It was in his nature.

"What do you see? When you're up top? Land?"

She shook her head. "Nothing."

"And his crew? What are they like?"

She thought back, pictured Barun's crew. "They're scared. He's not a nice captain. They won't look at me. And will only look at him if he speaks to them. There're no sea shanties being sung like there is on your ship. No laughter."

"No hope from that quarter," he said.

"No. Maybe John. If I can convince him."

"He won't help. He wants to save his brother."

"Do you think Barun even has his brother?"

Morgan put his hands on his hips and she was happy to see the desperation, the helplessness gone, at least for the moment. He was moving easier. Even the swelling in his knee had gone down and he could bend it a little more. "I don't know. But it's taking too long to convince John. What about weapons?"

"Most of the crew have daggers, but not pistols. Barun carries the lance everywhere with him. Never lets it out of his sight."

"And John? Does he carry a weapon?"

"No." She sighed in frustration. "Not when he comes to get me."

Morgan nodded, his eyes far away.

"Are you thinking of staging a coup?" she asked. "Leading a mutiny?"

He grinned. "It has possibilities, but I don't think it will work."

No. She'd thought that too.

"Our best bet is to wait until we reach land, but we don't have that much time, do we, Juliana?"

She met his unflinching gaze. How had he known? "No," she whispered.

"How much time do we have left?"

She closed her eyes in pain. "Tomorrow. He's coming for me tomorrow."

He made a low sound and when she opened her eyes, he'd turned away from her.

"Is this how it ends?" she asked softly. "Have we both traveled hundreds of years, found each other again, to have it end like this?"

He hung his head and rubbed his eyes, his back still to her. When he turned around, his eyes were moist with tears. "I'd like to say no. I'd like to storm out of this goddamn room and kill the bastard for you."

She squared her shoulders as an idea took shape. "Then let's do it."

He blinked and stared at her for the longest time. "Do what?"

"Let's get out of this room and kill the bastard. What's the use in waiting?"

"There are at least a hundred men out there loyal to him who would kill us in a heartbeat."

"And if we stay? If we wait for him to come get me? What happens then? I'd rather die fighting."

For the first time, there was hope in his eyes. "We could overpower John. You said he doesn't come with a weapon."

"We would need a weapon."

"Not necessarily." He flexed his fingers. Was he thinking of killing with those hands?

"We can't sail this ship by ourselves," she said.

"No. But we could steal a tender."

"We're days from any land."

"Isabelle will find us."

"Isabelle? How do you know she'll find us?"

"Because I told her what happened."

Juliana blinked. "What'd you do, call her on the telephone?"

He laughed and told her about Patrick showing up on the lawn outside the ball. "When Barun threatened your life I told Patrick we were sailing on the *Thomas* to Isabelle's home on Barbados. The *Thomas* sailed several weeks earlier, and Isabelle doesn't have a home in Barbados. Reed was forced to sell it after she was injured. I took a chance Patrick would understand the message and realize we were in trouble."

"Do you think she understood?"

"I hope so." His looked turned serious and he reached for her good hand, held it tightly in his. "I didn't tell you because I didn't want to get your hopes up. We have to be realistic, Juliana. Our chances of making it out alive are slim. The chances of Isabelle finding us are even slimmer. The ocean is large, a mile in either direction and she may not see Barun's ship."

She squeezed back. "I'd rather die fighting," she repeated. "I'd rather die with you beside me than at Barun's hands."

"Tomorrow night, then. When John comes for you." He tried to pull away but she tightened her hold on him.

"There's something you should know. Something I need to tell you."

His face paled and his lips thinned. "He...hurt you, didn't he? Ah, God, Juliana, did he rape you?"

She shook her head. "No. Nothing like that." She looked away and gathered her courage. "Promise you'll stick to our plan even after I tell you."

"Juliana, damn it, tell me."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I'm pregnant."

His hand went slack in hers. She saw his Adam's apple bob when he took a swallow and what little color had been left in his face drained. She knew his thoughts probably mirrored hers. They were going to have a baby and they probably weren't going to survive.

He pulled her against him, held her tight and rocked her. Juliana buried her face in his shoulder and cried. His muscles were like rocks, strung tight with emotion he wouldn't let go. So she let go for both of them and when he pulled away, his face was set with determination.

"Then we'd better make sure we get out of this alive," he said.

Morgan held Juliana through the night. As soon as they lay down, she'd fallen into an exhausted sleep, yet sleep wouldn't come for him so he held her and watched her. He even prayed a little. But mostly he thought. Of their plan. Of the baby.

My God. A baby. He should have known. Should have seen the signs—the sickness, the weight loss. He rubbed his chin against the top of her head and closed his eyes. His hand cupped her belly where their baby grew. Safe. But not safe if Barun found out. The thought turned his stomach and he felt a fierce protectiveness toward this tiny, fragile life.

He had more to fight for now. As if Juliana wasn't enough, now he had their child's life to fight for. Hope. He thought he'd lost it, but Juliana had given it back.

Even if they didn't survive he would have this moment. His family.

He turned his head and rested his cheek against her hair. She breathed deep and snuggled closer. His family.

She shuddered and he rubbed her arms until she stopped trembling. Dawn was approaching. He could tell by the noises coming from above. Not much more time before John came for her. Before their plan was put into action. He felt a mixture of anticipation and trepidation. And a great deal of satisfaction that he was at least doing something instead of sitting around useless.

But the painful truth was he was no match against Barun. Not now. In a few weeks, a month, maybe. They would have to be quick. In and out. Kill him and get on the tender. Row fast. In the dark, before anyone knew they were missing. John would be the first to suspect, but Morgan was hoping the man would understand and keep his mouth shut. At least until they were far enough away.

It could work. If luck and time were on their side.

The door flew open and banged against the wall. Morgan jumped to his feet, pulling a groggy Juliana behind him.

Barun stood in the open doorway. Automatically Morgan reached for his cutlass but it wasn't there.

"No," Juliana whispered. Then louder, "No!"

Morgan's stomach knotted. Not now. They wouldn't be able to escape in the light of day.

"You agreed, *sanam*."

Juliana clung to Morgan and he felt her body tremble against his. John wasn't in the room. Where was he? What had Barun done to him?

"One more day," she begged Barun. "Please give me a day. I'll go with you after that. I promise."

Barun stepped closer and Morgan shoved Juliana farther behind him.

Barun's mouth turned down into a sneer. "Protecting the slave, *sanam*? What is this?" He flicked a derisive glance at Morgan. "What happened to the woman who has been with me the last several evenings?" Barun leered, his words meant to indicate they had done more than dine together and walk the deck. Morgan refused to give the man the satisfaction of a reaction.

The lance was tucked beneath Barun's arm and his fingers played with the hilt as he eyed Morgan but spoke to Juliana. "Have you been fooling me, *sanam*? Pretending your affections while plotting behind my back?"

Morgan heard her small gasp and prayed Barun hadn't. But the man narrowed his eyes and Morgan knew yet another prayer had gone unanswered.

With a battle cry that bounced off the walls, Morgan lunged for Barun. The man side-stepped and hit him against the side of his head with the flat end of the lance. Morgan stumbled and went down on one knee. The second blow toppled him over and the stars dancing before his eyes went black.

"No!" Juliana dropped to her knees beside Morgan.

Hands grabbed her around the middle and pulled her back. She fought. Desperately, she fought to get to her husband.

Barun's fingers dug deep into her waist and she was hauled away. She screamed Morgan's name as she kicked, not caring anymore about the games she'd been playing or the deals she made. The door closed, locking Morgan on the other side. Barun put her down and her legs gave out as she reached for the closed door. Barun dragged her away by her arm but before she left, she caught a glimpse of John in the shadows.

"John!" She reached for him. "John, please. Help us." Barun pushed her down the corridor and she frantically looked over her shoulder. "John!" she screamed. "Please," she begged. "Help," she whispered as she was dragged away.

Barun took her to the gilded cabin and shoved her into the room. She stumbled, hit her head on the bedpost and wrapped her arms around it to keep from falling over. She felt drained, exhausted. Malnutrition and the near constant nausea from the baby had all taken its toll. She tried to summon the energy to fight, knew this was her last chance. Somehow she had to make it back to Morgan, save him, save herself. Get off the ship.

Stick to the plan. She could hear Morgan's voice in her head. *Stick to the plan, Juliana. Fight. Kill him if you have to.*

Barun's smile was cruel, vicious. "You are my wife now, *sanam*. You will do as I say. I never want to hear the slave's name again, not even in your thoughts." He stepped closer until his breath blew against her neck. "And I will know your thoughts."

He squeezed her throat, cutting off her air. She gasped and pulled on his wrist. His forearm trembled with the pressure. The veins in his forehead popped out. What sanity had been in his eyes was gone and in them she saw death.

The room dimmed. She heard herself gurgling, but it was a far-off sound. She fought to stay alert, to draw in another breath. His fingers dug into her skin and then suddenly he released her. The air whooshed back into her lungs. She doubled over, dragging in one lungful after another until her vision returned.

"That was for thinking of the slave. You will not think of him again. And you will pay for lying to me all these days."

He squeezed her breast. She flinched. His other hand squeezed her other breast and she averted her eyes.

Her gaze darted around the room, looking at anything but Barun and his hands on her body. His cold fingers plunged into the bodice of her gown. She shivered and bit her lip to keep from crying out. He yanked the bodice down. The flimsy material ripped and she was exposed from her shoulders to her waist. She reached behind her, wrapped her arms around the bedpost and closed her eyes, trying to take her mind to a different place.

He bit her neck. His lips seared her, scorching her skin. Hers trembled and she realized she was about to cry.

Crying, Juliana? She blinked the tears away and thought of sunflowers and lazy summer afternoons, of bees flying between the flowers, of the sound of children's voices raised in play. Of pink jump ropes with green handles and blond-haired boys with skinned knees.

Morgan opened his eyes but all he saw was gray smoke. No. Not smoke. He blinked and slowly things started to focus. He was staring at the wall of the damn prison Barun was keeping him in. His head pounded like a son of a bitch and he groaned, closing his eyes again. But they flew open when he remembered why his head hurt. Juliana. Barun had taken Juliana away.

Quickly he rolled onto his hands and knees, but that made the dizziness worse. He hung his head waiting for it to pass.

When he looked up, John was standing in front of him.

"You bastard." Morgan lunged and shoved John against the wall, his forearm across the man's neck. John pulled on Morgan's arms as his face went red, then white and his lips turned blue.

"I should kill you right now." He pushed harder. "Right here." John's eyes widened. "Where's Juliana?"

The man gurgled and Morgan eased the pressure. “Barun took her to his cabin.”

Morgan stepped back and noticed the door to his prison was open.

“I brought your dagger and a cutlass.” John pointed to the weapons lying on the floor. “She couldn’t... I couldn’t...” John swallowed. “She screamed.” His eyes were haunted. Scared, but determined. “I can’t do it anymore. He has her. He has her and—”

“And you need to help us.” Morgan interrupted. “Take me to her.”

Barun’s hand slid up Juliana’s skirt and touched her thigh. She closed her eyes, fought the bile clogging her throat and clutched the bedpost behind her. A whimper bubbled up, threatened to escape but she swallowed it.

He reached the juncture of her thighs and her eyes snapped open. Barun was all but panting now, his eyes glazed and unfocused. It was the first time she’d ever seen him without the tight control he usually exhibited and she knew this was her moment. Maybe the only moment she would get. She looked around the room, trying to find any sort of weapon.

And then she saw it. The Holy Lance lying in the middle of the bed, thrown there by Barun and all but forgotten by him. She glanced back as he dipped his head and kissed the tip of her breast.

With all of her strength she shoved him away. He stumbled back, his hands ripped from beneath her gown, his lips wet. He looked confused. She reached behind her, grabbed the lance and raised it high.

He had no time to duck, no time to even lift his arms in self-defense. She thrust it down and the lance sank into his shoulder, hitting bone and muscle with a sickening crunch that made her shudder. Blood spurted from the cut but she closed her mind to it and continued to plunge the lance into him until she didn’t have the strength to push any more.

Barun opened his mouth, his hands scrambling for the hilt. She pushed him away and watched, a part of her horrified at what she was seeing and what she’d done but a larger part satisfied. He made strange gurgling sounds, his fingers slipping on the bloody hilt. He fell back, his fingers still fumbling. Their gazes locked. She refused to look away. All of her disgust, the horror and terror and fury rose to the surface and she let it show in her face. He saw it. His eyes widened. Blood was pouring out of his shoulder, coating his arm, running onto the floor, the coppery scent of it overpowering, but still she refused to look away.

There was no regret, no sorrow, no remorse for what she’d done. In fact, she wished she hit a main artery. Or his shriveled heart. If he even had one.

She wanted to say something to let him know how relieved she was that she might have killed him but there were no words to convey her feelings so she watched. And waited for him to die.

Except he wasn’t dying. He was looking at her with an odd blankness, but he wasn’t dying.

“Damn you,” she whispered. “Die, you bastard.”

He smiled, an evil, horrendous smile that turned her blood cold.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Morgan shoved his shoulder into the door of the cabin. It crashed against the wall, a leather hinge breaking under the force.

His mind conjured up picture after picture of Barun and Juliana together, one more horrible than the last. What he hadn't expected was Juliana standing in the middle of the room, her bodice ripped and blood on her face and hands.

He followed her gaze to the floor where Barun was lying, his chest covered in blood, the lance sticking out of his shoulder.

"He won't die," she whispered, looking at him with blank eyes.

Barun's hand lifted. His fingers curled around the hilt of the lance and he pulled. His gaze was locked on Morgan's and there was a slight tilt to his lips, as if he were laughing at them.

All the anger, the terror, the helplessness and horror came together inside Morgan. He fell to his knees and plunged his fist into the man's face over and over again. Blood spurted as he rained down punch after punch. All those months in a prison cell, all those beatings he took, the starvation, the abuse, everything Barun had done to him and to Juliana, all of it came to the surface and Morgan vented his rage.

He won't die. Juliana's words kept repeating inside his head. He wouldn't die. The bastard wouldn't die.

Through the thick haze of his fury he heard Juliana calling his name. She was sobbing and pulling on his shoulder.

"Stop, please," she begged.

Morgan's arm fell to his side. Barun looked like a stomped grape, various shades of purple and blue, his face cracked and bleeding. Blood was everywhere.

Slowly, as if he were under water, he turned to her. Tears ran down her cheeks, her bloody hands were on his arm, pulling.

"Morgan, please, stop. He's dead. He's dead."

He stood and pulled her tightly against him for a brief moment, savoring the feel of his wife in his arms. Safe but not unharmed. He closed his eyes, wishing he could kill the bastard all over again.

"He's dead," she said quietly. "Thank God."

Morgan pulled away, stripped out of his tattered shirt and yanked it over Juliana's shoulders as John rushed in, a lighted torch held high in one hand, a cloth sack in another.

He stared at Barun for several moments. “Good,” he said almost to himself. He looked up at Morgan and Juliana. “A fire started in the kitchen and is spreading.” He shoved the bag at Morgan. “Hurry, you don’t have much time.”

Morgan grabbed Juliana’s hand and tugged. “Come on.”

She took a step toward John. “Thank you,” she said. “Thank you for helping us.”

“Go,” he tried to push her out the door but she wouldn’t move.

“Come with us,” she said. “We’ll help you find your brother.”

He shook his head. “There’s more I have to do here. You better hurry.”

Morgan pulled her through the door and down the maze of corridors, searching for the steps leading to the deck. Smoke billowed behind them as if pushing them forward. He thought of the *Molly Victoria* and the lives lost. He found the stairs and raced up them, Juliana at his heels. When they reached the top, they stopped and blinked against the bright sunlight.

Men were lowering the tenders, other were jumping into the water as smoke drifted through the cracks in the deck. Below the trapped animals in the manger bellowed. Morgan turned starboard and grabbed the closest available tender.

“Stop them!”

Barun limped up the steps. Clutching his bloody shoulder with one hand, he pointed to Morgan and Juliana with the other.

“Get in.” Morgan lifted Juliana up and over the side, heard her land in the bottom with an, “Oomph,” and threw the cloth bag in after her.

He grabbed the davit and began to lower the small boat to the water. Juliana scrambled to her feet and reached for him. “What are you doing?”

He ignored the look of panic on her face, ignored the hands reaching for him. “Morgan! Don’t do this! Come with me.”

“It ends here,” he said between clenched teeth.

She grabbed onto the rope. “No. Not like this. Please, Morgan!”

“Stop that man!” Barun shouted.

He was advancing. Limping, but advancing. And his men were beginning to notice although most of them were making their way to the remaining tenders. The fire was spreading quickly. Morgan unwound the crane’s winch faster but no matter how fast he went it wouldn’t be quick enough. He pulled his cutlass from its sheath and locked eyes with Juliana. “Don’t do this,” she whispered.

“I love you.” He cut the ropes. They raced through the pulley system and flew free. Juliana grabbed onto the sides of the tender and screamed his name as the boat fell to the water with a loud splash.

When Morgan turned, Barun was behind him, the Holy Lance raised to strike. Morgan blocked the blow, the clash of metal on metal ringing in his ears as the force of the blow traveled up his arm. In the

short time it took to lower the tender, the fire had advanced until the smoke was now black and licking at Barun's boot heels.

What a pair they made—Barun with his injured arm and pummeled face and Morgan with his waning strength and healing bruises. Evenly matched, he would say.

Fire crackled close by as Barun struck again and Morgan blocked, then parried. At times, the smoke blinded him and he found himself striking out blindly. At one point, he couldn't see anything and he stood perfectly still, listening to his own labored breaths. He lunged. His cutlass made contact and he heard Barun grunt, but the man moved and Morgan only nicked him.

Frustrated he turned in circles, listening for movement. It was difficult to hear one man when dozens were running about, yelling and jumping over the sides.

Morgan chanced a look toward the water but couldn't pinpoint Juliana's tender in the haze of smoke. A lone woman on the ocean with desperate men needing tenders to save their lives wasn't safe. Yet, he wouldn't leave, not until this was finished with Barun.

The smoke cleared. He glimpsed Barun a few feet from him before the gray haze obscured him again. He was like a ghost floating in and out of walls. Morgan attacked with the cutlass, hit nothing but air. He pulled back and waited with breath held.

The fire inched closer. Red sparks singed his skin. The heat was nearly unbearable.

From the darkness the lance struck out and nicked Morgan in the arm before he had a chance to pull away. Quickly, Morgan retaliated, connected and drove his cutlass as far as he could. Barun cried out. The deck groaned, heaved and suddenly gave way.

Morgan was airborne, falling through what had once been the upper gun deck.

Barun screamed and Morgan landed, bounced, rolled. Dazed he lay on his back and looked up through the hole he'd fallen through. Smoke billowed up, fire licked the ceiling. For a moment, he didn't move. The breath had been knocked out of him and he feared he might have broken something. But slowly feeling returned and he glanced around. He'd landed in the magazine—where all the gunpowder was stored.

The fire would soon reach this area and when it did, the ship would blow.

Morgan scrambled to his feet, wincing at his wounded knee. Where the hell was Barun? The bastard could have landed anywhere. Could even have fallen farther down. For a moment—a wild, insane moment—Morgan thought of searching for him. One look at the barrels of gunpowder had sanity returning. He scrambled over barrels in search of the companionway, found it and climbed down, toward the heat, the fire, the smoke. He was coughing and his eyes were watering so badly he could hardly see.

With a terrible shrieking, the companionway above him collapsed. Morgan ducked, jumped onto the lower deck and watched as the wooden stairs crumbled. He was trapped, one level above the magazines and on the deck with the thirty-two pound cannons and cannon balls the size of coconuts. Helplessly he looked

about and spotted the cannons sitting quietly by themselves. If he moved one, he might be able to squeeze out of the gun port and dive into the ocean.

The thirty-two-pounders were the granddaddies of the cannons, weighing in at about one-and-a-half tons. They were on wheels and while most of the time it took several men to move them into place, Morgan didn't have a helping hand. He untied the ropes lashing the cannon in place and pushed it back. It moved a bit on well-oiled wheels. For once he was grateful Barun ran a tight ship. He put all his weight into it and pushed more, straining to move the massive cannon. It slid a few inches but not enough for Morgan to squeeze through the gun port.

The fire was close, the heat scorching his back. The angry roar of it consumed everything in its path. The screams of the men had died and except for the voice of the flames and the creaks and groans of a ship in pain, it was eerily silent of human voices.

He put his weight to the cannon and pushed, using every bit of his strength and more. Whether God was looking down on him or it was just plain dumb luck, the ship rocked and the cannon rolled. Quickly Morgan climbed through the gun port. He glanced back, spared one last thought to Barun, then jumped.

He pushed to the surface and turned in a circle ignoring the pain in his knee. There were others in the water, but they were farther away and those who were in boats helped those who weren't.

He spotted a solitary tender off to the side and recognized it as the one he'd thrown Juliana into by the fresh wood where it had been mended. With sure strokes, he swam to it and when he reached its side, grasped on.

"Juliana?"

"Morgan?" Her sooty face appeared over the side, red eyes swollen. She was a beautiful sight to his tired eyes.

"Morgan!" She reached over and helped pull him in. He landed at the bottom, then scrambled to the oars.

"Grab an oar," he commanded. "Row."

"Are you hurt?"

"No more than usual."

"Is it over?"

He looked at the tenders fleeing the burning ship like roaches. Flames leapt from the portholes of the *Bhaya*. Was Barun still on the ship? Had he reached safety?

The fire made its way to the magazines and the ship blew. A fantastic ball of fire that transformed into a mushroom cloud of debris, men and sailing paraphernalia. Morgan tackled Juliana to the bottom of the tender and tucked her beneath him, covering their heads with his arms as pieces of the *Bhaya* rained down on them. In the concussion, the waves battered the small boat and the tender heaved.

When Morgan pulled Juliana up, the *Bhaya* was nothing but a huge ball of fire, the skeleton engulfed in flames. If Barun were on the ship, he was surely dead.

“Yes,” he said. “It’s over.”

He began to row, maneuvering their little boat to head in the opposite direction of the burning ship.

Dusk quickly closed in and Morgan turned the tender east. The flames from the *Bhaya* kept the sky bright, a beacon to other ships. Morgan hoped a beacon to Reed and Isabelle.

Juliana watched the debris burn as Morgan kept rowing, alternately searching the area for unfriendly tenders and friendly ships and watching Juliana.

When the small boats were but mere specks and the *Bhaya* a smoldering, sinking, hulk, Morgan pulled the oars in and rested his arms on them. Silently, Juliana searched through their store of food and held up some biscuits.

“This is all we have.”

“I’m not hungry, but you eat.”

She shook her head and put the biscuits away. “I’m not hungry either.”

Morgan stopped himself from pointing out that she needed to eat. Instead he held out his arm and she snuggled into him as he rested his chin on top of her head and looked out over the water. It was a vast ocean and Isabelle had only an idea of where to look. Several miles in either direction and she could miss them entirely. He prayed the *Bhaya* would keep burning through the night.

Juliana drifted off to sleep with her head in his lap. Occasionally her hands would twitch and her body would jerk. He wondered if she dreamed of Barun. Toward dawn the *Bhaya’s* foremast sank and the fire was extinguished. The other tenders were scattered to the four corners and Juliana and Morgan were alone on the ocean.

Thanks to John, they had enough food and ale to last several days if they were careful. One problem solved, but there were others to take its place. Weather, for one. If a storm blew up, Morgan didn’t know if their boat would survive.

Juliana stirred, blinked tired-looking green eyes up at him. He felt a tightening in his chest. A love so brilliant it outshone even the sun. He wanted to hold Juliana tight, to never let her go. He shuddered to think of everything he almost lost and could still lose if they weren’t found. His hands shook with the intensity of his emotions.

“Do you think John made it off the ship?” she asked.

“I don’t know.” And it didn’t matter. John had been a traitor. He put Juliana and their baby in harm’s way and Morgan would not forgive him.

“He set the fires, didn’t he?” she asked.

“I think so.”

“He saved our lives.”

“Yes.”

“He did what he had to in order to save his brother.”

“Maybe.” He didn’t want to talk about John.

Later in the afternoon Morgan was sitting in the stern with Juliana resting against his chest. He was stroking her hair, thinking of the silky softness of it and wondering if help would ever reach them.

“I got my first good look at you in a tender,” she said as they both stared out over the ocean. “After you fished me out of the ocean.”

“You mean after I saved your butt and hauled you up the steps.”

“You pushed me up the steps and left me.”

“I thought you were part of the crew.”

“I thought I was in your barn in Kansas.”

It was edging toward the heat of the day, that hour when the sun begins its descent and the rays were the hottest. Sweat was trickling down his back. He’d rationed the water but worried Juliana wasn’t getting enough.

“Full circle,” Juliana said. “Do you think it will end here?”

As he’d been doing for most of the day, he scanned the horizon. “Turn your head to the right.”

A magnificent five-masted schooner crested the horizon, its sails billowing in the wind, its bow cutting through the waves at an impressive speed.

Morgan hugged Juliana tighter as they watched Isabelle’s ship approach.

Chapter Thirty

Juliana stood at the window of the study and watched Morgan, leaning heavily on his cane, make his way through the garden.

It'd been three months since Isabelle's *Eve* plucked them from the ocean.

Morgan's bruises faded. His knee was healing but not quickly enough for his peace of mind. He wanted to be whole again and was frustrated he still needed his cane.

Juliana was healing as well. A small mark in the middle of her palm was all that was left of Barun's branding. A mark she would bear the rest of her life, a reminder of the bad times. But also a reminder of the strength she found to endure and fight back. In her opinion a tiny scar was a small price to pay for surviving.

The nightmares were slowly fading but occasionally haunted her in the deep of night. She always woke from them wrapped in Morgan's strong arms, his soft voice whispering in her ear, and she would instantly calm down.

Life continued on. Sophia moved, along with most of the nobility of London, to the country where she would spend the summer. Isabelle and Reed were about to set sail for Boston in a week.

By all accounts everything should be perfect, but it wasn't. Each day Juliana watched Morgan distance himself from her. There was no more laughter and loving, no more arguments or quiet times. He hadn't touched her in weeks except to hold her during her nightmares.

All because of four words. Four innocent words uttered by Isabelle not long after they returned to London from the *Bhaya*.

Juliana and Morgan had been alone in their townhouse when Isabelle sailed in, pulling off her gloves with a grimace and throwing them on the nearest chair. Two burly men followed, maneuvering a large package through the door.

"We found the mirror," Isabelle said.

We found the mirror. In those four words Juliana's idyllic life shattered.

"What mirror?" she asked through a thick throat, knowing the answer but asking anyway. She looked at Morgan but he wouldn't meet her gaze.

Isabelle glanced from Juliana to Morgan, her brows pulled together. "When we returned from the *Bhaya* Morgan began making inquiries into a large mirror. He said he wanted to give it to you as a wedding gift."

Juliana's heart sank to her knees. She continued to stare at Morgan, waiting for a response, an explanation, something to convince her that her heart was wrong. That Morgan wasn't looking for the mirror to send her back. But his gaze remained solidly on Isabelle.

Ignorant of what her announcement truly meant, Isabelle went on to say that when Morgan described the mirror, she thought it sounded suspiciously like a piece of cargo the *Molly Victoria* had been carrying. She assumed it was lost when the ship went down, but when she and Reed finally sorted out the cargo of all three ships, they found it in the back of their warehouse.

"Isn't it a coincidence?" she asked.

Neither Morgan nor Juliana answered.

The mirror now stood in an empty bedchamber while Juliana's marriage crumbled.

She turned from the window and put a hand on her swelling belly. Enough was enough. They had to face the reappearance of the mirror and deal with it or soon there would be nothing left of their marriage.

She joined him in the garden. It was late August and the day was hot. The flowers bloomed in a riot of colors and the bumble bees took lazy flight as she walked past.

He smiled when she approached, but the smile didn't reach his eyes. It never did anymore.

"You know, when I first met you, or rather when I first met Morgan, I didn't like you very much."

He looked surprised. It'd been a while since they talked, really talked about something other than his position with Parker and Parker, the weather, Isabelle and Reed and Sophia. They stopped talking about the important things weeks ago.

"Walk with me." She waited while he reached for his cane.

They made their way toward the house in silence, holding hands. It'd been so long since they held hands that Juliana wanted to hold tight but forced herself not to cling.

"I don't blame you for hating me back then." He reached behind her and on the outside of her dress traced the scars on her back. He'd memorized each one. She knew because he made a habit of kissing them often and expressing his sorrow without words. Or at least he used to. Now he didn't kiss her at all.

"I was evil and cruel and brutal and a bastard," he said.

She nodded. "Yes, you were. But I didn't bring this up because I wanted you to feel guilty." They entered the house and she led him toward the stairs, relieved to be out of the heat. He hesitated a moment before taking the steps beside her.

"My feelings for you changed after you healed me then rescued me from Barun.."

They stopped at the top and she turned to him, still not letting go of his hand. "So what happens now?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. You don't want me here anymore, do you?" It hurt to ask the question and it hurt even more to wait for the answer. In her heart she wanted him to deny her accusation immediately, but he didn't. His expression was like a mask, hard, unyielding and unreadable.

She placed his hand on her rounded stomach. "This is your child inside me." The baby kicked and a look of wonder crossed his face before he quickly pulled his hand away.

Anger made her want to lash out, but she put a tight rein on it. This wasn't the Morgan she'd come to know and love and she was determined to discover what was going on behind the mask he hid behind. "Tell me the truth. Do you want me to leave? Do you want me to go back to the twenty-first century? Do you never want to see your child?"

For a moment, a tiny second, the answer was in his eyes before he masked his emotions once again. But it was long enough for her to see. Long enough for the hope she'd been harboring to take seed.

She pivoted on her heel and walked away. He called out her name in an anguished voice, but she held her hand up and continued walking until she stood in front of the door to the room that held the mirror.

She pushed the door open revealing the mirror looming before them in the large, otherwise, empty room. The answer or the curse to her marriage? She approached it to find out.

"Don't," he said behind her. "Don't do it."

"You don't want me here."

"I..."

She closed her eyes, the pain too great to bear. Tears slipped from beneath her lids and dripped down her cheek. Their baby moved inside her as if feeling her despair.

"I can't stay," she whispered. "I can't stay and see you every day knowing you don't want me."

His hands settled on her shoulders, and she opened her eyes to stare at their reflection.

"Don't ever think I don't want you, Juliana."

"Then why?" she whispered.

"This is no place for you." He settled his hand on her belly, his touch bordering on reverent, and that was when Juliana finally saw beneath the stoic mask.

"You're afraid if I have this baby here I won't make it."

A pained look crossed his face. "A lot of women don't."

"But most women do. I'm strong and healthy, Morgan. I've faced Barun and survived. I can give birth in the eighteenth century."

"What if something happens?"

She turned around in his arms. "Nothing will happen."

"I can't lose you," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Not again. Not like that."

"I won't go back without you."

His eyes drifted closed and when they opened there was so much anguish in them she wanted to cry. “Then I’ll go back with you.”

“And what will you do in the twenty-first century? You told me before you have no skills other than sailing.”

“And plundering and killing.” The corner of his mouth lifted in an attempt to smile.

She smiled back, knowing the plundering and killing was far behind him unless someone threatened his family.

“Zach Langtree left when he was seventeen years old,” she said. “He never graduated from high school and has no training that will serve him in the twenty-first century. You’re part owner of one of the biggest shipping companies in the world. You have friends and family who love you. Your life is here. And my life is here with you.” She touched his cheek. “Morgan, I can step in front of a bus in the twenty-first century and be killed. Nothing in life is guaranteed except what we have at this moment in time. I would rather die a thousand deaths than be separated from you for even a moment. Please don’t send me away.”

He pulled her close, her belly impeding her from getting as close as she wanted. She rested her head on his hard chest, loving that she was back in his arms, but wishing it was for a different reason.

“I’m scared,” he whispered.

She had to close her eyes at the pain of hearing her strong warrior admit his fear. Not once during their captivity did he say he was afraid of Barun, a man who could have easily snuffed out his life. He’d acted with bravery and guts to free them, but the thought of her dying during childbirth terrified him.

“We’ll get through this and we’ll have a beautiful baby at the end of it.”

He searched her eyes, his own slowly losing the desperation in them. “But—”

She put a finger to his lips to silence him. “Tell me, honestly, where would you rather live? Here, where you’ve made a good name for yourself and you’re able to provide for your family and do what you love to do, or three hundred years from now? Because wherever you want to be, is where I want to be.”

The answer was in his eyes. He could no more go back to being Zachary Langtree than she could go back to being the seventeen-year-old girl with a head full of dreams.

“I want to stay here,” he said. “I want to raise my children in this time and teach them to sail. I want to show you the world.”

“Then that’s what I want too.”

He pulled her in for a quick hug. “Ah, God, Juliana. I love you so much.”

She squeezed him back. “I love you too.”

Epilogue

Morgan stood at the bow of the *Juliana* and watched London come into view. His first glimpse of England in over six months.

This was the end of the maiden voyage of the ship he'd commissioned Parker and Parker to build. The ship he named after the one woman he loved through all the centuries. It was only fitting he captain her first sailing and he'd done so with eagerness. Living in London was fine, but he missed the open water, the breeze in his hair and the ocean beneath his feet. He missed sailing.

Above him men furled sails, calling out to each other in excited voices, happy to be back to their families and loved ones. Morgan crossed his arms and planted his feet wide to accommodate the shuddering of the ship as the anchor lowered.

He swept a keen eye over the port, noting the other ships and their names. Recalling which company owned which ship. Some he didn't know at all, but he wasn't surprised. London shipping was growing by leaps and bounds and entrepreneurs were eager to jump on the bandwagon. Morgan studied the newest ships, taking pride in the fact that none compared to the modern *Juliana*. He'd done well designing this new vessel and made a mental note to talk to Reed about commissioning a few more.

The boom in the shipping industry was a windfall to Parker and Parker, lining the pockets of Isabelle and Reed and Morgan, who was now a full partner, and making them all very rich indeed. Currently they were looking to expand into India and China. Isabelle even asked Morgan to captain the first voyage to China, and he was seriously considering it. But only if he could take his family with him.

Just like *Juliana* promised, their son's birth had been a piece of cake. Or at least that's what she said. At the time Morgan hadn't been sure he would survive, let alone *Juliana*. Months before the birth she'd assuaged Morgan's fears by interviewing damn near every doctor and midwife in all of London, settling on the one with the most modern beliefs and practices. Of course, when the time came, she still shocked the doctor by insisting Morgan be present throughout the entire labor and birth. And so in wonder and fear, he watched his wife deliver their son into his hands.

Zachary Morgan Langtree inherited his mother's hair but his father's eyes and lust for adventure.

When Isabelle approached Morgan about taking this run to Spain, *Juliana* informed them all that no way was she being left behind in London. She packed up their clothes, closed the house and boarded the ship with Zachary riding on her hip. Morgan put up token resistance, wanting his family with him as much as they wanted to be with him.

And he'd proudly watched Zachary take his first steps on the *Juliana*, convinced the boy took to sailing like a fish to water.

As if conjured from his thoughts, his wife appeared at his side, holding a sleeping Zachary to her shoulder.

"Patrick wore him out," she whispered.

Morgan gently took the active two-year-old and cradled him against his chest. The boy's lids fluttered, he sighed and his body went limp. The slight breeze ruffled his blond curls.

Morgan put his arm around Juliana, pulling her close to his side. His family. For so long he wouldn't even allow himself to think of such a concept and now he couldn't imagine living without them.

"Are you glad to be home?" he asked.

Juliana leaned against him, placing her hand over his heart. "London isn't home," she said. "Home is wherever you are."

About the Author

At the age of ten, when I read *Black Beauty*, I knew I wanted to be a writer. But life got in the way. I discovered boys, went to college, got married, had kids, all the usual things people do. Yet during it all, the dream simmered until one day my two oldest were in school and my youngest was taking a nap and I said to myself, "Sharon, if you're going to do it, now's the time."

My brother sold me his out-of-date Gateway computer for \$200. I had dial-up connection and an Internet package that allowed me twenty hours per month of web surfing. Somehow I managed to write my first story in between pre-school playdates, naps and diapers.

Now, ten years later, the kids are nearly grown and I'm extremely proud and still a little awed by the fact that I have ten books published with many, many more to come God willing.

If you enjoyed reading *Wherever You Are* or any of my other books, please shoot me an email and let me know. I love hearing from readers and respond to every email I receive. You can find me at www.SharonCullen.net. I'm also an avid (okay, obsessed) Facebooker. Friend me at Sharon Cullen - Author where you'll be the first to learn of new releases or just find out what I'm up to.

I also have a newsletter where I announce new releases and contests. Please join us at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Sharon_Cullen/

Look for these titles by Sharon Cullen

Now Available:

Night Song
Deception

Love on the Edge
Deception
Redemption
Obsession

Love takes no prisoners.

Tiger Eyes

© 2010 Kimberly Nee

Captain Gabriella Markham is accustomed to standing on the deck of her ship, wind in her face. Not rotting in a dank hold on an enemy's ship. There's only one thing on her mind: revenge on the pirate responsible. Until she realizes the seriously injured man sharing the darkness is Captain Diego Cruz, the man she almost married.

When Diego opens his eyes, he finds himself twice cursed. Not only was he attacked and taken, he's marooned on an island with the woman who betrayed him five years earlier. Even worse, the fire between them still burns. And the faster he heals, the harder she is to resist.

Desperation cracks their resolve. Passion consumes them, but it only reopens the wounds of the past. Survival is only the first step in a quest to find out who hired another pirate to see them dead—and why. Only then will they learn if their hearts will survive on the fragile strand of trust that still hangs between them...

Warning: This book may lead to fantasies involving deserted islands, passionate affairs, and a belief in true love.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Tiger Eyes:

It was a calm night, with a gentle wind blowing in from the east. The warm air wrapped about Gabby like a tender embrace, and she sighed as she leaned against the quarterdeck railing. The island was still visible, though about the size of her fist, and as twilight stretched across the sky, it wouldn't be long before it was merely a darker mass in a sea of darkness.

After they came aboard the *Serena*, Gabby was shown to a small cabin, and the order was given for water to be heated. She soaked until the water grew too cool for comfort, and took an oddly great delight in scrubbing both her hair and her body.

Since they were very nearly the same height, with the same rather deceptively slender build, Fiona offered Gabby a gown, though she didn't seem particularly pleased about it. Still, Gabby thanked her anyway, and when she finished her bath, slipped into the clean garment, wanting to cry from the sleek softness of it, and the delicious perfume of clean fabric wafting down over her head. Though she normally shied away from such feminine garments, she reveled in this one now.

Footfalls sounded behind her and she turned to see Diego coming toward her. Gone were the straggly beard and unkempt moustache. Though he was clean-shaven, he radiated the same feral air as he did on the island, and her heart quickened at the sight of him. He still limped, but his black breeches were neither stained nor torn, and his white shirt was almost blinding in its cleanliness.

His sleeve brushed her bare arm, reminding her of her ladylike apparel. She was most unaccustomed to gauzy gowns, as she lived in breeches and tunics like her men. Her hair, free of tangles and snarls, had been tamed into a fall of loose dark curls that brushed her shoulders and danced on the breeze.

“Did Farruco pronounce you healed?” she murmured as he brought one booted foot up onto the bottom rung of the railing and leaned his forearms against the top.

“Not quite healed, but well on my way. And he commended you on your care. Apparently you’ve the makings of a fine ship’s surgeon.”

“No, thank you. I’d rather stay at the helm, if it’s all the same. I nearly retched each time I cleaned your wounds.” An unfamiliar, giddy sort of laugh teased her lips. Why did she feel so dizzy, as if she might swoon? It was uncomfortable and yet, a bit amusing at the same time. Her belly fluttered as if alive with a million butterflies all trying to break free, and as she cast a sidelong gaze up at him, those wings intensified their beating. It was like seeing him for the first time all over again.

He sighed softly, looking out at the silver trail caused by the *Serena*’s wake. “Not exactly my most preferred way to pass several weeks, but nonetheless, not the worst, either.”

As he spoke, he turned to give her a slow smile and her heart tripled its beat. The sudden rush of blood to her head made her giddier still, and her instinct was to tighten her grip on the railing, lest her knees betray her and crumple right out from beneath her.

“No, I don’t suppose it was the worst,” she said as he turned completely sideways to rest on one elbow as he gazed down at her. His eyes glittered like black opals, though she knew they weren’t black at all. They were like topaz, a beautiful warm mix of gold and brown. “Tiger eyes,” she murmured without thinking.

“What was that?”

His voice cut through her fog and she cleared her throat. “I...uh...that is... It is lovely out here. I’ve missed being at sea.”

“We are heading to St. Phillippe. If you like, I can take you to Port Royal.”

A tempting offer, the thought of being at sea with him for at least another three weeks. But no. It wouldn’t be wise. Her feelings twisted and fought with her head far too much. Regretfully, she shook her head. “No. I thank you for the offer, but I will find my own passage to Jamaica. Or perhaps I will simply go home.”

“Where is home these days?”

“London. My brother and I own Markham now. Well, my half-brother, that is.”

“Half-brother?”

She nodded. “Did I never mention him? His name is William. His mother was my father’s wife, but my mother was his great love.” She offered him a wistful smile. “Perhaps I should be ashamed of that, but I’m not. Theirs was a tragic love, but wildly romantic as well.”

His eyes softened. "You never struck me as the starry-eyed romantic, Gabby."

"Because I'm not. Their story did not end happily, though I was fortunate my father claimed me as his right from the beginning. It is also fortunate that I shared his love for the seas, while William saw it as dirty work."

She shrugged, her smile fading. "I became the son William was not, but unfortunately, my father could leave me only my financial interest in Markham. I own the *Galatea* outright, and receive a stipend of Markham's profits, but William owns controlling interest. I'm not at all certain how he managed to do this, but my father was quite the miracle worker, you know, and I don't think he trusted William overmuch." Another shrug. "Not that it matters to me. I prefer not having to deal with all of the rubbish that comes with property ownership and running the company. I am quite happy to sail my ship and watch my bank account fatten. William can't sack me. He can't even touch my ship. Although, since I haven't a clue where the *Galatea* is right now, that is moot, I suppose."

Her eyes stung with unexpected tears. Her ship. She hadn't realized how much she missed it until that moment. But miss it she did. Much as she loved being at sea on *any* ship, it couldn't compare to being aboard *her* ship.

"Perhaps Carmichael has it. He might have returned to Jamaica to file a claim."

"Perhaps. I wouldn't put it past him to claim salvage on it. I only hope he isn't fool enough to sail near Eleuthera. He'd be no match for the wreckers." She pressed her lips together as fresh anger flared in her belly at the thought of her precious *Galatea* destroyed because Carmichael fell prey to those who made their living from the ships they lured to their shores and then stripped. "If that happened... When I find him, he *will* be sorry."

Diego reached out his free arm to cup his hand on her shoulder. "Perhaps you'd best concentrate on finding a new ship, first. It'll be difficult to chase Carmichael down without one."

She groaned at that. "Never mind a ship. I'd need a crew as well. And there aren't many willing to serve a woman. I can only imagine where mine has scattered. Surely they've found other crews to join, I've been gone so long."

"Fools, all of them. No loyalty at all."

Gabby looked up to find him gazing down at her, a teasing smile pulling on his lips. "Diego, no..."

"What? I've done nothing."

"I know what you're thinking." She wanted to step back, to put some distance between her. "And trust me, you don't want to do it. It's simply the full moon, and the water, and the—"

"And the beautiful woman standing before me."

She almost shivered at his low growl. "No. Didn't we agree that what happened on the island was a mistake?"

"True. It was a mistake, but it was a rather pleasant mistake as well."

He brought his hand to her cheek and his fingertips swept over it with feather lightness. A flutter of desire rippled through her, despite her best efforts to ignore it. “Diego...”

He caught her face in both hands, tilted her head back as his fingers reached into her hair. Panic rose up as the tension thickened between them, and she wanted to pull away as strongly as she wanted to melt into him.

“Gabriella,” he whispered, and her eyes drooped at the promise laced through that one almost breathless word.

Nice girls love a sailor. Naughty girls are quite partial too.

The Wicked Lady

© 2010 Julia Knight

When a man she thought she loved offered Lady Catherine Harcourt a life wrapped in a velvet bow, she took it. That life wrapped her velvet chains. Now her status as a respectable widow allows her virginal alter ego, Cecily, to relieve milksop-for-blood dandies of their riches and go back where she belongs. The sea—aboard her pirate ship.

The one knot in her sail is Paul Ambury. Daring, irresistible, and a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Yet the temptation to indulge in his gorgeous body—all in the name of the plan, of course—is too much to resist.

Paul has known his share of empty headed society women, and fiercely intelligent Catherine doesn't fit. When he wakes up adrift in a longboat after a blazing night together, he knows why. She took him for a fool—and took his ship.

Plus, the evil little genius has him neatly trapped. If he reveals why he lost his ship, he faces court martial. If he does his duty, he must find her and hang her—the one woman with whom he's fallen in love. Damn it...

Warning: This book includes graphic sex and language, sexy sailors and saucy pirates trying to get one over on each other in the bed...on the floor...on that handy table...

Enjoy the following excerpt for The Wicked Lady:

Paul ducked through the doorway into the captain's quarters and looked around in the dim lamplight. It was only when she moved toward him that he saw her. He blinked in surprise, and all thoughts of ships, masts and pirates fled out of his head. "My apologies—"

She laughed, a low, throaty sound that made his belly quiver. Her voice was cultured and refined. A lady of breeding, no doubt. "No apologies required, not that I think you mean them, or you'd turn about, sir. My quarters were in the foredeck, along with all my clothes. They were burned to a crisp, and the dress I was wearing, well, there was a lot of blood. Please, there's no need to stand on ceremony. I'm Lady Catherine Harcourt, but you may call me Catherine. Everyone does."

"Lieutenant Ambury, captain of the *Newquay*." God, she was a bold one—and the name... Hadn't Matthew said something about a Lady Harcourt? He couldn't remember. He was too busy staring. She stood in a pool of lamplight, dressed only in a silk shift stained here and there with blood. The light shone through the thin fabric and showed every curve and line of her body. Her fair hair fell loose around her face, unbound in contrast to the tightly pinned hairstyles or wigs women wore in public. The caress of hair over shoulders was something he'd only ever seen on a woman as she lay in his bed, and was instantly

erotic to him. So was her complete lack of embarrassment and the way she watched his face carefully, a hint of mischief in the little half-smile. No simpering in her, no blushing modesty, just a clear intelligence and humour that mocked him. He shifted his feet and hoped the blood didn't rush to his face, and elsewhere too, obviously. She laughed again at his discomfiture and motioned for him to sit.

He hesitated once more. He should at least pretend to be a gentleman, even if he wanted to be anything but right now. What he wanted was to see what was under that shift. What he wanted was to have her believe his lies, the sweetest lies that got women into bed. He looked up from a furtive glance at her body and caught her knowing gaze. He was lost for words. Any lady of class would have had a fainting fit by now, but she seemed to be enjoying herself at his expense. He wasn't quite sure how to react, feeling on the back foot for once. Time to remedy that. "Lady, forgive me, but your reputation, if I should—"

"I told you to call me Catherine, and if I'd a reputation to lose, then perhaps I'd protect it." She sat gracefully in a chair, pulled her legs up underneath her, curled almost like a cat, and leant forward to pour him a tot from a bottle of cognac. Good cognac too.

Paul tore his gaze away from where her body pressed into thin silk. He sat opposite her, took the glass and gulped down some brandy. Catherine poured one for herself, and a drop of blood fell onto the table and splashed the stem of her glass.

"You're bleeding. Are you all right?" Paul put down his glass, glad to have a distraction from his thoughts, which were becoming more ungentlemanly by the moment.

She looked down in surprise and then laughed shakily. "A small cut, nothing too bad." She turned her hand palm up and showed him a cut along her wrist. "One of them got a bit too close. Unluckily for him, my father made sure I knew how to defend myself."

He couldn't resist the perfect opportunity to touch her, and took her hand to make a show of inspecting the cut. A waft of perfume came from her, a spicy scent that seemed to lay heavily on his senses. "Really?" he asked, more for something to say than because he thought she wanted an answer. The cut bled freely, though it wasn't a bad one, but if he bandaged it, he'd have to get closer. At the moment, that was all he could think of. That, and just how glorious she'd look naked.

She leant in, and now he could smell the woman under the perfume. Feel the heat of her arm along his, the hint of her breast pressed into his shoulder. He looked up and her face was next to his as she inspected the cut along with him. She looked at him from under her lashes with an enticing smile. Was she trying to seduce him? If so, she was doing a good job. His breeches had become decidedly uncomfortable. He'd never known a woman to behave like this, as though she knew what she wanted and was doing all she could to get it. At least not any woman who wasn't a whore. Her audacity was almost as intoxicating as the breast that pushed gently into his arm, her perfume or the soft curve of her lips that begged to be kissed.

Her flirting completely unnerved him for a moment, but, being the man he was, only for a moment. He cleared his throat. "I think I'll need to wrap this, to be on the safe side. Do you have anything to use for bandages?"

He couldn't tear his eyes away from hers. They were a dark blue-grey, like the sea, and full of impish fun. She raised an eyebrow. "Well, there's always my shift."

With a laugh, she bent down and, with a little difficulty, tore two strips from the bottom of the shift. It was very hot and stuffy in the room all of a sudden, and Paul passed a hand over his forehead to blot his sweat. He took another gulp of brandy. A few minutes were all he'd wanted to spare. He *should* be out on deck. He'd bind her cut, then go and check all was well. Get some air. For the first time in his life, he cursed his choice of career. Maybe he could come back later...

Catherine handed him the strips of cloth. "Will this be enough?"

He had to get a hold of himself instead of behaving like a half-wit boy on his first time. *Take charge, man!* "It'll be plenty, I'm sure." She held out her arm, and he began to wrap it. After every other twist, he smoothed the cloth down with a thumb, making sure he went well past the actual cloth. The beat of her pulse at her wrist fluttered under his touch. Once the first strip had been finished and tied, he let one hand linger on her wrist and stroked his thumb along the soft skin there.

Her pulse sped up under his thumb, and a rash of gooseflesh ran along her arm. The corner of her mouth rose in a satisfied smile, and she reached out with her other hand to pick up her glass. "To Lieutenant Ambury. My hero." She toasted him and took a tiny sip.

His own glass in his spare hand, he toasted her in return and let a long, slow smile spread across his face. There was an unspoken promise in her look, and he intended to collect. He had her. He shifted to relieve the ache in his crotch. "To Lady Catherine, my damsel in distress," he said and drained his glass.

Her gaze followed every drop as he drank, and he put the glass down with a frown. It was still very hot, hotter than it had any right to be. Sweat trickled down his back and face, sliding off him in waves. All his skin was on fire, not with heat, but with emotion. Catherine's face blurred before his eyes.

"I think that's enough for you," she said. "Don't want you passing out just yet, do we?"

Paul tried to stand, but his legs wouldn't hold him. They'd turned to wet rope. He slumped into the chair, blinking heavily and shaking his head, sure he'd heard some muffled thumps and shouts from out on the deck.

"The bosun is a devil with the crew," she said as she leant over him. "Shouts and screams half the day."

"What in God's name—" He tried to push her out of the way, but his senses swam. All he could see was her, sensuously swaying with the ship. All he could smell was her perfume. Anger and lust swirled through him, each vying for his attention.

She undid the buttons of his coat, and moved onward, her hands gliding over the smooth cotton of his shirt. Her breath tickled his cheek, her lips softly parted, and he forgot the shouts, forgot his anger at his helplessness. Lust won.

Fate rarely obeys the will of men...or women.

Prisoner of Desire

© 2010 Mary Wine

Learning she is bound on the next tide to marry a Caribbean commissioner, Lorena St. John is devastated. Yet she must obey her iron-handed stepfather, or her beloved sisters will suffer the consequences.

She arrives in Bermuda with hope, but finds her betrothed is a slave master who views her as chattel. Defiance gets her locked out of his house, vulnerable to the harsh tropical sun—and a band of desperate men.

Captain Warren Rawlins isn't above using Lorena as a shield to rescue his brothers from the British fortress. Once aboard his ship, though, he finds Lorena is no fragile English bloom. She's a delectable handful with a sharp sense of honor—and an even sharper tongue.

Despite her initial outrage, Lorena finds herself softening toward the rough crew of the *Huntress* who have more nobility than a thousand “proper” gentlemen. And its captain finds himself fighting a losing battle against the need to take her in his arms, propriety be damned.

All too soon Boston Harbor looms, but the danger isn't past. Warren once again takes to the sea to fight for the woman he loves. Winner takes all...

Enjoy the following excerpt for Prisoner of Desire:

It was amazing how a little water could restore a person's resolve. Lorena sighed and drew a last deep breath. Yes, she felt much better now. She smelled the fresh air again and felt the cooling night breeze on her cheeks. The burning heat was being carried away as she listened to the slap of the palm leaves.

A hand clamped down over her mouth, dragging her back against a solid body. She bucked frantically, trying to twist free. Whoever held her, lifted her completely off the ground. One thick arm bound her around the waist while the hand remained over her mouth, stifling any sound she tried to make. Two large steps and she felt her feet dangling over the water. Her eyes rounded when she noticed the rowboat. The bonnet still pinned to her head only allowed her to see directly in front of her. What had been empty except for oars was now full of dark shapes. They reached up for her feet, hard hands closing around her ankles. She kicked frantically, her mind searching for any means of escape.

She sank her teeth into the fingers pressing against her lips.

“Viper...”

The hand left her mouth instantly, but he released her waist too. She fell toward the boat, landing on top of the men in it. Pain shot through her back and shoulders. Her dress became a tangled mess, and she kicked at it, trying to get her feet on something solid.

The boat rocked dangerously and the men grabbed her to keep her still.

“Ease up there or we’ll capsize.”

Lorena snarled at the warning. “Unhand—”

The same hard hand slapped back over her mouth. “Make for the gate lads or we’re done for.”

Her captor spoke in a harsh whisper but the tone terrified her. It was solid as steel. He imprisoned her against his body again, this time throwing a leg over hers to trap her completely. She strained against his hold but it was like iron. Blood seeped over her lips from where she’d bitten him, but he kept his hand in place.

The other men dipped the oars into the water. The boat headed for the small arches that led to the sea. The iron gates were still raised and they slipped quietly out of the inner fort.

“Now, men, row! Row for your lives!”

Her captor gave the command. The men dug into their task, working their oars in unison. Light from the fires on the wall shone down on them. The hand over her mouth released her lips but returned with a knife. He pressed the cool blade against her neck.

“I suggest you stay still if you want to keep your skin uncut.”

She swallowed and even that motion made the blade press uncomfortably against her throat. Her heart accelerated, making everything seem as though it was moving in slow motion. On top of the walls, men pointed their rifles directly at them. She could see the soldiers looking down the long barrels of the weapons to line up a perfect kill shot. Terror choked her for one horrible moment which felt like an hour. Her ears strained to hear the explosion of the rifles being fired.

“Hold your fire!” The command echoed up and down the wall. The men looking down their guns hesitated but raised their heads and the muzzles of the deadly guns.

Breath rushed back into her chest, but it lodged in her throat when she realized how fast the boat was pulling away from the fort.

And taking her with it.

She kicked again, frantic to escape from the unknown men holding her. The knife slid into her skin, spilling warm blood down her throat.

“Damn it. I said hold still.”

Her neck burned and the scent of her own blood filled her nose. “I don’t care. As if I’d do anything you tell me to.”

The arms around her tightened, locking her so hard against him she struggled to breathe. The knife remained at her throat and a soft sound passed her lips. She couldn’t prevent it; helplessness was filling her so full it bubbled over.

"I'm sorry but you will do what I say." He spoke softly next to her ear. A whimper of self-pity tried to answer him but she clamped it behind her teeth, refusing to show him any more weakness. She tried to push the hand holding the knife away from her neck but he didn't move, not even a tiny amount.

Men were filling the walls on the fort and holding torches high to try to cast light far enough out to illuminate the boat. But the efforts of her captors were pulling the small craft out farther and farther into the darkness. The oars slid into the water with smooth sounds and the men working them panted. They were rowing to freedom and she could hear them straining toward their goal.

She couldn't blame them...

But she hated the one holding her. In the blackness she felt his heart beating against her back. He'd raised his head, no longer hiding his behind her own.

"Keep north." His voice was deeper now. A shiver went down her body. The little reaction annoyed her and she renewed her efforts to be free.

"Release me, sir!"

The knife lifted away but the hand around her chest remained, along with his leg. Tipping her head up, she caught her first look at the man who had kidnapped her. A gasp left her lips when she recognized him as the one who had told her where the water was. She was a trusting fool indeed.

"Can you swim?" He held her steady, completely ignoring her demand.

"Of course I can."

The man tightened his embrace. Oh she was so naïve. But she could not take back the information she'd just handed him.

"You...*mongrel*." She wished she knew how to swear. Lorena suddenly understood why prostitutes developed gutter language. They had to deal with rough handling such as this. Her heart was racing, straining against her corset. She was keenly aware of his body. It was much harder than she'd thought another human might feel. His strength fully amazed her. He held her without any hint of weakness. But he did remove the knife from her throat. She bucked when one arm moved, giving her the illusion of freedom.

An illusion was all it was. His embrace held her in spite of her struggles. A soft sound of frustration came past her ear before he clamped his right arm back around her. All the while, the men worked the oars. She heard every dip into the water but could only see straight ahead. *Idiotic bonnet*. Society was so worried about her flirting, it had trapped her in a hat which kept her from seeing someone sneaking up behind her. She strained once more, needing an outlet for her rage. A frustrated sigh came from her captor. He leaned closer to her ear and she actually felt his warm breath.

"We're well away from the fort. Do you really wish a watery grave tonight? It would not be an easy death, I assure you."

"Do you offer me one then?" She turned her head because she wanted to see him, the brim of her bonnet prevented it. But he was correct; the walls of the fort had faded into the night. She couldn't see the

light from the wall torches any longer. A shaft of fear went through her. There was no preventing it. Nothing but darkness surrounded them. The night seemed larger than it ever had on land, closing around the boat. It felt like they might be crushed in its grasp, just like the man holding her had the strength to do. “As soon as you need me no longer, will that knife finish its work, granting me a swift death?”

“Light ahead, Captain.”

There was both joy and fear in the man’s voice. Lorena turned to look at him. The moon cast an eerie glow on his face, but she could not miss the longing in his expression. However much she detested her current circumstances, she could not fail to enjoy watching the men manning the oars. They looked radiant, lifting their faces toward the twinkling beacon in the distance like it was a promise of eternal youth.

Compared to their life at the fort, she supposed it was. Her heart softened, their plight had been a grim one indeed. But their success meant her ruin.



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