

A Pirate's Revenge

**By
Brandy Golden**

**Featuring the Artwork of
Kenneth Manago**

A Pirate's Revenge

**By
Brandy Golden**

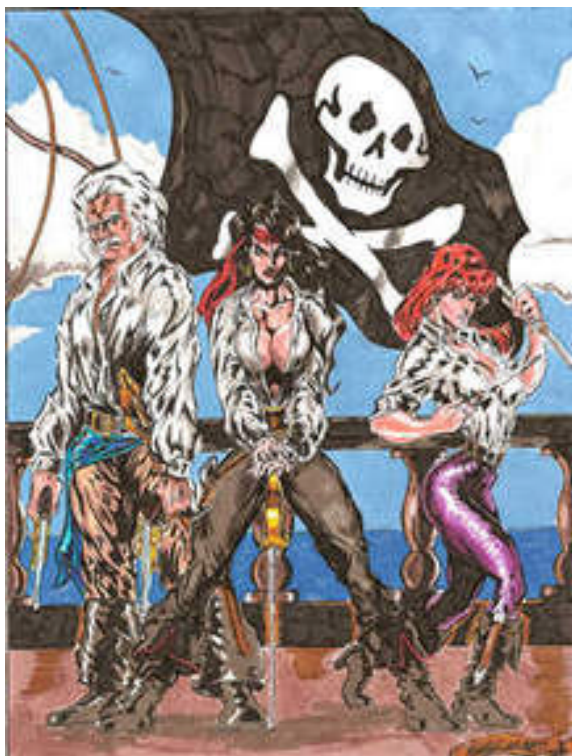
**Featuring the Artwork of
Kenneth Manago**

**A Newsite Web Services Book
Published by arrangement with the author
All rights reserved.**

Copyright 2008 © by Brandy Golden

This book may not be reproduced in whole or part,
by mimeograph or any other means, without
permission of the author or Newsite Web Services,
LLC

Published by Newsite Web Services, LLC
P.O. Box 1286, Loganville, Georgia 30052 USA
disciplineanddesire@hotmail.com
disciplineanddesire.com



Dedication

This is dedicated to my good friend, Cyn, who helped me with much of Kat's character. I'd also like to mention AJ, whose information and ideas regarding the pirate era helped with the formation of the book. Both of them have excellent writing skills and contributed to some of the dialogue used. It's been a lively and fast paced book that has been a joy to write and I thank them for helping me. I'd also like to thank Josh, my publisher at the time the book was written and his good friend, Kenneth Manago, whose awesome artwork is contained within the book. They both worked hard to create the story in pictures that have truly enhanced the work. And last but not least, thanks to Reesa, my current publisher, who has put so much time and effort into getting this ready for publication. It has been no small task! Now, on to the good stuff!

Brandy Golden

Chapter One

The Caribbean Sea, 1700's

The sun was peeking over the horizon, bringing the dawn of a new day to the beauty of the Caribbean Sea. The men stood frozen like a macabre tableau on the deck of the Aphrodite, the captive man's face painted in a snarl as he eyed his captors. They awaited the arrival of the ship's captain...a woman.

A woman he would sooner die than serve under! After all, had he known this Captain Frank, as he had sworn allegiance too when the Bounty went under, was a woman, he would have gone down with the ship!

Pierre stood at the open door of the Captain's cabin, his dark eyes watching as she buckled her sword around her slender waist.

"We're ready, Frankie," he said quietly.

Captain Frankie nodded to Pierre, her hand on her rapier as she preceded him out the door. Reaching the deck, she saw them.

Her men were gathered round a swarthy rogue with a knife slash down the side of his face. His eyes narrowed as he watched her approach, his fists clinched at his sides.

Frankie was silent as she returned his stare, her dark hair blowing away from her face, her eyes noting the weak chin and the stubble that didn't appear to be able to grow anymore, yet still pretending to be a beard.

"I'll not serve under a woman," he snapped, his spittle landing between her feet. His sharp black eyes faced her defiantly, giving no quarter.

She stared coldly at him until he began to fidget. "You'll serve, or you'll be shark food," she finally bit out.

She heard rustling and murmuring among some of her less loyal crew and knew she could not afford to show any weakness. The majority of them were her father's men, and were rock solid behind her, but they picked up strays now and then who swore allegiance to keep their throats from being cut and then reneged or tried to create a mutiny. Such was the man in front of her.

"Ye wouldn't put me off," he sneered, his black eyes saying it all. Saying he didn't think a woman could do it.

"Watch me."

She nodded then, and Pierre moved forward, his cutlass prodding the man in the chest as he herded him towards the plank.

The pirate shuffled backwards, a leer on his face, his disbelief still clearly evident. At the end of the plank, he stopped to stare her down once again.

"Can't do yourself can ye, bitch?" he sneered. "Yer're just a common whore who ain't got the guts to send a man to his death."

Frankie's temper flared inside her, but she gave no reaction to his words on the outside. He was a common pirate, brazen and bold, but he would scream for mercy at the last minute...just like they all did.

Her lip curled...she strode forward. She would give him mercy, the same kind that had been shown her father...and her gentle mother! She placed the tip of her rapier on his chest and pressed slowly.

The pirate's face began to show fear then, and he glanced down at the surging waters below him. He didn't see any sharks, but they were always there. Just waiting to sink their teeth into a man. A bead of perspiration broke out on his upper lip, but

he refused to give quarter to a woman. Death was preferable.

"Ye'll have to do better than that," he sneered feeling the tip of her rapier beginning to pierce his skin. Better to die at sword tip than be torn to pieces and still be half alive, watching those teeth coming at you again.

Suddenly, Frankie lowered her sword and planted a booted foot in the middle of his chest, kicking him backwards into the sea. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of impaling himself on her sword and affording himself even the tiniest of victories.

Even so, the pirate could not stop a gurgled scream from escaping his lips as he went down beneath the water and then struggled furiously to the top. She was looking down at him, the she-devil, laughing at him!

"If you can swim, you might make it to the island before they catch up with you," she laughed, pointing to the east.

He looked and saw a pair of dorsal fins about a hundred yards off, heading in his direction. With a muttered oath, he began swimming as if his life depended on it, which indeed it did!

Frankie turned and strode back onto the deck.

"Anyone else not want to crew the Aphrodite?" she asked mockingly. No one answered. She turned towards her cabin, Pierre falling in step with her.

"One of the men says he heard LaSalle was headed for The Pirates Hideaway, Frankie," murmured Pierre in her ear.

"The Pirates Hideaway?"

"Yes, it's a new harbor for pirates; been taken over by Macalister."

"You mean Morg Macalister?" she asked, her eyes narrowing as she stared at her Uncle and second in command.

"The same."

Frankie paused, considering the information Pierre had just given her. Macalister was a ruthless pirate who had slashed a reputation for himself that was as fierce as Captain Morgan's. But nothing would deter her in her revenge on Jacques LaSalle. Nothing! She nodded briefly. "Set sail for The Pirates Hideaway then, Pierre. How long will it take to get there?"

"About three days, I calculate," he replied.

"Well, set course, then. I'm going to talk to Kat. My twin sister needs to know this latest development."

Pierre Matis Fontaine watched his niece walk away, her stride bold and assured. He shook his head. He feared the girl's desire for revenge would bring about all their deaths one day.

He walked to the wheel of the huge ship, giving the command as she had requested.

"Weigh anchor for The Pirates Hideaway!"

Below, Frankie let herself into the cabin. "Hello, Kat," she murmured, watching her beautiful sister in front of the mirror. "We have things to discuss."

"Feeding the fishes again, Frankie?" Kat mocked, returning her sister's brooding gaze in the mirror. The girls were twins, but they looked nothing alike. The only thing alike about them was their temperament; both were feisty and high-spirited.

Frankie gave the red haired sprite a dark look. Her own raven hair fell to her waist in waves when she wore it loose, and her blue green eyes were hard and glittering. "He didn't want to do his job; what else was I supposed to do?" She shrugged her

slender shoulders then snagged a chair with a booted foot. Sitting in it, she leaned back and appraised Kat.

Kat turned sinuously, the dark pants and white silk shirt outlining her slender figure to perfection. Inside each boot, she had a pearl handled knife, her expertise. Katherine Adele Fontaine was as beautiful as her exquisite sister, Francesca Louise...Frankie to those close to her.

"Why didn't you just run him through with your sword?" Kat's green almond eyes gave her an exotic look as she asked a question she already knew the answer to.

Frankie's smile was mocking. "You know I won't do that if I don't have to. I like to at least give them a fair chance to live...sometimes." She thought of the man swimming for his life because he wouldn't work for her. In a way, he was right. She didn't have the stomach for this life, but the thought of their mother drove her on.

"So what did you want to talk to me about?" Kat asked, not in the mood to really taunt her sister. She leaned against the wooden dresser, her pert bottom resting on the edge.

"We have word of LaSalle's whereabouts. Seems he is headed for the new harbor, the Pirates Hideaway."

"Is the information reliable? You know I'm sick of chasing him all over the Caribbean!" Kat tossed back her red tresses and yawned, not quite awake yet like her sister.

"Pierre assures me it is reliable...well...as reliable as you can get. I've already given the order to set sail."

"How long?"

"Three days."

Kat sighed and nodded. "Three days it is then."



Frankie nodded and stood up. "I'll meet you in the practice room." She let herself out of the cabin. As she made her way to the room where Pierre instructed them in the art of handling weapons, she thought once again of her gentle mother. Attacked by pirates...her mother taken...her father killed. Her mother's face still haunted her dreams.

Shaking away the image, she once again vowed revenge on Jacques LaSalle! The master of the black ship, the one that had attacked their father's French merchant vessel on its way home to Louisiana in the New World...was a scoundrel. They said his heart was as black as the ship he captained, but Frankie didn't care. She would have her revenge, and if her mother was still alive, she would find her!

The Nemesis slipped silently through the shroud of night, coming upon the peaceful entry to The Pirates Hideaway. LaSalle kept watch through the spyglass as his first mate Frenchy guided the black ship slowly closer. He was a careful man; it was part of why he had such a fearsome reputation.

The Nemesis struck fear in hearts, and people whispered tales of the black ship that flew the pirate's flag; even her sails were black.

Some said it was revenge that drove LaSalle, revenge for the death of his young wife and the confiscation of his lands and properties by the French crown. Some said it was a black heart in league with the devil, but all respected his prowess, pirate and merchant alike.

"Frenchy, look at this," said LaSalle, handing the spyglass to the burly man beside him.

"That be Calico Jack's flags," Frenchy answered with a feral growl. "That lowdown back stabber has no honor, not even among pirates."

"Agreed," LaSalle replied smoothly, "but this is the Pirates Hideaway isn't it?"

"Oui, Capitan," responded Frenchy. "Bosun Graves is never wrong in reading the charts and the waves."

"Something is afoot, then," growled LaSalle. The hairs were standing up on the back of his neck; a sure sign that trouble was brewing. That, and gut instinct had saved his life more than once.

"Aye, my stomach feels colder than a wench's rump in winter," replied Frenchy, uneasily.

"We'll lay low here for a bit and keep an eye on things. I wouldn't trust Calico Jack, and the fact that he has three ships in harbor doesn't bode well for this Macalister."

"Macalister has made quite a reputation for himself, Mon Capitan," Frenchy mocked, knowing LaSalle already knew that. "Pretty soon, he will rival even yours and Blackbeard's."

"He already does," muttered LaSalle grudgingly, peering through the spyglass again. "Double the watch. Get someone in the crow's nest, and I want constant surveillance of the situation until dawn." He handed the glass to Frenchy. "Take charge of this thing and keep me informed. I want to know the second anything happens, anything at all.

"Oui, Capitan," murmured Frenchy, and he set about following orders as LaSalle strode off, bent on another task.

It was getting dusky, and Mathias Morgan Macalister stood on the balcony of his island home surveying the peaceful waters of the cove through

his spyglass. He sniffed the gentle wind, trying to gage the source of his uneasiness.

Calico Jack's three ships lay in his harbor alongside his own ships, and he was well aware of the pirate's reputation. He fully expected a takeover attempt before dawn, and he had his men in place and a surprise for old Jack, should he be so foolish.

Morg growled low in his throat. No one took what belonged to him, be it a woman, lands or gold! But there was something else going on...something he couldn't quite place.... something ready to happen.

Morg's gut instincts had saved his life on more than one occasion, and he knew something was coming to the Hideaway, but just what it was, he didn't know.

He put down his spyglass as he heard the soft footfalls behind him. He turned to face her, his startling green eyes piercing her slender frame, and she shivered.

Rosalie watched the big man carefully; his blonde hair tied at the back of his neck with a black ribbon was intriguing. He had a bandana round his forehead and a dark mustache that didn't match the sun-bleached blonde of his hair. His strong angular jaw was set in a foreboding manner, and she feared him.

"I'm ready, master," the young woman said, her fear showing in her lovely brown eyes, soft as a doe's. She trembled as Morg's ruthless gaze raked up and down her figure in the loose cotton gown. Rosalie fidgeted, hoping he would get to her punishment so it could be over with as soon as possible. She didn't know what he was going to do, but she was very apprehensive.

Morg's lips thinned into an almost cruel smile. The young lass had been brought before him today,

caught by his man and first mate, Nigor. The big black man had brought the frightened girl before him, saying they had finally caught the thief who had been stealing from their supply house.

When she had pled for mercy, Morg's soft inner core had been touched. The sixteen-year-old girl reminded him of his younger sister that he had left in Scotland so long ago. Her shiny brown hair hung to her shoulders, and she had tucked it nervously behind her ears, her movements so similar to young Eileen.

Morg had finally indentured her as his servant and took her to his home, ordering her to clean up and report to his chambers at dusk for punishment for her thievery.

"Well done, Rosalie," he said gruffly. "I see ye know how to obey orders...ye will make a fine servant for my manor house."

"T...thank you, sir," stammered Rosalie. She dropped a curtsy and bowed her head.

"Now, then, your punishment," he said briskly. Taking her by the arm, he walked her over to a straight-backed rattan chair and sat down. He began to pull Rosalie across his platform of broad hard thighs enclosed in white cotton material, bulging at the seams from the muscles in the long legs.

"W...what are you doing, Master?" gasped Rosalie, not understanding what was happening. She resisted him, pulling backwards desperately even though she knew her slender strength was no match for the powerful man.

Morg stopped and pinned her in an icy look. "Do ye know what the traditional punishment is for thievery, my girl?"

"N...no," squeaked Rosalie. She had never had to steal anything in her life until the pirates had

invaded the island and destroyed her childhood home. She had hidden in the woods until Nigor had found her, taking bits of bread and nuts, hoping the filthy lot wouldn't notice! She didn't dare voice her opinion, though; she was far too shy and scared!

"They get a finger cut off for the first offense," Morg declared. He took her slender forefinger between his own big fingers. "How about this one? Would ye like me to cut it off for ye?"

"No...please," begged Rosalie, trembling more than ever. "Please don't hurt me, Master!" She tried to pull her finger away from him, but he held on.

"Then ye will obey me in all things...and right now, ye are going over my lap to be spanked instead of having this lovely finger cut off. Will ye stop fighting me?" He could have forced her over easily, but down inside, he had a small feeling of protectiveness, and for some reason, he didn't want her to think him a total monster.

Rosalie's brown eyes opened wide, but she nodded, not exactly sure what he was talking about, but relieved that her finger was safe. She didn't fight when he pulled her down and over his thighs until he began to lift the loose cotton gown.

He had ordered she wear nothing beneath the gown, and this had been the true source of her nervousness. She knew little of the ways of men and women and was afraid he wanted to use her for his lust. The lifting of her gown seemed to confirm this, and she began to struggle again.

Morg bared her easily despite her struggles...he would have been surprised if she hadn't fought him. T'was only natural when a wench was about to get her hide tanned that she fight, but he subdued her easily, his huge arm blocking her hands as he gripped her hip with his left hand and patted the pale wiggling buttocks with his right.



"All right, my girl, here it comes!" With that he brought his palm down hard...so hard that Rosalie's body jerked, and her legs kicked straight out as she squealed in surprise and pain. He chuckled. "Aye, it hurts, little one, and there's a lot more to come! Ye'll be sorry you stole from us before I'm through with ye!"

Rosalie kicked and screamed as Morg smacked her bouncing cheeks over and over, igniting fire and pain like she had never known before! She cried and begged and pleaded for him to stop, but he ignored it all, continuing until the girl's bottom and thighs were a deep crimson red.

At last, he stopped and stood her up, then grabbed her as her knees buckled, and she sobbed hysterically.

Sitting back down, he fought with himself as he sat her on his lap, allowing her bottom to fall between his open thighs. "There now, lass, let that be a lesson to ye, don't ever steal!" His voice was gruff, and he didn't want to comfort her, but couldn't seem to help himself. He patted her shoulder awkwardly as she hid her face in her hands.

Rosalie paid no attention to Morg, other than to use his knees for support when her legs had buckled under her. She had never known such pain! Her bottom ached and burned like it was on fire,

and she shook from head to toe. She sobbed helplessly into her hands, finally becoming aware that he was patting her back and talking to her.

"Ye'll need to have Alyssa help you with some cream on that arse," he said gently. "Ye are going to be sore for awhile, as well ye should! Now, get along with ye and get ready for bed." He stood up then, gently pulling her to her feet and pointing her

towards the door. "And, if I have to punish ye again, I'll use a paddle!"

"Y...yes sir," she sobbed. Rosalie flew to the door on shaking legs. She knew what a paddle was, the men of the native villages used them in their canoes. She had no desire to have him beat her backside with one of those. She would never steal anything again...ever!

"Rosalie!" She stopped at the command in his voice and turned to face him "Send Alyssa so me. Ye women are NOT to leave the manor tonight, is that clear?"

She bobbed her curtsy. "Yes, Master!" She turned and went out, the tears still flowing down her cheeks.

When Alyssa appeared in the doorway, Morg gave her the same instructions. The lovely island woman nodded, her crisp black curls bouncing. She looked inquiringly at him; instinctively knowing something was bothering him. If he wanted her to know, he would tell her. If not, she would not intrude.

"See to the young lass, Alyssa," Morg added as she approached, her brown legs flashing beneath the island skirt. Morg's eye's gleamed as they watched her glide smoothly across the floor.

Alyssa's chocolate brown eyes met his with a smile. They were old friends. "Going soft are you, Morg?" Her rich island accent was a pleasure to his ears.

"Would ye like a trip over my knee then?" Morg returned pleasantly. He felt a hardening briefly at the thought of her full ripe bottom beneath his palm and the delights they enjoyed afterwards, but he tamped the stray thoughts down.



Alyssa was not fooled by his polite words, but she laughed as she moved out of reach. "Not tonight, I can tell there be other things on your mind." She grinned knowingly and fingered the sharks tooth necklace as she watched him carefully. She enjoyed their encounters, but expected nothing from him. They were from different worlds, but met as friends and, occasionally, lovers.

"I'm never too busy to tan your arse, Alyssa," Morg returned his eyes gleaming. "I have a new paddle just waiting for ye." He smiled when she moved away.

"I'll be passing on that offer, thank you," laughed Alyssa. She left, and Morg watched the door shut, the uneasy feelings starting once again. He strode to the balcony and took up the spyglass. It was going to be a long night!

Sure enough, it was just after midnight when Morg spotted the signal from Nigor. He was already dressed in dark clothes, his sword attached and a knife belted on his thigh.

Quickly, he shinnied down the trellis attached to the wall for the morning glories and slipped into the jungle undergrowth, headed for Calico Jacks biggest ship, the *Satin Lady*.

Nigor met him at the water's edge, and they slid into the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea and swam silently to the mooring ropes.

While his men engaged Jack's men in town, he and Nigor intended to hit Jack's own personal ship. Just as planned, the other men were already in place in the shadows along the ships base, and on his signal, they all began climbing the ropes. Once there, it was a simple matter to take over the greatly reduced crew Jack had left on board. A neck broken here, a throat cut there, and he was slamming open the door to the captain's quarters.

He stopped when he saw the woman. She was a woman of obvious English descent, and she glared at him with hatred in her eyes. She stood naked before him, proud of her lack of fear even though her ankle was manacled to the bed. Her body was beautiful, her full proud breasts swaying as she leaned forward and spat at him. "Filthy pirate!"

Jack's woman, obviously, or at least one he intended to have for himself. Morg strode forward and grabbed the woman by her long blonde tresses and ground his mouth into hers, tasting, drinking from her full red lips.

At first, the woman beat at him with her fists, but then she slowly surrendered and pulled him to her urgently, the scent of her arousal reaching Morg's sensitive nostrils. Quickly, he freed his throbbing member and drove her backward onto the bunk, mindful of the chain she was attached to and rammed his hard shaft home in one mighty thrust. It was the ultimate humiliation, having your woman taken by the enemy in your own sanctuary, and it gave Morg satisfaction to do it. Not that he had to take them...he had never taken a woman unwillingly, there were too many willing.

The woman screamed in delight and beat her fists on his back, her hips rocking and gyrating to the motion he was creating until at last, he groaned and sent her panting over the edge of her surrender.

Suddenly, the door slammed open, and Calico Jack roared with rage at the sight before him. The burly pirate raged forward, his greasy ponytail of black hair flipping behind his back. The black eye patch and three-day beard growth added to the roughness of his face, a face used to instilling fear.

Morg rolled off the woman and across the floor as Jack slashed at him with his sword cursing in

frustration at his misses. Quick as lightning, Morg rolled back and forth; avoiding Jack's useless jabs of his sword until he saw his enemy freeze suddenly, then collapse in slow motion, falling to the floor with blood seeping down the corner of his mouth.

Morg looked up and saw the full-bodied woman smiling, his sword in her strong grip. Quickly, she dropped to the floor and fished through Jack's pockets, squealing in triumph when she came across the key to her manacles. Keeping an eye on Morg and the sword in one hand, she unlocked the manacle and freed her ankle. "What is your name?" she finally asked him.

Morg got to his feet, still breathing heavily. He supposed the woman might have saved his life. "Morg Macalister," he answered cautiously. In his business, you never knew from where an enemy might spring.

"I have heard of you," she sneered. "You are another filthy pirate, just like that one." She kicked Jack's lifeless body. "No, not quite like that one. You did give me the best ride I've ever had, so I will let you live, but get off my ship!"

"Would ye mind giving me my sword and using Jack's?" queried Morg mildly, amused at her words. "What is your name, lass?"

"Jack's men are coming back," hissed Nigor urgently, sticking his head inside the cabin. "Time to get out of here!"

"Those are my men," crowed the woman. "That useless Calico Jack caught me in a weak moment and took over my ship, but the men will answer to me!"

"You never did tell me your name," insisted Morg, catching his sword as she threw it to him.

"It's Lola!" she said proudly. "Now get out of here before I change my mind."

Morg saluted her briefly and grinned. "I've heard of ye too, Lola...and ye called me a pirate!" Lola had a reputation in her own right, although she called herself a trader of goods. In short, she could be hired for anything and at just about any price. He chuckled and ducked out the door as she shrugged and grinned. "Until we meet again, fair lassie!"

Standing on the dock, Morg signaled his own men to let the *Satin Lady* go, and he watched as Lola strode to the deck and waved goodbye, a cheeky grin on her face.

Morg's men had confiscated Jack's other two ships, and Lola acknowledged his prowess with a wry salute as she sailed past him and out of the harbor; her own loyal men on board, Jack's most pathetic supporters left behind for Macalister to deal with.

Lola smiled wickedly. Her merchandise was safe. Macalister must have missed it. There were rewards to be had for the return of said merchandise, and she intended to get them to England, provided she didn't get stopped again. That backstabber Calico Jack had double-crossed her, but it wouldn't happen again. She watched as one of her crew hung his head off the prow of the ship, her brown eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"Not a bad nights work, eh, Nigor?" Morg asked as he downed his ale at the island pub. He too was feeling satisfied...for the moment. The Nasty Grubb was doing quite a business at 4:00am in the morning, and the men were celebrating.

Morg had assigned a couple of his trusted partners as captains of the ships they had taken over, and Jack's remaining crew had sworn loyalty to Morg as the governor of the island and to their ship captains.

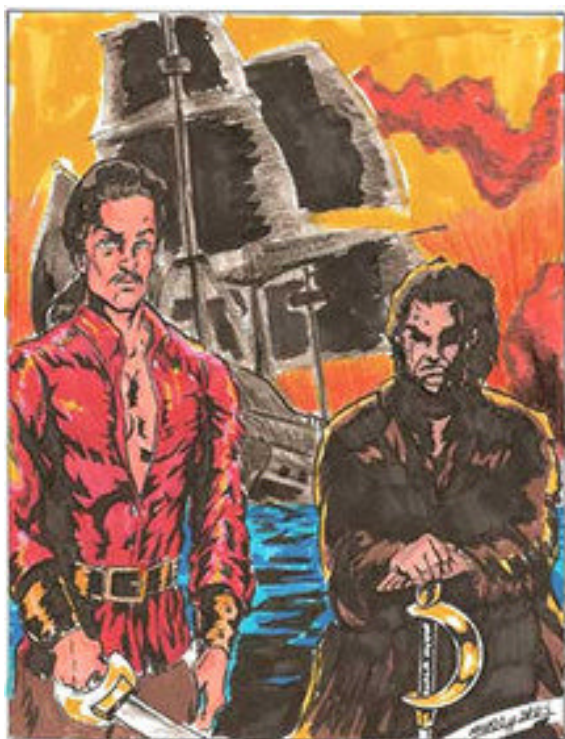
"Not bad at all, Captain," grunted Nigor, watching the goings on around him. He was ever vigilant in spite of the control they had over the island. Mutiny and treachery was always a possibility.

Morg felt a chill run down his spine, and he looked around him uneasily. The coup had been thwarted, the manor was safe, and two ships had been confiscated, why then did he still feel uneasy?

He swiped his mouth on his sleeve and walked out the door of the pub and stood gazing into the ocean horizon. What was out there that was on its way here? There was something coming, he could feel it in his bones, but what.... or who...was it?

Frankie's shirt back was soaked with sweat and so was the bandana across her forehead. She swiped at the liquid trailing into her eyes, and for an instant, was off guard. Kat quickly took advantage and deftly relieved her sister of her rapier.

"Merde," Frankie swore softly; her heaving breasts straining at the white cotton tunic open in a deep V. She took off the bandana and swiped at her face, wiping the sweat from her forehead and cheeks. Stalking across the room to the small table where Pierre sat watching the girls, she spoke quietly. "You know what to do."



Chapter Two

"You need more rest, Frankie," he said, steel in his voice. "You've been driving yourself too hard." Pierre watched her, concern in the liquid gold eyes that complimented the white blondness of his hair, giving him a leonine look. As a master of weapons, Pierre was teaching the girls his craft and had been since their father was killed and their mother abducted almost five years ago.

"I let my guard down," she returned, her eyes icy. "I could be dead right now!" She quickly peeled her men's breeches down and bent over the table, grasping the other side. "Just do it!"

Pierre sent Kat a troubled look, but Kat shrugged helplessly. Sighing, he picked up the heavy paddle from the table and moved behind Frankie. He could see the deep creamy expanse of her buttocks beneath the sheer knickers. It had been awhile since she had been in this position, and he felt it wasn't deserved today, but he had promised her he would follow through with her request.

Frankie had instituted this particular discipline a long time ago, when he first started training her. He hadn't missed once, yet today he did not wish to comply. However, his wishes were not what were in force here; Frankie's were.

Reluctantly, he raised the paddle high and then brought it down with a resounding thwack across her right cheek. He could not bring himself to apply as much force as he usually did, but it was still a blow to be reckoned with.

Frankie grasped the edge of the table and hung on. She gritted her teeth and waited for the first blow. When it finally came, the shock of that first



spank was as excruciating as ever, and she choked back a gasp and bit out a single word, "I!"

She tried to relax her buttocks, knowing the second one was right behind it, and when it bit into her left cheek, she grunted, "will!"

She braced herself for the third blow, and it landed harshly across both cheeks at once, making her gasp out, "kill!"

As each of the next three hot painful swats hit her backside, Frankie ground out, "you...Jacques...LaSalle!"

She slumped across the table, her bottom on fire, and the ache going deep from the heavy board. She panted, getting herself under control, her eyes dry as she slowly pushed up from the table and stiffly pulled her breeches back up. Without a word, she walked proudly from the room, making her way back to her cabin.

"I'm worried about her, Uncle Pierre," whispered Kat, placing a hand on his arm.

"I know, ma petite," replied Pierre heavily. "She is driving herself far too hard. She has a deep need for revenge."

"Do you think our mother is still alive, Pierre?" Kat stared doubtfully at her Uncle.

Pierre studied his small charge. He had been training the girls for almost five years, and they had sailed the seas now for the better part of two of those years, seeking the black ship that haunted Frankie's dreams. "I don't know," he said hesitantly. "You know the possibility of that is remote."

"We'll soon be to the Hideaway," she said musingly. "I wonder what Frankie plans to do once we get there. She can't just take on the Nemesis, although we do have it outgunned. The Aphrodite has taken many a ship and protected the fleet well. I just wish she had been there when all of you

sailed from France that time, Pierre. Maybe Father and Mother would still be here."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Pierre. "Not many pirate ships will take on a galleon. They usually hit the merchant ships and run, leaving once the galleons come after them. Still, I'm sure LaSalle will have others who would come to his aid in the harbor. No, direct confrontation is not an option, not unless we catch him on the open seas. We shall have to discuss it soon, though."

Kat walked back to the cabin, her thoughts on her sister. They had hit single pirate ships now and then to seek news of the Nemesis, and just for revenge for Frankie. They had a warehouse on Tortuga where they stored the merchandise from their spoils, but LaSalle was a hard man to find.

Kat took a deep breath and stepped inside the cabin where Frankie was applying ointments to her red bottom cheeks.

"I don't know how you can allow Pierre to do that, Frankie," grimaced Kat in distaste. "I certainly would never want to train that way."

"I got the idea from someone back home," replied Frankie, rubbing the cool ointments into the burn. It was already subsiding. "It's not so bad, and it's a heck of a motivator, I have to admit. I'm not sure I would be so skilled this soon were it not for Pierre's efforts."

Her blue green eyes twinkled at her sister in spite of her discomfort. She bent and slowly pulled the breeches back up, holding her breath until they had slid over her rounded backside and then heaved a sigh of relief.

"We need to talk, soon," Kat said uneasily. "We need to make plans on what we are going to do when we get there, we can't fight in a harbor!"

"Maybe...maybe not."

"Well, have you thought about it?"

"I'm thinking, yes!" Frankie had no intention of telling Kat exactly what she was thinking about, however, and Kat could tell she was hiding something from her.

Kat's eyes narrowed. "You're not thinking of doing something wild and foolish are you? Because if you are, you know that's my job!"

Frankie grinned. She knew full well how capricious Kat could be. She could take a sudden whim and fly with it. You just never knew what she might be up too at any given time. "I don't have anything concrete yet, just some ideas floating around in my head, that's all. When I come up with something, I'll let you know."

"We only have two days left, Frankie." She threw her hands up in the air when Frankie ignored her. Whirling on her heels, she turned and headed for the door. "Mon Dieu, maybe Pierre can talk some sense into you!"

By the time dinner was over that evening, Kat was tired and worn out. Tired of plotting, tired of revenge plans and the endless talk as the hours dragged on. And, tired of all the constant training and practice! It had really been getting to her, lately. The days had turned into months and the months into years.

Kat was bent on revenge too, but not nearly as hell bent on it as her sister Frankie. She was worried about Frankie, and she missed her. Missed their long talks about men, poetry, music and politics within the French court.

Frankie had become obsessed. Revenge on Jacques LaSalle was all she talked about, thought about, lived and breathed for. Kat prayed it wouldn't be what they ended up dying for.

Kat still remembered the good things in life, but not Frankie. Frankie seemed to have forgotten anything else existed

Slipping quietly out of the cabin, the young girl inhaled the fresh salt air. She did love these nights on the Caribbean, the cool breezes, and the starlit skies that seemed to stretch forever.

The moon was radiant in the heavens above, its silver earthbound shafts causing her creamy skin to glow. The emerald dress she wore clung just off her silky shoulders and plunged into a V between her ample breasts. Her long red gold hair brushed against the top of her bare shoulders, and her green eyes surveyed the darkened ocean as she meandered, lost in thought along the deck of the Aphrodite.

When Kat's petite foot hit something hard, she stumbled slightly and looked down. She spied the bottle of rum only half empty and grinned. "Just what I need right now, something to warm the spirits," she murmured quietly to herself. "It must have rolled out of a hiding place."

Picking the bottle up, she wiped the top off and tipped her head back to down a long swig and choked slightly...then smiled in satisfaction.

Standing on the deck, the young girl thought about the man she had left behind when they started this journey of revenge. She missed him and prayed desperately that LaSalle would be at the Pirates Hideaway, and this would all be over soon. She wanted to go back to her old life, the one she missed so desperately... at least what was left of her life without her parents.

How she missed her gentle father! The long evenings by the fire and the discussions they had engaged in. She missed her lovely mother, but her adored father had been her childhood hero.

She took a few more long soulful drinks of the intoxicating rum, and her gaze fell on the crow's nest high above her head. Perhaps a better view would gain her a better perspective, she decided, a bit tipsy.

Putting the bottle under her arm, she began to climb the rigging, slowly and carefully making her way to the top. Laughing giddily at herself, she stopped to take another drink and drained the last drop with relish; throwing the offending empty bottle into the sea.

It was then that she heard it, the thundering roar of Pierre. "Katherine Adele Fontaine! Get down from there this instant!"

It startled Kat, and she jumped, her foot slipping on the ropes. She suddenly found herself in the very unfortunate position of dangling upside down. She scrunched her tiny nose in disdain; she so detested getting caught in an ignominious predicament! This was not the norm for the charming beauty, and she was just tipsy enough to wonder how she was going to get out of this with her usual grace and tact.

In the next moment, a strong arm from above reached down, and in one fast swoop she found herself being pulled up and into the crow's nest. Flashing her most winning smile she spoke sweetly, "Why thank you, Gaston. You truly are a gentlemen."

Down below, Pierre was still having hysterics, and she peered over the edge as he shouted up at her.

"Kat! Mon Dieu! Get down here now and do so with care, young lady!"



His voice was unusually threatening, and Kat felt a bit uneasy. Flashing her emerald eyes at Gaston she asked, "I don't suppose you could get rid of him as easily as you pulled me up?"

Gaston's liquid brown eyes narrowed before yelling down to the anxious man below. "If she were my charge, Pierre, I would teach her a lesson on that tiny backside that she would not soon forget!"

Kat's green eyes rolled in disgust as her aristocratic nose scrunched up yet again. "That isn't quite what I had in mind, Gaston!"

Gaston's cool gaze stared her down, and with a simple jerk of his head, he conveyed his expectations.

"Fine, fine, I'm going," Kat grumbled quietly as she lifted her skirt and began to climb down.

"The daughter of a Duke is expected to behave with more sensibility and properness," he said sternly as he climbed down beside her to make sure she got safely to the bottom.

Kat rolled her eyes again and mimicked him under her breath.

Gaston's lips tightened, but he didn't say anything else. As soon as she was down to a safe distance from the deck, he quickly climbed back to his high perch.

Kat felt Pierre reach out and take her small waist in his strong hands as she neared the bottom. "Oh, for heaven's sake, Pierre, I'm fine," she said irritably. She tried to stomp away when she felt his hard hand on her elbow, spinning her around to face him.

"Not so fast, young lady, perhaps Gaston has the right idea."

"What?" Kat spat out. "Pierre, my sister may have requested that you discipline her in that fashion for her training, but that was her request,

not mine. I have never requested such punishment, and I never will, nor will she for any other reasons. Our father did not spank us, and we won't allow you to do so either, so don't get any ideas!" Kat jerked away from him and stormed towards their cabin.

She flung the door open, her emerald eyes flashing, and Frankie looked up, startled. "What is going on?"

"Pierre threatened to spank me, that's what's going on," raged Kat. "Probably because of that stupid training program you are doing with him. Honestly, Frankie, this is all getting to be too much!"

Pierre appeared in the doorway, his face set in an angry scowl. "Kat here decided to climb the rigging in that dress and got her foot caught. If not for Gaston, she would have fallen to her death! And, she was drinking when she did it, I saw her throw the rum bottle overboard."

"Kat!" Frankie stared at her twin in consternation. "What were you thinking?"

"I know what I'm thinking," ground out Pierre. "I'm thinking Gaston was right, and she needs her backside attended too with a good paddling!"

"Uncle Pierre!" Frankie remonstrated. "You can't do that!"

Pierre folded his powerful arms and peered at them from beneath his bushy blonde eyebrows. "I'm beginning to think I've been remiss in you girls training after all. Don't try me again, or you will both be in for an unpleasant surprise."

He turned and strode out the doorway, slamming the door behind him. Kat and Frankie looked at each other and heaved a sigh of relief.

"One of Jack's ships is leaving the harbor, Capitan." Frenchy was at LaSalle's cabin door, knocking softly.

A few minutes later, Jacques was staring through the spyglass, watching the approach of the *Satin Lady*. "Odd," mused Jacques. "I would have thought Calico Jack wouldn't leave until he had Macalister's head."

"Actually, it's Jack's head that's been taken," laughed Frenchy. "It's hanging off the prow of the *Satin Lady* as we speak."

Jacques focused the spyglass on the approaching ships' prow. Sure enough, there was Calico Jack's head hanging around the neck of the mermaid on the point. Jacques roared with laughter. "Send a hail across the bow. I want to know how Macalister pulled this off."

Thirty minutes later, the fiery Lola stood before LaSalle, her beautiful eyes dancing. "So, the gentlemen pirate wishes a conference with the commander of the *Satin Lady*?" she asked haughtily, her men standing at guard around her.

"If I may be so bold?" Jacques bowed gallantly and offered Lola his arm. After a moment's hesitation, she stepped forward with a challenging grin and put her hand on his forearm. Turning to her men she stated boldly, "Wait for me. You all have your orders."

The men nodded their understanding.

"And what makes you think you can command a bunch of brigands such as these," asked Jacques, amused at her orders. "Should I wish it, I could have control of your ship at any time."

The two were strolling along the deck of the *Nemesis*, enjoying the early morning air. The men's eyes lusted after the fair Lola, wishing they were in the captain's shoes at that moment.

"I'm aware of that," replied Lola candidly. "However, I've heard of your reputation. And, while pirates are a scurvy lot for the most part, there is a certain...respect that is accorded the successful is there not?" She arched her brow quizzically at him.

"Oui, ma petite," agreed Jacques good-naturedly. "Spin me your tale, I would hear it." His heated gaze perused the creamy expanse of breast that threatened to burst the bodice ties that lovingly confined it, then traveled back to her face.

He roared with laughter once again as Lola told her story then listened attentively when Frenchy came up and whispered something in his ear. Turning away from the woman, he spoke to Frenchy in low tones. Frenchy hurried off. Then he turned back to his lovely guest.

"Well, well, ma petite. It looks like you've been holding out on me." His voice had gone cold suddenly, and Lola's eyes narrowed. She refused to be cowed, though, and she lifted her chin defiantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about the hidden cargo on the Satin Lady. Or were you not aware?" he asked silkily.

She flushed then, but gave no other indication or acknowledgement of his words. "What are you talking about?"

"Are you telling me you had no idea of the women on board there?"

"Yes, I knew of it. So what? Jack had intended them for the slave markets on Tortuga. I simply intend to let them go when I reach England." She spat the words at him, knowing he wouldn't believe her if she denied knowledge of the women.

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that," he replied smoothly, knowing full well she had no such intentions. It was more likely she had hopes of collecting reward monies for their return. "The Satin

Lady is even now being taken possession of by a crew of my men."

"Y...you can't do that," she hissed furiously.

"Oh, I can, and I have. You see, now that my men know the women are there, they won't rest until we have them. With the help of one of your trusted men, plus the fear of the Nemesis, I am ensured an easy takeover. The only question that remains is what to do with you?" He smiled mockingly at her.

Lola held her head proudly; returning stare for stare though her heart sank. She had underestimated LaSalle. But she would not beg.

She knew some of her men were iffy at best. Some of them were pirates, but most of the men on the *Satin Lady* had been Englishmen loyal to her and their country. She had lost her gamble that she could bluff LaSalle, and he knew it.

"And they say you are a gentlemen," she sneered, her hand feeling for the knife beneath her skirts. She would not allow herself to be used by any man, not if she could help it.

"That's not a title I afforded myself," he answered lazily, watching her carefully, like a cat teasing a mouse. "However, ma chérie, I will be generous this time." He smiled as she froze, listening to his every word. "Such courage and audacity deserve a reward."

He reached out and dipped his fingers between her breasts, gently cupping around one of the warm soft mounds. He took it in to the warmth of his palm, his thumb playing with the hardening rosebud.

Lola sucked in her breath, his touch not unpleasant. "I'm listening," she murmured throatily, not above using her body to get what she wanted.

That was different than being used with nothing in return.

"I shall release you and any of your men who wish to return to England, but your cargo will remain with me. That is my only offer."

"Is that all you wish?" asked Lola coyly, pressing her body into his.

"Yes, ma petite, he replied, then pinned her to his chest and with the other arm, lifted her skirts and found the hidden knife, pulling it from its scabbard. "I prefer my women willing and without hidden fangs," he added, amused at the outrage on her face.

She laughed derisively and stepped back. "Your loss."

Jacques watched her go and nodded to Frenchy to release her and her men, and they kept the *Satin Lady* under careful surveillance until she was well under way.

"Send a launch into the Hideaway," he ordered Frenchy. "Tell Macalister we have goods for a slave market and will require port, fresh water and supplies, a cleaning for the *Nemesis* and docking for an undetermined number of days."

"Oui, Mon Capitan," mocked Frenchy lightly and he turned to his task.

Frankie awoke panting for air, the remnants of the old dream drifting slowly away. It was always the same and always left her tired, yet wide-awake.

Restlessly, she got up and dressed, strapping on her sword that she never went anywhere without. Silently, she made her way out and onto the moon



washed deck. She prowled the ship, checking on the night watch. When she came upon Gerard asleep, she was instantly angry.

Drawing her sword from its silver sheath, she pressed it against his broad chest, intentionally letting the point pierce the skin. "You are a dead man."

Gerard was instantly awake, his breath sucking in with a hiss when he recognized the captain's deadly eyes glaring at him.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't just run this through your heart," she snapped coldly. Gerard was one of the pirates they had taken aboard after they had razed another pirate ship, the Lady Hawk. He had sworn allegiance to Frankie, but Frankie hadn't trusted him. It looked like her instincts had been correct. The fool had fallen asleep on watch, a deadly sin in their way of life.

"I...I be beggin yer pardon, Captain," he stuttered. He stealthily tried to hide the empty rum bottle behind him, but Frankie's sharp eyes caught his movement.

"On your feet," she commanded.

Gerard slowly arose, keeping as far into the wall as he could to get away from the sword that was pressed into his skin. Frankie kicked the empty bottle away. "So, you've been drinking on watch as well," she said calmly. "You must not take me very seriously?"

When he didn't answer, she lowered her sword and backed off. "Draw your sword," she commanded.

A feral grin lit up the man's dirty features, and he reached eagerly for his cutlass. This was going to be fun! He'd best her, and then he would teach her what women were good for in a man's world. She

was a cocky beauty, hard as nails they said and a superior fighter.

However, he simply didn't believe she was that good. No woman was good enough to take on a real man. He'd just been biding his time anyway. Maybe later he'd hook up with LaSalle and warn him the wench was looking for him. In the meantime, he intended to enjoy this!

Frankie could read the intent on the rogue's face, and she grimaced in disgust. She kept her guard up easily, though, and watched his eyes, just as Pierre had taught her. She felt the adrenalin rushing in, and her eyes gleamed like polished stones, waiting for him to make the first move.

In the shadows, Pierre watched carefully, his hand on his sword. He would wait...although he was sure he wouldn't have to interfere. There were few men he had seen with Frankie's expertise. It seemed to come naturally to her, and she drove herself beyond excellence. She played with Gerard like a cat with a mouse, and the fool wasn't even aware of it. A small smile played across his lips.

It was a scant few minutes before the half drunken pirate was relieved of his sword. He lay flat on his back, wondering how he had gotten there, her booted foot in his chest and her sword at his throat.

Frankie smiled wickedly in triumph and then purred throatily, "So what's the penalty for falling asleep on watch?"

Going pale, Gerard snarled, "Ten lashes with the cat o nine." His eyes gleamed with hatred, and Frankie knew she had made an enemy.

There were some men who respected her prowess and authority when she bested them, and some...like Gerard here...who were cowards at heart



and would sink a knife in your back when you weren't looking. She would be better off to finish him, but she couldn't be quite that cold-blooded. If he had put up a better fight maybe...but he hadn't.

"On your feet," she commanded. "Take over, Pierre, she said without looking in his direction.

Pierre chuckled and stepped out of the shadows. "You are getting far too alert and skilled for your own good, ma petite. I fear you will never find a man to match your skill and spirit."

She gave him a dark look. "What do I want with a man?" she rejoined, meaning every word. In her 20 years of life, she had yet to meet one who stirred her blood. A few had commanded her respect, but none had touched her heart.

Pierre merely shook his head and began herding Gerard to the mast to tie him in place.

Frankie looked out at the dawn arising over the sea, the relentless red fingers of the sun painting the far off horizon. It was breathtaking, but her thoughts weren't on the view.

Would she ever forget that day she wondered? Would it always haunt her? Seeing her father go down under four filthy pirates and her mother spirited away, her face filled with shock and horror as a burly pirate tossed her over his shoulder. The huge pirate had grabbed a rope to take them both across to the Nemesis and away from Frankie...perhaps forever. Frankie shivered.

"Get her out of here, Pierre," her father had commanded desperately and Pierre had. He had taken them both backwards over the railing and down into the murky depths of the green water below them.

Her mother's strangled screams still rang in her ears, and as the dark water had closed over her head, her last sight had been Jacques LaSalle,

standing like a statue at the prow of the black ship, watching the carnage...and her.

Pierre had cut her dress off to keep them from being dragged under, and then hauled her to a lone rowboat, bobbing upside down between the ships. He had brought them up under the boat and slapped her as she came up screaming.

"Swim, Frankie, swim for our lives," he had commanded, and he had put her hands against the inside of the boat's hull. In shock and pain, Frankie had done as he ordered, and they had gotten away, but to what? Her mind always took her back...especially at night.

Chapter Three

Morg watched as the Nemesis slid silently into the harbor, the color of the big black ship making it look menacing. It was easy to see why it inspired fear and legends. Like a mighty sea beast, she slid in on watery feet and docked at the assigned location. The ship intrigued him greatly, and he was looking forward to getting a closer look at it.

There were many tales of the black pirate ship, but Morg had never tangled with it himself. As far as he knew, no one had ever beaten her in a fight, and rumors had filtered down that it was faster than any galleon in the Caribbean. It was easy to see why, she was not quite the size of a normal galleon and was built for speed and fighting, not just battle or speed alone. He stared greedily as her black sails came down, and men rushed to tie her off and lower the gangplank. Time to meet the infamous Jacques LaSalle.

Jacques stood at the railing looking out over the newly developing settlement. He saw the bold stride of the man coming down the wharf and knew it must be Morg Macalister. His sharp eyes didn't miss a detail about his appearance from the gold earring in his right ear to the tips of his shiny black boots. The man was a leader and carried himself proudly... too proudly to be a common pirate.

His eyes narrowed, and he smiled thinly as Macalister came to a halt at the bottom of the gangplank and studied him in return.

"Welcome to The Pirates Hideaway. I'm Governor Macalister." Morg stood at rest, his hand on the hilt of his sword, arrogance in his very stance. He carefully studied the notorious Frenchmen as he walked towards him, his bearing



almost regal. His dark hair was tied back in a black ribbon like his own, and his dark piercing eyes gave nothing away. His red silk shirt was open at the neck and fit like a second skin, enhancing the appearance of the powerful muscles of his chest and shoulders, tapering to a narrow waist. "Your man said ye were staying indefinitely?"

Jacques stopped and nodded, his ears tuned to the Scottish brogue, not unpleasant to the ear. "Oui, monsieur, that is correct. And are you prepared for a slave market? Or is the settlement too new as yet?"

"Ye have women?" Morg was interested, his green eyes lighting up at the news.

"Oui, monsieur. A little gift from the lovely Lola." Jacques's grin widened as Morg's eyes narrowed in realization that his men must have missed that detail. He wondered exactly how it would have escaped the sharp-eyed Scotsman, but he shrugged.

Something about LaSalle's wicked grin tickled Morg's sense of humor, and he smiled wryly. "Now wasn't that decent of the wee lass?" He'd have to take it up with Nigor later. Looked like his handpicked men hadn't been very thorough.

"Very decent," agreed Jacques, his eyes twinkling.

"Strange lass, that one," Morg said evenly, pulling on his blonde moustache.

"Cunning as the devil, always changing her story to fit the circumstances," Jacques added.

"Aye, don't they all?" Morg shrugged his broad shoulders. In spite of himself, he found there was something about the man standing in front of him that he felt a kinship with. "We have a definite need for women here, and I'm sure there will be many looking for servants, bar maids and whatever else a

man might want. I'll have to ask ye to keep the lasses on board until the auction. I don't want nae fighting amongst my men over them."

Jacques nodded. "How soon can we set up the sale?"

"Just as soon as ye are ready, the sooner the better. How many do ye have?"

"There are twenty two on board, but I want you to see that they have decent buyers. I don't like trading in flesh, but my men would mutiny on me if I didn't allow them the sale."

Jacques had no taste for selling women, and he would personally check each one out beforehand to make sure none were of aristocratic blood. It was the best he could do for them. He had bought a few himself in the past at such sales and then sent them home, not knowing whom their benefactor was.

"Aye, I nae have a taste for it either, but the island needs women. I'll see to it, ye have my word."

The two men nodded at one another, a mutual understanding passing between them. Morg turned and left, his long stride eating the ground as he headed for the tavern.

He stopped suddenly and sniffed the wind, a chill at his back so strong that he turned towards the open sea as if drawn to it by a strange hand. There it was again, that feeling of uneasiness. Something...or someone, was coming...he could feel it. He scanned the horizon, looking for something, anything, that would explain his uneasiness, but nothing was there. Disgruntled, he shook his head and turned away.

Jacques watched the strange actions of Macalister and wondered what was wrong. He had the look of a man plagued by something. He turned when Frenchy spoke in his ear.

"Capitan, you remember that man we picked up off Devil's Reef?"

"Oui, Frenchy," Jacque replied. "What about him?"

"He has a strange story to tell my friend. It seems there is a French ship looking for you. A ship captained by a beautiful woman...a she-devil he called her. She made him walk the plank for refusing to serve her, and she handles the sword better than most men."

"What is the name of her ship?" Jacques asked idly.

"She is called The Aphrodite, and she sometimes flies The Jolly Roger."

"Fascinating," murmured Jacques. "I wonder what she wants with me?"

"To hear this man talk, she wants to kill you, my friend," chuckled Frenchy.

Jacques's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Indeed?"

Frenchy nodded. "Perhaps she will find her way here?"

"Just in case, I'd better start practicing," said Jacques with a roguish grin. "I wouldn't want to disappoint her and not present her with a challenge." His black eyes gleamed with interest.

"Oui, Mon Capitan," laughed Frenchy, knowing that no man had ever bested Jacques LaSalle, let alone a woman. This should prove most interesting if the lady in question made it to the Hideaway...most interesting indeed!

Two days had passed and a heated argument was going on aboard the Aphrodite. They had dropped anchor outside the Pirates Hideaway, and at Pierre's insistence, were discussing their options.

Kat listened with growing apprehension as Pierre tried to talk sensibly to her sister.

"I say we go in boldly and challenge LaSalle. After all, we outgun him. He has nowhere to run!" Frankie's eyes were alight with battle fever, and she was ready to attack. Looking through the spyglass, she could see the black ship bobbing gently in her docking, a perfect sitting duck. They had come so far...she was filled with the raging desire to end it...now!

"You have to come up with a better plan than that, Frankie," insisted Pierre hotly. "Stop thinking of revenge for a minute and think of the 300 lives on board, many of them your father's own loyal crew. They have wives and families to go home to!"

He waved his hand towards the harbor. "As you can see, Gaston's information was correct. The harbor is set up to let only one ship at a time in and out. There is not room for more than that! If we go in there with guns blazing, they may all attack us or surround us and disarm us. And if they find out that most of us are not really pirates, we may never be allowed to leave!"

"But, once we defeat the Nemesis, we can take LaSalle and do as we wish with him," insisted Frankie. "Why are you so dead set against it, Pierre? We have the advantage of surprise." She ground her teeth in frustration.

"Because Macalister will never allow a fight within the harbor. You know the harbor bylaws!" Pierre paced back and forth, his eyes flashing. "You surely can't believe Macalister won't have cannons along the shore and guards on duty? If we break the laws, we are subject to our ship being confiscated and all aboard it, including cargo and women. Is that what you want?"

He strode over to Frankie and stared down into her angry face. "Have you even thought about Kat? What will happen to you two if they should find out you are Lord Fontaine's daughters?"

He turned away then and ran a hand along his chin. "Not only that, but there is something about LaSalle that is familiar. I just can't quite put my finger on it, but I know I've seen him before. The way he stood at rest on the bow of the Nemesis...something about him."

Pierre broke off, irked with the niggling that would not stop concerning the man. "If only I had seen him up closer."

"So what do you suggest then?" Frankie's eyes glittered with frustrated rage. "That we issue him a challenge to come from the harbor and fight on the open seas? Like that's going to work! Anyway, I don't hear you coming up with anything better!"

Her snide attitude had Pierre flushing with anger, and he wondered if the paddle might not come amiss at this point. His brother had done the girls no favors by not disciplining them when they were younger. They were far too independent for their own good.

"Of course not," he snapped, running his fingers through his heavy blonde mane. "I suggest we go in as we would anywhere else, and then get the lay of the land. Find out who is there and what is going on. Then make an informed decision. By now, I'm sure word of the Aphrodite having a woman captain has spread all over the Caribbean. LaSalle may even know you are looking for him. We must be prepared for all contingencies, ma petite. Surely, you can see that?"

Frankie sighed impatiently. Yes, she could see that, but it didn't make it rankle any less. She wanted this over with...she had to find out if there

was any chance her mother was still alive...and then end LaSalle's wretched life!

When the French monarch had approached Lord Gatineu Fontaine to relocate to the colonies and set up a merchant shipping business based out of New Orleans, who had ever thought this would happen? The exchange of goods between the new lands and the old continent was a thriving one, one to make a man rich he had been told. He hadn't been lied to.

So the Duke of Frontenac and his duchess and their twin daughters, then 12 years old, had relocated to the new land and soon had a thriving plantation and a rich merchant shipping business. All had been well, until disaster had struck!

Frankie shook off her dark thoughts and faced the issues at hand. "All right, Pierre, send a launch informing this Macalister that we wish to dock. We will play it your way...for now."

She turned to the window, trying to calm herself and have patience. At least, they finally had LaSalle cornered. As long as they were at the mouth of the harbor, he couldn't get away from them! "Make sure someone is watching the harbor constantly. I won't allow him to slip away from us again."

Pierre shook his head. He feared for Frankie and Kat. As much as they had seen in the last few years, he still felt they were unprepared for some of the atrocities they could still be forced to endure.

The relative safety of the Aphrodite, surrounded by a crew mostly loyal to Gatineu Fontaine was a lot different than being among true pirates. He had helped them to avoid exposure to the harbors they had docked in as much as possible...sending men ahead whenever it could be arranged, leaving the girls on board.

Pierre knew if anyone could pull off a coupe of Jacques LaSalle, it would be Frankie. She was well

trained and finely skilled, more so than most men he had ever trained. But at what price would victory be wrought he wondered? Would any of them ever see home again? With a grim sigh he turned to go.

Kat had listened while Pierre and Frankie argued, impatient at Frankie's stubbornness. She too sighed when she finally heard Frankie relent.

Kat was certain of one thing, their deaths would serve no purpose, and Frankie's desperation for vengeance was clouding her logic. The transition had been slow, but inevitable, she supposed. They had started out with a clear plan, one that had seemingly unraveled again and again. Months had turned to years, and they still did not have LaSalle's head. Her distaste for this life was increasing daily.

She nodded to Pierre as he brushed past her and out of the cabin, then turned back to Frankie. With the grace of a cat she planted herself on the tabletop and eyed Frankie through her crystal green eyes. Her slender finger mindlessly traced the outline of her thigh through her favorite pair of men's breeches.

Her mind wandered aimlessly, and her thoughts momentarily focused on her lover, the one she had left behind. For a moment, it was his hand that was playing along her thigh, roaming languidly across her bare flesh, slowly blazing a path to her womanhood. She closed her eyes and felt her rose colored nipples harden at the thoughts that engulfed her.

Oh, how she longed for him, to feel his smooth skin pressing against her milky flesh. She shook her head to clear away the imagery flashing through her brain. She had given herself to him countless times. She hadn't cared that it wasn't what a Duke's daughter was supposed to do before marriage, she

did what she desired, and she always had. She longed desperately to return to her old life.

"Frankie, this has to work," Kat blurted out into the silence, her feelings so intense she couldn't hold them back anymore.

Her outburst took Frankie by surprise, and her eyes narrowed.

"I can't stand it anymore, Frankie! This has to come to an end here and now, at this Pirate's Hideaway... It has to be finished! We cannot fail again!" Her passionate plea did not fall on deaf ears.

"I agree, Kat. This time will be the last time we find ourselves on the edge of a port awaiting news of Jacques LaSalle's whereabouts, I promise you that," vowed Frankie fervently. "We will make it work this time!"

Kat's voice became a cool whisper. "Let's not fight him in the open. Let's not risk all of these lives."

Frankie's eyes narrowed again, and she studied her sister. "What are you suggesting, Kat?"

Kat's voice was cold and calculated as she stated her idea flatly. "Let's get close to him, and when he isn't expecting it, slit his damn throat. I want to see him die, Frankie. I want to know it's over. I need to know it's over. Don't you want to look into his eyes and whisper our mother's name as his blood spills?"

"You have no idea how much I want him dead, Kat," Frankie replied. She was a bit taken aback at the vehemence in Kat's voice, though. She studied her sister for a moment, the clear green eyes so full of determination, the small piquant face flushed with feeling. How hard this must be for her, she realized.

Kat and Pierre had supported her completely when she had said she was going to look for

LaSalle. Pierre had trained them for three years, and then they set sail... It had been almost two years now, and they still hadn't found a trace of their mother.

Frankie stared grimly at Kat. "We'll find him...and when we do, he will tell us what happened to our mother...then we will kill him."

The two girls smiled at each other, but their smiles did not reach their eyes.

Gazing through his spyglass, Morg scanned the galleon that had dropped anchor outside the harbor. The name on her side was the Aphrodite. Nigor had informed him of the pirate that had been telling tales of the French woman seeking LaSalle's head. It looked like he might be right...at least about a ship called the Aphrodite.

Morg felt uneasy as he stared at the ship through the glass. She was a beautiful full sized galleon, very capable and very deadly. Well gunned and well manned. If she wanted to create havoc, it would be a hard battle stopping her from her vantage point at the mouth of the harbor.

The back of his neck tingled. There it was again, that feeling of something in the air...something he couldn't put a name too. Perhaps this ship was the source of that feeling. Maybe this woman would have the audacity to actually start a war in his harbor!

He dropped his glass and shouted orders to Nigor and his crews. There would be no fighting on his islands! He was the Governor here now, appointed by the British crown, and he didn't intend to let a blood vendetta destroy his growing colony and business. It was time to visit the mighty galleon

and this she devil captain he had heard so much about.

Soon, the Lady Princess and the Lady Queen were on either side of the anchored ship, and Morg motioned the Lady Princess in closer. It was then he saw them.

He was astonished at the regal bearing and beauty of the women as they stood at rest, watching him warily. The morning sun outlining their bodies through their silk shirts was an unexpected sight, and he found himself entranced with the red haired one whose burnished curls glinted in the morning sun. That nagging feeling of impending doom intensified, and he wanted to get a closer look at her.

"Permission to come aboard," Morg yelled, not knowing which one, if either, was the captain. That question was answered when the tall dark haired one stepped forward and nodded.

A plank was thrown between the sides of the two ships, and Morg walked across, leaving his weapon with Nigor as a sign of good faith. He thought he might have made a mistake when the dark haired woman drew her sword and held the point just under his nose.

"State your business," Frankie demanded.

Morg's gloved hand gently moved the rapier aside, his glittering green eyes giving nothing away. Inside, he was seething at her attitude. Apparently, the she-devil could not even be civil. He bowed slightly in greeting.

The rapier point returned again, and once more, she demanded, "State your business or get off my ship."



Behind her, Pierre's lips thinned in disapproval. Perhaps, he should have taken her more often into the ports, he thought. Then maybe she would be more familiar with protocol in dealing with these harbormasters. She had insisted on being allowed to do it this time, and Pierre had agreed to calm her down and make her see reason.

Holding his temper at her rudeness, Morg replied. "My name is Morgan Macalister, and I have come to find out your purpose here in the Pirate's Hideaway. I am governor here, and rumor of your search for Jacques LaSalle has reached my ears...and most likely his ears as well. It would seem some shark bait of yours found its way to the Nemesis."

Frankie's eyes narrowed as he talked, and she slowly lowered her sword. "Go on."

"I am no friend of Jacques LaSalle, nor ye either, lass. I am simply here to state that if ye two get into a fight in my harbor, I will sink both your ships and hang every crewmember. Our harbor is ringed with 40 twelve-pound cannons, and I have a fleet of four ships, plus friends. Neither of ye will have a chance. That is not a threat, Captain. That is a promise." His deep emerald eyes glinted in warning as he stated his business.

Frankie stared boldly at Macalister, her eyes giving nothing away. "I don't know what or who you chose to believe, and frankly, I don't give a damn. You are only here right now because I chose not to open fire on you when you came out of the harbor. Had we wished, you would be at the bottom of the bay right now, so don't threaten me, Macalister. Perhaps you should be more careful who you listen to."

"That is correct, Monsieur Macalister," added Kat, emphasizing the monsieur delicately as if he

had no right to be addressed with that much courtesy. Her green-eyed gaze raked over his masculine physique appreciatively as she stepped up beside her sister. She felt his animal magnetism and was both repelled and fascinated by it. She did not appreciate her body's response to a common pirate. "Shark bait is rarely reliable." Her tiny nose flared in distaste.

"All we require from you is safe harbor and fresh supplies. Our business with Monsieur LaSalle is just that...OUR business. Surely, he is not such a coward as to be afraid of a woman?" Frankie arched her eyebrow scornfully.

"If so," chimed in Kat, "you may tell him that we won't hurt him...much." Her lovely mouth curved in a slight mocking smile.

Morg's eyes narrowed as he ingested the well-cloaked insult and debated as to what, if anything, he should do about it. Studying the small red haired sprite he felt the surge of hot desire flash through his loins as well as the urge to punish, to subdue...to create in her the same desire he was feeling.

When his dangerous gaze scanned her, he felt the same uneasiness pool in his chest once again that had been plaguing him since last night. Was this red headed imp the source of that disquiet?

Pierre cleared his throat behind the girls, his brows drawn together in a frown, but he did not interfere. He scowled when Kat turned and flashed him a wink and a bright grin, her small white teeth gleaming in the sunlight.

Macalister did not miss the exchange, and he was intrigued as to what was going on here, but he would not probe for now. It was clear that these women had business with LaSalle, but as long as they did not intend to tear up his harbor that was all he was really concerned with.

He bowed mockingly to the women. "Ye may have safe harbor and all the supplies and fresh water you need at the usual price of 100 per ship and ten gold per day, but heed my warning...it won't be repeated. Cross me, and your crew will pay with their lives while ye two...ye will only wish ye had gotten off that easily." His green eyes held a clear warning and glittered coldly in the morning light.

Frankie merely stared at him, refusing to be intimidated in any way. "Don't threaten me, Macalister," she said frigidly. "You'll find we don't scare that easily by the likes of you."

Morg watched as Kat moved in close to her beautiful sister. There was no fear in either of their defiant eyes. The lack of fear intrigued him, but the lack of respect irked him. Perhaps some day, he would get the chance to teach them a little of each, especially the red-haired one. He bowed slightly again and turned to go.

Walking back to the Lady Princess, Morg's back was stiff and ramrod straight. After facing the two sisters, he warred with conflicting feelings. Bed them, spank them, or take off their heads with his sword. The encounter had certainly left him unsettled and seething at their lack of respect for his station.

When he dropped to the deck, Nigor approached him, followed by an old crewmember of Calico Jacks.

"This man has something to tell you, Sir," Nigor said. He motioned to a lean man with an eye patch.

"Well, what is it?" Morg snapped.

"Captain, I know that ship. She is no pirate ship; she is a French pirate Hunter!" The man smiled a toothy knowing grin.

"How would ye know this?"



"Because I know that ship...I used to sail with their father. That ship belonged to Lord Fontaine.

He and his wife were both killed by pirates, and them girls is seeking revenge."

"Well, now, that is good to know. Ye have done well. Now keep this to yourself." He looked at Nigor. "Reward the man, Nigor, and then turn us around and get us out of here."

"Aye, captain." The man took his gold coin and scurried off.

Nigor spoke with a question. "We'll be turning our backs to them, Captain, that is an insult."

"Show them our arse, Nigor, I don't care if they are insulted. That lumbering galleon is no match for the clipper and the frigate. Besides, they insulted me already."

Morg's eyes gleamed as he turned to watch the captain and her sister out of sight. He gave them a mock salute as the stern of the Lady Princess sent water splashing across their bow on her swing around. "Until we meet again, my haughty beauties," he murmured, watching Frankie's mouth tighten. They hadn't even had the courtesy to introduce themselves.

Pierre watched in grim silence as Morg sailed away, his rude gesture well noted. He turned to the girls who were grinning and looking quite proud of themselves. His ire grew.

"So, you insult this man, and you find it funny that he insults you back?" His voice was low and smooth, and the girls instantly looked warily at him. Pierre had been getting some strange ideas lately...Frankie was remembering Pierre's threat to spank Kat the previous day.

"We enjoyed the exchange with him, if that's what you mean," Frankie said cautiously, her instincts on alert.

Pierre's temper was bubbling beneath his cool exterior. "You girls have no respect for the unknown! This is not the French court or a coming out ball where the delicate repartee of disguised barbs is accepted and practiced. You anger a man like Macalister, and you could wind up dead!"

Pierre was spitting the words out furiously at them. "You toy with things you don't fully understand! You both need to be taught a good lesson in respect and deportment."

He grabbed Kat by the arm and hauled her over to a barrel where he sat and yanked her unceremoniously across his lap.

"Let me go, Pierre, you can't get away with this," Kat yelled, struggling furiously, then she bit into his thigh.

Pierre roared and brought his hand down on Kat's pant covered bottom with a resounding Crack!!

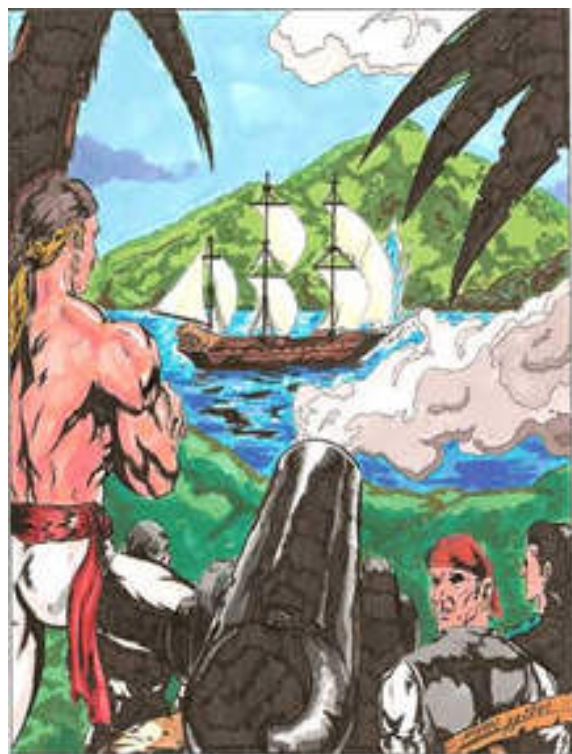
"You stop that, Pierre," yelled Frankie joining the fray. She grabbed him from the back, hanging onto his spanking arm with her right hand and looping her left arm around his neck.

Pierre let go of Kat and reached up to remove Frankie's arm from around his neck. Now free, Kat leaped up and tackled Pierre furiously. "How dare you hit me!" she yelled, her small fists pummeling him in the chest.

The barrel went over backwards and Pierre sprawled out on the floor. Seeing the fury on his face and the quick scramble to get up, Frankie grabbed Kat by the hand and raced for the cabin.

"You two better run," yelled Pierre furiously.





Chapter Four

"Having trouble, Monsieur?" Gaston asked as he bent over and retrieved Pierre's hat. He tried valiantly to hide his amusement.

"Nothing I can't handle," muttered Pierre angrily. He took the hat and rammed it onto his head and stalked away. He would deal with his nieces later; he was too angry right now.

"Oh, Oui, Monsieur, Oui, I can see that," chuckled Gaston as he watched Pierre. Either of those girls were bad enough one on one...the two of them together was more than most men would be able to handle. His sympathies certainly lay with Pierre.

Pierre did not deign to answer him. Instead, he yelled the order to prepare the Aphrodite for entering the harbor. Nothing would be gained by sitting out here, and their quarry was on the alert now---nothing to do but go in boldly. They needed supplies badly, at any rate, and the men needed a break from the ship.

Pierre took the wheel himself. They would have to be careful; he did not trust Macalister, especially now that the girls had angered him. Despite his obvious good breeding, the man was clearly a pirate. Pierre sensed he was a man of his word and did not make idle threats.

Watching the girls and making sure they did nothing foolish and unplanned would be a full time job. Once more, he gritted his teeth and wished he had instituted spankings in their training regime a long time ago.

Morg watched from the shore as the Aphrodite began her run into the channel. He had a surprise in

store for a certain pirate captain and her spitfire sister. They would soon find that he was not a man to be crossed lightly.

"Get those cannons ready," he snapped at his men. "We have company, and I want to greet them properly." His white teeth gleamed in a shark like smile.

There was little doubt Morg's island defenses could sink the ship coming into the channel even though she was magnificently gunned, but this was not about sinking her. It was about letting a disrespectful pirate hunter and her sister know that their attitude would not be tolerated in his territory.

"One across her bow, men," he commanded.

"You mean in front of her prow, Captain?" one of the men asked nervously.

"Did I say that? Nay! I said across the cursed bow!"

"But, Sir, she's not completely sighted in yet, what if the shell falls short?"

"Then we sink her." Morg grabbed the pirate by the shirt. "If ye ever question my orders again, I will have ye whipped! Now fire the damned cannon!"

The man hastily obeyed, and the cannon ball went whooshing out over the channel with a mighty boom and across the bow of the Aphrodite. It landed on the other side, splashing water high into the air as it hit the water.

The big galleon rocked as the waves jostled her, and hands on deck were running for cover.

Morg smiled in satisfaction and signaled the Lady Queen to move in behind the Aphrodite while he raced for his horse. It was time to greet his "guests" once again.

Frankie and Kat came running when they heard the hiss of the cannonball that barely missed the starboard side and the explosion that sent water careening into the deck hands.

They grabbed Pierre's arm as he held the big wheel steady while the ship waffled and then straightened out.

"Merde, but that was close, too close," he muttered, staring in the direction the ball had come from.

Frankie was angry. "Just what is that idiot trying to prove?" She brushed water drops from her dampened shirt.

"You insulted him, that's not hard to figure out." Pierre glared hard at her and Kat.

"So?"

"So, he didn't like it! I tried to tell you, but you thought it was funny didn't you?"

"Don't look now, Frankie, but I think we are now an 'escorted' guest," Kat barbed delicately, her thumb indicating the Lady Queen moving in behind them.

Frankie's eyes narrowed. The message was clear. The Aphrodite was a guest, but would remain until Macalister decided otherwise. Okay, that's fine with me, Frankie thought. It suited her purpose for the moment.

However, when she was ready to leave, Macalister would have little say in the matter, and if he tried...well...he didn't know who he was dealing with. He might just find he had bit off more than he could chew.

Pierre interrupted her thoughts. "The Nemesis." He nodded to the left, and Frankie could see the black ship, three docks down. An image of her mother's face slashed across her mind, the Nemesis in the background. Pure anger shot through her,

and her lips tightened in a grimace. Shaking it off, she took a deep breath.

"I wonder if this place has a decent pub?" Kat said speculatively. "I could use some fresh, hot food, something home cooked."

"It's almost noon." Frankie walked to the railing, observing the people milling about on the slip Pierre was easing them into. Several of the men began leaping over the side, preparing to tie them off, and Gaston began to let the anchor down.

"You two are not going anywhere," snapped Pierre. He was still angry with them.

"I'm sick of this ship, Pierre," stormed Kat. "We've been at sea for 6 weeks since the last port, and I need to feel dry land under my feet and talk to someone besides sailors!"

"I know, Kat," Frankie agreed. "I'm tired of it too, and I already told you, Pierre, that we are not going to sit on the ship this time. You promised me we wouldn't have to!"

"That was before you two decided to be rude and arrogant to the man in charge," snapped Pierre. "You obviously need more training in protocol and proper deportment before I let you roam about alone."

"Well, well, well," chuckled Kat wickedly. "Look who is coming to greet us."

The girls ignored Pierre for the moment and walked to the railing as the plank was lowered to look down into the mocking eyes of Morg Macalister.

Kat couldn't stop the feeling of interest that welled up in her as she watched the bold pirate...an interest she hadn't felt since leaving Louisiana and Mace. Her almond eyes perused his tall figure, lingering on the lean brown hands that rested on the solid hips...nice hands. Kat liked hands...

particularly large ones with lean fingers that could trail and tease.... she snapped her thoughts back to the present and grinned lazily at the island governor. Such a shame he was a dirty pirate.

"So this is the woman who seeks me?" murmured Jacques LaSalle, eyeing Frankie through his spyglass where the girls stood on the deck of the docking ship. "I think I am beginning to see what she wants from me." He handed the glass to Frenchy. "Tell me what you see."

Frenchy put the glass to his eye and swung it along the deck of the Aphrodite. There was a small but beautiful redhead dressed in men's breeches and a white silk shirt. "Nice," he murmured, "exceptional." He then moved to the other female and his face paled. "Sacre bleu!" he exclaimed. "It cannot be!" Lowering the glass he stared intently at Jacques.

Putting the glass to his eye again, he studied Frankie, noting the lovely features and the long dark hair blowing away from her face. He knew that face and that hair. This was a younger version, but it could be his Victoria all over again!

"It would seem that fate and a young woman's determination has brought us together once again," said Jacques, taking the glass from Frenchy and sighting in Frankie again.

"So, my proud beauty, you want me, eh? I bet I can guess what you wish to do with me. You are hoping to shorten my days on this earth I am certain." He chuckled softly.

"What are we going to do, Jacques?"

"Do? Why, we are going to do nothing, Frenchy. We will let her make the first move. We shall continue setting up the slave auction and preparing

to set sail once again. The lovely Capitan of the Aphrodite will have to come seeking me. Then, we shall see what happens."

"What if she bests you?" teased Frenchy sardonically, grinning at his old friend.

"Then I'm quite sure she shall kill me," he answered cheerfully. "However, that is very unlikely, even though we may have tutored from the same master. It should prove an interesting game at any rate." His sharp gaze hadn't missed Pierre Fontaine near the girls.

"Oui," muttered Frenchy uneasily, "it will be most interesting, this new development. I wonder if the shock would bring Victoria's memory back?"

Frenchy wasn't sure how he felt about this. The daughter's arrival on the scene could cause untold problems. He gripped the rails of the Nemesis, staring towards the ship in the distance. He did not intend to lose his lady, not for anyone, not even her own daughter. Who would have thought her child would come looking for her?

Jacques didn't answer. He continued to study Frankie, watching her movements, her commands to the crew as they prepared the ship for docking. There was something about her that moved him as no woman had in a long, long time. He felt a stirring of desire just watching her. At first glance, she was so like her mother, but on closer inspection, there were many small differences.

That day flitted through his mind, the girl on the ship, his men taking it, Pierre bringing the woman back...so many images...but he remembered this girl, her face full of revulsion, yet defiant to the core. A young, proud beauty...then Pierre had taken her over the side with him.

He had watched the water but never saw them come up. What a shame, he had been so entranced even then and thought to take her for his own, but fate had intervened. Now it looked as if the fates were smiling on him once again.

"I wonder if those lips are as nectar sweet as they look?" he muttered to himself, feeling the hardness growing between his legs. She was a woman to stir the blood, no doubt about that. Soon, he promised himself, he would taste them and find out.

"Do you always greet guests this way?" Frankie asked derisively, her blue green eyes stormy.

"Not always, but ye are a special case," returned Morg smoothly, his eyes sliding past Frankie to rest on Kat. They gleamed in appreciation despite his anger and then returned to Frankie.

"Ye remember my orders, Captain. I'm a man of my word. Any destruction of property or fighting in Pirates Hideaway will nae be tolerated. Oh...and it might be best if ye two women stayed on board while ye are here. This island is filled with randy pirates, I wouldn't want anything to be happening to ye," he said mockingly.

Frankie leaned over the railing, her eyes spitting sparks. "You understand that I will hold YOU personally responsible for any thievery or damage to the Aphrodite from your men. And, if any louts think an easy bedding to be had of my sister or I, they will pay the price of OUR blades."

Her eyes had gone a deep blue, and they gleamed with intent. "I assume you have your island under some sort of control, monsieur? Can not your women stroll upon the boardwalks, knowing YOUR word is all that is needed to keep

them safe?" Frankie mocked. "If not, then I suggest you look at your skills of command and make a difference, that is, if you mean to actually BE in control here."

The barb was not lost on Morg, and a dull flush deepened his neck. He knew that power and strength went to the strongest, the most willing to pay the price of control. She was not questioning his control so much as his right to mete justice should she or her crew mete out their own if they were crossed. It was clear she would defend herself and her crew if she thought it necessary, and the devil take him and his orders!

"Also, monsieur," Frankie continued boldly, "should the necessity to cross swords with you come up, I shall look forward to it." She turned her back to him then and strode away, satisfied that she had gotten the last word. Let him see her ass this time!

Morg's nostrils flared as he fought down the urge to board her ship and come after her and her sister. His palm itched to make contact with the arse that was walking away from him, her dismissal evident. As for the other one, those lush lips were just begging to be taken, those breasts to be fondled.... he shook his head to clear his lusty thoughts. After returning Kat's bold mocking stare, he spun on his heel and stalked away, Nigor at his side.

"Shall we board the ship, Sir?" Nigor asked. "We have well over 300 men that will follow you into hell. The way she spoke to you, Sir, we should kill her crew and then stake her and her sister out for the men to take turns with."

"No, Nigor, let the little lass have her moment, she is the captain after all," he answered with grudging admiration. She hadn't backed down one

whit, and he had to give her credit for that. However, her temper would be her downfall in the end. "Just keep an eye on them...and, Nigor...no one is to touch them. Do I make myself clear?"

"Aye, Sir, I'll pass the word." Nigor reluctantly stalked off. He hadn't missed his Captain's interest in the little redhead. It wouldn't be easy to keep the dogs off those two if they decided to flaunt themselves about the harbor, but he would do his best. Lord help anyone that disobeyed the Captain's orders.

Kat grinned as her sister passed by her, "Nice, Frankie, but next time give your butt an extra shake and bring him to his knees."

Frankie's creamy face blushed slightly, and she smiled sheepishly. "You are bad, Kat."

Kat swept her long red hair off her shoulder and with a wink of her eye responded, "I never claimed otherwise."

"As captain, you handled that well, ma petite," said Pierre, walking up to the girls. "However, now that we are in dock, I wish to speak with you two in the cabin if you please?" He ushered them towards the cabin in the middle of the ship.

"What is this about, Pierre," Kat asked suspiciously.

"We need to have a talk about the rules that are to be followed. And plans to make as well."

"As long as talking is all you have in mind, we are willing to talk," muttered Frankie, not altogether trusting of Pierre after this morning's incident.

"We will see how talking goes first," Pierre replied smoothly, a large hand gripping each girl by the arm.

The girls looked at each other, his hint not lost on them. Their lips tightened. He better not dare try anything else!

Jacques stepped through the doorway and into the lower hold of the Nemesis

"Over here," called Frenchy, motioning Jacques to come to where a young woman was huddled in the corner of the room. "On your feet, girl," growled Frenchy, hauling the young woman up.

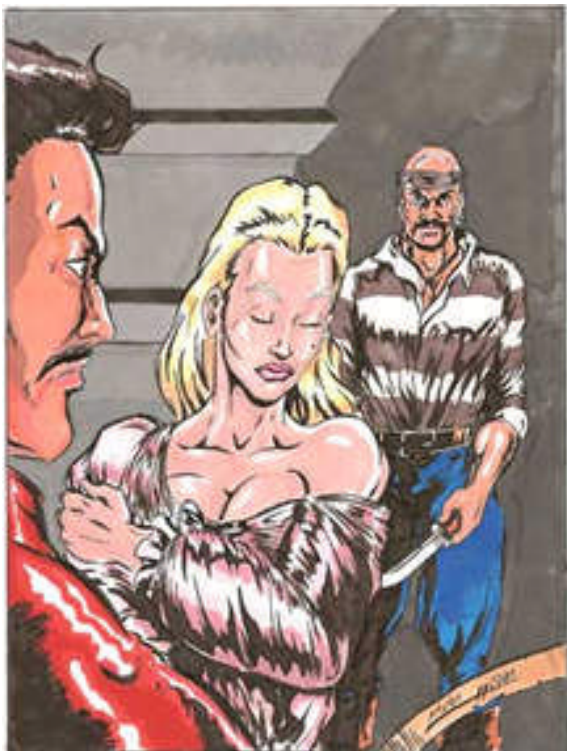
The girl stared defiantly at Jacques, fear in her eyes. She was dirty and unkempt, but she was also exquisite. Her eyes were as blue as the ocean on a sunny day and her hair like spun silk from a cornhusk, with hues of white running through the already light blonde coloring. Her dress was dirty, but her carriage and the delicate bones of her face gave away her breeding.

Jacques took her hands and inspected them. They were soft and not a scar or a hint of a callous on the tender palms. This girl was of breeding all right; she had known no physical work. "The dress," ordered Jacques to Frenchy.

Frenchy took out his knife and cut the dress away, the girl protesting all the while. At last, she stood proudly, dressed only in her thin silk spun chemise. Her skin was the same fine porcelain all over, and Jacques twirled her around to inspect her fully. She flushed beet red at his heated gaze and tried to cover herself with her hands.

"Have her taken to my cabin and make sure she stays, Frenchy. Have water brought for her to bathe in."

Frenchy nodded and handed her off to a couple of burly pirates standing there with strict instructions. The men nodded, familiar with the routine.



Jacques then turned to the rest of the women. After inspecting them to his satisfaction, he nodded to Frenchy. "Have them cleaned and prepared for this afternoon. The landowners and merchants will want to inspect them before the sale begins."

Again, Frenchy nodded. Each woman would be stripped, cleaned and put in a tunic slit to the waist and open to the navel. The buyers would want to inspect their wares thoroughly before purchasing. It was a cold-blooded business, and one Frenchy had no taste for. He would make sure the crew did not mistreat the women before they went on the auction block, it was the least he could do.

Jacques grimaced as he stepped out the door. He did not wish to deal in the flesh trade, but once the men had known the women were on Lola's ship, they would not have been happy if he had let her take them. Women brought money...lots of money. Some of the finer specimens would go for thousands in gold coin.

Jacques did not cater to his men; neither did he want a mutiny on his hands. He cared naught for what happened to them anyway, as long as they were not any of his family or of noble birth. The nobility could be ransomed if one was so inclined.

There were other things that could be done with the gentry as well. The bulge in his pants hardened as he thought of the girl awaiting him in his cabin.

Briefly, the image of Frankie flitted through his mind. He was looking forward to their encounter, but for now, he had other work to do.

He wanted to be on hand when the people came to inspect the women. Each girl would be guarded by two of his men. Buyers would come in close, looking the girls over for age, appearance, strength of muscle etc...all depending on what the buyer was looking for. Some would go as bar wenches, some

as servants, some as whores and some as house slaves. There were many reasons why men bought women...or that women might buy women.

Morg headed towards the Nemesis, intent on having a chat with LaSalle. After meeting with the fiery sisters, he felt some further damage control was in order. He spotted LaSalle just coming out of the hold of his ship. "Permission to come aboard," he called up to the tall pirate.

LaSalle motioned him up, and Morg strode up the plank and stopped in front of him. "I've just come from the Aphrodite," he stated flatly.

"Ah, yes...the one with the beautiful she devil...I have heard of her." Jacques's eyes were guarded although he smiled thinly at Morg. "Would you care to come in for drink while we talk?" He motioned toward his cabin.

Morg was more than willing. He wanted to see the insides of the Nemesis. If an opportunity presented itself, he would own it.

"So, you like my ship?" asked Jacques silkily, noting the gleaming interest in the emerald green eyes of the Scottish pirate turned seeming island governor. Many men had coveted the Nemesis, but Jacques did not give up what was his.

"Aye, I have heard many tales of her prowess."

"And, they are all true, I'm sure." Jacques poured two shots of whiskey and handed one to Morg.

His secretive smile intrigued Morg, and he studied the gentlemen pirate, as the seas had dubbed him. What made a man like Jacques LaSalle give up home and country to become a pirate, he wondered? He tossed back the shot. Many had wondered the same thing about him.



"I have heard the beautiful captain of the Aphrodite has a personal score to settle with ye," he said bluntly. "I'm here to warn ye I'll nae stand for a grudge war in my harbor. I'll hold ye and her personally responsible if something starts, and ye will both regret crossing me." He handed LaSalle back the glass.

"Indeed?" Jacques's eyebrow went skyward in a flash of admiration. Morg was obviously a man used to coming straight to the point. No subterfuge there. He liked that.

"Aye, indeed. I've already warned the lass." His lip curled in a cruel smile. "She won't enjoy the consequences should she be so foolish. She, nor her vixen sister."

"I've not met the Captain myself, although they say she calls herself Captain Frank... Frankie to those close to her. I doubt she would have come this far to start a foolish war within the harbor. I shall let her play her hand and come looking for me, then I shall deal with her as I see fit."

His eyes narrowed suddenly as he pinned Morg in a stare from the black depths. "It would be best if nothing happened to the girl. I'll deal with her myself," he warned softly.

Morg nodded. Looked like they understood each other. "I've already given orders the lasses are nae to be touched...neither one of them. Anyone who breaks my word will find themselves on the wrong end of my blade."

The two men appraised each other, each sensing the other's interest in the sisters.

Finally, LaSalle spoke. "Come, Monsieur Macalister, I will give you a tour of the Nemesis, including the cargo in the hold. Perhaps one might draw your interest. I would be willing to make a deal ahead of time if you are so inclined."

"Thank ye, Captain LaSalle, I am most interested." His emerald eyes gleamed as he followed Jacques out the door...whether from thoughts of the ship, or the women, Jacques could not be sure. Perhaps it was a bit of both.

"Pierre, will you stop coddling us?" Frankie blazed. "You've protected and hidden us for the last two years, and I'm tired of it! We are close to our quarry now, and I have no intention of hiding behind your shadow any longer. I WANT that man!"

"I agree with Frankie, it's time we stood on our own, Uncle Pierre." Kat walked over to Pierre and laid her small hand on his arm, her earnest green eyes looking up into his golden ones. The girls only called him Uncle when they were trying to beguile him. Between Frankie being so adamant and Kat so sweet, Pierre was being turned inside out.

"Mon Dieu, but you girls are stubborn," Pierre finally replied in frustration. He had brought them inside the cabin to lay down the law, and they were running him in circles.

He itched to get the paddle from the workout room, but he was afraid it was too late. He was getting too old for this! He threw his hands up in the air. He'd rather go to battle than deal with his two hardheaded nieces.

"All right, all right! You may go ashore, but you are to wear capes and stay as inconspicuous as possible. Hang around the locale and see if you can pick up information on LaSalle. But, I warn you, you had better be back here within an hour, or you won't like the consequences."

The girls smiled in triumph. They stopped smiling at his next announcement. "And you will

have an escort!" They both scowled at him, but Pierre was having none of it. "Take it or leave it!"

"We'll take it," they grumbled.

The girls were quiet as they prepared to head to the docks. Kat looked at Frankie. "What are we going to do if we see LaSalle? Shall we kill him?" Kat ran her tiny finger over the blade of her pearl handled knife, the tip of her tongue on her lip as if she were savoring the thought.

"You're not bloodthirsty enough for that, Kat," replied Frankie tucking the cotton shirt into her pants. It was thicker and heavier, therefore less revealing than the white silk ones they had worn this morning.

Kat's gemlike eyes turned suddenly cold. "You'd be surprised, Frankie."

Frankie looked up curiously. She felt a chill at the look on Kat's sweet face. Mon Dieu, what was this life doing to her...to them? She shuddered. "We can't kill him, Kat, not until we find out what he did with our mother," she hissed warningly. "Once we find out what happened to her, then we can decide what to do with him!"

Kat quickly flipped the knife and threw it deftly to land in the wall behind her sister. "I say we just kill him, Frankie," she snapped. "Our mother is dead, do you hear me? Dead! Just like our father! Let's just kill him and have it done with!"

Frankie's head jerked up when the knife sunk into the wood. "You weren't there, Kat, you don't know what happened! I saw Mother carried away, she might still be alive...she IS alive... I can feel it! In my dreams she calls to me." Frankie's eyes burned intensely as she stared at Kat. "I have to know, Kat...I have to know, can't you see that?"



Kat's slender shoulders slumped in defeat. "All right, Frankie, we won't kill him. But, please tell me this is going to be done with soon, I'm not sure how much more I can take."

Frankie gathered her sister in her arms, and they clung to each other for a moment. "It will be over soon...I promise."

Chapter Five

Frankie leaned back to look her sister in the face. "I have noticed Macalister sending you interested looks," she teased gently, hoping to lighten the atmosphere a little.

"Him? He should be so lucky," scoffed Kat. "He is just a filthy pirate, what interest could I possibly have in him, even if I were so inclined?"

"I don't know, but I don't think he is all pirate. I think there is some breeding in him, somewhere. It shows in his carriage and his language."

Kat's eyes narrowed thoughtfully, but she didn't say anything else.

A short time later, Frankie and Kat had navigated their way through the docks and found the little pub called The Nasty Grubb. They tried to ignore Gaston as much as possible, and they took a table at the back with their rum, trying to blend into the shadows. They were unaware of the eyes that watched them avidly.

The pub was suspiciously quiet as the girls sipped their drinks and looked around. When the serving wench came over to ask if they would like a refill, Frankie spoke. "Where is everyone? This place is awfully empty for the middle of the afternoon and several ships in port. Don't the crews come here on shore leave?"

"That's because everyone is gone to the auction," explained the wench. "I hear tell they got over twenty women over there. LaSalle done brung 'em in and is putting 'em up for sale!"

"Selling women?" Kat was aghast. She looked at Frankie who looked disgusted. They both knew it happened, they had just never seen it before. Frankie chalked up one more black mark against the



pirate. She shoved her chair back and stood up, briefly wondering if he had sold her mother. A sharp stab of pain accompanied the thought, but she pushed it away.

"Come on, Kat, let's go see what's going on."

The wench looked curiously at Kat and Frankie. "I'm guessing you two are the ones from that ship that docked a while ago. The sisters, right? And one of you is the captain?"

"My, news does travel fast around here," Kat mocked.

"I'm Captain Frank," admitted Frankie. "My friends call me Frankie, though. And this is my twin sister, Kat."

"Well, just some advice...from a friend...that ain't no place for a lady. Sometimes men will fight over a woman, and there's nearly always a killing or two. I'd stay away from there if I were you. My name is Monique, by the way...pleased to meet you!"

She grinned at the girls and flipped her long brown hair behind her shoulder. She was a pretty girl with a friendly face and huge blue eyes. Freckles dusted the bridge of her nose, and her slender figure was well shaped in the thigh high dress she wore with a pinafore apron.

"Do you know LaSalle, Monique?" Frankie asked carefully.

"I don't know much about him except they call him the gentlemen pirate. He ain't been in the pub yet. I seen him once over on Tortuga, though. He is a pretty mean customer in a sword fight. They say he ain't never been bested." She held the serving tray up on top of her shoulder as she chatted with the girls.

"Is that so?" probed Kat. "Have you ever seen him fight?"

"Nope, but my man has. Rusty says he's quicker than a lightning flash. He keeps to himself a lot, though, kind of solitary like. My man sailed with him for a while on the Nemesis...that was before he lost his arm. The Nemesis ain't ever lost a fight either. They make a good pair, don't they?"

Frankie felt a chill run down her back as the image of her mother's face flitted through her mind again, the black sails set behind it. Some called it the death ship. Those who dared to challenge LaSalle and the Nemesis always lost.

"Thank you for the information, Monique. I think we'll just check out this auction for ourselves." Frankie drained her glass and handed it to Monique.

"Captain?" Gaston stepped up to the three women. "It might be best if you didn't go there, like the girl said. A slave auction is no place for a woman."

"Who's he?" Monique asked the question of Frankie and Kat, much to Gaston's ire.

"Just remember I am the Captain, Gaston, and I give the orders." Frankie's face was cold and set, her eyes raking Gaston's imposing figure. "It seems to me there are women there, women who certainly should NOT be there, that I will agree with," she said silkily.

Gaston flushed angrily. He knew Pierre would never approve of such an action, but he had been reminded of his place. She WAS the Captain. "As you wish," he said, silently seething. He loosened the hook on his sword to make sure it was within easy reach. They might need it before they got away from there.

The trio exited the pub into the afternoon sunshine and turned to the right. All they had to do was follow the sounds of excited shouts, and it wasn't long before they turned the corner around a

stand of palm trees and stopped dead at the sight before them.

The auction stage was set up high on the beach, and there was a man holding a young woman by the arm. He was yelling out her attributes while two men at either end of the stage repeated the bids that men were yelling in from the audience.

At one point, the auctioneer lifted the back of the girl's dress, exposing her backside and bare legs, giving her a hearty slap and laughing. The girl hung her head and refused to look at the cheering, jeering crowd.

It was only a moment that passed when a man from the crowd approached the platform and passed through the two guards at the end of the steps. Striding up the platform, he handed the auctioneer a purse, which the auctioneer then counted. When he finished, he handed the loose rope that dangled from the girl's wrists over to the buyer. The buyer then led her away amid the cheers and catcalls of the crowd.

Kat and Frankie were incensed. "Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Kat. "I cannot believe those poor women are treated so miserably! Sold like animals!"

"I told you this was no place for you to come," reminded Gaston, his face grim. "Come, let us go, now."

But, Frankie was suddenly rooted to the spot. Sitting off to the side under an open tent, was Jacques LaSalle, and her gaze was riveted on him. Intently, she began to stride towards him, bent on getting some answers at last. As she walked, she drew her sword. No one would get in her way, or they would be cut down!

Kat immediately followed Frankie, having spotted LaSalle as well once Frankie started towards him.

"Mon Dieu," breathed Gaston, hurrying after the girls. "We are all going to die this day!"

Frankie looked neither to the right nor the left as she zeroed in on LaSalle. When he turned to face her and slowly stood up, she smiled a feral smile of satisfaction, the hunter cornering the hunted.

Jacques was sitting causally beneath the open-air tent enjoying his rum when the hair on the back of his neck stood up. Looking around quickly, he spotted three figures striding towards him. He immediately realized it must be the Captain of the Aphrodite, although the first two figures were covered in long capes with hoods on them. Behind them came a third man...French...looking very grim.

"She approaches, my friend," he said to Frenchy, and then stood up, his hand resting on his sword to meet her.

Suddenly, a tall figure stepped in front of the trio, his back and those of three of his men blocking the view of Frankie. Macalister!

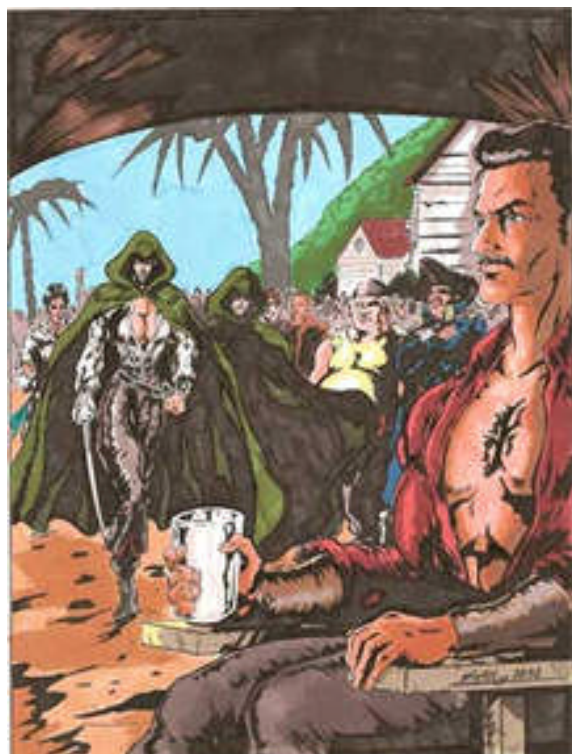
"Hold it right there," demanded Morg as he stepped in front of Frankie.

Frankie brought her sword up. "Out of my way," she hissed.

"There will be no trouble here," stated Morg flatly. "Put those swords away!"

"I said...out of my way or die where you stand!" ordered Frankie through gritted teeth. She hadn't come this far to let anyone stand in her way now that her quarry was so close.

Kat moved up beside Frankie, her sword drawn, and her face pale. But her green eyes were just as deadly as Frankie's. "You heard her, move aside, Macalister." She and Frankie had thrown their hoods



back in preparation to fight, and her red hair gleamed in the sunlight.

Morg wasn't about to let the girls get by with ordering him around. It looked like they needed a lesson. He nodded to his men, and they immediately came at the girls, intending to disarm them.

But, Frankie's adrenalin was pumping, and she quickly dispatched one with a shoulder jab. Kat and Gaston were defending themselves against another one, and Frankie soon disarmed the third, her boot on his neck.

"That's enough!" came a harsh command.

The participants all looked up to see Jacques LaSalle standing there. "I am quite capable of defending myself, Monsieur," he said to Morg. He had not drawn his sword, but stood staring at Frankie.

Immediately, Frankie faced off with him, her eye's going a deep blue with emotion. She was totally unprepared for the jolt that went through her body. She couldn't describe what it was unless it was raw physical attraction at its finest. Her breath came in a jagged gasp, and she fought the sensation of melting in that dark gaze. "Arm yourself," she hissed.

Jacques folded his arms, not faring much better. He was glad for the long tunic that would be hiding the instant bulge between his thighs at the sight of the raven-haired beauty up close. "To what purpose, ma petite? If you kill me, you won't have the answers you seek. If I kill you, then I won't have the pleasure of your sweet lips. They do so intrigue me." He gave her a mocking grin and bowed slightly, his pants straining uncomfortably against him.



"That is a pleasure you will never have," bit out Frankie, further incensed at her traitorous body's reaction to this...pirate!

"How do you know we might seek answers, LaSalle," mocked Kat. "Perhaps, all we wish is to kill you...or to feed you to the sharks."

Kat was having her own problems with Morg's huge sensual presence right in front of her. Only, she knew what was hitting her! Nothing but raw heady desire...something she hadn't experienced in a long time...if ever. The pull of Morg's attraction was stronger by far than the feelings her lover had incited in her. It was a devastating feeling, and she hated it. She did not want to be attracted to this bawdy pirate, not in the least!

Jacques sent Kat a sardonic grin. "Yes, you do have a habit of acquiring food for the beasts I have been told. However, it will not be me you feed to the fishes next."

He spread his hands wide and addressed Frankie. "Come to my ship tonight...have supper with me...we will talk."

"What makes you think I'd go to your ship alone?" scorned Frankie.

"You will, ma petite. I think you might be interested in what I have to say."

"That remains to be seen," replied Frankie, finally putting her sword away. There was nothing more to be gained with frontal confrontation, not with Macalister so bent on frustrating her.

"Be sure to wear a dress. I don't like women in pants."

"I don't care what you like; I'll dress as I please." Frankie turned her back on him and walked away, her temper simmering below the surface.

Jacques stared after her, tamping down the urge to stop her and teach her some respect. The cape

billowed out behind her in the wind, and he could see her bottom outlined in men's breeches, briskly swaying from side to side as she walked. How he would love to strip those men's breeches off her and apply his hand to those saucy cheeks before.... shaking his head, he pushed the errant thoughts aside.

"That one needs a strong hand, Mon Capitan," murmured Frenchy wickedly in his ear. "Looks like her sweet mother was remiss in her education."

"Oui, Frenchy, I shall have to remedy that." Jacques stroked his dark moustache. He thought of the girl waiting for him. Suddenly, he had no desire for her after all. "Get rid of the girl in my cabin, Frenchy. Take her to the hotel and give her money to buy a fare to wherever she calls home."

"Oui, I'll see to it," replied Frenchy with a sly grin. It looked like his old friend was falling under the daughter's spell. Very interesting. He must have it bad to refuse the luscious bit he had put in reserve. Still, Frenchy could understand. It had always been that way for him once he met Victoria. Well, Jacques would certainly have his hands full with that one! He grinned in anticipation.

Morg fell in step beside Kat as they walked back along the beach. "What is this business you have with LaSalle," he asked harshly. He was still irritated that the girls had disobeyed him...he was not a man used to being disobeyed. Nor was he a man used to dealing with women on a man's terms. He was also irritated with himself for the effect this redheaded sprite had on his libido. He found himself wanting to kiss her senseless...or teach her a lesson...he didn't care which order it was.

"Like Frankie said, that's our business; you had no right to interfere." Kat shot him a sideways look.

They were approaching the Aphrodite, and Pierre was standing at the railing watching them.

Morg stopped and swung Kat around to face him. "Let's get one thing straight here. This is MY Island, and I am in charge here. I'll nae tolerate anyone questioning my orders. Ye start something here, and I'll put ye in the brig, man or woman." His green eyes snapped sparks. "Is that clear to ye?"

"Perfectly." Kat jerked her arm out of his hold, her skin tingling from his touch. With a toss of her head, she turned her back to him and walked proudly towards the plank. Feeling his smoldering eyes on her, she added a bit of sass to her backside and grinned to herself. That would teach the arrogant man! If she could only have known what he was thinking, she would have been most outraged.

"Where have you two been?" Pierre hissed. "You've been gone over an hour. I was getting ready to come looking for you." He looked warily at Morg, wondering what brought his presence again.

"They were at the slave auction challenging Jacques LaSalle," Morg grated. "Not a place for a woman to be, and I've warned ye about starting anything here. I'll let it go this time, but next time, I'll put someone in the brig."

"Mon Dieu! Have you both lost your minds?" Pierre's voice was harsh with worry. "You were told to lay low and remain inconspicuous."

"I'm afraid that would be impossible for two such woman as these. You'd best keep them aboard if ye wish to keep them safe. I nae can be responsible for the actions of my men if they continue to flaunt themselves about!"

"I knew it," snapped Pierre, coming down the plank and seizing the girls by an arm each. He began to frog march them up the plank and towards



the cabin. "I knew I should not have let you go about the docks without me." He glanced at Gaston and then dismissed him. He could not blame Gaston. Frankie was too hell bent on having her way, he would have been no challenge to her, and she was bound not to listen to his advice.

"Let go of me, Pierre," protested Frankie, not liking being treated this way in front of possible onlookers as Pierre pushed them inside their cabin.

"I'm the captain of this ship, you can't march me around like a recalcitrant little girl!" She tried to jerk away from him but was unsuccessful.

"What you need is to be turned over a knee and soundly spanked or bent over the ship's rail and my belt applied to your backside," snarled Pierre, "the pair of you!"

"You wouldn't dare," yelled both girls as he slammed the door behind him.

"Don't try me any further, or you will find out what I dare," he bit out in exasperation.

Frankie and Kat rubbed the back of their arms where Pierre's strong fingers had bitten into them and returned his glare in silence.

Pierre ran his hands tiredly through his mane of hair. Finally, he spoke quietly.

"Frankie, I have helped you and Kat to become very proficient in self defense. I have played with you both since you were small children, indulged you as you grew and tutored you for the last five years in the sword, the knife and the art of hand-to-hand defense.

"Kat and I have followed you, Frankie, because you have made this quest the most important thing in your life. The men follow you because they are loyal to you, to the family, and to the French crown."

He paused a moment to let his words sink in. "However, ma petite, I fear you have both been allowed to speak your mind whenever you choose for far too long. Your skills have made you arrogant, and you have never known how women are really treated in the world. I have done my best to protect you, and you have grown increasingly proud and consider yourselves undefeatable."

He walked over to Frankie and cupped her chin in his palm and gazed sternly down at her. "Not everyone plays by the rules, something you have yet to learn. It is plain that Macalister and his kind are laws unto themselves. And, while you may not like it, he holds the upper hand here. We have no choice but for you to do as he says. From now on, you and Kat are to stay on board until we have a clear plan of action."

"No, Pierre," Frankie finally spoke. "I have an appointment with LaSalle tonight. He has invited me to dinner with him on the Nemesis, and we will talk. He insists I come if I wish to learn anything. I have no intention of following the whims of Monsieur Macalister when so much is at stake. I shall keep that appointment."

"Not by yourself, you won't," exploded Pierre.

But, Frankie knew she was right this time, and it cooled her anger. "Yes, Pierre," she spoke softly then. "By myself. Don't worry...I will be fine. I sense that he will not hurt me." Frankie didn't know how she knew, but she knew she was right.

Pierre studied her closely but could see only a cool determination to follow through. Not the hotheadedness she had displayed up to this point. He sighed heavily. "All right, but if you do not return in a timely manner, I shall come after you if I have to take the Nemesis apart."

Morg grinned as Pierre hustled the two women onto the ship. So, the proud captain and her sister did get humiliated once in a while. It did his heart good to see it. He wondered if Pierre would apply some much needed discipline to their errant backsides. From the sounds of their heated protests, he doubted it. They didn't appear to be very familiar with the womanly form of discipline that Morg enforced. They would find out if they continued to defy his warnings.

He had turned and was striding up the beach to the auction when Nigor and a compliment of men, who looked like British soldiers from the English ship sitting outside the harbor, intercepted him. He supposed someone else wanted docking. Morg was instantly wary and concerned when he found out what they wanted. This would bear careful handling. "I knew that redhead was going to be trouble the minute I laid eyes on her," he muttered to himself, leading the men to his manor home. "Now it looks like I've got to do something to save her arse already."

Just exactly why he needed to do anything was lost on him at the moment, but he knew he had to. She had gotten under his skin with one blink of those disdainful green eyes. Green eyes were a favorite of his, and he especially liked small redheaded women with feisty temperaments. Kat had all three, and he wasn't about to let her get away before he had the chance to have her for himself...for however long he wanted her. It would be a simple matter to put the British off for a few days, and then he would deal with Kat and her sister.

Once in his home, Morg treated the men with courtesy and discussed the situation

"Surely, ye know, I cannae just turn a ship's captain over to ye on a whim. There are details that have to be worked out. This is supposed to be peaceful waters in this cove as I'm sure your Captain well knows. What if the lasses have a British Lettre de Marque? If that is true, then your Captain would look like a fool taking the ship and the girls into custody."

The Lieutenant fidgeted uneasily. "I suppose you have a point, Sir," he said finally. "These matters can be quite delicate, of course. However, Admiral Whitehall was quite adamant. The best I can do is give you forty eight hours to work out your governmental logistics here and report back to Captain Parley of the Hawk. I believe the Raven with Admiral Whitehall is only a day's journey behind us and will soon be here as well."

Morg nodded solicitously. "Aye, that does seem fair, and I can work with that deadline."

The lieutenant took another swallow of the smooth scotch Morg had given him.

"However, I will impress upon you that we also have the Satin Lady with us and pulling into guard position as we speak."

Morg's eyes gleamed. "Aye, the lovely Lola I presume?"

"Yes, indeed." The lieutenant flashed him a wry grin. "She has strong desires to return to England unhampered and a deal as been cut so to speak."

"Aye, I can understand that." He supposed Lola must have offered her services in return for protection back to England. Now there was an enterprising wench. Her goods and services always for sale at the right price. He drained the last of his drink and stood up, offering his hand to the Lieutenant. "Until forty eight hours are up, then."

"Agreed."

Morg ushered them out and returned to his study, his mind at work. They had given him forty eight hours to make a decision. Already, an idea was forming in his mind, but first he needed to put on a show for the British captain who would be watching from his vantage point outside the cove. A gesture of good faith as it were...proof he was doing something for the British Crown. The girls would not like it, of course, but that was too bad.

Crossing to his study window, he took out his spyglass. Yes, he could see the Satin Lady at her position at the mouth of the cove, opposite the Hawk. He grimaced.

With those ships guarding the cove, it would hurt his island business if it kept up too long. If worse came to worse, he had the power to sink them, but he'd rather not have to engage one of England's finest if it wasn't necessary. After all, he had a Lettre de Marquee from the British, and his Majesty had appointed him governor of this island.

Most of the pirates all flew the flags of various nations when it suited them. Pirates were always for hire like mercenaries when the countries were at war. It seemed France and England were at it once again. He wondered if Kat and Frankie knew. He suspected not.

Neither would they know there was a warrant for their arrest. Captain Parley had recognized the Aphrodite when he dropped anchor in the harbor and now wanted to seize the French ship and arrest the girls

Morg wasn't ready to give up the little redheaded wench. He rubbed his chin. Interesting to know the spitfire was of the nobility. But then he had known that all along. It had been apparent the way she had turned up her aristocratic little nose at him.

He sighed and thought of the bonny green hills of his home. Who would have thought that the son of a Scottish laird, heir of one of the richest men in Scotland would become a bloody pirate? His Uncle had much to answer for and one of these days...one of these days he would return and claim his rightful place. Shaking off the morose thoughts he, turned swiftly and headed out the door. "Nigor! We have business aboard the Aphrodite...call some men!"

Chapter Six

The eyes that had watched Frankie and Kat so avidly in the pub now watched the girls on the platform with mild interest. His thoughts wandered. The hotheaded captain would figure into his plans nicely. He had followed the girls to the auction and watched the exchange between LaSalle and the raven-haired beauty. It was plain to him that LaSalle had an interest in her, himself. That was all the better. He could put his own interest in the beautiful captain aside for the opportunity to use her in his plans for revenge.

A scowl furrowed his brow. LaSalle would pay for humiliating him! Soon...soon he would own the Nemesis, and LaSalle's head would hang from the prow of his own ship! He would keep watch on this relationship with his old friend and the woman. Yes, she just might be the cement he needed to make his plans work even better.

The man's interest was peaked when he saw a blonde headed wench with bold eyes brought forward by the auctioneer. She was obviously a bar wench that had been picked up off a dock somewhere. He waited with anticipation for the moment the girl's backside would be exposed.

The man's male organ hardened when the auctioneer lifted the tunic off the wench's arse. Very nice and just the way he liked it, pale and fully rounded. Firm, plump globes to play with...his selection of implements would change their pale color when the time came. He raised his hand in the bidding.

Jacques paced restlessly along the deck of the Nemesis. The auction had finally ended with only a few fights breaking out...mostly due to the vigilance of Morg Macalister's men.

He wondered briefly where Morg had taken off too and just what his story was. It wasn't often you saw educated men in the role of a pirate, but Macalister was obviously well educated, which meant there was more to him than met the eye...as was the case with most men, of course, himself included.

He dismissed the island governor from his mind, his thoughts returning to Frankie. He took out the spyglass and trained it on the Aphrodite, hoping for a glimpse of her. He knew she would keep her assignation with him tonight. She had little choice.

It was only a moment of searching the ship when he was rewarded with the sight of her leaning over the railing as if deep in thought. Her brow was puckered, and she had a defiant look on her face. He let the glass wander idly up and down her figure, pausing as the wind blew the fine silk shirt to the side, revealing a creamy swell of breast. He felt himself growing hard, and he cursed. "Mon Dieu! What is it about this woman that effects me so?" He dropped the glass and groaned into the wind. But, like a bee to the honey, he cursed himself silently and raised it again.

He had never forgotten the sight of Frankie that day, her beauty in the white silk dress affecting him strangely, her breasts pushed slightly above the corset, her long hair flowing in the wind. There had been the proud look of defiance, then fear as she realized pirates were attacking them, and then shock and horror as Pierre had taken her overboard.

He had been determined to have her for his own on that eventful day, but fate had intervened, and he had lost her. Or, so he had thought. Fate seemed to have brought them together for the

second time, and this time...this time he had no intention of losing her again.

Jacques came back to the present and was treated to the sight of Frankie walking away from the railing, her raven hair falling in waves down her shapely back and blowing in the wind. Her hips swayed gently from side to side, and again, he felt the urge to feel his palm against that sassy flesh. His throbbing member swelled to giant proportions as he pictured her sobbing and repentant in his arms, submissive to his demands. She needed a few lessons in manners and respect, but there were other ways he would teach her as well. He shifted uncomfortably and lowered the glass as she disappeared from his view.

His gaze slid sightlessly to the murky water below, beating rhythmic cadences against the side of the boat. Perhaps I will stay here and throw in with Macalister, he thought. He'd seen him eyeing the Nemesis. He chuckled. Macalister wouldn't be the first man that had wanted the black ship.

Jacque had been looking for a place to build a warehouse and set up a base of sorts. Perhaps the Pirates Hideaway could be that place. He would talk to Macalister about it soon, very soon. He surveyed the lush foliage of the island, the clean scent of the fresh salt water. A man could do worse.

Frenchy brooded as he watched Jacques watching Frankie. He wondered how much Jacque was going to tell her.

He, too, remembered that fateful day that had brought Victoria into his arms. The French merchant vessel had been a fat partridge just waiting to be plucked. The galleon had moved

ahead of her, as if scornful of any puny efforts to take the plum it guarded.

The Nemesis had come upon it unexpectedly, and seeing its plight, had immediately taken advantage. They had struck and gone before the lumbering galleon could get into place to fire her canons.

There had been flames and the screams of dying men when Frenchy swung aboard and came face to face with a familiar face...one that had haunted him for sixteen years. They had met in Paris and fallen in love, and then she had disappeared. Disappointed that she never returned, he had finally left to seek his fortunes elsewhere.

Frenchy had recognized her instantly when he saw her, and her terrified eyes had burned into his soul. Throwing caution to the wind, he had slung her over his shoulder, taking her across to the Nemesis. When the ship had gone down in flames as they sailed away, he knew she would never see whomever she had been traveling with again, and he had been glad.

When she had finally come to after her faint, those soft blue green eyes had gazed trustingly up into his, and she remembered nothing about how she had come to be on the pirate ship, or whence she came. It was as if she had always belonged to Frenchy.

He had protected her fiercely against the crew who wanted to use her and cast her overboard. It was bad luck to travel with a woman on board they had said. But, Frenchy was in love, and she fell in love with him as well, and she had remained his...until now. Now, what would happen?

"You know she will have to know," murmured Jacques. Frenchy had come to stand beside him on

the deck, Jacques intuitively knowing what was bothering him.

"This, I know," replied Frenchy heavily. "But where do I find the strength to let her go if she chooses to leave?"

"I have rarely seen such a love as Victoria and you share, my friend. Perhaps you worry too much."

"Yes, but we both know that love often falls behind duty and honor. I don't even know who she is, but she is of noble birth, that I do know. I've never cared to find out." Frenchy's shoulders slumped in despair.

"Rumors say the Aphrodite belonged to Lord Frontenac, of the French court. It may be that Frankie and Kat are his daughters."

"Which would make Victoria a duchess," groaned Frenchy.

"Don't borrow trouble, old friend. We don't know anything for certain yet."

"I have sent a missive to Captain Baroque. He will bring Victoria to the Pirate's Hideaway for me. His entourage of ships will insure safe sailing for her."

"I know," responded Jacques, clapping him on the shoulder. "Take heart, I must get ready for my assignation with the daughter."

"You have my sympathies," chuckled Frenchy. "Victoria can be spirited and downright ornery at times, but the daughter...Ohhouiiiiieee! You have your work cut out for you with that one."

Jacques's black eyes lit up, and a dangerous smile turned the corners of his firm lips upward. "Yes, but I do enjoy a challenge, and I shall surely enjoy taming this wench."

He put the glass up once more and saw Macalister with a complement of men approaching

the Aphrodite. What was going on now? He wondered. And would it effect their dinner assignation later on? He hoped not, he was looking forward to it with great anticipation.

It had been three hours, and the girls had listened to Pierre's lectures until they were bored to tears, and Frankie had finally gone outside to get some fresh air. She pondered the coming meeting with LaSalle, her thoughts restless and chaotic as the wind gently blew her hair away from her face.

She was deep in thought when she saw Morg Macalister and several armed men coming purposefully towards the Aphrodite. Now what was going on? She sighed and pushed away from the railing to meet them on the other side of the ship. She was just meeting up with Pierre and Kat when Gaston rushed up to them.

"Begging your pardon, Monsieur, but it seems the girls are being put under house arrest. There is a compliment of men here to escort them to the Governor's manor." He looked concerned as he glanced hurriedly behind him.

Macalister was approaching with several men at his side. His green eyes mocked them as he smiled. "I have warrants here for the arrest of Katherine and Francesca Fontaine. It seems the British Government has put a bounty on their heads. There are two ships at the mouth of the harbor as we speak, and they don't plan on leaving until I've turned them over to them." He handed Pierre the papers. "As Governor of this island, I have no choice but to take them into custody." His green gaze raked Pierre's. "If ye cooperate with me, I shall do all I can to mitigate the

circumstances and help if possible." His green gaze burned into Kats.

"Let us confer a moment," Pierre said, his eyes narrowing as he read the papers. He pulled the girls aside to speak with them privately before they did something foolish.

"I don't believe the British want us," snapped Frankie, incensed. "I think he is making that up. I doubt those papers are legitimate."

Her fury and indignation spilled over. "And even if they are legitimate, how can he possibly help us? If he thinks we are going to turn ourselves over to him meekly and be taken to his house, he is a fool! Mon Dieu! What's to prevent him from kidnapping us himself, or keeping us captive?"

"I don't believe him, either," exclaimed Kat. "We have merely pricked his pride is all, and he is looking for a way to get even." Her green eyes raked over Macalister's tall frame scornfully, dismissing him as unimportant.

Pierre frowned and held his hand up to stem their protests. "You are not going to be kidnapped by Macalister. It would serve no purpose. I think you need to go with him and find out what is going on. Besides, the British will never take the side of a pirate against a line of nobility, although I suspect Macalister is not the ill bred pirate he appears to be."

He looked calmly at the girls. "No, we must keep our heads and go along with Macalister as he has indicated, especially if these warrants are real. Don't worry, I shall send Gaston and a complement of our men along to wait outside his home and bring you back here safely."

Frankie realized Pierre was probably right; Kat too, had nothing left to say, although her green eyes flashed indignantly. "Fine," replied Frankie,

"lets get this over with. I have plans tonight!" She spun on her heel and stalked to within inches of Macalister, Kat and Pierre right behind her.

"All right, Macalister," she stated proudly. "You may have the pleasure of our company for a few hours. But, I warn you, don't mess with us, or you will be sorry."

She and Kat preceded him down the plank, their noses in the air and their hands resting on their swords in challenge to the louts surrounding them.

Morg flushed with anger and tried to hold his temper in check. "Lord, these be provoking little madams," he muttered to himself, itching to lay his cutlass against their cheeky bottoms as they strode ahead of him. "One of these days," he promised himself.

Frankie's shoulders were squared, and her nose disdainfully high in the air as they walked along, her brilliant eyes flashing with rage and contempt. It was an outrage, appalling that this man would force them to his home like this!

Kat, too, was seething as the caravan made its way up the hill, much to the interest of the onlookers. Her emerald eyes were constantly aware of the ogling stares they were receiving. "I have never been so humiliated, Frankie. This is utter nonsense. I can't believe I am actually being forced into going to his home."

Frankie glared at Kat and hissed. "Be quiet and keep your guard up."

"Frankie, please," scoffed Kat. "You know I am a multi talented girl. Keeping my guard up while plotting murder is a piece of cake!"

Frankie had to smile at Kat's facetiousness despite her worry and careful watching for deceit.

Morg opened the door to the manor and let the girls go in past him with a mocking bow. Leading



them into a large room, presumably his study, he motioned them to sit.

"Please, ladies, have a seat."

"We'll stand," defied Frankie.

Morg seated himself behind the broad desk and leaned back in his chair. "Fine, suit yourselves." He studied them a moment, then commented. "You know, I overheard your shouting match with Pierre. I must say, he is a charming chap; one would think his manners and upbringing would rub off on ye two."

The girls did not deign to answer.

He continued, irked with their attitude yet again. "Lest ye think I am not entirely serious, I suggest that ye come and look at these documents."

Kat and Frankie looked at each other, then crossed the floor to the huge desk and leaned over to peruse the documents he had laid out. One was an official request from Captain Parley of the Hawk to take the Aphrodite and her crew on behalf of the British crown for reasons of war crimes. The other one was a warrant for the arrest of Katherine Adele and Francesca Fontaine for committing piracy on the high seas. The girls were to be brought before the council at Nevis for trial.

Kat was incensed. "We've committed no war crimes! This is an outrage."

"And the only pirating we have done has been against other pirates!" Frankie was furious as well. "These are all trumped up charges...probably by you!" She stared defiantly at Morg, refusing to believe her eyes.

Morg's patience was being sorely tried, but he remained calm. "Ladies, it may not seem as if you have committed a war crime, but have you attacked

any ships flying under the British flag in your travels?"

Frankie responded. "We were attacked by three small British ships a few weeks ago, and we defended ourselves." She tossed back her raven mane impatiently.

"Did you sink all of them?"

"No, one escaped as darkness was falling."

Morg nodded. "Then, that explains it, he filed a complaint with the Governor of Nevis for piracy, or claiming unwarranted French brutality, or perhaps both. France and England are at war yet again, in case ye did not know.

"But, they attacked us," Kat protested furiously.

Morg laughed. "Well, lass, now ye know the life of a pirate. It makes no difference who attacked who, the fact is you fly the French flag and were in battle with British ships at a time of war. It is your word against the other Captain's. Ye will not win, of that ye can be assured. The Hawk knows ye are here, and Admiral Whitehall of the Raven is a day's journey away. I can only forestall them for so long."

"War? But France wasn't at war with England!" Frankie's brow was puzzled. "And, LaSalle is French, too, and flies the French flag as well. Why aren't they after him?"

"Ye are partially correct, Captain, LaSalle is French, but he has been sailing here for a long time and is wise enough to have Lettres de Marque from many governments. He never flies the flag of a nation at war. If you look at the Nemesis today, she flies the Dutch flag."

"But...but this isn't right," protested Kat hotly.

Morg looked at her with a bit of sympathy. "I'm aware ye thought I was making this all up, but the truth is, lasses, that I can assure ye it's all true. I

have forty eight hours to surrender ye, or they will come and take ye. In case there might be a traitor or spy on board the Aphrodite, I decided the only way I could be assured of talking to ye about what was really going on and possibly save your lives was to get ye here." He looked sternly at each of them. "The show was for Captain Parley so he would see that I was taking him seriously."

He stood up and came around the desk to stand in front of them. "I will not lie to ye, I consider both of your attitudes unbecoming your stations in life, and I think what ye both really need is a good old fashioned spanking. Ye may yet find yourselves across my knee, but this is not the time for it. What I'm trying to do is prevent as much bloodshed as I can on my island. Now, ye go and talk it over with Pierre and plan on being here tomorrow evening for supper if ye want my help."

Frankie and Kat gaped in outrage at Morg's casual announcement of a possible spanking.

"Surely you jest, Monsieur," gibed Kat. "Spankings are for children!"

"No one lays a hand on us," snapped Frankie, right behind her sister.

"I have found a good spanking helps many a recalcitrant lass become better behaved in half the time of a lecture," mocked Morg, his green eyes gleaming in amusement at their indignation.

Frankie spun on her heel then, ignoring his derision. "We'll get back to you on dinner," she said, her temper seething. "Come on, Kat." She hustled her sister out to where the men were waiting for them. "We need to talk to Pierre, quickly."

"Can you believe he actually threatened to spank us, Frankie," retorted Kat, still bristling. But, she was also remembering the fine set of



Macalister's head, the chiseled lips and the broad shoulders with the powerful muscles. She couldn't stop the stirrings of desire yet again. She tried to shake it off; her desires should be for Mace only.

"Actually, yes I can," responded Frankie, thinking of their cousin in France who had told her of such things. "It seems it happens quite often with women and men, we have just never had the dubious experience, and I don't wish to. I'm glad our father did not believe in such an atrocity."

"Well, Mace never threatened to spank me," huffed Kat.

"Did you ever cross him?"

"Well, no, not really," murmured Kat, thinking of the hours they had spent in each other's arms. They had been so intent upon seeing each other and making sweet love that she had never thought to have words with him. "Are you saying he might have?" she asked curiously as they walked along.

Frankie's voice went to a whisper. "You remember Snipes?"

Kat giggled in spite of the seriousness of their predicament. "Who can forget cousin Snipes?"

"Well, he told me that the Lady Amelia crossed her husband one day with sharp words, and he took her into his study. Snipes said there is a hole in the broom closet behind a loose board that looks into the study, and he went to watch what happened, being curious, of course."

"Of course," chuckled Kat, knowing cousin Snipes.

"He said Lord Byron flipped up her skirts and bared her backside over his knee and spanked her with a hairbrush until she was quite red and screaming. It was what gave me the idea, really, to have Uncle Pierre swat me with that paddle to help me with my training. But only six times! That was



enough!" She winced, remember the sting and burn that came from that paddle.

"Mon Dieu," exclaimed Kat in a hushed whisper. "Do you suppose it is all that common after all?"

Frankie nodded sagely. "He told me Lord Byron quite regularly bared the servant girls' backsides and laid into them with his strap when they were remiss in their duties. Said he knew plenty of other homes where it happened as well."

"Why would he tell you all this, Frankie?" Kat asked, her green eyes bright with curiosity.

Frankie had the grace to blush. "Um...well...he threatened me one day, and I told him if he valued his life, he would never do such a thing."

Kat laughed, then, picturing Snipes' twinkling eyes and had a hard time imagining him as the strict, stern deliverer of punishment. "More like a bit of slap and tickle I would say," she said knowingly. She smiled serenely as Frankie looked curiously at her.

Pierre was waiting at the ship when they returned. "We have a lot to talk about, Pierre," Frankie said. She quickly explained what Macalister wanted them to do. She also added that she did not intend to go back to his home the next evening.

Pierre, however, had other ideas.

"There must be some other way, Pierre," Frankie argued. "I don't want to go to Macalister's for dinner. I'm not even sure these documents are real."

"I don't trust him," echoed Kat, determined to make Pierre see reason. "Why would he want to help us?" She paced back and forth, her lip in a decided pout.

"Kat is right, what does he gain by helping us?" Frankie asked suspiciously. "He doesn't even know us."

Pierre's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "The man has made a gesture. I'm quite sure there is something in it for himself, but that is beside the point at this moment. We have little choice but to listen to his options. It's the polite thing to do, and we might be surprised at what he comes up with. And, anyway, protocol insists we join him for supper."

"Damn protocol," hissed Frankie, her eyes turning the deeper green of a tempestuous sea.

"That is not what your parents have taught you, young lady, and you know it," snapped Pierre sternly. "You know how important protocol is among the court and the gentry. Reputations are made or broken on protocol!"

Lord, how he itched to turn these two over his knee and spank some sense into them! But he was too old to start down that road with them now. Their future husbands sure had their work cut for them!

"This is NOT the French court!" snapped Kat. "It's a bloody pirate's island, and we are pirates at the moment."

"Just the same, we SHALL attend supper tomorrow in Governor Macalister's home as he has graciously offered." Pierre rose to his feet, looking very firm and determined. "Not only that, but you shall both wear dresses, is that clear, Frankie?" He turned as she opened her mouth to protest once again.

"NO! I can't wear my sword with a dress, and I'm NOT wearing one, Pierre." Her eyes stormed daggers at him.



Pierre got up and walked to the chest under the side table and opened it. Picking up the paddle, he walked back to Frankie and held it up in front of her face. "I am through talking for now. You are looking at a man who has reached the limit of his patience. If you are not on deck at 6:30 sharp, both of you, in dresses...I shall have Gaston hold you down over the table while I blister both your backsides with this, and I won't stop at six swats. Do I make myself clear?"

Frankie and Kat looked uneasily at each other, then back at Pierre. The look on his face was deadly earnest.

"Perfectly," they gritted between clenched teeth. They spun on their heels and walked away from Pierre, indignation in every step.

Pierre sighed and returned the paddle to the chest. "What am I going to do with those two? Gatineu Fontaine, if you were here right now, I would challenge you to a duel for neglecting their educations!"

Chapter Seven

It was getting on towards dinnertime, and Frankie was preparing for her meeting with Jacques LaSalle.

"You are not going to wear a dress, Frankie?" Kat's green eyes were amused as she watched Frankie putting on fresh pants and a clean silk shirt after her bath. Her raven hair gleamed in the light from the lantern. It was getting dusk.

"Since when does a man tell me what to do," Frankie scoffed. "I'll dress as I please, and tonight it will be in my breeches so I can run him through if he does not give me the answers I seek!"

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"No, I am going alone. This is between him and me this time."

She opened the door and walked onto the deck where Pierre was waiting for her. "I still don't like you going alone. I don't trust LaSalle." He scowled.

"I'll be fine, Uncle Pierre," Frankie replied placing a kiss on his cheek. "It's only three berths down, you can see me from here."

"You won't mind if I watch, then, to make sure you get there safely?" Pierre added silkily. "And you had better come back safely as well. You have until ten o'clock before I come looking for you."

Frankie snorted indelicately. "You know I can take care of myself, Uncle Pierre. I doubt there is a man here who can come anywhere close to beating me."

Pierre shook his head in fond exasperation. "You are over confident, ma petite. You are headed for a fall. Besides, there are other things that can happen to you besides losing in a duel, as I hope you are aware." He looked sternly at her from beneath bushy eyebrows.

"You worry too much, Uncle Pierre."

Pierre and Kat watched uneasily as Frankie made her way down the plank and onto the dock.

"There is one who can beat you easily," Pierre muttered darkly under his breath. But that information he would keep to himself...for now. Only he and Jacques knew the relationship they had once shared...he the master...Jacques the pupil. But that had been years ago. He wondered what had brought him to this end?

Frankie ignored the looks that came her way as she walked along the docks, her sword comfortably at her side, a dagger in her boot. The night air was silky and tropical, and the water lapped gently against the pilings. No one challenged her. Whether it was the brooding look on her face or her reputation preceding her, she didn't know or care. As long as they stayed out of her way, it didn't matter what they thought.

Knowing Frankie would not be back for hours, Kat silently dressed in dark clothing, her daggers in her boots. She had no intention of sitting around waiting for her to return. Besides, she had no doubts but that LaSalle would lie to her sister.

For all her fervor and determination, Frankie was an innocent in the ways of the world and men. Kat had seen the lust in LaSalle's eyes and knew it for what it was. If he could, he would lure Frankie to his bed.

Checking to see that the guards were talking to Pierre, she slid along the back side of the deck and out onto the moorings, gently slipping down them until she dropped lightly into the water. Luckily they were the last berth on the cove, and the shore and its jungle cover was not far away. Quickly, she scooted up the beach in a crouch and melted into the shadows.



Morg was standing in the shadows, he too watching Frankie. Why he should feel concerned over two lasses who were little more than high-class chits was beyond him, but he did.

A sudden movement off to his left caught his eye, and he turned in time to see a figure dressed in dark clothing disappear into the foliage. It had been too small to be a man, so the chances were it was the feisty little hellcat.

He looked back at the Aphrodite and then again at the spot Kat had disappeared. It looked like Pierre was waiting for Frankie so he would follow the other one. Sighing, he stealthily moved through the undergrowth and picked up her trail.

When Frankie approached the plank to the Nemesis, the guards moved out of her way like automatons, and she knew they had been told to expect her.

"This way," said a big man with a moustache and a red scarf around his bald head. He bowed slightly and studied her intently, his gray eyes raking her face as if trying to memorize her features. Frankie thought him strange. "My name is Frenchy, mademoiselle. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Frankie stared at him, her eyes cold. "Well, Frenchy, I wish I could say the same, but I can't," she returned frankly.

The daughter does not have the manners of her mother, thought Frenchy to himself. The little madam needs a good lesson in deportment...her mother had surely been remiss, it seemed.

Frenchy kept his thoughts to himself, knowing Jacques would not give him away until he deemed it necessary.

"In here," he replied, bowing slightly and opening a cabin door.

Frankie did not bother to thank him, but stepped proudly inside. The door shut behind her, and she scanned the room. Jacques LaSalle rose from a table laden with delicious looking food and tall tapers flickering in the middle of it.

"Good evening, ma petite," he said courteously, reaching for her hand. His gracious tone belied his displeasure at her blatant disobedience in not wearing a dress.

"Save it," Frankie snapped, jerking her hand away. Her breath seemed short, and her hand tingled where he had touched her. He was looking very handsome, his dark eyes gleaming and his black hair tied back at the neck. He wore tight fitting black breeches that outlined the heavy muscles of his thighs. The dark mustache was neatly trimmed above well-shaped lips that smiled amusedly at her reaction. The air felt close, suddenly, and she scowled heavily at him.

Jacques's dark gaze slid lazily up and down her trim figure. There was no doubt her lovely body was well defined in the men's clothing she wore, but he preferred beautiful dresses that enhanced a woman's feminine charms. "So, you did not wear the dress. I AM disappointed," he said smoothly. "Such defiance in one so beautiful. What am I to do with you?" His fingers stroked his mustache almost absentmindedly.

Frankie drew her sword and placed it against his pristine white shirt with the lacy collar falling down the front, the tip slightly piercing the fine cloth. "You will do nothing with me save answer my questions or feel my steel through your heart."

He lifted a hand and moved the tip aside gently. "Didn't anyone ever tell you it's bad manners to point your weapon at an unarmed man?" he asked dangerously, his dark eyes glinting with anger.



"I care naught for what others say," mocked Frankie as she moved the sword back above his heart. The challenge thrown, Frankie waited, her eyes disdainful of his words.

Jacques deliberately stepped closer, leaning into Frankie's drawn sword, feeling the tip of it prick his skin. When the white shirt began to show a spot of red, Frankie's eyes were drawn to that spot. Then they slid back up to be locked with his, will against will.

"Go ahead, ma cherie, drive the sword through me. Go ahead, what's stopping you?" Jacques taunted her. His lips drew back in an almost cruel smile as he watched her carefully, sure she would not be able to cold-bloodedly kill him. Not many women could. It wasn't that they lacked courage, he knew, but it was because it went against the innate goodness of the fairer sex.

Frankie hesitated, and he knew he was right, the knowledge making him glad. However, she needed to know if she was going to play a man's game, she had better be prepared for such decisions when facing a real enemy.

Jacques reached down with his hand and moved the sword aside. "Bah, never hesitate, ma cherie!" His other hand wrapped in her long curls and pulled her to him with such force that when their bodies met; some of the air left her lungs.

He held her firmly as his lips swooped down to capture hers. Deliberately, he took her sweet lips, finally tasting the nectar he had long desired. It was well worth the wait.

The sword clattered to the floor as Frankie fought furiously against his hard length, her rosy lips trembling beneath his mouth. Her senses swam, and she finally leaned into him and for a brief moment, she kissed him back. A sweet melting



surrender threatened to engulf her, and then, suddenly, she was free.

Breathing heavily, her hand shot out quick as a flash and slapped him across the face hard enough to bring a trickle of blood to the corner of his mouth. She stared at him, her face flushed with anger.

"That was not wise, ma petite," he said as his own hand shot out and grabbed her arm.

"What, now," she spat, "rape and torture, like you did my mother?"

"No, ma chérie, I'm going to do what Lord Frontenac should have done a long time ago." He dragged her to the chair and sat, pulling her across his lap until she landed with a surprised oomph, her pert hindquarters high in the air. He began to spank her hard with his broad palm, the sound reverberating through out the cabin.

Frankie kicked and screamed with rage as his hand cracked over and over along her upturned bottom. She twisted and fought desperately to escape the burning chastisement, but his left hand quickly found a handful of her beautiful hair, effectively holding her in place. Quickly, he put his right leg over hers, pinning her in place over his knee, her writhing cheeks strategically located for his correction. The spanking continued relentlessly.

"You descend from royalty, yet you act like a common street urchin," he lectured as he worked. "You assume and presume certain rights, yet have never learned discipline."

His words were getting a bit labored, his arm tiring as he continued the fierce blows, each one bruising the virgin skin on her tender buttocks. The blows came harder and faster as he finished. "Your carelessness will be the death of you, just as it was your father." With that sentence he stopped.



It took a monumental effort for Frankie to avoid bursting into humiliating tears. Only her anger fueled her determination and kept them at bay even though the pain was excruciating.

He released her, and the mention of her father caused her to spring to her feet and pummel him in the chest with her fists.

"Murderer!" she screamed, "You killed them. If it's the last thing I do, I will see you in hell!"

He grabbed her fists, holding them against his chest as he came to his feet. She struggled wildly against him.

"No, Frankie, I have murdered no one. And, I know your mother very well. She is alive."

Frankie went stone still at that announcement, her breasts heaving, her breath coming in ragged gasps. "Where is she? Tell me!"

"As I said in my earlier invitation, we have much to talk about, but I will only speak to the daughter of Lady Frontenac, not a street urchin pirate. Return in the dress as I commanded; act like the lady you are, and THEN we will talk." He released her.

Kat felt a sense of freedom and heaved a big sigh of relief as she followed the shoreline under the trees until the ship was out of sight around the curve, and then she stepped out into the moonlight. Checking around her carefully, she could see the beach was deserted, the settlement being left behind. Quietly, she stood at the water's edge, letting the soothing sounds of the surf wash over her boots. Her thoughts were bitter.

Their gentle mother was dead...just like their father. Kat's heart twisted in pain. How she missed them both, but her father most of all. Sometimes, she wished she had been with them on that fated

journey. Sometimes, she wished she had died with them, but it had been Frankie's burden to be there.

Dear, sweet Frankie, who had changed so after that horrible day. She had become driven to look for their mother, fueled by revenge and a hatred that burned deep for the man who had done this to them.

Kat didn't know where she was going; she just knew she needed to get away from the ship, to stretch her legs, to be free. She continued on until the beach ended, and a path led up through the undergrowth. She took it.

Following Kat, It was only a few minutes before Morg saw her standing at the surf's edge, just staring at the water. Lost in thought, he supposed. He felt a kinship with her for her apparent need for solitude. It happened to him all the time; still...she should not be out here alone.

He continued to follow her, keeping back when he saw her stop and turn, as if startled by something. Her movements were stealthy and graceful, just like a cat. He grinned, thinking her nickname very appropriate for her.

As she disappeared into the foliage at the sand's edge, he knew it would only be a moment before she discovered the clear pool in the glade. His heart beating rapidly, he followed.

Sure enough, as he quietly approached, he could see her sitting on a large boulder at the side of the moon washed water. It was a favorite spot of his, too.

As Frankie slammed the door behind her, Jacques poured himself a glass of wine, shaking out his throbbing hand. He had intended to teach her a

lesson, and he hoped her inability to sit comfortably for a few days might get through to her.

Little did she know it, but she had confirmed the information given him that the Duke of Frontenac had owned the Aphrodite; and her own parentage as well. Which did indeed make Frenchy's wife the Duchess of Frontenac!

"Come," he said in response to the knock at his door. When Frenchy stepped inside, he waved him to the table. "Come, eat. We have much to talk about."

Frenchy grinned, his swarthy face amused. "I take it the lady did not appreciate your culinary efforts?"

Jacques had actually had the dinner made up, striving to serve things that might appeal to Frankie's feminine palate. She hadn't even looked at the food. "We never got that far," grinned Jacques in return, "but it was still an imminently satisfying exchange. At least, for me."

"Her loss is my gain," chuckled Frenchy, and he began to eat with relish.

Kat sat staring at the scene before her, her troubled thoughts pushed aside for the moment. It was a hauntingly lovely scene. The surface of the pool was aglow with moonlight, and fresh water trickled and gurgled off the ledges of shale and rock that led upstream, emptying into what could be a perfect bathing and swimming area.

It looked deliciously cool and inviting, and Kat could not resist its call. Standing up, she began to take off her clothes.

Morg's breath hissed in as he watched Kat beginning to disrobe, her movements almost languid as if she were enjoying the mere act. Soon,

she had peeled off the shirt, breeches and boots and was standing there in only a white, thin, one-piece chemise. Her red gold curls were burnished in the heavenly light, and she ran her arms beneath them, lifting them up and letting them fall back to tumble about her tiny waist.

He hadn't even realized he was holding his breath until she began to peel the delicate fabric from her shoulders, her movements unconsciously sensuous. Her pert breasts sprang forth, their rosy buds at attention in the slight night wind, and then she pushed the garment down over her rounded hips and finally off her feet.

Casting it aside, she stood there like a pagan goddess in the moonlight, and Morg was entranced. She lifted her arms and twirled slowly around in a full circle as if she were aware of his presence and wanted to show herself off to him. She couldn't know he was there, though, and he was mesmerized as she danced before the man in the moon.

His breath came fast and hard; his now swollen manhood throbbing painfully. Never had he seen such perfection in one so small and tiny. Her breasts were lush, and her ribcage tapered to a narrow waist from which the full hips flared out and then slimmed back down to slender thighs and on down to shapely calves and ankles.

She was exquisite, her alabaster skin gleaming as she stepped forward and dabbled her dainty toes in the water, testing its coolness. His blood roared in his ears, and he longed to peel off his clothing and join her, take her, make her his own. He held himself back, though.

As a pirate, he had come to enjoy taking what he wanted, when he wanted it and not looking back.

But there was something about this sprite that set his danger signals on alert.

It was in that moment that Morg realized it was exactly this girl that had been making him uneasy all day yesterday and last night. He wasn't much of a believer in pre-arranged destiny, but this girl was going to figure in his life. He didn't know how, but he knew it as sure as he knew he was standing there.

That is, if he didn't strangle her first for the disobedient, haughty chit that she was! He stepped out of the jungle covering and stood gazing at her in the water, waiting for her to notice he was there.

It had barely been an hour before Frankie came storming up the plank of the Aphrodite, her expression like a thundercloud.

Pierre had been pacing back and forth, although he had been certain she would be gone for several hours yet. "What happened?"

"I found out that Mother is alive," Frankie snapped trying to keep her hands away from her flaming, throbbing bottom. She didn't need to be further humiliated.

"And?" Pierre probed gently, elated at the news.

"And, nothing! If I want to know more, I have to put on the dumb dress and go back."

"Well, get to it," Pierre urged.

"No," she said as she walked stiffly towards her cabin. "I'm not going back tonight."

She just wanted to get away from Pierre before she did something stupid like burst into tears. Her bottom ached and burned, and she wanted to find her cream and soothe it.



Pierre looked suspiciously at her. Her eyes were awfully bright, and her voice a bit wobbly. He stopped her and turned her to face him. "What happened, ma petite?" he asked softly.

Frankie stared up at him in the moonlight, willing herself not to cry...not yet. It was a fruitless battle in the face of Pierre's sympathy, however, and she found tears leaking down her face. "He...he spanked me, Uncle Pierre," she said at last, giving way to sobs. She tried to pull away and get inside her cabin where she could be ashamed in private, but her Uncle pulled her into his arms.

He held her as she tried to choke back the sobs and rubbed her back soothingly. "There now, ma petite," he said comfortingly.

Pierre suspected there was more she was not telling him, but Frankie was a very private person. He was amazed, however, at her admission...and worried. The sparks between her and Jacques had not gone unnoted, and he wondered what was going on in Jacques's mind.

He couldn't help a small glimmer of satisfaction that Frankie had gotten a spanking. She had certainly been in need of one, and it looked like it brought her down a peg or two.

However, men usually spanked women they had a vested interest in or cared about in some way. Had Jacques just been trying to humiliate her? Was there something more going on? And what was the son of a French nobleman doing commanding a pirate ship?

He sighed as he watched Frankie turn away and go to her cabin. There certainly were a lot of mysteries here at the Pirates Hideaway!



Kat was thoroughly enjoying herself, her sinuous body cleaving through the water with ease and agility. Her father had always said she reminded him of a cat with the natural grace she possessed.

She cavorted and played, coming up from beneath the water and flinging her hair back out of her eyes. When she rubbed the water from them, the first thing she saw was Morg Macalister standing at the water's edge, watching her.

"Merde," she muttered to herself. "How did I get so lucky?"

Morg curled a big finger at her, indicating she was to get out of the water.

Kat arched a sardonic eyebrow at him and stayed where she was, her breasts barely covered by the warm silky liquid.

"Don't make me come in there after ye, lass," Morg said sternly. "Ye are not supposed to be out here. Luckily, I saw ye leave the ship and followed ye."

"Yes, lucky me," echoed Kat sarcastically. "Why don't you just pretend you never saw me and go back the way you came," she called sweetly. "I'll pretend I never saw you." She lowered her voice to mutter under her breath again. "Which won't be hard to do."

Morg heard the muttered comment that carried over the water, and he growled low in his throat. So she was going to be difficult. Had he expected any less?

Kat grew alarmed when Morg began to methodically peel off his boots, then his breeches and was starting on his shirt when Kat began to back up. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Ye won't come out, lass, so I'm coming in."

"Don't you dare!" Kat stared, fascinated as he threw the shirt aside, his muscles rippling beneath

their bronze covering. She could see the huge erection in his shorts, and she felt desire lick along her veins. She didn't want to like anything about the odious man!

As he started into the water, she moved like a fish and swam for the other side. Morg swam to cut her off, but he wasn't quite fast enough. Like quicksilver, she was out of the water and racing around the edge of the pool towards her clothing.

Morg swore and turned around, slicing through the water to get back before she did. But, Kat grabbed her clothes and boots and ran into the jungle just as Morg came out, the water sluicing off his body.

He grabbed his pants and yanked them on, and as he was reaching for his shirt, a pearl handled dagger cut into it, pinning it to the sand. He looked up in time to see Kat, already in her shirt and pulling her pants onto her slender legs. Her green eyes were mocking him.

He pulled the dagger from the shirt and shook the sand out of it and then yanked it on. Grabbing his boots, he looked up long enough to see she was gone. With a muttered oath, he swept them on and grabbed the rest of his things, following her quickly. She was in for a long hard spanking when he caught up with her!

Kat flew along the trail, not bothering to stop and put her boots on. She knew she didn't have time before Morg's long legs would eat up the distance behind her. She ran like the wind, clutching the front of her shirt together with one hand and holding her boots in the other.

Panting, she didn't even stop when she came to the Aphrodite, but ran straight on up the plank much to the amazement and shock of Pierre. She flew past him and the guards and straight to her

cabin, not even looking back. Once inside, she slammed the door and leaned against it, breathing heavily. Impulsively, she turned again and slammed the board down that locked the door.

Then she flopped down into a chair, breathing hard, but triumphant. She hadn't been able to resist showing off her knife throwing ability. Kat smiled smugly in spite of her fast beating heart, very pleased with herself. That would teach the arrogant pirate to mess with her!

Pierre was looking after Kat in consternation when he saw Morg Macalister running down the beach towards the Aphrodite. It was only a few seconds before he was at the plank, scowling up at him. "What's going on here?" snapped Pierre, still in shock. "Are you accosting my niece?"

"Not yet I haven't." Morg was seething. "But I'm sure going to accost her arse before long," he said harshly. "I caught her sneaking off ship and followed her. She decided to go bathing and when she refused to come out of the water on my order, I followed her in. She escaped me, however, but not without leaving her calling card in my good shirt!"

He held up the shirt with the slit in it and the pearl handled knife. "Ye obviously need better guards, if they can allow a slip of a girl to get away from them undetected." He threw the knife and Kat's chemise that she had left behind onto the deck of the Aphrodite and stalked away.

Pierre could read between the lines as well as anyone, and for the second time that evening, felt very worried! It was plain to him that Kat held some interest for this Macalister.

He sighed heavily. He was too old for this, and having never had any children of his own, especially girls, he was at a loss as to what to do. He couldn't keep them locked up forever. Fate had intervened in

the normal progression of their lives...hell...all of their lives! He paced restlessly back and forth, staring at the cabin door.

By normal rules, the girls would be married by now and settled down with husbands and children of their own. They had had their coming out ball at sixteen, just before their parents had been killed.

In fact, Kat had been courted by Mace Delarouge, son of Lord and Lady Delarouge, the Duke and Duchess of Aquataine. It had been assumed they would become betrothed, but she had given it up to follow Frankie.

Pierre snorted in disgust. Now here she was running around half naked from a handsome Scottish, pirate governor in the Caribbean, who was probably of the Scottish nobility, or at the least, the gentry.

And, Frankie had just been spanked by another pirate rogue; also nobility in disguise and who obviously had his eye on her! How was he supposed to protect them when they didn't even try to protect themselves!

"Mon Dieu," he muttered throwing his hands in the air. "Only one day in port and look at what has happened." He looked up to the heavens in vexation and prayed, "May you protect them when I fail!"

Chapter Eight

The next morning, Pierre made his way along the docks to the plank of the Lady Princess. "Permission to come aboard," he called to Morg.

"Permission granted," Morg replied cautiously, his green eyes glittering in the sunlight.

Pierre walked up the plank and stopped in front of Morg, looking around him with unfeigned interest. "We have given your proposal of dinner tonight some thought and decided to accept it. We'd like to hear what you have to say, that is if you are still interested in helping the girls after last night." He studied Morg intently.

"Where is Captain Frankie and Kat this morning?" probed Morg. He was still angry with Kat.

"Frankie is...indisposed," Pierre said delicately, a broad grin lighting up his face in spite of himself. "Seems she is having a hard time sitting this morning, and it is making her quite grouchy. Kat is very indignant on her behalf, of course, so I deemed it necessary that I should be the liaison to convey our wishes."

Morg's eyes narrowed. "Kat may soon find herself suffering the same malady."

Pierre warred with himself. On one hand, he couldn't blame Macalister; on the other hand, he felt he should defend his niece. Finally, he spoke. "Look, Macalister, you need to know that Kat and Frankie are my nieces. I don't know what your intentions are towards Kat, but I would personally appreciate anything you can do to help us out of this mess."

"Thank ye for telling me, I didn't know that," Morg replied, his eye's narrowing. "It still doesn't change anything between Kat and I. The only

intention I have at present for your niece is to put her over my knee and blister her arse."

"While I can appreciate your desire, I can't in good conscience condone it," said Pierre courteously.

"Well, are *you* going to?" Morg stared hard at him.

"I suppose I should," agreed Pierre, "but I'm afraid I've put it off so long now that I can't bring myself to do it. They are both willful girls, and their husbands shall have their work cut out for them, I'm afraid."

At the mention of Kat having a husband, Morg's insides gave a queer leap. He didn't like the sound of that, he realized. He tried to brush the thought aside. He was certainly in no position to offer Kat anything. "Is she betrothed?"

"Who? Kat?"

"Aye," growled Morg impatiently. Who else had they been discussing?

"No, monsieur, she is not yet betrothed. But it was thought she soon would be when we left France. I don't know if that opportunity will still be waiting when we get back." His eye's twinkled knowingly.

"Why are you here? What is your business with LaSalle?" Morg was curious by this time, as to exactly what was going on. "And call me Morg."

Pierre studied the younger man before him. "Thank you...Morg. I'm afraid our business with LaSalle is personal. But we shall endeavor to keep it from affecting the entire harbor."

Morg nodded, understanding his reticence. The fewer who knew a man's business, the better off the man was. He could respect that. He played his own cards close to his vest.

"Aye, I can accept that." He studied Pierre intently.

"So what's a man like you doing in a place like this?" Pierre asked curiously.

"Like you, I'm afraid that's personal," replied Morg, smiling evenly. "But, come, I'll show you around the Lady Princess."

"I'd like that," murmured Pierre.

Frankie paced the floor restlessly. The sun was just coming up, and she was no nearer to peace of mind than she had been when she left the Nemesis last night. Her backside ached, and sitting was very uncomfortable. She was tired yet could not rest.

She groaned when she remembered her behavior of the night before. She had been outraged when LaSalle had kissed her. Her fingers touched her lips, remembering how she had fought him to no avail.

Then she had found herself responding...his hand in her hair, his lips taking possession of hers; she had felt like she was slowly drowning...losing the will to resist. God help her, she had kissed him back...a licking flame racing through her blood, her nipples hardening in response to the pressure of his hard chest against hers.

When he had suddenly released her, she had put all her resentment and anger at herself and him into a heartfelt slap across his face. It had brought blood. It had brought something else as well.

Those six spansks from the paddle she had given Pierre permission to wield were nothing compared to the punishment she had received at LaSalle's hard hand. It had taken all her resolve not to give in to tears before he had finally let her up, her butt burning like fire and throbbing painfully. She had fled, his demand to return as he had ordered in the first place ringing in her delicate ears.



Frankie's pride had taken a major blow, and she cringed at the thought of herself, an established ship captain, a ruler of men, reduced to the status of a punished child with a spanking to her backside.

She fumed and fretted as her thoughts whirled chaotically. He would pay for the indignities she had suffered!

Frenchy's knowing grin as she left the cabin, the men all hiding smiles behind their hands as she strove to leave with her dignity in shreds. They must have heard her yelling and, she was sure her face had been the same color as her bottom cheeks had been when she inspected them later. She flushed just thinking about it!

Jacques had said their mother was alive, though! Kat didn't believe him. She wasn't sure if she believed him either, but she couldn't afford not to take him seriously if there was any chance at all that he was not lying.

Pierre had wanted her to return to LaSalle last night, but pride had forbid it. As badly as Frankie wanted news of her mother, she could not bring herself to swallow her pride and follow his orders.

She would humble herself and come dressed as he requested...soon. Just not right now. She bit her lip so hard it bled. "Merde," she muttered. "That man has a lot to answer for."

She should have run him through when she had the chance! Little did she know how much she resembled a sulky child as she rubbed her abused cheeks absentmindedly, her lower lip in a decided pout.

Morg was just finishing his ablutions when Rosalie appeared to let him know that his dinner guests were there. It had been an enlightening day. Things began to be a little clearer after the time he had spent with both Pierre and Jacques.



Jacques had told him a little more than Pierre did, but both men were very closemouthed.

He gazed ruefully in the mirror, realizing he was getting pulled into this whole thing whether he wanted to or not. And mostly because of a certain green-eyed witch that had him thinking things he had no right to think. He turned and strode out of the bedroom. It was time to meet his reluctant guests.

Joining the dinner party in the sitting room, Morg apologized. "Pierre, lasses, I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

"Think nothing of it, Morg," Pierre replied graciously. The girls glared at him. They were both present, both in dresses...and both there under duress.

"So just how do you propose to help us, Monsieur Macalister?" Kat asked mockingly. She was remembered him chasing her last night, and she was very proud of herself for getting away.

Morg placed his hand over her small one, amused when she pulled away with a small hiss. "All in good time, little lass, first we eat."

Rosalie and Alyssa had prepared quite a sumptuous repast, complete with wild boar, island fruits and fresh bread. The conversation was fairly stilted, but they managed to keep it respectful, even if it was forced at times.

Finally, they retired to Morg's study where he offered Pierre a fine cigar. Frankie could stand it no longer, and she blurted out, "Okay, Macalister, we've done the meal and the small talk, now tell us what's going on."

"Such impatience," he mocked, as he walked to the sliding door off his library. He opened it, and Jacques LaSalle stepped into the room. "Jacques, will ye tell them or should I?"



Jacques stepped forward and bowed over Frankie's hand, lifting it to bestow a kiss on the palm. Never taking his eyes from her, he replied. "By all means, you tell them, Morg, it was your plan after all."

Frankie jerked her hand away from Jacques, her palm tingling where his moustache had tickled the sensitive skin. She stared up at him with angry eyes, her temper seething below the surface, and her bottom protesting his presence.

Kat jumped up and hotly protested. "What is he doing here? I'm not staying in the room with this...this...murderer!"

"Ye will sit down, lass...NOW!" replied Morg in a voice like velvet steel, "while ye still have the ability to sit."

Frankie flushed at that comment, and Pierre pulled Kat down by the hand. "Behave, Kat, and listen. It's what we came for after all."

Morg gave Kat a hard stare and continued. "I've been given reliable information that a Spanish Fleet is to be passing within fifty miles of The Hideaway. The fleet is made up of two galleons and four frigates. It is said they are carrying enough gold and jewels for a king's ransom, and Jacques and I intend to relieve them of it." His emerald eyes glistened with anticipation.

"If we pulled the Nemesis, the Aphrodite, the Lady Queen, the Lady Princess, plus the two smaller frigates I took from Calico Jack, we could take on those six Spanish ships easily. We would have enough wealth to share between us all and plenty for the building up of our Hideaway here. Jacques and I want to know if ye want to throw in with us?"

"But that's piracy!" declared Kat heatedly before Pierre could shush her.

Morg winked at her. "That's what we do, little lass."

Frankie was busy contemplating. "But how does this help keep us out of the British hands?"

"Ye would need to lower your French flag and take a British Lettre de Marquee from me. I know of your loyalty to the French flag, but if ye try to sail from this harbor with it on your rigging, they will sink ye...and Admiral Whitehall himself is here now, we don't have much time. I have to give them an answer by morning."

Jacques spoke up. "The Raven is quite capable of sitting outside the harbor and picking us all off one by one."

Morg nodded. "Yes, seventy eight fourteen pound nautical guns and around three hundred sailors. They would sink either of my ships before I could ever leave the dock."

Morg was amused at Frankie and Jacques, at the way their eyes kept drifting to one another. There was a smoldering tension between those two that filled the room, and he wasn't sure if it was hate, lust or both.

"Are you saying they are offering us this letter?" asked Frankie.

"No, I'm saying I will give ye the letter, and it will be as if ye had it all along. Do I make myself clear?" He stared meaningfully at his three guests.

"Why would you do this for us?" Kat asked suspiciously. She didn't trust either of these two pirates, and she didn't mind letting them know that fact.

"Because I need ye," he answered baldly. "The Aphrodite out guns any of the ships we have, and she would help insure us a victory."

"So this is blackmail," sneered Kat. "Either help you, or you will turn us over to them."

Morg responded silkily. "I prefer to think of it as ye scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." The little green-eyed imp didn't need to know he would never turn her over, but it pleased him to let her think him without scruples. It was better than having her think he had any honest intentions towards her. In the position he was in, he had no right.

"I knew you were nothing but a filthy pirate," spat Kat, strangely disappointed.

Morg's lips tightened, but he did not answer her.

"When do you require an answer?" Pierre asked thoughtfully.

"Ye have until dawn to debate the issue. I will send Admiral Whitehall my answer by noon tomorrow. We set sail at sundown tomorrow evening, with or without the Aphrodite."

"Very well," Pierre replied, standing up. "We shall discuss it, and you shall have your answer tomorrow morning." The girls stood up too.

Jacques crossed to Frankie and looked down into her eyes. "Adieu, ma Cherie, until we meet again." He badly wanted to kiss those rosy lips that were curling in disdain, but he refrained.

Without a word, Frankie turned away, her heart beating fast and followed Kat and Pierre. Outside, she turned to her Uncle. "Perhaps I should go to his ship, since I am wearing the dress..." she trailed off, watching Jacques's tall frame stride down the hill with his men.

"No, ma petite," replied Pierre, "we have decisions to make that are going to concern the rest of our lives. We have no choice but to settle this first."

Frankie nodded, and it was a grim trio that returned to the Aphrodite and settled in the cabin around the Captain's table.

"Well, Frankie, it looks like we are being invited to become real pirates," murmured Kat as she took her seat. For some reason the idea intrigued her, and she laughed in delight.

"Kat, we are not really pirates, and you know it," snapped Frankie, her eyes flashing.

"We are being hunted as such, whether we are or not," interjected Pierre thoughtfully. "Not much chance now of escaping retribution, however unfair."

"But we have been *hunting* pirates," Frankie pointed out yet again, "not joining them. And we still have one to go!"

Kat turned to Frankie and spoke fiercely. "You know we have taken out other ships because they attacked us, even when they weren't pirate ships, Frankie. We have blood on our hands now, just like LaSalle and Macalister. Even if it was in self-defense; they wouldn't see it that way. They would have us before a tribunal quicker than you can blink."

"I fear Kat is right. I can't see our way clear to going back to our old life without severe consequences. I intend to think more on it, but I believe my mind is made up. I'm for joining with Macalister. At least mercenaries allow one to work for whatever country you wish, it seems, or several at the same time. It's by far the best solution to come and go as we please, flying whatever flag relevant to the place we are in, including the pirate flag."

"Even if he is blackmailing us?" Frankie was incensed.

"I don't believe for a minute he will turn us over," Pierre replied evenly, staring at Kat. "Do you, Kat?"

Kat blushed. "Let's just say I have my doubts, but you never know. He doesn't have the reputation he does for nothing, and I intend to treat him as the blackguard he is, anyway," she sniffed and tossed her red hair over her shoulder.

"A blackguard you would do well to heed, ma petite," interjected Pierre sardonically. "He is busy at the moment, but when he has time to concentrate on you, I can see you getting the same treatment Frankie got last night." He smiled grimly.

"He touches me and I'll kill him," vowed Kat fervently, "even if I have to wait until he's sleeping."

The trio continued to discuss the issue until well into the morning hours, and it was finally agreed that they would join Macalister, for lack of better options. They all agreed that finding the girls' mother was still a driving priority, but at present, surviving was their first.

Once beyond the current pressing problem, they could then concentrate their efforts again on Victoria Fontaine.

"It is decided, then," Pierre spoke heavily, their decision uncomfortable, yet seeing no alternative. "I shall inform Morg of our plans at dawn."

When the sun came up, he made his way to the Governor's mansion, deep grooves of tiredness etching his face. When Rosalie ushered him into Morg's study, he spoke hoarsely. "We will join you."

"Are ye sure, Pierre?" growled Morg studying the older man intently. "Ye need to be very sure that the girls are behind ye. I will nae stand for betrayal."

Pierre nodded. "You have my word as a French gentlemen. That's all you need."

"Aye, it had best be," Morg replied. "Your life depends on it."

Pierre studied Morg tiredly. "You cannot seriously think I believe you would turn Kat over?"

Morg hesitated. "Perhaps not, Pierre, but I can assure ye that none of ye would like the consequences should ye betray me."

Pierre nodded again. "Oui, Monsieur, that I can believe."

Morg handed him the Lettres de Marque required and the flags needed, his instructions crisp and clear. "Post the British colors, and I will send word to Admiral Whitehall. Tell the lasses to get some rest...we sail at sunset."

"Oui, Monsieur," replied Pierre. As he strode back down the hill, his thoughts were pensive. "I guess we are pirates now, for better or worse," he muttered to himself. Once again he sent a prayer heavenward that it would be for the better...and over soon!

Jacques was on deck enjoying the brisk morning as the crew went about their business of preparing the Nemesis for the sea. He tied his black hair in a small ponytail at the back of his neck and called for Frenchy.

Looking over at the Aphrodite, he saw the English flag raised high on her masts. Well, he had his answer. Looked like Frankie was joining them. That flag must have made her seethe as much as the "lesson in discipline" he had applied to her firm young buttocks.

"You called, Mon Capitan," Frenchy said jovially, coming up to greet Jacques. It felt good to be getting back to sea again. Seeing the British ships pulling away cheered him as well. They would be long gone before the pirate fleet set sail tonight.

"Oui, Frenchy. I wanted to speak with you. I want you to take the helm of the Bandit tonight. I want you to protect the Aphrodite. For all her guns, she is still slower than the frigates."

"Consider it done, my friend."

Memories of Frankie flashed through Jacques's mind, the kiss; the feel of her breasts against his chest and then spilling over his knee, her tight stomach against his thigh and the curve of her bottom against his hand. He felt his pants tightening uncomfortably, and he shook his head to clear it, breathing deeply of the fresh salt air. "Focus, LaSalle, or it will be you on the briny bottom," he muttered.

Frenchy grinned knowingly, and they set about their work together. Tonight, they would have many riches! Maybe he would even settle down with Victoria and stay put for a while. He did hate to leave her so much, but a pirate's ship was no place for a woman.

Leaning against the railing of the Aphrodite, Kat gazed appreciatively at the sun bouncing off the water, the surf rolling gently around her. Her long lashes fell to her soft cheeks as she absorbed the sounds in the air.

The call of men getting ready for battle filled her ears and echoed in her heart. It thrilled her. She knew it shouldn't, and that it was a long way from her upbringing, but it set her heart pounding just the same.

She had never confessed this; even to Frankie...and as tired as she was of this life, her spirits rose to the occasion. It always gave her great satisfaction to avenge her father's death, to triumph over a filthy pirate when he thought he had her. Frankie didn't think she was very bloodthirsty,

but she was wrong. Kat desired revenge, too; she just desired her old life more.

Sighing, she lifted the spyglass to peer through cool emerald eyes at Macalister talking with Nigor on the Lady Princess. Her blood boiled as she watched him.

She hadn't minded so much throwing in with him, that wasn't her source of protest...it was knowing she was being forced into it that nagged at her.

The idea of being coerced into anything struck a serious nerve with her. She had greatly resented being arrested and forced to his home, blackmailed and threatened with a spanking. Being treated like a child was not to her liking!

Kat was all woman, and she enjoyed using her feminine charms, even against Macalister. She knew he was not immune to her, but it aggravated her that he favored the childish discipline and had told Pierre he intended to spank her. Her delicate chin jutted out in defiance as he looked her way. If he valued his life, he had best reconsider!

She mulled the idea of the treasure over in her mind...wouldn't it be great if they could steal it out from under Macalister? What great revenge that would be on the odious pirate. The tip of her pink tongue licked her lips as she thought about it. Now THAT would be satisfying. Her emerald eyes gleamed in anticipation.

Kat knew double-crossing a man like Macalister would be a grave mistake, but she couldn't resist playing with the idea. After all, what did they really have to lose?

Their mother wasn't alive, this Kat was sure of. Frankie might be naïve enough to believe that treacherous murderer, but she was not. Certainly, they would come after the girls if they were to

double-cross them, but there were options to consider here.

A small smile played with her full soft lips as her mind began to speculate on the possibility of putting such a plan into action. She hailed her twin coming across the deck.

"No!" Frankie spat emphatically, staring at Kat as if she had gone crazy.

Kat glowered at her sister. "Why not? We could pull this off, Frankie, we could!"

"We are not risking it, Kat! If we try to pull off a swindle, and we get caught, Macalister will see our crew dead and God only knows what will happen to us. I haven't come this far to lose now over greed!"

"Greed?" Kat was aghast. "You think this is about greed? It has nothing to do with financial gains, dear sister." Her tone became mocking.

"Don't you see, Kat, we have to play this right! We are so close to finding Mother. I am not willing to risk losing her again."

Kat's eyes flashed scornfully. "She's dead, Frankie...dead! He is lying to you. Besides, what about our father? He killed our father! Is there no payback for that? If our mother is by some miracle alive, do we simply dismiss the murder of our beloved father? Or have you forgotten about him?"

She turned away in disgust, closing her eyes and fighting back the tears that threatened to spill out. Her father had been her world; he was the reason she had sought out LaSalle along side her sister. Her mother being alive would not change the fate of LaSalle in her eyes.

Frankie sighed deeply. "No, Kat, I haven't forgotten about him."

"I will see that man die, Frankie. If it is the last thing I do in this lifetime. I will see my blade run through his heart. In the meantime, I will cross



him, I will make his life as hellish as I possibly can, every single chance I get!" A fiery glow of determination burned in Kat's eyes.

"Why are you so bent on making Macalister's life hell?"

"Because he is an arrogant ass! I don't have time for men like that! Normally, I ignore them, but he has been an exceptional thorn in my side since we arrived on his little island, and I intend to get even." She wouldn't admit to herself that she was strongly attracted to him and that made her even angrier with him...and herself.

Frankie sighed and her hand rubbed her bottom cheek absentmindedly. Kat was always so...so...passionate about everything. "We are not crossing them, not yet, Kat. Perhaps, we will, in due time, but not yet."

Kat's eyes narrowed as she watched Frankie rubbing her backside. "I cannot believe you allowed that man to touch you, Frankie. He spanked you like a small child! I would have slit his throat, then stepped on his dead face on my way out the door!"

Frankie turned on her sister in frustration. "Kat, I have to know, can't you understand that? Until I know for certain, LaSalle shall live! And as for the spanking, it's not like I had a lot of choice, and neither will you if Macalister decides to punish you. You may think you do, but you don't!"

"Ha!" declared Kat, incensed. "That is where you are wrong, Frankie, I will cut his heart out of he tries it!"

Frankie stared shrewdly at Kat. "No you won't, you are attracted to the man, admit it. I've seen the way you look at him, Kat, and you are angry with yourself because of it."

Kat flushed. "I admit nothing!"

Frankie shrugged her slender shoulders. "Have it your way."

Kat appealed to Frankie one last time. "At least consent to considering the idea of stealing the wealth, Frankie. At least, give me the possibility of that satisfaction."

Frankie merely shook her head. "It's not the time, Kat."

With a muttered oath, Kat stalked off to sharpen the blades of her throwing knives and get some target practice. Maybe, if she was lucky, Macalister might jump in front of one of them during the fight.

Chapter Nine

Morg's glass had swung lazily around and caught Kat's earnest face while she was talking to Frankie. She was heated up about something. He wondered briefly what it concerned, and then dismissed it. He'd like to see that energy beneath him...writhing in ecstasy as he filled her with his long length...he brushed the errant thoughts aside. Now was not time to dwell on such pleasures.

He surveyed the ships one by one; it was a diverse fleet. The Aphrodite was a magnificent galleon, immense firepower, but not built for speed. The Nemesis, the Lady Queen and the Bandit had good firepower and adequate speed, while the Lady Princess and the Eclipse were like rabbits. Only twenty guns but the ability to move in and out quickly, striking and doing small amounts of damage almost at will.

The plan was simple. Hit the treasure galleons from a distance with the Queen and the Bandit, who were carrying British made cannon, with a far greater range than the French cannons carried by Nemesis and Aphrodite. The Spanish Fleet couldn't come close to reaching them with their guns.

After their bombardment, the Princess and the Eclipse would sail in at top speed and occupy the escort ships, while Nemesis and Aphrodite would storm in and attack the galleons up close. During the firefight, the Queen would race in and board the first treasure galleon, firing salvos of chain and nails onto the decks to soften the Spanish crew.

The final phase of the plan was for the Aphrodite to break off her attack and engage the escort ships from range, while Nemesis and her crew stormed the second galleon. It was a good plan, and Morg had confidence in Pierre and Captain Frankie, even

if he didn't like the girls' personal attitudes. He had been told Frankie was a good strategist, and both girls knew how to fight.

The Princess under Nigor's command led the way out of the harbor, and Morg's senses thrilled to the prospect of battle. It had been too long since he had been back on the open sea. Becoming governor of Pirates Hideaway had curtailed his activities a bit, and he was glad to be back in the fray.

The next day, about midmorning, the lookout saw the Lady Princess racing towards them at top speed. The prey had seen the wolf. Morg looked around at the other ships in the fleet and saw Frenchy and Jacque looking wary but confident. He looked to the deck of the Aphrodite and saw Kat with a gleam in her eye. That was a frightening look. The woman appeared to have no fear! Frankie and Pierre, on the other hand, looked resigned and determined. He was satisfied.

They engaged the Spaniards just before noon. It was indeed four frigates and two galleons; their information had been correct. The seas were heavy ahead of an approaching storm, but the winds were light. The Spanish Galleons were lumbering in the heavy swells, as were the Aphrodite and the Bandit, but Nemesis and the Lady Queen sat lighter in the water and were not having as much trouble. The Princess and the Eclipse were able to zip around, but even their speed was slightly impaired.

They engaged the frigates while the Queen and the Bandit got into firing position, and the morning sky exploded with the sound of long-range cannon fire. It did not take long for the well trained gunners on the Queen to find their range, and only two salvos later, the Bandit's crew found their mark.

Of course, the best-laid plans often go awry. As soon as the cannons found their marks, three of the Spanish frigates turned towards the Aphrodite and the Bandit at full sail.

Morg looked towards Nigor on the Princess and could see him struggling to keep her track in the rough seas. Her crew was being bounced around, and the ship was rocking so badly that her accuracy was off.

Jacques turned to his helmsman and called for full sail and right full rudder. It was time to enter the fight. Looking towards the Aphrodite, it looked like one of the frigates was bringing the fight to her. Just as he got the Nemesis turned, there was a deafening explosion on the deck of the Queen...one of her cannons had exploded. This was not the way the fight was supposed to start!

"Ready on all sides," yelled Frankie, directing the crew from the top deck of the Aphrodite. The men were ready on the starboard and the port side, but the Spanish frigate thought to sneak up the back door. Frankie was ready for him. She hadn't sailed with her father for years without learning a few tricks. She signaled Pierre, and when the frigate came up the back door, the disguised cannons on the deck sent their load into her bow, exploding it before it could turn to fire sideways.

"A direct hit," screamed Kat, her eyes alight with the joy of victory and battle. Frankie wondered as usual at her ferocity. It seemed Kat came alive in these battles, and she had always assumed it was "one more for my mother," but sometimes she wondered if it was more than that. Shaking off the thought, she concentrated on the fight raging around her.

"Hard to port, get those cannons ready...bite her as we turn," she yelled to Gaston. The frigate was

already taking on water, and its pace had slowed considerably. She raced to stand beside Gaston. "Get those grappling hooks ready, we are going to board her after you raze her and finish her off."

"No, Frankie!" Pierre shouted. "Leave the frigate for the Princess. The Queen just had a cannon explode on deck, and we need to cover the other galleon."

"Agreed," returned Frankie, her sharp intellect immediately understanding his instructions. They were supposed to hit the galleons to begin with but the frigate had done an about turn and played false. But then battles never go the way they are planned, and one must always be prepared for such emergencies!

"Hard to starboard, Gaston!" she instructed. She saw the Nemesis engaging the first galleon as they moved into place. The tall figure of LaSalle strode along the top deck, waving instructions to the crew and signaling the cannon fire. She felt a rush of blood to her face as she thought of the kiss he had given her. Dismissing it from her mind, she turned back to the battle.

Morg saw the cannon explode and men fall to the deck. He swore as Sam came running up, splattered with blood and splinters. "How many dead?"

"Five dead and seven wounded, Captain," he stated calmly.

Morg ripped the wheel out of the helmsman's hand and swung the Queen around hard to starboard. "Full sails, men," he screamed. "Man the grappling hooks, prepare to board. Port canons, load your shot and nails!"

"Captain," Sam interjected, "we have but eighty five men, and the galleon will have over a hundred

and fifty, even after that barrage. You are leading us to a massacre."

Determination set in Morg's face. "Trust me, Sam, there is a method to my madness." Morg looked at the panicked helmsman and gave him back the wheel. "We have but one chance, when I tell you, **HARD AROUND**, you bring those port cannons to bear. We'll be about twenty five yards from the first galleon."

Morg's plan was to give the galleon a small target from 150 yards, the effective range of their cannon, then swoop in as she reloaded, looking like a grappling move, lure their fighters to the edge of the ship and then blast them broadside with nail and shot...shredding the Spanish sailors. They would then swing inside of the first galleon, leaving the second one with no clear shot at them.

"Lower all sails!" Morg commanded as they hit a hundred and seventy five yards. Just as they hit the range of the Spanish guns, all of their training took over as the shells bounced off the hardened hull. The shot scattered over the deck, barely wounding two crewmen who weren't under cover.

"Forty five seconds men...**RAISE THOSE SAILS!**" The sails came up quickly as Morg looked off to the side and saw one of the Frigates moving close for a shot.

Just as quickly, the little Lady Princess cut the water between them. Nigor was brilliant, he had cut the range on the frigate to inside their effective cannon range, and he was pounding their sails and mast with cannonades, and sharpshooters were picking off men left and right.

The Queen moved in to twenty five yards as they quickly lowered main sail and raised the battle sail. At the same time the British flag came down, the scarlet battle flags were raised. The timing was

perfect as the Spanish galleon got off another shot that would have shredded the main sail, but barely damaged the smaller battle sails.

Morg looked at the helmsman. "NOW!" he screamed and the Queen came hard about in the water. "Give 'em hell, lads!" he shouted as the portside cannons rained death and destruction on the Spanish ship. "PREPARE TO BOARD!" Again the training paid off, and the sharpshooters protected the grapplers.

This was the most dangerous part, boarding a galleon from a smaller ship because they had to climb the ropes to get on board, except for the brave few that climbed the rigging and swung over on ropes.

Quickly, the crew of the Queen sprang over in twos and threes, their swords slashing, pistols firing and fierce battle cries ringing in the air. The smell of black powder and the screams of the dying were all around. The deck was slippery with blood as Morg went in search of the Spanish captain.

Jacque laughed and shook his head at Morg's tactics. He had to admit that he was either very brave or very foolish, but it was not hard to see how he had earned his reputation.

He surveyed the battle scene and was satisfied that the tide had turned in their favor. The Aphrodite had disabled one Frigate, the Princess had another occupied, and the Bandit was in a cannon fight with a third one.

He looked around for the Aphrodite and saw her circling to the far side of the second galleon. He tipped his hat. "Brilliant, Frankie, just brilliant." He urged his crew to hit the second galleon on this side. Boarding her from two sides should make short work of it for everyone.

As the Nemesis and the Aphrodite prepared to sandwich the second galleon, Morg looked up and saw the solitary figure of Kat, swinging on a line...not to the second galleon, but over to the first galleon!

He hoped to see some of Aphrodite's crew follow since the Queen was badly outnumbered, but no more came. "What is that woman up to?" Morg muttered as he heard the distinctive sound of wood on wood when the Queen butted up side to side to the treasure galleon.

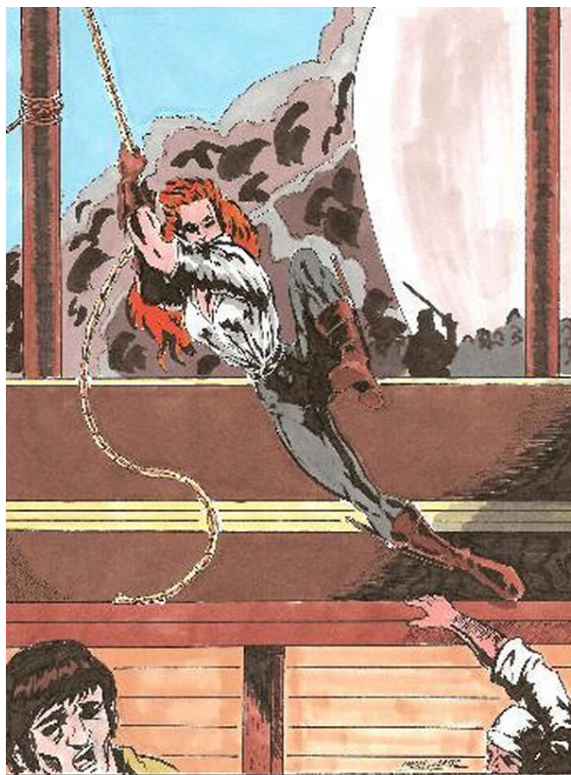
The crew of the Queen had fought proudly and boldly. They had asked no quarter and given none with the Spanish crew. Morg had finally located the captain, and the duel began. Thrust and parry...dodge and block...back and forth the battle raged.

Morg felt the burn in his lungs and the weakness in his arms, as fatigue became an enemy to both of them. "Surrender and you shall live, Captain," Morg called out.

"No, mi amigo," he replied grimly. "Death is preferable to dishonor! But it is you who shall die this day."

Morg fought like a man possessed and finally found an opening. He delivered a fatal blow into the Captain's stomach just as the hilt of the Spaniard's sword came crashing down across his left eye, knocking him backwards down the steps and into the hold of the galleon.

He must have been unconscious for a moment, for in the next minute, an angel, a redheaded vision swam before his eyes. A savior? No, he decided, as he tried to focus...it was Kat with the blade of her knife at his throat! He caught the fierce look in her eye and remembered his mother's admonition, "If you live by the sword, ye shall die by the sword."



Perhaps the Spanish captain had been right...maybe he would die today.

Morg hurt from head to toe, and he groaned in pain. His left eye was swollen shut, he figured his nose was broken, and he felt the blood trickle from swollen lips. Looking up at her, he managed a sardonic smile. "Go ahead, lass, nobody would ever know."

Frankie and Pierre quickly scrambled to the deck of the second galleon as the Nemesis bumped into the other side of her.

Her men began taking over the ship. With Pierre at her back, she began racing towards the helmsman where the captain stood behind him.

But where was Kat? She looked briefly around. The three of them always fought together and covered each other's backs. The captain and the helmsman drew their swords as Kat and Pierre advanced on them. As the fight began, thoughts of Kat had to be put out of her mind, and she forced herself to concentrate.

Frankie ignored the blood and the wounded all around her...she had learned long ago to blank it out, but it never ceased to bother her. It bothered her more today because she knew these men were not pirates, and she had nothing against them personally. It was she who was the pirate this day!

Finally, she sliced the captain across the thigh and he went down, dropping his sword and surrendering while the blood gushed from an obvious artery wound on the inside. "Order your men to stand down," she demanded, her blade at his heart.

"Madre de Dios!" The Captain swore softly. "What manner of senorita are you?"

"Just give the order," she hissed.



The captain, holding his leg, struggled to stand. Pierre finally hauled him upright. He issued the order through clenched teeth, and the few remaining that hadn't already fallen, dropped their swords. The pirates quickly rounded them up and put a guard on them.

"Take this man to the Aphrodite and see to his wounds," ordered Frankie to two of her men.

"Hold it!" LaSalle barked, his dark eyes thunderous as he approached them "What are you doing?"

"I'm taking this man back with me," Frankie replied, her tone brooking no refusal. "He is wounded and surrendered honorably, and he will die if we don't see to him,

"Captains rarely take the pirate oath," replied Jacque, "and pirates don't leave witnesses."

Frankie held her sword up. "Do you wish to fight me for him?" Her voice was soft and deadly, and Jacques knew she meant every word. She would defend this man to the death. He shook his head in amazement.

"You are being very foolish, ma petite," he said quietly.

"I have found pirates for the most lot to be incredibly ignorant" snorted Frankie. "If you will check his sword hand, you will find he bears a ring with the crest of the Spanish monarchy. "I'm quite sure he would be of more use to us alive than dead." She stared at him, daring him to refute her statement.

Jacques didn't say anything more, but he scowled as he appraised the girl before him.

Frankie lifted her chin defiantly. "I suggest you go to the aid of the Queen, she is badly

outnumbered," she said haughtily. "Pierre and I will finish up here."

"Oh, I'm sure you would like to finish up here. Just like I'm sure your sister is handling things on the other ship. No, ma cherie, I will stay right here, by your side as long as there is treasure here." He did dispatch several of his men to go to the Queen's aid, however.

Quickly, he barked orders to his other men. "Find out who intends to join with us and throw the others overboard. Then put them in a launch and send them to the Nemesis."

Turning to the Spanish captain, he poked him in the back with his sword. "Since the nursemaid here sees fit to take you to her ship, I won't argue, but I will take these," he said as he took the key ring off the captain's belt.

Frankie stared at the handsome Captain, thinking back to another day. Her father had done business with a man bearing that crest. A Juan Hidalgo of the Lamantero house of Spain, a very wealthy, very old, and prominent family. A family of wine merchants connected to the Spanish monarchy itself.

Some of the finest wines of New Orleans and Louisiana came from this source. Frankie remember her father clapping the old man on the shoulder and telling him he would hope to return the favor some day when he had fished Frankie out of the waters along the wharf where she had inadvertently fallen.

She had only been fourteen at the time, but she remembered the young boy at his father's side. The hand that had reached down to fish her out of the water had worn a ring like that, and it had glinted in the sunlight as she bobbed up, gasping for breath.

"What is your name?" she snapped, her blue green eyes boring into him.

He glared at her. "I will not answer your questions, senorita."

"You will answer her, or you will die," growled Jacques swiftly, pressing his sword harder against the captain's back.

"Go ahead," snarled the Captain. He turned to stare balefully at LaSalle, his liquid brown eyes daring him to do his worst.

"Where did you get that ring?" Frankie asked.

The Captain looked surprised at that question, but he answered grudgingly. "It was my father's." He peered closely at Frankie then, studying her delicate features. "You seem familiar, chica."

"You know this man?" snapped Jacques, not liking that thought. It did not set well with him.

"It matters little at this point," Frankie replied evasively. "Take him to the Aphrodite, Gaston, see to his wounds, and I will speak with him later."

She turned to Jacques. "We have much work to do." She held out her hands for the keys he had taken.

A wicked smile lit Kat's impish face, and her green eyes danced with delight. Leaning in close to Morg's unshaven face, she spoke in a sultry whisper. "Why, Monsieur Macalister, you do seem to be at a distinct disadvantage here." She delighted in the fact.

Leaning back on her heels slightly, she perused his masculine body. Not bad at all, as she already knew. Of course, the blood trickling from his eye and the condition of his face left a lot to be desired, but she still felt a stirring in her loins at the bulge in the V of his muscular legs. Pursing her soft pink lips together, she considered slipping the blade

across his throat. He was right, no one would know. This was her perfect chance for revenge. So why did she hesitate?

Tipping her head to the side with a grin, she eyed him contemplatively for a brief moment. He really was a fine specimen of manhood, and now that she had him at a disadvantage, she wasn't quite as angry with him as she had been. In fact, this was rather intoxicating, this knowledge that she had him at her mercy.

Morg squinted painfully through the one eye that was still of some use to him at the vixen squatting beside him. To his chagrin, she seemed to be seriously considering slitting his throat where he lay.

Gratification coursed through Kat when she heard him grunt as she stood and placed one well-polished black boot in the middle of his broad chest. Smiling devilishly, her silky voice reached his ear through the din above them.

"Monsieur Macalister, it is true that you have pricked my ire on more than one occasion, and you did seek to blackmail us so it would only seem right that I take full advantage of the opportunity fate has afforded me...however...I find I don't really desire your blood. In fact, I desire nothing from you...absolutely nothing!"

Morg could feel the fog lifting from his exhausted state. He recognized the feeling of a second wind approaching him, the renewed vigor of a man uncertain of his fate, yet not willing to meet death. Without warning, his hand whipped out like a snake and wrapped around Kat's small ankle. In a flash, he had pulled her to the ground.

Kat gasped for air as she hit the hard floor. Shocked by his speed and her own stupidity, she swore as he pinned her beneath his hard chest.

"Are you certain you desire nothing from me, Miss Fontaine?"

His ragged, hot breath brushed against her cheek as she recoiled in indignation. Her brilliant emerald eyes flashed as she spat, "I'm certain, Monsieur Macalister...nothing!"

Pressing himself against her ample breasts even harder, he returned her earlier devilish smile as she began to flail underneath him. Her hand ripped from his tight hold as she lashed out to slap him. Deep gratification raced through her as the crack of the slap filled the room. Her pleasure faded quickly when he flinched only briefly and immediately caught her hand in his hard grip.

Kat settled a moment needing to consider how she was going to best him. Their lips a mere inch apart, his voice husky, he whispered. "You really are one hell of a wildcat aren't you?"

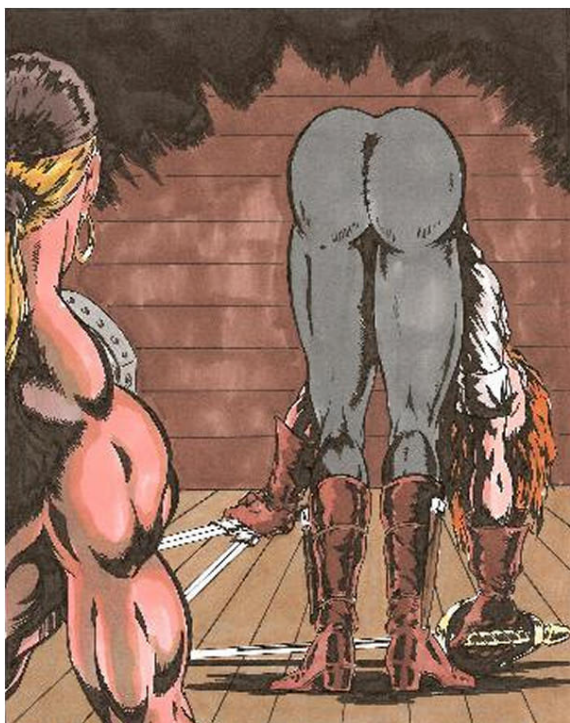
She wished he were laying straight down on her, rather than off to the side because she would love to have driven her leg straight into his manhood. She lamented over not having slit his throat while she had the chance. Her green eyes narrowing, she smiled provocatively. "Don't you ever forget it, Monsieur." With that, she slammed her head straight into his.

The dizziness set in immediately, and Kat took advantage of his weakness. Slipping out from under him, she grabbed her knife victoriously and wheeled around to face him.

"Captain," cried Pete from above, "get up here!"

The two combatants, interrupted, agreed by silent eye consent to take this up later.

Morg's head reeled, and he staggered as he looked around for his sword. Blood ran down his face, and his left eye was completely useless now, swollen shut.



Kat saw his sword and bent to retrieve it. He noticed she didn't kneel, but bent at the waist, allowing the firm young curves of her buttocks to wiggle in his direction. As she stood and handed him the weapon she smirked. "Enjoy the view?"

He patted her bottom as they walked towards the ladder. "Ye'll be sharing it with me soon enough, lass, when I have two eyes and ye are over my knee."

She started to respond indignantly, but he had already headed up the ladder. Fuming at the veiled threat, she followed him up, convinced once more that she should have sliced his throat!

When Morg reached the top of the deck, the carnage hit him. The crew of the Queen was fighting well, but the Spanish far outnumbered them. He was beginning to think he had miscalculated when crews from the Nemesis and the Aphrodite began pouring across the stern.

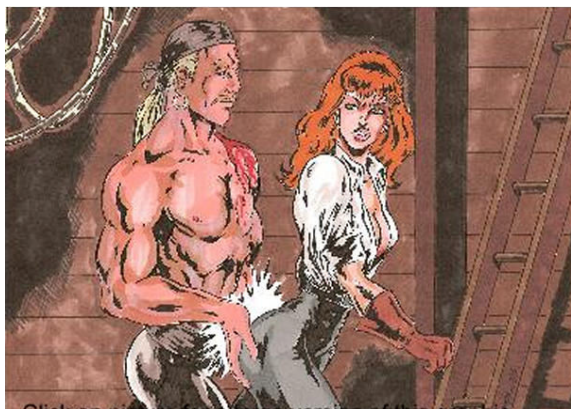
Kat and Morg were fighting back to back when the cry of "Rendicion!" came from the mouth of the helmsman. They had finally surrendered.

Morg's hand went to Kat's shoulder. "Tell me...the Princess?"

In a moment of gentleness, Kat whispered in his ear. "She is fine."

"You're not looking too good, Captain," remarked Sam. He tore a piece of Morg's shirt off and tied it around his head, stemming the flow of blood.

With blood blinding one eye and the other swollen shut, Morg had no idea how Sam looked. He wiped his good eye clear and stood back to survey the deck. Quickly, he began to bark orders to his crew. "Sam, we need to lash the two galleons together and transfer all the dead bodies to one of



them and the treasure to the other. Also, raise our flags to let everyone know the battle is over. How bad are our casualties?"

"Looks like we lost twenty eight from the Queen, plus the seven in the cannon blast, I don't know of the others yet."

As the leaders gathered together, the argument was still raging between Frankie and Jacques. He kept telling her that "dead men tell no tales," and she kept insisting they were taking care of the wounded and especially the Spaniard she had taken on board. Many of the Spanish crew pledged allegiance to the pirates, and those that didn't were thrown overboard, despite Frankie's objections.

It was agreed to scuttle the galleon that was heavily damaged, the casualties put aboard it and keep the other one.

"I'll take the treasure on board the Nemesis," Jacques volunteered.

Kat jumped in. "Oh, we can carry it on the Aphrodite." Something about the gleam in her green eyes made Morg nix that suggestion. He looked at Frankie. "The prisoner is your responsibility. I agree with Jacques, though, dead men tell no tales."

He was not surprised when Frankie glared at him and didn't answer. The ships returned to the Hideaway with their treasures and newly acquired crews and ships to divvy up the loot.

Chapter Ten

The Captains of the raiding ships and their first officers met at the Governor's mansion to discuss the percentages of the treasure division. It had indeed been a rich one, and Morg was well pleased with the day's work.

Jacques spoke up. "Divide the treasure into sixths and each ship gets a share. Ten percent to the captain, five percent to the officers and the rest to the crew."

Morg wasn't sure the bigger ships cared for that notion, considering the galleons had a lot more men than the frigates. He listened to the discussions until, finally, he spoke. "We'll divide the treasure this way. Thirty percent to the six captains to be divided evenly; Thirty percent to the twelve officers, five percent to be used for supplies, building and ship repair here on the island and twenty five percent to be divided between the crews.

Kat spoke up, "That's only ninety percent, Monsieur, what are you going to do with the other ten percent? Keep it as a bonus?" she jibed delicately.

"Have ye no patience, your highness?" Morg growled.

Kat flushed in indignation when the other men laughed at her.

Nigor spoke up. "Begging your pardon, milady, but the Captain always sends ten percent of any treasure taken from the Spanish Crown to one of the missions on the other islands to feed and clothe those who have been orphaned by the Spanish attack on their lands."

"I've heard rumors of you doing that, Macalister, but never really believed it," Jacques chuckled.

Always the skeptic, Kat snorted in disbelief. "Oh, oui, Monsieur, and I need an additional twenty percent for the street urchins in Paris. You expect us to believe that?"

Frankie, too, laughed derisively. "Is that how you justify what you do, Macalister?"

"In that case, maybe you better just give it all to us so we can dispense it to the poor and needy creatures of the world," scoffed Kat. She did not miss the tightening of Morg's jaw or the flash of his one good eye. Good! She hoped he was offended. She wasn't interested in how he managed to make himself feel better over blood money.

She felt sick, suddenly, as she stared at Morg and Jacque. Here she was sitting across from the man who had killed her father. She had teamed up with murderers! How could she betray her parents by arguing over a treasure they held only by cooperating with a man who had killed them? It was a treasure that she and Frankie didn't even have a use for. She stood up, the chair slamming to the floor behind her.

"Sit down, Kat!" Morg roared.

"NO!" Kat yelled furiously. Her mind reeled, and a sickening chill ran down her spine. "You keep your blood money and hand it off to whomever you see fit if that's what it takes for you to sleep at night, Monsieur Macalister! I want no part of it!"

She turned to face LaSalle. "And, as for you, Monsieur," she spat, "I could be laying discarded in a desert, ravaged by thirty men, parched to the bone and so help me, I would spit the last tiny morsel of saliva left in my mouth at you before I took anything from you! Keep your bloody treasure and may it curse you as you did us the day you killed our parents!"



Kat whirled and ran out the door, leaving a shaken and trembling Frankie behind. Her face was deathly white, and she stared accusingly at Jacques, her eyes huge. She felt torn between her sister and this man already. Her resolve to see him dead had changed, and not only that, but he created hot desires within her that she had no right to feel.

Jacques returned Frankie's stare, his face dark and grim. He wanted to take her in his arms and assure her that she meant more to him than passion's merciless drive, but he couldn't. He didn't want to feel those things, not for another woman who might be snatched away from him. He didn't say anything, and Frankie got up and followed Kat out.

"Kat!" she called, "Wait up!"

Kat waited until Frankie drew level with her, and then she said tensely, "I'm tired of this, Frankie! I want to challenge LaSalle, right now...make him talk...if he actually does know anything!"

Frankie fidgeted uneasily at the strength of Kat's vehemence. She, too, was tired, and Kat's outbursts were causing her emotions to war with each other. Finally, she spoke wearily, "Don't forget we need our share for the men. They do have families at home, Kat, even if we have no need of the money. And you know as well as I of the rumors concerning Jacques LaSalle and his run in with the French crown. Perhaps there is some good reason why he has taken to the sea, just as we have."

Kat really could not believe her ears. "You are defending this murderer?"

Frankie flushed. "I'm not defending him, I'm just saying he might have his reasons, you know. Just like us. It's obvious the man has breeding, just like Macalister. We don't know the entire story,

Kat. Perhaps we shouldn't be so quick to judge. After all, we are being judged unfairly as we speak!"

Kat became bitter and mocking. "My, for someone who was so hell bent on destroying LaSalle, you have changed your tune suddenly. What's the matter, dear sister? Are you suddenly wishing for the touch of a man's hand on your breast...his hardness waiting to enter between your silken thighs? Has Monsieur LaSalle stirred hot lust to life in your veins?"

"Stop it, Kat!" ordered Frankie furiously, her eyes flashing. "Perhaps it is you who is in lust! I've seen the way you look at Macalister. Don't tell me it hasn't crossed your mind! I know what you've been doing with Mace. I saw you both one night in the meadows. Perhaps it is *you* who is filled with desires you cannot quench! Perhaps *you* hate yourself for *wanting* a man like Macalister!"

"Mon Dieu, how can you even say something like that, Frankie, if you were not my sister I would cut your tongue out," hissed Kat furiously. "I love Mace more than life itself, and I long every day to return to him. But we are stuck here on this...this godforsaken island for who knows how long now, and I hate it! Do you hear me? I hate it!"

Frankie watched, incensed, as Kat fumed and stalked towards the ship, indignation in every move of her slender body. She sighed and ran a trembling hand through her hair.

Finally, she spun on her heel and headed towards the town's hotel. She had given Gaston instructions to have the Spaniard taken there where the Doctor could attend him, and he could get good care from the maids. The hotel proprietress would need payment for those services until she could decide what to do with the man.

She looked down the front of her clothes and grimaced. The Spaniards blood was all over her, and she longed desperately for a hot bath, but it would keep. As she walked, she thought of Kat's accusing words. There was no doubt she was feeling an attraction for Jacques LaSalle? Her mind screamed no, it can't be so...yet her body seemed to burn when she thought of his kiss...and yes, God help her, she had responded!

Shaking off her troubling thoughts, she knocked lightly on the locked door. A woman answered. She was tall, with long blond hair and sweet features adomed with big blue eyes. Her face and limbs were very tanned, and she wore the native island sarong. "How can I help you, Captain?" she asked quietly, her eyes narrowing at the blood on Frankie's clothing. She had seen enough blood for one day. Many of the wounded from the day's raids had ended up in her hotel.

"Bonjour, I wish to see the Spanish captain," Frankie replied. "To be assured he is well and to pay the owner of this establishment for medical services and care.

"I own this hotel; my name is Beth. I'll allow you fifteen minutes." Beth spoke tiredly. "It's been a long evening, and I personally lock up at night. I cannot rest until I know all is secure...you understand?"

"Oui," returned Frankie softly. "Here is a bag of gold, it should cover any expenses you incur." She gave the woman the gold and followed her, wondering how a light skinned English lady would wind up in a Pirate's Hideaway.

Beth led her to a curving stairway, having similar thoughts as Frankie. "Pardon my asking, but what are two young and obviously well bred girls such as you and your sister doing playing

pirate? I would think you would be home having coming out balls and looking for a husband."

"We have our reasons," returned Frankie tightly. She didn't bother to tell Beth that revenge was a powerful motivator...powerful enough to disrupt their lives.

She did remember what it was like to be sixteen, but it seemed years and years ago. She wondered if anything would ever be the same?

"In here," Beth said, unlocking a door in the left hallway. Frankie stepped past her to view the pale man lying back against the pillows. A young girl with skin like porcelain and hair like the sun was sitting at his bedside. "That is Emily. LaSalle sent her up here, one of his many castoffs, I'm assuming. She hasn't said much, but she has paid her own way so far and offered to help, so I told her to watch him for fever and such through the night. He was seriously wounded."

"I know," Frankie murmured. "It was my sword that wounded him."

Beth didn't say anything at this surprising admission. Nodding, she turned to go.

Frankie walked over to the sleeping man and looked down at the ring once again. *The house of Hidalgo.*

She was sure this was the young man she had seen with Juan Hidalgo that day. If so, then her father's debt would be repaid. She had saved his life, just as his father had saved hers seven years ago. But what would she do with him now?

"Ola, Francesca Fontaine," he murmured, his liquid brown eyes opening to look tiredly at her.

Startled, she looked from the ring to his face.

At her surprised look, he smiled. "Si, senorita, I know who you are. My father saved your life, and now, I presume that is why you have saved mine?"

"Como estas tu?" smiled Frankie softly. "Como se llama?"

"Me llamo es Pedro Hidalgo...y bien...bien...gracias." He gazed interestedly at her. "You honor me by using my language, senorita. Again...gracias."

"I know very little of your language, Monsieur, I just came to see how you had fared," continued Frankie with a smile. "I really need to get back to my ship. I need a bath and some rest. It has been a long day."

"Why don't you stay? We can talk about old times, get to know one another." His brown eyes gleamed. "You can tell me how it is that the lovely Francesca Fontaine of the House of Frontenac has become a bloodthirsty pirate."

Frankie smiled wryly at his attempt at humor. "I long to get your blood off me."

"Emily here can bring up a hot bath for you behind the curtain," he said mischievously, "and you can rest here by me." He patted the bed beside him. "There is plenty of room, and I promise not to ravish you in your sleep, senorita...por favor?"

The added please finally swayed Frankie. It felt so good to talk to someone from the old days that she agreed without thinking. After all, she had no one to answer to but Kat and Pierre. Besides, Kat was angry with her, and she cared naught for Pierre's protocol nonsense. That life was far behind her.

It felt very good to converse with a friendly and admiring face! And, obviously, Pedro was in no condition to do anything to her, so what was the harm?

Before she could change her mind, Pedro had sent Emily off to tell Beth that Frankie was staying

and to bring a hot bath and some clean nightclothes for her.

Thirty minutes later, Frankie was ensconced in the hot water, sighing deeply at the warmth and the pleasure of the lavender scents the young girl had poured into it.

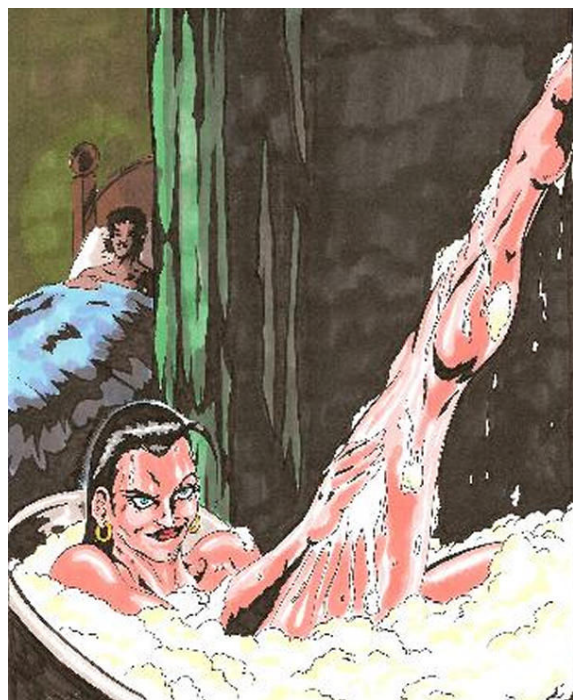
Beth sent her man Sam down the hill to tell Pierre and Kat that Frankie was staying at the hotel that night; Emily took her clothes off to clean and return so they would be ready by morning. She sighed once again in pleasure and anticipation of the coming evening.

Holding one slender leg up, she let the soapsuds trail down its long length. She could see the moon hanging between the stars at the window. They were on the second floor, and the tropical night breezes stole softly in through the window, stirring the fragile white cotton sheers. At last, she stood up and stepped from the tub, reaching for the towel to dry her body with.

Then she reached up the room-dividing panel for the cool two-piece chemise of soft white cotton. It was lovely with small burgundy ribbons at the calf gathers and on the bodice. Lace surrounded the scooped low-cut neckline and trailed along the edges of the sleeveless arms.

As Frankie brushed her long, dark hair, it fell in damp curls to her waistline, slowly drying in the breeze. Feeling thoroughly refreshed, she looked around for a robe, but didn't see one. Oh well...she shrugged her shoulders. Everything was covered, and she was looking forward to their long conversation.

Morg and Jacques both stood up, intending to follow Frankie and Kat, but Pierre held up his hand. "Please, a word with you gentlemen in private?"



Morg looked at the doorway, then back at Pierre and nodded grimly. "You men are dismissed," he said harshly to the other officers. They shuffled out, leaving Jacque, Morg and Pierre.

"It would be best if you gave the girls some time," Pierre said gently. "Kat is a very volatile personality, and Frankie is not far behind her. They are both prone to bouts of anger for which they may or may not be sorry for later on. They are good girls and have good hearts, but they are not used to this way of life."

Morg poured a glass of rum for each of the men while Pierre was speaking. "I'm sorry, Pierre, but what you are really saying is that they are used to having tantrums when things don't go their way and saying whatever they please without regards for the results or how it might affect the person they are addressing."

"They are indeed used to speaking their mind," allowed Pierre reluctantly, "and sometimes it is careless thoughts they express."

"They lack discipline," grunted Jacques taking a drink of his rum. "Never have I seen two such as these."

"You must make allowances for the things they have been through," growled Pierre. "Most of that dilemma has been caused by you, Monsieur."

"I beg to disagree, Monsieur," returned Jacques evenly. "I lay the most of that at the feet of Gatineu Fontaine. It's quite obvious those girls have never been taken in hand properly."

"Revenge has driven them for the last five years," snapped Pierre. His golden eyes narrowed. "Revenge for the death of their parents...a factor you played a large part in."

Jacques's eyes grew cold. "I had no particular interest in divesting them of their parents. That

ship was simply a French merchant ship, a prize to be had. If Fontaine had not been so arrogant and let his guardian ship get so far ahead, he would not have been left prey to anyone who chose to pluck the pigeon.

Revenge has played a large part in my life as well, Monsieur. Making life hell for the French government has been my sole objective for several years. Unfortunately, as always happens, innocents sometimes get ground up in the middle of such feuds."

He tossed back the rest of the drink. "As I'm sure Frankie has told you, her mother is alive. However, I don't intend to give her any details until she is willing to discuss it reasonably without waving her sword under my nose. I don't kneel to threats, and there are others involved that I would not have her taking her monstrous temper out on."

Pierre's lips thinned. "Kat does not believe you are telling the truth."

Jacques shrugged. "I cannot help what Kat believes. I have no reason to lie. Should I wish it, I could have both girls and the Aphrodite under my control, so I have nothing to fear. I speak the truth because it is the truth. Frankie has gotten all she will get from me until she is willingly to humble herself and act like a lady."

"Perhaps," Pierre admitted. "You always were my best pupil, and I'm sure you've outdistanced even me since last we dueled. But even I cannot match Frankie's skills anymore. She is very good indeed."

"Then she shall certainly be a worthy challenge, Monsieur," replied Jacques. "I look forward to the battle which must come, if she refuses to follow my instructions."

Morg spoke up for the first time. "I believe I will talk with the wee fiery lass. Perhaps I can help convince her you speak the truth."

"She doesn't appear to have any respect for you either, Monsieur," stated Jacques baldly.

"Aye, that is true. Perhaps it is time she learned some." He stood up. "I've been patient with her thus far, but my patience has been sorely tried. However, as ye have requested Pierre, I will give the lass some breathing space. I need to get cleaned up and my wounds tended to."

Pierre stood up, too. "Thank you, Monsieur. I'll expect the two of you not to hurt the girls. They are my nieces, and you will answer to my blade if you do." Pierre didn't bluster, he just stated that fact quietly, and Jacques and Morg looked at each other, knowing he meant the softly spoken promise. That was a mark of a master, the ability to convey deep commitment in a few quiet words. It was a command to be respected and, both men nodded.

Frankie woke up slowly, feeling a heavy weight across her middle and a light breathing moving the strands of hair on the back of her neck. She felt her breast being cupped and fingers brushing across the rosy peak. Sucking in her breath, she rolled over to her tummy and propped up on her elbows, then stared accusingly at a pair of twinkling brown eyes.

"Buenos dias, pequeno uno," Pedro murmured softly. His dark curls were in disarray around his temples, and his teeth gleamed against his brown skin. "I could not resist such beauty in the morning. Come back to my arms and let me hold you, and I will show you what a delight mornings can be." He laughed at her guarded expression.

"And here I thought you were too injured to be a threat," she mocked.



"What? You would view my lovemaking as a threat? I am deeply wounded, *senorita!*" He clasped his hand to his heart, his long brown fingers lying upon the pristine white cloth of his cotton shirt, his liquid brown eyes teasing her. "I should spank you for that comment!"

He lifted his hand threateningly over her sassy posterior, the swells so enticingly rounded and straining against the thin material. Her small feet were waving in the air from the knees as if she weren't the least bit worried. Pedro was charmed.

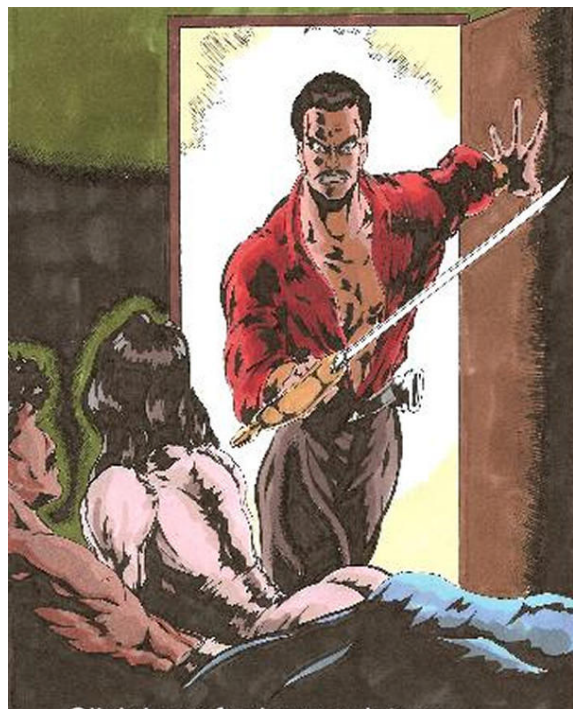
The door suddenly slammed open against the wall, and the teasing combatants froze in place, staring at the intruder. It was Jacques LaSalle, his face like a thundercloud, his brows drawn together into one straight line!

"*Sacre bleu!*" he swore softly, his eyes dark and menacing. "So, it is true. You have spent the night with this.... this mutual enemy. Well, *ma petite*...if you can give yourself to him, you can certainly share your charms with me. I shall have no future reservations in taking what I please...after I dispense with this intruder." He raised his sword and advanced on them.

"Hold it right there, LaSalle," snapped Beth, coming into the room, followed by Sam and two other men. "There will be no bloodshed or fighting in my hotel. The governor has assured me I am within my rights to defend my business, and I'm telling you to get out!"

Jacques stopped and looked at her. He could have easily taken all three men, but he brought himself under control. He bowed slightly to Beth and then looked back at Frankie. "This is not over, *ma Cherie*. You shall answer to me for this."

"She doesn't have to answer to you for anything," blazed Pedro. "You don't own her." He



refused to be intimidated by the pirate, in spite of his precarious position. He did have a pistol under his pillow should he choose to use it.

"Not yet, but she will," Jacques bit out. With a last warning look at Frankie, he spun on his heel and left the room.

Kat rose at sunrise, not her usual waking hour, but she had spent a troubled night. The bold reds were lighting up the sky, and the early morning sounds of the world waking up and starting a new day reminded her of what was important in life.

With a deep sigh, she dressed quickly and went to the railing of the ship to look out over the water. She inhaled deeply, listening to the sweet chirping of the birds as they sung their morning praises.

Her outburst at Morg's last night and the fight with Frankie played out in her mind once again. She wasn't sorry, not one bit, for the things she had said to LaSalle, or to Macalister. She had never met two such arrogant men; especially Morg, and he got her back up in a hurry.

She wasn't proud of her argument with Frankie, though, and she felt badly over the things she had said to her. But, she had defended LaSalle, for heavens sake and accused her of lusting after Morg Macalister, too!

Kat didn't want to face the feelings that were building with Macalister, and Frankie's accusations had only made her angrier. Sighing deeply, she tried hard to picture Mace in her mind's eye, but it was getting harder and harder. Often, Morg's face would supersede it, his cruel smile mocking her attempts to keep Mace foremost in her life.

Restlessly, she headed down the plank and off towards the glade where she had gone before. She didn't want to stay on the ship this morning.

Frankie hadn't come in last night, and she felt the lack of her sister's presence keenly.

Gaston saw Kat walking down the plank. "You are not supposed to leave the ship, Miss Kat!"

Kat turned, her emerald eyes glittering with renewed rage. "Gaston, if I can be a bloody pirate, then I can bloody well walk around on this bloody island and not be bothered by one of my own bloody kind can't I?" She turned her back on him and strode off down the beach.

"Let her go, Gaston," said Pierre quietly, coming to stand beside Gaston. "Right now, I'd feel more sorry for anyone she came across than I would her. Besides, I'm sure she will be fine. She has an escort." He nodded at the tall figure of Morg Macalister that had come down the jungle path and veered off after Kat when he saw her leaving.

"Ah, yes," murmured Gaston. "Although he doesn't look too happy with her, and I wouldn't expect it after last night."

"No," agreed Pierre. "They have some issues to work out."

Jacques left the hotel, still incensed. The fact that Frankie had spent the night with the Spaniard did not set well with him, and the treatment of the hotel owner did not help his fury. He decided a few drinks at the Nasty Grubb might improve his temperament, so he ducked in there and ordered rum.

"A bit early for rum isn't it, Sir?" asked Monique curiously. She knew this was LaSalle, and she wondered what brought him into the pub this morning. He looked furious.

"Just set me up, ma petite," replied Jacques, his bold eyes roving over her figure. Try as he might, he couldn't keep the image of Frankie from floating in front of him, though, her delightful bottom in the

air while she lay on her tummy. Her long raven hair had splayed across her back, and she looked to be enjoying herself tremendously.

He was jealous of the smile she had been giving the Spaniard, and his anger simmered. He wanted that smile for himself, as well as that beautiful body to hold in his arms. With a low growl, he grabbed the rum Monique set in front of him and tossed it back. "Give me another one," he ordered.

"As you wish, Sir," Monique replied obligingly.

Chapter Eleven

After the second drink, Jacques decided there was no point in getting drunk, it didn't stop the stabs of jealousy that were eating at him, so he pushed away from the table and stalked out of the pub. Might as well find a suitable place to live on the island. He could either take over something left from the old settlement or build his own place. He didn't want to live aboard the *Nemesis*, and staying at the hotel was out after his run in with Beth. Besides, he wanted his own space.

Walking between the dilapidated old buildings, he came upon what looked to be an old jail with living quarters on top. The jail itself had been made of stone, which explained why it was still standing, and the roof of the living quarters was in pretty good condition. It seemed it was out of range of most ship's cannon from the bay and so had not been damaged as many of the other buildings had. That was all the better, he decided.

Macalister had told him he could lay claim to anything he wanted; he decided he wanted this place. It was roomy and spacious up top and contained a cell that must have been used to question prisoners separately. It had restraining handcuffs on the walls and a set of manacles hanging from the ceiling. Interesting possibilities. He grinned.

Quickly, Jacques returned to the *Nemesis* and directed a crew of men to clean and ready the place for habitation. The large bed would need fresh bedding, and supplies of food would need to be stocked, as well as rum, candles and everything he might need.

The downstairs cells could be converted to extra rooms for guards etc. to stay in if he chose. There

was even a balcony that went around the entire top-floor living quarters, an excellent vantage point to look out over the sea.

There was a building nearby that perhaps Frenchy and Victoria might be interested in as soon as the island was past its growing pains and no longer in danger of being taken over by one of Morg's enemies. He would help in that department. Yes, perhaps it would prove a good place to settle for a few years. He was getting tired of the pirate life. And, in reality, his personal vendetta against France was growing old.

If he ever found out who had lied about him to the French crown, he would slice their throats, but in spite of all his attempts to do so, he had come up empty handed. They had taken his lands. His wife and small daughter had been killed in the fire that had been set to their barn. It had gone up quickly, burning too hot for him to get to them, although he had tried. It had left him almost mad for a while, but it had been eight years, now, and the pain had lessened. Now, at twenty eight, he tried to remember the good times.

Jacques sighed and returned to the present. As long as the French crown had a bounty on his head, he could never return home. His cousin was still working to clear his name, but nothing had come of it thus far. All leads were dead ends. His parents had gone into the country, ashamed and marked as the parents of a traitor. He had heard from his mother, but his father still refused to send him any word.

He stripped to the waist and began to work, clearing away rubble from around the place he had decided to call home for now. Perhaps good hard physical labor would clear his mind and help him not to think about Frankie.

He had stopped for a break and was looking over the balcony of his new home when he saw Frankie leaving the hotel. Quickly, he bounded down the stairs, intent on confronting her. It was a scant few minutes later that he was standing before her, a scowl on his face.

Frankie had just been thinking about Jacques and the things Kat had accused her of, when he suddenly appeared before her, his darkly tanned skin bare to the waist. Startled, she caught her breath.

"I see you are not nearly as concerned about your mother's welfare as you like to pretend," he snapped, his eyes burning into hers like fiery black coals.

Trembling, Frankie hissed. "Just what do you mean by that?"

He smiled sardonically. "You seem to have put your problems on hold with the bold Spaniard between your thighs, ma Cherie. You didn't even bother to approach me last night...although I waited for you."

Frankie reached out to slap him, incensed at his words, but he caught her wrist in his hand.

"Not today, Mon Capitan." He smiled cruelly. "I shall be waiting for you, of course, gentlemen that I am. However, after what I saw today, it will cost you more than you may be willing to pay." He let his other hand trace along the tightness of her abdomen and up between the cleft of her breasts to her chin. Then he flung her hand down and turned his back on her to stride away.

Frankie watched him walk away, his fingertip trail leaving bumps on her flesh from her tummy to her chin, and she trembled. She felt the hardened nipples of her lush breasts straining against the fabric just from the man's touch.



For a moment, she wanted to call him back, to reassure him that nothing had happened between her and Pedro, but she caught herself. What did it matter what he thought? And, if he intended her to barter her body in exchange for information, he couldn't be more wrong!

Confused and angry, she turned and stalked towards the Aphrodite. Of all the men she had met, why did one handsome pirate have to stir her blood with just a look from those dark eyes, raking her figure, making her long for...something? Why did his mere touch have her breasts at attention as if begging his indulgence? And why did she feel as if she were melting when he caught her in his gaze? She needed to find Kat; she had more experience with these things.

Kat drew her sword with relish, hacking and cutting at the dense jungle foliage along the path beyond the pool. She panted as she worked, completely unaware of the eyes that were watching her. She needed the exercise to clear her mind.

Not being one for tears much, Kat had to find other ways to release her frustration and energy, and she usually found that with physical exercise. She was very angry still. Angry with LaSalle and angry with Macalister for forcing her into this life she didn't want. She was frustrated with Frankie because she had defended LaSalle and just plain angry at the world for the circumstances that had taken her parents from her.

Morg watched Kat as she vented her feelings on the hapless weeds and palm fronds in her way. He could recognize her fury and helplessness; he had felt much the same way at his position in life. However, he was still angry himself for her disparaging words last night. She had no right to make the accusations she did, much less hold him

in such contempt. She knew nothing about him but what she saw on the surface.

Grimly, he started forward. He would try talking to her first. If that didn't work...well...there were alternatives.

"Good morning, lass." He grimaced when Kat turned at the sound of his voice, her sword at the ready. She didn't show any signs of lowering it either.

"It was good," Kat responded, wrinkling her tiny nose in disgust. Her heart began to beat just a little faster, and she hated the effect he had on her senses. It made her angrier.

"It is time we had a talk, little lass," he stated firmly, staying beyond her sword length.

"I have nothing to say to you."

"That's funny, ye had plenty to say last night!"

Her green eyes turned mocking. "Well, I guess I said it all didn't I? Nothing left to say...so leave!"

"I have nae intention of leaving until ye and I have talked. Maybe ye are through, but I'm not!" Morg's eyes flashed menacingly as he started towards her.

Kat kept her sword up, daring him to come through it.

"Put the sword down, lass. I'd hate to have to take it away from ye...ye won't like the consequences if I do." He folded his long brown arms, the sleeveless white shirt emphasizing the smooth muscles beneath the skin.

Kat had no intention of giving in. She had never had to before, and she didn't intend to start now. "Come and get it, if you can." Her scornful gaze raked him from head to toe, her stomach quivering in response to his masculinity. In spite of her resolve, she found herself backing away as he advanced on her.

"Running, lass?" Morg asked silkily. "Ye are the one with the weapon." He had a sword, but he refused to lower himself to dueling with her. He might hurt her accidentally, and he had no desire to do that. He had watched her fight and knew she did not have the expertise of Frankie and Pierre. But she was gorgeous with that mane of red hair and green eyes, and he felt his body responding to her wild spirit. He wanted to tame her, not crush her.

"Arm yourself!" Kat demanded, her breath coming in short burst as she jabbed at him, warning him to stay away. The bloody man kept on coming, and she finally lunged at him, aiming for his shoulder.

Morg quickly sidestepped her and moved in, grabbing her arms and forcing the sword to drop from her fingers. She screamed and cursed at him, and he yanked her up against his hard chest.

Kat screamed again and fought against him, but he wrapped one long arm around her and grabbed a handful of her red burnished curls with the other. In a flash, his firm lips swooped down, plundering her own soft pink lips, crushing her in his hold.

Kat raged at herself and him, unwilling to give in to the needs her body was pressing on her. Desperately, she tried to picture Mace's face and failed miserably. Her senses were slowly being overcome by the sheer animal magnetism of the amazing man in front of her. A man she had fought against, body and soul since their first meeting. In panic, she bit him, bringing the salty taste of blood to both of them.

"Ye little wildcat," said Morg hoarsely. He picked her up under one arm and began to pound the seat of her men's breeches, his powerful right arm



blistering the soft flesh of her tender buttocks as she kicked and screamed at him.

They were both breathing heavily when he set her back on her feet, holding her upper arms in a firm grasp. "Settle down, lass...NOW!"

Kat stood trembling in his arms, her head bowed, refusing to give in to tears. She panted, trying to get herself under control before looking up at him.

Slowly, Morg drew her into his embrace, moving carefully, not wanting to set her off again. "Don't think ye are the only one to suffer losses, wee lass," he crooned soothingly. "It happens to all of us sooner or later."

With monumental effort, Kat brought her defenses back up, willing herself to be unaffected at his close presence. "What would you know about loss?" she taunted, finally looking into his glittering green eyes, so like her own. She thought she saw a flash of hurt before anger flared.

"Maybe I'll tell ye some day," he responded gruffly. "When ye return to acting like a lady instead of a hellcat."

"That will never happen," scoffed Kat. "I never claimed to be a lady, and I'm not starting now."

Morg let one hand trail down to cup her breast while Kat stared defiantly at him, trying to prove she was unmoved by him. How could he know her insides were like jelly? His thumb found the rosebud of her breast while he kept her eyes pinned in a mocking stare. The nub hardened beneath his caress, and her breathing became faster. She could feel dampness between her thighs, and she cursed her traitorous body.

Morg sensed his advantage, and like the true pirate he was, he bent his head to once again take the slightly open lips, entreating this time, gently

nibbling the softness. His palm slid on down to the damp crotch, lightly caressing her womanhood through the breeches, making her moan low in her throat.

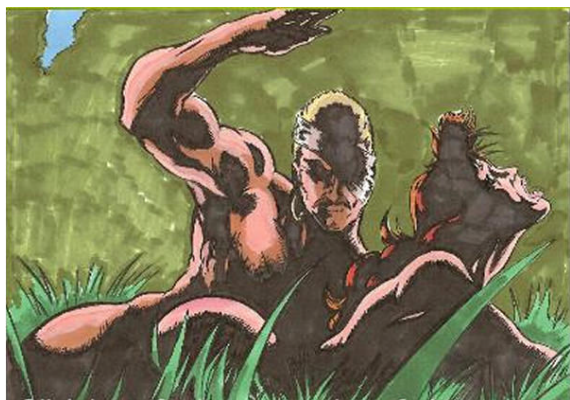
Kat was falling, her body giving in to the demands so long held dormant, and she leaned into the kiss hungrily, spreading her thighs in welcome. Her soft arms slid behind his head, pulling him closer.

Morg began to open the buttons on her breeches, gently slipping them down, the short pantaloons with them, giving him access to the red gold curls covering the creamy mound and on to the hot wet heat of her. His other hand began to open the button on her shirt, and he planted hungry kisses along her creamy skin as it came into view.

Kat was lost. Feverishly, her hands went to the buttons on Morg's shirt, deftly releasing them so she could splay her small hands across his bronze chest, rubbing and massaging before moving down to the huge bulge in between his thighs.

Morg groaned as her small hands rubbed him through his trousers, making him even harder if that was possible. Frantic now, they quickly divested each other of their clothing, sinking on top of them to the forest floor.

Morg took her gently, afraid she might be a virgin, and was happy to find she wasn't. Kat's nails dug into his back as he rammed home then and back out again to repeat the pleasurable sensation all over again. He held himself back, sliding faster and faster within the silken sheath until he felt her grip him, waves of pleasure shooting through her. She screamed when he made his final thrust, taking her completely. He collapsed to her side, pulling her on top of him. "Ye are mine now, Kat Fontaine," he growled into her ear.



"I belong to no one," panted Kat fiercely, her nails digging into his broad shoulders.

Morg quickly flipped her over. Her bottom was still bright pink from the earlier spanking, and he began to lay into her again on her bare flesh. "I said ye are *mine* now," he spoke grimly, his hard hand spelling out the message. "And, as such, ye are going to learn to behave if I have to spank ye every day until ye learn!"

Kat screamed again and tried in vain to twist away from his punishing hand, but he simply put his long leg over hers and held her in place. She was not getting up until he chose to let her go. She wailed and beat the ground with her small fists, her agony and frustration spilling over until finally she gave way to hot tears.

Morg continued to spank her until she was sobbing wildly and he felt her finally let go in acceptance of his mastery, her body relaxing. He rubbed the deeply red chastised cheeks; easing some of the painful burn he knew she was experiencing. Then he rolled her back over and lay on his elbows above her, kissing her wet cheeks, his knee between her sprawled thighs.

Gently, he smoothed back her hair while she cried, not attempting to stop the tears. He sensed she needed this cry...it must have been a long time coming, she had fought it so hard.

Eventually, her soft arms stole up around his neck trustingly as she sobbed, and he began to kiss her face, trying to absorb some of her pain. "Ye are mine, lass, and I'll protect what is mine. I may not have a right to ye, but I have ye now just the same."

Her trusting submission and the tears were his undoing, and his throbbing member was rock hard once again. "Shush now, lass," he said as he



entered her gently once again. "Ye have cried enough." Slowly he stoked her passion, being careful of her sore bottom until she was writhing with need beneath him once more.

Again, Kat screamed with pleasure as he took her, her body at last relaxing and accepting his dominance of her, at least for the moment. He wasn't foolish enough to figure it would be much easier from now on, but he knew he had made headway with the stubborn wench. He let her rest for a while, and then he pulled her to her feet and picked up their clothes, leading her naked back through the jungle to the glade pool.

Kat allowed herself to admire his taut masculine buttocks from behind as he led her to the water. She felt soft and relaxed, bemused in the afterglow of their union. Right now, she was too tired to worry about what had happened or the ramifications, she just intended to continue to enjoy the moment until reality tore it away from her once again.

Frenchy put the last bucket of pitch on the roof of Jacques's new home and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his shirtsleeve. He had seen Frankie and Jacques on the beach and knew it was only a matter of times before a real explosion between those two occurred. He watched thoughtfully as Jacques came back, a dark expression on his face.

Stepping down off the ladder, he met his friend. "Want to go to the pub for rum? I'm going to take a break."

"No, you go on ahead." Jacques's eyes watched the figure in the distance that was rapidly disappearing.

"She is giving you fits, eh?" Frenchy smoothed his moustache down his lips, his eyes twinkling in spite of himself.

Jacques glowered at him. Not deigning to answer, he turned and stalked into the jail.

Frenchy chuckled and returned to the ship. After pouring water over his head to get rid of the sweat and dust, he called to the guard. "I'm going up to the pub. Keep an eye on things here."

"Aye, Sir," the pirate replied.

He was soon seated at a table, a bottle of rum in one hand and a pretty barmaid talking to him on the other side. The bar was humming with sailors from all the different ships, and Frenchy was enjoying himself. Little did he know the next few minutes would change the scene dramatically.

Frankie stormed up the plank of the Aphrodite, angry with Jacques for his audacity. "Where is Kat?" she asked Pierre.

"She has gone into the forest," he replied, and then he added. "With Macalister."

Frankie followed the direction of Pierre's nod and walked along the shoreline, scarcely aware of the play of the surf around her booted feet or the call of the wild birds as they sang on the wind. Finding the woodland path, she started up it. It was only a moment before she heard the sound of laughter and splashing. Curious, she stepped silently closer, and then she saw them.

Kat and Macalister were in a pool, playing and cavorting with one another, naked, of course. At first, anger surged through her, then she sighed. Let her play. Kat deserved some happiness; they had been to hell and back over the last five years. If it made her happy to play with Macalister, then so be it. She would not interfere.

She turned and walked slowly back along the beach, her thoughts on the things she had wanted to talk to Kat about and her idea of sneaking on board the Nemesis to look for their mother. But, as her anger cooled, she realized it was not viable. There was no way a woman would be on board and not have been seen by this time. No, he didn't have her on board the Nemesis.

So where was she...if she was alive that is! They knew Jacques had warehouses on Tortuga, just as they did. Was it possible they had her secreted there somewhere? Did they have her under guard?

The thought made her wince with pain and anger. That her mother should be locked away, pining for her family all these years was reprehensible to her. But what else had he done with her? Sell her? Give her to some filthy pirate to use all these years?

She closed her eyes, and once again, saw her mother over Frenchy's shoulder being carried to the Nemesis, her eyes wide with shock and fear...WAIT! FRENCHY!

Frankie stopped dead in her tracks, her face going pale. It had been Frenchy who had taken her mother! Now, she remembered! The bald head...the scarf around his head...the moustache! It was Frenchy! It had been Frenchy all along, and Jacques had been protecting him!

Running now, Frankie sped on past the Aphrodite, headed for the Nemesis. Sword drawn, she came to a stop in front of the guard to the plank. "Where is Frenchy?" She demanded.

The pirate sneered at her and refused to answer. Frankie slashed out, catching the man's belt and his pants fell to the ground. "I asked you a question," she hissed dangerously as he scrambled for his breeches.

"He has gone to the pub," replied the pirate, backing away from her. "Crazy woman," he muttered as Frankie ran towards the pub.

She slammed the door to the Nasty Grubb open and scanned the room for Frenchy. There he was, sitting at a table with some bar wench.

The pub went quiet as Frankie quickly crossed the room, the point of her sword flashing up and against Frenchy's neck. "Get lost," she snapped to the wench, her eyes never leaving Frenchy. The girl tripped over herself to get away from the angry woman with the sword in her hand.

Frenchy started to stand, but Frankie's sword held him back; he stayed where he was, watching her carefully. If she had wanted to kill him, she would already have done so.

"What did you do with my mother?" Frankie asked in a deadly voice. "I remember now that it was you I saw carry her away." Her eyes narrowed in pain. "Did you enjoy using her? Did you pass her off to the rest of the crew to be assaulted until she was dead and her useless body fed to the sharks?" Her face twisted in fury. "You've got ten seconds to answer me before I take off your first ear. I'll go on from there!"

After Frenchy left, Jacques decided to knock off for the day and go for a swim. When he returned Frenchy was waiting for him, and Frankie was handcuffed in one of the cells with a blindfold over her eyes.

"What is going on here?" he asked in amazement.

"She came to the pub, wild with anger and pain," explained Frenchy. "She remembered that I had taken her mother. She threatened to cut me apart unless I told her where her mother was. Several of Macalister's men finally overpowered her

and placed her under arrest. Since you are now head of the island peacekeepers, she was brought here for you or Macalister to deal with."

Jacques's eyes glinted. "Did you tell her anything?"

"No," Frenchy sighed heavily. "That is between you two." It was on the tip of his tongue to tell Jacques what he had never told anyone, yet he still held back, for Victoria's sake. It was their private business alone.

"Leave us," demanded Jacques, looking towards his captive.

Frenchy placed a hand on Jacques's arm. "Don't be too hard on her, my friend. She is my wife's daughter."

"You know I shall not hurt her, but I shall teach her a good lesson." Jacques replied smoothly. "Such behavior is unacceptable. I would rather deal with it my way than arrest her and bring charges. I'm sure Morg will allow it."

Frenchy nodded. "Oui, on this we can agree. But, as I said before...don't be too hard on her!"

Jacques didn't answer. After Frenchy left, he opened the cell door and stepped inside. "Well my proud, Capitan, it seems we meet again. And I think this time, I will see for myself what the Spaniard was allowed to enjoy."

Frankie was trembling and furious. "Get me down from here," she hissed, kicking out at him, hoping to hit him where it would hurt the most.

"I see you are not going to cooperate, ma petite. I shall have to do something about those feet." He stepped in close to make her kicks ineffectual and reached up to untie her hands. He let her fall over his shoulder as she came down, and he picked her up and took her up the stairs to the private cell.

"Let me go," she hissed, kicking again. Her hands were still tied at the wrists, but she tried to hit him in the back. If only she could see! She stopped when several sharp spansks landed on her unprotected rear.

"I am not about to let you go. Creating a disturbance in the pub, resisting arrest, trying to cut up an innocent man, you have much to answer for, ma Cherie." He set her down and secured her hands once again to the manacles hanging from the ceiling. Only this time, he used the ankle bracelets as well. "No place to run now, ma petite."

Frankie tugged helplessly at the restraints over her head, her fury mounting. She tried to move her feet, but she was secured in a humiliating spread eagle position, and it made her feel vulnerable.

"I'll kill you for this," she gasped furiously. "Whatever you are going to do, you won't get away with it!"

Jacques chuckled. "Oh yes I will, you can scream all you want, and no one will hear you. These stone walls are thick and absorb sound, so yell away, ma petite. The very least you deserve is a good spanking.

Chapter Twelve

Jacques perused his helpless prisoner. "Lucky for you, Frenchy will not bring charges against you for trying to kill him. He is leaving your punishment to me, ma petite. Something I plan to thoroughly enjoy."

He stepped in close to Frankie's body, his hands slipping to her breasts. They were full and firm to the touch, and he lightly teased and tormented her, causing her nipples to harden in response. "I bet the Spaniard enjoyed these, did he not? The real question is, did you enjoy it this much?" He smiled in satisfaction as a groan escaped her trembling lips.

The tall pirate wrapped his hand in her hair and pulled her close against his chest, the hard nipples crushed against him as his mouth sought her full rosy lips.

Frankie moaned and tried to twist her head from side to side, trying in vain to avoid his capture; her senses swam as her breasts ached against the hardness of his broad muscles. She panted when he finally pulled away.

"Frankie, you cannot deny the flames between us. Let yourself go, ma Cherie." He resumed the kiss, his tongue lightly teasing her lips, gently parting them and sliding into her mouth. He felt her buck against him as she responded to the surge of desire that licked along her veins.

Smiling, he stepped away from her. "Frankie, ma petite, this could all have been avoided if you had just cooperated with me earlier. But now your stubbornness will cost you." Slowly, he began to unbutton her shirt, allowing his tongue to trace the flesh, as it was unveiled.

Frankie stood proudly, trying to withstand this assault on her senses. She was helpless to do anything but whimper in protest as his tongue trailed liquid fire down her breasts and stomach. Finally, he stopped, and she slumped in relief.

"What to do with these clothes?" he murmured wickedly, knowing the effect his "torture" was having on her. "Ah, well, clothes can be replaced." His knife made short work of the shirt, breeches and undergarments soon leaving his proud female pirate in nothing but her boots with her long raven hair cascading down her stiff spine.

Walking behind her, he ran his palm down her smooth back and over the satiny softness of her buttocks, admiring the firmness beneath their soft covering. Trailing around to the front, his fingers blazed a path across her flat stomach. She was mouthwatering. Her slender waist narrowed to lush hips and on from there to long slim legs encased in black boots to the knees. The sight was intoxicating, and his body couldn't be any more responsive to her charms. He was beginning to wonder who was torturing who!

Frankie resented his touch, and welcomed it at the same time. With her eyes blindfolded, she was left to the world of sense and touch, an unnerving situation, yet highly exciting to her. She found she wasn't afraid...only determined not to let him win.

"There is quite an assembly of ah... "implements of torture" left here, ma petite, shall we try some out?" Jacques asked silkily.

"Go to hell," seethed Frankie, not sure what he was talking about.

"Perhaps the bite of the lash will soften your will, hmmm?" Jacques took a whip from the wall.



Frankie trembled. Surely, he would not whip her! She waited in silence, wondering if the next moment would bring the lash of the whip across her back. She gasped in surprise when she heard the evil hiss and the following stinging burn across her bottom cheeks.

"I should have known you were the kind of man that would beat a woman," she sneered, starting to get scared in spite of herself. The lash bit into her buttocks again, a little harder this time. She squirmed but refused to cry out.

"You are mistaken, ma cherie," whispered Jacques in her delicate ear. "I would never beat a woman, any woman...let alone a woman as beautiful as you. You are made for other things." His mouth worked around from her ear to her lips and tried to kiss her again.

She jerked her head away. "Then what do you call that?" she snapped furiously. He hadn't really hurt her...yet. But it didn't do any harm to let him know how she felt about it.

Jacques ignored her complaint. "Since you don't wish my kiss on your lips, I shall deliver it...other places." He lowered his head to suckle first one, then the other of the rosy peaks jutting into the air. He smiled wickedly when soft moans escaped her lips.

Moving to her rear again, he held the lash in one hand and held a foot's length of the end of it in the other and snapped her harshly across her bottom cheeks, leaving a thin welt this time.

"Oh!" yelped Frankie this time, the pain coming sharp and hot.

"There is more than one way to spank a naughty woman," he teased, "and you have been very naughty, ma petite. You have much to answer for. He lashed her again, leaving another burning welt.

"No," she moaned.

"Oh, yes!" *Swish!* "This could all have been so much easier..." *Swish!...* "if only you had not been so stubborn..." *Swish!*

Frankie danced inside her ankle cuffs as the lash splayed across her bottom. She stubbornly refused to cry out again.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The cracks of the whip end across her pert bottom were not severe but they were very uncomfortable for Frankie. Jacques had no desire to mark or hurt her unduly, just to teach her a lesson. "Well, ma petite, have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"I hope you are enjoying yourself, you monster, for one day I will kill you!" she bit out shrilly, twisting her body and trying to avoid the painful lashes that he was still applying.

He laughed. "No, ma petite, I think it might be you who is enjoying this more than you will admit." He stopped the lashing and ran his fingers down the cleft in her cheeks to feel the wetness between her thighs. "Do you want to know about your mother?"

"You know damn well I do," she said in ragged gasps. His fingers were driving her crazy.

The torturing fingers had found the source of her womanhood and were gently playing with the soft nub of flesh. "Then ask...nicely."

"Tell me about my mother," she yelped, trying to wiggle away from him. There was only so far she could go in the ankle shackles.

"That is not asking, ma petite, that is demanding."

He removed his hand and began to spank her, his palm bouncing off her rounded cheeks, and though she squealed in pain, still she would not ask. He had to admit she certainly was stubborn.

"You need to learn respect," he said evenly as his hand continued to dance around her cheeks and move down the backs of her thighs, leaving red handprints all over them.

Frankie screeched then, unable to keep back the yells choking in her throat. The backs of her legs were unusually sensitive, and she juttied her hips forward, trying to get away from the punishing contact. Still, she did not ask, but stood there whimpering and panting when he finally stopped, her proud head hanging down between her shoulders as she drew in ragged breaths. The tears trickled down her cheeks, but she refused to look at him.

Finally, Jacques walked up behind her and cupped her now warm buttocks, then slid his hand lower once again. He dipped his finger inside her, sliding easily in and out. "As I said before, my proud pirate, I think you must be enjoying this torture, perhaps that is why you are so stubborn?" He laughed as her head shot up, and her eyes flashed daggers at him. He sighed exaggeratedly, "Ah, you leave me no choice, ma amie."

"What are you doing," she panted suspiciously as he came to the front of her and knelt down, his hands going between her thighs.

"I will make you ask," he assured her. "If not one way, then the other." He smiled then and his mouth and tongue began to explore her womanhood, teasing, tasting, taunting. She moaned as he tormented her, his finger sliding into her moist heat.

Frankie bucked and rocked, unable to escape the long arm around her slender hips that held her in place; she felt her body climbing, tensing, and reaching. She didn't know what he was doing to her, but she didn't want him to stop now.



"Please," she begged, not knowing what she was pleading for. "Oh, please, Jacques," she begged shamelessly, her hips rocking against him. She didn't even realize she was calling him by his first name. Suddenly, he paused, and she groaned in frustration.

"Nooooo...don't stop!"

Jacques smiled and moved slightly away from her. "ASK!" he demanded.

Trying to bring herself under control, she panted hard, but refused to ask. Her body trembled with the effort of resisting the completion of her desires.

"Such sweet torture, eh, ma petite?" He chuckled and bent to his task once more, torturing her once again, bringing her body to the edge of release. She needed it so badly that she squealed when he pulled away again. "ASK!" he demanded of her.

She cried tears of frustration, but refused to do as he ordered.

He began to spank her then, hard sharp spans...as his mouth once again bent to his task, determined to overcome her stubborn will. When the spans stopped, and he dipped his fingers once again inside her silken sheath she broke. "Please, damn you! Please tell me what you know of my mother! Please, please," she begged.

Of course, Jacques knew she was begging for much more than information, and he gladly complied bringing his proud lady pirate to the fruition of her desires. She screamed as wave after wave of pure pleasure shook her body from head to toe, and she gave in to the delights of the flesh.

Once she calmed, he quickly took off her restraints and picked her up in his arms, taking her



to the bed recently made with fresh soft bedding and placed her in it. He covered her with the light blanket and kissed her tearstained cheeks. "Sleep, my fierce pirate Captain. When you awake, you shall have your wish."

Frankie was tired, very tired. His gentle touch and kisses soothed her, and she slipped into much needed, restful sleep.

As she slept, Jacques stepped outside to meet Frenchy, who had never really left.

"Is she all right?" he asked, his brown eyes worried.

"Of course, she is all right," returned Jacques. "You must know I would never hurt her."

"Oui, Jacques, but I also know your fierce temper when roused. I trust you would not be overly harsh."

"She is a stubborn wench, but even she cannot resist forever. She finally did as I asked; now we have to tell her what we know. Although I suspect there is more you know than I do, am I correct my old friend?" Jacques asked, his keen eye gazing at Frenchy.

"Oui," replied Frenchy heavily. "All the secrets were not mine to tell, so I have kept some things back that were between me and Victoria alone."

The two men talked quietly for a while, then Jacques clapped Frenchy on the shoulder. "Come, let's talk to her, I promised her that much. You can tell her what you think she needs to know."

Inside, Frankie was just waking up, a feeling of well being permeating her body. When she felt the soreness in her buttocks against the sheets as she rolled over, it all came rushing back. She winced as she sat up and looked around. Two pairs of eyes

stared at her, one dark and the other brown. Quickly, she pulled the sheet up above her breasts and stared back, wide-eyed.

"There are some things you need to know, *ma petite*," said Frenchy quietly. Then he told her of the lean times in Paris when he had been thrown out on his own, with no one to care for him or care if he lived or died. It had been much longer than the brief time he had told Jacques about that he had known her mother.

They had met in the park in Paris, she a lonely wife and he a lonely, bereft man. They had fallen in love and continued to meet, and finally began to have an affair. She never told him her name other than it was Victoria. He never pressed her for information; he just loved her, held her when she was unhappy. Her marriage was a good marriage she had said, one of convenience but no love and unfortunately...no passion. It wasn't until she had met Frenchy that she had come to life.

Six months was all they had before she disappeared one day. Frenchy had waited. Waited for a month, but she never returned. Finally, he had taken to the sea, figuring her husband must have found out about them and spirited her away. He had never seen her again, until that fateful day when the Nemesis had attacked the French ship.

She had been overcome with shock and horror, and he had rescued her and brought her aboard the ship, protecting her fiercely, keeping her safe from all who would seek to harm her.

"And you've kept her for all these years?" hissed Frankie. "Mon Dieu, how could you? She must have been frantic to return. Even if my father and I were killed, there was still Kat. How could she desert her daughter?"

Frenchy looked sadly at her. "She doesn't remember anything before that day, Frankie. It's as if she began to live the day she met me again. Her memory is gone and has not returned."

For once in her life, Frankie was speechless. She stared at him with shocked eyes, huge in her ashen face. Her fingers trembled on the edges of the sheet she had pulled to cover her nakedness, her hair in disarray around her creamy shoulders.

"There is more, *ma petite*," Frenchy said quietly. "When we were together, she became pregnant. I knew she was pregnant, and I was happy for her. You have to know that we did not know whom the baby belonged to. It wasn't until you and Kat showed up here that I realized she had delivered twins."

"Are you saying...that you...you are our father?" croaked Frankie disbelievingly.

"No, I am not saying that. She was with her husband as well during that time, but I have noticed a few things. You and Kat are completely different. And I don't know what the Duke of Frontenac looked like, but *you* have the same birthmark that I do...and in the same place."

He walked over to her and gently touched the small star shaped birthmark just behind her left shoulder. Then he pulled the sleeveless shirt back from his brown muscled arm and turned towards her. He too had the same mark, just as he had said.

Frankie stared in fascination, then whispered. "Kat looks like our father, while I look like Mother. We never thought more than that." She shrank back as if horrified at the thought that her father might not be her father after all.

"I am sorry, Frankie," said Frenchy sadly. "I see the idea of me possibly being your father and your

mother's memory loss is more than you can absorb at this time. I will go and let Jacques comfort you." He stood up and walked to the doorway. He turned back to stare at the raven-haired girl who looked so stricken, her eyes lustrous with unshed tears, and his heart hurt inside his massive chest.

"I just want you to know, ma petite, if I am your father, that I could not be more proud of the strong and beautiful woman you have become. I would be most proud to call you daughter anytime you chose to acknowledge me."

He left then, and Jacques walked to the bedside, almost as stunned as Frankie at the revelations he had just heard. Frenchy had said nothing of all this before. He reached out and brushed his fingers against her cheek. "I will let you get some more rest, ma amie," he said gently.

He hesitated a moment, then he spoke again. "I will not apologize for the chastisement I dealt you, for you were most deserving. I don't know when I have met a more headstrong, stubborn woman, and you angered me by sleeping with the Spaniard as well."

When she said nothing still, he turned away to leave, but felt his fingers grasped. When he turned back to her she whispered one word to him, "stay."

Jacques hesitated only briefly. "Move over," he said gruffly, lying down beside her as she turned over on the bed. Then taking her in his arms, he tucked her spoon fashion against the warmth of his body, and he could feel her trembling. Moving the sheet aside, he tucked her in more closely to his warmth, trying to ease her chill and covered her again.

With his arm tucked beneath her full breasts, he could feel her breath moving in and out of her body. Her satiny rounded bottom fit snugly into the curvature of his body, and he felt his shaft growing hard at her closeness.

He bent down to plant a nibbling kiss along her scented shoulder, her hair tickling his face.

"Jacques?" came the breathy voice, so low he could barely hear it.

"Oui, Mon amie?" he replied hoarsely. He didn't know how much longer he could hold this position and remain sane.

"I did not sleep with Pedro."

"No? Then why have you not told me this before?"

"It's not important, I just wanted you to know."

Jacques rolled her onto her back and looked into her eyes. "Frankie, why?"

She closed her eyes and sighed, her voice almost a whisper. "I think I wanted you to be jealous."

The womanly scent of her, the naked body and her comment were too much to resist. He looked deep into her eyes as his hand slid between her legs. Gently, he began to rub and tease her, feeling the moisture already forming. Her legs fell open to admit him more fully, and she moaned softly in her throat, her eyes closing.

"There is no need to make me jealous, ma amie," he whispered throatily, and his head dipped to taste the delicate buds of her breasts, then he moved over her and claimed her lips. When they broke apart gasping, he went up on his knee to spread her legs more fully to admit his body between her silky thighs.

Frankie's eyes went to his manhood when he knelt above her, and she gaped at the size of him.

She had never actually seen a man full and hard, his shaft throbbing gently as if having a life of its own. She reached down to touch him, full of curiosity.

"Don't do that, ma amie, or it will all be over too quickly," he growled, pushing her back and claiming her lips again.

Frankie felt the hard shaft against her womanhood and the touch excited her. She moaned and rubbed against it, feeling that heat and desire building again. When his mouth suckled at her breasts she bucked up against him, hot and moaning. She felt him probing at her womanly opening, and she gasped as he began to enter her, forcing the muscles to stretch in a manner previously unknown to her.

Jacques entered her slowly, knowing he was full and hard and perhaps quite large compared to some, and he wanted to give her body a chance to accommodate him. He was surprised, however, when he felt the barrier, holding him back. She was a virgin!

He groaned, but it was too late to stop now; he couldn't hold himself back again. He bent to kiss her deeply, and when she was enthralled in the middle of the kiss, he thrust forward, breaking that barrier and moving past it to seat himself within her.

Frankie squealed in surprise and pain, the pleasure on hold for the moment as her body absorbed this new development.

"Shhhh, it's over now, no more pain, ma amie...now, there will only be pleasure." He looked into her wide shocked eyes and smiled. Slowly, very slowly, he began to move within her, watching her. He saw her eyes change color, moving to the

deeper hue, and her lids began to droop, as passion once more demanded her response.

Gently, he stroked, slowly, allowing her to take a little more of his length each time until she was gasping and rising to meet his thrusts allowing him entrance to every velvety inch of her.

Frankie moaned and rolled her head from side to side as the steady rhythm of his long slow strokes began to increase, building, bringing her body to that breathtaking peak that all lovers seek.

It seemed to Jacques an eternity of pleasure until he finally felt her spasm, her nails raking his back as she shrieked in surrender, her body bucking and thrashing. As she subsided, he looked down at her and smiled. "Now, ma amie, it is my turn." He quickened his strokes, making them more deliberate. Soon, he was taking her hard and fast, her full breasts bouncing with each thrust. When her head began to whip from side to side, and she began to keen high and soft, he knew she was coming again, and he came with her, his cry of pleasure mingling with hers.

Jacques moved up beside her, and they lay together, her head on his chest. It was then the door flew open and boots came crashing up the stairs. The door to the chambers flew open, and Kat rushed in, sword drawn and ready to fight. She stared in shock as Jacques grabbed his pants and jerked them on.

Frankie gasped and grabbed the sheet to pull in front of her as she stood up. "Kat, what are you doing here?" she asked breathlessly.

"I might ask you the same question," Kat responded, her eyes blazing. "I heard you were being held against your will, and I came to get you out. I guess I was wrong."

Frankie turned red. "You don't understand, Kat."

"No, I don't," said Kat evenly, trying to gain some semblance of control and failing miserably. It was all too much...too fast.

She had come back to the ship after her tryst with Macalister to knowing stares from the crew. Pierre was trying to deal with the Spaniards that had taken the oath to Frankie, but were getting disgruntled because Kat and Frankie both were off somewhere else instead of on board doing their jobs. Hers and Frankie's lack of leadership were making them restless, and they were questioning the experience and skills of their captain. In actuality, they were seeing a chance to finagle power and chasing after it relentlessly.

Pierre had been waiting with bad news for her. One of the Spaniards had informed them of the wedding of Mace Delarouge to the woman who had been Kat's rival before she left. He hadn't waited for her after all his promises. They had taken too long to get back, and now Kat's love was married to someone else.

When one of the crew had come rushing back saying Frankie had been arrested and was being held prisoner, she had gathered her knives and sword and come to rescue her, with Pierre right behind her.

That blasted Frenchy wouldn't let them in, but she had finally gotten past him...but for what? This? This was the ultimate betrayal...Frankie in bed with LaSalle. LaSalle, the man whose blood they had sworn to see! The man who had caused her beloved father's death! And the man she had quite possibly lost the love of her life over...Frankie was bedding him!



Disgust, hatred and anger filled Kat, swelling up like bile, and she could feel herself losing control. Something clicked inside her, and she suddenly felt numb, her only desire...to see this man dead!

Her voice dropped to a deadly tone. "At least he is well hung, Frankie, I hope you have enjoyed it...it will be the only opportunity you get." She raised her sword and started towards LaSalle, but Frankie moved in front of him and reached out towards her sister.

"Don't." It was a single hissing command that left Frankie frozen in place. Kat's eyes were a deep glittering green...different than Frankie had ever seen.

Shocked at this change in her sister, she tried to appeal to her. "You don't understand, Kat, we need to talk."

"Step aside, Frankie," ground out Kat, her eyes wild as the pressure crashed in on her. "I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I have to."

"I can't do that," Frankie said bravely, standing in front of Jacques who was trying to push her aside.

"Get out of the way, Frankie, I don't need a woman to protect me," snarled Jacques, "and I won't have you hurt!" He shoved Frankie aside and quickly dodged a swipe from Kat's sword as she slashed at his midriff. A small line of blood appeared where her blade made contact.

An instant later and Pierre was inside the door. "Stop this at once, Kat!" he thundered. It was all the distraction Frankie needed, and she threw herself at Kat, knocking the sword out of her hand.

Chapter Thirteen

Kat screamed a wild banshee scream as Pierre looped his strong arms around her from behind, lifting her off the floor while she struggled and fought like a demon against him.

He grunted as several kicks from Kats booted heels caught him in the shins, but he held her until at last, her struggles began to slow down, and her bright head sank back against his shoulder, accepting his superior strength.

Pierre let her down gently then, and turned her into his breast. Kat simply stood there looking small and defenseless, her eyes closed, panting heavily. He looked coldly at Frankie, his eyes raking disdainfully up and down her naked figure with the sheet in front of it. "You have betrayed us both, Frankie. You have allowed yourself to become the enemy's whore, I hope you are pleased with yourself."

"But you don't underst..." began Frankie, her eyes shining with tears. She held out her hand in mute appeal, beseeching him to understand, but Pierre turned away from her. Lifting Kat in his strong arms, he strode out the doorway and down the stairs.

Morg had been changing clothes when Rosalie knocked on the door. "Sir, Nigor is here, with news from the docks."

"Thank you, Rosalie," replied Macalister, as he slid on clean breeches. "Tell him I'll be right there."

Morg's thoughts were still with Kat. He pictured her lying beneath him on the banks of the pool where he had carried her from the silken warm waters and laid her on the heavy grasses on their clothes.



Again, he had taken her, but this time there had been tears when she climaxed, and he had sensed deep hurt inside her. She had gazed at him through those wet emerald eyes, and he had seen the vulnerable little girl that missed her father terribly and raged at life because she couldn't control it.

She was like dynamite, volatile and easily set off. But he knew that once her loyalty was won, she would give her life for the one she loved. He found himself wishing to be that man, but what of his own troubled past?

Rage and pain had sent him to the sea, just like Kat. When the Laird of Castle McKenna had died, he had left his clan with one instruction only...everything he owned was to go to his youngest son...meaning he, Mathias Morgan Macalister, including the clan leadership.

However, after his father's death, his Uncle had called upon the ancient written laws of the clan that would put his oldest brother in charge. The ancient laws had three conditions. One, the inheritor had to be a son of the previous Laird. Two, he had to have possession of the Laird's ring with the crest of the Macalister clan on it when he laid claim to his inheritance. And three, if there were a reasonable dispute, there would be a duel and winner would take all in a fight to the death. It was a harsh law, but one that was developed in harsh times when pride and power ruled the clans.

The old man had died when Morg was away and when he had returned; his oldest brother had taken the ring. Knowing what his father had wanted, Morg had challenged Canton to the ritual duel.

Canton had long been suspected as a troublemaker among the clan because he was an illegitimate son of Sir Creighton Macalister and, as such, was not happy with his lot. He knew he never

really stood to inherit, and it angered him; and that anger burned within him like a poison.

Morg never intended to kill Canton, merely to win the contest and reclaim his inheritance. However, Canton had no such honor. The night before the duel, Morg's food and drink were laced with a slow acting poison, designed to weaken and eventually kill if not discontinued.

The next day, his younger sister had begged him not to go through with the duel, but he could not refuse. If he opted out of it, he could not challenge his half-brother again. It was the law.

With Morg's reflexes and senses slowed, Canton had eventually defeated Morg and prepared to strike the final deathblow when Eileen had stepped between them. His younger sister had saved his life, much to his shame and dishonor.

Morg had left Scotland then, no longer able to stand the loss of his honor and reputation. Canton never failed to rub in the fact that he had used his sister as a shield, and the clan members looked down upon him, feeling him not fit to be leader. He had been nineteen years old.

Now, at twenty-seven, he was no longer a callow youth, and he could see where he had been set up, and he too burned for revenge, just like Kat. Age had brought a wisdom and maturity that he had lacked in his younger years, and he now understood how easily he had been duped. One day, he would return to Scotland and claim his rightful place. But he would have to kill Canton to do it.

Right now, he had nothing to offer Kat, no lands or titles that would befit a French heiress and daughter of a Duke. He was nothing...just a pirate. He had no right to tie her down or ask her to love him. Nevertheless, he wanted her to be

his. She burned in his blood, and destiny had brought her to him, he could feel it in his soul.

Grimly, he pushed his troubled thoughts aside and went to meet Nigor.

"There is trouble at the docks, Sir," Nigor said. He stood with his hand on his sword, a man comfortable only with a weapon close at hand.

"What is going on, Nigor?" Morg led the way into the drawing room to pour them both some rum.

"It's that woman pirate captain, Sir. She attacked LaSalle's man Frenchy in the Nasty Grubb about two hours ago."

"Why?"

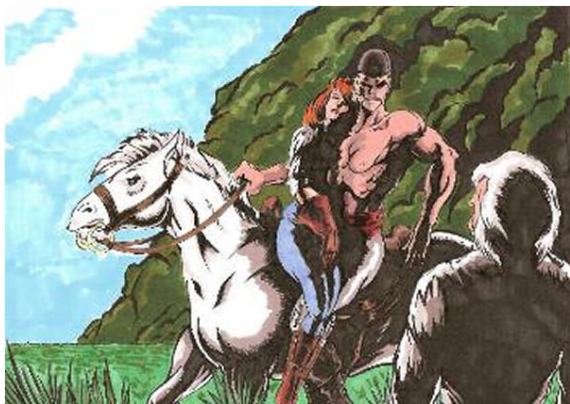
"She seems to think Frenchy abducted her mother," Nigor replied. "That's what the men said. I had some of the boys take her to the jail. LaSalle agreed to deal with her, but I thought you'd want to know."

"Yes, thank ye, Nigor. I need to know what's happening on my island."

"There's one more thing, Sir. Her sister, the red-haired one...she has gone to the jail to free the Captain. Her uncle tried to stop her, but she was adamant. She was very angry and swearing revenge at last, for incarcerating her sister."

Morg's eyes narrowed, and he quickly tossed back his rum. Kat was a time bomb waiting to explode, and he didn't want her hurt when she did. He left the house and mounted his horse, turning it towards the jail. "Nigor, get a couple of men and meet me at the jail, just in case we need them," he shouted.

He brought his horse to a grinding halt as Pierre came out of the jail, carrying Kat in his arms. His heart leapt in his throat. "Is she alright?" he bit out dismounting quickly.



"She is not physically hurt," Pierre replied grimly. "But she is exhausted mentally I think. She needs to rest."

"Give her to me," demanded Morg, mounting his horse and holding out his arms.

"I'm not sure..."

"Give her to me!" Morg insisted again, his green eyes fiercely devouring Kat's supine form.

Pierre was a wise man. He saw the love in Morg's eyes and sighed. He handed Kat up to him, albeit reluctantly. "No one was hurt, do not castigate her."

"I have no intention of causing her harm in any way," Morg replied. His gaze locked with Pierre's for a moment, and then he turned the horse away and headed towards his manor home.

Pierre watched them go, his gaze brooding. "You may not intend to cause her harm monsieur, but you will. She is already half in love with you and caught between two worlds." He shook his head and began to walk back to the Aphrodite. "Mon Dieu, what is to become of my nieces?"

The pain hit Frankie like a physical blow. Dropping the sheet, she wrapped her arms around her bare stomach as if to ward it off. "Mon Dieu," she whispered, "what have I done?"

"She will get over it, Frankie," murmured Jacques, enfolding her in his warm embrace. "But I do not like Pierre calling you a whore. If he were not your Uncle, I would run him through."

"Isn't that what I am?" Frankie asked painfully. "Isn't that what women are when they are not married, and they sleep with a man?" She pulled away from him and began to dress in his clothes, looking around for something to tie his pants around her waist. He had cut her clothing to shreds!

"Stop it, Frankie," he snapped, grasping her shoulders, his dark eyes burning as he addressed her bent head. "I won't allow YOU to speak of yourself that way either. Do you hear me?" He shook her slightly, her bare breasts swaying, causing his loins to tighten once again.

"No, YOU stop it!" She pulled away from him and grabbed his oversized shirt and stuck her arms into it. When she grabbed the shirt, her pants fell down, and she cursed in frustration, her hands shaking. "Merde!"

Jacques ran his fingers through his hair and sighed in exasperation. "Wait here," he ordered. He went to the room where he had spanked her and gathered up her belongings and brought them back. Picking up his pants, he threaded her belt through them and then held them up for her while she stepped into them.

Neither of them said a word as he yanked them up and tightened the belt around her small waist, then put her boots on. When she had rolled up the sleeves of the shirt and strapped her sword on, she pushed past him towards the door.

He grabbed her by the elbow and spun her around. "This is NOT over! I don't want you to leave like this, Frankie."

"Let GO of me," she demanded hotly, wanting nothing more than to get away from him at that moment before she did something stupid like cry. Her feelings were very chaotic, and she needed to find Kat.

Jacques stared at her in frustration. He wanted to say so many things, take her away where they could be alone and make love to her again, but he knew she was distracted with her family's reactions. She needed time to sort herself out. He dropped her arm.

"Go, then, ma amie," he said heavily. "But, we will talk soon, you can be assured of that." When she had walked out the door on the bottom level, he slammed his fist into the wall.

Frankie made her way back to the Aphrodite, warring between anger and sadness at the situation. Pierre and Kat's words had cut her deeply. She knew Kat had slept with Mace Delarouge, yet they called her a whore. And neither of them knew the situation yet because they had refused to listen to her.

She stalked up the gangplank of the Aphrodite, intent on making Pierre and Kat listen to the things Frenchy had told her. She stopped suddenly as three Spaniard's stepped in front of her.

"So, the Captain puta returns at last." A tall lanky Spaniard gave the insult, his dark eyes scornful and looking for an opportunity to take over. He didn't dare take on Pierre, but the woman, that was a different story. And, since she was the Captain, his fight was with her, anyway. His two buddies stood deceptively at rest behind him. At his words, all went quiet, and the other crewmembers close by paused to watch.

If the Spaniard had known Frankie's state of mind, he might not have chosen this moment to confront her, but fate being what it was, he sealed his doom by opening his mouth.

He spat at her feet and laughed. "I called you the puta and I don't serve under no woman, let alone a puta. It's time a real man took command since old Pierre can't seem to handle his women." His lustful eyes appraised Frankie. "I can show you how a real man pleasures a woman, senorita, if I don't kill you first of course."

"Hold it right there," snapped Pierre, coming up behind Frankie. "Get back to work!"

The Spaniards shuffled their feet uneasily, but they stayed bravely in place.

Frankie held up her hand to silence Pierre, never taking her eyes off the man facing her.

"So," she said smoothly, her voice soft and low like cream dripping off a cat's whiskers. "You have visions of grandeur, little man? Very well, arm yourself and let's see who is best fit to captain the Aphrodite."

If he had been an astute judge of women's character, he would have recognized the taunt of a woman who had confidence in her abilities, a woman...who was used to winning.

Apparently, he didn't, a grave mistake on his part, thought Pierre, standing back to let Frankie handle it.

The Spaniard smiled evilly and drew his sword. It was over almost before it began, the man's pitiful attempts thwarted immediately under Frankie's controlled fury. With deftness born of skill and practice, she pierced his lungs almost immediately, and he fell to the deck, gurgling in his own blood.

The other two gaped in astonishment and then as if on hidden cue, they both drew their swords and advanced on Frankie. She couldn't defeat both of them at the same time! She was a woman.

Still, the battle did not last very long, and another soon lay at her feet. The third dropped his sword and backed up after his comrade fell.

"So...you think you can't serve under a woman?" Frankie asked as she advanced on him. The light of battle fury glittered strongly in her eyes.

He continued to back away, scrambling in his haste. "Please, Captain, I...I meant no harm...eet was Jose! Jose wanted to be the Captain!"



Frankie reached out and slammed the butt of her sword into his jaw. "Get off my ship! I won't have a sniveling coward and a liar aboard. GO!" she commanded.

The Spaniard leapt over the side of the ship and began swimming for the dock.

Frankie replaced her sword and stood there, staring out to sea. She started when she felt Pierre's hand on her shoulder, and she heard him say softly, "I am sorry for the things I said, Frankie...it was...such a shock to see you with LaSalle. I would not have believed it if I had not seen it with my own eyes."

"There is much to discuss, Uncle Pierre," replied Frankie tiredly. She looked at him with sad eyes, knowing that she had turned a corner with her behavior, one she wasn't sure she was ready to face.

She could never go back to her old way of life, now...no man would have her...not if he knew. She went on. "Our mother is alive, but I'm afraid I have some shocking news for you and Kat."

"Whatever it is, we will face it together, ma petite," Pierre replied, pulling her into his arms. "Just as we have the last five years.

Frankie sighed and allowed Pierre to hold her. "How is Kat?"

"She will be fine. She has just had a lot to deal with the last few days. She is very volatile and feels very deeply. In spite of the defiant front she puts on, she is easily wounded on the inside... She hides that with her aggressive behavior."

"I know," replied Frankie, pulling away from Pierre. "I love her very much and have no desire to hurt her, but my feelings for Jacques are changing. I don't want her to keep trying to kill him."

"That is obvious, ma petite," he chuckled, "as is Kat's with Macalister. I think she cares for him, but won't admit it to herself, or anyone else."

Frankie sighed. "I need to bathe and change clothes, then we will talk."

They walked together towards the girls' cabin.

"By the way, you had a visitor this morning." Pierre said. "A very pretty girl named Rosalie. She is a servant in Macalister's mansion."

"What did she want?" Frankie asked curiously.

"She wants you to teach her how to defend herself." Pierre chuckled and shook his head. "I believe you and Kat have an admirer."

"She should have just asked you, Pierre, you are the master."

"There comes a time when the master can teach the pupil nothing further. Then the pupil becomes a master. You will be a fine teacher, Frankie, and Kat too for that matter. You don't need me any longer."

Frankie wrapped her arm affectionately through her Uncle's. "You lie, Uncle Pierre, we shall always need you. If not your skill, then your wisdom."

"The only real regret I have is not teaching you to submit to discipline," he replied chuckling. "You could both use a good spanking now and then."

Frankie scowled at him. "Do NOT even mention spanking! For that I should cut your tongue out!" She walked away, one hand clutching a bottom cheek as she swore softly under her breath.

Pierre chuckled in satisfaction. "Well, at least one good thing has come out of her relationship with Jacques LaSalle."

Kat was numb, her mind refusing to accept what her eyes had seen. How could her sister do this to her? How could Mace do this to her? And how could she have given herself to a pirate like

Macalister? The whole world had turned upside down, and nothing made sense anymore.

Gradually, she became more aware of the movement of the horse beneath her, the strong arms of Macalister holding her while they made their way up the path. He was taking her to his home. She sighed, too tired to fight anymore. She lay with her left ear against his chest, and she could feel his heart beating...strong and steady. Gradually, her eyes closed, and she went into a half sleep state.

Finally, they reached his stable, and his mount stopped when he clicked to it. Picking her up against his chest, he kicked his feet free of the stirrups and lifted his right leg over the saddle to slide off the horse.

Kat stirred against him and protested slightly, not wanting to move from the warm haven she felt all around her. When he gripped her tighter, she relaxed again, her small hand clutching his shirt.

He took her into the stables and sank down on the soft fragrant hay in the corner. She sighed into his chest, and he held her while she slept.

Morg knew he should put her to bed in the house and let her sleep while he did his rounds, but he couldn't bring himself to let go of her. Every time he shifted she mewled in her sleep like a kitten looking for warmth and moved closer to him.

He saw the shadows under her lovely eyes and realized she must not have been sleeping well, and her rest now was from exhaustion. If he were to leave her, she might not sleep any more, and she obviously needed it. Slowly, he allowed himself to drift off with her.

Kat woke slowly, trying to remember where she was. She felt a warm chest under her cheek, and she remembered that Morg had taken her away

from the jail. The pain of Frankie's betrayal sliced through her again, but not as sharply now.

She remembered the pain in Frankie's eye's and her attempts to explain. She needed to find her sister and talk to her. No matter what Frankie had done, she still loved her, and it hurt knowing how her actions must have hurt her sister.

Slowly, she sat up and pushed her hair back from her face. She was lying on a pile of fresh hay. She turned and looked down into a pair of gleaming green eyes, staring at her, studying her.

Morg tried to gauge Kat's mood. She seemed calm, rested. He hoped she was better. He sat up and tried to draw her into his arms, but she stiffened.

"There are things I need to do," she said awkwardly, resisting him.

"Aye, lass, and I as well." He stood up and held his hand out to her. "Come on, I'll drop ye at the ship if that's where ye be wanting to go."

He knew nothing more would be gained at this point, and she and her sister must need to talk. That is, if LaSalle was finished with her. Frankie might still be under arrest for all he knew, but he doubted it.

Most likely, LaSalle had given the lass a good thrashing...and maybe something else as well. Perhaps that was what was behind Kat's extreme distress. If so, he could understand how she would be feeling confused. Frankie was supposed to be here to kill LaSalle, not bed him.

They saw Frankie at the railing of the Aphrodite as they approached on horseback, her expression unreadable. It looked as if LaSalle was finished with the lass for the moment then, he decided. He'd just make his way over there and find out what happened.

Maybe it was time he looked into this business of Kat's mother. It was also time for a celebration party. They had bested the Spanish Fleet and come away with plenty of gold and riches, time for the rum to flow and the island to make merry. Maybe they could all forget the demons that plagued each of them for a while...if only for a short while.

After Kat had bathed and changed clothes, the girls and Pierre met in the cabin for a conference. It was time for Frankie to let them in on what she had found out.

"This is very hard to believe, Frankie," Kat spoke at last into the silence. Frankie's announcement of Frenchy's affair with her mother had shocked her.

"Not really, Kat," murmured Pierre, his brow furrowed in concentration. "That would be about the time Gatineu suspected Victoria of seeing another man and had her taken to the country. Not being a fighting man, he simply removed her from Paris and never tried to find out if it might be true."

"But how could he be our father?" protested Kat. "I look nothing like him at all! I look like my father!"

"Then how do you explain the birthmarks?" Frankie asked, puzzled. "I look like mother, but I could just as easily belong to Frenchy. We are both tall and have dark hair."

"I believe it would be possible for you to have different fathers," Pierre interjected. "It happens with animals, why not with people?"

"But...but...we are better than animals, Uncle Pierre!" Kat replied heatedly.

"Frenchy did say she was with both men during that time," reminded Frankie. The dismay she had felt at Frenchy's announcement was not as sharp as it had been before, but still she felt a sense of loss.

She had loved her father, but what if he wasn't her father after all? What did that make her? She stared at her hands, feeling bereft and lonely.

Pierre, sensing Frankie's distress reached out and put a large palm over her small hand. "It doesn't change anything, Frankie. There is no way to prove it is or isn't true, and as far as Kat and I are concerned, you are still the same as you always were."

She smiled weakly at him. "If I am not my father's, then I don't have any right to his inheritance or his name. It should belong to Kat alone."

Kat spoke vehemently. "Yes you do, Frankie! Everything is still half yours, you are my sister and my twin...whether half or not. I don't care! That will never change! And you will always be Frankie Fontaine. Father never made any attempt to deny it, so it's true as far as I'm concerned!"

"Well, since Victoria is actually the inheritor, she is the one who would be leaving everything to you girls. Even legally, as her daughter Frankie, you would be entitled to your share."

"I don't really care about the money, Pierre," said Frankie quietly. "I just want to see Mother, to know that she is alive. Then maybe things will feel normal again."

"I understand of course," Pierre agreed. "I guess we wait then."

No one said what was on all their minds. What if they had spent the last five years of their life looking for Victoria Fontaine, only to find that she didn't know them? And maybe never would!

Later on, Frankie stood at the railing looking over the moonlit sea. She started when Kat appeared at her elbow.



"Frankie, I am sorry about earlier. I did not know, and I...I lost control."

"It's not your fault, Kat. It just happened...like so many unexpected things have happened since we got to the Hideaway."

"Are you in love with LaSalle, Frankie?"

"Are you in love with Macalister?" countered Frankie softly, her eyes glittering as she turned to face her twin.

"I...I don't know," ventured Kat hesitantly. "I thought I loved Mace, but my feelings for Morg are...much stronger even than I had for Mace." She looked at Frankie. "Besides, didn't Pierre tell you? Mace married the bitch. Or, so they say. Who knows what to believe anymore?" Kat spoke bitterly, turning towards the sea, allowing the night breeze to gently sweep her red gold curls away from her face.

"I'm sorry, Kat, I didn't know." Frankie impulsively put her hand over her sisters and squeezed it gently. Then she embraced her, their foreheads touching one another in comfort.

"It's all right, Frankie," whispered Kat as she pulled away. Then she flashed her sister an impudent grin. "At least, we can give those two pirates a headache can't we?"

Frankie threw her dark head back and laughed delightedly. "That, we can, my dear sister, that we can!"

Chapter Fourteen

The next day the island was abuzz with the Governor's announcement of a celebration to be held that night. The beach near the glade pool was designated as the party site, and huge tables were being set up to hold all the food.

Huge pits had been dug and wild pigs were lowered into coals and covered with plantains and then buried beneath the sand to slowly steam and roast all day.

Gas lanterns were set strategically around to light the coming night and by mid afternoon, the smell of roasting pork wafted on the wind, making people hungry.

Big kegs of rum were rolled into place so people could drink freely. Wild fruits of every kind were gathered, and the island women had already set about making breads.

Frankie and Kat decided to visit the local island shop. It hadn't been open very long, but it did have all kinds of goods available, and they wandered among bolts of brightly colored fabric.

Frankie was studying an interesting floral design when a voice from behind startled her. Turning, she saw Rosalie, the servant girl from the Governor's mansion smiling at her.

"I can help you with a dress," she offered. "The island designs are simple to make and don't take very long." Her doe soft eyes were curious, and she studied the pirate captain in great detail. "And in return, you can teach me to fight."

Frankie laughed at the young girl's eagerness. "So you wish to learn to fight? I think that will take much longer than making a dress for this evening," she teased lightly, liking the girl's warm smile. "But, all right, you have a deal."

The three girls were just leaving the shop when Morg and Jacques stepped in front of them.

"What have we here?" Morg teased. "The three prettiest girls on the island nae doubt?" He looked around for Rosalie's escort as the girls smiled warily in return.

Rosalie dropped a curtsy to Morg, her head bent.

"Where is your escort, Rosalie?" he asked sternly.

Rosalie flushed and stammered. "I...I saw the pirate sisters walking along the docks and wanted to talk with them, Sir."

"And?" Morg queried silkily, folding his arms across his chest.

"And, I...I...hurried down here to catch them. I did not bring an escort, Sir. I am sorry...in my haste, I forgot." She put one bare foot behind her ankle, her slim brown fingers playing with her apron.

Kat and Frankie watched curiously, feeling sorry for the poor girl. Jacques had moved up to Frankie and whispered hello in her ear, and she smiled tentatively at him. They hadn't spoken since yesterday. Her heart beat faster at his nearness, and his palm on her hip made the skin tingle. She was reminded of that same palm burning his message into the tender flesh of her buttocks the day before.

"I believe I gave explicit instructions that ye were not to walk alone beyond the mansion, didn't I, lass?" He reached out and lifted her chin to look in her eyes. "Ye have disobeyed me."

"Come now, Macalister," said Frankie heatedly. "Rosalie is going to show us how make an island dress. We'll see that she gets home all right."



"That is nae the point, Captain," Morg responded darkly. "The lass disobeyed an order given for her safety. Now, she will be punished."

"You mean a girl is still not safe to be out and about on your island," Kat said delicately, stressing the *your* as if it were an insult.

"It is never safe for a lass to wander about alone, and that includes ye as well," returned Morg, his green eyes glittering. "But ye at least have the ability to defend yourself, Rosalie does not. And I'll thank ye not to interfere with the correction of my staff." He turned back to Rosalie. "Ye may show the ladies how to make the dresses, and when they deliver ye back home, report to me for your punishment."

"Y...yes, sir," Rosalie replied looking ready to burst into tears. She curtsied again. "Thank you, sir."

Morg turned back to Kat. "And, as for ye, little one, ye best watch that sharp tongue, or ye'll be eating your dinner standing up tonight as well." Not giving her a chance to answer, he turned as Nigor called to him.

Kat watched indignantly as he strode away. She had known immediately what Rosalie's punishment would be, and she didn't envy her. She studied the male buttocks and the well muscled calves of the back of his legs and felt her breath quicken. His broad shoulders set him apart from the crowd, and she loved watching him move. Sighing heavily, she turned back to the trembling Rosalie. "Don't worry, Rosalie, it won't be all that bad."

"Yes it will," whimpered Rosalie, her hands clutching her buttocks. "The last time was awful! I don't want to be spanked again!"

"You should have thought of that before you defied your master," replied Jacques lazily, smiling at Frankie. "Morg is right, the docks are no place for a woman alone. Not even two women really." He eyed Frankie and Kat meaningfully.

Frankie snorted indelicately. "If you think Kat and I are going to sit aboard ship and be sacred to walk down the docks, you are crazy," she declared. "We will go where we want to, when we want to!"

"I'm not going to argue with you, ma petite. But, if you get into trouble again, I will spank you again! You just remember that."

Frankie's eyes shot daggers at him, but he just bent and kissed her lips, whispering against her mouth. "I will see you tonight, ma amie. I can't wait to see the new dress." He turned then and followed Morg.

"Men," spat Kat disgustedly. "They think they know everything."

The other two agreed with her, and they turned to go. On their way to the Aphrodite, Pedro stepped into their path.

"Buenos Dias," he said cheerfully. "And how are the three most beautiful señoritas on the island today?"

The girls looked at each other and snickered. "We've heard that line already today," Kat said, eyeing him mockingly.

"That's only because it is true, señorita," he said gallantly. "I merely add my accolades." He eyed Rosalie speculatively, and she flushed under his gaze.

"Hello, Pedro," Frankie greeted. "I'm happy to see you are up and around. When are you leaving for Spain?"

"Alas, my lovely one, I am under island arrest until further notice, by order of the Governor, of

course. I have even been assigned a guard by Captain LaSalle." He motioned with his thumb over his shoulder at the pirate who was standing a short distance behind him, watching them and looking bored.

"Besides, I'm sure going home at this point would not be a good idea. The Spanish crown will be less than pleased to have lost their treasure and ships. They might even hold me responsible. They would certainly want to know who was responsible for hijacking it." He smiled pleasantly but the smile did not reach his eyes.

Frankie felt a shiver of apprehension. Although she would never wish Pedro dead, Jacques's adage of "dead men tell no tales" ran quickly through her mind. She had paid her father's debt, which was required. The rest would happen as fate decreed.

"Perhaps we will see you at the party tonight then," Frankie answered with a dismissive smile. The girls turned to go.

Pedro stared after them, his eyes enigmatic. "Indeed you will, my lovely, indeed you will," he muttered under his breath.

The girls boarded the Aphrodite, rather quiet and subdued, each lost in their own thoughts. Pedro had brought back the reminder that they were wanted in their own country and that life for them would never be the same.

Rosalie, sensitive to their mood, broke the silence. "Don't worry. All things in life happen for a reason." Her soft brown eyes were encouraging as she spoke to her new friends.

Kat tried to shake off her mood. "Of course, you are right, Rosalie! No point in looking back. All good things go from here, right?"

Frankie nodded, feeling a bit gloomy. She tried to put sad thoughts about her mother aside as she too smiled at Rosalie. "Yes, yes you are right...and tonight we are going to have fun!"

"Exactly," Kat crowed. "We may not have our old beaus, but like we agreed before, we can sure give a couple of pirates hell tonight can't we, Frankie?" Her emerald eyes glittered with mischief.

"But, of course, my dear sister, of course!"

Rosalie chuckled. "I think I'm going to like you two."

Pierre smiled as he heard the girls laughing. It was good to hear that sound. There had been so little of it in the last five years!

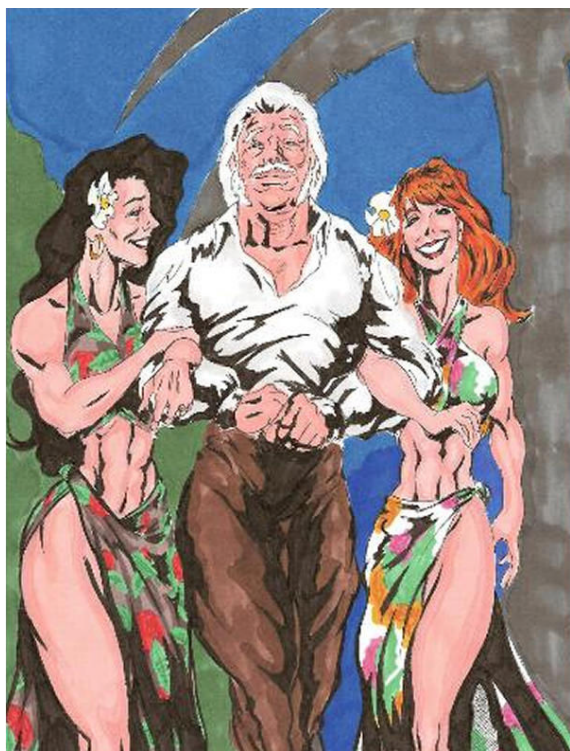
None of them had any idea that Kat's prophecy was about to come true.

A few hours later, Frankie twirled in front of the mirror, liking the freedom of movement the island skirts and tops afforded them. Rosalie had shown them how to tie the colorful tops in a crisscross across the breasts, tying in the front and leaving their midriffs bare with the two ends of the tie hanging to the waist. The long skirts wrapped simply around their waists and ended with a band of fresh flowers around their ankles.

Frankie's pattern was bright green foliage on a black background. Vivid red flowers were peeking from among the green foliage, and it complimented her blue green eyes and raven hair perfectly.

Kat on the other hand, was dressed in a white background with splashes of pink and orange among the green. Redheads might not look good normally with pink, but Kat's red gold curls and creamy sun kissed skin set off the color to perfection.

Both girls were equipped with knife bands beneath their long skirts and white orchids in their



hair. The scent wafting around them was lovely, and Pierre was delighted to see them looking and smelling so feminine.

"Mon Dieu, but I had forgotten how truly beautiful my nieces are," he said in admiration. "Jacques and Morg won't know what hit them." He chuckled in delight.

They made their way up the beach, the candles and lanterns giving off plenty of light, their stomachs growling at the smell of pork being freshly drawn from the pits.

"I can't remember the last time I had two such beauties on my arm," remarked Pierre. "I'm sure I'll be the envy of every man there."

The trio was unaware of other eyes that watched their progress, eyes that were hidden among the jungle growth...eyes with plans.

They soon made their way into the middle of the festivities and looked around for a place to sit.

"There have to be hundreds of people here," murmured Kat, looking around for Morg.

"Boy, that's for sure," agreed Frankie, her eyes seeking Jacques.

Rosalie suddenly appeared at their side, her warm brown eyes filled with excitement. "This way, we are seated at that table, and we saved you some of the few chairs on the island." She waved to a low table near the platform that had been erected, and Morg and Jacques both stood up when the group headed in their direction.

"How are you feeling tonight, Rosalie?" Kat whispered to the girl at her side. She looked at her sympathetically.

"I'm okay...my bottom is sore, but I am fine. I will make it a point not to sit too much tonight, though," she laughed lightly.



Morg had met her in the entranceway of the mansion after the girls had dropped her off and crooked his long finger at her. Her heart beating rapidly, she had meekly followed him into his study. The next few minutes had found her over his broad thighs, her buttocks bare and elevated while his hard palm had bit into her creamy bottom cheeks, turning them bright red as he reiterated the dangers of going about alone.

A few minutes in the corner, sobbing and holding her skirt up, and he had called her back to his desk. There, she had held onto the other side of it while ten swats of his "paddle" had burnt their message into her sitting area. She had howled in pain and vowed never to leave the mansion alone again! Blushing, she tried to brush those thoughts aside and concentrate on having fun.

Morg found his white shirt restricting at the neck as he watched Kat approach. She moved so sinuously, like liquid grace, he could barely take his eyes off her. He studied her carefully and compared her to Frankie. No, it was true; the girls looked almost nothing alike. After speaking with Jacques and Frenchy today, he had finally gotten the story of their mother. Both girls were lovely...but it was Kat that took his breath away.

Rosalie was young and temptingly lovely as well, and he was glad he had put a guard on her and Alyssa tonight. Alyssa was darkly beautiful, and she had been his devoted friend after he had pulled her from a mass assault situation years ago.

She had been here to help him when he had decided to build a settlement and a hideaway for he and his fellow pirates. The British government had gotten wind of his scheme and had wanted in on the

profits in return for backing him when he needed help. He had run under their Lettres de Marquee for years, so he had agreed.

Tonight, with the rum flowing freely and an island full of randy pirates, all women were fair game. The evening was young and anything could happen. He had been feeling uneasy all day again, and he wondered if it had anything to do with these feisty women. Shaking it off, he smiled down at his little spitfire as she approached him.

"Good evening, lass. Ye are looking exceptionally lovely tonight." He took her hand and drew her to his chest and dropped a kiss on her full pink lips. His loins tightened as he inhaled the fragrant scent of her, and he began planning how soon they could be alone.

Jacques was stunned. He too had stood when the girls approached, but he had been unprepared for the assault on his senses when he saw Frankie once again. He took her hand and bowed, placing a kiss on it. "Good evening, ma amie, words cannot describe your beauty. I salute you."

"And here I thought chivalry was dead," teased Frankie, pleased at his formality. His bow was worthy of the French court. She curtsied in return, her heart like a trip hammer in her chest.

"Beauty such as yours can bring new life to many things," Jacques murmured wickedly in her ear, his hardness straining at his breeches.

It was much later, well beyond dinner and the enjoyment of a pleasant evening when Jacques and Morg were called aside on some business.

While waiting for their return, Frankie and Kat decided to take Rosalie with them for a walk to the pool in the glade. "Maybe we can even sneak in a naked swim," Kat whispered to the other girls.

Giggling, the girls had just stepped into the foliage when Pierre called out to Kat, motioning her back towards him. "I'll be right back," she muttered to the other two, irritated that Pierre would interrupt her. "He probably wants to tell us not to leave the party."

"We'll wait here," Frankie promised. She and Rosalie had been partaking freely of the rum too, and she was pleasantly relaxed. It was unexpected when she was suddenly seized from behind, a hard arm around her middle and a piece of cloth jammed into her face. She fought to breathe but the drugging scent of laudanum filled her nostrils, and darkness quickly closed in on her.

Frankie awoke slowly, the effects of the laudanum slowing her senses. She was in a launch that was being pulled up onto a beach that she didn't recognize. Where was she? What had happened?

She tried to move and realized her ankles were tied with heavy ropes, and her wrists were tied in front of her. She felt warmth against her side and slowly turned her head to see Rosalie lying beside her. As the cool breeze danced across her body, she realized her

scarf top was gone, leaving her breasts bare and exposed to any lascivious view. She shivered.

Suddenly, strong, thick arms came beneath her back and legs, lifting her from the launch. "What a pretty sight," came a husky voice, and she felt a tongue lick her nipple. With a gasp she shrank back, as far as she could while being carried in a pair of tree trunk arms.

"Don't touch her," roared a cold voice Frankie had never heard before. "Chandler said they were to be unharmed and untouched."



"That's not fair," rumbled the deep voice of the man carrying her. "I don't want to hurt her, just have a little fun with her."

"Take it up with Chandler," Cold and hard replied. "In the meantime, keep your mouth off her. There are plenty of tavern wenches to slake your lust on. Women like these are for selling and bartering with."

Frankie heard Rosalie gasp and moan and realized she must have been awake and heard their comments. The poor girl must be scared to death, she thought. She wasn't any too happy herself, but she had learned long ago to focus and channel your fear and make it work for you. Her arms and legs felt very sluggish, and she couldn't think very fast yet. She knew it was the effects of the laudanum and that it would wear off eventually.

Frankie tried to pay attention to where they were going, but she didn't recognize anything. Still, she had to keep her wits about her, so she could help when Jacques came after them...and she knew he would.

She had a gut feeling he would probably spank her for leaving the party, but even that was preferable to what these men seemed to have in store for her.

She closed her eyes and prayed that he would be able to find them, and that he wouldn't be hurt or killed. She should have listened to him and Morg earlier and stayed at the party.

Her heart twisted at the idea of Jacques being killed, and she was very much afraid it was because she was falling in love with him. She didn't want to be in love with the bossy, demanding pirate, but her body had betrayed her, and she was afraid it was too late.

At least, Kat hadn't been taken, probably only because Pierre had called her back. Thank God for small favors anyway.

It wasn't long before they entered what appeared to be a massive cave entrance with three tunnels leading off in different directions. They took the right fork and finally came into a large well-lit room. The men dropped Frankie and Rosalie on a soft pile of blankets and pillows.

"Stay with these women," instructed Cold and Hard to a couple of the men hunkered in front of a small fire. "And, don't touch them. If you do, it will be your lives." He turned and strode out with the men he had come in with.

Frankie shook her head, trying to clear the last of her vision. She struggled to get to her feet and finally made it to a standing position. One of the men from the fire saw her standing and came over to her, his greedy lustful gaze fixed on her breasts where the nipples were peeking through her dark hair.

"What's this," he leered at her, his fetid breath filling her nostrils. He reached out and fingered the bud between his thumb and forefinger, making her gasp in indignation and jerk her tied hands up to knock him away.

"Keep your hands off me, you smelly goat," she hissed through her teeth.

He grabbed her hair and jerked her head back cruelly, his dirty mouth slamming into her tender lips, splitting one of them. Frankie tried to turn her head, but he ground his mouth against hers. When he lifted his head, she spat in his face.

"You need a lesson in manners he snarled," backhanding her across the face, catching her cheekbone with his ring.

Frankie gasped and fell to the floor, feeling the taste of blood in her mouth and a warm trickle on her cheek.

"You fool," snarled the other man, taking out his sword, "you were told not to touch those women!" He rammed his sword into the gullet of the man who had slapped Frankie and the pirate sank to the ground as the other men returned to the room.

"What's going on," roared Cold and Hard, striding over to the girls and the man with the bloody sword.

"He tried to kiss the wench, and she fought him, then he slapped her," returned the other man, "so I killed him."

Cold and Hard swore softly and grabbed Frankie's chin to look in her face. "Mon Dieu! I told you two not to touch these women!

He saw the swelling on Frankie's face, the blood coming from the cut on her cheek and split lip, and he was furious. "It's a good thing you killed him or you would both be dead right now," he hissed.

"I see you have the women," came another hard voice and the group looked up as a massive man strode into the room.

"Oui, Captain Chandler," agreed Cold and Hard. "We have them."

Chandler took one look at Rosalie and swore. "You bloody fools! I told you to get the sisters! You only have one of them. This girl is not the one Macalister is interested in. I should have you shot!"

"My apologies, Captain, but it was dark, and we saw the girls come into the forest. Since they go everywhere together, we assumed it was the sisters when we recognized the Captain."

"Get rid of her," hissed Chandler. "I want the red-haired one, the one Macalister is bedding. That will insure he comes after her."

"What do we do with this one?"

"Give her to the men for all I care!"

Rosalie trembled as two pairs of hands reached for her, but Frankie moved in front of her. "Wait! This girl is under Macalister's protection. If you value your lives, you will not touch her," she snapped, her eyes spitting sparks.

"I recognize her, now," added Cold and Hard. "She is the wench who works in his mansion."

"Hold it!" barked Chandler to the men who were grabbing at Rosalie. "Perhaps we can use her after all."

The men muttered among themselves, but they backed off, and Frankie felt relief course through her. They were safe for the moment, but for how long?

She noticed Rosalie's top was missing also, and realized they must have taken them for identification to Jacques and Morg. She shivered and kept her arms up to shield her breasts.

Chandler quickly assigned two more men to watch the girls and turned towards the tunnel. "Come on, we need to finish the preparations. It's only a matter of time before LaSalle and Macalister figure out where we are, and I mean to be ready for them."

"Get those cannons up on the hill ready and make sure the rear entrance to these tunnels on the other side of this island is well guarded. Get the Lady Queen into position to ward off the Nemesis. See that the Spaniard has his ship positioned at the back of the island. I don't want LaSalle or Macalister getting near here without me knowing about it!"

"Oui, Captain," replied Cold and Hard. The two men left together, leaving the girls alone again with their guards.

On the moonlit path to the mansion, Morg and Jacques stared at Monique, the bar wench from the Nasty Grubb. "Are ye sure about this, Monique?" Morg asked gruffly.

Monique looked stealthily around her. "Yes, I'm sure, Governor, I overheard Chandler giving orders to some men out back of the pub when I was going to empty the trash. I have sharp ears, and I didn't let on like I had heard anything at all, but I did. "Getting the bastards' women," was the way he put it, and I heard him mention Captain Frankie and Miss Kat specifically. Something is going to happen tonight, and I wanted you to warn you, Sir."

Monique's eyes were dark in the moonlight as she chatted with the two men. She had paid a couple of boys to get Morg's attention and bring them to the mansion path where she could talk to them privately.

There were too many eyes at the party; a person could wind up dead passing on secrets. But, Monique liked the woman Captain and her sister, and didn't want to see anything bad happen to them.

"Thank ye, lass, ye will be well rewarded for this if something is afoot. Now we'd best be giving ye back to your men there and be on our way. We'll be alert now, though, thanks to ye."

Chapter Fifteen

Jacques and Morg returned to the party in time to see Pierre and Kat arguing.

"Pierre, we are just going to the pool, it's no big deal, and there are three of us," argued Kat.

"I don't want you girls out of sight," growled Pierre, craning his neck to see where Frankie and Rosalie had gone. "I already can't see Frankie and Rosalie, have they gone on ahead?"

"Of course not," Kat snorted. "They will wait for me."

"Where is Frankie?" demanded Jacques, a fission of fear running along his spine after Monique's cryptic warning.

"She and Rosalie are waiting for me on the path to the glade pool," replied Kat scornfully. "Pierre called me back..."

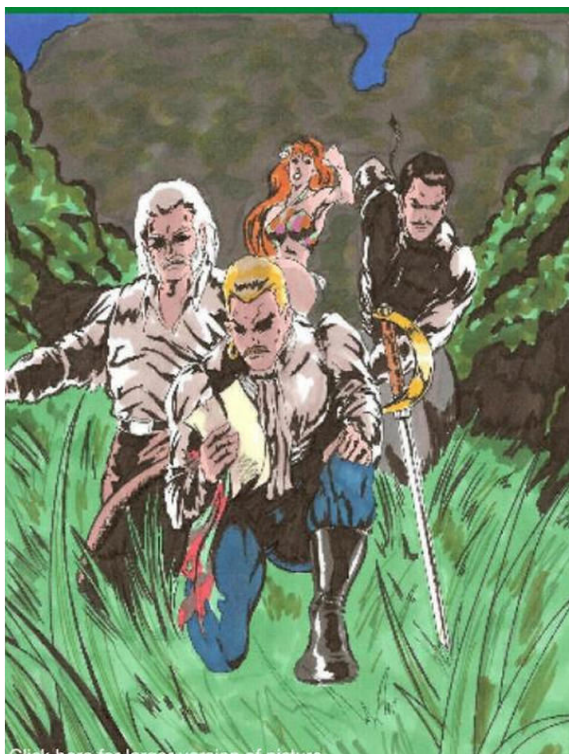
"Explain to them, Morg," ordered Jacques as he turned and ran quickly towards the path, his hand on his sword.

"We have reason to believe an attempt may be made on Frankie and Kat tonight," said Morg grimly as he lit out after Jacques. "Stay here!"

But, Kat and Pierre were already behind him, both concerned about Frankie, immediately.

Jacques had only run a few yards along the path when he saw it. Drawing his sword, he approached cautiously, looking around him. Morg was right behind him, and then Kat and Pierre.

Grimly, Jacques walked forward and pulled the sword out of the ground, sliding the paper and the scraps of material off the point.



[Click here for larger version of picture](#)

"Mon Dieu," squeaked Kat. "That is from the dresses Frankie and Rosalie were wearing tonight." Her face went pale.

Jacques read the note. Be prepared to surrender control of the Island and the Nemesis by morning, or you will never see your women again.

"Where is the Governor? I need to find the Governor," came a frantic voice from behind them.

Morg ran swiftly back towards the party. The others followed. He strode quickly to the young man who was yelling. The panting boy had blood running from a shoulder wound, and he was staggering. People were clearing a path for him. "What is it, lad?" demanded Morg, grabbing the boy by his shirtfront.

"There's trouble...at the docks," he panted. "The Lady Queen has been stolen, as well as two of the Spanish Frigates we took!"

Morg and Jacques began running towards the docks, with Kat and Pierre right behind them. The scene there was chaotic. There was a ship burning in the dock, and men were trying to put it out, other men were milling about, and the cries of the wounded rang in their ears.

Nigor came running up to Morg. "Sir, I came to the docks, and the Lady Queen was gone. Many of our faithful men are dead. They returned from the party after too much rum and were cut down, many before they even drew their swords."

"Who is behind this," roared Morg, his face reddening in frustration. "I'll have their scurvy hides for this!" He turned to Jacques. "Do you have any idea who would want the Nemesis enough to take Frankie?"

Jacques dark eyes glittered in the moonlight. "Like you, I have many enemies, Monsieur, it could be any number."

Beth came running up to Morg, her blonde hair flying out behind her, her slender figure on winged feet. "The Spaniard is in on this night's work, Governor Macalister," she panted handing him a note. "I found his guard in the hallway of the Inn with his throat cut, and he was gone, but this note was pinned to his chest."

Morg took the note and scanned it. I have a better offer from Captain Chandler than the one you have given me, Senor Macalister. See you on the gallows, one way or another. Captain Pedro

Morg swore and crumpled the note into a ball.

Jacques spoke harshly. "If Chandler is in on this, it could well be because I refused to give him second in command of the Nemesis. If he had stayed long enough, I would have given him another ship, but apparently, he has bigger aspirations."

"Aye, he not only wants the Nemesis, but the whole damned island as well," Morg snarled.

The Captain of a docked British frigate was listening to the exchange. "Thomas Blackthorn at your disposal, gentlemen. The Hawk and her crew are prepared to help you in any way you need."

Morg shook hands with the British Captain. "Thank you, Captain, as soon as I find out what we are up against, I'll let you know." He looked around as if searching for someone.

Alyssa knew the moment he was ready for her, and she stepped out of the crowd. "You needed me?" she asked softly, her black eyes glittering.

"Yes," Morg answered simply. "I need your knowledge."

Kat's eyes narrowed as she perused the island woman. It was uncanny the way she had just

appeared when Morg seemed to want her. But, no matter, if the woman could help get Frankie back, she would bless her name.

Jacques stared out over the sea. Where had they taken Frankie? He would find her...of that he had no doubt. Chandler would not be so foolish as to harm her, he was too big a coward.

But, the Spaniard, that was a different story. He had the feeling there was more going on than they knew of, and the Spaniard wanted Frankie. He had seen it in his eyes the morning he had gone to the hotel room to confront them. If he had not been wounded, he would have taken her while he had the chance. No, it was too coincidental. Frankie was more than bait for him, he was sure of it.

He felt a quick stab of pain in his heart. He had known her such a short time and already she was a part of him. He couldn't lose her now. Whatever it took, he vowed he would find her. He swung his attention back to what was going on, he needed to be apprised of all strategic tactics.

"Let's go to the Princess," said Morg, taking Alyssa's arm. "We need to look at the island charts and figure out where they may be."

"You do know it's a trap, don't you?" questioned Alyssa, her dark eyes enigmatic.

"Of course, otherwise they would not have been so cryptic in their messages." Morg's eyes glittered with anger. "They know we will not just sit here until morning, they will expect us to find them. That also tells me they are well prepared and planned this in advance."

He turned towards the Princess, and Pierre fell in step beside him. "Kat and I are coming with you."



"No!" Morg cut in. "I don't want Kat at risk. Its obvious they thought Rosalie was Kat when they took her. You keep her here, Pierre, I don't want her getting abducted too."

"I'll not stay behind when my sister is in danger," snarled Kat. "What kind of person do you think I am? To stay and hide while Frankie could be sold as a slave or god knows what?"

"Not this time, lass," Morg said heavily. He took Kat's small chin in his hand. "I've no doubt ye have plenty of courage, but I need to know that ye are safe. Besides, I've nae doubt we will have plenty of use for the Aphrodite once we figure out what's going on and where they've taken the lasses."

"Frankie is my responsibility," said Pierre gruffly. "Like you said, this is all a trap. Whoever this Chandler is, he wants you two dead. You are going to need all the help you can get."

"You are not a pirate, Pierre," said Jacques, studying his old mentor. "Let me handle this, and I'll see that neither the Spaniard nor Chandler return. I will bring Frankie back." His dark eyes were cold, and Pierre had no doubt he meant exactly what he said.

Pierre's voice dropped with deadly menace. "Hear me well, LaSalle, I will stay with Kat and the Aphrodite, but if Frankie does not come back with you, I will kill you myself."

With that, Pierre took Kat's arm and strode away.

Frankie felt beneath her skirt, but as she had figured, the small knife she had strapped on was gone.



"What are we going to do?" asked Rosalie, her terrified eyes dark in the dusky light of the cave. "I don't want to be sold as a slave!"

"Come closer, and I'll start working on the knots on your ropes. Perhaps we can get our hands free," whispered Frankie.

The girls heard the sound of booted feet coming through the entrance, and they looked up to see Pedro coming inside. He walked over to Frankie a cheerful grin on his face. He frowned when he saw the cut on her cheek. "They were not suppose to hurt you!" he seethed, reaching his fingers out to touch her face.

"What are you doing here, Pedro?" hissed Frankie, jerking her face away from his touch.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You might as well know, chica, I am saving you for my partner, Sheik Rasheed. He will not be happy to know your band of pirates took his treasure, but I'm sure when he sees you, he will forgive me for losing his gold.

Chandler and I struck a deal. We help each other, and I get you girls. Unfortunately, we did not get your sister; that would have made my revenge more complete. But, I will use Rosalie as a substitute. Rasheed will be delighted to get two such lovely women for his harem."

"I see," returned Frankie. "You offered Chandler your leadership of the Spanish sailors to get your ships back and to steal back as much treasure as you could get, and in return, he gets bait to get revenge on Jacques and take over the island, very convenient."

"I see your quick mind has put it together, chica. I like that in a woman."

Frankie spat at his feet. "You are a traitor, not only to Spain, but to our friendship as well. Jacques

was right; I should have let him kill you when we had the chance."

Pedro's eyes flashed. "My only regret is not having the opportunity to appease the hunger that has burned for you since I saw you on board my ship. But, make no mistake, by first light; you will be on my ship, El Diablo, which was taken from the harbor. You and Rosalie are my insurance for Rasheed. He loves pale skinned women."

"So you are using us to save you own cowardly hide," snarled Frankie.

Pedro shrugged. "Call it what you like, it will work and that's all that matters." His brown eyes mocked her. "Don't pine for your lover, chica, I hear the Sheik is well endowed and should bring you much pleasure." He walked away laughing.

Frankie stared after him, hatred burning within her. "We have to get free," she hissed to Rosalie. She sat back down to work on the other girl's ropes as unobtrusively as possible. "Damn, this is going to take way too long. We need another plan."

She glanced at the men at the fire and an idea struck. "I'm going to call them over here and tell them we need to relieve ourselves. They will have to untie us for that. Do you think you can help me?"

"I will do my best, Captain," whispered Rosalie fiercely. "I'll follow your lead, just tell me what you want."

"First, we have to get them over here." Frankie stood up. "Hey you!"

"What do you want Senorita?" asked the tall thin Spaniard with a moustache. He eyed her suspiciously.

"Can you help us please?" Frankie smiled ingratiatingly at them, tossing her dark hair back with a jerk of her head.

"Don't trust her," the other one snarled. "I've seen her fight."

Rosalie followed Frankie's lead. "Oh, please," she begged. "We just need to see to our needs, what harm can we possibly do, we are unarmed? Please untie us so we can."

Looking at each other, then back at the girls standing there half-naked and appealing to them, the tall thin one could not resist their appeal. "Come on," he said gruffly. "We are to take care of them and keep them in good condition, let them relieve themselves."

The men walked over and cut the ropes from their ankles and then each took a girl by the arm and led them to another small room off the cave. The tall one untied the ropes from their hands while the other stood guard, his sword drawn. When they were free, he shoved them through the blanket curtain. "No tricks now!" he warned.

Once inside, the girls quickly huddled. "I want you to pretend you have fainted," whispered Frankie. "Then, when they come in here to see about you, wait for me to attack and then hit the one checking on you in the temple with this rock." She pressed a rock she picked up from the cave floor into Rosalie's hand.

"Do you really think they will be fooled?" Rosalie asked fearfully.

"They are Spanish sailors, not pirates. They have more concern for us than a pirate would, plus they are under orders to see that we come to no harm."

"Okay then," Rosalie agreed softly. "I will do my best to help." They waited a few minutes, and then Rosalie moaned and slumped to the floor, the rock hidden at her side.

"Rosalie!" yelled Frankie. "Rosalie, what is wrong...talk to me!" She began fanning the girl on the floor.

Hearing the ruckus, the tall thin sailor peered through the curtain. Seeing Rosalie on the floor, he swore and ran into the room, the round one right behind him.

Frankie stood up as the shorter one knelt down to see about Rosalie. When the tall one looked down, Frankie yelled, "Now, Rosalie!" Then she swung with sure aim, hitting the Spaniard in the temple with the rock she clutched in her hand. He fell with a groan, clutching the side of his head.

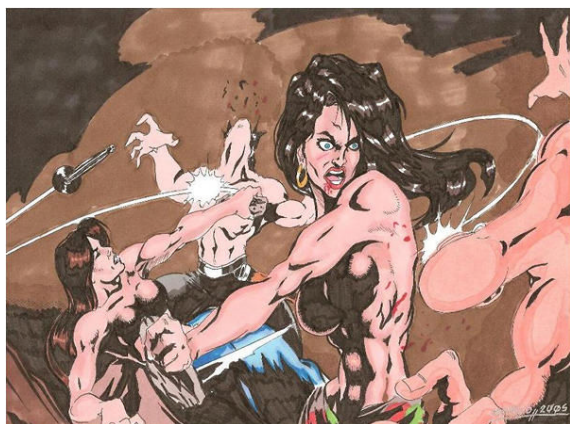
Rosalie brought her arm up on Frankie's order and slammed her rock into the side of the round one's head, and he too groaned and slumped. Rosalie quickly scrambled to her feet.

As the men fell, Frankie grabbed the knife from the Spaniard's belt and then grabbed Rosalie's hand and whirled to run.

"No, Kat, I forbid it!" thundered Pierre, his bushy brows drawn together in a fierce frown. "You are NOT to leave the Aphrodite!"

Kat glowered at Pierre, her green eyes glinting with anger. "We cannot sit here and do nothing! Mon Dieu, Pierre, I cannot believe you meekly agreed with LaSalle to sit here and wait! Frankie is my sister, for God's sake, we HAVE to go look for her!"

"She is not on the island, Kat! And, Macalister is right this time, we don't want to give them the opportunity to get their hands on you, too."



Kat paced furiously up and down. "I can hardly take staying here and doing nothing when Frankie is in danger. They are not going to kill her, of course; you know that as well as I."

She continued to pace. "They can make her wish she were dead, but they will not kill her...not unless they choose to do it in front of LaSalle for revenge. Most likely, they will kill him in front of her and sell her as a slave or worse! We CANNOT allow that to happen to her, Pierre, we can't!" Kat's voice ended on a hoarse sob.

"Shhhhh," soothed Pierre, taking her in his arms. "I know you are scared, so I am. But you know how resourceful Frankie is. She is never without a plan, and she is quick on her feet. Let's think about this logically. They can't have taken her too far. They must be holed up on one of the islands around here."

"Have you been here before, Pierre?"

"Yes, I have been around these islands before, and there are a few small ones, but not very many capable of defending against two ships like the Nemesis and the Princess."

"The docks are full of dead men," replied Kat, looking grim. "And two of the frigates we captured in the Spanish treasure fight are gone as well as the Lady Queen. That means they have the ability to take on these ships. The question is, where will they set the trap?"

Pierre went to the chest and pulled out the charts for the Caribbean area. "Here we are," he said, pointing a large island. And here are three smaller ones. They have to be on one of those, but it would take a while to check out all three of them."

"Is there anything special about any of them that you remember?" Kat was desperate. "Damn

LaSalle, I knew Frankie should not have gotten involved with that man!"

"Sometimes love makes strange partners, ma petite, and Jacques LaSalle is not quite all pirate," said Pierre mysteriously.

"What do you mean?"

"I taught him the sword years ago when he was but a lad of sixteen. He was...a superior student. He wasn't a pirate then, Kat."

"Who is he then?"

"That I am not at liberty to say...what drove him to piracy is his own private hell."

"Do you think he really cares for Frankie?" Kat asked scornfully.

"Do you think Frankie really cares for him?" returned Pierre smoothly.

"I'm afraid so," sighed Kat looked dejected. "Frankie has never shown interest in any man that I know of. She has lived only to train and find mother. None have been able to gain her attention, even before we set sail on this cursed mission. It worries me, for I fear she is falling in love with him."

"Perhaps she has finally succumbed to physical attraction at last," murmured Pierre, "and it will burn itself out."

Kat looked skeptically at Pierre. "You know Frankie is not like that. When she gives her body, I fear her heart is attached, and it will be permanent."

"Ah, ma petite, you are so young. Permanence has a way of changing when life intrudes."

"Not for Frankie, I'll bet," replied Kat, her green eyes glittering. She bent to the maps again. "How long will it take to circle the islands?"

"Probably not that long, at least once around before dawn at any rate."

"Then what are we waiting for?" She whirled, her feet silent yet determined as she made her way out the door and towards the wheel of the Aphrodite.

Pierre grimly followed her out, praying they would be in the right place at the right time. It was better than just sitting and waiting.

The men, too, were not happy with just sitting, and they jumped to his commands as he ordered them to take them out of the harbor and set a course for the east and follow the shoreline around. Macalister had headed west. If he found his target, the Aphrodite would be in the background, waiting and watching.

"Where are we, Frankie," whispered Rosalie, feeling the darkness all around her like a heavy blanket.

"I don't know," replied Frankie, honestly, feeling her way along in the dark. "But, be careful, I've heard caves sometimes have holes in the floors, and you can fall through them."

"I don't like this blackness. I cannot see my hand in front of my face!"

"I know, but this is still better than being tied up and helpless isn't it? We must stay together, though, so be careful. If you feel like I'm getting ahead of you, just say so."

"I will touch my hand to your back so you will know I am here."

"This is an island, I assume," muttered Frankie. "That means these tunnels have to end sometime."

"Oh, I know where we are," said Rosalie.

Frankie stopped abruptly, and Rosalie ran into her.

"What do you mean you know where we are?"

"We are on Kohokia. It is the only island in this group that has these extensive caves like this. I was here once, and we came in as far as the main cavern, but I have never been beyond that."

"Well, is there more than one entrance?"

"I believe my father told me there was an entrance at the back side of the island. But it is no secret. It is rumored a man from the island Chief's family got lost in here once and ended up coming out a small opening overlooking the cliffs."

"Has anyone ever gotten lost in here and never been found?" Frankie asked, shivering from the chill.

Rosalie hesitated. "It has been talked about, but I don't know it for a fact."

"Well, let's keep moving, we have to end up somewhere," said Frankie uneasily. "Wait, I need to do something, first."

The girls stopped, and Rosalie heard a tearing sound. "What are you doing?"

"I am cutting a strip off the bottom of my skirt," replied Frankie. "I do not like walking around with naked breasts. Here, can you tie this behind my back?"

Rosalie reached out and felt the ends of the cloth Frankie was holding at her sides. Quickly, she tied it off. Then she giggled. "We are in pitch blackness, and you wish to cover yourself."

Frankie chuckled with her. "Yes, well, one does get used to wearing clothes. Hold still, and I'll cut part of your skirt off for you." Finally, modestly attired once more, the girls kept moving.

"Do you smell that?" Rosalie whispered. It seemed like they had been walking for hours without stop. Rosalie was terrified of small close places, and it had taken all her courage to keep moving and not give in to her panic.

"What is it?"

"Salt air, I smell the water. We must be close to an opening."

"Yes, I smell it now. Be as quiet as you can in case there are more pirates out there. They may have known about this opening and have guards outside," Frankie cautioned. The girls used their noses and went quietly forward.

The tunnel veered sharply and became much steeper, making the climb more difficult. They had no way to know how long they had been walking, or even if it was still night.

Taking cautious steps, Frankie came upon the exit to the cavern and reached out to stop Rosalie from walking out without checking first. At least, now, they would have the moon and stars for light and not the blackness they had spent so much time in.

Quietly, they listened. Frankie's sharp ears picked up the low murmur of voices off to the right, and she peeked around the corner, and then drew back. "There are two pirates seated by a fire out there," she whispered to Rosalie. "We have to be careful."

Silently, the girls slipped off to the left and into the jungle covering. They made their way quietly a distance away from the campfire.

"Do you remember anything else about this island? How big is it? Are there any other natural shelters where we can hide until help arrives?" Frankie's questions were fast and furious.

Rosalie shook her head, "I can only remember my father talking about the caverns. And, I don't think this is a very big island. At least, I don't remember him saying anything about it being inhabited, so it can't be very big, can it?"

"Well, it might be best if we can find a high place to hide, so when it gets light we will be able to see the shore, but also be able to keep an eye on these scoundrels. They will want us back, but I don't know if they will take the chance of trying to find us in the tunnels. We must find somewhere quickly in case they come looking out here."

"There," pointed Rosalie. "Up there...that tree. It's tall and has a lot of foliage. They won't be able to see us among the leaves, but if we climb high enough, we can see the beaches...and any ships coming."

"Good idea," Frankie said enthusiastically. "Start climbing."

Chapter Sixteen

"This is where they will be," Alyssa said calmly. "It's the only logical place. It's defensible, and the cave system will hide the prisoners. They can hold off an army in that cave if need be, the entrance tunnel is long and narrow."

"Are there any other entrances?" Morg asked.

"There is a rear entrance, but it is well known, and the trip through the tunnels is slow going. Again, only one or two men at a time can get through, and there are side tunnels to get lost in and circle around in if you don't know your way."

"That's it?" Jacques bit out. "Nothing else?"

"There is the cliff side," Alyssa said slowly. "But it is not a climb for the inexperienced, and only a few have ever tried to access it. It can be quite treacherous."

"What will they be expecting?" Morg said calmly. "Let's look at it from their point of view."

"They will expect us to come charging in to save the day, of course," stated Jacques.

"So, let's give them what they expect," replied Morg silkily. "We send the Nemesis, the Princess and the British Frigate, the Hawk straight at them. Then you and I will take one of the smaller frigates and skirt the backside of the island and try for the cliff opening."

"I see," replied Jacques thoughtfully. "They will be expecting us to sneak to the back of the island and be prepared, but they won't be prepared for the cliff side."

"You got it," Morg said grimly. "All that remains, is to find the cliff opening, navigate the tunnels, rescue the girls and bring them back out."

Alyssa shook her head. This was the Morg Macalister she knew. Always ready to spit in the

eye of fate and come out on top. Loyal to a fault to those he loved. The girl was important to him because she was his, if for no other reason than that.

"What are we waiting for?" Jacques replied fiercely, the light of battle in his eyes. He would find Frankie, and when he did, he would slit the Spaniards gullet like a fish.

The little armada was already past the first island, and Alyssa knew the island with the caverns was next. They would soon know if she were correct.

"There's one of the frigates," growled Morg. "She has spotted us and is no doubt running to warn the others. Time to put our plan into action."

Morg sent Captain Blackthorn, Nigor and Frenchy to the front beaches while Alyssa used their ships for cover and went on beyond the bay of the front entrance to the island. She dropped anchor along the side where the cliffs were, the salt spray flying as the waves crashed onto the rocks. "There," declared Alyssa, "near that large boulder, see it?" She handed Morg the spyglass and pointed to the cliff opening, invisible to the naked eye.

"Oui, I see it," replied Jacques, his heart beating rapidly as he found it through his glass. Morg nodded in agreement. They looked at each other...it was time.

"Stay to the right, away from the rocks to get to the beach," Alyssa warned. "I don't have to tell you what happens if you get caught in the undertow to the left."

The men nodded, well aware of what would happen. Their bodies would be thrown like rag dolls

upon the ragged teeth of the rocks and pounded to a pulp by the merciless surf.

They could hear the gun battle beginning on the north side and knew that the enemy had been engaged. Morg figured they had enough firepower to defend themselves should they be spotted, and Alyssa knew where to find them if she had to leave and come back.

The two men made their way to the beach, swimming with only daggers and a tar covered canvas pack strapped to their bodies.

Once they cleared the water and were in the edge of the jungle, they removed their packs and took out their black clothing.

Finally dressed, they pulled out the ashes from the beach bonfire last night and covered their faces and hands in soot.

"Ever done any rock climbing, LaSalle?" Morg asked, his white teeth and the whites of his eyes gleaming.

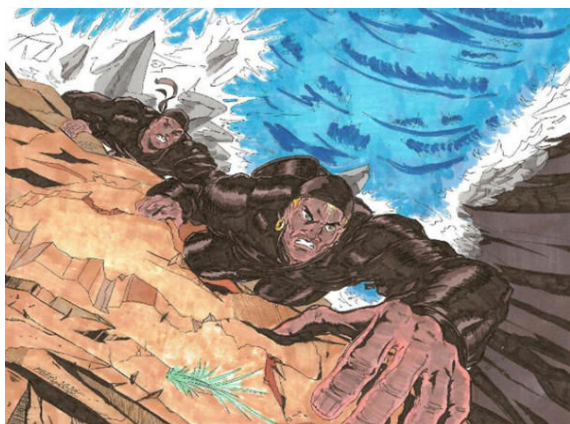
"Oui, Monsieur, but I am no expert."

"It doesn't take expertise to make this cliff, but it does take concentration."

"After you," replied Jacques evenly.

Inch by inch, the men slowly made their way up the rocky cliff. They carried ropes to tie off at the top for a quick retreat on the way back.

They could hear the sound of the fighting around the front of the island, the cannonade shots and the rifle fire. Once the ships began making their way ever closer into the bay, the cannons would be able to reach the mountain and subsequently, the caverns of the islands. They wanted to be in and out before that happened.



Morg grunted as he finally rolled onto the ledge and leaned over to give Jacques a hand. They both sat with their backs up against the wall, panting and waiting for their breathing to slow down.

Down below, they could see the ship and the glint of moonlight off the spyglass. Alyssa was watching them. Morg grinned and gave her the thumbs up sign, and then he turned and made his way inside the inky darkness.

Jacques had tied a rope around his waist and left the coil outside. Alyssa had told them the caverns would be dark, and they didn't want to risk a torch, it would alert whoever might be waiting in the dark for them. After several minutes, they saw torchlight flickering off the wall, and they advanced slowly, backs up against the cool earthen walls.

Morg moved on panther feet and before the pirate even realized he had company his throat was slit, and he was laid quietly to the side.

They froze as the mountain rumbled and small stones and dust began dropping from the ceiling. Morg smiled and whispered, "It looks like our crew has gotten through the blockade. They are starting to blast the shore. It's perfect, they will think we are coming right through the front door."

THUD! THUD! THUD! Jacques looked around uneasily as more dust and rubble came down upon them, but he followed Morg deeper into the cave system.

"We have to hurry," he hissed. "The long range cannons are getting too close to the mountain already!"

"Aye, I know that," Morg replied. "I just wish I knew how long these blasted tunnels are and where the rooms are!"

"Rosalie, we can't stay here," Frankie hissed fearfully. "Those cannon shots are getting closer. The last one was only about 100 yards away from us. They are shelling the front, trying to get in the front entrance, and the longer cannon are starting to shell the mountain. We may get killed if we stay here."

"I've been thinking we should try to get back to the front of the island," replied Rosalie uneasily. "We can't go through the cave, or over the mountain in the bombing, so the beach is our best bet."

"Agreed, staying here to wait for rescue is out of the question," murmured Frankie, watching the explosion of earth and rocks up the mountain path. "Come on, let's go!"

With a last uneasy glance at the mountain, she began to climb down the tree, wondering once again where Jacques was, if he was looking for her. Perhaps, they should have waited by the back door, but she was sure the back beach was guarded from the harbor. If only she knew what was going on! She could help them rescue her and Rosalie a lot easier if she knew where to go!

Course, at the moment, they weren't inundated with choices. She knew they must be making progress in the battle, or the cannonballs would not be landing further inland.

"This way," whispered Rosalie, making her way swiftly along the jungle path. Both girls were shocked when the hissing of a cannonball split the air around them, and they instinctively dove to the ground. The tree above them splintered and exploded into a thousand pieces and they covered their heads with their hands.

Frankie heard Rosalie cry out, and she sat up quickly. "What's wrong?"



"It's my leg," Rosalie answered painfully. "I...I think I've been hit with something."

"Stay still," commanded Frankie, trying to inspect the back of her legs. "Where did it hit you?" The air was filled with dust and she tried to see from the moonlight filtering through.

"My right thigh," whimpered Rosalie.

Frankie pulled the skirt up and felt along Rosalie's thigh, and she found it, a piece of jagged wood protruding from the flesh about two inches wide and a half inch long. She realized she could not tell how deeply it was imbedded. She grasped it gently with her fingers and gave a small tug to see if it would slide free. She felt warm liquid on her fingers and realized it was bleeding.

"OW...DON'T!" gasped Rosalie, trying to roll away from her. "That hurts, badly. Don't touch it!"

"I'm not sure I can anyway," Frankie grated in frustration. "I can't even see what the hell I'm doing! Can you walk at all? We can't stay here! We need light and water to see this. If it's imbedded in an artery, we don't want to pull it out until you are with a doctor."

"I...I don't know," cried Rosalie, trying to be brave. "Help me up, and I'll see." Frankie bent and helped her to a standing position, and the skirt fell back over the edge of the wood, causing her to cry out again.

"Here, let me cut that skirt off, it's only in the way right now, anyway," Frankie said decisively, quickly cutting the long skirt to just below Rosalie's buttocks. "There now, try to walk." She put her arm around the girl's waist as she put her weight down on her right leg.

Rosalie gasped and moaned, but she managed to limp back with her left leg. "It hurts...really badly," she whimpered, her eyes full of tears. She

looked at Frankie. "Just leave me, Captain, go on without me. I'll find a place to hide...they won't find me. I'm good at hiding. I'll just slow you down. You can go get help and then come back for me." Her soft brown eyes pleaded with Frankie.

"I'm not leaving you," replied Frankie determinedly. "Here, put your arm around my shoulders. I'll help you." Leaving Rosalie was unthinkable, but Frankie was proud of her courage. They both knew she would have a hard time surviving the shelling, let alone dodging pirates bent on recapturing her. They were almost to the beach when a mocking voice sounded behind them.

"So here you are. I knew you had to be along here somewhere. It is only logical to head for the beach when the mountain is being shelled."

He walked around the girls to face them, his eyes cruel and triumphant. "Time to leave, Frankie." He motioned to one of the big men beside him. "Take the young girl." He stepped closer to Frankie. "I'll take that knife in your waistband, chica, and if you try anything, Rosalie will pay the price...is that clear?"

Frankie glared furiously at him, but she knew she was beaten for the moment. Pedro had four other men with him, and she was hopelessly outnumbered. Besides, she didn't want to leave Rosalie. She watched in frustration as her friend was lifted effortlessly into the big man's arms.

When they reached the beach, Frankie let a piece of cloth from her dress drop unnoticed from her fingers. It had her blood on it from the cut on her face. When and if Jacques found it, he would know Pedro had taken them. His ship, El Diablo, was harbored just off the back of the island.

As the last man pushed the launch into the water and jumped inside it, she turned to stare at the island, willing Jacques to come into view. She could hear Rosalie softly whimpering in pain behind her, and she felt like whimpering herself. Her heart was heavy, and her eyes burned with unshed tears. Would she ever see him again...was he already dead? And what would Kat and Pierre do without her? She had come so close to finding her mother...but it looked like fate was trying to snatch that victory out of her hands once again.

Rosalie felt so helpless. Her leg was throbbing, frustration burned like a brand in her heart, and she was terrified; these despicable pirates had captured them once again. Frankie had lost her knife to Pedro, and they were without a weapon; the only good thing being they hadn't tied them up again. He must figure he had them well and truly captured this time.

Frankie was sitting backwards in the launch beside Pedro, and Rosalie caught her eyes. Was she trying to tell her something? She shifted to her left hip, trying to keep herself off her right leg as much as possible.

She returned Frankie's hard stare, trying to fathom her eye movements. It was obvious the lady pirate wanted her to do something, but what? Suddenly, she realized what she meant, and then she felt like a gauche fool for not recognizing it immediately.

Since "big and ugly" wasn't holding her anymore, Rosalie carefully leaned further backwards on her hip. She nodded briefly to Frankie and with the grace of a gazelle, she pushed off with her feet and slid backwards into the water, immediately

flipping to her tummy and swimming into the cool depths. Her leg stung like fire as soon as it hit the water, but she swam as fast as she could away from the launch and toward the shore.

"Should I get her?" growled the burley man who had let Rosalie slip away.

"Forget her, we don't have time to go back," snarled Pedro staring accusingly at Frankie. "You put her up to that didn't you?"

"So what if I did?" mocked Frankie. Inwardly she breathed a sigh of relief. At least the other girl was out of this. She prayed that she would find safety on the island. She had a better chance there than she did if Pedro sailed away with her.

Pedro grabbed her hair and cruelly jerked her head back. "I should just take you myself," he muttered, his bold eyes filled with lust. "After all, the Sheik would never know. It's not like you're a maid anymore...even if you were before LaSalle got in your pants." He bent his head and kissed her along the jaw line leading up to her delicate ear where his tongue outlined the shell-like fragility, causing her to shrink away.

"Leave me alone," she hissed, her eyes darkening as she shot daggers at him. His hand in her hair was tight and hurting her, but she refused to acknowledge her pain to him.

"I need to clean you up, first," he purred, gloating at her discomfort. "You've got blood on your face and dust and dirt all over you." His left hand reached out and trailed a lazy finger from her throat down to the cleft between her breasts, then slid beneath the fabric to tease and taunt a rosy peak.

Frankie slapped his hand away. Furiously, she spat out, "Leave me alone, you are disgusting to me!"

Angrily, he jerked her head back, putting his face close to hers. "You will change your tune when I'm between your thighs, Chiquita, you will be begging me to take you!"

"Never!" ground out Frankie.

He released her then and laughed. Looking at the big man across from him he said, "once we are away from the islands, make sure hot water and a tub is brought to my cabin. Frankie and I will bathe together." His mouth curved in a mocking smile as she turned her head away.

Frankie trembled, and her thoughts were despairing. Oh, Jacques, if you are coming, please hurry.

Rosalie reached the shore, finally, limping and panting as she made her way to the tall grasses before giving in to exhaustion, and she lay there resting and trying to regain her strength. Thank God, they hadn't come after her!

She moaned as the wood fragment in her leg throbbed and burned. She felt the area with her fingertips, realizing it was still seeping blood and swelling. She had to keep moving though; she couldn't give in to the pain.

She tried to think past the haze of pain. She was at the back of the island, somewhere between the West Side and the front entrance. The West Side was the cliff side. She could hide there among the rocks and make her way to the front until she recognized someone she knew who would take her to Jacques and Morg...if she could make it that far. She had to, for the Captain's sake. She had saved Rosalie's life more than once, now, and she owed it to Frankie to make sure Jacques knew where she was.



Taking a deep breath, she got to her feet, hissing as she stepped down on her right leg. The pain drove her back to the ground. So be it, she thought. If my knees are the only way I can go, then I shall crawl the whole way!

With determination, she set forward on her hands and knees, pausing only to listen now and then.

Jacques was in the lead when the ceiling in front of them began to shake and rocks dislodged, coming down in a rain of choking dust and debris. "The whole ceiling is coming down," he shouted. No sooner had he spoken than a cave-in happened right in front of their eyes.

"Back up, Jacques," yelled Morg, grabbing him by the shoulders and pulling him backwards.

Jacques stumbled backwards, and then turned to scramble back with Morg. "We can't go any further this way," he panted. "Now what do we do?"

"The way I see it," Morg answered, "the only thing we can do is go back the way we came and head to the front. We can't get to that front cavern from this direction, and the damned mountain is coming down. It will at least force them out the front, so they have to surrender."

"Unless they have taken the girls out the back way," insisted Jacques. "I say we head away from the shelling. If there is a back door, it will be the furthest away from the cannons."

"Let's go then, before we get trapped in here," Morg growled, not liking the dark closeness of the tunnels. Only the thought of the hapless women drove him on. No one took anything from Morg Macalister that he didn't want to give up! Besides, he liked Rosalie. The thought of her being ravaged and brutalized angered him.

Once that was decided, it wasn't too hard to make their way back, heading away from the shaking and rumbling. As the cannons grew more distant, the earth shook less and soon the dust and pebbles had stopped altogether

Another hour, and Jacques and Morg smelled it at the same time...salt water! They were soon rewarded with the flickering from a torch, and they cautiously approached, peering into the small cavern that opened up, checking for inhabitants. Seeing no one, they headed towards the tunnel on the opposite end of the small cavern, the only other one besides the one they had just came from.

It was only minutes before they reached the exit, and they listened for the sound of any voices. Hearing none, they looked outside.

"Look, a campfire," hissed Morg, his eyes spying the dying embers.

"No guards?" muttered Jacques, "that is odd. Why would they leave this rear exit unguarded?"

Morg knelt and checked the fire. "It's still got coals in it. They just left it without putting it out, probably in a hurry. It's starting to get dawn, and the shelling is well over the mountain. I would say the rear guard decided to cut their losses and desert, like the rats they are. They probably had a frigate on the beach down there and left."

"Come on," Jacques replied. "Let's go check it out, then work our way back along the West beach to our frigate."

It was only a scant few minutes later when they broke the jungle cover and stepped onto the beach. There were plenty of footprints, but no ship. Whoever had been here, had left.

"Look at this," growled Morg. He held up a piece of cloth.

A stab of fear raced through Jacques. It was a piece of Frankie's dress...with blood all over it. "Mon Dieu," he whispered, "have they harmed her then?" His fingers trembled and he stared at the empty water. "Where have they taken her?"

"Look!" Morg was running down the beach a few yards. "There! It looks as if someone came out of the water, small footprints! Maybe one of the girls got away from them!"

Jacques knelt and examined the prints. "Whoever it is, there is blood, not too old either. She is wounded." His heart beat fast, and he stood up and started running, following the prints to where they ended in the long grass.

Again, the men knelt down and examined the flattened reeds. "There is blood here, too," Morg spoke harshly. They followed the trail until it came back to the beach; perplexed at the wide swath it cut...much wider than a pair of feet would leave.

"Damn," swore Morg softly. "Whoever it is, she is on her hands and knees, just look at that!"

Jacques began running, Morg right behind him. Morg ran into him when he stopped suddenly. "Mon Dieu, it is Rosalie!" He pointed to where Rosalie was lying on her stomach in the sand.

Quickly, Morg ran to her side and gently turned her over. She moaned and opened her eyes, smiling in relief when she saw Morg. "The Captain...Pedro has her...El Diablo...they sailed away." Then her eyes closed, she was unable to stay conscious any longer.

Frankie had stared at the beach until they reached Pedro's ship, her eyes searching in vain for some sign of Jacques or Morg.



Pedro grabbed her by the waist and forced her up the ladder, climbing right behind her to keep her from taking to the water. As she neared the top, the big man who had carried Rosalie grabbed her arms and pulled her on over the railing.

She wasn't able to resist looking longingly at the beach as Pedro took her arm and pulled her along with him to his cabin.

"Don't bother watching for your lover. He isn't coming," Pedro sneered. "I'm quite sure he went into the tunnels, but they are coming down, and Chandler will be leaving soon, with or without the Nemesis."

"Oh, that's right," Frankie mocked. "You aren't staying around to see how the fight ends are you?"

"Why should I? I have what I want, my ship, my treasure, and my insurance for Sheik Rasheed. What do I care for Chandler? They can all kill each other off, and it wouldn't matter to me."

"You're a coward," accused Frankie hotly, "and a traitor!"

"Shut up!" he snapped fiercely. "This isn't the French court, and I can let these men use you and discard you if I chose to do so. You are lucky I'm only going to have you myself. You should be thanking me!"

Frankie raised her hand to slap him, but he twisted her arm behind her back and shoved her into the cabin. Following her in, he began to remove his clothing. "Maybe I won't wait for the bath, chica. It's obvious you haven't had a real man yet. Time to remedy that."

Chapter Seventeen

"Pierre, look at this!" said Kat excitedly, peering through the spyglass. "That Spanish ship is getting ready to pull out of the fight. It looks like it's headed around to the back of the island!"

"Keep an eye on it, Kat," instructed Pierre. "Bring the Aphrodite around, but keep her well back," he told the helmsman. Taking the glass from Kat, he looked through it, following El Diablo as she moved.

"Give it back to me, please," said Kat holding her hand out. It was only a few minutes later that the frigate dropped anchor, and a launch headed for the island. "It's Pedro," exclaimed Kat. "But what's he doing?"

"Maybe there is a double cross going on," said Pierre thoughtfully. "Let's keep watch. All that's happening on the front side is a fight, and the island looks to be getting the worst of it all."

It was nearing dawn when Gaston excitedly called to Kat and Pierre. "The launch is coming back, and it looks like there are more in it than left, but it's too far away to tell!"

"Let me see," demanded Kat, taking the glass from him. Once the launch got closer to the ship, she was able to make out the figures climbing the ladder on the side of the ship. "That's Frankie!" she gasped. "What's she doing with Pedro? And where is Rosalie?"

"I don't know," said Pierre grimly, "but we need some answers. 'Bring her hard to starboard! Head for that frigate!'" he barked.

"She's leaving," yelled Kat as the sails came out, and the launch was pulled in. The frigate was quickly setting sail for the open sea. "We'll never catch her, Pierre," cried Kat. "What is going on?"

"I don't know," snapped Pierre again. But, he was worried. The Aphrodite did not have the speed of the frigate, and she would soon outdistance them. "Where the hell are LaSalle and Macalister?"

"Whatever else is going on, that's Frankie on that ship, and we're going after her!" said Kat. "Even if we can't catch her, maybe we can at least keep her in sight and find out where they dock next." She looked around for Pierre, but Pierre was barking orders to the crew.

"You six men get below and start unloading cannons," he said. "Unload two from each side. Let's see if we can lighten this ship up enough to gain a little on the frigate. We'll dump them all if we have to, but we are not letting her out of our sight!"

He gestured to two other sailors. "You two, cut a launch and head for the Nemesis, tell them we're headed due east. And that means a stop at Tortuga regardless of where else they might be headed. Tell LaSalle to get out here, that's his old stomping grounds."

"Tortuga," gasped Kat. "That's where most of the slave auctions are held."

Pierre nodded worriedly. "Yes...it is

Frankie tried to think quickly. She was really getting tired. So much had happened in the last few days with very little rest for her, and she hadn't eaten much last night.

She knew she couldn't kill Pedro; he was the only thing that stood between her and the rest of the crew. She had no loyal followers here, only brutish men who would jump at the chance to use and discard her, leaving her to die if she survived at all. She needed to buy some time. Maybe there was

a shred of decency left in Pedro...she would find out.

"Pedro...please," she began softly, holding her hands out entreatingly. She walked towards him and put her hands on his arms, stilling his undressing movements. "Please, I am so very tired and dirty. If we are to...make love," she said haltingly, "Can we not make it pleasant? Allow me to bathe, to rest...to be properly prepared for such a handsome man as you."

"Are you saying you will come to me willingly?" growled Pedro, his eyes lighting up at the thought. He scanned her face, looking for signs of duplicity.

Frankie flushed. "I...I will not fight you...that is the best I can offer," she said hoarsely. She walked to the porthole and looked out, folding her arms across her bare midriff.

Pedro walked up behind her and put his arms around her, drawing her back into his chest. "Does it have to be like this?" he murmured into her hair. "Come away with me, Frankie, just the two of us, its not too late to start over."

Frankie felt bile rise up in her throat. "What about Sheik Rasheed?"

"I will deal with him when the time comes. I just won't tell him about you. After all, he needs me," he bragged to her.

"What's to stop him from killing you and taking me anyway," she asked, afraid to look at him for fear he would see the revulsion on her face.

"I've recovered most of his treasure," replied Pedro. "We stole it while the party was going on. He will be happy that he did not lose it all. Of course, you would have guaranteed his good will to me, but I would rather have you myself."

When she didn't answer, he turned her around and dipped his finger beneath her chin. "LaSalle is

dead, Frankie. I know he was in the tunnels, him and Macalister. The cannons brought the tunnels down. If it did not kill them, then they are hopelessly trapped and will soon be dead."

Frankie felt a fierce stab of pain in her heart, and she cried out. "No! That is not true! I don't believe you!"

"Poor Frankie," he said gently, his thumb brushing across the cut on her cheek. "I saw him, myself. He and Macalister passed within six feet of me when I was in the tunnels looking for you. I stayed still up against the wall, and they did not hear or see me. They were headed for the front, and the mountain was already coming down from the cannons."

He looked at her sympathetically. "I will give them credit, they tried to rescue you and Rosalie, but they didn't have a chance. How were they to know you had found your way out?"

"Nooo," moaned Frankie, her face going deathly pale. "It can't be true!"

"Let me help you forget about him, Frankie," said Pedro pulling her against his broad chest. "He was just a filthy pirate, anyway, not worthy of you! I will erase his touch and imprint my own, and you will belong to me!"

Frankie stood with her head bowed, not resisting, as Pedro pulled her into his arms. Mute tears began to trickle down her cheeks, and he led her to the bed. "Lay down and rest, mi amore," he said softly. "In a little while, I will send a hot bath for you, and I will wash you, myself, and bring you something to eat, and you will feel better."

Frankie allowed him to undress her and put her naked into the bunk, pulling the covers up to her shoulders. When the door closed, she turned to the

wall, great sobs wracking her body as she cried and then fell into an exhausted sleep.

"We have company, Senor," growled Luis, as Pedro stepped from the cabin. He handed Pedro the spyglass. "Emilio spotted her from up top the crow's nest."

Pedro took the spyglass and walked to the railing. Holding it up, he scanned the horizon until the ship came into view. "Is it gaining on us?" he asked, trying to make out the flag.

"No Captain, but she ees not slipping behind, either."

"It's too large to be the Nemesis," muttered Pedro. "Besides, LaSalle is dead. It must be the Aphrodite. That Pierre is a crafty old fox; he has found a way to lighten the load. He must have been watching and seen us leave the fight."

"Then he knows we have the woman?" questioned Luis, trying to follow Pedro's thinking.

"I'm quite sure he knows," answered Pedro dryly, "or he would not bother following us."

"What are we going to do, senor?"

"Keep an eye on her for now. If she begins to gain on us, it means they are dropping the canons. Without those, she will be a fat sitting duck in the water, and we can sink her at will. She cannot outmaneuver us, she is too large." He handed Luis the spyglass. "Let me know the minute it changes. I'm going to get some rest."

"Si, senor."

Frankie felt his mouth on her breast, suckling the rosy peak, bringing it to throbbing life. With his thumb and finger, he lovingly rolled the other soft bud into a hard ache, the sensations flashing hot jolts straight to her sex, making her wet and

yearning. She moaned softly, clenching the sheets between her fingers, her back arching as his fingers trailed down her stomach and into that hot wet cleft, finding the straining center of her.

"Oh, Jacques," she cried out as her hips lifted from the bed, seeking his huge male shaft in passionate invitation to fill her, to make her shudder with wild sensation, to fulfill her completely.

"No!" exploded an angry voice. "NOT Jacques...PEDRO!" Frankie's eyes sprang open, still dazed and filled with languorous desire to meet the fiercely glinting brown eyes of Pedro.

The desire left her body as she realized she had been dreaming, and it was not Jacques at all. Great disappointment filled her, and she stared defiantly back, refusing to answer him.

Pedro stared at her, watching her eyes change and become guarded, all desire leaving her face, and he hissed in frustration. "I WILL make you forget that filthy pirate if it's the last thing I do! You will beg for ME to fill you, to satisfy your need, and you will come when I say so and ONLY when I say so, chica!"

So this is it, thought Frankie. I have to endure his touch, and I cannot fight him. She turned her face to the wall and willed herself to lie still. What did it matter anyway? Jacques was gone. It was then that she realized she must surely have fallen in love with him. How had this happened to her? A single tear slipped from beneath her closed eyelid.

"Oh, no you don't," snarled Pedro. "You are not going to get away with that, mi amore. You WILL respond to me, you will see. But, for now, your bath is ready."

Frankie watched him cautiously as she got up and walked to the tub of steaming water and stepped into it. She was relieved at the reprieve,

however slight, and she let out a sigh of contentment as she sat down and let the hot water rush over her skin, enjoying the feel of its stinging warmth.

Pedro watched her greedily, his feelings mixed. He wanted her badly; he burned with lust for her. It galled him that LaSalle had already had her, and he was determined to make her writhe beneath him, making her beg for it.

But, he would not be unkind to her if she would give him a chance. He was not an animal, after all, regardless of her branding him a coward. He didn't call it cowardice; he called it taking advantage of a good opportunity, like any smart man would do.

He got up and quickly stripped himself of his clothes, his manhood already erect. He picked up the bar of soap and the cloth and walked over to kneel beside the tub. He soaped up the cloth and began to wash the cut on her cheek.

"It's not a deep cut, mi amore," he crooned softly. "I have some ointments that will insure there is no scarring to mark your beautiful face. He gently rinsed the soap off and washed the rest of her face, easing away the dirt and dust; tenderly dabbing clean the cut on her lip.

Then he began to pour water over her long hair, lathering it up with the scented lavender soap and then rinsing it. Once that was accomplished, he soaped up the soft cloth once again and began to wash the rest of her body starting with her neck. He was going to enjoy this.

Frankie sat quietly, allowing him to do as he wished. A small part of her mind had closed him off, thinking of Kat and Pierre, her mother, and most of all...Jacques. When his finger slipped inside her sex, she gasped at the intrusion and pushed his hand away. "Don't!" she snapped.



Pedro returned his hand, his fingers once more slipping into that secret cleft, searching for the soft bud inside, and she tried to push him away again. "Do not resist me, chica," he said warningly. "I will have you, but I would prefer your cooperation. And you did promise me that."

"What good are promises in this pirate's life," mocked Frankie, a flash of the old fire back in her eyes. "You, who are a coward and a liar, should understand that perfectly well."

"Madre de Dios," swore Pedro standing up. He lifted her wet body out of the tub and strode to the bed. "I will teach you to lie to me," he snarled as he followed her down, pinning her to the bunk while he positioned himself between her thighs.

Frankie couldn't help it, she screamed and began to fight him, trying to buck him off her as she felt his hard shaft trying to penetrate her unwilling body. "You want it the hard way, I'll take it the hard way," growled Pedro, grabbing both her wrists in one hand and

pinning them above her head. His mouth descended on her nipple, and he suckled hard, deliberately hurting her.

Suddenly, a pounding sounded on the door, and the urgent voice of Luis penetrated the wood. "Captain, come quick! The Aphrodite...she is gaining on us!"

"Mi Dios," he swore furiously, getting up. "This is not over, chica, I will be back to finish this!" Grabbing his clothes he slid into them, running for the door as he strapped on his sword.

Frankie lay there, panting and stunned...the Aphrodite? Kat and Pierre, she thought joyfully as her heart surged with hope.

She got up and looked around for something to dress with. It was time Frankie stopped moping she decided, her usual fire returning as she searched the cabin. This time, when Pedro came back, he would find her claws and teeth had resurfaced!

The hell with getting dressed, she finally decided! It was time to get out of there, and clothes would only slow her down, anyway. Frankie strode to the door Pedro had just exited. Sliding open the little window, she spoke to the guard. "You can take this tub

out of here now, we are finished with it."

She stood aside as the man opened the door and cautiously entered gaping at Frankie standing there stark naked with a smile on her face. With his eyes glued to her breasts, he had no idea what hit him as he slid into unconsciousness. Frankie dropped the water pitcher she had hidden behind her back and made for the open door.

In a flash, she was at the railing, then diving in a clean, arcing free fall that took her headfirst into the ocean. She cut back to the surface and veered right, heading for the stern of the ship. It passed her quickly, and she began slicing through the water with

clean even strokes, heading for the ship she could see in the distance. The Aphrodite!

Frankie loved the sea and was a strong swimmer. She risked a glance over her shoulder to see if they had spotted her and was dismayed to see the ship heading into a hard right to starboard, meaning they knew she was gone. Determinedly, she fixed her eyes on the ship in the distance and swam for all she was worth. It would take them a few minutes to get on course behind her, and with the Aphrodite coming straight at her, maybe she had a chance....maybe. She swam furiously.



Suddenly, she felt a backwash of waves coming over her, and her heart sank, thinking they were upon her already. She glanced behind her and was shocked to see the black ship cutting between her and El Diablo, so close its wash was sending her bobbing on its waves. The Nemesis! Where had she come from?

She saw a man pulling off his boots and peeling off his shirt at the railing high above her, but she couldn't tell who it was. Then, he was diving, and she saw his long ponytail stream out behind him as he came down. It looked like...Jacques! But how could that be? Jacques was dead! Wasn't he? She turned and began swimming again for the Aphrodite. Whoever it was, she didn't want to be captured again, especially if it wasn't Jacques!

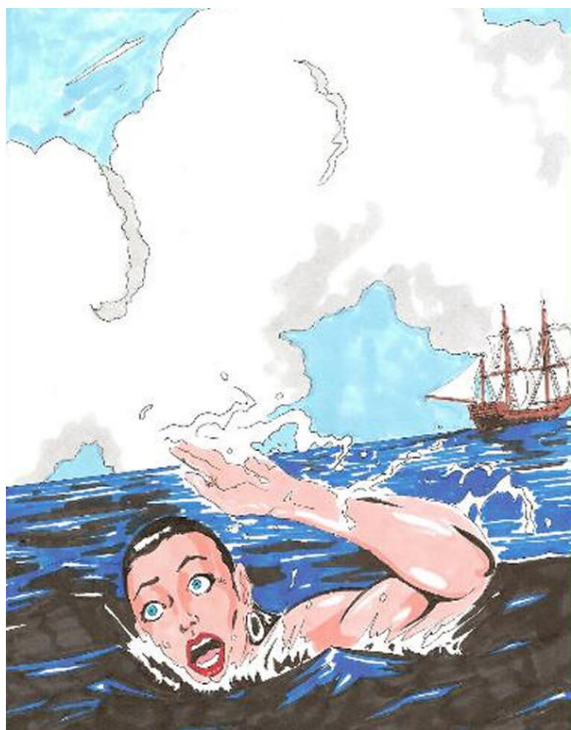
She heard the cannon fire and knew the Nemesis was engaging the Spanish frigate. Still, she swam for the Aphrodite, hoping Chandler would at least blow Pedro to hell and back for deserting him. It had to be Chandler; there was no other explanation. With Jacques dead, he had gotten his wish. Tears stung her eyes, but she swam furiously.

"FRANKIE!"

She heard her name being called, and she risked turning around again...it sounded so much like Jacques, but that could be wishful thinking, and this could be a trap. Mon Dieu! Whoever it was, they could swim fast...they had gained yards on her, already!

She turned and began swimming away again from that black sleek head, putting forth as much effort as she could.

"FRANKIE FONTAINE...IF YOU DON'T STOP, WHEN I CATCH YOU I'M GOING TO SPANK YOUR ASS HARD."



Frankie stopped then and turned around in shock. It WAS Jacques! No one could mistake that threat and that voice. "JACQUES!" she screamed in delight and began swimming back towards him, her heart beating a happy tattoo.

They met, and Jacques's brows were drawn together in a thunderous frown. "What the hell do you think you are doing...swimming away from me like that? You've already got one spanking coming; you just added another one!" He grabbed her and held onto her, treading water with her.

Well, this wasn't the sweet reunion Frankie had hoped for, and she got angry herself. "I was told you were dead, you idiot! Why do you think I was swimming away? I didn't have any desire to get captured by another randy pirate, the one I just left was bad enough!" If she could have stomped her foot, she would have, but treading water made it a bit difficult.

Jacques was quickly feeling her out beneath the water, realizing she was totally naked. "Where the devil are your clothes? What have you been doing? Screwing that bastard Pedro after all?" he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Well, what do you do with the women you capture," taunted Frankie, thoroughly angry now at his ridiculous attitude. "Serve them chicken on rice and ask their permission? GO TO HELL!"

She turned and began swimming for the Aphrodite again, too furious and hurt to talk, anymore. She wouldn't tell him anything! To think she had wasted perfectly good tears on this boorish brute!

Jacques stared after her, feeling frustrated and angry! He had come straight after the Aphrodite, heading due West towards Tortuga as fast as he could come after almost getting killed in those

blasted tunnels! He'd heard from three different sources that this was where they were surely headed, so he had put to sea without even a break to come after this headstrong woman and this was the thanks he got?

When Frenchy had spotted Frankie leaping from the Diablo through the spyglass, they had come up on the side to cut Pedro off and Jacques had come after her, wanting to make sure she was safe himself. The fact that she was indeed totally naked had concerned him. What if Pedro had hurt her? It wouldn't be uncommon, he had had her long enough. Worse yet, what if she had enjoyed it?

Growling with fatigue and anger, he began swimming after her again. He wanted answers, and he wanted them...NOW

What had she been doing to get herself caught like that in the first place? Didn't she know he had many enemies who would jump at the chance to get even with him, using whatever means they could? Why had she gone walking in the jungle with just Rosalie and Kat after dark with hundreds of drunken pirates around?

These questions had needled at him, and he had worried about it all the time he was chasing after her. The woman belonged to him; didn't she realize that? And Jacques LaSalle shared with no one! If Pedro had touched her in any way he was a dead man!

Jacque was exhausted, furious and frustrated, and it showed as he sped after her, reaching her just as she was pulling herself onto a rope ladder that Pierre had thrown over the side of the Aphrodite. He grabbed for the rope and his broad

shoulder coming up beneath her bottom boosting her up the ladder.

"Get AWAY from me," yelled Frankie, trying to scramble on up the ladder as he climbed up beneath her. She slapped at the top of his head.

"I'm not going anywhere until I have some answers," he snarled, following her up.

"I'm not telling you anything!" Frankie was just as furious as he was, and she kicked out, her knee catching him in the chin and making him fall back into the water. She started scrambling for the top as he grabbed the ropes again, taking the steps two and three at a time as his long legs made the reach, overtaking her again as Pierre grabbed her arms to pull her over the side.

"Come back here," he demanded grabbing her arm as he swung his leg over the side of the Aphrodite and slid onto the deck. Frankie struggled and kicked against him.

"What's going on here," roared Pierre, who had seen the whole thing from the spyglass as the two met in the water.

He had been very relieved to see the Nemesis spring up out of nowhere, for he knew they didn't have enough cannons left to successfully engage the Diablo. LaSalle must have sailed like the hounds of hell were on his heels to get here this fast!

"Let go of me," shrieked Frankie, her fist flying at Jacques's jaw. "You're an idiot, a brute, a bastard..."

That did it. No one questioned Jacques LaSalle's upbringing. He might be a lot of things, but a bastard wasn't one of them! He propped his knee up on the bottom rail and yanked her face down across it, lifting her toes off the decking. His left arm and hand held onto her squirming wet body while his right arm went high in the air. When his right arm



descended and his hard palm connected in a blistering spank, she screamed and kicked out, her arms flailing helplessly.

"AAIIIEE...DAMM YOU.... LET GOOOOO OF ME!"

But, Jacques didn't intend to let go of her just yet. He had had enough, and now she was going to get her ass paddled.... hard! He didn't care who was watching!

The crew got quite a show as Captain Frankie struggled and screamed helplessly over Jacque's knee, her butt turning redder and redder as his palm landed spank after burning spank on her upturned bare bottom. When she finally slumped in defeat, he stopped spanking her, stood her up, then hefted her over his shoulder and headed for her cabin, his long strides eating up the deck.

Kat started after them, but Pierre took her by the arm. "No, let them work it out," he said softly.

Kat started to speak, but Pierre quelled her with a look. As she strode away, she heard one of the men say. "I don't know which one to feel more sorry for, the Captain or LaSalle." He snickered as his friend standing near him agreed.

Chapter Eighteen

Frankie reached back desperately to try to rub her throbbing buttocks, but Jacques pushed her hand away. She was squirming and bucking from the ache, her face was bright red with embarrassment, and she was trying valiantly not to burst into tears. She would not give him the satisfaction!

"You deserve to feel the burn," he growled unsympathetically, holding her thighs firmly as she gyrated her hips in and out in an effort to relieve the awful stinging. If she had been standing on the floor, no doubt she would be dancing from one foot to the other and clutching her backside!

Jacques pushed open her cabin door, stepped inside and set her on the floor, holding her arms in both hands in case she tried to attack him again. "Are you going to behave, now?" he asked cautiously, finally lifting one hand to brush his thumb across the cut on her cheek, then bent to kiss the bruised area gently.

It was the tenderness that was her undoing. Head bent, she began to sob softly, tears running down her cheeks in swift profusion. The last two days had been horrendous, and the culmination of those days in a humiliating, painful spanking in front of her crew had been bad enough, but it was Jacques's gentle kiss that finally opened the floodgates where his harsh spanking had failed.

"Come here," he said gruffly, pulling her into his arms. "Sshhhh..." he said, his hand caressing the scarlet cheeks, easing some of the sting and burn. "What happened to your face, ma cherie?" If Pedro had done this, he was a dead man.

"T...the man who did it is dead," she sobbed. She snuggled into his shoulder, her arms creeping

around his neck, his warm bare skin feeling delicious against her own cool body.

"Did Pedro hurt you?" he asked softly, tipping her chin up to look into her tear washed eyes. He wanted to see the truth in them when she answered.

Frankie blushed and replied. "Were it not for the Aphrodite, he would have succeeded. Does that answer your question?"

"Mon Dieu, he is a dead man," he said fiercely. That explained why she wasn't wearing any clothes. "You can tell me the rest later."

Frankie wondered how many times you could kill a man. Many times over if Jacques had his way, it seemed. She felt the insane desire to laugh for some reason, and she realized how very tense she had been and still was. Right now, she wanted nothing more than to curl up in Jacques's arms and make love, but she knew it wasn't possible, not yet.

"I need to get dressed," she whispered, trying to pull away from him. She could tell he was feeling the same way she was, considering something was becoming awfully hard inside his pants as she pressed up against him. Shyly, she reached down and cupped the bulge, lightly running her thumb across it.

"I want you," he answered hoarsely, pulling her up tight against him, kissing her bare shoulder.

She shivered as she felt desire tug at her senses, drugging her, making her juices flow, and she whispered, "we can't, we have to go."

He reached down and between her legs, feeling the hot wetness in her cleft and knew she was ready for him. Quickly, he pulled his shaft free of his pants. "Put your arms around my neck," he instructed softly.

Placing his hands beneath her thighs, he lifted her, her legs obligingly spreading and coming around his hips, and then slowly, he began to lower her onto his throbbing organ, her tightness almost driving him to the brink of orgasm, immediately.

Frankie gasped in delight as he slowly filled her, her body stretching to accommodate his hardness once again, and she instinctively began to arch her back and buck her hips forward to receive all of him, then move back out.

Jacques allowed her to ride him while he held her, knowing they were both in need of release, and it would not be long before the tension in her body would explode, allowing him to take that same opportunity. When he felt her body began to tremble, and the keening cry come from her lips, he knew she was almost there, and he thrust up hard into her, sending her over the edge as her body shook and contracted with the force of her release. A few final thrusts, and he was there with her, exploding into her with a groan. At last, he let her slide down his body, and her feet touch the floor, holding her close, while their breathing slowed and returned to normal.

"You are so beautiful, so responsive," he murmured. "I wonder if I'll ever get enough of you?"

You mean you wonder if you will ever get bored with me, she thought, but she did not put it into words.

Swiftly, she dressed, Jacques watching her, wondering what was going through that raven-haired head of hers now. She was so unpredictable, fiery and tempestuous one minute and sobbing and cuddling the next. Every inch the fierce captain of her ship, yet soft and yielding when he entered her, her eyes round saucers of surprise and wonder. She

was like no other woman he had ever met, and she intrigued him.

"Jacques, the Nemesis has grappled the frigate. We are ready to pull alongside." Pierre's voice came through the door after the tentative knock.

"We're coming, Pierre," he answered, never taking his eyes off Frankie. He could see her transforming before his eyes, and it fascinated him. Would she ever be totally his?

Frankie dressed quickly, aware that Jacques was watching her with questions in his eyes. She felt inadequate at that moment and wondered if she really pleased him, or if she was just his new toy for the moment.

Her own mother had been taken before they had had the chance to talk of these things. She only knew that women were supposed to please men, yet she knew little of what went on.

She found Jacques's body fascinating and wondered how she compared to lovers of the past. She knew she did not like the idea of him taking someone else as a lover, just as he did not like the thought of her being with Pedro.

"Time to go," she said, shaking off the thoughts. She followed him out of the cabin.

"Here is Chandler's accomplice," yelled Frenchy, spying Jacques from the Diablo. The Nemesis was grappled up to the other side, and Frenchy and Pierre had the Diablo sandwiched between them. He put his sword point into Pedro's back and poked.

Jacques jumped the rails and faced Pedro, Frankie right behind him. "See that the treasure is reloaded to the Nemesis," he instructed Frenchy, taking his sword. "Time to die," he said cheerfully to Pedro, and he pulled his arm back.

"Wait," said Frankie, stepping boldly forward. "You can't just kill him in cold blood, Jacques. You two aren't even fighting."

"Do not interfere, Frankie," replied Jacque coldly, his dark eyes glinting with warning. He would brook no interference in this matter. "He kidnapped you and tried to hurt you: he will die. Out here we wait for no court, justice is served quickly."

"Rape?" Pedro laughed cruelly. "Is that what you call it, Frankie? Seems to me that you offered yourself to me, isn't that right?" He turned to Jacques. "I hope she was as good for you as she was for me, I thoroughly enjoyed her," he sneered.

With a roar, Jacque put his sword through Pedro's stomach and sliced up. Pedro fell to the deck, his entrails spilling out as Frankie watched silently, never acknowledging his words. It would not look good to show shock or fear.

She stared at Jacques for a moment, then turned on her heel and left the Diablo, Jacques's furious face standing out in her memory more than the death of Pedro.

Jacques started after her, but Frenchy stepped in front of him. "Not now, Jacques, we have work to do, my friend." Jacques hesitated, then nodded curtly to Frenchy and headed for the Nemesis.

Frankie returned to the Aphrodite, feeling stunned by what Pedro had said. Would Jacques believe him? How could she prove it hadn't happened that way? Not like that, anyway.

"Lets get out of here, Pierre," she said painfully. "Head for Pirates Hideaway. It won't be much longer before Mother will be here, and maybe we can take her and go home."

Kat followed her into the cabin and threw her arms around her sister. "I'm so glad you are back,

Frankie, we were afraid we wouldn't be able to catch you before reaching Tortuga."

"I'm glad you followed us, Kat," whispered Frankie, her voice raspy with unshed tears. "I had almost given up until I heard you were out there. You inspired me to keep fighting."

The two girls clung to each other, each taking comfort from the other.

Jacques watched Frankie through his spyglass now and then, trying to curb his anger and disgust. Had she really slept with Pedro? Had she lied to him? What if she had slept with Pedro? He argued with himself. It wasn't like he owned her or anything. "Okay, fine," he muttered to himself, "but why did she have to lie to me? And, I DO own her, she belongs to me."

"Talking to yourself?" came Frenchy's amused voice from behind his right ear.

"What is it with this woman, Frenchy," he asked his old friend, feeling thoroughly aggravated with himself. "Why do I burn for her?"

"Well," began Frenchy. "They say every man has one woman he never forgets. And he either ends up marrying her, or fantasizing about her for the rest of his life. I guess they call it one true love my friend." He clapped Jacques on the shoulder.

"I'm not in love with this stubborn wench!" declared Jacques. "Half the time I feel like strangling her where she stands! And she is not well versed in the ways of pleasuring a man," he added grumpily.

"I'm sure you'll have no trouble teaching her," returned Frenchy, hiding a sly smile.

"If I can keep her from taking my head off first," muttered Jacques looking through the spyglass again. "She is a fighter, that one; she has earned her reputation as the she devil that men call her."

But I will have her begging me to take her...." he trailed off as Frenchy smiled a Cheshire cat smile.

"She is just like her mother," Frenchy replied, thinking of Lady Frontenac. "You will not tame her with just the flat of your hand, my friend, you will have to earn her heart, or she will never belong to you."

"She already belongs to me! She just doesn't know it.... yet!" Jacques closed the spyglass and strode away, impatience in every step.

Frenchy watched him go and grinned delightedly. Frankie was giving him fits...and he loved it. It was about time he met a woman who was just as headstrong and stubborn as Jacques LaSalle himself. Yes, they would make a good pair, provided one didn't kill the other before they came to that realization.

"How is she?" Morg asked Alyssa as she came from Rosalie's room.

"She is resting as comfortably as I can make her," responded Alyssa, the pan of bloody water in her hands. "The doctor removed the wood, and it has bled freely. I applied a hot poultice with medicinal herbs to keep infection down. With care and cleanliness, she should recover fine." Alyssa smiled up at him. "She is sleeping now, and you should get some rest, too."

"Aye, I will soon," he answered looking beyond the door into Rosalie's room. He had taken a hot bath, but he hadn't been able to rest, yet. And he didn't think he would until Kat returned.

"Would you like some herb tea?" Alyssa asked solicitously. She knew what was bothering her friend. It wasn't just Rosalie, but the little red headed girl had gotten under his skin.

"No thank ye, Alyssa," he replied wearily. When he saw Rosalie stirring, he went in and sat down by

the bed. He felt deep concern for her even though he was angry with her and Kat both. Although Kat and Frankie had free reign of the island, he had thought they would have enough sense not to take off alone with the rum that was flowing among the randy pirates and crews of the ships in the harbor. It had been asking for trouble.

Thank God, Pierre had called Kat back. Not just for selfish reasons, but Morg knew pirates. They would have taken Rosalie along for the ride and given her to the men to be used like a whore and disposed of. Morg was no saint, but he didn't believe in letting men tear a woman apart like a bunch of dogs...and some would! Pirating seemed to attract not only the bitter and vengeful, but the scum of the earth as well. Unfortunately, all were painted with the same sour brush of hatred when the word pirate was mentioned.

"I'm sorry, Sir."

Morg started from his reverie to find soft brown eyes looking up at him, remorse shining in their depths.

"We'll discuss it later, lass, ye just concentrate on getting well."

"Yes, Sir," whispered Rosalie quietly, laying her head back down and closing her eyes, obediently. Then she popped back up again. "Have they come back, yet?" She was concerned for Frankie.

"Nay, lass. Jacques has taken the Nemesis after the Spaniard; he will bring her back."

"Yes, no one can defeat the Nemesis. Right, Sir?" Rosalie looked beseechingly at him.

Sensing she needed reassuring, Morg spoke firmly. "Aye, no one has ever defeated Jacques LaSalle and the Nemesis. With the Aphrodite to help, they are assured a quick victory. Captain Frankie will return, never fear, lass."



"I hope so," Rosalie replied. "She saved my life twice. She doesn't deserve to be a harem slave, but I think they would have to kill her first." She grinned then.

"Harem slave?"

"Yes, Pedro intended to give Captain Frankie and her sister to this Sheik Rasheed as harem slaves in return for his forgiveness for losing the treasure."

"If ye feel strong enough, lass, tell me more," Morg urged, leaning forward to listen. He thought they had taken Spanish treasure, not Arab treasure. He listened while Rosalie explained all that she had heard.

"Rest now, lass," Morg ordered finally, standing up to go. "Alyssa will be checking on ye if ye need anything."

"Yes, Sir."

Morg went to the stables and saddled Aramis. He was concerned with what Rosalie had told him. If Pedro had been in cahoots with an Arab Sheik, then the island could be in danger. This Sheik Rasheed might come after the treasure. It was time for a meeting with Nigor and the other ship captains.

As he was making his way down the hill, Nigor was coming to meet him. "Sir, there is a fleet of three frigates at the mouth of the harbor, awaiting permission to come in."

"Who are they?" Morg asked.

"They say they are here at the request of Jacques LaSalle," Nigor replied.

"Bring them in, Nigor. Jacques has been expecting them."

"Aye, Sir." Nigor hurried back to the launch and sent them off.

Morg sent Aramis walking towards the beach. He waited patiently as the ships docked, his green



eyes searching the decks, waiting. Finally, he saw her. As she stepped out of the cabin, he got his first glimpse of Victoria Fontaine. Frankie and Kat's mother had arrived!

He dismounted and tied Aramis off to a tree limb and strode down the dock to the ship.

Victoria was standing at the railing, searching for a glimpse of Frenchy. It concerned her that the Nemesis was not in port. Was something wrong? She walked to the railing and perused the settlement, her eyes lighting on the strong figure coming towards her. When he stopped in front of her, she looked down and smiled.

"Governor Morgan Macalister at your service," Morg said, his white teeth gleaming in a smile. She did indeed look like an older version of Captain Frankie, but more genteel and refined.

"I am pleased to meet you, Monsieur," replied Victoria, her voice soft and feminine. "My name is Victoria, and I am looking for the Nemesis."

"She is not in dock at the moment but should return by tomorrow," Morg bowed gallantly. "Jacques and Frenchy have been expecting ye."

"Are you a friend of theirs?" Victoria's bright eyes were inquisitive.

"Aye, we are well acquainted. There is a fine hotel on the island if ye would like lodgings away from the ship for a while, or ye are welcome at the mansion. I'll have Alyssa prepare a room for ye."

The Captain that flanked Victoria spoke up, "I think it would be best if you stayed on board until the Nemesis returns, madam."

Morg's eyes gleamed. "A wise precaution, but I assure ye, she has nothing to fear here."

"There is always something to be feared, Sir, it pays to be prepared at all times." His strong angular face was steady and cautious, and Morg

could understand his reticence to let the lady out of his sight.

"Aye, ye are a wise man," Morg replied honestly. "I'll leave ye then, as I have work to do. Welcome to the Pirates Hideaway. Nigor will be along presently to collect harbor fees."

Soon the ship's officers and Captain's were seated around Morg's table in his library. "Gentlemen, we could have a problem." He went on to explain the attack on the Nemesis and the takeover attempt and why. "There is a possibility that this Sheik may launch an attack against the Hideaway if he gets wind of who pulled off the raid. I want everyone to be on alert over the next few months, starting right now. We have done our best to eliminate witnesses, but as ye all know, pirates who take the oath can just as easily go back to being sailors for their country and spreading information, or even selling it by jumping ship at a port."

One of the frigate Captains spoke up scornfully. "Well, I 'ope Captain LaSalle has done got rid of this Pedro and doesn't let Captain Frankie go soft again!"

They murmured their agreement and Morg nodded. "I'm sure he'll take care of him this time, gentlemen, I've nae doubt about that."

The meeting was dismissed, and Nigor stayed behind for a few minutes. "Do you really think we'll be attacked, Sir?" he asked evenly.

"I don't know," Morg answered bluntly. "But, I'm a careful man, as ye know. I nae like to take chances if it can be avoided."

"Aye," growled Nigor. He looked around as if searching for something...or someone.

Morg assumed his sense of uneasiness was being displayed and discounted it until Nigor had gone, and he saw a movement in the shadows.

Drawing his sword, he stalked towards the trees. "Who's there?" he growled. He relaxed when Alyssa stepped from behind the trees, a smile on her face. "And what are ye doing skulking about, lass?" Morg smiled, but his eye's pinned hers in a stare that commanded an answer.

Alyssa glanced after Nigor and smiled. "Just getting some fresh air." Her dark eyes were mysterious, and Morg wondered if something was going on between her and his trusted first mate. He glanced at Nigor's disappearing back and then again at Alyssa. She had walked on, though, and he couldn't see her face anymore. "Interesting," he thought. He would have to keep an eye on those two.

It was the next morning when the Aphrodite and the Nemesis sailed into the harbor. The sun was just rising, casting a fiery glow behind their sails, and those watching could have said the Nemesis was sailing in straight from hell. The black ship against the fiery background was an amazing sight, and it was easy to see why people allowed fear and myth to inspire awe of Jacques LaSalle.

While Jacques might not have been the devil incarnate, he certainly felt like it. His mood had not improved overnight, and he was growling at everyone. After a bad night, he had convinced himself that Frankie must have slept with the Spaniard after all, and his jealousy was putting him a mood as black as his ship.

Frenchy, however, was in a jubilant mood. His wife was here, and he was more than ready to see her again! He slipped the Nemesis into the berth

next to hers and waved to her. Victoria waved back, smiling with pleasure.

Jacques was watching the Aphrodite that Pierre had docked just before them, and he saw Kat and Frankie headed down the gangplank, and coming their way. From the grim look on the girls' faces, he was sure they had seen Victoria at the rail of the ship, awaiting the Nemesis.

"Is this how you wish Victoria to meet her daughters?" Jacques asked with concern.

Frenchy looked, and his face went sour. "Merde! No dresses or anything...if Victoria does not recognize them, I'm not sure she would wish to own two such unladylike daughters!"

The two men hurried down their own plank and intercepted the girls as they were coming upon the Nemesis' berth. Jacques spoke to Frankie. "You surely cannot mean to meet your mother dressed like that?" he said dryly. "She is a woman of culture, and nobility. She would not appreciate seeing her daughters dressed like hellions."

"Well, perhaps we aren't the Duke's daughters, so we don't mind being dressed like this," Kat replied snidely.

Morg had been watching since dawn and had seen the events about to happen. Hurrying over to the four, he caught Kat's last comment. "Ye certainly have a sharp tongue, lass. That was uncalled for." His green eyes pinned hers in a fierce gaze. He devoured the sight of her hungrily even though he was unhappy with her temper.

"Well, then, if you are MY daughter, ma petite, I will be happy to teach you some manners and see to it that you are taught proper dress as befitting your mother's station," Frenchy returned proudly, his brown eyes flashing. "And a trip over my knee would be the first lesson."

"Frenchy? What is going on here?" came a soft voice from behind the men. They turned, and there stood Victoria, her gentle eyes so like Frankie's were questioning, wondering why he had not come to greet her. Had he not missed her as much as she had him? Her gaze scanned the two girls the men had been talking to. She was shocked to see a young girl that looked so much like her! Her face going pale, she stepped closer. "Who are you?"

Frankie trembled with reaction. Five years they had waited for this moment, and her mother did not know her! If not for Frenchy's warning, she would have been totally devastated. She found she could not speak as it was, the disappointment washing over her like a tidal wave. She had SO hoped it would be different!

Kat, too, seemed stunned, her quick tongue silent for once. Part of her had been convinced that they were lying, and it was all an elaborate hoax, but when her mother had been revealed as the men stepped aside, she knew she had been wrong.

She was even more disappointed to see that her mother didn't recognize them, not even Frankie who looked so much like her. It was almost more than Kat could bear, and her face was pale with shock.

Frenchy went to Victoria and picked up her hands, placing a gentle kiss on her lips. "It is so good to see you again, ma cherie, how I have missed you!"

"And I you my husband," Victoria returned softly. Her gaze swiftly returned to the girls at the sound of their shocked gasps.

"You can't mean that!" exclaimed Kat. Her fingers trembled as her hand extended towards her mother.

"Kat!" spoke Morg decisively pulling her by the waist up against his side.



Frankie couldn't take anymore at that moment. Her eyes were huge and dark in her ashen face, and realizing her mother was married to this pirate was the last straw.

Whirling, she began running back towards the Aphrodite, past Pierre who was just coming up to them and beyond the ship. She didn't know where she was going; she just knew she had to get away...away from them all!

Chapter Nineteen

"Merde!" Jacques swore softly and started after Frankie. He couldn't let her go off alone like that; he had just gotten her back. And especially not after the shock she had just received.

Victoria was a very intelligent woman. She might not know what was going on, but she knew something was wrong! She turned to Kat. "Of course, I mean that, Frenchy is my husband, why shouldn't I?" she queried softly.

Looking at Frenchy she asked, "What is going on, Frenchy, who are these young women?" She was beginning to think it might have something to do with her past, and for an instant, Frankie's shocked face flashed through her mind. But it was from another time, another place. As quickly as it came, the image was gone, and she shook her head uneasily.

"Victoria, I had not planned to tell you like this. I wanted the opportunity to break it gently, but that is gone now." Frenchy spoke resignedly, his glance sliding reproachfully to Kat and back. "Kat here, and Frankie are your twin daughters. They have been looking for you, and I brought you here to meet them, again."

Victoria gasped and went pale, and her gaze jerked back to Kat. "My...my daughters?" Her hand shook as it went to her mouth. "But...but how can this be? How could I forget my own flesh and blood! Mon Dieu, I would never have thought it possible! What kind of a woman am I, Frenchy? And why did you never tell me this?" She looked accusingly at Frenchy, as if she didn't know him.

"I did not wish to cause you pain, ma amie," replied Frenchy hoarsely. "I...had reason to believe

they were dead. I did not know they lived until a few days ago, when they came here."

Kat stepped forward then. "We are not dead, Mother, and we have been searching for you for the last five years." Her voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. "It is I who thought you were dead. Frankie has always believed you were alive, and Pierre and I have followed her to hell and back to find you."

Victoria reached out and touched Kat's soft cheek, her hand trembling. "You are so beautiful, so vibrant and alive. You do not look like me, yet you seem so familiar."

"I look like my father," Kat replied softly, tears in her eyes.

"Your father was killed when Jacques attacked our ship. Isn't that right, Frenchy?" She glanced up at the grim pirate, who nodded his agreement.

"But how is it you girls survived? Frenchy said there were no survivors, except me."

"He must have thought there were no survivors," Pierre broke in. "But, in truth, Frankie and I did survive. Kat, here, was not on that trip."

"And who are you?" Victoria focused on Pierre, the shock beginning to abate a little as these revelations sank in.

"Pierre Matis Fontaine, Gatineau's brother and Uncle to the girls," he responded. "It is good to see you alive and well, Victoria. We have much to discuss."

"Yes, it would seem so," agreed Victoria, taking Kat's hand. "I have children I wish to remember." She smiled sweetly at Kat, her eyes misting slightly with tears. "And, perhaps, their husbands?" She looked inquiringly at Morg, noting the possessive way he held onto Kat.

"We are not married...Mother," added Kat. It was difficult for her to actually believe her Mother was standing in front of her. She had not addressed her in five years, and the word did not come easily anymore.

"Not yet, anyway," mumbled Morg, his hot stare drinking her in.

Kat sent him a fierce glare, and Victoria couldn't help smiling. "And Frankie? Is she married?" She sent a worried look down the beach where her daughter and Jacques had disappeared.

"No," chuckled Frenchy. "But Jacques is working on taming her."

Victoria arched an eyebrow, and the other three were reminded of Frankie when her temper was riled. "Is that so?" she purred sweetly. "Perhaps I need to have a word with Jacques?"

"You need to have a large stick for that man," muttered Kat.

"I see your motherly instincts are well intact, ma cherie," Frenchy replied, his brown eyes twinkling.

"And, you have some explaining to do as well," she retorted, her hands going to her hips.

Kat was delighted while Frenchy looked chagrined.

"It seems there is much to be discussed," Morg interjected smoothly. "Why don't we all meet for lunch at the mansion? I can apprise you of the current situation, and we can talk.

"Situation?" questioned Pierre.

"Yes, we have a situation, and I've already told the other Captains. Perhaps Frankie can shed some more light on the situation now that she is back." He turned to Kat. "Kat, will you accompany me? I would like to speak with you."

Kat looked from Morg to her mother and hesitated.

Victoria reached out and took both of Kat's small hands in hers. "Shall we meet for lunch, my dear? When you have had time to change clothes and be properly attired for lunch at the Governors home?"

Victoria wanted to speak with Frenchy alone and have time to absorb these changes in her life. She was putting on a brave front, but inside, she was scared and unsure of herself. She fell back on good manners and breeding as all nobility did, even though she didn't know she was nobility.

She smiled as she spoke, and Kat was not offended. She knew her mother, and her mother had always been big on protocol, just like Pierre. She wrinkled her nose and nodded her head. "Fine, Mother, we'll meet at noon, then." She watched wistfully as Pierre led her mother aboard the Nemesis.

Morg took her arm and gently tugged her along with him, putting her up into Aramis's saddle and swinging up behind her. Pants on women did have a few advantages he reflected.

"Where are we going?" Kat asked, leaning back into his broad chest. She fought with her feelings. She didn't want to feel anything for this man except disgust, but her traitorous body would not allow it. It did feel good to be held, though, and she relaxed and laid her head back on his shoulder.

Jacques caught up with Frankie as they entered the forest cover near the glade pool. "Stop running, Frankie," he panted, grabbing her arm and pulling her to a stop.

"Just leave me alone," Frankie shrieked, kicking out at him. "Just go away and leave me alone!"



"I'm not about to leave you alone, ma petite," he ground out, grunting as her boot connected with his shin. "And stop kicking me!"

Frankie began to pummel his chest with her fists until he pulled her in so close to him that she couldn't move her arms. She fought like a wildcat for a moment, but Jacques held her firmly, not letting her pull away from him.

When she began kicking him again, he forced her to the ground and lay on top of her, holding her tightly, so she couldn't kick or hit him. Finally, frustrated, she began to sob wildly as if her heart was breaking.

"It is all right, ma petite, let it out," he said soothingly. When she began to relax, he cautiously lifted his hand and smoothed her hair back from her face and brushed away the tears that were streaming into her hair. She cried harder, and he finally set up and pulled her into his arms and rocked her, holding her dark head in the crook of his shoulder.

Frankie let go of the built up tensions and frustrations of the last five years as she wept into Jacques's broad shoulder. The rocking motion was soothing to her, and she cried until no more tears came. Then, she just sat quietly, softly hiccupping now and then, allowing the comfort of his arms to soothe her. She didn't have any strength of her own left at the moment, and she drew from his.

"Your mother may gain her memory of you again, ma petite, you must give it time," Jacques said quietly.

Frankie lifted her head to look up into his dark eyes. "You really think so, Jacques?" Her tear washed eyes looked hopeful, their lack of animosity making Jacques want to protect her from any possible future hurt.



"I spoke with a Doctor on Tortuga," he replied. "He said that traumatic shock can often cause a person to lose their memory. Quite often, they will recover it if certain things from their past can provide a trigger for that to happen. I can't think of a more powerful trigger than a daughter."

"I hope you are right, Jacques," Frankie said bitterly. "If not, the past five years have been almost wasted."

Jacques lifted her chin in his large palm. "Not wasted, ma cherie. You have found her and know that she is alive; that is a big relief for you. And, for what it's worth, Frankie, I'm sorry." He ran his thumb across her soft rosy lips and bent to kiss them gently. "I'm sorry to be the one who has caused you such pain in your young life. I know how it feels to lose home and family and those dear to you."

Frankie stared at him. "That means a lot to me, Jacques, thank you." She pulled his head down, so her lips could meet his once again, and she softly clung to him, and then pulled back. "Jacques, who are you?"

Jacques looked at her, then looked into the distance, his mind bringing up old memories for himself. "It doesn't matter at this point, ma petite. Suffice it to say that the French crown and I are old enemies. My parents live in disgrace, and I am falsely accused of being a traitor to my country."

"Who is accusing you?"

He looked down at her. "If I knew the answer to that question, ma amie, I would go back to France and see that their traitorous mouth was silenced. As it is, I am a wanted man in my own country."

"Just like Kat and I," Frankie said.

"Just like you and Kat," he agreed heavily.

"So that's why you turned to piracy."

"Oui, Frankie. I only wanted to hurt France. And anything I could do was to that end. However, I find I have tired of hunting French merchant ships and so have thrown in with Morg to be head of island security here at the Hideaway."

"But, you are still being a pirate. Look what we did to the Spanish fleet!"

Jacques shrugged. "Morg has no love for the Spanish. He has his own reasons for being a pirate, just like you and I. Hitting the Spanish treasure galleons was for personal reasons, as well as monetary."

"Morg is Scottish, what personal vendetta could he hold for the Spanish?" Frankie was puzzled.

"I don't know for sure, but I believe it has to do with Alyssa," Jacques returned. "He is very protective of her, and she does not like the Spanish, either. It is for her that he insists on ten percent of the treasure being distributed to the monastery on one of the other islands."

"So, he really does do that with the ten percent?"

"Oui, he really does," smiled Jacques. His white teeth gleamed. "You and Kat are so mistrustful, ma petite. It is not wise to be so critical of things you do not understand."

"Maybe," agreed Frankie. "Then again, we have not had much reason to trust, either."

"I would say that is true, ma petite." He looked up at the sun making its way to the high point in the sky. "We should be getting back. I'm quite sure Victoria is very worried about you by this time, and Kat has explained what is going on."

"Oui, I guess you are right." Frankie sighed deeply and looked up at his strong face. "Thank you, Jacques, for explaining these things to me. I

shall continue to hope Mother will recover her memory. I know I'll do my best to help her."

"You are welcome, ma amie," replied Jacques, rising and pulling her to her feet. "But, you and I have an appointment, soon." He ran his palm down the back of her breeches, lightly squeezing the globes of her buttocks.

Suddenly breathless, Frankie spoke. "We do? I shall look forward to it, Monsieur."

He pulled his head back and looked into her eyes. "What? You look forward to a spanking? I must say your behavior is improving in leaps and bounds," he teased.

Frankie's face fell. "A spanking?"

His face went stern, then, and he was no longer teasing. "Oui, ma petite. You went into the jungle with just you and Rosalie. That was a very dangerous thing to do, and you are lucky to be here to talk about it."

"But...but Kat was going with us; we were perfectly safe," she protested.

"No, Frankie, neither you nor Kat had your swords with you that night. If Kat had gone with you, Rosalie would have most likely suffered a horrible fate, and you two would still have been captured."

"Kat is excellent with knives," Frankie said hotly, but even she knew that Kat would have been no match for laudanum.

"They had their plans made well in advance and were just waiting for the opportunity to snatch you and Kat. You gave it to them...handed it right into their laps, as a matter of fact."

Frankie opened her mouth to protest once again, but Jacques shushed her with his hand over her mouth. "No more! You will be getting a hard spanking...and soon. Right now, there is too much

going on, but very soon, ma petite, I shall remove your ability to sit for a few days. Maybe that will make you think before being so careless with your own life and the lives of others." He turned her around and landed a hard slap right in the middle of her buttocks. "Now, lets go."

Angry, Frankie rubbed her bottom cheeks and walked silently ahead of him. She just wouldn't talk to him for a while, the insufferable man! How could she have thought she cared for him?

"Where are we going, Morg?" Kat questioned as he lead Aramis along a path that finally emptied along another shoreline, away from the docks. In the distance, Kat could see the surf crashing against a rocky patch that lead to higher ground. The white curl of foam rushed back into the sea. It was a wild scene, and it appealed to Kat's wild nature.

"I wanted to show you this scenery, lass," replied Morg. "I figured it would appeal to ye, as well as give me a chance to greet ye properly." He slid from the horse and took Kat's small waist and lifted her down onto this chest. With his arms below her bottom cheeks he reached for her lips, but she drew back.

"And what makes you think I'd want to kiss such a large, lumbering pirate," mocked Kat, her green eyes glittering.

"Are ye defying me? Ye who are a little bit of nothing in my arms?" he gave a mock growl and glared at her, insisting with his eyes that she lean into his kiss, so he could reach her lips.

Kat could not resist the opportunity to tease him. Slowly, painfully slowly, she leaned forward until her lips were a hair's breadth from his. "Of course, I'm defying you, what else did you expect?"

she breathed against his mouth, still not touching him. She rested her small palms against his massive shoulders and kept her distance.

Suddenly, his right hand shot up and entangled itself in her hair, and he forced her into his waiting mouth, crushing his firm lips against her soft pink ones. When she was breathless, he let her go. "One of these days, ye will beg me for a kiss, little lass," he vowed. "Not only a kiss but for me to fill the ache in your body."

"Ha!" she said in derision. "That will be the day, Monsieur," she challenged.

"Be careful, wee one," he replied, taking her hand to walk along the beach. "Or it will be today!"

Kat fell silent, fully believing he had the power to do as he said. She already burned for him, just being close to him again, but there were other things on her mind that were bothering her. Like her mother. She occupied Kat's thoughts as they walked along.

Finally, Morg sat down on a large boulder and drew her onto his lap, just holding her in his strong embrace.

"So what did you want to talk to me about, Morg?" questioned Kat at last. After all, he had been the one to tell her he wanted to have a word with her.

Morg kind of hated to spoil the mood, and he knew his next words would have her angry with him again. Still, he had to do it. "I wanted to know what possessed ye and Frankie to take Rosalie off into the forest without an escort the other night? I don't have to remind ye why ye should have used better judgment do I?" He paused and looked sternly at her. "If not for Pierre, Rosalie would most likely be dead now, used and discarded by Chandler's dogs."

Kat hated to admit it, but she knew he was right concerning Rosalie. She, too, knew what they had wanted. Still, she had a feeling she knew what he was getting around to, and her bottom cheeks tingled in protest as if they were begging for her protection.

She opened her mouth to formulate a protest, but she couldn't think of anything that sounded reasonable. They both knew what had happened. Even her and Frankie's knives would not have been enough protection against determined kidnappers.

"At a loss for words, lass?" Morg was somewhat amused that her mouth was open, but nothing was coming out.

"Certainly not," huffed Kat. "I know where this is going, and I'm telling you, you have NO right to spank me!"

"I have every right; ye belong to me!"

"Might I remind you that we are NOT married, therefore I do NOT belong to you," seethed Kat. "Maybe married men may get away with spanking their wives, but you are NOT married to me!" Her green eyes shot daggers at him.

Morg looked interested. "Are ye saying if we were married, ye would submit willingly if I decided ye needed a spanking?"

"Would I have a choice?" scoffed Kat scornfully.

"Aye, ye would have a choice. Ye could either submit willingly and take what ye have coming, or I could force ye over my knee and give it to ye...either way ye would still be spanked...as my wife, of course," he added helpfully.

"Oh, you are impossible," stormed Kat. "What kind of a choice is that? Never mind, we are not married, so it's completely irrelevant."

"Not quite, who said we have to be married for me to spank ye when ye need it? I believe I've already warmed your wee bottom once already."

Kat's eyes narrowed. "An error in judgment on your part, Monsieur, I've merely been too busy for reprisals. Do you sleep soundly at night?" Her small teeth gleamed in a feral smile, and he was nonplussed for a moment.

"I sleep very well, thank ye, but I come awake instantly when disturbed," he purred smoothly.

"Then I shall have to make sure my knife strikes true the first time, won't I?" she purred back.

"That would be best," he agreed amiably. "If ye think ye can do it, lass. I have my doubts on that score." His fingers began swirling small circles along her thigh moving closer and closer to the sweet juncture of thigh and hip.

Kat hissed sharply as desire began to prick at her abdomen.

"Of course, ye will have to move into the manor with me...that is, if ye want the chance to get to me in my sleep, although I'm well warned now." He grinned, knowing the effect he was having on her at the color change in her beautiful eyes. "Perhaps I shall have to put manacles on the bedposts to keep ye under control, so ye don't disturb my sleep."

He was surprised when the knife appeared between their faces, and Kat's eyes glowed in triumph. "I guess you were not expecting that were you, Monsieur," she said silkily. "I could have just as easily slipped it between your ribs, you know."

Grabbing her wrist with one hand, he took the knife from her with the other and tossed it aside. Then he pulled her on over his strong thigh where she landed with a surprised squeal. "And, I guess ye weren't expecting this, were ye?" he asked just as silkily. Lifting his broad palm he brought it crashing



down on the seat of her breeches. "Didn't your mother ever tell it's not safe to play with knives?"

Kat shrieked and yelped, "I do NOT play with knives, Monsieur!"

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

"Ye had no intention of using that on me, lass. We both know it, and that makes it play...and playing with knives can be dangerous...CRACK! CRACK! CRACK...in more ways than one."

"Fine, you have made your point, Monsieur, now let me up!" demanded Kat, her bottom burning and stinging.

"I'll decide when my point has been made sufficiently," returned Morg smoothly, landing three more blistering spanks on her writhing seat.

"OW! YEOECH!" yelped Kat thoroughly furious by this time. She tried to kick out but her legs were between Morg's, and she couldn't go anywhere.

Pausing, his hand rubbing her bottom, he spoke. "Now then, little lass, do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," gritted Kat from her humiliating position. She looked longingly at the knife laying on the sand not far from them, but knew in her heart she could never use it...not anymore.

"Lest ye be confused," Morg inserted helpfully, "this wee spanking is just an object lesson, and ye will still feel the bite of my paddle on this lovely rear end for leaving the party. If ye don't believe me, ask Rosalie."

"Let me guess...you spanked her for leaving the party," bit out Kat, wishing he would let her up. "What a brute!"

"Not yet, I won't spank her until she is well, but when she is, I think I'll spank ye both together. Then maybe the message will get across to ye stubborn wenches." He pulled her up then and set



her back on his knee to look into her concerned red face.

"Rosalie got hurt? Is she okay?"

"Aye, she will be fine. One of the cannonballs from the ship exploded a tree near her and Frankie when they were trying to get to the beach, and a large chunk of wood was imbedded in her leg. It has been removed, and Alyssa is watching her. So far, she is doing well." He watched her guardedly.

Kat trembled as the horror of the last few days came rushing back, and she truly realized how Rosalie could be dead right now...and Frankie too. And all because she had wanted to show them the glade pool.

Mutely, she stared at Morg, her feelings a chaotic jumble. She buried her face in Morg's broad chest, instinctively seeking his comfort in spite of herself. "I'm so sorry, Morg, I hope she gets well." She knew full well how infection could set in easily in these tropical climates, and she would never wish for Rosalie to be harmed. She felt guilty, suddenly, and hot tears spurted to her eyes. This was so strange; she was not normally a weepy person.

"Aye, well that's a start, lass," he rumbled from deep in his chest. When he felt the dampness against his shirt, he lifted her head to look into her face. He dropped his head and tenderly took her soft lips, drawing her close against him protectively. "Hush, lass, I don't like to see ye cry, whatever else ye may believe about me."

Kat clung to him, and he began divesting her of her clothing...and his. Laying her on their clothing on the sand, he took her gently. Kat responded, the tears trickling down her cheeks in spite of herself. She was falling in love with this damnable pirate, and there wasn't a thing she could do about it.

Her head lay submissively against his shoulder when he carried her into the surf to cleanse their bodies. She let the waves lap gently around her, pushing her into his broad chest with each bob, and she put her legs around his waist and clung to him.

"We'd best be getting back, lass," he said gently, after enjoying the soothing sounds of the surf and the warmth of the red headed sprite clinging to him. "It's almost noon, and your mother will be expecting ye in a dress for lunch."

Kat came out of her relaxed reverie and smiled up at him. "I'll tell you a little secret, Monsieur...I love dresses. It is Frankie who hates to get dressed up, but I think that is only because she feels defenseless in one. With a dress on, she can't wear her sword. But me, I can always wear my knives, no matter what I have on."

Morg caressed her bare buttocks beneath the surface of the water. "Ye just remember what I told ye about playing with knives, wee one. If ye are going to pull them on someone, plan to use them. They are not toys."

Kat didn't say anything else, not with her bottom bare, but she thought a lot. She smiled sweetly at him and didn't answer.

Morg, in turn, was suspicious of that sweet smile. What was the little vixen thinking now?

Chapter Twenty

Victoria had just stepped inside the cabin when she whirled on Frenchy with a stream of French invectives that made even him blush! "How could you not tell me I had twin daughters? You should have told me! How dare you hide things from me, Frenchy!"

She advanced on him, her eyes blazing. "What else are you hiding from me, Monsieur, out with it? Do I have a son somewhere, too, that you have hidden knowledge of? Do you know who I am? You told me we had met and been lovers before and in love with each other, and I felt the truth of your words. You said you never knew who I was, do you?"

"Yes, but..." Frenchy tried to speak, but Victoria rolled right on over the top of him.

"Aha! Another lie! Mon Dieu, how many more, Frenchy? What have you kept from me that would bring my memory back...that I might need to know? What? Tell me, this instant!"

"Victoria, I..."

Victoria threw her hands in the air and overruled him once again. "And, now my daughters have found me, and I have hurt them because I do not remember them...they might think I have deserted them. For all I know...I might have!" She stood shaking, staring accusingly at Frenchy. "They are so beautiful and the one...she is so much like me, how could I have deserted my own children...tell me that, Frenchy..."

"Stop it, Victoria," demanded Frenchy gruffly.

"Non, I will not stop, I..."

"You WILL stop, ma petite and stop this instant! Or I will put you in the best position to stop you and make you listen to me."



Victoria's hands instinctively flew to her backside, and her big eyes stared accusingly up at him, but she went silent.

"I see you remember what that is, ma petite," Frenchy said dryly. Then he sighed and took her trembling hands in his. "I understand you are upset, but give me a chance to explain, and it will all be clear, please, ma petite?"

"Oui, Frenchy," replied Victoria, trying to calm herself. "I'm sorry, Frenchy, its just that I am so shocked and...and hurt...and..." she sobbed then, the tears spilling from her eyes as she tried to choke back her feelings.

Frenchy took her in his strong arms and held her close, letting her vent her feelings this way, rubbing her back. As he held her, he began to tell her of her past with him and how he had found out who she was. And that he had known of her pregnancy but had thought her child would surely have been on board the merchant vessel and lost along with her husband. He hadn't known she had delivered twins, or even what their sex was. He confessed he hadn't tried very hard to find out. He hadn't even known where to begin looking.

"So you see, ma amie, I wanted to spare you the pain of losing a child. And, I do admit, knowing how we had loved each other in Paris, I wanted to keep that love for myself once I had found it again." He tipped his hand under her chin and forced her to look up at him. "Can you forgive me, ma petite?"

"Of course, I can," she whispered. "I see now that it was truly not your fault, and you were trying to protect me. After all, you didn't have to send for me. You could have told them I was dead...but you didn't."

"Once they were here, I could not do that," Frenchy answered sadly. "Although I was very

tempted to do so. I do not wish to lose you, ma cherie."

"I will never stop loving you, Frenchy," Victoria said fervently. "Nothing can change that!"

"Not even knowing you are the Duchess of Frontenac?"

The blood drained from Victoria's face, and she slowly sat down in the closest chair. "Did you say...Duchess?"

"Oui," replied Frenchy heavily. "Victoria Fontaine, the Duchess of Frontenac and wife to Gatineu Fontaine, the Duke of Frontenac. It was his merchant vessel we attacked when I recognized you and brought you aboard the Nemesis. I didn't know it at the time, but that is who you are."

"Oh no, how Frankie and Kat must hate Jacques then," she exclaimed. "I had no idea."

She closed her eyes and another image of Frankie flashed across her mind, an image of her shocked face, reaching towards her. It was gone again as quickly as it came.

They continued to talk, Frenchy trying to tell her everything he could remember about that day. He didn't remember seeing Frankie; he had been so intent on Victoria that nothing else had mattered except getting her to safety.

They had both been quiet for a few moments, Victoria trying to absorb all she had heard when he spoke again. "Come, ma petite, it is time to talk with your daughters and have lunch at the manor house. There is much to discuss."

Frankie was digging through trunks looking for the dresses she had brought along on an impulse when they set out on this vendetta two years ago.

"What are you doing, Frankie?" asked Kat, curiously, watching her.

"I'm looking for the dresses we wore at our coming out ball," came Frankie's muffled reply, her head deep in a trunk.

"What for?"

"Because those dresses were special, and I'm hoping it might jog Mother's memory," confessed Frankie stopping to peer at Kat over the trunk lid. "I know Father paid a lot for those dresses, and I remember him complaining to her about it."

"You actually packed those?"

"Yes, I did...wait...here they are!" Flushed but triumphant, Frankie brought the dresses from the bottom of the trunk and unwrapped them from the paper they were stored in.

The girls stood looking at the dresses on the floor, fingering the lace and ribbons and the beautiful materials. They had worn them for their coming out ball...on their sixteenth birthday.

"It seems a lifetime ago," whispered Kat. "But I still remember coming down the spiral staircase and Father waiting at the bottom for us."

"Oui, and Pierre was there too."

"And Mace," added Kat painfully. Compared to Morg, Mace now seemed a boyish youth, and she realized she had outgrown her childish love for him.

"You see the memories it has brought back, just looking at these dresses?" Frankie's eyes were fierce, her body tense.

"You are hoping it will help Mother to remember us," Kat replied.

"Exactly! Come on, let's get dressed."

Kat and Frankie deliberately waited until Victoria and Frenchy had gone up the hill before they left the ship.

When they stepped out of the cabin, Jacques and Pierre were waiting for them.

Jacques stared at the vision walking towards him. Frankie was without a doubt the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life, and he was having a hard time breathing. "Mon Dieu!" he muttered to himself.

When she smiled tentatively at him, it was like the sun coming out, and if he hadn't been hooked before, he was now.

"You are beautiful, ma amie," he whispered gruffly, unable to take his eyes off her. She was dressed in a dark green, off the shoulder gown that hugged her breasts lovingly and slid down the curve of her waist and shapely hips to fall to the floor in a graceful sweep. The curves of her breasts were pushed just above the bodice, which was white satin in the center of it and all the way to the floor. Tiny lace edged where the white satin met the dark green and tiny green crystal beads adorned the center of the panel...all floor length. The puff of the sleeve fell off her arms and was gathered at the base of the puff. Long white finger gloves went to her upper arm, just three inches short of the sleeves, leaving her slender fingers bare.

Kat had put her hair up for her in a beautiful jeweled comb and curls fell along the sides of her head and down her long slender neck. She wore a simple gold necklace with an emerald pendant on the chain that fell just to the tops of her creamy breasts. The dark green of her gown turned her eyes a deep sea green color and made them seem more mysterious as she watched him in return.

"Your birthday gowns," murmured Pierre as awestruck as Jacques, although he had seen them before. There was a new depth of maturity in the girl's faces that hadn't been there when they were sixteen, though, and it made them even more appealing.

Morg was going to be as devastated as Jacques, thought Pierre, as he inspected Kat. Kat, too, was dressed in a green gown, but different than the dark winter green that complimented Frankie's coloring so perfectly. Kat's was a shimmering emerald green satin that matched the beauty of her eyes. The sleekness of the off the shoulder gown complimented Kat's tiny figure perfectly without the need for bows and frills. Pearls adorned the creamy expanse of her neckline, and they shimmered with a slight warm pink glow.

She, too, was adorned with white gloves to her upper arms and a beautiful set of pearl inlaid combs that allowed her red gold curls to tumble down her back, but away from her delicate ears. Small curls adorned her temples and ears, and their burnished gold color accented her beautiful skin. Both girls were indeed exquisite.

"Are we going to stand here all day while you men stare at us," teased Kat. They had gathered quite a crowd of men around them, all just standing and staring wistfully.

"Pardon us," Gaston replied with a bow. "But, it has been a long time since any of us were home and among our lovely women, and it is a pleasure just to look at your beauty and femininity."

"At this rate, we are going to need an armed escort," muttered Jacques, looking around him.

"That is not a bad idea, Jacques," Pierre replied. "Gaston, choose some men and escort us to the mansion if you would be so kind?"

Immediately, men began volunteering, but Gaston chose three to accompany them. The rest just watched as the party made its way up the hill.

When Alyssa escorted the party into the drawing room of the mansion, Morg felt like the wind had been knocked out of him once again. Even as



prepared as he thought he was for Kat in a dress, he realized he was still unprepared for the effect she had on his senses. When he heard the gasp from Victoria, he turned to look at her.

Images were flashing through Victoria's mind at an amazing rate. Trembling, she stood and stared at the girls, seeing them coming down a spiral staircase, laughing. They had been beautiful, and she felt the pride she had felt then sweeping over her once again.

Then they appeared with a man whose face was not clear and disappeared again. Images crowded in upon her, and she put her hand to her throat and closed her eyes. She saw Kat standing on a dock, waving good-bye. Frankie, with fear and shock on her face, reaching for her...so many images flashing by.

"Are you all right, Victoria?" The voice crowded in on her, and she opened her eyes and looked into Frenchy's concerned face.

"Yes, yes I am...all right." She looked at Frankie then. She had yet to greet this daughter of hers properly, and she walked forward on trembling knees to take her hands in her own.

"Hello, Frankie," she said softly. "You are beautiful, my child." She looked at Kat and took her hand too. "And you too, my darling, you are both so beautiful. Those gowns...I saw you for a moment on a white spiral staircase...in those gowns."

"You remember?" Frankie asked hopefully gripping her mother's hand tightly.

"I am having...flashes of memories. Images...they come and go quickly."

"These gowns are the ones we wore for our coming out ball, on our sixteenth birthday," Frankie replied disappointedly. She had hoped for more than this.

"The 24th of October," Victoria spoke automatically, and then looked surprised.

"You ARE remembering," Kat spoke excitedly. "That is our birthday!"

"The 24th of October is in a few weeks." Morg spoke up, walking over to Kat and putting his arm around her tiny waist. "We need to have a birthday celebration, lass!"

"I had forgotten it was coming up," murmured Frankie.

"You will be 21 years old," Victoria said with a lovely smile.

"Maybe, by then, you will have remembered even more," Frankie added hopefully, watching her mother. How she longed for her mother to remember the special relationship they had shared as mother and daughter. She wanted it back.

"I hope so, darling," replied Victoria, watching Frankie in return. "I'm trying hard to remember all I can." She felt a special kinship with this daughter and realized they must have been close. She smiled warmly at her.

"Time for lunch," Morg announced briskly. "And I have news for Jacques and Frenchy that Pierre can help me spread along. Precautions to be taken. Come, lass," he said to Kat and held out his arm to accompany her to the table.

The next week at the Pirates Hideaway was a time of healing for everyone, a time of replenishing and rebuilding from the damages of the attack by Chandler and Pedro.

During that time Kat and Frankie spent delightful hours getting to know their mother again, and the life she had spent with Frenchy. Kat and Morg, and Frankie and Jacques had time to get to know each other in a peaceful setting although their

emotions were all strong in dealing with each other.

Rosalie was up and doing well, her leg healing very nicely with no infection to slow the process, and she was almost back to full capacity. She was very nervous, however, because Morg kept looking meanfully at her, and she had a feeling it was only a matter of time before he decided to mete out her punishment.

Kat and Frankie commiserated with her and knew they too were being given borrowed time as well. The three girls had discussed it and all knew that while the men were not saying anything right now, they hadn't forgotten their promise to them, no matter how much they hoped they would.

"Sometimes, I just wish he would get it over with," Rosalie sighed as the girls walked along the beach together, two men behind them; one man for Rosalie and one man for the twins.

"I still don't think we need an escort," scoffed Kat. "Frankie and I both fight better than our escorts. What good would they do if we were attacked?"

Frankie was a little more understanding. "It's not that they can protect us better, Kat, it's just that men respect men more. With men as an escort, other men automatically assume that we are being carefully protected and watched, and they back off." She shrugged her slender shoulders. "At least, that's what Jacques says. Dumb, I know, but there it is."

"Well, I for one do not wish to feel the Governor's paddle again," Rosalie replied with a grimace. "He used it on me the last time I went out without an escort, and I hated it."

"He has mentioned this...paddle before? What is it like?" Kat asked curiously.

"It is horrible! It is made of wood, and he holds it in his hand, and it hurts...a lot! I had to bend over the desk after he spanked me over his lap and receive ten hits with that paddle. They were worse than his hand! I will never go out without an escort again!"

Rosalie was adamant, and Kat felt a fission of fear. Morg's hard hand had felt bad enough on her tender bottom; she couldn't imagine anything harder or worse. He better not use it on her! She really would knife him in his sleep!

"I know what a paddle feels like," Frankie added to the conversation. "Pierre used one on me for training. But only six swats at a time." She winced. "I can imagine ten would hurt a lot! Especially after already being spanked by hand." She thought of Jacques's hard palm biting into her buttocks. She agreed with Kat, their hands were hard enough!

"They really have no right to do it, anyway," blustered Kat, although she knew they didn't care whether they had the right or not.

"So?" Frankie replied dryly. "Since when has that stopped a pirate from doing anything?"

"Or, any man, for that matter," added Rosalie.

"No, you are right," Frankie agreed, thinking of cousin Snipes and what he had seen. Men could pretty much do as they pleased, and if you loved them, you just accepted it. It was part of life.

"Ha!" scoffed Kat. "Are we wimps? Who said we have to take this kind of treatment! We can fight back!"

"Sure, we can," Frankie said derisively. "Only if we have weapons, and then what happens when they take them away from us, because you know we can't hurt them, not if we care about them."

"Shut up, Frankie," muttered Kat miserably, knowing her sister was right. She couldn't hurt Morg

anymore. The man had gotten to her, and now she couldn't seriously hurt him.

Little did the girls know, but Jacques and Morg were discussing the very same thing.

"It has been long enough, and Rosalie is recovered sufficiently, it's time I was giving the lass the spanking I promised her. And Kat's as well." Morg was sitting inside the doorway of the jail talking to Jacques and watching the girls on the beach below with their escorts.

"Oui, Morg, I promised Frankie a good spanking, too, and it's time for it. I have just put it off because it has been so peaceful lately, and she has been so sweet and well behaved. I know she isn't going to like it." He stood up and stretched his tall frame.

"Aye, that they have. But, they know it's coming, I've seen Rosalie watching me and sometimes trying to avoid me. The lass knows I keep my word." He too stood up and stretched. "I thought about letting them off, but I'm afraid if I do, then they would be pushing it again thinking each time I might be soft this time. Can't let that happen."

"Agreed, Monsieur, best to go on as promised."

The two men started down the beach, each prepared to take their charges and finally get it out of the way.

When the girls saw the men coming towards them on the beach, they knew instantly why they were coming.

"Oh, no," groaned Rosalie fearfully. "I recognize that look on Governor Macalister's face."

Kat and Frankie didn't say anything, but their hearts sank. They too recognized those looks.

Jacques stopped in front of Frankie and looked down into her apprehensive face. "Come, ma cherie,

take a walk with me." He didn't wait for an answer, but took her arm and walked on down the beach with her. Frankie glanced behind her; their previous escorts had been dismissed. She felt her stomach jump nervously, and her knees began to feel shaky.

Morg stared down at Rosalie and Kat. "We have an appointment in my study lass's, now if ye please." He took them both by the arm and began walking with them towards the manor house.

Rosalie trembled but did not object. Kat, however, was immediately defiant. She tried to jerk her arm out of Morg's firm grasp. "I'm NOT going with you! I know exactly what kind of appointment you have in mind, and I'm not buying it! You have no right, Morgan Macalister!"

Morg simply held her firmly and continued to walk her along, his expression almost amused at her sputtering defiance.

Incensed at this highhandedness, Kat stomped on his foot and jerked away from him.

Morg grabbed her arm again and spoke quietly. "Ye can come with me peacefully, lass, or I'll bend ye over right here for a practice session, and then finish the job inside. Now then, do ye want everyone to see and know about your chastisement?"

Rosalie gasped and stood still, but Kat stared defiantly at him. It wasn't until he began to tuck her under his long arm that she finally answered. "All right, you big brute, fine...I'll walk!"

"I'm glad to hear it, lass," Morg replied smoothly and took her arm again. Once inside the manor, he escorted the girls into his study and closed the door.

"Oh dear, what is going on?" Victoria asked, seeing her two daughters escorted in separate directions by purposeful men. She had been playing

with the spyglass, and Frenchy had been pointing out to her where her daughters were strolling.

Standing beside her, Frenchy chuckled. "Now, ma petite, don't tell me you don't recognize the signs of behavior adjustments about to take place?"

"But...but why? They have all been lovely girls, I haven't seen them doing anything wrong," protested Victoria.

"Oui," Frenchy grinned. "Of course you haven't, they have been on their best behavior all week. I'm sure they were hoping Jacques and Morg would let their indiscretions go. But, as you can see, they are men with a firm hand."

"What did they do?" she asked curiously.

Frenchy explained what had happened, and she sighed heavily. "Oui, they do deserve a spanking for that, I'm afraid, even I can see that. Still, it distresses me to know they will be in pain."

"That is what mothers are for, ma amie," Frenchy said tenderly, holding her close. "They always feel for their children. But Kat and Frankie are not children anymore. They are headstrong and willful young women, and Jacques and Morg have seen them at their worst. They both need a firm hand!"

"It doesn't mean I have to like it," Victoria answered reproachfully.

"No, you didn't like it when it was being applied to you either, but you learned, ma chérie." Frenchy kissed her sulky lips.

Frankie walked silently along with Jacques, seething beneath her cool exterior. Being led away like a recalcitrant child to face a childish punishment was setting her teeth on edge.



Finally, after several minutes, they were well away from the settlement. The gulls screeched, their haunting cries sounding on the wind, and the surf lapped gently about their feet as they walked. Jacques held Frankie's hand firmly. He didn't try to fool himself into believing she would take this submissively and without protest. Still, he had to try.

"Are you ready for your spanking, ma petite?" he asked quietly.

Unexpectedly, she jerked away from him and quickly drew her sword. "I think not, Monsieur. I refuse to let you treat me like a child."

Jacques's eyes narrowed. She had the light of battle in her eyes, and he knew she was issuing a challenge. One, he supposed, that would have come sooner or later.

"So you think you can best me, ma petite?" he asked dangerously.

"We shall see won't we," she mocked. "Arm yourself."

Jacques folded his arms patiently and stood at rest, but alert. "I will give you the chance to back down, Frankie," he replied warningly. "You have the chance to submit to your spanking now, before I have to take your sword away. Once I have to do that, you will not only feel my hand, but you will feel my belt as well." His dark eyes glinted, and his chin was set in that stubborn look Frankie was beginning to recognize.

For a fleeting moment, Frankie actually considered it. Then she stiffened. She would not give him the satisfaction of humbling herself for such a humiliating punishment. She stood there proud and defiant, daring him to do his worst.

Jacques began to slowly draw his sword. "You leave me no choice then, ma petite. This will have to be done the hard way."

They began to circle each other, Frankie's heart beating fast. She put all the concentration and skill Pierre had taught her into the duel. They began to parry, each feeling the other out.

Jacques soon realized that he had not seen Frankie's full range of skills yet. She was indeed highly skilled. He moved lightly, parrying her thrusts easily and she his.

The contest would be as always, first blood, or loss of sword, whichever came first. He intended to relieve her of her sword. As a result, the duel might take longer, but he would not have her hurt by his hand.

On and on they dueled, Frankie well aware of the rules. She did not wish to draw Jacques's blood either. She would rather relieve him of his sword and be triumphant, her blade at his throat to prove she could take care of herself. She didn't need him to treat her like a child and protect her.

They were both in excellent shape, and neither one was winded yet, the battle becoming faster and more furious as they each sought to take the other's sword.

Jacques's eyes gleamed with pride as he realized the only real advantage he would have over her would be experience and a repertoire of tricks learned over the years. He had thoroughly enjoyed this match, but it was time to end it and get on to the matter at hand.

With the quickness of a cat he dropped and rolled, his feet tucked under in a summersault and then springing out and catching her off guard, his foot kicking the sword from her hand.



Frankie was caught off guard at the unexpected move and gasped as the sword dropped to the sand. Quickly, she bent to retrieve it but a booted foot landed on it. Slowly, she looked up into the mocking eyes of her opponent. She had lost!

"Now, ma cherie," he said silkily. "It is time for your spanking."

Chapter Twenty-One

Frankie slowly stood up, her heart beating fast as she acknowledged defeat in her eyes. She stood there proudly as Jacques lay his sword in the sand and began to take off his belt. His eyes were locked with hers, and she shivered involuntarily, the seriousness of what she had let herself in for sinking in as she watched him pull the belt off his narrow hips.

"Take my hand, Frankie," Jacques ordered quietly, holding his hand out to her. She did so reluctantly and allowed him to lead her to the rocks.

When he began to undo the buttons on her breeches, she put her hands on his. "What are you doing?"

"I'm taking your breeches down, ma petite. This spanking will be on bare flesh, I wish to see what I am doing." He pushed her breeches down to her knees and stood back up.

She shivered as the cool wind off the water went through her silky thigh length undergarment. They were very light and thin, and Jacques could see almost through them.

"Do you have any idea how worried I was when I realized you were gone?" he asked softly.

He reached out and ran his palm down the side of her face. "It didn't take me long to realize you didn't sleep with Pedro either. The Spaniard was lying, and I know that. I was angry and jealous."

"I told you I didn't," Frankie replied proudly. She felt very vulnerable and exposed standing there, and she wished he would get on with it. She felt even more exposed when he reached down and lowered her bloomers.

"I know you did, but I was so worried about you I wasn't thinking straight." He sat down then and formed a lap of long, hard thighs and began to pull her down inexorably over them.

Frankie automatically resisted, her heart leaping into her throat. "No, Jacques...please..."

"Too late, ma petite, over you go," he replied pulling her firmly down and across his lap. Lightly, he caressed the firm buttocks that were getting goose bumps from the cool air. They wouldn't last long, he knew. Then he began slapping those pale buttocks, firm crisp swats that had her grunting and yelping in little protests as he applied his hand.

"Jacques, please...OW! OUCH! Jacques! No! Stop! Please...Jacquesss!" Frankie's legs began to pump up and down as the stinging increased, her cries filling the air. It seemed the gulls stopped their keening cries to listen to the human cries that sounded on the wind for a change. A few dropped down onto the beech and cocked their heads to the side as if in wonder at this spectacle of human behavior, their beady eyes bright and interested.

"You should have used common sense, Frankie," lectured Jacques as he continued to spank her backside at a comfortable pace. The skin was reddening quite fast beneath his palm. "You should not have gone off alone with just you girls; I warned you about that! I warned you what would happen if you got into trouble, and you did, didn't you?" He spanked harder and faster.

"YESSSS," wailed Frankie in distress. She was bucking frantically now trying to twist her body away from his punishing hand, but he never missed his target.

"OWWWWoooWWW....JACQUESSSS.....PLEASS SSEEEEE!" Frankie began to sob as his hand punished her thoroughly, her bouncing bottom a



glowing bright red when he finally stopped and rested it on her writhing hot cheeks.

"You are not to go anywhere without a male escort, despite your superb skills, Frankie, I mean that," Jacques ordered firmly. "I'm well aware you can best most men, but that is not the point, and you know it. You are a beautiful woman, and men will always desire you. If nothing else, an escort will keep away unwanted attentions, and you won't have to deal with them. Is that clear, ma petite?"

"YESSSS!" cried Frankie, her feet still kicking at the throbbing burning sensations in her seat, but she listened.

"Good, then there is only the belt left," he said in satisfaction as he bent and picked up the belt he had laid by the boulder.

"NO, NO, Please Jacques, please no more!" Frankie twisted frantically to cover her bottom with her hands, but Jacques removed her hands and pinned his leg over hers locking her in place.

"If you had not challenged me, I wouldn't have to, but you did, ma cherie. I gave you the chance to back out, but you refused." With her hand pinned to her back, he brought the belt down across her waiting cheeks.

Frankie shrieked and cried, but Jacques determinedly spanked her until he felt she was sufficiently punished and lay sobbing over his lap. Then he dropped the belt and ran his palm over the welts and the redness, softly caressing. Then he picked her up and held her in his arms, comforting her. "It was a good duel, ma petite. I look forward to more with you," he said softly.

"I h...hate you," she sobbed, burying her face in his chest.

"I know, ma amie," he chuckled, the laughter rumbling in his chest beneath her ear. Then he mouthed to the gulls. "But I think I love her."

The gulls looked thoroughly wise as if they understood exactly what he had said. One large bird walked up a few feet and cocked its head at him as if to say. "Why tell us? Tell her."

Rosalie snuck a sideways glance at Kat as Morg shut the door to the study and turned to face the girls. "Whose idea was it to leave the party?" he asked interestedly, although he was already sure of that answer. It was confirmed when Rosalie glanced at Kat and away.

"I saw no reason not too," Kat replied defiantly. "I wanted to show Rosalie and Frankie the glade pool." She looked apologetically at Rosalie. "Although, I'm sorry you got hurt, Rosalie, I would never wish that on you."

"It wasn't your fault," Rosalie answered quickly. She flushed when Morg stared frostily at her.

"Ye are an impulsive wench, Kat, and quick tempered. Ye've yet to learn patience and thinking ahead to consequences. Ye girls have had nae consequences as yet for your behavior, ye nor Frankie either one. I intend to change that, little lass, and hold you accountable for your impatient decisions made in anger or haste. Ye will learn to think."

He looked at Rosalie. "Rosalie, ye should have known better. Ye had just been spanked that very afternoon for going to the shops without an escort and yet ye let Frankie and Kat take ye out of sight of the party. That was irresponsible and foolish and look what happened because of it."

Rosalie hung her head at his stern censorious tones and whispered, "I'm sorry, sir."



"Aye, ye will be, lass, for your punishment will be harsher this time since it is the second time around. For now, ye will go to the corner and wait while I deal with Kat." He pointed to the empty corner, and Rosalie obediently went to it. "Nose in the corner, lass, and think about the things I've said."

"And just what gives you the right to punish her or me?" Kat said scornfully. She stared defiantly at him and tossed her bright curls, but her stomach felt queasy when he looked hard at her. It was all she could do to stand her ground when he reached for her and took her arm, pulling her towards a chair.

"We've had this conversation before, wee lass, and I'll not go over it again. Rosalie is indentured to me while ye," he stopped and looked her in the eye, "ye are mine."

"But..." Kat squeaked as he quickly diverted her breeches and bloomers to her knees. "That's not true..."

Without further preamble, he put his right arm under her bare thighs and lifted her off her feet, and then laid her across his lap, her tiny weight nothing beneath his strong thick arms.

"No...you can't, you..." she squeaked, unable to utter a coherent, complete sentence before he began blistering her backside once again.

In the corner, Rosalie began to shake, but she didn't dare turn around, although she would have liked to have covered her ears as Kat's cries and yelps of pain filled the room. It would soon be her turn!

Kat struggled valiantly, but her breeches and bloomers hampered her ability to kick and, Morg's heavy left arm had her securely pinned until he



decided his hard hand had landed enough times, despite her shrieking protests.

Finally, he stood her on her feet and pointed sternly towards the corner. "Ye will take Rosalie's place in the corner, and Rosalie, ye will come here."

Clutching her bottom, and her face bright red, Kat was barely restraining tears as she hobbled to the corner. Rosalie shot her a glance of sympathy, but her own heart was filled with dread as she slowly crossed to room to stand in front of Morg.

When she reached him, he took her hand and gently guided her over his lap, knowing she was obedient and would not resist him like his little hellcat. Once there, he lifted her long colorful skirt and carefully inspected the wound. "It is healing very nicely, lass," he said in satisfaction.

"Yes, Sir," replied Rosalie fearfully, her voice wobbling as Morg pulled her bloomers down over the wound. It was about 6 inches below her buttocks, and she knew he would be careful not to touch her there.

She knew she was in for a hard spanking, and she couldn't keep the sniffles back before he even touched her bottom. "I'm s...sorry, Sir!"

"That's good to know," he replied patting her bottom gently. Then he raised his arm and began the spanking. Over and over his hard palm fell on her wiggling buttocks, being careful not to go beyond them, and she was quickly reduced to wailing and tears.

Morg spanked her thoroughly although perhaps not as hard as Kat, since Rosalie seemed genuinely sorry and seemed not to have the pain tolerance Kat did. He finally stood the crying girl up and sent her to the corner to join Kat while he got the paddle out.

Kat heard him in the drawers and sneaked a peek over her shoulder. Her eyes widened as she saw what he had in his hand. The wooden paddle looked like it had been cut precisely for just such a use!

It was rounded and had what looked like a 6-inch handle or so, and it fit Morg's huge hand perfectly. She felt herself going pale, and she looked at Rosalie who was sobbing and holding her bottom. She jumped when Morg called her name.

"Kat, come here, lass." His voice brooked no refusal, and Kat gulped, finally afraid, really afraid, for the first time.

She glanced at the door and wondered if she could make it there before he caught her. Probably not with these pants around her knees, she thought.

"Don't even think it, lass, ye won't like the consequences if I have to chase ye." Morg's green eyes gleamed as he watched her turn over the possibility of running in her bright little head. "Besides, ye won't get far like that. It would be best if ye just obeyed and came to me."

Kat fought with herself, wanting to protest and defy him, yet knowing he held the upper hand in strength and determination. She knew she should obey, yet she fought submitting to him. She felt that if she submitted willingly, it was like saying she accepted his right to do this, and she didn't want to...yet.

Briefly, Mace Delarouge flashed through her mind. She had wanted to belong to him, but in the end, he hadn't wanted her. She had given him her most prized possession; her virginity, and he had tossed it casually aside. Now she didn't belong to anyone. She didn't want to belong to anyone...did she? She looked at the big man, unaware of the

plea in her emerald eyes, the fear that shone in them.

For Kat, it was more than just a spanking...it was giving herself to him, to his care and concern for her. Did she love him? Did he love her? Or did he just want to own her, like a possession? She trembled with the force of her emotions, unaware of them playing across her expressive face.

Morg waited patiently, realizing there was more going on here than a mere punishment for Kat. It didn't take a mind reader to see she was struggling with submitting to him. She wanted to, yet she didn't want too. She didn't trust him.

He held out his hand to her and spoke softly. "Ye are mine, Kat...now and always. That will never change, and as mine, I reserve the right to correct ye when ye need it. Now come to me."

Kat hesitated and then began to move towards him. Finally, she reached him and placed her small hand trustingly in his. "Will you let me down too?" she asked softly, her eyes finally shining with tears.

"Never, lass," Morg said tenderly and then he guided her across his lap. "Now then, ye are going to learn what happens when ye put yourself in danger, wee one." He brought the paddle down sharply across her buttocks, covering both of them at the same time and Kat let out a loud shriek and bucked hard, her bottom tensing with pain.

Kat had had no idea what Frankie went through when Pierre had landed those swats on her backside during training, and a new admiration for her sister crossed her mind fleetingly until the second spank landed. She tried hard to hold back the howl, but it came out anyway and went up in pitch as the third one bit into her tender buttocks.

"Merde!" she yelped, the French curse slipping out unbidden. Tears filled her eyes, and she began



to cry and plead with him to have mercy as he continued to spank her. He landed ten blistering spanks before he stopped.

"Are ye going to remember to take an escort when ye go about now, lass?" He rested the paddle warningly against her throbbing bottom.

"Mon Dieu! Oui! I will, please just stop." Tears were streaming down her face.

Morg slowly rubbed the paddle in circles. "It didn't seem to make an impression on Rosalie, and I gave her the same amount of spanks you just had. Perhaps more is in order, lass, just to make sure?"

"NON! I will remember," pleaded Kat.

He lifted her up then and cradled her shaking form in his arms. "All right, lass, we shall see. If you forget, perhaps the punishment Rosalie's about to receive will remind you."

"I'll r...remember," sobbed Kat, burying her face in his chest.

He picked her up then and set her down in a soft chair. "Stay there," he said softly, kissing the top of her head. Then he walked back to his chair. "All right, Rosalie, come here, lass."

Rosalie turned, the tears already streaming down her face at Kat's punishment. Shaking, she approached Morg. "Oh, please, Sir, please. I'm sorry I forgot. It was a party, we had been drinking, and I won't forget again, I promise, Sir." She wrung her hands and stepped back and forth from one foot to the other in her panic.

Morg looked sternly at her. "If ye hadn't just had a punishment for it, it wouldn't be so bad. But it was the same day, lass!"

"It...it was the excitement of the party and all...I'm sorry, Sir," Rosalie cried.

Morg shook his head and pulled her down across his knee. No point in dragging it out, he

decided. Just get it over with. Quickly, he lifted her skirt again and pinned her legs under his. Taking both her wrists in his large hand, he bent her well over his left knee.

Quickly, then, he laid into her reddened bottom with the paddle, ignoring the howls and wild shrieks of pain as her bottom bucked and squirmed beneath the strokes. He landed twenty firm spanks and stopped, giving her time to recover before he lifted her up.

"Are ye going to remember for sure now?" he asked gently as she sobbed wildly over his knee, her hands flying to her bottom when he released them.

"Yes, Sirrrrrr," she wailed pitifully.

"All right, then, your punishment is over." He lifted her up and set her on his knee to talk to her. "I did nae enjoy seeing ye hurt, lass, and I feel responsible for ye like ye was a younger sister, not a servant. I've grown quite fond of ye, and I want ye to consider this your home and not just a job. Ye are not an indentured servant anymore, and I'll pay ye to work. Does that suit ye?"

Rosalie stared at him, seeing the kindness beneath the harsh exterior. "Y...yes, Sir," she hiccupped, returning his smile. Her wet brown eyes shone with gratitude, and shyly, she placed a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you, Sir."

"Ye are welcome, lass, now go on with ye." He stood up and pointed her towards the door and waited until she had gone. Then he crossed to Kat and scooped her up in his arms, fixed her clothes and then took her place in the chair with her firmly ensconced on his lap.

Kat was still sniffing when Morg sat down with her, and she snuggled into his warmth like a small

kitten. He wanted to make love to her, but this wasn't the time, so he settled for holding her.

"Why did you leave Scotland, Morg?" Kat asked finally. She had been wondering for a long time now.

Morg rubbed his fingers between hers absentmindedly; enjoying the peace and the feeling of completeness he felt just holding her. "I was betrayed, lass, by my half brother and my Uncle. Between the two of them, they tricked me out of my inheritance as Laird of Castle McKenna."

"Oh," Kat replied, her eyes growing big in her small face. "Have you ever thought of going back? Getting revenge?"

"Aye, lass, every day."

Kat's heart sank. "Then, you will be leaving...someday?" she asked painfully.

"Aye, someday I will go back and claim my rightful place. But I will probably have to kill my half brother to do it. I've nae heard from anyone in the clan for a long time now, and I grow worried. I'm afraid Canton will destroy them all in the end and squander all that my father and grandfather worked to build."

"When are you going?" Kat's throat worked painfully, trying bravely to sound normal. He had said she would always belong to him, but he was already planning on leaving her.

"Not for awhile yet, I've got work to do here." He looked down at her. "What about ye, lass? Have ye decided that perhaps LaSalle is not such a bad person after all?"

"My father is dead because of him. I can't forgive him that. But at least he wasn't lying about my mother. I will do my best to be civil to him because of Frankie, but that's the best I can do," Kat replied fiercely.

"There are many such stories on the seas, lass. How would you feel if some lad came after your blood because his brother was killed when your ship attacked his vessel? How would that make ye feel? Ye may not even have known the lad yet ye are being held responsible for his death?"

"Oui, I do see what you mean," Kat answered slowly.

"In war, there are always casualties, and innocents invariably die, but are ye sure your Father was innocent then?"

"What do you mean?" Kat asked suspiciously.

"Why did he nae have the guardian galleon behind the vessel where she belonged? Did his arrogance perhaps cause the loss of the ship by leaving her open to acts of war and the like? Perhaps your father is at least partially to blame for the loss of lives that occurred that day."

Kat was silent, pondering the things he said. She had never thought of it that way before, and perhaps Morg had a point. She sighed heavily. "Oui, I can see what you mean, Morg, but that in itself does not leave LaSalle blameless."

"Perhaps not, but then I guess only the God in the heavens will have the final judgment. In the meantime, we do the best we can, eh, lass?"

Kat relaxed against him, getting sleepy. "Perhaps," she agreed finally, yawning and stretching. She snuggled into him and drifted off to sleep. Morg laid his head back on the chair and relaxed as well. When Rosalie checked on them, they were both asleep.

Rosalie went about looking for Alyssa. No one had seen her since that morning. That was strange; usually Alyssa was always about. Oh well, she thought. She will turn up sooner or later; perhaps she had gone to visit some of her island family.

She was working in the kitchen when she heard the sound at the door. Cocking her head to the side, she listened, and then figured she must have imagined it. Then she heard it again, a faint scratching noise, then a moaning sound. The hair on the back of her neck went up, and the kitchen boy's eyes went wide. "Get the gun," she hissed, pointing to the pantry.

The boy nodded and quickly went inside the pantry, returning with the pistol. "Keep it pointed at the door while I get the Governor." He nodded and she ran on swift feet to the study. Slipping inside, she went over to the sleeping couple. Lightly, she touched Morg on the shoulder. "Sir! Please wake up, Sir, there may be trouble at the kitchen door."

Morg was instantly awake, looking up into Rosalie's pale face, her dark eyes huge. "What is it, Rosalie?" He and Kat stood up, and he reached for his sword and pistol.

"I heard a scratching and moaning sound at the kitchen door," she whispered. "I left the kitchen boy holding a gun on the door while I came to get you."

"Where is Alyssa?" Morg growled. He quickly left the study, the girls following him.

"No one has seen her since this morning," Rosalie replied.

"You mean she's not back yet?"

"Back, Sir?"

"Aye, she went to visit her brother, but should have been back a few hours ago. I don't like this!"

Coming into the kitchen, he saw the wide-eyed lad standing there with the pistol still pointed at the door. "Stay there," he commanded in a whisper. "You too, Kat, and be prepared." Quickly, he left the room and went out the veranda door off the dining room, melting into the shadows.

With his pistol drawn, he silently slipped around the side of the house and then peered around the corner, looking towards the kitchen door. He swore when he saw the still figure of Alyssa lying on the ground. "Open the door," he shouted and he ran to her and turned her over. She was breathing, but there was blood down the front of her, and she moaned and opened her eyes to look at Morg. He lifted her up so he could hear her speak.

"My people...attacked by pirates...they are coming inland...and sending ships to block the harbor. You've got to get some of the ships out before..." she faded off and closed her eyes, her body going limp in his arms.

Morg picked her up and brought her into the kitchen. Quickly, he inspected her wounds. She had been knifed...twice...once in the shoulder and once along her ribcage. They must have left her for dead, and she had come back to warn him. "Take care of her," he commanded Rosalie, "I have to get to Jacques and the others."

He turned to the kitchen boy. "Into the bell tower...ring it. Keep ringing it until ye see people moving." The boy quickly scurried off.

Morg ran to the stable and brought Aramis out. Then he leaped on him bareback and gave Kat a hand up. He began thundering towards the settlement and the docks as the bell began ringing behind him.

Jacques was just walking Frankie back from the beach as the sun was setting. The peaceful beauty of the evening sunset was interrupted by the harsh tones of the tower bell ringing through the air. "Mon Dieu, that is the warning bell!" he exclaimed. Grabbing Frankie's hand, he began to run towards the docks.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"We are under attack!" yelled Frankie. "But who is attacking us? And where are they?"

Men were running everywhere when they got back, and the Aphrodite was already pulling out of the harbor. Frankie ran with Jacque to the Nemesis just as Frenchy was taking her out of the docking.

"I'll take over, you get the Rabbit," yelled Jacques. Frenchy nodded his agreement and ran for the ship he was assigned in times of battle. His first mate was just weighing anchor.

Morg had called a meeting right after the news of the Arab's involvement in the treasure. It was decided when the bell sounded, the Aphrodite, the Nemesis and the Rabbit would take up guard beyond the harbor. This would prevent any ships with long range cannons from taking a stance there and shelling the ships in dock.

Groups of men were assigned the cannons on the wall of the harbor and some were pointed towards the harbor, others pointed inward in case of attack from behind. It had been a good plan, but Morg hadn't expected to have to use it so soon.

Inside the mansion, the stable boys had pulled the windows shut and boarded them, leaving guards at each window while Rosalie and the kitchen girl looked after Alyssa.

Morg met his army of men in the middle of the docks and held up his hands. "We are soon to be under attack from the back of the island as well as from the front. I don't know how much time we have or what we are facing if my source is correct, but I want everyone in place and prepared."

He went on. "Spread out! Take up positions beyond the settlement and behind the manor. Be prepared for attack from the back, the ships out

front will be prepared to take on the attack from the front of the harbor.

If ye do get men from the back, let them come into the middle, and we'll sandwich them between us. Captain Colder, get a platoon dispatch of twenty sailors and defend the manor. All civilians that do not wish to fight need to go to the manor immediately."

He looked around and saw several wenches from the pub headed up the hill, as well as some older visitors to the island and workers from the hotel.

"Captain Montbalm, ye will cover the east beach with your ship's cannons. The east bank of cannons is prepared to back ye up. Captain Adams...the same for the West Side and the West Bank. Nigor, ye will watch the middle of the island with the Lady Queen and try to avoid shelling the manor if ye please." The men laughed uneasily at Morg's attempt at humor. "I'll take the Princess and be prepared to use her where needed."

"What do you want us to do, Governor," yelled a Captain from one of the docked ships that was only there for provisions.

"Any of ye that wish to leave can go," returned Morg swiftly. "Or ye can stay and be prepared to fight if need be. The choice is yours. We'll do our best to protect ye if ye choose not to fight, just stay out of the way."

Morg took Kat's arm and hurried up the plank of the Princess and they began to wait.

On the Nemesis, Victoria was holding Frankie's arm, her face pale as the ship followed Frenchy out of the harbor. "You should be in the cabin, Mother," Frankie told her. "I don't want you in harm's way."

"But what about you, ma petite?" Victoria protested.

"I can take care of myself, Mother, I've been fighting battles for a couple of years now. Pierre has trained me well."

Jacques overheard her comment. "That is true, Victoria. I had to trick Frankie out of her sword today, she is an excellent fighter."

Victoria nodded. "I will stay here until the fighting begins, then I will go inside."

"Do you have a pistol, Mother?"

"No child, nor do I know how to use one."

"Take this one," Frankie replied, handing it to her. "If you have to, just cock the hammer, point it and shoot it by pulling the trigger here. It will give you one shot anyway to protect yourself if necessary."

Victoria hesitantly took the pistol and held it up to look at it.

"Don't point it at anyone, Mother," Frankie said dryly, "unless you intend to shoot them. It could go off accidentally."

"Oh...Oui," she replied hastily, pointing the pistol towards the deck.

When everyone was in place, an eerie silence settled over the settlement. It was as if all were holding their breath. The bell had stopped ringing, and the boy stood with his spyglass, searching the jungle growth in the growing dusk, looking for any sign of movement.

Frenchy had taken the rabbit and began to scout around the island, making circling movements down one side of the island and then back along the other side. None of the ships had lanterns on, keeping themselves as dark as possible. When the Rabbit came racing back from the west, they saw the lantern flash three times. The signal that ships were coming...three of them.



From the deck of the Lady Princess, Morg saw the signal through the spyglass. "Here they come," he said tersely to Kat. At the same time, men began to appear in the settlement, hundreds of men. Morg gave the signal by firing the Lady Princess's cannon into the middle of the beach, sending men and sand flying in the air. Suddenly, the defense came swarming from the decks of the Lady Queen, the Spanish frigate, the Diablo and the other frigate, the Lobo. The guest ships decided to defend from their ships if necessary, since they didn't know which men were Morg's men and which were the attacking ones. They all looked like pirates!

Out in the harbor, the three ships had engaged, but they didn't have much of a chance. With the Rabbit zipping around them and placing small well spaced shots and the longer-range cannons of the Aphrodite and the Nemesis, they were unprepared for the ferocity of the defense. When the pirate flag of the Nemesis went up, they turned tail and ran.

"See what effect my reputation has," chuckled Jacques amused at the ships leaving. "They run like they have seen a ghost."

Frankie did think it was amusing. She smiled at him, and they turned their attention to the settlement and settled down to wait. They would guard the harbor to make sure the ships did not return.

Inside the cabin, Victoria was once again caught up in the battle. Only this battle was not in the present.

They were being attacked. She was remembering when the Nemesis attacked the vessel she and Gatineu were on. "Non!" she screamed, her shrill cry cutting the air. Gatineu, blood all over him...where is Frankie?



Outside the cabin, Frankie heard her mother scream, and she went racing to the cabin, Jacques right behind her.

Victoria's face was ashen and her hands shaking when Frankie walked in. "Frankie," she whispered hoarsely, "you are safe!"

Frankie took her mother's cold hands and rubbed them between her own. "Of course, I'm all right, Mother, the battle is over. It was not much of a battle."

"And Gatineu?"

It was then that Frankie realized her mother was not in the present. "Come, Mother, sit down and rest," she coaxed gently. She led her mother to a chair and sat her down, holding her hands in her own as she sat beside her.

"It's over, Mother, relax," she crooned comfortingly. They sat like that for several minutes. Victoria finally lay her head back against the chair cushion and closed her eyes. Her fingers still had a strong grip on Frankie's hands.

Jacques watched them, realizing too that the battle must have triggered memories for Victoria. Once again, he felt regret that he had let his need for revenge hurt innocent people, but what was done was done. He could not go back now.

The battle on the shore did not last long, either. Without the advantage of surprise, the Arab's men were quickly subdued and taken prisoner. Morg didn't even have to leave the Lady Princess. Nigor finally drug a dark skinned man before him and pushed him down on the deck to his knees.

"Who sent ye here?" Morg growled.

The man stared stonily at him, refusing to answer.

Kat watched curiously, staying out of it.

"I asked ye a question," Morg said dangerously. He laid his sword against the swarthy neck. "Answer the question, or I'll find someone who will."

When Morg drew his sword back the man hastily snarled. "It was Sheik Rasheed. He found out you murdered Pedro and stole his treasure. He sent us to get it back."

"And what happens if you return without it?" Morg asked silkily.

"If we do not achieve our goal, we don't dare return."

"The treasure is gone. Split up, dispersed, never to be gathered together again. And Pedro was a traitor to Sheik Rasheed. He was plotting against him on behalf of Spain." Morg thought for a moment, considering the man's words. His decision made, he spoke to the man again.

"I'll tell ye what I will do. I will send what little treasure I confiscated from Pedro back to the Sheik as a gesture of good faith. And I will release any prisoners my men have taken. But hear me well; if he comes against me again, I will see that each man captured is shot. I will take nae prisoners nor give nae quarter, is that understood?" Morg's green eyes gleamed wickedly, and the Arab nodded.

"And I'll expect a visit in return with a gesture of good faith from him that he understands me, and we can call upon one another for help if need be. Can ye deliver the message?"

With instructions for Nigor to guard the man, Morg went below and picked up the small chest of jewels and gold coins that had been part of his split. He handed it to the Arab, whose eyes lit up with greed. "I'll be checking to see that Sheik Rasheed received my gift," Morg said evenly. "What is your name?"

"Ahmed," replied the man.

"Well, Ahmed, Nigor will escort you and your men back to the ships at the back of the island. Twenty of your men will remain in my jail as insurance. If ye do not return to collect them with a gift of good faith from the Sheik, they will be executed within 60 days. Do ye understand?"

The man nodded, his eyes gleaming and guarded, and with what Kat interpreted as a glimmer of respect.

Morg pulled Nigor aside and talked to him for a few minutes. "Make sure ye get twenty men ye feel they will want back and lock them in the jail. Then escort the remaining group back across the island to their ships. Check on the status of the villagers and see if they need anything as well."

Nigor nodded and set off to do as the Governor requested.

"Why did you do that?" Kat asked curiously.

"Because if delivered, it will insure the Sheik's favor. He was only planning to rob Spain, just as we were. Since they were never his jewels to begin with, to get any part of the treasure is a salve to his ego. And if he believes Pedro was double-crossing him and was killed for the traitor he was, he would be happy to keep us on his list of prospective allies, especially since he was so soundly defeated. It will also mean we don't have to keep looking over our shoulder all the time for an attack from him." His white teeth gleamed in a smile.

"Oui, I see...an excellent tactician I must say," she mocked lightly.

"Come, little hellcat, let's go view the damages and see how Alyssa is." He slapped her sore bottom and she yelped, and then glared at him.

"I'll thank you to keep your hands to yourself, Monsieur," she said tightly, refusing to rub her bottom in front of the men.

Morg just laughed and held out his arm to escort her.

The battle had been a complete victory, and the cleanup was minimal. The ships were headed in and the men began to celebrate. Morg insisted they celebrate in shifts and keep a sharp eye out lest the Sheik's men should decide to return and try again.

Alyssa's wounds were not fatal and the doctor assured Morg she would be fine. Nigor seemed awfully relieved, and Morg couldn't help giving him a wolfish grin. He was delighted to see Nigor blush for the first time since he had known him. "So that's how it is, eh, Nigor?"

Nigor, flushed, but he nodded slightly. Then he sat by Alyssa's bed, his strong arms folded as if he meant to take up residence there.

Kat and Morg went back to the docks to find Jacques and Frankie. Jacques had prisoners to sort out. The ship captains had agreed to take shifts patrolling the harbor frontage beyond the reef to make sure no one tried to sneak back up on them.

Frankie was standing at the railing of the Nemesis when Morg and Kat arrived at the docks, and the ship was just tying off.

She motioned them aboard, and they came up behind Frenchy who was suddenly in a big hurry to get back to Victoria now that the Rabbit was docked.

"What is wrong, Frankie?" Kat asked, noted the pallor of Frankie's cheeks.

"Mother has regained her memory, Kat, she wants to see all of us. I've sent word to Pierre, he should be here soon."

"How did that happen?" Kat was puzzled.

"It was the battle. I guess the sound of the cannons, the battle cries and guns going on around her, it must have triggered that day in her mind."

"This is a good thing!" exclaimed Kat.

"Yes and no...the good news is that she does remember everything. The bad news is...The Duchess of Fontaine has returned with a vengeance. She wants to know why we aren't married to Morg and Jacques!"

"Uh oh," groaned Kat, "protocol?"

"Oui, protocol," echoed Frankie glumly.

"Protocol?" Morg queried, looking puzzled.

"You don't know my mother, Monsieur," groaned Frankie in tune with Kat's groans. "To her, protocol, the right thing to do at the right time, is the rules one lives by."

"How does she explain being married to Frenchy then?" Kat asked sarcastically.

"I haven't hit her with that one yet," Frankie responded dryly. "And I don't think she has thought of it...at least in application to her anyway."

Kat shrugged. "Well, at least her memory has returned, that is important for other things. Now she can decide if she wishes to return home with us."

Morg's stomach leaped at Kat's words. Return home? What did she mean return home? She wasn't going anywhere that was away from him! He followed the girls into the cabin where Frenchy, Victoria and Jacques were already present.

"Kat darling!" exclaimed Victoria softy as her eyes lit on her other daughter. She stood up to greet her, laying her soft cheek against Kat's in the typical greeting and mock kiss of aristocracy.

"Mother, its good to have you back. Frankie tells me you have regained all your memory." Kat smiled benignly at her mother.

A knock sounded on the door. Morg opened it to admit Pierre.

"Bonjour, Victoria, I heard the news, congratulations." Pierre strode over to Victoria who again placed the perfunctory kiss on her brother in law's cheek.

"Oui, I have, Pierre. It's so nice to remember you. You have been wonderful to care for the girls all this time. I can't thank you enough."

"It was my pleasure." He looked at her and then at Frenchy. "You do need to come back to Louisiana now that you remember, and sign some papers. Gatineu left everything to you. There are other matters of estate that need to be straightened out that have been left on hold as well. As you know, Gatineu left me as executor if anything should happen to you and him together, which gave me control of the girls' estate. But, without proof that you were gone, they were unable to clear some things up on your behalf."

He didn't put it into words, but they all knew that no one had wanted to have Victoria declared legally dead until they had proof. Instead, Frankie and Kat had set out to determine if she were still alive.

"All those things can be easily handled, Pierre, but what I am most concerned about, is my daughters." She looked first at Jacques, then at Morg. "You two men have been cavorting with my daughters in many unchaperoned situations. This is unacceptable. I'm afraid you leave me no choice but to insist that you now marry them. I cannot allow you to sully their reputations, as they are of noble blood." She spoke softly, but there was a thread of steel running through her voice. "For all I know, they may be with child as we speak. I'm afraid I must insist that a minister of God be brought forward to marry you immediately."

She looked reproachfully at Pierre. "I cannot think how you let this happen, Pierre. I am disappointed that you have not taken steps to rectify this situation before this."

Kat spoke first. "Mother, I am not willing to marry just to satisfy protocol!" Her voice was scornful. "When I marry, I want it to be for love, not because it's expected!"

"I'm afraid I have to agree, Mother, this is a long way from the French Court. Protocol is not practiced much here," Franked added helpfully.

Victoria stood up and raised herself to her full 5'5". Her eyes flashed. "This may not be the French court, Mademoiselles, but God's laws are still in effect wherever you go! I shall not have my daughters playing fast and loose with men. You chose to bed them, now you shall marry them!

"What makes you think common pirates would want to marry us, Mother," stormed Kat, her green eyes getting angry.

"They may be pirates, but they are not common, and we all know it," replied Victoria frostily. She turned to Jacques and Morg. "You young men have chosen to bed my daughters knowing full well their stations in life. Nobility and gentry are always obvious. Now I insist you be the gentlemen you really are and face the consequences of your actions." Victoria the Duchess did not believe in mincing words.

"Thank you, Mother, I love being referred to as a punishment," Kat responded acidly.

"Ye will nae back talk your Mother, lass," Morg said mildly. "I'm afraid I must agree with her, I'm more than willing to own up to my actions. I will marry the wee lass." He bowed slightly to Victoria, and she dipped her head to acknowledge his words.



Victoria then turned to Jacques. "And you, Monsieur?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Frankie flushing. "I do NOT want to marry Jacques!"

"Nevertheless, we shall be married, ma petite," Jacques answered, his dark eyes placidly watching her. "I too, shall live up to my obligations."

"No, Mother, I won't be any man's obligation," Frankie ground out, her eyes turning a deep blue green.

"Do not tell your Mother no, ma petite, or I shall have to remedy your manners," Jacques said laconically.

"Then, it is settled," said Victoria, satisfied with Jacques and Morg's decision. "I shall await the Priest, then make the decisions about going home for awhile." She turned to Frenchy. "Come, Frenchy, I am tired. Please take me to our cabin so I can rest."

"Of course, ma cherie," replied Frenchy, his brown eyes twinkling at the four young people.

"I will talk to you tomorrow, my daughters, we will have a nice long visit." She smiled tiredly at them, ignoring the scowls on their faces and bid them goodnight. She smiled and nodded at Pierre and allowed Frenchy to lead her out.

"Uncle Pierre, you have to talk to her!" blurted Kat. She looked ready to bite nails, and Frankie didn't look any happier.

"Why?" Pierre asked mildly. "I quite agree with her." He bowed slightly and left the cabin.

The girls looked at each other and then looked at their respective men. "I am NOT marrying you," they both blurted out.

The men merely smiled and looked at each other. They folded their arms across their chests and looked at their respective wives to be.

"Aye, lass, ye will!"

"Oui, ma cherie, you will!"

Kat stormed out of the cabin, Frankie right behind her. They were headed down the plank when Frankie stopped. "Wait!" she muttered, her hand going to her sore buttocks.

"Oui, I forgot," replied Kat, wincing. "We have to have an escort." Seeing the paddle in her mind's eye, she looked around for the nearest man.

"There is Pierre up ahead, let's just catch up with him," hissed Frankie, and she took off running, Kat right behind her.

"Wait, Uncle Pierre!" they shouted.

Pierre turned and waited for them to catch up, and then he put his arm through both of the girls' arms to escort them back to the ship, a big smile on his face.

Behind them, standing in the door of the cabin, Morg and Jacques chuckled. "They do learn don't they?" Jacques said in satisfaction.

"Aye, that they do," agree Morg, his green eyes twinkling.

The next day, the girls were seated in their cabin with Victoria having tea and talking.

"Mother, how can you really expect us to get married?" fumed Frankie.

"Oui, Mother, besides, we know that you and Frenchy had an affair behind Father's back. Don't deny it, Mother, Frenchy already told us. In fact, he thinks Frankie might be his daughter."

Victoria sat her teacup down and faced the two disgruntled faces in front of her. She sighed and spoke. "Oui, I met Frenchy in Paris, and we did fall in love."

She paused for a moment and then spoke again. "I never loved Gatineu Fontaine, it was a marriage of convenience insisted on by both sets of parents.

A business transaction, if you will. He did not love me, either, but we both were duty bound to live up to what was expected of us. 'You will grow to love him,' my mother said, but I never did."

She took another sip of tea. "I fell in love with Frenchy almost immediately, and then I got pregnant and Gatineu accused me of having a lover. He was correct, of course, and though I would not confirm it, he spirited me away from Paris. After you girls were born, I went back to Paris to find Frenchy, but he was gone. I never saw him again, until he found me on that ship."

Her hands shook with the force of her emotions then. "You must understand that Gatineu was a good man, he never harmed me, and he truly loved you girls.

But the idea that I had taken a lover festered within him and continued to eat away at him, like a poison that slowly changed him.

We were fighting on that ship from France; he was threatening to disinherit me from his will. He was...ill. The doctors did not know how to treat him and nothing seemed to help.

He had terrible headaches, and they were getting worse. They would give him laudanum to ease the pain of the worst ones, but they felt it was only a matter of time until they were so bad they would kill him. He had already lost a lot of weight, as you may well remember and could ill afford to lose more."

Frankie and Kat looked at each other. They knew their father had suffered from headaches and remembered him losing weight, but they hadn't known how serious it was!

Victoria continued, her face pale. "My own father held not much more than a title. He had a problem with gambling, which was draining the family

resources desperately. He was hoping to get Gatineu's help, but Gatineu had become so obsessed with the idea of my lover that he was refusing to help him."

She looked at Kat and Frankie; her eye's growing large. "He was threatening to disinherit me from his will and denounce Frankie as a bastard. I do not think he would have, for he loved you both, but with the pain driving him crazy and his jealousy eating at him, he was becoming a different man. I feared for the future, and for Frankie."

She put her hand over both of the girls', her eyes suspiciously bright. "He sent the guardian galleon on ahead, thinking we might be attacked from the front for some reason known only to him. Even Pierre tried to talk to him, but he would not see reason.

When the Nemesis attacked, I'm afraid my state of mind was not good already. Combined with the shocks I had received from Gatineu and the shock of the attack, I lost my memory."

"Mon Dieu," whispered Kat fiercely. "This is so hard to believe, Mother! I cannot think that Father would do that to Frankie, she is my twin!"

"I know darling," Victoria replied sadly. "But you have to remember that Gatineu was not himself. The headaches were driving him insane. The fact that Frankie looked nothing like him also aggravated him. Not once did I ever acknowledge I had met Frenchy, but he knew...somehow he knew."

"Mother, do you believe Frenchy is my father?" Frankie asked painfully.

"I honestly cannot say, darling," replied her mother tenderly. "Whether you do or not, as far as I am concerned, you legally belong to Gatineu, and you always have. If you and Frenchy wish to pursue a relationship, that is up to you."

They looked up as a knock sounded on the door. Pierre opened it and stuck his head inside. "Guess what? A British ship arrived in port a few hours ago, and there is a Catholic Father on board. He is prepared to perform a double wedding just as soon as the couples are ready!"

Chapter Twenty-Three

Morg stood in front of the mirror, critically surveying the image that looked back at him. He cut a pretty fine figure if he did say so himself.

The traditional Scottish formal dress with the kilt, left his legs bare underneath the tartan plaid, but some say it made sealing the wedding nuptials quicker and easier, if a man were so inclined. Across the sash was the clan emblem, an arm with a knife held straight and high, indicative of his fierce Scottish ancestors. His belt had the same emblem emblazoned in fine pewter with "Fortiter", across the top, meaning boldly. Aye, it was a good description.

In a few hours, he would be marrying the red headed chit he had claimed for his own. Frowning, he recalled their conversation from the previous evening.

The two couples had taken dinner together at the mansion, and then Morg had taken Kat into his study, while Frankie and Jacques had gone into the library to talk.

"I am NOT marrying you, Morg," Kat had insisted, when he spoke of the wedding arrangements made for today. His mind mulled over their conversation.

"We are getting married, lass, make nae mistake about that. Your mother is right, I won't take the chance of a child of mine being born a bastard." He looked down grimly at the defiant sprite.

"And just what makes you think you don't have bastards all over the Caribbean," Kat replied nastily. "After all, you are a pirate, Monsieur, surely you have hurt your share of women?" She didn't really

believe it, but she felt pressured, and she responded badly.

Morg's eyes narrowed. "I have nae hurt a woman, lass. The women who come to me willingly are women who know how to prevent such things, and have no desire for a child." He wasn't about to tell her the women had been few and far between. He didn't believe in forcing an unwilling woman, there were too many available and willing. "Ye had best watch your tongue, or ye'll be over my knee before this night is out."

"So you say," Kat replied sulkily. She looked up at him, angry that he had never once mentioned the word love. She didn't want to love this pirate, but she knew she did. It also grated on her nerves that she was once again being forced to do something she didn't want to. She just plain hated being forced into anything. She felt like screaming in frustration at the card life had dealt her.

"I say it because it is true!" He lifted her chin in his big palm. "Don't fight so, lass, ye are mine, just accept it. It may be a little sooner that we might have liked to marry, but we'll get along and muddle through it."

"If that's your idea of a proposal, I'm not impressed," Kat said acidly. She was disappointed that it seemed the best he could come up with. Maybe he didn't want to marry her and felt forced into it. She didn't want him on those terms. "I don't need a man who has to be forced in front of the Priest!"

Morg couldn't bring himself to admit he loved her, although he suspected it might be true. She was his...that should be good enough. Love made men weak, gave women ideas...ideas that they could take over and be the leader in the marriage. No woman was going to rule over Morg Macalister,

not while he could still put her across his knee and teach her who was boss!

"No one is forcing me in front of the Priest," Morg growled. "Ye are mine, little lass, and the sooner ye admit it, the better off ye will be. I'm just... 'Claiming my property,'...so to speak." He smiled ingratiatingly at her then, and Kat wanted to hit him. He bent his head and kissed the soft pink lips, then groaned as his body responded. "Ye are so perfect, lass, so beautiful. Say ye will marry me and stop fighting me."

Kat melted at his words. What woman who really wanted to say yes wouldn't? It was hard to think when his hands were doing things to her body that were driving her wild. She loved him, didn't she? Perhaps he would come to love her in return...at least he didn't want to lose her. Maybe it would be enough. "Oui," she sighed against his firm mouth. "I'll marry you."

Morg smiled in satisfaction and took her lips again. Coherent thought went out of Kat's mind.

In the library, Jacques wasn't faring much better. "Mon Dieu, but you are a stubborn woman, Francesca Fontaine! I've half a mind to put you over my knee and spank some sense into that beautiful head of yours!" He glared at Frankie.

"Non, it is you who are stubborn, Jacques. I don't want to get married right now! How can you just fall in with my Mother's wishes like this?" She put her hands on her hips and glared back at him.

"Because she is right, that's why," he replied. "We have an obligation to get married. You could be with child." He ran his palm lovingly over her flat stomach. "I want my children to have a father, so we will be married...tomorrow!"

"You can't make me marry you," seethed Frankie. In her heart, Frankie was confused. She had deep feelings for Jacques, but she didn't know if she was in love with him. On the other hand, she could be with child, and the idea of having a child out of wedlock was indeed very scary. She didn't think she would take well to convent life, and that's what she would have to do if she didn't have a father for her child.

"Yes, you will, ma cherie. I will not allow you to go to a convent. You might be pregnant even as we speak, and I don't want to lose you. If you are sent away, I might never find you again, and this I cannot bear."

Frankie sighed and her eyes filled with tears. "But, Jacques...I'm not sure I'm ready to be married." She skirted around the real issue. She wanted him to love her. She was pretty sure she could love him, if she didn't already...but she wanted to hear the words.

"Perhaps not, ma amie," he said tenderly, taking her in his arms. "But I...need you. Please say you will marry me." He kissed her sweetly on the lips, coaxing, pleading. He could not bring himself to say he loved her, not until he knew she loved him. But perhaps need would be enough.

"I need you so much, Frankie," he breathed against her mouth. "Say yes." He didn't want to drag her to the altar, but he would if he had too. There wouldn't be one hand raised against their marriage on the entire island, not even the Priest. Frankie really had no choice, but he wanted her to say yes just the same.

"All right, Jacques," whispered Frankie finally, feeling sad and defeated. Was she destined to be like her mother? Married without love? It appeared that way.

"Don't look so sad, ma amie," Jacques said throatily. "We will be good together." He pulled her to him then, his hand roaming down her back and cupping her buttocks.

Crushed to his chest, Frankie felt desire hot and strong, and she gave herself up to the cravings in her traitorous body. Maybe they didn't love each other, but they sure did desire each other...maybe it would be enough. It was more than her mother had started with.

Morg looked at the other image in the mirror, his friend Jacques was appraising his own clothing. "Are ye ready, Jacques?" he asked, his green eyes gleaming in anticipation of the coming nuptials.

"Oui, Morg, I am ready," he replied easily, grinning at the other man. He had finally gotten used to the sight of Morg in the red tartan skirt. Kilt as he had been corrected. "I just hope Frankie does not run out on me at the last moment."

"Aye, it would be just what those two wenches would do. I took precautions and put a guard on the mansion just in case. They won't get far if they do, and if they try it, they'll be getting married with sore arses."

"Are you planning on going back to Scotland anytime soon?" Jacques asked curiously, passing time until it was time for the wedding to take place. It was going to be held in the garden of the manor, and people were already there. Food had been set up on tables, and Rosalie and Alyssa had hastily prepared a wedding cake. It was also the twins' birthday; they were officially 21 years old today. It was a day for much celebration!

The men had talked extensively of their backgrounds by this time. Each knew the other had

been betrayed, and a deep friendship was developing between them.

"Not right away," Morg replied. "I've sent word to Eileen for news. I had it delivered by special messenger since I've nae heard anything from her in months. I suspect Canton is keeping her from receiving any of my letters or sending any out. I made arrangements for a courier to get to her another way. I hope to hear something soon."

He went to the liquor cabinet and poured him and Jacques a shot of rum. "What about you? Anything new on the horizon, lad?"

"Oui, I have made some new contacts, and they are doing some checking for me. One day, I'll get to the bottom of the matter, but for now, the Pirates Hideaway is going to be home for me."

"Aye, I'll drink to that," Morg replied, holding up his glass in a toast.

"Oui, to our business, our home and our brides to be," Jacques added with a chuckle.

They were just sipping their toast when they heard a commotion out in the dining room. Loud angry voices...a crashing sound...and then the familiar sound of a woman getting a spanking.

Morg set his glass down and opened the door. He rushed out with Jacques right behind him and came to a sudden stop as he came into the dining room.

Upstairs, Frankie and Kat were standing in front of the mirrors in a bedroom while Rosalie and Victoria worked with their hair. They had had no time to make gowns for the occasion, and the men had requested they wear the coming out gowns they had worn the first day Victoria was on the island.

"That's fine, Mother, it's not like Morg hasn't already seen this dress, anyway. What's the point of



going to so much extra trouble?" Kat was a bit grumpy.

"Stop being so grumpy, darling," Victoria admonished her, slapping her hand away from the hair comb.

Frankie was also a bit grumpy, but Rosalie was excited enough for both of them. "You girls are so beautiful! I wish I had something this lovely to wear." She looked wistfully at the gowns, touching the lace on Frankie's.

Frankie smiled at her. "Don't worry, Rosalie, you would find this dress far too hot for this climate. I can't wait to get a wardrobe of island clothing. It's much cooler!"

"Here are your flowers," Rosalie replied, showing the girls the lovely island bouquets she had made up of pink and lavender orchids, as well as some beautiful white lilies.

They were all admiring the flowers when the sound of shrieking and a crash came from downstairs. They looked at one another and then scrambled for the door.

Running out onto the veranda overlooking the dining room, they saw Nigor seated in a chair with Alyssa over his long hard thighs. He was spanking the daylights out of the seat of her island skirt with long hard strokes. Alyssa of course, was cursing and screeching while trying to get away from him.

They saw Morg and Jacques just rushing into the room, and Kat's mouth fell open when she saw Morg. "Mon Dieu! He is wearing a skirt!"

"You do NOT throw things at me, woman," growled Nigor as he continued to paddle Alyssa despite the audience they were gaining.

Across the room, a young kitchen girl was trying to sweep up broken glass.



"I will NOT marry you," shrieked Alyssa, thoroughly enraged. She fought desperately to escape Nigor's tight hold, but it was useless. He had her firmly pinned. "I don't care how much you spank me, I will NOT marry you, today!" Her voice was sounding a little tearful at this point.

Even Kat and Frankie winced at the sight of Nigor's powerful arm as thick their waistlines pounding Alyssa's bouncing buttocks through the flowered cotton.

Nigor stopped and pulled up her upright. "The spanking was for throwing that glass and breaking it," snapped Nigor. "And if you don't start being reasonable, I'll spank you some more!"

Alyssa glared at him, her black eyes shining with tears she refused to shed as she rubbed her painfully burning bottom.

"Do you need some help, Nigor?" offered Morg solicitously.

The girls were coming down the stairs. "That is not a skirt, Kat," hissed Victoria, trying to shush her daughter.

"No, Sir, I just wanted Alyssa to take advantage of the fact there is a Priest here who can marry us, and we don't know when another one can be found, but she is very stubborn and says she is not ready yet." He gave Alyssa an impatient glare.

"And I'm trying to explain to this unreasonable man, that I have to be married within my tribe first, or my clan won't acknowledge our union!" She glared back at him.

"That's just an excuse; I've talked to the Chief," declared Nigor. "Do you want to go back over my knee for lying now?"

"Well, he did say he would rather I got married in the clan first," Alyssa declared, looking away from him with trembling lips.

"That's probably true, however, he will always be available, and a Catholic Priest isn't!"

"If it helps any, I will soon have the ability to perform weddings as part of my Governor's duties, Nigor," Morg responded swiftly. "So you could get married anytime you chose."

"See, there is always a solution if you look for it," Alyssa said acidly.

"Woman!" growled Nigor warningly, taking her arm and leading her away. Over his shoulder he said, "Thank you, Sir, I'll keep that in mind."

Morg was chuckling when he heard a familiar voice sounding a bit too strident for his tastes.

"I'm not marrying a man in a skirt, Mother, I don't care what you say!"

He turned towards the stairs to see Kat coming down them, her eyes raking up and down his figure. Jacques snickered behind his hand, and Morg sent him a glowering look.

"This is not a skirt, lass," boomed Morg, "it's a traditional Scottish kilt, and in the red colors of the Macalister clan. All the men in Scotland wear them, especially for weddings."

Frankie looked sympathetically at Kat. She wouldn't want to marry a man in a skirt, either.

"We are not IN Scotland," Kat pointed out acidly. "So put on some pants!"

"I'll nae change clothes, lass, I'm already dressed for the wedding, and it's about due to start. It's too late to change now, even if I wanted too." He walked over to Kat and looked down into her tempestuous face. "It does have its advantages ye know," he whispered into her ear.

Kat's eyes grew wide, and her mouth opened in shocked disbelief. "You are joking, aren't you, Monsieur?"

Morg took her arm and marched into his study where he closed the door. Taking her hand he ran it up under his kilt. He grinned when she gasped. "Mon Dieu, so it is true!"

Kat grinned wickedly and ran her hand slowly down and back up his bare thigh until she came to the hardening shaft beginning to pulse in her hand.

"Stop that, lass," hissed Morg pulling her hand away.

Kat laughed when his hard shaft kept the kilt sticking out slightly. "I think you had better change into pants or everyone is going to know you are...um...randy," she teased.

"There is one way to cure that, wee one," he grinned back. Spinning her around he lifted her heavy skirts and parted the chemise. He ran his fingers down the valley between her bare buttocks and on down between her thighs while she gasped and protested. Her protests didn't fool him because he could feel the moisture gathering already. Quickly, he sent his shaft into her moist opening, feeling it slide easily, and he groaned with pleasure.

"No! Not here, Morg...you'll crush my dress...ohhhhhh!" Kat moaned and forgot about the dress as he drove into her quickly. Kat's hands were up against the wall, and she tried hard not to be too vocal, biting her fist to keep from crying out.

There was a sharp knock on the door, and Morg held it shut with his palm as he finished. "We'll be right there," he called, ending with a gasp of delight as he took his little sprite over the edge with him.

Panting, he stood her up and held her close for a few minutes until they both calmed down. Then looking down, he grinned boyishly and said, "See, all taken care of."

Kat looked down at the now flat kilt and shook her head, trying to keep from laughing. "Shhh...people will be scandalized," she whispered.

"You look beautiful, ma petite," Jacques whispered into Frankie's ear after Kat and Morg disappeared. "Shall we find a room as well?" He grinned wickedly at her.

"You don't think...surely not," protested Frankie, looking at the door her sister had disappeared into.

Clearing his throat he spoke loudly. "We need to settle this once and for all, ma cherie!" He took her arm and began marching her towards the library. When they had entered the room and shut the door, he spun her around and crushed her to his chest, taking her lips hungrily.

"Jacques!" Frankie gasped when he finally released her. "What are you doing?"

He was quickly unbuckling his breeches and lowering his pants. He reached down and lifted Frankie's skirts and slipped his hand between her thighs searching for the opening of the chemise. Finding it, he bent and kissed her again as he gently rubbed the small bud beneath his fingers.

"Ohhh...Jacques," breathed Frankie, spreading her thighs and putting her arms around his neck.

Quickly, Jacques backed up a few feet to a chair and sat down, and then leaning back slightly, he turned Frankie around and lowered her gently onto his rock hard shaft.

Frankie helped him as she held her dress and allowed him to slide into her silken sheath.

She felt totally decadent and wanton as the sounds of people gathering for the wedding filtered through the drawn curtains in the library.

Gasping, she rode him then, his hardness filling her almost painfully until she adjusted to his girth.

"This is so...so...wonderfulllllll," she moaned, delighting in the fact that it was so forbidden that it was even more exciting.

"You are the one who is wonderful," panted Jacques, groaning himself from the sheer pleasure of being inside her. He didn't think it could ever be the same with any other woman, and Jacques was hooked...for life. He wasn't about to let her get away from him.

He was just fixing his breeches when the knock sounded on the door. "Coming," he called, grinning at Frankie. Holding out his arm to her he said, "Shall we go get married, ma amie?"

"Well," Victoria said indignantly. "This is highly unusual...not normal protocol at all!"

"What's not normal, Victoria?" asked Pierre, coming into the room and looking around.

"The groom is not supposed to see the bride before the wedding. And now Morg and Kat have gone into the study, and Jacques and Frankie have gone into the library! This is most unusual!"

"Were they arguing?" Pierre asked worriedly. "They aren't getting spanked are they?"

"Non, I don't think so, although Kat was declaring she would not marry a man in a skirt, and Jacques said something about settling something. Oh, I don't know.... I'm confused!"

Pierre cocked his head to listen. "Well, I don't hear the sounds of spanking coming from anywhere," he chuckled. "At least, that is one good sign."

"Maybe they just wanted to talk," Rosalie added helpfully.

Pierre suspected it was more than that, but wisely he didn't let on. "We'll give them 15 minutes

then knock on the door. I came to tell you that the Priest is here, and the garden in filling up with guests. It's almost time for the wedding to begin."

Outside in the garden, the guests were indeed waiting for the wedding to begin. It was a ragtag mixture to say the least, mostly pirates. There were some guests from the various ships in dock, some friends, some just curious. The various ship captains of Morg's little pirate group screened them in advance, and all weapons were left at the garden gate.

No one was allowed in the manor except family and guests of the wedding party. The servants at the manor had taken the time to create a path of orchid petals for the girls to walk on and a small dias had been constructed for the Priest to stand on.

Morg and Jacques came in and stood at the front, waiting for Pierre to escort the girls in.

The food tables were off to the side and laden with meats and breads and plenty of rum was available.

A bottle of wine had been kept cold in the small stream behind the mansion, and it was waiting for the couples to share after the ceremony.

Finally, Victoria came and walked down to the front to wait, and soon after, Pierre escorted Kat and Frankie to the front, handing them over to their respective partners.

"Does anyone have just cause for these couples not to be wed?" Father Harrigan asked loudly, and then waited for a response. When none was forthcoming, he went on. "I now pronounce you man and wife. What heaven hath joined let no man cut asunder."



Kat and Frankie looked at each other. They were married now, for better or for worse, just as the Priest had said.

The cannons around the harbor each sent a salute to the middle of the bay and people came up to congratulate the happy couples.

Morg and Jacques looked at each other and grinned. "Shall we?" Morg asked.

"By all means...we shall!" Jacques answered.

The men took an empty chair each and before Kat or Frankie understood what was happening, they found themselves bottoms up over the laps of their newly acquired husbands.

"What are you doing?" shrieked Kat. She tried to push herself up holding onto Morg's leg, her face red with embarrassment.

"Oui...Jacques! What is the meaning of this," Frankie yelled as her hands came down to support her on the ground.

"We decided we needed to have a ceremonial spanking," Morg answered wickedly.

"Just to set the tone of the marriage, ma petite," added Jacques helpfully.

The crowd gathered curiously around, many of them laughing and pointing, others simply curious.

"I'm going to kill you," Kat vowed, "I'm going to slice you into tiny ribbons!" Her feet kicked furiously.

"I will never forgive you for this, Jacques," Frankie added fervently, her face flushing with embarrassment. She tried to put her hand back, but Jacques quickly pinned it to the small of her back.

"A ceremonial spanking," boomed Pierre grinning delightedly. "What a wonderful idea, and I can't think of two girls who deserve such an honor more than my nieces." He clapped his hands and



bowed to Jacques and Morg. "Carry on, Monsieur's, I've been waiting for five years for this moment!"

"Pierre!" gasped Victoria, thoroughly scandalized. "This is highly unusual, not normal protocol, not normal at all!"

"I don't think they are worried about protocol, ma amie," chuckled Frenchy, watching the couples.

The men did indeed proceed as Pierre instructed although how much the girls felt over their heavy dresses was anyone's guess. But they did kick and yell a lot and were quite flushed by the time their husbands pulled them to their feet, much to Pierre's delight.

He proceeded to give each of them a hug and kissed their cheeks, and Kat and Frankie decided not be angry with him. Their husbands were a different story, however, and once again; they were vowing revenge for being made a public spectacle.

"I hope you sleep with one eye open tonight, husband," whispered Kat fiercely, her emerald eyes flashing at Morg.

"I don't plan on sleeping at all, tonight," he responded wickedly and winked at her. Kat refused to answer that.

It was much later when Frankie and Jacques were finally alone in their new home above the jail, that he brought up revenge again.

"Do you still want revenge on me, ma amie?" Jacques asked wickedly, running his palm over her smooth creamy buttocks as she lay beside him.

Frankie thought about it for a moment. "Oh, I think I can get revenge anytime I wish," she responded throatily, caressing the hard muscles of his chest and running her palm down his flat stomach. "Just not the kind you are used to." She smiled sweetly at him as she teased his manhood

with her fingers, lightly touching him and pulling back.

"Be careful, my little pirate," responded Jacques with a growl. "Revenge can be a two way street you know."

"Isn't that the best kind?" she replied teasingly, her blue green eyes turning deeply blue as he stared down at him.

"Oui," he growled, pulling her head down to take her rosy lips more fully. "It is, indeed, the sweetest revenge of all."

