



## HER BOUNTY

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# HER BOUNTY

BY

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HER BOUNTY  
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## CHAPTER 1

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“Skiff ahead, cap’n!”

Jason Jennings stared up at the crow’s nest towering above. “Aye, I spot it.”

He’d been watching it for sometime bobbing on the water with no direction. *Curious, indeed.* Ever cautious, he’d been waiting until they were closer for a better look. It could have been a trap, although he’d spotted no other ships on the horizon.

He lifted the spyglass to his eye. A splash of blue lay in the bottom of the boat.

“What do you see inside?” he called up to the sailor.

“Looks to be a body, cap’n.” He shielded his eyes against the sun with his hand. The young man had the sight of a hawk—sharp and unquestionable. “It be a woman, sir, from the look of it.”

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Jason scanned the ocean in all directions. Nothing. Still... “Any sign of another ship?”

“Not a one, sir, but I’m keepin’ me eye out.”

“First sign of a sail, call out.”

“Aye, cap’n.”

Jason turned to his first mate. Wilbur Knott’s pale blue eyes never left the ocean. The skinny man was nervous, with good reason. They were going home for good. No more privateering for them. Henry Morgan’s arrest had thrown a scare into them. It was time to call it quits while they were ahead and free. No telling what the English government might do next to appease the Spanish queen. Jason didn’t want to be caught up in the storm.

They’d been lucky so far, and there was no reason to push it at this point. He and his crew had amassed a substantial fortune over the years. Used wisely, it would keep them in good stead the rest of their lives. And if Jason was anything, he was wise. Following Morgan’s example, he’d bought prime land in Jamaica. His plantation, though not the largest, was doing very well. He, his mother, and his sister need never worry...as long as he made it to port safely. Lucky so far didn’t mean lucky now. All of them—officers and crew—would hold their breaths until they were home safely. No one wanted to jinx the ship by being cocky.

“Could be a trap,” Wilbur finally said.

“That it could.” Jason peered through the glass then passed it Wilbur’s way.

He wrapped his long, thin fingers around it much like he would the hilt of his sword—strong and hard so as not to lose it. Fear emanated from him. Jason didn’t blame him a bit.

They’d been friends for as long as Jason could remember. Where Wilbur was thin, freckled, and blond, Jason was stocky, tanned from hours in the sun, and had dark brown hair. They matched each other in

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strength and devotion. It seemed right that Wilbur would soon be his brother-in-law. All Jason had to do was get him back to Jamaica and Cynthia in one piece. All he had to do was ignore the orphaned boat and the potential threat inside. The question became—would his conscience let him?

He knew that answer...so did Wilbur.

“Have the men stand ready. Head toward it slowly. Make ready with the grappling hook. We’ll pull it alongside first.”

“Wouldn’t launching a boat to check it out make more sense?”

“If it’s a trap, I want no man left off this ship. At the first sign of a threat or another ship, I want the sails full and us on our way.”

Wilbur gave his assent with a single nod and issued the order.

Tension made the crew silent, watchful. Several adjusted the sashes around their shoulders where pistols were tied for ready access. Jason did the same. Wilbur rested one hand on the hilt of the shortsword in the scabbard by his side as he handed the spyglass back to his captain with the other.

The snap of the sail was accompanied by the slap of water against their hull as they drew closer. A gull’s screech overhead split the silence. Several men jumped, reaching for weapons, then relaxed when they saw there was no threat. No one laughed.

Jason drew up the glass, focusing on the skiff. He could see her better now. She was a comely woman, her shape, from what he could see with her face down, was the hour-glass figure women—and men—longed for. Raven black hair lay in damp waves down her back. The splash of blue looked to be a dressing gown. Matching slippers covered her feet. Ropes of gold chains were tangled in her fingers. It was looking suspicious despite the absence of other ships.

“It’s her, isn’t it?” Wilbur asked.

Jason frowned. “It’s beginning to look like it. We’ll know shortly just how unconscious she really is.”



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Wilbur broke his gaze for the first time since they'd seen the skiff, focusing a scowl on him. "And if not, then what? Toss her overboard? That'd be just desserts for the likes of her."

"Don't be hasty, my impetuous friend. After all, pirates do give us privateers a bad name."

He snorted. "It's not as though she's doing the Lord's work, Jason. If that woman is The Rose—"

"Then we'll just have to convince her she's got the wrong ship. We take her back to port and let her be gone."

"Easier said than done. If that's her—" He jerked his head toward the boat now being hooked. "—then she's after *us*."

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"Still not a stir, cap'n," the sailor called up. "Should we haul 'er up?"

"She could be armed," Wilbur muttered beside him.

No doubt she was, but there were at least two dozen men there. She couldn't fight them all.

"With caution, Mr. Carson."

The sailor nodded. Tossing a rope ladder over the side, the man

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scrambled down as quickly as a monkey through a tree. The skiff rocked with his weight when he lighted. Jason monitored his progress over the rail. The woman didn't stir, not even as he tied the hoist to the ends. Either she was extremely accomplished at playing dead or truly out...or, worse still, dead.

*Now that would be a pity to have such a beauty lost to the world.*

Jason cleared his throat and straightened his shoulders as he reined his wayward thoughts to a stop. Just thinking of the tempting Rose sparked interest where it shouldn't. That was her biggest weapon—she used a man's cock against him.

A dozen hands reached for the skiff as it cleared the rail. The men hauled it onto the deck. She still hadn't budged. Carson rolled her over. Jason's breath caught. She *was* a beauty. Her ivory complexion possessed a hint of pink in her cheeks. Her lips were full, beckoning. The curve of her full breasts rose above the low-cut dressing gown. A hint of cleavage invited exploration. The blue gown spilled open at the bottom to reveal a creamy lace nightgown beneath.

His penis now pulsed hard against his breeches. Jason wondered how many others...suffered. A quick glance around revealed that nearly all did. Carson stared down at the woman, jaw hanging, mouth agape. His grimy hand hovered just above her breast. A spot of anger nudged its way to the forefront of Jason's thoughts. If the man laid one finger on her...

"Carson!"

Red-faced, the man jerked his head up. "Aye, sir?"

"Is she alive?"

He glanced down. "Aye." His voice barely carried to the poop deck. He was too mesmerized by the rise and fall of the woman's chest.

"Time for a closer look," he said, more to himself than to Wilbur.

"Just make sure you guard your throat," his first mate mumbled as he followed Jason to the ladder leading to the lower deck. "You might

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want to give heed to guarding your ballocks as well.”

Jason ignored the caution. He knew what he was about.

The men cleared a ready path for the officers. As they neared the rowboat, Carson quickly relinquished his spot to the captain. Jason stepped in, then squatted down beside the young woman.

She was more beautiful up close. Long, dark lashes lay feathered against her cheeks. Her lids didn’t flutter, nor was there any movement beneath them. The slender thread of a silver necklace draped around her neck and disappeared into her cleavage. Using his forefinger, Jason tugged it free. A silver cross dangled from the end. Small climbing roses were engraved upon it. Curiosity satisfied, he let it fall gently onto her skin.

The hand sprawled above her head was tangled in loops of gold chain. The other one, tucked against her stomach, had a small pouch tied to the wrist. He weighed it in his palm—coins, quite a few from the feel of it.

Her clothes and hair were damp, but her lips were still moist and her skin not burned. Obviously, she hadn’t been afloat that long. Jason opened one palm. No sign of injury, just soft skin. Which meant the skiff was lowered to the water by someone else or it was already down when she got in. She couldn’t have handled the ropes without some wear on her palms—her hands were too delicate.

There was a familiarity about her Jason couldn’t quite place. He put that down to all the stories he’d heard. Mostly likely, an image of The Rose had already formed in his head. Tales told had been very explicit in what she looked like. This woman bore a striking similarity to that. If she wasn’t The Rose, she was her twin.

“Well, gentlemen, we should probably get this lady out from the sun,” he finally said. “It would be a shame to mar her lovely complexion with sunburn.”

“Or, heaven forbid, freckles.” Wilbur scuffed his knuckles over his

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freckled chin.

Chuckles rumbled through the men.

“Yes.” Jason smiled. “’Twould be a sin. We’ll take her to my cabin.”

Carson stepped forward. “Wants me to hoist ’er there, cap’n?”

He fought a snicker. “I think I can manage the load. With someone ahead to open doors, we’ll have her settled in next to no time. Someone fetch a pitcher of rain water. The fresher barrel.”

Carson dashed off to do so.

Jason slid his arms under her shoulders and knees, rolled her weight to him, and stood. Her soft groan echoed over the men, its sound almost orgasmic. His testicles tightened. If she was awake, he applauded her timely ploy. She would most definitely feel his response throbbing against her hip. No doubt she’d call it a minor victory, one that would quickly lead to the capture of her bounty. He had a surprise in store for her—The Rose had met her match.

If she was unconscious, the small cry spoke of vulnerability. That affected him as much, if not more, than an attempt at seduction. Protectiveness welled up inside him. He could easily see himself, sword unsheathed before him, her behind him while he fought every menace to keep her safe. And afterward, she’d throw herself into his welcoming arms and drown him in her love.

Yes, he could see it all so clearly—living with this beauty by his side, her laughing with Cynthia and his mother, their beautiful children and grandchildren. They’d be the epitome of Jamaican society, sought after for all the myriad of functions. Dressed in a beautiful gown of rich blue, her hand on his sleeve—

“Captain?”

He snapped from his daydream. “Just making sure I had a good hold.” The gold chains dangling from her fingers slipped free. “One of you make sure those do not disappear. I want the lady to leave this ship

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with her property in her possession.”

Taking care not to trip on the edge of the boat, he stepped out and onward.

She was heavier than she looked—a lot heavier. He found himself wishing he’d let Carson take her. But he was stuck now. Giving her up at this point might be seen as a weakness. He couldn’t afford to allow that to happen, even if this was their last trip.

After retrieving the gold, Wilbur took the point, opening doors before Jason could reach them. Negotiating the steps up to his cabin was a bit trickier. Somehow he managed, although he was tempted to sling her over his shoulder. By the time he reached his narrow bed against the wall, sweat trickled down his face and back.

He plopped her into the center as Carson set a pewter pitcher of rain water on the wash stand.

“Anythin’ else, cap’n?”

“That will be all, Carson. We can only wait now until she awakes and tells us how she came to be stranded.”

The man gave a nod and left. Jason followed the sound of his footsteps down the steps, then stripped the heavy wool waistcoat away and wiped his arm over his forehead.

“You all right?” The hint of a smile tweaked Wilbur’s mouth.

Jason nodded. “Good God, she weighs a ton!”

Wilbur laughed. “You’re just getting weak in your old age.”

He had another suspicion, but wasn’t going to voice that out loud. Not when he couldn’t determine the true condition of the lady. “Are you certain she’ll be all right here?”

He studied the lady on his cot. “I’ll lock the door. No one will bother her.” Which also meant, she wouldn’t be able to leave. There was just one more thing Jason wanted to check. “You go on. I’ll be with you shortly.”

“I’ll count on that or be back to check on you.”

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He appreciated the concern, but he could handle one female—no matter how cunning. Forewarned was forearmed.

Jason wandered back to the bed as the door clicked shut behind him. The lady lay sprawled where he'd placed her, nestled in the feather mattress. From what he could tell, she hadn't moved one muscle. Now it was time to see just how unconscious she truly was.

He untied the pouch from her wrist. As he suspected, it was filled with gold and silver coins. He placed it beside the chains on the washstand, then fingered the material of her dressing gown. Silk. Very fine silk at that. He traced the line of tiny blue buttons downward—into the valley of her breasts, over the flat of her stomach, beyond the cleft of her thighs—until he reached the bottom. As he suspected, the hem was weighted with more coins. The lady was fortunate—if she'd hit the water, she would have sunk to the bottom from the treasure sewn into her gown. So her dampness could be from water splashing into the boat or part of her guise of shipwrecked lady. Jason opted for the latter, since her skin showed no sign of having been exposed to the elements overly long. Unless he missed his bet, he was certain he'd find a ship just over the horizon...if he looked...and he would not.

"Well, the least we can do is try to make you more comfortable." He smiled down at the prone figure. Still no movement.

He dropped his hand to the buttons at her bosom; slowly he pushed each seed through its loop until he reached her navel, then peeled the gown from her shoulders. Sliding his arm under her waist, Jason lifted her enough to pull the gown down and off her arms. Her night rail slipped with it, baring one shoulder.

He froze, fixated on the sight of smooth, creamy flesh. He bet it was as soft to touch as her silk gown, and he couldn't resist. With the backs of his fingers he brushed across it. Gooseflesh rose in the wake of his touch. Smiling, Jason glanced down. The peaks of her breasts pressed their hard little noses against the sheer lawn night rail. Dark circles

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shadowed beneath them, hinting at the pedestals upon which they were placed.

Jason slowly lowered his hand. He hovered above her breast, letting her heat waft around him, then cupped it. The nipple nudged into his palm, into the core of his soul. His cock was harder than he'd ever recalled it being. Logic tried to put that down to his long abstinence and the forbidden nature of his attentions. That's when he saw it. A movement so slight he barely caught it in the periphery of his vision—the lady swallowed...hard.

"Where are my manners?" he said, fighting a victory laugh. "I'm taking liberties I should not."

He laid her upon the bed and continued to peel the dressing gown down. It stuck at her thighs. Jason ran his hands over her hips, down her thighs, tugging at the material. That's when he felt the scabbard. The little minx was armed.

One final tug freed the gown. He tucked it over a peg in the wall, then sat beside her.

"What do we have here?"

Liberties be damned, Jason slipped his hands under her night rail. A leisurely stroll up her legs found not one but two scabbards, one strapped to each shapely thigh. He shoved the lacy lawn up for a closer look. One held a small dagger; the other a flintlock pistol. From the delicate and pristine condition of her hands, he doubted she had the skill or strength to use either. That wouldn't stop The Rose from trying. Her sheer bravado would convince a man otherwise.

Jason unbuckled both and let them clunk to the wooden floor. That didn't mean he had every weapon, though. He'd heard of women, and men, who hid them in some unusual places. A well-sheathed knife in a cylindrical container could easily be secreted. He peeked at the nest of dark curls guarding who-knew-what. A lecherous grin lifted one corner of his mouth. He couldn't take the chance of being caught off guard.

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“Anything else...hidden, my beauty?”

He felt her muscles tense when his hand drifted to her puss, still she continued the ruse. Locking his gaze onto her face, Jason parted her folds. Her jaw ticked, her breathing caught, and moisture greeted him. He circled her entrance, spreading the slickness as he tried to break her façade. He tested the way with a slow, gentle thrust. Velvet walls of molten heat sucked him in.

*By my blood! She's tight!*

And if she was The Rose, that was one story tossed aside. It wasn't possible this woman could be the strumpet waylaying pirate captains and their crews right and left. She was no virgin, to be sure, but her tight, slick passage showed she wasn't well used. Knowing that made Jason want her all the more...but not at the expense of a noose around his neck.

He knew he should withdraw—take her weapons and lock her inside the cabin. The pulse fluttering at the base of her throat captured him. He inserted a second finger, pushing deep and high. Her body quivered. The cherry at the point of her thighs swelled against his thumb. Her chest rose and fell in short breaths she tried to hide. He traced his thumb up one valley and down the other, carefully avoiding the beckoning throb of her clitoris.

Jason wasn't certain how much longer he could play this game. His body ached to feel her naked flesh against his. A starving man didn't want food as much as he wanted his throbbing cock encased in her heat. He'd learned what he wanted—she was no more unconscious than he. It was her identity he questioned now. Yet why would a fully cognizant innocent allow him to do what he was now doing?

He dared a brush against her hooded guardian. A gasp tore from her throat. With reflexes of a viper, she grabbed for the cross around her neck. Jason grabbed her wrists as she unseated the hidden dagger. Using his weight to his advantage, he pressed her into the bed before



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she could lash out with her feet. Violet eyes flashed fire at him. Pinned beneath him, her chest stabbed into his with every heave for breath. He hauled her hands over her head and twisted the dagger from her grip. One sling hurled it across the small cabin. It pierced the far wall with a *thunk*, followed quickly by a *clink*.

Jason dared a glance in that direction. The hilt had come loose. Thick liquid oozed from the hollowed out core onto the floor. He jerked his gaze back to hers.

“For a pirate hunter, you guard your virtue overly much.”

“Get off me,” she pushed out through clenched teeth.

“Why? So you can have another try at my throat?”

“What did you expect me to do? Allow you to continue to violate me?”

Mad as she was, he rather liked the feel of her nearly naked form molded to his. If he weren’t a gentleman...

“But you play dead so well,” he said, smiling.

She narrowed her eyes. “And had I not, I’d no doubt be at the mercy of your crew of cutthroats...”

“Rather than at mine?”

“If you intend to have your way with me, do be done with it.”

Jason laughed. “No doubt that would work well into your plan. You’d have me sated, then a knife at my throat and a noose around my neck before I knew it.”

She actually had the nerve to look puzzled.

“Don’t play coy with me, miss. Your legend precedes you...Rose.”

“My name isn’t Rose.” Each word came out with measured precision.

“Then it is...?” He lifted his eyebrow while he awaited her response.

Her chin lifted in haughty disdain. “Not your concern.”

“Very well. I’m done playing games.” He yanked her night rail up.

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She let out a squeal and squirmed beneath him, aggravating his situation.

Sitting astride her hips, Jason hauled the garment to her wrists. Wrapping them tight, he tied the material over the peg just above the bed until she was helplessly and hopelessly bound.

“Oh, please... Please, sir, do not ravish me,” she begged.

He passed a gaze over her exquisitely perfect figure. “One minute you ask me to get on with it, the next beg me not to. What a contradiction.” He reached out to flick his forefinger over her nipple.

She sucked in a gasp. Jason smiled. One hand dove into her crotch while his lips covered her breast. Another gasp arched her against him, followed by a soft mew when he suckled deep. Fingers found their mark in her moist heat.

“Your name,” he said around a mouthful of tit.

She shook her head.

He suckled again, circling her maiden until it grew hard and pulsing against his fingers. She twisted against him as if trying to get closer instead of trying to get away. He slid his hand to her thigh and heard her barely muttered protest.

“Your name,” he demanded again, alternately touching and withdrawing until she writhed in helpless abandon beneath him. “Tell me.” He removed his touch once more.

“Emma,” she gasped out. “Emma Scott.”

“Good girl.” He pushed himself to his feet.

To her credit, she didn’t beg him to finish her, though her need was clearly etched in her passion-clouded eyes. He watched her breasts quiver and heave with her breath. She’d caught him by the shorthairs and didn’t even realize it. Slowly, he released the beast in his breeches. Her gaze widened when she saw it.

He expected her to fight him; that would give him the excuse to stop and leave. Instead, he swore she actually parted her thighs when he

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wedged himself between them. There wasn't even so much as a kick. Poised on the threshold of sweetness, he caressed her cheek. She closed her eyes on a sigh that turned to a slow gasp when he seated his cock deep inside.

Long legs wrapped around his. She met him thrust for thrust, her walls clutching and contracting. He felt her tense, hovering on the threshold of completion, and rubbed hard. Her release triggered his. It shot through him with a fire all its own, and he knew she truly could have killed him now because he'd definitely reached heaven.

## CHAPTER 2

Emma tugged at the bonds that held her. This was a damnable predicament, not to mention embarrassing. To be tied up with one's own nightdress! To add further insult, he'd tied her ankle to the foot of the bed with his kerchief!

She gave up her futile attempts to free herself and sagged into the mattress. At least he was gone. And he'd taken all her defenses with him.

She wondered at what point she'd lost control of the situation. Actually, she wondered if she'd ever had control. This captain was unlike any she'd dealt with in the past. Emma had realized that from the instant he'd scooped her into his arms. The feel of him was different—strength poured from the arms around her. The scent of him was different—cleaner, fresher, although still with the tang of salt air from the ocean. Even his touch was different—confident and sure. Her body had reacted of its own accord. Why she'd let his explorations

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continue as long as they had mystified her. In the end, she had no choice but to try to defend her honor. She'd lain with no man since the death of her husband three years before. And no man would have her now.

Then she saw him. No pirate captain looked this fine. His eyes were a rich brown that matched his long hair tied back in a queue with a black ribbon. His breath hinted of mint. His teeth were white with not a one missing. Hours in the sun had darkened his skin to a smooth tan that contrasted sharply against her own fair complexion. And the feel of his body weighting her down...

*Good God, the feel of his body!*

Long-suppressed need had welled up in her. He'd built her to a fever pitch with his touch. Seeing him, feeling his hard body pressed against hers, had sealed her fate. Emma should be ashamed of herself. Like a wanton she'd opened herself to him, wrapping hers legs around his without hesitation. Everything was out of her control, most especially herself.

She decided playing dead was where she'd made her mistake. In the past, she'd always flagged down a passing pirate ship. They never hesitated to bring her aboard and straight to the captain. Through tearful eyes, she'd tell of the riches her destroyed ship held and that were now scattered upon a shallow reef. They always wanted it and her. A sleeping draught took care of the man's lust. He'd awake and Emma boasted of his prowess bedding her—a bedding that never took place. Then she'd lead him to the reef where another ship waited to arrest them all.

She'd never deviated from that tactic...until today. And look what it had gotten her.

Emma closed her eyes, then flashed them open when images of his lovemaking filled her head. To her shame, she wanted him still. Her body ached for his possession, to feel his hands roaming over her, to

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feel his lips tasting hers, to feel that glorious release by another's hand, and to have his massive cock pounding deep and hard into her.

"No, no, no!" She shook her head against the thoughts. Her nipples were thrust up hard as if seeking a mouth to pleasure them. Her crotch moistened and throbbed for equal attention. Somehow she had to get herself in check and salvage this situation.

Still, bound as she was, Emma wondered if he would have his way with her again when he returned. Shivers of anticipation coursed through her. She'd loved to see him fully nude and...

"Bloody hell. Stop it," she muttered to herself. A plan, she needed a plan. She'd come this far. Her bounty wouldn't elude her now.

A key in the door snapped her head in that direction. Panic raced her heart. Emma prayed it was him and not some other member of this dastardly crew. She held her breath, waiting as the door swung open. The scent of food drifted her way. Her stomach rumbled in response. Emma didn't care. She'd scream her lungs out until her throat was raw if another man crossed that threshold. No other man would touch her without a fight.

A deep sigh left her when she saw it was him. She yanked back the smile that threatened to form. But there was nothing she could do to stop her heart pounding at the sight of him.

His stature filled the doorway. A tray of food and drink was perched in one large hand. He shut and locked the door with the other then passed a gaze over her that Emma swore heated her skin to fever-pitch. There was something about him, something she still couldn't place even now that she could look at him with more leisure. She brushed it aside, blaming it on their carnal activity. He was definitely unique in this cutthroat world of piracy. It was a wonder his handsome looks hadn't spawned stories of his feats. To her knowledge, no one of his ilk existed in all the tales she'd studied.

"Now there's a sight every man likes to return to—a naked woman

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tied to his bed.” His brown eyes danced with humor.

Emma willed herself to breathe normally. Her body didn’t listen.

“What?” His eyebrows arched in feigned surprise. “No screams or demands to be released?”

“I see no reason to make a scene,” she quietly replied. “You’ve already had your way with me. It’s clear you intend to do so again.” *Please do so again.* She chided her conscience.

“I recalled no protest from your lips.” He set the tray of food on a stool.

“Would protesting have done any good?” Her mouth watered at the sight of cold chicken, bread, cheese, and a bottle of port.

He gave her a half-smile as he sat beside her. “Indeed it would. Any protest, or sign of protest, and I would have stopped. But I saw or heard naught.”

He braced his arms on either side of her and leaned so close Emma thought he’d kiss her. She closed her eyes and parted her lips in preparation. To her disappointment, he pulled back.

“I brought some food. I thought you might be hungry.”

“I can hardly eat trussed up as I am.”

“But you look so...delightful.” Long fingers traced a line from her throat down to her crotch. He parted her folds and massaged circles around her clitoris. “So wet. So hot. Are you sore from earlier?”

“No...I...” She couldn’t think straight with him doing that. All she wanted was another orgasm. “Why...why would you think that? I’m well used to—”

“Now, Emma, don’t lie to me. I know better.” He shoved two fingers into her passage.

Emma lifted her hips on a gasp.

“You are too tight. Too responsive.” A third finger joined the other two, thrusting gently in and out. “The cook’s monkey is sound asleep from the liquid hidden in your cross. I’m not a fool to be led around by

## *HER BOUNTY*

my cock, love. No doubt the others were easily fooled. A sleeping draught and your oh-so-descriptive and enthusiastic praise of them when they woke... What man wouldn't brag?"

"I...oh..." His free hand worked her maiden while the other thrust deeper.

"Don't deny it, Emma. I know the truth. You've not had a man in quite some time...true?"

Before she could answer, his lips replaced his hand. He suckled at the bulb, alternatively nipping it with his teeth then flicking it with his tongue. He took his time, bringing her to the very edge to hover there while his fingers pumped her until Emma thought she'd go mad from the wait.

"Oh, please do not torture me so," she gasped out.

With a low growl, he danced his tongue over her. Pleasure exploded through her body. Emma rose with it as far as her bonds would allow, then collapsed, sated and out of breath. She chilled with the sudden absence of his body warmth. The whisper of clothing being removed opened her eyes. He stood before her in breeches only, a magnificent creature carved from stone. He stared down at her, his eyes heavy with passion. She followed the breeches down and off his legs. Black boots and stockings were already gone.

He reached for the rope holding her ankle to the bed. "If you kick me, you'll find yourself over my knee with a strap against your backside."

A mix of fear and the thrill of the forbidden wiggled through her. "You...you wouldn't."

A curved brow indicated he most definitely would, and possibly enjoy doing so, too. A tug and her leg was free. He wasted no time crawling between them. Catching her behind the knees, he draped her ankles around his neck. Emma felt the head of his cock against her clitoris. He rasped it slowly then seated himself in a long, deep thrust



## *HER BOUNTY*

that touched her womb.

He sucked in a breath between his teeth. "God, you feel like a forge!"

She could feel the hard pulse of him inside her as he struggled for control. Gaining it, he ground into her, making certain she felt it. Emma longed to clutch him to her, to wrap her arms around him and never let go. All she could do was move with him and revel in the pleasure rapidly building. Climax seized her. He cupped her buttocks and seated himself deep, releasing himself with a low grunt. Her pants for breath echoed his.

He lowered her legs and dotted kisses to and around each nipple. Hands braced on the wall behind her, he untied her arms. More soft kisses followed, over her lips, her jaw-line, down her throat. Emma draped her arms around his neck, giving in to the need she had to hold him. Never had she thought she'd ever experience this wonder again. With Randall's death, she had died. It had taken her years to rejoin life. And this wonderful man! This absolutely wonderful....

Emma tensed. He was a pirate, nothing more. She'd sworn to see every last one of them hanged. This one, no matter how handsome or thrilling in bed could be no exception. He'd killed, raped, and pillaged just like the rest. His care with her was a ploy to get under her defenses, nothing more.

Bodies still joined, she felt him harden. But when she tensed, he pulled back. Puzzlement furrowed his brow. He actually looked hurt. That passed quickly. Though his erection remained, he relieved her of his weight.

He took the time to haul on his breeches. Emma tucked her night rail over her head and into place. She absently tried to comb the tangles from her hair.

"Here." He gave her his brush and comb stashed in the drawer of the washstand.

## *HER BOUNTY*

Emma mumbled her thanks and watched as he sat the tray of food on the bed between them. With the exception of the chicken, everything was already cut into bite-size pieces. She guessed it was a precaution to insure she did not have access to a knife.

He leaned against the wall and motioned to the food. "Please, help yourself."

"Thank you." She selected a hunk of bread and several pieces of cheese. "Do you have a name, captain? Under the intimate circumstances..."

"Jason Jennings."

She nodded. "Our ship floundered in rough sea yesterday. It went down quickly. Father barely had time to get me in a boat before it went down. I salvaged what little I could, but..."

She let her tale sink in. So far he showed little interest. Another oddity. Most would be salivating over the gold she'd brought aboard. Pulling in a deep breath, she continued.

"Father insisted on going back for more. He didn't make it. The ship perished on a reef not far from here and took a fortune with it. I'd gladly give up the fortune to have my papa with me."

Jason poured some port into two pewter goblets. "What type of fortune?"

She glanced at him from the corner of her eye. "Bolts of silk, chests of bullion, silver ingots, pipes of brandy, ivory tusks, jars of wine, bales of linen."

He stared into nothingness as he sipped his wine. "A pity."

Emma picked up the second goblet. "I know where it is...if you're interested."

He pivoted his head her way. "What makes you think I'd be interested?"

She gave him what she hoped was a shy smile. "What pirate wouldn't be?"

## *HER BOUNTY*

He shrugged. "Since I'm not a pirate, I couldn't say."

"Now, captain...Jason...don't play coy with me. I saw the flag."

"I saw the flag, too. On the ship we've been trying to stay behind for days. I'd been praying to avoid it. We're heading home from our last trip and I wanted no complications. Perhaps you missed it slipping by you when you played dead." He popped a piece of cheese into his mouth and wiggled his eyebrows.

Emma stared at him in open-mouthed shock. It had to be a ruse. "I...I don't believe you."

He shrugged again. "Sorry to disappoint you. I'm a privateer."

She narrowed her gaze. "Pirate or privateer. There's little difference."

"There is a big difference. Pirates are murders and thieves. Privateers work for their sovereign in times of war. We seize enemy ships. The value of which is divided among the government, the owner, the captain, and the crew. I am the owner and captain of this vessel. I have a letter of marque issued by the King of England during our hostilities against Spain."

"Our hostilities with Spain are over."

"So I've been told. Hence we are returning home. Would you like to see the letter of marque?"

All right, she'd call his bluff. "Yes."

Jason scooted off the bed. Two steps took him to a small desk in the corner of the room. He pulled out a parchment, unrolled it, and placed it before her.

Tears clouded her vision as she studied the impressive looking document. It bore all the ponderous legal phrases and flourishes she quickly recognized as being an authentic letter of marque. She never should have changed her tactics. Her bounty had eluded her. And here she sat... What must Jason Jennings be thinking of her?

Emma released her hold on the paper, watching it curl up. Crying

## *HER BOUNTY*

wouldn't do her any good right now.

"I...I do not bed pirate captains," she somehow managed to say.

Jason rolled up the letter of marque and put it back in its place. "I was well aware of that when I...uhm...inspected you earlier. Well-used women..." Thankfully, he left the rest unsaid. "When I discovered the sleeping draught, I realized how you had managed to keep up the game."

She nodded. "You obviously knew what I was about—"

"The Rose's reputation has become legend in Jamaica."

"Then why didn't you say something? Why all...this?"

"For one thing, you were supposed to be unconscious. I couldn't very well nudge you and say, 'Oh, by the way, you have the wrong ship, miss.' Another issue is the arrest of Henry Morgan, how was I to know you weren't after me? I was with Morgan in the Panama campaign. If the Queen of Spain is expecting heads on a platter, how was I to know my head wasn't next? And, lastly—" He bent closer to her. "—a beautiful woman, seemingly out cold in my bed? How could a man resist?"

Emma felt the heat rush to her cheeks. Her actions had been wanton and questionable. At least she could feel better that she'd mated like an animal with a gentleman not a pirate, and mated was truly the only word for it. She had some morals, though not many from this standpoint right now.

She took a long drink. "I'm only after pirates. They all deserve to be swinging from a noose. I won't stop until I see every last one of them hanged."

"And that begs the question, why would a beautiful woman like you engage in such a blood-thirsty and dangerous mission?" he asked softly.

Pain clutched at her heart, a pain she thought she'd deadened long ago. Tears rushed her once more. There was no stopping them now.

## *HER BOUNTY*

She didn't try. They trickled down her cheeks to the point of her chin, then plopped into her wine.

"Because...they took away everything from me...everything." She drained the goblet and set it aside. "We were coming to Jamaica where my husband had inherited a plantation from his uncle. Pirates attacked us. They took everything of value from the ship. It took them six days to unload it. During those six days, they kept us in the hold. The crew was killed. Only the senior officers, Randall, and I remained. I kept praying against the odds we would be saved. On the sixth day, they roused us. On the point of a cutlass they ordered us onto their ship. Ours was left to drift. They took us to an island.

"The captain was the first to be killed. He pleaded for his life, asking mercy for his wife and children back home. The pirate captain laughed and gutted him. I screamed out. The beast grabbed my arm. It was clear he intended to...to..."

Jason covered her hand with his and squeezed. Emma glanced up. Were those tears in his eyes?

"Randall shoved him back. Another one came up from behind. His sword...one slice...Randall's head. I'll never forget his sightless eyes staring up at me, bodiless in the sand." Emma buried her face in her hands. All the emotions she suppressed poured out. She heard the rattle of the tray. Seconds later, Jason's arms surrounded her.

"I was saved. Somehow I was saved," she cried against his chest. "A ship appeared in the bay. The pirates left me there screaming and screaming. I don't remember much. I was taken on to Jamaica. From there I returned to my family in England. At some point during the voyage home, I lost the child I was carrying."

He rubbed soothing circles against her back, rocking her gently. Emma hadn't felt this cherished, this protected in years.

"I plotted and planned," she continued on. "Once the war with Spain was over, I came back to Jamaica. I was determined to...well,

## *HER BOUNTY*

you know the rest.”

“Yes, I know,” he said softly.

Cheek nestled against his shoulder, she glanced out the small window. The sunset cast a golden glow over the sea. It would be dark soon. Immoral as it sounded, she didn’t want to spend it alone.

She pulled back. “Stay with me tonight, Jason. Hold me. Love me. I don’t want to be alone.”

He butted his forehead against hers. Those sweet circles against her back dropped lower. “Nothing would please me more. But there is something you must know.”

Emma nuzzled his face until she could kiss his lips. “What is that?”

Jason kissed her back. “It was me. I was the one who rescued you that day.”

She pulled in a gasp. That’s why he looked familiar! She’d been in such a state, everything had been a blur for weeks.

“I was returning from England with my mother and sister. Wilbur had mentioned the parrots on this island and the ladies wouldn’t rest until they saw for themselves. Fate brought us to you that day. When I spied what had happened on the beach, I couldn’t get there soon enough. Mother quickly took you under her wing.”

“She kept saying, ‘Poor little lamb.’ I don’t think she left my side.”

“She didn’t. You were in shock, expectedly so. In all my days, I’ve never seen anything more horrific. Were I you...let’s just say I understand your quest.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“I want you to know we buried them all in the forest. I was afraid the pirates would return so it was a quick job, but it was with respect and honor they deserved. My biggest concern was the safety of those in my charge.”

“You are indeed an honorable man.”

“Yes, my actions today scream of that, don’t they?” His sarcasm

## *HER BOUNTY*

wasn't lost on her.

Emma gave a light laugh. "Mine don't exactly proclaim me to be a lady, now do they?"

"You are more than enough lady for me. Your passion, your beauty..."

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "Enough. My head is beginning to swell."

Now he laughed softly. "I remembered little about the woman I rescued that day. Mother kept you sequestered. But your courage—"

"What courage?" She pulled back. "I was a screaming lunatic."

Jason smiled and traced the seldom-used laugh line bracketing her lips. "A screaming lunatic who carved furrows in a pirate's face with her fingernails. I've never seen a woman fight so furiously, so bravely. Knowing the fate that awaited you, you still didn't give up. That image has never left me."

Emma didn't remember that at all, only the horrible sight of her beloved husband.

"If only I'd gotten there sooner," he said.

"No," she said, cupping his face between her hands. "It isn't your fault. Don't cast blame where it doesn't belong. Don't. You saved my life—even if I've wished at times you hadn't."

"Emma—"

"Shhh." Her forefinger on his lips silenced him. "Enough talk. Being with you has opened my cold heart and stirred passion too long withheld. I want to love you unfettered by bindings and subterfuge until the sun rises once more."

"And when the sun rises, then what?"

"We'll deal with that when it comes."

Emma pressed her mouth to his. Their tongues twirled together in fierce abandon, as if they were lovers long parted instead of newly joined. Her skin tingled with life she'd never hoped to experience

## *HER BOUNTY*

again. Blood coursed along her veins, fueling her passion all the more. Strong hands ducked under her night rail and splayed over her back, drawing her near. Emma pulled from his mind-numbing kiss long enough to strip the cumbersome lawn over her head.

Jason followed her example, divesting himself of his breeches so quickly it was a miracle they didn't rip. She wondered at the power and strength his body boasted. All about him was hard and sculpted, as if he were born from granite. Marveling at his sheer perfection, Emma traced the cut of his bicep. Jason drew her down to the narrow bed, lying beneath her. Though his erection screamed haste, he seemed content to let her explore. She didn't hesitate. The past was a testament that each breath could be one's last. Moments were to be savored.

She let her eyes feast, her fingers feel, her heart swell with wonder and growing affection. She owed her life to this man. How many times had she alternately cursed and blessed him? Yet being here now had nothing to do with revenge or gratitude. This was about a man and a woman finding each other. Emma didn't know where it would lead. She didn't care. All she wanted was here and now, being with him, feeling his arms, his heat, his body linked with hers. Tomorrow would take care of itself. This was now.

Her fingers traveled to the hollows of his collarbone. Leaning closer, she inhaled the scent of him—that tang of sea air mixed with man. This was life. His pulse throbbed against her thumbs. His eyes were closed. Savoring this moment as well? She prayed that was so.

Emma planted a line of kisses from his chin to the well of his throat. There she indulged her need to taste him. Her tongue twirled a circle in the hollow, then followed the line of his collarbone to his shoulder and back. Jason sucked in a shaky breath yet did not move. He was now her captive, though no binds held him.

Emboldened, she sat astride him. Her questing fingers wandered to his smooth chest. It was tanned to a golden brown just as the rest of



## *HER BOUNTY*

him. In fact, there was nothing pale about the man. The image of his nude body open to the sun sent an arrow of pleasure through her. She'd love to see him free to nature, to love him there. His male nipples were already hard in anticipation of her touch. Emma flicked her tongue over one, reveling in the muffled groan he made. She took her time, moving from one to the other, licking and suckling, until deep breaths shuddered through him.

His cock throbbed against her belly, reminding her of its presence. Drops of moisture from the tip spread over her skin. She kissed her way down to it, stopping to loop her tongue around his navel and the beginnings of dark hair that laid a path to her goal. Emma swore his cock lifted its head for her. Jason's breath was ragged now. What little control the man possessed was waning. She smiled and pushed her hair over her shoulder as she studied him.

As with the rest of his body, Emma took her time. She cupped the velvet log and indulged in a single downward stroke. Jason grunted. His hips lifted, seeking firmer contact. Instead, she traced the periphery of his hardened sack. A gasp opened his lips. Fingers clutched at the sheet beneath him. She traced her forefinger along the ridge of his penis back to the tip, then down again. Up, then down. Up, then down. He shifted beneath her touch while the slit spilled more beads of moisture against his belly.

She licked them up and let the valley of her breasts cradle his erection. Jason grabbed her breasts and squeezed them more tightly around him. She let him indulge in a few thrusts, watching the deep purple head slide in and out. She darted her tongue out to meet it. He bit back a groan and pushed toward her mouth. Emma twirled around the head—once, twice, a third time—then sucked him deep.

Smothering a cry, his long fingers furrowed through her hair, holding her in place while he pivoted into her greedy mouth. Sucking him hard, she kneaded his balls and pressed her thumb against the base

## ***HER BOUNTY***

of his cock. Her tongue licked against the ridge, urging its release. She felt the twitch, his tension, the heat that signaled his end. Looping her thumb and forefinger around the base, she squeezed hard, choking it off.

Jason jerked helplessly beneath her—half in pleasure, half in pain. When she glanced up, his eyes screamed treason. Before he could utter the words, Emma smiled and seated herself on his rock-hard penis. His eyes rolled back in his head seconds before they closed in ecstasy. When Emma grabbed his hands, he opened them again.

She closed one hand over her breast, the other she pushed between them. Jason's thumb found her without hesitation. He circled it around the hard little bead while he tweaked her nipple. Hands braced on his chest, Emma rotated against his thrusts. She felt the orgasm ripple deep within, clutching at the iron imbedded in her. It coursed upon her in breath-taking intensity. She arched her back against a silent cry and felt him fill her with his seed.

## CHAPTER 3

Near morning after a night filled with love and passion like he'd never known. Near morning and Jason *still* had not had his fill of her. And while he didn't know what to do about it, one thing he was certain of—a thousand mornings could come after a thousand nights in her arms and he *still* would not have his fill of her.

He glanced down at the beauty sleeping in his arms. As if sensing his attention on her, Emma stretched and opened her eyes. Her body brushing against his awakened his cock. It tented the thin sheet tossed over them.

“Good morning,” she murmured in a sleepy voice. “And a good morning to *you*.” She gently stroked his erection.

Contented, Jason sighed and kissed her forehead. “Dawn will be here soon. I hate to leave your side, but...”

“Yes...duty calls.” She traced lazy circles over his chest.

“We'll be in port this afternoon. We have buyers for the cargo. All I

## *HER BOUNTY*

have to do is find one for the ship. Then I can devote my time to the less dangerous pursuit of running my plantation.”

She draped her leg over his. “Why not just keep the ship, hire a new captain, and have a shipping business as well?”

“A risky business these days with the waters filled with pirates and foreign privateers.”

Emma gave a soft laugh. “I believe that’s where I come in.”

Though said in jest, Jason sensed it was also half-hearted. “You’ve chosen a dangerous profession, love. Already word has spread through every port in Jamaica and some beyond of your exploits. There’s talk of a price on your head. Should you be discovered, it will not go well.”

And it was only a matter of time before she was. The pirate who captured *The Rose* wouldn’t hesitate to use her to his advantage. Jason didn’t want to think of all that would be done to her.

“What happened to the plantation your husband inherited from his uncle?” he asked.

“It is mine now and has been in the hands of a manager all these years. I suppose he’s doing an adequate job. Since I have little knowledge of how a plantation runs—”

“I could teach you.”

She pushed herself to one elbow and stared down at him. “I’d much rather—”

“Ship ahoy!” a voice shouted. “And she’s running a Jolly Roger!”

“Bloody hell!” Jason jumped from bed, snatching up his breeches as he did so. “I’ll bet it’s that ship we were trailing yesterday. They’ve done a turnabout.”

Emma scrambled for clothes as he did. “Set me adrift. I’ll waylay them and—”

“If you think I’m turning you over to those savages, you’ve lost your bloody mind! No one lays a finger on you.”

Emma’s mouth fell open as he finished dressing. Before he left, he

## HER BOUNTY

snapped his arm around her waist, yanked her close, and kissed her hard.

“Stay here.”

He left her standing there, mouth still open. He thought he spied tears glistening in her violet eyes. But Jason didn’t have time to question the cause. He had a ship, its crew, and his woman to protect. Yes...*his* woman.

\* \* \*

Emma stared at the closed door, night rail clutched under her chin. His tone smacked of possession. Rather than be riled, it warmed her inside and out. So, she wasn’t too far off the mark in what she was about to suggest to him.

She tucked the lawn material over her head then stuffed her arms into its sleeves. Looping her blue dressing gown on, she slowly worked the buttons into their holes while she pondered this sudden change in circumstance. She cursed the arrival of the pirate ship, not only for the threat it presented, but also for interrupting their conversation.

Jason’s offer to teach her how to run a plantation, coupled with his fierce protection later intimated he had no desire to end what they’d started. Emma was more than willing to set aside this foolhardy course upon which she’d set herself. She knew she’d been lucky to date and wasn’t willing to take further risks. Her suggestion to Jason would have made her wishes and intent perfectly clear—to join their plantations and work them together.

She wasn’t foolish enough to expect a marriage proposal, although society dictated it after how they’d spent their night. She wanted time to explore their passion, to learn one another first. Marriage was inevitable in the circles in which they traveled. Her reputation was at stake. Why that didn’t bother her until now was no mystery. Life without Randall and her baby had been a prison. She’d cared naught what others thought of her. Now? Everything had changed with the

## *HER BOUNTY*

night in Jason's arms. She'd been reborn, and had miraculously released all the pain of losing Randall and that life.

Emma tucked herself in the corner of Jason's bed as she absentmindedly brushed the tangles from her hair. She prayed they could outrun the pirate ship. If not, she needed her wits about her. Somehow she'd have to convince them vast treasure awaited them on a reef not far away. Once there, the English ship with whom she worked could swoop down and capture them all. She would be returned to Jamaica to resume her life, free to join Jason at his plantation.

In theory, it sounded perfect. Execution was the problem. Jason would never let her go off with the pirates alone, even if it meant saving his ship. He'd come along or follow. Even if the pirates caused them no harm, there was no guarantee the English captain would let Jason go. Jason was right—Spain wanted retribution for the attack on Panama. In the mind of the Spanish queen, all were pirates. Henry Morgan was already in custody. While no one actively sought those who fought with him, they knew who those men were. Certainly they wouldn't lose the opportunity to use Jason Jennings as another scapegoat.

And if Jason did manage to outrun the pirates, then what? She should have met the other ship at the rendezvous point by now. If she didn't show up soon, they'd search for her. No letter of marque would keep them from thinking the worst of Jason if they found her on his ship.

If she could slip out and into her skiff... No, there was no one to lower it to the water.

She could lower it herself, toss the dressing gown into the skiff, then dive into the water and crawl into it. No, she had no weapons. Even her cross with the sleeping potion inside was gone. She'd truly be at the mercy of the pirates. The very notion turned her stomach.

Emma buried her head in her hands. What a damnable predicament!

## *HER BOUNTY*

She listened to the tread of footsteps and the murmur of voices on the deck overhead. Having to be inactive was torture, not knowing what was happening even worse. But she stayed put, alert to all, while she continued to run alternative possibilities and solutions in her head.

She heard the change in pace immediately—rushed footsteps thundering across the boards overhead, skittering down the narrow steps. Emma listened to the thud fade, only to return minutes later and head straight for the captain's cabin. She was on her feet waiting when the door swung open.

Jason strode inside, shutting the door behind him. Her weapons and cross were clutched in his hand. "Put these on. Leave the flintlock, though. It is too bulky to go undetected."

Emma didn't hesitate to buckle the dagger around her thigh and tuck the cross deep into her bosom. Only the chain around her neck hinted of its presence—a harmless pendant.

"Tide and current are all against us." He stripped off his blue velvet coat and replaced it with one of soft brown leather hanging on a peg near the door. "We have no hope of outrunning them. The men are hiding the more valuable cargo. We have no wish to fight, but also worked too hard for what we have to let it fall into the hands of cutthroats." He stuck a dagger into a sheath hidden in his boot.

"Jason, they'll give no quarter. Cargo or not, this ship will be seized. The officers will be killed and the crew made to join theirs or suffer a similar fate."

"They'll be on us soon no matter what we do." He stuffed the gold chains into an inner pocket of his coat and the small pouch of coins into an outer one. "It's up to you and me to convince them otherwise. I trust you have a ship laying in wait nearby?"

"I do, but—"

"Then we'll have to see they fall into it." He grasped her shoulders in a gentle hold. "I'm depending on your ingenuity and considerable

## *HER BOUNTY*

charm to win them over, not to mention their greed. My plan is rough and we'll have to adjust as this deception plays out. Cook has put a powdered sleeping draught in your cross. I know you'll use it if necessary. Once we board their ship—"

"Jason..." She placed her hand on his chest. All the words in the world wouldn't be enough to make him change his mind. Why utter them?

"Yes, love?"

"I won't let you down."

"I have every confidence."

Grasping her by the hand, Jason led her up to the poop deck.

The pirate ship was closer than she'd imagined. They had little time to share plans and counter-plans with his men. Now all was silent about her, save the slosh of water against the hull. The sails billowed out, fighting, to no avail, to put some distance between them and the pirate ship. The man Jason called Wilbur now assumed the role of captain. After a look passed between him and Jason, he gave the order.

"Furl the sails! Hoist the white flag!"

The flag went up without haste while sailors scrambled up the ratlines to haul in the sails. By the time the last man put his foot on the rope ladder, the first had reached the topsail and were pulling it in.

The pirate captain rode the bow as if he were the figurehead itself. He'd be wise to suspect a trap. Judging from the grin splitting his dirty face, Emma doubted he did. That would give them the advantage. They just needed to play it through. Long, skinny legs carried him toward the highest deck. By the time the ship reached theirs, the man was perched on equal status with the officers of Jason's ship.

Wilbur hastened to the rail. "Be it known, sir, we want no quarrel with you. Leave us to go on our way and you may have the most valuable cargo we possess."

The pirate captain's chest was barrel-like and just about as round. A



## *HER BOUNTY*

sword dangled at one side, a dagger at the other, and slung over his shoulder was a leather sash with six flintlocks tied to it. This close, Emma could see gaps in his smile. He perched his hands at his hips and studied his opponent.

“Aye...and what might that be?”

Wilbur motioned to the men on each side of her and Jason. The men grabbed hold of their forearms and towed them forward.

“These two,” Wilbur said.

The pirate scratched at the stubble of dark beard shadowing his face. “A right treat the lass might be, but him? And all the sweet comforts of a woman won’t last with all the fighting she’ll cause among my randy crew. Every man will want a piece of her.”

Jason drew her coin purse from his pocket. “He’s referring to these.” He tossed it to the other ship. It landed at the captain’s feet. He retrieved it on the point of his sword and drew it up for a closer look. Apparently satisfied, he sheathed his weapon and dumped the contents in his hand. His dark eyes widened at the sight of the gold and silver coins.

“There’s plenty more where that came from. Our ship went down not far from here. My wife and I were stranded until this ship picked us up. There’s a fortune to be had to anyone able to salvage it. He’s not willing.” Jason jerked his thumb to Wilbur. “All these cretins want is to go home. I’m offering you a partnership.”

The pirate tossed back a boisterous laugh. “Partners, is it?”

“Aye, I supply the location, and you salvage the treasure.”

He scratched at his beard some more. “We do the work. We let this handsome ship go on its way. What’s to keep us from taking it all?”

Wilbur drew his sword and pointed it toward Jason’s chest. “One move and the location is lost forever. Do you really want to risk that?”

Emma’s heart hammered against her ribs. It was a grand bluff.

“You’d be wealthy beyond your dreams,” Jason added.

## HER BOUNTY

"I can dream amight grandly," the pirate said.

"But you'll be able to live *this* dream."

She knew those last words sealed the deal. The pirate was hooked.

"By all means...come aboard."

The gleam in his eyes screamed of duplicity. No doubt he planned to kill them both once they reached the rendezvous point. But there was little they could do now except see it through.

Lines of rope tugged the ships together. Jason scooped her into his arms and stepped over the rail. As he set her back on her feet, the hem of her gown hit the wood with a dull *thunk*. Worry knotted Wilbur's brow, but he gave the word to cast off despite his concerns. Inches, then feet separated the ships.

The pirate gave him a mock salute. "'Til another time, cap'n."

Wilbur gave the order to set sail. Emma and Jason were on their own now.

The pirate whirled around on them, his grin wide. "I'll be havin' two things now—the location of the treasure...and the coins sewn in your dress."

Emma squatted down to do as he'd ordered. One rip scattered gold coins over the deck. A sailor ducked forward to grab one that rolled his way. Without warning, the captain back-handed the young man over the rail. His cry was swallowed by the splash of water. No one made a move to retrieve him.

The pirate whipped out his dagger and pressed the tip under Jason's chin. "The location."

Emma quivered despite all the dangers she'd faced in the past. This was different. This involved a man she cared for, someone she was rapidly growing to love. To his credit, Jason didn't so much as blink.

"Due east. You'll see a small island. A reef surrounds it. Have a care. The water is rougher than it looks. The storm that hit us tore the ship apart and sucked it under. We were fortunate to have escaped

## *HER BOUNTY*

when we did.”

“So it seems.” He flicked the dagger away, leaving a prick of blood behind.

Emma longed to wipe it away. She kept her hands at her sides. They could display no sign of weakness.

The pirate focused on her again, on the silver chain around her neck. One grimy finger lifted it. The crucifix pulled free. She wrapped her hand around it.

“Please, sir, leave me something. This was my grandmother’s. You’ll have more riches than you can count in just a few hours.”

“We’ll be seein’. I can count fairly high.” To her relief, he dropped the necklace.

“If I’m wrong, I’ll gladly forfeit this when the time comes.” She tucked the cross out of sight.

This time he fingered her hair. “Oh, you’ll be forfeitin’ more than that, missus...when the time comes.”

Jason pulled her hair from his grasp. A steady glare dared the other man to touch her again.

The pirate snickered. “You be one against many, sir. Don’t be foolish. No skirt’s worth dyin’ over.” Slow footsteps carried him away.

Emma admired Jason’s ability to play the game. His eyes missed nothing. Every word and action seemed to be measured carefully. She longed to be inside his head, seeing how his mind filtered the information, planned for every contingency. Imagining it filled her heart with pride.

She stood beside him and monitored their progress. The elements were all on their side. Palm trees showed their goal was ahead. By now they would have been spotted by one of her men perched high in those trees. Runners would have alerted the ship hiding on the other side. Soon all would be ready.

The pirate paced slowly along the rail. “How far down?”

## ***HER BOUNTY***

“No more than ten feet,” Jason told him.

She twisted her fingers in the folds of her gown. It was a lie easily uncovered. The waters here were clear enough to see to the bottom. While her people had taken pains to plant false treasure along the reef, there was certainly no evidence of a shipwreck. Was the captain clever enough to see a trap? Or would his greed make him see only the reward that sparkled up from the ocean floor?

Wind and tide sucked the ship toward the reef. It helped corroborate their tale. Small breakers skipped to the white sandy beach.

The pirate peered over the side. “I don’t see no treasure.”

“You expect it to leap up at you?” Emma snapped.

He hauled back a hand to slap her. Jason was quicker. A fist to the jaw toppled the pirate...and six swords drew on Jason. Her pulse thudded in her ears.

“Hold!” the captain shouted. His glare never left Jason’s as he shoved himself to his feet. “He’s of no use to me cut up.”

“But we have the place, cap’n,” one of his cohorts said.

“But I’ll be wantin’ proof.” Nose to nose with Jason, he grinned. “Over the side with you. If there be treasure, bring ’er up. No sense us gettin’ wet if ya’ve erred. Over the side or I’ll see yer pretty wife cut up for fish bait...after I’ve had me a taste.”

“You want proof? I give you proof.” Jason crawled onto the rail and dove in.

Emma peered over the side. He hit the water with nary a ripple. He surfaced seconds later, arm held high. The gold chains he’d hidden in his pocket were lifted for all to see.

“Here’s your bloody treasure! Now toss me a rope!”

The pirate’s eyes gleamed. Emma swore he salivated like a hungry dog.

“Ship ahoy!”

He jerked around. Anger flared across his face. The English ship

## *HER BOUNTY*

was just coming around the point.

“Fill the sails and get us out of here,” he ordered.

Emma grabbed his sleeve. “But our treasure! My husband! You can’t leave him there!”

He jerked free. “Can and will! Toss her over the side with him and follow it with a couple buckets of chum. By the time the sharks have done with them, we’ll be clear to retrieve the treasure.”

Two men hoisted Emma to the rail. She let out a scream as they hurled her over the side. She didn’t hit the water as gracefully as Jason. A strong arm circled her waist, pulling her to the surface.

“Hello, love.”

Emma raked the wet hair from her eyes and met Jason’s smile. “That worked exceedingly well, didn’t it?”

“Almost. We just need to slow them down a bit. I found a patch on the side. Care to help me loosen it?”

“‘Twould be my pleasure. We might want to work quickly. They are preparing to bait sharks.”

Lifting her sodden skirts, Jason retrieved the dagger at her thigh. She helped him wrestle his water-logged boots off where his own dagger was hidden. As the first bucket of chum bloodied the water, they dove together. Emma followed him to a patch low on the keel. Using their daggers as levers, they pried the planks of wood off. They surfaced for a gulp of air and watched the pursuit. The pirate ship was sleeker, faster, but the slow leak would give the English the advantage. They’d be in deep water with no hope of escape, only capture. She and Jason swam to the white beach and collapsed, exhausted.

“Well done, love!” He fell back into the sand.

Emma crawled over him and planted a kiss on his lips. “I couldn’t have said it better.”

He looped an arm around her. “We make one devil of a team, Emma Scott.”

## *HER BOUNTY*

“Another sentiment I heartily second,” she said with a laugh.

“Perhaps we should look to making it a permanent arrangement.”

She brushed the sand from his cheek. “I could think of nothing which would please me more. Besides, since I’ve had my way with you, I should do the honorable thing and marry you.”

“Please do, Mrs. Scott. My reputation must not be besmirched.”

“Heaven forbid,” she said with a giggle.

“Wilbur should be positioned on the other side of the island by now.”

“Go ahead. A boat will arrive for me shortly. I need to assure them all is well. I shouldn’t be long. No more than an hour.”

He kissed her until she was breathless, then ducked into the trees. Emma wandered over to the shade of the palms and waited. They were never very long in coming. Having the ship return was another, longer wait. But they always refused to leave her alone on the tiny island.

As she knew, within the hour the small boat rowed into the cove. Phineas Cudrup lifted a wave and a smile she quickly returned.

“Another success, Lady Emma.”

“Indeed,” she called back.

While his men tied the boat to a nearby tree, he strode her way with a flask of fresh water and an apple. Emma stood as he neared, brushing the sand from her gown.

“And my last success, Phineas.”

He lifted an eyebrow. “I don’t know whether to be saddened or relieved.”

“Be joyous, my friend. I’ve a long tale to tell and not much time to deliver it. Suffice to say I must leave your company and tell it to you in port. Just know I am beyond happy and have most certainly met my equal. His ship awaits me on the other side of the island. I’ll be joining him now, but you did need to know I go willingly and with great joy in my heart.”

## ***HER BOUNTY***

On tiptoe, she kissed his cheek. Lifting her skirts, she picked her way over the sand to the trees. Seeing Jason just beyond the shadows, she smiled.

“Lady Emma!”

She glanced over her shoulder at Phineas’s call.

“What of your bounty? Will you be retrieving it in port?”

“I already have it.” Picking up her pace, she hurried to Jason.

He swung her up and around, kissing her soundly. “So now I’m your bounty?”

“All the bounty I’ll ever need.”

Hands tucked together, they headed for his ship.

## CAITLYN WILLOWS

Caitlyn Willows is the pseudonym for award-winning author Catherine Snodgrass, who wanted to flex her writing muscles in the erotica genre. Readers will find the same quality from “Caitlyn” that they have come to expect from “Catherine,” but the stories will be more over-the-top and more steamy. Sometimes the novels are written singularly, and sometimes they are a collaborative effort with award-winning author Paris Dixon. Always they will be action-filled...in more ways than one.

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