

CHAPTER 1



THE CARIBBEAN SEA, 1760S

The sun crept higher, its restless flames stealing over the vast horizon of the Caribbean sea, heralding the arrival of a breaching new dawn. On the rolling planked deck of the *Aphrodite*, several sun-swarthy men encircled their captive, his face etched in a snarl as he eyed his captors in the macabre tableau.

They all awaited the arrival of Captain Frank, and although Frank is typically a man's name, this man was actually a woman. Had he known this Captain Frank was a woman when the *Aphrodite* picked him up after the *Bounty* went down, he would never have sworn his allegiance to him. He would have gone down with the ship first. Shanks would sooner die than serve under a woman!

Not too far away, Pierre stood at the open door of the captain's cabin, his goldish eyes watching as she buckled her sword around her slender waist. "We're ready, Frankie," he said quietly.

Captain Frank nodded to Pierre, her hand on her rapier as she

preceded him out the door. Reaching the deck, her sharp eyes scanned the silent scene, missing nothing.

Her men were gathered around the scurvy rogue named Shanks, the one with a wicked knife slash down the side of his face. She watched his eyes narrow at her approach, his fists clench 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 patchy stubble that didn't quite pull off being a beard.

"I'll not serve under a damnable floozy," he suddenly snapped, his vicious outburst causing spittle to land 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 bait," she finally bit out.

Frankie heard the rustling and murmuring among some of her less loyal crew and knew she could not afford to show weakness. The majority of them were her father's men and were rock solid, but they picked up strays now and then who swore allegiance to keep their heads 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, herding him towards the plank.

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

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

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

Her lip curled and 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, her face set like cold marble.

Shank'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 on the sword than be torn to pieces, still half alive, watching those teeth coming at you .

Frankie lowered her sword and quickly 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 him even the tiniest of victories.

Despite his bravado, Shanks 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! Taunting him!

"If you can swim, you might make it to the island before they catch up with you," she said, cupping a hand around her mouth so her words made it to his ears. Laughing, she pointed 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 and a mouthful of salt water, he began swimming as if his life depended on it, which indeed it did.

Frankie turned and strode back onto the deck, her gaze cold and savage towards the rest of the men. "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. "That's what I thought."

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

"The Pirates' Hideaway?"

"Yes, it's a new harbor for pirates and it's run by MacAlister."

"You mean Morgan MacAlister?" she asked, her eyes narrowing as she turned to stare at her uncle and second in command.

"The same."

Frankie paused, considering the information. MacAlister was a ruthless pirate who had slashed a reputation for himself that was as fierce as Blackbeard's himself. But nothing would deter her. She would have her revenge on Jacques LaSalle. She nodded briefly. "Set sail for the Pirates' Hideaway then, Pierre. How long will it take?"

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

"Set course. I'm going to talk to Kat. My sister needs to know this latest development."

Pierre Matisse Fontaine watched his niece walk away, her stride bold and assured. He shook his head, fearing 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 standing before the dresser 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 similar 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. He left me no choice." 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 reddish trousers 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-shaped eyes gave her an exotic look. A delicate brow arched 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 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 taunt her sister further. She leaned against the wooden dresser, her pert bottom resting on the edge.

"We have word of LaSalle's whereabouts. Seems he's 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 burnished tresses and yawned, not quite awake yet.

"Pierre assures me it's 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 weaponry, she thought once again of her gentle mother. Attacked by pirates, her mother taken and her father killed, their faces still haunted her dreams. Especially her mother's.

Shaking away the mental image, she once again vowed revenge on Jacques LaSalle. The master of the black ship, the one who 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. Jacques LaSalle kept watch through the spyglass as his helmsman and first mate, Frenchy, guided the black ship slowly closer. Jacques was a very careful man; it was part of why he had such a fearsome reputation.

The Nemesis struck fear in the bravest of hearts, and people whispered tales of the black ship that often flew the jolly roger. Even her sails were black, giving her a demonic appearance as if she had floated up from the fiery depths of Hell itself.

Some said it was revenge that drove LaSalle—revenge for the death of his young wife and child and the confiscation of his lands and properties by the French crown. Some said it was his 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.

"Those would be Black Jack's flags," Frenchy answered with a feral growl. "That lowdown backstabber has no honor, not even among pirates."

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

"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 at attention on the nape of his neck, a sure sign that trouble was brewing.

"Oui, 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 don't trust Black 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 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 CLOSE TO DUSK, and Morgan Mathias MacAlister stood on the balcony of his island home, surveying the peaceful waters of the cove through his spyglass. He sniffed the night wind, trying to gauge the source of his uneasiness.

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

Morg growled low in his throat. No one would ever again take 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 about to happen.

Morg's gut told him trouble was coming to the Hideaway and it had nothing to do with Black Jack.

He put down his spyglass when he heard the soft footfalls behind him. That would be his new house maid.

Spinning to face her, the master's startling green eyes pierced her slender frame and Rosalie shivered as she stepped into the room. She watched MacAlister warily, her heart beating fast. His blond hair was tied at his nape with a black ribbon and he had a bandana around his forehead. The darker mustache didn't match the sun-bleached blond of his hair. His strong angular jaw was set in a foreboding manner.

"I'm ready, master," she gasped fearfully. She trembled as the pirate's ruthless gaze raked up and down her figure in the loose cotton gown.

Rosalie fidgeted with her fingers, wishing 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 most apprehensive.

Morg's lips thinned into an almost cruel smile. The young lass had been caught by his first mate, Malik. 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'd pleaded for mercy with her soft, brown doe eyes, Morg's well-guarded, tender inner core had been touched. The sixteen-year-old girl reminded him of the younger sister he'd left in Scotland long ago. Her shiny brown hair hung to her shoulders, and when she tucked it nervously behind her ears, her movements were endearingly similar to his young Eileen.

After much indecision, Morg had finally indentured her as his servant and taken her into his home. He'd ordered 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."

"Th-thank you, sir," she stammered and dropped a curtsy, bowing her head.

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

"W-what are you doing, master?" gasped Rosalie, not understanding. 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 with an icy look. "Do ye know what the traditional punishment is for thievery, my girl?"

"N-no, sir!" She'd never had to steal anything in her life until the Spanish had invaded the island and destroyed her childhood home and killed her family. The pirates had driven them off, but she'd hidden in the woods until Malik had found her, taking bits of bread and nuts, hoping the filthy lot wouldn't notice.

"They lose a finger for the first offense," Morg declared. He pinched one of her slender digits 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 somewhere within him was a feeling of protectiveness, and for some reason, he didn't want her to think him a total monster.

Rosalie's brown eyes widened, 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'd 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 in spite of his warning. 'Twas only natural when a wench was about to get her hide tanned that she fight. Easily subduing her, his corded arm blocked her hands as he gripped her hip with his left hand and patted the smooth 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 me before I'm through."

Rosalie kicked desperately and screamed as Morg smacked her bouncing cheeks over and over, igniting fire and pain like she'd never known before. She cried, 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 while she sobbed hysterically, catching her when her knees buckled. Sitting back down, he fought with himself as he sat her on his lap, allowing her painful bottom to fall between his open thighs. "There now, lass, let that be a lesson to ye." 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'd never known such pain! Her bottom ached and burned like it was literally 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 for that arse," he said gently. "Ye are going to be sore for a while, as well ye

should. Now, get along 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 fishing dugouts. 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 to me. Ye women are *not* to leave the manor tonight. Is that clear?"

She bobbed her curtsey. "Yes, master!" She turned and left, the tears still flowing down her smooth 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.

"See to the young lass, Alyssa," Morg stated as she approached, her brown legs flashing beneath the island skirt. His eyes gleamed appreciatively as he watched her glide smoothly across the floor.

Alyssa's chocolate brown eyes met his with a smile for her old friend. "Going soft, are you, Morg?" Her rich island accent flowed like mellow music across his ears.

"Would ye like a trip over my knee then?" Morg returned silkily. He felt a hardening of his shaft at the thought of her full ripe bottom beneath his palm and the delights they enjoyed afterwards.

Alyssa was not fooled by his polite words, laughing quietly as she moved out of reach. "Not tonight, I can tell there be other things on your mind." She grinned knowingly and fingered her shark 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 wolfishly when she moved further away.

"I'll be passing on that offer, thank you," she replied with a chuckle, opening the door.

"Don't leave the manor tonight, Alyssa; there's something brewing out there."

She turned and nodded solemnly. "Yes, I know. There be mischief afoot, for sure."

Morg watched the door shut, the uneasy feelings returning as the woman left. He strode to the balcony and took up the spyglass again.

Sure enough, it was just after midnight when Morg spotted the signal from Malik. He was already dressed in dark clothes, his sword ready and a knife belted to his thigh. Quickly, he shinnied down the trellis attached to the wall for the fragrant morning glories and slipped into the jungle undergrowth. His target was Black Jack's biggest ship, the *Satin Lady*.

Malik met him at the water's edge. No words were needed as they slid into the warm waters of the Caribbean and swam silently to the mooring ropes of the waiting vessel.

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

Morg froze when he saw the woman. She stood naked and proud before him, showing no fear although her ankle was manacled to the floor beside a bed pallet. Her peaches and cream body was magnificent, her full, proud breasts swaying as she leaned forward to spit at him.

"Filthy pirate!"

He quickly stepped back to avoid spittle on his clothing. She

was of obvious English descent, judging from her accent and coloring, and she glared at him with hatred in her startling blue eyes. Jack's woman, he assessed as he studied her for a moment. Or at least, one he intended to have for himself.

Without a word, he strode forward and grabbed a handful of her long blonde tresses, then ground his mouth against hers, tasting her full red lips.

At first, she hammered him with her fists, but then, she willingly surrendered, pulling him to her urgently, the scent of her arousal reaching his sensitive nostrils.

Quickly, Morg freed his throbbing thomas as she pulled him with her to the pallet on the floor. Mindful of the chain attached to one ankle, he shoved her milky thighs wide and, with an exultant growl, rammed his rock-hard shaft into her dripping core. It was the ultimate humiliation, taking your enemy's woman within his own sanctuary, and it gave Morg immense satisfaction. Not that he'd ever had to force a woman—and this one was no exception. Obviously, her pitcher had been cracked long ago.

She screamed in delight, her nails digging into the rippling muscles on his back, her hips rocking and gyrating to his rhythmic thrusts. He dropped his sword and grabbed her buttocks, his hips slamming into her, bringing her to a raging peak of madness as he brought them both over the precipice of raw, hedonistic pleasure.

Morg heard the pounding footsteps just before the door slammed open and Black Jack roared with rage at the sight before him. The black eye patch and three-day beard added to the roughness of his face—a face used to instilling fear.

Instinctively, Morg rolled off the woman and across the floor as the burly pirate lunged forward, his greasy black ponytail flipping back and forth as he slashed at him with his sword. "I'll send ye to Davy Jones' locker, ye filthy bilge rat," swore Jack, cursing at his misses.

Quick as lightning, Morg avoided Jack's useless jabs until he saw

his enemy suddenly freeze, then collapse in slow motion, falling to the floor with blood seeping from the corner of his mouth.

Catching his breath, he looked up and saw the lovely blonde 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, the sword in her hand, she unlocked the manacles and freed her ankle. "What is your name?" she asked boldly, kicking the chains aside.

Morg got to his feet, still breathing heavily and stuffing his thomas back in his trousers. He supposed the proud beauty might have saved his life. "Morg MacAlister," he answered cautiously, keeping his eye trained on the sword in her hand.

"I've heard of you," she sneered. "You're another filthy pirate, just like that one." She kicked Jack's lifeless body, then cocked her head arrogantly to the side with a sensuous smile as she reconsidered her words. "No, not *quite* like that one. You did give me commodities one of the best rides I've ever had, so I will let you live, this time. But get off my ship!" She motioned to the door with his sword.

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

"Jack's men are coming back," hissed Malik urgently, sticking his head inside the cabin.

"Those are *my* men," snapped the blonde. "That useless Black Jack caught me in a weak moment and took 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 hilt first.

"It's Lola!" she replied proudly. "Now get your sugar stick out of here before I change my mind."

Morg grinned broadly. "I've heard of ye too, Lola...and ye call me a pirate. Nice diddies, by the way," he added, his glance grazing her ample breasts. 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 any price. He chuckled as she shrugged, arching her delicate brow in derision. "Until we meet again, fair lassie," he mocked as he quickly left.

Standing on the dock, Morg signaled his men to let the *Satin Lady* leave the harbor. He admired Lola's confident stride across the deck and gave her a two fingered salute as he caught her eye. His men had already confiscated Jack's other two ships, and Lola acknowledged his prowess with a return salute as she sailed regally past him.

Lola smiled wickedly, ecstatic that her merchandise was safe. MacAlister must have missed it, too intent on dipping his wick. There were rewards to be had for the return of said merchandise, and she intended to bring the women to England, provided she didn't get stopped again. That backstabber, Black Jack, had double-crossed her. She watched triumphantly as one of her crew hung his head off the prow of the ship, her bright blue eyes gleaming with satisfaction. As Jack's flags were taken down and her own hoisted, she was delighted to know that Jack would never double-cross anyone again.



"NOT A BAD NIGHT'S WORK, eh, Malik?" Morg asked as he downed his ale at the island tavern. He too, was feeling satisfied...for the moment. The *Nasty Grubb* was quite busy for 4:00 am because he and his men were celebrating. Black Jack's untimely demise would serve as a stern warning to anyone else who might have thoughts of taking over his harbor. He'd assigned a couple of his trusted partners as captains of the ships they'd confiscated and the booty aboard them had been divided among all the men. Jack's remaining crew had sworn allegiance to Morg, as the governor of the island, and to their ship captains.

"Not bad at all, Gov'ner," grunted Malik, watching the

celebration going on around him. He was ever vigilant in spite of the control they had over the island. Mutiny and treachery were always lurking just around the corner.

In spite of the revelry, Morg felt a sudden chill run down his spine. He looked around him uneasily, searching for a possible cause. The coupe had been thwarted, the manor was safe and Black Jack eliminated. Why then, did he still feel uneasy?

He swiped his mouth across his sleeve and walked out the door of the tavern to gaze into the ocean horizon. What was out there? There was something coming, he could feel it in his bones, but what...or who...was it?