

The Captain's Lady  
*A Pirate's Treasure Book Three*

By

Maryse Dawson

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Published by Blushing Books®,

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ABCD Graphics and Design

977 Seminole Trail #233

Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Dawson, Maryse

The Captain's Lady (A Pirate's Treasure Book Three)

Cover Design by ABCD Graphics

EBook ISBN: 978-1-68259-703-3

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# Chapter One

*1714...Charleston*

Twenty-two year old Geraldine Van de Sarr looked at her reflection in the bedroom mirror and pulled a face. "Honestly, Alice, I know you mean well but truly, I look frightful!"

Alice, her maid, bit her lip trying to stifle her laughter but failed and laying a hand on her mistress's shoulder, gave in and giggled aloud. Geraldine soon joined her.

"Oh, dear Lord. I think your talents lie elsewhere, Alice. Please go and fetch Margaret."

Alice scampered from the room in search of the older and wiser servant, Margaret, leaving Geraldine to stare at the unruly mess on her head. Alice had asked if she could style her hair and Geraldine had allowed her free rein. Big mistake! It pretty much resembled a bird's nest now. Alice was only fifteen, and her lack of experience showed. But as with all things, everyone had to start somewhere. Perhaps though, she could use someone else as her guinea pig in future. Maybe her grandmother!

Geraldine's green eyes sparkled wickedly. Now *that* she would like to see. Although, the tongue lashing that poor little Alice would receive maybe wasn't worth it. Her grandmother was not known for her patience. Something her brother, William, seemed to have inherited.

Margaret appeared at the door and took one look at Geraldine's hair before turning on Alice, standing just behind her. "Oh dear me, Alice. What *have* you done?" she chided her before marching over to Geraldine. "Worry not, milady. I shall soon have it looking nice again. Fetch me that comb, Alice. Quickly now!"

Fifteen minutes later and Geraldine's long black waves were fashioned back into the latest style with soft ringlets framing her pretty face. She thanked Margaret and told Alice to fetch her hat and reticule.

"Are you going out, milady?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, I have a dress fitting in town at Madame Boudray's. It's William's fortieth birthday tomorrow, and I want to look nice. Juliette always looks so beautiful." She thought of her sister-in-law's natural beauty. "She has such gorgeous blonde hair."

"Aye, she does, but you are as dark as she is blonde – both of you are equally stunning, milady."

Geraldine smiled warmly as she stood up. "I can always rely on you to boost my spirits, Margaret."

"I only speak the truth, milady." she replied, in her usual no-nonsense manner.

Alice returned with her feathered hat and with Margaret's help, pinned it to Geraldine's hair. She peered at herself in the mirror. "There, I am ready."

"Is Bailey taking you, milady?"

"Yes. Can you tell Papa I shall be back in time for dinner?"

"Of course, milady."

Geraldine ran down the stairs on light feet. She loved shopping. Papa was always quite generous and within reason, she never wanted for anything. Reaching the bottom step, she walked demurely through the hallway, in case her father was watching, before running down the exterior stone steps.

Bailey opened the carriage door for her and within minutes, she set off to town.

\* \* \*

Two hours later and Geraldine descended the short steps outside the boutique, standing aside whilst Bailey loaded the carriage with her mound of purchases, aided by one of Madame Boudray's amiable assistants.

"I shan't be long, Bailey. I just want to pop down to the seafront."

Bailey paused, holding a box in his hands, his eyes widening. "By the docks, milady?"

"Is there a problem?" She arched a delicate eyebrow, disliking his tone.

Bailey shook his head, his grey whiskers bouncing with agitation. "Yer father won't like it, milady. 'Tis far too dangerous fer a young lady to be walking around down there!"

"Nonsense, Bailey! Carry on as you were."

Without waiting for him to chide her further, she hastily made her way down the narrow lane towards the sea. He could disapprove all he liked; it wasn't going to stop her. She sniffed the air appreciatively, sucking in a lungful of salty, fresh air. There was something exciting about the sea, a strange allure. The docks were heaving with people when she arrived. Carts, carriages,

horses, merchants – all manner of things being touted at high volume. Shouting and raucous laughter abounded but Geraldine loved it. It was so exciting! She walked to the edge of the cobbled quayside and looked at the ships. Amongst them were two of her family's merchant ships anchored in port, their gangplanks lowered and goods being unloaded endlessly by teams of competent sailors.

Glancing down at the water, she saw several fish swim past. It reminded her of being a child when her father used to buy a loaf of bread for her to feed them. She smiled wistfully, fond memories flooding in.

On a whim, she decided to do the very same thing now. Reaching down into her reticule, she pulled out a coin and made towards a small bakery along the quayside. She hadn't taken more than a few steps when she felt a sharp tug on her sleeve. By the time she looked down, her reticule was gone and the thief, a small boy, was already running away. She gasped and picking up her skirts, gave chase. "You there! Thief!" she cried angrily. "Stop, I say!"

Several heads turned to look at the commotion and the strange sight of a well-dressed lady running through the docks, her elegant ankles on display for all.

Suddenly, a large hand descended onto her shoulder, halting any further progress. "Stop right there, milady!" A deep masculine voice growled. "This is no place for a lady to be." She felt the man turn away and bellow. "Holden – chase that child and fetch back this lady's reticule. Be quick about it, man!"

"Take your hand off me, sir!" Geraldine sputtered indignantly.

"Only if you promise to desist chasing that child. You have no idea where he could be leading you!"

"Yes! Yes! Unhand me!"

He loosened his grip, and she turned around to face him. She was used to seeing handsome men, for her brother and cousins were all considered to be good-looking men, but this man took her breath away. His eyes were a deep shade of blue and they stared back at her almost fiercely. He wore his dark blond hair tied back at the nape of his neck beneath a black tricorne hat. His clothes had a fine cut to them.

"I saw what happened, milady. Holden will do his best to retrieve your property but these thieves are fleet of foot. I cannot promise he'll not return empty handed."

She cursed under her breath and pursed her lips, looking in the direction Holden had

taken. She turned her attention back to the man when he spoke low. "Do you often act so impulsively, milady?" he remarked, his whole demeanour one of disapproval.

She bristled at his tone. "If you mean do I often have to chase after thieves, then no, sir I do not."

The man quirked an eyebrow and then looked around with a puzzled expression before his eyes settled on hers once again. "Where is your chaperone?" he queried.

"'Tis no business of yours, sir!"

His eyes darkened and a nerve ticked in his jaw. "As a gentleman, 'tis every bit my business, milady! I advise you to curb your tongue. So I ask again...where is your chaperone?"

Geraldine placed her hands on her hips angrily. "I left my driver up yonder street by the clothing boutique. I have no need for a chaperone."

"I beg to differ, and I expect your parents or guardian would too!" He stared hard at her.

She raised her chin defiantly. "I was perfectly safe until that – that scoundrel decided to steal from me."

"Walking by yourself along these docks is certainly not a safe place to be and if you think otherwise, then you're foolish!" He reprimanded her.

For a moment, she was shocked into silence. She quickly found her voice, her eyes flashing angrily at him. "How dare you speak to me in such a manner!"

Folding his arms, he stared down at her assessingly. "You possess a reckless nature, milady. 'Tis obvious. If you were mine, I'd give you a sound spanking for venturing here alone."

Geraldine's jaw dropped and her cheeks flushed with anger, but before she had a chance to retort, the man called Holden returned, empty handed. "Sorry, Captain. The tyke got clean away, there was no sign of him."

"You did your best, Holden. Get back about your duties."

Geraldine looked at him. So, he was a captain! That accounted for his bossy behaviour. Incensed that he'd intervened, she snapped at him. "If you'd left me to continue pursuing the boy I'd have my reticule back now. 'Tis your fault he made his escape!"

His jaw tightened and his eyes turned to steel. "Your rudeness is not befitting that of a lady. Come, I'll escort you back to your carriage."

"I'm perfectly able to return there myself, sir. I've had quite enough of your so-called help!"

She spun on her heel with every intention of storming off, but his hand on her elbow waylaid her. She set her jaw stubbornly and glared at him.

"I *will* accompany you and you *will* act with decorum! Do you understand?" The deep rumble of his voice brooked no argument.

Something in his tone made Geraldine's stomach flutter nervously. She glanced down at his hand on her elbow, noticing how big it was. What if he were to carry out his threat of a spanking?

"Very well, but it will be under sufferance," she bit out.

"I never doubted that for a moment, milady."

Reluctantly, she let him accompany her up the narrow cobbled street to where she could see Bailey was anxiously waiting for her, pacing up and down next to the carriage, his face worried. Neither of them spoke on the way, but she could feel the captain's disapproval in every stride of his very long legs.

Handing her over to Bailey's safekeeping, the captain bowed curtly before excusing himself and heading off back to the docks. Geraldine stared at his retreating back from the safety of the carriage window. He really was a very handsome man – it was just a shame he was so disagreeable!

*The next evening...*

Geraldine's heart fluttered with excitement as her father's carriage clattered along the road on the way to her brother's home, Babbington House. It was William's fortieth birthday today and Juliette had organized what promised to be a lavish ball.

She loved to dance, and apart from the thrill of seeing her sister-in-law, most of her friends would be there too. She had become firm friends with Juliette since they had first met three years ago when she had married her overbearing brother, William. That they clearly loved each other was obvious but why she loved him, Geraldine knew not!

Admittedly, he doted on his wife but he also spanked her, which Geraldine knew from personal experience bloody well hurt. She scowled for a moment. William had taken the strap to her own backside a few times in the past. It was when their father had been taken ill and for a couple of months, he had not had the strength to keep her under control. William had stepped in

to chastise her. Although she felt she never deserved the rotten thing, William usually decided otherwise.

But now, Juliette took up most of his time plus the little addition to their family, baby Laurence, meant that William's attention was rarely on her. A year old and completely adorable, Laurence melted the hardest of hearts.

Her father was back to his normal strong self now, so she knew what would happen if she stepped out of line. She glanced over at him as he sat opposite her in the carriage. He was staring out into the night, deep in thought. He still cut a handsome figure at fifty-eight. He wasn't partial to social gatherings, preferring the peace and quiet of his own home but as it was his only son's fortieth, he had deemed to come. Although his demeanour earlier had been anything but agreeable, barking out orders to whichever servant was within earshot.

She smiled to herself and looked up at Babbington House when the carriage came to a halt on the front drive. A footman in green livery opened the carriage door and Geraldine alighted to the sound of laughter and music coming from the open doorway. Her father followed behind, a slight frown marring his brow. "Sounds a bit lively for my liking," he grumbled. Geraldine slipped her arm through his. "Come now, Papa. This isn't something you do often, so make the most of it."

"Do you chide me, child?" He raised a warning eyebrow at her but she just smiled and ushered him forward.

Juliette was standing at the top of the steps and rushed down upon spotting them.

"Charles! Geraldine! I'm so glad you've come."

"Good evening, Juliette. I hope that son of mine has been treating you well." said Charles, kissing her on the cheek. "How's my grandson?"

Juliette smiled warmly. "Baby Laurence is fast asleep at the moment. He was into everything today so he's worn himself out. Ellie can take you up to see him any time you like."

"Excellent!"

Geraldine smiled excitedly at Juliette. "'Tis lovely to see you, Juliette. You look simply stunning!"

Juliette twirled in front of her. "I ordered a new gown from Madame Boudray's." She lowered her voice so only Geraldine could hear. "I told William it cost much less than it actually did."

"What was that?" William appeared at their side and Juliette widened her eyes innocently. "Nothing for you to worry about, dearest."

Geraldine watched as William's eyes narrowed ever so slightly whilst looking at his wife. Her quick change of subject hadn't gone unnoticed. He gave a murmured "Hmm" before turning to her and his father. He shook his father's hand. "Evening, Father. There'll be cards tonight if you fancy it, in the back room. I think Bertrand's hoping to gain back his winnings from last time."

Charles smiled wryly. "Is he now? I suppose I could give the poor boy a chance."

William kissed Geraldine on the cheek and Juliette commented, "Doesn't your sister look beautiful?"

His eyes swept over her. "You do indeed look lovely, Geraldine."

"Thank you, William. Now, take us all inside and I shall give you your birthday present. I would have ordered you an ear trumpet, considering your age, but decided against it," She grinned, unable to resist goading him.

"Less of your cheek, if you please." said William, a wry smile forming on his face. He ushered her up the steps along with Juliette. Placing his hands on the smalls of their backs, he led them through the entrance and large hallway into the crowded ballroom, their father following behind.

Geraldine gasped. "Oh, it looks lovely, Juliette!" The room was adorned with flowers and ribbons. "It must have taken a lot of organizing."

Juliette nodded. "Yes, it did, but the look on William's face was worth it."

William smiled down at her. "It was a lovely surprise." He kissed her softly before turning to his father. "Thackeray's over there, Father. He's been looking forward to seeing you."

"Ah, most excellent. Do excuse me."

Charles wandered off and William turned his attention back to the girls, "Now let me get you two a glass of punch."

"Not so fast, brother dear. I think you've forgotten something." said Geraldine, raising an eyebrow at him. He frowned and she held out a small gift-wrapped box. "Your present, of course!"

"Ah!" He took it off her and untied the silk bow. Opening the small box, he withdrew a pair of gold cufflinks.

"Your initials are engraved on them. See." She leaned over and pointed out the intricate engraving.

"They're lovely, Geraldine." He snapped the box shut and leaned over to kiss her cheek. "I'll get Mocquet to put them away and return with some punch." A waiter walked past with an elevated tray of champagne in crystal glasses. "Or would you prefer champagne?"

"I think I should like a glass of punch first, William," she said, smiling happily. She did love a party.

"And for me." echoed Juliette.

William left them to talk whilst he went to fetch their drinks. Geraldine turned to Juliette when he'd gone. "So, how have you been? I haven't seen you for nearly two weeks, although it feels so much longer."

"Very well. Laurence took a couple of steps last week. I cannot believe he is over a year old already." Her face softened, thinking of her son.

Geraldine smiled. "You're a wonderful mother, Juliette. I hope I'll be the same when the time comes."

Juliette tapped her arm with her fan. "Of course you shall! Speaking of which, William has appointed a new captain for *the Pride of Port* – his new business partner, Lord Jonathan Forbes. He's devilishly handsome. I thought you might like to meet him." Juliette's eyes had taken on a wicked sparkle, and Geraldine couldn't help but smile.

"You seek to find me a suitor, Juliette? Shame on you." She giggled, laying a hand on her arm. "Show him to me immediately!"

Juliette's eyes browsed the room until she spotted the new captain. "Look to your right. He's standing talking to Aunt Wilhelmina by the archway. See him?"

Geraldine scanned the guests until she saw her aunt. She was talking to a tall, blond-haired man dressed in a smart dark blue frock coat. His back was to her but even so, she felt her stomach drop. He possessed the same build and stature as the overbearing captain she'd encountered yesterday. Lord, don't tell her he was her brother's newly appointed captain! Surely not? He turned his head slightly and she instantly recognized him.

Juliette was studying her, a small frown on her face. "What is it, Geraldine? Do you know him?"

Geraldine leaned nearer to her sister-in-law and whispered, "I met him yesterday and he

had the audacity to threaten me with a spanking!"

Juliette gasped, her eyes growing wide. "Oh, no! What on earth did you do to warrant that?"

Before she had a chance to answer, the man in question suddenly turned around and stared at her. She blushed hotly and, with a swish of her skirts, turned her back on him. "Good Lord, Juliette. He's seen me!"

"He's coming over," hissed Juliette under her breath. Her voice raised a little, "Why hello again, Jonathan." Juliette cleared her throat. "May I introduce William's sister, Miss Geraldine Van de Sarr?"

Steeling her nerves, Geraldine turned around, a forced smile on her lips. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

"Lord Jonathan Forbes at your service, Miss Van de Sarr." He bowed eloquently but his eyes pierced hers.

She swallowed hard. He was incredibly handsome, and the deep tone of his voice sent shivers up her spine. He was also, however, in possession of a particularly dominant nature. Something she had no desire to encounter at that moment in time. She decided her wisest decision would be to avoid him. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go and get that glass of punch that my brother promised me." She went to move but Juliette stilled her, a wicked look in her eyes.

"No, dearest Geraldine. Stay here and converse with the captain. I'll find out what's delaying William with our drinks. I expect he's been waylaid. Would you like anything, Jonathan?"

"Not at the moment but thank you."

Geraldine shot her a surreptitious look that spoke of retribution but behind Jonathan's back, Juliette shrugged innocently and with a broad smile on her face walked away. Her attention returned to the captain when he said, accusingly.

"You never mentioned you were William's sister."

She raised her chin a fraction. "Why should I have told you? You never told me your name – I certainly didn't feel inclined to tell you mine."

\* \* \*

Jonathan looked down at the feisty baggage in front of him. She was an outspoken little thing and hardly how he would have expected Lord William Van de Sarr's sister to behave. She was, however, exceptionally alluring. Her raven black hair shimmered prettily, adorned with tiny beads and ribbons. Her eyes sparkled as green as any precious emerald and her lips were ripe and plump for kissing.

He realized she was staring at him, her face blushing becomingly. He spoke quickly, "It was remiss of me not to introduce myself yesterday, milady. Perhaps we should start again?" He raised her gloved hand and kissed her knuckles.

He watched the play of emotions cross her face. She was still clearly frustrated with him but at the same time, his words seemed to be winning her over. He continued, "May I ask you for a dance this evening, milady?"

Geraldine's eyes widened perceptibly. "I'm not certain I wish to dance with a man that threatened me with a spanking, sir."

"A spanking that would've been justifiably deserved, as well you know. But, as I said, we shall put it behind us and start afresh."

She looked up at him, her bottom lip thrust out before capitulating. "Very well, I will dance with you, sir, but there'll be no mention of a spanking ever again."

"That I cannot promise, milady, but you've no need to worry if your intentions are to behave. Only bad girls get punished."

\* \* \*

Geraldine's stomach flipped, his words stirring emotions in her that she didn't understand. She should be repulsed by his dominance but in fact, confusingly, she felt quite the opposite. Perhaps it was her destiny to be surrounded by men that had no compunction in putting a woman over their knee when they thought she deserved it!

But then would she want anything else? A husband she could bend to her will would soon bore her – wouldn't he? She frowned.

"You hesitate, milady, which I can only assume means you're planning mischief which might warrant a spanking!"

Geraldine gasped. "I plan no such thing, sir. I'm just deciding whether I wish to dance with you or not. 'Tis all. I'm no mischief maker!"

A deep voice spoke next to her. "I beg to differ." It was her brother. She flashed her eyes angrily at him but he just smiled back, handing her a glass of punch. "I apologise for taking so long, Lady Smythe waylaid me. She has a tendency to prattle on."

She took the glass off him but admonished him at the same time. "William! I'm no trouble maker!" She was, and quite often, but she didn't need her brother confirming that fact.

He raised an eyebrow and glanced at Jonathan, a glance that spoke a thousand words. A grin on his face, he turned and walked back to his guests. Geraldine pursed her lips. Great! She flashed her eyes back to Jonathan and found him regarding her silently, an amused look on his face.

She huffed under her breath. "Ignore my brother, he likes to tease me." She took a gulp of her punch, relishing the warm feeling as it slipped down her throat.

Jonathan took the glass from her and placed it on a nearby table. "Come, milady. Dance with me."

This time he didn't wait for her to agree, he simply whisked her off towards the dance floor and taking a firm hold of her waist and hand, began to whirl her around the room. For a big man, he was quite light on his feet and Geraldine soon found herself laughing gaily, immersing herself in the party atmosphere. She loved a ball and her partner, despite his faults, was devilishly handsome.

He smiled down at her, flashing his white teeth, admiration in his face. "You dance well, milady."

"Thank you, sir."

When the dance ended, he led her to the side of the room. "May I fetch a drink for you?"

"Yes, that would be lovely. I'll have a glass of rum."

He frowned. "That's rather a strong drink for a young lady. I would advise you have a small glass of punch instead."

Geraldine's lips thinned. She had only had one dance with him and yet. Already he thought he could dictate to her. She bristled indignantly. "If you don't wish to get me a rum, sir, then I shall get it myself! I'm quite old enough, thank you." She went to push past him but his hand stilled her.

"Remember your manners, milady!"

Her breathing suddenly became erratic. His touch against the skin on her upper arm felt electric. She struggled to ignore the heady sensation and instead looked down at his hand pointedly. "I wish to join my friends."

He removed his hand and she sailed past him, collecting a small glass of rum on her way. When she was a safe distance from him, she raised the glass to her lips and making certain he was watching, she took a big gulp before raising her chin and turning her back on him.

She could feel his eyes boring into her back but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of turning around. Especially as her eyes were stinging from the fiery liquid burning its way down her throat! Instead, she joined two of her friends on the other side of the room, away from his piercing stare.

Mabel and Sophie were thrilled to see her and quickly the three immersed themselves in conversation, catching up with recent events since they'd last met.

With the evening coming to a close, Geraldine sought out Juliette. She was sitting out on the swing seat on the wide veranda at the front of the house, swinging her legs and staring up at the starry night. Geraldine threw herself down next to her and laid her head back. It was spinning a little from the alcohol she'd consumed.

"Lord, Juliette. That was one hell of a ball."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it." She paused. "What did you think of our new captain, Lord Jonathan Forbes?"

Geraldine huffed. "He is an overbearing, opinionated, arrogant, pig-headed knave!"

"So...you like him then?" Juliette giggled.

Geraldine smiled and then leaning into her sister-in-law, laughed out loud. "Unfortunately, yes." When she had her laughing under control she sighed. "Twice he has threatened to spank me and he even disapproved of me drinking rum, yet I find him attractive. There's just something intriguing about him. What's wrong with me, Juliette?"

"He's a handsome, strong-minded man, Geraldine, and the fact you find him attractive is perfectly normal. There's nothing wrong with you at all. I, for one, could never marry a weak man."

"Lucky for you then that you're married to my brother – a more domineering man I've yet to meet."

"You would not find me quite so domineering, my dear, if you learned to behave," said William, appearing next to them, his approach masked by the loud music coming from inside the house.

Geraldine bit her bottom lip and slouched down into the seat a little, her eyes wide. "My pardon, William. I didn't see you there."

"Obviously not." He arched a disapproving eyebrow. "I came to fetch you as Father is ready to leave." He held a hand out and clasping it, she stood up, Juliette following suit.

"It's been a lovely evening. Did you enjoy your party, William?" Geraldine asked.

"Yes, it was nice having everyone together." He placed a strong arm around his wife's waist and kissed the top of her head. "Juliette did an excellent job! Which reminds me, Lord Jonathan Forbes has asked if he can call on you tomorrow."

"Oh!"

"Is that a yes or a no?"

She hesitated and Juliette elbowed her lightly, her eyes urging her to say yes.

"Very well, tell him he may call on me in the afternoon."

She joined her father in the carriage and after making her farewells traveled towards home, wondering at her decision to see the formidable Lord Jonathan Forbes the next day.