

Tales of the Peregrine Inn: Olivia's Escape

Holly Bebernitz

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Dedicated to Jim "Frosty" McCallister, My longtime piratical pal

About the Author

Holly Bebernitz, after thirty years of teaching speech, English and history on the secondary and college levels, retired from classroom teaching to become a fulltime grandmother. With the change in schedule came the time needed to complete her first novel. Published in March 2013, *Trevorode the Defender* is in its third printing and has enjoyed a wide and varied readership.

For the many readers who have found Agnes Quinn to be a kindred spirit and have enjoyed visiting the Magnolia Arms, Holly now introduces *Tales of the Peregrine Inn: Olivia's Escape*, offered as a free download to enjoy and share with your friends.

"If you liked Ivy Leigh," Holly says, "you'll love Bonny Bee."

"A Pirate Portrait"

A parrot on his shoulder, A patch upon his eye, Intrepid, he'll withstand a squall, But from the law he'll fly.

He sails the seas in his worthy ship, Scorning conventional life. There's a place in his heart for his mother, But he should never take a wife.

Landlubber's life he scorns to live. Dread storms? They never faze him. A merchant's craft? A farmer's plow? You'll never hear him praise them.

He must be free to sail away Whenever oceans beckon. Cast his anchor in just one place? On that he'll never reckon.

So if a safe and normal life You find you are desirous, Set your sights on other work, But don't become a pirate.

~ Holly Bebernitz

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Chapter One An Excellent View

In the late autumn of 1719, the infamous pirate Calico Jack Rackham purchased an inn on the outskirts of Lenford, a village on the weather-beaten Carolina coast. He bought the house as a gift for his wife Bonny Bee, a peerless woman, who, everyone agreed, merited this display of extravagance. Rackham's purpose, however, was neither to bespeak his love nor reward her constancy, but to silence her persistent entreaties to give up his pirate life and stay ashore. While his ragtag crew looked on, he handed her the keys and demanded she cease her complaining once and for all.

That same night a frightful storm blew in from the northeast. Bonny Bee, new to the village and therefore friendless, waited alone, sitting by the fire and humming a shanty to shore up her courage. At dawn, wreckage from Rackham's ship drifted in. Ten days later—when all souls were presumed dead—the villagers hosted a grand funeral. The mayor accompanied Bonny Bee as she walked behind an empty casket. Even in her grief she was regal, so stunning in a black silk dress that men, hatless with heads bowed, peeked from the corner of their eyes as she passed.

A vibrant thirty-nine when Jack left her (for in truth it cannot be said when Jack "died," for he had staged his death so he could take aboard ship another "Bonny" he liked better), Bonny Bee could have beguiled a willing suitor. But before Jack's empty coffin came to rest at the bottom of his grave, she had decided to remain alone and do as she pleased with her newfound freedom and resources. She turned her home into an inn named "Peregrine" (for "wanderers") and put a sign outside which read: "Come in, if you are tired, and wander nevermore."

Orphaned at a young age, Bonny Bee had been shuffled from one aunt to the other. The varying degrees of welcome she received resulted in her making two solemn vows while yet a child. Each night, after she extinguished her candle, she thanked God for the roof over her head, bid Him tell her parents she was well, and whispered, "When I am grown, I promise always to work hard so I will never again be beholden to another human being, and, if anyone ever needs my help, I will offer it and *never* say they are a bother."

At long last—no longer under the threat of being compelled to flee when the constable came knocking for her outlaw husband—she was free to provide a

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Chapter One ~ An Excellent View

safe haven for those in need. Never again would she be forced to forsake her flowers, herbs, and bees, to board Jack's ship for a hasty retreat up the coast. Bartering with the bewildered but grateful villagers, she traded her china, silver, and paintings for straw to construct her beehives, stones to mend her garden wall, and cuttings of hollyhock, Michaelmas daisies, lavender, and sweetbriar to plant beside her pathway.

To foster goodwill with her neighbors, Bonny Bee began making weekly trips to the village shops, where she sampled wares and obtained services for which she really had no need. Each time she purchased a tart, length of ribbon, or sack of flour, she would say, "If a stranger comes to town and needs a place to rest, please recommend my Inn." So one morning, a month after the Inn opened, the local baker, Prudence Rundle, after she had given Edward Chilcott a loaf of bread, sent him to Bonny Bee, whose heart broke the moment she saw him.

Though scarcely twenty, he had the countenance of an old man, his face etched with sullen, relentless suffering. His coat, threadbare and torn, hung on stooped shoulders.

"I understand you have a room to rent," he said.

Bonny Bee opened wide the door, took him by the hand, and drew him in. "Take your choice. My own room is here on the first floor, so I can manage things, but the other rooms—"

He held up his hand. "I'll take the least amenable. I can pay for only one night."

"Are you passing through?" Bonny Bee asked.

"I'm looking for my wife Anastasia," he said.

"Was she to meet you here in town?"

"No. Our ship went down a week ago. The waves parted us. I swam in, dared to hope she did too, to another place on the coast. I've been scouring the shore, hoping...but it's cold. I—"

Bonny Bee led him to the chair by the fire. "Take off your coat. I'll get some tea."

When she returned, she found him asleep.

So Edward Chilcott—or Ned as he preferred to be called—became Bonny Bee's first resident and first employee, and no one (except Royce Fitzcannon, who arrived a year later) ever held a place in her affections like he did.

Chapter One ~ An Excellent View

All that day Bonny Bee tiptoed past him as he slept. When she woke him for afternoon tea, he stared around him, befuddled, and asked where he was. "You're home," Bonny Bee said. "And after you've eaten, you may wash up in the kitchen."

Tears flowing, he opened his mouth, but could scarce light upon a word to thank her.

After tea, Bonny Bee led him to the kitchen, poured warm water into the basin, showed him a nightshirt on the sideboard, and closed the door. When he emerged, clean and scrubbed, she accompanied him upstairs to the room farthest from the street. Before she closed the curtains, she pointed out the window.

"You'll have an excellent view of the garden...once we have one. There's a lot of work to be done."

At dawn when Bonny Bee emerged from her room and walked toward the kitchen, through the parlor window she saw Ned pulling wisteria vines from the sycamore.

She opened the back door. "Thank you. I've been dreading that task."

He brushed the dirt from his hands. "Beautiful blossoms, but wisteria can overcome a tree. We'll dig up the root, plant it by the porch, and train the vines along the eaves."

"A marvelous idea," Bonny Bee said. "We'll have a cascade of purple in the spring—and the bees will love it."

Thereafter, Ned, who had intended to become a prosperous colonial merchant, settled for the solitary life of a gardener, but never gave up hope he would find his wife.

Tired of English winters, a retired Oxford professor was next to arrive, followed by a Boston milliner left alone after her sister's marriage; a physician, exhausted from a measles outbreak; a blacksmith, destitute since his forge had burned down; and a minister, disheartened since his wife had run away with a deacon. Day after day, travelers, weary of the dusty road or restless sea, desiring companionship or desperate for solitude, drifted in and out of the Inn like the daily tide, some unable to pay what their rooms were worth, and some leaving behind priceless gifts to express their gratitude.

In the beginning, Bonny Bee advised her guests to "make themselves at home," until she realized some of their homes were like her Aunt Maude's.

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Consequently, she composed her own set of rules, which she repeated to each arrival.

"Here," she said, "you will be treated with respect; your academic pursuits will never be interrupted, except perhaps by a musical performance, which you must applaud, no matter what the quality; should you feel like dancing, you must not dance alone—a staff member will always be available as a partner; and dictionaries are never to be returned to the shelves."

Within two years—all along the coast—wherever patrons gathered for a meal or to sit by the fire—there would be talk of the Peregrine Inn, the conversation running something like this.

"Finest salmagundi on either side of the Atlantic," says a boatswain.

"And the lady who owns the Inn," says a diplomat, "...a

beauty...widowed."

"Her name?" inquires a conniving merchant, wondering if he can woo her and wheedle control of her business from her.

"Bonny Bee Rackham. And don't bother trying. She has only one love."

"And who would that be?" asks a tourist.

"Not who—," the tavern keeper says, "—what. She loves her Inn above all else."

"She restored me to my family," a stranger says.

"And me to health," says another.

The diplomat stands. "Gentlemen, raise your glasses to Bonny Bee Rackham."

"Bonny Bee Rackham," they say with a reverence reserved only for their Queen or their own dear mothers.

Far away in the sitting room of the Peregrine Inn, a fiddler licked blackberry preserves from his fingers, took up his bow, and played a tune.

"Dance with me, Bonny Bee," Ned said.

She stood. "The professor has already asked, and he won't be awake much longer. The sun's gone down."

"For you, my good woman," the professor said, "I could stay awake at least till nine."

No one observing Bonny Bee, laughing as she whirled around the room, could have been convinced she was once the castoff wife of an uncaring husband.

Brilliant, splendid, the full moon shone on the cobblestone path which led from the streets of Lenford to the door of the Peregrine Inn. Bonny Bee Rackham, proprietress, could not stop admiring the gleaming stone walk, constructed of ballast from the recent voyage of the *Golden Lily*. That morning, as she stood next to Collin Blackthorn while his crew piled the rocks in her courtyard, he reached in his red velvet coat for a chunk of amethyst.

"For you, my beauty," he said, "if you'll marry me."

She patted her eyes with a lace-trimmed handkerchief and produced a convincing sigh.

"Not yet. The memory of Calico Jack has not yet dimmed."

"It's been three years since he left," Blackthorn said.

Three years or thirty, she thought, would always be too soon to marry another pirate.

Her eyes closed, and she breathed in the brisk night air. The last of the leaves had long since fallen from the lofty sycamore behind the Inn. Autumn would be at an end; the first icy winter storm approaching. She could have stood there for hours, dreaming of good days ahead, but she knew the Inn's caretaker, Royce Fitzcannon, would never retire for the night until she was safe behind the doors of her private parlor. She would not have him lose rest on her account. She heaved the mahogany door closed and walked toward the fireplace where he waited.

"A cold wind is blowing, Fitz," she said. "Who has the watch—Wallace or Ned?"

"Wallace. Ned's leaving in the morning to journey up the coast. I thought he should have a good night's sleep."

Bonny Bee stared into the crackling fire. "Such an arduous journey, sure to end again in disappointment. I wonder sometimes if we should continue to encourage his delusions."

Fitz returned the fire poker to the iron stand. "We've discussed this before, ma'am—"

"I've told you countless times, Fitz," Bonny Bee said. "When we're out of earshot of the staff, you need not address me as 'ma'am.""

Composed, Fitz met her gaze. "As I was saying, until someone tells Ned they saw Anastasia's lifeless body washed up on some desolate coast...ma'am..."

"He'll never be at peace, *sir*," Bonny Bee said. "How do you like that?"

Fitz faced her, took her hands, and clasped them in his.

"You found me when I was lost and ruined," he said. "You pulled me from the wreck of my memories, gave bread for my hunger, salve for my wounds—"

She ducked her head. "Any small service I rendered, you have more than repaid—"

"—you cooled my fever, read to me, sang to me, brought me roses from the garden wall. I will call you 'ma'am' or 'Your Majesty'—no less. Your choice."

Bonny Bee lifted his hands, forever disfigured by his wounds, and kissed them.

"All right, my friend, call me what you wish, but say no more. My heart is full."

He offered her his arm. "May I see you to your room now, ma'am?"

She put her arm through his, resisting the impulse to lay her head on his strong shoulder.

"Tell Wallace," she said, "to leave the door unlocked. Someone always drifts in on the first cold night, and I suspect tonight will be no different. There's something in the air."

"An ineffable sense of mystery," he said.

"Has Ruggles gone up to his room, or is he in the kitchen?"

"His room. Took Burbage with him."

Bonny Bee shook her head. "Why couldn't he have named his dog after some other thespian?"

Fitz opened the door to her room. "I once asked him. He said his master had already chosen 'Marlowe' for his own dog."

"Dear Ruggles," she said. "How I wish he would stop thinking of himself as someone else's servant. Do you suppose he ever will?"

"If there's anywhere he can do that, ma'am, it's here. Good night."

After Bonny Bee changed into her white nightgown, she lay in the dark, listening to the wind. She thought of the staff who had found a home under her sturdy roof: Ned Chilcott, gardener, who charmed blooms from the soil; Wallace Newcastle, stable manager, who cared for her animals as if they were his own;

Lucien Morgan, blacksmith, so renowned for his craftsmanship that people traveled from miles away to hire him; Adelaide Finch, her cook, the envy of every innkeeper on the coast; Emmaline Wiltshire, housekeeper, who scrubbed and polished the livelong day; and Fitz, who kept watch over them all.

Nestled in her feather bed, she watched the shadows of raindrops dance on the walls and ceiling. Too excited to sleep, she reviewed the tasks yet to be done before the annual celebration the day after tomorrow. Three years, three happy years, had passed since Calico Jack had presented her with the keys to the Inn and bade her open the door. The look on his face and the tone of his voice were as fresh in her memory as if he had left yesterday. "I've bought you a house," he said. "Now stop complaining about how often and how long I'm away."

Bonny Bee, a faint smile on her lips, whispered the song she sang every year at the anniversary festivities. "O, Calico Jack, that man of mine, he went in search of treasure."

The next morning Bonny Bee rose with the sun. She entered the parlor and, as she had expected, found a stranger asleep on the sofa. Bonny Bee sat in the nearest chair. Adelaide appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"I thought I heard you," Adelaide said. "Ready for your morning tea?" "Yes, thank you," Bonny Bee said. "When did she arrive?"

"Wallace said she came in a few minutes after midnight."

The beautiful stranger opened her eyes.

"Did you sleep well?" Bonny Bee asked her.

"Yes, thank you." She sat up. "The best sleep I've had in a long time. It's amazing what a long journey and clear conscience can do for you."

Adelaide returned with the tea tray. "Breakfast in twenty minutes," she said. Bonny Bee poured the tea. "May I ask your name?"

"Elizabeth ... Johnson."

Bonny Bee shook her head. "Your real name."

"Cairncross."

Bonny Bee pointed to the wooden sign displayed on the mantel. "Would you read that for me, Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth rubbed her eyes and peered at the sign: "Open arms, open hearts."

"Our motto," Bonny Bee said. "There's no need for pretense here. You're safe now."

Elizabeth nodded at Ruggles snoozing in the corner. "It appears another guest arrived after I did. I was so tired I didn't hear him come in."

"He didn't come through the door," Bonny Bee said. "He came down the stairs. He's been with us since last November."

Elizabeth brushed her silky brown hair from her face. "Does he often sleep there?"

"Ruggles is tormented by nightmares," Bonny Bee said. "When they disturb his rest, he comes down to doze by the fire. He's more at peace now than when he first arrived."

"What happened to him?" Elizabeth asked.

"He was a butler traveling with a crooked trader, whose business deals went sour. When a constable arrived at our door, the master fled, leaving Ruggles behind."

"Does he work to earn his keep?" Elizabeth asked, thinking she might do the same.

"He gardens and cleans a little," Bonny Bee said, "but Fitz won't let him buttle."

"Buttle?"

"Yes, we think that's what butlers do. None of us has had one, so we're not sure."

"You'll forgive me," Elizabeth said. "I don't believe there's any such word."

Bonny Bee returned her cup and saucer to the tray. "We're trying to help Ruggles forge a new identity. Helping him not to take himself so seriously is the first step."

"So you refuse to let him 'buttle'?"

"Precisely," Bonny Bee said. "Whenever Fitz uses that word, Ruggles says, "We are not amused,' and tries his best not to grin, but we all end up laughing."

"Fitz?"

"Our caretaker," Bonny Bee said, "in more ways than one."

When Adelaide rang the breakfast bell, Wallace opened the back door. Burbage bounded in, greeted Bonny Bee, then pranced toward Ruggles, and licked his hand. Ruggles, in one smooth effort, opened his eyes, stood, straightened his clothes, pulled back his shoulders, and addressed Wallace.

"Thank you, my good man, for attending to Burbage and his morning constitutional."

Wallace nodded, removed his muddy boots, and padded in socked feet toward the sofa.

"Good morning, Bonny Bee," Wallace said. "Will you present me to our new boarder?"

"Elizabeth Cairncross," Bonny Bee said.

"Welcome," Wallace said. "I hope you'll be as happy here as I have been." Emmaline, feather duster in hand, spoke as she descended the stairs.

"I've opened the windows of the Blue Room," she said, "to air it. Sheets are clean and pillows fluffed. After breakfast I'll beat the rugs and fetch some lavender for the bedside table."

"The Blue Room is the perfect choice," Bonny Bee said.

Emmaline stood in front of Elizabeth. "The last boarder, Mrs. Fletcher, left behind some unfinished needlepoint. If you'd like to finish it, I'm sure it would honor her memory."

"You mean...I can stay?" Elizabeth asked. "I had only hoped to spend the night."

Bonny Bee, eyebrows raised, pointed to the sign again.

Ruggles approached Bonny Bee. "My lady, I apologize for oversleeping...again."

"Not at all," Bonny Bee said. "May I introduce our new boarder, Elizabeth Cairncross."

Ruggles nodded. "Lady Elizabeth."

Elizabeth offered her hand. "I'm not of the aristocracy, Mr. Ruggles. I'm a governess…or I was till yesterday."

"Miss Cairncross then," Ruggles said. "May I show you the way to the dining room?"

Elizabeth put her arm through Ruggles' as they walked toward the table.

Fitz, his curly hair windswept and wild, strode through the front door.

Bonny Bee stood. "Something's wrong, Fitz. I see it in your eyes. It's not Ned, is it?"

Fitz tried to smooth his hair. "No. Bad news from the village. The seamstress, Olivia Lynton, is missing. The constable fetched me last night to join the search party."

"Any luck?"

"No, either she's long gone or she's..."

"Hiding," Bonny Bee said.

"I mean no disrespect, ma'am, but I can hardly believe a girl of her age could elude a dozen hardy men. She's only sixteen and bred to city life."

"Olivia lived on a farm before her parents died and she came to live with her uncle. She's accustomed to roaming the forest. If there's someplace to hide, I assure you she knows."

"But why would she hide?"

"We'll know when she tells us," Bonny Bee said. "But we can't discuss Olivia till after breakfast. You know how Adelaide objects to unpleasant conversation at the table."

Fitz frowned. "Sometimes I wonder who runs this Inn—you or Adelaide Finch."

Bonny Bee took Fitz's arm. "You know my policy. I find the best person for the job; then I trust them to do what I've hired them to do. They bring their gifts and abilities. I nurture them."

"I'll not argue with that," Fitz said.

He pulled out Bonny Bee's chair at the head of the table.

Lucien, already grimy from his morning labors, entered through the side door. After Bonny Bee introduced him to Elizabeth, she asked him to say grace.

"Oh, Lord," Lucien said, "we thank Thee for Thy bounty and for Thy servant, Bonny Bee Rackham, in whose home we drifters have found refuge. We thank Thee for our capable friend, Adelaide, whose (he peeked at the table) scones and sausages sustain us each day. We pray Thy blessing on Ned as he seeks Anastasia. We pray Fitz will wisely oversee this house, Emmaline will have strength to keep it clean, and Wallace will keep our animals fit. I pray the fire in the forge will burn bright, Elizabeth will feel at home, and Ruggles will stop buttling. Amen."

After breakfast Bonny Bee addressed her friends.

"Fitz has informed me Olivia Lynton is missing. Therefore, it will be even more important for tomorrow's anniversary festivities to inspire our neighbors with hope and cheer."

"We have mutton, beef brisket, pork pies, roasted potatoes, salmon mousse, blackberry preserves, candied cherries and figs, plum pudding, and cake," Adelaide said.

"Do you need help with the cleaning, Emmaline?" Fitz asked.

"I could use someone to help polish the silver."

"We volunteer," Ruggles said.

"Now, Ruggles," Fitz said. "Isn't that-?"

"We assure you a butler would never stoop to polish silver with the housekeeper. Removing tarnish is the work of footmen, so we should be allowed to contribute in this way."

"We?" Elizabeth asked.

"Referring to himself as 'we' is one habit we cannot persuade him to alter," Fitz said.

"Ned tended the garden before he left," Wallace said. "I'll rake the leaves in the morning after I've groomed Empress and Opal. I'll tie a bow on Daisy after she's been milked."

"Ruggles," Bonny Bee said, "after you've finished with the silver, will you see that the table is set properly?"

Ruggles' mouth dropped open. "We'd be honored, my lady, to be allowed the privilege."

All that day and the next, the residents of the Peregrine Inn polished, pressed, stewed, simmered, baked, braised, tended, and toiled, dedicating themselves to their assigned tasks with solemn, yet blissful, devotion. Bonny Bee, Adelaide, and Emmaline formed a secret alliance not to allow Elizabeth to be alone in her melancholy. As they took turns enlisting Elizabeth's help with their chores, her careworn expression faded into a serene and gentle smile. Fitz, Lucien, Ruggles, and Wallace not only accomplished their own responsibilities, but, as civic-minded men, each took a turn with the villagers still in search of the missing seamstress.

On the day of the anniversary, her staff and guests accompanied Bonny Bee to the seashore at dawn. A solemn assembly, the men, each with their hat in hand, looked eastward as their benefactress raised a goblet of lime cordial to the golden sun.

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"Here's to you, Calico Jack," Bonny Bee said. "You knew how to love...your work. You were faithful to your religion...of piracy. You did your best to make me feel...unwanted."

Fitz cleared his throat.

"On this third anniversary of your giving me the keys to the Inn," she said, "we have come to this shore to give honor to the brave Captain Jonathan Barnet who captured you."

"Hear, hear," Lucien said. "And long life to the governor of Jamaica who dispatched the captain to bring Rackham to justice."

"To the governor," Ruggles said.

"And to the jailer..." Bonny Bee began, and then lowered her goblet. "No. I cannot toast the man who led Jack to the gallows, for he was my husband, and if he had not loved the sea—"

"If he had not loved *another woman*," Adelaide said, for though she never interrupted Bonny Bee's recounting Jack's transgressions, she cringed when she mourned his loss.

"He left you for another woman?" Elizabeth asked.

Then Emmaline, who had also heard the tale many times, sniffled and took a hankie from her pocket. "Hardly anyone knows the true story. Her name was Anne Bonny."

"A woman in every port," Elizabeth said. "I'd heard pirates were like that."

"No," Lucien said. "Anne dressed as a pirate and sailed with him."

"I've never heard such a story," Elizabeth said. "Was she taken prisoner as well?"

Bonny Bee nodded. "Jack's crew was taken by surprise while they were sleeping off their rum. Anne fought valiantly with only two other pirates to help her."

"Fighting for the man she loved, I suppose," Elizabeth said.

"Perhaps," Adelaide said, "but she blamed Jack for their ship being taken so easily. When he was granted permission to see her before he went to the gallows, her parting words were—"

"If you'd fought like a man, you need not have hanged like a dog," Bonny Bee said.

"Harsh—even for a pirate," Elizabeth said. "What happened to her?"

"She asked not to be tried till after she gave birth," Emmaline said, wincing when Adelaide jabbed her in the ribs. Emmaline blushed. "I'm sorry, Bonny Bee. I forgot—"

"She gave birth in prison?" Elizabeth asked.

"No," Adelaide said. "After several stays of execution, she disappeared. The rumor was that her wealthy father ransomed her and brought her home to the Carolinas."

"And the child?" Elizabeth asked.

"Should have been mine," Bonny Bee said.

The men stared at the ground; the women brushed away tears.

Fitz broke the silence. "Here's to Calico Jack Rackham, who purchased the inn which became our home."

Bonny Bee lifted her head. "And to my friends, whose lives have been blessed by Jack's ill-gotten loot."

"Hear, hear," Lucien said.

Her goblet lifted high, she turned to her companions. "Open arms and open hearts."

Glasses raised, her friends spoke with one voice: "Open arms. Open hearts."

A happy company, they returned to the Inn with Bonny Bee and Fitz in front and Ruggles and Burbage in the rear. After a hearty breakfast, they hung lanterns, picked fresh flowers for the tables, pressed their clothes, and then gathered in the parlor for final instructions from Fitz. After a simple tea, they retired to their rooms to rest and prepare themselves. Elizabeth, who had arrived without a trunk, was delighted to find a suitable dress lying on her bed. Bonny Bee donned her favorite silk turquoise dress and pinned her great grandmother's cameo broach to her lace collar.

Before she left her room, she unlocked the door to her private terrace.

Guided by lanterns on the porch, the villagers arrived at sundown. All of Lenford, from the mayor to the grocer, entered the common sitting room and gazed, awestruck, at the flowers, ribbons, candles, and glassware. Ladies sipped tea from china cups. Children ate cakes and fruit. Men balanced platefuls of savory meat and wiped their chins. Lucien played his hurdy gurdy, Adelaide sang, and everyone except Bonny Bee—saving her strength for her performance—danced. Though the atmosphere was jovial, here and there

whispers of "poor Olivia" rippled over the sea of people like cold spray from breaking waves.

At nine o'clock, Fitz moved a cedar bench in front of the fireplace. Ruggles stepped forward to drape it with a white linen cloth. Wallace escorted Bonny Bee from the back of the room and then held her hand as she stepped onto the bench. Lucien sounded a chord and Bonny Bee began to sing.

Oh, Calico Jack, that man of mine, He went in search of treasure. He wouldn't wear silk, it was too hot, So cotton was his pleasure. He'd sail away for months at a time To islands with a tropical clime And leave me all alone, Leave me all alone.

And when one day, I'd had enough, My patience had grown short, I told him if he left again, I'd find another port. And then he said, "Cheer up my dear, I've good news that you'll want to hear. I've bought for you an inn.

There was a storm that very night, His ship was torn and tossed. And as the sun rose o'er the waves, The ship and crew were lost. The wreckage, it did wash ashore To let me know he was no more. My Jack had lost his life. My Jack had lost his life.

The funeral, it was so grand, The townsfolk they were sad. I forced myself to weep a lot, But really I was glad. For Jack was gone and I was not. A lovely home I'd finally got. The Inn, it was all mine. The Inn, it was all mine.

And now the door swings open wide From morning until night And folks come in and warm themselves By a fire that's burning bright. For here there is a place for you; The heart of Bonny Bee is true. You'll not be turned away. You'll not be turned away.

Not a heart was unmoved nor an eye undimmed by tears. Even the narrow-minded vicar, who disparaged the Inn as a haven for persons of "doubtful character," sniffled and blew his nose.

When the last guest had left, Fitz escorted Bonny Bee to her room.

"A triumph," he said. "Even better than last year. And now I must hurry to bed. The men of the village are meeting at sunrise tomorrow to scour the countryside one more time before—"

"Rest well, Fitz," Bonny Bee said. "I doubt there'll be a need to continue the search."

"You've had some word?" he asked.

"Not yet."

When Fitz closed the door behind Bonny Bee, she stared into the darkness. A shadowy figure, wearing a cloak, sat in a chair near the window.

Bonny Bee stepped forward. "I thought you might choose tonight to sneak back into town," she said. "With the streets empty and everyone here..."

"I heard your song through the door," Olivia said. "It was lovely." Bonny Bee removed her brooch. "I wrote it before I knew the truth."

Bonny Bee took a nightgown from the cedar chest at the end of her bed. "Put this on," she said to Olivia. "Get into bed, and I'll fetch some tea." Olivia shivered. "I won't take your bed. I can sleep on the floor." "Nonsense. I often sleep on that sofa by the window."

Bonny Bee left her room and tiptoed across the parlor into the kitchen. Fitz, his pistol in one hand and a candle in the other, appeared in the doorway.

"You startled me, ma'am. What is it you need?"

"Tea," she said, "and a few scones. Was there any mutton left or did Lucien—?"

He set down the candle and pistol and opened the pantry. "You never eat this late."

"I...didn't eat much at the party, because I...didn't want to spoil my performance."

He stepped next to her. "Look me in the eye, Mrs. Rackham, and tell me the truth."

She stared at the floor. "It's for Olivia. She's in my room."

"Olivia? Why didn't you say so? I'll go straightaway to the village and let them know."

She grabbed his arm. "No. The secret must be ours tonight. Tomorrow you can go to the village, tell them we found her late in the night, and say she's staying here till she's recovered."

"She's ill? I'll go for the doctor."

Bonny Bee took two teacups from the shelf. "He couldn't help. Even the best doctor has no cure for the sick at heart."

Fitz poured water into the kettle to boil. "Sick at heart? Why? She has her uncle who loves her, a good home, a promising future."

"None of those things is sufficient to quiet a girl's heart once she's fallen in love."

Fitz took four scones from the larder. "In love? I've heard Zebedee refused all the young men of the village one by one as unsatisfactory for his niece."

"It's not a suitor near at hand. Do you recall when the Pratt family visited a year ago?"

"Yes, a mother and her son and daughter," Fitz said. "Came to visit her sister's grave, if I remember correctly, and claim some family heirlooms?"

Bonny Bee spooned marmalade into a dish. "The mother and daughter met Olivia at Thrashwick's Mercantile. Her sewing dazzled them. They each ordered a new dress."

Fitz smiled. "I wouldn't be privy to that sort of information."

"The daughter, Abigail, was thrilled to have some companionship while they were visiting Lenford. She invited Olivia to dinner. That's when Olivia met Josiah."

"I remember him," Fitz said. "A fine young man—on his way to Harvard, wasn't he?"

Bonny Bee nodded. "And except for that fact, he and Olivia would've been married by now. They fell in love the moment they met."

Fitz sliced a wedge of cheese. "So they had only a few days together before they were parted?"

Bonny Bee poured the hot water into the teapot. "Josiah and Abigail pleaded with their mother to let Olivia return to Boston with them."

"Why didn't she go?" Fitz asked. "There was nothing to hold her here."

"Nothing except Zebedee Thrashwick. When Mrs. Pratt asked his permission, Zebedee refused."

"But why? He should have been delighted to see his niece marry into a good family. Didn't you tell me he complained bitterly when she first arrived?"

"That's right. He resented having to take Olivia when her parents died. It was months before he treated her more like a niece than a servant."

"I knew that sort of treatment as a child," Fitz said.

"Zebedee changed his tune once he realized Olivia had a natural gift with a needle and thread. Her lace, in particular, has drawn customers from as far as Philadelphia."

"Thrashwick claims his success is solely the result of his own genius," Fitz said.

"I should say not—the old skinflint. He'd never admit it's the skill of a young seamstress who's singlehandedly put Thrashwick's Mercantile and Sundries on the map."

"So he refused to allow her to go—because it would be bad for business?"

Bonny Bee arranged the food on the tray. "Yes, and Mrs. Pratt knew that, but wouldn't allow Olivia to accompany them without her uncle's permission."

"Poor girl."

"Since Josiah left, I've watched Olivia shrivel like a rose in the snow. I knew it was only a matter of time before she could stand it no longer. I know the pain of an aching heart."

"So you weren't surprised when you heard she was missing?"

"When I went for a fitting of my new dress, Olivia wept when she told me goodbye. She paused when she opened the door and thanked me for my kindness. I suspected at once."

Fitz lifted the tray. "What's our next step?"

Holding the candle, Bonny Bee led the way from the kitchen. "She'll stay here under pretense of illness, so Zebedee can't force her to return to work."

"And then?"

When Bonny Bee noticed Ruggles asleep in his chair in the corner, she whispered. "Then we must reunite her with Josiah."

"How can we do that? With Ned already away and winter coming, we can't spare..."

"By sending her up the coast to Boston."

"Won't Zebedee try to stop her?"

"Not if she's aboard the *Orion*. They're due back any day, aren't they?" "Yes, but...we agreed...the last time they were here..."

"It can't be helped. Even Zebedee wouldn't give chase to a pirate ship."

Early the next morning Fitz informed the village Olivia had been found. Zebedee Thrashwick demanded to be taken to the Inn so he could ascertain for himself how ill she really was, but Fitz refused, claiming she had been quarantined. When Bonny Bee informed the staff and guests that Olivia would be staying for an unspecified period of time, they all rallied to the cause. Emmaline prepared the Orchid Room. Adelaide made chicken broth. Elizabeth and Ruggles took turns at Olivia's bedside, so they might ply her with tonic for her cough.

Bonny Bee knew she could count on her staff to help execute her plan, but she was concerned about Emmaline. Brought up by brittle parents, Emmaline compensated for her lack of self-confidence by organizing and maintaining her surroundings along with everyone else's—a sterling quality in a housekeeper but

an impediment when flexibility was required. The last time the pirates had visited, the alterations to the daily routine taxed Emmaline so severely she took to her bed for two days after the *Orion* sailed.

When they sat down to lunch that day, Fitz whispered in Bonny Bee's ear. "You can't wait any longer to prepare Emmaline for the news," he said. "A walk to the village perhaps?"

After lunch, Bonny Bee asked Emmaline to remain at the table.

"Is something wrong?" Emmaline asked. "I know there was dust on the mantel—"

"No, my dear, nothing is wrong. Adelaide needs some things from the bakery. I wondered if you would accompany me on a walk there."

Emmaline smiled. "I'd be honored. I'll get my shawl."

On the walk to Lenford Bonny Bee shared Olivia's story. Emmaline, herself the object of a cruel man's dominance, wept openly.

"We're going to help her escape him," Bonny Bee said, "but we'll need a way to send her north. We can't book passage...by ordinary means."

Emmaline stopped to pick a wildflower by the path. "Will Wallace take her by carriage?"

Bonny Bee straightened her lace cuff. "No. The *Orion* is due any day." Emmaline turned pale. "No. You won't be able to fight off Bartholomew." Bonny Bee kept walking and spoke over her shoulder. "And Sebastian."

Emmaline clamped her hands over her eyes. "Does he still lift his eye patch for fun?"

Bonny Bee stopped at the window of the village bakery to admire the Banbury cakes.

"And Ivan," she said.

Emmaline sank down on a wooden bench by the village well. "I won't be able to sing without being interrupted."

Still studying the pastries, Bonny Bee grimaced and said, "And Lars."

Emmaline gasped. "Lars? Burbage is sure to chew on his wooden leg."

Bonny Bee took Emmaline's hand. "Olivia can't get safely away without them. Besides that, you must realize I already have a plan to occupy the pirates while they're here."

Emmaline sighed. "All right-for Olivia."

"Come along," Bonny Bee said. "I'll buy you a tart and then we'll stop by Thrashwick's for a length of cloth."

"Thrashwick's?" Emmaline said. "We can't go there. Won't Mr. Thrashwick—?"

"Precisely why we need to make an appearance. If we avoid his shop, he might grow suspicious. We want everything to appear perfectly normal."

The ladies entered the store, greeted Zebedee, answered his gruff inquiries about Olivia, assured him she was making a good recovery, and asked for three yards of muslin.

That night Bonny Bee gathered the staff and guests after dinner and broke the news that Bartholomew Longscar, Lars Ravensbeak, Sebastian Sharkchum, and Ivan Whitefin would soon be joining them. Emmaline, who would never dispute Bonny Bee's authority in public, stood silent and stoic in the kitchen doorway—for awhile. Adelaide, hearing Ivan's name mentioned, swooned and fell into Lucien's lap. Wallace, on the other hand, was delighted that Sebastian, the "best storyteller on the seven seas," would soon be arriving, and then suggested they should hide the chessboard so Lars, a notorious sore loser, could not invite anyone to play.

Elizabeth, observing the chaos, asked, "You've had dealings with these men before?"

Standing near the fireplace, Fitz stood and raised his hands to quiet the room.

"Our guests deserve an explanation, so they can clear out before the crew arrives, if they deem the action necessary," he said.

"Hurry, Fitz," Lucien said, "while Adie is still out, or you won't get a word in edgewise."

As if preparing for a public address, Fitz straightened his coat.

"Bartholomew Longscar was Calico Jack's first mate. He's been pursuing Bonny Bee ever since Jack's timely death, so I'll thank all of you to make sure she's never alone with him."

"Hear, hear," Lucien said.

"Ivan is tame enough," Fitz said. "His one flaw is he's always fancied himself a singer."

"That doesn't seem to be much of a flaw," Elizabeth said.

"He's tone deaf," Emmaline said. "Doesn't know one note from another."

"It's the reason he turned to piracy," Fitz said. "Always wanted to play Rinaldo—"

"The opera or the role?" Ruggles asked.

"Both," Fitz said. "But he could never find anyone willing to cast him." "Is it any wonder?" Emmaline asked.

"So, one night during a rehearsal," Fitz said, "Ivan sneaked through the back door of the theatre on Drury Lane and—"

"That's enough, Fitz," Bonny Bee said. "We agreed not to discuss the incident again."

Fitz nodded. "Suffice it to say, Ivan sings whenever he's here, and it can be tiresome."

"And Sebastian?" Ruggles asked.

"The only docile one in the group," Bonny Bee said. "A poet of some repute."

Intrigued, the guests decided to stay.

Two days later the pirates swaggered in at sundown.

Lars rushed to Fitz and embraced him. "I see they've made an honest man out of you, Fitz old boy."

Lips puckered, Ivan hurried to Adelaide, swept her up in his arms and tilted her backward. Prepared for his bad behavior, she turned her face away so his chapped lips and scraggly beard only brushed her cheek.

"Come now, Adie, my love, give us a little squnch."

"Not on your life, Ivan Whitefin. A kiss here, a squnch there, and you'll be in my kitchen from morning till night begging me to sing duets with you. I won't have it. I won't."

Sebastian headed for Elizabeth, seated by the fire with a stack of books.

"What have we here? A solitary lass with only books for company. Come with me, my lovely. While we dance, I'll whisper a sonnet in your ear. Lucien, a tune, if you will be so kind."

Lucien, who knew Sebastian was the gentlest of the pirates and that a dance would do Elizabeth good, obliged with a lovely waltz of his own composing.

Bartholomew entered last. He looked around the room, but failed to see the one face he most longed to see.

He called out in a booming voice. "Bonny Bee, your Bart is here. Jack lies cold in his grave. There's no impediment to our happiness. Come, my lotus blossom, and we will dance the night away."

When Bartholomew took note that Bonny Bee's door was closed, he marched toward her room and was trying the door handle when Fitz called out.

"That's far enough, Longscar," he said. "Bonny Bee never accepts gentlemen callers into her private parlor. She most certainly will not allow the likes of a scurvy old seadog like you."

Bartholomew's hand lingered over the doorknob only a moment before he lowered it to his side. He had known Fitz in his pirate days and now knew better than to resist his will. He turned to face the assembly.

"Then lay on the feast, Adelaide, my dear, and I'll entertain all of you with tales of foreign ports and how I stole a ruby from the Duchess of—"

"No more, Longscar," Fitz said. "We can't have you terrifying the ladies."

Bonny Bee emerged from her room. Bartholomew grabbed Fitz's arm to steady himself. Ivan removed his hat and bowed low. Eyes to the ground, Lars went down on one knee. Sebastian, as if sleepwalking, let go of Elizabeth, walked straight toward Bonny Bee, took her hand, kissed it, and wiped a tear from his eye.

"Mrs. Rackham, since last I saw you, I have brandished my sword, run for my life, shinnied up a palm tree, tumbled from the crow's nest—"

Bonny Bee gasped. "You were not badly hurt, I trust."

He shook his head. "Caught my boot in the rigging. And through all my trials, I thought, If only I can return to the Peregrine Inn and behold the charming Mrs. Rackham, I—"

When he couldn't go on, Bonny Bee took his hand. "Will you favor me with a dance, Mr. Sharkchum? Lucien, a tune if you will."

The guests and staff cleared the floor and watched, breathless, as Bonny Bee placed Sebastian's grimy hand on her waist and took his other hand in hers. Around the parlor they glided, soon joined by the other ladies—Adelaide inviting Wallace, Elizabeth beseeching Ruggles, and Emmaline rushing toward Fitz, before the other pirates could reach her. The music must have wakened Olivia, for she appeared at the top of the stairs, frail, but with a sparkle in her eyes. Bonny Bee summoned Fitz, who climbed the stairs. Olivia slipped her arm through his and Fitz led her to the sofa.

Bonny Bee stood in the middle of the room. "Ladies, gentlemen, pirates, I am pleased to announce the annual Peregrine Inn Talent Show will take place one week from today."

"A week from today?" Wallace asked. "It's always in December."

Bonny Bee winked at Emmaline. "I thought it wise to take advantage of the *Orion* crew while they are here. Sebastian, will you honor us with a recitation?"

"For you, Mrs. Rackham...anything," he said. "The one about my mother?"

"Of course," Bonny Bee said. "It's my favorite. And now, let us delay our afternoon chores while we plan our program. Adelaide, some tea, please."

"Need some help, Adie?" Emmaline asked, eager to exit the parlor. Bonny Bee sat next to Olivia. "You look rested. Feeling better?"

Olivia nodded. "I wish I could stay here forever."

"You can stay here till you've regained your strength and then—"

Olivia gripped Bonny Bee's arm. "Please don't send me back to Uncle Zebedee."

"Cheer up, my darling girl. While the others are busy, let me tell you why I've invited the pirates here."

The arrangements were finalized. Bonny Bee would open the show with "The Legend of Quentin Drake." Adelaide, who adored Shakespeare, agreed to play Juliet opposite Lars as Romeo, in the balcony scene. Wallace and Fitz committed to a sword fight. Ruggles offered to deliver a few verses of "The Song of Roland." Elizabeth volunteered to play "Greensleeves" on the violin that Bonny Bee kept in her room. Bartholomew agreed to play his fife as Emmaline sang "Over the Hills and Far Away." Lucien surmised Ivan might hit one correct note if accompanied by the hurdy gurdy and readily proffered his services.

After sundown, while her staff kept the pirates busy with the first rehearsal, Bonny Bee invited Olivia and Elizabeth to join her on the veranda.

"Now that you've both had time to rest," Bonny Bee said, "I'd like to hear your stories."

Elizabeth ducked her head. "I'm ashamed to tell you."

Olivia gazed up at the sky. "I don't know if I can speak without weeping."

Bonny Bee pulled her shawl around her. "Remember, I was once married to a notorious pirate. Your stories surely can't be more shameful or regrettable than mine."

Elizabeth glanced at Olivia. "I learned something of Olivia's story while I was caring for her during her illness. Let me begin so she can compose herself."

"Very thoughtful of you," Bonny Bee said. "Pray, proceed."

"I was a governess for a wealthy family. I was happy there and loved my young charges, Theodore and Julian. Everything was fine, till their older brother came home from Yale."

"A haughty fellow?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Worse than that," Elizabeth said. "Dissolute. The first night he was home, he knocked on the door to my room. When I opened it, there he stood with a bottle of wine and two glasses."

"Most inappropriate," Bonny Bee said.

"I told him if be bothered me again, I'd tell his father. He laughed and said it would do no good. It was his stepfather, and his mother had never allowed him to lay a finger on her son."

"That explains much," Bonny Bee said.

"I endured his advances as long as I could, until the day he found me alone in the library. I blush to say he tried to kiss me. I ran from the room, packed my belongings, and left that night."

"How noble of you," Bonny Bee said. "I imagine the young boys were heartbroken."

"I left a note saying I had some unfinished business to attend to. Hardly believable."

"And now you, Olivia," Bonny Bee said. "I know you've longed for Josiah since he left. What finally moved you to flee in the dead of night?"

"Honoria Wiregrass," Olivia said.

Bonny Bee, who had often been the object of Honoria's scorn, was not surprised.

"What did she say this time?" Bonny Bee asked.

"I was in my workroom when she came into the store," Olivia said. "She didn't see me."

"Where else would you have been?" Elizabeth asked. "She should have held her tongue."

"She asked my uncle how I was," Olivia said, then imitated Honoria's stuffy voice. "'Poor girl. You'd better find a husband for her, Zebedee. She's almost lost her bloom.""

"Most unkind," Bonny Bee said.

Olivia nodded. "I did exactly what Elizabeth did—packed my belongings and left in the middle of the night. I had no idea how I'd reach Boston, but preferred dying on the road to—"

"Neither of us got very far," Elizabeth said.

"You came far enough," Bonny Bee said. "You've both taken the first step, and now I shall help you march boldly into the future."

That night Elizabeth, who, as a governess, had the best handwriting, wrote an advertisement Wallace posted in the village the next day. Since the Peregrine Inn Talent Show was a highlight of the year, everyone was pleased the occasion had been scheduled early. Bonny Bee's plan had worked perfectly. The pirates were so busy with their practicing they had neither time nor energy to create trouble.

A week later the villagers strolled or rode their buggies or horses to the Peregrine Inn. Zebedee Thrashwick strode in, perusing the parlor for his niece. Fitz stopped him from sneaking upstairs.

At eight o'clock precisely, Ruggles, in formal attire, stepped onto the makeshift stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is our pleasure to introduce Mrs. Bonny Bee Rackham, the author of our merriment, who will regale us with the history of this noble tradition."

When Bonny Bee, adorned again in her turquoise silk, took center stage, a hush fell over the room. She spoke:

My tale is of a stormy night Sometime in bleak December. The very date, it slips my mind Too fearful to remember. The wind it howled against the panes, The rain the doors did beat. The shutters in their hinges shook. None dared to walk the street.

We locked ourselves inside the Inn; Our windows were unlighted. For we had heard that Quentin Drake, Dread pirate, had been sighted. But as we sat and wished for dawn The door swung open wide, And Quentin Drake himself walked in, A cutlass by his side.

He growled and cursed the weather foul And then he said at last, "I must for now remain in port, For I've a broken mast." He fixed on us a deadly gaze. We could not help but fear it. And so we fed him stew and ale To soothe his savage spirit.

He was so fierce we dared not speak. We knew not to refuse him. Instead we thought we'd better find A good way to amuse him. We sang and danced and quoted verse And while one deftly juggled, We saw that Quentin's head had drooped As in his chair he snuggled.

And as he dozed, we took a rope And tied him to the chair. Next day we took him to the jail And gladly left him there. So now each year we tell the tale (Thus moving some to weep) In honor of the night we sang Dread Quentin Drake to sleep.

As they did every year, the audience rose to their feet with bravos and thunderous applause. The rest of the acts followed, astounding, stunning, and thrilling the assembly. And when the audience was convinced their emotions could be roused no higher or their hearts wrung out more rigorously, Sebastian Sharkchum, dressed in his finest garb, stepped onto the stage.

"My Mother," he said, and the crowd again fell silent. "When she was just a bonny lass with hair of golden curls, my mother was the fairest one of all the village girls." By the time he finished with "And still she reigns within my heart above all loves the best," there was not a dry eye in the house.

Sebastian left the stage and walked toward Bonny Bee, knelt on one knee, and took her hand in his. His voice faltered. "Bonny Bee, in the absence of my own dear mother, I most humbly implore you to accept a kiss from me in her place."

She leaned forward. "I am honored, Mr. Sharkchum."

He kissed her cheek.

Bonny Bee deemed it fortunate none of the pirates had a hook for they would have surely blinded themselves for all the vigorous dabbing at their eyes.

Safe in the darkness at the top of the stairs, Olivia watched the show. After Emmaline and Lars performed an encore and the pirates withdrew to the carriage house for a celebratory cup of grog, Olivia, as instructed by Bonny Bee, tiptoed to her room and got into bed. While the rest of the staff bid their appreciative audience good night, Zebedee Thrashwick, assuming he was unobserved, crept upstairs to find Olivia. When Olivia heard the door open, she pretended to sleep, moaning once for good measure. Zebedee closed the door and descended the stairs. Bonny Bee was waiting for him.

"She is much improved," Bonny Bee said, "but not yet restored to health."

"I'll be back tomorrow," he said, "for another look. Her work is piling up."

"Send a messenger instead. We'll be busy cleaning. Fitz will show you to the door."

Bonny Bee and Fitz stood on the porch and watched Zebedee disappear down the road. Fitz leaned on the handrail, breathed deeply and then gazed up at the sky.

Bonny Bee laid her hand on his back. "There's a sadness about you. What is it?"

He shook his head. "There's a storm coming—a bad one." That night the wind began to blow.

Chapter Four Drake's Revenge

In the gray light of dawn, as rain pelted the windows and wind rattled the shutters, the exultant performers of the previous evening ate their breakfast in silence. The pirates, soon to leave for their ship to batten down the hatches, were invited to the table for the first time since their arrival. Emmaline offered no objection to Bartholomew's slurping. Ruggles ignored Sebastian's smacking. Adelaide did not shush Ivan's humming. When Lucien and Lars reached for the last slice of bacon at the same time, Lucien withdrew his hand. Elizabeth and Olivia, pale and trembling, refused to eat.

When the meal was finished, Bonny Bee stood. "Please bid the pirates farewell. Then attend to the tasks Fitz has assigned you. He and the pirates will remain with me."

The men shook hands and clapped each other on the back. The women permitted their hands to be kissed. When the staff and guests had left the dining room, the pirates returned to the table, and Fitz stood by Bonny Bee's chair.

"Captain Longscar," she said, "I know the burden of saving your ship lies heavily on your shoulders, but allow me to remind you, storm or no storm, our arrangement is still binding."

Bartholomew stood. "Most respected madam, we will tie down and remain in port until we are convinced we have no choice but to sail south to escape the gale."

"You're aware," Sebastian said, "if we do not save the ship, we cannot help Olivia."

"I understand," Bonny Bee said. "But time is growing short. Winter is almost upon us."

Ivan approached Bonny Bee, took her left hand in his, and placed his right hand over his heart. "I speak on behalf of my mates, dear lady. We will not fail you."

Lars pushed back from the table. "While the memory of star-crossed lovers is still fresh in my mind, how could I fail to deliver the poor lass safely to the arms of her Romeo?"

Bonny Bee, her cloak wrapped around her, escorted the pirates to the door and waved from the porch till they disappeared into a wall of blinding rain.

Chapter Four ~ Drake's Revenge

As she turned to go into the house, she saw Wallace, laden with supplies from the village, struggling against the gale to approach the house. She waited for him and reached out to help him up the steps.

"What is it, Wallace?" Bonny Bee asked. "You look as if you've seen a ghost."

Breathing heavily, he shouted over the howling wind. "I…came as…fast as I could. Constable Brinsmead said to warn you. Quentin Drake…was seen in Charleston. They think—"

At the mention of Quentin Drake, Bonny Bee gasped and her knees gave way. When she fell back, Wallace tumbled forward, his fall broken by the bag of oats he was carrying. Wet and disheveled, they struggled to their feet, gathered the parcels, and stumbled inside.

Wallace guided Bonny Bee to the sofa. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Dreadful gust...knocked me right over. Take off your wet coat and start at the beginning...but keep your voice down."

Wallace nodded, though they both knew her stumble had nothing to do with the weather.

"A stranger in town," Wallace said, "looking for a place to ride out the storm asked about the Inn—said he'd heard about us at a tavern in Charleston."

Burbage, sensing unrest, lumbered over to Bonny Bee and nuzzled her hand.

"What does this have to do with Drake?" she asked.

"The stranger said he'd overheard a tall man in a black cloak asking the tavern keeper if he'd ever heard of Bonny Bee Rackham."

"Surely nothing to worry about," she said. "I'm not known to every—"

Wallace draped his coat over the fireplace screen. "The tavern keeper knew *exactly* who you were and asked the tall man if he were a friend. 'No,' he said, 'but I do owe her a debt."

"Perhaps someone returning to settle an account," Bonny Bee said, though she knew this was not case.

Wallace shook his head. "The tall man pulled back his hood and pointed to a long M-shaped scar scrawled across the width of his forehead, stretching from one temple to the other."

Bonny Bee sank onto a chair. "Anything else?"

"Yes, in the middle of his forehead...he'd been branded with a 'P."
"Find Fitz," she said. "Not a word about this news to anyone. Our guests are terrified enough. And Emmaline—"

"Yes, ma'am," Wallace said. "I know. We mustn't upset her. Are you all right?"

She waved him away. "I need to catch my breath. Tell Fitz to meet me in the attic to check the repairs made to the roof last spring—to be sure there are no leaks."

The day Bonny Bee had dreaded was upon her. As she ascended the stairs, the oft-repeated tale of Drake's public humiliation ran through her mind. Though she had not witnessed Drake's forehead being branded with a "P," the oath he had sworn was legendary. Run out of town by an angry crowd, he had pulled a dagger from his boot. "Here's what I think of your branding," he said, and carved a jagged line in his own forehead, the knife rising and falling around the livid and swollen wound between his eyes. "An 'M' for malice," he said, "and memory."

Bonny Bee stepped inside the attic and leaned against the wall. When Fitz entered, she held her finger to her lips. He closed the door.

"What's this about, Mrs. Rackham?" Fitz asked. "And don't tell me it's about the roof."

She sighed. "Something far more serious. Quentin Drake was sighted in Charleston."

Fitz slammed his hand against the wall with such force the attic door jolted on its hinges.

"I knew this would happen," he said. "I told the magistrate to banish him, but no—"

Bonny Bee squeezed his arm. "Perhaps the timing of his return will work to our advantage. The weather is sure to impede his progress."

Fitz began to pace. "But we don't know *where* he is, and no one will be concerned about tracking him when innocent lives are threatened by this storm."

Bonny Bee walked to an old trunk. "This news hasn't taken me unawares. I've always known Drake would return. I will lead him on a merry chase, so the household will be spared."

"You're not suggesting," Fitz asked, "you should sacrifice your welfare to save us?"

The rusty hinges on the trunk creaked as Bonny Bee opened the lid. "I'm the one he wants. If I'm not here, he's sure to come after me." Trembling, she lifted out a sword and scabbard wrapped in a purple velvet cloth. "Jack brought this beauty from Port Royal. He taught me a thing or two about fighting."

Holding the scabbard in her left hand, she drew the sword with her right. Without warning, Fitz seized the scabbard and thrust it upward, smacking the blade. The sword sailed toward the ceiling. Fitz extended his arm, grasped the hilt, and with a flick of his wrist, brought the blade to bear on Bonny Bee's left shoulder.

"And I'm a gentleman," he said. "Think what Drake could do. He's a savage."

Sobbing, Bonny Bee fell to her knees.

He dropped the sword, knelt next to her, and pulled her close. "Forgive me, ma'am," he said, "but you are a headstrong woman. I know when mere reason will not avail."

She buried her head in his shoulder. "Drake knows the only pain I fear is seeing harm come to one of you. I have to go. If he should take one of the girls—"

"Quiet," Fitz said. "Someone's coming."

Adelaide called as she rushed up the stairs. Fitz stood, helped Bonny Bee to her feet, and opened the door.

"Fitz," Adelaide said, "you must go at once. The wind snapped a giant oak. It fell through the roof of the church where families had taken shelter. Children are under the rubble."

Fitz bowed his head. "All right," he said. "Tell Lucien he'll have to—" "Lucien has already gone."

He sighed. "I'll have to go, too. Is everything ready here?"

"The ladies are in the cellar," Adelaide said. "Wallace wants permission to remain with the animals, and Ruggles refuses to leave the house till he knows Bonny Bee is safe."

"Tell Wallace he can stay in the stable," he said, "and tell Ruggles we're coming down."

Adelaide paused by the door. "Please hurry, Bonny Bee. Emmaline's crying."

Fitz handed the rapier to Bonny Bee. "Take this with you to the cellar. I'll give my pistol to Adelaide. She's a pretty fair shot. Lucien or I will return as soon as possible."

"Be careful," Bonny Bee said. "We haven't yet felt the brunt of the storm." He stood by the door. "Can I trust you to be here when I come back?" For the first time since she had known him, Bonny Bee lied to Fitz. "Yes," she said.

She watched Fitz bound down the stairs. Cradling the rapier in her right arm, she followed. Ruggles was waiting for her in the parlor.

"May we escort you to safety, Mrs. Rackham? The house cannot be secured until the mistress has retired."

She nodded and held out the rapier. "Hold this for me?"

She walked to the fireplace, took the iron poker, and turned back in time to see Ruggles draw the blade from the scabbard.

"Did your master ever—?" she asked.

Ruggles cast aside the scabbard, tucked his left hand behind his back and whisked the blade through the air in a dazzling display of parries and thrusts.

"Ruggles," she said, "how-?"

"When our master fell upon hard times, he had to dismiss his fencing instructor. It fell upon us to learn the art, so we could help him perfect his skill. We learned quicker than he."

Bonny Bee smiled. If her plan failed and Quentin Drake did break into the cellar, he might very well find himself bested by a butler. She almost wished she could be there to see it.

Ruggles called for Burbage and led the way through the kitchen to the back door. Bonny Bee followed, holding the poker at her side, tucked between the folds of her skirt. Outside, they fought against the wind to reach the cellar. While Ruggles lifted the door, Bonny Bee dropped the poker in the bushes. Ruggles held her hand as she stepped down and then he followed, pulling the door closed overhead. Adelaide had hung a lantern which cast a warm glow over the musty room. Olivia and Elizabeth were arranging cups and plates on a wooden bench. Weeping, Emmaline rushed to Bonny Bee.

"We're going to die," Emmaline said. "This is just like the storm that killed my brother."

Bonny Bee embraced her. "There now, none of that. We're safe. The sun will come up in the morning, and everything will look better. You'll see."

Emmaline wailed. "All those sailors drowning in that cold water."

Adelaide put her arm around Emmaline and pulled her away. "Come on, Em. Help me with the tea and let Bonny Bee rest. She's had a busy day."

"A good idea, Adelaide," Bonny Bee said. "Some tea would cheer us, and perhaps Ruggles would favor us with a story."

The fearful company gathered in a circle under the lantern and sipped tea. Except for the wind raging and water pounding against the cellar door, they might have considered themselves cozy. After a story from Ruggles, the girls gathered in a corner with patchwork squares and began stitching a quilt. Burbage, as if he knew what Bonny Bee was planning, stayed next to her, his head resting in her lap. When she was satisfied the young ladies were settled and secure, Bonny Bee took her handkerchief from her pocket and stifled a false cry. Every face turned to her.

Ruggles stood. "What is the matter, dear lady?"

"My great-grandmother's brooch. I left it in my room. If something should happen to it, I couldn't forgive myself. It's a priceless heirloom irreplaceable."

"Where is the brooch, Mrs. Rackham?" Ruggles asked. "We will fetch it for you."

She stood. "No. I will fetch it myself. It's hidden where no one could find it. I won't rest until I have it with me. I'll hurry and get it. It won't take a moment."

Accustomed to yielding to Bonny Bee's wishes and moved by her tears, they let her go. Both Adelaide and Emmaline had to restrain Burbage while Ruggles pushed open the door and Bonny Bee climbed out into the tempest. When the door was secured, she retrieved the poker she had hidden and jammed it through the door handles, barricading her friends in a safe place.

She knelt and patted the door. "Be safe, my darlings. Fitz and Lucien will return soon."

As Bonny Bee walked through the empty parlor, she glanced through the window at the sycamore tree bending in the gale. "Stay strong, old friend," she whispered. She glanced at the sofa and chairs unoccupied, the scattered books unread, the fireplace unlit, and the sign over the mantel. She entered her private room, locked the door, took her cloak from the wardrobe, sat on the edge of her bed, and waited. Within the hour an ax hacked at the shutters. Breaking glass showered to the floor. A silver hook glinted in the lantern light, and Quentin Drake stepped in.

The wind whipping his long black hair, he bowed. "Mrs. Rackham." She stood to face him. "Mr. Drake."

Nigel Greybeard, whose foul presence she had not anticipated, bounded into the room, seized her, and forced her through the open window. From his pocket Drake took a piece of parchment on which he had written "Revenge," laid the note on her pillow, stuck his dagger through it, and leaped out the window into the howling gust.

With Quentin Drake on one side and Nigel Greybeard on the other, Bonny Bee began her harrowing journey through the woods. The biting wind and driving rain stung her face as she stumbled over debris littering the path. She pushed low-hanging branches aside only to have them snap back, striking her arms and shoulders. Her feet and legs ached from trying to keep pace. She faltered. Greybeard snatched at her arm and dragged her till she regained her balance. Had she not taken comfort in the knowledge she was leading her captors away from her friends, her courage would have failed.

Her eyes shielded by her hood, her senses distorted by fear, she was endeavoring to make sense of how far or how long they had walked when at last Greybeard said, "There's the old fisherman's cottage."

"We must wait out the storm," Drake said. "With any luck, we can set sail tomorrow."

Bonny Bee lifted her head and was rewarded with the sight of a small dilapidated house. A dim light shone through a gloomy window.

Greybeard rapped on the door. "Gullsong. Gullsong. Open up, young scallywag."

A dark-haired youth appeared at the door. Drake shoved Bonny Bee inside. She fell, hitting her head against the corner of a rickety table, and sank into a dreamless sleep on the floor.

When she woke, she eased her hand toward the wound on her head—no blood, but a sizable swelling. Her wet cloak had been removed. She was lying beneath a man's coat and her head was resting on a sack of flour. She blinked her eyes at the rough furnishings in the room and the fire burning in the fireplace where a cast iron pot simmered.

"You're awake," a voice said.

She looked up to find a handsome young man, no more than nineteen, standing over her. A bowl in one hand and a cup in the other, he didn't look at all like a pirate. "I knew you'd be hungry after your journey," he said. He set the dishes on the table and wiped off a stool with his sleeve. "Let me help you up. You'll feel better once you've eaten."

She struggled to sit up. He put his hand under her elbow and helped her to her feet.

"Thank you, young man. Very kind of you. Does Drake know you're doing this?"

"No, ma'am. He's gone to the shore with Greybeard. You're shivering. Take my coat."

He stooped down and picked up the coat she'd been covered with, placed it around her shoulders, and then sat next her.

She tasted the stew. "This is wonderful. Are you the cook aboard ship?"

"No, the stew was already here. When we came ashore, Drake commandeered the first house we came to—a poor old fisherman—called himself Cousin Newman."

"And Drake forced him out?"

"Right into the storm," Roland said. "He was a feisty old fellow. When he reached the tree line, he turned around, shook his fist, and said, 'You haven't seen the last of me."

"Poor man," she said. "Out in this downpour with no shelter."

"He's better off than you are," Roland said. "At least he has a chance of being rescued."

She swallowed a bite of potato. "And you think I don't?"

"It's three against one," he said.

"Is it?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You're not *really* one of them, are you, Mister...what was your name?"

"Gullsong. Roland Gullsong. But why would you say that?"

"You're far too polite to be a pirate. How in heaven's name did you fall in with Drake?"

Far from the Peregrine Inn, anxious and alone, Bonny Bee gathered another needy soul into her open arms and open heart. She listened, transfixed, as Roland shared his misfortunes. Like Sebastian he had been the only son of a pirate's wife, left helpless and alone by her husband's lust for the sea. He had signed on to Quentin Drake's ship when he was but a lad of twelve and had been in his employ ever since.

Bonny Bee scraped her spoon around the bowl. "Not a suitable life for you, my dear. When we get out of here, you shall have a proper job at my Inn."

"When we get out of here?" he asked. *"You mean if, don't you?* These villains are not to be trifled with. You of all people should know."

"I mean 'when.' You may know these rascals, Roland, but you do not know me."

Nigel Greybeard, shaking water from his hat, strode through the door with Quentin Drake close behind.

"Mrs. Rackham," Greybeard said. "Stealing our food? And you call yourself a lady."

"Nigel," she said. "Did you hurt your back when you lifted the rock?" "Rock?"

"Yes, the one you crawled out from under," she said.

His back to the fireplace, Drake sat across from her. "The eloquent Mrs. Rackham, the soul of propriety and wit. Have you spent all the money left to you by your worthless husband?"

"You know perfectly well the only benefit I received from him was my Inn. So if you're planning to ask a ransom for my release, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

Greybeard sat at the end of the table. "We have ten times Jack's treasure stashed away."

"Then why the inquiry?" she asked.

"Idle chatter," Drake said. "I wouldn't free you for any amount of gold."

"Then what, may I ask, is your reason for kidnapping me?"

"Revenge, of course. I've never forgotten the rude treatment I received at the hands of your townspeople. Since it was you who turned me over to them, it is you who must pay."

Bonny Bee pushed away her bowl. "And how, exactly, am I supposed to atone for that?"

"Board the *Black Saber*, madam," Greybeard said, "for a voyage to the Sea of Marmara."

"Where?" she asked.

"Constantinople. A sultan awaits your arrival. He needs a woman of your sense and breeding to manage the women of his harem."

Sneering, Drake lifted his teacup, his pinky finger extended. "I offered your services."

Bonny Bee's heart sank. Meeting a swift and merciful end at the point of a cutlass was one thing, but to end her days in the court of a sultan?

Drake peered out the window. "The squall will subside by morning. We will sail at dawn. Fetch me some of that swill, Gullsong."

Roland dipped a ladle into the pot and filled a bowl for Drake.

Greybeard turned to Bonny Bee. "Too bad we're leaving so soon," he said. "I was hoping to soak the sand with the blood of your would-be rescuers."

Drake hunched over his bowl. "The only threat would be that secondhand pirate, Fitz. How long has it been, Mrs. Rackham, since he wielded a sword with those lily-white hands?"

Bonny Bee sprang up, leaned over the table and grabbed Drake by the collar. "Lily white? You haven't seen the scars your cruelty left behind. He almost died from his wounds."

Wide-eyed, Roland grasped her wrists. "Bonny Bee, you don't know what you're doing."

Greybeard stepped behind her, wrapped his arm around her waist, and pulled her from his cohort. Off balance, Drake wobbled, toppling backward into the fireplace. When he collided with the cast iron pot, hot stew showered over his head and dripped down his face. His long hair caught fire. Greybeard snatched Bonny Bee's damp cloak from the floor and threw it over Drake, smothering his smoldering locks. Drake pushed Greybeard away and rose in a fury. He raised his hand and struck Bonny Bee with such force that she fell. Stunned, but not unconscious, she had the sense to lie still.

Roland rushed to her side. "You might have killed her," he said.

"A fine kettle of fish that would be," Greybeard said. "What would you tell the sultan?"

Drake brushed a bit of onion from his coat. "Jack told me she was scrappy. We'll have to go back to the ship for some rope. We can't risk her escape."

"Clean up this mess while we're away, Gullsong," Greybeard said. "And if she tries to run, shoot her."

When the door closed, Bonny Bee sat up. "You have a pistol? That's a bit of good news, I must say."

The woods around Lenford bustled with travelers that night. Cousin Newman, the collar of his threadbare coat pulled up to his chin, grumbled and swore vengeance as he went in search of the constable to report the illegal occupation of his house. Fitz and Lucien, having returned to the Inn and freed their friends from the cellar, found Drake's message and hastened to the village to form a rescue party. Neither Ruggles nor Burbage could be restrained from joining them. Two disgruntled pirates, burdened with a length of rope, approached Cousin Newman's cottage from the shoreline.

And in the distance, a solitary figure, his love for his friends outweighing his fear for his own safety, trudged toward home.

Bonny Bee touched her sore eye. "At least he didn't break my jaw," she said. "Help me up, Roland. We need to make a plan."

He frowned. "You mean 'a last will and testament,' don't you?"

"Indeed I do not," she said. "I'm going back to my Inn, and you're coming with me."

He put his hand under Bonny Bee's elbow. She struggled to her feet and leaned on his arm as he helped her into Cousin Newman's rocking chair.

"Your Inn," he said, "the *same* Inn where Drake kidnapped you? That Inn?"

"The only reason Drake captured me was because I let him." She leaned back her head. "Fitz tried to warn me, but I wouldn't listen. I'm not going to make the same mistake twice."

"And what makes you think you can escape this time?"

"Because I have you."

"Me?" He shook his head. "No. No. I tried to run once. When Drake caught me, he made me watch while he punished Wilf Gregor in my place. I've never forgiven myself."

"Wilf Gregor?"

"The cabin boy—barely twelve. His father lost him to Drake in a card game."

Bonny Bee shuddered. "Wretched men."

Roland picked up the cast iron pot. "Drake has already thought of a thousand ways to punish you. If he fails this time, he'll keep trying. You'll never be free of him and neither will I."

His voice broke. Bonny Bee handed him a hankie from her pocket.

"My mother had a handkerchief like this," he said. "Hers was embroidered with an 'S.' He wiped his eyes and returned the hankie. "The stew's gone, but I could make some tea."

Bonny Bee touched his hand. "Come with me, Roland. You can have a new life."

"It's too late for that. I told you—if Drake catches us..."

"He's not going to," she said.

He filled the teakettle with water from a bucket. "You don't know him like I do."

"Come here and listen." She pulled a stool near her chair. He sat down. "Since you know Drake so well, tell me...what will he and Greybeard do when they return to the ship?"

"Call for Wilf to serve their grog—so they can celebrate."

"And how long will they drink?"

He shrugged. "Well past midnight. Sometimes almost till dawn."

"Then we have plenty of time to prepare," Bonny Bee said. "After you've poured the tea, set the kettle over there on the floor and cover it with my cloak. Now—where's that pistol?"

Aboard the *Black Saber*, Wilf Gregor did not allow Drake's cup to sit empty. Desperate for news about his friend Roland, Wilf kept serving, though he longed for sleep and was so tired he could barely stand. But he knew as long as Drake and Greybeard were drinking, they would while away the hours talking and congratulating each other about their success. He had lost count of how many times he had refilled their cups, when, without warning, Drake grabbed him by the collar and pulled him in till their noses touched. He felt Drake's hot breath on his chin.

"Would you like to hear what your friend Roland did tonight?" Drake asked.

Wilf nodded. "Aye, sir."

Drake shoved Wilf toward Greybeard. "Tell him, Nigel."

Greybeard blinked. He tried to prop himself up on the table, but his elbows slipped off into his lap. "Our captain was forced to defend himself when Mrs. Rackham assaulted him."

Drake stood, wobbling, and raised his hand as if delivering a sermon. "As was my right to do—even against a woman."

Greybeard's head began to droop. "He backhanded the old girl. She fell against..."

"She fell against the wall," Drake said, "and Gullsong ran over to *help* her. I ask you, young Wilf, is that loyalty—offering aid to someone who has just assaulted your captain?"

Wilf shook his head.

"It is *not* loyalty" was the last thing Greybeard said before he slumped forward onto the table and fell silent.

"Gullsong shall smart for it," Drake said, "or *you* will...or you *both* will, by Jove."

Drake sank onto his chair. Head back, mouth open, arms dangling at his sides, he began to snore.

Wilf snatched his coat from the chair in the corner and hurried to the deck, concocting a lie as he ran. Breathless, he charged toward a rowboat. Otto Driftwood, who had the watch for the night, snatched him by the arm.

"Ahoy there, young Wilf. Where do you think you're going? Has the captain retired for the night?"

Wilf gasped out his lie. "Aye. He said he was too tired to go back ashore and sent me to fetch Roland and the prisoner."

"Alone?" Otto asked. "In this current? A mighty tall order for a lad of your size, even though the wind has died down. Are you sure you have the strength?"

Wilf nodded. "Drake said if I return before dawn, I can learn to load the cannon. Will you help me lower the boat, Otto? I'm tired of serving grog. I want to be a *real* pirate like you."

Otto, far from being the cleverest man on board, questioned neither Wilf's compliment nor story and allowed him into the rowboat.

Lowered into the tempestuous sea, Wilf, fueled by devotion for his friend, rowed toward shore. But fervor alone was insufficient to propel him in the right direction. His frail arms, stricken too often with rickets, weakened. After more than an hour, land was still nowhere in sight. He wept, chiding himself for his lack of resolve and strength. There was nothing to do but return to the ship and hope Otto was still on deck to pull him aboard.

He turned around and rowed hard toward the lights of the ship. When his arms were so wracked with hot, searing pain that he could not go on, he used his last feeble breath to cry out, "Ship ahoy! Help me. Help. Help," and crumpled in a heap in the bottom of the boat.

The sun rose, still faint behind the dark lingering clouds. Drake, a dreadful ache in his neck, stirred himself, rose, and shook Greybeard awake. They found Otto, asleep on deck, kicked him, ordered a boat to be lowered, and started back to shore. At last, sated with grog and worn out from rowing, they dragged

their boat ashore and stumbled toward the cabin. They were furious, when, upon arriving, they found the door bolted. Drake shouted.

"Gullsong, open this door, vile dog, or, by Neptune, I'll flog you within an inch—"

Roland swung open the door. Drake fell headlong into the room. Greybeard, a long rope coiled over his shoulder, tumbled over his captain.

Drake drew himself up. "Where's the saucy wench? It's time we weighed anchor."

Greybeard stood, shook his head, and leaned against the wall.

"She never woke up after you struck her," Roland said, pointing toward the corner where Bonny Bee lay covered with her cloak.

"The sultan will not be pleased," Greybeard said. "Damaged goods."

"Don't be daft, man," Drake said. "We weren't sailing for Constantinople."

"You were lying?" Roland asked.

"Had to scare the old shrew, didn't I?" Drake asked.

Greybeard rubbed his puffy eyes. "I hope we can wake her. It's a long way back to the shore. Better if she can walk on her own."

They staggered across the room and leaned over Bonny Bee for a closer look. Drake jabbed her shoulder. "Wake up, Mrs. Rackham."

The teakettle grasped in her hand, Bonny Bee swung her arm in a wide arc and walloped Drake on the chin, the signal to Roland to smack Greybeard on the head with the butt of the pistol. Both pirates fell without so much as a whimper.

Bonny Bee pointed to the rope on the floor. "Tie them up, and we'll be on our way."

Though the worst of the storm was over, a heavy fog and cold mist still hovered over the gloomy woods. Wet Spanish moss and prickly vines brushed their faces and snagged their clothes. Fallen limbs blocked the path, making their journey more of a climb than a walk. Roland trudged ahead, clambered over logs, and then offered his hand to Bonny Bee once he had slid to the other side. Had she been in good health, she might have endured the process, but with one eye swelled shut, her head throbbing, and her ribs aching, she soon asked to rest.

Roland pulled a biscuit from his pocket. "We have three of these. Shall we eat one now?"

"Let's share it," Bonny Bee said, "since we don't know how long we'll be out here. I really am very sorry I got you into—"

Roland put his finger to his lips. "Sh-hh. Do you hear voices?"

They held their breath. Once their own footsteps had ceased, the quiet woods pulsated with indecipherable noise.

He stood. "Drake and Greybeard couldn't have possibly come untied. Someone else must have come ashore. Come on. We'll have to hurry. Can you make it?"

Bonny Bee held out her hand. "If you'll help me."

He helped her up, and they quickened their pace.

"Hello," called a distant voice behind them. "You there. Wait."

Roland grasped Bonny Bee's hand tighter and began to run.

"Stop," she said. "Let me take off this heavy cloak. I can move faster."

Again they ran, careless of the scraping and gouging of branches and brambles.

Again the muffled voice called. "You. On the path. I need a hand." Bonny Bee shouted to Roland. "Someone needs help."

Still pressing forward, he glanced back over his shoulder. "It's a trick. Don't—"

A gnarled root, half-hidden in the thick mud, snagged his foot. He tumbled headfirst to the ground. Bonny Bee followed with a thud. She raised herself on one elbow, wiped the mud from her face, and scrambled to her feet.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

He tugged at his boot. "No, but you'll have go on alone. My foot is wedged."

She knelt beside him. "Maybe we can tug your foot from your boot." "It's no use. I'm stuck. Leave me."

The voice drew nearer. "Hello."

Bonny Bee yanked harder as footsteps, shuffling through wet leaves, grew more distinct, but Roland's foot would not yield.

"Please," Roland said, "you have to run."

"No," Bonny Bee said. "I've never abandoned anyone who—"

"What have we here?" the voice said. "Bonny Bee, is that you?"

Bonny Bee felt a firm hand on her shoulder. She looked up.

"Ned," she said. "You've come home."

Ned Chilcott dropped his heavy bundle and gathered up Bonny Bee in his strong arms.

"What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere?" Ned asked.

"There's no time to explain," Bonny Bee said. "We have to get back to the Inn."

After hurried introductions, Ned and Bonny Bee worked to free Roland's foot. The travelers recommenced their journey, though, which of the three leaned on the others as they continued toward the Inn, none of them could tell. Roland limped on his sore ankle; the restorative effects of Bonny Bee's brief rest the evening before had long since worn off; and Ned, except for quick naps in the woods, had been walking toward home, toting provisions to supply his friends after the storm, for two days. When Roland mentioned the remaining biscuits in his pocket, they all agreed to sit down.

Ned opened his bundle "If we can find wood dry enough to start a fire, we need not be satisfied with biscuits. I have—"

"Is that barking?" Bonny Bee asked.

Out of the woods came a thunderous pounding of paws. Burbage bounded toward Bonny Bee, planted his front feet on her shoulders, and licked the mud from her face. Then Lucien lumbered over, pulled her up, and twirled her around, while Burbage kept prancing and yelping. Ruggles, too overcome to speak, dabbed at his eyes with a silk handkerchief. When Lucien caught sight of Ned, he released Bonny Bee and repeated the process with his other friend. At the edge of the assembly, Bonny Bee caught sight of Fitz, his arm in a sling, his face ashen, his brow furrowed.

She approached him and laid her hand on his bandaged arm. "How did this happen?"

"Rescuing the children from the church," he said. "A beam fell."

She bowed her head. "You're in pain...and you came after me anyway." "You lied to me," he said.

She could not look him in the eye. "I know. It was wrong. Forgive me?" "We'll discuss it when we get back to the Inn."

"Is everything all right?" she asked.

"The house is fine," he said. "No one was hurt, but the village is in need."

Above the joyful commotion sounded a loud clear whistle. The chatter ceased as Cousin Newman, who had stepped onto a large boulder, addressed the gathering.

"I'm as thankful as the next man this fine woman is unharmed, but the ne'er-do-wells who took her are still in my house, and I for one, cannot rejoice till what is mine is regained."

Constable Brinsmead stepped forward. "Cousin Newman is right. A lesser man might have given up and hidden in the woods, but he braved the storm to make it to the village."

"I'll go with you, Newman," Lucien said.

"We could use you and your dog, Mr. Ruggles, if you would be so kind," Constable Brinsmead said.

"We would be honored," Ruggles said, "that is, my dog and I."

Fitz raised his good arm. "I'll go. I have a longstanding feud with Drake and—"

"With all due respect," Constable Brinsmead said, "you've done enough. You insisted on coming with us on account of Mrs. Rackham, but now that she's been found, you should rest."

Bonny Bee called down silent blessings on the constable. She would never have presumed to argue with Fitz in front of the other men, but she knew he needed rest and care as soon as possible. He was pale, shivering with fever, his hand swollen to twice its size. Fitz never refused orders from an authority, so he yielded. Half the rescue party escorted Bonny Bee, Roland, Ned, and Fitz back to the village, while Cousin Newman led the constable, Lucien, Ruggles, and the remaining men to the cabin. Burbage loped along, still yowling, and rejoicing in the chase.

On the outskirts of Lenford, Emmaline tapped a sleeping Wallace on the shoulder.

"Sun's up," she said. "Adelaide insists you come home for breakfast and said I could take your place on watch."

Wallace gazed down the road. "I thought they'd be back by now."

"Me, too," she said. "But Adelaide said we have to allow for debris on the path and fallen trees in the woods and Bonny Bee might be..." She couldn't go on.

Wallace took her by the shoulders. "Don't even think that. The search party's only been gone since—"

Emmaline screamed, broke loose from Wallace, and began to run. "Bonny Bee," she cried.

Wallace outran her and swept up Bonny Bee. Once again, though her ribs were aching, she endured the embrace of a devoted friend, vowing to teach all of them new ways of showing their affection when someone was visibly injured. Emmaline pushed through the crowd and threw her arms around Ned, who grabbed her up and spun her around. When Wallace, who turned to see what the ruckus was, ran toward his friends, the spinning Emmaline knocked him flat. Off balance, Ned and Emmaline also toppled, and the three of them laughed like children on the last day of school.

"Thank you, my darlings," Bonny Bee said. "Now please help Fitz back to the Inn while I express my gratitude to the men who joined in the search for me."

Fitz draped his arm over Wallace's shoulder. Ned and Emmaline followed them back to the Inn. Bonny Bee bade the village men farewell and promised them a feast once Fitz had recovered. She turned toward home and motioned for Roland to join her.

He hesitated. "Are you sure your friends will welcome me? After all, I work for the man who kidnapped you. Look at me. I'm filthy, and there's blood on my sleeve from—"

"I'm sure," she said. "Come home with me, Roland. Lean on my arm."

Adelaide, Emmaline, Olivia, and Elizabeth were all waiting on the porch when Bonny Bee came home. Elizabeth and Olivia bounded off the steps in one leap. Surrounding her, the grateful girls each kissed Bonny Bee on the cheek. Her face was wet with their tears as each put a hand under an elbow and guided her toward the door.

Emmaline opened the door. "We're settling you on the sofa," she said, "so we can keep an eye on you. The window in your room hasn't been repaired yet."

"I don't want to be left alone anyway," Bonny Bee said.

Her arms crossed, Adelaide stood by the open door as Bonny Bee stepped in. "You know you'll answer for this, once Fitz is well enough to take you to task."

"I'll need lots of your good broth to fortify me," Bonny Bee said.

Adelaide embraced her. "Broth indeed. I made potato soup."

For the next half hour, Emmaline tended to Bonny Bee, cleaning her wounds, brushing her hair, and helping her into her nightgown and dressing gown. She led Bonny Bee into the parlor where everyone, except Fitz, was waiting.

Bonny Bee stood by the sofa. "I have a few words to say. First, please forgive me for worrying you. Fitz warned me I was no match for Drake, but I didn't believe him. I—"

"There's nothing to forgive," Wallace said. "We'd all of us either be in the churchyard grave or the poorhouse if it weren't for you. Anything else?"

"Yes," Bonny Bee said. "Fitz will try to convince you his injuries are minimal, but—"

"We've already put him to bed," Emmaline said. "Adelaide moved her things into my room, so Fitz can sleep in her room near the kitchen, and we can take care of him more easily."

Bonny Bee looked around the room. "And I would like to introduce Roland Gullsong, the young man who...where is he?"

"Here," Roland said. He stepped from behind Ned.

Bonny Bee gasped. "You're quite transformed."

"A little washing up in the kitchen," he said.

"And an old shirt of mine," Ned said.

"You don't look at all like a pirate anymore," Bonny Bee said.

Ned clapped Roland on the back. "Just because a fellow keeps company with pirates doesn't make him one. Our Wallace sleeps in the stable, but it doesn't make him a horse."

When everyone laughed, their fears and memories faded, becoming as shadowy and indistinct as the old tunes grandpas whistle but never sing because they've forgotten the words.

Adelaide entered with a tray laden with a steaming bowl of soup, a mug of milk, and a dish of Apple Brown Betty.

"Let's say grace," she said, "so Bonny Bee can eat. Everyone else, help yourself in the kitchen and bring your food back here. Sit where you will. Ned goes first. Welcome home."

For the rest of the day and into the evening, the happy company congregated in the parlor. Every half hour (according to Adelaide's schedule), someone would slip away to do their chores, so all their work was done, but Bonny Bee was never left alone. Each took a turn by her side, sharing specifics of their time in the cellar, inquiring about Roland, or asking for details about the kidnapping. Elizabeth wondered about Ned in particular, and Olivia apologized for asking Bonny Bee if she thought there was hope Bart and his crew might yet

return. That evening, they told stories or sang favorite songs till they all fell asleep.

When Bonny Bee woke the next morning, she was relieved to find she was truly at home. She gazed around the room. Wallace slumbered in Ruggles' chair. Olivia and Elizabeth were snuggled in quilts on the floor near the fireplace. Ned was asleep near the front door, guarding the entrance, Bonny Bee supposed. She lit a candle and started toward the kitchen, pausing to peek in Adelaide's room. In chairs on either side of the bed where Fitz was resting, Adelaide and Emmaline sat sleeping.

She stepped into the kitchen and found Roland loading food into a sack. Fully dressed, he had the pistol at his side.

"Where do you think you're going?" Bonny Bee asked.

His voice trembled. "I couldn't sleep. I can't stop thinking about Wilf and how heartsick he'll be when he finds I've left the ship for good. I have to go back."

She gripped his arm. "I've already thought of Wilf. He must be rescued, but you can't do it by yourself. Would you wait till Fitz is better? He'll know what to do."

Roland leaned on the sideboard. "Wilf has no friend but me."

She put her arm around his shoulders. "He'll have lots of friends once he arrives here. Now, if you'll be so kind as to hand me that big skillet, we have work to do."

In the soft light of dawn, Bonny Bee glided around the kitchen boiling water, mixing dough, seasoning, stirring. As she worked, she told Roland about her life with Calico Jack. One by one the residents awoke to the aroma of coffee, bacon, and cinnamon. Without conferring, each forsook the usual habit of dressing for meals. Instead they wrapped shawls or blankets around their shoulders and wandered toward the dining room like children on Christmas morning. Without speaking, each took a plate and heaped it high with eggs, meat, muffins, and scones. Smiling their greetings, they sipped their tea and coffee.

At last Emmaline broke the silence. "It's been too long," she said.

"Since we all had a meal together?" Ned asked.

"That, too," she said. "But I meant too long since Lucien and Ruggles left for the cabin. Shouldn't they have been back by now?"

"If they're bringing back prisoners," Roland said, "their progress will be slower."

"Have you ever escorted any prisoners?" Ned asked. "Back to your ship, I mean?"

"No," Roland said. "I was the prisoner."

"It's a long walk to Cousin Newman's cabin," Bonny Bee said, "and the way will be made longer by all the damage from the wind."

"Maybe they spent the night," Olivia said, "and—"

The front door opened and a booming voice called out. "Adie. Adie Finch. I hope breakfast is ready. I've had naught but hardtack and a cold potato since we started home."

Emmaline sprang up from the table and ran to welcome Lucien. Burbage ran full speed toward the kitchen. Ruggles stood in the doorway of the dining room and brushed a stray leaf from his waistcoat. Ned and Wallace gave up their chairs to the weary travelers. Adelaide asked Elizabeth and Olivia to follow her to the kitchen and then sent them back to the dining room with plates full of food and a fresh pot of tea.

Bonny Bee waited till the men had eaten a few mouthfuls and then asked, "So...are Drake and Greybeard with Constable Brinsmead?"

Ruggles ducked his head.

Lucien leaned his elbows on the table. "They weren't there," he said.

Roland pounded the table. "It's not possible. I used double overhand knots. They couldn't have gotten loose."

"I'm sorry, lad," Lucien said. "No one was there."

"We partook of the humble fare of Cousin Newman," Ruggles said, "rested, and started back. We were prepared to do battle and conduct the miscreants home, but it was not to be."

Roland ran from the dining room. "I'm going back to the ship."

Ned and Wallace rushed after him.

Emmaline began to cry.

Bonny Bee turned to Lucien. "In Fitz's absence, I must appeal to you for wisdom."

There was a knock at the front door.

Standing, Lucien looked at Bonny Bee. "Stay here. Keep the young ladies here, too. Look after them, Ruggles."

Burbage loped toward the front door. Lucien marched after him.

Gathering in a far corner, the ladies held hands and prepared themselves for the pirates' assault. Ruggles, ready to lay down his life, rose from the table and blocked the door of the dining room.

"Where's Mrs. Rackham?" said someone from the parlor.

"And where is Juliet?" said another.

When Bonny Bee heard the voices of Lars Ravensbeak and Sebastian Sharkchum, she hurried to the parlor. There they stood, a sandy-haired boy between them.

"May I present Wilf Gregor?" Sebastian said.

"And may we have some breakfast?" Lars said. "We've had a long walk, and this brave lad is tired."

Roland, once again dressed in his pirate garb, was hurrying down the stairs. Wallace had hold of his sleeve from behind.

"Let go of me," Roland said. "I cannot stay here when—"

Wilf raced toward his friend. "Roland," he said. "You're alive."

Everyone returned to the dining room table while Lars, Sebastian, and Wilf ate their breakfast and told their story.

"The storm was so fierce," Sebastian said, "we sailed south. Once the old wind wore itself out, we turned back."

"Night before last," Lars said, "Ivan had the watch, and he hears a pitiful cry coming from the water. 'Help me,' it said, according to Ivan."

"I said, 'Ship ahoy,' too," Wilf said. "Only I thought I'd drifted back to the *Black Saber*."

"What were you doing in the water?" Roland asked. "Did you fall overboard?"

Seated next to Bonny Bee, Wilf eyed the pitcher of milk. She poured him a third mug.

"No," Sebastian said, ruffling Wilf's hair. "That's the amazing thing. The lad was trying to row to shore to find you and warn you of Drake's ire."

"On account," Wilf said, "of your coming to the aid of Mrs. Rackham after the captain backhanded her."

Ruggles shook his head. "Blackguard. Ruffian."

"I couldn't row hard enough against the current," Wilf said, "and the water took me—"

"Right alongside the *Orion*," Lars said. "And we pulled the stalwart fellow on board."

"And he tells us," Sebastian said, "the whole story about Mrs. Rackham and how she's being held in a cabin and guarded by his friend Roland."

Lars leaned back in his chair. "So Captain Longscar orders a pursuit of the *Black Saber* and when we sight her, Bart and Ivan know where to go ashore to rescue Bonny Bee."

"Because Bart could not abide the thought of Drake's hands...well, hand...on the delicate frame of..." Sebastian said, pausing when he saw Wilf's eyes fixed on him.

Bonny Bee took Wilf's hand. "Have you had enough to eat, dear boy?"

"Aye," he said. "I haven't had food like this since my mum died."

"You may thank Miss Adelaide," she said, "and then follow Emmaline to your room."

Wilf gulped. "My...my room?"

Emmaline stood by his chair. "I'll take you there."

Wilf looked at her as if an angel had just beckoned him to Heaven and followed her to the door. He paused and turned around. "Will you still be here when I come back, Roland?"

"Neither of us is going anywhere, Wilf," Roland said. "Don't worry."

Lucien blew his nose on his napkin. "Must have caught a chill on my way home."

"Do go on with your story, gentlemen," Ruggles said. "You were saying the *Orion* pursued the *Black Saber*, but couldn't their crew see you so near? Why didn't they open fire?"

"There was yet a thick fog lingering and it was not yet dawn," Lars said. "So Bart and Ivan row ashore and find the cabin they've been told about."

Sebastian stood, warming to his story. "Only when they get there...the remarkable Mrs. Rackham and gallant Gullsong have whacked the scoundrels on the noggins and tied them up."

Following suit, Lars stood, too. "Bart and Ivan march the pair of them to the shore, lead Greybeard to his boat and tell him he's now captain of the *Black Saber*."

"And then," Sebastian said, "Bart takes Greybeard by his collar, shakes him and says, 'Set sail at once or there'll be nothing left of your ship by sundown.""

Lucien applauded. "Good man."

"And where is Drake?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Clapped in irons on the Orion," Lars said.

"How can you be sure he won't escape?" Ned asked.

Lars gulped tea from his mug and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Because Rufus One-Ear is guarding him."

"That's a relief," Bonny Bee said.

"Why so?" Elizabeth asked.

"Drake wooed away his sweetheart years ago," Sebastian said. "That's why Rufus became a pirate."

"What you call a fortuitous circumstance," Lars said. "For Rufus anyway."

"Once we set sail," Sebastian said, "our first stop will be Charleston." "Why there?" Elizabeth asked.

"Because the Charlestonians have neither forgiven nor forgotten the indignities they suffered at the hands of Blackbeard. They had no revenge on him, so Bart intends..."

"To hand over Drake as a replacement," Ned said. "Brilliant."

"An inspired idea," Ruggles said.

"So...you've come back to take me to Boston?" Olivia asked. "Of course, dear lady," Lars said. "Charleston is on the way."

Adelaide appeared in the doorway of the dining room. "We've lolled around in our nightclothes long enough," she said. "The day's half gone, and there's a lot to be done."

Ruggles glanced at the long case clock in the corner. "It's half past eight," he said.

"Precisely," Adelaide said. "It's time we saw to the needs of the villagers. Many have no food whatever, and those who do are too busy to cook. I'm going to bake bread for them."

"How bad is the damage?" Bonny Bee asked. "No one has told me."

"The church, of course," Lucien said. "Roof's gone. Pews are a total loss, as well as the pulpit. Several homes damaged, a few stores. The schoolhouse didn't fare well either."

"Adelaide is right," Bonny Bee said. "It's time we helped our neighbors."

Lucien motioned to Wallace, Roland, and Ned. "Come with me, lads. You've had a good breakfast. There's no reason you shouldn't be able to work all morning."

"You haven't slept, Lucien," Bonny Bee said. "Send them and take your rest."

"Nonsense," Lucien said. "When these three young bucks are wiping their brows and begging for sustenance, I'll still be clearing fallen limbs and repairing roofs."

"I'll send the girls with food at noon," Adelaide said as they left the room. "Come along, ladies. Dishes first."

Elizabeth and Olivia began clearing the table.

Lucien paused at the door. "Ruggles, would you stay here and see after Bonny Bee?"

"I'd be honored," Ruggles said, "and I'll set the house in order as well."

"Under ordinary circumstances," Sebastian said, "Lars and I would stay and help, but we must provision the ship and do our own repairs. Bart intends to sail at noon two days hence."

"Sunrise, if we can manage," Lars said.

"When should Olivia be on board?" Bonny Bee asked.

"If we could fetch her tomorrow night," Lars said, "we'd be free to sail with the tide."

Bonny Bee offered her hand to each of them. "We'll have her to the shore by sundown."

Sebastian bowed. "Farewell, good lady."

"And to you, fair maiden," Lars said to Adelaide, who allowed him to kiss her cheek.

After they were gone, Adelaide approached Bonny Bee.

"Fitz is awake," she said. "He wants to talk to you."

"Has he had breakfast?"

"No," Adelaide said. "Do you think a full stomach will make him more forgiving?"

Bonny Bee sighed. "Give him his breakfast and tell him I'll be there soon."

"As you wish," Adelaide said. "More tea to steady your nerves?"

Bonny Bee shook her head. The pirates' parting words still echoing in her thoughts, she clasped her hands behind her and stared out the dining room window as Adelaide withdrew.

Ruggles stepped beside her. "What would you like me to attend to first?" Bonny Bee spotted Zebedee Thrashwick striding up the lane.

"Let him in," she said.

Bonny Bee followed Ruggles toward the front door and stood back as he admitted Zebedee Thrashwick, red-faced, furious, and panting.

"Zebedee," Bonny Bee said.

He shook his finger in her face. "I've come for my niece. And don't tell me she's still sick. She could've recovered from the plague by now."

Bonny Bee tied her dressing gown sash into a bow. "No, she's not sick. She's helping Adelaide bake bread for the villagers. I knew you wouldn't object, since you will benefit."

"Benefit? How?"

"Mr. Ruggles," she said, "you were once in the employ of a wealthy trader. Tell Mr. Thrashwick how customers feel about a merchant who lends a hand in times of need."

Ruggles understood her meaning. "Customers view such a merchant as beneficent."

"There, you see," she said. "Beneficent."

Zebedee hesitated. "Being charitable is good for business, you say?" "Indubitably," Ruggles said.

Bonny Bee glanced at the ceiling. "As a matter of fact, we're going to host a fair and invite neighboring villages to attend—to raise money to rebuild the church and school."

Ruggles did his best not to appear stupefied. "Quite right…and the ladies are also making tarts and…there will be…"

"Entertainment," Bonny Bee said, "and...a bonfire."

"Lucien is stacking the firewood now," Ruggles said, trying to keep up with the story.

Bonny Bee eyed Zebedee. "You could have a table and sell goods from your store."

Zebedee rubbed his chin. "I've never been one to shirk my civic duty."

"The fair," she said, "is scheduled for...tomorrow...afternoon. Can you be ready?"

"Why...yes," Zebedee said.

Ruggles opened the front door. "You'd better go at once, sir. You haven't much time."

"And tell the others in the village," Bonny Bee said.

The prospect of a few extra coins' being added to his precious pile sent Zebedee fairly waltzing down the path.

Ruggles watched him go and closed the door.

"That went rather well, don't you think?" Bonny Bee asked.

He turned to her. "Rather well? If he hadn't left when he did, you'd have promised him a shipment of spices from the Indies and a chest full of Aztec gold."

She started toward her room. "Do you honestly think I'd have obligated us to a venture I hadn't already thought through and deemed feasible?"

Ruggles walked beside her. "Am I to believe, while you were waiting to be kidnapped and enduring your frightful journey through the woods, you envisioned a village fair?"

"Not exactly. Pondering Olivia's escape *was* an excellent distraction, but the idea of a fair came to me only just now. It's the perfect means for replicating Jack's most famous getaway."

"Your husband, Calico Jack?"

She opened the door to her room. "I've heard him tell the story a hundred times."

"And you think the same strategy will work for Olivia?" Ruggles asked.

Had she been able to open her swollen eye, Bonny Bee would have winked.

"There's no doubt," she said. "You'll play an important role in the scheme, by the way, so prepare to be properly dressed."

He straightened his shoulders. "I'm to be allowed to appear in my formal attire?"

She nodded. "Complete with waistcoat and scarlet sash."

"Scarlet?"

She laughed. "Ruggles the Magnificent would wear no other color. Would you fetch Emmaline and tell her I need help dressing?"

"To prepare for your meeting with Fitz?" he asked.

"Yes. Any advice?"

"Not for me to say, madam," Ruggles said, as he started up the stairs.

When Emmaline entered Bonny Bee's room, she found her with her black silk dress draped over an arm. Emmaline shook her head.

"If you think wearing *that* will make you appear humble and contrite, you couldn't be more mistaken."

"But it's black," Bonny Bee said. "Surely Fitz will-"

"You're too beautiful in that dress," Emmaline said. She returned the dress to the wardrobe and took out a simple homespun.

Bonny Bee sat on her bed. "Must I wear that? I look dreadful in brown." "You can change to your Kendall green later. And wear an apron."

Dressed as a penitent, her hair pulled back in a sensible bun, Bonny Bee left her room and proceeded through the parlor. From the moment she had jammed the fire poker through the cellar door handles, she had dreaded the consequences—not of surrendering herself to a bloodthirsty pirate, but of facing Fitz, if and when she returned.

Her stomach fluttering, she entered his room. He turned from gazing out the window to look at her. Propped up against white pillows, his broken arm resting in his lap, he looked every bit the wounded warrior, noble in his suffering.

Hovering near the door, she said, "You look better."

He pointed to her bruised eye. "You don't."

"I got this beauty on account of you," she said.

"Me?"

She stepped nearer. "Yes, Drake called you a secondhand pirate and asked how long it had been since you held a sword in your lily-white hands, and I grabbed him by the collar."

"And he threw you off."

"No," she said. "He fell into the fireplace and didn't much like hot stew on his head or his hair catching fire. When he got up, he knocked me across the room."

She managed a feeble smile.

"And what if," Fitz asked, his face chiseled with an expression she could not interpret, "he had hit you so hard he killed you?"

"But he didn't," she said.

He ignored her reply. "What if the search party had reached the cabin only to find you in a heap on the floor? Do you know what that would have done to me?"

"I...I never thought-"

"*Who* would've shouldered your lifeless body and carried it back here?"

"I...don't know," she said.

Hoarse with feelings long suppressed, his voice rose. "*It wouldn't have been me*."

"Of course not...not with one arm..."

He squeezed his eyes shut in a futile effort to stop his tears.

"Some *other* man would've assumed that sacred task in *my* place," he said.

Her heart broke. She rushed to him, knelt by the bed, and took his hand in hers.

"Forgive me...forgive me," she said, weeping. "I know I was a fool, but I did it to save you...all of you. I cannot bear to lose someone else I love."

He lifted her chin and whispered, "Neither can I. You must let me take care of you."

"I will," she said.

"And promise never to lie to me again."

"I promise."

There was a knock at the door. "Bonny Bee?" She stood. "Yes?"

Emmaline peeked in. "I'm sorry to disturb you. Wilf woke up and was upset when he found Roland wasn't here. May I walk with him to the village?"

Bonny Bee wiped her eyes with the hem of her apron. "Yes, and tell the men to come home in time for tea. I need to talk to them about—"

"Ruggles told us," Emmaline said. "Adelaide is peeling apples for cider." "What's all this about?" Fitz asked.

Bonny Bee pulled a chair next to his bed. "I'm glad you asked. I need your advice."

By the time everyone returned to the Inn that afternoon, there was not much left to be said about the fair. Not only had the news spread among the Inn residents, but Zebedee's boasting about his largesse had inspired other merchants in the village to follow his example. They had all promised to participate. Because Lenford had received the worst of the storm, residents of villages farther inland— Bramblebury, Westdale, and Redstart—who had come to the aid of their neighbors, carried news of the fair back to their homes and promised to return the next day for the festivities.

After tea that afternoon, everyone, including Fitz, gathered in the parlor.

"Let me begin," Bonny Bee said, "by apologizing for asking you to take on extra work so soon after the talent show."

"I'm glad you mentioned that," Wallace said. "I have no talent except sword fighting, and we cannot possibly expect Fitz to participate in that."

"Our purpose is not to display our talent," Bonny Bee said, "but to provide sufficient diversion for Olivia to slip away unnoticed."

"Actually, Wallace," Fitz said, "I suggested to Bonny Bee you should bring Empress and Opal to the village and offer rides to the children."

"They'd enjoy that," Wallace said. "The horses, I mean."

"Emmaline has designed the most stunning display for our table," Adelaide said.

"I thought I'd make a tablecloth from one of Mrs. Fletcher's gowns," Emmaline said. "You don't think she'd mind if I cut up her gold brocade, do you, Bonny Bee?"

"I'm sure she'd have been glad to donate her clothes for our purpose," Bonny Bee said. "May she rest in peace. You'll need to make alternations to my blue cloak as well."

"We can't cut that up," Emmaline said. "You wear it for—"

"No," Bonny Bee said. "Just a few changes to the hem and the hood. I'll explain later."

"If diversion is the purpose," Elizabeth said, "I suppose I should offer to juggle."

Wilf, seated next to her, looked up. "You can juggle?" he asked.

She put her arm around him. "I used to be the governess of some very stubborn children. When they finished their sums, I rewarded them with entertainment."

"What a remarkable woman you are," Ned said.

Everyone was stunned; Elizabeth, because she'd been attracted to Ned from the moment she'd seen him, and the rest, because they'd given up hope Ned could ever admire any woman but Anastasia.

"Thank you, Elizabeth," Bonny Bee said, hastening to end the uncomfortable silence. "We'll use your demonstration to draw the crowd to Ruggles' magic act."

"I've never met a real magician before," Wilf said, his eyes shining.

Ruggles blushed. "I'm not accustomed to the role yet. I find it rather undignified."

But secretly he was pleased.

"Lucien," Bonny Bee said, "Ruggles will need a cabinet with curtains in the front and a door in the back. Fitz has offered the old armoire in his room, so you won't have to build one."

"And the curtains?" Lucien asked.

"Take down the curtains in my room," Bonny Bee said. "I've never liked them anyway."

Lucien frowned. "Have you thought of where we'll place said cabinet once it's ready?"

Bonny Bee spluttered. "Somewhere in the town square, I suppose."

"And you expect everyone to have a view of Ruggles' act from where they're standing?"

"Of course," Bonny Bee said. "Everyone should witness Olivia entering the cabinet."

"Then you'll need a stage of some sort," Lucien said.

"Dear me, I hadn't thought of that," Bonny Bee said. "Any ideas?"

"No time to build one," Wallace said. "We'll do well to finish the cabinet."

"Is there a building we could use," Roland asked, "as a sort of theatre?" "The school," Ned said, "but there's still debris from the roof falling in." Lucien, groaning, clamped his hand over his eyes and slowly shook his

head.

"What is it, Lucien?" Adelaide asked.

"The Widow Wernham," he said.

"Who?" Roland asked.

"Widow Wernham," Wallace said. "Rich heiress—moved here from Charleston after her husband died. She hired Lucien to do some work for her. Let's just say she was impressed."

"With his craftsmanship *and* his 'rustic charm," Emmaline said. "That's how she describes you, isn't it, Lucien?"

"But what does all this have to do with finding a stage?" Elizabeth asked.

Lucien looked up. "The widow is building a grand manor house. The foundation's finished. There's a porch on the side...perfect for a makeshift stage."

"I'll be happy to call on her and ask her permission to use the porch," Elizabeth said. "Lucien has so much to do and has had no rest."

"Thank you for offering," Bonny Bee said, trying not to smile, "but the widow is a recluse. So far as we know, the only person she willingly admits into her home is Lucien."

"We don't fault her," Adelaide said. "What woman *wouldn't* find him irresistible?"

Lucien stood. "All right. That's enough of that. Help me wash up, Adie."

Fitz rose and shook Lucien's hand. "Steady on. We'll make this up to you somehow."

"Who knows?" Lucien said. "Maybe her cook made green currant pie today."

Adelaide sneered. "Green currant pie, indeed. As if that could soften the blow of your having to stare at the widow's long nose all evening."

"Bring the armoire from Fitz's room, lads, and put it in the forge," Lucien said. "I'll begin work as soon as I return from the widow. Anything else, Bonny Bee?"

"Yes," she said. "I thought, since there were so many downed trees, a bonfire might not be difficult to manage."

Lucien held his hand to his forehead. "We have a stack of kindling as high as this."

Adelaide laughed. "A bonfire will be a simple matter, compared to the fire burning in the widow's heart. Come on, Lucien. It will take an age to get that dirt off the back of your neck."

Lucien accompanied Adelaide to the kitchen. As the young men followed Fitz to his room to remove the armoire, Bonny Bee called to Ned. He stayed behind and sat next to her on the stairs.

"I haven't had a chance to thank you for helping me to free Roland," she said. "I'd had such a long night, and my courage was failing. I was never more surprised to see a friend."

"Not half as surprised as I was to see you," he said.

She considered her words. "You...usually stay away longer when you're looking for Anastasia. Did the storm force you to turn back?"

"Yes, but not in the way you think. I had made camp for the night. The wind began to howl, and the rain beat down on me. My fire went out. I was cold and miserable and alone."

She remembered her own perils in the woods. "How dreadful for you."

"But when I reflected on how lonely I was, I realized it wasn't Anastasia I missed. It was *you*...all of you...and I reproached myself for being away when I was needed here."

Bonny Bee embraced him. "The important thing is you're home now. And tomorrow, after our work is done, we shall give you a proper welcome back."

She retrieved her blue cloak from her room and returned to the parlor where Ruggles, Emmaline, Elizabeth, and Olivia waited. Burbage, weary of upheaval, stretched out by the fire.

"Try this on, Olivia," Bonny Bee said. "We need to check the length." She draped the cloak over Olivia's shoulders. "What do you think, Emmaline? Should we let out the hem?"

"I'm to wear this?" Olivia asked. "I thought the idea was for me to elude my uncle. Won't this royal blue make me rather conspicuous?"

Bonny Bee removed the cloak. "That's the idea. You'll circulate in the crowd, attracting attention, so when your uncle sees the cloak, he'll believe he sees you. Now you, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth stood and tried on the cloak.

"Turn around," Bonny Bee said. "What do you think, Emmaline?" "No one will know the difference," Emmaline said.

"Ruggles," Bonny Bee said, "can you orate long enough for Olivia to step out the back of the cabinet and Madame Illustria to take her place?"

"Madame Who?" Elizabeth asked.

"Ill-US-tria," Bonny Bee said. "A soothsayer of some repute."

Ruggles envisioned the scene. "If I practice adequately."

"Then, by all means, begin," Bonny Bee said. "I'll join you when I return from the attic."

Relieved she wasn't going in search of a weapon, Bonny Bee climbed the stairs and entered the attic. From Calico Jack's kit bag she pulled out a pair of breeches, shirt, coat and hat, still smelling of salt air. She opened a trunk marked "Theatre Royal, Drury Lane," which Ivan had stolen years before. Ever since she'd caught sight of Almirena's gown, she'd longed to wear it, but didn't want to sanction Ivan's thievery. Surely their noble enterprise warranted borrowing the gown for a single evening. She rifled through the trunk for any other useful items and found a conductor's baton.

She whipped it through the air. "Ruggles will be so pleased to have a wand."

Once again everyone slept in the parlor, not because they feared for Bonny Bee, but because there were so many preparations to be made. They reviewed their strategy again and again, suggesting every possible eventuality and formulating multiple alternatives should something go wrong. Long after the others had drifted off to sleep, Ruggles was still whispering his lines and perfecting his flourishes with the wand Bonny Bee had presented him. Shortly before sunrise, the magic cabinet was finished, the costumes and decorations stitched, the acts perfected, and the food prepared and crated for the trip to the village.

Morning dawned bright and clear. After breakfast everyone, except Bonny Bee and Fitz, heaved the cabinet onto the wagon. Empress and Opal, their harnesses adorned with the last of Mrs. Fletcher's gold brocade, strutted toward town as if they knew they bore everyone's hopes and dreams behind them.

While Wallace unhitched the horses, Roland and Wilf made their rounds announcing rides for the children. Customers thronged the gold-brocaded table

all morning, purchasing the Marlborough pudding pies and plum cheese first. Lucien, depleted from his evening with Widow Wernham, still managed to play some tunes. Ned invited Elizabeth for a stroll.

Wearing the blue cloak as instructed, Olivia summoned her courage and mingled with the crowd, even visiting Zebedee's display of wares to ask how he was faring.

"Quite well," he said. "Sold the last of your lace an hour ago. You'll be busy tomorrow."

At Bonny Bee's signal Elizabeth began juggling. When a sufficient crowd had gathered, Fitz took the stage, and with raised hands and a commanding voice, announced Ruggles the Magnificent, who, resplendent in his attire, explained the illusion and asked for a volunteer. Olivia stepped forward. Ruggles offered his hand, guided her into the cabinet and closed the curtain. While Ruggles expounded on the imminent peril the young woman faced, Olivia exited through the back door. Elizabeth took the cloak. Fitz helped Olivia into Calico Jack's coat and hat. Bonny Bee kissed her cheek, said goodbye, and slipped into the cabinet.

With a grand gesture, Ruggles drew back the curtain and announced Madame Illustria.

Bonny Bee, her bruised eye hidden behind a bejeweled mask, issued forth, more exquisite than any prima donna who had worn the costume before.

The audience rewarded Ruggles with thunderous applause—all but one.

Chin jutted forward, eyebrows arched, and nostrils flared, Zebedee Thrashwick elbowed the elderly woman next to him and stomped on the vicar's foot in an effort to extricate himself from the crowd. As he started toward the stage, a ragged boy, hat in hand, tugged on his sleeve.

> "Excuse me, sir," he said, "can you spare a few coins for an orphan?" Zebedee shoved Wilf aside. "Beg elsewhere, ruffian."

Speaking louder, Wilf pursued him. "Please, sir, I haven't eaten in *such* a long time."

People turned to stare. "Give the lad a coin, you old miser," called a voice. The crowd grumbled its assent.

Ned blocked Zebedee's path. "Come now, sir. Can't you tell how thin the lad is?"

As Zebedee fumbled in his pocket, Ruggles shouted his name from the stage.

"What is it, you old has-been?" Zebedee said.

"Madame Illustria requires your assistance for a demonstration," Ruggles called out. "Will you join us on stage? Everyone, please welcome Mr. Thrashwick."

Zebedee had no choice but to comply. He mounted the stage and stood next to Ruggles.

"Madame Illustria," Ruggles intoned, "has recently returned from a world tour where she astounded king, emperor, and potentate alike with her remarkable abilities."

More applause ensued.

"Madame Illustria, are you ready?" Ruggles asked.

Bonny Bee bowed, moved to the opposite side of the stage, turned her back to Ruggles, and placed her fingertips on her temples. "Ready," she said.

Ruggles addressed the audience. "I will now take a common item from our volunteer."

He took Zebedee's pocket watch from his vest. "Madame Illustria, what item am I holding?"

Zebedee peered around Ruggles to try to see inside the empty cabinet.

"Mm—mm," Bonny Bee said, feigning difficulty. "I see ... I see an auburnhaired girl."

"What kind of hoax is this?" Zebedee said. "Where is my-?"

"Are you sure, Madame Illustria?" Ruggles asked. "The item belongs to a man."

"Ah," Bonny Bee said, "but it was given to him by a woman, a woman who loved him. Wait a moment...yes, I almost have the image. It is a pocket watch."

The crowd roared.

"What kind of nonsense is this?" Zebedee said. "Everyone who's ever come into my store knows I wear this pocket watch. Either it was a lucky guess or you conspired yesterday."

"Madame Illustria," said Ruggles. "We have one who doubts your gift. Can you—?"

She raised her hand. "Wait. I'm seeing...would you be so kind as to open the watch and see if there is an engraving inside?"

Ruggles undid the clasp, looked at the watch cover, and then at Zebedee. "There is."

Zebedee scowled. "Lots of watches are engraved. That proves nothing."

"Mr. Thrashwick," Ruggles said. "Is there anyone in this audience to whom you confided the manner of engraving in your watch?"

His face went white; he faltered. "No. Now give me the watch. I need to find my—"

Bonny Bee returned her fingertips to her temples. "The words are...'Our love is timeless. Carlotta.""

The audience, as one, drew in its breath. Not one of them could imagine Zebedee Thrashwick being the object of a woman's tender affection.

Murmurs of "Not possible" and "Who could believe?" and "Carlotta...who's she?" rippled through the crowd.

Zebedee snatched away his watch. "This has been a cunning ploy to steal what's mine." He thrust Ruggles aside, strode toward the cabinet, leaned inside, and pushed open the rear door. Then he snarled, grabbed Bonny Bee, and shook her. "She's gone back to your Inn," he said, "but she won't get away this time."

Instead of struggling, Bonny Bee grabbed his coat and leaned in. She put her lips to his ear. "This is your last chance. Don't make the same mistake twice."

He broke her hold, leaped from the stage, forced his way through the crowd, and hurried down the street only to find his way blocked by Empress, Opal, and the wagon.

"Here now. What's this?" Wallace said. "Not leaving? We're lighting the bonfire soon."

"Move aside," Zebedee said.

"Hold on. I need to position the wagon in place so we can remove the magic cabinet."

"Move aside," Zebedee said, yanking on Opal's harness.

Whinnying, she reared her head.

"I wouldn't do that," Wallace said. "She's a very finicky horse"—a falsehood which the children who had ridden her all day would have vigorously denied.

Zebedee ducked under the horses' heads. Empress nabbed his hat with one chomp. He tugged; she held on. He fell backward.

"You'll pay for that hat," he said to Wallace. "It came-"
Chapter Six ~ Ruggles the Magnificent

"Came from Boston," Lucien said, approaching Zebedee from behind and lifting him up. "What are you thinking, Wallace, allowing a fine upstanding member of our community to be so ill-treated?" Lucien freed Zebedee's hat from Empress' mouth.

"My apologies," Wallace said, rifling through his pockets. "How much do I owe you?"

Zebedee snatched his hat. "Never mind. Now let me go."

Lucien put his strong arm around Zebedee's shoulder. "Let us make this up to you. Come along with me. You shall have the privilege of lighting the bonfire."

Zebedee growled. "Release me or I'll summon the constable and have you—"

Away down the street he spotted a solitary figure in a blue cloak. He pulled loose from Lucien and broke into a run.

"Going back to the Inn, as I suspected," Zebedee said to himself. "We'll see about that."

In the fading daylight he ran, his chest pounding and lungs aching from his exertions.

"Foolish girl," he said, "wearing that cloak. I could spot you a mile away."

At the edge of town, she veered off the path and ducked into the woods.

"I know these woods as well as you," he called, panting, and continued his pursuit.

She turned aside. In the gathering darkness he lost sight of her. He paused to catch his breath and heard, faint and far away, a rustling of branches and snapping of twigs. He renewed the chase and was rewarded with the sight of young woman in a blue cloak, stooping to tug at her hem caught in the brambles.

Exultant, he called out. "Thought you could get away while they distracted me, eh?"

The cloaked figure gave up the struggle and rose to her feet. He reached out, grabbed her shoulder, and whirled her around. Elizabeth let down her hood. "May I help you?"

The bonfire blazed to life. After a lusty hurrah, the jubilant voices dwindled into silence—not the somber stillness engendered by grief, but the satisfied quiet of grateful hearts. Like an invading army, the tempest had marched through their villages, damaging homes, felling trees, and spoiling their countryside, but not a life had been lost. The only injuries—Fitz's arm, the mayor's left foot, and Mrs. Bellingham's nose (broken when she fell pursuing her wayward cat)—would all heal. The happy day had brought them all together, so none endured his trial alone, and no need went unmet.

Worn out from her exertions and longing to return home, Bonny Bee stood at the edge of the crowd and yawned. Roland tapped on her shoulder.

"Em and Adie have left to start supper," he said. "Ruggles went with them. Wallace, Ned, and I are taking the cabinet back. Can Wilf stay with you? He wants to watch the fire."

"Of course. I'm waiting for Fitz to return. We'll all walk home together."

Roland surprised her by kissing her on the cheek. "Thank you...for everything."

Wilf slipped his hand into hers. "I had so much fun today," he said. "Did I do well?"

"We could not have managed without you," she said. "You played your part perfectly."

"Where's Elizabeth?"

"She's gone back to the Inn...had a chore to tend to."

A strong arm slipped around her shoulder. "Hello, Mrs. Rackham. What a lovely dress."

Fitz had returned.

"Did all go as planned?" she asked.

He nodded. "Sebastian and Lars were waiting when we arrived. Sebastian was so impressed with Olivia's pirate garb he offered his eye patch to complete her outfit."

"He removed his eye patch? Right in front of her?"

Fitz laughed. "Held it on his open palm like a rare jewel."

Bonny Bee shook her head. "Poor Olivia. Was she mortified?"

"Not in the least," Fitz said. "She thanked him for the offer, but politely declined."

Wilf, fear in his eyes, stared up at Fitz. "What about Captain Drake?"

Fitz bent down and peered in Wilf's face. "Still under lock and key. No need to worry."

"And Greybeard?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Lars said the *Black Saber* had set sail by the time he and Sebastian returned to the *Orion*. There's been no sign of them."

"You watched Lars and Sebastian row Olivia to the ship? You saw them help her aboard?"

He drew his spyglass from his inside pocket. "I remembered to take this with me. I assure you she is safely on board. Your work is done."

"One more question," she said. "You didn't mention I opened Ivan's trunk, did you?"

Fitz offered his arm. "Not a word. So far as he knows, his treasure remains unspoiled."

"Bonny Bee," Wilf said. "I'm tired. Can we go home now?"

With Wilf between them, Bonny Bee and Fitz stole quietly away from Lenford. Neither could manage to say, "You're welcome," one more time for the part they had played in rescuing their neighbors, hosting the fair, or providing "better entertainment than they have in Charleston." They strolled to the Inn, utterly content, certain no one anywhere was as happy as they at that moment.

"Look," Wilf said, pointing to an approaching traveler. "Who's that?"

"Wait here," Fitz said and walked ahead.

Wilf trembled. "You don't suppose it's a pirate, do you, Bonny Bee?" "I wouldn't think so," she said, though not at all sure.

The stranger leaned on Fitz's good arm as they turned back toward Lenford.

Fitz came into view. "I'll meet you two at the Inn. Mr. Thrashwick isn't feeling well. I'm taking him home."

Zebedee, struggling to breathe, still managed to glare at Bonny Bee as he passed.

"I'll be at your Inn tomorrow," he said, "and every day after, till I get back what's mine."

"He *sounds* like a pirate," Wilf said.

Before they had left for the fair that morning, Adelaide had put aside the best of the food for the Inn residents. As famished as they all were, they waited till Bonny Bee arrived at home before partaking of the feast. Once again, Adelaide instructed the diners to serve their plates and congregate in the parlor.

"Tomorrow," she said, "we'll start eating like civilized people again—at the table."

Once they settled down with their plates and cups, commotion erupted. Each person wanted to tell his or her version of the day's events, which resulted in all the others either asking questions, expressing disbelief, or interrupting to add a detail only he or she knew. Finally, Fitz, in his first official superintending act since he began to heal, stood and asked for their attention.

"We'll begin with Lucien, since he has already nodded off twice. After he has told his story, Emmaline will go second, and on around the circle till we end with Bonny Bee."

"Tell us about the widow first," Adelaide called from the kitchen door.

Avoiding the subject of the widow's affection, Lucien highlighted Empress' snatching Zebedee's hat. Then Emmaline, teary-eyed, described the schoolmaster's face when she handed him the proceeds from the sale of the baked goods. Wallace and Roland lauded the horses for their tireless service to the children. Ruggles, still wearing his red sash, expressed surprise he had not been bothered by stage fright, but, on the contrary, had found his first theatrical experience exhilarating. Ned praised Wilf's performance as a starving orphan. Elizabeth, last in the circle, asked to be excused from relating the story of her flight from Zebedee.

"You found the experience more frightening than you imagined?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Yes, but not because I feared for myself. I was afraid for Mr. Thrashwick. When I heard him gasping for breath, I pretended to be caught in the brambles, so he could stop and rest."

"How admirable," Bonny Bee said.

Elizabeth ducked her head. "I regretted spoiling the plan, but it seemed wrong to make him suffer. When he discovered I wasn't Olivia, I offered to walk home with him. He refused."

"You needn't worry, Elizabeth," Fitz said. "We found him on the road. I took him home."

"And his spirit is far from broken," Bonny Bee said. "He vowed to be here tomorrow."

Elizabeth sighed. "I'm relieved. Not that he'll be back, you understand, but that I'm not responsible for his falling ill."

Ned slipped his arm around her. "Like I said, you're a remarkable woman."

"More tea, anyone?" Adelaide entered with another tray.

"Sit down, Adie," Lucien said. "Bonny Bee is about to tell us her secret." "Secret?" Bonny Bee asked.

"How you knew what was engraved in Zebedee's watch," Emmaline said. Adelaide set down the tray. "Olivia told her. Right, Bonny Bee?"

"No," Bonny Bee said. "Olivia did not tell me. Carlotta showed me the inscription before she gave the watch to Zebedee."

"You knew Carlotta?" Emmaline asked. "How?"

"I was fourteen, Carlotta a year older. Her stepmother was as eager to be rid of her as my Aunt Maude was to be rid of me, so I was hired to be Carlotta's traveling companion."

"Where did you go?" Elizabeth said. "Someplace exciting?"

"Not in the least," Bonny Bee said. "Carlotta had been betrothed to Zebedee Thrashwick. Once he made his fortune in the colonies, she was to follow later and marry him."

"How romantic," Emmaline said.

"Romantic?" Lucien said. "For a nice lady to end up married to a man like him?"

"He wasn't the greedy man we know when he courted her," Bonny Bee said. "She loved him devotedly."

"So did they marry?" Elizabeth asked.

"No," Bonny Bee said. "It took precious little time for Carlotta to realize money had displaced her in Zebedee's heart."

"What happened to her?" Adelaide asked.

"She left me a note saying she could not endure a life with Zebedee. She refused to return to her stepmother and could no longer be responsible for my employment. She wished me well."

"Did you try to find her?"

"No," Bonny Bee said. "Soon after I met Calico Jack. You know the rest of that story."

"So the pocket watch was—?" Emmaline asked.

"A wedding present," Bonny Bee said.

"And you're not a soothsayer, after all," Ruggles said.

"No," Bonny Bee said. "If you intend to become a professional magician, Ruggles, you'll have to come up with another act. I'm retiring."

"I think we should all retire," Adelaide said. "It's time we all got a good night's sleep."

They wished each other good night and went to their rooms.

Bonny Bee and Fitz lingered in the parlor.

"I've so enjoyed this dress," she said. "Perhaps I'll wear it for the anniversary next year."

"Now that you've made your debut as Madame Illustria," he said, "your public may clamor for more than poetry readings from you."

She shook her head. "My secret-revealing days are over."

"A relief to me," he said. "I'd hate to find myself at a disadvantage."

"I've been seeing into your heart for a long time, Mr. Fitzcannon," Bonny Bee said. "And it's time you stopped thinking of me as—"

"As one whom all desire and none deserve..."

"Lovely words," she said. "But hardly true of me."

"Sir Walter Raleigh speaking of his queen," he said. "I understand his feelings all too well. He was an old sea dog like me, but"—he held up his scarred hands—"without my defects."

"Or your pure heart," she said, slipping her arm through his.

"I'll see you to your room," he said, "and then lock up for the night." They started toward her door. "You really knocked Drake into the fireplace when he insulted me?" he asked.

"That was not my intention," she said. "I only meant to silence him." Growling, Burbage bounded past them and pawed at the front door.

"Did you hear someone knock?" Fitz asked.

They stood still.

"A gentle tapping," Bonny Bee said. "Our visitor is either timid or afraid."

She stood beside Fitz as he opened the door.

A young woman, holding a sleeping child, stood on the porch. "Is this the home of Mrs. Bonny Bee Rackham?" she asked. Bonny Bee extended her hand. "I'm Mrs. Rackham. Please come in." Fitz closed the door. "May I take the child and put her to bed?"

"Thank you," the young woman said. "I've been carrying her such a long

time."

"Sit on the sofa," Bonny Bee said. "I'll make some tea."

Bonny Bee returned to the parlor with tea. She offered bread and cheese to their visitor and asked her name.

"Mary Hawkins," she said. "Thank you for your kindness."

After Fitz placed the child on Bonny Bee's bed, he joined the ladies on the

sofa.

"Your little girl is warm and tucked up," he said.

"She's not my child," Mary said. "I am...I was her mother's maid."

"And where is her mother?" he asked.

Mary reached for a second piece of bread. "Buried...last week."

"And how old is the child?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Almost two."

"And her name?"

"Jenny."

"Are you on your way to leave her with a relative?" Fitz asked.

"No," Mary said. "She has no relative but her grandfather, and he doesn't want her."

"You kidnapped her?" Fitz asked.

"Call it that, if you will," Mary said, tears springing to her eyes. "But I'll not stand by and watch him put our Jenny in an orphanage, just because her father was—"

She gave way to weeping, her frail shoulders trembling as she gasped for breath.

Bonny Bee put her arm around her. "There now. Calm yourself. You must have known we would help or you wouldn't have come to us. Here. Drink your tea."

Mary sipped her tea. "I'm sorry. I've been afraid for so long, ever since I heard the master say when Miss Anne was dead, he'd rid himself of all memories of her past."

"Anne?"

Mary nodded. "Anne...Bonny."

When the color drained from Bonny Bee's face, Fitz intervened.

"Your mistress was Anne Bonny-the pirate?"

"Yes, sir," Mary said. "I came to work for the family while she was still away on her...travels...and when her father brought her back from Jamaica, I became her maid."

Fitz took Bonny Bee's hand. She was trembling.

"So it's true," he said. "Her father ransomed her and brought her home."

Mary nodded. "Quite true. She was very ill from her...difficult life, and childbirth only weakened her further, but she loved our Jenny, and made me promise to look after her."

"Anne's father...never forgave her?" Bonny Bee asked.

"It wasn't that"—Mary bowed her head—"as much as Jenny being the offspring of a pirate."

Bonny Bee could only manage a whisper. "Jenny is the daughter of—"

"Your husband, Calico Jack Rackham. Miss Anne had her flaws—that is sure. But she truly loved Mister Jack and considered herself married to him. She loved no other."

"And you've come to me, because—?" Bonny Bee asked.

"Because everyone says you don't turn people away."

Mary slept with Jenny in Bonny Bee's room that night and no matter, for Bonny Bee and Fitz talked till almost dawn. The next morning Fitz and Ruggles reported Mary's presence to Constable Brinsmead. The following day they journeyed to the Bonny estate on the outskirts of Charleston, where they compelled Mr. Cormac, Anne Bonny's father, to sign a document relinquishing his rights to his granddaughter, which he, much to Ruggles' consternation, was only too happy to do. Fitz added that Mary Hawkins had expressed a desire to remain at the Inn with Jenny and would not be returning to Mr. Cormac's employ.

Jenny Rackham became the darling of the Inn. Wilf considered himself her older brother and treated her with the most tender affection. When Elizabeth's kind and patient tutoring raised him to the academic level of other children his age, Wilf, nonetheless, insisted he need not leave Jenny to attend school. In this matter only did Bonny Bee refuse his entreaties. Emmaline asked

for the privilege of decorating a room for Jenny and changed the Blue Room to pink. Adelaide asked Fitz to build a wooden stool for Jenny to stand on, so she could "help" in the kitchen.

Roland, after trying his hand at every manly occupation in the Inn, settled on blacksmithing as a trade and was proud to call himself "apprenticed" to Lucien, who was equally proud to think of himself as an official "master" of his craft. Wallace, having never forgotten the joy the horses had brought to the children, asked for (and received) a loan from Bonny Bee, so he could purchase a black stallion he christened as Rex. Opal became the proud mother of a filly named Ruby.

Within a fortnight, Ned asked Bonny Bee's permission to marry Elizabeth. Though they moved to a cottage nearer to Lenford, so Elizabeth could assume the permanent position of schoolmistress, Ned continued to tend the garden at the Inn. When Josiah and Olivia Pratt came from Boston to visit, they spent half their time at the Inn and half at the Chilcott home.

When Mary Hawkins, dispatched by Bonny Bee to Thrashwick's Mercantile to purchase a length of cloth for a dress for Jenny, saw a sign in the window—"Seamstress Wanted"—she applied within. Once Mary demonstrated her prowess with a needle, Zebedee hired her. A wiser man since Olivia's departure, he treated Mary with a kindness and respect he never afforded his niece. She, accustomed to working for the bitter Mr. Cormac, found Zebedee amenable and father-like by comparison. Soon they began sharing a midday meal and afternoon tea. Once Mary brought Jenny for a visit, Zebedee's transformation was complete.

The crew of the *Orion* sent word that Quentin Drake had been banished to Devil's Island. Where Nigel Greybeard and the *Black Saber* were, no one knew for certain.

Ruggles' exceptional courage as a member of the search party followed by his brilliant performance as a magician proved to be the final steps toward considering himself something other than a butler. He never buttled or referred to himself in the plural again.

Fitz recovered from his injuries. Though many weeks passed before he thought himself worthy to kiss Bonny Bee, he never again called her 'ma'am.'

Bonny Bee—who needs to be told that she was happy? She was surrounded by happiness of her own making and lived only to increase it.

The True Story of Calico Jack Rackham and Anne Bonny

John "Calico Jack" Rackham (1682-1720), like so many other pirates of his day, began his sailing career as an honest man, serving as quartermaster on the *Neptune*, an English warship under the command of Captain Charles Vane. Rackham might never have become a pirate, had Captain Vane not refused to engage a French vessel in battle. The crew, disgusted by Vane's cowardice, mutinied, and appointed Rackham as their captain. He immediately engaged the French in battle and soundly defeated them. Inspired by his success and dazzled by the riches aboard the conquered ship, Rackham and his crew turned to piracy.

In 1718 the British government appointed Woodes Rogers governor of New Providence (Nassau) in the Bahamas. He attempted to end piracy by offering the King's Pardon, conditional upon pirates' agreeing to give up piracy. Rackham sailed to New Providence and applied. While waiting to see if his pardon would be granted, he fell in love with Anne Bonny, a married woman. When their affair became public, the governor of New Providence threatened Anne with flogging. Jack assembled a crew, Anne donned pirate garb, called herself Adam Bonny, and they set sail. Anne became a respected and valuable member of the crew.

Anne and Calico Jack enjoyed a few adventurous years. By October, 1720, however, their escapades ended when Captain Jonathan Barnet of the Revenge defeated them in battle. Anne Bonny was one of only three pirates who fought bravely. The rest, inebriated, were incapable of resisting. Rackham and his crew were imprisoned at Port Royal, tried at St. Jago de la Vega on November 16, and found guilty. Rackham asked to see Anne before he was executed. The records agree on her parting words to him: "If you'd fought like a man, you need not have hanged like a dog."

Also tried and found guilty of piracy, Anne Bonny pleaded for and received a stay of execution because she was pregnant. In fact, she received several stays of execution and then mysteriously disappeared from public records. It is believed her father, by then a prosperous Carolina planter, ransomed her and brought her home, where she assumed a new identity. It should also be noted Anne was not the only female pirate on Rackham's crew. Her friend, Mary Read, also pleaded for a stay of execution because of pregnancy, and escaped hanging by dying of a fever while in prison. Calico Jack Rackham is also remembered for his flag: a skull with two crossed swords below.

So you see, it's entirely possible Calico Jack Rackham bought his first wife a home, faked his death, met Anne in New Providence, wrought havoc, was arrested and executed, after which Anne was ransomed by her rich father, returned to the Carolinas, gave birth, died from her broken health, and then her maid absconded with the child to the Peregrine Inn to live with Bonny Bee Rackham and her friends.

Happily ever after, of course.

"My Mother" by Sebastian Sharkchum

When she was just a bonny lass With hair of golden curls, My mother was the fairest one Of all the village girls.

She married at a tender age And then there came to be A hale and hearty baby boy Who happened to be me.

My father was a pirate brave Known as Sharkchum he. When I was still a tiny boy, He went away to sea.

My mother dear, she took in clothes— The dirty ones for washing. At night I'd hear her from my bed— The soapy water sloshing.

She tried her best to keep a roof Above our hearth and home, But soon she failed to earn enough And sent me out to roam.

She took my father's musket out And taught me how to fire it. Then said, "My lad, now go your way. You must become a pirate."

"I'll keep a fire burning bright And always light a candle. The pirate's life is sure to be No more than you can handle."

And with those words, she said farewell And kissed me on the cheek And sent me forth to sail away And my own way to seek.

From then till now, against her cheek My lips have not been pressed. But still she reigns within my heart— Above all loves the best.