



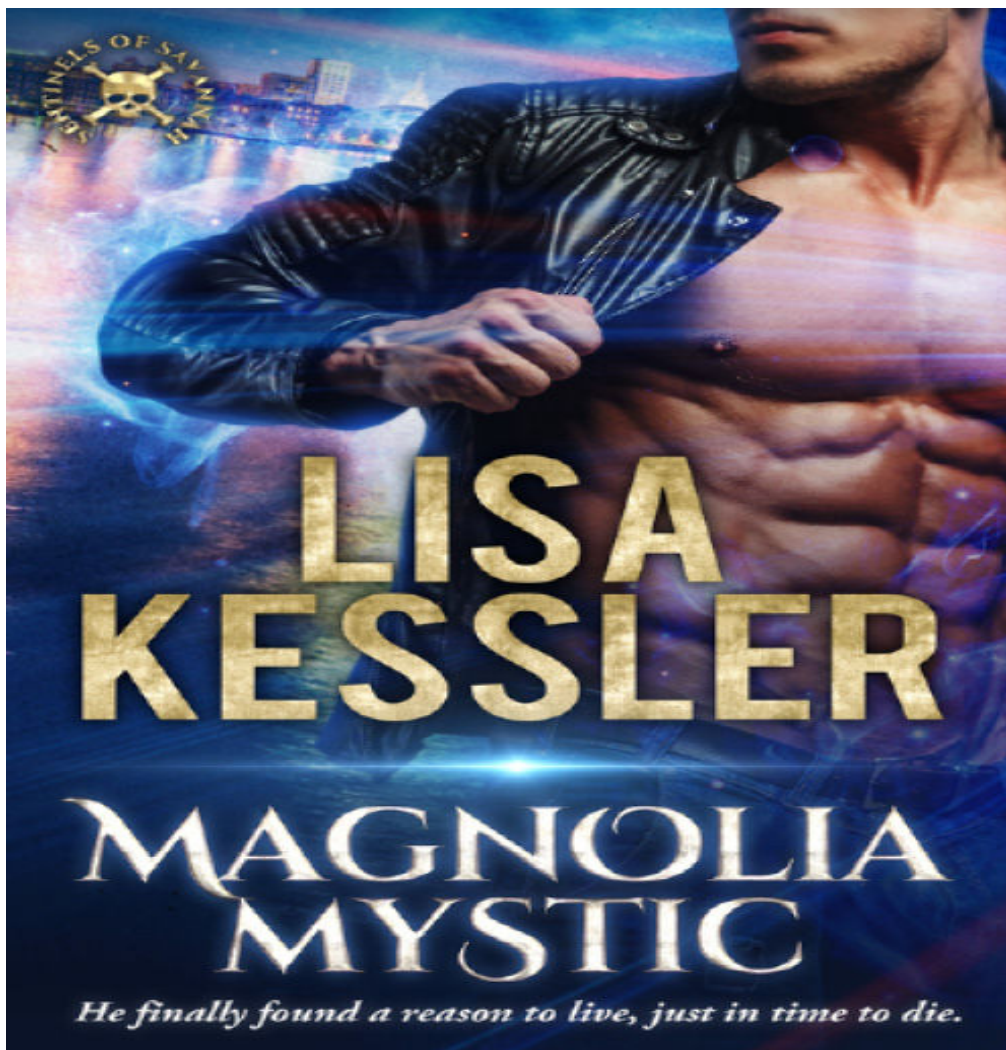
Two words: Immortal Pirates. It doesn't get better than that!
Sexy, spicy, and so much fun—I can't wait for the next one!

— Alyssa Day, *New York Times* bestselling author

LISA
KESSLER

MAGNOLIA
MYSTIC

He finally found a reason to live, just in time to die.



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MAGNOLIA MYSTIC



**LISA
KESSLER**

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Entangled Publishing, LLC
2614 South Timberline Road
Suite 105, PMB 159
Fort Collins, CO 80525

rights@entangledpublishing.com

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This one is for my grandparents. My grandmother Natalie Fulton Webb grew up near Savannah, and my grandfather Bob Webb, gave me the idea for One-Eyed Bob during a trip to the ER. The rest is history...

I love you guys so much!

Chapter One

“Pirates, or privateers as they sometimes called themselves, were actually very democratic. Everyone got a cut and the entire crew elected their Captain and Quartermaster...”

The tour guide’s voice faded as Skye Olson made her way toward the stern of the ship. She didn’t come onboard to listen to pirate stories. Growing up in Savannah, she’d heard all of them before, even the faint whispers of the pirate spirits that still walked among them. She was grateful every day that she couldn’t hear the dead.

She’d have to move away.

But the past few weeks had her thinking along those lines anyway. Catching glimpses of the future was her trade, she’d grown up with the sight, but somehow she’d been blindsided when she discovered Curt had been living a double life.

The deceit, and her lack of foresight, had shaken her to the core. How could she offer guidance to her clients if she couldn’t even protect herself?

She stared down at the Savannah River. The water was always changing, just like the boats that had come and gone from this port for centuries. Was it telling her to cast her sails to the wind and get a new start?

Last year she never would have imagined pondering that question. Indecisiveness used to be foreign to her.

She twisted the ring on her finger until it slid free. The engagement—the entire relationship—had been built on lies. Expensive, costly lies. She gripped the ring tight in her fist. She’d left her shop this morning determined to toss it into the moving water.

But now...

“Tour’s up on the bow.” A tall shadow fell over her.

She didn’t take her eyes off the river. “I know, thanks.”

His boots thumped on the deck behind her. “I wasn’t givin’

directions.”

She sighed and glanced over her shoulder. Her gaze traveled up his body, way up, to focus on his dark eyes. “I just need a minute.”

He shook his head, crossing his tan, muscled arms over his broad chest. “Plenty of minutes are available with the tour. This area’s off-limits.”

He was just doing his job, but her tolerance for men was at an all-time low at the moment. “I’m not going to touch anything.”

His eyes moved to her feet and back to her face. “Seems you already are.”

Heat burned in her cheeks. “What is it with you men thinking you can just make a law and judge us when we question it?” She jammed the ring into the pocket of her jeans. “I’m sick of your shit. So if you want me to move, you’ll have to do it yourself.”

He raised a brow. “You finished?”

His calm only fueled the tempest inside her. “No, actually, I don’t think I am.” She matched his posture: chest out, arms crossed. “My family’s been in Savannah since it was settled. I know the pirate stories, and I didn’t buy a ticket for a tour and ‘swearing in’ ceremony under the pirate mast. Forgive me for wanting a few minutes peace with the Savannah River.”

He pointed to a sign.

Area is for Crew Only

A spark lit in his eyes. “If you’d been sworn in, you might be able to sway me to let you stay.”

She blew out a frustrated breath, her hands falling to her sides. “Look, I just wanted to toss my engagement ring into the river without getting arrested for littering. I figured no one would see me from up here.”

He relaxed his stance a little. “Must be an idiot to allow a fiery lass like you to get away.”

“Please don’t get flirty.” She rolled her eyes. “I’m not in the mood.”

A hint of a smile curved his lips. “Wasn’t flirtin’, just stating a fact.” He glanced over his shoulder. “Speaking of facts, you should pawn the ring. Feedin’ gold to the fish won’t cure heartache.”

“Sage wisdom from a guy working on a pirate ship for tourists.”

His jaw tightened, but he didn’t take the bait. “Time to rejoin your tour.”

She chuckled. “Whatever they’re paying you for security, it’s not enough.”

“It’s my boat. My rules.”

She lifted her hand to shield her eyes from the sun as she peered up at him. “You own the Sea Dog?”

“Aye.”

Skye took a step back toward the railing. He couldn’t be much over thirty, if that. And the massive Spanish galleon ship had to be worth...more than she’d ever seen. “Wow. You come from old money?”

He tightened the knot on the bandana covering his head. “Something like that.” He tipped his head at the main deck. “Tour’s almost over.”

“Fine.” She narrowed her eyes. “Thanks for nothing.”

She stomped across the deck to the tour group, taking satisfaction in the clunking of her boots on the hard wood. Men and their freaking toys. The masts snapped above her head, pristine without a single rip or tear.

Okay, so this was an incredibly well-loved, amazing, historic toy, but still.

She crossed the gangplank after the tour, glancing over her shoulder just in time to catch the hottie pirate climbing up the riggings toward the lookout at the top of the mast. Sweat had his period appropriate shirt glued to him like a second skin.

God bless him, his back and shoulders were so chiseled, Michelangelo would be jealous.

Forcing herself to stop staring, she dropped the ring into the river from the plank. Not nearly as dramatic as she'd envisioned, but the deed was done. She was moving on.

...

Cold sweat sent a shiver down Colton's back as he lifted the spyglass. She had violet eyes and a fiery heart, just like the sorceress had predicted. Her reading failed to mention it would take two hundred years for the woman to cross his path.

He watched her move down River Street until she vanished into the crowd. He put the spyglass down and leaned his forearms on the railing. He'd given up waiting for her within a few years, and decades later forgot the witch's prophecy altogether.

But the second the trespasser with auburn hair and violet eyes looked up at him, the old woman's voice echoed through his mind, like she'd been lurking in the shadows as the centuries passed, just waiting.

A woman with violet eyes will signal the beginning and ending of your life.

He wasn't even sure what it meant. He couldn't die, and while he technically still existed, he wasn't sure it was really living. The only time he experienced the breathless rush of being alive was out on the open sea with the waves pitching the ship. Those moments when Davy Jones breathed on the back of his neck were brief reminders of what his life had been.

Back when dying was still an option.

Colton scrambled over the wall of the crow's nest, ignoring the tourists on the shore cheering and taking videos with their phones. No one climbed riggings anymore. It was a lost art once engines replaced the winds of the gods.

Milestones like that widened the separation between him and the people of this era. A buzz from his pocket surprised

him. His grip slipped on the rope. He slid for a couple feet, the ropes burning his hands as he caught himself.

“Fuck,” he growled.

Damned cell phones. He’d resisted them for years, but now that he’d opened his ship to tour groups, it was a necessary evil.

He hooked one arm on the rigging and jerked the cell out of his pocket. “Yeah?”

“Colton? It’s John.”

He frowned. John hated cell phones even more than Colton did. “Something wrong?”

“Eli was driving to Atlanta to meet the Captain about our counter proposal to his hotel plans for Savannah.”

“Yeah, I remember.” Colton glanced over his shoulder at the gawking tourists and growled. “Can this wait? I’m a few feet above the deck at the moment.”

“He was in a car accident.”

Colton groaned. “So we’ll get him a new car.”

“Ye don’t understand.” His true lineage leaked into his voice. “His injuries aren’t healing, Quartermaster.”

Colton frowned, glancing at the raw skin on his palm. “What do you mean, not healing?”

“He was airlifted to the hospital. I’ll meet you there.”

Colton stuffed the phone into his pocket and monkeyed down the last few feet of the rigging and dropped to the deck. His head was spinning. He stared at his unhealed hands.

Could this damned curse finally be coming to an end?

After checking the anchor line and locking down the helm, he crossed to the mainland. He needed to talk to the rest of the crew. Now.

The drive was a blur. Colton jogged from the parking lot into the hospital. At the information desk, he struggled to remember Eli’s last name.

They changed them every fifty years or so.

“I’m looking for...Eli McShane?”

The woman behind the desk checked her computer and peered up at him with an obviously well-practiced gentle smile. “He’s on the fifth floor. Room 523.”

“Appreciate it, lass.” He was halfway to the elevator before he noticed his slip. For the most part, no one would ever guess he wasn’t born in 1985 like it stated on his driver’s license, but when he was stressed or angry, his years aboard a pirate ship often colored his speech.

The lights flashed overhead, counting the floors. He glanced down at his hands. They were still raw and they ached.

For years, he’d prayed for this day, but now that it might be staring him in the face...the woman with the violet eyes appeared in his mind. He didn’t even know her name.

The doors parted, offering him a respite from his own thoughts. He followed the sign and rounded the corner to 523.

“I’ll be damned,” he whispered.

Eli was unconscious with wires and tubes running everywhere. Pins poked through the cast on his right leg, and his face was covered in cuts.

John looked up at him. “Worse than cannon fire.”

Colton pulled his eyes off the patient to the others. John rested his elbows on his knees, concern lining his dark eyes. He’d been the noblest boatswain Colton had ever sailed with. He was also the one who had sent Eli to Atlanta.

“Wasn’t your fault, John.” Colton shook his head. “Eli always drove those fast cars like a man who couldn’t die.”

“Might be changin’.” Over by the window, One-Eyed Bob held up a bandaged hand. “Cut my finger slicing tomatoes. Nearly bled out waitin’ for it to heal.”

Bob was the best damned cook on the seven seas, and a fine pirate. Now he owned his own restaurant.

Colton nodded. “Something’s not right, that’s for damned

sure.” He glanced at Eli and then back to the others. “If Eli never delivered our proposal, you figure the Captain is already in Savannah?”

John straightened up in his chair with a shrug. “Probably. He’s a tenacious dog when he sets his eye on a treasure he’s got no right to.”

“Fuck.” Colton shook his head. “He’s only got one property left to claim.” He ran a hand down his face. “Okay. I’ll see if I can find him. What’s the word on Eli’s injuries?”

John looked over at Bob, then back to Colton. “They figure he sat in that car overnight with head trauma. Can’t tell us if he’ll be the same Eli if he wakes.”

Colton blew out a breath and approached Eli’s bedside. He covered the younger man’s hand with his. “You hear me, gunner? It’s your Quartermaster. I expect you to get your ass back to the land of the living so you can help us figure this out. If the curse is ending, it’s not starting with you. Understand?”

He squeezed Eli’s hand and went back to the door. “Call me if he opens his eyes.”

“Aye.” John nodded, his gaze locked on their fallen friend.

One-Eyed Bob followed him out to the hallway, keeping his voice hushed. “Maybe we need another hit of the cup. We could bring it to young Eli.”

Colton froze, his eyes narrowing while his voice was barely a whisper. “You would seriously take another drink from that cursed cup?” He pointed toward Eli’s room. “That boy in that bed looks to be three and twenty, but you and I both know he hasn’t been *young* in centuries.” Colton shook his head. “Until we know his wishes, you keep that grail hidden.”

“Aye.” His good eye was still bright green, his body perpetually elderly. “Given the choice, I’d like another swallow.”

Colton’s eyes widened. “Haven’t you grown weary of this world? Every day it leaves us further behind.”

One-Eyed Bob grinned, exposing a new bridge of straight

white teeth. “Aye, but cooking never stagnates. New food, spices, and machines. Why would I allow myself to fade away?”

Colton ran a sore hand down his face. “Don’t you ever get lonely, old man?”

He swiped the air. “I got plenty of ladies, Quartermaster.”

“Flesh is always plentiful, but what happens when a warm body in your bed is no longer enough?” This conversation was getting him nowhere. “Watch Eli. I’ll handle the Captain.”

Chapter Two

Skye cut the deck of tarot cards and slid one out from the middle. Again, the two of cups. “Are you shitting me? Seriously?”

She pushed her chair back and stood up, resisting the urge to wipe all the cards off the table. Picking up all seventy-eight wasn't nearly as cathartic as throwing them on the floor.

She'd been drawing the same card for months. It wasn't always the first, but it turned up in every spread, every time. Two become one. In her deck, the card pictured a man and woman exchanging cups under a wedding canopy.

That damned card had blinded her to Curt's darker side. She'd been so sure he was the “one” that she'd secretly been thumbing through bridal magazines and naming their unborn children. Meanwhile, the thief was skimming from her books and merchandise.

A knock came on the door, and she glanced at the clock. Wishful thinking. She still had another hour until she turned off the neon palm in her window.

She tidied up her cards and went to the door. “Can I help you?”

A tall, slender man, *maybe* in his forties, with bright copper hair and a well-manicured beard to match stood outside. No sign of the grey she started coloring on her twenty-fifth birthday.

So unfair.

His gaze wandered from the tips of her worn buccaneer boots, to her custom tailored frock coat, and all the way up to the bandana covering her head.

A smile curved on his lips. “The Magnolia Mystic is a pirate. How charming.”

She bit her cheek to keep from telling him off. Maybe the run-in with the pirate from the Sea Dog still had her on edge. “Pirates and ghosts are all the rage in Historic Savannah, and I

don't look nearly as good in sheets.”

A red brow shot up, and a twinkle lit his bright blue eyes. “I highly doubt that...may I call you Skye?”

A chill ran down her back. “How did you know my name?”

He held up his phone. “Yelp, I'm afraid. You've garnered many glowing reviews. Apparently you're not a swindler like so many others.”

Now he was starting to piss her off. Yes, there were some psychics hoping to con people out of a few bucks, but thieves were everywhere. And now she was back to thinking about Curt. *Damn it.*

She gestured to the worn oak table in the middle of the room. “I close soon, so if you'd like a reading, we'd better get started.”

He took the chair across from her, but all his attention was focused on the table. He ran his hand along the holes in the center like he was caressing fine silk.

His eyes locked on hers. “This isn't a table, it's a windlass from a ship.” His eyes wandered over the wood. “We used them to raise the anchor.”

“You sail?”

He jolted a little and started to nod. “Yes. Years ago.” He shook his head. “Where did you find this?”

She shuffled her cards. “It's been in my family for generations. It came off a shipwreck just outside the mouth of the Savannah River.”

For a moment, his expression went distant. She cleared her throat and cut the tarot deck. “What kind of guidance are you looking for?”

He raised his gaze, his well-worn cloak of self-confidence sliding back into place. “I'm actually not in search of any.” He plucked a business card out of his coat pocket and placed it in front of her. “I came to discuss the purchase of your property.”

“What?” She studied the card, then stared at the man across

the table. “Wow. Sorry you came all the way down from Atlanta, Ian, but my shop isn’t for sale.”

His lips curved into a self-assured smirk. “Everyone has a price. I’d like to know yours.”

She shook her head. “I’m not interested.”

He leaned in. “You haven’t even heard my offer yet.” He glanced around the shop and back to her. “I could give you enough money to retire on, or you could find a new location if you’d like.”

She drew her cards in closer to her. “I’m happy with this location. Thanks.”

He shook his head. “Let me buy you dinner. We can discuss this further.”

“It wouldn’t matter how much you’re offering. The Magnolia Mystic isn’t for sale.”

He removed his wallet and placed a hundred dollar bill on the table. “Perhaps I’ll have that reading now.”

Skye shuffled her deck again. His business card taunted her. She’d heard of Ian Flynn. Who hadn’t? He was one of the largest real estate developers in the state.

And he wanted her shop.

Why?

She turned up the cards, her own thoughts fading away as she tapped into her gift. When she finished his reading, she lifted her eyes. The intensity in his gaze sent a chill down her spine.

She cleared her throat, scanning the spread before her. All the power cards mocked her, warning her this was a man who was accustomed to getting his way. But a few cards suggested an emptiness haunting him.

A barren pit that money couldn’t fill.

Interesting.

He pushed his chair back. “That was more enlightening than

I expected. Maybe we could discuss my offer over dinner.”

She retrieved the cards, shaking her head. “There’s nothing to discuss.” She met his eyes. “This probably won’t make sense to you, but this shop has been passed down in my family since the early 1800s. I may never get rich, but I’ll also never sell.”

He stood. “Never can be a very long time, Ms. Olson.” He went to the door and turned back. “I have acquired all the properties on this block for my new hotel, and I’m prepared to take whatever measures necessary to see the project moves forward.”

She raised a brow. “Are you threatening me?”

“Not a threat; I’m just laying my cards on the table.” He pointed to her table. “You can give readings anywhere. Imagine the freedom you could have with a healthy bank balance. Keeping an ancestral property is noble, but it’s also a prison. I’m offering you a chance to spread your wings.” He opened the door. “I’ll be in touch.”

...

Finding the Captain wasn’t tough. He still frequented the Pirate’s House restaurant. Colton didn’t find the place as nostalgic.

“Can I help you?” The hostess grinned up at him.

“I’m looking for someone. Red-headed gentleman from Atlanta?”

“Oh, Mr. Flynn is here. Is he expecting you?”

“Yes,” he lied without hesitation and followed her to a table by the window.

His captain looked up at him, the flash of anger in his eyes quickly faded. “Mr. Hayes. What a surprise.”

The hostess returned to her station as Colton took a seat across from Flynn. “We need to talk.”

The Captain took a swallow of his rum and Coke. “Do we

now?" He replaced his glass on the table. "If this has to do with my project here, it's not up for discussion."

Colton lowered his voice. "Your hotel is the least of our worries at the moment." He opened his hand, exposing the rope burn.

The Captain glanced at Colton's wound and back to his eyes. "I'm not a nurse."

"That's the thing," Colton pulled his hand back off the table. "I shouldn't need one."

Ian frowned. "What are you saying?"

"Eli was in a car accident. He's still in the hospital. And One-Eyed Bob cut his finger. It's not healing either." He glanced around the restaurant. "I'm calling the crew together. That includes you."

Ian stiffened. "You think the spell is broken."

"I don't know what to think. It's not like the cup came with instructions."

Flynn knocked back the rest of his drink. "What do you suggest?"

"Friday night, we'll meet at Bob's restaurant at midnight." He placed an envelope on the table. "Eli was on his way to deliver our counteroffer. You can build your hotel anywhere but here."

Captain Flynn tapped his finger on the envelope without picking it up. "*You* don't give *me* orders, Quartermaster."

Colton leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a hiss. "Savannah is *our* territory. That was the bargain."

"We made that deal centuries ago. Plans change."

"We let you live." He ached to wipe the smirk off the Captain's face. "If you break our deal, your sentence stands."

"Your threats are empty." Ian chuckled. "We can't die."

"That may not be true anymore." Colton stood up. "Friday at midnight."

He left the restaurant, his hands in tight fists. The ache was foreign. Physical pain had been a stranger since he sipped from the cup they'd plundered from the Spanish galleon. Curse the blasted Captain. The man had no honor, only ambition. Immortality hadn't changed that. If anything, it enhanced it.

Colton made his way through the dimly lit streets of historic Savannah, as the fog wafted in around his ankles. The block that Flynn Enterprises had been buying up wasn't too far. According to John's research, there was only one hold out. One person standing between history and Captain Flynn's vision of the future.

Checking the address, he knocked on the door.

The door opened a crack. "We're closed."

He recognized those violet eyes. His throat went dry. "Oh. You again."

Her eyes narrowed as she chuckled. "You must have women throwing themselves at you with lines like that. What are you doing here?"

"I came to see if Flynn Enterprises has made an offer to buy your property." His gaze wandered against his better judgement. On his ship, she'd been wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Now her curves were covered by a quality replica of a pirate's frock coat, complete with deck boots, a bandana covering her hair, and a single hoop earring. "Didn't take you for a pirate earlier today."

"You seriously came over here to talk to a stranger about private financial information, and then you have the balls to comment on her work attire?" She raised a brow.

"We're hardly strangers." He struggled to hold back a smile and offered his hand. "I don't think I introduced myself earlier. I'm Colton. Colton Hayes."

She looked at his hand and finally opened the door. "Skye Olson. And apparently I'm a glutton for punishment."

He entered her shop. "Didn't come to punish anyone."

She took her chair. “Why would a guy who owns a pirate ship give a damn about Flynn Enterprises?”

The fire in her eyes mesmerized him. Passion. He shook his head. “I have a long history with Ian Flynn. He doesn’t care about anything but turning a profit. My friends and I try to keep Savannah safe from people like him.”

She opened her hands. “Sit.” He hesitated for a second and she pointed to the other chair. “Please.”

He took a seat and she quickly shuffled her cards and spread them out in front of him. “Pick one.”

“I don’t believe in this stuff.” Or at least he didn’t. Since she came aboard his ship, he wasn’t sure what to believe.

“I do.” She sighed. “Or I did.” She scooped them back into a pile. “I need to get something to eat.” She yanked the bandana free and laid it on the table beside her cards. “Want to come with me to Bob’s?”

He considered rejecting her offer. This was the woman with the violet eyes. He’d been warned about her two hundred years ago.

But he didn’t have any resistance left in him. “Sounds good.”

She glanced at her outfit and back over at him. “Maybe I’ll meet you over there. I should get changed first.”

“All right. I’ll go get a table.”

“Deal.” She smiled, and his dead heart warmed.

One smile would never be enough.

...

After Colton left, Skye was drawn back to her deck. She spread them out. “Who is Colton, really?”

She plucked one from the middle. The knight of cups. At least it wasn’t the two again. If her faith in her second sight wasn’t so shaken, she’d have told herself this was a noble man with a mission. A defender. And the cup in his hand didn’t

have to mean love. But it usually did.

Given her recent experience, he could be a wolf in sheep's clothing and she'd probably be blind to it until it was too late. *Enough.*

She climbed the back stairs to her apartment over the shop. One bedroom, nothing fancy, but it was hers free and clear. Good thing since Curt had stolen most of her nest egg. *Not going there.*

No, instead she was going to dinner with a hot guy who captained his own pirate ship. She must be nuts, and a very slow learner.

Skye hung up her pirate garb and put on a pair of jeans and a black sweater. After brushing her hair, she checked the mirror. This wasn't a date, but she put on a little eyeliner and some lip gloss anyway. She pulled the hundred dollar bill from Ian Flynn out of the pocket of her pirate coat and headed for the door.

Bob's was a quirky pirate themed restaurant with a constantly changing menu of seafood. Pirate's House was a favorite for tourists, but Bob's was the spot for locals. Like her shop, it had been passed down through the family, too. The restaurant had been around longer than she had.

When she opened the door, the proprietor glanced up from the open kitchen. "Sight for sore eyes, or eye as far as I'm concerned." He chuckled. "Sit anywhere you like, Skye."

Bob went by One-Eyed Bob to his friends. She'd never asked how he lost it, but his glass eye was so expertly crafted some people didn't notice it was false, at least not right away.

She scanned the room and found Colton at a table in the corner by the window. He got up as she approached and pulled out her chair.

"Thanks." She couldn't remember the last time a guy did that for her. Old school.

He came around to take his seat and almost smiled. "You know Bob."

“Yeah, he makes hush puppies that are to die for.”

Speak of the devil, Bob came over with a hand towel draped over his shoulder. “You two know each other?” He grinned like some kind of Yenta.

She nodded. “I was trespassing on his boat earlier today.”

Bob laughed, his one eye sparkling with mischief. “Colton gets territorial when it comes to his lady. That’d be the ship. She keeps him too busy to court real women.”

“Is that so?” She chuckled, glancing over at the big, handsome man across the table from her. “I didn’t realize you already knew each other.”

Colton nodded. “One-Eyed Bob and I go way back.”

“I gotta get back in the kitchen, but dinner is on the house for you two, and you’re getting the special.”

He retreated before she could reply.

Colton chuckled and the sound warmed her. “Any idea what the ‘special’ is?”

“Nope. I just hope it’s not fish.” Her nose wrinkled in disgust.

He raised a brow. “You come to a seafood restaurant and you don’t like fish?”

“I like crab and shrimp.” A sheepish smile curved her lips.

The server came over with waters and a plate of hush puppies. She took a bite and groaned. “Mmm, they’re still hot.”

Colton shifted in his chair. “I’m sorry if I was a jerk earlier. I guess I do get protective when it comes to the ship.”

She shrugged. “I don’t usually go around disobeying signs. I was a little distracted today.”

“Did you pawn the ring?”

She shook her head and met his eyes. “I dropped it in the river from your gangplank.”

“He must’ve been a bastard.”

“You could say that.” She picked up another hush puppy. “I’m still kicking myself that I didn’t see it. I’m supposed to be a psychic, you know?”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. If you could see your whole life laid out before you, there’d be no reason to live it, right?”

She hadn’t thought about it like that.

He reached for his water, exposing a tattoo on the inside of his forearm.

“Is that a compass?”

He lifted his arm like he’d forgotten it was there. “Aye. North Star so I don’t lose my way.”

Something sparked in her memory, but she couldn’t quite place why. Before she could say anything, Bob put a steaming plate between them filled with shrimp, crab, and oysters.

“Eat up, my friends.”

She smiled up at him. “Looks amazing.”

He winked his good eye. “I try.”

She transferred some of the feast to her plate and glanced at Colton. “So why do you care about Savannah so much?”

He lowered his fork, meeting her eyes. “I’ve sailed all over the world, but I always come back here. There are parts of this town that haven’t changed since the 1700s. It’s rare that a place retains its identity. I don’t like to see people like Flynn sacrificing the heart of Savannah for the almighty dollar.”

“Pretty noble.” The knight card she drew popped in her head. *He rushes in where others dare not tread.* She tried not to smile as she poked at her food. “Then I guess you’ll be happy to know I rejected his offer.”

Colton’s grin made his dark eyes sparkle, and a flock of butterflies went off in her belly. This guy could be trouble.

And she’d sworn off that.

Chapter Three

By the time they left Bob's, the streets were empty. Colton hadn't lost track of time like that in...more years than he cared to think about.

He stopped in front of her shop and took her hand. "Thank you for the unexpected evening." He brushed a kiss to her knuckles. "I hope it won't be our last."

Skye grinned, her cheeks still flushed with the Drunken Pirate drinks Bob kept pushing on them. "I thought you only had eyes for your ship."

God, she was beautiful. "Until I met you."

"So you *do* know how to be charming." She took a step closer, looking up at him. "Maybe you could give me a proper tour sometime."

Oh, he wanted to give her so much more than a tour. He brought his hand up to caress her cheek. "Anytime."

"How about now?"

His heart thumped in his chest, and alcohol warmed his gut. Given the choice between sitting alone worrying about Eli and whether or not the curse was ending, or spending more time with her...ah hell, that wasn't even a choice. "Why not?"

He took her hand again, enjoying the spark of fire that lit through his bloodstream and led her through the fog toward River Street.

Seeing the usually bustling area empty was equally beautiful and haunting. It brought back memories of earlier days. Centuries before cell phones and email. Back when his crew would drop anchor in the cloak of night and shanghai new crew members out of the pubs.

Lifetimes ago.

He walked her across the gangplank and hopped down onto the deck. Turning back, he reached up to clasp her waist.

Her eyes widened. "Wasn't there a step before?"

“Aye.” He nodded. “It’s for tourists.”

She still didn’t move. “So I’m not a tourist anymore?”

“No.” He shook his head and lowered her to the deck. Staring down into her eyes, his hands slid up her sides. “You’re my guest.”

She tipped her chin up toward him. He couldn’t resist the invitation, bending to kiss her lips. He hummed into her mouth as she opened, welcoming his exploration. She tasted like rum, root beer, and something wild he couldn’t place, but it didn’t matter. He wanted more.

Craved it.

Her hands moved up his chest, as he clenched a handful of her silky hair in his fist. He held her tighter. God, she was made for his arms. His heart pounded in his ears, reminding him...he was alive. Until he bumped into her on the stern of the ship, only the swells of the open sea gave him a rush of passion.

His erection throbbed between them, and regretfully, she broke the kiss, stepping out of his embrace.

She reached up to touch her lips. “What the hell was that?”

“A damned fine kiss.” His chest rose and fell as he struggled to catch his breath.

She nodded, dropping her hand. Studying his face, her voice softened. “I don’t know what Bob put in those Drunken Pirates tonight, but wow. I’m impressed.”

He chuckled. “That kiss had nothing to do with the drinks.”

Her grin lit up the night. “Pretty confident for a pirate.”

“Aye.” He allowed his true accent to color his voice. “Haven’t ye heard? We excel at confidence, lass.”

“Damn.” She came closer, laying her hand over his heart. “You do make a sexy pirate.”

Except it wasn’t an act. She’d never believe him anyway, and he wasn’t ready for the night to end, so he kept the truth where it belonged. Buried.

He took her hand. “Want to see what you missed at the stern?”

She laced her fingers with his and smiled. “Yeah.”

He walked her toward the rear of the ship, pointing out the different sails and the crow’s nest at the top of the mast. He waited for her eyes to glaze over, or her attention to drift, but she seemed to enjoy his pride in his ship. Seemed she could make his heart both pound and ache for something he’d never had in all his years.

“What are the rope nets for?”

“Ratlines.” He grinned. “We climb them up to the riggings to take in the topsails and for the lookouts to take their posts.” Her eyes sparkled with mischief, and he raised a brow. “You already knew that.”

She shrugged. “I might have watched you climbing up them yesterday after I got off the boat.”

“Then why ask?”

She glanced at the ratlines and back to me. “I thought you might show me how.”

The billows of fog could have knocked him over. “You want to climb the ropes?”

“Why not?” She straightened her back, lifting her chin. “Think I can’t?”

He put his hands up in mock surrender. “Just surprised, that’s all.”

...

Colton lifted her like she weighed nothing. “Got a grip yet?”

She grabbed the ropes with iron fists, and then slid her feet into the squares. It was like a vertical net, a wobbly rope ladder, and a childhood dream she’d never shared with another soul. Okay, there may have been some clues. Instead of tea parties in a treehouse, she’d named hers the Scallywag, and spent countless afternoons in search of buried treasure.

And in truth, she'd owned the pirate outfit *before* she ever decided it might be good for business.

"Hold tight," Colton called before climbing up beside her.

He moved so fast on the ratlines, they all jumped and swayed under his weight. She squeaked, losing her grip with one hand.

He caught her flailing arm by the wrist and put her hand back on the ropes. "Are you all right?"

She nodded, incapable of wiping the smile off her face. "Yeah. I wasn't ready for them to move so much."

"Imagine when we had six men running up to the rigging on an angry sea. Your grip was your life."

She scanned his face. "You say that like you've lived it."

He broke eye contact, staring up at the crow's nest lookout perch. "I have a crew. We still take the Sea Dog out a few times a year." He glanced her way. "You go first. I'll be right behind you in case you slip."

It took a couple of tries, but she finally found a slow, clumsy rhythm climbing up the ropes. The rungs or squares or whatever they were called were definitely tied for taller pirates than her. The stretching and pulling her body weight up was a struggle, better than any workout she'd ever done on an elliptical machine.

Up near the top, her foot missed the rope. Before she could falter, he caught her tennis shoe in his hand and put it back in place. She started to look back at him and stopped. "Holy shit, we're high."

His laughter calmed the fear swelling in her belly. "First rule of a pirate's mate, keep yer eye on yer destination, not yer doom."

She focused on the platform of the crow's nest. From the deck it seemed tiny, but now that she was closer, she realized the railing was also made for a taller pirate. "How do you get in that thing?"

"I'll climb past and get in. Then I'll pull you up."

Don't look down, don't look down. He crawled past her, the ropes groaning and bouncing. She clung so tight her knuckles ached. When Colton pushed off the ratlines to reach for the crow's nest, the ropes twisted and swayed, throwing her around like a rag doll. "Oh shit!"

He caught her wrist. "No worries, love. I've got you."

She clung to the ropes. "I should go back. This was a stupid idea."

"Wait until you see Savannah from up here." He clasped her other wrist, too. "Let go, Skye. I won't let you fall."

She looked up into his eyes. "Putting my life in your hands is more trust than I intended on a first date."

His lips twitched into a tentative smile. "Didn't know we were on a date."

Somehow he managed to coax laughter out of her even while she was barely clinging for dear life. "Seriously, I need to get down."

He shook his head, smile fading. "I'm going to pull you up. You're not in danger. Not on my watch."

There was that pirate swagger. She had to be nuts to even be considering this. "If I let go and fall, I swear to God my ghost will torment your ship forever. I'm talking curses and pushing people to their deaths; none of that cool ghost hunting stuff."

He chuckled. "Understood."

"All right." She pulled in a deep breath and closed her eyes. "I'm letting go."

She released her grip and instead of gravity yanking her down, Colton lifted her up, hoisting her over the railing and into the crow's nest with him. She opened her eyes and gasped at the haunting scene below them. The yellow lights of Savannah glowed in the thick fog, the big moss-covered trees poking through the blanket of mist. Her jaw dropped as her gaze wandered over her hometown.

He drew her in closer, under the protection of his arm. "Beautiful, no?"

“Oh my God. Words don’t do it justice.” When she finally glanced over at him, Colton was staring at her. “What?”

He shook his head slowly. “The world below us has nothing on you.”

Her heart raced and her body warmed. If she didn’t stop looking into his eyes, she’d kiss him again.

Bad idea. She couldn’t afford any more of her bad taste in men. Literally.

Her brain wrestled against her hormones, and she faced the city again. “Thanks for bringing me up here.”

“You did most of the work.” He bent over, resting his forearms on the railing as he scanned the area. “Tell me about the bastard you were going to marry.”

Laughter bubbled from her throat. “His name was Curt.” She leaned next to him, watching the fog billow off the water. “The real ass kicker is in hindsight, I think I was so desperate to fall in love and have a family that I stopped caring about who it was with.”

She clasped her hands together, unsure where the sudden bout of honesty was coming from. She didn’t have many friends. It was tough to set boundaries as a psychic. Many people cozied up, but in the end, they really just wanted your “gifted” advice for free, not so much to go out and see a movie or play board games.

After kicking Curt to the curb, the only person she’d told about it was poor One-Eyed Bob. He poured her enough drinks that night that she was a little foggy on how much she had confided in him.

Colton’s attention stayed on the city below. “When I was younger, all I cared about was making money. I grew up in an orphanage half starved, and as soon as I could get on a ship, I did.”

Skye frowned. “I thought you came from old money?”

He rubbed a hand down his face and met her eyes. He started and stopped himself a couple times before looking

down at the deck below. “You said it. I agreed. Easier than explaining my parents died when I was a tot.”

“I’m sorry.” She ran her hand up his back, wishing she could swallow up her words. Instead, more fell out. “I never knew my dad, and my mother wouldn’t tell me anything about him other than I had his eyes.” She rested her head against his shoulder. “I used to daydream that I’d have a daughter and she’d have a wonderful daddy who would never leave her. About six months ago, a card kept coming up for me, over and over. It usually means love, a man and a woman making vows. I think when Curt started showing interest...”

“You saw what you wanted to see.” He covered my hand with his. The simple comfort warmed her all over.

“I think so.” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “A few weeks ago I noticed some things from the shop were missing. Then I got curious and checked the register receipts against the bank statements.”

His grip tightened. “Bastard.”

She nodded. “Exactly. I called him on it and kicked him to the curb.” She glanced over at him. “Sad part was realizing after he was gone that I didn’t miss him. I missed the *idea* of him.” She stared at her hands on the railing. “He lied to my face for months, and I didn’t see it.”

He cupped her cheek, coaxing her to meet his eyes. “I used to dream of a family a long time ago. It drove me to the ships to cast my net and make my fortune, but somewhere along the way, the greed overshadowed the dream.” He searched her eyes. “You never lost sight of it. Don’t let that bastard make you feel foolish. *He’s* the fool.”

Her vision blurred with tears as she pressed her lips to his. His strong arms enfolded her against his chest as her tongue danced with his. She pulled his shirt free of his pants and slid her hands underneath, moaning as she explored his hot skin. His muscles tensed under her touch, enticing her. This all-consuming hunger was new. She’d never wanted Curt or any other man like she yearned for Colton.

It didn't matter that she barely knew him. Her mind whispered that it should, but her body was in charge at the moment. He bent his knees and caught the backs of her thighs, lifting her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, her hands clasping together behind his neck, clinging to him.

His mouth was hot, searing her skin as he kissed along her collarbone. His erection pressed against her and instead of retreating, she ached to be closer. Needed to be closer. The warning came again that she just met him a few hours ago, but she was too far gone.

This was probably foolish, but tonight, there was no other fool she'd rather be.

Chapter Four

He gripped her thigh with one hand and slid the other under her shirt. Her moan nearly undid him. It had been *much* too long since he'd lain with a woman, and he'd never been with anyone like Skye, his lady with the violet eyes. He cupped the weight of her breast, yearning to taste her skin.

She rocked her hips into him and gasped. "Do you have a sleeping cabin on this boat?"

His teeth brushed her ear. "Yes."

"Do you have protection?"

Her question didn't register through the haze of his hunger for her. "Cannons, a cutlass, and a few pistols."

She chuckled and kissed him again. "How about condoms?"

"Oh." He would've smacked his forehead but dropping her wasn't an option. "Yeah, I think I do."

"Then we better get down there before we do something we can't take back."

A lopsided smile tugged at his lips. "I've never made love to a woman in the lookout."

"Sex." She nibbled her way down his throat until he was hard enough to cut diamonds. "Love hurts. Tonight is sex."

"As long as you're naked in my arms, you can call it whatever you like," he growled, gripping her ass.

Reluctantly he lowered her feet to the floor and straightened. "I'm going to climb over. Then I'll help you onto the rigging. You'll turn around and hang on to me. I'll take us both down the ratline."

Her eyes widened. "You're going to carry me?"

"It'll be faster and safer."

"Maybe I should be on your back so I'm not in your way?"

He shook his head. "If you slip off my back there's no way I'd be able to catch you. This way you won't fall." She didn't

look convinced, so he added, “You also won’t be able to look down.”

Gradually she started to nod. “All right. If you think it won’t be too much weight for you.”

He chuckled as he climbed out of the lookout. “You don’t weigh half as much as those topsails, love.”

Once he had his feet braced in the openings of the ratline, he helped guide her over the side, steadying her until she was on the ropes with him. He pushed back as far as he could to make room for her. “Can you slide under my arm?”

“I think so.” The heat of her body warmed his chest.

He let go of the rigging with one hand and wrapped his arm around her waist. “Now turn around and hold onto me.”

She was trembling, but finally clamped her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. “Okay. I’m ready.”

Having her body pressed so tight against him had his blood rushing below his belt again. He’d never climbed the ratlines with a gorgeous woman and a raging hard on, but he welcomed the challenge.

He had every intention of getting her down and into his bed in record time.

Forcing his body to focus on the ratline, he gradually found his rhythm, moving in harmony with the bounce of the ropes. Skye whimpered and he slowed his pace.

He looked down at her. “You all right?” She grinned up at him and he realized it hadn’t been a whimper. She’d been laughing. A smile crept up on him. “You’re enjoying this.”

“Not as terrifying when I can’t see how high up we are.” She licked the center of his chest and he shivered all over. “And the view doesn’t suck either.”

He loosened one hand and clapped it on her ass, pressing her tight against him. “Can’t get down soon enough, but I’d rather do it in one piece.” He winked.

She rolled her eyes. “Fine. I’ll behave. For now.” She wet

her lips.

He growled, forcing his gaze back to the task at hand. With both hands on the ropes again, he moved down the rungs. When he reached the railing of the ship, he wrapped one arm tight around her waist and swung them both around the rigging, dropping onto the deck.

The second his boots met the wood, his lips fused to hers, one hand tangling in the back of her hair while the other slid down her back. She tasted like rum and felt like sin, fucking heaven in his arms. He carried her to his cabin and reluctantly set her down in front of the door.

He hadn't ever had company in his bed here. Any female companions were found on land, but the moment she came aboard his ship, the world had tilted. He didn't recognize himself, and the rules no longer applied.

She passed through the door and he closed it behind him, cloaking them in darkness. He withdrew a lighter from his pocket and lit the oil lantern hanging above. A warm glow filled the room. Not bright enough to read by, but plenty of light for finding the bed.

By the time he pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it aside, Skye had crossed the room to his bookshelf. He came up behind her, sliding his arms around her waist from behind. She leaned back against him, her hands covering his.

“I thought pirates were too busy plundering to read.”

He nibbled along her neck. “You thought wrong.” His teeth brushed her earlobe. “Hope you didn't come here to read.”

She turned in his arms, staring up into his soul. “No.” She pulled her top off, then unfastened her bra. Her nipples were tight nubs begging to be kissed. He wet his lips as she caught his hand, her voice a little breathless. “I had something else in mind.”

She pressed his hand to her breast and he kneaded it slowly, his erection threatening to bust through his zipper. He bent to claim her lips, backing her toward the bed before scooping her up and laying her in the center.

He lowered his head and kissed his way down to her breast. As he sucked her nipple into his mouth, he opened her jeans and moved his fingers inside. He growled against her skin, finding her wet and ready as her hips rocked into his hand.

“Condom,” she gasped.

“Not yet.” He pulled her pants and panties free and tossed them aside. He wanted to memorize her naked in his bed, her long auburn hair across his pillows, her full lips plump and red from his affections, and those violet eyes staring hungrily up at him. Sexy didn’t begin to describe her.

He took off his pants, his eyes locked on hers as he crawled up between her legs, sliding them up his broad shoulders. “I’m starving for you.”

Her teeth raked her lower lip as he lowered his head. He licked her slowly at first, savoring the way her body writhed. He hummed against her as her fingers tugged at his hair. With his tongue, he teased her swollen nub, growling, “So good.”

He slid two fingers inside of her, working them into her slowly while his tongue and teeth picked up a feverish rhythm. She called out his name rocking her hips into his mouth.

He groaned. “That’s it, love.”

Her entire body shuddered, her thighs clenching tight around his head. He placed tender kisses until the aftershocks finally subsided. He raised his head. “Just wanted to hear my name on your lips.”

“Colton.” Her exhausted, blissful smile made him want to dive back in for more, but if he wasn’t buried inside her soon, he’d die.

With her, anything seemed possible.

He forced himself back to the head, the ship’s tiny washroom. It was dark, but small enough he had no trouble finding the drawer. He searched around for the box and came back with a foil wrapper in his hand. Her eyes followed his every move, stoking his ache for her.

He knelt down at the foot of the bed, staring down at her as

he tore open the condom. The moonlight danced in her eyes.

“I’m so glad I trespassed,” she whispered.

“Thank God you don’t read signs.” He slid the condom over his pulsing shaft and moved up over her, settling his hips between her legs. “I never thought I’d find you.”

He kissed her before she could ask, thrusting forward and joining their bodies. She was made for him, every part of her. His. But how could he explain he’d been watching for a woman with violet eyes for over two hundred years?

He couldn’t. Besides, it wasn’t a lie if she wouldn’t believe the truth anyway.

His lips trailed down her neck to her shoulder. She smelled like lavender and musk, and he filled his lungs with her scent. Her nails dug into his shoulders as she drew her legs up around his waist. He never wanted this to end, but his body had other plans, his thrusts coming faster now. But he wasn’t coming alone. He moved his hand between them and toyed with her until she gasped.

“Don’t stop!”

“Not a chance.” He pounded into her, aching for release.

Her inner muscles clenched around him as she scratched the hell out of his back, her orgasm slamming into her. He surrendered, erupting deep inside her. Every muscle tensed until he froze over her, trembling.

Her soft hands moved around his waist and explored his chest. He stared down into her eyes, unable to find words yet.

“That was incredible,” she whispered.

He managed a nod and slowly pulled back. He slid the condom free and dropped it off the bed. He’d find the damned thing in the morning. Skye rolled over onto his chest, her hand resting over his heart. He held her close, kissing her hair as he focused on the flickering lamp.

Gradually her breathing slowed, her body heavy against him, lost to sleep, leaving him alone with thoughts he had no business having.

How had his life changed so much in one day?

He tipped his head to see her face. She'd changed everything.

She'd said tonight was just sex, but he'd had that countless times over his long existence. Enough to know what they'd just shared was something new.

And he suspected he'd never get enough.

...

Skye woke up disoriented. Where the hell...then she noticed the beefy arm draped over her waist, the rough hand splayed over her belly.

Colton.

The fog of alcohol was gone, and the scent of sex was replaced by the musty morning mist from the river. Shit. She'd slept with him. She barely knew the guy.

Carefully, she shimmied out from under his arm without waking him. He shifted in the bed, his sculpted chest and strong arms tempting her to snuggle back in.

No. God, no. When would she ever learn?

At least she'd remembered the condom. She turned around and collected all her clothes. Between Bob's Drunken Pirate drinks, and Colton showing her around his pirate ship, she'd been lost in a lifelong fantasy. Reality was back in full force now.

And she needed to get a grip.

Once she was dressed, she slipped out of his room, praying the tourists weren't out yet to witness her rumpled clothes and mussed hair. She was grateful she hadn't found a mirror on board.

She didn't want to know what she looked like.

Crossing the deck, she stared up at the crow's nest. Holy shit. She'd been higher than she realized. No wonder her body ached all over.

But the best aches had nothing to do with climbing the ratlines. She smiled at the flashes of memory from the night before. Not like she had many to choose from; she could count her sex partners on one hand, but none of them even came close to the passion Colton kindled in her last night.

She rolled her eyes at herself. She did *not* need another man in her life. She hadn't recovered her losses from the last one yet.

Thankfully, there were only a few folks on River Street, and no one gave her a second look. In the distance, Uga, the University of Georgia's bulldog mascot, was already drawing attention on his morning walk through the park. He was probably the biggest celebrity in Savannah, which was just the way she liked it.

When she got back to the shop, she closed the door and locked it behind her. Time for a hot shower. She had to get her head on straight. Last night had been amazing—a memory to cherish—but today was Friday, and she needed a busy one.

Chapter Five

Colton stretched his arm out, moving it up and down the cool sheets before cracking his eyes open.

Skye was gone.

He slapped the mattress and sat up, scanning the room before flopping back onto the bed. “Damn it!”

Did she have regrets? Had he pissed her off? He had no fucking clue and no number to call her.

He glared at the clock on the wall. A tour was coming on board in an hour. No time to run to her shop now.

If she was even there.

Fuck.

He spent most of the day perched up on the mast, repairing the pulleys on one of the topsails. From that vantage point, he could almost see her shop. His phone buzzed, rescuing him from his obsession.

“Yeah?”

“It’s John. Eli’s getting worse. Some kind of infection now. They’re adding antibiotics to the concoction they’re feeding him.”

Colton sighed. “Did you tell the crew to be on the Sea Dog at midnight?”

“Aye.” John paused. “One-Eyed Bob mentioned bringing the cup.”

“No.” Colton opened his hand. While it was still red, the rope burn had healed. Not as fast as he was used to, but still quicker than he had before he drank from the cursed grail. “We’ll vote as a crew, and no one gives Eli a hit from that cup unless we know he wants it. Tell Bob to keep it stashed.”

“Fine.” John didn’t sound happy with Colton’s answer, but he respected Colton’s authority as Quartermaster. He’d obey his orders. “See you at midnight.”

“Thanks, John.” Colton stuffed the phone back into his pocket.

One more tour. With any luck, he’d have time to check in on Skye before the crew came aboard tonight. He went back to tying off knots, welcoming the distraction from worry for his fallen friend and the woman with violet eyes.

...

Skye finished up with her last reading and turned off the neon palm in her window. It had been a good day so far, but her head throbbed. Keeping her mind open for messages without a break was like tossing a giant welcome mat out for migraines. Shit.

She massaged her temples, willing the pain to back off. No such luck. She stood up, grateful that the room didn’t spin. There wasn’t time to change clothes. She needed food and needed it now.

Grabbing her dark glasses, she shielded her eyes and headed for Bob’s. Hopefully hush puppies and fried shrimp would ground her again.

It was too late for lunch and too early for dinner. Perfect timing. Bob’s was empty. He came out from the kitchen and frowned. “You look like hell.”

She chuckled and winced. “I haven’t eaten today. Time got away from me.” She took a stool at the counter. “I’m hoping hush puppies might help me get rid of the jackhammer in my head.”

He disappeared into the kitchen and came out with a plate of the fried balls of dough. “You know better than that.” He put it in front of her, watching her pop one into her mouth. “Everything okay?”

Skye shook her head. “Safe to say I should’ve gone straight home after those drinks last night.”

He raised his eyebrows. “You and Colton hit it off?”

“I have a horrible track record with men, but apparently I

still have a hard time swearing off them.” She sighed and ate another hush puppy.

He disappeared into the kitchen and came back with shrimp cocktail and sweet tea. Placing them in front of her, he smiled. “I’ve known Colton a long time. He’s nothing like Curt.”

“Maybe not, but I’ve got no business getting involved with anyone right now. I need to get my own life in order before I go mixing it with someone else’s.”

He shrugged. “You’re the one always sayin’ that no one gets put in your path without a reason, right?”

“Way to throw my words back at me.” She rolled her eyes and munched on a shrimp. “Maybe Colton was dropped into my path to give me a great night of fun and remind me I’m alive. If so, then mission accomplished and we can both move on.”

“You’re so quick to toss him off?”

She pointed a shrimp in Bob’s direction. “Why are you so intent on matchmaking?”

“Colton’s been alone a long time. It can make a man tire of living.”

She toyed with her food, mulling over his words. Lifting her gaze, she sighed. “Colton shouldn’t be my rebound.”

“Nah,” he agreed, placing the hand towel on his shoulder. “He’s worth keepin’.”

“And she’ll be a lucky lady.” She chuckled. “Can I get a box?”

While Bob searched for a to-go container, she did her best not to notice the hot pit brewing in her stomach at the thought of another woman in Colton’s arms.

...

The food and some Advil beat back her headache, and she clicked the neon palm in her window back on. Within five minutes, the bell clanged on the door and she turned around to

find Ian Flynn.

“You don’t look happy to see me.” He straightened his jacket.

She shrugged. “Sorry, headache.” She gestured to the chair. “Back for another reading so soon?”

“No.” He took the chair and opened a folder stuffed with paperwork. “I came to make you an offer you can’t refuse.”

She swiped the bandana from her head. “I already told you, the Magnolia Mystic’s not for sale.”

He pointed to an appraisal with photos of her shop. “This is an estimate of the building’s worth.” He pulled out another sheet with seven figures on it. “And this is what I’m willing to pay you to sell me this property.”

She tried not to choke on her tongue as she shook her head. Before she could find her voice, the door opened again.

“I’m sorry I’m with someone at the moment. There are chairs on the porch.”

“Flynn.”

Her gaze shot up at the sound of Colton’s voice.

Ian stood, a crease forming in his brow. “This is none of your concern, Quartermaster. Go back to your ship.”

Colton was a couple inches taller than Ian, his shoulders a little broader, but it didn’t seem to intimidate the real estate mogul in the slightest.

And why was he calling Colton the Quartermaster? She’d spent most of her girlhood reading about pirates. The Quartermaster was voted on by the crew to be the captain’s right hand, and the captain’s replacement if he was injured or killed.

But Colton owned his ship.

Unless that was all bullshit. Oh crap. She wanted to smack her forehead. Of course it was *bullshit*; that was how men operated.

Colton grabbed the lapels of Ian's jacket and shoved him back against the door. "You don't get to order me around anymore. *I'm* the only reason you're still breathing. So pick up your papers and get the hell out of here. You can build anywhere in the country but Savannah."

Skye popped out of her chair and grabbed Colton's wrist. "Enough. Let him go."

Colton's nostrils flared as he wrenched his hands away from Ian's coat. She went to the table, stuffed the papers back into the folder, and handed it to Ian. "Like I said, the shop's not for sale. Unless you'd like another tarot reading, I suggest you go."

She caught Colton's arm, lowering her voice. "You're not going anywhere."

Ian's bright blue eyes flicked from Colton to her, his lips curving into a cold smirk. "I didn't take you for an easy lay. The Quartermaster always was good with the lasses."

Colton landed a fist to Ian's gut that made his knees give out. He bent down and hauled Ian to his feet again. "Get the fuck out."

Ian was still heaving for breath as Colton shoved him out the door. Once it was closed he turned toward Skye, his expression tight. "He's an ass."

"He's a man." She crossed her arms.

He raised a brow. "You left without saying goodbye."

She struggled to keep her head on straight even though her nerves were shot from all the testosterone swamping her tiny shop. She'd have to burn some sage later. "Yeah. I had to work." He didn't reply so she added, "Didn't want to wake you."

The intensity in his stare had her on edge as he came closer. "Where do we stand?"

"We?" She shook her head. "Last night was...amazing, but that's all it was."

"That's not enough."

“Tough.” She tightened her arms around herself. “Why did he call you the Quartermaster? I thought that’s your boat out there in the water.”

“It is. Why are you changing the subject?”

She sighed, crossing back to her table. Anything to put some distance between them. He was too much of a temptation. “Because I have a horrible track record with men.” She lifted her gaze to meet his. “They *lie* to me.”

He broke eye contact and her heart sank. It shouldn’t have surprised her, but something about him, probably the way he kept her from falling last night, and protected her a minute ago with Ian, made her hope he might be different.

“I’m not lying to you. That *is* my ship. I’m the captain.” His gaze met hers again. “I told you I’ve sailed on ships most of my life. I’ve been elected Quartermaster more than once.”

She stared at him, time ticking away, and finally she picked up her cards to shuffle them. “I don’t know what you want from me.”

He took the other chair and rested his hand on hers, stopping her from mixing the cards. “I want a chance to know you. Last night was...I can’t remember a better time.”

“I had a good time, too, but I can’t afford to crash and burn again. We should leave it as a *really* good memory.”

He came around to her side of the table and got down on one knee beside her. “Sail with me.”

“What?”

He took her hand, his lips teasing her fingers. “I saw the joy on your face when you were climbing the ratlines, and we were still at port. Come out on the ocean with me.” He searched her eyes. “Please, Skye.”

In her wildest dreams, she never imagined a hunky sailor with pirate tendencies would be kneeling before her offering to take her out on his ship.

Laughter bubbled from her throat. “I don’t know how to sail, and that ship is too big for you to do it all by yourself.”

“I’ll get the crew together.” He pressed her hand to his chest. His skin was hot right through his shirt as his voice took on the tone that made her body warm all over. “Ye have the heart of a pirate, lass. Set her free, just this once.”

She would probably live to regret it, but she also couldn’t pass it up. “Fine. When?”

“Next week. Tours finish Tuesday. We’ll sail Wednesday at dawn.”

She smiled in spite of her certainty this was a bad idea. “Deal.”

He leaned in and claimed her traitorous lips. Damn, his kiss was quickly becoming her Kryptonite. He pulled back and stood up with a sparkle in his eyes. “I’ll be back for you.”

She shamelessly watched his ass as he turned to go. Once he vanished from view, she cut the deck and lifted the top card.

Two of cups.

What. The. Hell.

Maybe her gift really was fading. Or maybe Curt was never the partner she was meant for. That didn’t mean Colton was either...

But what if?

Chapter Six

Colton had the oil lamps glowing on the deck when the crew arrived. John was first aboard, followed by One-Eyed Bob.

John found a stool and pulled out his notebook and a pen. "I'll be keeping minutes of the meeting tonight."

"Fair enough," Colton answered, frowning. Bob was pacing back and forth along the bow. He left John behind to greet the rest of the crew as they arrived, and Colton wandered after Bob. He cleared his throat and the old man nearly fell overboard.

Colton raised a brow. "What's troubling you?"

The cook wrung his gnarled hands, and clasped one behind his neck. "It's gone. I looked everywhere. Couldn't have vanished." He resumed pacing and mumbling. "It was hidden, but now the whole box is missing. Impossible. Can't be."

Colton pursued him, turning him around to meet his eyes. "What's missing?"

"The cup." Fear shined in his remaining eye. "I hid it just like you charged me to centuries ago. I check up on it every year. It's always there."

The air rushed from Colton's lungs. He'd spent the better part of the past two hundred years cursing the damned thing, but even so, he wasn't prepared to hear it was gone.

He lowered his voice as more pirates boarded. "Maybe you didn't look hard enough."

Bob shook his head furiously. "No. It's gone, Colton." He glanced at the others. "They'll kill me."

"They can't kill you, remember?"

Bob's chin trembled. "Death is breathing down young Eli's neck, Quartermaster. We won't escape his fate much longer without it."

"We don't know that. We may not heal as fast now, but that doesn't mean we're going to show our true ages either." Who

was he trying to convince, the cook or himself?

A vision of Skye in his bed filled Colton's head. He finally had a reason to live, just in time to die. Fate was a cruel mistress.

"Damn it, Bob." He looked over his shoulder. The others were on board. He grasped the cook's shoulders. "We have to let the crew know, and then we need to find it before someone else guzzles the living water inside. Understand?"

Bob nodded, tightening his jaw. "Aye."

"Good." Colton led Bob back to the others. Eli was still in a hospital bed, but everyone else was on board. Colton scanned the group. Although they were all dressed in clothes fitting this generation, only the Captain, their pilot, Keegan, One-Eyed Bob, and Colton kept their hair short. The others still wore it long and tied back from their faces.

John approached Colton and Bob, concern lining his dark eyes. "I told the crew about Eli's condition. They've got questions."

Colton glanced at the others, raising his voice. "Eli's not healed from the car accident yet. Don't know that I can tell you anything more than that, but you can ask."

"Why are you denying him the cup, Quartermaster?" Greyson Till crossed his arms. He was their Master Gunner. He had trained Eli and still kept watch over him. He wasn't as tall as Colton, but his steely blue eyes could stare down any man.

"Is it so wrong to think the man should have a choice?" Colton looked at the others, noting the ones who wouldn't make eye contact. His gut pulled into a tight knot. "And I couldn't offer it to him even if I wanted to."

Now he had their full attention. Even the Captain and his first mate, Duke, stared at his face. Colton peered over his shoulder. "Tell them Bob."

The cook toddled forward, magnifying his age for dramatic effect. "I was charged with hiding the treasure centuries ago. I check up on it every year, and it's always been right where I

left it.”

“Stop rambling, old man.” The Captain straightened to his full height. “Get to the point.”

“It’s gone.”

Silence stretched across the deck for nearly a minute before Greyson came forward. “Where’d you stash it? I’ll go look myself.”

Bob moved closer to Colton. “It was well hidden for over two hundred years down in the underground tunnels.”

“Not well hidden enough,” Greyson growled.

“Busting Bob’s balls isn’t going to put the grail in your hands.” Colton ground his teeth, redirecting the conversation. “If Eli isn’t healing, it stands to reason the curse might be lifting for all of us.”

“It’s not a fucking curse, it’s a gift. Our gift. And we need to find the blasted thing.” The Captain stepped to the center of their circle, his cold blue eyes pinning Bob in place as if he were still the bloodthirsty Cap’n Flynn they’d voted to lead them lifetimes ago. “Take us to the last place you saw it, cook, or I’ll be certain you’re the first of the crew to meet yer maker.”

Colton stepped in front of Bob. “Threatenin’ him isn’t going to find the cup, Cap’n.”

“Excuse me.”

They all turned around. Colton narrowed his eyes at the well-dressed stranger on the gangplank. “Ship’s closed. Tours start at nine o’clock.”

The stranger came onboard like he’d been invited. “I’m not here for a tour.”

Colton stalked across the deck, eyeing the man in the black suit. “This is private property.”

“Are you Colton Hayes?”

“Yeah. Who are you?” He balled his hands into fists at his sides.

The man was almost the same height as Colton, taller than a few of the crew. He unfastened the button on his jacket and withdrew a business card. "I'm Agent Bale. I'm here on behalf of the U.S. government."

The white card bore the man's name, a cell number, and email address. Colton lifted his gaze to Agent Bale's face. "And I'm supposed to take you at your word? I don't see the FBI symbol."

The agent shook his head. "We're not affiliated with the FBI, CIA, or any other government branches you've heard of. I monitor otherworldly threats."

Colton's brow furrowed. "Do we look like ghosts to you?"

He glanced at the others and back to Colton. "Not like any I've ever seen." He cleared his throat. "There have been whispers that a black market ring of treasure hunters have located the Lord's cup, the Holy Grail. They're looking for a buyer."

The Captain came up beside Colton. "How much are they asking?"

Colton grunted. "Doesn't matter." He met the agent's gaze. "What does this have to do with us?"

The agent smiled. "An important artifact like the Holy Grail isn't something you can hide. We've known your crew had it since the original Sea Dog sank outside the mouth of the Savannah River."

Colton shook his head. "Don't know what you're talking about."

Agent Bale moved around him addressing the others. "You all fake your deaths or disappearances when people start noticing you aren't aging." He pointed at One-Eyed Bob. "Sometimes a patch, sometimes a glass eye, but folks in Savannah are too polite to question why all the generations of your family never has a pair of good eyes. Only in Savannah would folks accept it without staring the facts in the face."

He turned to Greyson. "And you've been working as a weapons expert and freelance mercenary." He scanned the rest

of the group. “We’ve kept files on all of you, and we know about the relic from the Spanish ship you raided. If we wanted to stop you and take the Holy Grail, we would have.”

Colton frowned. “If any of this were true, why didn’t you?”

“Because we only watch and record. We don’t get involved unless there’s a threat to American lives.”

A breeze fluttered through the sail above them. Colton crossed his arms. “We haven’t threatened anyone.”

“Which is why we’ve never met.” Agent Bale pointed around the group. “That all changed the moment that cup left your possession. If it falls into the hands of a rival government and they make their soldiers immortal, we could have a major problem on our hands.”

Colton dropped his hands to his sides. “Fuck.”

“Exactly.” Agent Bale met his eyes. “None of you posed a threat, and because no one else in the area seemed to be living forever, we were satisfied it was safely hidden and the Holy Grail slipped down the priority list. But when the antiquities underground started buzzing with this news, I had to come down to see if there was truth to the rumor.”

“Aye.” Colton nodded. “It’s missing.”

The Captain cursed under his breath. “Don’t tell him anything.”

Agent Bale chuckled. “Little late for that. I’ve had this ship and Bob’s restaurant bugged for two days. I know it’s missing, and that the immortality you’ve all been enjoying might be wearing off.”

“Shit.” Captain Flynn shook his head, storming back to Duke’s side.

The first mate was probably the strongest of them all physically. That’s why the Captain brought him onto the crew all those years ago. Colton was the *crew’s* pick, voted by them to take over the ship in case of the Captain’s demise.

Duke was the Captain’s pick, more of a bodyguard than a true first mate. Flynn counted on Duke’s ability to intimidate

the others and quell any talk of mutiny. Now Duke worked for Flynn's development company, most likely in the same capacity, Colton figured.

Colton narrowed his eyes at Agent Bale. "If you already know it's gone, then what the hell are you doing on my ship?" He clenched his jaw to keep his emotions in check.

"I came to offer you and your crew a deal." The wind ruffled Agent Bale's light brown hair.

"We don't even know who you really work for." Colton's shoulders tensed. "Why should we trust you?"

Agent Bale sized up each member of the crew and pointed at each one. "You're Colton Hayes, the Quartermaster of the original Sea Dog and Captain of this replica. You're Captain Ian Flynn of the original Sea Dog, and you broker big commercial real estate developments now." He continued down the line until he finally reached Caleb, lurking in the shadows. "And you're the ship's navigator, Caleb Graves. You've collected a few degrees since the original Sea Dog sank. In astronomy, marine biology, and most recently geography, am I right?"

Caleb's eyes widened as he stepped into the light. "How could you possibly know all that?"

"Because my division watches immortals like your crew. It's in the government's best interest to keep tabs on people who could potentially be assets someday. Which is why I'm here." He turned to Colton again. "I can use my contacts to locate the group holding the Holy Grail, but the American government can't be tied to the recovery effort in any way."

"So what are you sayin'?" Colton held his breath.

"I'm saying who better to steal it back than a band of pirates?"

...

It was nearly two in the morning by the time the crew finished voting on Agent Bale's offer. Colton didn't give a shit about the cup for himself, but if finding it gave them a chance to

save Eli, he'd do whatever it took.

The Captain crossed his arms, shaking his head. "If we do find it, what will stop the government from confiscating it from us?"

Colton shrugged. "Sounds like they've known we had it, and never tried to take it from us."

"How do we know it wasn't them who stole it?" Bob asked.

"Why would they take it and then offer to help us bring it back?" Colton glanced at the others, then the cook again. "Makes no sense, Bob. We've had that cup since 1795. They've had plenty of years to claim it and never even tried."

John cleared his throat. "I know we're out of practice at privateering, but we don't have to wait on the government to locate the thieves for us. We can find them on our own, like we used to. Deep down, we're still pirates right?"

"Aye." The others agreed.

A smile crept up on Colton, between finding Skye and a new mission for his crew on the horizon, something was awakening in his chest. Life. Funny to find it now that it might be ending.

As the crew headed for land, Colton called out, "Before you leave, I need a few hands on deck Wednesday."

Everyone turned his way, the Captain frowning. "For what, exactly?"

"I promised someone we'd take the Sea Dog out into open water."

"Someone?" For the first time since he'd stepped on board tonight, One-Eyed Bob smiled. "Any chance it's Skye?"

Colton hesitated, but they'd all know soon enough. He nodded. "Aye."

The Captain *tsked*. "Bad time to seduce women, Quartermaster."

"You're just sore she won't sell her shop." He shrugged a shoulder. "Besides, I don't need you to sail the ship anyway."

He glanced at the others. “Any of you missing the open ocean?”

Bob, John, and Drake, the ship’s carpenter, stepped forward. Colton stared at the others. “No other able-bodied pirates?” He shook his head. “What better way to remember who we are?”

Greyson sighed. “I’ll be keeping watch over Eli at the hospital.”

“I never forgot who I was.” The Captain chuffed. “I’ve got a bloody corporation to run in Atlanta. I don’t have time for a run on the open sea.”

The Captain’s ice-blue eyes were distant, betraying his words. Colton didn’t press. He’d enjoy the day more without Flynn and Duke on board anyway.

Keegan took a couple steps forward, a crooked smile on his face. “Expect me at the helm.”

Colton grinned. Keegan had coaxed the Sea Dog into making turns that should have been impossible when he was their pilot, and the man could sing. He was the frontman for a band these days, and was constantly mistaken for another pirate on television, less the hook for a hand.

“Anyone else?” Colton stared at Caleb. Their navigator had never been the same since the Sea Dog sank, staying away from open water.

“I’ve got a busy day at the university on Wednesday.”

Colton crossed his arms. “Come out with us, Caleb. We’ll be back before the sun sets.”

Caleb hesitated and Keegan draped an arm over his shoulder. “It wouldn’t be right to go out without our navigator. What if we’re lost at sea?”

Caleb looked at the two of them and sighed. “You’ve gone sailing without me for years.”

“Get yer sea legs back, Caleb.” Colton went to the helm, gripping the handles on the ship’s wheel. “Pirates aren’t landlubbers.”

Caleb rolled his eyes. “Fine. I’m in.”

Cheers erupted on board. Colton’s heart raced. Yes, he’d taken the boat out countless times over the years, but never with so many of his crew. Together they’d plundered well-armed ships, and together, they’d find that Holy Grail.

He turned around as the Captain and his first mate left the ship and faded into the shadows of River Street. Good riddance.

With any luck, Ian Flynn would go back to Atlanta where he belonged.

Chapter Seven

Colton loaded up the galley with bread, cold cuts, cheeses, and plenty of drinks in preparation for tomorrow's voyage. One-Eyed Bob was going to bring fresh pastries and hush puppies in the morning, and according to the weather app on his phone, there were no storms on the horizon.

A perfect day to drop all the sails and let the Sea Dog race through the water.

Inside his cabin, he unlocked the safe and removed a worn wooden box holding a small stash of doubloons—Spanish gold coins that he hoped would help convince Skye when he told her the unbelievable truth. He'd been twenty-nine years old when he drank from the grail in 1795, and he hadn't physically aged another year since.

He sat on the bed and ran his fingers through the treasure. It was the last of the booty he'd kept. The rest he'd sold over the years to fund his dream of building an exact replica of the Sea Dog.

These gold pieces were the last remnants of his life as a true privateer.

As lifetimes passed him by, he lost track of dreams. Food and drink turned bland and tasteless, and the thrill of lusty women paled, too.

Skye had changed all of that. Her fiery spirit sparked a flame inside of him, and he was addicted, starving to live again.

But he had no desire to live a lie. Skye deserved better than that, even if the truth bordered on unbelievable.

He pocketed two of the doubloons and locked the rest back in the safe. Dressed in a T-shirt and black jeans, he disembarked and made a stop at the florist before heading for the Magnolia Mystic.

An older woman and her daughter were leaving the store as he approached. He tipped his head. "Ma'am."

She and her daughter smiled as they passed by and he reached for the door. Skye was shuffling her deck when he stepped inside. She grinned when she saw him, and a million excuses for not telling her popped into his head.

“Are those magnolias for me?”

Damn, he'd forgotten he had them in his hand. He nodded, offering them to her. “The florist said purple magnolias were for good luck, but I thought the color matched your eyes.”

“Thank you.” She turned off the neon hand in her window and locked the door before reaching for his arm. “Come on, I want to put them in water before we go out to forage for food.”

He followed her up the staircase around the back of her shop. Since she'd stepped onto his boat a week ago, he'd spent as much time with her as he could. He was addicted to her smile, her laughter, and her lips.

He was having withdrawals for the rest of her, too, but they hadn't been naked together again. She claimed that rushing into a relationship got her into trouble last time, and she didn't want to make that mistake again.

She was worth waiting for, so in spite of the overpowering effect she had on him, he'd kept his pants on. But honoring her wishes was getting tougher every day. Even the scent of her hair got his blood pumping.

“So this is my place.” She opened the door and walked him inside.

It was his first time in her apartment. He scanned the modest space. A small kitchen, a living area with a sofa and bookcase, and a door opening to her bedroom and probably a bathroom.

It was bigger than his cabin on the ship, but not by much.

She took a vase out of the cupboard and filled it with water. Once the flowers were inside, she placed it in the center of her kitchen table and smiled. “They're beautiful.”

Colton grinned. “They've got nothing on you.”

Color flushed her cheeks. “There you go being charming

again.”

He stepped closer and raised her chin to meet his eyes. “Before we go to dinner, I need to talk to you about something.”

Concern lined her forehead, but she nodded and led him to the sofa. He sat beside her and struggled to find the words. “Thing is, the crew and I...”

His phone rang. He pulled it out and Greyson’s name flashed on the screen. Colton frowned. “Shit. I’ve got to take this.” He put the cell to his ear. “Hey, Greyson.”

“Colton, Eli’s awake. We need you. Now.”

“Is he...”

“His eyes are open. That’s all I know.”

Colton nodded. “Okay. I’ll be right there.”

He stuffed his phone back into his pocket, his fingertips brushing over the doubloons hidden inside. He hated himself for being relieved by the interruption, but it didn’t change the fact that he was.

“My friend Eli’s awake.”

Her eyes widened. “From the car wreck?”

He nodded. “Yeah. I need to get over there. We don’t know if he has brain damage yet, and we’re his only family.”

She took his hand in hers and held it tight. “You better go.”

He bent to taste her lips and whispered, “We can talk tomorrow morning before we sail.”

“All right.” She smiled as she pulled back. “I hope Eli is okay.”

“Me, too.” He stood up. “I’ll see you soon.”

...

When Colton entered Eli’s room, it was already crowded. Greyson, John, One-Eyed Bob, Keegan, and Caleb stood at the foot of Eli’s bed while a nurse checked tubes and monitors.

Colton grinned when their gunner's eyes met his. He gripped his hand and smiled as a weight lifted from his shoulders. Eli hadn't spoken yet, but there was recognition in his eyes.

Colton stepped out of the way of the nurse and turned to Greyson. "Where's Drake?"

The Captain and his first mate were missing, too, but no one really expected either of them to show up. The life of the first gunner wasn't a priority to them.

Greyson shrugged. "I left him a message on his phone. He's probably working."

Drake had been their ship's carpenter. He kept the Sea Dog afloat all those years ago, but today he owned his own custom carpentry business. If he was awake, there was a good chance he was working. He rarely slept anymore, only stopping his work to eat.

Another female entered the room and removed a stethoscope from around her neck. She listened to Eli's chest, and then plucked it from her ears.

She leaned in close to Eli. "I'm going to remove this tube from your throat. I need you to cough while I pull, ready?"

Eli nodded.

"Good. Here we go." She started to draw the tube out, and Eli coughed and gagged until it was finally free.

He gasped for air at first, while the doctor kept watch. As his breathing slowed, his eyes met Colton's. Eli's voice was scratchy, barely a whisper. "Cannons are loaded and ready, Quartermaster..."

Cheers erupted behind them, and Colton smiled. "Welcome back, Eli."

Colton backed off as the nurse and doctor peppered their gunner with questions. With each correct answer, Colton breathed easier. Eli didn't seem to have any lasting damage to his mind.

The doctor turned around. "I'd like to keep him tonight just to monitor his vitals, but if everything stays level, he should be

able to go home tomorrow with crutches and a referral for physical therapy.”

“That’s great news. Thank you.” Colton shook her hand and waited for her to walk away before returning to Eli’s bedside.

The battered gunner scanned the room and finally stared up at Colton. “What happened?”

“You were in a car accident.” Colton gave him a second for the words to sink in.

Eli frowned, lifting a hand and examining the tubes going into his arm. “I didn’t heal.” His green eyes flicked up to Colton’s face. “Am I dying?”

Colton glanced at John before answering. “None of us are healing as fast. The cup’s effect might be wearing off.”

“Shit.” He lowered his arm. “Am I going to wither up like in the movies?”

Colton chuckled. “Hope not.” He pointed at the cook. “One-Eyed Bob is the oldest, so he’d go first, but he looks alright.”

Bob slicked back the wisps of white hair on his head. “Better than all right, if you ask me.”

Eli laughed and winced. “Forgot what pain felt like.” He pulled in a slow breath. “Maybe another sip of the cup would heal me.”

Colton tensed, but Bob came forward, keeping his voice low. “It’s missin’.”

“What?” Eli’s eyes widened. “Who?”

“We don’t know yet,” Colton answered. “But we’re going to find out and we’ll get it back.”

Eli nodded with a hint of a smile on his lips. “They don’t know who they’re dealing with.”

On that they could all agree.

...

By the time Colton got back to the ship, it was nearly

midnight. He didn't stop at Skye's shop on the way back. It was late; he'd let her sleep and be ready to sail when the sun rose.

But he missed her. He'd been alone so long, the feeling left a foreign pit in his gut and a vise around his heart.

He boarded the Sea Dog, his footsteps on the deck echoing through the silence. The faint lap of the water below was the only other sound. Normally he welcomed the solitude, but now it only magnified his loneliness. He opened his cabin door and didn't bother with the oil lamp. The moonlight coming through the porthole was plenty. He knew where everything was.

After getting undressed, he went in the head and washed his hands and face with bottled water. Being in hospitals made him uncomfortable, but at least it seemed like Eli would pull through. Now he could enjoy his day at sea in the morning. Full sails.

He crossed to his bed and laid down.

Something moaned.

He frowned, his muscles tense, until his eyes focused. Even in the dim light, he recognized the curve of her face and the scent of her hair. Skye was in his bed. His gaze wandered lower as he raised the blanket. She was in one of his pirate shirts...and nothing else. His pulse raced as he slid in behind her, running his hand up her smooth thigh. She pressed back into him, her hips rubbing him to madness.

He growled against her ear. "There's a pirate in my bed."

Her eyes fluttered open as she smiled back at him. "A psychic actually; close though."

He chuckled, rolling her underneath him. He fused his lips to hers, plundering her delicious mouth. When he lifted his head, he traced her jawline with his thumb. "I thought you wanted to take things slower between us."

She turned and kissed his thumb, her eyes locked on his. He pulsed at her entrance, aching to get even closer.

“If I had to lay in bed one more night imagining your hands on my body, I was going to lose my mind.” She took his hand and placed it over her breast, her back arching into him as he kneaded it, pinching her nipple through the thin fabric.

She was the sexiest thing he’d ever seen. Coherent thought fled as he pushed into her. Her nails dug into his back sending a shiver through him. She was made for him. His.

He kissed his way down her neck to her shoulder. Her teeth brushed his ear. “I want to be on top.”

Without separating their bodies, he rolled over and she sat up. His shirt had never looked so damned good. He ran his hands up under it, cupping the weight of her breasts. She tugged the shirt off and tossed it aside. The beam of moonlight shone on her naked body as she rode him faster.

He brought one hand down and slid it between them, teasing her swollen nub. “God, you’re beautiful.”

Her back arched, her lips parting as her body tensed around him, pulling him over the peak with her. He erupted deep inside of her, growling into the darkness. “You feel so good.”

She froze above him. “Oh shit, we forgot a condom.”

He had no idea if he could get her pregnant. Did the cup keep him young and fertile, or just young? He caressed her thigh. “I’m sorry. I got so caught up...”

She laid down against his chest with him still inside of her. “Me, too.” She lifted her head just enough to meet his eyes. “I’m not usually this stupid.”

He cupped her cheek. “I like to think it’s passion, not stupidity.”

She relaxed back onto his chest. “Passion is what brought me into the world.” He ran his hand up her back, listening. “My mom never told me who my father was, only that she didn’t think straight when she was with him. She said I have his eyes.”

He kissed her hair, his chest tight. “That first night, when we were in the crow’s nest, I told you I always wanted a family.

That's still true. If passion led to a tot, you wouldn't be alone like your mother."

Her lips brushed over his heart. "Easy words to say when you're still inside me."

He chuckled and rolled her over so he could see her face. Staring into her eyes, he whispered, "Those aren't just words. Not to me. It's a promise."

She searched his face. "You barely know me."

"I know I've never met anyone like you before. I know you're the person I think of when I open my eyes, and the last name I whisper when I go to sleep."

She pulled him down to her lips, her tongue swirling with his, urgent and needy until he was pulsing inside of her again. He whispered against her lips, "Should I get a condom?"

She gripped his ass. "Get out of this bed and I'll kill you."

He grinned. "Spoken like a true pirate."

She nipped his lower lip. "You're rubbing off on me."

"I do like rubbing you," he whispered as his fingers moved between them again. He would never get tired of hearing her crying out his name in the moonlight. Never.

Chapter Eight

Colton shielded his eyes as he looked up at the sails. Skye's pulse thrummed with excitement. She'd been out on the ocean on fishing boats before, but this would be her first time out on a huge ship without a motor.

And seeing Colton in his element didn't suck either. He looked happier than she'd ever seen him with sweat on his brow, his biceps and forearms cut and defined as he helped the others prepare to launch the Sea Dog.

He stopped beside her and smiled. "Ready?"

"Yep." She nodded. "Sure there's nothing I can do to help?"

He glanced at the starboard side of the deck. "You're going to check our speed remember?"

"Yeah, but that won't help us get out to sea."

He chuckled her chin. "Ah, but it'll help us get *back*, lass. Can't navigate unless we know our speed and how far we've come."

God, he was sexy when he pretended to be a pirate.

She turned around, marveling at the crew. Keegan was at the helm, gripping the handles on the big oak wheel, and near the bow, One-Eyed Bob and Drake were at the ready to haul the anchor up. Caleb gripped the ropes that went up to the rigging for the sails waiting on Colton's command. They all were.

It was a skeleton crew, but Colton told her they'd be able to sail without too much trouble. He went to the center of the deck, his voice booming. "Weigh anchor and drop the sails!"

Above her, the canvas unfurled, snapping in the wind overhead, and the chain clanked as Drake and Bob turned the crank to raise the anchor. Under Skye's feet, the ship groaned, the wind pushing them forward toward the sea.

Caleb tied off the rope on the main sail and jogged over to help the others with the anchor. Once it was out of the water, the Sea Dog was on the move. Keegan controlled the rudder,

navigating through the other vessels in the port, while Caleb gripped his compass.

Once they left the channel of the Savannah River behind them, Colton shouted, “Drop the topsails!”

The ship lurched as it caught even more wind, racing through the water. Colton’s crew cheered, tying the lines down.

He met her eyes and the pure joy on his face melted her heart. “You ready for your job?”

“Definitely.”

He walked her over to the side and handed her a spool of rope with a piece of wood tied at the end. Caleb came to her side with an hourglass.

She chuckled. “Can’t you just time sixty seconds on your cell phone?”

His dark eyes flicked to Colton and back to her face. “Now where would be the fun in that?” He smiled. “Did Colton tell you how to count the knots?”

“I toss this wood overboard and call out the knots as they pass through my hand until time runs out.”

“Good.” He readied the hourglass. “Go!”

She tossed it into the water, shouting as the first knot ran past her fingers. “One! Two!” Her heart raced as the mist from the sea stung her cheeks. “Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight!”

“Eight knots!” Caleb yelled, signaling time was up.

Cheers rang out on deck as she reeled in the knotted rope. Colton brushed a kiss to her forehead as he took the spool from her.

She peered up at him. “Sounds like eight knots is a good thing?”

“Yes, she always was fast.” He took her hand. “Remember how to climb the ratlines?”

Her pulse raced. “Are you serious? While we’re sailing?”

He nodded. “You won’t get a better view than up in the crow’s nest.”

“I’d like to live to sail another day.”

He squeezed her hand. “I’ll be with you. You’re not going to fall.”

Her stomach twisted up with nerves, but the dash of adrenaline in her bloodstream pushed her forward. “You guys seriously climb these while you’re at full speed?”

“Course we do. Any pirate worth his salt runs the lines.” He grinned. “As long as the wind stays behind us, Caleb and Keegan won’t need me. Game?”

She chuckled. “Hope I live long enough to regret this.”

He led her to the ropes. “Remember—”

“Keep my eyes on my destination, not my doom.”

“You’re a quick study.” He gripped her waist and boosted her up onto the ropes. With the ship leaning toward the water, weighed down by the wind in her sails, the ratlines weren’t as steep as they’d been at port. She didn’t want to curse herself, but it was actually a little easier than the other night. Keeping her focus up on the crow’s nest, she found her rhythm and only lost her grip once.

Colton caught her leg, stuffing her foot back into the knotted rope. “You alright?”

“Yeah.” She reached up for the next rung. “The wind is really strong up here.” Understatement of the year. The gusts wanted to blow her away like a kite. “I feel like I’m one of the topsails.”

“A few more feet and I’ll help you into the bucket,” he shouted.

The last few rungs were slow, but she was faster to trust him to lift her over the rail this time. She stayed close to him, and he moved behind her like a huge windbreak.

“It’s gorgeous.” The wind tugged tendrils of her auburn hair

from her ponytail. Being this high up out on the Atlantic made her realize how large the ocean was. The ship had seemed gigantic at the dock in Savannah, but now...they were small.

Colton leaned in close to her ear. "I need to tell you something."

"Okay." She turned around in his arms, staring up into his eyes.

He bent to kiss her lips and pulled something out of his pocket placing it in her hand.

She brought it closer, it was a gold coin of some sort. A very old gold coin. "What's this?"

"A doubloon." He cleared his throat. "A Spanish coin from a booty we took in 1794. Our last take before we lost the Sea Dog in 1795."

What the hell was he talking about? She forced a laugh. "You don't have to play pirate for me."

"Not playin'." No trace of a smile. "I should have told you sooner, but I didn't think you'd believe me."

"Stop it." She frowned, a dull throbbing forming at the base of her head. "You're starting to freak me out."

"I'm not crazy, if that's what you're thinkin'."

She caught her hair behind her ear. "Well, what you're telling me is impossible, so I hate to break it to you, but you should see a doctor. Please take me back to Savannah." She couldn't stop rambling. "Does your crew know you think you've been alive for what, around two hundred and fifty years?"

God, saying it out loud made it even worse. And now she was trapped in the middle of the ocean with a madman.

"They've lived it with me."

"No." Skye shook her head, pushing him away from her, but they were in such a tight space he couldn't go far. "I need to get down."

"I'll go first and you can hang onto me."

“No.” She put her leg over the railing, heart in her throat. “I can do this myself, just take me home.”

She slid over the railing, gasping, as she hung by her hands and kicked her feet, searching for the ratlines. Colton leaned over the rail, grasping her wrists. She looked up at him. “Don’t touch me.”

A muscle in his cheek flexed, but his grip didn’t loosen. “I’ll let go once I’m sure you’re steady.”

Her feet were secure on the ropes and she jerked a hand free, gripping the rope. “Let me go.”

He released her other wrist and she held her breath, reaching her toes out for the next rung. By the time she was a few feet down, she was drenched in sweat. There was nowhere to look but down and if she fell...she didn’t want to think about it.

The lines groaned, bouncing as Colton made his way down. He was much faster, passing her by and waiting at the bottom to help her back onto the deck. His hands caught her waist, but the moment her feet were on the deck, she pulled away.

She turned to Keegan at the helm. “Where’s Bob?”

He pointed toward the bow. “In the galley making lunch.”

...

Colton watched her go. His chest ached like she’d ripped his heart out and taken it with her.

“Lass has incredible sea legs.” Keegan chuckled. “She’s pissed at you.”

Colton turned to face his pilot. “I told her we sailed on the original Sea Dog.”

Keegan’s smile faded. “Why? She must think you’re a lunatic.”

Colton gripped the back of his neck, nodding. “Yeah. We better turn back so she doesn’t think she’s being kidnapped.”

“Tacking is going to be tough with our skeleton crew.” Keegan glanced at the rigging.

“I know, but I can’t keep her out here against her will. I’ve done enough damage for one day.”

Keegan gestured to Caleb. “You hear that, navigator?”

Caleb nodded. “Give me a minute to set the new course.”

Keegan rested his forearm on the wheel. “If the spell is fading, you could’ve grown old with this woman. She never had to know you were the Quartermaster on the Sea Dog when it sank in 1795.”

“All true.” Colton glanced over his shoulder toward the bow. “But every man she’s ever known has lied to her. I didn’t want to be another one.”

Keegan chuffed. “But our truth is unbelievable. It’d be better for her not to know.”

“Says you.” Colton met his eyes. “I think I love this woman, Keegan.”

“Bah. What do we know about love?”

“I know that she’s all I think about.” He swallowed the lump in his throat. “From the first moment I met her, she was never intimidated. The fire in her is addictive. I want to be near her.” He pointed in the direction Skye vanished. “You saw how steady she is on the deck and even up on the ratlines. She’s got a pirate’s heart. How can I lie to her for the rest of our lives?”

Keegan shrugged. “Seems pretty simple to me.”

Colton ground his teeth, rolling his eyes. “Wait until you find a woman made to fit in your arms. She’ll share her secrets and you’ll want to share yours.”

He shook his head with a crooked smile. “Don’t put yer curse on me, Quartermaster. I’m good with a woman to warm my bed. Love makes men soft.”

Colton lunged at the helm. Keegan jumped back, arms up to defend himself. Colton chuckled, shaking his head. “Who’s soft now?”

Caleb interrupted them, compass in hand. “You still want to turn back, right?”

Colton nodded. "Take us back to Savannah."

...

Bob's head snapped up when Skye burst through the door. "You said Colton was nothing like Curt. You didn't mention it was because Colton is completely *insane*."

Bob shook his head and set down the knife beside the sandwiches. "Slow down. What happened?"

"I don't know if I can even say it out loud." She slowly met his eyes. "He claims he was the Quartermaster on the original Sea Dog, not in a past life, but now. He'd be..."

"Around two hundred and fifty years old." He came around from the workstation. "It does *sound* crazy."

"No, it *is* crazy." She jammed her hands in the pockets of her jeans and her finger brushed the smooth gold coin in her pocket. "Why would he get me out in the middle of the ocean and tell me that?"

"Maybe he wanted to be sure you couldn't run off before he could explain."

She shook her head. "There is nothing to explain." She pulled the doubloon out of her pocket. "Showing me a rare coin does not prove you've somehow managed not to age for hundreds of years."

Bob scratched his head and lifted his gaze. "How long have you known me?"

"All my life. Why?"

He leaned back on the table as the boat tilted. "And you've been alive now..."

"Twenty-seven years. What's my age got to do with anything?"

He kept his voice low, soothing. "Am I twenty-seven years older than the first time you met me?"

She frowned, staring at his lined face. She'd never given it any thought, but he had to be about sixty when she was a little

girl. Skye took a step closer, examining the wrinkles around his smile.

Goose bumps rose on her arms as her voice caught. “Are you saying you’re...”

“Even older than Colton.”

Her head throbbed, fighting the impossible conclusion he was asking her to make. “There’s no way.”

“You remember the legacy wall at Bob’s?”

She’d seen it a million times as she entered his restaurant. “Yeah. All your relatives who ran the restaurant before you.”

There was a twinkle in his good eye. “We all got one eye, and ain’t none of us young.”

“Young men probably don’t manage restaurants, not enough experience.” Her pulse raced as she clung to the edge of reality by her fingernails.

He waved his hand at her. “You telling me it’s more believable that every male relative I’ve had has looked just like me with one eye?”

“Some had beards, and others had eye patches.”

He rolled his eyes. “Wake up, Skye. I gotta change my appearance a little every time people start noticin’ I don’t look my age. It’s gettin’ to be about that time again.”

She gripped her head in her hands. “There has to be an explanation.”

“There is.”

She turned as Colton’s big frame filled the door. He nodded to Bob and the cook quickly zipped from the room. Skye set the doubloon on the worktable and crossed her arms. “Okay, so how is it logically possible that you’re over two hundred years old, but you don’t look a day over thirty?”

He raised a brow. “I said there was an explanation, not that it was logical.” He gestured to a stool. “Let’s sit.”

The boat tilted again making her take her seat more abruptly

than she intended. He pulled a stool up beside her. “You seem to know the stories. Do you remember the final Spanish ship plundered by Captain Flynn and the Sea Dog?”

She dug into her mental files. “It was coming back from the New World. Possibly El Dorado, right?”

He nodded, his eyes distant, lost in a memory. “The Queen’s Rose rode deep in the water. Her pregnant hull weighed down with gold. We’d been huntin’ her. Rumor was, she carried more treasure than we’d ever seen. We tore into her with cannon fire, I still smell it in my dreams. I gave the command: ‘Grappnels ready, prepare to board!’” He shouted the last part and stared down at his boots.

She ached to touch him, but she didn’t allow herself to reach out. If she bought into this delusion, she might never find her way back to reality.

“We boarded, but instead of a full crew of soldiers for the Queen, we found a priest and a small crew of slaves.” He lifted his eyes to her face. “We locked them up and searched the ship for the gold. In the captain’s chambers, we discovered a chest. We cracked the lock, expecting to find the gold from El Dorado. Instead, there was only a cup—a grail carved from olive wood.”

Her eyes widened. “Are you telling me you stole the Holy Grail?”

“We didn’t know what we had. Captain Flynn was pissed, but I picked it up and when I turned it upright, it was full of water. None of us had poured it.”

“It just magically filled itself?”

He shrugged. “I wasn’t sure, but I told John to bring the rest of our crew on board.” While the Captain questioned the priest, I showed the relic to Caleb, our navigator. He was convinced we’d found the Lord’s cup and to drink of its eternal waters would heal us and strengthen us. Maybe even keep us young.”

She worried her lower lip. As a psychic, she was used to keeping an open mind about the “laws” of the universe, but

this...immortal pirates. It couldn't be real. Fighting it wasn't going to change the fact that reality was changing before her eyes. Bob had been right. There was no way every male relative in his family would be missing an eye. Why hadn't she thought about it before?

"You all drank from it," she whispered.

Colton nodded. "Aye. And it did heal us. It took a few years before we realized we weren't aging anymore."

"Bob drank it, too?"

"One-Eyed Bob, John, Keegan, Caleb, my whole crew."

She pointed toward the door. "Everyone out there has been alive for over two hundred years?"

"Aye."

She reached for his hand and pushed up his sleeve to examine his tattoo. Now she remembered where she'd seen it before. Her gaze locked on his. "This is a talisman for a pirate. The North Star. I remember the stories."

He stared at his forearm. "It was to make sure I was never lost at sea. I could always find my way home." Lifting his head, he started to smile. "Don't tell Bob you heard it from me, but he has a tattoo of a pig on one foot and a rooster on the other. They can't swim, so the legend said if you fell overboard, God would use a miracle to save the innocent animals." He chuckled, shaking his head. "One-Eyed Bob isn't much of a swimmer." Colton sobered. "There's something else I need to tell you."

She crossed her arms. "It couldn't be stranger than finding out the guy I slept with last night really *is* a pirate."

He chuckled, meeting her eyes. "After the Sea Dog sank, I swam to shore and walked into Savannah. I had taken all the gold I could carry before we lost her to the depths, so I wandered into the Pirate's Inn for a cup of rum to warm me." He took her hand, and instead of pulling away, her fingers laced with his. "There was a seer there, a witch. She came straight for me and told me I was destined to meet a woman with violet eyes. She would signal the beginning and ending of

my life.”

Skye tightened her hold on his hand. The two of cups card was taking on a whole new meaning. His cup wasn't like hers. Even if they loved each other, she'd age and one day die, while he'd be left behind, forever young.

Staring at their joined hands, she whispered, “But your life will never end.”

He lifted her chin and stared into her eyes. “This is where it gets interesting.”

“I don't know how much more I can take.”

He cupped her cheek, searching her face. “You're stronger than you know.”

Chapter Nine

He wanted to memorize every curve of her face, the way her smile shone in her eyes. She shook her head. “I guess we’ve gone this far down the rabbit hole, why not dive in head first?”

“Our first gunner, Eli, the one from the car wreck, he drank from the cup, too.” He dropped his hand in his lap, watching her face as she connected the dots.

Her jaw slackened. “He didn’t heal.”

“Aye.” He ran a hand back through his hair. “Bob cut himself and I had a rope burn on my hand. We healed faster than normal men, hell, no one would’ve survived Eli’s accident.” He met her eyes. “But we’re pretty sure the curse is lifting.”

She raised a brow. “Eternal youth is hardly a curse.”

“I didn’t think so at first, but the best parts of living are knowing you have to cherish it because it won’t last forever. Take that away and all the color fades from the world.” He straightened on the stool. “So I never understood the witch’s prophecy, until I met you.”

A crease pinched between her brows. “I’m not following you.”

“I forgot how to live until the day you trespassed on this boat, and since then, everything has changed. I look forward to each day because it might have you in it.”

She searched his eyes, her voice dropping a notch. “What about the other half of the prophecy? Am I somehow going to lead to you getting yourself killed?”

He lifted her hand to his lips. “I don’t think so.” He sobered. “The cup is missing—stolen—and we’re going to find it.” He cleared his throat. “And when we do, I’ve decided I’m not taking another drink.”

Her eyes widened. “But you’ll—”

“Grow old with you.” He watched her face. “If you’ll have

me.”

She put her hands up, hopping off the stool. “Wait a sec. You need to think this through. You have the chance to live forever. You shouldn’t give that up because a psychic gave you a confusing riddle two hundred years ago.”

He looked up at her, his pulse racing. Alive. He started to smile. “I’ve thought it through. I’m tryin’ to say I love you, Skye. This is the life I want. With you.”

Her violet eyes shimmered and his chest tightened. Maybe he’d misread everything. Just because he wanted to begin and end every day with her in his arms didn’t mean she felt the same way.

He waited, watching her every move for a clue to her thoughts. Finally, she returned to the stool, her gaze locked on his. “I came on board last night and got in your bed because I made a choice, too. I know you don’t believe in the cards, but for the past year, every time I lay out a spread for myself, the two of cups comes up. It’s usually a ‘love’ card of sorts. It symbolizes a union or partnership between two people. I rushed into a relationship with Curt because I thought I was following my divine course. Destiny.”

She shifted on the stool and looked at the floor. “When I found out he was lying to me, I lost faith in my gift. But last night the card came up again and I realized maybe it was never Curt at all.” She lifted her head, meeting his eyes. “I think it was you all along.”

He yearned to draw her into his arms and never let her go as relief washed through him, but as he leaned closer, she put her hand on his chest. “I’m not finished.”

The nerves were back in full force. He ground his teeth and nodded, giving her more space.

“Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a pirate. When I heard the old stories, they weren’t just legends, they were dreams. My dreams.” She took his hand, calming the tempest of emotions swirling in his gut. “But I never believed I would actually fall in love with one.”

It took a minute for her words to sink through his thick skull. He started to smile, tentative, some part of him sure he was dreaming. “Are you saying you love me, too?”

“Aye.” She chuckled, and nothing could have wiped the grin from his face.

She reached for his hand. “But if you ever lie to me again...”

He shook his head. “I’ve told you all my secrets.”

She grinned and grabbed his shirt, pulling him in for a kiss. Her lips were soft, warm, and he would never get tired of tasting them.

Resting her forehead on his, she whispered, “Do I get to help you find the Holy Grail?”

“Aye. If I have anything to say about it.”

Her grin lit up the room. “Can’t hurt to have a psychic on your crew, right?”

He pulled her onto his lap and fused his lips to hers, his heart pounding in his ears as his tongue explored the paradise of her mouth.

“Crew’s gettin’ hungry.” Bob opened the door and Skye jumped free of Colton’s arms.

The cook grinned at them both. “Good to see you’ve mended your differences.”

Skye nodded. “I can’t believe I never figured out all the pictures on your wall were really all you.”

“Savannah’s a mystical place.” One-Eyed Bob chuckled. “Folks see what they want to see.”

Chapter Ten

Skye finished with her last client and went to the back cupboard of her shop. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door and drew out the crystal ball hidden inside. The clear orb had been passed down through the women in her family for four generations that she knew of, maybe longer.

But she'd never used it. That wasn't exactly true. As a teen, she'd taken it out once, struggling to get the face of her soulmate. Typical parlor tricks, but she hadn't expected it to work. That night she saw something, and it frightened her enough that she'd kept it stashed ever since.

It wasn't a face.

Instead, the fog in the ball had cleared to show her a ship with black sails.

During the past few weeks with Colton, she'd been properly introduced to the crew, and the Captain grudgingly agreed to stop hounding her to buy her property. She'd also learned the original Sea Dog that sank in 1795 had been wearing her black sails.

So the ball had given her the answer all those years ago, she just hadn't had any idea what it meant.

And now, she hoped it would give them insight into the location of the cup. Agent Bale had visited her shop twice since she'd been brought into the pirate fold, and his intel about the consortium shopping the cup on the black market was helpful, but they needed more. At least if she could get a location, they'd have a place to start searching.

Smoke twisted up from the incense burner in the corner. She turned out the light, drenching the room in shadows and the warm glow of the flickering candles. Her mother had never taught her to connect with the crystal orb, but the instinct was there. She ran her hands over the smooth surface, warming it with her energy and intention.

She closed her eyes, whispering her plea to find the location of the Lord's cup. Gradually, energy built between the ball and

her fingertips, tingling up her arms. She opened her eyes, staring into nothingness. Finally the fog inside began to clear. An image came forth.

The fountain in the center of Forsythe Park. She pushed for more, a name, a face, but she kept getting the fountain and running water.

By the time she broke the connection, her head throbbed. She'd been trying too hard, pulling for more information when the universe wasn't willing to give any more. She jotted down every detail before the tendrils of the vision vanished.

The lock on the door turned, breaking her concentration. She smiled as Colton stepped inside. He glanced around at the candles. "Romantic in here."

She chuckled. "Nah, just trying to see if I could get any clues about where we might find the Holy Grail."

He took the chair across from her. "Got any juice left to read for me?"

She raised a brow. "You don't believe in the cards."

"You believed me and my crazy story. I figure I owe you the same trust." He got up and turned the deadbolt, then took his seat and met her eyes. "I love you, Skye. And I believe in *you*. This is a big part of you." He nudged the cards toward her. "I'm ready."

She smiled, shuffling her well-worn deck. It was a silly thing really; she read cards for a living, but seeing Colton sitting across from her, trusting in her abilities, it warmed her all over. How was it possible that she loved him more every day?

"Okay, I'm just going to pull three cards. Past, Present, and Future."

"Fair enough." He shifted in his chair. "Do I need to do anything?"

"No." She smiled. "Stop fidgeting. It's not going to hurt."

He chuckled and stilled his jitters, clasping his hands together on the table.

She cut the deck and pulled three cards.

First was the eight of cups. She glanced up from the card. “Okay so this is your past. In my deck, this card usually represents regrets and progress for the future.” She raised a brow at the surprise on his face. “Think this might be regret at taking a drink from that cup?”

He nodded slowly, sitting back in the chair. “Aye.” His dark eyes met hers, the corner of his lips curving into a crooked smile. “So what’s my present look like?”

She flipped the card and chuckled. “Seven of swords in this deck represents a journey and you have the endurance to see it through.”

“The hunt for the cup.”

She tapped her nail on the card. “I think so. He’s even on a boat in this picture.”

“I’m impressed.” His eyes sparkled in the candlelight and her heart skipped a beat.

She gripped the corner of the final card. “Ready?”

“Aye.”

She turned the final card. “The three of coins.” Her lips curved into a smile. “This card shows that you’re a master at your trade and will profit from your endeavors. It means you’re going to end up getting what you want most.”

His grin lit up the room as he stood from his chair. He came around to her side of the table and in one swift movement, bent down and pulled her out of her chair and onto his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

Skye squeaked, struggling for a moment. “What are you doing?”

“Getting what I want most.” He ran one hand up her thigh.

“I think the card was referring to the cup.” She laughed as he carried her up the stairs to her flat above the store, careful not to hit her head on the doorframe as he stepped inside.

He laid her on the bed and settled over her, his gaze locked

on hers. “There’s one more thing I want.”

She smiled, reaching up to cup his cheek. “What’s that?”

He pulled out a silver ring with a big amethyst stone in the middle. “I want you to be my wife.”

Nothing in the world could have wiped off her smile. “Yes,” she whispered.

He slid the ring onto her finger. It was obviously not purchased in a jewelry store. She tore her eyes from the ring and stared up at Colton. “This is an antique.”

He shrugged with a twinkle in his eye. “Wasn’t when I stole it.”

She pulled him down and kissed him, her newly ringed hand sliding back into his hair. Never in her most precious secret dreams did she believe a pirate would steal her heart.

Breaking the kiss, she ogled the ring on her finger and smiled up at him. “Wait a sec, am I wearing pirate booty?”

His crooked grin warmed her all over. “Aye, lass, but would ye want it any other way?”



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About the Author

Stay up-to-date on new releases and giveaways by subscribing to Lisa's newsletter here: goo.gl/qalliS

[Lisa Kessler](#) is a best-selling author of dark paranormal fiction. She's a two-time San Diego Book Award winner for Best Published Fantasy-Sci-fi-Horror and Best Published Romance. Her books have also won the PRISM award, the Award of Excellence, the National Excellence in Romantic Fiction Award, the Award of Merit from the Holt Medallion, and an International Digital Award for Best Paranormal.

Her short stories have been published in print anthologies and magazines, and her vampire story, *Immortal Beloved*, was a finalist for a Bram Stoker award.

When she's not writing, Lisa is a professional vocalist, and has performed with San Diego Opera as well as other musical theater companies in San Diego.

You can learn more at Lisa-Kessler.com

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DRAKON'S PAST

a *Blood of the Drakon* novel by [N.J. Walters](#)

When Constance purchases a set of four dragon statues, she's thrust into a world of secret societies, men who think nothing of kidnapping and murder, and dragon shifters. The loneliness haunting Nic has been getting worse since all his brothers have found their fated mates. And when he finds his, and she's involved with the secret society of hunters who hunt and capture his kind, his heart and his life are in jeopardy.

THE CURSE

a *Shifter Origins* novel by [Harper A. Brooks](#)

Astrid's time is running out. If she doesn't find her soul's mate before her twenty-fifth Blue Moon rises, she will die. With only three weeks left, things aren't looking good. Lone wolf Erec is determined to stop a crazed killer from harming anyone else. Even if it means helping a rival pack. But he never expected to feel such a pull for the alpha's beautiful daughter, Astrid. Danger looms, but Astrid and Erec are willing to do whatever it takes to save the pack, even if they die trying.

WAR GAMES

a *Valiant Knox* novel by [Jess Anastasi](#)

Lieutenant Theresa Brenner will stop at nothing to save her downed pilot, even if it means being part of the dirtside team led by Colonel Cameron McAllister. Bren might respect the charming colonel, but she'll never trust him—because he was responsible for her brother's death. The last thing Colonel Cameron McAllister needs is Lieutenant Theresa Brenner tagging along on his covert mission. Not only doesn't the frosty pilot have the ground game to keep up, she's a potential distraction with all those gorgeous blond curls—and she might be just like her brother, who got his men killed.