

Pirates of Port Royal 2: The Penitent Pirate

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eISBN 9781682523513

Editor: Keren Reed

Cover Artist: Valerie Tibbs

Published in the United States of America

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 170549

San Francisco CA 94117-0549

www.loose-id.com

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Prologue

Port Royal

The night was filled with the Bacchanalian roar of pirates and strumpets making merry. It was All Hallows' Eve, but the most depraved city in the New World needed no excuse to celebrate. Torches burned bright in front of every tavern, punch house, and brothel, lighting up the streets.

But even Port Royal had its quiet corners. There was a crescent moon, but it was hidden by patchy cloud that intermittently covered its face. Here, a flambeau shone by a doorway, and there, the yellow gleam of a lamp spilled from a window. But for the most part, the avenues and lanes between New Street and Church Street lay in darkness.

A shrouded figure flitting through the alleys took good care to stay in the shadows. Autumn in Jamaica was far from cold, but the furtive form was enveloped in a voluminous cloak. Hunched and misshapen, its gait was odd but soft-footed withal. It stole into a narrow lane, looking up at the houses but passing them all by.

The figure reached the corner where the alley met the main street. There stood a small building, dwarfed by its neighbor, which rose three floors above it. The yard behind the corner house was separated from the alley by a gate, and here the cloaked figure halted.

Set deep into a brick wall, the gate was a door of solid wood panels and fitted with a stout brass latch. A pale hand appeared and quietly worked the handle. It rattled but did not lift. With a sigh, the figure crouched. A bulky shape emerged from under the cloak and was set on the ground where the shadow was darkest. Straightening up and glancing about, the figure raised both hands and threw back the cloak's hood.

The moon sailed from behind a cloud, casting dim light into the alleyway. If anyone watched, they would see a woman revealed. Gold rings flashed in her ears, and some gewgaw glittered in her dark hair. She was no beauty, but a certain haughty confidence in her bearing and a curl to her full lips conveyed sensuality. She fiddled with the bun at the back of her head, and from it she drew two long pins, crouching to insert them into the lock. With great care, she began to jiggle them.

She turned her head sharply at a burst of loud chatter and a snatch of singing from the street. Light from a cresset held high penetrated the alley. She shrank against the door, cowering in the shadow which would cover her only from a cursory glance. Taking up their fellow's song in so tuneless a fashion that it sounded more dirge than ditty, the revelers sauntered past without looking into the alley.

Quiet returned.

With a tiny sigh of relief, the woman bent to her work again. The noises she made were not loud, but every now and then she froze, cocking her head to listen. The moon slid behind a roof, plunging the alley into complete darkness, but it did not hinder her. Doggedly, she kept working the lock.

A cat yowled, and a soft thud, as if something fell, caught her attention. She straightened, her back plastered to the gate, her eyes darting about as she strained to see what lay in the shadows. Nothing moved.

Holding the cloak tight about herself, the woman raised her hood again, silently slinking past the house. Darting into the street, she half ran along the walkway before suddenly ducking behind a wooden fence. She peeped out cautiously, watching the alley's mouth. After a few moments, a man in loose slops and a yellow stocking cap emerged. He looked up and down the street indecisively, pushing back his cap to scratch at his scalp. Finally, he went left, away from her hiding place and toward the High Street.

Not until he had receded into the distance did the woman steal from behind the fence. She halted uncertainly for a moment. With a last, lingering look at the alley, she turned away, her steps swift as she went in the opposite direction to Stocking-cap.

Anon she came to the Lime Street junction and checked, her gaze sweeping the mass of people.

The crossroad was crowded, but not all were at leisure—in the busy port there was always work to be done. Messengers ran back and forth, skirting the merry-makers who staggered under the effects of the notorious Port Royal rum, and ladders were taking advantage of the cooler night to carry out the heavy work of loading and unloading ships. Myriad carts trundled noisily along the street, delivering goods to the sloops moored in the Chocolata Hole, and their drivers hurled insults at the drunken men who hindered their progress.

Glancing nervously over her shoulder, the woman crossed the busy thoroughfare and kept moving in the direction of the Hole.

The waterfront was even more hectic than Lime Street, filled with the Brethren of the Coast, the pirates of the West Indies. Celebrating the end of the storm season, the buccaneers had flooded Port Royal. They would soon set sail to hunt and plunder the fat merchant ships of the Caribbean, but tonight they were making the most of the town's debaucheries.

Most men in the street were fox-drunk and, if conscious, looking for company. The woman stepped over senseless forms snoring on the walkways and picked her way carefully around raucous groups of drunken seamen. But despite her efforts to draw no attention to herself, a buccaneer clutched at her cloak from behind.

"Show us what you're hiding, little sparrow. As sweet an arse as ever I fucked, I'll warrant."

She stamped on his foot. He staggered back with a howl. Slipping around him, she stepped back onto the walkway when another buccaneer cornered her against the wall of a tavern.

"I like a lad who puts up a fight," he said with a chuckle. "Oftentimes they have the tightest holes."

She warded off his adventurous hands, but in the struggle her hood fell back. The man gave a low whistle, an appreciative gleam in his eye.

"Why, a feisty lass—even better! If you've no prick of your own, I'm willing to share mine. How much for the rest of the night?"

The long nose of a pistol appeared from under her cloak.

"Your life," she said softly.

He put his hands up, stepping back with a smile.

"As you will, pussycat. But if ever you change your mind, come find me. Jan Hendriks, of *Night Hawk*."

She said nothing, backing away until she was out of reach. The pistol disappeared back into the folds of her cloak. Swinging around, she pulled her hood back up and hurried past the Hole. At the corner of Spaniel Lane, fifty yards distant, a sign bearing the crude likeness of a sheep rendered in black hung above a door. Her steps quickened.

Suddenly a man stepped into her path and caught her by the upper arms. His silk doublet was festooned with loops of ribbon, exquisite lace foaming from his wrists and throat, but even this finery was not enough to make her look up. She slapped impatiently at his hands in an attempt to pass him. But his fingers were strong, and he had too firm a hold to be idly beaten off. As she struggled, he pulled her close and pushed back her hood with one hand.

"Give you good even, Elena." The soft voice spoke with the accent of the gentry. "Your brother searches high and low for you, and haply I find you first! But whatever is a lady doing in such a rowdy place?"

Her eyes flew to his face, and she gasped, her struggles ceasing. The gentleman smiled sweetly, his voice dropping to a murmur as he continued.

"Did you really believe you could keep it from me?"

"I do not know what you mean, sir." Her voice trembled, and her eyes darted about as if she were seeking an escape. "Prithee, leave go of me."

"Enough. Tell me where you hid it, and I'll let you live."

She hung her head, her breath catching on a sob. His smile broadened at her docility, and his grasp on her loosened. In a swift and sudden move, she twisted like an eel and broke free. The gentleman clutched wildly, but her cloak slid from her shoulders and he was left with naught in his hands but fine woolen cloth. Beneath, the woman was clad in buccaneer garb, a pair of pistols tucked into the red-striped sash about her waist.

The gentleman snarled, his teeth bared. Before he could reach for her again, she was running down the street, dodging carts and men.

"Ho, not so fast," cried a new voice, and an arm tried to catch her about the waist.

Skipping sideways, she executed a neat turn, glancing up at her fresh assailant. He had an unprepossessing countenance, topped by a yellow stocking cap and dominated by a wide mouth filled with crooked teeth. As she spun, her arm arced upward, silver gleaming in her hand. With a grunt, Stocking-cap clutched at his throat and collapsed to his knees, red welling between his fingers. The woman darted into the shifting crowd and was swallowed up.

Left with an empty cloak in his hands and malevolent fury on his face, the gentleman approached the fallen man. He stood looking down for a moment, his nostrils twitching with distaste.

"I told you not to go near her," he said, disdain in his voice.

Stocking-cap looked up, his eyes already clouded. "H-help me."

The gentleman knelt. "Of course. First, tell me where she went and who she was looking for."

"C-c-c..." Slowly, the dying man crumpled sideways. A dark stain spread on the sand beneath him, and his eyes stared sightlessly at the feet that strolled carelessly past.

Passersby glanced at the little tableaux and shrugged. Another argument in Port Royal gone wrong, and nobody's business but those involved. If it did not disappear in the night, the militia would remove the body on the morrow. And long before then, no doubt, the dead man's pockets would be emptied and even his clothes stolen.

With a disgusted grunt, the gentleman stood. He let the cloak slip from his fingers, and it fell onto the corpse, partially covering its face. With a measuring light in his eyes, he looked in the direction the woman had vanished.

Sooner or later this very night, he would catch up with Elena.

Chapter One

Jamaica

"I can save you, Master Quinn."

There was a weight on his back. His face was pushed into water, and he was choking, drowning. He struggled wildly. The manacles around his wrists bit deep.

"Tell me, and you will be free," came that hateful voice, buzzing in his ears like a corpse-fly.

"No!" he screamed into the water.

No one would hear him. No one would find him. No one would save him.

Not this time.

He was back in the clutches of his nemesis, in a nameless dungeon, and this time he would die. He sank, his lungs crushed as the weight upon him moved, trapping him. He was drowning, but he could still hear that voice, warm and rich and thick as blood, flowing into his ears.

"All I want is Thomas. You have betrayed him already; what matter if you do so again?"

"I've...never betrayed him!"

"Liar." The word echoed through him, a knell of doom. "You lied to him. Every day you lie to him. Would he love you if he knew the truth?"

"I never...lied..." He could scarcely catch his breath. Blackness danced at the edges of his vision.

"You told him you were true to him. That there was no one else."

"I am true..."

"Deceiver." A poisonous whisper, shuddering across his nape.

He tried to shake his head, to deny it, but he could not move. "I have not...deceived him!"

Laughter, deep and mocking. "I saw you with La Piquêre, Master Quinn. I saw you with another man."

"That was...was nothing."

"Will Thomas believe that? Will he not wonder that you kept such a secret from him?"

"I have...no secrets... Not from him..."

Stale cabbage and garlic and sickly sweet musk assailed his nostrils as another laugh reverberated through his head.

"Ah, but you are a poor liar. You are afraid to tell him. So many secrets, Master Quinn. So many things for you to live in dread of." A tongue licked his neck, the weight upon him shifted. "Oh, how I love to taste it, your fear. But it is not you I want; it is he. This will all be over, and all you must do is betray him to me."

"Never!"

Quinn tugged at his bonds; his hands were slippery with his own blood. He was tied to a board, spread-eagled, helpless. Fingers caressed him, stinging along his skin as if they were made of nettles. His aching member was obscenely engorged; fluid leaked and ran down in a lewd trickle. A hand wrapped around his cock, and his balls tightened with fear.

"I know you want me," whispered the voice as his buttocks were wrenched apart.

Pain spiked as the entrance to his body was viciously jabbed. He bit down to halt any cry, but a grunt escaped him. Movement flickered, and he lifted his eyes. A figure in a black robe stood before him.

"Gabriel," came a soft voice.

Shocked, Quinn strained to see the man's face, hidden in the shadow of a cowl—but he did not need to. He would know the voice of his lover, were it a whisper amid the storm. Silver eyes shone upon him, and Quinn turned away, hiding from that merciless gaze.

Weeping helplessly, he surrendered, knowing he must be punished. He was hateful, vile. A base creature who deserved neither love nor life. He could not see the instrument of his death, but he could feel it probing, testing. Erelong it would pierce him and would not stop until it ran him through.

"Forgive me, Thomas." He wept.

"Gabriel," said Perry, grabbing his arms and shaking him.

Pain blossomed, stabbing his body like myriad thorns.

"Thomas!" he screamed, and there was nothing but suffocating dark.

"Gabriel!" came Perry's voice again.

Quinn's bonds were gone, and he was falling, falling into a black abyss.

His whole body jerked. He was facedown, buried in something soft. His heart hammered in his chest.

He focused.

He was in a bed, his face smothered by his pillow, and Perry was shaking his shoulder.

"Gabriel!"

Quinn flopped over onto his side, taking deep, gasping breaths as he lay as limp as a boned fish. His throat was dry, his cheeks were wet.

Light flared; he blinked at the sudden brightness, his vision blurred by tears. Beside their bed, Perry fiddled with the lamp, setting the flame low. Lifting the gauze curtain that surrounded the bed, Perry slipped under and crawled back to Quinn's side. Quinn reached for him, and their hands met and clasped. Perry pulled him close. Strong arms surrounded him as he pressed his face into the hollow of his lover's shoulder.

“Thomas.”

He spoke softly, but his voice cracked as he curled up into safety, sliding arms about Perry’s waist and clinging tight. His lover—his matelot—rocked him gently, cheek against his hair.

“Was it him?”

The name stayed unuttered, for Quinn could not bear to say it, nor even hear it said aloud. There was no need to answer his matelot. He shuddered with the memory of his nightmare, the remnant of it foul in his mouth.

Perry held him tighter. “He’s not coming back, Gabriel. Even if Rusé fails to find him, he’d not dare set foot in any place he might be recognized.”

“I know.”

There was quiet during which Perry asked no questions. Quinn was grateful for his lover’s forbearance. Rescued from a foul Spanish dungeon months ago, he still could not speak of what had happened there. What had been done to him there. His only desire was to forget. It seemed, however, his unconscious mind had other plans, weaving his trauma in with his guilty secrets.

Perry tilted Quinn’s head up, combing back his hair, tenderness in his eyes. “Think only of me,” he whispered, and he laid his mouth on Quinn’s in a soft kiss.

Arms were around him, hands flat and firm on his back as Quinn lay passive under his matelot’s kisses. Perry’s tongue teased his mouth open, gently seeking a way inside. Quinn sighed with a combination of relief and pleasure, letting his lover take the lead. Hands on him soothed, Perry’s body and mouth on his own in a comforting pressure.

They lay thus for a long time, warm against each other, kissing lightly, hands stroking softly. Calm spread through Quinn. Perry’s prick stirred, and soon it was pressing into his belly. His own prick had not awakened, but he moved his leg over his lover’s, tucking a heel into the back of his thighs. Their groins met, and the hardness felt

good against his own soft member. He ground his pelvis into Perry's, hoping to feel a tingle of lust, a spark of fire lighting him from within. He stayed humiliatingly limp.

A hideous screeching split the peace of the night. Quinn recoiled, giving a mortifying yelp of fear. With a vicious curse, Perry leaped from the bed and flung open the jalousies. There was a squawk and a frenzied flapping of wings as Perry stepped onto the balcony, and Quinn heard him shout, "Go on, gerroff, you!"

Curled into a ball, Quinn felt heavy tears gather in his eyes, tears of fright, of shame. He was a sniveling coward to start at such a noise. But though it was only the raucous morning cry of a rooster, the sound had pierced his soul.

The crow of the cock—the clarion call of the traitor.

He heard the jalousies slam as Perry came back into the room. Fighting for control, he forced his body to unclench itself and stretched out, propping himself up on his elbow, forcing his lips into a spurious smile he desperately tried to stop wavering.

"That accursed rooster," his lover grumbled. "I swear I'll order the cook to make it into soup."

"The bird—" Quinn broke off when his voice squeaked. He cleared his throat. "The bird acts as it should. 'Tis its job to wake us in the morning."

He finally got his trembling mouth under control and showed Perry a smiling face, but his lover was not fooled. His eyes dark, as sad as rainclouds, he sat on the bed by Quinn, resting his hand on Quinn's cheek.

"I suppose 'tis near enough to the dawn. The house will soon be stirring. Shall we stay abed?"

"I've a restlessness that needs quenching. Let's go the armory."

Quinn felt a twinge of guilt as disappointment flared in Perry's eyes. A moment later, he could have imagined it, for Perry gave him the smile that was sunshine and starlight.

"Aye, once we return to Port Royal, we'll be busy getting ready to sail," said Perry. "There'll be little enough time for our exercises then."

"Faith, I've never been so bloody busy during a sojourn ashore." He was pleased his voice sounded almost normal now. "You've had me at sword practice near every damned day! But for the last week I've been feeling the need to go roving again. 'Tis in the blood, I'm thinking."

"Mayhap in mine also," replied his lover. He smirked. "And now I'm chief mate, I outrank a mere sailing master. I'll make a special effort to keep you in line, Master Quinn."

Quinn's eyes lit up with merriment. "Ah, but don't be forgetting you're no longer Lieutenant Peregrine of His Majesty's ship *Royal Covenant* – you're Mr. Perry-grin of the buccaneer ship *Audacious*. Belike the crew won't be paying as much attention to your whims as you might be accustomed to."

"Such a rabble of pirates needs only the right discipline to be tamed. The Irish pirates in particular."

"You might find yourself subjected to quite a measure of the right discipline if you don't guard your unruly tongue. By an Irish pirate in particular."

"Oh?" Perry's eyes danced. "Is that a pledge, Master Quinn?"

Leaning forward, Quinn pinched Perry's determined chin and laid a swift kiss on his lips. "It surely is, *a chuisle*."

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