

**Pirates of Port Royal 0.5: A Pirate's Promise**

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**A Loose Id "Sneak Peek"**

*The Caribbean, 1664*

## Chapter One

### *The Gulf of Florida*

Job waited to die.

Kneeling on the deck, his hands on his head, he looked with dull eyes at the dead men around him. His *compañeros*. Not that he would call them that, but the pirates would. His gaze fell upon Silvio, openmouthed with his last gasp of death. An almost-smile twitched Job's lips, though he would be joining Silvio all too soon.

An argument had been raging above Job's head for several minutes. Several more minutes of his life to enjoy. The moment he had sometimes prayed for was here, and now the miseries he had endured seemed nothing. He wanted to live. But at any moment, the boarding ax in the hand of the fierce pirate would come down upon his head, and that would be the end of him.

But another man held the fierce pirate at bay with the long barrel of a musket. Shirtless and daubed with blood, soot masking his face, this man looked every bit as terrifying. But he was arguing for Job's life.

"Get the hell out of my road," snarled the fierce one.

"Crook, he's unarmed. Captain said we're not to be killing men who throw down their weapons."

His defender was an Irishman, thought Job distantly. As if it mattered.

"And how many of our mates do you think he's killed?"

"I couldn't say, but I saw him kill that one."

The Irishman pointed at Silvio as Crook raised his ax again. Crook checked and then bridled.

"He's a traitor twice over, then."

"What's toward here?" A new voice, crisp and filled with authority. Both pirates turned and stood that little bit straighter.

The new man was fully dressed, unlike most of the pirates who wore naught but their breeches. His shirt might be splashed with crimson, but his face was clean, and he bore the appearance of a civilized man. A rapier was in his hand, and though it was coated in gore, Job could see it was a fine weapon.

"Got ourselves a Judas Iscariot, Mr. Peregrine," said Crook. "This shit-sack was sailing with the Dons, and him an Englishman."

"But he's surrendered, Mr. Peregrine," said the Irish pirate. "And I'm thinking he's not overfond of the Dons—I saw him strangle one with his bare hands."

"Noted, Mr. Dubh." The man turned to Crook. "Mr. Cruikshank, you heard Captain Black's orders. The survivors go to Port Royal to be ransomed." He surveyed the corpses strewn around them, his lips pursed. "If there are any survivors."

"They'll nae ransom this one—he'll be hanged for a pirate. Let him die clean here instead of at the end of a rope."

"Mayhap." Cold gray eyes alighted on Job, and he dropped his own. "What have you to say for yourself, Judas Iscariot?"

"I ain't here willing," said Job, his voice sullen. "Them Dons attacked my ship. Sank her. Took me and forced me to—" He swallowed, unwilling to put it into words, but he must tell this grim man something. "Forced me to work for them."

"The Dons don't take captives to work their ships."

Job lifted his shoulder. "Their master had gone and died."

Mr. Peregrine's brows lifted skeptically. "You're a master of sail?"

"Nay, just a hand. But I know these waters. They said if I got them safe back to Isla de los Árboles, they'd let me go."

"And you believed them?"

Job could read nothing in Mr. Peregrine's flat eyes. He shrugged again.

“Figured I was bound for their bloody dungeon, whatever they told me. Was planning to sink them on the Rechinars. Told them I knew the way through the reef, didn’t I? They never suspicioned I’d be willing to go down with them, if only to take them all to hell.” Job cast a dark look at his dead captors.

To Job’s surprise, a smile lifted Mr. Peregrine’s mouth. It quite transformed his grim visage. He would never be a handsome man, but the smile gave him a certain charm.

“Very well; you have your life—for now. I’ll leave it to the captain to decide what to do with you. Mr. Dubh, take him to the ship. Mr. Cruikshank, you’re with me. We’re clearing out below.”

“Aye, Mr. Peregrine,” said both pirates in chorus.

Crook and Mr. Peregrine disappeared down the hatch. The Irishman held out a hand, and Job grabbed it, pulling himself to his feet. He looked up; like most men, the pirate was inches taller than he was. A grin curved the shapely lips. Job could not resist returning it, and the coldness that sat like a stone in his belly warmed.

“Much obliged,” he said awkwardly. “I mean, for saving my life.”

“Don’t be making me regret it, boyo.”

“I ain’t a boy,” said Job, a little sulky.

“Soothly? You surely cannot be much more than fifteen.”

Job was short, his figure slight, and he was accustomed to men underestimating his age. But somehow it stung more coming from this man.

“I’m nineteen!” he snapped, throwing his shoulders back.

Chestnut brown eyes laughed at him. It was kindly laughter, though.

“All right, I’m eighteen,” Job conceded reluctantly. “But I’ll be nineteen come the autumn.”

Mr. Dubh pursed his lips, though the brilliant eyes still danced. “I’ll remember,” he said gravely. “’Tis only half a year hence, after all. So, do you have a name?”

"Job Wright."

"Well met, Job. I'm Garrett. Follow me, now."

They crossed the deck, stepping over corpses. A rope net connected the two ships. Job watched for a moment, seeing the man's back muscles knotting under his skin as he hauled himself up, his arse on perfect display as his breeches tightened around his nether regions. Job swallowed at the sight, surprised by the stirring in his own breeches. He grabbed on to the net and climbed. Heaving himself over the gunwale of the pirate ship, he dropped onto the deck. Garrett was waiting for him.

"Welcome aboard the *Audacious*."

"The *Audacious*? You're the Black Wolf's crew?"

"That we are. Come, I'll take you to clean up."

For the first time since his own ship had been taken by the Spanish *guardacosta*, Job felt a glimmer of hope that he might survive. The *Audacious* sailed under the marque of the Jamaican governor. And whilst the Black Wolf was a fearsome captain, one of the Brethren of the Coast, he was known for his clemency toward captives. He might even let Job go. Though to do what, Job had no notion. He had been at sea since he was fourteen—he knew no other life. He had but one skill.

Garrett stowed his musket near one of the ship's guns and then led Job to the forward cabins. He opened a door and gestured for Job to precede him. The room was a quarter gallery, generous in size, containing several tall barrels and four privies. Job looked around, wide-eyed.

"We have necessary seats up top as well," said Garrett, noticing his stares. "We've a crew of a hundred odd, and the captain says a ship can never have too many places for a man to take a shit. Especially when the food's gone bad and everyone's got the squitters. And down here, you don't get soaked if the weather's foul."

A waist-high shelf ran along one bulkhead. Garrett opened the cupboard under it to reveal several washbasins stacked inside and a pile of waste cloths. Setting a basin on the shelf, Garrett scooped water from one of the barrels and poured it into the basin. He

loosened his battle-tangled hair from its sailor's queue, and it fell about his shoulders, a dark veil. Running his hands through the thick mass, he pulled out a tangle or two and neatened it before tying it back again. Job stood stock-still, wondering if he was supposed to assist him.

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