

*Wild Heart
of the Seas
Birth of the
Avenging Angel*

Book I of Wild Heart Series

By Jem Richards

To my youngest daughter, whom

I have used as my inspiration

for the main character

Table of Contents

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-one

Chapter Twenty-two

Chapter Twenty-three

Chapter Twenty-four

Chapter Twenty-five

Chapter Twenty-six

Chapter Twenty-seven

Chapter Twenty-eight

Chapter Twenty-nine

Chapter Thirty

Chapter Thirty-one

Chapter Thirty-two

Chapter Thirty-three

Epilogue



Prologue

Caribbean- Port Royal

Crystal rode her white horse into the woods out-skirting their small city for her secret practice. If anyone knew of her activities, Papa wouldn't let her practice her fencing with Commodore Edward Sullivan anymore. Papa had allowed Commodore Edward Sullivan to teach Crystal fencing since she was ten as a way to teach her self-defense in times where pirate raids are a real threat. Commodore Sullivan was a very nice gentleman who always shown patience towards Crystal, she had practically grown up with him around. He had long brown hair that he wore in a low ponytail that reached to his mid back and had kind hazel eyes. At his age of twenty-one, he was not yet married.

Crystal had been practicing rope swinging and tree hopping for years in secret, since she was twelve. At sixteen, she has perfected her techniques and found a thrill of freedom from her stifling life as the Governor's daughter. She always had to be the perfect little lady and use her manners to a 'T'. As far as anyone knew, she took horseback rides in these woods. Her Nanny used to bring her into the woods to let her play when she was younger. She used to climb and play in the trees even as a young child. When she reached twelve, Papa had stated she didn't need a Nanny anymore. Shortly after, she had begun her own practice. It wasn't unusual to anyone that she disappeared in the woods for hours at a time in the afternoon for her 'horseback ride'.

Nanny still watched after her younger sister, Anna, who is only eleven. Anna prefers to sit with Nanny by the cliff and paint her pictures. With the same raven black hair and emerald green eyes, she has a more artistic view and acts more feminine.

Crystal's Papa says she has a bit of a wild nature with her horseback riding, fencing, and swimming. When Crystal was fourteen, she had come across a young hawk with a broken wing in the woods. Crystal had taken her in and cared for the hawk until she was healed. The hawk has stayed close to her since, which she named her Nightshade. Nightshade was protective of Crystal and always stayed fairly close to her. Nightshade is a black hawk, with reddish brown mixed in the

feathers on her back and on her chest, and white feathers on the under-side of her tail.

Crystal led her horse deep into the woods to her secret area. She still wore her elegant white dress with bell sleeves and ruffles across her chest. She had packed a white blouse, black cloth pants, and boots in her saddlebags to change into for practice. She halted her horse under the deep woods tree cover where her ropes hung from the tree branches high above and dismounted from her sidesaddle. She opened her saddlebags and pulled out her blouse and pants to drape them over the saddle, and her black below-the-knee boots that she set on the ground by her. She anxiously changed from her elegant dress into her blouse, pants, and boots.

Crystal pulled her long raven black hair free from her blouse and let it fall full length down her back to her waist. She craned her neck to look up into the trees with her emerald green eyes and smiled in satisfaction. She felt exhilarated with her freedom and her chance to break away from her role of the perfect little lady as the Governor's daughter.

Crystal turned her attention to two trees as she began to run centered between two tree trunks. As she neared them she jumped and kicked out with her right leg to bounce off toward the other before kicking out with her left leg and bouncing back and forth, working her way up till she landed on a branch high up in the tree to the right. Crystal paused on the branch to look down at her horse ten feet below her as her blood began to sing in her veins and she felt a rush of adrenaline in her excitement.

Crystal turned her focus to her course of tree branches and hanging ropes that served as her practice grounds. She jumped to the next branch and felt it slightly sway down and come back up as she leapt to the next branch. She launched herself at a rope to grab hold of and surged forward to the next as she latched on to it and released the other rope fluidly to swing forward and landed with ease on another tree branch. She let go of the rope, moved to the next branch, and continued her tree hopping fluidly as she gained momentum moving from branch to branch until she brought herself into a large loop and approached a small clearing with a rope hanging at its center. Crystal leapt from a branch near the clearing and reached out to grab hold of the rope to swing over the clearing and into the tree branches on the other side to land fluidly on a tree branch before lurching forward to continue

moving among the branches. She loved the breeze brushing against her face and through her hair. As she moved through the tree branches, the leaves brushed against her as if in a soft caress.

Crystal continued her practice for a couple of hours before changing back into her elegant dress and stuffing her blouse, pants, and boots back into her saddle bags. She felt exhilarated from her practice and a sense of peace settled over her as she remounted her white horse and turned her to head back through the woods towards home.

As she reached the field clearing outside the woods tree line, Crystal pulled her horse to a halt as she looked up at the sky overhead to find Nightshade circling high above waiting for her to return. Crystal reached in her saddlebag to pull out her long leather glove for her left arm, pulled it on before holding up her left arm, and let out a loud whistle as she looked back up at Nightshade. The black hawk circled around one last time before descending, slowed as she approached Crystal, and landed on her outstretched left forearm. Crystal smiled at her and cooed, "Hey baby, have you been waiting for me?" as she stroked Nightshade's chest gently with her right hand.

She turned her attention to the large white mansion surrounded by brick layout and wall on the other side of the clearing. It was her family mansion, the Governor's house that sat on top of a large hill close to a cliff that overlooked the ocean from the courtyard to the right and overlooked the small city in front of the mansion. To the left was a long road that led into the city. A stone trail led from the courtyard by the cliff down the hill to the beach where Crystal loved to walk along the beach that was part of their property and she could walk out on a long private dock.

Crystal took in a deep breath of the salty sea air. She loved their home conveniently by the sea and woods. On hot summer days, she would go swimming and her two dolphin friends' would meet with her to play. She named them Aboo and Kady. Crystal loved swimming with her dolphin friends, but she was the only one they would approach.

Crystal was always under close surveillance around other people, but when she was with her animal friends, she could always be herself. Crystal always tried to

take an interest in the cities people and loved to stop and talk with them when she went into the small city.

Since she took an interest in Papa's cutlass, Lieutenant Christopher Rhine had taken her to visit the Blacksmith, Gregory Perchert, and his wife. Lieutenant Rhine was a young gentleman of eighteen. He had always shown an interest in Crystal, which she found somewhat endearing with his dark brown hair just long enough to pull into a low ponytail and his kind soft brown eyes. Lieutenant Rhine had tried to escort her places whenever the opportunity arose, and Crystal enjoyed their visit with Gregory Perchert and his wife. The Blacksmith was an older guy of about thirty who was a bit rounded in weight as well as stalky with laughing silver-gray eyes. He was proud to show a variety of the cutlasses and swords he made to Crystal. Many were quite elegant with designed hilts and cross-guard or hand-guard.

The Blacksmith's wife, Lilly, was a high-spirited woman who welcomed Crystal with open arms. Lilly was a little plump herself, but she had happy blue eyes and blonde hair pulled back in a bun. Crystal found her fun to visit with and hated when their visit ended and Lieutenant Rhine had urged her out the door.

As Crystal entered the front door of the mansion, Papa came out of his study to look at her appearance. Crystal's raven black hair was windblown and she still wore her leather glove with Nightshade still perched on her left arm.

"I just got back from my afternoon ride. Is there anything you needed Papa?" Crystal asked sweetly.

Governor Drake Boudier stood in his study doorway in his black dress coat over white fancy shirt and black pants and fancy buckled shoes. He wore a traditional wig of white long ringlets. His emerald green eyes gazed at her in concern as his face seemed a bit tense. "I was just worried of your safety, my dear. We heard reports of pirates' activities occurring more often around this area." He informed her.

Crystal stared at him in shock, "Doesn't the King have ships of men hunting down the pirates? I would think they would stay out of the areas most favored by our King!" she told him.

Governor Boudier's eyes softened, "He does my dear, just promise me you'll be careful when you go out. Make sure someone is with you if you go into town!" he warned.

"I know, Papa! Maybe we should have extra men posted on watch just to be sure!" Crystal suggested.

"I've already sent out the order. I want you staying close to home from now on. You're a young lady and it isn't safe." He informed her.

Crystal didn't like the feeling that she was on a leash and it felt like it just got pulled in shorter. "Ugh. Papis, I already stay close and have either a maid, friend, Commodore Sullivan, or Lieutenant Rhine with me most of the time! Nevertheless, when I go for a ride in the woods, it is almost the only time I get to myself anymore! I need that time to myself!" Crystal said defensively and held her breath while waiting for his answer.

Governor Boudier seemed to think on her answer. "Alright Crystal, you may have your ride in the woods, but any other time you go out it will be with an escort!" he told her firmly.

Crystal let out her breath in a sigh of relief, "Thank you Papa, I understand!"

"Now go upstairs and get cleaned up! Dinner is in an hour." He instructed.

"Yes Papa!" Crystal said solemnly before kissing his cheek and started climbing the staircase.

When Crystal entered her large luxurious room, she walked across the room by the double-doors leading to a large balcony. She held her left arm next to Nightshade's large carved perch from a thick branch for her to climb onto that stood to the left side of the doors. To the left side of her spacious room was her bed centered on the far wall with matching fine carved nightstands on both sides with a drawer. A large cherry wood wardrobe covered the same wall as the balcony to the right of her bed. The right side of the room had her writing desk and chair pushed up to the wall below a window on the left side. She had a large vanity centered on

the wall with a large mirror, and in the left corner was her tub that had a curtain drawn around it for privacy.

Crystal sighed in frustration with her lack of freedom as she pulled off her leather glove. She walked over to her vanity and sat down while picking up her brush. She started pulling the brush through her long raven black hair as she thought of the pirate problem. They needed protection from the lawless heathens who attacked the coasts towns, cities and ships at sea. She had heard stories of many pirates such as William Kidd, Bartholomew Sharp, Bartholomew Roberts, and now a new threat of the fearsome Blackbeard. As she continued brushing her long hair she contemplated what they might possibly be able to do to disband these horrid pirate threats, but the only way she could see that possible was for more manned ships being sent out after them. Unfortunately, too many were afraid to take the chance!

Chapter One

Crystal entered the dining hall; she noted Papa, Mama, Anna, and Nanny already sitting at the luxurious table. Mama's raven black hair was pulled back in a chignon and she wore a lovely powder blue elegant dress. When she spotted Crystal, her light blue eyes lit up as she smiled welcomingly, "Crystal, you are looking lovely this evening!"

"Thank you, Mama!" Crystal replied.

As Crystal took her seat across from her mother, Lieutenant Rhine entered the dining hall. Papa looked at him and smiled as he stood up, "Lieutenant, nice of you to join us. Please have a seat!" he said as he gestured to the seat next to Crystal.

Lieutenant Rhine gave him a slight gentlemanly bow before taking a seat next to Crystal, "Thank you, Governor! I appreciate the invitation." He replied kindly, "Crystal, you are looking lovely this evening!" he said fondly.

Crystal smiled at him, "Thank you, Lieutenant Rhine. You look handsome yourself!" she replied kindly.

The servants began bringing platters of food and dishing up their plates with roasted chicken, steamed broccoli, and fresh baked rolls lathered in butter. As Crystal started to eat her food, Papa and Lieutenant Rhine talked of politics. Crystal was accustomed to having various guests for dinner, but for some reason she felt uneasy about Papa's manner this evening. Something was on his mind, and she wasn't sure what it was. She politely continued eating her food while the men talked. When she glanced across the table at Mama, she smiled brightly at her. It took Crystal off guard; she smiled sweetly back and turned her attention back to her food. Whatever was going on, her Mama knew about it too. The hairs on Crystal's arms and back of her neck stood up and tingled in uneasiness. She knew something was going on and it somehow involved her. She was usually very outspoken and participated in dinner conversations, but something was going on and she felt uncomfortable this evening so she remained quiet and waited to be excused.

Once everyone was finished with dinner, Papa looked directly at Crystal. "Would you join us outside for a walk this evening, my dear?" he asked kindly.

Full of uncertainty and uneasy about the situation that she felt she would be made aware of during the walk, Crystal forced a smile before saying, "Of course Papa! It is such lovely weather out that it would be a waste to spend the evening indoors."

As Crystal carefully stood up, Lieutenant Rhine offered her his left arm, which she accepted hesitantly. Papa offered Mama his arm before leading the way out. Nanny and Anna excused themselves and left the room ahead of them.

They walked along the stone courtyard along the short wall by the cliff. The wall only went as high as Crystal's hip along the cliff, making it easy for her to look out at the oceans horizon as the sun sunk lower in the sky. Crystal paused to enjoy the beauty of the ocean as Papa and Mama stopped several feet in front of her. She released Lieutenant Rhine's arm and turned fully to look out at the expanse of ocean, listen to the waves crashing below, and inhale the salty sea air. A breeze brushed her face and lifted her straight raven black hair up to fly about behind her.

She could feel her Papa and Mama watching her intently. Papa cleared his throat as he tried to gather his thoughts, "Lieutenant Rhine has asked for your hand in marriage, and I approve of the match between you two!" he told her fondly.

Crystal turned surprised eyes to him, "Is that what this is all about!" she exclaimed in shock. Mama nodded approvingly as Crystal tried to collect her thoughts. She wasn't ready to be married just yet, or to have children. Yes, she liked Lieutenant Rhine. However, she did not love him! She still wanted to have a chance to enjoy freedom and enjoy some of life's experiences before she settled into a marriage. She chewed her lip nervously as she tried to think of what to say.

Governor Boudier saw her hesitation, "I thought you would be happy, my dear! He is a fine young man and adores you!" he coaxed.

"But Papa, I am not ready to marry as of yet!" she pleaded. "Yes, he is a fine man," she glanced nervously over to Lieutenant Rhine before turning back to her parents and continued, "But I do not love him in that way!"

"Nonsense, my dear! Love comes in time." He encouraged. "He is capable of taking care of you and seeing to it you have a comfortable life-style."

Crystal's mind reeled with frustration and confusion. She was too strong-willed to be bullied or coaxed into something she wasn't ready for. "Excuse me, I must think on this for a bit!" Crystal told them before she quickly turned around and ran toward the stone steps that led to the beach. She felt hot tears running down her cheeks as she made her way down the winding path that led to the beach below. As soon as she reached the sandy beach, she slowed to a walk as she kicked off her shoes to savor the soft sand beneath her feet. With troubled thoughts of a forced marriage and feeling suffocated that she wouldn't be able to make her own choices in life, she slowly made her way to the long private dock. She tried to calm her anxieties by taking calming breathes and enjoying the sea air. The breeze cooled her hot cheeks as she turned her face toward it.

She reached the dock, walked down it to the end before sitting on the edge, and soaked her feet in the cold water. She stared down at her feet, starting to feel numb emotionally in her shock, as she swirled her feet around in the water. She sat there for a while, enjoying the cool water on her feet and her solitude with nothing but the ocean waves and breeze making a sound.

She raised her head to a clicking noise in front of her to see Aboo's head poking out of the water. Crystal smiled at the friendly dolphin, "Hello Aboo!" she said softly as the dolphin moved closer within reach. Crystal leaned forward and

gently stroked *Aboo's* head. "Papa wants me to marry *Lieutenant Rhine*. However, I am not ready to marry yet! I do not know what I am going to do about this situation!" she told the dolphin sadly. *Aboo* made a clicking sound, as if in encouragement. Crystal would have loved to go swimming with *Aboo*, but it was late and the sun was getting ready to set in the next half hour. "I can't swim with you today, but perhaps I can tomorrow. I must get back before Papa sends out the cavalry!" she said fondly before pulling her feet up out of the water and stood on the dock. "Stay safe my friend! I'll see you soon!" she called and waved before turning to walk back down the dock.

Crystal lay in bed awake for a long time with troubled thoughts about marriage before she finally fell asleep in exhaustion.

When she woke up the next morning, sunlight streamed into her room as she opened her eyes and stretched before sitting up in bed. She had left her double doors leading to her balcony open for *Nightshade* to have free access to come and go and to allow the cooling breeze to enter her room. As Crystal climbed out of her bed, her white nightgown clung to slender form and showed her curves.

She walked over to her double doors, noted *Nightshade* wasn't on her perch, so she walked out onto her balcony, and searched the sky. She spotted *Nightshade's* black form high up as she soared on the wind above in circular patterns. Crystal turned to check the time on a pocket watch that lay on her desk, she noted she had an hour to dress and eat breakfast before her morning fencing practice with *Commodore Sullivan*. She opened her wardrobe and pulled out a pale yellow gown with ruffled sleeves and set it aside for after practice, she then pulled out a white blouse and black pants and quickly changed. She pulled on a pair of black boots and left her room to make her way to the dining hall for breakfast.

She sighed in relief when she entered the dining hall and noted she would eat her breakfast alone. She wasn't ready for a confrontation about the marriage proposal yet. She ate her breakfast as she enjoyed her solitude before making her way to the large room down the hall where their rapiers and cutlasses rested on stands along the wall. Crystal plucked her rapier off the mount and headed back down the hall and out the front double doors.

As she entered the courtyard, Commodore Sullivan was already there waiting for her. He kindly smiled at Crystal as she approached. His long brown hair was pulled back in a low ponytail that reached to his mid back and his kind hazel eyes watched her intently as she neared. "I hear Lieutenant Rhine has asked for your hand!" he calmly stated.

Crystal's eyes flashed as anger swept through her, "Yeah," she said calmly, "but I am inclined to turn him down!" she finished as she positioned herself into a pose of readiness for practice.

"I thought you would be happy!" Commodore Sullivan kindly replied as he posed for readiness.

Crystal rebelliously stepped forward and swung her rapier at him from right to left in a side-ways downward stroke, "I am not ready to be married!" she ground out as he blocked her swing and twisted away. "He is a good man, but I do not love him!" she said harshly as she lunged.

Commodore Sullivan felt her tension and anger as he stepped aside and knocked her rapier tip down and away with his. "My lady, you seem all worked up over the matter!" he stated understandingly. "You are tense and angry, let us work through it in your practice," he suggested calmly.

Crystal smiled at him appreciatively as she stepped forward for another attack. She poured all her energy, anger and frustration into her practice. On several accounts, she had pinned Commodore Sullivan triumphantly. He patiently let her work through her troubled thoughts as they continued their practice for an hour and a half. By the time they finished, Crystal had vented most of her aggression out and was feeling better.

"Thank you, Commodore Sullivan, for your patience and understanding! You seem to be one of the few people who actually understand me!" Crystal said appreciatively as she walked to the low wall at the edge of the cliff to look out at the ocean.

"My lady, it is my honor to be there for you in your times of need! I must say, your skills with the rapier are exceptional." He told her gallantly as he followed her to the wall and stood beside her.

Crystal looked over at him with her emerald green eyes up into his hazel eyes, "I have decided to live my life my way! I will decline his proposal. Some day, I will marry for love! Till then, I will do as I see as right and necessary."

His hazel eyes softened as he noted her stubborn set of her jaw and how she stood straight in her determination. "I understand your feelings, just be careful how you tell your Papa on your decision. Don't come on too strong, or he may push the issue." He wisely advised.

Crystal studied his high cheekbones and strong chiseled face as she contemplated his advice. "You are a good man, Commodore Sullivan! I will be careful when I tell him, but I won't do anything I don't agree with either!" she replied carefully as she fondly gazed up at him.

He was a good foot taller than she was and she had to crane her neck to look up at him when he stood close to her. He was always a gentleman towards her, always kind and understanding. Aside from Nanny, he understood her better than anyone did. Crystal turned her attention back to the view of the ocean.

The breeze and sound of the waves calmed her as she sighed in relief of her decision, feeling as though a large amount of weight had been lifted off her shoulders. "I will tell Papa and Mama my decision after dinner tonight!" she informed him.

"I have watched you grow into a fine young lady, Crystal! You have always been your own person, but have always been kind and understanding towards others." Commodore Sullivan fondly replied, "I am honored to be of service to you and your Father!"

Crystal felt her heart warm at his statement, "I am honored to have such a good friend as you! I do not get much freedom aside from the monthly balls my parents' have to meet others'. You are one of the few that I actually know well enough to call my friend!" she confessed sadly.

"Crystal, everything will work out in time!" he said softly before he turned and left her to her thoughts.

Crystal stood at the cliff wall looking out at the ocean for a while till she heard Aboo below by the dock. She looked over her shoulder to make sure no one was watching before she hurried down the stone path leading to the beach.

She dropped her rapier on the dock and pulled off her boots before diving into the deep clear water and came back up by Aboo. Aboo nudged her with his nose affectionately as Crystal turned toward him and smiled. She ran her hand along his back as he turned toward the open sea and slowly moved past her, she grabbed hold of his upper fin and surged forward in the water with him as a giggle escaped her. She loved playing with her dolphin friends; they brought her joy and happiness in her restraining life-style.

Crystal held onto Aboo's fin while holding herself away to swim along side him. She took a deep breath to hold as they dove under the water and swam through the crystalline water as she looked around below at the rock, coral, sea plants, and small fish around them. It was a whole different world below the waters surface, and she thrived and explored its wonders with Aboo.

When they resurfaced, Kady approached them to join the play. Crystal grinned and cooed at them as she took turns petting them and swimming with them. Since Crystal exercised a lot and swam with the dolphins often, she could stay under the water for long periods.

Together they splashed, played, and explored the area. Crystal dipped below the surface and savored the feel of the water as her tension left her and she opened herself up to enjoying her dolphin friends and explored the reef below them.

She stayed in the water with them for several hours before she finally turned to swim back toward the dock. Happy and elated, she heaved her weight up as she turned to sit on the docks edge.

Aboo and Kady were there to see her off, she leaned forward to rub their long noses affectionately, "I must go home for lunch! I'll see you again soon!" she coaxed tenderly before she turned to pick up her boots in one hand and her rapier in the other. She enjoyed walking leisurely down the dock and along the beach, prolonging any confrontations.

Crystal took a quick bath to wash away the sand and seawater. Her mother had caught her entering the mansion, soaking wet from her swim, and had acted dramatically. She managed to calm her before she had escaped to her room. Crystal heaved a sigh of relief as she lathered shampoo into her hair. She was not about to let the latest events put her in a compromising situation, she would have to trust herself and believe she was making the best choices for herself.

Crystal finished her bath and dried and with her private maid's assistance, Caroline, she dressed in her pale yellow gown with ruffled sleeves at the shoulder that she had pulled out that morning. She decided she would have lunch and sneak out for a horseback ride before her afternoon activities. She sat in front of her vanity and brushed out her long raven black hair.

She was too mentally exhausted for her usual practice, but she felt suffocated staying indoors. She finished her hair and put on a leather arm brace for holding Nightshade before she went to the balcony and whistled for her. Nightshade circled above and swooped down, slowing as she neared to perch on Crystal's outstretched arm. Her dark brown eyes gazed up at Crystal as she gently stroked the hawk's soft feathers on her chest in downward strokes.

"That's my lovely girl!" Crystal coaxed, "shall we go eat some lunch and head out for a ride?"

"Caw," Nightshade let out softly as Crystal turned to leave the room with Nightshade still perched on her arm. As Crystal descended the staircase, a knock came at the front double doors. Andrea, the housemaid, rushed to answer the door. Celeste Long, Crystal's best friend, stood outside the door waiting patiently.

Crystal reached the bottom of the staircase, "Celeste, how are you today? I haven't seen you all week!" she exclaimed as she urged her to come in.

Celeste stepped into the entryway wearing a red frilly gown with her dark brown hair in ringlets rolling halfway down her back. Her soft brown eyes lit up happily as she exclaimed, "I have been so busy with Mama's lessons lately. I finally broke away to visit!"

Crystal turned with her to walk down the hall to the dining hall, "I was just about to have lunch and go out for a horseback ride. Would you like to join me?" she asked her hopefully.

"Oh, yes! I have been so cooped up and welcome the thought of getting out for a bit!" Celeste exclaimed happily.

They went into the dining hall and ate cold cut sandwiches as they chatted about the past few days' activities. Celeste's eyes grew round when Crystal informed her of the marriage proposal between Lieutenant Rhine and herself.

"What did you say?" Celeste asked excitedly and full of curiosity.

"I haven't given an answer yet, but I am going to decline the proposal." Crystal informed her. "I am not ready to be married yet and I do not love him in that way," she rushed on before Celeste could argue. "I like him as a friend. But I am not ready to settle down and have babies!" she finished.

Celeste was surprised and her soft brown eyes watched her intently, "You would have made a lovely couple!" she said carefully.

Crystal observed Celeste, she struck her as a lady who would gladly accept and settle into a marriage. Nevertheless, Crystal was more ready to live her life her way, and not yet be bound by a marriage.

They finished their lunch and retrieved their prepared horses. They rode side by side, Nightshade perched herself on Crystal's saddle in front of her as they rode their horses at a walk just inside the tree-line behind the mansion and worked their way away from the city and into the countryside. They were over three hundred feet away from the cliff, but became interested in only the immediate wooded area as they talked.

"I understand you do not love the Lieutenant, but what would have been so bad about marrying him?" Celeste asked Crystal gently as they rode at a leisure pace.

Crystal sighed, "I feel confined and it's like I am chomping at the bit of being restrained as it is! I just want the opportunity to live for myself for a while, experience some things on my own. And when I marry, I want it to be because I love the man I marry!" she explained.

Celeste smiled kindly at Crystal in understanding, they had been friends since childhood and she knew how restrained she had been growing up. "He adores you,

you know" she said carefully, "You may have even found happiness in being his wife!" she shook her head sadly. "I understand how you feel though. We have known each other a long time, and I have never known anyone with as little freedom as you! I hope things work out for you, you must tell me how your parents' take your decision. I will worry greatly till then." Celeste informed Crystal gently with understanding.

They had been riding an hour and were turning around to head back when Nightshade jumped up and screeched a warning before taking flight and heading out of the trees overhead. Crystal felt a knot of tension build up in her chest; Nightshade had never acted this way before. Something was wrong, but what?

A loud boom sounded out from the harbor by Port Royal causing Crystal to kick her horse into a trot till she exited the tree line and sped into a gallop. Celeste was in shock, but managed to follow suit a short distance behind her.

Another 'BOOM' sounded out, followed by several more. Crystal felt panic build up in her as she sped toward the mansion. It seemed to take forever for her to enter the stone lined courtyard by the cliff as she peered out to see a large black ship with black sails in the harbor opening fire with canons on the small city. A black flag waved with the wind with a white creepy skeleton on it.

"Dear God, Pirates!" Crystal breathed as Celeste pulled her horse along side her. She turned to Celeste, "Help me find Commodore Sullivan! We must find out what we can do!" she explained before dismounting and running across the courtyard. Commodore Sullivan threw open the front double doors and spotted Crystal and Celeste as they neared.

"Thank God you are alright! I searched inside and worried when I couldn't find you!" he explained.

"What can we do, Commodore?" Crystal asked anxiously.

"There are too many of them! They have already entered the city and are raiding and destroying everything! We must get you to safety!" he urgently explained.

"Let me get my rapier, get a horse and I'll meet you!" Crystal urged as she ran past him to enter through the double doors and head down the hall. She quickly

retrieved her rapier and headed back down the hallway as she yelled for *Mama*, *Papa*, and *Anna*. No one answered her calls and she began to feel frantic with worry. As she exited the double doors, *Celeste* was already back on her horse and had led *Crystal's* in front of the entrance. *Crystal* quickly mounted and they turned their horses to the stable to meet *Commodore Sullivan* as he came out with a horse.

"Where are my parents' and sister? I called for them, but no one answered." *Crystal* asked him when she spotted him.

He looked up at her with sad eyes, "I called and called for anyone, but no one answered. I hope they found safety; we must ride inside the tree line and work our way to the harbor. It's our safest option, the whole city is under attack!" he told her urgently as he mounted his horse and kicked it into motion heading around the back of the mansion towards the woods tree-line.

Crystal could see some of the cities citizens running for cover in the trees as well further down. She hoped and prayed *Mama*, *Papa*, *Nanny*, and *Anna* had found safety in the trees before it's too late.

They worked their way around the city hidden inside the tree line when they came across *Caroline* and *Andrea* hiding in the trees frozen in fear. *Crystal* pulled up beside *Caroline* as she repositioned herself in straddling the horse instead of riding sidesaddle. "Come, hurry!" *Crystal* urged them as *Caroline* looked up with worried blue eyes and her blonde hair pulled up in a bun under a maids bonnet as she reached up to grab *Crystal's* offered hand to help her up.

Andrea smiled weakly as her brown eyes flashed thankfully and her brown hair hidden in her own white bonnet as she climbed onto *Celeste's* horse with her. Once adjusted, they kicked their horses into motion again, hoarding everyone they came across towards the harbor to try to board a ship to make an escape. Canons and pistols firing sounded around the city and harbor while screams and terror filled the air. Smoke filled the sky as buildings burned in the city.

Crystal forced herself to remain calm to deal with and comfort the people in panic as they worked their way inside the tree line around the city. They were forced to leave the tree line on the far side of the city and work their way to the harbor where all the ships were tied and anchored at the docks. Luckily, it was away from all the activity-taking place as they continued to redirect the people they crossed

paths with. By the time they reached the docks and worked their way towards the ships they had around fifty people they ushered down.

Commodore insisted on loading everyone aboard the *Flying Angel* due to its size and agility for a merchant ship. It was armed with 20 canons for protection and was big enough to suit their needs, yet fast in the water.

Crystal took her training clothes out of her saddlebags and followed everyone as they boarded the ship decorated with a lovely angel in flight at the bow. Lieutenant Rhine was already aboard, along with several other soldiers as they ushered all the people aboard.

"Have you seen my parents?" Crystal asked him anxiously.

He sadly shook his head, "I'm sorry, my lady! I was in the city at the first signs of attack. I immediately started rounding people up as quickly as possible to bring them here!" he informed her.

Crystal looked back at the city under attack frantically, "I must go back!" she said as she started to move back toward the dock.

Commodore Sullivan grabbed her arm, "Forgive me, but I cannot allow that! We must get all these people to safety." He urged her seriously with gentleness.

Crystal's eyes teared up as she squared her shoulders and nodded. "Hoist the anchor and release the sails!" she yelled out. "Women and children go below deck till we reach safety!" she called with authority.

Immediately the ship was a buzz in activity of preparation as the women, children went below deck, and the men set to work. No one questioned her authority since she was the Governor's daughter and had always looked out for them. She even sometimes rebelled against her own father when it didn't meet the needs of the people. Crystal entered the Captain's cabin and swiftly changed into her white blouse, black pants, and boots. When she re-emerged on deck, the ship was in motion heading out to sea.

"Ready the canons in case we need them to defend ourselves!" Crystal yelled anticipating the pirate ship to follow them. Commodore Sullivan immediately relayed the command to be prepared below deck as well. The ship had five canons

on each side above deck and five more on each side on the deck just below. Crystal headed up onto the upper platform to oversee the steering of the ship and a better view of their surroundings.

So far, the pirate ship paid them no notice as the city continued to be attacked and plundered. Tears escaped the corners of Crystal's eyes as she watched Port Royal burn and the screams of terror filled the air. She watched as the men expertly adjusted the ropes and readied the deck as the wind filled the sails and the *Flying Angel* gained speed as it moved further out of harbor and toward the open sea. They turned east to follow land down a ways putting distance between the city and pirates behind them. Crystal watched the coast with a telescope for anyone who may have escaped, but no one came into view. Her heart sank in defeat as they traveled an hour and waited anxiously.

Crystal finally called to drop anchor and assess how many were aboard, satisfied they had put enough distance behind them. As soon as the activity on deck slowed, Crystal turned to address Lieutenant Rhine, "Bring everyone above deck. We must take account of how many of us there are and discuss our options. This matter concerns everyone here and everyone will be involved in any decisions from this point on!" she informed him. Everyone nodded in approval as he went below deck to escort everyone up.

Crystal remained on the upper platform above the Captains cabin. It had two staircases that led up to it, one on both side of the ship. She stood at the railing and watched as everyone gathered on the upper deck. She counted heads of everyone present, there were seventy-one people total. Aside from the fifty she helped to bring aboard, Lieutenant Rhine had brought twenty soldiers aboard in addition. Many of them looked at her with hopeful expressions. There were thirty women in total and thirteen children. She saw many faces she knew. Celeste, Caroline, Andrea, the Blacksmith and his wife, and many others.

"We have a decision to make!" Crystal addressed them. "I fear we will not fare well if we return right away. I propose we wait at least day or two before we return to search for survivors. All of us have family and friends that we have left behind, but we must also think of the safety of all those we have aboard." She stated loud enough for all to hear.

Commodore Sullivan climbed the staircase and walked over to stand beside her, his face was sad at the tough decision he had to make to leave port. He turned to the crowd on deck, "She is right! We should wait at least a few days and then return to offer assistance." He told them calmly.

Many people readily agreed, while others hesitated out of concern for the people they left behind. "Everyone must understand that this is not a decision to be taken lightly. My Papa, Mama, and little sister have all been left behind as well! However, if we did not leave when we did, or if we return too soon, we may fall to the same fate as everyone else in Port Royal. We must abide our time, recover, and return when we think it would be safe to assess the damage and search for survivors. We have others out there who need us, for them we must be strong!" she told them wisely as her chest felt heavy with the decision she had to make. She hoped and prayed her parents and sister had found safety. A hush fell over the crowd as they sobered at the same line of thinking. "Are we all in agreement?" she asked them.

"Aye," sounded out through the crowd as everyone digested the situation and realized they had little choice.

Crystal looked up into the skies, searching for Nightshade. She spotted her black form over the tree line a short distance away. Crystal watched in curiosity as Nightshade looked in her direction and screeched several times, yet remained in the same area. Crystal turned to Commodore Sullivan, "Pull the ship closer to shore and send some men to shore in a longboat," she informed him as she pointed in the direction of where Nightshade was flying above the trees.

"Yes, Ma'am," he immediately responded respectfully as he instructed the other men as they worked to move about the ship to do as she asked.

Crystal heard a clicking from the water by the ship and looked down to see Aboo and Kady. "Commodore, I'll meet you ashore," she called before she ran to the plank. Several gasps ensued as she dove into the water with her rapier in hand. When her head came bobbing back up, Aboo swam to her side and she immediately reached out to grab his fin.

"What are you doing?" Lieutenant Rhine called after her in shock.

"If there are people over there, they will need assistance immediately! Don't worry, I'll be careful!" she called back before taking a breath and diving under water with Aboo as he pulled her along moving towards the shore well over five-hundred feet away. By the time she reached the beach, the ship was still moving closer to shore.

Anxious to assist people in need, she ran at the tree line and kicked out to jump between two trees till she settled into the branches high above. She immediately moved in the direction of where Nightshade was circling above. As she neared the area, she slowed to approach more quietly being more cautious of possible danger.

Crystal heard people talking ahead, but couldn't make out the words just yet. She waited as they approached her hidden spot up in the trees as she perched on a branch out of sight. She heard some woman's voices among the moving group as they neared, "What are we going to do? We can't go back or we can be killed like the others'." She heard one of them say.

"Don't worry, we will find help somehow!" a male voice tried to sooth one of the women.

Convinced they were from Port Royal, Crystal dropped down from her branch landing on the ground twenty feet in front of them. They immediately recognized her, "Miss! Oh thank God you are all right!" one of the women exclaimed. There were seven people total, three women and four men. She recognized them all, but did not know their names.

"How did you get all the way out here?" one of the men dressed in a cook's outfit asked with a thick accent.

"I escaped with Commodore Sullivan and managed to follow the tree-line to the harbor ushering people along the way to make an escape aboard a ship and managed to leave the harbor and anchored just off shore from here." Crystal informed the members of the small group.

"Thank God! Bless you!" one of the women exclaimed.

"But how did you find us?" another man in merchants clothing asked.

Crystal smiled encouragingly, "My hawk spotted you from above." She informed them and let out a whistle before holding up her left arm with the leather band still on.

Nightshades black form sailed down through a break in the trees and slowed as she neared to perch on Crystal's arm. "Come," she said as she watched their eyes widen in fascination, "I have a boat being sent to bring you to the ship. Let's not keep everyone waiting. Anxieties are already high enough at the moment." She informed them as she led the group toward the beach.

By the time they entered the sandy beach, Lieutenant Rhine and four men were pulling a long boat ashore. He heaved a sigh of relief when he spotted them as they approached. Crystal raised her arm and Nightshade took off into the sky as Lieutenant Rhine approached her. "Next time you pull a stunt like that, give me warning at least"

Crystal shrugged in humor, "I was perfectly safe, we have seven additions to our temporary crew!" she calmly stated as she glanced back at her followers. "I'll swim back with Aboo and Kady! Meet you aboard!" she called as she turned to a run, dropped her rapier in the long boat, and ran into the water heading toward her dolphin friends twenty feet out. The beach had a steady decline in the area, allowing her to dive into the water only ten feet out and bob back up by Aboo and Kady. She glanced back to see Lieutenant Rhine watching her curiously as the seven newcomers entered the long boat. Crystal turned back to Aboo and Kady and splashed merrily as the dolphins made happy squeaking sounds and she giggled in delight.

As she dove underwater, Aboo and Kady followed. Aboo pulled up on her left side and Kady on her right, their smooth skin shimmered gray-blue underwater. Crystal reached out to grab hold of both their upper fins as the three of them surged forward. Aboo and Kady jumped together pulling Crystal out and above the water and she took in a new breath and dove back in headfirst. She felt her tension leave her to be filled with exhilaration in its place. The ship was now about a hundred feet in front of them as Crystal swam underwater with the dolphins. They brought her right to the side of the ship as all three of their heads bobbed up.

Crystal smiled up at the faces looking over the railing as they peered down at her. She patted the dolphins' heads lovingly. "Thank you, dear friends!" she told

them before she turned to the ladder and pulled her weight out of the water as she climbed up the side of the ship. As she climbed over the railing, everyone's eyes turned to look at her as she stood and smiled as water dripped from her clothing as it clung to her slender form.

Commodore Sullivan approached her as his hazel eyes watched her in concern, "What in the world has gotten into you to pull such a stunt as that!" he scolded.

Her emerald eyes flashed with determination as she faced him, "I had the situation under control. I made it to shore with the dolphins help, which they were happy to do so by the way. Moreover, I was perfectly safe and concealed in the trees while I waited to see if they were friend or foe! Alone I managed to diffuse a situation that could have been dangerous, so do not think you can lecture me!" she told him stubbornly.

"What did you mean by 'concealed in the trees'?" he asked in shock and confusion.

"Ever since I was a child, I played in the trees. For the past many years, I have turned it into a sort of training. I was up in the tree branches totally concealed. They never would have spotted me if it weren't for them being our own people! We have seven newcomers on their way in the long boat to join us." Crystal proudly informed him.

Commodore Sullivan chuckled as he realized just how head strong and determined she had become as a young lady. He realized there was a lot more to her than he had ever realized. Swimming with dolphins and hanging out in the trees was just the beginning. He wondered what else she had kept from everyone.

Crystal's emerald eyes watched him wearily as he winked at her in his humor. "Fair enough, my lady! But I wonder what other talents you have kept hidden from the rest of us." He boldly coaxed.

Everyone watched the scene unfold in curiosity as Crystal grinned mischievously, "Watch this!" she said grinning before running across the deck and grabbed hold of a rope as she swung out over the water's surface. She arched around in a loop as she came back to grab hold of another and swung up into the rigging to land on the yardarm post of the main mast.

She looked down grinning as Commodore gazed up at her in shock. "Extraordinary!" he called up as she jumped sideways to perform a round off and landed smoothly onto the deck.

"I always trained to stay in shape and get a little freedom! Looks like I finally get to put it to use!" she told him proudly.

Celeste ran over to Crystal's side and gazed at her with wide brown eyes, "where did you learn all those crazy moves?" she asked in awe.

"I taught myself in private," she told her fondly.

By the time the long boat arrived and everyone calmed down, the hour was getting late and everyone was getting hungry. Crystal turned to the cook they had brought aboard, "do you suppose we can go down to the kitchen and see what we can pull together for everyone to eat?" She asked him.

"I'll help!" Andrea stated as she stepped forward with her brown eyes excited and her brown hair still hidden in her maids white bonnet.

"I will too!" offered Caroline with her blue eyes lit up and her blonde hair pulled up in a bun under a maid's bonnet.

Crystal smiled appreciatively at them before she turned to one of the soldiers, "can you show us where the kitchen would be located?" she asked gently.

The soldier nodded and headed down the walkway leading below deck. They went down to the end of the corridor and stopped in front of a closed door at the end of the hallway. He opened the door to allow them to enter. Many tables scattered an open area for the crew's dining area. Near the back of the room was a swinging door that led into the kitchen. As they entered, they noticed shelves full of food of fruit, grains, spices, flour, sugar, baked bread rolls, and much more. On the other side of the room was a baking stove with oven, wood was stacked in the corner for its use. Counter tops for food preparation lined the wall to the right just inside the door.

"I guess we will have to make due with a simple dinner tonight, perhaps tomorrow we can send a group of men ashore to hunt." Crystal said thoughtfully.

She started pulling baked rolls in large bowls off the shelf and placed them on the counter and moved back to grab a large bowl of apples to set on the counter beside the rolls. "It's a start!" she added more cheerfully as she watched the others dive into their work. "I am going to go back above deck and start planning sleeping arrangements," she informed them as she turned to leave the kitchen.

As she walked back down the narrow corridor, she poked her head into several of the rooms. They all had two sets of bunk beds making it simpler for her to make arrangements. In all, there were sixteen rooms with four beds in each.

As she stood on the upper deck, she realized she now had seventy-eight people to arrange for. She made her way back up to the upper platform and called, "We have dinner in the making and need to decide on sleeping arrangements. There are sixteen rooms with two bunk-beds per room." She waited as everyone quieted and gathered around before continuing, "I need to know the amount of families we have aboard and decide who bunks with whom. I want all the families to group together and hold hands, including children so I can start there!" she stated as she watched women grab hold of their children's hands and some men step forward to grab their wives hands. There were eight families with children and ten married couples with no children.

"Alright! I will follow these families below deck to choose rooms closest to the kitchen, which is near the back of the ship! When I come back, I will continue with the rest of the women." Crystal informed them before she moved down the staircase and turned to lead the married couples and families below deck. Eight married couples shared two rooms that had no children. Four married couples with two or more children shared two more rooms. She split the rest up in another two rooms, leaving her with still ten more rooms to be assigned.

Crystal returned above deck and climbed back up the stairs to the platform with a grin of success. As the remaining people on deck looked up at her, she informed them, "The five rooms to the right of the corridor will go for the women, who may now go down and select who they will bunk with. Lieutenant Rhine and Commodore, you two have the room right by the stairs to the left and the other four will go to the remainder of the men who may go down once the women have cleared the corridor."

Lieutenant Rhine sputtered, "Where will you sleep, my lady?"

Crystal smiled warmly, "In the Captain's quarters, of course!" she stated simply.

Commodore nodded approvingly, "Of course, my lady! We are happy to do ask you asked." He said kindly as his hazel eyes sparkled with laughter as Lieutenant Rhine became upset that she had become nominated captain.

Crystal watched Lieutenant Rhine's face as he stared at her in shock and uncertainty. "Do you have a problem with me taking the position of authority and decision making Lieutenant?" she asked him sweetly.

He considered the situation and realized from the moment she stepped foot on the ship, she had immediately ran the ship like a real captain and making the tough decisions only a cool-headed authority figure could make. "No, Ma'am! Just taken off guard by it is all and the events of the day!" he responded respectfully.

Crystal's heart lurched in sorrow as she contemplated his answer, "Very well, I suggest we post a three man watch every three hours throughout the night as lookouts. We don't want to take any more chances. Commodore and I can start while everyone settles; choose three men to start as soon as they finish their meal, and the others throughout the evening." She urged him in seriousness of their situation.

"Yea, Ma'am!" he responded before disappearing below deck.

Crystal turned to gaze out at sea as Commodore Sullivan approached her. "I am proud of the way you handled everything! You pulled through for everyone and gave them all hope."

Crystal sighed with a heavy heart, "They are good people and are afraid. I worry about my parents and sister, yet I know I could never risk any of these people in returning prematurely." Her emerald gaze turned up to look into his kind hazel eyes as her troubled thoughts returned to her parents and her stomach clenched in fear for them. The breeze played and lifted her drying raven black hair, "If anything happened to my parents', I will make a trip personally to see the King and inform him of what has transpired!" she told him decisively.

Commodore Sullivan understood her torment and stubbornness in her decision, "I will go with you, if that is the case! You can count on me to be there for you, no matter what happens!" he gently told her.

Crystal smiled up at him appreciatively, "You are a good man, Commodore! Is it an honor to have you with me in these troubled times!" she told him fondly as her troubled emerald eyes watched his kind hazel eyes. She turned her head to look back out to sea and watch the horizon, wary of danger that may sneak upon them yet again. They continued to watch the horizon for any signs of ships sails.

Within the hour, the first three men appeared on deck for the first three-hour shift allowing Crystal and Commodore to retrieve their meal and eat in the Captain's cabin. "Do not light any lamps that can give away our position!" Crystal warned them, and they nodded in understanding.

Crystal whistled and held out her arm as she waited for Nightshade to swoop down. Nightshade came into view overhead and swooped down to carefully perch on her arm before she took her leave.

The captain's cabin was a large room with a spacious bed in the left corner, a large window overlooked behind the ship and had a large desk with maps and sea charts on the right wall. A table with four chairs sat in the middle of the room where Crystal and Commodore sat to eat their meal in silence as they each fell deep in thought over their situation. Nightshade perched on the back of an empty chair.

"Commodore," Crystal began to break the silence, "we need men to go ashore tomorrow to hunt. We need meat to add to our provisions of food!" she informed him.

He nodded in response, "I am proud of you for planning ahead, I will send a dozen men out in the early morning." He informed her as he thought more on the situation.

"I would also like to go ashore and collect coconuts to add to our meager supplies. There are many palm trees close to shore with coconuts so I won't have to travel far."

"I can escort you to shore. Maybe even bring some of the other women to give them a chance to get off the ship!" Commodore Sullivan suggested.

Crystal nodded her head in agreement, "Yes, I am sure they would welcome the opportunity!" she offered thoughtfully as she pushed her plate of grain mush aside and munched on apple wedges.

Commodore smiled fondly at her, "I should call it a night and let you get some rest. Tomorrow will be another long day!" he kindly stated as he collected their plates and stood to leave.

"Thanks for everything!" she told him appreciatively as he paused and watched her stand and move toward the windows to gaze out.

"Make sure you get some rest, my lady!" he offered gently.

"I will!" she said and sighed. She glanced back at him before replying, "You too, Commodore!" and turned back to peer out the window as he turned to take his leave.

After a while, Crystal reluctantly peeled off her damp blouse and pants and pulled on a long shirt she found in the dresser before she climbed into the large bed. She lay awake in the dark for a long time tormented by her troubled thoughts and concern for her family and the people of Port Royal. She eventually fell asleep from exhaustion.

Chapter Two

Crystal appeared on deck the next morning wearing her white blouse, black pants, and black below-the-knee boots that had dried over night. Nightshade was perched on her left arm and rapier sheathed in a belt she found in the captain's quarters as she appeared on deck as she exited the captain's quarters. She noted one of the long boats was already gone due to the men who went ashore to hunt. Commodore was already standing on deck watching the activity of the men preparing the second long boat for Crystal and a handful of others to go ashore to collect coconuts. Caroline had brought her breakfast in the captain's quarters, so everyone had already eaten breakfast and was preparing for the day.