

*Wild Heart
of the Seas
Give No Quarter*

Book 2 of Wild Heart Series

By Jem Richards

*To both my loving daughters, who look
out for me just as much as I do for them!*

Wild Heart of the Seas Series:

Book I- Birth of the Avenging Angel



*If you enjoy a good adventure and pirates,
then you'll love the **Wild Heart of the Seas** series!
This is the second book of the series, so keep an eye out for book 3 to become
available!*

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Prologue

Captain Crystal Boudier smiled brightly as she stood on the upper platform deck of her ship, the *Avenging Angel*. Her men were standing along the deck as the ship neared Grenada Island in the Caribbean. She wore her sea clothing of white blouse, black cloth pants, and black below-the-knee boots. Her waist length raven black hair billowed around her in the wind as her emerald green eyes savored the first sighting of land from their long journey over the Atlantic Ocean as they neared the Caribbean Islands.

Crystal is in her third year of her mission; hunt and defeat pirates, protect the people, and assist cities who suffered from pirate attacks. She began a second crew for a ship she named the *Saving Grace* near a year ago. Recent events brought them the remaining of the crew they needed and even a famous military captain that the King of England had recommended, the famous Captain Jack Stevenson. Now the two ships were sailing together as they were returning to the Caribbean from a trip to England.

Pirates were thick in the Caribbean. Crystal worried of a pirate mutiny since they raided their adopted home, the island of Tortuga. During the raid they had wiped out the pirates on land, saved the hostages, and brought them to safety.

Shortly before the raid, pirate spies had been sent in an attempt to join ranks aboard the *Saving Grace* and attempt to assassinate Crystal aboard her own ship. Business had taken them to England, and now they were finally returning to ensure the people's safety among the Caribbean Islands.

The *Saving Grace* turned around to sail slowly along the east coast of the lower islands on the tail of islands known as the Windward Islands of the Caribbean islands. Crystal steered the *Avenging Angel* around the bottom of Grenada Island to sail up the west side of the islands.

The goal for the sister ships was to travel along each side of the islands as they checked on the cities along the coast to make sure the cities and people were safe. If they came to a location that had fallen to attack, they would stop and assist immediately. While they traveled along the coast, they were keeping a weathered eye out in case of incoming pirates ships for possible pirate attacks. They were to meet up and rest in Port Royal of Jamaica, before continuing on to check Cuba and the Bahamas.

Crystal felt relieved to finally be returning to the Caribbean as she gazed out at the clear waters that appeared turquoise in the distance. Her emerald green eyes scanned the horizon ahead as they traveled around the southern edge of Grenada. Her raven black hair whipped around her as the wind picked up.

They would have to stop in port soon due to the long trip overseas and their dwindling food supply. Both ships were scheduled to meet up in Kingstown on St Vincent Island. Crystal was looking forward to seeing her friend, the kind Governor Gerald Belvedere, again when they reached port.

Crystal retrieved her telescope where it lay on a crate and held it to her eye as she scanned the islands shore. The cozy island looked peaceful as they passed the city of St George and continued to sail along the coast. Lowering her telescope in relief, she tilted her head back to look up at the sky. Her pet hawk's black form sailed high above as she rode along the wind current. Nightshade was as black as night, with reddish brown mixed in the feathers on her back, wings, and chest with white feathers on the under-side of her tail. If Nightshade saw any signs of trouble, she'd notify Crystal right away.

Crystal relaxed as she turned her attention to the beautiful view of the island they sailed by as they passed.

It took a couple days for the *Avenging Angel* to pull into port in Kingstown. As Lieutenant Rhine steered the ship into the harbor, Crystal noted the *Saving Grace* already pulled up along the docks. He pulled the ship to the other side of the dock to pull up directly across from the *Saving Grace*.

Crystal had already dressed for their visit in Kingstown in a dusty rose pink thin fabric layered gown with short bell sleeves. She wore white dressy boots with low heels for comfort and style. Facing her crew as the ship pulled to a stop, she moved to descend the platform stairs. "Alright, gentlemen! It has been a long trip to return to the Caribbean. I only anticipate three days in port as we restock supplies. You all have the rest of the day off, but report in after breakfast to complete your chores. Commodore Sullivan already notified those taking their turns in watch. Enjoy the rest of the day and I'll see you all in the morning!" She reached the bottom of the stairs, stepped over to the dock to head into the city, and located Governor Gerald Belvedere waiting at the end of the dock.

Crystal was so happy to see her dear friend, she walked faster until she approached and stopped in front of him with a wide smile. "Governor Belvedere, it's so good to see you again!" she warmly replied.

"My lady, it is good to see you had a safe return! Captain Stevenson pulled the *Saving Grace* into port several hours ago and told me you'd be pulling in sometime soon!" he informed her.

Crystal smiled appreciatively for the shared information. "I have a list of supplies ready in request to restock. We plan on staying three days in port before continuing on our route of checking the islands!" she supplied as she handed him her list with her left hand and reached out with a leather coin pouch full of coins with her right hand to offer him.

"Splendid! We can have them ready and sent the day after tomorrow!" he proudly informed her as he accepted the leather pouch of coins. "Will you be joining me for dinner tonight, my lady? I am anxious to hear about your recent travels."

Crystal smiled brightly, "Of course, Governor! Are our rooms already reserved in the hotel so I can shop with the ladies before dinner?"

Governor Belvedere grinned in anticipation, "I informed the hotel already and they are waiting for you and your crew to check in! You'll find everything has already been taken care of!"

"You're a saint, Governor!" Crystal exclaimed appreciatively as the men of the crew smiled in greeting as they passed and the women stopped to wait behind Crystal patiently.

Governor Belvedere smiled at Crystal's little sister, Anna, "It's good to see you, my lady!" he greeted before stepping back to give Crystal and the other ladies room, "Why don't you ladies get on with your shopping! I'll see you for dinner this evening, my lady, Miss Boudier!" he directed to Crystal and Anna.

"Thank you, we'll see you this evening!" Crystal replied graciously before walking past him with the women toward the main street.

Chapter One

By the time the *Avenging Angel* neared the island of Jamaica, Crystal heaved a sigh of relief when pirate activity during their absence had remained on a somewhat low scale. She decided for an extended stay in Jamaica to transform the storage room on the other side of the stairwell into a bedroom that would extend off her Captain's quarters. Now that Anna was sharing her room, she felt the need to make the living quarters more suitable. Crystal also concluded it was time to have extra whips made for Anna and herself for training and self-defense in battles with the pirates.

Once the *Avenging Angel* and *Saving Grace* finished their route around Cuba and the Bahamas, she'd send the *Saving Grace* in route to sail around Indonesia. Crystal's plan was to meet up with the ship in Singapore when a year's time was up while the *Avenging Angel* stayed in the Caribbean for a while before sailing first along Africa's western coast, then moving around to the eastern coast. With pirate activity still running dangerously high, Crystal decided it was time to branch out to other troubled areas.

As Port Royal came into view of the passengers on the *Avenging Angel*, Crystal's heart beat erratically in her excitement as the men hooted and hollered in their joy. The city was a grand sight to them all as the city remained standing tall and proud in all its glory.

Crystal heard the bells sounding in welcome as the *Avenging Angel* turned into the harbor as blessed relief washed through Crystal to see no harm had come to the city in their absence.

Anna was practically bouncing up and down beside Crystal in her excitement as they watched the city's people begin to file down to the front of the city to greet them.

When Crystal walked down the dock with Anna by her side and Celeste, Caroline and Andrea following closely behind, Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs broke away from the crowd with wide smiles on their faces.

Crystal pulled to a stop in front of the two men as the other women followed suit. Crystal smiled brightly as she exclaimed, "It is so good to see that Port Royal remains standing tall and proud after our long absence!"

Governor Beckett proudly replied, "Since you had those canons relocated and regular watch posted, my lady, we have had a few pirate ships attempt an attack. With your careful planning ahead of time, we were prepared and managed to intimidate the heathens and get them to think twice before they left. I am in your debt for your quick plan of action that has saved us yet again!"

Lord Gibbs vigorously nodded in agreement, "And we have received word that cities among the other islands have been notified and took action in time for their own pirate assaults as well!" he anxiously informed her.

Crystal smiled in relief as she added the information to the thriving cities she had seen for herself along the islands as she traveled their route along the south coast of the Caribbean islands. "I must admit that I was quite worried since we left for England,"

she confessed. "But now that I have seen the islands for myself and heard the other islands received my message and took immediate action, I am most relieved!"

Governor Beckett smiled in understanding, "Rest assured, my lady, that we have sent additional word out among the ships that came into port to help spread the word. Although many cities have regular soldiers posted, your plan has helped to improve their watch and to help them in making the best of their limited resources," he boasted.

Crystal smiled warmly and nodded in satisfaction. "We plan to stay for a long visit as the ship is careened and I have my cabin remodeled to suit our needs since Anna stays with me now! I also need to talk to someone about getting some whips made for Anna and I," she kindly supplied.

"Ah," Lord Gibbs exclaimed in excitement, "I'd be happy to direct you to a man that makes excellent whips. It'll be our pleasure to have you here for a long visit as you catch us up on your travels, my lady!"

Crystal giggled in glee, "Meet us for dinner, gentlemen, and I'll be happy to tell you all about it. And we have big plans for the near future as we push off to travel farther out and offer our protection to other areas in need!"

Both men's interest was highly piqued, but they would wait for dinner, as usual, to hear more with great anticipation.

Governor Beckett exclaimed proudly, "Allow us to walk you to the hotel, my lady! The staff is already anxiously waiting for you and your crew to check in!"

Anna smiled appreciatively as the men stepped aside to escort them as Crystal replied affectionately, "Thank you gentlemen! It has been a long trip in our return and we dedicatedly kept close watch on the islands on our way in. We are most tired from our journeys and welcome some down time!"

The women were excited as their spirits revived from the slow trip along the islands. They were ready to freshen up before visiting among the city's people as they made their way with the kind Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs to the hotel.

The *Saving Grace* hadn't made it to port yet, but Crystal didn't anticipate for the ships arrival for a few more days since it traveled along the northern coast of the island's and would have to drop down after passing Hispaniola.

Crystal and Anna changed for dinner and made their way to the hotel's dining room. Crystal had dressed in a cream frilly thin fabric layered gown with elbow-length bell sleeves. Caroline had styled her long raven black hair to pile near the back of her

head elegantly. She wore a simple diamond charm on a silver chain around her neck and diamond studs in her earlobes.

Anna wore a power blue frilly gown with a bow at her lower back of the gown. Her black hair on top of her head was stylishly pulled back to drape down her back. She wore a silver necklace with a stylish oval pendant with an opal in the center.

When Crystal and Anna entered the dining room, an elegantly dressed server in a black uniform escorted them to a table by the open windows where Governor Beckett, Lord Gibbs, Commodore Sullivan and Lieutenant Rhine were already seated along the sides of the table. Upon their approach, all the men stood and gave gentlemanly bows. Commodore Sullivan assisted Crystal into a chair on the end by him and Governor Beckett assisted Anna in the chair next to her.

"Ladies, you are looking lovely this evening!" Governor Beckett exclaimed kindly as Crystal and Anna settled in their chairs.

Crystal smiled warmly over at Governor Beckett as he reclaimed his own chair, "Thank you, Governor!" she affectionately replied as she waited for the men to reclaim their chairs. She could tell Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs were most anxious to hear of their latest travels as they waited patiently for the server who came forward to take their orders before scurrying off to get their drinks.

When the server left, Crystal turned back to Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs to inform them, "The King and Queen were most gracious to hold a ball in favor of Anna's safe return and in celebration of the *Saving Grace*!" she began. Crystal launched into the story of their successful raid on Tortuga and the saved hostages. As she changed the subject to tell them of the ball, she noticed the men hold a proud and relieved air about them before their excitement reclaimed them as she continued to inform them of the ball and of Captain Stevenson. As Crystal was telling the men in more detail about the famous Captain Stevenson their meal was brought to them by the server. They hardly paid any attention to the server as their plates were placed in front of them, as they were completely absorbed in Crystal's description of the famous Captain.

"So when does the *Saving Grace* arrive so that we may meet this Captain Stevenson?" Governor Beckett anxiously asked with his face lit up and his eyes sparkling in glee.

Crystal grinned in her joy of having the company of her dear friends and their absorbed attention. "I expect them to arrive in the next few days," she graciously informed him. "In the meantime, I plan on having a few of my men with carpentry skills to begin restructuring my cabin to better suite Anna and my needs for sharing the

space. I expect the job to take no less than a week and then we'll have to careen the ship. It's sadly due since our last stay here."

Lord Gibbs gave Crystal an understanding smile, "Let us know if there is anything we can do to assist along the way!" he kindly replied.

Crystal smiled appreciatively, "I appreciate the offer! I am truly grateful to have such good friends as you two gentlemen!" she replied. As the meal wore on, Crystal explained their trip around the islands of the Caribbean and the few pirate encounters along the way that they had managed to stop in their attempt to flee from the *Avenging Angel*.

The next morning, Crystal instructed Milo, Charles, Matthew and a few other men who offered to assist in remodeling her cabin. She walked them into the storage area on the opposite side of the stairwell, leading below deck, from her quarters. She explained how she wanted to turn the space into a bedroom with connecting double doors where her bed currently was located.

Crystal then led the men into the cabin to explain where she wanted a built-in mini bar with cupboards in the far corner, built-in bird perches for *Nightshade* and *Polly*, and built-in cupboards along the wall by the door.

The men assured her that they could make the new wall and double doors to connect the rooms to match the dark wood interior of the existing walls. She watched the men absorb themselves in thought as they considered the designs for the built-in mini bar and cupboards made of polished cherry wood to match the wood of the furniture. Crystal left the men to begin their work. She smiled to herself in excitement to see them complete the job and be able to buy new furniture to suit her needs and interests. She felt excitement build up in her as she prepared to meet the other women to begin her shopping for furniture to be delivered once the cabin was completed.

She tilted her head back to peer up into the sky to spot *Nightshade*, her hawk, and *Polly*, her parrot, flying about high above as they lazily circled around.

Anna, Caroline, Celeste and Andrea met Crystal at the coffee shop in excitement in assisting Crystal with her furniture shopping. Anna had left *Chance*, the spider monkey, in the hotel room since they anticipated their shopping to take up most of the day. They finished their coffee and anxiously set out on their way. The first store the women came to held upholstered chaises, chairs, sofas, and loveseats of various sizes, colors, and styles.

Crystal found a burgundy soft chaise that matched the one she had purchased before that would be set in her new bedroom. She settled on purchasing it for her new main quarters that would serve as her living space and meeting room.

Andrea spotted a dusty pink rose-colored set with an upholstered chair, sofa, and loveseat that Crystal decided would be great for visiting among her guests when they weren't sitting down for a meal. She added the set to her purchase before she led the women out to head to the next store.

Anna grew more excited as she realized how much additional space the new set-up would allow and shared how she imagined she would have more room to set up her easel for painting in front of the large windows as the women headed into a wood furniture store.

Crystal found herself absorbed in the fine polished wood furniture as she moved around the store filled with tables, coffee tables, end tables, and bed frames. She loved the smell of the fresh polish and cherry wood as she selected a large cherry wood table that seated ten people, two coffee tables, and two end tables along with an elegantly designed canopy bed frame with burgundy covering and mesh net drapes that hung down the sides and ends.

When Crystal finished her furniture shopping, the women settled into a cozy restaurant for lunch before moving on to their regular shopping and exploring of the new shipments brought in.

When the *Saving Grace* pulled into port two days later, excitement filled the air as Crystal observed the work the men completed in her cabin. They had completely cleared the space to be turned into a room, removed her bed bunk, installed double doors, and moved the tub, vanity, two wardrobes and nightstands into the new bedroom space.

Crystal moved to wait on the main deck of the *Avenging Angel* as the *Saving Grace* pulled up by the dock across from the *Avenging Angel*. She was wearing a gold and mustard yellow gown with intricate swirl patterns elegantly gracing the fine fabric of her gown with long sleeves. Her long raven black hair lay loose down her back as the breeze lifted small sections playfully. She smiled brightly as Captain Stevenson turned to look at her from his position on the upper platform as Wong and Chow quickly moved to the dock to greet her.

Wong stepped over first with his handsome face lit up in excitement with Chow following close behind. As the two Chinese men stopped on the dock in front of where she stood on the main deck, Crystal placed her hands in front of her and respectfully bowed her head in greeting with a warm smile. When the two Chinese men bowed in

greeting, Crystal affectionately stated, "It's good to see you made it safely! Welcome back to Port Royal, gentlemen!"

Wong warmly replied, "It's good to see Captain! We look forward to visit in pub tonight to catch up!"

Crystal's face lit up in glee as Chow agreed, "Yes! We miss visiting with our great Captain!"

Crystal beamed at her friends praise and display of affection as she quickly moved to join them on the dock, "It will be a pleasure to visit with you fine gentlemen! I rather missed your kind faces!" she replied affectionately. Captain Stevenson wasted no time to move down the platform stairs and join them as Crystal moved forward to give the two Chinese men affectionate hugs as she realized how much she missed them.

Crystal had just released Chow from a gentle hug and stepped back as Captain Stevenson moved to stop beside them on the dock with his brown eyes lit up in humor at her display of affection toward the men. He wisely didn't say a word regarding her relationship with the crew. Instead, he gave her a gallant gentlemanly bow before kindly asking, "How long do you plan on staying in port, my lady?"

Crystal smiled approvingly as she gave him her full attention. "Perhaps a week and a half," she replied. "We need to careen the ships and I have my own quarters under construction for some needed changes." She noted his eyes spark in interest as she suggested, "Perhaps we should start with careening the *Saving Grace* first and pull it on shore tomorrow. I don't want to get behind on schedule."

Captain Stevenson nodded approvingly as he contemplated her proposal, "Very well! We can have the ship pulled in after breakfast, if that's alright with you, my lady!"

Crystal agreed, "That's what I had in mind! Why don't you give the men the rest of the day off and reconvene after breakfast in the morning!"

"Yes, my lady!" he graciously replied and turned to address the crew.

Crystal grinned at Wong and Chow; "There might be hope for him yet, Gents'!" she stated in mischief and gave them a wink causing them to chuckle.

Crystal turned to walk casually with Wong and Chow down the dock toward the shore as Wong and Chow shared their travels with her along their route. It didn't take long for Captain Stevenson to relieve the men and walk quickly to catch up to Crystal, Wong, and Chow as the Chinese men told her of a few of the pirate ships they encountered along the way.

Crystal smiled brightly as she turned to him when they finished and suggested, "Shall we go up to meet the Governor! He's anxious to meet you!"

Captain Stevenson smiled brightly welcoming a chance to walk through the city, "I'd be honored to, my lady!"

Crystal headed with the men to the main street and turned to follow the street to the left to wind their way back toward the Governor's mansion. As they reached the back street to turn up along the road leading up the hill to the Governor's house, Lord Gibbs met them on the street with a brilliant smile. "My lady, I spotted you as I was heading into town!" he stated excitedly.

Crystal smiled affectionately as she turned to him, "Lord Gibbs, it is good that you spotted us! I would like you to meet Captain Jack Stevenson!"

Lord Gibbs reached out to excitedly pump Captain Stevenson's hand in an enthusiastic handshake, "I am honored to meet you! We have heard so much about your accomplishments, sir!"

Captain Stevenson smiled appreciatively, "And I am honored to meet you, Lord Gibbs! Our dear Captain Boudier has told me a great deal of you and Governor Beckett!" he stated catching Lord Gibbs by surprise. "She tells me you have been loyal and kind to both the people of Port Royal and her crew!" he added graciously.

Lord Gibbs smiled proudly as he replied, "We are all very proud of our dear lady and her continued dedication to the people!"

Crystal smiled affectionately as she stated, "And you remember Wong and Chow, the left and right hand men of the captain on the *Saving Grace*."

Lord Gibbs smiled brightly at Wong and Chow, "Of course! It is so good to see you gentlemen again!" he greeted.

Wong and Chow smiled brightly as they placed their hands in front of them and bowed respectfully. Lord Gibbs returned the gesture and moved to lead the way up the hill to the Governor's mansion.

"Come!" he explained, "Let's not keep the Governor waiting!"

Crystal smiled appreciatively as their group moved up the hill in light companionable conversation. As they neared the building, Crystal grew hesitant as they neared the front door. Lord Gibbs gave her an encouraging smile realizing her hesitation and quickly moved to knock on the door. Captain Stevenson looked at Crystal questioningly as she stepped further back in her hesitation as she had flashes of memory flash through her mind of her parents lying on the floor of the study. Her eyes had

widened and began to tear up as she turned her back to the servant who was opening the door to greet Lord Gibbs.

Captain Stevenson followed her in concern as she moved away from the front door to the center of the courtyard with Wong and Chow quietly following in understanding. "What is it?" he asked slightly panicked by her strong reaction.

Crystal shook her head trying to shake the images from her mind and tears began to flow more freely. "I can't go in there!" she told herself mournfully. "Even after all this time, it's still as if it just happened yesterday!"

Wong and Chow moved to stand in front of her as Captain Stevenson looked to them in alarm. Wong pulled Crystal to him in an affectionate hug as he eyed Captain Stevenson, "Captain has us to keep company! You not alone, my lady!" he gently told her as she let him pull her close and buried her face into his shoulder.

Crystal took a few moments to collect herself before she stepped back to smile at Wong fondly. She dried her eyes as she replied, "Thank you! I never really come up here anymore!" Crystal turned to Captain Stevenson as he waited patiently as he anxiously watched her square her shoulders. "I am sorry you had to see me like that!" she gently confided. "You see, I was separated from my search group as we searched the city. I entered the mansion alone as we assessed the damage and recovered the people after the raid. I found my parents in the study... and still can't bring myself to enter the mansion since!"

Captain Stevenson's gaze turned to kind understanding, "It's quite understandable!" he replied as Lord Gibbs brought Governor Beckett to meet up with them.

Governor Beckett took one look at Crystal and yelled for the horses to be saddled for them to take a horseback ride. "My lady! Let us get away from the building so you may be more comfortable," he gently replied as he moved to grasp her elbow and move toward the brick wall by the cliff with canons placed every fifteen feet.

Lord Gibbs kindly took care of introductions between Captain Stevenson and the Governor as Crystal watched the oceans horizon and took in calming breaths of the salty sea air. The five men on watch by the wall, kindly spread out to give them privacy. Her nerves had gone on edge and every muscle in her body was tense as the men talked freely getting to know each other.

While they were waiting for the horses, Crystal asked if they would excuse her while, she wanted to change into her sea clothing so she could be more comfortable. She would take this opportunity to train in the woods and work off some of her tension.

Governor Beckett kindly agreed and suggested they meet her by the dock, understanding her edginess.

Within half an hour, Crystal came out of her cabin wearing her white blouse, pale pink bodice, black pants, and black below-the-knee boots. She felt even more tense than she had half an hour ago as her thoughts continued to drift back to the day she had found her parents' bodies.

She offered the men a weak smile as she fluidly swung up into her saddle as Captain Stevenson's eyes widened as she straddled the horse, as a man would ride. Crystal turned to Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs, ignoring Captain Stevenson's look of disapproval. "Do you mind if we ride out to my training grounds in the woods? I find I am rather tense and feel the need to practice!" she asked.

Governor Beckett kindly agreed, "Of course, my lady! I welcome the opportunity to see you in action!" he added with excitement entering his voice.

Crystal smiled appreciatively before kicking her horse into a trot heading to take the long route around the back of the city to travel along the tree line. Wong and Chow smiled knowingly as Captain Stevenson kicked his own horse with Wong and Chow moving to follow Crystal, Governor Beckett, and Lord Gibbs.

By the time Crystal had led the group to the tree-line behind the mansion and turned to enter the woods, she felt like she could breath a little easier.

When Crystal entered the edge of her training area with ropes hanging high in the tree branches, she pulled her horse to a stop and waited for the others to file in around her. As Wong and Chow took in the area appreciatively, Captain Stevenson looked around in confusion. He watched as Crystal turned to look at Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs as they smiled in understanding back at her. Governor Beckett nodded to Crystal and she grinned in response before tilting her head back to look up at the tree branches above her as she drew her legs up into the saddle and pulled herself into a crouch in the saddle. Everyone watched in amazement as she jumped up to grab hold of a branch and swung her body weight over and above toward the next as her body arched up and to straighten as she landed with grace on the branch.

The men gasped in surprise at the display of agility as she turned her attention to the familiar course. She sighed in relief as she jumped to the next branch and felt it slightly sway down and come back up as she leapt to the next branch. A grin spread across her face as she launched herself at a rope to grab hold of and surged forward to the next rope 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. She felt her blood sing in her veins. Her tension subsided and her muscles relaxed as she put all her focus into her training and savored her familiar surroundings.

Crystal leapt from a branch near the clearing as she whooped with glee 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. When she had completely looped back around and continued to make another lap, Crystal spotted the men below. Captain Stevenson was staring at her in wide-eyed amazement as Wong and Chow observed appreciatively. Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs faces were lit up in glee as she moved past them for another lap.

When she finished ten laps, she slowed as she neared the men below and executed a sideways round off to land ten feet in front of them with a wide grin splitting across her face in pure enjoyment. "Wow, I sure missed the pure enjoyment of my training! It's not the same in the open sea." she exclaimed.

Captain Stevenson just stared at her gaping in shock as Wong and Chow excitedly dismounted and walked up to her.

Wong proudly replied, "Still got it, Captain!"

Chow smiled brightly and agreed, "Yup, still got the moves!"

Captain Stevenson finally found his voice as he stated in awe, "That was something!"

Crystal turned to him in mischief, "That was nothing!" she exclaimed. "Watch this!" she stated before whirling around to take off at a run centered between two tree trunks to kick out and bounce between the two before settling high in the branches.

There was a small clearing behind the men that Crystal immediately hopped from branch to branch toward as she went deeper into the trees and looped back to head straight toward the clearing as she worked her way higher up into the branches. The branches high up were twenty feet apart in the clearing as she bravely dove out of the branches and disappeared into the other side as she grabbed a branch to swing over and land on the next with ease. She continued fluidly moving forward to loop back around as she worked her way lower. She popped back out of the branches diving over the men's heads to tuck and roll into a crouch. She slowly stood and turned to face the men with her face bright and full of excitement as her emerald eyes sparkled.

Wong and Chow cheered excitedly as Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs applauded. Captain Stevenson had barely moved, except to follow her movements with his jaw dropped in shock.

Crystal grinned as she moved back to her horse and fluidly swung up into her saddle. She turned her horse around and kicked her into a walk as she winked in mischief at Captain Stevenson as she passed with first Governor Beckett and Lord Gibbs following, then Wong and Chow smiling brightly as they climbed back into their saddles and turned to passed him. Crystal didn't turn back to see if he followed, but waited until she cleared the trees and slowed for the others to catch up.

Chapter Two

When Milo, Charles, Matthew, and the rest of the men finished Crystal's quarters, she stood in the main room observing their splendid work. Polished cherry wood cabinets with drawers and countertop were built along the wall inside the door, mini bar with cabinets and cupboards jutting out in an "L" in the far right corner, and the built-in bird perch for Nightshade in the left corner by the windows and another for Polly closer to the bar.

"You men have done an amazing job!" Crystal exclaimed in excitement as she explored the room.

She moved through the double doors adjoining to the left of the room into her new bedroom and savored the sight of her chaise in front of the bedroom window with the coffee table in front of it. Her large wardrobe was along the wall to the right near the windows and her bathtub in the far left corner. Her vanity was between the bathtub and a door that led to the deck since it used to be a storage area. Anna's wardrobe was behind her sitting between the double doors to the main room and the indented wall of stairwell for access below deck. Her large gold chest with gems laid into the lid with intricately designed swirl patterns was placed behind the left double door along the wall.

"It's beautiful and perfect!" Crystal explained in satisfaction. She moved to open the lid of her gold chest to pull out several leather pouches of coin to hand one to each man for payment of their hard work. "I insist each of you get paid fairly for all your hard work and dedication throughout your week off!" she explained proudly.

The men accepted the coin pouches with pride and comments of thanks as she handed them out. They smiled widely as they took their leave.

When all the men had left, Crystal walked back into the main room to observe their fine work appreciatively. Her new furniture would be delivered within the hour and she felt her excitement build as she swung the windows open wide to let the breeze in.

She noted her footlocker with crystal glassware along the wall behind the bar. She smiled to herself and set to work appreciatively to unpack the fine crystal plates, bowls, and glasses into her new mini bar. She continued until she added the fine silverware in the drawers and wine jugs in the cupboards. When the footlocker was empty, she merrily moved it outside her double doors on the main deck before re-entering and moving the footlockers filled with pirate flags from the ships they defeated to unpack the flags as she moved them into some of the built-in cupboards along the wall by the door. Once the footlockers lay empty, she moved them to stack on top of the other outside her cabin's double doors.

Smiling in anticipation, she explored her newly restructured living courters until her newly purchased furniture arrived.

The deliverymen were happy to assist her move the long table along the far wall between the mini bar in the far right corner and her desk in the near right corner. She placed the new chaise in the wide space between the bird perches in front of the windows with a coffee table in front of it. Her dusty pink rose sofa ran parallel to the table facing the rest of the room with the loveseat placed across from it with a coffee table snuggled between them with plenty of walking space. The matching chair sat back facing the doors wall and facing the coffee table and an end table tucked between the chair and sofa.

She finished by directing the big canopy bed to sit between her nightstands in the bedroom along the wall placed artfully between the tub in the left corner and her exceptionally large wardrobe in the left corner of the main wall. The additional end table was placed between the nightstand on the right side of the bed and her wardrobe so she could place her jewelry chest on top of it.

After she paid a handsome tip for the men's assistance, she set to work in re-hanging her beautifully colored paintings and tapestries. She now had room to add more if she liked.

Crystal became anxious to join her dolphin friends, Aboo and Kady, after lunch and snuck away from the other women as they went into the city to visit among the people. She went to her cabin to change into cutoffs and a comfortable black shirt for swimming in.

Filled with bursting excitement and glee, Crystal ran down the dock and turned left to run along the beach. When she reached the large jutting rocks sticking out of the sand

that separated the public beach from the private beach by the cliffs, she quickly climbed up them and jumped to the sand on the private beach. Hurrying in anticipation, she took off into a run toward the private dock. She ran down the dock as fast as she could go and leapt off the edge to dive into the clear water as she savored the gentle caress as the water greeted her. She swam underwater mermaid style as she swam away from the dock.

It didn't take long for Kady and Aboo to chatter excitedly in greeting and pull up to swim on both sides. Crystal reached out with both hands to run them down smooth gray-blue glossy skin of the dolphins backs till her hands came to their fins and she grasped them firmly. Aboo and Kady surged forward to a faster pace immediately as they pulled Crystal between them as they swam deeper and finally arched up to dive up out of the water as they pulled Crystal along. Crystal let out her breath as she savored the breeze hitting her skin and held a new breath before they dove back into the water.

She felt invigorated by her companionable swim with Aboo and Kady. Since they have spent several months apart as she had traveled to England, Crystal was anxious to spend as much time with them as possible in their blessed reunion. Letting go of their fins, they swam to shallower water as they explored the reef together to observe the coral, sea plants and fish when Crystal came up for air.

They had been exploring for nearly an hour as she surfaced and moved to float on her back to rest. Crystal floated on her back for a while as she gazed up at the sky with small puffy clouds floating far apart across the sky. She felt Aboo and Kady lovingly brush against her as they swam around her as she watched a small puffy cloud looking kind of like a whale when she heard a male voice calling to her from the end of the dock now nearly thirty feet to her right.

Crystal straightened to pull herself upright when she spotted Commodore Sullivan in his cutoffs with his finely chiseled muscular bare chest in view. "Mind if I join you?" he asked pleasantly as he watched Aboo and Kady staying close to her.

Crystal smiled fondly, "Sure, come on in! The water feels great!" she replied. She was surprised how her eyes seemed to keep returning to his bare chest with his chiseled muscles there for her to plainly see.

Commodore dove into the water and began swimming toward her. Crystal felt her heart leap in her chest in anticipation and discovered she was holding her breath as she watched him swim toward her underwater. She slowly exhaled and tried to clam her breathing and her racing heart as he surfaced just ten feet away from her.

Commodore Sullivan smiled brightly as his warm hazel eyes met her emerald green gaze. He moved closer to her as he swam leisurely closer without breaking eye contact.

"It's been a while since I joined you with the dolphins in a swim. I hope I'm not disturbing you if I join you!" he kindly exclaimed.

Crystal offered him a warm smile, "It's alright! I was enjoying being back with them since we had left for England. I was just resting before we continue to explore the reef. You're welcome to join us!" She graciously replied.

He smiled appreciatively as Aboo moved closer to him in greeting and surfaced to chatter excitedly. He reached out to fondly stroke Aboo's long beak as he moved closer.

Crystal smiled at her dolphin friends bond growing in friendship with Anna, Caroline, and Commodore. Aside from Crystal, they hardly came close to any other humans. The dolphins accepted them since Crystal had encouraged them, finding the dolphins seemed happier and content with additional people to swim and play with. She encouraged Anna, Caroline, and Commodore to learn to swim with them and taught them the necessary signals and swimming styles. So far, it has become useful of several pirate encounters as the dolphins assisted them to swim out to the pirate ships and gained an element of surprise.

Crystal took in a breath and dove underwater to swim down to explore the reef with Kady, Aboo, and Commodore following close behind. Crystal swam parallel to the beach heading further out along the private beach as she observed the jutting rock formations in various areas of the ocean floor with coral and sea plants clinging to the rocky surface. Her long raven black hair billowed behind her in a cloud as she propelled through the water in a leisure pace. Commodore pulled up beside her as she spotted a large school of fish just ahead of them. She turned to give him a saucy grin before moving toward the large group of fish and turned to swim among them as she joined them.

In awe of the display, Commodore swam to join her as he circled around her. She turned to face him as they swam around each other with wide smiles as the fish surrounded them.

Crystal found herself drawn by his gaze as he smiled in joy of the fish and her company. His hazel eyes remained glued to hers as they swam around each other in a circular pattern with a beautifully colored tropical fish swimming between them occasionally. When Commodore finally moved to surface for air, Crystal followed beside him. When her head bobbed above the water, she was only a few feet from him. Commodore smiled affectionately as their eyes met and she grinned in her happiness. "Aren't the fish amazing!" she breathed in excitement.

He happily replied, "That was amazing! I have never had that experience before, myself!"

Crystal smiled knowingly, "Stick with me, and you'll be surprised at what other wonders the water world holds!"

Commodore grinned, "I plan to! Since we began having these adventures together, I have witnessed far more than I would have ever dreamed!" he explained.

Crystal grinned widely with a knowing look, "Well, that's because I have found a connection with nature and adventure that no one else has experienced before!" She gave him a wink before diving underwater again.

Commodore watched her disappear in surprise before diving down to follow. Aboo immediately moved beside him and he reached out to grab hold of his fin. Aboo surged forward with a burst of energy as he discovered Crystal swimming mermaid style beside Kady. Her slender body moved fluidly as her body swayed expertly as she moved through the water with impressive speed.

Commodore watched her in amazement as he was once again reminded of her innocent and wild nature. She found enjoyment in the nature around her that any other person would overlook. Weather on land, in the water, or on a ship, she made the best of every situation.

Aboo pulled him to swim alongside Crystal and Kady as she arched up to dive out of the surface with Kady following. Aboo followed just behind them, not to be left out as he pulled Commodore out of the water a clear five feet before arching to dive back into the water.

Crystal immediately moved to swim over Kady and swam closer until she straddled her back and held on. Commodore moved to follow her example with Aboo, not yet perfecting the technique. Luckily, Aboo swam upward to meet him in his excitement. With legs bent at an angle to hold on securely and leaning into a sprawl across the dolphins backs, they swam faster and arched up to take them above the surface in another dive.

Before long, they had to swim along the surface for Commodore and Crystal to catch their breathes. Crystal turned to Commodore with an approving smile, "Your getting the hang of it!" she praised him. "Not long now and you'll be swimming like a pro with them!"

Commodore beamed in her praise. He was happy she was sharing the experience of swimming with the dolphins with him. All those years he trained her in fencing, he never realized just how unique and amazing she really was. Now that they took up the mission in fighting pirates and protecting the people, she opened up and put her trust and faith in him. He had discovered so much about her that fascinated him, and the more he learned about her, the more fascinated he became with her.

Crystal and Commodore swam with the dolphins, had water fights, and explored the reef for several hours. Finally, Crystal turned to swim back to the dock happy and lighthearted with her treasured time in swimming with the dolphins and sharing the experience with Commodore. She swiftly pulled herself up to sit on the edge of the dock as Commodore followed suit and pulled himself up beside her.

She was reluctant to leave the dolphins and hesitated in pulling her feet onto the dock to stand as Commodore glanced over at her adoringly. "Thank you for allowing me to join you!" he fondly commented.

Crystal was surprised by his comment as she turned her head to look at him. As soon as her emerald gaze met his, she felt as if she was being drawn to him. "Oh, uh, I was glad you did! It gave us an opportunity for you to become more adjusted to swimming with Aboo!"

Commodore smiled gratefully before pulling his feet up to stand and turned to assist her to her feet. Crystal gracefully accepted his assistance and felt her skin tingle where their skin touched. She gently pulled her hands free in surprise and wonder. He must have felt it too because he blinked in surprise as she hastily took a step back.

Her eyes were drawn to his bare wide expanse of his broad muscular chest. She realized where she was looking and blushed as she quickly raised her eyes to his. "Thank you for helping me up!" Crystal softly stated as she turned to walk slowly down the dock toward the beach. Commodore followed to walk leisurely beside her as their clothing dripped water as they walked.

Crystal drew in a deep cleansing breath as she gazed up at the high cliff in front of them. She observed the brick wall along the edge at the top with canons poking out every fifteen feet. She began humming a soothing tune as they slowly piqued their way to the beach and turned right to walk back to the small city. Her lovely voice softly carried out in a soothing melody as Commodore remained silent and listened to her humming as they slowly walked up the private beach and climbed over the rock formations to continue toward the dock. They always kept their swimming cutoffs on the ship, so naturally they headed to the ship to change.

As the end of the second week of their visit neared, both ships had their turns being careened, re-sealed, and returned to the water by the dock. Crystal found herself growing anxious to return to their route so she could rest assured Cuba and the Bahamas were safe from pirate attacks for the time being.

Crystal called a meeting with Commodore Sullivan, Lieutenant Rhine, Captain Stevenson, Wong, Chow, Anna, Caroline, Celeste, and Andrea in her newly

restructured main room to discuss her plans for future travel arrangements. One by one, they entered her main room as they observed the dramatic changes of the Captain's cabin. They explored the room approvingly before settling down at the large table. Crystal took out a jug of wine and glasses before setting them on the table in front of her and sitting at the head of the table nearest to the mini bar.

Crystal began filling glasses and passing them down as she began to speak, "Now that *Saving Grace* has a suitable captain, I propose we complete our trip around Cuba and the Bahamas. What I propose is that once we finish the initial route, sending the *Saving Grace* and crew to patrol around Singapore and Indonesia while the *Avenging Angel* takes a different route!" She finished filling and passing glasses of wine and set the jug down as everyone contemplated her proposal. She had hung the world map above her desk in a convenient place for everyone to see. When no one said anything as they considered the possibility, Crystal picked up her glass and stood to gracefully walk around the table and stare at the world map.

Commodore was the first to speak, "Captain, what route do you propose we take?" he asked in confusion.

Crystal turned with a ready smile as she confidently replied, "We'll go out and patrol along Western Africa, and come back for another patrol around the Caribbean. What I propose is that in one year's time, we regroup in Singapore. When we head back out the second time, we will travel along the western coast of Africa and follow the coast all the way down and around to the eastern coast. Depending on how much time we have left in our year mark, we can either cut across the Indian Ocean, or continue along the coast in patrol."

Commodore Sullivan, Lieutenant Rhine, Wong and Chow smiled brightly agreeing it was a brilliant plan. Anna seemed uncertain while Andrea sat demurely. Caroline and Celeste gazed at her adoringly while Captain Stevenson seemed rather confused.

Captain Stevenson cleared his throat, "What is the point in splitting up? Aren't we stronger when we travel together?" he asked in total confusion.

Crystal smiled warmly as she moved to retake her seat, "I understand from a military man's point of view that it would be the desirable choice, Captain Stevenson!" she gently scolded. "However, we have pirate ships out there scattering far and wide. People are suffering greatly right now as we speak! The purpose of our sister ship is to share in the responsibility as we split up to cover more ground. We can take turns from traveling together to taking separate routes. But the biggest thing is to not fall into a pattern because the pirates would notice."

Commodore Sullivan nodded in agreement, "Captain Boudier is right! She has pained many hours in studying the pirate ships paperwork. They all suggest the pirates are fed information and act accordingly. We must remain unpredictable to keep them off our scent."

Lieutenant Rhine readily nodded, "Any time a pirate shows a pattern, they usually change it to become unreliable for the most part. Captain has always remained several steps ahead by becoming unpredictable and using new techniques. If it wasn't for her brilliance, we'd never have made it this far!"

Captain Stevenson quietly contemplated what everyone was saying and finally looked up to Crystal and gave a nod of his head in decisive agreement.

"Excellent!" Crystal stated excitedly, "Now, we must get Captain Stevenson, Wong and Chow fully up to speed on our battle techniques from how we approach to how we pull up alongside and board." She became animated as everyone readily agreed. "Good, then we'll begin immediately!" she exclaimed as she walked to her desk and pulled out her own notes of various strategies from her desk drawer and moved back to her chair to take her seat.

They sat for hours as they discussed and openly familiarized each and every strategy and came up with a few new ideas. By the time the meeting ended, Captain Stevenson was shaking his head in amazement at all Crystal's brilliant and carefully thought out techniques. Wong and Chow gave her adoring and worshipful looks as she smiled in satisfaction.

Crystal stood in front of the table pushing her chair back, "Now I have open-mindedly considered as many possibilities as possible when planning these strategies. Commodore and Lieutenant Rhine assisted with several as well. Our success relies on not being predictable and not using any traditional techniques. I urge you to feel free to bring forward and try new ideas, but never place the ship or crew in harms way. We have managed to keep ahead by using the element of surprise and blindsiding them where they have limited reaction time!" she openly informed and encouraged.

Captain Stevenson gazed across the table with a wide smile, "You're absolutely brilliant!" he exclaimed in excitement with his brown eyes lit up.

Chapter Three