

A Pirate at Pembroke
by Danielle Thorne

Excerpt:

He held a handful of her shift in his fist. She had not snagged it after all. Rather, he had snagged her. She jerked in surprise, but his hold kept her from falling backward and tumbling down the stairs. His other hand trembled as it balanced precariously on a carved dragon head at the top of his cane.

"What do you think you are doing?"

"I... I heard music and followed it."

His eyes blazed with accusation, and it unnerved her.

"I'm so sorry," she said in a choking voice. Her nose tingled again. She touched it with her fingers to make it stop.

"It's not possible you heard music from all the way down in your room."

Sophie took a nervous breath. He stood there, one step above her like a giant, her bedclothes gripped in his hand so tight it shook. She hadn't heard him shuffle down the hall after her. He moved as silent as a ghost when he wanted -- even with a cane. She found the courage to meet his penetrating gaze. "I did hear something from my room. Then I was in the hall."

Captain Murdock waited for a long pause, while the dust they had stirred up in the rugs pirouetted in the air and into Sophie's eyes and nose. "You should not be out of bed," he said.

Sophie swallowed down her frightened apprehension. She tried to beg his pardon, but her lungs failed her, and she coughed in reflex. She covered her mouth with her fingers. "I'm so sorry," she repeated between them, her cheeks hot with humiliation. She stared at the fistful of her garments he'd snatched, aware his eyes examined her from her straight, waist-length hair down to her naked ankles. With a jerk, he dropped her shift like it burned his hand.

"Go to bed," he said in a quiet voice.

Sophie's nose had not quit tingling and itching. "Yes, sir," she said at once, but not soon enough to keep a sneeze from erupting. It came so fast and without warning, she had no chance to catch it before it doused him with all her rejection.

Horried, she stumbled down the next step, thankful the old handrail held fast. When she glanced back, he was wiping off his shirt with a look of disgust.