

Ghost Ship

Being a chapter in the saga of the Pirates of the Caribbean

Based on stories by Jacqueline Ching and Wilhelm Hauff

Chapter 1

As was his custom, Governor Weatherby Swann got up at sunrise, dressed and had a light breakfast. Great, however, was his surprise when, just as he was having a second cup of tea, he heard hasty steps coming down the great staircase. A moment afterwards, the door to the dining-room opened and his daughter entered. Swann blinked in amazement. Elizabeth had never exactly been a morning person; she preferred to sleep in. Yet here she was, looking just as fresh as the new day, already dressed and her hair done, though her maids obviously had forgot to put some powder on that unseemly tan she had acquired during the last few days – a reminder of her abduction by pirates, being marooned on a lonely island and spending far too much time on ships' decks.

“Good morning, Father,” she said, giving him a quick smile.

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” he replied, not able to hide his surprise. “You are up early today.”

She sat down, and a servant was quick to bring her breakfast. “Well, yes,” she said a little too casually.

“I couldn't sleep any longer. Besides, I have a lot to do today.”

“For example?” He looked at her searchingly.

She actually blushed and he sighed resignedly. Of course.

“I'm going to see Will this morning,” she confessed. “And I have to talk to the seamstress about my wedding gown.”

The boy again. Swann slowly shook his head. To say he was not happy with his unexpected new son-in-law would be something of an understatement. For the umpteenth time in the last twenty-four hours he wished his wife was still alive to help him deal with his wayward daughter. She would have taught Elizabeth some propriety, something he obviously had missed in her upbringing. Which was why she had given up bright future prospects and was now settled to marry a blacksmith who had nothing and was nothing.

“Elizabeth,” he said, “you have seen him only yesterday. I do not think it is proper...”

“But we are betrothed!” she protested.

“When your mother had excepted my proposal, we did not see each other for a whole month,” he replied.

She lifted her brows. “How terrible,” she stated. “I don't think I could stand it.” With that, she began to eat hastily and ravenously.

Swann watched her for a while, still shaking his head. A few days among pirates, and her manners suddenly left much to be desired. He doubted spending time with the Turner boy would improve things.

Yet he had to confess that even to a loving father's eyes Elizabeth had never looked more beautiful than this morning. She seemed radiant in some inexplicable way, and there was a small, unconscious smile on her lips. Had his dear wife of blessed memory ever smiled this way when she thought of him? Truth to be told, he did not know. Then again, their betrothal had not involved the rescue of a convicted man from the gallows and a kiss on the battlements for all the people of Port Royal to see...

“You are certain this is what you truly want, aren't you?” he abruptly asked.

She looked up. “Of course,” she said.

“It will not be easy,” he reminded her. “You will have to do without much of the comfort you are accustomed to.”

“I don't need it.”

“I still say it would be better if the both of you moved in here. I could arrange for... your fiancé to get a position in the administration.”

She laughed. “I can't imagine Will as a clerk!”

“I just want you to be happy, Elizabeth. And I'm still not convinced he is the right man for you. This is a decision that will influence your entire life. Maybe you are acting purely on a romantic notion. After

all, you had been through a terrible ordeal, and he rushed heroically to your rescue..." A look at his daughter's face told him that this had been exactly the wrong thing to say.

"His name is Will," she said icily. "You better get used to it, for I'm not changing my mind. I'm sure you wouldn't have any difficulty in remembering Commodore Norrington's first name."

"Speaking of which," Swann quickly seized the fresh topic, "I imagine he will be set to leave Port Royal within the hour. Perhaps you'd want to say goodbye to him?"

She suddenly looked sad and a bit guilty. "I don't think it would be proper," she said softly. And then she leaned forward and put her hand on his. "Father, I know Norrington is a good man, a very good man. He's done more for us than anyone would have had the right to hope for. I think I could have been happy with him – but I have loved Will for a long time. There is nothing that can change that. So I'll do without the comfort and prestige and rather become Mrs. Elizabeth Turner."

Swann sighed again but said nothing more, and after a short while he excused himself and went about his duties.

Elizabeth picked at the tablecloth. It would take her father some time to get used to the notion of her marrying Will. She had hoped that after all that had happened, after all that Will had done and been willing to do for her, her father would welcome him as her future husband. But Will's attempt to save Jack Sparrow from the gallows had marred the good impression somewhat... if ever there had been such a thing as a good impression. Upon returning to Port Royal after their ghostly adventure, her father had brusquely pardoned Will for his misdeeds, knowing they had been done for Elizabeth's sake. Yet he had never expressed any thanks or shown any kind of gratitude. As Elizabeth herself had acted quite coolly towards Will at that time, perhaps his attitude was understandable. But even after their sudden and very informal betrothal, her father had not spoken one word to Will. The shock, maybe; though that hadn't hindered Norrington from accepting his defeat in love nobly. Well, her father was too set in his ways to adapt to a new situation quickly.

Elizabeth cast an eye on the small golden clock on the mantelpiece. It *was* fairly early. If she hurried, she might still catch a glimpse of the *Dauntless* leaving.

Some moments later, Elizabeth passed through the gates of her father's estate in the fashionable St. Paul's district. She had never walked to town before but the thought of arriving at the smithy in a coach was ridiculous. And as she had just told her father, she would get used to living without luxury. After a while she noticed that she actually enjoyed the exercise. The heat was not yet as bad as it would be in the hours to come, and the sea glittering in the rays of the morning sun was a gorgeous sight.

Halfway to town, Elizabeth took a detour to the cliffs from where she had an unobstructed view of the bay and the harbour. True enough, the *Dauntless* was ready to set sail. Elizabeth imagined James Norrington already on board, giving orders. She felt sorry for him, but at the same time she knew she had made the right decision. And though she wished him well, she hoped he wouldn't be able to catch up with the *Black Pearl*. But as she had witnessed the awesome speed of Jack's ship herself, she was not too worried.

When the *Dauntless* sailed for the open sea, Elizabeth continued her walk. The town was still quiet, though there were already people up and about, especially at the harbour. Elizabeth made her way to the part of town where the craftsmen's shops were situated and looked for Mr. Brown's smithy. She had only been there once, years ago, some time after their arrival in Port Royal when her father had agreed to let her visit her friend in his new home.

It took her a moment to discover the sign of thongs, hammer and anvil in a corner. She opened the door a crack and peered through. Will was already at work, feeding the donkey and putting an iron into the fire.

How things could change within a few days. She remembered the Will of their eight years of friendship – an honest, modest, somewhat awkward boy who acted so blasted correctly all the time when all she wanted to hear was some word that told her of his true feelings towards her.

That Will was gone. She had first beheld the new Will Turner, the determined, daring and dashing young pirate of her dreams, when they had been chased by the *Black Pearl* under Barbosa's command and prepared for battle. He had not treated her as a woman who needed protection then, but as an equal. It had been a strange new, but oddly liberating experience for her.

Smiling, she opened the door fully and entered the smithy. Will looked up.

"Elizabeth!" he said surprised. "What are you doing here?"

“Why.” She closed the door behind her and coyly took a few slow steps in his direction. “I’ve come to see my husband-to-be. I’ve been told I might find him here.”

He smiled, and she ran to him and they embraced. After a long, passionate kiss Will confessed: “I still haven’t got a ring for you. There wasn’t time yesterday with all the excitement and the long talk I had with Mr. Brown...”

“About what?”

There was a twinkle in his dark eyes. “About me becoming a full partner, now that I’ll soon have a wife to support. A proposal to which he agreed in the end.”

Elizabeth grabbed his upper arms. “Will!” she exclaimed, beaming. “That’s wonderful news!”

“... So I’m going out today to find you the most beautiful ring in all of Port Royal.”

“I’m coming with you!” she said at once.

He seemed a bit reluctant. “I don’t think that’s how it’s done.”

“A marriage between a blacksmith and a governor’s daughter is not done either”, she reminded him. Right then a violent snore set her jumping.

“Oh, don’t worry about him,” Will reassured her. “He’ll sleep for the next few hours.”

Elizabeth looked around and saw Mr. Brown lying in a chair in the far corner of the smithy, fast asleep, a bottle of rum in his hand.

“He’s drunk this early in the morning?” she asked incredulously.

“Actually, since yesterday night.”

“Oh.” She took another long look at the blacksmith. “He must have taken it very hard. Losing you as an apprentice, I mean.”

Will took the iron out of the fire. “Perhaps,” he allowed. “Though his drinking has nothing to do with it.”

She turned around. “Does he do this often?”

He shrugged. “Almost every day.”

Elizabeth stared at him. “Then when does he work?”

“Seldom.”

“So – you’ve done his work all these years and never received thanks for it?” she said. “All the glory for your work went to him!”

He just shrugged again.

Elizabeth was at a loss for words. “Oh, Will!” she exclaimed. “Why... This is totally... You’re so... Why didn’t you... Do you have no ambition at all?”

He smiled and took her hand. “My ambition is doing good craftsmanship,” he said. “As for the only other ambition in my life...”

“Ah.” Playfully, she avoided his kiss. “No fooling around, sir. We have something to buy.”

“Right you are, Miss Swann,” he conceded.

“But I expect you to accept appreciation for your work in the future.”

“Aye, capt’n.”

So they strolled through the streets of Port Royal, Mr. Turner and future Mrs. Turner, for everyone to see. After a while Elizabeth said:

“I have a favour to ask of you, Will.”

“Anything.”

“I want to learn how to fight with a sword.”

He stopped abruptly. “What?” he asked perplexed. “Why?”

Elizabeth furrowed her brow and stared at her feet. It took a while before she answered. “When Barbossa and his crew abducted me,” she finally said, “I was totally helpless, and it nearly got us killed. I don’t want to feel that helpless and useless again.”

Will spoke forcefully. “You were not useless and you certainly weren’t helpless. You showed more wits and courage than all of us put together.”

She lifted her eyes. “I think what you did was incredibly brave,” she replied honestly. “You were willing to give your life for me.”

“I still am.” He was not bragging; it was a simple statement. “I love you.”

She touched his cheek. “And I love you,” she said.

“I have always loved you.”

“Not as long as I you.”

“Much longer.”

“I think I loved you before we even met.”

“Liar.”

“No, seriously. I’ve been waiting half my life for some charming pirate to come and steal my heart.”

“Like that Barbossa fellow?”

“Oh, you!” She gave him a slap on the arm, and they laughed.

At the goldsmith’s they had a great time choosing the perfect ring out of the many in the collection. Elizabeth finally decided on a band made out of tiny golden ivy leaves, with a small red stone embedded in them. Discreetly, she waited outside for Will to conclude the transaction and felt a bit guilty for burdening him with expenses beyond his humble income.

Arm in arm they went back to the smithy. By now, the streets were bustling with life, and more than one good citizen of Port Royal touched their hat and greeted them. Elizabeth smiled at a mother with two daughters who all curtsied upon seeing them.

“My, such nice people,” she marvelled. “I had no idea. Father should have let me visit the town more often.”

Will nodded politely in reply to a neighbouring craftsman’s shout of “A very good morrow to you, Mr. Turner! Miss Swann!”

“Oh, well,” he said, “they smell a profit.”

Puzzled, Elizabeth looked at him. “How so?”

“Well, they think: That Turner, he’s about to marry the Governor’s daughter, so we can expect him to become someone in the future. Let’s get into his best books.” Taking her hand, he added casually,

“Quite convenient, actually.”

Elizabeth snatched her hand back. “Will, you haven’t!” she exclaimed.

He furrowed his brow. “What do you take me for?” he asked. “I always settle my debts. But it helps. Or do you think Platt would have sold me anything on credit before yesterday?”

Elizabeth stared down at the golden ivy leaves on her finger. “An engagement ring on credit. Charming.”

“It’s the only thing I can give you for now.”

The unspoken apology in his voice made her slight indignation disappear at once. She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him.

“I’ll take your heart, then, Mr. Turner,” she said.

He smiled at her. “Now, that’s already yours, Miss Swann,” he replied softly.

The clock of the nearby chapel struck nine, and Elizabeth sighed regretfully.

“I have to go,” she said. “I told Father I’d see the seamstress about my wedding gown. And you know him – he might bring it up at the most inconvenient moment.”

He blinked. “Elizabeth, we haven’t even decided on a date for the wedding yet. We got engaged only yesterday, remember?”

“Clearly. But I promise you,” she threw him a long look, “that dress will be worth a year of preparation.”

Will laughed. “I really love you.”

He was about to turn away when she held him back.

“About the sword-fighting lessons.”

He paused, his hand on the latch. “What would your father say to that?” he asked.

Elizabeth straightened and did a fairly good imitation of the Governor. “I’m not sure this is entirely proper, Elizabeth. Oh, please, Will,” she added, “he won’t learn of it.”

Still reluctantly, he said: “I don’t know, Elizabeth.”

“At least let me try, then.”

Obviously, something of her determination must have shone through, for he sighed. “Very well,” he gave in. “Tomorrow morning?”

“Tomorrow morning it is.” She gave him a quick smile and walked away.

Chapter 2

That evening, Will went for a stroll.

Proudly wearing his sword and his new hat - only a few days ago he would never have dreamed of wearing something as outrageously flamboyant as this - he made his way to the waterfront. All his life he had lived by the sea, yet it had only been through recent events that something had awoken inside of him, some instinct perhaps (Jack might call it something in his blood), some hitherto unknown fascination, that connected him to a seafarer's profession. There was freedom in the vastness of the open waters. Now Will finally understood what had driven his father to go to sea, even though he disapproved of Bill Turner's choice to take up a pirating career and leave his wife and son behind. Well, he had paid the price, in the end.

Will stopped, apparently lost in the observation of a fast approaching East Indiaman. It had been a horrific realization, one he had not allowed himself to dwell upon, that by lifting the curse he had also condemned his father to death. True enough, it had been the only choice available to him, and one might argue that Bill Turner's fate had already been worse than death. Also, there had been no possible way of saving him in any case - yet that didn't make it any easier for Will. Even though he had never known Bill Turner expect from the tales of others he felt guilty, and he grieved for the decent, honourable man his father had turned out to be.

But far stronger than those gloomy thoughts, he reminded himself, was the overpowering happiness he felt. Elizabeth loved him, she stood by him, they were going to get married against all opposition, and that was all that truly mattered. They would be happy, and their children would never feel abandoned. On that thought, he resumed his walk.

The East Indiaman he had been absently watching entered the harbour. To Will, it appeared to be going at an incredible speed, and judging by the swearing of the sailors around, they thought so, too. "She's never goin' to stop in time," an old salt said. "Don't know what her captain thinks he's doin'." Closer and closer the ship drew. Hastily, the fishermen in their boats made way, and the onlookers cleared the dock. The East Indiaman slowed down somewhat, yet not soon enough as the old sailor had predicted, and with a terrible crunch it ran aground, smashing the dock on its way. Pieces of broken crates and barrels flew everywhere. Will dodged a passing plank, ignored the colourful oaths around him and squinted at the ship. A wild figure stepped to the rail, his grey hair and beard tousled, his eyes wide with terror.

"The ghost ship!" he cried. "I'm doomed! All saints preserve me - the ghost ship!"

The harbour went deathly quiet.

"Where?" a voice called.

"I passed it half a day ago," the man whom Will took to be the East Indiaman's captain said trembling. "Flee for your life while you still can; I fear it's coming this way."

There was a universal crossing of themselves, and the crowd began to mutter anxiously.

Puzzled, Will addressed the old sailor. "What's all this about?" he enquired.

"Don't you know the story, lad?" The seaman beckoned him closer, and Will was strongly reminded of Gibbs, Jack's right-hand man, who always had a yarn to spin. "It's said that there's a ship out there, crewed by the dead, sailin' the seas forever..."

"The *Black Pearl*," Will guessed.

"Nay, lad, nor the *Flyin' Dutchman* either." The old sailor lowered his voice to a whisper. "It's said that it's floatin' in blue light and that whoever sees it," he glanced furtively at the East Indiaman, "will die within the year."

"Strange kind of effect," commented Will. He had never put much store in these superstitions, even after encountering the cursed crew of the *Pearl*. "So what business does this ghost ship have in Port Royal?"

The old sailor shook his head with an ominous air. "No one knows, do they? But mark my words: It bodes ill for all of us."

Early next morning, Elizabeth returned to the smithy. She was clad in what supposedly was one of her older dresses (making it still elegant and costly far beyond the means of someone like Will) whose train trailed a small cloud of dust.

Will regarded the attire sceptically. "I'm not sure this is going to work."

"But I don't have anything else."

He thought about it for a moment. "Come along," he then said. "You can wear some of my old clothes."

He led her into the chamber where he slept. It was plain and unadorned except for a few trinkets Will had collected over the years: some shells, a bright blue parrot's feather, a strangely formed black stone.

"What's this?" Elizabeth picked up a small lace handkerchief. "There wouldn't be another girl in your life, would there?"

Will looked up from the chest he was digging in and smiled. "No."

Carefully, Elizabeth unfolded the fine fabric so she was able to look at the slightly crude embroidery in one corner. "E. S.," she read the initials, surprised. "This is mine? Where did you get it?"

"I've had it for years. A fair exchange, one might say." He straightened. "You lost it on the ship when you were looking after me."

Touched, Elizabeth replaced the handkerchief on the box that served as Will's bedside table. "We have to be more honest with each other in the future," she resolved.

"I intend to." Will threw her some clothes. "Here, those should about fit you. I've grown out of them for some time now."

When he had left the room, Elizabeth quickly stripped and put on the unfamiliar garb – brown trousers, a white shirt, a reddish jerkin – which stood in stark contrast to her elegant stockings and shoes. Somewhat giggly she emerged from Will's chamber.

"It's a blessing my father can't see me this way," she said.

Will had to laugh as well. "If he could, he might not recognize you. Now," he passed her a sword, "take this... no, don't grip it like a butter knife, you hold it like this..."

Elizabeth proved to be a quick study. Eager to learn, she mastered the basic moves in no time. Will was impressed.

"If Barbossa ever came back, he'd think twice about abducting you again," he praised.

Elizabeth tried to fasten some of her long strands that had come loose during the lesson. "There's a huge difference between knowing how to fight and to have experience in fighting," she pointed out. Will grimaced. "That's what Jack taught me," he said ruefully.

"So we'll continue the instruction?"

"Do I have any choice?"

"Not really... Oh, this is no good!" Impatiently, she yanked at her elegantly swept up hair. "Can you imagine what people would say if they saw me walking out of here like *this*?"

"I'd rather not."

Elizabeth knew that, without her maids, fixing her hairdo was simply impossible. Exasperated, she plucked the pins out of her hair so that the long tresses fell down on her shoulders and back. "There is nothing for it," she concluded.

Will ran his hand through her open mane of hair. For all sense and purpose, Elizabeth knew, a woman only ever let her hair fall open in front of her husband; yet during her recent adventure decorum had had to take a back seat, so Will was by now used to see her like this. Still, his touch sent a tingling along her spine, and she was suddenly reminded of that magical moment on board of the *Interceptor*, after Will had rescued her from the Isla de Muerta. It had been the first time that she had plucked up the courage to show him how she felt, and also the first time that he had responded in kind, had touched her like a lover. The first time they had almost kissed.

Elizabeth closed her eyes in anticipation.

And then someone opened the door. Quickly, Elizabeth ducked out of sight just in time.

"Mr. Turner," a voice said, "you'd better come and see this!"

Standing on the battlements of Fort Charles, Will, Elizabeth, Governor Swann and the fort's commander during Norrington's absence watched the strange ship shrouded in blue light that had entered the harbour of Port Royal that morning. Will had told them of the incident at the dock the day before and also of the doom the captain of the East Indiaman believed to have come upon him.

Swann took in the anxious crowd at harbour with a glance. "Shouldn't somebody ask them what they want?" he suggested.

"Well, it's not like they are doing something wrong, sir," the commander replied. "They're just lying there, making people nervous."

"People think it's a ghost ship." Swann shook his head at the absurdity of it. "And as long as nobody shows themselves, rumours are spreading. It might interfere with the running of Port Royal."

"I can go and find out," Will offered.

"I'll accompany you," Elizabeth said at once.

Swann put his foot down. "Elizabeth, no. We don't know what kind of people they are, and I have no desire to see you abducted again."

"And I think," said Elizabeth, "if the governor's daughter were to call, they'd respond, don't you agree?"

Swann did not. "It's too dangerous," he said fervently.

"Oh, Will can take care of me." She smiled.

For the first time, Swann actually looked at Will on something like a personal level, clearly begging him to control his headstrong fiancée where her father could not.

Though Will privately agreed with the Governor concerning Elizabeth's safety, he knew better than to expect her to change her mind.

"Of course," he said.

Dismayed, Swann turned away.

All too aware of the watching crowd at the dock, Will and Elizabeth rowed out to the ghost ship soon after. It didn't seem remarkable in any way, apart from the pale blue light that surrounded it without any discernible source. There was no movement and no sound at all.

At some distance, Will hailed them, but nobody showed themselves. When the dark hull loomed over them, blotting out the sky, they looked around for a means to fasten their boat. It was then that Elizabeth made a puzzling discovery.

"They haven't dropped the anchor," she pointed out.

Will frowned. "Then how do they keep the ship from drifting off?" he wondered.

Near the bow Elizabeth was able to take hold of a line. While Will held the boat steady, she clambered on board. Will made ready to throw her the rope to fasten the boat with when she froze with a strangled exclamation, one leg still dangling over the rail.

"Elizabeth?" Will called, alarmed. "What is it?"

Slowly, she pulled herself on deck. She stared at something for a while, ignoring Will's shouts. Then she turned. Her face was ashen.

"Take the line!" Will commanded, and like someone in a trance she caught and fastened it. As fast as he was able, Will climbed aboard. Only then did he see what was wrong.

The deck was strewn with bodies. They lay where they had fallen, propped up against the rail, spread-eagled on the planks, clutching either their own weapons or those of others embedded in their flesh.

"Oh, Will!" Elizabeth whispered.

The sight of this massacre made them shudder. Nevertheless, Will took a few tentative steps forward.

"Return to the boat," he said. "I'll check whether anyone's still alive."

Elizabeth swallowed. "Then I'll go with you."

Stepping carefully around the bodies, they made their way to the stern. There was no movement and no sound at all; everyone was indeed dead.

The door to the captain's quarters stood partly open, revealing a sumptuous meal on a large table. Several plates and cups were scattered on the floor.

"They must have been drunk and then got into a fight about something," Elizabeth said in a small voice.

Will nodded. Then, because he did not wish to expose her to the sight of a ship full of dead bodies any longer than necessary, he led her back to the boat. Glancing around, he noticed one curious detail: There were no flies on the bodies, something you'd expect some hours after the slaughter that had taken place here. Not wanting to upset Elizabeth with gruesome details, he kept his observation to himself.

They rowed back and reported.

"I'll have my men clear the ship at once," the commander said.

This, however, proved to be no easy feat. As the day progressed, the assembled crowd watched the soldiers grow increasingly frustrated by their efforts to shift the bodies. It appeared as though, try as they might, they could not move the dead sailors one inch from where they had fallen or even take the weapons out of their grip. In the end it was decided to remove the planks they lay on, and several shipwrights and carpenters from Port Royal were enlisted to help – with the same non-existing success. The ship itself seemed to resist every effort to damage it. Tools broke while trying to cut through the planks, and finally they had to give up.

Will learned of this from neighbours who had watched the spectacle. He himself had returned to the smithy to do some work; since his betrothal to Elizabeth orders had doubled in numbers.

The strange occurrences did nothing to allay people's worries about the ship, but events did not stop there. In the night, Will was woken by loud chattering in the streets. Looking out, he found what had to be every citizen of Port Royal running towards the waterfront or coming from there or standing around, talking in anxious tones. Curious, Will made his way to the harbour. The dock was packed with onlookers, though what they were looking at he could not determine.

"What's going on?" he asked someone in the crowd.

"The ship! It's cursed! We are all doomed!"

Will did not find the answer particularly helpful, so he pushed through the crowd until he got a clear view of the strange ship. Only then did he understand the reason for the excitement. Every lantern on board was lit, and shadowy forms were moving on deck, yelling and fighting. If Will had not seen the bodies for himself, he might have thought it some kind of trick or practical joke the sailors had played on them. As it were, he could not suppress a shudder when a fisherman next to him whispered:

"The dead are manning that ship!"

Chapter 3

The ghostly activity on board the ship ceased after an hour or so, leaving the vessel as still and devoid of life as before. By now, soldiers from the garrison were on their way to it in two longboats, and when they returned they reported that everyone on board was – still – dead. None of the bodies could be moved.

By morning the town was in a frenzy. A roaring trade in charms supposed to ward off evil was sweeping Port Royal. A priest was sent to the ship in order to purify it; without success, for the bodies still refused to be moved, nor could the planks be damaged, and even an attempt to drag the ship out of the harbour met with unyielding resistance.

Will finally left the scene and walked up to the Governor's estate. As he was just in time for breakfast, the Governor in an unusual display of politeness (or propriety) had another set laid out for him, and while they were eating, Will told Elizabeth and her father what had transpired during the night. After he had finished they were all silent for a time.

"I suppose then," said Swann in a down-to-business voice, attempting to hide his nervousness, "that we are dealing with another curse here?"

"It would seem so, sir," Will agreed.

"Then how do we lift it?"

Will looked down into his tea. "We don't know."

Elizabeth, who had been very quiet, said: "We have to ask them."

There was a long pause. Both men stared at her. At last, Swann said patiently:

"They are dead, Elizabeth."

"Not at night." She looked at them challengingly.

Will reminded her: "At night they are fighting."

"So ask them before they start fighting and dying!" She leaned forward, clutching the tablecloth. "If they only come alive at night, someone can slip aboard in the evening, wait there and speak to them as soon as they stir."

"And risk getting killed themselves," Swann protested.

She smiled. "So they'd better be able to defend themselves, hadn't they?"

Which, effectively, settled the argument.

"Very well," Will volunteered. "I'll try."

Sighing, the Governor nodded and got to his feet. "I will ask the commander to let you through. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

When Swann had left the room, Elizabeth fixed Will with a determined stare.

"Don't even think of going without me", she warned.

"Elizabeth, it's too dangerous..."

At once, she interrupted. "Please, Will, don't try to protect me. We have been through too much together. We have to look after one another, yes, but not protect each other like that. Would you want me to lock you away in order to keep you safe from harm?"

"Of course not," he conceded.

"Then don't expect me to stay behind while you face danger." She folded her arms and glowered at him.

Will mulled it over. "But how will you slip out undetected?" he asked after a while.

Apparently, Elizabeth had already given the problem some thought. "I'll borrow a dress and a bonnet from Estrella, my maid," she elaborated. "Once I'm in town, I'll disguise myself as a boy in your old clothes, and nobody will be the wiser."

Grudgingly, Will had to confess the plan might – *might* – actually work. "All right," he gave in. "But if your father ever finds out about this, he'll change his mind about not sending me to the gallows for sure."

Despite Will's misgivings, the first part of their endeavour went according to plan. Elizabeth arrived at the smithy at sunset, clad in her maid's garment. Smuggling her past Mr. Brown was hardly a problem. She changed into Will's clothes, pinned up her hair and put a hat over it, and they set out to the harbour under the protection of the approaching darkness.

Again they made their way across the deck, littered with bodies. They had decided that the best place to wait for the sailors' return to life were the captain's quarters, so they gingerly sat down in one corner of the cabin and waited – waited for the dead to move.

This, Elizabeth decided, was far spookier than seeing Barbossa and his crew turn into skeletons in the moonlight. Once you had got over the first shock you realized that, skeletons or not, their actions and desires were quite human (for pirates and cutthroats at least). But she had no way of knowing what to expect of the crew of the ghost ship.

Time passed.

Elizabeth fingered her sword nervously and rested her head on Will's shoulder. Whatever happened, she was glad to be with him. She imagined how different the situation might have been – if Will had not acted, if Jack had been hanged, if she had not broken off her betrothal to Norrington. The commodore would have kept her out of harm's way and charged into the ghost ship's mystery with every faith in the might of His Majesty the King and his own duty to the people of Port Royal. Which, probably, would have got him killed.

She wondered where he was now. Had Jack managed to outrun and outwit him? Were they engaged in a fierce fight to the death? That would be terrible; she did not wish for any of them to get hurt – or worse. Briefly, she closed her weary eyes. Her feelings were confused. There was James Norrington, honourable, noble even, with a strong sense of duty, though a bit stiff-necked. On the other hand Jack, the carefree spirit, adventurous, seemingly immoral but a good man at the core. She nestled closer to Will. Will who combined the best of both of them but never put his own interests first, even to the point of self-denial as he had proven during his time as Mr. Brown's apprentice. She still was a bit angry with him about it.

Blinking, she peered at him. His eyes were closed, and his head dropped.

Struck by the unnatural quiet on the ship that had something narcotic, Elizabeth jerked wide awake.

"Will!" She prodded him. "Will, wake up!"

His eyes fluttered open. He looked around with an unfocused stare for a moment, then his memory of where they were returned. "What is it?" he asked.

"We have to stay awake! I think..." She stopped. A faint babble reached her ears, coming from the deck and gaining in volume with every passing moment. There was the sound of many feet walking around, loud voices, and suddenly steps drew nearer.

Elizabeth and Will got up just as the door to the cabin was thrown open and two men entered. They did not appear to notice the both of them, though they stood in plain sight, but proceeded to the table where they sat and started eating and drinking. Both were tall, black men, but the one who carried an ornately forged sword seemed to be in command.

Will and Elizabeth exchanged a glance and stepped forth. The two men still ignored them. They were talking about someone who, by the sound of it, had repeatedly caused trouble aboard the ship.

"... and this time, when he lectured them about their behaviour," the man in the red jerkin was saying, "Matthew actually asked him for *forgiveness*. I always thought he was a bit soft in the head."

The captain gulped down a cup of wine and grunted.

"Excuse us," Elizabeth said, "but do you..."

"So," the seaman continued as though she didn't exist, "that must have encouraged him. Rambled about our ways, and that as captain you was leading us astray... His words, not mine," he added quickly when he saw the captain's grim stare. "The men think he's a holy man. We can't do anything about it."

"Can't we?" the captain spoke at last. "As long as we're on my ship, *I'm* in command, and I won't have my authority questioned. If he doesn't like our ways, he's free to leave." He quickly emptied another cup. "In fact," he said, "I'll just go and tell him so myself."

"Sir, no, there's only bound to be more trouble," protested the other, but the captain had already stormed out of the door. The seaman hastily went after him, with Elizabeth and Will following.

On deck they were met by a dramatic scene. The captain confronted a small, wizened man in the attire of a shaman or voodoo priest. The crew, all of whom Will and Elizabeth knew from seeing them lying dead on deck, had gathered around in a semicircle.

The captain was shouting at the old man, relaying in many colourful metaphors what he had just told the sailor in the red jerkin, while the crew muttered anxiously. The old man, however, seemed unperturbed.

“You are a cruel and remorseless man, captain,” he replied calmly. “You are supposed to set an example for your men, yet what is it you do? Encourage them to commit evil acts, drink and bet and cavort which in the end will destroy them and their families.”

The captain laughed wildly. “Preach your morals elsewhere, priest!” he mocked. “I live a man’s life and I’m not ashamed of it!”

“You are also quite drunk,” the old man declared.

At that, the captain drew his sword. An ominous murmuring came from the crew, and Red Jerkin put a restraining hand on the captain’s arm.

“Sir, no!” he urged.

“I won’t be lectured on my own ship!” the captain roared. “Let go of me if you value your life!”

“Sir!”

The captain jerked his arm out of his grip and ran him through.

Elizabeth let out a gasp that nobody but Will could hear. Suddenly the deck was deathly silent.

“See what you have done?” the old man said. “Your temper has cost you the life of a friend now. How much further are you willing to go?”

The captain stared at the dead body, at his sword, at the priest. His face contorted in a horrible grimace of hate. “Hell take you!” he swore and plunged his blade deep into the old man’s chest.

The priest stumbled backward to the rail, the sword still embedded in his chest. In words that gushed from his lips amidst a stream of blood he whispered: “And hell will never take you or your ship, captain. Forever shall you sail the seas until you recover what you have lost.” He clutched at the sword and tumbled over the rail into the sea.

The sailors gaped, too horrified to speak. After a long time, one of the said: “You have brought doom upon us, captain. The curse of a dying priest...”

Enraged, the captain drew a long knife. “Anyone else who speaks against my authority will go the same way as that lunatic!” he yelled.

“You are the lunatic, captain,” another sailor spoke up. “We won’t be damned because of you!”

“Who dares?” The captain brandished his knife.

As one, the crew drew their weapons.

What followed was the massacre that would leave every man on board dead. As though madness had overcome them, they rushed at their captain; he fought valiantly, yet in the end he fell to sheer numbers; then the sailors started attacking each other. Elizabeth and Will suddenly found themselves surrounded by a crew intend on killing everyone in sight. Will brought his blade up just in time to stop an axe from accidentally taking off his head while aimed at a sailor behind him. Elizabeth drew her sword as well, blocked the attacked sailor’s retaliatory blow, and dodging and parrying they hurriedly crossed the deck. Though Elizabeth was still a novice in sword-fighting, she held her own admirably. “Jump!” Will yelled.

Which seemed like an excellent advice to Elizabeth. She had walked the plank once, so falling from the height of a ship’s rail was nothing new to her. She climbed on the rail and jumped.

While sinking into the dark waters, she quickly sheathed her sword to get her hands free and swam for the surface and their waiting boat. Some moments later, Will followed. They climbed in, severed the mooring line and rowed towards the dock as quickly as possible.

Chapter 4

“This calls for a different approach”, Elizabeth said once they had reached the safety of Mr. Brown’s smithy. She was still looking a bit shaky, but more determined than ever. “What have we learned so far?”

“Except not to mess with cursed sailors?” Will emptied his soaked boots. “Let’s see. The captain killed that voodoo priest, and he put a curse on them.”

“To sail the seas until they had recovered the captain’s lost sword”, added Elizabeth. She was drenched from head to foot and there was a constant dripping of water all around her, but she did not seem to notice. “Which is probably impossible, as the shaman knew. If they were at high sea at the time, he and the sword must have sunk to the bottom of the ocean, never to be retrieved.”

“Like my father,” Will said softly.

Torn from her reverie, Elizabeth looked at him in dismay. “Will, I’m sorry,” she said, “I didn’t mean to...”

“It’s all right.” He took off her hat and shook the water from it. “Go on, get out of those wet clothes, you’ll catch your death.”

Abashed, Elizabeth retreated into his chamber and changed. Yet though she felt very badly about having caused him pain, she couldn’t stop herself from thinking, and when she emerged again she said:

“Will, do you think you can make a sword like the one the captain lost?”

He was in the process of wringing out his socks and looked up, surprised. “I guess so,” he replied. “A close match at least. But why? Do you think the curse can be hoodwinked like that?”

“It’s worth a try, isn’t it? We don’t know how long the ship’s planning to stay here, and we don’t have a voodoo priest around to consult on this matter.”

Will nodded slowly. “You are right,” he agreed. “I’ll do my best.”

“I know you will.” She bent down and kissed him. “Now I better get home before anyone notices I’m not in bed with a terrible headache. Though if I know Estrella, she’ll be fighting off intruders admirably.” With a small wave of her hand she left the smithy.

Although he was tired after two sleepless nights, Will started to work at once. As long as his memory was still fresh, he drew up a sketch of the sword, added approximate measurements and chose the materials he planned to work with. Then he caught some sleep, and a few hours later he was at work, to the surprise of Mr. Brown who shuffled out of his room in the small hours of the morning, sober for a change.

When Elizabeth rejoined Will later that day he was able to present her with a beautiful copy of the lost sword. What now remained was the question of how to give it to its owner. Neither Will nor Elizabeth fancied the idea of returning to the ghost ship at night, but would it be effective to go there in daylight?

In the end, they settled on a compromise. When the sun slowly started to sink towards the horizon, Elizabeth once again donned her boy’s garb (still damp from the night before), and they set out once again to face the cursed crew.

“Third time’s a charm,” Elizabeth muttered.

Once more they clambered aboard and crossed the deck. Now that they knew where to look, they discovered Red Jerkin almost immediately. Not far from him lay the prone form of the ship’s captain, half-buried under the bodies of some of his crew. Elizabeth carefully placed the sword in his left hand. There was a sound like a sigh and a dry rustle, and before their eyes the dead sailors one by one turned to dust.

Uncertain, Elizabeth looked at Will. “Is this supposed to happen?”

“How should I know?” He seemed as much at a loss as she. Then he pulled her away sharply as the captain slowly opened his eyes. The dead man stared in wonder at the sword in his hand.

“Recover what I have lost,” he whispered, seemingly to himself. He lifted his eyes to look at Will and Elizabeth. “It was never the sword,” he said. “All those years I awoke to this cursed half-life night after night. I knew what was about to happen, yet I was never able to say or do anything but what I had said and done in the night I brought the curse upon myself and my crew. After many years I began to understand – the things the priest spoke of, the things I’d lost, were decency and compassion. I never dared hope to see the day... yet you have shown us compassion and released us from the curse. Now

we can rest in peace. You have my gratitude.” He smiled at them and then he, too, turned to dust just as the sun sank behind the horizon.

When Will had finished his report, Elizabeth took his hand. For obvious reasons they had decided to leave out her part in the lifting of the curse, instead making Will the sole hero of the story. As the commander and Governor Swann grudgingly had to acknowledge.

“Well, Mr. Turner,” said the commander, “you have done a great service to Port Royal. We are in your debt.”

“It was my pleasure,” Will replied modestly, smiling at Elizabeth.

“What will happen to the ship now?” she asked.

“We will auction it off,” the commander answered. “I am sure there are some merchants who will be pleased with an addition to their fleet.”

Arm in arm, Will and Elizabeth left the garrison, Swann bringing up the rear.

“Another curse lifted,” Will said, “and we still haven’t talked about a date for our wedding.”

Swann cleared his throat. “Which reminds me,” he said.

They both looked at him.

“Mr. Turner,” he began, visibly uncomfortable with the situation.

“William,” offered Will. “Please.”

“Well... William.” Swann coughed, and Elizabeth pressed Will’s hand, beaming. “Perhaps you would like to have tea with us tomorrow afternoon and we could talk about the plans for the wedding?”

“I would like that very much, sir, thank you.”

“I was also thinking,” continued Swann more eagerly, now that he had found an opening, “we should have a dinner in recognition of your betrothal, it *was* a rather informal affair after all. Nothing too fancy, just the more influential families of Port Royal...”

“I hope you know what you’re getting into,” Elizabeth whispered into Will’s ear.

“Yes. Even more orders.”

The Southern Cross was very bright in the velvety black sky.