

## **Chapter 1 – Raiding the Kissinger Majesty:**

Leaning over the polished banister, she stared at the slow rolling waves. Long sails had been brought down, and the ship had taken to a floating pace, nearly just a drift on the wide-open sea. Soft blue waves bumped into the side of the ship, adding a gently thumping to the hum of activity that filled the deck and hull. Cool salt air blew up over the busy crew, wafting through the scuppers, and rustling the closed sails. The ship is home, has been home for many a year, to the beautiful gypsy princess watching the setting sun. Long fingers pushed her dark curls off her shoulders and her large round eyes squinted as she measured the approximate amount of time left before dark. It is heavenly, here, in the rolling waves, she had hoped for a peaceful life, hard work is fine, but dedication to a purpose is better.

As if suddenly decided on some particular thing she was pondering, she grabbed a hold of the nearest rope and swung up onto the banister with the gracefulness of a cat. She looked out over her beautiful ship to survey her crew. All of them family, not just servants of the amazing and graceful Ruby Red, but friends who had come to work with her, who had become members of her inimitable family. Not a one was unknown to her, her curiosity being very akin to her cat-like grace, all members of her crew were here to be a part of something greater than simply a ship floating on the endless sea. A few were rescuers, from a time that still haunts her in nightmares, the deciding moment, the true reason why the ship travels today.

The thin layers of material that made up her flowing skirt blew like a torn flag out behind her and she almost appeared to be a statue, mounted in such a strange place on the red painted deck rails with golden ropes and silver sails. Her stillness betrayed only by a momentary nod as she took pride in her crew, her family. A watchful team, diligent, strong, dedicated, and resilient,

even after all of the trials they have faced before. It isn't every pirate ship that is commanded by a woman, to be exact, there are no others. Her pride was granted another moment as in near synchronization, the busy team began to stop and stare eagerly up at the beautiful woman.

“Cap't Scarlet!” announced the oldest crewmember on the ship. Wooden spoon in hand, and his glasses pushed forward on his nose, he swung at the bronze disk by the captain's quarters causing it to ring loudly over the deck.

Quickly, the crew came to order – the view was similar to closing credits at a circus tent show. All manner of dress and entrance – swinging in on ropes, playfully pushing past each other, sliding down the mast... as her motley crew came to order on the deck before her. Of course, there is never a dress code as a pirate, it's come as you are – shirtless, shoes long missing, pants in shambles, hats or dirty old bandanas, and they aren't all men – strong and bulky – some are small women, lanky older men, even a few of the “little folk” - all shapes and sizes make up the worker bees before her. Diversity is the key to understanding the true needs of people, and there is only one perquisite to a pirate's life – the undeniable code.

“Thank you, Mr. Cross,” Scarlet smiled at her second in command as he tugged down on his tan rumpled vest, as if to make himself presentable.

“Her Majesty awaits us me mateees!” she shouted in her best pirate voice as she twirled her dark hat above her head. The crew cheered.

“Our date is but mere hours away, so we need to be cleaned up and ready to go!” She put her hand across her forehead and peered out over her ship.

“How goes thee?” she shouted.

“All is well!” Her crew answered boisterously, stomping mops, boots, and tools.

Letting go of the rope that seemed her only true connection to the ship, the high heels of her black boots hung out over the soft blue waves, her sleeves blew back in the cool sea breeze, and she put her hands out far to reach across the sky. Staring up at the heavens she called out, “Blessed Be the Ruby Red!”

“Blessed Be the Ruby Red!” her crew shouted and cheered the blessing and their content captain bounced down from her perilous perch to stand firmly on the deck beside Mr. Cross.

Darkness slowly whispered over the ship, the mast creaked gently in the wind, and the crew did not make a sound. It was as if the ship had become a ghost ship, void of life other than the eerie sounds associated with haunting. Scarlet rested her thin chin on her hands as she perched at the bow of the ship watching the dancing lights sliding over the waves towards them. Even though she knew it was far too soon, she imagined she could smell the teacakes wafting on the early night winding tendrils of sea breeze. She rubbed her soft red lips over her forefinger as she anticipated a sweet and delicious meeting in the very near future.

It was quieter than a cemetery; you could not even hear a single person breathing. The sails were pulled and tied, except for the two meant for “riding silent.” Sometimes the boat would creak, or a wave would hit with a splash, overall the silence was nearly deafening and Kissinger Majesty would not know of her secret admirer until she was upon them. A dozen men sat around the deck, ready to pounce up at her hand signal – ready for battle. Scarlet smiled, her

majesty was traveling at full speed. Staring at the ship, she calculated how much longer before they would need to move.

Minutes seemed to take hours, but soon the soft touch of Mr. Cross woke her from her pondering. His grey whiskers tickled her chin, “Off center, the lady will be about two clicks off our scheduled path.” She smiled and nodded at him. Raising her hand above her head she cupped her hand, brought it down with a swift turning motion, and suddenly the gentle slapping sound filled the air, and was followed by a heavy whooshing sound that demonstrated her crew was in sync.

Her patient crew sprung into action as the lights brought within reach the sleepy crew of the Kissinger Majesty. Ropes flew across the moonlight sky to drop blade-wielding bodies rolling into action across the pristine deck of the majestic ship. Mere seconds passed before the alarm was raised and metal upon metal was joined by audible thuds, as the battle came to life.

Scarlet was looking for something specific and the twinkling lights told her she would be well rewarded for her time. Ducking and weaving through the twisting and twirling bodies, the dark haired pirate made her way to the elaborate double doors, as they swung open. No stranger to this scenario, Scarlet slid across the floor on her knees, solidly bringing her elbow into a quick blow to the uniformed man’s crotch, pressing his blade with her own, and sent it across the deck beside them. It was a silent grunt as his face turned ghostly white and he crumbled to the floor. To prevent interruption, she struck him solidly in the back of the head and kicked him the rest of the way through the doors and onto the deck. She pulled the doors closed behind her as she stepped into the spacious captain’s quarters.

The Captain's eyes were full of fear as he stared at her grinning catlike green eyes. His sword sat over the wooden chair, but he didn't even glance at it. White gloved hands reached behind him, nearly tripping as he shuffled backwards towards an old dusty crate. His eyes followed the pirate invading his space, as she pounced up on the solid cheery table, causing maps and inks to tumble away. Scarlet grinned as her heels scratched along the polished surface.

"My, My," Scarlet knelt down, one knee forcing the pretty china teacup from the table to shatter on the floor. She tapped a finger against her lips lightly and pretended to examine the distraught older man for a moment.

"And what have you there, dear Captain?" She asked as his hand rested protectively over the dusty box. "Anything you would like to share with me?" One fluid movement made her clothing shimmer as she came off the table to place her face inches from his, her sword rested lightly over the wrist defending the loot and her other hand held firmly to his other arm. Her closeness was always a maddening experience for men who spent too long out at sea, but this captain was unable to contain himself no matter how many times this sea siren had boarded his ship.

Leaning in she ignored the many smells that attacked her senses – powders, colognes, vanilla and pastry... "Well Captain?"

"Ra..." he stuttered catching himself as she glared and pressed the sharp blade to dig into his wrist. "Sc...Scar...Scarlett, I am o...on...only trying to pro...protect you." His voice was barely audible as he stuttered. Suddenly the room spun around him and he heard the thud more than felt it as he realized he was on the floor with a polished boot pressing heavily on his chest.

“I think," she paused, "we have well established that I do not need protection.” Dust covered wooden splinters and rusty nails shattered over and around the captain. A sweet – nearly mossy smell filled the cabin room, and he resisted the urge to wipe the blood from his cheek.

“Now Captain,” she knelt down and her pointed heel stabbed painfully into his rib. “Rules of the Ruby Red, my dear Captain – Ye live if Ye give.”

She tapped the old decorated box she had pulled from the crate and blew straw into his face. “Do ye surrender yer loot?” she said in her gruff voice with an evil grin.

“I do,” he grumbled, familiar with the Ruby Red Rules, The pressure was gone and a flash of multi colored fabrics, she was throwing open the doors. A cheer broke out over the deck filled with growls and hooting as her crew recognized victory.

Maybe it was too easy this time, after all it was not as if it was the first time her crew had pillaged the Kissinger Majesty’s wares. Most often just for food, it was like a game for them – find out where Her Majesty was headed and track her down. For Scarlet, it was almost like revenge; Captain Torisinka owed her, in a way, for something that happened, something from nearly another lifetime. However, even with revenge, Scarlet wasn’t a cruel pirate, and though rumored to be responsible for any number of deaths; the goal was to leave the ship and its crew intact. After all, no crew, no ship, no one to raid later.

Off and running again, Scarlet snuck away from her crew as they searched through the rest of the loot and started to sort it. Even hyped from the adrenaline rush of the raid, she knew she wanted to wait to open the box, wait for just the right moment. A rumor had brought her word of the prize, word that it would be a long-lost secret in the world – lost for more than a

century, maybe longer. A secret lay within the box, a secret that no one was yet sure what it would lead to, but something in her told her that it was going to be worth anything she would have to go through to solve the mystery.

She placed the box on the table and sat on the edge of her bed staring at it. She wasn't tired, but the world faded away to darkness. A voice whispered in her ear, '*Sarita...*' it whispered. A mysterious voice, far away, and a name from so very long ago, that floated through the air in the darkness that deepened around her. Scarlet felt the hair on the back of her neck rise as the voice whispered again, '*Sarita...*'. A part of her wanted to wake up, break the spell that seemed to be wrapping itself around her, but it held tight. '*Come to me, Sarita...*' the voice was male, and an inner need tried to respond against her wishes.

Soft touches reached her body, like a soft breeze over her skin, caressing over her arms. Her clothes seemed missing, but other than the sense they were gone, she could not see anything around her. The caresses continued over the palm of her hand, causing a gentle gasp to slip from her lips. '*Come to me, Sarita...*' whispered in her ear, like soft kisses down her neck and over her collarbone. A quiver escaped over her body. Feather movements rolled slowly over her belly, circling around her belly button, and instinctively her hips moved upwards, her knees spread apart. '*Come to me, Sarita...*' gasping loudly, she thought to respond, to ask where he was, all of the rest of the world was gone, just the voice, '*Come to me, Sarita...*'. Her voice found no response, but a tingling feeling, a warmth, forming in her middle was responding for her.

A solid hand suddenly rested on her shoulder, "Cap't" a different voice said. Abruptly, everything stopped, the touches, the darkness, and the whispering voice. Scarlet's eyes snapped

open to see the concerned face of her second in command. “The crew has the loot sorted, and are wondering if we are headed for Pirate’s Bay.”

His breathing seemed a little heavy, and Scarlet sat up quickly, completely aware of her hard nipples desperately trying to push through her shirt. “Um, yes, Pirate’s Bay. Set course for Pirate’s Bay.”

“An’ Cap’t, did you open the box?” He asked, purposefully stepping back.

“No, I will be doing that after some rest.” Scarlet answered with a smile, yawning slightly. “I’ll let you know when I open it, Mr. Cross. Pass the order; we are headed to Pirate’s Bay.”