

CARIBBEAN CHRISTMAS

by Lara Zielinsky

Summary: Anne learns more about her pirate lover's secret life.

Disclaimers:

Uber: *This story contains characters who may to some extent physically resemble some other familiar characters, but their actual character names and this story belong to me.*

Violence: *This is a story set in the late 18th Century, when pirates roamed the oceans. There is violence, and there is inequality between men and women. That's the way it was.*

Sexual Content: *there is also same-sex attraction and sexual activity in this story. If you are underage, this sort of thing is illegal where you live, or you are morally outraged by such, don't read this story.*



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Somewhere on the Caribbean Ocean...

"Keep your elbow in when you strike," Mary said. To reinforce the why of her advice, Mary Flint, in boots, chausses, and a sleeveless vest, took the end of her foot long stick and tapped Anne's exposed wrist.

The result, as she knew, was instant. The brief interruption of the nerve to the hand forced Anne's fingers to open and the foot long knife with the corked tipped clattered to the deck.

Mary scooped the dagger into her hand as the deck shifted beneath their feet sliding the object to her.

Anne's blue eyes followed the knife as Mary sheathed it on her belt, but the young woman distractedly continued to rub her wrist.

"Did I pain you?" Mary asked gently, while silently cursing her honed strength, which still could have injured the lass. The very last thing she ever wanted to do.

"Nay, I am considering 'tis all."

Cupping Anne's hands in her own, Mary tilted her chin to meet the young woman's eyes. "Are you fatigued?"

In truth Anne looked achingly beautiful in the simple clothes of a deckhand, sleeveless shirt and boy's breeches. Her skin, so pale and porcelain when they first met, had been kissed by the sun. Mary had shared a cocoa butter lotion she had acquired to keep the skin soft as it bronzed in the Caribbean sunshine.

"Nay, you were taking it easy on me," Anne finally responded, and Mary detected the bit of scowl in the silk voice.

"I never wish to harm you," Mary replied.

"I know, but you have this life, and I have chosen to spend it with you."

"I will protect you with my last breath."

"I wish to do the same. You *must* teach me. Same as any of your men."

You are not one of my men. You are my heart, whom I love , Mary thought desperately though she did not speak so bluntly. She considered what to say, but was interrupted.

"Captain?"

She turned to the short plump man crossing the deck toward her. His gait rolled easily with the ship and she smiled, despite her irritation. "Yes, Nelson?"

"According to our readings we will make the sound by even'tide."

Her smile widened. "That is excellent news. Any sightings of our shadow?"

"Nay. Looks like we successfully shook it during our traverse of the Spanish straits." Nelson frowned. "Likely not for long though."

"I only ask Providence for 'long enough', Mr. Nelson," Mary reminded. "Have you word from Kotay?"

"At last stop he had left word he will meet us there."

Mary nodded. Reaching for Anne's shoulder, she said, "Good. Well, I'm going to clean up for shore leave. You have the wheel, Mr. Nelson."

"Aye, ma'am." He smiled broadly at Anne with a twinkle in his eye as the couple walked to the lower deck.

Mary escorted Anne to the captain's cabin. "Shall I fetch the water for our bath?" Anne asked.

"Just one pail, we have little time."

"Oh. Where are we going ashore?" Anne was anxious. Ashore meant towns, people, danger. Mary was a wanted criminal, a pirate. Her bounty had been doubled with her possession of Anne. That she willingly stayed with the one nicknamed 'Bloody Mary' mattered not to Anne's father, who had tried to ambush Mary Flint only four moons ago.

"Hush, or you'll never see it," Mary replied. More gently she added, "Fetch the water. I will wash you myself."

The sweet shiver of expectant desire coursed through Anne's body as she stepped from the room.

While Anne was gone to fetch the water from the rain barrels and heat the small amount on the wood stove in the galley, Mary quickly bent to the floor boards of her cabin, slipping her knife under the edge of one without nails.

From beneath the slatted floor boards, she retrieved a box. Setting it on the bed, she lifted its capwood with the edge of her knife again. Inside, carefully packed on straw lay a woman's gown. Not the muslin and cotton of American homespun, but a confection of French silk and ivory lace. The sea foam blue seemed to glow variedly under the lantern light as she turned it in her hands.

The small English merchant ship had been allowed to continue into port with most of her crew, but she had relieved their hold of this magnificent piece and a few other boxes of cargo.

She continued her quest for easily convertible wealth to finance their cause. It was the year of Our Lord seventeen-hundred and seventy-five, and Kotay's meeting would tell her how much longer before the rebels had what they needed, enough money, equipment and training to become an army capable of driving the English out.

No doubt, word of 'Bloody Mary' softening might spread. *But oh what a thing to go soft over,* she thought, envisioning Anne in the gown.

The heavy door to the cabin opened. She turned with the gown drawn to her chest.

"Oh. Is that what you will wear ashore?" Anne asked, immediately coming forward, barely remembering to put the pail down before she splashed all its contents.

"Nay, 'tis not for me."

"Oh, you should. It is... so breathtaking." Anne came forward and caressed the fine silk, lingering on the lace trim at the wrists and throat.

"So are you," Mary said, transferring the gown to Anne's arms and smiling at her startled expression. "It is yours."

"Mine? No, I... it can't be."

"It is my gift to you," Mary explained.

Eyes bluer than heaven, which Mary was sure she would never see when she left this earth, lifted questioning to her own. She continued to smile. "Tis truly mine?" Anne's voice quivered.

"A lady must be properly attired."

"What will you wear? Are we really going ashore? It is safe here?"

"This is the most safe place I know. And it is time to show it to you." She went to her trunks and sorted through the clothing until she reached the bottom, coming up with tan trousers, a royal blue naval officer's coat with red trim and gold braid, formal cut shirt and tan vest, all of fine linen.

Anne studied the array of clothing. "You will not dress as a woman? Here in this place you call safe? What can be safe about a place if you cannot go as who you are?"

"I am the lord here, Anne. I dress the part. I am more comfortable in breeches than gown, but that is only part of it. Today, I bring home my lady." Mary turned her in her hands. "Now, let's wash."

Anne blushed as Mary stripped her clothes from her body. The warm hands were strong and sure on her body, sensual even when they were utilitarian, cleansing the skin with the softer soap Anne had devised, and the warm water sluiced over her skin, rinsing her clean. A rough piece of linen absorbed the remaining water from her skin. Mary's touch aroused Anne, as it had from their first connection.

Knowingly Mary caught the moan on her own lips, and then tugged the kirtle, skirts and bodice to cover her figure. "I wish we didn't have to hurry," she murmured.

"I know," Anne replied.

"I will take care of this later," Mary promised.

While Anne, now dressed, settled before a small mirror and dealt with her hair, Mary quickly attired herself. The commanding presence that had always stunned Anne returned to Mary's posture with the clothing.

At last the couple was ready. Holding hands they made their way topside in time to hear the call to the boats.

An island cove lay before them. Anne scanned the coastline and the sea's horizon behind them. There was no sign of other ships anywhere.

Mary was lord here? Of what?

The men were excited and chattering in native tongues with which Anne was unfamiliar. It eased her somewhat, their own cheerfulness. They sensed no danger.

So why did she?

Anne continued her quiet observations as the boat neared shore. Several of the men leaped out and dragged the skiff the rest of the way onto the beach. Mary helped her step out onto the sand. She was still marveling at the way her lover had seemingly made her femininity vanish beneath the male clothing.

Anne lamented a little the loss of the woman she had come to love, as there was a short period of curt commands, orders to stow the skiffs and move the ship into the lee of the cove.

In her distraction, she was startled by a palm cupping her cheek. Dazedly she lifted her chin to realize her melancholia had been noted. A warm soft thumb caressed her bottom lip. "What burdens your mind?" Mary asked.

"We walk so boldly. I... am afraid for you."

"Not here. Never here. Come, I will relieve your mind." Mary took her hand; the steadiness of it markedly calmed Anne's hammering heart.

Lifting her skirt from impeding her steps, Anne stepped after Mary who forged a quickening path up the dunes and into the thick foliage surrounding the beach. It looked completely untouched.

They stepped through the cool shade of the trees for a dozen yards. At last, Mary reached forward and tugged aside the rigid limbs of a bush to reveal what was beyond.

Teeming life filled a large plain. Dark and light-skinned persons poured from clapboard houses. The wood was painted in such lively colors as to shock the eyes, red, orange, blue, green, seeming to each call for attention. The linens on the people were also brightly colored, and contrasted their midnight black or caramel skin.

Stepping out she and Mary were noticed immediately and surrounded. While their faces split in smiles

wide to show the bright white of their teeth, they chattered to Mary in their tongue, who answered back in kind.

Anne had not yet learned the sailors' other tongues. They spoke the King's English when they did speak to her. She waded through the crush with Mary, awaiting enlightenment.

Abruptly and distinctly, she heard Mary say her name. She turned around to cheers and more foreign words, sounding welcoming at least. At a loss, she looked to Mary for an explanation.

"I told them you are the Lady Anne. They asked which family. I answered, 'Mine'." Mary looked slightly abashed by her own admission.

"I love you too," Anne said. "But still it tells me little of this place. Who are these people to you? Did they live here first? Did you find them? Bring them? How do you know they will not turn you over to my father, or other British hunters should they come?"

Mary's voice was assured, and a bit hard. "No one comes here but the Rogue bids him come. I am the law here, and their lord. We came -- I brought every one. To escape their lives that were threatened in the colonies. Here is where we live, until we can live safely in our true home."

Anne swallowed. Mary took her hand, and led her along the street. It was a rough civilization here. A few carts, a few horses, but mostly people on foot. The buildings were colorful, but simply constructed, single floor. Many of the sailors, Anne could see now, ducked into the various homes and came out with women on their arms wearing homespun.

These women hugged Mary, and spoke in halting English inviting Anne into their homes.

"The feast awaits," Mary announced as they reached the top of a set of gabled steps at the front of the largest structure.

A cheer accompanied Mary pushing the double doors before them wide. Anne halted just inside the arched doorway, stunned by the sight.

A steady stream of people moved around her, and Mary who remained at her side. The children, she noticed, crowded around the base of a tree -- *growing inside? Surely not.* When the children moved aside she realized the evergreen had been staked upright and its boughs were heavy with decorations.

"What is this?" She had never seen the like in her life. The children were tearing into boxes wrapped in colorful paper, pulling out wood carved figures.

Mary had two glasses in her hand when Anne turned, sensing her presence at her shoulder. Real glass, not pewter mugs, or wooden cups. Anne studied the delicate stemware when one was given to her.

"It's wine," Mary explained.

"In a glass?" Her father had only pulled out the glass ware twice a year. "What is the occasion?"

"I know we haven't been to Church, but surely you know 'tis Epiphany?"

Epiphany? Anne had never celebrated like this. Her family dressed at dawn, and walked to the

churchyard. The Holy Father spoke eloquently of the Wise Men, the harbingers, the Christ child in the manger. Then they sang a psalm, King of Kings, and walked home.

That sobriety was so far from *this*. Mary and Anne stood in the midst of joy-filled chaos. Somewhere a fiddler began to play. The men and women began to dance, cavorting with lively steps about the room.

"It's Epiphany," Anne echoed.

"The day God-made-man was revealed to the world. Yes, darling." Mary held out her hand. "Dance with me?"

"In this manner? I know not how."

"Then we shall set and sup and wait for a calmer tune."

"This goes on for some time then?"

"All night."

"And you drink spirits and sing and dance?"

"Tis what one does at a celebration." Mary eased Anne down onto a chair along the wall. "You really are unfamiliar with this?"

"It has not been my experience."

"I have brought you to yet another first," Mary said proudly, then kissed her. Anne let herself sink into the safe feelings of Mary's touch. "Sip," Mary encouraged as their lips parted. "And we will dance later."

The wine Anne learned, as she and Mary continued to talk while watching the others dance, was native to the island, from their own small vineyard and stock. The outer area of the island made this place look completely uninhabited on purpose. They had carved and chopped out the interior for their little town. And it was little. The houses Anne had seen coming in were all there was.

The women and children were all family of the Rogue sailors.

"Have you anyone here?" Anne asked as the music tempo changed at last and Mary brought her to her feet for their dance.

Pulling her close, Mary whispered in her ear, "Only you."

THE END