

Blackbeard's Treasure

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For Amy

*'Nobody but meself and the Devil knows where it be.
And the longest liver should take all.'*

Edward Thatch, 1718



CHAPTER ONE

The Pirate Attack on Sandy Point

1st December 1717

‘Marry me and I’ll take you to Madagascar and we will set up a pirate kingdom and slaughter the British dogs!’ the boy said, triumphantly waving a stick over his head.

Abigail sat under her parasol, amidst the various rocks, sticks and flowers that represented her treasure. She raised an eyebrow. ‘It wouldn’t have happened like that.’

‘It did!’ he said. ‘The pirates overcame the Mughal warriors and won the heart of the princess.’

‘But why would a sultan’s daughter agree to marry Captain Avery, when he just killed her friends and took her ship?’ She gestured at the broken lopsided cart that was representing the mighty flagship.

‘It wasn’t *her* ship. Girls don’t own ships.’

‘If it was a boy’s ship then how come it was full of jewels?’ Abigail got up in a huff, dropping the orange which was supposed to be her royal orb and knocking over her parasol sceptre.

‘Me booty!’ The boy pretended to fall over in despair as the fruit rolled gently down the hill towards the great house.

‘Shhh!’ Abigail said but it was too late.

Nanny Inna came out of the house and marched up the hill towards them. It wasn’t until she was a few yards away that they could hear what she was shouting.

‘Achu! Boubacar, you depraved child, leave Master Buckler’s daughter alone.’

‘We weren’t doing anything, Mama,’ he said, dropping the stick and quickly removing the kerchief from his head.

‘Two days after harvest and already you’re running around like a rabid dog, when your brothers are still sick from work.’ She began shouting at him in her native language, speaking too quickly for Abigail to understand.

‘Mi nanataa Fulfulde! So speak English!’ Abigail said.

‘Have you been teaching her Fulfulde?!’ Nanna Inna looked horrified.

‘She’s really good,’ Boubacar nodded.

‘I taught Boubacar some Dutch, too,’ Abigail said happily but Nanny Inna wasn’t pleased.

‘Master Buckler is going to be livid if he finds out his child speaks like us. You terrible boy! I should spank you right here!’

‘Leave him alone,’ Abigail ordered. She deepened her voice to sound like her father.

‘Miss Buckler, Boubacar may have lighter skin than me but he is still a slave and he will get himself killed if he’s not careful.’ Nanny Inna’s

voice changed from soothing to near screaming as she barged past Abigail and threw a pebble at her son. Boubacar cowered behind the cart. ‘If a nasara sees you with a master’s child, a daughter no less, they’ll punish us all along with you! Alla hiin’ en e sarriiji Seydaani...’

A wild velvet monkey scurried down from the tree at the back of the garden. The monkeys had been brought over by the French who used to rule the island. They were pets but had escaped to the mountains and multiplied. They caused nothing but mischief. The monkey sidled up to the orange on the garden path. Abigail started after it.

‘Stop! Arrête!’

It grabbed the orange with both paws and darted back, jumping into a tree and then down into the rows of young sugarcane on the other side of the garden wall.

When she turned back, Nanny Inna had Boubacar by the arm and was dragging him to the kitchen door. Abigail sighed and then, still under

the shade of her parasol, walked leisurely back to the house. The cool darkness enveloped her.

The house was not its usual tidy calm. There were men's satchels in the hallway and dusty coats draped over the surfaces. Her father had been up for the past two nights, along with nearly everyone at Sandy Point. The sugarcane harvest had to be processed immediately or it would sour so slaves worked without sleep, and free men snatched a few hours when they could.

Abigail crept quietly to the door of her father's office. Inside, the voices of men rumbled and erupted in coughing and laughter. Suddenly, one of her father's friends, Mr Oultram, rounded the corner, coming from the front door. He was sweating, and covered in dust from the path up to the house.

'How do you do?' he said curtly. 'Is your father home?'

Of course he was home. Mr Oultram had just caught her eavesdropping on him. She shrugged and turned away.

‘Young lady,’ he called after her. ‘The Africans in the fields have better manners than you, and they haven’t had a fraction of your advantages.’

Abigail’s cheeks reddened. She didn’t like being told off. ‘My father owns this plantation. You can’t tell me what to do. You’re just a merchant.’

Mr Oultram shook his head. ‘You don’t champion your father by besmirching my profession. Good day, Miss Buckler.’

She tried to think of something very rude to say to Mr Oultram but he’d already gone into her father’s office.

The office overlooked the front of the house, past the sugarcane fields and down towards the town of Sandy Point. When the office door swung open, Abigail briefly heard the faint chime of the warning bell coming through the open window before the door shut in her face. She stood alone in the corridor trying to hear what the men were saying. Moments later, Abigail’s father and the rest of the men barged out through the door. Some

were still holding their cups. They ignored her and marched out towards the entrance. The warning bell grew loud again as the front door opened and the men stampeded down the hill. Her father didn't follow them. He stood in the entrance hall, shouting for Nanny Inna to bring him his uniform. To Abigail's shock, he was taking off his clothes, scattering them all over the floor. Nanny Inna quickly appeared with a bundle of clothing. As he tried to get his belly into his britches Abigail seized this rare opportunity to talk with him.

'I've learnt some Portuguese,' she said confidently. 'Você está feliz comigo, pai?'

'Not now,' he muttered, trying to do up his waistcoat.

'Aren't you going to be hot?' Abigail asked. Her father's face turned the same colour as his coat.

'Go and wait in the kitchen, child,' Nanny Inna said sweetly as she picked up his dirty breeches.

'No, her and the boy are coming with me.'

'To battle?' Boubacar asked, looking up from polishing his master's boot.

Nanny Inna shushed him.

‘To the fort. Safest place.’

‘But Papa, the French won’t destroy the house...’ Abigail began.

‘It’s not the French,’ he snapped at her. ‘It’s pirates.’

‘Why can’t we stay here?’

‘This isn’t just a ragtag ship. It’s an entire fleet about to raid every boat at Sandy Point.’ Major Buckler shook his head. ‘Pirates have been known to lay waste to entire towns.’

‘Will they take the harvest?’ Abigail gasped.

‘I imagine that is exactly what they plan to do,’ Major Buckler snapped. ‘Here, carry the flasks.’

‘Why does *he* have to come?’ Abigail asked, watching Boubacar slip the loops of leather over his head so that the flasks dangled around him like an enormous necklace.

She felt resentful that Boubacar, despite being a slave, got all her father’s attention. He was training him to be a clerk while Abigail had French lessons from a governess at the Phipps’ estate and rarely saw her father at all.

‘The boy will be safer in the fort. If they get him,’ Major Buckler indicated at Boubacar, ‘they’ll keep him. Either to turn pirate or to sell. Skilled slaves fetch a lot more.’

‘Fine by me,’ Boubacar whispered to Abigail. She nearly laughed.

‘What about Nanny Inna?’ Abigail said.

‘I’ll go up to the village and warn anyone there to stay away from the docks,’ Nanny Inna said. ‘We will hide in the forest if any pirates come to kidnap us.’

‘Would they kidnap me, Father? Would I be made a slave?’ Abigail asked as he checked his rifle. ‘Would I cost more than Boubacar?’

‘Don’t wish that on yourself for a second, child,’ Nanny Inna admonished her.

‘You’re a girl. An ugly one at that. You’d barely fetch more than my boots,’ Boubacar said, winking.

Abigail’s cheeks flushed. Nanny Inna looked nervously at her master but he was too distracted with his buckles to notice.

‘Onward!’ Major Buckler said.

Both children turned to wave back to Nanny Inna, before following him out of the house.

It was a short walk down the hill. Abigail could see masts peeking over the tops of the shacks and houses on the haphazard waterfront. She couldn't stop to take a look. Abigail's father steered them away from the seafront.

Militiamen were running the opposite direction along the road.

'Charles Fort!' bellowed Major Buckler, stopping to wave at them. 'Not Fort Charles! You're going the wrong way!'

The group stopped and waved back. They then proceeded to split in two, run in opposite directions and, realising the others weren't following, double back on themselves and collide in the middle.

'I bet it was that jackanapes Phipps, telling the men the wrong fort. You know that man brands his slaves?'

'That's terrible,' Abigail said. She'd once burnt her hand on the kettle and it hurt for days,

and that wasn't hot enough to leave a scar. She couldn't imagine how painful it would be to be branded; suddenly the idea of being captured by the pirates became a lot more scary.

'It is terrible!' her father continued, but he wasn't thinking about how it must hurt. 'Branding devalues slaves completely. What if he ever has to sell them?'

Boubacar was struggling to stay quiet. Abigail could tell he was angry that her father didn't care about the suffering that branding caused.

'If the pirates catch us, they won't brand us, will they?' Abigail asked quickly. She didn't want Boubacar to get into trouble. If he spoke back to her father, he would be punished for it.

'They aren't going to capture either of you, I'll see to that,' Major Buckler said confidently, dropping his pouch of gunpowder.

Boubacar picked it up and handed it to him, sharing a disbelieving look with Abigail.

She giggled, moving her parasol so that her father wouldn't catch her.

There was musket fire in the distance and then the boom of a cannon.

‘Are we going to Charles Fort?’ Abigail asked nervously.

‘No, we’re going up to the fort at Brimstone Hill.’

‘Shouldn’t we be helping to fight?’ Boubacar asked.

Major Buckler took this badly, as though Boubacar had accused him of being cowardly. ‘Brimstone Hill looks over the entire bay! Fighting isn’t just combat.’

‘Isn’t it?’

‘No! Someone needs to oversee everything. There are still a couple of working cannons up there. We can help protect Fort Charles... I mean Charles Fort!’

They headed up the hill to the unfinished fortress on the mountainside, the path was littered with the long sugarcane leaves. They looked like cutlass blades. Abigail jumped as she heard the boom of a cannon.

‘If it comes to it, we can hide in the forest,’ Boubacar said.

Abigail agreed. ‘Meet me by the saman tree on the path behind the house.’

He nodded and they marched on. Abigail’s dress clung to her back with sweat. When they were halfway up, they were joined by more men in red coats slowing down to speak to her father.

‘Sir, we’re worried what the slaves will do if the pirates make land,’ he panted. ‘Should we punish one publicly now, to remind the others to keep in line?’

Abigail moved her parasol in front of Boubacar to hide him from the red coat’s eye.

‘Not in front of the children, gentlemen,’ her father replied. He turned to Abigail and Boubacar. ‘Hurry up you two.’

Once they reached the fort, Boubacar and Abigail rested next to a pile of cut square cobbles. The building works were thick with weeds.

‘Major Buckler!’ It was one of Abigail’s father’s friends, whose red coat barely fitted over his round stomach.

‘Is it true there is more than one ship?’ wheezed Abigail’s father, still out of breath from climbing the hill.

‘Two sloops and a galleon.’

‘Why have the cannon stopped firing?’

‘Sir, it was *L’Océan* that was firing. They’ve boarded her and the other merchant vessels in the anchorage.’

‘Charles Fort hasn’t been defending her?’

‘Saving the powder.’

‘That’s my harvest! Signal to Charles Fort right now to fire those cannon!’

It was at this point in the conversation that Abigail backed away and followed Boubacar up the steps to the top of the fortress wall.

The wind was strong and she dropped her parasol. The King’s colours were flying above. The rope slapped against the flagpole in the sea breeze.

Looking down into the harbour, Abigail could see that one of the pirate sloops was broadside with

L'Océan. The pirates were hurriedly transferring hogsheads of sugar and barrels of rum into a jolly boat. The sails of the pirate sloop were slacked off and the wind billowed through them. It gave Abigail the impression they were greedily snatching at the merchant ship like a velvet monkey after fruit. She wanted to see the faces of the pirates themselves, but they were too far away.

‘Here, have a look!’ Boubacar handed her a telescope.

‘What is that?!’

‘It’s called a glass. The surgeon comes up here at night to look at the stars.’ He pointed over to a collection of objects propped against the wall. A chair, a blanket, and a collection of poles like a sheerlegs or easel.

‘You pinched it?!’

‘I’ll put it back when we’re done,’ Boubacar said.

The leather tube was heavier than Abigail had imagined and so she rested her elbow on the fortress wall and peeked through. At first she saw nothing, just black and then a flash of blue.

She followed the little patch of colour until it popped into focus. She gasped. The flat sea in the bay was wrinkled with waves. She could see the grinning faces of the pirates and the flash of oars in the sinking sun.

Abigail's eye travelled at once to the majestic flagship.

'Their flag is a skeleton and cutlass.'

'Let me see!' Boubacar took back the telescope. 'She's room for forty cannon. She must be super fast with a keel that long! How did pirates manage to capture her?'

They must really be in league with the Devil, Abigail thought.

'What are they doing to *L'Océan*?' Abigail watched as the merchant ship's sails were unfurled and set.

'They couldn't have unloaded her,' Boubacar said. 'It took all day to load her up.'

'Maybe they are going to commandeer her...'

But there weren't enough men left onboard. *L'Océan* drifted haphazardly, not out to sea, but

towards the shore and Charles Fort. She came to an abrupt halt, presumably stuck on a reef.

The cannon beneath them finally boomed. Both the children clutched their ears as dust rose around them. The aim was off. The rounds hit the shoreline, upsetting sea birds. The children watched horrified as the pirates set light to *L'Océan*. The cannon ports on the ship began to glow orange. The cannon at Charles Fort boomed again. Another miss.

The poor ship crackled as the flames rose higher, consuming the masts, sails and cargo. All that sugar that the plantation had worked so hard to get was gone.

‘What was the point in that?’ Boubacar yelled. ‘You idiots! Why? Are they stupid?’

The acrid smell of the burning timber and sugar blew in from the sea. It made Abigail retch. She took back the telescope and focused again on the flagship. She was broadside to Charles Fort, ready at any moment to fire her cannon. Abigail could just make out her name through the rising smoke. *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

It was obvious to Abigail who the captain was. He stood perfectly still on the quarterdeck, while colourfully dressed pirates swarmed around him. He was lean, dressed finely in a dark frock coat and had an enormous black beard, which was twisted into braids. The moment she focused the telescope on him, he turned his head and stared straight back at her. It was as though he could see into her mind.

She let out an involuntary squeak and dropped the telescope.

The Charles Fort cannon fired again and, this time, *Queen Anne's Revenge* responded. All her cannon boomed as one, rocking the ship. Charles Fort was smashed with a direct hit to its seawall. Men were buried under rubble, *L'Océan* was splintered by shrapnel, sending sparks into the evening sky. Abigail lifted the telescope to her eye once more and watched as men tried to get back to their battered guns but it was already too late. The pirates were heading out of the harbour. Every vessel left in the anchorage was on fire.



CHAPTER TWO

Captain Charles Vane

18 April 1718

Abigail sat watching the twins hit each other. Mrs Phipps continued to sew. The Phipps' slaves tended the garden in the heat. The white women and children stayed cool in the shade of three large parasols.

‘Doe voorzichtig! Take care. This is something that will pass down the generations,’ Mrs Phipps said.

Not in my family, thought Abigail, unpicking a stitch. In a fair world, Abigail would be making a quilt with her mother, who would still be alive.

‘Doe voorzichtig,’ Mrs Phipps said again, pointing at Abigail’s uneven stitches.

Do-four-s-ich-t-ich. She loved the crunchy sound of Dutch words. It required you to make the noise of the sea sweeping up the beach in the back of your throat. The Dutch language was the only good thing about being in Mrs Phipps’s company. When Abigail’s mother had died, the Phipps family had offered to look after her. Abigail’s father had gleefully welcomed having his daughter out from under his feet and helped pay for their governess, a Spanish girl who taught Abigail French.

Abigail was getting better at understanding both Dutch and Spanish, although she kept this to herself. She didn’t want anyone to know she could overhear their secrets.

‘ow you say, I meelked de cow for to make some cheese?’ asked Isabella, her tutor.

‘J’ai trait la vache et fait du fromage.’

‘You need to connect dees ideas. So, I meelked the cow pour faire du fromage. Para comer. Entiendes?’

‘Er, the children have...’

‘En français, s’il vous plait, mademoiselle.’

‘Les enfants jouent au soleil.’

Isabella saw the toddlers had moved into the sun. ‘¡Señora Phipps! Los niños se quemarán al sol...’

‘Brenge ze door, ik ben er zo.’ Mrs Phipps gathered the children and handed Abigail the patch she was working on. ‘Continue. We won’t be long.’

Once Abigail was sure both women were back in the house, she dumped the patchwork at her feet and made for the garden wall. A group of slaves were chatting on the other side in an African language. She was disappointed. It was different from the one Boubacar and Nanny Inna spoke. She was missing Boubacar, and wanted to make new friends.

After the pirate attack, her father had been forced to sell slaves to make up for the lost

harvest. One of them was Boubacar's older brother, Haruna. Ever since then, Boubacar had not spoken to Abigail, or even glanced at her.

She was furious with him. Boubacar was punishing her for what had happened. It wasn't her fault the harvest was destroyed. It wasn't her fault the banks needed the money. It wasn't her fault her father had sold the slaves. She felt he was being selfish. Now she had no one to play with.

Nanny Inna had always acted like Abigail was a barrel of gunpowder that could explode any second. Boubacar was the only one she could ever really talk to. Now she was alone.

Abigail climbed up the palm and braced herself against the wall, enjoying the chatter of the people, imagining what they might be saying and repeating their words under her breath.

'You're like a parrot,' Mr Oultram said to her that evening. 'You sound just like an African merchant I know.'

Abigail sat back quietly at the dinner table while her father and Mr Oultram's conversation returned to the attack on Sandy Point last year.

'According to Tibby,' Mr Oultram confided, 'we were attacked as revenge.'

'Revenge for what?'

'For the hanging of the survivors of the pirate ship that sank.'

'The *Whydah*?'

Mr Oultram nodded. 'That's this 'Blackbeard' character...'

'Blackbeard?! What sort of idiotic name is that?'

Abigail immediately thought of the man she had seen on the quarterdeck of *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

'He didn't like us flying the King's colours. Saw it as our tacit agreement with the hangings in Boston.'

'Of course we agree with the hangings!' Major Buckler slammed his fist on the table. 'Black Sam Bellamy robbed and murdered everyone who crossed his path!'

‘If he murdered everyone, how do we know his name?’ Abigail asked but she was ignored.

‘Word is that Cotton Mather heard their confessions and said the pirates had been pressed...’ continued Mr Oultram.

‘Nonsense! No one is forced into piracy. If they give you a choice to be a pirate or die, you save your soul and you die,’ Major Buckler said. ‘Pirates have one motivation. Greed.’

Mr Oultram shook his head. ‘A lot of them are Jacobites.’

‘Codswallop. They think that by claiming King George isn’t the real king they can escape punishment. Even if James were king, he’d still have them hanged.’

‘It isn’t just Blackbeard. There is his friend Hornigold and others. We’d need a fleet to stop them.’ Mr Oultram sipped his wine. ‘They must be making an absolute fortune.’

‘Blackbeard destroyed hundreds of pounds worth of my sugar and rum. How rich do you have to be to burn all that money? And where is he now?’

‘He could be anywhere.’

‘He’s ruined me.’ Abigail noticed her father’s hands shaking. ‘If the next harvest doesn’t come through...’

‘You can always sell more slaves,’ Mr Oultram said wearily.

‘No!’ Abigail blurted.

Both the men had forgotten she was at the table.

‘Bed for you, young lady,’ her father said sternly. ‘This talk isn’t for children.’

Abigail walked up the stairs and into the nursery. She hated seeing her father worried. He shouted a lot more. He drank a lot more. She didn’t know how to make it better.

She lay awake, listening to the ocean. It roared like a monster. Somewhere out in its incomprehensible vastness was Blackbeard. He was gloating. No one was going to hold him to account. No one could stop him. Abigail was full of rage. The injustice of it. She angrily turned over and stared blankly at the ceiling.

The next morning, Abigail woke to see Nanny Inna chasing an escaped mule down the hill. Abigail's father had passed out in his office. She tidied his papers away so he didn't have to face them when he came round.

Bored, she went for a walk and found two women pulling up weeds at the edge of the newly planted sugarcane crop. They were talking about a galleon that had arrived at Sandy Point that morning. At least, she thought that's what they said. They spoke the same language as Boubacar but faster.

The last galleon Abigail had seen was *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Was Blackbeard back? Would he attack again?

Casting aside her parasol, she dashed between the rows of sugarcane towards the docks. The wind picked up, and the grass whipped around her, waving her on. She came to the end of the field and, grabbing her skirt in her hand, she jumped the ditch.

She ran through another field, the slaves moving out of her way as she stormed past. She

punched through a row of older cane and barged into an overseer. He dropped his gun to quickly grab his dog's leash. The salivating jaws were inches from Abigail's leg. She could still hear it barking as she continued to run, her feet patting the mud like Nanny Inna slapping bread dough.

She got to the road. From here she could see the masts in the harbour. She scanned them, but there were no three-mast square rigs in the dock. If *Queen Anne's Revenge* had been here, she had already gone.

Instead of turning back, Abigail thought she'd make sure. The darkening cloudy sky and strong sea breeze lessened the stink of the small town. She ran diagonally across the slave market. It was only busy on Sundays when it was crowded with slaves from the surrounding plantations selling what little they had to each other.

In the anchorage, near the charred remains of *L'Océan*, was a large sloop. She was low in the water, full of cargo. She had obviously been in a battle. There were shrapnel marks all over her hull. Going by the lick of fresh paint on the stern,

she had recently been renamed *Ranger*. A torn St George's flag flew from her rigging.

‘Gail!’

She knew that voice. Boubacar was leaning against a water butt in the shadow of a building. He was clutching his stomach. He had something running down the side of his head. It was blood.

She ran over. ‘What happened?’

‘I was crab fishing,’ he said. ‘Two white fellas took my catch.’

‘What did you say to them?’

‘What could I say?’ he spluttered. ‘I told them the catch belonged to my master.’

‘And they still took it?’

He jutted his jaw out. ‘They beat me first.’

She felt vindicated somehow, that the universe was punishing him for ignoring her. Then she felt bad. He was close to tears. She wanted to hug him to make him feel better but someone might see them and tell her father.

‘Did you recognise them?’

He shook his head and she winced as blood oozed out of the small cut in his hairline.

‘Did you see where they went?’

‘Yeah,’ he pointed at the post house.

‘Can you stand?’

‘Why?’ He got up. ‘What are you going to do?’

‘We are going to get some money to pay for the damage they have done to my father’s property.’

‘That’s a stupid idea.’

‘No it isn’t. You might get a fever from the cut, plus the rips in your shirt, and the laundry...’

‘And the crabs...’

‘Never mind the crabs,’ she said, ‘they can’t go around beating people up.’

They walked into Miller’s shop which acted as part post house, part apothecary. Half a dead pig hung next to bags of post. Mrs Miller stood in front of shelves of jars, dealing with a well-dressed customer in a Portuguese hat. Her clerk was sorting a great sack of letters. She’d dressed him in a clean white shirt and neat waistcoat. Abigail felt embarrassed by the state of her own slave and dusted Boubacar’s shirt sleeve.

Two men were waiting in line at the counter. One was a younger white man wearing

colourful calico clothing. The other was light skinned, like Boubacar. The crab bucket was at their feet.

‘Excuse me.’ Abigail walked straight up to them.

Boubacar grimaced.

‘Those crabs belong to my father.’

The colourfully dressed man raised his eyebrows. ‘Is that right?’

‘Yes,’ she said, pointing at Boubacar. ‘You’ve damaged his property and stolen his catch.’

‘The boy wouldn’t give them over.’ The other man shrugged. ‘We didn’t know who he belonged to. He looked shifty. Needed a slap.’

Abigail puffed herself up. ‘That isn’t how gentlemen behave!’

‘We ain’t gentlemen,’ he said. ‘Go away or it won’t just be the boy who gets a beating.’

‘Now listen,’ she began, oblivious to the danger she was in.

Boubacar, however, could sense it immediately. He stepped forward to stand in front of Abigail. With raised hands he took the blow and fell

sideways. The colourfully dressed man stepped forward to grab him, knocking the bucket over.

Crabs and seawater sloshed over the floor.

‘Not in my holding!’ Mrs Miller pointed at the door. ‘You can’t come in here and act like Frenchmen.’

Her customer turned round, his hand on the hilt of a cutlass. ‘Eddy, Jack. Hop it!’

The two men made their escape, leaving Boubacar to pick up the crabs.

‘You’re English!’ Abigail said, recognising his London accent.

He touched his hat. ‘Captain Charles Vane, how do you do?’

‘How do you do?’ She bobbed a curtsy. ‘Miss Abigail Buckler.’

‘Buckler?’ he repeated. ‘I don’t come across that name often.’

‘I do,’ she said meekly, wishing Boubacar would hurry up with the crabs.

Captain Vane smiled. ‘You said your father owns a plantation?’

She nodded.

‘Which one, my love?’

Abigail’s confidence wavered. She felt a chill come over her as the stranger’s cool blue eyes met hers.

‘Don’t you know?’ he prompted.

Abigail ignored Boubacar’s slow head shake and answered the stranger’s question.

‘Oh I see. And is your father home?’

Just then, two militiamen, one of whom was Mr Oultram, came into the building.

‘Everything in order, Mrs Miller?’ Mr Oultram said, surveying the scene: the wet floor, Boubacar’s cut, the stranger, and Abigail Buckler, without a parasol, looking worried.

‘What’s happened?’

‘Nothing for you gentlemen to concern yourselves with,’ Vane said.

Mr Oultram looked at Abigail’s face again, Boubacar’s worried expression and back up to Vane. ‘Who are you?’

‘Captain Vane of *Ranger*.’ He removed his hat and bowed.

The second militiaman drew his sword. ‘There is a pirate named Vane! Commands a sloop called *Lark*.’

Mr Oultram jumped straight forward, his hand reaching for Captain Vane’s hilt to stop him drawing his weapon. Inches from Captain Vane’s nose, he looked him right in his eye. ‘You deny it?’

‘No, but I have a certificate of protection from Alexander Pearse proving I ain’t a pirate no more. My crew and I took the King’s pardon. I have proof on my ship.’

Mr Oultram didn’t back away. ‘So you’re what now? A merchant?’

‘A privateer, I hunt pirates. Word is Blackbeard is coming back to this island.’

Mr Oultram looked over at Boubacar and Abigail. ‘You two get back to your father! What are you doing talking to strangers anyway?’

Abigail and Boubacar didn’t need telling twice. They ran out into the street.