

DAUGHTER
of the
SIREN
QUEEN

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*For Mom,
because you said I could write a book
instead of getting a summer job.
I love you.*



“AND THAT WAS WITHOUT
EVEN A SINGLE DROP OF RUM.”

—CAPTAIN JACK SPARROW
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End




Chapter 1

THE SOUND OF MY knife slitting across a throat feels much too loud in the darkness.

I catch the pirate before his corpse hits the ground and gently lower him the rest of the way. He is only the first of Theris's—no, Vordan's, I remind myself—crew who will die tonight.


My own crew is spread out across the cobblestone streets, dispatching Vordan's men one by one. I cannot see them, but I trust all of them to do their parts tonight.

It's taken me two months to track down the pirate lord and gather enough intel to infiltrate his holding. Vordan thought to make himself safe from me by traveling inland. We're miles from the nearest port, and though I don't have a way to replenish my abilities, I came fully stocked.




My source inside gave me all the details I needed. Vordan and his crew are living in the Old Bear Inn. I can see it now up ahead, a four-story structure with a near-flat roof and painted green walls. The main entrance is composed of an impressive archway, a large sign depicting a sleeping bear jutting out from its top.

Vordan's crew of pirates have transformed themselves into a gang of land thieves, preying on the inhabitants of Charden, the largest of the Seventeen Isles. He bought the inn and pays the wages of all the staff, keeping it as his own personal stronghold. It would seem he has no fear of living in plain sight. The men in his employ number near one hundred, and there isn't a united force stationed on this island large enough to dispose of them.



But I don't need to dispose of them. All I need is to get in and then get Vordan and his map piece out without alerting the rest of his men. His questioning and inevitable torture will happen once we're back on my ship.



I slide down the street, keeping close to the roughly constructed townhome on my right. The city is asleep at this hour. I haven't spotted a soul moving about, save Vordan's men on watch.

A tinkling sound stops me dead in my tracks. I hold my breath as I peer around the next corner, into the gap between this home and the next. But there is only a street urchin—a young boy perhaps eight or nine years of age—searching through a pile of glass bottles.

I'm surprised when he turns his head in my direction. I've

been as silent as the dead, but I suppose to survive on the streets, one must sense when a threat may be nearby.

I put my finger to my lips, then toss a coin at the boy, who catches it without taking his eyes off me. I give him a wink before crossing the gap to the next home.

Here, I wait, watching my breath fog out in front of me in the slim moonlight. Though I could use the heat, I don't dare risk the sound of my hands rubbing together. There is nothing for me to do now except to hold perfectly still.

Finally, an owl hoot comes. Then another. And another. I wait until I hear all seven of them—signaling that each crossing street and guarded rooftop has been cleared.

I watch the windows of the large inn in front of me. There's not a single candle lit, nor a silhouette of movement behind the glass. I take my chance and scurry up to the inn.

A rope already hangs down from the roof. Sorinda has beaten me here. I hoist myself up floor after floor, avoiding the windows, until my boots steady on the stone tiles of the roof. Sorinda is just putting her sword away, four of Vordan's men dead at her feet. There is nothing she excels at more than killing.

Without saying a word, she helps me to pull up the rope and reattach it so it dangles on the west side of the rooftop. Vordan's window is on the top floor, third window from the right.

Ready? I mouth.

She nods.



Holding my knife against a sleeping Vordan's throat fills me with the sweetest feeling of justice. I move my free hand to cover his mouth.

His eyes fly open, and I press the knife in a little deeper, just enough to slice the skin but not enough to make him bleed.

"Call out for help, and I slit your throat," I whisper. I remove my free hand from his mouth.

"Alosa," he says, a bitter acknowledgment.

"Vordan." He's just as I remember. A man with unremarkable looks: brown hair and eyes, an average build, average height. Nothing to make him stand out in a crowd, which is how he likes it.

"You figured it out," he says, obviously referring to his identity, which he'd initially lied about. When I was a prisoner on the *Night Farer*, he had pretended to be one of my father's men and had gone by the name Theris.

"Where's the map?" I ask.

"Not here."

Sorinda, who stands as a silent sentinel behind me, begins moving about the room. I hear her rustling through the drawers of the dresser, then picking at the floorboards.

"I have no use for you if you don't tell me where it is," I say. "I will end your life. Right here. In this room. Your men will find your body in the morning."

He smiles then. "You need me alive, Alosa. Otherwise I'd already be dead."

"If I have to ask you one more time, I'll start singing,"

I warn. “What should I make you do first? Break your legs? Draw pictures on the walls in your own blood?”

He swallows. “My men outnumber yours three to one. I’m not going anywhere, and that voice of yours will do you little good when you can only control three at a time.”

“Your men won’t be able to do much fighting when they’re asleep in their beds. My girls are already locking them in their rooms.”

His eyes narrow.

“Pity you didn’t catch my spy in your ranks, and it’s a shame you didn’t notice her switching out all the locks on the doors. Yes, they lock from the outside now.”

“They’ve been alerted. My men on watch—”

“Are all dead. The four men on this roof. The five in the streets. The three on the butcher’s roof, the tanner’s, and the supply store.”

His mouth widens so I can see his teeth. “Six,” he says.

My breathing stops for a beat.

“I had six on the streets,” he clarifies.

What? No. We would’ve known—

A bell tolls so loudly it will wake the entire town.

I swear under my breath.

“The little boy,” I say, just as Vordan reaches underneath his pillow. For the dagger I’ve already removed. “Time to go, Sorinda.”

Get up. I direct the words at Vordan, but they are not an ordinary command spoken with an ordinary voice. The words are sung, full of magic passed on to me by my siren mother.

And all men who hear them have no choice but to obey.

Vordan rises from his bed at once, plants his feet on the floor.

Where is the map?

His hand goes to his throat and pulls out a leather cord hidden beneath his shirt. On the end is a glass vial, no bigger than my thumb, stoppered with a cork. And rolled up inside is the final map piece. With it, my father and I will finally travel to the siren island and claim its treasure.

My body is already alive with song, my senses heightened. I can hear the men moving below, shrugging on their boots and running for their doors.

I pull the vial at Vordan's neck. The cord snaps, and I place the entire necklace in the pocket of the ebony corset I wear.

I make Vordan go out the door first. He's barefoot, of course, and wears only a loose flannel shirt and cotton trousers. The man who locked me in a cage does not get the comfort of shoes and a coat.

Sorinda is right behind me as I step into the hallway. Below, I hear Vordan's men throwing the weight of their bodies against their locked doors, trying to respond to the warning bell. Damn that bell!

My girls haven't reached the upper floors yet. Men from this floor and the one below spill into the hallway. It doesn't take them long to spot their captain.

I sing a series of words to Vordan in no more than a whisper.

He shouts, "Outside, you fools! It's the land king's men. They approach from the south! Go and meet them."

Many start to move, heeding their captain's call, but one man shouts, "No, look behind him! It's the siren bitch!"

That man, I decide, dies first.

Vordan must have warned them against a situation like this, because the men draw their cutlasses and charge.

Blast it all.

I expand the song, placing two more of Vordan's men under my spell, then send them in front of us to battle the oncoming men.

The narrowness of the hallway works to our advantage. The inn is rectangular, with rooms lining the edge of one side of the hallway and a railing on the other. Over the railing one can see clear down to the first floor. A stairwell zigzags up to each floor, the only way up or down except for the windows and the long drop to the bottom.

I step in line with the three men under my spell to fight the first wave. I ram my shoulder into the pirate who dared to call me "the siren bitch," sending him over the railing. He screams until he's cut off with a loud crunch. I don't pause to look—I'm already thrusting my sword through the belly of the next pirate. He collapses to the floor, and I walk over his twitching body to reach the next man.

Vordan's pirates have no qualms against cutting down their own men, but they won't touch their captain. As soon as one of the spares goes down, I enchant the next closest man, having him fill the gap, keeping three under my control at all times.

Sorinda is at our backs, facing the two men who came out

of the rooms on the very end, and I don't worry about checking over my shoulder. They won't get through her.

Soon Vordan's men realize that if they kill their own men, they will be the next victims to fall under my spell. They retreat, running down the stairs, likely hoping to change the battleground to the open first floor of the inn. But my girls, the ones who were locking doors, meet them on the second floor. Ten women, personally trained by me, led by Mandsy, my ship's doctor and second mate, prevent them from taking the stairs.

We've got them fighting on two sides now.

"Snap out of it, Captain!" the unusually tall man fighting me now shouts over to Vordan. "Tell us what to do!" After parrying his last jab, I send my elbow into the underside of his chin. His head snaps back, and I cut off his grunt by raking my cutlass across his throat.

Their numbers are dwindling, but those who were locked in their rooms have started hacking through their doors with their cutlasses and joining the fight.

Men begin jumping over the railing of the second floor, crashing onto the tables and chairs of the eating area below. Some fall only to break limbs and twist ankles, but many manage the fall and attempt to attack my girls from behind.

Oh, no you don't.

I jump over the railing, land on my feet easily, and tackle the four men approaching my girls. I dare a glance upward as I find my footing, and see that Sorinda has dispatched the men once at my back and has now taken my spot.

“Sorinda! Get down here,” I yell, pausing my singing just long enough to get the words out.

I cut at the hamstrings of one of the men I felled. The next gets the point of my dagger jammed into the base of his spine. The other two are rounding on me, finally finding their feet.

The smaller of the two meets my eyes, recognizes who I am, and makes a run for it out the main entrance, just past the stairs.

“I’ve got him,” Sorinda, having reached the main floor, says, and darts past me.

The last man in my path throws down his sword. “I surrender,” he says. I hit him on the head with the pommel of my sword. He crumples in a heap at my feet.

There are maybe forty men left, trying to force their way down past my crew. Vordan and two of his men remain at the back of the line, still under my spell, fighting against their own crew.

But my powers are running out. We need to get out of here. I glance around the room, noting the unlit lanterns hanging all along the walls, contemplating the oil resting inside.

Jump, I command Vordan. He doesn’t hesitate. He throws himself over the railing. He lands with one of his legs bent awkwardly beneath him, just as I’d intended.

I release Vordan and the two pirates at the back of the line from my spell, and instead focus the rest of my efforts on the three right in front of my crew.

Hold the line, I command. They rotate instantly, turning their swords on their own men. To my girls, I shout, “Unload the extra gunpowder for your pistols onto the stairs.”

Mandsy steps back, pulls the powder pouch from near her holster, and throws it onto the step just below the men under my spell. The rest of the girls follow suit, nine more bags of powder dropping to the floor.

“Go get Vordan! Get him to the carriage.”

Vordan swears at the top of his lungs now that he has his senses. My girls pick him clean off his feet, since his leg is useless, and carry him through the exit. I’m right behind them, pulling my pistol from my side and aiming at that pile of gunpowder.

I fire.

The blast presses at my back, pushing me faster. Smoke fills my nostrils and a surge of heat envelops me. I lurch forward, but catch my footing and hurry on. Looking over my shoulder, I take in the destruction. The inn still stands, but it’s burning apart from the inside. The wall surrounding the main entrance now lies in tatters around the road. The pirates still inside are burning husks on the ground.

I make a turn down the next street, racing toward the rendezvous point. Sorinda materializes out of the darkness and runs silently next to me.

“In and out without anyone being the wiser,” she says, deadpan.

“Plans change. Besides, I had all of Vordan’s men piled together in one location. How could I resist blowing it up? He has nothing now.”

“Except a broken leg.”

I smile. Sorinda rarely bothers with humor. “Yes, except that.”

We round another corner and reach the carriage. Wallov and Deros sit at the reins. They were the only men on my crew until Enwen and Kearan joined, but I left the latter two on the *Ava-lee* to guard the ship under Niridia’s watch. Wallov and Deros are my brig guards. They jump from their seat and open the carriage doors. A cage rests on the floor inside. Deros pulls out a key and unlocks it, letting the opening swing wide.

“Wallov, show our guest inside,” I say.

“Gladly.”

“You can’t put me in there,” Vordan says. “Alosa, I—”

He’s cut off by Sorinda’s fist slamming into his gut. She gags him and ties his hands behind his back. Only then does Wallov thrust him inside the cage. It’s rather small, meant for a dog or some sort of livestock, but we manage to squeeze Vordan inside.

I step up to the carriage door and look inside. On the seats rest two wooden chests, their locks broken.

“Did you get it all, then?” I ask.

“Aye,” Wallov says. “Athella’s information was spot on. Vordan’s gold was in the cellar underneath the false floor.”

“And just where is our informant?”

“Here, Captain!” Athella steps out from among the group behind Mandsy. She’s still in disguise, her hair hidden beneath a tricorne, fake facial hair stuck to her chin. She’s put face paint over her brows to widen and darken them. Lines around her cheeks make them look more elongated. Blocks in her shoes

give her the necessary extra height, and she wears a bulky vest under her shirt to fill out the men's clothing.

She pulls the masculine accoutrements from her body and wipes her face until she looks like herself once more. What's left is a reed-thin girl with hair that falls to her shoulders in a smooth, black sheet. Athella is the ship's designated spy and most renowned lockpick.

I turn back to Vordan, who's staring bug-eyed at the young girl he thought was a member of his crew. He swivels his gaze to me, eyes sizzling with hate.

"How does it feel to be the one locked in the cage?" I ask.

He pulls at his bound hands, trying to free himself, and my mind is pulled back to that time two months ago when Vordan stuck me in a cage and forced me to show him all the abilities I possess, using Riden to make me comply.

Riden . . .

He, too, is back on my ship, healing from the gunshot wounds Vordan gave him. I'll have to finally take the time to visit him once we get back, but for now—

I slam the carriage door in Vordan's face.