



VENGEANCE
of the
PIRATE
QUEEN

The title is rendered in a highly decorative, gothic-style font. The word 'VENGEANCE' is in a tall, thin, serif font. 'of the' is in a smaller, elegant script font. 'PIRATE' and 'QUEEN' are in a large, bold, serif font with intricate flourishes. The text is centered and overlaid on a dark, ornate background featuring a skull wearing a pirate hat, with two crossed swords behind it. The entire design is framed by a complex, swirling pattern of dark lines and shapes.

Also by Tricia Levenseller

DAUGHTER *of the* PIRATE KING
DAUGHTER *of the* SIREN QUEEN


WARRIOR *of the* WILD

The SHADOWS *Between* US

BLADE *of* SECRETS
MASTER *of* IRON



TRICIA LEVENSELLER



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QUEEN

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*For Jacob,
Because we shared a love of Pirates of the Caribbean
and writing stories. I miss you, bud.*



“IF YOU WERE WAITING FOR THE OPPORTUNE
MOMENT, THAT WAS IT.”

—CAPTAIN JACK SPARROW

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl





CHAPTER 1



YOU CAN'T BE AFRAID of the dark when you're the monster lurking in the shadows.

I've lived by these words since I was five years old. They've served me well through many cold nights spent alone. They're doubly useful when I find myself killing, which is more often than not. The pirate queen has many enemies, and I'm the one she sends to take care of them.

Tonight's target is the pirate lord Vordan Serad.

This is the first time in my career I've had to track down the same target twice. I don't like it. Would have been far better if we'd gutted Vordan the last time we caught him, but the late pirate king had wanted him alive.

Vordan's been busy since he escaped. He commissioned a ship under a false name, hired himself a new crew, and slowly began to grow his prestige, starting on the island of Butana. I have no doubt he hoped to raise enough forces to eventually usurp Alosa's throne.

He should have known better. He should have kept running after he

managed to free himself during the scuffle between the land king and former pirate king. Might have had a nice, long life that way.

Instead, he has no idea that I'm curled up under his bed.

He prepares for the evening by lantern light. With my limited view from the ground, I watch him kick off his boots and throw them in the direction of the closet. A white bit of clothing joins them. His shirt, I think. Thankfully, he keeps his britches on. He ruffles through one of his pockets, and a soft *cbink* sounds a moment later. He must have pulled out that coin he likes to fiddle with and placed it on the bedside table.

Vordan seats himself on the floor, leaning his back against the edge of the bed, mere feet from where I hide. My heart pounds out a too-fast rhythm at the threat of discovery.

I could do it now, I suppose. Just roll over, grab my dagger from its sheath at my side, and slice his throat.

But Alosa wants him to know on whose orders he's being killed, and I'll be in a better position to keep him quiet if I can attack from above rather than below.

Killing is easy. The tricky part is being quiet. Being patient. Waiting for the right moment. That's what makes me good at my job. Being an assassin is not always about the easy kill. It's about the best kill.

I hold perfectly still and watch as Vordan stretches out his bad leg. Alosa once used her siren song to force him to jump from a two-story height. I'll bet he thinks about her every time it stiffens from the cold. He leans over to rub at the muscles near his knee before standing. He takes a drink from something at his nightstand, puts out the lantern, then sits on the bed.

I extend my arm until it is only inches from Vordan's left ankle. My fingers tiptoe ever closer, until my pointer finger is directly behind his

heel. It would be so easy to slice his Achilles tendon. He'd never walk again. Instead, I draw circles against the wood slats on the floor, allowing Vordan to think the last thoughts he will ever have. Eventually, he sighs, pulls his legs onto the bed, and fidgets with the covers.

When he finally goes still, I listen to his breathing, waiting for it to slow. Then I wait some more. If I stay my hand until my marks are deeply asleep, they're less likely to rouse from any soft sounds I might make in the room. I don't want them to wake until I'm in position. Until it's too late to fight back. Not to mention, the longer I wait, the more likely it is that everyone else on the estate will be asleep.

I slide out from under the bed and stand, watching Vordan's sleeping form for any movement. When his breathing doesn't change, I draw a dagger and tread to the bed. Scant light from the moon slants through the window. I stand on the opposite side of the bed so my shadow isn't cast upon Vordan. He sleeps on his back, hands at his sides atop the covers, face pointed at the ceiling.

He's unremarkable in appearance, with a medium height and build. Brown hair and beard. No distinguishing features. It's how he stays hidden. Stays alive, really. We pirates don't typically have long life spans. At least not under the former king's rule.

As I let my dagger drift closer to his throat, I replace the face before me with one from my memories. One with lighter skin, a beauty mark on the left side of his forehead, a single gold hoop high up on one ear. Straw-colored hair and a clean-shaven face. A cleft in the middle of the chin.

My first kill.

I pretend they all are so I can savor it over and over again.

As instructed, I let my dagger rest on the skin of Vordan's neck. His

eyelids twitch twice before shooting open. Without moving his neck, his eyes veer to the right so he can take me in. “You,” he says. “You’re one of hers.”

“The pirate queen sends her best wishes. You’ll need them where you’re going.”

“Wai—”

Before he can finish the request, I slice deeply, nicking the carotid artery. Blood drenches the sheets, drips quietly on the floor.

And I watch as the life leaves Samvin Carroter for the eighty-ninth time.

I clean my dagger on an unmarred section of blanket and sheathe it. Then I retrieve my rapier from under the bed and reattach it to my waist. Most pirates carry cutlasses, but I prefer the speed and dexterity of the rapier. Besides, I am noble-born, and I like to retain that remembrance of my family.

I exit Vordan’s room, letting myself into one of the hallways of the exquisite mansion he’d been living in. He killed the family who owned it. Bribed or threatened all the staff. Set up what few men he had in the comfy rooms. It was the pattern I had to look for while tracking him down.

He learned the first time that if he stayed in one place, Alosa was sure to find him, so he’d take up residence in some fancy estate, stay there a month at most, frequenting the big cities and rallying supporters. Then he’d move to a new city on a new island within the Seventeen Isles and do it all over again.

Unfortunately for him, a discernible pattern is just as bad as staying in one place.

The door makes the softest of clicks as I shut it behind me before treading down the carpet-clad floor. I round the hallway and take the

main staircase, stepping toward the outside of the steps, where they're less likely to creak. Three levels down and I reach the main floor. Thinking to leave the same way I entered, I pass through the kitchens.

"Hello?" a voice calls out, and I drop into a crouch.

Everyone is supposed to be asleep, but someone must have grown hungry in the night.

I might not be done killing. The thought sends a delightful shot of warmth to my sword arm, my fingers itching to reach for a weapon. As I crawl behind the nearest table, my heart races again. It's a wild percussion that I've grown used to, even crave at times. The thrill of the hunt.

"Did you hear something?" the same voice says.

"No, but it was probably Miss Nyles coming by the kitchens. Probably turned tail the second she spotted us."

The first man grunts. "We gave her a good beating last night, didn't we?"

"Not so good as the tugging we gave her the night before that."

Their laughter fills the corners of the room like a disease infecting a body. I peer over the edge of the table to get a look at them. Two brutes, mostly dark silhouettes next to the meager candle they have on the table between them. They're spearing cold meats with a knife before filling their goblets and passing a flask back and forth.

I could creep past them silently, leave the mansion with no one the wiser.

But I'm not about to do that after the conversation I just overheard.

It's a risk to attack with two of them fully alert, but it's one I'm willing to take.

I move under the table and push between two chairs. I am no more than a shadow as I waltz behind the pair and draw my sword. I strike the

bigger one first, smacking him on the back of the head with the pommel of my rapier. The second turns and manages the first note of a yell as I slam his head down onto the counter. Both don't rise again after slumping to the floor, unconscious.

Footsteps pound above my head, roused by the short-lived sound, and I have a choice to make. I can still slip away, lose them in the winding city streets.

Or . . .

I stare at the duo on the floor.

Or I can see vengeance done.

It isn't really a choice.

I slip back into the dark entryway once I ascertain no one has reached this level yet. A banister lines the stairs, with rails connecting it to each step. I reach out to see if my hands will fit into the spaces between each rail.

They do.

As the men race down the winding stairs, lanterns held aloft, I climb them from the side with my arms, hauling myself up rail after rail. Reach, grip, pull. Repeat.

My legs are too high off the ground by the time the men hit the main floor for them to notice me. Four individuals cross underneath me to reach the kitchens. I let myself drop when the last one is in just the right position. He collapses to the ground under my weight, and I snap his neck before he can rise.

The first two men are already in the kitchens, but the third turns at the sound of his crewman falling. I slice his throat with the tip of my sword before he can make sense of the scene in front of him. I flick the

blood from my rapier as I race for the doorway, placing my back against the wall just beside it. I sheathe my sword and draw my dagger.

“Two knocked out cold in here,” one of the men says. “Sound the alarm.”

The one following orders dashes out of the kitchens. I grip his arm, throw him against the wall, and rake the blade across his throat.

“Hello?” the remaining man calls out, likely having seen his crewman pulled out from his line of sight before the doors closed.

Why do people call out a greeting when something highly suspicious happens? Do they expect us monsters to announce ourselves?

He follows up with “Who’s there?”

I adjust the grip on my dagger as I wait to see what he’ll do.

He shouts for help, cluing me in to his approximate location in the kitchens.

I throw the doors open wide, sight my mark, and fling my blade. The dagger lands true, embedding in his throat. I don’t retrieve it just yet. Time is precious now.

I veer to the right, where the hidden servants’ stairs rest. Meanwhile, men rouse from their beds and burst out into the hallways. I see them on each landing as I make my way back to the top level. The dark works to my advantage. I’m used to being in its caress. I doubt there’s a soul alive who has better night vision than I do. While I can see the outlines of Vordan’s men, they haven’t a clue I’m a handful of feet away.

Not a soul even looks in my direction. No one thinks to use the servants’ stairs. They might not even know they’re tucked away here. These are murderers, thieves, and all other manner of foul scum. They’re not used to the layout of fancy accommodations such as these. And since

Vordan kept the staff on hand, his men would never have had occasion to use this route.

I reach the third floor, where Vordan's corpse has started rotting, and peek through bedroom doors one by one.

When I find a man who wasn't roused by the shouting, I enter, tread to the bed, and slice open his neck. It's not the most creative way to end a life, but it is the most efficient with the least amount of effort. And I have many more throats to slit, so I've got to reserve my energy.

"Six down!" someone from below shouts. "Spread out and search the mansion, and you there, go rouse the captain."

I bolt back for Vordan's rooms and slip under the bed. The blood has stopped trickling. It's partially congealed on the floor at the opposite side of the bed.

The door sways open, and boot-clad feet reach Vordan's resting place. "Captain, there's an intruder." He steps back, likely because his hand has come away sticky.

I pull his feet out from under him, climb atop his wriggling body, and prepare to go for the throat.

At the last moment, I turn my hand to the side and land a punch with my knuckles still wrapped around the dagger, right where Mandsy taught me to if the intent was to render someone unconscious.

The lad can't be more than twelve. He's all height with no muscles to his limbs. He's fallen in with a bad crowd, but even I don't murder children.

Back out in the hallway, I creep through the house, quieter than a ghost. I hear doors slamming beneath me, swords coming out of their sheaths, and men murmuring to one another. I search the rest of the

bedrooms on this floor, slitting three more throats, before returning to the servants' stairs and taking them down to the next level.

With just my head peering down the hallway, I watch a pirate enter into a bedroom to secure it. I follow after him, sneak up behind him, and cover his mouth with one hand while my dagger rakes across his throat. Back out in the hallway, I note that only some of Vordan's crew are holding lanterns. Should they see my silhouette, I will merely look like another pirate searching through the mansion just like everyone else.

I follow another man into another room, employing the same tactic as before. This one gets down on his knees to look under the bed and doesn't hear me as I come up behind him. Blood trickles onto my fingers from the knife as I right myself, so I take the time to wipe it and my hands off on the bedsheets before exiting again.

Two figures come toward me down the hall without their own light sources, so I flatten myself against the wall to let them pass.

I pull a second knife from my person as I follow them into another room. The first man gets a dagger thrown to the back where his heart rests beneath the skin and muscle. The second turns, but I'm already launching myself at him, slitting his throat with the second knife.

As I rise, I try to remember the last time I killed so many men in a single night. In fact, I don't think it's happened before.

I'm making new memories.

Some men continue up to the third floor, where they're about to find more dead. Others leave for the first floor. I follow the men upstairs first.

I reach the last one in line, covering his mouth as I kill him and catching him before he can land on the floor with a thud. The next one

is too heavy for me to catch as he lands, so I flatten myself into one of the closed doorways as a couple of men look behind them.

“Shit!” someone says. “Find ’em.”

I’m not sure if he said *Find him* or *Find them*. Should I be insulted or flattered? I launch from my hiding place when someone passes by and slam his head against the opposite wall. I hear the hammer of a pistol being cocked back, so I turn the man, letting him take the shot.

I reach for another dagger before I let the body drop and throw it at the person holding the lantern. The light sputters out as they fall.

More footsteps pound up the stairs, bringing more lanterns with them, and I drop to the ground, as though I’m just another dead body among the mess.

“Where is he?” one of the newcomers asks.

“He vanishes like smoke,” someone from the first party says.

Definitely offended.

The men tread past me, and I hold perfectly still. One of my arms is looped over my head, concealing my long ponytail from discovery if anyone tries to look down.

A boot knocks into me, but I hold back a grunt as I wait for the newcomers to pass me by.

When they do, I descend upon them one at a time. Slitting throats. Bashing heads. Catching bodies. Kill. Repeat. Kill.

My hands are slippery with blood again. My front is covered with it from all the blood spatter. I dodge a swinging cutlass on my way to deliver an attack to another pirate. He blocks my first strike but doesn’t expect me to deliver a second one so quickly. It pierces his heart.

I spin as the man I dodged comes charging at me with his sword raised; I leap aside but land atop one of the fallen bodies, and my ankle

rolls. When I land on my good leg, I pivot in place, ducking a slash and stabbing the man in the gut. I finish him with another slice to the throat.

Then the mansion is perfectly silent.

I rise, take a look around at the carnage. A throbbing pain lances up my leg when I try to put my full weight on my ankle. It slows me down as I retrieve all my daggers and find unmarred cloth to wipe them clean on. I scrub at my hands, though they're still red when I'm done. Dried blood has worked its way into the creases of my skin. I sheathe my rapier and daggers into their respective holsters. I pull my braided hair out of its loose ponytail and redo it.

Then I search through the mansion until I find the servants' quarters. Most have barricaded themselves in their rooms or hidden under their beds.

It takes some time, but I finally locate Miss Nyles's room.

"These are for you," I say, and I drag the two unconscious men from the kitchens inside, one at a time, ignoring the shooting pain in my ankle. Thankfully, the servants sleep downstairs; otherwise I wouldn't have managed transporting them.

I pull out one of my daggers and hand it to Miss Nyles, hilt first.

The young woman looks between my dagger and the two unconscious brutes tied up on the floor of her bedroom. She takes the weapon offered to her.

"I suggest waiting until they're awake," I offer. "It'll be better that way."

Then I put the mansion behind me and sail home.