



London South Bank
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**A Port for Thieves - The Historical Fiction of
Golden Age Piracy**

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Abstract

Over the course of my MRes, I have written a novel in the genre of historical fiction, titled *A Port for Thieves*. It is set within the city of Port Royal, Jamaica in the year 1688, and it explores the historical context of the Golden Age of piracy.

The key research aim of this novel is to illuminate and deconstruct the genre of pirate fiction, and the romantic tropes that surround it. By blending fiction with historical authenticity, I offer an alternative to the glamourisation of piracy that is seen in other works throughout the genre. By utilising graphic yet grounded writing techniques, the project aims to capture the reality of violent frontier anarchy, whilst abstaining from the sanitised storytelling that is pervasive in the generally family-friendly genre of pirate fiction.

One of the fundamental writing techniques that I have used in this project is a subjective third person point of view (POV) for multiple different characters, who represent not only the disunited factions among the pirates, but also their victims, their enemies, their allies, and their subjects. The impact, that these multiple POV characters have, is that they are able to inject a degree of richness and diversity into a genre that has, for the most part, been fairly one dimensional and formulaic.

With the project now in completion, it is clear that there remains a vast scope for creative originality within the genre of historical pirate fiction. This potential for new narratives far exceeds the relatively clichéd pirate stories that built the genre in the Nineteenth Century. Throughout the writing of this project, I have found that there is an incredible richness in the genre, and immense potential to continue telling stories that are familiar to pirate aficionados, but also innovative in bringing the genre to the 21st Century, and in infusing fiction with historical authenticity.

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Introduction of Historical Fiction

The genesis of my historical novel, *A Port for Thieves*, began with my undergraduate history dissertation, which focused on the real life pirates of the Caribbean. I was struck by how pervasive the idea of pirates are in our culture, yet how misrepresented and fictionalised they have become to the general public. It was for this reason that I became motivated to write a historical novel that featured authentic pirates, without indulging in the stereotypes and clichés of the pirate genre. The aim of this project was to tell a fulfilling self-contained story that illuminated the historical context, while abstaining from the Disneyfication and sanitised connotations of the strangely family-friendly genre.

At the very first symposium of the MRes, a member of the department was dismayed to learn that the most well known ‘facts’ about pirates, such as walking the plank, burying treasure, or delivering the black spot, were entirely elements of fiction, invented by Robert Louis Stevenson in his 1883 novel *Treasure Island*. This conversation inspired me to write a novel that is much more grounded in historical authenticity, and not beholden to the tropes of the familiar pirate genre.

The term historic authenticity aptly describes my writing style, although it raises the question of what is and isn’t historically authentic? This question was made more problematic by the historic context of pirates being criminals, who went to great pains to obscure their own histories. For example it was common practice for pirates to adopt new names upon beginning their careers, so as to spare the family name the shame of illegality. Furthermore, for the most part pirates were illiterate, which means we have very few first hand accounts of their personalities or the intricacies of their characters.

Thus there is a distinction between historical accuracy and historical authenticity. I found that while writing the novel, there is a counterintuitive discrepancy between these two notions. An example of this is that in my earliest draft, the character of Lily was called Tiffany. Now Tiffany is a historically accurate name that has been in use since the Middle Ages, and it is actually an old English rendering of an Ancient Greek name. However, in a more contemporary setting, the name has become associated with films like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* or the jewellery company Tiffany & Co., and this means that although the name is accurate, it doesn't feel historically authentic to a 21st Century reader.

Elizabeth Chadwick writes that “in the case of historical fiction, the story must rest solidly on historical integrity.” (Chadwick, 2017) This idea of historical integrity was formative in finding the distinction between accuracy and authenticity. She advocates that the primary goal of the writer is to “entertain readers with a riveting story, not bore their socks off,” with an excess of alienating historical data. However, this was not an excuse for me to simply manhandle history for the sake of drama. That would be in stark contrast to my aim of telling a grounded and authentic story.

A Port for Thieves takes place against the backdrop of the Golden Age of piracy, in seventeenth century Port Royal –then the capital of Jamaica, and the largest city in the Caribbean. I chose to set the story in 1688, as this was the year in which the historical figure Sir Henry Morgan died, King James II was overthrown, and British sailors began mapping the waters around Australia. 1688 marked a significant upheaval in the status quo, and this era of sudden change and uncertainty, is reflected in the characters of the novel. In fact it is Lily's concern for the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which serves as the catalyst that initiates her story.

However writing in this style of historical authenticity creates its own challenges in the construction of the novel. I am keen to establish a sensation of realism, but this limited some of my creative choices. For example it became immediately apparent that I couldn't include children in my target audience while faithfully writing about an era where slavery was celebrated, sectarian violence was considered a noble profession, and misogyny was the norm. Douglas Kemp writes that his "biggest irritant...is writers giving their characters contemporary mindsets, in taking them out of the conventions, culture and behaviour of their times and giving them an 'enlightened' temperament." (Kemp, 2018) I am keen not to fall into this trap, and so I recognise that the nature of the historical fiction necessitates the novel's mature themes. There is simply no way of reconciling the values of the seventeenth century with family-friendly ideals of the twenty-first century, and so the 'unenlightened' mind-sets of my characters are a part of the historical authenticity. From the beginning I was adamant that my characters would be as brutal and complex as the historical criminals they're inspired by.

This technique is supported by Alessandro Manzoni, in his ground-breaking text *On the Historical Novel*. He wrote that the historical novelist is required to give "not just the bare bones of history, but something richer...in a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history." (Manzoni, 1984) This statement highlights the fundamental distinction between historical accuracy and authenticity. When writing fiction, historical accuracy is insufficient in telling a satisfying story, but by "putting flesh back on the skeleton," the narrative becomes richer and more fulfilling.

However, despite the historical framework necessitating mature themes, I felt that history alone was not enough to justify an abundance of gratuitous violence

against certain demographics. In order to consolidate the dissonance of moral values with a satisfying story, I wrote the protagonist as an outlier in seventeenth century society, who is morally disgusted by the actions of the buccaneers with whom he coexists. This allowed me to explore the moral consensus of the period, without the entire novel becoming an inaccessible celebration of outmoded ethics.

Thus the target demographic of my readership would be broad, predominantly aged between sixteen and forty-five. The mature themes prohibit a younger audience of children, although there is no reason that an older reader (above forty-five) would not be able to find fulfilment and enjoyment in the novel. I imagine *A Port for Thieves* would have a readership similar to George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, which according to a 2017 poll has 72% of its readers between the ages 18-29, with a further 18% between the ages 30-44. (Selke, 2017) I imagine that a proto-persona of one of my most likely readers, would be a male in his mid-twenties with a preference for adventure and action heavy historical novels akin to Bernard Cornwell's *The Saxon Stories*, or Dianna Gabaldon's *Outlander* series.

One of the primary techniques that I used to create an authentic zeitgeist for the period, was writing the city of Port Royal as a historical character. In contrast to most other works of pirate fiction, which tend to be a subgenre of nautical fiction, the entire novel takes place in one location, and that is because Port Royal is at the centre of every major character's story. *A Port for Thieves* is comparable to Homer's *The Iliad* in the sense that it follows the traditional siege narrative. The novel's main threat descends on the city from foreign waters, and both the protagonist and antagonist consider themselves the protectors of Port Royal, who must defend their home from the external other.

In the historical canon Port Royal was the wealthiest and “wickedest” city in the world during the 1680s. (Davis, 2012) It was founded one hundred and seventy years before the novel begins, and it was the Spanish who built it. This means that my characters inhabit a city that they have conquered, and so the architecture and the fabric of the city reflect the opposite of the British buccaneers who now live there. I explored this idea by describing the dilapidation of Port Royal in a visceral manner, and reinforcing the notion that it is a city that has passed its prime. Port Royal is compared to the shell of a hermit crab, which now provides shelter for something very different to its original occupants.

Upon researching Spanish colonial architecture in the New World I found that there was a consistent trend of painting buildings in vibrant colours, using Latin inscriptions to embellish significant places, and dedicating significant spaces to Catholic worship. In order to reflect the second-hand nature of Port Royal I allude to these facts in the novel, but they’re subverted by the historical authenticity. In 1688 the colourful buildings are described as faded, the Latin inscriptions are worn, and the Catholic spaces are repurposed into brothels and drinking houses.

In order to turn Port Royal from a location into a character, the city needs a character arc. Just like both the protagonist and the antagonist, Port Royal ‘dies’ at the end of the story. In a reflection of historical fact, the city is utterly destroyed in a devastating earthquake in the novel’s final chapter. This ending is foreshadowed in the first chapter by a lesser earthquake, which splits the city’s foundations and initiates the story. However throughout the novel, this damage is never rectified. The physical city is neglected in favour of what it represents in the minds of the major characters.

Throughout the story, a supporting character makes frequent reference to the foundations of sand upon which Port Royal is built, and how, by its very nature, the city is transient. Bart, the protagonist, is motivated by his desire to save the soul of Port Royal and redeem it from the sins of the buccaneers. However at every turn Bart is forced into conflict with the human antagonists, and Port Royal is denied the redemption it deserves. The damaged seawall is never fixed and the foundations are never reinforced. It's because of this structural weakness that the earthquake is so apocalyptic in the final chapter. During the late seventeenth century, many people saw the destruction of Port Royal as divine retribution for the city's wicked nature. I reflected this historical sentiment by establishing the notion that Port Royal's ruin was primarily the result of its inhabitants being incapable of uniting for the common good.

Aside from the city of Port Royal, the most significant historical character that drives the plot of the novel is *Captain Henry Morgan*. Among historians, Captain Morgan is a highly divisive figure who can be described as both a British national hero, and a barbaric international terrorist. This lack of academic consensus became a formative part of planning my novel. Reconciling Captain Morgan's despicable actions with his knighthood and gracious treatment in London, was not only a challenge that I faced while writing, but it's also a challenge that the characters face. Captain Morgan is killed off in only the fifth chapter, but throughout the entirety of the novel, his progeny argue over what his legacy ultimately represents.

In addition to Henry Morgan, a number of other pirates from history are named in *A Port for Thieves*. Two of the most significant are *Roc Braziliano* and *Charlotte de Berry*. In the historic record Roc Braziliano, was famously a friend-turned-rival of Henry Morgan. He is infamous for being among the cruellest pirates of

all time, and his atrocities inspired me to write him as a villain who represents the shadow of Henry Morgan.

Similarly Charlotte de Berry was also supposedly a contemporary of Henry Morgan, and she struck my imagination by being one of very few named female pirates of the period. By utilising Captain de Berry, I was able to introduce the concept of female pirates, and the role of women as a whole during the age of piracy, without it feeling anachronistic.

In fact, the question of women pirates was a problematic part of writing *A Port for Thieves*, because there is a discrepancy between my desire to write a variety of complex female characters, and the historical fact that named female pirates were so few and far between. However, they did exist, and I consulted a number of sources in order to reconcile this discrepancy.

In *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World* Creighton and Norling write about the distinction between women pirates and pirates' women. Women pirates were rare because of the early modern belief that seafaring was equated with "rugged masculinity." (Wallace, 1924) The Articles of the historical pirate Bartholomew Roberts, which were drawn up in 1720, support this notion of seafaring being a strictly masculine profession. Article VI of Captain Roberts' code states that "No...woman to be allowed amongst [the crew]. If any man shall be found seducing any of the latter sex and carrying her to sea in disguise, he shall suffer death."

This means that women, who wished to pursue a life at sea, were in many cases forced to adopt a masculine identity, and the most famous example from history is the "transvestite heroine" Mary Read. (Creighton & Norling, 1996) This masculinising of the feminine was significant in the development of *Rowan De Berry*,

a female buccaneer in *A Port for Thieves*. When Rowan is introduced, her clothing is described as being that of a man's, and it's not until a scene later that the reader learns Rowan is in fact a woman.

However, only a few of my female characters represent the “transvestite heroine” archetype, and some of the most significant female characters, including *Felina* and *Lily Morgan*, never relinquish their femininity, despite living in, and in both cases ruling, a city of male buccaneers. I drew inspiration from John Appleby's *Women and English Piracy*, in which he states that “the socio-economic characteristics of piracy...included a dense structure of support on land...[and these] supporting mechanisms...included a varied pattern of interdependency between pirates and women.” (Appleby, 2013) This interdependency between pirates and women, forms the crux of Lily's character, as she sees male buccaneers as a tool for her to wield in order to make Port Royal strong. She is dependent on them to achieve her ambitions, yet she recognises that the buccaneers are equally dependent on her to govern their city, and to provide the mechanisms to support their way of life.

One of the considerable challenges that I faced whilst planning the novel, was to what extent I should fictionalise history. A significant part of the backstory involves Henry Morgan's raid on Panama. This is a formative event in the protagonist's life, and it's based on an historical event. However in real life, Henry Morgan attacked Panama in 1671, which is seventeen years before the novel begins. In the earliest drafts I stuck to this date, but a seventeen year gap between the raid on Panama and the first chapter struck me as slightly too long. The internal chronology became jarring, and the backstory ceased to make sense. To remedy this, I made the conscious decision to write the raid on Panama as taking place in 1675, which is

thirteen years before the novel begins. Despite the anachronism, I stand by this change, as it was the right choice for the story. First and foremost the emphasis of historical-fiction is fiction, and it was essential to the quality of the writing that historical accuracy never undermined compelling characters and plot.

This is part of the reason that Roc Braziliano and Charlotte de Berry lend themselves so well to historical fiction. Historically Braziliano disappears from all accounts after 1671 and his fate remains a mystery. This gave me a huge amount of creative license to write an older version of the character coming out of retirement in 1688. Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether Charlotte de Berry ever really existed. Although she's been a part of pirate historiography for hundreds of years, most current historians believe that Edward Lloyd, a writer of penny dreadfuls, invented her in his 1836 book. (Lloyd, 1836). This lack of historical fact, allowed me a great deal of creative freedom to shape her character arc in a way that best serves the story.

During the process of fictionalising these historical figures, I was inspired by Sarah Water's statement that "novels should [not] reinvent history...though this suggests we can represent history accurately – something I'm not sure we can do." (Waters, 2006) This lends further credence to the distinction between historical authenticity and historical accuracy, and the assertion that true historical accuracy may be impossible, supports my notion that a fulfilling historical novel can only be achieved by exploring history, without necessarily adhering rigidly to nebulous and unknowable 'facts'. Furthermore, in Jerome De Groot's *The Historical Novel* he writes "historical novelists take the bare bones of 'history', some facts, some atmosphere, some vocabulary, some evidence, and weave a story within the gaps."

(De Groot, 2010) This statement illuminates the key distinction between accuracy and authenticity, and it was formative in the development of my writing style.

In 2013, when this project was in its earliest infancy, two new instalments in the pirate genre were released within a few months of each other. One was the video game, *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the other a historical television series called *Black Sails*. I took inspiration from both these stories, as they were among the first subversions of the pirate genre that I had come across. Both *Black Flag* and *Black Sails* were aimed at a more mature audience than earlier works such *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan*, or *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and they were both much more deeply rooted in history. However, only *Black Sails* worked as a satisfying story, which is salient because the video game *Black Flag* was far more historically accurate, yet far less compelling.

Now in defence of *Black Flag*, it has a very different mode of storytelling to *Black Sails*, and because of its nature as a video game, the priority of the developers was on gameplay and not story. However this is not the reason that the story fails. The narrative of *Black Flag* is driven entirely by historical accuracy. The game features historical characters such as Charles Vane, Jack Rackham, Ben Hornigold, and Blackbeard (all of whom also appear in the TV show *Black Sails*) but their only role in the story is exclusively to follow the beats of their real life counterparts. Thus the audience spends no time with the historical characters, unless the action is a direct adaptation of an historical event. This means that none of the characters are developed in a meaningful way, and the pacing of the narrative is incredibly inconsistent. Characters appear and disappear without any characterisation, and huge time jumps occur without any exploration of the events within the time jump.

A key example of this, which affected my writing, is the execution of Charles Vane. This is a historical event that is present in both *Black Flag* and *Black Sails*. In *Black Flag*, the event follows history to the letter. Charles Vane is captured in 1719, and imprisoned for over two years before finally being hanged in Port Royal in 1721. Although this is far more accurate than the portrayal in *Black Sails*, the narrative is unfulfilling and the character is forgettable. Charles Vane is never recorded setting foot in Port Royal until he was taken there to hang, he had no prior connection to the Governor of Port Royal, and his two years languishing in prison added nothing to his character, as it was entirely glossed over in the game. In contrast to this, Charles Vane's execution in the TV show is far more compelling, and his character arc is considerably more rewarding for the viewer. In *Black Sails*, the story is also inspired by history, although details are changed to better serve the narrative. In the show, Charles Vane is executed in Nassau instead of Port Royal, and he's sentenced to death by his historical nemesis Woodes Rogers in 1718, instead of by an esoteric Governor in Port Royal in 1721. We know from Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates*, first published in 1724, that Charles Vane was one of the most feared and respected pirates in Nassau, and he had a personal vendetta against Governor Woodes Rogers. Thus *Black Sails* took these historical details and used them as inspiration to end Charles Vane's story in a way that better serves the character and the narrative, while still retaining an historically authentic feel.

Despite the fact that *Black Flag*, undeniably, has the more historically accurate story, the narrative fails in comparison to *Black Sails*. This is because *Black Sails* adheres to historical authenticity over accuracy, and so it is able to explore the more universal human elements of historical piracy, such as an individual's motivations, internal conflicts, and interpersonal relationships, which are almost entirely absent in

Black Flag. This realisation changed my approach to the historical framework in my novel, and it has resulted in a far more nuanced and compelling story, than would otherwise have been achievable if I'd stayed too close to fact.

However, there is a fine line between changing historical details for the sake of authenticity, and changing them to the detriment of authenticity. During the writing of *A Port for Thieves*, I took inspiration from two different novels, both within the pirate genre. Tim Powers' *On Stranger Tides* and Mark Keaton's *The Pirate Devlin*. Both of these novels have elements of a historical narrative, but they both stray too far from authenticity to be anything more than historical fantasy. In Tim Powers' *On Stranger Tides*, the historical figure Blackbeard features prominently, alongside another historical figure Juan Ponce de Leon, who in real life died two hundred years before the novel takes place. In Tim Powers' novel, Blackbeard is also portrayed as being a practitioner of Voodoo magic who is motivated by his quest to hunt the fabled Fountain of Youth. Although the story may be entertaining for a fan of the genre, it is too far removed from any kind of historical fact to be considered a historical novel, and for this reason it fails to add anything substantial to the already heavily fictionalised genre.

Similarly, Keaton's *The Pirate Devlin*, contains familiar elements of the nautical pirate genre, but the history is so loosely adapted that it loses any air of authenticity. The narrative follows a fictional pirate, the titular Devlin, and his captain, a pirate called Toombs. At first glance, this story appears to be pure fiction, but a significant number of the narrative beats are inspired by the life and career of a historical pirate called Bartholomew Roberts. The story of Devlin and his mentor Toombs follows, to an extent, the history of Roberts and his mentor Howell Davis, however because their names, and other superficial details are altered, the richness

and credibility of the history is lost. For example, in the novel, Devlin and Toombs sail from the Caribbean to the African coast where Toombs is killed in an unforeseeable crossfire. In the historical record, Bartholomew Robert and Howell Davis did a very similar thing, and Davis died in the same way, but in Keaton's story there is no exploration of why they sailed to West Africa, and how Africa differs from the Caribbean, or how the political and historical context drives the characters, as it certainly drove the historical figures. Although this is surely Keaton's intent, the world of his novel lacks the richness and diversity of the real world, which I have worked hard to build in *A Port for Thieves*.

Choosing the Golden Age of piracy as the novel's historical setting was hugely influential on my writing. There are a multitude of tropes that have followed pirate fiction since the early nineteenth century, and when I began planning this project, I found that there was no shortage of pirate representation in literature and film. Historic classics such as *Treasure Island* or *Peter Pan* introduced me to the genre from a young age, and I grew up with the more contemporary *Pirates of the Caribbean* film-franchise, which returned pirates to the twenty-first century public consciousness. However it was exactly this sanitised and 'Disneyfied' representation that I wanted to break away from.

The outmoded idea that pirates were either dashing rogues or colourful brutes is repeated over and over in popular culture. In works ranging from Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*, all the way to *Conan the Barbarian* or *The Princess Bride*, we see pirates portrayed as romantic or morally bipartisan characters who bury treasure, exchange black spots, and give orders in a nonsensical 'pirate accent.'

From the very outset of writing my novel, I set narrative rules to subvert these tropes. Thus *A Port for Thieves* is completely absent of treasure maps, walking the plank, talking parrots, or any element of soft magic, which remains strangely pervasive in a genre with historical roots. Instead I was keen to represent pirates, and the time period, with a much grittier and historically grounded focus. In a similar vein to how George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* reimagines the high fantasy influences of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, I wanted to reimagine the 'jolly pirate' represented by Johnny Depp's Captain Jack Sparrow.

My writing is significantly influenced by the long-form epic fiction of George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. I was inspired by the moral ambiguity of Martin's characters and the representation of both good and evil on both sides of the conflict. These elements were utilised in my novel by creating characters such as *Rowan de Berry* or *Jagua Blackwood* who are firmly on the side of the antagonists, despite being sympathetic and in no way evil.

My writing has also been affected by the historical fiction of Wilbur Smith, primarily his Ancient Egyptian trilogy. I wanted to emulate the way that Smith conjures historic settings that are both alien to the reader, but also entirely convincing. I also drew inspiration from the comprehensive style of research found in Bernard Cornwell's historical series *The Saxon Stories*. Both Cornwell and Smith use supplementary historical research to breathe credibility into their work. For example Smith describes south as being up, and north as being down. This reflects how Ancient Egyptians saw their world, and I applied this attention to detail to my novel. I was careful to avoid historically inaccurate terminology, and for this reason I

abstained from using common words or phrases such as ‘bullet’ or ‘train of thought’, as they would have had no meaning in 1688.

Furthermore, in Wilbur Smith’s writing, substantial attention is paid to the wider world in which the story is set. Despite Smith’s trilogy seldom straying from the banks of the Nile, he includes references to other Ancient locations such as Babylon, Crete, and Canaan. This wider world gave the trilogy a sense of authenticity that I wanted to capture. Thus before writing began, I conducted significant research into the international politics of Europe in 1688, the religious sectarianism in the Caribbean, and the indigenous populations of the New World.

This attention to historical context affected the plot of *A Port for Thieves* in a number of ways. Despite the crux of the novel rotating around piracy in Port Royal, it was impossible to tell this story without weaving in elements of slavery. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slavery defined every aspect of capitalism and profit in the New World. The story of slaves is indivisibly linked with piracy, and from the earliest drafts it became clear that I shouldn’t write about one whilst neglecting the other.

However the slave trade is a hugely impactful historic event, and it became a major challenge to write it into the novel without shifting the focus away from piracy. In order to achieve this, I decided to abstain from writing expository information about the nebulous enterprise of slavery, and instead I introduced a character called *Longo*, who had once been a slave. Longo’s struggles and motivations allow me to explore the historical context without changing the emphasis of the novel.

In a similar vein, the conflict between the predominantly Protestant pirates and their Spanish Catholic quarry, is also an element that defined the time period. Just like with Longo, I decided that it was best to introduce this historical component through a

character instead of simply dry exposition. Bart's love interest *Felina* is the lens through which Spanish influence is explored, and her character underwent a great deal of development after this change was realised. Whereas Bart's love interest had previously been a relatively one-dimensional young prostitute, rewriting her as a Catholic Spaniard redefined the character, and as a result, Felina is among the principal characters of the final draft, and one of my favourite to write.

Bart the Protagonist - “Opposites are the Root of Everything”

John Yorke wrote that “something confronted by its opposite – is of central importance to storytelling.” (Yorke, 2014) This simple statement is a fundamental influence on my novel. The “extraordinary universe of opposites” is at the heart of not only the novel’s plot, but also the characters. (Stanton, 2006.) *Bart*, the protagonist, and *Lily*, the antagonist, both represent the other’s antithesis. Throughout their conflict the two characters not only evolve and devolve as dynamic characters, they also begin to change places, ideologically, professionally, and morally.

Andrew Stanton’s concept of “Story Physics” was also a focal theme of the writing process. (Stanton, 2006) His metaphor on Newton’s Third Law, that every action has an equal and opposite reaction was instrumental in the development of characters and plot. At its core, story physics is about a truth or value of the writer’s that is debated and rigorously subjected to counter-beliefs until it is tested to its limits. The central belief in *A Port for Thieves* is that Port Royal can be redeemed through legitimacy, as opposed to piracy. However throughout the novel, the antithetical argument is also debated and at the conclusion, the original value is no longer deemed ‘truth’.

The hero of *A Port for Thieves* is the protagonist Bartholomew Morgan. However one of the novel’s central themes is the moral decline of Bart from a generous and humble vagrant, into a brutal and ruthless Governor. More so than any other element, the devolution of Bart’s character is essential in bringing the novel together in a satisfying way. This resulted in Bart being the most challenging character to write.

A significant influence on Bart is the protagonist of *The Godfather* Michael Corleone (Puzo, 1969). Michael and Bart share a number of superficial similarities such as both being reluctant sons who inherit their father's criminal empire. However there are also more significant parallels between the two characters. At the beginning of both their stories they are morally upstanding citizens, who view themselves as the model of how their criminal family ought to behave. However as their novels progress both characters are inserted into morally dirty situations, which force them to muddy their hands. Nevertheless, the key similarity between Bart and Michael Corleone is that despite their reluctance, they both have a real talent for their family's criminal elements, and they ultimately find purpose within an institution that they initially despised. Both characters eventually descend into villainy and surpass their iconic fathers.

In the earliest drafts, I intended for Bart's story to end with him fully embracing the dark side of his personality, just like *The Godfather*. Every action would have an "equal and opposite" reaction that pushes him further and further into villainy (Stanton, 2006). In the climax Bart would die as a cruel and despised man. The absolute antithesis of how he begins.

However it quickly became apparent that this was an unsatisfying arc for the novel's protagonist. If he morally declines to the extent that redemption is impossible, and all sympathetic traits are gone, the audience will lose interest in the character, and the story will have no point. When I realised that an over-abundance of hopeless grittiness only induces apathy in the readers, the character of Bart had to change.

In a speech delivered for *Talks at Google*, John Yorke said that there are ten questions the writer must answer before a story and its protagonist can become compelling and sympathetic. Among the most fundamental of these questions is

“what is the character’s flaw?” In the earliest draft, Bart’s flaws were pride and ambition, which led to him becoming a man as feared as his father. To an extent Bart’s character is inspired by Patrick Bateman from Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*. In the earliest drafts Bart has darkness inside him from the very start, and just like Bateman, it’s dormant in the first act but ever present. However upon rewriting, it became clear that these flaws were too severe to keep Bart sympathetic. If he’s a villain from the beginning, his arc will be flat and his character static.

To remedy this, I rewrote Bart as a genuinely compassionate individual whose flaw is much subtler. In later drafts, he is obsessed with making his city better and improving life for his citizens. Altruism becomes the driving force of his actions, but it’s this obsession with saving the dispossessed that ultimately becomes his downfall. His intentions are noble but his passion is flawed.

In later drafts, Bart’s moral descent was written as a twist that emerged in the second act to shock the reader. However this was also defective characterisation because it meant that Bart’s sudden turn towards darkness was inadequately set up and thus jarring. In the final draft, I signposted the potential for a moral decline in the second chapter, by having the villainous Captain Morgan explicitly compare himself to Bart and suggest the idea that they’re one and same. This meant that the point of the novel is no longer about the protagonist becoming a villain, but instead it debates whether or not being the protagonist is the same as being a hero. This question hounds Bart throughout the novel, and the central theme is not answered until the end of the final chapter.

Thus throughout rewriting, Bart changed from a villain protagonist to a morally grey protagonist, who is capable of genuine good as well as evil. This change

also makes him a more believable character as he always sees himself as a morally upstanding hero, and for the most part he's not deluded in thinking this.

This change made Bart far more compelling, as it introduces the element of doubt. Will he be corrupted or will he remain true? This change also has a positive snowball effect on Bart's characterisation in the sense that it made the rest of Yorke's ten questions simpler to answer.

Yorke's fourth question is "what does the character want?" In the earliest drafts, Bart wants power and respect as the Governor of Port Royal. At the beginning of the novel he's a wretched vagrant, and his core desire is to rise above his station. However as Bart became more sympathetic and nuanced, this desire evolved. In later drafts, compassion refocuses his desire into something more selfless. Bart is motivated by his want to help the dispossessed and improve quality of life for the poorest citizens.

However an unintended consequence of this change in desire is that, although it made Bart kinder, it also made him too earnest. The character became boring, and the only sympathy he'd garner would be pity. I quickly decided that this was not a character who would satisfy a reader for twenty-six point of view chapters, and he needed an additional element to become more vibrant.

This element came in the latest draft. I rewrote Bart's character to have a slightly more cynical worldview at the beginning, which is brought on by a decade of drug addiction and a failed suicide attempt in his backstory. This meant that Bart becomes one of the dispossessed citizens that he's trying to save. His desire at the beginning is as much about saving himself as it is about saving the city.

All the threads of Bart's moral arc are brought together in the final chapter, where I answer Yorke's sixth, seventh, and eighth questions in the resolution. The questions are, what's at stake, why should we care, and what does the character learn?

I knew from the very earliest conceptions of the novel that Bart will die in the final scene when an apocalyptic earthquake destroys Port Royal. This is true to history, and it acts as a bookend to the earthquake that initiates the first chapter. In this scene Bart awaits inevitable death and reflects on his actions. At this point it isn't Bart's life that's at stake but his soul. The reader should care about this because it's the first and most important question that was asked about Bart in the beginning. Throughout the novel, the question of Bart's soul has been subjected to a myriad of counter-arguments, disputes and "story physics", and it's only in the final scene that Bart can answer the question of whether he's a good person. What he learns is to reject the moral black and whiteness that he'd previously ascribed to, and to accept that good and evil are a choice rather than a disposition.

The structure of Bart's moral arc follows the universal idea of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis is identified in the first act as being Bart's dissatisfaction with life, his kindness, and his hatred of pirates. At the exact mid-point of the novel, Bart's antithesis is explored. He's become a ruthless leader of the pirates, and he acts in the liminal space between good and evil. However he is finding satisfaction by having a purpose. In the final chapter we explore the synthesis of these contradictions. Bart reflects that his hunger for change has been sated, and although he's made mistakes, he doesn't regret his life. This thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad is a pervasive structure that can be found in stories ranging from Disney movies to Shakespeare plays. However I decided that it was the most cohesive way to structure

the story of Bart's transformation from morally white, to morally black, to morally grey.

The challenges of writing Bart were, to a significant extent, due to his moral arc. However other elements of the story also provided their own challenges. Not least among these was writing Bart's physical disability, and how this disadvantages him in the martial society of Port Royal.

The presentation of disability in fiction is in many instances problematic. One need only look at the 2004 sports drama *Million Dollar Baby*, which seems to state that death, through a brutal suicide attempt, is preferable to living as a quadriplegic person. Even more problematic is the 2008 film *Blindness*, in which an epidemic of blindness strikes America, and the people afflicted are portrayed as "uncivilized, animalized creatures." (Brunson, 2008) Within literature, disability can also be troublingly portrayed, and in Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* it's stated "while [novels] rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as a social experience." (Mitchell & Snyder, 2001) This was something I want to subvert in *A Port for Thieves*, and so I spent a significant amount of time researching and writing about how Bart's disability affects him on a societal level as well as simply a physical one.

However, this led to additional problems because a historically authentic social experience of disability is incredibly negative. Throughout history, people with disabilities have been institutionally marginalised. In fact, in the bible it explicitly states that "no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed," may approach an altar. (Leviticus 21:18, 1978) Furthermore, throughout history, mutilated bodies,

especially amputations, were seen as a “life that was half death,” and so people with physical disabilities really weren’t considered to be living citizens, in the way that able-bodied people were. (Ringrose, 2003)

However, writing Bart as a lesser person, simply because of his disability is incredibly alienating to a 21st Century reader, but, sanitising history to make it more palatable is the antithesis of this project’s aim. So a major challenge of writing Bart’s character was how to reconcile this dichotomy. My method for doing so was to focus heavily on Bart as an individual, and to assert that although his disability is a part of him, it is *only* a part of him. He is a man of many facets, which include being a mixed race bastard, a recovering opium addict, an impoverished vagrant, and a person with a disability, among other things. This means that in every sense of the word, Bart is an outlier in 17th Century Port Royal, and because he is disabled in so many different ways, no one disability becomes an unwarranted focus of his character.

Bart’s amputated leg distances him from every other character in the story. The disability is used in the beginning to illustrate all his reasons for hating the world of piracy. In the first act, Bart experiences the world to an extent through his disability. I spent time describing all the ways that a crutch makes life harder for Bart, which establishes him as an ‘other’ in the port of thieves.

Bart’s addiction to opium is also a consequence of his disability, and it adds another dimension to Bart when we meet him. He is physically and mentally damaged at the beginning, and this anguish forms the crucible that forges him into the anti-hero of the second act.

During the second act, Bart’s quality of life begins to increase at the same rate that his ethical values decrease. As he discovers purpose in ruling Port Royal, he overcomes his withdrawal and he finds himself craving success instead of opium.

During the same midpoint, Bart is gifted a pegleg which allows him a level of mobility he hasn't known in years. Thus his physical and mental sufferings are inextricably linked with his moral decline.

In the final chapter, Bart's pegleg is crushed in the earthquake and he is disabled once again. However this time he reflects positively that he was always destined to lose his leg, and at the end of all things, he's glad that there's no pain when he dies. He ends the story broken but whole.

This addition was a necessary change to Bart's character, and it made him a more compelling protagonist. However it added the complication of writing a hero who is unable to do many things that other characters take for granted.

I found whilst reading other novels, that there isn't an abundance of disabled point of view protagonists in fiction. One of the challenges that this posed was that I had to rethink how Bart would interact with the world and the characters around him. For example he is unable to run anywhere, or move particularly quickly, and in any physical contest he is significantly disadvantaged. In order to compensate for these drawbacks, Bart had to become a much more psychological character, who honed his wit just as other characters honed their strength.

This change affected my practice as a writer in a significant number of ways. In the macro sense, it refocused Bart throughout the novel and forced me to rewrite his psychology and overall characterisation, which in turn sowed changes into the plot. For example, a traditional trope of fictional pirates is the climactic showdown, where the protagonist and antagonist clash in a dazzling, but entirely unrealistic, swordfight. However this was not an option for Bart. In later drafts, the final showdown evolved from a physical fight, into a psychological Mexican standoff.

Thus the central conflict is resolved by Bart's intelligence, and his gift for knowing other people's minds, as opposed to simple military might.

On a more micro scale of chapters and individual scenes, Bart's disability also affected the way that he was written, and the way he interacts with other characters. In an early scene of introspection, Bart ruminates on his physical handicap and begins to consider how vulnerable he is because of it. This short contemplative scene snowballed Bart's relationship with the major supporting character *Harry Ben Zafrany*. From the very first draft I intended for Bart and Harry to develop a close friendship, however this scene lays the foundations for both characters to become more three-dimensional. Due to Bart's amputation he is forced to overcome his animosity and rely on Harry for protection. However despite Harry's physical strength, he is psychologically unwell and prone to bouts of madness. This contrasts with Bart's collected and calculating nature, and their on-going relationship became considerably more compelling in the wake of this short introspective scene, where both characters recognise their shortcomings, and the importance of each other in their on-going struggles.

Despite the relatively small pool of disabled protagonists in fiction, I found inspiration from writing Bart's disability in a few sources. One of the primary influences was the character of Ivar the Boneless from Michael Hirst's long form television series *Vikings*. As a result of complications at birth, Ivar is born paralysed from the waist down. Just like Bart, Ivar is the son of a respected leader who rules over a martial society. The primary influence that I took from Ivar the Boneless is how other characters judge him, and how his disability stigmatises him. In retaliation, Ivar is driven to prove them wrong. His societal and physical handicap ignites a disquiet inside him, which urges him to work harder and achieve more in order to

spite his critics. Both Ivar and Bart are significantly motivated not just to advance themselves, but also to disprove the notion of their weakness. This disquiet turns to obsession, and initiates their descent towards villainy.

Another significant source of inspiration while writing Bart's disability was Bran Stark from George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels. In the novels Bran is paralysed through injury in a similar way to Bart, and so he retains memory of life prior to his disability. This memory has a major effect on Bart just as it has on Bran. In my novel, Bart was fifteen when he lost his leg, and it was his compassion for an innocent victim that resulted in the injury. This stirs the conflict between his vulnerable benevolence and his more pragmatic ruthlessness. Bran Stark's regretful contemplation that a single stroke of fate could cripple him for life, also feeds the resentment in Bart's character.

Furthermore Bran Stark's disability also distances him from his family of warriors, which forces him to take a more passive role as a frequenter of libraries instead of battlefields. However when Bran embraces his passivity, he is able to train his mind. Throughout his arc he acquires unparalleled power over others, and this is an element that inspired Bart's similar character development. The very passivity that Bart loathes enables him to refine his cunning and take power through intellectual might. This would be impossible to the host of belligerent pirates in the story, who rely on their physical strength.

I felt that by evolving Bart's character through his disability, he became the most cerebral character, which made him the most interesting point of view protagonist. In a story full of loud and aggressive warriors, I wanted the hero to reflect their opposite. Because he represents the antithesis of the norm, Bart experiences a

unique story within Port Royal, and he utilises this to different effect throughout every act of the novel.

Lily the Antagonist

Bart's shadow is his half-sister Lily Morgan, and she is, to a meaningful degree, his opposite. She is my novel's main antagonist, and her narrative represents the antithetical storyline to Bart's. At the core of Lily's character is the unrelenting aspiration to govern Port Royal, which she sees as hers by right. This compulsion is both her core desire and her primary flaw. It's central to her moral arc, and in the end, it's the pivotal element of her rejecting redemption.

Just like Bart, Lily's point in the story is to explore the sliding scale of morality. However whereas Bart is a complex man whose good intentions are threatened by corruption, Lily is the opposite. Lily begins the story as a proud and coldblooded leader of pirates, whose worldview represents the antithesis of Bart's. In the second act Lily's character softens to an extent, and although she never loses sight of her ambition, sympathetic traits do begin to emerge. This shift towards moral redemption shadows Bart's gradual shift away from it in the second act.

While writing these morally parallax arcs, that criss-cross at the mid-point of the novel, I took inspiration from Andrew Stanton's idea of the "unity of opposites." (Stanton, 2006). Stanton posited that a key element of storytelling is the notion of two opposing sides slowly changing places over the course of the narrative. John Yorke elaborated on this idea in *Talks for Google*, and he used the example of the HBO television series *The Wire*. The show begins with a professional and bureaucratic police department that represents authority in Baltimore, and the ruthless drug-dealing criminals who are their opposite. However as the police force grows more desperate and corrupt, the criminals become more successful. Over the course of the series, the criminals become the professional and bureaucratic kingpins of Baltimore, whereas the police stoop to unlawful means of resisting them.

This idea was influential on my writing of Lily's moral arc. As Bart's opposite, her morality needed to fluctuate in opposition to his. Just like the drug-dealers and the police, they eventually change places.

At the beginning of my novel Bart is an impoverished outcast who hates pirates. Conversely, Lily is a wealthy governess who rules pirates. However with the same inciting incident, which elevates Bart's status, Lily is betrayed and banished from the very mansion that Bart now occupies. At the end of the first act, Bart is the Governor and Lily is the outcast.

In the earliest drafts, Lily was a fairly one-note villain, and her purpose in the story was simply to offer a counter-perspective to Bart. In the original outline, Bart killed Lily in in the second act to motivate the other villains before their final showdown. However upon revisions, this struck me as one of the most problematic elements in the novel.

When I first began the writing process, I was eager to include a variety of dynamic female characters, which would be a further subversion of the largely male-dominated pirate genre. This was especially important in *A Port for Thieves* because the entire story takes place on land, where women would hold positions of authority. Although it is historically true that some women did join pirate crews, most would have remained ashore to run the society in which the men were transient and temporary. (Creighton and Norling, 1996) However my original plan to kill a major female character, in order to motivate a secondary male character, undermined what I was trying to achieve.

The way that I remedied this problem was to kill the secondary male villain, which then motivated Lily to lead the climactic confrontation as the primary

antagonist. By swapping these two roles, Lily became a much more central character, which necessitated a change to her characterisation.

John Yorke speaks at length about a key component of characterisation being the dichotomy between the façade that a character wears in public, and the flawed person that they are beneath. He said, “we are all animals, but unlike animals we are rational.” (Yorke, 2014). This idea was hugely influential on how I wrote Lily’s internal conflict, and as a result her characterisation was enhanced.

The conflict between Lily’s flaw and her façade forms a major crux of her character arc. When she’s introduced, she is described from Bart’s perspective as exemplifying the qualities of a wealthy heiress. Her hair is black like her father’s, and she is a paragon of grace and civic virtue. However this is the façade.

In Lily’s first point of view chapter I wanted to hint at her darker feelings, and the savagery that she buries deep down. This idea is first hinted at when she smashes a bottle in anger and verbally berates one of her subordinates. However in the same chapter Lily demonstrates her ability to effortlessly resume her façade, and when she goes downstairs and re-enters society, she is once again stoic and demure.

I also used Lily’s physical appearance to explore the idea of her façade and flaw in conflict. Her hair is pitch black like her father’s, and she speaks with an affected Welsh accent to mimic his. However the truth is that she’s never set foot in Wales, and her hair is actually dyed to mask the naturally golden curls that she inherited from her disgraced mother.

The loss of this façade is also critical to Lily’s evolution and development. At the same moment that she is banished from Port Royal, her face is badly scarred. This spoils her mask and makes it impossible to resume the façade. Furthermore the rain in

this scene washes the dye from Lily's hair, and thus after this transformative event, she no longer resembles her father. As Lily's story progresses, she joins a crew of feral pirates, and in time she begins to dress like them. By the end of the novel she is the antithesis of how she began. The poised and graceful façade is gone, and the true character underneath is revealed to be animalistic and unhinged.

This image was inspired in part by William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In the first act of the play, King Lear is the uncontested king of Britain. By the exact midpoint, he is wild and exposed in a storm, questioning if man is really anything more than "a poor, bare, forked animal" (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 3.4.114-115.) This sentiment is central to Lily's development from villain to dynamic character.

However, perhaps the most challenging part of evolving Lily's character, is striking the right balance in her dynamic moral arc. In stark contrast to Bart, Lily dramatically softens her morality in the second act, and is faced with a genuine opportunity for redemption. This is necessary to counterbalance Bart's descent towards villainy and ensure that the novel doesn't suffer from an excess of villainous characters.

It is important for readers to sympathise with Lily and hope for a happy ending, however in the final act Bart redeems himself, and Lily actively rejects a peaceful ending, due to her flawed persistence and her inability to lose sight of ambition. For this reason I had to straddle the line of hinting Lily's redemption, but never fully allowing the reader to root for her over Bart.

In order to achieve this, I built her relationship with two supporting characters. One is her sworn enemy *Roc Braziliano*. Roc is a secondary villain who I wrote as utterly psychotic and sadistic. Despite Lily's own unethical actions, she becomes an

antagonist with a code when compared to abhorrence of Roc. This technique is used by George RR Martin to initiate a redemptive arc in his characters. For example the character of *Jaime Lannister* is thoroughly villainous until he comes into conflict with the far more villainous *Vargo Hoat*. (Martin, 2000). Through comparison and conflict with someone far worse, both Jaime Lannister and Lily become more sympathetic characters.

The other character relationship that I use to make Lily more sympathetic, while still retaining her antagonistic role, is her love interest *Jagua Blackwood*. Jagua is a positive influence on Lily, and he makes her truly happy for the first time in the novel. This relationship humanises Lily, and when she discovers she's pregnant, the idea of redemption is seriously considered. However within the same chapter, Jagua is imprisoned and sentenced to death. This sudden shift in direction alters the trajectory of Lily moral arc, and her ruthless ambition reasserts itself. The love for her unborn child is also a factor that initially hints towards redemption, but ultimately seals her fate as an antagonist.

The essential flaw of Lily's character, and the primary factor in her rejection of redemption, is that she dogmatically believes in a lie that she's unable to relinquish. In his book on writing, K.M. Weiland posits that change in a character comes directly from "the lie that festers beneath the surface." (Weiland, 2016).

In Lily's case, this lie is the belief that Port Royal is worthy of her devotion and ambition. She is obsessed with the idea of the city that's hers to rule, and no power in the novel can depose that notion.

For this reason, a significant influence on the development of Lily is the character of *Elphaba* in Gregory Maguire's novel *Wicked*. (Maguire, 1996). In the

novel, Elphaba is the green-skinned woman who's destined to become the Wicked Witch of the West. Neither her nor Lily are born evil, but they both face constant contempt and discrimination from the local populace. Furthermore Elphaba is obsessed with an idea that relates to her own brand of social justice. She is fighting a perceived tyrant, and she abandons an opportunity to escape her destiny, because she cannot reconcile peace with her ambitions. These traits crafted Elphaba into a morally complex anti-hero, and they greatly influenced the character of Lily.

One of the later developments in my novel is the evolution of the character *Felina*, who becomes Bart's wife. Despite the fact that Felina only shares one scene with Lily, this new character significantly influenced how I rewrote Lily's arc, especially her ending. I knew from the beginning that Lily would be Bart's antithesis, and the two characters would exist on opposite ends of a spectrum. However in contrast to her husband, Felina is not so different to Lily at all. Instead of being opposites, Lily and Felina are incredibly similar characters, but they endure wildly different circumstances. In effect, Felina bridges the gap between Bart and Lily.

I wrote Felina to be Lily's foil. The two characters have an entirely antagonistic relationship, but this stems from that fact that they came from the same place. Both were once daughters of the Governor, both have ambitions to rule Port Royal, and both know how it feels to be cast out of their homes and reduced to beggary. In the original draft, Lily met her end at her brother Bart's hand, but this climax wasn't as impactful as I wanted it to be. Bart murdering his unarmed sister was a significant backward step in his arc, as it's the sort of immoral action that would have been natural in the second act, but felt forced in the third act.

In the later rewrites Lily dies at Felina's hand instead. This change paid off the arcs of both characters in a much more satisfying way, as Felina reflects that they're too similar to coexist. She has the same flaw of relentlessly pursuing her ambitions, and for this reason she recognises that Lily has to die, to ensure her own future. In effect Felina must become the enemy to defeat the enemy. Furthermore instead of Lily being undone by Bart's moral decline, she's eventually killed by the exact same unyielding mentality that she prescribed to through the entirety of her narrative.

Throughout the writing process, Lily evolved possibly more than any other major character. At times her development took me by surprise, as her character often resisted the plot I had planned for her. However this development eventually enriched Lily from a disposable villain to a principal character, and in the second act, a hero antagonist.

The Challenge of Proportion

After crafting the principal characters, the greatest challenge that I faced as a writer was striking a proportionate balance between plot and character. (Browne & King: 1993 p. 148.) From my previous writing experience, I knew the importance of concise storytelling, especially when juggling multiple point of view characters and storylines.

When I finished the novel's first draft, I was relatively happy with the story, but I was faced with the problem of its length. At 170,000 words I felt it was unjustifiably long as a first novel. It was filled with dozens of characters and subplots that needed to be streamlined. However my problem was that most of the characters and subplots were all stitched together, and so removing one caused the entire story to unravel.

I used a number of techniques to correct this problem, and the first one was to go back through the novel and cut any chapters or scenes that I did not consider essential in telling the story. This successfully trimmed the word count, but it initiated another problem. I now found that the novel was unbalanced and too fast paced. Most of the introspective character scenes were cut, and this meant that the story simply rushed from set piece to set piece without ever slowing to breathe. This resulted in it reading more like a video game than a compelling novel.

For my next draft I made sure to redress the balance between character and plot. I wrote chapters where different characters interacted and shared ideas with each other, whilst also exploring the fundamentals of who these people are. I channelled the process of a playwright whose characters are limited by the size of their cast. Instead of creating more players, I created more combinations of existing characters to interact with each other.

These rewrites improved the pacing of the story and enriched the characters, however these additional scenes increased the word count. Thus the proportions of the novel were once again imbalanced.

One of the challenges that contributed to the high word count was the amount of expository information that had to be delivered to build the historical setting. This problem was exacerbated in my early writing by the decision to feature only Bart and Lily as the point of view characters. This meant that every piece of information I write has to be delivered through either Bart or Lily's senses. As a result these two characters were being forced into unnatural situations in order to advance the plot. However as I re-read older drafts, I realized that it was an arbitrary decision to limit the novel to two point of view characters. Telling the story for a chapter or two through a supporting character's perspective, not only tightened the story, but it also added extra dimensions to some of the most significant supporting characters such as Jagua or Felina.

This change was a pivotal part of managing the proportions of the story, however there were still problematic elements that needed to be addressed. The novel's length was still troublingly long at 150,000 words, and it was clear that filleting individual scenes wouldn't be enough. The only way to make the story more manageable would be to cut characters and plotlines. However this was an extremely challenging process as I'd grown attached to all the characters, and there were no obvious ones to cut.

I eventually decided that the character of *Safiyeh bint Salih* was too similar to other characters, and her corrupting influence could be easily transferred to someone else. However for the purposes of plot and structure, Safiyeh had to die in the second act to represent Bart's lowest low. This made it difficult to cut her entirely.

However elsewhere in the novel I recognised that both Bart's adoptive mother and his cousin turn against him and leave Port Royal. This is also an important part of Bart's development, but it would work just as well if only the cousin abandoned him. This would allow Bart's adoptive mother to die in the second act and fulfil the role of Safiyeh.

By eliminating Safiyeh, Bart's mother had a much more meaningful impact on the story, and Bart's emotional nadir weighed heavier as it was actual family that he lost. Similarly, it allowed Bart's cousin to develop as a character, as she was no longer the sidekick in a subplot. Instead she drove the subplot.

This character consolidation was also instrumental in allowing me to cut parts of the plot without affecting the overall story. In the original drafts, Bart was hounded by representatives of the British King, and the role of the British Empire was also explored. However this subplot was not cohesive with the rest of the plot, and it did little more than create additional conflict, which the novel certainly does not lack. For this reason I chose to cut it, but I was challenged by a supporting character who was critical to Bart's moral development. However it was only his actions and not his character that mattered, and so by embellishing a recurring character with these actions, I was able to cut 10,000 words.

My final challenge of proportion came with the ending of the novel. I knew from the very genesis of this idea that the novel would end with an apocalyptic earthquake destroying the town. However this bleak ending posed a problematic question. What's the point? Although the tone that I wanted to capture was gritty and historically grounded, an excess of tragedy in the climax would induce only apathy.

For this reason I included two positive chapters before the finale. In these chapters, two of the supporting characters are rewarded for their actions in the story.

Both characters are written sympathetically from the start, and they represent the moral values that I hold true. Thus their happy endings serve to reinforce a positive idea that goodness is possible to achieve, even in a world of moral ambiguity.

The Future

During the process of constructing *A Port for Thieves*, my writing skills adapted and evolved dramatically as I learned new techniques and overcame a variety of technical and story-based challenges.

Historically 1688 marks the very beginning of the period known as the Golden Age of piracy. Throughout the process I was keenly aware that I was writing a prequel for infamous historical figures such as Black Sam Bellamy, Calico Jack, Anne Bonny, and of course Blackbeard. I was adamant from the start that *A Port for Thieves* would be a self-contained narrative that doesn't rely on a series of future books to complete the story. However I was also very aware that the fictionalised historical world that I've created, has immense potential to be explored as I continue to write novels in the future.

While drafting *A Port for Thieves* I was inspired to consider what might happen after the events of the novel. In real life, Captain Henry Avery was the most successful pirate of all time, and his career began only five years after 1688. I thought about what this figure might have been doing before he became the 'archpirate,' and this inspired me to write the character of Harry Ben Zafrany. Throughout my novel Harry is Bart's right hand man, but he despises himself until he meets a character called Old Avery. This character motivates Harry to pursue a worthier life and to make a name for himself. When Old Avery dies at the end of the story, Harry decides to take his name. This sets him up to be the historical Henry Avery, who I have every intention of writing about in the future.

Writing my first novel has been a challenging but hugely rewarding experience. Along every step of the creative process I've learned a variety of techniques for overcoming challenges that arise with characterisation, plot, and

proportions. I intend to carry these lessons forward as I continue to write historical novels, and I'm excited to continually hone my craft in the future.

A Port for Thieves - Synopsis

In 1688, the Jamaican city of Port Royal is the wickedest place on earth. It is governed by the most notorious buccaneer of all time – **Henry Morgan**. The protagonist, **Bart Morgan**, and the antagonist **Lily Morgan**, both exist on a sliding scale of morality. Bart is lured by corruption and Lily flirts with redemption. However neither will abandon their ideals, nor surrender their claim to the city.

The novel begins with an earthquake. **Bart** is a recovering opium addict, who lives an impoverished life as a one-legged vagrant. He despises the cruelty of the *Red Dragons*, Morgan's buccaneering gang, and he keeps secret the fact that he's Morgan's bastard son. Following the earthquake, Bart is tasked with visiting his father's mansion and demanding essential supplies. At the mansion he meets his half-sister **Lily**. Lily is Bart's opposite. She's a wealthy young woman and a proud pirate supporter. She advocates for Port Royal to re-embrace its buccaneering heritage.

Within days of Bart's visit, Henry Morgan dies of alcohol poisoning. At the reading of his will, the successor of the Red Dragons is named. To the horror of all, Bart is chosen over Lily. Bart faces a difficult choice, which he discusses with two fellow vagrants. **Felina Ortega** is a Spaniard of aristocratic descent. She despises the buccaneers for murdering her family and forcing her to ruin. She counsels Bart to govern Port Royal and capsize Morgan's hateful legacy. Bart's friend **Harry Ben Zafrany**, a half-psychotic sailor who relishes his violent reputation, also suggests that Bart should become Governor. The position will advance Bart from beggary to authority. Bart eventually agrees.

Meanwhile Lily is furious that Bart has usurped her birthright. She is betrayed by the Red Dragons for suggesting a coup, and she flees Port Royal with her only friend, the pirate woman **Rowan de Berry**.

However governance immediately goes wrong for Bart. On the night of Morgan's funeral, the Red Dragon fleet is burned down. This obliterates their numbers. The culprits are a radical faction of pirates called the *Sea Wolves*, who were banished by Morgan years ago. Bart is also personally attacked by the *Black Banshees*, a syndicate who once sold him opium. However Harry saves his life, cementing himself as a volatile ally.

Bart is tormented by the dilemma of violence versus mercy. He loathes the idea of becoming his father. However as Port Royal's enemies crawl to the surface, he begins to fear there may be no alternative. Bart makes an alliance with Felina. She wants to honour her murdered family by forging Port Royal into *Libertalia*, an independent city-state in the New World. They both agree to sacrifice whatever's necessary to make Libertalia a reality. Over time they become romantically involved.

Whilst in hiding, Lily hears from Rowan that Port Royal has been attacked by the Sea Wolves. Lily once had a relationship with a Sea Wolf Captain, **Jagua Blackwood**, and she decides to join their ranks to reclaim her city. Upon being reunited with Jagua, Lily rekindles their love.

After Lily shapes an alliance between the Sea Wolves and Black Banshees, they launch an attack on Port Royal. However Bart outsmarts her and the Sea Wolves are repelled. Rowan is shot, and the Black Banshees are utterly defeated.

Bart must now decide what to do with the dregs of the Black Banshees. Harry and Felina both counsel a violent retribution for his old enemies, but Bart fears himself becoming his father. He decides to show mercy, so he allows them a fair trial. However this has disastrous repercussions. Bart is betrayed and severely wounded. The Black Banshees kill his adoptive mother and threaten his brother. Bart destroys those responsible.

For a month Bart is bedbound with injury. He floats in and out of fever dreams and ponders the mercy that caused his anguish. When he wakes, he recognises his mistake and hardens his personality. He vows never to be weak again. Bart and Felina decide to marry, which consolidates their power.

Meanwhile, Lily and the Sea Wolves take residence in an old sugar mill, which was owned by the Morgan family. Lily's relationship with Jagua evolves and she becomes pregnant. Rowan recovers from her gunshot, but she's become disillusioned with Lily's cause. She tries to convince Lily to leave Port Royal and raise her child in peace. Jagua works at building a coalition between the Sea Wolves and the **Maroons**, who were once slaves of Henry Morgan.

The chief of the Sea Wolves, **Roc Braziliano**, orders Jagua to assassinate Bart on his wedding day. A spy guides him into the city. However Jagua is double-crossed and captured by Bart's soldiers, who have renamed themselves the *Black Dragons*. Jagua faces execution, and with his final words he denounces Bart and declares Lily the true Governess of Port Royal.

When Lily learns of her lover's death, all thoughts of peace are expelled. She unites with the Maroons and overthrows Roc, declaring herself chief of the Sea Wolves. However Rowan can no longer follow Lily on her crusade of vengeance. They sorrowfully part ways after Lily decrees she'll never give up.

Jagua's execution has sparked a rebellion in Port Royal. Bart has no choice but to quell it. However when he learns that his own young cousin is among the rebels, he reconsiders his dark path. It's only when a close friend is murdered that Bart sees he's lost his way. Harry, Felina, and Bart all discuss *Libertalia*, and the sacrifices they aren't willing to make.

Lily and her warriors attack Port Royal, but Lily's unwillingness to make peace, even in the face of defeat, alienates the Maroons on her side. They abandon her and Lily is taken prisoner.

Bart promises the Maroons he'll spare Lily's life. However in secret he orders Felina to cut her throat. He reflects that Lily would never surrender. Her death is a final evil to establish lasting peace.

After the battle, Bart promotes Harry to Captaincy. Harry accepts. He's learned that he wants more from life than a violent reputation.

Four years after Henry Morgan's death, Port Royal is flourishing. Bart and Felina have achieved their dream of *Libertalia*. However an apocalyptic earthquake strikes the island. Harry leads the survivors to safety, but Bart stays with Felina who is trapped. He reflects that four years ago his life was hopeless, but in *Libertalia* he's found purpose. He's free of opium and married to a woman he loves. Bart and Felina die in each other's arms and Port Royal is reclaimed by the sea.

Practice Component of the Thesis

Chapter One – Bart I

Port Royal was the stronghold of bold buccaneering. In the righteous places of the world, order conquered chaos, and the wicked were repaid with a noose. In Port Royal the law had capsized. It was made by sinners and enforced by thieves. The skies were blue and the seas were green, but the streets were stained red.

Just like its residents, Port Royal was a nocturnal beast. When day turned to night, it awoke from slumber, and the cycle of debauchery resumed. The narrow streets were brought to life by a mob of drunks. They guzzled their booze on the fringes of the world, and noisily relived the days when their brotherhood had purpose. The whores who walked among them were better paid than surgeons, and the monkeys that scurried like rats were better fed than the poor.

Bart passed through the stink and the noise with his head down. He silently judged the depravity, though every night it was the same. With each step, parrots fluttered and squawked around his wooden crutch. Over the years the filthy birds had developed a taste for the puddles of rum. Now they stumbled about on mangled feet, too drunk even to fly.

Though he judged them, Bart could not blame the degenerates who enjoyed the profit and vice of Port Royal. They were as lost as he was. They were only symptoms of the true evil that festered over the city.

Peaking above the quagmire of dens and whorehouses, Bart saw the arched roof of the Governor's mansion. It was the only splendid building in Port Royal, and it was the source of the city's disease. It stood in the heart of town and dwarfed everything around it. In another time the painted stone may have been beautiful, but

now it was a scrapheap of broken bottles, inebriate vagabonds, and swarms of ants that suckled the puddles of grog.

Bart stumbled towards the mansion. It was a place he had hoped never to return to, for he knew a monster waited inside. By all accounts Captain Morgan was the King in Port Royal. Before being awarded the status of Governor, he had been the cruellest of the Buccaneers. His legend was infamous and the city loved him for it. Bart knew better. There was no man in the world as monstrous as Captain Morgan, but it was to Morgan that Bart was headed. The mansion loomed above him as he approached. He climbed the steps and put his hand on the door. There would be no turning back now. Bart breathed deep, and stepped inside.

Bart's day had begun not with the sun in the sky but with a rumbling beneath the ground. He was ripped out of sleep by a violent shaking. Something had stirred beneath Port Royal. The earthquake was over in moments, and once stillness had resumed, Bart cursed the affliction of being awake.

The time of day was inconsequential. It was already intolerably hot and the dazzling sun burst through the threadbare cloth that Bart owned as a ceiling. His eyes flinched at the light. There was an intense pain beneath the bandage around his wrist. Every inch of his skin dripped cold sweat, and he pined for the return of sleep. Dreaming was the only relief he had from the ache of withdrawal.

Brooding, in the Jamaican heat, did nothing to ease Bart's mind, so he pulled himself up and sat on the folded sacks he used for a bed. He scratched his itching skin. Sandflies had been at his flesh. He threw on yesterday's clothes and splashed stale water over his face. It refreshed him for barely a moment.

He reached for his long underarm crutch, and used it to find balance as he stood. His crooked spine cracked as he stretched it out, and he exercised his left arm to relieve the aching knots of yesterday. He tied a cloth around the handle to protect his blistered palm, and began another unpleasant day in his impaired body.

Stepping out of his makeshift tent, Bart found desolation all around, although the earthquake's damage was scarcely discernible from the everyday chaos of the region.

The Hook was an oddly shaped peninsula that grew as a tumour on Port Royal's southwest side. It was a shantytown where the city's undesirables dwelt in solitude from the buccaneers. Long abandoned warehouses crumbled in the muddy sand and all manner of flotsam, jetsam and derelict littered the shore. Mobs of gulls pecked at the remains of faceless creatures while the sea slowly reclaimed the ruins of a more prosperous time.

The entire district was a shantytown of hovels, tents, and scuttled ships, yet it was as lively as anywhere else in Port Royal. Urchin youngsters scrambled through the washed up remains of scuttled ships, and played games in the collapsing fort. Waifs chased rats through crooked shacks while the bigger children scavenged whatever trinkets the sea had belched out. It was a jungle in miniature, a self-contained ecosystem that lay beyond the reach of Captain Morgan and his buccaneering ilk.

Bart had barely walked five paces before he found himself surrounded by a pack of a dozen noisy tykes. They seemed to appear from nowhere like crabs scuttling from their burrow. They were a filthy band but beneath the grime and the crude war paint, they were little more than children.

“You’re awake,” said the leader of the pack. She was no longer a girl, but not quite yet a woman. She was fifteen, though she was skinny and nimble like the younger tykes. “You got anything for me?”

Bart smiled at his adoptive younger sister. Her name was Loushinka. She was a savvy child who knew the Hook better than most men knew their own minds. She shared Bart’s mulatto skin and thick black hair, which grew wild beneath a scuffed Admiral’s hat. She was wore a cabin lad’s jacket and cut off trousers. However her feet were bare and black.

“Aye, I got something,” Bart replied. He reached into his trousers and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He handed it to Loushinka. She turned it over before unfolding it.

Loushinka’s brown eyes widened when they fell upon the golden disk inside.

“It’s a thing of beauty,” she said. “How’d you?”

“A Dutchman had a bag of them,” Bart said. “I thought he wouldn’t miss just one.”

Loushinka grinned. For a moment she stared at the gold disk in her palm, then she stuffed it into her mouth and began chewing. She didn’t stop until she’d swallowed every morsel of the toffee.

The rest of the pack stared enviously at Loushinka, but around here she was the boss. She licked her lips and smiled at Bart.

“My mother wants you,” she said when she’d finished. “She has a job.”

Bart frowned.

“What job?”

“I didn’t ask,” Loushinka replied. “But she told me to find you.”

Bart nodded and Loushinka's pack let him pass. They scampered over uneven ground and disappeared amid the sandy wasteland.

"Stay safe," Bart shouted after them, but Loushinka was too shrewd to follow his advice.

The earthquake had dropped a thin veil of devastation over an already demolished land. Countless shards of debris were strewn along the ground and Bart was careful to ensure that his crutch did not become stuck among them. The southern tip of the Hook was sliding into the water, yet life in the slum seemed oblivious.

Loushinka's mother was well renowned in the outskirts of the city. Some called her a witch, but to Bart she was family. Her hovel glowed orange in the distance, but it would be a hard walk. Already he felt rotten, and his crutch would find little purchase besides cracked stone and shifting sand. However if Nanny Rook had asked for him, Bart was powerless to deny her.

Dehydration pounded his skull with every step, but he kept on going. His thoughts were barely coherent, and the mirages all around only further muddled his brain.

From the corner of his eye, Bart saw something scurry passed. He turned and squinted at the shape. A strange looking creature blinked at him. At first Bart wasn't sure if it was real, but the impish vision persisted. After a perplexed moment he realised what he was seeing. The creature was a child. However she was unlike any other child in the Hook. Her limbs were stunted and her balding head was swollen and deformed. She was haggard and thin, and she wore only soiled rags around her waist.

Bart looked deep into the child's glazed and colourless eyes.

Then it struck.

The child opened her mouth and an opaque cloud of smoke gushed from her lips. The sweet floral smell crept up Bart's nostrils and his mind turned feverish. An unquenchable thirst stirred inside. The smoke had once enslaved him, and he craved to be enslaved again. Spiders crawled over his skin. Maggots squirmed beneath it. His stomach writhed inside.

"The sea will turn to glass," the child said in an old woman's voice. "And the earth shall grow hungry."

The words were a screech in Bart's ears. The sounds of children's distant play gave way to a relentless ringing noise.

Bart swayed and lost his balance. He teetered on his right leg and then stumbled onto the leg that wasn't there. His stump smacked the ground and a dull pain shot through his body. Bart collapsed. The earth knocked the wind from his lungs.

Still he could smell the smoke.

The dazzling sun began to fade. White turned into black.

When Bart's senses eventually returned, the first thing he felt was the pain in his stump. His mouth was full of sand and he was laid face down where he'd fallen. Slowly his vision mended. First he could see shadows, then he saw colours, and finally shapes weaved in and out of the light.

No one seemed perturbed by the one-legged man who lay sprawled with his face in the mud. Loushinka and her pack had moved on and such sights were common in the Hook. Bart groaned and sat himself up. He clenched his fist around the crutch.

The smoke is poison, he repeated in his mind.

When his vision was completely restored, Bart looked up and squinted at the bizarre child who gazed down at him.

“From beneath you comes calamity,” the little girl said.

Bart’s mind was full of fog but he knew the child and he knew the words being spoken.

The black-toothed girl was known only as Lost Howler. Her origins were a mystery to all, though the story as Nanny Rook told it was that she’d one-day found a baby on the shore, swaddled in a leaf, with no name and no beginning. The impossible child had dark eyes and skin from the depths of the Amazon, but none could say how she’d washed up in Jamaica, and no one had stopped for long enough to ask why. She regaled the Hook like a grotesque harlequin, and her japes were repaid with coins for mother’s milk.

“Calamity,” Lost Howler rasped. “I felt calamity from below.”

Bart tried suppressing the sickness in his stomach.

“It’s no calamity,” he said. “Just another earthquake.”

Lost Howler stroked her brittle hair. She twisted her stunted body and cackled at the sky. In her hand was a broken bottle top that she’d fashioned into a pipe. The black tar was still smoking inside. She placed the bit between her lips, kissed the smoke, and summoned it inside her. The smoke vanished and reappeared as a white wisp slowly seeping from a crack between her lips. She hugged herself and let out a sound that was both a whimper and a laugh.

Once again Bart’s nostrils filled with the treacly scent of his old medicine. He would not let it consume his mind. This time he knew it was coming. He closed his eyes and filled his head with safer thoughts.

Loushinka, Nanny Rook, Jojo.

For a moment, Lost Howler was still.

“The stars smiled when you drank mother’s milk,” she said. “It made us grow up strong.”

Bart looked up at the witless child. He’d never known her in any other state, yet the wretched imitation of life still made him sad. Port Royal had stolen her soul and left nothing but a husk. He almost wished he could be as hard-hearted and bitter as the buccaneers, but he discarded the thought. He was glad to be nothing like them.

He climbed up off the ground and used his crutch to find balance. He reached into his trousers and pulled out a single coin.

“For your mother’s milk.” Bart said. “But you stay away from those Black Banshees, you hear me? No good will come of them.”

Lost Howler twitched and plucked the coin from Bart’s hand.

“No good. No good at all.”

Bart looked at the sun. He’d lingered too long and Nanny Rook was waiting.

He turned and left Lost Howler behind him, but as her doom mongering faded, he pondered if he’d been wise to donate his last coin. Doubtless it would be spent on opium, which would only further mangle the poor child’s brain. However whether he gave her the coin or not, she would still surely acquire her medicine. Bart wondered what it would take to make Port Royal a better home for impoverished souls like Lost Howler.

It was a gruelling walk to Nanny Rook’s hovel, and by the time Bart arrived his dark skin shimmered with sweat. Bart’s adoptive mother lived inside the fractured hull of a long-wrecked ship, which had been abandoned on the shore. It was a strange sight, beached on the sand and disappearing into rot. The makeshift door was little

more than a gaping hole that was closed by a colourful drape. Bart was drawn inside by a scent of rich broth and pungent herbs. The smell was comforting.

Nanny Rook had her back to Bart when he stepped inside. It was pleasantly dark, and the nest glowed orange in the light of two-dozen mismatched candles. Wax dripped like stalactites down the walls. Obeah talismans hung from every surface, and in the centre of the nest was an open fire, which warmed a bubbling cauldron of stew.

“Barty.” Nanny Rook still had her back to Bart. “I knew you’d come. You felt the earth shudder?”

Bart nodded.

“Loushinka told me you have a job.”

Nanny Rook turned around. She gave Bart a sly smile.

She was a dark skinned woman with only a few silver threads in her long black hair. Her locks were braided and adorned with colourful feathers, wooden ringlets and cowrie shells that clinked and jingled together as she tossed her head. Her accent was uncommon in Port Royal, and as she said herself, it belonged far away.

“Sit yourself down,” she said, and gestured at the cauldron of stew. “I do have a job but first I want to see your wrist.”

Bart clenched his jaw. He tugged his sleeve over his wrist.

“It’s fine,” he said, but Nanny Rook was not deterred.

“Show me,” she said.

Bart could have argued more but it would do no good against Nanny Rook’s persistence. He held out his left arm and Nanny Rook snatched his hand.

With bony fingers she untied the fraying bandage that bound Bart’s wrist. Underneath, a raised crimson scar ran across his veins. He shuddered when Nanny Rook touched it.

“Are you healin’?” she asked.

Bart pulled back his arm and rewrapped the bandage.

“You can see I am,” he said.

Nanny Rook shook her head.

“I’m not talking about your skin’s healin’.” She knelt beside Bart. Her expression was one of compassion. “A month ago you tried killin’ yourself. How can I know it won’t happen again?”

Bart smiled. He squeezed Nanny Rook’s hand.

“I’m on the mend,” he said. “Tomorrow will be a month to the day since I last touched opium.”

Nanny Rook kissed his knuckles.

“And does it tempt you?”

Bart exhaled. It tempted him every minute of every day. He thought about the Lost Howler and the sweet floral smell of her smoke. It crossed his mind that he might never be free of his medicine. Nevertheless he’d made a promise and he meant to keep it.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “I’ll never touch it again.”

Nanny Rook’s dark eyes twinkled when she smiled.

“Then that is good.”

She stood and gazed up at the charms and magical items that hung from the ceiling.

“There’s a ritual I know to ease your achin’ soul,” she said. “But if I begin, the spell must be finished. Terrible luck will befall otherwise.”

Bart understood. It was not his first ritual.

Nanny Rook reached into the rafters and pulled down a small glass vial filled with a dusky red liquid.

“Where are you hurtin’ most?”

Bart thought about the question. Every part of his body hurt in a different way.

“My leg,” he said. “My stump.”

Nanny Rook knelt beside Bart and pulled up the sleeve of his trousers. Her palm hovered over his naked stump. Then with her sharpened black nails she scratched the skin. Three beads of blood oozed to the surface.

“It’s not your leg that’s sufferin’,” she said. “Twelve years you carried that wound. Today’s pain lies in your heart, and in your busy head.”

Nanny Rook flicked Bart’s temple.

She yanked the stopper out her vial, and poured seven drops onto her hand. She tenderly rubbed the red liquid over Bart’s forehead and began singing in her native tongue, of which Bart knew little. His mind became peaceful, and it seemed that the fog of withdrawal was evaporating with Nanny Rook’s song. With the excess liquid, she drew a circle over Bart’s throat, and then withdrew, and wiped her red hands on her shawl.

“Is it done?” Bart asked while a bead of crimson dripped down his sternum.

Nanny Rook narrowed her eyes and shook her head.

“Only half, but the ritual aint free,” she said. “Now is a good time to talk about that job I need you for.”

Bart stared at Nanny Rook. She was smiling like a guilty child.

“You could have just asked,” he said.

Nanny Rook shook her head.

“Perhaps, but you won’t like this.”

Bart shrugged.

“Ask.”

Nanny Rook stood up. She hesitated before speaking.

“I need you to talk to Captain Morgan,” she said. “I need you to ask his help.”

Bart almost choked on his response. That name hadn’t passed Nanny Rook’s lips in years.

“No,” he looked away. “Don’t ask me to do that.”

“No?” Nanny Rook said. “But the ritual’s begun. The spirits will curse you if it’s not finished.”

“Then finish it.”

“I will.” Nanny Rook took a step back. “Once you promised to do as I ask.”

Bart eventually looked up. Nanny Rook’s gaze was unflinching.

“Captain Morgan’s a bastard.” His mind was no longer peaceful.

“So are you.”

“He’s a monster. You of all people know this.”

“I do know this,” Nanny Rook said. “I also know that I cannot eat dirt. I had food and drink for my little fledglings in the warehouse, but today’s quake has gone and flooded it. Children have to eat, and Captain Morgan has food.”

“We’re better than Captain Morgan,” Bart said without hesitation.

“So much better,” Nanny Rook agreed. “We’re also starving.”

Bart leaned back and sighed. She was right but he couldn’t entertain this notion.

“There are other people, other ways.”

“This is the way,” Nanny Rook said suddenly becoming firm. “If the world were right I’d be in Igbo land. I’d watch children play in the river and dry off in the

sun, but I don't. I'm an ocean away and I see children starvin'. Is your hatred of Captain Morgan so unyieldin' that they must suffer?"

Bart swallowed.

"You know what he's done. To me personally."

"I do know." Nanny Rook's tone turned tender. "And I understand your hate. You're right, he's a monster. But is your hatred of Captain Morgan so unyieldin' that Loushinka must suffer?"

Bart felt himself shaking. The red fluid on his throat was beginning to dry.

"No."

Nanny Rook smiled. She stepped forward and knelt back down.

"If you're the one speakin'," she said. "Morgan will listen."

Bart looked into Nanny Rook's old eyes. Loushinka's eyes looked back.

"All right," he said. "Give me a day. I'll get it done."

Bart spent his day following the sea around Port Royal. The city was built on a beach, and water surrounded every side. Only in the northeast was it connected to the Jamaican mainland by an eight-mile strip of sand called the Palisadoes.

Bart wandered passed the crooked spire of St Paul's church. It was flanked on both sides by painted taverns and brothels, though the church itself was as empty as the gallows. Port Royal was nothing if not a colourful city, although the gaudy buildings were now flecked and faded. The morning's quake had cleft the ground and split foundations of stone, but there was not a soul in the town who tended to the bill.

Every road led to the same place but Bart walked in circles. He basked in every drop of the sun's light, though he was powerless to stop it sinking. When the first stars peeked out of the twilight, he knew his time was up.

Bart leaned on his crutch and swung his missing leg towards Captain Morgan's mansion. Nanny Rook's ritual filled him with vigour. He passed the obnoxiously grand Dragon's Den, and looked away from the cutthroats who considered this tavern their temple of iniquity.

When he arrived at the mansion, a handful of thugs were standing guard outside. Each one bore the mark of the Red Dragon on his skin. However when they recognised Bart's face they lowered their weapons. He had nothing to fear from Morgan's cronies.

Bart could see a warm glow beneath the dark painted door. He took a deep breath and pushed it open. Then, for the first time in twelve years, he stepped inside his father's mansion.

Chapter Two - Bart II

Inside, the foyer was magnificent. White marble sparkled as if it had been polished every day since it was cut. The dark mahogany was varnished to such a shine that Bart could see his reflection in the staircase bannister. It wasn't how he remembered. He'd been fifteen the last time he was here.

However the paintings hadn't changed. From floor to ceiling hung portraits of Captain Morgan, king of the buccaneers. The man looked incredible. In a long scarlet coat and a white plumed hat, he brandished a pistol in one hand, and his Persian scimitar in the other. His long hair billowed like a black flag in the wind. Behind Morgan, Panama burned and miniature buccaneers pillaged the carcass of the Spanish city. It was an idealised scene. The patriotic buccaneers subdued the enemy in the shade of the English banner. Bart had been in Panama. This wasn't how he remembered it.

For a moment he stood alone in the foyer, but before long he heard the approaching click of expensive shoes on marble. He looked to the staircase.

On the very top step stood a tall but willowy man in his mid-forties. He had receding grey hair, narrow eyeglasses, and close-shaven cheeks. He was smartly dressed, though his slate shirt and gilded waistcoat could not disguise the deep white scar that ran along his gullet. Bart recognised the former surgeon in an instant.

"The Governor won't be meeting anyone tonight," Lawrence Prince whispered with a dismissive wave.

Mister Prince's whisper was due to his scar, which was the relic of a slit throat he'd suffered years ago. The assailants had failed to claim his life, but the wound had stolen his voice.

"He will meet with me," Bart said.

For a second Prince was silent. His grey eyes cut like a scalpel. They fell on Bart's stump, and then suddenly widened.

"My God," he whispered.

Bart remained silent.

"Your father...your father's upstairs," Prince said.

"Take me to him."

Bart followed Prince up the flying staircase and along a familiar corridor to Captain Morgan's cabinet room. Prince knocked on the door and stepped inside, though he instructed Bart to wait in the hall.

Bart leaned against the wall and shuddered. On the other side of the door sat Captain Morgan. Bart thought of all the places he'd rather be. He closed his eyes and breathed.

When he opened them, he looked around at the place he'd once called home. He peered down the corridor and saw light through an open door. It was a young woman's room.

Bart frowned. It must be Lily's room. The last time he'd seen his half-sister she'd been a child. He removed Lily Morgan from his mind. He'd not come to reminisce on family.

The door of the cabinet room creaked open. Mister Prince's head stuck out.

"Captain Morgan will see you now," he whispered.

The moment Bart's hand touched the door, his resolve threatened to desert him. He thought of Nanny Rook and the job that needed doing. He'd made her a promise, and so, he stepped inside his father's cabinet.

The room was dim and the furnishings sparse. It was neither small nor particularly large, though a great desk stood in front of the draped bay window. Two

tall candelabras lit the gloom, and a beautiful Moroccan carpet embellished the floor. In front of the desk stood Captain Henry Morgan himself. However the Governor was a pale imitation of the swashbuckling rogue from the paintings.

Bart stared at his father in disbelief. The King of the Coast had grown fat and sallow in his reclusion. His once thick hair was now thin and greyed. His strong physique had given way to fat, and the white's of his eyes had turned yellow and sickly. His skin was swollen and age spots blemished his once handsome face.

Behind Bart, Mister Prince closed the door, though he remained inside the cabinet, blocking Bart's escape.

For a moment longer Bart stared at his father.

"Bartholomew?" Captain Morgan eventually said in a heavy Welsh accent.

"Captain."

Morgan's sickly yellow eyes crawled over every inch of Bart. With one hand he held a bottle of rum, and with the other he plucked a fine crab leg off a silver dish beside him. Before popping it in his mouth, he pointed the exquisite seafood at Bart. The bewitching smell teased his nostrils.

"Governor, I've come to request--"

Bart began reciting the script he'd memorised, but Morgan interrupted.

"Twelve years." Morgan stared at Bart as if he were an apparition. "Twelve years since I've looked upon my son."

The word made Bart nauseous. Morgan staggered forward and prowled around him in a circle.

"You look bloody awful," Morgan said.

Bart said nothing at the hypocrisy, though he eyeballed his father's unappealing evolution.

When Morgan drew close, Bart could smell the rum on his evil breath.

There was no sense in playing Morgan's game. Bart decided to say what he'd come for and get out.

"All I want," he said, "are barrels of food and drink to be sent from your stores to the Hook."

Morgan took a swig of rum and began to wheeze. Soon the sound turned into a cackle.

"So that's why you've come limping back," he said. "You want something from me."

Morgan's cackle turned into a bellyful laugh.

"Did I not predict this?" He pointed a fat finger at Bart. "Last thing I said to you was you'd be back. Just as soon as you need my favour."

"I've not forgotten," Bart replied.

Morgan strutted back to his desk and cracked open another crab leg with his bare hands.

"If you want something from the Red Dragons," he said. "You have to earn it."

Bart glanced over his shoulder. Prince blocked the door. He was as silent and impassive as stone.

Morgan sucked the crabmeat from the leg, and tossed the leftovers back onto the plate. He reached behind his desk and opened a draw. He pulled out an immense purse that was brimming with coins. He picked one up and fingered the golden edge.

"If you want my money," he said. "It won't be free."

Morgan tossed the coin at Bart. He caught it but tossed it back without hesitation.

Morgan scowled. He lifted his rum bottle and hurled it passed Bart's head. It shattered on the painted wall.

"Then you get none of it!"

Bart shielded his face from the spray of glass. He'd been a fool to imagine his father could be reasoned with.

"I didn't come for blood money," he said. "I came for food and drink. Delivered to the orphans of the Hook, to replace what was lost in the earthquake. It's your duty as Governor."

Morgan's bitter face contorted back into a grin.

"You want to talk about duty?" he said. "What about a son's duty to his father?"

Bart's jaw dropped.

"What duty? What more could you possibly want to take form me?"

Morgan perched on the desk. Behind him hung his old Persian scimitar. It was rusted and blunt.

"I took nothing," he said. "I would've made you strong."

Bart had no interest on discussing his past, but Mister Prince did not budge and Captain Morgan did not yield.

"You would have been a fine buccaneer," Morgan continued. "You should have earned your mark as a Red Dragon. It's what you wanted."

Bart looked away. Anger was coursing through his blood.

"It is what I wanted," he said. "No one believed in you more than I did. I was ready to make you proud, and then I actually saw your world."

Captain Morgan smiled.

"Afraid of a few dead Spaniards?"

Fury overcame Bart.

“Do not dismiss the evil that you did, I was there!”

“It was a raid what did you expect?” Captain Morgan reached for another crab leg. “Did you think we’d ask for their gold and they’d give it freely?”

Bart shook his head. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d spoken about Panama but he remembered what he’d seen there. Occasionally he still saw it in his dreams.

“I didn’t think I’d see babes dashed against rocks. Or children tortured for gold that didn’t exist.”

“They were liars. My men were promised treasure and they hid it from us. What I did was essential.”

“They were innocent. What you did was cruel!”

“The world is cruel, we simply exist in it.” Captain Morgan cracked open some cartilage. “I know you boy. It’s not the wailing of women that turned you from me.”

Bart blinked.

“What are you talking about?”

“How’s your leg?”

Bart did nothing. He felt the blood surging to his fists but he kept them still.

“I’m not the one who made you a cripple,” Captain Morgan continued. “One of your beloved innocents pulled the trigger no?”

Bart closed his eyes. Just the memory sent pain to his stump.

“She was a child.”

“Then it should have been easy.” Morgan rubbed his greasy fingers. “If you’d killed her like I said you’d still be whole.”

Captain Morgan was right and Bart hated him even more for it.

“There’s not even a single hint of virtue in you.”

“No virtue?” Morgan said, feigning insult. “I could’ve cast you out that day but I didn’t. Why? Because you’re my son.”

Bart felt sick.

“I’m not your son,” he said. “I’m your drunk ejaculation.”

For a moment Captain Morgan was silent. He seemed deep in thought.

“No you are my son,” he eventually said. “You would have been a great son. I always saw something in you. A piece of myself perhaps. You’re intelligent. And you’ve a talent for our way of life.”

Bart stared at the floor. He didn’t know what he’d expected from his father but it wasn’t this. Captain Morgan seemed to know exactly what words were the cruellest.

“We’re finished,” Bart said. He’d find food for Nanny Rook elsewhere, though he wasn’t sure how.

He turned around and headed towards the door. However Mister Prince did not move.

“Wait,” Morgan said when Bart’s back was turned. “Why don’t we make a deal? Is that not why you came?”

Bart didn’t take his eyes off the door.

“I’ll send the Hook food and drink in abundance,” Morgan promised. “But you must repay the favour.”

Bart needed only one word to respond.

“No.”

Prince still didn’t budge.

“No? It’s a good deal,” Morgan said. “I’ll give everything you want. I’ll even throw in silverware for your runts to eat off.”

Bart felt Morgan’s fingers take hold of his shoulder.

“All you have to do is shake my hand and ask my favour.”

Bart spun around. He smacked away his father’s hand.

“I will never be yours,” he said. “And fuck your Red Dragons.”

Morgan’s face twitched. Then with a sudden wrath, he pushed Bart backwards onto his missing leg.

Bart stumbled and fell, but before his face hit the carpet, Morgan’s fist closed around his collar. He held Bart inches off the ground.

“Make the deal.”

Bart spat on the carpet.

Morgan scowled. He held out his free hand and Mister Prince placed something in it. Bart’s eyes widened. His father was holding a pistol.

“Make the deal.”

Bart stared down the muzzle of the gun. If he were to die, he would do so defying Captain Morgan. He remained silent.

Morgan held his pistol parallel to Bart’s throat and fired at the ground.

Fire erupted from the muzzle, and hot powder burned Bart’s neck. The immense crack of the shot scoured his ears and all he could hear was a high-pitched ring. Morgan released his grip, and Bart hit the floor. A charred hole smoked in the carpet where the shot had struck.

Bart did not lie still for a second. He grabbed his crutch and smacked the shaft into his father’s gut. He crawled to the wall and used it to stand.

Both Morgan and Prince rushed forward, but Bart's crutch kept them from laying hands on him.

At that moment there came a frantic banging on the door. A second later it was flung open.

A young woman stood in the threshold. Her face betrayed alarm.

"I heard a gunshot," she exclaimed. "Father are you alright?"

Bart's eyes narrowed. He regained his balance and lowered his crutch.

His half-sister had grown almost beyond recognition in twelve years. She was an elegant woman, with porcelain skin and not a single inky black hair out of place. She wore an immaculate ruby dress that was wreathed in smoke. In her hand she held a glowing hot cigarillo.

"Get out!" Morgan shouted to his daughter, though he barely looked at her.

"Lily?" Bart said before she could disappear.

Lily stopped and blew a stream of Cavendish tobacco in Bart's face. The smell of black cherries and vanilla was soothing.

"That's Miss Morgan to you."

She spoke in a Welsh accent that was identical to her father's. Although she'd never in her life left Jamaica. Every drop of Lily's blood had flowed straight down from Captain Morgan, but unlike their father, her beauty seemed to have blossomed by the day.

Bart couldn't help smiling at what the child had matured into.

"You're all grown up," he said.

Lily scowled at Bart like he was dirt on her shoe. Then her icy blue eyes fell on his stump.

"Fuck." Her eyes remained fixed on the stump. "Bartholomew?"

Bart nodded.

“Fuck is right,” he said.

Lily seemed unable to comprehend what she was seeing. She turned to her father abruptly.

“Forgive my interrupting,” she said. “I didn’t know...”

“You’re not,” Bart said before Morgan could reply. “I was leaving.”

Taking full advantage of the distraction, Bart moved towards the open door.

He reached for the handle.

“You walk out that door,” Captain Morgan said. “And perhaps I’ll give you what you want.” He took a step closer. “But it won’t be free.”

Bart clutched the handle and stared with disgust at his father. He wanted to slam the door but he didn’t. He simply left it open and walked away.

He hurried along the corridor and down the staircase as swiftly as his crutch allowed. He could hear Morgan’s voice but he didn’t stop until he was outside and beneath the stars.

The cool night air turned Bart’s thoughts to Nanny Rook. He hoped he’d done right. He hoped the result would be worth it. The Morgans had left a sour taste in his mouth, and a good swallow of whiskey was what he needed to wash them away.

Chapter Three – Bart III

Bart faced another restless night of uneasy dreams. Captain Morgan invaded his thoughts, and for hours his mind spun in the liminal space between waking and sleep. It was only when dawn began to conquer the night that Bart finally found rest. However before long the sun was beaming on his eyelids, and sleep slithered away once again.

He sat up and rubbed dust from his eyes. His brain felt prickly and singed from withdrawal, but there was one small flutter of optimism to pull him out of bed. Today was the thirtieth day since he'd last touched opium. A month of purgatory hardly felt like victory, but thirty days ago sobriety had seemed inconceivable.

Bart felt a rare sense of triumph as he dressed himself. For the first time in years he allowed himself to think past tomorrow. He wondered if life would be easier in another month.

However as he considered his future, he realised that Captain Morgan still loomed over it. Bart's positivity was doused with thoughts of this favour that his father had promised to call in.

Bart dreaded the idea of Red Dragons coming to the Hook. The residents of the wasteland hated buccaneers as much as he did, and no one despised the Dragons more than the Spanish. They were the Hook's mob justice. Every day Bart feared the secret of his lineage being discovered. It was a secret that could kill him.

Today, Bart decided it was best to be away from the Hook. He tucked his crutch under his armpit, and stepped outside. The torrid heat of the day had yet to descend on Port Royal but it was airless and clammy nonetheless.

Bart walked towards the city and thoughts of Captain Morgan prowled through his head. Only the Reverend could unravel his muddled mind.

The steeple of St Paul's church loomed high over Port Royal. It was a crooked building that crumbled piece by piece with each passing year. There had been a time when the church was the heart of the city, but now it was only a relic left over from Spanish rule.

In the buccaneer's city, St Paul's was a neutral place. However it stood in the west, and the west belonged to the Black Banshees. They were the only rivals that the Dragons had, and while the buccaneers stooped further into feeble debauchery, the Banshee syndicates grew more and more ravenous. On every street stood another of their opium dens. Each one sang to Bart like a siren. Their only purpose was to seduce folk into the dark and ensnare them.

Bart did not linger.

In the hours before noon, Port Royal was at its quietest. The streets that had been filled with depravity the evening before were now as quiet as a graveyard. Bart could smell the evidence of last night's gluttony. An acrid cocktail of piss stained gutters and stale vomit wafted through the warm air. Bart walked passed broken bottles, puddles of rum, and suspicious drops of red on the filthy ground.

He glanced over his shoulder. The church was only yards away, but he felt uneasy. Someone was following him. He shot another look back, and his suspicion was confirmed.

The predator wore a black coat, and on his hip he carried a silver cutthroat razor. Bart recognised his tattoo in an instant. He'd never learned the man's name, but to all his customers, he was known as the Gentleman.

Bart quickened his pace. He hurried to the church as swiftly as his crutch allowed. Without pause he pushed open the great mahogany doors and closed them behind him.

St Paul's was deathly quiet. There wasn't a soul in the nave, and Bart could hear his heartbeat thumping like a drum. He basked in the silence and relaxed his sore shoulders.

However within seconds, the silence was shattered. The heavy doors creaked open, and in the threshold stood the Gentleman.

He was an Irishman with pale eyes and wormy lips. His dirty hair was thin but slicked back to expose the banshee tattoo on his neck. Her skeletal face wailed out from his throat, and her emaciated body stretched across his collarbone and under his shirt.

Bart took a step back though he had nowhere to run. He stared at the face of a man he'd hoped never to see again.

"You can't touch me here," Bart said. He clenched his spare fist.

The Gentleman stroked the pews as he strolled passed them. He smiled at Bart and tutted.

"That's no kind way to greet a friend." His sharp Irish accent grated Bart's eardrums. "I've not seen you in a month. I'm simply concerned for your wellbeing."

Bart wished he'd brought a weapon with him.

"If you're concerned for my wellbeing," he said. "You'll walk away and we'll never meet again."

The Gentleman let out a peculiar laugh and shook his head.

"Now shhhhh, you don't mean that," his voice was soft as a spider's web. "You've simply stopped taking your medicine. A few sweet dreams and everything will be better."

The Gentleman's blotchy hand reached into his coat pocket. He pulled out a rag of cloth and unfolded it. Inside was a lump of black tar.

Bart stared. He felt a thirst stirring inside him. Every hardship in his life could be solved in an instant. He reached for it, but stopped. Thirty days he'd suffered withdrawal. If he indulged now they would be for nothing.

"Walk away," he warned.

The Gentleman didn't move.

"You know the boss can't abide me losing customers," he said. "Go on just a little bit."

Beads of cold sweat dripped down Bart's back.

"Walk away."

The Gentleman's smile turned to frustration.

"Listen boy, the Banshee owns you." He put a hand on Bart's shoulder "You will buy or-"

The Gentleman's touch was unbearable. Instinct overcame reason, and before he knew what he was doing, Bart punched the Gentleman in the nose.

He recoiled and swore. He reached for the silver razor on his belt, but he never drew it.

A sudden crack boomed through the nave. Both Bart and the Gentleman immediately looked in the direction of the noise.

In a pool of shadow, beside the chancel, stood Reverend Edward Collier. He wore a buccaneer's jacket, a clerical cravat, and in his hand he held a long ironwood quarterstaff. He struck his staff against the ground and another crack resonated through the church.

"If your hand touches metal," Reverend Collier said to the Gentleman. "I'll shatter every bone in it."

He stepped out of the darkness.

“No need,” the Gentleman said, pinching his bloody nose. His fury disappeared like smoke in the wind. “I’m simply here for prayer. Surely that’s no problem?”

Collier didn’t reply. He strode to Bart’s side and pressed the tip of his quarterstaff against the Gentleman’s temple. One smack and his brains would streak the floor.

Collier’s single eye glared at the Banshee tattoo.

“That mark is not welcome in my church,” he said without lowering his staff.

The Gentleman looked Bart up and down before turning back to Reverend Collier. He nodded.

“Alright,” he said. “Bart you’ll know where to find me.”

“Get out,” Collier snapped.

The Gentleman didn’t need telling again. He tipped his forehead in a mocking gesture, and turned for the door.

“And when you see your boss,” Collier shouted just before the Gentleman disappeared. “Tell him that the Reverend sends his regards.”

When the church door closed, Bart was able to relax once more. He looked at the Reverend.

Edward Collier looked about as unlikely to be a reverend as Bart looked to be a soldier. He was a hard man who seemed to have lived every day with a death wish. His left eye socket was scarred and empty, and his weathered skin was streaked with old wounds. Some who knew him called him the Bladeless. Others remembered the old days when he was Morgan’s red right hand.

“You can’t go a single day without stumbling into trouble,” he said

Bart wiped a speck of the Gentleman’s blood from his knuckles.

“You have no idea.”

Collier turned his back on Bart and walked towards the communion table. He plucked a spill from a vase and used it to light three candles on a candelabrum.

“You did well to resist the opium,” he said almost begrudgingly.

Bart frowned.

“You were watching the whole time?”

Collier smirked and propped his staff against the table.

“I wanted to see what you’d do,” he said. “I didn’t expect you to punch him. It was amusing, but probably unwise.”

Bart shrugged. He had bigger problems than the Gentleman.

“You should be wary,” Collier continued. “The Black Banshees hold real power here. That God-awful tattoo still means something.”

“It has no power *here* apparently,” Bart said with a hesitant smile. “Maybe I should just live with you.”

Collier looked grim for a moment, but a smile soon spread across his flinty face.

“It’s my job to dote on God, not his cripples.”

Bart walked over to Collier.

“Doesn’t the Bible suggest you’re meant to do both?” he asked

“You ever read the Bible?”

Bart shook his head.

“No man who is lame or disfigured may come before the Lord,” Collier declaimed. “That’s the word of God right there.”

“Well I suppose I should take my disfigured body elsewhere then,” Bart said.

“I suppose you should.” Collier cupped his hands into the baptismal font and used the holy water to wash his face. “Although scripture also states there shall be no peace for the wicked, so perhaps you are my penance.”

Bart rolled his eyes.

“You deserve far worse than me.”

Collier wiped his hands on his buccaneer’s coat.

“What do you want?” he asked. “You never arrive early unless you want something.”

Bart looked at the floor and contemplated Captain Morgan.

“I need your advice,” he said. “Speaking of the wicked, I went to see my father yesterday.”

Collier turned around. He suddenly seemed interested.

“Why on earth would you go to a man like that?”

Bart explained his reasons.

“And what did the good captain say?” Collier asked.

Bart fidgeted with his crutch.

“He said I have some duty to repay.”

“What in Christ’s name does that mean?”

Bart blinked at the Reverend.

“Is there some other verse of scripture in your head that condones blasphemy?” Bart asked.

“The Lord and I have an understanding on that,” Collier replied. “Whatever Morgan wants, refuse him. Neither of us need reminding how awful the old days were.”

Bart remembered Collier delighting in violence back in the day. He said nothing.

“If it’s advice you want I’ll say this,” Collier said. “There’s no good in your father or his Dragons. You must follow your own destiny.”

Bart sighed. He was tired and the Reverend’s words made little sense.

“What destiny?”

“This.” Collier gestured all around. “You must defy your father like Jojo does. Be a man of peace, you’re already on the right path.”

Bart understood but he shook his head.

“This is my destiny?” he said. “I’m supposed to endure dissatisfaction every day until I die? What’s the point? Where’s the fulfilment?”

Collier picked up his quarterstaff and leaned on it.

“You want to choose a different destiny?” he asked. “You slit a wrist last time you tried that.”

Bart dug his thumbnail into his crutch. He’d survived his own suicide. If he was alive for a purpose, it wasn’t this.

“I’m tired of being worthless,” he said. “I’m tired of waiting for something to begin. There’s a disquiet inside me Reverend, but if I died today nothing would be different. Hardly anyone would notice. Is that the destiny I’m supposed to stay here and follow?”

Collier glanced at an arched window. It looked out over the church garden.

“Look at this,” he said. He approached the window.

Bart followed him and peered outside.

The garden was an oasis in the wilderness of Port Royal. In its centre stood a tall ackee tree, and all around it herbs and vegetables grew in their beds. A thorny wall kept out human trespassers, though stray animals often found refuge inside.

Beneath the ackee tree sat a little man. He was petting a snowy white goat that lay across his knees.

“Look at Jojo,” Collier said. “He’s happy with just this. His destiny is what all men should aspire to have.”

Bart gazed lovingly at his half-brother. Joseph Morgan was the Governor’s third and last child. However just like Bart, he’d inherited none of his father’s wickedness. The people of Port Royal called Jojo a simpleton but Bart thought he was extraordinary. He was one of the only men in the city who’d never partaken in violence.

Jojo had his dead mother’s green eyes and golden curls. However they weren’t the only marks that she’d left on her son. His whole body was stunted, and his head was unusually small. His eyes were oddly proportioned, and they looked huge beneath his magnifying eyeglasses, which he wore to stave off near blindness. Bart had heard that Jojo’s mother was driven to alcoholism by her marriage to the Governor. While he grew in her womb, the liquor had marred his growth. From the day he was born he’d been different. However Jojo was a merry man, and there was no doubt that he’d been well cared for by the Reverend.

“Do you still think you’re beyond a peaceful destiny?” Collier asked. “There is dignity in innocence.”

Bart smiled at Jojo but then turned away.

“But we aren’t innocent.”

“That’s what atonement’s for,” Collier said with a dismissive wave. “Bart, the only way you’ll find peace is to leave the world of buccaneers behind. Lay down the sword and pick up a trowel. Become a gardener and let the world turn without you.”

Bart looked back out at the garden.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said.

However Bart wasn’t sure he believed it. He still felt disquiet in his soul. There had to be more than this.

“I’m always right,” Collier replied without pause. “Now speaking of gardening, you ought to do your bloody job. I don’t pay you to talk.”

Bart exhaled.

“You barely pay me at all,” he said, but Collier was already walking away.

Bart spent his day sweeping the garden and tending to the church’s menial needs. The work was tedious but it provided a distraction from Dragons and Banshees. When he took a break, he sat with Jojo and they talked for a while about all manner of marvellous things. It was his first conversation since the earthquake where no one mentioned opium or Captain Morgan.

When shadow of the ackee tree reached the thorny wall, Bart knew it was time to head home. He thanked Jojo for the pleasant afternoon and left St Paul’s just as the sun was touching the sea. It was a magnificent sunset, but Bart didn’t tarry to observe. The streets were growing busy, and he had no desire to be on them when night descended.

By the time Bart had returned to the Hook, the sun was only a pink stain on the horizon. He wandered past his home but he didn’t stop. He’d been thinking about Nanny Rook, and he wondered if Captain Morgan had kept his promise to deliver

food. He wasn't sure what he was hoping for. If Morgan had reneged on the deal then Bart would be free of him, but Nanny Rook's fledglings would starve.

Before Bart arrived at the shipwreck hovel, he could hear little Loushinka's boisterous laugh. He smelled food bubbling over a fire and it warmed his spirits.

Bart pulled back the drape and stepped inside. He found Loushinka with her back to him. She was so enraptured in conversation that she didn't seem to notice his presence. She was smiling and sparkling with excitement. However it wasn't Nanny Rook that she was talking to. It was a man.

The man looked about Bart's age, but that was the extent of their similarities. He was built like a grizzly bear, and he looked no less fierce. His thick auburn hair had been hacked short by a rude knife, while his cheeks sported a full and unkempt ginger beard. Biting into his throat was a ragged rope burn scar, which was no doubt the souvenir of a lynching he'd endured. His face was a tapestry of half a dozen more scars, and on the back of his hand he sported an unusual brand that marked him as the property of some African king. His sleeves were rolled up and his large hands were soaked in blood.

On the table behind him, Bart could see a grotesque mass of gristly flesh and fur. For a moment he stopped and blinked in bewilderment.

However the strange man was not nearly as hesitant.

"Bartholomew!" he shouted. He rushed passed Loushinka and opened his arms wide. Without warning, he grabbed Bart and squeezed him hard.

Bart could do nothing but wait for him to let go. He staggered backwards and squinted at the man. His olive skin had been hardened by the elements, but his jungle green eyes remained unchanged.

"Harry?" Bart said, half hoping he was wrong. "Harry Ben Zafrany?"

The man wiped his bloody hands on Bart's coat and confirmed his intuition.

Bart sighed though he did his best to hide his displeasure.

Harry Ben Zafrany had always introduced himself as Bart's adoptive brother, but the truth was they shared nothing. They were both simply lost souls that Nanny Rook had once adopted under her wing.

Loushinka beamed at Bart.

"We've been looking all day for you," she said. "Harry arrived this morning. He just appeared and surprised us."

Bart returned Loushinka's grin but it was insincere.

Harry was a man of the sea, and mercifully his sojourns in port were brief. However every year or two he'd return for a fortnight, and wherever he went, chaos inevitably followed.

"You're back." Bart wasn't sure what else to say.

Harry slapped his shoulder.

"Bartholomew let me take a look at you," he said. "You look bloody terrible."

Bart said nothing.

"You know last time I saw you." Harry poked Bart hard in the sternum. "You were like one of them corpses waiting to die. Are you still drinking that dreadful stuff? Or eating it? Or smoking, or whatever it is you do?"

"No."

Harry flung his hands into the air.

"What a shame. I remember when you were rolling in the mud like a merry little child."

"That's why I stopped," Bart said.

“Well it looked fun to me, but whatever makes you happy Bartholomew, that makes me happy.”

Bart fidgeted and glanced at Loushinka. She seemed ecstatic to have Harry home.

“This one’s growing into her mother ay?” Harry said. He ruffled Loushinka’s wild hair.

Bart was pleased by Loushinka’s joy, but Harry’s relationship with her irked him for some reason. Whenever Harry re-appeared from the sea, he was received home like the Prodigal Son. Bart had never understood his appeal.

“Where’s Nanny Rook?” he asked, when Loushinka’s laughter had subsided.

“Checking her stores for ginger root,” Loushinka replied. “You won’t believe it Bart, Red Dragons came here today. They brought great barrels of food to eat.”

Bart clenched his jaw. A voice of dread whispered in the back of his brain. Captain Morgan had not forgotten their deal.

Harry turned around and loomed over the half carved goat carcass on the table.

“Nanny and I are cooking up a goat stew,” he said. “It’s my own recipe, you won’t go back after this I promise. I’m preparing it just like the Africans do.”

Bart felt a pang of revulsion in his stomach. Harry picked up a knife and hacked at the meat as if it were a jungle vine. He seemed oblivious to the chunks of gore that were flung off it.

“So when are you leaving?” Bart asked, hoping his question wasn’t too indelicate. “Is there another voyage you’ll be away on soon?”

Harry chopped away at the goat’s leg, but the muscle would not break free.

“Not sure,” he replied. “I am a man of the sea so I must return one day.”

Eventually Harry gave up on cutting the meat. He used his bare hands to rip the limb from the carcass.

“But,” he continued. “I feel I’ve become gluttoned on adventure. And there is no place quite like Port Royal. Perhaps I’ll stay ashore for a bit. Maybe even find a job with you.”

Bart’s heart sank, though he remained silent.

Harry rubbed his filthy hands and sniffed a small pot on the table.

“Loushinka, what’s this?” he said.

“Stewed cassava leaves,” she replied. “You add them at the end.”

“Hmmm,” Harry sniffed the pot again. “Looks like a frog what’s been chewed up by a fox. Would you eat this Bart?”

Bart shrugged.

“I’m sure it’ll taste fine.”

Harry nodded.

“No doubt you’re right,” he said. “Good food’s often better than it looks eh? You won’t believe what I ate in the Pacific. We bought Long Pig from a village of cannibals. Delicious it was. Probably not kosher though. Oh well, when I go to hell I doubt it’ll be for eating.”

Bart had no idea how to respond. He simply nodded along.

“I’ve seen things Bartholomew,” Harry continued. “Things that would shock and disturb.”

Loushinka practiced swinging the machete through the air.

“Tell Bart about your scars,” she said eagerly.

Harry smiled and rubbed a smudge of goat blood across his nose. He pointed at three parallel scars that ran down his neck.

“Got these fighting a tiger,” he said.

Bart scoffed.

“A tiger? That can’t possibly be true.”

“People always say that. It is true, I swear,” Harry said in earnest.

Bart raised a curious eyebrow.

“Alright, where in the open ocean did you find this tiger?”

“That’s a very good question Bartholomew, I’m glad you asked,” Harry said.

“Weeks I spent sailing the China Sea. Eventually we made port in Macau. Queer folk live in Macau, gamblers and betting men mostly. I heard of one who had a tiger locked away. Rumour was that any man, who lasted the length of a sand clock in the beast’s cage, would win a ruby what once belonged to an emperor. Now Bartholomew, you know I’m not one to shirk a challenge. So I fought the tiger. I fought it with nothing but these fists and a rolling pin. And killed it I did. Stone cold. But first it gave me these lovely little keepsakes.”

Harry tapped his scars.

“And where’s the ruby?” Bart asked.

“The ruby?” Harry stroked gristle through his auburn beard. “I must confess I lost it to a Malay in a wager. Not to fear though, there was good fortune in that loss. I’ve since discovered that the stone was cursed, and the Malay what won it found himself plummeting to the depths not a fortnight later.”

Harry reached into the goat’s carcass and pulled out a long line of intestines.

“Funny how things work out isn’t it?”

Bart was hardly listening to Harry anymore. The goat was being hacked and hewed as if it were a quarry on a battlefield. Harry went on and on, but Bart was deaf to his nonsense.

“Tomorrow Harry’s gonna teach me to pickpocket,” Loushinka said.

Bart’s mind returned to the conversation.

“You’re already a pickpocket,” he said.

“With untapped potential,” Harry interjected. “The real shinies are up in town. You know what they say about dragons guarding treasure.”

Bart froze. He glared at Harry.

“The Red Dragons are dangerous Lou. Stay away from them.”

Loushinka smiled and looked at her reflection in the machete.

“I’m not scared,” she said. “I want to fight bad people. I just need a good sword like this.”

Bart’s irritation turned to anger. Harry had returned for a day, and already he was filling Loushinka’s head with precarious thoughts.

“It is a fine blade,” Harry said with pride. “My best souvenir from darkest Africa. Take a look.”

He took the machete from Loushinka and handed it to Bart.

Harry wasn’t wrong. The weapon was heavy but well made. Its curved blade was sharp enough to hack through bone, and the hilt was fashioned in the shape of a lion’s foot. It was inelegant but destructive. Not unlike its owner.

Bart gripped the handle. He imagined swinging the blade through the Gentleman’s skull. It was a tantalizing thought, but nothing more than a fantasy. Bart was no warrior, and the Banshees would not forgive his defiance.

Bart almost handed back the machete, but before he could, his attention was stolen by the moving drape covering the entrance. Sharply, it was pulled back, and in the entryway stood Nanny Rook.

Bart's spirits soared at the sight of her. However they were immediately dashed. She was not alone, and Bart saw a dark bruise beneath her eye.

The man who stood behind Nanny Rook had his fingers tightly clasped around her arm. He had bronzed skin and greying black hair. Above his lip, a fresh scratch sweated beads of red.

Bart knew in an instant that something was wrong.

"The hell is this?" he said, holding Harry's machete aloft.

The man glanced at Bart's stump and sneered.

"Put it down or I break her arm," he said in a Spanish accent.

Nanny Rook winced as he twisted.

Bart was tired of being pitiful. He squared up to the Spaniard and kept his arm straight. He imagined he was talking to Captain Morgan.

"Hurt her and I will kill you."

The Spaniard sniggered. With his spare hand he drew a dagger.

"Your witch conspired with the enemy," he said in broken English. "In the Hook there's punishment for this. I shan't leave until she's paid for it."

"Then you shan't leave," Bart said.

Bart had no doubt that this Spaniard belonged to the Winter Solstice. They were a militia of outcasts, the Hook's defensive thorns that kept the Dragons and Banshees at bay.

"Barty," Nanny Rook said softly. "Put it down."

Bart looked at the Spaniard's dagger. Then he looked at Loushinka. If there were a fight, he couldn't guarantee her safety.

The Spaniard's dagger bit Nanny Rook's cheek.

"This will remind you," he said. "To never ever conspire with Dragons."

Nanny Rook flinched as the Spaniard cut a thin furrow down her cheek.

The sight of her blood, spurred Bart into fury. He raised the machete and swung himself forward. However before he reached the Spaniard, he was pushed aside.

It was Harry who'd knocked Bart out the way. He snatched the goat's severed leg from the table, charged forward and smacked it down across the Spaniard's skull. He was relentless. The Spaniard could do nothing but shield his face from the barrage. Not until the goat's leg was beaten down to a bloodied shard did Harry stop.

Bart took Nanny Rook's hand and led her to Loushinka.

The Spaniard took a long time to stand, and when he did, his face was no longer bronze. His cheeks were bloodied, his nose was broken, and four of his teeth littered the ground. The man panted and staggered towards the door.

Harry began counting.

The Spaniard was out of sight by the time he reached ten. When Harry reached twenty, he gave chase and disappeared into the night.

Bart was left holding Nanny Rook in stunned silence. Blood dripped down her cheek like a tear.

"Are you hurt?" he asked both Nanny Rook and Loushinka.

Nanny Rook wiped her bloody cheek and nodded.

"I'll be fine."

"What about Harry?" Loushinka asked. "He might need help."

Before she'd finished speaking, Loushinka was on her feet. Bart tried to stop her but she wouldn't listen.

"Bring him back," Nanny Rook said. "And by the spirits of Chukwu don't let him kill that man."

Loushinka nodded and without another word, she vanished amidst the dark.

Bart threw down the machete. His hands were shaking with wrath.

“That man could have killed you,” he said. “What happened to your eye?”

Nanny Rook shook her head.

“It’s nothin’.”

“He hit you,” Bart insisted.

Nanny Rook silenced him with a wave.

“He aint the first,” she said. “And I knew gettin’ food from the Red Dragons would upset a few Spaniards. Such is life here.”

She took Bart’s hand and held it tight.

“What you did was much harder.”

Bart put his hand on hers.

“You got your food then?” he said. “My father did as promised?”

“You did as promised,” Nanny Rook said. “Children will eat because of what you did. Thank you.”

Bart held Nanny Rook close.

“I’m glad it was worth it,” he said.

Nanny Rook reached for a bottle of rum on the table.

“Tell me what happened when you spoke to Captain Morgan,” she said after taking a swig. She handed the bottle to Bart.

Bart sipped the rum and explained everything that had occurred in the mansion.

“Your father wants you for somethin’?”

Bart nodded.

“He was mute on details, but he said I’ve some duty to fulfil.”

Nanny Rook took back the rum.

“Whatever mischief Morgan’s planned, I’ll be right behind you,” she said. “I owe you for today. And now that Harry’s back, he’ll help too if you let him.”

“That’s what concerns me.”

Nanny Rook looked at Bart and lightly smacked his arm.

“Don’t be harsh,” she said. “I know his ways are uncouth but I missed him dearly.”

“Uncouth?” Bart almost laughed aloud. “He beat a man half to death with a goat’s leg. Moments ago. You don’t think he might be dangerous?”

Nanny Rook smiled.

“I think he’s more dangerous than most,” she said. “But he’s one of us, and I’m not as young as I was. Havin’ him home is good, you’ll see.”

Bart’s feeling of irritation began to smooth away.

“He does love Loushinka,” Bart said.

“He loves us all. We’re why he came back.”

Bart gazed around at the flakes of goat meat littering the floor.

“I’m sorry his homecoming’s been ruined. I’m sure this would have been a wonderful meal.”

Nanny Rook looked quizzically at Bart.

“I didn’t plan this for him,” she said. “The meal was for you. Thirty days free of opium. I not forgotten. I’m proud of you.”

For the first time all day, Bart felt contentment. Nanny Rook pulled two cups from the rafters and filled them both with rum. She handed one to Bart and raised the other.

“I love you very much,” she said. “You got greatness in your future Barty.”

Bart smiled at Nanny Rook. He downed his rum and poured another cup.

“And if your father does come callin’, you won’t face him alone.”

Chapter Four – Bart IV

Bart and Nanny Rook were good and merry by the time Loushinka returned with Harry. Freckles of blood spattered his brow but he was buzzing with zeal. He joined the drinking without a second's hesitation, and shared his bottle with Loushinka.

It was late when Bart finally finished his drink. The rum had left him wobblier than usual, and he took a moment to find his balance when he stood. He leaned on his crutch, and struggled against the spinning world.

The time had come for sleep. Bart bid his family a good night, though it was to a chorus of protestation. Before he left, Harry handed him another half bottle of rum for the walk home. It wasn't necessary, but Bart's bad mood had ebbed out like the tide. He took the bottle with a smile.

When he stepped outside it was pitch-black save for the stars. However the dark was no stranger, and habit had long since taught Bart the way home. He stumbled over the uneven ground, and he almost fell when his crutch slipped into a sandy hole. He looked over both shoulders to check that no one had seen him, and then smirked at himself.

He took another swig. Perhaps more rum would help. He walked the unsteady route home, and began to think about Nanny Rook. She'd said there was greatness in his future. It had been a long time since Bart had seriously thought about the long-term. He pondered what he wanted from life. Where might he be in a decade's time?

He'd never known his mother, but despite being a slave, Bart had heard she'd been taught the violin. Music had always been something he'd wanted to learn, and he considered finding a book to teach him. Perhaps one day he might even own a music shop, somewhere far away. He wondered what else the future might bring. He

imagined a quiet house above the shop where he'd live with his wife. They'd never be rich but they'd have a good life. They'd have children, a son and a daughter, and Bart imagined reading to them of an evening.

When he finally arrived at his makeshift tent, Bart's head was full of bizarre cheeriness. He took another swig, and felt a need to relieve himself before sleeping. He pissed into the sand and looked up at the heavens. He thought he saw a falling star, though it may simply have been a trick of his befuddled eyes.

He concluded his business and looked to his tent, imagining he'd sleep for hours. But before Bart could remove his shirt and crawl inside, he heard something emerging from the dark. He peered into the gloom and frowned.

"Bartholomew," said a man with an authoritative voice.

Bart studied the darkness and clutched his rum.

Within seconds, an old man appeared against the night.

He was tall and thin, though he still had some muscle beneath his dark skin. A long white beard covered his cheeks and extended all the way to his chest. His hair was also long and white, but covered by a sea-green turban. The old man had a wrinkled face and dark eyes, but aside from his turban, he was dressed as an Englishman. He wore a long brown coat and scuffed black boots.

"I've been waiting."

Only the echo of a former Punjabi accent remained.

Throughout the Hook there were dozens of rumours told about the mysterious white-bearded Sikh. No one knew his true name, but he introduced himself as Old Avery. Bart had heard he was once a noble of the Mughal court. Some say he angered the Sultan, others say he ran afoul of the Company.

Bart hiccupped and looked at his crutch.

“Apologies I’m not known for moving quickly,” he said. “And it’s the middle of the night.”

“You’ve no need to apologise,” Old Avery said. “But I’m afraid I must delay your rest a little longer. Lady Felina has asked for you.”

Bart’s heart sank like a stone. He was in no state to speak with anyone, but he noticed the sword on Old Avery’s hip. It was a Mughal sabre with a curved blade and a talon of gold upon the hilt. The scabbard was made of cobra’s skin and adorned with a peacock’s feather. This sword was famous in the Hook. The mottled pattern in the wootz steel was like water rippling inside the metal.

Bart knew he couldn’t refuse.

He took a final swig of rum, and then dropped it in the sand for whenever he got back.

Without another word, Bart sighed and followed Old Avery away from his bed. They walked along a sandy trail to the northernmost tip of the Hook. Bart rarely ever ventured this far, and with good reason. As he neared his destination he saw disparate tents, pitched closer and closer together. He was in a shantytown built of driftwood and tattered cloth.

The penurious community was all that remained of Spanish rule in Port Royal. They were castaways, leftover from a time before Morgan and his buccaneers descended on Jamaica.

Bart felt dozens of eyes pursuing him as he followed Old Avery. He heard the inhabitants murmur in Spanish, but he kept his head down and paid them no mind.

Old Avery led him to the very edge of the shore where the largest and grandest tent stood alone. Atop the canvas roof flew the colours of the House of Ortega.

“Wait here. Please,” Old Avery said before disappearing inside.

Bart stood alone. He felt naked and exposed with dozens of Spaniards eyeballing him. He really wished he wasn't drunk.

However within only moments Old Avery re-emerged. He nodded at Bart and gestured for him to enter.

“Lady Felina’s awaiting you.”

Bart’s stomach anxiously fluttered. An hour ago he’d been laughing with Loushinka. Now he was among Spaniards. He followed Old Avery inside.

Lady Felina’s tent was sparsely decorated, but it was a sanctuary in the wasteland. A woven carpet kept out the sandflies, and a salvaged ship’s mast held up the roof. In the centre of the tent was a long table, and atop it were rustic candlesticks and bottles of burgundy wine.

Two people stood inside. One was a man with a red face. The other was a tall woman in scarlet. There was no mistaking the woman.

Despite her status in the Hook, Felina dressed in the same tattered clothes as her subjects. She was not what most Englishmen would consider beautiful, but Bart thought she was stunning. She was slender, with olive skin and a silver ring in her right ear. Her hair was long and dark like coffee. However Felina Ortega’s unkempt veneer could not disguise the aristocratic blood that ran through her veins.

“Bartholomew,” Felina said in effortless English. “I appreciate you coming.”

Bart wanted to say that he’d had no choice, but he thought better of it.

“Why am I here?” he asked. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Old Avery blocking the exit.

Before Felina could reply, his eyes made sense of the other man in the tent. Anger swelled in his chest. The man’s red face was one huge bruise. It was the same Spaniard who’d held a knife to Nanny Rook and been savaged by Harry.

Bart stared at the man in disgust. He smiled at how much injury Harry had caused.

The Spaniard uttered something hateful and looked at Felina.

“What was that?” Bart said. “I don’t speak Spanish.”

“Stop,” Felina declared. “I didn’t summon either of you for a rematch.”

The Spaniard scowled at Felina.

“I deserve compensation,” he said.

“Then ask Harry for some.” Bart turned to Felina. “Is this really why I’m here?”

Felina’s copper eyes flickered at Bart.

“No,” she said.

The Spaniard opened his defiant mouth, but Felina sternly silenced him in their native tongue.

“You’re here,” she continued, “because I hold you the ringleader of your people.”

Bart shifted his weight.

“What people?”

“The people who conspire with Dragons.” Felina took a step towards Bart.

His fingers tensed around his crutch. Suddenly he became aware of his danger.

“I’m referring to the six Red Dragons that visited the Hook this afternoon,” Felina continued. “Commanded by one Admiral Margulis.”

Bart shook his head.

“I know nothing of this.”

Felina narrowed her eyes.

“Truly?” she said. “I have it on good authority that you went to Morgan’s mansion yesterday evening.”

Bart’s resolve plummeted. His eyes widened.

“How...?”

“You confirm it,” Felina said. “It’s my duty to know what happens here.”

Bart felt he was treading barefoot over broken glass. There was no one in the world with greater cause to hate Captain Morgan than Felina.

“I’ve committed no crime,” Bart said, trying to stir the intellect in his inebriated brain. “I asked Morgan for food, nothing more. I did it so a kind woman could feed orphans in need. The same kind woman this *bastardo* tried to maim.”

Bart felt Old Avery close in behind him.

Felina silenced the Spaniard before he could respond.

“That might be true,” she said. “But it only raises more questions. You claim to be a man of charity, yet you spend your days in the company of the Governor’s foulest lieutenant. What was it they call him? Morgan’s red right hand?”

Felina said the words with exceptional venom.

“He’s changed,” Bart said. “Edward Collier’s a reverend now. He’s sworn off killing. He simply runs the church and I’m his... caretaker. I’m a caretaker.”

Felina’s stare was as firm as adamant.

“You tend to a Catholic church on behalf of a reformed butcher?” she asked.

“The church is Protestant now, but yes.” Bart’s tolerance of the inquisition was rapidly waning. “I also tend to the garden, I teach Jojo his reading, I help-”

“Jojo?”

Bart rubbed his weary eyes and cursed his drunken tongue.

“Joseph Morgan?” Felina straightened her spine. “What exactly does a guiltless man such as yourself, have in common with Captain Morgan’s son?”

Bart shook his head. He’d said enough.

“You know less than you think.” He turned around and faced Old Avery. “Am I your prisoner? Or am I free to go?”

Old Avery gave no reply. His eyes were fixed on Felina.

The red-faced Spaniard began an aggressive tirade against Bart. It was a mix of Spanish and English, but Bart only gleaned a fraction of the truculent words. He ignored them all. If he had to retaliate, he’d do so in the morning.

However the Spaniard didn’t get to finish his ranting. Felina slammed her fist onto the table and glared at her countryman.

“I told you be silent!” she shouted. “Get out.”

The Spaniard blinked for a moment and then smiled.

“Santa Felina,” he said with his head bowed. He spoke in contrite syrupy Spanish, but Felina cut him off.

“Avery,” she said. “Escort this man from my sight.”

Old Avery drew his sabre and the Spaniard fell silent. He did not need telling again. He glared at Bart as he walked passed, but he respectfully nodded to Old Avery. Without another word, he departed Felina’s tent.

Bart turned back around and gazed at Felina. She was a queen cat ruling a clowder of strays. She was beloved yet imperious. For a second Bart wished he had her self-assurance, although he knew it had been forged through tragedy.

Felina’s gaze softened. She picked a wicker cask off the table behind her, and filled two tin mugs with tawny Madeira wine. She sipped one and held out the other for Bart.

“That fool does not speak for me,” she said. “Please, stay a moment longer. No harm will come to you, you have my word.”

Mixing dry wine with the rum in his stomach seemed like a dire combination to Bart. However he took the cup anyway. Refusal to accept would look suspicious. He took the slightest sip possible.

“The truth is this,” Felina said. “I don’t believe you’re a wicked man. I’ve never known trouble from you before, and I respect Nanny Rook for the good she does.”

She put the mug to her lips and drank.

“But I face an impossible task.” Felina sat on the edge of the table. “Goodwill in the Hook is a rare thing. I try to keep peace while defying the Black Banshees, the buccaneers, and all the rest of our numerous enemies. My people look to me for answers, and today you invited six Red Dragons to our home. I need to know why.”

Bart gazed at his reflection in the tawny wine.

“Why did the cruellest man in the Caribbean give you what you wanted?”

Bart was trapped like a hunted animal. He wanted the questions to be over, but if his secret squirmed free, he could never take it back.

He looked at Old Avery and his Mughal sabre.

“Whatever I tell you,” he said. “No harm will come to me?”

Felina smiled.

“I gave you my word.”

Bart closed his eyes. For twelve years he’d locked the truth away. One sentence would set it free.

Shit.

Bart stared at his wine. Sobriety couldn't save him now. He lifted his mug and gulped down every drop.

The acidic Madeira almost made him wretch, but it gave him the vigour he needed. His tongue was defiant, but the wine loosened it.

“Henry Morgan's my father.”

Felina said nothing.

“I'm his bastard. My mother was a slave of the Dragons.” Bart slowly moved forward. “One night Morgan took a liking to her. I'm the result.”

He placed his empty mug on the table. Now that the words were finally released, he saw no sense in holding anything back.

“Furthermore.” He grimaced. “Morgan only gave me the food in exchange for some vague favour I apparently owe him.”

Felina's face remained still. However her eyes were fervid as she tried to grasp the enormity of what she'd heard.

For what felt like a full minute Bart stood in silence. He had no sense of what might come next.

“I didn't do this for the Dragons,” he finally said. “I did it for Loushinka. She deserves better.”

Felina stood up. On her right hand she wore a golden ring that she twisted around her finger.

“Your father,” she said while shaking her head. “He wields immense power. He's one of the wealthiest men in the New World. Yet you live in a slum. Why?”

Bart looked at the ground and shrugged.

“This is my home.”

Felina almost smiled.

“You carry a dangerous secret,” she said. “There’s not much mercy left here after what your father did. Isn’t blood for blood the buccaneering way?”

Bart didn’t answer.

“It doesn’t matter,” Felina continued after a moment. “It’s not my way. And my people also deserve better than the truth.”

Bart exhaled.

“Then will you keep my secret?”

Felina said nothing but Bart trusted her silence.

“I’m tired,” he said. “Please let me rest.”

Felina gestured for Old Avery to stand aside. Bart thanked her and turned towards the exit.

“I’ve one last question,” Felina said when Bart could feel the breeze on his skin. “If you could wield your father’s power, what would you do with it?”

Bart stopped. He could barely think through his intoxication.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Kill the damned Banshee?”

Bart stepped out into the night. He looked at the stars and thought about his bed.

“That’s a good answer,” Felina said. “Sleep well. I know where to find you.”

Chapter Five – Lily I

Bartholomew the cripple was on Lily Morgan's mind. It had been twelve years since she'd even thought about her half-brother, but a week ago he'd wriggled from the woodwork like a shipworm. Captain Morgan remained mute on the reason for his bastard's return, but the curious reunion had nestled itself in Lily's brain. Everything that happened in Port Royal was her business. She didn't imagine that a crippled opium smoker would hold much significance to her ambition, but his reappearance after all this time was strange nevertheless.

But tonight, Lily had far more important affairs than her bastard half-brother. She discarded Bart from her concerns, and followed the meandering streets towards the sounds of exhilarated revelry. In thirty minutes it would be midnight, and Captain Morgan's fifty-third birthday would officially commence.

Port Royal celebrated its Governor's anniversaries as if they were holy holidays, and the beating heart of the festivities was the Dragon's Den.

It was the tavern that all other taverns bowed to. Standing three storeys high, it was taller than any other drinking house in the city. Lesser men gossiped about the decadence that could be found inside the painted scarlet walls, but only those who bore the mark of the Dragon were allowed entry.

The Den stood in the centre of the city square. On either side it was flanked by some of the most prosperous brothels in the New World. The prostitutes of Port Royal earned more than anywhere else in the world, and those who plied their trade to the Dragons, lived like royalty. It was often said that the finest whores were like a barber's chair. No sooner was one man out, another came in.

On the eve of Morgan's birthday though, even the opulence of the Den was not enough to contain the celebrations. Throngs of people from every corner of the Caribbean were packed into the main square. Their mania was louder than thunder.

Lily walked silently among them. It wasn't drunken hysteria that she'd come to indulge. She knew her father would not be attending his own party. Morgan had been celebrating his birthday for days now, and when Lily left the mansion he'd been rolling in a stupor of coca leaves, fine rum, and exotic courtesans. She thought it best to leave the Governor to his vices. Her business could be conducted without him ever needing to know.

When Lily stepped inside the Dragon's Den, her senses were immediately confounded. The Den always stank of booze, but tonight the air was smokier and the hurdy-gurdy played even faster. Men revelled in frenzy and sang their drunkenness to the ceiling. The drinks were kept flowing by buxom wenches who refilled tankard after tankard with a variety of liquors. Whatever they were paid, Lily reflected it wasn't enough. On every wall hung dozens of buccaneer flags, and somewhere on each, was stitched a red dragon.

Lily's face was well known in the Den, and the crowds split to allow her through. A few men whistled as she passed, though she paid them no mind. Most of the men were cocky young lads, who were a generation younger than the original buccaneers. They boozed with the arrogance of conquerors, but Lily knew they must have been boys the last time the Red Dragons truly conquered anything.

She made eye contact with a bar wench and gestured for a bottle of whiskey to be brought up to her. Then she walked to the rickety staircase at the back of the tavern and climbed up to the officer's council.

Upstairs, it was cooler and somewhat quieter. The space was reserved for the mightiest of the buccaneers who'd sailed as Captains alongside Morgan. However in the days of peace, the council was little more than a pack of old drunks. Lily walked among the former buccaneers. They each looked up and acknowledged her as she passed. All except one.

The man known as the Bygone Admiral sat alone in a dark corner. His scuffed black boots rested on the table's top, and in his hand he held a cup of whiskey. Lily didn't approach but she kept her eyes on the Admiral.

She sat by herself at a table on the balcony, which overlooked the square below. Here she waited for her bottle of whiskey. As she sat in silence, she watched the Bygone Admiral devour his drink. In her lifetime, he'd turned from Morgan's second-in-command to a cancerous old drunk. He was the reason she'd come.

The Admiral was a grim faced man, who was of an age with Captain Morgan. Much like his Governor, the Admiral's former splendour had long since waned. He was now an ugly man with dirty blonde hair, yellow eyes, and browning teeth the colour of bile. He was not as fat as Captain Morgan, and he still had a shred of muscle beneath his skin, but age had broken him in other ways. His countenance was perpetually grim and he spent his days ruminating with whiskey on a grander time when buccaneers ruled the seas.

He had all the sweetness of a moray eel, and he was no friend of Lily's, but tonight she needed his collaboration. She watched him swallow his Irish whiskey and smiled. She hoped that if his belligerent mind was dulled by drink, he might be more accommodating to her proposal.

When a bar wench arrived with Lily's bottle, she tossed the woman a silver coin and took the whiskey to the Admiral.

“Admiral Margulis, how lovely to see you,” Lily said with feigned decorum. “I’ve a bottle of Bushmills that I’m sure I can’t finish alone. Is Bushmills not your favourite?”

Margulis looked Lily up and down, before staring at the whiskey. He grunted and Lily took a seat opposite him. She broke the seal and prized the cork from bottle.

“How about a toast to the Governor?” she said as she filled Margulis’ empty cup.

The Admiral sniffed the whiskey and raised an eyebrow. He swallowed the contents of his cup in one mouthful, and poured himself another.

“What do you want Lilywhite?” he said.

Lily downed her whiskey and stared into Margulis’ yellow eyes.

“Only to talk,” she said. “I’ve important information from my father.”

“If it’s important, why would he send you?”

Lily ignored the slight, though her first instinct was to smash the bottle over Margulis’ irascible head.

She was lying when she said her information had come from the Governor. Her father was as impotent as his admiral, but Morgan’s name still held weight over his Dragons. In truth, each scrap of salient information came from Lily herself. She’d combed through every news pamphlet, spoken with a dozen merchants, and gathered reams of intelligence about the motions of the wider world. Every encounter implied the same fact.

“War’s coming to Europe,” she said. “And war is the buccaneer’s playground.”

Margulis displayed no notice.

“Unless you’ve lost interest in gold?” Lily added.

“Gold? What sort of gold?”

“The shiny sort.” Lily poured herself and Margulis another cup of whiskey. “The Spanish have found mountains of the stuff in New Granada. Their treasure ships will sail straight past our door to get home.”

“Their gold ain’t ours.”

“Of course it’s not ours. That’s why I’m suggesting we steal it.”

Margulis tensed his arched back.

“Buccaneering is outlawed,” he said. “Your father made a deal with the King. You of all people should-”

“I do know that.” Lily didn’t need a history lesson. “But what happens when the good King decides he can tolerate Spain no longer? Surely he’ll look to his loyal buccaneers who served him so well the last time.”

“Maybe, but my loyalty’s to the King and country. Not your endless scheming.”

“The King’s reign may be waning Admiral. I’ve heard rumours of a glorious revolution brewing.”

“So you want me to help you support some foreign king?”

Lily sneered.

“I don’t give a fuck who sits on the throne. But if their eyes are diverted from the New World, isn’t that a chance for us to rekindle the old ways?”

“The old ways,” Margulis said. “What would you know of them? You were a child when Panama fell.”

“I’m a child no longer.” Lily said. “I remember when the buccaneers of Port Royal brought nations to their knees. We’re the wickedest city in the Christian world,

there are four thousand miles between us and the king. Shouldn't we be dealing in more than sugar, slaves and cacao nuts?"

"Why? There are ten thousand slaves in Jamaica and hundreds of sugar mills. We prosper every day."

"We grow richer every day. There's a difference."

Lily could tell that the Admiral's belligerence was immune to reason. She changed her tactic.

"Don't you miss the old days Francis, when saltwater ran through your veins? The Red Dragons used to mean something, shouldn't we go back to that?"

"Things were different then. Spain was our enemy-"

"Spain is old and tired!" Lily slammed her cup on the tabletop. "I am young and I'm hungry. We're buccaneers for Christ's sake, that gold is ours to take."

"My orders come from my Governor and my King. You are neither. You're nothing Miss Lilywhite. Go back to your embroidery and leave me in peace."

Lily's patience ran thin.

"Pirating is in our blood!"

"Pirating?" Margulis sat up straight. Lily knew she's overstepped. "I am no pirate. I was a buccaneer in the war, and I'm an Admiral of the Governor's fleet. A king's man! Pirates hang in this city."

The Admiral's hypocrisy was maddening. Lily remembered a time when he'd have cut down children if there were gold to be had. He'd become a king's dog and nothing more.

"We were all considered pirates once," she said. "And back then we weren't afraid of the label."

“Watch yourself girl. You’re beginning to sound like one of the Sea Wolves. Perhaps you aren’t as loyal as you pretend.”

“I alone have re-sharpened this city, I bear the mark, and I’m as much a Goddamned Dragon as you. So I suggest you watch your mouth Admiral.”

Margulis’ lips curled into a cruel smile.

“Or what? You speak of war but you know nothing. Tell me Miss Lilywhite, have you ever actually killed anyone?”

“No,” Lily said quietly. “But call me Lilywhite again, and I swear to God I just might.”

Lily stood and peered down at Margulis.

“The Golden Age is coming back, and I intend to seize it,” she said. “Will you do the same? Or are you just a craven old drunk, with nought but a bottle for a friend?”

Without warning or hesitation, Margulis stormed to his feet and kicked over his chair. He lunged forward and snatched Lily by the throat. His dirty hand tightened around her windpipe. His eyes were bloodshot with rage.

“I’m no craven!”

Lily gasped for air. She dug her fingernails into Margulis’ skin, but his grip did not diminish. Within seconds every man in the council was on his feet, but they were slow to choose a side.

Lily scraped and tore at Margulis’ hand until there was blood beneath her nails. However he didn’t let go until a pistol’s muzzle was shoved against the back of his head.

Lily filled her lungs and coughed uncontrollably once she was free. Her whole throat felt bruised.

Her saviour was a russet haired buccaneer. Even when Margulis had relaxed his grip, the pistol didn't move.

"De Berry," Margulis snarled. "Of course you'd take her side."

"Captain De Berry," the buccaneer said in a husky voice. "And ain't it treason to attempt injury on the Governor's daughter?"

Before Margulis could respond, De Berry cocked the pistol.

"Surely a king's man ought to know better. But perhaps you're simply besotted with whiskey."

Margulis said nothing but Lily didn't care. She gave Captain De Berry a grateful nod, and picked the bottle of Bushmills off the table. She didn't want an apology. She wanted action.

Every eye in the council was fixed on her. If she had to be strangled to gain their attention, so be it. She took a deep breath and hurled the bottle down on the tabletop. The glass shattered in a cacophony, but Lily stood her ground amongst the spray of shards and whiskey.

"Listen, all of you!" she shouted loud enough for every captain to hear. "The Red Dragons do not belong in dens and whorehouses. For too long you've forgotten what you are. Before the mast you were strong, but on land you've turned soft and weak. Now I'm not asking your permission. We're not taking a vote. We will attack our enemies and take from them whatever the hell we please. And if they respond with war, let them. We'll have ships, we'll have men, and we'll have prey. So get your vessels seaworthy. Get your crews seaworthy. And if any of you whores' sons have a god-damned word to say, now's the bloody time!"

Lily threw down the broken neck of her bottle. Two-dozen pairs of eyes blinked at her in silence.

“These are your father’s orders?” Captain De Berry asked.

“They’re my orders. Now get it done!”

Lily stood outside under the Den’s upstairs balcony. She held a glowing cigarillo between her fingers, and filled her lungs with liquorice-flavoured tobacco. The smoke sharpened her mind and calmed her temper. She tucked a stray black hair back into place. All around her, honeysuckle bines spiralled up a support post, and set free a sweet smell in the humid air.

Lily’s bare forearms were speckled with tiny red cuts where the broken glass had fallen. Her throat was still sore, and she knew that by morning she’d have a choker of bruises. However the thought didn’t bother her. She could hide the marks beneath a scarf, though she didn’t think she would. No one in Port Royal was without blemish, and she planned to wear hers proudly.

From behind, Lily heard the sound of a door swinging open and footsteps approaching. She turned and saw Captain De Berry walking towards her, with a cup of Jamaican kill-devil in each hand.

Lily smiled and greeted the unconventional captain.

“Drink?” De Berry said.

Lily shrugged and took a cup of the kill-devil.

“That were an expensive bottle you smashed. Shame to see it wasted.”

Lily smirked.

“It did what I got it for,” she said. “Thank you though, for earlier. I appreciate it.”

De Berry nodded.

“I reckon us women got to stick together.”

Rowan De Berry swept her long redwood hair behind her shoulders. She'd gained the rank of Captain during Port Royal's civil war, however the other Dragons remained slow to accept her. She pulled a pipe from her jacket's pocket and stuffed leaves of tobacco into the bowl. She gestured for Lily's cigarillo and used its embers to ignite the dried leaves.

"Also you ruined Margulis' night. That tickles me a bit."

Lily smiled and took back her cigarillo.

"I only wanted to talk," she said. "I doubt he'll forget that anytime soon though."

"Ah there're worse folk than Francis Margulis. And if he ever does forget, I suppose we'll have to remind him won't we?"

Lily took a swig of the kill-devil and looked out over the town square. Half the city was still raucously rejoicing the Governor's birthday. In the centre of their celebrations stood an eight-foot statue of Captain Morgan in full buccaneering regalia. Above his head flew a British flag.

"You really mean to start a war?" Rowan asked. "That's a bit bold ain't it? Even for you."

"War with Spain is certain as the sun. Sometimes we see it, sometimes we don't, but it's always out there. Which means we should be too"

"Why? Gold's just shiny metal. It's not actually good for much."

"It's not about the gold. It's about taking the gold. It's about making Port Royal strong. Our people aren't farmers or builders, we're buccaneers."

Lily pointed at the British colours, which flew over her father's statue.

"That flag is everything that's wrong with this city," she said.

"A flag's just cloth and dye."

“No, it’s a bargain. A bargain we ought never have made.” Lily stared at Morgan’s stone likeness. In the moment of its carving, his might was at its zenith. “I love what my father’s built, but selling Port Royal to the King was his greatest mistake. We don’t belong to the Old World. We’re what they ought to fear.”

Rowan blew a stream of grey smoke from her mouth.

“I don’t often agree with Margulis,” she said. “But he’s right about one thing. You’re starting to talk like one of the Sea Wolves.”

“I’m no Sea Wolf,” Lily replied. “I’m just a woman who knows Port Royal’s place in this world. My father won’t live forever, and I can’t abide his legacy dying with him. We need a future.”

“Unless another earthquake sends us sliding into the sea.”

Lily kicked a pebble over the sandy ground.

“We’re sturdier than that,” she said. “There’s bigger things need doing than mending a few cracked stones. This city’s my life, and I’m not inclined to share it with a King or anyone else.”

“This city’s your life? You sure its worth that? This ain’t some promised land, it’s just...foundations of sand.”

Lily watched her tobacco slowly burn away.

“The old ways can come back.”

“The old ways weren’t all that. A lot of people died for this city, but it’s never loved ‘em back.”

“I disagree,” Lily said when her cigarillo was completely burnt out. “Port Royal’s the only thing that matters.”

It was early in the morning when Lily left the Dragon's Den. She raced the sunrise back to her father's mansion, and by the time she arrived home all but the morning star had vanished from the sky.

The mansion looked eerily quiet from the outside. Lily had expected her father's birthday orgy to last long passed daybreak, but everything was silent when she stepped inside.

She walked through the dark foyer and headed for the staircase. Perhaps the courtesans had exhausted her father early, and she'd be fortunate enough to enjoy a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. She rested a hand on the bannister.

"Miss Morgan."

Lily's head spun around. She'd thought she was alone.

"Mister Prince?"

Before the grand fireplace stood the silhouette of Morgan's deputy. Lily squinted through the gloom and saw that he wasn't dressed in his usual immaculate attire. His collar was unbuttoned and his grey shirt was untucked.

"Everything alright Prince?"

"No," he whispered.

Lily straightened her back.

"Something's occurred with the Governor," Prince said. "His heart."

"What's happened? Where's my father?"

Prince turned around. He stared at Lily through shadow.

"Your father's dead."

Chapter Six – Lily II

Lily dressed herself in a black silk mantua. For five days she'd worn only black, and experienced her world through a black veil. Even the sky was black with mourning.

She draped a golden necklace across her discoloured throat. The magnificent piece of Spanish jewellery made her look like a queen. She considered wearing it for today's ceremony but ultimately she decided against it. She'd need to appear demure and dutiful if the buccaneers were to follow her lead.

Lily gazed at her reflection in the square Venetian mirror. Behind her, she could see the flags of England, Wales, and the Red Dragon flying at half-staff outside her window.

She stared at her face. Her lips, nose, and cheekbones were all passed down from Captain Morgan. However it was more than a façade that she'd inherited from her father.

She wore short sleeves to ensure that the dragon tattoo would be visible on her forearm. The elegant beast coiled like a serpent. She'd had the ink reapplied half a dozen times, and now the scarlet mark embellished her skin like a medal of honour. She was as much a Red Dragon as any buccaneer, and today Port Royal would need to know it.

While Lily contemplated her appearance, her mind wandered through unpleasant memories.

When Prince had told her of her father's passing, she'd run to his bedroom and found his abject body half naked and grotesque. The next day physicians had come from the mainland, decked in long robes and beaked masks to protect against miasma.

The physicians had concluded that it was a combination of the coca leaves and rum, mixed with years of dropsy, that ultimately stopped his heart.

The thought of her father's ignoble death almost drove a tear to form in Lily's eye. There was a time when it would have been unimaginable for Captain Morgan to die in bed of so common a cause. It wasn't how he'd be remembered.

Lily discarded the tear. Now was no time for tenderness. During the five days since Morgan's death, her life had been perpetual chaos. She'd undertaken full responsibility for organising the state funeral and the transition of power. She only realised while staring at her reflection, that this was the first time she'd paused for even a moment. It was a strange sensation. She felt the sort of stillness that could only be found in the eye of a hurricane.

She peered at her reflection and spotted treacherous hints of beaten gold in the roots of her black hair. It was her mother's hair and she loathed it. She picked up a phial of black dye, concocted from lead and crushed leeches, which she applied to her hairbrush. The inky liquid smothered her golden roots, though she was careful to ensure it didn't stain her skin.

When she was satisfied, Lily drew in a deep breath. Today she'd need to be perfect. Nothing else would suffice.

Lily spent most of her morning in the Governor's cabinet room. She sat behind her father's desk and planned her ascension over the Red Dragons. Sitting in his chair stirred strange sentiments. Lily wasn't sure how she felt. She'd truly loved her father, but it would be a lie to pretend they were ever close. However with his departure Captain Morgan had bestowed her the greatest gift she'd ever receive.

She thought of herself as a young tree in a dense forest. In the wake of a giant's falling, light streamed through the canopy, and now it was her turn to grow into that light. She wanted to do right by the man her father had once been. The man she'd idolised as a child.

However a knocking on the door interrupted Lily's ruminations. Her eyes flicked up, but she had no well-wishers scheduled to offer their condolences. She lowered her quill.

"It's Rowan."

The husky voice drifted under the door's threshold. It brightened Lily's spirits the moment she heard it. She stood up and invited Rowan inside.

Rowan De Berry was dressed no differently to any other buccaneer captain. She wore plain cloth trousers, calfskin boots, and a long captain's coat with a red sash around her waist. Over one shoulder was slung a baldric that contained a dagger and a cutlass. Her redwood hair she wore long and unfastened.

Lily approached Rowan and extended her hand. Rowan looked at it as if she'd been offered something absurd. Without a word she put a hand on Lily's shoulder and then pulled her close for a hug.

For a moment Lily tensed. She couldn't remember the last time anyone had held her. She hardly remembered how to respond. Her chin quivered and tears filled her eyes when she wrapped her arms around Rowan. Memories of her father swelled like a river behind a dam. A tear dripped down her cheek. If another fell, hundreds more would follow. She inhaled and let go of Rowan.

"Have I interrupted something?" Rowan glanced at the stacks of paper on the desk. "I didn't see Prince downstairs."

Lily wiped her eyes and held a tight rein over her emotions.

“No,” she said. “Mister Prince is away escorting my father’s lawyer from the mainland. They should both be back by midday.”

“Your father’s lawyer? It’s a bit soon to be involving him no?”

“The sooner the better,” Lily said. “I want his will read publicly this afternoon. Hopefully that’ll re-establish a modicum of order here.”

Rowan peered out the bay window behind the desk.

“Seems like half Jamaica’s lost its nerve without your father around.”

“When everything’s properly inherited, all things will fall into place. Until then, time’s not something we have to waste.”

Rowan nodded.

“So what happens now?” she asked. “The King appoints some new Governor?”

Lily smirked.

“Eventually. But England’s in disarray, hell Europe’s in disarray. Replacing the provincial Governor of a city, on an island an ocean away is hardly an urgent matter. Especially while France, Spain, and the Dutch all circle the throne.”

“So you think the King’s gonna forget about you?”

“On paper Port Royal will be ruled by the Lord Governor of Jamaica. Someone Lynch. He’s a cowardly old fool, in twenty years he’s not left the cosiness of Montego Bay. We’ve nothing to fear from him. Besides, by the time a new English Governor’s finally appointed, I’ll have built enough power to make him obsolete.”

Rowan raised an eyebrow.

“Sounds like you have it figured.”

“I’ve been planning this for years,” Lily said. “Ever since I first saw my name on my father’s will. By this afternoon the Red Dragons will mine, and all my sacrifices will be worth it.”

Lily paced across the cabinet and looked up at a floor-to-ceiling portrait of her father. He’d once stood where she was now, at the beginning of a long road to infamy.

“So how you thinking you’ll build this power?” Rowan asked after a long pause.

Lily lifted a sheet of paper from the desk.

“It begins with this,” she said. “An armistice. It allows any pirates, or former buccaneers, to return to Port Royal and pay their respects without fear of incarceration.”

“An armistice?”

“Not all my father’s allies retired from buccaneering as readily as he did. But it doesn’t mean they don’t deserve a chance to attend his funeral?”

“They’re pirates Lily”

“Those who we call pirates today we once called friends. All that’s changed is the law. I’m suggesting an amnesty in that law.”

“By opening our gates to the enemies of mankind?” Rowan shook her head. “That’s a terrible idea.”

“It’s not.”

“Lily these people were banished for a reason. Your father made some dangerous enemies, and he kept far more dangerous friends.”

“You’re referring to-”

“I’m referring to my mother.” Rowan’s tone became stern. “The Mad Kraken. She earned herself that name.”

Lily sighed. She'd anticipated Rowan's objections.

"I understand your feelings towards your mother."

"No clearly you don't. She's a monster Lily. She murdered her own son in cold blood. My brother. Is that someone you really want back here?"

"I know what she's done, but I also know she's among the mightiest pirates in the Caribbean. If we want the old ways-"

"The old ways? Why are you so obsessed with the old ways?"

"Because they're our parents!" Lily said. "Because we're the next generation. It's our destiny to follow their footsteps."

Rowan rubbed her brow and tossed back her hair.

"Your grandfather was a Welsh sheep farmer. Mine was...I don't know. Our parents didn't follow their footsteps. You don't have to either."

"Enough!" Lily was in no mood for a debate. "It's already done. The armistice is signed and sent out. I'm not asking for your approval."

Rowan looked at the floor.

"At least answer this," she said. "How do you plan on getting rid of the pirates once the armistice ends? Do you really think they'll politely resume their banishment?"

"Perhaps they don't need to," Lily replied. "The only real crime committed by these pirates is refusing to kneel. I respect them for that. Maybe the time's come to pardon those we banished."

"Lily?"

"No. We're a city of hunters. You've seen the state of the Red Dragons, maybe some actual warriors can make us strong again. Will you help me or not?"

Rowan stared at Lily with a dumbfounded expression.

“You want my mother’s help. You want to build some pirate republic so you’re name’s remembered.”

“I want to build something that’ll last.”

“Thing’s like this don’t last, they can’t last.” Rowan gestured emphatically at the window. “Look outside, there’s not an old man in sight. Your people burn fast and they die. Change is like the water Lily. You can’t break it and you can’t fight it. You have to step aside or drown in it.”

Lily clenched her fist and leaned on the desk.

“Do not talk to me about change. Jamaica was a Spanish island before the Brethren came. My father was the change and now I am too. You have a choice Rowan. Help me, or stand against me, and learn exactly how a pebble feels when confronted with a tempest.”

Rowan bowed her head.

“I’ll never stand against you Lily. But I can’t help you with this.”

Lily sniffed and fought to hold her emotions at bay.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Rowan added. “Truly.”

Without another word, she turned around and left the cabinet.

Lily had no choice but to watch her leave. She stood in silence while a rebellious tear trickled down her cheek. All she could feel was the weight of her duty, and the burden of being entirely alone.

The rest of the morning went excruciatingly slowly. Hours ticked by while Lily sat in the Governor’s cabinet and pondered the coming days. Before long she grew restless and she began pacing up and down to calm herself.

Eventually noon came and went, and Mister Prince finally returned from the mainland. His reappearance meant that the time had come for the reading of Captain Morgan's will.

Lily took a final opportunity to perfect her façade in the gilded mirror. Everything was perfect. She took a deep breath and stared at her reflection for one moment longer. Then she left the mansion and walked along the seafront towards the courthouse.

Mister Prince followed her like a shadow. If he had any emotion at all for his master's passing, it was hidden deep behind his steel coloured eyes. The streets were strangely busy, and every eye followed Lily. She ignored the crowd. Her heart thumped with nervous excitement.

Outside the courthouse stood Gallows Point. The empty nooses swayed in the sea breeze. The courthouse was an old Spanish building that still bore a Catholic inscription above the door. It was already packed when Lily arrived.

She recognised dozens of the Red Dragons who milled around the entranceway, although there were dozens more who she didn't know. At the back of the courthouse stood Admiral Margulis with his loyal men. Lily passed him without making eye contact.

She occupied an empty chair at the very front, and smiled at the grey-wigged lawyer who stood behind a lectern atop a short dais. The air was thick with a buzz of anticipation.

The multitude of colourful characters in the back of the court, jostled together to fill every shred of space. Lily glanced over her shoulder. She was heartened to see Rowan standing among them. However she looked away the moment her eyes met Lily's.

On the other side sat an odd couple. Lily's half-brother Bartholomew the cripple, with his one-eyed mentor Edward Collier. However the former buccaneer was now dressed in the garb of a Reverend. Lily ignored them both and turned back towards the lawyer when he demanded hush.

"Gentlemen, ladies, you know why we're gathered," he said. "I have in my hand the last will and testament of Sir Henry Morgan. In accordance with his daughter's wishes, the will shall be read before an audience of witnesses."

The lawyer donned a pair of spectacles and peered down at the papers.

"The first item is a sum of fifteen thousand pounds, which has been bequeathed to the Governor's youngest son Joseph Morgan. This sum shall be collected and distributed by Reverend Edward Collier."

Lily smiled. She was glad that her afflicted brother would receive some measure of wellbeing from their father.

"The next item is Captain Morgan's flagship the Glory. This is bequeathed to his long time friend and ally, Admiral Francis Margulis."

A cheer erupted from the back of the court.

"Order," the lawyer shouted, though order came slowly.

"The sugar mill Mansfield Hall, along with the entirety of its staff and four hundred slaves, shall be inherited by Miss Lily Morgan."

Lily's heart was thumping. She wasn't surprised that she'd inherited the plantation. Jojo would have little use for it. She remembered her childhood home fondly.

"Next I have a letter bearing Captain Morgan's seal. This he bequeaths to his illegitimate son, Bartholomew."

Lily frowned. The lawyer held aloft a simple envelope. Every eye in the courthouse turned to Bart. Uneasily he stood up, and swung gracelessly on his crutch to collect it. A snigger wafted from the Dragons in the back.

“Order! My next item is the thirty-three emeralds of Guzmán.”

A collective gasp rose from the courthouse. To most of Port Royal the thirty-three emeralds were merely a legend.

“It was Captain Morgan’s desire that the jewels be buried with him. He bequeaths them to no one.”

A groan of dissatisfaction filled the court, but Lily ignored it. The only men complaining about wasted emeralds were the ones who never learned the difference between wealth and power.

“Now we come to the main item,” the lawyer said once quiet had resumed. “Captain Morgan’s authority at the head of the Red Dragons.”

Hush quickly fell. Lily felt her heart racing but she forced herself to remain still.

“It was Captain Morgan’s wish that he be succeeded by his true heir, and favourite child.”

Lily looked up at the lawyer and smiled.

“Bartholomew Morgan.”

Chapter Seven – Bart V

The lawyer's words lingered over the courtroom like a foul smell. An uncanny pit opened in Bart's stomach. Had he heard true? Surely this was just a nightmarish deception of withdrawal. However every eye was trained on him.

Dread turned to nausea when it became clear he'd not misheard. Red Dragons surrounded him. He felt stifled. Sheets of sweat swathed his prickling skin. His heart began hammering faster and faster. His shallow breaths became too rapid to control.

Within seconds of the lawyer's announcement, the courthouse erupted into a discontented din. The sound pounded Bart's eardrums, and the temperature beneath his skin continued to build.

"This a fucking joke?" Someone shouted in a broad Yorkshire accent.

Bart thought he might be sick. Hardened men were bellowing all around him.

A nudge to the ribs turned Bart's head. It was Reverend Collier.

"You need to go," he said.

Bart sucked down air like it was water in a desert. He clumsily stood, but he did so too quickly and his head rushed into dizziness. His vision faded, and for a second he feared he might faint. He turned his eyes towards the double doors. The faintest hint of a breeze drifted in from outside. The fresh air was tantalising, but Bart would have to fight through a mob to reach it.

In his immediate way stood an ugly buccaneer in a scarlet coat. He grabbed Bart by the collar.

"You're no Dragon boy!"

Bart yanked himself free but almost lost balance. Reverend Collier caught him.

“Let him pass Margulis.” Collier held his quarterstaff level with the Admiral’s temple.

“I heard you’d given up killing.”

“Aye, I won’t kill you,” Collier said. “But I’ll leave your brain in such a state you’ll wish I had.”

Bart didn’t linger to hear the Admiral’s response. He pushed his way to the door, and hurried out of the courthouse as swiftly as his crutch would allow.

The afternoon sun was dazzlingly bright, and for a moment Bart was blinded. He could hear the bustle of the streets and smell the salty air, but he had no direction other than forwards.

He followed the sound of waves, and stumbled towards the waterfront. He stood in the uneven sand and stared at the ships bobbing atop the calm water. To the rest of Port Royal it was an ordinary day, and the minutiae of life trundled on in ignorance. However the city wouldn’t stay ignorant for long. The ships in the harbour would soon set sail with stories of Governor Morgan the Second amongst their cargo. In a fortnight his name would be known from Barbados to Madrid. The lie that had taken a decade to maintain would soon be gossip throughout the Spanish Main.

The realisation spurred Bart’s shallow breathing until he could no longer control it. He gasped and fell to his knees. The enormity of the situation threatened to suffocate him.

Bart looked at his fist and watched it tremble. Between his fingers he could see the corners of a crumpled envelope. It was the letter he’d inherited from his father. Slowly he unfurled his hand and broke Morgan’s seal. There were only three sentences written on the creased paper.

I sired you for a reason. Do me this favour. It’s what you want.

The letter was signed in Captain Morgan's hand. Bart crushed it in his fist. He was rigid with anger. The whole pantomime was nothing more than his father's sick revenge.

While kneeling in the sand, Bart heard rapid footsteps coming from behind. He glanced over his shoulder and squinted at a black robe approaching. It must be Reverend Collier. He breathed deep to try and calm his body. He got up and leaned on his crutch. Then he saw he'd been wrong. It wasn't the Reverend approaching. It was his half-sister.

Lily stormed towards him like a black cloud before a storm.

"What did you say to him?" she demanded as she drew near.

Bart blinked at Lily. When he'd last seen her she was stoic and sophisticated. Now she was like an animal unleashed.

"The day you came to the mansion," Lily shouted. "What did you say to him?"

Bart's intensity matched Lily's, but his brain was unable to articulate a response.

"You turned our father against me. Do you really think I'll let you steal what's mine?"

Bart shook his head.

"I've not a clue what you're talking about," he said. "Our father never even mentioned you."

"You're lying!"

"Look at me," Bart said. "Do you really think I wanted this?"

Lily's icy eyes scrutinised Bart from head to stump. Slowly her ferocity faded.

“No.” She clenched her jaw and glanced at the courthouse. “You don’t. But the Red Dragons won’t see it that way. They’re not as sympathetic as I am. They’ll presume treachery and punish you for it.”

Bart could hardly hold himself still.

“But,” Lily continued. “You’ve no need to die for their resentment. As your sister I’ve an obligation to protect you. Let me.”

Bart stared at his sister. She looked elegant, graceful and almost charming. He knew it was a lie. She was as manipulative as her father, and beneath her breast beat his same calloused heart.

However as Bart stared, he began to see what lay behind the façade. Lily had been a lovely child once. He remembered caring for her as he cared for Jojo. It saddened him that the sweet girl had become a reflection of her father. She was perhaps the worst thing that Morgan had ever done.

“Protect me how?”

“Escape.” Lily lowered her voice. “Our father’s death uncovered thirty-three emeralds. Until today no one knew they were real. I can give you them. All of them, to do with as you please. I just need what you have.”

“The emeralds aren’t yours.”

“I can get them.”

Bart looked at Lily. He didn’t trust her, but the legendary emeralds of Guzmán were priceless. They could buy him anything. They could take him anywhere.

“I’m supposed to believe you’d give me these jewels freely?”

“Not freely,” Lily said. “But if you hand the Red Dragons to me, you’ll leave this city one of the richest men in the Caribbean. You have my word. Just give me yours.”

Images flashed through Bart's mind of a luxurious life somewhere far away. He could take Nanny Rook and Loushinka, and retire with them on an idyllic isle where buccaneers never roamed.

"I need your answer," Lily said.

Bart considered her offer, but before he could give voice to anything, he saw Reverend Collier hurrying towards him. Lily glanced over her shoulder and scowled.

"Give me your word now," she insisted, but Bart's attention had turned to the Reverend.

"I'll think about it," he said.

Both Bart and Lily looked down at the sand as Reverend Collier drew near.

"Miss Morgan." Collier approached as if nothing was wrong. "Last time I saw you, you were a little girl pretending to be a buccaneer. Apparently not much has changed."

"Fuck you old man."

"I'm a holy man, I don't fuck anyone," Collier replied.

Lily ignored the Reverend and turned to Bart.

"You know where to find me."

Without another word, Lily turned around and walked back up to the town. Bart watched her disappear into a mirage.

"What an awful family you've got," Collier said.

Bart didn't reply. His thoughts were with the emeralds.

"Your father's twice the bastard for this."

"I know."

"And she's as cruel as he is."

"I know."

“I’m not sure you do.” Collier planted his staff in the sand. “Jojo’s terrified of Lily. That boy loves everyone, but he hates his sister. Why is that do you think?”

Bart shook his head.

“Being here was a mistake,” Collier said. “Come with me back to the church. We’ve a lot to discuss.”

“No.” Bart stared at the horizon. “I need to think on my own.”

For hours, Bart sat in the shade and watched the happenings of the Hook unfold. He leaned against ruined rubble that had once been the wall of a mighty fort. From within the fort’s shadow he looked out at the sandy wasteland.

He watched troops of fledgling children play amongst the washed up flotsam. Each child was too skinny, and far too exposed to hardship. Poverty and degradation had doomed them to a life of thievery, and for many there’d be no future beyond an early drop from the gallows. Bart slowly exhaled. He reflected that his father had utterly failed this place.

On the fringes of Port Royal, where the city met the Hook, Bart saw an odd creature skulking back to its nest. It was the misshapen child Lost Howler. She slunk from Black Banshee territory like a creature possessed by spirits. Bart was sure she’d just acquired a fresh lump of opium, and his heart ached for her. He could only guess what perverse payment the Banshees had demanded in exchange.

Bart’s chain of thought snaked from Lost Howler to the emeralds of Guzmán. He remembered hearing rumours of the jewels in Panama, but until today he’d never known if Morgan had ever actually found them. Each stone was tainted with blood, but then again all treasures were. Bart contemplated the limits of what they could buy.

With thirty-three emeralds, perhaps he could save every unfortunate soul who was bound to the Hook. He thought about the Black Banshees and the Gentleman. Maybe he could offer an emerald to any man who killed the Banshees' leader. However there was also the problem of the Spaniards. Felina's people had a worthy claim to the Spanish jewels, and Bart was too shrewd to ignore their fury.

He rubbed his sore forehead. The dilemma was like a hydra. Every time he strayed close to an answer, two more quandaries emerged. He imagined building a seaside cottage somewhere far away. There, at least, he hoped he'd find peace.

Bart's deliberation was interrupted by the sound of pebbles scraping against stone. He looked to his left and his eyes widened at the sight of Loushinka, scrambling over rubble to join him. She wore tattered trousers, a cabin boy's coat, and nothing on her feet.

"Lou?" Bart said in a tone of astonishment.

"I was looking for you." Loushinka climbed down and sat herself in the sand beside Bart. "I been up in town, heard folk talking. They're talking about Morgan's one-legged son."

Bart bowed his head.

"How'd you find me?"

"You always sit here when you don't want to be found." Loushinka lifted a broken shell from the ground "What you gonna do?"

Bart almost laughed.

"You're not the first person to ask me that today. You think I could do nothing?"

"No I don't. Things have gone mad up there."

Bart looked at Loushinka and smiled. On the day he'd deserted the Red Dragons and abandoned his father, she'd been only two years old. He'd missed much of her childhood due to opium, but now she was a child no longer. If he could rescue Loushinka, and ensure her a worthy world to inherit, then all the darkness that came before might be worth it.

"I've a question for you Lou," he said. "If you had a ship, a ship that'd take you anywhere, where'd you want to go?"

For a while Loushinka was silent.

"I've thought about it myself," Bart said. "I hear Charles Town's nice, or perhaps the new city they've built all the way up north. Philadelphia. A city of brotherly love. I'm sure there're worse places."

Loushinka looked at Bart and wrinkled her nose.

"Sounds too fancy. I don't want to be a woman among snooty rich folk. What would I talk about? My fashionable new frocks? Or embroidery maybe? No, that sounds horrible."

Bart frowned.

"If I had a boat, I'd sell it, and use the money to buy a good house here," Loushinka continued.

"Here? In Port Royal?"

"In Port Royal there's opportunity...and discovery. Where in Philadelphia would a girl like me find that?"

Bart stared at the ever-shifting sand. He said nothing, but Loushinka's answer had shocked him.

"Why'd you ask?" she said.

"It doesn't matter."

Bart sighed. Not too far away he could see the glow of Nanny Rook's shack.

"I imagine I should talk to your mother about all this."

"She'll be cross if you don't."

Loushinka unfolded her legs and bounded to her feet. Bart took considerably longer to stand. He planted his crutch in the ground and held it for balance.

"You know," Loushinka said with a smile. "Harry will want to hear about this too. Maybe he can help."

Bart's muscles tensed. His heart sank. He hadn't even factored Harry Ben Zafrany into his calculations.

Bart and Loushinka arrived at Nanny Rook's shack just as the sun was beginning to set. As soon as Bart stepped inside, Nanny Rook hugged him and held him tight. Bart savoured her embrace. Somehow she soothed the tribulations of the day.

Harry was sat beside her, fingering stew from a bowl to his mouth. Bart sat opposite him, and explained everything that had occurred since the reading of Morgan's will.

"Thirty-three emeralds Barty?" Nanny Rook said once he'd finished. "You could go anywhere. Anywhere in the world."

Bart smiled.

"I wouldn't go alone. We could all find somewhere. Somewhere where our troubles can't follow."

Harry stroked grease into his auburn goatee.

"Mmm maybe," he said. "Or maybe a bigger, stronger man's gonna put a dagger in your spine and takes your emeralds for himself. You thought of that?"

“They’ll be a secret.”

Harry scoffed.

“Wrong,” he said. “You’ve been gifted the authority to rule this city, and your plan is to run away in secret? Not your best idea.”

Bart exhaled but he didn’t have a comeback.

“But, maybe I can find a way through your conceptual quagmire,” Harry continued. “Why not do what your father wanted? Lead the bleeding Dragons, take the emeralds by force, and do very unpleasant things to those what have wronged you. You got power now Bart. You should bloody use it.”

Bart shook his head.

“Once again Harry you’ve taken a complex issue and arrived at the simplest conclusion,” he said.

“No Bartholomew, once again you fail to see the simplest conclusion.” Harry plucked a chunk of meat from his broth and stuffed it in his mouth. “Am I the only one that sees the difference between wealth and power? One’s all well and good but it’s common, it’s just money eh, the other’s exquisite. Ask your sister, she gets it.”

Bart cracked his jaw and rubbed his tired eyes.

“You’re saying I should turn Lily down and become the Governor?” he asked incredulously.

“No, course not. I’m saying you should take both.”

“That’s not how it works. I get one or the other.”

Harry looked at Bart as if he were speaking a foreign language.

“Why aren’t you getting this? Course you can have both. Your father did.”

“Well I’m not like my father,” Bart snapped.

“You say that, but here we are. The rules have changed for you friend, consequences no longer matter. I reckon you should get up, find that Gentleman fella what’s been giving you grief, and stab in the heart. I guarantee that’ll solve your immediate problems.”

“My God Harry stop talking.” A small part of Bart wished he could do what Harry was suggesting, but he needed to be wiser than that. “I can’t just start killing people I don’t like.”

“Maybe you’re right.” Behind Harry’s eyes a dangerous thought was brewing. “You’re a little brother to me Bart and I recognise there’re things you cannot allow yourself to do. I respect that.”

Bart was unsure how to proceed.

“Thank you,” he said tentatively.

“You’re welcome Bartholomew.” Harry put his bowl to his lips and slurped. “But those things must still be done, eh?”

Bart tensed.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing,” Harry said with a wink.

“Harry?”

Before Harry could respond, there came a knocking on the outside of the shack. Harry dropped his bowl and reached for his machete. The knocking came again.

“You expecting company?”

Both Bart and Nanny Rook shook their heads.

“What you want?” Nanny Rook called out.

Slowly, the drape that covered the entrance was pulled back. Harry stood up and raised his blade.

Into the shack stepped an unexpected, yet familiar, face. It was the enigmatic Punjab, Old Avery. He looked at Bart and rested his hand on the hilt of his Mughal sabre. Behind Old Avery stood a woman in a long coat. She wore a black hood over her head, but Bart recognised Felina immediately.

“If you’re looking for trouble, I’ll slaughter you both,” Harry said without hesitation.

Felina stepped inside and looked Harry up and down.

“I’m sure you’d give Old Avery a fair challenge,” she said. “But I’m not here for you.”

Her copper eyes met Bart’s.

“Forgive my intrusion,” she said. “But you and I need to talk. It would be best we do so alone.”

“She’s a Spaniard Bart,” Harry said. “I don’t trust her.”

Bart put his hand on Harry’s machete. If Felina intended violence she could have mustered fifty fighting men. Instead she came with only one, and his sword was sheathed.

“It’s alright,” Bart said. “I think I do.”

Bart followed Felina and Old Avery away from Nanny Rook’s shack, and down to the water’s edge. Felina kicked a pebble into the polluted sea. She lowered her hood, and let free her coffee coloured hair.

Bart remembered Felina’s promise, and he trusted her to keep it. Nevertheless he was entirely at her mercy, and that fact made him uneasy. Behind him, Old Avery

stood as a silhouetted sentinel beneath the starlight. Bart waited in silence for Felina to speak.

“If you wanted to keep the issue of your father a secret,” she said. “You’ve done a terrible job.”

“Do all your people know?”

“In a single day you’ve become the Hook’s most famous son,” Felina replied.

“But don’t worry, no one will hurt you. I gave you my word.”

Bart nodded.

“Thank you. So it’s just my sister and the Dragons I ought worry about then. And the Banshees of course.”

Felina sharply turned her head and narrowed her eyes.

“Do you trust your sister?”

“Not at all.”

“Good.”

Bart frowned.

“What concern is Lily Morgan to you?”

“She’s a Morgan,” Felina said. “All Morgan’s are a concern to me.”

“Even myself?”

Felina twisted a golden ring around her finger.

“Do you know why I hate your family?” she asked.

“Don’t all Spaniards hate the buccaneers?”

Felina gave Bart the slightest hint of a smile.

“You weren’t born in Port Royal were you?” she asked.

“No, I was three when my father invaded.”

“I wasn’t much older,” Felina said. “But I was born here. I was born in your father’s mansion in fact.”

Bart’s eyes widened.

“What?”

“Before the buccaneers came, my father was the Governor of Spanish Port Royal,” Felina said. “Your father hanged him. He hanged my mother too, and my brothers. I’m only alive today because Old Avery brought me here in a bundle of rags.”

Bart stared at Felina. He’d had no idea.

“I’m telling you this because by right, Port Royal was mine to inherit,” Felina said. “Yet now it’s yours.”

Bart frowned.

“What do you want from me?”

In the moonlight, Felina’s hair was tinted silver.

“I was five when my father was murdered, but I remember him well. He was a radical man with a radical idea. Independence from Europe. He wanted Port Royal to be the first sovereign city-state in the New World.”

“Independence?” Bart said.

“Yes, from Spain and England both. He called his idea *Libertalia*.”

Felina pulled the golden ring off her finger. She placed it in her palm and showed it to Bart.

“This was his,” she said. “His ambition was for Port Royal to be a nation, like Rome or Carthage of old. But Morgan’s ambitions got in the way.”

Bart peered at the golden band in Felina’s hand. In tiny letters was etched the word *Libertalia*.

“If you sailed from here and found peace, I couldn’t stop you. But this city would pass to your sister. Maybe she’d wield it better than Morgan maybe not. Either way nothing would change. The Red Dragons will rule, the Black Banshees will hunt, and the innocent will be trampled.”

Bart touched the golden ring. How different the world might be if his father never came to Jamaica.

“Or?” he said.

Felina’s lips slowly arced into a smile.

“Or, we can stop this Lily Morgan and spare the next generation,” she said. “Port Royal’s a rusted blade, but it can be reforged. Isn’t it time for Morgan’s legacy to die?”

Bart turned away from the sea and stared at Felina. He thought about her father. He thought about his father.

“You truly believe Port Royal’s worth saving?”

Felina closed Bart’s fist around her ring.

“I believe in Libertalia.”

Chapter Eight – Lily III

Dark clouds painted Port Royal's sky a stormy grey. Lily stood behind her father's desk, and looked down from the bay window. Her distorted reflection gazed back through the glass. Since the reading of the will, she'd been alone in the mansion, prowling like a tigress and brooding over the insult she'd suffered.

On the desk behind her, all thirty-three emeralds of Guzmán were arranged in two lines. Each stone varied in shape and size, but they all reeked of her father's greed.

Just the thought of Captain Morgan roused outrage in Lily. She was supposed to be his heir and most loyal child. Instead she'd been cast aside to make room for some half-caste bastard. She wouldn't allow it. The sting of betrayal was a bitter thing, but pain fuelled her wrath. She vowed to surpass her father and take what she deserved through spite.

It would begin with the emeralds. Lily had spent the whole night scouring the mansion, and as dawn broke she'd found them. They were hers now, restitution for her father's betrayal. She had no intention of throwing such treasure into his grave.

On the dreary streets below, Lily spotted an asymmetrical man swinging on a crutch towards the mansion. She watched his onerous approach and smiled. Why did this bastard matter so much? He was an unimpressive cripple, yet the universe had given him the means to inherit unthinkable wealth with just a simple sentence. Perhaps Lily's unfortunate brother was in fact luckier than most.

A miserable drizzle had begun to fall by the time Bart made it to the mansion's door. Lily scooped up the thirty-three emeralds and secured them safely inside a leather purse. Then she ventured downstairs to meet her half-brother.

Bart's thick hair was tied back with a ribbon, and though years of the crutch had left his spine crooked, he seemed to stand taller than before.

Lily greeted him with a courteous smile. She invited him upstairs to the cabinet room, and when they were both inside, she gestured at a chair for him to occupy.

"Thank you," he said. "But I won't be here long."

Lily shrugged. She respected Bart's terse pragmatism.

"Very well. Thirty-three emeralds as promised."

Lily picked up the leather pouch and handed it to Bart. She felt a swell of delight as he took the jewels from her.

"Congratulations, you're the richest cripple in the New World."

Bart weighed the purse in his hand.

"And if I might offer you some complimentary advice with these jewels?"

Lily continued. "Take them and be gone. Find yourself some quiet corner of this world and live well there."

Bart gazed at the jewels. For along moment he was silent.

"That's good advice," he eventually said. "And I truly hope you'll follow it."

His eyes flicked up and met Lily's. He closed the purse and tossed it onto his father's desk.

Lily glared at the purse.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

"I appreciate the offer, but I don't want to trade."

Lily snatched the purse.

"We had a deal. You made a promise!"

“I promised to think about it,” Bart said without raising his voice. “And I did. I’ve decided to stay and do my best with what our father’s left me.”

Lily shook her head like a slow pendulum.

“You’re a Goddamned fool. What do you know of Port Royal?”

“I know it’s broken. And I know it’s time for change.”

Lily narrowed her eyes and prowled towards Bart.

“One day soon you’ll reflect on this choice, and curse it as the worst mistake of your life. Spare yourself that future.”

“I’m sorry Lily but I won’t change my mind.” Bart’s stillness was maddening. “Take the emeralds if you want. Retire on a beach somewhere. Live out your days as a wealthy heiress. I insist.”

Lily straightened her spine.

“You insist?”

“I do.”

“You *insist*? You’re certain?”

“Yes.”

Lily stared deep into Bart’s eyes. She tried to read whatever foolishness lay behind them. She saw not a trace of doubt.

“Well in that case, what more can I do?” Lily said with a polite smile. “I’d be lying to pretend I’m not disappointed but...you insist. Congratulations Governor.”

Bart’s change in expression betrayed his sense of danger. He edged towards the door.

“Alright good. Good day Lily.”

Lily nodded and smiled sweetly.

Bart put his hand on the polished doorknob, but he turned around before departing.

“You know, I wish we could have been closer.”

Bart’s bittersweet sentiment took Lily aback.

“So do I,” she said without thinking. “Goodbye Bart.”

Lily watched her half-brother disappear from sight. When she heard the mansion door close behind him, she struck the desk with her fist. The cripple was yet another complication, but he would be overcome. Lily focused her bitter resentment of Captain Morgan and channelled it into fury against Bart.

She almost felt sorry for the bastard. It didn’t need to be this way, but he’d stood against a dragon and walked away unscathed. She now had no choice but to put her brother in the ground.

By sundown, the rain was falling in torrents. Lily donned a canvas jacket and a felt hood to keep off the downpour. She tucked the emerald’s purse under her belt and picked up a slender stiletto with which she’d defend them. Then she slipped out onto the empty streets.

Port Royal was a different city in the rain. The often-disorderly roads were now void of people, and all Lily could hear was the endless patter of raindrops and the rumble of distant thunder.

Even the Dragon’s Den looked serene in the deluge. The tavern’s insides glowed orange against the dark, and the sounds of music and laughter leaked onto the street. Lily stepped inside, although it wasn’t rum she was looking for.

The Den was packed full of rowdy Dragons. On the far wall was a painting of Captain Morgan in his prime. Beneath it was a crude shrine that contained candles,

coins, and bottles of grog for the fallen king. Not a single man paused his merriment for Lily. She removed her coat and cap, and hung them by the door.

In only a moment, she spotted Mister Prince by the unsightly scar across his throat. He sat silent and alone at the back of the tavern. She hadn't seen him since the reading of her father's will.

Prince's grey eyes met Lily's from across the room. She moved through the jostling crowd towards him.

"Lawrence finish your drink," she said when she was close. "There's work needs doing."

Prince's expression was as impassive as always. He said something in response, but the ruckus smothered his whispery voice. He emptied his mug and Lily led him through the tavern towards a side door.

Outside it was cooler and quiet, though the rain was pouring ever harder. A balcony above, on the top storey, sheltered Lily and Prince from the curtain of water, and they stood together in a dry sanctuary amidst the drenched city.

Lily glanced at Prince and clenched her jaw.

"I'm in need of your less savoury talents sir. I'll pay you well."

Prince blinked.

"I've no idea what you mean Miss," he whispered. "My talents lie in managing the Governor's affairs?"

"Don't play coy sir, I'm no gullible maiden. You were a surgeon once. You have skills with a blade, and intimate knowledge of a body's weakest points. I know my father used your skills for all manner of distasteful errands, and now I'm requesting the same."

Prince stared at Lily, but he said nothing.

“The cripple Bartholomew’s made an enemy of me. I need him to disappear. Quickly, quietly, and permanently. I’ve no doubt you’ve done far worse in your life.”

“I suppose I have.” Mister Prince removed his spectacles and wiped them with his sleeve. “Do you know what my final errand was, before your father died? He sent me to his lawyer. He sent me to amend his will.”

Lily recoiled in horror.

“His will? You swapped my name for Bart’s?”

“On your father’s orders, yes,” Prince said. “You see my loyalties belonged to the Governor, and it was his final wish that those loyalties be inherited by your brother. So it does concern me that you want my lawful master to...what was it you said? Disappear.”

Lily’s eyes grew wide in anger.

“You cowardly little traitor,” she said. “After everything I’ve done for this city, you’ll just slither away when it’s convenient? You’re a damned disgrace.”

“From where I stand, it appears you may be the traitor,” Prince whispered. “Perhaps you should run back to your Sea Wolves. Perhaps they’ll have the unsavoury talents you seek.”

Lily’s fist shook with rage. One day Prince would suffer for this duplicity.

“You may have lost your fidelity, but I trust your greed remains in tact,” she said. Her fingers brushed the purse on her belt. “I’ll give you an emerald right now to put a knife through Bart’s heart.”

Prince’s dispassionate expression suddenly changed. Even he couldn’t mask his concern for the jewels.

“An emerald? You found them?”

Lily stared at Prince. However before she could give a nod of confirmation, the backdoor of the Den swung open with a sudden bang.

In the threshold stood Admiral Margulis. He held a bottle of whiskey in his hand, and behind him stood three Red Dragons.

“Aah Lilywhite,” he said. “I thought I’d seen you prancing out this way.”

Lily’s heart rate quickened. She’d hoped that the Admiral would be aboard his newly inherited flagship.

“Me and the lads were thinking,” Margulis said gleefully. “Isn’t this a wonderful time to revisit our last conversation? You remember the one? That night your father died?”

The three Dragons behind Margulis grinned at Lily. Their yellow teeth prickled her skin.

“All your blustering and fine words, they can’t help you now.”

Lily took a step backwards and felt a spatter of rain on her nape. Margulis and his Dragons slowly filled the gap she’d left.

“Excuse me Admiral,” Mister Prince said before Lily could reply. “But just a moment before you arrived, Miss Morgan said the most fascinating thing.”

Lily glared at Prince but it did no good.

“She told me she’s found the emeralds of Guzmán. In fact, she implied they’re on her person.”

Fury seethed beneath Lily’s beast. She wanted to plunge her stiletto through Prince’s throat and watch him drown in blood. However her own survival was more important. Tonight was not her moment to die.

“My God,” Margulis said with a chuckle. “Those jewels aren’t yours to take. Give them to me girl. Resist and my men will have to hurt you. So go on, resist.”

The three Dragons stalked forwards. Lily had no choice but to her draw her stiletto.

“Get back,” she shouted.

Margulis’ lips curled into a smile.

“You stupid witch. Too long you’ve been an ache in my bones, but no longer.”

Lily held her blade outstretched.

“Under the King’s law in Port Royal, I declare you an enemy of the city,” Margulis said.

Lily breathed deep. Her stiletto was no more than a needle next to the Dragons’ swords. Her mind raced but she saw only one option. She pulled the purse from her belt and clenched it in her left hand.

“Surrender woman, and perhaps England might take you back.”

Lily’s blade sliced open the purse.

“I’m Welsh.”

She flung the purse into the air, and the green gems came cascading out through the hole she’d cut. Each stone vanished amidst the rainy darkness, and every head turned in anguish as the jewels were scattered in the sand.

In the split-second of distraction, Lily bolted.

Through the dark and through the rain she ran, oblivious to any direction but forwards. Men were running after her but she didn’t dare turn around.

Lily hurtled from the Den, but her soaking dress slowed her down. A hand of iron caught her collar and dragged her to the ground. She fell on wet sand and Margulis’ Dragon fell with her. He punched her in the stomach and knocked the stiletto from her grip. The Dragon held a long knife in his fist.

Every muscle in Lily's body surged with strength. Savagery coursed through her veins. There wasn't a single thought in her head. Only instinct. She reached for the Dragon and clawed the skin beneath his eyes. He howled and raised his knife. The naked blade slashed Lily's face, and cut a deep furrow down her cheek. She felt the hot blood and the cold steel, but all else was numb.

Within moments the other two Dragons were on her. The largest one dragged her to her feet. She filled her lungs and shouted with all her might. The Dragon forced a hand over her mouth. Lily bit down.

The Dragon howled and relaxed his grip, but Lily didn't stop biting. Her jaw was clenched so tight she could feel the gristle of his thumb between her teeth. Her mouth didn't open until it was filled with blood.

The other two Dragons heaved her off their mate. They knocked her to the ground and kicked her in the ribs.

The downpour rinsed streaks of dye from Lily's hair. She gasped in a puddle of blood, dye, and lashing rainwater.

The largest Dragon clutched his bleeding hand and drew a pistol from his baldric. He cocked back the hammer and shoved the muzzle against her temple.

For a moment everything went quiet. Lily felt only the rain and the pistol. She stared death in its unblinking eye.

Crack.

Lily's body tensed. She looked up at the Dragon and saw a crimson hole in the side of his skull. For a second his empty eyes were glazed with disbelief. He keeled over and dropped dead beside her.

Across the street stood a warrior in a russet coat and a wide-brimmed hat. In one hand was a short sword, and in the other a still smoking pistol. The two remaining Dragons spun around but they were too slow.

One man was cut down in an instant. The other had time to charge. His blade clashed and the steel sang. The Dragon was stronger than his foe, but he was slower. The duel lasted only a moment. The Dragon swung and when he missed, his throat was opened from ear to ear. He was dead before his body smacked the street.

Lily clutched her left cheek. The wound grew ever more painful as her flesh cooled.

Lily's saviour rushed over and grasped her shoulder. She flinched but through the rain and the blood she recognised the face beneath the hat.

“Rowan?”

“Lily what have they done to you?” Rowan De Berry held Lily tight.

“Emeralds, they have the emeralds.”

“Forget them.” Rowan stroked Lily's dripping hair. “Can you stand?”

Lily nodded.

“Good. Then we need to run.”

Chapter Nine – Bart VI

Thirteen days after the death of Captain Morgan, Port Royal prepared itself for the grandest funeral that the city had ever known. The mansion was draped black and every mirror, window, or reflective pool was covered to prevent the soul from being trapped inside.

The city had become a circus, but Bart kept his distance. He spent his morning at St Paul's Church, discussing and debating his future with Reverend Collier. However the moralistic sermons soon grew tedious. Before long, Bart found himself making excuses to go outside and tend the gardens with Jojo.

He wanted to be with his half-brother on the day of their father's funeral. He knew neither of them would be attending the actual burial. He tried to explain how things might change when he becomes Governor. He did his best to satisfy Jojo's questions, but when he was asked what happens now, he realised he wasn't sure of the answer.

Five days ago, Morgan's former deputy had come to visit Bart in the Hook. The enigmatic Mister Prince had reintroduced himself, and promised that he now served Bart just as he'd served his father. He explained that after the funeral, Bart would officially become the new Governor, and as such, he'd be free to occupy the Governor's mansion.

However since then, Bart hadn't had much to do but keep his head down and his eyes open. Every day he'd anticipated some retribution from Lily, but her attack never came. He'd neither seen nor heard any hint of his sister since their last meeting. It seemed she'd simply vanished.

Unfortunately the same could not be said for Harry Ben Zafrany. When Bart told Nanny Rook of Lily's half-veiled threats, she insisted that Harry accompany him

throughout the day for protection. But after only a morning at the church, Bart was beginning to think he might prefer the company of Lily's assassins.

Harry was like a bull in a hen house. Everything he touched turned to chaos, and every word he spoke shattered the relative serenity of St Paul's.

By midday, he'd become so insufferable that Bart could no longer tolerate the confines of the church. Eventually he relented to Harry's incessant demands. In exchange for a moment of peace, he agreed to spend the afternoon exploring the macabre pageantry that had overtaken Port Royal.

The streets were packed. Vendors lined the gutters and hawked their stock, while troupes of players embellished scenes from Captain Morgan's life. Now that his secret was out, Bart no longer felt shame in it. Thirteen years ago he'd made a promise to stand straight-backed and defiant over his father's corpse. Now that time had come.

In the past six days Bart had become a figure of curiosity in Port Royal. A buxom prostitute mockingly dipped her head to Bart and offered a full service for the crooked governor. He passed her with only a shake of his head.

On his belt he wore a short dagger that Nanny Rook had given him. It wasn't much against the pistols, axes, and cutlasses that were brandished heedlessly in the street, but Bart reflected, that's what Harry was for.

"Step right up Gentleman," shouted some huckster when Bart and Harry wandered too close. "I have here relics of the Brethren's King. Behold, a tooth sundered from Morgan's mouth on that fateful day he took Panama. Only two pesos and it's yours."

Harry seemed intensely fascinated by the tiny vial and the yellow tooth that rattled around inside. He was like an unruly child on May Day.

“Morgan lost three teeth in Panama,” Bart said to the huckster. “All knocked from the back of his mouth. That’s a canine.”

The huckster blinked at Bart.

“You’re mistaken friend.”

“I’m not mistaken. You’re a fraud.”

The huckster may have had some quick response on his tongue, but before he could deliver it, Bart heard a voiceless laugh behind his back.

“Apparently there’re still a few in this town who aren’t familiar with our new-found Governor.”

Bart’s blood froze. He recognised the Irish accent without a moment’s hesitation. Instinctively, his hand found his dagger as he turned around.

The man known only as the Gentleman put a hand on Bart’s shoulder.

“Fancy spotting you here, friend.”

In an instant, Bart’s muscles constricted. The thud of his heart grew louder. Misery and despair returned at the sight of the revolting banshee tattoo. However within only a moment, his panic began to deflate.

Bart was stood in a public place with Harry at his side. He was in his second month of freedom from opium, and he realised he no longer had anything to fear from his old tormenter. The rules had changed.

Harry reached for his machete, but Bart stopped him. There was no harm in talking.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“I want to revitalise our friendship,” the Gentleman said. “You’ve been avoiding me Bart.”

Bart raised his chin.

“And you didn’t take that as a hint to give up?”

“Ah ha, no I’m afraid that I can’t do.” The Gentleman pulled back his long coat. Hanging from his belt was a silver cutthroat razor. “I’ve a message for you lad. It’s from the boss.”

Bart frowned. He knew nothing of the Black Banshee’s ruler.

“Why don’t we go somewhere more discreet?” the Gentleman said. “We’ve a fair amount to discuss.”

Against his better judgement, Bart followed the Gentleman down a narrow alleyway. Harry trailed close behind. The alley was quiet, but close enough to the bustling street that Bart didn’t feel vulnerable.

“Who’d have believed it?” the Gentleman said with a slimy smile. “The same mixed-blood cripple who bought my opium is in fact Morgan’s firstborn? It seems your circumstances have changed.”

“They have,” Bart replied. “Tell me your boss’s message.”

The Gentleman feigned a sympathetic sigh.

“It all comes down to money, as all things must. You see the Banshees made a tidy profit off you when you bought our mother’s milk. Perhaps you can afford even more now that you’re a Governor?”

“You want me to pay you?”

“A hundred doubloons a month. That’s what the boss wants.”

Bart scoffed.

“A hundred doubloons? Are you mad?”

“I’m not. You should consider what I’m asking. If we were so inclined, the Banshees could make life very unpleasant for you...and the ones you love.”

Bart stared into the banshee’s face. The tattoo’s ink was faded.

“You were right,” Bart said. “When you told me my circumstances had changed. However you neglected to mention that your circumstances have also changed. The Banshees never mattered to my father, but you matter quite a bit to me. I don’t like you. I have the authority to crush you. And now your plan is to threaten me? That seems unwise.”

The Gentleman’s wormy lips twitched.

“Watch your words boy.”

“Or what? You’ll kill me in the street? The Banshees aren’t buccaneers. You’re not conquerors, you’re not even criminals. You’re simply men of business. And my city is no longer good for business.”

The Gentleman wiped his grubby hands.

“You’ve changed Bart. I don’t think it suits you.”

“I don’t care what you think. I’ve outgrown your intimidation.” Bart straightened his back to stand as tall as possible. “From now on I’ll speak only with the man in charge. That’s not you.”

For a moment the Gentleman looked unsure what to say. He brushed his nose and smiled.

“Alright then, I’ll tell the boss,” he said. “Like you say, we’re all just men of business.”

Bart nodded but said nothing.

“And if we’re conducting business,” the Gentleman added. “That makes us partners. So why not begin our friendship anew?”

The Gentleman spat on his palm and stretched it out for Bart to shake.

“Wouldn’t you agree friend?”

The hand disgusted Bart almost as much as the man it belonged to. However he now had an opportunity to face his demons. There were much bigger Banshees than the Gentleman, and a single handshake was no great hardship in ensuring that their syndicate crumbled. He spat on his own palm.

“Don’t shake that fucking hand!”

Both Bart and the Gentleman turned to Harry. His fist clutched his machete.

“Don’t shake that hand,” Harry urged.

The Gentleman gave Bart a tentative smile.

“Who’s this lump of meat?” he asked.

Bart flashed an angry look at Harry.

“I know what I’m doing.”

Harry shook his head.

“No you don’t. Only a fool would go into business with a man like this filthy papist.”

“Harry!”

“This fool belongs to you?” The Gentleman put a hand on his razor.

“Harry stop!”

The Gentleman chuckled softly.

“Dissention already? You’re not even in the mansion yet Bart. Perhaps you should be nicer to your bodyguards.” The Gentleman grinned at Harry. “The Banshees would be much kinder friends to a man like you.”

He extended his hand, but Harry withdrew from it as if it were riddled with plague.

“You want to be my friend? That’s embarrassing,” he said without hesitation. “I’d sooner befriend some red-toothed shark than a piece of dirt such is yourself. Now piss off before I feel compelled to roll up my sleeves and bloody my hands.”

The Gentleman looked at Harry. Then he looked at Bart. His smile sent a chill down Bart’s spine.

“You’ve a passion for violence,” he said. “We’re not so different you and-”

“Right you’re still talking, which must mean you want to die.” Harry squared up to the Gentleman. “I think I’m going to wiggle my thumb right through your eyeball and into your brain. Then I’ll probably move onto the next Banshee I find.”

“Harry stop!” Bart demanded, but he might as well have been talking to the breeze.

“In fact you know what?” Harry continued. “I’m inclined to declare war on every single one of you ugly tattooed, bloody Irish-Catholic, fat fucking bastards. Do you like me now?”

For a fraction of a second the Gentleman seemed to recoil.

“You’re inclined to declare war?” he said. “Those are big words my friend. You’ve never seen the Banshees at war.”

Bart clenched his fist and barged Harry out the way.

“This man does not speak for me.” He glared at Harry. “He’s nothing to me. Go back to your boss and deliver my message.”

The Gentleman’s eyes flitted between Bart and Harry.

“Oh I will go to the boss. I’ll speak of everything that’s been said today.” He winked at Harry. “You’d be wise to leave this city. The boss isn’t forgiving like I am.”

For once Harry remained silent.

“Good day Governor.” The Gentleman mockingly bowed his head. “We’ll be seeing each other very soon.”

The Gentleman nodded, and without another word he left Bart and Harry alone in the alleyway.

Bart hung his head in silence. Anger boiled beneath his skin.

Harry wore a smug smile.

“You’re welcome,” he said.

In an instant Bart’s frustration erupted beyond control.

“What in God’s name’s wrong with you?” he shouted.

“What’s wrong with me?” Harry seemed genuinely astonished. “You were about to shake hands with a man you hate. That’s not what you want, I did you a favour.”

“I’m the judge of what I want.” Bart stared into Harry’s jungle-green eyes. “Go!”

“Go where?”

“Away.”

Harry looked perplexed.

“I can’t go. You need me.”

“No. I don’t need you.” Bart breathed deep. “I don’t want you.”

Harry flinched at Bart’s words as if they were bolts from a crossbow.

“You don’t mean that. We’re brothers.”

“You’re not my brother Harry. You’re a rabid dog due for extermination.”

Harry stepped backwards and shook his head like a shamefaced child.

“No. No,” he said. “No, you’re wrong.”

He glanced at Bart's missing leg, and without a word he kicked the crutch away. Bart dropped like a stone from a cliff. His ribcage thumped against the ground, and the wind was smacked from his lungs. Harry peered over him.

"You desperately need me."

Bart's gasped to catch a breath. He rolled onto his back and pulled the dagger from his belt. He brandished the blade at Harry.

"Get out of my sight."

Harry frowned at Bart and bared his teeth like a wild animal.

"You're a bloody fool Bartholomew," he said. "And I'll hear you admit it before the end."

Harry looked at Bart but said nothing else. He exhaled and shook his head. Then he walked away, and left Bart alone to pick himself up.

The Hook was the only part of Port Royal that wasn't enthralled in the spectacle of mourning. Bart trekked by himself along the shore. Thoughts flowed in and out of his mind like the ebb and flow of a tide. It had only now occurred to him that in the morning he'd move into the Governor's mansion. This could very well be his last night as a citizen of the Hook. He wasn't sure how he felt about it. In the Hook he was a vagrant, but he belonged. In the mansion he'd still be a vagrant, and a stranger in a land of privilege.

It didn't take long for Bart's contemplations to be overcome by thoughts of Harry. He reflected on the last things he'd said to him. He still wasn't sure if he should regret it. Angering someone as volatile as Harry could prove dangerous, but he thought probably not as dangerous as the full wrath of the Banshees.

What worried Bart most though, was the love of Nanny Rook and Loushinka. What if they chose Harry over him? The Banshees and the Dragons paled in comparison to that fear. Bart tried expelling the intrusive notion, but it always returned to gnaw at his brain.

Bart headed through the dark towards the north of the Hook. There he found a decent view of the harbour and the distant Palisadoes. He wanted to witness his father's funeral without giving him the satisfaction of being present.

It was dark when Bart arrived at the spot, and he found to his dismay that he wasn't the first to have this idea. At the very tip of the Hook he saw a crowd of Spaniards gathered around their driftwood bonfire. All of them seemed in high spirits as they celebrated the demise of the Buccaneer's king.

Bart smiled at their revelry, though he knew better than to intrude. He kept his distance and sat alone on a mound of sand, overlooking the dark water. In the harbour was a flotilla of nineteen merchant ships in tight formation. The Red Dragon's two warships, the Guernsey and the Swan, flanked the flotilla. At the head of the fleet was Morgan's old flagship the Glory, although now she was captained by her new owner: Admiral Margulis.

On the far side of the water, Bart could make out a trail of orange lights heading up the skinny Palisadoes. He reckoned they were the lanterns of the funeral procession. Morgan's place of burial was to be the Palisadoes cemetery, where he'd forever overlook the city.

From behind, Bart heard the sound of faint voices. He glanced over his shoulder and saw two silhouettes approaching. For a moment he considered getting up and moving. However as they drew near, Bart recognised the turquoise turban and

curved scabbard on the taller figure. They belonged to the sage Punjabi, Old Avery.
At his side walked Felina.

“I saw you sat alone,” Felina said when Bart tried standing to greet her. “Sit back down, do you mind if I join?”

Bart raised an eyebrow but shook his head.

“Please.”

He greeted Felina with a nod. Old Avery nodded too, though he remained a few paces away.

“Apologies if my people become rowdy.” Felina sat in the dirt beside Bart.
“This is a happy day for them.”

“For all of us,” Bart said while smiling. Despite Harry’s foolery, today truly had felt like a victory over his father.

He picked up a handful of sand.

“When God made Captain Morgan, he really shat upon the rest of us.”

Felina looked shocked. Suddenly Bart felt anxious that his blasphemy was a step too far, but Felina’s smirk quelled his nerves.

“Apologies. I shouldn’t say that to you.” Bart scratched his hand and smiled.
“Also I probably shouldn’t have been drunk at our first meeting. Sorry for that too.”

Felina half laughed.

“You’ve nothing to apologise for. Morgan may be a devil but he’s dead now.
His shadow dies with him.”

Bart frowned at Felina.

“Can you really do that?” he said. “Can you really let the past die after everything Morgan’s done? To you personally? I imagine I’d lie awake every night thinking about it.”

Felina seemed to choose her words with care.

“I’ll never be free of it. My grandparents lie in the same graveyard he’s to be buried in. But you want to know what keeps me awake at night? It’s Libertalia. That’s the idea worth pursuing. That’s the idea that I’ll let the past die for. Can you do the same?”

Bart stared out at the harbour.

“I think so.”

As Bart spoke, Felina’s sentiments were echoed in an almighty boom from across the water. White smoke billowed from the starboard side of the flotilla. One after the other, each ship fired their cannons in a twenty-two-gun salute.

Felina spat at the water. Bart did the same.

“Good riddance to the worst man in the Caribbean,” he said

“The king is dead. Long live the new king.”

Bart’s heart quickened when he realised that Felina was talking about him.

“Does Libertalia have a king?” he asked. “I’m not sure I fully understand your father’s idea.”

Felina’s copper eyes looked deep into Bart’s

“That’s why I came to join you. Tomorrow’s when the future begins.”

Bart looked back to the warships.

“Independence,” he said. “It’s a tantalizing thought. But revolution’s a messy business.”

“We won’t need a revolution. Spain and England are both far too occupied with each other to raise a navy against us. The Empires are stretched too thin. They’re too heavily in debt. But we have the wealth of the New World. More money flows through Port Royal than London. The Governor of Jamaica’s a tired old man; this city

is the true power in the Caribbean. From that we can forge a colony into a country, and Europe won't be able to stop us until it's too late."

"The first country in the New World?" Bart tossed a pebble at the sand. "If we prove it's possible, won't the rest of Jamaica, even the Caribbean, do likewise?"

"Is that a bad thing?"

Bart exhaled.

"We're talking about changing the world."

"Yes. We are. If we give life to what my father conceived, you'll become the first Lord Protector of the state of Libertalia. You'll treat with kings. You'll rule a nation."

"And what will you do?"

"I shall be represented by old Mister Avery in your parliament. And who knows, perhaps..."

Felina suspended her thought. She was staring at the harbour.

"What is that?" she said.

Bart peered at the dark water. A twenty-third ship was drifting towards the flotilla. She was a single-masted sloop that was dwarfed by the frigates and brigantines she was nearing. Bart frowned. He wondered if this was another part of the pageantry.

Old Avery put a hand on his sword. At that moment, a huge sheet of canvas was cut loose over the sloop's mainsail. It was black, but in the dim glow of the flotilla's lanterns Bart could make out a shape painted in red. The emblem was of a giant wolf's head. Its mouth was open, and drops of crimson dripped from its bared teeth.

"The Sea Wolves," he thought aloud.

“The Sea Wolves are gone. Crushed by Morgan?” Felina said.

“Crushed but not killed.” Old Avery’s fingers twitched.

Bart squinted at the sloop. He caught a glimpse of what he thought was a tiny figure hurling himself overboard.

Suddenly his eyes widened.

“Smoke.”

In an instant the smoke turned to searing fire. The sloop erupted orange, and for a moment she was entirely engulfed in flame.

Then she collided with the Glory.

The decking of Morgan’s flagship was caulked with tar and her lines were greased in fat. All of it was fuel for the fire. Within seconds the Glory was an inferno. A moment after that, the powder magazine exploded, and the Glory’s bowels were flung skyward in a ball of fire. Hundreds of fiery splinters rained down on the rest of the flotilla.

Before Bart could comprehend what he was seeing, the entire harbour was aflame. Wood crackled and drowned out the sound of screaming. Felina jumped to her feet. The fire detonated another frigate’s powder magazine. Every soul aboard was consumed. The force of the explosion rattled Bart’s eardrums and he felt the heat of it on his skin. A few tiny silhouettes jumped ship like fleas off a dog. Against the inferno they were specks. Those who thought to fight the fire were devoured by it.

Bart stared at the blaze.

He remembered the Sea Wolves. He remembered their captain. And he realised now that he’d misspoken. There were far worse men than Henry Morgan.

Chapter Fifty-five – The End

The 7th of June 1692 began as a beautiful day in Port Royal. The azure sky flaunted only the finest feathery clouds, and a handsome sea breeze kept them sailing in constant passage. It was twenty minutes to noon.

Bart, Felina, and Captain Harry Avery stood with their backs to Saint Paul's church. They stood on the fringes of the Hook. A bustling throng of excited people occupied the streets. They had come to celebrate the official reopening of the old Fort Charles, which under Bart's command had been fully restored to function.

Beloved Felina was as always plying her charisma on the wealthiest merchants that flocked to the city. Libertalia had reformed Port Royal into the wealthiest port in the Caribbean, and vendors from every corner of the world sailed to the grand harbour. The Governor of Jamaica lounged in the North, and in Port Royal he held no power. Independence was slow, but every day the influence of Libertalia grew. It was the first true city-state in the New World.

In stark contrast to Felina, Harry swaggered among the populace wearing his long captain's coat and a fine hat. He'd become an esteemed though unorthodox captain, but his voyages through the Spanish Main had brought significant prosperity to Port Royal.

In a place that had once been the hive of Black Banshee territory, Bart stood as a king beyond England's reach. But he wasn't paying attention to the day's duties. He was staring at the sea. It seemed odd. He'd never seen it like this before. The water had turned strange and glassy, and the noisy sea birds had all taken to flight. The breeze was dead.

From the corner of his eye, Bart saw something small scurrying among the crowd. He squinted, though his eyes widened again when he'd made sense of what he

saw. It was the misshapen child Lost Howler. She stopped and stared at Bart without making a sound. He hadn't seen her in years, but she looked no different. He'd assumed she was dead.

Bart looked deep into the child's glazed and colourless eyes.

Then it struck.

The earth convulsed with violent retribution. The ground was rent open, and nature itself was shaken apart. Immense fissures opened in the sand and then closed as quickly as a hand's clap. The street shuddered and people fell. Screaming and panic seized the city. Then more fissures appeared. Anywhere and everywhere the ground opened, until two hundred were open at once. Into some cracks people were swallowed, into others they were crushed. One fissure snapped closed and left only a man's head above the surface. Ships shattered against the dock, and sailors flailed in the water. It was the mightiest earthquake Port Royal had ever known.

Bart was shoved and manhandled within the frenzy of panic, but he kept his balance and fought his way to Lost Howler. He scooped her up in his arms. As he turned, he saw Harry snatch the collar of Felina's dress and haul her backwards. She hit the ground just before a ship's disembodied mast came crashing down where she'd been standing. Within seconds she was back on her feet, running with Harry over to Bart.

Then there came an almighty rumble from the city's foundations. Within seconds the sand beneath Port Royal liquefied and the western edge of the town began rolling into the sea.

Without a word being spoken, Harry and Felina fled east with the crowds towards the Palisadoes. Bart hurried behind them as fast as his body would allow. As he sprinted, there came another shock. Stone buildings crumbled like parchment in a

breeze. Bart kept his eyes on the ever-shifting ground, but before him he heard a tremendous crash and a cry of pain. He looked up and his heart fractured like the earth.

Beneath an enormous pile of timber, Felina was pinned and bleeding. She was alive, but the debris was crushing her legs. For a second Bart's head was empty of all thoughts. Then just one crept into his brain. Felina wasn't going to make it out. She knew it too.

Harry glanced over his shoulder and ran back to Bart. Time was running out. Panting, Bart handed Lost Howler to Harry.

"Take her and run," he shouted.

Harry didn't move. His iridescent eyes were anchored on Bart.

"Harry its eight miles across the Palisadoes. You have to go."

Still he didn't move. Harry shook his head.

"What about you two?" he said.

Bart looked at Felina. Her copper eyes were wide and bloodshot with fey foreboding.

"Harry I promise I'll meet you on the mainland," Bart said while his body shuddered. "Now take her and run!"

Harry clasped Lost Howler and nodded at Bart.

"I'll see you on the mainland," he said.

Then Harry turned and sprinted away. Bart watched him run, and in his heart he felt relief as Harry disappeared through the panicked crowd.

Then he turned back to Felina. He gazed at her coffee coloured hair and the olive of her skin, and he knew he couldn't keep his promise. He wouldn't leave her.

Felina gasped and clawed at the sand.

“Go!” she screamed. “Run!”

Bart’s heartbeat slowed to a tranquil rhythm. His pegleg couldn’t outrun this doom. He knelt by Felina and smiled.

She must love me, he thought.

With an outstretched hand, Bart reached for Felina’s. But before their fingertips touched, a third huge shock rattled the ground beneath them.

Bart fell onto his back. Above him a slab of rubble tumbled from a collapsing rooftop. Bart lurched his body away but he was too slow. The rubble smashed into his leg and shattered it completely.

Bart’s body tensed for the otherworldly pain, but it never came. He felt nothing. He looked down and saw it was his pegleg that lay smashed beneath the stone. His body was uninjured.

Bart exhaled and a strange thought came to him. He was always destined to lose his leg. Now that he could see his life in completion, he was glad that he’d lost it years ago. It allowed him peace in this moment.

Bart crawled around the rubble and lay beside Felina. The liquefying sand had begun to slow, and for a moment there was quiet. Bart and Felina lay together. They were the only ones left in their silent city.

Far too soon, the silence gave way to the rushing sound of water. The sea had withdrawn from Port Royal’s beaches. Bart knew full well that this was the omen of a tidal wave.

He took Felina’s hand and squeezed it. He looked upon his own wrists and the old scars that had once been raw. He’d already met death. It didn’t frighten him now.

Bart thought about the first morning he’d awoken up after renouncing opium. A future had seemed so impossible back then. Yet a future he had lived. He’d known

love, he'd commanded a city and he'd made mistakes. But his leg hadn't bothered him for four years.

Bart clutched Felina's hand, and he twisted the golden ring on her wedding finger. He felt the word *Libertalia* engraved in the metal. Once that word had been nothing but a dream.

"We built it," Bart said as he crawled closer to Felina. "It'll never be beggared nor ever grow weary. It'll be golden forever."

Felina was crying but she stroked Bart's face. She kissed him for all the passion they'd never share.

When their lips finally parted, Bart could hear the thunderous roar of the ocean's return.

"Libertalia existed," he said.

Bart embraced Felina and held her tight.

The tidal wave was six-feet high when it collided with the city. It struck the shore with the ferocity of cannon fire, and all in its path was razed to ruin. Within minutes the land was drowned. Twenty ships were capsized and splintered in the harbour, while nought but the church's steeple remained above the water. Eventually the foundations of sand were swept away, and the city of Port Royal, was reclaimed by the sea.

THE END

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