

Excerpt The Hawk's Lady

**CHARTER BOOKS. NEW YORK**

THE HAWK'S LADY A Charter Book/published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY

Charter edition/February 1989

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1989 by Colleen Shannon.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission. For information address:

The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue,

New York, New York 10016.

ISBN: 1-55773-158-6

Charter Books are published by The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

The name "Charter" and the "C" logo are trademarks belonging to Charter Communications, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To a wonderful woman: my own Greaty, Lorraine Fuglaar. For the love, and the belief in myself that made this possible.*

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

With warmest thanks to Mr. Michael Alford, curator of North Carolina's Maritime Museum.

# The Hawk's Lady

Colleen Shannon



CHARTER BOOKS, NEW YORK

# PART I

‘The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ, moves on: not all your Piety nor Wit shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.’

—*THE RUBAIYAT*, Omar Khayyam

# Chapter 1

That lovely June day began perfectly. A smiling Nature beamed down on Tory, blessing her with a warm but not hot sun and a cool but not cold breeze. The serene Mediterranean horizon hinted of no danger beyond. Turquoise seas and cornflower skies mixed into a sublime blue palette; the air sparkled with purity after London's fumes; and the boundless waves were a buoyant escort to freedom.

Porpoises frolicked alongside the *Defiant Lady*, skimming the waves. Occasionally one leaped into the air, flaunting a pale belly before diving again. When one rascal arced and turned his perpetual grin on her, Tory smiled back, wanting to shout her joy to him and all creation. How good it felt to be mistress of her own destiny at last!

Tory spun exuberantly, arms flung wide, and laughed. In her clinging yellow muslin gown, red-gold hair ablaze, she seemed as brilliantly untouchable as the sun. Sailors admired her tall, lush figure, grinning at her joy until a stern look from their captain sent them hastily back to work.

The tiny woman at her side, however, was immune to Tory's contagious mirth. She watched her charge sourly, as if fearing this moment would be scant recompense for the inevitable sorrow to come.

Tory took Becky's hands in hers and said cajolingly, "Don't spoil the *Defiant Lady's* maiden voyage with those sour looks, please? We're almost to Majorca, so your dire warnings have come to naught. I can't wait to see Eleni! It's been so long since our academy days, letters or no. How surprised she'll be to see me!"

Plump and pugnacious as a bulldog, Becky pulled away to prop her fists on ample hips. "That smile won't wheedle you out of this mess, Victoria Alicia Grenville. You've gone too far this time. Your grandmother will cut you off for sure for embarrassing her by leaving poor Baron Howard at the altar."

Tory's smile faded. She narrowed eyes as turquoise as the Mediterranean at her friend and companion. "She has no one to blame but herself. I told her I wouldn't marry Cedric and I meant it. Besides, since I've attained my majority, she can cut me out of her will if she pleases. I'll live on my mother's bequest."

Her bravado won but a rude snort from Becky. "There speaks a lady who's never known a moment's want. Well, Her Grace will indulge you no longer. Had she known to what use you'd put this pretty new yacht, she'd never have bought it for you, peace offering or no. As for living on that piddling income from your mother . . . pshaw! You've no idea how to economize. And you'll be ostracized to boot, at least for a time. There's a limit to what the ton will stand for, even from Tory the Terror."

Tory the Terror opened her mouth to speak, but Becky cut her off. "Yes, yes, I know you don't care a farthing for their opinion, but that will change when you meet the right man. *If* we survive this ill-conceived voyage and make it back to England."

When Becky paused in her pacing to cast a scared look over her shoulder, Tory's scowl faded. Her famous grin flashed again, as wild and bright as her red-gold mane. "Smile, you old cross-patch, we've won!"

This time she earned a glower. Tory put a bracing arm about Becky's shoulders. "We're too close for Greaty to drag me back now. Napoleon is too occupied in Egypt to notice one small British yacht. And I daresay those tales about the Barbary pirates are exaggerated."

As if cued, the lookout cried, "Sail ho, to starboard!"

Stony gray eyes clashed with dancing turquoise ones before both women rushed to the starboard side of the vessel to await Captain McAllister's verdict.

The captain snapped his eyeglass closed and roared, "All hands on deck! Hoist every rag she'll carry, men!"

McAllister wheeled and strode up to the women. He'd argued volubly against this voyage, as had Becky, with as little effect. Grimly he watched his mistress whiten when he growled, "She's showin' nae colors, but she's a xebec, a ship favored by the corsairs, and she's bearin' doon fast. Wi' her tonnage, in this brisk wind she'll run us doon in a trice. I trust ye understand noo how foolhardy ye were to insist we leave wi'out obtainin' a pass. We hae nae choice but t' try t' repel them hand to hand, but we've little

hope o' that, since they outnumber us probably five t'one."

Removing a pistol from his belt, he offered it, butt first, to Tory. "If we fail, I suggest ye use this. On yourself." He offered some extra shot, which Tory ignored. Some instinct, however, bade her accept the pistol.

Becky moaned and clutched her bosom, but Tory tilted her chin high, stared into McAllister's condemning brown eyes, and snapped, "Don't be idiotish! As British subjects, we're duly protected by our treaties with each of the Barbary States. Doubtless once they see our colors they'll leave us be."

"It wouldna be the first or last time these pirates hae abrogated a treaty. We showed our colors upon sightin' them, but they still pursue. And wi'out a pass . . ." His voice trailed off into ominous silence, and he stalked off to organize his crew.

Tory ignored Becky's pleas to go below and stayed to watch, unable to believe she was to be captured now, when they were so close to their destination.

The seamen harbored no such illusions and scrambled to hoist all sail. To a man, they were scared. The Barbary States were notoriously ruthless to captives.

But the xebec was built for speed. Inexorably it closed the gap, long black bow and stem crowded with boarders, triangular sails puffed by the wind. Turbanned figures swarmed about the deck, scimitars winking at their sides. Final confirmation of their identity came: The crescent and star of the Algerian flag fluttered brazenly up the xebec's mainmast.

"Oh, God, no," Tory whispered. This time she didn't protest when McAllister marched her to the companionway leading to the hold, Becky clasped to his other side.

"When we refuse t' open fire, they'll realize this ship is unarmed, an' perhaps they'll be merciful. Hide as best ye can, but if ye're discovered, tell them your identity immediately. Perhaps greed for the handsome ransom ye'll bring will—" McAllister bit the words back and hurried off to help his men prepare for boarding.

Tory's pallor increased as she finally realized the danger she'd brought upon them all, herself and Becky especially, in her headlong flight from a distasteful marriage. As the xebec drew alongside, Tory chanced one last look—and almost fell into the hold as glittering green eyes locked with hers. Shocked, Tory stared. The brigand stood out from his swarthy mates not only by his assurance but by his stunning golden beauty as well.

His features were the most regular she'd ever seen, Roman nose balanced perfectly by a wide, full-lipped mouth and high cheekbones. It was a strong face, an arrogant face, a face that asked and gave no quarter. His forehead was broad, his jaw as unyielding as the muscular, bronzed torso revealed by his scanty vest.

His honey-brown, sun-streaked hair glittered in the sun, curling in riotous disregard of the red band he wore about his forehead. Their mutual appraisal only took a second, but in that moment, Tory trembled. He wore a threatening arsenal: a dagger at his side, two pistols in his belt, and a cutlass in one hand. But she was frightened more by his expression as he hovered in the rigging of the xebec like a golden hawk preparing to swoop. He touched his brow insolently, his gaze dropping to her body. I look forward to a closer acquaintance, he said as plain as words.

- Pure terror broke his spell. Tory scrambled behind Becky into the hold, convinced of her folly at last. She'd seen lust before in men's eyes, but it had been veiled; the blond pirate had made his intentions plain in one blistering look. Her station would not save her this time . . . She hunkered down beside Becky behind the crates and rigging in the hold, her head bowed in uncharacteristic humility, praying as she never had before.

Only then did she remember the pistol . . .

Unreasonably comforted, she straightened her shoulders and pushed Becky behind her. Grenville heirs had remained true to their motto, "Honor above all," through centuries of war, pestilence, and natural disaster. She was the last direct descendant of that proud line, and no gang of cutthroats would shake her loyalty to her heritage. She clutched the pistol to her bosom like a talisman and waited.

She held her panic at bay when the *Defiant Lady* shuddered as the other ship scraped alongside; when the terrifying yells of the boarding pirates resounded; and even when she heard the clang of cutlass and

pike and the screams of wounded men. The battle was mercifully short. Savage whoops proclaimed the pirates' victory, and the English travelers' doom. Tory met Becky's tearful eyes.

"Whatever they do to us can't be worse than death," she reprimanded.

Becky shook her head sadly at this innocence, but they had no time to argue. Tory shoved Becky prone behind her and braced the pistol on a low crate. She'd been taught to shoot by her grandmother's head groom, but she'd never aimed at a moving—especially a human—target before.

Booted feet tramped down the companionway, followed by a tall lithe body. Only her nervousness saved the pirate captain's life. When that ash blond head cleared the hatch, Tory held her breath and tried to squeeze the trigger, as she'd been taught, but her sweaty finger slipped and jerked it instead. She flinched at the report, but the bullet merely sheared off one gleaming curl as the pirate froze on the steps. Tory watched it flutter to the deck and form an exclamation point. She dropped the spent pistol and raised her eyes to appraise him as he walked into the hold.

They traveled up and up, over strong calves encased in knee-high brown boots, up muscular breeches-clad thighs, past a flat, taut midsection, over a wide, blood-streaked chest, and came to rest finally on the face she expected to see grimacing with rage. Her mouth dropped open as she again met sparkling green eyes and a wide mouth quirked in . . . amusement? Amusement!

Tory shot up to a sitting position. She watched disbelieving as he lithely jumped the last few steps, bent, picked up the lock of hair, and sauntered over to her like a London dandy parading in Hyde Park. Two swarthy pirates had followed him into the hold. They leveled angry black eyes and steady pistols on her.

Ignoring Becky's warning look, Tory rose. She was tall for a woman, yet even standing ramrod straight, she felt dwarfed. However, she was too furious at the pirate's rude appraisal to be intimidated. Thorough green eyes ran down and down, from her curly mane to her graceful neck, paused on her large, heaving breasts, descended past her small waist to the rich curve of her hips, slid down to her long feet, and glided back up to her full mouth. Finally, his eyes met hers.

He astonished her yet again when he cocked his head and murmured in flawless English, "A veritable Amazon. I'm surprised you missed. Still, you should praise Allah that you did. My crew would not have been . . . pleased had you killed me." He twirled the lock of hair between forefinger and thumb absentmindedly as he spoke, but his stare was challenge direct.

Something dangerous flickered in his eyes, and she shivered as she got the strangest feeling he had a grudge against her that he was eager to settle. Ridiculous. How could she have ever met a Barbary pirate before? She opened her mouth to tell him her identity, but he beat her to it with a smile and a bow.

"Sinan Reis, commander of the xebec *Scorpion*, subject of that most noble of deys, Bobba Mustapha of Algiers, informs you, madam, you are my prisoner." When she sniffed disdainfully, he added, "To do with as I will."

Before she realized his intention, he stepped closer, tweaked her bodice open, and dropped the lock of hair inside. He patted the spot, his smile widening when she jerked away. "A memento of the man to whom you belong—until I honor you with my attention again." He turned to walk away.

Tory was unused to such insolence from any man, and in her fury she forgot her precarious position. "I belong to no one!" she spat. "You filthy freebooter, you would not be so cocky were I still armed."

Becky groaned, but Tory shook off her restraining hand. The dark pirates understood the universal tone of contemptuous defiance. They grumbled and started forward, but Sinan Reis stayed them with an outflung hand.

He swiveled. Tory refused to look away from the gimlet stare lancing her in two, even when he closed the gap between them. She backed up a step before she could stop herself, and her fury raged hotter when he smirked.

"Like all women, you're show without substance. You bray like a jackal until faced with a stronger opponent," he goaded, backing her up another step, and another, until the bulkhead prevented further retreat.

Putting his palms on either side of her head, he leaned into her, every muscle pressing into her shrinking body. Tory clenched her teeth and tried to shove him back, but he smiled and leaned closer. She

shied away from the touch of his smooth, warm skin. No power on earth would have made her admit she was curious to see if the bulging muscles in his arms were as hard as they looked,

Tory drew a deep breath, flung up her head, and fixed him with the glare that had cowed many a London dandy. "Release me, pirate, and we shall see how brave I am."

He raised his eyebrows and settled more comfortably against her. "Indeed? What will you do? Scratch my eyes out? Kick me where it hurts most?" He threw back his golden brown head and laughed scornfully.

Tory's eyes narrowed to incandescent turquoise slits. Words were useless against this man. He twisted them and wrapped them about her. Since this barbarian recognized no rules but his own, it was time he learned a lesson men through the centuries had ignored at their peril: Not all women were weak and cowardly.

Suiting her action to his words, she went for his face, simultaneously lifting her knee. He caught her hands before they connected and tried to dodge the knee she rammed into his groin, but he was standing too close. Her knee connected solidly. He groaned and doubled over, releasing her.

Two cries of rage preceded the turbaned whirlwind that engulfed her. One brigand caught her hair and jerked her head back; the other whipped a dagger up to slit her throat.

Becky screamed. Tory closed her eyes, waiting for the cold slice. Sinan Reis straightened painfully before the knife could connect and sharply ordered his men away. They protested, but at his repeated command they let Tory go and stepped back to his side, their stares inimical.

Putting an arm about Tory, Becky urged, "Tell him who you are, and for God's sake don't anger him further. Your wealth and title are meaningless to these savages. You're just another woman to them—"

Sinan Reis interrupted, "On the contrary, madam. Lady Victoria Alicia Grenville is not just another woman to them. They think her a demon and want to exorcise her before she casts her spells upon me."

Becky and Tory stared at him in astonishment. "How do you know my name?" Tory demanded.

He shrugged, but that dangerous glimmer in his eyes was now twice as bright. Tory stared into that threat and promise as long as courage allowed, but finally dropped her gaze to his torso. No comfort there, for the size and strength of him posed a threat of another kind. Masculine aggression vibrated from the powerful physique, though he didn't move. Why did she suddenly feel like a battle to be won or a wall to be scaled?

"It matters not how I know your name. What does matter is the handsome ransom you'll bring—when I'm finished with you and ready to let you go. *If* you survive long enough for me to collect it. Normally, we treat Christian women gently—especially *rich* Christian women—but I may make an exception of you."

The provocation was so blatant, his white teeth bared in a nasty smile, that Tory reacted exactly . . . as he wanted her to? She sensed he was goading her, but she was too furious to care.

She reached inside her bodice and flung the lock of hair at his feet like a gauntlet. "Are my threats still empty, mighty reis?" She sent a derisive look at the bulge in his buff-colored breeches. Becky gasped; the pirate stiffened. Tory smiled. Magenta stained his throat and face in an angry tide, but her triumph was short-lived.

"Make good on your threats, mighty Amazon," he mocked her intonation. He drew his dagger from his belt and sent it whizzing into the plank between her feet, which were spread in a challenging stance. Point first, the blade stuck and quivered. Tory was too innocent to catch the sexual innuendo, and she looked at the pirates in bewilderment when they guffawed. Becky clasped her hands to her red cheeks and worried her lower lip with her teeth.

Tory looked from the knife to Sinan Reis, who had his thumbs hooked in his belt. His hips made one blatant little grind; his eyes caressed her bosom. Comprehension hit her like a slap in the face. She paled, and then reddened as fury swept the vestiges of caution away. She bent down and heaved the knife free.

"No!" Becky yelled, trying to catch her arm, but the turbaned pirates dragged her aside. She could only watch this inevitable battle.

Sinan Reis braced his feet and spread his arms for balance, smiling languidly. "You'd kill an unarmed man? Tsk, tsk!"

“Arm yourself, pirate!” Tory cried. “If I must die, I’ll go honorably by sending your black soul where it belongs!”

Sinan shook his head. “Wishful thinking, my lovely Amazon. You’ll not die, nor will you kill me. Come, vent your spleen and turn your passions in a more pleasurable direction.” He didn’t reach for the dagger one of the other pirates offered, but he did remove his leather vest and wrap it around his right arm.

Tory gripped the knife firmly. They circled each other. Tory’s loosened hair flowed around her shoulders like a fur cape, and her eyes snapped with the primitive need to avenge herself and her crew. That wide chest was too smooth. It needed some scratches in it to make it less appealing. Not too deep, just enough to scar him a little.

Calculating green eyes never left hers, and when she made her first strike, he turned neatly aside. The knife slashed thin air. She inched forward, hoping to corner him against the bulkhead, but he danced around her before she could maneuver herself into striking position. Teeth gritting, she turned and stalked him. He rarely allowed her close enough to strike, and when he did, his shielded arm blocked the point of the dagger or he dodged at the last moment.

He taunted, admiring her heaving bosom, “What creamy white skin. I shall enjoy licking your sweat away, fair captive.” His arm blocked her furious jab.

A red haze clouded Tory’s vision as she realized he was toying with her. She was indeed a weak woman compared to him; he’d challenged her merely to humiliate her. The knowledge gave her strength. Before he’d regained his balance from her last jab, she slashed his left wrist, which was all she could reach. Blood welled up along the gash, delighting her. His mouth tightened as he, too, watched.

When his eyes met hers, they no longer teased. He had become deadly earnest in his intent to disarm her. Now it was she who retreated and he who stalked. She jabbed wildly, but always he foiled her. She lunged in a desperate attempt to break past his guard, but found herself caught at the waist, her knife hand manacled in a ruthless grip. Tighter and tighter he squeezed until she moaned and dropped the dagger.

Defeated, she bowed her head and bit her lip, but he gave her no time for self-pity. He flung off the vest and forced her head up. Triumph glittered in his eyes. “So, do you still want to kill me?”

Tory hated her weakness, despised his strength, and she still had spirit aplenty to cry, “Yes, I hate you!”

A tug on her hair bowed her body, fitting her curves to his disturbing angles. “You’ll get your chance, lady hellion. You will make me die a little death every time I take you.” He consumed her defiant cry with hungry lips.

Tory struggled to hit him, but he clasped her wrists behind her back. She tried to turn her face aside, but he bent her over his arm until she couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think. She told herself she was revolted, that his lips tasted as bland as the other lips she’d known, but slowly, curiosity grew. How could his mouth be so hard, yet so persuasive? Who ever heard of a gentle pirate? Her resistance weakened.

The mingled smell of their sweat, the feel of his soft chest hair tickling her breastbone, and the wooing heat of his mouth combined to disarm her of her righteous, flaming sword and sear her with the need to respond to him. No, Tory, no, he’s a murderer, a renegade, she tried to tell herself, but her senses didn’t care. They enjoyed the nibbles he took from her mouth; they urged her to open her lips to his bold exploration.

She resisted, forcing her eyes open. Her willpower rebounded at his calculating look. He didn’t care about giving her pleasure. He wanted to humiliate her, and she’d almost helped him do exactly that! Tory went limp. He lifted his head. Her considerable weight seemed to pain his wrist, but his grimace smoothed into a smile as, blushing, she met the kindling green eyes.

“Ah, you surprise me, Amazon. Stripped of sword and buckler, are you a woman after all? Made for man’s delight?”

Tory ignored the first genuine smile he’d bestowed on her and hurled back, “Something you know nothing about!” When he raised an inquiring eyebrow she sneered, “Being a man!”

Instead of bursting into a rage as she expected, he let his smile deepen. This time it was the smile of a

man who knew he was a man and could therefore ignore her puny insults. “Before we are quits, milady, you’ll see I have intimate knowledge of same and you will be the better for it.” Tory struggled so furiously he let her go. God, she hated him! Even her worst insults he dismissed. What manner of man was he? Tom between rage and fascination, she backed away. “I’ll see you hang for that!”

He shrugged into his vest with total unconcern. “Indeed? That will be a neat trick, since the combined forces of Europe have been unable to defeat the Barbary States in over three centuries.”

His men grabbed Tory and bound her hands behind her back, smiling at her cries of rage. Sinan turned to Becky. “I’ll leave you unbound, madam, if you give me your word that you will not try to release this hellcat.” His gentle tone won Becky’s reluctant nod.

When he turned back to Tory, his face hardened. “You’ll remain in your cabin until we reach Algiers. If you try any tricks, I’ll personally see to your punishment.” He cupped her chin and forced her head up so he could meet her glare. “Our methods of disciplining slaves are not pleasant. It would be a shame to mar that lovely skin.” Another raking glance and he added, “Especially when I have such plans for it.”

Bending, he pressed his lips to the V-shaped neckline of her bodice, teasing her bountiful flesh with his mouth, her ears with his words. “Farewell milady. I leave you my favor.”

Tory gasped in shock when she felt a gentle but unmistakable nibble on the upper curve of one breast. “You bragging ass, you dare to liken yourself to a knight?” Her arms were bound, but not her feet ...

He choked into the skin he still nuzzled when she kicked him. He lifted his head. The blinding beauty of the smile he bestowed on her made her blink. She had not kicked him that hard, but to laugh?

He took two steps back, crossed his arms, and braced his feet, indeed laughing softly—as would a man who looked forward to untold delights. He leaned close to rim her lips with one tanned finger, pulling his hand away when she tried to bite it. His smile still in place, he said, “Knights extended gallantry to the weak, the helpless, and the womanly. The first two you are not. As to the last ... we shall see. But one similarity between our sport and the tourneys of old does exist, milady.”

Though she tried, she couldn’t resist. “Well?” she snapped when he waited.

“If I’m the knight, milady, don’t you realize what that makes you? No?” He stepped up to her and wrapped one strong thigh about her legs to keep her still. He paused again, and only when she looked at him did he finish softly, “My conquest. And make no mistake, milady. A conquest it will be.” He planted one last burning kiss on her bosom before he walked away, turned, and blew her a cocky kiss from the companionway.

Then he was gone, but the imprint of his lips, the promise in those eyes, burned long after in Tory’s flesh and mind. She squirmed to free her hands so she could wipe his touch away, but the pirates hauled her up the companionway to the deck. Tory swallowed and braced herself. The carnage she dreaded did not appear. At first she was relieved to see no bodies, but her cheeks bloomed with color when she spied her crew, stripped to drawers and socks, huddled in a miserable group. Some were wounded, but all, thank God, were alive.

Tory glared at their captors. She was surprised at their diversity: aquiline-faced, dark-skinned Moors; full-blood Negroes; Turks, like the escorts of the captain, who apparently served as officers; even pale and tawny-skinned Italians and Spaniards babbling in their own languages. Tory’s mouth firmed with contempt for these most of all, for they had turned on their own kind. Like their captain. Tory squelched her curiosity about her adversary and watched, her anger growing apace with her frustration.

The pirates danced around in their stolen clothes, pointing derisively at their prisoners. Tory gritted her teeth at the indignities and stood tall despite her bonds. She’d show these pirates what an Englishwoman was made of!

When the brigands caught sight of her, their merriment subsided. Aah’s and grunts of astonishment sounded at her fiery beauty; she was a little rumped now, but striking to the men nonetheless. Pirates crowded about her, tweaking her flowing locks, testing the resiliency of her arms, stroking the softness of her cheek.

One corsair, taller and cockier than the others, closed his hand over her breast. Tory gasped and tried to shrink away, but she was surrounded by a wall of rank male flesh. The tall pirate grinned, his strong white teeth as rapacious as a wolf’s, and elbowed the other pirates aside to cup both her breasts. Tory was

frightened, but angrier still, and she kicked him in the shin.

He grunted in broken Spanish, "Woman not be so proud when sold at *besistan*. Perhaps I buy you and teach you respect." He tugged her head back and shoved his face into hers.

Tory had never thought she'd be thankful to hear that smooth voice, but she closed her eyes in relief when Sinan came on deck and spoke to the pirate in Arabic. The man answered in Spanish, a language Tory spoke fluently. "She not yours, either. Great dey keep her himself or send her to Constantinople."

Sinan pulled Tory away from the pirates, his hold as possessive as his encompassing look. "Not this time. I intend to ask for her as my share of the capture. I think you know our generous master will not deny me, Ahmet."

The other pirates who spoke Spanish gasped at such foolishness. As captain, Sinan was due a larger share of the booty than anyone other than the ship's owners and the dey, and to fritter it away on a mere woman, even such a beautiful one, was beyond their ken.

Ahmet was not appeased. "Perhaps I ask for her myself. I, too, am respected." He hawked and spat at Sinan's feet. The spittle oozed down the toe of Sinan's boot.

The crew looked warily from Ahmet to Sinan. Ahmet was a favorite of the Janissaries, the Turkish military elite respected even by the sultan of Turkey. Ahmet was jealous of Sinan's influence with the dey and the *ta'ifa*, the corsair council established by Barbarossa. If Ahmet defeated Sinan in a fair fight or made him lose face in the eyes of his crew, he'd be a step closer to winning his own command.

Though Tory understood none of this, she felt the anger emanating from the powerful body behind her, and her heart raced. If he were killed, what would become of them? Arrogant as he was, Sinan at least was clean, and he had a measured control she sensed the sly Ahmet could not match. Thus, Tory, Becky, and the crewmen, both Christians and Muslims, watched and awaited Sinan's response.

Setting Tory aside, Sinan strode up to Ahmet and ordered softly, "Clean my boot of your spittle, dog, or I will cleanse it in your blood."

Ahmet paled, but he snarled, "It is you, infidel, who will bleed until your skin is as pale as your wit." Ahmet unsheathed his cutlass and brandished it, his hatred at last bare for all to see.

Sinan grabbed his own weapon one of his men handed him and gestured with his arm for everyone to clear a circle. "I've been patient too long. Your kind understand only one thing!" Sinan bared his teeth in a snarl as feral as Ahmet's. Each man circled the other.

Cutlasses rang in the silence as Sinan blocked Ahmet's vicious stab. Sinan slammed Ahmet's cutlass aside and made a swift strike at his exposed middle, but the pirate leaped back a step. Sinan followed, slashing, jabbing, forcing Ahmet to retreat. Ahmet turned away from a thrust, striking at Sinan's torso simultaneously, slipping under his opponent's guard. The wicked point of the two-edged blade lashed the left side of Sinan's chest. Sinan knocked the cutlass aside, not pausing, though blood oozed from the shallow gash and trickled down his body. Ahmet recovered quickly, arcing his sword at Sinan's belly.

Sinan sucked in his middle, clasped his weapon in both hands, and whammed Ahmet's extended blade down so hard that its point was embedded in the deck. The Arab had no time to pull it free; he backed away and removed a small dagger from his belt. He flipped it toward Sinan's heart, but the captain pirate ducked and the dagger stuck in the mainmast.

Ahmet retreated, searching frantically for another weapon. He swooped down to claim a discarded pike, but Sinan stepped on the hilt and set the tip of his own cutlass against Ahmet's throat.

Ahmet straightened gingerly, red with hatred, and spat, "Finish me, then!"

Sinan leaned on his sword until a bright speck of blood appeared. He lifted his foot and wiped his boot on Ahmet's dirty pantaloons; then he lowered the sword and shook his head. "No, I'll let you live to face the *ta'ifa*. Bind him! Take him back aboard the *Scorpion* and let him reflect on his greed and foolishness." Ahmet was dragged away.

"Does anyone else challenge my right to the woman?" Sinan propped his sword, point down, against the deck and leaned casually on it. When none of the other pirates stepped forward, he sheathed it. "Lock these men in the hold and set sail for Algiers. Tonight we celebrate!"

Cheering, the pirates scrambled to obey. Tory's relief dissolved into apprehension when Sinan stepped up to her and lifted her chin.

“You are mine by right of capture and by right of battle now, woman. It’s time you learned what that means.” Sinan hoisted Tory over his shoulder-, ignoring McAllister’s threats, Becky’s pleas, Tory’s curses, and his crew’s laughter. He took his booty below to her own spacious cabin.

And what a cabin it was! He flipped her down on her capacious poster bed and looked appreciatively about. Sea-green silk hung over the portholes and around the bed, and emerald-green brocade chairs sat opposite a gold sofa. The bulkheads were paneled in black walnut, the ceiling banded at the top with gilded molding. The ebony dressing table and bed were inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl.

Sinan walked to the vanity and riffled its contents, searching until he discovered a false drawer bottom. He pulled out her jewel case, ignoring Tory’s outrage, and dumped her jewels on the dresser. He whistled as rainbow hues of green, blue, purple, gold, pink, and other colors sparkled even in the muted light.

He put the jewels away, went to her washstand and poured water into the fine Chinese porcelain bowl. After cleansing himself, he dried off on her clean white towel, shrugging at the rusty stain. Still ignoring Tory, he investigated her armoire. Her clothes were a mess, for other pirates had already flipped through them and filched a gift for wife or sweetheart. Finally he found something that pleased him and threw it over his shoulder.

The whisper of azure silk looked ludicrous against his decidedly masculine frame, but Tory was in no humorous mood. She rose and matched him look for look when he strode up and tossed the negligee on the bed. He slit her bonds with his knife and pointed with the tip of the weapon at the garments.

“Put them on.” He sheathed the knife, folded his arms, and waited.

Stalling for time, Tory rubbed her tingling wrists as she considered her best course of action. She wondered if her own little pistol remained in the bottom of her wardrobe, and she couldn’t hide the betraying flicker of her eyes.

He clicked his tongue. “Is this what you seek?” He pulled her pistol out of his breeches pocket and dangled it in the air just above her head.

Tory’s gaze went from the gun to his superior expression and then to the floor in apparent defeat. She said huskily, “Yes, but, as usual, you’ve outwitted me.”

His eyes widened at this response. He smiled slowly. “Ah, you show some sense at last. Do you yield to me, madam?”

Sighing sadly, Tory inched closer to him, her eyes still lowered. He was taken off-guard when she whipped her hand to his belt and seized his own weapon. “Never while I live, pirate,” she sneered, nudging him in the chest with his pistol. All her frustrated pride and all her hatred were visible in her eyes.

Calmly, he dropped his remaining weapons behind him and leaned into the barrel pressed against his chest. “The advantage is yours. Take your revenge,” he whispered.

Tory nibbled her lip. She didn’t want to kill him, for she knew the other brigands would show her no mercy if she did. She looked at his chest, rising and falling steadily with his unhurried breathing, and knew she couldn’t put a gaping hole in it and drain life from that magnificent form. Groaning in frustration, she would have lowered the pistol, but he held her hand level.

“Come, you’d best pull the trigger, for it’s the only way you’ll be free of me before I’ve taken what I want,” he whispered, his eyes compelling.

Tory struggled to free her hand. To her astonishment, she felt his finger forcing hers to contract. She screamed and closed her eyes, cringing away. But no report sounded. An empty click was followed by deep chuckles. Her eyes opened. Blood lust glowed from her pupils.

Hissing, she flung the weapon away and flew at him, teeth bared, nails curled, but he was waiting for her. He tripped her neatly, caught her hands behind her back and pressed her into the soft mattress with his own body. Tory spat vitriol, but he might have been stone deaf for all the heed he took. He smiled and held her until her struggles slowed, then ceased.

His gaze lowered from her glorious, tempestuous face to the white flesh above her breasts, bared by her position with her hands behind her back. Inhaling shakily, he ripped the muslin with a capable hand. Her dainty chemise parted like leaves before a whirlwind. Her full, pearly breasts, dusky pink circles

crowned by enraged nipples, were bare to his eyes.

Sight alone didn't satisfy him long. He traced one pink rim, touch leading naturally to the most basic urge: taste. His mouth sampled a roseate crest.

Tory struggled, terrified at the feel of the warm mouth sucking the flesh no man had seen or dared touch. Humiliated tears bedewed her eyes. He consumed her like a famished man presented with a banquet.

When he ceased tugging at one puckered crest only to torment the other, Tory could bear no more. "Please, please, let me go. I'll do whatever you say, but stop!"

He laved the hard tip of her breast one last time, then, panting, he sat up, released her arms, and pressed her shoulders into the mattress. "You will obey me?"

Tory nodded wildly. "Yes, yes, anything you ask if you'll let me go."

His eyes went compulsively to her voluptuous display, but he stood and whirled away, commanding over his shoulder, "Dress yourself in the garments I selected. ' ' He poured fresh water into the basin to wash his face.

Eyeing him, Tory rose on trembling legs. She looked longingly at the door, but only more—and perhaps worse—danger awaited outside. Nerving herself, she flung off her ruined clothes and pulled the gown over her head. As it slithered to her feet he turned to look at her. The fine azure silk nightgown had a high bodice yoked with pleated chiffon. An upstanding ruffle framed her face, and azure ribbons were tied under her breasts, their streamers falling to the flowing hem. It was a garment meant to tease a man. From the look on his face, it succeeded despairingly well.

"So much the lady," he murmured, "yet so much woman, too. If only . . ." So softly he spoke, as if to himself. But all too soon his face set indomitably again.

Tory brushed her tangled hair away from her face and braved a look into his eyes, but the hunger there struck her like a blow. She looked away. Pulling the robe over the gown, she tied it shakily. She froze like a cornered animal when he flung his forehead band off and advanced. She clenched the robe as if sheer willpower could keep it on, but he brushed her hands away and pulled the ribbons open.

A different emotion made him tremble, too, as he stared at the tall figure that was as richly curved as the sirens who lured seamen to their doom. Her heart thundered with hatred, but, for the moment, she was defeated by his aggressive masculinity.

"Please, you promised . . ." she croaked. He seemed not to hear as he raised his hands and cupped her breasts, kneading the firm flesh and testing their weight in his palms. He thrust his arousal against her.

Nuzzling the hollow of her throat, he whispered, "And I'll keep my promise ... for now. Your initiation will be no rushed affair, my lovely captive. Only patience will teach you the delights of submission. The day will come when you'll no longer wish to escape me. You will see."

He pressed a passionate kiss to her cleavage. Stepping back, he swept one last look over her, then turned, collected his weapons, and exited.

Tory crumpled where she stood. He had spared her ... but for how long?