

**Rackety Kate  
and  
The Pirates  
by  
Denise Rossetti**



*With the kind assistance of the Newsletter Readers of the deniserossetti newsgroup.*

*<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/deniserossetti>*

## **Chapters Twenty One to Twenty Two**

Chapter 21	Spectator Sport
Chapter 22	Love's a Trap
Chapter 23	Racing the Clock
Chapter 24	Beginnings and Endings
Chapter 25	Bumps and Briefs



## CHAPTER 21

### Spectator Sport

*The story so far:*

*The auction's over. As Jack promised, everyone seems to have obtained their heart's desire – except Duka. Desperately worried about the First Mate's Happy Ending, Kate follows Jack into the forests of Sweet Sisters Isle.*

Warm lights twinkled in the darkness ahead. Kate tugged on Jack's hand, drawing him to a halt on the path. "Wait," she said. "Jack, this is all wrong. Duka's not the right sort of man. Someone's going to get hurt."

Jack gazed down at her, his eyes fathomless pools in the moonlight. "Oh ye of little faith." In the dark shadow of his trim beard, his teeth flashed in a grin. "Is Peter happy, do you think?"

Kate quivered as a warm questing breeze caressed the nape of her neck. Even without the assistance of the Hormone Harlots, her imagination supplied a mental picture of Peter entwined with big Tom Cavanagh. Peter was nuzzling the First Officer's chest, his hands busy somewhere else out of sight. Tom's head fell back and his mouth opened in a helpless groan of pleasure. Kate could have sworn she heard Peter's delighted chuckle floating on the still night air. "Uh, I guess so," she said.

"Remember how you pleaded for him, pretty Kate? The crafty little shit."

Kate wet her lips. "Perhaps I did." She stiffened her spine and glared. "What of it?"

"I said you'd owe me for that."

"I never agreed to any such thing!"

Jack's grin had the devil in it. "Near enough, sweetheart." He caught her up against his chest, brushing his warm lips over hers in a tingling caress. "Near enough."

When he set her down, Kate had to clutch at his arm for a moment.

"C'mon," he said. "Just around the bend."

Every nerve ending throbbing in concert, Kate let him wrap her fingers in his and draw her forward.

Duka's home turned out to be very like Jack's, a large palm-thatched bungalow, but Jack led her to an inconspicuous gate half-hidden by a great overhang of some delicious-smelling flowering vine. Bending his head, he murmured, "You can speak, but not too loudly. All right?"

At Kate's nod, he opened the gate, ushering her into a dark space full of the gentle rustle of fronds and the pale faces of topical blossoms. Cool, velvety grass brushed her ankles as he led her over to a rattan-cane couch, long and low, furnished lavishly with pillows and cushions and throw-rugs.

In contrast, the empty room they looked into was lit up like a stage, big brass lanterns hanging from the rafters, sliding screens drawn away to open it up to the night breeze. To anyone indoors, she and Jack would be cloaked by the darkness of the garden, virtually invisible.

Voyeurs.

Very softly, she heard it. *Tap, tap, tappity, tap.* She and Jack weren't the only ones.

Uneasily, Kate glanced at his face. "Jack, are you *sure*?"

His arm tightened as he drew her down onto the couch. "Aye," he said, the accent thickening. "Duka asked me. To be sure o' fair play, like. No one said Chan and Harley be angels."

"You'd know," she muttered, all the breath leaving her in a gusty rush as she thought of what the two of them had done to Jack in the clearing by the pool. And thus to her. Holy hell! Abruptly, her skin became too tight for her body. Her breasts tingled, hot chills racing up and down her spine. Jack's hand as it rested casually on her ribcage seemed unbearably hot and heavy, and yet she knew she'd die if he removed it.



In desperation, she fixed her eyes on Harley and Chan as a door opened and they entered together, grinning fit to beat the band. There was very little in the room, beyond jeweltone rugs and cushions scattered over the floor and a few odd-looking wooden contraptions. A tall ornate cupboard made of polished wood in a vaguely oriental style stood against the back wall. One door was mirrored.

Chan dropped a battered leather pack, just as Duka strode in, all dark majesty, the Duchess following behind, trotting to keep up, drawn along by the leash gripped in his huge fist. Her pretty face was stormy, her cheeks flushed, but it wasn't Duka she was flaying alive with her aristocratic gaze, it was Harley.

When he gave her an unrepentant, bad boy grin, her lip curled. Duka turned his head, just in time to catch her at it. Grasping her chin in one huge brown hand, he tilted her face up until she had no choice but to meet his eyes. "Behave yerself, Venetia," he rumbled.

The Duchess's magnificent eyes flashed. "Don't flatter yourself. It's not as if I care."

"I don't." Duka's lips softened into a wry smile. Gently, he slid his palms down her white throat until he reached the slim collar. Unbuckling it, he tossed it aside, his brow creased in a frown. Then he bent his head and nuzzled the faint pink marks the leather had left.

The Duchess raised a hand as if to touch his shoulder, then dropped it. Her lashes fluttered down and she turned her head away.

"Aw," said Harley, standing at Duka's elbow, a length of black fabric hanging from his hand. "Ain't that sweet?"

The Duchess hissed a curse a guttersnipe would have been proud to own.

A dark brow winged up. "Reckon she be worth it, Duka?" He leered at the perfect breasts half-concealed by the diaphanous gown. "Ye can still change yer mind an' give her to us."

Duka stared him down, his eyes gone black and flat. "No. She's mine."

The Duchess quivered, from head to heels.

"Fine." Harley's expression became predatory. "Bend yer head then."

The gold rings in Duka's nipples flashed as his chest rose and fell. "I want to see. Take it like a man."

"Oh, aye, ye'll take it all right. The hour starts now. \*Bend your head, man.\*"

Swearing, Duka did so and Harley tied the blindfold. "Can you see?"

"No, damn you!"

Completely silent on the rugs, Chan approached from behind. When he ran his fingertips in a trail from Duka's shaven skull to the waistband of the leopard-skin loincloth, the giant stiffened, every muscle rigid with tension.

"We have you now." He rubbed his cheek against the swell of Duka's biceps, like a cat. "Are ye scared?"

Duka's full lips compressed. "What do you think, bastard?"

Chan took a leisurely nibble of smooth mahogany skin. "I think ye're afeared of losin' her. More than anything else in this world. You're gone, man."

Duka said nothing, The Duchess of Dorchester's pretty mouth fell open.

*Tap, tap, clunk!*

Harley tilted his head. "Sounds like we'd better get on with it." Grinning, he unfastened the loincloth. "Let's see what we have to play with, hmm?"

When he tossed it aside, Duka stood like a statue of polished wood, naked save for the blindfold, the gold nipple rings and the bundles of feathers bound beneath his knees.

An African god. Kate stared in awe. A perfect example of glowing health, virile and powerful, the hard slabs of his pectorals flowing down to a cobbled belly, and below... She released the breath she'd been holding. Holy shit, she'd never been a size queen, but for a man like this, she'd wear a tiara. Any size.

With a reproving chuckle, Jack nipped the curve where her neck met her shoulder. Kate gripped his arm.

Duka wasn't even aroused, his uncut cock hung flaccid, but it was long, thick and beautiful, his balls plump and heavy, the whole package springing from a thicket of dense black hair. The skin over his genitals was darker than the rest of his body, with an underlying blush that reminded Kate of a ripe aubergine.

The silence went on and on, the players on the stage standing frozen.

Eventually, Duka cocked his head. "Happy now?" he growled.

"Jesus Christ." Harley's voice was reverent, hushed. Then he shook himself, his dark curls flying. "Yeah, I'm happy. And don't speak again. Not unless ye're spoken to."

Duka's lips pulled back from his teeth in a snarl. "Fuck you."

Harley laughed. "One way or another, matey." Licking his lips, he beckoned to Chan. "Front or back?"

Chan shook his head. "I'll take left, you take right." He ran a palm over Duka's chest, ribcage and belly. Delicately, he leaned in, flicking the big man's nipple ring with his tongue. Duka jerked, then stilled. With a chuckle, Chan sucked it in deep.

Harley skated his fingertips over the high proud rise of one muscled brown buttock. "Very nice," he purred, progressing further around, tracing the diagonal notches where hip met thigh.

Duka's cock twitched, the foreskin pulling back enough to reveal the first hint of a domed head, but that was all.

The Duchess stood staring. Her cheeks were flushed, her nipples rosy peaks, clearly evident beneath the gown. But as Kate watched, she turned to face the wall, brushing something from her eye.

"Hell." Frowning, Harley beckoned to the Duchess with a jerk of his head.

The moment she was near enough, he grasped her hands and slapped them onto Duka's massive chest. Without a pause, he ripped the front of her gown wide open. Two perfect creamy breasts swung free, each topped with a velvet strawberry nipple.

The Duchess gasped and Duka's nostrils flared. The strong brown column of this throat bobbed as he swallowed. "Venetia?" he rasped.

"Shut it, man," said Chan.

"Ah, that's better," said Harley, his hand pumping in a luxurious rhythm, obscured from Kate's sight by the Duchess's voluptuous body.

Her fingers looked slim and very pale against the mahogany expanse of Duka's chest.

Duka made a strange noise, deep in his throat, a cross between a moan and a growl. "I can't - I can't do this." He licked his lips, blindly raising a hand to brush her shining hair.

She reared back, tossing her head.

"Please, Venetia. Help me, for God's sake."

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What does the Duchess do next?

A. The Duchess stared. "I'll strike a bargain with you," she said huskily. "Give me my freedom and I'll think about it."

B. "I hate you," the Duchess said. "God, how I hate you." Without warning, she went up on her tiptoes, kissing Duka so hard she almost knocked him back a step.

C. "Help you? Are you insane?" The Duchess propped her hands on her hips, her eyes flashing from Harley to Chan and back again, all with the utmost scorn. "It's these two incompetents who need the help."



## CHAPTER 22

### Love's a Trap

*The story so far:*

*Jack and Kate are safely hidden in the garden, ready to witness Duka's submission to Harley and Chan. But no one has counted on the Duchess – except, perhaps, Duka.*

"I hate you," the Duchess said. "God, how I hate you." Without warning, she went up on her tiptoes, kissing Duka so hard she almost knocked him back a step. Reaching up, she raked the blindfold away.

In the process, she cannoned into Harley's arm. He cursed and Duka grunted. But the First Mate's huge hands came up and clamped onto the Duchess's shoulders, pulling her hard into his chest. They both hissed when her pale breasts collided with the hard slabs of his chest.

"Ah sweetheart," mumbled Duka against her lips.

"Shit, can ye hear yerself, man?" snorted Harley.

With a flick of one big brown paw, Duka sent him reeling into the wall, so hard the building shook. Rebounding, Harley disappearing into a pile of cushions. The First Mate didn't even look up.

Kate pressed her face into Jack's warm, hard chest to stifle a giggle. His whisper stirred the hair on her temple. "Told ye."

By the time Harley's head had emerged from the devouring embrace of silks and satins, the Duchess had half-climbed Duka's body as if he were a tree, a sturdy jungle giant. He had one palm braced under her raised thigh, his other arm cinched around her waist.

Kate stared open-mouthed. She supposed that what they were doing could be called kissing, but she couldn't decide. On the one hand, it was so carnal, so full of tongues and wet heat, it defined the concept of tongue-fucking. On the other, she thought they might be exchanging souls. The Duchess had abandoned her safety to the First Mate's care, trusting to his strength. Instead of holding on, she was cradling his dark flushed cheeks in her palms, whimpering into his mouth.

Duka took two steps, until he reached a wall. Gently, he leaned forward until the Duchess was tilted back against the firm surface.

God, the man had the most amazing ass. A true African ass – round and high and firm with muscle, all burnished to a satin brown like the surface of chocolate melting in a pan. His skin looked so soft, his flesh so hard. Kate sighed, imagining. One real thrust

using the power in those buttocks and thighs and he'd put the other woman through the wall and into the next room.

Kate pressed her thighs together in guilty pleasure. Lord, she was wet and swollen. Well, Jack had wanted her to see this. He could cope with the consequences. Growling under her breath, she turned her head and nipped the side of his neck, just below the line of the beard. Jack growled right back, gripping her chin so he could tilt her face and take her mouth. Kate surged up, gripping the front of his shirt so hard, the fabric ripped. She slipped her palm to cup his pectoral, feeling his heart pound, his nipple rising to kiss her heated skin.

Jack Cavanagh was a figment of some crazy writer's imagination. How could he be so real? So solid?

*Tap, tap, tappity, tap. An emphatic clunk!*

Kate came up for air, her heart turning a painful somersault. What did that mean? Was Rossetti trying to say Jack *\*was\** real? Hell, between the fizzing of her blood and the whirling of her head, she couldn't think straight.

Duka roared. The Duchess shrieked. They weren't sounds of pleasure.

"Jeeesus," breathed Jack against Kate's temple.

Harley had snapped a broad metal cuff around one of the First Mate's thick wrists, but with the other hand, Duka held Chan by the throat, pinned against the wall. The pirate's beautiful almond eyes bulged and his feet thrashed a foot above the floor.

"Duka!" shouted Harley, right in his face. "Ye're goin' to kill him!"

Duka's lips drew back in a snarl revealing large white teeth. He looked...hungry. But to Kate's disappointment, his magnificent erection had dwindled - though that meant it was still pretty damned impressive.

The Duchess tugged on his arm, with as much effect as if she'd tried to budge a mountain. "Duka," she hissed. "Drat it, ye great black brute! Will ye stop?"

Duka's fingers opened and Chan slid down the wall, sucking in desperate, heaving breaths, rubbing his throat. A beatific smile spread over the First Mate's features, replacing the jungle beast expression. Ignoring Harley, who still held the chain of the manacles, he drew his fingertips over the Duchess's porcelain cheek. "You said my name. Ah, pretty love, say it again."

The Duchess blushed like a rose. Fumbling, she drew the scraps of her bodice together. "Duka," she whispered. "You're Duka."

Harley speared fingers into his long black curls and tugged. Hard. "This is only goin' to work one way." Reaching down, he hooked Chan under one elbow and hauled him to his feet.

"Yeah?" rasped Chan, casting the First Mate a look that combined grievous bodily harm with raw lust.

"With her." Harley grinned his bad-boy grin, his brow clearing. "Could be downright interestin' at that."



Chan punched Duka's arm, getting no more than an inquiring look in response. "Where's yer honour, man? Ye promised."

Duka frowned. "Aye, so I did." He pulled in a breath that expanded his chest to an alarming degree, and held out the other wrist to be cuffed. "Where?"

"Here." Harley tugged, leading the giant back to the centre of the room. "On yer knees an' raise yer arms." Duka sank down and Harley slung the chain over a sturdy beam, pulling the chain until the First Mate's hands were high over his head, his arms stretched almost to the point of pain but not...quite.

Chan knelt, his slim golden fingers looking pale against the darkness of Duka's hard jaw. "Ye're going to beg, ye bastard."

Duka stiffened, glaring. "Never."

Chan's grin was feral. "Aye." With no further preliminary, he pressed his lips against Duka's, using his thumbs to force the other man's mouth open. Angling his head for the best fit, he took his pleasure in a manner so casually brutal it couldn't be mistaken for anything other than a studied insult. Awed at the pirate's sheer nerve, Kate watched Chan's mouth working, his tongue lapping, push and pull, suck and lick. The tiger tattooed on his back looked like it was snarling with every shift of muscle beneath the skin.

Duka remained still as a graven image, his eyes wide open.

Eventually, Chan drew back, panting, his face flushed, a lock of ink-black hair flopping over his smooth forehead.

As one, everyone's gaze zeroed in on Duka's groin. Kate clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle her snort of laughter. The First Mate's cock remained long and thick, an uncut thing of beauty, but Chan could have been reciting legal briefs for all the interest it was exhibiting in the proceedings.

"Bollocks!" snarled Chan.

Kate giggled. They weren't interested either.

"Right." Harley grabbed the Duchess and hustled her right into Duka's line of sight. In one smooth movement, he ripped the remains of the filmy gown right off her. The Duchess swore viciously, but the pirate grabbed her hands, pinning them behind her back. Her pink-tipped breasts jutted. "She worth it, matey?" he growled.

Duka's dark gaze devoured the woman's pink and white beauty, the thatch of golden curls between her smooth, pale thighs. "Oh, aye," he breathed. "Worth anything."

Golden lashes fluttered down over suspiciously bright sky-blue eyes. Scarcely breathing, Kate watched that huge cock quiver and swell.

"Thought so." Harley gave the Duchess a little shove to Duka's side. "Keep his mouth busy, love."

Shaking a little, the Duchess leaned forward, brushing her lips across the First Mate's. "Venetia," he murmured. Then sooty black lashes fell, shuttering his eyes as he gave himself up to the kiss.

Harley and Chan exchanged a glance. Chan grinned. "Ye're a sneaky bastard, ye know that?"

Harley winked. "Aye. An' lookit that." He nodded at the awesome sight of Duka's shaft, filling and swelling, rising impossibly, every vein throbbing, blood engorging the smooth dark head. "We ain't got long an' time's a-wastin'."

Chan dropped his breeches, revealing the cock Kate remembered so vividly, a tattooed dragon coiled down its hard length. Gracefully, he sank to his knees and bent his head, the line of his back long and supple, the tiger dark and fierce. When he ran the flat of his tongue from the base of Duka's cock to the weeping crown, the chain rattled as the big man jerked.

The Duchess pulled back a fraction, gripping Duka's jaw and gazing into his eyes. "No," she whispered. "Not them. You only look at me. Ever, you hear?"

Chan was running the tip of his tongue around and around the head of Duka's cock, burrowing inquisitively under the soft collar of his foreskin, one hand cradling the heavy balls, rolling them with a man's understanding of the fine line between pleasure and pain.

"Aye." Drops of sweat rolled down Duka's strong neck.

In the mirror of the tall cupboard, Harley's reflection nibbled across the curves of Duka's tight buttocks, ran a finger down the dark cleft between them.

Duka's eyes went so wide the whites showed all around. "It's...ah, fuck!...worth it."

"Yes, it is." The Duchess's slim fingers tweaked a brown nipple, tugged gently at the gold ring that pierced it. "You like that?"

"Yes!" The chains clanged as Duka's back arched, away from the inexorable progress of Harley's finger.

Chan grunted, swallowing a thick inch of dark flesh in consequence.

Immediately, Duka drew back, only to encounter Harley, who'd fetched a pot of some slick ointment from the cupboard and was working busily, slathering it on where it would presumably do the most good. His dark merry face had taken on an other-worldly expression, so intensely involved in his explorations, he wouldn't have noticed the detonation of a cannon.

Jack's warm breath puffed on Kate's cheek. "He's caught, pretty Kate. Do ye see? Whichever way he moves, forward or back, he's trapped."

"Yes." She was going to implode. Or explode. Possibly both. Kate tugged open the laces of Jack's breeches and slipped her fingers inside, his cock leaping into her hand like an eager animal, the skin so satin-smooth, the core so iron-hard.

"Fuck!" Jack let out a gusty breath, his hips arching. "Trapped like you, sweetheart. By me."

Kate abandoned the erotic tableau before her to stare deep into his gold-shot eyes. "The same way I have you, Jack." She swept her tongue over the pulse pounding in his throat. "Now. I need you now."

"Fuck, yes!"

In a single move, Jack lifted her, bringing her down across his hips, sliding himself home where he belonged, filling and completing her.

"Yes, yes," she moaned, the pleasure of the joining so exquisite tears came to her eyes.

Jack's steely fingers dug into her hips. "Don't move, Kate."

Quivering, she did her best, but she couldn't prevent the flutters that clasped his length in the centre of her being.

After an endless moment, Jack blew out a long breath. "Hell, that was close." His gaze shifted to a point past her shoulder and his jaw dropped. She couldn't believe it, but inside her, he swelled even more, long tremors traveling his length.

"Sweet Jasus, will ye look at that?"



## CHAPTER 23

### Racing the Clock

*The story so far:*

*Duka is proving remarkably recalcitrant about his submission. The time he promised is slipping away when Harley has an inspiration.*

Kate locked her ankles in the small of Jack's back and wrapped her arms around his neck. With a luxurious wriggle, she ground down harder on the magnificent length inside her. God, he was buried so deep, she swore she could feel him under her heart. Only then did she follow his gaze.

Her mouth dropped open. Who cared if this was a dream? She'd never forget it - ever.

His hands chained above his head, Duka knelt in the centre of the floor like some pagan sacrifice, his taut body an offering to the dark gods of lust. His head was tilted right back, the Duchess leaning over him, his head cradled in her pale hands, feasting on his mouth. Chan sprawled in front of him, propped up on a pile of pillows, slightly in profile to Kate and Jack, out in the garden. The position meant Kate could see the necklace of dark bruises decorating the smooth strong column of this throat. It also meant she could observe his Adam's apple bob as he fought to swallow Duka's fabulous girth. Kate's mouth watered, just looking. She couldn't imagine what effect the sight must be having on the Duchess, but every few seconds, the other woman flicked a glance at the tableau from under her downswept lashes. Duka eyes were tightly shut and beads of sweat dotted his brow. His chest heaved with the force of his respiration.

Chan wrapped a hand around the base of Duka's cock and alternated between long, pulling sucks that first distended, then hollowed his cheeks, and kitten licks and dainty slurps around the fat mushroom head. With the other hand, he hefted the First Mate's heavy scrotum, rolling and caressing.

From behind, Harley was twisting his fingers to the same rhythm. As she watched, he added a third and Duka jerked forward with a grunt. Chan choked and spluttered. "Gonna kill ye, Harley," groaned the big man. "Break...all yer fucking...fingers."

"Aye, but not...yet," panted the other man. With a triumphant grin, he leaned forward and sank his teeth into the brown satin of Duka's shoulder. His forearm flexed as he probed.

"Aaargh!"

Duka bucked so hard Chan tumbled off his pillows and rolled to the floor, coughing. The Duchess fell back a step. But Harley gave a dark chuckle. "Never thought to teach ye somethin' new, matey." His expression hardened, grew predatory. "Spread for me now. Ye've got ten minutes by the clock to go."

"Damn ye," growled Duka, every muscle in his massive body rigid with tension and reluctant desire. "Damn ye to hell."

"Listen to me." The Duchess took the First Mate's chin in her dainty hand and forced him to meet her eyes. "This is happening because we permit it - because we wish it. Do ye understand?"

"We? Ye wish it too?"

"Aye." The Duchess said nothing further for a moment, but a flood of crimson raced up over her breasts and neck to flush her porcelain cheeks. Then she bent and whispered in Duka's ear.

The effect on the First Mate was electric. The chains rattled as he reared back to stare into her face. Were those tears in his eyes? "Swear it, Venetia. Swear on everything ye hold holy."

Neither Harley nor Chan moved a muscle. The Duchess lifted one graceful white hand and laid it over the delicious inner curve of her left breast. She didn't shift her gaze from Duka's. "I so swear," she said and although her voice shook, it was with determination.

A huge smile broke over Duka's face and she bent to press her lips gently against his. "Did you see that?" sighed Kate in Jack's ear. "Talk about romantic."

"Aye." Jack's hands moved soothingly up and down her spine. "Wonders never cease, but that's how it is on Two Sisters Isle."

*Tap, tap, tappity.* Kate glanced up. Rossetti was beginning to sound awfully close. And was that a watery sniff?

*Not yet, she thought. For Gods' sake, don't take me yet.*

"Their hands are my hands," murmured the Duchess. "Their lips are my lips."

Duka stared into her face.

"Their will is our will." She gripped his shoulders with both hands. "Say it."

"Aye," breathed Duka. "Their will is our will and your pleasure is my pleasure." His face split in a hungry grin. "But fuck, lass, ye're going to be paying me for this. For the rest of yer life."

"If I have to." Kate would never have thought her capable of it, but the Duchess's pink lips curved into the sweetest smile, an expression completely without artifice. "Trust me?"

"Aye." Slowly, Duka lowered his proud head until his cheek rested against the soft skin just beneath the swell of her breasts. Even as she smiled, a tear slipped down the Duchess's cheek. Giving Harley an infinitesimal nod, she caressed the nape of the First Mate's neck with her fingertips.

Duka closed his eyes and blew out a long breath. As Kate watched, he relaxed each muscle in turn. Only the glorious, awe-inspiring tree-trunk of his erection remained unaffected.

Harley stepped forward, again, his dark merry face uncharacteristically serious. Spreading his fingers, he cupped the lower curve of Duka's buttocks. "Chan?" he said softly.

"Aye." Chan returned to his task with enthusiasm, no longer teasing, but sucking with real purpose and undoubted skill. Duka groaned and shivered.

"My lips, remember," whispered the Duchess and he turned his head to press his open mouth against her skin.

Harley gripped Duka's shoulder with one hand, using the other to guide himself to his target. His hips flexed and the big man froze, biting his lip.

An instant's pause and Harley surged forward, not quickly, but steadily. Duka made a guttural noise, deep in his throat. "Sshh," murmured the Duchess, stroking his shoulder.

"Jesus, I want to kill 'em. I want to fuck ye 'til ye scream. I need-- Fuck, I need...need..." Duka moaned harshly and the Duchess threw both her arms around him. "Hold me, love," Kate heard his gravelly whisper. "Don't let me go, for God's sake."

"Our will," said the Duchess. "Our pleasure, our pain." On the words, she bent forward, gathering Duka's huge body even closer.

It was simultaneously the most carnal and the sweetest thing Kate had ever seen.

Rivers of sweat ran down Duka's broad chest, trickling over his flat belly. Each time Harley reached his full length, the First Mate shuddered with pleasure, his nipples drawn up into hard tight peaks, the golden rings gleaming in the lamplight.

From another room, a clock began to chime, deep melodious sounds.

Chan stilled, gripping Duka's hip. Harley jammed himself as deep inside the big man as he could go and froze. "Shit." He thumped Duka's biceps with a furious fist. "Out of time. Hell - and - bloody - fucking - damnation!"

"No," whispered Kate. "Oh, no!"

"Wait," said Jack, lowering his burnished head to lick a nipple. When he pulled away, a cool perfumed breeze licked over the wet flesh in his stead and she trembled, tightening on him deep inside. "Wait and trust."

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh no, indeed! What happens next?

- A. Duka blew out a huge breath. Then he straightened, his dark gaze snagging that of the Duchess. He didn't look away as he spoke. "Loose me, ye bastards. I have unfinished business." At his unabashed, predatory grin, the Duchess gasped and fell back a step. "With my - own - personal - property. Eh, pretty lass?" His voice dropped to a rumble. "My Venetia."

- B. Duka turned his head, his cheek brushing against the soft, white skin of the Duchess's belly. "I know ye're out there, Jack," he called. "What's yer judgment, Cap'n? Ye and yer pretty lady?" Duka turned his head, his cheek brushing against the soft, white skin of the Duchess's belly. "I know ye're out there, Jack," he called. "What's yer judgment, Cap'n? Ye and yer pretty lady?"
- C. Duka turned his head, his cheek brushing against the soft, white skin of the Duchess's belly. Imperiously, he snarled, "Don't stop, ye bastards. You started this, are ye men enough to finish it?"



## CHAPTER 24

### Beginnings and Endings

*The story so far:*

*Duka and the Duchess appear to have formed some sort of pact. Meanwhile, Harley and Chan are moving things right along to their inevitable conclusion – until the clock chimes. Oh, no! They've run out of time!*

Duka turned his head, his cheek brushing against the soft, white skin of the Duchess's belly. Imperiously, he snarled, "Don't stop, ye bastards. You started this, are ye men enough to finish it?"

Out in the garden, Kate held her breath, Jack equally motionless beneath her. The playful little breeze had dropped, the night air balmy and still. Thank God, the crazy Rossetti woman had shut up, not even the faintest tappity, tap of her fingers on the keyboard.

"Oh aye," growled Harley. "I'm man enough to make ye scream."

The First Mate was shuddering now, full body tremors, head to toe. Gritting his teeth, he grunted a negative. The Duchess pressed even closer, whispering in his ear.

Harley leaned forward to sling a muscled arm around Duka's neck. "You'll never last," he hissed. "Give it up for me, man."

"Fuck you."

Harley gave a hoarse chuckle, his eyes gleaming with lust and devilment. "Ye got that arse about, matey."

Chan snickered, his mouth full. Duka bucked and swore. Chan's laugh choked off into a pained splutter.

Harley withdrew, paused for a moment, and shoved forward – hard. Chan gripped Duka's hips and set about deep-throating him with ruthless skill.

"C'mon, damn ye," Harley muttered with every thrust. "God! C'mon, c'mon!" His dark curls flew about his shoulders, his handsome face deeply flushed.

The chains creaked, the rattling punctuated by desperate masculine groans and huffs of effort. Sweat rolled down Duka's chest, making his skin gleam as it were burnished bronze. The pace was purely merciless. "Sweet Jasus," murmured Jack, his breath hot against Kate's throat.

"They'll kill each other," said Kate in mounting horror.



Jack huffed a laugh, stroking Kate's belly with his fingertips, the fluttery sensations skating delightfully low. "Not they, but something's got to give, true enough." Deep inside her body, his shaft flexed and she whimpered. "Or someone," he added.

Slowly, he began to rock inside her and she gasped in pleasure.

Over Jack's shoulder, she could see Duka biting his lip so hard, a thin trickle of blood oozed over his chin. His breath was raspy and erratic, his hands clenched into huge fists gripping the chains above his head.

Kate's head swam. She couldn't last much longer - and she was certain Duka couldn't.

The Duchess swooped, grasping Duka's chin and jerking his head up so their eyes met. "Don't ye dare," she hissed.

Duka groaned, long and low. Harley grunted, tilted his hips and thrust even more ferociously. Chan gurgled, his throat working.

"Damn ye, come on!" roared Harley over the slap of sweaty flesh. "Damn ye to— Aaargh!"

With a strangled shout, he plastered his whole body against the First Mate's broad back, his buttocks flexing hard.

In response, every muscle in Duka's magnificent body went rigid, every tendon and muscle clearly delineated beneath the dark satin of his skin. Squeezing his eyes shut, he growled a string of words in a language Kate had never heard.

Chan froze, the tattoo gleaming dark on his golden body. Then he fell away from Duka, rolling over on the cushions, grabbing at himself, his back arching as he pumped, yelling in ecstasy.

Kate's mouth dropped in awe at the sight of the First Mate's engorged cock, the wet skin shining like a ripe aubergine, the towering column of it crowned with a head like a velvety plum. Without ceremony, the Duchess planted a dainty foot in Chan's ribs and kicked him aside. Wrapping both hands around Duka's girth as far as they'd go, she stroked once - up, then down.

Duka panted, staring down into her face, all his soul in his dark eyes.

Her pink lips curved. "Now," she said. "Give me what's mine, ye great black brute."

She tilted her chin, offering her mouth. Duka bent his head, his lashes fluttering shut, as he sank into the kiss.

"Venetia." Kate barely heard his cracked whisper. "Love."

With a long groan, he spilt himself endlessly against the Duchess's soft white skin, his hips jerking. Gently, she milked him with her fingers, her mouth busy with his.

Beautiful, thought Kate, watching through misty eyes.

"Magic," said Jack in her ear, slipping his arms around her and spreading her beneath him. "The magic of the Isle."

Gently at first, he began to thrust, hot and silky and thick, deep inside.

Kate arched into him. "Yes. Oh, Jack, that's good."

"Won't last long," he muttered, dipping his head to tongue a nipple.

Kate said nothing, locking her ankles together in the small of his back and digging her fingers into the taut flexing buttocks. They came together as it were an erotic dance they'd been perfecting all their lives. Tears of bittersweet joy stung her eyes. He was right. How much longer could something so right, so absolutely perfect, continue?

As if the thought had conjured the sound she'd been dreading, a soft, distant *tap, tap, tap* kept pace with the beat of her heart. *Not yet, oh God, please - not yet.*

Inside the chamber, Duka was sagging in the chains, his head bowed, breathing like a bellows. Harley staggered to his feet, grabbed his breeches and fished out the key to the manacles. Chan was still lying spread-eagled among the cushions, his arms flung wide, a beatific smile on his face.

"Give it here." The Duchess extended a hand. "And better run, ye bilge scum. Afore I let him loose."

"Aye." Harley passed her the key and scratched his chest, slanting her a sparkling bad-boy glance. "Any time ye want a return round, sweetheart..."

Duka's head jerked up. "GO!" he roared, chains clanking.

Unrepentant, Harley blew him a kiss and hoisted a still grinning Chan to his feet. Arms about each other's shoulders they wove out of the room and staggered off into the night.

The moment he was released, Duka climbed to his feet. "Hell." He winced. "Not as young as I used to be."

"Such a pity." The Duchess shook her head in apparent sorrow. Meditatively, she drew a finger through the creamy mess on the First Mate's flat belly.

"Bath," said Duka decisively. "You can wash me." He swung the Duchess up in his arms and her laugh rang out, full and rich.

"What? You think I'm a slave?" Her blonde tresses flew as she tossed her head.

"Not at all." Smoothly, Duka threw her over his shoulder and strode for the door. "What you are is mine."

Kate's last sight of the lovers was the pale soles of the Duchess's feet kicking and Duka's huge hand spread firmly over the creamy globes of her ass. Her happy cries of protest lingered, floating on the soft night air.

"Let's go home," said Jack, drawing Kate's dress back over her shoulders. "I want you in a real bed, pretty Kate."

"Aye. I mean, yes."

Slipping an arm around her waist, he drew her to her feet and they wandered out of Duka's garden and off down the sandy path, the moon shining so round and bright it



hurt Kate's eyes. That must be why her cheeks were wet. Like a metronome, the distant boom of surf kept pace with her shallow breath.

She'd never felt like this before and it was so disconcerting, it took her until they reached Jack's doorstep to work it out. It wasn't only that she desired him, lusted after his firm, golden flesh, she liked and respected him. Odd really, because they had nothing much in common - a pirate captain and a woman sworn to uphold the Law.

Or did they?

She stole a glance at his handsome face as he led her into a dim, spacious bedroom and opened the shutters to the night and the moonlight. From the first moment they'd laid eyes on each other, it had been a tussle of wills, a sensual duel. But Jack was not only a fighter, he was a winner.

And so was she.

No other man had ever met her on every level. No other man had ever shown himself to be her match.

Save for Jack.

Every word he'd spoken to her had turned out to be truth - and he deserved nothing less now. "Jack?"

"Hmm?" He unfastened her dress, flung it aside and drew her down onto smooth cotton sheets that smelled of sunshine.

"Do you remember I said I love you?"

"Aye." A boot hit the floor. Then another. "I'm hardly likely to forget." His shirt sailed over his head.

"I've never said that before, to any man."

He turned to face her, his hands on the waistband of his breeches. "I believe you, pretty Kate." He smiled, slow and very sweet. "It's the same with me." In a single smooth movement, he shucked the breeches and settled beside her, all lithe and smooth and golden. "I love you too, sweetheart."

Kate's breath caught and tears stung her eyes. She struggled on. "It's not going to last. I can feel it."

"Why not?" Jack drew her close against his muscled length and she lowered her head to his shoulder. "You're perfect." He yawned. "Perfect for me..." Another yawn. "...and Sweet Sisters Isle." Jack turned his face into her hair, sighed once and fell asleep.

Kate drifted her fingertips over the silky smattering of hair on his chest. She slid down until she could rest her cheek against his chest. *Thud, thud. Thud, thud.* Steady and strong, not like the frantic fluttering of her pulse.

God, she was tired, melted all the way to the bones. For a long time, Kate lay caressing Jack's skin, relishing every moment. How many more of them would she have? From far away, came the sound she'd been dreading. *Tap, tap. Tap, tap.* Rossetti, damn her to hell, the woman was off her trolley.

Slowly, but surely, it twined itself around Jack's heartbeat, around her own, until they were indistinguishable, nothing remaining but a rhythm of breath and being that drew her down, down into sleep.

Clinging even harder to Jack, Kate fought bitterly, but eventually she could resist no longer - too sated, too relaxed, too damn happy. Tears still streaking her cheeks, she gave up and slid into the soft dark.

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No vote this month. I've already assumed you'd like Kate to wake up next month! The question is - where? Hmm, I'll have to think about that. \*evil cackle\*



## CHAPTER 25

### Bumps and Briefs

*The story so far:*

*Duka and the Duchess, Harley and Chan, all disappear into the night, well-satisfied. Kate's pretty happy too, cuddling up with Jack and dropping off into a happily exhausted sleep. If it wasn't for the ominous tap, tap, tapping of the Rossetti woman's keyboard...*

Sometime during the night, Kate woke, tears streaming down her cheeks – even though she never cried. She couldn't recall the substance of her dreams, but her arms and legs were twined about Jack's sleeping form as if he were about to be torn from her. Over the regular soothing boom of the surf, she heard the sound she dreaded – *tap, tap, tappity, tap*. Stubbornly, she clung even harder.

"No," she muttered through clenched teeth. "I won't leave him. You can't make me."

*Tap, tap, tap*. The sound sped up, the little clicks running together, merging into a long murmuring rush like tropical rain on the roof. *Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap...*

Kate's eyelids drooped like lead shutters. She struggled. "Jack!" She shook his shoulder.

Jack opened one sleepy hazel eye. "Humpf?" he said.

"Hold onto me! Don't let me go!"

"Course not." Jack slid a warm, appreciative palm over the curve of Kate's backside. "Never gonna...let...you...let...you..." His words trailed away and his lashes fluttered down.

"Jack? Jack!" When she tried to rouse him, he simply drew her closer, nuzzling the skin under her ear, mumbling unintelligibly. If she didn't know better, she'd swear he was drunk. "Hate you, Rossetti," she muttered. "Hate—" But she was overtaken by a jaw-cracking yawn. Her head swam, images flashing by beneath her eyelids – Duka, with the Duchess over his knee, her upraised bottom a delightful stinging pink; Peter, stretching up to release Tom Cavanagh's bonds and Tom flushing brick red as he did it; Harley's bad boy grin and dark tossing curls; the Comte de Nothos, his pale perfect body and shining pointy teeth. Then there was Jack – his tiger gaze, his body cradling hers as they floated in the jungle pool, his hard length buried as deep inside her as it would go. His kisses – hot and wet and searching, tender and coaxing.

Everyone she'd met on Sweet Sisters Isle had found their happiness, even Ess and Tess, the Hormone Harlots. There was nothing left for her to do – except love Jack for the rest of her life. Oh God. Nothing left to do. Nothing at all.

Each vision pulled her further into the dark velvet of unconsciousness, sleep cushioning her like a soft warm blanket, safe forever in Jack's arms.

It was a lie. She wasn't safe at all.

She fought back, with every particle of lawyerly grit in her stubborn, adversarial soul. "No," she grunted, writhing, clutching Jack's hard biceps. He emitted a small, happy snore. "Won't, won't...won't..."

*Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap...*

Inexorably, the swelling tide swept over her, dragging her down into cottony darkness. Kate's last sensation was the warmth of the muscled planes of Jack's chest, his heart beating strong and steady beneath her ear.

She frowned in her sleep, the tap, tap, tapping growing louder, more intrusive. Kate wriggled, seeking the reassurance of Jack's body, the wonderful smell of his skin.

Why couldn't she get comfortable? The mattress was hard and unyielding under the point of her hip and something cold and clammy kept swiping across her face. "Mmpf." Kate batted it away.

A woman's voice said, "Oh, thank God, she's coming to. You haven't rung the ambulance yet, have you?"

"Uh, no." It was a young man's voice, soft and hesitant.

"Good. Don't then."

*Tap, tap, tap. CLUNK!*

Silence, though she could hear someone breathing.

Abruptly, Kate's head started to throb. "Ow." She fumbled a hand up under her hair, discovering a tender, egg-shaped lump on her temple. "Jack?" she said, an unpleasantly hollow space opening up under her breastbone. "Jack?"

"Do you want me to ring him? Is your cell in your bag?"

If she kept her eyes shut, the voices would go away and she'd wake later in Jack's arms, in time for a tropical breakfast.

Someone patted her cheek, gently at first, then a little harder. Kate's head rocked. She pulled in a jerky breath.

She wouldn't cry, she wouldn't.

"Here. Let me help you up," said the woman. She insinuated an arm under Kate's back and heaved with surprising strength. What felt like a half a dozen books slithered off Kate's chest and stomach and clunked to the floor.

Kate's head swam. Books? A whimper slipped out of her mouth before she could prevent it.

"Wait a minute," said young man. "Let her get her breath back first. You all right, Ma'am?"

"Jack," whispered Kate miserably. "Want Jack."

"Sure," said the young man. "Here, I found your cell, you can ring him." He pressed a cool rectangular shape into her lax fingers. "I'll help if you like."

He sounded just like Peter. Hopefully, Kate levered her eyes open and squinted.

Nope. Nothing like Peter. This one was plump and a little spotty, though he had nice eyes, big and brown. He was currently gazing at her like a worried puppy, a dripping washcloth clutched in one hand.

"You must have knocked the shelf when you reached up," he said. He went pink. "You weren't out very long, I think. I heard a noise and found you with your feet sticking out from under the erotic romances." His eyes flicked over a cover displaying a gorgeous man with a dragon tattooed over his bare chest. He blushed harder than ever.

Rossetti. Right.

Kate's guts clenched. If she met the woman she'd kill her with her bare hands.

"Glad to see there's no problem," said the female clerk, rising to dust off her skirt. "I have customers waiting." Ah yes, it was all coming back, the bookstore, the prissy shopkeeper.

Bitch.

"I'm an attorney," croaked Kate. "With Windsor, Nott and Choke."

The result was all she could have hoped for. The woman stopped as though she'd run into a brick wall. "Oh." She cleared her throat, her already pale face whitening. "There's a doctor in the centre. I'll ring and ask him to step `round."

She disappeared with remarkable rapidity.

"Are you going to sue?"

Kate shifted her gaze back to the young man. She bared her teeth, breathing hard. Rage battered her insides, clawing to break free in an endless howl of misery and grief. But once she started she might never stop. "I might."

He swallowed hard. "I packed those shelves."

Kate sat up, holding her head. More books slithered to the floor. "Did you?" she said absently, reaching for a familiar cover. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Benjamin. I, uh, work here. It's my first week."

*Corporate Piracy for Do-Gooders*. Kate picked it up with hands that shook. Jack's eyes laughed up at her out of the photograph, dressed in that ridiculous pirate outfit. A dream. Nothing more, born out of loneliness, too much erotic romance and a bump on the head.

"I need to get back to the office," she muttered.

"Not until the doctor's checked you out," said Benjamin, his voice squeaky with determination. "And then I'll take you wherever you want to go."

The doctor arrived, pleasant enough, but none to be pleased to be pulled from his appointments. Swiftly, he checked Kate's vitals and held up various numbers of fingers for her to count. "A bit shaken, but good to go," he said briskly. "Over-the-counter painkillers are fine." He rose. "Take it easy, all right?"

Benjamin rushed off and returned with a couple of tablets and glass of water. Kate swallowed obediently enough, wondering if the pain would ever stop. She'd never felt

like this before, as if she'd been flayed, inside and out. Every part of her seemed to be aching, from the lump on her head to her broken heart.

With Benjamin's help, she staggered to her feet and wove her way toward the door, half a dozen books tucked under one arm.

"Now just you wait a second, missy," said the clerk, hurrying out from behind the counter. "Are you going to pay for those?"

Kate wobbled in her red stilettos, but she favoured the woman with a vicious grin. She could almost swear she saw a tiny winged figure in biker's boots hovering near the cook books, giving the woman the finger. Tess, bless her. "No," she said. "No, I'm not. Come on, Ben." She took his arm. The woman glared, but subsided, biting her lip.

As they threaded their way through the crowds in the mall, Benjamin said morosely, "She's going to fire me."

"Probably," said Kate, hurting too much to be tactful.

The silence lasted to the two blocks to the Windsor, Nott and Choke building. Benjamin insisted on seeing Kate right to her office door. Kate collapsed in her chair, looking around the room as if she'd never seen it before – the law books in serried rows, the bland landscape on the wall, the framed certificates, the ever-present computer, its screensaver cycling endlessly through the boring pipes pattern.

Putting her elbows on the desk, she lowered her head into her hands, feeling a million years old.

"Right," said Benjamin. "'I'll be off then."

"Wait," said Kate. Her brain cells were sloshing about in her skull like pea soup. "Go see George in the mailroom. He's been complaining it's too much for him at his age. Tell him I sent you."

"Really?" The boy's voice went up a full octave.

"Yeah." Kate waved a weary hand. "Go on, Benny boy, before I change my mind."

"Hey thanks, Kate!"

The door slammed. Big feet thundered away down the corridor.

The headache had receded somewhat. Slowly, Kate reached out a trembling hand and drew the brief she'd been working on closer. Then she picked up a yellow legal pad and a pencil.

Kate O'Reilly never cried. She was as hard as nails, a real ball-breaker. Junior partner material.

Her mouth compressed into a grim line, she picked up the pile of books she'd carried from the store and dumped the lot in the wastepaper basket. That was where dreams belonged. Contract law was real. She loved it. She really did.

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Kate hadn't intended telling Alice about the dream, but her friend took one look at her set face and winked it out of her. Alice crowed with delight. "It's perfect!" she cried. "You're going to be my bridesmaid and then I can be yours. Or matron of honour." She waved a hand. "Whatever."



"You're nuts," said Kate flatly. "Certifiable."

"Am not," said Alice stoutly. She held out her left hand and waggled her ring finger under Kate's nose. Diamonds flashed. "Will's real." Her eyes went out of focus and pink rose in her cheeks. "Really real."

She leaned forward over the table in the café where they were having coffee. "Katie love, all you have to do is wait. Why not read Rossetti's books? To get you in the mood." She giggled.

Kate's lip curled. "I'd rather read the Tax Act from cover to cover, complete with the last fifty years of amendments. I'm never thinking about it again. It was a dream for chrissake."

Alice had just laughed.

That had been a month ago and Kate had been working such insane hours, even the venerable Mr Choke had noticed. His rheumy eyes had twinkled with approval, though that could have been the sight of Kate leaning over to unjam the photocopier in a tight skirt. "Ah," he creaked, "my dear Ms O'Reilly, I wonder...would you be interested in a new brief? Quite a corporate high flier, very demanding."

Kate smiled tightly. "Of course, Mr Choke. I'd be delighted." If she could exhaust herself, she might sleep without seeing Jack's face in her dreams. Every morning when she woke, the pillow case was so wet beneath her cheek she had to change it for a fresh one. But she never cried.

The following afternoon, she was tracking down a precedent on the Net, nails clacking busily, when there was a tap at the door. "Come in," called Kate.

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Who is at the door?

- A. Alice, Kate's best friend, on important wedding business
- B. Peter, his spectacles shined, and wearing a business suit
- C. Mr Choke, the senior partner, with an important client
- D. Benjamin, now the mail boy, with an important letter