

# Sweet Trade of the Red Coral

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SWEET TRADE OF THE RED CORAL

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Written by Coral Russell.

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To my husband who helped write this story.

Many thanks to Scott Kelly for his help with this story.



## **"Life's pretty good and why wouldn't it be? I'm a pirate, after all." - Johnny Depp**

Floor boards creaked as patrons passed to and fro, sloshing mugs overflowing with alcohol. The smell of rum perfumed the room, especially the breath of the men seated around a rickety table playing a game of high stakes poker. The Peg Leg was not a pub for the faint of spirit, but rather beckoned the cutlass of every gentlemen o' fortune, in other words, pirates.

Captain Ezekiel Jones sat in one of the chairs around the poker table. Only one other player was left out of the seven that had started, Captain Argus the Black. The game became tense as each man kept upping the ante each round. The men were rivals not only at sea, but every time they met on shore. Jones had an unsettled personal vendetta against Argus. Beating him at poker would only satisfy a tiny portion of the dark, burning hatred that sat in his stomach for the man.

He watched Captain Argus's eyes shift uneasily back and forth between his cards and the pot in the middle of the table. "Well, look at you all these years later. You turned out well for being a mutinous dog."

Jones didn't bother to reply, not willing to be sidetracked rehashing the history between them. His teeth tingled with anticipation. "It's to you," said Jones.

The rickety wooden chair creaked as Argus shifted his weight. "I tell ya what. . ."

Jones recognized the crafty look in Argus's eye and forced himself not to grin in reply.

". . . Let me loosen up the purse strings and throw in something that'll really interest ya," Argus said.

Jones paused, then leaned back in his chair. "And here I thought you'd thrown in all but the barnacles on the bottom of your ship."

Argus scoffed and spit. "Ha, you wish."

Captain Jones's eyebrows rose a notch.

"I be bettin' the Red Coral," Argus said.

Jones took a deep breath and leaned forward. "I imagine it's time to put you out of your misery then." He pushed in the rest of his booty into the heaping pile of money, gold, jewelery, even a small jeweled scabbard already in the middle of the table. "I call. Your cards, Captain Argus."

Argus grinned from ear to ear smacking his three Jacks down on the table. He leaned back in anticipation.

Jones took another deep breath. "Three Jacks. Well played and that does beat three nines."

Argus's grin widened as he leaned forward to sweep up the heap of treasure.

"But, it doesn't beat a full house." Jones let the words drop like an anchor.

Argus froze with his arms in mid-air then he brought his fists down hard enough to rattle the surrounding tables. "You lily-livered, scurvy dog, son of a..."

Jones fingered the hilt of his cutlass willing Argus to give him a reason to use it across his neck. "There's no need to get all upset o'er a simple game of cards. You bet and you lost. I'll be 'round tomorrow to pick up the Red Coral. What say you, noon?"

Several beats passed before Argus unclenched his hands and pulled back from the table. "Aye, noon it is."

Jones didn't believe Argus would give up that easily. "You wouldn't want to cheat me on a bet, Captain Argus, I would chase you down where'er you sailed if you did."

Argus kicked the table. "I ne'er welch on a bet."

Captain Ezekiel Jones stepped out into the tropical night air feeling thoroughly pleased with himself. After tonight, he could finally make good on his promise to his first mate, and friend, Casey, and make him the Captain of his own ship. *Captain Casey Dawson, has a nice ring to it.* Jones let the spicy-scented air take him back in time as his steps slowed to a stroll.

The Jones family were jewelers—Jones Family Jewlers. He was an apprentice to his father's craft which they'd practiced for generations. On his very first assignment Ezekiel was sent to a wealthy family to outfit new jewelery for the daughter. Ezekiel was not prepared for her beauty as she sat demure, eyes downcast, while he measured her neck, wrist and fingers.

Her father blustered about and demanded the new gem he had heard was coming out of India and Borneo. When Ezekiel told his father he paused to tap his miniature screwdriver against the work table. "They're called diamonds. A colorless gem that is so hard it cuts glass."

Ezekiel thought this impossible but stayed quiet. His father took a couple of days before he broke the news that his son would make an overland trip along with Casey, the son of another family jeweler and family friend Dawson Jewelers. Diamonds were new and word was spreading among the wealthy families. The Dawson and Jones would merge with the windfall from this new business.

The trade route usually followed from India, through the Mediterranean and the Strait of Gibraltar, ending in England. Dawson and Jones decided their best chance at getting the diamonds before anyone else was to send their sons overland to meet the shipment in Genoa, Italy. The ship would make at least seven more stops before reaching England, more than enough time for the boys to reach the port and return with the precious cargo.

Genoa, La Super, was the largest port in Italy. The nightmare of the plague, which killed half the people in the city, was fast fading away and being replaced by a resurgence in the arts. Ruben, Caravaggio and Van Dyck were painting. Alessi designed many of

the palazzis. Ezekiel and Casey wandered the narrow caruggi waiting for the cargo ship to arrive, drinking in the sights. A trip like this was once in a lifetime and had cost their families a small fortune. The family business was dependent on this new gem.

Captain Ezekiel Jones returned to the present. He closed his eyes and lifted his face to the moon. His family gambled everything and as cruel as life can be, they lost it all. The memories of his past played out to the bitter end.

Captain Argus the Black must have been tracking the young men because as soon as they picked up the diamonds he robbed them, threw them on his ship and headed past the Strait of Gibraltar to the open ocean. Darius befriended them and those first couple of years kept them from dying young. In Porto Bello they made their stand. Ezekiel, Casey and Darius escaped Captain Argus.

His freedom solved nothing. Without the diamonds their families were lost and scattered. The young, beautiful woman he thought he loved married. Ezekiel committed to his new vocation—pirate of the high seas. He'd never exacted revenge on Argus, until now. Jones fought the urge to howl at the moon in victory.

The sun was directly overhead and hot with only a faint breeze coming off the sea as Captain Jones along with Casey and four, fully armed, swarthy sailors at their heels headed straight for the sloop to take them to their new ship. Casey Dawson couldn't hide the pleasure in his eyes at possessing this formidable ship that rivaled Captain Jones's, *The Jewel of the Damned*. The group's pace slowed as it neared the dock. A large group of the Red Coral's crew gathered around with Captain Argus standing squarely out in front.

"You think he's up for fightin' you over it?" Casey said.

"I was afraid of it once he sobered up and realized what he'd lost and I'm half hoping he gives me a reason to challenge him then I'll justify my sweet trade of the Red Coral on the high seas," Jones said.

Captain Argus the Black stood feet planted firmly on the dock with a broad smile on his face. "Ahoy, Captain Jones! Fine afternoon for settlin' a bet, isn't it?"

Captain Jones's fingertips prickled with suspicion. He raced over the details of last night's game in his mind but could not find any way out for Argus. *Why, then, was Argus so confident?* "Aye, it is. I've come for my ship and Casey Dawson here will be captain. He'd entertain keeping on some of the crew after—" Jones was drowned out by Argus throwing his head back and laughing along with his crew. On lookers gathered behind Jones to watch the spectacle.

"Oh, I be sorry Captain Jones, that was funny."

"I be glad you find it amusing Argus but you lost your ship, the Red Coral, to me in a bet last night at our poker game." Jones raised his voice. "I'm here to collect at noon as we agreed. Unless you be welchin' on the bet. . . then, believe me, I be placin' a black spot on your head."

Argus chuckled, "No, no you be not mistaken. I did bet Red Coral." He reached behind him and flung a person dressed in tatters and dirty from head to foot onto the dock in front of him. The person's cap fell off and a dirty tangle of bright red hair spilled out. "What you be mistaken about is which Red Coral. This is the Red Coral I was bettin'." Argus chuckled as his crew bellowed with laughter behind him. The crowd behind Jones was chuckled as well.

Jones eyed the heap in front of Argus. "Now Argus, that doesn't look like a ship."

"Well, I never said ship now did I Jones? Aye, I didn't. I said, and I be quotin' here, I be bettin' Red Coral and this here is Red Coral. Not my fault you don't know the difference between a

wench and a ship." The crowd and Argus's crew laughed, their humor spilling out across the docks.

"It's a woman? You had a woman on your ship?" Jones stepped forward to nudge the heap with the toe of his boot. Everyone on the dock fell silent.

"Aye, I won her in a bet as well and figured I'd pass the good luck on to you."

Jones walked slowly around the unmoving heap and glanced at Casey, who looked for all the world like someone had just kicked his puppy off the dock.

"All right, Argus," Jones said. "Get up, Red Coral. Follow me." He turned around and walked away from the snickers of the crew. The crowd dispersed disappointed at the lack of a fight or at least an argument.

Casey was the one who looked behind to see if Red Coral was following. She was. A curtain of dirty, red hair covered her face. "What are we going to do with her?" said Casey.

"I'm hopin' she'll just run off."

"And if she doesn't?" Casey looked again. "Because she's still followin' us."

"I have no idea."

**There's very little admirable about being a pirate.  
There's very little functional about a pirate. There's  
very little real about a pirate." - Will Oldham**

One by one the crew looked up as word spread that Captain Jones was returning with Casey, the four soldiers and a woman. The crew gathered around in rare silence as they boarded the ship. Finally, Jones turned to Red Coral and told her to go below to find some food and clean up. She dutifully scurried past the men. Hostile eyes followed her route then snapped back to the Captain.

Jones held up his hands to stop the deluge of protest on his crew's lips. "I know. Yes, she's a woman. No, she's not stayin' on the ship."

"What happened?" said Second in Command, Sword Jugglin' Darius. "We thought you were coming back with the Red Coral?"

"So did we," said Casey as he slumped towards the forecandle deck.

"Sorry, mateys," said Jones. "Captain Scallywag Argus claims that woman's name is Red Coral and that is what he was bettin' last night at the Peg Leg." The crew looked at each other in shock and some in amusement.

"That was clever of him, Captain, surely you be not letting this go?" Darius spoke what the rest were thinking.

Captain Jones's brown eyes turned to stone and his voice turned cold. "By the powers, I fully intend to go on the account and send that squiffy Argus to Davey Jones's Locker where he belongs."

Jones found her in the galley gulping down the ship's fresh provisions of salt pork, biscuits, cheese, and grog. It would be many months before the provisions turned into the wormy, moldy, sour, and putrid mess that the crew had to stomach until they reached the next port. It was feast or famine on a pirate ship and this woman looked like she'd seen more famine than feast.

She paused in her chewing to eye him over her spoon then returned to her food, plate drawn in close and protect by her forearm, as if she expected it to be yanked away from her. She was dirty! Filthy, even by a pirate's standards, which were none too high to begin with, and smelly too. Jones honestly couldn't tell what she looked like other than she was slim and of average height.

He decided not to spook her any further by getting closer so he settled down at a table farther away. Sea Monkey Sid, the cook, dropped a mug of grog in front of the Captain and said, "She hasn't spoken a word, but she's workin' on her second helpin'."

Jones nodded, took a long drink before turning his attention back to the woman. "You won't be stayin' on the ship. I thought we could get you cleaned up after you finish eatin' and look into settin' you up at the Peg Leg or some such place at port." She continued chewing so he took another long drink before asking, "What say ye, Red Coral?"

"My name isn't Red Coral. It's Sophie Haggerty, not Red Coral." She lowered her spoon and looked up at Captain Jones, her green eyes bright with unshed tears. "And if it's all the same to you, I'd like to stay on the ship until I can figure out a way to kill Captain Argus the Black and feed his body to the sharks."

"You can't mean to let her stay!" said Casey. After talking with Sophie, Captain Jones had sought out his first mate.

"She's still eatin' and I've sent someone round to fetch her some new clothes to wear when she finishes gettin' cleaned up." Jones

knew first-hand Argus was ruthless when he plundered any merchant vessel unlucky enough to cross his path. This time Argus had turned truly sadistic when it came to her crew and unfortunately the couple of passengers on board, which included Sophie Haggerty and her father. She described how he'd gutted her father like a fish and tossed him bit by bit into the sea for trying to protect her from Argus. He kept her as a part of the 'booty' and when he'd tired of her, left her to survive amongst the crew. Jones shook his head as if to clear the vividness of her description and wondered how much of Sophie was left and how much had died on the Red Coral. "Simply put. . ." he said. ". . .she wants revenge, as I do. You ha'e to respect that."

"But she can't, she won't. Not against someone like Argus. Look how many years we've had to wait for a chance!" said Casey.

"I know. Which is why she'll be stayin' here. If not workin' at the Peg Leg, then somewhere else at whate'er suits her."

"Do you ha'e a plan then?"

"Not yet, but I am workin' on it," said Captain Jones, the words floating off across the water. "I can take revenge enough for the both of us."

Captain Jones leaned over his desk studying the charts before him when the door to his Great Cabin banged open. A young woman stood before him in a slightly worn, full ankle length skirt of dark brown with an off-white, long sleeve blouse and a black corset tied snugly around her waist. Her now shiny, red hair was pulled back from her face with a handkerchief, but spilled over her shoulders in soft waves showing off a thin but otherwise perfect face. Perfect, except for the green eyes that held a flame of pure anger and the mouth set in a firm, hard line. He knew he was staring, but couldn't help it. Was this the real Sophie Haggerty?

"I thought after telling you my story that it would stir some pity in your heart, a tall order considering you're a pirate."

"I heard you Miss Haggerty. It is Miss Haggerty, isn't it?" He saw a shadow of sadness pass over her features before returning to an even sharper anger than before.

"Yes, it is."

"Look, all the jacks on this ship still consider a woman on a boat for any voyage to bring bad luck. The fact that the merchant vessel you traveled on was taken by Captain Argus just confirms their superstition."

"But you don't believe a woman brings bad luck."

"It doesn't matter what I believe." He held up his hand to stop her. "I also understand your reasons for wanting to see Argus dead and I fully agree with them. I have my own reasons for wanting to keelhaul him across my ship. My next account will be the sweet trade of the Red Coral. I give you my word, we will both have our revenge."

"How can I know what your word is worth? You're a pirate. You'll be out at sea and lose interest as soon as you run across a fat, rich ship."

"He made me look like a squiffy in front of the whole port."

"He hurt your pride? That's your reason for revenge? He killed my father!"

Jones came around his desk to close the distance between them. "You be not the first to lose something you loved, lass."

"Captain Jones you cannot expect me to stay or live in this God forsaken port in the middle of nowhere—"

"No, I don't. I except you to save your money and buy or earn a passage back where you came from. Surely, there is family somewhere waiting for you. Go home." He took her arm, turned her around and thrust her past his cabin door. "Darius will escort you to the Peg Leg and see you set up there."

**"In an honest service there is thin commons, low wages, and hard labor; in this, plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power; and who would not balance creditor on this side, when all the hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour look or two at choking. No, a merry life and a short one, shall be my motto." - Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts**

Every night was lively in Porto Bello. Especially Friday nights, since it was considered bad luck to start a voyage on a Friday. Captain Jones ordered some of the crew on shore to put on a good show while he stayed behind with Casey and the rest of the crew to start putting plans into motion.

Porto Bello was a crescent shape carved out of the jungle with a naturally deep harbor that made it a perfect port. The fortress was built out of coral rock mined from the harbor with walls three feet thick. Porto Bello had two seasons - wet and dry. Currently it was the dry season.

The biggest occupation for everyone was keeping the jungle from creeping in and overtaking the town. It was a quiet, almost peaceful town until the Spaniards sent the gold and silver they'd collected from the interior back to Spain. Then everyone was busy moving cargo from the two story Customs House, decorated with graceful arches and heavily guarded, to the ships. The biggest building in town sat right on the edge of the harbor making it easy to transfer the riches by ship across the ocean.

The town was divided into four sections - Triana for the poor and slaves, Merceds for the rich, Guinea for the free negros, and the shanty town for everyone else. The inhabitants of Merceds

enjoyed Plaza de la Mar surrounded by the King's houses, the Cathedral of San Felipe, a Convent, and a hospital. Down a side street about a hundred feet away and over a small bridge was the Plaza for all the other city's inhabitants. People gathered there day and night to drink, eat, smoke, seek pleasure and generally pass the time.

The Peg Leg was a short walk down one of the many side streets leading away from the Plaza. Sophie found herself staring up at the sign, unable to move. Captain Jones was true to his word and set her up at the Peg Leg with instructions to take care of her or let her seek other work if she wanted. What she wanted was to scream, tear everything within reach to pieces, basically, fall apart. Instead, she stood frozen, wistfully thinking that time would stop and wait until she was ready to face the details of life.

Darius had brought her here but he couldn't force her to enter, so he reluctantly left her standing outside. She told Captain Jones the parts of her story that she could, as for the rest, she wasn't sure she would ever be able to put it into words. Right now she thought that was for the best.

"Lass. Lass?" Sophie felt a light touch on her arm which broke her reverie and forced her attention to gather on a short, old woman looking up at her. "Are you all right?" Sophie didn't want to answer that question. "Do you have business in there?" The old woman looked at the battered door of the Peg Leg where muffled shouts and laughter could be heard. "It's not the worst place around here, but I wouldn't go in unless I had to."

"There's only one thing I have to do," said Sophie.

"What's that Lass?"

Sophie started. She hadn't meant to say it out loud. She didn't want to answer that question either and shook her head.

"Dear, I'm an old woman and prone to meddlin' so please take no offense, but there is the Black Christ of Porto Bello at the Cathedral, our patron saint. He was a gift that floated into the harbor one day to protect us from an epidemic. Take the widest

street out of the Plaza and cross the bridge to the Plaza de la Mar. You'll find him there and the Convent of Mary." The old woman squeezed her arm and then shuffled off into the dark.

The information the old woman told her seeped into Sophie's mind. A convent and after the weekend a way to send a message home. Sophie would at least let the rest of her family know she was alive. Decision made her stride toward the Plaza. She didn't get far.

**"Yes, I do heartily repent. I repent I had not done more mischief; and that we did not cut the throats of them that took us, and I am extremely sorry that you aren't hanging as well as we." - Anonymous Pirate, asked on the gallows if he repented.**

Several of Argus's crew spotted the pretty red head, making her way across the Plaza.

"That be her, all cleaned up?"

"Aye and if it isn't, we'll still ha'e a bit o' fun." They spread out to intercept her and corner her in the street off of the Plaza right before the bridge leading to the Plaza de la Mar. It was indeed Argus's red head and at this time of night there was no one traveling between the two plazas.

Jones's crew had been ordered to act as if they were just having a good time on a Friday night. Their real job was to keep an eye on Argus' men while Captain Jones and the rest of the crew were planning an attack on the Red Coral. Porthole Bryan spotted Sophie as well and sent one of the men to tell Darius who was on the other side of the Plaza. By the time Darius and his men reached the bridge they found a circle of men around Sophie. Sophie was wild-eyed and holding a dirk that she managed to take from one of the pirates. The short blade was covered in blood and several of the pirates were bleeding from small wounds and cursing.

"Barnacle Breath!" Darius yelled above the din.

"This is none of your business, Sword Juggler. If your Captain doesn't want her, then she's fair game."

"No, she isn't. Captain Jones put her where he wanted her, so let her be! Besides, you won't get any farther with her alive. I think she's made that clear, even to a sprig like you Barnacle Breath."

Barnacle Breath Malroy sent a long stream of tobacco colored spit to the ground. "Dead or alive, I be not sure it matters any more."

Both sides drew their weapons and circled each other. Sophie tried to cross the bridge, but one of the pirates she scratched blocked her way and pulled a short dagger out of his boot with a grin. The sound of steel being pulled from its resting place filled the dry, cool night air and with a cry the fighting began.

Jones's men were not as drunk as Argus's and quickly started taking the advantage. Darius began to make his way to Sophie. He would do his best to follow orders and get her across the bridge out of harm's way. The same feeling of protectiveness came over him the day Ezekiel and Casey had been thrown aboard Argus's ship.

No matter how badly the men wanted a fight, rabble would not be tolerated in the Plaza de la Mar. Someone would sound the alarm soon and guards would appear.

There were more of Argus's men afoot that night and more came pouring up the street toward the fight. The river that ran under the bridge lead past the docks so Jones's men headed toward the bridge.

"Darius, watch out!" Porthole Bryan yelled. It was too late, a dagger sunk into Darius's side. He pulled away and stumbled backwards into Sophie. The rest of Jones's crew closed in a tight circle around Darius. He gathered himself, wrapped his free arm around Sophie and hissed, "Back to the ship! Now!" He flung them over the bridge. The rest of the men followed.

The adrenaline rush that woke Argus's men at first, quickly wore off with the cold water and slippery banks of the river bed. They soon lost interest in the chase and instead hurled insults after the retreating men. Barnacle Breath Malroy pulled his flintlock from his belt, took aim at the red hair fleeing in the dark, and fired.

**"Damnation seize my soul if I give you quarters, or take any from you." - Edward "Blackbeard" Teach**

By the time they reached the small sloop, the men were half carrying, half dragging Darius across the dock. Porthole Bryan helped Sophie onto the sloop, her left arm covered in blood. Everyone boarded and headed for Nombre de Dios. The Spaniards abandoned this harbor many years ago in favor of Porto Bello. The pirates soon took it over as a safe place to dock their ships while scouting the other small harbors with sloops or dinghies. The men set off hoping that Captain Jones still had enough time to put his plan into action.

The Jewel of the Damned rose up to greet them just inside the entrance of the safe harbor of Nombre de Dios. It's three masts covered with dark, emerald green sails gave vessels a false sense of hope that nothing that beautiful would be deadly. The sloop was spotted long before they arrived. One look at Darius and Captain Jones sent him straight away to the infirmary with Jake Sawbones, the ship's doctor.

Porthole Bryan recounted the events to the crew standing around, all eyes on Sophie. She moved towards Captain Jones, but he interrupted her. "Take her to Sawbones as well. Porthole Bryan, you're Second in Command now. Mateys! We be going ahead as planned. Prepare the fire ships."

**"Let's jump on board, and cut them to pieces." -  
Blackbeard**

The Red Coral lived up to her name with sails colored a bright red, a sign of the violence to come to any ship she was bearing down on at sea. Captain Argus smelled the air and thought it was still, too still. He roused himself and gave his Second in Command the order to round up the crew on shore. The Second in Command, Bart Leadfoot, started to ask for more time, it being a Friday and all. He was silenced with a glare from Argus. "Round them up, now!"

Argus made his way to the poop deck, uneasiness filling his gut. Ever since he'd found out the young whelp who'd jumped ship years ago became a Captain Jones in his own right, he knew Jones would confront him at the first opportunity. Years passed and nothing happened. Argus then thought him soft with an unruly crew. Something on the air told Argus he might have underestimated Captain Jones and all this time he'd been biding his time.

*Caution and crew be damned.* He bellowed orders. "Everyone up and at the ready. We sail tonight!" Men scrambled to their jobs. Soon there was a shout from the starboard side.

Bart Leadfoot limped as fast as he could up to the Captain. "There be movement on the water Captain. It looks like small sloops, one of which I think belongs to the Jewel of the Damned."

"Get us out of this harbor now, Leadfoot."

"Aye, aye Captain."

Darius was dying. Sophie mopped his brow as Sawbones did his best to make him comfortable. After the doctor saw the bruising on the front of his stomach he shook his grey head. "He's bleeding inside." He turned his attention to Sophie as another crew member held her down. Luckily, the lead ball passed through muscle and missed the bone. To her credit, she didn't scream, much, as he dug it out. Sawbones pocketed the lead ball and headed top side.

After sucking in air to calm herself, Sophie made her way to Darius's side to provide what comfort she could. "I'm so sorry, Darius. It's my fault."

"Nay, lass, don't be worrying. To go to the Fiddlers Green in a beautiful woman's arms ain't such a bad thing." Sophie helped him drink. When he closed his eyes, she grabbed the dirk and headed to the main deck as well.

Captain Jones wanted two things tonight - the Red Coral and Captain Argus the Black dead. He heard the grim news and took the lead ball from Jake Sawbones. He loaded his own flintlock with it, intending to bury it in Argus's belly.

Sword Jugglin' Darius was the best Second a Captain could ask for. The Jewel ran smoothly through fair weather and foul under his guidance. Darius had risked his own life to save Ezekiel and Casey and he didn't deserve to be skewered like a rat.

Sophie approached him, her left arm bandaged. Her right hand armed with a dirk.

"How be you?"

"I'm sorry!" Tears thought long spent running down her face. "I couldn't stay at the Peg Leg. I was going to the convent to wait out the weekend and send a message to my family."

Jones moved to touch her but he didn't want to cause her any more pain. "Please, just stay out of harm's way. There's accounts to be settled tonight."

**"Heaven, you fool? Did you ever hear of any pirates going thither? Give me hell, it's a merrier place. . ." -  
Thomas Sutton**

Captain Jones sent the fire ships ahead so as soon as the Red Coral made it out of the harbor she was blocked in by blaze. The Red Coral was short half her crew and moving slowly because of it. Jones knew Argus must head towards Porto Bello to pick up the rest of his crew and was waiting there for the ambush.

The fire ships lit the Red Coral and the Jewel of the Damned as they drew up alongside one another. Crews rushed to the sides armed with daggers, cutlasses, axes, and grappling hooks. The Jewel of the Damned prepared to board the Red Coral.

Crew from the Jewel began throwing crowsfeet across the main deck and howls of pain went up as unlucky jacks stepped on the sharp points. Grappling hooks went sailing overhead and struck the sides of the Red Coral with a solid thunk. Red Coral's crew hacked at the ropes and a few went below to aim a cannonball at the Jewel's side.

Jacks from both sides started swinging over and Argus's crew from Porto Bello could be seen picking their way over the water through the fire strewn debris. Captain Jones swung over to the Red Coral as a cannonball went off from the Jewel barely missing him. It slammed into the side of the Red Coral. Wood splinters prickling his arms and back. When Jones landed on the deck, he hacked and bellowed. "Argus! I challenge you!"

It took some minutes of intense fighting before his words finally sunk in and the Red Coral's crew looked to Captain Argus. They were sorely outnumbered. Flintlock fire kept their sloop with the remaining crew at bay, unable to aid them.

"Argus you squiffy of a Captain, I challenge you here and now!"

"Aye, I'll just bet you do," Captain Argus said as he made his way down to the main deck brandishing his cutlass. Both men drew near each other as the crew marked the outline of a wide circle for them.

Captain Argus moved in quickly to strike the first flurry of blows, testing Captain Jones's ability. Jones parried and moved back to the edge of the circle before countering a blow, sending Argus back to the middle. Argus charged back swinging. Jones fended him off but as he moved to the side, Argus swung behind his back and slashed him across the chest. Seeing his blade strike, Argus spun around and charged again only to miss a thrust and feel steel cut across his shoulder.

Jones grunted with the effort of continuing the attack, forcing Argus to retreat across the circle to the quarter deck. Argus bellowed with frustration as Jones cut him again on the arm. He lunged at him, throwing his weight into it. Jones lost his balance for a second that cost him a slash, this time to his stomach.

Both men moved apart for breathing room. Captain Jones's jacks cheered louder as he rushed in for another attack. They fought to the middle of the circle, crossing swords until Argus threw Jones off. Jones came back quickly, wearing Argus down until with a sidestep and lunge, Jones plunged his cutlass into Argus's body. They remained poised for a moment before Argus slumped heavily to his knees, his cutlass clattering to the deck.

Argus gasped, clutched his stomach and rocked back on his heels. "There, there Captain Jones. You've won the challenge. I be making my way to the sloop with the rest of my crew that wants to follow."

Jones shook his head, waving the blood stained tip of his cutlass. "I could, but that was for Sophie Haggerty. This. . .," he said pulling his flintlock from its holder. ". . . is for Sword Jugglin' Darius."

The sound of the flintlock was deafening after the noise of the sword fight. Argus fell forward in slow motion as Jones' crew roared in triumph.

**"I am sorry to see you here, but if you had fought like a man, you needn't be hanged like a dog." - Anne Bonny**

Captain Casey Dawson saw to Barnacle Breath Malroy and the few remaining crew of the Red Coral that continued to fight after Argus's body was dumped overboard. The Red Coral suffered some damage but she was sea worthy and ready to set sail. Captain Jones and Captain Dawson decided, since they had the two fastest ships at sea, to go into the buccaneer business and build a pirate fleet of their own.

Sophie Haggerty stood on deck the salt air tickling the inside of her nose. Captain Jones offered to take her to any port she wished so she could return to her family. Sophie couldn't imagine herself returning to an old life that no longer fit her. Captain Jones assured her he knew exactly what she was going through. In the end Sophie said, "I thank you for the kind offer, but if it's all the same to you, it's a pirate's life for me."

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to my wonderful husband, Matt Russell, who wrote this with me. I wanted to start writing but was too chicken to do it by myself. He had some ideas and I asked him to write a story with me and oh, by the way, there was a contest we could enter. We wrote this, we entered the contest, and we won!

Enjoy these other titles: *Amador Lockdown*, *Sacrifice*, *Peace on the Peninsula*, *The DIY Guide to Social Media Marketing and eBook Publishing*. Available wherever eBooks are sold.

## Sample from Amador Lockdown

### Part 1: Devil of a Ghost Tour - 1885

His black robe billowed out around him, exposing the red satin lining. In one hand he held a hazel wood wand, polished and consecrated in blood; in the other hand was a ceremonial knife with a black hilt. Both were engraved with the symbols of his faith.

Shoulders relaxed, feet slightly apart, drawing air in through his nose and releasing it with a soft whistle, he spoke: “O Sadai, most holy and most powerful, vouchsafe to consecrate and bless this circle to contain the demon I am about to invoke. O most holy Sadai, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” He drew a circle with his knife on the dirt floor, still speaking: “I invoke and conjure Thee....” The point scratched through the fine sand and rocks as he carved a large outer circle and then an inner circle, filling the space between the two with ceremonial writing. “Choronzon, appear forthwith. Show thyself to me....” He drew three obtuse triangles and continued the writing at the corners and insides of the triangles. “Choronzon, come and do not tarry; Choronzon come, fulfill my desires; persist unto the end, according to mine intentions.”

He stood in the center and waited.

## Present

Lynn and Lee Hoyt parked their car as the sun shot its last fading rays across Cleveland Square in front of the El Paso Downtown Library. Lynn pulled Lee along at a brisk pace, even though she was the one who almost always made them late.

Two men, dressed in black, approached them as they drew near and introduced themselves as the tour guides, Hector and Marcos. Both wore t-shirts with the El Paso Ghost Tours logo. Hector motioned for them to join the other couples of various ages and persuasions standing around a park bench.

“Tell me again why we’re here?” Lee asked.

“I went on one of these ghost tours in Charleston. They tell you the history of the city and point out the famous buildings, plus elaborate on any local, popular ghost stories,” Lynn answered.

“Great. You, me and a history lesson. You know how much I hate this stuff. Wait, when were you in Charleston?”

“Believe it or not, I did a lot of things before we were married.”

“That’s not my fault.”

Lynn playfully slapped his arm. “It was a lot of fun and we can always start season four of Pawn Stars tomorrow night.”

“So, that means there are no real ghosts on this tour? What a rip-off.”

Lynn nudged him with her elbow as they approached their first stop – the library itself. She listened as Hector told numerous ghost stories about the library, which opened in 1904 and was built on top of an old military cemetery. Hector and his investigators even experienced a book falling off a shelf for no apparent reason while trying to do an EVP session.

“For those of you that don't know,” Hector informed the tour group, “EVP stands for Electronic Voice Phenomena. Basically, you catch something on this digital recorder.” He held up a thin electrical device. “You may not hear anything during the investigation, but when you go back and review the recording, you might hear voices or unexplained sounds.” Lynn caught Lee’s skeptical glance as she wrapped her arm around his waist.

Hector continued, holding up a gray device with a rainbow of colors at the top. “Another device we use is called a K2 Meter. We've passed a couple out to the group. Ghost hunters believe these devices can measure the magnetic field given off by ghosts. Sometimes you can use the lights to ask 'yes' or 'no' questions.”

Lee's warm breath close to her ear tickled as he whispered, “You so owe me for this.” She snuggled into his side as he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and kissed the top of her head.

She smiled and whispered back, “I know, I know.”

They passed by the Plaza Hotel, which towered over downtown El Paso like a dark, silent sentinel. Lynn and Lee learned the new owner had intended to restore the building, but was currently behind bars for tax evasion. The restored Plaza Theater, a bright spot downtown, hosted the world’s largest Classic Film Festival and also claimed long-since deceased patrons still wandered the aisles.

As they approached the seven-story Caples Building where Pancho Villa plotted against the U.S., Lynn imagined, in the prevailing darkness, that the building had been drawn from negative space. She turned to Lee. Her jaw dropped in disbelief. He was snapping pictures. “Honey, what are you doing?”

“I'm taking pictures.”

“Of an empty building?”

“I got a feeling.”

She chuckled as he put the camera away and reached for her hand. “See, this stuff is interesting,” she teased, giving him her most devilish smile.

“I didn't say that.”

Lynn thought the O.T. Bassett Tower was the most fascinating building on the tour. The art-deco style architecture on all four sides was quite rare for its time. Small terra-cotta plaques decorated the outside, along with blocks covered in swirls and flowers. The plaque above the front door resembled the builder Henry C. Trost himself. The dull reflection in the windows signified yet another vacant historic building.

Lynn turned to Lee. “It's so gorgeous! I would rent an apartment here in a heartbeat.”

“Oh, no, we wouldn't.” Lee said, squeezing her hand.

Hector overheard her and agreed, “We're trying to bring awareness to the downtown area through these tours and get people interested in preserving the rich history and, of course, hunt ghosts. We've tried to bring the ghost tour inside more buildings, but some of the owners want to charge us \$5000 to go in.” The group laughed in sympathy as he added, “Ghosts don't pay that well.” He went on to talk about the gunfights, prostitutes, gamblers, and violence of Old El Paso, the original Sin City.

“Does it feel cold to you?” Lee asked.

“No. The wind isn't even that bad. You're not getting sick are you?” Lynn ran her hand up his back to the nape of his neck. “You don't feel warm.”

“I'm fine. What's that saying? Someone must have just walked over my grave.”

“Don't say things like that,” Lynn said as he bent down to kiss her forehead.

“I'm just joking.” They slowed to a stop in front of a plain white building.

“We end our tour at the Franciscan Hotel,” Hector said. “One of the most haunted places downtown. Inside the basement we'll investigate an evil spirit or entity. I want to warn you now, it could get scary.” He nodded at a husky fellow. “It's usually the big,

tough-looking guys that get scared and need to be escorted out.” Nervous laughter broke out among the group. “OK, let’s head in.”

## Sample from Sacrifice

**"Quiet and sneaky is fine if you're thinking like a thief. Thieves find entrances, but grifters? Uh-uh. We make them." - Leverage**

The faint smell of rotten eggs hung in the air. It was the smell of money coming from the El Paso natural gas refinery towering above the horizon. Roberta wrinkled her nose at the aroma. "Three years and I still don't have enough." She touched the button to roll up the windows against the smell. Instead she opened her mouth and breathed in the pleasant, dry air. May was the last month before the desert became a furnace blasting air hotter than the surface of the sun.

Run-down neighborhoods of the lower valley flashed by Roberta's open window. She jerked the steering wheel and made a quick right into the Carolina Senior Residential Home. A worn-brick wall separated the parking lot from two rows of one-room apartments facing the driveway leading into the Home. Roberta slowed her car and crawled past the building marked "Office" on her left. She gave a hand signal to the elderly man staring at her from behind a large picture window. The old man, his face swallowed up by dark-rimmed glasses, dismissed her with a wave.

It was lunchtime at the Home. The elderly—in various stages of infirmity—hobbled across the driveway with the help of walkers, canes, or the arm of a loved one. Roberta tapped the steering wheel. "I never, ever want to get that old." The elderly

parading past her, resigned to their fate, never looked up from the all-consuming task of getting from point A to point B.

At the end of the driveway, a man leaned out of the last apartment and lifted his hand. A full head of dull, black hair made him stand out from the crowd. Roberta knew Chewy wasn't excited to see her. It might have something to do with her being the boss's daughter. Or maybe he didn't care. There was no sparkle in his features. He never mentioned family or dreams or plans.

"Come on." Roberta willed the last old woman to hurry across the driveway. Time is money and her life, her real life, couldn't begin until she had enough. Roberta hoped Chewy would give her the job she needed. The job that would solidify the plan bouncing around in her head. The job that would set her free.

When she entered the bedroom-slash-living room, Chewy handed her a cell phone, his voice animated. "There's a big shipment coming across and we need new stash houses. The plan is to work with a car dealership. Details are on the phone."

She'd worked with him for three years, and this was the first time he seemed on edge. "Something special about this job?"

Chewy moved between her and the door. "Not for you."

Roberta cringed. He wouldn't dare touch her because of who she was, but losing a pound of flesh would be better than what was coming next.

Roberta tapped her fingers against her thigh. Her restless fingers the only sign the bars of her private cage were closing in on her. She should have known. Should have planned. Roberta balled up her fists so hard her knuckles cracked. How the hell could she have planned for a double-crossing, back-stabbing, dull-witted, stinking maintenance man to have a clue to what she pulled off—correction—almost pulled off two years ago?

"Relax," she chanted to herself. There's nothing to do but move forward. There was no way Chewy was getting a cut of this action. She knocked a second time, and the door flew open.

A man with a slight build and boyish face posed in front of her. "You must be Roberta! Let me look at you."

Roberta smiled and turned side to side. Her plan was going to require a lot of acting. Good thing she minored in theater at the University. An actor is basically a professional liar, and with her line of work, it was more useful than her major in accounting.

She held up the phone and wiggled it back and forth. "And you're Jesus?"

"The one and only." Jesus shepherded Roberta into his tiny apartment. "This job is going to be easy peasy. It might even be fun." While Jesus droned on about the details, Roberta noticed his eyes. They were shiny, alert and expressive like her father's eyes.

For two years, Roberta skimmed money off the top of her father's business. Matteo Guerra was a high-level leader of the Juarez Cartel. She was proud, like only a child can be, of getting one over on a parent, until her father asked to meet at an abandoned house on the outskirts of Juarez, Mexico. Roberta watched in horror as her father broke random bones of a man tied to a chair. Her father's shiny, expressive eyes letting Roberta know this was the only time he would let another person pay for his daughter's mistakes. The broken man's screams of innocence still echoed in her ears.

"Are you okay?" Jesus asked.

Roberta blinked the memory away. "Fine." Everything would work out; she just had to keep moving forward.

"Here's the list of dealerships. You've got to pick a mark."

"There isn't someone already on the inside?"

"Not this time, honey. People are jumpy lately with all the trouble in Juarez. They want new faces."

With the list of dealerships safely in her purse, Roberta noticed the apartment for the first time. It was immaculate. The place smelled good, like fresh-cut limes. "You have a nice place here."

"Thanks. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Sure. Tea would be great."

The apartment was so small Jesus crossed to the kitchen in a handful of steps. The refrigerator opened and closed. Ice clinked into glasses while he spoke, "This is our first time working together. You're the boss man's daughter so do I need to handle you with care, *las burlas se vuelven veras?*"

Roberta's eyebrows rose. Straight-forward talk was refreshing to hear. "You're not going to offend me. I'm sure my father thinks I can handle myself. Have you worked with Chewy before?"

"Eh! He's a bit dull, isn't he? I just know him from shuffling contacts back and forth. How did he get that job?"

"No idea." And she had no idea how someone so outwardly dull found out about her skimming money from the Guerro family business.

Jesus returned with two glasses and set them down on the ornate coffee table. It gleamed like it was dusted several times a day. "Father? Not daddy, papa, papi. You two aren't that close?"

The cold sweet tea clung to the back of her throat. "*Cada gallo canta en su muladar.*"

Jesus perched like a bird on the other side of the couch and let out a peal of laughter. He fixed her with those glittering eyes. "Right, to each his own. I can only guess what he must be like to deal with on a daily basis. My family wasn't very supportive. It does free you up to do whatever you damn well please. Takes the pressure off, really."

Roberta's face puckered unsure how to respond. She felt plenty of pressure and not at all free.

"So what's your plan?"

"Mande?" Roberta swallowed hard. "What?"

"Oh, come on: no one does this for a living. There's always an escape plan."

Tension froze Roberta for a second.

"Relax," Jesus giggled like a teenager. "I have a plan. I work at the fancy cafe downtown. All these suits—lawyers, government types—eat, drink and tip well. Then I have a night job working at the club downtown. Pull down a couple more of these jobs and then . . . ." He swooped his arm out in front of him. "Brazil. Live and let live."

Roberta's eyes clouded over. Her father had forced her into this particularly crappy corner, but that didn't mean she couldn't change. A world was out there that had nothing to do with drugs. "I'd go to Argentina. Learn to tango."

Jesus gave a slight squeal. "That sounds good too. If I had more time, I'd fix you a caipirinha. Heaven in a glass. We're going to get along I can tell. I hate to rush you off, but I have to get ready for my day job."

"No problem." Roberta's face warmed with a determined smile. She didn't need to wait for the right job to come along. She needed to make this job the right one.

Jesus showed Roberta to the door and winked. "I hope the salesman's handsome."

Roberta assured Jesus, "He'll be perfect."

## Sample from Peace on the Peninsula

# Koreans believe "Holy Trinity" prevents outbreak of SARS

I don't know if I should boast about this or not, but we ate amazingly well during our stay in Korea.

We were taken to some of the finest places in Seoul to eat and most of our meals cost \$5-\$7 U.S. per person. As a highlight of our food trip, we went to Myongdong, the international fashion district of Korea, and ate at an exclusive traditional Korean restaurant. We feasted on two successive several-course meals called "Dishes of the Kings" (and Queens) for \$60 for three people. We ate traditional Korean foods, soups, exotic fish and shellfish, pork and Korean vegetables, cooked with local spices the way Koreans cooked centuries ago. And these foods were as delicious as they were historical and impressive. There were representative dishes from every area of Korea and the ingredients were displayed as artfully as in any French cuisine.

For those who think the only thing to eat in Korea is kimchi, think again. There are more than 48 distinctly different varieties of kimchi produced in Korea. Kimchi, seasoned and preserved Asian cabbage, is rich in vitamins, minerals and even protein. And no, kimchi is not cabbage buried in the ground to rot. Before refrigeration became common, kimchi used to be buried in the ground in large, brown, clay pots in order to preserve the food over the winter, but the kimchi was not rotten, just pickled.

Pickling used to be a common practice in America, too, not long ago.

Some of the best places we found to eat were small, hole-in -the-wall, Mom-and-Pop restaurants that serve one thing and do it really well. At one tiny shop, we ate ton jon, seasoned sausage patties covered with egg batter and pan -fried, that you picked up with your chopsticks (kind of) and dipped (or dropped) in a seasoned soy sauce. Wash that down with some milky Korean rice beer, called makali, and add some side dishes of spicy pickles and spicy vegetables for variety - delicious. Now I know many would balk at the idea of eating pigs feet, but sam kye tal is an incredible dish. Take all the meat from a pot of boiled pigs feet. Grill it and pile a huge heap of it on a platter. Pick up a piece, lay it in a lettuce or sesame leaf, smear some ko chu chang sauce, a spicy fermented bean paste, add a sliver of garlic, fold it up and pop it into your mouth. Then, repeat the process over and over, again and again.

And Korean food is not the same as Japanese food or Chinese food. I think Americans might tend to lump all three cuisines together when in reality the food from each of these countries is very different. I've heard that connoisseurs in these three different Asian countries judge food differently: the Japanese judge by look, the Chinese judge by smell, while Koreans judge by quantity. A full Korean meal can consist of grilled meat (done right at your table), three to five side dishes or seafood, seaweed, pickles and vegetables, rice and a noodle or soup dish.

While we ate mostly in restaurants, we also experienced some wonderful home cooking. I knew my friend Monica, who lived in Taegu, in southeast South Korea, liked sam gyeop tang, a chicken dish we had eaten together when I lived in Korea 10 years ago. When we visited her, she made me her homemade version and it was wonderful. You take a whole chicken and stew it with rice, young ginseng root and jujube fruit. A kind of sea salt, less refined than table salt, is served on the side. Add some side dishes and you have a feast.

That brings up another Korean obsession, ginseng. Korean ginseng is reputed to be the best in the world. We visited the

National Ginseng Store where it is sold in various forms - powder, syrup and extract. Despite (or perhaps because of) its bitter taste, ginseng is said to have all kinds of healthful properties. I've found that I can drink it in the morning, and it gives a better boost than caffeine. I've also taken it to overcome jet lag.

There are several different "holy trinities" of food. The Creole cook uses onions, celery and green pepper; the Native Americans use corn, beans and squash; the Koreans use ginseng, garlic and kimchi. The Koreans consider their food to be healthy. There have been no reported cases of SARS in the country, and Koreans credit the use of their "holy trinity" for that. Sales of South Korean kimchi and garlic have gone up 20 percent since the outbreak of SARS. Most of the increased sales have been exports to China. I didn't realize how much I missed Korean food until I went back. I ate Korean food exclusively when I lived there 10 years ago. When I felt homesick, I would eat pizza from the Hannam food court or go to TGIF's to get a cob salad. But on the whole, I considered it better to eat good Korean food than crappy American food. I've tried, and failed, to recreate the flavors and odors and textures and colors of that food in my own home here. So, if I've made you hungry, I'm sorry. The closest Korean restaurant that I know of is the Korea House in Bolivar, about two hours from Joplin. And I suspect a dinner there will cost way more than \$5-\$7.

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On a more professional note, I have a Masters in Teaching English to English Language Learners and taught ELL students for ten years.

I've lived in Korea and traveled to Canada and Mexico and visited 47 out of the 50 United States. The last three are on the bucket list...

I have a tremendously supportive family that indulges my writing whims.

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