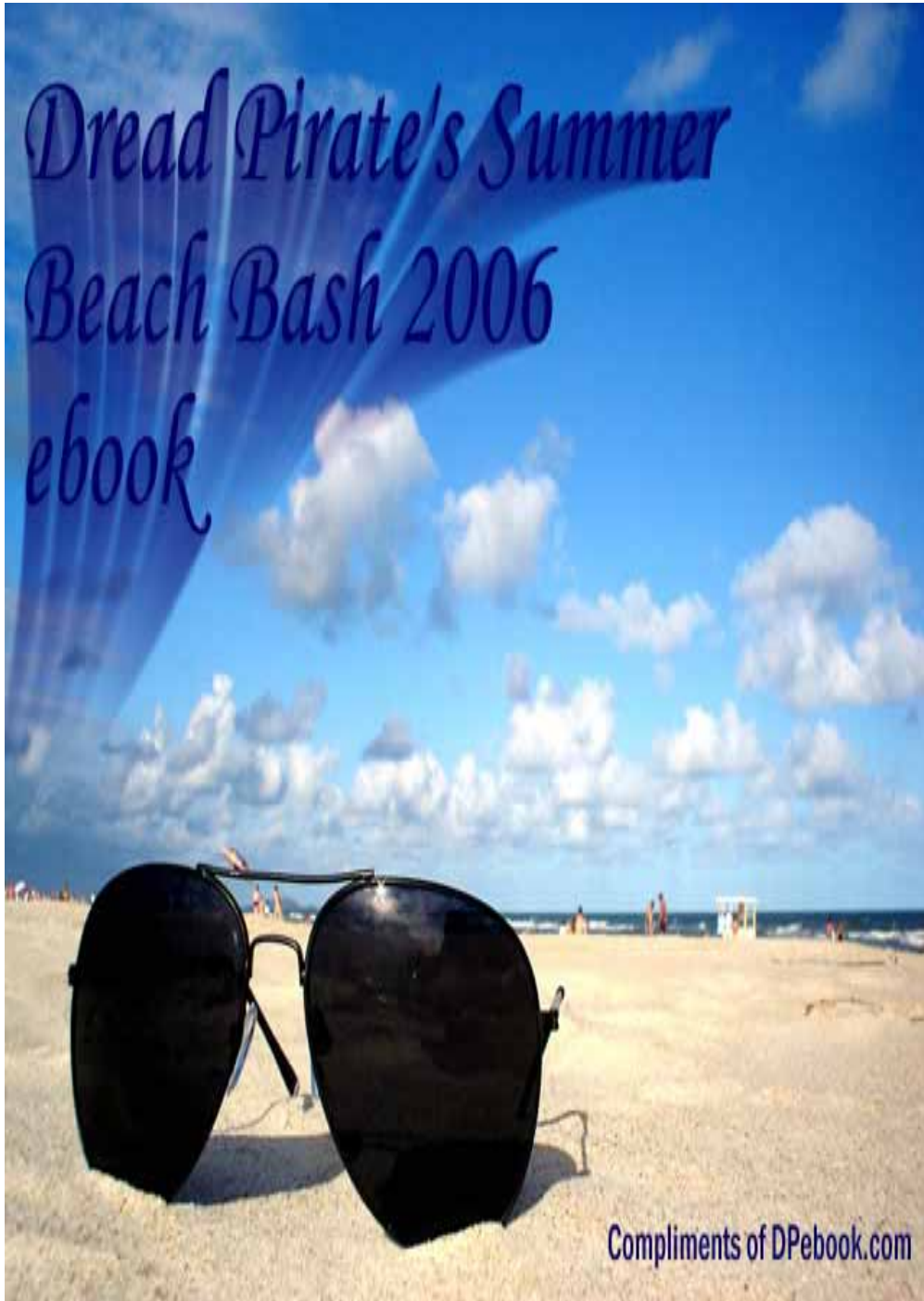


*Dread Pirate's Summer
Beach Bash 2006
ebook*



Compliments of DPebook.com

Dread Pirate's Summer Beach Bash 2006

By

Gregory Scott

Trinity Rose Cassandra Bennett

Little Miss Aki

Rebecca Hollingsworth

Margaret Merrill

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Winners of the 2006 Dread Pirate's Summer Beach Bash writing contest.

1st Place Treasure Chest

MAKE IT

by

Gregory Scott
Treichlers PA

2nd Place Treasure Chest

The Siren's Key

by

Trinity Rose Cassandra Bennett
Sydney Australia

3rd Place Treasure Chest

Rathscum, the Lion, and the Pink Flag

by

Little Miss Aki
SeranishCity Colorado

Honorable Mention Treasure Chest

Who Laughs Last

by

Rebecca Hollingsworth
Lafayette LA

Best Poem Treasure Chest

Incident in Guelph

by

Margaret Merrill
Tonawanda, NY

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Incident in Guelph by Margaret Merrill

A note from Dread Pirate

Greetings shipmates!

This year, the Summer Beach Bash Writing Contest was the 4th annual. This contest was a true landmark for both Team DPe and me. The sponsorship this year was overwhelming and the prize packages were wonderful. Team DPe pulled together to bring on board some very prestigious sponsors as well as acquire some incredible prizes. The first place treasure chest had a value well over \$250.00 US. If it were not for both Team DPe and willing sponsors, this writing contest could not continue. I thank them all. If it were not for their positive motivation the Summer Beach Bash Writing Contest could not continue. I would like to especially thank Diva C for her commitment, energy, and never ending dedication.

Each year, I have had treasure chests for the winners that held some great booty. This year, it occurred to me to put the winning entries in ebook form and offer it to the authors and the Crew free of charge. This would give these great authors exposure and allow them to claim that they are, now, in fact, published authors.

I congratulate Gregory, Trinity, Aki, Rebecca and Margaret on their motivation, and their success in this contest. Thank you for taking the time and effort out of your long hard days to enter the Summer Beach Bash. May you treasure the prize booty and this ebook always; after all, it is YOURS.

Sail on... sail on!!!



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Winning Stories

MAKE IT

Gregory Scott

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“You’ve got to make your own luck,” Sam said from his barstool, “That’s what I think.”

“Bad luck, too?” The man across the chessboard asked, musing through his beard with his hands. His sunburn and his paunch of a belly marked him as a tourist.

“How do you mean?”

“If you were to get struck by lightning right now, would that be your fault?”

“Of course not,” Sam said, striking a pawn from the board, “but that’s a rare occurrence. You have to be able to discuss generalities, because there’s an exception to every rule.”

“Including that one?”

“Of course.”

“I’ll agree with that, Sam, but it brings up a new issue: how do we tell between the rules with exceptions and the rules without exceptions?”

“You propose a rule, and then check for exceptions.”

“But if you find an exception what does it prove? The rule could be a true rule with an exception, or it could be a rule that is completely false.”

“Very true,” said Sam, “and it does call the validity of my statement into question, but I can’t discuss it any longer.”

“Why not?”

“Because you, Ed, are checkmated, and I have to go practice for tonight.”

“I’m not checkmated, and—well, I guess I am—what do you have to practice for?”

“At the big beach party tonight, they’re hosting an American Idol competition.”

“And you’re singing?”

“I’m playing drums in the band that’s backing the singers.”

“And you’ve got a rehearsal to get to now?”

“No, we rehearsed earlier. I’m just going to practice the feels and stuff—there’s an R&B tune that I’d like to work on. You’ve got to make your own luck.”

He pushed in his stool, pulled on his shirt, and walked down the dirt road away from the beachside bar.

Sam, of all the tourists and washups on the island, had made it—on Roatán, there were poor islanders, poor whites, and tourists. The rich tourists were always preparing for departure, and the rich businessmen who owned the bars and the dive shops and the tour boats would never consider living on an island where running water was an intermittent luxury.

It takes a twin-prop puddle jumper to even get to Roatán, and once you arrive, there are very few cars to get to very few towns. The beat-up pickup truck will clatter out of the paved airport and into the jungle until you arrive in West End, where Main Street runs the north coast, town on the left and beach on the right. The taxi continues to Coxen Hole, going through town and around the point, but you walk into the siesta-laden mango air, past the beach- and bar-bound tourists and the natives sleeping in the corner stores that are all called *pulpería*. Look all the way down to the Bar at the Point, where you can watch the sunset; mango trees dot the island, and, at one of the wood-and-thatch hotels,

there are two monkeys, pests and playmates to everyone who passes by. You walk out of your hotel room (preferably one that is two stories up in the mango trees) through the hotel grounds, across the road, and dive into the water, where the reefs lie visibly offshore. You can swim in the moonlight, after you've napped all afternoon sleeping off the Big Kahuna burrito from the Cannibal Cafe (where they'd love to have you for dinner), or you can walk home in the soft glow of tiki torches and bug lights.

Sam had done all of this during his first visit to the islands. He hopped the puddle jumper home, withdrew his savings from the Banco de Honduras, and bought the old shack out by the Bar on the Point. Currently, he was the owner, manager, and artistic director of Fuzzy Dice records, the only recording studio on Utila, Guanaja, or Roatán.

“Why Fuzzy Dice?” Sam was often asked.

“The dice are a sign of luck,” was the answer, “And luck is a concept supported only by fuzzy and flawed logic in order to make people feel fuzzy inside when they should be working towards their goals.”

“You mean there’s no luck out here? Mon, you do not know the islands.”

The studio was at the West End of Roatán, close the Bar at the Point, the island’s fingertip, that he had built the studio, and artists from around the world came to record in the soundproofed studios and on the deck over the ocean, where the ambient noise was only that of the waves and the seabirds.

From his windowed practice room, Sam could see the Garifuna bar workers setting up side by side with native Mayan and Spanish descendants, preparing for the evening's white tourist festivities.

"You make your own luck," he said after an hour of practice, and buckled down to another hour, pushing his toned forearms to their limit.

That night, the beach was dark and warm, and as the sunset swam further out to sea, the band's frontman, Xavier Warren, took to the bamboo-and-thatch stage.

"I know you regulars are expecting me to start singing," he said, "But tonight, we're turning it over to you to give us some music at tonight's first annual Beach Party Idol Competition. Let's meet our first contestant..."

Sam swung the band into the introduction, looping through the opening bars of "Luck Be a Lady" until the singer, a sunburned, redheaded woman grabbed the microphone.

Sam winced as she opened her mouth, skewing the opening note into a whole new key. The band struggled to adapt, but she led them on a merry chase up and down the tonal range and across fields of rhythm. The band lost, and Sam was clearing his head for next number when a shout blew with the sand across the beach crowd.

"Look!"

And the eyes turned out onto the sea. Anchored offshore in its own orange torchlight was a three-masted vessel; wooden, and flying black sails.

"What is it?"

“Is it part of the party?”

“Is it from the tour company?”

The crowds, in their herd-minded questioning, failed to see the longboat until it was ten feet offshore.

“It’s pirates! There! In the boat!”

“There’s no pirates anymore—In the boat?”

“Run!”

They bolted for the bar, for the road, but they had only begun to run when the crack of a pistol stopped them all dead.

“Nobody leaves here until I says.”

The man was a silhouette, coming up the beach with the tiki torches at his back. Flanked by ten shadows, he stopped before the stage.

“Bring all yer valuables, and set’em here,” he motioned to his men, who formed up to receive the watches and necklaces and wallets that washed towards them from within the crowd.

“Now,” said the captain, turning to Xavier, “I’m looking for Sam Ashman.”

“Why?” Xavier asked, crossing his arms. The other band members stonewalled with their eyes, waiting for the pirate to try and take one of their own.

“That is of no matter to ye,” he leveled the gun at Xavier, who stood undaunted until the clicking sound of the cocked primer knelled.

Sam stood up at the drum set. Make your own luck, he said to himself.

“I’m Sam Ashman.”

“Thank ye kindly, mister Ashman. Now if ye’ll please come with us.”

Sam, moving as if to step around his drums and join the captain, instead flung the hickory drumsticks like tomahawks at his kidnapper. The sticks impacted, one on the pistol, which fired into sky, and the second on the side of the captain's face.

"Ye'll pay for that, Ashman," said the captain, and it was the last thing Sam remembered before the fist smashed into his forehead.

* * *

Ed sipped his sangria more appreciatively this year—an incident like last summer's pirate raid would have closed any American establishment, but on Roatán, liability was a term unheard of, and the Bar at the Point was still running a good business in beer and beach parties. It was empty in the early evening, save the native workers preparing the party, and the photographers shooting the purple sunset. Ed couldn't see Sam anywhere.

"Excuse me?" said Ed.

The bartender came over, a bronze, brown-eyed Honduran. The bartenders were usually Garifuna—black, barrel-chested men who could laugh with the island accent of TV and the movies.

"I'm looking for Sam Ashman. I checked at his studio, and it's boarded up. For rent, the sign said."

“Sam’s studio?” the bartender’s wide eyes widened as he drew out the long A in Spanish fashion. “We haven’t seen Sam since the pirates got him. They said he was dead, and his place was sold.”

“The pirates took Sam?”

“You heard about the raid last year, sí?”

“Yes.”

“Well when the pirates left, they had Sam with them, and I think he is very lucky if he lives now.”

“Lucky?”

“This is the word, yes? Lucky?”

“Yes.”

Ed was quiet for a moment, then he pointed to the carved bead around the man’s neck.

“Is that lucky?”

“This? Si, Señor. This I found on the night before the pirates come. I put it on, and just like that, the boss here call me and say ‘Marcos, you take off tomorrow.’ I was not there when the pirates come. I was lucky, and I wear it ever since.”

“But don’t you think that life is more about hard work than about luck? I mean, think about Sam—he built his studio from the ground up, with only his own money and strength, no luck.”

“You want hard work?” the bartender asked, “Look out on the beach. They all work hard, and I am out there tomorrow night or yesterday night, and I work

hard, and we still here. Hard work bring us little good, and look what it did to Sam—taken by pirates. No, Señor, luck is here, good and bad.”

Ed paid for his drink and walked out onto the beach. The purple blaze was gone, but the sun was still setting as the photographers packed their tripods. Sam was gone. It was still a mystery as to how the pirates had come, how they had gotten away, and how a crew of seventeenth century brigands could still operate in these waters. No one had tried to explain it, and as far as the island was concerned, no one ever would. Strange things happen in the islands, and you never push your luck.

There were white flecks approaching from seaward, just rounding the point—a man, swimming on...it looked like a board. It was definitely a person, and the swimming was sloppy in its desperation. The figure pulled into towards the beach, and Ed waded out to help whoever it was.

He swung off the plank as Ed reached him, his sunburned forearms lolling into the water. On the beach, Ed rolled the body over, preparing to perform CPR, when he saw the face.

“Sam?”

Sam spluttered, coughing seawater onto his bearded face. Ed picked him up in Heimlich maneuver, and he gasped, falling to the beach, breathing deep and heavy.

“Can you speak to me? Can you cough?” Ed repeated the standard CPR phrases to ensure a clear airway.

“Yes,” Sam choked out, “Water.”

They sat at the bar, Sam draped over a highback stool gulping glasses of water.

“So the pirates’ ship was sunk?”

“Crashed” Sam gulped again “On a reef.” Gulp “Got away from them.”

Gulp “Swam here.”

He whooshed an exhale, setting the glass of water down.

“A reef?” asked the bartender, “Barrera?”

“Sí,” said Ed.

“Only reef close by is five kilometers. You are lucky to get back alive, Sam.”

“Thank you, Marcos.”

“Yes,” said Ed, “I was just sitting across an empty chessboard wondering where I could find you to talk about life and luck and the meaning of the universe.”

“Let’s not talk about luck,” said Sam, peering through the bottom of another glass of water.

“Oh, but Marcos and I were just discussing it,” said Ed.

“Ed,” said Sam, “Drop it.”

“Why?”

Sam sighed, dropping his head back.

“You want to know the name of pirate ship, Ed?”

“Yeah.”

“Lady Luck.”

Marcos nodded and fingered his bone necklace.

* * *

“Mr. Ashman, this is your attorney. I hesitate to leave this message on the voicemail at the place of your employment, as it contains information that is somewhat personal, but this is our only reliable means of communication with you. We regret to inform you that the sale of your studio at the time of your presumed death is irreversible. The government has refunded the entire sale price, but it doesn’t begin to equal what the establishment was really worth. We apologize for any inconvenience and look forward to working with you again.”

Ed didn’t hear the message, recorded on the answering machine inside the bar’s office. He was not as grateful for this year’s sangria as he had been for the previous year’s. The Bar at the Point was the same as it had always been, the bronze and the black workers setting up the tourist parties at minimum wage, tending bar and pouring drinks until they died. He hadn’t seem Sam since his dramatic reappearance last summer, and he was not surprised—everything the man owned had been sold off or repossessed, and, when they had parted at the end of the previous summer, Sam was off to Utila to open a dive shop. Good old Sam, he thought, always making his own luck.

“Hey!” The big Garifuna boss stepped out of the bar’s office, clicking off the answering machine, “Hey Ashmon! They’s a message for you.”

A man on the beach looked up, turning from his bamboo-and-thatch stage platform to saunter towards the bar. Ed recognized him.

“Sam?”

“Ed,” said Sam, his eyes down at the gaze of his old summer friend.

“Sam, what are you doing here? What happened to the dive shop?”

He coughed at the floor, waving the boss, telling him that it’s fine, I don’t mind talking with this tourist.

“You gotta do what you can to get by. I was out of money—after I was dead, they split up all my stuff. I was broke, so I took a job here.”

“But that was a year ago.”

“Well, I’m starting to like it. I mean, who needs to put in all that work of opening a shop, and running it, and what’s it all for anyway? At least here I can go home and not have to have the whole weight of the establishment on my back.”

As he said it, Ed watched him glance, down the beach at the boarded up remains of the Fuzzy Dice studios.

“But whatever happened to making your own luck, Sam?”

“You can’t make your own luck down here, man,” said Sam, and Ed noticed the white of the carved bone charm dangling from his neck.

“You did it once, Sam,” he said, but Sam was already gone, inside the bar, “You’ve got to make your own luck.”

The Siren's Key

Trinity Rose Cassandra Bennett

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Introduction

Grabbing the rock near by she felt the sharp edge pierce the skin. Everything in her wanted to cry out but to do so would be certain death. Warmth flooded through her like a raging Storm. The now broken skin tingled between pain and numbness. The voices were close, this mixed with aches of a lifetime and her loudly pounding heart spelt a need to hide. Staying focus was hard. The newest wound was not her only one, but she continued onward.

Climbing over some more rocky terrain she tripped over her salvation. There amongst the darkness, dirt and rocky mountain lay a large dead animal. With only moonlight as a light it was hard to ascertain how the creature died, but it was matted with stench and the beginnings of decay. Touching it was making her sick. She knew that there must be a reason for the beast, but even if not it was an opportunity that wouldn't present itself twice in a row in such a short time that she had left.

The voices were almost upon her. Taking a sharp and quick deep breath attempting to hold back the gags she grabbed both sides of the animal and threw it over her. The weight against her wounded body was forcing the air in her lungs out. Sweet exhausted slumber was starting its pull on her as delirium took its toll. They were so close she could now make out the words being said yet somehow they made no sense. The stench, which had been unbearable to her a moment

ago, was now starting to float away in a dream. The only thing keeping her in the moment was the thin layer of will that was breaking.

The voice began to fade away and she felt herself sinking into the matted fur of darkness. Spiraling down, she began to dream the voices again but this time one only. The voice penetrated her delusions. A face hazily came into focus before all faded again.

Part I

Kelly sat up in a sweat, she was slightly shaking. The dream had been so real. Unlike any dream she had before. So real, that without thinking, she had hopped up and made her way to the bathroom to look for any injuries that she had felt in the dream. The coolness of the air within the bathroom was a nice relief against her bare skin. Pushing her messy red hair out of her face she inspected herself into the mirror. Almond Brown eyes and an oval face with natural full lips staring back at her.

The new satin purple nightie was disheveled across her slim shoulders while floating over a fairly tall athletic body indeed. Kelly was not narcissistic but she was aware that her looks had provided some opportunities that would otherwise

not have been available had she not looked like she did. Today was Kelly's day off and she planned to take full advantage of it.

First things first though. Turning on the radio on the back of the bathroom door, she jumped into the shower to prepare for the new day. One hour later she was refreshed, dressed in a tailored skirt and elegant blue buttoned up shirt. Her hair looked more presentable in a clip. Wisps of hair highlighted her lightly made up face. She grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and she was gone.

Exploration of the mall waited.

The Mall was very spacious and had a feel of an egg shape within because of the massive waterfall and fountain in the middle. It had the many levels formed around it to highlight the light from above and the relaxing sounds of the bubbling waters below. The shops were brands and the prices expensive. It was no wonder they could afford to show it through Décor.

The first item on the list she decided was a tall hot cup of coffee. But before she could consider it, she had to visit her friend. If Kelly even attempted anything else first she would never hear the end of it. Thankfully, her destination wasn't too far from the entrance. Kelly's friend worked in the only Mystical Shop in the area. It wasn't her style. But the aura of her friend and the store attracted her. It was the foundation of a fast and firm friendship.

The opening of the store was an old gothic metal and glass door. It opened to an array of charms, stones candles and books. Music floated through the store that was both exotic and calming. There amongst it all stood Kendra. Kendra wasn't as tall as Kelly. She was 5'3, a good 6' shorter than herself. The hair, once blonde, was now a green blonde color with a halo of pink strands. Even her clothes were eclectic in nature. She wore a patchwork style flowing dress with a lace vest that matched her velvet and lace boots.

It was hard not to be drawn into her, her sultry tan and emerald eyes and a voice that sent shivers down anyone's spine. Kelly admired the fiery personality of her friend. She was also attracted to her subtle vibrancy and comforted by her easy going nature. Playing with a candle of a man and woman entwined, she waited for Kendra to be free.

"Boo!"

"I see you decided to go with the pink strands anyway."

Kendra giggled, "What can I say. I felt like a slight change."

"Just don't get any ideas on my hair!" Kelly demanded with an amused smile.

"I know, I know! The most daring thing you would do is straighten it!"

Kelly laughed and shook her head “There is nothing wrong with my hair. Many would kill to have this hair color naturally, including you!!! “

Kendra conceded, it was after all, true.

“You going to the beach party tonight?”

“I don’t know. I had planned to relax tonight...”

Kendra glanced around at a new couple that had entered into the store.

“You HAVE to come! Pleeeeeease? I promise you will have a great time. “

Placing a gold trimmed card in her hands, Kendra scampered away before Kelly could reply. It was her way of getting her way. It annoyed Kelly but it also worked. A vicious cycle, without question. Rolling her eyes Kelly left. The coffee was now more than over due.

Walking past a stroller of a screaming kid she escaped into the elevator and let out a long sigh. As the doors began to close a old man caught her eye as he stood unblinking. The man was barely a few meters from her, having just missed the lift. The way he stared at her gave an odd shiver.

The old Man watched the thick doors close with her in it. His skin shimmered and shifted ever so slightly across his cheek and down his old throat before he replaced his hat. He turned the coat collar up. Something glowed in his hand as he placed it safely in his pocket.

The lift paused on level 4. Muttering something, he hobbled over to the stairs and walked up to the 4th level. As the lift moved down, annoying music was piped in. The enclosed space gave her a sense of falling. Kelly closed her eyes. Suddenly time seemed to hold still. All the sounds of the lift disappeared and only the sound of a fire could be heard.

Opening her eyes, she jumped with a fright. Instead of being in the lift she was in a small cabin. The woman she had dreamed of was now resting on a bed near the fire and a young man was wetting down her forehead. A storm was brewing outside the old broken window.

Kelly turned around when the front door opened. Backlit by lightening, a cloaked woman entered the room. Staring between the man and the new woman she looked perplexed, which turned to shock as the cloaked woman removed her hood. There with darkened hair stood her friend, Kendra.

With a bang she was whisked out of the vision and back into reality as the lift doors opened. Racing out, she nearly slammed into a old man. She had barely noticed him as she ran up to the coffee shop. Stopping as she entered the seating area, she began to wonder what was happening to her. Was she going crazy?

After ordering her coffee, she decided to use their bathroom since there would be a bit of a wait before it was ready. The bathroom was elegant. The mall had thought of all details. There were pictures on the wall and plenty of toilets. Going over to the sink, she filled it with water and splashed some on her face. Staring at herself in the mirror, she sighed as she thought of the vision.

Visions were something Kendra had read and heard of. They were not something that Kelly had ever encountered. Staring at her face in the mirror her vision began to blur. Something slid behind her in a quick movement. Blinking to try and focus, she spun around and listened. Each time she turned, she caught movement in the corner of her eye. This was insane! "Whoever is here, stop it!!" she yelled.

A toilet flushed and a woman gave her an odd look before quickly washing her hands and rushing out. Kelly closed her eyes, took a deep breath and made her way to the door. It was as she got to the door that she saw it again but this time the shadow formed beneath the still mermaids in the picture. Peering closer, the

eyes on the mermaid moved. In her mind a voice whispered. The painting swirled and blurred as the colors around the mermaid reformed at her will.

The pictures mirrored the ones that were now being drawn in by the voice into her mind. With each haunting sound it brought them clearer and clearer into the mind's eye. The figure of a mermaid on the floor bound in some kind of green ties. A bare canvas. A shadow lurks over taking some of the figures flesh and scales. Paint is mixed with the items than sand. Two voices can be heard attempting to compete with the other. Some kind of spell and the words of the mermaid, which seemed to simply repeat the same words, over and over, again.

Focusing on the bowl and the shadow as it caused a fire to combust from the bowl before adding water. In her mind she saw each stroke of the brush as the picture that she now stood before took shape. It was only than the words of the mermaid came to the surface and the image of such terror faded.

“Selina...save us!”

“But I'm not Selina!” Kelly said, feeling more scared than she ever had before.

Why did they think her name was Selina?

“Selina...save us!”

Kelly did the only thing she knew, placing the art work under her arm discretely hidden between herself and her bag, she casually walked out of the bathroom and then the coffee shop. She quickened her pace as she made her way closer to the exit. It was the craziest thing she had ever done, but if this art work was true or she was going crazy the only person who could help now was Kendra.

Driving down to the beach she sat on the warm sand. There was something she was missing. There was something that until that moment, looking at the sea came back like a clap of thunder. There had been something around the mermaid's neck. A necklace that looked familiar...but where?

The cool breeze was calming and the warmth of the sand was making her tired but she had to try to remember. Then it dawned on her, it was the same or very like the necklace, she had brought a few days ago at the fair. Had the mermaid's necklace come to her to save the trapped mermaid? But the thing that she didn't understand was; who was Selina?

Kelly sat on the sand for what seemed like forever before finally getting up for a quick trip home to look for something to wear and to get the necklace she had from her dresser drawer. As she drove home, she let her mind wonder about the day's events. The sooner the night came and Kendra heard about the days events, all the better.

By the time Kelly got home she felt exhausted. Since the day had gone awry, using the time to relax was important. Placing the kettle on the stove, she wandered over to the computer and connected online hoping to find some kind of information on what had happened today. Sitting and waiting she played with things on her desk, mainly the fuzzy dice. Kelly couldn't remember when or where she had gotten them, but when there was a lot on her mind playing with them seemed to help.

After the tea was made, she settled down and began her research. After a few hours of searching it seemed to be of no help. There had been dream meanings, but till she knew more it was hard to search. Seeing it was dusk and the party would start soon she decided to give up and have another shower than get ready. The shower had been more what she had needed than anything else because it meant connecting to water again. Something about the sea, water seemed to instantly bring a Zen like calm over her, so much so, she nearly forgot one of the reasons she came home.

As she was standing under the water she heard a sound. Snapping her eyes open and trying to focus she looked out of the shower there near the doorway looked to be part of a shadow. Quickly turning off the water and rubbing her eyes she looked again but it was gone. The calm that once resided there a moment before was now gone. Grabbing a towel she wrapped it around herself. Kelly

grabbed her brush as she left the bath. It wasn't the best weapon, but it made her feel a bit better.

"I am armed!" She called out feeling a little silly, but not caring.

Waiting a moment in the middle of her room she listened when she felt sure nothing was there she shook her head and walked over to the wardrobe. Slowly opening the door she paused remembering the new dress. Returning to the bathroom, she got ready singing only then realizing the radio had been left on. By the time she was finished hair dry and down make up sultry and the new white cotton slip of a dress with lace trims on. Kelly felt pretty but felt she was missing something.

"The necklace!" she said out loud having forgotten it yet again. Striding out, she walked over to the drawer and took it out. It was beautiful, no doubt about it. After putting it on, she turned towards the wardrobe to finish the look with some cute sandals, when she noticed the door was shut. "I could have sworn..." A bang from the corner of her room had her spinning towards the window. Standing and staring at her was that old man from the Mall.

Not stopping to think, she ran out of the room. Kelly flung the front door open she ran outside. Pausing for a moment and not seeing him, she jumped into her car

and sped off. It was still a bit of time before the party by and hour but she didn't care. Kendra needed to help her even if it was just calling the police.

The Trip to Kendra's pad was a blur with thoughts and memories filling her head.

The place she was staying at for the month was considered a holiday house in that it was on the beach. Part of how she earned money was too house sit.

Having a party in them added spice! She got paid while she partied.

After parking, Kelly raced up to the door and banged on it. Kendra was yelling at a cater, not unusual. The last details of a party always seemed to worry her.

When she finally noticed her and opened the door Kelly wasted no time in dragging her into her bedroom. Kendra was about to rant when she noticed how stressed Kelly looked.

"What's going on?" she said patting the bed.

"I don't know, since I saw you this morning a lot has been happening!"

Kelly sat while she kept shuffling her feet.

"I don't know where to begin...from the dream, the vision to the painting or the old man. I feel like I am going mad."

“What old Man?”

“I don’t know who he is, but he was at my house and at the mall. I think he is following me.”

“I think I saw him...” Kendra trailed off as she hopped off the bed.

For some reason the idea of Kendra seeing the old man worried Kelly more than she would have guessed. “When? How? Where,” was all she could think to say.

“He came into the store before you did!” he handed me a strange book said he wanted to sell it and if I could price it. I told him when I had time and to bring it back later, but he said he trusted me to keep it and he would return.” Kendra had a dark book clutched to her chest as she walked toward the bed. “It was strange, I was going to say no, but when I grabbed it something in me felt like I needed it. Funny isn’t it? It isn’t like any other books I have seen.”

“So show me already!” Kelly said insistently having a feeling she knew what it was already. Kendra laid the book on the bed. It was old and the look of the cover had a strange aging that Kelly had never seen before. Kendra was still holding it when Kelly touched the side to feel what type of material it was. Both girls looked at each other as a simultaneous zap flashed through them, bonding each together.

The surroundings began to melt away and all they could do was watch helplessly as they became a witness but to what they did not know. The room darkened only lit by fire light. This light draped its fingers across the room leaving many shadows. The door was now old and rusty began to shake as the sounds of angry voices boomed behind it. From the corner of their eye a shadow slipped by. Turning, they saw a hooded figure bent over the fire.

The figure was chanting over a book words of a strange language as she seemed to repeat them over and over again. They had no voice to speak, only eyes to watch, as they saw the figure take a dagger and begin slicing flesh off and placing it on the book. With each chant the flesh would morph, and begin shaping over the book.

As mystery person chanted, Kendra looked down at the book before her that was now open. With each chant page by page began to fill with a blood red writing before darkening. The door was starting to split. Faces could now be seen through the new holes in the failing door.

The figure finally looking up towards the door shocked them both. The figure looked exactly like Kendra. Removing the cloak she stood there naked and covered in self inflicted wounds. Wrapping the book up, she removed some rocks in the corner of the hearth and hide the book.

The door smashed open, and as men rushed in, a strong wind that made the scene slip away. Kelly spoke to Kendra in shock, "How can it be?" Kendra stared unblinkingly at the book in her hands. Then at her arms in search of the hideous scars that covered her chanting twin sister.

"I think I really was meant to get this. " Slowly looking up, she seemed to take on a strange aura. It was her friend, yet somehow at that moment didn't feel like it. "You have a Job to complete Selina...go between the salty kisses of the sea and the earth's embrace you will find the way."

Kelly stood, she felt as though she should leave. But she knew running was probably futile. Where would she go? All she wanted was a long warm sea-salt bath.

The night was warm and the sounds of the darkened sea sounded simply glorious to Kelly. So many thoughts were on her mind. Was she "Selina?" Was Kendra the Witch in her vision? Had she died that night at the hands of the angry mob? Was she being haunted by some sort of a past life? Kelly had a millions questions, a million "what if's", and no answers. Who was the old man and why did he follow her so?

As she walked the beach a shadow in the surrounding bushes caught her eye. Kelly decided if it was the old man she would confront him. No matter how it ended, she was ready to end this madness. Beside the wooden gate that kept the lush green grass separate from the sand, stood the old man. Diving at him as he tried to run, Kelly felt a burning sensation in her chest and her arms and legs. With a body that felt like it was on fire, she tumbled into darkness. The last thing she saw was the old man leaning over her.

Part II

A voice penetrated the darkness; a face hazily came into focus. She was in an old Cottage by the sea in a home made style cot. Her cuts and scraps from falling against the gate had been cleaned and covered. A young man with blue green eyes like the sea itself stood watching her. He smiled when he saw she was fully awake and said, "You picked a strange place to sleep!" His voice was a mixture of concern and amusement.

"Yeah, I guess... is this a dream? Am I...dead?"

"If it was, I would hope you would pick a better place to dream about. My humble home isn't much to look at, my Lady." The old wood shatters were open enough

to spread the days light through the room without making it too bright. It was true, as she tried to focus the room was nothing special. Yet while it was a simple abode, the pot simmering over the fire made the whole place smell inviting.

“Where am I?” she said trying to struggle to sit up. The pain made everything feel so clear, yet blurred at the same sense. Pain did not annoy her, the sense of weakness and helplessness, did.

The young man crossed his arms, “Before I answer that, I need to know something. Who are you and why were they looking for you? He slowly bent over reached out, and helped her sit up. His face and those beautiful eyes came so close it gave her bumps on her skin. She had never felt so scared and yet so very happy in her whole life.

“Yes...I am Selina.” she sighed. “Captain of the Masked Eagles”

“A pirate?” he asked.

“Yes, I guess that is also true...do you plan to heal me then hand me over?” Kelly asked.

“I don’t know. I should mind you, but I haven’t decided.”

Silence filled the air for a moment. “For now you need not worry. “Til you are healed, I promise to keep you safe. “ He turned away from her then and moved slowly to the hearth and the steaming pot. He returned with a tin mug and handed it to her, “Drink this. It will help you sleep.” Selina eyed the mug suspiciously. “Would it help if I took a sip?” He said smiling? He took a sip then gave it back to her. She was weak, so he had to help her slowly sip the hot, spicy brew.

Gently the man with sea colored eyes guided her back down to the bed. He smiled softly, “ Sleep pirate...” he whispered

“Who are you? “

“James”

Selina closed her eyes and slept.

Part III

The next few months seemed like a dream. James took care of her. They both got to know each other on many levels. All felt so right and she soon found herself falling in love with him. James felt the same. Yet in all the time of him

helping her, he made no mention of the growing bump that was Selina's once flat stomach.

Then one night a knock on the door changed everything. It was nearly dawn when the visitor came. James was resting so Selina crept over to see whom it was. There witch who looked like her friend stood at the door. She opened the door and dragged her in. "Layla what are you doing here?" Selina knew a visit from witch never meant anything good.

"Selina it is time. The Siren have begun their ceremony. We must leave now before light is upon us." Selina looked back at James. She didn't want to go but she knew her destiny was written long before she had met James. Limping over, she kissed him softly, "I'm sorry," was all she said before she silently slipped out of the small cottage she had grown to adore.

She knew they had to get to the meadow to make sure it could be completed. It had been a long while since she had been on land, even longer since she had been on a horse. The ride was rough and being so very pregnant didn't help. With the child sitting so high, she was already naturally uncomfortable, this was an added annoyance that certainly didn't help alleviate any of her discomfort. Thankful she would not be on the horse long, she allowed herself to wonder if James would ever forgive her for her sudden disappearance. When she thought of him; a warmth spread through her that was hard to explain. It was unlike any

emotion she had felt before. It started at her toes and tickled its way up to her lips. It made her feel happy and sad all at the same time.

All of the sudden, they entered into a unnaturally busy area. The witch had placed an illusion to hide the ceremony. A once open field now looked like it had never seen the touch of mans hand.

A Siren was standing upon a strange symbol. It believed that it would share its power from, parent to child. The siren was in male form, the same form that it had taken on the night they wed. In that moment she had wished that there had been love between them. Maybe it would have made her choice easier. Deep down she understood it was simply a part of a merging. Many pirates had made pacts with sirens to survive the endless miles of sea. To survive the brutal storms that threatened to swallow them whole, they were needed. This siren had brought much too both her family and to her life in general. This wasn't about love, it was about protecting the future of a race.

The siren was neither male nor female. No one really knew who or what they were. To some sailors, they were breath-taking female beauty's leading them astray. But the fact was a siren didn't control such fate, it merely gave one an option. If death was inevitable then they would call them into the deep dreamless slumber beside the one they loved the most. Over time she had learned that the siren embraced death and life in its cycle.

The day she had found out she was pregnant they had attacked. Many used spells and charms on the sea. The Witch had not been alone in this. Normally the woman represented on the front of the boats laid evidence to which one they served. They weren't goddesses but certainly were treated as such. Selina thought of that day, but it was still a blur. Seeing the siren there alleviated some of her fears. Siren's are hunted for their natural ability of creating illusions and their ability to alter another's mind.

Selina had feared they had captured him. That meant he would not have been here to give the child its powers. Selina, didn't know if it was true that within a ceremony powers could be passed on to the unborn child, but she hoped it was. It would mean that she could have more control over her own life. Including the power to choose ones own love.

Layla guided her onto the symbol with a soft smile. The unborn child was getting distressed so placing a coral necklace that had once been around her neck on her stomach she sang. The pain started to leave.

Part IV

“They have found you...I sense the darkness coming, “ the witch said as she stood. Selina lay with her child at her breast. They knew this day would come. It was known what would happen but still Selina couldn't bear to accept it. “Give the child the necklace. “

All too soon she and the witch were horseback and riding away. Pausing at the top of the rise, she looked back before disappearing amongst the illusion of trees.

James woke to the sound of banging on the door. It had been unlike him to fall into such a deep sleep. He opened to a small band of men. All in different stages of injuries with anger in their eyes. At the front stood an unblinking man with a thin pair of cruel lips to match his heartless eyes.

“Where is she, James?”

“I don't know what you are talking about, Tabieth.”

Tabieth didn't skip a beat. With an icy stare he warned, “Don't make this harder than it has to be.” His words were softly spoken but they held strength. The men

were restless. While they rode the bloodlust rage of indignation and blind faith, but even that had only so much staying power to keep them in that moment.

Tabieth, was a whole different matter. He wasn't swayed by religion or rumors. His style of hunting and interrogation was renowned. It was impersonal and dangerously effective. There was no known personal vendetta that he had nor reason for the inner coldness and drive that kept him going where others gave up. No matter the reason it was clear no one would know the truth.

"You are a tad late Tabieth, my wife died a few winters ago."

Some of the men standing behind him began taking their hat's off out of respect. Others did not as they were taking their direction from Tabieth. The moment that followed was awkward to say the least. Tabieth stared at him but while others couldn't see his reaction for a second, James could have sworn that a hint of frustration was hinting at his lips before being pushed back down.

"The witch where is she!" If he had been frustrated by the time he spoke it was obvious that emotion was long gone by the monotone emotionless response. Hearing him seeking a witch made James almost giddy with relief. "A witch?" he laughed, " Would I be living like this? If I had access to a witch?" Stepping aside so they had a good look at the dilapidated state the interior was in, he waved his hand. Some of the men laughed while a few others made comments ranging

from, "My wife would kill me if I lived like this" to "Witch ha!, him and his place wouldn't know a broom let alone witches' broom". The laughter had been successful in breaking the blood rage and the men were now officially bored.

"Tabieth, lets look elsewhere, or go eat. Clearly good James isn't the one we seek! " more than a few men suggested at once. One by one, they began to leave having been satisfied that it was all a mistake. Tabieth lingered at the door until they all had left.

"I am watching you." he said barely above a whisper, before turning around and leaving.

James waited a moment to catch his breath. When he was sure they were all gone, he went out the back to his horse. He feared the mob would think Selina was a witch. He let his feelings help him by riding not by knowledge but gut instinct to where he felt she was, after all, instinct had found her the first time. As he rode away a hooded figure stood amongst the shadows watching him. Following at a safe distance, the deranged man whispered, "I will find you witch, make no mistake about that."

By the time he had found her, she was standing near the cliffs holding her stomach weeping. James ran to her and took her into his arms. "Where is your child!" he said fearfully. "G-gone. " she said in a wailing tone. "I don't

understand.“ he said as he softly stroked her hair. Selina stood looking suddenly quite frail and pale. A strange warmth filled his stomach which made him blink in shock.

“I feel funny....” he gurgled but nothing came out.

It had all happened so quickly, too quickly for his mind to register. One moment he was staring at her the next moment half of him was on the ground the other half still partially standing. Things began to fade , time lost meaning, one moment he saw Selina, then Tabieth, then blackness took him.

Part V

Kelly woke with the old man standing by the shore, part of her wanted to run but part of her needed to know what had happened. “Am I Selina?” she said as she got unsteadily to her feet. The old man turned and looked at her with a faint smile. “When I first met you, you were a terror of a child. I swear if I had been able to keep you, I would have raised you with better manners. “

“I don’t understand...who are you, who am I? “ Kelly felt like someone had placed her life in a kaleidoscope and shaken it up.

“Do you know why you were drawn to that necklace?” he asked.

“It was pretty? “ she replied questioningly.

“Close! While it is pretty, that wasn’t why, it was your birthright.”

Kelly looked surprised, “But if I am not Selina, how can I be her child, she died.”

“Not is all as it seems child, Selina knew death would find you if you stayed with her.” As he spoke Kelly lightly touched the necklace feeling like she would almost see it in her mind's eye as he spoke.

“I was placed in charge to take you. I was meant to bring you back to the sea. Even I knew they would not stop looking for you. So I did what I had to do. “

“You placed me with a family you knew. “ Kelly knew her history, she didn’t need a replay on that.

“Yes,” nodded the old man.

“So how did they die, was it Tabieth? If so, then if he is still alive...it is my duty to find him and kill him for what he has done. “

The old man laughed softly. "I don't think your adopted father would like to hear you speaking about him in such a way."

Kelly blinked. After a moment she almost yelled, "That can't be so! That wasn't his name! In my vision I saw a man kill James."

The old man shook his head slowly, "No my dear. That is what James thought he saw as well, but he simply was the last to find them. James is a witch as well. But he chose a different path. James as a protector. So he looked for real and false witches. Only helping the real ones fake deaths. "

"So if he didn't do it, who did? " she questioned.

"That I don't know, none of us do. " the old man shrugged.

"Well what happened to my mother since my father was clearly killed?"

"After his death she wasn't the same, diving off the cliff saved her from death but she never spoke again. Returning to her old life was all she had left. When she died, we placed her in the sea, hoping one day she would find James again and be happy once more."

"But she is dead...there is no hope of a reunion anymore. "

The old man shook his head “Always assuming aren’t you. Where they are is as much why you were attracted to the necklace “ Kelly reached up to find the necklace around her neck. Taking the necklace off, she looked at it as if for the first time. Without thinking, she stood up and walked down to the sea shore. Placing the necklace partly in the water, she wasn’t surprised when it began to glow. Slowly the light broke the seas darkness as the light grew. There in the light and shadows, a figure formed from the necklace.

The moment was breathtaking. In a moment it was as if the water disappeared and all stood still and there stood James and Selina. The light surrounded them. They kissed and joy and happiness almost pushed her over and she was thrown from the vision, necklace and all.

Laying now on the sand she glanced at the necklace. It now had swirls of darkness through it. Kelly smiled with tears in her eyes.

“I love you mom and dad.”

The old man came over placing his hands on her shoulder. “Now they are finally together.” was all he said for a long moment.

Since all this began Kelly had felt anxious and somehow out of place, in that moment she felt truly complete.

“Does that mean you are...”

The old man's skin shimmered as he nodded.

“I am Siren, your other father, so to speak “

“But why didn't you say so?” She thought about all the times she had been sure he was some sicko stalking her.

“It wasn't the time, but what I offer is now, the truth is out now you must decide. I want you to take your mothers place as leader. We all will help you. But only you can decide. “Kelly looked to him and back at the necklace. “I need time to decide.“

The next morning Kelly stood on a large ship looking at papers. That night she had not slept, sure this wasn't for her. But at dawn approached the more she was ready to just accept it, the more it felt like no other choice was acceptable.

“Forget someone?” The voice broke Kelly's thoughts and brought with her a sudden realization that she had never let Kendra know of what happened or that night. Never had she left Kendra out of her plans. Turning and seeing her with a bag in one hand and a knapsack on her back, surprised her even more.

“How did you know?”

“Was I the only one in that vision last night?? Well missy? “

“well...no...but...”

“Exactly “ Kendra said in a tone of, “In't it obvious?“ Her friend continued, “I am witch. I truly understand that now. I was meant to meet you. This book is mine. Well in a past life, and don't think I plan to slice myself up to save you again in this lifetime!”

Kelly laughed as she pulled Kendra into a hug. “I wouldn't dream of asking you either.“ The hug and laughter while seemed to last for a long time, Kelly knew at that moment it would never have been long enough.

“so where too?“ Kendra said as she leant on her shoulder trying to read what Kelly had in her hands.

“Two places “ Kelly replied “ To find my fathers killer and to save some Mermaids”

“Well than, what are we waiting for? “ Kendra said with a twinkle in her eyes.

“What indeed...what indeed!” Kelly replied with a smile.

The End.

Rathscum, the Lion, and the Pink Flag

"Little Miss Aki"

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The Summer heat of a Colorado July beat down on the deck of the Smeeworthy's Treehouse. The crew, consisting of four rag tag rabble rousers clad in jumpers and jeans, lounged in the shade of the great Oak's cheerful green verdure. A Capri-sun juice bag suddenly skyrocketed through the air, launched from a calloused hand into a steel cattle trough that was wedged up against the tree, filled with water for the fifty head of cattle that milled about in the southern hay meadow.

"You better remember to get that or else Uncle Rodger will get mad at you." A long haired brunette of a 8 year old girl said, playing with a green leaf in her small hands. Her dark blue eyes fascinated by the intricate fabric of the foliage, her blue jeans and white t-shirt dirtied from climbing up the side of the neighboring tree gave her the air of a nymph or tree fairy.

"Why don't you make me, Mel?" growled the boy, a dirty blond with flashing hazel eyes. He wore a pair of sunglasses on the top of his head, holding back his ruffled hair, his freckles and tan skin slightly pink with sunburn. He too wore jeans and a blue polo shirt he pulled at as though it were something offensive.

"Leave her be, Timmy, she just doesn't want us getting yelled at." A boy perhaps a inch taller than his companions, leaned down from the branch above the treehouse. He wore a pair of overalls over a white tanktop and had a piece of wheat bit between his teeth, the end of it waving in the air. His short brown hair and beady brown eyes fixed on Timmy and then glanced at Mel who rapped on the wooden side of the treehouse. The canvas roof had blown away sometime in the spring and though they'd wanted to fix it, no adult would assist.

"Sally Ho!" Up through the floor on a little cotton rope climbed a blond girl with bright, cheerful green eyes, her long hair neatly braided, her face marked with mud and dirt, her blue overalls matching her brothers with a pink blouse beneath now stained with grass and dirt.

"What have you been doing, Lil Jess?" asked her large brother as he hauled her up onto the deck.

"Nothin' illegal, Xander...I hope." Mel volunteered, but Jess made a big smile on her face.

"I been a naughty niece..." and she grinned, holding up her prize. A pair of bright white fuzzy dice swung joyously in the afternoon sun, tarred with dirt but otherwise unharmed.

"My sisters dice?" Mel looked nonplussed at Jess who squished the dice.

“She never lets us borrow em when we’re playing games, so I stoled them from her car! Crawled in the window!” Jess giggled and looked at the dice like a thief with his clay pigeon.

“And you were getting on me for my juice box in the drinker...she’s going to get us fried, not me.” Timmy was on his feet and took the fuzzy dice from the little girl who instantly climbed up the branches of the tree to where Xander had been sitting earlier. She pulled off her pink shirt, leaving her just in her overalls, bare-chested in her little-girl joy. She hung her pink shirt on a branch flag style and Timmy tossed her the fuzzy dice which she tied around the stick, making a pink flag with the dice as its banner.

“I say my good chaps, wot!” laughed Jess as she jumped down, looking proudly at her flag.

“A fine banner for the crew of the Smeeworthy!” laughed Timmy, running to the “pirates chest” in the corner of the treehouse, a little steel toolbox which had in it every size of stick. He drew out what he believed a cutlass and poked Mel in the ribs.

“Come on me hearties! Let us set sail and way anchor and all that jolly hoot! We’ll go out and hunt ourselves and golden load of loot!” Timmy rhymed happily in his best pirate swagger. Mel pulled her hair back in a pony tail and then opened up the tool box for a Halloween pirates eyepatch which she pulled over one eye. Timmy tossed her a bandanna from the trove to complete the look and she drew out a shorter stick she envisioned as a small sword. Xander spat out the weed he chewed on and picked up the remains of a coat hanger he held in his hand like a hook, drawing out a large curved stick he pictured an axe.

“Who we gonna be killin’ today, Cap’n Tim!” Jess squealed excitedly, grabbing a stick.

“Don’ be calling me Cap’n Tim, swab! I’m Cap’n Rathscum! The scariest and deadliest of all the Main seas! I pillaged and plundered and murdered and laughed, that I did, when I gutted my First Mate, some scally wag of a Kid!” Jess laughed as Timmy demonstrated his gutting technique. Mel ran to the flag and pointed with a stick.

“Cap’n Rathscum, sah! The winds are heavenly, we aught to make landfall shortly!”

“Landfall where, First Matey Mel!? I haven’t even said where we’re going.” Timmy asked, but Mel pointed off the bowsprit with her stick.

“The beaches of Bermuda! The lost island of El Dorado, sir! You said yerself we were going to get our loot! What better place than the city of Gold!” Jess looked

off towards the southern meadow which in a flash of her young eyes was transformed into a long stretch of white sand and blue ocean with a great volcano rising up from green palm trees and lush bushes.

“Why it is! Cap’n! The Isle of Gold herself!” Xander yelled cheerfully, now dressed in true buccaneer style, golden earring and black tattoo’s of viciousness. Mel was dressed in hearty corsair flare, and Timmy wore a great black hat and coat with buccaneer boots, his sword glittering with gold and ruby pommel.

“Don’t just sitting their jabbing, ya gobs! Man the boat!” they ran for the small skiff and slid down the rope into her, Jess and Xander manning the oars as Rathscum and First Mate Mel climbed down after them. They began to haul for the shore, coming up big waves, onto the glassy lagoon before making the shore.

“The Isle of El Dorado!” Xander gawked, looking up at the great volcano as First Mate Mel pulled out a spy glass and glanced about for signs of life.

“Seems deserted, Cap’n. Shall we proceed?” she asked, glancing back seaward towards the Smeeworthy. Jess was already charging up white sands towards the trees of the rainforest when Xander gave a holler.

“FREEZE UP, JESSY!” He dropped his stick, the pirates garb vanished as he charged through the hay meadow after his prancing sister. Timmy and Mel both gave a holler. Jess turned as Xander tackled her out of the way of a great black and gray and brown cat with great big ears and angry yellow eyes. It gave a snarling roar and sent a clawed paw shooting at Xander’s unprotected arms. Jess gave a scream as she saw his face tighten in pain as the big bobcats claws caught his soft flesh. Jess was on her feet and beating the cat off him with her little stick.

“GEDDAWAY FROM MY BWOTHER!” She was red-faced and crying as the cat hissed and snapped at her. Timmy and Mel came charging with sticks waving and the bobcat took off through the meadow.

“Xander!?” the young boy was crying, holding his cut arm as he rolled in the grass. Some of the cattle from down the way were coming to investigate the commotion.

“Come on, Xander!” Timmy dropped his stick and grabbed the boy around the middle as Jess and Mel hauled him onto his feet, helping him walk back towards the Smeeworthy. Some of the cattle were running to catch up to them and Jess gave a frightened glance back.

“Its was a mountain lion!” Timmy growled angrily, his shirt covered in his friends blood as Xander wailed. They got back to the stock tank and shoved Xanders arm in the cold water to rinse it off. Jess scampered up the rope to get her shirt

and the dice. They wrapped the screaming boys arm in the makeshift bandage and tied it on with the dice's strings. Mel glanced at Timmy.

"You and Jess aughta run back to the Ranch House, Timmy...get Uncle Rodger."

"XANDER'S GONNA DIE!!!" wailed Jess, but Tim clapped a hand over her mouth.

"We'll be interrupting their big party for your sister, Mel..." Timmy started but then he glanced at the crying Xander who was rocking back and forth holding his arm.

"Right...right..."and he grabbed Jess and took off at a run through the tree's. Mel looked back at Xander and took off her bandanna, wiping his tears.

"That was brave...saving Jess like that. Really brave. So stop crying and be brave...it isn't that bad..." but Jess's shirt was already red and Xander shook his head.

Uncle Rodger had a thick belly, rawhide skin, and a sneer. His beady brown eyes under bushy eyebrows, and his Sam Adams brew were shaded in the afternoon sun as Vanessa's Graduation Party continued on. He'd made note earlier as young Jess had climbed in and out of the Chevy Blazers open window to steal the famed fuzzy dice of Vanessa and secretly hoped whatever adventure the four young ones were having, was more exciting than this hip-hop identity-confused party. Hot dogs and burgers were grilled up as flies buzzed around the garbage tank, another steel tank set up a few feet away filled with beers and sodas. It was like a stinking family reunion...

Timmy and Jess? He sat up in his lawn chair as he saw the two charging through the tall grass of the main meadow up from the gulch and the creek bottom. Where was Mel and Xander? Rodger was on his feet, beer aside as he ran to his blue '85 Silverado. He fired it up, grabbing his .22 from the passenger seat and setting it in his lap as he drove to meet the two young ones. Both were teary-faced and gasping as he pulled up aside them.

"HE'S GONNA DIE!!!" Jess wailed.

"A..A...MOUNTAIN LION...GOT...XAN..." Rodgers eyes went wide, his eyebrows lifting up in surprise as he motioned to the back of the pick up. The two kids climbed up the tires into the bed of the truck, crashing on the rubber matting in the back as he drove down the hill.

Mel glanced up from the tank, waiting for Jess and Timmy's return when she felt the hairs on her neck rise. Xander made a squeak of fright as she turned around to see the cat running up to the tank, she ran forward, unsure of what to do, but put her arms wide, protectively shielding Xander from the creature which lunged

up and put its paws on the edge of the tank, drinking deeply of the bloodied water.

Mel was frozen and Xander was trying to hide behind the tank. The cat noticed the floating Capri-sun wrapper and snarled at it, smacking it with its paw. Xander let out a terrified whimper and Mel felt as though she was going to lose her balance and fall. The sound of a gun went off loud in the afternoon and the cat gave a cry as it fell back. Uncle Rodger was running down the hill with gun in hand. Timmy and Jess behind him at a scampering sprint. Two more shots at the wounded animal and it was over. Mel grabbed Xander and took off running to Rodger who shuffled them back behind his body, walking forward to the cat. He fired once more just for certainty and then nodded.

“Hardly a mountain lion, just a liddle one...God forsaken critters, getting shoved this way by all the construction towards the west. Poor blighter...” He slung the great cat over his shoulder like it weighed nothing and began hiking back to the truck, idling on the hill. Xander hurried along after him, the pain forgotten as he stared at the cat and his Uncle.

“Whatcha gonna do with, Uncle Hodge?” Jess asked, running to climb into the truck.

“Well, we’re going to take a look at that arm of Xanders...and then stuff this critter. Make a nice mantle piece.” Rodger replied, grinning like a kid at Christmas. Jess grinned from ear to ear. Xander climbed into the front with Rodger as the others piled in back.

“Sally Forth! Crew of the Smeeworthy! We’re off to El Dorado!” she laughed, and Mel and Timmy gave her a failing glare. But Jess was already back on the sailing ship, rolling up the green waves of a Colorado July.

The End.

Honorable mention

Who Laughs Last

Rebecca Hollingsworth

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Edward St. John VI regarded the little paper umbrella in his sunrise-colored drink with some bemusement and remarked, “Do you know, I can’t remember the last time we went to five parties in as many days.”

Belle Godwin sipped delicately at her own neon-pink drink without dislodging her matching parasol and contemplated the chaotic merriment spilling across the beach in front of them. “I think we’ve only been to one party--the same one, five times. It keeps migrating, and we keep stumbling across it when all I’m trying to do is collect sea shells.”

“You may have something there.” St. John pulled the umbrella out of his glass and waved it vaguely towards the happy crowd between them and the surf. “I do seem to remember seeing rather a lot of these same pretty people on assorted beaches recently.”

“Maybe not quite as much of them,” Belle amended wryly, opening her eyes wide in comic dismay as two young women and one young man simultaneously flung two bikini tops and one pair of swimming trunks towards the sunset-painted clouds and sprinted for the waves. “I take your point, though. Same old movie stars, same debauched expats, same rum-soaked journalists--”

“Same Mrs. Van der Moolah with all her decorative entourage. And her even more decorative bling.” St. John raised his eyebrows at Belle over the rim of his glass. “If I didn’t know better, I’d suspect you of stalking the old bat.”

The designation made Belle laugh; the lady in question was barely forty, had three personal trainers and two plastic surgeons on permanent retainer, and credibly looked ten years younger, if not the fifteen years she routinely shaved off

her age when asked. “You wouldn’t want me to get out of practice at old bat stalking, would you?”

“It would be a shame, I admit. You’ve always been so good at it, and it’s been such a lucrative hobby.” He polished off his drink and gave her a speculative look. “So what’s going through your devious little mind?”

“I have had a thought,” Belle conceded. “The absent *Mister* Van der Poole is what--the fifth richest man in the world?”

“Third richest, I believe,” St. John corrected her.

“Better still. You have, of course, noticed the birthday present he sent to his young wife.”

It wasn’t a question. St. John glanced at the small, elaborately carved wooden treasure chest that Mrs. Van der Poole, to give her her right name, had been carting around with her for days. It was currently half-buried in the sand, but the appearance of negligence was misleading; several members of the entourage were very well-muscled and suspiciously sober, and at least two of them were keeping a close eye on the chest at all times. No one knew what was in the fancy box; the intended recipient had grandly announced, more than once, that she would only open her husband’s gift at sunrise on her actual birthday.

That dawn was now about ten hours away. “And what are we going to do?” he asked cheerfully.

Belle smiled and reached over to take his hand. “Well, first of all, I think we’re going to have another drink,” she said. She turned her head to look for the nearest circulating drink tray, and it was at that point that the first pirate suddenly

appeared over the dunes behind them. She squeezed St. John's hand, and he turned to look where she was looking.

They knew immediately that the newcomer was a pirate because he looked so much like one. He had the feathered hat, the thigh-high boots and the seventeenth-century flared jacket. He had the cutlass and the flintlock pistol. "He's even, by God, got the parrot," St. John observed delightedly. He dropped Belle's hand and surged out of his low-slung chair for a closer look. "Does it talk?"

"Stand and deliver!" said the parrot.

Belle gave it a sharp look and eased out of her chair, holding her shapeless purse in the crook of her arm. If she was alarmed by what she heard, St. John apparently was not; he blinked, and smiled. "That's what highwaymen used to say, not pirates. You've got the wrong kind of robber, mate."

The costumed pirate swung his hand up and aimed the heavy pistol between St. John's eyebrows. "Heave to," he said encouragingly.

"Prepare to be boarded!" said the parrot, stepping sideways along the buccaneer's outstretched arm.

"Good boy," said the pirate.

"Impressive vocabulary," St. John agreed, backing away slowly with his hands held out from his sides.

Belle spared him one glance over her shoulder as she drifted across the sand, moving as quickly as she could without obviously appearing to hurry. She was relieved to see St. John removing himself from harm's way, fading into the

throng as soon as the pirate dismissed him as a threat—for a man as big as he was, St. John could seem remarkably harmless when he wanted to—and looked elsewhere. Other people were starting to notice the newest party crasher, and to greet his appearance with shrieks of approval; Belle didn't think she had much time to get into position where she wanted to be, beside the birthday present.

Indeed, almost at once the quality of the shrieking changed, as fear and confusion took the place of joyous hilarity. One of the pretty people fell back bleeding, clutching his arm where the cutlass had scored his tanned hide. The pirate raised his pistol and pulled the trigger, and the party threatened to erupt into a riot.

“Just a warning shot, I think,” St. John murmured in Belle's ear, under the echo of the blast.

She nodded. “He was aiming out to sea. The ball went over everybody's heads.”

On Belle's other side, a tall woman in jeans and t-shirt glanced their way. She was one of the strong, sober types, and had kicked more sand over the treasure chest as soon as the pirate raised his weapon. “We can't give him time to reload,” she muttered, tensing like a predator about to pounce.

Definitely hired security, Belle thought. She shook her head sharply. “Don't try it, Tiger,” she said.

“Good advice,” said the pirate, stepping forward through the acrid cloud of powder smoke. He stuck the muzzle-loading pistol through his belt, and smoothly drew a thoroughly modern semi-automatic handgun instead. “I'd follow

it if I were you. Everybody down!” he roared at the crowd at large.

He was largely ignored, at first. But the warning shot had also been a signal; three more men, in modern dress but similarly armed, spread out across the beach and corralled the partygoers in the cove. Gradually the screams of alarm fell silent as everyone sank onto the sand. St. John and the tiger went to their knees right where they were; Belle took two precise steps to the right and settled down cross-legged, her long skirt floating down around her.

The security woman’s face went blank, and she deliberately looked away from Belle to watch the pirate instead. The only man in period costume, he was obviously the ringleader of whatever was about to happen.

Finally, when everyone was down, he stepped up to the edge of the tightly contained crowd. His minions shifted position slightly, making sure they had everybody covered. The buccaneer in charge announced, “I know most of you won’t have valuables on you, but anyone who does will have to give them up now. I’ll need one of you to collect them, so that I don’t cross any lines of fire. You, with the bag,” he concluded, and pointed his cutlass straight at Belle.

The security woman closed her eyes and sighed. Belle stood gracefully, revealing the treasure chest she had been sitting on. “It was a nice try,” the pirate assured her. “Now, start with your hostess.”

Belle stepped around and over the bodies on the sand until she reached Mrs. Van der Poole, near the center of the mob as she had been the cynosure of the party. Without a word, Belle knelt and held open her scruffy purse; without a word, the wife of the world’s third-richest man lifted her diamond pendant over

her head, pulled off her rings and earrings, and dropped them in. A handful of women near her, almost as rich but not as smart, started to protest the loss of their jewelry; the parrot imitated the sound of a gunshot, and Belle's purse got a little heavier.

Finally she turned and picked her way towards the pirate. The sun had gone down completely and it was now getting dark; she slung her purse, filled with other people's riches, over her shoulder so that she could see her feet in the dim light of distant tiki torches.

She tripped over the treasure chest all the same, and stumbled forward for a couple of steps.

Or so it seemed. But then she let her bag drop to her hand, turned her stumble into a run, and with a great underhand sweep she slung the bag as hard as she could toward the pirate's face. She immediately launched herself after it, fist first.

St. John and the tiger were first off the mark, sprinting in opposite directions before the pirate's henchmen could react, but the other security personnel caught on quick. Belle had guessed they would; she had spotted them as she made her way around collecting loot, and realized they had distributed themselves through the crowd within reach of each of the gunmen. They had been watching for their chance, and now they had it.

Only one of the underlings—the farthest down the beach—got off a shot, but the bullet went wild as the shooter went down under two of the security men and a random partyer. The parrot bit the security man who came to Belle's aid,

but he ignored the blood dripping from his ear until the costumed pirate was immobilized; then he pulled the silk sash from the man's waist and used it to apply pressure to his wound. "That was fun," said Belle, dusting the sand from her skirt as she turned to pick up her purse, and he grinned at her.

The tall security woman reached Belle at the same time as Mrs. Van der Poole and her coterie. Ignoring the babble of rich women demanding their jewelry back, the tiger held out her hand. "Bonnie Marianne Reid," she introduced herself.

Belle laughed and shook her hand. "A swashbuckling name if ever I heard one. I'm called Belle, but it's actually a nickname, from my initials. B.L."

"Wait for it," said St. John cheerfully, strolling up the beach.

"I was born in Barataria, Louisiana," said Barataria L. Godwin.

Belle readily opened her purse for Bonnie, who raised her eyebrows at the seashells six inches deep at the bottom of the bag. "I've been collecting them all week," Belle said, and unzipped the inner pocket she had held open for the valuables. Bonnie scooped them up, loudly assuring the dispossessed ladies that it would all be sorted out as soon as they could get to more light.

Belle and St. John, suddenly left out of the center of attention, looked at each other and retreated over the dunes hand in hand. They just missed the local police, who spent the whole night hearing statements.

The police were only human. It was nearly dawn by the time they finished, and when Mrs. Van der Poole asked them to stay on as additional security until she opened her birthday present, they readily agreed. As the sun rose over the

sea, she unpinned the small silver key from her gown, unlocked the chest, and opened the lid.

The pellucid light of dawn shone on a pair of red and white fuzzy dice, and an engraved card saying, "Happy birthday, from the last pirate of Baratavia Bay."

Many miles away, Belle Godwin pulled over to the side of the road and flipped a switch. While she waited for the ragtop to fold itself majestically into the trunk of the convertible, she dug in the seashells at the bottom of her purse and pulled out a large jeweler's case, coincidentally about the size of a pair of fuzzy dice. When she opened it, St. John whistled respectfully at the massive ropes of diamonds and pearls that lay there.

"Don't tell me you made the switch when you were sitting on it," he said.

Belle grinned and looped the jewels over the rear-view mirror like so many Mardi Gras beads. "Actually, it was beside me, under my skirt. So yes, that's when I made the switch. It wasn't when I'd planned to do it, but I had the fuzzy dice ready in my purse." She shrugged. "When Calico Jack showed up, I figured I'd better seize the moment."

"And everyone thought he was the pirate."

"Piratical is as piratical does," said Belle Godwin as she put the car in gear and drove off into the sunrise.

Poetry

Incident in Guelph

Margaret Merrill

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Barefoot on a beach
Collecting twenty percent
Bastien the modern pirate
feeling very sure of himself.

Money when he needed it
Found its way to him
Opportunity knocking
Said his trusted men.

He was no man to hold a grudge
He'd fight and then move on
Still, he remembered every slight
And where he had risen from.

The full moon was silver light
As all along the beach
Red Stripe flowed, music roared
To celebrate a summer night.

Bastien picked the voice out
like no one else was there,
the doctor's son in crisp linen suit
still brayed like an ass.

The man waved his soft hands
And bragged about his craft
A sleek teak decked sloop
He'd named Saffire Wind.

The sloop sailed with the tide
As did local fishing folk
Bastien followed later
He'd something to set right.

They found the sloop easily
And made her strike her sails
Bastien bounded onto the deck
And got right up in his face.

I am Remy's son
Bastien shouted to the wind
Brother to a sister whose honor
You besmirched.
Bastien hit the doctor's son
Hard upon the chin

Then kicked him twice for the pain
Caused to his dear Madeline.

The pirates smashed the radio
Took all the booze and cash
Ruined the electronics and
Threw a sextant over board.

They helped themselves to his clothes
And passed around his shoes
And when they found his hiding wife
They took her too.

Bastien looked around
at the ruined sloop
Was about to board his craft
When something caught his eye.

Hanging from a little peg
Just inside a door
One last reminder of the
Incident in Guelph.

Madeline had killed herself.
And nailed upon the wall
Like a trophy of the conquest
The fuzzy dice from her car.

The pirates sailed back to their beach
Where the Red Stripe flowed
And the teak decked
Saffire Wind settled beneath the waves.

This ebook brings you the best and winning entries of
the
Dread Pirate's Summer Beach Bash 2006

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