

Will of the Pirates

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*P*rologue

"Pirates!"

As soon as the warning was shouted from the crow's nest, Will heard the captain and his crew spring into action above deck. Will envisioned every man taking up a pistol, strapping on a sword, and making his way to the leeward side of the ship, ready to defend if the pirates tried to board.

"Pirates," Will mouthed in disbelief. He had waited for this moment all his childhood life thus far, but now that it was here, he was petrified. His legs began to tremble. Beads of sweat saturated his forehead, crept down his neck, and wetted the small of his back. The muffled sounds he heard up on deck were now replaced with a severe pounding in his ears—the beating of his heart. Will's mind raced, torn between the captain's strict orders to stay hidden below deck during an attack and his instinct to try to help fend off vicious pirates—or at least to get a closer look at them. Either way, Will Davies was scared.

The bright, clear December morning in 1682 had started just as all Will's other days at sea had. But this day would be very different, for this was the day William Davies would be kidnapped by pirates.



Chapter 20

Within the next week, *La Trompeuse* found a fine consort—a speedy, easy-to-maneuver frigate that would come in handy both in a fight and in getting away fast with plunder. They took her just in the nick of time, too, because as they moved away from Africa toward the Americas, Hamlyn and his crew were attacking ships almost daily. With the power of *La Trompeuse* and her consort together, the pirates were equal to almost any ship they encountered. Will witnessed it all from his perch in the mizzen crow’s nest.

One day the pirates were cruising the coastal waters of the southern Americas looking for prey. It was early in the day and there was still a mist hanging over the water when they spotted a large ship at anchor. The first mate went immediately to report the news to Captain Hamlyn, who hadn’t even made his first appearance of the day on deck yet.

Will heard the news from one of the men at the morning meal and ran up the steps to see what was going on. As always, he grabbed the wooden sword that he’d been using for several months for sword fighting lessons given by one of the pirates. He always took it up to the crow’s nest, not because he ever intended to fight with it, but because he thought that poking it through the trapdoor of the nest would help keep unwanted visitors away. He didn’t run to the mast just yet, though, but waited to see what might happen.

“Hoist the king’s jack and pendant,” Hamlyn ordered. Will knew that was what Hamlyn ordered when he wanted to make the other ship’s crew believe *La Trompeuse* was an English man-of-war. It always made Will hopeful that the ship about to be attacked might be English and that he could make his escape.

As the pirate ship approached, their victim struck her colors and saluted. *La Trompeuse* returned the salute, anchored before her, and

promptly poured a volley of cannon fire toward the broadside of the ship. Hopeful for a chance to make his getaway, Will saw that their victim was, indeed, an English merchant ship. But rather than stand and fight, it looked as though the ship was going to try to outrun *La Trompeuse*.

"She's cut her cable and is fixing to run, captain!" yelled the mate.

"Take after her!" was the captain's order.

That was just what Will wanted to hear. He climbed up the mizzenmast to his place in the crow's nest, hoping with all his heart that *La Trompeuse* would get close enough to board directly and that a fight would stir up enough chaos and confusion to allow him to slip aboard the other ship unnoticed. But it didn't work out that way.

With the bulk of their loot in the consort, *La Trompeuse* was light enough to easily catch the merchant. The pirates boarded the merchant ship quickly and with little resistance, and soon the boarding party returned to report to Captain Hamlyn.

"She carries seventy pounds of gold and an abundance of rum," reported the mate.

"Gold and rum are my favorite combination," said Hamlyn with a big smile. He ordered the crew to seize everything and commandeer the ship as a second consort.

The English crewmates were held in their own brig, and Will never even had a chance to board the ship or talk to any of the sailors. Within a few days, the captured ship's captain and crew were forced overboard close to an island. Those who could swim made it to land. Those who couldn't, drowned.

Will had never felt more helpless or angrier. He even thought of Black Pete—as ruthless as he was, at least he couldn't be at sea, as Quincy had said, but was confined to do his dirty work in London. Then a chill went up Will's spine as he thought about the possibility of his family encountering Black Pete or his ilk again one day—if they ever went back to London, for instance. He hoped that his family was safe and sound and out of the way of any trouble, unlike the likes of what he had encountered during his time aboard the pirate ship and at sea.

Over the next several weeks, with a small flotilla made up of *La Trompeuse* and two consorts, Hamlyn was virtually unstoppable. Eventually, however, the ships became so overloaded with gold and silver that they were at risk of being too slow. Either they wouldn't be able to catch their prey, or they'd be too slow to avoid being caught themselves. They had to put in to port—and soon—to get rid of some of the

weight. Fortunately, they were by then in the waters of the Caribbean, which was full of islands well suited to the needs of pirates.

They made their way to Île à Vache and anchored on an uninhabited portion of the island. The pirates began lugging boxes of treasure up the steep sides of the cliffs that led to a series of caves. Will noticed that the pirates didn't unload any of the boxes of Portuguese gold that had been stolen from the *Royal Triumphant* prior to Will's arrival on *La Trompeuse*. He thought, *Maybe Hamlyn doesn't want anyone else to know how much gold he actually has on the ship.*

As the last of the plunder was lowered into one of the dinghies, the captain motioned for Will to get into the boat.

"Really? I can go ashore?"

"If you're quick about it," said the captain.

"Cor blimey!" Will ran across the deck and leaped over the railing into the dinghy. "Let's go!"

Once on the island, they made the long trek up to a particularly large cave that Captain Hamlyn kept referring to as Lookout Cave. When they arrived, Will could understand how the cave got its name. From this high on the small island, the pirates could see the coast in three directions. The fourth side was blocked by taller mountains.

The cave was open and allowed in a great deal of sunlight, almost as though the sides had been dug away to make huge windows framed by rock. There were ledges around the cave that were used for sitting and for storing items. There was a fire pit at one end that could be used for cooking or as a signal fire.

Within minutes of arriving, Gaston had a fire going and meat roasting on a spit. The aroma filled the whole cave, and Will was suddenly hungrier than he'd been in a long time. While they waited for the meat to cook, the captain motioned Will over to where he sat on a ledge overlooking *La Trompeuse* and her two consorts anchored in the blue waters below.

"Will," said the captain, looking off into the distance, "tell me again about that day on the *Royal Triumphant* when you found the gold in the 'old."

"I don't know what more I can tell you," Will said, genuinely confused about what the captain wanted him to say.

"Well, why did you go down there in the first place? What made you think there might be something interesting in the lower 'old?"

Will told him all about the conversation he'd had with the cook and how he'd reported back to him that all he'd found were slave shackles.

Then he told about his conversations with Beeks. Once again he lied about throwing the map overboard so that no one would find it on him and realize he'd been snooping around the ship.

The captain seemed satisfied and sat in silence for a moment. Then he said slowly, rubbing his chin as he spoke, "I just can't 'elp but wonder, though, why such a smart boy as yourself wouldn't think to memorize the map before throwing it over the railing." He didn't look at Will, and it almost seemed as though he were just talking to himself.

Will didn't say anything until the captain turned toward him, looked him straight in the eyes, and said, "Can you 'elp me understand that, *jeune* Will?"

"Well, like I said, sir, I knew the gold hadn't been taken or buried yet, so I thought the map had no real meaning."

"And didn't you ever think that, possibly, there were other maps with the same information and that the treasure would be buried at some point according to the map?"

In truth, Will hadn't thought of that possibility. Beeks had never mentioned it either.

"Well, captain, truth be told, I had overheard part of the plan when I was in Lisbon."

At that, Captain Hamlyn sat straight up and leaned over toward Will. "What's this? Why 'aven't I 'eard any of this before? Who did you over'ear, and *what* did you 'ear?" There was an edge of anger in the captain's voice that made Will's heart beat faster, and his leg started to shake slightly. Like the day many months before when he was first taken by the pirates, he decided that the truth would be best.

"I overheard a businessman, Mr. Wentworth, talking with the captain of the *Royal Triumphant*."

"Wentworth? You know 'im?" The captain's eyes widened, and he had a strange look on his face.

"Well, I found out his name later," Will said, not sure he wanted to tell Hamlyn everything. "But when I overheard him, he was instructing the captain to hand the map over at the time of the assault. I didn't know what he meant at the time, but it all made sense to me later. That's how I knew that the treasure couldn't be buried according to the map—because the captain had dropped the map in the hold."

"So it's likely that Wentworth, not knowing that the map directing me to bury the treasure in a certain place 'as been lost, now believes I've kept all the gold for myself. Would that be a fair assumption, Will?"

"Yes, that's probably true," Will said, still not certain of where all this was leading.

"And if you were Mr. Wentworth and you believed someone 'ad stolen all that gold from you, 'ow would you feel about such a betrayal?"

"Well," Will said, not stopping to think about what he was saying, "I think that if Mr. Wentworth does business with pirates, he shouldn't expect a fair deal."

As soon as he saw the look in Captain Hamlyn's eyes, Will wished he'd kept his mouth shut.

"Because pirates are without honor and, therefore, never to be trusted," the captain said, making it a statement rather than a question. Will didn't know what to say, so this time he said nothing.

"Hmm." The pirate captain once again seemed lost in thought. Just as Will was wondering if their conversation was over and he should leave the captain alone, Hamlyn spoke again. "Well, Will, in spite of what you think of me, I believe that *you* are an honorable *garçon*."

These words made Will wish he hadn't implied that the pirate captain had no honor.

The captain continued. "I believe you are honorable and I trust that, more often than not, you would do the right thing."

He paused for a moment and looked out toward the open sea. Finally he took a deep breath and looked Will directly in the eyes. "I 'ave it on good authority that we're being pursued by an English ship—the HMS *Francis*, captained by *Monsieur* Charles Carlile. The *Francis* 'as been spotted in many of the waters we've sailed through the past few months, and it's probably just a matter of time before we meet."

As he talked, the captain took off his blue jacket, revealing a wide, bronze bracelet on the bicep of one bare arm. He removed the bracelet and handed it to Will. "If anything 'appens to me, or if you and I part company for any reason, I ask you to give me your word that you'll get this to Mr. Wentworth in Lisbon."

"Was this part of the treasure?" asked Will.

"In a way," said Hamlyn, showing Will the underside of the bracelet. There were some scratches and etchings that included numbers and some words in what Will thought must be French. "Just give this to Wentworth. 'Ee will know what it is."

He placed the bracelet in Will's hand and closed his fingers around it. "Swear, Will. Swear on your honor and that of your father that you won't fail me in this."

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"I swear, sir," promised Will, not knowing how he'd ever find Mr. Wentworth again. "I'll do my best."

"That's all a pirate captain can ask."



The other men started showing up at the cave with fresh coconuts, fruit, and roots that smelled and tasted like leeks. The meat was divided and everyone feasted. Will kept reaching into his tunic to feel the bracelet. He knew it would never stay on his arm—not until his muscles grew bigger, anyway, so he planned to keep it in his leather duffel with his other "treasures"—the coins in the leather bag from Mr. Purvis and the map carefully sewn into his pants. He could hardly wait to get back to the ship.

After they'd eaten, the pirates divided their plunder. This was the first time Will had been allowed to watch them divide the stolen loot, and he found the whole process very interesting.

The pirates all gathered in a circle around the great heap of coins and precious objects that they had stolen. Some stood with arms crossed, eyes gleaming. Others sneered, their mouths revealing ghastly teeth, their eyes darting from the pile of treasure to the faces of their shipmates.

Regardless of their greed, the process of handing out the loot was quite systematic. The first and largest shares of gold coins went to the men who did the most important jobs on the ship: Captain Hamlyn; Ansel, the ship's surgeon; Gaston, the cook; and Phips, the carpenter.

There was some grumbling among the sailors over the decision to give Phips a share of the loot—after all, he was only a captive, some of the men said—but the captain put a halt to it in short order. "Our spoils are divided according to the articles that you all signed or upon which you made your mark and swore to uphold: every man who obeys the civil command will receive one full share of the take. *Monsieur* Phips also signed the articles and has lived by the rules aboard *La Trompeuse*, so he will receive the fair share of a ship's carpenter."

The captain eyed his men fiercely, his right hand resting on the handle of one of the pistols at his hips. "Only a fool or a scoundrel would expect his shipmates to uphold the articles but receive nothing in reward for doing so. If there are such fools and scoundrels among us here, speak now."

Of course, no one said anything, so the captain gave Phips's share to Will to take back to the carpenter since Phips hadn't been allowed to leave the ship.

Once the first four received their shares, other men who held key positions on the ship and those who had been hurt got theirs—the next-largest portions. Clumsy ol' Beaumont had fallen from the mast not three days ago and received ten extra silver pieces of eight—an "eight" being a Spanish dollar—even though he wasn't gravely injured in the fall.

Gaston, who stood helplessly smiling ear to ear with his cook's share of gold, noted Will's interest, as well as his confusion. He nudged Will. "Interested in the pirate's way, are ya?"

"Gaston, why does Beaumont get gold for falling from the mast? Why, anyone could have done that! I could only imagine what I would do with ten extra pieces of eight!"

"Shh, Will. It takes either a courageous man or an ignorant boy to judge the ways of the pirate code. It's just the way it is. When we divvy up the treasure, anyone who's been hurt gets a bigger share. Men that have lost something like a finger or who have broken a wrist get four hundred extra pieces of eight. Those who have lost a limb, such as an arm or a leg, get eight hundred extra. The pirates who've lost an eye, well, Will, they get a thousand extra pieces of eight!"

Will simply shrugged and stated, "Where I come from, we have to work a lot harder than just being clumsy to get gold!"

Gaston laughed as the rest of the loot was divvied up in equal shares. Being just a boy and not having signed the articles, Will did not receive a share of his own. When all the coins were gone and everyone—including Will, who held Phips's gold—had a shining pile in their possession, they began auctioning off the one-of-a-kind pieces.

Will sat staring as a beautiful gold chalice was placed in the middle. One pirate shouted, "Nine pieces of eight!" Another screamed, "Ten!" The bids went higher and higher. The highest bidder, Raoul, was a pirate whose sword was much faster than his thoughts. He simply grabbed the chalice from the center and roared, "Mine!" All of Raoul's coins went back into the center.

As all the unique pieces of treasure dispersed, the men's coins ended up back in the center pile. When the auction was done, the new stack of coins was split exactly the way the first one had been. Will could

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hardly believe his eyes. Perhaps even pirates, in certain circumstances, knew how to be fair and organized.



“Mr. Phips, they’ve given you a share of the spoils!” announced Will when they returned to *La Trompeuse* as he plunked two heavy bags of gold coins on the deck in front of the carpenter.

“What? Gold?” Phips could hardly believe his ears. Then he frowned and pushed the bags away with his foot.

“You don’t want it?” Will asked in amazement.

“It’s not honestly come by, Will.”

“But *you* didn’t steal it, Mr. Phips. You did nothing dishonest.”

Phips just looked at the bags on the deck. He looked so sad that, for a moment, Will was afraid the older man was about to cry.

“Phips?” Will said softly.

The carpenter looked at Will as though he’d forgotten the boy was there. “You’re right, Will. If someone has to spend this gold, it might as well be an honest soul rather than a pirate. I’ll tell you what. You take one bag to your bunk and keep it for yourself. I’ll keep the other.”

When Will started to protest, Phips added, “I didn’t steal the gold, but neither did I do anything to earn it. It’s yours as certainly as it’s mine.” Will gave no further protest, so each went to his bunk to stow his gold.

As Will carried his bag down the galley steps, he couldn’t help but think that he was carrying more wealth than his own father had earned in a lifetime. Will had become rich in the last few minutes, so why didn’t he feel any different? And if the pirates and their captain had just become even richer than Will, why didn’t they quit pirating? How much gold was enough?

Will would think about these questions many times over the next few years. Right now, though, as he put the bag of coins and the bronze bracelet into his leather duffel, he started dreaming of all the things he’d be able to do for his mother, his brothers, and his sisters when he returned home. And he *would* return home, he vowed silently—and soon. Will had a feeling his luck was starting to change.



A few days later, Will overheard some of the sailors talking about the captain's plans to head for the island of St. Thomas and put in to the immense bay for a few days. The HMS *Francis* had been spotted again off the coast of the southern Americas and seemed to be closing in on *La Trompeuse*. Captain Hamlyn wanted to make sure *La Trompeuse* was fully stocked and her treasure load lightened so she'd be ready if they should need either to flee or to stand and fight.

Before turning toward St. Thomas, Hamlyn put in to a smaller island and explained the situation for the crew of *La Trompeuse* and her consorts. Any sailor among them was free to part company in one of the consorts, forming their own crew, electing their own captain, and sailing for whatever destination they chose. None would be thought less of, he assured them, and all would be free to take their share of the hoard with them.

The pirates now beamed with excitement as a few of them had been enlisted members of defeated ships and were there against their will. Others had enlisted willingly but were now excited to be free from rules and regulations. Some of the crew members that had been picked up in various ports over the months *La Trompeuse* had been sailing were simply anxious to see their homes and their families after a long time at sea.

A fair number decided to take their leave and took off on the larger of the two consort ships. The rest—including Will and Phips, who weren't allowed to take their leave—stayed aboard Hamlyn's ship as she turned her sails into the wind and headed for the island of St. Thomas.

The island of St. Thomas was, at that time, under Denmark's rule. Phips knew that there was a fortress there that housed not just Danish soldiers, but also the governor of St. Thomas and several other high-ranking officials. "This could be our chance, Will," said Phips. "We need to be ready, especially if the English ship actually catches up to us at or near St. Thomas. I think we'd better agree that if we're separated in any escape attempt, we try to make it to the governor's offices and ask for sanctuary."

Will was excited at the possibility of finally escaping from *La Trompeuse*. "Or if we see the English ship, couldn't we just lower a dinghy in the night and row toward it? Surely they'd pick us up!" he suggested.

The carpenter shook his head. "No, we have to be careful about that, Will. We don't know what story made it back to England about why we've been sailing with pirates all these months. What if we've

been made out to be deserters or mutineers by Captain North or any of his crew that survived?”

Will frowned. He couldn't believe that any of the men of the *Thomas and William* would deliberately lie about them, but what if someone had misunderstood what had happened when they were taken? He looked up as Phips continued.

“The English just might be ready to hang us as high as any pirates they catch. No, we'd be better off at this point to play our hand very carefully. Let's go first to the Danish officials and tell our story. Then they can approach the English captain on our behalf and find out whether we're wanted by the king or are free to go home.”

Will couldn't wait, and as it happened, they didn't have to wait long. Within days they sailed into the mouth of St. Thomas Bay, and even though it was still far away across the bay and perched high on the hills, they got their first look at Christianfort. The Danish fortress gleamed in the sunlight, looking to Will like a giant “Welcome Home” banner.

But when *La Trompeuse* came around the small peninsula that curved out into the entrance to the bay, Will saw an even more amazing sight—the HMS *Francis*, a magnificent ship proudly displaying the English colors. She must have seen *La Trompeuse* approaching, because she immediately fired a salute.

“Bring her about!” Hamlyn ordered as the pirates flew around the deck.

The ship lurched, and almost before Will could blink his eyes, *La Trompeuse* changed course and headed across the mouth of the bay—not ready to run or to fight at this point, but hoping for enough time to restock and regroup.

One thing Will knew for sure—something big was about to happen.