

*A
Maiden's
Honor*



Josanna Thompson

A Maiden's Honor

Book 1

The Woman from Eden Series

By

Josanna Thompson



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CHAPTER 1

A warm breeze swept across the quarterdeck sending Emile Dumont's chestnut curls dancing around his leathery face. The chatty seagulls demanded his attention as their wings caught the wind, sending them swirling high above his three-masted clipper before diving to the water below. Not even the playful seagulls could distract his attention from the ominous dot lurking on the horizon, which was growing larger with every passing moment. Emile inhaled the last of the elixir from his wooden pipe. It was the only thing that calmed the uneasiness billowing inside him.

His captain approached him and leaned against the railing. "Report."

Emile tore his gaze from the horizon and gasped when he spotted the gleam in his captain's eyes. Gerard Rochelle looked like a rugged gentleman. His green eyes and casual smile engendered the trust of every man he met. The captain promised to take his crew away from Napoleon's war. He also promised them riches beyond their dreams. Desperately wanting to escape France, Emile eagerly signed on as the ship's surgeon.

"Your pirate ship is sailing straight for us, Captain." Emile looked back at the horizon, silently noting that the ship was now close enough to see its half green, half white Algerian flag waving proudly. "Do you think it's him, sir?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Hassan Aziz," Emile replied.

His eyes narrowed, the captain glared at Emile with pursed lips. "You've have been obsessing about that savage since we reached the coasts of Africa," Gerard snapped.

"Perhaps we have a good reason to be concerned, sir. You've heard the sailors talk; Aziz has a reputation for being the most ruthless corsair on the Barbary Coast. Sailors claim that he is the devil himself. His ship appears out of thin air. God help you if your vessel catches his eye because there is no way of eluding him. If that happens, we can watch our freedom and possibly our lives sail away."

The corners of Gerard's lips curled into a mocking grin. "Don't be a gullible fool. Aziz is like any other man; he can be bought."

Emile turned away from his captain and raised his pipe to his mouth.

Gerard yanked Emile's arm, forcing the doctor to face him. "What?"

"What makes you so confident that these barbarians will seize our cargo and not sell us too?" Emile retorted.

Gerard took Emile's pipe and inhaled before handing it back. His eyes narrowed again, "I need to know that I can depend on you." Gerard's voice sounded almost sinister.

Emile forced his thin lips into a smile because he was sure that his captain would throw him overboard if he sensed the least bit of betrayal. "Of course, sir. Have I not proven my loyalty already?"

"You can prove your sincerity by administering Monsieur Campbell's medicine. Make sure it is extra potent this time. Prepare his daughter. I surmise that she will be meeting her new owners shortly."

Emile nodded and pushed past his captain.

Gerard grabbed the surgeon's arm. "Do not fail me."

"Why would I fail you? Or have you forgotten that I was the one who led the babes to slaughter?" Emile glared back.

"I've seen the way you look at that savage."

"Sarah Campbell is sweet, but I want my share of the prize as much as you do. Monsieur Campbell will be dead by the time the corsair ship arrives. I suggest that you prepare our ship to be boarded." Emile yanked his arm free and headed to the gangway leading to the middle deck. He scurried down the ladder and paused when he reached the deck below. Taking a few moments to let his eyes adjust to the darkness enabled him to collect his thoughts.

The beat of a drum stirred sailors into a flurry of activity. Emile took a deep breath and forced his way through the chaos to the surgery. He retrieved a vial of clear liquid and mixed it with the last of the red wine before heading to the ship's stern. Gerard initially placed the Campbells in the cargo hold. Because that area of the ship was prone to flooding, Emile offered them his quarters; he slept in a hammock in the surgery.

Mr. Campbell laid on his berth, which was nothing more than an oversized wooden shelf, attached to the bulkhead and covered with a thin layer of straw. Sarah knelt beside her father and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a damp cloth. Emile's heart raced when he realized that this would be the last time he would see Sarah Campbell.

Hassan Aziz stood on the quarterdeck watching his prey through his scope. Every muscle in his face was tense as he stared at the ship's French flag waving back at him. A small merchant ship was legitimate prey even if he were flying under the British flag. Hassan knew his crew would have no trouble taking the ship. Still, the tension kept building inside him.

Amir Zamani sidled up beside Hassan. "The crew is ready." He paused as he studied his captain. "You seem nervous, Captain."

Hassan lowered his scope and glared at his second lieutenant. Amir Zamani was the only one among his seasoned crew who had naturally dark features. Amir was also the only one Hassan hadn't handpicked for his crew. "I am not weak," Hassan growled.

"I know you hate enslaving infidels. I see it in your eyes every time we attack another ship. It is the only way they will see the light," Amir stated.

"My crew and I do what is required of us. We have executed our duty with distinction, and I have made your employer a very wealthy man," Hassan reminded him.

"You mean *our* employer. Naa'il Dhar is the Dey of Algiers. Oh, I forget; you are a British subject, not a true Ottoman."

Hassan towered over Amir, his eyes narrowing. "Dhar would not have made me captain had I not renounced my allegiance to Britain, would he?"

Amir held his gaze. "His Excellency made you captain because your exploits are profitable." A smirk formed on his lips. "I am curious how it feels to sell your Western people into slavery?"

Hassan returned his attention to the French ship.

"I wonder; would you enslave your countrymen?" Amir queried.

Hassan looked his lieutenant in the eyes. "No. England pays Algiers a king's ransom in tribute money to prevent corsairs from attacking British ships. While other corsairs ignore this agreement, I will not."

"What about your Western women, would you sell them too?"

"I doubt I will ever have to make that decision. The people from Western countries will not bring women to this part of the world because they know they will be sold into slavery if they are captured."

"We get a few women from time to time," Amir countered smoothly. "I trust you will turn over the crew and whatever else you seize to His Excellency."

Hassan's knuckles turned white as his hand clutched the railing. "I have turned over the crew and the plunder of every ship that I have seized since I became a corsair. Why are you challenging my loyalties now?" His voice grew louder with every word he said.

"Because I know that you and your crew are still infidels. You all kneel on your prayer rugs, but you do not pray to my God. You drink your spirits; you play your games for money. We have strict punishments for these offenses."

Hassan gave his second lieutenant a murderous glare. "Dhar does not care what we do so long as we bring his prizes to him. That is *exactly* what I will do. Now report to your station."

Sarah Campbell stared helplessly at her father, who had been reduced to a hairless skeleton. At the beginning of their journey, Thomas Campbell was a strong and healthy man, but an illness seemed to have struck him a few days after they left their island. Each day he grew steadily worse, yet her father fought off death. He lost consciousness that morning; Sarah would do anything to make him well.

The crew had been kind to Sarah and her father during their journey. She was grateful that Emile gave them his quarters and medicine for her father.

"Sarah," said Emile in a gentle voice.

She wiped the tears from her Adriatic blue eyes and glanced up at her friend. "Da no better."

Emile squatted and tucked the cup under the berth. He took Sarah's arm, pulled her to her feet, and led her outside her cabin.

"I can see that. I brought more medicine for your father, but Sarah, you must be strong for him." Emile wiped a tear from her soft cheek and nudged closer. He slid his arms around her waist and pulled her against his chest, stroking her satin hair. Moments later, the ship shook after a loud boom.

Sarah yelled. "What is?" She pulled away, bracing herself when the ship shook from the impact.

"That? Oh, it is nothing. It is just ... drills," Emile smirked.

Sarah knew that Emile was keeping something from her by the way he avoided eye contact with her. His widened eyes also hinted that he was scared. She heard another loud boom. This time, Sarah reached for Emile when the ship shook again and was followed by loud screams. "What is?" Sarah pleaded.

"Sarah, I am ..." Emile pressed a kiss to her full lips. "Come with me to the quarterdeck."

"No, I stay with Da," Sarah insisted.

"It is better for you and your father that you join me on deck. I promise that the loud noises will end shortly," Emile reasoned.

"Why?" Sarah challenged.

"Trust me; it's a beautiful day. I think your father would want you to enjoy it."

Sarah was accustomed to the constant thundering of footsteps from the overhead, but her inner voice told her that these sounds were different, and something was very wrong. At the same time, Sarah couldn't deny that she missed the sun's warmth. Her father was sleeping, and Emile was right, he wouldn't miss her, providing that she didn't stay away for very long. "I come back soon?"

"Of course," Emile said convincingly.

Sarah bent over and retrieved the cup of medicine. The loud thud caused half of the contents of the cup to slosh out. "Give him medicine now?"

Emile took the cup from her and carefully set it under the berth. "You can give it to him later."

Nodding to her friend, Sarah hovered over her father and kissed his forehead.

"Sarah, would you do something for me before we leave? Will you tie your cloth around your waist, like the way you wore it on your island?" Emile reached past her and retrieved her paru sitting on the edge of her father's berth.

"No, Da say he no want," Sarah countered. It was true that she wore only a cloth tied around her waist when she lived on her island. That was how the women dressed, but Sarah and her father left that life in what seemed to be a lifetime ago. Her father insisted that she remain covered for the duration of their journey, which meant wearing a shirt and breeches whenever she was on deck. "It is for your protection, lass," her father counseled her. He was right; her western clothing seemed to lessen the sailor's hungry stares.

Emile gently tugged on a lock of her waist length hair. "Sarah, you look so beautiful when you wear your native cloth. Besides, your hair will protect you from the sun. Please, will you do this for me?"

"Da say no do; I no do," Sarah maintained.

"You must!" Emile snapped.

Sarah backed away from him when she spotted the anger in his eyes. "No," she maintained.

Just then, a man wearing loose-fitting trousers and a cloth wrapped around his head, ran towards them wielding a large saber in his hand. The invader stood at least half a head taller than Sarah. Although a pointed beard covered a third of the intruder's face, she could see that his skin was much darker than Emile's.

Emile slowly raised his arms over his head as he quietly and calmly spoke to the man in French. Fearing for her father's life, Sarah charged towards the invader, attempting to slap his face. The last thing Sarah saw was the intruder blocking her arm and striking her across her cheek.

Hassan's lips parted when he spotted Amir proudly carrying an unconscious naked woman over his shoulder with a French sailor walking beside him. He glanced over at the French captain whose smirk matched Amir's delight. Hassan wanted to rush over and kill his second in command for stripping a woman of her clothes, but his inner voice insisted that he wait. Amir reached the center of the mob and dropped the woman onto the deck.

Hassan squatted to take a closer inspection. He had known many women throughout his life, and he had never seen her equal. Her face, her curves, her long-flowing burgundy hair were absolute perfection.

"I am Captain Rochelle. It is my great pleasure to present a unique treasure. I assure you that she is the only one of her kind. We found this exotic maiden on an island in the South Seas. We will gladly give her to you ... for a price."

Hassan studied the woman a little longer. He couldn't deny that the black outline of a single six-petal flower inked on each upper arm and the bands of matching flowers around her ankles gave her an exotic quality. Still, he wasn't ready to believe the captain. "Rochelle, did you say? I am not a fool. South Seas maidens are legendary. I know a person who enjoyed the pleasure of their company. He described their appearance to me, and I can ascertain by this woman's red hair that she is no more Polynesian than I am," replied Captain Aziz as he stood up.

"You have a keen eye, Captain. Sarah Campbell was born to Scottish parents, thus her red hair. Her father and mother lived on the island where she was born. Her mother died a few years later. The natives welcomed Sarah and her father into their village. Needless to say, the savages raised her as one of their own. In fact, we were the only civilized people that she's encountered, save her father of course. If you don't believe me, look at her markings. Surely a well-informed man such as yourself is familiar with the cultural trappings of the Polynesian women. Her arms are adorned with tattoos of flowers that are indigenous to her island. You can rub all you want, but the ink will never come off."

Sarah stirred when she heard the drone of an unfamiliar baritone voice. She slowly opened her eyes and gasped when she discovered Hassan crouching over her. He looked

and dressed like the man who struck her, except he was even more intimidating. A short pointed beard covering his defined cheekbones and his chiseled jaw partially hid a scar on his left cheek. His muscular arms and chest looked like they could crush her with a single blow. Sarah would have been terrified had she not seen compassion in his brown eyes. Then he did the unexpected; he reached for her hand and pulled her to her feet.

One of Hassan's men began removing Gerard's coat. Emile stepped in and gave her paru to Hassan, who stared at the cloth with disapproval. Fearing he would throw her cover overboard, Sarah reached for the cloth. Hassan gave her a curious look before handing it to her. Sarah tied the paper-like cover over her shoulder. She knew her father wouldn't approve, but at the moment, it was better than wearing nothing at all. Sarah then gasped when she looked around and realized that she stood in the center of what seemed to be a legion of men. Half looked and dressed like the man who hit her. Each of them pressed a knife against a French seaman's neck. Fearing for her safety, she wanted to run, but Gerard locked his hands around her arms and pinned her back against the wheel.

Hassan and Gerard continued talking, although, Sarah only recognized a few words that Emile taught her. The rest of the conversation was nothing more than gibberish. Polynesian was the only language she spoke fluently; Sarah wondered if she would understand them better if they conversed in English. Her father attempted to teach his native language to her while they lived on their island. Learning English was difficult and a waste of time for Sarah because her father was the only person who spoke that language on her island. So, she saw no point in learning something that she would never use. In her defense, she honestly believed that she would never leave her island until the French ship arrived. Her father resumed her English lessons during their journey, but they were cut short after he became ill. Shaking herself from her regrets from past mistakes, Sarah attempted to focus on the current conversation.

"I see you still need more convincing, Captain Aziz. Her white teeth are another common trait to the Polynesians." The crew watching the spectacle erupted with laughter when Sarah snapped at Gerard's fingers as he attempted to part her lips. He forced her to obey by pinching her neck. "To my knowledge, the South Seas savages are the only ones who have teeth of this color. Perhaps the most prominent trait is her lack of shame." Gerard lifted the cloth to expose her front. "Do you see what I mean?"

Hassan chuckled when Sarah attempted to bite Gerard's hand. He didn't know what to think other than he couldn't take his eyes off her. His expression hardened a moment

later when he spotted her humiliation after Gerard pulled back her cover. Hassan cocked his pistol, pointing it directly at Gerard's head. "That's enough. Now lower her cover."

Gerard grimaced as he released the end of her wrap. "That is not necessary." A sinister grin formed on his lips. "I see she pleases you; I will be happy to sell her to you for two hundred francs, or its equivalent in gold."

Hassan's eyes widened. "That is a high price for a maiden, even for one as pretty as this."

"As I mentioned before, she is unique. I assure you; this creature was raised to provide pleasure in a way that is worthy of commanding such a price. Do we have an agreement?"

Glancing to his crewmates on deck, Hassan signaled for them to take Emile and Gerard captive.

To Gerard, he replied, "No, we do not have an accord. Gentlemen, do not attempt to fight; every member of my crew is skilled at inflicting excruciating pain. I am seizing your ship and your cargo."

"Captain Aziz, I beg you not to do this. If you let me, I will return to the South Seas and will return with a ship full of these maidens," Gerard wheedled.

"Or you will flee from the Barbary Coast like cowards," Hassan countered.

A sheen of sweat beaded Gerard's brow. "No, I will return. I swear it."

"I do not do business with infidel dogs," Hassan nodded to the man holding Gerard hostage.

His captor thrust his fist into his ribs. Gerard collapsed and fell to his knees, gasping for breath.

"What do you intend to do with us?" Emile spoke up.

"I intend to sell you and your crew," Hassan replied. "Algiers is always in need of laborers."

Hassan glanced over at an older boy standing adjacent to Amir. Everyone surrounding the boy edged away from him when they heard and smelled the boy's waste trickling onto the deck, but Amir still kept his eyes focused on Sarah. "Are you frightened?" Hassan asked in French, even though it was plain to everyone that the boy's whole body was shaking.

"Please, I do not wish to become a slave," the boy pleaded.

"You seem to have no issue enslaving this woman," Hassan pointed out.

His comment was answered with silence.

"Answer me, boy," Hassan demanded; his tone was laced with anger.

"She is a heathen savage," the boy answered timidly.

Hassan leaned in and whispered, "We are all savages, including you." Straightening his body, he announced in French, "You are all the property of Naa'il Dhar. The only

freedom you will have is the kind that comes from death." As he spoke the last words, Hassan's eyes rested on Amir with subtle malice.

"Is there nothing we can do to change your mind?" Emile spoke up.

Hassan looked at Emile with a menacing gleam in his eye. "No," he replied in an uncompromising tone. "Gentlemen, remove their clothes, take them below, and clap them in irons. They can travel like slaves to the Americas."

Hassan's crew screamed in unison like banshees as they ripped the clothing off the sailors' bodies.

The boy charged Hassan as another pirate tore his shirt from his chest. Their arms locked in a fight to control Hassan's knife. The Corsair forced the boy's arm to his side and shoved him towards Amir. Hassan's second lieutenant gasped when the knife pierced his stomach. The pirate captain punched the boy's jaw several times, causing the seaman to fall to his knees. "Sorry, boy, you will not escape your fate so easily." Hassan nodded to one of his men to secure the prisoner.

"Take them below. The girl stays with me," Hassan commanded.

Sarah screamed as Amir collapsed onto the deck.

Hassan knelt beside him.

"You will pay for your treachery," Amir whispered.

"Your death was an accident. Your assumptions are correct; I am an infidel, and I will not sell a woman into slavery." Hassan pressed his fist against Amir's throat until he crushed his larynx. Gasping for breath, Amir stared at Hassan with bulging eyes.

Sarah watched Hassan with eyes, wide and dilated when he returned his attention to her. Her whole body trembled. Hassan raised his arms and tucked his knife under his maroon sash. "I will not hurt you," He said in a soothing voice.

Sarah leaped over Amir's body and raced to the nearest mast. She grabbed the closest ratline and began pulling herself up the rope. Hassan charged after her. He stood over six foot, two inches, yet Sarah was already beyond his reach. He gave the line she was climbing several good yanks. Sarah yelped as she lost her grip and fell into Hassan's arms.

"I won't hurt you," Hassan said more forcefully.

Sarah's athletic body writhed in Hassan's iron grasp. "Da," she shouted over and over again as she struggled to break free.

Hassan let go; Sarah landed on the deck with a thud. For a moment, she was immobilized. He locked his hands around her arms and pulled her to her feet. Just then, a salty breeze swept across the weathered deck like a storm tearing across a landscape. Hassan felt as though he had been thrust into a cyclone of absurdity. Sarah's wrap took flight as the wind passed under it. Her hair and her garment fluttered proudly like a banner in the wind as Sarah pleaded for help in her native language. Her tears flowed,

and her movements became more animated with each word she spoke. During her entreaty, she hadn't noticed that her body was completely exposed. All Hassan could do was smile and think, *my God, it's true.*

"Stop fighting, you little hellion. I am trying to help you," Hassan said with a distinguished English accent.

Sarah's lips parted, and her movements came to an abrupt halt. "You speak English?"

His hands remained locked around her arms. "Yes, and so do you," he replied with a hint of surprise. "Please, calmly tell me what 'Da' means."

"Da me da."

Hassan's brows snapped together. "Do you mean your father? He is still on this ship?"

"Aye, he ee ... eel," Sarah said as tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Do you mean that your father is ill," Hassan clarified.

Sarah nodded.

"Take me to him."

Sarah fervently led Hassan by the hand to the stern on the middle deck. Hassan was surprised to discover that this small merchant ship was large enough to fit a wardroom with six closet-size cabins surrounding the common area. There was also a long table with two benches in the center of the room.

"Da," Sarah pointed to the middle cabin on the starboard side of the ship.

Several of Hassan's crew had already discovered Sarah's father. Two of his men stood outside the room while another knelt beside the berth. All looked on with concern. The two men standing beside the door to her quarters made room for Hassan and Sarah to pass by them.

Hassan glanced at her father and then to the one examining him. "Is he dead?"

The lieutenant examining Sarah's father looked up at his captain with a grave expression. "He is still breathing, sir, but just barely."

Hassan dropped his gaze to the floor when he noticed a tin cup half-filled with red liquid peeking out from under the berth. He crouched down and picked up the cup. The Corsair dipped his finger into the burgundy liquid and tasted the wine on his finger. Something had been added. Tilting his head to the side, Hassan issued a command to the Marine standing outside the cabin. "Get Rochelle and that helpful man who escorted Zamani to the main deck."

"It medicine for Da," Sarah piped up.

"Medicine," Hassan turned away before her hand could reach the cup. "I would like your captain to confirm the cup's contents before we feed it to your father."

Sarah replied with a puzzled look.

Several men appeared with Gerard and Emile. Their jackets and shirts had already been stripped from their bodies. Hassan was sure that his men allowed them to cover their lower bodies out of respect to Sarah.

"What is wrong with this man?" Hassan demanded.

"He fell ill during the journey," Emile said.

"Who are you?" Hassan studied Emile. Dressed in tattered breeches, he looked like a gentleman who was down on his luck, yet he still kept his sandy curls and beard neatly trimmed.

"I am the ship's doctor, Emile Dumont."

Hassan knew that the doctor was withholding details about Mr. Campbell's illness by his refusal to make eye contact with him. He held the cup to Gerard's lips. "What did you add to this wine?"

"Medicine," Sarah repeated.

The French captain rolled his eyes and looked away from his captor.

Hassan motioned to his Marines to pin Gerard against the bulkhead. Clutching the tin cup with one hand, he pressed a dagger against the captain's throat. "What did you add to this wine?"

Gerard stared back at the pirate captain with an enigmatic smile. "Medicine," he replied in a cool tone.

Hassan stood nose to nose with the French captain. "You may be able to fool the girl, but you do not fool me. For the last time, what did you give the girl's father?" he demanded in a hushed voice.

Gerard looked away.

"Very well. Tip the captain's head back and pinch his nose."

His marines executed their captain's orders; Hassan returned his knife to his sash. When he raised the mug to Gerard's lips, the French captain jerked his torso forward, causing the wine to splash onto Hassan's face.

"I thought as much," Hassan grunted. "Very well, pin the captain's hand to the table in the wardroom galley."

Hassan's Marines locked their hands around Gerard's arms and escorted him to the table in the center of the wardroom. While the larger of the two held Gerard steady, the other pinned the French captain's hand to the table. Hassan pressed his saber against Gerard's pinky. "One last chance, Rochelle. Tell me what you added to the wine, or I will chop your fingers off, beginning with your fifth finger."

Gerard winced when he felt the blade piercing his skin.

Emile spoke up. "Arsenic. I added arsenic to the wine."

Hassan glanced back at his captive. Gerard's smug grin hadn't changed. Hassan lifted his crescent-shaped weapon and sliced off the French captain's pinky.

Gerard screamed as blood spurted out from his hand. "We answered your question!"

"No, your doctor answered my question, a question that I asked *you*," Hassan retorted. He released Gerard's arm and glanced over at Sarah, who looked on with interest. It was evident from her vacant expression that she didn't fully comprehend the point of the conversation. Hassan motioned to the Marines to pin Emile against the bulkhead. He moved in until the ends of their noses touched. Pressing the blade against Emile's neck, he said in a threatening tone. "Now you are going to tell the girl *in English* how you murdered her father."

Emile's gaze dropped to the deck behind Hassan. "No, I cannot," he whispered.

The corsair captain pressed the blade deeper into Emile's neck. "Tell her," Hassan shouted.

"Please don't slay me," Emile pleaded.

"Tell her," Hassan shouted over the doctor.

Emile looked directly at Sarah. "I poisoned your father's medicine."

Sarah rested her hand on her stomach. "I no understand," she said in a timid voice.

Emile didn't elaborate.

"Explain it in a way that she can understand," Hassan shouted. "I want her to understand your treachery. Tell her now, or I will cut off your ears, your nose, and every part of your body until you confess your sin." While several of his crewmen held Emile steady, Hassan pressed his saber against the doctor's ear. "This is your last opportunity to confess," he warned as he pushed his saber deep enough to draw blood.

Beads of sweat rolled down Emile's forehead. "I deceived you, Sarah." His voice quivered as he spoke in English. "We intended to murder your father when we decided to give you passage to France."

"What murder?" Sarah asked.

"Speak plainly," Hassan commanded.

"Captain Rochelle intended to kill your father. I poisoned the wine your father drank. That poison caused his illness, and it will kill him."

"I no understand," Sarah whispered.

Hassan released Emile and backed away.

The doctor reached for the cup and held it up. "This killed your father!" he shouted.

Though the lantern hanging from the overhead offered little light, there was just enough to see the color draining from Sarah's peach cheeks. She just stared at Emile with dismay. Her breathing became short and harsh. Hassan approached her and enveloped her in his arms. Sarah was trembling, yet there were no tears, no sobs. Without warning, she lifted the knife from Hassan's belt without his notice. Sarah pulled

away from the Corsair and lunged towards Emile, screaming in Polynesian. Hassan grabbed her waist with one hand and held her arm steady with the other.

"No princess, death is too good for these men. I give you my word that they will pay for their crimes," Hassan whispered in her ear as a Marine pried the knife from her hand.

Sarah's body became limp, and her screams turned into sobs.

But Sarah heard another voice. It was the only one that had the power to soothe her anguish. He only needed to say one word, "Sarah."

"Da," Sarah whispered when she heard his voice. She glanced down and smiled at her father, who was looking directly at her. "Please," she said in Polynesian to Hassan.

Hassan nodded and released her.

Sarah knelt beside him. They talked quietly as though they were the only ones on the ship.

Hassan didn't know what her father said to her, but it was enough to stop her tears. He marveled at the tenderness displayed between this father and child. Her father's love, he reasoned, must have been fierce to allow him to return from the beginning of death's journey to comfort his child.

Hassan looked over Sarah's shoulder. "I am Captain Aziz. I am going to have you moved to my ship so that you can receive care from my surgeon."

"Grateful. Sarah?"

"Your daughter will join you. Do you have any belongings?"

"Trunk ... at feet ..." the man said with difficulty.

After uttering several words in Polynesian, Sarah jumped to her feet and pointed to a small wooden trunk sitting at the base of the berth.

"Return Rochelle and the doctor to the hold, transport the patient to the surgery and bring the trunk to my quarters," Hassan ordered.

"Aye, captain," they replied in unison.

After Gerard and Emile had rejoined their crew, several more Corsairs arrived to help. Two men carried Sarah's trunk out of the cabin while two others moved Sarah's father to a transportation plank and carried him into the wardroom. Sarah lingered in her cabin; Hassan didn't know why. "Shall we?" he asked after an awkward moment of silence.

Sarah started to answer. She shook her head and mumbled in her own language.

Hassan frowned when Sarah crawled across the berth. His brow furrowed when she retrieved a brown pouch concealed between the berth and the bulkhead. It was the size of a rounder's ball with pea-size divots bulging out the sides. "What is that?"

"It poe'," she replied. "We go?"

Still puzzled by her cryptic behavior, Hassan extended his arm towards the wardroom and said, "After you."

I hope you enjoyed reading the first chapter from *A Maiden's Honor*.

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