Paying the Price: Prologue 2

by Megpie71

Summary

Black Maggie? Ah, now there's a name to conjure with.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

Black Maggie? Ah, now there's a name to conjure with.

First met her about ten years ago, after my escape from the island Barbossa marooned me on. She, or rather he, was working on a rum-running ship. Scrap of a lad, or so I thought at the time. Earnest, too. Wanted to be a sailor and loved the sea, I could see it. I took the lad under my wing.

Things come to an end, and I never expected to see the scrap again. Came as a bit of a surprise to bump into young Mark Blackett in a pub in Virginia, and discover the young sprout was looking for a ship. Well, I remembered the lad as one as knew his letters and his numbers, and I was quartermaster on the crew of a smuggler, so I took the lad on as my assistant.

Lord, the child was innocent. He'd seen a bit, I knew, and he'd come to me with many questions about what went where with which and for whom. So I was expecting, now the lad was fourteen and the sap rising, so to speak, that he'd maybe come to old Jack with a few more questions, and we could both enjoy ourselves in the answering of same. But no. Not a bloody thing. Not a dicky bird. Started to wonder whether there was something wrong with the lad.

Oh, but he was a sight to behold, he was. Dark hair, pale skin, and grey eyes with the rim around 'em – tell you, that's why I started wearing the kohl. Couldn't get the image of that kid's eyes out of me mind. Thin as a lath, and a little shimmy to the hips when he walked... well, I wasn't the only one as had an eye on him, but I was the one as had him in my cabin, and the other lads respected that. All of 'em except Morgan.

Monk bloody Morgan. Built like a brick outhouse, and full of just as much shit. Morgan wanted the lad, having buggered everything else on the ship as couldn't stop him. Were I not quartermaster, he'd've been trying to bend me over a barrel. Fool that I am, I thought the kid was safe behind my rank. Should've known better.
Morgan tried to lay hands on the kid once, and I made certain he was on latrine duty for the next three days. Should've clocked him with a belaying pin for all the good it did. He waited a week, then tried again. Broom was in the hold and saw Morgan heading in the kid's direction. He ran for me. I got there just in time to see the kid throw up all over Morgan.

I'd had the sense to bring the Mate and Captain with me. What they saw was Morgan beating a lad. That's what got Morgan the brig. I helped the kid up and shuffled him off to our cabin. Got the shock of my life when I lifted the shirt and found bandages, and the unmistakable line of bubbies below 'em.

'Course, I had to check the goods.

Wasn't sure about how I felt about it. After all, she'd not told me of her own accord – I'd only found out because Morgan beat her. But if she'd chosen this road, she was going to have a hard one to walk. Soon as she was back on her feet, I started teaching her sword and knife fighting – it was the least I could do.

Three months pass, and we've not spoken a word about the whole business, save her admitting her name. Then she comes into my room, crying fit to burst. Once I'd got her calmed down enough to find out why she was so upset, I nearly laughed. 'Twas the first time she'd bled, and she was scared silly she'd bleed to death. So I took her to the best brothel in town, plunked the child down in front of the Madam, explained the situation and made good my escape.

Next day, after the lads had given up on toasting “Mark's” success with the Madam, she came to me in the cabin, and sort of shyly made a half-offer. Sort of said she'd got the theory from the Madam, but she needed a little help with the practical, would I mind terribly much? And I, being the ninny I am, refused her. Said I thought of her as a sister. Gave up me job on that boat, and caught the first ship East I could find.

Didn't see her again for two or three years, which isn't to say I didn't think of her. Even at fourteen, Maggie had the hallmarks of a beauty. I'd left the Caribbees rather than fall for a beautiful girl I couldn't have. Already done that over Pearl, and one at a time's enough, even for me. But my god, she and Pearl between them haunted my dreams. Began to wish she'd left me on that island. Began to wish I'd never hired young Mark Blackett that time. Began to almost hate her.

Heard about the situation with her and Morgan - his new nickname raced across the map. I don't know why seeing Maggie in that pub in Madagascar shocked me so much. She'd changed. For one thing, she was much more woman than she had been. No chance of her passing as a boy any more, not with her frontage. So she dressed to show it off, flounced about the place flirting. Looked like a damn tart. Reminded me of someone: Anne Bonney. She'd brought a barrel of rum with her, said it was wages from her last venture (and looked smug as Mary Read when she said so – no prizes for figuring out which floating cathouse she'd been working on).

She sat down by me, and started talking in an affected brogue. I knew for a fact she was able to talk better'n that. 'Nother bad habit picked up from Rackham. And she flirted with me, acting the tart. Nothing like the Mark I used to know; nothing like the Maggie I'd been dreaming of. I'd fallen for a girl who acted like a boy, and a clever boy at that. Not a whore.

Remember I said I'd almost got to hate her? I can't excuse meself for what I did, but figure in, it's been six.. no, seven years since Barbossa dropped me on that island, I've a brand on me forearm from dreaming of the Pearl and her when I should've been keeping watch, and I'm hurting despite having been drinking for three days. Can't explain it better than that. Can't excuse meself for bending her over the table and treating her like a twopenny trull. Like I said, I'd been drinking three
days, and Little Jack had long since succumbed, so nothing happened, not really.

Girl's got a wallop on her. I deserved that.

Three days later, I'd sobered up enough to tender sincere apologies for what I did. I made the mistake of taking her out for a drink again. She watched me like a hawk, and I'd not had many drinks before she started telling me to go easy. All concerned-like. Sisterly. Problem was, I wasn't thinking of her as a sister. Nope, Little Jack was doing all the thinking, and he's never the brightest of the two of us. So I asked the question, she gave the answer, and things went downhill from there.

Now I think on it, when I asked her she had the oddest look on her face. Like she'd had her greatest dream come true, but it was handed to her by her worst nightmare.

I accused her of being a cockteasing whore like Anne Bonney, which was just the start. Then I accused her of being a bulldyke like Mary Read. That earned me a glare, and she lit right back into me, saying at least she'd never had to prostitute herself for passage, which led to me calling her jealous 'cause all she'd ever done was watch. Told her she should've taken her chances the other night. She called me a slut, I called her a frigid bitch, she swore I'd never touch her, I swore I'd never want to, and she clouted me again.

Girl definitely has a wallop on her. But I'm not sure whether I deserved that one.

I'd passage out the next day, so I didn't get a chance to make up again (I've a feeling she would have killed me and had done with it). Didn't see her again until after I'd got the Pearl back. First night in town, and I'd gone strolling into the Schoolhouse in Tortuga. There she is, acting as peacekeeper. Struck me as funny, because I could remember hearing she'd got her own ship. Well, I wasn't going to hear much from her in public, so I decided to make things a bit more private.

"I'll have that one," I said to the Madam, pointing at Maggie.

"I'm sorry sir, but Peggy's not for sale. Maybe Maybelle?" the Madam suggests.

"Definitely that one," I said, and started to wander over to her.

"I've told you sir, you'll have to choose someone else. Peggy isn't one of the lasses here."

I couldn't resist. I looked Maggie over from about six inches away, then turned around to face the Madam.

"You sure?"

"Don't ye worry yerself, Sal. I'll take care of the troublemaker," Maggie told her.

"Ah, that's more like it!" I said.

Then my hand was bent up behind me back, I was hustled out the back door, and into the stables.

She glowered at me. "God in heaven! Just when I think me life can't possibly get any the worse along ye come. Jack bloody Sparrow!"

"Hullo Maggie." Sounded like she still remembered Madagascar.

"What're ye doing here?" she asked me, all hostile.

"Just taking in the scenery, Maggie love." She was lookin' very toothsome. Y'know how some girls get better and better as they get older?
“Answer the bloody question, dammit.”

“What's a nice pirate lass doing in a place like this?”

“I work here.”

Now, really? Am I supposed to resist a line like that? “So I'd gathered.” That got me a glare. I decided to keep talking. “Last I'd heard, you were captain of your own ship. What was the name, again?”

“The Magpie.” She was whispering now, the first hint I got. Then I looked at her, and she had pain in her eyes, and I suddenly knew what she'd been facing. What else could I say?

“Ah. I take it you're in the market.”

Long and short of it: the circumstances were similar to my situation ten years ago. She'd been caught by a mutiny and turns out the mutineer was Morgan's sister. Morgan and his sister have Maggie's ship, and she was determined not to let them keep her. Somehow we got onto the ships in harbour, and whether any of them could help her. Tricksy lass managed to manouver me into a position where the Pearl is the only ship who'll do.

I decided to get a bit of me own back. “Well, you have to remember Maggie, pirate ships don't come cheap. I don't know if you'd be willing to pay the price.” I leaned back and looked at her speculatively.

“Name yer price; I'll tell ye if I'm willing to pay,” Maggie came back.

“Lessee...” I said, letting myself take a good, long look at her; down, then up, then down again. If what she said in Madagascar was true, she wasn't going to be interested. What she said next is very interesting.

“Some things aren't for sale, Jack,” she told me.

I caught her gaze and held it. “Seller sets the price here, Maggie, and I can't undercut the market. That's my price. Take it or leave it.”

Got the shock of my life when she said yes. When first I laid eyes on the Magpie, I could see why. Lovely sleek lines, cut through the water like a dream. If not for the Pearl, I've done my best to take her. But the Pearl is more than enough ship for me. Turned out Maggie had another reason for wanting that ship – she'd learned from my loss of the Pearl and bound herself to her ship, heart and soul. Bloody thing's nigh on alive for her, but for anyone else, it's a scow that moves like a whale with a broken back.

That was six months ago. Since then, she's been leading me on a chase around the Carribee. If it hadn't been for the way she looked back in Madagascar, and the way she looked when she agreed to pay me price, I'd suspect her of lying. But there was a look in her eye. Same look as at Madagascar – her fondest wish and her worst nightmare, combined in the one bundle. There's a few other things make me suspect there's more to this than she's saying. Tales of me own adventures between the sheets circulate, yet while there's countless tales of Black Maggie, there's very few as are about her bedchamber. Almost none. I've heard three, and each has been the bragging of a fool. I'm starting to wonder about Maggie.

Speaking of whom...
This is a previously-unpublished work, written as a prologue to another work which barely got started, and as a sequel to a second work which never got finished. I think it stands on its own.

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