

Drake: Tales of a Lusty Pirate

an online serialization by Erin McCarthy & Kathy Love © 2007



Part Two

The door creaking open distracted Drake from the debacle of the night before and drew his attention to the guard who was standing in front of him, a hulking, filthy mass of muscle.

“You.”

The guard waved a meaty finger in his face and the smell of onions and sweat crawled up Drake’s nostrils. Lovely. He’d fallen far in twenty-four hours, from the arms of a woman, with her sweet scent and body powders, to a cell, and the smell of Eau de Ugly in front of him.

Such was the price of passion, he supposed, needing to be prosaic.

“Yes?” he asked, standing straight and putting out a leg. He was no coward. While impoverished in his own right, and dependent on the good will of the women he seduced — or loved, in a manner of speaking — Drake was still the son of a British nobleman and his third wife, a beautiful Spaniard contessa half his age.

So his father had disowned him a decade earlier. It was of no import. Drake may have lost the right to the title of Lord Hanover, but he was nonetheless still of blue blood. And he would get through this little hiccup and move forward to the life of luxury he was entitled to.

“Out. They’re putting you to trial today.”

Swift justice. Perfect. He would be released in time to dress for dinner. Pop in to visit Charmaine, and be in bed with her by nine, after her husband fell asleep in his port. She certainly owed Drake a great deal of enthusiasm for the inconveniences he had suffered this day and he intended to collect promptly.

“Excellent.”

The guard frowned at him as he clapped hand irons on Drake’s wrists. “It’s nothing to get excited over, unless the idea of swinging makes you happy.”

Swinging? A noose promptly replaced the sensual image in his mind of Charmaine down on her knees in front of him, making sweet amends for her betrayal.

Perhaps he had misunderstood the guard. His French was adequate, but not that of a native. “Did you say swinging? As in a noose?”

The guard jerked on the hand irons to test their security. “Yes. As in hung by the neck until dead. You’ve been put in the hanging cell. No one here walks out of these prison grounds alive. The trial is just a formality.”

The man scuttling around behind Drake laughed, a blood curdling high pitched shriek of a laugh that made the hair on Drake’s neck stand on end. He shook off the feeling, damn irritated with the whole situation. “You can’t be serious. At worst, they’ll just send me back to England. No one hangs a nobleman for stealing ear bobs from his mistress. Which I didn’t do, by the way.”

Charmaine’s jewelry from her ancient husband was all paste, and he was savvy enough to know the difference. Not that he would steal it anyway. Not unless he *really* needed to. Which he hadn’t, because Charmaine had funded him quite adequately thus far. Though if he were honest, he would admit he had been with Charmaine purely for the joy of her soft, warm flesh, and the beauty of her smile.

Almost. The money hadn’t hurt either.

Damn his cock. He just couldn’t say it enough.

“Tell it to the judge.”

He tried to.

The judge was unmoved and unimpressed.

“Mr. Hanover, do you refute the claims of the Marquess de Soppe that his wife’s jewelry was stolen from her bedchamber last night?”

“I am not refuting that her jewelry was stolen, merely that I was the one who stole it.” Drake stood in his hand irons and leg shackles and stared down the judge, who was probably all of ninety pounds soaking wet. This man was to decide his fate? The entire situation was sheer lunacy.

He almost wanted to laugh when he pictured the Marquess bounding into Charmaine’s bedchamber the night before, discovering his wife was not suffering from the headache as she’d claimed, but was actually playing horse and rider with Drake. How the man could have noticed missing jewelry in the midst of so much bare flesh and flung clothing was beyond him. But if the old idiot had Charmaine in all her naked glory in front of him and the first thing he noticed was her ears, then it was no wonder his wife had sought entertainment elsewhere.

“He says he saw you take them. That you stole them like the lying, thieving bastard Englishman that you are.”

Drake’s anger overrode common sense. “The only thing I stole from the Marquess was his place in his wife’s bed.”

A collective gasp went up in the courtroom, which was crowded with officials, guards, curiosity seekers, the Marquess himself, and a wretched few who were merely huddling in corners as a means to escape the vicious March winds outside.

“That’s outrageous!” The Marquess wheezed, struggling to rise from his chair, his buttons threatening to burst.

Drake raised an eyebrow. “Not as outrageous as that waistcoat, old boy. Canary yellow is not your color.”

“You will face front!” the judge demanded.

The door at the back of the courtroom opened. Charmaine walked in with her maid, her eyes anxious. Drake locked gazes with her, knowing the question was in his own eyes. Was she involved in this set-up?

She smiled sweetly at him, her hand rushing to her throat in relief. For his safety? Possibly. Then she touched her forehead, rubbing it, frowning at him. It was signal, he just didn't understand what she was trying to tell him. She was going to fake a headache? A faint? Help him escape?

Charmaine pointed her index finger at him, than touched her forehead again. Drake instinctively touched his own forehead and his fingers came away covered in rusty flakes. Fabulous. He was standing in court with stripes from his cell bars on his flesh. Though it beat a beetle crawling around on him down south.

The irritating and emaciated judge spoke again, and Drake turned to face front, his stomach rumbling from hunger.

“Confess to this theft, Mr. Hanover, and we shall show mercy. Are you guilty?”

Drake didn't even hesitate. They had clearly made their decision already, and if he were to swing he might as well leave this life the way he had led it — with charm and a silver tongue. “The only thing I am guilty of is losing my heart.”

He turned and winked at Charmaine. She flushed and giggled, quickly hiding her smile behind her hand.

Trollop or not, he'd had fun with her. Fancied himself in love for a moment or two.

“Gentleman, haven't we all been fooled into making mistakes by the fairer sex? But surely stupidity is not a crime. If it were, we'd all be strung up for falling for a pretty face in a skirt. Any one of you could be standing in my position, facing a similar fate, if lust were declared criminal.”

He was about to wax poetic on what the turn of an ankle or an artfully displayed décolleté could do to a man's common sense, when the judge slammed a

gigantic gavel down on the stand, making half of the courtroom jump. Gavel nearly bigger than the judge, Drake suspected someone was compensating for his small stature. Very small stature.

“Stupidity is not a crime, but stealing is, for which you are found guilty and sentenced to deportation.”

No swinging? That was excellent news. And he could stomach a trip across the Channel back to England if it meant avoiding a neck stretching. He would just have to maintain distance from his father and set up house in London instead of the country. Which was preferable anyway, as female marks were in higher numbers in the city.

“To the colony of Louisiana.”

Pardon? That language barrier was raising its head again because Drake could have sworn the judge had just said he had to go to...

“A ship leaves on the morrow for the Port of New Orleans, and you will be on it, Mr. Hanover.”

Bloody hell.



To be continued...

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