

Raven's Conception

A short story

By

Aaron Bunce

The air was stagnant. Not a wisp of breeze could be discerned. Not to cool Raven's fevered skin, nor to drive away the hordes of buzzing, biting insects. She picked her way through the trees, the jagged-edged leaves grating against her skin like a hundred rapiers. The island felt asleep around her. There was naught noise but a gentle moaning, as if the island itself respired of dream's abundant promises.

The shot split the air. The musket ball cut through the supple leaves and delicate ferns, impacting the palm tree next to her in a shower of fragmented lead and splintered wood. Raven, as she was so named for the black color of her hair, went into flight. Her boots felt like they floated across the ground as the angry shouts of unsavory men threatening wick deeds filled the air. She knew the truth of every vow and promise keen enough, after all, she had, for a time, been one of them, one of the crew.

The vegetation peeled open before her, and the night sky blossomed. The moon hung over the water, flirting with its reflection in the Caribbean's cool blue water. The island sloped down to her left, back down toward the beach and the water, but her head instinctively swiveled to the right. She pushed onto a trail heading further up the volcanic cap, the rumbling, smoking mountain known as hell's gullet. She had been up this path many times over the past fortnight. It was different this time, now that she alone had the map.

The angry shouts sounded closer than ever. She knew they were gaining ground, but she was so very close now. Her foot snagged on a bramble root and she staggered. She could see her destination, and with great determination, managed to keep her feet beneath her long enough to stumble through the veil of scraggly plants. Raven lay there, flat on her back, afraid to breathe for the sound it would make, yet terrified not to move at the same time. Her arm shook as she held her musket up to the curtain of plants and waited. In a moment the sound of angry men filled the air just outside. She could smell the rum on their breath as they ran by, not a man taking notice of the cave entrance cleverly concealed before her.

She was up and moving again, stopping in the faint pools of light that cascaded down from the ancient lava tubes above her. She turned right, and then left as she weaved her way through the ancient tunnels. She read the map on the run, daring a peak to confirm that she was close. She turned and then was falling. She felt her trousers snag and tear, her shirt pulled up over her head and the grit of rock scraped against her bare skin as darkness swallowed her. She was sliding, feet first, and then head first. Around and around she went, spiraling down on a horrific, tumbling descent, until finally, with a suffocating crash, the water embraced her.

Sputtering, gagging, and cursing every oath she could think of, Raven managed to get her feet beneath her. The water wasn't deep. It barely came up past her waist, and even in the darkness she could see clear through to the bottom. She waded forward, her attention now locked forward on a most glorious sight. It was what they were told they would never find. *It's a story, a myth...an old pirate legend* so many had told her, chortling all the while. It was what others said should never be found. "The devil's due in gold is a man's wits to Davy Jone's locker, surely sent!" Was the old song, but she wouldn't believe that such a treasure was cursed; only lost.

Raven pulled herself up onto the rocks and wiped her face on her sleeve. She took in its graceful lines, and its stout hull and mast. She jumped up and wrapped her fingers around the ledge and pulled herself through the open canon-port and onto the gun deck and stood up. She had found it, she had found the *Neustra Senora de la Concepcion*. Raven had found her treasure!