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CHAPTER ONE

An explosion echoed across the harbor, sending bits of flaming debris soaring into the night sky.

Edward Talbot yawned. "I thought we were finished for the evening."

"Parently not." An older, portly man rose from his chair in the corner of the thatched hut that passed for a tavern and tottered over, blocking the view. "Will ye take another?" He waved toward the pewter tankard on the table. "Seems we shall be kept awake for some time yet."

Edward stood, peering around the man toward the distant east end of harbor. He was confident Hardey would keep the *Osprey* well clear of the hulk Charles Vane had set aflame at the west harbor entrance, but all the same he couldn't help but look. Then he turned back to his new companion.

"Be my guest. Or rather, I shall be yours."

The man grinned as he heaved his ponderous bulk into a chair that creaked in protest. Even in the dim candlelight, it was clear his garments were those of a wealthy gentleman, but his unkempt gray hair, unshaven face and swaggering gait counterbalanced any pretense to gentility.

He looked like a pirate.

As did nearly everyone else in Nassau. Since the English crown had elected not to send a governor to Providence, pirates had made the island their own, with the decrepit town of Nassau their capital. But all that was about to change, as the presence of the warships in the harbor testified. He had