



## Meet Lynne Marie!

Lynne Marie started writing in the mid-1990s. She grew up in the state of South Carolina and has lived and worked in the coastal region with her husband for over 30 years. As an amateur historian, she has spent uncounted research hours scouring through many coastal libraries, as well as touring numerous plantations and historic sites collecting data. She has even taken low-level flights over the Waccamaw and Santee River Basins in order to view the layout of the rice fields, which are still visible from the air.

She and her husband have raised a family of three girls and all have obtained college degrees. With a mutual love of history, they still plan family trips with their daughters to Colonial Williamsburg and attend historic events dressed in period clothing. The only baby left at home is a black Lab mix who has quickly become spoiled rotten.

In her spare time, Lynne enjoys working on large and small projects in a type of faux stained glass. She also loves to cook, especially Southern comfort foods, and has recently started collecting exotic orchids.

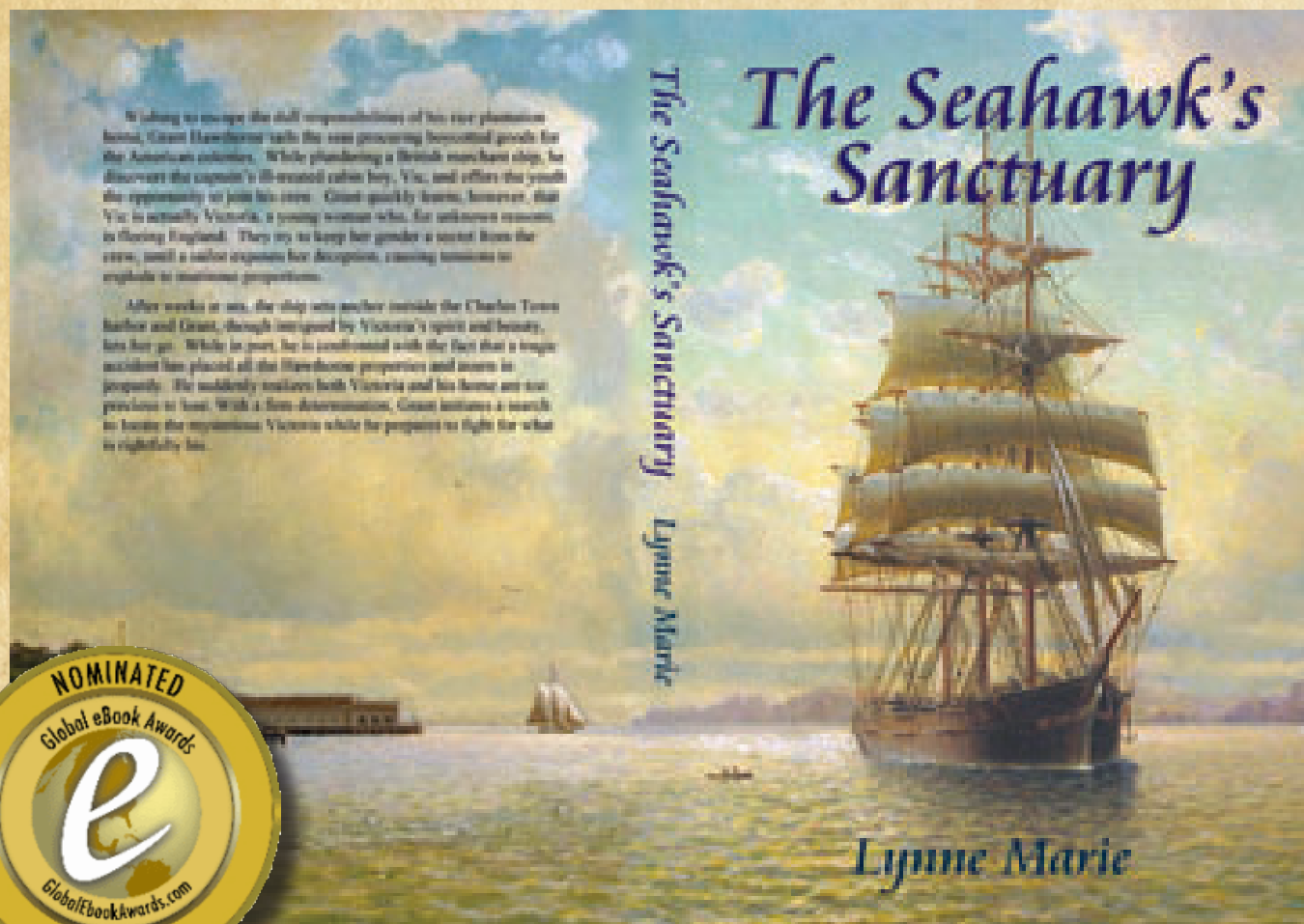




I'm pleased to announce that  
*The Seahawk's Sanctuary*  
 has been nominated for the  
*Global eBook Award*  
 in two categories:  
*Best eBook Cover* and  
*Historical Literature - Fiction.*

I invite you to enjoy a look at  
 the book's cover here as well as  
 the opening of the book!

— Lynne Marie



# *The Seahawk's Sanctuary: Chapter One*

*Atlantic Ocean, 1772*

*Near the Twentieth Latitude North*

**P**irates. Now she had to contend with pirates. Victoria wondered at the magnitude of her bad luck as she tried to gulp down her fear.

Her fate seemed hell-bent to steadily progress from one terror-filled nightmare to the next. The thundering barrage of cannon fire had finally stopped, and Victoria thought it miraculous that the ship was still afloat. The deep coughs of pistol fire and pounding of feet as the pirates swarmed over the decks echoed throughout the cabin. Contempt narrowed her eyes as they swept over the British captain's inert form lying on the floor. Her gaze fastened on the cabin door, drawn by the sudden jiggling of the latch. She strained to make out the pirates' short, heated debate before they resorted to brute strength as a means to gain entry. Victoria cursed softly at the bite of the shackles as she frantically tried, once again, to work her wrists free.

Victoria's hopes rose with her gaze when the blows to the door ceased. In the eerie silence, resounding words echoed throughout the cabin. "What's the problem down here?" demanded a voice of authority.

"He's locked and braced the door, Captain."

"Find Buck. Seems I have need of his special talents. The upper deck is secure, so you others look for stragglers below. I'll handle this."

Her brief optimism at the pirates' inability to gain entry vanished when she heard their retreating footsteps, accompanied by deep chuckles. Then, the richly-toned voice commanded her attention. "Come now, Captain, open the door. We do not intend to harm you or the crew. We only want your cargo and valuables. You're only prolonging the inevitable."

Victoria did not dare to make a sound.

Impatient knocking on the door

jolted her. "I'll give you five minutes—then we'll break it down."

She desperately tried to span the distance separating her from the British captain's lifeless bulk in an attempt to reach the key he always kept on his person. The unrelenting hold of the manacles and the short chain connected to them allowed her access only to the immediate vicinity of the bunk, making the feat impossible. Glancing down at the linen shirt she had been reduced to wearing by the British captain's debauchery, Victoria lashed out with all her pent-up anger. "God will surely condemn you to Hell," she hissed, landing a vicious kick in the captain's side. Her gaze then focused on his sea chest, and, drawn by the bounty of clothes within, she hurried toward the end of the bunk. She winced as she shifted the chest, causing it to scrape loudly against the floor.

Violent pounding announced the end of her reprieve. "Time's up, Captain. Unlock it now or we break it down!" A long moment ticked by after his final demand. "Okay, Buck, it's all yours."

A reverberating blow fell upon the door, quickly followed by another, and the constant barrage spurred her to action, for the pirates' entry now seemed inevitable. Flinging open the chest's lid, she searched through the contents. She would disguise herself, and the bulky clothing would be to her advantage. The oak brace was now groaning in protest as the unrelenting blows continued to fall. Plopping down onto the floor, she jerked up the knee-length pants, which she then secured with a length of leather. Perspiration began to soak the shirt as she stuffed it loosely into the pants. Her hands shook with fear, yet she managed to pull a pair of coarse stockings on over her calves. With clumsy fingers, she fastened them in place before thrusting her feet into an oversized pair of black buckled shoes.

The shattering blows continued. Crawling forward, she sighed heavily in relief when she discovered a stock-

ing cap at the very bottom of the chest. As the door groaned, threatening to give way, she ran her fingers through her hair before twisting it into a tight coil. Victoria quickly plucked something from a knothole, and the flash of gold and pearls caught the light as she tossed them into the cap before tucking in the mass of auburn-colored hair.

The final blow came, the brace screeching as it shattered and fell to the floor. With the sound of her heart pounding in her ears, Victoria pulled the cap securely into place. She snatched a waistcoat and jacket into her lap just as the cabin door splintered open, its hinges hanging uselessly. She scuttled backwards as the gaping hole was filled with the largest black man Victoria had ever seen. Poised for battle, he held a flintlock in one hand and a cutlass in the other. The whites of his eyes showed when his gaze encountered the captain's body lying on the floor. Warily, he backed out to allow another to enter first.

The next man, presumably the pirate captain, appeared in the doorway, a pistol in each hand and a triumphant smile fading as he scanned the captain's quarters. "Keep everyone else out of here!" he ordered the black man.

"Aye, Captain," came the muted response.

A small gasp escaped Victoria when the pirate captain came into full view. While Captain Hedgegrove had been old and fat, this man was young, tall, and muscular. His broad shoulders were accented by lean hips and a flat stomach. With every movement, a sword dangling from his hip swayed to caress him with its touch. Black boots covered his legs and ended in a flare at mid-thigh. Tight dark blue pants and a spotless white shirt with ruffles at the sleeves completed his ensemble. The ties of his shirt were loosened in the front, revealing a firm chest lightly covered with dark hair.

Victoria's gaze slowly rose. Long, raven-colored hair, tied at the nape, de-



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finished his handsomely chiseled face and tight jaw. The intensity of his penetrating, dark gaze was formidable in the way it seemed to assimilate everything. He did not resemble the descriptions of pirates Victoria had read about, and, despite herself, she found him quite dashing. She sat motionless, waiting as his eyes discovered and focused on her with an alarming intensity.

Captain Grant Hawthorne shrewdly inspected the large quarters. The room was a scene straight out of Dante's Hell: drawers, charts, and clothes were strewn about in wild disarray. Amid the chaos was the captain, sprawled out on the floor, a dagger hilt protruding from his back. His second sweeping glance acknowledged the small form huddled on the floor near the bunk. Tucking one pistol into the back of his belt, he entered the room, cautiously stepping over the captain's body as he advanced toward what appeared to be the captain's cabin boy.

During his careful approach, Grant became aware of the boy's abused condition. Sporting a blackened eye, bruised face, and a split lip, the boy had obviously been repeatedly subjected to

brutal treatment. Deciding the youth may still be armed, he paused. "Come here, boy," he said softly, strategically keeping the remaining distance between them. "I'll not harm you."

"Best be careful, Captain. That body you just stepped over didn't fall on that knife," Buck said from the doorway.

"If the boy's face is any indication of the man's cruelty, he deserved it."

Victoria took heart in the pirate captain's last words. She might live through this ordeal after all. She could hardly believe her ruse had worked.

"What's your name, boy?"

Victoria felt her eyes widen in fear and her mouth go dry when she realized a verbal response was unavoidable.

"Are you ready to leave this ship?" he said softly as he squatted down. "I'll take you aboard mine, if you wish. I guarantee no one will touch you."

"Where are you bound?" Her voice sounded strange to her ears as she lowered its pitch. And once again, hope began to swell within her at the enticing thought of leaving the ship.

A slow, lazy smile spread across the pirate's lips at the sound of the rolling English lilt. "Once our hold is filled, we're bound for the American colonies."

"Which colony?"

"That I won't say, but it will be warmer than the sea or England's prisons . . . if the crew lets you live that long."

Knowing the truth of his words, Victoria had no option. "I guess I'm bound for the colonies, then."

"We have to call you something.

What's your name?"

"It's . . . Vic, sir."

"Well, come along, Vic. It won't take my men long to transfer the cargo. Is there anything of value in here?"

"There's a small strongbox hidden behind a plank near the desk." When Victoria raised her right hand to indicate the proper wall, the length of chain leading to the bunk clinked. Her blood-encrusted wrist, bleeding freely again, came into view.

"My God!" the pirate captain exclaimed. "Buck, get in here and relieve this cabin of its bounty."

"Aye, aye, sir." The large black man entered and began tearing apart the wooden boards of the wall.

"Do you know where he keeps the key?"

"Yes, he usually keeps it in his coat pocket. I would have gotten it myself, except he staggered forward before falling."

Moving to the captain's side and extracting the knife, Grant heard a low moan escape the British captain as he rolled him over. "Well, he's still alive," he stated, flinging the knife aside.

"Unfortunate."

This riveted his gaze back to her before he started searching through the pockets. After locating the key, the pirate captain returned to release her. Working it in the lock, he asked, "Was he afraid you'd abandon ship? Where would you go in the middle of the Atlantic? The sharks would have surely found you in no time."

"I would have preferred that fate to what awaited me at his hands. I paid for my passage, but once away from land, he placed me in bondage."

An exclamation of delight filled the cabin when the Negro pirate found the small chest. "I have it, Captain!"

"All right, let's go. Are you ready?"

Victoria nodded; she was glad to leave this ship and all her hideous experiences behind. She stood and followed the two pirates out of the room. Quickly ducking into her cabin, she shrugged into the waistcoat and quickly buttoned it before donning the jacket and gathering a small bundle of her possessions. Victoria left all her gowns; she would have no need for them in her current disguise. For the present, her only concern was survival and continued deception.

Climbing up onto the main deck, Victoria drank in the bustle of activity. The two ships were lashed together with a series of large ropes. From time to time, the spars and rigging would briefly collide and rub against each

other before easing apart. A solid red flag, the signature of a pirate, fluttered in the breeze.

The pirate captain was silently surveying his seamen's progress. Tripods had been erected on the deck of the merchant ship to transfer the cargo out of the hold. It took several men to lift the supplies held together in nets and swing them over the breach between the two ships. Once on the opposite deck, the cargo was quickly unloaded.

She knew that the captain was aware of her presence the moment she set foot on deck. She saw his eyes narrow as he watched her pause before she hurried to join him. "Ah, here's the lad now," he announced to the two men flanking him. "I thought you might have changed your mind."

Not trusting her voice under the piercing scrutiny of the men, Victoria shook her head in denial while clutching the small bundle closer. His dark brow rose in a question. "These are mine, sir. I stole nothing. I only want to take what is mine."

"Fair enough, but hardly a pirate's behavior," he said with a teasing smile. "No matter, we're sure to make a proper pirate out of you. I'm certain we can make room for one more and his personal belongings." He turned as Buck suddenly appeared and gave him a curt nod. "The men are almost finished," he said, still addressing her. "Go wait on the quarterdeck. We'll be underway soon."

Victoria nodded and rapidly moved away to the designated spot, glad to escape the pirates' fierce looks.

"Are you certain about taking the boy, Captain? He could endanger us in the future." Sam Roberts was a seasoned sailor with a firm, robust body. In his weathered face were keen blue eyes. Brown hair heavily streaked with gray belied his age of only thirty-five years. Sam possessed the natural gift of diplomacy, which had won him the respect of the crew, and he often acted as an intermediary between crew members and their temperamental captain.

The captain leveled a smoldering

gaze at Sam. "Didn't you hear? The boy wishes to go with us. Just look at the results of his kind treatment by the captain of this ship," he added sarcastically. "And while he denies it, he's most likely a caught stowaway, for no captain would molest a paying passenger in such a way. He'll perform the duties of my cabin boy and assist the cook. I can hardly leave him here—he and the captain have had a permanent parting of the ways. They'd hang the lad from the yardarm before the day is through."

"What did he do to the captain?" Sam asked curiously.

"I found the boy chained in the captain's quarters. Unfortunately, he sought revenge by his own hands. He tried to kill the captain with the help of a well-placed knife."

"Good God, Grant!" the second man, Jeremy Smythe, interjected. "He has injured the captain and you want to bring him onboard with us?!"

"The man deserved it! How many others has he mistreated in a similar manner? I'll be responsible for the boy."

"All right, Captain," Sam said. "We'll do it your way."

"Well, it is my ship, Sam. Come along, men," he said while rubbing his hands together. "Shall we take our leave?" The men nodded their agreement. "Buck, have the sails been properly treated?"

"Aye, sir. They've been stripped and furled. It will take them a day, probably two, to make the necessary repairs."

"Bring the master gunner and first mate on deck. Put them in a dinghy with only one oar and set them adrift. By the time they row back to the ship, release everyone, and treat the captain, we'll be well underway and out of range."

"Aye, Captain, that we will." The black pirate smiled, showing a set of large white teeth, before leaving to cheerfully complete his orders.

Grant turned to address Jeremy, who had remained silent except for his earlier outburst. "Once we get underway, I would appreciate it if you would

see to the boy's injuries. The wounds caused by the manacles are particularly foul looking."

"Certainly, Grant, anything you say. Maybe I should check on the captain as well. He'll never admit the boy is responsible and we'll be blamed."

"No. I doubt the blade hit anything vital. His own surgeon will see to him."

"I'm glad this is our last voyage. Never did care much for this piracy business."

Grant gave the man an exasperated look. "You know as well as I that the British have forced us into this! Their unreasonable demands and taxes have made it nearly impossible for the less fortunate to survive. If they would give us fair market value, or allow us free trade with other European countries, none of this would be necessary."

The tall Negro reappeared at his side with a wide grin on his face. "It's done, Captain, and the last of the cargo is coming out of the hold now."

"Good. Make ready to cast off. I'll make certain everything is secure and the crew doesn't break out too quickly." Grant turned, abruptly leaving them.

Victoria watched as the pirate captain turned toward her and, with quick, even strides, closed the gap between them. When he reached her side, his orders were sharp and concise. "Do not move from this spot."

She nodded, but he did not wait to see her compliance. With an air of assurance that any direct order from him would be obeyed, he was already heading below deck. She watched as the remaining pirates rapidly started to evacuate the merchant ship. They scrambled across the lines spanning the two ships, then began casting off the ropes holding them together.

She stared in awe at the delicate maneuvering as the two began to separate at the bows. As the ships parted, the name, painted in gold on the pirate's ship, sparkled in the afternoon sun: Avenger. She briefly wondered who or what he was avenging.

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