



# The Pirate Woman

**Aylward Edward Dingle**

Aylward Edward Dingle

# The Pirate Woman

## **PUBLISHER NOTES:**

Quality of Life, Freedom, More time with the ones you Love.

Visit our website: [LYFREEDOM.COM](http://LYFREEDOM.COM)

# Chapter

## 1 THE CAVE OF TERRIBLE THINGS.

A great unrest brooded over mountain and forest; the blue Caribbean lay hushed and glaring, as if held in leash by a power greater than that which ordered its daily ebb and flow.

Men moved or stood beneath the trees on the cliffside in attitudes of supreme awe or growing uneasiness, according to their kind: for among them were numbered Spaniard and Briton, creole and mulatto, Carib and octoroon, with coal-black negroes enough to outnumber all the rest—and it was upon these last that profound awe sat oppressively.

Apart, followed by a hundred furtive eyes, Dolores, daughter of Red Jabez, ranged back and forth before the mighty rock portals of the Cave of Terrible Things, like some magnificent tigress hedged with foes. Beyond those portals Red Jabez, Sultan of pirates, arbiter of life and death over the motley community, lay at grips with the grim specter to whom he had consigned scores far more readily than he now yielded up his own red-stained soul. Red Jabez was dying a death as hard as his lurid life had been.

Beyond those rock portals none save Jabez and Milo, the herculean Abyssinian slave, had ever passed. Dolores, next in line, was in ignorance as deep as her meanest slave, concerning what lay beyond the great mass of rock which formed the door, and which Milo alone could move. She knew, as did every one, that the great chamber of Red Jabez held some vast mystery; she suspected, as did the rest, that it concealed wealth beyond dreams; deep down in her soul she hoped that inviolate chamber held for her the means of emancipation; but of this hope, none knew save herself. For Queen of Night though the white men called her, Sultana though she was named with fear and submission by the blacks, though her power was second only to that of Red Jabez, and barely less than his, a canker gnawed at the heart of Dolores, the canker of a suspicion that her power was but a paltry power, her freedom but a caged freedom.

Somewhere beyond the great ocean that stretched away before her eyes lay a world she knew nothing of; yet since her earliest childhood her keen mind had told her that the silk with which she was clothed, the jewels that encrusted her dagger-hilt, the ships whose pillage had yielded up these things, must come from lands far distant, more desirable than the maroon country of Jamaica. More, her ears attuned to the whisper or roar of the sea, the sigh or shriek of the winds, carried to her the mutterings of men long held in leash, who now saw in their chieftain's death the realization of their own wild dreams of riches and

release. All these things told her that the great, strange world beyond the sea-line was something for her to strive for; not for the rabble who called her queen.

She paced back and forth, a splendidly lithe, glowing creature of beauty and passion, every movement a grace, each grace such as befitted a royal woman conscious of mental and physical perfection. Her hair surrounded her face and shoulders in a lustrous, rippling cloud, through which peeped a bare arm and breast stolen from the goddess of beauty; her tunic of quilted Chinese silk hung from one shoulder by a strap fashioned from the ribbon of the Star of Persia, and fastened by the star; her strong, slender waist was girdled with a heavy gold cord that supported a long, thin dagger, no toy, in a jeweled sheath; the hem of her single garment rang with gold sequins to the movement of her smoothly muscular knees; her high-arched feet were protected from thorns and shells by sandals of red leather.

As the moments passed, and no sign came from within the cave, Dolores restrained her impatience with increasing difficulty. The men scattered around were not of such stuff; they felt the impending crisis settle heavily upon them, and white and black alike drew together for the comfort of close touch. From time to time a hardier spirit uttered his thoughts aloud, yet always with a glance of uncertainty toward Dolores. They had reason to glance that way; for every man had tasted of the queen's justice, which rarely erred on the side of mildness; many of them had experienced her terrible competence to carry out a sentence in person. Of them all, not one but knew that in Dolores he owned as queen a woman who need yield nothing of prowess to any man: her knife was as swift, her round wrist as strong, her blazing violet-black eyes as sure as any among them. Not a man could ever forget the offending slave whom she had thrashed with her own hands, disdainingly assisting, until the wretch tore loose and fled screaming to the cliff to pitch headlong into the shark-infested sea; nor could they forget her unhesitating dive and terrific struggle to recover him and her completion of the interrupted punishment when she had brought him back.

Yet the stress proved too great, even in face of these memories, and a tall, powerful Spaniard, heavily earringed, handsome, with a swart, brutal beauty, delivered a scorching oath to the heavy air and exclaimed fiercely:

"A curse on this babe's play! Must men stand here like whipped curs until a slave commands us enter? Come! Who'll follow me past that door? I'll know what lies behind this mummery if I choke it from old Jabez's withered neck as he dies."

The man stepped forward two paces, glaring defiantly at Dolores, waiting for men to follow. An uneasy shuffling of feet was his only answer for a moment; then his eyes shifted with cooling ardor at sight of

Dolores. For a breath after he had ceased speaking, the girl stood like a splendid statue, except for the glitter of her eyes and a slight quivering of her limbs; it was as if she awaited some response; then her face relaxed into a contemptuous smile, and her crimson lips parted to reveal her even, gleaming teeth. She laughed, a rippling little laugh like the tinkle of steel links, and with a single gliding movement that permitted no avoidance she swept to within two feet of the now frightened ruffian.

"Yes? Yellow Rufe would choke words from a dying man!" she cried. "Nothing that lives and can stand on two feet is in danger from such as he. Peace, slavish dog!" she panted, flinging out a gleaming hand and seizing him by one earring. "Thus I mark curs that seek their food among the dead!" With the words Dolores's right hand flashed upward, knife-armed, and across Rufe's cheek glared a crimson cross; into his eyes leaped the fear of death.

"Now go!" she said imperiously, pushing him away. "Let no man forget that while the life is in Red Jabez he holds thy lives in pawn. When his spirit goes, ye shall reckon with me!"

Rufe staggered away, half incredulous that his punishment had fallen short of death. His companions led him apart with many a backward glance of apprehension at the authoress of his discomfiture, and a deep, sullen muttering rippled through the crowd. Dolores resumed her solitary pacing without another thought for the hardy rascal she had so swiftly and effectively softened. Her eyes were ever bent toward the great rock; her thoughts were centered on a vague, mysterious instinct which whispered to her that with her first admission into that frowning cavern the mantle of fierce old Red Jabez would fall upon her, and with it would come power that a Czar might envy! A Czar's power, indeed, but with all of a Czar's cares and more; for Czar never ruled over subjects like these.

A sudden hush fell upon the place; the mutterings ceased as if tongues were stricken stiff. Rufe, with his head now enwrapped in crossed bandages, stared toward the great rock with a wavering expression in his smoldering eyes, an expression that hovered between reluctant submission, reawakened cupidity, and dawning hope. Dolores stood motionless, imperious in every line and feature, her heavy eyelashes veiling the eagerness in her eyes, her red lips curved in royal indifference.

The great rock was turning.

Slowly, yet with the flawless regularity of a millwheel, the mass of stone was rolled upward and to one side; it rested at last on a ledge, balanced perfectly, ready to fall again at the touch of a finger; and in the aperture appeared the human agent of its opening.

Milo, the giant Abyssinian, guardian of the rock, custodian of the Cave of Terrible Things, bone of contention for the jealous and terror of the

strongest, filled the entrance with his colossal frame and looked out with a calm dignity that made the whites cringe with hatred. Slowly, with stately grace, the giant advanced until he stood before Dolores, and in his coal-black eyes shone the light of limitless devotion. He knelt, kissed the sequins on her tunic's hem, then, with both hands pressed to his forehead, he bowed his face to the earth at her feet.

"Rise, Milo," said Dolores, gently, and her breath caught painfully as she spoke. She knew what the slave came for; every man in that community of pirates, wreckers, escaped slaves, and convicts knew as well as she. All had awaited this moment, knowing when it came that the mystery of the cave would be a mystery no longer to at least one of them: all knew that the summons meant the passing of the old pirate who had brought them together, ruled them with blood and iron, and forced from them a homage none of them would render to his Maker.

"My Sultana, it is time," said Milo, rising and waiting. He needed to say no more.

"Lead me to my father, then," replied the girl, and stepped after the giant with sure step and resolute face, giving no heed to the renewed shuffling and congregating of her people, nor to Rufe, who again stood out before the rest and addressed them in fierce tones.

Dolores entered the great hewn-rock doorway and in spite of her stout heart and steel will she thrilled in every fiber. At the end of the frowning passage, whose ruby lamps but accentuated the gloom and imparted to it an infernal glow, lay the great chamber that only the chief might enter. What would she find there? Her father, yes, and dying! Otherwise this summons had never come. The death must be upon him now; the fierce old sea-king had held his throne-room inviolate through many bouts with the grim Reaper, knowing his own strength to conquer. But now he had called, and Dolores sought the unknown with a curiosity that beat down fear.

Behind her a heavy thud echoed along the rocky walls, and the outer light was cut off by the falling of the great stone. In a moment Milo stood beside her and, taking her hand in his, led her along the utterly invisible floor until she stood before a massive door. Her feet sank into the pile of heavy carpets; her nostrils quivered to the delicate odors of burning spices; at the top of the door a great jeweled lantern cast a rich, yellow light down the panels, and the girl gasped involuntarily at the sight revealed to her. Each panel was formed of scales that overlapped like a serpent's; the scales were roughly hammered gold and silver, richly chased, and studded thickly with gems—without any conjecture she knew them to be precious vessels that should have graced an altar, split, perhaps with a bloody cutlass, and beaten out into irregular plates to gratify some grim humor of the terrible old corsair in the long ago. Neither hinges, handle, lock, nor latch appeared on the surface; apparently the door was solidly embedded in the mighty rock itself. The

giant laid a hand on the side of the door-frame, and Dolores waited with impatience for admission. For all her schooled self-control her eyes glinted with astonishment when Milo stood aside and bowed low, saying:

"Enter, my princess!"

Without a sound the massive door had vanished, sliding up and out of sight in the dark recess of the roof, leaving smooth, steel-lined slots at sides and bottom that reflected the polish of scrupulous care. Dolores stifled her surprise, and moved toward the heavy velvet hangings which still barred her way. These, too, were swept aside with no visible effort, and the girl stood on the threshold of the chamber of mystery.



## Chapter

### 2 DOLORES RECEIVES HER DIADEM.

In a great canopied bed, taken from some rich looted Indiaman, Red Jabez lay motionless as an effigy in stone. His tall, powerful body was sharply outlined in coverings of silk and rare lace; the arms and crest of a ducal house were worked into the pillows that supported his massive head. His drawn, haggard face was surrounded and all but covered with a great mane of vivid red hair; his silken shirt, wide open at the neck, revealed a massive chest, whose tide of respiration had all but ceased to run. Only his eyes, fierce yet, held token of lingering life; it was as if the vital spark was concentrated into one final blaze of tremendous brilliancy.

The fierce eyes moved swiftly at Dolores's entrance, and one might have said a film of tenderness swept for an instant over the hard glint in them. It was gone as swiftly as it came, and the stare settled unwaveringly upon the stupefied girl. For stupefaction had gripped Dolores in that first entry into the great chamber. Her wildest dreams, and they had been at times fantastic, had never showed her anything measurably approaching the scene that smote her eyes now. For the moment death, Red Jabez, her destiny, everything melted into the visionary beyond and left her capable of no volition.

The great bed stood in the center of a vast cavern; sides, roof, floor, every inch of the rock itself bore proof of the handiwork of hundreds of cunning craftsmen; but the furnishings filled Dolores's eyes to the exclusion of all else. Divans and chairs, cabinets and tables carried the mind far away to the realm of emperors and kings; vases from China and Greece stood on stands of boule-work; a tall ebony-and-ivory clock-case, in which ticked sonorously a masterpiece of Peter Hele, stood between two gorgeous pieces of Gobelin tapestry. And around her and above, Dolores's amazed eyes lighted upon gems of the painter's art such as few collections might boast. The entire ceiling was covered with a colossal "Battle of the Amazons," by Rubens, each figure thrown out in startling distinctness, full of voluptuous life and action; the walls were mantled by vast golden frames holding the best of Titian, Correggio and Giorgione, Raphael and Ribera. And jewels flashed everywhere; cunningly placed lamps, themselves encrusted with the reddest of rubies, the subtlest of green emeralds, flooded walls and furnishings with a soft yet searching light which seemed to be carefully calculated to accentuate those things whose beauty demanded light, yet to leave the eye unwearied.

"The hour has struck, my Sultana," said Milo anxiously, and Dolores shook off the spell and approached the great bed. Red Jabez closed his eyes as she leaned over him, and his lips now alone gave evidence of life. The girl, reared among the wildest of desolate isolation, knowing no softening ties of family, her impulses and emotions those of a beautiful animal, and increasingly so because of her station among the rabble that called the dying man chief, stared down at her terrible parent without a trace of visible regret: rather in her eyes shone the triumph of a victor about to enter upon a conquered kingdom. But the red pirate was speaking, and she bent her ear to catch his words. It required no physician's knowledge to perceive in his damp face all the signs of imminent dissolution.

"Dolores, my traverse is run," whispered Jabez. The effort all but stole his breath. He paused; then summoning all the tremendous will that had dominated his frame when surging with strength, he told what he had to say in short sentences, nursing the flickering spark to force his speech. "Never leave here, girl. Let no man go, either. The world has forgotten me and all of us; but memory is tenacious—it will revive at a hint; every throat that pulses with hot life here—yes, my daughter, even your fair throat—was measured years ago—a rope awaits every one. But here—"

"Yes, father?" Dolores shivered in the pause; the silence chilled her. The giant Abyssinian stood at the head of the bed, and now moistened the dying lips with wine. Red Jabez strained convulsively, snatching at his throat, and resumed with weaker voice.

"Here I have been king; here you are queen; all these things you see, and many more, are yours; life and death are in your hands to give or withhold. Keep the steel hand, though you wear the glove, Dolores. You have learned power; with the greater power you take from this chamber, and with Milo, let nothing, no man, stir your fears. Keep this chamber as I have kept it; it is your strength; when danger threatens to beat you down, here you will find—"

The fluttering whisper ceased. The old pirate lay rigid. Dolores, having heard so much, yet so little, hovered over the bed in an ecstasy of unsatisfied hunger for more; Milo stood by, a magnificent statue in living bronze, his eyes set in a steady blaze on the face of his master. Once more the blue lips moved. Dolores darted down with eager ear, her hands clasped as if in supplication.

"Milo—tell," came the whisper, and with it went up the soul of Red Jabez to face a tribunal more dread than any earthly judge his body had eluded. And the tall clock ticked his knell.

Dolores flung herself down on the bed, patting the dead face with nervous fingers; but she was dry-eyed, no filial despair raised tumult in her breast, her pleading was for the impossible—for the dead lips to speak—and when she was refused her plea, she sprang from the couch in a paroxysm of royal fury:

"Now, by the powers of evil, he shall lie uncoffined until those secretive lips read me the riddle they have half told!" she cried, pacing between bed and wall with uplifted arms and hard, glittering eyes. She suddenly paused in her wild walk, turned swiftly, and reached the bedside with the same subtle, gliding sweep that had carried her before Yellow Rufe; it was a characteristic movement with her—a compound of the gliding dart of the tiger-shark and the silent-footed pounce of its jungle brother. Milo roused from his dejection and sprang from his knees with amazing promptitude, but he had yet to round the bed-foot when the splendid fury stood panting over the corpse.

"Speak!" she cried, shaking the coverlet savagely. Milo, with horror in his shining face, gently removed her hand, then stood before her with bowed head, his cavernous chest heaving wildly.

"Fool! Leave me!" she snapped, and struck the slave with all her savage force on the cheek. Milo's face turned gray for a flashing instant, then the doglike devotion that filled his heart shone through his eyes, and he knelt at the furious girl's feet, his head to the ground. In a moment he stood up and, laying a hand reverently upon Dolores's shaking shoulders, he gazed deep into her eyes. She shivered again at the uncanny hint of volcanic might effused by the giant—volcanic, yet quiescent for the moment. His lips opened to speak; and she sprang to the reaction. Now a fresh fury seized her at the slave's temerity; she flung off his hand, and snatched forth her dagger.

"Strike, Sultana," said Milo simply. He drew aside the strap of his leathern tunic, baring his heart. "Strike, but first suffer thy slave to release thee from this tomb."

"Release? Tomb? What talk is this?" gasped Dolores, her dagger held poised aloft, her lips quivering.

"A tomb it is if thy servant falls, Sultana. None save I can open the great door. Close it? Yes, any might close it. Come, I will lead thee out of this awful presence; then at the gate thou shalt send Milo to his master who loved him."

Slowly Dolores slipped her dagger into the sheath, and her face was bowed in confusion. All her life, the giant slave had tended her, guarded her steps and her sleep, taught her the exercises that had made her feared by all the turbulent crew outside; and she was now permitted the saving grace of remembrance. She gave him her hand, and allowed him to place it upon his head, always his favorite means of expression when she followed an outburst of rage with contrition; and in softer tone she begged for an answer to the riddle that had been left with her.

"Come, Sultana," Milo said, once more laying a hand on her shoulder, this time without resentment from her. "Thy father, the Red Chief, left much to be told; I will tell thee all, but not now. Patience, princess," he pleaded, catching the warning glint in her eyes, "dost thou hear nothing? Listen attentively—no, not in here, outside—bend thy ear to

this tapestry; 'tis before a cunning sounding stone through which voices may well be heard on the cliffside. Listen."

Dolores listened with bad grace, for she regarded this as a subterfuge of the giant's, and resentment was very ready to rise in her again. But in a moment her indifference vanished; she grew alert; her body tensed, and her limbs quivered; the glitter of a queen in righteous anger lighted her eyes, and she raised an unnecessary hand to impress silence upon the slave.

"Hast hear this before now?" she demanded in a vibrant whisper.

"Since thou entered, Sultana. It could be nothing but rebellion; yet was I loath to burden my chief with this trouble in his hour of passage. But I know now that it has risen to heights which demand swift action; therefore I have made thee aware of it."

"'Tis that villain Rufe again!" muttered Dolores, still pressing her ear against the tapestry. The murmur of a hundred voices came clearly to her, and above all sounded the high-raised shout of one who harangued the rest. At periods the murmuring became a howl, and the triumphant note in it left scant room for doubt as to the nature of the address. The girl, faced with the responsibility of decided action, no longer able to depend on the wisdom and terrible power of Red Jabez, stepped from the wall with panting heart and parted lips, but with no trace of fear. Uncertainty moved her; uncertainty as to the resources of the great chamber, whose mysteries had scarcely begun to unfold for her ere the curtain was dropped again. Her stout spirit decided for her.

"Come, lead me out, Milo," she ordered, drawing herself royally erect and slipping her dagger around nearer her hand. "We must cool that rabble before the fire spreads further. Take a weapon, open the door, and follow me."

"It is the decision of a fit daughter of my chief," replied Milo, his great frame expanding to the bounding energy that surged through him. Unknown to her, his eyes had never left Dolores while she was making her decision; now joy and ardor suffused and transfigured him. Slave he was, yet it was he who looked the royal part in that instant.

"Wait but a breath," he said, and reached in two gigantic strides a massive oaken chest heavily fastened with wrought iron. Lifting the lid with reverence, he took out a plain gold circlet and returned to Dolores.

"Thy father bade me make this and keep it until thou wast my Sultana, indeed," he said. He raised the heavy, dull-gold band, and placed it upon Dolores's brow with the courtly homage of a born noble. It fitted to perfection—as indeed it should, since the loving fingers that had fashioned it had crept around the girl's sleeping head many times to that end—and feminine vanity would not permit Dolores to ignore the fit. She stepped over to a long gilt-framed mirror, and her beautiful face grew dark and her violet eyes dusky at the glorious reflection that gazed out at her.

"It is well, Milo; I thank thee," she smiled. "Now to scatter the rats that gnaw at my walls. Lead out quickly."

Milo entered the passage, raising the plated door and letting it fall after them. He disdained to carry a weapon; but Dolores was content, for she had witnessed what those huge hands could do. As they approached the great stone at the entrance, the sounds outside rang through the corridor, and the sharp reverberations that accompanied them at intervals told of an assault on the rock itself with pikes, crowbars, or other smaller rocks. Milo stooped to the sill of the rock, and placed his hands beneath it.

"Stand away," he whispered, and strained his arms. "Let thy servant go out and silence this clamor—"

"Open quickly!" she interrupted him, imperiously. "It is not for the slave to precede the sovereign. Peace, and open."

Her hand was on her dagger, her head was raised proudly; every inch and line of her figure irradiated splendid strength and surety; Milo heaved at the rock, and smiled blissfully. This was indeed how he had dreamed of his Sultana when she should come into her own.

He heaved steadily, and the great rock rose from one side, rolling up and up until it balanced on the ledge; but Milo knew there was some agency at work that hindered the raising of it; never before had it been a task to bring sweat to his brow, and now he dripped from every pore. The rock refused to balance without his hand upon it, and he dared not take his shoulder away to look over the top lest it fall and crush him. He cast an appealing look toward Dolores, who was impatiently waiting for him to stand clear, and she stepped past him to the outside. She was greeted with a roar of derision that echoed far down to the sea.

"Peace, dogs of the devil!" she cried with one hand upraised. A roaring guffaw answered her. Then a burly ruffian, one-eyed and marked by a great cutlas-scar that ran from his chin across his broken nose and ended somewhere among the roots of his hair, stepped forward with a smirk of confidence, and made a mock curtsy.

"Queen o' the pirates, we salute ye!" he said. Then threw away all pretense, and swore a ripping curse to the destination of his soul. "Come, my girl," he shouted, "the game's played to a finish. Th' old buck is dead, an' we want some o' them pretties he hid away inside. You're a nice gal, I don't deny, and we ain't going to harm ye if ye don't hinder us; but we ain't playin' kings an' queens no more. Come now, let the big feller take us in, and say no more about it, for have our fling, we will."

The mob had edged nearer, until now they surged around the entrance so close to Dolores that she felt the breath of the leaders. She noticed with sharp wonderment that Yellow Rufe was not among the foremost; but she was given no time to surmise, for the mob pressed on until she was forced either to risk an advance or give ground. A little shock rippled through her when she turned swiftly to see how Milo