

# THE SUBLIME AND SPIRITED VOYAGE OF ORIGINAL SIN

*by*  
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## CHAPTER ONE

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As the sailor's dirty finger squeezed the trigger, the blunderbuss exploded, scattering shot and smoke in all directions. An instant later the blade of a cutlass, steeped in blood, pierced his abdomen. He toppled backward, clearly surprised, the crimson fluid flooding the ship's deck.

Ellis Churchill crouched and jerked his cutlass from the dying seaman's gut. "Bloody bastard," he spat, wiping the blood off his prized weapon and onto the British naval uniform of the man he had just run through.

He took in the rest of the ship's deck and at last saw no movement. The Royal Navy had caught up to *Original Sin* with a faster, more diminutive sloop, and her small crew had boarded them with relative speed, though a few well-placed cannon blasts had certainly cut into the size and power of their attack.

"Churchill!" someone called urgently from within the captain's quarters, and he dashed over, cutlass at the ready. Crossing the threshold of the room, he saw Captain Malvern badly wounded, his head resting in the lap of his daughter Gayle.

"He's taken some shot to his chest." Gayle's voice was filled with panic. "Have we dispatched the navy?"

"We have." Churchill dropped to his knees to examine the captain's chest wounds. "Neptune's balls. This looks bad."

"Go get Poole. Tell him to prepare for surgery. Father's losing blood fast."

Churchill grimaced. “Poole is dead.”

“Buggar!” Gayle tried to apply pressure to her father’s wounds, though they continued to ooze blood liberally. “Bring me whoever is left and healthy.”

Churchill scrambled back out to the open deck of *Original Sin* and quickly assessed the results of their devastating battle with the Royal Navy. Many were wounded, but he commanded two of the more able-bodied seamen to follow him. Churchill knew that he and these two crewmen—Abernathy and Dowd—would have to find a new surgeon, one who could keep the captain from bleeding to death.

Gayle wiped her forehead on the sleeve of her linen shirt and cursed softly. This had been the worst attack on their ship that she could recall. When they had caught wind that the Royal Navy was patrolling the eastern Florida coast, no doubt devising a plan to invade this Spanish-ruled territory, her father had unsuccessfully tried to elude them, hoping that once night had fallen they could dissolve into the fog and steal safely away. Instead, before the sun had completely set, the navy had spotted and overtaken them.

Churchill and his two recruits appeared in the captain’s quarters. “Is the navy sloop salvageable?” Gayle asked as she packed her father’s wounds with more cotton cloth to stanch the loss of blood.

“She’s hurtin’, ma’am,” Abernathy, a seasoned pirate who loved his rum, answered. “But we can get her up to speed, I’d wager. Her sails and masts are mostly intact.”

“Good. I know this battle has taken quite a toll on us, but the life of the captain is a higher price than I’m willing to pay.” Gayle glanced through the open door and squinted at the horizon. “The sun is already setting, and we’re too far out to take the skiff. Take whoever you need to man the *Abigail Lee* and obtain a doctor from the mainland. Leave me the rest of the wounded and I’ll tend to them as best I can while you’re gone.”

“You’re leaving yourself a sittin’ duck,” Dowd, a dark, stocky fellow, asserted. “I’ll not leave the cap’n here with naught but a woman and a pack of wounded men to defend him.”

“What would you have me do?” Gayle asked. “*Original Sin* cannot sail into harbor crippled, even in the dead of night. If we stay here, our chances of remaining unmolested are greater.”

“She’s right.” Churchill sounded resigned. “We’ll grab a few more

lads and be off. We won't come back without help for the captain. You have my word on it."



It was well after dusk and past time for Dr. Phillip Farquar to finish up for the night. He drew his pocket watch out of his waistcoat and examined it. Yes, he was definitely done for the day. No more house calls to the populace and no more admitting sick visitors into his home. All these simple Spaniards did was whine and complain about their conditions, when he had things to do and places to go. Public service was such a burden. He sighed loudly.

Damn his father for insisting that he trade his life of entitlement for this parade of open lesions and gout. Phillip still recalled his parent's horrifying final words on the subject. "Until you can learn to care for people as much as you care for a bloody farthing, you'll never inherit so much as a lump of my spittle."

Had Phillip known that a doctor saw such disgusting things, he might have chosen to be a blacksmith instead, but he worried the physical labor might chap his skin.

Now half of his bargain with his father was completed. He had secured a position (though hopefully a temporary one) as a physician in San Augustin, Florida, after being unceremoniously dropped not far off the eastern seaboard and set adrift by an angry British ship captain who, in Phillip's assessment, lacked complete breeding and judgment. After all, any reasonable person would have understood that amputating the captain's diseased penis was the only viable course of action. It made perfect sense.

At any rate, instead of arriving in the Province of Carolina as planned, he was placed in a skiff with his belongings and left to drift for several days. Based on the horrible things he had heard about the Spanish, when he realized he finally had made landfall in Spanish territory, he was worried that he would be instantly killed and eaten. It was fortunate that once he was able to help the inhabitants of San Augustin understand that he was a doctor, they were interested enough in his services to ignore his nationality—just as his desire for food, shelter, and wine helped him ignore theirs.

To fulfill the second part of the bargain, he now had to marry and

create an heir, a surprisingly challenging task. These Spaniards simply didn't appreciate his gentility, and his poor command of their language didn't help. It was astoundingly difficult to woo a lady who thought he was either trying to purchase a chicken or a few tomatoes from her, or ask her for directions.

The only thing that had kept him from leaving town was the tailor's bewitching young daughter, one Celia Pierce. She was the loveliest lass in East Florida, and it didn't hurt that she and her British father were the only other people in San Augustin who spoke fluent English. Thank God she had accepted his proposal of marriage. Otherwise the last four months in this hellhole would have been completely for naught.

She had dark hair, eyes seemingly cut from sapphire, and the most voluptuous figure he had seen in a good, long while—and he had seen his share of figures, though he was unable to inspect some as closely as he would have preferred. Phillip was tall, but the top of Celia's head nearly reached his jawline. And since she was the tailor's daughter and a fine seamstress, she sported the most beautiful gowns in town.

At times, her mere presence made him lose his ability to form words, and he would simply stare into her décolletage, his mouth agape. True, these were not among what he considered his best moments, but they were definitely more interesting than having one more peasant hobble into his office with the Devil's Pox.

Good Lord, he could scarcely bear these people, with their oozing sores and dirty, common ways. He hoped within a few years to journey north to a cultured city such as Philadelphia with his beautiful and, with any luck, somewhat sexually deviant wife, where he could relish living the life of a wealthy doctor. He saw himself attending lavish parties, eating the most sophisticated and succulent fare, being the center of aristocratic attention. He could certainly do with a little more of that and a little less of the dropsy.

He jumped as a sound startled him from his ruminations. His fiancée stood there, absolutely stunning in a billowy gown of blue and green. Obviously his servant had barely mumbled the usual announcement as he had let her in.

"Hello, Phillip." She greeted him with a bright smile.

"I have told you, madam. It is improper for you to refer to me so informally before our wedding. Please, call me 'Doctor.' After all, I

didn't spend all that time in the hallowed halls of Trinity College so that I can be addressed like any street peddler or fishmonger."

He thought back to his university days. He had hoped to venture to Italy to pursue his studies, and if it hadn't been for them speaking that damned Italian all the time, he was certain his dream would have come to pass. As it was, he had been barely able to keep up with all the body parts, fluids, and various diseases in English, let alone once they were translated into a bloody Romance language. He was thankful that his father had enough money to make sure that he secured his degree, as he had less than a natural proclivity for science and struggled with its terminology constantly.

Celia pursed her full lips slightly. "Yes, Doctor." Her voice was tinged with a hint of irritation. "At any rate, I've brought your coat for tomorrow night's engagement party. I would like for you to try it on to ensure it fits properly, as I've spent the better part of the day altering it." She produced a beautiful navy blue topcoat with large, flared double cuffs and elaborate embroidery.

Phillip was almost awestruck at the sight of such a garment, but collected himself and turned around with a sudden flourish so she might help him slip it on. The soft, rich fabric felt marvelous as he fingered it. This was how clothing should be, he thought. It should make a man feel that he was worth a king's ransom. He started to spin giddily, until he self-consciously remembered Celia stood there watching him preen.

"How does it look?" he asked.

A smirk passed over her features and disappeared just as quickly. "It seems to be long enough. But is it too tight through the shoulders?"

He froze, concerned that his magical coat might be flawed in some way. "Is it?"

She scrutinized it more closely. "Hold your arms out to the side," she instructed, and he rapidly did so out of concern. "Hmm, it could be roomier through here. But that's easily fixed. Did you receive the matching breeches I sent this morning?"

"I did, but I've had no time to do anything today but administer the occasional bloodletting. Wretched peasants."

"Your selfless devotion to curing others overwhelms me, Doctor," Celia said sarcastically. "Such compassion is so very attractive."

As she'd expected, Phillip's chest swelled slightly with pride. He was always oblivious to her ridicule.

"I find you attractive as well, my cabbage."

She fought her natural urge to grimace at his unpleasant metaphor. "Cabbage? Might you compare me to a vegetable with a slightly more palatable smell?"

His brow furrowed. "My little...mushroom?"

"You would liken me to a fungus?" Celia laughed. "Such wooing, sir. You might make my heart burst within my breast."

Phillip eyed her with belated suspicion. "Are you mocking me?"

"I? Your devoted mushroom dares not," Celia replied insincerely. "Were I perhaps a potato or a leek, however, I would be brimming with mockery. They, sir, are victuals of the trickiest sort and are not to be trusted."

Phillip seemed befuddled by this logic. He stood inertly, as though the activity of his brain stalled the functioning of every other limb.

"Now go and try the breeches on as well, Doctor," she said. "I'll wait out here for you."

As he disappeared into the back room, Celia momentarily dreaded her future. While she supposed that she should be excited about her betrothal, and thrilled with the promise that a life as a married woman offered, thus far she simply did not care much for Dr. Phillip Farquar.

Not only was he gangly and rather plain, but he possessed no discernable sense of humor and no visible chin. He was also as vain and obsessed with his appearance as the most conceited of females, and it rather unsettled Celia that he often focused inextricably on her bosom.

She knew she was more decoration for him than a mate. He made that abundantly clear with his obvious disinterest in most of what she had to say—unless, of course, it was about him. He also seemed to view her father as quite beneath him and spoke down to him on the few occasions he deigned to address him. She wasn't sure if Phillip's objections were rooted in the fact that her father had married a Spanish woman, or if he genuinely did not care for him.

Celia furrowed her eyebrows, a habit she tried to suppress, well aware that female frowns suggested bad temper or, worse, an opinion. If she knew of anywhere she could simply live as a seamstress and thrive as part of the community, she would pack her things right now. But she doubted such a place existed. She could aspire to no more than

becoming the wife of a wealthy man who was not unkind. Phillip was at least somewhat wealthy. As for his lack of kindness—perhaps his nature had not fully revealed itself, and once they were man and wife he would prove to be wise and thoughtful.

Her own loud scoff of skepticism brought her back to reality. Somehow she could not imagine Phillip as the benevolent husband of her girlish dreams. Her cousin had already suggested Celia would simply have to take a lover, like most women who married for reasons of practicality. Who knew? Perhaps Celia could become a patron of the arts and have many lovers. Perhaps her life would be filled with romance and intrigue. The soldiers and settlers around here didn't have much time for the arts, so perhaps she would become a world traveler.

The thunderous sound of Phillip breaking wind from the next room shattered her reverie. So much for a life of romance and intrigue. She would obviously have one of dyspepsia and intestinal distress instead. She winced. One was hardly an adequate replacement for the other. She was brooding on this sorry fact when the door to the sitting room fractured open with a loud crack and three rather seedy pirate types greeted her coarsely.

“The doctor has closed for the night,” Celia said.

One of the motley specimens drew his cutlass and flashed it malevolently. He was older than the others and had a red, bulbous nose. “We’ve special business for the doctor.”

“But he has gone already.” She was alarmed, though a bit excited. Had the god of irony just answered her wishes for intrigue?

“Gone where?” rumbled a dark, heavily muscled man menacingly. He stepped toward her and leered as if her beauty had overwhelmed him.

“He has left town, you see.” She felt suddenly weak when she realized she might have found more adventure than she’d hoped for. And she really needed to work on her lying, she thought—especially when she finally took all those lovers. “He had to tend to someone several townships away. They sent a carriage for him. Spotted fever, I believe.”

“And who might you be, lass?” growled the most physically imposing of the three grubby intruders, continuing to devour her with his eyes.

“Celia Pierce,” she replied softly, sensing that this man could be

dangerous. Surely Phillip was listening and would come to her rescue if things took an ugly turn. “I’m his seamstress.”

“A seamstress, eh?” the obvious leader of the group asked with some interest. “And are you a very good one?”

“They say I’m the best on the coast,” Celia said coolly. Phillip was coming out to save her, wasn’t he? Any time now would be suitable.

“Then you’ll have to do.” The leader grabbed her by the arm, and his hulking companion gagged her and tied her hands together behind her back, albeit he was not as rough as Celia feared. To her left, the pirate with the red nose stuffed a nearby black leather bag as full of medical supplies as possible.

“Don’t get any wise ideas about trying to call for help, or we’ll slice your bleedin’ heart out.” The brawny one tossed a sack over her head. “Just come help us out a mite, and we’ll let you go unharmed.” He picked her up, slung her over his shoulder, and whisked her off into the night.

Nearly twenty minutes later, Phillip quietly poked his head out of the back room. He carried a fireplace poker in his trembling hand and searched about for any sign of the intruders, then sighed with relief when he saw they had taken nothing of real value.



“I told you to bring a doctor.” Gayle stared in disbelief at the kicking petticoats of a woman draped over Churchill’s shoulder. “What the hell is this?”

Churchill snatched the sack from the woman’s head, exposing long, dark hair in disarray, wide panicked eyes, and a rather inelegant gag propping open her mouth. “The doctor wasn’t to be found. We nabbed the town seamstress instead.”

“The seamstress?” Gayle was afraid for a moment that the sheer force of her frustration might make her head come clean off her shoulders, but when she touched her forehead she found it was still attached. Whether this was a blessing or a curse, she was unsure. “Who will take out the musket balls?” she shouted. “Who will cut off the limbs shattered by cannon shot? Who will tend to the lads bleeding into their bloody bellies? This dressmaker?”

“Aye,” Abernathy said, tossing the medical bag onto the deck

beside her. “And I lifted plenty of supplies, though I found no drink there, as I’d hoped. She’ll do a fine job of stitching up the cap’n and the men, I reckon.”

Gayle expected the dressmaker to either faint, cry, or scream like some prissy governor’s wife. Instead she simply stood there, then slowly closed her eyes. Maybe she could be of some value, Gayle thought.

Dowd untied her gage and ogled her. “It was this girl or nothin’. There was no time to gather a proper doctor.”

Gayle studied the hostage before her. She was tall and dark-complexioned, with beautiful features. Her eyes were surprisingly blue, and she seemed strangely confident, not at all like someone who should fear for her life. “Have you ever seen a surgeon work before, good woman?” she asked.

“My name is Celia, and I have seen my fiancé remove a musket ball,” the seamstress said matter-of-factly. “Of course that was from the rump of an ox, but I daresay the procedure can’t be that different for a man.”

Was their unwilling captive actually offering to help? “Then come with me, Celia,” Gayle said, pointing toward the captain’s cabin. She picked up the medical bag. “Churchill, direct the men to take whatever is salvageable from the *Abigail Lee*, then cast her off and help the others tend to the wounded. We will be with the captain.”

She sliced through the ropes binding Celia’s wrists and motioned with her dagger that she follow. Celia did so, gently rubbing her rope burn.

The cabin was lit dimly by a small oil lantern suspended from the ceiling. On the bed Gayle’s father lay very still, his skin clammy and pale, his breathing shallow.

“Go in,” Gayle instructed, then closed the door behind them.

“This is your captain?” Celia asked tentatively.

“Aye,” Gayle answered. “He cannot die. It is not yet his time.”

Celia assumed that this woman must be the captain’s courtesan, though she wasn’t dressed in the extravagant fashion for which courtesans were known. This one wore a man’s shirt and breeches. She was a commanding presence, with her fiery red hair and full lips. But surely no pirate crew included a female. Celia knew that would never be accepted. In fact, if memory served, someone had once told her that it was considered bad luck for a woman to even be on a ship.

The redhead rummaged through the medical bag and pulled out a scalpel and some small forceps. She took out some antiseptic powder and shook it onto the captain's chest. Thankfully, for his sake, he had lost consciousness. "Light that lantern and bring it here so I can better see," she said, gesturing to an unlit oil lamp.

Celia did as she was bid and increased the length of the wick to get as much light from it as possible, then propped it beside the wounded man.

The woman passed the medical bag to her. "See if you can find some surgical thread in here. We'll have to trust what I remember from assisting Poole and what you remember from the ox's ass."