

# Hard Man

A movie poster for the film 'Hard Man'. The central figure is Jackie Rose, a man with long dark hair, wearing a black leather jacket that is open to reveal his muscular torso. He is holding a large, ornate sword with a cross-guard and a serrated blade high in his right hand. The background features a dark, gothic-style castle with a prominent tower, set against a dramatic, fiery red and orange sky. The overall tone is gritty and action-oriented.

Jackie  
Rose

**The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.**

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Hard Man: Rebel Rogue and Prince Charlie's Witch

Copyright © 2005 Jackie Rose

ISBN: 1-55410-580-3

Cover art and design by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books, a division of Zumaya Publications, 2005

Look for us online at:

[www.zumayapublications.com](http://www.zumayapublications.com)

[www.extasybooks.com](http://www.extasybooks.com)

## Author's Note:

'Hard Man' is the typically poetic Irish term for a dedicated rebel...and Captain O'Neill earns that honor in both victory and defeat.

In real life, he shared in Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat, after the Highland Uprising that started two hundred and sixty years ago. If the revolt had been successful, he would certainly have enjoyed the fruits of the victory. Presented here together, 'Rebel Rogue' and 'Prince Charlie's Witch' show these two alternative fates for this one 'Hard Man'...what actually happened and what might have been.

'Rebel Rogue' is a realistic historical romance, based on the true story of Captain O'Neill's adventures as a prisoner in Edinburgh Castle. In 'Prince Charlie's Witch', a loyal time traveler changes the outcome...and he rides triumphantly into London instead.

A gallant, faithful hero in defeat, he becomes a charming, ruthless villain in victory...but he's always an irresistible lover. I believe that this 'hard man' will win your heart either way...just as he won mine...inspiring both these books and this dedication.

# Rebel Rogue



Jackie  
Rose

## **Dedication:**

To the memory of Brendan Behan, our own favorite  
Irish rebel rogue, hard man and author. To  
paraphrase that old Irish blessing, we feel sure he  
was in Heaven for half an hour before the Devil  
knew he was dead.

## Chapter One

### the wild goose

Gazing out of her apartment window, Lady Mary Buchanan could barely believe her eyes. The Irish rebel prisoner was smiling. Even more remarkably, he was coaxing a faint smile from the wounded Highlander limping to prison beside him.

Neither had the faintest cause for merriment.

The people here in Edinburgh had cheered themselves hoarse for the Pretender's Son less than a year before, when he had ridden down this same High Street at the head of his Highland men, with their bagpipes blaring the ancient Scottish tunes like 'Hail to the Chief'. The citizens had called him Bonnie Prince Charlie then, as they had shouted together, again and again,

*"You are welcome, Charlie Stuart,  
There is none as fine as you are."*

Now they were cheering just as loudly for the red-coated English soldiers, dragging the same kilted Highlanders, chained and wounded, from the prison ship in Leith Harbor to the dungeons below

Edinburgh Castle, taking this Irish officer along with them. The lucky ones, like the notorious seven Glenmoriston Men, had taken to the mountains to live as bandits there.

Clumps of children were running after the wounded men, cruelly mimicking their halting walks, throwing rotten vegetables and clumps of mud. Even the adults, who should have known better, were standing on the street corners or leaning out their windows, shouting insults.

The five hundred captives tried hard to ignore their tormenters. Some looked down, some stared straight ahead, a few gazed around in utter confusion as though they had no idea how they had gotten so far from their mountain home.

She looked on in icy disapproval. Even having no love for these wild Highlanders, she felt that the spectacle was vulgar. The soldiers should have moved the prisoners privately, by night. They should not have subjected them to this senseless abuse.

Belatedly, she realized that she was behaving as badly as her neighbors, staring at these captives as though they were animals in the zoological garden. She turned away from the window. As she did so, she caught a flash of emerald satin, gleaming briefly in the cold sun, and recognized it as the lining of a red woolen uniform.

As an English Army officer's sister, she knew the uniform belonged to a French Army captain in Lally's Irish Regiment. She felt compelled, despite herself, to gaze at the rebel Irish officer who wore it.

He strolled along with his fellow prisoners, as carelessly as though he were out taking the air in Vauxhall Garden with the fashionable London throng. He was, incredibly, still joking with his Scottish companion, and the wounded man was smiling in response. The Irishman's mere presence would have been remarkable enough, even without his astonishing behavior.

Guaranteed the right to rent hotel rooms under the rules of the Cartel of Frankfort, other Irish officers were staying in Inverness, while waiting to be shipped home. The cartel did not apply to the Scottish rebels, who lay in the dungeons of Edinburgh Castle awaiting trial for treason, to be followed by its hideous penalty. For some reason, this particular Irish officer was destined to lie among them.

Already, he was as ragged and dirty as they. Only the fourth of nine brass buttons remained on his tattered red uniform coat, and that one was literally hanging by a thread. His black curls hung unbound to his shoulders. The Highland youth beside him was in an even worse state. His tartan kilt hung in rags and he hobbled on crude wooden crutches barely held together by a leather thong.

Mary could barely believe her eyes, therefore, when she saw that the Irishman was still grinning and joking with his companion.

"What kind of man can joke at a time like this?" her mother, Lady Catherine, wondered aloud as she stood at the window beside her.

"An Irish traitor. William says the Irish regiments



are nothing but rebel battalions, paid by the French king to fight against their country."

"That's what your brother's commanders tell him," her mother replied with a sniff. "Others call them the Wild Geese."

Wild, Mary thought. Yes, that's the word for him. Wild and mad and, even as a prisoner, still a threat to us all. She drew back suddenly from the window, determined to walk away. But the Irishman had seen her staring at him. He looked quickly up with a smile and a wave, as though she had been throwing flowers and kisses. *Dangerous, and insolent, too.* She dropped the curtains.

Lady Catherine quickly pulled them open again and vigorously returned his wave.

"What a handsome fellow he is," the older woman said. "He must be close to six feet tall."

One of the English soldiers was looking straight up at their window, to see at whom the prisoner was waving. She hurriedly dropped the curtain, but both women returned to the window to see an even stranger spectacle.

When the motley procession reached the Castle courtyard, two guards emerged to lead the Irish prisoner through the main gate. Barely able to stand, the kilted Highlander hobbled over and started a heated argument. With feeble anger, he gestured wildly.

The soldier used his bayonet to prod the Scottish prisoner away. Dropping his crutch, the Highlander would have fallen had not the Irish officer jumped

forward to steady him with his right hand. With his left, he lifted the crutch and restored it to its owner, all in one swift motion.

Once the Scottish youth was safely on his feet again, the Irishman sent him a reassuring smile and wave of farewell. Then he strode away from the other prisoners across the stone bridge between his two English guards. They had to hurry to keep up with him, as all three faded together into the great grey maw of Edinburgh Castle.

Mary turned away. The view inside was hardly more cheerful. These three cramped rooms above a dressmaker's shop were now the best they could afford. Officially, they were renting them so that William could visit them and sleep in the hallway bedroom whenever he was not on duty. Unofficially, but much more important, they were counting on him to introduce his sister to his unmarried officer friends, who might well be her very last hope of avoiding spinsterhood.

\* \* \* \*

**july the first, 1746**

**3:00 A.M.**

Having devoured the rebel prisoners that day while the whole city looked on, the Castle disgorged loyal soldiers all night. They called and answered each other, as they clattered across the cobblestones of High Street, below the Buchanans' bedroom window.

"Is all well?"

"Yes, all's well."

They were shouting a constant reminder of the Castle's presence, not that anyone needed reminding. It overlooked Edinburgh and the surrounding countryside, a great stone pile of palaces and dungeons, armories and barracks, men and arms. Lady Catherine had often said that the Castle hovered over the city like a great stone toad over a fly. Her daughter had contradicted her, as usual, by saying that it seemed to her more like a great stone eagle, spreading its protective wings over its brood. No matter what kind of creature it was, it was a very noisy one.

"Is all well?"

From time to time, Snowflake added to the din by barking a furious response as she lay on the sheets between her two mistresses, guarding them both with a fine political neutrality. As fierce as any mastiff—all ten pounds of her—the Maltese lifted her fluffy white flower of a face to howl at the marching intruders.

"Is all well?"

"Yes, all's well."

"Woof woof woof!"

"That's all right, Snowflake," Mary said drowsily, as she reached out to stroke the white cotton fur and touch the licorice gumdrop nose.

The little white dog put her chin on Lady Catherine's shoulder and closed her great black button eyes, then jerked her head up again at a new alarm.

"Is all well?"

"Yes, all's well," the Dowager Countess of Dunronald echoed irritably. "Now be quiet and let us alone."

"Yes, all's well," Mary recited along with the soldiers. "If you are so sure that all is well, though," she murmured, "why do you have to keep shouting it?"

"All is not well," Lady Catherine retorted. "All will not be well, until Good King Jamie enjoys his own again as ruler of Scotland, England and Ireland, and his own Scottish people are happy and free and German Georgie is back in Hanover."

Mary sighed. Lady Catherine could go on like that for hours, and the soldiers were already doing a good enough job of keeping them both awake. They didn't need help from her mother.

"Without them, we'd have the wild Highlanders and Irishmen on us again," Mary pointed out.

"We'd have our rightful Prince back again!" her mother cried softly, raising her fist from under the covers and shaking it defiantly. Snowflake jumped on the fist and started chewing it gently.

At once, Mary was sorry she had spoken. At this rate, they might well be up all night.

"And what a Bonnie Prince he was!" the older woman exclaimed. She petted the dog absently with her free hand until Snowflake decided to release the fist and chew the proffered fingers instead.

"If you'd only come with me to see him at those ladies' receptions he gave us, he'd have won you

over, too," Lady Catherine assured her, with a sigh. "He had a smile for every one of us, even an old lady like me."

Suddenly, her daughter remembered the Irishman who had smiled that way at her, just that morning.

"I'm certainly glad I did not attend," Mary retorted. "All my friends were forever after me to join them in sighing and swooning about their Bonnie Prince Charlie and the way he smiled at them. They were good Protestants, too."

"Now that we've defeated him, you'd think they were ashamed of themselves, but no such luck. They are still carrying on about their Bonnie Prince and his smile. As though that was any basis for a political decision." Mary always prided herself on being rational, as befitted one who had studied the French philosophers at school.

"Prig," her mother snapped. "When have we bred such prigs in our family? Have you forgotten what I told you about your great-great Auntie Buchanan? She dressed up as a man and robbed the London mail coach twice to keep her lover's death warrant from reaching Edinburgh Castle."

"That was a long time ago," Mary answered dryly. "It was a more romantic age. These are modern times and I don't have a lover to rob a mail coach for."

"No wonder, being such a prig," her mother muttered.

\* \* \* \*

As soon as she had spoken, she was sorry for her words. She knew they had not been fair. Mary was still single at twenty-six, but it was not her fault. She was the Earl of Dunronald's sister on the one hand, and as poor as a common crofter on the other. She could not marry the kind of man who would have her without a dowry and could not afford the kind of man who deserved one.

The standard dowry for a captain was thirty thousand pounds sterling. For the Buchanans, it might as well have been three hundred thousand, but Mary could not possibly marry anyone below a captain's rank.

Other than the dowry, Mary had every other requirement for an officer's wife.

Lady Catherine had spent most of her own dowry buying her son an army officer's commission, but enough had been left to provide Mary a lady's education. At the Edinburgh Academy, she had learned literature, mathematics, French, philosophy, history, natural science music, dancing, embroidery and painting, skills which would help her take her place in society when she married a suitable gentleman of captain's rank or above.

If worse came to worse and no suitable gentleman appeared, Mary could always be a governess. Her mother hated to admit that that was even a possibility but Mary knew it was a likelihood. The war had created a shortage of captains and a surplus of suitable wives. Her teachers had suggested that she might be able to support herself as a portrait artist. So

many gentlemen were making money in commerce nowadays, and they often wanted paintings of their wives, children, horses and dogs.

Her mother had questioned if painting were respectable but Mary suspected there was no choice. As it was, her artistic talent was proving useful now. She was always busy with her needle or paintbrush, turning their High Street apartment into something resembling a fashionable home. In the nearby garrison, there might be one officer who would forego the dowry for Mary herself, in view of these other qualifications.

The apartment's best feature was this great central chamber. It served as a bedroom, parlor and dining room depending on the time of day, allowing the ladies to entertain in some small measure of respectability. 'Small' was definitely the word for it.

She had been taught since childhood that the Buchanans had always been professional soldiers. In the past, they had lived in very great elegance as a result.

The famous court architect Inigo Jones had designed Culcross Abbey for them in 1608. The famous Gobelins factory in France had provided the tapestries and the rugs were imports from Turkey. They had brought two of the old Gobelins hangings with them, to cover the rough stone walls. These depicted the Fall of Icarus, in rich, glowing colors, but the sky, the sun and Icarus' wing tips were badly frayed.

Mary would not have minded if it had fallen apart.

It was always so sad to see the golden-haired youth flying happily towards the sun in the first panel, knowing the misery that awaited him. It was even worse to see him in the second scene, falling into the ocean, with his wax wings melting in the sun.

She had worked to create more modern, cheerful decorations, by embroidering the bed covers and curtains with blue and crimson flowers, had already painted her mother and brother and was now hard at work on Snowflake. This portrait was more difficult than the others, due to the model's habit of jumping on her skirt, chewing on the paintbrushes or running off into the kitchen to see if the family's one servant, Annie MacKay, had any pieces of cheese for her. Annie MacKay was stealing food for her two-footed friends, but the Buchanans could not afford anyone else.

Her best hope was to find a husband in the English Army, just as her brother had made a career there. There was no way around it. The Earl of Dunronald's good Scottish family needed his British Army pay though he was earning his money by helping to hunt his rightful Prince like a common criminal. The light had dimmed at Culloden, when his Scottish and Irish rebels fell before the English juggernaut. If they succeeded in killing him, it would go out forever. That Irish captain, now—some of that light still seemed to glow in his dark face. How long could it last in that rock pile up on the hill?

As though it had been timed to remind her of the danger, the monotonous watch still shouted from the



street. The bright, cheerful birds her daughter had painted on the ceiling reminded her of the Wild Goose who had smiled and waved to them that morning.

William was not like the others, Lady Catherine assured herself. He was only trying to do his best for his family. She just hoped he did not do it by capturing his Prince.

## Chapter Two

### Three Bachelors

**W**illiam, Lord Buchanan, the Seventh Earl of Dunronald, was doing his best to help his sister escape a spinster's fate. To that end, he had managed to have her invited to a dinner with three of the most eligible bachelors in the kingdom, held in the Governor's Mansion.

Now he stood before her, thumping the knocker on the important looking door, and she could not help looking over the lines of the impressive building. Directly overhead through the window, she thought she caught a glimpse of an Irish uniform with a mass of black curls above it. Taking a step back, she craned her neck, looking. It looked as if it were that self-same Irishman who had been taken to the castle. Whatever would he be doing *here*? But he looked terrible—even more worn than the day she had seen him on the street.

Then the most remarkable thing happened: he looked down through the barred glass directly at her. At once, he seemed to brighten. His eyes caught hers,

jauntily, glittering like blue ice in his dark face. He reached up, pantomimed holding his phantom hat over his heart, then gave an elaborate bow.

Lowering her eyes to avoid his insolent smile, she was saved from further embarrassment when she heard her name being called. William was waiting at the open door, looking impatient. Anxious about the upcoming dinner, she thought no more of the incident.

One of the three guests was his friend, Major James Wolfe, of Rockville's Tenth Regiment. The other two were their commanding officer, General Henry Hawley and, most eligible of all, the Commander of the entire English Army, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, King George's favorite son.

With the prospect of such company, consisting mainly of eligible gentlemen, she had purchased a very pretty quilted petticoat of salmon-pink silk to wear beneath her sky-blue silk frock. The skirt was pulled back on either side to reveal the petticoat, following the latest fashion. She also wore an equally stylish white lace cap and apron.

More white lace trimmed her bodice, while leaving her bosom fashionably bare. She now feared that it was too clearly exposed for modesty. Feeling the bachelors' appraising gazes on her breasts, she wished she had filled in the bodice with the lace kerchief called a 'bosom friend'. At least she had the satisfaction of knowing that the gentlemen were enjoying the view.

She wished she could have said the same for

herself. These bachelors might have been highly eligible, but they could hardly be called desirable, except in the strictly practical sense of the word.

William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland was the darling of London. 'Billy, the Martial Boy' and 'Sweet William'. He could not, however, possibly been called Bonnie Prince Willie. He was, she thought, as she modestly gazed at him from under her lowered eyes, fat in the worst possible way. Cumberland's bulk seemed, instead, to be hard, cold and white, like the grease congealed at the bottom of a roasting pan.

His eyes were small and his lips were thin, giving him the appearance of a great white worm. To be fashionable, he had dusted his face with rice powder and rouged his lips with crimson. They made his unhealthy, unattractive pallor seem like a corpse's.

She wondered if she could endure being his wife, for the sake of being his duchess. Thankfully, since his military victory, she was spared the chance. He could have any woman he wanted.

His companion, General Henry Hawley, was more than twice as old, but probably three times as fit—remarkably hearty, for a man in his sixties. His face still had a healthy, ruddy glow, and his bright little eyes darted constantly about with good-natured interest. He, too, was considered a remarkable catch for some lucky girl.

The third gentleman, Major Wolfe was only General Hawley's aide-de-camp, but he was said to have a remarkable future in the army. What's more, he was reasonably good looking, if you overlooked

his resemblance to a rabbit, with his wiry red hair and his lamentable lack of a forehead and chin. Her brother had warned her, though, that Harriet Wolfe was prospecting for a wealthy daughter-in-law. Considering Wolfe's prospects, he would probably find one.

Mary sighed. It was almost enough to make you want to join the Papists. They let their women retire into convents if they wished to abandon their husband hunt.

Having given up the chase, for the evening at least, Mary felt free to enjoy the dinner. On that basis, she saw a great deal to enjoy. Platters of roast duck and goose circled a roast leg of lamb. Pitchers of wine and ale stood on either end of the table. The delicious, homey fragrance of the roast meat was, hopefully, making the gentlemen think of the pleasures of family life—even more hopefully, with a lady like her.

"Did you know that my sister paints portraits?" William Buchanan asked the others eagerly, as a servant in royal livery carved the entrée.

Then he added, as though in an afterthought, "Perhaps Your Royal Highness would allow her to paint you."

She looked down to hide her smile. *We're flying high, aren't we, dear brother.*

"It is too much to ask Your Royal Highness to sit for an amateur like myself after the greatest artists in London have painted you."

"They must have copied other pictures, then. I haven't had time to sit for any portraits." He dabbed

at his painted lips with his napkin before lunging forward on his heavy haunches for his third heaping platter of goose.

"I'd be more than glad to sit for you, my dear," said General Hawley, leaning amiably towards her. "After all, the greatest Dutch painters liked to do ugly old men."

"You're not old at all!" she insisted. "You're the very model of a vigorous soldier in the prime of life, and it would be a pleasure to paint you that way. I'll show you on your horse, or perhaps leaning against a cannon, just like —"

*"The minstrel boy to the war has gone  
In the ranks of death you will find him.  
His father's sword he has girded on  
And his wild harp strung behind him..."*

Then he shouted, as though his song had not been insolent enough, "and he carried that sword to Fontenoy!"

It was he. That insolent voice could only belong to the man she had seen in the window, wearing the Irish uniform.

Sung in a loud, hoarse voice in the unmistakable accents of his native island, the voice made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in musical talent. The sound was made even livelier by the rhythmic stamping of feet. Coming as it did from straight above their heads, the banging seemed to shake the ceiling, making Mary stare up anxiously at the candles above

them, fearing that the vibrations would send the tapers falling onto the white linen table cover.

"What the Hell was that?" General Hawley cried. "I beg your pardon, Mary."

The Duke of Cumberland threw down his napkin as the two younger officers stared at each other, with no idea what to say. Mary kept her wary eye on the candles. It was the Irishman, she thought wildly, as if he were only the only Irishman in Scotland.

He had succeeded into driving the Duke into a rage, which had doubtless been his fondest hope. The 'Fontenoy' he had just shouted about had hardly been Cumberland's finest hour. On the contrary, one could say that it had had been his very worst. He had been forced to retreat from the field there, before a frenzied charge of the Wild Geese in Lally's Irish Regiment.

It had happened only a year before Culloden, but even this victory had not wiped out the humiliation of being beaten, not by French soldiers but Irish rebel scum. Cumberland's face showed his fury now, going from dead white to violent red, at the reminder.

His companions tried to ignore the singing, but the Duke did not.

"Fontenoy!" he snarled, banging his fat fist on the table. "We were betrayed there. We would have retaken Fontenoy in triumph, but the Scottish and Irish rebels stabbed us in the back by raising rebellion here at home. Well, I promise that they will pay dearly for their treachery."

The others lowered their eyes, silent, trying to ignore his outburst. Seeing his embarrassment at it,

Mary realized that the wretched Irishman was obviously determined to make it worse. He had not yet completed his unwelcome serenade.

*"Oh, Land of Song, said the warrior bard  
Though all the world betrays thee  
One sword at least thy right shall guard  
One faithful heart shall praise thee."*

"Filthy Irish rebel!" Hawley said indignantly. "Mary, I apologize."

"You are hardly to blame, general," she assured him.

"He should be down in the cells with his fellow traitors," the Duke of Cumberland growled.

"And we would love to have him there," Hawley assured him. "But there is the Cartel of Frankfort to consider."

"If we did not have a lady here, I would tell you what I thought of the Cartel of Frankfort."

"We kept the other Irish rebel officers in the Highlands, at Inverness," she recalled. "Why was this one was brought all the way here to plague us in the capital instead."

"We had to guard this one very carefully," Cumberland answered. "He was with the Pretender's Son after Culloden, and he was the one who got that foolish Flora MacDonald, to help him escape. He is here for questioning. He knows where the Pretender's Son is!" He banged the table again, making both the dishes and his companions jump. "And he will tell us



soon enough."

"Does the Cartel allow Your Royal Highness to interrogate him?" she asked, then realized that it sounded more like an accusation. and desperately wished she had stayed silent.

"Mary!" horrified, her brother objected. "His Royal Highness knows the law much better than we do."

"Yes, of course," she agreed quickly. "I was merely curious, Your Royal Highness. I meant no offense."

"None was taken," her brother's young friend, Major Wolfe, quickly assured her.

Turning to her with an earnest expression, he explained, "This is a very special Irish officer. The Count de Lally sent him on a smuggler's boat with messages, promising that ten thousand more Irish volunteers were coming to help the Pretender's son."

"But they did no such thing, of course, by God," Major Hawley went on, his red face burning even darker. "A storm came up and threw them right back into the French port. They were those good old Protestant winds, by God, the same as the ones that smashed the damned Spanish Armada."

"There were still enough of those damned Irish rebels at Culloden to make trouble for us," Cumberland added, with barely suppressed rage. "We could have wiped out the MacDonald men, at least, if the Irish had not been shooting at us from behind a farmyard wall to cover the clan's retreat. And we would have caught my Cousin Charlie, too, by God. He was Hell bent on leading a last desperate charge, until the Irish officers grabbed his horse's

bridle and dragged him off the field."

"There is a lady present," her brother murmured, as reproachfully as he dared.

"So there is, and a fine lady, too," General Hawley answered, reaching out to pat her hand. "Please forgive me, my dear."

"There is nothing to forgive," she assured him. "We all got carried away."

This bluff old soldier was much more attractive than the younger men. If there were one desirable bachelor in the group, it was he. How much it would help William to have his commander as a brother-in-law.

"He also had four hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket when we caught him," Cumberland added." Of course, he's demanding it back and saying it's his own private money, but I ask you, does that sound like a captain's pay?"

"It most certainly does not." Captain Buchanan answered nervously.

"Obviously, he brought it to recruit men for the Irish Brigade," the Duke concluded. "At the usual bounty of five pounds, it could have bought him ninety rebels. He'll see reason about the Pretender's Son soon enough, when he hears that the penalty for recruiting is death."

Then he will die, she thought. He could save himself by betraying the Pretender's Son, but if this was the same man she'd seen laughing in the face of his imprisonment, then he would never do it

As though in defiant echo of her thoughts, the

singing started again.

*"The minstrel fell, but the foeman's chains  
could not bring that proud soul under..."*

Assuming the role of hostess, Mary firmly changed the subject.

"Would you like me to paint you in the style of Mr. Gainsborough, General Hawley?" she inquired. "Or is Mr. Hogarth more of a favorite of yours?" Tactfully, she refrained from mentioning the equally celebrated Mr. Ramsey who, as an Edinburgh native, was unlikely to be the general's choice. For one thing, he had painted the Young Pretender in the most flattering way.

"I'm afraid I don't have time for painters, my dear," he said. "I can't tell one from the other."

She found that a strangely endearing confession. Marriage to him might not be so hard after all. He wasn't really too old for her, she tried to convince herself, considering that she had no dowry. *That* mechanical part of marriage (as her school friends called it) would be a small gift to pay for all he had to offer.

At school, a girl from the Highlands had said that Scottish men played the bagpipes on their wedding night, which made the women want to do the mechanical thing. Mary could not imagine why, unless it was to stop the piping. She could not imagine wanting to do *that* with General Hawley under any circumstances, any more than she could

picture him playing the bagpipes. He would never have anything to do with anything so Scottish—except, hopefully, her.

She thought of asking him whether he, too, had been at Fontenoy, but thought better of it.

"How much more time do you plan to stay in Scotland?"

"As little as possible," he told her. Then he seemed to remember that she was Scottish herself. "I'd want to stay longer, if I could meet more charming young ladies like you. You are obviously a nice Lowland girl, or Midlands perhaps, almost the same as an Englishwoman."

"Born only twelve miles north of Edinburgh," she said, with a smile. She thought he might have winced at her mention of Edinburgh, especially when she made the 'burgh' sound more like 'burrrr' in the way she had taken for granted all her life—until she had started spending so much time with Englishmen, that is. Then she had become very conscious of her Scottish tones, since apparently they were, too.

"That is certainly not the Highlands," he agreed. "I can see that, wherever you came from, they produce very charming young ladies there." His little blue eyes, surrounded by wrinkles, danced over her face and down to her bosom as he smiled at her.

He's really rather charming himself, she thought, smiling faintly as she looked modestly down at her plate.

\* \* \* \*

The Irishman's guards had kept him awake for two days, ever since they had brought him to the little attic bedroom above the parlor where his captors dined.

His guards had doused him with cold water or prodded him with their bayonets every time he seemed to be moving towards the narrow bed. He was leaning forward now against the chair back, grasping it with both hands. When he grew tired enough to actually sleep on his feet the guards poked him hard enough to force his eyes wide open. He started singing to keep them from hearing his groans of fatigue.

They may have been following General Hawley's orders, but his guards obviously loved their work. They were in the detachment of Cobham's Dragoons that had helped to capture him, Captain Francis O'Neill. He had made sure it had been a miserable job, too. He could see just how grateful they were for this chance at revenge.

When they had cornered him hiding in a cave, he had refused to come out like a gentleman. Instead, he had laughed and told them to come in and get him. When they tried, his two pistols had taken down their share of dragoons, as he had kept firing until the clicking sound had told him they were empty.

By the time they had dragged him out of his hiding place, they were tired and angry and none too gentle. They threw him onto the rocky ground long enough to tie his hands behind his back, then jerked him up

again.

When Captain Ferguson announced that he was going to flog the damned rebel as he deserved, they had cheered in reply, and they had come close to flogging the other officer who had stopped him. That meddling fool had come from the Royal Scots Fusiliers, which proved that you could never trust the Scots.

After two days alone with his captors, O'Neill had done his best to appear unworried. Now he greeted the general with a new song, dealing with current events...

*"You are welcome Charlie Stuart,  
there is none as fine as you are."*

He sang lustily, even while swaying with exhaustion against the chair. He pushed his cracked voice harder as he saw the two commanders squeeze into the small room, stooping as he did under the low-sloping ceiling. Designed for one servant, the room now held himself, his two burly guards, General Hawley, and the ponderous bulk of Cumberland, which took up half the space on its own.

"Can't you shut him up?" General Hawley snapped.

O'Neill watched Corporal Enoch Bradshaw's fingers curl around his Brown Bess musket before he used the butt to strike his shoulder. Somehow, the managed to remain standing. And singing.

"You should not have done that, Corporal," the

general said, in obviously mock reproach. "We only want to talk to him, as fellow officers and gentlemen."

"Gentlemen, is it?" the prisoner crowed, lifting his head to stare at them. "Hangman Hawley, the way I heard it. Did you bring your gallows from the Market Square?"

"And you, Your Royal Highness," he added, with a low bow to the Duke. "I never thought I'd have the honor of seeing Your Royal Highness' face, although I saw your royal back at Fontenoy. Butcher Cumberland and Hangman Hawley both—this is distinguished company indeed."

Snarling like a great baited animal, Cumberland lunged, the plank floor creaking beneath his weight. Hawley touched the Duke's arm discreetly. With a grunt of disappointment, Cumberland sank down on the prickly straw mattress covered with coarse linen, which was still the most comfortable object in the room. After looking around for another chair, Hawley seated himself on a brass-bound leather chest at the foot of the narrow bed, under the tiny window.

Both generals stared coldly at the Irishman. He glared at them in return, clutching the chair in his powerful square hands.

He could feel Cumberland and Hawley waiting for him to beg permission to sit. He stared at them levelly, denying them the satisfaction of refusing him.

"Damn me, man. There's no reason to act this way," Hawley said, in his most genial tone, crossing his booted legs as comfortably as he could.

"We are officers and gentlemen as you are. We

merely asked these fellows here to be sure you were awake, so we could ask you a civil question."

"Sure, and what might that be now?"

He returned their cold stares with an ironical smile.

"Where is the Pretender's Son?"

"Are you going to offer me your thirty thousand pound reward, Hangman Hawley?" O'Neill asked cheerfully.

Hawley thought about that for a moment, then waved the thought away, as though it had never occurred to him before. "We know you are an officer and a gentleman like ourselves," he said. "We want to discuss the matter with you on that basis."

"Very well, then," he agreed, in his most genial tone. "The Prince left for France the very day we parted. He is back in Paris along with Ran MacGregor and his men."

"You're a liar," Cumberland growled.

"And I thought we were all gentlemen together," he sighed, shaking his head until the black curls shook, with mock dismay.

Hawley fought for self-control. It was a long moment until he was able to address O'Neill calmly again.

"Will you at least be reasonable about this? You know that this country has been in great confusion. Some poor souls are still waiting in hiding, for Charlie to return and lead them to victory. Consider that poor girl, Flora MacDonald."

"We will not talk about that lady." He straightened, meeting their eyes, one by one, with his



coldest glare.

Even the English commanders were startled into silence for a moment. Hawley was the first to recover.

"We have only sympathy for that poor girl. She was captured a few days after you. She is on a prison ship now, but she is being treated well."

O'Neill felt a muscle bulge in his jaw as he fought for control. "I said, we will not discuss her."

"We will set her free when we find the Pretender's Son," Cumberland added.

"And he'll be put on the prison ship instead!"

"There's no thought of his being a prisoner," Cumberland seemed-shocked at the very idea. "We want him to make an official surrender. Then his followers will realize the rebellion is over, and he can go on his way."

"Do you promise that, now?" Both men nodded eagerly.

He gave the appearance of considering their words carefully.

"Didn't you give your word that you would pardon the poor Highlanders if they brought their weapons to you?" he finally asked slowly.

Hawley's face flushed.

"Didn't you hang the poor devils who tried it?"

"Some of our men made a few mistakes, nothing more," Hawley assured him.

"A whole bloody lot of them, from what I've heard."

"What do you care about the Highland savages, in any event?" Hawley asked. "It was a Highlander who

told us where to find you. Your precious Flora MacDonald's own cousin, Neil MacEachain, betrayed you to us to save his own skin. Or didn't you know that?"

"I did not know, then, at all, at all," the Irishman replied, after the briefest possible pause. "If it's true, I'll deal with Mr. MacEachain in time. But that has nothing to do with my Prince," he told them, going back to his light, bantering tone. "I can't risk your men killing him by mistake, can I now?"

"There will be no such mistake," the Duke told him. "The Pretender's Son is my cousin—a great-great-great grandson, just as I am, of King James I. How could I harm him?"

"With great pleasure, I am sure," he added a bow.

"How could we do that? Is he an English subject, to be charged with treason against us? We have always called him the Young Italian, born in Italy and now serving the French king, who is at honorable war with us. Now how can we say he was an Englishman all along, by accusing him of treason against us?"

"You would never dream of making your Cousin Charlie stand trial, I am sure. " As they started to smile, the Irishman went on in the same even tone, "You will keep him in the finest rooms of Whitehall Palace or Kensington, perhaps. He might even have his own suite as an honored guest, all very fine, until some ruffian somehow manages to poison his sugar cake or stab him in his canopied bed. So sad for you. So embarrassing, too. You might even have a state funeral to atone for it."

"We might put you on trial, though," Cumberland told the prisoner, in a voice that shook with rage, even as his jowls were shaking. "Even for an Irish officer, it is a capital crime to recruit for the French Army's Irish brigades."

"I fear it is no use, Your Royal Highness," General Hawley bluntly contradicted him with a sigh. "Captain O'Neill has made up his mind. There's no sense trying to change it. We will see about giving you the freedom of the castle, like any other captured officer. I suppose you will want to get some sleep right now, before you do anything else. We will say goodnight, sir." He stood and walked to the door. After a moment, Cumberland reluctantly followed.

\* \* \* \*

Mary and her mother were both waiting in the hallway to greet General Hawley as he arrived. He was exactly on time for their appointment, just as the grandfather's clock was striking two in the corner of their narrow white hallway. He brought a blast of cold air with him as he came through the door.

Snowflake joined in greeting him, even more enthusiastically than they. She jumped up and clawed his shiny black boots while vigorously wagging her tail and whining urgently, unmistakably demanding to be picked up. He leaned down and absently petted her soft round head instead.

The general sat down on the narrow wooden bench where Snowflake acted as chaperon, between him

and his young human hostess. As soon as he was seated beside her, the Maltese turned to the opposite side, where she started frantically licking the masculine, wrinkled red face. To Mary's surprise, he turned away from those frantic wet kisses, which seemed so sweet to her.

"We should take her on the hunt with us," he joked. "She'd lick the fox to death."

"Not if she thought the fox was attacking you," Mary answered. "She protects her friends quite fiercely. You've obviously won her over."

"I hope to win an even closer friend," he answered smoothly and patted Mary's hand, which was resting on the dog's soft fur.

She noticed that his hand was rough and weathered, but still powerful despite his years. She tried not to notice how the blue veins stood out clearly beneath the ruddy skin. She even tried to ignore her feeling that he seemed to be merely enduring her pet's attentions, rather than relishing them as she did. Instead, she imagined her brother placing their two hands together, while they all stood facing the altar. Lady Hawley, Lady General Hawley, the General's Lady.

"I did not come here only to make friends."

She looked up, startled. Between men and women, friendship was a short step to something more.

"I have a favor to ask you—not for myself, but for our King and country. We know that this part of the country has been in great confusion. The main problem seems to be that the Pretender's Son has

never officially surrendered."

He sighed, as though mourning the unjust suspicion in the world. "Perhaps he doesn't realize that he could do so safely," he confided. "If only His Royal Highness William Augustus could meet with his unfortunate cousin. The poor, foolish lad would realize that his family means him no harm. Once the country was settled," he added, "I could start to concentrate on other things."

Leaving no doubt about what these were, he gave her hand another pat.

Given these two inducements—marriage to a general and service to their King—she leaned forward, wondering what she could do to help bring about that family reunion. Her guest was about to tell her.

## Chapter Three

### The Scottish Thistle

O'Neill was still sound asleep late the next morning, lying face down on the narrow bed with his boots dangling over the end. With distaste, she decided that he must have passed out after that bout of drunken singing. Had he already been drunk when he'd joked with that crippled Highlander? Was it the whiskey that made him so jovial?

Still, she could not let him lie there until his legs swelled within his boots. Setting her tray of bread, cheese and beer down on the wooden chest, she knelt beside him. Ignoring the guards' curious stares, she tugged hard at his boots.

Her cry of disgust awakened him. The second boot had fallen against her white lace apron, soiling it with the dried Highland mud that even spattered her blue silk dress. Ever on the alert to danger, he sprang to a sitting position, forcing her to pull back in alarm. She was left sprawling on her bottom in a most undignified position until she quickly rose. Even though she was now gazing down at him, she still

had to fight the discomfort caused by his cold, appraising stare.

"Bless you, me darlin'," he told her.

That Irish way he spoke made his words sound like an intimate caress. He leaped to his feet so quickly, she had to jump out of the way.

"My legs ache badly enough as it is, and aren't you the angel to be taking my boots off?"

"Your head aches too, I should imagine," she answered.

"Other things ache as well," he said. "I have to use the necessary. Could you leave me alone for a moment?"

His smile did not deceive her. His eyes still measured her coolly as they glittered against his warm brown skin, like ice on a midnight pond. She could feel her pink-and-white complexion, which always blushed with such embarrassing ease, warming to a crimson rose under his bold stare. She strode out of the room so quickly that the guards had to jump out of her way. When she returned, the chamber pot was hidden under the bed again and he was sprawled on the hard, narrow chair, with his legs thrust out before him.

"And now, if you will hand that tray to me?"

Shocked by his insolence, she could barely bring herself to grant his request. When he gobbled the food down ravenously, she was just as offended by his rudeness. Why, it was as though his captors had not fed him at all, officer though he was. Then she was struck by a startling thought: Could it be that, in fact,

they had not?

Her own dilemma soon drove that question away. Realizing that she would have to sit on the bed facing him, she did it as demurely as possible. Crossing her ankles delicately, she sat up as straight as she could.

"You must know who I am, or you would not be here," he said, as soon as he could tear himself away from the chunks of cheese he kept piling onto his bread and the beer that kept washing both down. "That gives you the advantage of me, me darlin'."

"I am Lady Mary Buchanan," she said. As he enclosed her slim white hand in a powerful brown fist, and drew it to his lips, she forced herself not to pull it away.

Just a French courtesy, she told herself, as those firm, dry lips and the harsh stubble around them touched her fingers.

Nevertheless, he was arousing a strange stirring that went far beyond her fingers. Fighting to ignore the sensation, she went resolutely on, "I have been acting as hostess here because the commanding officers are unmarried. I see that you've torn your coat, and I will ask them to send a seamstress to you." He must have torn it while dodging her government's soldiers, in the two months since Culloden, but she saw no reason to mention that.

"As good as you are beautiful," he exclaimed. "Bless you, me darlin', and your seamstress, too."

She tried to ignore the flattery and the way it was arousing the same unfamiliar feelings that his lips on her hand had done.



"Is there anything else I can bring you?" she asked, as coldly as she could, pulling her hand away.

"Well, now, I'd like a pen and paper."

"I'm not sure you can send letters out yet."

"Who said anything about letters, now?" he demanded. "I've been thinking of trying my hand at the literary line, like my famous countryman, Dr. Swift. My travels might not be as entertaining as his Captain Gulliver's, but some people might want to read about them, all the same. Seeing that you are obviously a lady of refinement, you might like to help me with the work."

"You are an author?" she asked, in some surprise.

"I am not quite an Irish peasant who snuck over to France on a smuggler's boat," he told her gently. "Our retired officers keep little schools for other officers' sons, and my teacher was a great man for the books. He said I might have some talent that way myself."

"I'm sure you do. Please forgive me if I insulted you. I meant merely that you seem more like a military man."

"And so I am," he assured her. "You did not offend me at all. I'm sure you won't do it now by asking me to betray my Prince."

"It isn't a matter of betraying him. There isn't any question of putting the Prince—the Pretender's Son—on trial. The government only wants his official surrender, to end all the confusion in this country."

She stopped, outraged at his hoot of laughter.

"Is that what they told you, now—Butcher

Cumberland and Hangman Hawley? And they say we Irish believe in fairy tales."

Ignoring her gasp of indignation, he went on, "The only question is, why are you doing it for them? Is it the money you need? You can't have too much of that, or you'd be offering to send your own seamstress, not asking the army to provide one, and you'd have had a servant carry in my tray. Still, I don't think this is your way of earning more, or you'd be trying a lot harder to do it, not arguing with me at every turn."

She cast about desperately for a suitable insult to toss back at him. Still seeming not to notice her growing anger, he went on.

"Perhaps you've got some handsome young lover in the army and you're trying to help him advance himself."

*He's not a young officer, he's a general, and he has no need of me.* Mary bit the words back just in time. She could imagine how O'Neill would have hooted at that, which might even make her angry enough to lose control, ruining any chance she had of persuading him.

"A girl must be careful with those army officers, as I should know, being one myself." he went on, in the same light, mocking tone. "Those English are the biggest liars of all, not telling you that they are planning to kill their Prince."

She fought for control. "I know that they are your enemies, but you don't know them as I do."

His blue eyes blazed. "I'll tell you how much I

know of them," he snarled, all smiles gone now. "They treated me with the courtesy of pirates. When your Captain John Ferguson captured me, he had my shirt torn off me for a flogging and threatened to put me on the rack, to tell him where the Prince was. I would not tell him for all that, so do you think I'll tell you for a few kind words?"

"You don't seem to be in the process of recovering from a flogging," she answered coolly.

"Another officer stopped him," he reluctantly replied.

"What a pity," she sighed, "It might have taught you some manners."

The prisoner stared at her in amazement, then swept into his deepest, most courtly bow.

"Not only good and beautiful, but clever, too," he cried. "No way to avoid it, I'll have to marry you."

Now it was her turn to stare at him.

"I mean every word of it." Throwing himself to his knees before her, he captured her hands in his. "I'll take my oath, right in front of these gentlemen here. I can't tell you where my Prince is, but I'll make it up to you by making you the princess of my heart."

The guards stood gazing at them both, as though they were at the theater. Mary struggled to pull her hands away, until the captain released them with a smile. She stood staring at him in open-mouthed shock until she finally managed to gasp, "You insolent traitor!"

"Oh, me darlin'!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "Are we having our first lovers' quarrel? But never

mind—it's such a pleasure to be making up again."

Before the guards could stop him, he reached out to grasp her wrists and pull her into his arms. He didn't even seem to feel her fists reaching up to beat against it.

He leaned down and kissed her pursed lips with one long, firm, well-practiced motion.

His scent reached her then, of wool and sweat and leather, mingling with her own faint rose-water fragrance. His unshaven cheek rubbed not unpleasantly against her soft one. When he forced his tongue into her tightly closed mouth, her lips parted before his and she shut her eyes in rapture. Even through her quilted white petticoat, she felt his lower body, with its large, hard bulge, through his tight blue woolen breeches, pressing against her.

As though her body had its own mind, deaf and blind to reason, she found herself pressing against him in return. Then her eyes flew open again as he pulled away.

She was still trembling as he, with a brief bow, released her, following up with his most cordial smile. It did not fade even when she drew back her hand and slapped him, with all her force, across his insolent face.

With a warrior's instinct, his hand pulled back to return the blow. It fell to his side before the soldiers lifted their rifle butts towards him.

Hastily, she pushed Bradshaw's rifle away.

"He's telling lies about you already," she warned the soldiers. "Don't let him provoke you into making

his lies come true. That's just what he wants you to do. You need not pay any heed to his stupid jokes."

"That was no joke at all," he indignantly insisted. "I will marry you the moment you accept me. And I will tell you a real joke, if you like."

Accordingly, he fell into a storyteller's measured tone.

"It's about two English soldiers," he recounted. "One asks the other, 'Did you hear about old Carruthers? He was drummed out of the regiment for making love to a goat.' 'A male goat or a female goat?' his friend asks him. 'A female goat, of course,' he replies. 'Old Carruthers is no Sodomite.'"

To keep herself from smiling, she had to bite down hard on her lip. "We won't let you make us angry," she told him, for the soldiers' benefit. "We know all about the Cartel of Frankfort."

"And don't I know all about it myself?" he demanded. "It's protecting both of these gentlemen. You won't see one Irish lad attack two Englishmen—it would not be fair to them. We must have lost our heads when we gave you those same odds at Fontenoy."

The soldiers' hands tightened briefly on their muskets, then relaxed again. They were getting used to Paddy and his breezy insolence. Corporal Bradshaw actually seemed to be fighting back a grin.

Visibly angry now, feeling her face flaming red, she no longer felt in the least like smiling.

"I think I'd better go now," she said coldly, "before he starts singing about that battle again."

Before he could think of some clever response, she swept out the door, glad to have the side hoops sweeping majestically beside her, like rolling waves in a stormy sea.

Her first impulse was to triumphantly tell her mother how this Irish rogue had treated her. What would Lady Catherine have to say about her gallant rebels then? At once, she decided against it. A romantic at heart, Lady Catherine would insist that her daughter had been secretly attracted to that insolent rebel rogue.

Lady Catherine read too many sentimental novels and had sighed over both *Joseph Andrews* and *Pamela*. Now she would sigh even more heartily when she heard about the sudden kiss. The Reverend Mr. MacDowall had said that novels addled women's brains and, thinking about her mother, Mary was inclined to agree. At any rate, Mary did not want to relive the moment. Heaven knew it had been embarrassing enough the first time.

\* \* \* \*

Captain O'Neill, on the other hand, hoped to relive it as soon as possible. He had felt her soft lips opening like flower petals, against her will when he had kissed her. Then he had felt her body, soft but slim, yielding to his. Her breasts had been small, but round and firm against his chest.

When it came to bosoms, he agreed with the old adage: more than a mouthful is a waste. Those

delicious little breasts would be as sweet as apples when his tongue tasted them, gently circling the pink nipples until she writhed with ecstasy beneath him. They suited that perfect little pink-and-white heart-shaped face with its prim little rosebud mouth, which was so demure...and which formed such a startling contrast to the riotous red curls that fell beneath her shoulders.

The thought warmed him to the point where he would have opened his breeches and committed a sin with himself (as the priests would have called it) had the guards not been watching. Then he thought of entertaining himself instead by singing about Fontenoy until he drove his guard into a rage, but he decided against that, too. He had already seen their hands twitching on their muskets and knew, from experience, that they'd soon be lifting those muskets against him if he didn't stop baiting them. One Irishman against two English was unfair odds to the Englishmen, true, but it helped if they were not armed.

So he lay back on his bed and waited for Hawley's paper of parole allowing him the run of the castle. He knew that it was intended to give Mary a run at him, but he was more than ready for her.

The first thing he'd see would be St. Margaret's Chapel. It was the oldest building there, built by none other than Malcolm's queen in Shakespeare's Scottish play. He gave it that name, even in his thoughts, because he did not need the bad luck, did he, of even thinking about the title.

St. Margaret was also noted for having brought the Catholic faith to Scotland, which made it a historical, literary and religious pilgrimage in one. Francis might have been an atheist, like every other educated man in France, but, by God, he was a Catholic atheist. He smiled to himself in appreciation of his little joke.

General Hawley, who had no love for Catholics, was sure to keep his promise to this one. He would set him free, as the Cartel demanded. The old Hangman had ulterior motives, of course. He wanted Francis to roam around, talking to people, that little Mary especially.

And aren't I the boyo for that? he thought, still smiling. He had ulterior motives of his own, having formed his plan when he felt her lips parting under his.

He almost felt sorry for that silly little schoolgirl, naïve enough to believe Hawley's lies. She was an easy prey for the general, whom she had been taught to respect, and would be even easier pickings for Francis himself. She was ripe for a man, his experience told him, and almost any man would do, but she was more than ripe for an Irish lover trained in Paris. What girl could ask for more?

She knew only Edinburgh Castle and its English officers. He knew Versailles: the glittering, gilded world of fashion. His friend and patron, the Count de Lally, had taken him there with other Irish officers, and soon he had become even more popular than the count himself.

Intellectual ladies, especially, had enjoyed



discussing literature with a strapping twenty-three year-old. They often took him to their private rooms, to inspect their libraries. The elegantly lacquered book cabinets had concealed volumes filled with illustrations that would have made his barracks-mates blush.

Francis and his Parisian hostesses had often taken these volumes to bed, where they served as instruction manuals. Even he refused, however, to follow all of the directions, especially those calling for other people and animals. Nothing queer about old O'Neill.

But none of the ladies had ever complained, especially when they unbuttoned his breeches and saw the size and hardness of the member beneath.

The books had given him at least one piece of very valuable information, telling him about the hidden pink pearl—the secret of women's desire—not in the *vagin*, mind you (to use the French word) but above it. Merely by touching that place gently, you could bring a woman to ecstasy. And when your tongue circled it, you would drive her so wild with pleasure that you had to cover her mouth with your free hand, to keep her from screaming, which would have been a real inconvenience with a party going on in the next room.

Having duly pleased the women, he had left them more than willing to do the same for him. It had all gone to show him the truth in that old joke about the Dublin lad who visits Paris and comes home to declare, "Gentlemen, I may safely say that sex in Ireland is in its infancy."

The ladies had given him another valuable piece of information as well, by introducing him to Dr. Condom's useful invention, made of sheep intestine. It dated back to the time of Prince Charlie's great-great grandfather, they had told him. His loyal Royalist soldiers had made it part of their normal garrison supplies, fighting the Puritans and the pox at the same time.

Francis had soon learned to keep a sample in his uniform pocket at all times, in case, in a manner of speaking, the opportunity should arise. This second joke made him smile again.

And the opportunity had arisen frequently. So frequently, in fact, that it, and he, now welcomed a new challenge. After harvesting so many of those ripe Parisian plums, this Irish farmer's grandson would find it easy enough to pluck this rough Scottish thistle.

That did not go for every Scottish thistle, of course, as he reminded himself hastily. Flora MacDonald would have sent him packing if he had even hinted at anything out of the way (or in the way, as it were). She'd sent him packing at any rate, after he'd offered to marry her in the most sincere, respectful manner. This had cured him of making respectful marriage proposals, although, as he had just realized, he could still entertain himself with the other kind. Flora was a Highland heroine who had risked her life for the Prince. She could not be compared to this foolish Edinburgh girl.

His conscience gave him a few uncomfortable

moments, reminding him that Mary was just a silly schoolgirl, after all. As always, he wrestled briefly with his conscience and won. She wasn't really as sheltered as all that. Wasn't she planning to use him to help the Prince's enemies, just as he himself was planning to use her?

His conscience tried to rally. *She is a clumsy amateur*, it shrilled, *you are a skilled professional warrior*. He silenced it sternly. This friendship would be fully justified if it might help his Prince. Never mind that the word was not "friendship" but "seduction." It was all for the Honest Cause. For that, any dishonesty could be forgiven.

But his conscience was not the only enemy traitor in his head. Another voice also struggled to be heard, even fainter and farther away. It was a voice that told him Mary was a lady to be cherished, protected and sheltered from rebel rogues like himself. Even worse, it whispered that he himself wanted to do the shielding—holding her trim little body close against him, while he defended it with his own.

He even felt that she was a lady to take back to Ireland, which he knew to be the most beautiful place in the world, even though he had never seen it. And Ireland was his real love. He would abandon everything, both love and honor, for the Prince, and the Prince for Ireland.

## Chapter four

### Portrait of the Artists

**A**long with the soldiers' wives and other spectators, Mary applauded politely. Behind her, she heard strong hands clapping with undue enthusiasm. She turned to fix the scoffer with a reproachful glare and wound up giving an exasperated sigh.

"I should have known it was you," she said, extending her slim fingers reluctantly. "Good evening, Captain O'Neill."

"You look especially fetching, with the wind reddening your cheeks under the russet woolen cloak," he said, with another half-mocking sweep of his phantom hat over his heart.

She faced him steadily as he kissed her hand. "I do not fluster you so easily any more," he said ruefully.

She thought that he had changed greatly for the better in the past three days. Except for his emerald satin uniform lining, he could have fit easily among the other red-coated soldiers. A seamstress had come to clean and mend his uniform, just as she had promised. He was wearing the wide black ribbon she

had left him, to tie back his black curls. His leather thong had gone to hold a Highlander's crutch together.

He slouched with the easy grace of a dancer or a duelist, one knee thrust carelessly forward. Even so, he loomed over her and most of the crowd, from more than six feet of height. Above his dancer's long legs and narrow waist, he crossed his powerfully muscled arms over his broad chest, leaving her with the unmistakable feeling that he was trying to display all of his physical attractions at the same time.

"Good afternoon, me darlin'," he said, with his most courtly bow and genial smile, after briefly touching her hand. "Wasn't that Camp Beating the fine thing, altogether? All the regimental drummers lining up, with the drumbeat spreading from one to the other, like an ocean wave. The only trouble was, I came to see the Camp Beating, and no one from the camp got beaten." Once again, she had to bite her lip to keep from smiling.

An alderman's plump wife sniffed reproachfully behind them. Mary could no longer keep the smile from her face.

"Now you're going to tell me how you saw a real camp beating at Prestonpans with your Bonnie Prince."

"Not I!" he assured her, throwing up his hands with a great show of innocence. "I missed out on all the great victories of Prestonpans, Sterling and Falkirk, and showed up just in time for the disaster at Culloden. It was very Irish of me, you must admit.

When he's told that he does not have a chance in the world, an Irishman answers, 'Pass the ammunition!'"

"Well, at least now you won't be singing about them," she murmured. He laughed softly in reply.

"No, I'm more for the literary arts today," he said. "I've been working on my journal. I wondered if you'd be willing to read what I've done so far and give me your honest opinion, being a well-educated young lady, as anyone can hear from your voice. You said you would help me, remember?"

"No," she corrected him gently. "You said I would help you."

Still smiling, he nodded briefly to acknowledge her wit.

"But I'll be glad to do it, all the same," she assured him. "Have you brought your journal with you?"

"It's back in my room," he answered easily. "Would you like to come to see it now?"

She could barely keep from smiling again. "I'll wait until you bring it here, thank you."

"It's much too cold to do any such thing," he said, wrapping his arms around his massive chest and shivering theatrically. "My hands are half frozen as it is. They could never hold the pen." He blew dramatically on them, in another illustration.

"I don't know how it is in Paris," she said, although she had had to bury her own hands deep in the pockets of her cloak, glad of the warmth inside. "But here in Edinburgh, young ladies do not go alone to young gentlemen's rooms."

"Could that be what's stopping you?" he cried, as

though the thought had never occurred to him before. "But there is no danger to your reputation at all at all at all."

He waved towards the stocky, pockmarked young soldier hovering at his side. Recognizing him as one of the guards from his bedroom, Mary realized that they seemed much fonder of each other now.

"Corporal Bradshaw here goes with me everywhere," Francis explained. "He is supposed to be my orderly now and I even trust him to shave me without cutting my throat, although the suspicious among us could still call him my guard. Whatever he is, we're great friends now, aren't we?"

Bradshaw nodded hesitantly. He came over willingly when Francis waved and called, "Corporal Bradshaw, will you step over here?"

"My minister back in Cirencester warned me about subtle and devious Papist lures," the corporal confessed to Mary, bowing over her hand, "O'Neill seems as devious as they come. Still," he continued fondly, "He is a funny fellow, always telling jokes. Tell my favorite," he coaxed.

Francis grinned. "There's the Irishman who somehow gets invited to an elegant ball in the Bath Assembly Room. Seeing two Englishmen arguing with each other, he goes up to them and says, 'Begging your pardon, gentlemen, but is this a private fight or can anyone join in?'"

"You seem quite friendly," Mary observed, as she wondered whether she should smile or show disapproval. "You've come a long way."

Francis laughed, "Corporal Bradshaw tried to apologize for the way he had treated me, but he was just following orders. Order is orders, and all officers are bastards, as I should know, being one myself." Then he winked broadly, to show that there really were no hard feelings.

"I have asked Mary to read my journal for me," Francis said, "But she doesn't know how gentle and innocent I am." He spread his powerful brown hands widely, to show his utter helplessness. "Will you come up with us like a good lad, as our chaperon?"

Corporal Bradshaw nodded respectfully.

The perfect gentleman, Francis took Mary's cloak as they entered the upstairs bedroom and put it on the wooden chest before Corporal Bradshaw could do it for him.

Mary caught his aroma of lemon soap and cinnamon tooth powder above the scent of his woolen uniform and leather boots.

His manners were as perfect as his grooming. He seemed to be trying hard to make up for his foolish behavior at their first meeting. This time, there was no nonsense about making her sit on the bed. He held out the chair in front of the dresser before he took the journal from the upper drawer.

As he seated her, his muscular arm lightly brushed against her bosom, suggesting that the old, insolent Francis was not gone for good. He did not seem to notice that it had happened, but went on looking for the right page. She had certainly noticed, though, and the touch of that hard, powerful arm had sent a thrill



of dark and guilty pleasure through her.

It warned her that she must be careful. Even if he had been a suitable future husband, as he definitely was not, he had given no sign that he was thinking of her as a future wife. She could only be a fleeting amusement for him, a story to tell in a tavern that would entertain his friends in the rebel brigade.

More than ever now, she needed control, control, control.

As she noted with envy, he seemed to be controlling his own emotions perfectly. Apparently, the only emotions that interested him were his future readers'.

"I have gotten to this part here," he said. "Do you think it is exciting enough for the public?"

He reached across her to point out the passage, brushing his arm across her bosom again. This time, she knew it was no accident, but despite herself, thrilled to his touch.

As he pointed to the page with his right forefinger and leaned down to read it, he rested his left hand gently on her shoulder. She ordered herself to move away, before his hand pressed down more firmly and fought her own mad impulse to cover that hand with her own.

Just as her fingers were moving, against her will, to do so, he pulled his own hand away with a quick, apologetic smile. Noting his show of confusion, She could hardly help believing that he really had touched her by accident, after all.

When she glanced up again, she saw that he was

concentrating on his manuscript, just as though he had forgotten the entire incident.

\* \* \* \*

He had forgotten nothing, but had merely decided that it was not yet time. She had responded to him, but not yet fully enough. He must teach her to trust him first.

As she sat with her head bent earnestly over his writing, he realized, to his great annoyance, that his conscience was reawakening.

He was earning her trust only to betray her, his conscience accused. She had never trusted men before meeting him and would certainly never trust them after he was through with her.

Like the warrior he was, he mounted a counter-offensive. He would never betray his Prince's confidence, and Prince Charlie was the only one who mattered. Besides, wasn't she here to abuse his own trust, by making him betray his Prince?

And he wasn't lying to her at all at all, was he now? He really did want her opinion on this chapter, which was, in his opinion, the most exciting episode of the entire work.

Eagerly, he waited while she skimmed the passage. Then she hesitantly assured him that it was exciting enough for anyone—just as thrilling as anything created by Mr. Fielding, Mr. Defoe or even his own Dr. Swift. This left him wanting more than ever to ravish her in love.

"I just read about the escape of the Pretender's Son," she said. "The Prince," he corrected. "Read aloud."

After twelve days filled with adventure, as he had reported, the Prince and his faithful Irish companion had boarded an open fishing boat headed for the Outer Hebrides. His leading Scottish followers had either been captured or, like Ranald Macgregor of Clanranald, had managed to escape back to France, but the Irish would not leave their Prince's side.

*"A violent storm arose," she read, as he listened avidly. "The next day, running for shelter into the Island of North Uist, we struck upon a rock and staved to pieces and with great difficulty saved our lives. The heroes were soon hunting for provisions on the deserted island."*

"I'm sure the reader will love it," she assured him.

He smiled radiantly, until she added, "I see one problem, though."

His grin faded. "And what is that, pray?"

"I know that part of the Hebrides. If you had run aground on a rock there during a storm, you would not have walked away so easily. One of you must have been seriously injured, at the very least."

"It makes a better story this way," he insisted.

"You asked me what I thought, and I told you."

"Are you telling me that I am a liar?"

"I think you are a fine storyteller," she answered, with unusual tact. "But this story does not happen to be true. It simply could not have happened this way."

"It does not matter what happened," he replied patiently. "It matters what people think happened."

Noting her shocked expression, he explained defensively, "We have the book sellers and newspapers nowadays. For everyone who sees something happen or believes he does, there are thousands who read about it. They will think what the newspapers tell them to think. I must be the one to tell the newspapers."

Now her look had changed to outrage, leaving him even more defensive than before.

"The story still has the truth behind it," he insisted. "He is a wonderful hero. There has never been a Prince like him. It is my duty to tell the world about him."

"But that story is not true!" she cried. "Don't you care about the truth at all?"

"I care about my Prince and my nation."

For once, she was speechless.

\* \* \* \*

I suppose I should be grateful, she told herself. He warned me, straight out, not to trust him, and I'll be very careful to avoid doing so. She was not at all grateful, though, she realized. She was horrified.

It was not his dishonesty that upset her, she realized. It was the sheer ruthlessness that caused it. This was what disturbed her so, especially when it lay hidden behind so much talent and charm.

"I love my Prince," he said.

Looking into his eyes, she felt that when he loved, it was with all his heart and soul, and he had given

both to his Prince and nation.

"Do you hate the same way?" she asked, "With all your heart?"

"Yes," he said baldly and abruptly changed direction. "The newspapers have amusing cartoons, and no one takes them too seriously," he said as he opened the drawer. "Did you see this one yet?"

This time, she gasped with sheer disgust.

"Even a rebel newspaper should not have printed this," she said. "The government should never have allowed it."

"A greyhound is more agreeable than an elephant," the caption needlessly said, beneath drawings of the two animals labeled, respectively, 'Charles' and 'Cumberland'.

"How cruel and how completely pointless!" she exclaimed. "Let them argue that Prince Charlie—the Pretender's Son—is the rightful heir, if they believe it. What has that to do with his figure, or the Duke of Cumberland's?"

Her indignation grew as she realized that even Bradshaw was smiling, however reluctantly. Billy was his leader, but he really did look like an elephant, right enough.

O'Neill hastily returned the picture to the drawer.

"All wars are cruel, me darlin'," he explained, with a sigh. "Especially this one, when the enemy has so many more men and guns. We have to use what weapons we have."

Mary realized she was also an English weapon in the war against his cause.

"But we can make it less cruel," she told him. "If you could only tell us where your Prince is, then his cousin could meet him, face to face. I'm sure the Duke would have to love him, if he's as agreeable as they say."

"I'm not so sure at all, at all," he answered, still smiling. "But wouldn't you like to read how the Prince got away, after Culloden? That's an exciting adventure and perfectly true."

"I heard he fled," she answered simply. Then she drew back, frightened at the fury that flared in his eyes.

"We had to drag him off the field," he told her. "He was all for making a last desperate charge. His Irish officers would not let him do it. That's the truth of it!"

*But now, how can anyone ever know when you are speaking truly? You have told me that your own lies are perfectly acceptable, since they are all in a good cause, but your enemies' are wicked abominations, so I see no reason to believe either one.*

He leafed through the pages then pushed the journal into her hand. "You will read all about it here," he said, thrusting his finger at the lines.

"Do you suppose he went back to Uist after you left him?" She spoke as though she were wondering aloud, barely aware of what she was saying. She hoped he would answer the same way.

"Not likely," he replied, with a taunting smile. "The boat had crashed, remember?"

His smile told her that deceit was the order of the

day, but there were no hard feelings about it. She would, she realized, have to be much more subtle next time.

She turned obediently back to her reading. His journal really was exciting, she realized—and if it weren't true, then it should have been. As he leaned over her shoulder, she tried hard to ignore his warm closeness and the feelings it inspired.

\* \* \* \*

The next day, she wore her russet cloak and her brown woolen dress over her salmon quilted petticoat. Still, she was so cold that she would have gone down from the castle battlements if her work had not been going so well, and if it had not been so important to please her model.

She had been sketching him furiously for the last half hour, trying to ignore the growing stiffness in her half-frozen fingers, when she realized that her model might be uncomfortable, too. "Only a few more minutes," she called.

"Take your time," General Hawley replied. "I'm really enjoying myself." He playfully patted the iron cannon beneath his gloved hand.

She was capturing the pose very well, she thought. She even had the lighting right, down to the shine on his boots. She also had an interesting color scheme. His cheeks were burned dull crimson by the wind, above his bright scarlet uniform.

His expression was her only real problem. She

simply could not capture that bluff, hearty, soldierly look. No matter how many times she sketched his face, it came out looking hard, closed and treacherous—as though he were stealing the cannon, rather than displaying it proudly.

With a sigh, she started penciling in the background. She would have to work on his expression later, perhaps with a softer pencil.

As she sketched her view of the city as seen from the castle wall, she realized that the garrison could have turned this cannon on any part of it. Mons Meg alone, the great thirteen-footer, would have knocked it flat.

The city made a perfect target. The apartment buildings were packed close together with some rising eight stories high. They towered over her when she looked up at them from the street, but seemed like fragile doll houses when she gazed down from the castle wall. Was this why the Castle's master's face was not coming out quite as she had intended, as a hearty, jolly man—why it seemed strangely threatening instead?

She had to find a way to evoke a livelier expression. In a mysterious tone, she called out that she was sorry.

"For what?" he asked, with a very attractive look of confusion. Quickly, she started sketching it before it had time to vanish.

"For my failure with the Irish rebel," she replied—wondering, as she did so, why she had not used his name.



Hawley shrugged, forcing her to call out again that he had to stand still while she drew.

"It was just a thought, my dear. Perhaps you'll be able to ask him again. And you don't mind my calling you 'my dear,' do you?"

"Of course not," she assured him lightly. "We have been working so long together, I feel we are good friends." Sternly, she forced from her mind the thought of another voice that had caressed her as it said "Me darlin'."

"May I rest for a moment?" he asked at last. She had to smile again, at the thought of this great general having to ask her permission.

"Of course you can," she agreed. "I must not let my best model grow tired."

Coming to join him as he sat perched on the cannon with his right fingers resting on the turret wall, she saw his left hand fumbling in his uniform pocket. She was first surprised, then pleased when she saw that he was pulling out a glittering object.

*Could it be a betrothal ring?* What should she should say to him if it was? Would she seem too forward if she accepted his proposal on a few days acquaintance? But what if he took her refusal as final and she let the opportunity pass?

Coming closer, she realized wryly that she had no cause for concern. He was not holding out a betrothal ring, but a delicate ladies' gold-toned repeating watch brooch.

"I hope you'll accept this little gift, my dear," he told her. "Please consider it as a token of my

friendship."

"It's lovely," she assured him, as she examined him, caught between disappointment and, strangely, relief. "I really appreciate your kind thought. But I am afraid I can't accept such a valuable gift."

*And you should not have offered it.*

"Not a gift, then," he insisted, still holding it out to her. "Please consider it as your artist's fee. You will give me the picture, which I can see is going to be a particularly fine one."

"On that basis, I accept," she said, as she held out her hand. "It's my first fee as an artist, and probably my last as well."

"I hope you won't need to earn any more," he replied. He closed her hand over his gift, then covered her hand with its own.

She could not pretend that she had missed his meaning. A general would not want a stupid wife, and she would have to be very stupid not to realize that he was hinting at marriage. He needed more time to declare himself, she realized. He feared, perhaps, that she might reject him, but he knew he had good reason to hope. So did she. Marriage, prosperity, safety were coming very near.

As the realization came to her, she felt a little thrill of excitement. General Hawley's lady. She wished she had a way to tell him that she was willing to settle the bargain now, but realized it would be a great mistake. A general, above all men, wanted some sense of conquest.

"I think it is time to get back to work before we

lose the light," she said, gently drawing her hand away. As she turned back towards her drawing stand, she found herself looking at the hard, brown face of Francis O'Neill. Like any other tourist, he was sauntering out of Queen Mary's room, the birthplace of James I. He waved and smiled casually at her, and she wondered at his amusement.

Quickly, she turned to General Hawley, and hoped that she did not see a look of suspicion in his eyes, which were, by contrast—

What color were they, really? She realized she had no idea what kind of eyes he had, even though he had just been holding her hand and she had spent hours drawing him.

She would look more carefully next time he was beside her. She should know what color his eyes were, if she hoped to marry him.

## Chapter five

### interrupted melody

After two weeks, Mary was so accustomed to working with Captain O'Neill that she no longer waited for a soldier to bring his invitation to her mother's door. She suspected that the guards in the hallway no longer noticed her going up the three flights to his room.

'Working' might not have been quite the right word, she realized, as she toiled up the stairway. While not believing a word of the journal, she enjoyed reading it all the same—so much so, that she felt sure she would have been glad to read it even if it had not been part of her job. And, despite her role as editor, reading was the only thing she was allowed to do. Any real editing was out of the question.

He often heeded her minor contributions—for instance, her suggestion that he should described exactly how the Prince had tried to rally his troops, rather than merely asserting that he had done so. But he firmly ignored her major suggestion—that he should stick to the truth.

Well, it *was* his manuscript, she decided.

Today she had her own artistic creation to show him. She had made a new dress for herself of pale lavender silk in the latest London fashion with a ladder of bows climbing from the waist to the bodice, holding it closed.

The skirt fell in one shimmering flow straight to the floor. In mid-June, it was finally getting warm enough to dispense with the quilted petticoats. She had long since left off her side hoops. This little room was cramped enough, she knew, without her skirts sticking out three feet in either direction.

As she entered his room, she turned automatically to let him take her cloak. Seeing that he was alone, she quickly backed towards the door.

"Where is Corporal Bradshaw?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Off posting a letter to his brother," he said, with a shrug. Before she could protest, he closed the door behind her.

"I saw that letter, and he's not a bad writer at all, as I told him," he added. "Better than that moralizing fool Richardson—although I know you ladies love him, and I did not mean to criticize your taste."

"He is not to my taste at all, even though my mother disagrees," she assured him. "I side with you completely. Can you imagine a girl staying that long with an employer who keeps insulting her with his attentions?"

He smiled and shrugged. "Perhaps Pamela was not really insulted at all. Perhaps she knew that he loved

her."

His low, intimate tone, as he leaned down to her ear told her that this was no longer a strictly literary discussion.

"Enough about Mr. Richardson," she replied briskly as she walked away from him. "It's your book I want to see."

Like every author she had ever heard of, he found those words impossible to resist. Taking the pages from the dresser, he thrust them into her hand without waiting for her to sit.

"I want your honest reaction," he told her.

This meant, of course, that he wanted her enthusiastic praise. She had been working with him long enough to realize that. As she read, he waited eagerly to hear it.

He did not seem to realize that his knee-length uniform jacket was unbuttoned, revealing skin-tight breeches. Pretending not to notice, she read doggedly on.

He was introducing a new character today—Flora MacDonald. Mary had already heard about the famed Highland heroine who had led the fugitive Prince to safety through the British lines disguised as her maid, Betty Burke. Even the English soldiers spoke of her with admiration, and she was curious to see what Flora's chief admirer had to say about her.

Now, Francis was saying that he was the one who had introduced her to the Prince. Mary found herself wishing that she could dismiss that as another of Francis's lies, but it had that ring of truth. *Could I be*

*jealous?* She dismissed the absurd idea.

She had the distinct feeling that he would not lie about this one subject, at least. She heard it in his voice as he spoke about Flora MacDonald—hushed, awed, almost reverent—and she knew, with another stab of jealousy, that he would never talk about Mary Buchanan that way.

She called herself back to her real business, which she had been neglecting for too long.

“Was there anyone else like Flora?” she asked casually. “Were there other ladies who helped him escape?” *And who might therefore know where he is.*

“Many ladies helped him, and I listed them all in that journal,” he answered calmly, neatly avoiding her trap. “But there were none like Miss. Do you think the reader will know how I feel about her?”

“‘Miss?’ Is that what you call Flora MacDonald?” she asked coolly. “Yes, I am sure she will.”

“And do you know how I feel about you?”

The change was so abrupt, so completely unexpected, she had no idea how to reply. When she managed an answer, it was as light as she could make it. “How could I know?” she asked him. “You haven’t written about me yet.”

“I have another way of showing you,” he answered. Grasping her arms, he pulled her towards him and then closed his own arms around her. It happened so suddenly that she did not have time to resist.

Then she felt herself being crushed, overwhelmed, overpowered in those powerful arms. As she inhaled

his unique aroma of leather, wool and lemon soap, it was so intoxicating, she wanted only to drink it in forever. She was glad that she could offer him the scent of her own rosewater in return.

Still, she knew she could not, dared not, remain in his arms. She struggled briefly, and stopped in shame when she realized how much she had been enjoying her vain resistance against his powerful embrace.

Still, she had to fight—really fight—with words as well as actions, if she hoped to escape without leaving her life in ruins.

“Isn’t Bradshaw coming back?” she asked.

“Sooner or later,” he whispered, with a shrug. “I paid him to make himself scarce for an hour or so.”

In the fact of that brazen admission, she found herself fighting against him, armed with real anger at last. He seemed to sense the difference, because his arms started to open as though to set her free.

Then he clasped her even more tightly against him. His arms pinned hers against her sides, so that she could not even try to fight. Reaching down, he pressed his lips on hers. They were firm, hard and demanding against her own soft mouth. She could not stop herself from yielding, from surrendering to that insistent, relentless command. He was overwhelming her, she felt, not only with his strong embrace and firm kiss, but with his dark and ruthless soul. She pressed her own lips against his in silent surrender.

Slowly and gently, his tongue ran along them. Timidly, her own tongue flicked out to trace his thin,



hard mouth in reply.

He laughed with surprise and pleasure at her boldness.

With well-practiced fingers, he pulled open the first three lavender bows holding her bodice closed. Then he pressed his lips firmly against her shoulder and his kisses marched in a slow, steady procession to her right breast. His tongue circled her nipple, even more gently than it had caressed her mouth. Then he turned to give her other breast its fair share of delight.

A fiery message ran through her then, like a spark along a gunpowder trail. Her slender hands reached up to caress his powerful arms, beneath his rough woolen sleeves. Slowly, luxuriantly, she traced the muscular ridges up to his broad shoulders.

The sensation sent a sweet fire running through her fingertips, across the network of her nerves and into her heart and soul. She had to touch those sculpted contours even more intimately. No matter what the cost might be, she had to enjoy them in their naked splendor.

With trembling fingers, she fumbled to open the nine brass buttons running from his throat to his waist. Still holding her close, he slipped out of the opened jacket, so skillfully that she realized that he must have done it often before. She felt no anger, though. She might as well have been angry at a perfect woodcarving in an art gallery because other visitors had praised it.

She did not stop to wonder why he was naked under his emerald-lined red jacket. She only felt

grateful that she had bared his chest so quickly and easily, leaving her free to fully relish the naked brown woodcarving that revealed itself to her fingertips. Her hands traced slow circles and spirals over the perfect contours of those rippling shoulders and arms. Her sensitive artist's fingers explored his magnificent body as though she were creating and enjoying the splendid masterpiece at the same time.

If he was her masterpiece, she was his as well. He was the maestro and her body was the instrument, as he composed and performed a concerto of ecstasy.

As he kissed her breasts in perfect rhythm, he eased her to the bare white wall, until her back rested against it. Then he thrust his breeches against her, and she felt his hard, pulsing manhood following the same rhythm as her fingers traced it along his naked chest.

Back and forth he moved against her, towards and away, arousing wave after wave of desire.

Then he pressed his hand gently against her skirt. Gently opening and closing his fingers above her mound, he sent the same waves of delight surging through her.

In the same tempo, with a dancer's grace, he bent to the bare wooden floor, where his left hand lifted the hem of her skirt and threw it over his naked forearm. She waited, trembling, as his right hand sought the hidden place. His hand closed slowly over the tight, moist chestnut curls there. She pressed that place against him, too, barely able to stop herself from groaning with delight.

But he had not yet brought her to the height of pleasure. He dipped his right forefinger gently inside, just deep enough to gather the warm moisture. Then he rested that finger on her secret place. His left arm held her close —so close that she felt his heart pounding against her own and his chest heaving.

She was gasping with amazement and delight. She had not even known that that place on her body existed, or that such pleasure could be felt.

Clasped in those superbly muscled arms, held against that magnificent sculpted chest, caressed by those skillful fingers, she felt sensations that she could not even name. She was flying, swooping and soaring. She was riding some magnificent wild steed, galloping into the wind. She was gliding swiftly through the waves, like the most graceful mermaid. She was dancing, as those powerful, tireless arms whirled her across a glittering golden floor. She was doing all this and more—a thing that could only be mocked and degraded by calling it “the mechanical part of marriage.”

Knowing that she was ready and more than ready, he moved his finger into the warm, wet opening. In and out, with slow and perfect timing, his finger brought the tantalizing promise of the greater and even more complete fulfillment to come.

Then she saw his left hand reaching into his breeches pocket and was surprised to see it emerge holding a sheepskin envelope about six inches long.

“It is Dr. Condom’s useful invention,” he told her. “It will save you from being a mother before you are a

wife." She was wondering how it could do that when his next words drove all other thoughts away.

"Are you ready for me, me darlin'?" he crooned. "Do you want me inside you?"

She could barely manage to breathe the answer. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." He lifted her as easily as she would have picked up Snowflake and carried her towards the bed.

In a moment he would ruin her, she knew, in her last moment of reason—but how could this be ruin, when she was feeling the pure delight of Eden's most glorious hours?

But even in this shining moment, jealousy shadowed the light. "Was it this way with Flora MacDonald, too?" she asked, silently begging him to say no. "Was that how you won her over?" Because she believed now that, doing this thing, he could have won any woman to anything. She only wished that he had won Flora MacDonald some other way.

And, as though granted by some cruel genie, her wish came crushingly true.

"No, I did not," she had wanted him to whisper, as they continued their magical dance. Instead, the silent music stopped abruptly as his arms went stiff and he pulled away. He was glaring down in outrage, as though she'd asked if he had done this with the Holy Image of the Blessed Mother in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Because, she realized, despite his great show of worldliness, he regarded Flora MacDonald that way. *To him, I am not even worthy to speak her sacred name.*

Seeing his error at once, he tried, in obvious

confusion, to correct it.

"Well, now, we were not together that long," he said. For the first time since she had known him, he lowered his eyes, looking openly abashed. But he was not ashamed of what he had almost done to her a few moments ago, Mary realized—only that he had to speak the holy name of Miss MacDonald at the same time.

With a burst of fury, she pushed herself away from him and, with trembling fingers, started to fasten the lavender bows across her bodice.

"It would not have mattered, would it?" she asked, as she looked down to make sure she was pulling them tight. "You would never have done this with your Highland heroine."

With contempt for him and herself, she realized that he was struggling hard to force himself to come up with the perfect lie.

Pulling on her cloak, she strode to the door and yanked it open. With her hand on the frame, she turned to face him.

"You know only two kinds of women, don't you? The Highland heroine and the common whore. I don't like the category you have put me in."

"Damn me!" O'Neill exclaimed to himself. In his burst of anger and frustration, he threw his journal to the floor.

She turned her head away quickly as she fled so he could not see her tears. She could barely see to race down the three flights of stairs, her skirts billowing around her. She did not notice the soldiers

whispering in the hallways below or think of him  
chasing the pages under the bed, but only of her woe.

## Chapter Six

### Female Rebels

**W**hen she reached home, Mary headed straight for the kitchen. She badly needed a cup of tea and a few moments of solitude.

Above all, she had to calm herself before she faced her mother. If Lady Catherine guessed the truth, she might be furious at her daughter or Francis or both. If she were ever to work with him again, she would have to force herself to act like a lady, even if he were not always a gentleman.

Speaking of gentlemen—what if the whole story got back to General Hawley and the other eligible officers, via Corporal Bradshaw? She gasped in dismay as the thought struck her.

But why hadn't it occurred to her before? Her reputation was her most priceless possession—her only dowry, really. When she was with Francis O'Neill, it did not seem to matter at all. Nothing mattered but the two of them.

Lost in her thoughts, it took Mary several minutes to realize that the two other women were acting

strangely.

With their backs to her, they were filling a sack with bread, cheese and apples from the cupboard. This would not have been remarkable, except that they were doing it in such a stealthy way. Lady Catherine actually seemed to be stealing her own food from her own kitchen, with her maid as her accomplice.

When the older woman caught sight of her daughter watching her silently, she started behaving in an even more suspicious manner. First she jumped, startled. Then she pulled herself up to her full height of 5'3" and tried to look impressive, even though that left her three inches shorter than Mary herself.

She seemed calm regal and composed at that moment, every inch the great lady. In short, she seemed as she always did, when she was trying to hide something. Her daughter remembered, with alarm, that Lady Catherine had looked just that way when she had told her son that she was going to visit a sick friend and then headed straight for the Pretender's Son's ladies' reception.

Hearing her mother's voice, Mary's alarm grew. It was steady, clear and commanding: a sure sign that she was hoping to avoid her children's criticism.

"I am giving Annie some food to take to her family," she said. With a sinking heart, Mary remembered that her mother had spoken that way – in tones befitting the dowager countess that she was – while telling William that she had no intention of going anywhere near the Pretender's Son.



If Mary had not known from her mother's tone that she was telling a barefaced lie right now, she would have learned it from Annie's behavior. The blond girl made a quick, almost instinctive attempt to hide the bag behind her red woolen skirt.

"Annie's family is in the Isle of Skye," Mary retorted sharply.

"She has cousins here," Lady Catherine answered, in an even more noble, less trustworthy tone.

"Mama," Mary asked quietly, "what in the world are you up to?"

In her more normal manner, she answered simply, "Annie is taking food to the prisoners."

"God help us," Mary whispered, as she leaned for support against the rough stone mantel.

"Will you tell your friend Hawley?" her mother asked, her voice shaking, as Annie's terrified eyes silently echoed the question.

"Of course not!"

For a moment, Mary wondered for a moment why she had answered so quickly. Could she be secretly suspecting that her kind friend Hawley would not be so kind at all, even to his sweetheart's mother, if he knew she was defying him? Even worse, could it be that she herself believed all those foolish stories that Francis had told against him?

Resolutely hiding her doubts, she answered, "Telling him would be an insult to him and our army. You are saying he can't be trusted to care for their prisoners."

"But they are not lies, any of them!" Annie cried.

"They are letting the prisoners starve!" she insisted, grasping her young employer's hand, her position as servant forgotten. "They look like skeletons. You can count all their ribs through their skin. Always, they cry for food and water. The ladies send their servants with as much as they can, but it is never enough."

"The female rebels," Mary muttered, pulling her hand away. A London newspaper had recently coined that term, to describe women like Colonel Anne MacIntosh, who had led her clan regiment for the Pretender's Son and Flora MacDonald, who had helped him escape after his defeat and, worst of all, Lady Primrose in London, called the Notorious Primrose, because she was still the ringleader of all his followers there. The editor meant it as a term of ridicule. Lady Catherine refused to take it that way.

"I am proud to be one of them," her mother proclaimed, her voice truly regal and honest this time.

"Are you a rebel, Annie?" Mary demanded coldly. "I thought you were a MacLeod and they did not like Charlie."

"We do not, then," the girl replied indignantly.

"Then have you a rebel lover?"

"How dare you!" her mother shouted. "You will ask Annie's pardon at once."

"Yes, I do," the servant answered, steadily holding Mary's eyes.

She stared as though really noticing her servant for the first time. Now that she did so, she did not find it at all surprising that the girl would find a lover.

Annie's broad, flat face had a womanly, sensual allure beneath her tangled straw hair.

Annie didn't need some captive Highland savage, though, Mary decided, in exasperation. Plenty of lonely English soldiers were stationed here, like Mary's own good friend.

Mary sighed. It was no sense saying that now. She was touched, despite herself, by the glow that lit the girl's broad face, making it seem almost soft and delicate, as she said her lover's name.

"He was a captain in the Highlands," she said quietly but proudly. "He is a MacDonald of Bellfinlay, from the Clanranalds Regiment on the Isle of Skye. His leg was broken by the grapeshot at Culloden, but he is still so tall and beautiful, and not yet twenty-one years old."

To Mary's surprise, she felt her eyes filling with tears, almost matching the ones that were running down Annie's pink cheeks.

"I hope everything will be all right for you both," she whispered reluctantly. "If you want to take him some little treat, it is no business of mine."

"It most certainly is not," Lady Catherine answered, with an angry glare. "If you make it your business and report her, I will go there in her place."

Even more coldly, she added, "Annie did not start going there because she had a lover. She met him in the prison, and she had been taking food there from simple kindness, because I asked her to."

Mary gasped with dismay, but then lowered her eyes before her mother's stern gaze.

"I am sure that I meant no offense," Mary said. "We have some gingerbread left from last night's dinner. I suppose you can take him that, too, as a special treat."

Annie pressed her hand in gratitude. "Can I ask you for something else, Miss?" she begged. "Ranald wants to know about another prisoner, an Irish man. He was taken from the others at the castle gate. Ranald wants to know if he is safe."

Suddenly, Mary remembered the crippled lad who had walked besides Francis O'Neill to the castle. "Was he Captain O'Neill, from Lally's Regiment? Did he tell jokes to your man on the way to the castle? Was your man walking on a crutch?"

Annie nodded eagerly. "The Irish man made Ranald smile," she said. "I will always bless him for that."

"He has made me smile, too," Mary admitted, doing so faintly now, even as he remembered how he had, more recently, made her weep with shame. "He is a French Army officer, so the English are treating him well."

As Annie turned to go, dragging her heavy sack, Mary added impulsively, "Tell him that Captain O'Neill has found an old friend, Old Carruthers." She hoped that that might bring the boy another smile.

She was surprised when her mother hugged her impulsively, after the girl had left. "You really are not such a prig at all," Lady Catherine assured her.

Still trying hard to be sensible, her daughter insisted, "But she shames us."

"Oh, yes," Lady Catherine answered, in a rueful tone. "That is quite true. She shames us."

\* \* \* \*

Considering what she had heard that morning, O'Neill's conduct no longer seemed so terrible after all.

The embarrassing memory of her near disgrace was replaced by a more inspiring one, as she remembered Francis's descriptions of the Prince.

"There is not such a Prince in all the world," he had said, time and time again. And his journal had given her an entirely new picture of the Pretender's Son. Knowing Francis and his lack of regard for the truth, she had deeply suspected his glowing descriptions before. But if the Prince had inspired her mother and Annie that way, Mary felt that they must have had some truth. Together, they had given her an entirely new picture of the Pretender's Son. Now she knew why so many people persisted in calling him Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Supporting her head on her hand, she had a perfect view of the tapestry showing Icarus falling into the sea. Studying it closely for the first time in years, she realized that she was seeing it as she never had before.

The weavings were not really about the fall of Icarus, she realized with surprise. They were about his flight. He had soared to the sun—that was the important thing—not that he had fallen afterwards.

The world would remember his flight with admiration. Perhaps some day, the memory would inspire others to fly more safely, on stronger, unmelting wings.

The two scenes did not seem depressing at all now. They seemed noble, uplifting, inspiring—heroic. They made her glad to be a human being, rather than a bird, because only a human would have dared to strive so bravely, against nature, against fate, against the gods themselves.

And they reminded her of the portrait of another golden-haired youth—the kilted Highland laddie on the posters being circulated all over the country, promising a thirty-thousand-pound reward for the Pretender's Son.

No one had claimed it, and she was sure now that no one would. Everyone in Scotland, even his enemies, knew what it meant that he had flown, even briefly, so near the sun.

She was drifting off to sleep—with Icarus, wearing a Stuart clan kilt, floating through the air beside her—when the muskets banged on the door. At once, she was fully awake, fearing that the building had caught fire and the soldiers were trying desperately to wake her. She pushed her feet into her shoes and pulled her woolen cloak from the peg.

It was no fire, though, she knew, when she heard her mother shouting at the man in the hall. The strained, outraged tone was so unlike her mother's usual voice, Mary knew at once that something truly terrible had happened.

As she reached the hallway, she saw an English officer almost throwing her mother onto the bench, while two of his comrades strode towards the kitchen door.

"What in the world do you think you are doing here?" Mary shouted, jumping up to follow them. "My brother is the Earl of Dunronald!"

"He is also a captain in your own army," Lady Catherine cried.

Both women remembered, then, that the soldiers must have entered many Scottish earls' houses that way since Culloden.

Still the men did not answer, and their silence was more frightening than the roughest curses. Both women followed them to the kitchen in time to see them pulling Annie out of her bed.

Annie was screaming something about how she was a MacLeod, she did not like Charlie, she liked the Duke. Snowflake was almost drowning out her frantic cries with her own barks and howls of rage.

The little white dog was circling the invaders, snarling and springing at them. By reflex, they were lowering their bayonets to stop her. Mary picked her up, threw her into the main chamber and closed the door.

"Mary, go to General Hawley!" her mother cried.

Her daughter did not even pause long enough to don a dress as she rushed to obey. With her russet woolen cloak hastily thrown over her white bed gown, she raced down the stairs. She barely saw the neighbors pouring into the hallway or heard their

curious questions.

With horror, she watched the soldiers dragging Annie out of the house between them. They threw the servant girl into the horse cart and rode towards the castle. Mary ran up the cobblestones after them, a frantic figure in the moonlight, ignoring the night's cold and the blistering of her stockingless feet, in their pointed shoes.

The guard on duty recognized her as the girl he'd seen painting the general's portrait. He did not try to stop her as she ran through the gate, behind the soldiers.

She ran straight towards Hawley's headquarters building.

Two more soldiers stood on duty before it. "I've got to see General Hawley," she managed to gasp, breathless from her frantic journey.

If they were surprised, or even shocked, to see the general's lady friend showing up at such an hour, and in such disarray, they were too well-trained to show it.

"I'm sorry, Miss," one of them answered, in his most respectful tone, ignoring the bed gown that peeped out from under her cape. "The general has gone to question a prisoner who was just arrested tonight."

"That prisoner is my chambermaid!" she cried. "I know what happened, she brought food to her lover in prison. He can't arrest her for that, can he?"

"I don't know about bringing food, Ma'am. She was arrested for helping prisoners to escape."



"No!" she cried in horror, not daring to even think of what the penalty would be. "She did not do that. She was only bringing him treats from our kitchen."

"I'm sure you'll have time to tell the general later," he told her firmly.

She was far beyond embarrassment now. Racing towards one of the smaller stone buildings that made up the complex that was Edinburgh Castle, she looked straight up at the third floor and shouted, "Francis! Captain O'Neill!"

Within moments, he was bursting out the door and racing towards her, still buttoning his black brocade bed jacket as he ran.

Someone had been kind enough to lend it to him, and she suspected that Corporal Bradshaw was the man. Now she found herself wishing that the English soldier had managed to bring his Irish prisoner a sword. With that in his hand, Captain O'Neill could have held them all off, she thought wildly, and I would have been proud to stand beside him while he did, as her own warrior bard lived out, once again, the song that so well described him...

*One sword at least thy right shall guard... one faithful heart shall praise thee.*

Then her dream was shattered by the terrible reality that had brought her there.

"Did you hear anyone say where they were taking Annie?" she demanded. He shook his head abruptly.

"I heard the general saying that he was going to question her in person," he answered.

"They think Annie has helped someone escape,

and it isn't true!" she wailed.

He led her away to the ramparts, where they could talk without being heard. "Yes, it is," he said softly. "She brought Robert Nairn a civilian's coat, two days before his execution date. She lured the guard away while the cell door was still open, and Nairn got away. They'll flog the skin off the soldier's back for this, and God knows what they'll do to Annie. Nairn ran into one of those countless back alleys of yours. May all the saints go with him." She saw no laughter in his blue eyes now.

*Good Protestants know there are no such thing as saints, she thought, but may they go with him anyway.*

"Nairn?" she asked blankly. "Her sweetheart was named MacDonald."

"He was too crippled to go with Nairn. He said he could only slow him down."

Mary angrily fought back her tears, having no time for them now.

"Did they put her with MacDonald, at least?"

"Do you think they are so merciful?" he demanded. "They put her into the bridge hole—a tiny cell under the bridge."

"Oh, my God!" Weeping helplessly now, she did not even notice when he put a comforting arm around her.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" she sobbed.

"I can do something," he said. Glancing up, she saw his cold blue eyes blazing with a fanatic's fire that frightened her.

"I know who betrayed her," he said gently.

Incredibly, despite the icy fury in his eyes, he was still speaking in his soft, lilting Irish brogue.

"I heard Hawley slamming out into the night," he told her. "Then I heard the informer bragging to the other soldiers about it. He was an Irishman, God damn him, a man named Trapeau, a lieutenant in Sackville's Regiment. He pretends to be an Irish prisoner, so he can worm out secrets for Hawley and his friends. He was laughing about how much he got paid for this one. He's a dead man walking, I promise you that."

She did not doubt for a moment that he would make good on his oath. O'Neill was a cold, hard man with a soft, gentle voice, and nothing could have been more dangerous. She had heard someplace that the Irish rebels called themselves 'hard men', and now she understood why.

For a moment, she felt sorry for Trapeau, who was destined to hear that lilting brogue pronounce his death sentence.

"What good will it do Annie or anyone else to kill him?" she finally asked.

"It will keep him from testifying against her or anyone else, me darlin'."

"They will think she had him killed!" she exclaimed.

The thought obviously took him by surprise.

"I did not think of that," he admitted, with admiration in his eyes. "I'll wait until Annie is safe." As if testing her, he added, "and then, do you want me to let him go?"

She thought of the glow on Annie's face, as she talked about her beautiful, crippled lover. Annie had sounded so proud, because her man had been an officer in some savage clan regiment on some barbaric island. That was something they would have boasted about to their grandchildren.

"No," she answered shortly, knowing that her voice sounded much harsher than Francis O'Neill's.

She did not know if she had passed the test, but Francis clutched her to him. She looked up to see, with surprise, that tears were running down his brown cheeks, just as they ran down her own.

\* \* \* \*

Mary did not notice that the Duke of Cumberland was at his window, peering through the blue brocade curtains. Another slim, elegant greyhound, he was thinking—or, rather, an Irish wolfhound this time.

At any rate, the Irishman was not a funny elephant. Of course a fat elephant was funny, he thought, like a fat man. Nothing else was quite so amusing, the Duke thought bitterly, deliberately feeding his cold rage.

No, one thing was just as amusing, he decided with satisfaction. An old man, like General Hawley, in love with a pretty young girl who naturally preferred a handsome young captain, even if he was nothing but an Irish rebel prisoner—nothing could be any more diverting than that.

He could not wait to tell Hawley the truth about his ladylove.

## Chapter Seven

### CLOAK OF DARKNESS

**A**fter lying awake until sunrise, Mary managed to fall into a fitful sleep, only to be awakened by more fists pounding on the door. This time, though, she heard only two of them, banging furiously, as an urgent voice pleaded, "It's me, Corporal Bradshaw. For Christ's sake, woman, open the door!"

Pulling her cloak around her once again, she ran to admit him. "Has something happened to Francis?" she demanded.

"They've arrested him."

She swayed and would have fallen, if he had not caught her and helped her to the bench. "But they can't charge him with treason" she wailed. "He is a French Army officer."

"They arrested him for trying to recruit for the Irish Brigades, and they can hang him for that."

For a long time, she could only stare at him in horror, as the full meaning of his words sank in.

"But how can they do such a thing?" she demanded finally.

"Hangman Hawley can," he abruptly replied.

"Even you call him that?"

"Miss, the whole army does. Don't you think we know what he is and what he's done? His own men told me how he promised the wounded prisoners that they were being taken to see physicians, then locked them in a shed and set it on fire." In tones so bitter she was sure he would have spit on the floor if she had not been present, he said, "And that is what he made of our great victory at Culloden. By the time he's done with it, no English regiment will wish to claim it."

And this was the man I dreamed of marrying, she thought as she clasped both hands over her mouth to keep from screaming.

"What can I do?" she pleaded.

This was obviously the question he had been hoping for. Reaching immediately under his coat, he produced a sheaf of papers that she recognized well. "It's his journal," she said.

"And they can use it against him. They can use it to hurt others, too, like the seven Glenmoriston Men. You must hide it for him."

Then they could arrest us both, she thought for a moment, before she dismissed the idea.

"Go, then," she ordered. "Even you must not know where it is. They could torture you to find it."

Neither of them stopped to question whether Hangman Hawley was capable of that.

As he turned towards the door, she found herself asking the question that had been hovering at the back of her thoughts.

"But why did you come to me?" she asked. "How did you know you could trust me? The last time you saw us, we were not good friends."

Despite their shared danger, he could not repress a smile. "You were always very good friends," he said. "Much better than either of you knew. That's how I knew you would do this last thing for him."

Oh, no, she thought, as he closed the door behind him. That is hardly the last thing I will do.

But first, she had to carry out his wishes and hide his precious journal. Sure that the soldiers would soon be searching for it, she looked wildly around the little apartment. Where would they not search? She asked herself wildly. Then her glance fell on Snowflake, standing beside her dog dish, barking for her breakfast.

\* \* \* \*

Whatever else General Hawley was, he was not stupid. Just as Bradshaw had warned her, he came with four soldiers less than an hour later.

The ladies were still at breakfast, when Lady Catherine rose from the kitchen table to answer the hammering at the door.

"Good morning, General," she said, as the five men stormed past her, ignoring Snowflake's ferocious greeting. "We have finished our breakfast, but would you and your men care for some tea?"

"We would care to see your daughter," he answered, in a tone of barely repressed rage.

"She is still in the kitchen," her mother replied, fighting hard for calm. "I am sure she will be glad to see you."

But she could no longer even pretend that it was a social visit when Hawley grasped her daughter's arm and dragged her up from the table. The horrified mother tried to throw herself on him, but two of his men pulled her away and held her fast.

"Leave her alone!" she shouted. "I am the female rebel, the one who loves our Bonnie Prince, God bless him—not my daughter. She is as loyal to King George as you are yourself."

I was, Mary thought, but King George's men are forfeiting my loyalty to him. She did not dare say so. Instead, she asked, her voice shaking, "What do you want with me, general?"

"Not your hand in marriage, you Highland slut!" he snarled. "Not after you have been with that Irish rebel scum."

Because you could not stand the competition, she thought, not even caring if her face revealed her contempt.

Out loud, she demanded, "And who told you that lie?"

"Cumberland saw you embracing in the courtyard, the night your servant was arrested."

"And he proved his truly royal nature," she retorted, her voice ringing with scorn. "He saw only a man who was trying to comfort a woman, as any true man should do. I have not been with the prisoner, if you mean that in the way that I suspect you do. And



you were the one who sent me to him, as you recall."

"And you have enjoyed your work only too well."

At that, decency would allow her to do no less than slap him across the face, knowing, even as she did so, that he would respond in kind. Instead, she asked, in her coldest tone, "May I ask you again what you want of me?"

"His journal," he retorted. "It will help us prove that he committed a capital crime. I know you were working on it with him. We have torn his room apart without finding it. He must have managed to give it to you."

Now she hoped only to protect the only ally she had left. "Corporal Bradshaw has already been here asking that same question," she replied, and, as she did so, she was surprised to realize that she had started lying as easily as Francis O'Neill did himself. "I told him what I am telling you, that I do not have it. Your men are welcome to search our home if you do not believe it."

"And search we shall," he growled. "We do not need your invitation."

And search they did, starting by throwing every bit of food from the cupboard onto the floor. Lady Catherine hurriedly started pulling the China from the shelves to save it from the same fate, and laying it carefully on the table. Benches were turned over, to see if anything had been fastened underneath. In the main room, the chair cushions suffered even harsher treatment, as bayonets slashed them open. The soldiers did not even hesitate long before they pulled

the lid off the chamber pot, which was, for the sake of the ladies' modesty, decently empty.

All of this brought moans from the owner, but she and her daughter had to clasp each other's hands for comfort only when the soldiers tore down the bedroom tapestries that were the last of their family's fine possessions. And through it all, Snowflake kept barking fiercely from her dog bed at the intruders and snapping at any one of them who dared come too near.

"Are you satisfied now?" Lady Catherine asked coldly, sounding truly regal now, when the search had finally ended and she stood facing the men, with her daughter at her side.

"The men may go," Hawley said. But, as the two women noted with sinking hearts, he did not follow them out the door.

Instead, he grasped Mary's arm again and dragged her into the bedroom, while his free hand pushed her frantic mother away and locked the door against her.

"Now I will take what you promised me, and what you gave so freely to your Irishman," he said, as Lady Catherine pounded on the door and screamed for help, almost loud enough to drown out Snowflake's howls.

Relentlessly, he pushed her towards the bed and the cushions that were spewing feathers where his men had ripped them apart. They rose in a cloud around Mary as he threw her down among them. As he loomed over her, coming ever closer, she watched desperately for her opportunity to resist.

After pulling off his coat, he started fumbling to open his trouser buttons, and she finally saw her chance. Thanking Heaven for the fashionable shoes with the pointed toes that had always been such a nuisance before, she kicked those leather toes with all her force straight into the place beneath those buttons. As he howled in pain and rage, she used the precious moment to race for the door and pull the latch open. Neither noticed that her mother's cries and poundings had stopped.

With a curse, he grasped his intended victim's arm again, but released her with another oath when her teeth tore at his hand. That gave her just enough time to pull the door open and race into the main room, planning to throw herself into her mother's arms.

But her mother's hands were occupied. They held a pistol, pointed at the door. If her daughter had been ravished, she would have shot the man coming out of it. As it was, General Hawley emerged to look into a pair of eyes that could have belonged to any of the Buchanan warriors in any generation past.

"Get out of my house," she told him.

"Gladly," he answered, with the dignity he could muster. "I will go to arrange the trial of your daughter's lover, who will hang within the fortnight. And he is fortunate at that, because we are trying him only for illegal recruiting, not treason, so he can only be hanged rather than hanged, drawn and quartered as he deserves, right along with the other Scottish rebels."

Without even the briefest, most formal nod of

courtesy, he strode out the door and slammed it behind him, sending Snowflake into an even noisier fit of rage.

\* \* \* \*

Lady Catherine had no trouble getting General Hawley's permission to attend the trial with her daughter. He sent a reply to her note within an hour, assuring her that he would be pleased to see both ladies there. And they were sure it was true. In particular, they knew full well, he wanted to see Mary's horror and dismay when her lover heard his death sentence pronounced.

Accordingly, seats had been saved for them in the third row of the courtroom, outraging two of the good citizens who had come to regard that location as their own. On the other side of the aisle, the Buchanan women could see Cumberland, Hawley and Wolfe—the three bachelors who had once entertained Mary in such a courtly way—now turning their backs on them both.

Above the three judges in their white horsehair wigs, the gilded lion and unicorn gleamed against the oak-paneled walls, representing the majesty of Britain. Outside, she knew, armed soldiers surrounded the building. Against them all, a slim, elegant figure stood defiant and erect in a red woolen coat with an emerald lining.

"Francis O'Neill," the chief judge asked. "You have been charged with conspiring to recruit for the rebel

Irish brigades. How do you plead?"

The prisoner's voice was just as firm as his judge's. "I do not plead at all, your honor," he said, ignoring the babble of confusion and outrage that rose around them. "I am an officer of the French Army. This court has no authority to try me."

He has doomed himself, Mary thought, in despair, and she half rose from her seat in her need to stop him. Then she sank hopelessly down again. *No*, she realized, he could not do anything else and still be who he is—the man I love. And what a terrible time this is to come to know it.

"Then I have no choice," the judge announced, with a very unconvincing show of regret. "Francis O'Neill, you are sentenced to hang at sunrise tomorrow and may God have mercy on your soul."

Even through their screams of horror, the two women heard the Irishman's mocking reply, "and on yours, too."

If the trial had ended at that moment, the veteran spectators would have agreed that that was the most memorable session they had ever attended. But more was yet to come, making it a story to tell to their grandchildren.

Major Wolfe, who had looked so to Mary like a rabbit, was on his feet, walking up to the judge's table.

"But that cannot be done, your honors," he said in a firm tone. "The King must sign the decree."

"He will do so, I assure you," the Duke of Cumberland growled, setting off a wave of nervous

laughter. "We have no need to waste my father's time."

"But the law is the law," Wolfe answered, just as shyly. "And what did we fight for, my lords, if not the laws of England?"

"Very well, then," the judge said impatiently. "We will wait for the King's reply."

"But not too long," joked Butcher Cumberland, setting off more laughter.

"For a month," the judge decided. And then, before there could be any more outrages, his falling gavel declared the trial over.

\* \* \* \*

She had to lean on Bradshaw for support as she descended the long flight of stone stairs leading to the dungeons. Her right hand stayed on her shoulder, carefully holding the russet cloak in place.

Reaching the bottom, she could see into the dim cells, with the men clutching the bars, often packed five or six together, in a space where only one could barely stand. Seeing that she had brought no food, they stared back at her silently.

As befitted his rank, Captain O'Neill had his own private cell. Now he stood with his arms folded, gazing at her with his old mocking smile. The English obviously thought so too, because a guardsman stood before it, from Bradshaw's own Cobham Dragoons.

The guard stood in her path as she ran towards the cell. "We have not heard that he had permission for

any visitors," he said.

"Would you deny him a last night with his girl?" Bradshaw asked. "What kind of soldier are you?"

"The kind that don't want to hang along with him, because I still want to live long enough to have a few girls of my own!"

"Perhaps this will relieve your fears," said Bradshaw as, digging into his coat pocket, he produced five shillings.

"Well, there's no need to refuse him a bit of comfort," the guard decided, as he pocketed the coins. In a moment the door was opened, just far enough to let Mary slip through.

"What in the world are you doing here?" Francis demanded, so surprised that he forgot, for once, to add, "Me darlin'."

For answer, she moved closer to him and opened her cloak, to reveal her nakedness that only he could see. It was complete except for the shoes that guarded her feet from the rough stone floor. His eyes widened in even greater surprise, mingled with appreciation for her love and courage, and desire for the slim but rounded form he saw before him.

"But I would not disgrace you, me darlin'," he said, with the last of his self-control.

"I have disgraced myself enough already, where the English are concerned, and they themselves are too disgraceful to care about," she whispered in reply. "As for that other thing, my time of month has just ended, but it would not matter. I would have come to you all the same."

Glancing at his trousers, she saw that he was as ready for her as she was for him, with his male organ bulging against his breeches.

As soon as he had opened the lowest of the five brass buttons, she wondered at how hard he had grown. Then she spread her arms around his shoulders and, thus supported, wrapped her legs around his waist. He turned so that the guards could not see that they were merged together beneath his cloak.

Both her arms and legs tightened convulsively as his long right middle finger slipped beneath the tight, moist chestnut curls that hid her *vagin*. Unerringly, it found her hidden pink pearl and circled it slowly. Without her willing it, her body threw itself towards him, almost impaling her on his waiting manhood.

Both of his hands slid over her cloak where it concealed her bottom. Firmly grasping those little round globes, he pushed her towards him and thrust himself into her.

Her arms clutched at his shoulders in the burst of pain, and she felt blood running down her leg. Then there was only the pleasure of paradise itself, as they fulfilled the promise they had made to each other the first time they had been alone together in his attic bedroom. This, this, she thought, is the moment that all life is lived for, and the rest is the mechanical part.

In and out, backwards and forwards, he thrust himself, and her body echoed every motion. His weapon filled and expanded the warm, moist walls that welcomed and surrounded it. In the same way,



their opened lips were locked together, as his tongue circled her mouth. Their eyes were wide open, to see the rapt pleasure on each other's faces.

Their bodies thus joined together, every movement sent her soaring higher and higher towards a sun of joy, warmth and light. At last the sun exploded into unimaginable bliss.

His arms on her shoulders still supported her as her feet slid down from his waist to the stone floor again. Even here, she still felt the strong echoes of his body inside her, as though he were still moving there.

When she opened her mouth to speak her words of love and praise, he silenced her with a quick shake of his head.

"Say nothing, me darlin'," he warned her. "It might be something that they could use, and you could reveal it under torture."

She found, to her surprise, that she could still manage a weak smile, realizing that it never occurred to him that he, too, might break under torture.

But they would have to find her first, she grimly decided. And they might not be able to do it, any more than their predecessors had been able to capture that other Lady Buchanan, so long ago.

## Chapter Eight

### The Eighth Man

Gazing constantly across the valley, she strained to catch a glimpse of one of the seven savage men who, if she were very fortunate, would soon capture her. She could only hope that Francis had told the truth this time, and they would not shoot anyone down in cold blood, not even two English Redcoats, especially since they included one who was very small.

Looking upwards, she saw the bright pines giving way to the misted rocks, which grew even hazier until they vanished into the clouds. Did she see the movement of a man toward the top? Glancing down, she saw the same pines merging with the purple rhododendrons, beside the sparkling blue river that guided her ever northward into the Highlands.

Now she wished she had brought her watercolors, to capture this perfect scene. Why did I never take the trouble to admire it before, she wondered, when it lies only three miles north of Inverness?

Often enough, she had traveled to that city—

officially visiting friends from school but actually in the hopes of meeting their unmarried cousins or brothers. How important that relentless husband hunt had seemed to her, in that other world that seemed so far away. Well, she was not searching for a husband now. She was stalking more dangerous prey. If she found them, they could only serve to guide her to the most perilous opponents of all.

What did it matter, though? Now she cared no more for safety than she did for hunting a husband, because she cared only to save the life of the only lover she would ever desire. Now her entire soul longed for him, and she did not want to even imagine living on after his death.

Naturally, she had not told her mother about her plans. She had said that she was going to Inverness again, to escape the scene of so much suffering. What's more, Corporal Bradshaw had kindly said he would escort her as far as he could, having gotten her brother's permission. It had not occurred to William to question the corporal further.

If Bradshaw suspected what her mission was, he did not ask her about it—not even when she suggested that she might be safer if she rode beside him in a soldier's uniform.

The golden eagle soaring above them seemed a good omen, its golden head reminding her of Icarus. Following its path so intently, she did not even see the short, stout, red-bearded man until Bradshaw alerted her with his shout. Then her eyes were fixed on the stranger who came sauntering down from the hills

until he stood in her path with his pistol drawn. Her chestnut horse reared beneath her, calling on all her skills to keep her seat. Beside her, the corporal had almost as great a struggle with his more powerful mount.

The filthy stranger gestured for them to dismount. So quickly did she obey him, she had to grasp the saddle to keep from falling onto the grass, and the leather grazed her face as she slid past.

Facing him, she realized with a sinking heart that at any other time, she would not willingly have come within five feet of him—any closer than she had to come to throw him a coin, like the beggar he resembled. He could have been any one of the mendicants who lined the Edinburgh streets, for he was just as dirty and uncombined as they. The only difference was that instead of ragged trousers, he wore a tattered Highland kilt. The only clean thing about him was his pistol.

For a moment, she hoped that he was some distressed but decent countryman, but he soon dashed that hope. His manners were as savage as his dress. Trying to stammer her carefully memorized plea for aid, she managed only the first trembling words before he shut her off by thrusting his hand between her legs. Private Bradshaw gasped in outrage, only to be silenced again by the pistol leveled straight at his red-coated breast.

"You sound like a lass, and you are," the stranger observed, turning briefly towards her. "We have need of one, my men and I."

Taking an angry, involuntary step towards the ragged stranger, Bradshaw was stopped by his pistol once again. Using his free hand to pull two dirty strips of fabric from his sash, the ruffian ordered the corporal to blindfold her with one of them and tie her hands behind her with the other. Then the Highlander jerked on the bond to test it, almost pulling her off her feet.

Next it was Bradshaw's turn to be bound and blindfolded by the Highlander's expert hand. He and his prisoner left the corporal behind them, lying face down on the rocky ground, where she heard his farewell and Godspeed. That left her feeling a faint glimmer of hope. The savage could have killed him, she realized, so he must have some mercy in his unwashed breast. He did not even steal the horses, but left them tied nearby to a pine tree.

"When you get loose, your laddie can untie them and take them home with you," he told her. "We need no mounts, to go where we are going."

"God bless you for everything, Corporal Bradshaw," she called over her shoulder as the Highlander led her away.

"But he is not my laddie," she explained, as she turned towards the Highlander.

"No, indeed," he retorted with a sneer in his savage accents, which grew ever louder as he advanced on her. "You will be mine first and then my followers'." In her darkness, she felt his pistol pressed against her heart and his free hand fumbling at her jacket buttons.

Terrified beyond thought, she could only blurt out the first thing that occurred to her. "I cannot be your lass, because I am Francis O'Neill's. The English are planning to kill him, and I came to beg you to help me save his life."

To her immense relief, the hand on her chest stopped moving and withdrew. "Francis O'Neill? He's the Prince's friend indeed, and that makes him ours. You should have told me that you were his lass before."

Under the circumstances, it did not seem advisable to answer that he had given her no chance to do so. It would have been hard to speak in any event, as he started pulling her more quickly after him.

She kept stumbling over the rocks she could not see, but always he dragged her up again, keeping her on her feet. Blindfolded as she was, she had to trust his rough guidance.

"But how do I know you are what you claim to be?" he demanded, after several moments of silence. "Captain O'Neill has made no secret of being the Prince's friend, even to the English soldiers who captured him. They could have sent you here as a spy. That was my first thought, when I saw you and your friend wandering across our lands. I asked myself, could they be trying to set a trap for me? Saying that you are Captain O'Neill's sweetheart does not mean that it is true."

Realizing all too clearly what her fate would be, if he decided she had tried to betray him, she almost fell again. Trying to match his offhand tone, she

remarked, "It could not have been much of a trap, could it? I was the one who got captured."

Her only reward was a grunt of grudging acknowledgement, breaking the silence that seemed to last for hours as she struggled to keep from falling.

While she could see nothing through the blindfold, she felt the ground changing from a level field of grass and flowers to a downward slope of rock. As the blindfold was cut and pulled away, she found herself gazing up at a vaulted grey stone ceiling. Jagged rocks grew from the roof and the floor, to meet like gaping jaws. Beside them, waterfalls formed pools and rivers, swollen by the steady drops.

Torches cut into the rocky walls revealed the eerie scene. They stood beside natural doorways leading to smaller caverns.

Their flickering flames also revealed that this cave was a storehouse—filled with carts of English army supplies—food, wine, weapons, blankets, uniforms and stacks of gold coins.

The Glenmoriston Men had captured field furniture, too. Her captor's six companions now sat on the folding chairs, staring curiously at her.

"Why have you brought a red soldier here, Patrick?" one of them demanded. In his thick Highland accent, it sounded much more like "Wa ha ye bra yon siller ray, Padraig?"

Her escort answered in a slightly less barbarous tone, but with a show of the same discolored, broken teeth.

"This is no soldier," he said. "This is a lass who

says she came looking for help from the seven Glenmoriston Men." His voice held the edge of a sneer, as though he were scoffing at his own romantic legend.

One of the others interrupted with a coarse laugh.

"I'm sure we can help her well, and pay her just as handsomely for the privilege." Patting his lap as an invitation to sit there, he smiled a welcome that gave him an even more frightening aspect.

Seeing his chieftain frown and shake his head, the man added, with a sigh, "But I suppose you must serve our leader first, and Patrick Grant is as good a man as any to let you do it—aye, and pay you well for your service. But mind, we've all got gold for you, and you can be sure we will pay it. We have earned the name they call us of the Honest Thieves."

"You're a fool, Gregor, and your brother Patrick is a worse one," a third savage growled. "It's the English gold she came for, not ours. She came here to find us for them, so now we can't let her leave here alive. Why did you ever bring her?"

Patrick Grant smiled, much less pleasantly than his murderous follower.

"Well, Hugh, she seemed so determined to find us, she came riding to our land. I could not disappoint her, could I? I had to hear what she had to say to the Glenmoriston Men. Tell them what you told me, Lass, then we'll decide what to do with you."

A moment ago she had believed that she was too frightened for words. Now she heard them pouring out, tumbling over each other in their rush to be



heard.

"I need you to help me save Francis O'Neill," she cried. "He is a prisoner in Edinburgh Castle, and they have sentenced him to hang."

As she avidly watched Patrick Grant for his reaction, she prayed that these Honest Thieves were the heroes of legend, the modern Robin Hoods, that Francis had made them. The Highlander's shrug of dismissal dashed her hopes and told her how foolish she had been to rely on the Irishman's tales.

"So are many others," he answered. "We cannot help them all."

"But this one you can save," she pleaded. "They dare not carry out the sentence until the warrant comes from London. I am going to hold up the mail coach to be sure it does not arrive."

He snorted with ridicule at her foolish plan, but she raced heedless on, even as she realized just how mad it sounded.

"My great-great aunt did the same, so I know it can be done," she said. As they seemed ready to burst out laughing, she raced on, "But she must have had help to do it. I need help, too, and the famous Glenmoriston Men are the only ones who can give it. You have robbed enough coaches in the past, so you can stop this one now."

"I know well of Francis O'Neill," Patrick Grant answered slowly. "He was a great friend to our Prince, just as you say, and he did as much as any man to save him."

So Francis, for once, had told the truth. These

simple, savage men would save him, for their Prince's sake.

But then she realized that Patrick was looking down at the stony floor, obviously not wanting to see her disappointment as he dashed her last hopes.

"I'm sorry, lass, but we can do nothing," he said. "We can't risk all for our men for one of them. God forbid we should kill such a gallant lassie as yourself, though, so we'll let you go back and comfort him until the end."

"Let her go?" cried Hugh. "Are you daft, man? If she does not sell our lives for English gold, she'll do it to save her Irish lover."

The heavy drops fell from the ceiling to mingle with her tears.

Then, to her surprise, she felt anger rising to join her grief.

"I am his lass, I told you," she shouted, realizing that her face was turning as red with rage as her uniform coat. "He would not sell his Prince any more than you would. Why do you think they are hanging him?"

"Hugh did not say that Captain O'Neill would betray us," Patrick Grant answered, in an infuriatingly reasonable tone. "He said that you would do it for the captain's sake. And Hugh is right. We cannot let you go back to Edinburgh Castle now, even to comfort your sweetheart. We know you love him truly, and you will not die for that. We will only keep you here until all is over."

"All is over?" she wailed. "You mean, until he is

hanged?"

The rebel leader stared hard down at the rocks, almost silenced by shame. "I fear so, lass. We can't risk all for one. He would never ask us to."

And try though she did, she knew that she could not disagree.

Then, through her tears, she saw that another man had heard the shouting and was coming from one of the smaller caverns to join them.

To avoid the low-hanging ledges, he had to stoop deeply before he could pull himself to his full height of almost six feet when he finally reached the chamber.

At first glance, he looked as savage as the others. His wide shoulders almost burst out of a shabby red uniform jacket, obviously stolen from a normal-sized man much smaller than he. His white-and-rose Highland complexion had been badly sunburned, beneath his tousled lion's mane of red-gold curls.

But he stood with a nobleman's easy grace, ignoring the water that fell steadily onto his head. His great brown eyes gazed openly at her, as though he never imagined that she might take offense at his scrutiny.

"Why is this lady here?" he demanded. "Tell me how you have made her so angry." In his voice, she heard the faint tones of the French court, and the habit of giving commands there.

*It cannot be he*, she thought, and yet it must be. If she had had any doubt before, it vanished when she saw how those unmannered men fell silent before

him. Her hands thoughtlessly reached out for the skirts that should have been billowing beside her as she bowed her head and sank in her deepest curtsy to the damp grey stones.

She heard herself using the same phrase she had addressed to the bejeweled, be-powdered Duke of Cumberland. They had sounded like extravagant empty flattery to her own ears then, but now, as she spoke to this sunburned young fugitive, the words seemed no more than his natural due.

Gazing down respectfully, almost in awe, at his well-worn stolen army boots, she murmured, "Your Royal Highness."

"Have we heard you speaking of our good friend Captain O'Neill?" he asked, as he helped her to rise. "Did we hear you say that he is in danger of his life and we can save him?"

"We cannot risk all of our lives for his, let alone your own precious life, My Prince," Patrick Grant objected.

"Did he hesitate for a moment before risking his life for us?" Prince Charlie flared angrily. "Are we less than he?"

For a long moment she could only gaze up at him, her eyes filling with grateful tears. "He told me that there had never been a prince like Your Royal Highness," she said. "And now I know it was true."

\* \* \* \*

And so Lady Mary Buchanan, sister of British Army

Captain William Buchanan, was wearing a tartan kilt with a scarf to mask her face. She thus resembled Charles Edward Stuart and seven fellow thieves who were waiting with her to rob the royal mail coach en route to Edinburgh Castle. It had to be a dream, she thought, even as she realized that it was terribly, mortally real.

When the coach came riding across the grass below them, she was surprised at how high its wheels were as tall as a man's head. She imagined those great wooden hoops rolling over her after the driver's guards had shot her, and she hoped she would be dead when they did. Failing that, she hoped that she would be dead before they seized her, to spare her the trial and the execution that would take the form of a simple hanging, at best.

What's worse, she realized, they would not even hang her beside the man she loved, and she could only hope to meet him in some Paradise where good Protestants and atheist Catholics could walk hand in hand. Her growing nausea told her that this was a faint hope indeed. Only the prospects of death, now or later, were very real.

Behind the rear wheels, a pair of red-coated soldiers stood looming over the two who sat at either side of the driver. All four rode with their muskets at their sides. When they came so close that she could see their faces, she knew for sure that, even to save her lover's life, she would not dare to challenge them. Her hands grasped the reins to turn her horse's head away, but her companions' steeds were racing

towards the carriage, and her own mount galloped after them. All she could do then was hang on to the reins while her boots pressed the stirrups, trying not to be thrown to the ground.

The Prince, on the other hand, seemed to be riding down towards them eagerly, urging on his great grey stallion. For a moment, she wondered why she had ever thought it worthwhile to help keep his enemies from cutting off his handsome head, since he seemed to eager to help them.

She shut her eyes tightly to keep from seeing the tree or the rock that was sure to bring her headlong race to an abrupt and painful finish. Her eyes opened only when she felt the ground grow level beneath her. Then she opened her eyes wide enough to find her companions still beside her.

Their group had circled the coach before the driver could even try to flee. With so much practice in these adventures, the Glenmoriston Men had their pistols ready before the soldiers raised their muskets.

The Redcoats glared down at them, failing to hide their growing alarm.

*Don't be afraid, we won't harm you.* Mary opened her lips to say the words but closed them again quickly when she realized, with a sinking heart, that they might not be true. These seven men could kill anyone, she felt sure, herself included, if they thought it necessary to protect their Prince. At any rate, Patrick Grant had warned her to say nothing. The soldiers might meet her again in Edinburgh and recognize her voice.

The Prince, too, had been warned into silence. But, as he leaned forward eagerly in his saddle, Mary realized that he would heed that warning about as well as he had followed every other bit of sensible advice he had ever heard—starting with his father’s warning not to come to Scotland with his mad rebellion scheme.

“Stand and deliver!” he cried, like a hardened highwayman, pointing his pistol straight at the driver’s heart. With weapons pointed at their breasts, the guards obediently dropped their own firearms.

“Well done, Your Royal Highness!” one of the Highlanders cried.

The flash of horror was like a burst of flame in her heart, followed by a blast of cold. She gasped, realizing what the man had done. The soldiers would have to die now, before they could tell their leaders that they had found the Pretender’s Son and, worse, that he had become a common highwayman in the notorious Glenmoriston Gang. And even if she did not die on the gallows for her part in the crime, she would still live in shame and fear—shame at the memory and fear of the soldiers’ fists banging at the door so they could drag a traitoress and murderess away.

Beside her, Hugh McMillan shrugged and raised his gun, obviously having come to the same realization and accepted it more easily than she could. He was interrupted by the Prince’s lighthearted cry, “Thank you, Your Royal Majesty. That is praise indeed! Now, if your loyal servants will kindly pay us

the taxes we owe, we can go back to our royal palace and divide them fairly among us."

\* \* \* \*

Galloping towards the cave, Mary gazed with new appreciation at the approaching mountains with their misted peaks, then looked back at the purple wildflowers on the ground they were leaving behind. *How beautiful those blossoms are in the cold, bright sunlight, she thought, and how close I came to never seeing them, or anything, again.*

"You saved those soldiers' lives," Mary told the Prince, who was riding beside her.

"They are still my subjects, even if they do not know it," he reminded her gently. "Now we will soon see if we have saved our friend as well."

But they had not yet saved themselves, she knew. They might still have to repeat the same mad exploit, over and over again, until they found and destroyed the document that would otherwise seal Francis O'Neill's fate. So she did not dare ask Patrick Grant to open the royal mailbox that he held under his arm, until they had reached the safety of the cave.

As soon as he had pulled aside the tree that hid the entrance, he threw the box to the stony ground. When it failed to open, he dropped to his knees and hammered at the lock with his pistol. Seeing that it still refused to yield, he shrugged, fired and then pulled the shattered lock away. The letters were thrown to the ground by the handful, as he searched



for one with the royal seal.

Kneeling beside him on the rocky floor, she peered at the discarded papers more carefully, holding them next to the fire. She barely noticed the Prince kneeling beside her.

At last, Charles Edward looked up and announced. "He's safe for another fortnight, at least, until the next coach comes. There is no royal warrant here. We're safe that long, too, so I won't have to join in any more robberies very soon."

It seemed to her that he added that last comment in a rather disappointed tone. It grew more cheerful when he said, "So let's have a toast to our safety." Turning to Patrick Grant, he added, with a courtly bow, "If Your Royal Majesty will agree to take the whiskey that German Georgie and his soldiers so graciously sent to us."

To her own amazement, she was laughing hopelessly at that little joke. Even hearing George II called by that insulting title was hilariously funny to her. Her face flamed red as she doubled over in pain, barely missing the fire. To stop her show of mirth, she thought of the saddest things she could: Francis hanging from the gallows, her mother and even poor Snowflake dangling beside him. That only added tears to the laughter, as she rolled on the rocky ground. Knowing that her laughter was hysterical, she could only wish desperately that it had taken the more seemly form of tears.

They were staring at her, she saw, with barely concealed contempt, but even that could not stop her

helpless bouts of merriment. Only Hugh Chisolm, she saw, was ignoring her. Snatching up the discarded envelopes from the mail coach, he was tearing them apart in his search for coins or banknotes, then throwing the accompanying letters into the fire.

Her laughter died in an instant, when she saw the newspaper crushed in his hands and read the words beneath them: "Irish rebel captain—" She pulled herself upright and raced towards him.

He grunted in surprise as she grasped his hand and tried to pry open his fingers. As he started to push her away, without thinking, she stopped him by crying, "It is news of my captain!"

Bounding forwards, the Prince held his hand out silently, and Hugh extended the newspaper towards him. With her gaze fixed on the Prince's face, Mary strained to read his expression as his eyes darted over the page.

It was a front-page story, the front page of the *London Gazette*. Francis would be glad to know that.

Then she was glad, too, happier than she had ever thought she could be since the moment he had been arrested. Looking up from the newspaper, the Prince was smiling.

## Chapter Nine

### the highland heroine

her side hoops pulled her backwards and her pointed shoes hobbled her toes as she tried to stride up the apartment stairs. Where she had long been accustomed to their weight and awkwardness, now those garments seemed an unbearable obstacle, forcing her to spend what seemed like hours toiling up towards her home.

As soon as the door was opened to her, she fairly flew into the hallway where she saw who was standing there. Dropping the cloth she had been using to polish the grandfather's clock, Annie MacKay was rushing to embrace her. Mary hugged her close in return with one arm while she lowered her other hand to pet Snowflake, who was frantically jumping and clawing at her skirts, waving her white plume of a tail.

"How did you ever get free?" Mary cried. "Will you have to go back to jail again? Are they putting you on trial?" She stopped only long enough to scoop the insistent Maltese into her arms before asking her

next question, "What charges have they made against you?" They could not be half so serious, she thought, as the ones they could level against me.

"I had my trial already," Annie answered. "And I had a fine lawyer, too. Lady Primrose sent the money to pay him, when she read my story in the London newspapers."

"And what about your sweetheart? Is he safe, too?"

Annie lowered her eyes in sadness and shook her tousled head. "He is still in prison," she said, "but he has as good a chance as any of coming out alive."

She wiped her tears away on her apron and said, "I must go to fetch your mother. She is probably in church praying for you now. She never believed you when you said that you were going to visit friends in Inverness."

"It was true, though," Mary insisted. *Although not, perhaps, in the way I implied.* "But speaking of our friends, where is Captain O'Neill? He was reprieved, was he not?"

Annie eagerly shook her straw-blond mop of hair, sending it tumbling into her pale blue eyes. "Indeed he was, Miss. They're sending him to London with some of the other prisoners, and from there they are shipping him to France." She sniffed in a superior way. "Exile, they call it, but they are letting him go."

And for good reason, Mary thought.

*They dare not keep the Wild Goose in their cage.*

Summoning her new first-hand knowledge of the law, Annie explained, "And they have to let him stay gone, too. It would not look right for the King to take

back his own reprieve."

"No, indeed, it would not," Mary exclaimed, putting down Snowflake so she could hug Annie once more.

"You seem very happy about it," Annie replied suspiciously, drawing back from her embrace.

"I am," Mary admitted, with an even tighter hug. "I grew very fond of him."

Her suspicions fully aroused now, Annie pulled away. "You were not too fond of him, I hope?"

"I have had my monthly courses since."

Hearing Annie's gasp of dismay, Mary quickly added that she would never see him again. "I can't afford to go to London," she said, with a shrug, "and he is not enough of a fool to come back here, so that ends that."

"He isn't in London yet, Miss," Annie told her. "He's in Leith Harbor on that prison ship, the Furnace. You could go to see him, and I will tell your mother to meet you there. Lots of people have gone there, because they've got that famous young lady, the one they call the Highland heroine."

"Miss Flora MacDonald," Mary responded, through lips that were suddenly tight and hard. Miss Flora MacDonald and her great admirer Francis O'Neill were on the same ship.

I will not go there to interfere with their reunion, she told herself firmly, even as her feet were dragging her back to the stairs.

*No matter what he is doing now, even if he is holding Flora MacDonald in his arms, still I must see him again.*

\* \* \* \*

Where Francis O'Neill went, violence followed. Mary became aware of that all over again as she toiled up the gangplank to the Furnace under the cold, bright sun.

She reached the deck in time to see the girl slap him hard around the face. The soldiers standing around them raised a mocking cheer.

His hand went to his reddened cheek, but he did not strike her in return or even make his usual ironical bow. Instead, he lowered his head in shame. From that, Mary knew, as surely as though he had formally introduced them, that the girl who had struck him was Flora MacDonald.

With a guilty sense of satisfaction, Mary realized that Highland heroine did not look very heroic at the moment. The cold wind had blown her dark brown curls into her face, and her tears stuck a few strands there. Her delicate pink-and-rose Scottish complexion, so like Mary's own, had taken on an angry red hue. Shaking her finger right under Francis's eyes, the terrified girl shouted, "That's the dark face that has ruined me!"

The seagulls seemed to be shrieking their agreement, from their perches in the three masts.

When Francis answered, Mary was struck at his gentle tone, so far from the note of cold mockery that she herself had so often heard.

"Act proud of what you have done, not ashamed,"

he answered, as he stroked her tousled hair. "Then you will make many fine friends and have a great reputation."

His soft voice carried over the screaming gulls as he went on in the same soothing tone, "And do not be afraid for your safety. I am sure that the government will not be cruel enough to put you on trial."

He put a protective arm around her, and she was soon sobbing against his chest. At last, she snuffled into silence and wiped her face with both hands. Torn between pity and jealousy, Mary hastened forward, plucking her own lace handkerchief from the pocket of her russet woolen cape.

Taking the offering gratefully, Flora rubbed gently at her tear-stained face. Then she delicately dabbed at her prominent, reddened nose, before drawing the handkerchief reluctantly away.

"Please keep it, Miss MacDonald," the owner said. Gratefully, the Highland heroine blew her nose.

"Haven't I told you, now?" Francis cried, turning towards Mary and pointing triumphantly at her. "Isn't this a young lady of rank and dignity, Lady Mary Buchanan herself? The sister to an earl in the English army she is, for a fact, and wasn't she after giving you her very own lace handkerchief – which is fine enough to be true Irish lace, by the look of it."

He was trying to entertain her. Flora smiled feebly in response.

"And this same lady is also helping me to build your great reputation," he confided. "Mary, you did save my notes on the subject, just as my friend asked

you to."

"The soldiers did not take your journal," she assured him, hoping he would not hear the bitter tone she could not keep from her voice. *I protected your journal, I defended you with my own life—but you can think only of trying to safeguard your Highland heroine.*

"And how did you do it?" he asked.

*By turning highwayman,* she longed to say. *That's how I tried to save you, knowing I faced hanging to do it. But I will not make a fool of myself by saying I risked my life that way to save another woman's lover.* At any rate, she did not have to. He had asked only about his precious journal, and so she answered him in the calmest tone she could command.

"I put it in Snowflake's dog bed," she said. "The soldiers tried to look there, but she made such a fuss that they went away, because they did not want to look foolish by fighting her."

Confused for a moment, he soon burst into laughter. "You mean, your little white lapdog?" he cried. "My life on her, she fought off the English army!"

Turning to Flora, he explained, "She can't weigh more than ten pounds, and most of that is fur, but I can just hear how she must have barked and snapped until she drove them away. Sure, and couldn't we have used her at Culloden?"

Even Flora had to smile through her tears—and that, as Mary realized, had always been his intention.

Flora's smile faded, though, when a soldier approached her very respectfully, to say that the sun



was setting and it was time to go to her cabin.

Her admirer's own smile vanished, once she had gone.

"You see how well they behave, when she has others around her," he said. "But I am afraid all that will change once she is alone at night here. You must make sure that does not happen."

*And how am I to do that?* she almost asked. But, as always, where he was concerned, she was already looking for a way to help. When she told him that she had found one, she won his smile of approval. And that particular smile, as she admitted to herself, was now her highest reward.

\* \* \* \*

Mary stood at the door, her small troupe of woman behind her. She turned to look back at them, taking a deep breath.

"Are we ready?" The words had no sooner left her mouth than she heard what sounded like a small scream coming from within. She shoved the open the door to the captain's cabin. Followed by her companions, she almost bowled the men over as she ran across the Persian carpet to embrace Flora MacDonald, nearly knocking over the candles that stood on the captain's prized harpsichord.

One of the men, red-faced and discomfited, was clearly rearranging his breeches to be presentable in polite company. The others were now stunned into angry silence. The only sound was the feminine cries.

"My dear Flora, you are so fortunate to have been able to help our dear Prince!"

"I could gladly wipe your shoes for you!"

"Will you let me spend the night with you?"

Mary found herself being hugged very tightly. She patted Flora comfortingly on the back.

"They were going—" Flora whispered.

"I know what they were going to do," she said scornfully. "Captain O'Neill warned me that they were plotting to disgrace you, and that's why they put you here in the captain's cabin, away from the other prisoners. They won't be able to do it now, unless they are ready to ravish half the ladies in Edinburgh. I doubt that they will venture to do such a thing, since they did not even dare to force us off their ship."

Flora smiled through her tears, as Lady Mary turned her around to face the other ladies and began her introductions to them.

"Miss Flora MacDonald," she began, "may I present Miss Rachel Houston, a friend from school—although," she added wryly, "I have not seen much of her lately, since I thought her too much of a rebel. Also, Miss Peggy Forbes, Miss Susie Graham and Miss Sarah Serra."

"Sarah Sarah?" Florida asked.

"The last name is S-E-R-R-A, but they sound the same," the young lady answered, with a smile.

"Shall we have some dancing?" Miss Graham asked, having noted the harpsichord. "We should do something, since we are going to be here all night."

Sinking down onto a cushioned chair, still trembling, Flora apologized that she did not yet feel in a mood for dancing.

"Then you must play for us," Lady Mary told her firmly, knowing that Flora needed some useful occupation now, to take her mind from what had almost happened. "And will you send those fellows to bring us tea?"

She looked around, as though to give the directions.

"It seems that the gentlemen are already gone," Miss Serra said, with a giggle. "We seem to have frightened them away."

"So now, you can tell us all about one of your brave exploits!" Miss Forbes cried.

"I would hardly call them brave," Flora replied, lowering her head in modesty. "Everyone knows the story by now, about how a friend sent Captain O'Neill to me, while I was tending my brother's cattle."

None of the ladies thought it wise to mention that her friend was Lady Margaret, who had not been arrested yet. Spies might still be somewhere listening.

"He asked me if I wanted to meet another friend of his, and of course I knew who the friend had to be. I said that I would give anything to see him, even if he were on one mountain and I were on another."

In a less lofty tone, she said, "Francis had the idea of dressing the Prince as my maid, so we could cross from the mainland to the Isle of Skye together. As you can see, my part was very small."

"We all just wish that we could have done so much!" Miss Serra exclaimed.

"And you must have at least one more story to tell!" Miss Graham urged.

"One moment was rather exciting." Her visitors clustered around to hear about it.

"We were in the boat going to Skye," Flora recalled. "It was late at night, and I had fallen asleep, when I woke up to see the Prince standing over me, holding his arms out over my head. The water was rough, you see, and he explained that he wanted to make sure none of the sailors tripped over me as they walked around the deck."

The ladies applauded, and Miss Houston cried that that proved, once again, what a wonderful Prince he was. "Aren't you sorry that you didn't come to meet him in Edinburgh?" Miss Houston demanded, turning to Lady Mary.

Smiling faintly, Lady Mary replied, "I'm really not sure. Staying at home seemed the sensible thing, at the time."

"Thank goodness Miss MacDonald was not so sensible," Miss Houston retorted.

"But you still have not told us about your adventures, Miss MacDonald," objected Miss Forbes. "That story was about the Prince."

"I really don't know any stories about myself," she replied, in an apologetic tone.

"You are too modest!" objected Miss Graham.

"Can a lady be too modest?" Lady Mary asked. "I don't think the men would say so."

"Captain O'Neill said that the folk in London would like me the better for that."

"I'm sure that they will, and that Captain O'Neill likes you for it, too," Lady Mary answered. Bravely, she added, "Who can blame him?"

When Mary left the cabin, she saw Francis in a silhouette made by the moon, waiting expectantly for her with his arm resting on the rail. I have seen him in so many lights and so many poses, she thought, but he always find a new way to show me how beautiful he is. Desperately, she fought to accept the thought that his outward grace made him a fitting mate for Flora's inward loveliness. *If it is not to be me then I am glad Flora has him, because she deserves no less.*

"You were able to save her, then," he said. "I can tell, because you seem so calm."

"And it was my honor to do it, Francis. She is everything you said she was."

"Sure, and she is, is she not, the way she served our Prince? But now, it is your turn to serve our Prince."

To her own surprise, Mary realized that she was proud now, not resentful, that he assumed she would agree. There was, indeed, no other such prince in the world.

## Chapter Ten

### in Paris

All across Britain, Irish officers were making their way home to France. No one was surprised to see two more young men in emerald-lined red jackets riding south together in November 1746.

They certainly attracted attention, though, when they stopped at a Maidstone inn. There, they heard the jokes and whispers throughout the dining room, as their fellow patrons pointed them out to each other.

Everyone knew that army life attracted such men as these, but few people had ever seen them flaunting themselves this way. They made no effort to hide what they were: the smaller, more delicate one gazed up in open admiration at the tall blond man at his side.

The innkeeper could barely hide his smirk, as he asked if they would require one room or two. He almost admired the taller man's honesty, when he answered bluntly that he and his companion could share the same quarters.

As they mounted the stairs side by side, the other customers stared at them open-mouthed, aghast at such boldness. When their bedroom door had closed behind them, the jokes and laughter burst forth again. Their gain was the women's loss, as the diners agreed, because they were both fine-looking fellows indeed.

Safely behind the door, the taller man sighed as he sat on the bunk and started pulling his boots off.

"I hope the world never learns about this," he said ruefully. "It's bad enough having them say I escaped from Scotland disguised as Miss Betty Burke, without adding that I made my way to France by playing her part beneath the sheets."

"They will never hear it from me, Your Royal Highness," Mary assured him, as she pulled off her red jacket. Going behind the screen, she unwrapped the bindings that had flattened her chest, sighing with relief.

"I only wonder if we should have stopped here, rather than riding hard for the coast," she called out, before she emerged wearing only the shirt that covered her to her knees. The Prince gazed with admiration for a long moment, before he turned away. He kept studiously gazing at the print of hounds and horses on the wall as she sat on the bed beside him.

"Riding hard, we would be stopped and questioned," the Prince answered, eyes avoiding Mary, on the bed at his side. "We are much less suspect traveling slowly and stopping overnight. Of

course, everyone suspects us of being a pair of Sodomites, but they will not behead us for that."

He searched her face in vain for some sign of sorrow at that fact.

"Don't you care that you are going into exile with me?" he asked. "Of course, I will make sure my father treats you generously, but you will be an émigré all the same."

"And hardly the only one, Your Royal Highness," she assured him. "And being of service to you is the only reward that any one of us needs."

"You sound like my good Captain O'Neill. I was glad to be able to give him permission to marry when he asked for it."

As sure as she had been that the blow was coming, it stunned and then crushed her all the same. Fighting to keep back the tears, she was barely able to breathe as she managed to answer, "I don't know how good he is, but he is certainly your loyal captain, and even Flora MacDonald is fortunate to have him."

"Flora MacDonald of Kingsburgh?" he answered in confusion, turning to stare at her at last. "Madame, Miss MacDonald is betrothed to her cousin Alexander. Captain O'Neill asked for permission to marry you." With a smile, he added, "Since I am both his commanding officer and, it seems, your guardian, I was able to grant it on behalf of you both."

For a long moment she stared at him, unable to believe her own ears. Then, to keep from screaming with sheer delight, she clasped both her hands over her mouth.



He responded with dismay, "He has not yet told you? Please do not tell him that I ruined his surprise. Act as though he has overwhelmed you with joy."

"That will not be difficult, Your Royal Highness," she assured him fervently.

\* \* \* \*

The ship's steady rocking set the rhythm that their nude bodies passionately followed, twined together on the narrow bunk.

Mary's slim white legs were wound around her bridegroom's powerful brown hips, her breasts pressed into his chest, her arms locked around his shoulders.

His tongue flicked gently across her lips, sending a fiery messenger down to the place where their bodies twined together. She thrust her tongue into his mouth in reply. Then she was moaning in pleasure as he drove himself deep into her body, and she responded by pressing herself against him, forcing him into her even more deeply.

At last, she fell back on the bunk and he let himself collapse on top of her, still cradling her between his arms as he held her face between his hands and covered it with gentle kisses. They told her everything that speech could not.

\* \* \* \*

As fine a way as he had always had with words, now

he could not find the ones to express the feelings that had made such a surprising conquest of his cold heart. Passion and tenderness fought for mastery and, apart from them all, amusement seized him at his own unexpected fall.

Flora MacDonald had won his deepest admiration and, in his vast inexperience of the topic, he had mistaken that for love. Peasant girl that she was, she still knew the difference, and that is why he had never been able to win her.

He knew, for sure, what his feelings were, when he heard that Flora was marrying a fellow Highlander named Allan MacDonald. His only reaction had been a mild annoyance, because her new husband was loyal to the British crown and would undoubtedly influence his bride to be the same.

By the time Francis himself had gone to the Prince to ask permission to marry Lady Mary Buchanan, he knew the difference well. He had fallen in love with this little Scottish schoolgirl, and it was the first time in his adult life that he had loved anything but his nation and his Prince.

As he cradled her face in his hands, he suddenly thought he knew, for the very first time, why she had won him. Beneath that pretty little heart-shaped face, he had realized, there beat a rebel heart as wild as his own.

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, had she really played the highwayman to save him?* Devout Catholic atheist that he was, he could never keep from mentally crossing himself and thanking the entire Holy Family, when he

thought of the danger she had faced because she loved him, before even he realized that he had loved her in return.

*But when did I first love her? Was it the day they sent her to my attic room in Edinburgh Castle, looking so prim and Quakerish in her little white apron. Or was it later, when she came to me in the dungeon, risking all, and I embraced her with the gallows waiting for me?*

He thought of asking when she had first loved him, but feared he would sound like a fool. Instead, he said, "Damn this little bunk, it's all a man can do to keep from falling out onto the floor."

"It's a wonderful bed," she insisted. "It's the first one where I have lain with you as your wife."

Capturing one of his powerful brown hands in both of her slim white ones, she showered it with kisses as gentle and passionate as the ones that she still felt on her face.

To him, her voice sounded perilously close to tears.

"You aren't weeping now, are you, me darlin'?" he demanded, pulling back to look down at her. "I know you've given up everything to follow me, and I hope you don't regret it."

"Everything," she agreed, between the kisses she bestowed on his hand. "Everything and everyone, all my friends and family, and I never thought I could be so happy. That's why I'm weeping, my darling, from joy."

At that, he jumped up and sat perched beside her, fearing that she might see answering tears of his own.

"Wait until you see where I'm bringing you!" he

crowed, turning to gaze down at her again. "We'll have a townhouse as fine as any other in Paris, with the ceilings covered in molded plaster flowers painted gold."

"Actually, I should think that the plain white flowers would be nicer," she said, sitting up beside him and leaning against him.

"White plaster it is, then," he agreed cheerfully, pressing her red curls even further into his shoulder. "When it comes to fine decorations, aren't you the girl for it? First, though, we'll be married again in the King's own chapel at Versailles. Nothing will be too good for Prince Charlie and his heroes, and certainly not that quick ceremony done by the ship's captain."

"How can you say that?" she asked pulling back indignantly. "Wasn't our Prince there himself to give away the bride? How many wives can say that for themselves?"

"He will do the same at Versailles," Francis answered. "Then I will take you to court and the opera and the theater, where the crowds will cheer for the Prince and his brave followers. There will be two great attractions then, us and the actors, and the actors will not be in it with us."

"But it will not all be frivolity," he assured her, fearing that he had awakened her prim sensibilities. "We'll also go to all the finest assemblies, where you can talk with all of the greatest philosophers. Don't you want to meet M. Voltaire and the Baron de Montesquieu, who is so great a friend of our Prince, and always after telling him how to set up the perfect

government when he comes into his own again?"

His smile faded, telling her that he suspected as strongly as she did that that would never happen now. The Prince had lost his one great chance to become the king he was meant to be—but thanks to his loyal Captain O'Neill, he might well become a legend instead—and one to be remembered for all time, whenever men fight against all odds for freedom.

Then her voice grew light again, to keep his mood cheerful.

"I suppose I will enjoy those trips," she told him. "Just as long as you take me to see King Louis cut the top off his breakfast egg. You told me that was such a treat, I would surely hate to miss it."

He laughed, reaching down and pulling her into his arms again.

"But now it's time for another treat," he whispered.

"And this time we won't have to worry about falling out of bed," she promised. Climbing onto his lap she sat facing him, her legs spread wide around him. From that vantage point, she could look down and clearly see his manly part, his soldier, standing straight and proud again. Caressing it, she felt the pattern of the hard veins against the soft background, making it stand more firmly yet.

Then she moved forward, surrounding his sword with her scabbard—her *vagin*, as the French called it. Their arms encircled each other and their tongues entered each other's mouths, as they once more were joined completely.

\* \* \* \*

In a private box at the French Comedy Theatre, Colonel O'Neill leaned down to his wife and whispered, "And wasn't it the truth I told you? There are two attractions here tonight, us and the actors, and the actors aren't in it with us."

For once, she realized, his boasting was true. The ground floor had shaken dangerously as the spectators jumped to their feet applauding, the moment the youthful threesome appeared in Prince Charlie's box. Fifteen minutes later, the cheers showed no sign of dying down. Even the two actors on stage joined in with remarkably good grace, considering how long they had been waiting for their own chance to shine.

One could always see *The School for Wives* performed in Paris, the audience agreed, but how often could you see those three renowned young people who now stood smiling and waving down at them.

So they cheered for Charlie, the heroic prince who had fought so bravely against the enemies of France. Beneath the chandeliers, he looked the very model of a prince from some folk tale, like their story of Cinderella—so tall, blond and handsome, with all of his medals glittering against his blue velvet coat as he stood waving down at the audience.

The cheering also extended to his favorite Irish officer, recently promoted to Colonel O'Neill. A fine

collection of medals glittered against his own red woolen jacket, with its gleaming emerald lining showing his allegiance to his own land.

He had obviously earned his honors, too. Everyone had read of his adventures in rescuing his prince, in his own most exciting *Journal*. It had not, of course, omitted a whit of his own great courage and loyalty to his Prince.

To the very discerning eye, he was showing his loyalty once again. A foppish fellow named M. Domino le Desire had entered the Prince's box and tried to engage him in light conversation, accompanied by many flicks of his lace-cuffed wrists. The Prince listened with his usual courtesy, but his Irish companion's blue eyes were narrowed with suspicion. Clearly, if the man was determined to make Prince Charlie's acquaintance, he would have to wait until he found him alone.

The female readers of O'Neill's *Journal* dreamed of winning his own attentions, but they all knew that he reserved them for his bride. Never mind. They wished even more ardently for the Prince's attention, and he was always willing to make their dreams come true, often obliging them two or three at a time.

As for Mme. O'Neill, in one short year she had made herself welcome in the most exclusive salons, thanks to her talent at painting. Her portraits were much in demand, because just like the lady herself, they were always frank and honest but never harsh or unkind.

She also enlivened society by introducing her

delightful mother, who had come from Scotland bearing the famous *Journal*. Even better, she had brought along the adorable dog who was a heroine in her own right. Naturally, that made Snowflake the center of attention at all of the most fashionable gatherings, where she was welcome to lick the sugar frosting off the most noble fingers.

Above all, Mme O'Neill enchanted Paris with her obvious love for her husband. So enamored of each other were they that anyone seeing them for the first time would have sworn she was his mistress. She was gowned as richly as any demimondaine, in forest green brocade embroidered with white roses. And yet she was the most respectable of young matrons with their infant Charles Francis in the nursery at home.

Tonight their admirers noted with approval that, even as the couple cheered and waved to the crowd, the handsome colonel often leaned down, grinning, towards his charming lady to make some witty remark. Her whole face was aglow as she smiled up at him in return.



## About the Author

From Achilles in *Warrior's Captive* to Prince Judah in *Planet Maccabee* and Charles Edward Stuart in *Prince Charlie's Witch*, Jackie Rose has always enjoyed paying tribute to legendary heroes. Less famous but equally fascinating, Captain O'Neill was Prince Charlie's most fanatically loyal follower.

While a prisoner in Edinburgh Castle, he enlisted the aid of a British officer's sister. The incident inspired Jackie Rose to write her latest historical romance, *Rebel Rogue*, in time for the two hundred and sixtieth anniversary of Bonnie Prince Charlie's revolt. Visits to Edinburgh Castle and other historical sites helped bring the story to life.

Captain O'Neill's direct descendant and namesake also appears as President O'Neill in Jackie's contemporary comedies, *I'm Undead and I Vote*, *I'm a Vampire and I Count*, *I'm a Viking and I Protest* and *Dueling Duo*.

# Prince Charlie's Witch



Jackie  
Rose

## Dedication

*To my husband David, even though he is not a reliable Jacobite – and has even been known to argue that it's a good thing the Bonnie Prince lost. And to eXtasy Books, which gave me a chance to publish this story that I first started writing twenty years ago, at a time when romance publishers told me it had too much science fiction and the other way around. I have no question therefore that eXtasy Books is a very good thing.*

## Prologue

*Many's the lad fought on that day  
Well the claymore could wield  
After the fray, silently lay,  
Dead on Culloden's field*

From the “Skye Boat Song” recalling Bonnie Prince Charlie’s narrow escape from the English army after his defeat at Culloden—caused, as most historians agree, by his generals’ disastrous decision four months earlier to retreat from Derby rather than advancing on London.

## Chapter the First

### *In Which His Royal Highness Charles Edward Stuart Receives Aid from an Unexpected Source*

December 5, 1745

Prince Charles Edward Stuart stared wildly around the oak-paneled drawing room of Exeter House, wondering how he could be hearing such madness spoken in the most elegant mansion in Derby.

"What reason have I to give orders, if they are not obeyed?" he demanded, fists clenched beside his tartan kilt. "You all plan to betray me!"

His commander, Lord George Murray, patiently repeated what the Prince already knew only too well. His supporters in England had not risen in any great numbers to join his Scottish invasion. Only a few, like Sir Francis Townley, had answered his call.

"They will join us when we advance on London," the Prince urged.

"We must go back to Scotland where our friends are and make our stand there," Lord George repeated calmly, as though speaking to an unreasonable child.

Prince Charles turned to Ranald MacGregor, "You were the first one to follow me. You said that you would come with me to London, even if we were the only two who went there."

Ran MacGregor nodded his shaggy red-brown head. "Aye, and I say it again," the young Highland chief proclaimed, his devotion showing clearly in his eyes. They were all the more compelling because they matched his thatch of hair. Stubborn determination showed just as clearly in the long, hard chin jutting forward from his square, wind-burned face.

"Your Royal Highness is right, and these others are daft to oppose you," he said. Seeing that the others were listening, Ran MacGregor pressed on.

"What need we of English followers? Our men are fighting over who will be the first to have his sword sharpened in time for the march on London. All we need are your good Highlanders."

Reluctantly he added, with a nod at Captain Francis O'Neill, "and your loyal Irish regiments from France to help us."

The Irishman bowed and smiled in ironic thanks. Standing with his back to the fire on that raw December day, he seemed like a dandy in his fine red wool uniform with its shining emerald satin lining, among the Highland men in their tartan kilts. His smile was as deceptive as his dandified airs. It was warm and genial, while his blue eyes glittered like ice against his dark, hard, handsome, black-Irish face.

"And is there any English army that can stand against good Scottish and Irish men together, and them fighting for their rightful Prince?"

"The Irish were ever brave fighters but they cannot change the facts," Lord Elcho retorted. "The fact is, if we march on London, we will be in Newgate within the week."

"And if we retreat to Scotland—" with growing desperation, the Prince began his reply.

A frantic female voice from outside interrupted him.

"I have ridden straight from London with news for the Prince!"

Ran flung the door open. Glenmoriston MacGregors were on guard that night. Once their young laird had welcomed the stranger, they would never have dreamed of trying to stop her.

Racing through the doorway, the girl stumbled on her skirts, as though unaccustomed to their length and weight. She jerked them shockingly high above her booted ankles and ran resolutely on, until she stood surrounded by the Prince's men. Her resolution failed her then, and she stared at them helplessly, as though frozen by wonder.

She was already frozen by the cold. Her lips were literally blue with the chill. Snowflakes clung to her long golden curls, which were a tangled mass peeking from beneath the hood of her russet wool cloak. The cold had also turned her pink-and-white Highland complexion into a rough red, just as Ran and the Prince had had their fair skins burned by the sun. Her numb hands struggled in vain to remove riding gloves that seemed frozen to her fingers.

The Prince drew her gloves off gently and gave her his own kerchief to dry her hands. Leading her to the

marble mantel, he waited as patiently as he could for the heat to reach her.

"What news do you bring us, lass?" he asked kindly, as her violent shivering started to subside.

Her lips were returning to their normal pink, but she still seemed unable to answer. Instead, she stared down at her hand in his, as though that were the most wonderful sight in the world.

The Prince was used to seeing that look of awe on young ladies' faces—first in Scotland, now here in England as well, when they crowded the streets to see him. Her accent told him that she came from the American Colonies, and he was pleasantly surprised to learn that he had fair admirers so far away.

But if she did have any news, this was no time for feminine vapors. He hoped that she would not suddenly shriek and faint, as so many other young ladies had done at the touch of his hand.

"Go on, lass," he said, smiling encouragement at her. "What news have you for us?"

Still, she stared up at him in amazement, from great brown eyes that seemed much too large for her heart-shaped little face, giving her the look of a wild woodland creature.

Then she turned his gaze to his companions. They all seemed to amaze her—Lord George Murray, Ranald MacGregor, Lord Elcho, Francis O'Neill—but always, she turned back to Bonnie Prince Charlie himself, as the most astonishing sight of all.

Her gaze was especially disconcerting to them because her eyes were almost level with most of their own. Taller than almost any other woman they had



ever seen, she stood nearly as high as Murray and O'Neill. Only MacGregor and the Prince himself towered above her, and they stood over six feet.

As she continued to stare at Prince Charles, his interest gave way to impatience. She had come to him just as the other girls did, he decided irritably. She merely wanted to judge for herself if he really was as bonnie as they said, with his broad shoulders, his compelling brown eyes and his lion's mane of red-gold curls.

"She only wanted to see you, as all the lassies do," Lord George snapped, unpleasantly echoing the Prince's thoughts. "Well, Miss, you may see him tonight, at the public reception." He reached for her shoulder to put her out of the room.

The pressure of his hand stung her into frantic action. She pulled sharply away from his grip.

"Never mind the public reception, you can't stay here that long," she cried.

Once the words had started, there was no stopping them. They came tumbling out in a torrent, racing over each other in their rush to be heard.

"You must leave at once for London," she exclaimed. "It lies open before you."

Lord George parted his lips to object, but she raced heedlessly on.

"The banks are shut, the shops are closed, the streets are empty!" she cried. "No army stands between you and the capital. Cumberland is in the West, Wade is in the East, they could never intercept you if you head straight south right now."

Even more urgently, she rushed on, "Above all,

you must not think of retreating back to the Scottish Highlands. Your enemies will follow you there, and you will be trapped and destroyed. You must not give them time to grow stronger."

Seeing Lord Elcho violently shaking his head, she added with frantic urgency, "Your time is now. Right now! King George—German Georgie the Usurper—has his yacht loaded and ready to take him back to Hanover."

She noted the annoyance on Lord George's womanish face. He could tell that the Prince was listening to her, so he demanded angrily, "Why should we believe you, Girl, when you could be a spy or a madwoman? We can't change our plans for your ravings!"

"Then change them for this!" From her cloak pocket, she produced a flintlock pistol and pressed it into Murray's side. "You do as your Prince orders or you'll never give orders to anyone else ever again."

They all stared silently, fearing that she was, in fact, a madwoman. Lord Elcho sprang forward to pull the weapon from her. He found himself facing another primed pistol in the far more capable hands of the Young MacGregor of Glenmoriston, called so not for his twenty-five years but because he was heir to his uncle.

"The lass seems set on having her way," the Highlander observed pleasantly. "We must oblige the lasses, must we not? I will go on to London, as I promised from the start. My MacGregor men at least will go with me."

"All my friends will follow them," the Prince

added. "If you will not give the orders, I will go to the men myself."

Lord George shrugged in surrender. The detail about the yacht was very convincing and so was MacGregor's gun.

"Will you please order your followers to put away their pistols?" he asked the Prince. With relief, he saw the follower in question doing so, even before the order could be given.

"I'll order my fair Colonial to take some hot tea as well," the Prince offered. "Have you a name, my lass?"

"If it pleases Your Royal Highness, I am Miss Mary Marvellous."

"Could you not use some tea, Miss Marvellous?"

"Hot tea with whiskey in it," Glenmoriston added. "And I'll have some as well, while we're at it."

She stared with growing amazement and dismay.

"Haven't you heard a word I've said?" she demanded, forgetting, for a moment, the courtesy she owed her Prince. "Your enemy is gathering his forces, and soon they will join together between you and your capital. You must leave for London *now*!"

Even before the Prince had given his brief nod of agreement, Ran MacGregor was racing out the door, shouting orders at his clansmen. For such a powerfully muscular man, he moved with surprising ease and grace. Slimmer and even more graceful, O'Neill waited by the fire with an ironical smile. One booted foot was thrust out before him as though showing that he was ready to follow his Prince the instant he heard the command.

“And you must come with us, me darlin’,” he said, in his beguiling brogue, wearing his charming smile. “Sure, do you think we’d leave you here to miss out on our good fortune, and you the one who brought it to us?”

In O’Neill’s unsmiling eyes, the Prince saw the rest of the promise: if she brought betrayal, O’Neill would be there to make sure she met the fate all traitors deserve.

## Chapter the Second

*In Which His Royal Highness  
Receives the Thanks of His Grateful Nation*

**W**hen the Prince's army arrived, London streets were eerily quiet. Even the street venders had stayed indoors.

Glancing down at his Colonial friend, Charles realized that she must have been exhausted indeed. She had slept soundly through the bouncing of their carriage on the cobblestones, the tramping of his Highlanders beside them and even the shriek of their bagpipes.

Oblivious, she was drowsing beneath the down-filled satin comforter that he had wrapped around her shoulders, after she made it perfectly clear that she would not stop in Derby even long enough to change her cold, wet clothes. The Prince had slept in sodden garments often enough during those five incredible months since he had landed in Scotland, but he still wondered how a young lady could do it.

He had many other, even more intriguing questions to ask her, but they would have to wait. For

now, it was more than enough to peer out the windows at the city he had won.

Some of his local supporters had welcomed him by attaching white ribbons around the street railings to represent the White Rose emblem of the Royal Stuarts. An especially lavish display of white satin roses had been tied to the wrought-iron gate of Lady Violet's townhouse in The Strand.

He smiled as he saw it, circling back from the Tower to Parliament House. He was curious to see the lady herself, even though he understood why she, like his other supporters, had chosen to stay within doors. They feared that there might be a last desperate battle with the usurper's men, before the Stuarts were well and truly restored to their rightful throne.

Thinking of this, he hummed the end of the old Jacobite anthem,

*"So look for no peace, for the wars will not cease, 'til the King shall enjoy his own again."*

The legitimate King, his father, did not yet know about this astonishing turn of events. His Prince Regent could not wait to tell him. At the moment, though, he was thoroughly enjoying victory.

Even the London beggars had cause to share his joy. Left alone in full possession of the streets, they reached out for alms. Highlanders tossed bags of bread into their rag-wrapped hands. At long last, the Highlanders had plenty to share.

All along the route from Derby, loyal country squires had sent their servants out to their gatehouses

with cartloads of food for their rightful Prince's army. Those who had not been loyal to him before had rapidly changed their minds, when they heard the first faraway notes of their piping and glimpsed the Highlanders marching towards them.

In London, too, homeowners waited cautiously behind their wrought-iron gates, in the gleaming white stone townhouses that were arranged in perfect squares around common gardens. These were also glittering white now, with no footprints marking the newly fallen snow, because so few people had ventured out of doors since they heard that the Scotsmen were coming.

One of these perfectly planned communities bore a sign that proudly proclaimed it to be Hanover Square. The Prince wondered how many days it would take them to change the name to Stuart Square.

The streets were not nearly so elegant in the older parts of town, and they were not so quiet, either. No one had planned the buildings here, and apartments were crowded together above the shops. Bare arms appeared at fourth and fifth story windows, waving cheap white kerchiefs that were not entirely clean.

A few of the more daring well-wishers popped up on apartment roofs or leaned out of windows when the coach came into view, marked with the three white plumes that identified the passenger as the Prince of Wales.

They quickly vanished from sight, as the wild Highlanders waved them away while shouting a harsh warning. For many of these lads, these were the first English words they had ever learned: "Get away

from that window!" and "Get down off that roof!"

Hearing them shouted now, the Prince angrily demanded to know why he was being kept from his loyal people. He reminded his friends, once again, that this was not the way he had planned his triumphal entry.

From Scotland to Derby, and then from Derby to London, his only talk had been of how he would enter the capital. Should he march behind the pipers at the head of his clans, he had wondered happily, or ride before them on his great grey stallion. He had never considered hiding in a closed coach. So annoyed was he at the thought, he awoke his female advisor to ask sharply if he really needed to do so.

She roused herself enough to explain the problem once again. They were riding past houses that were crowded close together, as close as the builders could pack them. One man standing on a roof or leaning out a window, with a musket in his hand, could dash their hopes of a glorious restoration, even now.

"Do they hate me so?"

"Only a few," she replied, as she had so often before. "But even one could be enough."

"Only because I am a Catholic."

"Some for that reason. Some because they fear you will rule as a conqueror."

Suddenly, she seemed to come fully awake as she added, "Some hate you because you are young, strong, handsome and victorious—everything that they are not. Believe me, they do."

The Prince wondered if this Miss Mary Marvellous had seen so much hatred and envy while living



among the Quakers in her City of Brotherly Love.

But the Young Glenmoriston agreed with her. So did Francis O'Neill. So did George Murray, who was delighted to find them sharing his own habitual caution at last.

Murray's good humor grew as Miss Marvellous offered lavish apologies for her rash and impulsive behavior the day before. She should have used the force of reason rather than arms, and she prayed to learn more self-control in the future. With equal fervor, Murray assured her that she was completely forgiven. The Prince saw no apologies would be coming from MacGregor and Captain O'Neill, for whom a drawn pistol was a good enough argument for anyone.

In any event, MacGregor seemed to be fully absorbed in the sight of his men running into Parliament House. They soon ran back again, shouting that this too was as empty as the other government buildings in their path. Ran MacGregor ordered a few men to stay and secure it, and the coach rattled on.

As they left, Prince Charles threw himself at the tiny rear window, for a last look at those stone lace towers, now in the hands of his followers. That sight told him, at last, the extent of his victory.

"Do you know what this means?" he asked.

The lady smiled, fully awake now. "It means that Your Royal Highness has won."

\* \* \* \*

As night was coming on, they went west to the King's house in Kensington Gardens. It was to be Prince Charlie's residence now. They had expected to find it, too, deserted, but here they were surprised. As they approached the sprawling red brick structure, they saw some lights in one of the side entrances, then heard an air by Handel being played very badly by a string quartet.

Before jumping out of the coach, MacGregor and O'Neill both drew their swords. In some annoyance, they saw the Prince leaping down after them, weapon in hand, without waiting to hear that the coast was clear.

Lord George lifted Miss Marvellous down. Still clutching the comforter around her, she stumbled up the three stone steps and through the palace door.

Now the whole group was staring in amazement.

The musicians were sitting on the winding oak stairway, still playing their air of welcome. Prince Charlie's party recognized the cellist from his official paintings. On the previous day, he had been known as Frederick Augustus, Prince of Wales, son and heir to King George II. Now he was merely the eldest son of George, Elector of Hanover. He was also a nephew to the rightful King James III, as shown by the fact that he looked something like his cousin, although, while Charles Edward resembled a young lion, Frederick Augustus looked more like a sheep.

He did not look at all disturbed by his sudden decline from royalty. On the contrary, he mercifully stopped the music to exclaim, "Dear Cousin Charles, welcome to your house! I am your Cousin Frederick,

and this is my lady, your Cousin Augusta, and my sisters, your Cousins Caroline and Anne."

Noting that his companions were still gaping wordlessly at the musicians, Prince Charles hastened forward to take his cousin's hand and then kiss the ladies in turn.

"You are the only Londoners of any note who have come to greet us," he assured them. "We thank you for your kindness."

"But where are your father and brother?" MacGregor asked.

"On their yacht headed for Hanover," Frederick replied happily. "They packed up yesterday and left this morning. Good riddance to them both!"

The Colonial lady smiled proudly at the others, glad to have her report confirmed. Her smile faded when she saw the others glaring at her, even more suspiciously than they had stared at her in Exeter House.

"They left this morning," Lord Murray repeated. "But you told us about it in Derby, days ago."

"I must have heard rumors of their plans," she answered quickly.

"They must have planned it before they did it," MacGregor pointed out. "She must have heard about the preparations and thought that they were further along than they were."

"She heard them in Philadelphia, when we had not heard them in England?" O'Neill asked softly.

She turned toward Ran for protection but lowered her eyes when she saw that he was staring down at her with suspicion, his brawny arms folded across his

massive chest.

He was pushing back the uneasy questions that had been crowding in on him ever since they had met. The obvious answer clamored to be heard: the one born of generations of Highland belief. It was the only sure way to explain her astonishing knowledge, but he refused to even consider it. He knew what that would make her and refused to even accept the remote possibility that she was such a thing.

For one thing, he was a university student who had left Scots College in Paris only to serve his Prince. He had learned there to sneer superstition and ignorance. For another, this lady had aroused his admiration, his gratitude and feelings that, he feared, ran even deeper.

Gazing at the top of her head, he saw that her golden curls still hung limply down her neck after her wild ride to save her Prince. As proof of her loyalty and devotion, her disheveled hair impressed him more urgently than her words had done of the desperate need for speed. He would not repay her by thinking that she could actually be a —

Witch.

The harder he fought this word, the more it filled his mind. Glancing at O'Neill, he saw in the Irishman's narrowed blue eyes that he had accepted the possibility long since, and didn't seem to care. O'Neill would not have minded if she were the Devil's own bride, Ran realized, as long as she served the Prince.

To distract himself from his suspicions, he forced himself to pay attention to Frederick, who was

making cheerful explanations for his own rather astonishing conduct.

"It would have taken more courage to go with my father than it did for me to stay here," he said with a shrug. "He was so suspicious of me, he would not let me near his army. And he was right, of course, I was on your side from the start. I've always been a real rebel, just like you. I even held a party to celebrate when you captured Carlisle.

"As soon as I heard about you, I loved you more than my hateful father and my pig of a brother. I know the people will feel the same. Do just as you did in Edinburgh—give public receptions in the evening and go riding in public during the day. You can let the ladies pet your horse's nose—that was a nice touch."

Rather dryly, Prince Charles assured him that he would take his good advice.

"Just as soon as it is safe to do so," Lord Murray added hastily.

"And after we've all had a good dinner, a hot bath and a good night's sleep," Lord Elcho put in. They all nodded eagerly at the thought.

"But you must be the first one to taste each dish, because that is your right as our host, you know," O'Neill said gently.

His hostess, Augusta, rose angrily at the implied insult. Her husband's voice silenced her objections.

"To be sure that the food is not poisoned!" Frederick exclaimed, clapping his hands together. "What a capital idea! And what a clever fellow you are! How fortunate my cousin is, to have such

servants."

"And even more, to have such kinsmen," his cousin answered, with a gracious bow.

## Chapter the Third

*In Which His Royal Highness  
Is Entertained by Two Famed Actresses*

Joy to the world, our Prince has come,  
Our land receives her King!  
And every heart prepares him room,  
As noble and common sing,  
As noble and common sing,  
As noble and clerical and common sing

*From an air by Handel, first sung at the Drury Lane Theatre in London on December 16, 1746, before a command performance of "The Beggar's Opera," given to celebrate Prince Regent Charles Edward's triumph.*

Anyone with ten pounds sterling may sit right up beside the performers, on the stage," Prince Charles Edward complained, "But I must stay hidden like a prisoner."

To prove how senseless his confinement was, he leaned forward through the red-velvet curtains to smile and wave at the cheering crowd. The ground floor shook as half of the spectators jumped to their feet, straining for a glimpse of him in the royal box. The ladies waved their fans in his direction, hoping

that he would glimpse them in turn. The resulting breeze carried up the mingled fragrances the ladies had purchased for the occasion, sparing no expense, at the Floris Shop.

The ovation had started the moment he entered the royal box at Drury Lane Theatre. Even after fifteen minutes, it showed no sign of dying down. Every time it seemed on the verge of fading, Cousin Freddie, who was allowed to sit on the stage, jumped forward with a new burst of applause to start it up again.

Kitty Clark, Peg Livingston and David Garrick, the stars of the show, were applauding as loudly as anyone, but obviously finding it hard to control their impatience. Partly out of compassion for them, Prince Charlie finally sank back in his seat and pulled the curtains closed, leaving only a crack wide enough to let him glimpse the performance.

"Don't you see how my people love me?" he asked, once again indicating the crowd with a flick of a white lace cuff. "Why must we sit up here, where I can hardly see them? And why aren't they even allowed to come to me?"

Still patient and smiling, after answering that question so many times before, Francis O'Neill explained once again that it would take only one person who did not love His Royal Highness to end His life, as Miss Mary Marvellous had so often warned them. He had no need to remind his Prince that, so far, Miss Marvellous's advice had been well worth heeding.

And once again, the Irishman shrugged and smiled



when the Prince asked peevishly if he really needed an entire army to foil this one imaginary man.

"Army" was no exaggeration. The hallway was filled with loyal Highlanders, mostly MacGregors of Glenmoriston. They were arrayed in their full battle plaids, bristling with pistols and dirks, attracting from the ladies almost as many admiring glances as the Prince himself.

Within the auditorium, loyal armed men from the Irish regiments of the French Army—Lally's, Ruth's and Dillon's—occupied all the boxes from which a gun could have possibly been pointed at the royal seats. Their red woolen jackets were lined with emerald green, telling the world that the Wild Geese had come home to the English and Irish islands that many had never seen.

They earned their share of admiring glances, too. The sight of them would have been even more startling, had not the Prince made a hasty peace with the French after six years of intermittent war.

The entire colorful but fearful display of armed men was intended to keep the Prince's new subjects from penetrating to his hiding place. His guards were more than willing, though, to accept petitions, love letters, white roses, white ribbons and other signs of esteem on his behalf. One corner of the royal box was piled four feet high with presents, including an entire rose bush in a pot. Similar gifts overflowed a storage room at Kensington.

But no man was allowed in to present his token personally. Even more annoying from the Prince's point of view, no woman was allowed to present hers,

even though, judging by the feminine handwriting on the gift cards, plenty of the ladies in the audience had hoped to offer them personally.

He had not even been allowed backstage to offer his personal congratulations to the golden-haired Kitty Clark on the delightful comic gift she had shown earlier in the season, in *"The Devil to Pay."* Instead, he had been forced to send her a written invitation, in a most ungentlemanly way, to visit him at Kensington, quite as though she were a common harlot, rather than a gifted and celebrated artiste and thus well qualified to join the long and distinguished list of actresses who had served as mistresses to princes and kings.

As though fate were scheming to make his life even more difficult, a soldier handed him a message from Kitty's long-time rival, Peg Livingston. Both were appearing in the play tonight, and each, it seemed, wanted to make a personal appearance afterwards in his private suite. But how was one cock supposed to fill two cunnies, even though one man could obviously rub two clits?

Really, it was a bedroom farce worthy of Mr. Sheridan. It even mirrored the rivals' roles on stage tonight, fighting for their mutual robber bridegroom, who was thus led to sing sadly, "How happy could I be with either, were the other dear charmer away." It seemed he himself would have to send one of the dear charmers away, with deepest regrets.

It would, indeed, be hard to make his choice. Blond, bouncing Kitty was known for comedy roles, while sultry Peg was the queen of tragedy, and each

exuded an all-but-irresistible appeal.

He glanced at his personal bodyguards, whose minds were obviously on more serious matters, with no thought of his dilemma.

Ran MacGregor stood grimly behind the royal chair, pistol in one hand, dirk in the other, his claymore thrust into his belt. Captain O'Neill sat beside him, with a pistol and sword in his sash. While MacGregor glowered in a fearsome way, O'Neill wore an engaging smile that never reached his wary blue eyes. They swept constantly over the crowd, barely ever coming to rest on the stage below.

In the center of these concentric rings of protection, the Prince himself was armed for his own defense. A pistol and dirk were thrust into his white satin sash, fastened over a jacket of rich blue satin brocade. He well knew how to use these weapons and wore them as proudly as the decorations pinned to the sash—the medals of St. Andrew, St. Patrick, St. George and the Garter Knights—emblems, respectively, of Scotland, Ireland, England and the Royal Family.

He caught himself almost wishing that someone really did manage to invade the royal box. Then he and his companions could have the sport of driving them off together. Now, during their last evening on duty, he suspected that his two companions felt the same way.

They would be replaced by Robert O'Shea and Aeneas MacGregor, who would later give way, in turn, to Johnny Yeats and Alexander MacLeod. He made it a point to always have one Irishman and one Scot guarding him, to show his impartiality.

He went so far as to partake of their native delicacies when his guards joined him at dinner, consuming boiled oatmeal and potatoes along with his own favorite dish of oysters. If there was anything he hated worse than potatoes, it was oatmeal, but he found it worth any sacrifice to keep his men united with him and with each other.

Even his female companions regarded themselves as his guards. They sat stiffly on either side of him, gazing out over the crowd as often as they looked to the stage.

Lady Violet also turned her gaze, from time to time, on her countryman Francis O'Neill, and he met her eyes with an encouraging smile. If he had not owed O'Neill so much gratitude, the Prince would have been encouraging her himself. And, he realized, even at age forty-nine, she would have had any man doing the same.

Her bright blue eyes kept meeting O'Neill's openly, sending an invitation that was frank and unashamed. Just as boldly, she took full advantage of the fashionable bodices that barely covered the nipples. Unlike more modest females, Lady Violet made no effort to fill in that opening with the lace kerchief coyly called a "bosom friend." Instead, she pulled the deep square into an even deeper V by pinning a watch at the cleavage. A golden curl fell over her shoulder and onto her left breast. What's more, she was constantly winding that curl around her finger, thus calling even more attention to the creamy mound beneath it, as if any more were needed.

Miss Marvellous, in turn, could not seem to stop herself from turning around to glance with helpless fascination at the tall Scot standing behind her. Prince Charles noticed many other ladies were doing the same. With his wild red-brown mane, his square stubborn jaw, his tartan kilt and his weapons, Ran was the very model of a wild Highland laird.

As always, the Prince wondered if he could turn the situation to his advantage. When he had made himself Miss Marvellous's official guardian, he had assured her that his guardianship was only the first sign of the favor he planned to show. As part of his duties, he would have to find a husband for her from among his loyal followers.

Glenmoriston was the obvious choice. For one thing, he was as loyal to his Prince as the lady herself had proven to be. The only drawback to the plan was that Glenmoriston apparently did not want her. He seemed so determined not to meet her glance that she was always forced to turn away in disappointment.

The Prince was torn between despising MacGregor for his indifference and admiring his iron self-control. He wondered if he himself could have resisted the helpless look of appeal in those great brown eyes. As always, they seemed too big for her face. It formed a perfect heart shape, from her high, wide generous brow to her delicately pointed chin.

Her perfect little rosebud lips were innocent of rouge, and her skin needed no mercury water to enhance its pink-and-rose perfection. This was fortunate for her, he thought, because she refused to use any cosmetics at all, beyond rosewater fragrance,

and was known to have told other ladies that mercury water was bad for the skin.

Certainly, she was in the right place to overcome such foolish prejudices against modern beauty products, he thought. She was living with Lady Violet in Stuart Square while waiting for Greenwich House to be ready for her. Her hostess availed herself of the entire paint box, from the black rims drawn around her eyes to the crimson rose on her lips.

Miss Marvellous's opinions were, he supposed, the natural result of living among the Quakers in Philadelphia, although she was certainly not one herself. Quakers would not have gone to war for any cause. They would certainly not have crossed the ocean to fight for the "Papish Pretender" as they were pleased to call his father or, alternatively, himself.

And if Quakers insisted on living simply, she certainly failed to qualify. Instead, she had gratefully accepted his gift of the small but lovely royal palace in Greenwich, along with an income to support it. It was little enough to give, as he had assured her, considering that she had presented every royal palace in England to him.

He was all the more eager to make his gifts because she had never asked for any. The only request she ever made was on another's behalf.

Francis Townley had done yeoman service in holding Carlisle Castle for his Prince, as she had reminded him before asking her favor. He would surely have been hanged, drawn and quartered for treason if his enemies had managed to capture him. Would the Prince be sure that he was freed at once

and restored to his wife and children?

The Prince had sent the messenger that very moment and assured the lady that Townley would have ample chance to thank her personally. She had responded that she did not want to meet with him at all. She would, in fact, rather that the Prince immediately dispatch him to his home in Wales. The Prince had discreetly refrained from pressing for an explanation. She must once have loved the man, he assumed. He could not possibly have guessed how close to the truth he was, or how far away.

If Townley had loved her in turn, then the Prince could only applaud his good taste. He himself found her all the more stimulating because of her simple, Quakerish ways and could only wish that Ranald MacGregor felt the same way.

As he soon realized, she had no Quakerish prejudices against modern entertainment. On the contrary, she laughed as heartily as anyone at the frankly bawdy jests. And when Peg and Kitty in their roles as Polly Peachum and Lucy Brown started pulling each other's hair, ripping each other's gowns and finally rolling around on the ground as they sang their insults, "How, now, saucy jade? Dirty slut!" she almost fell off her chair in merriment.

The Prince, however, was suddenly thoughtful. The scene had given him an idea that would solve his own dilemma concerning the evening's entertainment, in a way which, he hoped, would be satisfactory to all concerned.

\* \* \* \*

Kitty Clark was the first to arrive. When the servant led her to the casual dining room, Charles was already seated before the spread of shellfish and champagne. As the servant took her rabbit cape, she looked around appreciatively at the Dutch floral paintings on the oak-paneled walls.

"What a lovely room this is, Your Royal Highness," she told him, and he heard the faintest accents of her native Dublin in her lilting voice.

Then she looked down at the table, and her lips tightened as she saw that it was set for three.

"I have also invited a friend of yours," he said, with his most beguiling smile. "Another young lady."

"And what young lady is that?" she asked, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"Your own fellow artiste, Miss Livingston."

Now the tones of Dublin were not faint at all, as she thrust her fists against her hips, which seemed, in silver-threaded white brocade, much too elegantly covered for such a gesture.

"Peg Livingston, is it?" she cried. "Well, Sir, I will have you to know that I am an artiste, as you called me, and not some harlot from the street, to share a man's bed with another, and certainly not that trollop. A trollop she is indeed, for isn't she after sharing her bed with Mr. Garrick, just so he will give all the best roles to her? I will thank you to have my servant bring my cloak back to me."

"No, no, you misunderstand!" he exclaimed. "I wanted to ask you both if there was a role for me on stage. What better way to let all my subjects see me?"



"Well, if that is your reason," she said, sinking down into the cushioned chair he held out for her. "Then I am happy to give my advice, and I am sure she will be, too, not that she would know the difference between Henry V and Jack MacHeath."

Without asking, he placed six oysters on one of the costly imported Imari plates, its blue and crimson flowers outlined in fine gilt paint against the glowing white glaze.

Smiling her thanks, she lifted her head to pour one of the oysters straight from the shell down her throat in a gesture that seemed as refined as her surroundings. It was an unmistakable invitation as well.

"But couldn't you perform either part to perfection?" she asked. "Mr. Garrick would be glad to mount a lavish production around you, and I would be glad to play Fair Kate or Lucy Brown again. What a romantic hero you would make. On stage you will cut a gallant figure. I can just imagine the posters for his production of *"The Begger's Opera"*: HRH Charles Edward Stuart as the highwayman MacHeath, with Miss Clark as Lucy Brown."

"But how could I lose my Highland accent in time? My tutors in Rome spent long enough making sure I kept it."

"We would not dream of asking you to do it," she assured him. "We will explain that you recently came down from the Highlands to practice your craft as a highwayman, and what applause you will get then. And think of the way they will laugh when I say my line, *'He follows the example of the military officers, and*

*calls himself a gentleman because of his profession."*

"But I hope the young ladies will not be laughing," he said, his voice falling seductively. Rising from his chair, he strode to her seat and leaned over her. Obliging, she raised her lips for a kiss, then demurely lowered her head as she lifted another oyster in one hand and her glass of champagne in the other.

She downed them both quickly when that all-too-familiar low, hoarse voice emerged from the hall, "I hope I am not late for dinner, Your Royal Highness."

"Not at all," he replied, as he pulled out the third chair for Peg Livingston.

"It was all I could do to get past all those Scots and Irishmen guarding the hall," she said, as she threw her blue-velvet cloak to a servant and sank into her vacant chair. The man quickly and discreetly departed for the cloakroom, leaving the Prince alone with his two guests. The newcomer noticed her rival already seated there.

"I did not know Your Royal Highness had another guest," she said. "I will come back another night."

"His Royal Highness wants our advice," Kitty assured her. "He is thinking of treading the boards along with us."

"The Prince Regent, on stage? That hardly seems proper."

"But I am sure your great friend Mr. Garrick could arrange it," Kitty replied, in her sweetest tones.

Peg half rose at that, ready to return the insult. "He is not my friend the way you mean."

The Prince hastily waved her into her seat again.

"Are you going to re-create your famous scene from the play tonight? I have already seen you pulling each other's hair out and rolling on the floor. Once was quite enough."

She responded by sinking down again, with a reluctant smile.

"I have no such thing in mind, Your Royal Highness," she assured him. "We are just having a polite conversation."

"And I was just joking about going on stage." With a reluctant sigh, he added, "Not that I would not enjoy it, jumping around with a sword in my hand and hearing all the applause. But I fear that my subjects would not think it was suited to my station."

"There is more to acting than jumping around," Peg murmured, and her colleague nodded agreement.

"But perhaps we could perform together on another stage," he said, leaning forward to fix each in turn with his compelling brown eyes. "We could all act out our parts as MacHeath, Polly and Lucy there, doing the scene that could never be shown in the theatre."

Kitty Clark, who enjoyed a reputation for purity despite her profession, leaned forward to return his gaze, her blue eyes wide open in a great show of confusion. Peg Livingston, who had a reputation of another sort, leaned back to gaze at him from under her black brows, with a smile of open invitation.

The Prince pulled back in his own chair, far enough to let them glance below his kilt and see that he was more than ready to answer his cue. To signal her own responding readiness, Peg poured six oysters

down her throat in rapid succession.

Then he stood, with a smile and nod for each lady, and walked towards the gallery leading to his bedroom. Peg quickly stood to follow him, stopping only to drain a glass of champagne. More demurely, as befit her reputation, Kitty trailed after.

"An elegant setting for a highwayman," she murmured, when she saw the gold-and-crimson brocade walls, the crimson velvet curtains and the silver chandelier above the carved four-poster bed. She glanced with special fascination at Mary Marvellous's portrait on the walls.

The Prince had placed it there in the hopes that it would transfer some of her marvelous powers to him.

"Our Captain MacHeath has purchased many fine things for us, with the gold he stole from travelers," Peg retorted, falling into her role. "But now he is the one who must stand and deliver." Gazing at his kilt, she went on, "I see that he is standing already."

"But he has deceived us both!" cried Kitty, getting into the spirit. "Instead of fighting each other, let us both punish him! Tear off his clothes!"

He did not resist the assault. On the contrary, he assisted by showing Peg how to unwind his kilt as Kitty reached up over her to unbutton his shirt. Between the two of them, he was soon naked and laughing as he fell onto the carved four-poster bed.

"But now you must be angry at each other again," he ordered. "Angry enough to strip each other naked."

Kitty pulled back at this, genuinely shocked this time, but Peg was well into her role.

"How, now, saucy jade!" she sang, just as she had done on stage a few hours before. But this time she went further than any stage director would allow, by tearing open the laces that held her rival's bodice tight beneath her breasts. As the bodice fell open, Kitty finally responded to her cue, if only in self-defense.

Soon the Prince was admiring Kitty's small, firm breasts with their pink nipples and Peg's full, soft ones, with their equally inviting brown centers. It was like seeing fresh strawberries displayed beside chocolate drops, he thought, and how he would delight in savoring both.

As they continued to unbind each other's fastenings, soon both of their gowns were lying in heaps at their feet, leaving their metal side hoops and petticoats exposed. These defenses, too, were soon torn away, leaving the guests as naked as their host. Now they were more grateful than ever for the fire in the marble mantel.

Then they stepped out of their skirts and were standing like statues painted in perfect contrast. Some art dealer might have brought them for his approval, the Prince mused, as he lounged on his bed, appraising them.

Kitty stood with downcast blue eyes: an image of the chaste Diana. Her rival gazed with bold confidence: Venus herself inviting her worshippers' admiration. The firelight flickered on them both, as though they were sculpted goddesses in a pagan temple, where the ritual fires were kept burning.

Which of these divine images would His Royal Highness prefer? How the dealer would bow and

scrape as he asked that, hardly daring believe his good fortune, in having this chance to display his wares for the Prince Regent. No statue could have swiveled and undulated as they did, though. Their hands slid slowly from their shoulders to their breasts and then down to their cunny curls, blond and brown respectively. With a sly smile, Peg circled her nipple with her forefinger, to show how hard with desire the nipple had become.

And statues would not have been eyeing each other that way, barely able to hide their jealous sideways glances. "How happy could I be with either, were the other dear charmer away..." just in time, he stopped himself from humming the words.

How happy will I be with both, he thought, when my hands press those breasts and buttocks—one set soft, the other firm—as I bury my cock in their cunnies. It will travel first through the golden thicket and then through the ebony, unless I would rather send it by the opposite path.

What a delicious dilemma that was! His hand was itching now to grasp those two feminine backsides, one in each hand, perhaps. Then he thought of an even more vigorous way to enjoy them.

"But you are both saucy jades indeed!" the royal host cried, bounding up from his bed. "And you must both be soundly whacked for it, Peg first, because she was the boldest!"

For a moment she seemed truly dismayed. But before he could explain his plan more clearly, she had realized what he had in mind and threw herself with gusto into the scene.

"Oh, no, my Prince—I mean, my Captain—spare me!" she cried, in her most theatrical tones. Making a great show of terror, she ran around the bed. Easily seizing her by the arm, he fell back onto the brocade cover and threw her over his knee.

His legs closed around hers to keep her from escaping while his left arm came down like an iron bar across her shoulders. Then his right hand rose and fell in rapid rhythm, turning her bare bottom first bright pink and then an angry red, first warm and then almost unpleasantly hot. His right hand grew heated in the same way, but he easily ignored its stinging, while his untried left hand pinned her slim shoulders down. As her belly pressed against his thighs, he felt her squirming against him, creating an entirely new area of sensation.

The scent of her face powder and rosewater mingled with the last traces of her greasepaint to bring him an added excitement: the wicked pleasures of the theater and the actresses who provided them.

And was he not also an actor? Usually his stage was on the most heroic scale. But before playing that noble role, he had rehearsed this same domestic comedy often enough in Paris, with ladies of the French Comedy Theater, not to mention servant girls, noblewomen, and even intellectuals, following some particularly heated discussion. Now two of the most famous women in London were happy to follow this script of his by lying across his lap with their backsides in the air, all dignity forgotten, waiting for his hand to strike them again.

He noticed then that his first partner did not seem

to be completely happy any more. Instead, Peg was begging him to stop: half still in jest, he believed, but perhaps a bit in earnest.

Reluctantly, he promised her that, "These will be your last five whacks, then." He laid them on her hard and fast, so he would not have time to wonder if her pleas for mercy were completely genuine.

When he finally let her scramble to her feet, she stood rubbing her bruised backside. With some remorse, he realized that she was showing every sign of real discomfort.

And what could a gentleman do then, he asked himself, but go and help her soothe the injury with his own good hand? As he did so, he tried hard to be gentle, watching carefully for any sign that she wanted to flinch away from him. Then he returned to his stern role, glaring down at her from over his folded arms.

"Now you can go stand in the corner, like the bad girl you are, while I attend to your friend," he ordered. Peg obeyed, but kept glancing over her shoulder with a rather unkind smile. His threat against her rival seemed to have cheered her, to the point where she had almost forgotten her own pain. She wanted to enjoy watching the punishment, he thought, to make sure that it is no less than the portion she herself endured.

It seemed to him, though, that Kitty's eyes were round with genuine fear. No matter how experienced she is on stage, he realized she still was not used to following this script. She stood with her hand on the silver doorknob, although he saw that her fingers



made no effort to turn it. He had learned how to deal with such conflicted feelings in the courts of Paris and Rome. When he leaned down to whisper in her ear, he saw that she pulled away, but also noted that she made no motion to flee.

"If you really do not want me to continue, then call me by my real name and we shall stop," he instructed. "Do you understand?"

She nodded, not yet smiling, but with her hand releasing the knob.

He grinned and winked in reply, before he raised his voice harshly again.

"Then you, too, know you must be punished!" he proclaimed and dragged her to the bed. She hammered at his shoulder with her free hand and kicked his legs, so that he was glad that her pointed shoes had been pulled off during the fighting.

Her body was much softer than her rival's had been, though, when he threw her across his lap, leaving him glad that Peg was not the one who had fought him. As trim and fit as she was, she might have escaped him if she had fought hard enough, which would have been embarrassing to them both.

"You must stop resisting your punishment, or you will get a second thrashing for doing that," he exclaimed. Obediently, she clenched her fists and curled her toes as he put her across his knee.

"That's better," he said gruffly. "So I think that twenty lashes is traditional. One-two-three..."

"Ow, ow, ow!" she cried, as his relentless hand changed her cool white bottom to a hot red mass. He saw that her hands were still closed as she tried to

keep from struggling, even as she no doubt fought to keep herself from saying the magic word that would end her torment.

He was almost glad to hear her howling. The effort had left his own hand stinging almost as badly as her backside must have been, so he felt it was only just that she should suffer more than he did. His blows grew ever harder, even though he knew that each was falling on an area that was already tender from the one that had come before.

When his count reached eight, her hands opened again and flew to cover the bruised area, but he pushed them away. "Now you are being a bad girl, resisting my discipline," he reproached her. "So I must start my counting again. One – two –."

"Please stop!" she cried.

"And now you have thrown me off my count one more. One – two –."

"Ow, ow, ow!" she cried, as she writhed in a vain attempt to evade the blows, although her fists were now tight again. "Please, Captain, no more!"

Rather than answering, he went on, until he reluctantly reached the final numbers – "seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty!" As she stood, he saw, with some concern, that very real tears stood in her eyes, but reminded himself that she had chosen not to stop the scene. Now it was her turn to rub her bottom, and to feel his hand turning gentle as he stroked it along with her. He was rewarded by the grateful smile she sent him.

And how glad he was that she had not called his name! He had celebrated his victory once again, by

thoroughly thrashing the bottoms of London's two most famous actresses. They had accepted every stinging second of it willingly, too, he felt sure, because it was coming from their Prince Regent. Now he was ready to share other delights with them.

"So now, you both come here and I will show you that you are forgiven," he said as. Hurling himself back on the brocade cover, he stretched out his arms for them. They obediently fell onto the bed beside him, one head at either shoulder. They were careful to lie on their sides, he noted, holding their bruised bottoms off the bed, as proof of the thorough job he had done on them.

Their breasts pressed against him, with the flesh warm and soft around the firm, jutting nipples. Soon his cock grew so hard and long, he knew he could service both of those cunnies, after all. Thrusting a middle finger into each in turn, he found that they were warm, moist and ready for him. Both women squirmed in welcome under his touch.

Now he was especially glad he had thought to keep a good supply of Doctor Condom's useful invention in the dressing table nearby.

He turned to kiss Peg's soft lips, which still tasted of champagne, while still keeping his arm around Kitty's shoulder. Between the kisses he gave it, he sang, "the Prince will enjoy his own again."

\* \* \* \*

In Lady Violet's townhouse, the Prince's friends were enjoying another form of entertainment, although this

was not, perhaps, quite as pleasurable as his.

The parlor was a great deal more elegant than his royal dining room. Rising eleven feet above their heads, the fashionably high ceiling was adorned with an exquisite plaster molding showing a sunburst encircling the head of Apollo, god of the sun. Ran thought it was no doubt at Violet's direction that the plasterer had given him a marked resemblance to the Bonnie Prince. In case anyone missed the resemblance, Antonio David's heroic royal portrait hung over the white marble mantel.

On Violet's equally stylish clawfoot oak table, the dessert collation was also much more elaborate than the simple dinner that the Prince and his guests had shared. Crystal goblets filled with jellied fruit formed a brilliant centerpiece, shimmering like jewels of crimson, purple, yellow and green in the glow of the white candles flanking them. Platters and bowls were arrayed at either end of the table, overflowing with plum tarts, candied cherries, gingerbread squares, frosted cakes, cheese cakes, fruit pies and both plum and tansy puddings. Silver pitchers of wine and lemonade gleamed at either end.

"And isn't this the fine feast altogether?" Francis O'Neill exclaimed, as they came through the paneled door.

"I am pleased that you enjoy my hospitality," Lady Violet said. Toying, as ever, with the blond curl that fell over her shoulder, she let her fingers brush against the bosom beneath them. Then she raised her eyes briefly to O'Neill, in a manner that clearly promised an even more intimate gathering to come.

She smiled when he responded with a cheerful wink.

"Sure, and your hospitality is a fine thing indeed," O'Neill crowed, and exchanged another knowing smile with her.

"Do you enjoy such late suppers in the Colonies?" Lady Violet asked, as she generously garnished her own pudding with candied cherries.

"And why should they not, now?" O'Neill asked, after hastily conquering a mouthful of cheesecake. "Do you think they're barbarians entirely? I'm sure they dine every bit as daintily in—Philadelphia, is it not?"

Ran MacGregor put down his gingerbread square and stared at her openly, listening hard for the answer—too hard, it seemed to them all, for such a simple question. The others pretended to concentrate on their sweet selections, but MacGregor was sure they were waiting for the answer as avidly as he.

She let them wait as long as she dared, while she returned her half-eaten frosted cake to her plate and lowered her glass of lemonade.

"Yes, Philadelphia," she finally answered, not speaking too quickly. "And of course we like our sweets, but they aren't quite as elegant as this. If you go to Virginia, now—that's where you'll see a spread as fine as this one."

"How did you get here to London, and where did you stay?" her hostess asked, in the same pleasant tone. "Where did you go, to learn all the things you did, and who did you hear them from? You know we're all curious to hear your adventures."

"I came by way of Bristol, how else?" With a great

show of indignation, she went on, "We have a fine port in Philadelphia, you know. You have no need to wonder how I managed to take ship there."

For the first time, MacGregor spoke. "What ship did you take?" he asked, making no effort to make it sound like a casual question.

"What difference does that make, now?" O'Neill asked. "Can't you see that you are making the poor lass uncomfortable? Were you never in Paris, man, that you ask such rude questions?"

"Not rude at all," Mary assured him, "I can't give you the name, though, because I gave my word—because I sailed with pirates. I paid them to take me and they kept their promise to do it, so I must honor my oath not to expose them."

"Quite a chance you were taking," the hostess observed.

"I had to take chances, if I wanted to serve my Prince."

"So you came all the way to London, just to serve as a spy for us," Ran said, skeptically.

With some spirit, she assured him that she would have gone a great deal further to save her Prince and his loyal Highlanders from the disaster on Culloden Moor.

Then Francis O'Neill turned his vivid blue eyes on her, with a gaze as intent as a cat's. "Now, how could you have known about Culloden?" he mused gently. "Only O'Sullivan has even talked about the plan for making a stand there, to a few of us Irish officers and our Prince. We told him straight out that we'd all be slaughtered there, too."

"Perhaps someone mentioned it," she replied, too hastily, "Someone might have been thinking of it and said the word aloud."

"Or perhaps you have ways of knowing what others were thinking," MacGregor suggested gruffly.

A horrified silence followed his words—not so much at the suggestion itself, as the fact that someone at last had voiced it. O'Neill broke the silence with his own indignation.

"For the Lord's own sake, let's leave it alone," he exclaimed. "She wanted to help her Prince and that must be enough for us. And if she gave her word to the pirates, then she did, and that's the end of it. And if she thinks someone mentioned Culloden to her, then he did that, too. It was an Irish plan, and we all talk too much, as the whole world knows. Will you be silent now and eat your dainties?"

Their hostess nodded her firm agreement. MacGregor forced himself to be silent by biting into his gingerbread. *Yes, Mary, he thought, be silent and eat your dainties. All of you know that you'd better not ask her too many questions, if you want to enjoy them in comfort.*

\* \* \* \*

Later that night, with his fair guests sleeping on either side, the Prince found no comfort in his dreams. He was walking down the King's Staircase, as he had so often done in waking life. And, as he had so often done then, he paused with his hand on the oak banister to admire the crowd of Londoners painted on the stairwell.

William Kent had depicted a fashionable throng of soldiers, ladies and even African pages engaged in lively conversation. They were all depicted in so realistic a way, they seemed to lean out over their painted railings towards the Prince himself. One youth actually stood outside the railing, so that he seemed to have escaped from the painted scene.

As always, the Prince felt that they were talking about him, just as other groups were doing, all over the world. They spoke of his incredible reconquest of the British throne in one amazing year—reverently known to his Scottish subjects as Charlie's Year.

As he strained to make the words out, he suddenly realized, with horror, that they were not what he had expected them to be. The Londoners were chatting, not about his victory, but rather about his defeat, at the hands of his cousin, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, son of King George. It was all hail Billy the Martial Boy, Sweet William, Billy the Butcher. All hail Billy, who had pursued the Scottish rebels back to their own Highlands and slaughtered them on Culloden Moor.

Waking to find himself lying in a royal bed between his country's two most famous actresses, he could not stop thinking about that horrifying word—Culloden.

Not even thoughts of Elizabeth, the golden-haired Empress of Russia, could distract him. How foolish his proposal to her had seemed, when he had sent it to her from his father's court-in-exile in Rome. This time, the proposal had come from her Kremlin Palace to the Prince Regent in London. He was too much of a



gentleman to twit her about her sudden change of heart.

Indeed, no gentleman would have wanted to twit her about anything. Her portrait now hung opposite that of her father, the Great Czar Peter I, in his own father's royal art gallery, where it would have been a welcome addition on aesthetic grounds alone. While all the world knew that all royal ladies were always considered beautiful, the Imperial portrait made it clear that in her case the description was accurate. She seemed as deliciously ripe as a perfect plum.

Overripe, some would have called her. At thirty seven, Elizabeth was twelve years older than he, but he had always found older women more attractive. Witness the two charming ladies who now filled his bed. The Empress had reportedly had more cocks in her Czarian cunny than both of his little actresses combined, but this fault could be overlooked in view of the fact that she would bring all Russia as her dowry.

It was the crowning touch of his good fortune that this beautiful and powerful woman was available to be his bride at the very moment he was seeking one. From what he'd heard of her, he suspected that she'd enjoying playing the same games as he played with his actresses.

Now, he found himself wondering how much he would have to pay for the empress's hand, not to mention her cunny, mouth and ass. He feared that she, with the rest of his royal advantages, had cost him his very soul, and without his even knowing it.

He shook his head, to drive the thoughts away. A

soldier must not have such notions, he reminded himself sternly. A soldier must never count the cost of victory, in the numbers of the dead who purchased it. In the same way, he must not wonder about Miss Mary Marvellous and how she had come to know those things she had no way of knowing. No natural way, at least.

Seeing that the actresses were finally stirring, he forced himself to don a genial smile.

"Good morning, ladies," he said cheerfully. "Shall we all have our breakfast in bed together, before I send for the coach to take you home?" Then seeing their disappointed faces, he went on, "but not, of course, before I take you on my own personal tour of the finest rooms in this palace."

## Chapter the Fourth

*In Which Captain Francis O'Neill  
Seeks to Advance the Interests of His Nation*

Ever alert to danger, O'Neill's blue eyes flew wide open at the soft sound that the abigail made, placing their cups of breakfast chocolate on the mahogany tripod bedside table. As he reached out instinctively to grasp her wrist, she retreated quickly to the door, gasping her frightened apologies.

"Sure, and it was my mistake, me' darlin'," he assured her, but she had already fled down the stairs.

Now thoroughly awake, he stared upwards in appreciation at the exquisite white molded plaster display above his head. Interlocking rings of spring buds, summer blossoms, autumn fruits and winter snowflakes represented the four seasons there. Hazlitts Hotel, where the Irish officers were billeted, was nice enough, if not half as fine as his room in Paris, but neither one was a patch on this. It made him even more satisfied to be lying beside the lady who owned it.

"I was just admiring your beautiful ceiling," he told her cheerfully, when he turned to see her gazing

at him from the satin pillow beside his.

"He chose the best of everything. And didn't he have the good taste to take a lovely Irish lass from Armagh?"

The lass now known as Sir Hugh Violet's widow smiled and nodded her appreciation for the compliment, as she sat up in bed. When she reached to take the China cup of chocolate, in the costly and fashionable Blue Willow teacup, the bedcover fell to reveal her bosom.

She let him have a good long look by sunlight at the creamy expanse that his fingers and tongue had explored so thoroughly the evening before, in the dimmer glow from the candles. Her own fingers toyed invitingly with the curl falling onto her naked breast, emerging from her tousled mass of hair.

His glance then strayed to the painting above the mantel: Venus and the Lute Player by Titian. It covered the entire wall, in its elaborate gilded frame. The Italian had painted the goddess of love in the nude, save for a short chain of pearls around her throat. The glowing gems reflected the soft, creamy mounds of flesh that seemed in perfect harmony with her golden curls, red lips and blue eyes. Francis was amused to see that his own lady's pearls were a replica of the goddess's, except that Lady Violet's necklace served as the chain for a jeweled timepiece.

She resembled the voluptuous painted Venus in many other ways as well. In fact, that marked resemblance was undoubtedly the reason why she had obtained this painting in the first place and hung it here in her boudoir.

"And isn't that the lovely picture altogether?" he said. "You were the model, I assume."

"Flatterer!" she retorted, striking his shoulder lightly with her pink fingernails. "You know it was part of the Duke of Norfolk's collection before I purchased it."

"And I am sure he gave you a very good price indeed, just to show you what a great good friend he was to all of the Prince's friends." His eyes narrowed as he went on, "Not that you should have had to pay for it at all, me darlin'. You should have been able to take it without asking." As all of us who stood by the Prince should have been free to take what we wanted from those who had stood against him, he thought.

"But of course our Prince would never have allowed that!" she retorted quickly. "You know that he is determined to be just as kind to his English subjects as he was to his Irish and Scots. You know what he has always said: He fights for the rights of those that fought against him."

"Sure, and if you ask an Englishman, there's none of them ever fitted that description," O'Neill answered, his tone of light banter giving way to an open sneer. "Aren't they insisting now that every man jack of them was loyal to his true king, all along? They were always faithful to good King Jamie, they say, even though they feared to defy German George. Never mind that they used to keep crying for their government to put down the Rebellion and the Rising, as they called it. And do you know what they're after calling the same event right now? It's the Second War of Restoration, right enough!

"They hid their true feelings well, didn't they now, since no one suspected they were loyal to their poor old king in exile until his son won back his throne," he added, with a bitter laugh. "Sure, but the Prince will be even kinder to these English hypocrites than to his old friends."

"How can you say that?" she asked, raising her hand to hide her bosom from his gaze. "Hasn't he already revoked the Penal Laws in Ireland?"

"He had to let the Catholics bring their priests back from exile, being a Catholic himself," Francis retorted. "When it comes to giving the Catholics back the land that the accursed Cromwell gave to all the other Curse-of-Cromwell Protestants—well, I would not advise my fellow Catholics to wait for it."

"Are you such a good Catholic, then?" she asked, in an arch tone. "I thought you were an atheist, like every other enlightened man in France."

"Sure, and I am an atheist," he agreed cheerfully. "But by God, I'm a Catholic atheist." His voice hardened again as he went on, "But were Cromwell's men after asking the Irish babies how they prayed to God, when they threw them onto the fire at Drogheda?"

"If we are going back to Drogheda," she answered, with an ironical sigh, "then I had better tell my abigail to bring our breakfast here, because we will be talking for a long time. There's been one hundred more years of history since then."

Normally, he would have laughed at that, throwing back his glossy black curls. But now he was angry enough to say, "Sure, and it was not your

Protestant babies that they killed.”

At that she sat bolt upright, clutching the cover to her bosom with both hands.

“Didn’t I surely serve my Prince as faithfully as any Catholic in either Ireland or Scotland, living in constant fear of arrest while I did it, right here in the heart of London? And hadn’t my father stood up for the Catholics, at the risk of his own living, as the Anglican Dean of Armagh? And what about that other dean in Dublin, Jonathan Swift, who had written with such bitter wit against the English oppression? And then there was Dean Will Yeats in Sligo, whose son Johnny had come here to join Dillon’s Irish Regiment—”

“If we’re in for the listing of all the good Protestant patriots in Ireland, we’ll be here until dinnertime,” he assured her, as his good humor returned. “But if any of us are waiting for the Prince Regent to rule Ireland, Scotland and Wales as three separate countries, the way he promised he’d do when he needed the Irish, Scots and Welsh to fight for him, well then, we’ll all be waiting for a good long time, Catholics and Protestants both.”

“...and my own Viscount Hugh Violet was a loyal Jacobite Protestant or I would never have married him, no matter how wealthy he was,” she persisted, as though she had not heard.

A loyal Jacobite, yes, he thought—loyal to King James. But how loyal was he to our nation? Whatever her answer would have been, he decided not to invite it. The discussion had grown too heated already. It was taking their minds from another sort of heat,

which would be much more pleasant.

"And isn't it a good thing that neither of us is too good a Catholic or Protestant?" he asked, his tone growing beguiling. "If we were, we could not be doing what we are now."

Rolling to his side, he pushed the covers to the foot of the bed, so she could admire the dark, slim length of him.

"So let us not fight about politics," he said. "My soldier is ready for another conquest." To illustrate, he pointed down at his cock which was standing as stiffly at attention as it had the night before.

Bending down, she kissed and licked that mighty warrior until it was standing even more rigidly. The head was as soft as velvet to her tongue, above a shaft that was as hard as corded wood. Both tasted faintly of salt. When he was squirming beneath her, for once beyond words, her legs rose as slowly as a dancer's to wind around his waist, welcoming the invader into her warm, moist domain. She closed around him, pulling him deeper yet. Back and forth they rocked, in an ever-hastening rhythm, as he advanced.

Their thighs and their bellies pressed against each other as they lay side by side, his hardness pressing against her soft opulence. As their arms wound around each other's shoulders, her lips caressed his right upper arm and its scar from the army surgeon's knife, showing white against his warm brown skin. Then, as he thrust harder and harder, deeper and deeper, faster and faster into her womanly part, her mouth could do nothing but gasp and moan against his in the sweetest surrender.



She was still panting with happy exhaustion when they finally rolled onto their backs.

"And is it any wonder that you are the perfect lover?" she sighed, when she could speak again. "An Irishman trained in France."

That particular compliment brought his thoughts back to more serious things.

"Sure, and all the ladies love us," he said, turning towards her with his warmest smile, hiding the chill in his heart, "But isn't it time the world learned to fear us as well?"

"All the world fears the Wild Geese above all the rest of the French army," she assured him, turning towards him quickly and placing her fingers on his shoulder again, as though to give him comfort.

He patted her hand with an absent gesture. "Lord Sarsfield got my father and his men to France after we lost the Battle of the Boyne to the English, and he made us into the Irish-French regiments," he mused, his eyes on the ceiling again. "Do you know what he said when he lay dying on the battlefield in Flanders? The words are famous enough. He said, 'Would it were for Ireland.' That's the same thing I thought, every time I went into battle for my Prince."

Now she sat bolt upright, pulling the covers almost to her neck. In tones of sheer horror, she asked to know if he were even dreaming of going into battle against Prince Charlie. It is true that he had not yet given Ireland her freedom, but surely the Irish had only to wait.

"Do you know when I thought of Lord Sarsfield again?" he went on, as though she had not spoken. "I

thought of him when Miss Marvellous was rambling on about our plans for a stand at Culloden, which she had no way of knowing about in the world, certainly not when she had just come from Philadelphia. I thought, I would it were for Ireland."

His hostess gasped in horror as the meaning sank in.

"Do you think she could be a witch?" she gasped.

"Do you think I'd give a tinker's damn?" he asked, with a shrug. "Just as long as she used her power for our nation."

Once again, she pulled away from him in alarm.

"Whatever powers she has, she uses them only for her Prince," she exclaimed. "She would never work against him."

He laughed as he reached out and drew her back towards him. For a long moment, she lay sheltered in his hard, brown arms, enjoying the feeling of his chest beneath her head and the beating of his heart below her ear.

"It isn't against her Prince she'd be working," he answered reasonably, as he stroked her tousled curls. "It's for her loving husband."

So contented did she feel, it took a moment for that answer to reach her. Then he saw her leap out of the bed in outrage and reach for the bell on the tripod table, to summon her maid. Before she had time to shake it, he pulled her back into his arms and was assuring her that they were both much too modern to let marriage come between old friends. Indignantly, she struggled against him before she sighed in surrender and lay back in his arms.

Resting her head on his chest again, she finally laughed ruefully as she shook her tousled hair and said, "Of all the Wild Geese who ever left Ireland, O'Neill, you must surely be the wildest."

## Chapter the Fifth

### *In Which Two Suitors Vie for Our Heroine's Hand*

A few hours later, Lady Violet was waiting patiently in the office of *The London Gazette* while her friend placed her weekly paid announcement.

"Miss Mary Marvellous wishes to inform her friends, most particularly Mr. James Cavendish of Philadelphia, that she is well."

The Londoner had warned her guest that, due to the vagaries of any ocean crossing, it would be a long time before her friend received the news.

"It will be a very long time indeed," Mary Marvellous answered. "I also intend to place a second advertisement for a lady's maid at five hundred pounds sterling per month."

"Things are no doubt very different in the Colonies," her friend hastily assured the publisher who was gaping in amazement. "Abigails may learn to read there, and are therefore worth ten times their price in London."

Turning to Mary, she added, "I will find you a

suitable servant from among my own abigail's friends, and fifty pounds a month will be more than generous."

"You are fortunate to have a friend who knows our city and the prices here," the printer said. "Other shopkeepers would be only too eager to cheat you."

*And I could be cheated of vast sums, too, she thought, since I have so much to spend on the furnishing of my new home in Greenwich.*

Today, she was planning to shop for a silver tea set made by Paul de Lamerie, who was known for his distinctive way of decorating such homely items as teapots, tongs and sugar bowls with shells, scrolls and flowers—now patriotically supplemented by Irish shamrocks and Scottish thistles. Both ladies were looking forward to exchanging this newspaper office, with its inky odor, for the silver shop, with its elegant displays.

On the verge of offering her hand to the printer in farewell, Mary pulled back as she saw that his fingers were, inevitably, covered with the black fluid. Seeing her gesture, he tried to wipe them on one of the few white patches that remained on his apron, gave it up and bowed his farewell instead. When the two ladies reached the door, they had to jump quickly out of the way as Ran MacGregor strode into the shop, bringing a blast of cold air in with him.

"Miss Marvellous was just sending a message to her friend James Cavendish in Philadelphia," Violet said. "That is a good Scottish name. No doubt he'll be waiting as eagerly as you are to hear when the Prince will let Scotland vote on the Act of Union. And we

can wager what the voting will be: to dissolve it and make Scotland independent again. He promised to do that when first he came to your country. But when will he do it, I wonder."

"Who knows?" MacGregor shrugged. "Whenever anyone asks him about making a change nowadays, he says that his country is like a stallion with a new rider, which must be calmed before it can be taught to gallop."

"So Scotland and Ireland must stay yoked to England, if I may carry on the equestrian metaphor," Lady Violet murmured.

Noticing that the publisher was listening intently, Mary jerked her head towards him to warn the others to silence. Obviously not at all ashamed of being caught in the act of eavesdropping, he came towards them with a confident air, now well prepared to ask his questions.

"I could not help overhearing you," he said.

"Actually, you could have helped it perfectly well, but you did not choose to do so," Violet answered, in her most courteous tones. Abashed for an instant, he cheerfully went on, "You made me think of some interesting questions."

Not one of his three customers gave him the least encouragement to ask those questions. Ignoring their reluctance, he quickly recalled, "As I am sure you remember, when he first landed in the Highlands he said, 'I have drawn my sword and thrown away the scabbard, and with it and with God's help I will make these people happy and free.' I'm sure he will keep his word, but have you any idea when that will be?"

"If you find out, you can tell the rest of us," MacGregor growled. Seeing the printer's expression change from politely curious to openly ecstatic, the young laird quickly went on, "You dare not print that, though, or my men will burn this office around your ears and every copy of your wretched newspaper that we can find, right along with it." He nodded grimly towards the ladies. Violet wore a polite, remote expression while Mary seemed speechless with shock.

"You can't talk to a newspaper publisher that way!" Mary finally managed to gasp.

"And why not, pray?" he asked in confusion. "My words could have embarrassed the Prince if he had printed them." Looming over the publisher, he said, "And now he will not, will he?" His victim quickly shook his head and opened his hands, palms outwards, to prove they were empty of paper and pen.

"But this is the *London Gazette*!" she exclaimed. "It is a very famous newspaper." Turning to the proprietor, she quickly assured him, "And a very fine one, too."

"So?" the Highlander demanded. "Does that give him the right to print every word I say?"

"But you did say it!" she argued, glaring straight up at him. "And the public has a right to know the truth, especially with a question this important. How else can they decide on the issue?"

"And who says that they should decide?" he asked, glowering back down at her. With him looming over her, arms folded that way, she would have been terrified into silence by his angry stare, she realized, if

she had not been so sure she was in the right. "That is for their King and their lairds to do," he said.

"And is that what they taught you at college?" she demanded.

For an instant, he lowered his red-brown eyes before her indignant gaze, his russet mane falling over his wind-burned forehead. "They taught us fine words in a classroom!" he shouted. "But this is the real world, where I do not care to have everyone in it reading about everything I say."

"They will not learn it from me," the printer assured him hastily.

"Mind you remember that," the young laird warned, turning to thrust his fist so close to the other man's ink-smeared nose that the publisher flinched in response. Then the Young Glenmoriston stamped out the door, without even a backwards bow. When the sound of Ran MacGregor's boots on the cobblestones had faded off in the distance, he recovered himself enough to approach Mary Marvellous.

"I hear you have recently come from Philadelphia," he told her. "Can you tell me, to print in the *London Gazette*, what the news is there?"

"The same as it is here," she said, in some surprise. "They are all talking about the Second Restoration, I am sure. It has changed so many things, since I was home." And that was certainly true.

It had changed the fortunes of Clan MacGregor almost as drastically.

\* \* \* \*



Sir Alexander MacGregor found his nephew Ranald in the Long Library. It was a very long library indeed: 180 feet long, to be exact, with majestic fluted marble columns standing between the bookshelves and guarding the entrance doors. Even the laird had to admit that Armadale Castle, his own ancestral seat, seemed little more than a parsonage compared to Blenheim.

Prince Charlie had given this palace to the MacGregors, the greatest of all the clans that had fought for him. His own official residence, Kensington, was a modest brick home by comparison. The Prince Regent thus seemed to be honoring his most loyal followers even above himself, Sir Alexander thought approvingly, just as a good laird should do.

As impressive as this palace was, though, it did not completely satisfy Sir Alexander. He had not fought for a building, no matter how magnificent. He had fought (or, rather, his nephew had fought in his place) for Scotland's freedom, which meant, to him, the lairds' ancestral right to rule over their clans. Had not the Prince sworn to his Highland army, in ringing tones, that with his sword, and with God's help, he would make them happy and free?

At the time, Sir Alexander and Ran MacGregor both had assumed that "freedom" meant independence from England. Now, they were both less satisfied that the Prince shared their interpretation. For his part, the laird was even less pleased with his nephew, who made it clear that his favorite part of his new home was the library. This

was not because of the columns and arches, which any gentleman might have enjoyed, but because of the books that filled the marble cases.

Ranald was even talking about going to nearby Oxford College next fall, and his uncle inwardly shuddered at the thought. The famed university certainly deserved the royal patronage, as a traditional center for loyal young Jacobites. Ever eager to demonstrate their classical knowledge, they had even given their movement its title by pointing out that, in Latin, the name of King James was "Jacob." It hardly seemed the proper place for the Young MacGregor of Glenmoriston.

Scots College in Paris had been bad enough. Sir Alexander was always shocked at how many Highland lairds had let their sons go there to study like common clerks, when their learning should have been focused on the sword, dirk and pistol.

Not that the boy himself was to blame, Sir Alexander reminded himself hastily. It was his foolish old invalid father who had, thankfully, stayed behind on the family's Island of Sleat. Young people often got nonsensical notions, like exchanging their plaids for a student's robes, which is why they needed their elders to guide them.

In order to do so, he had to hide his disapproval, which was not so easy to do. Were it not for his tartan kilt, the Young Glenmoriston would have looked the student already. He sat slouched before a high arched window to catch the light, his books piled high on a tripod table beside him. His pen was clasped in his square hand and his shaggy red head was bowed

over his papers, so that he did not even seem aware of his uncle's approach. The old laird consoled himself with the thought that his nephew's scholarly conduct might make him even more suitable for the purpose at hand.

To start the conversation, he peered over his nephew's shoulder.

"Are you giving us a history of this war?" Sir Alexander asked hopefully.

"It's more a history of our ancestors," he said. "I had it from our crofters — their stories of Ossian."

"Nursery tales!" his uncle cried with indignation. "You came back from college and started going among the peasants, gathering their fairy stories."

"Not nursery tales!" the author replied, equally outraged. "Legends of our hero ancestors."

Nursery tales, Sir Alexander thought again, fit only for children and thus fit for his nephew. Ranald had already made enough trouble with his childish college talk.

When Prince Charlie had landed in the outer islands, alone except for a few Irish followers, Sir Alexander had naturally urged him to return home. Young Ranald had shamed them all into action by throwing himself at his Prince's feet and crying, "I will follow you to London, even though you and I are the only ones who go there."

It had turned out well, to be sure, but if it had not? The laird shuddered at the thought. His followers might now be dead, in prison or in exile, rather than comfortably camped out around English palaces.

But he quickly found a way to turn the situation to

his own advantage.

"Haven't we heroes enough in our own time to write about?" he asked. "There's you yourself, rallying your men behind you with your own brave example. And heroines, too, like that fine and lovely lady who convinced the Prince to race to London, at the very last minute when he could have done it, because she knew it lay helpless before him."

"Aye, and I'm still wondering how she could have known that," Ran growled.

"Well, she did, and she knew about the plans for Culloden Moor, too," Sir Alexander answered patiently. "We can all thank the Lord that she kept the Prince from carrying them out, because they would have led us straight to disaster, right enough. Have you never seen the accursed place? It is a flat moor, which is perfect for the Redcoats with their cannons, but bloody awful for us with our claymore swords, and us needing every advantage because we were outnumbered two to one."

"It was not a good position," Ran agreed, looking up at last. "I'll never know why the Prince kept listening to his Irish officers, except that they always smiled at him and told them what he wanted to hear in those smooth voices of theirs."

"Perhaps O'Sullivan knew we would all be slaughtered there, in a splendid sacrifice, if all hope was lost. The Irish are the great ones for sacrifices, but we Scots would rather win. And we did win, thanks to that Colonial maid. But don't you know the Irish would sacrifice us all the quicker, if they could get her powers to free their own wee island? It would be *all*

*Ireland free, and never mind if it's done by witchcraft."*

At last the word had been spoken between them, shocking even Ran MacGregor into silence. Before he had time to argue that witchcraft did not exist, except in the minds of the ignorant and ill-informed, his uncle was racing on, "Aye, it was witchcraft, well enough. Do you think I do not know it?"

"If you think she is a witch, how can you praise her?" his nephew asked. "How can you even stop the law from burning her at the stake for her crime?"

"Because she is Prince Charlie's witch," the older man answered simply. "Whatever she is, she is loyal to him, and to us, as long as we serve him. I am not some canting minister, to let the word frighten me. Francis O'Neill, now — do you think it would frighten him? He would use her power to serve his nation, were she the most vile witch in Hell. He would even marry her for it and, if half of what I hear is true, he is campaigning to do that now."

\* \* \* \*

Ran found that the thought was more upsetting than he wanted to admit. He could not bear to think of that cold, hard man winning her powers to use for his own purposes. Nor, as he had to admit to himself, could he bear to think of that him winning that sweet young lady, and she not even knowing what he was.

A flash of memory came to him, of O'Neill on the march from Scotland to Derby. The Prince had told him that he suspected the loyalty of one of his own chief officers. In Ran MacGregor's own hearing,

O'Neill had promised that he would watch Sir George Murray carefully and kill him if he made the least suspicious move. Francis had smiled as he said it, but by the look in his cold blue eyes, Ran had known perfectly well that he meant every word.

The Prince had known, even then, not to ask the Young Glenmoriston to commit such a dishonorable deed. But the Wild Goose would use even baser treachery, even witchcraft, or whatever weapon came to his hand, for the advantage of his nation. He would not hesitate for a moment to use a naïve Colonial girl and her love, and his own debt of honor and gratitude be damned.

Honor, yes, O'Neill cared for that in plenty, MacGregor corrected himself. But it was the honor of his nation and his Prince, and any dishonor could be justified in their name.

Thinking of this, Ran was struck by another memory, of a public reception at Kensington Palace soon after the march into London. There, he had overheard O'Neill deep in conversation with a man named Samuel Johnson, who wrote for the newspapers. O'Neill always did seem to be seeking out such men, even though every true gentleman despised them for the sneaking spies they were.

Over the lush strains of the violin music composed by Mr. Vivaldi, MacGregor had heard O'Neill ask, "Did you know that at his very first battle, at Prestonpans, the Prince had his horse shot out from under him?"

The writer had listened open-mouthed, like an aging child. Still, he had had enough presence of

mind to turn to MacGregor and ask, "Is that true?"

"No, it is not," MacGregor had answered abruptly and seen the flash of fury in the Irishman's blue eyes. O'Neill had soon hidden it behind an ironic smile and shrug, but without looking at all ashamed of his lie. Instead, he had gone on to tell another story, even more incredible than the first.

In sheer disgust, MacGregor had left them alone together, knowing that, otherwise, he would have to spend the rest of the evening denying his old comrade's falsehoods. He would much rather pass the time enjoying the fine paintings in this royal gallery, most notably Rubens' fine portrayal of Sleeping Nymphs. They were enjoying their slumbers in the nude, with their voluptuous thighs and bosoms in full sight.

Curiosity had driven MacGregor to approach O'Neill, though, when the Irishman came to admire the same picture. The Highlander asked to know why his old comrade was telling such tales to the newspaper writers. "Didn't we have miracles enough that really happened?" he asked. "Need we have you making up more?"

O'Neill had smiled and shrugged again. "What happens doesn't really matter, now does it?" he had asked cheerfully. "What matters, is what people think happened. And now with all these newspapers being published every day, we can tell people what to think. For every man who knows what happened at Prestonpans, there are thousands who know only what we tell them. Isn't that even better than having it be true?"

Somehow, for Ran MacGregor, this quiet conversation, with no threats made, was the most disturbing memory of all. He found it even more frightening to think of this charming, ruthless man ensnaring Mary Marvellous with his lies and taking control of her powers along with her.

"No one should ever use a power like hers again," Ran muttered. "And certainly not a fanatic like Francis O'Neill, because that's just what he is, behind his smiling. Perhaps what she did was justified at that one moment, for the Honest Cause, but it can never be used again."

"But it will be used, for some other cause that seems just as honest to someone else," his uncle replied patiently. "If Clan MacGregor used it now, it would be only for the cause we fought for—all for Scotland's king and law. And of course, for the MacGregors against the Campbell clan."

Ran grinned at him, understanding him now. His uncle ruefully smiled back.

"And all for Scotland, she would let us know when the Prince will let us vote on freeing ourselves from England," the young man said. "And if he isn't going to do it at all, we can decide what to do about that. And after that, we would always know the plans that the Campbells were making, because she would tell us about them. But the Irish at least are fighting for their nation—all Ireland free, as they say. Should Mary use her powers against our fellow Scotsmen in a mere clan feud?"

"The Campbells have always been our enemies, and the King's as well," his uncle reminded him



stubbornly. "If Mary Marvellous became a MacGregor, now, they would be her enemies as well."

At last, Ran grasped his uncle's full meaning. As always, he immediately dragged it out of hiding. "You want me to make her a MacGregor by marrying her?"

He was glad to see his uncle seemed embarrassed. Then Sir Alexander quickly recovered himself and turned the situation, as always, to his own advantage, even though it meant standing his own argument on its head.

"Does she deserve any less reward?" he asked "She came here all alone to help her Prince. We well know that she risked her own life to do it, with our ignorant laws against witchcraft. Now she is on her own here, with no one to guide her. The Prince is her guardian of course, but he has no time for the task. She will have to choose a husband all by herself. Who knows what kind of foolishness that would be?"

"A young girl could have had her head turned completely, by a rebel rogue like Captain O'Neill. You would love and honor her as befits Lady MacGregor. O'Neill would use her for his own purposes, without a thought to her happiness."

Sir Alexander paused briefly. Ran's lips tightened in an angry scowl. His uncle pressed his advantage.

"It's better that we should choose someone for her," he urged. "We know what a perfect match you would be—as handsome as you are, and a college man and yet a future Highland laird. In no time at all, she would thank us for it."

"Thank us for what?" Ran was confused for a

moment. Then he understood and, leaping from his chair, he glared at his uncle angrily.

"So that's your game, you sly old fox!" he cried, forgetting all rules of courtesy. "You want me to take her against her will, like some kind of Highland savage."

"That is not quite the way to put it," his uncle objected sternly. "You know that it is within our law—Scotland's law, the law that we fought for. The Prince made Blenheim part of our lands, so Scottish law rules here. If you can't find a bride, you may capture one."

"The law was not clear at all." As far as he knew, it was one of those laws that proved to be mere folktales when you looked more closely at them. "And even if it is a law," he added, even more angrily, "I still don't have to rely on it. I am perfectly capable of finding a bride, perhaps even that lady herself, without being driven to rape."

Now it was his uncle's turn to be outraged.

"Rape!" he exclaimed. "How dare you even use that word in front of me! No other man would even dare suggest it. No matter who you are, I'd be sure you paid dearly if you ever committed it against any woman, high or low. No, I am speaking instead of a marriage that would be to everyone's benefit. I merely wish to make sure that it happens quickly, with our own chaplain on hand to perform the ceremony, as soon as you fetch your bride. You might call it abduction—in the strictly legal sense, of course, meaning merely 'to bring forth,' nothing to do with violation—but that's far from rape."

"You are speaking, I presume, of having me burst into her home with my men to protect me, throwing her onto my horse and galloping home with my pipers to drown out her screams! Do you think I am a Highland barbarian from two hundred years ago?"

"Why must you always be looking for ugly words for everything? If that is what they teach you at college, I am glad I never went. I am speaking of letting the lassie know your true position in the world, by seeing your men and pipers around you. What woman can resist the sweet music of the pipes?"

"Many women could resist it and many men, too. And if it failed to win her heart, I'll be riding home to Blenheim with a witch to wife."

"But we both know she is the Prince's loyal witch."

"That does not make her loyal to me. And if it did, witchcraft and rape are both against the law and nothing can make them right." Ran MacGregor grasped his pen and turned resolutely back to his writing to prove that all further discussion was in vain.

"No one knows what's right and wrong except for college students!" his uncle shouted, his words echoing "If that's what they teach you, I'm glad I never went. And I'll tell you one more thing," he added, when he reached the marble arch at the door. "I could wish that Francis O'Neill were my nephew, because will do more for his poor wee island than you do for our own Scottish nation."

"Then you can adopt him, if you like," Ran muttered to him. "You deserve each other." And he

thrust his head back into his book, assuring himself that that ended the matter.

\* \* \* \*

FROM: The Reverend John Wesley, London

TO: Dr. Benjamin Franklin,

Philadelphia, January 15, 1746

*I do not speak of witchcraft. I have never done so, even when reporting cases that seemed to me clearly to be of demonic possession. I always chose, instead, to lay the plain facts before every man and ask him to judge for himself.*

*Whether in the pulpit or even in a private letter, I would never say that a female with scientific knowledge must be guilty of witchcraft, by reason of her gender. My own dear mother would return from her grave to silence me, having always insisted that females and males must be educated the same way.*

*How then can I explain the wisdom of this Philadelphia lady, having information that, as I keep hearing, she had no way to gain? Might it not have come from the Lord himself? If so, then this Prince and his King were patently sent by the same Providence to rule us – whether for our joy or our punishment, I do not presume to say.*

*My own dear mother was a great supporter of this King's own father, the late King James II, and left the house rather than drink the health of the man who replaced him, as my father demanded that she do. Her quarrel with my father was settled only by William of Orange's death. I regret that her own passing came three years too early for her to gain the earthly bliss of meeting her idol, our Prince*

Regent.

*If his crown was won by witchcraft, no good can come of it, for how can good come of evil? If he does some great good deed, I will realize that his victory was achieved by natural and honorable means. I pray, then, that the Lord will put it in the Prince's heart to give us some sign – by using his great power against some equally enormous evil – whether gin, gambling or slavery, the three great scourges of our Commonwealth. Then I will see that his power was not evilly won.*

*In the meantime, I must press you for news about the young lady in question, and what sort of reputation Miss Mary Marvellous won in Philadelphia, for piety or good works or, hopefully, both.*

\* \* \* \*

Captain O'Neill gallantly divided his attention between the ladies on either side of him, as the three of them waited to be called to their table in the supper box at Vauxhall Gardens. Other gentlemen bowed as the trio passed. O'Neill bowed even more deeply in return.

"Aren't we the popular ones this evening?" Lady Violet asked, as this happened for the fourth or fifth time.

"And aren't they all half mad with envy?" their escort asked cheerfully. "And haven't they good reason to be, and me with two such lovely ladies at my side?"

He was speaking the truth. Both were indeed lovely, in their contrasting ways, especially now that

they had laid their cloaks aside, their cheeks still ruddy from the evening cold.

"It isn't your companions that they envy, as well you know," Violet said. "It's your fine Irish-French uniform."

"Irish-English," he corrected her, "Our regiments are part of the British Army now. And you know what an Englishman now calls an Irish rebel or a savage Highlander."

"What is that?" Mary asked.

"My lord." While they laughed appreciatively, he went on smoothly, "and it is all thanks to our good friend Miss Mary Marvellous here. She knew just the right thing for the Prince to do. I wonder, does she know what he will do about the Irish Question?"

He posed the question in a casual tone, but his blue eyes were even more watchful than ever.

"I think our table is ready now," she exclaimed, pointing to the miniature Greek temple they had waited for, where white pillars supported the dome above the table. In addition to being more elegant than most, this box was right beside the orchestra pavilion, where lilting melodies by Vivaldi, Lully and Handel would entertain them as they dined. That choice table was yet another tribute, they knew, to Captain O'Neill's uniform.

His frustration at her obvious evasion obvious, she saw that the waiter was, indeed, beckoning them to their table. While the ladies were being seated, O'Neill gave his order for roast chicken, iced cakes and champagne. The man served them almost immediately, while urging the captain to tell him at

once if there was anything more that he and his lovely companions desired.

"We are indeed popular now," Francis mused, when the attendant had gone.

Mary waited, while her two companions eagerly tore the legs off their perfectly browned fowls.

"Aren't you going to say grace?" she asked finally.

"Well, indeed I am!" he assured her, letting the drumstick fall to the plate. "Forgive me for my oversight. I will indeed say my favorite Irish prayer." Claspng his hands devoutly, he intoned, "May we all be in Heaven for half an hour before the Devil knows we're dead."

Lady Violet immediately burst out laughing. After a little gasp of surprise, Mary joined in. "But aren't you supposed to be a good Catholic?" she asked.

"Supposed to be," he agreed, with a smile. "But, in truth, I have the same religion as the Prince—and that is the same as most of the Princes of Europe, as he has so often said. Do you know what religion that is?"

Mary did know, having read the Prince's adage often enough. Still, she smiled and waited for her host to say it, knowing he would do so in an amusing way.

"Little or none."

"That sounds more Irish than Scottish," Violet observed. "Our people must always have our joke."

"And the Scottish are a surly bunch," he agreed cheerfully. "Nothing against them, mind you—fine brave men they are. But they would not see a joke if you fired it out of a cannon." More cautiously, he went on, "The Young Glenmoriston, now—he's as brave a man as anyone, but a surly brute, with it."

"But he'll be a very important one," Violet reminded him. "Won't he be the next laird?"

"Sure, and that will put him far above a mere Irish colonel."

Lady Violet reminded him dryly that he was, in fact, a mere Irish captain.

"Captain, then," he shrugged, not at all ashamed at being caught in his lie. Hiding her amusement, Mary wondered if it was the first time he had told that particular falsehood and knew for sure that it would not be the last.

"But aren't I descended from the Earl of Tyrone himself, the great Hugh O'Neill? And don't I have my pensions, from King Jamie and King Louie both? They'll make me richer in Ireland than I could be in London with twice the sum. And isn't Ireland twice, or three times, as beautiful as all of England together?"

For once, he really seemed to be giving way to sincere emotion, as he went on, all sign of banter gone, "There are a hundred shades of green there, and each with its own name in the old Irish tongue. There are mountains and waterfalls and sandy beaches, and everything that can be seen."

As he seemed to have forgotten the champagne glass at his elbow, Mary felt guilty about taking a sip from hers.

"And don't the people love the land and everything that lives on it? When a lad and lass want to marry, he will go to her father and say that he has two cows or three pigs, so if she has five chickens they can make a go of it."



"How romantic," Violet responded dryly. "Have you any chickens, Mary?"

"Well, I have no pigs or cows, either," he said, with a short laugh, at his own show of sentiment. "But I have my pensions, as I said, Mary, along with my military pay and, if I may say so, a fine career ahead of me. Sure, and when I said I was an Irish colonel, I was just anticipating the truth."

For a moment, she wondered what pigs, pensions and army promotions had to do with each other and what either had to do with her. Then she asked, in amazement, "Are you asking me to marry you?"

For answer, he swept up her hand in his and kissed it. The only response that came to her stunned mind was, "But I don't have any pigs at all."

"But you do have beauty, goodness and loyalty."

I also have a lifetime tenancy of Greenwich Castle, she thought, and that's worth a whole herd of porkers. There was something else that she had, though, even more precious to a stranger in such a very strange land, and this needed to be mentioned.

"I hope I am loyal to my friends," she said, trying to gently withdraw her hand. She had seen the rapport between Francis and Violet. Now glancing significantly from one to the other, she sought a way to ask how great it was.

Violet saved her from having to inquire.

"It's your great good luck, Mary, that I haven't a pig to my name," Violet joked. "Besides, I am hardly the marrying kind. I quite agree with Dr. Johnson that a lady loses everything by marriage and gains nothing."

With Francis still clutching Mary's hand, she was acutely aware of his firm, warm grip.

"I don't agree!" Mary retorted. "If I could marry a man who was as handsome and charming as Captain O'Neill, I might be happy to do it. Besides, he makes me laugh." And beyond that, she thought, I know him to be a brave and decent man, better than he knows himself, and, thanks to me, better than he ever will know. No one else has asked me, and I am here all alone—much more alone than anyone can ever imagine.

Almost painfully, his hand tightened around hers, making her feel much less lonely than she had for a long time. "I'm tempted to accept you right here and now," she assured him.

"Then give into your temptation!" he crowed and pressed her fingers so hard that she winced, until she managed to pull her hand away.

"I need some time to think about it. I promise you, I really will think."

"And what is there to think about?" he asked, with a wink. "Sure, and how could you dream of turning down a handsome fellow like myself?"

First smiling in reply, she turned serious.

"There is something for you to think about," she told him. "I have a rather unpleasant reputation, in some circles, for doing something I have never done."

"You mean, some think you helped the Prince by witchcraft? Well, I don't believe in witchcraft, but if it did exist and you were practicing it all night and all day, I'd be grateful to you for using it to help the Prince. Any loyal Jacobite would feel the same."

She was about to tell him that one loyal Jacobite, at least, did not feel that way at all but stopped herself just in time. She had no business thinking about the Young Glenmoriston now. He really was the surly brute O'Neill had called him.

\* \* \* \*

TO: The Reverend John Wesley

FROM: Dr. Benjamin Franklin

*In response to your message received, I can assure you that I have heard nothing either bad or good about Mary Marvellous's actions in Philadelphia. I have heard nothing about her at all, except for the notable part she played in the Second War of Restoration. Yet I must, I feel sure, have heard about a lady of such learning and, above all, of such strong Jacobite views, if she had lived in our city. What this means I cannot say, but I will repeat that, as far as I can gather from all of my wide circle of acquaintanceship, this lady has never been in Philadelphia at all.*

\* \* \* \*

The Reverend Mr. Wesley might have been relieved to see that the Prince was spending the next afternoon at Westminster Abbey, with an entourage including Miss Mary Marvellous, who, if she really had been a witch, should not have been able to enter any church of any denomination.

His Royal Highness was there making plans for his father's coronation. This would be followed by the

even more significant ceremony of re-opening Parliament, ending what the Prince Regent had tactfully termed a “recess.” It had lasted for three months so far, during which he was ruling by personal decree.

The coronation ceremony seemed a simple matter, but was full of vexing questions. Most troublesome of all was the matter of the King’s Champion.

This loyal knight was to ride fully armed into the Abbey, challenging the King’s enemies to combat. Of course, there were never any takers, but the ritual gesture had to be made. Who could play that crucial role? Did the honor belong to a Highland laird, an Irish officer or some loyal Jacobite Englishman? Whoever he chose, the other two nationalities would bitterly resent it.

His own preference would have been the Glenmoriston. This lad really would have been ready to fight anyone who challenged his King Jamie. But Prince Charlie knew that his personal feelings could not matter any more. He would have to make his selection with great care, and hopefully without letting anyone know that he considered the whole thing a waste of time.

The same, and worse, was true of that damned stone. It was a rough grey rock like any other, yet it caused violent controversy between his kingdoms. This made it a very special stone indeed – so special, in fact, that he had to spend yet more of his valuable time wondering what to do with it.

It had stood in Arbroath Abbey 450 years ago, when Scottish kings had been crowned before it. Now

it stood beneath King Edward's gilded throne, where English monarchs were anointed.

The Scots wanted this Stone of Scone returned to their own country. It was a matter of national pride to them, as the Young Glenmoriston had told him bluntly (and was this fellow capable of speaking any other way?) At the same time, the English wanted it left where it had become an equally sacred tradition of their own.

*I suppose I must be grateful that the Blarney Stone is still in Blarney Castle, he told himself. Otherwise, the Irish and English would be tormenting me over yet another worthless rock.*

His subjects were making less pother over stones of more value, namely, the crown jewels which German Georgie had carried away on his yacht to Hanover. The Prince could have seen some reason for going to war over those gems, but no one seemed interested in even asking for them. Instead, they seemed satisfied with his hasty decision to be crowned instead with the Scottish royal jewels, which were even now being brought from Edinburgh.

But over that grey rock, it seemed, no such compromise was possible. All he could do was go on as he had done, trying to show his impartial fondness for his English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Colonial subjects alike.

His favorite Scottish and Irish bodyguards were with him now. Two of his favorite ladies, Anne Violet and Mary Marvellous, were happily representing London society and the American Colonies as well. The only thing lacking was a Welshman, and the

Prince made a mental note to seek one out for favor.

These four friends of his were now gazing at the famous stone, as he discussed the problems it was causing him. He did not, of course, describe it as *that damned worthless rock*. Instead, he told them that it was a sacred symbol, beloved of both nations.

His party had the area to themselves. Other visitors were kept away by men from the Irish and Highland clan regiments, once again, at Miss Mary's urging.

"It looks like any other stone to me," O'Neill said, with a shrug of his red-clad shoulders. He smiled as he spoke, jokingly, "Why not get another stone and send this one to Scotland, or else put that other one here late at night and send this one away? Then you can tell each of them that his nation has the real thing."

"Have you no honor at all, man?" Glenmoriston snarled, making O'Neill quickly back away. Mary stepped rapidly between them to assure the Highlander that O'Neill had been in jest.

"And Captain O'Neill is a man of great honor, in his own way," Violet added. "Otherwise, our Mary Marvellous would not be so fond of him."

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, thought Glenmoriston, as the Prince led the discussion back to the problem at hand. Francis O'Neill is a man of honor, the honor of his Prince and his nation. He would stoop to any dishonor for those. And Miss Marvellous is fond of him, enough to defend him. Perhaps she is even foolish enough to be

won over by his Blarney tongue.

His fears grew stronger, as she smiled up at the captain and laid her hand on his arm. She spoke quietly, close to his ear, and he smiled in reply. Then he leaned down to whisper something into her ear, and she laughed in response as their hands clasped each other.

No doubt she told him how right he is to make light of a simple stone. And surely he answered with some Irish jest, making sport of those who take it seriously. Those two understand each other so well, he thought, perhaps they do belong together.

"I hope she is telling him yes or no at last," Violet confided to her companions. "He's waited long enough for her answer."

The Prince gallantly assured her that he himself could wait forever, for a woman like Lady Violet. In turn, she assured him that no woman would keep the Bonnie Prince waiting for an instant.

Ran fumed. It was true. O'Neill has asked for her hand, and she had not turned him down. To Hell with the modern age, then, and everything he'd learned at Scots College. That marriage will not take place while he could prevent it. He must prevent it. He had no choice. The thought was disquieting.

Holding Lady Violet's hand, the Prince led the group up the stairs to the tomb of his ancestress, Mary of Scotland. Captain O'Neill, in turn, placed his hand under Mary's arm, to steady her on the narrow stone stairway. Left alone behind them, MacGregor climbed silently, as thoughts came unbidden of how Mary's second husband, Lord Bothwell, a true Scot,

had murdered her first, Lord Darnley, the English fop.

The Prince was saying something about the reason why his two queenly predecessors were buried so close together, but Ran did not know what it was. For once, Ran MacGregor was ignoring his Prince completely, so rapt was he in darker, more dangerous thoughts.

\* \* \* \*

The Prince dreamed that night.

He was at Culloden Moor again. He saw it with dread, knowing that a nightmare was sure to follow, as it did whenever the accursed place appeared in his dreams. He saw it in great and vivid detail, even though, in the real world, he had only passed through it briefly on his way south. Now he viewed it with agonizing clarity, even through dense clouds of cannon smoke.

His men were fighting desperately, charging with their claymores against the enemy's artillery. Then they were running from the same big guns. In even greater desperation, he was trying to lead a hopeless charge into the cannon's mouth. His only hope now was going down in a blaze of glory before it, but O'Neill and O'Sullivan tore even that last aspiration from him, as they seized his horse's bridle and dragged him off the field.

"Run, you damned cowardly Italian, run!" Lord Murray shouted after them, and this was the most horrifying thing in this long day of horrors.



Then the terrible day was over and he was in a rowboat, dressed, for some reason as a woman. He would have thought he was crossing the River Styx into Hell, except that a true woman was with him, guiding him to safety, and he knew her to be a pure and noble spirit, who was facing the most dreadful danger for his sake. Even though they were both silent, he also knew that her name was Flora MacDonald of Kingsburgh. Following such a dream, the Prince was in no mood to deal with Glenmoriston when he came bursting into Kensington Palace.

\* \* \* \*

Glenmoriston pushed his way past the royal guards, uninvited and even unannounced, knowing that no one would dare deny him entry. In the same discourteous way, he charged up to the Prince's office in what had been the King's Presence Chamber.

"You must do something about Mary Marvellous," Ran commanded his Prince.

"Right now, I am trying to do something about the Jew Bill," Charles Edward answered, clutching his pen as he fought for control. He waved at the pile of drafts and petitions on his desk, all dealing with the same contentious issue of complete citizenship in this Christian country for these unabashed non-Christians.

"Sign it and be done," MacGregor decided. "You said that no one should suffer for his religion, so show that you mean it now."

Charles Edward gazed at the ceiling, where Apollo

was painted driving his chariot across the sky, as though the Prince were praying to the sun god for patience.

"It isn't that simple," he began.

Incredibly, MacGregor forgot all of his manners so far as to interrupt the Prince Regent. "Then wait for your Royal Father," he said. "He will do the right thing."

"And that is exactly why I can not trust my father with such a sensitive issue. King James III would do as his conscience told him, just as King James II had done. This trait had cost him his throne, when nothing would do but to tell the world he had embraced the Catholic faith."

"But never mind that now," MacGregor ordered bluntly, in another shocking display of insolence. "What I want to know is, are you going to let her marry that Irishman? You are her guardian, so you must stop her."

"If you mean Miss Marvellous, she is a woman grown," he answered shortly, "and Captain O'Neill is one of my most loyal men. What's more, 'must' is not—"

"—a word that one uses to Princes. I know, Queen Elizabeth said it. But you must not allow this marriage."

"It seems to me a perfectly good one. Captain O'Neill is a faithful subject with good prospects for a fine career."

"He is faithful to his nation, you mean, and the only prospects he cares about are Ireland's."

"I really don't have time for this, MacGregor. Look,

man, we can trust Miss Mary to choose for herself, and this choice would not be such a bad one."

"No, we cannot," MacGregor snapped, and swung away towards the stairs. "And he will never love her, which makes it a bad choice indeed."

Charles knew, of course, that MacGregor would much rather Miss Marvellous had chosen him instead, and wondered if he had even asked her to do so. Then his attention was distracted by a letter from London's most famous prize fighter, Mendoza the Jew. Before even opening it, he knew it would be an eloquent plea for the Jew Bill, leaving the Prince to wonder how he could ever go to cheer the champion on again if he refused his request for simple justice. He knew that he could not make too many changes at once, no matter how right they were. This thought set him to wishing devoutly for a moment that he were the prize-fighting champion while someone else was Prince Regent. Thanks to his most loyal Scottish supporter, he would soon have cause to wish it even more ardently.

## Chapter the Sixth

*In Which Violence  
is Offered to Our Heroine*

"I would love thee all the day,  
Every night would kiss and play  
If with me you'd only stray  
O'er the hills and far away."

The three were singing their favorite tune from "The Beggar's Opera." It had remained the most popular show in London for the past four months, thanks largely to the prospects that the theatergoers enjoyed of glimpsing the Prince himself on his way to the leading ladies' dressing rooms.

As they sang, Mary decided that her first intimate party in her own bedroom here at Greenwich was a great success. She felt sure she was playing the harpsichord as skillfully as most London ladies. And she was sure she would serve the tea just as gracefully as they would have done.

What's more, she was proud of the taste she had shown in choosing the Japanese Kakiemon tea

service, with its green-and-coral border of berries, leaves, thistles and shamrocks, chosen to harmonize with the fashionable pale green brocade walls and the richer green-and-gold scrollwork carpet from the famed Savonnerie company in France.

Some wit or other had said that woman's greatest pleasures were sex and shopping, although not necessarily in that order. While she had not yet enjoyed the first of these during her stay here, she had indulged in an orgy of the second, in furnishing this great house. The Kakiemon China was accompanied by a silver tea service by de Lamerie.

Her ornamental white lace apron and cap were worn above a sky-blue silk gown, pulled back to reveal a decorative pale salmon petticoat, all in the height of fashion. Of course, Violet outshone her, with her gleaming amber gown richly embroidered in violets, but Violet was known for her glittering style.

Mary hoped her entertaining was duly impressing both of her guests, and she looked forward to meeting a third. Her friends had staunchly refused to say who it was, other than to keep assuring her that he would be a great surprise to her and that it would be to her advantage to know him.

"I hope your friend gets here soon," she said, turning towards him, as she ended the song. "You must be wanting your tea."

"I promise, me darlin', he will be worth the wait," Francis assured her.

"In the meantime, will you let us see your journal, Captain O'Neill?" she asked, sure that that question was sure to please any author anywhere. She was

furious at herself when he seemed confused by her question. "I thought I heard somewhere that you were keeping a journal of all your adventures with the Prince," she explained, lamely.

"I have indeed, been thinking of writing my memoirs," he answered, his blue eyes narrowing above his wide smile. "But how did you guess it?"

Casting about desperately for an answer, she finally managed to say, "As well as you speak, and the way you are always talking to newspaper people, I thought you were sure to do some writing of your own."

An awkward silence followed, leaving her feeling vastly relieved when they heard a carriage clattering over the cobblestones and then a servant opening the front door. Going down the winding wrought-iron stairway to greet him, she stopped frozen on the second stair when she saw him below her, as soft and ugly as a slug creeping across the black-and-white checkerboard marble floor. Then she was racing down the stairs, with the intention of ordering him out into the night.

Her friends hurried downstairs after her. "Is something wrong, me darlin'?" Francis asked.

"Yes, something is very wrong," she answered, glaring up at him. "How dared you invite Butcher Cumberland to my house?"

"Mary!" Violet explained, horrified. "I know you are from the Colonies, but they must have some manners there."

"Shall we all go back up to the bedroom?" asked Francis, putting his hand on her arm. "You can

explain yourself to your guest up there."

She started to tell him that she was not going anywhere with William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and that his grace—or, rather, his grossness—was going out of her house that very minute, unless he wanted her servants to kick him out the door. Then she realized that he was not Butcher Cumberland now and might never be.

"Saints preserve us!" Francis chuckled into her ear, as the delicate winding stairway creaked beneath the stranger's ponderous weight. "Saints preserve this stairway, at least, and it over one hundred years old. Sure, and doesn't he look like a Butcher, just as you called him? No wonder you did not want him here to crush your fine furniture entirely."

At the door of the bedroom she wheeled to face her suitor, pulling her arm from his hand. "I don't care what he looks like!" she whispered urgently. "I don't call him the Butcher for his looks."

With the other two quickly approaching, she went desperately on, "Francis, if I swore to you that I knew, I absolutely knew for a fact, as well as I know anything, that he will do the most horrible things you can imagine, to the Scots and Irish both, if you give him half a chance, would you believe me?"

"Sure, and I would indeed," he assured her, opening the door and standing back to let her precede him. "You do have the strangest ways of knowing things."

"Doesn't it matter to you?"

"Not at all," he answered cheerfully, "as long as he can help Ireland."

When they reached the yellow Damask-covered chairs arranged around the marble fireplace, she pointedly took a seat as far as possible from Cumberland.

"You have no reason to dislike me," Cumberland began plaintively.

"I have a better reason than you know," she retorted. "But if you have anything to say to me, you had better say it quickly and go."

Francis sent the Duke a brief smile that clearly said, "We must humor the ladies now, mustn't we?" Then he assured his hostess that she did not seem to understand at all.

"You seem to think that the Elector's son has some kind of designs against our Prince, but it is not that way at all," he assured her. "If he did, and me with a pistol in my belt, do you think he'd walk out of here alive? Do you think I could do anything to hurt Prince Charlie?"

Reluctantly, she shook her head. On the contrary, she knew better than Francis did himself, how much he was willing to sacrifice for his Prince.

"And it's all for his own country, because he is patriotic, too," he assured her. "He's doing it all for Hanover, to make it great in Germany."

"It is very rich already," Cumberland put in.

"Richer than ever, since your father stole the crown jewels of England," she retorted. She was rewarded by the cold rage in his pale blue eyes, peering out through the layers of fat surrounding them. It was a relief in a way, because it showed her that he could, given half a chance, become Butcher Cumberland



again, and she thus was not reviling a completely innocent man.

"My father will pay you well," he told her, without trying to deny her accusation. "He only wants your good advice about his own wars on the continent."

"Surely you want him to be able to help Empress Maria Theresa again," urged Violet. "He fought so that her enemies could not keep her out of her rightful place, merely because of her sex. He only stopped fighting for her because he had to come back here."

She refrained from adding that he had come back because Prince Charlie had just invaded England. Even more tactfully, she refrained from mentioning that he had returned after being soundly defeated at Fontenoy in Belgium by French-Irish regiments including Francis O'Neill's own. "Don't you want him to go back to defending a woman's right to rule?"

"The Duke of Cumberland does not want to defend our sex. He wants to win more land for Hanover, from the other German states. Preferably, he wants to rule all of the states from there. He can probably do it, too, if I can tell the future for him so he knows how to change it."

Despite her efforts to control her voice, it climbed harshly as she rose from her seat and cried, "But I swear to you that I could not do it if I tried for a hundred years, and I would not if I could."

So, you see, Cumberland," she added more calmly, sinking down again. "You could have spared yourself the trouble of courting Captain O'Neill—whom you undoubtedly hate just as heartily as he

despises you – and promising him men and arms for Ireland, in return for bringing you here to meet me. That was the arrangement, was it not?”

“And aren’t you the clever one!” Francis exclaimed, dipping his head and flashing his most beguiling smile. “Is it any wonder I love you?”

“But I am not clever enough to foretell the future for you either,” she urged, not even bothering to answer the captain’s latest declaration of love.

He was about to assure her, once again, that he believed her, when Lady Violet suggested that Cumberland could also pay her, and very well, too.

At that she was on her feet, the last of her control gone, shouting, “I wouldn’t bring you a cup of tea for all the gold in Hanover! So you might as well get out of my house!”

“Yes, I think you might as well do it, for now,” Francis told him.

“It is not just for now, it is forever!” she shouted. Cumberland glanced towards his Irish confederate, who smiled and shrugged as though to say, then that is final – for now.

At that, Cumberland pulled his ponderous girth out of the chair, bowed coldly to his hostess and went to the door. They heard the delicate stairs creaking again, under his departure.

“But why were you so angry at that poor man?” Violet asked, shaking her head. “He is not as pleasant as Captain O’Neill, but then, who is?”

As Mary struggled to find a way of explaining her actions, she was saved by the clamor below. It was the drumming of hoof beats, combined with voices that

joined her Irish servants' in an angry dispute before the front entrance. Then a fist banged against the door—made by a stronger, harder hand than Cumberland's.

O'Neill had jumped to his feet at the first sign of the quarrel and now stood with his pistol in hand. The two women stared at each other in alarm. "Lock the door behind me," he ordered them. Clutching his weapon, he raced down the fragile stairway into the entrance hall.

He stopped short as he found himself facing Ranald MacGregor of Glenmoriston with sixteen of his men at his back, wearing the same clan tartan. One carried his bagpipes, while the others had their own claymore swords at the ready. O'Neill put his pistol back into his belt with a shrug and a cold smile.

Prince Charlie's two former companions glared at each other, looking like a glowering bear facing a wary panther.

"Call the servants here, O'Neill," the Highlander said.

"You'd better come here, my boyos," he shouted into the air. "Our old Scottish friends do not seem too friendly tonight, and they might shoot me down where I stand."

\* \* \* \*

Never, Ran MacGregor thought. You were good servants of the Prince. At the same time, he was grateful that he had brought so many armed men with him. He would not have been able to overpower

the servants otherwise, without risking many lives on both sides.

Mary Marvellous had apparently seen the need for a dozen brawny Irish coachmen and footmen. More likely, he suspected that O'Neill had seen the need to recruit them, in order to keep the lady under his control, just as he himself intended to do. He did not have time to wonder about the domestic arrangements though, since he dared take neither his eyes nor his weapon off Captain O'Neill.

With his free hand, MacGregor violently rattled the gilded knob on Mary's bedroom door.

"Tell them to open the door," he ordered.

"Keep the door locked, ladies," his adversary shouted over his shoulder, then turned to fix MacGregor again with his gaze.

Stepping back towards the spiral staircase, Ran MacGregor lifted his booted foot and kicked the door down. With shame, he saw the two women clutching each other in terror, as though he had been a common housebreaker. And what else could he call himself?

It was O'Neill who asked the question, "What is it you want here, MacGregor?"

"I want my bride," the Highlander shouted, thrusting his jaw forward and flinging back his shaggy red-brown lion's mane. "And I am here to take her."

Leaving no doubt which lady he had in mind, he reached out his powerful square hand to Mary Marvellous, who gazed at it in fascination.

"Shouldn't your bride have something to say about that?" Violet asked, while the lady in question

stood beside her, staring up at him silently with great brown eyes.

They all turned to Mary who stood frozen with her mouth gaping open, as though she were past all words.

Glenmoriston stood wondering how he had ever gotten into this ridiculous, undignified and highly illegal disaster – which was starting to seem more like a low comedy than a noble drama. Angrily he glowered down, to avoid meeting their eyes. Still, he could feel Violet glaring at him with outrage, O'Neill with cold appraisal and Mary Marvellous, his proposed bride, with the same disbelieving stare.

He would have abandoned the whole idea and run back into the cold night, were it not for his men who were crowding up into the hallway to watch – and even beyond that, were it not for Francis O'Neill standing there facing them warily, obviously still watching for his own opportunity to win Mary Marvellous for himself.

"I have said all that there is to say, he concluded, turning towards her, "Take your shawl and follow me."

"I don't have a shawl,"

"Then I will take you beneath my own." he told her but he was forced to wonder how he was to control his horse, his shawl and his lady all at the same time.

O'Neill broke into his thoughts, with a voice that was, for once, deadly serious.

"Are you taking us with you, then, to make up the bridal party?" he asked. "Or will you tie me hand and foot, perhaps, and Lady Violet, too, just to show us

once again tonight how much respect you have for the ladies."

Ran didn't see any rational way of arguing that he was, indeed, acting respectfully, since he so patently was not.

"You would have liked to do the same thing yourself, wouldn't you?"

Francis seemed to be thinking that over seriously, his sense of irony restored. "I won't say it's a bad idea, now," he decided, with a cynical grin. "But it is not the way we Irish manage things. We have no need for such rough wooing."

Mary's brown eyes were as round as saucers, immense in her pink-and-white little heart-shaped face, making her look like a helpless child as she gazed up at him. Wrenched with sympathy for what seemed her sheer terror, Ran turned away. Even Francis took pity on her.

"But he isn't going to hurt you," Francis assured her. "Sure, and don't I wish I could say the same for my own prospects."

"You'll be safe enough," Ran told him. "But I know you for a brave man, and I know you would get free and follow me, with the help of your own lady here, no matter how well I tied you." Fumbling in the purse at his belt, he produced a flask of whiskey.

"Is that wee dram supposed to make me drunk?" asked O'Neill, with a short laugh. "Sure, and it's little you know of the Irish. Or have you taken all the rest of it yourself?"

"It's going to put you to sleep for an hour or so, and Lady Violet with you."

Without thinking, Francis stepped backwards. "Won't you take my word of honor that I will stay behind?"

"I know you for a brave man, not an honest one," Ran told him, with a faint smile. "My Lady Violet is a brave lady, too."

"Well, as long as you are not accusing the lady of dishonesty," O'Neill answered, with a short laugh. "That would be discourteous, would it not?"

With his eyes still fixed on them both, Ran emptied the tea cups into the slops and refilled them from his own supplies. Violet gingerly lifted her cup in both of her trembling hands, but Francis folded his arms and asked, in his most reasonable tone, "What if I refuse to take my draught like a good child?"

"Then I'll bash you in the head with my pistol butt, and the result will be the same," Ran answered, just as calmly. "But I don't want to hurt you. I know you for a good friend of the Prince."

Francis smiled and shrugged again. "To Good King Jamie," he said in his most ironical tone and drained the cup in one swallow. Lady Violet drank more hesitantly, then her lover pulled her down onto the bed with him. He did it with such a practiced gesture, MacGregor was sure they had done so often enough before, giving him even more reason to carry through his own plan.

\* \* \* \*

O'Neill had time to press his mistress's fingers. Then he was holding, not her slim delicate hand, but one

that was stronger and harder with toil. He looked up into the lady's steady brown eyes, knowing that he had something very important to say to her but not yet sure what it was. Then the words came to him, along with her name.

"What would you give to see the Prince?" he asked.

"I would give everything, even if he were on one mountain top and I were on another," answered Miss Flora MacDonald of Kingsburgh.

All he wanted then was to kneel before her, to weep and kiss the hem of her gown as though she had been the Mother of God herself, standing in Notre Dame. Instead, he asked if she would help the Prince escape the country, to stop the English from killing him after the disaster at Culloden.

He woke with a terrible sense of loss, knowing that she was the woman who had been meant to inspire and even guide him. And then he remembered where he was and how he had gotten there and leaped to his feet at once.

\* \* \* \*

"Delicious shivers," Mary had always called it—that feeling of being partly cold and partly warm, beneath a blanket that failed to either cover your face or adequately heat your feet. Now she was shuddering deliciously indeed, as she rode through the cold night beneath the plaid shawl that he had wrapped around them both, leaving her face exposed to the wind. Even if it had been a summer's day, she would have been



shivering with both delight and shame.

And she should be ashamed, as she realized. She could probably stop this, she thought, by telling him that there were three men before him, besides her husband. The Scots College student might have accepted that; the Highland laird would not. What's more, she knew she should stop him because the situation was such a complete outrage to her, against all the rules of dignity, equality and freedom. Yet she let him keep galloping through the night, holding her as a helpless captive on his saddle before him.

But how many rules had she broken to be here? All of them—except for that good old Highland rule that might makes right. The good old rule, the simple plan: they will take who have the power and they will keep who can. It was good Scottish poetry.

She was very glad now that she had denied having a shawl of her own, so that she could feel his tartan enveloping both of them together. The Highland shawl might even have been designed for that very purpose. It was the size of a blanket until it was folded for wearing, tied from the shoulder to the waist, above the kilt of a laird.

And a laird could not risk rejection, even in favor of a rival as formidable as Francis O'Neill. That was why he had had to take the choice away from her. He could not risk the shame of failure. But he would never have had to do so, if only he had declared his feelings for her. Then she would have told him that he had held her heart safe from all adversaries the moment she had first laid eyes on him.

She could not tell him that now, with his men

around them, even though they almost certainly could not have heard her above their blaring pipes. But, as she promised herself, she would do so soon. For now, she was happy to know that he had always returned her feelings. And she was even happier to have his arm across her bosom, like an iron bar, so that she could feel his stallion galloping beneath her without fearing that she was about to fall to the ground.

She inhaled deeply. He smelled of whiskey, wool and leather. She was very glad that she was scented with rosewater, to please him.

She knew that Ran hated the way that he and his Prince had won the day. But he was willing to overlook what he thought was witchcraft in order to have her, so she could overlook this rape or kidnap or abduction or whatever you call it—marriage by capture—in return.

She hoped they would go on playing the bagpipes, even though she had no intention of screaming, so they were not needed to drown her out.

“God, I love bagpipes. Scottish soul music!” she shouted.

“What?”

“Fine music,” she shouted.

“What?”

She tried again, “I said, fine music!”

He raised his hand towards the piper, and the music died away with a last wail.

“The lady says she likes your playing,”

The piper nodded acknowledgement of her praise—pleased but by no means surprised, since all

the young ladies of good taste felt the same way.

She pressed her shoulders back against Ran's chest again, enjoying the delicious shivers. She did not shudder at all about the prospect of spending the indefinite future in the wild Highlands, with some very wild Highlanders, and this one in particular. It seemed safer to her than the sophisticated Lady Violet and her ever-so-charming Irish countryman and their new friend and ally, Butcher Cumberland. God knew what horrors he could still commit.

If Ran kept her in Blenheim Palace, so much the better. It was not a single building but an entire city of white marble, lifted out of ancient Greece—or, rather, out of an architect's dream of it. Either way, he would keep her safe from that unholy trio she had left behind in Greenwich. And Prince Charlie would come to visit her—in fact, he would have to. The Prince Regent was her guardian and had to make sure she was safe.

So far, she had avoided facing that fact. By seizing her, Ran had insulted her Prince Regent. Could the Highlander want her as his wife so badly, on the basis of their brief and not very friendly acquaintance, that he was willing to risk the Prince's just rage? It must be so, she assured herself. She would not even consider the other possibility—that he wanted something else from her, which would put him beyond even the Prince's anger.

At her sudden motion, she felt his arm tighten around her.

"Are you afraid of me?"

She shook her head.

"You are the right bride for me. Even if I am carrying you off against your will."

For a long moment, she wondered how to respond.

"I asked for nothing after Derby. But if I had asked for some reward," she said, "it would have been having you carry me off this way, by force, against my will."

He pressed her even closer, so close that she could hardly breathe, but she didn't complain.

"I won't oppress you," he assured her. "I will take you to London as often as you like as soon as you are my wife, which will be by tomorrow morning. You can go to all the finest shops, after our marriage is consummated."

She would still have one drawback he would learn about soon enough.

Forcing the words out, she confessed, "I am not a virgin." As his arms stiffened around her, she went hastily on, "I was married, but lost my husband."

And that was honest enough, she decided. Let him assume that she was a widow, whose late husband had claimed her virginity—not a divorced woman, who had not even given that honor to her spouse. Other times, other ways.

"I prize wisdom more than virginity," he answered loftily. "I had many virgins to choose from, but none with knowledge like yours."

For a moment, it seemed like praise, and she basked in it. Then she swiveled around towards him, going hard and unyielding with rage.

"You want me to use my wisdom to help you!" almost choking on the words in her fury. "You want

me to tell you the future of Scotland, so you can change it any way you like. But you hated the knowledge I used to help the Prince, you called it witchcraft."

"I still hate it!" he retorted, with such vehemence that the horse reared beneath him, and he had to clutch her with both his arms to keep her from being thrown to the ground. "But possess it you do, and as long as that is true we must have it for Clan MacGregor, so we can stand against the Campbells."

"Clan MacGregor!" she virtually shrieked through a throat that had almost closed with fury, as wild as the bagpipe itself. "It is not even for your country, the way it always is for Francis O'Neill. You want me to use my power for your clan—your dirty, ragged Highland savages."

"I had the greatest power in the world, and I used it to save your Prince, but that wasn't enough for you. Instead, you wanted it to prop up your primitive clan system and you were willing to rape and even marry me for it, like the Highland barbarian you are. All right, marry me if you will, and by the time I am done changing the future you might be a peasant on your own estates."

She was weeping now, with rage and disappointment.

"All I want is to get away from the whole thing," he snarled. "I will go back to college in Paris and I only hope that neither you nor His Royal Highness ever hears of me again."

His arm stiffened against her chest, as he wheeled his horse's head around toward Greenwich so

violently that the animal had to struggle to keep all four legs on the ground. Ever alert to his actions, although they had not heard his words, his men followed.

In one instant, she realized with mingled relief and disappointment, that he was taking her home to Greenwich. In the next, he wheeled his horse's head the other way, back towards Blenheim Palace, the MacGregor stronghold. Again, his men followed after.

"I am as trapped as you," he swore.

"You had better not make me a peasant," he warned, "or you will be a peasant's wife." His jaw shot forward in stubbornness, and his generous lips pressed together in such a hard thin line it would have taken a chisel to part them.

Her own lips set almost as hard. She held herself rigid against him as his horse's hooves clattered across the great Blenheim courtyard. They rode past the main entrance where the Roman gods looked down on visitors from the marble roof and galloped towards the side entrance leading to the chapel, where Ran's uncle was waiting with the priest.

\* \* \* \*

In his brief career since ordination, Father David had never faced a dilemma like this one. Desperately, he wished he had time to consult the bishop, but he had been summoned here only minutes ago, in the wee small hours of the morning, and he would be forced to take action at any moment. His youthful face,

normally thin and pale, seemed positively ghostly now. His eyes had still been blinking with sleep when they brought him here, but learning of the crisis had left him wide awake.

Even under the best of circumstances, the chapel here at Blenheim would have made him distinctly uncomfortable. The marble statues rising beside the altars were not of holy saints but rather a Roman conqueror, as shown by his laurel wreath and the short tunic displaying his muscular legs. His adoring wife sat gazing up at him, as one of her children sought nourishment at her conveniently bare breast. The feelings they inspired, Father David feared, would not be religious in nature.

The couple represented the first Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, both Protestants, which made the setting, in Father David's mind, even less spiritual. Sir Alexander had assured him that the chapel had been properly consecrated by Father David's predecessor. "Pagan" was the word that the young cleric would have used to describe it, but he saw no need to contradict this prominent Catholic laird, especially in the laird's stronghold.

Tonight's issue was much more serious than any question of taste and décor. Sir Alexander had all but told him as much, informing the priest that he had been called there to perform the sacred rites of marriage. The groom would settle for nothing less, being as devoted a Catholic as the priest himself, Sir Alexander had assured him, even though law did not require the formal rites.

"How do you mean, not required?" Father David

had demanded.

"Well, it is well known that, in the MacGregors lands, marriage is completed on consummation. Once he has taken her, she is his bride. The grounds of Blenheim are now our territory and follow our laws."

Seeing the look of outrage on the cleric's face, he had added quickly, "But that is not good enough for a fine young man like Ranald MacGregor. He must have the Church's sacrament of marriage before the wedding night."

Knowing what he did of Scottish marriage laws, Father David asked if the bridegroom had obtained the bride's consent. "Because," he had said firmly, "I will not legitimize a rape."

The word left the laird glaring in such righteous fury the priest had had to force himself not to make an apology.

"And I would slay any other man who suggested that I was asking him to," Sir Alexander had exclaimed. "But you will see that this lad and lass belong together, even if she must hold back in modesty."

At that, Father David himself had drawn back, and stared at the jolly old gentleman as though he had been the Devil himself, there to tempt him.

"If she does not agree to the marriage, I will not perform it."

"Well, I should hope not," Sir Alexander had immediately exclaimed. "You will see for yourself that she does not disagree."

'Disagreeing' and 'failing to agree' were two clean different things, the priest had pointed out sharply.



"She must agree positively, not merely fail to refuse," he had insisted.

"And she will agree with all her heart," Sir Alexander had assured him. "But if you will look at yon Roman couple up there, you will remember how their laws let them take a Sabine wife by force."

"We are not Romans, and we are not in the Highlands, and if the bride does not agree to the wedding, I will not perform it."

The speaker and listener had both been surprised, at how the younger man was defying the older one. Now Sir Alexander was opening his mouth again, no doubt to find more good reasons to defend his outrageous conduct, when he was spared the necessity by the opening of the door.

To the dismay of the laird and priest alike, the bride who appeared there did not seem at all inclined to agree to her fate. Nor did she seem to be holding back out of modesty. On the contrary, she seemed wild with rage. Towering over her as he did, and as powerfully muscled as he was, the scowling bridegroom could barely keep his hand on the arm she kept struggling to pull away from him, even as he used it to drag her towards the altar. The sixteen men who pressed in afterwards all clutched their claymore swords in hand, as though fearing that she might succeed in pulling away and they would have to stop her from making a desperate rush at the door.

Under the circumstances, Father David saw no need to ask if she consented to the marriage. She obviously did not agree, in a way that went far beyond any mere failure to give agreement. What's

more, the bridegroom smelled so strongly of whiskey, the priest wondered if even he was in any condition to give consent.

Still, mostly to satisfy Sir Alexander, he asked her, "Do you want to marry this young man, lass?"

"Do you have to ask?" she retorted in outrage. And, indeed, as he silently agreed, she did not.

"Then I cannot perform the rites."

They glared at each other for a long moment, the thin, pale priest and the ruddy, stocky laird. Both were surprised when the Highlander was the first to look away.

"Well, if you cannot, you cannot," he mumbled, gazing down at the black-and-white checkerboard marble floor.

"Our men will take you back to your residence for the moment," Ran informed the priest. "But you'll be called back here soon enough."

\* \* \* \*

At that, Ran hauled her out the door and into the hall.

He dragged her past the magnificent sitting rooms, with walls covered in brocade, tapestries and gilded moldings, but she hardly saw their splendor. Instead, she was frantically pleading him to stop and think for one moment about what he was doing.

"If I did use some magic powers to change the outcome of the war, then I changed everything that has happened since," she argued desperately. "I can't see the future of the world as it is now."

That was enough to make him stop in mid stride

and stand glaring down at her.

"So you are a witch, you admit it! Well, then we'll find good use for your powers here."

"No!" she cried, making one frantic effort to free herself, as he pushed open his bedroom door and thrust her through it, so forcefully that she would have fallen if he had not still clutched her.

The walls had no gilt or brocaded adornments here. He had planned his rooms to suit his own taste, a Highland man's taste. In the light of the fire from the rough stone mantel, she saw that the MacGregor tartan was draped across the four-poster bed. Sword, daggers and pistols were nailed to the oak panels above it, within easy reach of his hand.

Still grasping her with one hand, he pulled a dagger from the wall with the other. As he came towards her, she was sickened and terrified by the scent of whiskey and sweat that had seemed so intoxicating a few hours before. Now in the face of his half-drunken anger she feared for her life, until he turned her around and slashed through the laces that held her garments closed before dropping the dagger onto the bed.

At least murder was not the crime he planned as he cut away her gown, apron and petticoat. Her white lace cap had long since fallen to the ground, despite the pins that held it, during their wild ride. She was grateful now for the fire in the mantel, which kept her from suffering cold as well as shame.

Now only her white stockings and buckled shoes were left, as he lifted her high into his arms and threw her on the bed. Then even these last remnants of her

dignity were ruthlessly torn away. Holding both of her wrists over her head with his powerful, square right hand, he used his left hand to pull off her shoes, drag down her stockings and throw both onto the floor.

Then he pushed her knees up, one at a time, thus forcing up her lower body. She felt the wiry hair and sweat of his thighs against her own soft, smooth ones. The tops of her legs started to ache with the strain. Now his lips were right above hers, mingling his whisky smell to mingle with her rosewater. His red-brown mane fell over his brow and caressed her forehead. Still, there was no sound but his harsh breathing, which was still so low that she could clearly hear the crackling of the flames.

As he raised his kilt, she glanced down. The wiry hair that grew on his thighs also formed a tight cluster around his cock. It emerged like a mighty oak tree rising high, wide and hard from out of a tangled thicket.

"You want that, do you not?"

Far past lying now, and even beyond thought, she could only nod, gasping as warmth spread across her lower body, making her squirm. Yes, he was what she wanted, and even now he was the only reward she wanted to claim.

"Then you must have it," he crowed. "We must always oblige the ladies."

As he spoke that last word, he put his free hand beneath her knees again, to force them into place. With no more preparation than a touch to her wetness, he pressed himself deep inside her, the

velvet head of his cock smoothing the way.

If it were any other man, she would never forgive him, she thought, no matter what kind of cock he had. But she could not deny her arousal. She wanted him. She was so ready that she had not needed his hands or his lips. She had been already warm and wet enough inside to welcome him, as big as he was.

This was no other man. This was Ran MacGregor of Glenmoriston, and having him take her this way was all she could ever have asked for. As his left hand fell open, freeing her wrists, she wound her own arms around his neck, feeling the powerful muscles of his shoulders.

The hard, wide shaft with its bulging veins now caressed her smooth, slick vaginal walls. The sensation would have been so unbearably strong, she felt sure that she must die from it. But he controlled the ebb and flow as he retreated and then advanced again, in a steady but quickening rhythm that eked out a responding chord in her. In reply, her throbbing cunny drew him further inside.

The pace quickened.

His pace grew harder and faster. Her heart sped even faster as she endeavored with him. Her breathing also followed his in an ever-speeding tempo, until it was as hard and fast as his thrusts. Above the crackling fire, she could hear his as it changed into moaning.

Then his groans rose into a snarl, as he made his final, deepest assault. She trembled and writhed beneath him, so that every bit of herself could share in the final joy. At last he reared back in the final

pleasure. At the same moment, her own body arched in a convulsion that flung her up from the bed and then slammed her back down onto it.

When he rolled over onto his back, she saw his hot, thick fluid spreading over her inner thighs and ran her forefinger into it, slowly forming the letter R, over and over again.

When he finally opened his eyes to gaze at her, she parted her lips, to tell him how much joy he had brought her, to ask if they could lie that way forever. He had recovered enough of his strength to speak first.

"Now you will have to marry me," he said, triumphantly. "You've got no way out of it now. Otherwise I have ruined you, and you might be with child, so you would be in even more disgrace. You know that if I say you are my wife, by old Scottish law, you *are* my wife."

She turned her head away, furious once again with herself and him. How could she have yielded to him so shamelessly, forgetting that all he wanted was marriage to her and the powers that would go with them?

Still, she hoped against hope that he would tell her the words that would make her consent with all her heart and soul: that he wanted only her and to hell with her powers.

"And if I still refuse?" she asked.

"How could you do that?" he demanded in confusion. "You have to marry me now."

"I will not, ever!" she cried, in disappointment and shame. "Being raped will not persuade me."

The charge enraged him all over again. "Rape is not what I would call it," he snarled, sitting bolt upright beside her. "You did not seem to mind it. No woman could refuse to marry a man who had pleased her that way."

"This one can and will."

"You told me that you were not a virgin," he responded defensively. "So what is the loss, either way?"

For once, she was speechless, unable to even answer such callousness. She was tempted to shock him with the news that she was a divorced woman who had not even been untouched at her first wedding.

"If you had taken my virginity a hundred times, I would not marry you."

Leaping to his feet, he folded his massive arms and glared down at her from above them.

"And I say you will marry me, for any reason you like!"

"And I say that I will not! And how could I agree to marry a man who shouts at me this way?"

"You would drive any man to shouting, Woman! How long do you think you can keep defying the Young Glenmoriston, on his own lands?"

"How long will you keep defying a witch?"

Even as she spoke, she knew how foolish her words were.

"You will not curse me tonight, Witch," he said. "I will not stay long enough to let you. And when you leave this room again, it will be to become my bride."

Refusing to look over her shoulder to see him walk

out the door, she buried her face in the pillow and heard the door locking behind him as he returned to the hallway. There were those who would say she had gotten just what she deserved. She had wanted to see the savage Highlanders win at Culloden? Now they had. Savage Highlanders indeed. Reaching down to pick up her petticoat, she scrubbed her thighs in a frantic effort to wipe his fluid away.



## Chapter the Seventh

### *In Which Our Heroine's Secrets are Revealed*

To: The Reverend John Wesley

From: Dr. Benjamin Franklin

April 15, 1746

*Your letter so intrigued me that I continued the research that you asked for, and I may now assure you that your prayers have been answered. Mary Marvellous has taken her powers from science rather than Satan. I will share the reasoning that led me to this conclusion, knowing that it will surely seem startling to you, but trusting that, as a modern and enlightened thinker, you will not reject it on that account.*

*First: As I wrote before, Mary Marvellous never lived in my city. Having made such a figure in the world, I am sure that she would be the boast of her neighbors here, if any existed.*

*Second: We have no coven of witches in Philadelphia. As both a magazine publisher and a man with some connections in public life, I feel sure that I would know about it if there were.*

*Having accepted these two facts we must proceed to the*

*obvious conclusion. Which is: There is nothing in the least mysterious about your fair prophetess. Either she is a visitor from another planet or she has returned to our own time from the future of our own world, armed with the knowledge needed to set things right, as Hamlet would say – except that, unlike the famous Danish prince, she has no hesitation in doing so.*

*Since I cannot so far flatter myself as to believe that the doings of our puny planet are of any interest to other worlds – and since I do believe, on the other hand, that our “Bonnie Prince” will remain a romantic figure for Earth ladies of centuries to come – I must conclude that she has traveled to us, not through space, but time.*

*Considering the difficulty of undertaking such a journey, I must further deduce that she could have done so only for the most compelling reason – namely, to save her idol from the devastating defeat that must otherwise surely have befallen him, had our armies trapped him in the Highlands, as they planned to do before his first meeting with her in Derby and his subsequent race to London.*

*This must, admittedly, seem strange at first consideration – no less strange, in fact, than the antiquated theory of witchcraft. It is not, however, any more remarkable than the other wonders that science has recently revealed to us, most notably electricity and smallpox vaccination.*

*With this (as I trust it to be) reassuring news, I ask to remain your most humble and obedient servant,*

*B. Franklin*

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Marvellous (as Frances Townley was now

known) had awakened for the first time in London to the sound of car horns and train whistles (as she at first thought them). They had, she decided resentfully, awakened her from a wonderful dream she had had, of Bonnie Prince Charlie victorious.

Then she had recognized the cries of street vendors, selling fruit, vegetables, coal, wood and newspapers, over 150 years before the first car would drive on The Strand. The newspaper vendors were shouting about Prince Charles, just as they would be two hundred and sixty years later, but it was not the son of Queen Elizabeth II who filled the front pages. That Prince Charles might now not ever exist (and no great loss, she thought, true Hanoverian that he is). Her Prince Charles ruled London this morning because she herself had brought him here.

Then she thought of what J. Robert Oppenheimer had said after his atom bomb fell on Hiroshima—"I have become Death, the destroyer of worlds." Those words came from a Hindu holy book, she remembered, and in the Hindu tradition the destroyer is a female, the goddess Khali. Yes, she thought, I, too, am Khali, the destroyer of worlds, of the world that was. But I am a creator, too. This world exists because of me. And what a bright shiny world it is, too, lit by Bonnie Prince Charlie as its sun.

The newspapers were shouting about Bonnie Charlie, the Prince Regent, and not about King George's son, the Duke of Cumberland, Billy, the Martial Boy—because she had brought forth the world in which the Bonnie Prince vanquished Butcher Cumberland.

One of the many sad old songs came to mind, but it seemed happy now, because it would never be written:

*"And on Culloden's field of yore  
They bravely shout, 'Claymore, Claymore!'  
They bravely fight, what can they more  
But die for Royal Charlie?"*

Well, it turned out that she could do more, and she had done so. She had gone back through time to change history, and it was all for the better, she was sure. She had destroyed a world, yes, and had broken the laws of nature to do it, some would even say the laws of God, because the world she had shattered had been meant to exist—a world of burned Highland cottages, slaughtered Highland men, starving Highland children and a fugitive Highland Prince.

The vendors' cries reminded her of all the newspapers she had read at her desk—or, putting it more precisely, that she was going to read, two hundred and sixty years from now—the first thing every morning, as part of the job that had set her on the road to becoming the destroyer and creator of worlds: science editor for the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

One morning in late September 2005, she had forgotten to stir her coffee, so intrigued was she by two headlines. Entropy reversal experiments begin at UC, said one. This was on the science page, but it was far more fascinating to her than any page-one banner.

The story had started by quoting William Butler Yeats. Things fall apart, they are changing minute by minute. The writer wondered how an Irish mystic poet could have known that, but there was really

nothing supernatural about it at all. As things grew older, their molecules moved in a less orderly pattern. Frances had heard long ago that if you could reverse entropy, by returning an object's molecules to an earlier, more orderly stage, you could return the object itself to an earlier time.

The interviewer must have realized the same thing, because he went on to issue a patient and patronizing denial of the obvious conclusion: As a result of this new University of Chicago study, time travel was possible. Thinking about it, she wondered if the science writer in question was as sure as he sounded. Like most scientists and many writers, he was probably a science-fiction fan, and thus had had ample warning of the damage that could be done by going back to change the past. Poul Anderson had created the time patrol to deal with that very real danger.

A second headline, in even smaller type, appeared in the society section of the Philadelphia Enquirer. James Cavendish was footing the bill for a lavish two hundred and sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the tragic Battle of Culloden. She already knew about Cavendish from her mother, who held the James Cavendish Chair of Scottish History at the University of Chicago.

Pearl McGavin-Townley spoke with awe about Cavendish, a Scottish-American billionaire who had gone back to his roots with a vengeance. She was always asking him to help her preserve some ruined house or battlefield connected with Bonnie Prince Charlie's rising of 1745, and he was always glad to

oblige.

At home, she had encouraged her daughter Frances Townley's interest in history and literature, pointing her towards the overflowing family shelves that were filled with virtually every book on the subject of any importance of all—from Sir Walter Scott's historical romances to scholarly historical journals. As a result, she felt that she knew Flora MacDonald, Lady Violet, the Young MacGregor of Glenmoriston, Francis O'Neill and, of course, the Bonnie Prince himself, the way other girls of her age knew the Beatles and Rolling Stones.

Fat and awkward as a child, she had poured all her time and energy into her Jacobite obsessions. Even when the fat had been dieted and exercised away in time for college, leaving her, if anything, too thin, she still felt isolated from others and consoled herself with her dreams. She was glad to realize that they had not left her, even though she realized how much they were costing. Her flesh-and-blood boyfriends soon realized who their rival was, because, try as she might, she could not resist finding a way to bring the Bonnie Prince into every conversation.

Under these circumstances, she felt lucky to be able to say that one man had been willing to marry her. Born to a working-class Italian-American family, he had mistaken her obsessions as a sign of the culture and breeding he admired. Soon enough he had realized his mistake and the marriage had not lasted through its second anniversary.

Her father had had his influence, too. As a professor of physical science, he had guided her

towards the most enjoyable and intriguing theories of his own fellow professionals: Asimov, Hawking, Dawkins, Gould. Even more, he had given her the name that had, for as long as he could remember, been given to his family's girls: Frances Townley.

His wife and daughter both were always much more impressed than he had ever been when they learned that the name was bestowed in honor of Francis Townley, an English ancestor who had gotten himself hanged, drawn and quartered for rising on Prince Charlie's behalf.

When the time came, Professor David Townley was able to bestow a more practical gift: a job as a newspaper science writer. His wife, of course, could have helped her obtain a history professorship instead, but by now both saw the danger of feeding her obsession any further.

Involved in her enjoyable and prestigious career, she had finally been able to stop thinking about the Bonnie Prince much more than half the time, except when something special called him to mind—like these two headlines, coming together on this fateful day.

Her hand froze on the paper, as they joined together in her mind with a crash—the crashing of bagpipes, as the Highland army marched, in her mind, to victory and away from disaster—from Derby south to London, rather than back north to Culloden Moor. What's more, they came together less than a month from the anniversary of the infamous Derby Decision. Surely it would be easier to travel back a round two hundred and sixty years, rather than

trying to adjust a setting for individual years and months.

All too clearly, she remembered what had happened after Culloden—the atrocities that had won the British commander his label as “Butcher Cumberland.” To name only the very first of them, the wounded prisoners had been locked in wooden sheds and the sheds set on fire. Racked with guilt, Prince Charlie himself had been driven into exile as a hopeless, wandering drunkard. If her dreams came true, he would never know the fate she had kept from him—but it was enough that she would know it well.

What would it be like, she wondered, to at last meet her heroes, whom she had worshipped with such devotion over the infinite and yet ever-increasing chasm of the decades? Bonnie Charlie, Gallant Flora, the mysterious Lady Violet, that delightful rebel rogue Francis O’Neill, the gallant Young Glenmoriston—she had poured out her hours, freely and happily, in learning all she could about them including hours of research just to discover the elusive Lady Violet’s first name, Anne.

Didn’t there have to be a reason why she had done so? Hadn’t the reason been that she had always hoped—hoping against hope, against reason, against sanity—that she would someday, somehow, break through all the books and stand face to face before them?

And what if they, understandably, decided that she had come there through witchcraft? The song came to mind then—what can they more, but die for Royal Charlie? But with any luck at all, I can do much more,



she thought. I can win. I need only remember what Vince Lombardi said—Winning is not the most important thing. It's the only thing.

With that thought in mind, Frances Townley reached for the telephone and called her mother's Hyde Park condo for Cavendish's private number.

He listened politely as his favorite professor's only daughter told him that she had learned of a scientific development that might interest him. Before she had finished explaining what entropy reversal could mean, he had told her to go to O'Hare Airport to meet his private plane.

\* \* \* \*

Even after two centuries in America, the Cavendish family, like the Townleys, kept the rosy cheeks of their ancestral Scotland. James Cavendish still boasted them, even though his hair had long since grown sparse and white. These cheeks positively glowed with excitement as she sat in his living room on a genuine William Kent gilt-and-red velvet sofa, made in 1740.

"But won't it take us years to do it?" she asked hesitantly, wondering how many years he could have left. "Those experimental devices are hardly for sale."

Almost cherubically, he smiled at her. "These sofas were not for sale either," he told her, patting the cushion he sat on. "Everything is for sale, for the right price."

As though to illustrate his words, he reached for the phone on the small tripod table, constructed in

1744. While waiting for his administrative assistant to reach the Earl of Pembroke, he explained to Frances that he would not need to buy Wilton House in this case, only to rent it for a few weeks, so that she could learn what it was like to live there.

For a moment, though, his hand hesitated.

"These devices are experimental," he said. "Only rats have traveled in them. We don't know how safe they are for human beings."

Having raised that same objection often enough in her own mind, she had the answer ready at once. "How safe were the Highlanders after the Derby Decision?"

\* \* \* \*

Like all visitors to Wilton House, she was overwhelmed by the opulent beauty of the rooms, their walls covered with gilt plaster moldings and their ceilings with painted Greek gods. For the first time, she realized what it might mean to her own prospects to be returning to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as the Bonnie Prince's favorite. His followers would no doubt think she was a witch, as she now realized, but they would not mind too much, she was sure, as long as she was Prince Charlie's witch.

And as for the others, who might not be so tolerant? The last witch had been burned in Scotland twenty-five years earlier. But whenever that thought came to mind, she remembered her song: *What can they more, but die for Royal Charlie?*

And she must, she knew, be ready to do just that.

Cavendish had brought her here to lessen her danger, not only from witch hunters, but also from the more normal perils of eighteenth-century life.

Not that she foresaw many problems, as she walked through the rooms of Wilton House. She would not ask for any reward, but knowing the Prince's generous nature, he was sure to offer one—if not Wilton House itself, then something very similar.

This prospect was especially cheering, considering that she had known, from the beginning, she might have to stay back there. They had already agreed on the story that Cavendish would tell her parents, about some faraway research project he was paying for. And that, as they also agreed, was not too far from the truth.

Her anticipation soon vanished, when Cavendish started putting her through a grueling round of what she came to call her "time travel basic training."

The first thing he did was to shut off all the electricity, replacing it with candles and wood fires, thus cutting in half the perpetual warm daylight of twenty-first century houses. In a museum devoted to musical instruments, he found both a harpsichord and a curator who could teach her to play eighteenth century compositions on it, requiring hours of practice before she could reach the level of even the least talented girl of Prince Charlie's time.

Raiding Hollywood storehouses, he purchased an authentic mid-eighteenth century wardrobe, down to the wooden side hoops, which held her skirts out three feet in either direction. They felt like big baskets tied to her waist—as, indeed, they had been created to

imitate the baskets carried by milkmaids—and pulled her constantly backwards, over pointed shoes that made keeping her balance even more difficult.

Wearing that awkward contraption, she had to sit, stand, walk, curtsy, serve tea and play music by the hour, even though it took all of her effort merely to breathe beneath the tightly laced bodice. When she irritably asked how long she would have to practice, he asked to know how skillful she would want to be, when the time came when her life would depend on the natives believing that she was one of them.

“God is in the details,” as he kept reminding her, whenever he came up with yet another one of them. She had to learn which tea services to look for, when it came time to purchase them for her new home. Japanese Kakiemon or Imari were the safest.

If she made the mistake of asking for English Derby or Chelsea, which would not be manufactured until after 1750, the small mistake might be great enough to bring her to the stake and possibly her Prince along with her. She came to be sure that she was as great an expert on the early eighteenth century’s décor as she was on its history.

For further recreation, as she ironically called it, she rode in a clumsy sidesaddle—rode hour after hour at a gallop, knowing that she would soon have to ride that way through the freezing cold, for her very life and her Prince’s. She learned to use another piece of equipment, too—the flintlock pistol—surprised at how easy and efficient it was.

At the same time, she came to be wearily and blearily sure that she had read and re-read every

work ever written about eighteenth century Britain in general and Prince Charlie's revolt in particular. The most entertaining – if least reliable – account was the *Journal of Francis O'Neill*, which might have been the origin of the Bonnie Prince Charlie legend, the Irish rebel poetic tradition and, just possibly, the comic-book superheroes as well – including her own namesake, the consort of Captain Marvellous.

It was certainly the most diverting entry in *The Lyon in Mourning*, still the definitive source on the subject. The Irish captain never let the facts get in the way of a good story, as the other contributors agreed. They seemed united in judging him to be a brave and loyal man, but not an honest one – a real rebel rogue. Even his tall tales, however, eventually lost their charm for her and became another wearisome chore.

On top of that, she read the plays and novels of the period, or as many as had survived, suggesting that they were the best of the bunch. And if these were the best, then she was sure that popular taste had not grown at all worse over the past two hundred and sixty years. Indeed, judging by the plot of *Pamela, or Virtue Triumphant* – usually considered the first English novel – they had not changed at all.

Then as now, the heroine spent most of her time protecting her honor against a heartless, lecherous nobleman and was finally rewarded by getting to marry the creep. Frances greatly preferred "The Beggar's Opera," where everyone was ruthless and heartless, except, perhaps, for the murderers and thieves.

As though that were not enough to learn, she also

had to acquaint herself with Philadelphia in the eighteenth century, when it was the greatest metropolis in America—except that she must not call it America, it was ‘the Colonies’. And she had to know enough about them to hold her own if she happened to meet a real Philadelphian. Cavendish had consigned her to a Colonial city that would explain the inevitable gaps in her knowledge of eighteenth-century England and her strange accent.

He warned her not to research beyond December 5, 1745. Already, she knew too much about what would happen afterwards, and remembering too much could be just as deadly as knowing too little.

Stopping again on that date, they pored over the incredibly detailed paintings of Canaletto, which were as close as anyone could come to a photographic record of eighteenth-century London.

But the least pleasant preparations were yet to come. Cavendish made her submit to purges, which, as she learned to her discomfort, were very effective. He even made her put leeches on her arm. Through her misery, she heard him explaining that she must become familiar with these treatments, so that she would not become hysterical the first time one was prescribed for her.

He also insisted on her taking some medical precautions of the twenty-first century. She had to be vaccinated against smallpox and, knowing the ravages that that disease had caused, she did not argue about that. Luckily, her appendix had already been removed or that would also have been seen to, in view of what a rupture would mean.

Even without his arguments, she saw the need for the IUD birth control device that his doctors implanted. She would be in enough danger, he told her, without risking herself to eighteenth-century obstetrics. Even more, she could not risk having a child who might change history in ways they could not foresee.

They were both silent for a moment after he said that. It reminded them, more than anything else could have done, that she was probably going back there to stay. Then she smiled bravely and said, "You seem pretty sure that I will find a husband in the eighteenth century."

"Perhaps a wild Highlander will carry you off to his castle."

"Sounds romantic," she agreed, and she was not entirely joking.

"But you will be subject to a guardian," he warned her. "Single women had them."

"I know, we were legal minors," she answered with a sigh, but then brightened visibly. "I will ask the Prince himself to be my guardian," she explained. "Won't that be an honor for me?"

Then they were both completely serious again. The main thing she had to avoid, as he warned again and again, was changing history more than she had to, because no one could foretell what the effect would be. They were taking enough of a chance, goodness knew, with this one great alteration.

Soon she would be in a position to make any requests to Prince Charlie that she chose to make, but she must not be tempted to make them. Reluctantly,

she promised not to ask for female suffrage, the abolition of slavery or even more help for the poor.

But how did she know how much she was changing? If she changed Bonnie Prince Charlie's fate, would that also change the fate of James Cavendish? His family had been among those who fled to America when the clans were disbanded, after Culloden. If that disaster had not happened, would they have ever done it? Was there not, in fact, the danger of the dreaded time-travel paradox: What if you go back in time and kill your grandfather?

Or, in this case, what if Culloden had not happened? His family would not have come to America and grown rich enough to prevent it—and then Culloden would have happened—and then his family would have come to America—and then Culloden would not have happened—and so on to infinity. Trapped in this dilemma, the universe could, conceivably, keep swinging back and forth between December 5, 1745 and the same date in 2005, forever.

Overruling decades of science fiction doctrine, he brushed that objection aside. The old Highland way of life had been dying, the clans would have come to America anyway. His ancestors would therefore have emigrated here anyway and grown rich enough to subsidize time travelers. He could accept the risk to himself, he told her with a shrug, and the universe would have to do the same.

The same went for the related prospect, of the American Revolution never happening, because George III never ascended the throne. America would have won her independence one way or another, her



patron was sure, and if that could be achieved without warfare, so much the better.

Both were willing to accept the more obvious threat, in their own time, to their reputations. The servants and even the newspapers must soon be gossiping about old Cavendish and the young lady who was being paid to carry out his eighteenth-century fantasies. She only wished that she could have told her parents the truth, thus sparing them the shame that the rumors would bring.

She need not have worried. She had called to tell them that she was going to visit friends in Derbyshire, but her mother had answered that they, too, had put those newspaper articles together and knew perfectly well where she was headed. "And God go with you," her mother had said.

When she flew to English with Cavendish, they did not go to Derby directly. Neither did she have any intention of riding all the way from London, as she would claim to have done. She had made herself into a fine horsewoman, but not that good.

Where she should ride from had been a matter of some concern. Forests, rivers, caves: all were considered and rejected. Great Britain no longer held any place that was so deserted, she could be sure of materializing there without being seen.

Finally, they realized that they had been looking at it in the wrong way. The safest place to hide, as always, was in plain sight. The most deserted place in the world was a church at night. It remained only to find an 18<sup>th</sup> Century church that was still standing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, so that she could appear there

without being seen. If someone did happen to see her leaving, he would assume that he had simply not seen her entering – especially since, as was known, a witch could not enter a church.

Pouring over tour guides, they settled on St. John's Church in Coventry. Relatively unchanged since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, it spared her from the danger of leaving from a chapel and materializing inside a new wall. It was also about 30 miles south of Derby, so she would be seen riding from the right direction, if anyone happened to see her.

In addition, Cavendish joked, Coventry was already well known for producing national heroines. Frances had replied dryly that riding naked through the street like Lady Godiva was a great deal safer than what she had planned.

Their joking died away, as she donned her riding habit—a fleece-lined woolen cape and full-length skirt. Mercifully, they had decided that she must dispense with the three-foot hoops, since no sensible lady would have gone riding in them. For the same reason, she was allowed to wear riding boots, virtually unchanged by the twenty-first century, instead of fashionable pointed shoes.

Silently, he handed her the flintlock pistol and a purse containing 100 pounds sterling in banknotes from the early eighteenth century, worth \$10,000 at the time. It reminded her, once again, of how much the Highlanders had sacrificed, in resisting the temptation of the 30,000 pounds sterling offered for the Prince's capture. It made her own sacrifice seem all the more worthwhile.

Perhaps James Cavendish was making the greatest sacrifice, though. He was staying behind, so that, with the fortune he controlled, he could try to send help if she summoned him. To do so, she would purchase a newspaper ad in a paper, which they knew, would still be in business in 2006. Fortunately, many enduring enterprises of the twenty-first century, including Twinings Tea and Derby China, had started in the eighteenth.

The message, they agreed, would announce a joyous celebration of Mayday: a universal distress signal of the twenty-first century but only a holiday in the eighteenth. They chose not to tell each other why they had had to make that backup plan. Cavendish might no longer be alive when the message arrived, but with luck someone else might decipher the 'mayday' message. For the same reason, they gave her the name of a modern heroine of popular science fiction, perfectly capable of traveling through time.

At last he gave her the entropy-reversal equipment, and she was surprised at how unimpressive it seemed—rather like an upside-down facial sauna made of steel. The biggest part was the curved operator's shield, which would hopefully keep her own molecules from being restored to the pattern of whatever Francis Townley had managed to find to eat earlier that day.

With a final impulsive kiss for James Cavendish, she went into the garden where her horse was tied under an oak tree that must certainly have been there much longer than two hundred and sixty years.

She was surprised at how little noise the machinery

made, although, as she realized, she probably should not have been, since it had been programmed by the best engineers that Cavendish's money could buy. As she huddled with her horse beneath the entropy shield that was saving them both from disintegrating completely, she remembered the commercial for a luxury sportscar.

Nervously, she replayed that commercial in her head, thinking how appropriate it was. "At one hundred years a minute, the only sound you can hear is the ticking of the clock." With only a very soft ticking, it moved the surrounding molecules—and all the molecules surrounding them, to the limits of the Earth's atmosphere—back to their patterns, year by year, to December 5, 1745.

Peering out from behind the shield where she had huddled with her arm on her horse's saddle and her hand firmly holding the reins, she saw the centuries racing by with no sign of change. When the dial had stopped she pushed another button, which destroyed the apparatus in a silent explosion. The machine was designed to be used only once, but there might always be a mechanic, in that very mechanical age, who would find a way to make it run again, without realizing that it could easily send the whole world hurtling back to the Stone Age.

Either that, or she had merely destroyed a useless piece of metal and would emerge to see the Coventry Holiday Inn just where it had always been in her lifetime, brightly lit at all hours to welcome visitors.

Instead, she reached the location to see a cluster of cottages, with a few dimly lit by the hearth fires'

glow. And even after all these months of plans and preparations, she could barely believe her eyes. It was completely impossible and everyone knew it, but she had done it all the same. The machinery's clock had assured her she would still arrive in time to hear the Prince still making his vain arguments against the completely logical insistences of Lord George Murray in favor of retreat the next day.

But was Lord Murray wrong?

That thought almost sent her tumbling from her saddle. What if the seasoned general was right all along, and she was leading Prince Charlie straight into Newgate? Or what if her flintlock pistol went off in her hand, killing his lordship or herself or both, as she tried her final persuasion? It had been easy to accept that possibility when Derby was two hundred and sixty years in the past, but now the time for action had arrived.

She shrugged the fear away. Always, she had known, as surely as the Prince did, that advance was no guarantee of victory but retreat was a sure road to disaster. She would make no Derby Decision of her own but would rather race ahead. *What could she more, but die for Royal Charlie?*

And so she galloped north, glad to see the English soldiers straggling in twos and threes to join Wade or Cumberland, just as she had trusted that they would be, to keep the highwaymen at bay. She did not stop until she reached the outer ring of Scottish guards and started crying out that she had come with news from London. She raced into Exeter House in time to hear the Prince shouting, "You all plan to betray me!"

No, they do not, Your Royal Highness, she thought—but the effect would be the same—if she had not shattered the rules of nature, science and God to stop them.

And so she had placed the prize in the hands of those wild Highlanders she had so much admired, when marriage by capture had seemed a romantic idea.

\* \* \* \*

After that frantic night and early morning, she had never expected to fall asleep in Ran MacGregor's bed. She awoke only when she felt herself being lifted up, and opened her eyes to find him cradling her in his arms. His kilt was rough beneath her, in contrast to his gentle arms, and she started nourishing the faint hope that the outcome might still be romantic indeed.

He had also placed a bowl of oatmeal, a cup of coffee and a tall water glass on the bedside table, beside the water basin, the pitcher, a bar of lemon soap and a box of tooth powder. A towel had been thrown over a chair beside them. He himself smelled only of the soap and tooth powder. All trace of liquor was gone. She was sorry not to have sugar with the oatmeal, then shuddered as she remembered that, in this time and place, they seasoned it with salt. Better to have it plain.

"I see you are awake now," he said. "As you see, I have brought you some breakfast. Do you have to use the chamber pot first? I will wait in the hall while you do."

When she still gazed at him in suspicion, he reluctantly went on, "I played the fool last night. You had shamed me in front of my uncle and my men, and I already felt ashamed enough, God knows. I should have let you wait here until you were ready to be my wife. I had used whiskey to make me bolder, and it made me wild instead."

But he did not ask for forgiveness. A college student might ask pardon for going on a rampage, but a Highland laird would not.

Instead, she asked, "Will you let me go, then, until I am ready to be your wife?"

To her surprise, a smile of gentle teasing came over his full lips and danced in his red-brown eyes. "We can discuss that a moment," he said. "I have a wee surprise for you first, and I think you will enjoy it. So up with you now and do what you have to in the morning. I will be waiting for you in the hallway." Gently and carefully, he stood her on her feet.

To her own amazement, she found herself hurrying through the morning ritual after he had left the room, so she could call him back again. She only wished she had a comb to pull through her tangled hair before he saw her again.

"May I come back now?" he called through the crack in the door.

"Wait until I am dressed," she answered.

"There does not seem much need for that now, does there?" he asked, in the same teasing tone. "You have a nice fire to keep you warm, and I have already seen all there is to see."

"You can come in now," she called, as softly as she

could.

He lifted her into his arms. Then, to her terror, he put her face down again on the bed, where he bound her wrists to the bedposts and placed a pillow under her hips to raise her backside off the bed.

"Please don't beat me," she begged him, tears filling her eyes, not knowing what else the preparations could be for.

"I have no such plan. I have something quite different in mind. I lived in Paris," he assured her, in a soothing voice, "and not all of my learning came from books."

She knew what else he had learned when he gently spread her buttocks farther and ran his finger in slow circles around her clitoris. She gasped. His finger was rough and dry against that most delicate of all organs, but it moved in a rhythm as slow and gentle as a lullaby. She feared at any moment he might press too hard, but it kept touching her softly. She knew he could see her squirming in pleasure before his face, but she was past shame.

She was glad that the fire had died down during the night, and the faint morning chill was a delicious contrast to the gentle flame inside her. It was more of her delicious shivers, heat blending with cold, and these were the sweetest of all. She was just as grateful for the thick walls of Blenheim that would keep even the most eager ears from hearing the loud, helpless moans of pleasure he was wringing from her.

She was writhing and whimpering helplessly when his finger circled yet again. Each slow rotation sent her rising ever higher, in a spiral of desire that was



finally as unbearable as the worst whipping would have been.

His finger slowed. She was afraid he was going to stop, and then she was terrified that he would not. Finally, she heard him whisper, "Will you marry me now?"

Then she saw his purpose all too clearly, and she also knew, to her shame, that it did not reduce her helpless longing by one whit.

"And if I do not? Will you leave me here to suffer, with my hands tied, so I cannot satisfy myself?"

"Who could stop me if I chose to do that?"

"No one," she admitted, lowering her head in defeat, wondering if she would, at last, be forced to bend to his will. Then she saw a way to escape her dilemma and was glad he could not see her smile. "I can no longer say that I will not marry you."

"You said you would never marry me," he reminded her, in a taunting tone, as his finger stopped an endless, agonizing second.

"I say it no longer now," she gasped. "I can no longer go on refusing to marry you."

That completely restored his good cheer.

"But I can promise that you never will regret it!" he crowed. "Yesterday I took you by force. Today I will pay you in pleasure—and it is only the first installment I will make, now that you are my bride."

His tartan kilt brushed against her backside, as he started to keep his pledge. As his cock plunged into her once again, it seemed to reach far beyond her cunny and into the very depths of her being.

"Lady MacGregor," he whispered, as he slowly

pulled out of her. "Lady MacGregor of Glenmoriston."

"Don't talk," she begged. "Let me think only of my joy and yours." She felt a thrill and inadvertently contracted around him. "Did you feel that?" she asked him.

"Indeed I do," he whispered, as he thrust again.

Lavishing kisses on her shoulder, he roused himself to thrust more deeply. With each thrust and stroke, each contraction, they drove each other and themselves to greater heights of ecstasy. When they could finally climb no higher, she cried out her release and he spent himself in her again. He fell back onto the blanket.

"So now you are ready to keep your word?" he asked her. "Will you be my bride, as you promised?"

She had to eat quickly now, she realized, before he got angry enough to take her food away and replace it with Heaven knew what new torment as well.

So she sat on her cushion and gazed up at him in adoration that was not hard to feign, after their bout together.

"May I take some nourishment first?" She asked. "You have left me very hungry for my breakfast."

"Of course you may," he answered indulgently, as he untied her hands again. She turned her attention to the oatmeal, spooning it up as quickly as she could and washing it down with the coffee, determined to take as much as she could before she risked his fury again.

"Can I bring the priest back, then?"

"As well you should," she responded, in a teasing

tone. "We both have need of him, good Unitarian that I am." And that was the truth, she thought. Even if their first churches would not open for a few more years, she really-did not want to deny her principals now, when she would need any God there was to help her.

"I have not heard of that denomination," he answered. "But I would not care if you were a raving Methodist, so long as you married me."

She hurriedly spooned up the last mouthful.

"Well, I know you mean that," she answered cautiously, reaching for the last gulp of coffee. "But do you think we are ready yet for such a big step?"

"Are we ready?" he asked indignantly. "How could we be any more ready than we are now?"

"Well," she said reluctantly, making sure that no scraps of food were left for him to whisk away. "Are you ready to show your true love for me, by agreeing to have me even if I swear never to use my powers to help you?"

It was not the powers themselves so much, she realized. It was the fact that she still felt able to refuse them, or anything, to him, after what he had done with her, to her and for her.

"I will swear no such thing!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "What belongs to a wife is her husband's. I will not give up my rights to please your fancy. If you want my cock in your cunny and my hands on you, then you can put your powers into my hands as well."

Making a visible effort to collect himself, he went on more calmly, "But you cannot make conditions

now. You have already said you would marry me."

Now she had to tell him: There was no way of stalling any more.

"No, Sir," she answered, trying to keep her voice from trembling. "I did not say I would marry you. I told you only that I would not refuse."

She flinched, as his obvious confusion turned to open fury before her terrified eyes.

"Then you lied to me," he accused her, his voice shaking.

"No, I did not lie. You heard what you wanted to hear."

Now it was his fists that opened and closed as he visibly fought to control himself. She winced at the sight.

"If I cannot force you to marry me yet," he gasped, through his heavy breathing, "then at least I can wash the lies out of your mouth."

For an instant, she wondered how he planned to do that. Then both of their heads turned towards the bar of lemon soap from the bedside table, wet as it was from washing, as the meaning grew all too clear to her. It became even more evident as he dragged her to the table.

Seeing his intention, she opened her mouth to deny once again that she had ever lied, but he silenced her too quickly by shoving the bar of soap between her lips. Then he scraped it against the back of her teeth, leaving enough of it grated there to fill her mouth with the sour, bitter taste, which was a shocking counterpart to the delightful fragrance.

"Will you lie to me again?" he asked.

"I never lied at all," she said, as she spit out the tiny, slimy pieces as fast as her tongue could find them.

This time, she had to watch in horror as, still clutching her arm, he filled the glass with water and ran the bar of soap around it until it was filled with suds. She tried frantically to pull her head away, as he seized her hair, pulled her head back and then forced the glass through her teeth. When he had poured a fourth of its contents through them, he held her lips closed over them and shook her head up and down, making sure that her entire mouth was coated with the hateful mixture.

After he finally pulled her head to the basin and let her empty her mouth after ten endless seconds, it was only so he could fill it again, just as she had feared he would. He followed the procedure twice again yet before the glass was empty.

"When you finally do marry me, it will be as an honest woman," he said.

While she could not stop her face from twisting in revulsion, she forced herself to wait until he had slammed out the door, even though he delayed his departure long enough to remove all the weapons from the wall.

"With a temper like yours, who knows what you might do?" he growled as he did so.

After what seemed an eternity of tasting soap and perfume, she still forced herself to wait until she heard the door lock behind him before she grabbed at the towel and pitcher.

Frantically, she poured more tooth powder on the

towel and scrubbed at her tongue and teeth, rinsed her mouth with cups of water, then rubbed and rinsed them again. Her only relief came from realizing that he had been too angry to tie her up again, although she feared that he might return at any moment to do it.

\* \* \* \*

He was feeling too remorseful to do any such thing. He had lost her again, thanks to his damned temper and impatience, which were driving her straight into his rival's arms. And why should she not prefer Captain O'Neill? Doesn't he always make a great effort to be pleasant, with that damned Irish charm of his? Hasn't he a smile and a joke for every occasion? Mary must be remembering that compared to O'Neill, he had given her so few smiles and so many tears.

\* \* \* \*

In the terrible temper he was in, Ran might have been pleased to know that O'Neill had run out of jokes and smiles and was close to despair.

What a time for the Prince to be off somewhere enjoying a well-earned rest. Sure, and this was the famous luck of the Irish: all bad. Nevertheless, after he had spent two days asking, and bribing, every servant who was left at Kensington, he had finally learned that the Prince had gone incognito to the resort at Bath.

Yet more bribes led him to a private room, where

the Prince was enjoying the naturally warm waters seated between Kitty Clive and Peg Livingston, with one royal arm around each. Since his hands were thus occupied, Peg was holding his champagne glass to his lips.

Glancing down into the water, O'Neill noticed that the honey-colored hair on Kitty Clive's head had not been maintained by paint, as his own mistress's golden curls had been. Kitty's tresses matched the curls that sprouted below her waist, where no paint was likely to reach them. As for Prince Charlie, his cock showed that their nude bathing together had left him ready for an even more intimate encounter. His Royal Highness may not be an Irish rebel, Francis thought with a secret smile, but he was still a hard man. The way the women squirmed against him showed that they were equally well prepared.

"Captain O'Neill!" the Prince said. "You must be warm in that wool jacket. Why don't you take it off so you can join us? You can sit right down next to Kitty here."

"And then our Prince will be outnumbered by us Irish," she said, glancing up with a smile that openly seconded the invitation.

"Now, Kitty, our Prince is Irish too now," her fellow actress reproached her. "At least he's got a good Irish heart. And other things as well, I am sure." They all laughed at this, thanks partly to the magnum of champagne that they had opened an hour before, which was almost empty now. Their merry mood would not last much longer.

"It's the Scots you have to think about now," he

answered. "Ran MacGregor has abducted Miss Marvellous and he's holding her at Blenheim, where he's trying to force her to marry him."

The Prince's arms froze on the actresses' bare shoulders. "Force? But why? I thought she was very fond of him."

"And so she was, until he told her to use her powers against the Campbells," he lied.

The actresses moved away from Prince Charlie's anger, which was royal to behold. Water splashed with his rage.

"Holy Christ! He wants to take my witch from me and use her to start a clan feud? As if that were not bad enough, she is also my ward. Who does that Highland savage think he is?"

He thinks he is your most loyal supporter, after only myself, and he has proven it many times over, the captain thought, but saw no advantage in saying so.

The water splashed over the edge of the pool in a virtual tidal wave, as the Prince sprang out of the marble tub.

"I will have him arrested."

"That might not be so simple," O'Neill informed him. "Isn't Blenheim and its property now MacGregor territory, following Scottish law?"

Francis had the satisfaction of seeing that the Prince was too angry for legal niceties.

"He'll follow my law, soon enough," the Prince answered grimly. Bowing briefly at the two women, he said, "Ladies, I will have my guards escort you back to London. Francis, you and I are going to



Blenheim."

With his back turned as he reached for his towel, he did not see that the captain had bowed his head to hide his smile.

\* \* \* \*

Mary jumped when she heard the knock on the door, but soon calmed herself. It was not Ran MacGregor's hand she heard. The sound was not that loud and harsh and angry, so she knew she did not have to fear being tied up again, or worse.

It was Sir Alexander's voice she heard. She hastily pulled on her gown and petticoats before she invited him to come in and heard the lock click open in reply.

"I have brought you pen and ink and a whole box of paper," he said, holding them out to her. "I don't want you to feel like a prisoner, sitting here with nothing to do."

"But I am a prisoner," she retorted, enjoying his embarrassment. "If you don't want me to feel like one, why don't you set me free?"

"Because you are my nephew's bride," he answered reasonably.

"I do not want to be his bride, and so you should let me go."

To his credit, she thought, the old laird looked uncomfortable at that. He struggled for an answer before he finally said, "Well, you young people have your notions. But you and he are so perfectly suited for each other, I am sure that you will see it soon." With that, he patted her hand before he turned to go.

"And thank you for bringing the paper and pen to me," she said. "I would have gone mad sitting here with nothing to do."

"I am sure you will find good use for them," he answered eagerly, and at once she knew what the use was supposed to be. For fear of losing the precious writing supplies, she stopped herself from telling him that she would not and could not write down what the future would bring, since she had changed the present. She would put down everything she could remember about Scottish history, she thought, and that was a great deal, even though she would have to be careful to stop around 1720.

The pen and paper gave her an idea of her own.

"Sir Alexander," she said, "could you do one more favor for me? My friends in Philadelphia are accustomed to getting my messages. They may become alarmed and even go to the royal governor if they do not hear from me." She noticed, with satisfaction, that he seemed uncomfortable at the second prospect.

"So could you ask one of the servants to take my advertisement to the *London Gazette*?" she went on. "I will be glad to pay you—as soon as I can get to my money, that is."

"No need for that," he assured her hastily. "I would be glad to do this favor for you."

And you will study the message carefully first, she thought, but it will mean nothing to you. As quickly as she could, she wrote the words out and handed the paper to him with a grateful smile.

Indeed, as soon as he was in the hallway he did

scrutinize the writing, just as she had expected him to, before deciding that nothing could be more innocent. And indeed, he reflected happily, nothing could show that she was becoming reconciled, and even more, to her current condition that the words she had written there:

*Miss Mary Marvellous wishes to tell her friends in Philadelphia that she is now visiting with the MacGregors of Glenmoriston in Blenheim Palace, where all is as merry as MAYDAY And she especially wishes her dear uncle James Cavendish to make the usual preparations for the coming holiday of MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY.*

\* \* \* \*

The answer should have been instantaneous, since Cavendish was supposed to have received her message two hundred and sixty years to the day after she had sent it. Even if it took him years to send help, via a newly-constructed entropy-reversal device, she would receive it within hours. Instead, there was nothing for four long days. After the first three, she realized that she was on her own.

The fourth brought a new dilemma, greater than any she had faced before.

She realized that something was happening, even more crucial than everything that had already taken place, when one of the maids burst into her room with a newly-purchased gown draped over both of her ample arms. It was fit for the most elegant occasion.

She realized how important the event would be

when an abigail took her downstairs for bathing. She had few doubts that, whatever the day would bring, it would include yet another attempt at forcing a wedding.

For a moment, she had been confused by the fact that the proffered gown was not bridal white, then remembered that, even before her time-travel training, she had known that the white wedding gown was a fairly recent invention. Before the nineteenth century, girls had gotten married in the best dresses they owned, and this one certainly qualified for that category. Now she could only pray that the would-be bridegroom would not react so violently this time when his efforts failed.

She had to save her strength for the coming encounter, as she realized, without attempting to resist in a way that could only bring trouble for a servant. With a sigh, she allowed the girl to help drape the heavy fabric over her head: deep forest green brocade heavily embroidered with white roses and a row of matching bows from her waist to her bodice. Then she stood still while the girl pulled the laces tight behind her and arranged the train that fell from her shoulders to the ground.

"Now will you let me comb your hair, Madame?"

"It certainly needs it," Mary ruefully agreed, as she sat on the bed and turned her head. She winced as the girl pulled her comb through her tangled brown curls, but sat silently until the abigail had finished arranging them and fastened the white silk rose on top.

"Must I go to the chapel now?" Mary asked, as the

girl stood back to admire her handiwork. "You will have to lead me there. I am afraid I could never find it again, with all these rooms and hallways." And I don't want to get him angry in advance by making him come here to find me, she added silently.

"You are not going to the chapel, Madame. You are wanted in the entrance hall, to await our Prince's visit."

As the meaning of the words reached her, she had to stop herself from literally jumping for joy. Could this be the fine hand of James Cavendish in motion at last, reaching out from the twenty-first century, she wondered. More likely, she realized, it was the fine Irish hand of Francis O'Neill, which always seemed to be stirring some pot.

Now she moved quickly towards the door, trusting her Bonnie Charlie to rescue her. When she reached the great hall, though, she wished she had stopped long enough to ask the abigail to fetch her a shawl. Alexander Pope's description of Blenheim seemed too apt now: It is a residence, but not a home. And the residence was freezing.

With ceilings rising sixty-seven feet high, the room would have been virtually impossible to heat even in Mary's own era, when even an eleven-foot ceiling was lofty. The white stone arches and their pillars increased the impression of chill. Following the Corinthian order, which was the most elaborate of all, the fluted columns were crowned with acanthus leaves. This made them much less suitable for an inside room than they were for the front entrance, where they also towered over the passers-by. While

all of the rooms in Blenheim had been built to impress the visitor, this one was downright intimidating. And it was freezing, despite the heavy brocade she wore. She clutched her thin arms to warm them.

When Ran MacGregor and his uncle strode through the marble archway, she noted that they did not seem intimidated at all. No wonder, she thought, since they lived here. Then she decided that no surroundings would have awed these MacGregor lairds: They had merely accepted them as their due.

Seeing her shiver, Ran took off his tartan and wrapped it around her shoulders.

"But you will be cold now," she objected.

"I am a Highland man," he told her, which meant, of course, that he was impervious to the temperature around him. Right now, he seemed very grim one, as he waited for the Prince Regent. And if he had not been a Highland man, she realized, he could even have been described as looking concerned or even worried at the prospect. And with good reason, she thought. She could hardly wait to hear him trying to explain his actions to her guardian.

They did not have long to wait.

The footman had barely started to announce him—getting no further than "His Royal Highness, Charles Edward Stuart, Prince of—" before Prince Charlie's boots were clattering over the black-and-white checkerboard marble floor, followed by Captain O'Neill's.

"What in the Holy Name of Christ is going on here?" the Prince demanded, as he strode towards the marble archway. It now loomed above the two

MacGregor men, who towered, in turn, over the slim young lass between them. "Do I hear that you have abducted my legal ward and are trying to force her to marry you?"

His full lips were set in a firm, angry line and his great brown eyes fairly flashed with fury as he went on, "Have I nothing else to think about but my subjects trying to ravish the young lady in my care? Do you know what kind of insult this is to me? I will be the laughingstock of Europe, my enemies will be bold enough to rise against me and we will be fighting the Second War of Restoration all over again!"

"Well, Your Royal Highness, I do not think it is as bad as all that," Sir Alexander replied. "We all acted somewhat hastily, it is true, but only because the loving young couple did not want to take up your valuable time with their little matters."

"With the little matter of my ward being ravished in my own land?" By now the Prince's white-and-rose Highland complexion had turned a furious red.

"Well, Your Royal Highness," the old laird continued, more hesitantly. "Blenheim could be called the MacGregor lands—in fact, it must be, since Your Royal Highness was gracious enough to grant it to us. Our laws apply here."

It took the Prince several moments to collect himself enough even to gasp with fury.

"All of these lands are the King's lands, my royal father reigns over all of them and right now I am ruling as his regent, in his place."

As he spoke, Mary glanced at Francis O'Neill and

saw the triumphant smile that he was trying to hide on his respectfully lowered face. A brave man, yes, she decided, just as Ran MacGregor called him, but not an honest or a kind one.

"By the Good God, you violate my laws, or my ward, and I will see you all in prison before tomorrow," the Prince cried.

Now it was the Young Glenmoriston who answered him "Do you think our men would arrest us? And do you think they would let you out of here to bring the ones who would?"

Even Mary gasped in horror at this treasonable threat. The Prince did not even try to speak, until he had overcome his rage. Then he barely managed to force the words out. "Are you daring now to threaten your prince?" he demanded. "Is this the famed MacGregor loyalty? And are you the young man who said he would follow me to London, even if we were the only two who went there? Do you threaten to hold me prisoner now?"

"The MacGregors do not threaten—" the Young Glenmoriston began. Stunned, the Prince waited for the inevitable end of the sentence, "— they act."

And then, an instant before her captor would have spoken the words that might well have sparked a civil war, Mary Marvellous grasped his muscular arm in both of her long, slim hands.

"Why do we talk about making threats?" she cried. "We should all be glad now that our Prince is with us on this happy occasion. And since he is my legal guardian, we are all asking him to honor us with his consent, even though, with his kingdom to rule, he



could hardly be expected to worry himself with such a small matter as that."

"Are you sure you are willing to marry him, lass?" Charles Edward asked. "Because if you are not, there is not a man will dare to lay hands on you without facing his Prince's anger."

"I am more than willing!" she assured him. "We were waiting only in the hopes of gaining your consent."

"Then I am willing to give it," he said, and reached his hand out to congratulate the bridegroom, who was still scowling as he grasped Charles Edward's hand in turn.

"And aren't you the lucky one, having a bride who will do so much to keep the peace between friends?" O'Neill crowed, knowing that, for the moment, his only option was a strategic retreat.

"Then let us send for Father David again!" Sir Alexander crowed, fairly rubbing his hands with glee. Even before he had time to nod his head at his men in a silent command, three of them were out the door and running towards their horses.

\* \* \* \*

"And shall we all go into the chapel to wait for him?" Mary asked brightly. "It really is terribly cold here. And we can sit in the pews while we wait."

"Anything to oblige my bonnie bride," MacGregor said, trying to grin like the happy bridegroom he was supposed to be—rather than one whose bride had agreed to have him in order to serve another man.

To his surprise, he found it did not matter much that that other man was the Prince whom he himself had followed with his last ounce of devotion. He wished only that his little Mary had taken him with all her heart—not, he admitted to himself, that he had cared that much about her heart when he had first abducted, raped and abused her.

If he had not loved her before, he did now—if only for the courage she had shown in defying him. Alone in his stronghold, surrounded by his loyal men, she had still held out against him, just as Scotland had stood against England. How could he not love her for that? How could he explain it, so that she would not consider him an even bigger fool than he was.

He must not think of that now, he told himself sternly. He must play the happy bridegroom.

The Prince interrupted his thoughts.

"I would speak to you privately for a moment, MacGregor," he said. Leading him to one of the smaller white stone arches that stood in the center of the hallway, he asked bluntly, "Have you ever struck her? Because I know that she resisted marrying you, until I came. I am also sure that she did it to prevent contention between us, which is all the more reason why I want you to be happy with her. So be honest with me, Man, for both your sakes."

Now it was MacGregor's turn to feel his wind burned face turning a brighter red as he lowered his head.

"I did not, Sir, but came close to it."

Prince Charlie said, with understanding. "They can drive us to it. We can smack them for other reasons,

though, and that I have done myself. If we stop with pummeling their backsides and do it only in sport, then just make sure the game does not go too far for her liking."

With a broad wink and a wider smile, His Royal Highness clapped his friend on the shoulder, gave him a farewell grin and strode towards the chapel. About to follow, the bridegroom was stopped by Father David's arrival.

The young priest also asked a private word with MacGregor, after the Prince had left him. With a sigh, MacGregor led the cleric, in turn, to the private area beneath the smaller arch.

This was no pleasant matter, though, as the young Highlander realized, when he saw the priest's thin, pale face staring sadly up at him.

"I have heard things," he began.

"What things," the young laird interrupted, instantly wary.

"Things about your lovely bride."

"What things?" he repeated stubbornly.

"Things that, perhaps, I should question her about. Not to take any action, of course," he added quickly, under the Young Glenmoriston's frightening glare. "But merely to question her, so that she can clear herself, before I even think of mentioning it to anyone else, you understand." Lowering his voice even further, he said, "Witchcraft is still a serious crime."

"I understand you very well," the Young Glenmoriston answered, with a forced smile so warm and genial, he wondered if it would have done credit to O'Neill himself. Still grinning with his teeth

clenched, he added, "Now you understand me, Priest. If you ever dare to mention that matter to anyone else ever again, Lady Mary MacGregor included, I will burn your church to the ground and make sure that you are burning in it. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly well!" the priest assured him, after a horrified moment, when he had not, in fact, been able to believe his ears. "But do you dare to threaten your priest?"

"Do you dare to threaten your laird?" Ran demanded, glaring down at him from above his powerful folded arms.

"Well, no educated person believes in witchcraft nowadays," the cleric quickly decided. "I do not even know what made me mention it. And if there were such things as witches—which there are not, of course—then they would not dare to set foot in a chapel."

"Well, Miss Marvellous is there now," Ran assured him. "So shall we go to join her?"

\* \* \* \*

Mary moved towards Ran eagerly as he entered the chapel, even while Sir Alexander called out anxiously that it was, as everyone knew, bad luck for the bride and groom to see each other before the wedding. Noting her bridegroom's glare of annoyance, she quickly suggested that they could talk to each other behind the altar, standing on opposite sides, where they could hear but not see each other clearly. She would stand beside the Duchess of Marlborough, as

she suggested brightly, while her bridegroom took his appropriate place beside the heroic duke.

There, staring at him in the dim light behind the marble statues, she said, "So, it seems that I will marry you after all."

Hidden from his sight that way, she felt almost bold enough to go on. "It is what I always wanted," she would tell him, "because I have always loved you, even before we met perhaps, and centuries after you were born. Now it seems I must do it for the Prince's sake, but that is only another reason for me to serve him."

But, once again, he spoke first.

"It seems I am in your debt," he said, with stunted formality. "You could have caused us great trouble with the Prince, and you have saved us instead. But I will not repay you by troubling you more.

"Tomorrow I will go to Oxford and find a tutor there. After a month or so we can get an annulment, and for good reason, too, because the marriage will not be consummated." In the twist to his voice, she could almost hear his bitter smile as he went on, "We will both be able to swear to that, and our servants will, too, because we will have separate bedrooms in opposite wings of the palace. And you have been there long enough to know that that is very far away indeed."

"What about my powers?" she asked him.

"That was madness, too." She could hear the faint smile in his voice as he went on, "You are so stubborn that I could never force you to use them for me, husband or not. I could not even force you to marry

me."

Glancing up at the Marlboroughs as though to summon their courage, she replied, in a timid tone, "We could still try to be man and wife." The whole world seemed to stop for her as she awaited his answer.

"No, I am not so modern as that," he said. "I tried to marry once for my clan's advantage. I will not do that again."

She had to grasp then at the marble skirt, to keep herself steady. At the same time, she thanked whatever deities might be lurking there that they had stopped her from making a fool of herself by confessing her love to someone who had just announced that he did not want her. She knew she should be grateful that he had stopped her from blurting out her feelings and thus disgracing herself completely. Instead, she felt only a great, sick emptiness.

"We've left you alone there long enough," Sir Alexander's voice reached her, and she could practically hear him rubbing his hands with glee. "Now you two lovers must come forward to be married. His Royal Highness cannot stay much longer."

Thankful, now, for the numbness that kept her from suffering, she let the old laird lead her to the front of the altar, where she stood staring up at the marble idols. Prince Charles came to stand beside her, as her guardian. Then Ran took his place at her opposite side, and the pain of her loss started burning through the cold void of her feelings, as she realized

again how handsome he was.

Knowing, as she did, that he thought she was marrying him only for the Prince's sake, she wondered what he would have said if she had told him that she hardly knew that Charles Edward Stuart was there at all. He might just as well have been a family servant, pressed into this ceremonial role, for all she cared. No doubt, she decided, Ran MacGregor would have pitied her for a fool.

Father David interrupted her thoughts as he took his place facing them.

Then she noted that the priest was looking over her shoulder, beyond the bridal party, towards the chapel door. She turned to see that another guest was joining them, as the footman announced Lady Violet's arrival. In spite of the circumstances of their last parting, Lady Violet greeted Ran warmly, the past apparently forgiven. Kissing him on both cheeks, she enveloped him with cold air and rosewater.

"The best of good wishes to you both!" she exclaimed, grasping his hands. "I have not had time to get you a gift, but that will come later, I promise you."

"That is not necessary," he assured her. "Having you here for the wedding is more than enough." Then his smile faded as he asked, "But how did you know to come here? We only decided on it ourselves less than an hour ago."

Rather than answer, she turned towards the Prince, who was coming forward to join them.

"Lady Violet," he exclaimed, holding out both his hands to raise her as she curtsied before him. "We are

very pleased to have you here."

"You may not be very soon, Your Royal Highness," she answered. "I fear that we cannot allow this wedding to proceed, because this couple must not have any children."

"You mean that they cannot?" Father David asked, reflecting the confusion he saw all about him. "They are not too closely related to marry. As far as I know, they are not related at all."

"I mean that they may not, Father. In fact, I cannot allow this crime to continue any further."

"No crime is being committed," Prince Charlie explained. "While you must not have heard the good news, Miss Marvellous has consented to the marriage." When he turned to smile at the bride, though, he saw that her face had gone pale with fear.

His voice grew harder, as the full meaning of Lady Violet's words struck him. "And what do you mean that you cannot permit it. Who are you, to decide what can be allowed or not allowed in my kingdom?" His voice rose even higher in anger as he went on, "Do you dare to give orders to my subjects, in my presence?"

"I do, Your Royal Highness," she went on respectfully.

His head turned automatically to the MacGregor men, who started moving towards her. Facing them with her wintry new smile, she reached for the timepiece at her bosom.



## Chapter the Eighth

*In Which Our Heroine  
is in Grave Danger*

“Explain yourself, Madame,” the Prince commanded.

“Merely open the chapel door, and you can see for yourself.”

With a nod, Sir Alexander silently ordered his men to do so.

For a moment, they were all too stunned to respond to the sight that greeted them beyond the portal. Then Father David crossed himself devoutly and most of the others followed him.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph and all the saints preserve us,” breathed that good Catholic atheist Francis O’Neill, as the priest expressed the same sentiments in Latin.

A short aisle led through the darkness to a giant egg made of some silvery metal, but with windows along the sides, revealing cushioned benches within. It seemed like some demonic carriage made to carry them off on a journey to the worst possible

destination.

"Where are the horses?" Father David asked, his voice trembling.

"You know the answer as well as I do," Ran answered harshly. "This devil's carriage has no need of them."

Standing beside him, Mary took comfort in the feeling of his powerful arm beside her face. But she felt him trembling as a hidden door slid silently open and they were bidden to enter by a voice like a clanging bell.

At that sound, the priest quickly changed his prayer to the Act of Contrition, in a tone that showed he was miserably certain that his entire flock was in urgent need of the Last Rites, with this coach to Purgatory waiting for them. In horror, he glanced at Mary, but lowered his eyes quickly when Ran MacGregor glowered back at him over her head. Purgatory might be near at hand, but the Young Glenmoriston's anger was closer.

The Glenmoriston men instinctively moved to stand between that devil's coach and their Bonnie Prince, grasping the claymore swords in their belts.

These men had never seen a subway, Mary thought. Even the railroad is twenty-five years in the future. Yet they stand before this hellish vehicle, thinking only to protect their Prince, while their leader stands by his own guilty bride. Barbarians they may be, but I only wish I were worthy to stand with them.

Lady Violet must have shared some of her feelings.

"Your Prince is in no danger," she assured them, in

an almost kindly tone. "Neither are his loyal men."

"But I am," Mary Marvellous said softly, glancing into her former friend's cold eyes. "All I can do now is beg you not to make these brave men suffer with me."

But none were more gallant than the man they served. Charles Edward Stuart was striding towards the carriage now, determined to be the first to face whatever waited inside. The Young Glenmoriston raced from Mary and stepped past his Prince to enter the cabin before him, so that any demons lurking there might devour him first. Before His Royal Highness could protest, the other Highlanders were pushing past them both, equally determined to shield their young laird.

Mary pushed her way to the front, to stand beside her bridegroom in the carriage. Gazing through the window before them, she saw that a metal bar ran beneath the coach, leading into infinite darkness. The sight frightened even her, so that she could imagine what it was doing to the others. She was as glad as any of them to hear that the priest was still murmuring his prayers.

When the last entered, the door slid silently shut.

"Passengers, please be seated," the metal voice clanged.

"We will not sit in our Prince's presence," Sir Alexander announced.

"Sit down, man!" Charles Edward cried. "We are all in this adventure together." He threw himself into the seat before the window and gazed down at the silvery rail. "Who knows where this adventure is

leading us?" he asked. "It is sure to be a place we have never seen before."

Who else in the world will call this an adventure? Mary wondered. She had done right, then, no matter what they did to her for it. He was a Bonnie Prince indeed. And now that the time had finally come, she knew the song was true: "*What can I more, than die for Royal Charlie?*" Although, she realized, she would much rather have lived with the Young Glenmoriston.

The coach door slid open before them a moment later, leaving them an instant to imagine the unknown horror inside. Instead, they were confronted by a terror that was all too familiar to them—much more, in fact, than it was to Mary.

Even she could recognize it, though, from the movies. They were staring into an English courtroom. Three stern judges glared down at them in their long scarlet robes and curled white horsehair wings. The gilded British lion-and-unicorn coat of arms stood behind them, gleaming against the oak-paneled walls.

To make the scene even more frightening, no barristers were there to represent them: only three grim men sitting in judgment. Yet the prisoners had no choice but to enter the courtroom, because the vehicle door was sliding silently closed behind them.

Obviously designed to intimidate, the scene did not entirely achieve its purpose, except where the Mary was concerned. Glancing around, she saw that the Prince was indignant, Sir Alexander outraged, Father David awestruck, Francis scornful and Ran angrily defiant. They had dealt with English 'justice'

before. His men stared at him, determined to follow their chief's example, their hands still clutching their sword hilts.

"Miss Frances Townley, approach the bench," the chief justice said.

"Is that your real name?" Ran asked. She nodded before she headed for the bench, as quickly as her side hoops would allow.

"You are charged with traveling through time in order to change the past," the judge declared, glowering down at her from beneath his bushy white brows.

A wave of understanding, even relief, washed over the group. Not a witch, then, but a time traveler.

"There's no papal edict against time travel," Father David cried, in obvious relief. "Believe me, Your Honors, I have tried to remember every one I have ever heard of. Therefore, our friend has not committed any sin. If you will only let me take the stand, I will be pleased to swear to that."

"Silence!" the chief justice gaveled him into silence. More courteously, he added, "We thank you for your offer, Father, but we will not need your testimony. We do not follow Church law here."

The Prince Regent obviously felt differently.

"So I don't owe my throne to the black arts after all, but modern science," he exclaimed. "And my dreams must have been sent to show me what might have been without Mary. How can I let my brave Miss Mary suffer for changing that?"

Before his men could stop him, he was striding towards the judges.

"These charges are now dismissed!" he cried. "As Prince Regent of Britain, I pardon her in advance for all her crimes, as you call them, but I will reward her actions by creating her the Duchess of Greenwich. And I am now dissolving this court."

To his open-mouthed outrage, he was answered by a crashing gavel.

"Your law does not govern here," the chief justice told him, glaring down over the bench. "Be silent, Charles Edward Stuart."

The Prince's face turned crimson with rage as he struggled for an answer. Turning away from him, the judge went on, "Violet, please give your evidence."

When she took her place before them, her silk skirts rustling around her, her firm, steady tone soon made it obvious that she had performed this function many times before.

"I am Violet, a Preservatrix, charged with defending the past," she began. "Four months ago, the guardians of the shielded records noted a change in the unshielded ones that they constantly monitor beside them, to see if the past has been altered. Sure enough, the newspaper reports of the Battle of Culloden were replaced by accounts of the Prince's arrival in London.

Shaking her long blond curls in disapproval, she went on, "The guardians started cheering, even those officers like Ginsberg and Battaglia who were not of Scottish descent. They should all be reprimanded for unprofessional conduct.

"The altered records also showed us a correspondence between John Wesley and Benjamin

Franklin. The great Dr. Franklin deduced the truth in a very impressive way, even with the slim evidence he had at hand.

"Naturally, our proof is much stronger than his. First there was her name itself: Mary Marvellous, a heroine with supernatural powers, as our own defendant doubtless fancied herself to be. Then there was her mayday distress signal, which, of course, we intercepted at once, to use as evidence against her co-conspirator, James Cavendish.

"We found many smaller matters, too, like her offering five hundred pounds per month for a maid, an incredible sum at that time, her unquestioning belief in press freedom and her knowledge of modern security measures, like keeping would-be assassins away from the windows when the Prince rode into London.

"But even all this was not conclusive, since we could put it all down to coincidence. She might, indeed, have been merely announcing a Mayday holiday celebration, for instance. Therefore, I made more conclusive tests, like inviting the Duke of Cumberland to her house, where she immediately denounced him as Butcher Cumberland. No one would have done that without knowing of his atrocities after Culloden, where he earned that name, by slaughtering prisoners and civilians alike."

"That is what I saw in my dream!" Prince Charles cried. "Then you should not be trying her, but rewarding her instead."

"I agree, of course, that Miss Marvellous—Miss Townley—did well to spare the world from Butcher

Cumberland," she answered, without turning to look at the Prince. "But that does not excuse her crime. Most of our defendants are acting from such noble motives—the others, who want to invest in stocks that will soar in value, for instance, are few and far between. We convict them all the same, and I am afraid that your honor must do the same to her. Who knows what the results could be, even from such a popular change as this?"

"No, we agree, people cannot be allowed to change history whenever they please," the chief justice agreed, with a sigh. "So, Miss Mary Marvellous, have you anything to say before we pronounce our verdict?"

"The only thing I can possibly say," she answered, in tones as grim as his own, as she turned her face up towards him. "God save King Jamie and his bonnie son!"

She turned when she saw that the judge was looking over her head, and saw that Glenmoriston was pushing his way through the crowd to stand beside her. "And not even that true king would dare to pass a verdict on the Lady of Glenmoriston," he shouted. "So I have an even shorter speech to make. *Claymores!*"

Obedient to his word, his men drew their swords.

"Guards!" the chief justice shouted, into a machine that distorted his voice into another metallic clang.

"No, Ran!" cried his bride, clutching his powerful upper arm with both of her slim hands. "God only knows how far we are in the future and what kind of weapons they have. We don't even know what kind



of creatures they are or what they really look like. I think they are appearing this way just to frighten us, and as far as I am concerned they are succeeding. They could make your entire clan vanish in a burst of light. I can't let you do that for me."

"You do not let me do or not do anything, Woman," he roared, easily pulling his arm away.

"What about the wives and children who are waiting back at Blenheim for them?" she pleaded desperately.

"They would spit on cowards. These men are no such thing, and they heard my command."

"And the man who fails to obey that call is no kinsman of mine!" Sir Alexander shouted in turn, from the back of the courtroom. "But for the man who is broken in this cause, my lands and fortune will be his own, just as they were for the ones who were wounded in fighting for our Prince."

"They could kill the Prince along with you!" Mary wailed.

"Would your Prince want to live, if he refused to defend his most loyal lady?" Charles Edward cried, brandishing his pistol. "My weapon may not make a man disappear, but it can shoot him down, right enough."

O'Neill's voice was as soft and gentle as ever while he uncrossed his arms and reached for the gun in his belt. "Well, now, as we Irish would say, 'Is this a private fight, Gentleman, or can anyone join in?'"

Just as they had done at the theater, the warriors formed a protective circle around their Prince. He impatiently pushed through them. "Get out of my

way!" he shouted. "I will stand as I have always stood, at the head of my men. No one will take my place there."

"But your precious life must be protected," his Irish captain said, reaching for his arm, to lead him to safety.

"Back, O'Neill, I order you," he shouted, pulling his arm away. The Irishman could only bow and obey, taking his place beside his Scottish allies, who opened their ranks long enough to make room.

Shoving his bride behind him, Ran stood at the ready before his soldiers, directly behind his Prince.

"Please, Ran!" Mary begged her Highlander one last time, grasping his arm again. He wheeled around and she stared up into his glowering face.

"I don't want you and the others to suffer for what I did," she said. "I am only thankful that the judges knew I was acting alone and that they have no quarrel with you."

"No quarrel with me?" Ran demanded, folding his arms across his barrel chest. "How can you speak so foolishly, as to say that they have no quarrel with me, when they have one with my bride."

"You have no reason to marry me now," she reminded him. "I have no powers to help anyone, even myself."

"The Hell with your powers!" he told her. "You are my bride because I love you, as I have since the first time I saw you, and you half frozen to death with the ice in your hair, because you had come running to save your Prince.

For a long moment she drank in his words,

thinking that they would be her only nourishment in the long dark hungry days to come.

"But why didn't you tell me so?"

"Because," he answered, with a great show of patience, "I did not think you wanted me, the way you refused to marry me. But you were always my bride all the same, even if you did not know it, and I would fight all the angels in Heaven for you."

"If you had only told me so, we could have enjoyed those last few days together," she complained, folding her arms in a defiant gesture that unconsciously echoed his own.

"Well, I am telling you now," he shouted down at her. "Must you always cross me? No wonder you drive me to play the madman."

"If you don't mind my saying so," Francis put in gently at their shoulder, "you are both playing the madman now. If I were you, MacGregor, and she my bride, I would not waste my last few moments arguing with her."

"He's right, you know," she said. The Young Glenmoriston nodded ruefully. Ignoring all the others, he pulled his bride into his arms and pressed his lips down on hers. She stretched her own slim arms up as far as they would go, to encircle his shoulders.

They all turned as the courtroom door slid open to admit the Preservers.

Dressed all in black these guardsmen were, with black metal visors over their faces and weapons that looked like black beehives in their hands. The Prince and his followers could only stare in terror. It was

Charles Edward who collected himself first and strode towards his enemies.

"Villains, will you shoot your Prince?" he shouted into their masked faces.

"If you did kill him, you could let the others live, even Miss Mary included," Lady Violet pointed out, in her coolest tone. "His followers would not be so quick to fight for old King Jamie, so the Hanovers could come back after all, and history would go right back on track."

"Shoot me, then," said the Bonnie Prince, standing firm and commanding before her. "You see the Garter medal pinned over my heart, so use that as your target. Shoot me down like the traitors you are, but let my brave men live and my gallant Lady Mary, too."

While all the others still stood staring, Ran MacGregor pushed his bride behind him again and turned to shout at his men, "Will you let these traitors threaten our Prince before your very faces? Claymores!"

For an instant, the Highlanders stared in justified terror at the invaders' weapons. Then they raised their swords in a flash of steel.

"Hail, Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee," Father David intoned beside them.

"We don't have a chance in the world, do we?" Francis mused, as he primed his pistol. "Now, how could any Irishman stay out of a fight like that?" Shaking his dark curly head and sighing, he added, "But I would it were for Ireland."

"I am sure you do," Violet replied cheerfully. "But failing that, you will die for your Prince and his loyal

servant. So, Preservers, put your weapons up. They have passed the test."

The MacGregor men stared suspiciously, fearing a trick, with their swords still in their hands, until their enemies had holstered their own weapons with their black-gloved hands. Mary could barely keep from smiling as she heard some of the MacGregor men muttering to the others that these invaders were cowards who dared not stand against Highlanders.

Having seen their weapons, Charles Edward knew better. This was obvious to Mary when he closed his eyes in relief. It soon gave way to outrage, when he had had time to consider Violet's words.

"This trial was a test?" he shouted. "You dared to test your Prince?"

"And we are all very glad you passed it," she assured him, as the men behind her removed their visors to reveal their grinning faces. The Highlanders accepted the tribute as their due, with gracious nods of their heads. Cowards the strangers may be, they assured each other, but they could still show respect to their betters.

"The changes that Mary Marvellous made will bring nothing but good to the world," Violet said, ignoring the din around her.

Still suspicious, Mary said, "But you told the judges that history must not be changed."

"That's mostly true in science fiction," she responded, with a shrug and a smile. Turning to the Prince, she said, "I especially congratulate Your Royal Highness on his choice of a bride."

"I will give your good wishes to the Czarina

Elizabeth," he said, although he was obviously wondering why Lady Violet had chosen that moment to send them.

Mary smiled secretly, knowing the reason perfectly well. The Czarina had had no children in other reality, despite her long-term lover, so there was no reason to think she would do so now. The effects of King Charles III's reign, good or bad, would probably end with his death.

Violet interrupted her thoughts by turning to her with a slight bow and saying, "We noticed that you tried to follow the law of minimal interference, and that was in your favor, too. You arrived on the very day of the Derby Decision, even though it meant riding through the cold all night, and you refused to try to influence the Prince, even for the worthy cause of religious toleration.

"You even knew enough to decline to meet your great-great-great-great and so forth grandfather, and that showed very sound instincts. On the other hand, you warned me against using mercury water, which was a strictly private matter, and that was very touching to me.

"We still prefer to leave history unaltered, no matter how small the changes will be, unless they will also be positive. Your lover's ridiculous call for a claymore charge tipped the balance for you. You showed courage, honor and loyalty that must have a positive influence on anything that happens from now on.

"There is only one thing we must insist on, though," she said, turning her eyes to Ran. "You two

must not have any children. Any offspring that you two produced would be sure to alter history."

"And how are we to arrange that?" Ran asked.

"I believe that Mary has seen to it already."

Mary looked down at the pointed tips of her buckled shoes, hoping she was not blushing.

"I know that women can do such things, with herbs and such," he said.

"Herbs and other things," said Violet. "But I think you had better leave women's knowledge to women."

"Gladly," he agreed, with obvious relief at hearing the subject closed.

He knows I can have no babies, even if I want to, thought Mary. Yet he still wants me for his bride. How much more could he love me? For the first time, she regretted that she could not give him children, no matter what the risk to herself. Then she realized that she was trembling at the thought of how much more she would have lost, if the Preservers had not come, to make him prove how much he loved her.

"But I'm still shaking," Mary confessed. "I was really afraid that the least I could hope for was a life on a slave planet."

"Slave planet?" Violet exclaimed, laughing. "You really have been reading too many science fiction books."

"Science fiction?" Ran asked. "What sort of book is that? Science and fiction together? Will I ever live to see one?"

"You have already," Violet told him. "*Gulliver's Travels*."

"Oh, well, then," he responded happily. "I read

science fiction books, too. I always try to be a modern man."

Overhearing them talking so cheerfully, Captain O'Neill obviously decided to take advantage of her good mood.

"So now I suppose you must go back to your own place in the future," Francis said, with a sigh. "And you being such a great lady and Preservatrix as you are, with such wonderful powers, I suppose you are too fine a lady to spend one more night with a poor Irish lad like me.

"If you can, though," he added, moving closer to her as his voice fell seductively, "perhaps I might persuade you to bend your rules a wee bit, then, to tell me how I can bring the sweet light of freedom just a wee bit sooner to Ireland."

For a moment she stared at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"You think I'll tell you the future, in return for one night in your bed?" Then she smiled and shook her head as she declared, once again, "I have said it before and I shall probably not be the last. There is no question, Francis O'Neill. Of all the Wild Geese who ever came out of Ireland, you are certainly the wildest."

Her smile faded as she added, "Father David would tell you, Francis, that you would have had a much better chance of going to Heaven in that other world than you do now."

With a shrug and a smile, he answered, "Then perhaps I'll be in Heaven for half an hour before the Devil knows I'm dead. In any event, Heaven cannot



be any finer than Ireland. And for Ireland, I will always fight, because I will always be — “

“ — the indomitable Irishry,” she finished for him, “as a great Irish poet will say. But is your country really so beautiful, then?”

“How the Hell should I know?” he answered, with a sigh. “I’ve never seen it.”

Then, with his grin firmly in place again, he said, “But, sure, and I can show you a bit of Heaven tonight.”

\* \* \* \*

“So the MacDonalds will be best known for a farthing meat pie?”

“Well, it’s a farthing in your terms, although somewhat more in ours. And it will be eaten all over the world.”

“I don’t know, though,” he said, shaking his shaggy head as he held her in his arms and they leaned together against the headboard. “Would they not rather be known for Flora MacDonald, the Highland heroine?”

“She would never have been as famous as the Big Mac,” she assured him, gazing up at him as she rested her head on the arm that encircled her.

“So that’s why you gave me that name last night. Or, rather,” he corrected with a grin, “why you gave it to part of me. And what’s that the customers say, when they want a second portion of fried potatoes?”

“Supersize me.”

“That I did!” he crowed.

"And I lost count of how many times you did it," she assured him.

He kissed the top of her curls in reply, inhaling their strawberry fragrance. She could no longer stand the smell of the lemon soap.

On this morning after the wedding, bagpipes were still playing beneath their window. Not only did they set the mood for making love, she believed—knowing that many would not agree—they also let them do it as loudly as they liked. And the fire crackling in the marble mantel kept them warm enough to do it in the nude. So she had been able to enjoy caressing every hard muscle on his body, while he enjoyed fondling every soft curve of hers.

"And we could do other things," he said. "Our Prince himself told me about one of them. For instance, he said that you ladies like having us smack your bottoms, if we know when to stop. I'm not sure how we are supposed to figure that out."

"We can choose a word, and you will stop if I say it," she told him. "It's called a safe word." Hearing his disapproving grunt, she quickly went on, "We read about those things in romances." If she tried to explain "erotic romances," she was afraid he would not understand. He would certainly not have understood if she had confessed to having learned by experience. Oh, well, she decided, if she had wanted a modern man, she could have stayed in modern times. Other times, other ways.

"I never did approve of those novels," he muttered. "*Pamela* and all those other foolish tales." Proudly, he added, "I'm more for science fiction. But

what kind of safety word could we have?"

"How about Blenheim?" she answered almost instantly.

"You seem to have that ready," he answered, in a more teasing tone. "Were you waiting for a chance to use it?"

"Well," she answered, "I might admit that I have been a bad girl. Some would say I have been a real witch."

"Then you must be punished," he cried, sitting bolt upright in bed. The next thing she knew, she was flying through the air with his hands on her arms until she landed face down across his lap. As his legs held hers clamped together, his arm fell across her back. His limbs were so strong, she could barely wriggle against them.

"These are for refusing to marry me," he said, as the first three smacks landed. He meant them to be light and playful, as she could tell from his bantering tone. Coming from his powerful hand, they were still hard enough to turn her cool backside hot and stinging.

"And these are for arguing with me when we had only a few minutes left to live," he said. His voice was growing harder, and she noted with alarm that his blows were, too. "And these are for not trusting me enough to tell me the truth. Should I go on?"

"No, please, don't!" She was shocked when the tenth blow fell despite her pleas, on a backside that was already changing from stinging to burning. Glancing back over her shoulder, she saw that he had also turned her bottom from creamy white to vivid

pink. Then she remembered to cry out, "Blenheim!"

When he finally let her up, she tried to sit but quickly thought better of it and lay on her stomach instead, rubbing her backside. She soon felt his hands beside hers, making gentle, soothing circles on her injured flesh. Folding her arms below her chin, she sighed with contentment as he stroked her.

"I have another way to comfort you," he murmured.

Turning her head, she saw that his cock was indeed ready for her again, as hard, long and wide as it had been the night before.

"Yes," she exclaimed happily, "I see that you do."

## About the Author

Living in Northern Virginia, Jackie Rose indulges her passion for history by touring restored colonial homes. A resulting newspaper story on historical re-enactors led to a Virginia Press Association first prize. This was the first of five VPA prizes she earned during her ten years of feature writing for area newspapers.

Her husband David shares her love for history, travel, cruising, Walt Disney World and their son Frank. Their vacations have included trips to England and Scotland, where they visited many of the places that appear in this book, including Blenheim Palace, Kensington Palace and the Culloden battlefield. David also supports her other hobbies: working out with Jazzercise and buying the latest Vera Bradley pattern handbags.