



HER
KILT-CLAD
ROGUE

JULIE MOFFETT



Her Kilt-Clad Rogue
By Julie Moffett

Englishwoman Genevieve Fitzsimmons never expected she'd return to the wilds of Scotland. And she certainly didn't expect to become governess to the son of Connor Douglas, the man with whom she shared her first kiss and her first heartbreak. The man who still intrigues her...

For Connor, duty means everything. Years ago, it forced him to break Genevieve's heart and marry another woman—one who made him miserable. Now a widower at odds with his son, he's determined to put his heart first.

As Connor and Genevieve begin to find their way toward a future together, they can't escape the past. Someone is bent upon revenge against Connor and his feelings for Genevieve make her the perfect target.

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Dear Reader,

I feel as though it was just last week I was attending 2010 conferences and telling authors and readers who were wondering what was next for Carina Press, “we’ve only been publishing books for four months, give us time” and now, here it is, a year later. Carina Press has been bringing you quality romance, mystery, science fiction, fantasy and more for over twelve months. This just boggles my mind.

But though we’re celebrating our one-year anniversary (with champagne and chocolate, of course) we’re not slowing down. Every week brings something new for us, and we continue to look for ways to grow, expand and improve. This summer, we’ll continue to bring you new genres, new authors and new niches—and we plan to publish the unexpected for years to come.

So whether you’re reading this in the middle of a summer heat wave, looking to escape from the hot summer nights and sultry afternoons, or whether you’re reading this in the dead of winter, searching for a respite from the cold, months after I’ve written it, you can be assured that our promise to take you on new adventures, bring you great stories and discover new talent remains the same.

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generalinquiries@carinapress.com. You can also interact with Carina Press staff and authors on our blog, Twitter stream and Facebook fan page.

Happy reading!
~Angela James

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To my beloved mom. Words cannot express how grateful
I am to have such a wonderful and loving person to call
my mother. I am truly blessed. I love you.

Chapter 1

Aberdour

Scottish Highlands

May 1780

The magnificence of spring in the Scottish Highlands splashed across the countryside, covering the meadows in a riotous patchwork of yellow, green and purple. Genevieve Fitzsimmons peered curiously at the sight through the dusty carriage window, thinking Scotland didn't seem all that barbaric in the bright sunlight. But it wasn't the scenery that had her worried.

It was *him*, Connor Douglas. Scottish rogue and her future employer.

She narrowed her eyes and squinted in the distance, waiting for the famed twin turrets of *Caisteal na Mara*, or Castle by the Sea, to appear. The castle by the sea would be her new home, at least temporarily. For years her grandfather had spun delightful and frightening tales about the castle inhabitants.

Huddling in one corner of the otherwise empty carriage, Genevieve peered out the window and clung desperately to the seat. The carriage rocked so badly, she was certain a spill was imminent. Her stomach dropped as the road wound around a steep hill, revealing a precipitous rocky cliff on one side. Daring

a glance down, she could see waves crashing against a boulder-strewn beach. Seagulls screeched in the sky as they circled, almost as if crying a warning to her.

The carriage continued its dangerous trek around the tor until suddenly the castle loomed ahead. Genevieve's breath caught at the sight of the imposing stone fortress. Surrounded by a thick, high wall on one side and the natural defense of the cliffs on the other, the only visible edifices she could see were the jutting twin turrets in the northeast and southeast corners.

At last the wheels lurched to a stop and Genevieve peered out the window. They were about to cross a bridge leading to the imposing castle. She craned her neck, looking up at the impressive structure just as her driver pulled forward across the bridge and into the bumpy courtyard.

The door opened and the grizzled driver held out his hand. "I hope the ride wasna too rough for ye, miss. Welcome to *Caisteal na Mara*."

She alighted, wanting to drop to her knees and kiss the ground, thankful she was yet alive. But instead she smiled graciously. "I thank you, sir." She placed her bonnet firmly back on her head, tucking in a few strands of her flyaway brown hair and tying the ribbon under her chin.

A middle-aged woman with a starched apron and white cap on her hair appeared at the doorway to the castle. She waved her hand at Genevieve. "Miss Fitzsimmons?"

"Yes." Genevieve walked toward her. "Are you

Mrs. MacDougal?”

“Aye, I am.” The housekeeper had a round, friendly face and Genevieve liked her instantly. “I trust the journey wasna too difficult.”

She resisted the urge to rub her aching bum. “We stayed last night in the village, so the trip this morning was quite brief.” She couldn’t help but stare up at the castle, feeling small in its shadow. “’Tis quite an impressive structure.”

“Aye, ’tis so. And we welcome ye warmly.”

“Really?” Genevieve murmured.

The housekeeper must have heard her for she smiled. “Dinna fret, lass. Ye’ll be treated fairly here. Although for many o’ us, ’twas quite a surprise to hear Mr. Douglas had hired an Englishwoman. Sometimes, I fear the world has gone mad, I do.”

Genevieve didn’t sense any hostility behind the words, but something in her tone seemed odd. “You don’t approve of an English governess?”

“’Tis no’ my station to approve or disapprove. ’Tis simply unusual, that is. After all, ’twas the English that stole our land, forbid us to own a dirk and play the pipes. Yet here comes an English lassie ready to learn the young master. Canna blame me for thinking ’tis a bit odd.”

“I don’t blame you. It’s just that my family has been friends with the Douglasses for years. Not to mention that the war ended forty-five years ago.”

She shook her head. “No’ around here, it didna. Come, ye must be quite weary. I’ll show ye to your

room.” She stepped through the doorway.

Genevieve followed the woman into the castle. She couldn’t help but gawk at the furnishings as they traipsed down a long hallway. Ornate furniture lined the hall—elegant chairs with velvet cushions, beautiful wooden lowboys and sidebars. Candles flickered along the walls, held in place by gleaming golden candlestick holders. Thick woven tapestries adorned the walls, accompanied by a few enormous oil paintings of people she presumed were past inhabitants of the castle.

A gorgeous tapestry depicting some fierce battle caught her eye and she paused to study it. Barbarians half-dressed in blue and green plaid skirts, stockings and no shirts, swung swords and dirks in close proximity. She caught her breath as her eyes fell on one of the figures. Black hair, blazing blue eyes and a muscular chest had been frozen in time. The figure clutched his dirk above his head, his face a mask of anger and violence. Her heart stumbled in her chest. He was the mirror image of Connor Douglas.

“Genevieve Fitzsimmons!”

She nearly jumped out of her shoes as she whirled around. Malcom Douglas, the patriarch of the Douglas family, shuffled out from a room behind her, leaning heavily on an ornate wooden cane. His hair had gone white since she’d last seen him five years ago during a visit he’d made to Alnwick. His eyes still shone with a fierce intelligence and kindness. Upon seeing him, Mrs. MacDougal nodded and then disappeared down

the corridor, leaving the two of them alone.

“My dear lass.” He took her hand, clasping it with his gnarled fingers. “How fare ye?”

For a moment he reminded her of own beloved grandfather and a wave of grief hit her. Swallowing hard, she managed a smile.

“As well as can be expected under the circumstances.”

Malcom nodded. “’Twas my great sadness that I couldn’t attend Randall’s funeral.” He pointed ruefully at his leg. “It pains me so much I didn’t think ’twould take the agony o’ such a long journey. I hope his end was peaceful, was it no’?”

Genevieve felt another stab of pain. “He died in his sleep. I can’t thank you enough for offering me the position here. Grandfather’s debts were quite unexpected.”

She saw pity and sadness in his eyes. “Our business was no’ as profitable as we had hoped. I didna know he had invested everything in our venture or I would have warned him otherwise.”

“I’m not certain it would have made a difference. Grandfather could be quite stubborn sometimes.”

Malcom nodded, a sheen of wetness in his eyes. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, the men had been close friends. “He was a verra good man.”

She nodded, fighting back her own tears. “Yes, he was.”

They fell silent a moment before she cleared her throat. “I wanted to let you know that I’m honored you

feel me qualified to serve in your household. I am well educated in all subjects including letters, sums, geography and literature. I can—”

Malcom cut her off with a wave of his hand. “Genevieve, I have no doubts as to your abilities. Ye have impressed me more than once wi’ your keen wit. But I should mention that *Caisteal na Mara* is no longer my household. Connor now rules wi’ what some o’ us affectionately refer to as an iron fist. And just ’tween us, he is welcome to it. My days as a laird are o’er and ’twas my great pleasure to pass it into such capable hands. But I know he’s glad to have ye here, too, lass. He thinks quite fondly o’ ye.”

Heat rushed to Genevieve’s cheeks and she hated herself for the show of emotion. After all it had been ten years since she’d last seen Connor. A decade since he’d broken the heart of a shy, tender girl. But she was a girl no longer.

“I’m not at all certain he’ll remember me.”

Malcom’s answer was quick, firm. “Och, but he does. I assure ye o’ that.”

Her face burned hotter and she turned away, praying for composure. She needed this job and a summer dalliance of many years past would not interfere with that now. She turned her gaze back to the painting and the brutish man with the dirk.

“’Tis Gavin Douglas, one of the Douglasses who once lived in this castle.” He pointed to the dirk. “A fierce fighter, but sadly no’ one o’ much honor. Instead o’ siding wi’ his clansmen in the fight against

the English in the fifteenth century, he instead allied himself wi' the crown against his own kind. At first, he acquired himself much o' the forfeited Douglas property and became a mighty rich man. But he sold his soul to the devil to acquire it. When he was but thirty-seven years old, one o' the few surviving Douglases hunted him down. Hung him from the very bridge ye crossed coming into this castle. Gavin had no legitimate male heirs, so 'twas his bastard who eventually avenged him, bringing the castle back under our control again. Black Gavin is our direct ancestor. Looks a wee bit like Connor now, doesna he?"

Appalled by the story and yet nonetheless fascinated, Genevieve could only nod. Black Gavin looked more than just a *wee* bit like Connor.

"I can see I have a lot to learn about the Douglas family."

Malcom put a gentle hand on her shoulder. "And yet I understand ye do have *some* familiarity with the Douglas men."

She glanced at him in surprise and saw a twinkle in his eye. God's mercy, did he tease her? Could it be possible he knew something of the stolen kisses and beautiful promises his son had given her beneath the summer moon long ago?

She groped for an appropriate response when he laughed. "Dinna worry, lass. You'll learn all ye need to know about us Douglas menfolk soon enough. I'm verra glad to have ye here and canno' think o' anyone more qualified to help Connor. A sensible and sturdy

lass is just who he needs to help him teach his son properly.”

She tried not to wince at his rather unflattering description of her. “I am sorry to hear about the death of Connor’s wife. It must be a very difficult time for all of you.”

Malcom cast his eyes down. “I’ll admit it has no’ been the best o’ times. The hearsay has been especially difficult for Connor.”

Genevieve blinked. “Hearsay?”

“Surely ye know o’ what I speak. All o’ Scotland has heard the gossip.”

“Need I remind you that I’m from England? Besides, Grandfather and I haven’t heard from you in months. I truly don’t know of what you speak.”

Malcom frowned. “Ye dinna know, then. Well, I might as well be the one to tell ye. Connor was accused o’ killing Janet.”

Genevieve took a step back, stunned. “Killing her?”

Malcom harrumphed. “’Twas naught but idle talk. Truth is she threw herself out o’ the tower window in a moment o’ madness. Left him alone and wi’ a young lad to raise, the foolish lass.”

She stared at him in horror. She’d assumed that Connor’s wife had died a death of natural causes.

“Suicide?” The word rolled unnaturally off her tongue. “Why?”

Malcom shrugged. “Who really knows except the woman herself? I’ve no wish to speak ill o’ the dead, but Janet was no’ right in her head, I’d say.”

“That’s dreadful. I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“’Tis been the most difficult for the lad.”

“Understandably so.”

Malcom ran a trembling hand across his brow. “I willna lie to ye, Genevieve. Ewan is a strong-willed lad. We’ve no’ been able to keep a governess here for more than a few weeks. But I’m certain your presence here will change all that.”

She ignored a flutter of worry. “I’ll certainly do what I can to help. When will I have the opportunity to meet Ewan?”

“At supper. I do hope ye’ll join us.”

“I’d be delighted.” In truth, she wished to sup alone to recover from her long journey and absorb all the unsettling things he’d just told her. Yet her presence had been requested, so she would make a proper appearance.

Malcom bowed. “Well then, I’ll just deliver ye into Mrs. MacDougal’s verra capable hands.”

As if by magic, the housekeeper appeared. After parting ways with the elder Douglas, Genevieve followed the portly woman up a wide set of stone stairs and down a long, dim hallway before she stopped in front of a wooden door.

The housekeeper opened the door. “This is your room. It attaches to the schoolroom. Ewan’s room is on the other side.”

Genevieve stepped inside. She’d assumed she would be relegated to a small and functional room.

This chamber was huge and bright with three

leaded windows above padded window seats, flanked by dark blue velvet drapes. A large hearth took up nearly one side of the room, and someone had lit the fire where a cheery blaze now emanated warmth. A heavy quilt of blue and white stripes covered the big canopied bed in the center of the room. Against another wall sat a tall wooden wardrobe. Her three valises already sat in front of it. Next to that was an elaborately carved lowboy atop which sat a chamber pot, a pitcher of water, a few folded linen cloths and a small looking-glass.

Genevieve smiled. "It's a lovely chamber. Thank you."

Mrs. MacDougal beamed, pointing to a door beside the hearth. "I'll send up Lucinda to help ye unpack your valises if ye'd like."

"No, thank you. I'm quite capable of doing that myself."

"As ye wish. Supper is promptly at five o'clock. I'll have someone fetch you."

"I'd appreciate that."

After Mrs. MacDougal left, Genevieve removed her bonnet, left her valises where they were and went to examine the schoolroom. She opened the door and stepped across the threshold, her gaze sweeping across the three small desks, the comfortable window seats and a long trundle table covered with numerous scratches and errant splashes of ink. She spied a child's reader, a sum book and an exercise book. She picked up the third one and examined Ewan's

handwriting skills. The boy's penmanship needed quite a bit of work.

"Are ye the new governess?"

She nearly dropped the book. Turning around she saw a young boy with a mop of unruly black hair and piercing blue eyes. He was rather tall and thin, and at this moment, completely filthy.

She set the exercise book down. "Hello. My name is Genevieve Fitzsimmons. You must be Ewan."

"Ye're English." His lips curled in distaste. "No one told me the new governess was goin' to be English."

Had no one thought it necessary to prepare the boy? She smiled despite sensing a brewing problem. "Did you know our families have been friends for many years?"

He snorted, clearly unimpressed. "I'm no' goin' to be learned by an Englishwoman. Why do ye think I'd care to learn anything the English have to teach me?"

Stunned by the hatred in the boy's voice, she searched for calm words. "Because I am quite proficient in reading, sums and handwriting, among other things. From what I just observed in your primer, it looks like the last is an area where we have much work to do."

He stared at her for a moment longer and then shrugged. "Doesna matter what ye say, ye'll no' be here for long. I've already decided I dinna like ye."

With those words, he strode across the schoolroom into his room and slammed the door shut behind him.

For a moment, she could only stare in shock at the ill-mannered nature of this boy. Was this truly going to be her charge?

Anger mingled with fear. What would happen if she failed? What if Connor dismissed her for being unable to manage his son? Where would she go? Her carefully laid plans for building a reputation as a reliable governess would be ruined. Somehow, in the blink of a moment, her entire future seemed to rest on this one difficult child.

Sighing, she returned to her own room, exhaustion from her journey starting to overcome her. She would rest a bit, unpack and then prepare herself for supper. It seemed she would need more strength than expected to handle this young Scottish boy.

Genevieve had rested little more than an hour when a young servant named Lucinda unexpectedly awakened her.

“I’m sorry, miss,” the young woman said as Genevieve opened the door. “But the master has requested your presence in the library at once.”

She wasn’t anywhere near prepared to meet Connor, but the girl stood in the corridor, looking at her nervously enough that Genevieve got the distinct impression that one did not simply say no to Connor Douglas. What was it Malcom had said about Connor running the castle with an iron fist?

Genevieve smoothed down her skirts and ran a

comb through her unruly brown hair. She might have taken a few moments to re-braid it, but Lucinda hovered by the door, her body language clearly indicating that Genevieve should not tarry long.

She swallowed her irritation. Had Connor not the decency to permit her a suitable period of respite from her journey? What could be so important that he could not wait to see her until supper?

The hand holding the brush faltered and then stopped mid-stroke. What if Ewan had already gone to his father to complain of her? A sense of dread crept over her. Would her position here be over before it had even started? Where would she go? Pressing her lips together, she yanked her hair back and pinned it loose at the nape of her neck. At this point in time, the condition of her hair and gown was the least of her worries.

She took a moment to compose herself. "I'm ready."

"This way, miss." The girl practically ran down the hallway.

Genevieve lifted her skirts and hastened after her. Her heart pounded hard. Whether it was from the anticipation of meeting Connor again or from the exertion of keeping up with the young girl, she did not know. She wondered what she would do if he decided her unsuitable on the spot, and then dismissed the thought, believing that even *he* would have to give her an opportunity to prove herself.

Lifting her chin, she strode forward, stopping as

Lucinda lifted her hand and knocked on the wooden door.

A deep voice came from behind the door. "Enter."

Lucinda pushed it open but did not cross the threshold. Instead she motioned Genevieve inside. She crossed the threshold, trying not to wince as Lucinda shut the door so fast it rapped her on the bum.

Connor sat behind a desk, examining what appeared to be a ledger. Ten years had changed him little. He appeared as breathtakingly handsome as she remembered, his presence somehow imposing even from a sitting position. When he glanced up, she noticed at once that his long, thick hair remained as black as the night and his eyes the same piercing blue. His face had matured into hard angles and lines, and yet was softened by what she could only call a careless, dangerous sensuality. He wore a dark brown waistcoat atop a crisp white linen shirt, but his neckcloth had been removed and his throat was bare. Tension hummed in the air as his cool, aloof gaze raked over her.

He rose from the chair, addressing her formally. "Miss Fitzsimmons."

The intimacy of many summers past was clearly gone. Not that she had expected otherwise. Still, the politeness in his voice hurt.

He continued. "'Tis my great fortune to once again have the pleasure o' your company. It has been some time since we last met, ten years if I recall correctly."

If he recalled correctly. The cad.

She, on the other hand, remembered every detail of their last time together—the golden moon, the way the summer breeze blew through his hair as he leaned down to kiss her. The memory rushed at her now like a fire through her mind, sending a blazing heat through her veins.

“Miss Fitzsimmons?”

His voice was still rich as ever, tempered only by the peculiar and sensual roll of his Scottish burr. Even now her senses tingled.

“Yes? I...I am here.” She hated herself for sounding like a child stating the obvious.

He said nothing but walked toward her, as if he were a cat stretching his long limbs. He stood far taller than she remembered. It seemed unfair that age had not made him any less attractive, but instead had deepened his allure, casting his eyes with dark and knowing shadows and providing subtle and interesting lines around his mouth. For a moment she stared at him in disbelief, unable to accept the irony that God had created such a magnificent specimen in the form of a devilish Scotsman.

“Come in, please.” This time his voice softened. “No need to linger by the door. I willna bite. No’ much anyway.”

She saw a flicker of amusement in his eyes. Pride made her lift her chin. “I’m not lingering. You wished to see me?”

His mouth curved into a smile. “I did. It’s good to see ye again. Ye’re all...well, grown up.”

His gaze swept across her and Genevieve tried not to flinch, knowing he examined her only to remind himself of her glaring faults. She stiffened when his perusal lingered on her hastily combed hair, her wrinkled gown and plain, ordinary features. He most likely would know her grandfather had provided a lavish season for her in London and that she had turned down her one and only suitor. He would now remind himself of why no man, except for him during a summer amusement, had ever paid her more than a passing glance.

She kept her chin raised high, refusing to let him unnerve her further.

“I’m sorry to hear about your grandda.” He spoke with genuine sincerity. “He was an honorable man wi’ an even hand and a keen sense o’ business. He was a good friend to my family and I liked him.”

“Thank you.” Her voice wavered with emotion.

“I heard ye had to sell the estate to pay off his debts. I’m sorry to hear that. ’Twas a fine house ye had in Alnwick.”

An unnerving flush of guilt swept through her, knowing she could have saved the estate had she accepted old Herbert Young’s offer of marriage. A lump rose in her throat. “Yes, it was a beautiful home.”

“I regret your misfortune, but am grateful that ye’ve accepted our request to come here.” He straightened and pulled out a chair for her. “Please have a seat. I’d like to talk to ye about my son.”

Genevieve complied and as she swept past him, they brushed arms. She jerked back as heat streaked all the way up her arm and down to her toes. Horrified, she peeked and saw him staring at her. She perched on the chair and waited. After a moment, he walked around the desk and sat down, the leather of his chair creaking as he lowered himself into it.

“Have ye the opportunity to meet Ewan yet?” he asked.

Relieved that the boy hadn’t yet come running to his father complaining of her, she nodded. “I have.”

“And what did ye think o’ him?”

She chose her words carefully. “We had an informal introduction. He seems rather...strong-willed.”

“’Tis kind o’ ye to say it that way. The truth is the lad is in need o’ proper instruction in the ways o’ manners and learning. I’m oft away and need someone that I can trust to see to him.”

Trust? She thought that an odd choice of words, coming from a man who had so carelessly treated her feelings. “He seemed rather shocked that I am English.”

He seemed amused, but not surprised. “Well, is he, now? The lad hasna ever met an Englishwoman. ’Twill be a good experience for him, then.”

“In what way?”

“I mean that the English seem to have a way with...well, subjugation.”

Genevieve bristled. “I find that remark quite

improper.”

He laughed, revealing a row of gleaming white teeth. “Now that’s the lass I remember—all prickly and proper. Do ye remember how many times ye berated me for what ye called my ‘insolent’ humor?”

She did remember and even now could picture him needling her just to see her frown. After he’d manage to coax a rise out her, he’d kiss away that disapproval from her lips.

“You don’t need to remind me. And I’m not prickly.”

He laughed again, a deep, rich sound. “If I offended ye, I offer my sincere apology. I meant only to suggest that ye are quite capable of handling a firebrand such as Ewan. I’ll be the first to admit the lad is no’ easy to manage.”

“Ewan is just a child.”

“A very willful and disobedient child.”

“No doubt aggravated by the sudden loss of his mother.”

Connor sighed. “Aye, it has been difficult for him.”

“And for you?” She had no idea how that slipped out of her mouth. Mortified, she clamped her lips together and wished the floor would swallow her whole.

He took his time before he answered her. “A lad needs his mother.”

She noticed no trace of sorrow or regret in his voice. “I heard what happened. I’m sorry.”

He waved a hand dismissively. “’Tis a matter that

is o'er. Ewan is the one who concerns me now."

Genevieve understood that the matter was now closed. "Have you discipline in place for the boy?"

He shrugged. "Since I'm no' around much, I'm no' always able to provide a firm or consistent hand. He minds me well enough when I am here. But 'tis no' enough. That's why we hired ye. Consistency and firmness. Qualities I've seen for myself that ye possess."

Not exactly the words every woman wanted to hear, but it indicated he had faith in her. Given her present circumstances that, above all, was important.

"Thank you. But discipline is only a small part of instruction. What about his letters and sums?"

"Aye, that, too, is most important. The other governesses reported that the boy is a bit dim-witted. As a result, I fear 'twill be most difficult to encourage him to attend to his studies in the first place."

She considered this. "Will you then support my efforts to impose some sort of organized discipline with him?"

He raised a dark eyebrow. "Organized discipline?"

"Punishment. Withdrawal of privileges, confinement to his room and so on."

"Does this include floggings?"

Genevieve gasped. "Certainly not."

Again amusement flashed in his eyes. "Why no'?"

"Because it won't be necessary."

"Ye dinna know Ewan verra well."

"It doesn't matter how well I know him. I will not

whip any child.”

“Ye seem certain about a great many things.”

“Well, I’m quite positive about that.”

His mouth curved into a smile so dazzling she felt warm from it. “Then ye have my full support, o’ course.”

“I’m grateful for that.” Perhaps this wouldn’t be as difficult as she had anticipated. Now the question that she wanted, no, *needed* to hear the answer to.

“May I be so bold as to inquire why you requested me? Given your position and status, certainly you had many more, let’s say...suitable choices.”

He seemed surprised by the question and leaned back, threading his long, tapered fingers together. “Only if I may first ask why ye chose to become a governess. ’Twas no’ your only choice. I heard ye turned down a suitor.”

So he *had* heard. Her cheeks flamed. “I...I thought it best at the time.” Of course, she hadn’t known then that the old man would be the one person to ever ask for her hand. “Nevertheless, I enjoy learning so given my present circumstances, the post of governess seemed a proper, even enjoyable choice for me. Your offer came at just the right time.” Of course, it had been her *only* offer under very dire circumstances, but he didn’t need to know that.

Again his gaze raked over her and she felt her face grow even warmer. But to her great relief, he pressed no further on the matter.

“Well, because ye asked, I’ll tell ye why I invited

ye here to assume the post o' governess. I remember ye as an able young lass with a discerning eye, quick wit and easy smile. Ye challenged me, and I liked that. Now, I hope ye'll do the same for my son."

An able young lass. So, that's how he remembers me.

She didn't know why his words should hurt, but they did. Of course just because that summer with him had been the most incredible, sensual, wonderful experience of her life, didn't mean that it had been of the slightest importance to a man like Connor Douglas. He'd likely created dozens of similar memories for many more naïve women like her. It was time to accept the brutal truth. She had been nothing to him but a pleasant summer diversion. She'd been invited here to Scotland because Connor's father had heard of her plight and took pity on her. Connor, desperate for any help to manage his unwieldy son, had agreed. As a result, she would do best to perform her duties adequately and move on as soon as possible.

A strange tight feeling constricted in her chest. "Well, I appreciate your frankness. I shall endeavor to fully meet your expectations."

"I appreciate that. Ye were always a responsible lass."

Responsible lass. Able lass. Prickly and proper.

God's mercy, her pride could not take much more. Standing, she decided to end the conversation before she humiliated herself any further. "Well, if that will be all, Mr. Douglas..."

He rose as well and again the elegance of his movements reminded her of a sleek, predatory animal. “Before ye leave, I would request a favor o’ ye.”

Genevieve felt a flicker of apprehension. “And what might that be?”

He graced her with one of his bone-melting smiles. For a moment the years faded away and she saw the young man with whom she’d fallen in love. “I’d ask that ye address me by my Christian name when we are in private.” The request came easily and without embarrassment, as if he asked women to do this all the time. “And I would ask your permission to do the same. ’Twas how we were wi’ each other the last time we were together and somehow it feels unnatural to be so formal when it is just the two o’ us...alone.”

He paused as if remembering something. For a breathtaking moment, Genevieve thought he might say something about the last night they had been together, sitting under the big oak tree behind her grandfather’s stables, gazing up at a glittering array of stars. That night he had told her she was beautiful and she had believed him. He had kissed her tenderly, all the while murmuring sweet words of endearment in Gaelic in his soft Scottish burr. She had been so in love with him.

“Well, what say ye...Genevieve?”

Her heart stumbled...weakened. The way her name rolled off his tongue in his deep, sensual voice stirred up memories she had long ago buried. He’d always been able to do that, say her name in a way that made it seem as though she were the most cherished person

in the world.

“I suppose there is no harm in that.” The words slipped from her lips. God’s mercy, what had happened to her resolve to keep a proper distance from him?

The corners of his slowly mouth turned up. “I’d hoped ye’d agree.”

She thought to leave but he came around the desk and unexpectedly took her hands in his. A quiver surged through her veins at his touch, an immediate, instinctive response.

His expression softened. “There is yet one more matter to discuss ’tween us. A matter of an apology.”

Emotion clutched at Genevieve’s throat and squeezed. “An apology for what?”

He shifted uneasily on his feet. “For leaving Alnwick as I did ten years ago. For no’ saying goodbye. For no’ telling ye how much that summer meant to me.”

She stiffened. “That summer took place a long time ago and I’ve considered it completely forgotten.” It was the most boldfaced lie she had ever told and she amazed herself by the sheer audacity of it.

“I didna forget it, nor have I forgotten ye.”

She laughed, mostly in self-defense. “We were young and foolish. It was a pleasant enough time, I suppose, but a mistake, nonetheless.”

He frowned, his dark brows knitting together. “’Twas no’ a mistake. I didna regret it then, and I still dinna.”

All the hurt and anger arose afresh in her throat as raw and painful as if that summer had happened last night.

“Of course, you don’t regret it. After all, a man of your reputation must be quite well versed in stealing kisses from young ladies in the moonlight.”

She saw a flash of anger in his eyes and then it disappeared. “Were they truly stolen kisses, Genevieve?”

A well-aimed barb directed at her heart...and her pride. “Perhaps not,” she admitted. “Although now you likely expect me to say how impressed I was by your admirable restraint in taking it no further.”

“’Twas admirable restraint.” He spoke so softly that had not she been standing close to him she wouldn’t have heard it.

Her emotions asunder and feeling ridiculously close to tears, she pulled her hands from his and took a step back toward the door. Connor made no move to stop her.

“Well, if that will be all, I shall take my leave and return to my duties.” She gathered the vestiges of her dignity, devastated that after all these years he still had the power to hurt her.

“That will be all.”

She left him, deeply unsettled by the turn of their conversation. She deserved an apology from him, but now that she had it, it sat heavy on her heart.

When she reached her room, she immediately went to the small basin of water on the lowboy and dipped a

linen cloth into it, applying it to her heated cheeks. Seeing Connor again had been more difficult than she had expected. Life here at *Caisteal na Mara* would be challenging.

Especially for her heart.

Chapter 2

As soon as Genevieve left the library, Connor turned and slammed his fist against the mantle. A vase tumbled to the floor and shattered into a dozen pieces. Furious at himself for mishandling his first encounter with her, he kicked a jagged piece of the vase with his boot, feeling a savage rush of satisfaction when it slammed into the stone hearth and disintegrated into mostly dust.

He'd never expected it from her—not from his sweet Genevieve. She had been so cool, so aloof. He had been certain that she would still harbor at least *some* feeling for him, but she had looked at him with such disdain, such derision.

“Hell and damnation.” He stalked over to the highboy and yanked out a bottle of whiskey. Pouring himself a generous helping, he took a long swallow.

Women were going to be the death of him.

How could he have been so utterly wrong about her reaction? He'd been prepared for her resentment and possible disappointment in him. But she had simply acted as if what had happened between them that summer hadn't mattered one whit. He hadn't been prepared for that.

It was a pleasurable enough time, she had said.

“A pleasurable enough time?” He spoke the words

to the empty room, his ire rising. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Her reaction changed everything. His plans, his thoughts, his dreams. He’d never imagined that he would have to win her back. Not the one woman who knew him better than he knew himself. Not the woman who had once told him that she loved him.

The anger dissipated and he sank into his chair, whiskey glass still in hand. He rested a finger atop the rim and circled, reconsidering his approach. Perhaps he’d been wrong about their summer together. She’d been sixteen then and perhaps he’d only imagined they were soulmates. Or mayhap he’d only wished for them to be so exceedingly like-minded so he could forget about what lay ahead for him.

He’d expected her wrath, hurt and disbelief. But never disinterest.

He’d been selfish. He should have told her about his betrothal. But once he’d fallen under her spell, he didn’t dare. He’d wanted their time together to last for as long as it could. And then it had been over all too soon. He hadn’t even been able to say goodbye.

God, how he had missed her all these years. His little English sprite. When she’d walked into the room today, he felt his throat close, his breath quicken. She appeared nearly the same as she had that summer ten years ago with impossible-to-tame brown hair, a wide mouth quick to smile and a short, pert nose. Her brown eyes held the same intelligence and wit, only now they held a hint of refinement and coolness.

Perhaps they had both grown up too much to still be meant for each other.

He sighed. The longer she stayed at the castle, the more she would learn about him, and the further away she would slip from his reach. Once again he'd acted selfishly and brought her here in his employ—but the timing had been right and he had so longed to see her again. Besides, he feared if she'd disappeared to London as a governess, he might never see her again. But pairing her with Ewan could result in disaster. It had been a calculated risk, but one he'd decided to take.

Her indifference now forced him to reconsider. No, he'd been right to try. He'd be damned if he'd just let her slip away again.

If she left of her own volition, there would be little else he could do.

Genevieve decided to spend some quiet time alone in her room before supper. She needed time to settle her nerves and regain her composure. She intended to appear calm and refreshed, the way a proper governess should appear. Not shaken and unsettled like an untried girl of sixteen.

She took her time changing into a clean chemise and stockings and brushing her brown hair until it gleamed. So as to not crease her gown before supper, she pulled on a light dressing gown and sat in the padded window seat, looking out at the castle grounds.

Her room had a splendid view of the front courtyard, the gardens and an old stone gatehouse that apparently had once protected the entrance to the castle.

She shifted on the seat to get a better view of the gardens. A warm spring had caused many of the flowers and shrubs to thrive, creating a lovely display of red, yellow and purple. Thinking of the flowers made her miss her own garden in Alnwick, and for a moment, her heart ached to be at home among familiar people and blooms. But that life was no more. She hoped the new owner of her home would tend to the garden with the same loving care she and her grandfather once had.

A knock at the door startled her and she rose, clutching the dressing gown tighter to her chest. “Who is it?”

“’Tis just me. Mrs. MacDougal.”

Genevieve crossed the room and opened the door. The kindly housekeeper stood balancing a tray with tea in one hand. “I thought ye might be in need o’ a warm drink before supper.”

Genevieve held the door open. “How very thoughtful of you.”

The middle-aged housekeeper entered, placing the tray on the table next to the armchair. She gave Genevieve a smile. “Well, if that will be all, miss...”

“Would you like to stay and have a cup? I mean, that is, if you have the time to indulge me.”

The housekeeper seemed flattered at the suggestion. “Me? Are ye certain?”

“I could use the company,” Genevieve admitted. “I feel a bit homesick at the moment.”

“Well then, I suppose in the interest o’ providing a bit o’ comfort for a new arrival, I could join ye for a few minutes.” The housekeeper went to fetch another teacup. She soon returned carrying not only a cup but a small plate of sweet biscuits and, to Genevieve’s surprise, a bottle of spirits.

“I dinna normally take a nip so early in the afternoon, but seeing as how ye are a wee homesick, I canna see how a small splash would hurt.” She poured the tea and then added a more-than-generous dollop of the spirits to each cup.

Genevieve took a sip, the liquid searing a fiery trail down her throat. The housekeeper drank the tea without incident, making Genevieve wonder just how often she engaged in these afternoon nips.

“You’ve made me feel quite welcome.”

“Now isn’t that sweet o’ ye to say so. A good heart ye have, even if ye are English.”

“A sentiment I hope many others here will share.”

The housekeeper clucked her tongue. “Dinna ye fash yourself. No one at this castle would hold ye personally accountable for the actions o’ the English. Besides, ’tis well-known that the elder Mr. Douglas was quite fond of yer grandda. They were friends for a long time, were they no’?”

“Yes, they were. They were fortunate that their mutual interests in trade bridged the more obvious divisions of politics.”

“How did they meet?”

“It’s quite an odd story, actually. Mr. Douglas needed a place to sell his lumber and my grandfather was more than happy to sell it to the shipyards in southern England. Our mutual locations near the sea made it convenient to transport the wood.” She took another sip of the tea and this time, it went down smoothly. “Looking back, I think my grandfather’s biggest mistake was not investing in a wider variety of goods. Fortunately the Douglasses did not make the same error.”

The housekeeper cradled the cup and saucer in her lap. “Well, it may be a wee bold o’ me to say, but ’twas a bit o’ a surprise when Connor told the staff that he’d invited ye here.”

“Connor invited me?” Genevieve spoke in surprise and then blushed when she realized she had inadvertently used his Christian name. It was one thing for the housekeeper, who had probably known Connor since he was an infant, to call him that, but it was utterly improper for the new governess to address him as such. Trying to cover her mortifying slip, she added, “I thought it had been the elder Mr. Douglas’s idea.”

The housekeeper shrugged, either not noticing or not caring about her slip. “I dinna know for sure. Mr. Douglas certainly took it hard when he heard your grandda had passed on. But ’twas Connor himself who made it known that he intended to bring ye here for Ewan’s sake. But it caused quite a stir, it did.”

“Why is that?”

“Because ’tis one thing to have English acquaintances, but ’tis another to bring one in to teach the young master. No’ that I mean any offense to ye personally by that.”

Genevieve took a bite of her biscuit, considering the housekeeper’s words. “I understand that emotions over the war still run high in Scotland. I just hope everyone understands that I have no quarrel with them.”

“I think they will. Especially since many o’ them do no’ envy your task.”

“My task?”

“Managing Ewan. It has been a verra difficult time for him.”

“Well, that is certainly understandable, especially since his mother’s death was so sudden.”

“Aye, ’twas a real tragedy.”

“For both Mr. Douglas and Ewan, of course.”

Genevieve saw a moment of true distress in the woman’s eyes before she lowered her gaze. “Aye, for all.”

The conversation lulled and Genevieve had a feeling that there was something the housekeeper wished to tell her, but could not. Genevieve wondered that if she had asked the right question, something significant might be revealed. But she knew so very little of the situation and had no desire to appear too eager, even if she desperately wanted to know.

But Mrs. MacDougal, bless her heart, apparently had a burning need to share the information anyway

for she took another sip of her tea and leaned forward.

“Seeing as how ye are a part o’ the household now, I dinna see the harm in telling ye what happened. I figure ye’d hear it soon enough anyway. Janet fell out of the tower window.”

Genevieve nodded, already beginning to feel a bit light-headed from the spirits. “The elder Mr. Douglas informed me of such. But why would she do such a thing? Certainly she had everything she could want—a lovely home, a child and a husband.”

Mrs. MacDougal shrugged. “I’m no’ privy to what happens ’tween a man and his wife. But I do know they used to argue quite fiercely. ’Twas an ill-fated match made for naught more than coin. ’Tis said Connor had his eye on young beauty Catherine Graham. But his da wouldn’t hear o’ it.”

God’s mercy, another woman?

Genevieve struggled to keep her train of thought. “But I thought the Douglasses were quite well off. Surely he could not have been forced into a loveless match if he had strongly objected.”

“Wealth is fleeting.” Mrs. MacDougal lowered her voice. “And these are precarious times for the Scots. Young Connor had a duty to his family to ensure their position and power.”

How quickly her grandfather’s wealth had disappeared. “I suppose that is true.”

“On the night she died, I heard them arguing. Janet ran from their room and up to the tower. I was in the corridor when she passed me, nearly knocking me over

in her haste. Connor followed, looking mighty angry.” She paused for a moment, whether to catch her breath or for dramatic effect, Genevieve didn’t know. “Soon after that, Janet was found dead.”

Genevieve shuddered. “An unspeakable tragedy.”

Mrs. MacDougal leaned forward, balancing her teacup on her lap. “’Tis a wee bit odd that no one heard her scream, though.”

A chill crept up Genevieve’s spine. “Surely you don’t think Connor had anything to do with it. I heard there was some kind of investigation.”

“Only because Janet’s da outright suggested Connor had pushed her. An accusation o’ murder is no’ so easily dismissed, so Connor agreed to the investigation to clear his name.”

“A sensible thing to do.”

The housekeeper opened her mouth to say something more and then closed it. Perhaps feeling she had already said too much, she stood.

“Well, I thank ye for inviting me to share tea and company.” Mrs. MacDougal gathered the cups and plates. “Ye are the first governess to do so and an Englishwoman nonetheless. ’Tis a mad world sometimes, it is no’?”

Indeed, Genevieve had been thinking the same thing herself. Never in a hundred years had she pictured herself impoverished and at the mercy of a man who had once broken her heart and been accused of murdering his wife.

“It is.” Genevieve rose and held the door open for

the housekeeper.

“Lucinda will be by soon to fetch ye for supper. I’ll bring a fresh pot o’ washing water for ye, if ye’d like.”

“That would be most kind of you.”

After she left, Genevieve leaned against the door, thinking about the strange things she had learned about Connor and his life at *Caisteal na Mara*. Suicide, murder and intrigue. Hadn’t her grandfather once told her such tales when she sat at his feet and listened with rapt attention? Now she was living in one of those tales and was not at all certain it was a place she wanted to be.

Feeling a sudden chill, she walked to the wooden wardrobe. She pulled open the door, musing as to which gown would be most suitable for her first supper at the castle when suddenly she felt something drop onto her foot. Startled, she jumped and let out a shriek as a small snake writhed across the floor and disappeared out of sight under the bed. She took at least two more steps back, watching the bed warily in case the reptile reappeared. Then she heard a muffled giggle from behind the door that led to the schoolroom and her eyes narrowed. Before she could move a knock sounded on her door. Mrs. MacDougal’s worried voice carried through the wood.

“Are ye all right in there, miss?”

Genevieve walked across the room and took a deep breath before opening the door.

“I’m fine, Mrs. MacDougal. I just...ah, dropped something on my foot.”

The housekeeper looked at her curiously, holding a tray with a clean wash basin and a pitcher of fresh water. “Well, if ye are certain...”

“Thank you.”

With a shrug, the housekeeper replaced the pot and pitcher and then left. Genevieve dropped to her knees and gingerly lifted the bedcovers to peer underneath the bed where the snake had escaped. She could see nothing. For all she knew, the snake would rest there until she slept and then venture out under the cover of darkness. Furious, she stood and stalked across the room, throwing open the door to the schoolroom. The room was now empty.

She crossed the schoolroom in four steps and knocked on the door to Ewan’s chamber. There was no answer, but she heard muffled movements from inside.

She leaned against the door, raising her voice. “Ewan, I wanted to thank you for your small welcoming gift. And seeing how you are so fond of snakes, we shall start our lessons tomorrow with a thorough study of the reptile.”

Turning on her heel, she marched back toward her room, when the door to Ewan’s room abruptly flew open. Hands on her hips, she turned to face him.

“It didna bite ye, did it?” His eyes glinted with triumph.

“I didn’t give it the opportunity to do so.”

“Then why are ye fashing so?”

“Did I say I was upset? I do, however, recall saying that you gave me an excellent idea for our science

lesson tomorrow.”

“Ye were frightened.”

“I don’t frighten so easily.”

“Ye will next time. And if ye tell my da about this, I’ll deny it.”

“I don’t intend to tell him anything. As long as you are in the schoolroom bright and early in the morning.”

He snorted. “Blackmail? Is that the best ye can do, English? I willna come. Ye canno’ make me.”

She nodded. “You’re right. I can’t make you attend your lessons. But your father can. And he told me he intends to stay at the castle for some time until he’s convinced you are working hard at your lessons. It seems that you tend to perform in a more satisfactory manner when he is in residence.”

Genevieve noticed he flinched at the mention of his father and she wondered if the reaction was motivated by fear or anger. Yet as soon as he opened his mouth to speak, she saw she was wrong on both points.

“Da is staying?” She saw unmistakable excitement in his eyes. “Did he say for how long?”

Surprised, Genevieve realized the boy had just inadvertently revealed his weak spot. Ewan desperately loved his father.

She shrugged, careful not to seem too interested. “He didn’t say exactly, but it is my understanding that it will be for at least a few weeks.”

She watched as a shadow descended over his eyes. “Or mayhap longer if I tell him I dinna like ye or that ye aren’t learning me proper. And if I dinna learn

proper, he'll have to find a new governess. And next time she willna be English."

Genevieve stiffened, surprised by the venom in his voice. "I'm afraid it's not going to be so easy, Ewan. I have no place else to go and your father has extended me his full support. Whether you like it or not, we are going to work together. I'll expect you in the schoolroom tomorrow."

He gave her a malicious look. "Just see if ye can find me. This is my home, English, no' yours. Mark my words, ye'll be gone before ye've been here a fortnight."

Genevieve crossed her arms against her chest, refusing to be worried or intimidated by his threats, despite the fact that he could very well be correct. "No you mark *my* words, Ewan Douglas. You *will* learn and eventually come to enjoy it. I will not give up. And I warn you, we English are a very stubborn people, perhaps even as much as the Scottish."

"I willna come," he shouted, slamming his door on her.

Genevieve took a deep breath and returned to her room, more shaken than she cared to admit by the encounter. How in the world would she breach the hatred this boy had for her and her heritage? And what if she failed? Where would she go? The alternatives were too frightening to contemplate. She couldn't fail, she *wouldn't*.

Nonetheless, she had no plan if the boy failed to show up for his lessons. Ewan was right. This was his

castle. She did not know her way around here and could hardly be expected to spend the day looking for him. She felt assured she could count on Connor to help her the first few days, but after that, he'd certainly begin to be annoyed by her inability to manage the boy. She'd have to use her wits to figure this out.

Well, she had no time to dwell on it now. Lucinda would be coming momentarily to lead her to supper and she had yet to dress. She made her way back to the wardrobe, taking care to notice where she walked. Finding the snake and doing a quick look about the room for any other assorted "gifts" from Ewan would be a priority after supper.

She chose a dark green gown from the wardrobe and gingerly took it down, shaking it out just to be certain the folds of material held no further unexpected guests. She donned it and smoothed out the skirts. Leaning over, she carefully examined her shoes and put them on just as Lucinda knocked at the door, announcing that supper was ready.

Standing, Genevieve followed Lucinda downstairs. She was surprised when the girl led her to the Great Hall where Connor sat talking softly with his father in front of a blazing fire. One end of a long trundle table had been covered with a white tablecloth with four places set. Both men rose when they saw her and she summoned a confident smile she did not feel and walked toward them.

"You are prompt." Connor offered her his elbow. Genevieve hesitated a moment before she took it,

acutely aware of the strength in his forearm as her fingertips lightly touched the soft material of his coat. Although it was all very proper, Genevieve couldn't stop the way her pulse jumped by just being in close proximity to him.

"O' course, she's prompt," Malcom said with a twinkle in his eye. "She's English, is she no'? 'Tis one thing ye can say about the English. They are ne'er late for a meal."

She smiled and Connor chuckled as he helped her into her seat. As the small talk dwindled, the mood at the table soured. After the servants had filled their wine cups for a second time, Connor began drumming his fingers impatiently on the table.

"Where in the devil is Ewan? I'll no' have that lad delaying our supper again."

Clearly annoyed, Malcom summoned a young servant and ordered him to find the boy. The servant appeared visibly upset at the request, but scurried off to try. Genevieve got the distinct impression that this kind of thing happened often.

Again the conversation lulled and Genevieve sipped her wine wondering how much longer they would wait before starting dinner. After a few minutes, Malcom pulled out his pocket watch and looked at it, grumbling softly under his breath. The scowl deepened on Connor's face before he threw back the rest of his wine and stood up.

"I'll go find the lad myself."

Genevieve held up a hand. "Wait. I know it's rather

presumptuous to make a suggestion on my first day, but if you would indulge me, I have an idea that might help in this matter.”

Connor leaned forward, placing both hands on the table. “Please do grace us wi’ your suggestion, Miss Fitzsimmons.” His blue eyes studied her intently.

Malcom leaned forward on the table, his elbows on the table. “Aye, please do.”

Even the servant who stood motionless by the door that separated the Great Hall from the cooking area, seemed interested in what she had to say.

Genevieve swallowed hard, the taste of wine suddenly bitter in her mouth. “I would suggest removing Ewan’s plate from the table. If he cannot bring it upon himself to arrive at supper in a timely fashion, then he should go without.”

“Go without supper?” Malcom appeared slightly shocked.

“Yes. And the servants and those in the kitchen should be warned not to provide him any food—not even a scrap of bread.”

“Surely ye canna mean to starve the lad?” Connor had a trace of exasperation in his voice.

“I assure you, he’ll not starve. But I do think it will cause him to reconsider his decision to make us wait for our supper. The rule should be consistent. If he is not at the table, washed and ready to eat by five o’clock, then his plate will be removed and there will be no food until morning.”

Malcom gazed at her. “’Tis a bit harsh, is it no’?”

“If we do not set limits with him, then he will not know how to behave properly.”

Malcom stroked his beard, looking at her thoughtfully. “Ye understand that by doing this, ye declare war wi’ the boy, then? ’Tis a risky strategy wi’ him, ye know.”

“I know.” Seeing how she stood on shaky ground with Ewan as it was, this directive would certainly not endear her to him, and she had no doubt he would figure out who had issued it. It would have been much safer to let Connor deal with this particular behavior problem and hold her tongue. She was certain she’d have enough matters to deal with as soon as they started their lessons tomorrow. But she had followed her instincts with the boy and now simply prayed for the best.

She continued with a firmness she didn’t feel. “He cannot be allowed to direct the course of the activities in this castle. This should hold true whether or not you are in the castle, Mr. Douglas. But it will not work without your support and authority.”

Connor stared at her for a moment longer with his penetrating blue eyes and then raised his hand. The servant was instantly at his side.

“Remove Ewan’s plate from the table and inform the staff that they are not to provide even a morsel o’ food for him tonight. If I find out that anyone has disobeyed my orders, they will lose a week’s pay. Do ye understand?”

The servant swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing

nervously in his throat. "Aye, sir."

"Excellent. Then bring us our supper."

The mood of the evening ruined, Genevieve ate her soup quietly, nearly finishing before Ewan deigned to appear. To his credit he had washed and changed his shirt, but his breeches and boots were still filthy. He ignored her as he slid into his seat.

"Da, ye should o' seen what happened in the chicken coop today. The rooster went mad, chasing the hens about and sending feathers flying in the air. Old Mr. McKay chased him about, falling twice on his arse. Me and Jamie jumped in and chased the rooster until it simply wore out. Mr. McKay took the bird and said he intended to wring its neck, but Mrs. McKay said 'twas no one else loud enough to wake him from sleep, so the rooster would have to stay."

He reached for a cup and then frowned when he realized it was missing. "Where is my cup? And my plate?"

Connor took a sip of his wine and regarded the boy over his cup. "If ye canna make it to supper on time, then ye willna eat."

A look of disbelief crossed Ewan's face. "What? But Da, I..."

"Ye heard what I said, Ewan. I've had enough o' your excuses these past few months since your mum died."

Ewan appealed to his grandfather. "Grandda, surely ye canna mean to let me go hungry?"

Malcom shrugged, focusing his attention on his

dinner. Genevieve watched as the boy's gaze finally landed on her and his blue eyes grew hard.

"This is your doing." He pushed away from the table angrily and came to his feet. "Ye told them to starve me, didna ye, English? Ye probably told him about the snake too. Well, I shouldna be surprised. Ye think ye're in charge here, but ye're no'."

Connor stood, his knife clattering to the table. A deathly silence fell over the room. Genevieve realized she was holding her breath.

"That is quite enough, Ewan. First, ye will apologize to Miss Fitzsimmons, and then ye will go to your room. I believe ye now understand what ye must do in order to receive your meals. I suggest ye think hard and well before ye decide to disobey again."

Ewan stood, still glaring at her, his fists at his side and bristling with hostility. "Sorry." He stalked away from the table without another glance backward.

After a moment Connor sat back down and calmly resumed eating. Genevieve's appetite had fled and she could only push the food around on her plate. Malcom, trying valiantly to revive the dinner conversation, began speaking about the lovely spring weather. She appreciated the effort and did her best to seem interested, but was thankful when Connor inquired if everyone had finished the meal. She practically leaped from her chair, wishing for nothing more than to retire to her chamber and end this horrid day.

Both men stood and Connor came around the table and offered her his arm, saying that he intended to

escort her back to her room. She protested, but he insisted. Hesitantly she took his arm, her elbow linking with his, her fingers resting lightly atop his forearm. She marveled at how tall he stood and yet how he carried his height with a graceful elegance. The warmth of him beckoning her nearer.

She bid Malcom good night. They walked down the hall and climbed the stairs until arriving at her door. Connor released her arm and she reached for the latch until he grabbed her hand. Still holding it, he turned her around, deftly backing her up against the door.

“’Twas a bold move ye made wi’ Ewan tonight. I like that ye took a stand wi’ him.”

Oh, God, how her heart jolted and her pulse pounded every time he touched her. He disturbed her senses in every way. “I...um, do think it is the right course of action, Mr. Douglas.”

“Connor.”

He stood much too close. She swallowed hard. “Connor.”

“I agree wi’ ye. But it willna make your task any easier.”

“I never expected this position to be easy.” She pressed back against the door wondering how she could politely extract her hand. He seemed in no hurry to release it and a traitorous part of her openly enjoyed the physical contact. “But I do believe I shall manage somehow.”

“O’ that I have no doubt.” He smiled and Genevieve could not help but respond. His good nature

had always enchanted her.

God's mercy, better not to think of those things.

His mouth quirked. "Now, Genevieve, why didna ye tell me o' the snake?"

"Snake?" She squeaked the word. "Oh, that."

"Aye, that."

She straightened her shoulders and firmly extracted her hand, once again a governess in charge. Except he still had her trapped between him and the door. "Nothing really. I happened to come across one in my room, that's all."

"Courtesy o' Ewan. Why didna ye tell me?"

"There are some matters I am quite capable of handling for myself."

He leaned forward, causing her to press back tighter against the door to avoid touching his body. "So, I presume that means ye dinna want to me make certain it is gone from your chamber."

"Oh, would you?" The words came out in a relieved rush.

He smiled and bent his dark head toward her. For a paralyzing, breathtaking moment she was certain he would kiss her, but instead he reached around her waist and unfastened the latch to the door. She would have fallen backwards across the threshold if not for his hand firmly at the small of her back. For a brief moment, they stood there, gazing into each other's eyes.

Then he politely released her and stepped back, permitting her to regain her balance and go into the

room. After a moment he followed. It seemed far too intimate a place to be with him, but he did not seem the slightest ill at ease. Instead, he seemed to fill the room with his mere presence, his scent and his gaze. She tried not to think about the other circumstances that might make him so comfortable in a woman's chamber.

“Where did ye last see it?” he asked.

“It?”

“The snake.”

Her cheeks grew hot as she pointed to the bed. “Under there. It was in the wardrobe. When I opened it, the snake fell out to the floor and proceeded to slither under the bed. I looked, but couldn't see it.”

“Did ye get a look at it?”

She shuddered. “It was green and grey. Rather small, actually.”

“Naught more than a garden snake likely. Completely harmless.”

“I didn't think otherwise. I'd just rather not have it under my bed, harmless or not.”

He bent down to his knees by the bed and glanced up at her, a glint of humor in his eyes. “There are a lot more dangerous things a lady could have in her bed, ye know.”

She pursed her lips at him. She had accused him of insolent humor and he had obliged. Odd how that was one of the few aspects of their relationship he seemed to remember. Although when she thought about it now, she, too, had greatly enjoyed matching wits.

He lifted the bedcovers and searched beneath the bed, giving her a most spectacular view of his bum. It strained against his breeches, tight and well-formed, tapering off into a remarkable pair of muscular thighs and calves. Unbidden, heat rushed through her. Appalled at her thinking, Genevieve tore her gaze away and settled it on the window.

“I canna see a thing under here.” His voice was muffled as he swept his arm back and forth beneath the bed. “I didna feel anything either.”

“I sincerely hope the creature departed.”

“Perhaps.” He rose and dusted off his breeches. “If ye’d like, I’ll check the bedsheets and blankets.”

For a fleeting moment, Genevieve pictured herself tangled with him in those very sheets and blankets and flushed even hotter. “Please, I’d appreciate it.”

He lifted the covers one by one, shaking them out. Erotic images leapt to mind as she watched his hands. He had the most beautiful fingers she had ever seen—long, tapered and capable of great gentleness. For a moment, she remembered how it felt to have those wondrous hands pressing into her back, tangling in her hair and stroking her cheek.

Cease this at once, she commanded herself. Her face burned so hot, she was certain he would need only one look to know exactly what she’d been thinking.

“Clean.” He turned to face her. “Ye should be able to sleep safely.”

She turned away and walked to the window, staring out. After those improper reminiscences, she doubted

she'd sleep a wink. "Thank you. You make me feel safe." As soon as she said it, she snapped her mouth shut in mortification. What in the world had come over her?

"That is good to know. Well, I should bid ye a good evening, then."

"Yes. Good night." She hoped to hurry him along and end this torture.

But instead of walking to the door, he approached her at the window. *What in God's name is he doing now?*

Gathering her composure, she turned to him. "Is there something else...sir?" Better to remind them both of her position here.

He reached out, cupping her chin in his warm hand. "I asked ye to call me Connor. Didna forget again, aye, Genevieve?"

She wanted more than anything to resist his charm and ignore the way he made her feel. But at that particular moment, standing in the intimacy of her bedroom with the only man she'd ever loved, she couldn't.

"Connor." The word came out as a whisper.

His fingers tightened on her chin. She knew that their closeness was not proper, but she couldn't move. The faint stub of whiskers on his cheeks and the muscles that twitched in his jaw captivated her. His powerful chest and muscular shoulders were both within reach of her hands if she dared to reach out and touch him like she once had. A hot rush of warmth

swept through her, his nearness kindling long forgotten feelings of desire.

He smiled slowly, a look of both knowing and understanding in his eyes. So he was aware of his effect on her—the scoundrel!

“’Tis good to see ye again, Genevieve. Being here wi’ ye, it seems as though no’ much time has passed.”

The emotion and longing in his voice tugged at her heart and she struggled to set her resolve against him. She had no idea why he said such things or why he toyed with her emotions, but never again would she open her heart to such pain and grief.

The spell broken, she pulled her chin from his hand, tears pricking her eyes. “I beg to differ. Times have changed and so have I.”

He shook his head. “No’ in the ways that matter most,” he murmured.

Rain started to fall outside the open window, the pattering sound soft and familiar. She closed her eyes when he reached out and twined a strand of her hair around his finger.

“With your permission, I’ll go have a talk wi’ Ewan about the snake.”

Shaken by the tenderness of his gesture and dismayed at how vulnerable it made her feel, she stepped away from him. “I wish you wouldn’t. It will only make matters worse. I can manage this alone.”

“Are ye certain?”

Her body longed to return to him, but she stood her ground, wrapping her arms around her waist. “I am.”

“As ye wish, then.”

“Thank you.”

He turned and walked to the door, pausing on the threshold. “Good night, lass. I wish for ye the sweetest o’ dreams. We have a custom here in Scotland that whatever ye dream on the first night in your new home will come true.”

Without another word, he left, leaving her standing there with her heart hammering foolishly and her body tingling from the encounter with him.

The sweetest of dreams, indeed. If only he knew what she dreamed about him.

Genevieve sank into a chair, her knees weak. She had never felt so unnerved, so completely unable to control her emotions. Horrified, she realized it was as if she *were* sixteen years old again, without either the willpower or sensibility to conduct herself in a proper manner around him. How could he still manage to have such a disturbing effect on her after all these years?

She pressed her hand to her breast, willing her pulse to slow. This was a most unfortunate turn of events. She had no intention of engaging in any sort of misconduct with him. But she couldn’t seem to stop her heart from beating quicker when she saw him, nor could she manage a cold indifference. Yet for the sake of her future, she had very well try harder.

She glanced at the mussed bed sheets and remembered the way he touched them, like an intimate caress. She drew in her breath sharply. His actions had

been innocent, not to mention done upon her request. Men like Connor were so practiced in the art of seduction that it clung to them as second nature.

Sighing, she changed into her bed gown and sat in front of the fire. As the heat from the fire warmed her body and the sound of the rain comforted her, she began to relax. She'd manage this. She'd handle Connor Douglas despite his reputation as a rogue extraordinaire.

She was strong, she was English, she was a Fitzsimmons. She would persevere.

Feeling emboldened by the thought, Genevieve retired to the bed, ignoring the mussed sheets. Slowly, she let her eyelids drift shut, overwhelmed by all that had happened to her this day.

As she drifted off to sleep, the lingering scent of him gave her an odd comfort. Sleepily she made a vow not to dream of him during her first night at *Caisteal na Mara*.

But despite her best intentions, Connor's mocking blue eyes were exactly what she saw as the darkness reached up to pull her under.

Connor stood in front of the hearth in his bedchamber completely naked, drinking a cup of wine and staring into the fire. The room was dark except for the flickering light of the flames that cast grotesque and eerie shadows across the wall. The darkness suited his mood at the moment.

He'd been utterly unprepared for the strength of the desire that had slammed into him as he caught her scent and remembered the soft touch of her skin.

Christ, it had felt so good.

He still needed her, wanted her. Badly. Even ten years hadn't been able to diminish the feelings and the longing he felt for her.

He was still in love with her. Except this time around there was no one in charge of his future but himself. Since Janet's death, his financial situation had become quite secure. Now all that was left to him was to apologize to Genevieve for his past mistakes and gain her trust once again. It seemed simple enough.

Except there were a number of complications on the horizon, ones that could pose troubling and potentially damaging problems if he did not deal with them quickly. Now he no longer had the luxury of time to lure her to his bed. Damn his father for insisting that he hold a foxhunt and ball at the end of the month. But neither had foreseen the unexpected death of Genevieve's grandfather. Connor's plan had to be put into action far earlier than he would have liked.

But he would manage.

In the past he'd been manipulated, cajoled and forced into a life he hadn't wanted. Never again. He was fully in command of his own destiny, of his own desires. This time, he had every intention of getting what he wanted.

Genevieve Fitzsimmons would be his, and he'd use whatever methods he could to win her. But he would

have to act carefully. He didn't want her to come to him bitter or trapped or deceived. He wanted her to come of her own free will. Because she knew, like he, that they could not deny the bonds that linked them.

He took a sip of his wine. He was not the man she thought he was. Would it make a difference to their bond once she discovered that?

Sighing, he set his wine cup aside and sank into a chair. He didn't dare contemplate that question for too long because he feared the answer.

He must win her back. There was simply no other way.

Chapter 3

Genevieve sat alone in the schoolroom, trying not to continually glance out the window as the sun rose and Ewan didn't appear. She fully expected him not to appear, but had nurtured a small hope that he might. Her head ached after a fitful night of sleep. She had dreamed of lying abed with Connor, both of them laughing and tangled in the bedsheets. He'd kissed her as moonlight streamed in through the open window, forming golden puddles across the bed. She'd given herself to him, and then he'd gathered her in his arms. In one easy movement, he swept her from the bed and over to the window. Before she could utter a word, he smiled and tossed her out the window. She woke up screaming, her heart thundering and her body slick with sweat.

She glanced out the window, a tight ball forming in her stomach. Ewan was a half hour late now and she knew he wasn't coming. Not of his own accord anyway.

She stood, deciding to check his room first. To her surprise, the door was open. Ewan still lay abed, huddled beneath his covers. Encouraged by this small stroke of fortune, she pulled up a chair and sat by his bedside.

"Good morning, Ewan." She kept her voice light

and cheerful. "It's a lovely spring day. Perhaps we can have our lessons outside today."

He peered out from beneath the covers. "Go away. I'm no' coming."

"Very well. We'll do our lessons right here. I'll go get your primer."

That got his attention. He sat up, wide awake and pulling the covers to his chin. "Are ye mad? I'm still abed and clad in my night clothes."

She smiled. "Did I mention that I'm quite accommodating?"

He stared, his mouth agape. "Ye are daft."

"Just determined. Ewan, I know you don't like me, which really isn't fair since we've not yet had the chance to get to know each other. But I do have this feeling that we'll get on."

"Go have your lessons by yourself, English."

She shrugged. "It's your choice not to attend. But I feel it's my duty to mention to you that your father said he'd stop by this morning to see how the lessons are going. In fact, I'm expecting him any time now. I'm certain your absence would greatly disappoint him."

With that Genevieve left the room, closing the door behind her and praying her words would get the reaction she wanted. After a few minutes she heard Ewan get up and stomp around. Finally he stalked into the schoolroom, his clothes wrinkled, hair mussed and eyes glinting. He flopped down in a chair, slouching.

"I canna be learned if my stomach is grumbling."

Genevieve walked over to a lowboy where a tray with milk and sweet biscuits sat. “Isn’t it fortunate that I happen to have some nourishment on hand?”

Clearly intending to annoy her, he stuffed them in his mouth, daring her to challenge him on his manners. Instead, she ignored him, readying his math primer and using the opportunity while he couldn’t speak to talk to him about the day’s plan. From what she had already observed of him, he was an active boy, so she decided to intersperse writing and sitting lessons with some physical exercise and a bit of fresh air.

After he finished, he sat at his desk, at first quite rude and uncooperative. Genevieve gently persisted, keeping the lesson light and easy. Eventually he began to come around as she increased the difficulty of the material. Most likely, she suspected, to prove that an Englishwoman couldn’t possibly know as much as a Scot. She kept adapting the lesson, making it more competitive between the two of them and much harder.

To her astonishment, Ewan met her challenges. Unlike the reports he had heard from Connor, the boy was neither slow nor dimwitted and, in fact, had a curious and lively mind.

She was grateful when Connor stopped by about an hour into the lesson. He leaned against the doorjamb, clad in dark riding breeches, a white linen shirt and boots. His hair had been combed back and tied with a leather strip at the nape of his neck and his intense blue eyes raked over her as if taking in every detail of her appearance. Emotion caught in her throat at the

simple sight of him, and she was barely able to tear her gaze away.

“Good morning, Miss Fitzsimmons. Ewan, lad, it warms my heart to see ye hard at your lessons.”

Ewan grunted something and Genevieve realized it had fallen to her to carry on the conversation. “Are you riding this morning, Mr. Douglas?”

“I am. I’m preparing for the foxhunt to be held in a fortnight here at the castle.”

Genevieve blinked in surprise. “Here? A foxhunt?”

To her chagrin, his mouth twitched with amusement. “From the tone of your voice I get the impression that this particular activity does not sit favorably with ye.”

“I did not state my opinion in any way.” Nonetheless, she could not help but be annoyed he could read her so well.

“Aye, but your expression did.”

She sighed. “Well then, no use denying it. I just don’t see the point in hunting down a poor defenseless animal.”

He chuckled. “Defenseless, hardly. The fox has a remarkable wit.”

“All the more reason not to hunt it.”

“Miss Fitzsimmons, I had no idea ye were a champion for the defenseless.” He was openly teasing her now.

“I am a champion for reasonable, not barbaric sport.”

Ewan interrupted excitedly, “Well, I think foxhunts

are grand. If ye would let me come, Da, I would—”

“Nay.” The word came out so sharp that Genevieve blinked in surprise.

“But, Da...”

Connor cut him off with a curt wave of his hand. “I said nay. A foxhunt is no place for a bairn.”

“I’m no’ a bairn.”

“Then show me by behaving.”

Pouting Ewan slumped back in his chair, disappointment evident on his face. Genevieve watched the interaction both with interest and dismay. Something changed in Connor’s demeanor when he spoke to the boy. His tone was cooler, almost indifferent. She sensed no warmth, no affection. How strange. Tragedy should have brought them closer together.

Connor directed a question at her. “How are the lessons going?”

Genevieve brightened. “Quite well, actually. Ewan is an apt pupil.”

“That’s no’ what I’ve heard.” Connor’s gaze turned back to Ewan.

Irritated at the thoughtlessness of the comment, Genevieve put a hand on Ewan’s shoulder as if in some way to comfort him from his father’s coolness.

It was a mistake. Ewan practically snarled at her and leaped from his chair so quickly he knocked it over.

“Well, I have interrupted enough.” Amusement shone in his eyes. “I can see ye have your hands full,

so I shall let ye return to your lessons.”

With those words, he walked away, his short visit ruining all that had been accomplished between her and Ewan this morning. Her irritation at Connor grew as did her pity for the child.

She pretended not to notice Ewan’s glare and instead picked up his reader and shut it. “I think we’ve done enough for this morning. Would it be acceptable to you if we adjourn until after the midday meal?”

She saw surprise and then suspicion cross his face and she realized he’d probably never been consulted on how or when he wanted to do his lessons. “Ye mean I’m done?”

Genevieve nodded. “You finished the first reading lesson more quickly than I expected. We’ll resume with math problems after the meal. Then, since it is such a lovely day, perhaps we’ll take a visit to the bog to examine some of the herbs growing there.”

He stared at her a moment longer, not certain what to say or do. Finally he just turned on his heel and walked out of the schoolroom without a word.

Genevieve sighed, picking up the rest of the primers and stacking them neatly on the table. She certainly hoped she knew what she was doing.

She ate her midday meal alone in her room then returned to the schoolroom to await Ewan. She wasn’t terribly surprised when the boy did not appear.

Making a conscious decision not to be angry, she wandered downstairs and outside, thinking she had the best chance of finding Ewan there. She walked past the

stables, but the stable master told her he hadn't seen the boy. She decided to take a stroll through the garden and admire the colorful buttercups and poppies. Bushes were also in full bloom and she stopped along the way to smell the fresh, pungent scents. For a moment she closed her eyes, imagining herself back in England surrounded by her own beloved garden.

A thorough examination of the gardens indicated Ewan was nowhere around. Resigned, she decided to follow the sound of barking dogs. Soon she came upon a large pen surrounded by a low fence made of rough-hewn logs roped together. Inside the fence, a man ran around with a pack of dogs, presumably the hounds that would hunt the fox. To her surprise, she spotted Ewan not far away, sitting under a tree and watching the handler work the dogs. Ewan hadn't seen her yet, so she stood quietly, catching the boy in an unguarded moment. He looked very young and dejected, his knees pulled to his chest. There was something inherently sad about him and it tugged at her heart.

Taking a deep breath, she hitched up her skirts and walked toward him, being certain to make noise. He lifted his head and narrowed his eyes when he saw her, but he didn't move away. Silently she sat down beside him on the grass.

"I'm no' coming back for lessons."

"Actually, I thought we might work a bit outside. Not all of life's lessons are learned in the schoolroom."

"Why dinna ye just give up, English? 'Twould save us both a lot o' trouble, ye know."

“Why don’t you give up? And then we’d have a lot more time for pleasurable activities.”

“I dinna want to do pleasant things wi’ ye.”

“Well that’s too bad. Because I simply do not subscribe to the theory that schoolwork has to be hard and boring.”

He curled his lips in distaste. “Ye are an odd duck. And it isna going to work if ye think this approach will make me like ye.”

“I am quite aware of the fact that I can’t *make* you like me no matter what I do. What I *can* do is make learning interesting.”

He snorted in disgust. “Have ye ever been a governess before?”

“No, I’m afraid you’re the first,” she admitted.

“Ye have a lot to learn about bairns.”

“I suppose I do. Perhaps we’ll end up teaching each other something.”

He rolled his eyes and resumed staring at the hounds. Genevieve followed his gaze to where the man was being chased about by several of the dogs. They barked and growled until she noticed the trainer held a fox pelt in his hand. She shivered.

“What’s the real reason your father doesn’t want you to go on the foxhunt?”

Ewan turned to her, annoyed. “Dinna ye ever stop talking, English?”

“You may call me Miss Fitzsimmons. And to be truthful, I’m rarely at a loss for words.”

“’Tis just my luck,” he grumbled. For the first time

Genevieve noticed the underlying current of hostility had faded.

“And you have effectively avoided the question. Why won’t your father let you come on the foxhunt?”

He sighed in resignation. “Ye heard him. He thinks I’m still a helpless bairn.”

“Fathers are naturally protective.”

“He’s no’ protective. He’s ashamed.” Then realizing he’d let something personal slip, he frowned and fell silent.

Genevieve was taken aback by his words. “I’m certain that’s not true, although I’m puzzled why he’d object based solely on your age. In England, children as young as six hunt with their fathers. Perhaps he’d change his mind if he knew that.”

“He willna change his mind. Ever.”

“Perhaps it would be beneficial if I spoke with him.”

Ewan glared at her. “Nay!”

“Why not?”

Ewan turned away, his cheeks reddening. “Because I said so.”

Just as he spoke the words, the hounds starting barking furiously. Genevieve saw that a hapless squirrel had run into the pen. The dogs began chasing it, whining when it slipped beneath the fence to safety. A large black hound that had been separated from the others and tied to a wooden pole, began barking and thrashing about viciously. Shocked, Genevieve watched as the dog snapped its binding and leaped

over the fence directly toward them.

Ewan screamed in terror and dove behind Genevieve. Stunned, she didn't move a muscle. The dog darted past them and into the forest in pursuit of the squirrel. It returned moments later when the trainer whistled angrily.

The trainer jumped the fence and addressed Ewan who still cowered behind Genevieve. "I'm right sorry about that, young master. I didna know Charlie had gotten so strong. I'll have to double his bindings to keep 'im under control. Are ye both all right?"

Genevieve's heart still pounded. "Thank you, we're fine."

Charlie approached them at last, stopping to sniff at Genevieve's hand. Ewan trembled behind her.

"It's all right, Ewan. Charlie's actually quite friendly as long as you aren't a squirrel. Why don't you pet him?"

"Nay, I dinna want to touch him."

"Come on then, Charlie," the trainer said. "I'm sorry to have bothered ye both." The dog followed at a trot, looking back at them once over his shoulder as if amused.

As soon as the hound was safely fenced in, Ewan stood and began stalking back to the castle. Genevieve hastily rose as well, brushing off her skirts and following him.

"So that's the problem? You are afraid of dogs."

He stopped in his tracks, his face flushed and furious. "I'm no' afraid of dogs. Now leave me alone."

She ignored his command. “You shouldn’t be ashamed. I used to be terrified of dogs.”

Ewan began walking again, his fists clenched at his side. “O’ course ye were. Ye’re a lass.”

She resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “Do you know how I overcame my fear?”

“Somehow I have a feeling ye are going to tell me no matter how I answer.”

“My grandfather helped me by taking me down to see the dogs a little every day. Soon they got used to me and I wasn’t so afraid of them either.”

“It willna make a difference. Da knows about the dogs.” His face flushed with shame. “He knows. So just forget about it.”

Genevieve was not deterred. “Let’s not give up so easily. I have an idea. Let’s come down here to the pen everyday until the foxhunt. To start, we’ll ask the trainer, Mr.—” She paused, waiting for him to fill in a name.

He let out a breath. “Foley.”

“Foley to let the dogs sniff us through the fence. Eventually, maybe you will even be willing to pet them. Perhaps once your father sees you with the hounds, he might be willing to reconsider his decision about the foxhunt.”

Ewan clenched his jaw. “It willna work.”

“Well, what do you have to lose? We can consider it a part of our lessons. It will certainly be more entertaining than a math primer. If it doesn’t work, no one else need know besides Mr. Foley and us. What do

you say?”

Ewan stopped, his eyes narrowing with mistrust and suspicion. Yet deep in those blue depths, she saw a faint glimmer of indecision and something more...hope.

“I’ll think about it.”

“That’s fair. Now I suggest we go down to the peat bog.”

He lifted his eyebrow in a way that reminded her of Connor. “The peat bog? What about our lessons? Aren’t ye going to insist we go back to the schoolroom?”

“Do you want to go back?”

“Nay.”

“Then let’s have our lesson at the bog.”

A sly grin blossomed across his face. “But there are frogs and snakes down at the bog.”

“I certainly hope so. All the better to examine them in their natural habitat. And by the way, I’ll be watching you closely to make certain you don’t slip any unsuspecting creatures under your shirt for later use.”

To her astonishment, he laughed and headed toward the bog. “All right, English. We’ll do it your way. Mayhap this won’t be such a bad day after all.”

“Mayhap, indeed,” she murmured with a smile.

A week passed and Genevieve fell into a comfortable routine. She and Ewan had declared a tentative truce of

sorts. After just one more time being late to supper and receiving no food, he began to arrive promptly, washed and well-mannered.

He also appeared on time for lessons, and in turn, she kept them lively and entertaining. To the boy's great delight, the lessons were not confined solely to the schoolroom.

She also continued to have daily tea with Mrs. MacDougal in her room, gossiped with the young serving girl Lucinda and began to feel an integral part of castle life. In the late afternoon, she and Malcom Douglas played chess together, an activity she had greatly enjoyed with her grandfather.

Each evening after supper Connor walked with her back to her room, chatting in a warm, friendly manner, a complete gentleman. There was no further mention of their time together ten years earlier. No suggestion in his voice or gaze, only amiable respect and warmth. How could such a handsome, charming man not affect her? Nonetheless, she took every opportunity she could to remind herself that he was being kind because he needed her to stay for Ewan's sake.

Without Connor's knowledge, she and Ewan visited the dog pen every day. While Ewan hadn't worked up enough courage yet to step into the fenced area, he had permitted the dogs to sniff him and once she even caught him giving one of the hounds a pat on the head. The boy was still frightened by them, but the fact that he was willing even to try overcoming such a deep-seated fear was testament to how much he

yearned for his father's approval.

Nonetheless, the more she watched Connor and Ewan together, the more baffled she became by Connor's cool indifference to his son. He had no warm words for Ewan, no fatherly hugs or pats, just customary polite exchanges that left Genevieve's heart aching for both of them. No wonder the boy felt compelled to disobey. It was the only way he seemed able to get his father's attention.

This morning after lessons, she strolled through the garden when she heard steps behind her. She turned around to see Connor clad in a pair of tan breeches, a crisp white linen shirt and black boots. His hair had been tied at the nape of his neck and he was freshly shaved. Her pulse skipped a beat.

"I heard ye've been spending time here. Do ye like our gardens?"

"They are lovely. I hope you don't mind that I help tend to the flowers. I do so miss my own garden."

"I dinna mind at all. In fact, I'm pleased ye are able to find some solace here." He pointed to a small stone bench. "Do ye have a moment to speak wi' me?"

"Of course." She lifted her skirts and sat gingerly. He joined her, his thighs brushing against her skirts. Her heart stumbled. Just sitting next to him with the sun warm on their heads and shoulders caused a flood of memories to rush back.

"How is Ewan doing wi' his lessons?"

"Quite well, actually. It's my pleasure to inform you that he is not dim-witted at all. Actually Ewan is a

highly intelligent boy. I feel confident he will progress rapidly.”

“I’m glad to hear that, although I must say I’m a wee bit surprised. Ye are the first governess to speak so kindly o’ Ewan.”

“I’m not speaking kindly, I’m speaking truthfully. He has many talents I haven’t yet explored to my satisfaction. Did you know he is quite an accomplished sketcher?”

“Ewan?”

“Yes. He provided me with a beautifully detailed sketch of an oak leaf. And he drew a lovely representation of the castle.”

“’Tis a talent he received from his mum, no doubt. Janet was quite an accomplished painter.”

It was the first time she’d ever heard him bring up her name voluntarily. “You’ll have to come by and see his efforts for yourself.”

“I must, indeed.”

The conversation lulled and Genevieve felt increasingly awkward sitting so closely. Just being near him heightened her senses to an extraordinary level. The color of the flowers seemed more vivid, the sun warmer, and the scents of the garden were far more fragrant when he was near.

He shielded his eyes from the sun. “There is another matter o’ which I wished to inform ye. The foxhunt will commence next week. I’ve invited several important guests and the celebration will take place o’er a few days. I’d like ye to keep the lad out o’ the

way.”

“I’ll do my best, of course. But if I may be so bold as to inquire as to why you won’t permit Ewan to accompany you on the foxhunt?”

He raised an eyebrow. “I thought ye didna approve of the foxhunt.”

“I don’t. But that doesn’t change the fact that your son wants desperately to attend.”

“He’s too young.”

“Children as young as six years of age foxhunt in England.”

“This isna England.”

She studied him intently. “Why don’t you really want him to go?”

Connor sighed, perhaps realizing she intended to persist. “Ewan is afraid o’ the hounds. He may think he could manage, but ’twould be a terrifying experience for him. I’ve no wish to upset the lad.”

She shifted slightly on the bench. “What if he weren’t so frightened anymore? Would that change your mind?”

He studied her for a long moment. “Just what are ye plotting, Genevieve?”

“You’ll see. I ask only that you reserve judgment on your final decision about the foxhunt.”

He considered it for a minute and then nodded his head. “Agreed.”

She smiled. “I thank you, then.”

He smiled back, a bit of the devil in his eyes, and for a moment she saw the young man he’d once been,

unburdened by the responsibilities of life. A bittersweet longing filled her and she had to look away for fear he'd see it in her eyes.

"Oh, and my da has talked me into hosting a ball to entertain our guests before the foxhunt. I'm no' certain it is a good idea, but 'tis something he truly wanted to do, so I decided to indulge him."

Her heart fluttered with dread. Balls reminded her of her failed London season.

"I suppose you'd like Ewan to attend."

"Aye, can ye see that he is suitably prepared?"

"In what way did you have in mind?"

He seemed at a loss. "I dinna know. I would think the proper behavior for a lad at such things. I suppose he should be taught how to dance."

"In a week?"

"Is that no' possible?" He looked so panicked that she almost felt sorry for him. Men were so utterly daft when it came to such things.

"I suppose I can teach him a step or two."

Connor sighed in relief. "Good."

"What kind of ball is it to be?"

"A costume ball."

Genevieve threw up her hands in exasperation. "A costume ball? For heaven's sake, Connor, it's not as if I can produce a suitable costume for him out of thin air."

"Mrs. MacDougal will take care o' it for ye. She'll make one for ye too."

"For me? You wish for me to attend?"

“O’ course, I wish for ye to attend.”

She searched around for a reason to refuse, but could think of none. He had clearly tied her presence to the ball as part of her duties in monitoring Ewan. How could she say no?

She rose, her mind racing. “Well, if that is what you desire.”

“It is.”

“Then there is much to be done. May I have your permission to leave?”

He seemed pleased that she had asked. “As ye wish, Genevieve.”

She started to walk away and then stopped and peeked over her shoulder at him. He still sat on the bench watching her, smiling. The sunlight danced across his dark hair, his face illuminated with a passionate kind of beauty. A bittersweet sense of longing filled her. Even now her memories of him remained strong and clear, as did her attraction.

He lifted a dark eyebrow. “Is there something else, lass?”

She shook her head. “No. There is nothing at all.”

Chapter 4

Genevieve petted the sweet brown-haired hound over the wooden fence. “I think Mari will be the one to find the fox.”

“No’ possible. She’s a lassie.” Ewan bravely reached over the fence to scratch her behind the ears. “Twill be a male who leads the pack. Charlie, I think.” He glanced over at the large black dog.

Genevieve marveled at how hard Ewan had worked to overcome his fear of the dogs. While he was not yet comfortable in their presence, no longer was he terrified. In fact, he had made progress with a great many things. He showed up for his lessons and the work had gone as well as could be expected. Ewan was still wary and not entirely cooperative, but at least he was coming along. She thanked God for the small things.

Genevieve resumed scratching Mari’s hindquarters when the sound of hoof beats caught her attention. Turning, she saw a group of six people ride into the courtyard. Curious, she craned her neck to see the visitors. As the riders dismounted, Genevieve saw Connor stride out of the castle and go directly to a cloaked woman who remained seated on her mount. Connor offered her a hand and she took it, sliding down to the ground, safely ensconced in his arms. For

a moment, Genevieve felt an unexpected surge of jealousy.

The hood slipped back from the woman's head and thick black hair spilled down her back in a cascading wave. She said something to Connor and he laughed, leaning his head down toward her.

Genevieve pointed to the woman. "Ewan, who's that?"

Ewan turned around. "Lady Catherine Montclair."

"Montclair?" Genevieve echoed and then an unpleasant thought leapt to mind. "She wouldn't happen to have been the former Catherine Graham, would she?"

"How did ye know she was o' the Graham clan?"

"A fortunate supposition." Her stomach started to churn uncomfortably. So *this* was the woman Connor had wished to marry before he'd been forced to wed Janet MacIntyre.

"I hate her," Ewan declared.

Genevieve glanced at him in surprise. "Why, that's a truly awful thing to say."

"It's true."

Catherine laughed, the tinkling sound floating toward them on the breeze and drawing Genevieve's gaze back to the handsome couple. Suddenly Connor lifted his dark head as if sensing she was watching. His eyes locked onto hers, intense and thoughtful. Embarrassed she had been caught staring, Genevieve flushed and turned away, But not before she saw Catherine link her arm possessively with his.

Genevieve marched over to the fence and began petting Mari again, her thoughts awhirl.

Ewan followed. "I hope she doesna stay long this time."

"This time?" *God's mercy, just how often does Catherine visit?* "Isn't she...well, already wed?" Not that it would matter to a rogue like Connor, but for Ewan's sake, she hoped it did.

"She was married. But old Archibald died just a month before mum."

Stunned, Genevieve fell silent. What an extraordinary coincidence that Connor's and Catherine's respective spouses had died within a month of each other.

He stood on the bottom log of the fence and reaching over toward Mari. "She's come here a lot since mum died."

"Oh." Genevieve digested that unpleasant bit of information. "Isn't it a bit odd that she is here already? The foxhunt won't take place until next week."

Ewan shrugged. "I dinna think Da minds spending time wi' her. At least it means he willna have to be wi' me." Bitterness tinged his voice and Genevieve winced.

"Your father is simply being a gentleman and duty requires that he spend time with his guests."

Ewan looked at her curiously. "Why do ye defend him?"

Why, indeed?

She kept her expression neutral. "I'm not defending

him. I'm only stating facts."

"She doesna love Da." He scuffed his foot. "She just wants the treasure."

"Treasure? What treasure?"

Ewan rolled his eyes, clearly put upon to explain things to her as if she were a child. "The treasure of ole Black Gavin Douglas.'Tis said he hid some jewels in the castle. People have been searching for centuries for the jewels without luck. But I'll find them someday. I will."

"That's a marvelous tale, Ewan, but most likely not true. Surely any hidden treasure would have been found by now."

"Well, it hasna."

Genevieve brushed off her skirts. "I think that's enough talk of hidden treasure. Let's return to the schoolroom for the rest of our lesson."

To her surprise, he didn't complain as she led him back to the room. At least that thought warmed her even as the more disturbing thoughts of Connor and Catherine served to worry her considerably.

Connor sat beside Catherine in the castle arboretum, trying to seem interested in her endless chatter about her latest journey to Edinburgh. He couldn't care less about the newest fashions, the renovation of the inn where she had stayed and the gossip about so-called important people she had visited.

Why in God's name had the woman come so early?

He cursed because he already knew the answer to that. She came for him, for what she believed would happen between them. And until he'd seen Genevieve, even he thought it was a possible future.

However his plans had altered once he realized his feelings for Genevieve remained true. Now he had to determine the best way to win Genevieve back without excessively hurting Catherine's feelings or pride. And from what he knew of Catherine, that would not be an easy task.

Hell and damnation, women would be the death of him.

He sighed and leaned back in his chair. The plants and flowers in the arboretum were in full bloom and he should have been enjoying their beauty and fragrance. Instead he felt his mood sour.

Catherine said something and patted him on the knee. That intimate gesture from a woman of her beauty and stature would have had most men fervently counting their blessings. How easily he had fallen for her as a lad. She had a full, curvy body and her thick black hair hung in graceful curves over her shoulders. Yet for all that, she could also be cruel and cold, and he hadn't always liked what he'd seen. Besides, there was no compelling pull, no common interests and no real passion beyond that of the physical between the two of them. Had it not been for Genevieve, he might have been content with that much. But now he knew better.

He wanted more.

It had been a lesson well learned that beauty was skin deep, and did not a blissful marriage make. Just thinking about the years he'd spent with Janet caused his chest to constrict uncomfortably. But Catherine knew too much about him, about his past. If she even suspected his affection for Genevieve, she could make trouble that he would be hard-pressed to handle.

Christ's wounds, he had to do something to extricate himself from this intolerable situation before he lost any of the gains he had made so far with Genevieve.

But how in hell's name was he going to do that with Catherine watching his every move?

Chapter 5

As the days for the costume ball and foxhunt approached, the castle whirled in a frenzy of activity. The kitchen was a busy place both day and night, and Mrs. MacDougal appeared harried every time Genevieve saw her.

She had been formally introduced to Catherine, who had barely acknowledged her existence. She'd seen the woman about the castle, ordering people to and fro as if she already lived there. Maidservants scurried about scrubbing floors and beating the rugs.

Several nights in a row, Ewan and Genevieve ate supper alone at the big table in the Great Hall. Malcom, Connor, Catherine and her entourage apparently dined far later in the evening. Genevieve tried hard not to be jealous when she saw Connor and Catherine strolling about the castle grounds, but she was.

And she hated herself for it.

On day five of Catherine's visit, Genevieve had the unexpected opportunity to get a closer look at the woman. Catherine swept into the Great Hall with Connor and Malcom trailing close behind, apparently determined to have an early supper. Genevieve gave Ewan a discreet nod of her head and the boy reluctantly stood until Catherine was seated.

Unlike some women, Catherine was even more beautiful close up. Her long black hair was intertwined with threads of gold that glittered in the candlelight, complimenting her black velvet gown. Just being in the same room with her made Genevieve feel even more dowdy than usual.

As she had expected, Catherine barely even registered her presence, never once addressing her directly, considering her as naught more than a servant. The most awkward part of the evening came when the guests were served the main course. As soon as the plate had been set before her, Genevieve knew she was in trouble.

Bile rose in her throat as she studied the brown lump on her plate. “Is this...haggis?”

Connor smiled. “Aye. Have ye tried it before?”

Genevieve shook her head. She’d heard her grandfather speak often of the Scottish delicacy. Oh, how he’d laugh when she covered her mouth with a cloth and gagged at the thought of having to eat a sheep’s heart, liver and lungs all mashed together after being simmered in the stomach sac. She should have better prepared herself for such Scottish customs, but so much had happened since arriving at the castle that she’d simply forgotten.

Genevieve searched for a polite answer. “I...I haven’t had the honor.”

Ewan took a bite, chewed. “Ye look a bit green. Eat up.”

Genevieve tore her gaze away from her supper.

“Ah, I’m not feeling well. Perhaps I should retire.”

Connor laughed, knowing at once what had distressed her. “I’m afraid we’ve offended Miss Fitzsimmons’ English sensibilities wi’ our food offering.”

“No, not at all. I’m aware it’s a Scottish delicacy. I’m just not that hungry.”

Ewan harrumphed, lifting another bite of haggis to his mouth. “Ye were eating fine a minute ago.”

“Ah, well, I...”

Connor held up a hand, his eyes twinkling. “Please stay, Miss Fitzsimmons. I’ll have another plate brought out to ye.”

“No, please. That won’t be necessary.”

Nonetheless, Connor insisted. He also persuaded her to stay and chat for far longer than she considered proper for the governess. Genevieve had just thought to excuse herself again when the conversation suddenly turned to her.

“So, the governess is English. How fascinating.” Catherine’s voice carried just a hint of distaste.

Genevieve looked up from the table. Despite the fact that Catherine’s comment hadn’t been directly addressed to her, pride dictated she answer anyway. “Yes. I’m from northern England. Alnwick to be exact.”

“Never heard o’ it.” Catherine turned her beautiful green eyes toward Connor. “I must say, Connor, this is quite unusual, even for ye.”

Genevieve stiffened at the woman’s casual and but

very pointed use of his Christian name in front of both his father and son. This was clearly a woman making a public claim on her territory.

If Connor understood the implication, he was nonplussed. “Miss Fitzsimmons is an old friend of the family.”

“Is that so?” Catherine lifted a delicate eyebrow. “Just how old a friend?”

For some unfathomable reason, Malcom laughed. “Well now, my dear, her grandda and I go back quite a ways. Connor and I spent a most delightful summer at their estate some years ago. Miss Fitzsimmons was an impeccable host, especially to Connor.”

Genevieve flushed. Malcom was clearly baiting the woman and seeming to enjoy it. Even worse, Connor made no move to stop him.

Catherine leaned back in her chair. “Really?”

Genevieve took a gulp of her wine. “Um, it was a long, long time ago. Ten years.”

Why in God’s name she had volunteered the information?

“Well, well.” Catherine regarded Genevieve thoughtfully over her wine cup. “How very interesting.”

“Um, not really.” She rose to her feet, her cheeks burning uncomfortably. “Well, with your permission, sir, I shall retire for the evening.”

The men at the table rose, but before Connor could offer to escort her, she invited Ewan to do so. He seemed reluctant to leave the table, but to her surprise,

agreed. Gallantly he walked her to her door, pausing only momentarily before darting back toward the Great Hall.

Why she did not simply enter her room and retire for the evening, she didn't know. One minute she had her hand on the latch, and the next, she turned and headed toward the spiral steps at the end of the corridor. Without consciously making the decision, she began climbing up the long, winding staircase that led to the north tower. At first the way was dimly lit from below, but as she ascended further, she had to feel the way with her hands. It was a far greater climb than she had expected and she was quite out of breath by the time she reached the top. Genevieve paused as she felt the cold wood of the door beneath her fingers. Groping for the latch, she pushed down, certain it would be locked. To her astonishment, the door swung open with a groaning creak. She blinked, trying to let her eyes adjust to the bright light of the moon that spilled into the room through an open window.

Now why was the window open?

Genevieve stood in the doorway listening to the whistle of the wind through the empty room, her heart beating rapidly. She could see dim shape of a single chair and in the corner by the window, a spinning wheel. She had no idea why she had come or what she hoped to find. Yet here she stood in the very room where Janet Douglas had met her untimely death.

Compelled forward by morbid curiosity, she moved toward the window. She dared a cautious glimpse

down at the courtyard below.

Suddenly Genevieve heard a clatter and whirled around, shrieking as a dark form grabbed her by the upper arm. Yanked away from the window, she was slammed into the stone wall, the breath rushing from her lungs with a loud whoosh.

Connor growled, his curt voice lashing out at her. "What in the devil are ye doing here?" In the moonlight she could see his nostrils flared with fury, his eyes cold with anger.

"I... I..." Genevieve fought to catch her breath and slow the thunder of her heart. "I was just exploring."

He shook her slightly. "Exploring? Here?"

"I'm sorry." Her body started shaking. "I d-didn't know it was forbidden."

His grip on her shoulders eased although he still pinned her against the wall. "'Tis no' forbidden. But if ye had wished to see the room, ye could have asked."

"You are right. I apologize."

His anger seemed to fade. "Why did ye open the window?"

"I didn't open the window. It was open when I arrived."

"'Twas already open?"

"Yes."

She could see he didn't believe her. "Where is your light?"

"I don't have one."

"Ye came up here in the dark?"

"Well, I don't see yours." She knew she sounded

ridiculously defensive.

“I dropped it when I entered the room and saw ye at the window.”

“Oh.” She wondered why he had yet to move away. He remained pressed against her, his considerably large body shielding hers as if protecting her from something.

But what?

Silence stretched between them before he spoke. “Hell and damnation, Genevieve, ye could have been hurt up here. Ye could have been lost.”

She thought it a curious choice of words, but before she could consider it further, he pulled her roughly, almost violently, to him, his mouth claiming hers in a blast of heat and hunger. The careful barrier she’d erected around her heart was crushed in an instant as his mouth devoured her softness. These were not the gentle, tender kisses he had once bestowed upon her at age sixteen. These were the kisses of a man driven by hunger and untamed desire.

Her knees buckled beneath his unexpected ravishment and she gripped his shoulders, both thrilled and shocked by the heady sensation of his burning lips and her body’s welcoming response to him. He was devouring her and she permitted it, wanting it more than anything she’d ever wanted before. He tangled his fingers in her hair, angling her mouth to fit his, demanding she meet him with the same reckless abandon.

She gave herself to the passion of his kiss,

succumbing to the forceful domination of his lips. She was weak, but didn't care, didn't want him to stop. She'd never before been able to resist him and she realized she never would.

Then, as abruptly as he had bent to kiss her, he lifted his mouth, closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against the stone wall beside her head. She didn't dare move. The blood pounded in her brain, leaped from her heart and clogged in her throat along with a raw and powerful emotion.

Love.

For a moment, he said nothing and then reached over to close the window. "Let's go. Take my hand and I'll lead ye down the stairs. They can be quite treacherous in the dark."

She hesitated, not trusting herself to touch him again, still deeply shaken from his passionate onslaught. He waited for her to decide and slowly she gave him her hand. He grasped it, those same magic hands having moments before been wound in her hair.

Connor remained silent for the entire trip down the stairs. Without evening bidding her a good night, he dropped her off at her room and walked away. Genevieve shut the door, leaning back against it and closing her eyes.

She still loved him. It was an admission dredged from a place beyond logic and reason. And it was horribly, awfully true.

What had happened in the tower between the two of them?

She trembled. Had he followed her, and if not, why *had* he gone to the tower? Who had been there before her and opened the window?

Ignoring the sudden chill, she undressed for bed and blew out the candle. Tonight she would dream of good things, of things that were safe. But just as she drifted off to sleep, she thought she heard a soft voice whispering in her ear.

It warned to her beware of Connor Douglas.

Chapter 6

Other castle guests began trickling in on Wednesday morning for the foxhunt that would take place on Saturday. Even more anticipated, it seemed, was Thursday night's costume ball. The castle bustled with servants scurrying about cleaning, baking and preparing rooms for the numerous guests. Genevieve personally counted twelve new faces, but was certain she had missed at least a few.

In deference to all the excitement, she suspended Ewan's regular lessons and they spent their days either practicing dance steps or down with the hounds. She was amazed at his progress and could only attribute it to his deep-seated desire to please his father.

She considered it her duty to warn him. "We still have to convince your father. That may not be easy."

"We can." Ewan sounded so confident, she prayed he was right.

The rest of Wednesday Genevieve spent helping Mrs. MacDougal sew on her and Ewan's and her costumes. Once Ewan heard he would be permitted to attend the ball, he promptly announced he wished to be a pirate. Mrs. MacDougal sent two girls to work sewing his, while she selected a light blue gown to serve as a costume for Genevieve.

"Who shall I be in that?" Genevieve eyed the

housekeeper curiously.

“Christina Douglas, wife o’ Black Gavin.”

Genevieve gasped in surprise. “Christina Douglas? Why her?”

Mrs. MacDougal shrugged, but Genevieve sensed her disapproval. “Because Connor requested it. And because ’twill be an easy costume to sew. She haunts the tower, havena ye heard?”

“The north tower?” Genevieve thought of the open window.

“Aye, indeed. Certainly ye’ve heard o’ the treasure Black Gavin hid in the castle.”

“Ewan told me. Surely you don’t really believe such rubbish.”

“’Tisn’t for me to believe or no’. It simply is.”

Genevieve sank into a chair. “Whatever happened to Christina?”

“After Gavin was killed, she disappeared. Some believe she found the treasure and ran wi’ it but she was never found alive or dead. And no one ever revealed the treasure.”

Genevieve shuddered. “It sounds like this treasure, if it really exists, brings rather ill luck.”

“’Tis so. After all, the treasure came from the English and its price was treachery and betrayal o’ Gavin’s own people. If the truth be known, ye sort o’ resemble Christina Douglas.”

“I do?”

“Aye, ye can see for yerself. Her portrait hangs in the Great Hall on the wall west o’ the hearth. She is

sitting in the garden, clad in a gown o' blue with silver threads."

"Thus your choice of the blue gown. I must have a look at her."

"Indeed, ye should." She lifted up Genevieve's gown and studied it. "Ye just take care o' our Ewan. 'Twill be his first ball and certainly a night to remember. Perhaps for us all."

Genevieve nodded, unaware of just how right she would be.

"Ye shall no' escape me this time, Madame." Ewan took a step forward in the schoolroom, brandishing a wooden sword. The black patch over his right eye slid down his nose and he pushed it up. "Surrender your treasure at once or face a certain death."

Genevieve held up her hands in mock terror. "I beg of you, sire, don't harm me."

Ewan laughed and Genevieve was delighted to see the warmth actually reach his eyes for the first time since they had met.

"Well, do I look fierce enough for the ball tonight, English?" He held out his hands and turned around for her inspection. Truthfully, she thought he appeared nothing short of adorable in a flowing shirt of white, black breeches, a red rag tied over his head. A wooden sword attached to his waist with a strip of leather. But she knew better than to say it.

"You look positively ferocious." She adjusted the

rag on his head. "Remember, in front of the other guests you should address me as Miss Fitzsimmons."

He gave her a boyish grin. "I never call ye that. Tonight I shall call ye Christina Douglas. Did ye know ye look just like her?"

"There is a slight resemblance, I suppose."

Genevieve smoothed the folds of her blue gown. Mrs. MacDougal had draped the bodice with silvery gauze, undoubtedly to look similar to the one worn by the real Christina Douglas in the portrait.

"Come now. Let us practice those dance steps one last time before you put them into practice."

The musicians had already begun to play downstairs and they could hear the lilting strains wafting in through the open door.

"Now don't forget when you ask a lady for the pleasure of a dance and she accepts, you need to offer her your arm." Genevieve held out her arm until Ewan took it. "Now lead me to the dance floor."

The boy did as told but he looked so nervous, she thought he might wretch. Genevieve patted him on the shoulder. "This is not so terrible a thing."

"'Tis easy for ye to say. Ye're a lass. Ye like dancing."

She rolled her eyes, but took pity on him. "Now, take my right hand and then turn to your left. We shall both take three steps forward and then turn to face each other again."

He took her hand and immediately took three steps. Genevieve swallowed a laugh. "No, Ewan, you must

wait for the lady before you take the three steps. Like this.” She showed him how to proceed and he blushed bright red, scuffing his foot on the floor.

“Sorry.”

“You’re doing fine.”

They practiced it a few more times until they heard a noise at the doorway. Both of them whirled around to see Connor leaning against the doorjamb. Stunningly resplendent in a blazing white shirt and a kilt of black and gray, he exuded masculinity. A plaid in matching colors had been draped over one shoulder and fastened with a gleaming red ruby brooch. His black devil hair hung loose about his shoulders and a sheathed dirk had been fastened to his waist with a leather belt. He so closely resembled wild Black Gavin in the painting that it took her breath away.

He nodded at Ewan. “Well done, lad. Ye’re no’ bad on your feet for a pirate.”

Pleased by the praise, Ewan puffed out his chest. “Dancing is easy.”

Genevieve smiled at the cocky boast and glanced at Connor. He gazed at her, a mixture of amusement, heat and desire on his face. They had not spoken of the kiss in the tower and in fact, had said very little since that night. That suited her just fine because she had every intention of forgetting that it ever happened.

“Christina Douglas.” The words came out like a revered whisper. “The resemblance is remarkable.”

She offered a small curtsy. “Mrs. MacDougal said you requested it. Given that we had little time to make

a costume, I agreed this was a suitable choice.”

“Aye, I’m pleased that ye saw fit to indulge me. May I request the pleasure o’ this dance?”

“Now? But what about your guests downstairs?”

Connor grinned, his teeth flashing white. “Ewan, go on down to the ball and take my place temporarily as host, would ye, lad? Miss Fitzsimmons and I will join ye in a minute. I’d have her instruct me in a dance step or two.”

“Ye want me to host?” Ewan could barely contain his excitement. “Aye, Da, I can do that.” He darted down into the corridor, presumably before his father changed his mind.

“He’s a good lad.” Connor turned to Genevieve and bowed. “Shall we begin, my lady?”

Genevieve nodded, trying to still the hammering of her heart. Connor held out his arm and she took it. He slid his warm hand down her arm, leaving a trail of fire before linking fingers with her. Together they began to dance, perfectly in step with each other. After a few minutes, Genevieve spoke.

“It’s clear you don’t need any instruction.”

“’Tis only because I have an excellent partner.” He had a bit of the devil in his blue eyes.

She couldn’t help but smile. “You are quite incorrigible. And you do realize that wearing the kilt is illegal. The King has decreed it so.”

“Really?” Connor expressed mock surprise, pressing his palm expertly against hers and stepped forward. “And are ye intending to enforce the king’s

decree?”

“Of course, not. But aren’t you worried that word of this will get back to the king?”

“Are ye?”

“Certainly, I am. You are my employer after all. If you are led to the jail, who will pay my stipend?”

His warm fingers gripped hers as they stepped side by side. An air of command exuded from him, reminding her of just how powerful and virile he was. “Is that all that concerns ye? Your stipend?”

“I would worry for the effect it would have on Ewan, of course.”

He laughed. “Ye worry for naught. ’Tis just a costume, Genevieve.”

She frowned. “A costume? And just who are you supposed to be?”

“Why Black Gavin, o’ course. If ’tis necessary, I’ll remind the English that he was the one and only Douglas loyal to the crown.”

Genevieve stopped dancing. “You’re dressed as Black Gavin?”

In one forward motion, he pulled her into his arms. This was not part of the dance. “Aye, and for tonight at least, it appears ye are my wife.” His breath felt hot against her ear. “What say ye o’ that?”

Their eyes locked. His arms tightened around her, one hand pressing into the small of her back. *His wife?* Acutely conscious of where his warm flesh touched her, she tingled from the contact. Tonight something intense and bold smoldered in his cool blue eyes. Her

body responded to him with such a fierce intensity it left her reeling.

Still, she pretended indifference. "I'd say naught, of course. It is nothing but a pretense."

His gaze intensified, searching her expression for something. *But what?*

"I like your hair loose like this," he said, taking a strand and winding it around his finger. "'Tis so soft and pretty."

"It is really quite ordinary and plain."

He chuckled. "Ye are far too modest, Genevieve. Ye have no idea how beautiful ye really are."

"Now you patronize me."

His expression turned serious. "Never. Ye are beautiful and never more so than at this moment. Come now, dinna ye still believe in just a wee bit o' magic?"

She had believed once, she almost said aloud. When she'd allowed a handsome Scottish rogue to kiss her under the stars and she believed him when he told her she was beautiful. Never again.

She shrugged off his closeness, his words. "Magic is for the young and foolish. I am neither."

She detected a flicker in his gaze. "One is never too old for magic." His voice was soft. "I could make ye believe. I did once before."

Before she could speak, he kissed her, caressing her lips with his mouth in almost a reverent fashion. She quivered at the sweet tenderness of it and unable to resist, stood on tiptoe, winding her arms around his

neck and kissing him back.

He groaned at her response, his arms tightening around her, deepening the kiss. The gentle massage sent currents of desire through her and she savored every moment, a part of her wondering if it would be their last kiss. His hands explored the hollows of her back and she molded into the hard contours of his body. She expected hunger and urgency in his kiss like before in the tower, but tonight the kiss was thoughtful and intimate. Achingly affectionate and dreamy. A kiss that would make even a hardened heart believe in magic.

All too soon, he lifted his head and brushed a light kiss across her forehead. "So, do ye feel it," he murmured against her hair. "'Tis just as it was 'tween us ten years ago."

The memories rushed back and the pain, long suppressed and buried, broke to the surface in an agonizing burst of anguish and grief.

"I'm *not* the same girl you knew. She no longer exists."

"Och, but I think she does."

The memories of his abrupt departure assailed her, jagged and hurtful. "I'll not let you do this to me again."

He raised a dark eyebrow. "Do what?"

"Take liberties with me because it amuses you. I know you sent for me because you pitied me. I...I had nowhere else to go and you knew it. But you hired me to teach your son and nothing else. I'll not serve as an

object of your entertainment because you are bored with your other dalliances.”

He seemed stunned by her words. “An object o’ entertainment?” Anger lit his eyes. “That’s what ye think ye are to me?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” Furious that once again he had caused her to forget reason and exposed her deepest vulnerabilities, she nearly shouted. “I’ve seen you with Catherine. This time around I *know* she’s your intended. So I’m putting you on notice that I’ll not permit myself to be ravished again by nothing more than a...a...kilt-clad rogue.”

His voice cooled. “Is that really what ye think o’ me, Genevieve? That I’m a man who canna keep his hands off a woman? A man who cares naught who he takes to his bed?”

“That’s exactly what I think.” The pain in her heart made her reckless with her words. “So, go back to the arms of your beautiful fiancé and cease your dalliance with me.”

She turned away from him, hating the fact that her voice sounded so strained and so terribly, awfully...jealous. Desperate, she wanted him to leave before the tears fell and she humiliated herself any further.

Silence hung heavy before he spoke. “I thought o’ all people, ye knew me better than that. I hoped that ye did.”

She still could not bring herself to look at him. “Just what do I really know of you, Connor? That you

made sweet promises to me, none of which you ever intended to keep or that you broke my heart when you left without a word or explanation. How do you expect me to trust a man who drove his own wife to her death?”

The minute the words slipped out she wanted to take them back. Horrified, she turned to face him, shocked at how pale his face had gone. “God’s mercy, Connor, I’m sorry. I was angry and hurt. I didn’t mean to say that.”

It was too late. Shutters fell over his eyes, his expression turning distant and cool. “I suppose ye are right about me after all. How kind of ye to give me a most honest, if no’ brutal, look at my true self. Now, I must attend to my duties and permit ye to see to yours. That will be all.”

With those bitingly cold words, he left the schoolroom without a backward glance. For a moment, Genevieve simply stood there, a horrible pain squeezing her heart.

If only he knew how much she still loved him. But she would not be his mistress. For to do so would destroy what little was left of her heart.

Chapter 7

Connor should have been pleased his guests were enjoying the ball, but he couldn't have cared less. It didn't matter that Mrs. MacDougal and the other servants had transformed the Great Hall into an elegant retreat with hundreds of candles and beautiful displays of flowers. A group of colorfully dressed musicians he had paid a pretty coin for played in one corner while nearby a long trundle table groaned under the weight of dozens of plates of food.

The guests mingled, ate and danced with appropriate merriment as Connor dutifully made his way among them, stopping to chat. He knew he appeared the impeccable host, gracious and generous. But inside he felt angry, despondent.

Now he knew what Genevieve truly thought of him.

Her accusations stung, even more so because many of them had been true. He was no saint and he had never claimed to be. But his feelings for her were different. They'd *always* had been different. Nonetheless, she hadn't believed him, hadn't believed his kisses were true. She didn't trust him, *couldn't* trust him because of his past. In many ways, he didn't blame her.

Damn it all to hell.

Tonight he'd intended to reveal his feelings, to apologize for his mistakes over the past years. He wanted to tell her that he did not love Catherine, and that he was not intending to wed her. But he'd never been good with words and instead thought his kisses, his passion, would convey his true feelings. It had always worked for him in the past and, so he had hoped it might work with her.

Instead, it had only made things worse. Unfortunately his ill-famed reputation was interfering with the most important relationship he'd ever had. What in God's name had she called him?

A kilt-clad rogue.

He cringed. Did she really believe that?

Unbidden, he sought her out and saw her moving among the guests. She stayed close to Ewan, but was careful not to smother the lad. She looked so lovely and pure in that simple gown of blue. Even more surprisingly, she truly resembled Christina Douglas with her impossible-to-tame brown hair flowing loose about her shoulders. He had no right to soil her, to stain her with his reputation, but God help him, he still wanted her.

Clenching his fists, he turned away. Catherine murmured something and he forced a smile. He'd have to hurt her too. Undoubtedly she would recover once he smoothed the way with a fair amount of coin. He had no illusions that she loved him, but his rejection would greatly damage her pride. Still, he'd do what had to be done.

He caught another glimpse of blue from the corner of his eye and turned in time to see Genevieve and Ewan whirling across the floor. Emotion tightened in his chest. He would have her no matter what she thought of him. There had to be a way to rebuild the fragile trust that had been forming between them. But first he had to show her he wasn't a rogue and that his intentions toward her were honorable.

Determined, he waited until Catherine's attention was elsewhere and made his way over to Genevieve and Ewan. He forced himself to keep his voice light with no trace of his earlier anger.

"Ah, Miss Fitzsimmons, there you are. Are ye, um, having fun?" He grimaced. Witty conversationalist he was not.

Surprised, she glanced up at him. When he saw her red-rimmed eyes and knew she'd been crying, his heart stumbled.

"Of course, it's a lovely ball, Mr. Douglas." She spoke so softly he had to lean down to hear her. "I'm grateful to be invited."

Hell and damnation. This is not how he wanted her, meek and miserable. He wished to show her he was no longer angry—that he understood why she had misconceptions about him. But what in God's name could he say to her with Ewan standing right there and a roomful of guests all poised to conveniently overhear whatever he might say?

"Ah, would ye like to dance?"

He saw the confusion in her eyes. "I'm afraid I'll

have to decline. Ewan and I were just about to retire for the evening.”

“Oh. I see...so...I...” Silence stretched between them. Connor groped for something else to say, but as usual, words failed him. Even worse Ewan had begun to stare at him with curiosity.

He cleared his throat. “Well then, I’ll bid ye a good night, Miss Fitzsimmons.” He nodded at Ewan. “Lad.”

When they turned away, he strode directly to the balcony to let loose a string of curses. Christ’s wounds, he didn’t have the slightest idea how to handle this mess he’d made with her.

Before he could berate himself further, Catherine sidled up, linking her arm with his. “Will ye dance wi’ me, Connor?”

He took another breath to steady himself. For one more night, he’d pretend to be the man she thought she wanted. But come tomorrow, he’d tell her the truth. His heart lay with another.

Genevieve awoke to a fierce pounding on her door. She jumped out of bed, snatched a robe and wrapped it around her. A quick glance at the window showed that it was still dark. She swung open the door. Connor stood there still fully dressed in his kilt and plaid.

“What time is it?”

“Late.” He removed his plaid and draped it over her shoulders. “Ye must come at once. Ewan’s been hurt and the lad is asking for ye. Fetch something for your

feet.”

“Hurt?” She stumbled toward the hearth and slid her feet into a pair of shoes. The wool plaid was scratchy and smelled of Connor. “What happened?”

“I dinna know exactly. Mrs. MacDougal just summoned me and I’m stopping to get ye on my way out. Make haste, please.”

Panic streaked through her. “Where is he?”

Connor’s expression turned grim. “The hound pen.”

“No. Oh, my God, no.”

She had to run to keep up with Connor’s hurried strides. His plaid shielded her from the cool wind, but inside she was chilled by fear.

They saw the bobbing torches and heard the murmur of voices near the dog pen long before they saw Ewan. Connor pushed his way through the small crowd and easily jumped the fence. Worried, he knelt at his son’s side. Ewan lay on his back, clutching his left shoulder, tears streaming down his face. He was still dressed in his pirate’s costume. Genevieve felt a rush of guilt and shame. He must have slipped out after they had bid each other good night. She hadn’t thought to check on him before going to sleep.

What kind of governess was she?

“Da.” Relief crossed his face when he saw Connor.

Connor took the boy’s hand. “What happened, lad?”

“I...I was trying to climb the fence when I fell.”

“What in the devil were ye doing down here at this

hour?”

Ewan glanced at Genevieve shamefaced. “I was too excited to sleep. I thought to see the hounds just one last time so I could show ye how well I can handle them now. But ’twas dark and I slipped.”

“Are ye hurt badly?”

He tried to hold back the tears. “Just my shoulder, I fear.”

Genevieve felt wetness dampen her own cheeks. “It’s going to be all right, Ewan.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve ruined everything. I’ll never be able to go on the foxhunt now.”

“There will be other times,” Genevieve reassured him.

“Says who?” Connor snapped out the words. “I’ll no’ have Ewan harmed again.”

Ewan shook his head. “Dinna be mad at her, Da. Miss Fitzsimmons helped me see that the hounds are no’ so frightening.”

It was the first time she had ever heard him call her by her proper name and emotion thickened in her throat at his defense.

“I’ve sent for the doctor.” Connor lifted Ewan from the ground. “Ye’ll rest in your room until he arrives.” He handed the boy over the fence and into the arms of a man on the other side. After jumping over, he took Ewan back in his arms.

Without another word, he strode toward the castle. Genevieve followed silently, her heart heavy. She was certain she’d soon have to face the moment she’d been

dreading since her arrival.

She was about to be dismissed.

After Connor had settled Ewan into bed, he motioned for her to go into the schoolroom. He followed, leaving Ewan's door slightly ajar.

Instead of immediately admonishing her, he all but ignored her, pacing the schoolroom with his hands clasped behind his back. He still wore his kilt and as he moved, she caught fascinating glimpses of his bare, muscular thighs.

She finally spoke. "Connor, I'm sorry. I should have consulted with you before allowing Ewan to work with the hounds. It's just that he wanted so badly to surprise you, to make you proud."

He stopped pacing and crooked his finger. "Come here." She took several steps forward until she stood nearly toe-to-toe with him.

"Was this your idea or Ewan's?" A dark gleam shone in his eyes.

"Mine."

He laughed, but without humor. "Are ye certain Ewan didna manipulate ye into doing this? To plan this to look like an accident so he could rid ye from the castle?"

The thought both startled and unnerved her. "No." Then she reconsidered. When she remembered the look of sheer joy on Ewan's face when he petted the hounds for the first time, she shook her head firmly.

“No, I’m certain. This was no devious plan of Ewan’s.”

Connor sighed. “Then ’tis ye I must blame for this mishap.”

“Yes, I accept full blame.” She paused and then plunged on. “And yet, I feel it is my duty to point out that part of the blame is yours, as well.”

His eyebrows shot up. “Mine?”

Since she felt she would be dismissed by the end of the conversation anyway, she decided to be completely candid with him. “Yes, yours. If only you had shown Ewan some attention, he wouldn’t have been so starved for it, and I wouldn’t have been so willing to help him gain it. But apparently you couldn’t bring yourself to spare that kind of affection. Instead, you have had nothing but the coolest reserve for your own son while you spent your time arranging foxhunts and balls, dallying with widowed women and kissing the governess.”

There. It came out a bit bolder and harsher than she intended, but she’d said it. And by God’s mercy, it was the truth.

For a moment he simply gaped at her in surprised incredulity. Then his eyes narrowed and she saw fire flash within their depths.

“Ye dare to tell me how to act with my son?”

“Someone has to. You barely show him any fatherly interest.”

He straightened. “That isna true. I provide for him, dinna I? He has a home, a name. I’ve hired him a

governess to teach him the ways o' the world. What more does he expect? What more do *ye* expect."

"I expect a lot from you. But Ewan doesn't expect anything. He simply wants your love, your affection. You may not realize it, but you behave quite differently when you're around him. It's like you become another person—more formal, cool and aloof. Most of the time, you don't even look directly at him. It's as if you've purposely erected some kind of barrier between you and Ewan."

"That is quite enough."

She ignored his command. "Connor, I don't know what happened between you and your wife, but Ewan is innocent. Would it hurt so terribly much to lower that barrier a bit and get to know him? He's obviously hurting and so are you. Perhaps together you can resolve the issues that are keeping you apart."

Before he could reply, they both heard a noise in the corridor. Connor strode out and Genevieve heard him greet the physician. She waited in the schoolroom, listening to the low murmur of their voices while the doctor examined Ewan. After a short time, Connor returned to the schoolroom.

"It seems we are fortunate Ewan hurt naught more than his shoulder. The doctor will bind it."

"Thank God."

His mouth tightened at the corners. "Despite what *ye* think, Genevieve, I know what's best for my son."

She sighed. "I know you mean well, Connor, but do you really? Have you asked Ewan how he feels about

the possible union between you and Catherine? It's hard enough for him to get your attention without a wife, and he's likely terrified of what will happen once has more competition. Perhaps if you'd reassure him that everything will be fine once you're wed, he'd feel more secure about the marriage."

She paused, rubbing her eyes with her fingertips. "Now, having said my piece, I shall go pack my bags. If you would be so kind as to order me a carriage back to Alnwick on the morn, I would greatly appreciate it."

He stared at her with an open mouth and then snapped it shut. To her amazement, there was no longer anger in his eyes, only sadness and a deep-seated resignation.

"I'm no' dismissing ye. I dinna want ye to quit as Ewan's governess."

It was her turn to be surprised. "You don't?"

"Nay. There is much I need to discuss wi' ye, but now is no' the time. I've a son in bed with a hurt shoulder and a castle full o' guests all expecting a grand foxhunt tomorrow. Just promise me that ye willna pack up and leave before I've had *my* say."

"Your say? What do you mean?"

"Ye shall see. I promise ye, soon all will be clear."

Chapter 8

Genevieve sat in a chair next to Ewan's bed, reading him a story. Her eyes felt gritty from lack of sleep, but she refused to leave the boy alone. He'd slept only a few hours and then awoke in pain as the morning sun peeked through the drapery. She'd given him a tonic and now he sat propped up, his injured shoulder bound snug in a sling made with white linen strips. A soft breeze wafted through the room while outside the open window, a light summer drizzle fell. Genevieve wondered if the rain would interfere with the foxhunt, which, as far as she knew, was still planned for tomorrow morning.

Ewan shifted against the pillows. "I got ye in trouble wi' Da."

She shook her head. "No, I got myself in trouble."

"Will ye have to leave?"

"Do you want me to?"

He shook his head vigorously. "Nay, I'd rather ye stayed."

"Well that certainly is a change of heart from when I first arrived."

He plucked nervously at his sheets. "I'm sorry about that, Miss Fitzsimmons, there is something else I want to ask ye. Something I've been thinking about for a long time."

“You may ask me anything.”

He nodded, his face paling a bit. “Do ye think my da is a murderer?”

A soft gasp escaped her. “What did you say?”

“Do ye think my da killed my mum?” He repeated the words in a rush as if she’d forbid him to say it again.

Stunned, she groped for words. “Ewan, why would you think such a thing?”

His eyes filled with tears. “I saw him. That night. The night mum died.”

Dread crawled up her spine. “You saw what?”

“They were arguing. He followed her to the tower. I crept up the stairs to listen. They were fighting...about me.”

The pain and guilt in the boy’s eyes tore at her heart. “Ewan, sometimes people argue about many things, even their own children, but it doesn’t mean they don’t love them. It’s actually quite a normal occurrence.”

Ewan pressed his lips together. “M-Mum was crying and Da was yelling at her. I heard him say he didn’t love her and he wished he’d never wed her. Then suddenly ’twas quiet. I thought Da was leaving so I ran downstairs and hid. A minute later, I saw him come down the stairs. I’ve never seen him angrier. After he passed, I climbed back up to the tower room to see Mum. I thought mayhap I could make her feel better. I opened the door, but she wasna there. ’Twas when I noticed the window was open.”

Genevieve felt as if a hand were squeezing her heart. Had he told no one of this? “Oh, Ewan.”

His lower lip trembled. “I knew Mum hadna gone past me. So I walked slowly to the window and peeked down. Th-there she was just lying on the ground so verra still.”

Genevieve couldn’t speak. Instead, she reached out and pulled him into her arms and he shook with heartbreaking sobs.

“Ewan, have you ever told anyone else about this?”

“Nay,” he said in a muffled voice. “I was afraid.”

“Of whom?”

“Da. Did I do something to make them argue so? Did I do something to make him so frightfully angry?”

“No.” Her eyes filled with tears. “None of this is your fault.”

“Then whose fault is it?” His eyes shimmered with wetness.

Genevieve stroked his hair. “I don’t know, Ewan. I truly don’t know.”

The morning turned into afternoon and neither Genevieve nor Ewan spoke of what the boy had seen in the castle tower the night his mother died. Instead, she brought him his midday meal and they had a picnic in bed. She had just begun to read a new book when Connor suddenly appeared in the doorway. He was dressed in a tan colored riding suit and dark boots, clearly having been on a practice run for the foxhunt

with his guests. To Genevieve's astonishment, instead of his usual brief and formal greeting from the doorway, he sat on the corner of Ewan's bed and patted the boy on the leg.

"So, your secret is out, lad. Ye've been working wi' the hounds."

Ewan nodded. "I'm sorry for what happened, Da. I just wanted to show ye that I'm no longer afraid o' them. At least no' most o' the time. Right, Miss Fitzsimmons?"

She smiled and Connor's turned his gaze on her. Something stirred in his eyes, but he said nothing.

"Ye really wished that much to go on the foxhunt, Ewan?"

"I'm no' a child any longer."

"Ye're right. Ye worked hard to conquer your fear. That is indeed the action o' a man."

The boy beamed with pride, and Genevieve felt tears prick her eyelids. Connor glanced at her over his shoulder, perhaps seeking her approval. She smiled and when he resumed speaking with Ewan, she slipped out of the room, leaving the two of them alone.

She was dabbing her eyes with the corner of her sleeve when she saw Malcom shuffling down the corridor, leaning heavily on his cane.

"How's my grandson?"

"Better. Connor is in speaking with him now."

"I'm relieved to hear that. I never knew Ewan was so interested in foxhunts."

“He’s isn’t really. He’s more interested in gaining his father’s approval.” It slipped out before she could stop it. “I’m sorry. I seem to be quite adept lately at saying things I shouldn’t.”

“It has been a difficult time. Janet’s death was hard on both o’ them.”

“I know. But thankfully it seems that Connor might at last be trying to rectify the past.”

“Because o’ ye.”

“No, because I think he finally realizes how important he is to Ewan.”

Malcom cleared his throat. “Dinna be so hard on Connor. There’s a lot ye dinna know. A lot that could change your mind about him.”

“There isn’t anything that could matter more than loving his son.”

Malcom ran a gnarled hand over his brow. “That’s the problem, lass. Ewan isna his son.”

Chapter 9

Genevieve's mouth dropped open. "Wh-what did you say?"

Malcom motioned with his hand. "Follow me to the sitting room. The corridor is no' the place for such a discussion."

Stunned, she followed him and waited while he asked Mrs. MacDougal to bring them sweet tea and biscuits. Genevieve stirred the fire to a blaze by adding another square of peat.

After the housekeeper had served them and left, Genevieve sat back in the chair and asked the question burning on her tongue. "What do you mean Ewan isn't Connor's son?"

Malcom stared sadly into the fire. "Janet had a lover."

Genevieve felt as though she'd received a blow to the chest. "My God," she murmured.

"His name was John MacDonald. Quite the charming lad and in many ways, a lot like Connor. Janet wanted to wed John, but her family wouldn't have it. She'd been intended for Connor since the day she was born."

"What did Connor have to say about that?"

Malcom laughed, but it was not a happy sound. "He didna have any say, lass. He knew his responsibilities

to his family and he knew them well. He married her because I told him to.”

He stood heavily on his cane and shuffled over to a wooden lowboy where he pulled out a bottle of whiskey. He brought it over to the chairs where they sat and asked whether she'd like a dollop in her tea. Genevieve nodded and after he added in the spirits, he sat down and picked up his teacup.

“The marriage was a mistake from the start. Connor and Janet were no' suited to each other. Janet wished to entertain and travel while Connor preferred solitude. 'Twas also a time when he began to shoulder more o' the responsibilities for the business, including the arrangement we shared wi' your grandda.”

Genevieve took a sip of the tea, barely noticing as the whiskey burnt a trail down her throat. “It must have been a trying time for him. But how do you know Ewan isn't his son?” It was an indelicate question and her cheeks heated as she asked it. But she *had* to know.

“Connor began to travel more and more often. Part o' it was a genuine interest in the business, but more oft than no', I suspect 'twas to escape from Janet, from their loveless union. On one trip, he was away for nearly four months and when he came back, she confessed that she was with child and John was the da.”

Genevieve closed her eyes, imagining the pain the revelation must have cost him. “Does Ewan know?”

“Nay, no one knows for certain except me and Connor and now ye. Connor might no’ have told me except I found him one night in the library drunker than I’d ever seen him. He never drank to excess, so it frightened me. ’Twas then he told me what happened. I’d been charged wi’ keeping matters at the castle safe until his return, so ’twas my fault I failed to discover that Janet had been trysting wi’ John.”

“You can’t blame yourself.” Her thoughts were awirl. “Nor can Connor blame himself.”

“I assure ye, we both did. In many ways, ’twas a mess o’ our own making.”

She didn’t know what to say to that. “What did Connor do?”

“He went to call out John MacDonald, o’ course. But the scoundrel had departed once he’d heard from Janet o’ the impending birth. He knew Connor would come around. The last I heard he’d traveled south to catch a ship bound for America.”

“And yet, Connor didn’t disown Ewan.”

“Nay, he didna, although he thought long and hard about it. He finally told Janet he’d provide and care for the lad as if he were his own. But the relationship ’tween him and Janet was destroyed.”

“I can understand why.” God in heaven, so many things were beginning to make sense now. The coolness between Connor and Ewan, the unnatural barriers in their relationship.

“Ewan has never been an easy lad to handle. Yet he’s perceptive. I think he knew from the start that something ’twasn’t right ’tween him and his da.”

“And he got Connor’s attention the only way he knew how—through disobedience.”

“Aye. But every time Connor looks at the lad, he sees Janet’s betrayal.”

“He must have looked at Janet the same way.”

Malcom closed his eyes and Genevieve saw how very old he appeared. “And after enough times, it drove her to her death.”

Genevieve suddenly felt ill to her stomach. She set her teacup and saucer on the table and stood. “Why have you told me this?”

“Because I dinna want Connor to make the same mistake again.”

“What mistake?”

“Wedding Catherine.”

Genevieve’s indignation rose on Connor’s behalf. “Shouldn’t he be allowed to make his own choices at last?”

“Aye, he should. And that’s why, for once, I want him to follow his heart.”

Genevieve frowned. “I don’t understand. Doesn’t he want to wed Catherine?”

Malcom shook his head. “Nay, lass, he wants to wed ye. ’Twas what he wanted from the very first.”

She returned to her room, deeply shaken by Malcom’s

revelation about Janet and Ewan, and above all, Connor's supposed feelings for her. She had no idea what to think of his claim that Connor had wished to wed her. More than likely it was simply the fanciful wishing of an old man. But the knowledge of everything together disturbed her terribly.

Nonetheless, she somehow managed to sleep away the rest of the morning and into the early afternoon. She had supper with Ewan in his room, successfully avoiding Connor and the guests preparing for the next morning's foxhunt.

After tucking Ewan in, she slept fitfully, waking at dawn and hearing the castle already abuzz with preparations for the big event. She dressed in haste, hoping for a breath of fresh air before the festivities got started. Slipping outside, she used the servants' stairs and then headed for the garden. She was admiring the dew-wet blossoms when she heard footsteps behind her.

She turned, surprised to see Catherine. Clad in a blue velvet riding outfit with her dark hair pinned up and a cap positioned artfully atop her head, she was a vision to behold.

"Good morn' to ye, Miss Fitzwellon. 'Tis a lovely morning, isna it?"

Genevieve swallowed her annoyance. "It's Fitzsimmons. And yes, it's a lovely morning."

Catherine smiled and perched on the stone bench. "Och, how careless o' me to get the governess's name wrong. I should take more care when speaking o'

Connor's friends."

"That would be kind of you."

She chuckled, a deep, throaty sound. "Ye are no' as meek as ye look. Do ye mind if I ask just how close friends ye are wi' Connor?"

"Pardon me?"

She laughed outright. "I am a woman, dear, and I know Connor well. Ye fancy yourself in love wi' him, dinna ye? What did he do? Steal a kiss? Whisper sweet promises to ye under the stars? Well, let me tell ye something about Connor. He's a man who has a way wi' the lassies. He's handsome, brooding, charming. Every woman he meets falls hard for him. 'Tis naught but second nature to him. It means little."

"You are quite mistaken."

"Am I?" Catherine stretched on the bench like a sleek, slender cat. "Haven't ye asked yourself why he really brought ye here? Was he bored or perhaps needed an amusement to lighten his tedious routine? Ye would be naught more than a passing fancy for him, not even suitable for a long-time mistress. Why look at ye. Ye are plain, ordinary. A woman, aye, but no' a woman who would capture his fancy for verra long."

Genevieve clenched her fists together, her anger rising fast and furious. "How *dare* you suggest such a thing."

The sleek cat showed her claws. "I dare because Connor is mine. He intends to announce our betrothal tonight. I wanted to make that clear to ye. Ye are

naught more than a governess, a servant in his employ...and soon to be in mine. Your fate rests as much wi' me as it does him. So tread carefully."

Genevieve felt as if she'd been slapped. Connor was going to announce their betrothal tonight? Although she'd been prepared for an eventual joining of the two, she did not anticipate the hot flash of jealousy that ripped through her. It was time to show Catherine that she was not without claws either.

Raising her chin, Genevieve gave Catherine a cold smile of her own. "Well then, may the best woman win." A satisfied warmth filled her as Catherine's beautiful face paled.

Without another word, Genevieve turned on her heel and walked away.

The foxhunt took all morning and stretched past midday until finally the guests returned. Genevieve stood at Ewan's window, watching as Connor rode in first, his dark hair tousled from the ride. Catherine rode in behind him, looking as beautiful and regal as ever. They made a handsome couple.

At that moment, she saw Connor raise his head, his gaze capturing hers at the window. Startled that he'd seen her there staring, she stepped back.

Ewan could hardly contain his excitement. "Did ye see Da?"

"Yes. Everyone is back."

"Do ye think they caught the fox?"

“I would presume so.” Genevieve approached the bed and plumped the pillows.

“I hope Da comes up here soon to tell me about it.”

“I’m certain he will.” She was glad to see the boy in such good spirits. “I need to attend to something now, Ewan, but I’ll return later.”

She left the room, retreating to the safe haven of her own chamber. She’d been considering her situation all day and had finally come to a decision. After the guests departed, she would tell Connor of her desire to leave. She would not be welcome in a castle controlled by Lady Catherine nor had she any wish to live under the woman’s direction. She only prayed that Connor’s and Ewan’s new bond would hold and the two of them would enjoy their relationship.

She sat at her desk, writing some letters of inquiry as to governess posts in London and hoping Connor would be willing to give her a letter of reference. She still had pen in hand when a knock sounded on her door. Thinking it was Mrs. MacDougal, she walked across the room and opened it.

Connor stood there still dressed in his riding outfit, his massive shoulders straining against the coat. His dark hair had been tousled by the wind, his cheeks red from the ride. His presence seemed to fill the entire room and he studied her face for a moment, seeming to search her expression for something.

Her sense of trepidation rose. “Is all well with Ewan? I was with him just a short time ago.”

“Ewan is fine. I haven’t come to see ye about him.

Do ye have a moment to speak privately wi' me?"

"Of course."

Without another word, he led her to the library. After she was seated, he walked around to his side of the desk and sat down, saying nothing. Instead, he tapped his fingers on his desk and stared into space as if gathering his thoughts. He was nervous, she thought in surprise. The rogue of Aberdour was visibly unsettled about something.

The silence stretched on interminably until Genevieve could no longer bear it. "Did you catch the fox?"

He seemed relieved she had spoken. "I'm sorry to report that we did no'. I presume the news pleases ye, knowing how ye disapprove o' such gaming."

"I am pleased on behalf of the fox."

He managed a chuckle, but it sounded pained. "Diplomatically put." He fell silent again.

At a loss as how to help him further, Genevieve crossed her hands in her lap and waited. She had run out of meaningless conversation, so the rest would be up to him.

Finally he spoke. "Ye've been right about me."

"I have?"

"I've treated Ewan poorly. 'Twas wrong o' me. Genevieve...he's no' my son."

She was struck by the raw pain in his eyes. "I know. But in all the ways it matters most, you are indeed his father."

"Ye knew?"

“Your father told me yesterday, urging me not to judge you harshly. Why didn’t *you* tell me?”

He sighed. “I thought if ye knew ’twould make things worse between us.”

“It might have helped me understand why you treated Ewan the way you did.”

“Ewan doesna know.”

“Maybe someday he should...when he’s old enough to understand. But then it won’t matter. You’re the only father he’ll have ever known.”

He gave her a grateful look. “My dear, sensible Genevieve. How have I managed all these years without ye? If only I could see life the practical way that ye do. There is much ye dinna know about me...much that I’m ashamed to reveal. That summer we were together, I knew I was about to be officially betrothed to Janet. I didna tell ye. I couldna.”

The confession was stark and simple. But even after all this time, it hurt more than she cared to admit. “Why couldn’t you tell me?”

“Because I wanted naught to spoil our magic. And because I didna love her and she didna love me. She loved another, and until I met ye, I didna even know what love was.”

Anger bubbled, spilled over. “You didn’t love me, Connor. If you had, you wouldn’t have left. You would have stood up to your father.”

He sighed. “I don’t blame you for believing that. I tried to stand up to Da. I told him how I felt about ye. But he made me leave the next day without even

permitting me to say goodbye. And I let him. But that doesna change the fact that I loved ye.”

She stood, clenching her hands in the folds of her skirt. “Stop it, Connor. Don’t say that. Please.”

“Why, Genevieve? Why is it so hard for ye to hear?”

“Because I’m *not* going to let you break my heart again.”

He stood, came around the desk toward her. She backed up two steps.

“Don’t touch me.”

“Genevieve...”

“I mean it, Connor. Don’t touch me.”

“Ye didna mind when I touched ye before the ball. When we kissed, I felt the passion in ye.”

Her traitorous body betrayed her at the mere remembrance, her pulse beating in such an erratic fashion, she nearly lost her breath. “I’m asking you to end this discussion.”

He took another step closer, his blue eyes staring intently at her. “Do ye fear me, Genevieve?”

“No.”

“Ye’re lying. Do ye really think I harmed Janet?” The ferocity of his question took her off guard.

“I...I don’t know.”

His muscles bunched beneath his jacket as if coiled to strike. “Do ye think me cold enough to take ahold o’ my wife and push her from the tower window? Tell me the truth.”

Before she could answer, he closed the distance

between them, yanking her into his arms. She gasped as his arms wrapped around her like iron bands. Her hands were trapped against his chest and although she struggled, he only held tighter.

“You will answer me,” he commanded, looking down at her with a fierce gaze. “I need to know. Do you think I killed Janet?”

Genevieve’s breath burned in her throat. “Ewan said he heard you arguing with Janet in the tower the night she died. About him. He watched you storm down the tower stairs and afterwards, he crept up to see her. She had already fallen.”

A wild flash of shock and grief ripped across his face. “Ewan saw her?”

Her stomach knotted. “He did.”

Connor closed his eyes and after a moment he opened them again. “He thinks I pushed her?”

“He doesn’t know what to think. He’s just a child.”

The muscles of his arms hardened beneath his jacket. “And what say ye, Genevieve? Ye’ve yet to answer me.”

She reacted with anger to the challenge in his voice. Furious that he seemed able to lock and unlock her heart at will, she glowered. “You want the truth? Then I’ll tell you the truth. You are, at times, an insufferable, arrogant and supercilious rogue. But you are no murderer, Connor Douglas, and I believe that with all my heart.”

He stared at her for what seemed like an eternity, seeming to weigh the sincerity of her words. Then

without a sound, he lowered his face to her hair, his arms sliding down to her midriff to rest at the small of her back. The stiffness of his body seemed to melt into her and his fingers drew light circles on her back, his touch nearly unbearable in its tenderness.

“Thank ye, Genevieve,” he murmured against her hair. “I needed to hear ye say it. God knows I wasna even sure ye believed it.”

He released her and stepped back, the muscular arms that had nearly crushed her falling to his sides. Still deeply shaken by what had transpired between them, Genevieve sought to still her trembling hands.

Misery etched his face as he looked at her. “There’s more I want ye to know. When Janet told me that she was wi’ child and the babe was no’ mine, I raged for a week. Then after I considered, I told her I’d raise him as mine. She was grateful. ’Twas one o’ the few times I ever saw her smile.”

Genevieve felt her heart clutch. “But things did not go smoothly.”

“Nay, they did no’. We began to quarrel more frequently, more passionately. I should have done something. I should have tried harder to please her, but ’twas too late. For both o’ us. We muddled along for several years more before she finally had lived the lie enough. Jumping was the easy way out, and I’d be lying if I told ye I hadn’t considered it myself.”

Genevieve swallowed the lump in her throat. “You don’t owe me an explanation.”

“Och, but I do. For this and much more. It means

more to me than ye will ever know to hear that ye dinna believe I pushed Janet. I swear to ye that I didna. But I'm still partially responsible for her death. For making her life a living hell and making her feel as if she had no other choice."

"Connor, I'm sorry." It seemed all she was able to say. She was sorry for Connor, sorry for Janet, sorry for Ewan and sorry for herself.

He shoved his fingers through his hair. "I might have followed her except for Ewan. Now 'twas just me and him and I had no idea how to handle the lad. Then there was the matter o' Catherine."

"At last you were free to wed her and she was free as well."

"But I couldn't stop thinking o' ye...o' our summer together. I heard ye had turned down a suitor some years earlier. I wondered why. And I couldn't stop wondering what kind o' woman ye had become and if ye'd ever forgiven me."

She never thought she would say the words, but to her surprise they came out easily. And they were true. "I forgive you, Connor."

Their eyes met and locked. "Thank ye yet again."

She sighed. "And now that your conscience is eased in regards to me, you are free to wed Catherine."

His eyebrows shot up. "Catherine?"

"Yes. She told me you intend to announce your betrothal tonight."

"Tonight? Genevieve, I'm no' going to wed Catherine."

She blinked in surprise. “You aren’t?”

“Nay, I’m no’. I dinna intend to make the same mistake I made wi’ Janet. I can’t wed Catherine because my heart lies elsewhere.”

To her utter astonishment, he knelt to one knee and took her hand, his warm and powerful fingers wrapping around her fingers. “It lies wi’ ye, Genevieve. I fell in love wi’ ye that summer in England. I’d never met a lass so self-assured, so keen in wit, so enjoyable to be wi’. I’d found my soulmate and I was too young and foolish to realize it. Well, I’m older now and far wiser. And I still love ye.”

She was so astounded by his revelation that she simply sat there in shock. “You *love* me? Now?”

He laughed. “I tried to show ye wi’ my kisses, to make ye believe in the magic again, but ye thought me too bold...a rogue.” He paused, his mouth twitching at the corners. “I’ll be the first to admit my approach wasna the most refined.”

Stunned, she groped for something, *anything*, to say. “How can you be certain you love me?” As if she didn’t know for herself what it felt like to be completely and utterly in love.

He considered the question. “Because despite the years, my feelings for ye havna changed. I knew the moment I saw ye again. My heart slammed against my chest so hard I couldna breathe. And each time I’ve seen ye since I’m as nervous as a lad. My palms get slick and my tongue feels heavy. I should tell ye that even before your grandda died, I was already plotting

to get ye here to *Caisteal na Mara*. I am truly sorry for the loss of your grandda, but it gave me the perfect opportunity to bring ye here. I thought I only had to break through the mistrust ye had for me, and make ye see that my feelings were true. Instead, 'twas ye who saved me, giving me a chance to redeem myself through the love o' my son."

He gazed at her with such a burning intensity that it touched her very soul. "The truth is I brought ye here, Genevieve, because I had to know. Did I really love ye or just a memory o' what once was? Now I know."

Genevieve felt close to tears, the last of the wall she had so painstakingly built around her heart crumbling to dust with his words. "I don't know what to say."

He stood and embraced her, holding her close against his chest. "Then say that ye love me. Or if not that, at least that ye could learn to love me."

Emotion like she had never known before welled in her throat and broke, leaving bright unshed tears glittering in her eyes. "I do love you, Connor. I always have. You did make me believe in magic, as you're making me believe now. But I'm frightened. I was so terribly hurt when you left. I grieved for you for many years. I just couldn't bear it if you left me again or changed your mind."

"Never. Not this time. Wed me, Genevieve. Be my wife and stay wi' me forever."

Without any more hesitation, she wound her arms around his neck, pulling him down toward her mouth. "You know that I will. But when will you tell

Catherine?”

“Tonight.”

The promise lingered between them as his lips claimed hers in a hungry, possessive rush. And then she thought no more.

Chapter 10

Genevieve watched the sunset from her window seat, her nerves jangling, her thoughts so scattered she could hardly think straight.

Connor loved her.

She wanted to pinch herself and yet feared waking to find it had all been a dream. But it had to be true. Her heart brimmed with so much happiness, she thought she'd burst.

She didn't dare tell a soul, not even Ewan. In fact she was almost afraid to attend the closing feast, terrified everyone would see the joy in her eyes and know what Connor intended. But he had asked her to come. Now, she had only to act as normal as possible, whatever that was.

Earlier she'd begged off her afternoon tea with Mrs. MacDougal who stared at her strangely. But bless her heart, the housekeeper said naught a word.

Now Genevieve took extra care in preparing herself for the feast, braiding her hair and choosing her best gown. She had just finished dressing when the servant girl Lucinda knocked on the door and handed her a note. Puzzled, Genevieve took it and closed the door. She unfolded the parchment and read the bold, sprawling handwriting.

Meet me in the north tower at half past six. 'Tis

important.

Connor

Perplexed, Genevieve read it again. What could Connor possibly have to tell her that couldn't wait until after the feast? And why did he wish to meet her in the tower? She folded the note and sat down in the chair in front of the hearth. Her heart thumped uncomfortably. Had he changed his mind after all?

She stood and went to check her timepiece on the desk. It was nearly half past six now. Hurriedly, she left the room.

Walking down the corridor, she heard a noise coming from Ewan's room. Genevieve decided to check on him.

He smiled when he saw her, whistling approvingly. "Ye look awful fancy."

She perched on the bed beside him. "For that welcome flattery, I'll bring you some food later."

He grinned. "Hurry, would ye? I'm hungry. Bring some plum pudding."

She patted him on the cheek. "Only if you eat some venison first."

"Must I?"

"You must." She rose, walked to the door and paused at the threshold. "Ewan, does your father often go up to the tower room?"

He seemed taken aback by the question. "Sometimes. Why?"

"Well, he's invited me up there to talk."

"About what?"

She lifted her hands helplessly. “Something important that apparently can’t wait until after the feast. I’ll tell you about it later.”

Smiling, she headed toward the tower stairs. She climbed up, thankful that Connor had lit the torches all the way to the top. When she reached the door, she pushed down on the latch and the door swung open. Standing on the threshold, she could see that Connor hadn’t arrived yet, but the window was open again. The same eerie moaning noise echoed through the room bringing to mind the legend of Christina Douglas and how she supposedly haunted the room. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up.

Deciding to wait for Connor at the bottom of the stairs, Genevieve turned to leave when she heard a slight noise behind her. Before she could move, something hard hit her on the back of the head.

“No,” she breathed as the world turned black.

Connor stood in the courtyard, helping the stable master, Mac O’Donnelly, calm a restless steed. One of the guests had taken the horse out for a ride and for some strange reason the beast had become uncontrollable. Connor always had a deft touch with the horses, and had a particular fondness for this steed, so he rushed out to help Mac even though he was already dressed in all his supper finery.

“Hell and damnation,” Connor cursed as the steed nearly kicked him in the leg. “What’s got into him this

evening? He was fine during the foxhunt.”

“I dinna know, sir,” Mac said, barely escaping a buck to his ribs. “I’ve never seen him act this way.”

“Did he throw a shoe?”

“No’ that I can tell, sir. Seems to me his stomach is hurtin’. As if he’s eaten somethin’ rotten.”

A small crowd had begun to form around them. Connor wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead and stopped to catch his breath as the horse quieted momentarily. So much for his impeccable evening finery. He’d have to go and change again before supper.

Mac had just offered the steed a lump of sugar as a bribe when Connor suddenly noticed Ewan walking unsteadily toward him still dressed in his bed clothes.

Connor dropped the reins and ran toward the lad. “Ewan. My God, are ye all right? What are ye doing out o’ bed?” He knelt in front of the boy, noticing his face was deathly white and contorted with pain.

The boy needed a moment to breathe. “I...I looked out my window and I saw ye in the courtyard, Da. Ye are here.”

Connor frowned, puzzled. “Aye, Mac needed my aid with the steed. Where else would I be?”

A trickle of sweat slipped down Ewan’s temple and Connor realized the effort it had cost the boy to get there. “B-but Miss Fitzsimmons said ye wanted to meet her in the north tower. Now.”

Connor felt the world stop for an instant, his heart turning over in his chest. “Stay here,” he ordered the

boy and dashed toward the castle at a dead run.

Genevieve came to, her head pounding, her stomach queasy. The room seemed to be spinning, so she blinked, but the movement didn't stop. It was then she realized someone had grabbed her beneath the armpits and was dragging her across the floor...toward the open window.

"No!" She twisted her body to the side, causing her attacker to lose balance. Genevieve rolled sideways, freeing herself from her captor's hold. The movement nearly caused her to retch and her vision spun so badly she could barely see. Nonetheless, she managed to come to a crouch amid her skirts.

She could see her attacker blur and then split into two figures. Genevieve blinked hard until it became one figure again.

"Dinna move." The form spoke almost reassuringly.

Genevieve started at the familiar voice. "Mrs. MacDougal? What are you doing here? Someone hit me and..." Her words trailed off as the housekeeper took a step closer, effectively blocking the door. The waning rays of the sun glinted off a dirk in the woman's hand.

Genevieve pressed a hand to her head. "You? You hit me. But why?"

Mrs. MacDougal took a careful step forward. "Because I'm no' goin' to let ye give Connor even one

moment o' happiness. He deserves to suffer as she did."

Genevieve rose to her feet. "You think he murdered Janet." She steadied herself, trying to ignore the wild throbbing in her head.

"He did murder her." Cold rage punctuated every word. "He drove her to her death as surely as if he'd pushed her wi' his two hands."

"So you know he didn't push her."

"Mayhap no' physically, but he sent her to her death. O' that I'm sure."

"It was a doomed union from the start." Genevieve stepped back until she felt the cold wall. "Surely you can't put the blame solely on his shoulders."

"She was my niece...my baby. I raised her as my own. And she took care o' me by bringing me here to run her household. But I failed her."

Genevieve's eyes widened in shock. She'd assumed Mrs. MacDougal had been in Connor's household since he was a babe. But it was Janet who had brought her to the castle and that was where her loyalties lay.

"Janet was so verra young and frightened. And he didna want her."

"She didn't love him either."

"She might have if he'd shown her any true affection. But she told me at night when he slept, he murmured the name o' another."

"W-who?"

"Ye, lass. He was dreaming o' ye."

Her heart clutched with emotion. "I didn't know he

was betrothed to her.”

“Nevertheless, ’twill cost ye yer life.”

Glancing behind the housekeeper, Genevieve noticed that the wall was at an odd angle. She blinked but the wall stayed where it was, strangely out of alignment with the rest of the room.

Genevieve suddenly understood. “A secret passage. That’s how you got up here without anyone seeing you. It was *you* who kept opening the window.”

Mrs. MacDougal nodded. “’Tis one o’ many passages that were sealed since the death o’ Black Gavin. He used them to evade capture by his Scottish neighbors while he was shamelessly aidin’ the English. After he was killed, the passages were sealed. I reopened this one wi’ the aid o’ John MacDonald.”

“Janet’s lover.”

“Aye, ’twas me who helped reunite the true lovers. This was where they met and loved, safely shielded from the prying eyes o’ others at the castle. Janet was so happy.”

“How could you do that to Connor?” Genevieve’s anger rose to the surface. “Given time, they might have been able to make their marriage work.”

She scowled. “Never. And look at him now, the heartless bastard. Janet was barely cold in her grave before he sent for ye. But I’m no’ going to let his little plan work. Wi’ ye gone, he’ll at last turn to the poor, grieving widow Catherine Montclair. She’ll make his life utterly dismal, the same as he made Janet’s. Let him live the life he forced on her.” Again she laughed,

waving the dirk in front of her.

Genevieve desperately searched for some escape. The housekeeper had already come within two steps of her.

Summoning an inner courage she didn't know she possessed, Genevieve lunged forward and slammed her foot directly into the housekeeper's knee. She darted sideways toward the door, but Mrs. MacDougal reached out grabbed a fistful of her skirts, yanking her backward. Genevieve let the full force of her body knock into the housekeeper, sending them both hurling to the stone floor. Genevieve managed to roll away but Mrs. MacDougal recovered quickly and charged her again, apparently furious at her unwillingness to go meekly.

Genevieve turned and dashed for the secret passageway. She'd taken a step or two inside when Mrs. MacDougal crashed into her from behind wielding the dirk. Genevieve wrenched her body to the side at the last moment and the blade slid into her upper right arm. White hot, searing pain enveloped her and she screamed, pushing at the housekeeper with all her strength.

With a cry of triumph, Mrs. MacDougal yanked the dirk out, aiming it once again at her neck. Genevieve threw herself to the side of the narrow passageway, crashing her body hard against the crumbling wall. The dirk missed her head by a hair's breath, and sent a shower of small stones sliding to the floor. A bright glint from something lodged in the wall caught her

attention, but she had no time to examine it further. Mrs. MacDougal lunged, grabbing her injured arm and twisting it hard behind her back. Genevieve sobbed as an agonizing pain shot through her. Blood, hot and thick, ran down her arm and back, her gown was soaked and sticky. Still, she struggled until she felt the cool metal of the dirk against her throat.

“Stop.” The housekeeper pressed harder. “Fight me no more, lass. Let me help ye end this as peacefully as possible.”

Genevieve’s legs trembled, her vision blurring with tears. The housekeeper half-carried, half-dragged her across the floor, the dirk pricking her skin and causing a trickle of warm blood to slide down her neck.

Mrs. MacDougal led Genevieve to the open window. “Fare thee well, lass.”

Tears streamed down Genevieve’s cheeks and she hadn’t even realized she was crying. She didn’t want to die like this...like Janet. Without ever having the chance to see Connor again.

Suddenly the tower door crashed open. Mrs. MacDougal screamed in rage and Genevieve glanced over her shoulder, seeing Connor dart toward her, his face stricken with fear.

Mrs. MacDougal gave her a push. Genevieve screamed and stretched out a hand to him just as she started to fall out the window.

“Connor!”

Chapter 11

Connor's heart dropped to his toes when he saw Genevieve at the open window. In the longest, most agonizing moment of his life, he threw himself forward, knocking Mrs. MacDougal out of the way and catching Genevieve's hand just as she began to disappear over the side.

He braced his body against the windowsill, holding on to Genevieve desperately and grimacing as Mrs. MacDougal screeched and jumped on his back, brandishing the dirk. The blade sliced into his jacket and pierced the flesh beneath his right shoulder. Gritting his teeth against the pain, he jabbed an elbow hard into her stomach, hearing the breath go out of her as she dropped gasping to the floor.

Sweat beading on his temples, he dragged Genevieve back over the sill and into the room. A quick glance at her indicated she was breathing, but had fainted. He carefully laid her on the floor, then rose to deal with Mrs. MacDougal who still held a dirk and came at him brandishing the weapon.

"Ye killed Janet and drove John MacDonald away. Ye stole any chance at happiness she had."

Connor fought to control his rage. "Is that why ye've done this? To see me pay?"

"Why shouldn't ye suffer as she did? Janet's no'

even six months in her grave and ye've already brought *her* here."

"I know ye loved Janet and I'm sorry ye lost her. We all lost her. Janet and I were young and foolish when we wed, completely unsuited to each other. And we were both in love wi' someone else. We never meant to hurt each other, but 'twas simply our lot in life."

"How could ye no' love her? She was perfect."

For some reason, he felt obliged to reply. "Matters o' the heart are more complicated than that. And ye should know, Genevieve is innocent. She didna know I was betrothed to Janet."

"It doesna matter. I'm no' going to let her give ye a moment o' joy or peace."

Connor glanced down at his hands and saw they were sticky with blood. His temper flared again, hot and blinding. "Ye've harmed Genevieve. Ye know I may just yet commit murder in this tower."

She screeched and threw herself at him, the dirk aimed at his heart. With one hard swipe of his hand, he knocked the knife from her grasp and it clattered across the floor, disappearing into a secret passageway he'd thought long sealed. She came at him again, pummeling and clawing his face with her bare hands. He yanked her off and cast her aside roughly. She slammed into the stone wall and crumpled to the ground.

"Connor?"

It was Genevieve lying beneath the window. He

turned, his heart lodging in his throat. He knelt beside her.

“Ye’re going to be fine, my love.” He shrugged out of his coat and then removed his shirt. With one sharp rip, he tore the material down the middle. He took a strip and began winding it around her arm to stop the bleeding.

She gazed up at him. “How did you know I was here?”

“Ewan. He told me ye’d come up here to meet me. Imagine my surprise to hear that.”

Genevieve turned her head toward the passageway. “She found it.”

Connor paused, holding the strip still. “I saw. I thought the passageway was long sealed.”

“Mrs. MacDougal opened it years ago with the aid of John MacDonald. Connor, this is where Janet trusted with him.”

His stomach clenched but he resumed calmly binding her arm. “I’ll have it sealed again.”

“The treasure is there.”

His eyebrow shot up. “Treasure?”

She nodded, biting her lower lip. “I saw it out of the corner of my eye in the stone wall. A red jewel of some sort, wrapped partially in a cloth. Mrs. MacDougal inadvertently revealed it when she tried to skewer me. I think it may be the treasure of Black Gavin. It’s yours now.”

He slid his arms under her body, lifting her up and holding her close to his bare chest. “My darling,

Genevieve. I already have the treasure of Black Gavin.”

She frowned. “You do?”

He pressed a kiss on her nose. “Christina Douglas was Black Gavin’s treasure. The legend is that she was more precious to him than a thousand gems. ’Tis what every Douglas man seeks. That treasure doesn’t lie wrapped in a cloth and hidden in a secret passageway. ’Tis lying in my arms right now.”

Genevieve sighed. “That’s the most romantic thing I’ve ever heard.”

Connor grinned, a lock of hair falling across his forehead as he pressed another kiss to her lips. “I’ve known the jewel was there all along. It stays where it is to perpetuate the legend. Some day our son will seek out the treasure and find his greatest reward ’tis not in a cold stone, but in the warm arms o’ the woman he loves.”

Genevieve wound her arms around his neck, pulling his mouth back to hers. “That’s a beautiful tale.”

“Indeed, it is.” He held her close and showered feather light kisses across her brow. “A tale o’ true love and magic. At last I’m finally claiming the Douglas treasure for *my* very own.”

About the Author

Julie Moffett is a bestselling author and writes in the genres of historical romance, paranormal romance and mystery. She has won numerous awards, including the prestigious PRISM Award for Best Romantic Time-Travel and Best of the Best Paranormal Books of 2002. She has also garnered several nominations for the Daphne du Maurier Award and the Holt Medallion.

Julie is a military brat (Air Force) and has traveled extensively. Her more exciting exploits include attending high school in Okinawa, Japan; backpacking around Europe and Scandinavia for several months; a year-long college graduate study in Warsaw, Poland; and a wonderful trip to Scotland and Ireland where she fell in love with castles, kilts and brogues.

Julie has a B.A. in political science and Russian language from Colorado College and an M.A. in international affairs from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She worked as a journalist for the international radio station Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Washington, D.C., for eleven years, publishing hundreds of articles before "retiring" to be a stay-at-home mom and full-time writer.

Julie speaks Russian and Polish and has two sons. She enjoys interacting with readers at her website, www.juliemoffett.com, or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Julie-Moffett-Author/123804877633091.



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