



The Lyon and the Lass (The Lyon's Den Connected World)

Author: *Callie Hutton*

Category: Historical

Description: An arranged marriage, a desperate escape, and a Highlander's hope—can love find a way to their hearts?

Laird Kerrigan Lindsay never thought he'd be hopeless enough to save his clan by marrying a stranger for her money. But desperate times call for desperate measures.

Thus, he finds himself at The Lyon's Den in London prepared to meet the woman Mrs. Dove-Lyon, the owner of the Lyon's Den, has arranged for him to marry.

Lady Christine Spencer is so determined not to marry the man her greedy uncle has chosen for her that she climbs out her bedroom window late at night and makes her way to The Lyon's Den to find a man she chooses for herself, with help of the notorious Mrs. Dove-Lyon.

Total Pages (Source): 16

Page 1

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

London, England

1814

Lady Christine Spencer sat in her dark bedroom, clutching the unlit candle in her sweating hands. Finally, after waiting hours for the London townhouse to settle down and become quiet, all she could hear was the frantic thumping of her heart.

The time had come. Either she did this, or she would spend the rest of her life in misery. She slowly rose and walked to the bundle of bed linens tied together to form a rope. Could she really drop from her window? Would the rope hold her weight? Would she break both her legs? Or worse, kill herself?

Those questions had troubled her for days.

Taking a deep breath, she lit the candle, placed it in the holder, and using that scant bit of light, tied the end of the makeshift rope to one of the sturdy bed legs. The other end, she tied around her slim waist. She reached down and tucked the small bundle she was taking with her under her arm and walked to the window.

The window made no noise as she opened it. She'd made sure to rub a bar of soap around the edges to avoid squeaks. The cooling night air swept into the room, chilling her. Slowly, she climbed onto the windowsill and dropped her bundle to the ground. The ground that seemed so very far from where she sat.

You can do this, Christine. It's this or a lifetime of brutal unhappiness. She closed her eyes and the image of Lord Newton, the lewd look on his face as he ran his beady

eyes over her body, was enough to encourage her to slide off into the night air.

She gulped as she dangled from the window, the right side of her body banging against the stone. Don't look down, don't look down, don't look down.

She looked down. And almost lost her last meal.

Blowing out the breath she'd been holding, she inched her way down, praying as she'd never done so before. She made a number of promises to the Lord to do good deeds, donate money, read her much-neglected Bible, anything at all if she made it to the ground safely.

Hand over hand, she made her way to the bottom, her body continually slapping against the brick wall. Her fingers ached and tears rolled down her cheeks as her feet finally hit the ground with a thump. She promptly fell on her bottom, a smile of success bursting from her.

Rather than wait to see if she would be discovered, she quickly untied the rope, picked up her bundle and headed to the front of the house. Now for the second frightening part of her plan.

She found a hackney and quickly entered after telling the driver where to take her.

"Are you sure, my lady?" he asked.

"Yes. I am quite sure. If you hurry, I would greatly appreciate it."

Shaking his head, he scratched his short beard and jumped up to the driver's seat.

Now new worries flooded her. This was only the first part of her escape. Next, she had to convince Mrs. Bessie Dove-Lyon to help her. She'd sent a letter to the well-

known club owner, but not having received any sort of response, she hoped that didn't mean she had dismissed her request.

The only information she had managed to gather about the woman was scandalous. The owner of the notorious Lyon's Den, Mrs. Dove-Lyon was also known to help wealthy women find husbands in dire need of funds. Since Christine had the funds—at least presently—she would certainly qualify.

Rumor had it that most of the women who came to her were or had been involved in scandalous matters. She hoped that she would not be disqualified because she was still a virtuous woman.

She patted her sweating upper lip and forehead with a handkerchief, constantly looking behind her for her uncle chasing her down. Hopefully, he'd been in his cups enough that shortly after she'd heard him enter his bedchamber, he would be sound asleep, snoring to raise the rafters.

The hackney pulled up to a very nondescript blue building. Certainly not something she would have expected. The driver jumped down and opened the door. "Are you sure this is where you want to go, my lady?"

She picked up her bundle and moved to leave the coach. "Yes. I am certain." She held out the coins to cover the cost of the ride.

He shrugged. "If you say so. I will wait out here until you are inside."

"That is very kind of you." She took a deep breath and walked to the front door. The Whitehall neighborhood was new to her. She'd never stepped foot anywhere near this section of London. The smells were different, and even late at night people like she'd never seen before shuffled by.

She knocked lightly on the door. Nothing happened. She knocked once more, a bit forcefully. The door immediately opened. By a monster. The man was the tallest she'd ever seen. He had a scar from his forehead down his face to his neck. His nose had been broken more than once. He was dressed as a gentleman, but there was nothing that would make this man so.

“Yes?” His voice was gravely and curt.

“I would like to speak with Mrs. Dove-Lyon.”

He jerked his chin up. “You have an appointment?”

“No.”

He began to close the door, and she found the nerve to put her foot in the small opening, keeping it from closing. “I sent her a letter.”

He studied her from head to foot, then opened the door wider and waved her in. As the door closed, she heard the sound of the hackney rolling away from the building.

“Follow me.” The monster turned and strode through a narrow corridor and climbed small steps to the first floor. She could hear the cheers and groans of men gambling, winning, losing, and egging other men on.

They climbed one more flight to a floor that was heavily decorated. Plush carpets under their feet hid the sound of their steps. They stopped at a beautiful oak door, polished to a high sheen. He opened the door and waved her inside.

Inside was even more richly and tastefully decorated.

“If you take a seat I will see if Mrs. Dove-Lyon wishes to see you.” He glared at her.

“It is difficult to see her without an appointment.”

Christine nodded “I understand. Thank you for allowing me in.”

He grunted and entered another door where she assumed the notorious Black Widow of Whitehall resided.

She pushed her bundle under the chair she sat on. She took off her gloves which were damp with sweat. She smoothed out her skirt and patted the sides of her hair.

How did she get to this point in her life? Papa died, left her a fortune, and Uncle Carl wanted the money. Short of killing her, he decided to marry her off to a friend. She had no doubt that there was an agreement somewhere that Lord Newton would split the fortune with Uncle Carl. They would get all of Papa’s money and she would get a portly, slobbering, lewd husband.

The door opened and instead of the man who had escorted her, whom she was expecting, a slim tall woman of undetermined years, wearing all black, including a fashionable hat with a veil covering her face that made it impossible to see her, glided into the room.

Christine stood, her heart in her throat. “Mrs. Dove-Lyon”?

Laird Kerrigan Lindsay glared at his steward Neil and cousin, Patrick, not ready to hear another warning from them. “Doona have anything to say. I am set on this path and ye will no’ talk me out of it.”

“What if this wife of yers turns out to be ugly? Or a shrew? A woman looking to buy a husband must have something wrong with her,” Neil said.

Kerrigan downed the rest of his ale. “’Tis no concern of yers. As ye well ken, our

people will starve if I doona find a way to buy the sheep we lost during the disease that wiped out almost our entire herd. No sheep, no wool. Therefore, no making sweaters, caps, wraps, kilts and blankets that keeps coin in the clan's pockets. As laird, 'tis my duty and responsibility to take care of the problem."

"But to marry a stranger," Patrick said. "A woman looking to buy a husband? And English? Dinna ye ken that the English lasses are spoiled, haughty, and expect others to take care of their every need? You might be looking at a lifetime of grief."

Kerrigan slammed his mug down on the table. "Enough! Ye are no' changing my mind and now that I have received an answer from that woman in London who makes matches, I will be on my way at first light."

The direction he'd received from Mrs. Dove-Lyon, led him to a blue-painted house at the fringes of Whitehall, a section of London he'd not been to before. Granted, his visits to the city had been few and far between since he didn't care for them, always feeling as though there wasn't enough air to breathe. And you couldn't walk the streets without bumping into someone.

He preferred the open country and the smell of grass, trees, and sheep to what was found in London. But that was where his only hope lay. If it hadn't been for his longtime friend, the Earl of Devon, he'd still be home pulling his hair out as he tried to think of a way to gain the coin he needed to replace his sheep.

He and Devon had gone to school together when Kerrigan's da had decided he should attend Cambridge. No amount of arguing that he preferred to attend the University of Edinburgh swayed the man who never changed his mind once he'd made it up. Considering the damage the English had done to the Scottish clans over the years, it seemed an odd demand, but even though he never knew why his da had insisted on it, it had given Kerrigan the opportunity to make friends in England, who most Scots hated.

After sending Devon a letter telling him of his clan's darkness, his friend wrote back with information about a woman, referred to as the "Black Widow of Whitehall", who matched up wealthy women, mostly with bad reputations, with men in dire straits. He sent a letter, pleading his case, asking to be considered for a woman who could solve his problem. He'd been immediately informed that he must present himself to her for an examination. Her women, she'd said, deserved the best and she would give them no less.

The next afternoon he set out for London with hope in his heart. He didn't care if the lass was tall, short, ugly, pretty, plump, skinny as a broom, or had a face full of warts. All that mattered was that he had the coin he needed and the coffer to renew his clan's riches. He would take care of her, show her respect, and provide a loving home for her and any bairns they might produce.

She was saving his clan when he had no other way to do it.

The Lyon's Den, which was where he was told to present himself, was not in the best of neighborhoods in London. The building that housed the notorious gambling den was unimpressive when he approached it.

A small building, painted blue, made him chuckle. It stood out from the other buildings, making him wonder what her neighbors thought of the unusual presentation her place of business made.

He climbed from the hackney and straightened his cravat, a fashionable bit of nonsense. The man at the door merely nodded when he presented his name and the information provided by Mrs. Dove-Lyon as to when and where he was to appear at The Lyon's Den.

He was led down a narrow corridor, where he almost had to turn sideways to walk. They climbed two flights of stairs before they stopped at a well-polished oaken door

that his escort opened.

“Mrs. Dove-Lyon will meet with you momentarily. In the meantime, I can send for tea.”

“Tea?” Kerrigan almost choked out the word. “Are you telling me a club like this doesn’t have whisky?”

The man with the scar on his face and a squashed nose that had probably been broken a couple of times grinned. “Yes, Laird. If you wish something stronger than tea, you may help yourself.” He gestured to the bar in the corner.

“Thank ye,” Kerrigan said. If he was going to move ahead with this scheme, he needed a drink or two. Being offered one was far better than he’d expected. The escort left the room and Kerrigan poured himself a drink. He no sooner took a sip then the door opened and who he assumed was Mrs. Bessie Dove-Lyon entered the room.

She was dressed in all black, with a veil of the same color hiding her face. With the clothing she wore, there was no way to ascertain her face, or even her age. He placed his glass on the table next to him and stood. “Mrs. Dove-Lyon, I assume?”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

“Y ou assume correctly, Laird Lindsay.” Her voice was soft, but full of strength. This was a woman who had seen the harder parts of life. But somehow she’d made a good life for herself and based on what he saw, a wealthy one, also.

Almost as if she’d read his mind, she said, “Things are not always as they seem, Laird.” She took a seat, and he sat as well. “I have sent for tea, but please continue to enjoy your whisky.”

There was no doubt in his mind that she rattled him. He’d spent the past two weeks visiting various clubs with Lord Devon, gathering information about this infamous one. Although there was speculation, not much was known about Mrs. Dove-Lyon, but there was plenty information to be had about The Lyon’s Den. Everything from drinking blood as a dare to men being snared into marriage by passing or failing a test. He hoped his plea to find a wealthy wife would not involve any blood drinking.

The door opened and a male servant brought in a tea tray. As he’d learned to expect, it contained an excellent array of small sandwiches, biscuits, and tarts. His hostess fixed her tea and looked expectantly at him.

“No thank ye, I will enjoy my whisky.”

She nodded and took a sip of tea. “I understand from your letter to me, and from the recommendation I received from Lord Devon, that you are in dire straits.”

“Aye. Our clan’s entire sheep herd was wiped out by a disease. Our clans folk depend on the wool from the sheep to make clothing items to sell all over Europe. We have an excellent reputation, and our items bring in good money. Without sheep, my clan

will starve.”

“And if you replace your animals, how do you know it will not happen again?”

A very smart woman, which was likely why she owned the most lucrative gambling den in London.

“Before the last few of our herd died, we brought in a specialist from Edinburgh who determined the cause of the illness. I willna go into boring details with ye, but we are now well prepared for a recurrence of that, and even other illnesses.”

She nodded and took another sip of tea. She placed the cup in the saucer, rested her very delicate, very white hands in her lap. “I have a woman who is in serious need of a husband. Fast. A lady who will need to be removed not only from London, but Britian.”

He took a sip of his whisky and nodded.

“Are you prepared to marry quickly and leave London immediately?”

“Aye.”

“Are you also prepared to keep your wife safe?”

“Aye.”

He did wonder what he was getting himself into, but at this point, he had no choice. He just hoped the woman was not wanted by the law.

Again, she guessed his thoughts. “She is not in trouble with the authorities.”

He shifted, growing uncomfortable with this veiled woman who seemed to read minds.

“Very well. I have arranged for the two of you to meet right here tomorrow morning at ten o’clock. If you both agree, a special license has already been procured and you may marry then, and I expect you to be prepared at that time to leave London.”

Kerrigan cleared his throat. “Will it be necessary for me to perform a task of sorts?”

Although he could not see if she smiled or not at his question, her voice held the sound of humor. “No, Laird Lindsay. You will not be required to drink blood.”

“Will I get to meet the lass before tomorrow morning?”

“No.” She was also a woman of few words. She stood, as did he. “My man will see you out and I will expect you at ten.” She turned and swept from the room like a queen, leaving him rattled once more. Before he had too much time to dwell on it, the same man who’d brought him up entered the room and waved him out.

Once he left the building, he headed to Brooks’s where he intended to meet Devon and have himself another—very large—whisky.

Christine had been wringing her hands and pacing up and down in her room at the inn since before dawn. If all went well, she would be a married woman in a very short time and on her way to Scotland—of all places.

Was she making a huge mistake? She had enough information about Mrs. Dove-Lyon to feel as though she would not marry her off to someone horrible. At this point she wasn’t sure if she was more afraid of this unknown husband or her uncle who she knew without a doubt was right now combing London searching for her.

It had cost her a bit of money for Mrs. Dove-Lyon's fee, but it was money well spent if she was able to keep the rest of her fortune. Of course, she had learned at her last meeting with the club owner that the man she was to marry—Laird Kerrigan Lindsay—desperately needed money to support his clan. She already admired this man who put the needs of his people ahead of himself. She knew many Scots were leaving Scotland after the Clearances and moving to the Americas. This man, hopefully, had compassion and loyalty that prevented him from abandoning his clan.

She checked her watch once more and took a deep breath. It was time to leave if she were to be on time. She'd asked the innkeeper to have a hackney waiting for her so she could slip out the door and into the vehicle without being seen.

The ride could have been longer to settle her nerves, but it seemed that within minutes she was climbing out of the hackney and staring at the blue building. She took a deep breath and walked up to the door, taking a quick look at the jewelry store in the front. Before she even reached the door, it opened and a different man than the one who had allowed her entrance the week before when she came for the first time waved her in.

Once the door closed, she felt safe for the first time in weeks. No one her uncle would hire could grab her in here, and if all went well with the meeting between her and Laird Kerrigan Lindsay, she would leave a married woman and completely out of her uncle's grasp.

They again climbed the stairs and walked down the corridor to the beautiful oak door. Her stomach muscles clenched, and she blinked to keep the tears that had quickly flooded her eyes from falling. Her escort opened the door and held it for her to pass him into the room.

She really had no idea what to expect, but it mattered not, because she would never have conjured up this handsome, very large man with deep green eyes, golden red

hair to his shoulders, and a tentative smile on his face. He walked up to her and gave a quick bow. “Ye are Lady Christine Spencer?” he asked, his rolling burr evident even in these few words, spoken in a deep, velvety voice.

It was embarrassing when she realized she stood there like a fool, staring at him with her mouth open. She shook her head, causing him to frown since he must have thought she was saying no.

“Yes. Yes. I am Lady Christine,” she quickly said. “And you must be Laird Kerrigan Lindsay.”

It was then that she noticed Mrs. Dove-Lyon in the room, seated on the chair she’d served her tea in only a few days before when they talked about Laird Lindsay and what he had to offer in the way of a husband. Then, the best part of this man’s appeal was that he was willing to marry immediately and then move them to Scotland.

Now, the fact that he looked like a Scottish Warrior from years past and was handsome enough to turn a lady’s eye, she viewed as an unexpected plus. His huge build would be able to protect her from her uncle who was short, round, and clumsy.

Christine nodded at her hostess. “Good morning, Mrs. Dove-Lyon.”

She stood and dipped her head. “I will leave the two of you to yourselves so you can get to know each other and decide if you want to go ahead with this marriage. If so, I have notified the vicar to present himself this morning as soon as I have your approval. With Lady Christine’s situation, I want her to leave here a married woman, with no question as to the validity of the marriage.”

Once the door closed, Kerrigan waved to one of the chairs. “Won’t ye take a seat, my lady?

The tiny little lass offered him a slight smile and nodded. She took a comfortable looking chair, leaving him either the settee, which would put him a distance from her, or the chair across from her that looked as though it would collapse when he sat in it. He had no choice since he wasn't about to stand above her and converse that way.

Holding his breath, he sat on the chair and studied his intended wife, who fussed with her hair and dress. She was a bonny lass. At first he thought she was a mere child, but once he noticed the enticing curves underneath her dress and the maturity of her face, he'd pushed that thought aside.

He cleared his throat. "Mrs. Dove-Lyon told me ye are in need of a place to escape." Well, that was certainly a stupid way to start the conversation, which apparently his future wife thought as well, since she stared wide-eyed at him.

"I apologize, lass. That was no' what I intended to say. Mayhap to redeem myself, you can tell me what ye are seeking in a marriage."

She thought for a moment, then said, "Although that was a surprising way for you to say that, it is true. I have money that my father left me. His brother was not happy that I got it all, and he wants me to marry a friend of his so they can split my fortune."

"And ye donna like the mon he chose?"

She shook her head. "No. Not at all. He is boorish and makes my skin crawl when he looks at me. Even if he didn't affect me that way, I would still not want to marry any man my uncle chose since it would end with me depending on a man I do not know for every coin I wanted to spend." She took a deep breath. "And I have reason to believe this man my uncle has already chosen is heavy into gambling, so I can see myself a pauper in a few years."

Kerrigan felt his temper rising, imagining a young lass with a great deal of money

losing it and most likely living a life of misery because of the greediness of her uncle. He shook his head. "That is truly a horrible situation." He studied her for a minute, thinking of how his cousin told him he might end up with an ugly bride. Lady Christine was beyond beautiful. Crystal clear blue eyes stared at him, surrounded by dark, long eyelashes. Her blond hair fought the hairpins that were attempting to keep the locks from falling around her beautiful face. He would have no problem bedding this wife, for certain.

"I understand you've had a tragedy at your estate in Scotland?" she asked.

Kerrigan shared the story of his clan's sheep, noticing the way her eyes filled with compassion. He told her, "My people need sheep to survive. I will nay let them down."

She nodded.

They both sat silently for a couple of minutes. Finally, Kerrigan stood and stepped to where she sat. He got down on one knee and took her tiny, cold hand in his. "Lady Christine Spencer, will ye do me the honor of becoming my wife? I understand we donna ken each other, but I think we would do well together. I promise to take care of ye, protect ye, and do all I can to make ye happy. And I doona chase the lasses, gamble, and drink verra little."

Lady Christine studied him for a few moments, and then her bright smile brought sunshine to the room and sent all his blood racing to his groin. Aye, there would be no trouble making this one his wife.

"Laird Kerrigan Lindsay, I accept your proposal. I also think we will get on well."

He grinned and stood, raising her up. Slowly, so as not to frighten her, he cupped her face in his hands and lowered his mouth, giving her a chance to pull back.

She did not.

He brought his lips to her pink plump ones and the taste of their sweetness turned his thoughts to how soon they could summon the vicar.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Christine felt her legs melt and she gripped Laird Lindsay's upper arms—very muscular upper arms—to keep from sinking to the floor. She had received a few kisses during her Seasons, stolen in a dark part of a corner during a ball, but comparing those to the laird's kisses was like comparing a sack of pebbles to a sack of gold pieces.

Her heart thundered and when he pulled back, staring into her eyes, she had a difficult time getting enough air to keep from swooning.

She did not swoon.

He grinned at her, no doubt noticing her addled appearance. She stepped back and patted the sides of her hair, which—due to having put it up herself was falling in clumps around her shoulders. “Well, then. I guess we can let Mrs. Dove-Lyon know that we wish to proceed.” There, that sounded very composed and adult.

While no longer grinning, his eyes were full of mirth. She didn't want to believe that there was someone listening at the door, but as soon as Christine uttered those words, the door opened and the man who had escorted her up to see Mrs. Dove-Lyon walked in, followed by another who she assumed was the vicar. At least he looked like a vicar. It did give her pause to wonder how someone with Mrs. Dove-Lyon's reputation, along with the club itself, would have a vicar on call. Unless she arranged so many marriages that it was necessary. Or maybe, even vicars had vices.

Mrs. Dove-Lyon appeared from the door at the back wall, carrying a piece of paper, along with a small, lovely bouquet of sweet-smelling flowers. It appeared the laird was either surprised or impressed—so it seemed—as well as she was.

Their hostess handed Christine the flowers and moved her, so she was positioned in front of the vicar. After handing the marriage license to the vicar, the male escort moved the laird into the proper space beside Christine and the vicar opened his book.

Growing up, Christine never really thought too much about her wedding day, only that she would most likely have one. No matter how hard she would have tried, she would never have imagined this one, set in an opulent yet dark room, with furniture moved to make way for them, in a notorious gambling den in the heart of London, or with a black-dressed and veiled gambling den owner for an attendant.

Still, it was a far better wedding setting than the one she'd have endured at the hands of her uncle, so she could only feel thankful, and especially, relieved.

The vicar droned on for a few minutes about the sanctity of marriage and their respective duties as husband and wife. Her brain was muddled, but when it came to these words, she flicked her eyes to Laird Lindsay as he said his vows:

With this Ring I thee wed, with my Body I thee worship, and with all my worldly Goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Laird Lindsay slid a heavy, jewel-encrusted gold ring on her left hand—did he bring that anticipating they would indeed suit? It was way too large, but she held it on her finger with the tip of her thumb.

The vicar had them both kneel whereupon he blessed them. And then it was over. She was married. Safe from her uncle. She smiled brightly at her husband—my, that word felt strange—and he smiled back.

The laird stood and helped her to her feet. Before he was able to give her a kiss, Mrs. Dove-Lyon said, “I can already see that the two of you are very well-suited.”

“I believe you are right,” Laird Lindsay said. He then turned to Christine, taking both her hands in his. The vicar shoved a paper—most likely the marriage certificate—at the laird, closed his book, offered his felicitations and left.

“There is a hackney awaiting you downstairs,” Mrs. Dove-Lyon said, then cast her attention toward Christine. “I assume you will be visiting with your solicitor immediately?”

“Yes.” Christine had already arranged with her bank to release the agreed upon fee to Mrs. Dove-Lyon for her services once she saw her solicitor, who would then notify the bank.

“Then I wish you both well.” With those words, she also left the room through the back door. The man who escorted them up opened the front door and waved them out.

This all seemed so very rushed that Christine’s brain was spinning. She’d said yes to the laird’s proposal, the vicar entered, Mrs. Dove-Lyon arrived with a bouquet, a few words were spoken, a ring was placed on her finger, and they all left through different doors.

She looked up at her husband and shook her head. “What just happened?”

“What just happened as far as I’m concerned is I dinna get to bestow a kiss on my lovely bride.” He looked down at her with twinkling green eyes.

“It did all end rather abruptly, did it not?” As confused as she felt, she was also somewhat giddy.

Kerrigan gave her a brief nod, and then after leaving the building, looked around the area, then led her to the end of the pavement where a hackney stood, the driver

leaning against the carriage, his arms folded, obviously hoping for a customer. She gave the driver the directions, then Kerrigan helped her into the hackney, following her behind. He settled on the bench across from her. “Do ye feel as though ye were rushed, lass?”

“Yes. A bit. But I’m thinking you feel more rushed since I am the one who needed a quick wedding, then a visit to my solicitor to protect my money.”

Kerrigan felt as though he should reach across the way and bring Christine to his side, but considering that only an hour ago they didn’t even know each other, ’twas probably best to give her time.

“Do ye wish to tell me about yerself? Or yer uncle who has caused this race to the solicitor?”

She shook her head. “I just want to get this part over.”

He nodded. “I am not verra familiar with London, since I try to avoid it at all costs, but I’m hoping ye ken of a place where we can have a nice meal when we’re through with this.”

Her face lit up. “I do! There is a charming restaurant on Bond Street that serves wonderful food. The best part is if you sit near a window, you can see the shoppers strolling by, and if that doesn’t appeal, we can take a table near the back of the room which is quieter.”

He leaned back and rested his foot on his knee enjoying the view of his pretty, petite bride and again he congratulated himself. He’d done well. “I’m all for quiet. I would like to spend our time enjoying a relaxed meal and getting to ken each other better.”

She smiled her agreement. ’Twas only a matter of about ten minutes when the

hackney driver drew up to the pavement edge and stopped the vehicle. He jumped down and opened the door. Kerrigan stepped out first, then turned to help Christine. He then reached in his vest pocket and handed the man coins to cover the ride.

With his hand at the lower part of Christine's back, he directed her into the building that apparently housed her solicitor. They walked down the corridor to a wooden and glass door with "Kendall– Solicitor" on it. A young man sitting behind a small wooden desk stood to greet them as they walked in. He then gushed over Christine, which Kerrigan had to admit annoyed him just a bit.

The office was small, but well-appointed. "If you will follow me, Mr. Kendall is waiting for you."

They entered the man's office, which was not quite as appealing as the outer office. Files were piled on various tables and the corner of his desk. The carpet was worn, and the walls in need of painting. He had a feeling the man was always too busy and disorganized to give the necessary time to having his workspace redone.

The solicitor was an older man, with a paunch and very little hair on his head. His face was a pleasant one, and his smile warm as he regarded Christine. "So you are married now, Lady Christine?"

"Lady Lindsay," Kerrigan said.

Blushing slightly, she raised her hand where the very heavy ring hung. Another thing to do once they took care of this business and relaxed with some food was to find a jeweler and have his wife pick out a ring of her choice.

The one he'd brought with him was old, and possibly valuable, but since it was the only ring he could find before he left his home, he'd grabbed it. All other jewelry of value had been sold to keep the clan fed.

“Mr. Kendall, this is my—husband—Laird Kerrigan Lindsay from Scotland.” She turned to him. “This is Mr. Kendall, who has been our family’s solicitor for many years.”

The men nodded to each other, and Kerrigan pulled out a chair for Christine to sit. He settled himself, a tad uncomfortable since the solicitor obviously knew why they were here. He would also know that he would receive a great deal of money upon marriage to the former Lady Christine Spencer.

He shifted, feeling as if his body was comfortable, his brain would be also. In the short time he’d known her, he’d found his bonnie wife so intriguing and sweet that he was tempted to refuse the money, which was foolish since once her uncle grabbed it from her, it would be gone, anyway. And it would certainly not be used to feed hungry people. He needed her money to feed his hungry people.

“Laird, here is an accounting of the funds Lady Christine—I beg your pardon—Lady Lindsay owns.” He slid a document across the desk and pointed to a column of numbers. “These are all the holdings her father owned in property, stocks, investments, and money.”

He tried to pretend it was not an extraordinary amount, but since spending years as laird after his da died, he had developed an appreciation for financial security. Of which he’d had none, and apparently his wife had plenty. He nodded, his mouth drying. This was truly a fortune. And her uncle wanted to take it from her.

“Mr. Kendall, as we spoke of a few days ago,” Christine said, “since I am now married I am assuming that would keep my holdings from Uncle Carl’s grasp.”

The man nodded and Christine turned to Kerrigan. “May I have the certificate, please.”

Kerrigan reached into his jacket pocket, withdrew the document and handed it to her. She, in turn, placed it in the solicitor's hand. "As you can see, it is all legal. We were married just this morning by a vicar with two witnesses."

He smiled at her. "Lady Lindsay, I must say I have a great deal of respect for you. Most young women in your place would have spent her time wailing and complaining, and eventually doing as her uncle wanted." He glanced at Kerrigan. "I expect you to take good care of your wife. Her uncle can be quite a cad, and sneaky. Just because you're married doesn't mean he will give up."

Kerrigan nodded. "I can take care of my wife. No one will get near her or harm her."

"Very well. I will have my secretary make several copies of the marriage certificate and send the documents to the necessary people to release your funds into whatever financial institution you wish."

"That would be the Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh."

Mr. Kendall studied the certificate. "How long do you intend to stay in London?"

Christine looked at him for an answer.

"How long do you think it will be for you to take care of what you need to do that requires our presence?" Kerrigan asked Mr. Kendall.

"If I press my secretary, I can give you the needed paperwork in a few days."

Kerrigan nodded and sat back, satisfied.

"I have always lived in my papa's house, as you know, Mr. Kendall. Can you recommend a hotel where we can stay while we wait?"

He thought for a minute. “The only places I am familiar with are traveling inns outside the city. However, I would be more than happy to let you stay in a townhouse owned by my brother who is currently on the Continent.”

“That would be wonderful, Mr. Kendall,” Christine said.

He grabbed a piece of parchment and after dipping his pen into the inkwell, scratched out the direction. “The only staff there now is the butler and a maid to keep the place clean.”

“That is fine, Mr. Kendall. I am able to cook,” Kerrigan said.

Christine stared at him, a slight smile on her face.

“I will send my secretary to my brother’s townhouse with your travel bags and a message to the butler on duty, Stevens, and advise him you will be staying there for a few days.” Mr. Kendall folded his hands and placed them on the desk. “I will, of course, notify your uncle of your marriage. I’m not convinced he won’t try something else, but at least that should give you enough time to do what you need to do here and leave for Scotland.”

Christine stood, followed by Kerrigan and Mr. Kendall. The men shook hands and just as they arrived at the door, Mr. Kendall cleared his throat. “Just one more thing.”

He looked uncomfortable, and a slight bit of redness rose to his cheeks. “This is a delicate matter, but I feel it is my duty to inform you that unless the marriage is...ah, consummated, your uncle could attempt to force an annulment.”

Kerrigan glanced at Christine, whose shade of red was a bit deeper than the solicitor’s. “I assure ye that will no’ be a problem, Mr. Kendall,” Kerrigan said.

Christine didn't wait for him, but hurried from the room, her head down. He couldn't help the chuckle that rose from his throat.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

I feel it is my duty to inform you that unless the marriage is...ah, consummated, your uncle could attempt to force an annulment.

“I assure ye that will no’ be a problem, Mr. Kendall.”

Christine settled in a comfortable chair at the rear of the restaurant she’d chosen, those words playing over and over in her mind. Of course, she knew that marriage included intimacy between husband and wife, but she’d hoped to take some time—weeks perhaps—to get to know her husband before they did that .

At first she thought perhaps bringing it up now so to prepare Laird Lindsay for her thoughts on the matter would be a good thing, and ease her mind somewhat. However, now that she sat only a few feet from him she found speaking of such a thing near impossible.

She now had the time to actually study the man. His broad shoulders and warrior’s build she’d noticed the minute she saw him. With everything that had happened in rapid succession, she’d not really studied his face. He was handsome. More so than she had the right to expect. His deep green eyes mesmerized her as they sparkled with mirth and life. He certainly seemed the cheerful type.

The server arrived at their table, and time was taken up with ordering food. The ring on her finger kept slipping off until Laird Lindsay reached over and took it off her finger. “After we eat, we shall find a jewelry store and buy you something that you like and that fits better.”

She shook her head, the familiar panic settling in her stomach. “I don’t think that is a

very good idea. I am very sure my uncle is out hunting me.”

He tilted his head as he studied her. “That subject seems to be a good place for us to start learning about each other.”

The laird nodded as the server arrived at their table and placed bowls of white soup in front of them. He also set a bottle of wine on their table. The man went through the procedure of opening the bottle, smelling it, pouring a small amount, then passing it to her husband to approve.

Once they were alone again, she said, “My laird, I—”

He held up his hand. “Before ye continue, I believe we have gone beyond any formality. Although we have kenned each other only a few hours, we are married. I would prefer if ye call me Kerrigan, and I hope to have leave to call ye Christine.”

Again she felt a rush of blood color her face. “Of course. That is probably best.”

Kerrigan took a sip of his soup and waved at her. “Please continue.”

“Yes. Well, my uncle wished me to marry a man I did not want to marry. No, that is not completely correct. He ordered me to marry this man that he drew up a marriage contract with. From what I was able to discover before my uncle locked me in my room was that Lord Newton—my ‘so-called’ betrothed—is a gambler, drinker, and heaven knows what else. I met the man, and the way he looked at me made my skin crawl.”

She took a sip of wine and continued. “My uncle, Viscount Carl Allenby—my father’s title he inherited when Papa died—is a wastrel, also. My father spoke to me many times about his younger brother. My papa gave Uncle Carl a very generous allowance, but the man was always in debt. Apparently one of his creditors is Lord

Newton.”

“How do you ken this?”

Christine sighed and looked at her plate. “I snooped. When Uncle Carl was away from the house, I went through the papers in Papa’s desk so I could find out what he planned to do. Papa had warned me that since his brother would try to find a way to get the money from his estate, he’d been assured by his solicitor that the will was solid.”

“Yet yer uncle inherited the title. ’Twas there nothing besides that for him?”

She looked back up. “No. Papa said he would leave him nothing, but certain things were, of course, entailed, so Uncle Carl got those—houses, estates, things like that. He would also get any income from the estates which Papa said would provide a decent living for him. But the rest of Papa’s money was his to do with as he wished, and he wanted me to have it since he didn’t trust his brother to take care of me until I was settled with a husband.”

Another sip of wine. “My father didn’t count on his brother forcing me to marry one of his cohorts so they could split the money.”

“And no doubt lose it,” Kerrigan added.

“Yes.”

He looked down at the plates laid before them of Haricot lamb, pickled figs, fish with wine and mushrooms, and vegetable pie. “I suggest we finish this conversation once we are through with our meal. It is wonderful food, but it will grow cold.”

It was indeed wonderful food, and Christine was quite happy that the la—rather,

Kerrigan—liked it, since it had been her suggestion. The rest of the meal passed in comments about the various offerings, which gave Christine time to settle her nerves. She felt as though she'd been talking forever. But then, most couples had that kind of conversation over a period of weeks or months before they married.

Kerrigan tried not to stare at his wife while they ate. She was a beauty. Although he'd been prepared to marry any woman he needed to in order to save his clan, never in his very active imagination had he conjured up a lass such as this one.

The new Lady Christine Lindsay, however, would never succeed in a game of poker. Every thought was visible on her face. She smiled, grinned, frowned, and everything else to show the world what she thought as she spoke. Her voice, alone, was enough to drive his blood to his shaft. Deep, soft, and inviting. He didn't think he ever had to worry about his wife lying to him. It appeared it was merely not in her nature.

They finished their meal with tea and an array of sweets. As much as he was looking forward to retiring to the townhouse Mr. Kendall had offered them, he was feeling a tad guilty as to how very tired his new bride looked. He imagined that what she'd gone through the last few days with escaping her home, seeking out Mrs. Dove-Lyon, and wedding a stranger, was taking a toll on her body.

Kerrigan placed money on the table and stood. "I believe it is time to make use of the generous offer Mr. Kendall made us and retire for the day."

Most likely not thinking about the looming consummation of their vows, she smiled warmly at him. "Yes, I am quite tired."

Yet that was all he could think about with his bonny bride at his side.

Once they left the building, Kerrigan waved down a hackney and gave the driver directions. Despite his desire to bed his wife, the more he studied Christine, the more

convinced he was that any intimacy between them was better left off for now. She was a gently bred lady, after all, and even though she'd had the resourcefulness to seek a husband, he was still a stranger to her, and she was very tired. Since it was best to start his marriage as he intended for it to go on, he would forego any romantic notions he had and let his wife have a good night's rest. After all, he told his disappointed shaft, they had the rest of their lives.

The townhouse was in a very fashionable neighborhood, with well-kept front gardens and freshly painted doors. Kerrigan assisted Christine up the steps and before they even reached the top, the door was opened by an older looking man, dressed in a full butler ensemble. Apparently, not having the master in residence didn't cause his employee to slacken.

"Good evening, Lady Lindsay, Laird Lindsay. After your belongings arrived, along with a note from Mr. Kendall, I arranged for one of the bed chambers to be readied for you, but it might take a bit more time. However, you may rest in the drawing room, and I can send for tea if you would like."

"Thank you so much, Stevens, but we just finished our meal," Kerrigan said.

The butler led them to a lovely room just as a maid was leaving with a bundle of dust covers in her arms.

"There is brandy and sherry on the sideboard, Laird." He waved toward the south wall. "I have retained the services of a cook for the few days you will be staying. Will you be breaking your fast in the dining room, or your bedchamber?"

Christine looked at Kerrigan. "You may have our morning meal sent up," he said.

She tried very hard not to let the warm flush from her middle climb all the way to her face, but she thought she hadn't succeeded. Kerrigan was kind enough not to notice

or react if he had.

The butler walked to the door. “I will advise when the bedchamber is ready.” He softly closed the door, leaving Christine and Kerrigan staring at each other.

He took her hands in his. “Are all English butlers as efficient as Stevens?”

She couldn’t hide her smile. “No, I think not.”

Kerrigan grinned back at her and waved to the sideboard. “Would you care for a drink?”

“Yes, I believe so.” She certainly needed something to fortify her before she was marched upstairs as if she were headed to her execution.

“Nay, lass, it won’t be that bad.” Her husband smiled.

“Oh, my. Did I say that out loud?”

“Aye. But calm yerself. Tonight I believe we should continue to learn about each other, relax and have a good night’s sleep.”

She couldn’t stop the sigh of relief that escaped her lips.

With a soft laugh, Kerrigan walked to the sideboard.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

“Y our bedchamber is ready, my lord, my lady.” A small woman with curly brown hair and large brown eyes entered the drawing room. “It is the one at the top of the stairs.”

“Thank ye, lass,” Kerrigan said. He turned to Christine and studied her for a moment. “’Twould be best if ye go on ahead and prepare yerself for bed. I will join ye after a little while.”

She placed her glass on the table alongside the chair she’d been sitting in. Even though Kerrigan had said they would just learn about each other and have a good night’s rest, she wasn’t completely sure her idea of a good night’s rest was the same as his idea. She certainly hoped he meant they would put off any completion of their wedding vows tonight.

“Thank you. I am quite tired.” Just in case he had thought of changing his mind.

“As am I, lass.”

She almost snorted because she knew if she suggested they do what was needed to prevent her uncle from pushing for an annulment Kerrigan would most likely beat her up to the bedchamber.

The room was charming, also in good taste as was the rest of the townhouse. Mr. Kendall never mentioned if his brother had a wife, but if he did not, he was a very good decorator. The walls were striped pale green with a soft cream color, and a deeper green carpet on the floor. Dark blue and green window hangings and bed covers contrasted nicely.

The maid had apparently unpacked the few things she was able to sneak out of her room the night of her escape. Her nightgown and dressing gown lay across the bottom of the bed. With a very unladylike yawn, she began to undress, having worn the gown she was able to put on herself, knowing she would not have a maid at Mrs. Dove-Lyon's where she'd spent the night before.

She washed with the warm water and soft linens the maid had provided and brushed her hair. Feeling overwhelmingly tired, she removed her dressing gown and climbed into bed. She was just pulling the bedcovers up when the sound of the door opening caught her attention.

The nicely sized room shrunk as Kerrigan walked into it. Lord, was the man that tall downstairs? He smiled at her, and apparently having no qualms about undressing, proceeded to remove everything except his braies, for which she was eternally grateful.

He approached the bed, resting his knee on the mattress. "Ye look lovely with yer hair down, lass." He reached out and ran his thick fingers through the strands. "It feels like fine silk."

She attempted a smile but was afraid it would come out more like a grimace. Picking up on her mood, he stood and climbed in alongside her. "What I've been wondering is how you managed to escape your house."

"I jumped."

His brows rose to his hairline "What?"

She grinned. "I jumped. I knotted the bed sheets, then tied one end around the sturdy bedpost and the other about my waist. Then I dropped my bundle out the window and climbed out after it."

He shook his head. “How far of a drop was it?”

“I don’t know and I’m glad I didn’t know because I never would have attempted it. In fact, I had no idea how far it was until I was hanging out the window.”

Kerrigan took in a deep breath. “Doona ever try something like that again.”

Christine stiffened. “Ye cannot tell me what to do.”

“Aye, I can, and I will. I am yer husband now and ye are under my protection. Ye are no’ to put yerself in danger like that ever again.”

Well, then.

Apparently, she hadn’t considered how annoying a husband could be. Her papa had not put too much restraint on her. He was always busy and if she had a maid and footman with her, she’d been able to go just about anywhere she wanted. When he was still alive, he’d engaged a chaperone for her, but that was only for balls, and strolls and carriage rides in the park.

“Ye’re lucky ye dinna break yer neck.”

She huffed. “Based on what my uncle had planned for me, that would have been the better choice.”

He grew silent and stared at her for a minute with a very dangerous look in his eyes. She began to squirm. “What?”

“I was wondering if I could get a kiss good night from my wife.”

She slid over a bit, bringing a smile to his lips. “Where are ye going, lass? If ye keep

that up ye will be on yer bottom on the floor. Just a kiss.” Kerrigan reached over and pulled her to him. “Come here before ye fall.” He kept pulling until she was flat against him. The warmth from his bare chest invaded her body and her senses. Before she could catch her breath, his mouth descended on hers. Just as she’d remembered, his lips were warm and soft. He gave her quick little kisses before completely consuming her mouth and her mind.

Almost as if they had minds of their own, her hands slid up his warm, massive chest to encircle his neck, pulling him even closer. He nudged her lips with his tongue and entered, bringing sensations to her that she’d never felt before. Her nipples swelled and she rubbed them against his chest. It felt so good, she let out a soft moan.

Kerrigan cupped her face in his hands and moved her head into a position where he took the kiss deeper. Warmth spread throughout her body, bringing a dampness to her woman’s part. Since she’d been without a mother for so long, she was not certain where these feelings came from, but just her normal intelligence told her that her husband’s kisses were setting her body on fire.

He pulled back and began to kiss her neck, shoulder, the soft skin under her ear. When his hand slid up to cup her breast, she pulled back. They were both panting, and she shook her head. “Not yet. I need a little bit more time. You promised.”

Running his fingers through his hair, he said, “Aye. I did at that.” When he reached for her, she slid over again.

“Nay. I just want to hold ye. We can talk for a while.”

“Talk? That’s all you want to do?”

He snorted. “Nay, that’s no’ all I want to do, but I did promise, and ’tis no’ a good way to start off a marriage with broken promises.”

She nodded and moved closer to him again. He rested his arm around her shoulders and slid them both down, so they were lying on their backs. He took her hand in his and rubbed his thumb over her knuckles.

“And I do want a good marriage, Christine. I ken we dinna start off in the normal way, but I think we can have a happy life. I think ye will be content as my wife at our castle. Ye will be able to run things the way ye want to run them. Right now, Llioni, our cook, has been doing the duty of both cooking and seeing that the castle runs smoothly. She will be verra happy, I am sure, to give up the duties to ye.”

Duties? He expected her to take over duties? It seemed she hadn't given this marriage business enough thought. While Kerrigan was very charming, indeed handsome, and had the greatest way to warm her in a way that didn't need a fire, she hadn't thought beyond keeping her fortune from Uncle Carl. What exactly did a wife do? All the mothers of her friends had spent their time paying calls on other women, visiting the modistes and shops and hosting dinner parties and balls while trying to marry off their daughters to do similar things.

But a wife in the wilds of Scotland would have other duties, she was sure. Did they host dinner parties and balls? Was there even a decent modiste in the area? Would she have a carriage for her use to make calls?

Fatigue once again washed over her at that thought, along with the strain of planning her escape from Uncle Carl, convincing Mrs. Dove-Lyon to help her and getting herself married before she was forced to marry the dreadful Lord Newton.

The soothing sound of Kerrigan's voice as he spoke of his home lulled her as she lay against him. The warmth coming from him and the soft rumble of his voice brought her closer and closer to sleep. She shifted so she was plastered against her husband's body like an old, familiar pillow and drifted off.

After a few minutes of speaking of his life in Scotland, Kerrigan realized his wife's breathing was becoming deeper. He looked at her slumbering body under the bedclothes, feeling sorry for himself for not being able to uncover the lushness waiting for him, but reminded himself that he would have many years to enjoy her body. He shifted so he was able to blow out the candle next to the bed.

Making sure she was tucked securely next to him, he yawned, expecting to take a while to fall asleep with the day he'd had. The thought had barely gone through his mind when he was sound asleep himself.

"I demand to see my niece right now. I don't care who you are and whose house this is."

The shouting startled Kerrigan awake, and he sat up in bed. Christine remained asleep, so he climbed from the bed and padded to the bedchamber door. The shouting continued, along with the soft, modulated voice of Stevens. Kerrigan grabbed his shirt from the back of the chair near the door and slipped it on.

"What is all this racket?" He asked as he made his way downstairs, tucking his shirt into his braies.

"Oh, thank goodness, Laird. This man"—Kerrigan noticed the butler did not refer to the person at the door as a "gentleman"—"insists on seeing Lady Lindsay."

The man leaned forward, stabbing Stevens in the chest with his index finger. "That is where you are wrong, man. I don't wish to see Lady Lindsay, whoever she might be. I want to see my niece. Lady Christine Spencer."

It didn't take too much consideration on his part to realize Christine's Uncle Carl had arrived for a visit. The man was florid with anger, his double chin jiggling as he spoke. Another man stood behind him, looking bored.

“Excuse me, sir, but I wish to ken who ye are and why ye are making so much noise while my wife and I wish to continue our sleep.”

The man turned his attention to Kerrigan. “I have no idea who you are, or who you think you are, but I’ve come to retrieve my niece, Lady Christine Spencer.”

Kerrigan rubbed his chin and looked at a very unsettled Stevens. “I will handle this. You may return to yer duties.” After the butler’s hurried departure, Kerrigan gave his attention to the irate visitor. “I’m no’ sure ye are at the right house, sir. There is no Lady Christine Spencer here.”

Spittle flew from the man’s mouth. “Do not play with me. I know Christine is here and I intend to bring her home. Now.”

“Uncle Carl?” Christine’s soft voice caused Kerrigan to turn to see his wife coming down the stairs, tying the belt of her dressing gown. He wanted to tell her to turn back and return to the bedchamber and let him hand the bully, but after the way she’d reacted the night before when he ordered her to never go out alone again, he thought it best to allow her to speak to her uncle.

However, he would certainly keep himself between his wife and the deranged man.

“Why are you here?” Christine asked.

Apparently, the man decided to try another tactic. In a softer tone he’d not used up to that point he said, “I was worried about you, niece. It took me some time to track you down, and now what I’ve found you, I’ve come to bring you home.”

Kerrigan reached out and pulled Christine to his side. “I’m afraid ye are mistaken, my good man. This woman is my wife, and she is going nowhere with you.”

“I am married, Uncle Carl. You can no longer force me to marry Lord Newton. This is my husband, Laird Kerrigan Lindsay.”

The lass’s uncle pulled the man standing behind him forward. “No. You are not married, and as your legal guardian, I have brought a doctor here to examine you.”

“Why?”

“So we can apply for an annulment since I am certain you have not had time to consummate this farce of a marriage.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Christine sucked in a breath at her uncle's words. A doctor here to examine her? She looked over at Kerrigan, fear twisting her stomach muscles. They did not consummate their marriage last night and now there was a doctor here to confirm it, whatever that meant.

She watched as Kerrigan stiffened. "No one will touch my wife except me. You may leave now."

Her uncle, being not too bright, stepped closer to Kerrigan. "Lady Christine Spencer is my ward. She is betrothed to Lord Newton. Any attempt at marriage is unlawful since she needs my permission to marry. Furthermore, I am certain with as shy and useless as the girl is, she wouldn't allow you to consummate these so-called vows."

Christine was certain her face was as red as the apples hanging from the trees in her garden at home. How was she to get out of this?

As if reading her mind, Kerrigan turned to her and muttered, "Do no' worry, wife, I will take care of this."

He leaned into Uncle Carl, who finally backed up. "Since ye are my wife's relation, however pathetic, I willna do what my hands are itching to do, which is wrap them around yer neck. I will say this for the last time. No one will touch my wife. If ye doona leave within the next few seconds, I will toss ye out the door, along with yer doctor."

There apparently was something in the way Kerrigan spoke, or the look on his face that finally convinced Uncle Carl that he was in imminent danger of injury. He raised

his chin and tugged on his cravat. “You will not win, Scot, I have papers declaring her betrothal to another and I have important friends who will honor that and declare this marriage illegal.”

The doctor who stood behind Uncle Carl all this time stepped forward. “Do you wish me to examine the girl, my lord?”

Kerrigan growled. “Since ye apparently have a hearing problem, I will repeat this for ye. If ye take one step near my wife ye will be spending the next couple of weeks in bed recovering from yer injures. Ye ken?”

The man nodded and turned to leave the townhouse. Kerrigan waved at the doctor and glared at Uncle Carl. “Follow him if ye value yer life.”

“I am not done. I will be back with the authorities.”

Stevens, who had been lingering in the background, opened the door and stood next to it, waiting for the two men to leave. Once they were gone and the door closed, Kerrigan ran his fingers through his hair and let out a deep breath. “Stevens do not let that man, or anyone else for that matter, into the house. Lady Christine and I have things to do to prepare to leave for Scotland.”

“Very good, Laird.”

Her insides were still knotted. Did her uncle have men who could annul their marriage? Kerrigan joined her where she’d stood the entire time on the last few steps. “Come, Christine, doona worry. As I said to Stevens, there are things we must do to prepare to leave as soon as we are able.”

She felt the tears gather in her eyes. “I am frightened, Kerrigan. My uncle does indeed have friends in Parliament whom he may prevail upon in this matter.”

Kerrigan wrapped his arm around her waist and moved her up the stairs. Once they were in their bedchamber, he pulled her against him. “There is something I want ye to remember our whole life. I am yer husband, yer protector. No one will take ye from me. Ye are mine and will remain so. Yer uncle can come waving any number of papers, with any number of doctors behind him, but that will no’ change anything.”

“That is what I don’t understand. Why did he bring a doctor? And what sort of examination was he to perform?”

Her husband pinched the bridge of his nose with his index finger and thumb. “Ach lass, has no one e’er told ye about what happens between a man and a woman in the marriage bed?”

She shook her head, feeling confused. “No. Not exactly. I assume my mother was waiting until my wedding to speak of it, so she never told me, but I have overheard some of the maids talking.”

He let out a sigh and hesitated. “When a woman lies with a mon for the first time, there is something inside her that must be broken for consummation to take place.”

Her mouth dried up. “Broken?”

“That was probably no’ the best way to describe it. Ye have a small piece of flesh inside ye which will tear—” He stopped when she let out with a squeak.

He closed his eyes, and she swore she heard him praying. “Let me say it differently. From what I’ve heard, it’s a matter of a small, sharp pain that ends almost as soon as it arrives when a mon enters ye completely for the first time.”

She gulped. “So this doctor would have had to fumble around inside me to see if it was still there?”

It was obvious her husband was having a hard time controlling his laughter. “I wouldna put it that way, but aye, that is what he would do.”

Her hand flew to cover her mouth. “No!”

He placed his knuckle under her chin. “He will no’ touch ye. No one except me will touch ye. Ever.” He bent his head, and his lips met hers. Warmth flowed over her, soon turning to a need she didn’t recognize as he took the kiss deeper. His tongue entered her mouth, touching all the places she had had no idea were sensitive until now.

Tentatively, she moved her tongue to join his, eliciting a moan from him. He leaned down and scooped her up, placing her on the bed. He came down on top of her, bracing himself on his elbows so as not to crush her. The kiss resumed, more frantic and deeper.

Christine felt her insides melt. Her heart pounded and she noticed a dampness between her legs. There was a strange tingling there as well. She felt the need to press against Kerrigan’s body, noticing a hardness that she certainly guessed was what she’d heard the maids speaking about. Was she ready for this? It seemed her husband certainly was.

“Ach, Christine, ye drive me crazy. I want ye so much that if we doona stop now, we willna have to worry about a doctor examining ye.”

She giggled, but decided she didn’t want to stop. It had nothing to do with her uncle or any doctor, but how Kerrigan’s kisses made her feel and how anxious she was to discover what all the maids already knew. “I want to continue. It’s about time I became your wife in truth.”

With a growl, Kerrigan covered her mouth again and moved his hand up to cup her

breast. Soft, warm, with her nipples already swollen and ready for his mouth. Because she only wore a nightgown and dressing gown, it took no more than a few seconds to divest her of it all.

He leaned up on his elbow and studied her body. Lush, generously curved, and just waiting for him to explore it. His hand slid over the silky skin, dipping into the curves. His mouth covered her breast, and she moaned as he suckled; her hands fisted in the bedsheets. He lifted his head to peer at her. “Do ye like that lass?”

“Yes. Please don’t stop.” She panted the words.

“Mo chridhe , I have no intention of stopping until ye are screaming my name.”

She looked up at him. “Oh, my.”

He switched to the other breast, moving his hand down her luscious body, cupping her plump bottom, squeezing and smoothing his hand over it. He shifted so they faced each other as he pushed her flush against him. “Do ye feel how much I want ye?”

“I think so. I’m trying to remember what the maids said.” Her words were barely above a whisper.

He continued his exploration. “Doona think of anything, wife. If ye have a thought in yer head, I’m no’ doing my job well enough.”

His fingers found her moist opening as he continued to assault her mouth. Her tongue now met his, the dueling frantic.

“Ye are ready for me.” He pulled away from her mouth and kissed her face, her neck, the soft skin under her ear.

“I’m not sure what that means.”

He’d forgotten what they were speaking of, which was fine since he wasn’t interested in conversation. “Doona worry. Just relax and enjoy what I’m doing.”

He skimmed his thumb over the bit of stiffened flesh at her opening, pressing slightly. She hissed and pushed against his hand. He wanted to pleasure her with his mouth, but considering this was her first time, he would do things less frightening.

“Kerrigan?”

“Aye, mo chridhe .”

“Can I touch you?”

He almost came apart and had to take deep breaths to keep from shoving her legs apart and taking her in the most basic way known to man. But she was a virgin, an innocent and his wife; he had to keep control of himself. “Aye, lass, ye can touch me.” He didn’t recognize his own voice.

Slowly, her fingers inched down his chest to his stomach, and then to the coarse dark hair surrounding his shaft. Which by this time was almost ready to burst. She gently held his cock in her hand. He had to close his eyes and take deep breaths.

“Does that feel good?”

His strangled voice tried to sound normal, but to no avail. “Aye. It feels wonderful.” Her small, soft hands continued to squeeze him, but when her thumb slid over the top smearing the bit of liquid there, he almost jumped off the bed.

“I’m so sorry. Did I hurt you?”

He offered her a feral grin. “Nay. But ’tis time to move on before I embarrass myself and spill in yer hand.”

She frowned. “What does that mean?”

God save him from women who knew nothing about a man’s body, or for that matter, even their own. He rolled over her, nudging her legs apart as he settled between them. “Just let me kiss ye and make ye feel good.”

He used all his experience and passion for this woman to worship her with his body, as promised in their wedding vows. When she was panting and crying for him to do something to make the feeling go away, he plunged into her. Christine stilled and looked into his face. “Was that the pain you told me about?”

He brushed the damp hair plastered to her forehead back. “Aye, but ’tis over now.”

“Oh.” She almost sounded disappointed.

Slowly he began the oldest dance in time, sliding easily in and out of her tight, warm, moist channel. At first she seemed confused, but when he leaned down and kissed her while at the same time fondling her stiffened flesh, she began to ask for more, to be released from the torture he was causing.

He began to thrust, more than he should with her untried body. Strongly. Desperately. She didn’t seem to be in pain from his movements, so he kept on, all the time fingering her until she was pressed so hard against him it only added to his frenzy. Suddenly her legs tightened, a keening cry coming from her sweet lips.

With the pulsing of her release clenching his cock, it took only a minute before he shouted her name and poured his seed into her.

He collapsed, then remembering her wee body, rolled over, bringing her against him. The only sounds in the room were the two of them attempting to control their breathing. Kerrigan closed his eyes and immediately a sense of rightness washed over him. Lady Christine Lindsay was his now, always, and forever. They would raise bairns together, watch his clan grow and flourish, and hopefully years later, hold hands when the first of them left this earth. He tugged her close and reached down to cover their cooling bodies with the bedcovers. Tucking her against him, nice and snug, he was just settling in for a nice nap when her voice slid over him.

“Can we do that again?”

Page 7

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Kerrigan helped Christine into the hackney he'd had Stevens summon for him. Now that her uncle knew they were married and where they were staying, he had to be aware of their surroundings. It would not surprise him if Lord Allenby hired men to follow them and grab Christine.

Still, Kerrigan insisted on visiting a jewelry shop to purchase a proper wedding ring for her. It pained him that he'd been forced to sell all the Lindsay jewelry to feed everyone last winter, but when he reluctantly sold his mother's wedding ring, he was more concerned with taking care of his people than about what his future wife would wear.

He'd brought the last of his coin to London, hoping that the arrangement he'd made with Mrs. Dove-Lyon after the introduction from his friend, Lord Devon, would result in filling his coffers. As much as he had hated the idea of taking money from his future wife, he had no choice.

But this ring he would pay for.

They arrived at Bond Street, not a place that Kerrigan was familiar with since he'd only made a few trips to London in all his years. However, Stevens, who seemed to be a butler extraordinaire, told him it was the place to go.

"Do ye have a favorite jewelry store, lass?"

"I do. Rundell and Bridge on Ludgate Hill is a fine place. It is only a few miles from here." Although she had decried him buying her a ring, she appeared excited.

He tapped on the ceiling of the hackney and gave the driver instructions to continue on to Ludgate Hill. The man maneuvered his way through the traffic and soon they were at their destination. The driver jumped down from the driver's bench and opened the door. "Is this where you wish to stop, my lord?"

"Aye," Kerrigan said, stepping out. He took a quick scan of their surroundings, then reached into the carriage and helped Christine down. He paid the driver and extended his arm for her to take.

"It feels lovely to be out and about again. After being locked in my room, then hiding at The Lyon's Den, then at Mr. Kendall's brother's townhouse, I feel as though I am a prisoner being let free."

"Just a couple more days, lass, and we'll be on our way to Luffness Castle."

"Oh, I never even asked you the name of your home. Luffness Castle. That sounds very proper."

He couldn't help but feel there was nothing proper about Luffness Castle right now with the loss of their sheep, and income. Hopefully, things would change once Christine's money was transferred to his bank in Edinburgh. There were things that needed fixing in the castle, and several of the clan cottages needed new roofs and other repairs before winter set in.

The store was obviously meant for the upper crust of London society. London was a place he would never have visited if it hadn't been for his necessary marriage. However, besides the lovely wife he'd wed, he had enjoyed his time here with Devon. The clubs they'd visited had been an eye-opener. He couldn't imagine gambling until you lost everything. Some men were fools.

"Good afternoon, Lady Christine. What interests you today?" The man eyed Kerrigan

speculatively.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Chester.” She turned to Kerrigan. “May I make known to you Mr. Robert Chester? Mr. Chester, this is my husband, Laird Kerrigan Lindsay.”

“Husband? What a surprise. It is a pleasure to meet you, Laird. You are a very lucky man to have married Lady...Lindsay.” He laughed. “I must get used to that.”

Kerrigan smiled at her. “Aye, I certainly won the prize.”

The jeweler nodded his agreement. “What are you interested in, my lady?”

“My wife needs a proper wedding ring. As ye can see, the one she wears does no’ fit and I’d rather if she had something she liked.”

“Of course.” He looked at Christine. “Do you have anything particular in mind?”

Christine shook her head. “No. I never thought much about wedding rings. What do you suggest?”

The man brought out trays of rings. There were no prices on them, which made him a tad uncomfortable. Most likely those who shopped here were unconcerned about prices, but there was a good chance the ring would wipe out the rest of his coin.

“This one is particularly lovely,” the jeweler said, holding up a gold band with a large stone in the center—he wasn’t sure what it was since he had very little experience with purchasing jewelry—surrounded by diamonds.

He held his breath, wondering if insisting on purchasing her a ring now had been such a good idea.

The lass scrunched up her nose in a most delightful way. “No. I don’t think something that fancy would suit. My life is changing, Mr. Chester.” She beamed at Kerrigan. “I will be living in a castle in Scotland. I won’t have cause, I am sure, to wear such fancy things. Do you have something a bit more—practical?”

“But verra nice.” Kerrigan wasn’t sure if Christine was truly looking to be practical, or if she was concerned about the cost.

It took a several trays later, but eventually Mr. Chester—begrudgingly—brought out beautiful but simple rings. “Yes, I am sure one of these will suit,” Christine said.

The piece she picked fit perfectly and looked wonderful on her hand. “I love this one,” she said.

Kerrigan reached over, took the ring off her finger and dropped it into his pocket. She looked a bit surprised but said nothing.

“Shall I add it to your account, my lady?”

“Nay,” Kerrigan said. “I will pay for the ring now.”

The man actually looked confused. Apparently, the Upper Crust didn’t trouble themselves with paying for things as they were purchased. After the years he’d had as laird, he couldn’t imagine being so unconcerned about price, or not paying for things right away.

“Very well.” Mr. Chester scribbled something on a piece of parchment and handed it to him. Kerrigan sighed in relief when he realized he could pay for the ring and still have coin left over. He dug into the pouch he carried attached to his belt, and counted out the coins as Christine wandered the shop.

Once the purchase was completed, the jeweler wished them well and they left.

Christine took his arm, and they strolled the pavement for a while. “We really should get back to the townhouse,” Kerrigan said. As happy as Christine seemed to be now that she was free of confinement, he knew they were taking a risk. Not that he thought Allenby would hire someone to snatch her off the streets in the middle of a busy area, but depending on how desperate he was—and the man certainly was—he could lose all common sense and do just that.

He had no fear that he couldn’t protect his wife, but he didn’t want to upset her.

She sighed and looked up at him. “Yes. I’m afraid you are right. I hope Mr. Kendall can arrange things quickly.”

Kerrigan waved down a hackney and they settled themselves inside.

Christine smoothed out her skirts and after folding her delicate hands in her lap, said, “Tell me about Luffness Castle.”

She was excited about her new home. A castle!

Kerrigan shifted so he was able to rest his foot on his knee. “’Tis quite old. It was originally owned by the Earls of Lothian. The Lindsays acquired it through marriage in the twelfth century. There have been several renovations over the years and right now we are in desperate need of more.”

Christine viewed him with wide eyes. “That is quite interesting. I must say I love the idea of living in a castle.”

Kerrigan sighed. “Well, lass, I must warn ye. For the past sixty or so years we have depended on our sheep to provide wool for our people to use to make wraps, bonnets,

kilts, and other items that we sell all over Scotland as well as other countries. We have a reputation for producing the best.

“However, once we lost our sheep to bluetongue disease, our entire source of income dried up. We needed the coin held in reserves to feed our people. The only way we will survive is if we buy more sheep and have the time to allow them to be able to produce the wool we need and once again begin to make and sell our well-known items.”

“That’s terrible. Your poor people.”

“Yes, poor indeed. All of them have gardens that serve them well, and hunting is allowed on the property, but with everyone trying to bring down enough animals to feed their families, the herd grows slim.”

“I’m hoping the money from my father will help with this.”

Suddenly, Kerrigan looked very uncomfortable. “I hate to use yer money, lass. It makes me feel verra strange to do it. I wish there was another way.”

She waved her hand. “Don’t concern yourself. If you remember, the reason we made this arrangement was because I needed a husband who would protect me and take me far enough away that my uncle could no longer touch me. And, in return, you would get my money so you could save your clan.”

“I ken, but it still makes me uncomfortable. In my world, the men take care of the women, no’ the other way around.”

“If you were using it to pay off gambling debts, as Lord Newton had intended to do, I could see your concern, but this is for such a good reason.” She reached out and touched his arm. “Please don’t make this into more than it should be. I am more than

happy with our arrangement. And remember, I've never lived in a castle before! I've never had a husband before! And I don't have to marry a man I don't wish to marry. To my way of thinking, we both got what we wanted."

He reached across the space and pulled her next to him, then took her hand. "Ye are the kindest person I have e'er met. I will do my best to make sure ye ne'er regret yer decision." With those words, he reached into his pocket and withdrew the ring they'd just bought. "This is my promise that I will try my best to be the worthiest husband e'er and do e'erything I can to protect ye and make ye happy." He slid the ring on her finger, and she looked up at him with teary eyes.

"And I will try to be the best wife ever."

He cupped her face in his large hands and lowered his head until their lips met. Once again, she was stunned at how soft and warm his lips were when she considered his height and breadth. Laird Kerrigan Lindsay was an unusual man, and she was very happy that he was her husband.

"My Lord, we have arrived." The driver opened the carriage door and stepped back so Kerrigan could exit. He reached in and helped Chrstine out.

As they made their way to the steps of the townhouse, a carriage pulled up where their driver had just left. Lord Allenby jumped from the carriage, waving papers in his hand. "I have documents here that require my niece to appear before a panel of judges with regard to this false marriage."

Kerrigan took one look at the man and swung his fist at his face. The crunch of bone indicated a broken nose. He landed on his bottom on the sidewalk and held his nose while blood trickled down his lips.

"You broke my nose," he said, sounding surprised and somewhat petulant.

“Aye, I did. Now take yer papers and yer panels and shove them... Well, I guess ye doona have to think too hard to ken where I suggest you shove them.”

Kerrigan straightened his jacket as he returned to Christine’s side, who looked at her uncle in horror. “Wife, are ye ready?”

She nodded and he moved her forward while she continued to stare over her shoulder at her uncle, blood running down his face.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

“I have no idea what those papers and panels mean except that we have to leave for Scotland today.”

Christine twisted her fingers in her lap as Kerrigan paced in front of her. She was still reeling from watching him swing his fist at her uncle. “We have to wait to hear from Mr. Kendall.”

He stopped, placing his hands on his hips. “I have no idea what stunt yer uncle will pull next, and I have no intention of waiting here until we find out. I suggest we go to Kendall’s office now and get as much straightened out as we can. Then leave.”

“Won’t Uncle Carl just come after us?”

“Mayhap. But he will be in my country, with my laws. He can wave around all the papers he wants to, but they most likely will mean no’thing in Scotland.”

Suddenly energized, she hopped up. “Yes. I agree.”

Kerrigan had Stevens secure another hackney for them, and, watching their surroundings carefully, he escorted her down the steps. Her insides were twisted. Fear of her uncle, fear of what he could do, fear of facing what she’d known was to happen—her new life in another country with a husband she barely knew, and people she’d yet to meet, who might not accept an English wife for their laird.

Mr. Kendall’s secretary informed them that the solicitor was out of the office but was expected back shortly. She and Kerrigan decided to wait and made themselves comfortable. There seemed to be nothing else to do.

The three of them sat in silence, the ticking of the clock in the corner the only sound until footsteps broke the quiet and the door opened. Mr. Kendall took one look at them and said, “You must leave as quickly as possible.”

They stood and followed Mr. Kendall into his office. They took seats in front of the heavy oak desk, and he sat behind it. “Your uncle has managed to find a few cohorts to join him in this ridiculous objection to your marriage.”

“Aye, we are aware of it, which is why we are here. How close are ye to finishing up whatever business ye need to do?”

“Finished. As soon as I received notice that Lord Allenby was serving papers on you, I went to the bank and had them finish up the last of the steps. As of now you are free to go. The money has been transferred into an account bearing your name, Laird, and will be available at the bank you chose to use in Scotland.” He reached across the desk and handed him a rolled-up document.

Christine breathed a sigh of relief. There was no doubt that Uncle Carl was absolutely livid after his altercation with Kerrigan. She’d been subjected to some of his temper tantrums and knew he could get dangerous.

“I took the liberty of withdrawing funds for your travels.” He pulled a bag from his jacket pocket and handed it to Kerrigan.” He then turned to Christine, a soft smile on his face. “I have known you since you were a babe, Lady Lindsay. Your father was a wonderful man, who always wanted the best for you.” He glanced at Kerrigan. “I believe his wish has been granted.”

With tears in her eyes, Christine and Kerrigan left the office. Once settled in yet another hackney, Kerrigan said, “We will waste no time. Pack up as quickly as ye can and we will leave now. We can stop on the road at an inn right outside of London that I’m familiar with where we can stay the night and rent a carriage to take us all the

way to Scotland.”

“How will we get to the inn?”

Kerrigan ran his fingers through his hair. “I have my horse, Fergus, with me that I rode to London, so he will have to carry the both of us.”

A sense of urgency started her heart thumping. Once the hackney came to a rolling stop, Kerrigan hopped out, paid the driver, and ushered Christine up the steps. “Pack lightly, lass, while I go to the mews and get Fergus ready.”

Christine raced upstairs, throwing a few things into Kerrigan’s satchel. She would be arriving at her new home as a pauper with very little clothing. Not wishing to part with her scented soaps and oils, she sacrificed a second pair of shoes to be able to smell good.

Kerrigan entered the room and headed to the satchel. “The horse is ready, so as soon as ye’re finished we’re leaving.” He threw a few items into the bag and said, “I’ve already told Stevens we would be leaving now. He has been instructed that if your uncle comes back to the townhouse to hold him off by pretending we are still in London.”

She nodded, her heart continuing to pound. She was even more frightened than she’d been when she’d dropped from her bedchamber window. Now she had more to lose. A husband she was fond of, and a chance at happiness.

After handing Stevens coins for himself and the other servants in the townhouse, Kerrigan hustled Christine down the steps to the horse standing in front of the building, ready for them. He secured the satchel onto the animal, tossed his wife up onto the saddle and jumped up behind her. Wrapping his arm around her waist, hugging her close, he headed north, leaving London behind.

The sky had darkened by the time they'd reached The Grouse and Bear Inn. He'd stayed there on his way to London and found the beds to be comfortable, the food tasty, and the innkeeper and his wife jovial and helpful.

A young lad greeted them as he swung his leg over the saddle. He helped Christine down, who looked very tired. After giving the stable lad instructions to take special care of Fergus because of the extra weight he'd carried, he led her into the inn. The innkeeper remembered him and greeted him warmly. "Is this the lovely bride you told us about on your way to London?" the man asked as he wiped his hands on a linen cloth.

"Aye. This is Lady Christine Lindsay."

Christine offered the man a warm smile, but 'twas obvious from her demeanor that all she required was a meal and a soft bed.

"I have a nice bedchamber for you and your new wife, Laird. Shall I have your dinner sent up?"

"Aye, please." He took Christine by the elbow and led her up the stairs behind the innkeeper.

"If you wish a bath, my lady, I can have one sent up for you."

Christine's entire demeanor changed. "Oh, thank you very much. A hot bath would be just the thing."

The room was clean with a comfortable-looking bed. As much as she would have loved to just lay down and sleep, she knew she would rest better with a clean body and full stomach. Of course, she had very little in the way of clean clothes to change into.

She did have one travel gown in the rapidly packed satchel. “Do you think your wife can try to brush a dress clean for me?” she asked the innkeeper. There wouldn’t be so much road dust the rest of the way to Kerrigan’s home since they would be traveling in a carriage now.

“Of course. I will ask my wife to fetch it from you when she brings your meal.”

“Thank you,” she said.

Once the innkeeper left, she removed her cloak and dropped it in the chair next to a small table where they would most likely eat their supper.

“I am going downstairs to have an ale while ye take yer bath,” Kerrigan said.

She was grateful for him to do that because she wasn’t comfortable with him in the room while she undressed. “Thank you. I won’t take long.” She removed her shoes, and he made a fast exit.

Lying in the warm water was wonderful. She sat up and reached for her scented soap. And realized it was in her satchel. She climbed out of the tub and hurried over to where she left it and after rummaging around, pulled out the soap. Even with the small fire in the room, she had become chilled, but relaxed again when she slid down in the warm water.

Once she was warm again, she sat up to wash her body. No cleaning cloth. She looked over at the table where the innkeeper’s wife had placed the cloth. She splashed the water in frustration and again climbed from the warmth of the tub, rubbing her arms.

Back again, she sighed with pleasure, rubbing the sweet-smelling soap over the cloth and washing her body. When she was finished, she dipped her head into the water

and rubbed soap over it. It was lovely to feel clean. With soap dripping down her face she realized there was no maid holding a bucket of clean water to dump over her head and body so she could rinse the soap off.

Whatever was she to do? She glanced down at the water which was now cold and soapy. How did women without maids take baths? She'd been given the services of a personal maid once she was out of the nursery.

She assumed that Kerrigan would be returning to the room soon. Here she sat, shivering, in slimy water, strands of soapy hair hanging down around her face. She had to rinse the soap off or she would be itching all night. Glancing down, she realized the only way to end up with a somewhat non-soapy head was to dunk it. Or wait for her husband to return and ask him to go to the kitchen and bring a bucket of clean water.

Shrugging, she dipped down and tried her best to swirl her hair to remove the soap. She came up guggling and spitting water. Anxious now to get out of the tub, she stood and groaned when she realized the drying cloth was on the chair next to the table where the washing cloth had been.

Just as she was stepping over the edge of the tub, the door opened, startling her. She turned, lost her balance and tumbled to the floor, landing on her hip. "Ouch!"

Kerrigan closed the door and hurried to her side. "Are ye well, lass?" She shook off the desire to ask him if he thought she looked well. "I hurt my hip." She looked up at him, realizing her naked, wet, soapy body was on full display. "Can you get me the drying cloth over there?" she snapped.

He reached the chair in two strides and returned to her. Kneeling on one knee, he helped her up, as gently as possible. "Here, stand up and I'll wrap ye in the linen."

If only there was a hole in the floor she could crawl into. He shook out the cloth and wrapped it around her, then led her to the fire in the hearth. “Sit here and ye will warm up. I need to look at yer hip.”

God’s bones, she didn’t want to unwrap herself and have him poking around. “No, it was merely a bump, I am fine.” She sat in the chair attempting to dry herself off without removing the cloth.

“I will make use of the water and give myself a quick bath.” He began to remove his clothes as he spoke to her.

“It is rather soapy,” she said.

“’Tis fine. I’ll use the water in the jug on the dresser to rinse off.”

Christine closed her eyes and groaned.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Christine was so weary by the time they reached the end of their fourth full day of travel, she was ready to alight from the carriage and tell Kerrigan she was going to make her home right there in that very spot. However, he patted her hand as if she were a cranky bairn and merely smiled at her and told her they still had another three or so days of travel after they crossed the border.

She sighed at that news. “I didn’t realize how far London is from the Scottish border.”

“Aye, lass, ’tis true. But I want to make sure we are across the border as soon as we can be so yer uncle with his documents and panels doesna matter.”

She groaned and shifted once again. At least with them this far from London, she hoped there was little chance her uncle would find them. Or even make the effort to do the travel. The constant rolling of the carriage wheels, the bumps under her bottom and the boredom were about to make her crazy.

“Once we are beyond Gretna Green there is a nice little village I passed on my way to London where we can stop and visit for a couple of days. ’Twas to be a surprise but since ye’re looking so miserable, I thought it might perk ye up a bit if ye kened we’re about to take a break in our travel. I told our driver he can return once we arrive, and we will secure another carriage there for the rest of the trip.”

She couldn’t stop the grin that broke out on her face and to her utter humiliation tears flooded her eyes. “Oh, thank you so much. I’m afraid I’m not used to so much travel.”

He smiled back at her. “Gretna Green is right over the border between Scotland and England. With stops ’tis still a four-day trip from there to Luffness, though.” He leaned back in the carriage and rested his foot on his knee. “Do ye ken couples who have eloped to Gretna Green?”

“Not personally, but the ton just loves to hear such things. It gives them gossip for weeks. Especially when family members—brothers and fathers—race after them attempting to stop the marriage.”

He smirked. “Like yer uncle wants to annul our marriage to get his hands on money that is no’ his.”

She fought a yawn and nodded. “Yes. Sometimes it comes down to money, but other times it’s a matter of control. The family wants to dictate who the young woman can or cannot marry.”

He nodded, a smirk on his face. “Again, like yer uncle.”

She smiled. “But we thwarted him.”

Kerrigan shook his head. “During my few visits to London, and spending time with Devon, I ne’er understood why people have so little to do that they are interested in what others are doing. In my world, we all must work hard.”

“Oh, my dear husband. You have no idea how much the ton loves gossip. And you are correct. Since earning one’s living is considered beneath one’s dignity, there is quite a bit of time for examining others’ lives.”

“And from what I saw when I was visiting gambling houses with Lord Devon, there are many men who spend most of their time losing their family’s fortunes.”

The carriage made a turn in the road and a picturesque view of small farms set between two hills greeted them. “It is most distressing when a young man inherits a title long before he is ready for such a responsibility. Oftentimes he spends more time enjoying his money than protecting it. And the ones who suffer are the rest of his family. A man with a title has a duty to see that his mother and siblings are provided for, and have what they need.”

Kerrigan shifted, disgust on his face. “In our world, there are those who inherit a Lairdship before their time, but there is a Council to advise the lad to avoid such problems.”

Remembering things she had heard her papa speak of after reading newspapers she said, “Have things been hard for your clan? I mean, before the problem with the sheep.”

He looked out the window at the passing scenery. “Aye. Yer English made sure they no’ only took over our country, after the Culloden slaughter, but with the Clearances, so many clans split up and folks had to move to North America. The English threw the farmers off the land and brought in their own herds of sheep. So many had no choice but to pack up their families and leave.”

Silence reigned for the next couple of hours and just as Christine thought she would fall asleep, she peeked out the window and sat up, her eyes wide as they rounded another curve in the road. “I can see the village from here.”

Sitting close to a loch, the village looked charming and inviting. As they grew closer, it showed many shops, vendors and crofters in the center of the small town. She also noticed two inns, one facing the water.

Fisherman were pulling in their boats for the day. There appeared to be a great deal of bantering back and forth among the men as their day came to an end. “What are the

young boys doing?” Christine asked as they watched the activity. Young boys ran in between the boats, lugging nets full of fish to the wharf.

Kerrigan leaned forward, looking out the window as the carriage proceeded to the center of the village. “They are lugging the fish to where they will be sorted and prepared for sale tomorrow.”

For all the times she’d eaten fish dishes at dinner parties and her own home, she never once thought about the men who caught the fish, and those involved in the sorting and sale of them. And the cleaning. She shuddered. But then, she was still wrestling with how to clean her own body in her bath without a maid.

Kerrigan was more than happy to stop for a day or two himself. As much as he would have preferred to travel riding Fergus, he felt an obligation to ride with his new wife, rather than abandoning her to travel alone.

He wouldn’t exactly say they’d settled into a married couple’s routine, but he felt comfortable with Christine, which he hadn’t thought was possible when he was speaking with Mrs. Dove-Lyon about a possible marriage with an unknown lass. He was anxious for them to arrive at Luffness Castle, so Christine could take over the managing of the keep, which was badly needed.

When he had left, things had been in shambles. Llioni was in charge of the kitchen, but did not get along well with the lasses who did a lot of the work, with squabbles erupting all the time. Isla was supposed to be helping Llioni, but they also didn’t get along.

The few maids they were able to afford were overworked and, therefore, grumpy. Now that he had more money, he would like to have Christine hire more help. That would probably make for more pleasant working conditions.

She also needed to take over as chatelaine and make sure the larders were stocked and the vegetable garden tended to. There was just so much to do since his ma passed two years before, shortly after his two sisters married. One moved to Canada and one to Australia. The absence of family was sorely felt in the keep.

“It appears we’ve arrived at the Cock and Hen. I have passed through this village a few times before and I know this place to be clean, comfortable, and with tasty and generous food.”

“I will just be glad to get out of this carriage. I would love to walk around for a bit, if that is acceptable to you.”

“Of course. We will go inside to register and arrange for another carriage to be readied for us in a few days as well as speak with the stable lad about my horse. Then we shall stroll the marketplace.”

The inn was as he remembered it from a few years before, the last time he passed through the area. The innkeeper was younger than he remembered but most likely he was the son who had taken over when his parents grew too old.

They were welcomed and shown into a large, corner bedchamber with a window that overlooked the harbor.

Christine turned from the window. “While we are here, I would like to purchase a few garments. I left my Papa’s house with very little and even less when we left Mr. Kendall’s brother’s townhouse.”

“’Tis a good idea. I can use a few new items myself.”

They washed the road dust off them and proceeded out the front door and into the busyness of the village.

“Oh, look, Kerrigan. Ribbons. I could certainly use a few new ones.”

Not used to shopping with a wife, or with any woman for that matter, Kerrigan decided it was not something he would like to do ever again. Christine stopped at just about every vendor table, picking up little things here and there. She chatted with every vendor, also.

After what seemed like hours, Kerrigan took his timepiece from his pocket and declared, “Goodness, Chrstine. The hour grows late. We must return to the inn for our supper.”

She nodded at the woman she’d been speaking with, handed the bairn back to its mother, reminded the older man with the woman what he should do for his aches and pains, and finally, he was able to drag her off.

Kerrigan took her arm and marched her directly to the inn door, not allowing for anymore stops. What he’d needed to purchase had been done when they first arrived and took about ten minutes. They’d had all her acquisitions sent to the inn as she bought them.

He looked at the pile of bundles and bags in the corner of their bedchamber. “Lass, this will take up quite a bit of space in the carriage on the rest of the trip.”

Christine studied the stack of items she’d purchased, her index finger tapping her lips. “This is quite a bundle.” She turned to Kerrigan. “I had no idea I was buying so much.” Her shoulders slumped, a look of sadness on her face. “Do you think I should return some of this?”

His stomach twisted with the way she eyed her purchases. “Nay, wife. Doona fash yerself. We will be sure to secure a large enough carriage for the rest of the trip, and I can ride Fergus if it is verra crowded.”

He chuckled to himself, knowing that riding his horse in the fresh air would be a wonderful payment for all the hours spent crowded in the lack-of-air carriage.

The meal of very tasty lamb stew with side dishes of roasted vegetables, along with warm freshly-baked bread was everything Kerrigan remembered from prior visits. As they relaxed after dinner, Kerrigan enjoying a brandy and Christine a sherry, he looked at her across the table. “Ye look tired.”

“Yes, I am,” she said, covering her mouth with the back of her hand, stifling a yawn.

He sat back, crossed his arms over his chest and viewed her from underneath his eyelashes. “How tired are ye?”

Christine perked up. “Not that tired.”

Kerrigan downed the rest of his drink, stood, and held out his hand.

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Misery. That was the only word to describe her life. They were still traveling, and while the two-day break had been pleasant and soul-refreshing, they were once again on the road all day. This day was the worst so far.

Before they left the lovely village they had visited, Kerrigan had insisted on them speaking marriage vows before the local blacksmith, who like most men of the trade in Scotland married couples “over the anvil”. Although most hurried marriages took place closer to the border, there were those couples who didn’t want to take a chance stopping at the popular Gretna Green where their families would most likely be searching for them.

The man had marriage certificates and provided them with one after they again spoke their vows. Kerrigan explained that the procedure they went through was considered a legal marriage in Scotland and he wanted to make sure her uncle didn’t have any question about the legality of their marriage either in England or Scotland.

She had started her monthly flow that morning and, too embarrassed to tell Kerrigan why she was in such pain, she made up a story about a bad headache that traveled to her stomach which only caused him to ask her every ten minutes if they should stop and see about finding a doctor or a healer.

Her woman’s time had never been pleasant, but this one was particularly bad. Plus, there was no maid to see to her comfort. No one to bring her a hot brick wrapped in soft cloth to place on her aching stomach. No maid to bring her hot chocolate with a touch of laudanum to ease her pain.

No. She was stuck in a carriage in the pouring rain. Her husband was outside helping

the driver push the wheels out of the muck. She was cold, in pain, and miserable. Perhaps marriage to Lord Newton might not have been so bad. She sighed and was immediately thrown to the floor as the carriage experienced a large jolt. She screamed, feeling as though the vehicle was about to turn over.

“Are ye all right, lass?” Kerrigan called from outside of the carriage.

“Yes. Just fine,” she said as she climbed to her feet and settled back onto the seat. Two tears slid down her cheeks.

The door to the carriage opened and Kerrigan stuck his head in. He looked as though he’d been pushed into a pond. Not only was he soaking wet, but he was also covered in mud. “I think I will ride Fergus to the next village so I doona get ye all wet and muddy.”

“Is the carriage out of the mud, then?”

“Aye, but one of the wheels doesna look sturdy enough to continue the rest of the journey, so we will have to secure another carriage.”

Another delay.

She moaned and turned her head to the wall.

“I think I will ask about a doctor or healer when we reach the next village. Ye have me concerned, lass.”

Why, oh why, did she get her monthly flow now? Were they at his castle, she was sure there was someone who could take care of her. Rather than argue with him, she merely nodded and within minutes there was another jerk that almost tossed her to the floor before the carriage moved on.

With the ground being slippery, Kerrigan tried his best to keep her from getting dirty as he helped her out of the carriage, his arm wrapped snugly around her waist. She was bent over like an old woman, barely able to walk.

The inn they stopped at looked like it had been built during the Crusades. And with no renovations since then. Of course, the continuing deluge didn't help the inn's appearance. Kerrigan opened the door, and they were immediately welcomed with odors of ale, meat grease, and smoke.

Christine moaned again and hoped the contents of her last meal remained where it was supposed to stay. Kerrigan continued to study her, frowning. If only she had the nerve to tell him what she had was perfectly normal, and he should stop looking at her as if he expected her to pass from this life any minute.

The innkeeper greeted them with a smile, a contrast to the surroundings. Although the place left much to be desired, the man was cheerful and seemed delighted to have paying guests. "It appears ye have been caught in the rain," he said. "I will get my wife to help ye into a room."

Christine was so cold she began to shake which only increased the look of worry on her husband's face.

After patting her hand, he switched his attention to the innkeeper. "Do ye ken of someone who can rent us a carriage for the rest of our trip? We are headed to East Lothian."

The innkeeper didn't even pause. "Nay, I'm afraid no'. This is a small village. What is wrong with the carriage ye have now?"

"It got stuck in mud, and when the driver and I managed to pull it out, it damaged one of the wheels."

“Wheesh,” the innkeeper said as he wiped down a dirty table with an even dirtier cloth. “We have a mon who comes here all the time who can fix the wheel for ye.”

“That would be welcomed,” Kerrigan said. “My driver is outside with the carriage now. Do ye have someone to send a message to the mon ye speak of? My wife is quite anxious to finish our trip.”

“Aye. I will send my lad to fetch him. Give me a minute to find my wife and have her direct ye to a room.”

Kerrigan turned to Christine as the innkeeper headed up the stairs. “I’m going to ask for a healer also to look at ye.”

She tried to smile but didn’t quite make it. “No. It is nothing, I assure you.”

The innkeeper’s wife arrived, wiping her hands on a soiled apron. “Welcome to The Fish and the Turtle. My name is Jess. Let me show ye to yer room, lass. It looks like ye’re in need of clean, dry clothes.”

“That would be wonderful. May I request a bath, also?”

The woman looked at her as if she asked for an audience with Prinny.

“Ach, ’tis sorry I am, lass, but we doona have a tub or anyone to lug up water. When we need to, we bathe in the loch a bit up the road. I will bring up a jug of warm water for ye.”

No bath.

“That would be fine, mistress.”

She had to get away from all these people who looked at her as if she was from another country. Then remembering she was indeed from another country, she burst out laughing which only appeared to increase the confusion of Kerrigan, the innkeeper and his wife.

“My wife is no’ feeling well. Is there a doctor or healer about?” Kerrigan said, studying Christine.

“Aye. I am able to do some minor healing. Did ye hurt yerself when the carriage had its accident?” Jess asked.

“No. My husband worries overmuch, but if I could just be shown to a room, I would be most grateful.”

Kerrigan continued to study her as she followed the woman up the stairs. She felt a tad faint but made it to their lodgings. It was a small room, but considering the location of the inn, not a bad space.

She began to struggle out of her dress and Jess helped her out of it. “‘Tis yer woman’s time, aye?” she asked.

Christine nodded. “How did you know?”

The dress landed on the floor, and the corset followed, leaving her in her chemise. “Ye have that look about ye. I’m no longer bothered with it, but I remember it well. Why does yer husband think ye are sick? Dinna ye tell him what yer trouble was?”

Christine felt the blood rush to her face. “No. We’re newly married and I didn’t know how to tell him without embarrassing myself.”

“Lass, I’m sure yer husband kens all about a woman’s flow. He doesna look to me as

a mon who isn't familiar with all things about lass's bodies." She winked at her which only made her face grow warmer. "And ye say ye're newly married. What will ye tell him when he reaches for ye tonight?"

Christine drew in a breath. "Oh, I never thought about that." She felt like a fool. Of course, Kerrigan would expect to share intimacies with her tonight. It had been that way since the first time they made love.

A knock on the door drew their attention. Jess opened the door, leaving only a narrow space since Christine was undressed. "Leave the satchel there by the door and go to the kitchen and fill a jug with warm water. Bring that back with a cloth."

Jess waited until Christine heard footsteps on the stairs and then she opened the door all the way and retrieved the satchel.

It didn't take long for Jess to get Christine washed, changed into her nightrail, and her hair brushed and plated. It felt lovely to have someone care for her body.

"I will send up a tonic for ye to take that will ease yer pain and help ye sleep," she said as she gathered the clothing from the floor and folded it.

"Thank you. I appreciate it."

Jess was only gone from the room for about fifteen minutes when the door to the bedchamber opened and Kerrigan stepped in. He carried a mug with him. She could see the steam coming from the container. "The innkeeper's wife sent this for ye. They are bringing up our supper in a few minutes."

Christine held her arm out and he placed the mug in her hand. "Thank you. This will surely help."

Kerrigan said nothing but appeared to be holding back a grin. He turned at the sound of a quick tap at the door and opened it to allow in a young maid with a tray of food in her hands.

“Thank ye, lass,” Kerrigan said as he took the tray from her. She gave a quick curtsy and left.

Christine sipped on the warm drink as her new husband set the various dishes out on a small table near the door. Now that she was dry, clean, and with the tonic warming her insides, she began to feel hungry.

“Are ye feeling better, lass?” he said as he handed her a plate of food. He still had that silly look on his face.

“Yes. The tonic the innkeeper’s wife gave me is helping.”

He nodded and filled a plate for himself and sat on the edge of the bed. Their conversation was on the condition of the carriage, the rest of the trip, and if they would be able to continue the next day.

Christine leaned back and placed her hand over her stomach. She had finished the tonic and now she was ready to sleep. Kerrigan removed the dishes, placed them on the tray and set it all in the corridor in front of the door.

He then proceeded to wash his face and hands, and removed his clothes, in preparation for bed. After admiring his muscular body, tight buttocks and broad shoulders, she closed her eyes feigning sleep so Kerrigan would leave her be for the night and she would not have to explain herself.

He climbed in alongside her and took her hand in his. “Lass, why dinna ye tell me what was troubling ye so I dinna have to worry all day?”

She knew by the look on his face that Jess must have told him. Mortified, she slid down and covered her head with the blanket. "I'm going to sleep now."

"Ach, lass, ye'r no' getting away with this." He tugged the cover off her.

She placed her hands on her face. "Go to sleep."

Now fully laughing, he pulled her hands down. "I am yer husband. I am fully aware of how a woman's body works. Ye should ne'er be embarrassed to tell me anything."

She turned over and placed her pillow over her head. "I'm going to sleep now."

Kerrigan kissed the back of her neck. "Aye then," he said gently with a smile in his voice. "Good night, wife. Sleep well."

"I will now," she muttered.

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Kerrigan was growing anxious to finish the trip and arrive at his home. They were only about two hours from Luffness Castle. He'd been away a little more than a month. He had sent a messenger right after his marriage to alert the clan that he would be returning as soon as he could and with the money to purchase sheep, sustain them through the winter, and even begin the desperately needed repairs.

Christine seemed more nervous than excited, and he expected that was normal. He was returning to his home, yet she was beginning a whole new life. He had to remember that it would take some time for her to adjust. He was confident that she would have been trained as a lass growing up, as all English women were, in everything necessary to run his keep, hire and supervise servants, keep track of the larder and oversee the garden. She would most likely need a day or two to get settled, however.

He would send immediately for the animals to replace the lost sheep and other game to repopulate the woods that had been depleted with the clan folks hunting to feed their families. Aye, things would definitely be better. And with the bonny and cheerful wife he'd gained in addition to the money, he was quite pleased with his—overly long—trip to London.

He'd chosen to ride Fergus since the carriage was now crowded with Christine's purchases during their stops. He was quite happy to ride his horse, unable to stand even one more day in the carriage. He looked around at the green hills and deep blue sky and took in a refreshing, deep breath of Scottish air. No more suffocating London air for him. He was happy here and he and Christine would have a good life. Raise strong boys and bonny girls.

He rode past the carriage and looked inside to see Christine gazing out the window. She'd tried several times reading one of the many books she'd purchased in villages along the way, but unfortunately, it seemed she was subjected to nausea trying to read in a moving vehicle. He'd teased her about helping to rebuild the castle's library with all her books. Although with her duties as chatelaine, her time for reading would be limited until she got everything in the keep under control.

Finally, they rode over the last hill and around a curve. Luffness Castle came into view. He called to Christine and pointed. "There is yer new home, lass."

She smiled, but he saw a slight hesitation as she gazed at his home. He was sure everything would be fine, and she would be comfortable in no time at all.

He jumped from Fergus as they came to a stop at the huge main door. Within moments the door slowly rolled open and his cousin, Patrick Lindsay, strode through the opening. "Kerrigan! We thought ye would ne'er return to us, that mayhap ye enjoyed the London life."

They grabbed each other's forearms in the traditional greeting and Patrick slapped him on the back.

"Nay, I dinna like London any more than the other times I visited. I was verra glad to leave it behind."

Neil strode up to them with a bright smile on his face. "Welcome, home Laird."

Patrick looked over Kerrigan's shoulder. "We got yer message. Where is this wife of yers?"

Kerrigan walked to the carriage and opened the door, extending his hand to help Christine out. She was busy brushing her skirts and patting her hair. The lovely hat

she'd put on that morning was crooked and it appeared the ribbons tied under her chin were knotted. Whatever it was she'd done to her hair hadn't worked and clumps of it drooped over one shoulder. It mattered not to him. She was his wife, and she was bonny, kind, and smart. That was all he cared about.

Instead of taking her by the arm, he clasped their fingers together and walked her up to where Patrick and Neil stood. Just then several others came out of the keep, curious looks on their faces. He heard mumblings about "the Sassenach" and reminded himself to make sure everyone in the castle treated Christine with respect and no name calling.

He looked first at Patrick. "This is my wife, Lady Christine Lindsay." Then he turned to Christine. "This is Patrick Lindsay. He is my cousin and right-hand man." He then waved at Neil. "Neil Lindsay is my steward and supervises the shepherds."

He beamed at the others who had gathered and, aside from very few dips and bows, for the most part they all just stared at her.

Christine cleared her throat. "I am most pleased to be here and to be part of your clan."

Silence.

She turned to look at Kerrigan, a slight bit of terror in her eyes. "What do I do now?" she whispered.

"No'hing." He spread his legs apart and crossed his arms over his chest as he surveyed the silent group. "Lady Christine Lindsay is my wife. She is to be treated with respect. She will oversee the keep and ye will obey her orders. She will be assessing what has been and not been working to keep everything in good form. Ye will answer to her and I doona want to be made aware of anything that I might find

unacceptable. Ye all ken that Lady Christine is English. That is no' her fault, she was born that way. Ye are to forget that. Do I make myself clear?"

A few mumbles followed.

"I said, 'Do I make myself clear?'"

"Aye." A much more robust answer pleased him.

"Good." He turned to Christine. "See, everything is fine." He bent down and kissed her on the forehead. "I have a lot of work to catch up on. I will see you at supper time."

With that he walked away, deep in conversation with Patrick, Neil following behind them.

Christine felt her stomach take a plunge to her feet. Whatever was she to do next? She tried to imagine this was a large estate in the country outside of London. If she was in this position there, what would she do?

"Would one of you arrange to have my things brought from the carriage and to the bedchamber the laird and I will occupy?"

One of the women standing in the group in front of the main gate frowned and nudged the woman next to her. "What did the lass say? I couldna understand her."

Her companion leaned over. "'Tis hard to hear for sure, but I think she said she wanted someone to bring her things up to the laird's bedchamber."

The woman peeked in the carriage. "The lass has a lot of packages in there. I wonder how much clothes she needs?"

Listening to the conversation that she had a hard time understanding, Christine felt as though she'd already lost whatever control she might have had. Again she cleared her throat and looked at one of the young girls. "Is there someone who can lead to me to the laird's bedchamber?"

She had no idea if Kerrigan planned for them sleep together, but she thought it was a good place to start.

"Isla, get ye lazy bum up here." An older man who had straw sticking out of his hair nodded to the young girl who had commented on her packages.

Isla stepped forward in a dirty dress and barefoot. "Aye?"

"Ye heard Lady Christine. Show her to the laird's bedchamber." He slapped the lass on the back of the head.

"Hear now," Christine said, aghast. "I will have none of that."

"What did ye say, lass?" the man shouted, his brows raised, his hand cupping his ear.

She raised her voice. "I said, there will be no slapping, hitting, or any other physical form of discipline."

He stared at her for a few moments, obviously trying to figure out what she'd said. Then he shook his head, straw falling all around him. "Ye won't be getting anything done, ye ken. 'Tis no' a verra lively bunch ye have here." With those words, which she had trouble understanding, he walked off, scratching the front of his trews.

When the other lasses began to return to whatever it was they'd been doing, Christine grabbed one of their arms. "My apologies, but can someone unload the carriage and bring those things upstairs?"

The girl she'd stopped huffed her annoyance. "'Twill be a lot of work. We have chores to do. Do ye need these things right now?"

She raised her chin. "Well, yes, actually I do." It seemed it was time for her to take charge. If Kerrigan expected her to run the castle and keep—she wasn't sure what the difference was but had heard him say it—she needed to be strong and let them all know that she was an Englishwoman, a lady, and the daughter of a viscount.

"If that is so, then Isla can carry these things to the bedchamber when she shows ye the way." The girl turned and sashayed back to the steps leading to what Christine assumed was the keep, the other girls following her like ducks behind their mother.

She was still waiting for Isla to show her into the keep and to the bedchamber, but the lass stood there just staring at her. Were all these lasses dim-witted? Certainly being presented with their laird's English wife should not have taken them by surprise because Patrick had seemed to know about it.

If Kerrigan was nearby at the moment, Christine would have hit him over the head with something heavy. How dare he introduce her and then stride off as if he'd done his duty. While she didn't expect him to coddle her, since she knew the Scots were tougher and not as formal or aware of social graces as the English, she did think it would have been helpful had he shown her to their room, at least.

With a deep sigh, Isla picked up some of the packages. Christine gathered a few more. Goodness, she wasn't aware of how much she had purchased on their stops. However, if she held these things in her hands, and followed Isla she would end up in her bedchamber.

The young maid was anything but chatty, which might have been for the best because it seemed they had a problem understanding each other. She juggled much more than Christine could handle, and after some of the items were in their arms, Isla took off,

Christine right behind her. “Will someone else fetch the rest of my things?” she asked the young maid as she had to almost run to keep up with her.

The lass shrugged. “If no’ ye can get them yourself or have the laird do it for ye.”

This was the maid who had complained that she couldn’t understand her when she’d spoken before. Well, she was finding understanding her just as difficult. Had the lass said she should ask Kerrigan to retrieve the items?

It seemed odd to her that the laird would be expected to do what a lower servant should. She was finding she had a lot to learn about the differences between the English and the Scots.

Isla led her up two flights of stone stairs to a landing very poorly lit. She opened one of the doors and stepped inside before she not too gently dropped the things she was carrying on the floor. “This is the laird’s bedchamber.”

With those words she turned and left. Was the lass going to get the rest of her things? Was she off for the day and leaving? Was she going to summon someone else to get the rest?

She pushed all those questions aside when she went to one of the windows and pulled aside the covering, allowing bright sunlight into the room.

Her hand flew to her mouth as she looked around the bedchamber that appeared to have not been cleaned most likely since the Battle of Culloden. She slowly spun around, taking in the unmade bed, dirty clothes lying on the floor, used plates with questionable leavings on them stacked on two tables, and mouse droppings on the rushes.

She dropped to the bed, then screamed as a baby pig appeared from beneath it with a

squeal. She shifted and the piglet grunted and pushed at her with his nose. “My apologies. Do you own this room? Now I understand why it looks like a pig pen.” She wrinkled her nose. “And why it smells like one, too.”

Once Christine rid the room of the pig by carrying it, squealing all the way to the kitchen door, she turned to those in the room watching her with surprise, and said, “The laird’s bedchamber is a disgrace. It needs a thorough cleaning.”

No one spoke. She turned to Isla. “Who is in charge of making sure the rooms are clean?” She lifted the piglet. “And that animals who belong outside are kept there?”

The girl shrugged.

One of the young maids sitting at a worktable cutting vegetables cleared her throat and looked at her. “My lady, there is no one in charge. Of anything. The laird told us when he left for London to find a wife that she would be in charge. I guess that means you.”

Christine pinched her bridge of her nose with her free hand, trying desperately to avoid the headache she felt coming on. Then she put the piglet down and approached the young woman. “I see you’re cutting vegetables. Who is the cook?”

All four girls shook their heads. Finally one of them said, “Llioni.”

Christine turned to look at the cold fireplace. “Where is Llioni? Shouldn’t she be cooking the nooning meal, or supper?”

“I doona think so,” Isla said.

As much as she wanted to present herself as a firm, but kind mistress, Christine was definitely losing her patience. She took a deep breath and said through gritted teeth,

“Why not?”

“Because she died three days ago.”

Page 12

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Christine paced the filthy bedchamber, waiting for Kerrigan to join her. She knew that her prior life had been very different from what she'd experienced so far in Luffness Castle, but certainly living in filth was not anyone's lifestyle.

She had worked herself up by the time the bedchamber door opened, and Kerrigan walked in. "Good evening, lass." He walked up to her and placed a kiss on her forehead, then dropped the rest of her bundles on the floor. So, apparently, someone did ask the laird of the castle to carry her belongings upstairs like a servant.

"Good day to you. If you have a minute I would like to discuss something with you."

"Aye, I'm here, lass." He began removing his shirt and tossed it on the floor. He then looked in the wardrobe against the wall and after viewing the empty contents, turned to pick up the shirt from the floor, shake it out, with something small and furry that she didn't want to think about dropping to the floor and scurrying away, and put it back on. All the while Christine watched in horror.

She crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot in the filthy rushes. "Do you not see how dirty this room is?"

He looked around as he finished tucking his shirt into his breeches. "Aye. Ye are right, wife. It could use some straightening up."

"Straightening up? The only thing to make this room more habitable is to burn it."

He smiled. "Aye, lass ye will find things different here than in England."

“Cleanliness is not just an English thing.” She blew out a deep breath. “You said I was in charge of the castle, correct?”

“Aye. Ye can do wha’ever ye want.”

Aside from cleaning this disaster she was expected to sleep in, she had no idea how to run a castle, or a keep. She had learned nothing about running a household from her mother before she passed, and Papa had never had the time nor the inclination to train her after that. All her papa’s homes had been run by very efficient housekeepers who had brushed off any of her questions.

“Who has been running the keep so far?”

He placed his hands on his hips and studied her for a minute. “I doona really ken, lass. I’ve been so busy trying to find ways to keep my folks from starving, and before that attempting to save as many of our sheep as I could, I ne’er paid attention. Ye might want to start off asking Llioni.”

“The cook?”

“Aye. I think I remember something about her being in charge.”

She was growing frustrated. “Llioni will not be doing any cooking. Or managing.”

He stopped brushing his hair. “Why no’?”

“Because she died three days ago.”

He shook his head and sighed. “Aye, she was getting up in years. God rest her soul.” He continued to brush his hair.

That wasn't the reaction she was expecting. "Was there ever anyone in charge that ye remember?" Maybe she could learn from someone who knew what they were doing.

"My mam. But when she died over a year ago, my sister Fiona took over, but she married a few months back and moved to Ireland with her husband."

"She didn't train anyone?"

Kerrigan scratched his head. "Well, she did train Miriam a bit, but then she also got married and moved to the Highlands. 'Twas a bit of a hurried wedding, so I doona think she had time to do anything except prepare to leave."

Christine was beginning to get the headache she'd be trying to avoid all day. All the women coming and going were making her dizzy. What it came down to, she was afraid, was that there was no one to do the job except her but no one available to train her.

And, more importantly, no one to cook.

When the lasses in the kitchen had told her about Llioni being dead, she'd asked them who had been cooking the last few days. Apparently, one of the young lasses had attempted but the people who ate in the keep were complaining.

Tired to the bone, Christine again looked around the room. "I cannot sleep in here, husband. I dread to think of what would crawl on me once I'm in bed."

That familiar look immediately came into his eyes. "Well, lass, I ken who will crawl on ye in that bed."

She huffed, her face growing hot. "Not yet. I am still not finished..."

His shoulders slumped. “Ah, I understand.”

“Seriously, Kerrigan. Where are we to sleep tonight? Are there no bedchambers that are somewhat clean?”

He took her by the elbow. “Come, let us eat whatever they prepared for supper, and we can ask the maids and see if they ken of any room we can use.”

“I really need to clean myself up from our journey. Do you think it is possible to get a bath?” Even as she asked, she realized it was unlikely. After all, the kitchen fires had been allowed to die; where else would she get hot water?

Again he scratched his head, which she realized was something he did when he was thinking. Or else when she asked him a question he didn’t know the answer to. “I think ’tis best to ask John.”

“Who is John?”

“The mon who helps in the stable.”

She smirked. “The one with straw in his hair?” If that was who she had to depend on to get her a bath, she was definitely not having one tonight.

Her frustration grew. She’d not had a bath in days. Was it possible the Scots didn’t bathe? That didn’t seem likely since she never noticed a bad odor coming from her husband. “Kerrigan,” she said, “how do you bathe?”

He shrugged. “In the loch.”

“And what about winter? Where do ye bathe then?”

“In the loch.”

Her eyes grew wide. “It is freezing in the winter.”

“Aye, but I am used to it.”

It didn’t seem worthwhile to ask him where the women of the castle bathed because she doubted very much if he knew. She was beginning to believe her husband knew absolutely nothing about the castle or the keep; his focus seemed to be only the sheep and the problems of the clan.

She looked around, hoping there was a basin or jug of water, but the two items stood on a table next to the wardrobe, empty. With a deep sigh, she walked to the bedchamber door, gave her husband a big smile she didn’t feel, took his extended hand as they left the room and descended the stairs to the great hall for supper. But of what use would it be to complain or take out her frustration on this man? She reminded herself she’d chosen him—without knowing him or his circumstances—as a way to avoid a life with a man she loathed. Despite all she’d seen so far, this was a better choice.

He patted her hand. “Do no’ fash yerself, lass. Once ye get everything under control, ye will see this is a wonderful place to live.”

So he did expect her to get things straightened out.

“I will meet ye at the dais in a minute.” Before he could question her, she hurried to the kitchen.

Chaos reigned.

Isla was shouting at two young maids who were rushing around, appearing to do

nothing.

Supper didn't smell at all appetizing and there didn't appear to be any bread. She asked anyway. "Isla, do you have bread for the meal?"

"Nay. 'Tis Edward's fault." She waved her cooking spoon in the direction of a young lad, the contents from her spoon dripping onto the floor.

And her feet.

Her dirty, bare feet.

Continuing to wave the spoon around like a sword, bits of meat flying around the room, she continued, "The lad was supposed to go to the granary this morning and get the flour, but the mon told him he couldna give him any more flour until the bill was paid."

Christine was aghast. "You mean the castle was denied flour because we are behind on the bill?"

A young man whom Christine assumed was Edward spoke up. "Aye, my lady, 'tis about six moons since we paid the mon."

Her headache increased. "Go back to the granary and ask the man for an order of flour and tell him he will receive full payment tomorrow." It was unlikely the flour would arrive in time for supper, but at least there would be bread when they broke their fast in the morning.

Edward shot out of the room on his quest, and Christine took a deep breath. At least something had been accomplished. "Is anyone aware of a room in this castle that is clean?"

“This is no’ the castle, my lady. This is the keep.” Isla answered.

Christine closed her eyes and took a deep breath. At least now she knew there was a difference between the castle and the keep. “I will re-phrase my question.” Two maids sitting side-by-side looked confusingly at each other, apparently not understanding her statement.

“Is there a clean bedchamber anywhere here? The castle, the keep, the stables, anywhere?”

“Aye, Jackson’s room in the stable is always clean. He does it himself e’er day.” Isla shrugged. “I doona ken why, but he does.”

“The old man?”

“Nay. John just hangs around the stable. He doesn’t work there, his job is to tend to the sheep.”

Of which they had none.

No doubt this group didn’t understand cleaning each day. “And that is the only room you know of that is clean? Is there no one assigned to the duty of cleaning the rooms?”

The other lass spoke up. “’Tis true. The rest of us leave after supper and return to our homes in the village, so we ne’er use any of the bedchambers. Since the laird’s mam passed and then Fiona got married and then Mariam, no one has really slept in the keep except the laird, Patrick, Neil, and the few guardsmen who don’t have a cottage in the village.”

And the laird had been gone for a month. That explained one of the reasons the

castle—rather, the keep—was in such disarray. But that didn't solve her immediate problem. "Someone please ask Jackson if the laird and I can use his bed for the night."

"Aye, I will, my lady." A young girl—she really had to learn their names—was off with Isla yelling at her that she needed her to begin bringing out the food. Based on what she'd seen so far, Christine made haste from the kitchen before she was asked to act as a maid. There were certain things she didn't intend to do.

Kerrigan sat at the dais growing impatient. He had seen very little of Christine all day and it appeared that supper was not on time. There was a lot to do now that he'd returned with the money to take care of all those repairs that needed to be done as well as contacting the man from whom he'd purchased his flock from before.

Before all the sheep had died, they'd managed to save as much wool as they could. It had been washed, but the carding engine had broken down and without that, and the coin to either fix it or buy a new one, the entire production had come to a halt.

Tomorrow he would take a trip to Edinburgh and see about a new engine and also find other contacts to replace the sheep in case the man he usually bought from was unable to sell him any. He wondered, in fact, if the sheep farmer's animals had been tainted by the disease that took his flock.

Just as he was about to go to the kitchen and find his wife and his supper, Christine appeared at the entrance to the great hall. She looked a tad frazzled and very tired. She walked to the dais and sat next to him. His cousin Patrick then joined them, sitting on Kerrigan's other side.

"Do ye have any idea when supper will be brought out?" Kerrigan was quite hungry and those who ate at the keep kept looking at the entrance, waiting for the food.

“Isla is just gathering the maids to bring out the food.”

Kerrigan nodded as the young lasses came out with trays. They plunked bowls of some sort of stew on the tables, along with scant pieces of cheese. He looked at Mavis, one of the serving lasses, who had just turned to walk back to the kitchen. “Where is the bread, lass?”

She shrugged. “We doona have any.”

Christine nodded at Mavis and turned to Kerrigan. “I have arranged to have the overdue bill to the granary paid tomorrow, so there will be bread in the morning.”

He kept looking at the bowl of devil-knew-what and said, “No bread.”

“No.” Christine picked up her spoon and carefully dipped into the contents. She placed it in her mouth with a great deal of trepidation that—once the taste and texture settled on her tongue—had been well-deserved. But there was no fix for it. It would fill their bellies no matter the taste. She closed her eyes and shuddered as she swallowed.

Vile. Christine took a sip of ale to wash out her mouth before she turned to him. “We also will be sleeping in the stable tonight.”

He stared at her. “No bread?”

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

The next morning, after a night of tossing and turning on the hard cot in the stable, with Kerrigan stretched out on a bundle of hay alongside her, Christine rose with determination. Even though she'd never been involved in the actual running of a home, and she had no idea how to run a keep of all places, she did know they needed servants—many more—than what they had. Her father's home always had servants cleaning, cooking, shopping, and doing laundry. She knew the duties they needed to perform and how many were necessary for a smooth-running household.

Like other women of her class, she'd spent her entire life with a personal maid, along with numerous other servants, but the trip had taught her she could do things for herself—except take a bath—and did not want to give those in her new home reason to believe she was a spoiled English woman.

So, she dressed herself in an easy-to-wear warm wool skirt that she'd bought at Kerrigan's suggestion during one of her shopping trips. Unfortunately, everything fancy that her husband just smirked at would most likely end up at the back of the wardrobe in the bedroom, never to be worn.

After a quick wash in the bowl of water she had one of the young men bring her the night before, she dressed, braided her hair in what would never be called well-done, and headed for the keep.

Kerrigan was gone, but he'd told her that he and Neil would be headed to Edinburgh to see about replacing their sheep. He left instructions with Patrick to begin visiting the tenants and seeing what their sorely neglected needs were.

Hopefully, with flour delivered the night before once Edward promised the granary's

bill would be paid today, the kitchen should smell of the wonderful scent of baking bread.

She walked into a very silent kitchen. No kettle of porridge bubbling over the hearth, no lovely aroma of bread baking, and no activity at all.

The kitchen maids all sat at the worktable, chatting away. Christine shook her head, thinking she must be imagining the scene before her. “Why is there no food being prepared?”

The chatting stopped and they all turned toward her. Isla spoke up. “Llioni is dead.”

Christine sighed. “I know that. But you all work in the kitchen. One of you must know how to at least cook porridge.” She looked at Isla. “I planned to find a new cook today, but since you cooked the supper last night, do ye think ye can do porridge?”

Edward entered the room and said, “No one ever cooked except Llioni. ’Tis a wonder Isla hasn’t poisoned us all yet.”

Isla reached out and smacked Edward on the arm.

She had less knowledge of the kitchen and cooking than any of them did. The first time she actually stepped into a kitchen had been here. “I assume that besides no porridge no bread has been baked either?” She turned toward Edward. “Did the flour arrive last evening?”

“Aye.”

“Can you get some and bring it here so we can get bread made?” Could bread be baked that quickly? She had no idea. “Where is the porridge kept? And does anyone

know how to make oatcakes?" She was growing desperate, knowing after last night's skimpy supper there would be hungry people looking for a meal once they arrived at the great hall.

One of the girls raised her hand. "I ken how to make oatcakes. My mam makes them all the time."

Christine breathed a sigh of relief. "Very good. And what is your name?"

The girl dipped. "Bridget, my lady."

"Can you get started on some oatcakes, Bridget? And make a great deal because I don't think bread can be baked quickly."

"Nay," Edwad said as he hefted a container of flour onto the table. "My mam always mixes her bread up before she goes to bed and covers it with a piece of linen. If we mix it now," he continued, "it might be ready for supper. I can run home to my cottage and ask her."

"I don't suppose your mother would be interested in cooking for us?"

He shook his head. "Nay, we have seven little ones at home."

Seven! Plus him? In a cottage? She could hardly breathe thinking of such a thing. "Very well then. Hurry to your home and get instructions from her on how to make bread."

Edward ran from the kitchen and Bridget began to assemble what she needed to make oatcakes.

"And the porridge? Does anyone know how to make that?" She didn't even know

what ingredients went into porridge.

“I’ve ne’er made it, my lady,” another one of the girls whose name she needed to learn said, “but I did watch Llioni make it each morning. I am interested in cooking, but she always pushed me away.”

“Good. Do what you can.” Christine looked at Mavis. “Go to the garden and bring back plenty of apples.” She swung around and looked at the last girl at the table. “What is your name?”

“Beatrice, my lady.”

She nodded. “Please go to wherever the cheese is kept and bring up as much as you can carry.”

So this was what being in charge of a keep meant. Just like it was Kerrigan’s responsibility to see to the clan’s needs, as lady of the manor, she was the one responsible for seeing that food was provided for those who ate at the great hall.

“How many break their fast here?” She asked.

Isla shrugged. “I doona ken for sure, because it changes, but twenty or so seems right. We have a lot more for supper.”

Supper! Yes, that meal again. Once the morning meal was finished, she would make a trip into the village and make things right with the vendors and shop owners who were owed money so she could buy some supplies to make supper better than the evening before.

From what Edward had said, things had gotten so bad that more than the granary didn’t trust the laird. Well, she didn’t know how to run a keep, but she certainly knew

how to charm people. Her training in that, along with the experience she'd had during her Seasons would not be wasted.

Two hours later, Christine sat fanning herself with a limp piece of linen, thinking of the lovely, well-decorated fans she'd owned in London. The kitchen looked like a battle had been fought, but there were other things to be done. Once all those who had arrived to break their fast had been fed and on their way to do their jobs, she looked at the servants in the kitchen who appeared as weary as she felt. It had taken a great deal of scurrying around, shouting, and threats between Edward and his younger brother whom he'd brought back from his trip to his cottage to provide additional help.

Taking a deep breath, she said, "Our next matter is cleaning the bed chambers."

Several loud groans reacted to her statement.

"Ye seem in a hurry to return home," Neil said as they cantered along the turnpike that would bring him and Kerrigan close to Luffness Castle.

They had been gone five days, but during that time, they'd found a used, but very sturdy engine to replace the broken one, and arranged with a livestock agent to purchase more sheep as well as geese, rabbits, cows, pigs, and chickens. He'd also spent time with the bank in Edinburgh, setting up an account and withdrawing sufficient funds to pay for all the necessary daily expenses for several months.

"Aye. I've done enough traveling the past month to last me a long time. But his trip to Edinburgh was necessary and worthwhile."

"And ye have a pretty wife waiting for ye." Neil grinned.

Kerrigan smiled back. "'Tis true."

Neil studied him for a minute. “Do ye really think Lady Lindsay is capable of managing the keep? From what ye’ve told me, she was raised in a much different way than our lasses are.”

He nodded. “Aye. The ladies in London are raised to ken how to run a household. ’Tis part of their upbringing.”

The other man frowned. “Kerrigan, this is no’ a rich man’s household. Luffness is a castle and keep. ’Tis different from one of those fancy London townhouses.”

Kerrigan studied him. “How do ye ken about fancy London townhouses?”

Neil grinned again. “I wasn’t always a smelly head shepherd in Scotland. My mam was a servant in one of those houses before she married my da and she told me many stories of how the ladies spent their time. They had someone waiting on them all day. My mam even had to bring chocolate e’ery morning to the lady of the house she worked in. They spend their time visiting each other for tea and gossip, buying clothes, and going to garden parties, the theater and balls. Any ‘managing’ they did was meeting with the housekeeper and letting her do all the work.”

The man gave him pause. Had he been too confident leaving Christine so soon after their arrival? He had left her with quite a mess. His concern grew as he realized that with Llioni dead, there really wasn’t anyone to take her in hand and help her learn what she needed to know. When he thought about how the keep looked when they’d returned from London, he frowned and urged Fergus to go faster.

“I don’t care where the bitch is. I want her found and her scheming and lovely arse brought back to London.” Carl Allenby waved the papers clutched in his hand as he dealt with the dimwit he’d hired to get his niece back. “I have documents here that would grant an annulment once she meets with the magistrate in Edinburgh. Then she will honor the betrothal I made with Lord Newton.”

Carl had spent money he didn't have to hire someone to locate the whereabouts of the bloody woman. He didn't care to know how the information was obtained, just that it was. He still found it hard to believe his niece had the nerve and intelligence to somehow find herself a Scottish Laird to marry her and sweep her off to Scotland.

Now he needed someone to fetch her. "Take her to Edinburgh, about twenty miles west of this blasted castle she's living in. There is an inn there, the Gooseneck Ale House. I will meet you at the place with her betrothed. Do not harm her or touch her. She has a very large, brutal husband who you will have to avoid at all costs." He stopped himself from reaching up to touch what was left of his poor nose. "However if you are given the chance to kill the bastard, do so. It will make it easier for me since my niece will be a widow and we won't have to deal with the annulment. Pay someone who works in the bloody castle to find out how to get in and get her out."

"I do not kill, my lord. If that is part of the job, you will need to find someone else."

Carl waved him off. "I don't care. Just get my niece." The man, Rupert Sanders he'd said his name was, nodded and slipped the information into his pocket and stuck out his hand. "I'll have my money now, my lord. I understand you have debtors all over London."

Carl stiffened at being spoken to that way from a man so far below him. "I will pay you half of what we agreed on, the rest when she is delivered."

"Half now, plus travel expenses."

Carl sighed. When this man returned Christine to him, he would have plenty of money. And this had to work. If not, he was most likely leaving the country. Blasted debtors.

He handed the last of his banknotes to him. The man counted them, tucked them into

his pocket and nodded. With a grin and a salute, he turned and left the room.

Carl sat on one of the few chairs left in the drawing room. All the expensive paintings and furnishings had been sold. If only his luck would turn at the tables, but each time he went to the clubs, his money disappeared, and his debt grew. The last time he'd been to Brooks's, he was told not to come back until he had the money to pay his debt with them. Imagine treating the new Lord Allenby that way!

Very few of his so-called friends would even buy him a whisky, and things were growing desperate. He had to get his niece back, marriage annulled, married to Newton, and money in his hands.

"Hollis!"

His only remaining servant appeared at the door to the drawing room. "Yes, my lord."

"Get me a whisky, the decanter is empty."

"The whisky is all gone, my lord."

He cursed and left the room, and the house. He still had a couple of clubs he was welcomed at. At least for now. Someone there would buy him a whisky.

Bloody niece and her arrogant, low-class husband. Scotland!

Christine wiped her forehead with a piece of not-too-clean linen. She'd just finished helping the young lasses clean the last bedchamber. They'd started with the laird's room right after that first disastrous morning meal days before.

She hoped Kerrigan would return this evening. He'd been away for days and all that

time she'd worked like a servant herself. The new cook she'd hired, Rose, had been a very good choice but was still feeling her way with the unfamiliar kitchen, which was probably lacking some necessities. She'd also sent word to the village that she needed a few more lasses to work at the keep. Five young ladies showed up and she'd hired them all.

After spending time in the village, paying past due bills to the shopkeepers and vendors, she'd used the charm she'd learned from her governess to assure them all that the castle was now able to pay for their necessities and soon there would be sheep so those who earned their living that way would once again prosper.

"My lady, the new cook has just announced that the evening meal is ready to be served, and she needs all the serving maids at the kitchen." Allison, one of the new maids made this announcement as she arrived at the bedchamber door.

"Yes. We must be sure that supper is served on time." Christine looked around the room and decided it was clean enough. The bedchambers they'd worked in had required backbreaking days, but all the critters who had taken up residence had been disposed of. Fresh rushes sprinkled with lavender and rosemary had been laid down, which would do until she could order some carpets for the rooms. Clean bedding and hangings had replaced those that had been there for no-one-knew how long.

She stood, stretching and rubbing her sore back. She'd never worked so hard in her life. Truth be told, she'd never worked at all. She had been waited on, fussed over, made to feel like the lady that she was. Now she looked with dismay at her filthy dress, her plaited hair hanging in clumps, her dirty hands. If she were to join the others downstairs for supper, she had to clean up.

Sighing, she knew there was no one available to bring her warm water to clean up. She had to do it herself. Everything she needed these days she had to do herself. But it was still better than being married to Lord Newton. She shuddered.

The kitchen was in a frenzy. Rose seemed to have things under control, but considering how new she was to the kitchen, she was a tad frazzled. The maids were all racing back and forth, carrying platters of excellent-smelling food. There was even the enticing aroma of fresh baked bread in the air.

Without disturbing the goings-on, Christine retrieved a large jug of water and carried it upstairs to her and Kerrigan's bedchamber. She was panting when she arrived. This whole experience had been a lesson in how hard the servants worked. She dipped a cloth into the water and washed as best she could.

She rummaged through the dresses she'd bought from the village seamstress, pleased again that the woman had some not-too-fancy dresses readymade. When she took out the dark rose wool dress, with tiny green leaves embroidered along the neckline, she thought it would be perfect.

However, it was a wrinkled mess, and she had no idea how to get the wrinkles out. Her maid had always swept dresses away to somewhere in the house and come back with them all pressed. However, now there was no choice. The dirty dress she'd worn when she spent the day cleaning was not a choice, either.

She smoothed out the dress as best she could and put it on. Since the great hall was generally chilly, she decided to wear a lovely rose shawl.

Her hair was a mess and had been for days since she'd been unable to wash it. The first thing the next morning, she would send word to the village that a few strong lads were needed at the keep. Their first assignment would be to drag the old bathtub she'd seen in one of the unused rooms to her bedchamber and fill it with hot water. She would climb in and soak for hours, or at least until the water cooled until she couldn't stand it anymore. Just the thought of it made her eyes water.

Her stomach rumbling with hunger after the day she had, she left the room and

hurried downstairs. Not paying much attention to where she was going and the poor lighting in the part of the staircase that reached the floor, she took two steps from the stairs and ran into a brick wall.

Well, a brick wall that was warm and gripped her shoulders. “Good eve, wife.”

Her heart sped up and she grinned. “Kerrigan! You’re home.” She peered up at him.

“Aye and anxious to see how ye fared.” He looked down at her. “’Tis sorry I am, lass, that I left ye here so soon after our arrival.” He gave her the crooked-little boy smile she recognized and loved. “Will ye forgive me?”

The fluttering in her stomach told her she was glad to see him. As frustrated as she’d been trying to make some semblance out of the keep after he’d barely introduced her, then hied off to Edinburgh, he was still her husband, and he was home.

It must have been the fatigue from all the work, because she opened her mouth to speak and burst into tears. In between sobs, she mumbled, “Yes. I forgive you.”

He took her in his arms and drew her close. She wrapped her arms around his warm, strong body and rested her weary head against him as the tears slowly dried up. His large hand cupped her head, rubbing her scalp. He pulled back and placed his hands on her face, looking into her eyes before his lips met hers.

Again, he gathered her close and nudged her lips with his tongue. She opened to him, and he plundered her mouth. When she thought she would melt to the floor, he pulled back. “That was a verra nice welcome home, Christine. But we will finish what we started later tonight.” He winked.

She took a deep breath and smoothed out the wrinkles in her dress and patted her hair where some of it had come loose from the ribbon. “I was headed to the hall for

supper.”

He leaned in and kissed her again. Not the soul wrenching one he’d just given her, but a more subdued one. “Is there water in our bedchamber?”

“Aye. I just brought up a jug from the kitchen. It might not be too clean, but it’s wet.”

He laughed and kissed her forehead. “I will be down to join ye in a few minutes.”

She smiled, a warm feeling coming over her that Kerrigan was home. She had been so taken up with the jobs she’d been doing that she hadn’t realized how much she’d missed him. They’d gotten close on their trek from London to the castle and had spent a great deal of time just talking and enjoying each other’s company.

Even though it had been quite a chance to take on an unknown husband, she’d been blessed with a wonderful, kind, caring one. She thanked the lord every night for Mrs. Dove-Lyon.

As he started up the stairs, she said, “You will see a change in our bedchamber.” This time she winked.

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Although he was weary from his trip, especially since he pushed Neil to finish the trip home, all Kerrigan could think about was taking his beautiful wife to bed. Especially since the food had smelled good and tasted wonderful; there even had been crusty loaves of fresh bread. He'd been able to enjoy a few mugs of ale and a shot of whisky. Now he was ready for Christine.

They had chatted throughout supper, some of the people of the keep stopping by to tell them of issues they needed him to deal with, but he brushed them all off by telling them to see him in the morning. Tonight was for him and his wife.

He glanced at her berry tart. "Are you finished yet, lass?"

Christine sighed. "Kerrigan, that's about the tenth time you asked me if I was finished with my food."

"Aye, 'tis true. I'm anxious for ye to show me how our bedchamber has been cleaned."

She laughed. "Do not try me on that, husband. I know you've been up there already and have seen our hard work."

He leaned in closer and whispered in her ear. "Ach, lass I have more hard work for ye upstairs, but I guarantee ye will be falling asleep with a smile on yer face."

His sweet wife glanced around to see if anyone overheard him. He loved the deep blush on her face. He was beginning to believe there was a lot about Christine to love.

She pushed her half-eaten tart away and stood. "I am finished."

Feeling slightly guilty because the lass had seemed to be enjoying her treat, he said, "Nay, mo chridhe , finish yer tart."

Placing her hands on her hips, she smiled in a way that had him standing so abruptly, anyone watching them would assume he'd been pushed from the chair.

"If ye are sure?"

Taking his hand, she led him from the table. He wrapped his arm around her waist, and they made their way upstairs.

"Ye did a wonderful job on the room, Christine," he said as they entered. Clean and sweet-smelling rushes on the floor, clean window coverings and bed linens made the room look very comfortable.

"Why doona ye take off those clothes and climb into bed?"

Christine's jaw dropped. "Husband, you have no idea how to woo a woman."

He dragged his hand down his face. Spending time away from his wife and now seeing her with a bed so close was turning him into an arse. "Aye, ye're right. Would you care for some wine? I can have one of the maids bring up a jug."

She shook her head. "No. What I want is a nice, hot bath."

His brows rose. "The loch is cold, Christine."

"Not the loch. While rummaging around the keep I found an old wooden bathtub. I had asked Edward and Joshua to bring it upstairs after I cleaned it up, but they never

had the time to do it.” She walked close to him and placed her hands on his shoulders, looking him in the eye. “I noticed that the tub was big enough for two people.”

He stepped back and headed to the door. “Where is this bathtub?”

After getting instructions from Christine, he hurried down the stairs. A bathtub big enough for both of them? Since he’d always cleaned up in the loch this was something he never thought of. He had no idea from where the idea came to his innocent little wife, but ’twas certainly a good one.

He grabbed Edward as he headed from the kitchen. “Help me with this bathtub yer lady wants brought upstairs. Then I want ye and Joshua to bring up buckets of hot water.”

“It might take time to heat up enough water to fill that tub, Laird.”

He would have to find a way to keep them occupied until the job was done. “Ask one of the kitchen maids to start heating water.” He headed to where the bathtub sat. Once Edward joined him, they hefted it up onto their shoulders and carried it up the backstairs rather than taking it through the great hall.

Once it was settled in their bedchamber, he took Christine’s hand. “The maids will be heating up water and filling yer bathtub. But come with me.” He took her hand and led her to his solar which had also been cleaned very well.

“We have some time before the bath will be ready.” He walked to the small table against the wall and poured them both a whisky. “While we wait, why doona ye take a seat, and I’ll start a fire to warm the room up.”

“There is no need to do that. I am comfortable enough.”

He handed her the drink and sat alongside her. “It appears ye have done a wonderful job with the keep. I kenned ye could do it.”

Christine almost spit out her drink. “Kerrigan! Ye have no idea how difficult this has been for me.”

He raised his brows. “But it all looks so good.”

She took a sip of the whisky and set the glass down on the table in front of them to prevent herself from tossing the liquid into her newly arrived husband’s face. “I shall be happy to inform you how different this all is”—she waved her arm around—“from the life I’ve known. For example, do you know the bath I took while we were traveling was the first time in my life I bathed without help?”

He frowned, looking genuinely confused. The big oaf. “I doona understand.”

She sighed. “I’ve had a personal maid since I left the nursery. I never did anything for myself. There was always someone nearby to fetch what I needed and travel with me to social events and trips to the shops. Big, strong footmen carried my purchases as I strolled along, buying what I pleased.”

When he opened his mouth to speak, she held up her hand. “Let me finish. I’m sure you think as most young ladies of the Upper Crust, I was taught how to run a household, hire and supervise staff, meet with the housekeeper about the menu, and arrange flowers. But I was not. My mother passed when I was very young, so the housekeepers ran my dad’s houses and didn’t bother to show me. That was my life up until the night I dropped out of my bedroom window and raced to The Lyon’s Den.”

He stared at her and took a sip of his whisky. He shook his head, then carefully placed the glass on the table in front of him. With an odd look on his face, he leaned over and cupped her cheeks. “I am now even more sorry I left ye as soon as we

arrived. I had no idea what I was handing ye.”

She swallowed and closed her eyes. “I was determined not to have the other clan members believe I felt privileged. It is bad enough that I am English, without them thinking I was like what all Scots believe English women are.”

“I ne’er thought that about ye.”

Her brows rose. “Not ever?”

He grinned and his face flushed. “Mayhap it did cross my mind after friends told me about their experiences with English lasses. But the minute I met ye, I kenned in my heart that you were different. I can’t imagine any of the ladies my friends spoke of jumping out a bedroom window in men’s britches and escaping from what she dinna want. Most lasses I am sure would just plop themselves in a chair and wail.”

She laughed. “I had no idea how strong I was until Uncle Carl waved the betrothal agreement in my face. My da always told me I was like my mother who defied her family and married him, she the daughter of a duke and him a mere earl.”

A knock on the solar door drew their attention. “Enter.”

Edward opened the door. “There was hot water in the kitchen, Laird, so we were able to fill your bathtub sooner than I thought.”

“Thank ye, Edward. Good night to ye.”

Once the door closed, Kerrigan turned to Christine and held out his hand. “Are ye ready, Lady Lindsay? Our bath awaits.”

As soon as they entered their bedchamber Christine eyed the full bathtub with

longing. Still a bit shy, however, she glanced over at Kerrigan who was having no problem removing his clothes. She walked over to the table next to her bed and removed the sweet-smelling oil she'd bought in one of the villages where they'd stopped on their trip.

This one was a fresh smelling scent, not a flowery one since she didn't think her husband would appreciate walking around the keep smelling like roses. By the time she retrieved it and walked to the tub, her husband sat in the water in all his naked glory, smiling at her. "Are ye going to join me, wife, or am I to use all this nice warm water myself?"

Taking a deep breath, telling herself she could do this, she began to unfasten her dress. It would have been easier if her husband was not sitting there watching her with a grin on his face and hunger in his eyes. Finally, annoyed with herself, she quickly removed the rest of her clothes, kicked off her shoes and pulled off her stockings.

Before she could take a breath, Kerrigan reached out and pulled her into the water. She landed on top of him. Even with that distraction, she sighed with enjoyment at the feeling of warm water surrounding her body.

Kerrigan immediately drew her mouth to his. His hands fisted in her hair as he moved his mouth one way and the other. Her heart immediately began to bang against her chest. Her fingers dug into his shoulders as he pulled back, both of them out of breath. "Remind me ne'er to take a long trip away from ye again."

"Don't ever take a long trip away from me again," she said right before she took his mouth in a searing kiss. She could do that, too.

Kerrigan's hands roamed her body, his palms circling her nipples, causing her to wiggle in the water, aware of the sound of splashing on the floor, but uncaring. She

leaned back, Kerrigan's strong hands holding her from falling backward into the water. His mouth replaced his hands, and she moaned, restlessly moving her legs.

More splashing.

He shifted her body, so her legs were spread, each one on the other side of him. Without removing his mouth, one hand braced her back as his other hand delved between her legs, his fingers fondling the stiff piece of flesh begging for his attention. She thought the water had already started to cool, but then realized her body was growing warmer and warmer with Kerrigan's talented fingers and mouth.

She hung onto the sides of the bathtub and continued to shift her body and press against his hand. Her breathing was growing more difficult, and it didn't take her long to break apart as wave after wave of absolute pleasure rode through her body. She bucked forward, a loud moan coming from her mouth.

Once her breathing returned, Kerrigan placed his warm, large hands on her waist and picked her up, sliding his engorged cock into her opening. She bucked at the invasion, welcoming the fullness. It was his turn to moan.

This was truly an interesting position and odd at first, but she soon understood what he wanted her to do. He moved her up and down until she caught the rhythm and soon was bracing herself on his shoulders with her hands as she covered his mouth with hers.

It didn't take him long to grunt and pour his seed into her. Christine collapsed against him as they both struggled to catch their breath. "We never took our bath," she panted.

Limply, he lifted his hand and grabbed the piece of linen draped over the edge of the bathtub. "Here. I'm too weak to move."

She took the cloth from his hand. Kerrigan rested his head on the rim of the bathtub, his eyes closed. He'd told her about his push to get home, so she knew he was worn out. She rubbed soap on the cloth and began to wash his large body. By the time she had finished, he was asleep.

She grinned and began to wash herself before the water got too cool. She dipped her hair into the water, washed it and dumped the jug of water she'd had from before over her head. This time she knew enough to place it within reach.

Growing cold, she leaned forward and kissed her husband awake. He opened his eyes and smiled. "Did ye enjoy your bath, mo leamman?"

"Aye." She stood, water dripping down her body. Looking up at her, Kerrigan seemed to come awake. He reached for her, but she stepped out of the tub. "Time to sleep, husband."

Two large linens rested on the floor next to the tub, fortunately not where water had splashed during their lovemaking. She rubbed her body, enjoying the feel of being clean.

Kerrigan climbed out, took one of the linens, dried himself and dropped the cloth to pick her up. He walked over to the bed and dropped her. She laughed, as she bounced up and down, enjoying the silly interaction between them.

He climbed in and pulled the bedcovers over them. They cuddled together. Clean, tired, and happy in each other's arms.

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Rupert was amazed how easy it had been to get so close to Carl's niece, Christine. Everyone in the village had been friendly and talkative. It appeared the young woman was well-liked and apparently nothing like her uncle, who was trying to marry the young woman off to one of his sleazy friends to get his hands on her money. If he had a conscience, which he lost years ago when he'd worked as a mudlark at no more than five years of age, it would trouble him. But a man had to eat. Now he knocked at the door to the kitchen, ready to put his plan into place.

A young man with hands coated in flour opened the kitchen door. Appearing casual and as if he'd belonged had always worked for him in the past, so he relaxed his body and smiled at the young man.

"I heard in the village that the castle is looking for workers."

The boy nodded. "Aye. We are still needing people. Lady Lindsay has many projects going on. What kind of work do ye do?"

"Anything you need done. I've worked for years doing both inside and outside jobs."

The young man's jaw dropped. "Yer English!"

Rupert smiled and stuck out his hand. "Yes, I am. I hear your lady is English, also. They talk a lot about her in the village. My name is Rupert Sanders."

"I am Edward Lindsay." He waved in the direction of a long table where several girls sat chopping vegetables. "If ye're looking for work, ye need to speak with Lady Lindsay. She was here a few minutes ago, but she just left to break her fast in the

great hall. Ye can wait here, and I'll send word that ye wish to speak with her when she finishes."

Rupert nodded and took a seat, smiling at the young girls.

He still could not believe how easy access to the woman he'd been paid to bundle off to Edinburgh had been. It was obvious from his experience so far that neither the laird or his wife expected any trouble, so people came and went to the castle and even now, the young man he just spoke with didn't look suspiciously at him at all.

Good. He liked the jobs that were not messy. Just gain the woman's trust, ask her to accompany him wherever it is he was assigned a job to answer a question. The little bit of laudanum he carried would go far to silence her as he rode away. This was definitely one of the easiest jobs he'd ever done.

His only concern was getting the second half of his money off Allenby. He'd hate to have to hold a knife to the man's throat to receive the agreed upon amount.

Edward returned to the kitchen. "My lady said she will see ye as soon as she is finished. She offered a meal and drink to ye if ye want it."

"Yes, that would be nice." Anything that would prevent him from having to spend the travel expense money Allenby gave him was a grand idea.

He enjoyed bannocks with butter and honey, a bowl of porridge, a slice of warm bread and a chunk of cheese, enough food to hold him all day. He sat back and sipped on the cup of tea Edward had given him.

A young woman hurried into the kitchen. She was a beautiful woman, but from the clothing she wore and her hair, which was already in disarray, she was obviously not Lady Lindsay. Most likely the woman had sent her personal maid to deal with him.

“Mr. Sanders?”

He stood, even though he doubted a maid deserved such treatment, but it might be a good idea to get on the good side of this woman. She might be helpful. “Yes, I am Mr. Sanders.”

“You are English!” The maid smiled and stuck her hand out. “I am Lady Lindsay and English as well. I understand you are seeking work?”

He was dumbstruck. This beautiful woman, dressed like a maid, was Lady of the Manor? This was the woman he was to kidnap and bring to Allenby to turn over to the slobbering, short, rotund man Allenby had indicated was the man he wanted her to marry?

He mentally shrugged. It wasn’t his problem. He needed to keep his opinions to himself, get the job done, and get money in his pocket.

He took her hand and said, “Yes, I have done all sorts of outside and inside work.”

“Excellent. We are trying to get the castle up to snuff and then keep into shape. It has been neglected for some time now. Presently, I could use someone to help my husband, Laird Lindsay, fix some of the cottages that are in dire need of repair.”

He stared at her like he was in a dream. Perhaps he was. “Your husband, the laird, is repairing cottages?”

“Yes. And he could use all the help he can get.” She smiled at him, and he found himself smiling back. What the devil was wrong with him? She was his target, the woman to snatch from her home and return to her uncle to do with her as he pleased. He took a deep breath. “Yes, my lady, I would like to help the laird out.”

“Did you get the chance to eat?”

Another surprise. The woman actually cared if an unknown man who walked into the castle looking for work had received food. “Yes, I had a wonderful meal.”

“You may sleep in the stables where we recently added a few rooms for the male employees we needed to hire. Eventually, there will be a separate building, but I’m afraid for now you will have to make do with that.” She chattered away, waving her arms around. “If you bring your things with you, I will show you to a cot you may use and then direct you to where my husband is working.”

He trooped alongside her as she went on and on about how she came from London to marry Laird Lindsay and how she’d found things in such poor condition.

Since she seemed so open about her life, he decided to gain more information which might help in removing her from the castle and returning her to Lord Allenby. “How long have you been married to the laird?”

“Several weeks now.” She blushed and looked at him.

This woman had certainly broken free from her upbringing. Although never a member of the upper crust, he knew enough about it and had worked a few jobs for the nobs. Lady Lindsay was in an altogether different category. Of course, based on what her uncle had told him, she was resourceful enough to climb out her bedroom window and disappear, escaping the man’s plans. That was certainly not usual ton behavior.

Then she ended up in Scotland married to a laird. He shook his head.

They walked in the direction of the village he just came from but stopped about 200 falls short. The sound of hammers pounding away led them to a cottage where two

men worked diligently while a very old man sat outside on a tree stump watching them.

“Husband, I brought you another worker.”

The man she called to turned toward her from where he squatted on the roof. Yes, the Laird of Lindsay was not sitting on his bottom and giving orders. He was working right alongside one of the other men. “Great news, wife. I could use another set of hands,” the man said, wiping sweat from his face.

“This is Mr. Rupert Sanders.”

The laird waved and jumped from the roof. He certainly was large, as her uncle had said. Brutish, however? From his friendly smile and warm demeanor, that was hard to discern.

“I will leave you here to help. The laird will direct you in what you will do. Supper is served in the great hall.” With a warm smile and a wave at her husband, she walked off, leaving him once again wondering why he should remove this happy woman from a happy husband and drag her back to her uncle for a life of misery. He had no doubt that was where she’d been headed, or she wouldn’t be in Scotland married to someone else.

Money.

He’d been paid to do a job and wouldn’t get the rest of the payment if he didn’t produce her. He had to put himself first. In all his life, he’d never had a guaranteed roof over his head or food for his belly. Since he’d been a child he’d looked out for himself. It was too late to change now.

“What do you need me to do, Laird?”

Later that evening as Christine and Kerrigan lay in bed, holding hands, still catching their breath from their lovemaking, she said, “How did that new man do today?”

“Verra well. He kened how to do a lot of things I thought I would have to teach him. He dinna talk, just did his work. Where did ye find him?”

She shrugged. “He walked into the kitchen and said he’d heard in the village that we were looking to hire people.”

“He’s English.” Her husband said it like it was an illness.

She huffed. “Very observant, husband. Your observation abilities continue to amaze me.”

Kerrigan reached over and pulled her head next to his. “Are ye making fun of me, lass?”

She laughed. “Aye.”

He covered her mouth with his and after a heart-stopping kiss which left her a tad dizzy, he pulled back. He tapped her on her nose. “Goodnight, wife.”

It took her a moment to compose herself before she slid down, pushed her body into her husband’s warm one and, with his arm wrapped around her, settled in for a good night’s sleep.

Rupert had decided this was the day. He’d spent enough time admiring Lady Lindsay and her hard-working husband. It was time to snatch the woman and bring her to Edinburgh. If he stayed here much longer he would begin to question his life, and he didn’t want to know the answers.

He placed his hammer on the stump of a tree and walked off the job he'd been working on for the past week. Most likely the laird thought he was going off to piss somewhere. Once he left the cottage far enough away, he ran to the keep's kitchen door. He knew this time of the day Lady Lindsay was in the kitchen helping with the nooning meal.

"Good day to you, Rupert. Can I help you with something?" She smiled brightly and he fought to push his doubts aside.

"Yes, my lady. I have an issue I would like to discuss with you, but I see you are busy."

She never turned anyone away who needed her. Now, she wiped her hands on her apron. "No. There is enough help here. Did you want to go to the great hall?"

"I would prefer some privacy. Can we walk?"

She whipped the apron off. "Of course."

They stepped out into the weak sunshine. He walked her toward the stable where he had his horse ready to go. "I'm having an issue with either doing the right thing or wrong thing."

He looked around and just as before when he'd readied his horse, no one was in the stable. The area surrounding him was empty because everyone was inside awaiting the nooning meal. He took a deep breath and continued on until they reached where his horse awaited. "I am very sorry for this, Lady Lindsay."

She frowned. "What are you sorry about?"

"This." He pulled out the cloth soaked in laudanum and pressed it to her face. She

inhaled to scream and took in enough of the drug that her bones seemed to have a hard time holding her up. With a soft sigh, she collapsed against him.

He quickly placed her over the front of the saddle and hopped up behind her.

Lady Lindsay remained asleep for most of the trip since it wasn't too long, but she was awake, and still groggy when they stopped in front of the Gooseneck Ale house. He jumped from the horse and placed his hands around her waist, lifting her off.

"I don't understand, Rupert, where are we?" Her voice was sluggish, and she shook her head as if to clear it.

"Just come along." He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and practically dragged the woman into the alehouse. Lord Allenby hopped up from where he was sitting at table with a mug of ale in front of him. Another man, the slobbering portly one with red-rimmed eyes—her intended husband according to Allenby—looked Lady Lindsay up and down in a way Rupert did not like.

"It's about time." Allenby turned to the man sitting with him. "Look, Newton, your wife is here!"

Lady Lindsay turned to him. "What is my uncle doing here? And why is he saying Lord Newton's wife is here?"

Rupert didn't know a lot about Scotland, but he did know by Scottish law, a couple could be considered married if they referred as such in front of witnesses. Apparently, that was what Allenby was attempting to do even though he'd told him he had legal papers to prove the laird and his lady were not legally married.

Lady Lindsay turned to him. "Rupert, please take me home. You know I am already married." Tears formed in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks. "I want to go home.

I want my husband.”

Lord Allenby shoved banknotes at Rupert. “Here is your money, now be on your way.”

He put the money in his pocket and backed away. Lady Lindsay’s hands were reaching for him even as Lord Newton wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her toward the stairs.

“My lord, I don’t think—” Rupert started to say.

Allenby pushed him. “You are correct, you do not think. Now leave before I ask the innkeeper to have you arrested for trespassing.”

Rupert turned and left the inn. He jumped on his horse and headed toward London.

“Do ye ken where yer lady is?” Kerrigan asked for what seemed like the hundredth time since he’d returned from working on Old Matthew’s cottage. He’d planned to clean up for supper but had been unable to find his wife.

“Nay, my laird, I haven’t seen her since the nooning,” Isla said.

Kerrigan ran his fingers through his hair. ’Twas not like the lass to just disappear. Since no one in the keep had seen her, he headed to the stable to take a ride to the village. ’Twas possible she decided to do some shopping and hadn’t told anyone where she was headed. He didn’t like that, knowing traveling by herself was not a good idea.

He finished tacking Fergus up just as the thunder of horse hooves going very fast sounded in the distance, growing close to the castle. Kerrigan swung his leg over the saddle and rode toward the rider coming at him.

By the time they were a few falls apart, he recognized the man as Rupert, one of the men helping with repairing the cottages. It was then that he remembered the man had walked away earlier in the day and never returned. With Christine missing, he'd forgotten about the disappearance of the man.

"Laird!" Rupert pulled up on his horse's reins, the animal prancing alongside him. "You must come. Lady Lindsay's uncle has her at an ale house in Edinburgh and is planning on visiting with a magistrate to have your marriage declared illegal."

With both Rupert and Christine missing, it didn't take Kerrigan long to figure out how Christine ended up in Edinburgh.

Kerrigan growled. "Ye had the nerve to take my wife, yer lady, from her home and bring her to Allenby?"

The man straightened his shoulders and looked him in the eye. "Yes. And for that I am very sorry. When I first spoke with Lord Allenby about snatching your wife, I needed the money. When you're hungry and have no roof over your head, you don't think about the end result of what you are paid to do."

Kerrigan nodded "Before I beat you senseless, stay right here."

"Yes, Laird."

Kerrigan raced to the keep, up to their bedchamber and slammed the door open. He strode to the wardrobe and grabbed the box on the floor. He pulled out the marriage certificates from both England and Scotland and shoved them into the pouch strapped around his waist.

Not sure if Sanders would be waiting for him or not, he was pleasantly surprised to see the man sitting on his horse where he'd left him. "It is not a long trip, but I have

no idea when he plans to see the magistrate.”

Kerrigan waved him on. “Let’s ride.”

After Newton dragged her upstairs, making sure everyone within hearing distance assumed they were husband and wife, she kicked him as the door to the bedchamber closed, aiming for his man parts, but hitting his leg instead. “Bitch!” He slapped her in the face, the power of the blow knocking her to the floor.

She scooted backward, her face throbbing, looking around the room for something to use as a weapon. Now that the drug Rupert had given her had worn off, she was so angry she felt as though her heart would explode in her chest. There was no way she would allow this slobbering idiot anywhere near her.

“Take off your clothes. Once we ‘consummate’ our marriage, and we see the magistrate, we will return to London where you will be the subservient, obedient wife I want.”

She continued backward until she hit the wall. “You will never ‘consummate’ anything with me. I am married, bedded—many times—and am in love with my husband.”

He stalked over to her and grabbed her by her hair. “I am your husband. Ask anyone in this inn. You know the laws of Scotland. Your uncle referred to you as my wife, and we are now upstairs in our bedchamber, alone.”

“I don’t care if you tell everyone in Scotland that we’re married. It’s a lie and I will not return to London with you.”

He stood up and brushed the sleeves of his jacket. “We will see. Your uncle will visit with the magistrate tomorrow and it will all be legal. Now take off your clothes.”

Kerrigan and Rupert jumped from their horses and raced into the alehouse. Kerrigan almost took the door off its hinges as he opened it. The few men and one woman sitting at the tables looked up at him.

He looked at Rupert. “Which one is the uncle? I didn’t get a verra good look at him when I broke his nose.”

He didn’t need Rupert to tell him which one the bastard was because one of the men sitting at a table with a plate of food in front of him turned a pasty white and stood, looking back and forth for an escape.

Kerrigan raced after him as he turned, heading up the stairs. Kerrigan jumped over the banister and grabbed Allenby by the neck. He shook the man like a bairn’s ragdoll. “Where is my wife?”

Allenby pointed to the second floor. Kerrigan shoved the man down the stairs and looked at Rupert. “Doona let him leave.”

He took the stairs three at a time. “Christine!”

“Kerrigan,” she screamed, the sound coming from behind the third door on the left. He found it locked, but laughed at that. No one, and no door, was going to keep him from his wife. Leaning his shoulder to the thin wood, he shoved it open, breaking it apart.

Christine was on the other side of the bed in the room, her dress torn, the side of her face bruised. She held a jug in her hand.

With a bellow as he flew through the air, Kerrigan landed on Newton, fists flying. At first the man tried to fight back, but when it became obvious he had no chance, he covered his face with his hands.

After a few minutes, Kerrigan felt the innkeeper pulling him back. “My laird, stop. Ye donna want a murder charge,” the man said.

Kerrigan leaned back on his heels, panting to catch his breath. “He hit my wife.”

Christine raced over and threw her arms around him. “Oh, husband. I knew you would come.”

He cupped her head and continued to catch his breath. “Of course, I came. I love you, wife, and I have no intention of living the rest of my life without ye.”

She laid her head against his chest and cried with what he knew was all the fear, pain, and love she felt. “I love you too, Kerrigan. I don’t want to live the rest of my life without you, either.”

The innkeeper had apparently sent for the local constable once the fight broke out because the man entered the room and looked around at the mess. “I’ll be needing statements from all of ye, so doona go anywhere.”

“We are going nowhere tonight,” Kerrigan said as he led Christine out of the room but not before he kicked Newton in his side. “Yer lucky I dinna kill ye.”

Her uncle had managed to move over to a table where he sat, holding his head, Rupert sitting alongside him, acting as guard.

“We must stay the night, my love, because I want to appear in front of the magistrate in the morning and get this nonsense settled. I brought both our marriage certificates with me.”

Uncle Carl looked up. “Both?”

“Aye. We married in both England and Scotland, so yer claim is worthless. And doona doubt that our marriage has been consummated.”

The innkeeper’s wife walked up to Christine, shaking her head. “Such nonsense. My lady, I can give ye one of my lass’s dresses to change into after cleaning up.”

“Thank you,” Christine said.

“And a wet cloth to place against your bruise.”

Kerrigan and Christine moved to the table with Allenby. “With ye niece’s permission, I will give ye enough money to leave the country. I hear things are going well in the Americas.”

Uncle Carl’s brows rose. “After all I’ve done, you would be willing to do that?”

“Aye. I doona want my wife troubled about this anymore. If ye are out of the country, she will feel safe.”

Just then Rupert stood and pulled banknotes out of his pocket. “Here is the money you paid me. I didn’t spend any of it, only the travel expenses.” He tossed it on the table. “Take your thirty pieces of silver.” With that he turned and left the inn.

“Why is Rupert here? I thought he returned to London,” Christine said.

“Rupert came to the castle and told me.” Keegan stopped for a minute and rubbed his forehead with his thumb and index finger. “I doona want to see the lad walk away with nothing.”

“He was the one who kidnapped me!”

“I know. But on our ride here, he told me about his life so far. ’Tis a sad story, wife.”

Christine chewed her lip, her basic compassion fighting with the anger at being swept away from her home and handed to Newton. Eventually, she sighed. “If ye think ye can trust him, then I have no objection to having him return to the keep and continue working with you. He did take me, but if he hadn’t returned to our home to tell you, I would be on my way to London tomorrow.” She paused. “And you’re right. He did give the money back. He has nothing.”

Kerrigan slapped the table with both hands, stood, and headed out the door.

After appearing before the magistrate the next morning, and sending Uncle Carl on his way with enough funds to start a new life, Christine, Kerrigan, and Rupert returned to the castle.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: August 9, 2025, 7:19 am

Every time Kerrigan looked at the healing bruise on Christine's face, he growled and threatened to travel to London and finish the job he started on Lord Newton.

About a month after their return Christine told Kerrigan that he would be a father. He held her tightly, kissed her all over and then refused to let her do anything except rest until she threatened to see to it that their child would not have a father when he was born.

Rupert turned out to be the best employee the castle ever saw. He and Isla married within months after the kidnapping.

Christine had a letter from Uncle Carl right after the babe, Douglas Kevin Lindsay, made his appearance. Ironically, he was in line to inherit the estate—which had once belonged to his maternal grandfather, before it fell into the hands of his greedy and unscrupulous great uncle—until he left for the Americas. Apparently, the man was doing well, had started a business, but found a wealthy woman to marry so he sold the business.

Some things never changed.