

# Toward the Horizon

By

Jeanne MacGregor Lahn

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# Cover Art

by

## Dave MacIntosh

David MacIntosh is a full time, self taught artist who found inspiration in pictorial books featuring the works of the early European painters. Building on this early influence he has developed a uniquely recognizable and appealing "Old World" style that is reminiscent of the early "Masters of Light". For many years while showing his work in Halifax area galleries he concentrated mainly on marine themes, but now produces quality work in other areas as well (primarily portraiture, landscape and historical). To date, his oil paintings hang in many private, corporate, education and museum settings locally and abroad.

Although David does not consider himself to be a wildlife painter, he has to his credit three Canadian Wildlife Conservation Stamps, P.E.I. 1996 and N.B. 1997 (national program), the third presents the Atlantic Waterfowl Celebration that takes place in Sackville, N.B., this event has in the past received the Governor General's Award of Excellence. The images used for these stamps were taken from commissioned works he completed for well known photographer Sherman Hines, who also for a time received some art instruction from David during family visits to his home in the Windsor, Nova Scotia area.

At present, during the summer season David is the resident artist at the Hector Heritage Quay in Pictou. His images are used for almost all material promoting this very popular tourist destination (brochures, guides, posters, sea chests, labels, etc.). A new look for the cover of Donald MacKay's popular book "Scotland Farewell", almost 1/3 of the content of the award winning documentary "New Beginnings" and a design for the large stone Ship Hector Foundation donor monument were also recently completed.

In addition to the permanent display he is creating for the Town of Pictou which documents the history of the arrival of the first Celtic immigrants and present ship "Hector" reconstruction, David can also be credited with creating images for two other Nova Scotian tall ships, the "Pictou Castle" for Captain Dan Morland, Lunenburg, N.S. , and museum paintings of the "Avon Spirit", a top sailed schooner built near Windsor N.S. under the supervision of Vice Admiral (ret.) Hugh MacNEil. Hugh also recently asked David to do a portrait of Admiral Leonard Warren Murray who commanded the North Western Atlantic Allied Forces during World War 2. The finished portrait

is prominently displayed at navel command headquarters in Halifax. This earned David a personal invitation from the Navy's supreme commander to it's unveiling and the image appears in a publication "In Peril on the Sea" by Donald E. Graves. His portraits, which are incredibly life like are in great demand by many individuals from both the private and professional sectors.

Recently, his work, which over the years has been used on just about everything from magnets to murals appeared on the cover of Stanley Spicer's "Age of Sail", Master Shipbuilders of the Maritimes. Many of the images that were created for the Avon River Heritage Museum also appear within the publication. David also has been given the honor of being in the company of some of the most accomplished artists in Canada, past and present, in "above and Beyond", a history of J.R. Shaw's Family in Life and Business.

David was the original official artist for the R.C.M.P. Adopt a Library, Literacy Program.

**This novel is dedicated to my dearly departed grandmothers...**

*May we always remember our past while we continue to strive for our future.*

Ruth (Billy) MacGregor Ramaley, the first woman in the family to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and my childhood best friend. It was because of her that I explored our Scottish heritage and discovered this remarkable story.

&

Bernadette Johnson Sorlie, the grandma who loved little children so very much. She always had lemonade, Jell-o, cookies and a warm hug waiting for every child or grandchild that might drop in for a visit. I like to think she is still watching over us.

+ + +

I would also like to thank my mother for the valuable gift of her time spent teaching me to read and love books as a child and for always encouraging me to write.

I am so grateful to my father for his gifts of stoicism, laughter and courage. I miss you.

+ + +

I love and thank my husband, Eugene, beyond measure for his patience and his support.

I love and thank my children for teaching me about life, hope and unconditional love.

Last, but never least, I thank my dear friend and faithful proofreader, Bonnie Corcoran.

Without all of my wonderful family and friends this story might never have been written.

Jeanne MacGregor Lahn  
November 2007



## *Toward the Horizon*

This story pays homage to the courageous immigrants of the Ship Hector on their fateful trip from Scotland to Nova Scotia in the summer of 1773. Although the following novel is based on actual events, the characterizations are fictional.

Jeanne MacGregor Lahn



## Chapter One

Loch Broom, Scotland: Spring 1773

**H**ugh McLeod leaned heavily on his gnarled pine walking stick as he prayed silently above the grave of his beloved wife, Flora. She was buried in the family burial plot, behind the old kirk on the hill. He stood with his back to the sea, ignoring the beauty of Loch Broom where it emptied into the Minch over his left shoulder. Beyond that, the rugged Northwestern coast of the Highlands held back the sea on either side of the mouth of Loch Broom. Teasing ocean breezes tugged at his whitening red hair, whipping stray strands from its loosely tied knot into his careworn face.

His prayer ended, he opened his eyes. Tears welled up and slid free, first from one eye and then the other, tracking down his cheeks to drip off the chiseled granite of his jaw and fall onto the earth which his Flora lay beneath. Despite his age and his disfigured leg, he was still a huge and imposing figure with all of the fierce features of his Norse and Celtic ancestors.

"Oh, Flora, my dear one, it's glad I am tha' you didna live ta see wha' has come aboot," he spoke in his thundering Highland voice. "And yet, here I stand, selfishly longing to take comfort in your arms. I know not, what is ta become of us."

He paused to swipe at his face with one huge hand, annoyed to find the moisture there. "Our eldest, Hugh... I ken he resides there with you and the good Lord, but now 'tis only our son, David, and this auld wreck you see before you that are left to provide for the bairns and their mithers." He shifted his weight from one leg to the other with a slight grimace as pain shot through his crippled left leg. An echo of the saber that had pierced it

long ago rang against the bone. "Achh, spending me life a soldierin' has ill equipped me for such a task!" His mind wandered back through the mist of years past.

He had been a young man during the bloody Jacobite rebellion thirty years past and he and many from his clan had been a part of that final doomed battle on Culloden Moor. The door to Scotland's freedom had closed firmly on that blood drenched day. Those few of his clan that had survived the ghastly slaughter under the English leader, Cromartie, had struggled home in defeat, only to find the war following them to their once peaceful coastal and loch side homes. In the hellish decade that had followed, he had occasion to be sincerely glad that he'd at least known the satisfaction of killing some of William Cumberland's English troops. They had shown no conscience and given no quarter during the murdering, raping and burning that had been done during Scotland's long despairing years after the English victory.

Despite few able-bodied men left alive, the troops had come to burn and loot the surrounding areas. While Hugh was trying to protect his home, his thigh had been run through by a British saber, just above his left knee. He and the other men and most of the older boys of the village and countryside had been marched off to prison. The English soldiers took those that had served at Culloden and even those who had not, along with any lad over twelve-years-old, to thoroughly quell thoughts of further Scottish rebellion.

His wound had festered off and on for most of the first year of his captivity. At one point, only his massive size and his ferocious temper had prevented the prison doctor from lopping off his leg with one of his wicked looking little saws. By sheer willpower alone he had survived, but the scarring that ensued had left him with a permanent limp from his stiffened left knee. The only thought that had sustained him through those dark years was his tenacious desire to return home to his wife, Flora, and their young sons, Young Hugh and David.

Flora had been luckier than most women were after Culloden. Their home was near the coast and her family ties were strong in the outer islands. She and their two boys had sought refuge on the McOulachan isles with some of her kin and they had been spared the post war atrocities inflicted on many of the mainlanders by "Butcher" Billy Cumberland and his troops.

After several long years in prison, Hugh and his fellow Scots prisoners were given the choice of deportation to the Americas as indentured

servants, or enlistment in the Highland regiments of the English Army. Many family men chose to fight for the English, and with their oaths of allegiances sworn, they prevented any further persecution of their families at home. It also paid wages that were nearly non-existent in those days from any other source, especially after so many English nobles had been granted large tracts of land after their victory. This money the soldiers earned could be sent home to their kin and was often the deciding difference between life and death for their loved ones. Choosing to enlist also allowed the men to keep alive the hope of seeing their family between military campaigns, where deportation would not.

For Hugh, there had seemed no other option. With his crippled leg, the labors of fishing he had been raised to would be difficult at best. His lack of balance aboard a fishing boat could endanger others; but he could still fight as well as ever. He had swallowed his pride painfully and sworn the hated oath of allegiance to the very army that had imprisoned and crippled him.

Hugh drew a shaky breath and stood a little taller. "Ah, Flora... Forgive me, my love," he said, with a sigh. "I am acting like an auld fool feeling sorry for me self! We have borne sa much already; surely we will bear up ta this as well. Sleep well, mo mhurninn, my love!" Feeling somewhat comforted just for having talked to her he turned and began to limp away, leaning heavily on his cane. He made his way with difficulty along the narrow path that wound down across the rock-strewn hillside below the kirk.

A lone golden eagle screamed as it circled effortlessly overhead hunting small prey. A short way downhill Hugh paused on a stony ledge to watch it and rest his aching leg. The magnificent bird needed only an occasionally flap of its great wings, as it skillfully rode the currents of air that rushed uphill from the loch. Suddenly, the eagle angled sharply toward earth, drawing its great wings into its body in order to speed up its steep dive. Hugh squinted, trying in vain to see any movement on the ground below. In the blink of an eye, the eagle snatched up what looked like some unfortunate rodent in its lethal talons. A few powerful strokes of its wings later and the eagle soared toward its mountaintop aerie with its prize.

Hugh watched the lone eagle go, admiring its strength and beauty. He felt it was a good omen and took comfort in the thought that it was. He would, with the good Lord's help, find a way to provide for his own. He continued on in his labored way, hitching down the mountainside with his walking stick supporting him when his leg threatened to fail him.

By the time he reached the cluster of homes above the small fishing village of Ullapool, it was mid-afternoon. Several small boats were bobbing on the bay of Loch Broom, but most were still out in the Minch seeking the salmon, trout, and herring that were gathering near the mouth of the Broom after leaving their winter homes out in the Atlantic. Soon, most of the salmon would move up the loch, seeking the rivers and streams of their birth. Once there, they would spawn the new generation and then die, completing their circle of life.

Hugh walked past several cottages as he made his way to the home where he lived with his eldest son's widow, Janet. Their neighbor, Molly McKenzie, was stirring woolens with a pole as she dyed them in a great steaming cauldron outside her cottage. She glanced up as he approached and smiled, her blue eyes sparkling with good humor when she recognized him. "Good day ta ya, Hugh McLeod, been up to the auld kirk to see Flora again, have ye?"

"Good day ta ya, Mistress McKenzie, aye, I have. And a fine day for the hike it was, too," He answered, bowing to her as he passed. The rich animal smell of boiling wool drifted on the breeze. On the hills behind the house, her youngest boy, Colin, and her daughter, Elspa, could be seen herding their few sheep along, like willful little white clouds floating upon the green hillside.

"Give Maggie and Janet me best!" Maggie added, with a flap of a work reddened hand in his direction before he was too far gone.

"Aye, I wull, and mine ta your John!" He shouted back, waving back with a hand that was nearly as gnarled as his old walking stick.

A little further down the path he came to Dougald McLeod's place, where no one was about to greet him but their skinny barking dogs. He patted their furry heads to shush them as he continued on his way. He was just passing the widow Murray's place when she came bustling out the door with a worried looking lad at her heels. She nearly collided with him and he steadied her with one huge hand, as the startled lad ran right into her ample rear end. "What has got you in such a swivet then, A bhoireanaich?" Hugh asked, hiding a smile.

"Oh! I b-beg your pardon, Hugh!" She stammered, turning a gimlet eye on the boy at her rear, who hurriedly stepped back a pace, flushing hotly as he did so. "I'm on my way ta see ta young Abigail. Her time has come and the babe is in some hurry to be born!" The freckled lad with her shifted nervously from foot to foot and tugged impatiently at her sleeve. "Aye, Adam! If you will pardon us, we mun be on our way." The round

little midwife rushed downhill in a flurry of skirts and disappeared around a bend, half dragged by the frightened lad.

Hugh shook his head and chuckled softly to himself, thinking of his own nervousness when his mother was birthing his little sister. As if it would matter one way or the other what he did! It was something men could only helplessly wait through, praying all would be well. He had waited through the long agonizing hours of his Flora's labors and then again through his daughter-in-laws', as well. No matter how skilled he had become at fighting, he knew there was little he could do to defend his women from the mysterious inner dangers of childbirth. A few minutes later, he passed the small cottage of Abigail and Christopher Murray. He muttered a prayer for her and the bairn's safe delivery and crossed himself, as her tormented groans could be heard coming from inside.

Off the well worn path and around another small hill, he arrived home to see one of his concerns skipping toward the cottage with grasses scattered through her red hair and across her homespun skirt and disheveled shift. In one hand she carried a somewhat wilted bouquet of wildflowers. Her mother, Janet, appeared at the door with little Finlay on her hip. Spotting her daughter, she put her other hand on her free hip, her mouth pursed in obvious irritation. "Elspeth Rose McLeod! Just where ha' ya been all this time then? I sent ya ta look for your grandfather, did I no?"

Looking at the ground in embarrassment, Elspeth still came forward to courageously stand before her mother. The small bouquet hung at her side, now forgotten. "I'm sorry, Mither," She began, "But, I..."

Hugh cleared his throat to interrupt as he came into view and to the rescue of his small granddaughter. "I'm here, Janet, and sa she did find me," He said, with a sly wink over at Elspeth. Startled at first, Elspeth quickly realized she might be saved from a scolding and her grin broke, like sunlight as the rain clouds fled.

"I picked these for you, Mama," she added, belatedly offering the limp little bouquet to Janet.

"Oh! How pretty they are, Elspeth!" Janet relented, as she smelled the early spring wildflowers. Her irritation evaporated as she inhaled their sweet smell. "Well, it's sorry I am then, lass, and thank you for these pretties!"

Little Finlay reached out with chubby fingers toward the flowers his mother held. "Pah!" He exclaimed, his other arm whirling with excitement. "Pah, mah!"

Elspeth giggled and grabbed his excited little hands in hers. "He said they are pretty, Mama! Did ya hear it?"

Janet laughed too. "Aye, I think he did!"

Hugh laid his walking stick against the wall and reached out for the little boy. Finlay stretched both his little arms eagerly toward his Grandfather, clinging to him as readily as he did to his mother. Hugh sat down on the wooden bench outside their house, arranging his stiff leg as comfortably as possible and then held the boy up high. "Of course he did! That's me fine wee laddie," He crooned. "Sharp he is, like a wise wee owl."

Finlay squealed with pleasure as his grandfather swung him through the air as if he were flying. Hugh put him on his good knee and began jostling him as he always did. "Ride your pony, me wee little owl, ride him!" Finlay bubbled with laughter and in between the chuckles his eyes grew wide, looking exactly like the little owl his grandfather had said he resembled.

"Father, could ya mind him?" Janet asked. "I should go and milk the goats. I hear them bleating from here." She ducked inside with the flowers and rushed right back out.

"Of course I wull Janet, I could use a spot of rest, meself. Be on your way then, I will sit with the bairns." As Janet disappeared over the rise, he patted the bench next to him with a grin, inviting Elspeth to join him.

"Oh, Grandfather!" Elspeth said, as her mother disappeared. "Thank you for telling Mama I found ya! But isn't it like tellin' a lie?" She asked, soberly.

"Well now, lassie, ya were out looking for me, aye?"

"Yes, Grandfather, but I didna find ya!"

"Aye lassie, ya did! Just as I was coming ta hame, why there you were! And if you were admiring the flowers on the way, well tha's why the good Lord put them there. 'Tis no a sin ta admire and love God's handiwork! Besides, I canna sit by watching me only granddaughter be punished because I am myself gone too long up the ben!"

Hugh patted her flaming, sun warmed hair. She leaned in and hugged him close. "Taing, Grandda," she sighed. "I didna mean ta be gone sa long either, but it was such a fine day! And the flowers are a-springin' up everywhere! Besides, I kent ye were on the mountain with Granny Flora and wanted ta be alone."

Hugh hugged her back. "Ah, lassie, ya ken me sa well. You are much like your Granny Flora." His throat tightened for a moment, thinking how much his wife would have loved this little girl, having never had a daughter of her own.

"Best run along now and help your mither. The men will be ashore soon and there is mun yet ta do afore supper."

"Aye, Grandfather," she said, and scampered off to find Janet.

Hugh stood up and scanned the loch trying to spy his son Davy's fishing dory. They wouldn't likely come in until sunset, after they had used every precious minute of daylight. Often these days, they could be seen mooring by lamplight. After the too recent loss of his son, Young Hugh, his men and their boat to the unpredictable sea, Hugh couldn't loosen the knot of fear in his gut every time his remaining son, Davy, went out with Elspeth's older brother, Willie. He sent another plea to the heavens, that Davy would not widow his wife Maggie, as his Hugh had widowed Janet. "And may the Lord watch ower your big brother, Willie," he said softly to the little boy.

"Weee!" Finlay said clearly, pointing out to the boats.

"Yes, my fine Finlay! Willie is oot there!" Hugh agreed with a laugh, pointing to the boats down on Loch Broom. "He is on a boat! Can ya say 'boat' then?"

"Bo!" Finlay shrieked with glee.

Hugh laughed and tossed the boy in the air, deftly catching him as he fell. "What a fine wee fellow ya are, me wise wee owl!"

The old man and the toddler both laughed joyously as they enjoyed the pleasure of each other's company. One head glowed like warm silver and the other like copper fire under the lazy afternoon sun. Soon the family would gather to greet the returning men and have supper, but for now this golden time was theirs alone.



## Chapter Two

Eastern Shores of Loch Katrine, Scotland: Spring 1773

The sun's dying rays stretched long and soft across the late afternoon air, lighting James' path into the foothills of the Trossach Mountains. Despite the rapidly setting sun James felt reluctant to return home with the meager catch he had managed to snare. He had hunted for many miles around, sitting patiently near game trails for hours, hoping to bag a deer or at least a fat grouse for his family's support. He looked down at the puny rabbit and squirrel he had in their stead and sighed. He thought of his wife, Mary Katrine's smiling face. Somehow, no matter how poor the hunting or fishing was she always made it into something that would satisfy all. She seemed to work magic stretching their provisions with soups and stews.

He paused only a moment before jumping across the small, icy burn that flowed through the greening glen. Thoughts of the winter past swiftly wiped the last vestiges of a smile from his face. His sister-in-law, Ann, had died slowly before their eyes, failing to thrive again after the birth of her tiny twin sons, William and Alex. James secretly believed that she had died of a broken heart as well, having lost her husband, William, only a month before their twins' birth. William had died of a strange wasting sickness that had come on during Ann's pregnancy. They had done their best to nurse him back from his illness, but all their efforts had failed and William had not lived to see his twin sons be born.

James ground his teeth, feeling the hopeless rage of being unable to provide better for his growing family. In addition to his and Mary's four youngsters, there were now the twins to care for as well. Orphaned as

they were, James and Mary had no choice but to raise them as their own. Food was the scarcest commodity of all in the Highlands just now; the only thing scarcer was hope. The only reason that the twins had lived at all was because of his beloved Mary. She had given birth several months before Ann, to their little Alasdair, and had milk enough to nurse all three babes after Ann's death. But he was worried about Mary and hoped she could continue until the bairns were weaned. All the nursing and caring of so many babes at once was beginning to take a noticeable toll on her. The fragile looking flesh around her large brown eyes was smudged dark with fatigue, her young forehead was creased with worry and she had grown very thin. There was a deep sadness in her that James could not name, despite the fact that the three babes thrived and grew, and it worried him.

James could hear dogs barking and the shrieks and shouts of children at play as he rounded the last bend of the winding footpath. Several youngsters were scuffling around in the dirt with their feet, trying to kick about a small bundle of rags that had been wound into a rather lopsided ball. There were small groups of children standing off to either side yelling encouragement to their friends. The village dogs had joined the fray, thinking it great fun to try to steal the ball and make the children chase them instead, which they often did.

Little Lizzie, only three-years-old, tried in vain to push into the rabble and join the play. Her older sister, Katy, pushed her gently away from the others, "Gwa' Lizzie! You're too little ta play! Don' be naughty, aye?"

Always precocious, Lizzie scowled in frustration, her little bottom lip pursed into a pout she pushed at one big dog that bumped into her. "Gwa', goggie!" she screeched in her shrill, little voice. "Bad, Gog!" she added as the dog hung his head and retreated in defeat. Lizzie folded her arms and with satisfaction gleaming in her eyes, watched one of the few creatures that would obey her, skulk away.

James laughed at this little outburst as he approached. Within seconds, he was surrounded by squeals of, "Da! Uncle James! Mr. McDonald!" The dogs added their barking to the din until it was nearly impossible to distinguish one voice from another. The dogs pawed and whined their greetings to him, rolling over to present their bellies as he patted them. They sniffed politely at the game hanging from his belt with inquiring noses. The children performed a similar excited dance around him as he patted each one on the head or laid his hand on a bony shoulder of one of the older lads. "Well, my wee Lizzie," he said scooping up her warm little body, "sa it's too little ya are agin, aye? Well tha' wull be remedied soon enough I'm thinkin'."

Seven-year-old Katy looked up at him worriedly with her mother's shining brown eyes. "I didna want her ta be hurt, Da! Ya told me ta watch out for her and so I did."

Her earnest little face looked so serious, that he reached out and yanked gently at the curl on the tip of one shiny black braid. "Aye, Katy, and a fine job ya did too!" He kneeled down to include her in a hug with her little sister. "Both my girls look right as rain!" He buried his face against their small heads for a moment, one red head, and one black. After a moment, he lifted them both off the ground in a warm embrace as he breathed in their sunny grassy scents.

Ten-year-old Andrew appeared at James' elbow, eyeing the rabbit and squirrel tied to a strap of leather thong around his waist. "Shall I clean those and bring them ta Mother for you then, Da? She'll be waitin' on ya." His nimble fingers were already working at the knot in the thong before James could answer.

"Aye, lad and hurry now, its late I am with them too. I had ta wait a long, long time before I spotted even that wee squirrel. Even the trout seem ta be scarce in the burns, after such a bitter winter." James put the girls down and stood up.

"Were there no deer ta be seen, even in the forest then, Mr. McDonald, sir?" One of the older lads, asked. Hope wavered on the skinny lad's face.

"I walked nearly ta Achray and back, Hamish, and nary a bitty bird ta keep me company, let alone a deer!" Seeing the boys' crestfallen faces, he added, "but, take heart; there is always tomorrow, lads!"

"Young Angus," James called to a red haired lad with a pubescent sheen of fuzz on his cheeks, "did you and your Da ha' any luck on your sealg ta the north today, then?"

"Aye, sir, only twa' auld grouse though; good only for the soup pot, I expect." Eyeing James' rabbit and squirrel as Andrew finished untying them, he smiled. "That's a fine catch ya have there, too, sir! We'll all et some hot broth tonight."

"Aye, we will at tha'." James said. He watched with a smile as Andrew took the game to the chopping block next to the house. Angus, Hamish and several other MacGregor youngsters tagged along at his heels to watch, jostling for the best position. James watched the boy walk away, feeling warm with pride. His dark auburn hair looked very like his own, with just a bit of curl, like his mother's shining black locks. He was small, but already growing long of bone and showing the promise of the man he would one day become.

The other lads his age respected him and were always eager to watch him show off his prowess with a knife. He could already dress game or clean a fish almost as well as James could, in spite of his young age, and he wasted none of the precious meat. He could whittle a piece of wood into any imaginable shape or animal and often enjoyed making gifts of his work. Andrew's natural gift with a blade had already earned him the nickname, Sgian Dubh, or black knife, among his friends. It was also due to Mary's brother, Ian, whom he resembled and who had also borne that nickname in his youth. Ian had spent nearly as much time with Andrew as James had, teaching him the many uses of the small sock knife and larger knives as he matured.

James glanced to the east at the scarlet glow of the setting sun as it reflected off the upper slopes of Ben An. Happy to be home, his heart squeezed tight and then expanded to take in the sight and commit it to memory. The glen itself already lay deep in plum shadows. It was still early in the season and it would be full dark soon. He shivered, a nameless fear suddenly gripping his heart. "Get you now ta your evening' chores, you wee beasties! I must go and greet my wife before she starts ta worrit for me," he said, shooing them off with pretend gruffness.

All the children scampered away to their own family's fire, confident that if the McDonalds had meat, they would share around what broth they could that night to every needy hearth.

James stepped through his own humble doorway and went inside. Sgian had been right. Mary already had a large pot of savory smelling herb broth bubbling over the fire just waiting for some meat to be added. She sat by the fire in the willow rocker he had made for her, with one of the twins snuggled comfortably in each arm. Next to her, lay little Alasdair bundled up in his withy basket and already sound asleep. She smiled at him, "Whist! I finally got them all ta sleep," she whispered.

Gently James reached down to take one of the small bundles from her as she rose from her chair, carefully holding the other. He put the babe in a larger basket next to the fire and she placed the other, with his head facing the other direction, to nestle alongside each other in the same basket. Mary stretched her burdened back with an arching stretch and then put an arm around James' back. They watched all three babes in the firelight for a few moments. Little Willie made small sucking noises, as if dreaming of still nursing and they chuckled. Alasdair stirred a little, so they backed away quietly, in order not to wake them.

James drew Mary into his arms and among the shadows of the room, they fashioned a greeting all their own. Mary's soft lips were as warm as always, but he could feel how tired she was. She leaned into him as they kissed and he was very nearly holding her full weight. Their lips parted and he stared into the dark depths of her eyes in the flickering firelight. "Ah, this is sa hard for ya, my love. I want sa badly ta make life a wee bit better for us all," he whispered to her. His large brown hands smoothed back the shiny midnight curls that escaped their pinning around her sweet face as he stared into her wistful brown eyes.

"Acch, we are doin' just fine dear," she scolded, "and a far cry better than most! We've a roof o'er our heads, good health and each other. God shall provide the rest."

"Well, the good book says, 'the Lord helps those that help themselves' my dear heart. Although, I think we've been doin' plenty enough on our own side of the matter! I'm just wondering when our Lord will remember us and get around ta doing his share of the helpin' is all."

"Why James Andrew Campbell McDonald, don't ya be mocking the Lord that way! 'Tis bad luck and a sin at that!" Mary said, her cheeks turning a healthier shade of pink, as she teased him. "I won't have it in this house!" She stamped her small foot on the packed earth floor and crossed her arms across her chest defiantly.

"God forgive me, then! I meant no disrespect ta the Lord.... or to you," he added, playfully pulling her to him again. "I ken that the Lord wull forgive me, sa wha' about you, my sweet Mary?" He leaned in and nipped lightly along the side of her neck until she giggled and squirmed in his arms.

"Stop that," she gasped, wriggling in his grasp. "We'll wake the bairns!"

He grinned, loosened his hold on her, placed a quick kiss on her brow, and then stepped over to stir the fire. He knelt to block the sleeping infants from errant sparks with his body as he turned the smoldering chunks of peat over with a stick. Meanwhile, Mary retrieved their wooden quaichs, tied a few dried rosehips, some dried chamomile, and a pinch of their precious tea leaves into a small piece of cloth and dropped the little bundle neatly into the tea kettle to steep.

James smiled and pulled his whiskey flask out of his breast pocket and poured a small splash into each quaich that awaited the brewed tea. "Have a wee nip before we add the tea, my dear; it warms the bones. Not that mine need be warmer, but yours surely do!" He winked mischievously and handed hers to her.

"James!" She admonished, but she said it with a smile. "You can be such a wicked, wicked man! But I must be wicked as well, because I love ya dearly, my own." They had a few precious moments of quiet with each other, sipping and listening to the hiss and pop of the slow burning fire before the hurly-burly of their bairns tumbled through the doorway.

Little Lizzie was leading the way through the door at a run, squealing, "Mama! Mama! I helped!"

"Whist, hush you now!" Mary scolded. In the commotion Alasdair woke and began fussing.

The twins squirmed and threatened to wake as well, before Lizzie quieted herself. Lizzie rushed worriedly to Mary's side and patted and stroked the twins and Alasdair, trying to soothe them with her little hands. "Baby sleepy, shhh," Lizzie said, imitating Mary's motherly comforting tones. With peace in the room again, partially thanks to Lizzie's anxious ministrations, the babes drifted back to sleep.

Sgian handed his mother the nicely skinned and cleaned rabbit and squirrel, which she promptly pounded flat with her maul and deftly cut into pieces. She efficiently added every morsel to the already boiling vegetables and water and then added the brewed tea to the remaining whiskey in her and James' quaichs.

Katy handed her the small pail of milk she had been able to get from their skinny little highland cow. "That's a good, lassie," her mother said softly. "Let's make a bit of oatcake, aye?" She smiled down at Katy, as she pushed back her sleeves.

Katy smiled back at her mother lovingly. "Yes, Mama," she replied, as she pushed back her own small sleeves to help.

"I can help!" Lizzie chimed, stirring from her place by the twins' basket.

"Whist," her mother reminded her, with a nod toward the babes. "Ya are helping, lassie! You're tending the babes should they wake. And a great help ya are too! Now, hush."

"Aye, Mama," Lizzie whispered obediently. Taking her task most seriously, she bent down to examine her tiny charges with a small worried scowl which comically imitated a little old woman. Satisfied that they were going back to sleep, she sat down between the two baskets.

James chuckled softly and patted her small head. Sgian sidled up to the table, eyeing James' whiskey flask with interest. "Is whiskey tasty, Da?" Sgian asked, as he leaned in curiously and sniffed loudly, "it doesna smell very tasty!" He wrinkled his nose as he drew away.

"Well now, to a wee laddie, no it doesna, but I am no a wee laddie, aye?" He added with a wink. He finished his whiskey-laced tea with an exaggerated flourish and smacked his lips for effect.

"I am no a wee laddie, Da!" Sgian exclaimed indignantly.

"Nay my lad, your a fine, braw, lad" James quickly responded, having no wish to offend his eldest son. James scratched his beard thoughtfully and glanced at Mary. "Weel, if your mither has no objections.... you may have a taste. But mind me, just a taste!" He cautioned. "If a man has too much whiskey afore his full height and wits have come ta him, he'll go saft in the heid."

Nodding seriously, Sgian warily picked up the artfully decorated flask that he knew was a prized possession of James. With a confirming glance to his mother, who wore a mysterious little smile, he slowly raised it to his lips. His throat bobbed with the first greedy swallow, but he quickly pulled the flask from his lips with a grimace. His eyes grew quite round and began to water as he gasped for air. "Da," he finally croaked, "how can ya drink it?" He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and quickly handed the flask back as though his hand burned from it, "'tis filthy fire in me mouth!"

James and Mary held back their laughter, so as not to be unkind, but a warm look passed briefly between them. "Well laddie, it's as well ya don' yet like it. You still ha' a bit of growing to do, aye? The flavor gets better with age.... like a woman!" He added with a playful wink.

"James!" Mary said, reproving him gently.

"Tis a good bit of advice, my love, and the truth, as well," James retorted, with a grin and a decisive nod.

Sgian glanced from the flask to his mother, looking doubtful as to the truth of his father's words. He drew in a deep breath and coughed again, ending in another grimace. "If tha' is true Father, then I shall marrit the oldest lass I can find!" Sgian said vehemently.

Mary and James laughed heartily at this, but were quickly admonished by Lizzie. "Mama, Da, the babes!" She whispered fiercely. They guiltily stifled their laughter and looked away from each other to prevent further outbursts.

Mary and Katy finished patting together the oatcakes, placed them in a hot pan over the fire, then set out the rest of the quaichs to be dipped into the stew pot for their suppers. The children had all washed up before coming in, knowing that their mother would have ushered them right back out, if they had not. James ducked out to do his own washing in the cold little burn. He rubbed his hands and face vigorously with the

icy mountain water and then stood up, briskly shaking the water off. He stared up at the star sprinkled sky for a few moments, letting the last glistening droplets of water drip from his beard and fingertips.

He drew in a deep breath, paying silent homage to the beauty of the newborn evening. In every direction the valley was lost in darkness. Faint, contented, family noises were all that could be heard and they mingled prettily with the song of the bubbling burn. Ben An's snow-capped peak still shone in the soft darkness, as if lit from within by the memory of the sun's fiery kiss. As he walked back to their cottage, he could see the early stars as they appeared over Loch Katrine to the west. The horizon was still rimmed with jeweled tones that shimmering alongside silvery water and golden sky, reflecting in a way that made the line between water and sky difficult to distinguish.

Despite the ethereal beauty in front of him, James knew a feeling of profound emptiness. This was no longer the Scotland of his forefathers. Scotland's defeated rebellion against England thirty years prior had changed its fate forever. Harsh English rule, greedy landowners, and the long occupation by armies of soldiers had reduced her remaining people, her native and domestic animals, even the very ground under their feet to a barren and poverty stricken condition.

The McDonalds and their tenant farmer kin were no longer welcome with these new landowners. They were seen as a burden and an impediment to improving the lands, grazing animals and increasing the lord's profits. Not only that, they were often falsely accused of any criminal activity in neighboring regions and constantly persecuted. To live to see another day was more of a challenge now than it had ever been before. Instead of life getting easier as time went by, it was getting harder with each passing year to provide for his family and starvation had become a common fact of life. For a father, it was an aching fear that haunted him mercilessly and one he felt helpless to remedy. James rearranged his face, hoping to hide his deepest fears from his family as he went back in to rejoin them at the fire.

## Chapter Three

Town of Blantyre, Scotland: Spring 1773

Jane Forbes absentmindedly drummed a tattoo with her fingernails on the bottom of the china saucer she held. The tea was starting to cool in her cup and still her mother had not come in from the garden to join her. She picked up the letter she had been staring at since it had arrived and sighed. It was clearly addressed to her mother, Mrs. Mary Jane Forbes. Jane would not dare to open it herself, despite knowing her entire future likely rested upon its contents. Glaring at her uncle's seal in frustration, she slapped it back on the table. She was past all patience and was rising to go and drag her mother away from her beloved flowerbeds, when she suddenly appeared at the door of the sitting room. "Oh, there you are, Mother! I was just coming to fetch you. Your tea is getting cold," Jane said, nervously sitting back down on the settee.

"Is that what you're all a flutter about then? My tea may get cold?" Mary teased, with a smile. Their one remaining servant, Gwyneth, had come to tell her of the letter's arrival a quarter of an hour before. But she had stayed out in her garden to collect her thoughts the best way she knew how, by weeding and plucking while the whirlwind in her mind calmed itself in the simplicity of labor. She quickly patted her graying light brown hair by habit, with barely a passing glance at the large oval mirror on the wall, to assure that its heavy coils were still properly in place before she gracefully crossed the room toward her daughter.

"Mother, I sent Gwenny to tell you that the letter from Uncle George had arrived quite some time ago and...." Jane began to protest, half rising again from her chair.

"Hush now, lassie, I was only finishing the task I had begun. I had to put the flowers in water and wash the garden grime off my face and hands now, didn't I? A task worth doing is worth doing well; remember that, lassie. Now then, let me have the letter, dearie." Mary held out her freshly scrubbed hand for the letter as she took her seat next to Jane. She broke the familiar wax seal with a quick flick of her thumbnail and opened the letter with her usual brisk efficiency. A portrait drawn on heavy stock fell out of the letter and she placed it face down on her lap for now. Not wishing to keep her daughter in suspense any longer, she began to read the letter out loud:

*"My Dearest Mary,*

*It is with a greatly relieved mind that I write to you this day. An agreeable proposition has been presented to me, which I now propose to you. My dear friend and colleague, Mr. Martin McCain has a son, Colin Charles, who is of marrying age. He is desirous of a match and has agreed to let his family make inquiries seeking said match from eligible young ladies in Scotland. He is an educated man, raised by respectable folk of some means, who are all of good character. He is occupied within their family mercantile business and is at present living overseas, establishing trade routes within the Americas."*

"The Americas!" Jane interrupted, with dismay.

"Now Jane let me finish!" Mary said, laying a calming hand on her daughter's arm. She took a small sip of her tea and made a grim gesture of distaste at its cool temperature. She returned the teacup to its saucer and resumed reading the letter.

*"Not only does he wish a suitable young woman of good family name, which is uncommon in the Americas, he is most agreeable in the matter of caring for her widowed mother, as well. As I have known Mr. McCain and his family for many years, I believe this to be the most suitable arrangement that can be obtained for my beloved niece and you, my only sister, as well as a fine solution to your present situation. As much as I will dislike being separated from you, I can rest assured that you will both be maintained in comfort and well treated by a family that is well known to me.*

*So that Jane will know that I have given due consideration to her happiness, I have enclosed a small portrait of the young man in question. She can see for herself that he is a handsome and kindly looking young man, aside from all of*

*his suitable character, financial, and family considerations. Please reply with an answer to their proposal, as soon as you are able, so that marriage contracts and travel to the Americas may be arranged.*

*With all my love,  
Your dutiful brother,  
George Danforth."*

Mary laid the letter aside and looked at the young man's portrait with interest.

Unable to wait any longer to see her possible future husband, Jane jumped up to lean over her mother and peer at his picture. Her heart paused for just a moment and then began to beat faster as she saw that her uncle had indeed been most correct in calling him handsome.

He looked to be four or maybe five years her senior, with kind dark eyes set below a wide intelligent brow crowned with longish dark hair. He had somewhat of a boy's face yet, smooth skinned and slightly plump in the cheeks, giving his entire face a look of general happiness and geniality, despite the serious pose. His mouth, though, was what really caught her attention and admiration. He wore a fashionably trimmed moustache over lips whose edges were so sharply defined and beautifully arched that they almost looked feminine.

Jane smiled at the picture and then smiled at her mother, flushing prettily. "He's beautiful, Mother. I had no idea Uncle George had such a fine eye for men! Perhaps, he has missed his calling and should be a matchmaker. Saracene should no doubt seek his services, forthwith!" Jane giggled.

Mary smiled and stifled her own laughter. "Jane! That's a perfectly awful thing to say!" She scolded. "Saracene Meadows is a dear friend to you!"

"Well I don't mean to disparage Sara, Mother. But you have seen her last two choices of beau! Her taste in men leaves much to be desired, I should think."

"Well, nevertheless, it is a poor comment from a true friend and quite beneath you," Mary added, a little more sharply.

"I'm sorry, Mother! I don't mean to be unkind. It's just that Sara and I have grown up dreaming of our future husbands and planning such lovely families. I just can't bear to think of her married to someone like Hector Boughton, Ughh!"

"Well, I have to say I thought him a most disagreeable fellow also, what with his distasteful snuff habit and his pompous airs. But, he comes from a good border family with connections to the nobility," Mary said. "Not a terribly good looking fellow, I must admit, but it is a match that her family approves of."

"I would rather die an old maid than to wed the likes of him," Jane scoffed.

"Well, and mayhap Saracene would rather wed the likes of him, than be forced to live so far away in the Americas with all the dangers that abound there?" Mary asked bluntly, as she raised one long eyebrow, contemplating her daughter's attitude. She eyed Jane speculatively, trying to gauge her daughter's true reaction to the matter at hand.

Jane glanced up quickly at her mother's serious tone; then her blue eyes darkened with realization, losing some of their luster and cheer. Frowning a little, she said, "To be sure, the thought of leaving Scotland and going to the Americas is disconcerting, at best. I hadn't thought about moving so far away. Or to such a wild place," She added, looking down at the portrait she held with a worried scowl. "But, everything else is as I had always hoped for," she sighed. "And you and I would have each other, as always!" She added, looking back up at her mother. She left the unasked question lingering in her eyes and behind her words, hanging between them like an unshed tear.

Mary patted her hand reassuringly, and folded it between her own. "Yes, dear we will have each other, whatever may come. As you know, there is nothing for me here now that your father is gone. I don't wish to be a burden to you, but this is almost as much a chance for me as it is for you, since they agree to my accompanying you."

Jane scowl was replaced by a brightening smile. "Well, let's take the chance then, Mother! Let Lavinia have Father's estate, as she has such a burning desire for it, then. You will come with me and we will make our own home. It will be as fine as this is, one day. Finer even, because it will truly be ours." She said, with a flap of her hand indicating the lovely house around them. Jane kneeled before her mother in a rustle of skirts, grasped her mother's hands and raised them to her lips, kissing them soundly, "I promise that we will, Mother!"

Mary gazed down into her daughter's earnest blue eyes and felt a great weight of worry lift from her chest. Her husband, Duncan's, older sister, Lavinia, had been putting increasing pressure on Mary to turn over the estate. It was the family manor and by a provision of Duncan's

father's will, now belonged to Duncan's sister Lavinia, rather than to Duncan's heirs after his death. Mary, being Scottish by birth, had not been a favored choice for her husband to make in the first place. And being women, neither she nor Jane could claim the estate. She found they were quite alone, as the English in-laws sided with Lavinia to keep the estate in their family.

Mary and Jane had been left with little in the world beyond their own personal possessions, a small maintenance sum and their good family name. They had been invited to stay with Lavinia, but clearly as guests. The thought of staying on, with Duncan's designing younger sister playing mistress of the manor while looking down her nose at them, was more than Mary felt she could bear. There were very few choices left, but Mary still wanted her daughter to be happily wed more than anything else. "Are you quite certain, my dear? We could wait for another match, if you have any doubt at all."

Jane shook her head firmly, her dark blonde mass of braids sliding slightly, from the motion. "No, Mother. This is what I wish to do." She looked down at Colin's portrait again and smiled at the sparkle the artist had captured in his eyes. She thought that he looked like a very kind man. "I am quite sure of it," she asserted with a nod.

Mary exhaled loudly, as the lightness in her chest spread. She drew her only daughter into a warm embrace. "Well then, it's decided. I trust your Uncle George as to the young man's character and family. And you seem to find him.... agreeable," she said smiling and drawing back to look questioningly into her daughter's eyes again.

Jane nodded firmly and then with a shy smile, returned to staring at the portrait of her soon to be husband, her eyes shining. "Mrs. Colin McCain.... Jane Isobel McCain," she mumbled, getting lost at once in girlish daydreams.

"It is settled then. I will reply at once, so that George may draw up the marriage contracts and begin arrangements for our travel." Mary left her daughter to her romantic daydreams and walked slowly to her own bed chamber to ponder how she wished to sketch the framework of their future into the pen strokes of her reply.



## Chapter Four

Greenock, on the Firth of Clyde: Spring 1773

**I**an MacGregor walked away from the Crossroads public house reading one of the broadsheets that had recently been posted around Greenock. He paused to carefully pack the saddlebags on his small highland pony with the bread he had purchased for his trip home. He carefully folded the post and put it in his pocket, pulled his cap down firmly and nodded goodbye to a few of the men he had become acquainted with from the docks. He made his way in the opposite direction through the throng of people and wagons. They jostled their way past Ian and towards the docks and the waiting ships, like spring salmon in a hurry to spawn.

He pulled the copy of the broadsheet out of his ragged jacket and re-read it again. Maybe it was the answer he had hoped for. And then again, he could perish in such a treacherous ocean crossing and it might all be for naught. He was unsure, yet still excited. There was a great deal to consider.

“But by God, if it were true...” He muttered to himself. Free passage across the Atlantic to Alba Nuadh; the new Scotland! The chance to own land again, free and clear, just for the farming of it. To hunt and farm a plentiful and by all accounts bountiful land and also have provisions for that crucial first year. Wasn’t that worth such a terrible risk? His mind raced with his tumbling thoughts. He thought that it was surely worth the risk, but he was not sure his sister and brother-in-law would agree; especially now, with all the bairns to care for after Ann’s and William’s deaths. He could not, in good conscience, go without them and leave

James to provide for them all alone. But he thought there was a good chance that if he told them about the offer that they would wish to go.

If it weren't for his brother Alex, they would none of them even have a place to lay their heads, as it was. Ian's and Mary's older brother, Alex MacGregor, had kindly given them the use of the small crofts in the valley they lived in, in return for their help at harvest, planting and any other time a need arose for sheer manpower at the MacGregor farm. They owed a debt of gratitude to Alex, but he, Mary, and her James would much prefer to work their own land. The farm here would always belong to someone else. They had no hope at all of obtaining land to call their own in Scotland.

Ian lived alone in a small cot that could not support a wife and bairns. He could not stay where he was and ever have much hope of marrying, with so very little to offer. It wasn't that he had someone in mind at the moment, but he dreamed of a pretty wife and family. Most of all, he dreamed of his own land. Across the ocean lay that chance, gleaming like a rainbow of promise, land to farm and to pass on to his children, after he was gone.

Ian wanted nothing so much as this chance to make a life. Starvation and cold need not trouble his family, as long as he could work and hunt a more bountiful earth. He imagined he was there already walking the farmlands and forests. To see oats waving in the fields and kine and sheep grazing lush, green grass would be a miracle. "Aye, a risk worth taking, it is. God, give me the words to convince my family of this opportunity," he said, softly to himself.

A passing woman looked at him strangely as he muttered to himself. She looked hastily away when he caught her eye and picked up her skirts to walk even faster. "Oh, aye," he said out loud. "Now I be a dafty too." Only slightly wobbly from the whiskey he had recently consumed, he touched the brim of his hat and gave a slightly ironic bow toward the woman when she glanced back fearfully. He grinned as she hastened to a run and he continued on his way down the narrow lane leading his pony.

Ian had come to Greenock after hearing that there was work to be had on the docks again. He had even been willing to ship out as a deckhand, despite his lack of any experience. It had been yet another disappointment and now he must trek home, with but a shilling left in his worn out pocket. Inexperienced labor was being turned away, as even the experienced men were hungry for work. If you did not have a friend or kin to put in a word for you, there was simply no work to be had. They

hired their own before hiring a skinny highlander with no experience. The only other work available to him was soldiering and he knew that he could never bring himself to do that, not after all that the English had done to his family over the years.

The resentment toward the English was generations deep in the MacGregor clan. It had only been sixty-odd years since his cousin, Rob Roy, had been alive to lead the English on many a merry chase. Now Ian and his kin were not even allowed to use the name MacGregor, since it had been proscribed, or they risked going to prison. It had been many, many years now since their clan had held their traditional lands. The Campbell's now held most of that land, thanks to their alliances with the English over the years. The MacGregor clan was scattered and in ruins, for which he blamed the English Crown. Ian would rather be dead than soldier for them.

Ian turned onto the road that ran southeast out of Greenock and gently turned his pony's nose in that direction with his rope bridle. The sturdy little pony balked a bit until he gave his customary "tchaa" and a little leg to encourage it. He planned to travel back the way he had come - through Port Glasgow, around the eastern shore of the Firth of Clyde and then continue north along the eastern shore of Loch Lomond. He would follow the lakes and valleys east from Lomond toward his home on Loch Katrine. It was another full two days past Loch Lomond on foot to Loch Katrine, on one of the rough paths that snaked through the Scottish Highlands.

Unconsciously, he picked up his pace, letting his mind flow ahead in the mile-eating way of the highland man that he was. He would be walking on the last half of the journey, as he had on coming, to spare his little pony. For now, he rested and enjoyed the ride as his mind turned over the details from the broad sheet he carried.

Ian reached Port Glasgow late in the evening. He would have preferred to sleep in the forest outside of town, but he felt that he should check here again for work before giving up entirely. This town wasn't half the size of Greenock, but it boasted a bustling harbor. The public houses and rooming houses near the harbor were a good place to start. Aware as he was of the dangerous nature of harbor towns, he stopped a moment to check the blade at his waist and the smaller sgian dubh in his stocking. He would be ready if anyone wanted to trouble him.

When Ian was a lad, his Uncle Andrew had taken it upon himself to train his nephew in the art of hand to hand combat. His uncle Andrew had been renowned from Aberfoyle to Balquiddar for his speed and

agility with a knife. It had earned him the nickname of Black Knife, or Sgian Dubh. It was a name that Ian had carried in his youth, as well, and it was for him that Ian's own nephew, younger Andrew, was nicknamed. Older Andrew had many a time taken an armed man down that attacked him, with only his sock knife, his speed, agility and his quick wits. Those who underestimated him soon suffered scars to remember him by. After his uncle Andrew had trained him as a boy, the same could be said of Ian himself. Ian had taken it upon himself to pass on these same skills to his own nephew after the elder Andrew had died.

Near the busy docks he spotted a tavern with the dubious name of The Dowsing Kine. Several watermen stood about the door and two were in a rough scuffle on the ground nearby. The man on top reared back and smashed the other fellow in the nose with a tremendous crack and the unfortunate fellow underneath him went quite still, knocked out cold and nose likely broken. The man on top clumsily climbed off him and cheerily grabbed his mug of ale off a nearby bench and polished it off, wiping his mouth with the back of one of his grubby sleeves.

Feeling it a good time to interrupt, Ian hailed the fellow. "That was most impressive, sir. Could I beg a moment of your time?"

The man turned his dark eyes to Ian and scowled. "What is it then? Want your turn at me, do ye?"

"Nay sir, I ask only any news ya may ha' of a captain looking for a crew, or a warehouse needin' a strong back?"

The man scratched his greasy head and then his unkempt beard thoughtfully, making it stand out, like a bushy hedge. "Can't say as I have... at least not for green hands," he answered, looking Ian up and down doubtfully.

Ian nodded his head reluctantly. It was plain to anyone that he was no sailor. He wore his dark hair long with small plaits on each side, in the traditional highland way. He sported only the tanned skin of a farmer, not that of a bronze skinned waterman. He was tall, lean, and suffering from slight malnutrition from the harsh winter past. "Aye, sir, 'tis true I've no experience, but I'm a verra hard worker."

"Sorry, mate! There is nothing hereabouts for the likes of a teuchter, like you, except me," the man sneered, stepping closer and raising his fists in invitation.

Ian's hand itched to grab his blade and carve up this rude man's grin and teach him a lesson or two in manners, but he could ill afford to end up in gaol again. The last time he had been incarcerated it had nearly killed

him. He was in no shape to tolerate it after a hard winter. Ian looked the man over from his greasy hair and tarred pigtail, insolently down his filthy clothes to his rough shoes. His muscles tensed in preparation to fight, despite his wishes. This man just wasn't worth it. "Dinna fash yourself, then, I'll be on my way." He touched his hat carelessly, just a hair's breadth from being rude, and then did likewise to the other men. "Gentlemen," he said, sarcastically, no longer unable to conceal his anger.

All the men grumbled and stepped toward Ian menacingly.

Just as he was turning away, but wary and expecting to be jumped from behind, a local blowzabella sauntered out of the public house. She sized up the situation in an instant and put on a pretty pout as she swayed past Ian and approached the group of men. "Now then, are none o' you lads goin' ta buy me a pint? I'm gettin' sa bored," She sighed, as she smoothed her hands slowly down her bodice, showing off her ample figure suggestively. "Mebbe I shall go ta hame," she fawned, placing herself directly in front of Ian and smiling a secret smile, as she swished her rear end suggestively toward the belligerent sailors.

The fighting man stepped up immediately taking her bait and puffed up, like a toad, both sure of himself and full of arrogance. "Surely, I will lass. If'n you want to put that sweet arse on my lap, that is," He said, his eyes pinned to the skirts over her posterior.

"Now wait just a minute, Tom!" said a smaller companion. "I was just about to buy Mabby a pint my own self."

Tom grinned menacingly. "And sure as you'll have to get through me then. Would you like to have a go then, Rob?" He snarled back at him.

Rob flamed red, but clamped his mouth shut prudently. He had no wish to have his nose rearranged by Tom Mandler. He had seen the result of his anger often enough and his eyes flitted unconsciously to the man still prostrate in the dirt, nose bleeding profusely.

Forgotten in the brewing excitement, Ian started to go, but not before he caught a mischievous wink from the woman, Mabby. She knew that she had interrupted what would have been a rare stramash and was obviously enjoying her power over these men immensely. Ian grinned and tipped his hat respectfully to her as he turned to leave, chuckling as he went.

Mabby squealed as Tom obviously pinched her backside and chased her as she ran playfully back through the dark doorway she had emerged from.

Shaking his head and still chuckling at the woman's antics, Ian moved

on to the other public houses that were lined up and down the narrow street, asking now and again if anyone had work for eager hands. He learned a few new colorful insults he had not heard before and got into a minor scuffle with a would-be thief over his pony, but he found no luck with any of the dockside public houses or shops. Nor any from the draymen he questioned, who frequented the docks looking to haul loads. Not wishing to sleep on the docks with only one eye closed, he rode out of Port Glasgow and through the night on the road for home. He had been searching for work for a fortnight and he was out of both money and patience. It was time to head for home.

## Chapter Five

Ullapool, on Loch Broom, Scotland: Spring 1773

**S**ituated as it was, on a natural harbor, Ullapool had seen booming growth in its fishing industry. Many of the boats came from Scotland and England, but some came from as far away as Ireland and Scandinavia to ply the rich waters of the bay and the outer islands. This was not of any benefit to the local fishermen, despite the collective skills of many generations. Their small dipping nets could not compete with the big luggers from the south, nor the efficient fishermen from the north and it kept the price of herring down for what they were able to catch.

Davy McLeod tied off his small boat and began filling a small sack with the herring they had netted. It wasn't enough to sell this time, but it was enough for their families to eat for a few days. He culled out about half of the catch and put it in two separate sacks for his two crewmen.

Alan, the older of the two brothers reached out for both sacks and then handed one to Geordie. "When are we goin' oot again then, Davy?" Alan asked.

David looked up at the northwestern sky, a pale blue streaked with pink mare's tails. "Looks like rain coming on the morrow ta me, lads. We'll see how saft it is in the morning, aye? If she is just a drizzle, we'll go. If not...." he shrugged, indicating the sacks they held, "then best make her last the days."

The men nodded glumly and went their separate ways, two to the left, along the busy road to town and two to the right, along the northeastern hills of the harbor. Davy walked along with his nephew, James William.