

HIS SWEET CURSE  
SCOTTISH SUBMISSION BOOK ONE



FINLEY BROWN

BLUSHING BOOKS

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

## PROLOGUE



The full moon of MacFarlane's Lantern shone brightly as Kieran stood before the wise woman and the duke's council in his dream. There was nothing he could do to stop the agreement. She had decided to punish the two feuding clans and put an end to the cattle raiding. With her gnarled hand skimming the ancient grimoire, she recited the words that would doom the first-born daughter of each laird to death on her twentieth birthday, unless her father handed her over to the other clan in marriage. The old woman raised her withered face to Kieran, looking into the dream keeper's pale eyes.

"Go now and tell the clans there will be peace, or there will be death."

## CHAPTER 1



SCOTLAND 1735

Sorcha MacFarlane rested her head against the rail of the ship, relishing the cold spray of the ocean on her heated skin. Salt from the sea crusted her lips and eyelashes as tears trailed down her cheeks from the stinging pelts of water and the realization her life, until this moment, had all been a lie. Gripping the paper in her hand, she willed herself to read the tattered letter for the hundredth time, although she didn't need to reread the message. She knew it by heart. It was her aunt's last chance at redemption, a cleansing of her soul through the written word. So, while her aunt was now resting peacefully in Heaven, Sorcha's life was left in shambles.

Orphaned at an early age, Sorcha knew no other family than the one she had grown up with for the past nineteen years. Raised by her unconventional aunt, along with her three male cousins, in the wilderness of Maine's backcountry, life up until this point had been just about perfect. That was until her aunt, on her deathbed, confessed to Sorcha she was not an orphan as Sorcha had thought.

Her father lived. Not only lived but was the Chief of Clan MacFarlane in the Scottish Highlands.

A gust of wind came up, blowing the paper in Sorcha's hand madly, sending it skittering across the ship's deck. Running after it as it floated through the air, she caught it on her third attempt, holding it close to her heart. She might be mad at her aunt for lying to her, but this was her last connection to the woman she loved and admired. Sorcha thought of her aunt's pained expression as she begged for forgiveness, handing Sorcha the letter that explained the morbid lie deciding her fate and leeching her life of truth, then her aunt squeezed her hand and abruptly died. Only the letter didn't explain anything at all, just spoke of curses and folklore, leaving Sorcha more confused than ever.

Now she was doing the only thing she could think of to get answers. She was headed to Scotland to confront her father, having been raised by her headstrong aunt to believe a woman could live independently, making her own decisions. Her aunt came to the colonies from Scotland with her young sons after her husband died. She had always said she wanted to test her luck in a new country instead of marrying another man for survival. The opportunity was her aunt's chance for a fresh start, and she succeeded, owning a large plot of land with a thriving horse ranch. Raising Sorcha as her daughter, she taught her a woman could do anything a man could do. These were not everyday thoughts for a woman, and because of them, Sorcha grew up confident, strong-willed, and brave. She could outmatch her three cousins in any physical or mental activity she put her mind to, often proving to her male counterparts she was a worthy opponent—which is why any thought of her father hurt so much. Why did he give her up? Was he like so many other men who disregarded women? Did he get rid of her to save his skin? Was she just a commodity to be tossed around without a second thought? She would find out soon enough, and she was ready for a fight.

The streets of Glasgow bustled with merchants and tradesmen

as dusk fell upon the port city and the Firth of Clyde, the air thick with the smell of fish and unwashed bodies. Having no idea which direction her father's estate lay, Sorcha questioned her hasty decision to come to a foreign land without any forethought. Filled with uncertainty, she was beginning to doubt her rationale. Maybe her cousin, Hamish, was right; she had no business strumming up the past.

Thinking of him brought a tear to her eye. He would be worried about her; she only hoped he wasn't hair-brained enough to follow her here. Though she had other reasons for her impulsiveness than wanting to find her father, personal ones even Hamish didn't know. Thoughts of Three Feathers drifted through her mind, provoking memories she wished she could leave behind, painful enough she could not bear to be in the same country as he. Sorcha reminded herself she was far away in Scotland, and as painful as the memories were, that's all they were—memories. She was safe here. He could not hurt her again.

Thoughts of him flitted through her mind; it wouldn't hurt to indulge them, this once. What she once thought true, in reality, was a fantasy. Closing her eyes, she brought the day up as clear as if it happened yesterday. Thinking she loved him and he loved her, she let him kiss her. Remembering the touch of his lips as they brushed across hers, to her surprise, she had not expected them to be so soft nor did she expect Three Feathers to run his fingers through the back of her hair as he pulled her in close, deepening the kiss. She could still feel his tongue searching her out, her lips parting as she opened for him and how he caressed her cheek with his hand. How she dared to place her hand on his bare chest and the feel of his heart beating through hardened muscle.

Sorcha traced her lips with the back of her knuckle, reliving the pleasure of his tender restraint, remembering the hunger in his eyes as the kiss ended and he held her in his arms. The memory sustained her when she was sent away to Quebec for her coming-out season at her aunt's and eldest cousin's insistence. It helped her

endure the countless dinners and balls she was forced to attend ad nauseam, trussed up like a pretty package. When she returned, three months later, with four marriage proposals from suitors she turned down, one could only imagine her shock to find out Three Feathers was already married, himself. He had tried several times to come to the farm to call on her and explain, but she refused his visits, having nothing to say to him. Her heart was broken. As far as she was concerned, she never needed to see him again. So, when her aunt died, a week later, and she found out she did indeed have a father, she fled.

An angry shout pulled her from her self-pity. Startled, she moved out of the way of an oncoming horse and carriage, just in the nick of time before being hit. Pulling the slouch hat farther down on her head, she hoped her disguise as a boy would work. Society had its rules, she could not travel as an unchaperoned young lady in a foreign country and so far, no one had caught on. The evening drawing near, she thought her best plan of action was to go to the nearest stable and find out if she could hire a coach. Having plenty of money in her purse, she only hoped someone would be able to point her in the right direction.

"Buck up, girl," she said to herself. "You can do it."

The stable sat on the edge of the city, looking deserted. She wasn't surprised when she was told there were no coaches available for hire. The old man working there did offer to sell her a horse, though.

"Where are you headed to, laddie?" he asked, leading her over to a stall with a black gelding.

Sorcha thought for a moment. Having time on the six-week journey over the Atlantic to come up with a story, she had rehearsed it over and over in her mind.

"MacFarlane lands," she said, adjusting the stock at her neck. "Castle Arrochar."

"Aye." The old man held out his hand to the horse so that he

could get his scent. "You'll be looking to see Calum MacFarlane, Laird of Arrochar."

"You know him?" Sorcha asked, perking up. This trip might not be as hard as she thought.

The man looked her up and down, sizing her up. She knew she must look like a scrawny boy dressed in one of Hamish's old suits from when he was a lad. It seemed slightly worn, but the buttons on the coat and waistcoat were silver; so were the clasps on her riding boots. He would think her a gentleman from her outfit.

"Aye," he hesitated. "Is he expecting you?"

"No, I've never met him, but I have business with him." That was not a lie; boy, did she have business with him.

She carefully looked the horse over. It seemed in good enough condition.

"Do you know where the castle is then? Could you maybe point me in the right direction?"

"Do you want the horse?" the greedy man asked.

She patted the horse's muzzle letting him sniff her hand. He took a nip at her.

"Bloody hell, you little bugger," Sorcha said, pulling her hand back and examining it. "Nasty old boy. He's mean-tempered."

The old man looked shocked, then shrugged it off. "He's all I've got."

"For Christ's sake." She palpated the bite; no blood, at least he didn't break the skin. "Well, I guess he'll have to do. Do you know where the castle is?"

The old man raised an eyebrow at her, holding out his hand for money. Sorcha paid the decrepit farrier, hoping the horse would prove to be worth the silver she handed over.

He pocketed the coin. "I can do better than that. If you wait a few minutes, some MacFarlane men can take you there." Then he turned on his boot heel, leaving Sorcha to get to know her new friend.



Sorcha awoke early the next day, anxious to get on the road and out of the flea-infested room she had rented for the night above the local pub. Skipping the morning meal, she headed straight to the stables to ready her new horse. She beat her two traveling companions she had met the night before there, and by the time the MacFarlane men arrived, she had already mounted her horse and was ready to go.

"You seem eager to get on the road, Mr. Blackwell," Kieran, the younger and friendlier of the two men said. He offered his name to Sorcha when she had been introduced to the two men the evening before, but the other man refused to make his introduction. Giving them the alias she came up with, the men all but gave her the third degree, insisting they know precisely the business she had with Calum MacFarlane. Not able to hide her accent, they recognized her as an outsider, immediately, so she stuck with the story she came up with, telling them she was in trade. The older and dark-haired man was not satisfied, insisting he know what kind of business. He was imposing with his piercing stare, his eyes as dark blue as the ocean in a storm, going right through her and touching a place deep in Sorcha's core.

She stumbled on her words. "The people I represent in the colonies are in need of supplies like whiskey and tea, and in return, I can provide you with weapons and fighting techniques the Indians use. Things your enemies here wouldn't expect."

"It sounds like you are suggesting we smuggle goods." The man laughed at her. "And we have no use for the savages' weapons."

Sorcha grimaced at the word savage but held her ground. "I'm not asking you. I'm asking Calum. Do you always make decisions for your laird?" She didn't give him time to answer. "He sought me out. Why else would I make the journey from the colonies to Scotland?"

"Calum doesn't partake in illegal activities." He turned to leave, dismissing her.

Kieran spoke up, "We will take you, Mr. Blackwell."

The dark-haired man froze, turning on his companion, fists clenched at his sides.

"We will take him," Kieran repeated, his pale green eyes looking past his friend and straight into Sorcha. "I have seen it."

Whatever that meant, it seemed to change the mind of the man who seemed to think he was in charge. He turned back to Sorcha, glaring at her.

"We leave early, tomorrow."

They kept a grueling pace, stopping only to rest and water the horses, Sorcha was a keen rider and kept up without any problems. The first day, the dark-haired man refused to speak to her, keeping to the front of the pack and often going ahead to scout the territory. Sorcha was not sure what he was scouting for but did not question, recognizing his skill as a tracker. Kieran, with his white blonde hair and fine-cut features, spoke little to her. She found him staring at her several times throughout the day, sending a foreboding chill up her spine. When they finally stopped for the night, Sorcha unsaddled her horse, letting it roam down to a gentle creek to nibble at the soft grass. Following it, she was glad to be out of the scrutiny of both men. If they were any inclination of the welcome she would get from her father, she needed to prepare herself.

The dark MacFarlane man returned to camp, tossing a rabbit at her feet. She stared at him with her piercing green gaze, refusing to be intimidated. Knowing he was testing her, she slowly picked it up, not taking her eyes off the man, the animal still warm in her hands. It wasn't as if she hadn't met men like him before, the kind who liked to intimidate. She would show him what she could handle. Sorcha had it skinned and on a spike roasting over the fire Kieran had started, within minutes.

That night, she dreamt, disturbing images filling her mind. At one point, she could swear Kieran had been standing over her with his seafoam eyes boring into her soul. Jerking awake, she sat up, startled to find nobody there but the smoldering fire and the sounds of sleeping men. She fingered the dreamcatcher on its

leather thong around her neck, Three Feathers' grandmother had given it to her. It was supposed to ensnare bad dreams in its web, only letting good dreams through. Sorcha placed it close to her heart, though she was left unsettled.

Exhausted from the nightmares by the time morning finally came, she was glad to be back in the saddle and headed towards her goal. Today was no different from the first, except the scenery began to change as they left the soft trails along the creek and started climbing up into the rugged mountains. Tiny lochs marked their way and led them through abundant forests and sweeping glens. Stopping for the night at the head of a large loch, Kieran explained to her it was called Loch Long; they were finally close to MacFarlane lands.

Turning her horse free for the night, Sorcha went to seek refuge by the loch. The closer she got to Arrochar, the more she felt consumed with dread. Finding a long, thin stick from an Aspen tree, she used her knife to shave the tip into a sharp spear and made her way down to the peaty brown shoreline of the loch. It looked like it went on forever. Sorcha wondered, as apprehension filled her heart, how much longer it would be until she met her father. Tiny fish played at the edge of the water, darting in and out of the shadows. Sorcha found a large boulder to stand on to get a better view. Spying what she was looking for, she crouched patiently until the large trout came close enough to the surface, then lifted the spear and threw it. The trout dangled off the tip. Sorcha smiled at her success, aware the men were studying her. She was glad to give them something to watch. Three Feathers had taught her to fish with a spear—the sudden thought of him ruined her moment of triumph, and she felt a lone tear slip down her cheek. Wiping it away quickly, Sorcha found a log to sit on, looking out over the loch. She and Hamish had grown up alongside Three Feathers, the three of them inseparable for most of their childhood. He even gave her an Indian name, N' Klozi Mina, or as he put it, her Indian name picked her. The closest translation in English was Talks Too Much.

He said he had gotten his name because on the day he was born, his mother found three feathers at the foot of her pallet. A feather was a sign of a spirit, he explained to her. His mother believed it was an omen he would grow up very wise, an indication he had an old soul. Sorcha scoffed at that now. He hadn't been wise enough to wait for her. They had always been friends until the year Hamish was sent away to France to study. That was the year feelings started to develop between them or at least on her side. His image came to her mind. She pictured him sitting next to her on the log with his waist-length black hair and bronzed skin as she got lost in his coal black eyes. But it would never be, it was never meant to be. Standing up, Sorcha went to wash her face and hands in the loch, wiping away the days of dust from traveling—and wiping Three Feathers from her heart.

After dinner, she lay down with her head on her saddle. She could handle her sore body with her aching muscles. It was the disturbing dreams that troubled her. As the moon came out and darkness engulfed the earth, the strange nightmares took her into a fitful slumber. In the dream, she was alone, searching for something just out of reach. Eyes watched her, the same pale green eyes that were always there, glowing in the blackness of night; only this time, there was a new set of eyes, dark as Obsidian. An old woman stood by her side, placing her bony hand on Sorcha's shoulder to stop her, only it was no longer a woman's hand who touched her, but a skeleton turned to dust. As the old woman faded, a new image appeared, that of a wolf, teeth bared and snarling. Sorcha tried to scream for help, but no one could hear her. Calling out to the eyes, they just looked on, filling her with fear. She let out one final, blood-curdling scream, sitting up. Strong arms held her, gently shaking her awake.

A deep voice whispered in her ear, "Hush, it's just a dream."

Jolting awake, she quickly felt for the hat on her head, but it had been knocked off, revealing her long brunette braid.

"You were greetin in your sleep." The dark-haired man pushed a

tendrils of hair off her forehead, looking at her with his deep blue eyes. "And you're a lassie, not a lad," he said, raising his eyebrow.

Sorcha jumped from his lap, still feeling his finger where it brushed her skin.

"Where is Kieran?" Dawn was coming up behind the mountains, painting the sky a beautiful shade of pink, welcoming the new day.

"He's gone ahead. I'll take you to the laird, myself."

Sorcha frowned. She had grown used to Kieran, but she did not trust this man before her, and now that she had no disguise, she had no idea how she would explain herself.

He laughed. "Few people have ever looked at me the way you do. Do you not think I can handle the job, lassie?" he said, folding his arms across his chest.

Sorcha grimaced at the word lassie. Now that he knew she was a girl, he wouldn't take her seriously. "No, it's just I don't even know your name."

"Did I not give you my name the day we meet, Mr. Blackwell?" The man smiled, emphasizing her false name as he held out his hand. "How rude of me. Edward MacFarlane. At your service." The smile changed his appearance. No longer did he look chiseled from stone, tiny lines appearing around his brilliant blue eyes. He wore his dark black hair pulled back at the nape of his neck, emphasizing the elegance of his high cheekbones and straight nose. He was handsome.

Sorcha took his hand and shook it. "Miss Blackwell."

"And do you mind telling me why a lass is tramping around the Scottish countryside dressed as a lad, Miss Blackwell?" Edward inquired. "Surely, a young lady as yourself would require a chaperone."

Sorcha stood taller. "I don't require a chaperone. I can take care of myself. Anyway, it's none of your business."

Edward walked around her in a circle, scrutinizing her. "Well, it is my business if you want me to take you to the laird." He continued to circle her until he stood inches from her, grabbing her

chin between his thumb and forefinger, gently tilting her face to the side.

"You ken, I dinna know how I mistook you for a boy. You're quite beautiful. Your lips are a little full, and the freckles across your nose tell me you spend too much time outside without a proper hat, but all in all, you're a lass. Where is your guardian?"

Sorcha pushed his hand away with force, stepping back. "Get your hands off of me."

He took her by the shoulders. His eyes turned black, threatening. "I'll ask you again, Miss Blackwell. Where is your guardian?"

Sorcha tried to break free, but his grip was firm. She pulled her leg back to give him a knee in his sensitive spot, a maneuver she learned to use on her cousins. Before she knew it, Edward grabbed her around the waist and sat down on a nearby log with her over his knee.

Sorcha kicked and pounded him with her fists. "What the hell are you doing, you bloody bastard?" she yelled at him.

Restraining her kicking legs with one of his muscular thighs, he grasped both her wrists in one giant fist above her head, preventing her from any movement.

"I'm going to punish you for lying to me and pretending to be a lad and for that foul tongue of yours. Where did a lassie learn such language?"

"You can't punish me, you beast, you don't even know me. Let me go, or I'll kill you," Sorcha spat at the horrible man.

"Threats, is it? I can and will punish you, since you have no guardian you can tell me of, and you obviously need one," Edward said as he began to deliver ten hard swats to her backside.

Sorcha screamed, protesting as her bottom began to burn with a heat she didn't know possible. Tears flooded her eyes that she refused to shed. The assault on her backside continued with steady, hard smacks. Never in her life had she been treated this way. She struggled to break free, but his grip was solid, and she didn't have the physical strength to fight him.

By the time he righted her to a standing position, the tears she tried to hold at bay came flooding down her face.

"How dare you." Hearing the quiver in her voice, she took a deep breath to refocus her resolve.

Edward pulled her onto his lap, wiping her face with a cloth he found in his sporran. She tried to push his hand away when the tattered linen touched her cheek, only he stopped her by grasping her hand and holding it to his chest. The more she squirmed, the more her bottom burned from rubbing the wool of his kilt, the thin breeks she wore offering little protection. His sudden change in demeanor confused and disarmed her—one minute, he was spanking her, the next, he was trying to provide her comfort.

"Stop wriggling," he commanded. "Or next time I spank you, it will be on the bare."

She immediately stilled as she felt his shaft grow hard beneath his kilt, pressing against her hip. They both felt it. However, he seemed nonplussed by it, pulling her in closer. He enjoyed this, and the knowledge made her face burn red with embarrassment. Imagining how she would look draped over his knee with her breeches around her ankles and her naked reddened bottom in the air, her sex flooded with her arousal, soaking the fabric of her pants. A dark stain spread at the apex of her secret flower. He saw it, running his hand between her legs. A moan escaped her lips before she could stop it, and she slammed her thighs shut.

"I see you dinna mind your punishment all that much," he said, holding her in place. "Now tell me where your guardian is?"

Taking in a shaky breath, she let it out slowly, not understanding her body's reaction to the situation. Even while she sat there, humiliated and embarrassed, her body responded. This stranger just spanked her; she should be fighting back, but the throbbing deep inside her womanhood took over her rational mind. She needed to get a grip and come to her senses.

"I told you, I don't have a guardian." Sorcha resisted the urge to lean her head against his chest, suddenly exhausted. She was tired

of traveling, tired of the truth that haunted her, and tired of having to be in control all the time.

"So, you're an orphan, then?" He pushed a tendril of hair that had come loose from her braid behind her ear.

"Yes, you could say I'm an orphan." Saying those words helped pull her from the dream-like state she was in, mustering some courage in her. She pushed herself off his lap.

"Where did you learn to ride a horse and hunt the way you do?" He looked into her eyes, searching for some answers, but she gave none. "I'm sorry, had I ken you were a lass, I wouldn't have pushed you so hard these past few days."

"It's none of your business, and I don't care if you beat me again, I won't answer you. I only want to get to Castle Arrochar. Do you think we will reach it today?" she said, standing up with her hands on her hips.

"Aye, we will be there before sundown."

Sorcha's stomach clenched. It was happening; she was going to meet the father who had so easily given her up.