

THE SCOT CORSAIR



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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.

CHAPTER 1



16TH FEBRUARY 1817, EDINBURGH

With infinitesimal care, Elspeth eased the door of her bedchamber shut behind her. Only when the handle rotated silently into place did she let go of her breath, and turn to face the man she had just led through the dark and sleeping house.

She was flushed with excitement, fear and a sense of her own daring, her heart hammering and her breath short and dizzy.

"Your maid doesn't wait up for you?" muttered Sir Duncan Buccleuch. He kept hold of the hand she had offered him to guide him up the three flights of stairs to her top-floor apartments, but he was making no other attempt to come closer. No move, as yet, to renew the impassioned kisses they had shared in a darkened parlour in Mrs. Hamilton's house; a single door away from the lights and laughter of the company at her fashionable soiree.

He had pressed her hard against walls with the texture of velvet and devoured her mouth with his, while his hands ran along her thigh and over her bosom and down her back to cup and squeeze

her nether cheeks through the thin muslin of her evening gown. It was only when he teased aside her lace and pulled down one side of her neckline to pop one soft white breast free to the air, and took it gently into his mouth, that she took fright.

Not that she had thrown him off. Instead, she froze in place, and said, "Sir Duncan—we must not—"

He kept his mouth exactly where it was and looked an enquiry and entreaty up at her with his dark, glittering eyes. Gently, the tip of his tongue flicked against her nipple.

"Or not—not here," she gasped. "Anyone could open that door at any time."

He released her breast and rose up to look her directly in the eye, holding her very close, the tip of his nose touching hers. "Then where," he murmured, "Do you suggest?"

And so it had been her idea that he should come back with her to the town house on Charlotte Square, although she was still not sure how that had come about. The sheer recklessness of the adventure thrilled her almost as much as the taste of his brandy-flavoured, smoky lips.

He could not, of course, accompany her in her carriage; but Charlotte Square was only a few minutes' walk away from Mrs. Hamilton's house in Moray Place, so his following on foot created no difficulties. More of a problem was getting him into the house unseen. Her sister Henrietta, who was supposed to be her chaperone while she was in town, had been called away unexpectedly because her new husband had had an accident at their country estate.

This was the only reason why Elspeth had found herself attending Mrs. Hamilton's soiree on her own. She had no other female companion to hand, as Henrietta had intended to stay with her in town until the end of March at least. Henrietta's husband, the Earl of Leith, had stayed in the country to hunt for a few days longer. News of a fall had reached them by special messenger as

they breakfasted that very morning, and Henrietta had flown into an alarm and set off for Keldoun House within the hour. Elspeth had been left alone where she sat, staring forlornly at her coffee and kippered herrings.

Henrietta was a goose. Lord Leith, her esteemed and recently acquired brother-in-law, had the co-ordination of a drunken baboon and Elspeth was surprised that he knew how to seat a horse while it stood in the stable-yard, never mind stay on one when it galloped off in pursuit of a fox. Why should Henrietta be alarmed if he took a tumble? He must be used to it, since he would persist in hunting. Elspeth thought that her sister was using the opportunity to create drama, to play the part of a devoted, easily alarmed wife, trying to hang on to some of the distinction that had come her way when she had been a bride, only five months before. As the not especially pretty or accomplished ninth child in a family of ten—even if that family belonged to the Marquess of Crieff—distinction had scarcely ever come Henrietta's way before. A very respectable marriage to a man of suitable rank, at twenty-five—an age when she must just have been starting to worry that no such nobleman would ever deign to notice unremarkable Lady Henrietta Dunwoodie—had shone the bright light of glory on her, even if her husband was in Elspeth's opinion as coarse and dull a fellow as ever disgraced a coronet.

And she, Elspeth, was due to be shut up with the lately-weds in Keldoun House over the summer, where she would see nobody. Or nobody she cared about, at any rate. She had no acquaintance in the neighbourhood of Keldoun, which was on the east coast of Fife and where she had never been in her life. It was sufficiently far enough away from Edinburgh to be remote from town, and it was nowhere near Dunwoodie House, her own family's seat in Aberdeenshire. Dunwoodie was hardly a pleasure resort either, but at least she had friends nearby. At least it was home.

It was so frustrating to be made to go and sit about in the

country for weeks at a time. Elspeth had no taste for gardening, hated walking and had no interest in the beauties of nature, so even in fine weather the country held no attractions for her at all. She liked pavements and people, carriages and candelabras, gowns and gaiety.

Unfortunately, after *the incident* in London during her debutante season, nobody was prepared to leave her to her own devices. Elspeth had thought her brother might eventually forget, but the fact that she had only been allowed to spend a few weeks in Edinburgh with Henrietta in oppressive attendance told her that he still had her misconduct very much in mind.

That morning, it had looked like Henrietta's parade of uxorial devotion was going to deprive Elspeth of one evening of pleasure at any rate, and probably many more. There was nothing special about that evening's engagement, it was merely a soiree at the house of Mrs. Thomas Hamilton, wife of a prominent Edinburgh physician and authoress of a couple of volumes of fashionable poetry, but the loss even of a single night's amusement made her wretched. With the prospect of a summer of boredom in deepest Fife before her, she hated her sister for leaving her so abruptly without a chaperone.

She told Henrietta as much, or something like it.

"I might have thought, Elspeth," said her sister, as she was going out the door, "that you might at least pretend to express some concern for your poor brother."

And Elspeth realised afterwards that she was not entirely sure whether the brother to be pitied was the un-horsed Lord Leith, or her own actual eldest brother, James.

At any rate, Elspeth had moped for the rest of the morning until it occurred to her that there was no reason why she should not go to the soiree alone. She was acquainted with Mrs. Hamilton, so where was the impropriety in it? She would think nothing of calling upon her alone in the morning, so why should she not go to

her house on her own a few hours later? Besides, there was nobody to stop her. She and Henrietta had been alone together in the Charlotte Square townhouse, and now she was left as its sole mistress.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Leslie, nevertheless did her best to interfere. "It's no right, ma'am, young ladies gaein gallivanting about the toon a' alone."

"I'm not gallivanting about the town, I am going three streets away to the house of a friend. And the carriage is taking me there. What possible harm is there in that?"

Mrs. Leslie pursed her lips and muttered something, turning away.

"What is it?" Elspeth caught hold of the housekeeper's sleeve. "Speak out loud, and for heaven's sake, speak clearly. Speak the King's English."

The housekeeper turned a stony gaze upon her young mistress. "I said, my lady, that his lordship would not be happy to hear about it."

"I suggest you don't tell him about it, then he will be spared unhappiness."

Mrs. Leslie shook her head, but said nothing more.

Elspeth doubted she would trouble so great a man as her brother, far away as he was in all the stately splendour of Dunwoodie House, with so trivial an infraction as this. She prepared with a light heart, and had really looked forward to nothing more than an evening spent in lively company and conversation, for Mrs. Hamilton was known for inviting literary oddities to entertain her usual set.

There had been no poets or lady novelists on display that evening, but there had been the notorious Sir Duncan Buccleuch.

"NOW THEN, WHAT HAVE WE HERE..." He traced a hand over her hip and around to where the centre of her being was hidden beneath

folds of muslin gown and cotton petticoats. His fingers pressed and stroked over the fabric and she parted her legs involuntarily as she stood there. How could he know so very precisely where her secret place was?

"Let's get more comfortable," he murmured, and manoeuvred her towards the bed.

The bed was high and wide, a smart modern brass frame that, like everything else in the townhouse, was new. The counterpane was embroidered satin, soft and shiny and cool under her skin as she let him lower her onto it. He put aside his hat and then, still standing by the side of the bed, gently eased her onto her back.

She caught her breath. She was alone in her bedroom, lying on her bed, looking up at a man.

He was not even handsome, Sir Duncan Buccleuch. He had sharp features, and a pale sallow complexion, and deep black eyes. The only light in the room was cast by a single bedside candle and the dying embers of the fire, so his face was planed by shadows and his eyes glittered darkly.

For several long moments, he just gazed down at her. "Lady Elspeth Dunwoodie," he said eventually. "Now just why have you not been plucked like a ripe plum already, all luscious beauty that you are?"

"How do you know I have not, sir?"

"Oh... I can tell." He ran the back of his hand from her bosom to her waist, and then lower... lower. Again, his knuckles pressed between her legs, and she burned with a formless longing that was at once exhilarating and maddening. His touch kindled a fire she scarcely knew how to quench. "And I can tell what you want," he continued in a low voice.

She arched her back. His hand was inside her skirts, travelling up the silky smoothness of her calf, over her knee, up to the top of her stocking, and then beyond. Lingering teasingly on the softness of her inner thigh, and finally, finally touching her where she was hot and swollen and damp.

She gasped. She had gradually let her legs fall open, parted and welcoming.

"Aye," he said, his lips against her ear. "I can tell very well what you want."

"Yes!" It came out short and breathy, for he had begun to stroke the place that was now the centre of her being.

"Bad idea though."

"Wh-what?"

"Your father is the Marquess of Crieff."

"I know, sir, who my father is." She was trying for dignity, but his fingers continued to caress her rhythmically and she could hardly keep her thoughts together. She spread her legs still wider, her fists clenching in her skirts and pulling them convulsively up to her waist. Now she could feel the chill of the cooling air on her burning centre.

"Ahhh." It was an appreciative moan at the sight. With a quick motion he climbed up onto the bed himself.

"Don't stop that, Sir Duncan!"

He silenced her with a lingering kiss, laying full on top of her.

She embraced him with her thighs, feeling the roughness of the fabric of his breeches against where she burned and throbbed.

"God, you're keen," he breathed. "But as I said, bad idea. You'll be wanting a suitable husband and I certainly am not that."

"I do not want a suitable husband. Or rather, I do not want any husband at all."

"So you might say, sauceboat, but you can be sure that your father will want it for you."

"He may want it all he likes. What matters to me is what I want."

"Is it indeed!"

"Aye, sir. And you were bold enough to tell me that you knew what that was..."

He gazed at her, propped up on his elbows, for a full moment. Then he laughed. "Saucy minx. I have never known a maid like you, Lady Elspeth."

"Have you known many maids, sir?"

"Not for long."

He shrugged off his tailcoat and with a single tug, pulled off his necktie. His dress shirt fell open, revealing a glimpse of dark curls below.

Elspeth's heart was pounding, with excitement and terror both. It had seemed important to win the argument, and now she had done so, and now she was really going to do it. Without thinking, she had closed her legs and smoothed her skirts back down, as if backing away tentatively from the brink.

But it seemed he would be merciless now. With a quirk of a smile tugging at the edge of his mouth he put a hand on either knee and eased them gently apart once more; then, to her astonishment and confusion, he dipped his head below her skirts.

A moment later came the extraordinary sensation of his mouth kissing her between her legs, his tongue teasing the hot, stiff focus of her longing. It drew a gasp of surprise from her, then a groan of delight.

"Lady Elspeth?"

The voice was quiet and unemotional in tone, but Elspeth screamed. She scrambled up the bed, frantically pulling her skirts back down over her knees. Whereas her heart had been beating fast before, it was now racing so hard that she thought she would faint.

The short solid figure of Mrs. Leslie was framed in the bedroom doorway, holding a candle. She stood quite still, but the light in her hand quivered.

With one smooth move, Sir Duncan slid off the bed and retrieved his hat.

"How dare you come into my room without knocking first!" Elspeth cried. Anger was all she could find. She was shaking, refusing to think, refusing to comprehend the consequences of this discovery.

"I did knock, my lady. You didnae reply."

Sir Duncan was picking his coat off the floor.

"I will bid you good night, your ladyship."

He bowed, and by walking boldly towards the door, obliged the frozen-faced Mrs. Leslie to stand aside to let him pass.

Elsbeth was left crouching alone on the bed, clutching her skirts uselessly to her ankles, staring in terror into the housekeeper's remorseless, implacable eyes.