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Sample Chapter of *The Gardener’s Wife*
Chapter 1

Kent, England, 1777

Susan paused on the landing and looked out at a sight that always arrested her soul. Her father’s pleasure garden lay before her with its green fields, hedgerows, flower gardens, pathways, shrubberies, and even a wilderness. Her heart was aching with an overwhelming desire to wander there and discover all its secrets when her father came up the stairs still in his nightgown.

“You are up early, my dear,” he said.

She caught a whiff of his liquoured breath. “’Tis the best time to take a walk,” she said.

He grunted and continued up the stairs.

“Father,” she said, stopping him on the first step.

He turned around. “What?”

“May I have a corner of the garden to plant my favourite flowers?”

He frowned. “Why do you want that?” He took a step back down to her level. She held her breath as he whispered in her ear: “Don’t get too attached to the garden, my dear.” Then he stepped away from her and swung his arm in a wide arc. “All of this,” he said dramatically, “will never be yours.”

Susan moved to avoid his arm.

“I’m sorry, my dear. Women cannot inherit property, and God has not seen fit to bless me with a son.”

“All I asked for was a corner of the garden, Papa.”

“Ask the new gardener, Mr. Dean. Perhaps he will plant a few flowers for you somewhere.”

“I wanted to plant them myself.”

Her father chuckled. “What, and get your pretty hands all dirty! Don’t be ridiculous!”

He continued chuckling to himself as he went up the stairs.

Susan’s silk gown rustled softly as she resumed her descent of the stairs, placing each foot gingerly on a riser as she was unused to wearing high-heeled shoes. It irked her that she could not run and play as she used to. The only compensation for being sixteen was that she no longer had a governess to confine her to the study and prevent her from escaping into the garden.

In the parlour, the butler was waiting at the sideboard to serve her breakfast. Susan accepted a slice of bread and butter and a cup of chocolate, but refused more substantial fare. She wanted to be in the garden before her mother arose, for then her time would no longer be her own. She quickly swallowed the last dregs of chocolate and called her maid Mary.

“May I have my mantelet and outdoor hat?” she asked.

“Yes, madam.” Mary ran off to fetch the required items.
“I hope you are not intending to go out in such weather,” the butler addressed her sternly.

“Why? What of the weather? If we waited for the sun in this country, we should never leave the house.”

The butler gave her a disapproving look, but only said, “Yes, madam.”

At the great hall door, Susan removed her tiny lace cap and handed it to Mary before putting on a broad-brimmed straw bonnet and the lace mantelet that covered the shoulders. “I shall take a turn in the garden, Mary. Call me when my mother is risen.”

“Yes, madam.” Her maid curtsied and nodded as Susan opened the door and stepped out into the fresh spring morning.

The rain had not yet arrived but the dew had wetted the grass of the estate lawn. She knew it was the time of day when the lawn was scythed, and she enjoyed watching the young garden worker do the mowing. It gave her a vicarious feeling of activity and industry that was lacking in her own too sedentary life. Susan turned into the serpentine walk of gravel that wound around the grass field of the estate and through scattered clumps of flowering shrubs. Here, she glimpsed silver droplets of moisture shining on the crimson petals of peonies. The sweet perfume of rose and syringa lingered in the damp air as she brushed by the branches. The hedgerow was alive with the sound of robins’ song. Susan felt sorry for the people of London who had to pay a shilling for the privilege of touring a garden the like of which she could enjoy every day.

A turn in the path revealed a rectangle of lawn bordered by flower beds. At the far end of the lawn Susan espied a strange man working with a scythe to mow the wet grass. She assumed it must be the new gardener her father had mentioned.

As she walked towards him to ask him about having her own border, she noticed the gardener’s tight hose revealing his muscular calves and his curly black hair peeking from under his tricorne cocked hat. He must have heard the rustle of her gown as she approached because he turned in her direction. Susan was unprepared for the force of his clear blue eyes that sparkled when his face broke into a broad, soul-melting smile. While she was attempting to compose herself to speak to him, she saw the flesh of his upper chest as his coat hung open and his waistcoat and shirt were unbuttoned at the top. He saw the direction of her eyes and reached to close his shirt with his free hand. Then he glanced at the same part of Susan’s anatomy. The fashion of women’s gowns was not so modest and her creamy white skin and deep dark cleavage were visible. The gardener blushed, turned away, and carefully placed his scythe against a tree. Then he turned toward her again and said, “Good morning, Miss Kirke.”

His rolling Scottish lilt surprised her and made her own name sound foreign to her. “Good morning, Mr….” She hesitated, embarrassed. “I’m sorry. I’m afraid I don’t know your name, sir.”

“It’s Dean. John Dean.”

“Good morning, Mr. Dean. I’m surprised to find you doing the mowing yourself. Doesn’t Andrew usually scythe here?”

“That he does, madam. Unfortunately, his mother is ill and he has gone to be at her bedside, so we are short one pair of hands for a time. I am obliged to take up the slack.”

Susan tried to remember what her father had said about Dean at the time he had been hired. He had bragged that his new gardener was only twenty years old. She knew there were twelve employees under his direction, and she was impressed with how much he
had managed to accomplish at such a young age. In comparison, her greatest accomplishment was to take a walk in the garden every morning. She did not know why she felt this enormous restlessness, this longing to do more with her life than be an ornament in her parents' lives. Sometimes she felt like a flower that no one else would ever see.

“I have a question to ask you. Do you think could take a moment from your labour and sit with me in the bower here?” Susan walked to the stone benches that formed a circle around a sundial close by. Before she could sit down, Dean spread his coat on the wet seat.

“Why, thank you, sir. You are most considerate.”
He blushed and continued standing.
“No, please. I must insist you sit and hear my proposal.”

Appearing reluctant, Dean sat on the bench opposite her. They looked at each other for an uncomfortable moment. “What is your question, madam? Or is it a proposal?”

“I would like to have a corner of the garden to plant some of my own favourite flowers.”
The gardener listened earnestly. “And does your father approve of your project?”
“Yes. He told me to ask you.”

“I can see no objection to it. Let me consider the best place for your garden. Perhaps if you tell me which flowers you would like to plant, it will give me an idea of the best location for them.”

Susan was embarrassed. She had envisioned a clump of sweet-smelling pink, purple, and white blooms cascading over each other, but now her idea seemed childish. “I don’t know the names of flowers, I am afraid.”

“Dinna fash. Let us walk about. You can point out which flowers you like and I shall name them for you.”
“What does that mean, ‘dinna fash’?”
“Dinna worry,” he said.
“Oh.” She got up and he picked up his overcoat and offered it to her. She shook her head.
“Are you sure, madam? It is cool this morning, and I am afraid you might catch a chill.”

“Don’t be concerned for me. I have a strong constitution.”

As they strolled, Susan searched the beds for the colours she loved the most in the garden and found one of them in a group of flowers along the path rising towards the house.
“What are those little violet flowers?” she asked.
He chuckled.
“Why do you laugh, sir?”
“Forgive me, madam, but those are violets of course. Surely you know that flower?”
Susan blushed. “I have, of course, often observed it. I am not ignorant of its existence, only its name.”
“I dinna wish to insult you, but not knowing the name of something is, by definition, ignorance.”

Susan stopped short. This was the second time today she had been belittled by a man, and she would not tolerate it from a servant. “Ignorance, then, is only a lack of education
and not the fault of the person accused of it, especially where women are concerned. We
are not to blame for our ignorance. Rather than laugh at me, you should teach me so that I
might know the names of the flowers around me and not be unjustly accused of
ignorance.”

He looked chastened. “I beg your pardon, madam. I shall hereafter endeavour to be
your tutor in these matters.”

They continued walking and Dean taught her the names of the flowers she liked. “I
shall order the seeds for you and find a good location, madam. Now forgive me, I maun
get back to work.”

She could feel his impatience, but she wanted to hold his company for just a little
while to get better acquainted with him. The morning seemed to stretch dull and empty
before her without his company. “I shall walk with you back to the lawn where you were
mowing if you don’t mind, sir.”

“If you wish,” he replied.

As they walked in awkward silence, she tried to think of a question to ask him. “What
do you do when you are not working?”

“I read.”

His answer surprised her. “You read? I didn’t think servants knew how to read.” She
could not recall ever seeing any of the house servants engaged in that pastime.

“Well, ’tis the way in Scotland, you see, to educate every child of every class. Unless
each child can read the Bible for himself, his salvation is not assured.”

He sounded like a dissenter, a kind of religious fanatic. She had often heard her father
speak scornfully of the Scots as Presbyterians. “Is that a Presbyterian notion?” she asked.

“That it is.”

“And what do you read, besides the Bible, of course?”

“Well, I will admit to you—if you promise not to tell a soul—that my Bible is The
Compleat Gardener.”

“Even in your leisure, sir?”

“It is my passion, aye. Do you read, Miss Kirke?”

“Why, of course! I am not such a dullard as you might think. I am presently reading
The Fashionable Lover by Mr. Cumberland.”

“A novel! Does your father approve of such reading material? Surely your time would
be better spent in reading sermons.”

“You surprise me, sir. I thought I was speaking with my gardener and not my
governess.”

“Your governess sounds like a sensible woman to me. Perhaps you should heed her.”

“Fortunately, she is no longer in my father’s employ, and that should serve as a
warning to you. I shall not abide dull boring sermons on any other day but Sunday when I
must.”

“Perhaps you will permit me to lend you the collected sermons of John Knox. You
will not find them dull, I assure you.”

“Oh my goodness, sir. If my parents found me reading the sermons of a Presbyterian
preacher, I am quite sure they would turn me out! So you will perhaps give me a
summation of his text, for I dare not bring such a book into my parents’ house.”
“I shall do my best, though I am afraid you might find some of his ideas revolutionary. By way of example, Mr. Knox believes that all men are equal in the sight of God and none is greater or lesser than another. Would you not agree with that?”

“Agree to the fact that his ideas are revolutionary?” She smiled at him, a brilliant teasing smile. “Yes, indeed, I would agree.”

Dean looked down as if he were uncomfortable with the turn in the conversation. “Well, Miss Kirke. It has been most pleasant chatting with you this morning, but here we are at my scythe. I really must be about my work now.” He tipped his hat to her and bowed discreetly. “Good day to you.” He picked up his scythe and continued the mowing that her presence had interrupted.

Susan felt chastised by his abrupt leave-taking. He was such a serious man compared to her father and her light-hearted banter did not seem to accord with his manner. She stood for a while and watched him waving the heavy scythe back and forth across the grass, a dark patch of perspiration growing on the back of his waistcoat. No, he was not at all like her father. He was young and strong, and her father, a weak old man with a red nose from too much drink, was gouty, flabby, and most disagreeable to look at.

Mary was coming down the path at the other end of the rectangle. Her mother must be up now, and her day’s freedom was at an end. She went halfway to meet her maid and walk back to the house with her.
Chapter 2

As she entered her mother’s sitting room, Susan saw the back of the butler standing in front of her mother’s chair. Then she heard her mother’s imperious voice: “That will be all, Sutton.” As the butler nodded and turned towards the door, she saw the dismissive wave of her mother’s hand. He cast a peripheral glance at Susan as he passed her on his way out. As usual, his impertinence chilled her.

“Sutton tells me you have been out walking in the garden again this morning, Susan.” Her mother looked her over.

“Oh does he?” She did not see what business it was of his what she did with her time.

Her mother’s eyes rested on her shoes. “And walking in the wet grass, I see. Look at your shoes and hem. They are in a disgraceful condition. Go and change your clothes immediately, and then come back here when you are decent and we shall do some needlepoint.”

“Needlepoint again, Mother! Is there not another way we could fill our time together?” “Susan.” Her mother spoke sternly. “If only you would learn to act like a young lady instead of a tomboy! What will the Fitzwilliams think of you when they visit in a few weeks?”

This was the first that Susan had heard of the visit. Her interest was piqued. Could it be that she might have someone of interest to pass her days with? “Who are the Fitzwilliams, and why might they be visiting?” she asked.

“They are my cousins, Mr. Herbert Fitzwilliam, his wife, daughter, and son. Your father met with them when he was in London last week and invited the family to visit our garden. Before the end of the London season, your father hopes that our garden will be the talk of the town, and we may have many more such visitors.” Her mother preened herself as if the garden was her personal accomplishment, and in a small way it was. She had pushed her father to hire the great Capability Brown to design the garden so that it would be an attraction on the London circuit.

“Then what does it signify what they think of me, if they are only coming to visit the garden?”

“Consider what they might find in the garden, Susan. Perhaps a beautiful bloom fair enough for their young son, Herbert.”

So her parents were seeking a husband for her! Susan was uncertain how to respond to this unexpected news. “I do not think I am ready for marriage yet, madam.”

“Don’t worry. It is not a fait-accompli. You are only going to meet the gentleman, the first, perhaps, of many suitors. However, young Fitzwilliam is an excellent prospect; he is rich and, what is more, a member of the family.”

Susan opened her mouth to protest, but then reconsidered. She could hardly continue to argue with her mother, who was describing a perfect scenario. “I shall just go and fetch my needlework, Mama.” With that, she went to change her clothes as slowly as she possibly could, while she contemplated the bliss of living forever on her father’s estate and taking long walks in the garden with her husband Fitzwilliam, whose face in her daydream looked suspiciously like the gardener’s.
Susan walked through her dressing room and into her bedchamber, tossing her mantelet across the bed her maid had just finished arranging.

“Mary, can you imagine? My mother is chastising me for going out walking! It’s the only activity I truly love to do. And she has that horrid butler spying on me as well.”

Mary simply nodded as she picked up Susan’s mantelet and folded it carefully.

“Did you need me, madam?”

“I have soiled my shoes and gown and Mother insists that I change.”

“What would you like to wear then?”

“Nothing at all.”

Mary raised an eyebrow.

“No, I mean it is simply too much! My mother attempts to induce me to act like a lady so that she can marry me off to some distant relative or other in order to send me away somewhere so she will have the estate all to herself. I will not be removed from the garden, Mary. I intend to stay right here, forever.”

“Yes, madam. Would you like to choose a gown to wear now?” she asked patiently.

“They are all one and the same to me.” Susan dropped herself in her chair. Then she leaned forward excitedly. “I know. Fetch me the gown that is the colour of a lilac.” She named a flower she had just learned. “I would as soon attract a honeybee as a man.”

As Mary helped her mistress into the sleeves of the gown, Susan continued her harangue. “You know, Mary. Sometimes I truly envy you.” Mary looked up from the innumerable hooks and eyes she was attaching and Susan noticed her astonished face.

“Don’t look askance at me like that. I really do. I envy you your freedom.”

“I work a lot harder than you are accustomed to, madam.”

“Oh, I know that, but at least your work has a point to it. You do not spend your days stitching useless pieces of cloth, of which there are already more than enough in this world. And then once you have done your work, well, you can do whatever you like.”

“But I am usually too tired to do anything else, madam.”

“And you can marry for love, can you not? Almost anyone your heart could wish. You are not required to choose from a group of fat, lazy gentlemen, are you?”

“I should like to wear fancy gowns and go out in society,” Mary suggested somewhat plaintively.

“I wish with all my heart that we could trade places then, Mary.”

“Come now. Your mother is waiting for you in the sitting room.”

“I think I shall take my novel. Can you fetch it for me on the bedside table? Oh, I cannot tell you how bored I am!”
Chapter 3

The next morning, Dean was in the greenhouse comparing the list of Miss Kirke’s favourite flowers with the young plants he had grown from seed. Miss Kirke struck him as shallow and spoiled, reading novels, ruining her silk shoes in the wet grass, and passing time with simple garden workers like Andrew. It surprised him that she even knew his name! He should not have conversed so openly with her. It was foolish of him to have made that comment to her about the equality of man. If Miss Kirke repeated it to her father, it might prove an embarrassment to him. In future he would endeavour be more guarded in his conversations with her.

Consulting her list, he chose the hardiest seedlings that were ready to be transplanted in the garden now that spring was well-established. He placed them on a tray and stepped outside. There she was a little way up the path, approaching a deer at the edge of the wilderness garden. Dean stood transfixed for a moment watching her. He had forgotten how lovely she looked—how her lovely chestnut locks escaped the pins confining them and curled about her slender white neck, how the dramatic billows of her gown accentuated her tiny waist so that she reminded him of a leggy seedling that could be broken by the buffeting of nature, how her appearance stirred in him the same curious desire to care and protect that his plants evoked.

Her hand slowly stretched out to touch the forest creature, and the deer bolted at the rustle of her gown, galloping along the hedgerow and leaping gracefully over the ha-ha that delineated the border of the estate.

Susan stamped her foot and cried, “Damn.”

Dean could not help but laugh out loud at the incongruity of this angelic vision, cursing.

She turned around quickly and gave him a scathing look.

“Good job, madam,” he said. “I dinna think I have ever seen anyone approach a wild creature so closely before. But they are nae pets, you know. You canna get them to eat from your hands like a dog.”

Susan smiled. “I suppose not. But I should like to have a pet. The only animals we have at the house are father’s foxhounds, and he will not abide them being treated as pets. At least not by anyone else but himself or the groom responsible for their care.”

“What were you doing in the greenhouse, Mr. Dean?”

“Well, I was looking for the plants you had requested when I was distracted by the bewitching sight of a maiden and a deer.”

“Did you decide where we should plant them?”

“I thought we should place them near the side of the house, so you will not have far to walk to enjoy them.”
“That is not a consideration. I enjoy a good walk. How about here?” She indicated a shrubbery under a shade tree.

“These plants will not tolerate the lack of sunlight here,” he responded.

“Then they are just like me, for I cannot abide the lack of sunlight.”

“‘Tis a shame that you live in such a climate as this.”

“I do so agree. What I would not give to be transplanted with the garden to India or some such place.”

“How about America? Should you like to be transplanted there?”

“I believe that I would, at least in the more southern lands. I have heard good things spoken of the Carolinas.”

She seemed to be genuinely interested in the garden, so he could not resist showing her more. “Perhaps you would like to see the exotics, madam. I could show you some plants that come from the Carolinas.”

“Nothing would give me more pleasure, sir.” He carried the tray of seedlings and led her along the garden path back in the direction of the great house.

They came to a wall at the north end of the house where there was a border garden.

“Here we are now.”

A few ordinary-looking plants were barely visible under a blanket of dried ferns.

“Why are they covered over so that they cannot be seen?” she asked.

“The tender young plants need to be protected in the winter. They are not used to the frosts we have here in England.”

“But it is spring. Surely you can take off the ferns now.”

“Aye. I have begun to uncover them gradually. Do you remark the soil, madam? I have planted them in a rich black turf mixed with some sand. They seem to thrive best in this.” He surveyed the border proudly. “Mark ye that it is a north-facing wall protecting the plants from the hottest sun of the midday.”

“Do the exotics not like the heat, then?”

“A few hours of sunlight in the morning and evening is what they like best, ye ken.”

“Which are the ones that come from Carolina?” Susan asked.

He bent down and began removing some of the ferns from a group of plants. “These are called \textit{Amorpha fruticosa}. They have lovely purple flower spikes dusted with orange when they are in bloom.” He looked at them tenderly.

“I have never studied Latin, sir. What is their English name?”

He hesitated, but she had shown no modesty with regard to language, so he continued. “They are called Bastard Indigos.” In spite of himself he felt his face redden, and Susan responded with a giggle.

“What are some of the other flowers called?” she asked. “In English, please.”

“There are lady’s slippers and side-saddle flowers, some leatherwood, and the Mayflower.”

“What lovely names! Why do you give them Latin names as if you were some kind of scholar?”

Dean blushed again. He felt for the first time that she was calling attention to his menial position. “Pardon my impertinence, madam.”

Susan seemed a little embarrassed and quickly changed the subject. “Well, there seems to be a great deal of work that you must do to keep exotic plants alive in our cold, damp climate.”
“’Tis true that they must be treated with special care and attention, but they reward one with such beauty and originality when they survive.”

“Tell me, sir. Will the rebellion in the Americas make it more difficult for you to obtain these exotic plants?”

She surprised him again with her intelligent questions. Perhaps he had been too hasty in his earlier assessment of her character. “Aye, some of them. You are a most perceptive young lady! If your father knew how bright you are, he would dismiss me and hire you in my place.”

“You flatter me too much. I am sure you must be mocking me.”

“Not a bit of it. I am quite in earnest, I assure you.”

Her face glowed in response to his praise; he wanted to continue conversing with her so that he could watch the animation that his words evoked. “There are plants here from other countries as well. There are Chinese plants and alpines and shrubs from the Falkland Islands…”

“And what about plants that come from Scotland?” she asked, her head cocked like a bright bird.

“Och. Never you mind, lassie.” He laid on his thickest Scottish burr for her amusement. “Scots will grow anywhere. They are of very hardy stock indeed.”

They were both laughing when the maid arrived and announced that Susan’s mother had risen.

“Before you go, madam, let me show you where I shall plant your flowers.” He led them around to the eastern wall of the house. “Here,” he said.

“Thank you, sir, but just leave them. I wanted to plant them myself,” she said.

He had not expected such an unusual suggestion. “But you havena the equipment you will need. Do you hae gloves?”

“I’m not afraid to soil my hands.”

“Madam, I shall turn the soil with my spade and then I shall leave a pair of gardening gloves and a trowel for you to use. You must plant them as soon as you are able.”

Susan nodded and then left with Mary.

For the rest of the morning as he dug her border, he could not stop thinking of her slender figure walking away from him along the garden path.
Chapter 4

Susan was more impatient than usual to get out in the garden the next day, yet she took great care to choose her most modest gown and her firmest walking shoes. She glanced at the parlour on her way to the front door. She did not want to have to face that despicable butler Sutton and suffer his critical and demeaning glare. Why did it matter in the least what he thought of her? The sun was out this morning and the garden was basking in its radiant light. The reds, yellows and oranges of freshly opening blossoms were brilliant against the green foliage.

Susan walked to the side of the house that held her border and saw where Dean had turned the soil for her. There was the tray of seedlings, a trowel, and a pair of gardening gloves as he had promised. She put on the gloves. They were much too big for her tiny hands and she did not know how she would manage to manipulate the trowel wearing them. She crouched down and her billowing skirts formed a barrier that kept her from reaching any of the objects she needed to begin her work. Trying to tuck her skirts under her knees, she picked up the trowel and began digging a hole. She took one of the seedlings, dumped it out of its pot, and realized she had not dug the hole deep enough. As she bent forward, a stray lock of hair fell into her face and she tried to brush it away with the over-sized gardening gloves. As soon as she bent over to continue digging, the stray hair fell across her face again, and she tried to blow it away. Trying to ignore the annoying strand, she dug the hole deeper and plopped in the plant. It immediately leaned to one side. Her legs were beginning to ache from their unaccustomed position, and she stood up and sighed. She took off her gardening gloves, dropped them with the trowel, and refastened her unruly hair. Now she would need to put more dirt in the hole so that the seedling would stand up straight. She replaced her gloves, crouched down again, and readjusted her gown. Then picking up the trowel, she dug some dirt, and scooped it into the hole. She patted it firmly and admired the plant. Then she looked at the tray of seedlings still to be planted and groaned. She could not hold herself up on her haunches anymore and sat down on the dewy grass.

Dean appeared at that moment. Susan felt sure he must have been watching from somewhere. It was humiliating, but she knew she would have to admit defeat.

“Good morning,” he said, tipping his hat. “May I help you up, madam?”

She accepted and he lifted her from the ground. He was so close she could smell his minty breath.

He smiled at her. “You have a streak of dirt across your forehead,” he said.

Susan wiped it with the gardening gloves.

“No, stop. That is only making it worse.” He laughed.

She blushed.

“Here. Let me wipe it off.” He took a handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and gently cleaned the dirt from her forehead.

Her heart was beating noisily in her ears. When he had finished, she said, “I think you have been well amused this morning watching me plant my flowers.”

“No, not at all. I was just around the other side of the house looking after the exotics.”

“Come, Mr. Dean. You know it is a sin to tell a lie.”

He blushed. “Did you want to finish planting these?”
“Yes, yes, of course.”
“If you like, we could leave them to Andrew. He is back from visiting his mother.”
“Oh.” It was a kind of compromise. “Yes,” she said. “That is a good idea.” She dropped her gardening gloves. “Now, you must show me what you were doing with the exotics.” She started walking along the path, and he followed.
Susan saw that he had removed the dried ferns from the bed. “I see the sunshine has made you optimistic about their chances,” she said.
Aye, spring has arrived at last.” He smiled again.
She did not want him to leave her. “I should like to continue my gardening education this morning,” she said.
“Once the flowers are all planted, there is naught to do but give them a wee bit of water now and then.”
“Yes, of course, but what I mean is I would like you to continue showing me the garden and teaching me the names of flowers.”
“Oh,” he said. “Shall we start with the wilderness?”
Susan nodded. She looked forward to seeing that familiar part of the garden through his discerning eyes. She followed him along the gravel path, past the greenhouse, beyond the shrubbery, and down a path that led into a wilderness hollow. There they strolled over a blanket of bluebells while the warm sunlight filtered through the trees illuminating bright flashes of blue and green that danced across their path as the wind gently shifted the leaves. The soft rustling of foliage, the sweet scent of the bluebells and the warm spring breeze on her face cast a spell of silent reverie that was suddenly broken by the businesslike sound of a woodpecker. They both laughed.
“I almost thought I was in a dream,” Susan said.
“Yes, it is very peaceful here, is it not?”
A few more steps and they abandoned the shade of the trees to return to the formal garden. Dean led Susan to an arched bridge over the canal.
“From here we can observe almost all of the garden,” he said.
“Yes, it is a lovely aspect.”
“Do you see how the fresh yellow-green leaves of the weeping willows contrast with the darker green of the laurels and yews that have been placed on the earth banks behind them?”
“They are very pretty.”
“It was an artist’s eye that created that, and on the canvas of Mother Nature herself. Do you see the lime trees there with their shiny new leaves?”
“Yes. The garden looks especially beautiful in the spring, does it not?”
“I would agree, but each season has its particular beauty. Shortly, last year’s bulbs in the borders of the shrubbery clumps will add even more colour to the palette.”
“Those trees over there already have some rosy blooms. What are they?”
“Those are larches.”
She sighed, not wanting their time together to end.
“I must get back to work now, madam,” he said, as if her sigh were a signal to him. He tipped his hat and left her on the bridge, observing the garden with newly opened eyes.

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For some days after this conversation, Susan walked in search of her tutor each morning. She passed many agreeable hours in his company and acquired more
knowledge than she had ever learned from her old governess. Perhaps it was the
dbenseness of her tutor that made her more attentive.

This particular morning was no exception. In her search for the head gardener, she
followed the serpentine path by the rectangle of lawn where she had first seen Dean and
espied, not the head gardener, but the boy Andrew, barely strong enough to hold the
scythe. When he saw her, he put it down and tipped his cap to her.

She nodded. “How is your mother, Andrew?” she asked him.

“Fair to middling, madam,” he responded.

“Thank you for planting my little border shrubbery,” she said.

“You are welcome, madam.”

“Have you see Mr. Dean this morning?”

“Yes, but I cannot say where he is now.”

She walked past the seedlings that Dean had planted in the shade of a great elm on the
morning when he had set aside his work to talk to her about the exotic plants of the
Carolinas. She retraced their steps to the exotic garden, but he was not there. Then she
decided to seek a secluded bower where she often used to sit alone daydreaming even
before Dean came to the garden. Susan found the stone seat and sat down. Shivering as
she felt the dampness of the stone through her thin silk gown, she remembered how the
gardener had spread his coat on a bench for her and wished it were beneath her again.
Suddenly, between trees, she caught sight of him pulling the dead blooms off flowering
shrubs and placing them in a basket. She should have called out, but it was so pleasant to
watch him in secret for a moment or two.

She did not understand the sensation that coursed through her whenever she saw him,
but she knew it was more pleasant than anything she had previously felt. She examined
him closely, trying to ascertain what it was about his appearance that gave her such
pleasure. Was it the loving way his eyes looked at the shrub? Was it the tender way his
hands plucked off the dead flowers? Was it the strong limbs or the broad back of him?
She shivered.

Then he moved out of her view, and she shifted herself to a new part of the bench,
feeling again the shocking chill of wet stone; a moment later, he was out of sight again.
She was at the end of the bench and decided to come out of the enclosure to surprise him.
At first, he seemed to be so engrossed in his work that he did not notice her.

“Mr. Dean,” she said.

He looked up, nodded at her, then put his head down again and pulled vigorously at a
flower. She stood waiting for him to give more response, but he continued working as if
she were not even there. He did not smile in his usual manner, and she felt the lack of it
colder than the chill of the stone bench.

“Mr. Dean,” she repeated.

“Excuse me, madam. I dinna wish to seem rude, but I have much work to do this
morning,” he spoke without looking up. The shock of his words left Susan speechless.
There was no mistaking him now. She was clearly rebuffed. For a moment, she
considered begging him to talk to her, but how could she stoop so low as to beg a
servant? She looked away, saw the house in the distance and started to walk back in its
direction.

She was deeply embarrassed. The garden, which only moments before had seemed so
fair, now seemed ugly to her. The sun shone too brightly, and the flowers were gaudy and
common in their disarray. It was difficult for her to look at them as she passed because each one of them bore a name that had been given to her by him. She was angry. How dare he strip the beauty from these flowers and pollute them with names that now she would rather not know? How dare he trifle with her heart? Why had he become so cold and distant to her? She could not remember having done anything to occasion this change in him. She would not think about this mortification. She would go back to the house and resume her life as if she had never seen the man before.

In spite of her vow not to dwell on her embarrassment, Susan thought of nothing else as she traversed the distance from the garden to her mother’s sitting room. Her humiliation had her so transfixed that she passed through the house without a word or thought to anyone or thing around her. When she was next aware of her surroundings, she found herself staring at tiny stitches of colour arranged higgledy-piggledy on a cloth. A great fat shiny tear fell on the stitches. She quickly shook it off, afraid that her mother might see.

Why should his indifference make the slightest impact on her? He was just a gardener after all. How had she been so foolish as to come to care for a simple gardener? What could he offer her, beyond teaching her the names of a few plants? Why had she imagined that she loved him or that he cared about her? What kind of future was there for her in a life with a gardener to whom the garden did not even belong? There was another man coming soon, one who might even become the heir to the garden. Was he not more worthy of her consideration and affection?

“You know, Mother,” she said aloud. “I can scarcely wait for the Fitzwilliams to arrive. It is so deadly dull here without proper company.”

Her mother smiled. “Mr. Fitzwilliam is my cousin, you know.”

“I think you mentioned that.”

“I know you have not met his son yet, but just think how lovely it would be if you should like him.” Her mother looked at her coyly.

“Why do you wish me to marry him, Mother?”

“If you married him and he took the Kirke name, your father could leave the estate to him.”

“Really? Is that true?” Susan would not have to leave her home and the garden. The memory of the garden brought a painful stab. “Is he handsome?” she asked.

“I do not know, but it does not signify. He is rich and that is what matters.”

Susan continued stitching, annoyed by her mother’s response.

“You know it has never seemed fair to me that when your father dies, I shall lose this house and be at the mercy of one of his relatives. They might, if they wished, turn me out on the street,” she said peevishly. “All because I did not have a son. Oh, I wish you had been a boy, Susan!” She sighed.

Susan did not know how to respond.
Chapter 5

The Kirkes sat at the great table in the dining room, attended by the butler and three footmen. Susan’s parents sat at either end of the long table, with Susan between. It would have been easier to converse with the footman behind her than it was to keep up a conversation with her parents. However, her father, who generally came to the table already well refreshed with libations, made a great effort to shout the day’s affairs to his wife and daughter.

“And so, Susan,” he slurred, “how have you passed this fine day? Were you out walking in the garden, as is your wont?”

“No, sir. Not today.” Susan did not wish to discuss the garden. For the past few days she had gone on her accustomed walk hoping that Dean’s rebuff was only a temporary aberration of character, but he had not once spoken to her beyond a cursory nod and a succinct, “Good morning.” She had foregone her only pleasure and resigned herself to her mother’s will.

“But you are tending the flower garden that you planted, are you not?”

“Yes, sir,” she said. Every morning she went there and found a watering can and gloves that she could only presume the scowling gardener left for her.

“Susan has been sewing with me,” her mother bellowed. “We will soon be finished embroidering the skirt of the gown that she will wear when the Fitzwilliams arrive. Is that not so, Susan?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“And are you looking forward to that event, Susan?” her father asked.

“Yes, sir. I hope it will relieve my utter boredom.”

Her father laughed heartily in response. “Sutton, pour me another beaker of wine, please.” He handed his glass to the footman to be refilled at the sideboard.

Susan observed her mother’s scowl.

“Yes, well, I told your father that you were ready to begin the London season this year, but he insisted that you were too young.”

He took his glass from the footman, said “Thankee” and slurped with relish. “A very good wine, Sutton.” He raised his cup to the butler before finally returning his attention to his wife. “What’s that, madam?”

Mrs. Kirke repeated her remark. “I said Susan was ready to be introduced to London society this year, but you insisted otherwise.”

“And I was quite right about that, madam. What could Susan learn about life in London at this time of year, except perhaps how to shop and how to gossip, neither of which is an asset in a wife. She is better off here in the country where she can walk out of doors and enjoy the garden.”

“Nonsense, sir. That is such a limiting activity for a young lady. It affords her no opportunity to go out and meet society, and such a thing is essential at her age. How else is she to meet a suitable young man?”

“Why, the young men will come to her, madam. The Fitzwilliams will be only the first of our visitors, I am certain. As soon as news of this garden’s attractions spreads, it will
become a regular feature on the circuit of country estates at the end of the London season. You will see.”

“I hope you are right. But I still see no reason why we could not have gone to London.” Mrs. Kirke pouted and took a sip of her wine. “Would you not have liked that, Susan?”

This was a frequent dispute between her parents. In the past, her sympathy had been with her father’s point of view, that she was not ready for the evils of London society. Now, for the first time, she found herself wishing that her mother’s argument had prevailed. If it had, the family would be in London now, far from the accursed garden and the cold, heartless gardener. “Yes, Mother. I believe I would have enjoyed the London season.”

“Good God, now I have all my females against me!” her father shouted. “It will nearly drive me mad!” He finished off his wine in one angry gulp and handed the glass to his footman. “Bring on the next course, Sutton. We have had enough of this one.”

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The next morning, Susan went as usual to her mother’s dressing room when she thought her mother would have completed her toilette. She knocked on the door, entered almost immediately, and was surprised to see the butler sitting on a chair at her mother’s side. The servant sprang to his feet like a Punch and Judy puppet and said “Will that be all, madam?”

Susan looked on, astonished, as the embarrassed servant rushed out the door.

“You must not come to a hasty conclusion, my dear Susan. Sutton was not doing anything improper, I assure you. He asked to sit down as he had some important information that he did not wish the other servants to overhear. He was sitting so close to me in order to whisper these extraordinary allegations.”

Susan’s expression must have revealed her disbelief because her mother hastened to add, “You need not act so superior about the matter, my dear. His remarks concern you and his discretion was to the advantage of your reputation.”

“What do you mean, Mother?”

Her mother hesitated. “My dear Susan, it has come to my attention…. In short, you have been seen engaged in intimate conversation with a man of a very common sort.”

Susan was brought up short by her mother’s accusation. “How can that be, Mother? I assure you, I never pass my time with ruffians.”

“Did I say ‘ruffians,’ Susan? I most certainly did not. I only referred to the man as a ‘common sort,’ that is to say, a person of the common class, someone not at all an equal to your status. In short, you have been seen in close conversation with the head gardener, Mr. John Dean. What have you to say to that?”

Susan did not know what to say for a moment. A glimmer of understanding was beginning to peep through the clouds of gloom that enveloped her for days. “Why do you listen to the idle gossip of servants? I can assure you that nothing of an improper nature has ever passed between Mr. Dean and myself.”

“You do admit that you have spoken to the man?”

“Yes. I have on some occasions spoken to the man. What is improper in that?”

“As I mentioned earlier, this man does not belong to the class of people with whom you should be spending any time. There can surely be no need for you to speak to the
gardener. You are not at all responsible for the condition of the garden on the estate. So what has been the topic of these conversations?"

“Although I am not responsible for my father’s garden, I am very much interested in it. Mr. Dean has been so kind as to teach me the names of some of the plants and their methods of cultivation.”

“Do you think such an education is proper for a woman of your station?”

“Yes, I do, for surely one day I will be the mistress of a great estate, and I will be responsible for overseeing the choice of plants and the correct procedure of planting them.”

“I should hope your husband would have a gardener to look after such mundane affairs. I can assure you that I know no more about flowering plants than that they are beautiful to look upon. Perhaps you will learn more than you ought to about things you ought not to know if you continue to consort with common people, Susan.”

“That is the most absurd notion I have ever heard.”

“Take care how you address your mother.”

Susan bowed her head and spoke to the floor. “Yes, madam.” Inside she seethed at the hypocrisy of the woman whom she had just found in close conversation with a servant herself. But she knew the futility of speaking any further.

“In the meantime, you are not to spend time in the company of the common gardener.”

Susan knew it was useless to respond. Instead, she went straightaway through the house to the front door. Once outside, she allowed herself to feel the fullness of joy that had slowly grown in her during the preceding conversation. She had barely been able to keep from smiling as her mother had chastised, and she had begun to realize the truth. Perhaps Dean had been ordered by her father not to speak to her. Why had he not told her so? Why had he allowed her to believe that he no longer cared for her? She was determined to find the gardener and ask him to explain himself at last. She went with unerring directness, as if some unknown force guided her straight to him. He was walking in the same direction ahead of her on the serpentine path, so that he did not see her until she was right behind him.

“You will not elude me any longer, Mr. Dean.”

He jumped off the path, startled by her voice.

“I know the reason for your peculiar coldness to me now, and I wish to speak to you about it.”

“If you know the reason, then you know that I am forbidden to speak to you.”

“Who forbade you, sir?”

He looked around, and drew her off the path, closer to him. “Your father, and my employer.” He spoke softly.

“Why do you listen to him? Are you a hypocrite?”

“What do you mean? Why do you accuse me of hypocrisy?”

“You yourself told me that you believe that all men are created equal by God. So, if my father is your equal, why must you follow his orders?”

“As I recall, I said that that was John Knox’s belief. I may strive to believe it also, at least in a theoretical fashion, but only God recognizes the true equality of the human species. We live in an imperfect world, in a society that believes quite otherwise. Your father is my employer, and I must obey him or lose my employment. It is that simple.”
“It is an imperfect society, you are right. But we must strive to improve it. We must try to right injustice whenever we are able. I shall speak to my father. I shall make him see the unfairness of his position.”

“Please do not defy your parents on my account, Miss Kirke. They want what is best for you.”

“They do not know what is best for me.”

“I am afraid that I cannot agree. You are still young, and they have more experience of the evils of this world than you do.”

“You are certainly not one of the evils, sir. You will at least allow that!”

“Where you are concerned I am not so sure that is true. Regardless of that fact, no less an authority than the Bible admonishes us to honour our father and mother.”

“I will not do it!”

“Do not be willful, Miss Kirke.”

She stopped pleading, suddenly aware that it would not move him. Her mood was quickly turning to sorrow.

He spoke to her gently. “I am sorry that I appeared rude to you, but now that you understand the reason for it, I hope that you will understand.”

Yes, and I thank you, sir, for assisting me with my garden plot.” She looked at him, daring to be hopeful.

“It is part of my job. Now, we will never again exchange words.”

Susan felt as if the world had suddenly ended. She opened her mouth to speak but knew her words would be wasted. Then her eyes slowly filled with tears, and she turned away from him. She could not even bring herself to say “goodbye.” Her feet escaped the clutches of gravity and took her with all dispatch back to the house.

Dean watched her go with ineffable sadness. He had committed a great sin in allowing her to become attached to him; his penance was to see how she suffered for it. What is more, the absence of her company while he worked in the mornings had made him realize how close she had come to his own heart. What a fool he had been! But it was not too late to make amends by his correct and distant behaviour in the future.
Chapter 6

On an unusually hot day at the end of May, Susan sat fanning herself on a bench close to the house with a view of the long driveway to the estate. Her mother had warned her not to gad about but to be available whenever the visitors arrived. In any case, she no longer relished her walks in the garden. It had been two weeks since she and Dean had said goodbye and she could not bear to pass him in the garden one more time. That cool nonchalant nod of his and the way he deferentially touched the tip of his cap sometimes maddened her beyond despair. She longed for him to talk to her. She longed to hear the sound of his voice again—the way he pronounced her name with that guttural rolling sound. On the occasions when she dared to greet him with a “Good morning, Mr. Dean” and a bright, and she thought irresistible, smile, he would return not a word, just a nod and that infuriatingly dismissive touch of the hat.

She turned her thoughts to her mother’s cousin’s family, who were due to arrive today. This was a more pleasant contemplation since the Fitzwilliams happened to have a son, a young man of marriageable age and of her class. While spending more time at the house, she had been able to learn through the servants’ gossip and careful eavesdropping of her parents’ conversations that a business arrangement was being discussed between the families. The Fitzwilliams were looking for a wife for their son and were greatly interested in her father’s property, which might be included in the deal. There was little benefit to the Kirkes in such an arrangement—the possibility of keeping the estate within the family, albeit on the mother’s side, might be some small consolation—but they had to be resigned to the fact that, because their only child was a female, the Kirke family had few options. This was a salvage operation at best.

It rankled Susan to be considered as if she were no more than a part of her father’s property, but there was nothing she nor anyone could do about it, so it was not worth fretting about. At any rate, she was just a little curious about this second cousin Herbert. She wondered if he would be as handsome or as intelligent as Mr. Dean. It was a preposterous notion. How could he be? And yet, she thought, if he were only a little like the gardener, she might be interested.

Her curiosity had brought her to this seat near the house. She had decided that the moment she caught a glimpse of the carriage as it turned into their driveway at the distant gateway, she would enter the house and quickly retire to her dressing room. She wanted to know the moment they arrived, but it would not do to be seen as eager. It would make her look like an overanxious spinster, which she most assuredly was not. In fact, she meant to reject Mr. Herbert Fitzwilliam no matter how handsome or smart he was. She was not in any sort of hurry to marry. If she could not have her first choice, Mr. Dean, then she would wait. She would hold out for the Prince of Wales himself. She would wait and see. Perhaps a miracle would occur and Mr. Fitzwilliam would be so enamoured of her that he would wait, and then one day, they would own the garden together, and she could still go for walks where she would see the handsome black curls, the captivating blue eyes, and the radiant smile of her gardener among the flowers.

Susan started from her reverie. At the end of the long drive sat a splendid coach and six with two liveried footmen standing sedately at the back, the plumes of the hats
blowing in the breeze. The driver lifted his whip to urge the horses up the slope to the house, and Susan jumped from the bench and darted inside, hoping no one in the coach had seen her before she disappeared into the great house.

The door safely shut behind her, she called her maid, who quickly appeared at her side. Susan pulled off her gloves and handed them to her. “Mary, let the butler know the guests are arriving. I’ll be in my dressing room.”

On the way to her room, Susan encountered her mother on the second floor examining the servants’ preparations for the guests again.

“They have passed the gates, Mother.”

“Oh, my!” Her mother clapped a hand to each cheek in dismay. “What are we to do? Where is your father? I have not seen him this morning.”

“I do not know, Mother, but I will be in my sitting room, if you should need me.”

“Should need you, Susan?!” Her mother clasped her wrist as if to detain her. “Of course, I shall need you. We must all go down to greet our visitors en famille. It is the correct way of doing things.”

“But I do not wish to appear overanxious, Mama.”

“That was certainly not the effect I was intending, Susan. I was intending a welcoming demeanour. You could manage that, I suppose. Speak to his mother and sister. You will not be required even to look at the young Mr. Fitzwilliam. Now go and find your father—perhaps he is in his sitting room pretending not to be eager as well. I shall go down and greet our guests. A member of the family ought to be present for their arrival.”

Susan went in search of her father. Not even look at the young Mr. Fitzwilliam? How ridiculous! Of course she would sneak a peep.

She was a little disappointed at her first glimpse. He was not ugly—some might even call him handsome—but he was small and fair and much older than she had imagined. He looked almost thirty. When he saw that she was looking at him, he bowed in her direction, which startled her. He must think her very rude to gape! She extended her hand. “Cousin Fitzwilliam,” she said.

He gallantly kissed the offered hand. “Miss Kirke,” he said in his flat dull English, lacking the resonance of Dean’s brogue. “The world has not lied in naming you handsome.”

“I am sorry, sir, but the world does not know me at all. How can it have such an opinion of me?”

“Then I feel sorry for the world.”

He was still holding her hand, an intolerable length of time, so she removed hers, making a conscious effort not to wipe it on her gown. Her disappointment grew rather than abated on hearing Fitzwilliam speak. His speech was practiced and artificial, and his mannerisms were affected and foppish. It should be very easy to refuse the proposal of such a man, she thought.

The member of the guest party were shown to their apartments so that they could wash and rest after the rigours of their journey. They were expected to dress in their finest clothes for dinner, which was to be taken at four o’clock. Mr. Kirke, as host, entered the dining room, accompanied by Mrs. Fitzwilliam, who, as the most senior lady, was free to choose her own seat first. The other guests arranged themselves as they fancied. Susan placed herself near the roast ribs and the salad because they were among her favourite foods, and she would not have to rely on others to pass them to her. After sitting down,
she found that the younger Fitzwilliam had taken a place beside her. He smiled and nodded in her direction.

“Oh, my goodness! Look at that!” his sister exclaimed. “Look, Father, it is a garden!” She was pointing at the large plateau that took up a great part of the table. On this plateau was arranged a miniature garden complete with foliage, tiny hedges, walks, mirror ponds, and streams; along the path, several porcelain figurines were strolling.

“It is a replica of our garden,” Kirke explained proudly. “We thought it would be useful to show our guests the disposition of the grounds so that no one is lost when we walk there later.”

“How delightful, Mr. Kirke!” Mrs. Fitzwilliam exclaimed.

At that moment a footman arrived with the tureen. He spooned the soup into everyone’s bowls, as they talked quietly to their neighbours.

“How long have you had your garden?” Mrs. Fitzwilliam asked her host.

“It has been several years in the making. First the design was drawn by the great Capability Brown, and then several other gardeners did the physical work of planting and construction. Finally, it was completed to our satisfaction, although a garden is ever a work in progress, you must understand. This is the first season it is open to the public and you are the first guests.”

“We are honoured, sir,” Fitzwilliam Senior answered him. Turning to Mrs. Kirke at his right, he said, “You will have no shortage of visitors once the London season is concluded, considering your proximity to London itself.”

“It is our hope that the garden might be an inducement to visitors.”

“It is not the only inducement that you are blessed with, madam,” he said, eyeing Susan.

Mrs. Kirke, not noticing the direction of his gaze, blushed. “Why, thank you, sir.”

“Let me propose a toast,” Fitzwilliam Senior said, enthusiastically.

“By all means, sir,” his host cried. “Sutton, fill up the goblets.” The footmen provided each guest with a bumper of wine with which to toast. When they each had cup in hand, Fitzwilliam Senior continued, “To our host’s beautiful daughter, to Miss Susan Kirke.”

Mrs. Kirke reddened. Mr. Kirke cried, “Hear, hear,” and everyone took a sip, while her father, to Susan’s embarrassment, swallowed his full cup in one long gulp.

The footman arrived at that moment with the roast goose and placed it in front of Mr. Kirke to be carved. Mr. Kirke did a poor job of it, slicing huge slabs and shredding much of the finest meat. Susan and her mother were used to his poor carving skills, but Susan could read in the faces of the guests their disgust at his lack of skill.

“There ye be,” he said, pushing the platter of goose toward the centre of the table.

The footman stopped the goose’s momentum before it knocked over a couple of figurines in the garden.

“Now, let us have another toast,” Mr. Kirke called. “Refill everyone’s beaker, Sutton.”

The footman took the host’s goblet to be refilled, and the other diners were obliged to wait until Mr. Kirke had his cup in hand. Then he stood up shakily and proposed, “To the fine goose, I say.”

As everyone took a sip, Susan could see over the top of her glass how ridiculous the guests thought her father to be. She decided she would show them that not all her family were country clowns, and so, when they had finished their toast, she found the courage to say, “May I be so bold to propose a toast to our good guests.” Her mother discreetly put a
finger to her lips to warn her not to speak, but Susan ignored the gesture. “To Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fitzwilliam and their children, Herbert and Melissa.”

“To the Fitzwilliams,” her father seconded her, before swallowing the remnant in his glass.

“Now, we shall leave off hobnobbing and enjoy this splendid dinner,” Mrs. Kirke suggested.

The company were glad of her intervention and fell to devouring the contents of the feast.

When the eating slowed, the servants removed the dishes, many of which still contained a great deal of food. Slowly, gingerly, the footmen lifted the elaborate centre-piece plateau so that the butler could remove the dirty tablecloth, revealing a clean one beneath it. Then the second course was brought in. This consisted of venison, ragout, macaroni, vegetable pie, vegetables of the season, and even creams, jellies, and ices. Susan hoped that the sweet pastry would be placed on the table in front of her so that she would not be obliged to ask the footman to put some on her plate, thus calling attention to herself. Unfortunately, it was placed in front of the young Miss Fitzwilliam at the far side of the table.

A few moments later, when plates were filled and the guests were again conversing, Fitzwilliam Junior remarked to Susan, “Miss Kirke, I see that you have no sweet pastry. Would you like some?”

“Why, yes, I would.”

He called the footman to fill her plate with the pastry.

“Thank you, sir,” she said, accepting the dish gratefully. Her poor opinion of the man was somewhat amended by his solicitous care of her plate.

“Shall we walk in the garden after dinner, do you think?” the young man enquired.

“I should think so,” Mrs. Kirke responded, overhearing him. “Walking in the garden is our daughter’s favourite activity. Is that not so, Susan?”

“Yes, Mother,” she said half-heartedly. Or at least it used to be, she thought to herself.

“Why, Susan knows as much about the garden as the gardener does, do you not?”

Susan blushed. “I would not say that, Mother.”

“You would not say it only because you do not wish the gardener to be dismissed,” her mother continued, causing Susan’s blush to deepen until she burned inside. She glared at her mother.

“Well, I look forward to learning all about the garden from you this evening, Miss Kirke,” Fitzwilliam Junior said. “Here. Have some of the venison fat.” He took a spoonful of it and poured it on her sweet pastry. She wanted to scream at this violation of her favourite food but restrained herself. Her poor opinion of this insufferable man returned.

After dinner all the party walked out into the garden. The young Fitzwilliam and Susan were soon separated from the rest of the family who seemed to be conspiring to walk slowly. In Susan’s view, early evening was the second best time of day, after the morning, to visit the garden, and she was glad to be out in it again. She had not realized how much she missed the calm peacefulness that she enjoyed while strolling among the garden’s Elysian delights. She was grateful for Fitzwilliam’s silence.

Finally, he spoke to compliment the beauty of the Kirke estate.

“Yes, it is quite lovely,” Susan murmured.
“You are so quiet, Miss Kirke. Have you nothing to tell me about the particular features of the garden? Your mother has assured us that the garden is your passion and that you know it as well as the gardener himself.”

Susan blushed again, waving her fan in front of her face to abate the sudden heat there. “Oh, sir. You embarrass me. I assure you I can barely tell a pansy from a buttercup. My mother exaggerates because she never sets foot in the garden and knows less than nothing at all.”

“Then, if the garden is not your passion, Miss Kirke, what is? Or is your passion a secret?”

Susan blushed again. She wished she could be rid of this meddlesome man. “My dear sir, I have none, at least none that I would admit to you. If I did, it would no longer be a secret, would it? Perhaps you have a secret passion. If you tell me yours, then I might be persuaded to share mine. A secret for a secret is only just.”

Susan was quite pleased to see that Mr. Fitzwilliam was blushing as prettily as she had been. “Ah ha!” she cried. “You do have a secret passion, Mr. Fitzwilliam. I see it on your face! Perhaps you are in love with a scullery maid. Or perhaps you are having an affair that your parents would disapprove of. Admit it, Mr. Fitzwilliam. I will hear your secret affair.”

“Nothing of the kind, I assure you. There are no women that I am secretly passionate about. None at all. I promise.”

“That is quite a shame. So tell me what you are passionate about.”

“I enjoy playing tennis.”

“Do you, sir?” Susan was not at all interested in tennis, but she was not sorry the topic of conversation had changed. “You must tell me about the game. I believe I have never played it nor seen it played.”

Fitzwilliam began to explain to her the niceties of the sport, to which Susan only half attended; for, at that moment, the gardener came into view around the turn of the path in front of them, walking in their direction. Her heart skipped a beat when he looked up and saw them.

For the first time in a long time, she saw emotion on his face. Could it be jealousy? Perhaps he did care for her after all. His cold demeanour had been so unwavering that she had begun to doubt his affection, of which she had once been so sure. She felt renewed hope now. She was even glad Mr. Fitzwilliam had come, if only to elicit this jealousy in Dean. Susan looked ahead boldly and saw with satisfaction that the path at the point where they would meet was not very wide and they would be obliged to make some kind of communication as they passed.

“Good evening, Mr. Dean,” Susan said.

He nodded and touched his cap as usual, but added civilly, “Good evening, Miss Kirke.”

Susan spoke to Fitzwilliam. “Sir, you will be interested to know that this is the head gardener, Mr. Dean. Mr. Dean, Mr. Herbert Fitzwilliam.”

“How do you do,” Fitzwilliam spoke first.

“How do you do, sir,” Dean bowed.

“I was just admiring the beauty of the garden to Miss Kirke. Unfortunately, she was unable to enlighten me on many aspects of the garden that pique my interest. Would you be so good as to walk with us, Mr. Dean, and answer some of my questions?”
“Why, certainly, sir. I would be delighted to render any assistance that I might.”

As already mentioned, the path was narrow, so Fitzwilliam and Dean walked together just in front of Susan. She watched them in animated conversation—Fitzwilliam asking intelligent and probing questions and Dean assiduous in his answers. As she did so, a sensation of jealousy grew in her, as well. The two men, who should have been attentive to her, seemed to have forgotten her in their shared interest of the garden. Fitzwilliam had taken her place as a pupil and, in her imagination, Dean was paying him even more attention than he had ever shown her. She waved her fan in misery and scarcely listened to what they were saying.

“What would you not agree, Miss Kirke?”

She became aware that Dean had turned and was addressing her. She was deeply embarrassed by her petulant inattention. “I am so sorry, but I was not listening.”

He looked disappointed. “I was just saying to Mr. Fitzwilliam that it will be difficult to get plants from the New World now that the rebellion is in progress.”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Dean.” Susan smiled at him, warmed by this small reminder of a conversation they had once shared.

At that moment, the path opened onto a lawn where the three of them could walk abreast.

Dean stopped and said, “Well, I must leave you here and finish my work. It was a pleasure to talk to you, Mr. Fitzwilliam.” He offered his hand and Fitzwilliam shook it. Susan watched in amazement as Fitzwilliam held it just a moment longer than was conventional, in the same manner as he had held her own hand too long. She could see that Dean was as uncomfortable as she had been.

After the gardener disappeared back down the path where they had met him, Fitzwilliam remarked, “He is a most agreeable fellow, and so knowledgeable in his field. I do like the Scots, madam. I find them to be such affable people, though my parents would be scandalized if they heard me talking thus.”

“As would my parents, I am sure, Mr. Fitzwilliam. I have no knowledge at all of the Scotch race beyond Mr. Dean, but if he is a sample, they are a wondrous people.” She sighed.

Fitzwilliam looked at her. “Why, my dear, I believe you are in love!”

Susan, for the third time this evening, blushed a deep crimson. “Sir!” she exclaimed, waving her fan frenetically. She could scarcely think of anything to say in response.

“How dare you insinuate something so improper?”

“Miss Kirke, forgive me. I did not mean to upset you. Believe me, I do not mean to judge you for it. None of us can help whom we love. I sympathize most ardently with your distress if you do love him.”

How could he have known? How could he have read her so expertly? She was mortified at her artlessness. He must think her a simple naïve country girl. “Let us go back to the house at once, sir.”

“If that is your wish, but please, be assured that I shall not reveal your secret passion to anyone.”

Susan said nothing, not even to ask him to tell his secret in exchange. Her embarrassment was too deep for words.
Chapter 7

The next morning when Susan went down to breakfast, she discovered that Mr. Fitzwilliam was already in the parlour ahead of her. She wished him to the devil. The man had a hold over her now that he knew her secret; she could not so easily be rid of him as she had first intended.

“Miss Kirke, after your breakfast, would you be so good as to walk out with me again this morning? I so enjoyed our walk yesterday.”

“It would be my pleasure,” Susan lied.

When they were well on their way along the serpentine path of the garden, Fitzwilliam finally spoke. “Yesterday, in my pleasant but brief conversation with Mr. Dean, he insinuated that you know more about the garden than you have let on.”

Susan was alarmed that he had immediately begun speaking about the gardener.

“Please, do not be distressed. I have promised you that I will not reveal your secret.”

“You know nothing at all about my secret, sir. There is nothing for you to reveal.”

“It is of no use for you to pretend to me, madam. I have seen your face as you looked at him. Perhaps nothing improper has yet passed between you, but you cannot honestly say that you do not love him.”

Susan was exasperated by his insinuations. “I thought that you were here to court me, Mr. Fitzwilliam. Why do we speak about another man?”

“We speak of another man simply because there is another man upon your heart. How can I begin to court where the heart is already taken?”

“Mr. Fitzwilliam, consider the differences in our positions. I mean that of Mr. Dean and myself. You must understand that a marriage between us would never be approved by my parents. So you understand that whatever my feelings are for Mr. Dean, or whatever his feelings are for me, they are completely irrelevant to your courtship of me.”

“I understand that the difference in your stations makes marriage an impossibility, Miss Kirke. However, I am also certain that your relationship with Mr. Dean is at least part of the reason for my being here. I am sure that your parents, if they are even slightly aware of your predilection, must be desperate to marry you off before you do something foolish with the gardener.”

His impertinence was intolerable. “I would never, sir…”

“Let me finish,” he interrupted her. “My parents are similarly in a hurry to see me wed because they are afraid I will remain a bachelor forever. It is my belief that we would make an ideal couple. We ought to announce our engagement in order to satisfy our parents and allay their fears, after which, we may carry on as we wish behind their backs and with each others’ blessings.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I would give you my encouragement if you wished to continue to pursue the gardener after our engagement.”

Susan was shocked at the debauchery of this man. “How could you?”

“In return, I should expect that you would support me in the pursuit of my secret passion.”
“How can I know if I would support it, sir, when you have kept it a secret until now?” Susan remarked.

“And I intend to keep it a secret, madam. I do not wish to offend your delicate sensibilities by revealing it to you.”

“That is hardly fair. You know my secret, so you ought to share your secret with me, especially as I am expected to endorse it.”

“Yes, madam, but you did not tell me yours. I was obliged to guess it. In the interest of fairness, therefore, I will not tell you my secret. Perhaps one day, you may guess it, as well.”

Susan felt unequal to his sophistication. How could she begin to guess his secret?

“What you are suggesting seems immoral to me, sir. I can assure that I do not wish to engage in immoral behaviour.”

“I am sorry if I have offended you, cousin. We will talk no more of this matter today. Let us simply enjoy the beauty of the garden instead, shall we? Oh look, madam! There is the handsome gardener over there.”

Susan glanced at Dean. In spite of her desire to walk with him again, she would not do so in the company of Fitzwilliam. “I believe, sir, that I have walked far enough this morning. I shall return to the house.” She turned and began to go back.

“Then, good morning to you, madam. If you do not mind, I shall walk on and speak with Mr. Dean. Our conversation was too brief yesterday.”

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That evening, the Kirke and Fitzwilliam families were witness to an apparent lovers’ tiff. At dinner, when Herbert Fitzwilliam the younger attempted to engage Miss Kirke in conversation, she responded tersely and turned her head away to converse with others at the table. After dinner, when the ladies had removed to the drawing room, the young Fitzwilliam exhibited an impatient agitation that could only be attributed to his anguish at being separated from the object of his desire. When the party was again all together in the drawing room, Fitzwilliam invited Miss Kirke to walk with him around the room. Although she could not embarrass him with a refusal, she invited his sister to accompany them, as well. It was evident that Fitzwilliam was most annoyed by the inclusion of his sister in their tableau. Then Miss Kirke most uncharacteristically offered to entertain everyone with a performance on the spinnet. This surprised her mother above all since Susan rarely, if ever, played; she took it as a strong indication that Susan had fallen in love with Fitzwilliam.

It was not until the next morning that Fitzwilliam finally managed to accomplish a tête-à-tête with Susan. Again he arrived at the parlour before she did, and although she attempted to elude him by slipping out to the garden without eating, Fitzwilliam had been watching for her possible escape and exited immediately behind her.

“Miss Kirke,” he called to her.

Short of feigning deafness or running away like a mad woman, she could not think of a way to avoid him. She turned back with evident disdain and said, “Yes, Mr. Fitzwilliam. What can I do for you?”

“My dear Miss Kirke, you could do me the honour of listening to my most abject apology. I feel I have insulted your delicate sensibilities with my crude attempt at humour yesterday.”

“I do not recall your making any humorous comments at all, sir.”
“Well, as I said, they were crude attempts and not worthy of the understanding of a lady such as yourself.”

“Mm,” she said, turning away from the gentleman.

“May I walk with you, madam?”

“I would rather you did not.”

“But I have not fully expressed myself to you. I feel there is more that I need to say in order for you to comprehend my meaning.”

“Pray do go on and make the attempt then, sir, for I confess I am at a total loss to understand your babble this morning.”

“I regret that I have managed to lose your good esteem by my reckless comments.”

“I do not believe that you ever had my good esteem.”

“Well, you have mine, Miss Kirke. I do admire your frankness and spirit.”

Again, Susan murmured the slightest of responses.

“Let me attempt to explain to you why I am so anxious to continue in your good graces, or I should rather say, why I would like to achieve your good graces, if such a thing is possible.”

“Please proceed. You have my attention.”

“Have you considered that as long as our parents believe that we are in love with each other, we will have peace?”

“What are you suggesting, sir?”

“It is merely this. Once my parents are aware that my suit has broken off irrevocably, they will begin again the mad hunt for a suitable partner for me. This is something I can scarcely bear, for I do not wish to be married. Please correct me if I am mistaken, but I believe that you have similar feelings at the moment.”

Susan felt her interest grow. “Are you suggesting a deception, Mr. Fitzwilliam?”

He smiled at her. “You are always so frank and bold, madam. I do wish we could be friends.”

“Perhaps we may, if your desire is for nothing more than friendship.”

“Now you begin to understand me. I wish you to be my friend, and if our parents seek to interpret our relationship as something more, we do not need to spoil their illusions at this time. At any point that you should wish to change our relationship in any way, that is to say, if you should wish to break it off at any time, I would be most happy to oblige.”

“And you wish to do this only to avoid further engagements that your parents might arrange?”

“That is right.”

“Because you do not wish to marry at this time?”

“You understand me perfectly. Now is this such a devilish proposition? Does it do you dishonour? Should you wish to marry in a year or so, we can break it off with no harm to either party.”

“I am not so sure about that. First of all, what suitor could I meet if I was engaged to another? And even if I did meet someone, who would have me if I was cast off?”

“As to the first, you are right, madam. You would not be in the marriage market at this time, but I thought that was your desire. As to the second, well, I am quite certain it would be no obstacle. Once London society is introduced to your beauty, I can assure you that there will be no end to the suitors who would wish to pursue you in spite of a failed
engagement. But forgive me, I was under the impression that you did not wish for suitors, as your heart was already engaged.”

Susan felt properly chastised both by the remarks of Fitzwilliam and by the look of disappointment that he gave her. She remembered that he had been talking to Dean yesterday, and she wondered for the first time if he might be a kind of intermediary for them, since they were forbidden to speak directly. Dean’s jealousy had given her hope that he might be interested in such an arrangement. The thought made her bold to consider his proposition. “You are right, sir. My heart is truly engaged elsewhere, and you know where. Tell me, when you spoke to Mr. Dean yesterday, did he speak of me at all?”

“Ah, Miss Kirke. At last your honesty rises to the surface like fine rich cream! And you blush again like a sweet crimson rose. You have restored my faith in womankind.”

“Mr. Fitzwilliam, you are embarrassing me.”

“Did he speak of you? Why, not a word, and yet to that, his eyes spoke of nothing else. He watched you leave the garden until he could not see you, and then his eyes kept wandering back to the place where they had last seen you. He scarce could keep his mind on the questions related to the garden that I addressed to him. I can assure you, that the man is most thoroughly besotted, and I would say that his love is deeper than yours. I do not believe that he would ever speak of looking for another suitor as you have spoken to me this morning.”

Susan blushed again. “If you speak to him again, I would appreciate it if you did not mention that to him.”

“I never would. I will tell him only what you instruct me to tell him.”

“Would you tell him how much I miss our conversations in the garden?”

“Of course I would. I shall convey the message to him immediately if you wish. Where might I find the gentleman, do you think?”

“He is often to be found in the greenhouse at this hour. Oh, sir, I do so appreciate your intercession on my behalf.”

“Then we have an agreement, Miss Kirke? I will intercede on your behalf with Mr. Dean and you will pretend to our parents that my suit has at least some chance of success.”

“This sounds most fair, Mr. Fitzwilliam.” Susan extended her gloved hand and he shook it.

“Good day to you, sir,” she said as she turned and walked back toward the house, pleased that she would again have a chance to speak to Dean, even if through the voice of another.
Chapter 8

To the delight of both their families, that evening found the two lovers again walking out alone into the garden. As soon as they were out of sight of the house, Fitzwilliam said to Susan, “I have arranged a little surprise for you, Miss Kirke.”

“What is that, sir?”

“Look there.”

She looked up and saw Mr. Dean standing cap in hand at the end of the rectangular lawn where she had first met him, apparently waiting for them. When he saw her, he nodded as had become his custom in the last few weeks. Susan’s heart skipped a beat. Fitzwilliam had more than fulfilled his promise, arranging a meeting rather than simply carrying messages. She wondered how he had convinced Mr. Dean to be a willing participant, but it was a brief thought, immediately replaced by an overwhelming urge, which she did not resist, to run towards him. As she approached, he took hold of her arms as if to restrain her from throwing them around his neck impulsively.

“Miss Kirke, may I speak with you alone?” he said, his voice earnest and anxious.

She looked back at Mr. Fitzwilliam, still strolling toward them, looking eminently pleased with himself. “Of course you may if you wish, madam,” Fitzwilliam said. “I shall wait right here on this bench and walk back with you when you are finished.” He went to sit on the stone bench that Susan considered “theirs.”

Susan and Mr. Dean walked on for some moments without speaking. He led her, still holding one of her arms, to the wilderness away from the common paths where they might have been seen. Susan was acutely aware of his hand clenched tightly around her arm like a vice. Something about the roughness of his touch made her tremble with a strange mixture of emotions: fear and yet anticipation. She began to fantasize what was awaiting her; how he would turn toward her, take hold of her other arm and kiss her, bruising her lips with his ardour. When he finally stopped and turned towards her, she was so filled with terrified longing that she closed her eyes. He did not kiss her, and instead of taking her other arm, he released the one he had.

“Miss Kirke,” he said.

She opened her eyes, feeling about to topple now that he was not holding her up.

“I apologize to you for violating your father’s wishes in speaking to you, but I feel certain that he would approve if he understood my motive.”

She was too disappointed to comprehend his words and said nothing.

He continued. “My motive in speaking to you today is to warn you of the great danger that you face at this moment.”

Finally, she found her voice. “What danger is that, sir? If you mean the danger of my being alone with you, then I am not greatly afraid. After all, it is not a very dangerous wolf that warns the victim of her plight.”

“I do not refer to your immediate situation. Although you might be universally condemned for allowing yourself to be alone with me in this place, you and I both know that you have nothing to fear from me. I would never harm you. No, I am referring to the danger of associating any further with that panderer and reprobate Fitzwilliam.”
“Whatever do you mean, sir? He has always acted towards me in an honorable manner.”

“I am afraid you are somewhat naïve in the ways of the world. Please trust me that I know better than you in this regard.”

Susan fumed at what she perceived to be a slight. Although he was only confirming what she had already thought herself, she could not bear that Dean should even think this of her, let alone express it. “What? You have spoken to Fitzwilliam twice at most and you have formed an opinion based on those conversations, one of which was about nothing but gardening?” He looked hurt by her assault, and she immediately felt sorry instead of angry. Why was she wasting the short time they had together with her petty grievance? “And the second time he spoke with you, did he not tell you how much I miss our conversations, Mr. Dean?” She looked at him with pleading eyes.

“Am I to understand that you wish to engage him as an intermediary between us?” She nodded, barely able to speak.

“And what are you to give him in return, if I may be so bold as to ask?” “Nothing at all but the appearance of a courtship, so that our parents will no longer hound us with suitors.” “I do not trust the man. I do not wish to entrust my secrets with him.” “But do you not see? He has already arranged this meeting for us, and he will arrange others. He will be a screen so that we can continue meeting without the arousal of my parents’ suspicion.”

“Yes, I see perfectly well. However, I am not at all comfortable with the notion of sneaking around behind your parents’ backs. If that had been our intention, we could have arranged to do that without Fitzwilliams’ assistance. I have agreed to my employer’s injunction forbidding me to speak with you; apart from this one necessary meeting, I intend to carry it out.”

His words dumbfounded her. In her excitement at meeting him again, she had not considered the situation carefully. Of course, he was right. Nothing had really changed. She had set herself up for further disappointment. “Then, this is to be goodbye again?” she murmured.

Mr. Dean did not speak. He swallowed a hard lump.

“You do not wish to say goodbye anymore than I do,” Susan said, taking heart from his discomfort.

“Miss Kirke, you are punishing me most cruelly by prolonging our farewell.”

“You do not wish to say goodbye to me anymore than I wish to say goodbye to you.”

“We cannot always have what we desire.” He spoke barely above a whisper.

“Maybe you cannot, but I always have,” she said, turning around so that he would not see the tears she was about to cry. “You give up too easily, it seems to me. I do not want someone who is so weak.” She started to walk away.

He watched her walking away from him. Weak! he thought. Weak! She could not know the strength it was taking him not to follow her, not to stop her, not to succumb to her plans and let Fitzwilliam be their go-between; but Dean knew what the man was. He could read the large spaces between the lines that poor Susan was unable to see. He wanted so much to protect her from the potential hazards of associating with such a man, and he realized that he had failed to impress her with his admonition. He should try again because, if he let her go back in her present frail condition, she might be in danger of
destroying her own future happiness by marrying Fitzwilliam. He felt compelled to call her back in order to save her.

“Susan,” he whispered her name, praying that she would not hear him.

She continued walking. He watched her slender back moving away from him, the long, bare neck holding her head full of upswept chestnut curls high and proud above her. If she turned around at that moment and lifted her hand to beckon him silently, he would go to her. He would not be able to stop himself because it seemed as though his heart was seeping out from him at that moment. A long string of his love was going with her, growing thinner and thinner as she walked farther and farther from him. He did not know if he could stand it. If she called him back and he ran to her, all of that love would be gathered back together and scooped between them, and they would never be apart again. But she did not turn around. She had not heard him. He thought he saw her back move up and down softly in a shudder that could only mean she was crying, too. It was cruel and unfair that they should be apart.

He turned around to go back to his garden, but his work had never before felt so empty and uninspiring. As much as he had missed her in the last two weeks, he missed her more now that he understood how much love there was between them, love that was going to waste like rain in a fallow field.

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Susan saw Fitzwilliam’s smiling face waiting for her in the lawn where she had left him. She felt dizzy and looked down. As the blood rushed from her head, she saw only white and heard a ringing in her ears. Fitzwilliam was at her side taking hold of her as she fainted. He swept her up in his arms and brought her to the bench where he had been sitting. Susan could feel the peculiar warmth of the spot where he had been waiting for her. It made her feel sick.

“My dear Miss Kirke! Whatever is the matter?”

She leaned her head forward over her dress and swallowed hard to keep from throwing up.

“Can it be that your lover has rejected you? What a despicable rogue the man is! I cannot believe he can be so blind to your evident beauty.”

She could feel the blood returning to her head. “Please, sir. Let us not speak of this matter. Let us never refer to it again.” She slowly raised her head in order to warn him with her eyes.

The look was not lost on Mr. Fitzwilliam. “Yes, of course. I shall not say another word.”

He took her hand between his and they sat for a few moments in silence. As soon as she was recovered sufficiently, she stood up. “Let us go now.”

“Are you quite recovered? Do you think you could walk back to the house now? Wouldn’t you rather stay here and rest a while?”

“I should, above all things, desire to quit this accursed garden and never return to it.”

“Yes, madam. Well, we shall do as you wish.”

He stood up and took her arm in his. If there were any witnesses at the windows of the house, they would have observed the touching tableau of an intimate and apparently loving couple strolling up the walk arm in arm, she a little pale and delicate and he looking positively triumphant.
Chapter 9

The next day was hot. Summer had at last found refuge in the garden. The windows that had been thrown open in every room admitted not the slightest cooling gust. In spite of the heat, Susan did not go out into the garden. She did not even go down to breakfast. Instead, she stayed in her bedroom to consider the new conditions of her life. When her mother sent the maid to ask after her, Susan sent word that she was not well so that she might be left to ruminate in peace.

She felt an unbearable shame that she had allowed herself to be rejected again. It was clear that her great love would never be consummated. Until now she had allowed herself to be governed by childish fantasies. It was apparent to her that Mr. Dean was too principled either to go against her father’s wishes and court her or have an affair with her. There truly was no future to be found in her fantasies, unless—even now her will looked for ways around the impasse—he could be persuaded to give up the garden and elope with her. But the garden was his livelihood, his life even, so how could he leave that?

She was beginning to understand, but it was very difficult. She would have to spend the rest of her life indoors or risk seeing him, and she could not bear to see him. It broke her heart every time she saw him. The only escape was for her to marry and move away from this place. However, the family was not going to London this season, and it might be another whole year before she could meet someone who would be willing to take her away. Of course there would be other visitors to the garden who might be captivated by her, but she could scarcely endure the thought of escorting more suitors through the garden.

Then there was Fitzwilliam. In many ways he would make an ideal husband. He had already shown himself willing to indulge her every whim. And he would look very pretty on her arm. It was curious that she felt no passion for him, but certainly passion was not a requirement of marriage, except in novels.

It was afternoon before her mother finally managed to persuade her to come out of her bedroom and join the others in the drawing room. Mrs. Kirke suggested that Fitzwilliam take Susan for a walk so that she could recover from the headache that she complained of, but Susan refused to go. When Fitzwilliam suggested the idea of a drive around the neighbourhood instead, Susan acquiesced.

As the horses trotted down the driveway pulling the couple in their phaeton, Fitzwilliam spoke. “Well, Miss Kirke. Having been in your bedroom all morning, you have no idea what a to-do we have caused by walking together arm in arm yesterday.”

“Is that so, sir? I hope you informed everyone that I required your support only because I was unwell.”

“Of course, madam. I am always at your service.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“My parents have been most assiduous today in insisting that I press my suit. In short, they will not leave this place until I have made you a proposal.”

“Is that right?”

“Yes, it is. So, I hope that this experience will not prove too unpleasant for you, but I must ask. Would you do me the very great honour of becoming my wife?”
Susan was not entirely taken aback by the offer. The question of how to respond to the proposal was one of the quandaries that had occupied her mind in the time she had locked herself in her bedroom, but she still had not resolved the issue.

One moment she was sure it was the right thing to do because it would take her away from this garden that had become a personal torment to her. The next moment, she could not bear to leave in spite of everything. One moment she thought he was a most obliging and pleasant man who would never require more love from her than she could give. The next moment she was just as sure of Dean’s assessment of him as a reprobate.

“Well, Miss Kirke. Your silence frightens me.”

“Thank you, for the honour of your proposal. I will need some time to consider it, if you do not mind.”

“Of course not, but in the meantime, may I make some argument in favour of my suit?”

“If you wish, sir.”

“First of all, as I said before, I am in no great hurry to marry. We may have a long engagement if you should wish. Secondly, I understand the position that you are in at the moment.”

She became alarmed that he might mention Dean.

“Do not worry. I shall not allude to it again. I only mean that I intend to be sympathetic to your emotional distress and not push you in any way beyond what you are ready to accept.”

She felt relieved by his words. “You are most kind. I will, of course, take your remarks into consideration when I make my decision.”

“Please know that a positive decision from you will relieve me of the onerous obligations that my parents have imposed. Even if your acceptance of my suit is only a temporary measure on your part to obtain a little respite from your parents’ demands on you, I shall understand.”

“Sir, it worries me that there is absolutely no talk of love or even of affection in your suit. You do not express your feelings towards me. It would be helpful for me to know what they are.”

“Of course, madam. Forgive my clumsiness in expressing myself. Let me honestly confess that, of all the women I have ever met, you are the one with whom I would most like to be allied. I appreciate your honesty and candour, qualities which I hope to learn from you so that one day, I may be equally as honest with you as you are with me.”

“Perhaps your honesty will extend to sharing your secret passion with me?”

He blushed. “Not at this time.”

“Well, it is not full honesty then, is it?”

“I did not promise you full honesty, only equal honesty.”

“You imply, then, that I am not fully honest with you?”

He nodded.

She blushed. “I confess I am disappointed in your proposal, Mr. Fitzwilliam. I had hoped to hear some expression of love in it.”

“Miss Kirke, have you not been told that affection often increases after marriage? I feel certain that our friendship will grow with time.”

“I have heard that it is true, but such has not been my observation in the limited experience that I have had.” She was disappointed with his reticence. “Although your
feelings are not as passionate as I would hope for, I will consider your proposal and give you my answer within twenty-four hours. Let us not talk of the matter any further.”

“As you wish.”

The rest of the drive continued in idle chitchat about the affairs of the various neighbouring villagers.

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The next day, after another afternoon of her mistress’s brooding, Mary came to Susan’s drawing room to assist her with her toilette before supper. She was to dine with Mr. Fitzwilliam and give him her response.

“Are you feeling better, madam?” she asked politely.

“Oh, Mary. My head aches with the quandary I am in. Mr. Fitzwilliam has made a proposal, and I do not know if I should accept.”

Mary looked around the room. “Which gown would madam like to wear?”

“Oh, Mary! Do not vex me so. I have just told you that I am not capable of making a decision. You choose.”

“It is not my place to advise you on your choice of suitor,” she said, “but I think I can help you with your choice of gown. Pink goes well with your complexion. Why don’t you wear that new Spitalfields silk?”

“Yes, Mary. But at least tell me what you think of the gentleman for whom I shall wear it.”

Mary blushed. “I like him well enough,” she said, noncommittally.

“Well enough to marry him?”

“There is not the remotest possibility of that, madam.”

“But if there were no impediment to it, would you marry the man?”

Mary touched the gown lovingly. “If he asked me and I like his conversation, then I believe I would.”

Susan tossed down her hairbrush limply. “I believe you are a lovesick fool, Mary. Do you like him better than Mr. Dean?”

Mary could not help but blush again.

“I do believe you are in love with every man you meet. Tell me, do you love Andrew, as well?”

Mary did not blush but instead shook her head firmly. “That is enough nonsense, madam. Let’s put on your gown.”

As Mary lifted the gown above her head, Susan began to chant annoyingly. “Mistress Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?”

“Tis not my garden. ‘Tis yours.”

“With silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maids all in a row.”

“You are one pretty maid who causes me endless trouble, madam.”

“And you are one pretty maid who never helps me with my troubles.”

“That is because I am contrary, just as the rhyme says. Never mind, madam. I promise I shall stay with you, whatever you decide, if you’ll have me.”

“Now that is a good, dear friend, Mary. Of course I will.”

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Mr. Fitzwilliam had arranged an intimate supper with Miss Kirke that evening. They had the parlour to themselves with no servants to disturb them as the food was already
arranged on the sideboard to eat at their leisure. Miss Kirke filled her plate and sat down. Mr. Fitzwilliam sat down facing her.

“Will you not have any food to eat?” Susan asked him.

“How can I eat when I am in such a state of suspense? Can you not see that I am hanging here waiting for your response? Will you have me or no?”

Susan smiled slightly. Now this seemed like some kind of passion, even if it was only impatience. “Do you expect me to give my response to you on an empty stomach? What if the news is other than what you hope for? Then you will be unable to eat at all, and I will have spoiled your supper.”

“Oh, say it is not so, Miss Kirke. Tell me quickly if the answer is to be no.”

“Then I shall tell you slowly and at my leisure, Mr. Fitzwilliam.” She took a piece of cheese and put it in her mouth.

“Does that mean the answer is ‘yes’? What has become of your plain speech of which I am so fond?”

Susan laughed. “It is amusing to tease you, sir. I believe I might even enjoy being married to you if I may tease you at my leisure.”

“Ah ha! I have won the day, then!” Fitzwilliam jumped up and clapped his hands. “Now I shall have some food and drink to celebrate.” He went to the sideboard to fill his plate, skipping and singing, “Pray, when will the wedding be?”

Susan watched him with some lingering doubt. He seemed happy, but only for himself. He had not greeted her warmly or touched her since she had said yes. “Not too soon, I hope, sir.” The words slipped out of her mouth without her thinking.

“What’s that?” He stopped capering and turned to her.

Fortunately he had not heard, and she had time to amend them. “I hope the wedding will be soon, sir.”

“No, no. I am not overanxious for that. I should like to be betrothed for a few years yet just to grow accustomed to the position and to have some peace from my parents’ matchmaking. I shall live the life of a bachelor in peace and no man will seek me out as a mate for his daughter. You do not know how happy this makes me, Miss Kirke.”

“As your future wife, I suppose I must be glad for your happiness, sir. However, your happiness seems not to include me.”

“I am sorry. I have been too frank even for you. Do not mistake me. I hope that your life will be easier for the next few years, also.”

Susan could not imagine how it would be if she was to remain here at her parents. “Now that I have had more time to reflect, I think I would rather marry you sooner than later, sir. I wish you could take me away from this place before a few years’ time.”

“What! You surprise me. Why would you want to quit the garden that you love so soon?”

“May I have your permission to speak frankly, sir?”

“I wish that you would, madam.”

“It has become a torment to me to encounter the gardener who no longer loves me.”

“Ah, Miss Kirke. Now I understand your haste.” He got up and went to the sideboard to fill his plate while he gave her the following advice. “Do not be discouraged. I have great faith in your powers of persuasion. You have no idea what wonders the passage of time may work. You should wish for more rather than fewer years in which to win his love. Though as to that, I am confident that you will accomplish it sooner.”
Susan was astonished by his complete lack of jealousy. “Am I to understand that you would want me to marry Mr. Dean?”

Fitzwilliam sat down with his plate of food. “We have already established the improbability of that event. I speak rather of his seduction.”

Susan blushed. “Mr. Dean is too moral a man for that, sir.”

“Such a man does not exist in my experience.”

Susan regarded him eating a chicken leg as he spoke with such cynicism. There could be no man on earth more unlike Dean. She did not like Fitzwiliam, and yet she had just accepted his proposal. “Sometimes I do not understand you at all, sir. Have you not a jealous bone in your body?”

“I have not, madam. But do not be concerned. You will have a lifetime to learn to understand me.” With that remark, he put his piece of chicken back down on his plate.

“Miss Kirke, I am so excited by your acceptance of my proposal that I find I cannot eat after all. You will forgive me if I rush off to acquaint my parents and yours with the good news first.”

“We should go together to deliver that news, sir.”

“Oh yes, of course. How foolish of me. Forgive me, but I am new to the concept of engagement, as yet. It will take me some time to replace ‘I’ with ‘we.’” Then he rose, offered her his arm, and they went together to inform the family.
Chapter 10

Andrew had a basket filled to the top with weeds that he was attempting to balance on his shoulder in order to carry them to the compost heap. He held it nonchalantly at a rakish angle, and some of the weeds began to tumble out. The old widow Hardwick, who had spent the morning bent over filling the basket, nevertheless began to laugh with her wide open mouth revealing her missing teeth.

“Why are you cackling, old woman?”

She could not speak in her merriment, so she pointed. He looked behind him at the weeds strewn on the ground and bent down to pick them up again, still holding the basket at its angle. Even more weeds tumbled out over his head. Mrs. Hardwick literally doubled over with laughter, although, with her stooped back, she had not far to bend.

The gardener, overhearing them, came to investigate the sound of laughter so foreign to his present mood.

Andrew, by this time, had put down the basket and was picking up all the weeds that had tumbled around him.

“What is all this disorder, then?” Dean scowled.

“Oh, Mr. Dean, you ought to have seen it.” Widow Hardwick tried to explain between her chuckles.

“You are a clumsy oaf, Andrew.” Mr. Dean cuffed the kneeling boy on the side of the head.

“Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir.”

“Here, Mr. Dean. There’s no harm done.” The widow came to the boy’s defense.

“Never you mind, madam. Just get back to your work.”

“You’ve always been a good, kind master, and I would never complain on my own behalf, but don’t beat the boy, sir. Don’t take your sorrow out on him.”

“What do you know of my sorrow?”

“Begging your pardon, sir. I only assume you must feel sorrowful to hear about the engagement of the young Miss Kirke and that scoundrel Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

“And why would I feel anything about that? Get back to your work or I shall cut your wages.”

“There are no coins smaller than a farthing, sir.” She began cackling again, this time louder, then turned and toddled off into the wood like a diminutive spirit of the forest.

Dean took to heart the grizzled lady’s advice and apologized to Andrew before he returned to his greenhouse retreat.

So it was true, and even the most lowly servant knew about it! Dean cursed himself. How could he have let Susan slip into the clutches of that vile Fitzwilliam? He had tried to warn her, but he should have known that his warning would only incite her to defy him, just as she had defied her parents by meeting with him even after she had been forbidden. He should feel relieved to be rid of her. Such a perverse and disobedient child would have brought him only heartache. He tried to convince himself that he was better off without her, but his heart refused to believe it, linked as it was steadfastly to hers. How could she even consider marrying another man, especially one like Fitzwilliam? She had no idea what marriage was or she would not become engaged with someone who
could not love her and would not make her happy. How could he make her understand this before it was too late?

He had not seen Susan in the garden for several weeks and so he foresaw no opportunity of meeting her by chance. He could not arrange a meeting stealthily through a servant. Besides it being forbidden, he did not know whom he could trust. He did not trust his own heart to risk speaking to her in person. He had lost his chance to employ Fitzwilliam as an emissary since the Fitzwilliam family had already left the premises, perhaps to prepare the impending nuptials.

If that was the case, then Dean did not have time to spare. For all he knew, the wedding could be next month. That was it! He suddenly hit upon the perfect pretext to broach the topic with her father. He would speak with Kirke about the preparations that would be needed to prepare the garden for a large wedding party. He resolved to do so at the first opportunity, which was not long in coming.

The very next day, Kirke sought the gardener out to discuss some expenses for the maintenance of the garden, and Dean found the courage to ask about the wedding.

“Mr. Kirke, I understand there is to be a wedding in your family.”

“Well, yes. What!” Kirke coughed and blustered proudly. “There has been an engagement announced between my daughter and Mr. Herbert Fitzwilliam.”

“I would like to offer my congratulations, sir. You must be very pleased. When is the wedding to be celebrated?”

“Thank you for your good wishes. No date has been settled yet. There is no rush. Miss Kirke is still very young, you understand.”

“Of course. I only ask because I am sure you would want to show off your garden to best effect during the celebration. Pray, let me know well in advance of the date so that I may make the necessary preparations. Perhaps we might also make some plans for the use of flowers during the ceremony.”

“Capital idea! I shall keep you apprised, sir.”

Dean did not feel relieved to have obtained official confirmation regarding Miss Kirke’s engagement, but he was pleased to learn that the wedding was not to be celebrated immediately. There might still be time to warn her if he could only think of a means to achieve it.

***

The next day Mr. Kirke observed his melancholy daughter sitting in the window seat, looking out at the beautiful summer morning.

“You sit here pining as if you wished to go out, Susan, and yet you do not. Why is that, my dear?”

Susan was surprised by her father’s observation, and for a moment could not think how to respond. “I have so much on my mind, Father. There are a great many preparations to be made for my wedding.”

“Extraordinary! I had no idea there was so much to consider in preparing for a wedding. Why, just the other day I was speaking to Dean and he mentioned the fact that the garden needed to be prepared for the wedding, and flowers would be required. You know, I had never thought of such things before.”

Just to hear his name mentioned lifted Susan’s spirits remarkably.

“However, I can hardly credit your words as you are not doing anything but sitting here. How is it possible that you are preparing while you stare out the window?”
Susan laughed in spite of her melancholy. “I was looking at those flowers there, wondering which of them would make the sweetest, most colourful nosegay.”

“‘Tis a beautiful day, my dear. Why do you not walk out where you can smell the scents and see them more clearly? If you see the gardener, you might discuss with him yourself which flowers would be best for decorating. There is not a man in England more knowledgeable on the subject.”

“But I am forbidden to talk to the gardener, Father.”

He looked nonplussed. “I had forgotten that. However, it seems to me, considering your new position as an engaged woman, there would be no danger, would there, my dear?”

“Of course not. I shall always be ruled by Mr. Fitzwilliam, and I would do nothing that he would disapprove of.” She looked down at her shoes as she spoke. She felt awkward, but Fitzwilliam had given her leave to seduce the gardener.

“I am pleased to hear it, Susan. So, run along now into the garden. Perhaps the fresh air will put some colour in your pale cheeks.”

“Thank you. I believe I will.” He was a fond old fool, she thought as she got up from the window seat and prepared to go outside. She now had her father’s permission, as well as her fiance’s; there could be no harm.

***

Dean was deep in contemplation regarding the best manner of warning Susan about the danger of marrying Fitzwilliam when he almost ran into her on a solitary woodland path.

“Miss Kirke,” he stammered, feeling the blood drain from his face.

“Are you all right, sir?” She examined him solicitously.

He nodded.

“I am sorry to have startled you. I had the advantage of seeing you coming before you saw me. You were deeply preoccupied. May I enquire as to the subject of your reverie?”

He was embarrassed to tell her. “You may not, madam.”

“Yes, well…” She looked down.

“I beg your pardon. I didna mean to be so abrupt. You startled me so because you were the object of my preoccupation. I was considering how best to meet you, and then, suddenly, there you were.”

“How very strange.”

“Yes. It was as if the devil himself had conjured you out of thin air.”

“Not the devil, I hope, sir.”

“Yes, the very devil.” He hoped to hurt her just a little, as she had hurt him by her foolish engagement.

“Well.” She continued meeting his gaze, but he thought he noticed a slight tic near one eye. “What is it you wanted to contact me about?” she asked.

“I wanted to warn you.” He saw the exasperated look on her face. “From the bottom of my heart, madam, I do not try to warn you out of my own self-interest. I have given up all claim to that, but I am still interested in your welfare, and I know you will never be happy with a man like Fitzwilliam.”

Susan negotiated steps around Dean and began walking down the path. He turned and kept pace with her. “And just what kind of man is he?” she asked.

“One who has no interest in loving a woman.”
“I do not know this kind of man, sir, but Mr. Fitzwilliam is my friend. He has ever
honoured my wishes, and he makes no excessive demands on me.”

“Nor ever will, I am sure. Just as I am sure he will leave you quite alone once you are
married. Is that your wish?”

The path opened onto a lawn. Susan stopped short and faced him. “What right have
you to interfere in my happiness? As you say, you have given up any claim to me.”

“I have.”

“Then you have no right.” She turned to walk away.

“Miss Kirke,” he called after her. “I only wished to counsel you.”

She whirled around. “You gave up your right to counsel me when you promised my
father never to talk to me again, a promise which you see fit to break now.”

He realized that she was angry at him because he had rejected her. He did not have the
heart to anger her further. “Do you really believe there is any way we could have a future
together?” he asked.

She said nothing.

“Would you be able to give up all this?” He looked around the garden. “Because you
would lose it all if you married me.”

She stood looking at him intently a few moments before she finally responded, “And
you would lose it all if you married me.”

“I would,” he stated firmly. He would not hesitate to abandon the garden if she would
consent to be his wife. It was only his work. However, she had more to lose, for she
would be losing her home and family, which were very precious possessions indeed.

“Well,” she said. “It seems we are at an impasse. You do not wish to give up your
livelihood. I can understand that. It must be everything for a working man.”

“My livelihood!” He said with disdain. “Why, such a loss can be nothing to me
compared with the loss of your family for you.”

“You would be willing to give up your employment for me, sir?”

“There is other employment elsewhere for an industrious gardener like me. However,
you have only one family, and I would never ask you to give up the wealth and status, in
short, everything that your family affords you.”

“Go ahead. Ask me,” she said eagerly.

He looked at her, not believing what she was saying. Would she really choose him
over her family? “Would you…” He began, but before he could finish the question, she
ran to him with her arms outstretched. He stood firm against her violent assault and
wrapped his arms around her tiny, warm body. His heart was a bird beating its wings
inside of him. His tears fell on the top of her head and he kissed them away till she turned
her face upward and he kissed the soft, white skin of her forehead, her cheek, her chin,
her upturned nose and then the pink bud of her lips.

He was lost for a moment that seemed like an eternity.

Then he felt the shock of the reciprocal emotions engendered by his kiss. It was as if a
bolt of lightning had struck him, and he stepped back and looked at her. “Miss Kirke,” he
said, recovering himself. “My apologies.”

“No apologies necessary, sir.” She smiled.

“Will you do me the very great honour of becoming my wife?” he blurted out.

“With all my heart, sir.”
He opened his arms to her and she stepped into his embrace again. She fitted the space there as if she had been created for it, and he did not want to release her ever. Instead, they started walking down the garden path, arm in arm.

“Of course, you realize it is necessary for me to disentangle myself from another engagement before we can announce ours,” she said.

“Aye. But I cannot keep it secret for a moment. Let us be open and honest with your family from the start. We should go straight to your parents and make an announcement to them. When that is achieved, disentangling yourself, as you say, will be redundant.”

“My parents will be very angry and they will put all kinds of impediments in our way, I am certain, sir.”

“Why should they not wish for your happiness above all else? When they see how happy we are, how can they stand in our way?”

“You will see, sir. They will.”

“But we cannot keep our love hidden any longer. We must confess it openly. It is the only right and honourable thing to do. We must accept the consequences of that, whatever they may be.”

“If you say so, sir.”

He was determined. The emotion of the moment so clouded his usual good judgment that he was convinced love would overcome all obstacles. So they continued walking arm in arm until they came to the great house, and then they walked together up the stone steps and in through the door. There was an agitated stir among the servants that they passed as they penetrated farther into the house. Finally they walked boldly into the sitting room of Mr. Kirke, who was unfolding his napkin in order to take some repast.

“What have we here?” he said in evident shock.

“We have come, sir, to declare our undeniable love for one another and to ask your blessings on our union.” Dean recited his speech like a prayer he had memorized.

Kirke threw down his napkin and jumped to his feet far more nimbly than he had done in many a year. “How dare you break into my house in broad daylight and steal my daughter from me? The audacity of the man. Such bold impudence! Leave hold of my daughter immediately or a magistrate will be called for.”

“Why, sir? What laws have been broken?”

“I can only assume your ignorance of the law is due to the fact that you are Scottish. Perhaps in your wild country, it is acceptable to steal a man’s daughter from him.”

“It is your daughter who has stolen my heart…”

“Please do not recite pretty poetry to me. I will not be so easily pushed over as my daughter has been.”

Susan extricated herself from Mr. Dean’s arm and stood up to her father. “How dare you insult me by talking about me as if I were a cow and Mr. Dean a cattle thief. How dare you suggest that I am under the influence of this man’s ‘poetry’! I tell you that I am in love, Father, and no one has swayed me.”

“You are too bold, you ungrateful baggage. Go to your room while I talk with Dean.”

“‘I will not.’

Mrs. Kirke arrived at that moment and burst into the room. “What is the meaning of all this commotion?”

“Your daughter and this scoundrel here,” he nodded at Dean, “have just announced their intention to wed.”
Mrs. Kirke began to faint, slipping toward the floor, but the butler, one step behind her, caught hold of her and led her to a chair.

“Are you all right, my dear?” Kirke came to her side.

“Yes, yes,” she murmured.

Kirke turned on his daughter. “You see how your willfulness has shocked your mother! Now, go to your room.”

“I will not.” Susan continued her insolent words, but her demeanor changed. She knelt down beside her mother. “Are you sure you are all right, madam?”

Her mother looked at her fiercely. “You cannot do this to our family. You are already engaged to Fitzwilliam. Think of the dishonour the whole family will suffer if you go forward with this unspeakable plan.”

Dean spoke at last. “What is unspeakable, madam, if you will pardon my intrusion, is that you have engaged Miss Kirke with a man who can never make her happy.”

“The impertinence of the man! Mr. Kirke, I cannot suffer to be spoken to in such a manner in my own house. Call the magistrate and have him escorted from our home.”

“Yes, dear. Right away. It is only what I have already threatened to do.”

Dean knew that he had been foolish and that Susan had been right, but at the same time, he could not fault himself. It was not in his nature to sneak around like an outlaw when he had made up his mind on a course of action. Still, it was clear that this was a time to withdraw from the battlefield. Nothing further could be gained from going before the law now. “There is nae need, sir. I will leave of my own accord peaceably. I need some time to assemble my things, and then I will be off your property in short order.”

“No, Mr. Dean! Surely you do not intend to leave me here. Take me with you,” Susan cried out from her position on her knees.

He was moved with pity for her. He should have thought through the consequences for her before he acted. He tried to reassure her. “Have faith and be patient. Wait for me. When you are the age of consent, they cannot stop us. Our love will win in the end.” Even as he said it, he could scarcely believe his own words. Patience was never her strong suit, but she would have to learn it or learn to forget him. “Goodbye, my love.”

With that, Dean left the family as they were, Susan sobbing on the floor beside her mother, her mother wailing, Mr. Kirke ordering the butler to escort Mr. Dean to collect his belongings, and then the butler superciliously passing on the task to a footman.

Mr. Kirke looked at his two women howling and almost put his hands over his ears. He went to the door and called Susan’s servant, who arrived in mere seconds. In fact, the gardener had just passed by all of the household servants, or at least those who could manage it, huddled within hearing distance.

“Escort my daughter to her apartment, where she will stay for the remainder of the day,” Kirke said to Mary. “You will see to it.”

Mary curtseyed. “Yes, sir.” Then she bent down and linked her arm in Susan’s to help her up. “Come, madam,” she said and took her to her bedroom.

There, Susan flung herself full-length on her bed and wept inconsolably, her face buried in the bedclothes, while Mary sat quietly at the side of the bed waiting for her mistress to recover.

He was gone. Just like that. He had abandoned her. He expected her to wait until she was of legal age and no longer needed her parents’ consent to marry. Did he not know that the age of consent was twenty-one in England? Or perhaps he did not know that she
was only sixteen. Five years was an eternity! The snail crawls faster than those five years would pass.

Why had he insisted on telling her parents? She had warned him, but he had to be so honest and so noble. She cringed at the sarcasm in her own head. It was wrong of her to chastise him, for he was honest and noble. She was not worthy of him with her wicked thoughts. She imagined him standing before her in his gardening clothes, in his blue overcoat, which matched those blue eyes that stared at her disapprovingly. What would he disapprove of now? Her extravagant display of emotion that served only to waste time that could be more helpfully employed in rectifying the situation.

Well, she said inwardly to the man in her mind, I understand. I really do, but you must give me half an hour—just half an hour is all I require—to wallow in misery and self pity. She sniffed loudly. After that I promise I shall employ my time making all things right again. A little sob escaped her mouth and her imaginary Mr. Dean inclined his head ever so slightly to kiss her forehead. It was more than she could bear.

She began to weep again, but this time not only for herself. She was weeping for John Dean, for his loss was greater than hers. He had lost his employment because of her selfish desire to be in his company. She tried to console herself with the thought that he was a skilled gardener, and he would easily find another position. She was sure of it. She hoped for it. She wanted to see him immediately in person to tell him how sorry she was to have put him in jeopardy. She wanted to get up and go to him before he was gone she knew not where.

“Mary, fetch me my walking shoes. I need to find Mr. Dean to apologize before he leaves.”

“I am sorry, madam, but your father has ordered me to make sure that you stay here.”

“You are being ridiculous! You are my maid. If I ask you to help me, you will.”

“But your father pays my salary, so I must do as he bids me.” Then she muttered under her breath, “Though to that, he does not pay me near enough to be a jailer, too.”

“I appeal to you as a friend, Mary. Help me now.”

“I cannot let you go, madam. You understand I could lose my job if I let you go.”

“You are right. I am sorry. Enough people have lost their job because of me. Do you think somehow you could get word to him on my behalf, maybe by way of another servant? Go down to the kitchen and bring me some broth for I am feeling poorly. Ask around and see if a message may be sent to Mr. Dean. While you are gone, I shall compose one.”

“Do you promise you will not slip away while I am absent?”

“I promise I will not.”

Mary left and Susan took a piece of paper from her escritoir and sat at her bureau to write a letter to “Mr. John Dean, Esquire.” The words came painfully slowly, each one wrung from her, reconsidered, and erased a dozen times or more.

Sir:

You cannot know how sorry I am that your employment has been terminated on my account. I pray that you will soon find another position. I have every confidence that you will with your excellent skills.

Please send me word of your destination…

How could he send her word of his destination if he never received the missive because she did not know his destination?
Before she had finished, Mary returned with a dish of broth and word that Mr. Dean was already gone and no one among the household staff knew where.

Susan crumpled the letter until her hand ached from squeezing it. Then she threw it with all her might. She resisted the urge to cry again, and her sorrow transformed into anger at herself. Her vision of John Dean had been right. While she had been wallowing in self pity he had gotten his things together and left. She could have sent a message to him; instead she had wasted the time in tears, and now she did not know where he was. She wanted to scream.

Five years. She would probably require every moment of that time to find him.

“Mary, will you help me find him?”

“Yes, but there is nothing more that can be done today. Tomorrow we can go and speak to the garden servants. Perhaps one of them will know where he has gone.”

“So, I am to be imprisoned only for today?”

“Yes, madam.”

“Good. So what shall we do till the end of the day?”

“Well, I suppose we could have a game of ‘all-four.’ Have you ever played it before?”

“I do not think that I shall be much of a companion today. I have no spirit left to play cards. I am sorry, Mary, but I shall retire now.” Susan sat down and Mary helped her to disrobe.
Chapter 11

The next day, Susan arose with firm determination and went to the wash bowl on the commode. She poured the water from the pitcher and splashed it on her face. Then she dried her face and called Mary to help her dress to go out into the garden. She was determined to question everyone she met about Mr. Dean’s whereabouts. She still boiled inside at what she perceived to be her father’s injustice, so it would do her good to walk in the fresh air of the garden to cool her overexcited nerves. She put on her bonnet, wrapped a mantelet around her shoulders and went out, ignoring the stares and whispered comments of the servants she passed as she made her way to the door.

She glanced over the colourful display of blooms searching everywhere for some human form as she walked. A movement in a flowerbed caught her eye. She looked more closely and saw the shape of an old woman crouched in the middle of the flower garden under a tulip tree. It was the Widow Hardwick, whom Dean employed to pull the weeds. As soon as the old woman noticed she was being watched, she stood up slowly, her back remaining stooped. Susan walked toward her, hoping that the widow knew where he might be.

“Widow Hardwick, good morning.”

The old woman’s face scrunched up disagreeably. “Morning, madam,” she grunted.

“Do you know where your master has gone?”

“Lost him, have you?”

Susan thought it a strange comment. “Yes. I wonder if you know where he is.”

“No, though I wish I did. From whom can I collect my farthing now that Mr. Dean has been dismissed? Can you tell me that, madam?”

Susan’s face turned as red as the lupin beside the widow. She wondered what she could possibly tell her. It occurred to her again that her own sorrow was just a tiny speck compared with the ripples of grief that would now spread out from Dean’s dismissal from this garden. Poor old Mrs. Hardwick, whose husband had left her no income and who refused to take money from the parish, preferring to crouch in the Kirke Hall gardens making twenty shillings a year pulling up weeds. Only Dean had ever taken pity on her. Who would employ her now if the new gardener was not as charitable as the old?

“Well, I need to know where my next meal will come from.”

“You must speak to the gardener who will replace Dean.”

“Who might that be?”

“I am sorry. I have not been informed, but I am sure that someone will be appointed before long.”

The old woman scowled, a look filled with loathing, and then she turned and spat on the dark earth. “Good day, madam,” she said as she hobbled away.

Susan turned back to her walk. Disagreeable old woman! How saintly Dean had been to tolerate her!

She continued looking for other servants who were doing their early morning chores, but no one to whom she spoke had any knowledge of his whereabouts. Their responses made it evident that they held her responsible for the departure of the well-loved head gardener.
However, it was the garden itself that reproached her most stingingly. She could not
turn a corner in the serpentine walk that did not remind her of him. At every moment she
expected to see him trimming a hedge or inspecting the new plantings or pulling old
blooms off a bush, but of course he was nowhere to be seen. As beautiful as the garden
was, without Dean it seemed dull and lifeless, containing nothing to delight her any
longer. Susan walked back to the house more downcast and dejected than she had been
when she set out.

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That afternoon Susan decided to resume her letter to Dean. She retrieved the crumpled
page from the corner of the room where she had tossed it and copied the words that she
could barely discern before she added the thoughts that preoccupied her now.

“I walked in the garden this morning, but I am afraid that the sound of the birds and
the sight and smell of the flowers did not reach my soul. I received them with my outer
senses only, for my soul was deaf and dumb and blind with the loss of your company. I
swear that even the garden misses you.

Please forgive my impertinence, Mr. Dean. I know that the sorrow I feel at the loss of
your company is but an insubstantial shadow beside your loss of livelihood.

I hope that this missive finds you in good health and that you will send me word of
your situation through my maid who delivers this to you. Your proposal to me makes me
bold to make a counter-proposal. Since I said yes to you, I have thought of nothing else
but our wedding. My mind is still set upon it. Therefore, I propose that we elope at your
convenience. Mary will be our go-between in this affair. Please send word through her
when you will come for me. I cannot stay under my parents’ roof any longer since they
have no regard for my happiness. I anxiously await your response.

Yours in sincere devotion,
Miss Susan Kirke

She placed her pen upon her writing desk and called her maid.

Mary entered the room and curtseyed.

“You are from London, are you not, Mary?”

“You know I am, madam.”

“And you know your way around the city. I daresay you have walked hither and yon
by yourself before.”

“Well, yes, up to a point. But there are some parts of London I would not walk by
myself. Not if I could help it, begging your pardon.”

“Yes, that is as it should be, I suppose. But what I want to ask you is, if Mr. Dean has
gone to London, would you be able to deliver a letter to him for me?”

Mary looked doubtful.

“Oh, you need not be alarmed. It is a perfectly respectable letter. I only mean to
apologize to him for my part in his dismissal. It was so imprudent of me to speak with
him in the first place, even if it was done in the open, where suspicious and evil eyes
could observe us and idle, lying tongues could report on us.”

“It was never me. I certainly did not report on you.”

“And whoever said you did, Mary? If I thought for one moment you had, I most
certainly would not charge you with the task of finding him now, would I?”

“No, but how am I to find him?”
“Perhaps you will have more luck speaking with the gardening servants than I did, for they will not talk to me.”
“Tis true.”
“And when you have found out where he has gone, please come to me; I will give you the letter to be delivered into his hand personally. Then you are to wait for him while he writes a reply. Do you think you can accomplish that?”
“I shall do my best.”
Mary was happy of an errand that sent her out into the garden. She enjoyed the opportunity to walk out in the pleasure ground, but she rarely had time in her busy day to glimpse out the window. She strolled leisurely among the green trees and shrubs, observing the ornamental statues and wondering what they signified. Occasionally, she encountered a garden servant and stopped to pass the time of day, but whenever she broached the topic of the gardener, they would shy away from the conversation.
One cantankerous old woman said, “You are Miss Kirke’s servant. I’ve already told her that I know nothing,” and then spat upon Mary’s shoe in disgust. Mary had endured enough insolence and was set to give up on her mission when she noticed a young man watching her.

“Why do you gawp at me, boy?”
“Pardon me, but I heard you were looking for Mr. Dean.”
“That’s right, I am. Do you know where he is?”
“I might have that information. What will you give me for it?”
“I shall give you the time of day, if you’re not too impudent.”
“Me? Impudent! Never.”
“What’s your name, boy?”
“’Tis Andrew, and I’m not a boy.”
“I say you are, Andrew.”
“What’s your name, madam?”
“Mary. Now is that enough chit-chat? Will you give me Mr. Dean’s address?”
“I have not agreed to such terms, Mary. I think the information is more valuable to you than that. I also think that you have something that would be just as valuable to me.”
“Name your price, Andrew.”
“I’ll give you the address for a kiss.”
“I knew you were naught but an insolent boy.”
“What do you say?”
“A kiss, is it?” A quick one would do no harm and should satisfy such an innocent as this boy. She leaned forward and gave him a kiss on the lips.
He blushed bright red and seemed unable to speak for a moment.
“So, will you pay me now, or are you dishonest as well as insolent?” she asked.
“Yes, Mary,” he stammered. “I’ll give you the address. Mr. Dean has written it on a piece of paper that he left in the greenhouse. I’ll fetch it for you.”
Andrew ran off, his feet scarcely touching the ground in his joy at receiving his first kiss.

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Susan waited impatiently for her maid, installing herself in a window seat where she would be able to see Mary returning from the garden. There she was, her pale white skin turned rosy from the exercise of walking in the fresh air. Mary looked up at the house and
Susan waved to her. Mary blushed even redder. Susan opened the door to greet her and
the maid walked in, a little short of breath.

“Well? Were you able to discover Mr. Dean’s address, Mary?”
She replied between pants. “Let me catch my breath first, madam.”
“You could have said yes or no in the time it took you to say all of that. You were not
gone very long. Did you give up too easily?”
“Patience, madam. I have it.” Mary reached into her bodice and withdrew a paper.
“Good for you. What a good servant! But tell me, how did you manage it?”
“Ah, madam, as to that, you should always acknowledge me the best friend you ever
had after I tell you what I did to obtain this paper.”
“What do you mean? What did you do?”
“I had to pay for the information. That is what I did.”
“Do you wish me to reimburse you?”
Mary laughed. “Not at all, Miss Kirke. I would rather you did not.”
“So what was the payment then?”
“I was obliged to kiss one of the garden hands.”
“Oh, Mary!” Susan giggled. “Who was it? Tell me.”
“It was Andrew.”
“Andrew! Well then it was not too unpleasant, I think.”
Mary laughed along with her mistress. “He is a sweet boy, to be sure, but a little
childish for my taste.”
“Come along. Give me the paper, then.”
“You are such an impatient lover, madam. Here it is.”
Susan opened the paper and read out the address. “Do you know where this is?”
“I believe so, but I shall ask the coachman tomorrow to be certain. If I am right, it is
south of the River Thames, so I should be able to return before the end of the day if I
leave early tomorrow.”
“Thank you, Mary.”
“You ought to thank me, madam. I do not think it is a very respectable part of
London.”
“Nonsense. We are talking about Mr. Dean, are we not? Everything about the man is
respectable. You must be mistaken.”
“On this, we shall see.”

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After Mary left for London, Susan waited for word from her with great impatience. As
usual, she channeled her restlessness into her morning walk in the garden, ignoring the
scowls of the workers and concentrating for the first time in a long time on the beauty of
the flora that surrounded her. Walking along the serpentine path through the flower beds,
she amused herself by naming the flowers as Dean had taught her. The English daisy,
lobelia, and forget-me-not. (She would not forget him, she would not). And behind them,
alyssum, bergenia, and love-lies-bleeding. (She would not forget him, she would not).
Bright yellow calendula, wall-flowers yellow and red, white candy-tuft, and the little
purple flowers of heliotrope growing scattered everywhere. Painted daisies, Sweet
William. The song popped into her head: *Sweet William died of love for me, and I will
die of sorrow*. She wanted to prostrate herself on the grass and bury herself in tears again,
but her pride would not let her. She would have to be satisfied with an inward suffering with the music of the flowers’ names as an echoing refrain.

It was a waste of time to be miserable anyway. She should think of the good times when he had tried to teach her the Latin names of all the plants. She had refused to learn, and even now she did not feel the need to know them. English names were good enough. English names said all they needed to say. Think of Scotsman’s Purse. How they had laughed together at the name. Again, as she had done every day since he had left her, she tried to conjure up his presence. She prayed that Mary had managed to find him.
Chapter 12

Dean was in the middle of writing a difficult letter to his mother, telling her of the change of course in his career. He was chewing on the end of his quill, trying to decide if he should leave anything out or tell her everything when there was a sturdy knock on the door. He recognized that knock. It belonged to his landlady, Mrs. Clark, a fellow Scot whose name had been recommended to him by an acquaintance back home. She had been living in this house for thirty years, but since her husband had died, she had been obliged to take in lodgers.

Dean got up and opened the door. Mrs. Clark’s pinched scowl greeted him. “You have a visitor,” she said.

“A visitor!”

“Aye. A young lady.” Mrs. Clark’s disgust was evident. “I have told you that you are not to have young ladies in your apartment alone with you. I run a respectable lodging house here, in spite of the neighbourhood.”

“Aye, Mrs. Clark. Dinna fash. I am well aware of that.”

“Come then,” she said, leading Dean down the stairs to the vestibule as if he did not know the way.

Dean followed, his heart full of mixed emotions. With the exception of Susan, he could not imagine who it might be. Although he was longing to see her again, he prayed that it would not be her. Oh, please God, let her not be so foolish as to follow me, he prayed. The vestibule door opened, and he saw the young lady visitor.

“Mary,” he smiled warmly. “Tis a pleasure to see an acquaintance from Kirke Hall.”

“Tis good to see you also, sir.”

The landlady continued to stand beside Dean and made no move to leave.

“Mrs. Clark,” he asked. “Is there somewhere in the house I might invite Mary to sit and rest? She has come some distance.”

“You may not entertain a young woman in your dressing room, sir. I made that clear when you let your apartment.”

“Aye, madam. I was inquiring of another possibility. Perhaps the servants’ quarters?”

“That would be acceptable.”

The dour Mrs. Clark led them to the back of the house to the kitchen where the housemaid was preparing the next meal. They sat at the table, and once Mrs. Clark had left, Dean leaned forward and whispered, “Please tell me you have only good news to report of our friend, Miss Kirke.”

“Yes, sir. She is quite well. Or at least she has no physical complaints, although she is pining, sir.”

“Give her my regards, and tell her that I miss her, also.”

“I have brought you a letter from Miss Kirke, if you will be so good as to read it.”

He leaned forward, eager to take the letter but even more concerned to make Mary aware that there must be no more. “Mary, I must warn you that it is foolhardy for you to act as a go-between between your mistress and myself. I do not think Miss Kirke is aware of the risk to you, or she would not ask it. I do not want another person to suffer the loss of an employment in this affair. I shall accept this letter since you have been so bold in
delivering it, but I must insist that you do not attempt such a feat again. I willna accept any future missives from your hand.”

Mary looked sincerely frightened by his words. “Yes, sir,” she said, but made no move to give him the letter.

He continued, “Since you are already here, you may give me the letter.”

“Yes, sir,” she repeated and reached into her pocket to retrieve the letter and hand it to him.

Dean took it from her and perused it lovingly. He imagined Susan as she wrote it in her tidy, delicate school-girl hand. It was like her. Then he had to reread it to truly catch the meaning. It was as he feared. She was considering an elopement. How could he dissuade her? At last he became aware of Mary’s stare and put the letter down with reluctance.

“Do you expect a response?” he asked.

“Why, yes, sir. Miss Kirke led me to believe there would be one.”

“I cannot in good conscience write a letter to her. If you are intercepted and the letter is found on your person, you will undoubtedly find yourself in need of new employment, and I do not wish to be responsible for such an outcome.”

“Are you also still without employment, sir?”

“You may report to your mistress that I have found work at the Vauxhall Gardens, a pleasure ground for Londoners. It is but a short walk from here.”

“Oh! That is why you live in such a frightful neighbourhood. I was afraid to walk here alone from the coach station, except that it is daylight and the ladies of the evening are all abed. Anyway, I braved it for my mistress’ sake.”

“Well, Mary. I am much relieved that you arrived here safely. But I am trying to tell you that you have more to fear from those you know than from total strangers. Take care, and do not return on a fool’s errand for Miss Kirke.”

“She will not be satisfied with no message from you.”

“Do your best to persuade her not to try to contact me again. Tell her she must be patient. When she has reached twenty-one, we may be married without her parents’ consent.”

“Mr. Dean, did you know that Miss Kirke is but sixteen years old?”

He had never asked her age, and somehow in his mind he had presumed that she was near eighteen. Three years had been a lot to ask of her, but five years! For someone as impatient as she, it must seem like an eternity. Perhaps after five years she would come to realize the absurdity of a marriage between them and think better of casting aside her fortune so impulsively. Dean was saddened by the thought, but what he said to Mary was, “Five years may seem like a long time to Miss Kirke, but tell her I shall need all of those years to earn money enow to support her well. Please make her understand that if she insists on marrying a poor man, she maun learn patience. Will you tell her to wait for me, if she can?”

“Yes, sir. I shall tell her to be patient and not to contact you again, but in five years you will be waiting for her if she still desires to marry you. Is that correct, sir?”

She had it exactly, as if she had read his thoughts. “You are a good and faithful messenger.”

She stood up to leave. “Well then, thank you, sir. I shall convey your message to Miss Kirke. Good day to you, sir.”
“Good day to you, Mary. May heaven smile on you and your mistress.”
Dean was sorry to see her go.

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Meanwhile Susan was so nervous at her needlework that she pricked herself several times and finally abandoned the effort, saying, “Oh, I am all thumbs today!”
Her mother raised her eyes from her work. “Where is your servant Mary this afternoon?”
Susan scrutinized her mother but could perceive no suspicion in her manner. “She was required in London on urgent business.”
“What business was that?”
“Her mother was taken ill quite suddenly. I told her she should go straightaway.”
“I hope you first received permission from your father to release her?”
“Oh, I did not even think of that. Events occurred suddenly, and Mary was so distressed about her mother’s health that I gave her permission immediately. She should be home tonight. She told me she would catch the last return coach.”
“How did Mary obtain the news that her mother was ill?”
Susan was beginning to chafe under her mother’s questioning. What had seemed idle curiosity at the start now seemed like an inquisition. “She received a letter at the last post yesterday.”
Her mother nodded and said nothing more. Susan went back to her needlework, much relieved, but also feeling guilty that she had had to invent such an elaborate lie to alleviate her mother’s suspicions.

Susan did not leave the house that evening to walk in the garden. She was most anxious to meet Mary when she arrived. She wanted to be the first to talk with her and receive any message that Dean may have sent. Unfortunately, it was not to be. When Mary entered by the servants’ entrance, the butler Sutton was waiting for her with orders from his mistress that she was to be brought to Mr. Kirke’s sitting room as soon as she arrived. He executed those orders, and so it was that when Susan saw Mary she was following the butler like a prisoner being led to the scaffold.

“Mary,” she cried.
Mary looked up at her mistress. “Yes, madam?”
The butler turned to her. “There is to be no communication between you and Miss Kirke. Is that understood, Mary?”
“Yes, sir.” Mary shrugged at Susan, who followed the procession to her father’s room. There she was told by her father to wait.
“No, Father. If this concerns my maid, then it concerns me, also.” Susan slipped into the room before he could stop her.
“Very well. You may stay, but on one condition only. You may not utter a word. Is that understood?”
“No, Mr. Kirke,” Susan’s mother responded angrily. “She is not to be in the room.”
“Well, then you will have to remove me physically, madam, for I shall not remove myself.”
Her mother glared. “Very well. But you will sit silently as your father has said or I shall have the butler carry you out.”

Susan sat where her mother asked her to, behind Mary so that she could not give her any visual assistance during the interrogation.
Mary stood in the middle of the room shifting from one foot to the other, looking from Mr. Kirke to Mrs. Kirke to the butler who stood straight as a ramrod beside Mrs. Kirke’s chair.

Mr. Kirke first addressed the frightened maid. “For what purpose did you leave your position to travel to London today, Mary?”

“It was an urgent family matter, sir.”

“Can you be more specific, Mary.”

Mary cleared her throat. “A death in the family, sir.” Her voice lifted slightly as if it were a question.

“I am most sorry to hear that, Mary. Whose death was it?”

“My grandmother, sir.”

“How very sad.” Mr. Kirke looked briefly at his daughter and then turned back to Mary. “Susan said that it was your mother who was ill? How extraordinary! Well, she must have been mistaken.” Mary was shuffling from one foot to the other nervously.

“How did you learn of this illness, or should I say death, Mary?”

“My brother came with the news yesterday, sir.”

“Ah ha!” Mrs. Kirke cried gleefully. “Tell her, Sutton.”

The butler, who had been standing in silence all this time, spoke at his mistress’ bidding. “I am not aware, nor are any of my staff, of your brother’s visit here yesterday or at any other time. What is more, there has been no mail delivery for you in the last week.”

Mr. Kirke resumed the questioning. “So, how did your brother gain entry to the house without any of the servants’ knowledge?”

“I met him in the garden, sir, before he reached the house. It was quite a surprise, I can tell you.”

“Oh, the garden!” cried Mr. Kirke. “That garden has a great deal to answer for, I must say. Madam, do you not think we would be wise to tear that garden down? It seems to be the setting for any number of intrigues.”

“A veritable Eden, sir, in every sense of the word, a place where wickedness and rebellion flourish more than flowers.” She looked at Susan, a glance that forbade comment.

Mary looked down at her feet.

Mr. Kirke continued. “Now, Mary. We do not believe your story. We believe that you have gone to see Dean on your mistress’s behalf. You would be well-advised to give up your present charade and forfeit to me any letter that Dean has written to Miss Kirke.”

“I have no such letter, sir. I told you I went to visit my mother in order to comfort her in her grief.”

“No, Mary. I told you we do not believe that story. I am losing patience with you. Hand over the letter.”

“Mr. Kirke, I beg you. I have no such letter. You may search my person if you wish. Or you, Mrs. Kirke. I have no letter.” Mary burst into tears.

Kirke looked uncomfortable and turned away. Mrs. Kirke replaced him in the questioning. “Your tears do not signify, Mary. They will not spare you. We are totally unconvinced of your story and you will be dismissed regardless, so you may as well give Mr. Kirke the letter that Dean has sent Miss Kirke.”
“I assure you, I have no such letter. I went to London to visit my mother who is grieving the loss of her mother. How can you so unkind? I will not stay at an employment where I am treated so cruelly.”

“You may get your things and go then, Mary.” Mrs. Kirke spoke to Sutton. “Take her away.”

Mary wiped her tears with the back of her sleeve and followed the stiff-necked butler out the door. Susan ran after them before her parents could catch her.

“Mary, I am so sorry for what have I done to you.”

Mrs. Kirke spoke. “Step back in now, Susan.”

Susan ignored her mother and followed Mary and the butler down the hall.

Mrs. Kirke remained at the doorway almost screeching after her daughter. “Susan, come back here.”

At the end of the hall, before going down the stairs, Mary turned around.

“Do you have a letter, Mary?” Susan whispered.

“No, madam,” she whispered back. “But he says to wait patiently for five more years and not to look for him.”

Then the butler turned around. “Miss Kirke. Mary has nothing more to say to you. She has been dismissed. Now go back to your mother immediately. You are causing her a great deal of distress.”

Susan glared at him and then looked at her maid. “Mary, I am sorry. I shall make it up to you somehow. No matter what happens to me, I swear I will.”

“Goodbye.” Mary replied as she turned and followed the butler submissively.

“Goodbye, and thank you.” Susan watched her go, feeling remorseful. Then she turned back. “I am coming, Mother.”

At the interrogation room, Mrs. Kirke fell exhausted into a chair. “I have quite lost my voice shrieking at my daughter, sir. You will have to do all the talking now. I have never felt so abused in all my life, and by my own offspring!” Her mother sat weeping loudly and fanning herself through the whole interview that Susan endured with her father.

“You have lied to us, Susan.”

She considered whether the time had come to admit the lie or whether she should continue in it. It made no difference now as far as Mary was concerned: she had lost her employment. Finally, Susan decided to say nothing.

“You have nothing to say in your own defense?”

“No, sir,” she said.

“You know that your maid has lost her position because of you?”

“You have dismissed a loyal and faithful servant of mine for no good reason, sir.”

“She was not loyal and faithful to me. She went behind my back at your request in order to scheme and plot and…” Mr. Kirke had begun to run out of steam. “I have had enough. It is too much for me, as well. Susan, you will go to your room and stay there until your mother and I decide on your punishment.”

Susan went willingly. She had no more tears to cry. She was beyond tears, in a despair so deep that she thought she would never see the end of it, and now she was alone in her grief. There was no one to turn to. She gave little thought to her parents’ punishment. What more could they do to her, and how could she possibly feel any worse?
Chapter 13

Susan waited a week in silent despair for a punishment that did not arrive. She began to assume that her parents had forgotten all about it until one morning her mother broke the news to Susan that the date for her marriage to Fitzwilliam, which she had all but forgotten about, had been set and would take place in a fortnight.

“But I do not wish to marry Mr. Fitzwilliam, Mama,” Susan protested feebly, knowing that her wishes were of no consequence.

“Susan, do not contradict. You are to marry Fitzwilliam. The engagement was never called off in spite of your disgraceful behaviour. You should be grateful that no word of this… this affair, has reached the Fitzwilliams, and we are most anxious for the marriage to take place before it does. Do you not see how your behaviour, if it becomes generally known, will poison any hopes you have to make a suitable marriage?”

“Have I not expressed that a suitable marriage is of no interest to me?”

“Susan, I will hear no more about it. Fitzwilliam is arriving tomorrow, and we shall go with him to London to purchase whatever you may need for the wedding. Is that clear?”

At the mention of London, Susan became more interested, and quietly acquiesced.

“Yes, Mother.” She immediately began to consider how she might get Fitzwilliam to take her to Dean’s lodging. He had always been obliging in that regard before.

The prospect of getting out of the prison that her home had become and perhaps doing something towards finding Mr. Dean put the bloom back on Susan’s face, so that she looked positively radiant when Herbert Fitzwilliam arrived the next day.

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“Miss Kirke, you look lovely,” he said.

“It is my pleasure at seeing you once again, Mr. Fitzwilliam,” she lied, pleased at her artifice.

Kirke and his wife exchanged puzzled glances.

“Let us not lose a moment of time, but drive on straight to London. I am anxious to be gone.”

“I would be most happy to oblige you, but the horses must have a rest, and I confess myself to be a little weary and in need of sustenance before I continue my journey.”

“Besides, Susan, we are not yet ready to leave,” Mrs. Kirke said.

“I did not realize that you were coming, Mother.” Susan could scarcely hide her disappointment.

“You did not expect that we would let you go unescorted! And, of course you will need some feminine assistance to choose a trousseau, will you not?”

“I am grateful for your guidance and good taste, madam.” Susan nodded deferentially toward her mother, and then turned her attention to Fitzwilliam. “But sir, are you too fatigued to take a turn with me in the garden as we used to do before we dine? There have been some great changes there that I am certain will meet your interest.”

“Why, certainly, my dear, if your parents have no objection.”

Kirke and his wife again exchanged looks before agreeing to let the young people go.
As they walked away from the house, Fitzwilliam was the first to speak. “Do not tell me yet what the changes to the garden are. As I recall, there is a seat on the bridge above the brook where most of the garden may be observed. We shall go there, and then I shall endeavour to identify the changes. Is this not a good game?”

“It is, sir, but I dare you to find out the change, even from there.”

“I accept your dare.”

As they walked along the gravel path, they passed several garden workers, who did not return Fitzwilliam’s greeting. They were so rude that he could not help remarking on it to Miss Kirke. She gave him no explanation, but continued walking. The serpentine path wove its way beside the pond and onto the bridge from where Fitzwilliam surveyed the entire estate for some time.

“I do wish that I had brought my spyglass. I am afraid that the changes you mentioned are not so great after all, for I cannot see them.”

“Then you are blind, sir.”

“Can you not give me some clue? In what section of the garden do these changes reside?”

“Why sir, they are everywhere. As for hints, you have already had several.”

“When was that, madam?”

“When the garden workers refused to greet you.”

“I cannot discover what that signifies. I am afraid you have won your wager. I must relinquish. What are the changes, Miss Kirke?”

“Can you not see how miserable the garden is, sir? Why, nothing at all is the same as it was.” He looked at her as she kept him in suspense. “The gardener has gone.”

“Oh, no! Do you mean that Dean has left?”

“Yes, sir. We have been discovered, and he has been dismissed. That is the reason you have been summoned here so hastily and why our marriage date is set.”

“I understand. But you seemed so happy to see me.”

“Yes, sir. I have been kept a virtual captive in my room almost since the gardener was dismissed. My maid has also been let go for helping me to locate Mr. Dean. You, sir, have rescued me from my virtual prison, and I pray that you can help me meet with him.”

“So you do not mean to marry me, Miss Kirke?”

“I am sorry. I did not think that you really wanted to marry me, sir. At one time, I remember you said you would help me in my affair with Mr. Dean.”

“If you recall it was to be a mutual assistance in the guise of a marriage.”

“Mr. Dean told me to have nothing to do with you. He did not like you for reasons that I barely understand, and he did not trust you. Perhaps I should not trust you, either, but what choice have I? You are my only hope, sir. I beg of you to assist me now to see him again. I am engaged to him now, and I renounce my engagement to you. I am sorry if this causes you grief. I do not know if there is any other way that I can assist you, but I will not marry you.”

“You do cause me grief in this announcement. It would have given me happiness to be your husband. Not only Dean, but I, too, have lost the pleasure of this garden. Reconsider, madam. If you marry me, I shall restore him to his position, and you can see him every day.”

Susan considered for a moment. Dean had been so right about Fitzwilliam. He was a rogue of the worst kind, but she must appeal to his better nature. She was sure that he had
one. “Mr. Dean would never approve of what you are suggesting, sir. He would not come
back here if I were your wife.”
“I am afraid that you are right. I have seldom met such a principled man. It is really
quite a shame. I wonder that he did not become a clergyman rather than a gardener.”
“So will you help me, sir?”
“You can depend upon it, Miss Kirke. In spite of my personal loss, I have too sensible
a nature to deny assistance to such lovers as you and Dean.”
“Oh, sir. Thank you.”
“While you and your mother are shopping in London, I shall seek out your gardener.
However, you do not know what I sacrifice for you. I, myself, was anticipating the
shopping expedition.”
“Sir, I have his address already. My maid managed to obtain it from one of the
servants in the garden, and she has spoken to him. He told her that I should wait for him
until I am twenty-one, and my parents will not have the same control over me.”
“He surely cannot mean for you to wait for five years! Love’s fire burns brightly, but
never for so long as that. At any rate, since our marriage date has been set to take place
within this fortnight, I must warn him that he no longer has any time to lose. He must
carry you off to Gretna Green immediately. Is that essentially the message, madam?”
Susan blanched at his directness. “Yes, sir,” she said.
Chapter 14

Susan and her mother set out in a hansom cab to visit a mantua-maker on Oxford Street that had been recommended by Fitzwilliam. A young man greeted them at the door and showed them to some seats. After offering refreshments, he left the room.

“Now we shall meet the mantua-maker,” Mrs. Kirke said.

However, it was the same gentleme who returned with a basket of dolls from Paris for the ladies to examine.

“Are you the dress-maker yourself?” Mrs. Kirke asked.

“I am, madam.” He bowed ingratiatingly.

“Perhaps we should patronize another business, Susan. I have my doubts about men who do women’s work.”

“I assure you, madam, in France all the mantua-makers are men,” he said with a strong accent.

Mrs. Kirke sniffed disapprovingly.

“Mother, you must admit the best fashions come from France,” Susan said, attempting to mediate. “Please show us your gowns, sir.”

The young man handed the basket to Susan, and she looked through the dolls dressed in the latest fashions.

“What about this one, Mother?”

Susan pulled out a doll dressed in a French gown of silk brocade festooned with gold and silk thread and flounced cuffs adorned with triple-layered needlepoint lace.

“Mademoiselle has excellent taste. Let me show you the materials we have in the other room.”

“Do you have this material?”

“Oui, mademoiselle.”

“Then I shall have this.”

“We have it in many fine colours. Let me show you.”

“I like this colour. What do you call it?”

“Ecru.”

“That will be fine.

“But Susan, there are many other shops to visit. I do not wish to purchase a gown from a Frenchman,” her mother said.

“I shall not wear any other gown.”

“You are such an insolent and disagreeable daughter that I cannot wait to be rid of you.” Her mother sat back in her chair and resigned herself while Susan’s measurements were taken by a woman shop-assistant and the mantua-maker jotted down the numbers.

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Dean was reading *The Compleat Gardener*, daydreaming about what he would have been doing had he still been working at Kirke Hall Garden instead of picking up the rubbish left behind by careless strollers at Vauxhall. Mrs. Clark’s familiar rap at the door startled him from his reverie, and he opened the door expecting to see her sour face. Instead, the face that greeted him was animated, almost smiling.

“Come, Mr. Dean. You have a visitor.”
“Who is it, Mrs. Clark?”

“Why, it is a gentleman, sir, such as I have not seen at this house in many years. A Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

Fitzwilliam! Was this another attempt by Miss Kirke to reach him? Well, at least she was no longer employing her maid in her dangerous schemes. He hoped that she had given up on the idea of an elopement.

“I had no idea that you were acquainted with a gentleman of Mr. Fitzwilliam’s distinction, sir!”

Would it have made a difference? he wondered. Would this knowledge have made her smile more frequently as she was smiling now?

At that moment they arrived at the familiar vestibule where the gentleman himself was waiting.

“Mr. Fitzwilliam, how good it is to see you again.”

Fitzwilliam extended his hand and Dean took it, surprised at the vigour of Fitzwilliam’s handshake. He could see that the landlady was also impressed by this gesture and hoped that she would treat him with less contempt in the future.

“Mr. Dean, it is good to see you looking so well. I bring greetings to you from the Kirke family, in particular one member of it.”

Dean blushed slightly. “Do walk up with me to my room. There we shall have some leisure to talk on these matters.” He was aware of Mrs. Clark hovering in the hallway and showing no sign of imminent departure.

“Most assuredly, sir,” Fitzwilliam responded.

“Will you not take some refreshment, sirs? You may sup in the dining room if you like. The housekeeper will set up the room immediately.” Mrs. Clark made an attempt to retain them within her jurisdiction as they walked out and left her in the vestibule.

At the doorway to the stairwell, Dean paused and looked back. “Thank you for your hospitality, madam, but we dinna require any refreshment. Good day.”

The miserable look on her face erased any hope he had entertained of her future goodwill.

Dean’s apartment consisted of a small dressing room with an even smaller bedroom adjoining. If a lady had entered, her skirt would have so filled the room that no one would have been able to turn. Dean could see that Fitzwilliam was astonished at the sight of it as he looked around uneasily for a chair to sit on. Dean indicated the only comfortable stuffed chair in the room and invited his guest to take it, while he took a simple straight-backed wooden one.

“So, how is our mutual friend Miss Kirke?” Dean asked once he was seated.

“She is fine, Mr. Dean. We are engaged to be married, as you already knew, but now the wedding has been moved up to next week. We are in town to purchase the necessary accoutrements to such an occasion, most especially the bridal trousseau, among other things.”

Dean nodded, too much in shock for the moment to form the words necessary to polite conversation.

“Miss Kirke has expressed to me her desire to meet with you while she is in town, and I am ever anxious to accede to her requests.”
Dean recovered himself enough to respond, “I do not see how that would be possible. It is evident that I canna welcome her here, even if Mrs. Clark would allow such a thing, which to her credit, the good lady does not.”

“Of course, I understand. Might there not be another neutral place you could meet, such as a church or garden, sir?” Fitzwilliam suggested.

Dean felt exasperated. “To what end, sir? I do not understand the purpose of a meeting with Miss Kirke when she is engaged to marry you.”

Fitzwilliam uncrossed his legs and recrossed them the opposite way. He looked about to say something, but grunted instead. A moment later, he asked, “Have you found employment, Dean?”

“Aye, sir. I told Mary as much when she came to visit me on Miss Kirke’s behalf. Did she not relate this information to her mistress?”

“She did not, sir. Unfortunately, Mary was relieved of her employment, and Miss Kirke was unable to speak with her before she was dismissed.”

Dean was stricken by the news. “Oh, I am most sorry on Mary’s account. ‘Tis so unfair.” He wished he could have done more to prevent this unfortunate outcome.

“That is true, sir. It is one of the things I hope to rectify after our marriage. You will be relieved to know that I hope to reengage Mary at that time. Tell me about your employment, Dean. Have you a position worthy of your talents?”

“I have found employment at Vauxhall Gardens. Have you heard of them?”

“Yes, of course. I have often visited them. They are but a short walk from here, are they not?”

“Yes, sir. Which I hope will explain to you my rather rude apartment. I confess I didna ken the nature of the neighbourhood when I took it. I hope soon to have enough money to move to a more respectable abode.”

“Yes, quite. Have you a good position at Vauxhall?”

“It will suffice for now. Thank you, sir.”

“Well, if your present employment is not altogether to your liking, I would be most happy to offer you a position on my estate. Although the garden is not as fine as the one at Kirke Hall, it is not as common either as the Vauxhall Gardens.”

Dean was astonished. “I dinna ken what to say, sir. Why do you make this offer?”

“Mr. Dean! I am surprised at your question. You are such an excellent gardener, and as I have already mentioned, I would like to rectify past wrongs, specifically the ones done to you and Mary.”

“Does Miss Kirke ken that you are making this offer, sir?”

Fitzwilliam did not answer immediately, which made Dean doubt the veracity of his words even before he spoke.

“Yes, she is aware of it, sir.”

“I had hoped you would say that she was not. I am disappointed in her apparent lack of judgment, but one must make allowances for her youth and inexperience. It is my opinion, though I ought not be so bold as to share it with you, that her upbringing was poorly attended to as her parents allowed her to spend her time frivolously in reading novels and without the direction of religious guidance.”

Fitzwilliam seemed uninterested in his opinion. “What is your response to my offer of employment, Dean?”
“I am most grateful to you for the offer, Mr. Fitzwilliam. Even though it far exceeds my present position, with great regret, I maun decline. If I canna marry Miss Kirke, then I maunna not see her again. Such daily temptation would bring me more grief than any employment is worth.”

“Well then, I am most heartily sorry for your response, and I know that Miss Kirke will be disappointed, too.” For the first time during this conversation Fitzwilliam sounded sincere. He immediately stood up. “I shall take my leave of you, sir.”

Dean and Fitzwilliam walked down the stairs together. At the vestibule, Fitzwilliam attempted to express his best wishes to Dean as he left, but his efforts were hampered by the volubility of the landlady, who had been waiting in ambush for their return.

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Susan was so anxious to see Fitzwilliam when she returned from her shopping expedition that she did not even remove her hat before she called for him. “Will you walk out with me? A London street is not so pleasant as the pleasure ground at Kirke Hall, but I am sure it will divert me.”

Fitzwilliam laughed and took her arm as they strolled out. “I do not know how I shall survive without your good humour if you do not marry me, Miss Kirke.”

“If, sir? I have told you plainly that I shall not. What is the news from Mr. Dean?”

“Patience, madam, patience.”

“What did he say, sir?”

“I am most sorry, but Mr. Dean was not at home to receive me.”

“What! On a Saturday afternoon he was not at home! Where was he?”

“The landlady told me he was at his place of work.”

“And where is that, sir?”

“Vauxhall Gardens.”

“Vauxhall Gardens! You mean the public garden, sir?”

“Yes, I do.”

“That is most fortunate. Will you take me there? Then I can make my suit myself.”

“It is not seemly for a woman to make a suit.”

“I do not care what is seemly. Will you take me there tomorrow?”

“The gardens will not be open on a Sunday, and even if they were, Mr. Dean would not be working on a Sunday, would he?”

“You are right, Fitzwilliam. I shall be obliged to wait until Monday. Will you take me then?”

“I am at your service, madam,” he replied. “Now tell me all about your gown.”

Susan described it to him in a few scant details.

“Oh, I do wish I could have helped you choose it. But I can remedy that by purchasing some jewelry now. A stomacher brooch would add some sparkle to the gown, I think. We are not far from a jeweller’s now. Come, let’s purchase something stunning that will set off your gown. What colour is it?” he asked.

“The mantua-maker called the colour ecru, and there is some gold and silver embroidery.”

“Then pearls and white sapphires set in silver, I should think,” he said, leading her to the shop whether she would or not.
Chapter 15

The next morning at breakfast Fitzwilliam enquired of Miss Kirke the colour of the gown she would wear to visit the Vauxhall Garden later in the day.

“Why ever do you wish to know that?” she asked.

“I would like to choose a coat whose colour will complement your gown,” was his response.

“How very odd,” she said.

“Not at all, madam. You will see when we stroll around the gardens that all the very best people will be there in all their very best apparel. So you will do well to take care with your toilette today.”

“I shall, sir.” She was greatly amused and anticipated with pleasure Fitzwilliam’s choice of garment.

She was not disappointed when that afternoon, at the appointed time, Mr. Fitzwilliam appeared in a deep burgundy coat that contrasted perfectly with her pink petticoat. He also wore his finest embroidered waistcoat; later, as he strolled nonchalantly along the Grand Walk, Susan remarked how he held his coat open with his one free arm to make certain that all would be able to see it.

His other arm was looped tightly around hers, and though she made every effort to free herself so that she could see as much as possible of the Grove in her search for Mr. Dean, Fitzwilliam would not give her any latitude of movement. Their stroll was becoming more of a wrestling match than a nonchalant walk. At the intersection with the Grand Cross Walk, he suggested that they return to the Grove and take a box where they might partake of a supper.

“No, sir. I have come to find Mr. Dean and he will not be at the boxes. Let us continue on the Walks.”

They went down the Grand Cross Walk and turned on the Hermit’s Walk. Susan looked in all directions, taking in everything. Fitzwilliam continued his efforts to thwart her attempts. She could not help but compare this garden with her father’s. Here the paths were laid out more regularly at right angles to each other instead of meandering as they did at home. Vauxhall Gardens was many times larger than her father’s, but it had the cramped feeling of city streets when compared with the expansiveness of the countryside. Though both gardens employed artifice, her father’s was more artfully arranged to mimic nature. Dean must feel this distinction as well, she thought. She felt sorry for being the agent of his loss.

“Look at that, Miss Kirke?” Fitzwilliam cried.

She looked eagerly in the direction he was pointing, expecting to see Mr. Dean, but did not. Disappointed, she said, “I do not see anything remarkable. To what are you referring?”

“I am referring to that bill posted on the tree there.” He read it aloud. “You are cordially invited to a Masquerade to be held at Vauxhall Gardens on Tuesday, the fourth of June, to celebrate the Birthday of His Majesty King George the Third. Have you ever attended a masquerade, Miss Kirke?”

“No, I have never had the opportunity.”
“That is most unfortunate. Of all entertainments, I do enjoy a masquerade.”
“What is so wonderful about a masquerade, sir?”
“Everyone dresses in the most amusing habits and behaves in accordance with their disguised persona. A mask gives one such liberty that you would be astonished at the outrageous behaviour of some of the people at a masquerade. Would you like to attend, Miss Kirke?”
“I think at the present time, my life is preoccupied with other engagements. Let us continue our walk.”
“I shall oblige you only a little longer. There is still the South Walk to examine, but if we do not find Mr. Dean there, I hope you will permit me to take you to supper. Perhaps he is not here today. We cannot continue walking until nightfall. My weary limbs will not allow it.”
“But if we do not find him, I am in despair.”
“If he is not here, then he is not here.”
“Where could he be then? Do you suppose he might be at his lodging? Shall we go there to find him?”
“There is very little that I would not do to oblige you, Miss Kirke, but this one thing I will not. Do not ask me to accompany you to Dean’s lodging. It is not at all a proper place for you to be.” He shuddered, as though remembering some hovel.
“Then, you will return yourself to his apartment after you have escorted me home.
Will you agree to that?”
“At your service, my dear.” Fitzwilliam inclined his head slightly.
That was what he had said before, but Susan had the distinct impression his heart was not in it. At that precise moment she looked over Fitzwilliam’s shoulder and saw Mr. Dean under a tree in the Grove. She immediately unclasped Fitzwilliam’s arm from hers and bounded towards the unsuspecting gardener.
Behind her, she could hear Fitzwilliam call her name. It served as a warning to Dean. He looked up and saw her running in his direction, and was thus able to brace himself for her assault. She threw her arms exuberantly around the astonished man.
With his rough and dirty hands Dean took hold of her smooth white arms and gently placed them at her sides. He looked up and gazed into her eyes, but said nothing.
Fitzwilliam arrived at her side and clenched her arm firmly in his again. Then he extended his free hand and enthusiastically shook Dean’s dirty hand. After which, he thrust his own into his coat pocket. “Good day, Dean. It is, as always, a pleasure to greet you.”
“And you, Fitzwilliam.” Dean bowed courteously.
“This is most awkward.” Fitzwilliam began.
Susan interrupted, “We have come on purpose to find Mr. Dean. I do not know what is awkward about it, sir.”
“We are speaking in a public place, where all eyes can see.”
“You were aware it was a public place before we arrived.”
“But I did not anticipate your precipitous behaviour when we encountered him.”
“Then you do not ken the young lady very well, for all that you are engaged to marry her,” Dean remarked.
“Engaged!” Susan cried, slipping her arm out of Fitzwilliam’s. “You forget yourself, Mr. Dean. We are the ones who are betrothed.”
Fitzwilliam interjected. “Nevertheless, Miss Kirke. It is not seemly behaviour to throw yourself upon a man in public, whether you are engaged to him or not.”

Dean was looking at him suspiciously. “I was given to believe that you were still betrothed to Fitzwilliam.”

“It is not my intention to marry Mr. Fitzwilliam, and I sent him to let you know that. Apparently, he did not.”

Both Susan and Dean were glowering at Fitzwilliam now, and he reddened. “It was necessary under the circumstances to mislead you. Well, I ask you, sir,” he addressed Dean, “can you really marry the young lady in your present position?”

“Nae, you are right. ‘Tis not a wise decision presently, but if Miss Kirke would be so good as to wait a few years…” He looked at her.

“That is why I have come to find you. We cannot wait any longer. My family expect me to marry Fitzwilliam, and the wedding is to take place this very week. Can you not rescue me from my predicament?”

“As I see it, the two of you can rescue yourselves since you are the bride and groom. Does not the preacher in this country ask the pair of you if you consent to the union?”

Fitzwilliam intervened. “That is right; of course he does. But if I were to say no, her parents would continue searching until they find another man who would say yes.”

“Is it not possible for her to refuse then?”

“I shall refuse, Mr. Dean.” Susan said with conviction.

“And will you continue to refuse for five more years until I have enough money to keep us and you are of the age of consent?” he asked her.

She did not speak at first. So, he utterly rejected the idea of an elopement. He was intent on making her wait. The thought saddened her, but if it was the only way to have him, she must accede. “I will, sir,” she said with regret.

She looked intently into his eyes; there she saw relief mixed with love.

Fitzwilliam spoke again. “I do not believe you realize what you are asking of her. You cannot expect her to refuse for five more years. How will the young lady withstand her parents’ relentless insistence on marriage? I have some experience in these matters, and I know how persistent parents can be.”

“You may have too weak a will, but I shall withstand my parents’ bullying,” Susan spoke firmly.

“Consider my plan first,” Fitzwilliam suggested. “I shall speak to your parents and insist that you are too young and that we have decided to postpone the wedding for some years. We will continue our engagement, while you make frequent visits to London, ostensibly to visit me. On these occasions, I shall of course escort you to visit Dean, either here or at his abode, when he has found some place more suitable to entertain young ladies of your stature. We shall keep postponing the date until five years have passed, when we shall break off our engagement. Your parents can make no objection to your marriage at that time. It will still require five years’ wait, but at least those five years will be passed with minimal parental interference and with opportunities for you to visit one another.”

“It seems too good to be true,” Susan said.

“I agree,” Dean added. “You have lied to us already, sir. Why should we trust you now?”
“I am hurt by your mistrust. I have always acted with the best interests of Miss Kirke in mind, and I always shall. What do you say?”

“I agree to it,” she replied.

The look that Dean gave her was unmistakably one of disappointment. She looked away from him briefly, feeling momentary shame. Then she met his gaze again. “What choice do I have, Mr. Dean?” she pleaded.
Chapter 16

While Fitzwilliam discussed the postponement with her father, Susan sat in her dressing room considering the few options that were open to her in the new circumstances in which she found herself. The disappointed look that Dean had bestowed upon her when she agreed to Fitzwilliam’s latest plan was etched on her heart. All the way back to his London abode, she had listened to the gentleman talk about what he would say to her parents to persuade them the marriage should be postponed. His story was well crafted and persuasive. It was evident that Fitzwilliam was a practiced and consummate liar. It seemed to be his nature to lie convincingly to anyone about anything. Even his act of swearing that he would be truthful to her was a lie.

She was sick with that knowledge. Dean was right to be disappointed in her. How could she have agreed to accept Fitzwilliam as her intermediary? Again, she asked herself, what choice did she have? She was fatigued from finding herself totally dependent on others. Just once in her life, she wanted to take her destiny into her own hands, but it was completely impossible. A woman was subject to her father’s wishes until she married, and then she was subjugated to her husband. Perhaps when those two men were dead and she was old and no longer of interest to anyone, the world would leave her alone and let her have her own way.

Did a woman have any choice in her fate? It was impossible to choose one’s father, but a woman could at least have a right of veto in the choice of a husband. If there had been a real choice between Dean and Fitzwilliam, Susan knew without a doubt which one she would choose.

Even though everything in her nature strained against the brutality of waiting another five years for her marriage, she would have striven to do so for the sake of her love for Dean. The greater difficulty in her estimation was the fact that for those five years she would be at the mercy of Fitzwilliam, who had proven himself an utter liar and therefore unreliable.

So she determined to devise a plan to go to Dean herself, without any intermediary, while she was still in London. If she could convince him to marry her now, she would be free of the tyranny of both her parents and Fitzwilliam. It was an easy decision for her to make, but she could not see a way to execute it.

How could a single gentlewoman with no friends arrange to move herself from one part of London to another? Ladies were not permitted to go out alone, except perhaps to church. Susan considered this. It was almost a week until Sunday, and once they had heard about the postponement, her parents would probably want to return to Kirke Hall before then. Even if they could be persuaded to stay, they would think it odd if she expressed the sudden desire to attend church. Then there was the possibility that either they or Fitzwilliam would wish to accompany her to the service. And, of course, Dean would attend a Presbyterian service. She would have to make inquiries where such a church was located, and her parents would not allow her to attend if they knew where she was going. She needed to think of something else, something that could be arranged sooner.
On what other occasion was a gentlewoman granted some measure of freedom? Suddenly, she remembered something that Fitzwilliam had said on the matter earlier. When was it? It was something about the posted bill that he had read out to her at the Vauxhall Gardens. He had alluded to the great liberty of expression to be enjoyed at a masquerade. A masquerade! That was it!

It would require no acting ability for Susan to convince her parents and Fitzwilliam that she would like to attend a masquerade ball because, truly, she would. His description had piqued her curiosity. Neither would it be difficult to persuade Fitzwilliam to accompany her because he had already expressed his enthusiasm for such assemblies. It would not even be a hindrance if her parents desired to accompany her because, once she was there, she was certain it would not be difficult to become lost in the crowd. She had never before seen so many people all together in one place as she had seen today at Vauxhall Gardens, but at a masquerade, there would be an even greater multitude promenading in their habits! Once she had eluded her escort, she could slip away from the Vauxhall Gardens and hire a chaise to take her to Dean’s address. However, again the difficulty arose of performing this act as a woman alone once she had left the freedom of the masquerade and reentered the confines of society.

Suddenly the idea came to Susan. She would require a masquerade disguise, so why should she not attend in the apparel of a man? When she slipped away from the masque still dressed as a man, there would be no difficulty in hiring a chaise to take her to his address. She would be afforded the same freedom of movement as any man. Susan was suddenly impatient to put her plan into execution.

When Fitzwilliam came to her apartment to apprise her of her parents’ acceptance of the news of the nuptial postponement, she was so filled with excitement about her plans that it took all of her restraint to listen calmly and comment on his news dispassionately.

“Your father was greatly distressed at the postponement and questioned me on the reason for the delay. I explained that you needed more education in the art of housewifery and that you were still too immature, as we had agreed upon. Finally, what could he say? He could not tell me the true reason he wanted you to be married so quickly, so he agreed to a one-year postponement.”

“One year! It ought to be longer than that, sir.”

“There will be no difficulty in extending the postponement from one year to the next. Such a gradual extension will not be remarked upon. However, if I had asked at once for a five-year postponement, it would have been suspicious, would it not?”

“You are right, sir,” she said. It hardly mattered now, in view of her plans. “I thank you for your efforts on my behalf. Now I have another favour to ask you.”

“What is that, madam?”

“I have reconsidered my decision about the masquerade to be held at Vauxhall Gardens tomorrow evening. Since I am so rarely in London, and since I have never been to a masquerade before, it would be foolish to let such an opportunity pass. You expressed such enthusiasm for masquerades that I hoped you could be persuaded to escort me to the event.”

“Why, of course, I would be most delighted to accompany you, but the masquerade is tomorrow! There is scarcely time to prepare. On such short notice, we shall be obliged to purchase ready-made habits from Jackson’s Habit Warehouse. They will be of such inferior quality!”
“Sir! I have anticipated such a problem, and I thought, would it not be amusing for me to go as a young man? It would be a simple arrangement for me to wear your clothes. We are much the same size. Perhaps with a few alterations, they might be made to fit. I can comb my hair flat and tie it in a queue.”

Mr. Fitzwilliam clapped his hands in evident excitement. “How perfectly delightful that would be! Oh, let us make the illusion complete. If you are to be a man, then I shall masquerade as a woman!” He snapped his fingers and cut a caper. “And I shall wear your wedding gown! Since the wedding has been postponed, and the fashion will be changed in a year, you will have no immediate need of it. When we go to the mantua-makers tomorrow for the final fitting, I shall be the one to try it on and have it finished to fit me.”

Susan was utterly horrified that her wedding gown was to become Fitzwilliam’s, but she bit her tongue and said nothing. His enthusiasm accorded so well with her plans, and besides, it would not be possible for her to wear the gown when she married Dean. “What about my parents?” she asked.

“I am sure that they can be persuaded to stay for one more day, if only to appease their daughter, who must, after all, be so disappointed in the loss of a wedding. Are you not, madam?”

“I am, sir, especially in the loss of a wedding gown.”

Fitzwilliam laughed.

“But might my parents not forbid this excursion on the grounds that I have not yet been presented to society?”

“For any other occasion, perhaps, but at a masquerade, you will be masked and unknown at any rate. It is quite exciting, you will see. A mask is so liberating. One can be or do almost anything and no one knows, or would pretend to know, who you are. In your case, they cannot know you, as you have not yet been presented in society. Such a situation will only add to the intrigue.”

“It sounds most interesting, Fitzwilliam. I look forward to it with great anticipation.”
Chapter 17

It was ten o’clock at night before they finally departed for Vauxhall Gardens. Susan had been dressed and ready hours before, but Fitzwilliam did not emerge from his dressing room and would permit no one to enter but Mrs. Kirke’s maid, whom he had borrowed to perform his toilette. When Susan stood at his door and called for him to hurry, he replied, “Have patience. The world does not arrive until late in the evening.” So Susan was obliged to wait in her room with fear gnawing at her guts as she tried to concentrate on every detail of her plan to avoid thinking of its implications.

Already she felt a different person wearing a man’s attire. Being able to walk without stays binding her waist relieved her of one nagging pain, which she had exchanged for the minor discomfort of having her breasts bound. Nevertheless, as she paced up and down in her dressing room, it was certain that she had more space to move without the wide girth of a skirt surrounding her at every turn, and without the enormous pile of hair on her head, her mind felt free, as well. She amused herself with the thought that it would have been very pleasant to be a man, if she had not been obliged to wait for a woman to be ready!

At last Fitzwilliam was satisfied with his toilette and came out to be inspected. Susan hid the pang of jealousy she felt at seeing him in the gown that she would have worn to so much more advantage. It was the French gown of silk brocade with gold and silk embroidery that she had chosen, with the addition of engageantes, or flounced cuffs of triple-layered needlepoint lace. The stomacher brooch he had bought her glittered where his breasts should have been. He teetered perilously on high-heeled silk shoes with silver embroidery and glittering paste buckles. On top of his head was a great high splendid wig that made his head appear enormous. If it were not for the abundance of paint on his face, she might even have believed him to be as beautiful as she proclaimed him to be. He was certainly more handsome as a woman than he was as a man, she thought.

At the entrance to Vauxhall, they debarked from their coach at the same time as numerous other characters were debarking from theirs. She recognized a milkmaid, a sultan, and a wolf, but there were other habits she was not so certain of.

Upon entering the garden, Susan was bedazzled by the splendour of the decorations. She had never before seen a garden illuminated at night as her father could not afford the expense of so many candles. The globes that were hung on trees and shrubs briefly painted what they touched in a ghostly white, creating deep black shadows that appeared to flicker like devils in the darkness. However, it was the real devils and other creatures emerging suddenly among the trees that startled Susan at every turn. Just as she was becoming accustomed to the strangeness of the beings about her, she was shocked by the sight of a woman standing next to her wearing little more than a fig leaf over her private parts. Susan’s face reddened behind its mask, and she tried to keep her transfixed eyes from staring at the woman’s naked breasts.

“Do I know you?” the woman asked.

“No,” Susan stammered as she walked away quickly.

Fitzwilliam hurried after her, looking most amused. “Now that is a liberated woman! But I do not wish to be so liberated. Please take my arm and escort me, will you, sir?”
Susan reluctantly took his arm and changed the subject. She indicated a masquerader dressed in a loose black-hooded cloak. “What is that habit, Fitzwilliam?”

“It’s called a domino. Those who choose to wear such habits are frightfully unimaginative. There are far too many of them, don’t you think?”

Susan looked about her, but rather than confirming his opinion, she was more impressed by the endless variety of habits around her. “I don’t know what some of these costumes are supposed to be.”

“Some of them are abstractions. You may ask them who they are.”

Susan immediately turned to the woman next to her dressed elaborately in a winged gown. “Who are you?”

“I am Curiosity,” the woman replied.

Susan would have liked more time to explore these wonders and speak with more of the “creatures,” but, as distracting as these oddities were, she had not forgotten her primary purpose in being there. It would be necessary to leave the masquerade almost immediately or it would be too late to call at Dean’s apartment, if it were not already. The first step in her plan was to slip away from Fitzwilliam at the earliest opportunity.

Fitzwilliam made this difficult as he hung on to her arm and guided her through the throng. Every so often he tittered and hid his face behind his pierced ivory fan, batting his eyes as he did so. His use of the fan was so vigorous and intentional that Susan thought he must be in possession of a secret code. Certainly some young men seemed to understand the language because, before long, they were surrounded by a coterie of men and other beasts.

One of the young men, dressed as a Harlequin, spoke to Susan. “Who is your beautiful friend, sir?”

She had been instructed by Fitzwilliam not to reveal their true identities, so she responded with the question: “Do I know you?”

The young man did not answer but instead seized Fitzwilliam’s hand. Fitzwilliam smacked his suitor’s hand with his fan. “Do not be so bold, sir.”

The suitor nursed his hand with exaggerated strokes as the other young men laughed.

Another suitor stepped forward to try his chance, this one a sultan, or so Susan supposed by his costume. “May I get your ladyship some refreshment?”

Fitzwilliam’s fan opened wide and was waved so vigorously that she could feel the breeze on her face. He giggled.

Susan saw an opportunity of escape. “That is my obligation as your escort, madam.”

She unhooked her arm from his.

“Oh, please do not leave me alone with these beasts!” Fitzwilliam said with mock horror.

“I shall be right back,” Susan said. She hoped that he would not soon look for her, but when she looked back over her shoulder, he was basking in the attentions of the young men and would not soon miss her company.

“Do I know you?” a voice said at her other side. She turned to see one of the young men dressed as lion had accompanied her.

“Oh,” she said.

“Pardon me if I startled you but you must not think me enamoured of that fop, I mean, that hussy.” He snorted. “I am more intrigued by you.”
The lion-man was walking so close to her that Susan felt uncomfortable. She realized there was no one to come to her aid if he made improper advances.

“The refreshments are this way,” he said. “You are heading in the wrong direction.”

“Oh, thank you.” How annoying! How was she to get rid of this unpleasant man? He grinned at her, revealing blackened teeth instead of fangs.

“Oh,” she said, “Oh,” pretending to be vexed. “I have just realized that I have no money to pay for refreshments. How embarrassing!”

“I could lend you the money.” He winked. “Sir.”

“Oh, would you? How kind!” She wished she had a fan so that she could wave it as Fitzwilliam did. “Do you know,” she said, “what would be even kinder?” She removed her mask. “As a lady—I know I should not reveal that I am a lady to you,” she waved her mask like a fan, “but as a lady, I should not purchase the refreshments myself. Would you fetch them for my friend and me? I shall meet you back there.” She indicated the party they had just left.

The lion-man nodded. “It would be my pleasure, madam, and your true identity is a secret with me.” He winked at her, lasciviously, she thought.

“I am ever so grateful,” she said, watching till she could not longer see him in the crowd. At last, she thought, I can get away.

Susan returned to the entrance and asked that a hackney coach be called for. The request was quickly executed, for there was a coach already at the gate debarking a devil, a gypsy, and two Circassian maidens. The driver asked where Susan wished to be conveyed, and when she told him, he informed her that it was only a short distance, one which could easily be walked.

“I thank you for your advice, sir, but I do not know the neighbourhood. I will pay you a regular fare to the City if you would be so good as to take me to this address.”

“At your service, my young master.”

A few moments later, she found herself alone in the dark at the door of a strange house in an unknown part of London. Susan had never felt so terrified in her life. She knocked to be let in.

There was no answer.

It seemed as though the inhabitants of the house were all abed. She could not detect any light from the windows. She would have to knock more vigorously to awaken someone within. She pounded on the door and waited.

Still there was no answer.

What could she do? She wanted to give up, but that would entail walking back again through the dark streets. From the coach she had not much relished the sights that the neighbourhood afforded. The only alternative was to continue pounding on the door and calling out to wake one of the inhabitants within. A growing, choking sense of panic compelled her to do so, vigorously and continuously.

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The inhabitants of the house were finally awakened and greatly disturbed by the commotion at the front door. Mrs. Clark and her housekeeper arrived at the vestibule at the same time.

“What shall we do, madam?” the housekeeper asked.

“Go and wake Mr. Dean. As he is the only man in the house, he will protect us if needs be.”
The housekeeper met Dean already coming down the stairs in his night robe.
“What shall we do, sir?” Mrs. Clark asked.
“Dinna open the door, but demand a name of the intruder as you would from any visitor.”
“How can I make myself heard, sir?” the housekeeper asked.
“Wait until he stops shouting, of course.”
At that moment there was sufficient lull in the noise for the housekeeper to call out,
“Who is it?”
“My name is Andrew, and I have come to see Mr. Dean, if I may.”
The two women looked at him. “Do you know this person, sir?”
“I believe I might. Let me address him.” He called through the door. “Andrew, where do you come from, and what do you want?”
“From Kirke Hall. Would you open the door, sir? I am losing my voice.”
Dean was still not sure of the identity of the voice he heard, but the individual, whoever it was, had mentioned Kirke Hall, and Dean was willing to take a risk. He requested the ladies to step back in case there was yet any danger to them, and slowly opened the door. Immediately he saw that it was not Andrew, but before he could speak, the young man looked him directly in the eye and he recognized, with great astonishment, that it was Susan Kirke, disguised as a man.
“May I come in, sir?”
He attempted to regain his composure. “Aye, of course, Andrew. Come in.”
Andrew entered.
“What is the meaning of this disturbance, young man?” Mrs. Clark asked.
“I beg your pardon, mum,” Andrew bowed, in an evident attempt to imitate the rustic accent of her country servant. “I have urgent news to communicate to Mr. Dean.”
Mrs. Clark looked at Andrew expectantly.
“Of a personal nature, mum.”
“I have been greatly upset by this disturbance, and yet I am not to know the meaning of it. Mr. Dean, I cannot allow such improper conduct in my home.”
“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Clark. I shall listen to my former servant Andrew and convey to you a better explanation in the morning. In the meantime, may I borrow an apartment for my young friend to sleep tonight? I can vouch for his character.”
“Nae, Mr. Dean. You canna vouch for the character of a ruffian who disturbs the peace of a Christian home in the middle of the night.”
“Mrs. Clark, have some Christian charity. Where will the boy sleep tonight?”
“Why, I believe the floor of your dressing room will do well enough for him. But be warned, Mr. Dean. You will see that he is gone tomorrow morning at the first light, no matter what his story.”
“Thank you, Mrs. Clark. You are most kind. It is more than he deserves.”
With that, she and her servant retired to their respective chambers, and Dean returned up the stairs to his apartment, expecting Susan to follow.
He said not a word as they ascended the stairs. He was thinking the unpleasant thought that a woman did not come to a man’s room in the middle of the night unless she was a prostitute. When they entered his dressing room, he indicated the comfortable chair that Fitzwilliam had used a few days before; she flung herself on it.
“What in the name of God are you doing here in that habit?” he cried.
She looked frightened at his speech, but he was too angry to repent of it. What would he have to do now to protect her reputation? “Answer me,” he attempted to speak less stridently.

“I am too frightened by your manner, sir.”

He paced back and forth in an effort to control himself before he spoke again. He needed to know her story in order to help her.

“Are you not at all happy to see me, sir?” she asked.

He sat down in the straight-backed chair, leaned forward and buried his face in his hands. He wanted to cry with the tumult of emotions he was feeling. How could he continue to be angry with her? What she was doing here was evident. She had run away from her family to marry him. With her presence in this room, there was no other possibility open to them now, but how was it to be accomplished? No church in England could legally marry them without her parents’ consent, which was not to be had. They would need to travel by coach to Scotland or by boat to France, and this was a great expense he could ill afford. Besides which, it would mean he would have to leave his employment for the time being. He did not know if they would reengage him when he returned as he had only been there a short time. Then, there was the necessity of finding a home more suitable to Susan’s expectations, another expense that he could not manage. Why could she not have waited as he had asked her?

At that moment, he heard her crying and felt moved in spite of his fears.

“Susan,” he said. She looked at him with all of her sorrow evident in her eyes. He held out his arms to her and she slipped inside. He could do nothing but hold her while she cried on his night robe. All other thoughts and emotions vanished from him in that sublime moment of tenderness. She had risked everything to be with him. How could he treat her so coldly? “I am sorry, sweetheart.”

Her shoulders shuddered with emotion, and she sighed.

It was some time before they had both recovered sufficiently to sit down again and continue their much-needed but difficult conversation. He took one look at her sublimely radiant face and all of the impediments that had risen in his mind seemed of no consequence. “Even dressed as a man, you are beautiful, my dear.”

She smiled at him. “Thank you, sir.”

“But tell me at last how you come to be here dressed as a man?”

“I was attending a masquerade at the Vauxhall Gardens with Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

“A masquerade! I had no idea the depravity to which you had sunk, madam. I maun marry you immediately and rescue you from a life of such sinful folly,” he said, smiling as if it were a jest, but he was in earnest about every word he spoke.

She laughed. “One day I shall amuse you with a tale about all the immoral sights that I witnessed in my brief experience at the masquerade, Mr. Dean. However, now there is no time to do them justice.”

“Was Fitzwilliam such a poor escort that he allowed you to slip away from him?”

“Mr. Dean, you cannot imagine how many people were there, and all so artfully disguised. It was simplicity itself to disappear into the crowd.”

“I should not hae lost you, if I were your escort,” he said with a serious tone. “What do you think will happen when Fitzwilliam discovers you are missing?”

“I had not thought about that, sir.”
“Do you not think he will assume that you have come here? I am afraid that he may come looking for you, and then he will disturb the house again at an even later hour. Nae doubt Mrs. Clark will throw us both out on the street if that happens.”

“What shall we do, sir? Perhaps we should leave now before he comes and finds me.”

“Where should we run to at this hour? Nae. I shall go downstairs and wait outside the door for his arrival. When he comes I shall talk to him and persuade him to give us this one night before he informs your parents that you are gone. Tomorrow morning we shall set out very early, so you had best retire to my bedroom and sleep while you are able.”

“Will you join me there later?”

“I dinna think that I shall sleep tonight.” She began to protest. “Dinna fash, my dear. If I have time, I shall sleep here on the dressing room floor. It will do me no harm, I assure you. Good night, dearest.” With that he kissed her tenderly on the cheek and was rewarded by the deep look of love in her eyes.

As he was leaving the apartment, she called, “Mr. Dean.”

He turned to look at her.

“Fitzwilliam is dressed as a woman, sir.”

He smiled and went out the door.

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Several hours later Fitzwilliam arrived alone and on foot, much flustered and somewhat inebriated. Dean was dozing at the base of a tree in front of Mrs. Clark’s house. He was startled awake by the rustling of Fitzwilliam’s gown as he passed.

“Sir,” Dean called.

Fitzwilliam cried out in alarm.

“Please sir, dinna wake the household at this hour.”

“Who is it?” Fitzwilliam asked.

Dean stood and presented himself. “Mr. Dean at your service, madam.” He offered his hand, and then, when Fitzwilliam extended his, rather than shake it, he kissed it. “You look perfectly charming tonight, Fitzwilliam.”

Fitzwilliam looked pleased for a moment and then snatched his hand away. “Don’t be ridiculous. Now tell me, where might I find Miss Kirke?”

“Why, have you lost her?”

“You know that I have. She is with you, is she not?”

“She is within, safe in bed. Safe from such debauchery as you and her parents see fit to involve her in.”

“I suppose there is no debauchery in her present condition, alone in the bed of a single man.”

Dean was angered by Fitzwilliam’s suggestion. “Sir, let me speak plainly. I know what manner of man you are. I know that you prefer the sexual favours of men to women, which is an abomination before God. A marriage with you would be a miserable sham, and I will do anything to prevent Miss Kirke from falling into it. Now leave this place.”

Fitzwilliam seemed deflated by Dean’s speech. “I am sorry you think so ill of me, sir. I cannot help what I am.”

Dean guffawed.

“But I am not such a terrible person as you believe me to be. I am concerned for Miss Kirke’s reputation. I cannot leave without her.”
“Her reputation is perfectly safe with me, I assure you. I am here to ask that you feign ignorance when her absence is discovered in the morning. If you do that for her, we may be able to escape to Scotland in the morning to be wed.”

“When she is found missing tomorrow, the servants will surely report that I returned home alone.”

“Send your servants home without you now and tell them that you and Miss Kirke will arrive later by hired coach. Surely you can rely on your servants’ discretion in this, as you must have on other occasions,” he said, suggestively.

“Oh, this is such a coil! Might we not still salvage the situation somehow? Can you not persuade her to return with me now?”

“I think not. With this act she has declared her desire and intention; I can no longer deny her her wish.”

“It is good of you to take on the full burden of her reputation, Dean. It will be very expensive for you. Perhaps I could help you in some way. You will need money to travel to Scotland, and I can provide the funds for the voyage. It is the least I can do for you both.”

“Sir, I canna accept your charity.”

“It is not charity; it is a gift.”

“After what I have said, it would be wrong for me to accept a gift from you.”

“You were only being honest, and for that, I consider you my friend. If you will not take a gift from me, consider it a loan. And if you cannot accept it for yourself, accept it for Miss Kirke. She does not yet understand the financial situation that she is in because she has never wanted for anything. I imagine that she gave no thought to money when she left, and did not bring any with her apart from a little pocket money, which she may have already spent in making her way here.”

As much as it hurt his pride to take money from Fitzwilliam, Dean was practical enough to understand it would relieve some of his greatest worries. “It is kind of you to take pity on Miss Kirke,” he said, accepting the money on her behalf.

Fitzwilliam called his butler over and asked him for a ten-pound note, which he handed to Dean. “Here you are, sir.” Then he removed the brooch from his stomacher and gave it to him as well. “This is my wedding gift for Miss Kirke,” he said. “Now I shall send my servants home, return to the masquerade, wait a little while, and then return by hackney coach. You will return to your lady and escort her from the country so that you may marry her.” He touched a handkerchief to his eye. “I feel in my heart as if I have just contributed to unite Romeo and Juliet.”

“I hope not, sir. I do not wish to repeat their terrible fate.”

“So, take care, good sir. I am much affected.” Fitzwilliam could not speak for a moment for the tears.

“Thank you. You have proved a good friend in the end,” Dean said grudgingly.

“It is nothing. Adieu.” With that, Fitzwilliam turned and began to walk unsteadily back the way he had come. He stopped. “Wait a moment, Dean.” He removed his high heels. “Please return these accursed shoes to Miss Kirke.”

“Goodbye to you, and thank you, Fitzwilliam,” Dean said, relieving him of the shoes.
Chapter 18

Susan felt as though she had barely slept a wink when Dean roused her. She had slept in the clothes she had worn the previous evening, and, having no other change of clothing, she was obliged to remain a boy for the time being. Dean could not provide her with anything of his because of the difference in their sizes. Besides, it suited their purpose that she would travel in cognito as a young man.

At the coach house, Dean gave her name as Andrew Gardiner, his young master. Not being used to wearing men’s clothing, she felt a strange kind of nakedness or vulnerability without the voluminous layers of skirts that she normally wore. The other passengers gawped at her, and she was conscious of her too formal evening attire. She must look a foppish young gentleman putting on airs above his station. She expected Dean to take his place beside her and was surprised when he did not.

“Mr. Dean, are you not going to join me?” she whispered to him out of the window.

“No, Master Gardiner. I have paid the lower fare and shall sit outside.”

They were unable to continue their conversation as other passengers were beginning to arrive and take their positions in the coach. Two men, one old and one young, sat on the same side of the coach as Susan, forcing her into the corner, and two ladies, evidently their wives, sat opposite. Susan felt uneasy with the other male passengers sitting so close beside her. She also felt strangely insignificant as she took up so little space in the coach without her gown.

They passed some time in polite conversation. She explained that her servant John was accompanying her back to her parents’ house. She was greatly relieved that they did not ask too many questions. Attempting to speak in a masculine voice was causing her considerable nervous strain and she began to question herself. What was she doing here, dressed as a boy, traveling alone in a coach with total strangers? At any moment her identity might be discovered. What would they do if they suspected her? She determined it was best not to speak again unless she was directly addressed and then to answer only in monosyllables. The other passengers soon found the burden of attempting to engage the young man more onerous than it was worth and managed to carry on a conversation without him.

Susan gazed out the coach window without appreciation for the charms of the early summer English countryside. The rolling hills of vivid green grass and multi-coloured wildflowers where the sheep grazed had no power to abate the worries that continued to accumulate. What had she done? Her father would be angry beyond words. He would send the fastest riders he could find after them, and soon, very soon, at any moment, this slow coach would be overtaken and she would be dragged from the carriage and taken back to London in shame, where she would never be forgiven. No one would ever want to marry her or even have correspondence with her. She would live her life as a miserable old maid. When she heard the galloping hooves of a horse approaching, she gasped out loud.

The young lady opposite was startled by her reaction. “Whatever is the matter, sir?”

The sound of the hoof beats diminished as the rider overtook the coach and passed by. Susan breathed a sigh of relief before endeavouring to answer the young woman. “I am
sorry, madam. I have an inordinate fear of highwaymen. I have read too many terrifying stories and it has overexcited my imagination.”

“I do hope that your fear is unwarranted,” the young lady said, grasping her throat nervously.

“Of course it is, my dear,” her husband tried to comfort her. Then he cast a sidelong glance of disapproval at Susan. “You should think better of frightening young ladies.”

She remembered with embarrassment that she was supposed to be a young man.

Then the older man in the party spoke to the young woman opposite. “Do not be so foolish, child. You ought to trust your parents better and know that we have chosen a good husband who is well able to protect you in any situation.”

“Yes, Father.” The young woman looked down demurely.

What had she done? How could she have been so disobedient to her father? All of her upbringing had taught her, even Dean had told her, that she ought to honour her father and mother, and yet she had acted in total defiance of their wishes. No one in the world, not even Dean, considered her justified in her action. She had been irredeemably selfish and sinful. She had listened to no one’s counsel and now, without the support of any friends, she was wavering in her steadfastness. She had not met with the unconditional and immediate acceptance from Dean that she had expected and which would have bolstered her, and she was left alone in this coach to ruminate on the mistake that she had made. “Mistake” was too mild a word.

Evening found the weary travelers arrived at Leicester. Susan hobbled off the coach half in play-acting and half in earnest. Dean remarked on it.

“Poor Master Gardiner. Have you some kind of infirmity?”

“It is the necessity of sitting cramped for long hours in a carriage.”

They took a room at the inn where they wearily washed up before going to the tavern for supper. If she had not felt so thoroughly disheartened, she would have relished the opportunity of gaining entry into a territory which had hitherto been forbidden her. She looked around at the assorted characters in the darkened room. In the corner, four gentlemen stood in slouched positions holding their pints of ale as they were able, speaking in a rowdy and slurred fashion that revealed their inebriation. Susan had often seen her father in such a condition and looked at them with evident disapprobation.

“It would be best not to stare at them or to draw attention to yourself. Drunken men are often more aggressive than other men and may be eager to pick a fight with you.”

“With me!” Susan exclaimed.

“Aye, Master Gardiner. With you.”

Then she remembered that she appeared as a boy now.

They had begun to eat their supper when they were disturbed by a commotion from the corner where the four men stood. The men had been joined by a soldier who was holding up a shilling.

“Who will take the king’s shilling?” he cried.

“Go on with ye,” one of the four scoffed. “We’re busy drinking, don’t ye see?”

“It’s all drinking,” the soldier continued. “All the time drinking in the king’s army. Except for the times we’re eating, of course. And occasionally making love. There’s time for that, too. What d’ye say, boys, are ye up for it?”

“I don’t suppose there’s any time for fighting then?” the scoffer continued.
“Why, yes, some. But a battle’s the finest thing in the world when one’s side wins, and the English side—our side, sir—always wins. Don’t you worry none.”
“What is going on?” Susan asked Dean.
“He’s a recruiting sergeant,” he replied. “Just keep your head down and say nothing.”
Susan was aghast and spoke out in spite of Dean’s warning. “Supposing you should be killed in battle, sir. What good is the king’s shilling worth to you then?”
The sergeant strolled over to their table. “Well, supposing you should be,” he said, confidently. “What then? Your country loves you, and His Majesty King George the Third loves you. Everybody’s grateful to you, sir, and your name’s wrote down full length in a book in the War Office, so you will never be forgot. Damme, gentlemen, we must all die some time or other, eh!”

He punched Susan in the shoulder so that she nearly collapsed. Evidently disappointed by her weakness, he turned his regard on Dean, and Susan immediately regretted having called his attention to them.
“What about you, sir?” he addressed Dean. “Will you take the king’s shilling to fight the rebels across the sea?”
“I willna, I thank ye, sir.”
“Why not? Are you a coward?”
“I have two brothers in America. I dinna wish one day to find myself looking down the barrel of a gun into my brother’s face.”
The recruiting sergeant seemed taken aback by the comment and, turning on his heel, retreated to the corner with the four drunks.
“I did not know that of you,” Susan said.
“There is a great deal ye dinna ken. For instance, and one of my brothers is named Andrew.” Dean smiled.

Susan returned his smile. “So, is that the way that ordinary soldiers are recruited into the king’s army?” she asked.
“’Tis,” Dean replied, between mouthfuls.
“How very strange! Among the gentry, the men must buy their way into the army, but the common soldiers are given money to join up.”
“Aye, they are bribed, ’tis true. But ’tis much worse for the common sailors. During times of war, they are often pressed into service.”
“What does that mean, ’pressed’?”
“Why, the Impressment Service, or sometimes the ships’ captains themselves, set up gangs to go around the streets of port towns and forcibly take merchant seamen onto the Navy ships. They ha’e no choice in the matter.”
“Really? How barbaric! And they are not even given the king’s shilling?”
“They may be if they sign up willingly once they ha’e been impressed.”
Susan thought there was no end to the indignities the lower classes suffered.
They finished the rest of their meal without further incident, and then retired to their mutual apartment. Dean indicated that Susan was to have the bedroom and he would sleep as he had the night before on the floor, but she insisted that he share the bed with her. “It is certainly large enough to fit both of us, and you did not have a good sleep last night.”

He was too weary to argue with her.
“I have only one problem, sir. I cannot sleep in these clothes: they are too dusty from the road, and they are even beginning to smell, I believe.”
“Remove them, and I will air them. You should wash your under garments. That will remove the smell. Are you able to do that, madam?”
“I believe that I can, but what shall I wear, sir? I cannot dress myself in wet clothes.”
“I shall lend you my banyan.”

Susan tried to undress discreetly and conceal her many charms as she prepared for sleep. Once she slipped on Dean’s night robe, however, she was completely covered and concealed. She thought she would not have attracted the notice of even the most practiced scoundrel. When she was comfortably installed in her bed and Dean had slipped discreetly in beside her in his shirt, she expressed the concern that had bothered her all day.

“Mr. Dean,” she addressed him.
“It is curious to be addressed so formally under the circumstances,” he said.
“Do you want me to call you by your Christian name?” she asked blushing.
“No,” he replied. “More formality rather than less is called for, I think,” he replied.
“As you wish, but I hope it will not continue thus once we are married.”
He laughed. “Nae,” he said. “It willna.”
She felt curiously warm to hear him slip into Scottish burr.
“What were you going to say, Miss Kirke?”
“I was afraid when we embarked on this trip that a public coach would be too slow. I had thought that my father would have sent a fast horse and rider that would have overtaken us by now.”
“That is certainly true, and if we had taken the road to Gretna Green, I’m sure your father would have caught us by now.”
“We are not en route to Gretna Green then, sir?”
“Nae, we are not.”
“But I thought that is where people went to be married, sir.”
“Aye, that is where the English go to be married, simply because it is the closest place across the border. But I am a Scot, and I do not feel myself constrained to one place in the country to be married. In fact, marriage is so sacred to me that I wish to tie the bonds in my own kirk.”
She startled at the word.
“That is, my home church. ‘Kirk’ is ‘church’ in Scotland.”
“Is it so?” she said, wondering at the irony of it.
“Aye, it is. I wish for all my family to be there when we tie the knot.”
“So, where are we going?”
“To Dundee.”
“And will that be farther than Gretna Green?”
“Considerably farther.”
“Do you think I could sit outside with you? It is tiresome making conversation with strangers.”
“Dinna speak then. If you speak you may gie something away.”
Susan was not satisfied with the answer. She had dreaded another two days like the one she had just endured. Her imagination failed her in the contemplation of many more, but the worry quickly faded when her exhaustion overcame her and she slept soundly.
Chapter 19

It is indeed true that a good sleep and a new day often dispel the fears that we have taken to bed with us, and so it was with Susan. As she took her place in the carriage, which was now a familiar setting to her, she felt a new confidence in her role as a male. She had already passed a day traveling as a boy without being detected. She felt more comfortable in her clothes, which had been aired and washed the night before. Indeed, she was appreciative that her masculine dress afforded her more latitude of movement, and she rejoiced at her newfound ability to breathe without the confines of stays. She vowed she would never again go back to wearing them.

Dean had also removed the fear that her parents would find her. If her pursuers had taken the wrong road to Scotland, she reckoned they would have already lost a whole day’s travel at least. As slow as this coach was, there was no possibility it would be caught; if her father was in pursuit he would likely go all the way to Gretna Green before realizing his error.

With the possibility of detection abated, there remained only her guilt of the previous day to concern her. Her release from fear and the feeling of freedom from the “bondage” of the stays brought about a corresponding lightening of the burden of conscience. Just as there was no longer a risk of being found, there was no longer a risk of being found guilty. At any rate, there was no way she could rescue herself from her choice at this point. She might as well accept it and make the best of it. She decided that she would give herself over wholly to the safe keeping of Mr. Dean.

That evening, the travelers debarked at the ancient town of York. The coolness of the evening confirmed that they were indeed traveling in a northerly direction.

“How many days before we reach Scotland, Mr. Dean?”

“We should cross the border sometime late tomorrow,” he answered.

“And then how many days till we arrive?”

“We should arrive in Edinburgh the next day. From there ‘tis but another day’s journey to Dundee.”

With her newly emancipated attitude, the secrets of the tavern did not intrigue her. Susan was much more anxious to encounter the secrets of the bedchamber and felt more energy to explore them. Taking no care to hide her charms as she undressed that evening, she caught a glimpse of Dean blushing before he turned away from her. She put on his banyan, and leaving it untied, carried her clothes to him as she had done the night before.

“Pray be so good as to shake the dust from them as you did last night, sir.”

He took them from her, still blushing, and left the room with them. When he came back she was already tucked into the bed. Susan watched him as he undressed, clumsily, as if he were aware of her eyes on him the whole time. He removed all his outer garments hastily and tossed them on a chair beside the bed. She had a brief glimpse of him standing in his white loose-fitting shirt with his powerful, muscular thighs bare and visible before he blew out the lamp beside the bed. She heard him jump into the bed and tangle himself in the blankets in his haste.

After he was done untangling himself, she turned to face him. He was so close that she could feel his breath on her face.
In all the novels she had ever read, the hero kissed the heroine in a situation like this.

“You may kiss me, sir. I am not afraid.”

“’Tis not your fear that constrains me.”

“Then what is it? Do you find me too ugly in this garment? It can easily be removed.”

She began to divest herself of his banyan.

He grasped her hands. “Dinna remove it. I can assure you that if you were wearing sackcloth, I would find you charming.”

“Then what is it that constrains you? We are lovers. Lovers kiss when they are alone.”

“I am afraid that if I kissed you, I would have a great deal of difficulty to restrain myself further.”

Susan knew that there was more to love than kissing, but none of the novels she had read ever went beyond the kiss, and she was not at all clear in her mind what it was that lay beyond. She had heard rumours and seen rutting cows and dogs, but surely human love could not be as base as animal love? She was curious to discover what the “something beyond” was, especially since it was so secret and forbidden.

“I do not mind,” she said. “We shall be married in a few days’ time. What difference does it make? Now or later, we shall be united either way.”

“The difference is that my conscience will suffer if I try to cheat God, for He sees all and knows the difference.”

“I still do not understand,” she pouted.

“Then I shall endeavour to teach you one day, but not tonight. In the meantime, you must learn a little patience. I no longer expect you to wait five years; all I ask is your patience for a few more days and nights.”

“Can you not at least give me a good-night kiss?”

“Nae, I most certainly canna do that. If you continue to behave like a common strumpet, I shall remove myself to the floor of the dressing room. Would that be to your liking?”

Susan was cut to the quick by his words. The tears started in her eyes, and she turned over and put her back to him.

“I am not so cruel as to push you on the floor, sir. If you do not wish to touch me, I shall not impose myself on you any further.”

“Dinna fash. I dinna mean to be cruel. Perhaps I should pay the extra expense of another room to safeguard our comfort and chastity tomorrow night.”

“Perhaps you should.”

“I would without hesitation, except that I maun economize. A wedding is very expensive.”

Susan lay staring at the wall in front of her. What had she done? She did not know this man. His appearance was handsome and manly, but he acted and spoke like a prude, a woman over-nice and scrupulous. It was even more alarming to her to realize that he was so miserly, worrying about the few pennies that another apartment would cost. She whispered, “Good night, sir,” and cried quietly into the pillow until she fell asleep.

The next day passed as the preceding two, except that now Susan became more preoccupied with her own deep feelings of doubt. She had previously experienced only a minor sensation of guilt at breaking the commandment exhorting her to honour her parents. She might have honoured them if they had considered her feelings, but they had cared only about the propriety that society demanded. Once before she had made the
mistake of taking Dean at his word, when he had claimed the belief that all humans were created equal. She had agreed with his statement, and therefore thought she had done no dishonour to herself in choosing him. However, she remembered that he had disappointed her by accepting her parents’ restrictions and rejecting her because they were not of the same class. Last night he had rejected her again for his own moralistic reasons, and he had called her a common strumpet. She was deeply humiliated by this remark and angry with him for naming her what the world would call her, but what he should know was untrue. She had chosen him of her own free will and at considerable risk to herself. Now she felt a deep abiding fear that she had misjudged him, and that he did not love her. She feared that he was marrying her because he was concerned for propriety only, just as her parents had been. What is more, she realized that he regretted the necessity of the marriage because of the expense.

If he did not love her, then she was marrying a cold, moralistic, and impoverished Presbyterian who regarded her as a great financial encumbrance to himself. She feared she would have to suffer the consequence of his ill humour for the rest of her life. This bleak future loomed large in her imagination, and she struggled to think how she would survive in such a loveless marriage. The one hope that she had harboured when she made her choice and embarked on this adventure was that she would have a husband who would respect her and treat her with dignity. If this hope was dashed, then her action now seemed foolhardy indeed, not only to the rest of the world but even to herself.
Chapter 20

The maidservant greeted them as they entered the tavern in Hawick, Scotland. “God gie your honours gude e’en.”
“Gude e’en to you, hinny,” Dean replied.
Susan looked from one to the other as if they were daft.
“Losh me, lookit ye, a’ drookit and ourie!” The maid exclaimed at the sight of Dean.
“Dinna ye ken there’s been a landlash the lee-lang day?”
“’Tis nought but a flaw, sir. Ye maun hae a bink in the ingle-neuk,” she said and guided them to a place near the fire.
“’Tis cosh, thankee,” Dean replied as he sat down.
“Ye’ll tak a dram, sir?”
“Nae nappy for me, hinny. I’ll hae a bicker o’ ale. Ye’ll take a horn, Master Gardiner?”
“What are you saying, sir?”
“Will you take a drink?”
“Aye,” Susan replied, making a feeble attempt to speak their language.
“Mak’ it twa’ bickers o’ ale.”
“In a breathin’,” the maid said as she left.
Dean was smiling broadly, seeming to be in his element speaking to the barmaid in this kind of butchered English filled with nonsense words. No one had told Susan that they spoke a different language in Scotland. She felt frustrated by her inability to understand and a little angry at Dean’s happiness that had nothing to do with her. It had nothing to do with the weather, either. Ever since they had arrived in Scotland, it had been raining a dreadful drizzle and, being outside on the coach all day, he was soaked to the bone. What cheered him must have been the company of his fellow countrymen, perhaps especially the company of this one woman in particular.
The maid returned with two beakers of ale that she placed before them. “Here’s your deuch,” she said.
“Thankee, hinny.”
“How’s a’ wi’ your fiere? He’s nae muckle to say.”
“He’s from ayant the Tweed.”
The maid laughed, and Susan was hurt. She suspected that they were talking about her but could not decipher what they were saying. Since they had left London, Dean had not once spoken to her in such a friendly and kind manner as that with which he was now addressing this common barmaid. She felt she deserved better treatment from him than the maid received. It was not that she considered herself better than the maid. Regardless of class distinctions, she was soon to be Dean’s wife.
“’Tis nought but a Sassenach in perlins,” the maid said. Susan did not like the way the maid was looking at her.
“Stop your clishmaclaver and bring us some victuals, hinny.”
“Aye, sir. Belyve.”
Dean spoke quietly when the maid had left. “If you are afraid to speak, Miss Kirke, dinna fash.”
“Speak in English, John.”
“I have informed the maid that you are English. You may speak freely as you would normally do.”
She took a sip of ale to keep from crying.
“You do seem disheartened this evening. Does the Scottish countryside not agree with you?”
“It is very gloomy weather.”
“Then your mood will change with the weather, I expect.”
Susan was confused by her feelings of jealousy. She had deceived herself into believing that she felt only disappointment that he no longer loved her. This over-familiar fraternity with the serving wenches and the way they laughed about her as if she were not there should only have confirmed her suspicions that his love for her was dead.
Unexpectedly, instead of indifference to his behaviour, she felt a wrenching pain. Her throat constricted as she fought back tears.
The barmaid arrived with plates of food that she placed in front of them, obviating the need for further dialogue. The foreign food on her plate filled Susan with disgust. It did not improve her appetite to watch Dean attacking his food with relish, taking large quaffs of ale to swallow it.
Finally, with his mouth full, he asked, “What is wrong? You are not enjoying your tatties and neeps?”
She made a face. “Is that what they are?”
“Aye. Good hearty Scottish fare to defend the constitution against the Scottish climate.”
She had always loved his Scottish accent but now it seemed to have broadened. Only the night before she had felt warmed by his accent but now his rolling burr annoyed her. She pushed her plate away.
He stopped chewing, took a swig of ale to swallow what was left of the food in his mouth, and said, “You hae spoiled my appetite with your bad humour.”
“Good,” she said. “Good, because you have likely spoiled my whole life.” She stood up as if to leave.
He looked as though she had stabbed him with a knife. “What are you saying? How ungrateful can ye be?” She started to leave. “Sit down, sir. I have a mite more to say to you, but I dinna want to shout so that everyone can hear.”
She was fighting back tears and wanted desperately to get out of the tavern before starting to cry. He had reminded her that she was a boy, and boys did not cry, especially not in public. “I cannot stay,” she said. “If you want to continue this discussion you must follow me to our room.”
“You go ahead if you maun,” he replied. “I shall be up later. I want to have another pint of this good Scottish ale that I have been too long deprived of.”
Susan looked at him in utter shock. She knew that he had more to say to her. She had heard the bitter anger in his voice. Yet he chose to stay here and drink! The only man she would ever love had chosen drink over her! She left him to his pint and walked up to their apartment. She did not need a candle; it was June and getting closer to the longest day of the year, which, in this northern latitude, was longer than any she had ever known. A gloomy kind of daylight it was, with the rain falling outside. It was cold and she decided to get under the covers with all her clothes on.
She lay in bed and listened to the rain falling outside the window. He was not coming. He was going to have another pint of Scottish ale, and another conversation with a certain Scottish barmaid as well, no doubt. And where would that lead? Even in her anger she had trouble imagining him being a scoundrel, but she knew what a man might be capable of once his better judgment had been clouded with too much drink. Susan herself was feeling the effects of the single pint she had imbibed. She pictured him kissing the lovely barmaid and lifting her skirt to place his hand on her thigh. Then she imagined the barmaid laughing and encouraging him. Finally, her unexpressed anger turned to tears and spilled out of her. She lay there, sobbing, for the longest time, until fatigue finally overcame her, and she slept.

Several hours later, Dean opened the door without attempting to be quiet, walked clumsily across the floor, and sat down hard upon the bed. Susan started awake. Even through sleep-filled eyes, she could see that he had been drinking: his eyes were bleary and shot with red.

“You have wakened me, sir,” she scolded him.

“Dinna fash.” His speech was slurred and somewhat maudlin.

“I do fash!” she said. “You have been drinking, sir.”

“Drunkenness is not one of my faults, Susan.”

The fact that he was speaking to her in such a familiar fashion gave her no pleasure under the circumstances. “I would not have thought so, but I do not believe that I know you well enough to say.”

“Do ye nae love me anymore, Susy?”

His face was close to hers now, and she could smell the drink on him. She was afraid that he was going to kiss her and, as much as she would have welcomed it the previous night, she did not desire him in his present condition. “Sir!” she exclaimed crossly. “Have some dignity. You cannot leave the barmaid’s bed and come directly to mine.”

He jumped back as if she had struck him and almost tipped over. When he had regained his balance, he replied, “How can you accuse me of lichensus…” After several attempts, his tongue proved incapable of pronouncing the word and he restated his thought, “of being a rogue. I would never share any other bed but yours.”

“Again, I would not have thought it possible before, but this has been a night of surprises for me.”

“You dinna wish to marry me now,” he wailed.

“No, sir, I do not. Not in your present state.”

“Do you think you can just go back to your mommy and daddy? Will they take you back, do you suppose?”

She wondered if he was insulting her by suggesting as he had the previous night that she was a strumpet, but he seemed to be asking the question, not of her, but of the wall opposite.

He continued to address the wall. “I dinna ken these English. The claims of social class seem to outweigh those of religion with them.” Then he looked at her. “‘But you are too good for me, Susan. That much is clear. How can you descend from a ‘Kirke’ to a ‘Dean’? It is a long way down.”

“Are you mocking me, sir?”

He choked and started sobbing. “I am so sorry, Susan,” he sputtered between his tears.
“It is all right,” she said. At least he was a maudlin drunk and not an angry one as her father had been. “Why do you not lie down and go to sleep? We can discuss it further in the morning.”

“Aye,” he said. “’Tis a good idea.”
Then he fell into the bed without removing any of his clothes and was almost immediately asleep and snoring beside her. Susan dozed fitfully the rest of the night.
Chapter 21

Susan was awake, risen and dressed long before Dean the next morning. She sat for a while in the chair beside the bed and gazed upon him. His long, dark lashes fell on his white cheeks and his curls lay upon the pillow. He snorted loudly every so often, tossing and turning restlessly. She felt some tenderness for him, but it was mixed with so many other emotions now that she could barely express them. He was a complicated man. She wondered how he would react when he woke up. She suspected that he would be full of remorse. Should she forgive him if he was, or would it be better to let him stew in his own water for a while? She thought perhaps the latter would be better. He had hurt her, and she needed to make him pay. Remorse in a husband could be a good thing.

Dean gave a loud snort and woke himself. He started and sat up. “Wha...?” he shouted. He saw her staring at him as if he were naked and covered himself with the bed clothes, even though he was fully clad. “Och,” he moaned, squinting and clutching his head. “Excuse me. I am not feeling well.” He walked quickly into the dressing room and vomited into the wash basin.

“Are you ill, sir?”

He continued retching into the basin for a few moments. “You ken that I am,” he said, as he wiped his face on a towel. “My apologies for last night,” he said. He picked up the jug and tipped the water over his head, spilling much of it on the floor as he did so.

“Look what you are doing, Dean.”

“Well, ‘tis not your responsibility to clean it up, so dinna fash yourself.”

She said nothing.

“Let us proceed to Edinburgh, Master Gardiner.”

“Shall we not have breakfast first?”

“Do you think you can abide our good Scottish parritch?”

“Do you think that you can?” she responded.

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All the way to Edinburgh, Susan considered what John Dean had said to her while inebriated. In vino veritas, she thought. He had said she was too good for him. Was he being ironic or had he lost his belief in the fundamental equality of mankind? Was he perhaps correct? Was she too good for him, and not just because of her station in life? She had always believed that he was her moral superior, but now she was not so sure. She was profoundly disappointed in his behaviour of the preceding night. One could not choose one’s parents, it was true, and now it seemed equally true that one did not really choose one’s mate, either. It was a pig in a poke, and not much better than that.

And what about the question he had addressed to the wall? Would her parents take her back again and forgive her for her elopement with the gardener? If they would, then perhaps there was some way out of this nightmare she had found herself in. Perhaps she could send a message to her parents from Edinburgh. She would try to forestall the marriage until her father came to rescue her. She would not say anything to Dean, lest her father did not feel her worth rescuing. If she had to, she would stand at the altar and refuse to marry him. Then she would have to wait alone and friendless in Dundee until a
rescuer came from England. The contemplation did not bring her any warmth against the 
Scottish mist.

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By the time of their arrival in Edinburgh, Susan was sunk into a funk even gloomier 
than the Scottish weather. She descended from the coach, used now to debarking without 
the offered hand of a gentleman. She walked past Dean into the tavern of the Cowgate 
without a word of greeting.

“Master Gardiner,” he called after her. “Have you forgotten your manners?”

Susan turned around. “Sorry, sir,” she said as she waited for him to walk beside her. 
She had not meant to be petulant. She had only been intent on arriving ahead of him in 
order to enquire about the post to London privately. She did not know when there might 
be another opportunity to do so.

Inside the inn, Susan was astonished when Dean requested two apartments for three 
nights.

“Why are we staying for three nights?” she asked him.

“Tomorrow is the Sabbath and there will be no journeying then.”

She had lost track of the days. “That I understand, but why another day after that? Are 
you not anxious to arrive in Dundee where your family awaits you?”

“That I am, sir, but my parents will be disappointed if I arrive with a lad. They will be 
expecting me to marry a lassie, I fancy.” He smiled. “On Monday, we shall visit the 
shops of Edinburgh. I am sure that you will not find apparel as handsome as Fitzwilliam’s 
gown at the masquerade, but perhaps it will be pleasing for you to wear women’s clothes 
again.”

“Yes, indeed,” she said, but her mind was moving swiftly now. They would be here 
two full days, and in separate apartments! She would have the opportunity to write to her 
father and perhaps, if he came immediately, he would arrive in time to rescue her before 
the wedding took place. She could not determine how many days it would take for the 
letter to reach him and then for his coach to arrive, but with this respite in their travels, 
she felt some reassurance. The day of reckoning was at least postponed.

At the door of her apartment to which he had led her, she asked, “I am curious as to 
why we are to have separate apartments after so many days of sharing.”

“Well, Gardiner.” Dean walked close beside her and whispered. “Once you are 
transformed into a woman, it will not be appropriate to share a room.”

“And how is this transformation to occur without arousing suspicion?”

“On Sunday you will go to bed a man and awake a woman. I hope with all the traffic 
in this busy inn that it will not be remarked upon. If it is, we shall hope that it is greeted 
with silent astonishment only.”

“If it is remarked upon, we can say that I am going to attend a masquerade.”

“I would rather not make such an admission in Scotland.” Dean laughed. “Here is your 
apartment, sir. Mine is just a little farther down the hall, I believe. And so we shall meet 
in half an hour to sup together. Is that agreeable to you?”

“It is, sir.”

Susan went inside, happy that she had all this time to herself to compose a letter to her 
father, but it taxed all of her skills to draw upon the emotion of humility, which she was 
not used to.
“Sir:” she wrote and then scratched it out as too formal. “Dear Father”. That was better, she thought. “I humbly apologize”. Would “abjectly” be better or would that be too strong a word? She let it lie. “I humbly apologize for my disrespectful behavior.” A few other adjectives came to mind: flagrant, disobedient, willful, dishonourable. She swallowed hear and dipped the quill in ink again.

“I hope…” A great blot of ink appeared in the “o”. She had forgotten to shake the excess from the quill. “Damn,” she said, blotting the paper. It only smeared further. She picked it up and crumpled it.

“I hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive me,” she said to herself as she arranged a clean sheet, dipped the quill, shook the excess ink from it and began to write again. She paused when the process of writing finally caught up with the thoughts in her head. What next? she thought as she read the words she had written thus far.

Somehow I must convince him I am a virgin still. “You will…” “Mr. Dean has been…” “Not so much as a kiss has been exchanged between Mr. Dean and me.” That was it. She wrote the words down. Who would believe it since they had shared a room since London? Her father might; he was gullible where she was concerned, but no one else would. So what? She was writing to her father, not to the world.

What next? She wrote down her simple heartfelt plea: “I want to come home. Please come and fetch me.” A teardrop fell and smudged the ink again. She crumpled another piece of paper and consigned it to the floor.

In half an hour, she had succeeded in filling all the paper that the inn had afforded her with scratched-out words and tear-filled blots. Fortunately, with her own apartment she would have all of Sunday to write if she so required.

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Dean knocked at her door the next morning early. “Let us go to the kirk, Master Gardiner.”

She was ready. “Yes, sir. Shall we walk?”

“Aye. The High Street is but the next street over from the Cowgate. St. Giles is there.”

As they walked, she asked, “Why is the road called the Cowgate? I see no gate anywhere.”

“’Gate,’ in Scottish dialect, means ‘way.’”

“I had no idea that Scottish was a different language.”

“’Tis only a different dialect of English that we speak. The highlanders farther north speak another language altogether.”

They arrived at what is called the Royal Mile, the High Street between Edinburgh Castle and the old royal palace of Holyrood; they walked the rest of the way to the church in silence. Susan observed that Edinburgh seemed as crowded and dirty as London. Even on the Sabbath day, the street was teeming with people jostling and elbowing on the narrow thoroughfare.

The building was old and dark, a converted Catholic edifice not greatly different from the churches of England, but the service was unlike anything that she had ever experienced. The only music was the chanting of a Psalm, with no accompaniment of a musical instrument.

However, the greatest difference was the sermon. Susan remarked that the preacher did not read his homily but spoke directly to the assembly. For the first hour, she was captivated by the delightfulfulness of his oration as she listened intently to his sermon on the
Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek…” A heap of blessings were piled upon the neglected and downtrodden, it seemed. Perhaps it was a good thing, after all, that she had become one of them.

When the minister came to the next beatitude, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,” she lost her way, when he said: “I find in my heart a flame of desires. After the righteousness of Christ. My soul earnestly desires to be stripped naked of my righteousness, which is rags, and to be clothed with the robe of his righteousness. This wedding garment my soul affects: so shall I be found without spot when the Master of the feast comes in to see the guests. My soul is satisfied and acquiesces in justification by an imputed righteousness, though, alas! My base heart would have a home-spun garment of its own sometimes.”

Why would anyone want a home-spun garment, she wondered, when they could have a robe of righteousness? She pictured her own magnificent wedding-gown, left far behind in London, and sighed. Dean had said they would shop for a gown tomorrow. She wondered what it would be like. Home-spun, no doubt. Her feelings were decidedly mixed. It might be pleasant to wear a gown again, but she had enjoyed being without the encumbrance of stays and a pannier. Perhaps the home-spun apparel that Dean could afford to purchase here in Edinburgh would not require such severe restrictions as the fashion in London demanded. She felt a little guilty that he should incur the expense of a wedding gown when she intended to jilt him the next day. When her father arrived she would try to persuade him to repay Dean for his expenses. She laughed out loud at the ludicrous thought, and Dean gave her a reproving look.

By then, she had completely lost the thread of the preacher’s discourse and spent the next hours trying to imagine standing at the front of the church before all the congregation on her wedding day. Would she have the courage to refuse to marry Dean before all his family and friends? She could not think so. It was too unkind. So she prayed earnestly that her father would arrive to rescue her before that eventuality. However, she had not even written the letter yet, never mind posted it. God did not perform such miracles in her experience. Perhaps she had better pray for the courage to refuse Dean. She watched the preacher standing behind the pulpit and was amazed that he was still speaking so eloquently. It seemed as though half the day had passed. When would the sermon end so that she could go back to her apartment and compose her letter?

At long last, the service was over and they walked out into the High Street in silence until they reached the Cowgate.

“Was it not an eloquent sermon, sir?” Dean asked her.

“Indeed.”

“Superior by far than any I have heard preached in England.”

“Was it not a little long, sir?”

“Not at all. Only three hours. Some would consider that a trifling short homily. No, I found I was transported by his words and inspired to improve my life. I have not been a good Christian these last few days, I confess it openly. Were you not moved also, Master Gardiner?”

“Aye, and I shall be transformed also in these two days in Edinburgh, shall I not, Mr. Dean?”

He laughed. “Aye, you shall.”
That afternoon Susan composed herself in front of a fresh sheet of paper that she had acquired from the innkeeper. It was her last chance to write her cry for help. It was now or never. She would have to choke down all her pride and find the words to admit that she had made a grave error and was ready to return home and play the dutiful daughter. She had no greater luck finding the words than she had had the day before. Something, she could not say what it was, perhaps her obdurate pride, would not allow her to confess her mistake. She decided she would have to resign herself to going through with this charade. Her father could never rescue her in time now, and she could never stand in a church and deny Dean. Perhaps she could find the courage to speak to him this evening or tomorrow or some time before they arrived in Dundee and admit to him her severe misgivings. With that thought, she abandoned her efforts to write and prepared herself for supper.
The next day dawned grey still, but at least the rain had stopped so that it would be less onerous to walk about the Royal Mile from shop to shop. Susan and John decided to pretend to shop for a gown for John’s wife as a surprise gift on his homecoming. Each gown could be surreptitiously measured against Gardiner’s figure to determine if it would fit.

Dean escorted his master to a shop that sold ready-made gowns. The shopkeeper proposed a French gown made of Spitalfields silk with pink stripes and flower patterns, gold and silver lace decorations and double-flounced cuffs. Susan especially loved the engageantes, intended to decorate the cuffs, which were made of a triple layer of Brussels lace. The gauzy silk apron was adorned with chenille flowers that reminded her of the Kent garden that she had left so far behind.

Susan looked at the gown longingly and then at John. “I believe that your wife would love this gown, Mr. Dean.”

“I am quite certain that she would, but my pocket book does not love it at all. We shall see a more practical, everyday gown, if you will, sir,” Dean addressed the shopkeeper, who scurried off to search for a gown with these specifications. Turning to Susan, Dean said quietly, “Consider that this gown will not only be used for special occasions, but also for every day. I am not so rich that I can afford many gowns for my wife, and I maun be more practical in my choice, and the expense of lace is out of the question.”

The shopkeeper returned with a similar silk gown festooned with blue stripes, red flowers and double-flounced cuffs, but without the gold and silver lace decoration. The engageantes were made of linen white work rather than silk. It was the kind of gown that Susan might have worn on any given day back home, and not at all what she would consider appropriate for a wedding, even as a guest.

“How is this one?” the shopkeeper asked, placing it in front of her.

She looked down and saw the flowers on the gown. As simple as it was, it still reminded her of her home in Kent and the garden from which she had been expelled and which she might never see again. The thought brought a wave of homesickness over her. She would have the gown as a reminder of all that she had lost with her impetuous decision to follow Dean. She took a deep breath to keep from crying, and her voice was so low as to sound masculine without any feigning. “I believe it will do quite nicely.”

“Do you think my wife will like it?”

“Yes, but what about shoes and jewelry?”

“I am sure that my wife already has those. Dinna fash, sir.”

Susan looked at him frostily.

Dean enquired the price, swallowed hard when told, and went to settle accounts with the shopkeeper.

On the way back to the inn in the Cowgate, Dean asked Susan if she was ready to resume their trip the next day.
“Well,” she said, “I am as ready as I can be. Two days of rest have been most welcome, but I do not happily anticipate returning to the coach.”

“I hae been giving that matter some consideration. I too am tired by the constant jostling of the coach. I hae decided to go down to the harbour of Leith this afternoon to see if there are any ships bound for Dundee tomorrow on which we might book passage. Do you approve of this plan?”

“Oh, yes. May I come with you?”

“I dinna think so. You should stay here and rest this afternoon in case we maun continue by coach tomorrow.”

“But I must walk. I cannot sit all day.”

“I shall be taking a coach to Leith as it is too far to walk. Do you still wish to accompany me? Would you not prefer to take a walk in the New Town along Princes Street?”

“All right. I see your point,” she conceded, not altogether graciously.

As she watched Dean climb aboard a coach that afternoon and set out for Leith, she remembered that she had meant to approach him about her misgivings regarding the wedding. Ah well, it would have to wait now until this evening, or perhaps tomorrow.
Chapter 23

The next morning Susan arose early and put on her austere blue gown. As she examined her disappointing likeness in the mirror, she was struck by the thought that she would never in all her life have imagined being married in such a plain gown. Even her everyday gowns had had lace *engageantes*. This was as ordinary as one of Mary’s gowns—at least she did not have to wear stays with this gown. With the thought of Mary, she felt a familiar tug around the ribs and a similar tug of guilt at her heart. She had not given one passing thought to Mary in a long time. She wondered what Mary might be doing now and if they might somehow be able to reengage her when they returned to London. Susan would find some other occupation for her than tying stays. If she went through with this marriage, as it seemed more and more likely she would in spite of herself, Mary would be the only servant and would find herself very well occupied.

Concluding that she was as presentable as she could make herself in this gown, especially wearing a pair of men’s shoes on her feet, Susan sat down to wait for Dean to come and escort her to breakfast. She had not seen him the previous evening. She thought he must have been delayed at a tavern in Leith. She had not waited up for his return but rather had gone to bed and fallen asleep angry that he was again out drinking. Now she waited, growing more and more impatient. Where could he be? Perhaps he was ill this morning as he deserved to be. Perhaps he was sleeping late. Susan was hungry, but it would not be appropriate for a young lady to descend to breakfast alone. At any rate, she did not dare to call attention to herself in that way. This was her first morning as a woman, and no one in the tavern knew her as such.

Finally, when she could bear it no longer, Susan went to Dean’s apartment and knocked on the door. There was no answer. She knocked again and called his name, but there was still no response. She tried the door but it was locked fast.

A sense of foreboding came over her. Surely he had not abandoned her! Such a thought was not possible. Had he gone down to the tavern alone, expecting to meet her and forgetting that she would be dressed as a woman today? She would have to return to her dressing room and change into the male garments that she had thought never to don again, so that she could go down and find him.

Dressed again as Andrew Gardiner, Susan paused at the tavern door and looked over the guests to see if Dean was among them. Seeing an unwelcome, familiar face, she gasped and stepped back to hide herself behind the door. Pray God that he had not seen her! It took a few minutes for her to regain some sense of composure. What on earth was the butler Sutton doing here in Edinburgh? But of course, he was looking for her. He must have been sent by her parents to find her. She would have to keep out of his way.

She went to find the innkeeper to see if he could answer some of the mystery with which this morning had presented her. “Sir,” she said. “Could you tell me who that Englishman is in the tavern and what his business is here?”

“You do not know him, sir? He enquired after your friend Mr. Dean yesterday.”

“And did you give him any information?”
“Aye. That I did. I told him Mr. Dean had gone to Leith to book passage on a ship to Dundee. But you say you do not know the man in the tavern? I thought you might since he is a fellow countryman. He was also looking for a young lady, a Miss Susan Kirke.”

Susan’s heart rate increased. She was glad they had given her name as Andrew Gardiner and not Andrew Kirke. “No, sir. I do not know him.” She changed the subject. “Can you tell me if you have seen Mr. Dean this morning? We were supposed to meet for breakfast, and I cannot find him.”

“Nae, I havena. Did you try his room?”

“Yes sir, but there is no response. Would you mind opening the door? I fear that he might be ill.”

“What reason have you to fear that?”

“Nothing in particular, though perhaps he may have visited too many taverns in Leith yesterday.”

“Come with me,” the innkeeper said, taking a key and walking up the stairs.

At Dean’s apartment, he unlocked the door and opened it, revealing a bed that had not been slept in.

“It looks as though he did not return from Leith last night,” the innkeeper said.

“Oh, my!” Susan felt faint all of a sudden, but she could not grab hold of this greasy innkeeper. She could not swoon like a lady. She must stand firm like a man. She waited until the ringing in her ears had ceased and the brightness at the corner of her eyes had dissipated before speaking. “Where can he be?”

“Where, indeed?” the innkeeper repeated. “I have to know, sir, if you will pay for Mr. Dean’s room since he seems to have absconded.”

Susan was suddenly just as angry now as she had been faint a moment before. “Mr. Dean would never abscond, as you put it, and he would never abandon me.”

“Why do you say ‘abandon you’? Do you not have any money of your own, sir?”

She realized that she had inadvertently spoken as a woman again. She must be more careful and guard her tongue. She attempted to laugh. “Of course I have money. Of course I shall pay if it becomes necessary. However, I have not altogether given up the possibility of finding Mr. Dean at this moment. I shall go to Leith to look for him. Pray do not mention this to that Englishman in the tavern. I fear he may have something to do with Mr. Dean’s disappearance.”

“I need to have some surety for the payment of the rooms before you go off looking for the man and disappear as he did.”

Susan did not have a penny to her name. Dean had always looked after her and paid for everything out of his pocket as her father had before that. She had little or no knowledge of financial dealings, and now she felt keenly the lack of both knowledge and coin.

“Yes, sir. I have told you I shall pay. You may rely on me,” she said, hoping he believed her bluff.

“And these rooms maun be cleared before you flee, so that I may rent them,” the innkeeper said.

That was it. Perhaps while gathering his possessions together she might find some coins so that she could pay the innkeeper. “How much do we owe you for the apartments, sir?”

“A shilling a piece per night. That’s six shillings.”
It seemed a great deal to her, considering that the king offered only one shilling for the life of a soldier. In fact, she remembered six shillings was the same amount as Mrs. Hardwick earned in a year pulling weeds. “Thank you,” she said. “You may go.”

“You will not leave without at least a surety that you will return to pay.”

“What do you mean by a surety, sir?”

“By that I mean something of value that you could leave with me. Then if you do not return, I can redeem it for money.”

Susan saw some sign of hope. She doubted that Dean had left any money in the room—after all, he would need his coin to book a ship—but perhaps he owned something, a pocket watch or some such item. It was certain that she had nothing. She cursed her own foolhardiness in running away from home without any possessions at all. She had been so naïve. Then she thought of the gown that Dean had purchased for her. She wondered if it might do as surety if she could find nothing here. First, she should search the apartment. “Of course, sir, before I leave I shall either pay you or provide a surety.”

The innkeeper finally left Susan to search the apartment for the few belongings that Dean might have left there. She remembered he carried a canvas bag and found it under his bed. There was nothing inside but a few rolled shirts and some toiletries. Susan looked closely and noticed that one of the shirts was bulkier than the others. She removed it, unrolled it, and was surprised to find a pair of high-heeled shoes made of white silk with silver embroidery. They were her wedding shoes! Perhaps they would suffice as surety.

When she picked one up to examine it more closely, something heavy fell out of the shoe onto the floor. Susan was astonished to see a piece of jewelry dazzling with white innumerable sapphires and pearls. It was the brooch that Fitzwilliam had bought for her. How had Dean acquired it? But of course, when they had met on the night before they left London, Fitzwilliam must have given the items to Dean. She did not have time to wonder why. Even little as she knew about the cost of things, she could was quite sure it was worth more than six shillings. It would be too valuable to be used as surety.

For now, she realized, she must hide it. Pinning it inside her pocket, she examined the other shoe, hoping for another rich discovery. She was not disappointed for, wrapped in a cloth, she found two silver shoe buckles covered in glittering paste. She was quite certain they would cover the entire cost of the apartments. The innkeeper might accept them for the full amount she owed him and she would be quit of the unpleasant man for good. She wrapped the shoes in her gown and placed them in Dean’s carpet bag beside his shirts. Then she descended, stealthily keeping her eye out for the butler Sutton.

She gave the shoe buckles to the innkeeper and watched his eyes alight with greed. So, it was not only women who liked shiny, sparkly things. “Will this cover the expense of the apartments, sir?”

“Aye. ‘Twill do,” he replied.

“Now, do you know where Mr. Dean would have gone in Leith?”

The innkeeper gave the name of a coffeehouse.

“And can you give me directions to Leith?”

“You will need to hire a coach, Mr. Gardiner. It would take you all day to walk there.”

Susan’s shoulders sank. She never realized before how difficult it was to look after everything without a guardian. The innkeeper seemed to recognize her trouble and take pity on her.
“I can see you have no money, sir, or you would have paid me instead of giving me these buckles.” He handed Susan a few pennies, which she gratefully accepted, and then went to look for a coach.
Chapter 24

As Susan settled in to the cab she had hired a cab for the drive to the neighboring town, she realized that she could have turned herself over to the butler and returned with him to Kent. Only the day before, she had attempted to compose a letter to her father asking him to come and retrieve her. Somehow, the sight of Sutton had filled her with such revulsion that she had acted without hesitation to track down her lover and rescue him from whatever predicament the butler had left him in. The moment she saw Sutton, she knew that he must be responsible for Dean’s disappearance. She could not imagine how he had managed it, but she would discover the truth of it. She shuddered at a passing thought that occurred to her, but surely the butler, even wicked as he was, was not capable of murder? She would not entertain the possibility.

She pictured Dean as she had first seen him, labouring in her father’s garden, and a tear came to her eye. How could she have been so unloving and uncaring in the last few days, expecting his unquestioning support of her and giving him none in return? It was only her wretched doubt that was in error. Even if they did not marry after this misadventure, she would never be able to live with herself if she abandoned him. No, she was doing the right thing in going to find him.

Susan entered the coffeehouse the innkeeper had suggested and asked the barmaid if she could speak to the proprietor. The barmaid looked her over and told her that the proprietor was not present that day.

“Were you working here yesterday evening, madam?” Susan asked.

“Aye, I was. Why do you want to know that?”

“My name is Andrew Gardiner.” She attempted to speak at her lowest register without sounding artificial. “I am traveling with my servant, John Dean. Unfortunately, I have lost him. Yesterday he was here enquiring about passage to Dundee, but he did not return last night. I have come to enquire if you have seen him, or if you might know what has happened to him. I am much afraid what my father will do to me if I do not return with his servant.”

“That is most unfortunate for you, Master Gardiner. However, I do not believe I can help you. I have never heard of this man, Mr. Dean. What is his appearance?”

“He is a young man, perhaps twenty, tall, well-built, with black curly hair and very blue eyes. He has a most pleasant aspect. Did you see anyone of that description in the coffeehouse yesterday?”

“Aye. That I did. A most handsome young man. He came in here in the afternoon alone, but he left with a group of men, although he did not appear willing.”

“Do you know where they went?”

“I have nae idea. Not at all. Now, if you will excuse me, I must wait upon the patrons here.” The maid left Susan standing alone, not knowing where to go now.

An old merchant man at a nearby table, who had been watching their conversation, called her over. “Come here and sit down, laddie,” he said.

Susan did not know what else to do, so she sat at his table.

“I overheard some of your conversation with the barmaid. Perhaps I can help you.”
Susan repeated her story while the old salt listened avidly, sucking on his pipe. “That is bad news.”

“Do you have any idea where they might have gone? Is there a tavern I might go to look for him?”

“Aye, there are plenty of taverns in Leith, lad, that you can be sure of. But I doubt that is where they hae gone.”

“What do you mean?”

“From the sound of it, your servant has been taken by a pressgang. The barmaid said that he did not look eager to go. I am so sorry for you, if that is the case.”

“I cannot believe it, sir. Mr. Dean is a gardener, not a sailor. He knows nothing of the sea. What would a pressgang want with him?”

“Dinna forget that the Navy is in great need of sailors with the rebellion in the Americas now on. They take anyone they find. In more peaceful times, they might have tossed tossed a gardener out, but they will train him up to be a sailor, never you mind.”

“But I cannot lose him, sir. My father will have my hide if I lose the servant he has already spent so much money on. Is there not some way I can get him back from the pressgang?”

“Perhaps. Your father is rich, you say?”

Something about the question or the way he asked it made Susan feel suddenly wary. She nodded cautiously.

“Then ye might be able to redeem him from the gangers. If ye can find him, that is.”

“You seem to know a lot about the pressgangs, sir. Where would you go to look if you wanted to find him?”

“Oh, I would never go looking for a pressgang. I am a merchantman, laddie. I am the very man they want. I would ne’er go looking for them to make their work any easier.”

“But have you any idea where they may have taken Mr. Dean?” Susan asked frantically.

“A rendezvous. They call the place a rendezvous, but it always changes. ‘Tis never the same place. And then, of course, as soon as possible they would have moved him to a navy ship. If he’s on a navy ship, ye’ll not have any luck getting him out of there. Nae, methinks ye should give up on the servant, laddie. Perhaps, ye’ll have a beaker of ale with me, instead. What say ye, boy?” The old man winked at her.

Susan felt very uncomfortable, as if he had somehow discovered that she was really a woman and was making an improper proposition to her. Something about the man suddenly brought Fitzwilliam to her mind, but it was a ridiculous thought. They were not at all alike. Fitzwilliam was a gentleman and always polite, but this simple seaman had a kind of leering suggestiveness to him. She needed more information from him, and yet she did not dare to speak with him any longer. “Thank you, sir. You have been most kind, but I must decline your invitation. I must perform my father’s service and retrieve his gardener. Good day to you.” With that, Susan got up and left the merchantman before he could say another word to delay her.

As Susan walked toward the dock, she made a plan. The old sailor had said it might be possible to redeem Dean. She felt in her pocket for the pin she had attached there, relieved that it was still there. It was worth enough, she was sure. If only, she was not so afraid to carry her plan into execution. Until today, she had only had to pretend at being a man. She could always count on Dean’s protection, but now, alone, she would have to
accept not only the freedom of the masculine sex but also its responsibility. Today, she would have to be a man and not merely play one.

The ships with their tall rigging grew more ominous as she approached. Susan had only ever seen such sights before at a distance from the window of a coach as it crossed a bridge in London. She had no idea which ship was a navy ship and which was a merchant ship. She looked about her for someone to ask.

There was a young man walking confidently along the dock whistling a tune. Susan approached him.

“Excuse me, sir. Which of these ships is a navy ship?”

He gave her a look of dismay. “You’ll not be looking for a navy ship, boy, unless you want to enlist, and then, more fool you.”

“Yes sir. I want to sign up and see America. Can you direct me to a navy ship.”

“All right then, but don’t say ye were not warned. There is only one navy ship docked in the harbour today—at the New Quay, a man-of-war called The Eagle set to cross the Atlantic soon with fresh Highland troops for the Americas. I suppose you will want to be an officer, then?”

Susan ignored his question and asked directions to the New Quay.

Her legs almost failed her going up the gangplank. The only thought that sustained her was that if she never felt dry land again, at least she would be on the same ship as Dean.

The officer of the watch stopped her before she boarded. “What is your business, sir?”

“I need to speak with the captain.”

“What is the nature of your affair with him?”

“I have come regarding my servant, John Dean, whom I believe was impressed yesterday. Do you have any new recruits to your ship?”

“Aye. There were a group boarded just yesterday, an unpromising bunch of knaves. I will take you to the captain, but I doubt you will get anything from him. Not a very pleasant fellow is our captain. No one wants to join his ship. That is why he must resort to pressing. So mind your manners when you talk to the captain.”

Susan was terrified to meet this formidable captain, and his appearance was as fierce as reported, as fierce as she imagined a pirate’s would be.

The officer of the watch related her business to the captain while he scowled as he looked her over. Susan felt his evil eye on her and for the second time today feared that she might be recognized as a woman. She wondered what he would do to her if the truth were revealed. Perhaps he would force himself upon her, or… She refused to allow her imagination to dwell on it further, for surely, like a dog, he would be able to smell her fear. She must at least appear bold. She looked the captain directly in the eye.

“Who is it you’re looking for, Master Gardiner?” he asked

“I am looking for my servant, Mr. John Dean.”

“Ah, yes. A strong strapping young fellow. Will make an excellent sailor.”

“Yes, but he is not a sailor, sir. He is a gardener and knows nothing of the sea.”

“He can be trained. Looks intelligent enough.”

“But he is my father’s gardener. I was sent to bring him back to my father’s estate. My father is a gentleman, sir.”

“Yes?” The old captain raised an eyebrow as if somewhat interested.

It was time for Susan to broach the topic that she most dreaded. “How much,” she asked, tentatively. “How much do you want for Mr. Dean?”
“How much are you willing to give me, sir?”
“I have never negotiated for a man’s life before. I have no idea what amount to offer you.”
“You speak rightly, young man. We are negotiating for a man’s life. Life is not cheap. Usually someone in your position would offer me ten pounds.”
“Ten pounds! The king only pays a shilling for his soldiers!”
“Take it or leave it.”
“Well, of course I have not that amount of money with me, and I am too young to have access to bank notes.”
The captain looked ready to dismiss her.
“But I have something here…” She reached for her pocket and began to unpin the brooch that was there. “I know it is very valuable.” She took it out and handed it to the captain. “Those are true sapphires, sir, and true pearls. Look at the number and brilliance of them.”
The captain’s eyes seemed to reflect the gleam of the precious stones. Susan had a little experience with bargaining now; she knew that she had him. She knew it with an instinct that is usually obtained only after much practice in dealing. No matter what he said to her now, she had only to stand firm, and he would falter.
“It’s worthless to me,” he said, and for a moment her heart was in her mouth, but he did not hand it back to her, so she did not believe him. He was playing with her. “I cannot redeem it for money until I am back in port again and who knows when that will be.”
“Ah, well then,” she said, playing his game. “Give it back to me. I will go redeem it myself at a jewelers and I shall bring you back the ten pounds that you asked for. If it is worth more than that, I shall pocket the rest.”
She reached her hand out to the captain, but he did not offer her the pin. She felt great relief that her instinct had been right.
His eyes still gleamed as he went to the door of the cabin and called a midshipman.
“Go fetch the new recruit Dean, will you? Give him into this boy’s custody.”
The man looked as if he wanted to object, but he thought better of it and turned on his heel.
The captain looked at Susan. “I think that this Dean must be very valuable. It is not often that I am paid twice for the same man.”
_Ah ha! So Sutton the butler must have arranged Dean’s impressment._ She had been right to suspect the man.
“You may wait outside, Mr. Gardiner.” The captain waved his hand in dismissal.
She left as quickly as possible and stood on the deck waiting for Dean, her heart beating so fast that she thought it would burst.
He came, following a step behind the midshipman like a lowly servant. When he looked up and saw Susan, his face flashed upon her that beautiful smile that she had almost forgotten. It was so brief that she was not sure she had even seen it, but it was long enough to recall to her all of the love that she felt for him.
“You are to go with this boy, Dean.”
Dean looked at the midshipman, obviously unable to believe it. “What? Off the ship?”
“Be gone with ye.” With that comment, the midshipman turned on his heel again and left them.
Dean and Susan stood looking at one another for what seemed an eon, the tension of resisted attraction almost visible between them.

“How…” he began to ask.

“Let’s get off the ship, John, before they change their minds.” Her words broke the tension and the two of them walked at the double towards the gangplank. Without a word, Dean took the canvas bag from her and they continued at a brisk pace without stopping until they were well out of sight of the New Quay.

“We must hire a coach,” Dean said at last.

“Then you did not manage to book us passage to Dundee?”

“I did not. The pressgang found me before I was able to accomplish that. I do not wish to travel by sea now, if you do not mind.”

Susan laughed. “Do you have any money for a coach?”

“Aye, I have. Fortunately, they did not take the few coins I have left. It should be enough to get us to Dundee. Now, we must go back to Edinburgh to settle our bill at the inn.”

“We cannot go back to the inn. That horrid butler was there, and I do not wish to encounter him. Did you know that it was he that sold you to the press gang?”

“The butler Sutton from Kirke Hall?”

“The very man.”

“How do you know this?”

“He was at the inn looking for you and the innkeeper told him where you had gone to book passage. The captain confirmed that someone else had given money for you before me. I can only presume it was Sutton who paid to have you captured.”

“And how did you pay for me?”

“So many questions! Let us first obtain passage on a coach, and then we will have leisure to discuss all that has passed.” Susan remembered all the time she had spent alone on coaches thus far.

As if he noticed her apprehension, Dean said, “We will sit together on the coach this time. I have no wish to be separated from you again. You cannot imagine how afraid I was that I would never see you again.”

Susan smiled at him. “Yes, I think I know precisely how you felt.”
Chapter 25

A short time later, Dean and Susan sat across from one another, the only passengers in the coach that afternoon traveling inland away from the coast, exhausted and relieved. “I feel terrible about cheating the innkeeper in Edinburgh of the bill. We must remember to pay him when we pass that way again as husband and wife.”

Susan smiled. “That will not be necessary as I have already paid our account with the innkeeper.”

“How did you manage that? Do have a secret cache of coin, Susan?”

“I gave the innkeeper the silver buckles from my shoe.”

“How clever! And how did you redeem me?” Dean looked worried.

“I found the brooch in the shoe, and I used that.”

Dean nodded but said nothing.

“How did you come by the brooch, John?”

“You did not recognize it?”

“No. When did I see it before?”

“It was the pin that Fitzwilliam had on his gown at the masquerade. He gave it to me as a gift for you.”

“My stomacher pin! Of course. I should have recognized it, but it never looked so fine on the stomacher of that gown.”

“That is the peril of having too much finery. One never realizes the true worth of what one has.”

Susan considered this statement. How could anyone suspect that a brooch was worth the value of a man’s life? She felt no sense of loss now that it was gone. If the truth be known, she did not feel any loss at all in leaving her old life behind. She had something more valuable, something that she was finally sure of—the love of a man.

After a few moments of silence, Dean spoke again. “There is something I need to tell you about that brooch. When we were in Edinburgh at the gown shop, you asked me if I would purchase shoes and jewelry, and I refused your request. I think you understand why now, as you have found your wedding shoes. Fitzwilliam gave them to me, and also the stomacher pin, as a wedding gift for you when I spoke with him in London just before our departure.

“You surprise me, sir. I would not have thought Fitzwilliam capable of such generosity towards us.”

“The man surprised me by his gesture, also. I think that, in spite of his lack of moral compass, he had a kind heart and was sympathetic towards star-crossed lovers. He called us Romeo and Juliet, and when I was so rudely snatched up by the press gang, I was afraid he had foretold our destiny.”

Susan shuddered. “But we have found one another alive.”

Dean took her hand and squeezed it. “That we have, which is all that truly matters. Nevertheless, I had anticipated with great pleasure the occasion of presenting you with the brooch, as it is a Scottish tradition for the groom to give his bride a pin before the ceremony.”
“It is no matter, John. The pin has found a much more important use, and ‘tis not the gift but the thought that counts, as they say.” Changing the subject abruptly, Susan asked, “How long before we reach Dundee?”

“Due to our late start, we will not arrive until sometime tomorrow. Tonight, we will be obliged to stay in Stirling.”

“But what if Sutton overtakes us?”

“Aye, the butler. I had forgotten that the man was still on our trail. He must have gone to Gretna Green, and, not finding us there, made his way to Edinburgh. Do you suppose he knows that we are going to Dundee?”

“It seems very likely that my father has made enquiries to discover your hometown in Scotland, in which case, we may presume that he will follow us there. On the other hand, he may have gone home, now that he has foiled our wedding plans by having you impressed into the navy.”

“I do not think we can presume that. He has not found you yet and I doubt that he will go home without you.”

So, it was just as Susan had suspected. She was still being hunted.

“You have no reason to fear the villain. I will stay beside you until our wedding, and I will not let him snatch you away. You cannot be compelled to go against your will. This is Scotland, and you have the legal right to marry, even without your parents’ consent, from the age of fourteen.”

“Is it so? It seems a very young age to know your own mind.”

“So what age would you set for consent, Susan?”

“Sixteen, I think. A girl knows what she wants at sixteen.”

Dean smiled. “Does she now? Is she still so certain that what she has chosen is the best thing for her?”

“Aye, sir,” she tried the local language tentatively. “I have learned a great deal on this voyage. I learned that I love you enough to set aside my fear and rescue you from the King’s navy.”

When she was finished speaking, he took her hand, looked into her eyes and said, “I believed that I loved you before. I told myself that I loved you in spite of what you were, which to me seemed to be a spoiled, impulsive, and unruly girl. Today I can say that I love you because of who you truly are—a woman as brave and fearless as any man, my equal in every way. I thank you for restoring my liberty to me, Susan.”

“I hope that you still love me in spite of what I am, for I am still impulsive and unruly. If I were not, I would never have rushed out alone to rescue you. I would never have dared to play the part of a man so whole-heartedly.”

“That I know, and I cannot think why you did it. When I consider how cold and half-hearted I have been towards you in the last few days, I am heartily ashamed. Mr. Fitzwilliam had warned me that you would not understand about money.”

“Fitzwilliam was right. I did not understand, but now I do. I think I understand better than anyone how vastly money is overrated and how unimportant it is in the grand scheme of things, and yet, paradoxically, how necessary to life in this evil society in which we live.”

“It is a just and apt description. A Presbyterian preacher could not have expressed it better. Seen in that light, I have been most sinful in pinching every penny as if there would never be another.”
“Well, I forgive you, and I understand. I have always behaved as if money did not even exist, but now that I am aware of its usefulness, I will never make that mistake again.”
“Does that not contradict your earlier statement that money is unimportant?”
“I said ‘unimportant in the grand scheme of things,’ and it is not. I would never trade you for a stomacher pin, for I know the value of human life is beyond price. No matter what the pin was worth to the captain, it was worthless to me except in its use as an instrument of redemption. You see what I mean; money is worthless in and of itself; its worth is only evident in its use; thus it must be spent and should never be hoarded.”
“Oh, I dinna like the sound of that. The only means of becoming a wealthy man is to save what money you can.”
“I will not have you wealthy. I will have you just as you are.”
“And I accept you just as you are.”
It was impossible to resist the attraction any longer, and being alone in the coach, they kissed. It had been a long time since their last kiss. She had almost forgotten the feeling of being suspended, being outside of time and space, being so alive in this moment that nothing else existed except the two of them. For a long time they kissed, a kiss that seemed to reach into the future with a promise of so much more that was deep and lasting.
At the end of their long, soul-refreshing kiss, they looked at each other, and Dean broke out laughing.
“What is so amusing?” Susan felt annoyed.
“I have never kissed a man before. It feels quite odd.”
“Oh.” Susan reddened. “I do not suppose it would be safe for me to change into my wedding dress yet?”
“I think you ought to wait until tomorrow, in case the butler overtakes us.”
Chapter 26

The next day, at about the same hour, Susan awoke when the coach in which they traveled stopped at the inn in Dundee. She heard Dean call out the window. “William, ‘tis good to see you.” Then he opened the door and jumped down, embracing this William almost immediately upon alighting.

“John. How’s a’ wi’ ye? And where is your bonny lassie?”

Susan resisted the urge to alight on her own as she had become accustomed to on her long voyage and enjoyed playing the lady, waiting patiently for John to take her hand and help her out. “Susan Kirke,” he said. “May I present to you my brother William Dean. William, my fiancée Miss Kirke.”

William took her hand and shook it warmly. “I am so pleased to meet you. John has written such a glowing description of you, but I am afraid it does not do you justice.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“But I thought you said that your brothers were in America, John?” Susan asked.

“Two of them are in America and two of them are here.”

“Four brothers! And are there any sisters as well?”

“But one.”

“Yes, poor little Esther,” William injected. “Let us go now, John. Do you have any bags? Only one? Mother is anxious to see you, and to meet you, as well, Miss Kirke, especially as we expected you yesterday. We have had to postpone the service until tomorrow, and Mother has been cooking these last two days, since we first had word you were coming. There will be such a splendid feast. You will see.” William did not cease talking until they were safely installed on the chaise he had brought to convey them to the Deans’ humble abode, and even then he kept up a running commentary on the sights that were to be seen in the neighbourhood. Susan attempted to listen and absorb it all but she was busy looking about for any sign of Sutton the butler, and she was weary.

There was an equally enthusiastic clamour upon arrival at the aforementioned home. Mrs. Margaret Dean opened her arms wide to embrace first her son and then Susan.

Dean asked his mother and brother if an Englishman had been about asking for them.

“No one has come to the door to make enquiries, but Mother mentioned that a man was seen skulking about the house yesterday,” William replied.

“Aye, ‘twas a cowering, timorous knave, and I fetched William to confront him, but the coward slunk away before we returned.”

After supper, Mrs. Dean took hold of Susan’s arm and led her to the parlour. She commanded her son to stay without the room, which was filled with women only.

“Miss Kirke,” Mrs. Dean spoke her name with the same rolling lilt as her son. “I am pleased to introduce you to the women of the family and our friends and neighbours.” She proceeded to name all the smiling women who greeted Susan warmly.

“We have a tradition in our country, madam, that is performed before the wedding.” She gestured to move the women aside so that Susan could see the tub of water in the middle of the room. “’Tis a foot washing.” Mrs. Dean brought Susan to the tub. “I do not hold with many of the old pagan traditions of my country, but this one I approve of, since our Lord Jesus Christ saw fit to wash the feet of his followers in the Holy Book. You
maun sit down and remove your shoes and stockings while the good women of Dundee scrub your feet.”

Susan responded. “Thank you, madam. It will do them good, I assure you, for my feet are weary. They have come a long journey.”

“And maun be washed clean before they take another step.”

When Susan was seated, Mrs. Dean knelt down to remove her shoes and stockings. “They are such fine shoes, Miss Kirke.” She held them in her hands a moment examining them before she passed them to her daughter. All the women passed the shoes around and admired them as Susan placed her feet in the warm water. One of her sisters-in-law knelt down with a bar of sweet-smelling soap to scrub them. Then another sister-in-law rinsed them clean. Finally, Dean’s sister knelt down and massaged Susan’s feet for a moment. When she had finished, she rooted around in the soapy water with her hand. Susan was wondering what she was doing, when she took out her empty hand, shrugged, and stood up.

“I have nae found it,” she said. “Let all the other single ladies have a go.”

At that, the youngest ladies chattered excitedly and, surrounding the tub, all began to plunge their hands into it, alarming Susan. “What are they doing?”

Mrs. Dean answered, “Dinna fash yourself. It is just another part of the tradition. I have put my wedding ring in the water and the one who finds it will be the next woman to marry.”

With that knowledge, Susan moved her feet a little in the water, imperceptibly with all the hands moving about in it, groping with her toes to find the ring herself. When her toes found it, she placed her foot firmly over it, so that the other girls could not find it.

“Are you sure ‘tis here, madam?” one of the young ladies asked.

“Yes, I am sure. But that is enough,” she said. “Anymore jirbling about in the water, and you will upset the tub. Let me look to find it now.”

With that, the young ladies took out their dripping hands and wiped them on their towels. Mrs. Dean moved to place her hand in the tub, but Susan stopped her. “It is not necessary, madam. I am the one who has found the ring. I wanted to be sure that I would be the next one to marry. I could not risk that anyone else should find it, so I made it secure under my foot. I hope I have not upset your tradition.”

Everyone laughed and Susan reached down, put her hand in the water and, removing the ring from under her foot, held it up high for all to see it.

Mrs. Dean looked surprised for a moment, and then her face broke out in a smile. “Well, ‘tis na usually done in that manner, but I am glad that you are such an eager bride because you will have the best husband in the world.”

Susan handed the ring to her future mother-in-law, who took it, and a tear came to her eye. “Now that my William is dead…” She could not continue for a moment. They waited patiently while she regained her composure. “I have no more need of this ring.” She looked at it fondly. “I want you to have it, my dear.” She looked at Susan. “So I will give it to John that he might give it to you in the ceremony tomorrow.”

Susan was so moved that she could not speak. She could see how much the ring meant to Mrs. Dean. It was more precious to her than the most expensive ring that could have been purchased at a London jewelry shop. Susan wanted to refuse it, but she knew that would be insulting. She must accept it gracefully as soon as she could gather the strength
to speak the words. “Mrs. Dean, I will be honoured to accept the ring from your son. Thank you for your great kindness.”

Mrs. Dean smiled as if she were satisfied with Susan’s response.

“Mother, may we get John now?” her daughter asked.

“He may as soon as Miss Kirke’s toes have been dried.”

That done, John was dragged into the room in order to perform the next part of the tradition which was much less tender and sweet. For this the women stepped aside and his brothers and friends entered, and while two of them held him, a third roughly daubed his feet and legs with cinders, soot, and ashes from the hearth. When they had done, they dumped the whole tub of water on his head while all the women stood around laughing, with the exception of Mrs. Dean who left the room, evidently no longer so well-pleased with the pagan tradition.
Chapter 27

After so many days of rain, the clouds finally lifted on the morning of Susan’s wedding day. After the darkness and gloom of the last few days, she cherished the blue sky and bright sunshine that smiled on her from out the window. When she emerged from her apartment dressed in her blue gown, her new sister and sisters-in-law were already there to add their finishing touches to her apparel, lending her a ribbon to tie around her neck, some bracelets, a lace mantelet, and a veil so that she might more resemble a bride. Mrs. Dean gave her a small nosegay of bright flowers with which she pinned the mantelet at Susan’s bosom. Then she went to the cupboard to pour a glass of whiskey, and she handed a small coin to Susan.

“What is this, madam?” Susan asked her.

Esther laughed. “Mother claims to abhor the old Scots’ customs, Miss Kirke, but she upholds them for a’ that. On our walk to the kirk, the first person we encounter, we call ‘the first foot,’ and you maun gie him a wee dram of the whiskey and a coin. Then he maun walk a mile to the kirk with us.”

Then the good ladies of the family set off to the kirk where John was waiting. As they walked, the young nieces scattered petals on the path in front of her. To pass the time, Susan asked if there were any other customs unknown to her that were likely to creep up upon her unawares.

Esther amused herself recounting as many as she could remember. “Well, if we encounter a funeral or a pig on the gate to the kirk, we maun go back to the house and begin again.”

Susan laughed. “And after the wedding, will there be any other surprises for me?”

William’s wife laughed at that. “I do hope so,” she said.

Mrs. Dean shook her head disapprovingly.

Esther continued. “A hen maun be thrown in the door of your house. And a burning peat. And you maun be carried over the step or there’ll be no luck for you.”

“What of the oatcakes, Esther?”

“They’ll be crumbled over your head.”

“And Esther will tak ain hame to put under her pillow and dream of a husband.”

“I’ll nae do that,” she said, but her comment was drowned out by the children crying out, “First foot, first foot,” when they espied a man coming toward them on the other side of the road.

Susan looked up to see to whom she must now give the coin and drink of whiskey, but when she saw who it was, she dropped both items in the dirt at her feet.

“What?” Esther cried, seeing the spilled whiskey soaking in the ground.

“Why ‘tis the cowering, timorous knave.” Mrs. Dean stood in front of Susan to protect her. “And what would you be wanting, Mr. Butler?” She confronted the man.

Sutton had on his usual sour face as he looked past the old woman at Susan.

Susan returned his stare. She had faced down a “pirate” captain, so she could face the likes of a skulking, cowardly butler.
“I want the young lady there—or at least her parents want her. She can go to the devil for all I care—but her parents have charged me with the task of bringing her back to England, will she or not.”

“She will not,” Susan responded.

“There,” said Mrs. Dean. “You have the young lady’s word on’t. She will not.”

“As I have said, her will is not required. Her parents do not consent to her wedding and she must come home. She is subject to the laws of England, being an Englishwoman.”

“Not while she is on the soil of Scotland. Here she doesna need her parents’ consent to marry. I have given my consent. Susan is my daughter now.”

Susan felt warmed by the words. “Thank you, Mother.”

“Now be off with ye, ye knave. And come no more to spoil our happy day.”

“Susan should know that if she does not return with me, her parents will cut her off. She will no longer be their daughter. She will no longer receive a penny from them. She will not have an inheritance. She should consider those things well before she refuses to return to England.”

Mrs. Dean looked at Susan. “You’ve heard the man. Have you aught to say to him?”

“I have but one word to say to him, Mother, and that is ‘goodbye.’”

“Have you heard enow? Be off with ye.”

Sutton gave Susan one last evil glare and then began to slink away. She watched him leave, her heart lifting as he faded.

“Are ye certain, Miss Kirke? ‘Tis a lot to give up. There’s still time to go after the man if you have any doubts. I will explain to my son.”

“Are you mad? I would not leave with that wretched man if he offered me the throne of Great Britain itself. I have given my heart to your son and we are to be married. That is all that I have to say.”

Mrs. Dean’s eyes filled with tears and she enfolded Susan against her ample bosom. “It does my heart good to hear you say it, lass.”

“Do you think we ought to go back to the house and begin again?” Esther asked.

“What do you mean, child?” her mother said.

“Well, the custom says if we meet a pig, we must begin again.”

Everyone laughed.

“Not at all, child. The man is not that kind of a beastie at all.”

“What kind of beastie is he then, Mama?”

“Why, he’s a rat. That’s what he is. He’s far too thin to be a pig.”

Again the whole group of women laughed all the rest of the way to the kirk.

The wedding was beautiful. Susan felt as if she were in a dream through the ceremony. She understood almost nothing of the words that were spoken but gave herself over to the sentiment. At the church door, the bride and groom were escorted to the Dean home by all their friends, family, and neighbours. There were so many people that the party spilled over into the garden. Everyone enjoyed the feast that Mrs. Dean (that is the elder Mrs. Dean, as there were now two) had prepared. Susan was disappointed that there was no music and dancing, but no one else seemed to expect it. John explained to her that they were strict Presbyterians and as such disapproved of dancing. She did her best to understand all the people who came to greet her in the Scots dialect, but in the end, gave
up and understood only the general spirit of good will. She smiled so long and hard that her jaws were sore at the end of the day.

John drank the many cups to his health with well-watered whiskey. He had made a promise to Susan, and to himself, never again to come to their bed in a drunken state, and he wanted to be in a fit shape to perform his marital duties. Through all the joy and excitement of the day, he was nervous about the conclusion of it. At twenty, he was still a virgin and about to embark on a journey into unknown territory.

At last all the others had gone home. John’s mother went to stay with her son William’s family and left them alone with her marital bed, which she had sprinkled with fresh herbs, whose tantalizing aromas would be released under the pressure of the newlyweds bodies.

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In the first moments of the morning, Susan woke to the astonishing feeling that all was right with her world. She turned over, saw John, and realized why. His eyes opened and he smiled at her.

“Good morning,” she said.

“Gude morning, lassie.”

She smiled. If one could die of happiness, she felt that surely she would at this moment.

“Well,” he said. “Should we lie abed for two days or should we be off now as quickly as possible to start our new life? What say you?”

“I should like to lie abed. What do you say?”

“Surely you’re not serious, Susan!” He looked shocked.

She laughed.

“You are having fun at my expense, are you? Is that any way to treat a husband, I ask you?” He looked only a little peeved. “Then we shall ride in a coach side by side all the way back to London. What say you?”

“I can think of only one thing that I would like better,” she replied, “and that would be to lie abed with you alone for all that time.”

He kissed her, long and hard, and they stayed in bed just a little while longer before beginning the long coach ride back home.

The End
About the Author

Edeana Malcolm discovered the story of Susan Kirke and John Dean while researching the genealogy of her maternal grandfather Everett Dean and his family in Nova Scotia. The couple’s scandalous love story and subsequent journey to Nova Scotia inspired her not only to write this romance novel, but also to continue the series about their later life together in Scotland, Ireland and Nova Scotia. The final book in the series A Garden in the Wilderness is available through Borealis Press at http://www.borealispress.com

Edeana has previously published six short stories and is an active member of Victoria Writers’ Society. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia with her husband David Bray. Visit her website at http://www.edeana.com
Other Books by the Author

*The Gardener’s Wife* available at Smashwords
[https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/edeana](https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/edeana)

*Letter’s from a Belfast Gardener* soon to be e-published

*A Garden int the Wilderness* published by Borealis Press at [http://www.borealispress.com](http://www.borealispress.com)
Sample Chapter of *The Gardener’s Wife*

Chapter 1
London, Spring, 1780

Susan gasped with the sudden sharp pain. She held her breath to hide it from her children, but Ellie stared at her, eyes wide with fear, and James scrambled up on the bed beside her.

“The children should not be in the room with you, madam.” The midwife’s voice was sharp and certain.

Susan glared at her. They were too young to be left alone. Where was her husband John? He should have arrived by now. Mary had been sent to fetch him hours before. The midwife already knew this, so Susan said nothing, trying instead to concentrate on managing the slippery ache inside of her.

“Have you no other servants?”

Susan shook her head, incapable of speech while in the pain’s tight grip.

Ellie began to cry.

The midwife lifted James from the bed, placed him on her hip, and then scooped up Ellie with one hand. “I shall find a servant at your neighbour’s to mind them.” She walked out of the room with a child on each of her ample hips. They stared over the midwife’s shoulders at their mother but did not even have time to open their mouths to cry before they were gone.

Susan was momentarily relieved to be alone with her pain. Then that feeling too abandoned her and panic arrived to take its place. Where was John? His work was but a half-hour’s distance by foot and yet Mary had been gone for hours already. For a brief, unwelcome moment, she imagined that her husband was dead, and that she and the children were left a charge on the parish. That is what happened to a mother without means. Her children went to the workhouse, and there they would likely die of too much work and too little food. In the midst of this horrid vision, another pain gripped her, this time building to an intensity that she almost welcomed to divert her mind from her fears.

As she wrestled with this agony, lying almost senseless, and sweating from the effects of labour in the afternoon heat, she heard the midwife’s cool voice again. “It will not be long now, madam.”

“The children?” she whispered.

“The surly maid upstairs is minding them, but you will have to pay her when this is done. Have you enough money, madam?”

As quickly as it had clutched her, the pain let go and Susan was annoyed. She did not want to be reminded of the demands of trade at a time like this. Besides, John always paid their debts. “Yes, yes, of course.”

But if John did not return, there would be no money and no means to pay even the midwife. What would she do?

She would go to her parents and beg them to take her back in. Perhaps they would relent and forgive her, or at least provide for her children. They had a great deal of money, so much that she had never even understood its necessity when she was growing up. In her ignorance, she had willfully married her father’s gardener against her parents’
wishes, and they had disowned her. Now money was the only thing that she could think about some days.

Another pain seized her.

“They are very close together now. Let me look.” The midwife lifted Susan’s chemise and peered between her legs. “I can see the crown.”

As if this were the permission she had been waiting for, Susan surrendered to the ineluctable force of nature and began to push and bear down. Yet it was still another quarter of an hour before, at last, the baby’s head emerged fully, and then the rest of its tiny body slid out like a slippery fish.

The midwife placed the newborn on her chest where it squirmed, thrashing its tiny arms and legs about and squishing its tiny face. An animal sound like a bleating lamb emerged weakly from between its quivering lips.

“’Tis a boy.”

“That it is,” Susan said as she examined all of his parts and counted his fingers and toes.

The midwife finished cleaning up the afterbirth and collected it in a chamber pot to be buried in the garden later.

The baby was beginning to discover his voice and his bleating was growing in volume. “Let me wash and swaddle him now.” The midwife took him from her.

Susan lay back on the bed exhausted. The thought of the chores still to be done rose in front of her seemingly insurmountable. When the midwife left, she would need to feed the baby and retrieve her children from the neighbour’s servant. Where was John? She wanted him to help her. And Mary. Would she ever see them again? Or was she alone? She did not want to think these thoughts. She would have the midwife bring the children to distract her before she left.

“Can you fetch the children for me now?”

“Not yet, madam. First you must be washed and dressed too.”

Susan thought of her own mother, always perfectly groomed and presentable, never in disarray, and a desire to hold her baby overcame her.

“Let me hold him,” she demanded.

The midwife ignored her and continued her swaddling.

The memory of her mother’s coldness to her when she was a child always filled her with such anxiety that she wanted to smother her own children with love.

Finally the midwife finished wrapping the baby and handed him to Susan. Only his squished little face was visible now, but at least he looked contented.

“Would you go and fetch James and Ellie now?” Susan asked.

“You are not dressed yet.”

“I will dress while you are gone,” she said without the least intention. Instead, while the midwife went to the neighbour’s to retrieve the other children, she lay in the bed, memorizing the baby’s face and cooing at him. He stared back in silent fascination.

Some time later, James and Eleanor toddled in, their faces solemn, and James again climbed on the bed with her. “Mama,” he said and grabbed at her breast.

The midwife clucked her disapproval. “I told you that you ought to be dressed first.” James was staring at the bundle on his mother’s lap.

Susan showed him the baby. “This is your little brother.”

“Baby?”
“Yes, he must have a name, mustn’t he?” John was not here to help her decide. They had thought of a dozen or more names, spoken them aloud, tried them out, settled on a few. There was only one name in her mind right now, and it was not one that they had considered. “John,” she said. “Just like Papa. His name is John.”

“John,” his older brother repeated.

Eleanor, still hanging on to Susan’s chemise, tried to mouth the name too. “Don, Don,” she repeated, encouraged by her mother.

“I shall go now,” the midwife announced. “You know where to reach me for the bill.”

“Good-bye,” Susan said, glad to see the last of her. Then she laid the baby beside her and turned to Ellie. “Do you want to come on board?” Ellie nodded, so she pulled her up on the bed. “Let us pretend that we are on a ship,” she said to them, “and we are sailing to somewhere safe.”

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At Vauxhall Gardens, a light breeze blew between the orderly lines of plane trees, stirring the gardener’s hair and touching his cheek like a soft kiss. John Dean uncurled his back slowly and stood up. He felt a sharp spasm in his lower back. He had been bent too long, pulling weeds in the shrubbery. As he stretched out to lessen the pain, his eyes skimmed over the fashionable people in their boxes in the amphitheatre eating their sweetmeats. By their number, he calculated that it was getting late in the day, almost time to go home to his family, he noted happily.

One of the ladies among the bon ton, wearing a gown so absurdly wide that it would not be contained on one chair, was attempting to sit between two gentlemen. She began to giggle and the ship on the top of her high hair rocked as if a storm had risen suddenly. A shipwreck seemed imminent, but the lady grabbed the ocean on her head and sat down, merrily displacing the gentlemen on either side of her.

John scowled and thought of Susan. He imagined that she too might have dressed so ridiculously had he not married her and rescued her from the gentry. He would not have given a second glance to such a silly creature. As he dismissed the vision from his mind and turned to resume his weeding, he caught sight of their servant Mary coming up the Grand Walk, searching for him in the shrubbery. Immediately, he knew that it must be time for Susan to give birth again. He hallooed her and she ran to meet him, her face so strained and anxious that he was suddenly concerned. Perhaps this third birth was not proving as easy as the first two had been.

“Is there aught the matter, Mary? Is Mrs. Dean not well?”

“No, no. She is fine although she is in childbirth.”

“Then what is amiss?”

“Oh, sir...” She was unable to finish her statement, overcome by tears.

John was at a loss what to do. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to her, looking away. He could not bear to see young ladies cry. Fortunately, Susan seldom did so. “Try to compose yourself, Mary, and resume your speech.”

“Thank you, sir.” She wiped her eyes and blew her nose before beginning again. “You cannot imagine what an ordeal I have come through. There was a great mob close by the Palace of Westminster and even more crowds coming across the Westminster Bridge towards the Palace. It was nearly impossible to move against the tide of people. I was terrified at every moment of being knocked over and trampled to death.”

“A mob! What was their business?”
“I do not know, sir, but they wore blue cockades and carried a banner that read ‘No Popery.’”

John had almost forgotten that there was to be a rally today. If it were not for the necessity of making a living and caring for his family, he would have been a part of that “mob” as Mary called it. On Sunday, the preacher had condemned the Catholic Relief Act and urged his parishioners to aid Lord George Gordon, president of the Scottish Protestant Association, in delivering a petition to Parliament. John wanted as much as anyone to see the repeal of an Act that was intended to relax the restrictions against Catholics in the kingdom. As far as he was concerned, it was naught but an excuse to gather more soldiers from among the Catholics in Ireland and the highlanders of Scotland in order to fight the war in America. It pleased him to hear that Gordon’s call to action had found enough support to be considered a “mob,” although he suspected that Mary’s distress had caused her to exaggerate.

“I am sure that I do not want popery any more than the next person,” she continued. “But to have my life come so close to being ended because of the pope! I had no notion that he was even in London!”

John smiled inwardly at his servant’s ignorance. “He is not, Mary. ‘Tis naught but a rally to make sure that the pope’s influence never again predominates in the British Isles.”

She looked somewhat relieved at his comments, and he suggested they attempt a return trip. “It will not be such a difficult journey in going back. We will at least be traveling in the same direction as the petitioners,” he assured her.

So, when Mary was sufficiently recovered, they set out and joined the throng of people still crossing the Westminster Bridge. John soon learned that Mary had not exaggerated in the least in her description of the mob. While perhaps 20,000 people had been hoped for at the rally, he reckoned that there were tens of thousands more than that number, a seething tide of mankind stretching out for miles, farther than the eye could see, sweltering in the heat of the late afternoon. John immediately sensed the danger: there was an undercurrent of restlessness and enough ruffians in the crowd to provoke violence. Indeed, he could see that some violence had already been done. Several carriages were lying like vacant boxes on the ground, their wheels removed and their windows smashed. He tried to escort Mary around the shards of glass scattered on the road, wondering as he did so what had become of the carriage occupants. For once, he was glad to be on foot.

His principal thought was to remove himself and Mary to safety at once, but it was difficult to make their way through the shuffling bodies of shouting men. The crowd was thickest as they neared the Palace of Westminster where Parliament was sitting.

One of the scoundrels called out to him, “Where’s your cockade?”

John wanted to upbraid the man for his rude manner, but in his situation, protecting Mary and trying to get home to his pregnant wife, he did not dare.

“I am for your cause, sir,” he said to placate the man, “but unfortunately a pressing personal matter makes it impossible for me to join you.”

The man looked taken aback at John’s Scottish accent, but let him pass with only a sneer.

These were not Christian men at all, John thought. Their behaviour was decidedly heathen. He was embarrassed and ashamed by the words, ill dress, and unruliness of the
crowd, and he was heartily relieved that his own concerns had prevented him from joining their number. He took Mary’s hand in order to keep her secure and tried to hurry on, wishing that he had a blue cockade himself to make his way more safely through the mob.

By the time they reached home, his third child was already born. John smiled fondly at his wife and child, and Susan burst into tears. He removed the baby delicately from his wife’s arms and held him close.

“What kept you so long?” Susan asked. “I was so afraid that I would never see you again that I named him ‘John’.”

“What? You hae named him without my consent?” In spite of his words, he was pleased.

The baby gave him a good strong kick in the ribs with the heel of his foot, knocking loose his swaddling clothes as he did so, and John smiled at his namesake. My name, he thought, but his mother’s spirit, and the bairn, as if to prove it, began to cry lustily.

“You have not answered my question,” she said.

Before John could reply, Mary began describing in great detail the tumult they had witnessed. John could see that Susan was only half attending, being worn out by her own ordeal, so he interrupted the maid and handed her the baby, asking her to take him from the room to give his wife a respite.

When they were alone, Susan asked him. “Was it really as bad as she described, John?”

“Aye, ’twas as bad and worse. I should not think it safe to go out of the house until the mob is dispersed.”

“Truly? Are there that many people in the streets?”

John shook his head soberly. “I pray God that the civil war in the colonies has not found its way to our doorstep.” She looked at him with such frightened eyes that he was almost sorry he had mentioned it. Long ago, before he had met her, before he had even come to England, he had considered emigrating to America where his older brothers had gone. He was grateful that the path of his life had led him away from that land, where war was being waged, and he often prayed for the lives of his two brothers. Still, he had not entirely abandoned his dream. He had read the Declaration of Independence and it had moved him, rekindling his passionate yearning for a society where a man would be judged by his work alone and not by his social class or religion. When the war was over, if his own situation did not improve, he would consider emigration once again. But he said nothing of this to Susan lest he alarm her.

The rioting, which had begun on Friday, June 2, abated somewhat on Saturday, but on Sunday, which was the King’s birthday, it began again in earnest, confirming John’s opinion that this was no Christian crowd. He did not venture out to work on Monday, fearful of the mob that was roaming the streets, looting and rioting. Mary helped him fashion a banner from a bedroom sheet with the words No Popery painted in blue. This they placed in the window of their home in order to discourage vandals. On Tuesday night, the family watched from that same window the fires that were burning on Holgate and Ludgate Hills to the north of Westminster.

In spite of the violence raging out of doors, a cozy kind of peace reigned in the Dean household. John enjoyed the time he spent with Susan, alleviating her of some of the burden of caring for the three children. Finally, on Wednesday, martial law was declared.
and on Thursday, the King sent out the militia to crush the rebellion. On Friday, a week after the rally, John walked back to work at Vauxhall Gardens. When he passed by the Palace of Westminster, he was relieved by the sight of a regiment of Horse Guards patrolling its perimeter. The cobblestones rang with the clip-clop of the hooves and, in the cool morning air, the horses seemed to breathe fire. The sight of the mounted soldiers was fierce enough to quell the heart of any would-be rioter.

When John arrived at the Gardens, his employer threatened to dismiss him for his long absence. Apparently the riots had not made a wit of difference to the *bon ton*. They had continued to patronize the Gardens while London was besieged. In the end, he persuaded his employer only to dock his wages for the time lost, even though it was an expense the young family could ill afford.

John soon forgot that he had ever been attracted to the cause that had precipitated the riot and was relieved when he learned that Lord George Gordon had been arrested for his part in disrupting the peace of London life.
London, Summer, 1782

John walked through the Ladies flower garden and scrutinized the flowers, searching for those which pleased the palate of scent as well as the palette of colour. The first odor to strike him was the pungent perfume of phlox, but he knew that Susan preferred a subtler bouquet. The sweet smell of stocks called to him, but he did not tarry over them either because the carnations’ bright colours and cinnamon scents demanded his attention. They would last a long time once cut, he thought. Although such a consideration suited his practical temperament, this was a gift for Susan. So, his decision finally came to rest with the sweet peas, whose aroma and pastel colours he knew she favoured.

She would have a nosegay of sweet peas then. He set about to cut a variety of colourful blooms, choosing those with the longest stems. He hoped the delicate flowers would withstand the hour-long walk home in the sweltering heat. Last year the family had moved from their apartment in Westminster and taken less expensive lodgings in the City. Westminster had always been beyond John’s means, but it had had three assets to recommend it: first, it had been within easy walking distance of his workplace in Vauxhall just across the Westminster Bridge; second, it had not been far from the Presbyterian Church in Covent Garden; and third, but most importantly, it had been a more elegant address for Susan, who had been raised to expect a higher position in life.

However, the birth of their third child, and its attendant expenses had finally convinced them that they could no longer afford to affect a position in society which they did not hold, and so they removed to the cheap, but still respectable address of Fetter Lane. John had to walk an hour or longer to his work at the Vauxhall Gardens, and a somewhat shorter distance to his church on Sunday, but he did not complain. He felt acutely the embarrassment of seeing Susan descend even further in the world’s assessment, but it would have been wrong to complain. Of greater value than wealth, God had blessed them with health, which gift John daily improved with his increased perambulation.

***~*~***

Susan was standing at the looking glass tying a ribbon around her neck when she saw his reflection in the glass. He looked tired. The three toddlers at her feet squealed with delight and jumped up. “Papa,” James cried, putting his arms out to greet his father. John did not pick him up as he usually did, so James wrapped his arms around his father’s leg.

Then Ellie let go of her mother’s skirt and clutched his other leg.

“Do you know what day it is today?” Susan asked him.

John pulled some flowers from behind his back, and she smiled at the cascading sweet peas.

“You remembered my birthday.”

As he was unable to walk with a child attached to each leg, she went to him and took the flowers. Johnny, the youngest, toddled beside her, and pushed his sister so that he could take her place at his father’s leg. Ellie screeched, and John bent down to pick her up, planting a kiss on her fat cheek.
“They are beautiful,” Susan said, burying her nose in the blooms. John was going through his evening ritual of kissing the children, and Susan waited her turn patiently. When he had put down the last child, he kissed her lightly on the cheek as well.

“I hope you will do better than that later,” she smiled at him coquettishly. “I promise I will.” He returned her smile. “Let me put the flowers in water.” He took the nosegay from her and left the room with the children toddling after.

Susan returned to her image in the looking glass, frowning at the reflection. It had been five years since she had met him, and her face seemed to show every one of those years. She looked as weary as he did. She tried a smile and different creases formed.

John returned, this time alone. She looked at him, replacing the smile on her face with a pretty pout. “Where is my proper birthday kiss?”

“You seem a little peevish today,” he responded. “Is anything the matter?”

It was not the response she had hoped for, so she tried a different tack. “Do you know how old I am?”

He did not answer immediately and seemed to be counting mentally the years from the time he had met her. “I am twenty-one,” she said, impatient with him. “I am twenty-one,” she repeated, hoping he would realize the significance of the number, but he said nothing. “You do not remember.” She was disappointed.

Five years before they had gone together to her parents and professed their love for each other. Her father had immediately dismissed him from his employment as the head gardener on the Kirke estate. Then, he had asked her to wait for him until she was twenty-one, that being the age of consent in England. She had thought this to be an eternity, especially when her parents had arranged her marriage with a man she disliked. Then she had run away to John, arriving at his doorstep in the middle of the night. He had had no choice but to elope with her to Scotland in order to save her reputation. She had gotten what she wanted, but she could not have imagined the result. Her parents had not only disowned her, but even worse, had placed John on a black list so that he was unable to find employment as a gardener on any estate of consequence in England. He was considered to be a common thief who had stolen a rich man’s property.

“Aye,” he said. “I remember.”

“You do not look happy about the memory.”

“On the contrary, I am glad we didna wait. I cannot imagine a life without James and Eleanor and little Johnny. I cannot imagine coming home from work every day and not meeting you at the door with your sweet smile.”

“You do not lie very well, John.”

“That is because I do not lie, Susan. I do not regret a moment of the last five years. Do you?”

“I love you, John, and I love our children, but you were right when you said that I was silly and impetuous. We had three children in the first three years! I am exhausted, and we are impoverished! How can I not regret it? How can you not regret it! You are lying to me, I know you are.”

He shook his head. “I am not. Our children are a bountiful harvest from our maker and they are all the riches I will ever need. I dinna blame you; indeed, I love you as you are, even your silliness.” He added, smiling.
She was not impervious to this smile, but she pressed on. “Perhaps you do not blame me, but you must surely blame my parents. Even though we named our first two children after them, they have neither forgiven us nor even acknowledged our existence.”

“That is their loss. I pray that they may change their mind one day, but I dinna require their approval for my happiness. Do you?”

Susan said nothing. She wished for it of course. As long as her father blacklisted her husband, he would not be able to make enough money to support his family. How could she not blame her parents for their intransigence? It was their grandchildren who suffered for it.

John tried to show her that he did not blame her by giving her the kiss she had asked for, and Susan finally succumbed to his charms.
London, Autumn, 1783

The streets south of the Thames still held traces of the countryside, though the old mansions were here and there were being torn down and the former fields were rapidly becoming building sites for housing developments. John admired the small two-story clapboard houses that were being erected and wished that he had the means to purchase one for his growing family. As he walked towards London Bridge, he came to the older and more densely populated area of Southwark. There he crossed the Bridge and entered the business section of the City. Here the narrow, cobble-stoned streets were quiet now, the bankers and other businessmen having long since made their way home. At his lodgings, he usually opened the door to a happy chaos, but today was different.

The children were sitting on the floor crying at the frightening sounds emanating from the bedroom. He realized immediately that Susan must be in labour.

Mary greeted him. “You have arrived in time for the birth this time,” she said smiling. “The midwife is in with the mistress, and all seems to be going as it should.”

“God be praised!” He removed his cap and jacket and hung them on the rack. “Would you let Mrs. Dean know that I have arrived and that I shall mind the children.” Mary nodded and went in to the bedroom to impart the comforting news.

“Come, my bairns,” John cried, feeling somewhat like Jesus suffering the children to come unto him. “Dinna fash. Your Mama is in the capable hands of God. Let us pray together that He will care for and protect her.”

He sat down with them, making a little circle, and showed them how to put their hands together and close their eyes to pray. Though he did this every evening, this was the first time that they all obeyed without fidgetting. The cries of their mother must have put the fear of God into them, he thought and wondered what would affect the same change in her. They had been together for six years and, by his standards, she was a heathen yet, but he loved her and would love her till the day he died. So he prayed for her, earnestly, lovingly, remembering how she had given up everything for him, and how she had given everything to him: these three beautiful bairns seated beside him, and another one whose cries he could hear just now coming from the other room.

“Let us thank God for the gift of new life, children.”

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Susan was sitting up in bed, and Mary stood beside it with a bowl of soup.

“You have to eat so the baby will have milk, madam.”

She could sense that Mary had no more patience with her. Susan could not explain her lack of will. A kind of lassitude had invaded her spirit and it felt too much effort to raise her limbs, never mind to get up and move about.

“There will be more food for the rest of you if I do not eat,” she said, aware of, but unable to curb, the petulance in her voice.

“What about the baby? Do you want Sweet William to die?”

Sweet William. That was Susan’s name for him. It was the name of a flower and a line from a song that she had sung a long time ago, or so it seemed to her, when she had once
been in love. “Sweet William died of love for me, and I will die of sorrow.” Such melodrama, she thought, but she could not keep herself from wallowing in it.

“Eat your soup, madam.”

Susan could hear the anger in Mary’s voice now. Perhaps she had gone too far.

“Fetch me my bairn,” she said.

In spite of her anger, Mary smiled then. “Your bonny wee bairn?” She affected a Scottish accent like John’s.

“Aye. Fetch him.” Then Mary left Susan with her soup and her misery. Sweet William would have his supper soon. She started to sing that sad and sugary song because it suited her mood so well and perhaps it would purge her.

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Something had to be done. There was another mouth to feed from a fund that did not provide for the opened mouths already sucking from it. It was impossible to let Mary go: Susan was already unable to cope with the burdens that mothering and housekeeping demanded of her, and the children were still too young to help. Besides, it would not be possible to find someone else willing to do so much for so little. John could think of no other economies he could make that he had not already put into practice.

So he went through a list in his mind of the people he might turn to for assistance in this time of need. He would not ask for money. He wanted only a more remunerative employment. It was no use applying to Susan’s parents: they had returned all of his previous letters unopened. His own family in Scotland had no connections. There was only one person he could think to appeal to, and that person was Herbert Fitzwilliam, a distant cousin of Susan’s on her mother’s side. He was the man that Susan had been engaged to marry at the time of their elopement.

One might be surprised that John should consider this jilted suitor as someone who would aid them now, unless one already knew the gentleman, for it was he who had given John the funds required to undertake the elopement with Susan, a fact that John had never divulged to her. He had also never told her that through all these years he had been setting aside a tiny sum from his wages every month in order to repay Fitzwilliam for his uncommon generosity.

As great as his need had been, John would not visit Fitzwilliam to ask for his assistance until he was able to repay him. After six years of effort, he had at last amassed the sum required, and, before the temptation to spend it on his family became overwhelming, he went directly to the gentleman’s London house and enquired after him. Fortunately, he was in town.

Fitzwilliam greeted John with an enthusiastic and uncomfortable hug.

“Dean! It is so good to see you again at last! Have a seat. Stay a while. Where have you been hiding? I have been so hurt that you have not come to visit me before this. How long has it been? Five years at least, I’d say.”

“Six years, sir.”

Fitzwilliam seemed not to have heard and continued. “And how is your good wife, the former Miss Kirke?”

“Mrs. Dean is well.”
“I am so glad to hear it. Have you any children that I might enquire after their health as well?”

“Aye, sir. We have three sons and a daughter.”

“Three sons! Upon my word! Three sons and a daughter! That is amazing, Dean. But you were always such a prodigious gardener that I ought not to be surprised by your procreative abilities.”

“I thankee, sir,” John said, though he was not sure that the remark was meant as a compliment. He began to wonder if he should ever be asked to state the purpose of his visit.

Fitzwilliam finished chuckling and ordered his footman to fetch them some sherry.

“We must drink a toast to your productivity, my good friend. It has been a long time since I have laughed so heartily, sir. Five… or did you say? six years, at least. I am so pleased that you have come to enliven my day. I was about to leave for Parliament. Can you imagine anything more dull? No, I suppose you cannot. Not in your life with your beautiful wife and all of your babies about you. When I think what a fate you have saved me from, I must thank heaven. I have to ask, how do you tolerate it, Dean?”

“I must protest, sir…” John was about to say when the footman arrived with a decanter of sherry and two beakers on a tray, and Fitzwilliam interrupted him.

“No, no, Dean. I know that you are some kind of dissenter, and probably an abstainer at that, but I must insist you drink a toast with me. It is most probably a lack of alcohol that has made you such a prodigious sire. Perhaps you ought to drink more as an antidote, my good man. Have you considered that?”

Fitzwilliam poured the sherry into the cups and passed one to John. Then he took his glass and raised it. “To the health and well being of the family of John Dean, gardener.”

John could never have refused to drink to such a toast. “I shall drink with you, sir,” he said.

“Good man.”

John raised his glass and swallowed the sherry quickly. It burned his throat, sending pleasant fumes through his nostrils and leaving a sweet and cloying taste on his tongue. He replaced the glass on the tray and began to speak before Fitzwilliam could resume.

“The health and well being of my family is the very subject I have come to discuss with you.”

“Then, what can I do to assist you, Dean? Name it and it shall be done.”

“You are most kind. I dinna ken if you are aware, but since my marriage I am blacklisted by Susan’s father and hae found myself unable to obtain work suitable to my abilities and with sufficient wages to support my family. I am hopeful that you might be in need of a gardener perhaps?” Dean felt himself demeaned by the necessity of his plea.

“I should not wish my father dead, of course, but until that unhappy occasion, I am not in possession of an estate worthy of your talent. I cannot offer you employment on my father’s behalf as he remains on good terms with Mr. Kirke in spite of our failed engagement, for which he blames me.”

“Surely he does not know of your involvement in our elopement?”

“No, but it springs naturally to his mind to consider me as the guilty party as I have already so many failed engagements to my credit”

“Perhaps you might know of someone among your acquaintances who is in need of a gardener.”
“Now, there I may be able to aid you. I have some friends among the peers and gentry at Parliament. I shall make enquiries and mayhap find some gentleman who will act like one and rescue your family from penury. I am only sorry that you did not consider me enough of a friend to come for assistance before this.”

“I confess the reason that I did not visit you earlier was my shame that I could not repay the money you had lent me. Now that I have managed to amass the sum required, I feel that I can come before you as an honest man.” Then John took a small bag heavy with coins from his pocket and handed it to the gentleman.

Fitzwilliam would not take it, waving his hands so that John could not place the bag in them. “No, no, sir. I know from your own admission that you cannot afford such an expense. Besides, I am afraid that you mistook my meaning at the time I gave you the money. I intended it as a wedding gift for you and Mrs. Dean. I will not take it back.”

“There was no mistake, I assure you. If you had given it under any other pretext than as a loan, I would not have accepted it. I maun insist that you receive it. If it is any consolation to your generous spirit, I hae not paid you any interest.”

Fitzwilliam laughed heartily. “You do amuse me, Dean.” He said, taking the bag at last.

John continued to sit, looking as though there was still something on his mind.

“Is there anything else I may do for you?”

“There is, sir,” he finally said. “I would be much obliged to you if you could give me any news of my wife’s family. She seldom speaks of her parents, but I ken they are often in her thoughts.”

“I am afraid that my family has had few dealings with the Kirkes since the engagement was broken off, as you can well imagine. All the information that I have is at second and third hand, so you must not value it as very reliable.”

“I shall keep that in mind, but I would still appreciate any information that you might have.”

“Because of my particular interest in the Kirke family, I have heard much gossip on their account. It is said that Mr. Kirke drinks a good deal, even more than he did before. It is further said that Mr. Kirke’s inebriated state blinds him to the fact that his butler has moved in to his wife’s apartment. But I cannot vouch for the truth of this slander to the lady’s reputation. The world takes pleasure in a cuckold, and it could indeed be pure invention. How can anyone know for sure, especially since the Kirkes do not often come to London? Of course, the Kirke Hall Gardens were on the tour of the bon ton for a few years, but they have recently fallen into disrepair without your expert hand, and without Mr. Kirke’s will to keep them up. I believe the man is heart-broken, and not on account of his inconstant wife either, though I rather suspect it is she and the butler who keep him from visiting his daughter.”

John was so disheartened by this news that he decided not to repeat it to his wife. He knew it would only upset her, but an idea began to form in his mind that he might ask Fitzwilliam to be an intermediary once again, as he had been in the days of his engagement to Susan. “You have been so kind that I hesitate to impose on you further.”

“Ask anyway, Dean. I can scarcely refuse you.”

“Perhaps you would you be able to arrange a meeting between Mr. Kirke and Susan and his grandchildren, without the ken of Mrs. Kirke and the butler, of course.”
Fitzwilliam looked thoughtful a moment. “You do present me with an interesting and challenging assignment. It would be most amusing for me to consider this scheme. Just let me know the time and place of the assignation, and I shall endeavor to bring the old fool there.”

“Aye. I shall need some time to prepare Susan before such an event. I will let you know. In the meantime, you may devise the means of implementing such a scheme.”

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As Susan sat in the rocking chair nursing Sweet William, there was a rapping at the door. Mary was upstairs washing baby clothes. Susan called to her, but the maid did not hear. Disturbed from his meal by her raised voice, William started crying. Then the children came out of their room and little Johnny ran to answer the door before Susan could stop him.

She could see the outline of a man indistinctly through the open door to the anteroom. Though the baby was still screaming, she placed him in his cradle and arranged her gown to cover her breast. Then she commanded the other two children to stay and went to the door.

The man was squatting in order to talk to Johnny face to face.

“May I help you?” she said, and he stood up.

“Good morning, Mrs. Dean.” He said, and Susan almost fainted from the unexpected shock of seeing Fitzwilliam after all these years.

He saw her distress, deftly stepped around the boy and caught her arm. “I see that you recognize me,” he said smiling. “I do not often have such an effect on women, I can assure you. Here, let me escort you to your seat.”

He led her back to the parlour where James and Ellie, having stayed at their mother’s command, now seemed entranced at the sight of this strange man who was not their father holding their mother’s arm. Johnny came running back into the room. At the rocking chair, Fitzwilliam released Susan and said, “Have a seat.”

“Thank you, sir, but I am fine. I must see to the baby.” William was kicking and screaming in the cradle.

“Allow me.” Fitzwilliam went to the cradle, picked up the baby as if it were a delicate figurine in danger of being smashed, and handed it to her. She took him and sat down. Immediately that he was in her arms, the baby started groping for the breast again. She did not wish to resume feeding him in front of Fitzwilliam. Fortunately, at that moment, Mary arrived and stopped at the bottom of the stairs.

“Mr. Fitzwilliam!” She cried, as astonished as Susan had been.

“Mary!” He responded equally enthusiastically. He went to shake her hand. “It is good to see you. I am glad you are gainfully employed again.”

Mary blushed, unaccustomed to so much attention from a gentleman. After a moment, she came to Susan’s aid, roused by the baby’s renewed crying. “Let me take the infant, madam. Ellie, James, Johnny, come with me. It is time for your nap.” She herded the little ones effectively and they trotted reluctantly to the nursery, looking back over their shoulders one last time at the strange man.

“Extraordinary!” he said as the door closed behind them. “And all of these marvelous creatures are issue from your body, madam?” He shook his head. “It is simply extraordinary.”
“I rather think that such a feat is all too ordinary,” she replied.

“Not in my experience, madam.” Fitzwilliam was still shaking his head as he took a chair and pulled it next to hers.

“I would offer you some refreshment, sir, but Mary is our only servant, and she is otherwise engaged at the moment.”

Fitzwilliam shook his head vigorously again. “Not my purpose in coming, madam. I can get refreshments at any coffeehouse in London where I will not be so thoroughly entertained as I am by your company.”

She blushed, unused to hearing such nonsense now that she was no longer part of society. She was suddenly conscious of the thought that John would not approve of her entertaining Fitzwilliam alone. “I am afraid that my husband is not here, sir, if that is your purpose in coming.”

“I know that he is not, madam. I have timed my visit to coincide with his absence so that I may speak with you alone.”

Again she blushed. “You have placed me in a compromising position of which Mr. Dean would not approve.”

“I am sure he would not, but be assured I have not come to dishonour you in any way. Let me explain. Some days ago your husband visited me in order to return a sum of money that I had given him before your marriage.”

“Is that true?” she was astonished.

“I see by your reaction that you were unaware of that transaction.”

“I knew you had given us several items, all of which were most useful in our escape to Scotland; however, I was not aware of any sum of money.”

“An elopement to Scotland was an expense that Mr. Dean could ill afford. At that time, you were ignorant of the cost involved in such an adventure. Perhaps you have since learned the value of money?” He looked at her slyly.

She nodded, blushing again at the thought that she had placed her husband in a position of indebtedness to a man he despised.

“Mrs. Dean.” Fitzwilliam looked directly in her eyes, so that she could see his sincerity. “I want you to know that I always intended that money as a wedding gift for you and your husband. It was Mr. Dean’s mistake to consider it a loan.”

He paused for a moment, but she did not know how to respond to him. He continued. “You know your husband better than I, I am sure, but I know him well enough to realize he is too proud to accept money from me no matter how sincerely I offer it as a gift. So, I have come to you in the hope that you will receive it in the spirit in which it was given, and for the sake of your children, if for no other reason.” Fitzwilliam revealed the bag of coins which her husband had given him.

How could he have kept that money from them? She thought of the days when they had eaten little more than bread. But here it was now returning to them.

Before she could extend her hand to take it, Fitzwilliam continued, “I know you will scruple to take it behind your husband’s back.”

She felt a little ashamed that she had not, but with small children and an overriding concern to keep them alive, she could ill afford such scruples.

“But consider that Mr. Dean did not tell you about this loan. Consider that all this time, he has been keeping from you and your children, a sum of money with which to
repay me, a sum of money which must have been greatly needed at home. Pride is such a terribly expensive commodity, is it not?"

“Do agree,” she said.

“I trust you will not tell Mr. Dean.”

She nodded and Fitzwilliam handed her the bag.

She took it. “I will be as secretive about the money’s return as he was about its disbursement.”

“And about my visit as well?”

“You can rely on my discretion, Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

“I thank you, madam.”

“I owe you a debt of gratitude, sir. Indeed, I am so overwhelmed by your generosity that I am at a loss to comprehend it.”

“I know your opinion of me is coloured by your husband’s. He is an extremely moral man who sees the behaviour of others only in black and white. In his eyes, because of my peculiar sexual appetite, I am purely black. But I believe you can see other colours in people. You see that I am capable of good as well as evil. I am a liar, that is true, but society has forced me to perfect that particular skill. In fact, most people are liars. Even Mr. Dean himself, though in many aspects a paragon of virtue, has lied to you by omission, and you would do no worse to keep this truth from him.”

She wondered what Fitzwilliam meant by his “peculiar sexual appetite.” He had never shown any odd sexual desire for her or anyone else that she could ever remember. When he was gone she would ask Mary about it. In her experience, servants usually knew about such things. Besides, she would need to take Mary into her confidence in order to keep the meeting a secret, and Mary should be the one to spend the money. Susan suddenly realized that the money was probably owed to Mary at any rate, because her wages had too often been cut short in the past.

She saw that Fitzwilliam was preparing to leave and she still had something to ask him. “Sir, have you any news of my parents?”

He stopped his preparations and looked her straight in the eye. “I am sorry, Mrs. Dean. I have none, other than to say they are both in health. As you can imagine, our families no longer keep in touch.”

She could not deny the truth of such an excuse. She did not know if the rest was a prevarication, but it was the sort of thing a person might lie about to spare another from grief.

“They are alive then?”

“Yes, madam. I can assure you of that fact. I should not tell you this because you have enough secrets to keep from Mr. Dean already, but he has charged me to arrange a meeting for you and your children with your father.”

She must have shown her pleasure because he immediately said, “Now, do not hope for too much. It may not be possible but I shall try what I can do.”

She started to cry, unable to adequately convey the joy he had given her. “Oh, thank you, sir.”

He stood up, kissed her hand, and said, “I am at your service, madam.” Then he turned away. “Now, do not rise. I shall show myself out. Good day.”

He departed quickly after that, and Susan sat in her rocker a long time, crying softly. She thought of how much she had hated Fitzwilliam in the past, while all this time,
unbeknownst to her, he had been her greatest benefactor and friend. She had never understood him. What was this sexual peculiarity that he spoke of?

Then suddenly she recalled the last time she had seen him. It was at a masquerade, and he had been attired as a bride wearing her wedding gown. Surrounded by a coterie of men, he had fluttered his eyelashes coquettishly. Silly as the scene was, he had looked extremely happy, happier than she had ever seen him, and a realization came to her. Perhaps Fitzwilliam had wished all his life to be a woman! She had never heard of such a thing, except perhaps among the ancient Greeks, and yet it explained what he had meant when he said that society had taught him well to be a liar. If he had always wanted to be a woman, then he would have always had to lie about himself. A feeling of profound sadness came over her. How unfortunate that nature had trapped such a compassionate and feminine nature in the awkward body of a man, and how sad it was that only now had she recognized what a truly good friend he had been to her.
London, Winter, 1784

John was eating his breakfast and contemplating what his chores would be that day considering the dullness of the sky and the possibility of rain, when Mary announced the arrival of a letter by the post. His curiosity excited by the unusual event, he hurried to the door, where the postman was waiting for his penny.

John was tempted to say, “Indeed I have not any,” like Simple Simon of the nursery rhyme, but his desire to know the contents of the unexpected letter compelled him instead to ask Mary if she had the money.

She nodded and reached deep into the pocket of her pinafore, extracting a copper coin which she gave to the postman. He handed her the letter and made his departure.

John’s surprise at her hidden wealth was overshadowed by his curiosity, so he said only, “Thank you, Mary. I will repay you.”

She nodded again, but did not leave. He considered sending her away so he could read the letter in private but decided her penny had bought her the right to know. So, he unfolded it, noticing as he did so that the fine quality paper bore a coat of arms and the handwriting was immaculately formed. John read the letter aloud.

“My Dear Mister Dean:
We request your presence at our London residence at Bloomsbury on January 28, 1784 at three o’clock.
You will no doubt be surprised to receive such a summons from such an eminence most certainly unknown to you. The explanation lies with the fact that we have lately been apprised by a mutual acquaintance, his honour Mr. Herbert Fitzwilliam, that you are seeking employment as a gardener. As it happens, we are also in need of a gardener. If you would please come to the above-mentioned location at the appointed time, your suitability for this position will be ascertained by us.

Your humble and sincere patron,
George Gordon,
Lord of Haddo,
Third Earl of Aberdeen.”

The signature, though not as neatly penned as the rest of the letter, was nonetheless legible. John read it again. “George Gordon, Lord of Haddo.” Could it be the same Lord George Gordon who had precipitated the riots just a few short years ago, upsetting the city of London and the peace of his own family? He hoped it was not, because he did not think he would like to work for such a man.

Well, John argued with himself, but the riot was not really Gordon’s fault. He may have initiated the rally but it had been for a good cause. Indeed, John himself had been supportive of it, before the tumult began. He could not have known beforehand how large the mob would become and how unruly it would behave. Besides, the King himself had acquitted Gordon of treason. Who was John then to judge him so harshly?

“Mary,” John said. “Do not say a word of this letter to Susan in case nothing comes of it. I do not wish to give her false hopes.” But his own heart sang with hope and he said a silent prayer of gratitude, asking God to have mercy on the immortal soul of Herbert
Fitzwilliam. Then he went with trepidation to his appointment with Lord George Gordon at the appointed time.

John was ushered into a great hall where the Earl met him. He was an attractive man of middle age, wearing a fine embroidered jacket unbuttoned to reveal a vest so tight that the buttons were strained almost to bursting. His graying and thinning hair gave him a distinguished appearance, and he carried himself in a self-assured, almost haughty, manner that befit his rank.

John inclined his head politely. “My lord.”

“Mr. Dean.” The Earl stood aside to reveal two ornate chairs. “Have a seat.”

“Thank you, my lord.”

John sat, but the Earl continued standing, strutting about the room and orating as if he were addressing the House of Lords. “Us wish you to know, at the very outset, that us is not the same Lord George Gordon who started the anti-Catholic riots some years ago. Were you in London at that time of tumult, Mr. Dean?”

“I was, sir.”

“Yes, well, then you remember what a terrible time it was. So, us wants to assure you that, although we share the same name, us is not he.”

John was taken aback at the Earl’s peculiar manner of speaking.

The Earl continued. “No. That Lord Gordon is our cousin, the brother of the Earl of Gordon, whose intercession saved his life. A grave injustice was thus done. Us believes that the king should have hanged the scoundrel for the treason he committed. Then there would have been an end to this confusion of names.”

“I am relieved to hear that your lordship is not that Lord George Gordon.”

“Aye. That Lord Gordon is now in Amsterdam, fomenting more treason, no doubt. Us has our faults to be sure, but religious fanaticism is not one of them.” The Earl laughed heartily.

When he had finished, John said, “‘Tis true that we all have our faults, my lord. In my own case, you may be aware that I am married to the daughter of a gentleman, which is considered to be a kind of thievery in England, though not quite a hanging offence. Instead, my punishment is to be kept on a black list, which as prevented me from obtaining employment equal to my abilities.”

“Pshaw,” the Earl made some such utterance of dismissal. “The English! What do they know of love? They have no heart for such an emotion! A man cannot choose whom he loves, and love breaks the bonds of class. Love does not recognize class.” The Earl approached him. “Us will not hold your love against you. Us is only interested in your gardening ability.” He leaned forward, holding the back of his chair and looked John directly in the eye. “Can you make a pleasure-garden from a wilderness? That is all us wants to know.”

John’s heart was beating loudly in his chest. “You may place a wager upon it that I can.”

“Good man, good man.” He patted John on the back vigorously and then resumed his pacing. “You have no objection to moving to Scotland, presumably, being a Scot yourself?”

John hesitated before answering.

The Earl stopped and faced him again. “Do you have such an objection?”
“I dinna have such an objection, sir. I am only considering my wife’s opinion on the matter since she is English.”

The Earl waved his hand dismissively. “She can have no objection, sir. A wife goes where her husband goes. Surely love will bid her follow you.”

What could he say? “Of course, my lord.”

“Then it is settled. Us has purchased a property in Ellon just north of Aberdeen and not far from our home estate of Haddo. Until this year it has been uninhabited but now us has finished restoring the castle and now the garden must be attended to. A pleasure garden will make a splendid decorative addition to a castle, do you not agree?”

John smiled. It sounded even more splendid than Kirke Hall. “I canna wait to see it, sir.”

“Nor will you have to. Us shall arrange a private coach to transport your family this fortnight. Can you be ready?”

John nodded.

“How many be in your family?”

“Six, sir. Including my wife and our four bairns.”

“Well there be a servant to accompany you as well?”

“I dinna ken if our maid will make the journey. Since she is English, she may not wish to be uprooted to Scotland.”

“Probably not. The English think Scotland a wild, untamed place, and she has not the inducement of love to lure her there. If she will not go, us shall arrange a servant to accompany you.”

“Thankee, my lord.”

“Come, let us settle the bargain with a bumper of Scotch whiskey.”

And so they did.

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Susan was pregnant again with their fifth child. It was early enough so that she was still sick in the morning, indeed, sometimes sick the whole day.

John came home from work early. That was her first intimation that something was amiss. He greeted her at the door with the smell of whiskey on his breath, and his kiss almost turned her stomach. The second intimation. His face was beaming. She was going to say third, but truly this had her baffled.

“What is amiss, John?”

“Amiss, Susan! Why should anything be amiss?”

“You are home too early. Have you lost your employment?”

“I hae given my notice.”

She looked at him then. This was clearly the third intimation. Her heart was beating so irregularly that she feared for the life of her unborn baby.

“Sit down.” John took her by the arm and led her to a chair. “You are looking ill, my dear.” She sat down. “You have no reason to fear,” he said. “I have good news for you.”

He stood there with his hat in his hand not saying anything. How could this be good news then? The maid was in the room now, seeming to know that something was amiss.

“Mary, take his hat please.” Its movement was distracting her.

“Yes, madam.” She took it and hung it on the coat rack.

“Well?” Susan said. “Out with it. If it is good news, let me hear it.”
“I have found employment on a nobleman’s estate.”

Now, this was good news. She smiled, put her hands on each of the arms of the chair and lifted herself up and into John’s arms. He hugged her and kissed her and danced her around the room. As she twirled by, she could see that Mary was smiling.

“Stop! Stop!” she cried, getting dizzy and fearing she would soon need to run to her dressing room to look for a basin. “Tell me the rest. Who is the nobleman? Where is his estate?”

“The nobleman is Lord George Gordon, the third Earl of Aberdeen, and the estate is near Aberdeen in Scotland.”

Her heart felt as if it had stopped beating. For the longest time she stood as if waiting for it to start again.

“Say something, Susan”

“When are we to leave?”

“In a fortnight. The Earl will have a carriage for us.”

She remembered the trip that they had made to Dundee to be wed, days and days of coach travel. It had been grueling then when she had been young, alone and healthy. What would it be like with four small children? “I cannot imagine,” she said, “how I can manage such a journey in my present condition. Is Aberdeen closer than Dundee?” she asked innocently.

“Considerably farther. Several days farther.”

“I am not sure that I will make it, John.”

“Of course you will,” he said lamely.

Mary came to stand beside her, and Susan saw tears streaming down her cheeks. Why was she weeping? “Surely you will come with us, Mary?”

“To Scotland, madam!?” She said it in such a way that Susan knew she would not. She could not blame her and began to cry as well.

“If Mary willna come, the laird has promised to employ a servant to accompany us,” John said.

She and Mary were too busy weeping to respond. Mary might have been her servant, but she was the only friend she had, and the oldest friend she had left from the time before, when Susan was someone besides a wife and a mother.

For several years now, Susan had been grateful for her loyalty while at the same time being sorry for it as well. Mary could have obtained a better position elsewhere with far less work to do and greater remuneration. Or she could have married and had her own babies. She would have made someone a far better wife and mother than Susan did because she knew how to cook and keep household accounts. In the face of such competency, Susan felt useless. So now, though she should have been happy for Mary, she felt selfishly sad because she would miss her so much and because she could not imagine how she would manage without her advice and assistance.

Later, when they were alone in their bedchamber, John and Susan talked of the matter.

“We willna gang,” he said, “if you dinna wish it.”

“But you have already told the Earl that we will, John.”

“’Tis no great matter to tell him that I willna. He will hire another man. That is all.”

“But you cannot continue to work at Vauxhall Gardens, where you do not make enough money to support us! It is not an option that we can afford, John. We have no choice. We must go.”
“But there is another choice, Susan. Now that a peace treaty has been signed with America and the war is over, we can emigrate there, as I have so long wished to do.”

Susan had been expecting John to make this suggestion for several months, ever since September when the treaty had been signed. She had been preparing an argument against such a possibility; she saw it now as an argument to be used in favour of moving to Scotland. “If I am reluctant to move so far as Scotland, how can you think that I would be willing to go to the other side of the world? I am not. However, I will agree to go with you back to your homeland.”

“You are willing to do so even though it means you maun leave your family and friends behind you?”

“What family is that, John? Where have my family been in the last six years? We have sent an announcement at each child’s birth, and never once have my parents come to see any of the children. There will be no forgiveness from them should we wait another six years. Besides, you have family in Scotland, and your family shall be my family, as it should be, as your blessed Bible always says it should be.”

Then he could not help but quote chapter and verse, for that was his nature and the way he had been raised. “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; from the Book of Ruth.”

It was a beautiful piece of scripture, and Susan felt her life was bound by it, then and now, always, whatever her will.

“And what about your friends?” he asked.

Without thinking she answered, “It is pitiful when the only friend one has is a servant.”

He gave her such a look then, and she remembered that he was, in truth, a servant too.

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness; from the Psalms,” he continued quoting to assuage his anger.

“Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,” she added for good measure.

“Who said that?” John asked, surprised by her erudition.

“Satan said it,” she answered, “in Milton’s Paradise Lost.”

“So, you did have a good governess once. I wish that I had met her.”

“The pair of you would have got on famously!” Then they laughed, and the terrible thought of her future travail, the journey back to the wilds of Scotland, seemed to slip from her consciousness, though it was always there, in the back of her mind, another trial to be endured.

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As they were making the arrangements for their trip to Scotland, John sent a letter to Fitzwilliam advising him of their imminent departure. Fitzwilliam replied by return post that he would do his best to accomplish his assigned task. Then John finally broke the news to his wife, unaware that she was already apprised. In anticipation of the meeting, the family remained at home as much as possible during this period, nervously awaiting a knock at the door. On the weekend before the Deans were to leave, the visitors arrived.

Mary started at the sound of the knocker. Then, smoothing the front of her gown, she walked to the door to answer it as a proper butler would have done, closing the anteroom door behind her.
Susan, sitting in the rocker with the baby on her knee, and John, interrupted in his romp with the three older children, could hear only a muffled cry from the anteroom. A few moments later, their suspense was ended and the door opened.

Mary announced the visitors. “Mr. Fitzwilliam and Mr. Kirke,” she said, and then stepped aside.

Fitzwilliam, grinning from ear to ear, entered the room and nodded at both John and Susan. “I have the honour to present your father Mr. Kirke.” Then he stepped aside, revealing a man much reduced in stature since Susan had last seen him. When he saw the family, he tottered a little, and Mary took his arm to support him.

Susan placed the baby on the floor and skipped to embrace her father, holding him tightly in her arms. When she finally let go and stepped back, he was weeping, copiously and unashamedly.

“Have a seat, Father.” She led him to the chair she had just vacated.

“Papa, why is the old man crying?” little Johnny asked.

Ellie began to cry in sympathy, and John picked her up to comfort her.

Susan was trying desperately, but with little success, to hold back her own tears.

Her father began to rock himself in the chair, muttering over and over, “Oh my! Oh my!”

“Are you all right, Father?” Susan asked.

He did not answer, but kept on muttering and rocking as if he had not heard.

“Is he right in the head?” John asked Fitzwilliam.

“Well, he seemed right enough on the way here. He was quite excited when I told him where we were going. I expect it is just the shock of seeing you that has put him in this state.”

Mary said, “Do you think some smelling salts will bring him round to his right mind?”

“Why not?” Fitzwilliam said, and Mary made a move to fetch them.

Kirke spoke up suddenly. “I would prefer gin, Mary, if you don’t mind.”

“Are you sure that is wise, sir?” Fitzwilliam asked.

“I am not a very wise man,” Kirke stated unequivocally.

“At any rate, there is not a drop of gin to be found in the house,” John said, shifting Ellie, who no longer cried but still had the snuffles.

“What do you have, Dean? Whiskey?”

“The house is dry, sir, save for a little ale.”

Kirke made a face. “Not even brandy?”

“No, sir.”

“Ale will do then.”

Mary nodded and went to fetch the ale instead of the smelling salts.

“You have not changed, Father,” Susan said, her eyes now as dry as the house.

“’Tis not true, Susan. I am not the same man any more. I am all filled up with regret now. But enough of that. I do not expect your forgiveness. Just introduce me to my grandchildren. How many are there?” He looked about him. His eyes lighted on the baby sitting at his feet looking up at him. “Who is this, then?”

“This is the youngest, William. But you must meet them in the correct order. John, bring the children to meet their grandfather.”

John pushed the boys gently forward. “This is the eldest, your namesake, James.” He nudged his son’s shoulder. “Go and shake your grandfather’s hand, lad.”
James, looking very solemn, did as he was bid. The old man shook the offered hand and then kissed the palm that the youngster had touched. His whole body began to tremble and he burst into tears again.

The introductions were thankfully interrupted as Mary arrived at that moment with the glass of beer. Susan was almost sorry that they did not have stronger liquor in the house to assist her father through his ordeal.

When Kirke had recovered himself enough, he took the glass in his two hands and shakily brought it to his lips, finishing it off in one gulp. “Thankee,” he said, returning it to Mary. “Now, who is this?” He looked at the cocky young boy who was glaring at him.

“The correct order,” Susan stated simply. She would not have her daughter passed over.

John understood immediately, setting Ellie down in spite of her protests. He gave her a warning look and she stopped struggling. “Next we have Eleanor. Go and see your grandfather, Ellie.”

She shook her head stubbornly.

“I can see she is as eager to approach me as her grandmother, for whom she is named,” Kirke commented.

Susan ignored her father’s remarks and took her daughter’s hand, leading her forward. “This is my papa, Ellie. He is your grandfather. Give him your hand.”

Ellie put out her hand tentatively and Kirke took it. “How do you do, my dear.” He bent his head to kiss her hand, but she snatched it away and ran back to her father’s arms. John caught her up and gave her a hug.

Mr. Kirke straightened himself and stood for a moment watching father and daughter, his eyes shining and his face wet with tears. Then he looked down at the third child. “Now, might I meet the young soldier who is shooting at me with his eyes?”

Susan laughed. “You may. This is young John, named for his father. We call him ‘Johnny.’” She did not need to encourage him as she had Ellie. He stepped forward on his own and shook the old man’s hand vigorously.

“Good afternoon, sir,” Johnny said.

“Good afternoon to you.” Kirke smiled when the young man’s shaking finally ended. “How old are you, boy?”

“I am free,” he lisped.

His grandfather laughed and the youngster glared at him again. “And now the baby,” Susan said, hoping to defuse her young son’s anger. She picked him up from his seat on the floor. “Would you like to hold William?”

“Well.” Kirke looked hesitant. “It has been a very long time since I have held a baby. You were that baby yourself, Susan.” He smiled.

“‘Tis not something you forget how to do.” Susan handed William to him, and he began rocking again, although now he was crooning at the child, who continued to stare. “Father, have you dined yet?”

The old man, rapt in his attention to the baby, did not respond, so Fitzwilliam, who until now had held himself in the background, stepped forward. “No, he has not. We came here directly from Kirke Hall this morning.” Fitzwilliam’s eyes were rimmed with red and he held a moist, crumpled handkerchief limply in one hand.

Susan smiled at his sentimentality. “Will you dine with us also, Fitzwilliam?” she asked.
“I would be delighted to be included in such a party.”
“Amen to that,” Mr. Kirke commented from his rocking chair.

While they waited for Mary to prepare the dinner, Susan asked after her mother and others of her acquaintance in the vicinity of Kirke Hall. Her father was not very informative in his brief responses.

“What I would like to know,” he asked, “is if I might come to visit you again. I should like to come often, if I may.”

Susan and John exchanged glances.

“Then you have not told him, Fitzwilliam?” John asked.

Fitzwilliam shook his head.

“Told me what?”

“I could not,” Fitzwilliam said.

“I ask you again, Dean. Told me what?”

“We asked Fitzwilliam to bring you here not only to meet your grandchildren but also so that we might say good bye to you, sir. We are moving to Scotland next month. I have found employment on an estate there.”

A strange ungodly sound erupted from Kirke, and all the children turned to look at him. Susan took the baby from him before one of them began to wail.

They all waited until he recovered his power of speech. “Could you not have found any employment closer to home, Dean?” Kirke asked his son-in-law accusingly.

“I could not, sir, as you well know, since it was you yourself who put me on a black list because I married your daughter.” John spoke coldly.

The same strange noise emanated from the old man again. There was a wild look in his eye. “What have I done?” he muttered.

Susan wanted to say something to relieve his obvious suffering but could think of nothing.

Fortunately, Mary arrived at that moment to announce that dinner was ready.

The group found their places at the dining room table and sat down. It was not the sumptuous suppers of Susan’s youth when far more food had been placed in front of the Kirkes than three people could ever eat at one sitting. It was instead the kind of simple meal the family had become accustomed to: a hearty soup with some bread and butter.

Usually, the children would have been fed before the others, but since the visitors were hungry, not having dined on their long journey, the company was quite content to eat at the same time. With only one servant and one table, they were obliged to dine in one place as well, which had they not, old Mr. Kirke would have insisted upon at any rate. William was put in his cradle beside the table, although he was already at an age when he would rather have been included with the company at the table. Mary was constantly interrupted in her serving duties to attend to him.

Kirke gradually regained his equanimity, not wanting to waste a moment of the brief time that remained of the only visit he would ever have with his grandchildren. He began to propose a toast to each of them in turn, not forgetting his daughter and husband.

The health of each member of the family was drunk to, and the children happily lifted their tumblers of milk to join in.

“I would like to make another toast, but we have no more ale.”

William, whose health had just been toasted, cried even more lustily to be picked up.
“Go and fetch the ale, Mary, and I will take the baby,” Susan said, picking up William and sitting him on her knee so that Mary could fill her father’s glass.

Kirke raised his beaker.

“Who is left to toast?” Fitzwilliam said, laughing.

“Saving your kind self, sir,” Kirke spoke sincerely. “I wish to raise a glass to Mary Turnbull, a loyal servant, unjustly dismissed from my household, who is doing the duty of several servants at once at this fine feast. Mary Turnbull!” he exclaimed, lifting the tumbler that she had just filled.

The maid blushed prettily, unused to being singled out, especially by her ex-employer.

After putting down his glass, John said, “If I may be so bold as to speak, I would like to ask a favour of you, sir. Mary will not be going to Scotland with us. As you can well imagine, she does not wish to travel so far from her native country to leave her family and friends behind. But as you say, she has always been loyal and hard-working, so if either of you gentlemen could provide her with a position here in England, we would be most grateful to you.”

“I will make it my first priority to find her a place as a lady’s maid, a position that she so richly deserves after the devotion she has shown to your family,” Fitzwilliam said.

“And I will provide a testimonial of her service,” Kirke added.

“Thank you, sirs,” John responded.

Mary wiped a tear from her eye with the corner of her pinafore.

Kirke held his glass for Mary to fill it. He raised it to toast again. “I give you Fitzwilliam, a true gentleman.”

Again the children lifted their glasses, and Susan thought to herself they had never drunk so much milk at one sitting and perhaps the proposal of toasts might be a good tradition to continue at meal times.

Kirke and Fitzwilliam left reluctantly some time later. The next day a parcel arrived from Kirke Hall containing a set of silverware engraved with the letter “K”, a pair of brass candlesticks, and a glass finger bowl. There was a brief note included.

“My dearest children,

Forgive me. I know these gifts are pitifully little, and that they do not make up for all that you have lost at my hands, but I saw your need of such items at table yesterday. I hope they will bring you fond memories of your childhood, Susan. I am certain that they will not be missed in this house. It is my hope that we may correspond by way of Fitzwilliam in the future. God be with you on your journey to Scotland.

Your loving but negligent father,

James Kirke.”