



MARY LANCASTER
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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CRIME & PASSION

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GHOSTLY LOVER

**Crime and Passion
Novella**

Mary Lancaster



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Text by Mary Lancaster

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Dragonblade Publishing, Inc. is an imprint of Kathryn Le Veque Novels, Inc.

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Moreno Valley, CA 92556

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Produced in the United States of America

First Edition September 2023

Kindle Edition

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CHAPTER ONE

TENDRILS OF CLOUD drifted across the moon, bathing a swath of countryside in a pale, almost shimmering silver. The tired carriage halted though smelling their oats, picked up speed again. To the right, through the trees, Griz glimpsed a large, gracious house, and the knot in her stomach tightened with a rush of nerves and anticipation. Now she and Dragan would be together again. She had missed him, and his summons to join Cathlinn House had been balm to her unexpectedly lonely soul.

Of course, she should have gone with him in the first place, but her journey with a fractious baby from London to her father's seat in the Shire borders had exhausted her. Truth be told, she had been a trifle miffed when Dragan had left her only a couple of days after arriving at Kelburn, and she had received a letter from a friend in Renfrewshire. She had refused to go with him.

But then a slightly desperate note from him, including an invitation to visit his hostess, had brought her charging across the country, complete with a teething infant, who at least had the grace to be contentedly asleep. The carriage approached their destination.

The coach charged up a steeper hill, swinging around narrow bends between high walls on either side, which was when Griz noticed the castle for the first time. Perched on the hill to her left, surprisingly close to the road, the picturesque ruin of a square keep rose into the sky. Perhaps disturbed by the carriage, two bats flew across the moon, and beneath it, against the outline of the stone walls, she saw a couple embracing.

It was a romantic, atmospheric place for a tryst, though Griz would not have cared for the presence of the bats. This couple did not seem to notice them. As the carriage breasted the hill, the woman wound around the bend and seemed a willowy wisp of loose blonde hair and pale, flowing garments. She looked weirdly insubstantial in the moonlight. Griz had missed her embraces herself, so she generously wished the lady joy.

Until her male companion turned his head toward the carriage, she saw that he looked very like her husband.

And then the coach swerved around the bend and downhill with a burst of speed. The road rose on up the next hill, but the horses turned into a winding drive toward the big house she had noticed earlier. An couple at the castle ruin didn't quite flee her memory, she could at least of the at her mind for playing tricks on her.

Cathlinn House was a pleasant country home of two stories and rses, as beneath the eaves, small, perhaps, by the standards of a duke's daughter, though the which Griz was—but more than grand enough for a physician's wife stomach she also was. I would

him at As the coach pulled up before the front steps, she pushed her spectacles more firmly on to her nose and prepared to greet her hosts. And her husband

but the Ewan, her own coachman—or at least her father's—had opened the carriage door, let down the steps, and helped her and the baby down Scottish anyone emerged from the house. Then servants spilled out to welcome d when and take her bags inside. when he

d to go She followed a footman inside the house. The entrance hall blazed with light, as did the central staircase, down which glided a smiling woman.

on from “Mrs. Tizsa, welcome,” she said, crossing the hall with one arm laid out extended. “I am Claire Cathlinn. Was your journey awful?” te with

as they “No, surprisingly pleasant. Thank you for inviting me.” She took the hostess's hand with a slight curtsy.

ls, with “I doubt you'll thank me when you hear what we have involved the first husband in, but we are glad to have you with us, at all events. And thank ad, the be young Master Tizsa. Dragan has missed him.”

l by the *I hope he missed me, too*, she thought crossly, the little tableau of the castle ruin entering her head and being dismissed. She was not jealous nature, and she had no reason to be irritated by her hostess, who was important to Lord Cathlinn's son and heir. uld not

notice “Good,” Griz said. “Then he will be glad to deal with the next trouble crisis.” r swain

nts that Mrs. Cathlinn laughed. “That's the spirit. You will be hungry after d such journey, so a supper tray will be sent to your rooms. Oh, I have just spoken with Dragan, so I hope that is acceptable to you? It was his suggestion we can move you in the morning if you prefer more privacy.”

and she “With Dragan is fine,” Griz said. “Thank you. I’m sorry for disturb household so late.”

another “It isn’t late at all,” Mrs. Cathlinn said dryly, “but the family retired right to our own rooms so that we don’t need to see each other more if thenecessary. There is no nursery set up, but Dragan said a cot in your st laughrooms would serve.”

“Of course. I hope he does not disturb you.”

d attics “Oh, the guest rooms are well away from mine, and besides, in this ghter—a little more shouting will go unnoticed.”

, which By this time, they had reached the upper floor and turned right al passage. Griz was rather intrigued by Mrs. Cathlinn, who was, perhaps actaclesyears older than her, and rather beautiful in a dark, sultry kind of way sband. to the point, she seemed unusually open and deprecating about h ned thehousehold, though in a humorous kind of way.

before No wonder Dragan had asked for help.

me her Her hostess led her to the last door in the passage and threw without knocking. At least she did not go inside.

ed with “Your rooms, Mrs. Tisza. Supper will be up directly, and you must you need anything else.” Her gaze flickered over the sleeping baby. “/ nguidlyperhaps, to change him?” she hazarded.

“No, I will manage, thank you.”

ook her “Then I shall bid you good night and look forward to seeing tomorrow. You will meet the rest of the family at breakfast, but at le ed yourwill have Dragan to support you through the ordeal. Sleep well.”

is must “Good night,” Griz called after her retreating form, torn b amusement and vague irritation. For some reason she did not like th i at thewoman using Dragan’s Christian name, though she refused to dwell lous byreason.

married Closing the door firmly, she turned to examine a small, comi sitting room, lit by a solitary lamp and the wood fire that burned b eethinguard in the grate.

“Dragan?” She walked around her bags, which had been left in the er youof the floor, toward the open door of what was, presumably, the bedch put youWas he asleep already that he had not come to meet her?

ion, but She had to light the lamp in the bedchamber, which showed her a still-made bed, and a scattering of Dragan’s things—a coat over the ba

ing the chair, books on the bedside table—but no sign of Dragan himself.

The baby wriggled, and a familiar stench assailed her nostrils. He es early his eyes and smiled as though he had been particularly clever.

re than “I suppose you want more food, now?” she said. “To make up ur own loss.”

He kicked his little legs, so she laid him on rug on the floor while s out the baby paraphernalia that took up most of her baggage and chan s house, napkin.

When the maid brought her a generous cold supper with wine and : ong the tea, she asked the girl, “Is Mr. Tizsa downstairs? Does he know I am h

s a few “There’s nobody downstairs, ma’am,” the girl said with a stron; 7. More accent. “If he’s with Mr. Richard, I’ll send him along to you.”

er own “Thank you.”

Richard Cathlinn was the younger son of Lord Cathlinn, an aqua Dragan had made while in Edinburgh and Glasgow for medical lect

it open was at Richard’s mysterious behest that he had come here to Cathlinn and Griz was eager to know why—quite beside wanting to see her h

t ring if So far, it was hardly the delighted reunion she had envisaged.

A maid, Young Alexander did a lot of kicking and throwing himself or stomach, then stretching up his neck to admire the scene from a d

angle. Fortunately, he seemed in much better humor, though his p ng you tantrums must have exhausted him, for his eyes soon began to close

ast you Griz changed him for bed and laid his sleepy form in the cot provic didn’t seem to notice its strangeness, for he was asleep in no time.

etween She unpacked the bags.

ie other And still Dragan did not come.

on the She went to the bedroom window and looked out over the formal to the trees, between which she could glimpse the road winding uphill

fortable castle ruin at the top. The castle ruin where she had seen someone w ehind a looked like Dragan.

It was not him, of course, but she was damned if she would sit h middle wait for him to notice she had arrived. With sudden decision, she st

amber. the bell pull and rang. By the time the same maid appeared, she had her traveling cloak once more.

empty, “I shall only be half an hour at the most, but please sit with the bal ack of aeither I return or my husband does. If he wakes, just stroke his forehe

he sleeps again. Will I need a key to get back into the house?"
opened "Oh, no, ma'am. The front door is never locked until midnight."
Griz nodded, thanked her, and left.

for the



she dug

ged his DRAGAN TIZSA SMELLED orange blossom, and immediately, the uneasy
swimming through his mind vanished. Without opening his eyes, he sr

a pot of "Grizelda."

ere?" "Dragan. I knew you would remember eventually."

g, local Her familiar, welcome voice was amused, and yet just a little clip

it tended to be when she was annoyed and did not wish to be. It was

dear to him that he reached for her before he had even opened his eye
intanceclosed his arms around cold, too-fresh air.

ures. It *Damn but it's freezing in here.* He opened his eyes to dark sky and

House, drifting like fingers across a pale moon. Abruptly, he sat up,

usband. disoriented, a dull pain throbbing behind his forehead. "What the...?"

Through the darkness, his gaze at last found his wife, crouched
i to his away from him. She wore a traveling cloak, the hood drawn up over h
ifferen the spectacles faintly gleaming.

revious "You came."

e again. "Some time ago. You chose an odd couch."

led. He "I did, didn't I? I don't even remember falling asleep. What time is
"About half-past ten, I think."

He scrubbed his hand over his face and hair. This was not quite as
envisaged his reunion with his wife. For one thing, there was still
gardentwelve inches between them, and she showed no inclination to close
and the another, he should never have brought her here, and the knowledge
who had him from the inside.

He shivered, rubbing his arms. He was not even wearing an overc
ere and moved his legs, trying to get feeling back into them before he stood.
rode to we go back?"

donned She rose, and he forced himself to his feet. He staggered on his

limbs, and her hands immediately shot out to steady him. His arm fel
by until her shoulders, and he embraced his warm, sharp, achingly sweet v
ad until

frown tugged at her brow and vanished. She would save her question for later. He was warm, and for that he was grateful. Although she would have been pleased when he sent her away again.

But still, she smelled of Griz, orange blossom, and other delights. He pressed his head and kissed her mouth because he could not wait for that. A relieved kiss that was never going to be enough. He kissed her again, and in a dreamtime her lips parted in welcome.

“Dragan, you are freezing, you idiot,” she whispered.

“I know. Come.”

Without releasing her—he needed her there in the circle of his arms—he walked with her down the hill from the castle and across the road toward the house. The movement helped, but he was still shivering. And as if he had an ague. He must have slept there in the cold for almost a week. Unforgivable stupidity, besides leaving Griz to arrive alone in a cloud of strangers who were eccentric at best.

But then, so was Griz. And eccentric hosts could not disappoint the duke’s daughter.

He retained enough sense to lead her back inside through the side door, which he had left and use the back staircase that emerged just opposite their rooms. Their rooms.

He opened the door, and Jeanie the maid jumped up immediately from her armchair by the fire. “There you are. Your wife...oh. She found you.” She effaced herself, though Griz, ever practical, called after her. “Some more if you please.”

“You brought Alexander,” he said in wonder and dread, gazing at the good-looking sleeping baby, who smiled as though even in slumber he recognized his father’s voice. Fresh panic surged and he squashed it for later.

“Of course, I brought him. He’s not a piece of luggage I can simply leave with my parents.”

Prickly.

“Shall I?” A blanket landed over his shoulders, and she pushed him back toward the fire. She removed the guard to let out more of the heat and threw her shawl over the sofa while he sank into the warm armchair so recently abandoned across Jeanie.

“Is that what you think?” he asked curiously, “that I abandoned my wife. Alexander like luggage?”

ns until “Didn’t you?” She knelt on the rug before the fire, holding her ha not beto the rosy glow. A small flame reflected in her spectacles.

He bentdon’t know. Not like luggage. I answered a call for help from a frien . quick,least a friendly acquaintance. You didn’t appear to need me.”

and this She shrugged. “We existed without each other for decades. Of c don’t *need* you.”

He let that go for now. She was far too tense and so was he.

She said, “What the devil were you doing up there?”

is arm, He frowned, and since he didn’t know, he made his best guess. “I stle andlook for inspiration. It’s where the girl died.”

shaking She stared. “What girl?”

ost two Just for a moment, he barely knew. The vision of a pale, silvery amongfrom his dreams slid along his mind and vanished. “Richard’s betroth died at the ruins, and no one knows how or why. That is why he sent fo

ose this “And why you went. Why did you send for *me*?”

“Oh, lots of reasons,” he said vaguely, gazing into the fire. He n door byeffort. “The puzzle is beyond me. These people are beyond me. I hop site hiswould understand them better. And then...that’s mostly excuse. I you.”

rom the She met his gaze, and with some shame, he read the hurt and hop ’ Jeanie“Did you?”

ore tea, He smiled ruefully. “I went too quickly, didn’t I? Another two c days and you would have come with me. April Weir would be no less c

lown at She did not touch him, which he regretted, though she admitte zed hisfamily, en masse, is a lot to put up with. Somehow, I never thoug bothered you.”

y leave “It didn’t,” he said in surprise. “But when I got Richard’s letter, I you would appreciate the excuse to enjoy time alone with them.”

“I don’t—” she began, then broke off as a knock on the door heralc ard the Dragan, his bones beginning to feel warmth again at last, rose to t r cloaktray from the maid, who curtseyed and left. Griz put a little table bes oned bychair, and when he had set down the tray, she poured him a cup of tea.

He sat, resuming the blanket, and received the fine porcelain c you andsaucer from her in silence. He sniffed the tea, tasted it, and relaxed little.

nds out “You don’t what?” he prompted, when she had knelt on the floor more.

stly. “I She waved that aside with her teaspoon. “Who was the lady d, or atcastle?”

“Lady? When?”

ourse, I “I saw you with her from the coach when I arrived.”

He frowned. “No, I went alone.” Or did he? Something tugged memory and gave up. He shivered. “It’s a weird place at night, though castle.”

went to “I see. It’s certainly a trifle weird to find you asleep out of doors dark.”

“I did feel very tired,” he recalled vaguely. Trudging up the hill beautyintent he could no longer remember, the castle grim and yet misty. Died. Shereality? “I was...a little lightheaded, so I sat down for a moment against a stone wall. The next thing I knew, I could smell orange blossom and you had come at last.” He paused, shaking his head, and took a moment to make a hot tea. “Very strange dreams, though.”

ed you “Perhaps a courting couple disturbed you.”

missed “Perhaps. The locals seem to think it’s romantic, though I imagine a woman dying there might have put a stop to such trysts.”

e there. “What happened?” she asked.

“Her name was April Weir. She was engaged to marry Richard and for three been staying here for a week or so before her parents were due to join the party. Her father is a merchant of some kind, wealthy, but not aristocratic, “Mythe Cathlinns.”

ght that “Did the Cathlinns approve of the match?”

“So far as I can tell. Old Lord Cathlinn seemed indifferent. Richard thought brother Robert said he liked her. Claire—Mrs. Cathlinn, Robert’s wife—not. However, it was Claire who noticed April was not in her bed and led tea. the alarm. They found her over at the castle, almost where you found her. Only she was curled up in a ball, her arms over her stomach, and quite side his Griz shivered. “Had she been attacked?”

“No, not that anyone could see. Apparently, she had a weak head and birth. The doctors believed the condition better, as sometimes happens in adulthood, but her death is being treated as natural causes.”

“Then why did Richard Cathlinn send for you?”

or once “Because he thinks there is more to it.” Dragan hesitated. “He something supernatural happened to her. That some malevolent spirit at theher.”

Griz held his gaze. “*You* do not think that.”

“There are many kinds of malevolent spirits,” he said flatly. living, from my experience, more than the dead.”

l at his “You believe she was murdered,” Griz said slowly.

gh. The “Because of her heart condition, and because both families wish Lord Cathlenn is not nobody—no autopsy was done immediately. I...u s in theinfluence and insisted. In fact, I was there.”

“And?”

with an He held her gaze. “She was poisoned with arsenic. Which is why y eam orAlexander must leave in the morning.”

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“Because he thinks there is more to it.” Dragan hesitated. “He thinks something supernatural happened to her. That some malevolent spirit took her.”

Griz held his gaze. “*You* do not think that.”

“There are many kinds of malevolent spirits,” he said flatly. “In the living, from my experience, more than the dead.”

“You believe she was murdered,” Griz said slowly.

“Because of her heart condition, and because both families wished it—Lord Cathlinn is not nobody—no autopsy was done immediately. I...used my influence and insisted. In fact, I was there.”

“And?”

He held her gaze. “She was poisoned with arsenic. Which is why you and Alexander must leave in the morning.”

CHAPTER TWO

“**W**HAT?” GRIZ STARED at him. “We have only just arrived. You as my help.”

“I did. I only discovered today that April had been poisoned. I w you at once not to come, on the off chance that you had not alrea Kelburn.” He set down his cup and leaned forward to take her hand. that girl was poisoned *in this house*. You cannot be here.”

“But you can?” she said indignantly.

“Someone has to discover who poisoned her, for I’m pretty s Cathlins control all the authorities hereabouts.”

“But murder, Dragan! They surely want the culprit found?”

“Not if it’s one of them.”

“But surely they cannot cover this up! If arsenic was discovered—”

“It is not unknown for ladies to take small quantities to improv complexions. That is their explanation for the presence of arsenic. H concurs.”

“But you don’t believe it?”

He shook his head. “Something is *wrong* in this house, Griz. I you could help me see what, but I should never have brought you here.

She pulled her hand free. She should not be hurt. Warning t suspicion should not be sounding in her head. This was not how thing between her and Dragan. She said, “You and I have faced many t together. We look after each other, but you do not coddle me. It is one I chose to marry you.”

“And Alexander?” he said tightly.

She stared at him. “Who would poison a baby? Come to that, who be stupid enough to poison two people in the same house? That really cause scandal.” She stood. “I am tired after my journey. I believe I wi bed. Don’t forget to put the fireguard back.”

“You are angry with me,” Dragan said.

She paused, wrestling with some uncomfortable feeling that she had. She had no name. "You are not...you are not *yourself*, Dragan." *And I will leave you here alone.*

He frowned up at her though, interestingly, he did not dispute her statement. Leaving him to finish his tea, she prepared for bed. She had never slept as soon as her head touched the pillow, but she did not. She was so far too wound up, like a spring, her mind jumping from the poisoned dagger to her discovery of Dragan asleep at the castle and her sighting of the man embracing there when she first arrived.

Dragan was not telling her everything. Dragan was *not* himself.

She had left the bedchamber door ajar, so eventually, she heard him push the fireguard back in place and walk across to the bedchamber. The faint sounds of his undressing and washing soothed her as nothing else she had ever experienced had arrived.

He slid naked between the sheets, as he always did, and leaned over her. In the Butterfly light, he smoothed a strand of hair off her face and brushed his fingers against her temple. Then he lay down with his arm across her body as he always did when he slept.

She tried to be relieved that he did not make love to her. But she was not for Dragan was a very physical man. But then, he was also a considerate man and she had claimed to be tired. For the first time ever, she had no idea what either of them needed.

Exhausted, she fell asleep at last. Apparently, so did he. For a moment, she turned over, only half-awake, and sighed with pleasure to find a large, warm husband naked in her arms. Half-asleep, their bodies spoke to them, and by the time she was fully awake, things had progressed to the point she could not draw back or even to want to. Urgent, silent passion swept her up, carrying her from clamoring arousal to delight and to joy.

Afterward, he held her, murmuring words of love both sweet and tender, and she clung to him, smiling as she fell at last into much more content and satisfied sleep.



SHE WOKE, INEVITABLY, to Alexander crying for his breakfast. But

med to Dragan who brought the baby to her. Apparently, morning coffee had
will not left in the sitting room, for he came back to bed with two cups and set
against the pillows beside her to drink it.

ute her He said nothing about her leaving again, which was as well, for she
should no intention of going without a very, very good reason.

he was “Everyone will be at breakfast,” Dragan told her. “Are you ready to
fiancée them all?”

couple “I am. Who is all?”

“Lord Cathlinn, imperious old martinet, and his dotty spinster sister
Cathlinn. Then there is Robert, the heir, who is rather larger than life,
and his wife Claire.”

familiar “I met Claire last night. She is very beautiful. And blunt.”

nce she “Deliberately so, I suspect. And then there is my friend Richard.”

“The bereaved fiancé. Who else?”

ver her. “Apart from the servants, no one else.”

his lips “From your manner, I assumed there were hordes of them.”

7, as he “Trust me, those are enough.”

“And one of them poisoned Richard’s fiancée?”

was not, “Unless it was one of the servants—who all know where the rat po
te man, and who would have access to all the food and drink prepared in the ki
ea what

“Only, why would a servant kill a visitor? What of the victim
maid? Who claims her mistress took arsenic for her complexion?”

it some “She showed me the tin and the tiny quantities involved. Even if
ind her forgot and took a double dose, two days running, it would not hav
oke forenough to kill her. Though I can’t say it was good for her to be taking
o far to The idiocies of vanity.” He bent and swiped Alexander off the floor, r
arrying the baby’s delight, and they marched off to breakfast *en famille*.

When they arrived in the breakfast parlor, only two men occup
wicked, table, and they appeared to be arguing, although they broke off imme
ted and and rose to their feet, smiling.

“Griz, allow me to present Robert, Master of Cathlinn, and Mr. I
Cathlinn. Gentlemen, my wife, Lady Grizelda Tisza, and our
Alexander.”

The elder Mr. Cathlinn, who bore the Scottish traditional courtesy
it was the heir to a barony, Master, was a large, twinkly eyed gentleman in h
thirties, with an impressive mane of auburn hair and luxuriant mustach

had been brother shared the same coloring but was clean shaven, his eye
drawled thoughtful than constantly laughing at the world, which was the imp
Griz got of Robert Cathlinn.

she had “Lady Grizelda, your humble servant,” Robert pronounced, bowing
her hand. “You are most welcome to Cathlinn House. I’m only sorry
to meet not on hand to greet you.”

“Neither was her husband,” Richard said dryly. “She had to fet
home at some ungodly hour. Must do better, Tizsa.”

Mr, Miss Griz laughed. “If half-past ten is ungodly, sir, I shall ensure we
and histucked up by nine tonight.”

“And you are Alexander, are you?” Robert offered the baby his
Alexander took it in both hands for a closer inspection, and then tu
toward his mouth. Robert laughed.

“Yes, it’s a baby, Robert,” came a sardonic female voice from the
“Do let poor Mrs. Tizsa put it down. The servants dug out a high
Dragan, so he shan’t be parted from his mama.”

Claire Cathlinn sailed languidly into the room while Griz,
murmured, “Good morning, Mrs. Cathlinn,” settled Alexander in
poison ish high chair.

itchen.” Dragan held the chair beside it for Griz and went to the sideboard
’s own Mrs. Cathlinn smiled up at him.

“Did you get in trouble for being absent without leave?” she ask
if Aprillow voice that Griz was not, presumably meant to hear, although Rob
ze been his wife an irritated glance.

it at all. It seemed everyone knew Dragan had not been in the house who
much to arrived, yet nobody had told her. Or perhaps they had merely been

returning from the castle. She did not sense any direct hostility from
ied the Cathlinn, although the woman was definitely flirting with Draga.

mediately deliberately using his Christian name while sticking rigidly to Gri
proper title, Mrs. Tizsa, even though most people—including R

Richard addressed her as Lady Grizelda, her courtesy title as the daughter of
ir son, Claire was distinguishing between them too obviously. Which was inte

more than annoying, especially after the sweet and passionate ni
title of interlude.

his mid- “I fell asleep in the cold, which was trouble enough,” Dragan said
ies. His He turned, placing a plate of Griz’s favorite breakfast foods in front

more before returning to the sideboard to fetch his own.

Griz cut off a toast crust and gave it to Alexander, who grinned at it.

Dragan sat opposite them, just as their host appeared with a flourish, his hands overfluttering in front of him. Everyone stood up again—except Alexander. Griz was introduced to Lord Cathlinn and his sister.

“Very pleased to meet you,” Lord Cathlinn growled, bowing slightly before stomping off to the sideboard. “Know your father.”

“Such a distinguished man, the duke,” Miss Cathlinn said dryly. “Though quite high in the instep. I danced with him once. Are you like that, Griz?”

“Aunt!” Richard protested while both his brother and sister giggled. “I snorted with laughter.”

“Oh, I’m not high-in-the-instep at all, ma’am,” Griz said amiably. “She is our guest, is she not?” Claire pointed out, but the old woman, clearly had meant no harm and was now flustered and apologetic.

“Oh, dear, that came out quite wrongly! It often does with me, you know. And we are very glad to welcome Mr. Tizsa. The Hungarians, you know, are the heroes for the gallant way they tried to throw off the oppression.” She leaned closer and all but winked. “And *such* a handsome man!”

“For God’s sake, Marie, come and get breakfast,” Lord Cathlinn said. “Everyone sat down. Griz met Dragan’s gaze, and his eyebrows wavered up and then down again quite speakingly. Like her, it seemed, he didn’t know whether to be amused or irritated with their hosts.”

“So, you have already been across to the castle?” Robert Cathlinn asked. “Not much of it left, sadly, but quite picturesque. It’s not real, Claire either, so beware. Stones fall down all the time.”

“You should fence it off,” Richard said.

“But then where would the local lovers go?” Claire said mildly.

“That’s a myth anyway,” Richard said dismissively. “Courting a duke are afraid to go there because it’s haunted.”

“Oh, by whom?” Griz asked with a manufactured shiver of delight. “How wonderful that you have a ghost.”

“Ghosts, plural,” Robert said, watching her.

“But the one most often seen is Aileen Cathlinn,” Richard added. “She died a hundred years ago of a broken heart.”

Griz let her eyes widen. “Oh dear, do people really die of broken hearts. “Well, they have to die of something,” Claire drawled. “And if the lady has a broken heart at the time, the diagnosis is simple. Though I doubt a resident physician would agree.”

“Grief can induce melancholia,” Dragan said mildly, “which can jerkily many directions. In the case of the ghostly Miss Aileen, I understand death had a definite physical cause.”

“She died of complications from being with child,” Claire commented. “Mockingly, “but we have to say it in low voices because of the sharp betrothed was a Highlander and that horror of horrors, a Jacobite. Rumor—in-law they trusted by the castle ruins, and that is why she went across to the castle to die. She probably died in her bed, but everyone likes to believe he haunts the castle ruins, still waiting for her Highlander to come for her.”

“And what happened to him?” Griz asked.

Claire shrugged. “He died at Culloden.”

“What a sad tale,” Griz commented.

“And not,” Richard said tightly, “why April went to the castle.”

“Then why do you think she went?” Dragan asked.

“I told you,” Richard retorted. “I think she was lured there.”

“If it was by ghosts,” his brother said with unexpected gentleness, “she was lured. I wish you would tell us and get it over with. No one would think the worse of her. She did not go to marry you, after all.”

Richard met his brother’s gaze, and his lips twisted.

He doubts it, Griz thought suddenly. And thinks his brother should be safe, why. She itched to ask questions that would only have been rude at the time and unlikely to be answered truthfully in any case.

So, as if she had not noticed the moment, she reverted to the previous topic. “I might have seen your ghost,” she said with awe. “Just as my couples was arriving last night. We reached the top of the hill, and I was watching bats—which are such odd creatures, are they not?—and I saw a silvery ghostly figure. Robert laughed. “You are way ahead of yourself, my lady. It is tonight before the ghosts and demons walk on All Hallows’ Eve.”

“Around here they are quite small ghosts and demons,” Claire said placatingly. “They knock politely on the door and are easily placated with fruit and cakes.”

parts?" "It is the same at Kelburn," Griz agreed. "I guised, too, when I lived in the country as a child."

But our Claire considered her. "What an odd mixture you are, my lady."

"So my family tells me." Actually, they usually just said *odd*.

lead in "Shall we take Alexander for a walk after breakfast?" Dragan asked.

and her "What a good idea." She was suddenly desperate to get out of the house.

"He walks already?" Claire blurted.

confided Dragan laughed. "No, thank God, but he will crawl soon, we think. He gets into everything we don't want him to. At the moment, we do the best we can for him."

the castle Everyone smiled, and yet Griz had the feeling that Claire was so embarrassed or humiliated by her mistake, though she gave no obvious sign.

Griz set down her coffee cup. "I'll fetch what we need from our kitchen." she said. "If you will excuse me?"

All the gentlemen stood up again, and she hurried off, relieved to get out of the room. The dynamic between family members was so exhausting. Interesting, but exhausting. She needed to talk to Dragan in private, out of their hearing.

She opened the door of the sitting room and halted. A maid she had seen before stood by the sofa, fingering her traveling cloak, though she had just hastily dropped her hands to her sides as Griz erupted into the room.

"Madam," the maid said with a curtsy.

"Yes?"

"I'm Davidson, madam, Mrs. Cathlinn's maid. Since yours is not a lady's maid, she sent me to see if I could help you unpack or dress, or if there is time, anything else you needed."

It was true most people found it odd that a duke's daughter did not have a lady's maid, but it was a mixture of personal choice and financial necessity. Mrs. Cathlinn's woman was tall, angular, and middle-aged, and if her name was Scottish at all, it was only just. She seemed to be of the most superior variety of lady's maid, the kind Griz found most repellent.

"Thank you, but no," Griz said pleasantly. And since she suspected the maid was merely curious on her own account, she added, "I shall thank Mrs. Cathlinn for her thoughtfulness the next time I see her."

"You have a child," the woman said, looking about her as if expecting Alexander to leap out from behind her skirts.

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upper servants rarely endeared one. And yet servants knew more
everything that went on in any house, and Griz badly wanted away fr
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“Not my place to be aware of any such thing, madam.”

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“No one knows,” Davidson intoned.

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“Not my place to be aware of any such thing, madam.”

“Nonsense,” Griz snapped. “I’m sure the lowliest kitchen maid knows all about it. I wanted to ask you, as a more educated and reliable person, what you believe happened to Miss Weir.”

Davidson shivered. It looked involuntary. “Ghosts.”

“Ghosts,” Griz repeated.

“It’s what Mr. Richard believes.”

“Mr. Richard is a grieving man who has lost his bride-to-be. I would have thought you a sensible woman.”

Her chin jutted upward. “I hope I am.”

“Then what did happen?”

“No one knows,” Davidson intoned.

“Did you like Miss Weir?” Griz asked quickly.

The maid blinked. “Like her? Not my place. She was a modern young lady, from trade, and ambitious. Will there be anything else, madam, or shall I get on?”

“Oh, get on, by all means,” Griz said amiably and waited for her to go before she flung on the cloak and collected the baby sling.

CHAPTER THREE

“*DID* THEY TRYST at the castle of an evening?” Griz asked as she and set out on their walk. Dragan carried the baby, although Griz wore the

“I don’t think so,” Dragan replied, turning his footsteps toward the south. “They wouldn’t need to. Everyone retires so early that there would be plenty of opportunities to discreetly visit each other and enjoy the warmth and comfort.”

“But did they?” Griz pursued.

He glanced at her. “I really don’t know, though I would suspect that April was young, and Richard rather had her on a pedestal. Why do you think that is so important?”

“If she was with child, she might not have been at her best. What if she had taken the arsenic herself?”

Dragan frowned. “From shame? She was about to marry, and it would hardly be the first seventh-month baby.”

“But *was* she about to marry him?” Griz speculated. Without her realizing it, they had somehow reached the road instead of the fields and crossed it toward the castle. “Some look between the brothers bothers me. I don’t seem to doubt that April would have married him. Perhaps she had already broken the engagement before she realized she carried his baby.”

“Or the baby was not Richard’s, and he had somehow discovered it,” Dragan said thoughtfully. “Although I cannot imagine him murdering anyone, let alone the woman he loved and by such a vile way as poisoning. And then, if by her own hand or his, why would she come to die?”

Griz paused and gazed up at the broken, jagged walls of the castle. “Richard thinks the ghosts lured her. Particularly the lady deprived of her Jacobite husband-to-be. Aileen? Who had also been with child. Perhaps April, it was simple fellow-feeling. But whatever the reason she came to die, she got the impression all was not happy in her engagement.”

“Perhaps, but in fact, the autopsy showed she was *not* pregnant.”

“But she could have feared that she was, with much the same effect.”

“True.” Dragan sighed and, holding Alexander in one arm, took her hand and drew her up the rest of the hill. “There is a danger of falling masonry we need to pay attention to.”

Griz cast constant, wary glances upward. Apart from anything else, a crash of large, falling stones, or any loud, sudden noise, could prompt Dragan, throwing his mind back into the hell of battle.

He said, “I suspect your impression is correct. From what I hear, she is a flirtatious girl, and Richard did not like it.”

“Did she flirt with someone here?”

“I doubt she would lower herself with the footmen, which leaves Richard’s father and brother.”

“The brother who is the heir and not a little flirtatious himself.”

“The married brother,” Dragan pointed out.

“How long have they been married?” Griz asked.

He shrugged. “Five years or so, I believe.”

“And no children. It bothers her, though she will never admit it.”

“Claire is also flirtatious. But I cannot see her poisoning a young woman who dares flirt with her husband.”

“Perhaps the poison was meant for Claire,” Griz said, sitting down on a rock from where she could see across the fields to the distant city of Gormann in the north, and Cathlinn House closer to the east. A river, perhaps a tributary of the more majestic Clyde, meandered through Cathlinn lands, and a village sprawled along its banks.

“With April as would-be murderer instead of victim?” Dragan murmured, sprawling at her feet and sitting the baby beside his feet. “Only she so easily drank the wrong tea or whatever?”

“Would you taste it in tea?”

“You wouldn’t really taste it in anything,” he said grimly. “Which rats will eat it so happily, and the reason I want you to leave.”

“We have already agreed that another death in this house from poisoning would bring the authorities in droves and accompanying scandal.”

“Griz, there are other poisons in the world.”

A memory flashed through her brain. “You smelled the tea last night. You tasted it very gingerly.”

“Hardly infallible,” he said ruefully. “But the best I can do with arts.” not eaten by the rest of the household.”

er hand “Then we shall eat like birds with delicate stomachs. And buy pie onry, sovillage to consume in private later.”

A breath of laughter escaped him. “Not such a bad idea.” He lse, theAlexander’s hand to prevent him stuffing brown and gold leaves i aralyzemouth, then brushed off the dirt before standing and swinging the bal up into his arms. “Come, then, to the village.”

she was As she stood, something caught the corner of her eye, and she turn frowning. No one was there, but just for an instant, she had imag slender, long-fingered hand trailing possessively over Dragan’s shoul es onlyvanishing into the nearby stones.

She shivered. “This place *is* eerie. Do you feel it?”

His lips twisted. “I try not to. I am a man of science and logic, n tales and the supernatural.”

“Do you never think there are reasons behind those old tales and be

“Yes, enabling the control of their social superiors.”

“Stop being a radical and just be human. Supernatural beliefs oungerlimited by class or education. There is an upper-class fashion for me you know, who let the dead talk through them.”

vn on a “They are charlatans.”

ilasgow “Yes, but again the beliefs that allow them to be accepted are old rhaps aChristianity, as old as time.”

l, and a “It doesn’t make them right,” Dragan insisted as they walked dc other side of the hill toward the river and the village. “People just n mured,stories to try to explain the natural world around them. They still do.”

mehow Griz looked up at him. “So, if I saw a woman in your arms last nig my mind making sense of a ghostly lover?”

He met her gaze, watchful, as unreadable as he had been when s is whyfirst met him. “You were the only woman in my arms last night.”

She shivered and glanced back over her shoulder. What was left arseniccastle glared back at her, as though determined to outlast her des ndal.” ruined state.

“And if you did not believe that,” he said quietly, “you would alre t night.halfway back to Kelburn with Alexander.”

“Or at least be rummaging below stairs for the rat poison.”

“I’m just relieved he seems to have recovered his good nature,” Griz said. “He screamed for most of the journey north from London, and for the children my four days at Kelburn.”

Richard smiled crookedly. “Is that what compelled you to answer where?”

“On the contrary. It almost compelled me to refuse,” Dragan said.

“Dragan has been telling me about Miss Weir,” Griz said. “I’m sorry.”

He bowed his head. “We are all sorry.”

“What do *you* think happened?” Griz asked.

He shrugged. “That she took substances she should not, merely that she was even more beautiful. And her heart was not up to the effects.”

“Dragan thinks she had not taken enough or for long enough to have caused herself that degree of ill.”

Richard cast a less than friendly glance at Dragan. “Dragan is knowledgeable, but he is infallible.”

“No, but he is knowledgeable and dispassionate in such matters.”

“My lady, do you expect me to be dispassionate about the tragic death of my fiancée?”

“No,” Griz replied. “That is why you have Dragan and me to help.”

Richard’s hand, clawing through his hair, tightened.

Griz said gently, “You do *want* to know what happened to her, don’t you?”

“Would you?” he retorted.

“Yes. It might be more comfortable to believe her death was an accident, depriving you of your happy future together, but—”

“But it would never have been that, would it?” Richard interrupted. “You would never have had your happy future in this house?”

“She would have brought you the means to live elsewhere,” Dragan pointed out.

“She liked the idea of being lady of the manor. A traditional old-fashioned thing like Cathlinn.”

“But she would never have been that, would she?”

Richard shrugged. “Robert has no heirs.”

“You think she preferred your brother?” Griz asked brutally.

Richard sneered. “Don’t you?”

Griz said. "Right now, yes," Griz replied. "But then, I thank God I am made free of Dragan."

Richard flushed. "You should," he said gruffly. "He is a good friend. I apologize to you both for my rudeness."

"I apologize for my intrusive questions," Griz returned at once mildly. "Dragan and I help each other to solve puzzles, sometimes tragic or amusing ones. Did you love Miss Weir?"

He nodded once.

"And she loved you?"

He groaned. "I don't know. I truly don't. I thought she did. I was the luckiest of men when she accepted me, and then, almost as soon as she came to Cathlinn House, she seemed to fall under Robert's damned spell. I've done my best to speak to her in her own language, my lady."

"Would anyone in this house wish her dead?" Griz asked, as gently as he could.

His eyes were harrowed as they lifted to hers. "If Tizsa is right, then yes, somebody more than wished it. But dash it, no one would do such a thing. Servants?" Griz asked.

Richard waved one dismissive hand. "Tizsa has already been through this with me. And spoken to the servants. They have all been with us for many generations of them in some cases. Our honor is theirs, so no, I don't imagine any of them guilty of such a thing either. Tizsa, a walk in the garden."

Dragan glanced at Griz, who nodded infinitesimally, and the men went off on their walk. Griz picked up her book and remained beside the stone well, watching the baby to see if anyone else would disturb her.

She did not have long to wait before Claire wandered in. She showed a surprise at finding Griz there, so it must have been deliberate. She looked over and gazed down at the baby in silence for several moments. As Dragan's expression was hard to read, it did not appear to be malevolent.

"Will he wake if we talk?" she murmured.

Richard said, "Lord, no. My brothers' singing doesn't even disturb him, and that would wake the dead. Sorry, that was careless."

"Was it?" Claire asked wryly, and rightly, for Griz had indeed been looking for reaction. Claire sank elegantly onto the chair Dragan had vacated. "Dragan says you can help him find out what happened to the baby. I find that hard to believe, too."

ried to “Why? Neither of us are stupid women.”

nd, and “No, which is why I could see through your little act at breakfast.”

e. “But “That was largely for the men,” Griz admitted.

ies like Claire’s lips quirked. “I’m sure I shouldn’t like you ei...”

Claire shrugged. “No. She was vapid, ambitious, silly, *young*.”

“And not good enough for a Cathlinn?”

“My dear, *I* am not good enough for a Cathlinn. Robert married r
whim and is stuck with me.”

“Did April flirt with Robert?”

“She flirted with every male who came near her, and they w
Pardonflattered.”

“Why do you think she chose Richard from all her admirers, then?”

Claire did her the courtesy of thinking about it. Or seeming to. “I s
you are not seeing Richard at his best. But he is quite charming under
it, thencircumstances. And devoted.”

“To you?” Griz asked, because bluntness appeared to work bett
this woman.

Claire laughed. “My dear, one Cathlinn is too much for me. Richa
years—devoted to April, and to his family.”

Something sparked in Griz’s brain. “Do you think...was April som
rain?” *threat* to the family?”

“I don’t see how, apart from making Richard miserable. To be ho
leepingwould have been better for all of us if Richard had married her and ;
live elsewhere.”

Griz frowned. “But would she have lived elsewhere? Did she n
walkedforward to being...if not *the* lady of Cathlinn, at least *a* lady of Cathlin

Claire hesitated. “Look. I’m sure she imagined she would lov
Robert’s wife instead of Richard’s and Lady Cathlinn one day. But the
is, Robert would never divorce me. His father would not allow it.”

Although a sardonic smile accompanied this startling statement, sh
not quite hide the bitterness. All was not well in her marriage. B
d beendoubted she could force any further confidences on that topic. She do
recentlywas relevant, although there was so much in this house and its envirc
April. I did not appear to be relevant.

“Do you believe in ghosts, Mrs. Cathlinn?” she asked, the words

out before she had properly considered them.

“That again?” Claire said, amused. “No, of course I don’t.”

“Claire’s ancestry is hardly conducive to such sightings,” Robert wandered into the room. He sounded more amused than disparaging. “Your family is English. But then, it’s largely the servants who see ghosts, may judge whether that is due to Celtic ancestry or mere ignorance.” He paused, catching sight of the baby, and his face softened. Was that regret in his eyes because he had no children of his own yet? His eyes turned to Grizelda’s. “You must be a very proud mother.”

Claire stood up and walked out of the room.

“I am,” Griz replied, dragging her frowning gaze from Claire’s face to Robert’s. “But was it kind to point it out to your wife?”

“Claire goes where and when she likes. She is not so sensitive to remarks as you appear to be.” He moved to lean on the arm of the sofa next to her and gave her the full benefit of his twinkling smile.

Griz had no difficulty withstanding it. She was, after all, married to Dragan Tizsa. “I think we both know that is a lie.”

His eyebrows flew up. “You don’t pull your punches, do you, my lord?” “It can be too easy to miss what is right under one’s own eyes. I wish someone would tell me.”

“What, trouble in my lady’s own marriage?” he teased, only just on the right side of mockery. “How can this be? Of course, you are a relative of a nobleman, a mother, daughter of a wealthy duke, and Tizsa is a romantic refugee gone to the east with a heroic background and more masculine beauty than any one man I have ever known. It must be difficult for you, too.”

“Being so plain that I was clearly only married for my father’s vanity?” she said affably. “What did you think of April Weir?”

A flash of something that might have been admiration lit his eyes for a moment, but it was gone in an instant before he shrugged. “She was pretty, empty-headed, and not good enough for my brother.”

“Even though he loved her?”

“I could tolerate empty-headedness,” he said mildly, “if she had not been so stupid.”

“You think she did not?”

“She...flirted too intensely with me.”

Griz caught her breath. “You were testing her? Dragan thought you

her.”

“I might have liked her in my bed ten years ago if she was a lady
rt said, virtue. Since she was of respectable family and my brother’s fiancée,
g. “Her considered it. Shocked?”

so you “Yes, but not by that foolish little speech.” Griz rose and picked
e.” Hesleeping baby before staring up at Robert Cathlenn. “Do any of you
hint of care how that girl died? Or even that she is dead, let alone which of
s lifted responsible? No, don’t answer that. It’s plain enough. Excuse me.”

Before she reached the door, which had remained open through
stood in front of her, as though being polite, though she was forced to
back to her grand exit.

“I am honoring you with the truth,” he said impatiently. “E
to my whatever happened to her, none of my family is responsible.”

fa right *Directly or indirectly?*

For once, the twinkle was not present, and he sounded very certain
ried to She inclined her head. “I am very glad to hear it. The baby is wak
and I will not vouch for the pleasure of that experience.”

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I hope to the staircase that Alexander did indeed wake up. By the time they

the half-landing, he had realized how hungry he was, and Gr

on the vindictively glad to let him exercise his powerful little lungs in

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“I might have liked her in my bed ten years ago if she was a lady of easy virtue. Since she was of respectable family and my brother’s fiancée, I never considered it. Shocked?”

“Yes, but not by that foolish little speech.” Griz rose and picked up the sleeping baby before staring up at Robert Cathlenn. “Do any of you actually *care* how that girl died? Or even that she *is* dead, let alone which of you is responsible? No, don’t answer that. It’s plain enough. Excuse me.”

Before she reached the door, which had remained open throughout, he stood in front of her, as though being polite, though she was forced to halt in her grand exit.

“I am honoring you with the truth,” he said impatiently. “Because whatever happened to her, none of my family is responsible.”

Directly or indirectly?

For once, the twinkle was not present, and he sounded very certain.

She inclined her head. “I am very glad to hear it. The baby is waking, sir, and I will not vouch for the pleasure of that experience.”

He stood aside, and she left the room, walking so quickly across the hall to the staircase that Alexander did indeed wake up. By the time they reached the half-landing, he had realized how hungry he was, and Griz felt vindictively glad to let him exercise his powerful little lungs in a few moments of screaming that must have reached every corner of the house.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALEXANDER WAS FED and changed and jumping up and down on his hands trying to catch his spinning top when the maid Jeanie appeared with a tray.

“I brought you some tea and scones, my lady,” she said cheerfully.

“Thank you,” Griz replied from her position on the floor. She spun the top again. “Will you leave it on the taller table, please? Just in case he comes for it.”

“Of course!” Jeanie all but dumped the tray in her hurry to get to Alexander. “What a happy wee man he is. Shall I pour the tea for you, ma’am?”

“No, that’s fine, thank you.”

“Mr. Tizsa’s just back from his walk with Mr. Richard,” the maid reported, still beaming at Alexander. “I expect he’ll be up in a minute. Still raining. Hope it’s better for the guisers tomorrow evening.”

“Ah, yes, Halloween,” Griz said, extracting the top from Alexander’s mouth. She sucked on the end of it. She spun it for him again, and he bounced with excitement. “When all the ghosts and demons rise up and the children disguise themselves so they can walk among them with safety.”

“So they say,” Jeanie grinned.

“You don’t believe it?”

“Of course not,” Jeanie scoffed. “It’s just fun.”

“Then you’ve never seen ghosts over at the castle?”

“No!” She looked up at the window, though, through which she could probably see the castle, and shivered. “I don’t like it, mind. Weirder than Always was, but I never saw a ghost there or anywhere else. Some children claim they have, but I reckon they just say so for attention.”

She glanced at Alexander again and smiled. “Lovely wee boy,” she said to Griz, “but I’d better get back to work.”

“Thanks for the tea.”

When the maid had closed the door, Griz stood and walked to the

with one eye on Alexander. Without looking at it, she picked up the pot and paused for several seconds before she laid it back down again.

Blinking, she went and retrieved Alexander who seemed to have been bumped most of the way to the door. She had just picked him up when the door opened and a rather wet Dragan strode in, shaking his head. A puddle flew off him, Alexander chortled and grabbed at his face.

bottom Dragan blinked, clearly surprised to find them quite so close.

tray. "Miss me?" he asked in amusement.

"Madly. Dragan, what did you eat or drink last night?" She picked up Alexander back on the floor and spun the top before going to her husband to help him wrestle himself out of his wet coat.

lunges "I'm not poisoned," he said mildly.

admire "No, but you should never have fallen asleep in the cold, should you or you, unless you were dead drunk. Or drugged."

He watched her as she hung his coat up and went to find him dry clothes.

"Drugged," he repeated, and she knew the notion was not new to him.

e maid "You said yourself there is more than arsenic that could be put in a minute to anything else."

," He sighed. "To be honest, I don't really remember going over the castle. And I had such strange dreams."

er, who "Dragan." She almost threw his clothes at him. "Why did you come here with me?"

children "Because I was worried I had over-indulged. Because I didn't want to concern you. Because I was scared for you."

"Have we not always been beyond that kind of secrecy?" she demanded.

He nodded, frowning, as though he didn't understand it. Then he ran his hand over his forehead, just over his eyes. "I don't like this place, Griz. Even Ricard is different here, though I suppose he has the excuse of a murdered fiancée. I can't see anyone poisoned April Weir, and I can see no reason for it. No reason for anything to gain by it."

of the "Perhaps they did, and they drugged you to make you give up trying to find out what."

she told Dragan changed his clothes in silence, then went to the teapot and poured two half cups. He sniffed each of them. "I don't know why I'm bothered. I don't know how they managed to drug me with something already. A mouthful only. The same for anything that is served only to you or me."

—and She nodded and went to the cupboard beneath the window and laid out the apple tart they had bought in the village. Cutting two slices, she took them on a plate and returned the pie to its hiding place. Sitting together on the sofa, they ate in silence.

“Then he said, ‘I’ve wasted time not acknowledging this before. I have been working out who could have contaminated...’”

“Contaminated what?” she asked as he broke off. “When did you start feeling sleepy last night?”

“After dinner. I went with Richard to his rooms, and we talked about the arsenic in April’s stomach. My mind was clear enough then, though I was annoyed with Richard for refusing to believe the evidence. We had a couple of glasses of brandy.”

“Served from the same bottle? Was Richard affected?”

“I don’t know,” Dragan said slowly. “His lordship keeps the brandy strictly rationed. A glass after dinner and then another delivered to the gentlemen’s rooms. The talkative maid, Jeanie, brought it to Richard’s room. Or then, when Richard rang, she brought another. The first glasses will have been around in the hallways as she distributed them to all the gentlemen, so anyone passing could have drugged them.”

“But then, how could the perpetrator be sure you would get the drugged glass? And if he or she indiscriminately drugged them all, several of them, especially Richard, would have been affected, too?”

“Maybe they were, although no one has told me so.”

Griz looked at him and said what they were both thinking. “Richard is an obvious suspect. Only he would have known which glass was yours. He was closest to April.”

“And eager to go with the theory that the arsenic in her stomach was from her cosmetic and that her weak heart killed her.”

Griz nodded. “He could have enticed her to the castle so that there would be no one to help her when she was taken ill. Or even administered the drugging to her?”

“Possible. The trouble is, I can’t actually imagine him behaving in that way. Railing and shouting, yes, but poisoning? Hard to believe. One thing, if many other things that bothers me is Claire discovered April missing from her bed. What was Claire doing there after midnight?”

“Did you ask her?”

brought “Yes. She said she knew April never retired early and went to she put her.”

r on the “What about?”

“She told me she had no particular reason, implying she was only I should for company.”

Griz said, “She didn’t care for April. If she sought her out, you start probably to tell her off for flirting with her husband.”

“Or to poison her,” Dragan said grimly.

out the “Is she so jealous of her husband’s attention that she would do I washing?”

couple “I have no idea. She would have to be pretty unhinged. But t would anyone else. She gives no sign of being that unhappy.”

“She *is* unhappy, though.”

brandy Dragan’s lips quirked, and he nudged her with his shoulder. “This to the I needed you. These people baffle me.”

’s. And Griz leaned against his shoulder, watching Alexander push the s ave lain top about and bounce after it. “And they have gone from wanting nen, so solve the puzzle to drugging you so that you can’t. That doesn’t mak either.”

correct “It does if the person who invited me is not the poisoner.”

people, “True.”

Dragan took the empty plate and rose restlessly to his feet. “We even know when she went to the castle that night. No one admits to d is the her go, or to seeing her at all after dinner.”

And he “Not even Richard?” she asked.

He put the plate with the others on the tray and began to pace. “I as only had tea together in the drawing room after dinner, then Richard accom April upstairs and said goodnight at her door.”

was no “Do we know that he left her there?”

poison “We know he came back to the drawing room to finish his own every member of his family and several servants saw him do so.”

such a “Or said they did,” Griz said thoughtfully. “They might lie to cc e of the him.”

ig from “They might. But it makes little difference because they all retir shortly after to their own rooms. Anyone could have visited April af and not been seen.”

talk to “Including Claire,” Griz mused, “earlier than she claimed. Do she husband share rooms?”

“Connecting rooms. I understand the relationship is volatile. They lookingspend the evening together but claim to have heard each other around.”

it was Griz scowled. “Nothing is certain, nothing is provable. Everyone c lying.”

“And that is before you even start on the servants.”

such a “What a pity we cannot speak to April’s own maid.”

hen, sore “I spoke to her,” Dragan said. “April dismissed her almost as soon retired. She got the maid to unlace her and then sent her away. She ring for anything during the evening. And she was found in her night beneath a cloak.”

is why Griz rose and scooped up the baby who was getting too close to th

He chortled and threw his little arms around her neck, making her spin pinningache at the same time. She had been so lucky in her life. But then, she you to looked for marriage. It had found her in the shape of Dragan. April e sense waited at all. She seemed to have had no other interest except marryir a type of young lady with which Griz was only too familiar.

Carrying the baby, she walked over to the window to join I

“Would April have gone to an assignation in her night clothes? Sure do not was always well dressed in public.”

seeing Dragan turned his gaze from the ruined castle to Griz. “She could been drugged as I was and taken to the castle. And poisoned then waved one impatient hand. “But it is all speculation. There is no evidence

they all “What of the household rat poison?” she said suddenly. “Is it w rpanied should be?”

“Yes, it was the first thing I looked at. It’s kept outside in a garde which is locked. Though there are several keys. And no one could s tea, formuch, if any, was missing.”

Griz shivered. “I feel...unsafe here. I feel everyone is unsafe.”

over for “You and Alexander should return to Kelburn first thing tomorrow

“I won’t leave you here.”

ed very A loud knock on the door startled them both.

ter that “Enter,” Dragan called, and Robert Cathlinn stuck his head aro door.

and her “Forgive the intrusion,” he said cheerfully. “Tizsa, come and play billiards before dinner. You’re on my team.”

did not She could see Dragan’s refusal on his face because he feared for moving alone. As she feared for him. But if they were to do any good, they could skulk here alone.

ould be “Go on, Dragan,” she urged. “I have some things to do before I get ready for dinner.”

He met her gaze, then his frown smoothed, and he kissed her cheek before he departed.

1 as she While she played with the baby, she made intermittent lists of suspects, motives and alibis, for both the murder of April Weir and the drug deal with Dragan.

ie door.



ible and

had not ON THEIR WAY down to dinner that evening, Griz paused to examine the family portraits hung in the upstairs hall and the staircase. One by one, they were as old as the seventeenth century, though it was the eighteenth-century ones that truly interested her.

Dragan. She stopped before a lady in a powdered wig, with rouged cheeks and a patch at the corner of her mouth. “Do you suppose this is the Jacobite lady?”

ld have “Lord, no,” said another voice before Dragan would speak. “She’s not here.” He here out of the way.”

nce.” Lord Cathlinn’s sister, blinking amiably, beckoned them to the doorway where she had just emerged from. Daylight was fading, and no lamps had yet been lit.

n shed, “There she is,” Miss Cathlinn said, pointing to a portrait of a very young lady. Her hair was unpowdered, her skin natural, and her smile with blue eyes danced very like Robert’s. “Aileen Cathlinn. Tragic, really, she should have married Kenneth MacDonald of Dunmore, but when the time rose, her family wouldn’t hear of her going north. They kept her here, presumably until they saw which way the wind would blow.”

und there was something familiar about her. More than Robert’s eyes. So

id play in the angle of her head, the slope of her shoulders.

A shiver ran down Griz's spine, perhaps because Miss Cathlinn's
her left close behind her. Dragan shifted as though by accident, and the o
uld not moved away.

Griz considered the way she—and presumably everyone else in the
change—thought of Miss Cathlinn. A half-dotty old spinster, vague, ha
invisible. But...

ek, and “You see everything that goes on in this house, don't you
Cathlinn,” Griz said amiably as they walked back toward the staircase.

uspects The old lady smiled sweetly. “I like to understand the past.”

ging of “And the present, I suspect.”

Civilly, Dragan offered Miss Cathlinn his arm, and she took it gra
to descend the stairs.

“Well, I am not blind,” she said.

ome of “What do you really think happened to April Weir?” Dragan asked

Miss Cathlinn smiled. “Whatever his lordship says happened to her

or two That seemed to flummox Dragan, but Griz, the duke's daughter
century made of sterner stuff.

“Come, madam,” she said, “that will not do! You are a wise lady a
s and aware your opinion counts more than most. Whether or not you choos
e ghost it.”

“And I don't. Except to say none of this family would have hurt the
around troublesome girl. And I will never believe otherwise, whatever d
imagine you are digging up, young man.”

passage She gave Dragan's sleeve a little shake as she spoke.

et been “The truth is not dirt, ma'am,” Dragan said seriously. “It is necessa

She nodded, but her mind seemed to have moved on for sh
r young “Tonight is not Halloween, is it? Tomorrow, of course. I am quite
de. Her forward to the chaos!”

ly. She It struck Griz then, that there seemed no sane reason to have kille
ie clans Weir. And so, perhaps they were looking for someone who was no
r here, sane either. Did dotty and sincere-sounding old ladies count as no
sane?

..” And

nothing



DINNER WAS A civilized meal, with intelligent conversation, a food so controlled by Lord Cathlinn and Claire, so that it never strayed from the lady's impersonal. The food was adequate, if plain for an aristocratic entertaining guests, and the wine was of good quality if not quantity. The house was hardly the generous hospitality one expected in Scotland.

Thought of course, Dragan was poking his nose into their business they didn't like it. It was far more convenient to believe that April had a weak heart rather than by poison administered by one of their household.

Griz, who felt she could cut the tension with a knife, was relieved. Claire declared it time for the ladies to withdraw. She more than expected her hostess to buttonhole her and ask for the date of her departure. However, Claire surprised her again. "Is little Alexander still awake?" asked as they walked to the drawing room. "Bring him down if you like."

"Are you sure? I'm afraid I stole the services of one of your maids with him." "Davidson, I hope. She seemed very keen to be considered for her duties."

"No, I asked Jeanie. Although I thank you for offering your own well this morning."

She looked as if she had forgotten about that but said only, "Well, don't disturb the little one, but if he's up to it, I'm sure we'd all enjoy the fun at poor Alexander, bless him, would also be an excuse to retire early. No yearly retirement seemed to be a problem in this house. Griz hurried up and found both Jeanie and Davidson sitting on the sofa, gushing over the baby who sat between them, gnawing on his teething toy and grinning broadly."

Davidson, her smile fixed, stood at once and said, "The girl looking qualified to look after an infant. Please call upon me in the future."

"Thank you, I will, if it does not interfere with your duties to Lord April Cathlinn. And Jeanie has been most helpful. Thank you, Jeanie."

Alexander stretched up his arms to Griz, and she swept him up along with a tea shawl and his spinning top. "I'm taking him down to the drawing room. You may both return to your duties with my thanks."

It struck her as she carried Alexander downstairs, that two maids were in fact, safer than one, for while she could not imagine either of them harming the baby, it was perfectly possible one of them had killed April W.

Although drugged Dragan.

From the Maybe Dragan was right. Maybe she should take Alexander away from the family here in the morning.

In all, it For the next half hour, Alexander happily entertained the household laughing at the spinning top, chewing it occasionally, bouncing on his knees, and investigating everything that caught his fancy, from Miss Cathlinn's old-fashioned shoe buckles to Claire's embroidered gown. The gentlemen left them after only ten minutes or so, and to her surprise, none of them could stand when the baby's presence either. Robert seemed quite taken with him, and his lordship smiled benignly.

Robert said, "Pleasant to have a baby about the place again," he said bluffly. "And no, Claire, that is not a snipe at you."

"I didn't suppose it was," she replied mildly. "Shall I hold him for Mrs. Tizsa? And let you drink your tea?"

The tea all came out of the same pot, the same sugar bowl, and cream. Griz felt safe enough, although she had watched the servants who laid it, and how everyone had collected their own cup and saucer from Claire's maid. Other beverage was offered or requested.

Lord Cathlinn was the first to retire, with a curt nod and a "Good night, don't fall. Sleep well."

Through the chorus of polite replies, Griz recalled his sister's words. Not that she thought whatever his lordship told her to. Even over his sons, his upstairs appeared to be law. How much power did he imagine this gave him? If he had not obeyed him, or shown a desire to upset one son for the sake of another, how far would he be prepared to go?

Poisoning, however, did not seem much in his style. Although she was no better than anyone else in the house.

When Alexander began to rub his eyes and get slightly fractious, Mrs. Tizsa took him from Claire. "Shall we take him up to bed?"

"Yes, it seems to be time."

Robert was already heading for the door.

As Griz followed him, Dragan and Alexander, Richard said, "Nice night, Tizsa?"

"Not tonight," Dragan said easily, "All the coming and going disturbing a little tyrant sometimes. Good night."

and

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Dragan

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CHAPTER FIVE

“HE MIGHT TELL you things we need to know,” Griz observed, while Alexander his final feed of the day in their bedchamber.

“He might,” Dragan agreed from the window seat, where he regarded the baby. “But I doubt he has anything to add. I certainly don’t want to be drinking drugged brandy again, whether at his hand or someone else’s.”

“Why are you smiling about it?”

“I’m not. I’m smiling at you and our son. I like to watch you feed him. Actually, I just like to watch you.”

Her body flushed in response. She really, really wanted away from Cathlinn House. This was not a fun puzzle to solve, not an adventure that she could race through hand-in-hand with Dragan.

“We need to finish this,” she said low. Laying the half-asleep Alexander on the bed, she changed him, cuddled him, and laid him in his cradle. Thankfully, he seemed to be in no teething pain, although no tooth had yet appeared.

“Finish it how?” Dragan asked, leading her through to the sitting room. “We have no evidence, no clue as to who is responsible. I want you out of here, too, but it goes against the grain to let a killer—”

A knock on the door heralded Jeanie with a glass of brandy. “Nice evening, sir,” she said cheerfully. “Can I fetch you anything, my lady?”

“No, thank you.”

Dragan took the glass from her tray with a word of thanks. When Jeanie was gone, he poured it into a vase of wilting flowers, took a flask from his pocket, and held it out to Griz.

With a breath of laughter, she took it and drank. “It’s water!”

“Straight from the pump in the kitchen. The spare flask is full, and I don’t want to point in dehydrating ourselves for fear of poison.” He sat beside her on the window seat and accepted the flask back from her. He took a sizeable sip and screwed the top back on, while Griz mulled over a new idea.

“We have no evidence *yet*,” she corrected, harking back to his words.

His gaze flew to hers. “You have a plan?”

“A possible one. If we pretend to have found something, to know and by whose hand April died, we would draw the attention of the killer

“My least favorite attention.”

giving “We will appear over-confident and smug, perhaps promise to reveal after the guisers have been tomorrow evening. The killer will want to

ded her^{us.}”

want to “And poor Alexander will be left alone in this damned house.”

e’s.”

ng him. “No, he won’t,” Griz said eagerly, “because we will look out for other. We know how this killer works. And we will need to wait passage and the castle.” As she spoke, she glanced through the dark window to the ruined keep.

y from The rain seemed to have gone off, but the sky was still cloudy that she night dark. Just for an instant, the black keep seemed whole and square crenellations all the way round, and the shadows surrounding it looked buildings sprawling down the hill to the wall. Then she blinked, and buildings became no more than the scattering of bushes and trees she used to. The jagged outline of the ruined keep was clear, even darkness.

g room. But there was no time for relief, for a silvery-white figure drifted u away of the old castle, almost like Claire’s graceful glide.

Griz shoved her spectacles up her nose and peered. “Dragan!”

ghtcap, “What?” He pressed his nose to the window, gazing where she d figure, clearly a woman, wound herself around a tall stone and clung still, much as Griz had seen her cling to Dragan last night.

she had “Who *is* that?” Griz demanded. “She moves like Claire and yet. pocket, figure turned, as though looking toward the house. Griz could almost i she gazed straight at her window. And the face, while familiar, v Claire’s.

too. No “Where?” Dragan demanded.

on the “Right in front of the ruin. By that tall stone on the left.”

e drink Dragan’s gaze moved to her. “Griz, there’s no one there.”

Her heart twisted in sudden fear. Dark, bat-shaped shadows rose the cloudy sky as she swung around to him. “No one? But I am not

earlier things, I am not drugged... am I?"

As Dragan put his arm around her, she stared from his concern back to the castle. And saw that he was right. No one was there.

ow how
er."



veal allTHE FOLLOWING MORNING, Dragan picked up the fed and changed ba
silence took Grizelda's hand. It struck him that they almost marched ac
bedroom and the sitting room, as if they were going into battle. Whi
way, they were. And some part of him recognized the element of ming
or each and determination which always came with their joint adventures. He
tch that this moment, he could not shake off a vague sense of anxiety th
arke ned almost...ominous.

And yet Griz's plan was good—or would be with a few subtle cha
and the had no intention of revealing to her until she was forced to agree wit
re, with Last night, she had clung to him, seeking to lose herself in love v
ed like intensity that was beyond her usual delicious passion. Whatever tri
and the mind had played on her over the ghostly figure she had imagined
he was castle, they had unbalanced her, made her feel unsafe.

in the Griz was vulnerable. Few people saw that, but Dragan did. It was
the reasons she sought adventures with him, to overcome, to prove to
in front And Dragan would do everything in his power to protect her.

He had to release her hand to open the door, so he paused for a mo
touch her cheek and kiss her. "It is a good plan."

id. The She nodded, squared her shoulders, and marched through the open
g, very Everyone was already in the breakfast parlor when they arrived. S
said their good mornings, and just like yesterday, Dragan sat Alexande
.." The high chair, held the seat next to it for his wife, and went to fetch the
magine breakfast and coffee.

was not "Thunder in the air, according to Tam Shepherd," Lord Cathlinn sa
Dragan's sense of unease grew. He did not function v
thunderstorms, not since the war.

"Well, that should spoil the guisers' fun," Claire remarked.

"Or increase it," Robert argued. "They can scare each other witles
against angry thunder and lightning crashes overhead."

: seeing

“Expect it will be over by then,” Richard said, “if Tam’s pre-
ed facethunder already.”

“We shall have an early meal tonight,” Claire said as Dragan fin-
down. “So that we can enjoy the guisers. They are usually quite enterta-

A manservant and a maid were hovering by the door, perfect con-
spread the word below stairs, so Dragan began to implement the plan.
by and and I must thank you all for your kind hospitality at what I know is
oss the difficult time. We mean to depart tomorrow morning.”

ch, in a “So soon?” Richard said from across the table. He sounded both su-
bled fun and chagrined. “Then you have finally accepted the truth of April’s
owever, death?”

at was “I believe I *know* the truth of April’s tragic death,” Dragan co-

“And I would like to explain it to you and the rest of the household t-
nges he leave to speak to the authorities. Perhaps this evening? About nine o-
h them, the clock?”

with an “What is wrong with now?” Lord Cathlinn growled.

cks her Dragan did not look at Griz. “I do not wish to spoil my wife’s d-
in the the ugly truth.”

He was aware that on the other side of the highchair, Grizelda
one of turned toward him.

herself. “Even your wife does not know?” Claire asked amused. “I thou-
wanted her here to help you?”

ment to “And she has helped me. Her insight has been invaluable in reach-
truth.”

door. “Dragan,” Griz said warningly. She knew exactly what he was abo-

to, they He smiled at her, aiming to appear the perfectly implacable and
er in the superior husband. “No, my dear. You must wait until this evening, too-

m both “Damned theatrics,” Lord Cathlinn uttered, glaring at him. “The-
need to turn this tragedy into some circus for your own entertainment.”

uid. “I do not find murder remotely entertaining,” Dragan said coldly
vell in neither will you.”



s while

“THAT WAS NOT the plan,” Griz said between her teeth as they walked

predicting opposite direction to the castle. She was not so much angry as I
Dragan's sudden exclusion of her from the plan which had been her
ally sat first place.

aining.” “But you see the sense in it,” he argued. “If the killer only has or
duits to attack, it makes the threat easier to track.”

1. “Griz “And you did not bring this up last night because...?”

a very “Because you were not thinking quite straight,” he said quietly.

“Because I hallucinated?” she snapped.

irprised “This place has you too wound up, Griz. A trick of the eye, of th
s tragic in line with one's fears or hopes is not so unusual. You know that. B
immediate response is to hurl yourself into the breach to prove y
rrected. worthy. You *are* worthy, and for the rest of the day and the evening
before I need your protection.”

r ten of She frowned up at him in quick understanding. “Especially if it thu
He nodded.

Loud and sudden noises were his weakness, a result of his experi
ay with battle. She had seen it utterly debilitate him, and though he was deali
it better now, she prayed there would be no thunder to distract him tod
's head “Perhaps there will be no storm,” she said, looking up at the clou
dry sky. “It does not feel like thunder to me.” Not yet.

ght you He changed the subject as they reached the top of another inclin
locals believe Mary, Queen of Scots, watched the Battle of Langsic
ing the here before fleeing to England. Cathlinn disagrees.”

ut. “Cathlinn disagrees with everything on principle.” She
desperately to stay out here all day, with Dragan and Alexander, and n
slightly back to the house. Sadly, that would defeat their entire object. “Shall v
.” to the village and buy another pie?”

re is no



7. “And

THE HOURS PASSED uneasily. The very air seemed to grow heavy and or
and Griz thought they would be lucky to escape a thunderstorm. She a
looking at the castle, and yet the figure she had seen there haunted he
She even found herself drawn back to the portrait of Aileen Cathlinn.

l in the Griz did not believe in ghosts.

hurt by And yet there had been odd incidents during her childhood in Kel
s in the whisper of heavy skirts in a silent, empty passage; a song in her dream
she could repeat but that no one else knew; shadows of...nothing.

ie of us that everyone else had called imaginary teased the edges of her memory.

She had forgotten those incidents, dismissed them as the fantasies of a
lonely child whose older brothers and sisters had been only too happy to
leave her behind. And now she could no longer remember whether
they had been real or part of a story she had made up.

e mind, But last night's ghost had looked real, more real than the painted
ut your the portrait before her. So had the girl wrapped around Dragan on the
you are she had arrived. Was the ghost some kind of trick to scare her off,
, I will Dragan with her? Though if so, why had Dragan not seen the shade, to

Either way, she had to keep her wits about her, for everyone's sake
inders." She turned from the portrait and walked toward the stairs. Behind her

thought she heard a door softly closing, and the hairs on the back of her
ence in pricked. Everyone, family and staff, would be watching her today,
ng with not as closely as they would watch Dragan, who had set himself up
ay. murdered.

ady but She descended the staircase and made her way outside by the side
and around to the stables. The air felt close and heavy now and she
e. "There would indeed be a thunderstorm.

le from A few grooms were playing pitch and toss against the wall with farthings
and halfpennies, though they stopped at the sight of her and nodded
wanted of respect.

ever go "Will one of you send my coachman out to me, please?" she
ve walk pleasantly, though as it turned out there was no need, for Ewan emerged
the stables and came straight toward her, a large, slow-moving but
capable man with horses and with people. She had known him all her life.
He had taught her to ride, plucked her out of tall trees and deep ponds, and
trusted him implicitly. And he could probably sense her tension as easily as
ninous, though she were a horse in his care.

avoided "My lady," he rumbled. "All well?"

r mind. "Yes, of course," she replied since the others could still hear. "I
talk to you about our departure tomorrow morning." She turned and
pace away from the staff, forcing him to keep step with her. "I want to
as early as possible."

lburn: a “I’ll have the horses ready and harnessed by first light.”
ms that “Thank you. Also...” She glanced up at him and lowered her v
Friendsneed a favor, Ewan. I don’t trust the house servants, and I would like
y. sit with the baby while we are both away from him this evening.”
es of a “Sure,” Ewan said laconically.
appy to “Come up the back servants’ stairs and our door is the first one yo
any ofto. If anyone questions your presence, you say Mr. Tizsa sent for you.”
“When?”
face in “Five o’clock. If we aren’t there, wait for us.”
ie night He touched his cap, and she cast him a quick smile.
taking “Thanks, Ewan.” She turned away from him, then before he had
o? step back toward the stable, she paused. “Ewan?”
:. “Mmm?”
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asily aschildhood nickname for her made her smile. She felt more relaxed
walked back to the house, though she knew that would not last.

need to
egan to
o leave

“I’ll have the horses ready and harnessed by first light.”

“Thank you. Also...” She glanced up at him and lowered her voice. “I need a favor, Ewan. I don’t trust the house servants, and I would like you to sit with the baby while we are both away from him this evening.”

“Sure,” Ewan said laconically.

“Come up the back servants’ stairs and our door is the first one you come to. If anyone questions your presence, you say Mr. Tizsa sent for you.”

“When?”

“Five o’clock. If we aren’t there, wait for us.”

He touched his cap, and she cast him a quick smile.

“Thanks, Ewan.” She turned away from him, then before he had taken a step back toward the stable, she paused. “Ewan?”

“Mmm?”

“The evening we arrived and drove past the castle, did you see anyone there in front of the ruin?”

“I saw someone. Looked like Himself.”

Ewan, who had always referred to her father the duke in this way, had taken to alluding similarly to Dragan. Griz had assured her husband it was an honor.

“That’s what I thought,” she said, ignoring the sudden drumming of her heart. “Did you recognize the lady, too?”

A frown tugged at his brow. “Didn’t see any female. Only Himself.”

Would you tell me if you did? She could hardly ask him that. Instead, she blurted. “Do you believe in ghosts, Ewan?”

He shrugged. “Don’t disbelieve in them. There are more things in heaven and earth, as they say. Certainly more than the mad wee tikes who’ll come guising round the houses tonight! You hold on to what you have, Miss Grizzly, and you’ll be fine.”

Although it was hardly respectful to most ears, the use of his old childhood nickname for her made her smile. She felt more relaxed as she walked back to the house, though she knew that would not last.

CHAPTER SIX

CLEARLY A MUCH-LOVED tradition at Cathlinn, small grinning ghouls, witches, and demons arrived throughout the evening. Some were arm lanterns made from turnips with scary faces carved out of them to release light. The creatures made eerie noises before reciting some scary poem or song, complete with grimaces and shouts designed to terrify.

One group, dressed as witches with tall hats and long noses and bodies made from twigs, performed a weird, energetic dance. Another acted out a short play that finished with the demons rushing straight at the watchers before skidding to a halt and bowing, their muddy noses cracking with their grins.

Griz, who had imagined somehow that the Cathlinns would tolerate the tradition as lairds of the manor, was impressed by the household's enthusiasm. They gathered in the large entrance hall where chairs had been set up for the family, and the servants watched from the kitchen or from the front door or the stairs. Family and staff greeted all the creatures with exaggerated terror and applauded their acts with genuine approval and laughter, before the servants gave every child a treat—oranges, cakes, and sweets. And the guisers went off chattering and giggling with excitement.

Dragan murmured in her ear, "Everyone is here, all the servants, too."

Griz had noticed the same thing. In truth, watching them tonight he could not imagine any of these people murdering anyone. But then, if children could dress as demons, it was perfectly possible for adult demons to do the disguise of amiable human. She began to worry that upstairs someone had already been drugged or poisoned—even though he had been warned against eating or drinking anything—and that Alexander was unprotected.

Grinning, a footman opened the door for the departure of a risen corpse as a ghost in an old sheet, and a very small devil with wooden horns. A gust

wind rushed through the hall, and surely that was a faint rumble of thunder? Certainly, the sky was filthy.

“Will the children be able to see enough to get home?” Griz uneasily.

“They’ve got their turnip lanterns,” Richard said.

“Pretty sure they could do it blind-folded anyway,” Lord Cathlin cheerfully. “But there will be enough people around looking out for the

ghosts, “Hurry home, mind!” the footman called after the children, “It’s ed with to rain, and you’ll get caught in the storm.”

“That will be it, then,” his lordship said, getting to his feet. “Good to bless ’em. I’ll bid you all—” He broke off as his gaze fell on Dragan, brooms scowled. “I don’t see why you can’t just spit it out, man!”

Because he still had nothing to “spit”. No one had made any move d out a him. Griz didn’t know whether to be frustrated or relieved. But this, seated by the previous crimes, was the dangerous period, when everyone we take-up separate ways. The servants were going about their own business, b merely slowly, presumably hoping to hear the rest of the exchange.

“I will explain all in just over an hour as we agreed,” Dragan said whole “Once the baby is settled. Perhaps we could reconvene here? I won where your staff to be present, too.”

behind, Lord Cathlinn stamped off toward the stairs, muttering about children impositions, and then, loudly, “I’ll have a brandy in my rooms!”

reciation “Good plan,” Richard agreed.

apples, Griz and Dragan, clearly the pariahs of the evening, joined the ig with procession upstairs. Nobody went to play billiards or talk in the library.

o.” Miss Cathlinn seemed in a hurry to reach her own room.

ght, she “If looks could kill, I would be dead many times over,” human murmured. “I hope this works, or I shall have made several enem nons to nothing.”

, Ewan Griz, who felt all the hairs on her arms rising, was desperate to get n well own rooms. She almost tore the door from Dragan’s hand in her hurry er was in and bolted through to the bedchamber.

corpse, a The large figure of Ewan loomed in front of her, holding Alexa one muscly arm.

it of icy “He got a bit fractious,” Ewan reported as the baby stretched out h to Griz, “but he liked watching the children and the sky out the window

distanthanded Alexander over without obvious relief. "Do you still want me l

"We might do," Dragan replied. "Come through to the sitting room."
asked Griz fed the baby into sleepiness, then changed him, cuddled him,
him in his cot before creeping out to the sitting room. Dragan stood
door to the passage, which he had opened a crack, and was peering
nn said sight of her, he closed the door softly.

em." "Do you really insist on doing this part?" he asked, frowning.
starting could go in your place. Or I could and leave you here."

"Ewan is harder to hide. And you have to be here when your br
l show, delivered." She picked up her warm coat, and Dragan helped her
and he before throwing the traveling cloak around her shoulders.

A flash lit up the room for an instant, and Griz held her breath u
against thunder sounded, much closer than before. She grasped Dragan's
judging "Will you cope?"

nt their "I will cope," he said, although she felt the tension coiling in him.
ut very you will be seen. And Griz?"

"Yes."

mildly. "For God's sake, be careful of falling stones from the ruin. And i
ild like are...too weird, come back. We will find another way."

She knew what he meant. "You, too." She reached up and he gav
bloody quick, hard kiss, before she slipped out of his hold and into the
passage.

The servants, no doubt beginning to deliver tea and brandy an
general supper to various rooms, would use the back stairs, so Griz flitted al
y. Even passage to the main staircase. Every sense was alert for moveme
opening or closing doors, but the house was almost eerily still and si
Dragan least the stairs and front hall remained lit.

ies for Crossing the hall to the side door, she heard voices coming fr
kitchen, subdued, uneasy. They, too, needed this matter resolved.

to their She slipped out the door into rain and darkness. She could not
y to get lantern, so she forced herself to wait a few moments until her eyes ha
chance to adjust. To protect her spectacles from the rain, she drew th
nder in of the cloak as far over her head as she could while still being able to
flash of lightning lit up the sky, and she set off at a run to the accompa
is arms of rumbling thunder.

w." He It was easy enough to reach the road and to cross over, though aft

ere?” the path that led to the castle was harder to find. She had to rely on t
i.” lightning flash and then bolted through the opening onto the path.

and set The ruin rose up in front of her, ancient and jagged. She slogged
by the muddy slope until she reached the castle itself and went carefully for
out. At the place where she had found Dragan asleep on the night she had arr
was also where April had been found.

“Ewan She moved behind the moss-covered walls, where she would not
from the house, but from where she could see that same spot where Aj
andy is been murdered, or at least where she had come to die.

into it, She settled down on piles of wet leaves to wait, hunched her sh
against the hammering rain, and drew in a few deep breaths to calm
ntil the Then she dried off her spectacles and glanced upward, wondering how
hands the stones above her were. Something screeched and flapped against h
and she almost cried out.

“Go, or *Damned bats*, she thought shakily as her “attacker” soared up
illuminated in a fork of lightning. The rain came down harder, ar
wished it all to be over.

f things And then she saw the silvery, ghostly lady, glowing like an elega
in the storm.

re her a
empty



id even IT WAS THE maid Jeanie who brought the tray as usual, though she w
ong the talkative than before and clearly in a hurry to escape. Well, she had
ent, for who he would accuse. He hoped it wouldn't be her.

lent. At “There's some tea as well,” she said rapidly. “Is her ladyship well?”

“Yes, she's seeing to the baby,” Dragan said. “Thank you, Jeanie.”

om the She curtsied and bolted, closing the door firmly behind her.

Ewan emerged from the bedchamber while Dragan sniffed the
t risk a glass and the tea, and the sandwiches that had been provided.
d some stomach rumbled.

ie hood “Don't even think about it,” Dragan warned. He sniffed the tea ag
o see. A dipped his finger in the brandy. Neither were quite right. A faint, herb
miment and taste permeated both. “I don't think this will kill us, but it will p
send us to sleep. It's meant for Griz, too, to keep her out of the way.”

ter that,

he next “While someone does you in,” Ewan growled. “How?”

“Arsenic probably, but there’s no rule that says a murderer has to pick up the same tool. I suspect we’ll find out in the next half hour.” He crouched toward the cupboard beneath the window and brought out the remains of the divided. It apple pie. “Help yourself.”

The rain came on harder, and lightning flashed across the sky, but he didn’t flinch even before the thunder crashed like guns and a hundred images chased each other across his mind. *Memory, not reality. Stay with reality, Tizsa, or so help me, God...*

oulders “Good pie,” Ewan rumbled.

herself. Dragan drew in a shuddering breath and began to deal with the tray. He poured the brandy into an empty flask, shoved a few sandwiches in the cupboard, and poured two half cups of tea into the plant pot on the windowsill. As a final touch, he laid the brandy glass on its side as the door to the bedroom was knocked over.

nd Griz “You stay with Alexander whatever happens,” he told Ewan, who turned back toward the bedchamber with a half-eaten slice of pie.

nt lamp “And you watch out for Herself or it’ll be me doing the killing.”

Dragan only nodded and caught his breath as more lightning and thunder blasted. He folded himself onto the sofa, thought hard about the joy that his wife and the wonder that was their son. And waited.

The door opened slowly without even a knock.

was less Dragan adjusted his expression to one of woolly blankness, mouth open, eyes unfocused. And the murderer crept into the room.

” “Where is your wife?” came the hoarse whisper, eyes darting around the room, taking in the tray as well as Griz’s absence.

“As-asleep,” Dragan said groggily.

“You must come with me, urgently. It’s a matter of life and death.”

brandy And suddenly, he remembered clearly that this had happened before Ewan’s night Griz came when he had wakened at the castle. If her horses and carriage had not disturbed the killer, he would probably be dead already.

ain and *Dead.* A thunderclap seemed to shout it at him, but at least he had enough sense to let himself be pulled to his feet by an iron grip. He stumbled from the room, terrified he had miscalculated, that he was not up to the task with the debilitating noise of the storm and his wife depending on him.



stick to
ched to GRIZ STARED AT the apparition, who seemed to lean against the tall stone
second she had first seen her with Dragan. Her back was to Griz, h
shimmering down her slender back. It might have been the wind, b
making thought she sighed.

bloody Somewhere, she knew she should be appalled by this halluc
with the Although it could also be a theatrical trick. The woman could be real.

“What are you doing here?” Griz blurted.

The ghost whipped round and surged toward her, making Griz clu
ray. He throat in sudden fear. No human moved with such speed, wit
nto the smoothness. More than that, the beautiful, translucent face was alm
on the same as that in the portrait of Aileen Cathlenn.

ough he While Griz forgot to breathe, the ghost gazed at her, head leaning
side. *Waiting.*

ambled The ghostly lips did not frame the words, but Griz heard them
same, as though they had arrived in her brain without troubling her ear

“For him? For the Jacobite, Kenneth MacDonald?”

thunder *He will come.*

hat was “After a hundred years?”

The ghostly head jerked back. *A hundred years... Is he dead?*

A wealth of tragedy echoed in Griz’s mind with the words. She
n partly slowly. “Yes, he is long dead.” She swallowed. “So are you.”

Mostly, the ghost whispered. Only tears remain.

und the “Then go to him,” Griz pleaded, from some pain she could not
perhaps the fear of being parted from Dragan. “Every part of you sh
with him.”

The ghostly head cocked again. *I should leave this place...?*

re. The “You should.”

carriage *I...*

The ghost whipped around, and to her horror, Griz saw that she h
retained distracted. Two figures were making their way up the hill to the cas
umbled shorter figure all but dragging the taller.

his, not The taller she knew at once was Dragan, stumbling and falling. A
he was acting—Griz hoped to God he was acting—she hated to see h

that. Worse, just as they reached the top of the hill, lightning forked the sky and thunder exploded overhead.

Dragan dropped to his knees, his hands covering his head as he curl into a ball. She had seen him like this before, when he had no over his body. It acted on its own because his brain was somewhere entirely.

Fear surged through Griz, even as she willed him out of his old night and into the present one. They both had to pay attention, to identify...

His companion knelt beside him, and a double flash of light illuminated her gaunt face and figure.

Davidson, Claire Cathlinn's maid.

She wrenched up Dragan's head.

You lie, the ghost cried into Griz's mind with a bizarre mixture of and joy. *He is here, he is here again at last!* She rushed on Dragan there was no time for Griz to react.

The ghost of Aileen wrapped her transparent arms about his shimmering hair falling over his face and neck and chest. And Dragan even notice.

Then, with a moan of loss, Aileen wrenched backward, and Griz see that Davidson had a flask and she was lifting it to Dragan's mouth.

Not Kenneth, not my Kenneth, the ghost mourned.

"No, he is *my* husband," Griz cried out, launching herself from her place. For Dragan in the grip of this paralysis was incapable of defending himself, and Davidson was trying to force the contents of her flask down his throat.

Davidson leapt to her feet, glaring into the darkness until she found "Who's there? You! You nasty, spying—"

"Stand away from him," Griz warned. "You have no reason to hurt"

"I have every reason! He'll send me away from my mistress! To protect"

"Give me the flask," Griz said, advancing. "And you might have had"

Davidson advanced, too, brushing past Dragan and all but walking through the drooping, ghostly figure of Aileen.

Griz held her hand out commandingly. But Davidson appeared to acknowledge no superior but her own mistress. She grabbed Griz's arm like a bruising grip and hauled her closer, whisking the flask up to her face and grasped the woman's wrist, appalled by her strength.

l across “I have no hope if you two live,” Davidson panted. “Without you, will pay any attention to the death of that vile female.”

tried to “Vile?” Griz gasped. Thunder boomed again, but something controlbeyond Davidson’s shoulders, giving Griz hope. “How was she vile?”

ere else “Pursuing my mistress’s husband, trying to take her place. And he fool that he cannot appreciate my mistress—she is far, far too good for ghtmareand flirts and carries on with the vile creature instead. I could not let h my mistress aside.”

ghtning In fresh lightening, Dragan loomed behind Davidson, plucking Griz and sending the flask flying through the air, almost striking th ghostly figure who appeared now to be watching everything.

Davidson yelled in fury, fighting and kicking, trying to scratch a f angerbut Dragan held firm, immobilizing her without apparent effort altho so fastmouth and eyes were grim.

Until, over the woman’s shoulder, his gaze found Griz.

m, her She smiled tremulously as the thunder rumbled off into the d 1 didn’t“You did it, Dragan.” He had broken through the paralysis while th still raged.

z could His lips quirked. “In the words of your military hero, it was a c close-run thing.”

And then lantern light blinded her, and voices called. “Well done, ; : hidingher! We heard and saw everything.” Robert and Richard Cathlinn fendingtoward them, grinning.

own his Dragan almost threw his captive at them, and she collapsed on R shoulder. “Take me to her, take me to her!” she wailed.

id Griz. “We’re taking you to the strong room,” Robert said with distaste.

Griz tumbled into Dragan’s arms and felt them close about her. I : him.” her safety, her security, her love, as she was his. She closed he :ison!” clutching him convulsively.

ope.” And then a shout of outrage made her open them.

ig right “She’s got loose! Grab her!” Richard shouted.

And sure enough, Davidson was darting in front of them like a h. ared toaiming for them but for the flask, which she snatched up and held rm in amouth before anyone could move.

ie. Griz The ghost watched and smiled.

Dragan, with a yell of fury bolted to Davidson, snatching the flas

her hand and seizing her once more.

“Too late,” Davidson said with triumph. “Too late for all of us!”

“Only for you,” Dragan said with a pity Griz could not yet match. “But I’ll still try.”

She fought him, of course, and the Cathlenn brothers told him to let her die, that it was only justice, and Davidson laughed and threw herself about. And the ghost came right up to Griz, her head leaning again to one side.

You will live and he will live?

“Yes...”

And for me it has always been too late. I waited too long and got lost. He was never coming back to me. I should always have gone to him.

Griz lifted her hand, whether to touch or to wave farewell she didn’t know. And before her eyes the ghost faded to nothing but rain.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AS EWAN HAD promised, the carriage waited for them on the front terrace at first light. To Dragan's surprise, the family all came out to bid them farewell. Claire even gave them a parcel of food for the journey.

Of course, they had cleared the air last night. Dragan could not hold back his anger that the brothers had not leapt immediately to his wife's aid when Davidson had seized her. For one thing, neither had Dragan, though though he had dragged him off his own, personal, bloody battlefield and back to the castle. For one horrible, unendurable instant, he had thought he was too late. Davidson had already poured her poison down Grizelda's throat.

The awful emptiness of a life without Griz, of watching her murder, had propelled him to his feet and into action, but he would never forget the look of her whole body shaking with the effort to prevent Davidson forcing the flask into her mouth.

He hadn't been able to save Davidson. No one but he seemed to have missed their air-clearing session of both family and servants, Claire had told him that her maid had been increasingly erratic in her behavior and suffered from terrible headaches. But since she had only ever seen the devoted side of the man, never entered her head that Davidson would harm anyone. The men had been slightly sheepish about their determination to believe in April's natural immunity. And Richard had apologized for his more personal hostility to Dragan.

"You made me feel guilty," Richard had said ruefully, later, in a room of privacy. "Because you were doing what *I* should have. April should have been my bride, and you were the one seeking justice for her."

Lord Cathlinn himself handed Griz into the carriage with Alexander and clapped Dragan on the shoulder as he followed her inside.

As they drove away, Robert had his arm around Claire's shoulder and perhaps some good had come out of the whole mess.

Perhaps he muttered something aloud, or she just read it in his face. Griz said, "The truth is important."

“I suspect Davidson had some brain infection. Or a tumor, perhaps at least they will do a proper autopsy.”

Griz threaded her fingers through his and squeezed. “I hated it, but I’m glad we came.”

In the sling Griz wore, Alexander shifted his head, and his little eyes began to flutter closed.

Dragan said, “I will be glad, too. Soon.” He turned slowly to face her. “The castle, you said, *No, he is my husband*, as though there was some magic. For much of the time, you were distracted, looking at something I could not see.”

Griz considered. “We all see different things. And science explains everything.”

“No,” he agreed.

The sweet smells of the countryside after rain filtered into the carriage. The horses pulled them onward toward Kelburn and Griz’s large family. His wife sat close to him, laying her head on his shoulder. Even now it seemed, his life got better and better, and today was no exception.

He smiled and kissed her hair. “I love you, you know.”

“I hope you know I love you, too. So much that perhaps I would live a hundred years for you, too.”

“Only a hundred?” Dragan asked, and she laughed.

The End

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He smiled and kissed her hair. “I love you, you know.”

“I hope you know I love you, too. So much that perhaps I would wait a hundred years for you, too.”

“Only a hundred?” Dragan asked, and she laughed.

The End

Author's Note

Cathlenn House and its nearby castle ruin are mostly fictional. But I did base the castle on an old ruin that used to stand five or ten minutes from where I was brought up. It was incredibly spooky in the dark, and I definitely lived there. Naturally, it was rumored to be haunted, though obviously by teenagers up to no good!

Sadly, the ruin no longer stands there. Like my castle in the story, the masonry became a serious danger, and since there was no available money to preserve it, the remaining stones were removed and stored in a German museum.

Author's Note

Cathlinn House and its nearby castle ruin are mostly fictional. But I confess I based the castle on an old ruin that used to stand five or ten minutes' walk from where I was brought up. It was incredibly spooky in the dark, and bats definitely lived there. Naturally, it was rumored to be haunted, though most obviously by teenagers up to no good!

Sadly, the ruin no longer stands there. Like my castle in the story, falling masonry became a serious danger, and since there was no available money to preserve it, the remaining stones were removed and stored in a Glasgow museum.

About the Author

Mary Lancaster lives in Scotland with her husband, three mostly grown kids and a small, crazy dog.

Her first literary love was historical fiction, a genre which she is mixing up with romance and adventure in her own writing. Her most recent books are light, fun Regency romances written for Dragonblade Publishing. Her *The Imperial Season* series set at the Congress of Vienna; and the *Blackhaven Brides* series, which is set in a fashionable English spa town frequented by the great and the bad of Regency society.

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