

Excerpt: Rogue of the Moors

The horses trotted down a narrow, hardened-dirt street with a few sparse trees on one side. They passed several small cottages and a large two-story wood flat home behind high hedges and tangled vines. Three houses later, the carriage rocked to a stop.

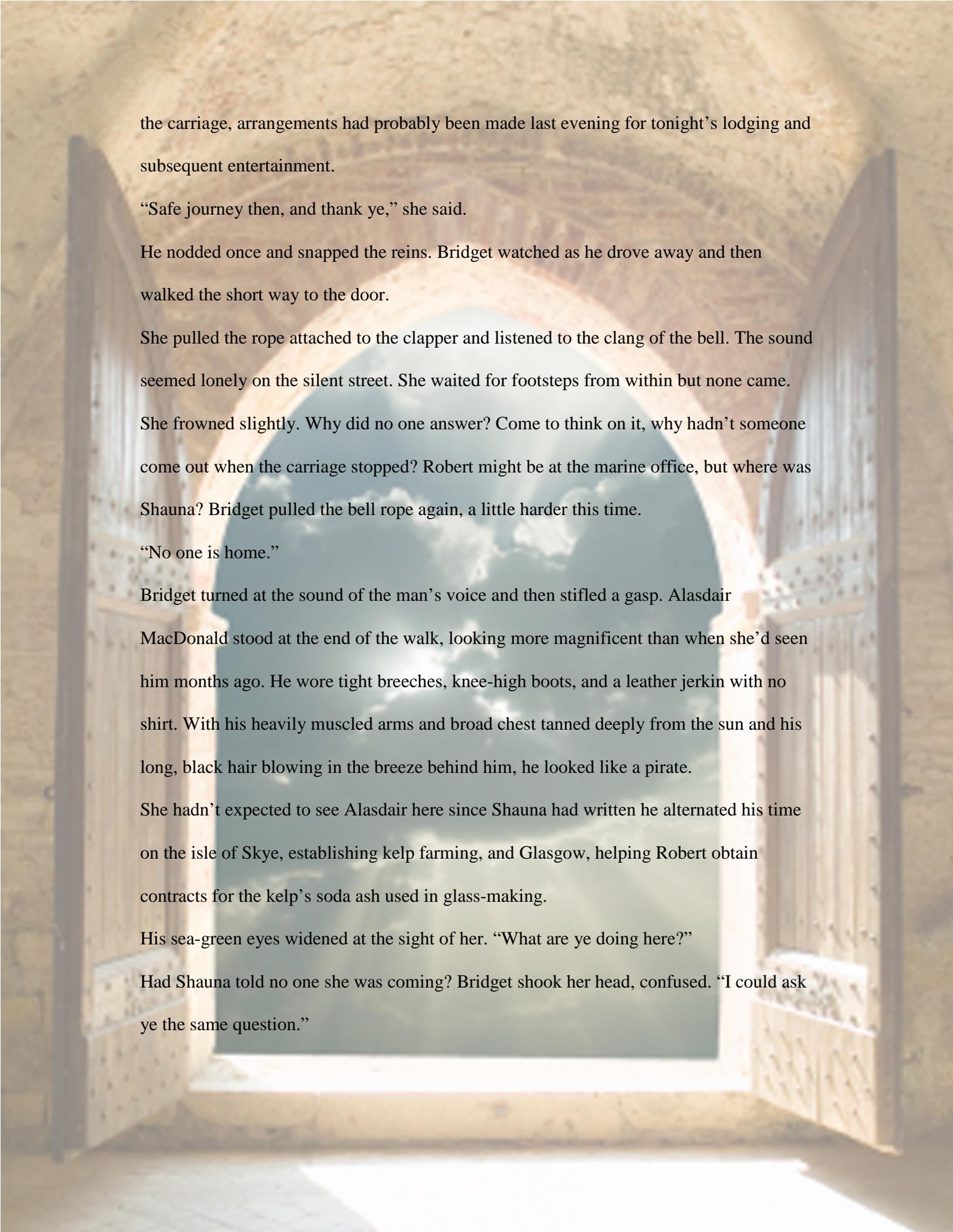
This was it then. Her new life awaited her. Bridget took a deep breath as the coachman opened the door. She stepped down and stood for a moment surveying her sister's home. It might be Bridget's new home too, at least for a while. Larger than the cottages, smaller than the house behind the rambling vegetation, Shauna's house sparkled with fresh white paint, green shutters, and varnished front door with a polished brass bell hanging from a bracket beside it. The short walkway was graveled with neatly trimmed lawn on either side. Everything looked shipshape, which wasn't surprising since Robert was a ship's captain and Shauna had a penchant for tidiness.

The coachman brought Bridget out of her reverie as he unloaded the trunk from the rumble seat with a grunt and carried it up the walkway.

"Ye will be spending the night here?" Bridget asked as he returned to the carriage.

The man shook his head and climbed up on the bench. "With the summer light, we can make it back to Loch Morar before dark."

Bridget didn't need to ask why. The inn there was the only one within twenty miles and was also a popular spot for sailors coming up the loch. The proprietor kept the place well stocked with whisky and barrels of ale, and Bridget had seen several buxom serving maids when they'd stopped. Since Ian's guards were already waiting down the street for



the carriage, arrangements had probably been made last evening for tonight's lodging and subsequent entertainment.

"Safe journey then, and thank ye," she said.

He nodded once and snapped the reins. Bridget watched as he drove away and then walked the short way to the door.

She pulled the rope attached to the clapper and listened to the clang of the bell. The sound seemed lonely on the silent street. She waited for footsteps from within but none came.

She frowned slightly. Why did no one answer? Come to think on it, why hadn't someone come out when the carriage stopped? Robert might be at the marine office, but where was Shauna? Bridget pulled the bell rope again, a little harder this time.

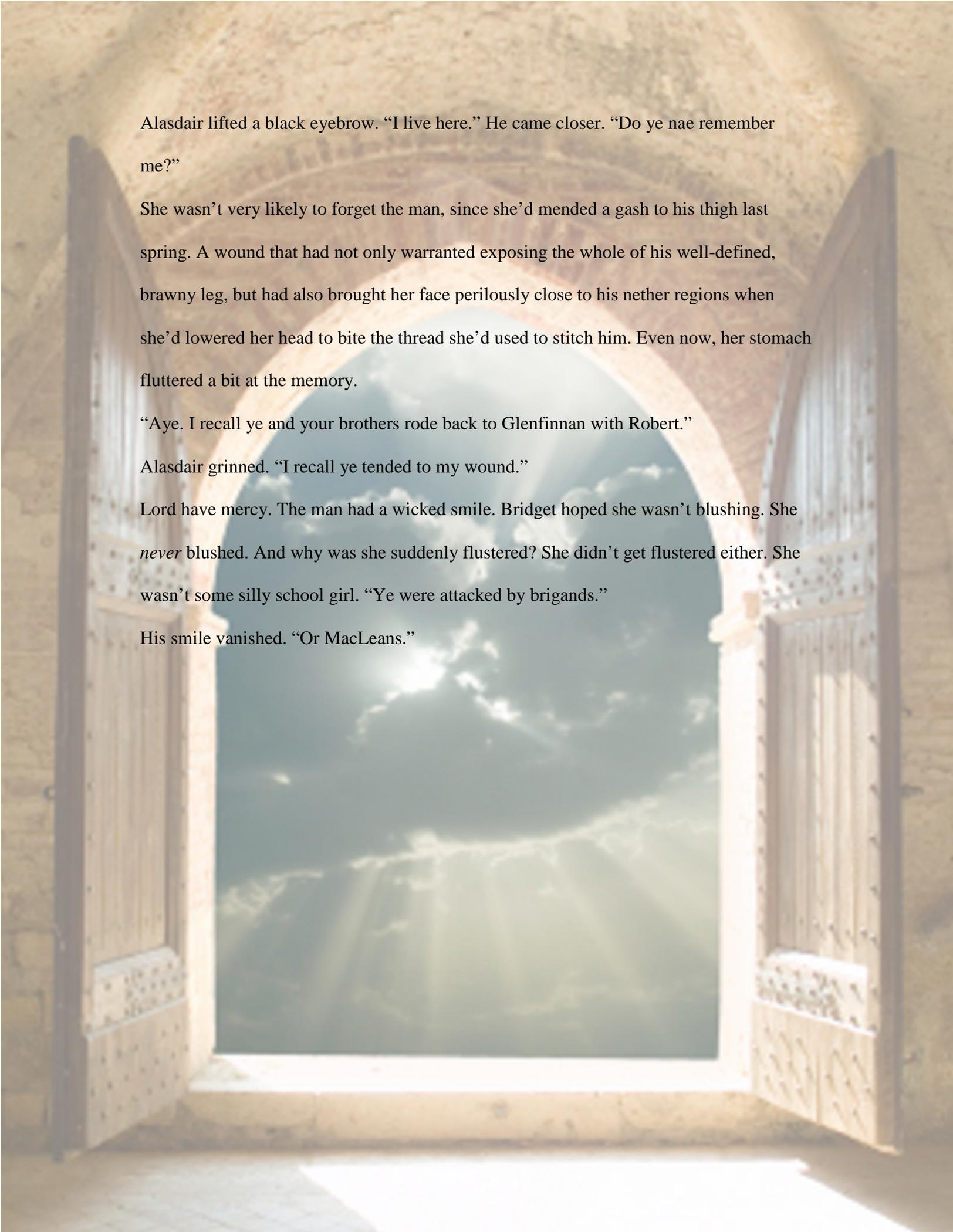
"No one is home."

Bridget turned at the sound of the man's voice and then stifled a gasp. Alasdair MacDonald stood at the end of the walk, looking more magnificent than when she'd seen him months ago. He wore tight breeches, knee-high boots, and a leather jerkin with no shirt. With his heavily muscled arms and broad chest tanned deeply from the sun and his long, black hair blowing in the breeze behind him, he looked like a pirate.

She hadn't expected to see Alasdair here since Shauna had written he alternated his time on the isle of Skye, establishing kelp farming, and Glasgow, helping Robert obtain contracts for the kelp's soda ash used in glass-making.

His sea-green eyes widened at the sight of her. "What are ye doing here?"

Had Shauna told no one she was coming? Bridget shook her head, confused. "I could ask ye the same question."

The background of the text is a photograph of a stone archway with two large, open wooden doors. The doors are made of light-colored wood with decorative panels. Through the archway, a bright, sunlit landscape is visible, featuring a river, mountains, and a clear sky with some clouds. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a bright day.

Alasdair lifted a black eyebrow. “I live here.” He came closer. “Do ye nae remember me?”

She wasn’t very likely to forget the man, since she’d mended a gash to his thigh last spring. A wound that had not only warranted exposing the whole of his well-defined, brawny leg, but had also brought her face perilously close to his nether regions when she’d lowered her head to bite the thread she’d used to stitch him. Even now, her stomach fluttered a bit at the memory.

“Aye. I recall ye and your brothers rode back to Glenfinnan with Robert.”

Alasdair grinned. “I recall ye tended to my wound.”

Lord have mercy. The man had a wicked smile. Bridget hoped she wasn’t blushing. She *never* blushed. And why was she suddenly flustered? She didn’t get flustered either. She wasn’t some silly school girl. “Ye were attacked by brigands.”

His smile vanished. “Or MacLeans.”