

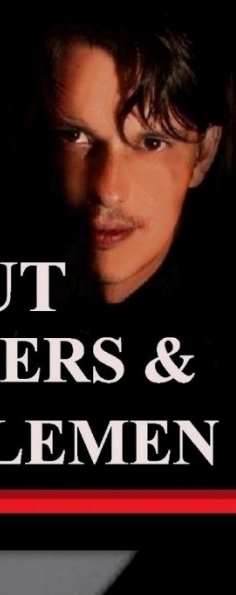
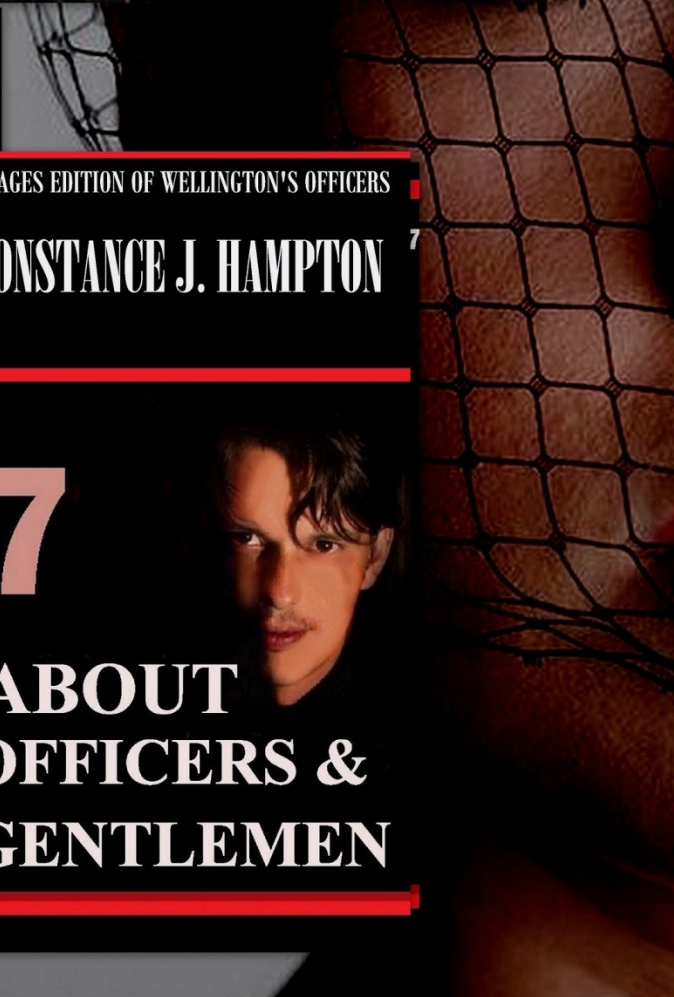


COLLAGES EDITION OF WELLINGTON'S OFFICERS

CONSTANCE J. HAMPTON

7

ABOUT
OFFICERS &
GENTLEMEN



CONSTANCE J. HAMPTON

8

ABOUT OFFICERS AND
GENTLEMEN

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‘A special collages edition = enhanced with
illustrations/collages

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Chapter 1: LORD JOHN'S PROLOGUE

*

After Lord John's dogs had been brought to the kennels John hesitantly took a seat in his mother's ante-chamber.

Mr. Tubbington nodded at him and flicked two fingers at a waiting footman. He whispered something and the footman hurried away, after sending John an insolent look.

John knew the butler was instructing the footman Mordecai to warn his valet that he needed some very necessary ablutions before he could enter his mother's rooms.

He raised his brows when somebody shrieked in the room next to the antechamber and began to listen intently. He knew that shriek so well! It was without a doubt his mother, the Duchess.

"You will do as I ask, Jonathan!" her harsh voice threatened.

Ah, yes, threats! His mother had always been a master at threats. John had been on the receiving end of them countless times.

He heard his father mumble something inaudible.

"A tit for tat!" his mother yelled, "I'll curse you on my deathbed if you ignore my wishes, Jonathan Montgomery!"

His father's answer was muffled, but John could hear it anyway: his mother should not take things so hard; the girl had been just a fling when he was in the North...

John shifted his chair so that he was closer to the wall behind which his parents quarreled.

A girl! His father had been seeing a girl in the North?

Ah, yes! Was mother referring to that very beautiful blond woman John had once met when he and his father were taking a ride all the way from the castle in Stirling to a 'strong house' near Bannockburn? He was

only four then and was riding his favorite pony Leslie.

They had seen the woman standing in front of that house with a five year old boy, who was standing in a protective stance next to her.

Even at the very young age of four John had noticed the ethereal beauty of that woman, a very different beauty compared to his mother's. The Duchess was always elaborately dressed and coiffed. The Duchess was never seen without her cosmetics, her white mask of rice powder, her painted blushes and her kohl-accentuated eyes.

The girl from the North wore only a simple grey dress with a squared apron. Instead of dainty high-heeled shoes, she had sturdy leather clogs on her small feet. Her long blond hair was fashioned in one big braid. It fell all the way to her very shapely

butt, which was not hidden behind a frame of whalebone or horsehair.

Since he had seen this woman, he had secretly frowned upon the artificiality of court clothes; the wooden corsets, the unseemly low necklines and the harsh make-up that made the women look like puppets on a string with similar wooden movements.

His father and the woman talked for some time. His father had seemed urgent about something and the woman had shaken her head, pointing at him and the boy, whom he later heard was called Lochiel.

In the end, the woman had given in to his father's urgings and told the boy, Lochiel, to take care of the little Lord John. They had disappeared into the house, his father with a look full of joy and longing on his face.

He and the boy had played behind the stables until the evening fell and his father hurried out of the house at last, a bit

flushed, with his clothes looking as if he had put them on without the help of his valet.

"You must agree that our John should have the same chances at happiness as we had, my darling," the Duke pleaded.

The Duchess started to say something, but she got stuck in a coughing fit.

The Duke urged her not to upset herself so much and then John heard his father agree.

"If you think this is so terribly important, I'll sign the papers for the betrothal, Elisabeth."

His mother cried between racking coughs and still accused the Duke of 'damned betrayal'.

Half an hour later, wearing clean clothes and the scent of expensive lemon soap, Lord John Montgomery heard that he was to be betrothed to a girl called Elisabeth Campbell, obviously the 'tit for tat' his mother had cried so loud about.

He was supposed to marry her when the girl reached the age of sixteen, which seemed a long time away for Lord John, as she was on that day only four years old. Quick calculations told him that he would be twenty-four by the time the girl was marriageable, so he decided not to worry about this arranged marriage with a little chit nobody knew a thing about, apart from his hysterical mother.

He only understood Tubby's worries about his appearance in the evening, when his father told him that the Duchess, his mother, had sadly passed away.

Without realizing it to the full, he had been betrothed at his mother's deathbed, at the respectable age of twelve.

By the time the date of his arranged marriage approached, Lord John started to balk.

His father had sent him twice to a small village near Glasgow, to court the little chit John was betrothed to.

It was unfortunate that he was by then in love with the Russian refugee Countess Maria Oblinsky, and so he'd hated every minute with his longstanding fiancée.

He was not willing to agree that Lizzie Campbell was actually exquisitely beautiful and a very proper virginal girl.

In the end, the Duke had to promise that Lord John would become the Marques of Lorna and Kintyre, instead of his brother Randolph, upon the Duke's demise, in order to persuade Lord John to meet his mother's deathbed wish.

Randolph did not mind handing over that title 'in advance' to his younger brother because he would become the new Duke of Rothford, and being the Marques of Lorna and Kintyre was only a courtesy title anyway.

In the end, Lord John, a spoiled cad with a bad reputation and worse sexual appetites, prepared to go to Edinburgh to marry the Right honorable Elisabeth Campbell; a chit without a dowry or any ancestry of note, in exchange for being Marques one day.

John would be happy to be titled at last. His debts were already piling sky high and he feared he could not hold out much longer on the credit of being the spare son of the Duke of Rothford. To be Marques of Lorna and Kintyre would stretch his credit infinitely longer with the loan sharks that were always on his tail.

He hated Lizzie Campbell all the more because she stood between him and the chances of marrying an heiress, who could get him out of his self-inflicted dire straits and towering debts.

The only thing Lizzie Campbell would bring him was her body, which generated him nothing but obligations and would keep

him as poor as the proverbial church-mouse.

"Bloody hell, John," Lord Randolph growled, "can't you even stand straight? Christ, what will Father say when he sees you like this?"

"Why should I c...care," Lord John stammered, looking around for something to vomit in. He raced behind a pillar and his appalled brother heard him splash his meager breakfast onto the floor of the Chapel.

"Damn him to hell!" Lord Randolph swore, fishing a handkerchief out of his sleeve and urgently signaling a footman who hovered mercifully close. He grabbed his brother around the waist and rubbed his handkerchief against John's mouth.

"Clean yourself up," he ordered him, muting his voice as he saw his father enter

the chapel together with the Countess of Loghaire.

"Think about how you are going to be Marques one day, but only because you are going to say 'yes' to that little beauty that Mother found you. You could do a lot worse, you know!"

"My tit for tat!" John sneered, "I'll marry her but I'll never consummate!"

"You will," Lord Randolph growled through clenched teeth, "don't you know Father made that a new condition? You'll never get Lorna otherwise!"

Lord John slouched against the bench he was to sit on later, refusing to return his father's nod of greeting when the Duke sat down in the first row.

He felt like a sacrificial lamb; a very hung-over sacrificial lamb.

"The bishop's here!" his brother warned superfluously, checking Lord John's waistcoat for specks of vomit and

wondering what his marriage kiss would taste like. No matter. If he knew John, he would not deign to kiss his bride anyway, the stubborn lout!

John looked down at the girl, who had followed him unwillingly and hesitantly to the apartments in the ducal residence, that were legally his as well as hers as of just three hours ago.

He was glad his thundering headache had disappeared the moment he had his first whiskey at the feast that was actually his bloody wedding breakfast.

"Don't stand there!" he growled when she hesitated at the door of her own bedroom. He gnashed his teeth, thinking about how late it was and that the ship to London he wanted to be on would soon leave with the tide.

He pushed her against her butt, which felt surprisingly sturdy.

Damn, but he liked sturdy butts!

He kicked the door shut behind them and grabbed her around the waist.

Better make this a fast one, he thought fleetingly.

His hands slid along the soft thick silk of her wedding dress, over generous hips.

John had learned to like girls that were kind of fleshy. His mother had been reed thin, especially the last years of her life and he had never forgotten the dislike he had felt for her thinness and artificial ways, as if she had been an over-painted, thin doll.

The girl gasped when he pushed his breeches with his growing erection against her belly. It had not been difficult for him to get aroused, as he was almost always in some state of horniness. The hips and the butt had finished the trick for him; his cock had swelled and hardened. His hands went to her cleavage, which might be deemed far too deep for a sixteen-year-old virgin bride.

He roughly lifted her breasts out of the bodice without any trouble and bent down to suckle them. Ah, but the flesh of a sixteen-year-old did indeed taste different than the flesh of last night's ripe harlot.

He had to steady himself when he grabbed at the white tender globes. He had imbibed all through the wedding breakfast without bothering to eat and it seemed as if he was on the ship already, because the floor of the bedroom tilted dangerously.

She gasped with pain when his hands squeezed her tits. He laughed cruelly and bent down to bite in one. She seemed to swoon with the pain of it and he had to grab her by her waist to prevent her from falling.

He pushed her to a dresser next to the door, lifted her and put her on top of it. He laughed; he would take her against the wall like a cheap whore! "Now, then, my love," he mocked her, "open up for me, because

I'm going to fuck you only once in your whole lifetime!"

He pressed her legs apart, tearing at the slit of her pantalets to open them wider.

She mewed with shock at his rough treatment, but he refused to listen and already had taken his aroused cock out of his breeches. He brought the head of his cock to her entrance, but she was dry and unyielding.

He swore, retracted his dick, spit in his hand and covered the head with his spittle. He looked up at her in surprise when she suddenly sat up, out of her initial slump, closed her eyes and spread her legs, as if she had suddenly decided that it was best to accommodate him.

He entered her with a growl and noticed that the spittle had truly helped; he slid inside of her as if he had been sucked into her sheath. She was very narrow and the feeling almost brought him over the edge.

He wondered if she actually gripped his cock, but shook his head. Impossible! He was too drunk to be able to distinguish such subtleties. He pushed far inside her and heard her utter a small cry. It made him go over that delicious point of no return and he almost fell backwards when he retreated from her while his cock surged and spurted his seed. Ah, Lorna and Kintyre, he thought triumphantly, here I come!

He grinned maliciously when he saw that he had ruined her bodice and a shoe with his actions; his seed trailed from her breasts, to her right shoe, to the floor.

He hoisted his breeches, pulled his shirt into them and fastened a few buttons on the plaque. He opened the door, wavered through it and closed it with a loud bang.

He was out of there! He had done his duty, alright, and to hell with his father and the rest!

**



Chapter 2: A MESSAGE FOR RANDOLPH AND JOHN

London, 1807

John looked with some alarm down on the letter, which was written by his father.

None of the ducal crests or seals that were so distinctive of his father's ducal commands was waxed on it. Instead, it bore his mother's small seal, which his father had years ago created for her personal use.

It was the second year after his father's demise and true to form Randolph had handed the letter to John with a secretive smile.

"He wanted you to read it two years after his death, so here it is. I read it myself after Lyons-Crowns handed it over to me, before the will was to be read. Father wanted to be certain that there would be hardly any emotions involved when we read this, but I

could not, for the sake of the duchy, keep this closed for two whole years."

Randolph stirred his coffee noisily. John watched his brother closely while he was chewing his bread and eggs.

Randolph had turned out a lot better of a duke than anybody had expected after their father had succumbed to a lingering heart condition. Randolph wore the ducal strawberry leaves quite well on his unfortunately balding person.

"Did you send her away?" he asked lightly, not wishing to refer to a letter he had not even read.

Randolph shook his head regretfully.

"She fell in love with Arthur Wellesley, she claims. I was getting bored with her anyway. She was quite jealous of Whit... of someone else. Why are you up and about so early?"

Randolph looked carefully around the sumptuous breakfast room. Of course, his

staff knew about all his vices, but his occasional lusty trysts with his former head-footman did not need to be bandied about by curious staff members.

"I'm needed at the House today," John said distractedly. "We'll discuss if your friend Wellesley is right about a war on the Spanish-Portuguese Peninsula. He calls it Napoleon's backdoor. Parliament won't be happy about paying for another war but we think it cannot be avoided if we want to keep the Corporal from conquering the world. It's bad enough as it is. That man just won't stop winning all those battles."

Randolph gave his brother a pensive nod. It still felt strange that John was such a rake in one way and that he took his duties at the House so seriously in another.

"Prinny won't like it. He'd rather have Parliament spend all that money on him, so I guess the Lords will give in to the demand

of a war somewhere on the Continent, just to annoy him."

John rose from his chair.

"I have to be off. I have to see to some things that seem to be enormously urgent."

He looked at his ducal brother with genuine curiosity.

"Was she any good, that new chick?" he inquired offhandedly.

"You've been talking to Whitby, haven't you?"

John noticed that his brother sounded amused, more than annoyed.

"Was she?"

"Are you in need of a new mistress?" Randolph grinned.

John shrugged without comment.

"Getting bored, with them, are you? Why don't you send for little Lizzie? She's twenty now and my informants told me she's quite a dish!"

John walked abruptly to the door.

"I'll read this in the library!" he growled pointing at the letter.

Randolph stared at his brother's rigid back as John stamped from the room.

"As I am restricted by an oath regarding certain things, I am writing this down for your and John's eyes only and it is only to be read by you after my demise. To avoid excessive emotions regarding those matters I have requested you read this two years after the day of my parting from this world."

John closed his eyes, leaning back into the big-winged chair.

His father had been gone for two years, but he still missed him sorely. He had died quietly, albeit painfully, sitting in his chair in his study. A heart condition, the doctors told him.

He had never told his sons he suffered from one. It seemed that Audrey Agnew, the Countess of Loghaire, his father's secret lover in the last years of his life, had been the only one to know about the Duke's frail health.

John had loved his father and he was certain that Randolph had, offhandedly, adored him as well.

His father had been his hero, his war-hero. Before he took up the ducal strawberry-leaves he had been the Colonel in his own regiment that had merged later, after the Duke felt too old to hold a sword in his hands, with the famous 'Black Watch', the 42nd Scottish Regiment that used to be a Highlander regiment.

When Jonathan Montgomery became a duke, he was the one with the most influence and the old king's ear.

It had been a coup that he had married Elisabeth Grey, the Duchess of Lindley,

after old Lindley cocked up his toes. Their children Richard and Sophia, John and Randolph's half-brother and -sister, had been moved under Montgomery's care and they had been secured under his influence.

Now Richard Grey, Duke of Lindley, was the one wielding the greater power in the Realm. Randolph did not even come close to being number six, but Randolph had never been overly ambitious about the position and had no wish at all to fight the Royal Dukes for it.

"I regret that John was promised to marry Lizzie Campbell of Ayre at the early age of twelve. It was a promise I made to your dear mother on the day she departed this world for another one.

I am still under oath to be silent about the circumstances that eventually brought this marriage about."

John stared at the words his father had so punctually written.

They represented for him a world full of hatred for a girl he had never wanted to marry. He had left her in Edinburgh after the nuptials, making a mockery of the consummation by raping her against the wall of her bedroom and denying her his seed in the end.

She had been wide-eyed with shock and only sixteen.

Sometimes those eyes haunted him in his fitful dreams, but he refused to feel remorse about his terrible behavior towards the almost unknown woman, who since two years shared his title as Marchioness of Lorna and Kintyre.

"I do think I owe you an explanation for this marriage that raised so many questions in the World of the Quality.

I hope that your dearest mother will understand my wish for the release from her oath to her, when I am long in my grave.

Your grandfather from your mother's side, Bentham Belding, had sired a son on a Scottish girl of the gentry when he was in Glasgow, supplying my Rothford regiment with extra men from his own.

This child was adopted by the Campbell's of Ayre. Your mother, my wife Elisabeth, wished to raise the child, Barnaby (Barry) Campbell, to the status that she supposed due to him. Therefore, she requested the betrothal between Lizzie Campbell (Barnaby's daughter) and John. I raised Squire Barnaby Campbell to the Barony of Ayre. If Barnaby would die without male issue, Ayre was to revert to John."

John closed his eyes again. He remembered the long ago quarrel between his mother and his father on the day he had

been waiting for permission to be admitted into his mother's apartments.

A 'tit for tat' she had called it.

He wondered if his father would specify his 'tit for tat' at last.

"The reason for my giving in to those demands, which did not seem very fair towards John, was that I had wronged your mother by having an affair with a girl who lived in Bannockburn. Out of this affair two children were born. The younger child died when only a few days old, after having cost the girl her life when she birthed her daughter.

The boy still lives on the day I write you this missive. I am under oath still not to reveal his name to you, although, according to my best friend Lady Audrey Agnew, Countess of Loghaire, he wears my face like nobody else. I did try to keep him under my protection and as a token of my marking

and my respect I gave him my sabre, the Klingenthal, which my good father the Duke of Rothford presented me with when I headed the Rothford regiment as a Colonel.

I am not at liberty to reveal to you more about this son, your half-brother.

I removed the ducal crest from the pommel of the Klingenthal, exchanging it for the sapphire that resembled the colour of his mother's eyes.

It is my wish, though, that this man will one day be elevated into the peerage, just as I elevated Barnaby Belding, later Campbell, to a barony.

I have been advised on this matter by Lady Loghaire, who pointed out to me the Barony of Halkhead that is 'floating' due to the demise of John Ross, Baron Halkhead, who left no male issue. I must leave the matter further into your capable hands to execute this request of mine, advising you to wait till the war with Napoleon is over.

I deeply regret having put filial duty before filial happiness and if John wishes it, I grant him the permission to a divorce before the Scottish courts, although I cannot but point out to him that a divorce will bring Lizzie undeserved ruin, which will be contrary to your mother's initial wishes.

Written on the 8th of March 1805, under the witnessing eyes of Lady Audrey Agnew, Countess of Loghaire.

Your loving father, Jonathan Montgomery, Duke of Rothford etc."

John dropped the letter into his lap and hid his face in his hands.

His name had been Lochiel; Lochiel Cameron.

He had seen him the very first time in the company of the most beautiful woman on earth. Lochiel had been five years old then.

John had only realized that his father had bedded the woman after he had heard his parents quarrel about her on that fateful day, when his mother died. She had wrangled the promise of the betrothal of Lizzie Campbell to her second son from an ashamed and blackmailed duke.

He understood his father's request to make Lochiel a baron after the war with Napoleon was finished; Lochiel was a warrior, an officer, and when the decision would be made in Parliament, he probably had to go to war like everybody else. His father wanted prudently to prevent Halkhead from being given to somebody who would only have the benefit of it up until the day he met with his death on a battlefield, which could be short.

Father had always been a practical man.

He felt relief that his father had been prepared to face the consequences of a divorce within the House of Rothford, but

John already knew he would never divorce Lizzie Campbell. The shame of a divorce would reflect badly on his ancestral House and his own reputation.

He did not need a wife, so he would leave her be, up there in Scotland. Randolph had not yet married, but he would do so within the coming years and then the question of siring heirs for John would become moot soon enough.

He heaved a deep sigh, feeling enormous regrets for his brave father, who had found his match and his superior in a calculating, shrewish woman. At least the burden, which had been with him in his grave, could now be shared with his two sons, although he did not have a clue as to how and when he could help his father in his very final wishes. Lochiel Cameron was the man with the Klingenthal he and Randolph had both once coveted. John smiled grimly. Neither Randolph nor he needed the Klingenthal but

for the very few ceremonial duties they attended. His father had been right to give it to a warrior just like he had been himself, years ago.

John rose and walked back to the breakfast room.

Randolph was still leisurely reading the newspapers. He looked up at him with curious expectation.

"Do you know who owns the Klingenthal, right now?" John asked him without any introduction.

Randolph nodded. "That information was easy enough to come by; Father detailed everything in his ledgers and with the Klingenthal it was not different."

"Do you know him?"

Randolph looked down at his coffee and then he blinked at John.

"A very handsome guy, that Cameron! He lives in Edinburgh. Why? We're not going to do anything about Halkhead right now.

The war with Napoleon is only beginning, if I got your drift."

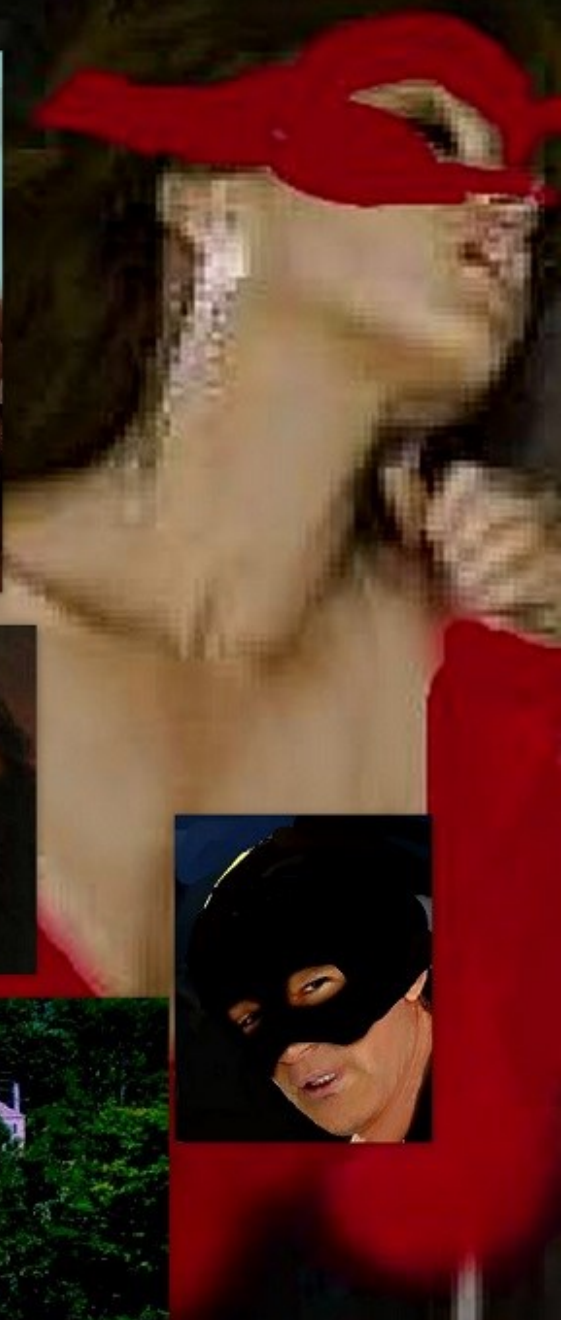
John stared at his brother. "We're not going to do anything about the fact that we have a half-brother?"

Randolph shook his head and shrugged at the same time. "There's nothing we can do, John! We'll see how it all works out and I'll take the proper measures when the war is over."

"You're probably right," John admitted reluctantly. "Got to go, give my regards to Harry." Randolph grinned. "I told you she's after Wellesley now, but he's never going to give her a carte. He prefers to spend his money on his soldiers instead of on his whores. The girl's more stupid than I thought. Women, bah!"

"Can't agree with you more!" John mumbled, walking out of the ducal breakfast room.

**



Chapter 3: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MASQUE

*

London, 1811

Lizzie Montgomery, Marchioness of Lorna and Kintyre shivered.

She was standing outside the big Morrison mansion and wondered for about the twentieth time if she was doing the right thing.

Under her silk cape, she wore a Spanish dancer's dress that consisted of layers and layers of black and red lace. The cleavage was daringly low. With her long black wavy hair falling practically unbound to her waist, she looked the epitome of a seductive Spanish dancer.

A footman came out of the house to lead her up the great marble stairs, while the black town coach of the Hamiltons rumbled away. She felt a surge of panic. Oh God,

had she really allowed Snow to lead her into this very uncertain adventure?

His very distinct frame suddenly showed in the open doorway.

She hastened to tie her black and red mask around her face.

He had seen her arrive, then. She signaled to the footman to make himself scarce and stood stock still on the red carpet, waiting for the man in the doorway to come and get her.

He held out both arms when he came to stand in front of her and lifted her high, kissing her on the mouth.

She struggled to free herself and he laughed with genuine amusement.

"You look ravishing!" he exulted, "Don't fight me, love, this party is of a very particular sort. Kissing in public is obligatory tonight!"

She blushed at his words and felt the urge to run after the Hamilton's carriage, jump in

and go home where life would be safe and harmonious. And dull, she mused; terribly dull.

Susan had arranged it all for her. She was to meet an aristocratic escort, who would take her to one of the notorious parties at the Morrison Place. His nickname was Snow, and she had met him only once before, when they both were wearing a mask, as they did now.

When she had remarked that he looked quite familiar he had smiled at her. He had shrugged and nodded, saying that nothing in the Ton could be kept a secret entirely, but that for all parties concerned, it was better that they meet thus, keeping things uncertain for both their sakes.

He took her arm and they rapidly ascended the stairs.

"Act as if you have done this all your life," he whispered in her ear.

Upstairs there was nobody to announce them.

Most visitors turned out to be masked but some were a lot more recognizable, than others. Lizzie instantly saw the Prince Regent standing in the middle of the ballroom. Even with his mask, he was hard to overlook with his huge fat body. He had not bothered to put on a costume for the masquerade, neither the man standing beside him.

Lizzie let out a startled breath.

Snow immediately bent to her ear as if to kiss it, urgently whispering: "That's Randolph Rothford, alright. Be careful. We don't want him to notice you here! He might spoil it all by calling out your name."

He steered her away from the two prominent people, pushing her down on one of the many love seats. He motioned to a footman to bring them two glasses of champagne.

She breathed slowly through her nose; that was Randolph Rothford, not John! She wondered if Randolph had recognized her, but if he did he would probably not show a thing; it had been his idea more or less that she went after John.

"The mountain and Mohammed," he had said, looking her over with those light eyes of his.

As John did not deign to show himself at the respectable 'Ton' parties, there was nothing but to look for him at the less-than-respectable ones.

Snow put his arm around her shoulders, pushing his nose into the angle of her neck to kiss her with a smacking noise.

She had to force herself to act as if she had never done anything else in her life, but to let a rake cuddle her in public brought a deep blush to her cheeks.

She looked around her, panic rising. She had done some daring things in the past, but

she had never been to an orgy, at least, Snow had told her that the feast would probably turn into one.

Nick Morrison had built a house a few miles out of London just to indulge in such daring parties. He was as rich as Croesus, but a known perverted baron, who could not be bothered with formal Ton events anymore. He'd had his share of 'cuts direct' in his life and had announced that Polite Society was not his cup of tea and could go and drown itself for all he cared.

Snow caught her mood and wrapped her reassuringly in his arms.

"Don't fret," he whispered, kissing her softly on the cheek, "it's the only way to get through to him. He hardly visits any official parties anymore since your father-in-law died."

Lizzie reflected that was rather strange, as John seemed to take his position as Marques quite seriously nowadays. He had

even taken possession of his seat in the House of Lords and did more than use it as a chair to sleep in. On the other hand; he was long married and did not need to find himself a bride amongst the young debutantes, so he did not need to show his face anywhere just to make a good impression on anybody.

She wondered about the wisdom of this night's whole venture again and then resignedly leaned back into Snow's embrace.

He reminded her of Lochiel Cameron; her long-time lover who had been obliged to leave her to play the soldier in the Peninsula. She surmised that somebody had spied on them in Edinburgh and had told on them. Lochiel had gotten a major's rank, had settled his affairs, had put their children, their illegitimate children, entirely into Mattie Burns' care and had left with the early tide.

She forcibly pushed all thoughts of Lochiel aside. Susan Hamilton-Downs had talked her into trying to get her husband back and that was the motto for tonight. Randolph Montgomery, her brother-in-law and more importantly the recent Duke of Rothford, had ordered her to stop hiding herself in Edinburgh and to come to London. He insisted she do her utmost to give the dukedom an heir at last, as his own recent wife Caro was not showing any sign of pregnancy. Randolph had seemed to become quite nervous suddenly about the fact that neither he nor John had sired any children on the right side of the blanket to date. It did not help that his recently acquired wife Caro was approaching the advanced age of forty-four.

Lizzie wondered if she would recognize her errant husband.

He had been twenty-four when she had last seen him, furiously and drunkenly

fastening his wedding breeches after raping her on a chest of drawers against the wall of her bedroom. Now he was thirty.

The music started to play a waltz. Snow rose, grabbed her wrist, murmuring that she would be better visible on the dance-floor.

The dancing was obviously more a means to touch each other than a social function, she reflected after a few minutes. It seemed to her that all the paired dancers were moving far too close, holding each other happily in indecent places.

At least Snow led her expertly around the floor not indulging, like everybody else, in occasional grabs at her silk dressed bottom or thumbing her cleavage.

At the end of the set, he only kissed her hand lingeringly.

She was not a cold woman and the distinct atmosphere of sexuality started to get her in its grasp. Roses formed on her cheeks when

Snow's fingers trailed the space of her uncovered upper arms.

It had been some time since a man had touched her. Lochiel had followed his beloved Highland Regiment into the South-European Peninsula, leaving her desolate and lonely, first in Edinburgh, then soon in London, after her brother-in-law had summoned her to the ducal townhouse in Arlington Street.

Lizzie knew she craved love and affection. It had been initially the sole reason why she had succumbed to her adulterous affair with the handsome Lochiel Cameron, as none would be forthcoming from her errant cad of a husband Lord John.

Once separated, they had decided not to write to each other, although once in a while she had written to Mattie in Edinburgh adding some words for Lochiel. It seemed however, that Lochiel had decided to cut the fine bonds with her

entirely; there was never a note or news from him. He knew about the Duke's summons and had obviously decided that it would be best if they let the past lie in the past and get on with their separate lives.

She had come to London without anybody knowing her or truly acknowledging her.

Her marriage to Lord John Montgomery, now Marques of Lorna and Kintyre, had been almost seven years ago and if anybody remembered it, people were probably too embarrassed for her to mention it; she had been treated as if she had been plague-ridden in London.

At least, when Randolph was entertaining, together with his homily new wife, Lizzie was always invited and thus she started to know people of the Ton; at the Duke of Rothford's table it was inconceivable for the guests to 'cut' her, so she slowly started to build up her very own small circle of friends and acquaintances.

Her first push into Polite Society came as a result of her friendship with Lady Susan Hamilton-Downs.

Susan was a cousin to Rothford's wife and the sister-in-law of George, the Duke of Hamilton. She was very recently pregnant. It turned out that Hamilton-Downs showed as much interest in Susan as Lord John had shown for Lizzie. That Susan was pregnant with his second child was because Hamilton-Downs took his obligations about getting an heir and a spare seriously, but Susan disavowed Lizzie of the notion that they might have even a semblance of a marriage. She explained that her husband would jot a note telling her when he would visit her bedroom. Unfailingly he would enter her darkened bedroom, lift the sheets, stick his thing inside of her and then would quietly steal away from her bedroom after he was 'done'.

After a few years of such dealings Susan had stopped wondering about her husband's rather strange behavior. She never saw him in the house as they kept different hours and their house in London was huge. Susan could not remember the times when they had breakfast together. Her dinners were a lonely affair with a tray in her apartment, unless they had to entertain or go somewhere together. He never spoke a word to her during such dinners, only the obligatory ones.

Susan was, however, a very strong woman in constitution and character. At an average build, with a nondescript hair colour, a fine face with eyes that were a deep grey and always amused, she was what people would call 'handsome, but not pretty'.

She was very eager for the baby she carried to be born because she intended to indulge in an affair with a dashing member of the 'Ton' as soon as she had done her

part of the marriage contract; taking care of the heir and possibly the spare of the line of Hamilton-Downs. She knew from rumors that her husband hoped that the new future Duke of Hamilton would spring from his loins, as his brother George had not yet found himself a new suitable wife after the demise of his first one.

George Hamilton nurtured the same notions as his younger forty-one year old brother; that although wives might have some uses, they were not a very strict necessity in their lives.

In order to avoid meeting her husband at his brother's house, Lizzie gladly took up Susan's invitation to stay at the Hamilton's London residence whenever she felt like it and whenever she could find the right excuse not to stay with the Rothfords.

After Lizzie experienced a few nasty encounters and quite irregular snubs in London's Polite Society, Susan had made

up her mind: Lizzie had to reunite with her husband in some way or another, then at least then she could start to live the Ton life in London to the full, without the undeserved cuts or indignities she was exposed to right now. She *was* the Marchioness of Lorna and Kintyre, for heaven's sake!

Lizzie felt unsettled with this notion. Her husband had shown no interest in her whatsoever since she arrived in London. He had meticulously avoided the few social functions to which she was invited.

After all those years of abandonment, she had learned to become indifferent about him, as one becomes indifferent about a family member who was not known and who had immigrated to the Americas. She had told Susan she really could not be bothered, but her friend had been adamant and had energetically started her investigations into John's life in order to

bring about the happy reunion of the long estranged couple.

It was soon apparent that Susan had been slightly optimistic about the matter. John was still a first class bounder and rakehell, and a Whig to boot. He had taken up with the courtesans of Harriet Wilson's clique for years and had many a mistress next to it. As he barely bothered to go to any of the respected social functions in order to avoid walking into his unknown, and unwanted, wife, he resorted to frequenting the less opulent but mostly thoroughly indecent parties of which the more steadfast Ton members knew everything, but hastily assured everyone that they had never attended.

Susan had decided, regretfully but firmly, that Lizzie should go to such parties as well, in order to seduce her husband into some kind of affection towards her. She stated that Lizzie was a most sensuous beauty,

whom Lord John would never be able to resist, the moment he set eyes upon her.

Lizzie had allowed herself to be convinced of that notion. She had thought Susan's idea quite a lark; to steal upon her unwilling husband, 'to make him fall madly in love with her' or whatever would turn out to be a more realistic possibility.

Susan had convinced the mysterious Snow to become Lizzie's handsome escort, for a sum of money of course, suggesting that if the whole scheme failed, she could at least indulge in a love affair with the good looking and well-built Snow.

Neither Susan nor Lizzie knew this 'Snow's real identity. Susan had heard about him, but professed she had never encountered him. He was one of the few men in the Ton who was known to 'help out' people for outrageous amounts of money in affairs of the heart or with slightly

criminal situations that needed expert handling.

Snow had only agreed to Susan's written plea when it was certain that he could wear a mask. He was obviously a man who treasured his anonymity.

Susan had heard whispers about this Snow. The most insistent ones were that he was a high Peer of the Realm, who added to his income with the things he did under this secret identity.

Now, Lizzie was holding hands with him in the middle of the ballroom of the raciest Peer of the Realm. Snow even caught her by the waist, almost hiding his nose in her deep cleavage.

Lizzie mused that if her illustrious husband did not show up at the party, she would not hesitate to take Susan up on her offer and try a little taste of the man who was so boldly holding her; she had been deprived of 'love' for far too long.

It was not to be; when Snow nuzzled her neckline, he muttered under his breath that their victim had just arrived.

Lizzie had forgotten how tall and handsome her errant husband was. More than six years had been a long time.

She gasped when she peered at his face, rugged with thick eyebrows over startling brown eyes. His nose was straight but slightly snubbed, which did nothing to diminish the sheer sensuality of his mouth, with the curved lips. He was dressed entirely in black and wore black Hessians instead of dancing shoes. He had not bothered to put on a mask.

She swayed against Snow, feeling faint and dizzy at the same time.

Snow, who immediately sensed her discomfort, grabbed her by the waist and turned her away, out of John Lorna's sight.

He muttered something under his breath but Lizzie was too dazed to catch it.

"Here!" Snow pointed to an area that was screened off by huge pots of palm trees. "Let's retire to recuperate."

He pushed her gently into a love seat and sat down close to her.

"Are you alright?" he asked her with a concerned voice.

Lizzie thought she heard a note of tenderness and wondered if she would just let her husband be and go on with Snow.

She nodded and then shook her head. She opened her mouth to take in a deep breath. She felt as if there was a stone lying on her chest.

"That bad?" Snow smiled.

She sighed deeply and tried to award him a faint smile.

"I did not... I was not..." she stammered.

Snow kissed her trembling lips.

"There!" he said again, moving closer towards her. "You've got a friend, you know. You can tell me."

Her hands went to her face.

"I have not seen him for almost seven years," she whispered, "but when he was standing there it felt like yesterday."

Snow gazed intently at her.

"That bad, huh?" he repeated, shaking his head, "So you were in love with him?"

"Madly," she confessed with a deep blush, "the moon and sun rose with him, you know. I was just a sixteen year old chit with a head full of fluffy clouds."

She did not dare to tell him that despite her so-called love for John Montgomery, she had cheated him out of his husbandly rights to breach her. She had seduced a young lieutenant, out of spite for the indifferent groom-to-be, who had only come twice to Ayre to make a mocking of his courting her.

He had not even bothered to escort her from her ancestral home to Edinburgh, where they were to marry.

Snow shook his head.

"That won't do. Not with this scheme we invented. He did not come alone, either."

He took her hands in his, stroking the red silk of her gloves.

"That woman he has with him is the worst opportunist in London. If I know her well, she'll be glued to him all night."

He did not add that she was also the most wanted fuck of the Ton. If Ariel Broadhurst-Blackwood was after John, and there was no doubt about that, then there would be no room to maneuver Lizzie into the scene.

"Let's go home," she proposed suddenly, "it was all a bad idea anyway. I have to rethink everything, now that I have seen him again."

Snow nodded sympathetically, rose and helped her out of the low couch.

"I'll get your carriage," he announced.

"I thought it was you!" a low baritone rumbled behind them.

Lord John Lorna looked at Snow with his head cocked. He reached out to shake hands with him.

"Business or pleasure tonight?" he asked in Snow's direction, looking appreciatively at Lizzie.

"Oh, ah, is it you Lorna?" Snow asked with obvious distress.

John nodded knowingly.

"Pleasure then, you rascal! Introduce me to this beautiful lady, will you?"

"Eh... Eleanor..." Snow stammered, for once at a loss for words.

Lizzie bobbed a curtsy before taking Snow's arm.

"We were on our way out," Snow explained apologetically.

Lorna frowned.

"So soon? They did not even start to..."

"John! You cannot leave me alone if I do not know... Snow? Long time since I've seen you at Morrison's!"

Lizzie sighed resignedly.

A very beautiful woman with jet-black hair had taken John Lorna by the arm, at the same time leaning over to Snow to kiss him on the mouth. She wore a black clinging dress and obviously, scandalously, nothing else.

Lizzie just about avoided gaping at the stunning woman.

She stepped backwards, ready to retract herself from the scene, but John reacted amazingly quickly.

He grabbed her by the wrist with some force.

"You're not really thinking of leaving, are you?"

His piercing look shifted from her face to her black and red-laced bodice with the

indecently low cleavage. The woman Ariel looked frostily at them, but said nothing.

Snow turned to Lizzie.

"We were not that much in a hurry were we, love?" he asked her, with meaning in his voice.

Lizzie shook her head after some hesitation. She had not uttered a word yet in John's hearing, afraid that he would recognize her voice.

She pressed her lips together, scolding herself. He had hardly heard her voice in the past years! She had only squealed at him when he had mistreated her on their moment of 'consummation'. How could he ever remember what she sounded like?

"I am hungry!" Lorna declared suddenly. "Let's head down to the buffet."

He grasped Lizzie's hand, hooking her arm around his.

He leaned into her, pressing the right side of his body suggestively into her hip and

legs while he brushed a breast with his elbow.

Lizzie looked at his arm in confusion and tried to retract hers, but John was definitely not going to let go.

Snow and Ariel followed them silently.

After the buffet, Lizzie flung herself into the ladies' powder room. She stood there for some time holding her flushed cheeks with both hands.

Now what?

She breathed in deeply. John had been all over her during supper.

Lizzie had caught annoyed looks from Ariel Blackwood and amused grins from Snow when John had fed her tidbits from his plate, announcing to everyone and sundry that she was his new favorite, obviously removing Ariel Blackwood from her wrongly assumed place next to him.

Now what?

She sat down on a chair in front of the mirror.

A fleeting glance assured her that her hair and mask were still in place. She put her elbows on the table leaning her head on her cupped hands.

Did she still want him? The question shocked her into awareness.

When he had been all over her, something had repeated itself in her mind, something very disquieting. She started to think; “You left me alone, you bastard, for all those years, and now you pretend I’m the answer to all your daily prayers!”

To her own annoyance and amazement she found herself wishing that he had been speaking the truth; that she was his new favorite woman instead!

She shook out of her reverie when the door opened.

John entered slowly. He locked the door carefully.

"There you are, my dove," he drawled lazily, "straight into my cozy dovecote!"

He fingered his stock, untying it with one gesture. He then threw his black coat on the floor.

She sat frozen in her chair. Thinking about him and having him here in front of her in the flesh were quite different notions!

Do I want this, she wondered. Do I truly want this?

He took a few careful steps in her direction, sensing her hesitation.

He cradled his crotch with one hand. Even with him wearing black breeches, she noticed his arousal. It was huge, just as she remembered it from that wedding day.

She started suddenly. He had hurt her with that thing. She watched him with wide startled eyes.

"Come here, my beauty," he whispered, "I've a mind to have you here and now!"

He grasped her around her shoulders dragging her up out of the chair. His hand went to her mask, but she shook her head fiercely.

"No, leave it!"

"Oh, well," he murmured, leaning heavily into her, "give us a kiss, my love, you must have the most beautiful lips in the world!"

He smelled of brandy and champagne. Lizzie knew he had been drinking steadily all evening.

Kiss him? He had never kissed her before in her life!

When he bent to take her half-opened lips in his mouth, it all came back to her; that scent of his, that maddening, intoxicating waft of maleness and Lord John.

Damnation, but she could not help reacting to him!

She did not struggle when he drew his tongue deep into her trembling mouth. She did not object when his hand reached for

the hem of her Spanish dress, lifting the skirt slowly and tantalizingly.

He suddenly bent to pick her up, putting her on the dressing table, her bare buttocks on the warm gleaming wood and her dress almost up to her ears.

Lizzie felt panic rising. It was a damn déjà vu! He had done exactly that on that long ago day of their wedding!

A hand drifted to the apex of her thighs, expertly touching the folds of her warm cleft. He kissed her again, deeply. She had not put on her pantalets tonight. She wondered if it had been some sort of wishful-thinking or foresight.

He groaned, smiling against her lips.

"I've been wondering about your little cunny all evening. It's as juicy and fleshy as I imagined!"

He pushed a finger into her intimate depth and hummed again.

"You want me, don't you, my beauty? God, you're wet!"

I am, she thought in mortifying shame, I bloody want him to put that big dick into me, and not because he is John Lorna, my damned legitimate husband, but because I am hot for *any* cock now, even his!

She moaned. I am a harlot, she thought scathingly. I could not care less if it was Snow's, John's or Lochiel's.

He let go of her lips and put both his hands on her thighs, pushing them apart.

"And now for tonight's main course," he whispered, kneeling in front of the dresser, pushing his head between her legs.

He tantalizingly let out his hot breath over the little nubbin crowning her cleft. Lizzie did not know if she actually screamed with pleasure or if she just imagined it. She clasped his head with both hands.

He stuck out his tongue and started to lap her folds.

"Oh yes," she panted, "oh yes, do it, do it to me..."

She felt him withdraw his hands from her knees. She registered that he opened his breeches while his tongue was still probing and caressing.

"You like that, don't you?" she said huskily, wriggling towards his moving tongue, suddenly realizing he was licking her more for his own pleasure than hers. The movement of his shoulders and his arms showed her that he was masturbating while he was feasting on her intimate parts.

"No, no!" she cried out, "I want you inside of me, I want... Oooh..."

She moved her belly spasmodically when her orgasm came, very aware now that she was screaming.

Lorna rose, supporting his cock with his hands as he steered right into the direction of her cramping sheath. When he pushed

his hard shaft into her, he bent to close his mouth over hers.

"Sh, my beauty," he urged her, "you'll bring the house down!"

He moved slowly inside her, almost thoughtfully.

"Ah, yes," he groaned, "suck it slowly, beauty, ah, yes, now, yes, yes!"

He ejaculated inside her and she felt the force of it, his body shuddering and shaking intensely.

Her only answer to that was to have another raging orgasm.

She was positively a harlot; she thought when the Hamilton's carriage sped back towards London.

Even if she had mated with her own husband, she imagined herself the worst wanton woman. She had enjoyed the act immensely. Enjoyed! It had had nothing to

do with him being her husband. She realized he could have been anyone.

She shook her head.

Now what?

As soon as he had retracted from her, she had jumped from the dresser, and ran to the door, unlocking it with all the speed she could muster.

She had run down the stairs, grasping her wrinkled skirts so that she would not fall, and had shouted at the footmen in the hallway to bring her carriage around.

Morrison's valets had been well trained. They did not move a muscle as she stood impatiently on the red carpet in front of the house. Her carriage had appeared in no time in front of the steps, together with her cape.

She had repressed a wry smile. They must be used to disheveled Cinderellas flying out of the house while the festivities were still going on.

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