



**SPECIAL COLLAGES EDITION**  
**CONSTANCE J. HAMPTON**



**HOMECOMING**

CONSTANCE J. HAMPTON

HOME COMING

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# 1: PROLOGUE – THE WOMAN FROM THE PAST

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Doctor Halden threw a worried look in the direction of Devon Broadhurst, who was now lying in the same bed as his friend Christian Andover, Viscount Brondemeire, in a room at the Duke of Lindley's Brussels residence.

He wondered about the Viscount. How could anyone incur so many wounds in one battle? The Viscount must have carried on fighting till he was taken down by the very last enemy; there was no other explanation for it! At least the man had not needed an amputation, like the unlucky Lord Broadhurst, who had just begun to moan.

It was sheer good luck that the surgeon who had treated Devon Broadhurst close to the battlefield had the good sense to cauterize the stump. Infection didn't seem to

have set in yet, although Lord Broadhurst was definitely feverish.

The Duke had accompanied the physician to the room and he looked with wonder at the Earl of Allington's third son.

“Do you hear it?” he urged. “He is saying it again: a woman's name. Cornelia? It sounds like ‘Cornelia’, doesn't it?”

Bertha hefted the candlestick high, so that the soft light shone on Devon's face.

“He has been seeing Cornelia Marlowe,” the Duke continued. “Maybe we should warn her? It seems she arrived in Brussels on the sixteenth.”

“I am not certain,” Bertha said hesitantly. “It sounds more like Cordelia. Is that possible? Cordelia with a d. Like the woman in King Lear. The girl who loved her father as much as she loved salt? Halden took a step back from the bed in sudden shock. Richard stared at Bertha with surprise, but realised then that governesses

were supposed to have read Shakespeare's complete works.

"No, no!" He shook his head almost vehemently. "I know for a fact that he was seeing Cornelia Marlowe-Grange in London. They were whispered to be preparing for marriage."

And what a preparation that had been, he remembered grimly, thinking of all the reports on Devon's adventurous and amorous ways, which had not been restricted to the widow Marlowe.

"I know of only one *Cordelia*," Doctor Halden murmured carefully. "She was my very best nurse in the Peninsula. Cordelia Williams, née Sutherland. Her husband perished during the battle of Toulouse. She birthed his child this January. I cannot imagine Lord Broadhurst knew her intimately. No, I think your Cornelia Marlowe-Grange fits the picture best, Your Grace."



Richard grimaced. He definitely remembered Devon distractedly asking ‘Which widow?’ after Richard had suggested ‘a very charming widow’ in a conversation about Devon’s future. Maybe this Cordelia Williams fit the picture better after all? He knew now for a fact that the rich widow Cornelia Marlowe-Grange had not seemed at all interested in visiting her poor wounded lover since her arrival in Brussels.

“Was your Cordelia worth looking at?” he inquired.

Doctor Halden raised his brows. What a strange conversation this was turning out to be!

“She was not beautiful in the normal sense of the word,” he answered honestly, “I heard the men refer to her as ‘horsey’, which, I assume, is not a big compliment. But she was a wonderful and caring nurse. Her relationship with her husband was not

very good. He was years older than her and could always be found near the blanket-girls, if you know what I mean.”

He threw a swift look at Miss Dunn, who did not move a facial muscle at hearing the word ‘blanket-girls’. Well, maybe an innocent lady like the distinctly lovely Miss Dunn did not know the meaning of ‘blanket-girls’; another word for camp followers who offered men a place under their blanket and hence their physical services in exchange for money, protection or food.

“Hm,” Richard said pensively, “where does this Mrs. Williams live? In London by any chance?”

The spy-master in him could not let go of such titbits of sudden information.

Doctor Halden shook his head.

“No, I remember she came from Hull. Williams as well. Cordelia’s father owns a shipyard there, has done for about five

years. I remember how proud she was of him acquiring it.”

He threw a longing look at the bed. The always attentive Duke caught it at once.

“You must excuse us, Doctor Halden,” Richard apologized quietly, “you are no doubt exhausted. We had to move you to the fifth floor as I fear three men are occupying your bedroom now, but Poussin assured me the bed there is good. Let’s all find a place to sleep. Tomorrow is a new day. I already asked two men of my household to guard the sick for the night.”

He quickly left the room.

The other widow: Cordelia Williams from Hull, he recited in his head.

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## Chapter 2: BRUSSELS AFTER THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

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Jeffrey woke up when someone emitted a loud snore next to him.

He looked around with confusion, trying to remember where he was. When he felt mounds of flesh pressing against his left arm, he suddenly knew.

“Line!” he cried out, “You’re lying on my arm! Get away from me! And what’s that bloody smell?”

Line de Teisseire opened her eyes and immediately pulled a face of disgust.

“De Dieu!” she scoffed and then remembering that Jeffrey’s French was rather lacking, she continued in halting English: “Geoffrey, your ah... *blessure*! It has... *ouverture*! Opened?”

She hoisted herself out of the bed, calling for the maid, not caring that her great

bulking body was not covered with one shred of clothing.

Jeffrey looked down his naked body.

And remembered.

He had come back to his billet at the Rue du Grand Cerf after he had delivered the wounded and unconscious Colonel Lord Brondemeire to the house of the Duke of Lindley in the Rue Royale. He had been exhausted and had only allowed Line, his landlady, to help him undress before he fell into his bed in an exhausted sleep.

He was dirtier than he had ever been in his life: his hands and face were black from gunpowder, smoke and accumulated dirt. He could smell the rancid odour of his sweat, the clinging smell of horse, gunpowder and blood.

On his right arm something was oozing and he saw at once that the emitting liquid was disgusting yellow-green pus. Damn, he had forgotten all about his wound! After the

battle had been over he had gone searching for Brondemeire, his former girl-next-door's husband. God only knows why he had felt responsible for getting the badly wounded Brondemeire into the hands of a surgeon as fast as possible, but he had. Jeffrey and Brondemeire's wife of one year Anthea Fairfax went back a long way. He had even wanted to marry her until he found out that Anthea's father Cyril Fairfax, Earl of Rotherham, once had a long lasting romantic affair with his own mother Ellen Burroughs, Baroness of Caversham and thus might be his own father as well as Anthea's.

He wanted to sit up, but dizziness overcame him and he slugged back against his dirty pillow. His head was pounding!

Line stood suddenly next to him.

“Votre blessure...” she pointed. “C'est horrible. I need to wash it and ...” She obviously decided that it was better not to

tell Jeffrey what sort of further treatment she had in mind for his wound.

“My husband had a blessure like that when he fell into a... comment dit-on... *pelle*, but we made him better.”

To explain to Jeffrey what ‘*pelle*’ meant she made a shovelling movement: shovel.

Her maid came into the bedroom with two bowls, crinkling her nose at the smell Jeffrey’s wound emanated and looking curiously at Jeffrey’s big naked body while Line took both bowls from her.

“*Va-t’en!*” Line ordered the girl immediately away.

She had quickly put on a wrapper around her naked bulk.

She shouted something after the disappearing girl which Jeffrey did not entirely understand: Feu! That meant fire, didn’t it? The French always shouted that word when they started firing their artillery he suddenly remembered, confused.



Line took hold of his arm and put one bowl underneath it. She dipped a cloth into the other bowl that smelled of hard liquor. Then she took a pincer and wrangled around the wound until she found a bullet and pulled it out with a quick movement.

Jeffrey groaned and almost bit his tongue in pain. He sighed tremulously and stared at Line's hands as they started cleansing out the wound, as if he were a mere spectator. He had seen this sort of treatment many times before in his army life, but it had hardly ever happened to him. Jeffrey always had the reputation of being a 'lucky man' in battle. He had never sustained any big wounds in the past four years of his military career.

Another wound close by on his arm was a deep wedge and he assumed he had been stabbed there with a bayonet that probably slid off his arm. It was that wound that oozed all the stinking pus. He did not have

a clue when he had been stabbed there. The whole battle at Waterloo was only a blur to him. When Line was finished she looked at him with a frown, murmured something and went to the door.

“Nicole! *Tu-l’as?*”

The maid came back with a red hot poker and a burly man. Line silently pointed at Jeffrey’s arm. Jeffrey recognised the burly man as one of the men from Line’s household who did most of the heavy work.

The man grunted something and pulled Jeffrey into some sort of embrace. When Jeffrey started to fight him he just put his big hand around Jeffrey’s windpipe and pushed him back into his pillow.

The moment Line applied the sizzling hot poker to his raw wound, Jeffrey fainted.

“Would you like me to arrange to have you brought to Lindley’s house?” Peter Wallace, Baron Irving-Wallace, asked

Jeffrey. He was sitting on a chair close to Jeffrey's bed.

“Lindley owes you a favour or two so if you want a place under his roof I can help you in a thrice.”

Jeffrey pulled a face. His wound was burning like hell. Line had put on what she called a ‘soothing salve’, if that was the right translation of *‘une lotion douce* , but Jeffrey thought bitterly that the soothing was still to come, if it ever would.

He had a pounding headache and supposed he was feverish.

He looked at the baron, who was also a major. He supposed that the Duke of Lindley's staff had done a credible job on Peter's uniform: it looked clean and pressed. He had none of the soot or grease in his hair that was still part of Jeffrey's battlefield appearance.

Line had taken Jeffrey's uniform away and had promised him a bath. As far as he

knew the water for his wash was now being brought to the boil in Line's big kitchen.

“Doctor Halden is staying with us. There are at least forty wounded officers at the Duke's house and the staff is taking good care of them. Lindley even called in a few of his acquaintances to lend a hand...”

Peter suddenly stopped. One of those acquaintances was none other than the girl Jeffrey had encountered at Madame Majorica's brothel in York, almost two months ago. He had confessed to Peter that he had fallen in love with her and wanted to buy her away from her infamous employer. The girl obviously thought otherwise and fled the brothel and Jeffrey's more than loving arms. When she unexpectedly arrived in Brussels as a governess with Peter's sister-in-law Amelia Aubrey's family, the Duke of Lindley asked Peter to 'court' her so that the major would have

easy access to the house of Lord and Lady Aubrey.

Lord Harmon Aubrey was a suspected spy for Napoleon and Lindley wanted to have him caught red-handed. That was also the reason why Peter had been invited to stay at Lindley's residence during the days of preparation for the battle against Napoleon: his brother-in-law Harmon Aubrey lived in a house only one garden away from the Duke's residence. Peter surmised now that the Duke personally took care of the housing of the Aubreys, in order to be able to keep a close eye on its renters.

Richard Grey, the Duke of Lindley, followed the Allied armies to Brussels and took residence at the Rue Royale as the Prince Regent expected to have dire need of his acumen at diplomacy, once hostilities were past. Not many people knew that Richard Grey was also one of the Prince Regent's master spies who worked

unrelentingly for the safety of the English Crown and Realm.

Peter understood that Lindley was soon to travel to Paris to start peace talks now the Allied forces had won the battle at Waterloo and presumably the war with Napoleon.

Lindley felt obligated to send his wife Attelante off to London on the night of the Duchess of Richmond's ball as it had become clear that Napoleon was rapidly approaching Brussels, after defeating the Prussian army at Ligny near Charleroi. The only reason why Napoleon had not been able to enter the capital to defeat all the English troops had been the Dutch Prince of Orange's success in holding off Napoleon's divided army at Quatre-Bras.

It had been the traitorous Lord Aubrey's doing that no messenger ever arrived in Brussels to inform the Duke of Wellington, the British Field-Marshal, about Napoleon's movements in the North of France or later

on when Napoleon crossed the borders with his army.

Jeffrey shook his head.

“Line is very good for me and I truly don’t fancy staying in a house with forty wounded officers. Just ask Halden to prescribe me something against that bloody pain in my arm and my head.”

Peter nodded, thinking that Jeffrey was being very sensible. His friend was lying in a big bedroom that he did not need to share with three or four other men, as was now the case in Lindley’s residence. He mused that as soon as the young captain was on the mend again Line would no doubt shower him with the bodily affections she was so passionate to give to any man who proved to be to her liking.

He ventured a smile. He had also been at the receiving end of Line’s lush treatments for the duration of one night. He had been happy to accept a night in her bed. At that

time his rival, brother-in-law and enemy Lord Aubrey was still alive.

Peter had loved Amelia Aubrey-St. Just from the very first time he clapped eyes on her. He had been a lowly lieutenant of the Scottish 42nd at the time when he saw her first, and he had since then never managed to remove her from his heart. Amelia was courted by a widowed and very rich Lord Aubrey when Peter met her and he ended up reluctantly marrying Amelia's sister Christina instead.

About everybody knew that he was one of the many bastard sons Andrew Agnew, the Earl of Loghaire, had sired. At least his wife, later on the Countess of Loghaire, had taken care that Peter was adopted into a poor squire's family. She paid them generously for his upkeep, but the family had never wanted to show any gratitude towards him, except maybe his youngest 'sister' Detty.



Fate had it that his three Warleigh brothers died and only one year ago, a few days after his wife Christina committed suicide, he inherited the title of Baron Irving-Wallace, the elevation in the Realm of the Peers that the Countess of Loghaire had managed to bestow on the Warleigh family.

Peter nodded at Jeffrey.

“Sure, I’ll ask Halden to get some medicine for you. Ah, I see you’ll be getting a bath at last. I’ll go now!”

“Did you see her?” Jeffrey asked suddenly.

Peter knew that ‘her’ was no-one else but the girl he himself had courted at Lindley’s request: the governess from the Aubrey household whom Jeffrey claimed to have known when she was supposedly a whore.

“Miss Dunn, you mean?” Peter asked coolly.

Jeffrey had growled that Roberta Dunn had once been his lover, when they were

waiting to leave the Duchess of Richmond's ball. As all officers needed to join their regiments on the double, Peter had to escort Roberta back home through the pouring rain as there was no transport available for her.

Jeffrey had been uncouth and rude. Peter counted him lucky that few people could have heard the remark in the din and confusion of leaving the ball.

“She's gone back to England with Lady Aubrey and the girls. They left this morning.”

Jeffrey sagged back against his pillow. He gazed unseeing at the burly man who was placing a bathtub in a corner of the room.

It was obviously not the time to do anything about Yvette or Roberta, or who the hell she really was. He bit his lip, feeling the agony of longing for her crashing down on him. God, but he was still so terribly in love with the whore! Whore...

She had been ‘new’ at it. The madam in the York brothel had assured him so. He *had* noticed that she was evidently a lady, from the beautiful blond hair on top of her head down to the nails of her little toes, even in the moments of the incredible passion they had shared.

Had she been forced to take him as a client? Was that why she had fled the brothel when he wanted to buy her contract so that he could take her to Caversham as his very own mistress?

And that cook!

Jeffrey got a bit up to lean his head against the headboard, not immediately reacting when Line signalled that his bath was ready.

That brothel’s cook had been very protective of her. She had growled at him that the girl was not going to be anybody’s mistress. She’d only be the mistress of her own household one day. Fancy that!

It was all a moot point, Jeffrey decided. He really could not marry a girl who had been a whore. The clause in Cyril Fairfax's legate had been clear: he could only marry a girl from the gentry who was born outside a range of fifty miles from Rotherham, otherwise he could wave goodbye to 8000 pounds per year. Roberta was probably born in York, so even if she proved to be genteel, which he doubted, she would not be eligible.

He slowly crawled out of his bed towards the steaming bathtub, eyeing his luscious landlady. The promiscuous Line would probably claim her reward soon for housing him and caring for him. The thought made him feel sick. God, what a mess he'd put himself into...!

Devon slowly opened his eyes.

He noticed that somebody was moving restlessly next to him in the bed. The room

was dark. The curtains were closed and it took him a while to figure out that his bed-mate was no one else but his good friend Kit Brondemeire.

‘Blast, did they get you as well?’ he muttered.

Kit moved his legs, but did not open his eyes.

Devon sighed and reached for the table-bell that was placed next to his bed.

Oh, God, but his left leg was burning! And when he tried to pick up the bell something seemed to stress high in his chest and started to hurt.

He managed to ring the bell at last and Poussin, the Duke of Lindley’s butler, came rushing in. ‘My lord, we are glad that you’re awake at last! You worried us all to no end! You have been unconscious for the better part of two days!’

‘Can you get me that glass of water?’ Devon croaked, feeling suddenly thirsty.

The butler bowed and hurried to give him a glass filled with water that had been standing on a side-board, obviously waiting for one of the wounded roommates to wake up.

“I need to...”

“Yes, yes,” the butler nodded hurriedly, reaching for a chamber pot.

Poussin figured he should call in Lord Broadhurst’s valet John Craft, who'd had the sense to leave his master’s rooms at the Prince of Orange’s house in Braine-le-Comte three days ago, before the Battle of Waterloo had started, and travelled to Brussels in a roundabout way, thus avoiding the war-zone.

However, Poussin immediately saw that Lord Broadhurst was in a hurry to relieve himself, so he decided to help Lord Broadhurst with the chore. War times *did* ask for other services than the butler of a Duke was usually required to perform!

Devon put his legs outside of the bed and gasped.

“Why is one leg so short?”

Poussin reddened to the roots of his scarce hair. How was one to tell his lordship that one of his legs had been partly amputated?

“Your leg was... The surgeons saw no other way than to amputate part of your left leg, sir,” he managed to say.

“What?” Devon roared, “They took it off without asking my permission?”

“I’ll... I’ll send in Doctor Halden right away,” Poussin suggested, stealing out of the room after placing the chamber pot next to a flabbergasted Devon.

Doctor Halden looked worriedly at a silent Devon. The man had not uttered another word since the doctor came to his room to explain why there had been no other option for the field-surgeons but to amputate part of Devon’s leg.

When the Duke of Lindley entered the bedroom the good doctor almost sighed with relief. No doubt the Duke knew what to say to the third son of the Earl of Allington, who had been promoted to the rank of Colonel and baby-sitter for the Dutch General William, Prince of Orange.

“How do you feel, Devon?” Richard Grey asked quietly. Doctor Halden did not blink an eye. He knew already that both aristocrats were on first name terms.

“How do you think, Richard?” Devon asked. “They took off a part of my leg!”

Richard nodded at Doctor Halden that it was alright for him to leave and sighed.

“Your leg was taken off because a grenade had damaged it beyond repair. It was already festering within an hour. At least you will live, Devon.”

“Live for what?” Devon asked, “I will be a cripple for the rest of my life! Who will want me now? I don’t want to go back to



that hovel in London and live there in solitude with a valet till the bloody end of my days! I'll have to retire from the army and get half-pay. There is no future in that, Richard, none at all!"

Richard agreed that Devon's prospects were indeed grim. Devon's father, the Earl of Allington, was not at all rich. To say it outright; he was damn poor. He would not be able to support his third son with even the smallest allowance. Richard knew that Devon had been contemplating marrying the wealthy widow Lady Cornelia Marlowe-Grange. Richard had also been informed, however, that this lady left Brussels again on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, only a day after the Battle of Waterloo was fought. She was known to have heard about Devon's wounds but had definitely not even contemplated to visit her unfortunate lover at Richard Lindley's residence. Richard did not doubt that the surgeons had not only cut

off Devon's chances of ever walking properly again, but also his chances of marrying one of the richest women in London.

“Halden knows of a specialist who can make you a contraption that will enable you to walk almost like you did before.”

Devon sniffed. Small consolation that!

Kit, next to him in the bed, started to moan. Richard looked warningly at Devon who had raised his voice a few times.

“He is very ill,” Richard whispered. “Halden is not certain if he will survive his wounds. The worst is his chest wound. He cannot be moved until he is a lot better. He won't see his new-born children for some time yet.”

Devon bent his head. God, what a disaster it would be for Kit's wife Anthea if her husband of only a year were to die on her!

“Thank you for taking me in, Richard,” he said haltingly. “I am sorry to have upset

your staff and Halden with my bickering and shouting. We soldiers know we take a risk when we go to war. Is there anything I can do to help?”

Richard smiled thinly.

“No, just get well! It will take three months for your... uh... leg to heal. Don't go at it too quick. Halden said that if you don't give it enough time the leg will hurt until the end of your days. You can stay in this house as long as you please. I have extended the lease to six months. Ariel Blackwood will be staying here for most of that time. The Flemish hired help will also remain here. I'll need to go to Paris and Poussin will come with me. Now, Poussin will bring you some food and I'll ask your valet to take care of your further needs.”

“Ariel is still here?” Devon asked.

He was known not to be very fond of his younger brother's widow. He knew she led a 'fast' life with a group of people of the

English Quality. His own former fiancée-to-be Cornelia Marlowe had been part of that particular group as well.

Richard shrugged. Ariel Broadhurst-Blackwood had played a suspicious role in alliance with the master-spy Harmon Aubrey, but for old time's sake he had decided to give her a chance to remain in Flanders, as opposed to a shameful execution in England. A young, rich Flemish baron was after her and Richard hoped Ariel would be sensible enough to accept van Klaveren's hand in marriage if the man was so unwise to ask for it. For the wounded officers' sakes and Ariel's he had extended the lease on the house in the Rue Royale. He could hardly throw them out into the streets of Brussels when he left. He had figured out that it would be best if Ariel stayed on the Continent, far away from unwanted questions about her relationship with the traitor Harmon Aubrey, the spy

who had been betraying them all to Napoleons' Intelligence Services.

He bit his lip. It would be best if his young wife of eight months Attelante Fairfax did not get wind of that part of his wishes. Ariel was actually Attelante's cousin although Richard knew for certain that not much love was lost between the two ladies. Ariel was the half-sister of Gilles Blackwood, who was now the new Earl of Rotherham since the death of Attelante's father. It would certainly not improve Richard's relationship with his wife if she were to find out that Ariel had shared a bed with him on more than one occasion before he'd married Attelante. In that respect Attelante had not proven to be a subdued partner.

He looked away from Devon. His thoughts turned to the fact that he had ordered Poussin to call one of the buxom chambermaids to his rooms in his wife's

absence. It was a shameful thing, but he had bedded the girl every night since and a few more times during daylight. Of course the girl did not mean anything to him except some profound swiving, but the whole affair had made him realise that even his new found love for his wife-since-December-last-year had not changed him a bit when it came to his lustful yearnings for women in general. Now he was to go to Paris and he did not even want to contemplate what that would do to his sex life. Paris had always meant one big orgy for him in the past.

“She has caught the interest of some rich baron who is related to the Rothchilds. In my mind she would be best off in the anonymity of a marriage on the Continent, than dragged back to London where her only options would be a firing-squad or a hanging.”

Devon nodded slowly. He had met Jeffrey Burroughs and Peter Wallace on the day of the battle at Quatre-Bras, where the Dutch had managed to mislead Napoleon's confused General Ney and to chase him away from the only possible entrance for Napoleon straight into Brussels. On that day Jeffrey and Peter were just returning from a mission that involved following Harmon Aubrey, who was then expertly killed by Jeffrey during this pursuit. Jeffrey had also told him about Ariel's strange presence in Brussels. No, a firing-squad was not what Devon wanted for his sister-in-law. She had opportunistic streaks that betrayed her mercenary background and he knew for certain that she had been guided by her yearning for money, and not her good common sense, to throw in with the master spy.

Richard turned to the door.

“Try to get more rest, Devon. We don’t want that leg of yours to get worse. We’ll talk later, if you wish.”

Devon obediently lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. He would think of the only woman in his life who had truly been able to find a place in his heart: his Cordelia. Only the memory of her seemed to sooth his pain.

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## Chapter 3: A MARRIAGE AT ITS WORST

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*Rotherham, July 1815*

When Lady Bernadette Blackwood, Countess Rotherham, was brought to bed she was squirming and wriggling with the pain of her contractions.

Detty had been immensely looking forward to the occasion of the birthing of her child. She surmised she looked the size of an elephant in her last weeks of breeding and her much older husband Gilles had not done a thing to hide his disgust of her, or to mock her body.

Detty secretly laughed about her husband's bad manners. As far as she remembered he was always like that: a boorish, mean man, who could only claim his nobility through his poor long-dead mother, a sister to the Earl of Rotherham, who had the bad taste to marry a commoner

for love. Her Blackwood-husband from a merchant family died within a few years of the nuptials, freeing the way for a randy cousin to claim the widowed lady for his bride. By the time the poor lady birthed their daughter Ariel, her second husband was leading a fancy-free life as the lazy lover of a brothel-keeper.

Detty used to think that was exactly where her unknown 'stepfather-in-law' lived - in a brothel - until she found out that he had supposedly been carried to an early grave after succumbing to a very nasty disease or a brawl at a racetrack that ended badly for him.

She had never known her mother-in-law either. The woman had died of small pox only a few years after Ariel's birth, or so everybody liked to claim. Detty soon understood that the pox had not been small at all and was caused by her low-life stepfather-in-law, when he decided that he

wanted a rest from his woman of the profession and came 'home' to reclaim his husbandly rights.

Detty had been brought up in a village called Wattles, close to Glasgow in Scotland. Her father once was a very poor squire who fathered three boys and three daughters, of which she was the youngest.

Yet, despite having so many offspring, Squire Warleigh had responded to the summons of Lady Audrey Agnew, later the Countess of Loghaire, to adopt a bastard son born from her favourite chambermaid and her husband, who was at that time the old Earl of Loghaire's heir. The child had not been unwillingly conceived while Lady Agnew was carrying Andrew Agnew's first child and heir.

The chambermaid Martha Wallace died during Peter's birth. Lady Agnew knew of Squire Warleigh's dire circumstances and

assumed he would not mind taking her money and the baby that came with it.

Once adopted, Peter had been a mocked and sneered-at child within the Warleigh household, notwithstanding the professed religious attitude of the parents and the fact that Lady Agnew's payments for Peter's upkeep were enough to keep the whole family afloat for years.

After Lady Agnew became the Countess of Loghaire, more than eleven years after Peter's adoption, things got slightly better for the Warleigh household and almost twenty-three years later, after Detty had come back from her best friend Lizzie Campbell's marriage to a duke's son in Edinburgh, her father had been suddenly elevated to the title of Baron Irving-Wallace.

The name of the barony might not have been a coincidence if one looked at it closely: Detty's older two brothers had

found an early death when they were hunting stags in the Highlands and fell into a deep crag and her remaining brother was sickly and ailing. Detty often wondered if the kind Countess had foreseen that her third Warleigh brother would not live long enough to inherit the Irving-Wallace barony, although in the end Paul had lived until 1814 reaching the age of thirty-five years. Her father died a month after Paul's early demise, regretfully leaving the title to the unloved adopted son Peter, who'd had the effrontery to call himself Peter Wallace, refusing to use his Warleigh surname, since joining the army as a Scottish ensign at fourteen years old.

Detty had been married to Gilles Blackwood, a gentleman-farmer in Yorkshire, for almost three years when the title of Earl of Rotherham was awarded to her husband. His uncle Cyril Fairfax, Earl of Rotherham, had died without legitimate

male issue. There were only three girls born of his marriage to Annette du Plessis, a woman of the French nobility.

Gilles inherited the title while rumours ran galore about the other children the promiscuous Earl might have fathered on the other side of the blanket. One of them was Bruno Bouchier, physician in Rotherham, and another might be Jeffrey Burroughs, the new Baron Caversham for less than a year.

She gasped when she felt another contraction and looked with some alarm into Doctor Bouchier's worried eyes.

Bruno shook his head.

“The baby won't come for a long time yet,” he assured the Countess. “First-borns mostly take their time and I doubt this one will be an exception to that rule. I'll take the chance to go on my rounds, but I'll leave Mrs. Middleton with you. I gave her

my schedule, so if there is anything urgent she can send a stable-hand after me.”

“Wait!” Detty cried after him, “Are you certain? I have this strange urge...”

Doctor Bouchier shook his head.

“I think the baby is in a breech position. We must wait till the very last moment to get it out. You are not yet open enough, milady.”

Detty looked wide-eyed at the man who was rumoured to be the former Earl of Rotherham’s bastard son. People at the castle said it was just as well he was not at all interested in becoming an earl.

“A... breech position?”

“The baby is feet down and head up. That, uh, might pose a problem in some way.”

Just when Detty started to feel regret about ever having conceived, a fierce contraction almost seemed to rend her in two. Dr Bouchier nodded at the midwife who sat quietly on a chair.



“Take good care of her, Janey! I’ll come back as soon as possible.”

The Earl slammed the bedroom door closed.

“A... bl... bloody girl!” he warbled. “All she can give me is a mere girl! Damn the woman! I should never have married her!”

Mrs. Middleton looked aghast at the visibly drunken Earl.

“Sh... milord!” she urged him. “Her ladyship had a very bad time of it. She nearly lost her life at the birthing.”

“I don’t give a farthing arse about that! She should have given me a son! Now those snooty Brondemeires will still inherit with those twin boys Anthea threw into this world! Wake her up; I want to talk to her!”

Janey Middleton looked with alarm at the man in front of her. He was swaying on his feet.

“Now!” he roared.

Detty moved in her bed and managed to open her eyes at last.

“What is it?” she asked her husband.

“I want to sleep here tonight. I want a *boy* next time, you hear! As soon as possible!”

“Milord!” Janey interfered, “Her ladyship won’t be up to any sorts of intercourse for the next six weeks! It won’t be any use either! She will not be able to conceive until the weeks of her recovery are past!”

“And not after that either, Gilles!” her ladyship added grimly, “I’ll never sleep with you again!”

“Oh yes, you will,” the Earl whined, “you are my wife and you have a duty to fulfil. Don’t you think of denying me, Detty, or I’ll send you back to the stinking place you managed to drag yourself away from!”

The midwife took a few paces backwards in horror. She had witnessed nastiness at a birth once or twice, but today the Earl took the cake!

Detty just smiled into her clean sheets.

Oh God, if that would only be possible!  
She would run to the real father of her  
newly born daughter and never look back!

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## Chapter 4: ANOTHER LIFE IN HIDING

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*Hull, July 1815*

“Are you by any chance related to the Fitzroys of Somerset?”

Bertha bent her head over her steaming teacup.

She blushed deeply at the curious question posed by an old biddy, who had just entered the carefully decorated drawing room that belonged to Vicar Henry and his sickly wife.

She had known that the question would come one day and it was really her own fault. When she had chosen a name to hide herself behind as a new-baked widow, she had purposefully taken the name Fitzroy, for the sole reason that she had liked the sound of it. She *had* in fact heard that name in Brussels. Young Fitzroy of the Somerset

family, one of the close buddies of the Prince of Orange, had fought at the battle of Waterloo and survived. He had been with the wounded at the Duke of Lindley's house in the Rue Royale in Brussels. She'd helped nurse him for about a day and had liked the young man immensely. Of course she could never admit to knowing Harry Fitzroy and under which circumstances.

She quickly shook her head when she noticed that eight pairs of eyes were watching her with enormous curiosity and less politeness.

“One would wish to be related to such a high and mighty family!” she smiled tremulously.

Lying was still something that did not come easy to her, although her last statement was not at all untrue. It was just the fact that nowadays she always had to lie about her background. It made her shiver inside, but she really could never tell

anybody her true story: that she was a legitimized daughter of a baron, struggling not to slither down into the gutter after her grasping mother, second wife to and widow of that same baron, had abducted her half-sister Robin to have her marry a lowly footman, so that Robin would never be able to reclaim her father's title for her future son.

Everything had gone wrong at that precise point: the lowly footman turned out to be a baron and a major, dressed as a footman for a masked, costumed ball. In the end it was clear that Bertha's mother had Robin forcibly married to a Peer of the Realm. To escape retributions for her crime her mother had hidden in York with her uncouth and unworthy lover Pettigrew.

When Pettigrew decided that Bertha should earn her keep in his sister's brothel, Bertha's mother tried to shoot him in a bout of protectiveness, but was killed in the

struggle over the gun. Pettigrew found his ignoble end on a gibbet within a month of the shooting and Bertha ended up in Madame Majorica's brothel anyway.

It had been her luck at first that Madame Majorica found her 'unfit' for the profession, until the dashing Lord Captain Jeffrey Burroughs, Baron of Caversham, had decided to visit the brothel and Bertha's so-called unfitness made her a perfect match for the twenty-six year old captain.

They'd had two nights and almost three days of perfect bliss together, until Jeffrey decided that he wanted Bertha for his mistress. He told her he wanted to free her from her 'contract' with Madame Majorica.

Bertha just could not get it into her heart to become the young baron's paid lover until the day he found himself a suitable wife. She still was Baron Dunstead's acknowledged child and her father had married her mother Evelyn after he became



a widower, doing everything in his power to give Bertha the semblance of legitimacy. Bertha fled the brothel to become a governess in the household of the Aubrey family. It turned out that Bertha's employer Lady Amelia Aubrey was terribly abused by her husband and, to top her misery, was secretly in love with her deceased sister Christina's widower: Major Peter Wallace, Baron Irving-Wallace.

Before the great battle of Waterloo the whole family removed to Brussels as Lord Aubrey had managed to get a high function within the army in Flanders.

Bertha happened to walk into Jeffrey during the ball in Brussels that was going to precede the battle of Waterloo and he had reacted upon seeing her on Baron Irving-Wallace's arm with scorn and anger, telling Baron Irving that Bertha had been his lover. Then he went to organise his regiment, just

like all the officers at the ball had to do to prepare for the battle against Napoleon.

Richard Grey, the Duke of Lindley, had asked Bertha to help nurse the wounded officers in his house, brought there after the battle of the Allied Forces against Napoleon had proven a scant but definite victory.

After Jeffrey had turned up with a wounded Viscount Brondemeire at the Duke's residence, Bertha had fled to Antwerp with the Aubrey household, who had just been notified that Lord Aubrey was found dead close to the spot where the battle of Quatre Bras took place.

Bertha managed to get the Aubrey household, Lady Aubrey and the two girls, who were in her charge, onto a ship to London. She said her goodbyes to them there, professing to go back to the Duke's house in Brussels, but in reality taking a coach to Bergen op Zoom, a port about forty miles North of Antwerp.

There she found a ship to take her to Hull. It was not that she had decided upon that specific English port at all: she just took the first ship that could take her back to English shores.

Now she was in Hull, taking tea with seven ladies of the Church Committee for the Poor and Vicar Henry.

“*My* Harry was of a middle class family near Bath. I don’t believe there was a connection with the Somersets. I never heard him say so,” she lied convincingly.

One of the women opposite her smiled at her.

“You would not have preferred to go back to Bath?” she asked Bertha, “I mean: you are here without any protection from your family.” Oh, well, in for a penny in for a pound, Bertha decided wearily.

“My husband worked for the militia in London, until he was needed in Brussels. I just...”

She stopped abruptly, searching for a handkerchief. She knew by now that when questions got difficult to answer she'd better fall back on her tears for her dead husband.

“Both our parents died years ago. Harry had a sister near Bath, but according to him she made an unfortunate marriage and I never got to know her. We rented an apartment in London, but under the circumstances I hated the idea of going back there. The whole of London is known to be in a festive mood because Napoleon was vanquished and I just could not...”

“Ladies, I really think it is time we started planning the winter clothes for the young poor!” the kindly woman opposite Bertha announced, moved by Bertha's distress.

Bertha sent her a grateful smile. If it was up to her she would like to be done with lies for the rest of the day.

A woman dressed entirely in black next to her pressed her gloved hand onto Bertha's wrist.

“We have not yet been introduced,” she said softly. “I am Cordelia Williams. It is a pleasure to meet you at last Mrs. Fitzroy.”

Bertha looked up at the lady in shock.

Cordelia Williams?

Wasn't 'Cordelia' the name Colonel Lord Broadhurst had been crying out when he was in a feverish delirium after a surgeon on the battlefield amputated part of his left leg? She remembered clearly the conversation with the Duke of Lindley and Doctor Halden about the name. Lindley said that Lord Broadhurst had been seeing a Lady called Cornelia Marlowe and Halden assured them he knew of only one Cordelia, his former nurse, but that he doubted that Lord Broadhurst was even remotely acquainted with her. Oh, it was such a small world! She'd escaped from her life as a

governess, a prostitute and a baron's daughter to a haven in Hull only to meet a woman who probably knew most of the officers Bertha helped nursed at the Lindley residence!

“My husband died during the battle of Toulouse, more than a year ago,” Cordelia explained, “but as luck would have it I became pregnant of our very last encounter. I have a son now: Alistair. He's half a year old and such a wonderful baby!”

Cordelia suddenly hid her mouth behind her hand with shock in her eyes.

“I am sorry, I am so overly proud of my little one! When will your happy event take place?”

Bertha looked about her with climbing panic. She truly did not want anybody to know just yet about Jeffrey's child growing in her belly.

Cordelia pressed her hand comfortingly on Bertha's wrist again.

“Don’t mind me, Mrs. Fitzroy, I have been a nurse with Wellington’s army for years and that included assisting with such happy events as well. I guessed it because you have the cautious behaviour of a woman who is expecting a certain occasion and...”

She smiled softly.

“You really got green around the gills when you were offered the vanilla wafers, half an hour ago.”

Bertha grabbed her handkerchief again and brought it towards her lips. The thing proved to be a great wall of defence.

Cordelia bit her lip. She was not certain of Mrs. Fitzroy’s age but it was clear that she was expecting her first child. No wonder she was skittish about it! She had no one to turn to; no family, and most importantly she'd just had to cope with the loss of her young husband.

When Cordelia came home in September last year she had been five months

breeding. Her parents were elated to have her back in their protective arms. She could feel sheltered and happy; trying to forget that the husband and son-in-law Rory Williams they were mourning for was not the father of her child.

Although her child was conceived during the time her husband Captain Rory Williams might still have been alive, his family looked upon her in distrust. It had not helped that she only came home five months after the battle of Toulouse because she had been with the last wounded at the hospital of Bordeaux.

Cordelia shrugged her shoulders at her in-law's suspicions. She knew they were fed by an orphaned nephew and his wife who stood to inherit the Williams' money and possessions if it were not for the grandchild that had sprouted – supposedly - from Rory Williams' loins. Nobody but Cordelia and Colonel Lord Devon Broadhurst knew of



that one day and night of passion they had shared in Cordelia's tent, that late afternoon after the battle, when Cordelia had wanted to give a letter to Lord Broadhurst. It had been a message to the Marquis of Andover and Lord Christian Andover, Viscount Brondemeire's proxy-bride, about the state of his wounds and health.

It had been such a wonderful surprise for Cordelia to find out that the handsome and sympathetic Lord Broadhurst confessed to have had his eye on her during the bigger part of Wellington's Peninsular campaign.

After their night together he had gone back to England with the returning regiments, leaving Cordelia to nurse the wounded in the English hospital in Toulouse under the supervision of Doctor Halden, and later in the hospital in Bordeaux.

When she understood that her one night of passion with Devon Broadhurst had not

remained without consequences, she had been elated and sad at the same time. At least she was in her widow year and so her child would have the protection of Rory Williams' name, but on the other hand it saddened her that Lord Broadhurst would never know that she was to birth him a child; she knew he was a widower without issue.

She did not regret her widowhood and she felt very guilty about that fact, as her marriage to Rory Williams, who had been two decades her senior, had been a disaster from the day she had followed him to the Peninsula when she was only eighteen years old. Rory had never wanted to know the meaning of faithfulness and he had preferred to sleep most nights with the blanket-girls who followed the army, rather than stay with her in their mutual tent.

It had given her a lot of room to dream about the young aristocratic Captain

Broadhurst, who had been a major at the time when Wellington had meant to hunt down General Soult's army in Toulouse.

The shared passion with Lord Devon Broadhurst became an impossible dream again: she was only a cit's daughter while Devon Broadhurst was the third son of an earl.

Cordelia watched Mrs. Fitzroy silently.

The girl was sheer beauty, something Cordelia would never be able to claim. She knew that the men in the army used to call her 'horsey'. It was true that she was quite tall and her face was not very refined: it had all the wrong angles that could turn beauty into ugliness. But at least one man had appreciated her for the person she was: the man she had admired silently from afar, when she lay in her lonely bed in her tent, waiting for Rory Williams to find the occasion to come 'home' to her. The people around her used to wonder about her son's

name. Rory's father's name was Ronald and her own father was baptized Derrick. There seemed to be no connection at all with their names and that of her babe, and that was exactly what Cordelia wanted: she had discovered that Devon's second name was Alistair when she'd checked with the army's administration in Bordeaux. That had been easy enough as all the names of the military men who had gone back to England through that port were listed.

Cordelia wondered about Lieutenant Harry Fitzroy, who had once had the luck to claim such a lovely woman like Mrs. Fitzroy as his wife. It was obvious that Mrs. Fitzroy was a lady from the hair on top of her head down to her toenails.

She sighed and looked at Vicar Henry's clock. Almost four o'clock. It was time to go home and nurse little Al.

"How do you like the cottage the parish found for you, Mrs. Fitzroy?" the vicar

asked with the voice that would normally reach the rafters of his church.

“Oh,” Bertha blushed, “I am such a lucky woman to have been able to obtain it! I hope this week the carpenter will finish the chairs for the table.”

She nodded with enthusiasm at the seven ladies and the vicar.

When she landed in Hull she had taken a simple room at the local inn in the town centre. At the time she truly did not have a clue what she would do with herself. It had been in the back of her mind to go back to York, but under the circumstances, with her pregnancy and the fact that many people knew her there as a servant in Majorica’s brothel, she had been forced to think twice about it.

She refrained for the time being from buying a ticket for a coach and had stayed in Hull instead. On Sunday she went to church, not because she was in any way

religious, but because she knew that Hull's most respectable people would be there. She never went to church in Auldly, the village closest to Hillview Manor where her father used to live, for the sole reason that her mother never bothered about such respectable doings. It was clear that most of the inhabitants of Auldly distrusted her mother and tended to look down on her. They obviously knew her as the woman who was not really a lady and who had taken advantage of Bertha's father's grief to grab the Baron's deceased wife's place in the mansion and her bed.

When Bertha went to her boarding school close to Edinburgh she had been forced to go to church on Saturdays and Sundays.

In Hull it seemed like the best point to start from and she had not been proven wrong. Exactly because Vicar Henry's wife was sickly a big group of women took over Mrs. Henry's tasks for the parish. Their

curiosity about the beautiful young woman, who went dressed entirely in black, was raised and before Bertha knew it she was sitting in the vicarage having tea with them.

The ladies and the vicar were appalled that she had to live at an inn and within a day they'd found her a cottage on the outskirts of Hull that had been recently vacated by an elderly woman who went to live with her sister.

Before Bertha left the Duke of Lindley's residence he had given her 300 guineas as an advance on the four thousand pounds he awarded her after Jeffrey Caversham and Peter Wallace had gotten rid of the traitor Lord Aubrey, due to Bertha's information about him. The rest of that money was waiting for her at 'Samuels', the Duke's London banker.

Bertha was already worried about how she would ever get hold of that money: most of the people she knew in Brussels had their

residences in London and it was impossible for her to turn up there and claim her money now that she had gone so deep into hiding again. She supposed that her sister Robin had lived mostly in London since she became the Countess of Wentworth, and that the Earl and Countess were probably searching for her.

On the other hand, 300 guineas could go a long way if she was frugal and she still had her jewellery hidden in the basket she used for her embroidery.

She shook her head. She really should stop worrying about these things. She would take one step at the time.

“Did your furniture arrive from London, Mrs. Fitzroy?” the very curious Mrs. Baker asked her.

Bertha shook her head sadly.

“I have not heard anything about it,” she lied. “It is possible that our landlord has confiscated it, thinking that we would never



come back for it. In a big town like London you never know.”

Most ladies nodded solemnly. To them the city of London was equal to Sodom and Gomorrah and the stealing of furniture did not surprise them in the least.

“I will have to buy some furniture sooner or later,” Bertha added, “I already finished sewing most of the curtains and Mrs. Littlepenny left her bed behind. I am not sure how far my jointure will take me in that respect, but I have good hopes that I will manage.”

Cordelia got up from her chair.

“I need to go home,” she declared to no one in particular.

She suddenly got a bright idea.

“Mrs. Fitzroy, a ship will be docking at my father’s shipyard for some time. It is to be renovated and I dare say there is some furniture on board the captain would like to sell. I will ask my father to keep the things

apart that might be of good use to you. Oh, and Mrs. Bradshaw recently finished a beautiful tester that might be to your liking. I know she needs the money badly so you will be able to get it for a bargain. Why don't you join me on my way home, it is in the direction of your house.”

Bertha nodded gratefully and almost jumped out of her chair.

She truly liked Mrs. Williams best of all the women gathered in the vicar's house.

After Cordelia nursed her baby she put him smiling to bed.

Life had been good to her since she'd come home in September last year. Her parents loved having her back home, with the bonus of a grandchild they never expected. They had been worried about her when she followed Rory and the drum into the Peninsula and into France, especially after they guessed that all was not well with

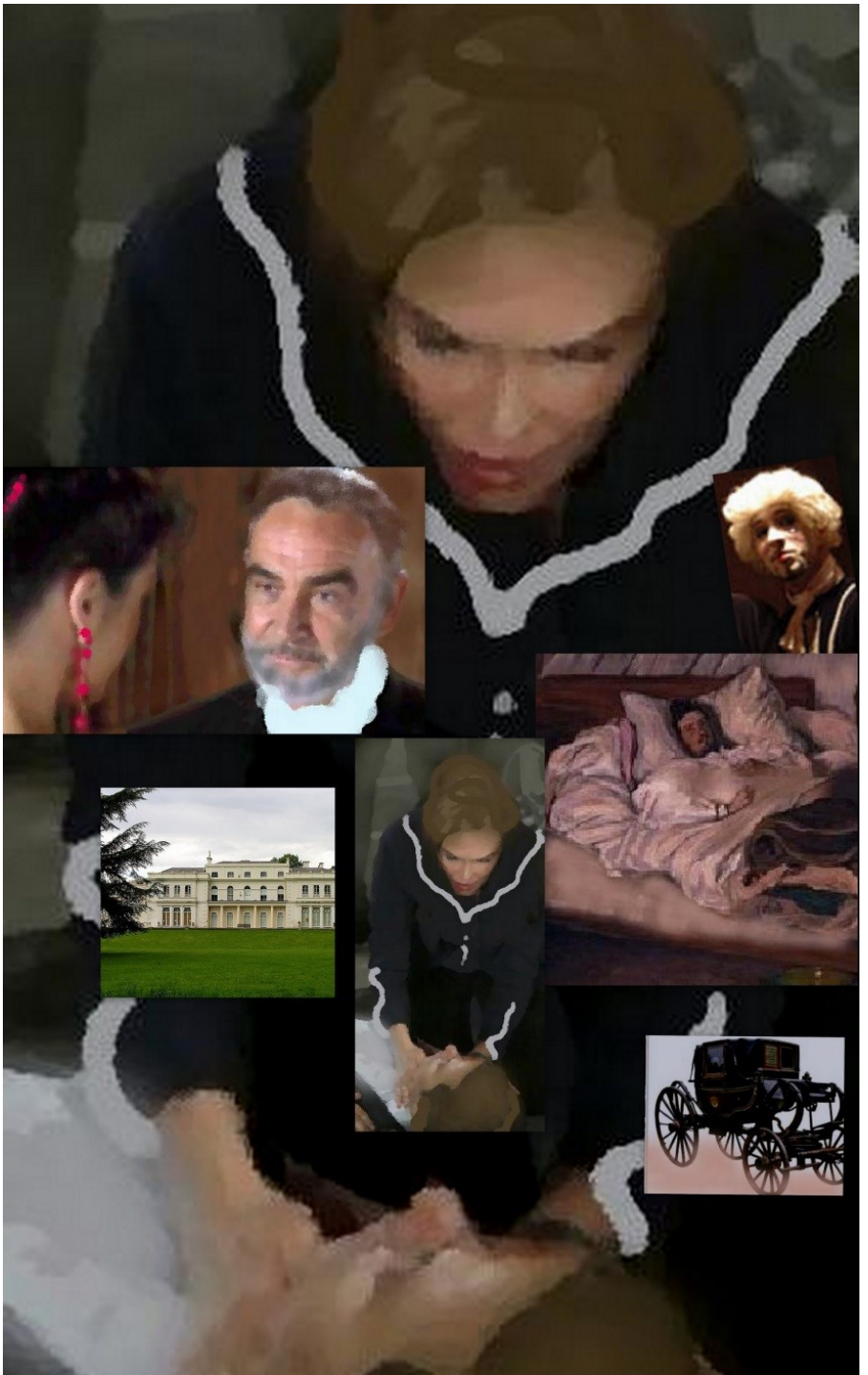
Cordelia's marriage. Now they preferred not to talk about their deceased son-in-law in front of their daughter.

Cordelia decided months ago that it would be better to look straight ahead of her instead of back into the past.

She smiled lovingly at her child. Little Al was falling asleep in his snug cot. She considered how fortunate it was that Rory and Devon both had brownish hair and darkish eyes. Otherwise it would have been hard to explain why Alistair did not resemble his father.

She bit her lip. She truly did not yet have the heart to ask Mrs. Fitzroy if a certain Lord Broadhurst had survived the battle near Brussels. She would have to bring it up with the woman one day; otherwise she was sure the uncertainty about his fate would absolutely kill her!

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## Chapter 5: RICHMOND AND LONDON

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They put the horses into an easy canter as