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Echoes of Edinburgh

JOANN DURGIN

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EDINBURGH

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Dedication

Thank you, Lord, for never failing to provide inspiration when I sit down to create a new story. It's my prayer that readers may experience Your abundant love as they read *Echoes of Edinburgh*.

For my family, as always, I could not do this without you.

For my cousins, Terry and Lyntha Eiler, I owe you a huge debt of gratitude. Your invaluable "insider scoop" from your many summers in Edinburgh with your photojournalism students from Ohio University enriched this book immeasurably.

For Christine Lindsay, thank you for exchanging Passport to Romance chapters and sharing ideas. Your faithful friendship, prayer support and encouragement are a blessing.

For the citizens of Scotland, I thank you for your gracious hospitality when I visited Edinburgh and Glasgow while studying abroad in London during my sophomore year of college. I eagerly anticipate visiting your charming country again one day.

Blessings,

JoAnn

Matthew 5:16

1

“This one’s for you, Daddy.”

Six months ago, who could have guessed Shelby Harmon would be standing outside a castle? Not your average, run-of-the-mill castle, either, but Edinburgh Castle. Scotland’s national treasure. She breathed in the heady scent of blooming roses and soil dampened by the late morning rain. Shelby’s pulse strummed faster as she followed the winding walkway. Was she crazy to travel nearly four-thousand miles to deliver an envelope containing who-knows-what to a man she’d never met? Perhaps, but a promise was a promise, especially to her dying father.

The tour guide said she’d find the man she sought somewhere on the grounds, most likely in the Castlehill Gardens. After rounding a bend behind a row of hedges, she stopped short. Hunched between multi-colored rose bushes, a middle-aged gardener was engaged in a tug-of-war with pesky weeds. Intent on his work, he grunted with the effort. Thankful he hadn’t yet spied her, she stepped off the walkway, frowning as her new ballet flats sank into the earth.

When she glimpsed his profile, Shelby’s breath hitched. The strong resemblance to the man in the faded photograph she’d found among her father’s possessions was undeniable, the only difference being the added refinement of a quarter century. His dark hair was peppered with silver and cut military short,

and his faded jeans were tucked into combat boots. The rolled sleeves of his denim work shirt revealed arms tanned a deep brown—an anomaly among the perennially fair-skinned Scottish natives.

He straightened to his full height and released a shallow groan. Sliding his hands down to his hips, he raised his face to the warmth of the emerging sun. As though sensing her scrutiny, he turned, his features a study in curiosity as he spied her.

“Please stay on the walkway, lass.” After tugging a soiled work glove from one hand, he pointed to the path. His slight brogue—husky as if thick with the ever-present mist—was tinged with an unmistakable Kentucky accent, an unexpected solace so far from home. He took a few slow steps toward her, favoring his right leg. As he approached, Shelby caught a glimpse of deep-set, piercing blue eyes that held a guarded wariness.

Not wanting to irritate him further, she stepped back on the walkway. “I’m sorry to interrupt your work, sir, but I’m looking for Robert Nichols from Lexington, Kentucky.”

“You’ve found him.” Standing a few feet away, he tilted his head and narrowed his eyes.

Shelby smiled, hoping to put them both more at ease. “I’m Shelby Harmon, Katie and Tom Harmon’s daughter.”

No immediate response was forthcoming although something akin to recognition flickered in his gaze.

“My Aunt Lily told me you worked at Harmony Lane with my mom when you were teenagers. I believe you knew her as Katie McCormick?” Her professional instincts taking over, Shelby extended her hand.

Robert’s stoic expression relaxed and, for a fleeting

moment, reminded Shelby of her father. Gruff around the edges but softening at the mention of her mother. "Aye, I should have known. You have your mama's same honey blonde hair and bonnie blue eyes." He removed his remaining work glove and enfolded her hand in his warm grasp. A quick glance revealed the hands of a working man with small, rough calluses. His nails were clean and neatly trimmed, and he wore no wedding band.

"It's been a long time since I've planted my feet on Kentucky bluegrass," Robert said. "Left a big part of myself there. Kind of hard to shake it out of a man, not that I'd ever want to." His lips curled as he released her hand. "Tommy was sweet on your mama from the time we were old enough to saddle up and ride." He smoothed a hand over his short hair and glanced into the distance before returning his gaze to hers. "Seems fitting she ended up marrying the boss's son and living at Harmony Lane. The way I see it, Katie belonged there all along. Born to the manor."

Shelby had expected to hear more about her father, not her mother. What *was* Robert's connection to her parents? Enough to bring her across the world on a personal mission?

For a half second, she considered pulling the envelope from her purse and handing it over. The promise to her father would be fulfilled, and she could return home to Chicago and her usual routine. No strings attached. End of story. "Mr. Nichols, I have something I need to—"

"Pops?"

They both turned. A tall, lean man with tousled blond waves rounded the corner. He was rugged with high cheekbones, healthy sun-kissed skin, a square,

chiseled jaw with a shadow of stubble, and a well-formed mouth—the latter *not* something she normally noticed. She estimated him to be in his late twenties to early thirties. With a black T-shirt stretched across broad shoulders, faded jeans and scuffed leather boots, he appeared an incongruous cross between a muscled surfer and an urban cowboy. Most definitely, this was a man she'd never expect to see standing in a garden outside a castle.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to interrupt." Raising his hands, he started to back away but not before he shot a curious glance Robert's way. "I'll check on you later, Pops."

Robert motioned to him. "No need to leave. Come meet Shelby Harmon. I knew her mama a lifetime ago when I worked at her daddy's thoroughbred farm in Kentucky. Shelby, this is Harrison Reed."

Shelby's pulse skipped a few beats, but whether from nerves or an instant awareness of this man, she couldn't be sure. Eyes as blue-green as the lochs in the travel brochures met hers. Brilliant and intense. Intelligent. The ingrained business instinct kicked in again and she stuck out her hand. "Nice to meet you."

"You, too." Harrison's grip was assured and self-confident, always a good trait.

Shelby opened her purse, retrieved a business card from a small engraved case, and handed it to Robert. "I'm staying at the Radisson Blu on The Royal Mile. My cell phone number is on the card. If you'd consider having lunch while I'm in Edinburgh, please give me a call." A trace of her no-nonsense, professional tone crept into her words. Wonderful. Instead of coming across as friendly, she probably sounded like a controlling, bossy know-it-all. Not exactly the

impression she'd hoped to make.

"It would seem you inherited more than your looks from Katie." Amusement laced Robert's words. He glanced at her business card before tucking it in his front shirt pocket. "One of the top ten worldwide brokerage firms, eh? I'm sure Katie and Tommy are very proud of you, as well they should be. So, you've come all the way from Chicago. Are you in Edinburgh on business?" The charming way he pronounced *Ed-in-ber-ah* made her smile.

"No. I'm here for personal reasons."

"Fair enough," Robert said. "How about sharing the noon meal tomorrow?" He nudged Harrison's arm with the ease of well-worn familiarity. "I trust you're free to join us." Robert returned his focus to her. "Provided that's all right with you, Shelby?"

"Of course." Although she'd planned on meeting with Robert in private, why shouldn't Harrison come along? The two men obviously shared a close relationship.

"I have a meeting in the morning, but I'll make it a priority to be done before noon," Harrison said. "Abernethy's might be fun and give Shelby an idea of some of the local flavor."

Robert appeared pleased. "Excellent idea."

Harrison's mesmerizing gaze met hers again. "How about I swing over to the Radisson and meet you in the lobby a few minutes before noon? It's only a five minute walk to Abernethy's from there." His deep southern accent hinted of Alabama or perhaps Mississippi and was as distracting as everything else about this intriguing man.

"Ever been to Scotland before, lass?" Robert tugged a work glove back on one hand.

"When I was eight." Her gaze moved to the ancient castle wall behind them. "I told Mama I was moving here to be a fairy princess and live in Edinburgh Castle forever. The rolling hills and the countryside were so lush and lovely, and the lochs were the most incredible color of blue-green I'd ever seen." She avoided glancing at Harrison since his eyes brought to mind that very thing. As it was, his smile thawed her more with each passing moment. "And sheep," she said, feeling silly. "Lots of sheep."

Harrison chuckled. "You'll find nothing's changed in that regard. How long will you be in Edinburgh, Shelby?"

"I'm not sure. At least a few days. My airline ticket says a week from Sunday." Now she'd done it. Must be her subconscious taking over. She'd intended to return home straight away, but as a precaution, she'd cleared her schedule for a little more than a week in case she'd need to track down Robert across the Scottish moors. Thanks to her Aunt Lily, she'd discovered Robert lived in Scotland, and through the wonders of the Internet, she'd located him quite easily.

"Long enough to fall in love then," Robert said.

Shelby snapped up her chin. "I beg your pardon?"

"I think you'll quickly fall under the charms of...Auld Reekie." Was that pause purposeful? The corners of Robert's mouth tipped upward, making her wonder.

"What exactly is Old Reeky?"

"It's a nickname for Edinburgh," Harrison said. "Pops is a self-appointed ambassador."

"I see." She didn't, really, but managed a small smile. "I'll look forward to seeing you both tomorrow." With a murmured good-bye, Shelby departed, aware

the men watched. As the sound of their voices grew faint, she retraced her steps, being mindful of the still somewhat slippery walkway. A few hundred yards away, she sensed movement behind her.

“Shelby, wait up. Can we talk for a minute?”

Harrison. She’d only just met the man yet she’d know that voice anywhere. How odd. She glanced over her shoulder and drew in a quick breath when she spied the long-stemmed, yellow rose he carried. Walking toward her, he filled her range of vision, exuding a confidence that was masculine and swoon-worthy. She’d always rued that silly description—one the women in her office bandied about when discussing the latest hunk-of-the-moment actor—but Harrison effortlessly earned the title. The ladies would have an absolute field day with this man.

Shelby gasped as her right foot slid out from beneath her. Skidding forward, she flailed her arms like a fledgling leaving the nest. But instead of soaring, she was going down fast, and it was *not* going to be pretty.

So much for six years of ballet lessons.

2

Harrison rushed forward. Moving one hand around Shelby's waist, he pulled her against him. Almost hip-to-hip close. Goodness, he was solid muscle. She couldn't help but breathe in his masculine soap-and-water clean scent. At least he didn't wear an expensive, cloying cologne. Those only made her sneeze and her throat itch. His gallant heroics kept her upright, never mind that her pride was now splattered all over the walkway. Putting one hand over her chest, embarrassed, Shelby took a couple of deep, calming breaths. "Well, that was fun."

"Are you all right?" Steadying her, Harrison's brows knit together. "If I let go, you're not going to fall, are you?"

Her laugh came out an unladylike grunt. "Yes, thanks. I mean, I'm fine and it's safe to let go. I think. Why don't we try it and see what happens?" Averting her gaze as he released her, a flush warmed her cheeks. "I should buy you a cape and call you Captain Hand..." She cleared her throat. "That's, um, Captain Harrison."

Good thing she wasn't in a room full of potential clients, or she'd be a discredit to her profession. Never in her life had she been so inarticulate. Or clumsy.

Old Edna Pinson would be shocked by her appalling lack of social graces. After all, any young lady of fine breeding in Lexington who'd attended Edna's House of Charm should know the proper

manner to recover from a near-fall with grace or the dignified, if not subtle, method of falling—or was it swooning?—into the arms of a handsome man.

Harrison leaned forward and captured her eye contact. “Shelby? Still with me?”

She lowered her gaze and smoothed one hand down the front of her khaki skirt. For once in her life, she wished she wasn’t wearing something so absolutely utilitarian. Even her simple, white sleeveless blouse was as plain and boring as they come. “I might be suffering from a little jet lag. Or the change in altitude, atmospheric conditions...I don’t know.” She shrugged. “Something like that.”

Suffering the effects of Harrison Reed was more like it. Maybe she’d been cooped up too long in her office and needed the break more than she’d realized. This was also why she never flirted. When it came to engaging gorgeous men in conversation, she was much more competent in a business setting.

“Who’s Edna Pinson?”

“Excuse me?” She’d voiced that thought aloud? Harrison’s hearing must be uncommonly sharp. Chewing the inside of her cheek, Shelby pushed aside a long strand of hair whipping across her face in the warm, mid-July breeze.

“You said Edna Pinson. Right before you mumbled something about charm.” The corners of his mouth twitched. “Something like that.”

“Oh,” she said, tucking the wayward hair behind one ear. “I was giving thanks for not”—she searched her mind for something resembling coherency—“having a...head full of pins.” With that comment, he probably questioned her intelligence, and she couldn’t blame him. Next he’d tell her he’d need to cancel for

lunch tomorrow.

“Do you normally have a head full of pins? If that’s the case, I trust you’re talking about in your hair and not actually inside...” His grin widened as he pointed to his head.

Laughter bubbled up inside her. What an insipid conversation. “No pins involved. Promise. Edna Pinson ran a charm school I attended once upon a time. Goes without saying I’m a classic dropout.”

“I thought charm schools went out of vogue a century ago, but you’re doing a fine job of it.”

She couldn’t resist. “It?”

“The charm factor.”

Shelby was still trying to formulate a response when, in one smooth action, Harrison scooped the rose from the ground and presented it to her with a small bow. When she accepted it, he wrapped his hand around hers for the briefest of moments. As if he wasn’t distracting enough, Harrison’s warm, gentle touch proved far more dangerous than the slippery walkway. “Robert asked me to give you this rose in honor of your mother. Said he used to call her Katie Rose.”

Shelby tamped down a swell of emotion. Robert must have known Mama pretty well to know she’d always preferred yellow roses over the traditional red—the color used for the Harmony Lane logo and the floral garlands draped around the necks of Kentucky Derby-winning thoroughbreds, four of which had been bred at Harmony Lane.

“How thoughtful of Robert. Thanks for bringing it to me.” She brushed one finger over a velvety soft petal, exquisite in its perfection. While she appreciated Robert’s sentiment, a faint twinge of disappointment

pinched her. No sense in pondering the reasons why. "Isn't it illegal to pick a rose from the palace gardens?" she said, inhaling the flower's lovely fragrance.

Seeing Harrison's skeptical glance, Shelby hastened to explain. "Take the national forests in California, for example. If you carry pine cones off the protected grounds, it's considered stealing and an offense punishable by law." She lifted her shoulders. "Same theory, I should think." She was only digging herself in deeper.

Harrison widened his eyes and slapped a hand on one cheek. "Don't tell me you've done time for"—he mock-gasped—"pine cone theft? I'm shocked to my very core."

Shelby couldn't remember the last time she'd giggled, but it was freeing. Fun. "Guilty, but I paid my debt to society. And you've obviously spent time on the stage."

"Guilty, but I was horrible at it. I'd rather be stealing pine cones. In the case of your rose, since Robert's the one doing the plucking, I doubt the castle police will hunt us down. I hope you noticed I had the foresight to de-thorn it."

"I did, and thanks. Smart thinking. Tell me something," she said, resuming her walk with Harrison by her side. "Why would anyone plant a palace garden on such a slippery slope?"

"I don't really know, but the castle sits on Castle Rock, an extinct volcano. Its location was very advantageous during military sieges. You should check out the Princes Street Gardens while you're here. It's very popular with tourists and a lot less treacherous."

"I need to catch up on my reading about Scotland, but I have the feeling I could learn a lot from you."

Now she sounded like a tourist? Hopefully that comment didn't come across like an invitation. Her mistake was sneaking a peek at Harrison's profile to gauge his reaction. *Oh, no.* Again, her foot slid forward, catching her unaware. The saving grace this time was stumbling forward.

With a small cry, Shelby landed with her full weight on her right hand, splayed in the grass. "Not one word," she said. Humiliation burned her from the inside out. It seemed she hadn't broken or sprained anything. Small consolation.

To his credit, Harrison remained silent as he helped Shelby to her feet and retrieved her purse. After drying it with the bottom of his shirt, he handed it over. "Here you go. No harm done."

"My pride would disagree, but I suppose a decent fall from grace keeps a girl humble." Shelby slung her purse over one shoulder and tried to be as discreet as possible as she brushed her damp hand over the side of the skirt. "For the record, these are new shoes. I think they should come with a warning against walking around a castle. In Scotland. On a slope. After the rain." She lifted her chin. "If you think that was something, you should see what I can do in heels." She needed to stop talking.

"I'm sure it'd be entertaining, but if it's all the same to you, I'll escort you wherever you're going next." A speeding train on the nearby railway muffled the last part of his statement, but when Harrison offered his arm, Shelby accepted with a grateful smile.

"My rental car's parked a few streets over." Together they crossed the bridge behind a band stand. As they walked, Harrison asked about her work. Relieved for a comfortable subject, Shelby relaxed even

while she hoped she didn't bore the man to death.

"It's obvious you care about the individuals behind your accounts," Harrison said. "I hope they understand how blessed they are to have you managing their money."

"My clients value my services as long as I don't *lose* their money," she said. "I work hard to ensure that doesn't happen." To her own ears, that statement sounded borderline pompous and self-aggrandizing.

Harrison had paid her a lovely compliment, and she should act appropriately thankful. When she slid a little, he tightened his hold on her. How long had it been since a man younger than fifty had demonstrated such chivalry? So long, she couldn't begin to recall.

"I hope you take time to do the things that make *you* happy, Shelby." After asking her which direction the car was parked, with a light hand on her elbow, Harrison guided her to a quieter side street. He dropped his hand when they reached more level ground. "Sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I didn't intend to trespass on any personal boundaries."

"You didn't," she said, wanting to reassure him. "I don't mind, but since it's not really a question, I reserve the right not to answer."

Harrison narrowed his eyes. "Actually, I think you just did."

They stopped walking and stared at one another for a long moment. Shelby lowered her gaze first and started again toward the car, now within sight. Dissecting her life with a virtual stranger wasn't on her list of things to do while in Edinburgh. Time to change the subject. "How long have you known Robert?"

"I come to Edinburgh a couple of times a year, and I met Pops in a café on The Royal Mile about four years

ago. We started talking and hit it off. Since we share a love of history, architecture, and art—for starters—we can go on for hours. We've closed down quite a few pubs, talking late into the night."

"If I may ask, why do you call him Pops?"

"His neighbor kids call him that, and I picked up on it. Robert doesn't have kids of his own—none that I've ever heard about, anyway—and he seems to like the nickname."

Harrison moved ahead of her. With one swift kick of his boot, he sent a large pebble out of her direct path, flying into the grass.

Shelby couldn't hide her grin. "My equilibrium, and my pride, thank you."

"Always happy to be of service."

"Well, this ugly metal trap is my rental." She stopped beside the small white car and clicked the key fob. As he reached around her to open the door, Harrison's arm brushed hers, increasing her awareness of him tenfold.

"If you're not already attached to the car, might I suggest the tram, trains, or a cab?" The crinkles around his eyes surfaced when he smiled, making him even more impossibly attractive. "You'll find Edinburgh's a very accessible city."

"Oh, I've already learned that lesson," she said, snapping to attention. She needed to stop staring at him or he'd think she was a naïve, silly schoolgirl with a crush. "You'll be happy to know I plan on returning the car tomorrow. To protect the fine citizens of Old Reeky, if nothing else. I have enough trouble keeping myself from colliding with the ground, so why chance anything?"

Shelby's pulse sputtered as Harrison's smile

sobered. What was coming next? This man seemed uncommonly sensitive, but he was also forthright enough to speak his mind. “Shelby, I don’t know your reason for wanting to meet with Pops—and I realize it’s none of my business—but a word of advice?”

She’d started to climb behind the wheel but pulled herself back up, anchoring her hand beside his on the car door. “What’s that?”

“You might want to tread carefully when it comes to talking with him about Kentucky. There’s a sadness there. Regret, maybe. Or loneliness.” He shrugged. “I don’t really know.” When he raked his hand through his thick blond waves, it tousled them even more.

A quick rush of frustration surged inside her, and Shelby concentrated on keeping her voice even. “Robert’s blessed to have such a valiant protector.” Maybe that sounded snippy, but Harrison was right. It *wasn’t* his business.

“All I’m saying is, a trip down memory lane might not be in his best interest.” He hesitated. “Or yours.”

Shelby dared to meet his gaze. “On the other hand, talking about it might be cathartic.”

“For you or for Pops?” Harrison’s tone sounded more like concern rather than a challenge.

“Maybe for both of us.”

Why was she even having this conversation?

“I hope you find what you’re looking for here in Edinburgh,” Harrison said, “but I’d hate to see Pops get hurt in the process.”

A bristle of irritation snaked its way up Shelby’s spine. “Trust me, Harry. While I appreciate your loyalty to Robert, I didn’t come here to dredge up unhappy memories or to cause ‘Pops’ any undue pain.” The moment of closeness broken, she tossed her