

A SECRET LIST
A FUGITIVE WARRIOR
ONE LIFE-SAVING OPTION...

ANNE GREENE

MASQUERADE
 Marriage

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Marriage

by

Anne Greene

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Masquerade Marriage

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Dedication

To my own hero, Colonel Larry Greene, US Army
Special Forces.

GLOSSARY

Arisad - Scottish woman's dress, white - reached from neck to heels, tied at breast with silver buckle

Bairns - Children

Bodhran - Small hand drum, held in one hand and played with other hand or with a double-headed stick

Broch - Iron Age hill fortress built as a round stone tower with unrailed interior, unwalled stone stairs and a small defensive door

Ceol Mor - Bagpipers call to arms. Above the clash of weapons and the sound of battle, the skirl summoned Highlanders to battle

Claymore - Large two-edged sword formerly used by Scottish Highlanders

Dirk - Long straight bladed dagger

Piob Mhor - Great Pipes

Piobrach - Ancient music from the bardic school. Musical version of epic poems

Plaide - Large rectangular length of tartan worn over the left shoulder

Sept - Branch of a clan

Sgian-dhu - Black knife. Short bladed, razor-sharp knife

carried inside a sheath nestled above the Highlander's knee-high hose

Skirl - Sound of a bagpipe

Sporran - Man's pocket carrier made of leather or fur, hangs from his belt over his pelvis

Targe - A small, round shield

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

~Romans 12:1-2, KJV

1

April 16, 1746 - Drumossie Moor, Scotland—the Culloden Estate

Brody MacCaulay woke to a pounding head and gut-wrenching thirst. What happened? The wind and sleet had blown through. Smoke from blazing canons no longer choked him. He no longer heard the deafening din of battle. Silence hung around him, slit at times by weak cries of wounded men.

Cold weight pinned him upon icy ground. He could scarce draw a breath. Fingers dangled in his face. He felt the hand. Cold and stiff. He jerked back his own. Slowly he realized three clansmen crushed him against the frozen earth.

Even as his heart flamed hot hating everything English, the sound of approaching voices alerted him to lie still. He dug numb fingers into blood-dyed ground to keep from springing up and using his dirk.

Duncan, Collin, and Da were dead. He'd seen them fall. Sharp pain bit into his chest. He gritted his teeth. And Angus? Brody's stomach heaved. Only a protecting angel could have spared Angus. Darkness, black as the smoke of gun powder, descended deep inside Brody's mind. For certain his favorite brother lay dead, too.

Brody wedged his anguish deep inside his heart, slammed the door, and disciplined his thoughts into calculated coolness. He was a warrior.

The voices drew closer. Clipped. Not softly burred.

A sliver of moon lit ice upon the ground, casting enough light to see heaps of bodies, twisted limbs. The voices grew close. Two scarlet-clad English soldiers stalked among the killed bodies.

A wounded Highlander looked up at them and begged. "Water."

With cold-blooded deliberateness, one of the soldiers ran him through with his bayonet, strangling the Highlander's weak voice into silence.

Brody slammed his eyes shut, hardly dared suck in a breath, and counted his heartbeats. English voices spoke so close that hair on the nape of his neck spiked. As the awful sound of a bayonet slashed into a nearby body, he fought back bile rising into his throat. "I say, I do believe we've dispatched all the wounded Scots."

"Right. Nasty job."

The first soldier snorted. "Sure to be an awful stink. Letting all these bodies rot."

"Good riddance, say I."

Boots clumped off. The voices faded.

"'Tis almost light." Brody's own whisper, though hoarse as a rusty hinge, infused him with courage.

Somehow he lived. He must fight his way to Ma and Fiona. Protect them before the English hunted them down. A piper's family proved precious booty for scavenger soldiers. With Da and his brothers dead, his duty lay in protecting Ma and Fiona.

He'd do whatever it took.

He struggled free of the weight sprawled atop him. The dirk lay half-frozen to the ground beneath his cheek. He gripped the handle of the *sgian-dhu*, worked it free, and jammed it into the sheath on his right leg. Panting, numb hands planted on frozen earth, he pushed to his knees. The scent of bog-myrtle and blood clogged his nostrils. He gazed over the silent battlefield.

What he saw would haunt him forever.

Thousands of men lay still in the blue moonlight. The strength and youth of Scotland's Highlands sprawled in heaps across the great expanse of the battlefield. Pale twisted limbs gleamed in the cold light. Bloody clan banners lay beneath bodies already stiff.

A stab of guilt pierced Brody's rage. Why had God spared him? If his brothers hadna sent him to the rear, there would not be a male MacCaulay left alive. Mayhap that was why he found breathing so unnatural. He shook his head. Dizziness. His pulse pounded, increasing the thundering pain. Touching his bloody left temple, he closed his right eye. The carnage before him went black.

He whispered, "Canna see with my left eye. Appears my head's no' as hard as Angus insisted."

Angus.

Brody shoved aside the heart-stopping thought of his brother. For Ma's sake, for Fiona's sake, he must

escape before English sentinels spotted him. Hunched double, hiding among the bodies, he retrieved his targe and pipes and strapped them atop the claymore on his back. Despite the cold wind, sweat beaded his forehead. Belly pushed into frozen dirt, he crawled south toward the line of trees growing by the river Nairn. He'd head for high country. Find a place to hide.

Barely able to see his own hands ploughing the earth, he crawled between bodies of family, friends, acquaintances drawn close in the heat of battle. Bodies, clad in blood-drenched tartan stared wide-eyed at the waning moon.

Hurry! Daylight threatened. If the English found him, he'd be murdered.

"I willna give them that satisfaction."

2

“We’ll hunt the Highlanders down. Kill every last man Jack of them!”

Brody held his breath. The English-accented voice outside the cave sounded dangerously close. Huddled inside with eight other wounded warriors, Brody hunched lower. At the metallic clank of bayonets being fixed on muskets he made a swift, practiced movement and silently unsheathed his claymore.

A deeper English voice resonated through the stone barricaded entrance. “Cumberland ordered no quarter given.”

Brody’s jaw dropped. Hadna he seen the duke’s work killing the wounded fallen on the battlefield? But take no prisoners! Kill all Highland warriors! That was dirty warfare. Unheard of. The devil’s work.

The shrubbery hiding the mouth to their moldy cave shook. English bayonets and musket barrels slammed against the barrier he and the others had stacked to close off the entrance. Stones thudded inside, stirring dust and sending small insects scurrying.

In the distance, a horse whinnied. When the sound of military accouterments clanked, Brody imagined the red coats turning to listen. In the sudden silence, he heard the sob and heartbreak in the wind whistling around the cave.

His belly growled, audible in the tense silence. He

grabbed his gut with both hands to stifle the noise. He was hungry no' merely for food, but for revenge. For the death of Englishmen.

"I smell them, Reginald. The Scots have to be hiding here somewhere. Light a torch. We'll set this whole bloody mountain afire."

The voice sent spiders crawling down Brody's spine. His breathing raced and his blinding headache throbbed. Would he die by fire rather than the blade or ball?

From somewhere down the mountainside a Lowland Scot's burr called, "Halloo, the soldiers!"

"It's Reverend Fergus," the deeper English voice outside stated.

"Ooo's Reverend Fergus?" a soldier's cockney-accented voice asked.

"Lowland bloke. Pastors the Protestant flocks at Kirkmichael and Inverness. What's he want?"

"Doesn't matter."

The unmistakable sound of flint striking tinder caused Brody's jaw to harden. Huddled together in the darkness, the musky stench of fear overpowered the pungent odor of bloody, unwashed bodies. Brody fought his urge to run from the cave, claymore poised, ready to die a soldier's death rather than burn.

The English voice floated through the half-demolished barricade. "The grass and wood are too wet. Can't get a spark. Bad business that."

"Would you soldiers care for some shepherd's pie and hot cider?" Again, Pastor Fergus called from further down the mountainside.

"Nice, that. These frigid heights aren't fit for man nor beast." English boots clattered on stones and grew softer as the soldiers descended the mountain.

Brody sucked in a breath. He stretched the burning muscles cramping his calves. His mouth watered. Shepherd's pie. He could taste the lamb chunks smothered in gravy, with tatties floating in—

"Thank Ye, God, for delivering us from being roasted alive," Lachlan muttered as he cradled his shattered arm to his chest.

"Aye," other voices whispered.

Brody frowned. Two days past, he would have thanked the Lord as well. His gratitude died with Da on the battlefield. No' his anger. With a blink of His eternal eye, God could've stopped that slaughter. Brody scowled at the wounded men squatting with him on the cave's floor. He slumped on a rock, teeth chattering like a bodhran.

He felt barren. Nay, more than that. Deserted. More hollow even than that. He struggled to name the emptiness binding his chest as though a tree lay across it. Betrayal. That was it. He clenched his fists around the claymore's hilt and plunged the double-edged blade deep into the hard earth. God betrayed his trust.

"Isna a man among us escaped the battle without a terrible wound." Lachlan hung his head. "Mine hurts some fierce."

"Sorry, lad." Brody laid a hand on Lachlan's sound shoulder. "Pastor Fergus mayhap will make it through with food for us tonight." His voice sounded hollow. He had no real hope to offer. God was not going to send *them* manna.

After waiting out the long, frigid, miserable day, night did bring Pastor Fergus and food. Though, the shepherd's pie failed to go far shared among nine starving men. While Brody wolfed his meager portion, Pastor Fergus confirmed that all three brothers lay

dead. Tight-lipped, Brody smothered his grief. He would not give way in front of the other men.

"The redcoats didn't even spare some innocent lasses and bairns watching near the battlefield." Tears glinted in Pastor Fergus's eyes.

Iciness inside Brody's chest out-froze the cave's chill.

Pastor Fergus crouched in the center of the circle of wounded men, looking from face to face.

"The English confiscated the Chiefs' lands and homes. Women and bairns scattered to whatever safety they could find. English officers carried off many lasses to the coast."

Brody blinked. His mind numbed. He watched Pastor Fergus's Adam's apple move up and down his slender throat. "No one kens the lasses' fate? Slaves, ye think?"

"Or worse." Pastor Fergus shook his head.

Brody's voice grated, "Ma and Fiona? Do ye ken if they're safe?"

"Safe, for the moment. Hiding inside a well."

Brody sprang to his feet, hunched forward, and duck-walked to the entrance. He pushed aside the demolished barricade and gazed into darkness. The redcoats would hunt down Ma and Fiona. He must find them a safer place.

Pastor Fergus gripped Brody's arm and pulled him back into the group. "This cave's no longer safe. Meanwhile, I have a plan that will help one of you." He glanced around the circle. While a flickering torch cast shadows on the rock wall, Pastor Fergus wrote each man's name on a crumpled paper. Then, deep voice barely above a whisper, the young preacher outlined his plan. When he finished, the wounded men

glanced at one another and nodded. A gleam of hope softened the tired lines of their faces.

Pastor Fergus raised his voice, "What of you, Brody?"

"Nay. Yer idea doesna appeal to me. I'll take my chances in the wild Highland bracken." Even as he spoke, Brody questioned what stiffness inside made it impossible to bend his pride and receive the pastor's help?

"Think of your ma, lad. She's lost all sons save you. The English hang or burn alive every fugitive they catch."

Brody shook his head. "Nay, I'll find my own way."

"And what of your wee, tender sister? The English will make sport of such a bonny lass, especially with her being kin of the piper."

Brody grimaced. Hot blood pulsing in his wound kicked his pain higher. He slumped against the cold rock wall.

Was there no other way?

Something strong inside him hated the thought of accepting help. Harder to do than face death. Brody burrowed his forehead against cold stone, lifted long, dirty hair off his neck, and rubbed the tight muscles bunched there. Was he man enough? Forfeiting his name was like surrendering his manhood.

"The Lady is one of the Ladies MacMurry," Pastor Fergus tempted.

3

"On the morrow I wed." Megan Moria MacMurry, lay full length on the moor that divided the Highlands from their Lowland estate. She propped her chin on her hands and gazed across the soft grass at Cailin, her older sister.

"You've had but three days of mourning your Jamie." Cailin reached across waving grass and squeezed Megan's hand. "It's very soon."

Too soon. The scene that had changed her life three days past rushed back to cloud Megan's senses...

Despite the extra peat she'd thrown into the sweet-smelling fire, the dovecote remained chill, its small window open to welcome her returning pigeon. She drew the scarlet fur-lined hood of her cloak closer.

For hours the gentle cooing, the ruffling of feathers, the scratching in cozy nests, and bright round bird eyes watching her, kept her company. Soon she'd be forced to return to the castle for dinner. She hugged herself to keep from shivering. She'd been so confident the day would bring news from Jamie. Despite the morning's cruel premonition, she had prayed for God to give the Highlanders another victory. With a gentle whoosh and flapping of grey wings, a feathered form landed on the window sill, clutched the perching bar with pale talons, and waited as she'd trained it.

Megan leaped from her three-legged stool, rushed

to the window, and cupped the messenger's soft, feathered body. She felt the rapid beat of its heart and smelled the faint bird odor as she opened the capsule on its leg and slid out the tiny slip of paper. A whisper of cool air fanned by pigeon's wings, and the bird slipped from her hand to fly to its nest.

Megan scanned the note. The handwriting looked unfamiliar. Her heart sank. Her fingers shook. The words blurred. Small inked letters. Devastation on thin parchment, crackling in her fingers.

No. No. No!

She must have read it wrong. She brushed a fist across her eyes and tried again. Letters, in haphazard shapes, jumbled across the parchment. She sorted them out.

She had not misunderstood.

Falling to her knees on the cold hard floor, she dropped her head into her hands to smother her scream.

Jamie was dead. The clans decimated. The Highlands lost.

And with Jamie, Megan's last hope died.

All the dreams of her life gathered in a heavy puddle inside her stomach...

That was Monday's pain. Today, the agony had not abated. Megan squeezed Cailin's hand. Then let it slide to the grass.

"I must wed before Papa announces my betrothal to that odious earl." Numbness chilled Megan's heart. She hoisted herself to a sitting position and retied the narrow blue ribbon around her bundled love letters. "This is all I have left of Jamie." She spoke with absolute certainty. "And I know with him dead, I shall never love again." She took a deep breath. "So now I