

### *The Year of Our Lord, 1691, May 22nd*

We held our wedding beside the River Coe on the northern borders, between *Aonach Eagach Ridge* and the high peaks of *Buachaille Etive Beag*, under the watchful eyes of the Three Sisters. A sea of colorful tartan swarmed in through the pass and the Old Military Road, as every clan from neighboring villages arrived, many on foot, some horseback.

By mid-day, the Glen was a swarm of bodies. I am not sure if it was in congratulations, to gawk at the unlikely pair, or to come and view those of Glencoe who dared take in a *Child of the Mist*, one who refused to take on the name of Campbell. Yet that is exactly what we had done and I was proud to wed Isobel and give her the royal name of Stewart as her own. A name that would vindicate her all the days of her life from the ruthless persecutions of the crown. Or so I thought at the time.

A spectacular event, Isobel a vision in her beige dress and tartan wrap, proudly herolding the Glencoe MacDonald brooch. The rare sunlight accented the red highlights in her golden hair; which was wreathed in spring flowers. So breathtaking was she with the green and purple heathered hills flourishing around her that I could scarce keep my eyes to myself. Tingles ran through my loins, throwing me into silent prayer that my excitement would not draw up my kilt and embarrass me afore the entire village.

The winds blew a gale, lifting strands of hair into my face. And such pains I had taken that morning over my appearance, even using a blade to clean up my face. But worry I did not as Isobel smiled and everything promised to be perfect.

That was the first time I saw him, standing stiff as a dragoon would, upon the brae, sunlight grazing through straggling gray-streaked red hair tied back in an attempted appearance to be well-groomed against the Highland winds.

His gaze lit down upon us, and even from the distance, I could see his face was worn with the ravages of age, debt, and drink—and something else I was not yet sure the meaning behind. Though not on duty, he wore his uniform and himself as if he were, and the bright red of his coat shone against the land and brought a malevolent glint to his dark eyes. Captain Brian Campbell, cousin to Captain Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, a minion of King William's Regiment of Foot.

His stare fixed on mother afore it moved to me, thin lips curled upwards in a shrewd grin, as if he held some grave secret or a deep-rooted antipathy reserved only for me.

I knew not the reason. What had I done to this man? The broken union between himself and mum had taken place long afore my birth.

*Could he still harbor ill will towards my mother, and thus toward me for being her son?*

I dared one more glance. Our gazes locked then, as if he were attempting to communicate with me without words. And as I stared, perplexed, a spark of recognition struck me. Aye, I had seen this man afore. He and his soldiers often rode through our villages in search of trouble where there was none.

But, nae, this was different.

Those eyes. There was something familiar in them, and the hair, the set of his shoulders.

I had no time to ponder the familiarity of this man, however, as the events of the *réiteach* hailed my attention... I turned back as Isobel's father spoke:

*“Ma tha ise deònach,  
Tha mise ro-dheunach,  
Agus mura bi sin mar sin,  
Cha bhiseo mar seo.”*

“If she is willing, I am very willing and if that weren't so, then this wouldn't be so.”

Isobel and I spoke our vows with precision, and as I stated the final words, “... *gus an dèan Dia leis a' bhàs ar dealachadh*,” a sudden chill crept up my spine. “Till God shall separate us by death.”

As the skirl of the pipes announced us husband and wife, the feast and *ceilidh* followed.

I must admit I overindulged myself on the many delicacies that lay across the table; hens flourished, cooked in various manners, gifts from family and neighboring clans, mutton, scones, bannocks, meats, cheeses, and too much whisky and port wine.

I was not sure I could dance as the wedding party stepped into place for the foursome reel. But I did and finally collapsed with the rest afore a bonnie fire.

Isobel sat across from me, beyond the blaze, and every now and again her soft laughter chimed like a songbird and reached my ears. I smiled, keeping my eyes on the men ranting and laughing around me, but my thoughts were with Isobel.

"The problem wi' this world today," I stated to Ian, the large dark-haired clansman who had been one of few with me the day we found Isobel near the Devil's Staircase, "is that nae enough people speak their minds true."

"Och, aye," said Ian, his laughter rolling through the mountains. "And what's goin' on in yer wee mind the night, eh Wolfie, tae speak such a profound statement?"

A young cousin who had come over from Glen Shira, Robert Roy MacGregor, was seated beside Ian. He cackled. "I'll teel ye what's goin' on in his wee mind is all up under that kilt!"

I scrunched my eyes at Rob. "Haud yer wheesht!" And that only made them laugh more fiercely.

As they hooted, it was all too simple to ignore their chides as my gaze swept past the red and orange roar of the flames and halted on Isobel, her profile delicately lit by the flickering fire on her fair skin. She laughed and conversed with the woman beside her. Perhaps Rob was correct. My thoughts were driven up under my kilt at that moment, but also in my heart.

The celebrations would keep on until the wee hours, until most had slumbered off after having succumbed to the effects of too much drink and dancing.

I rose and went to Isobel, ignoring the chiding of the men behind me, and took her delicate hand. I'd waited long enough.

Despite the abundance of spirits I'd consumed I was fast awake as I swept Isobel off to our wedding chamber. Several clansmen followed, needing to be sure the union did indeed transpire. I shut the door in their faces, but not afore casting them a glare of condemnation.

Excitement strung up in my gut; not only was I wed to the most beautiful lass in the Glen, but the night I'd dreamt of my entire adult life was upon me.

I breathed in the scent of Isobel's hair as I slowly tugged at the ties that fastened her bodice. No words were spoken, the exchange between us heated by desire.

So still she stood, no notice nor objection of the cold room as I lifted the shift over her head, dropped it to flutter at her feet, unveiling the pale and unblemished flesh, covered by naught but the golden locks that waved over slender shoulders. Pert breasts augmented by rock hard nipples I wished to taste more than any food or drink.

I wasted no time on my own attire. Kick off the boots, a quick flick of the brooch and belt buckle and the wool of my *fèileadh-mór* fell in a crumpled heap to dusty wood slats.

I lifted my wife and placed her upon the bed, climbing under the coverlet beside her, our bodies providing more than enough warmth to tame the bite from the room.

Isobel responded to my first caresses by brushing my lips with a soft kiss. My eyes closed, my senses open and aware of the flowery scent of her hair, lingering still from the wreath that had long since escaped in the wind. Tingles raced up my spine as her tender hand slipped beneath the coverlet and took a soft hold on my much aroused manhood.

Oh, the need, the desire for her burned through me like a raging pyre. I could scarce contain myself. I needed to drink of her love, taste of her essence, consume every part of her. I rolled myself over until my strong, hard body engulfed her soft, weaker one. Our lips locked with the promise of eternal bliss and I was lost.

I drew her close. I knew from hearsay that I needed to be gentle, for being a man, I must brag, a bit over-endowed, I could easily harm her. But as I pushed past the resistance of her virginity and felt her heat

engulf me, a shadow within my soul sprung to vivid life. All thoughts of gentle ease succumbed to a burning desire to possess I had never previously experienced.

Deeper and deeper I drew into her, the demand to have all of her overwhelming me, drawing me higher and higher until I wanted, needed to make her part of me. The pounding ache in my body and the urgency within rendered me unaware of her screams that I was driving too hard.

*Please, just let her be part of me. Let me drink of her completely until I am no longer thirsty.*

Better than any drunken excursion—for that is what I was, drunk with need. I was imperceptible to the small hands that shoved and raked at my chest as, with one last thrust, I released a lifetime of waiting.

My head and heart ached with the sound of her cries and the love I felt for her wrested me suddenly from the fire afore we both could be burnt. I drew back, peered down into Isobel's tender face.

"I am so sorry, my sweet bonnie Isobel," I whispered afore kissing the tears from her cheeks.

As her body relaxed beneath me I pulled her close again and simply held her, concentrating on the feel of her heart pounding against mine, lest the fear within me take hold and I break down and weep as well.

What beast dwelled within that I did not know existed? Where had it come from and how could I control it?

The questions raged through my mind as Isobel's breathing slowed to that of a sweet slumber. Her soft complexion glowed ever so soft in the luminescence of a slowly dying fire.

Gently, as not to wake her, I kissed her hair, rose and wrapped the full of my tartan around my naked body, set a log on the fire and stole silently from the room.

By this time, the house had emptied of drunken Scots, all having staggered off to their beds, either with relatives or on their own. I poured myself a dram of whisky and sat alone by the fire. As I stared into the raging flames, my mind wandered back to the 15<sup>th</sup> year of my birth—and the day Isobel came into my life.