



IN
DARKENED
CORNERS

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A Lindisfarne Series Short Story

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Johanna Craven

Northumberland, England
1715

She laces her bodice with a thick helping of regret. “Do not speak of this to anyone.”

He rolls over, the sheet pulled to his waist. He is a polished city man, faintly handsome, she supposes. At least, far less weather-worn and scruffy than most of the folk on this island. “Who do you imagine I would tell? I don’t know a soul in this place.”

Julia looks over her shoulder at him, re-pinning stray copper curls at her neck. “Indeed. A bird hunter. Should I believe that?”

He grins. “An ornithologist.”

“Aye, a bird hunter.” She believes him, of course. There is a spying glass and hunting musket leaning up against the wall in one corner of the room, notebooks and pencils tossed beside them on the floor. Wooden collection boxes that smell like earth and sea, and faintly of dead things. This pretence of disbelief, it is just some foolish game the two of them have begun to play.

He sits up, grabbing his shirt from the floor and sliding it over lean white shoulders. “Why do you doubt me? Holy Island is a haven for birdlife. Is it such a surprise that a man might go searching for beauty?” He winks at her. “Natural and otherwise.”

Julia snorts. “Please. Save the smooth words. I’m not that foolish.” She bends over to lace her boots. “Although I’m well aware my actions suggest otherwise.”

The man, her lodger, chuckles. “How your words pain me.”

“I should not have come.”

“No,” he says, giving her that dazzling smile that had tempted her into his room in the first place. “You should not have. But you will come again. I know it.”

She narrows her eyes at him, but doesn’t speak. Because she knows there is every chance he is right. It will not be long before the loneliness seizes her again and she is creeping down to the cellar she has turned into a guestroom, tapping shamefully on his door.

Well. She has a reputation. She may as well live up to it.

She hears a loud knock and hurries upstairs, hopping into her other boot as she goes. She unlocks the door of her curiosity shop, allowing the man belting on the window to come blustering in.

“What are you doing closing shop in the middle of the day?” he demands, charging up to the counter. Julia follows, without bothering to answer. The man dumps an unsheathed sword on the counter. “A piece of history. My da fought with it at Dunkeld. Brought it home stained with the redcoats’ blood.” His eyes shine. “I daresay it’s worth more than ever these days, with another Jacobite Rising on the horizon.”

Julia turns the sword over carefully. It’s a fine rapier with an ornate brass pommel, though its blade is tarnished and the leather on the grip is worn through in places. Clearly seen better days. “I’ll give you a pound for it.”

“That’s criminal. This is a piece of Jacobite history.”

She’ll not be advertising it as such. It’s far too dangerous. These days, she can feel the unrest growing. Can feel it seeping into the air and the sea; can feel herself breathing it in, a deadly disease. Since George the German had become King of Great Britain last year, the Jacobites

have been stirring again, ready to fight to put the Stuarts back on the throne. Ready to make noise. Ready to tarnish their swords with redcoats' blood.

But Julia will not be making noise, or advertising to her customers that she has Jacobite tokens on her shelf. She will do nothing but maintain a firm neutrality. The safest way forward.

Twenty-six years since the Battle of Dunkeld, when countless Northumbrian men had marched over the border and joined the Scottish Jacobites to restore James to the throne. Twenty-six years since far too many memorial stones had been placed in the churchyard on Holy Island.

Julia had been born just weeks before the battle at Dunkeld. The story went that the first time her father had laid eyes on her, pink-cheeked and chortling in her crib, he had been weary and tired with the weight of defeat. Still in mourning for those who had been lost.

"What a sorry world the lass has been brought into," he'd said to her mother. "She'll learn soon enough there's not a thing worth giggling about."

This was her father; full of gloom. Staunchly Catholic, with a bone-deep belief that the world was out to do him wrong. He'd only grown more morose the further the Jacobite cause had sunk into oblivion. As a girl, Julia had countered his perpetual gloom by making it her duty to be as bright and cheerful as possible. It had done nothing to endear her to her father.

"One pound," she repeats to the man with the sword. Her ginger cat, Minerva, leaps soundlessly onto the counter and sniffs the sword, before turning away in disinterest.

The man sighs dramatically, then nods. Julia reaches into the pocketbook hidden beneath her skirts and produces the money. He snatches up his payment and leaves, letting the door slam closed behind him.

Julia hears footsteps coming up the stairs. Her shoulders tighten and she wills her lodger away. She ought never have gone near him. She likes to think she has a little more willpower than to crawl into bed with a stranger. A little more decency. But today, her loneliness had got the better of her.

She is relieved when his footsteps continue across the landing and out the side door.

He had come to Holy Island to see the birds, so he had said. To collect eggs and nests that would be added to vast London collections. Usually, the people who lodge in her cellar are pious pilgrims come to pray on the islet where Saint Cuthbert had healed with his hands. Nothing pious about this lodger, she thinks wryly. He's all honeyed words and warm, roaming hands. Her body is still humming from their afternoon together.

Julia leans the sword up against the wall behind the counter. Tomorrow, she will polish it up, ready to be sold. When her son, Bobby, sees it, he will be utterly obsessed.

She wonders at the truth of the man's story. Had this sword really been carried into battle at Dunkeld? After running her curiosity shop for three years, she has come to know that most items that are brought in have a story attached. A swashbuckling or pitiable story that might tempt her to hand over more money than the pieces are worth. Not that she is one to talk. She'll do whatever is necessary to make a few extra pennies; to put a good meal on the table for herself and Bobby. Last month she had told a customer that a pocket watch had once belonged to the Duke of Albany, and had sold it for three times its value.

The door flies open and Bobby charges in, leaving a trail of muddy footprints in his wake. Behind him are Julia's three brothers, each tall and broad-shouldered, with flaming red hair dancing about their faces. Cold, sea-scented air blows in with them.

“We went all the way out to the Farne Islands, Ma.” Bobby grins his gap-toothed smile. “The sea was so rough, I nearly fell overboard!”

Her brother, Michael, swipes him playfully over the back of the head. “Don’t go telling your ma that, lad. She’ll never let you off dry land again.”

“I will,” Julia says. “Just not in the care of your uncles.”

Bobby’s eyes alight on the sword and he scurries behind the counter to examine it.

“Careful. It’s sharp.” Julia puts a hand on her hip and looks at her brothers. The three of them smell like they’ve not been near dry land in months, a disaster of saltwater and herrings. “You might have washed yourselves first,” she snorts. “You’ll scare the customers off.”

Her youngest brother, Angus, holds out his hand. “The key for upstairs, Jul?”

She pulls it from her apron and hands it to him. Hopes he’s heading for the washbin.

Hugh, the eldest, puts his thick hands on Julia’s shoulders and looks at her squarely. “Isn’t it time you locked up for the day? We’ve things to talk to you about.”

“Tide’s coming in,” Michael adds.

Julia hesitates. Thanks to the afternoon’s little detour, she’s been closed longer than she’s been open today. Still, the high tide, when Holy Island is cut off from the mainland, brings quieter streets. And she always enjoys her brothers’ company. Even if they do smell like something that came up with the herring nets.

“All right. One of you go and get the fire lit and I’ll tidy up.”

Michael chuckles. “Tidy? Is that what you call it?” His eyes roam the mad clutter of objects on the shelves. Books share space with pocket watches and ornate hair brushes, vases crammed in between toys and plates and jewellery. It’s chaotic, orderless, musty. She would have it no other way.

Julia gives him a sickly sweet smile. “Just go and get the fire started, will you?” She pulls a few pennies from her pocketbook and hands them to Bobby. “Fetch us some milk.” She has no idea whether her brothers’ planned topic of conversation is fit for seven-year-old ears. “Let yourself in around the side when you’re done.”

She watches through the window as Bobby scurries down the street, then she locks the front door after him. Hugh picks up the sword and examines it.

“A nice piece,” he says.

“Fellow who sold it to me says his da fought with it at Dunkeld.”

“Is that so?” Hugh turns it over, seeming to look at it with fresh eyes.

“Put it back.”

Reluctantly, he sets it back against the wall. Julia pushes the fireguard in front of the simmering coals in the grate. She scoops Minerva under her arm and leads Hugh up the narrow staircase at the back of the shop. She sees his eyes skim over the steps leading down to the cellar.

“Still got your lodger in there, then?”

“Aye.”

He makes a disapproving noise in his throat. Julia grits her teeth. She knows well that Hugh considers her foolish for letting strangers into her home. Believes her to be putting herself and Bobby in danger.

Perhaps he is right. In more ways than one. But renting out that little room beneath her shop guarantees she can put food on the table. Guarantees she can keep the doors of the curiosity shop open when the streets of Holy Island are too empty to fill her pockets.

But she is not getting into this conversation again. It's a discussion they've had far too many times. It always ends with Hugh offering to help her, and Julia feeling like a burden. Hugh had put a roof over her head for four years after Bobby was born—she refuses to take advantage of his generosity any longer.

When she steps into the living quarters, she finds Angus sitting at the table with his long legs stretched out in front of him, Michael splashing about at the washbin.

She takes four cups from the shelf and picks the teapot up off the table. She's not washed it since this morning, but she doubts her brothers will notice. She grabs a tiny jar from the shelf and tosses a few seeds of Queen Anne's Lace into her cup. The last thing she wants is a brother or sister for Bobby.

When the teacups are filled, she passes them around, then joins her brothers at the table.

"Well?" she says expectantly. "You have news?"

"The Duke of Ormonde is mustering a Jacobite force in the West Country," says Michael. His hair is still dripping and dark around his face. "He plans to take Plymouth, Bristol and Exeter. We're going south to join his army."

Julia's stomach dives. "Don't be foolish."

Michael looks at his older brother. "Tell her, Hugh. She listens to you."

"I'm listening to you, Michael," Julia snaps. "I hear what you're saying. And I'm telling you it's foolish."

Hugh leans back in his chair, completely casual, as if he weren't about to charge across the country and risk his life. "What would you have us do, Jul? Stay here and watch that Hanover pig take over our country? Do you truly think it right that we've a German sitting on the throne?"

"I'd have you stay here and earn an honest living with the fishing fleet," she says. "Make sure your nephew is safe."

Make sure that I'm safe. She doesn't say it, of course. Doesn't want to admit to the fear that is stirring inside her at the thought of her brothers leaving. At the thought of her and Bobby being alone here on Holy Island.

Hugh gives her a smile. "You're doing a fine enough job of keeping him safe yourself."

The words, of course, are supposed to encourage her. Placate her. But they just make her angry. She wraps her hands around her teacup. "The Jacobite cause failed. It has failed again and again."

"Things are different this time. No one wants George on the throne."

In spite of herself, she suspects Hugh is right. This time, the Jacobite murmurings are louder than before. Cities are rioting. Plots are forming in darkened corners. Whispers carried across the country have men building armies. But this cause, why should it belong to her family? What bearing will it have on their lives whether it's a Stuart or a Hanover on the throne? Her life has felt like enough of a battle without taking on such a lofty cause.

She knows her brothers don't see things that way. Two years ago, influenza had swept through Hugh's house and taken his wife and only son, and since then, he has thrown all his energy into the Jacobite cause. Each week, it seems he is off to a protest somewhere in

Northumberland; to a meeting in someone's lamplit cellar or some tavern's hidden back room. A need, she supposes, to be part of something bigger than himself and his grief.

As for Michael and Angus, well, they just trail along after Hugh like jetsam in riptide. Always willing to follow wherever he leads. She'd been the same once; an obedient sister. How could she have done otherwise when Hugh had saved her and Bobby from a life on the streets?

"When will you leave?" she asks, her voice coming out thinner than she intended. Maybe it's for the best. Maybe if she plays up the part of the weak and needy young mother, it will convince her brothers to stay.

The moment the thought arrives, she shrugs it off as foolishness. They won't stay—nor will they believe she needs them to stay. If anything, it will just cause Hugh to harp on about getting rid of her lodger again.

"We'll leave at week's end," he says.

"So soon?" She gets up suddenly, too angry to look her brothers in the eye. "You've been planning this for a while, haven't you. And you did not think to tell me?" She flings another log onto the fire. Sparks explode up the chimney.

"We did think to tell you," says Hugh, with something far too close to a smirk. "We just decided not to. Because we had a feeling you'd react a little like this."

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When her brothers leave her lodgings, a sinking feeling overtakes her. She can't pretend to be surprised. In truth, since she had heard the first rumblings of a new Jacobite Rising, she had been waiting for them to tell her they were leaving to fight. Even still, the news is grossly unwelcome. Three will leave. And she knows there is every chance that three will not return.

She scratches through an uninspiring supper of stale bread and cheese, forcing down a few mouthfuls and trying to prevent Bobby from guessing that anything is wrong. After supper, she tucks him into bed, then locks the living quarters and heads downstairs.

For a moment, she stands on the landing, looking down at the closed door of the cellar. Is her lodger, with his neatly trimmed nails and un-callused hands, out scouring the island for nightingales and warblers? Looking out across the dunes with a spying glass to his eye?

She pulls her gaze away from the cellar door. She did not come down here for this; for him. Although she cannot deny he would be a fine distraction from the anxiousness her brothers have stirred up inside her.

She steps out through the back door and lifts her face to the cold sky, drawing down a long breath. The cold and the dark steadies her somewhat. This island has always had the power to do that.

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne has always been home, with its rising and falling tides that link her back to the rest of England for half of every day. She knows with a deep certainty that there is no part of her that will ever want to leave this place, with its pink skies and grass-covered dunes. The constant sigh of the sea, and the keening of seals on the wind. There's a strange magic to Holy Island, to Lindisfarne; a strange magic that sustains her.

She and her brothers were born and raised here. They had buried their mother when Angus was barely walking. When Julia had confessed to her father, as a foolish, scared seventeen-

year-old, that she was with child, he had thrown her from the house and told her to leave the island.

He had not even thought to ask questions. Not that there would have been any satisfactory answers. Bobby's father was a fleeting mistake she'd made, enamoured by a visiting Scotsman. They had parted ways before she had even straightened her skirts. There certainly was no offer of marriage coming.

Julia had refused to leave Lindisfarne. Yes, she would leave the lopsided cottage her father called home; she had little choice but to do so. But with everything crashing down around her, with her future so uncertain, refusing to leave the island she called home felt like the only way she could survive.

Without their father's knowledge, Hugh and his wife had taken her in. For months, she had existed within the confines of her brother's cottage, terrified of stepping into the streets of the tiny village in case she crossed paths with her father—or anyone who might tell him where she was hiding.

When, just a few weeks before Bobby's birth, their father had barged into the house and found Julia hovering beside the hearth, swollen with his illicit grandchild, he had fled Holy Island himself, refusing to be subjected to the shame her presence brought.

The island, Julia thinks, with rather petty regularity, is a far better place without him.

She knows people still talk of her. Still whisper behind their hands when she passes. Murmur to one another at the sight of her child, who, infuriatingly, looks almost exclusively like his long-absconded father. She tells herself she does not care what people say. And mostly, that is the truth.

Footsteps sound down Church Lane, and here he is, her lodger, with a leather book bag over his shoulder and his tricorne hat pulled low over his dark hair.

He steps into the circle of light cast by the streetlamp above her shop. Gives her a teasing smile. "Have you been waiting for me?"

"I've been counting the minutes," she says dryly. He chuckles. Digs a pipe from his bag and lights it with a single flick of his tinderbox. He blows silver smoke into the threads of mist.

"Something bothering you?" he asks. "You seem troubled."

Julia leans back against the window of the shop. A part of her wants to speak. To unload the burden of her brothers' leaving. Unload her fear of losing them.

It's this she longs for most of all, she thinks: someone to share the load with. She will never be a wife; of that she is certain. Bobby's father had made sure of that. And while she would never dare wish for a life without her son in it, there are times when she wishes she was not forced to be quite so independent. Sometimes she craves a life of shared burdens and conversations lasting long into the night.

"Nothing bothering me," she says, reaching for the lodger's pipe and taking a long draw. She watches the smoke curl in the lamplight as she releases it steadily from her lips. She wants to share. Wants to unload. But with these first stirrings of rebellion, there are secrets that must be kept.

She hands back the pipe and goes inside before she is tempted to give more of herself than is wise.

When Hugh strides into the shop the next morning, he is wearing that overbearing elder brother look that Julia knows all too well. He reaches into his pocket and produces a coin pouch. Sets it ceremoniously on the counter.

“I want you to take this.” His green eyes meet hers. “That way you don’t need to keep your lodger.”

She peeks inside. It’s a ridiculous amount. Offensive, almost. And in a way, frightening. As though Hugh does not intend to come back. “I couldn’t,” she says. “I’ve taken enough from you over the years.”

His eyes soften. “Please, Julia. I would feel much better about leaving you and Bobby knowing you didn’t have strange folk bedding down in your cellar.”

She looks at him pointedly. “If you are worried about leaving us, don’t leave.”

“We have to. It’s the right thing to do. And we have a chance this time.”

We have a chance. Julia wonders when it became her brothers’ war. She supposes it became Hugh’s after he buried his wife and child. She is certain he would not be marching out to put his life on the line for the Stuarts if he had a family to take care of at home.

She nudges the pouch back towards him. “Thank you, Hugh. But I’ll not be taking it.”

Her brother stands motionless for a moment, and she can tell he is debating whether to press the issue. He doesn’t, but lets out a sigh of blatant disapproval. Julia forces herself not to react.

“Well,” he says finally, digging into his cloak, “perhaps you might distribute these to your customers.” He holds out a bundle of small pages—tracts, Julia realises. Jacobite propaganda.

‘James the third, by the grace of God king of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the faith...’

She looks at him in disbelief. “Are you truly asking this of me?”

He dumps the papers on the counter and rams a thick finger against them. “Do you not think we ought to fight for what is right?”

Anger flares inside her. She snatches the pile of tracts and shoves them against his chest. “I care far more about the safety of my son and I, than I care who sits on the throne. How can you come in here concerned about me keeping a lodger, and yet ask me to distribute these? You know I could be arrested for such a thing.”

Hugh’s fingers curl around the edges of the pages. “Rubbish. If the German pig’s men went about hanging every man, woman and child who merely supported the true king, there’d be no one left.”

Julia folds her arms across her chest. Does he truly imagine such an argument might convince her? “Why is it so important to you that I get involved in this cause?”

Hugh sighs. “Because it’s the right thing to do. And...”

“And what?”

“If you were to help us, it would make our father proud.”

Ah. So that’s what this is truly about.

She’s not spoken a word to her father since he had caught her in Hugh’s kitchen almost eight years ago. This is far from the first time her older brother has tried to nudge her back in his direction. As if their estrangement had been her choice. These days, her father is no more than a distant memory. She has long stopped asking her brothers for news of him. Has even

renounced his dangerous Catholicism—and the compulsion towards Jacobite support that comes with it.

“There’s little point trying that approach,” she says bitterly. “The man wants nothing to do with me. And I want nothing to do with him either. Stowing a few Jacobite tracts in my shop is not going to change that.”

“He’s our father. Does that mean nothing to you?”

“It clearly means nothing to him. So why should it matter to me?”

Hugh sighs, like she’s a petulant child. “Julia, I—”

“Leave,” she tells him suddenly. “I don’t want you here either.” She plants her hands on her hips and stares him down, making it clear the conversation is over.

Hugh’s heavy footsteps click-clack across the stone floor and she doesn’t look up until the door slams. When she does so, she sees he has left the tracts sitting on the counter. Just the sight of them staring up at her makes her jittery. With each day, the Jacobite movement seems to gain momentum. Riots and violence are spilling across the country. How long will it be before they are at war again? And how long will it be before there are spies skulking around this island, with eyes out for the Northumbrian Jacobites? Not long—if they are not here already.

Julia rushes to the door and locks it. Then she stokes the fire in the corner of the shop. Feeds each one of Hugh’s tracts to the flames, watching smoke spiral up the chimney and burn the damning words away.

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She tells herself she will not see them off. That will teach them, if they stand about waiting for her farewell, and she does not bother to show her face. Of course, in reality, she knows she can do no such thing. And two days later, she and Bobby are standing at the edge of the sand where Holy Island joins the mainland, while her brothers approach with packs on their backs. The tide is out, the sea casting a thin, glittering sheen across the mudflats. The morning is brilliant and blue.

Angus reaches her first. Julia pulls him into an embrace.

“Stay. Please.” He’s the youngest; four years below her, almost a decade younger than Hugh. The gentlest and, she hopes, the easiest to sway. “Bobby and I need you.”

He holds her to him, but says, “Stop it, Jul. I know what you’re doing. It won’t work.” He steps back, looking her in the eyes. “You’re better than this.”

Is she? This manipulative, calculating streak has been a part of her for as long as she can remember. A necessary part, she thinks. Because there’s a certain vulnerability to being in her position, and she will take up any weapons she can to counter it. But she is reminded that Angus knows her too well to fall for such mind games.

She gives him a faint nod. She will try to be better, at least. A lump tightens her throat. “Please be careful. Come back to us.”

She is blinking back tears as she embraces Michael, but when she approaches Hugh, she feels her body tense with anger.

He kisses her cheek. “Take care, Julia.”

She nods wordlessly, wipes her tears with the back of her hand so Bobby doesn't see them. And she watches them step out onto the sand, three silhouetted figures in the sunlight, disappearing towards the mainland.

*

Julia walks with Bobby to the home of Alice Emmett, the elderly widow who runs the dame school on Holy Island.

Alice is waiting for her students at the door of her cottage, a shawl tugged around her narrow shoulders. Threads of fine grey hair peek out from beneath her cloth cap. "In you go, Bobby." She ushers him through the door. "Go and find yourself a seat. Several of the other children are here already."

Julia just manages to plant a kiss on the top of his head before he is thumping off down the hallway. She is glad he will have something to keep his mind off his uncles' leaving.

Alice looks up at Julia, her blue eyes bright in pitted cheeks. "Something's upset you. I can tell."

Alice has always been a friend. A straight-talking no-nonsense friend, far more likely to judge Julia on her terrible cooking skills than having mothered a child out of wedlock. No doubt she would have plenty to say on the topic of her brothers having marched off to join Ormonde's army.

But of course, Julia can tell her none of this. Can say nothing of her fear that she will never see her brothers again. Hugh may be hell-bent on proclaiming his Jacobite allegiance far and wide, but Julia will do nothing of the sort. As far as she is concerned, the fewer people who know where her brothers truly are, the better.

She knows there is every chance that soon, she will not be able to hide it. If the Rising begins, more and more young men will trickle out of villages to join the rebels' cause. She knows that then, whatever lies she cobbles together to explain her brothers' absence will become hollow and transparent.

But for now: "Nothing I can't handle. Just a difficult morning is all."

She knows Alice will not pry. The older woman pats her elbow. "You know you can come to me if you need anything."

Julia nods, grateful. She leaves the dame school so Alice can start her lessons.

It is still early—too early to open the shop. And she does not trust herself to return home with her lodger lurking temptingly in the shadows. Besides, a walk will do her good. Clear her head. Allow her to burn off a little of the anger at her brothers that is still simmering under her skin.

She walks out of the village, up through the middle of the island so she might avoid the castle and the reminder of the looming conflict it has come to be. But it is hard to step out from beneath its shadow; a monolithic fortress on an island the size of a penny. Sometimes it feels as though its hilltop ramparts are visible from almost everywhere on Lindisfarne.

She looks out instead towards Emmanuel Head and the gentle roll of the dunes. Sea knocks against the scattered shingle on the shoreline. This north-eastern tip of the island has always been her favourite, with its heavy seas and glittering pools, and its blissful isolation. Not a sign of inhabitation beyond the great stone hulk of Highfield House.

Built a century or more ago, the place was once home to the wealthiest family on Lindisfarne. These days, it's little more than a ruin, abandoned by the Blake family like an unwanted toy. What must it be like, Julia wonders, to own such a piece of the world, and leave it to rot away? Despite the house's emptiness, a path is still worn through the grass around it, and Julia follows the trail, eyes on the darkened glass of the manor. Two storeys of grey stone stare down at her, with faded brick extensions suggesting the house has been cobbled together over time. Elaborate oriel windows hold cracked and grimy panes, and a sea of ivy has taken over one wall.

She remembers the family, vaguely. They had left Holy Island perhaps twenty years ago, when Julia was a child. She has no idea where they are now, but she can't deny she is a little curious. Ruins and relics have always intrigued her, and this house is no different.

"It's quite a sight, is it not?"

Julia whirls around. His voice seems oddly out of place here. Then again, she imagines anyone's would—it's too lonely a place for conversation. "Nightingales out here?" she asks her lodger.

"Yes. But I confess, I'm more intrigued by the house. Strange for it just have been left like this, is it not?"

"It is, aye."

"It's a dreadful sight, if you ask me," the lodger says. "Ought to be torn down."

He's right of course; Highfield House has the potential for beauty, but in its run-down state, it is a scar on the headland.

Julia nods. "There's been some talk of it. No one has seen the family in years. I imagine they would not even notice if the place were to disappear."

She begins to drift away from the house, back down the faint path towards the village. Usually, this part of the island calms her, but today, the sight of Highfield House makes her think of lost and ruined things.

"You are leaving?" he asks.

She nods. "Will you join me?"

There's a faint smile on his face, and he tilts his head, as though considering her. "No," he says finally. "I've work to do."

"Yes," she says, remembering herself suddenly. "As do I."

*

Two days later, a woman Julia does not recognise comes into the shop. She dithers by the back shelves until the other customers leave, then approaches the counter with a glance over her shoulder. The cat surveys the situation for a moment before sidling over the flagstones and curling up in front of the fire.

"May we speak in private?" The woman is not an islander, but her accent suggests she has not come from far away. Her conspiratorial tone makes Julia nervous.

"What is this about?"

The woman nods towards the door, indicating for Julia to lock it. Fear knots her stomach. It's a fear that has never been far since her brothers left. She locks the door, then turns to look at the woman expectantly.

“You’re Hugh Mitchell’s sister.”

Julia guesses the woman a few years older than her. She has shrewd brown eyes and sharp features. “Hugh sent you?”

“Aye. He said you’d be a good person to help our cause.”

Julia notices then the small rosette pinned to the side of the woman’s bonnet. The white cockade of the Jacobites. She grits her teeth, anger flaring inside her. No doubt Hugh had made this woman’s acquaintance at one of the many meetings he had been frequenting.

“No. I’m sorry.” Julia makes for the door, ready to unlock it, but the woman darts in front of her, blocking her way.

“Just hear me out. Please.”

Julia folds her arms across her chest and sighs.

“Hugh tells me you know how to sail. He says you can handle your brothers’ fishing vessel.”

Julia eyes her. “What of it?”

“We are in need of a messenger. Someone to run missives to the Jacobites in Newcastle. Update them on developments out of Edinburgh.”

She lets out her breath. “No.”

“You would only need sail as far as Amble. Another messenger would meet you in the harbour tavern and complete the rest of the journey.”

“No,” Julia says again, firmer. “I’m sorry.”

“You support the true king, do you not?”

“I support my son. And I’ve a business to run. I can’t be spending my days shipping messages across the country.”

The woman’s voice hardens. “We need you, Miss Mitchell.”

Julia gives an incredulous laugh. “Truly? I am the only person you can find who is able to take a vessel down to Amble?”

“We need a woman to do the job,” she says. “We raise far less suspicion than men. Dragoons have their eyes open for spies, and one of our messengers was almost caught out of Edinburgh last week. When he heard about it, Hugh suggested we come to you.”

Julia snorts. Typical Hugh.

“You’re wrong,” she says. “A woman sailing alone will garner plenty of attention.”

“Attention, perhaps. But not suspicion. No one expects women to be involved in politics.”

Perhaps she is right. But Julia does not want this to be her life. With Hugh, Michael and Angus gone, she is all Bobby has. This life the two of them have created together, it feels so fragile and fleeting. She cannot do anything to put that in danger. Remaining neutral, remaining as far from this conflict as possible, is the only option. She’s worked too hard to build this solid thing for herself and her son. She’ll not watch it fall at the hands of the Jacobites.

“I’m sorry,” she says shortly. “I wish you luck. But I cannot be involved.”

*

And that is the end of it, she thinks.

But then she is standing outside Alice Emmett’s cottage, waiting as the children file out from their lessons. Most of the students have left already, drifting into the village in their coats and bonnets. There is no sign of Bobby.

Julia waits at the gate. Stares at the open front door, as though she might will her son to appear. After a time, Alice's hunched figure appears in the doorway and she makes to close the door. Julia rushes at her before she can do so.

"Bobby. Is he still inside?"

She is expecting the answer. But it chills her anyway. No, says Alice. Bobby is long gone. Was the first to leave as always. She attempts a smile: "Always craving his freedom, that one." But there is no light in her words, as though she can sense Julia's worry.

Julia rushes back to the shop. A mix-up she tells herself. Nothing more. After all, she has permitted Bobby to walk home alone in the past. He is almost eight now, and craving independence. But that morning, she had made it clear she would be waiting for him at the gate when his lessons finished for the day.

She throws open the door, the bell above it clattering noisily. She calls Bobby's name.

The stairs creak and her lodger appears from downstairs. "Is everything all right?"

"Have you seen my son?" she asks, breathless. "Did you hear him come in?"

"No. I'm sorry. I've not seen him all day."

She drops her head, clutching at her chest as panic sets in. Something on the floor, she realises. A folded scrap of paper has been slipped under the door.

She grabs it. Unfolds it, and looks down at scrawled handwriting she does not recognise: *Highfield House*.

*

It is more than a mile from the village to the manor at Emmanuel Head, but Julia runs every inch of the way. When she reaches Highfield House, she is stumbling over the dunes, her breath roaring in her ears and her lungs burning.

She lurches towards the front door and rams down the knocker. The sound echoes through the innards of the house.

The door creaks open to reveal the woman who had come to the shop that morning. Julia is not surprised to see her. "Where is my son?" she demands.

"He is unharmed."

"Where is he?"

"Upstairs. Come. I'll let you see him, and then we can talk."

Julia clenches her fists, forcing herself not to knock the woman down. Surely keeping a level head is best. As hard as that feels right now.

The woman leads her towards a creaking wooden staircase. Even in her chaotic state, the sight of Highfield House surprises her. She had expected an empty shell, but a lamp hangs from the ceiling, still clutching the waxy stump of a candle, and paintings line the dark wood of the foyer walls. It looks as though the Blake family had just left for a stroll one morning and forgotten to return.

Julia has little recollection of them leaving Holy Island. She had not known them well. Their second son, Nathan, had been just a few years older than her, but he had kept away from her, under the thrall of his older brother. One day, she simply realised she had not seen the two boys for a time, but she has no thought of whether they had left the island hurriedly, as the state of the house suggests.

The woman leads her up the creaking staircase and pushes open a door at the end of the hallway. Bobby is sitting on a narrow bed that is still covered with a faded blue bedspread. A large fireplace is built into one wall, ash still sitting in the grate. The floorboards are stained and discoloured. The air smells thick and close, like forgotten things. Bobby flings his arms around her waist.

She kneels down to look him in the eye. "Are you hurt, sweetheart?"

He shakes his head, eyes full of tears. "I'm sorry, Ma. She said she knew you. She said she was going to take me back to the shop. She said..."

Julia runs gentle hands through his hair to calm him. "It's all right. It was not your fault."

Bobby sniffs, his brown eyes wide. "Are you angry?"

Julia tucks a strand of dark hair behind his ear. "No, my love. Not at you." She stands, ushering him behind her. Keeps a firm grip on his spindly wrist. And she glares expectantly at the woman.

"Perhaps we might speak outside?" The woman nods towards Bobby.

"No." There is no way Julia is letting him out of her sight. "We will speak in here."

"Very well." The woman holds out a sealed and folded page. "This is to be delivered to Amble. Tomorrow at the latest."

"Is this what the Jacobite movement is relying on these days? Recruitment by force?"

The woman smiles thinly. "Can you blame us for having a little desperation?" She takes a step towards Julia. "The time is right for us to rise. You can sense that, can't you?"

"I am not denying that. I just want no part in it."

The woman's syrupy smile returns. "Well, I'm afraid you do not have a choice in the matter."

"Have you no more decency than to go after a child?" She wonders if Hugh knows of this. Knows of how far these people will stoop to get what they want. And then she wonders what he would think if he knew the woman had come after Bobby, in an attempt to secure his mother's involvement. The thought is an uncomfortable one. Because Julia is far from certain he would disapprove.

"One message," says the woman. "It is an urgent matter. And far too important to risk putting it in the hands of someone who might be caught. Just one message. And then we will leave you in peace."

"One message?" Julia repeats. "Why should I believe that?"

The woman takes a step towards her, looks her in the eye. "What choice do you have but to believe me?" Her voice is sweet, but the threat beneath her words is thinly veiled.

Julia's hand tightens involuntarily around Bobby's wrist. The woman is right. What choice does she have? If she does not agree to this, is there any guarantee she and Bobby will be allowed to leave this house?

She snatches the folded page from the woman's outstretched hand. The woman smiles. Pulls the white cockade from her bonnet and presses it into Julia's palm.

*

One message, Julia tells herself. And then all this will be over.

She cannot make herself believe that, of course. The next time Hugh's little cohort has another message to deliver, what will stop this woman coming for her again? Coming for Bobby again?

Still, she knows she has no choice. Deliver this one message and they will be safe, at least for now.

She walks back from Highfield House with her arm tightly around her son, her heart racing in her ears. Wild anger at Hugh is searing through her. It's a damn good thing he's left for the West Country, or she'd be putting his head on a spike herself.

Bobby is silent on the walk back over the dunes. Julia hears herself rattling out pleasantries, and offers of sweet tea and seedcake—anything to take his mind off the ordeal he has just endured.

His silence breaks as they slip back inside the shop. "Who was that lady? What did she want?"

Julia locks the door, then tosses the white cockade into the simmering remains of the fire. She'll not be wearing something so dangerous—the messenger will just have to find some other way to identify her. She ushers Bobby upstairs, shooting a glance at her lodger's closed door as she passes. For the first time, she is wary of having a near stranger in the house. Perhaps she ought to have been wary long before this.

She tells Bobby the truth—that the woman is connected with the Jacobite movement, and that she sought his mother's involvement. Bobby is far too intelligent, far too aware for half-baked stories told for the sake of comfort.

"Is she gone now?" he asks, watching Julia hang the kettle.

"Aye. She's gone." She wishes she could tell him this with a little more certainty. She kisses the top of his head. His hair smells like grease and sea and the forgotten dust of Highfield House.

Bobby falls asleep quickly that night. Julia sits on the settle with her legs folded beneath her, watching her son as his chest rises and falls.

She cannot take Bobby with her to Amble, of course. She does not want him anywhere near this madness. One wrong step and she could find herself arrested. But how can she leave him here on Holy Island? Leaving him alone is no option, of course. And now her brothers have gone, there is no family left here. Nor can she leave him with Alice, or another of her friends. None of them can know of her involvement with the Jacobites. Even a well-placed lie is far too dangerous. She has heard word of spies in these parts. Knows there is every chance there are government spies right here on the island, with ears and eyes out for tendrils of the Rising. She does not imagine Alice to be involved with such a thing, but then again, she is sure she would think the same thing about her.

Julia hugs her knees. What other choice is there?

She knows the answer to this question, of course, and she hates it. Almost as much as she hates the thought of leaving Bobby alone.

Her only option, she thinks sickly, is to take him to her father.

“Where are we going, Ma?” Bobby asks as the pony wagon pulls onto the sand. The tide is starting to rise, and seawater licks at the wheels of the carriage. Gulls bawl as they swoop over the mudflats.

“We’re going to visit your grandfather,” Julia says stiffly. “You’re to stay with him while I go to Amble.”

Bobby’s mouth hangs open. This is the first time, Julia is sure, he has ever heard her mention his grandfather. She wonders if he had ever even considered his existence.

She has no idea whether her father will even be willing to help her. Willing to acknowledge his grandson. She hopes that, while he may still be too angry at her for forgiveness, he will see that Bobby does not deserve such animosity.

In any case, she is utterly without options.

“My grandfather?” Bobby repeats, as though testing out the words. His brow furrows. “No, Ma. I don’t want to.”

“It’ll only be for a little while,” says Julia. “A day at most.” And likely not even that, she thinks. There is every chance her father will take one look at her and send them both away.

“But I—”

“Bobby. That’s enough, aye. No arguments.”

Bobby huffs and folds his arms, looking sulkily out across the mudflats as the sea drifts back in towards the island.

*

Her father’s house is easy enough to find, thanks to the countless times Hugh had given her directions, in an attempt to reconcile them. A small stone cottage on the edge of Bamburgh village, with a tangle of brambles lining the front path, as though warning visitors away. Julia’s heart is racing as she knocks on the door. Nausea turns her stomach and she regrets the scrap of bread she had forced down for breakfast.

The door opens, and there is her father. He is hunched and bristled, his coppery hair turned white with years. Deep shadowed pockets of skin hang beneath his eyes. He looks older than she was expecting, and it reminds her of how much time has passed since they last were last in each other’s company. She wonders what the past eight years have done to her. Can he read in her eyes the struggles she has been through? Would he even care?

“Julia.” His voice gives nothing away. Nor does his empty expression. He has always been impossible to read. Craving her son’s nearness, her hand tightens around the back of Bobby’s neck. She feels him flinch, and forces herself to release her grip. Her father’s eyes drift to Bobby, taking him in. “I assume this is my grandson?”

Julia swallows. Bobby takes an almost imperceptible step towards her. “Aye. This is Bobby.” She clears her throat. “He needs to stay with you today, Da. There’s something I need to do. Some trouble has come up.”

Her father shakes his head slightly, gives her a look that says he was expecting this. Perhaps not the request for Bobby to stay, but she knows he is not surprised at her declaration that she is in trouble. She wants to tell him it is all Hugh’s doing. Fine, upstanding, golden son Hugh. The lad who can do no wrong.

She knows there is little point. Angling herself against Hugh will only turn her father against her even more.

“What kind of trouble?” he asks.

She could rattle out a pitiable story. One full of half-truths and made-up desperation. And in front of anyone else, she is likely to have done so. She has always been somewhat liberal with the truth when she needs to be. But not with her father. There’s no point. He has always been able to read her, to understand her better than she understands herself. It is not that they’ve ever been close; even as a child she had been overawed by him, and he had spent so many years away fighting that for much of her childhood he was little more than a stranger. Nonetheless, he has always had an uncanny ability to sift the truth from her lies.

And so she says, “Nothing you need to bother yourself with. I ought to be back before midnight.”

Her father’s hand reaches out and fastens around Bobby’s wrist, drawing him into the house. “The lad will be fine here,” he says brusquely. “You do what you need to do.”

And before she can make sense of what is happening, the door is closing and her father and son are gone.

*

Julia stands frozen outside the door for a few moments. She hates the thought of leaving without so much as a goodbye, but Bobby is where he needs to be. Now she can put her mind to the task at hand.

As she walks back into the village in search of a wagon to take her back to Lindisfarne, she can’t help but feel like a coward. She thinks of her brothers, willing to risk their lives to see the rightful king returned to the throne. Where is her own bravery? Where is her passion?

She shakes herself out of it. Her passion is in her little curiosity shop on the corner of Church Lane. It’s in the care she shows each time-worn treasure she places on her shelf. It’s in ensuring she and Bobby have a safe and comfortable life. And her bravery—well, that’s in getting up every day since her father had disowned her and showing her face to a world that has done nothing but look down on her.

Who decided these things were less worthy than fighting to put the Stuarts back on the throne?

She returns to Holy Island with a knot growing in her stomach. She goes to the rundown farmhouse on the edge of the village owned by Donald Macauley and his son. The crooked wooden cottage is hemmed by long grass, the windows thick with grime. Smoke is puffing steadily out of both chimneys. Somewhere in a faraway paddock, she hears the mournful bleat of a cow.

She knocks on the door. Hears the creak of footsteps inside the house, but it takes an age for the old man to reach the door. Julia wills him to hurry. By now, the tide will be rising, and she must catch the high water if she is to meet the messenger in Amble at the appointed time.

Finally, Macauley pulls the door open. His flinty eyes narrow at the sight of her and thick grey brows poke out from beneath the hem of his cap. The smell of liquor and animals clings to his woollen cassock. Julia knows there are people in the village who like to keep their

distance from the man, but he has never troubled her. Donald Macauley is also a renowned hunter. The perfect person to come to with this unsettling request.

“Mr Macauley. I need to borrow a weapon. Something small. A pistol, perhaps.” She holds out a handful of coins, hoping it will be enough to prevent him from asking questions.

His colourless lips twitch. “What d’you need a pistol for, lass?”

She swallows. “I’ve some correspondence to deliver. Could be dangerous.”

“What kind of correspondence?” This is Donald Macauley, of course. Always damnably suspicious. Julia realises she has no hope of getting away with anything other than a full explanation. But while the rest of the island is keeping their allegiances close to their chests, Macauley and his family seem to be making a point of publicising their Jacobite alliance. She has heard him speak outwardly of his support for a new Rising at the market, outside the tavern, even in church.

She pulls the folded missive from her pocket. “Word for the Jacobites in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. I’m to deliver it to Amble.”

Macauley’s leathery face breaks into a smile. “Good lass.” He steps aside, gesturing to her to enter the house. “I’ve just the thing for you. I’ll even teach you how to shoot it.”

*

Julia’s mind is full of her brothers as she guides their fishing dory out of the Lindisfarne anchorage.

Hugh was the one who had taught her to sail. She had been little more than a child at the time, full of cocky self-assuredness. Had bragged to her brother that she knew just how to manage the dory—of course she did, because how many times had she watched him sail back into the harbour?

Hugh had just laughed. “Go on then. Raise the sail and cleat the halyard.”

Julia had been forced to admit defeat and grumble her way through her brother’s lessons.

She is tacking into the wind, zigzagging the boat across messy, spitting waves. At least if this weather holds out, the wind will be behind her on the way back to Lindisfarne, and the journey back to Bobby will be a short one.

She follows the crags and divots of the coast, past the Farne Islands, past the ghostly ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle. When she views the neat village of Amble, she guides the boat into the estuary.

There’s a stillness to the village. Reassuring, perhaps. With the spring sun lighting the streets and making the water glitter, it does not feel like a place of intrigue and danger. The outlandish scenarios her mind had conjured up on the journey here—of being caught by dragoons and tortured to give up her brothers’ whereabouts—feel far more like fiction than reality.

The tavern is easy to find. Harbourside, with shirt-sleeved men spilling out the door, tankards in hand, despite it being just past noon.

She follows the building around its outside walls. The messenger, she has been told, will be waiting for her at the corner of the alley beside the tavern.

The laneway is empty, and Julia feels something sink inside her. She had been hoping to make the exchange as quickly as possible. She waits, tugging restlessly at the hem of her shortjacket.

Her skin is prickling. The stillness of the village is beginning to feel threatening, as though the place is holding its breath in anticipation of disaster. What would happen, she wonders, if she simply returned to Lindisfarne and claimed to have delivered the message? The truth would come out eventually, she supposes. And she does not want to imagine what might happen then.

“You’re Hugh Mitchell’s sister,” says a voice behind her. She turns to see an older man, bearded and bare-headed, the white cockade of the Jacobites pinned discretely to his cloak.

“How do you know that?” she asks.

He nods to the thick red plait hanging over her shoulder. “You Mitchells have a look about you. You’re easy to recognise.”

“Well,” Julia says tautly, handing the message over swiftly, “I’d say that is all the more reason for me not to get involved any deeper in your cause.”

He tucks the missive inside his cloak. Gives her a faint nod and smile. “As you wish.” And he is gone.

Julia stands motionless for a moment. Is that it? Is this over? There has been no calamity, no men on horses bearing down on her, dragging her to the gallows. No threat of torture, or bloodshed, or a life spent in Newgate.

But she does not feel at ease. Clouds have drifted over the sun, and in the narrow throat of the alley, it feels suddenly like dusk. The muscles in her shoulders tighten.

She hurries out of the lane, craving sunlight. As she strides towards the anchorage, she hears a great crash from inside the tavern. A man howls, bursting out the door with his shirtsleeve aflame. He throws himself into the sea. A stream of other men hurry from the tavern. One leans over the wall of the marina and hauls him from the water. The man lies on the cobblestones, staring at the sky and groaning in pain.

Julia watches with her arms wrapped around herself. She shivers. Tries to swallow but her throat is dry. She feels a deep sense of dread fall over her. And suddenly, she knows with aching certainty that she will never see her three brothers together again.

She closes her eyes. Tries to shake off the unease. It’s foolish superstition. The man’s accident has rattled her, that’s all. Has prodded at her anxiety and come a little too close to her fears. She is safe, she reminds herself. Unharmed. And there is nothing to suggest that her brothers are not either.

But she can’t help the inexplicable tears that prick her eyes from nowhere.

*

She moors the fishing boat in Beadle Bay and follows the road on foot towards her father’s house in Bamburgh. It is dark and cold now, with a few sparse stars straining through the cloud bank. She can smell the chaos of the day on her skin: smoke and sea and sweat. Her unease has settled into a vague sense of dread sitting somewhere at the back of her mind. She knows she needs to push it away. She does not want Bobby catching hold of it.

When she reaches her father’s house, a thin line of smoke is rising from a chimney, silver against the deep blue of the night sky. A lamp glows behind the curtains. She stops motionless

for a second, straining to hear voices through the glass; an illicit glimpse into her father's life that has been blocked off to her for so many years. But she hears nothing.

She knocks at the door. When her father answers, he has a hand on Bobby's shoulder, gnarled fingers curled around the top of her son's skinny arm. He nods at Julia, brusque and formal.

"You're out of trouble then?" he says.

"Aye. I hope so."

He nods wordlessly, and a thick silence passes between them.

"Get your coat and boots, Bobby," says Julia. Her voice comes out strained. He darts back into the house, stockinged feet whispering against the floorboards.

"He's a fine young lad," her father says after a moment. "You've done well with him."

Julia swallows an unexpected lump of emotion. "Thank you. And thank you for letting him stay."

He nods. She waits for a moment, hoping against reason for more. For an invitation to sit, to speak, to tell him about her little shop and about her and Bobby's lives. It is not forthcoming, of course, and she chides herself for her foolish optimism. And why should she want this, she reminds herself. Why should she pander to a man who had seen fit to cast her onto the street?

She wants to show him he was wrong. Wants to show him that, against all odds, she has carved out a good life for herself and her son. But it is more than that. There's a part of her that craves his affection. His acceptance. A part of her that misses him with an intensity that makes her ache.

Bobby runs back to the door, bundled in his coat and scarf. He looks up at his grandfather. He shakes Bobby's hand and ruffles his dark hair. The sight of it brings a smile to Julia's face. She locks the image of it away in her memory, knowing such a thing will never happen again.

As she steps out the door, her father says, "Julia."

She turns in surprise. His eyes darken with seriousness and she ushers Bobby down the path so he can't catch their conversation.

"I know Hugh came seeking your help in his cause. I warned him not to involve you."

Her lips part in surprise. "Why? Because you thought I couldn't manage such a thing?" The comment is the height of foolishness, of course. She regrets it the moment it is spoken.

Her father's lips quirk slightly, the closest thing to a smile she is sure she will ever get from him again. "Because it ought to be your choice to involve yourself in such a matter. Not your brother's. I hope you were not in great danger."

"Nothing I shan't survive."

"I'm glad of it."

And as Julia bids her father farewell and walks with Bobby back towards the bay, she can't help but feel strangely vindicated.

*

When she returns to the shop, it is silent. Minerva prowls between the shelves, and curls around Julia's legs as she lights the lamp sitting on the counter. Bobby bends to scratch the cat behind the ears, then stumbles towards the staircase, eyelids drooping. Julia puts a soft hand to his back, ushering him forward. And then she stops walking. In the pale circle of light from her

lamp, she sees the cellar door is hanging open. Is her lodger out scouring the island for feathered treasures? Unlike him to keep the door open. She notices then that he has left the key in the lock, as though he is not planning to return.

“Upstairs, Bobby,” she tells him. “Off to bed. I’ll be up in a moment.”

Julia holds the lamp up for Bobby as he totters upstairs without complaint. Then she climbs down to the cellar. The blankets are neatly folded on the end of the bed, the pillows straightened. The spying glass, the musket, the notebooks, the boxes—all gone. The room still smells faintly of pipe smoke and earth and rosewater—of him.

It is no great shock to find him gone, she supposes, even if it does sting a little that he might make a hurried departure without so much as leaving a note. Perhaps he has. Perhaps a word of thanks is waiting for her on the counter. Perhaps she missed it in the dark.

Or perhaps he has left her something else. Because she sees it then, nestled between the pillows.

It’s the white Jacobite cockade she had been given by the woman who took Bobby. Blackened around the edges, but intact enough to be recognised.

Neatly cut into two.

She stares at it for long moments, holding the lamp motionless in front of her until her arm begins to ache. Her lodger had clearly found this among the ash of the burned-out fire. She has been careless. She has been a fool. Because what does it mean that he has cut the cockade in two and planted it here so neatly for her to find?

It feels like a warning.

It feels like she has been caught.

It feels like this man who had been lodging in her cellar had not been hunting birds at all, but rather Jacobite plans.

How much does he know? Had he heard her brothers speaking? Had he heard her discussion with the woman who had visited the shop? Had he seen Julia leave the harbour for Amble, with a Jacobite message tucked in her cloak?

She is being foolish, she tells herself. Her imagination is running wild, still trapped in the dread that had welled up inside her in the streets of Amble. She will destroy the cockade—properly this time. There will be no proof of anything.

And yet she feels an instinctive need to hide herself, even here in the secrecy of her cellar. She lifts the lamp and blows out the flame, feeling herself swallowed by the dark.

FIRELIGHT RISING

Book One of the Lindisfarne Series

Holy Island of Lindisfarne
England, 1715

Twenty years after fleeing Holy Island, Eva Blake and her siblings return to their dilapidated family home in an attempt to piece together their tattered lives. But a new Jacobite Rising is gaining momentum, and as outsiders from London, the Blakes find themselves under suspicion from the villagers.

When conflict with the locals comes to a head, Eva finds herself escaping to the nearby island of Longstone, where the reclusive Finn Murray keeps a makeshift shipping beacon burning on the shore.

Alone on Longstone, Eva and Finn find themselves drawn to each other, despite his attempts to keep her at a distance. But long-buried secrets are beginning to resurface, and Eva can't help but fear she has made a grave error in opening her heart to Finn.

All she knows is her life is in danger, and she must confront the past if she is to survive.

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