

Excerpt: Rogue of the Highlands

Chapter One

*Merciful Heavens! He is here.* Jillian Alton, Lady Newburn, took a deep breath as she heard the bell clang at the front entrance of the Mayfair townhouse. Was she really going to be able to follow through on what the Prince of Wales had persuaded her to do? How did one “tame” a wild Highlander to fit into *haut ton* Society? She must have been quite mad to think it possible.

Or scared of being turned out on the streets. Jillian bit her lip as she stared out her bedroom window. Now that Wesley, the long lost son of her elderly, dead husband had been found in France, he would be returning to claim the family holdings as the rightful Marquess. A widowed marchioness—even if she were only three-and-twenty—would have no place here. Prinny’s payment for her services would allow her to buy back the townhouse Papa had lost to his gambling debts and provide for her younger sister, Mari’s, Season next year. Most of all, the money would allow her to be financially independent.

No man would ever own her again. For that freedom, she would take on a whole clan of barbarians.

Jillian closed her eyes, recalling the conversation from two weeks ago.

*“The Earl of Cantford died without issue,” the prince said after she’d been shown into his private sitting room at Carlton House. “We were finally able to trace a male descendent back through the grandfather and locate an Ian Macleod near Glenfinnan.”*

*“A Scotsman will inherit the title?” Jillian asked in surprise.*

*The prince sighed. “It seems so. Our grandfather bestowed the title on his great-grandfather for helping to squelch the Jacobites finally in ’45. It’s all quite legal.”*

*"I'm sure it is," she answered, "but what has that got to do with me?"*

*Prinny gave her the captivating smile he used on so many women and folded his hands over his large paunch. "Cantford is adjacent to Newburn. We're sure your dear, departed Rufus would want your next door neighbor to be civilized."*

*Jillian bit back a retort. Her DEAR, departed husband was anything but civilized, although she was the only one who bore the marks to prove it. To Prinny's Set, he had always been a model of decorum. "I still fail to see how I can change that."*

*"As a widow, it would be perfectly proper for you to...um...refine the man's ways. We shudder to think that the gentle women of Our court be subjected to loutish behavior."*

*Other than your own, she almost said, but one didn't call the Prince Regent a lecher. At least not out loud.*

*"The objective, naturally, is to make the man suitable for the proper marriage so an heir can be produced to insure the title carries on."*

*Jillian winced. Her husband had told her often enough that she must be barren since no child had come along, but it still hurt when the subject was mentioned.*

*The prince's voice took on silken tones. "You have always had the most excellent of manners, my dear. Always a proper lady. We are sure that's one of the reason's Rufus married you. And for your beauty, of course."*

*She was hard-pressed not to give a very un-ladylike snort. The old marquess had offered to pay off her baron father's gambling debts at White's in exchange for her hand in marriage at the end of her Season. She had been seventeen and devastated. Thank*

*God Mama hadn't been alive to see her sold or how Papa had begged her forgiveness with tears in his eyes.*

*"We can make it very worth your while," Prinny added. "Name your price."*

*He hadn't even blinked when she told him.*

Jillian's eyes flew open as her maid, Darcy, and the parlor maid burst through her door, giggling.

"Oh, mum! You should see him!" Darcy said with a roll of her eyes and a sigh. "He's right fetching, he is. Makes me almost wish I warn't a proper lady's maid and could lift my skirts for him."

"Darcy, we don't speak like that," Jillian admonished gently, but she couldn't be too hard on her. The girl's country upbringing had helped her take care of ugly welts Rufus inflicted on Jillian when a more squeamish maid would have swooned away.

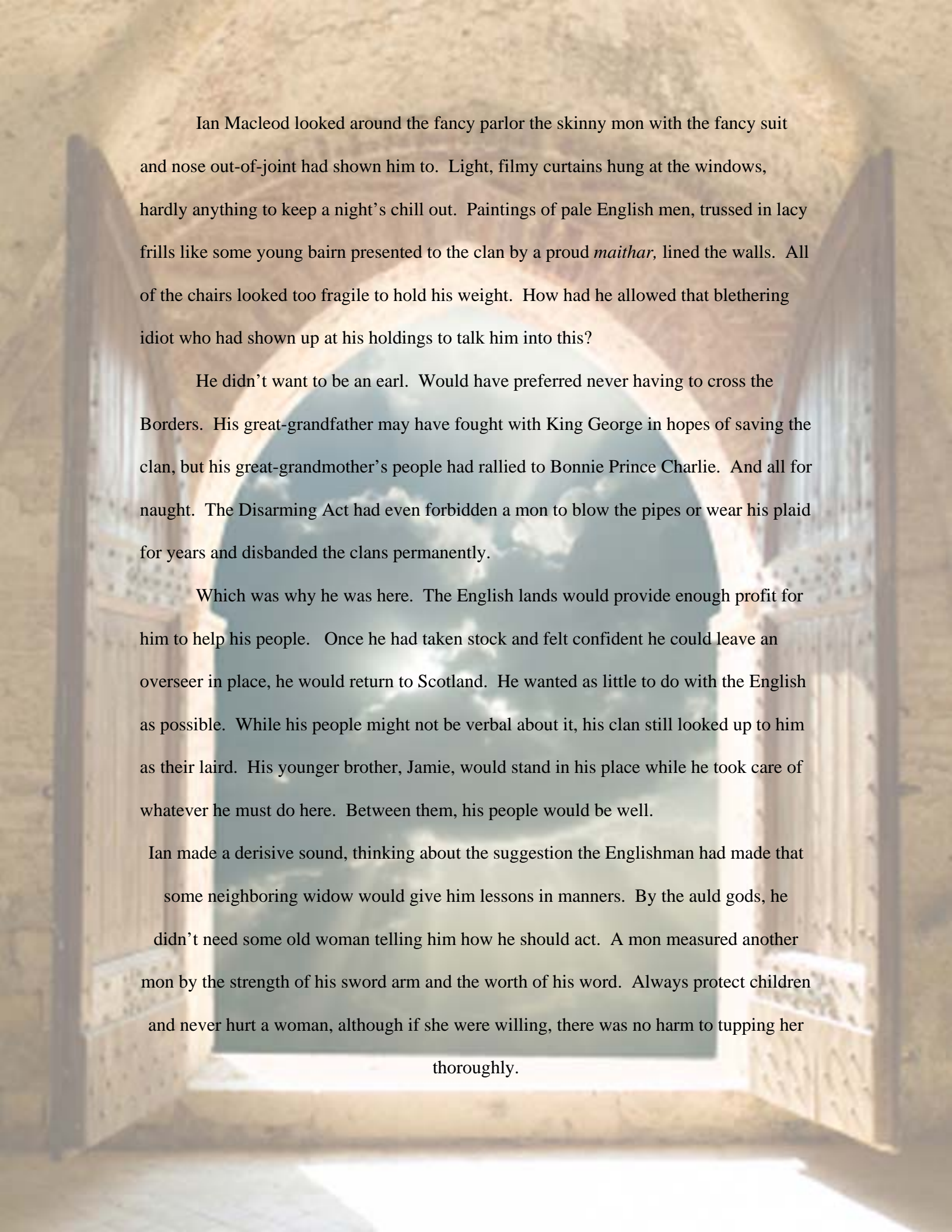
"Yes, mum," the maid agreed and then both girls giggled again.

With a small sigh, Jillian stood up and smoothed her dress. "Remember, the man will be a guest in this house for several weeks. I'm sure if we treat him like a gentleman, he will act as one." She wasn't sure if she believed that, but she wasn't about to have her maid entertain fantasies about any skirt-lifting.

She straightened her shoulders. Time to begin earning her money. She descended the stairs and moved toward the drawing room, pausing for only a second before she opened the door. And gasped.

What on earth was the man wearing?

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Ian Macleod looked around the fancy parlor the skinny mon with the fancy suit and nose out-of-joint had shown him to. Light, filmy curtains hung at the windows, hardly anything to keep a night's chill out. Paintings of pale English men, trussed in lacy frills like some young bairn presented to the clan by a proud *maithar*, lined the walls. All of the chairs looked too fragile to hold his weight. How had he allowed that blethering idiot who had shown up at his holdings to talk him into this?

He didn't want to be an earl. Would have preferred never having to cross the Borders. His great-grandfather may have fought with King George in hopes of saving the clan, but his great-grandmother's people had rallied to Bonnie Prince Charlie. And all for naught. The Disarming Act had even forbidden a mon to blow the pipes or wear his plaid for years and disbanded the clans permanently.

Which was why he was here. The English lands would provide enough profit for him to help his people. Once he had taken stock and felt confident he could leave an overseer in place, he would return to Scotland. He wanted as little to do with the English as possible. While his people might not be verbal about it, his clan still looked up to him as their laird. His younger brother, Jamie, would stand in his place while he took care of whatever he must do here. Between them, his people would be well.

Ian made a derisive sound, thinking about the suggestion the Englishman had made that some neighboring widow would give him lessons in manners. By the auld gods, he didn't need some old woman telling him how he should act. A mon measured another mon by the strength of his sword arm and the worth of his word. Always protect children and never hurt a woman, although if she were willing, there was no harm to tuppung her thoroughly.