

# **The Mustang Chronicles:**

*Forgetful Mustang*

**A Novella**

by

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# I

Spring in Scotland lacked the qualities of rebirth Elizabeth Duryea so relished during her years in Montana. Among the few joys she experienced living on her parents' ranch, the Mistress of Boleskine House longed for the sudden burst of green outside the bedroom window one morning - a welcome respite from the cold, snowy winter.

An undeniable harbinger of the season she recognized in her third year residing near Loch Ness: bagpipe melodies drifting across the countryside from the May Day celebrations in nearby villages. She could envision men parading through the streets in clan tartan kilts and sporrans, women dancing a highland fling in traditional plaid costumes. No desire compelled her to attend the festivities, content instead to ride her horses, read books and play chess with an occasional historic visitor.

An Arabian stallion purchased at auction the previous autumn by Glenn MacDonough on her behalf was a true prize. Sensitive to her moods and movements in the saddle, he reminded her of Heartbeat, the pinto she had called her own throughout her teenage years. He could clear the highest jump with the ease of a bird in flight, and she spent hours guiding him along the trails of the 47-acre estate.

Children from the area, and their parents, wandered the woods freely; if Mustang encountered them, she merely smiled and trotted past. They called her "Lady Elizabeth Neville" - an alias she'd chosen to prevent inquisitive law enforcement personnel from bothering her. Her sincerest wish: putting involvement with both the FBI and Interpol behind her.

Unlike her other yearnings, this could not be affected by the affinity with the natural elements she'd inherited from Jack Parsons, her grandfather. Controlling life and death, yes; preventing herself from impulsively sticking her nose where it didn't belong resulting in catastrophic consequences, no.

She'd hoped living as a hermit would resolve the latter problem.

If she avoided interaction with people, she wouldn't cause trouble for them - or for herself.

Uninvited visitors still managed to seek her aid at inopportune moments, to her chagrin.

A shrill progression of notes, as if a fanfare, reached her ears as she traversed the western perimeter of the grounds, nearest the main road. A gunshot followed; her mount flinched and she tightened her grip on the reins. Then, the sound of small engines, not loud enough to be go-carts, but louder than most toys.

She glimpsed a swirl of remote control airplanes soaring overhead. A race of some sort had been devised for the model enthusiasts, no doubt. The horse skittish, she steered him toward the corral, hopefully far enough from the din to calm his nerves.

A light breeze rustling the branches, and hoof beats creating a steady rhythm, Mustang didn't hear the miniature F-16 careening toward her from behind, its antenna broken and useless. The sturdy plastic wing slammed the back of her cranium; she pitched over the Arabian's head onto the packed earth.

Stars filled the sky when the young woman awoke. She didn't recognize her surroundings; her hands and feet felt frozen, and her skull throbbed unmercifully. Attempts to sit upright heightened an awareness of pain shooting up both legs. Raising fingers to her right temple, an ominous stickiness coated her skin.

How long it took to stagger to the road, she couldn't guess. A car veered to avoid hitting her, and she sank to her knees on the gravel berm. Heading north seemed most sensible, but she couldn't reason why.

The bonfire in Dores' village park blazed far above the tree tops, visible for miles. It drew Mustang like a beacon. A colorful crowd ringing the flames sang old Scottish ballads in raucous, drunken voices, bottles in hand. They might have been speaking Chinese, for all the newcomer comprehended. Fresh waves of disorientation overwhelming her, she collapsed on a slanted tree stump.

"Are ye all right, lass?" came the pleasant tenor.

"No."

"Too much t' drink?"

"I... think I fell," she muttered.

The elegant, grey-haired Scot squatted beside her, maneuvering her chin toward the fire light. "Ye are in a bad way, lass," he declared. "Ye be needin' a doctor's care."

"I..."

He placed his arm around her waist and lifted. "We always ha' a few accidents at these dos. There's a tent just beyond the bar."

Sprawled on a cot inside the canvas shelter, Mustang fought off nausea aggravating the searing headache. A white-clad physician hovered near the flap, consulting with the kilted gentleman.

The next thing she realized, thick gauze was being secured across her forehead. "What..."

“You received a nasty cut when you fell, Miss. We’ve stitched it up, and you should be feeling better once the concussion subsides.” His inflection differed from the first man’s.

“Con... cussion?”

“Aye.” He pulled a cell phone from his lab coat pocket. “Who can I call to take you home?”

“I... don’t know.”

Concern flickered in his blue eyes. “Do you know your name?”

It hurt to think, and Mustang surrendered to the anguish. “No.”

The doctor shuffled to the waiting figure. He didn’t lower his voice, and his patient heard every word.

“MacIntosh, do you know her?”

“Ne'er seen her before, Denis. By her accent, I'd say she isn't from these parts.”

“Best we call an ambulance, then, and send her to hospital.”

“No, please!” Mustang groaned, rolling suddenly left to vomit in a plastic bucket.

“Wi' all the fairs, the medics from Inverness wouldna make it 'til morning,” reasoned MacIntosh. “I’ll take her home and, if she’s no better come daylight, I’ll call ye.”

“You know such kindness has backfired in the past,” Denis warned.

“This lass is no escapee from the Edinburgh prison.”

“Let’s pray you’re right.”

Floating in and out of consciousness, Mustang was transported in a farm truck to a small cottage on a rutted dirt road. Strong arms carried her across the threshold, depositing her on a narrow bed. Nimble fingers eased off her blood-soaked windbreaker, a partially-buttoned blue denim shirt and red t-shirt visible by the light of three candles in the rustic chamber.

Flames flickered, blurred and merged before her. Cultured hands held a glass to her parched lips. She drank the icy water and shivered.

“I’ll fetch another blanket and more pillows,” said her host.

“Who... are you?”

“Ian MacIntosh, lass.”

“You talk funny.”

“So do ye. From America, I take it?”

“I’m... not sure.”

“Ye ha' a bad knot on your noggin, so don't fret. Denis instructed me t' keep ye awake as much as possible, until your brain unscrambles itself.”

“Denis?”

“Doctor Sommers.”

Like listening to a foreign language, Mustang made no sense of his words. Her lids fluttered closed as she tried to relax.

“None of that, now!” scolded her host, jiggling her shoulder a second later. Gently, he propped her head on a goose-down cushion. “Come, ye mustna fall asleep.”

“I’m so tired.”

“Tis expected, but ye might ne'er wake again!” A playful note lightened the import of his statement, but not enough. He pulled a stool close and rested upon it. “Let’s play twenty questions. I’ll go first.”

“All right.”

“Do ye know how ye got t' Loch Ness?”

“No.” Her muscles stiffened. “The monster...”

“There be nae monster. I’ve lived here many a-year, and ne'er seen hide nor hair.”

Mustang exhaled a bit of her tension.

“Were ye robbed? Denis found nae wallet, and ye had nae purse when I met ye.”

“I... don’t think so.”

“If I let ye have a mirror, might that help?”

“Maybe.”

MacIntosh rose and crossed to a brightly painted wash stand in the corner. An oblong frame hung above the floral-decorated bowl and pitcher set. He freed it from the nail and offered it to Mustang.

She gazed at the reflection, her mind a blank. Black hair tousled by white bandages framed a slender countenance, hazel orbs squinting over a pert nose and chapped lips.

A faint voice echoed ominously inside her skull: “You’ll look in the mirror and not recognize your own face, doubting your own sanity.”

Tears flowed in abundance.

MacIntosh relieved her of the glass and embraced her tenderly. “There, there, lass. ’Twill come back, in time.”

“What if it doesn’t?”

“Then, ye can create a new life, where all dreams come true. I dinnae know a soul on earth who wouldna want such a chance.”

His wistful tone puzzled her. Sniffing, she studied his weathered mien. “You’re unhappy here?”

“I’m here of necessity. I was a groundskeeper at Balmoral until...”

“Balmoral?”

“The Queen’s castle here in Scotland.”

“Queen?”

“Ye dinnae even recall our dear Queen Elizabeth?”

“No.”

“She is a grand lady. Those who work for her, however, can be brutal.”

Mustang recalled something. “We were playing... twenty questions.”

“Aye.”

“Is it my turn?”

“If ye wish.”

“How old are you, Ian?”

“I’ve lived 58 summers.”

“Where were you born?”

“A tiny village on the northern coast.”

The young woman posed far more than twenty questions, learning MacIntosh had served in the British Navy after graduating from the Scottish school system. He’d never married, holding a variety of positions in the private and government sector before joining the staff at Balmoral. The onset of arthritis hadn’t been the reason for his dismissal, though.

And he was reluctant to provide the answer.

Mustang retained sufficient manners not to press the issue.

The night passed slowly. MacIntosh cooked a pot of chicken broth, which Mustang’s stomach promptly ejected into the porcelain bowl from the wash stand. A mandolin came off its perch near the crackling fireplace, and he serenaded her with bawdy, off-key drinking songs.

She laughed so hard, her torment redoubled.

His fingers worked the frets expertly, even after he stopped singing. She watched his brown eyes peer off into nothingness, a soul transported by the music. His salt-and-pepper hair dangled over his forehead, and a bulbous nose dominated sallow cheekbones and thin mouth. Broad shoulders had yet to stoop with age, but carried an awful burden, she sensed.

At sunrise, MacIntosh extinguished the candles and prepared himself some oatmeal.

“You need to get some sleep,” Mustang suggested.

“Not ‘til ye recover.”

“Nonsense. I’m not so... groggy anymore. I haven’t thrown up for three hours...”

“Denis will be stoppin' by, first thing. If he sees progress, then we'll both sleep.”

First thing turned out to be 9:00. Dr. Sommers tapped lightly on the warped door, smiling broadly when MacIntosh invited him indoors.

“A brisk morning, to be sure.”

“Warm your bones by the fire, Denis, and I'll pour ye some coffee.”

The mug emptied and his toes thawed, the surprisingly youthful, lean Sommers didn't approach Mustang for nearly thirty minutes. He set his bag on the night stand and started by unraveling the bandage. “Feel better?”

“Some.”

“Any luck remembering your name?”

“No.”

He examined the gash, then pulled a bottle of alcohol from the leather case. Mustang stifled a scream when he touched the wound with a cotton swab.

“When was the last time you had a tetanus shot?” he queried.

“A what?”

Sommers glanced toward MacIntosh, who shrugged.

“We don't want this to get infected, or worse,” remarked the doctor. “Are you allergic to any antibiotics?”

“I... don't know.”

Clean gauze in place, Sommers flashed a penlight to test the dilation of her pupils. His expression betrayed apprehension.

“What?” she prodded.

“I have to be honest. You really should be in hospital. Your condition is far more serious than I expected.”

She wept anew. “I...”

“There, there,” soothed Sommers, patting her arm. “I'm only thinking of your future. I'll be leaving tomorrow...”

“Leaving?” she sobbed.

“I'm just here on holiday, visiting my uncle, Glenn MacDonough. I'm due back in Manchester on Monday.”

“Is that why... your accent is different from Ian's?”

“Aye.”

Another question answered, but not the important ones. “I don't like hospitals,” she pleaded. “Isn't there any way?”

“It would take a miracle. Without proper care, your concussion could cause permanent damage.”

“What kind of damage?” interspersed MacIntosh.

“Enduring memory loss, motor function disruption, and failing vision.”  
MacIntosh swallowed hard. “Lassie, dinnae ye think...”  
“I think I need a tall whiskey about now,” Mustang responded.  
Thunder and lightning outside the windows preceded a tumbler appearing  
in the patient’s hand, filled to the brim with brownish liquid.  
Simultaneously, MacIntosh and Sommers collapsed on the floor.

## II

The glass shattered on the boards when Mustang released it, petrified.  
“What the hell...”  
Nobody could provide an explanation. Denis Sommers, however, replaced  
his equipment in his bag and made a hasty exit, as soon as his legs could hold him.  
MacIntosh’s reaction, after his initial shock, wasn’t so dramatic. “Lass,  
what are ye about?”  
“I... don’t know.”  
“Have ye an angel protectin’ ye?”  
She didn’t reply.  
“We Scots believe in all sorts of creatures, seen and unseen. Those who  
ha’ tamed them are considered blessed.”  
“What are you saying?”  
“If ye control the spirit world, they may help ye recover before too much  
damage is done.”  
“I’m... not calling on any... spirits for help. I... don’t believe in such  
ridiculous notions.” She paused. “At least, I don’t think I do.”  
“The subconscious may have other ideas, lass. Why not try again?  
Something harmless?”  
“What, like moving the table across the room?”  
“Why not?”  
“Oh, shut up. I don’t care what Dr. Sommers said, I’m going to sleep, and  
you should, too.”  
Unable to protest - his vocal cords immobilized - Ian MacIntosh sank on a  
ratty armchair and was soon dozing.  
Seeing this, Mustang could not close an eye. She had not recognized  
herself in the mirror, and definitely doubted her own sanity at that moment.  
“Open the window,” she murmured, as a test.  
The metal crank twisted slowly, and the pane slid outward. A cold blast of  
air forced Mustang to yank the blankets up to her neck.

“Close the window!” she nearly shouted.

Her limited reason - accessible through a thick fog caused by her jumbled brain cells - dictated these actions should not be possible. Unless, as MacIntosh said, she controlled some type of native spirit.

If she did, she'd have to be careful what she ordered them to do.

First, she'd have to know what they *could* do.

Broken shards littered the planks beside the bed. “Restore the glass.”

She clutched at the headboard when the structure vibrated, the bits and pieces moving together. When the tremor ceased, the tumbler sat, whole, on the night stand.

“Wow.”

A frantic banging on the front door disrupted Mustang's experiments. She didn't dare stand herself, dizziness claiming her from more than one source. “Ian, wake up. You have a visitor.”

As if he'd never been asleep, MacIntosh rose from the chair.

Waiting on the stoop, a burly, bearded ruffian angrily signaled the man outside. MacIntosh complied, drawing the door closed behind him.

Their agitated voices bothered Mustang. “I wish I could hear them more clearly.”

A stereo speaker might have been sitting beside her, the words came so distinctly.

The gruff baritone belonged to the visitor, she guessed. “Ye old fag, I told ye t' pay the rent by Saturday or move.”

“I dinnae ha' a chance t' get t' the bank before the holiday. Can't ye give me 'til Monday? I'm caring for a friend who took a nasty spill...”

“Oh, sure! One of your men...”

“Nae,” MacIntosh countered. “A young lady. She's suffering from a concussion and amnesia. Denis Sommers recommended constant attention.”

“Liar!”

The pair struggled physically, banging into the wall. MacIntosh fell with a cry, and his opponent burst into the sunlit dwelling.

Mustang's temper flared at his attitude. Another faint echo - “I mustn't get angry. I do horrible things when I'm angry.” - went ignored.

He growled, “Who be ye?”

“None of your bloody business,” she retorted.

“Why, ye insolent tramp!”

“Oh, go jump in the lake!”

The microburst of wind which bent trees double beyond the window sucked the hefty individual out the door and through the air. Without pausing to consider the consequences, Mustang leapt from beneath the blankets and rushed to the opening.

“Ian, how far is it to Loch Ness from here?”

“Half a mile.”

Nonetheless, they heard the splash.

Weak knees buckling, Mustang grasped the lintel for support. Her fingers didn't hold long, and she slid down in a heap.

MacIntosh, catching his breath after the tussle, scrambled to his feet. He hoisted his guest off the ground and carried her to the bed.

“How very foolish o' ye, lass.”

“I can't help it. I hate stupid people.”

“Aye, I feel likewise.” He dropped on the stool. “Angus Burke isn't from the loch country. The lord o' the manor hired him t' enforce certain... rules, too often wi' unnecessary roughness.”

“What rules?”

“Rent bein' paid on time, the conduct of the tenants...”

“You mean, you don't own this place?”

“Nae, but I'm lucky t' ha' it. After I was dismissed from Balmoral...”

“Because you're... gay?”

He nodded. “It dinnae matter, so long as I didn't... The night I was seen by the head steward in a bar wi' me... friend, 'twas all over.”

“What happened to your friend? I mean, you live alone...”

“He left me. Used me hopin' t' gain a position in the Queen's household.”

“Idiot.”

MacIntosh squeezed her hand gingerly. “Thank ye for understandin'.” He moved to the stove. “How 'bout tryin' some chicken broth this mornin'?”

She let him spoon the steaming soup into her mouth, watching his mournful eyes. This sadness touched her soul; life could be so unfair.

“When I recover my memory, you'll be rewarded for your kindness, so you don't have to worry about the likes of Burke,” she assured him.

“Not necessary, lass. My reward will be seein' ye walk through that door with faculties intact, able t' resume your trip.”

“Trip?”

“Ye must be travelin' through Scotland, since ye are American.”

“I... don't think so. Aren't there any Americans living around here?”

“In the cities, aye. Business people, mostly. Ye are a bit young for such duties.”

“I’m... “ She couldn’t recall her age, either.

He set aside the bowl and tucked the blankets around her. “Rest now. Would ye like me t’ read t’ ye? I’m almost done wi’ a mystery by Rolf and Greta Stecklin’, good writers. I wouldna mind starting over, if ye care t’ listen.”

The name rang a bell for Mustang; its tolling faded rapidly. “Sure.”

She drifted off to sleep, her dreams filled with distorted images. Right before she woke, she felt herself straining against shackles in a damp castle dungeon...

Trying to stretch when her lids opened, she couldn’t move.

White walls and ceiling housed her, wrists and ankles strapped to a steel gurney. Mustang feared herself trapped in the nightmare or, worse, dead.

Yet, she faintly recollected a previous confinement in a similar room. All she’d had to do then was utter a command...

Denis Sommers’ blue orbs peered through a rectangular gap in the metal door. A key turned in the lock, and he entered.

“What have you done to me?” Mustang squealed.

“It’s for your own good, Miss. Ian MacIntosh is a fine man, but he’s not a doctor. You need professional attention, in order to make a full recovery.”

“You expect me to recover like this?”

“Angus Burke reported to the constable in Dores you... threw him in the lake. We can’t have any violence on a hospital ward.”

“Do you believe Burke’s story?”

“No. You couldn’t lift yourself off that pillow, even without the restraints. Still, to let others get hold of you...”

“What others?”

“Those who would... exploit your abilities.”

Mustang wrestled against the leather. “What are you talking about?”

“Calm yourself, Miss. I saw the glass of whiskey materialize in your hand. Who can tell the limits of what you can do?”

She inhaled deeply. “There are no limits.” Unseen elements burst the bindings around her limbs. She boosted herself on one elbow. “Now, unless you want to drop dead where you stand, get me the hell out of here.”

Terrified, Sommers pounded on the riveted iron panel and, when an attendant’s face appeared, he ordered a wheelchair. “Where will you go?” he queried, facing Mustang once again.

“Back to Ian’s. He needs my help to teach the likes of Angus Burke a lesson.”

“You’ll be wasting your strength,” countered Sommers. “My uncle has witnessed how Burke treats those who live on Lord Guthrie’s property. His tactics would’ve been better suited to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.”

“Why hasn’t anyone stopped him?”

“Lord Guthrie is patron to many charitable causes, including financing a settlement of artists near the loch. To cross him would mean losing thousands.”

“Money isn’t everything,” Mustang snarled. “Maybe Lord Guthrie needs a refresher course in good manners.”

Pushed by a hesitant orderly, the wheelchair rolled Mustang from the building, Sommers keeping pace. She twisted in the seat to view the hospital facade, another dormant memory slipping into obscurity.

“Have you been here before?” asked Sommers.

“I... maybe.”

“We could search the old records...”

“Useless without dates, wouldn’t you agree?”

He did.

His silver Mercedes coupe sped south from Inverness to Loch Ness. Mustang couldn’t avert her gaze from his face, her mind working to remember where she’d previously seen him.

The stern jaw line ended in a cleft chin, his nose broadened slightly at the tip, though straight. Straw-like bronzed hair combed off his forehead revealed deep horizontal furrows. A green polo shirt - bearing the Manchester United crest - clung to his muscular torso.

“You’re not an... ordinary doctor, are you?” she inquired.

“You mean, a general practitioner?”

“Right.”

“No, I’m not.” Hand on the radio knob, he glanced at her. “You a mind reader, too?”

“If I were, I’d be able to remember who I am,” she chuckled.

“I’m an orthopedic specialist, on retainer for a number of England’s sporting associations.”

“Good money in it?”

His tentative reply, “Yes...”

“You take vacations every year?”

“As my schedule permits.”

“Were you ever in... Monte Carlo?”

“What are you getting at?” he snapped.

“We’ve met before.”

“I... don’t think so. I would remember.”

“Seeing how many patients a year, you’d remember one face in a crowded casino?”

“I’ve never been to Monte Carlo. Have you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then, what made you...”

She turned toward the window. “Desperation.”

Rain splattered the glass, dulling the shades of spring green.

Mustang’s stomach churned ominously, realizing the car traveled in the wrong lane. “Stop the car.”

“Why?”

“You want your upholstery ruined?”

Sommers veered onto the berm, and the passenger door shot open. She stumbled to the nearest tree, grabbing the trunk as her muscles wrenched and she lost the chicken broth MacIntosh had fed her that morning.

Surgeon’s hands held her shoulders and offered a handkerchief when the ordeal ended. She brushed aside the gesture. “You want to get us both killed?”

“What do you mean?”

“You were in the left lane, and that truck was coming...”

He seized her arms firmly, ushering her toward the vehicle. “You’re in Scotland. We don’t drive like you fool Americans.”

Contrite, she grinned fragily. “Sorry.”

“You really should let me take you back to the hospital.”

“You’ll die trying,” she warned. Then, a possibility flashed to the surface. “Was your grandfather a German soldier?”

Sommers recoiled, stunned. “You are the most unusual...”

“Answer the question!”

“My mother’s father, yes. He was stationed with Rommel’s Panzer division in Africa.”

“You favor him.”

He wedged her against the car’s boot. “How would you know that?” he barked. “You couldn’t have met him; you’re barely twenty, and he died when I was three.” An added threat, “And, if you say ‘I don’t know’ once more, I’ll kill you myself!”

The electrical jolt which ran through Sommers’ body propelled him backward, unnerving him entirely. “Who *are* you?”

The quiet contralto barely reached his ears. "Just take me home."

### III

"You really ought to have an MRI," Denis Sommers persisted, the car again moving.

"Why?"

"Your brain functions are beyond my comprehension. Your fall may have caused worse than a concussion."

Mustang objected. "Have you ever played connect the dots?"

"You mean, those pictures school children draw, with all the numbers?"

"Right."

"Not recently, no."

"My brain is trying to connect dots which aren't in proper order. The picture has been cut up into a puzzle, besides everything else."

"How can you be so certain?"

"It makes sense. I see something random, and it resurrects a memory. Eventually, the pieces will align themselves into the finished product."

"You weren't a student at university, were you?" ventured Sommers.

"I... think I hated school, so I doubt it."

"I still don't understand how you knew about my grandfather sixty years ago."

"Neither do I. I promise, you'll be the first person I tell when I remember."

Braking at the end of MacIntosh's short drive, Mustang noticed graffiti spray-painted on his mail box: "Queer". A muttered instruction erased the lettering.

Ian was nowhere to be found. The fire had died on the grate inside the cottage, and there appeared to have been a struggle - furniture toppled, silver and pans scattered. "Do you think..." Mustang stammered.

"I don't know."

His words brought laughter to them both.

"Where does Lord Guthrie live?"

"His estate is ten miles east. In fact, the only property he doesn't own in these parts is the village of Dores itself, my uncle's place, and Boleskine House."

Mustang's eyes clouded briefly; Sommers thought she might faint. He clutched her waist to steady her.

"What?"

She shook off the disorientation. "Nothing."

He let it go, wondering if the mention of Boleskine House had triggered another latent recollection. “Come, sit and I’ll make some coffee. Then, we’ll drive to Guthrie Manor.”

The local brew lay harsh on her tongue, and she didn’t finish the cup, while Sommers drained two refills before zipping his jacket.

“Have you nothing warmer?” he asked.

“I had a coat.” She scanned the room. Her windbreaker hung above the wash stand, where MacIntosh must’ve been scrubbing off the blood when he was interrupted and, evidently, abducted.

The fabric had dried with only a blotchy pink stain, so she pulled it over her denim shirt.

“Good. Now I won’t have to worry about you catching pneumonia,” Sommers smirked.

Winding roads gradually ascended as they neared the Guthrie clan’s feudal home. A rebuilt castle, scaffolding denoted continuing construction on the northern wing. A butler emerged from the marble entrance when the Mercedes stopped under the portico.

“Lord Guthrie is not at home,” the balding servant snippily answered Sommers’ query.

Mustang asserted, “Then where’s that bastard, Angus Burke?”

“Mr. Burke is visiting the tenants.”

“Will he be returning to the house for dinner?” prompted Sommers.

“He prefers to dine in town on weekends, at the Toad Pasture Inn.”

“Thank you.”

Sommers chided Mustang for her outburst as they motored toward the road. “You’ve got to be from America. The British don’t behave so rudely.”

“Not even when they’re pissed?”

“Well, perhaps,” he admitted. “Back to Inverness, if you don’t mind.”

“To confront Burke in public? Where does he usually live?”

“In the servants’ quarters, I’d presume.”

“Could he stash a body there?”

“Not likely.” Sommers shifted into neutral, idling on the cobbles. He looked over his shoulder at the half-finished scaffolds. “The carpenters and masons don’t work on weekends, however...”

Mustang grasped the unspoken idea, her hand reaching for the door. “Let’s go!”

“Not so fast. If we wait until dark, it’ll be safer.”

“For who, us or Ian?”

“All three.” He drove into Dores, parking near the inn. “Stay here.”

“Why?”

“Do you want every knockabout asking what’s wrong with your head?”

“True.” She settled on the headrest, planning revenge against Lord Guthrie’s pit bull.

Sommers shook her awake when he returned. A strange light shone in his blue orbs, and Mustang realized the sun had fully set over Loch Ness.

“How long were you gone?”

“An hour. Sorry.” He deposited a paper sack of supplies on the rear seat. “It seems the constables have been called from town to investigate a missing person case.”

“At least, it’s not a murder.”

“Some of the shopkeepers think it might end up that way.”

“Sounds like the mystery novel Ian was reading to me last night. What happened?”

“The truck from Ben MacPherson’s feed store stopped at Boleskine House to make its regular delivery this morning. The driver found Lady Neville’s favorite Arabian wandering loose near the stables. From what he could tell, the other horses hadn’t been fed for a day or more, either.”

“Who’s Lady Neville?” Mustang mused.

“I’ve a strong suspicion you are.”

“Bull. How could I be a noble woman, if I’m American?”

“From what my uncle told me, Lady Elizabeth Neville *is* American. Young, and pretty, with long, dark hair.”

“Oh, hell...”

“The name means nothing to you?”

“No.”

“Maybe if we drive down to Boleskine...”

Mustang blocked him from inserting the ignition key. “Not until we find Ian. That’s more important.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

She hissed, “Don’t call me that.”

Sommers grinned as he swung the car toward Guthrie Manor. They would have to hike from the road but, given the lack of a fence surrounding the estate, he was reasonably sure no guard dogs provided security.

A single window emitted light on the north wing’s top level. Mustang’s head ached tremendously; she promised herself a long rest once they rescued her new friend.

“Put up your hood,” her companion directed. “That bandage is reflecting the moonlight.”

“That’s your doing, not mine.”

“Hush.”

Mounting the scaffolding proved an arduous task. Mustang lost her grip on the cold metal rungs more than once, nearly falling. To their misfortune, the construction platform ended two stories below the glowing window.

“What now?” Mustang speculated.

Sommers extracted a grappling hook and rope from a pouch belted beneath his jacket. “One thing I’ve learned as a surgeon: the smallest details matter most.”

Four throws finally snagged a trustworthy hold for the three-pronged claw. “There’s no way, Doctor...” Mustang protested.

“Then, stay here. I’ll get inside...”

“Why waste the energy?” The glass directly above their heads slid inward silently. “Can’t we take the stairs?”

With a resigned sigh, Sommers grabbed the stone sill and hoisted himself through the opening. He leaned out, then, and gripped Mustang’s hands, raising her easily.

A blinding beam shot from his torch; a flashlight, Mustang corrected. They found a ladder propped between floors - the stairs had been dismantled for refurbishing. Hours seemed to elapse before they detected shafts of light under a closed door.

“Ian?” Mustang called quietly.

The sole response, a frantic thumping.

Sommers turned the knob. Locked. He counted a compact pick-lock set among his equipment...

“What, you’re a burglar in your spare time?” quipped Mustang.

She touched the old fashioned handle, and the panel creaked inward.

Ian MacIntosh was trussed to a wooden chair, hands and feet, a filthy towel stuffed in his mouth as a gag. One eye was swollen shut, a hideous purple. Sommers surmised his left shoulder had been dislocated, as well, which would account for the odd angle of his arm.

“Should I untie him, or do you want your friends to do the honors?” offered the doctor.

“My friends?”

“Whatever beings perform these marvelous little tricks of yours.”

“Now’s not the time.” A word from her lips, and lengths of duct tape fell into the sawdust.

Ian attempted to stand. Sommers eased him back onto the chair, examining the injuries.

“Burke did this?” Mustang stated.

“Aye, lass.”

“He’ll never terrorize another soul again.”

Sommers interrupted, “I won’t take no for an answer, MacIntosh. You’re going to hospital. I can feel three broken ribs, and there may be internal bleeding.”

“Whatever ye say, Denis.”

Moving the incapacitated man from the structure would be difficult, though. Mustang hadn’t the strength to help Sommers carry him, and the absence of stairs...

“Does this wing connect to the rest of the house?” asked Mustang.

“Aye, lass.”

“Fine. Give me five minutes.”

“What do you have in mind?” Sommers huffed, restraining her.

“Lord Guthrie’s responsible; he’ll make it right.”

The men blinked as, one by one, walls between Ian’s make-shift prison and Guthrie Manor’s living quarters disintegrated, leaving a straight path to the owner’s suite.

The butler intercepted her, having retrieved an evening tea tray from his employer’s bedroom. “How did you get in?”

“Out of the way.”

The erect servant slammed against the wall so hard, an oil portrait of the third Lord Guthrie crashed onto the tile.

Tuxedo shirt unbuttoned, the present occupant burst from his ornate sitting room, fighting to adjust spectacles on his nose. “What on earth...”

“What on earth, indeed, your lordship,” spat Mustang. “What on earth has that bully, Angus Burke, been doing to your tenants, and what right has he to beat and kidnap them?”

“Ye are talking nonsense, woman.”

She grabbed the oldster’s sleeve. “Come with me.”

“I will not!”

“Don’t test me, Guthrie. You don’t want to see me really ticked.”

Her smoldering temper triggered a rapid succession of portraits dropping along the dim corridor. Ancient carved frames splintered, launching deadly projectiles at the pair. Lord Guthrie lunged for cover, the rapport louder than any machine gun.

The rain of wood chips subsided; Mustang yanked the man from behind the door. Practically dragged toward the north wing, he gasped, “What have you done to my house?”

“Nothing a few thousand pounds won’t fix.”

Presented with Ian MacIntosh and his wounds, Guthrie’s own anger erupted. “Heads will roll for this!”

“Can I watch?”

Sommers scowled at the young woman; she winced.

An ambulance en route, servants were summoned to transport MacIntosh to the ground floor. Sommers accompanied him; Guthrie and Mustang remained among the construction debris, conducting an animated discussion.

MacIntosh was admitted to same Inverness hospital where Mustang had been confined twelve hours earlier. He, fortunately, was not tethered to his bed. X-rays confirmed no internal bleeding. Bandages secured his ribs, and a sling prevented his arm from moving.

He thanked both Sommers and Mustang profusely, when they took their leave well past midnight. During the journey back to Dores, a radio bulletin reported the arrest of Angus Burke.

“Now, we’re back to you,” said Sommers.

“Meaning what, exactly?”

“You need rest and food.”

“Take me to Ian’s.”

“The place is a wreck. Besides, you need someone close by, in case....”

“In case, what?”

“You could get worse at any time. A concussion can be fatal.”

“All right, then, Doctor. What do you suggest?”

“My uncle’s.”

Shadows cast eerie spectres across MacDonough’s modest brick edifice and, when she alighted from the Mercedes, Mustang heard odd noises from a spacious barn.

“The horses,” Sommers clarified.

He led her around the rear of the house, his key fitting into the kitchen deadbolt without any illumination. Gesturing for silence with a finger to his lips, they crept up narrow stairs to a row of bedrooms.

“We’re not two teenagers sneaking around, having sex,” Mustang whispered.

“No explanation would satisfy Uncle Glenn. He’s...”

A door opened, and he tugged her across the threshold. Only after manipulating the knob lock did he switch on a table lamp.

“There should be a nightshirt in the top drawer,” indicated Sommers. “And the bathroom is there.” He pointed toward a recess in the far wall. “I’m in the next room, so if you need anything, just call.”

“You mentioned food,” she reminded him.

“I’ll bring you a cold meat plate, if that’s okay.”

“Toast might be better. My stomach is still a bit queasy.”

“And juice?”

“Sure.”

He withdrew, and she discarded the windbreaker and two shirts. Contrary to Sommers’ prediction, a pair of oversized pajamas lay in the oak chest. Mustang wondered who normally slept in the bed.

Washing hands and face in a marble sink, she didn’t recognize herself in the mirror, but the texture of the counter made her fingers tingle in a familiar way. She felt refreshed as she crawled under the satin quilt, at any rate, and settled on a stack of three plump pillows.

Sommers brought a silver tray with a platter of muffins and pitcher of apple juice before retiring himself. “I couldn’t find the toaster, so I thought these might appeal to you.”

She bit into one hungrily, while he filled a crystal goblet.

She drained the glass in one gulp.

“Not so fast!” he warned. “It’ll come right up, with your stomach so empty.”

“Not this time... I hope.”

He sat on the mattress edge, placing the back of his hand on her forehead. “No fever. A good sign the gash isn’t infected.”

“You asked me... something... about antibiotics.”

“Whether you’re allergic. Some people have a violent reaction if they take penicillin-type drugs.”

“I don’t remember ever being that sick.”

“Every child gets ear infections, or the flu... Your mother would’ve given you cough medicine when you had a cold...” He paused. “You *do* have a mother?”

“Of course!” she chuckled. “You thinking I’m an alien life form or something?”

“No, and in a few days, we should know the truth.”

“Meaning, my memory should return?”

“Or we’ll find someone to positively identify you.”

“How would that help me?”

“If you have a name to build on, it might be easier to reconstruct your life.”

Heavy oak slammed against the wall at that moment. Glenn MacDonough stood, livid, on the carpet.

Sommers straightened. “Uncle Glenn!”

Mustang jerked the covers over her head.

“Look at the hour, lad!” the older man raged. “How many times ha’ I told ye, I dinnae like ye bringing trollops int’ m’house!”

“It’s not...”

She heard footsteps approach; the quilt was ripped aside. “Lady Elizabeth!”

## IV

Denis Sommers’ raucous guffaw reverberated the window panes, his suspicions justified. MacDonough glared from the female in the bed to his nephew. Mustang blushed.

“Well?” demanded the Scot.

“Those bandages aren’t part of a costume, Uncle. She fell - off her horse, I suppose - and has fifteen stitches in her scalp, along with total memory loss.”

MacDonough’s frown softened. “Total?”

“Total, but temporary, I estimate.”

“Why isn’t she in hospital?”

“She was, but wouldn’t stay put.”

“Ye are more than welcome t’ recuperate here,” the squat contractor stated, taking both her hands in his massive paws. “So many people were worried...”

“Why?” she wondered.

“Because stories o’ your kindness have circulated far and wide. Ye are much more beloved than Boleskine’s prior owners.”

A stabbing pain shot through Mustang’s frontal lobe; she cringed.

“What is it?” Sommers probed.

“A vague image... of a hill... a man in white robes.”

“What man? A priest?”

“I’m not positive. He’s old, very old, and he dies...”

Clamping her hands over her face, she screamed.

Sommers forced her fingers into her lap, penlight stimulating the pupils' dilation. His expression bespoke confusion at the near-normal results. "The concussion is improving, so she shouldn't be having such traumatic spells."

MacDonough observed, "Probably a nightmare since comin' t' live on the property. They say that profligate Crowley and the scoundrel Jock White haunt the grounds."

"I've heard those names before," Mustang mumbled, shuddering.

"No doubt. They would ha' been listed on the title ye signed when takin' possession..."

She couldn't recall signing any papers. She couldn't recall...

Insistent hands eased her onto the pillows. "Rest, my lady. Who knows how you'll feel in the morning."

"I told you not to call me that," she snickered feebly, strength drained from her limbs. "Where's the juice?"

Sommers refilled the goblet, and offered it to her. She sipped the liquid, more slowly. "Thank you. Both. For everything."

MacDonough and his nephew strode to the door. "I'll sit up wi' her, if need be."

"No, Uncle. I'll leave the connecting door open to my room. If she so much as talks in her sleep, I'll hear."

"Good night, then."

"Night."

MacDonough popped his head of fine, wispy hair back inside just as Sommers switched off the lamp. "She'd make a fine wife, I suspect. When she's healthy again, I mean."

"I don't need a matchmaker, Uncle."

"Just a thought."

"You can stop thinking about it any time, as far as I'm concerned."

The door closed, and Sommers crossed to his own room. He managed five hours' slumber before a flock of birds nesting in the maple tree outside his window roused him.

His drowsiness vanished upon seeing Mustang's bed empty.

Pulling a robe over his nightshirt, he rushed down the stairs to the kitchen, where the cook prepared a sumptuous Sunday breakfast. "Have you seen a girl wearing Uncle's pajamas?"

"Nae, Doctor," the rotund woman replied.

Slipping into the loafers he'd discarded during their stealthy entrance in the wee hours, Sommers searched every room of the dwelling, the barn and the

woods. Nearing the horse pasture, he detected movement on a nearby rise. He sprinted up the hill, where Mustang shivered in a heap beside a pile of rotting timbers.

He stripped off the embroidered robe and draped it around her. “What in hell are you doing out here?”

“This... is where it happened. This is where I killed him...”

Sommers gulped. “Killed who?”

“The old man.”

He shook her shoulders, too hard, perhaps. “Look at me. You didn’t kill anyone. It was a dream. A dream, you understand?”

A pillar of fire shot from the pit behind her. The doctor swept her into a protective embrace, fearing for their lives as the sizzling flames encompassed them both. He waited for his flesh to begin blistering, in vain.

“What is it?” he shouted.

“That day,” whimpered Mustang. “Rain without clouds, fire without fuel. Earthquakes and wind...”

“Caused by what?”

“Me.”

Sommers retreated, holding her at arm’s length. “You?”

The fiery column dissipated in an instant. The phenomenon went unheeded by Mustang, staring instead at her hands. “The blood... so much blood...”

Her companion raised the scarred palms toward the morning sun. “Were these burns self-inflicted from some bizarre desire for attention?”

“Lightning. The same lightning which destroyed... this.”

Releasing her, he inspected the mutilated lumber in disbelief. “If you were struck by lightning, you’d be dead.”

“I wish I *was* dead.”

“You can’t mean that.”

“My brain feels like scrambled eggs, everything mixed together. No more do I sense a bit of truth than it vanishes. Do you know what that’s like?”

“No, I don’t. Please, let me take you back to the hospital. I’ll call a specialist I know, who may be able to bring you through this by inducing a coma...”

She broke from his grasp. “No!” Bare feet scurried down the incline toward Boleskine House.

Winded from his own run, Sommers pursued her at a jog. He finally located Mustang in the stable, nuzzling the snout of a magnificent Arabian.

“Isn’t he beautiful?” she breathed.

“Very.”

“He knows me.”

“I can tell.”

“Help me feed them. They look hungry.”

“I think Uncle Glenn came and fed them last night.”

“Why would he do that?”

“Because he loves horses, too. You bought most of these from him.”

She read their names aloud. “Pietra, Wench, Crystal, Molly, Sarge.” Her head swiveled, curious. “Where’s Heartbeat?”

“Heartbeat?”

“My... pinto.”

“Neither you nor Uncle Glenn own any pintos.”

“Not me. My... father.”

Her cheeks drained of all color, eyes staring blankly. Sommers rushed her into the house, laid her on the living room sofa and hastily built a fire. He rummaged blankets from the bedrooms, and elevated her feet with throw pillows.

No phone on the premises, he couldn’t call for assistance. He didn’t dare leave, for fear she’d regain consciousness and wander off again. He discovered a fifth of whiskey in the kitchen pantry, and poured some in a shot glass.

Holding her head, he touched the rim to her lips. She slurped the liquid, then hunched forward in a coughing fit.

“You shouldn’t buy the cheap stuff,” he advised when she glared at him.

“It’s not cheap. It’s Jameson. Sent... by a woman I helped... to replace the last bottle...”

“Sorry. Feeling better?”

“My head hurts.”

“It will, for a few days yet.”

“Why are you here?”

“A doctor doesn’t abandon his patients, my lady, even when they run off.”

“How many times do I have to tell you, don’t call me...” The pieces of the puzzle summarily assembled in their assigned positions inside her skull. “Oh, hell...”

“What’s your name?”

“Mustang, er, Elizabeth.”

“Lady Elizabeth Neville?”

She nodded, exacerbating the throbbing in her temples.

“You have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Twenty questions?”

“Maybe more.”

“I feel like I haven’t slept in days. Can’t we postpone this until later?”

“I’m leaving in three hours.”

“What did I do this time?”

Sommers hesitated before proceeding. “What do you mean, ‘this time’?”

She detailed her habit of impulsively interfering in the lives of others, concluding, “I don’t seem to learn from my mistakes.”

“You don’t remember last night?”

“If we slept together, I won’t regret it.”

“No, we didn’t.” He unraveled the gauze drooping over her ears. “We rescued Ian…”

“Yes, Ian! Where is he?”

“In hospital. Where you should be.” Scar tissue had begun forming over the gash, a good sign. “Or, at least, come back to my uncle’s, so I can apply a fresh bandage.”

Her fingers barely touched the injury. “How bad?”

“The stitches can come out in a week, but it’ll be tender for a month or more.” He glanced out the window. “And you won’t be able to ride.”

“Riding is my one joy,” she countered. “I won’t give it up for anything.”

“I’m sorry. Doctor’s orders.”

“The doctor doesn’t know me very well, does he?”

Seeing the mangled skin knit itself whole in a matter of seconds sent Sommers into a state of shock. “What… are you?” he babbled, gripping the carved marble mantle for support.

“Someone who wants to be left alone.” She rose unsteadily. “Please, be on your way.”

“It would be a violation of my ethics to leave without being sure you’re fully healed.”

She rolled her hazel eyes. “You want me to do a couple back flips?”

“No, just satisfy my curiosity.”

“Fine.” She waved him onto the green velvet sofa, while she settled on the cane-backed rocker.

“How’d you know my grandfather was a German soldier?”

“A photo was taken of Field Marshal Rommel’s staff, just before they left Africa. One of the men was Georg Schiller. Another was your ancestor.”

“You’ve seen this picture?”

Mustang was in no mood to reveal her experience inside Schiller’s body.

“Schiller made a presentation to my high school government class.”

Sommers appeared content, but his inquiries didn't stop there. "How did you make the glass of whiskey materialize?"

She chuckled drily. "I can materialize many things, including the dead. If you play chess, I can bring Mark Twain around for a quick game."

The man sensed humor in her voice, and laughed. "All right, all right. If you can concoct such an imaginative tale, your brain must be fully functional." He stood. "I'll respect your wishes, and be going."

She followed him to the door, laying a hand on his arm. "Denis, I'm sorry. To finally have myself... myself again..."

"Don't worry about it. I will say this: I'll never forget the last two days."

"Will you do me one more favor?"

"Anything."

"Take me to see Ian."

"Get into some clothes, and I'll bring the car around."

She restored the robe to him. "I don't think you want to wear pajamas to town, yourself!"

Any trepidation Mustang entertained about passing through the portal of the Inverness hospital vanished with her awareness of the power she possessed. Ian MacIntosh sat up in bed, his lunch uneaten, a nurse checking blood pressure on his good arm.

"Denis, when are ye goin' t' discharge me?" the Scot whined.

"Today, if you promise to rest your shoulder until it heals, and not bend over for any reason, which would aggravate your ribs."

"Aye, ye ha' m' word." He extended his hand toward Mustang. "How are ye, lass?"

"Much better, thanks. And ready to fulfill *my* promise to you."

"What promise be that?"

"To reward you for your kindness."

"There be no need o' that..."

"Bull. It's all arranged. As soon as you're able, you'll take over Angus Burke's position at Guthrie Manor. Beginning tomorrow, your cottage is going to be completely renovated and refurnished, as well."

MacIntosh could not speak, he grew so emotional. He kissed her fingertips in gratitude, sniffing back tears.

Sommers, too, was astounded by the announcement. "When did you manage to arrange this?"

"Just because I didn't remember who I was doesn't mean my sense of justice vanished," Mustang remarked. "Lord Guthrie was responsible for Burke's

actions, whether he sanctioned the man's methods or not. I wasn't about to let him off the hook without some guarantee of restitution for the damage to Ian's house and life."

"Bravo, lass," praised Ian.

"Now I understand why the villagers were concerned about you,"

Sommers noted. "You may live like a hermit, but your generosity extends far beyond the boundaries of your estate."

Mustang smirked. "Since I... inherited these powers, I've managed to do a lot of harm through impulsiveness and stupidity. I always tried to make the situation right, but it became abundantly clear the only way to keep out of trouble would be by spending my days alone. If I can do a bit of good from this self-imposed isolation, it's small compensation for the lives I've ruined."

After heartfelt farewells, Sommers walked Mustang back to the Mercedes, dropping her at the end of the winding gravel drive to Boleskine House. "If you have the slightest relapse in concussion-related symptoms, you will ring a doctor, won't you?" he pleaded.

"I would, if I had a phone."

"What if I have Uncle Glenn check on you every morning?"

"How 'bout I ride by on my daily rounds and give him an update?"

"For a week, at least."

"Check."

"When next I come up on holiday, do you mind if I pay a call?"

"My door will always be open to you, Doc."

They embraced, then Sommers slid once more behind the wheel. Mustang waited until the vehicle disappeared from sight before hiking toward the house.

Resting wasn't her top priority; the horses hadn't been exercised for three days. The feed delivery man had unsaddled the Arabian when he'd found it, but had left the leather in a tangle on the floor. Cleaning and straightening it, she guided Wench from her stall, adjusted the blanket and tightened the girth.

Her life had resumed its normal routine.

If normalcy could be considered the ideal.