

The Camp Follower Affair

Mary Fraser in the Ohio Country

Robert J Shade

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MAJOR CHARACTERS

Historical

Henry Bouquet	Colonel, 60 th Foot, Commander of British Forces in Pennsylvania
Thomas Stirling	Captain, 42 nd Foot (Black Watch)
Asher Clayton	Lieutenant Colonel, 2 nd Battalion, Pennsylvania Regiment
Thomas Hutchins	Ensign, 60 th Foot, Engineer of British Ohio Expedition
Robert Kirkwood	Corporal, 42 nd Foot (Black Watch), formerly of 77 th Foot
Charlot Kaske	Shawnee war captain
Simon Girty	Captive of Mingo tribe

Fictional

Mary Fraser	Camp Follower and nurse in 42 nd Foot (Black Watch)
Joshua Baird	Civilian scout for Colonel Bouquet
Richard Grenough	Owner of border trading company
Reginald Welford	Lieutenant, 60 th Foot, Colonel Bouquet's adjutant
Percy Munro	Surgeon of 42 nd Foot (Black Watch)
Charles Highsmith	Contract surgeon of Pennsylvania Regiment
Abigail Gibson	Captive of Mingo Indians, known as Orenda
Charles McDonald	Captain, 42 nd Foot (Black Watch)
Timothy McGregor	Private in Captain Stirling's Company of the 42 nd Foot
Ian Tavish	McDonald's bagpiper
Kathryn O'Hara	Nurse in 42 nd Foot (Black Watch)
Wolf Claw	War captain of Slippery Rock Creek Mingo

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Chapter One

Gathering at Fort Pitt

The wagon landed on its side with a resounding crash which echoed through the forest. Mary Fraser stood in the mud at the edge of the wagon track, looking down from the hillock at the great blue Conestoga as it lay on its left side in the gully, the two right-side wheels still slowly revolving in the air. Three of the bows which supported the canvas cover had snapped, tearing the cover wide open. Several trunks had spilled out through the hole in the cover as the wagon tipped onto its side and now lay alongside the wagon bed. One of them had broken open and scattered medical instruments around the ground. Surgeon Munro, Orderly Taggart, and the other nurses of the Black Watch stood with Mary, all of them silently staring down at the wreck.

Kathryn O'Hara shook her head and said with her usual understatement, "Sure 'n that's a proper mess, Mr. Munro."

Munro looked over at the driver, who was working to calm his team of six horses. When the wagon had rolled off of the trail, it had snapped the pin which connected the front axle assembly to the tongue, so the team had not been dragged down by the weight of the wagon and now stood, agitated but unharmed up on the wagon track. The surgeon said quietly, but with great irony in his voice, "McLane, It would have been much better if you had managed to stay on the road."

"I tell you, it weren't my fault," exclaimed the driver. "It's all this rain we been have'n. The side of the road turned to mud and gave way under them left wheels."

"The other wagons seem to have made it through here safely." Munro looked over at the driver with a grim look on his face.

"That was earlier in the day, sir. Way earlier. It weren't so wet back then. You know it's been raining on and off all day." Then he said accusingly, "If we hadn't started so late, we'd a' made it through like the others."

Munro sighed. "McLane, you know all that was unavoidable. We had that emergency surgery at last night's campsite. So we couldn't leave with the rest of the convoy."

The wagoner exclaimed, "I'll tell you what I *do* know. We ain't gonna get that wagon back on the road with just this team. We're gonna' have to lighten it so we can push it back up on its wheels and we'll need to have at least another team hooked up to pull it out." He looked around rather unnecessarily and said, "An' I don't see nary another team 'round here."

Mary could remain silent no longer. "Maybe If McLane hadn't been taking long nips all day from that jug he keeps in the side-box on the wagon, he'd have been able to see the soft mud at the side of the road."

McLane scowled. "Keep that sharp tongue of yours still, you little red-haired tart. This ain't none of your concern."

Munro snapped back at the wagoner, "I'll have you keep a civil tongue in your mouth toward my nurses, McLane."

Mary pointed up at the sun, half hidden by a cloud and now low on the western sky. "It will be our great concern if we have to camp out here all night waiting for help to come back from the column. And we don't have anything to eat."

Surgeon Munro nodded. "Miss Fraser is quite right. We need to get help as fast as possible." He turned to the orderly. "Taggart, you'll have to take my horse and ride up to the convoy. They're undoubtedly encamped at Bushy Run Station by now. It's only about three or four miles ahead. Go straight to the convoy commander, Captain McDonald. Tell him about our problem and that we need at least one more Conestoga team. And he must send a full squad of soldiers with strong backs." He waved to the four nurses. "These women can't get that wagon upright."

Taggart sighed. "Aye, sir." Then, not being an experienced rider, he mounted the surgeon's horse rather tentatively, and soon disappeared to the westward along Forbes Road.

Munro started down the slope to where the wagon lay. "Ladies, I said I'd not expect you to help right the wagon. But there's certainly no reason you can't assist with unloading it. Shall we get started?"

They had been at work for perhaps half an hour when Kathryn suddenly stood still, then put her hand to ear and said, "I hear noise of horses and wagons in the distance."

Munroe stood up from repacking the spilled chest and said, "That seems rather too soon to be from the convoy."

Mary heard the sounds also, but said nothing. Instead she laboriously climbed the bank up to the road, slipping and sliding in the mud. She looked westward, but saw no sign of anyone approaching from the direction of Bushy Run. McLane, who had not deigned to assist with the unloading, had been lounging on a fallen log, his jug – which had miraculously survived the wreck – beside him. He burped, then pointed in the other direction. "There be horsemen and wagons a'commin' from the east. I caught sight of them crossing a ridge a little while ago."

Mary snapped, "I guess it was too much trouble to mention it to us." Then she looked in that direction and immediately caught sight of a rider visible at the top of a low ridge, sitting his horse and taking in the scene of the accident. Then another rider appeared and stopped beside the first. The two men carried out a short discussion, then spurred their mounts forward.

Mary called down to inform Munro and then took a few steps toward the approaching horsemen. The man she had first seen was well dressed. He wore a dark brown coat, tan breeches, with highly polished leather riding boots which reached nearly to the knee. On his head was a fine beaver hat with a round crown. A brace of horse pistols were holstered in front of his saddle and he carried a short riding crop in his right hand. The second man was obviously a retainer, dressed in rough working clothes including a short shell jacket, breeches with cloth leggings, and a hat with turned up brim. As she watched, three Conestogas came into view. In addition to the drivers there were seven or eight men walking alongside the wagons.

The well-dressed man pulled up his horse in front of Mary. He touched his hat to her, motioned toward the overturned wagon, and said, "It appears that you're having a spot of trouble."

Mary replied, "Mister, we could handle a spot of trouble with no problem. But this is more like a *lake* of trouble. And we're sunk into the middle of it!"

The man grinned. "Well, young lady, it would be our pleasure to help extract you from the lake." He turned to the man beside him and said, "McCrae, lead all the wagons up beyond this wreck, then bring one of the teams back to help get that wagon out of the gulley. And get the rest of the men organized to right that wagon."

By now Munro, puffing from the effort to climb the hill, had arrived. "Good day, sir. I'm Surgeon Munro of the 42nd. I'd be much obliged if you could see your way clear to assist us."

“Naturally, sir. I’ve already told the young lady here it would be our pleasure. I have several teams and a dozen strong backs available, Mr. Munro. And it is *always* my honor to assist His Majesty’s forces.”

The man, who Mary guessed was in his mid-forties but very well preserved, with only a hint of thickening at the waist, doffed his hat and made a small bow to Munro. “Permit me to introduce myself. I am Richard Grenough, of York, sir. A merchant providing supplies to Colonel Bouquet’s expedition.”

Munro smiled broadly. “Grenough! Why certainly I have heard of you. But you are too modest, sir! I read how you advised the colonial government during the recent Paxton Boy insurrection. And if the Pennsylvania Gazette is to be believed, you were of great assistance to Dr. Franklin in negotiating the accord with those Ulster-Scot rogues which ended the uprising.”

“I plead guilty to offering a few ideas to the good Doctor and sharing my knowledge of the western border people with him. But I would be remiss if I took any credit for the work done by the brilliant Doctor Franklin, sir.”

Munro nodded and continued. “And now I understand that you are to act as one of the commissioners for treating with the Indians once we bring the savages to negotiations.”

Grenough swung down from the saddle and offered his hand to the surgeon. “Once again, you are correct, Mr. Munro. Colonel Bouquet and I have worked together on many occasions and I’m indeed proud to call him my personal friend.” He motioned in a generally westward direction and said, “I’m looking forward to arriving at Fort Pitt and meeting with Henry.”

The three of them moved aside as Grenough’s wagons carefully transited the muddy hill. The first wagon was driven expertly by a burley, broad shouldered waggoner. Mary noticed that he limped on his left side. But then she was shocked when the man looked at her as the wagon passed. His face was terribly misshapen, particularly on the left side. His cheekbone was mashed in, the ridge bone of his left eye appeared to have been crushed, his nose smashed nearly flat, and it was clear that he had lost his front teeth. There were scars all over his face. Mary instinctively put her hand to her mouth at the sight and averted her eyes in embarrassment.

When the wagon had passed, Grenough, who had seen her reaction, leaned over and said softly, “Mr. Bratton is my lead waggoner and a very good man. But unfortunately he lost his looks in a vicious tavern fight over a faithless tart. And I’m sad to say his brains were disturbed and he’s never again been quite right in the head.” He paused for a moment and an angry look came over his face; then he continued, “The man who beat him is a vicious, conniving German who is known to have killed in cold blood.”

Mary looked up at the merchant. “That’s interesting, Mr. Grenough. I once knew a young German; he was a fine lad; kind, gentle, and loving.”

Grenough smiled and said gently, “Naturally, Miss, I didn’t mean to imply that all Germans were vicious.”

Once the wagons had all passed, several of Grenough’s men descended the hill and without much trouble heaved the wagon to an upright position.

Meanwhile McCrae, a burly, black-haired Irishman, had surveyed the muddy road. He looked down scornfully at McLane, who was still on the log with the jug in his hands and clearly in his cups. Then he turned to Grenough and said, “By the Saints, any bloody fool could have gotten that wagon over this patch if he’d been paying attention.”

Grenough walked over to McLane and scowled at him.

McLane looked up and shook his head. “See here, Cap’n, that ain’t fair. That Irishman weren’t here when it happened. I was doing my best; just misjudged how solid the ground was, that’s all.”

Grenough had been tapping his riding crop against his right boot; suddenly he raised the crop and then with a swift, powerful motion struck the jug out of McLane’s hands. It flew against a tree and smashed. Then he turned and said to McCrae, “Have one of our men drive this man’s rig into the camp

at Bushy Run to make sure it gets there safely.” Then he looked at Munro. “Surgeon, I submit that you should permanently replace this scoundrel as soon as possible. I expect you could arrange that at Fort Pitt. Meanwhile, I believe if you explain the situation to Captain McDonald, he’ll arrange for an appropriate punishment for this driver.” He looked down at McLane. “Most likely something which would take place while he was lashed barebacked to a wagon wheel.”

McLane was not too drunk to miss Grenough’s meaning. A look of horror came over his face.

By this time all of the nurses had joined the group on the road. Bratton, the man with the disfigured face was leading a team from one of Grenough’s wagons back to help pull the surgical wagon out of the gully. Another man had re-hitched McLane’s team to the now upright Conestoga. Grenough turned to Munro. “We’ll hitch my team ahead of your team, and together they should have enough strength to get the wagon back up to the road.”

Munro made profuse thanks to Grenough.

Grenough shook his head. “Not at all, Mr. Munro; it’s my pleasure to help.” He motioned to all the nurses and bowed slightly. Then he looked directly into Mary’s eyes, smiled, and hesitated a moment.

Mary looked into the man’s eyes and felt a disturbing sense of excitement.

Then Grenough continued, still looking at Mary, “I could not have lived with myself if I had left these lovely ladies marooned in the bush away from the comforts of an established camp.”

With that, he turned and walked over to where he could personally supervise the efforts of the waggoners.

Kathryn nudged Mary in the arm. “Now ain’t he the nicest gentleman?”

Mary nodded. “Indeed he is; he certainly knows how to get things organized.” She looked at Grenough directing the salvage of the wagon, and felt a surge of admiration at the man’s confidence and obvious competence. She turned back to Kathryn. “We’re lucky to have such a man helping Colonel Bouquet on this expedition.”

* * *

“Smartly now, men, let’s get these tents up. And corporal, I’ll caution you to take care we get them in proper straight rows. Remember, we’ll need a wide space between the two rows so we can maneuver litters easily. We’re right under the parapet here, and I don’t want Colonel Reid of the 42nd or even Colonel Bouquet giving me grief about the hospital lacking in military standards.” Munro was directing a sharp faced, red-haired corporal with a thick chest and broad shoulders who was leading a detail of the Black Watch which had been assigned to help set up the hospital.

The corporal faced Munro, stood to attention, and gave the surgeon a crooked smile. He said, “Now do ‘na worry a wee bit, sir; we’ll get you set up proper-like in no time. The hospital will look as regimental as any company in the battalion.”

The surgeon nodded. “See you do that, Corporal. And then help these nurses unload the wagon and stow the medical supplies and equipment in the proper tents. Orderly Taggart and Miss Fraser will tell you where to put things.” He paused and looked over at Mary Fraser. “I’ll be going over to meet with the adjutant, Miss Fraser. I should be back in a couple of hours.” Having admonished the corporal, Munro adjusted his bonnet and strode off toward the main gate of Fort Pitt.

Mary and Kathryn had stood by watching the proceedings, barely able to keep straight faces.

As soon as the surgeon was out of earshot, the corporal turned to Mary and broke into a wide grin. “Mary, my beautiful lass, I was up on the parapet when Captain McDonald’s column arrived. And my eyeballs nearly jumped out of my head, for I swore I must be seeing a ghost marching behind the hospital wagon. All these months and I was thinkin’ you was dead of your wound from Bushy Run. Why, Eckert and Donegal and Baird and I searched the burial ground over there lookin’ for your grave in

the chill winds of last November. But when I spotted you in that marching outfit of yours, with the red jacket and the skirt made from the tartan and then spied the round bonnet on your head, bless my soul, I knew it could 'na be anyone else. I immediately volunteered to help set up the hospital."

Mary laughed and turned to Kathryn. "Did you ever think you'd see the day when Bob Kirkwood volunteered for anything except an extra rum ration?" Then she turned back to the corporal, took a step forward and gave him a long hug. "It's wonderful to see someone from the old 77th, Bob. I feel like I'm coming home."

"Ah, me darlin' Mary, I feel the same. But you must tell me how it happens that you're still alive, with all of us thinkin' you had long since joined your Mum and Pa beside the seat of the Lord. When I left with Captain Stirling's company last October to carry Bouquet's message to the Ohio Indians, we knew you was dying. Doc Munro was certain you did not have but a few days. And when we came back in late November, the 77th was gone to be mustered out and everyone at the hospital was changed. Munro had gone east with most of the 42nd. No one knew anything about you." He waved toward the burial ground. So we thought you was out there." He paused a moment, then said, "Wend searched the crosses for your name, and became very bitter about how they had treated you, puttin' your body in an unmarked grave."

Mary shook her head. "By all lights, Bob, I should be in Heaven with Mum and Pa. The fact is, I owe my life to Esther McCulloch. She told Munro there was something wrong inside my wound that was making it fester and the corruption was spreading through my body. She demanded that he cut into it to see what was wrong. At first he refused, but she kept after him, saying it couldn't do any harm since I was dying. Finally, he agreed. By that time I was burning up and unconscious most of the time. But they filled me with rum, and laid me out on the table with a piece of leather in my mouth. Then with Kathryn and Esther and one of the officer's wives holding me down, Munro cut into the wound." Mary looked down for a moment. "Before he was fair started, I passed out. For a while, I swear I was truthfully with Ma and Pa. I saw her standing over me, smiling like she used to when I was young, and there was Pa standing behind her with his hands on his hips. You remember how he used to stand like that, with his head cocked to the left?"

Kirkwood smiled and nodded. "Ah, that I do, lass."

"When I came to, I was on my cot in that little storeroom they had cleared out for me. But I woke up feelin' better than I had for a long time and hungry enough to eat a side of beef. Esther told me that when Munro cut into the wound, and cleared out all the mortification, he found a big wad of cloth that had been used to soak up the blood of the wound. In the dark of night there at Bushy Run, and them working in a hurry cause of all the other wounded, they forgot to take it out before they sewed me up. That's what had been causing all the mortification."

Kathryn put her hand on Mary's arm. "I feel so ashamed; I was working with Doc Munro that night on the battlefield; I thought we had got everything out 'afore we sewed up the wound."

Mary turned to Kathryn. "Oh, come on, woman, you must get over that. I know you did the best you could. And so did Munro. You had been working for hours on all those wounded men. You were exhausted and had nothing but the light of a tiny fire. It was just bad luck nobody saw that wad." She smiled turned back to Kirkwood. "Anyway, after that, I got better and didn't have any more attacks of the fever and weakness which had been coming over me." Then she paused and bit her lip. "There's a horrible big hole in my side where the Doc had to cut out all that corrupted flesh and a scar which is hard to look at. But I'm as strong as I ever was now."

"And you're as pretty a lass as ever was, Mary." Then a cloud came over Kirkwood's face. "But why are you here? Why ain't you with Wend? The whole of the 77th knew you two were in love."

Mary felt a heaviness in her heart, the same as always happened when someone mentioned Wend's name. "There was a terrible misunderstanding, Bob. You know that when I lay dying here at Pitt, I forced Wend to go with Stirling's column to see if he could find that Philadelphia girl Abigail who

was captured by the Mingo. She was his first love, and I knew I couldn't offer him a future. Then, as soon as I had recovered, they sent me east with the companies of the 42nd who were wintering in the east. I spent most of the winter in Carlisle Encampment. All that time, I thought Wend had found Abigail, so I didn't even think of leaving him a letter or trying to find out anything about him. I thought it would have been interfering in his new life with her."

Kirkwood shook his head. "So you never knew that Abigail decided to stay with the Indians because she had children with that Mingo war captain?"

"Not until just a few weeks ago. That's when we marched from Carlisle and joined up with Captain McDonald's company at Fort Loudoun. He came by and told me that Wend had stopped by the fort on his way to live in Virginia." She paused and caught her breath. "And then he told me that Wend is married, but not to Abigail. McDonald told me how Abigail turned him down, and that Wend, certain that I was dead, married an Ulster girl from his village up in Sherman Valley."

Kirkwood's mouth opened in shock. "The devil you say! God, what a bloody mess!"

Mary sighed. "Yes, it is, Bob. One night, while we were on the road to here, McDonald's piper, Tavish, came by our fire. He told me about Wend's woman. He said she's incredibly beautiful; she's tall, slim waisted, with long legs, raven hair, and eyes which sparkle when she speaks. He said all the men at Loudoun were finding ways to visit Wend's camp just to get a look at her." She paused and swallowed hard, feeling a lump in her throat. "So I guess that Wend has a new life and has forgotten all about me."

A look of distress came over Kirkwood's face. He walked over and put his arm around Mary's shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Mary, he may have a new life, but I can 'na believe that Wend has forgotten about you, lass. I've marched with him for many miles and I saw with me own eyes the distress in his face when he thought you were dead and buried. So there may have been some awful mistake, but I vow to you that he's carrying a love for you around in his head and his heart." He squeezed her. "So buck up lassie, keep all that in your mind, but its time to start thinking about making a new life for yourself." He winked at her. "Tell you what: Tonight, build a big fire, and I'll come around with some fine lads and a jug of Captain Stirling's best spirits from his personal store, and we'll make merry." Then he broke into a wide grin. "We'll be celebratin' your return from the dead!"

* * *

The September night was unseasonably warm and comfortable for the host of soldiers, camp followers, and contractors encamped around Fort Pitt. Hundreds of bright, flickering fires filled the open area between the tree line and the great fortress, making an island of light amidst the unbroken darkness of the vast forest. The light from the fires nearest the fort illuminated the walls and bastions, giving them a kind of enchanting beauty which contrasted to the hulking military presence they presented in daylight.

Mary looked around and reflected that as Kirkwood had promised, it was indeed a merry night at the hospital camp; the corporal had brought his friends from Stirling's Company. Also at his invitation came Piper Tavish and several men from McDonald's Company who, like the captain, had transferred to the Black Watch from the 77th Highlanders. Mary's morale had soared in the air of fond reunion with old friends. Moreover, all the nurses, their husbands, and children were at the gathering, adding to the feeling of a family affair. Many jugs were present, and before long, spirits were high, the worries and travails of the day forgotten.

There was only one fly in Mary's ointment. She caught sight of an older girl, in her early twenties, sitting and laughing with a group of men Mary didn't know. The girl was blond-haired, well endowed, and pretty in a sassy-looking way. Mary turned to Kirkwood. "Bob, why did you invite that lowland trash Laurie McPhie? You know she rubs me the wrong way; and besides, I have no time for her ways."

Kirkwood looked at the blond girl and smiled crookedly. "I 'na invited her. She must of come along with those boys from Stirling's company. I did tell them to come over tonight." He shrugged. "What's the difference? And anyway, she probably sold the lads a lot of the spirits what are here tonight."

Mary knew Kirkwood was right. Laurie was officially a sergeant's wife and a washerwoman. But she made extra money as an unofficial suttler, selling liquor and other things men wanted, usually at dear prices. She answered, "Yes, and by the way, where is her husband? I don't see him around."

"He's with the guard today."

Mary pursed her lips and then smiled knowingly. "I'm sure she's very happy about that. You know he's one of the oldest sergeants in the regiment. He's near twice her age; she married him as a business arrangement, nothing more. And the fact that he's on duty means she can sell some of what's between her legs later tonight." It was well known that Laurie had long been a paid tart, and marriage had not changed her ways.

"Now Mary, my lass, you know I don't like it when you sharpen your tongue like that. It doesn't become the sweet little girl I used to put on my knee. And besides, I'd be lying if I didn't admit I done assorted commercial business with her now and then."

Mary pursed her lips and shot a quick glance at Kirkwood. "I should have guessed. But besides all that, she's the biggest gossip in the regiment. And she dreams up lies to make her tales more interesting."

Kirkwood grinned. "Now Mary, she ain't the only one who tells stories; how else would we know what is goin' on in the battalion if we couldn't talk about it?" Then he waved toward the fire. "Enough about Laurie; look—Taggart's getting ready to play."

Taggart had brought out his fiddle. It was his proudest possession and he had real talent in playing the instrument; it seemed to come alive in his hands. Mary could see the great pleasure in his face as he prepared to play. Soon his bright tunes were enhancing the joyous atmosphere. After a few sprightly tunes, the group began to sing songs of home interspersed with jovial tavern songs. Presently Taggart stopped to rest, and Tavish took over, standing beside the fire, playing the pipes. The sound brought people from nearby fires and soon the crowd had grown to large proportions.

Kirkwood, grinning broadly, walked out in front of the fire, a broadsword in each hand. He exclaimed to the company, "Now, me lads and lassies, we'll be see'in who can hold their spirits!" He laid the swords on the ground in the shape of an 'X' and shouted, "Who'll be the first?"

Mary laughed and called out, "It's you who put the swords down, Bob! You damn well should be the first!"

There was a universal cry of agreement from all the men and women around the fire. Kirkwood looked perplexed for a moment, then raised his hands and shrugged his shoulders in signal of surrender. He waved to Tavish and called, "Do your worst, Ian!" He stepped over to the swords, and waited for the piping to begin.

Tavish responded with one of his fastest tunes. Kirkwood laughed and then started his dance, his feet moving rapidly in the spaces between the swords, his hands high in the air. Mary was impressed to see that — despite the copious amount of drink he had consumed — Kirkwood was able to maintain the precise control of himself which was required to keep from landing on either of the sword blades. When Tavish finished his tune, Kirkwood jumped away from the swords to the clapping of the crowd. He acknowledged the applause with a broad grin and the wave of his hand.

Kirkwood came and sat down beside Mary. She squeezed his arm and whispered, "You're as good as you ever were, Bob."

"Do 'na you ever doubt it, Mary!" Then he winked at her, and a mischievous smile came over his face. He shouted out, "Let's have young Tim McGregor!"

A wave of laughter rolled through the assemblage. Then the men from the 42nd started shouting: McGregor! McGregor! We want McGregor!"

Kirkwood leaned over and said to Mary, "McGregor's the youngest man in Stirling's company. He's not yet twenty."

"How can there be someone so young? The 42nd has been here in the colonies for more than six years."

Kirkwood waved his finger. "When we was reorganized last year, there wasn't enough of the old crowd left over to bring the battalion up to full strength."

Mary looked puzzled: "Even with the men from the 77th who decided to transfer?"

"No, they needed new men, even to meet just the peacetime establishment. So they shipped over a draft from the barracks in Scotland, Mary. McGregor was one of them." He smiled. "He's so young, the lad's become the pet of the company."

As they spoke, a young highlander was propelled to his feet by comrades and pushed toward the crossed swords.

Mary saw that he was wobbly on his feet, but had put on a game face. "He's feeling his drink," she said to Kirkwood.

"All the better for our amusement," Kirkwood said with a roguish grin. "Anyway, we've all had our embarrassing moments dancing over the swords. Sure and I've provided merriment for watchers often enough. Ask anyone from the 77th."

Mary looked at the young man closely. He was of a tall and wiry build, with light colored hair. He had blue eyes and a pleasant face, which at the moment had taken on a determined look as he attempted to shake off the effects of the alcohol and get control of his limbs.

The music began and the youth started his dance. Mary found herself impressed with the almost feminine grace of his moves, as he stepped delicately into the spaces between the swords. He danced with one hand on his hip, the other in the air, periodically holding both hands upward and then changing back to his hand-on-hip stance.

Mary noticed that as he danced, the expression on McGregor's face became more confident and his movements bolder. Finally his face broke into an outright grin and it was clear he was enjoying himself. She turned to Kirkwood. "It looks like your friend is not a stranger to the dance."

Kirkwood shrugged. "Indeed, lass, he's 'na doing too bad. An' as I always say, a man who can drink and then dance makes a fine mate for the company."

Mary turned back to watch, and at that moment McGregor got into trouble. Tavish was finishing his tune, and McGregor was preparing to jump away from the swords. But in so doing, he placed one foot awkwardly and then tripped and stumbled toward the fire. He instinctively reached out with his hands to catch himself, and when he did fall, his left hand landed in the edge of the fire.

There was a collective shout from all the watchers. McGregor's mouth opened in a silent scream as his hand was burned by the coals. He quickly pushed himself out of the fire and rolled onto his back, clutching his left hand with the right. Mary knew that the pain must be excruciating, but the highlander gritted his teeth and made no sound as he stared down at his burned hand in shock.

Suddenly Surgeon Munro was there, having pushed his way through the crowd. Mary realized he must have been watching from the edge of the gathering. He bent over McGregor, examining his left hand. The surgeon looked up and surveyed the crowd. He called for Taggart and then to Kathryn and motioned for both of them to join him. Then the three of them helped McGregor to his feet. Mary jumped up and joined the group by the fire.

"Can I help?" She asked.

Munro, still examining McGregor's hand, looked up at her and shook his head. "No, I'll not need you, Mary. Taggart and Kathryn will be enough help. You stay here and enjoy yourself."

Mary stood by the fire watching as they helped the youth toward the hospital tents. Then the crowd, which had been watching silently, started with another shout. "Mary! Mary! Mary dance!" Kirkwood called out from his seat, "They'll not be satisfied till they see you dance to the pipes, lass!"

"You put them up to this, didn't you, Bob?" She stood looking down at the corporal as the calls for her to dance grew louder and began to be accompanied by clapping.

"Now lass, everyone knows how much you love dancing. And all the young lads have been waiting, 'cause they love watching you as much as you like dancing. You're 'na going to let them down are you?"

Now the calls were increasing, coming from all around the fire circle. Mary smiled. The truth was she did love to dance; to lose herself in the music and to allow her spirit soar away from the drudgery of life. So Mary permitted herself to be convinced. She was still in her improvised marching outfit, which she had put together from cast-off uniform parts. For comfort, she unbuttoned the red waist-length jacket, allowing her white uniform shirt to show, and hitched up the long ankle-length skirt which she had pieced together from two soldier's kilts. Men cheered and whistled as the lower part of her legs came into view. She grinned back at them and then snugged the blue bonnet down on her hair to ensure it wouldn't fly off as she jumped and twirled.

Then she waved to Tavish to start the pipes. He nodded, but then smiled and motioned to Taggart. The two of them conferred for a moment and then both of them began a duet, pipes and fiddle playing the same tune. The people around the fire clapped enthusiastically.

Mary tapped her foot for a moment in concert with the tune, and then started her dance. It was one of her best times above the swords. She had had enough drink from Kirkwood's jug to feel playful, but not enough to impair her movements and balance. She had the sense of being as light as a bird and agile as a squirrel running and leaping through the branches of a tree. Her feet seemed to hardly touch the ground. She was spurred on by the appreciative shouts and clapping of the soldiers.

It seemed as if Tavish and his partner played for a long time, repeating the tune over and over. Mary lost track of how long she danced. But finally, the music stopped and she jumped to a stop in front of the swords, her arms above her head and a broad smile on her face. There was a long and resounding cheer from all around the fire, men and women alike.

After a few seconds, Mary put her hands down. Kirkwood stood up and held out the jug to her. Seeing it, she suddenly felt incredibly thirsty. Walking to him, she reached for the jug and, putting her head back, took a long gulp of the liquid. The whiskey burned as it went down, but immediately gave her a warm feeling which enhanced the glow she was already feeling. Mary lowered the jug and looked into the faces of a score of smiling soldiers, who now cheered her prowess at the jug as enthusiastically as they had her dancing.

Then, just behind the crowd, she saw two men standing and watching her. One was dressed in the green uniform of a colonel of the Pennsylvania Regiment and the other was Richard Grenough. Her eyes met with those of the wealthy merchant. He broke into a broad smile, nodded, and touched his hat to her. Then he said something to the colonel, and the two of them turned and walked off into the darkness.

* * *

Morning sick call was over. Munro turned to Mary. "I'm going over to see the adjutant; Lieutenant Welford says that another battalion of Pennsylvania Provincials is arriving today and they have a Surgeon attached. He is supposed to tend both of the Pennsylvania battalions. Bouquet has the idea of consolidating his surgery with us for better efficiency and I'm supposed to discuss the idea with Welford."

Mary smiled. "Spend time with Lieutenant Welford, sir? I'm sure you'll enjoy that."

Munro gave Mary a tight-lipped glance. "Keep your thoughts on the officers to yourself, Mary."

"All right, I will. But I still don't have to like him. He's the most arrogant officer in the Royal Americans."

"Be that as it may, he speaks for Bouquet." The surgeon motioned to all the items laid out for sick call. "You clean up and re-stow the supplies and implements."

Mary was at work when Timothy McGregor appeared at the end of the row of hospital tents. His left hand was heavily bandaged. He stood looking around the hospital area and then walked up to Mary. "I'm supposed to see Surgeon Munro this morning. He wanted to check my hand and replace the dressing."

"Well, Private McGregor, if you wanted to be seen by the surgeon, you should have been here over an hour ago." She gave him a look of impatience. "You may be new to the 42nd but you've been here long enough to know the hospital hours."

"My sergeant ordered me to do something before I came over here."

"A job for someone who obviously needs to go to sick call?" She motioned to the bandaged hand. "What sergeant would keep you busy when you need attention? Everyone knows how badly you burned your hand last night."

"Now lass, you don't know Sergeant Leslie of Stirling's Company."

Mary sighed. "All right, I'll take care of you, McGregor. Sit down in the chair beside that table."

McGregor looked askance at Mary and then glanced around the hospital tents. "Miss, you seem a wee bit young for this job. Where are the regular nurses?"

Mary felt a flash of anger. "Regular nurses? I'm near enough to seventeen. And I started helping my mother treat sick and wounded soldiers when I was ten. The first time a soldier died in my arms was when I was eleven. I was one of only three *regular* nurses at Bushy Run." She gave McGregor a withering look. "Now, Private McGregor, do you want a new dressing or don't you? I do have other things to attend to."

The youthful soldier blushed slightly and sat down in the chair and laid his hand on the table.

Mary untied the covering bandage and discarded the dressing. As she worked, she surreptitiously looked over the young highlander, and what she saw confirmed her impression from the previous night. She had to admit he had a strong, handsome face, with a determined looking mouth, good teeth, fine nose, and wide-set blue eyes. He was tall, with muscular but graceful legs and arms.

With the dressing off, she inspected the burn. "You know those coals burned right down into the flesh, don't you?"

"Miss, you're 'na telling me anything I don't know, after trying to sleep with this last night."

She looked at him and said, "Well, you're going to have permanent scars. But you're lucky. The scars will only be on your palm and the underside of your fingers, so they won't be too visible. And I don't think they'll be thick enough to interfere with using your hand."

McGregor nodded. "Now, I guess I'll be thankful for that."

Mary said, "Just so you know, I saw you fall into the fire last night. I found it surprising that you were able to keep from screaming. Not many men could have done that."

"A McGregor is brought up to keep his pain to himself."

Mary said nothing, concentrating on preparing a new cloth dressing. Then she said, "I'm going to put some ointment on the burned areas, McGregor. It's going to sting at first, but after that it will reduce the pain, at least for a while." She applied the ointment and then put the dressing in place. Finally, she wrapped the hand with a new bandage.

As she finished, Taggart came out of one of the tents where he had been working on morning reports. He walked over to the table and glanced down at Mary's work. Then he smiled and looked at the highlander. "You can consider yourself lucky that Mary was here to treat you. She's the best of our

nurses; Munro says her work is as good as most surgeons.” He paused and turned to Mary. “When you’ve finished with this man, will you please go in and check my figures on the morning report? You know how I always have trouble with my sums.” Then he was off down the line of tents.

Mary looked the young highlander directly in the eyes and gave him her sweetest “I told you so” smile. “You’re done, Private McGregor. You can go back to the tender mercies of your Sergeant Lester now.”

McGregor looked sharply at Mary. “You can do sums?”

“Yes, Private McGregor; and I can also read and write. I was taught by Chaplin Ferguson of the 77th.”

“Now why would a girl like you want to spend time learning all that? You’ll not be needing it when you’re married to a corporal or sergeant in a few years.”

“I’ll need reading and writing and doing my sums when I find a job as a tutor or a nanny for a wealthy family’s children. That’s when!”

“You would leave the army?”

“This may surprise you, Private McGregor, but I don’t want to spend all my life dressed in cast-off clothing and sleeping on the ground or on army cots. Someday I want to spend my nights in a real feather bed with real sheets. And eat meals at a proper table; food that I didn’t have to cook myself.” Mary started to gather up the medical implements and left-over dressing material. “And Private McGregor, the only way I know how to do that is to find a job in service with a good family after we get back to Scotland. That’s where I see my future — not married to some corporal whose only object in life is to become a sergeant.”

“You ‘na have respect for sergeants?”

“My father was a sergeant.” She pointed to an imposing hill which rose to the west of the fort. “He died on that hill trying to rally the 77th during Grant’s Battle in ‘58. His grave is over there in the burial ground. So don’t question me about respecting sergeants. And I’ve been with the army since I was seven. I watched my mother and stepfather — another sergeant — die of the fever in the West Indies back in ‘62. I’ve seen enough of the army to know that someday I want a different life.”

McGregor looked at her silently for a moment, then stood up. “Thank you, Miss Fraser, for helping with my hand. “ Then he smiled down at her. “You’re a wee slip of a girl aren’t you? But full of a roaring great spirit.” A roguish look came over his face and a twinkle in his eyes. “I think it would be much better if you started calling me ‘Tim’ instead of Private McGregor, because I intend that you are going to be seeing a lot of me from now on.”

And with that he touched a finger to his bonnet and was off, heading back to the camp of the 42nd.

Mary watched him go. He walked with a strong, confident stride and had something of a bounce in his step. She thought: *He is a saucy one, but the truth is, I wouldn’t mind seeing more of this Timothy McGregor.*