

The Secret Chapter 3

Chapter 3

They didn't laugh at her. Iain smiled, but none of the others showed any reaction to her sinful boast. She could still feel herself blushing. She hid that telling show of embarrassment by turning her attention to repacking the containers.

There wasn't any food left to put away. Once Brodick started eating, he didn't stop until the last morsel was gone.

Judith excused herself and went back to the stream to wash the sticky apple juice off her fingers. She sat down on the grassy slope near the water and brushed her hair until her scalp tingled. She was exhausted, yet was enjoying the beauty and the peaceful solitude of her surroundings too much to move.

When the sun had almost disappeared from the sky, and only streaks of golden-orange shadows remained, Iain came to fetch her.

Her smile of greeting took him by surprise. He reacted by being a bit more gruff than usual. "You should get some sleep, Judith. Tomorrow will be a difficult day for you."

"Will it be difficult for you, too?" she asked. She stood up, patted the wrinkles out of her gown, and then started down the slope. In her haste she forgot about her brush. It got caught up in her feet, tripping her, and she went flying toward the ground. Iain moved with amazing speed for such a giant of a man. He grabbed her before she could pitch forward.

She was horrified by her clumsiness. She turned her gaze up to his to thank him for his assistance, but the words got caught in her throat and she could only stare up at him in confusion. The intensity of his gaze made her tremble inside. Her reaction to

the warrior didn't make any sense to her, and because she couldn't reason it through, she couldn't control it.

"No."

He'd whispered that reply. She didn't have the faintest idea what he was talking about.

"No, what?" she whispered back.

"No, tomorrow won't be difficult for me," he explained.

"Then it won't be difficult for me, either," she said.

His eyes sparkled with amusement. He smiled, too. Her knees went weak. Lord, he was a handsome devil. She had to shake her head because she'd noticed. She forced herself to turn away from him. He bent down to pick up her brush. She had the same intention. Their foreheads bumped. Her hand reached the brush first. His hand covered hers. The warmth of his fingers startled her. She stared down at his hand, marveling at the sheer size of it. It was at least twice the size of hers. His strength was so apparent to her. He could crush her if he wanted to, she thought to herself. The power radiating from him was fairly overwhelming, yet the gentleness in his touch was evident, too. She knew she could pull her hand away if she wanted to.

She stood up when he did, but she still didn't pull her hand away. Neither did he. They stayed that way for what seemed an eternity to Judith, yet she knew only a minute or two had actually passed.

Iain was staring down at her with a puzzled look on his face. She didn't know what to make of that. Then he suddenly jerked his hand away. The abruptness of that action embarrassed her. "You confuse me, Iain."

She hadn't realized she'd spoken those words out loud until she'd said them. She backed away from him, then hurried down the hill.

Iain watched her leave. His hands were clasped behind his back. When he realized how rigid his stance was, he forced himself to relax.

"Hell," he muttered to himself. He wanted her. Iain accepted that fact without flinching. He excused his behavior by telling himself any man with healthy appetites would be drawn to her. She was a damn beautiful woman, after all, incredibly soft and feminine, too.

What shook Iain was the fact that he'd only just realized she was also attracted to him. He wasn't at all pleased by that realization, either. He knew he could control his own desires, but he didn't have any idea how he could control hers.

This simple errand had already become complicated. Iain decided it would be best if he separated himself from her as much as possible for the duration of the journey. He would ignore her, too.

After forming that plan of action, he felt better. He went back to the camp and saw that Judith had already gone inside the tent Alex and Gowrie had built for her. Iain went over to the tree next to Brodick, sat down and leaned back against the trunk. Alex and Gowrie were already sound asleep. Iain thought Brodick was too, until Brodick turned and spoke to him. "She's English, Iain. Try to make that matter." Iain glared at his friend. "Meaning?"

"You want her."

"How the hell would you know what I want?" Brodick wasn't intimidated by Iain's angry tone of voice. The two men had been friends for long years. Besides, Brodick had Iain's best interests at heart, and knew his friend understood that his motives were good-hearted.

"If you don't hide your feelings, Alex and Gowrie will soon know about this attraction."

"Damn it all, Brodick—"

"I want her, too."

Iain was astonished. "You can't have her," he commanded, before he could stop himself.

"You're sounding possessive, Iain." His friend didn't answer that statement of fact. Brodick let out a long sigh.

"I thought you hated the English, Brodick," Iain remarked after several minutes of silence.

"I do," Brodick answered. "But when I look at her, I forget. Her eyes... it's an affliction..."

"Get over it." Iain's voice had gone hard.

Brodick raised an eyebrow over that ferocious command. Iain was finished with the discussion. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He couldn't understand his reaction to Brodick's admission that his friend also wanted Judith. He'd been furious. Hell, he still was. Why did he care if Brodick wanted the woman or not? No, it shouldn't have mattered to him, yet the mere thought of anyone touching her—anyone but him, he qualified to himself—set his blood boiling.

Iain didn't go to sleep for a long, long while. He kept trying to sort out his irrational thoughts.

His mood didn't improve the following morning. He waited until the last possible minute to wake Judith. She hadn't moved at all during the night. He knew that for a fact because he'd spent the night watching her. The tent concealed most of her body, and only her feet and ankles were visible to him, but they hadn't moved at all during the dark hours.

Only after the horses were readied did Iain go over to the tent to wake Judith. He tossed the furs covering the posts to Alex, then knelt down on one knee and gently touched Judith's shoulder. He called her name, too.

She didn't move. Iain nudged her again, more forcefully.

"Lord, she's a sound sleeper, isn't she?" Gowrie made that remark. He'd walked over to stand next to Iain. "Is she breathing?"

Judith finally opened her eyes. She stared up at the giants looming over her and almost screamed. She caught herself in time and only a startled gasp escaped.

Iain noticed her fear. He noticed she'd grabbed hold of his hand, too. He stood up, then helped her stand.

"It's time to leave, Judith," he said when she continued to stand there. "Why don't you go to the stream and wash the sleep away."

She nodded.

She finally started moving. Brodick caught her from behind. His hands rested on her shoulders as he slowly turned her around so that she was facing in the right direction. Then he had to nudge her to get her moving again.

The men were vastly amused by Judith's stupor, but none of them smiled until she was out of sight.

"Think she'll walk into the water?" Alex asked.

"She might wake up before then," Gowrie said with a chuckle.

Judith was wide awake by the time she reached the water's edge. The water was refreshing, too. She took care of her personal tasks as quickly as possible, then hurried back to the camp.

Everyone but Iain was mounted and waiting. Judith didn't know who she was supposed to ride with today. Both Alex and Gowrie motioned to her to come to them.

Iain was on the opposite side of the clearing. She watched him mount his stallion's back, and when he still didn't look her way, she decided that since Alex was closer, she'd ride with him.

Iain had made the decision the night before to distance himself from Judith. That intention was completely forgotten, however, when he saw her walking toward Alex.

She was just taking hold of the soldier's hand when she was intercepted. Iain's stallion didn't pause in his gait. He had his arm wrapped around her waist and lifted her up onto his lap without breaking stride.

She didn't even have time to grab hold. Iain took the lead. She heard someone laugh behind her, but when she tried to turn around to see which one of the soldiers was making all the racket, Iain pulled her up against his chest and wouldn't let her move.

His hold was downright painful. She didn't have to tell him to let up on his grip, though. As soon as she touched his arm and relaxed against him, he lessened his hold.

The next several hours proved to be an exhausting ordeal for Judith. They had veered away from the broken north road and ridden as though they had a legion of devils chasing them. The pace was grueling until they reached the rugged steep mountain terrain. They had to slow down then.

Iain finally allowed a short respite. They stopped in a small clearing surrounded by thick thistle. The prickly plant was filled with vibrant purple and yellow flowers. Judith thought the area was beautiful. She walked around the lovely paradise, careful not to step on any of the blooms while she worked the ache out of her legs. She wanted to rub the sting from her backside, too, but didn't dare because the men were watching her every move.

They weren't a very talkative group, and so she spent her time touching the surprisingly durable flowers and sniffing their unusual fragrance. Judith walked to the

pond Gowrie told her about and drank a fair amount of cold water. When she returned to the clearing, Alex handed her a square of cheese and a huge helping of thick bread.

She sat by herself on a smooth-topped boulder, her nooning meal in her lap. Iain came back to the clearing and joined the other men. The four warriors stood near their horses, talking to each other. Every now and then Iain would turn to look at her, as if making certain she was still where she was supposed to be.

She took her time finishing her food, staring at Iain most of the time. It occurred to her that she really didn't know much about any of the men, except that they were all in some way related to Frances Catherine. They were loyal to her too. She hoped that her dear friend realized how fortunate she was to have so many caring people around her. Of course, they were damn lucky to have Frances Catherine in their family now too.

She suddenly remembered the very first time they met. She had been too young at the time to remember all the details of that day, but over the years since then, Frances Catherine's papa had liked to recall the first time he'd met Judith. She'd heard about the story of the stinging bee from him so many times that she no longer knew which details she remembered and which ones she'd been told.

She thought about that incident now. According to Frances Catherine's papa, there was this bothersome bee...

"What has you smiling, lass?"

Judith had closed her eyes and was so intent on her recollection, she didn't hear Alex's approach. She opened her eyes and found him standing just a foot away from her.

"I was remembering the first time I met Frances Catherine," she answered.

"When was that?" Alex asked.

He seemed genuinely interested. She assumed he wanted to hear about Frances Catherine's childhood. She told him now she met her friend, and by the time she'd finished the story, Gowrie and Iain had joined in to listen. Alex asked her several questions, too. Judith didn't embellish on her answers until the topic of Frances Catherine's father came up. She lingered over the explanation of how she'd met that wonderful man, even described his appearance. His voice had taken on a soft, loving tone. Iain noticed the change, noticed too that she had mentioned three times how kind Frances Catherine's father had been to her. It was as though she was still, after all these years, surprised by that realization.

"Did Frances Catherine take to your father the way you took to hers?" Gowrie asked.

"My father wasn't there."

The smile had left her voice. She stood up and walked toward the privacy of the trees. "I'll just be a "few minutes," she called over her shoulder.

Judith was quiet the rest of the day. She was subdued during supper, too. Gowrie, the most outspoken of the group, asked her if something was wrong. She smiled, thanked him for inquiring, and then excused her behavior by telling him she was just a little weary.

They slept outdoors that night, the following four nights as well, and by the sixth day of the journey, Judith had reached the point of real exhaustion. The cold nights didn't help. The farther north they rode, the more frigid the wind became. Sleeping was an almost impossible task, and when she did doze off, it was only for a few minutes at a time. The tent offered little protection against the fierce wind, and there were times during those dark hours when she felt as though the cold was slicing through her bones.

Iain had become just as withdrawn. He still insisted she ride with him, but he barely spoke a word to her.

She'd learned from Alex that Iain was the newly appointed laird over the clan, and she wasn't at all surprised by that news. He was a born leader of men, which she thought was a blessing because he was far too arrogant to follow orders. He liked to have things his way. Oh, she'd noticed that flaw quick enough.

"Are there problems at home that have you worrying?" she asked when the silence of the long ride started to grate on her nerves.

They were riding through a difficult mountain pass and the pace was slow. Judith turned to look up at him while she waited for his answer.

"No."

He didn't expound on that answer.

Another hour passed in silence. Then Iain leaned down and asked, "Do you?"

She didn't know what he was talking about. She turned to look up at him again. His mouth was only inches away from hers. He abruptly pulled back. She quickly turned around. "Do I what?" she asked in a tight whisper.

"Do you have problems at home that have you worrying?"

"No."

"We were surprised your family allowed you to leave with us."

She shrugged. "Will it get warmer during the summer or is it always this cold up here?" she asked in an attempt to change the topic.

"It's as warm now as it's ever going to be," he answered. The amusement in his voice confused her. "Is there a baron back home who has spoken for you, Judith? Are you pledged to anyone?"

"No."

The man wouldn't let up on his personal questions. "Why not?"

"It's complicated," she answered. In a rush she added, "I really don't wish to discuss this. Why aren't you married?"

"There hasn't been time or the inclination."

"I don't have the inclination either."

He laughed. She was so surprised by that reaction, she turned to look at him again. "Why are you laughing?" she asked.

Damn, he was appealing when he was happy. The corners of his eyes crinkled with his merriment, and his eyes fairly sparkled silver. "Then you weren't jesting with me?" he asked.

She shook her head. He laughed all the louder. She didn't know what to make of him. Neither did Gowrie. He turned in his saddle to see what was going on. He looked a little stunned too. Judith decided the soldier wasn't used to hearing his laird laugh.

"In the Highlands, it doesn't matter if a woman is inclined or not," Iain explained. "I assumed it was the same in England."

"It is the same," she said. "A woman doesn't have a voice in the matter of her future."

"Then why—"

"I've already explained," she said. "It's complicated." Iain relented. He quit his questions. Judith was immensely thankful. She didn't want to talk about her family. She'd really never given the matter of her future much thought. She doubted a marriage could be arranged by her mother, though. It was a fact that both mother and daughter were still the property of the laird Maclean... if he was still alive. If he'd died, then Uncle Tekel would become her guardian... or would he?

Aye, it really was complicated. She decided she was simply too tired to think about it. She leaned back against Iain and closed her eyes.

A little while later, Iain leaned down and whispered, "In an hour or so, we'll be riding through hostile territory, Judith. You must be silent until I give you permission to speak again."

Her safety was in his hands, and for that reason she immediately nodded agreement. She fell asleep minutes later. Iain adjusted her in his arms so that both her legs were draped over one of his thighs. The side of her face rested against his shoulder.

He motioned both Gowrie and Alex ahead of him and left Brodick to protect the rear from attack.

The secluded area they rode through was thick with foliage and summer blooms. The sound of the falls roaring down into a gigantic gorge drowned out the sound their horses made.

Gowrie suddenly reined in his mount and raised one fist into the air. Iain immediately turned to the east and nudged his stallion into a thick cluster of trees. The others followed his lead now and hid themselves in the surrounding forest.

A shout of laughter came from the broken path not twenty feet away from where Judith and Iain waited. Other laughter joined in. Iain strained to hear over the thundering of the falls. He calculated that at least fifteen Macphersons were in the area. His hand itched to reach for his sword. Damn, he wished he could take the enemy by surprise. The odds were in his favor. With Gowrie, Alex, and Brodick fighting by his side, fifteen or twenty inept Macphersons wouldn't even provide a victory large enough to talk about.

Judith's safety came first, however. Iain instinctively tightened his hold around her waist. She snuggled closer, then started to let out a little sigh. His hand clamped down over her mouth. That action woke her up. She opened her eyes and looked at him. He shook his head. He still didn't remove his hand. She realized then that they were in enemy territory. Her eyes widened for just a second or two over that worry. Then she forced herself to relax.

She was safe as long as she was with him. Judith didn't understand why she had such confidence in his ability, but in her heart she knew he wouldn't let anyone harm her.

A good twenty minutes passed before he finally removed his hand from her mouth. His thumb slowly rubbed across her lower lip and she couldn't imagine why he'd done that, even as shivers of pleasure coursed through her body. He shook his head at her again; a signal, she guessed, that she was to remain silent. She nodded to let him know she understood.

She simply had to quit staring at him. Her stomach was fluttering, her heart as well, and she knew she'd be blushing in no time at all if she didn't control her thoughts. She thought she'd die if he had any inclination of his effect on her. Judith closed her eyes and rested against him. Both his arms were wrapped around her waist. It would be easy for her to pretend he wanted to hold her, easy to dream impossible dreams about the handsome laird too.

She told herself she wouldn't allow such nonsense. She was made of stronger stuff and could certainly control her emotions, and her thoughts.

The wait continued. When Iain was finally certain the Macphersons were well away from their shelter, he let go of his fierce hold on her. He gently nudged her face up, to look at him, with his thumb under her chin.

He'd meant to tell her the threat was over, but he forgot his intention the second her gaze met his. Desire such as he'd never experienced before gained his full attention. His discipline deserted him. He felt powerless against this attraction. He couldn't stop himself from tasting her. He slowly leaned down, giving her plenty of time to pull away from him if she wanted to, but Judith didn't move. His mouth gently brushed over hers. Once. Twice. And still she didn't pull away.

He wanted more. His hand clasped her jaw and his mouth settled possessively on top of hers. He captured her gasp, ignored it. He thought to end this attraction with one thorough kiss. He told himself his curiosity would then be appeased. He'd know the taste of her, and the feel of her soft lips too, and then it would be finished. He would be sated.

It didn't work out that way. Iain recognized that fact soon enough. He couldn't seem to get enough of her. Damn, she tasted good. And she was so soft, so warm and giving in his arms. He needed more. He forced her mouth open, and before she guessed his intent, his tongue swept inside to mate with hers.

She did try to pull away from him then, though only for the briefest of seconds. Then she wrapped her arms around his waist and clung to him. His tongue rubbed against hers until he was shaking with his need. She certainly wasn't acting shy now. Nay, she was actively kissing him back.

He growled low in his throat. She whimpered. Passion raged between them. His mouth slanted over hers again and again, and when he realized he wasn't going to be content until he was resting between her thighs, he forced himself to stop.

Iain was stunned, furious too, though only with himself. His lack of discipline was appalling to him. She was staring up at him with such a confused expression on her face. Her lips looked swollen... he wanted to kiss her again.

He shoved her head down on his shoulder, then jerked on the reins of his mount to get them moving back to the main path.

Judith was thankful for his inattention now. She was still shaking from the kisses he'd given her, astonished too by her own passionate response. It was the most wonderful and the most frightening experience she'd ever had.

She wanted more. She didn't think Iain did, though. He hadn't said a word to her, but the way he'd abruptly pulled away from her and the anger she'd glimpsed in his eyes were both sound indications he'd been displeased.

She suddenly felt very inadequate and horribly embarrassed. Then she felt like shouting at the brute for injuring her feelings and her pride. Her eyes filled with tears. She took a deep breath in an effort to regain her composure. After a few minutes her trembling subsided a little, and she was beginning to think she'd won this battle with her own confusing emotions, when Iain injured her feelings again. He stopped his mount next to Alex's brown stallion, and before Judith had an inkling of what he was planning to do, the rude man had dumped her into Alex's lap.

So be it. If he didn't want to have anything more to do with her, she would retaliate in kind. She refused to even glance his way. She carefully adjusted her skirts, keeping her gaze downcast all the while, and prayed to her Maker that Iain wouldn't see her blush. Her face felt like it was on fire.

Iain took over the lead. Gowrie nudged his mount into position behind his laird, then she and Alex joined the procession. Brodick was once again left to protect the rear.

"Are you cold, lass?"

Alex whispered that question close to her ear. The concern in his voice was most apparent.

"No," she answered.

"Then why are you trembling?"

"Because I'm cold."

She realized the contradiction in her answers and let out a little sigh. If Alex thought she wasn't making any sense, he was kind enough not to mention it. He didn't speak another word to her that long afternoon, and she didn't speak to him.

She couldn't seem to get comfortable in his arms, either. Her back brushed against his chest several times, but she couldn't relax enough to lean back against him.

By nightfall she was so exhausted she would barely keep her eyes open. They stopped at a beautiful stone cottage with a thatched roof, nestled in the side of the mountain. Thick ivy covered the south side of the structure and a stone path led all the way from the barn adjacent to the front door of the cottage.

A gray-haired man with a thick beard and wide shoulders stood in the entrance. He smiled in greeting and hurried outside.

Judith saw the woman hovering in the doorway. She had been standing behind her husband, but when he moved forward, she backed into the shadows.

"We'll be spending the night here," Alex said. He dismounted, then reached up to assist her. "You'll have a roof over your head and a good night's rest."

She nodded. Alex, she decided, was a truly compassionate man. He'd helped her to the ground, but he didn't let go of her. He knew she'd fall on her face if he did. He didn't mention her pitiful condition, and even allowed her to hold on to his arms until she could make her legs quit shaking. His hands held her by her waist and she knew he could feel her trembling.

"Get your hands off her, Alex."

Iain's hard voice came from behind Judith. Alex immediately let go. Her knees buckled. Iain caught her from behind just as she was falling forward. His left arm was tightly wrapped around her waist and he wasn't at all gentle when he pulled her to his side. Alex backed away from his laird's glare, then turned to walk toward the cottage.

Iain continued to stand there holding Judith for several more minutes. Her shoulders were pressed tightly against his chest. She kept her head bowed. She was so weary she wanted to close her eyes and let him carry her inside. That wouldn't have been proper, of course.

How could a man smell so wonderful after such a long day's ride? Iain's scent was a combination of the clean outdoors... and male. Heat radiated from him. She was drawn to his warmth, and when she realized that fact, she knew she should pull away.

He was as distant as the storm brewing in the south. Judith knew he was only holding her because she needed his assistance. He felt responsible for her and was simply doing his duty.

"Thank you for your help," she said. "You may let go of me now. I've recovered."

She tried to push his arm away. He had other intentions. He half turned her in his arms, then nudged her chin up.

He was smiling. She didn't know what to make of that. He'd been acting like a disgruntled bear just minutes before, though she admitted to herself that Alex had been his target.

"I'll let go of you when I want to," he explained in a soft whisper. "Not when you give me permission to, Judith."

His arrogance was outrageous. "And when do you suppose that will be?" she asked. "Or am I allowed to ask?"

He raised an eyebrow over the irritation in her voice. Then he shook his head at her. "You're angry with me," he said. "Tell me why."

She tried to push his hand away from her chin but gave up when he squeezed her jaw.

"I'm not letting go until you tell me why you're upset," he told her.

"You kissed me."

"You kissed me too."

"Yes, I did," she admitted. "I'm not sorry either. What think you of that?"

The challenge was there, in her voice and her eyes. A man could forget his every thought if he allowed himself to be captured by her beauty. That thought settled in his mind even as he answered her. "I'm not sorry either."

She gave him a disgruntled look. "Perhaps you weren't sorry at the time, but you're sorry now, aren't you?" He shrugged. She felt like kicking him. "You'd better not touch me again, Iain."

"Don't give me orders, lass."

His voice had taken on a hard edge. She ignored it. "When it comes to kissing me, I can give all the orders I want to. I don't belong to you," she added in a much softer tone of voice.

He was looking like he wanted to throttle her. She decided she'd been a little too high-handed with him. Iain seemed to have a prickly nature.

"I didn't mean to sound surly," she began. "And I know you must be used to getting your way, because you're a laird and all. Still, as an outsider, I really shouldn't have to obey any of your commands," she continued in a reasonable tone of voice. "In this instance, as a guest—"

She stopped trying to explain when he shook his head at her. "Judith, do you agree that while you're in my brother's home, you'll be under his protection?"

"Yes."

He nodded. He smiled too. He acted as though he'd just won an important argument, and she wasn't even certain what the topic had been.

He let go of her and walked away. She chased after him. When she reached his side, she grabbed hold of his hand. He immediately stopped.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because you just agreed with me."

"How?"

She wasn't deliberately trying to bait him. He could see the confusion in her gaze. "Until you return to England, I'm responsible for you. You will follow all my commands," he added with a nod. "That's what you just agreed to do."

She shook her head. The man was daft. How in heaven's name had her announcement that he couldn't kiss her ever again led to this twisted conclusion?

"I agreed to no such thing," she said.

She hadn't let go of his hand. He doubted she realized she was still holding on to him. He could have pulled away. He didn't.

"You told me I'd be under Patrick's protection," she reminded him. "Therefore, he would be responsible for me, Iain, not you."

"Yes," he agreed. "But I'm laird and Patrick therefore answers to me. Now do you understand?"

She pulled her hand away. "I understand you think that both you and Patrick can give me orders," she replied. "That's what I understand."

He smiled. He nodded, too. She burst into laughter. He couldn't imagine what had caused that response.

He wasn't left guessing long.

"Does that mean that you and Patrick are both accountable for all my actions?"

He nodded. "My transgressions become yours?" He clasped his hands behind his back and frowned down at her. "Do you plan to cause mischief?"

"Oh, no, of course not," she answered in a rush. "I'm really very thankful to you for allowing me to come to your home, and I certainly don't wish to cause any problems."

"Your smile makes me wonder about your sincerity," he remarked.

"I'm smiling for a different reason altogether," she explained. "I've just realized what an illogical man you are," she added with a nod, when he looked so incredulous.

"I'm not in the least illogical," he snapped.

She didn't realize she'd insulted him. "Yes, you are," she countered. "Unless you can explain how my decision not to let you kiss me again led to this bizarre conversation."

"The issue of my kissing you isn't relevant enough for discussion," he replied. "It holds no importance."

He might as well have slapped her. The hurt from his casually spoken words stung just as much. She wasn't about to let him know he'd injured her feelings, though. She nodded, then turned and walked away from him.

He stood there watching her for a long minute.

Then he let out a weary sigh. Judith didn't understand, but she was already causing problems. His men couldn't keep their gazes off her. Damn, neither could he.

She was a beautiful woman, and any man would notice. Yes, that made sense. That was logical. Yet the raw possessiveness he felt toward her was another matter altogether. That wasn't at all logical.

He told her that ultimately he was responsible for her... until she returned to England. Hell, he'd almost choked on the words. The thought of taking her back didn't sit well at all. What in thunder was wrong with him?

How was he ever going to let her go?

