

# Prologue



*1500 - The White Goat Tavern, Edinburgh, Scotland*

Three hours past midnight, the streets of Edinburgh are all but deserted. The only ones about are those who don't want to be seen on the streets in the light of day but instead chose to stay to the shadows, of the back alleys at night.

Not wanting tongues to wag, as to save the sensibilities of those in the castle that no not where their mate is, I don't bother with a coach to bring me to a place I hate to venture to, or my men, that would cause suspicion, but I walk the distance from the Castle on the Rock and keep my sword in plain view, lest some unsavory cad think I am easy pickings.

I walk along the dockside, and then I turn down an alley off Roseland Street. Roseland Street is located in the part of Edinburgh that would put Pigalle in France to shame. This part of the city is littered with ladies of the evening in almost every doorway or sitting high on a balcony, half-clothed, showing their wares despite the garbage in the street and drunkards littering the stoops.

The smells of rotten meat, and piss coming from the sewers that run right in the middle of the street. I take a scented handkerchief out of my doublet and press it firmly to my mouth and nose to try to keep out the fousl smells of the underbelly of Edinburgh in the summer night's heat.

The messenger sent in the palace with an urgent message, one I could not ignore. I wished I could, but the sender of the message is not a figure to be ignored.

I have long since regretted my association with this unscrupulous figure, but certain I am in duty to his father, and his father is the King of Scotland, I cannot ignore a command from the King to bring home his way-

ward son. Certain vices that he is prone to have come to the surface months ago, and this son has choose to enjoy these weakness, no matter what this does to his family, and lineage. Unfortunately for me, I am sent to bring him back, by force, if necessary.

I come to my destination and look at the wording on the door: “The White Goat,” a tavern frequented by thieves, ladies of the evening, and drunkards. What shall I say about my charge? His position, even if he was born on the wrong side of the blanket, is out of place in a place like this, but it’s not unlike his character to frequent such an establishment.

Made of red brick, the building has never seen better days. With a dirt floor and misplaced bricks, leaving large gaps in the walls with holes, this place is not a tavern but a hovel.

“A Scots penny, govnae?” a harsh-looking woman asks, standing just inside the tavern by the door when I walk in.

I reach into my over-coat, and pull out a coin, I know not what kind. “Aye.” I say sternly.

I stand by the door and wait until my eyes get accustom to the dim lighting; my ears, the crude loud noise; and my nose, the smell of unwashed bodies.

I press my arm over my nose momentarily, as I try to blot out the stench of this place. Of all my years in battle, this is and battle is ever the worse places I have ever been.

The inside is no bigger than a small barn, with broken tables scattered about, somehow still standing upright with one or two legs; benches that are either being used to sit on or turned over on the floor; broken pieces of wood on the dirt floor, possibly from a recent brawl; and candles placed on the rafters that dripped wax down onto the dirt floor and tables.

One table in the corner has a lone candle on it, which is my sign, and in the flame’s flickering light, I see my charge so I make my way in the

direction of his table. It seems, in this place, a bow to formalities and status is out of sorts; so, I just stand across from him at the table, staring down at him.

Just as I stand here, a doxy, woman comes over, puts his drink on the table, and sits on his lap to gives him a sloppy kiss.

Wanting to get this over with, I say, “Yer Grace.”

As always, whenever I have to return him, to his father, I retrieve him from a place like this, and he likes to show what authority he thinks he may have and make me wait.

My overindulged charge is preoccupied now. No stranger to his ways, and no longer uncomfortable to witness such acts from him, I look away, preferring not to watch his gluttony, and say a silent prayer to God.

For weeks now, I have had to endure chasing after him as a favor to his father. A favor that has me regularly escorting him back to the palace from whatever hovel he chooses, and a service-type bondage to him for my service to the King.

“I dinnae have a problem sharin,’ Cill,” he says.

I hate when he calls me that. I don’t bother to look. I simply say, “Nay, thank ye, Yer Grace.”

“Aw, yer nay fun,” the woman says, and I hear the sound of wet kissing.

I’ve played this game before. All I have to do is show no reaction to his crude ways, and he soon gives up this antagonizing of me, and we get down to business.

“I need tae talk business, lass. Dinnae go far.” he growls.

His entertainment stands up and flounces off.

My charge knows he is not very popular at court and simply does not care, or he does care and acts an ass to any and everybody who snubs him for being the king’s bastard. Because of his arrogance and spoiled, hateful nature,

no one at court dares to befriend him unless they absolutely have to, and even those false friendships are temporary.

I look to my already drunk companion. “Nay, thank ye, Yer Grace. Yer father, the King, has sent me tae bring ye back tae the palace?” I press, getting angrier by the minute.

“Aye, I figure why yer here.” He looks at me with a sly look in his eyes, “Tis said, ye dinnae enjoy the flesh as men aught tae do. Tis said ye are a man of God.” He says not asking.

I have made it no secret, that I have made it my way of life not to succumb to the lusts of the flesh, instead, I chose to remain untouched by a woman, until such time as I am joined with a wife. The power of prayer, is credited for a strong will and the ability to see beyond the flesh, and into my Spirit, to continue to keep my Spiritual life strong.

From as far back as I can remember, my father had counseled to me, to not falling victim to the lusts of this world. On one of the few occasions my father, Seamus was home from being about his business for the King, he came home once with scrolls. Scrolls that he said to have been in the hands of a prophet from the Holy Land.

It is these scrolls that my father also brought back with him, a holy man to help him to interpret those writings. It was when those writings were laid bare that the fierce Pherson clan followed the teachings of Jesus Christ, the almighty Savior.

“Aye.” Is all I say, not wanting to engage with him about my private life.

“Dinnae acts so hordy, tordy. Ye are a man same as I.” He slurs.

“Aye. But I chose tae act as a man should.” I say, looking at him intently.

I don’t have a problem having words with the King’s illegitimate son. No man on this earth is beyond the Will of God, and I live my life as such.

“Be that as it may...” He leans over the table. “...I came across some information ye may want tae hear about.”

Normally, I would not engage him in his drunken conversations, they come to naught, but there is always some bit of truth when someone has been into their cups. “What is it... Yer Grace?” I ask.

“Tis no’ that easy Cill. What will ye do for me, tae get the information.” he says with a smile, thinking he may have me.

“If I dinnae ken of it, then I will wait until it comes to light.” I stand up, “Tis time tae go, Yer Grace.”

Although my companion is a crude and ignorant man, he is also part-royal. He was still born on the wrong side of the blanket and loves to abuse and take advantage of the class set, the very ones that snub him.

He sits back in his chair. “Ye ken, my father doesnae want me at court. He only tolerates my company acause he has tae.”

That I know to the fact, but, I am not here to dip into his past, or present, only to bring him back.

“Aye, tis somethin’ ye need tae look at. Let’s go, Yer Grace.” I say again and move to the side of his chair.

He looks up, “Ye dinnae want tae hear what I have heard, about yer future, Cill.” He says.

“Nay.” I say, impatiently. “No’ unless ye are a prophet of the Lord, which ye are no’.”

I grab his forearm, not to gently, but he pulls from my hold and stand up with his chair between us. Most people in our circle know of his evil ways, especially when he’s been drinking—in private, of course.

“Ask me. Ask me and I will tell ye, with yer high and mighty that ye are no’ above the King’s dealin’s and trickery.”

I have known for years, that John Stewart, the kings bastard son, carried the spirit of jealousy for any of those that have the King shows favor too. My

first stay at the Castle on the Rock, I was seventeen Springs old. I'd come with Seamus to Edinburgh, so that I can start my training under the King, to be knighted. John and I were paired up as sparing partners in our training the first day of our training. I bested him easily, which of course embarrassed him not only in front of our peers, but his father, the King and the king's heir, John's brother, Prince James looked on. That day was the first that John was in the field for training, It was not so for me.

My father, Seamus Pherson, has been in some service to the king in one way or another. Whether it was going out to put down border clashes, or fighting the English, my father as always been a fighting man.

And he taught his son to fight. I am Seamus' only son, and it was in me, he put all his years of fighting knowledge, as well as our clan warriors. Seamus brought back a new knowledge of warfare from the Holy Land. The Pherson clan warriors are the fiercest in Scotland.

"Ask me." He insists.

"Nay. John. I'll no' be baited by yer childishness. We leave now." I command and in moving the chair out of my way, it hits the wall.

"Ken yer place, Cillian Pherson. I am yer..."

"Ye are no' my Lord. We are equals John. Let yer hatred go."

Aye, That did it. I know that it was not that embarrassment he suffered that day years back that made John so hateful. His brother James will be the next King, and John, although he is a Duke, and he is older than James by three-years, he will never be King.

I stare at John, and his unwavering stare tells me that he still harbors resentment towards me, and he may always will.

I sigh, "Tell me, Yer Grace, what is it ye have knowledge of." I ask, sternly.

John smiles, a wicked smile. “What is the one thing in all of Scotland that will brin’ ye tae yer knees? What will brin’ the great Cillian Pherson will no’ so easily away tae get out of this.”

I don’t say a word. I just stare down at him.

“I have had tae watch ye, fight off the advances of Scotland’s most beautiful woman, where I had tae beg for a simple favor of a conversation. Still, time over they come back tae ye and ye never even gave them a by-pass look. I had tae take the scrapes from beneath the table, while the fine courtly mams flaunt their precious daughters before ye openly at court.” He stumbles back, and continues in his drunken tirade, and smiles when he says, “Well, finally, I will watch ye take up the yoke that I have had tae endure, because he...” He points in supposedly the direction of the door. “... made me take a wife...” He steps closer, “... and now so will ye. Ye stood witness at my wedding, and then went about yer merry way tae live yer life as ye please, while I am married ta that shrew. Now tis yer turn tae finally get yer due.” He says with a sly grin.

I look down at John. I stare into his blood-shot, watery eyes, and all I see is hatred. But I tread lightly with my question, lest he thing I am moved to anger by what he has confessed to me.

I close the distance between us, “And ye ken this how?” I ask.

He smiles, walks over to where the chair lays turned on its side against the wall, and sits back down at the table, take a drink, and looks up at me.

I say another prayer beneath my breath, waiting on him to tell me what he knows, that I do not. Seamus, which I call my father, because that is his name, and I was never made to call him father, not even by my mam. All I know is Seamus. When I left home, to take up arms with the king against the last fight with the English, Seamus tried again to tell me my duty is to the Pherson clan and to send my cousin, Teagan in my stead to lead the Pherson warriors along-side the king’s army.

But, I had no intention of putting someone else in my place to take up a duty that I willingly don't want to take up. I enjoy the strategies of war-fare, not the killing, but the true strategy of anticipating the opponents moves before the battle the art of hand-to-hand combat. And it is that enjoyment that have given me the name of "Cill".

"Do ye remember when ye were called home tae BlackRidge acause of yer mam's sickness?" He asks. I don't respond, but he goes on. "Well, my father in one of his generous moods, took me along with him and Jamie up tae Inverness to meet unawares with the Chieftain of the Grants. Well, it just so happens..." He chuckles, "... that yer da was also there, tae put up provisions on ship, on his way home."

I walk around the table to face him, "John, whatever tis ye have tae say, ye will no' control my Spirit with whatever it is. Get tae it." I command. All respect for him as the king's whelp is gone.

"Well, ye should no' have made the declaration that ye will ne'ver marry on that fateful trip, our fathers, and a certain Baron made an agreement, that you..." He stands up, after picking up his goblet of drink, and hold sit up. "... and the Baron's daughter, are in-fact, all these years, have been betroth tae marry." He says and falls back into his chair, laughing so loud, this crude shack is silent, but for his loud laughter.

A fire starts to boil in my blood. I clench both my fists at my side. I am no fool. Though this wasteful, and hateful person before me vile and at times cruel, he is still my king's son, born on the opposite side of the blanket he may be, but he is still a royal child of the king's.

It is true, I chose years ago, as a young lad, to never marry. I knew I would have to have to fulfill my service to Scotland for a few years, and so have I been in Edinburgh for two-years, and before that, I have fought for Scotland's continued independence for over a year, and in a few days, I will



be released from my service and return home, to the Highlands of Scotland, to BlackRidge, to my home.

Now I find out, from this drunken slob, that my life has been planned out since I was a lad of seven and ten-years. God has planned out my life since before I was born. I'll not put any woman through what my mam went through every time Seamus left to be about clan or the king's business, that sometimes kept him away for months.

When John has stopped his loud riotous laughter, the crowd around us starts up their talk and laughter into their cups, I lean forward, plant my fists on the table, and lean down into John's face.

"Ye lie." Is all I can say.

"Do I? Or is the warrior's heart inside of ye, no' want tae accept what I have said, while the kings' man ken he must obey his king and wants tae do God's will tell ye that what I say has some truth tae it." He holds up his now empty cup, "Even though I have been intae my cups, I'm still of m right mind. The only reason ye are still here, after the battle has been won, is acause, my father has no' let ye return home, until the future boy Baron who will be yer brother in-law has just come tae court, yestereve, after he has done his duty at the university. He is the leverage that my father needs so that the Baron will keep his word."

All I can do is look down the eyes that I've seen for years bore distain toward me. One character John may possess, it is not being a liar. He can be cruel, and will tell those that he associates with, what he wants and how he plans to get whatever it is he wants.

I look around at the other occupants, and the bile that's threatening to come up burns my throat like bad whisky. I'm not only sickened by my association with the king's illegitimate son, who preys on his own countrymen, but, I am sicken because, Seamus has chartered a path in my life, that he had no right too.

“If I was no’ a man of God, I would beat ye until yer poor wife would no’ recognize ye. Ye take great pleasure in the misfortune of others, ye always have. But I’ll tell ye now. God has a plan for my life. Tis God’s destiny for my life, no’ the king’s and no’ my father’s.”

As I walk out the shack, I hear him laugh, and say, ““Fine, Cill. We are through. Now get out, and let me have fun,” John says.

He laughs at my back, because before he finishes his sentence, I am walking to the door, and once I walk out onto the street, the contents of my stomach violently erupt from my mouth.

This is the last time I will play nurse-maid to the king’s whelp.