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Trade Winds

Written by Christina Courtenay

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Trade Winds

Christina Courtenay



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Chapter One

Edinburgh, Scotland

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‘You have the devil’s own luck, Kinross, but it can’t last. Just one more throw of the dice and you’ll see I’m right.’

Killian Kinross stared at the man sitting opposite him and weighed up the risk. On the table between them lay the money he had won so far and it was a fair amount. He was too canny these days to trust the fickle Lady Luck completely though. As usual, he had taken the precaution of slipping some of his coins into his pockets when the others weren’t looking, just in case of an emergency.

He glanced at the winnings again. It was very tempting to just pick it all up and leave, but gambling was his only income and he was known as a man who rarely refused to play. For the sake of future earnings, he wanted it to stay that way.

‘You’ve nothing left to play with, McGrath,’ he drawled. ‘Shouldn’t you go home and lick your wounds?’

The other two men sharing the table muttered in agreement, their words slurred from too much wine. McGrath wasn’t as far gone and glared back. ‘There’s still my ship. I’ll wager that against your entire night’s winnings.’

‘That old sieve?’ Killian scoffed, even though he’d never actually seen it. ‘What would I want with that? Besides, you’ll need it yourself now I’ve cleaned you out. How else will you make a living?’

Although McGrath was an uncouth man who deserved no consideration, Killian didn’t want to bankrupt anyone he gambled with. It would be stupid to acquire a reputation for such things, then others might refuse to play with him. That

would be nothing short of a disaster.

‘If I don’t win back what I’ve already lost, I can’t afford to buy a cargo in any case,’ McGrath growled. ‘So I might as well take the chance.’

Killian studied the man for a while longer, considering his options. He could lose a huge amount of money. On the other hand, if he refused, McGrath might think him a coward and spread rumours to that effect. He made up his mind.

‘Very well, if you’re hell-bent on destroying yourself, so be it.’ He sounded more confident than he felt. The odds really were in McGrath’s favour and they both knew it.

McGrath smiled, a wolfish grin that showed Killian just how sure he was of winning this time. ‘Excellent, but first, some more wine. You there, girl,’ he shouted at a serving wench who was passing by, ‘bring some more of that piss you call Burgundy.’

The girl threw him a look of acute dislike, but did as she was told. When she returned, she made a point of standing next to Killian rather than McGrath. She leaned over at just the right angle to give him an eye-full of her assets. Straightening up, she touched him on the arm and said, ‘Anything else for you, sir?’ Killian shook his head with a smile and watched her sashay away to the next customer.

‘You’re too damn handsome for your own good.’ Rory Grant, his long-time friend and gambling companion, cuffed him jokingly on the shoulder. ‘Should leave some ladies for the rest of us.’

‘And you shouldn’t drink so much, then they might look twice at you too. You’re not much use to them in that state,’ Killian shot back.

‘Rory’s right though.’ The fourth man at the table, Dougal Forster, nodded in exaggerated fashion. ‘With you around, the rest of ush don’t get a look-in. Sh’not fair.’

Killian didn't know whether to be amused or exasperated. He was well aware the ladies seemed to like what they saw when they met him. He had always refused to wear a wig and his thick auburn hair, bright blue eyes and even features usually made women stare at him with longing. It was something he'd become used to and he rarely gave it a thought. Besides, Rory and Dougie had their fair share of amorous adventures, even if they couldn't compete with Killian when it came to looks. Tall, blond and easy-going, Rory could charm most ladies if he had a mind to, and although Dougal was shorter, with dark hair and eyes, he was so good-natured it was impossible not to like him. Killian let their comments pass. No doubt they'd have forgotten the conversation by morning in any case.

'Are we playing or not?'

McGrath's petulant voice brought Killian back to the matter in hand. He nodded. 'Do you want to go first?'

'Aye, I do.' The man picked up the little container and rattled it, but stopped abruptly. 'I say we ask for new dice first though. Just to make sure.'

Killian frowned. 'Are you accusing me of cheating?'

'No, no, but I'm not taking any chances. Why, do you refuse me the right to change them?'

'Go ahead, it makes no difference to me. Just takes longer, that's all.' Killian shrugged, but inside he was seething. He had never cheated in his life, and he wasn't about to start now.

After a lengthy delay, new dice were found, and McGrath picked up the container once more. He muttered some incantations for good luck in Gaelic, then shook the dice as hard as he could before rolling them onto the table.

'A four and a six,' Rory commented, as if they couldn't see that for themselves. 'You'll have a hard time beating that, my friend.' He tried to cuff Killian's shoulder again, but missed

and almost fell off his chair.

‘For heaven’s sake, Rory.’ Killian took a deep breath, trying not to let on that he felt as rattled as the bones they were playing with. He had already thrown double sixes twice this evening. There was no chance they’d come up again unless a minor miracle happened. He cursed inwardly. *I should have walked away with the spoils while I had the chance and to hell with the consequences!*

But it was too late for regrets.

Scooping up the dice, he put them back in the container and began to shake it in his turn. The sound was familiar, almost soothing, but he knew it was a stupid way of earning a living. Sometimes, like right now, he wished that he had found some other means of supporting himself. He pushed the thought aside and spilled the dice onto the table with a flourish.

‘Hell’s teeth!’ Rory blinked and rubbed his eyes. They were probably smarting as much as Killian’s from the unwholesome atmosphere inside the tavern, a mixture of cheap, smoking candles and a fire made up with unseasoned wood that belched grey clouds into the room.

‘A six and a five? I don’t believe it.’ With a roar of rage, McGrath upended the table. Dougie, who’d been on the verge of falling asleep, crashed to the floor and sat there staring around him with an expression of total confusion. Most of the coins ended up on his lap, but he seemed not to notice.

‘You just can’t have that kind of luck, Kinross, it’s impossible!’ McGrath bellowed.

‘Meaning what?’ Killian narrowed his eyes at the man as righteous anger surged through him. He’d had more than enough of McGrath’s insinuations. ‘Be careful what you say,’ he warned. ‘I’d never seen those dice before and you know it.’

But McGrath was beyond listening to reason. His face was purple with rage and his throat worked as if he was having

trouble making any sounds at all. Instead of replying, he launched himself at Killian, fists flying.

Throughout the taproom there was a mad scramble across stools, tables and benches as everyone realised there was a fight going on. No one wanted to miss such entertainment and a circle quickly formed round the two combatants. The crowd began to egg them on, shouting out advice and abuse in equal measures. Most of the spectators probably didn't know what the fight was about, but they didn't care. The thrill of it was all that mattered.

Killian ignored the onlookers and concentrated on the man in front of him. He side-stepped the first onslaught with ease, feinting left, then right, and lashing out with a quick fist. This wasn't the first time he'd been challenged and he'd learned the hard way how to defend himself.

McGrath charged at Killian several times, but despite the rage that lent the man extra strength, Killian's fast reflexes kept him at bay. Time and again, Killian's punches hit their target, while McGrath's mostly went wide. With a snarl of fury, McGrath finally stepped back and produced a lethal looking dirk from inside his sleeve.

'Now we shall see,' he muttered and with a triumphant smile he tossed the knife from one hand to the other, showing off his skills with the blade. Killian drew in a sharp breath and felt a shiver of unease snaking up his back. Fisticuffs was one thing, a knife fight quite another. He had to end this, and quickly.

When McGrath attacked, Killian danced out of reach of the flashing steel. Before his opponent had time to even blink, he retaliated with a lightning strike, faster than a viper's bite. His knuckles connected with McGrath's left temple, all the strength of his powerful arm and shoulder behind the blow. While the man was temporarily stunned, Killian reached for

his wrist with both hands and twisted it until the dirk clattered to the floor.

McGrath tried to fight back, but with his flabby girth and a gut full of wine he was no match for the much younger and fitter man. Killian punched him once more and McGrath fell backwards into the crowd. With a cheer, they pushed him back into Killian's path and Killian grabbed him by the throat with both hands and shoved him up against the nearest wall.

'I never cheat,' he hissed. 'Do you yield?'

McGrath struggled for breath, glaring at Killian with murder in his eyes, but said nothing.

Killian slammed him against the wall once more and tightened his grip on the man's windpipe. 'You changed the dice yourself,' he insisted.

McGrath's only reply was to try and land a few punches to Killian's ribs and back, but without enough air, his efforts lacked the necessary strength to do much damage. He soon ran out of breath, his face turning ever more puce. 'Fine. Let ... me ... go,' he croaked at last. Killian took his hands away, but just to be on the safe side, he pinned McGrath's arms to the wall instead.

'Well?' he prompted.

'I said fine,' McGrath growled. 'The damned ship is yours. Have someone fetch me a piece of paper. And a quill and ink.'

Killian waited a moment longer, staring McGrath straight in the eyes, then judged it safe to let the man go. He nodded at a nearby servant. 'You heard the man. Some writing implements if you please.'

The crowd began to disperse and a few of them congratulated Killian on his successful tactics, clapping him on the back. He only nodded his thanks. The entire episode seemed so unnecessary and he certainly hadn't meant to provide the evening's entertainment.

While McGrath massaged his bruised throat, Killian and Rory righted the table, then bent down to pick up the coins on Dougie's lap and some that had scattered onto the floor. A few had probably been lost as they rolled under the feet of the onlookers, but he didn't care. He just wanted to leave, and fast.

The stench of unwashed bodies, mixed with the acrid smoke from the fire and candles made him gag suddenly. The cheap vinegary wine he'd drunk didn't help either, and he swore this was the last time he spent an evening in a place like this. There had to be more to life.

He waited while McGrath wrote him a note, ceding all rights to his ship. 'I need witnesses to my signature,' the man said, tight-lipped and ungracious, but in control once more. 'Anyone here who can sign their name?' Two men came forward and witnessed the deed, then McGrath thrust it at Killian. 'I hope you get what you deserve one day,' he spat, before storming out, slamming the door behind him.

Killian stared after him for a brief moment, then bent down to pull Dougie off the floor, where he had stayed since sliding off his stool. 'Rory, help me get this fool out of here. I've had enough of this place.'

Rory did his best, but it was mostly Killian who half dragged, half carried his friend out. Relieved to be outside, he drew in huge breaths of the cool night air.

'I need to get away from here,' he said to no one in particular.

Rory hiccupped, then laughed. 'Well, you can always be a ship's captain now. When do we sail?'



Chapter Two

Gothenburg, Sweden

Jessamijn van Sandt entered the room which had been her father's study and her heart contracted painfully. If she closed her eyes, she could picture him sitting there in his quiet haven, greeting her with that beaming smile he reserved just for her. Sadly, he was gone for ever. In his place sat Robert Fergusson, the stepfather she'd never wanted and cared about even less. A man who, in her opinion, didn't belong there.

The usurper.

'So you're back,' he commented.

Jess only nodded, since he was stating the obvious.

'I trust you've had a nice stay in the country?' His voice was bland, as if she'd gone away for pleasure instead of being banished at his command nearly a year ago.

Jess had to bite back a sharp reply. His mild expression didn't fool her for a moment. Instead it reminded her just how precarious her situation was. Robert had ignored the countless letters she'd sent, begging to be allowed to return, but now he'd relented at last. She had no idea why, but was only too aware he could reverse his decision in the blink of an eye if she put so much as a foot wrong.

'Yes, thank you,' she replied. 'And it was kind of you to send Mrs Forbes to keep me company.'

Robert frowned, as if he wasn't sure whether she was being facetious or not. She looked him straight in the eyes to convince him she was sincere and he relaxed. It was partly true in any case, she thought. His relative Mrs Forbes had been acting as her gaoler and wasn't what anyone would call stimulating company. However, without her the months of

incarceration would have seemed even longer.

‘She tells me you’ve been a model of propriety.’ Robert steeped his fingers together and looked at her over the top. His dark, deep-set eyes were fixed on her from under shaggy brows, his gaze penetrating in a way Jess found most uncomfortable. ‘Make sure you continue to behave here in Gothenburg.’

Jess nodded again. She didn’t trust herself to speak in case she gave her true feelings away.

‘Just a word of warning. I believe everyone has forgotten all about your ill-advised attachment to young Mr Adelsten last year. Still, it might be wise if you don’t seek him out.’

‘I have no intention of doing that,’ Jess answered, without looking at him this time, since it was precisely what she had planned.

Karl Adelsten’s ardent courtship of her had come to an abrupt end on the day he had gone to ask Robert for her hand in marriage. This puzzled her and she wanted to know what had made him change his mind so suddenly. It was obvious it had something to do with Robert. What exactly had he said to the young man? The more she thought about it, the more she suspected Robert had an ulterior motive in wanting her to stay unwed.

She recalled her conversation with him at the time of her banishment. It was etched into her memory, word for word.

‘There was a young man here this afternoon, asking to marry you,’ Robert had said. ‘I sent him away, I’m afraid. Most unsuitable.’

‘What do you mean, unsuitable?’ Jess had felt her spirits plummet and disappointment made her blurt out, ‘That’s not true. I *want* to marry Karl. I love him!’ Hearing herself saying the words out loud for the first time, Jess was suddenly unsure. She did love him, didn’t she? And he had said he

loved her.

‘Pah, love,’ Robert waved his hand dismissively as if such a thing didn’t exist. He smiled. ‘A youthful fancy, that has nothing to do with the matter. No, marriage is a serious business, as I’m sure you know. In any case, the boy is too poor.’

‘Surely not? He’s a nobleman.’

‘I happen to know that Mr Adelsten’s father is in financial difficulties, noble lineage or not. Trust me, there are better fish in the sea.’

‘Not here in Gothenburg. In fact, nowhere in the whole of Sweden.’ Jess clenched her jaw and suppressed the angry words she wanted to hurl at her stepfather. How could he be so blind? Karl was perfect in every way. His family had been prominent in the area for generations. Why couldn’t Robert see the advantages of that?

‘Nonsense,’ he said. ‘Besides, you should be marrying a foreigner like yourself, not a local. It’s what your mother would prefer.’

Jess frowned. It was true that her father had been Dutch, but the family moved to Sweden when Jess was just a baby. She had never lived anywhere else and didn’t feel like an outsider, even though she spoke both Dutch and English in addition to the native tongue. And Robert himself had been here some ten years now. He’d even taken on Swedish nationality, although she knew that was probably only because it was expedient from a business point of view.

‘Mother has never mentioned anything about that to me. I thought she just wanted me to marry well, and Karl is the third suitor you’ve sent packing in as many years.’

Jess could feel the frustration swirling inside her. She’d been glad when the other two young men were refused, since she had no interest in either of them. But Karl was a different

matter. He made her feel desirable, beautiful even, despite knowing herself to be only passably pretty at best. Her white-blond hair and clear grey eyes didn't draw anyone's attention. Nor did her small stature or a figure which was pleasing but nothing out of the ordinary. And yet Karl had pursued her with a single-minded determination that persuaded her of his sincerity.

He was also practically her last hope. She was nearly twenty and if Robert refused any more suitors on her behalf, she was afraid they would stop asking and she would end up an old spinster.

She decided to try a different tack. 'Surely marrying into a noble Swedish family is better than a Dutch or Scottish merchant's son whether he's rich or not? Think of the connections, the commercial possibilities.'

Robert shook his head. 'I doubt he'd be of much use in that respect. And we wouldn't want to hand over your dowry to just anyone. High-born people like that simply spend money, without any thought for the future. They have no business acumen whatsoever and no idea how to earn money. Ask him. I'm sure he'll tell you he's not interested in such things.'

Jess narrowed her eyes at him, thinking furiously. She sensed there was more to this matter than met the eye. Her father had educated her beyond what was normal for a girl and she was far from stupid. Lately, she had begun to suspect Robert was trying to keep her under his thumb for as long as possible. There was only one reason why he should want to do that – by keeping hold of her share of the business he could use it for his own ends. Was he investing her money in ventures that would never benefit her?

He had no right.

'Isn't that a moot point though?' she dared to ask. 'When I marry, my dowry will consist of most of the business. I know,

because Father told me I would inherit everything. If my future husband has no interest in such things, he can always sell it.'

Robert looked surprised. 'I'm afraid you're mistaken. Your father's will said nothing of the kind. He left everything to your mother and since I'm now her husband, her assets have naturally passed to me. There was an instruction she should pay your future husband a dowry of three thousand silver *daler*. Of course I'll honour your father's wishes in that regard, but I can assure you such a sum isn't large enough to support the kind of lifestyle Mr Adelsten is used to.'

Shocked to the core, Jess stared at Robert in disbelief. She shook her head slowly and tried to assimilate his words. It simply didn't make sense. 'That can't be,' she murmured. 'That's not at all what Father told me. Are you sure you had the right will?'

Robert regarded her calmly. 'There was only one, as far as I know. It was legal, signed by your father and witnessed. Whatever he may have told you, we have to follow his written wishes. They take precedence over any foolish promises made.'

'Could I have a look at the will, please?'

Robert stiffened, obviously not pleased by her persistence. 'That won't be possible. It was retained by the magistrate, after it was proven. I doubt he'd still have it after all this time.'

Jess was far from convinced, but realised she had no proof of any wrong-doing, just a niggling sense of unease. The way she had been banished soon afterwards, despite fighting tooth and nail to be allowed to stay in Gothenburg, only made her even more suspicious. Robert had claimed she was being sent to the country to heal her broken heart, but Jess knew that was just a convenient excuse.

Now, a year later, she still couldn't shake the feeling of having been duped. Her father had said she was to receive everything except a ten percent share already owned by Robert. Although as a woman she couldn't run the business herself, he had taught her enough to be able to oversee whoever she employed.

'I wouldn't want you to be cheated,' he'd said. 'You have to be the one making the decisions.'

They both knew very well that Jess' mother Katrijna would never be able to cope with such a burden. Why then should he suddenly have changed his mind and bequeathed the company to her? It was most unlike him.

No, Robert was up to something and she was determined to find out what that was. For her father's sake as well as her own. She could read between the lines, however, and recognised the threat implied in her stepfather's words. If she didn't do as she was told, she would be punished again.

'Very well, you may go then,' he said. 'I hope you've learned your lesson. Men will declare their love for you one minute, then change their mind the next. It's the way of the world.'

'Oh, yes. I have definitely learned my lesson. I'll guard my heart in future.' *And my thoughts, especially from you.*

She walked out of the study with her head held high and closed the door behind her as quietly as she could. She suppressed the urge to slam it hard instead.

Insufferable man, she thought. Well, she would show him. He might think he had the upper hand, but she wasn't beaten yet.

Author's Note

This story is loosely based on the Swedish East India Company's first journey to China in 1732 and I have tried to adhere to the true facts as much as possible. Since this is a novel, however, I have had to take a few liberties in order to make it a more exciting story, but the actual travelling and some of the incidents described really happened, notably the capture of the Swedish ship by the Dutch near Batavia.

The Swedish East India Company (the SOIC – *Svenska Ost Indiska Compagniet*) was formed in June 1731, although it was originally named *Henrik (Hindrich) König & Compagnie*. The first ship was called the *Friedericus Rex Sueciae* and it sailed to Canton on the dates given in this novel (leaving Gothenburg on 24th February 1732 and arriving home on 26th August 1733). Although Killian, Jessamijn and their families and friends are fictitious, Colin Campbell was the name of the first supercargo. The other supercargos and crew members named in this novel were also real people.

I have tried to portray Colin Campbell as accurately as possible, based on a journal he kept during this trip (see “*A Passage to China – Colin Campbell's diary of the first Swedish East India Company Expedition to Canton, 1732–1733*”, Edited by Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx, Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Gothenburg 1996, ISBN 91-85252-55-7). A Scotsman born in Edinburgh, he was about 45 years old at the time of this venture and had a wealth of experience of the East India trade. He had sailed as a supercargo to Canton before and was therefore asked to help form the Swedish OIC, of which he became one of the first directors. He decided to go along as the first supercargo to

show others the way and thanks to him the venture was a success. Other SOIC ships were able to carry on the very profitable trade with China.

During the first few years of the SOIC, a lot of Scotsmen and Englishmen were employed, especially as supercargos, since they had more experience than the Swedes. Gradually this changed. To protect any foreigners who sailed with the Swedish ships, however, everyone was given Swedish nationality (as other countries were not keen on the competition). Campbell became a naturalised Swede at the same time as the first charter of the SOIC was approved in 1731 and was made the first ever Swedish envoy (Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy) to the Emperor of China. On his return, he was summoned to meet King Fredrik I in person and given a miniature of the king surrounded by diamonds as a gift. Campbell stayed on in Sweden and lived in Gothenburg until his death.

For anyone interested in learning more about the SOIC, the Gothenburg City Museum houses a collection of artefacts and much research material such as journals written by the intrepid SOIC employees. As mentioned in the Acknowledgements, I am greatly indebted to Agneta Hermansson and her staff at the Museum for their assistance in helping me to find the documents I needed and for being so kind and welcoming.