

*A BOUND
HEART*



LAURA FRANTZ



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Dedicated to my sixth great-grandfather,
George Hume of Wedderburn Castle,
Berwickshire, Scotland



Scots Glossary

<i>addlepat</i>	—mixed-up	<i>canna</i>	—cannot
<i>aflocht</i>	—troubled	<i>couldna</i>	—could not
<i>Alba</i>	—ancient term for the kingdom of the Scots	<i>da</i>	—dad
<i>auld</i>	—old	<i>didna</i>	—did not
<i>Auld Reekie</i>	—Edinburgh	<i>dinna</i>	—do not
<i>Auld Toun</i>	—old-town Edinburgh	<i>doesna</i>	—does not
<i>bairn</i>	—child	<i>douce</i>	—sweet, lovely
<i>bannocks</i>	—oatcakes	<i>dunderheed</i>	—fool
<i>bethankit</i>	—God be thanked	<i>fash</i>	—worry, vex
<i>blether</i>	—gossip	<i>gaol</i>	—jail
<i>bonny</i>	—pretty	<i>ghaist</i>	—ghost
<i>brae</i>	—hill	<i>gruamach</i>	—sulky, moody
<i>Braiste Lathurna</i>	—the brooch of Lorn	<i>haeddre</i>	—Scottish heather
<i>braw</i>	—handsome	<i>hasna</i>	—has not
<i>Buik</i>	—Bible	<i>haud yer wheest</i>	—hold your tongue
		<i>hoot!</i>	—pshaw!
		<i>howdie</i>	—midwife

<i>hungert</i> —hungry	<i>peely-wally</i> —sick
<i>ill-scrappit</i> —rude, bitter	<i>ruadh</i> —red
<i>ill-trickit</i> —wicked, dangerous	<i>sennight</i> —week
<i>isna</i> —is not	<i>sgian dubh</i> —black dagger
<i>jings</i> —gosh	<i>shooglie</i> —shaky
<i>kelpie</i> —water fairy	<i>shouldna</i> —should not
<i>ken</i> —know, understand	<i>slàinte</i> —(to your) health
<i>kirk</i> —church	<i>smirr</i> —sprinkle
<i>laird</i> —landowner ranking below a baron and above a gentleman in Scottish order of precedence	<i>sonsie</i> —pleasing, pretty
<i>leine</i> —shirt	<i>sporrán</i> —leather pouch
<i>loch</i> —lake	<i>stayed lass</i> —spinster
<i>loosome</i> —delightful	<i>tapsalteerie</i> —topsy-turvy, upside down
<i>michty me</i> —goodness gracious!	<i>tolbooth</i> —courthouse, jail
<i>Moonbroch</i> —ring around the moon	<i>unchancie</i> —dangerous, risky
<i>neeps and tatties</i> —turnips and potatoes	<i>wasna</i> —was not
<i>och!</i> —oh!	<i>wheest</i> —quiet, hush, to hold one's tongue
	<i>willna</i> —will not
	<i>wouldna</i> —would not

1



Nae man can tether time or tide.

Robert Burns

Isle of Kerrera, Scotland, 1752

As the sun slid from the sky, Lark pressed her back into the pockmarked cliff on the island's west shore. The sea stretched before her like an indigo coverlet, a great many foam-flecked waves tossing gannets about. A south wind tore at her unbound hair, waving it like a crimson flag, as crimson as the fine cloth she'd seen smuggled ashore the previous night. These free-trading times were steeped in danger. Countless moonlit liaisons and trysts. Sand-filled shoes and sleepless nights. How oft she'd prayed an end to it all.

On this breathless May eve, the only aggravation was the sting of tiny midges as night closed in—and the thickset Jillian Brody as she bumped into Lark and nearly sent her off the cliff's edge.

“Look smart, aye? There's tax men about.”

“I pray not,” Lark breathed, craning her neck to take in the sweeping coastal headland that could only be called majestic. She wouldn’t tell Jillian she was more addlepatated about the handsome captain of the *Merry Lass* than the chancy smuggling run, and that she braved the midnight hour to gain but a glimpse of him or his ship.

“Yer not out here for the same reasons as the rest o’ us.” Jillian managed to stand akimbo, hands fisted on her ample hips despite the path’s ribbon-like lip. “What’s this I hear about ye refusin’ to help bring in the haul?”

“My conscience smote me,” Lark told her. “I canna be in the business of stealing even if it betters the poor.”

“Hoot!” Jillian spat the word out as the night wind began a queer keening, lifting the edges of their plaid shawls. “Yer fellow islanders are not so high and mighty. Be off wi’ ye then.”

The dismissal, though said in spite, was gladly heeded. Lark turned and hastened away, stepping ably along the path though ’twas nearing midnight. Darkness didn’t fall till late, which left precious little time for the free traders to do their work in the smothering safety of night.

Tense, she climbed upwards, casting a glance over her shoulder at the beach now and again. But this long, miserly eve brought no goods ashore, nor a handsome captain home again, and so she entered the wee cottage no bigger than a cowshed, its humble stone her home since birth. Only she and her granny fussed with the peat fire and kept a-simmer the kettle of porridge or soup, which always seemed to taste of smoke. She washed up before donning a worn nightgown, then all but fell into the box bed, exhausted.

Early the next morn she trudged through the mist to Ker-rera Castle. Glad she was to have gotten even a snatch of sleep.

Once on castle grounds she quashed the urge to steal into the walled garden and drink from the spring that bubbled forth in a stony corner. Like ice the water was, even in the heat of summer. Most servants weren't allowed in the formal garden. Kerrera's mistress did not like the help to be seen. Her fragile constitution could not bear it. The glorious bower was reserved for Lady Isla and Kerrera's infrequent guests.

Bypassing humble beds of herbs in the kitchen garden, Lark came to the beloved bee garden. Here she could stay content forever. Against one ivy-clad bricked wall were numerous bee skeps. Made of thick coils of straw, they were fashioned into golden domes, a wee door at the bottom of each. Even now their inhabitants hummed a lively tune, already at work among enticing calendula and borage, awaiting a feast of bee balm and snapdragons and cosmos in summer. Come August she would take a hive or two into the heather, making the coveted heather honey of which the laird was so fond.

Her gaze swung to the bee bath she'd created years before, a chipped, shallow dish for fresh water. Beach pebbles were scattered about for the busy creatures to perch on while drinking lest they drown. Their droning seemed to intensify with her coming. The bees sensed her, their singing rising and falling as she moved among them. They did not favor everyone, merely tolerating the head housekeeper yet circling the maids benignly. But they stung Cook in a fury. The laird of Kerrera Castle moved calmly and respectfully in their midst, much like Lark, both of them spared the piercing pain. She'd always wondered about their reaction to Lady Isla. But the laird's wife rarely ventured near the bee skeps.

Seeing all was well, at least in the gardens, Lark turned toward the castle.

“There ye be, Lark.”

Was she tardy? Mistress Baird, the stern housekeeper, never greeted her, only made her feel guilty. In the bowels of the castle came the liberating chime of the case clock in the servants’ hall.

Not late. On time.

From her chatelaine, Mistress Baird removed the key to the stillroom. Lark took it, murmuring thanks, and turned to go. She took the crushed-shell path to the small stone building attached to the castle’s orangery, which had been damaged in a storm, a few panes of glass broken. The few awakening plants within were seeking summer, showy bright blossoms adorning one glassy corner.

The stillroom door creaked open. The scent of damp, cold stone and pungent peppermint embraced her, a reminder of yesterday’s tasks. She reached for an apron dangling on a hook, tied it around her waist, and set to work.

Out the back door she soon went into the kitchen garden, mindful of her mission. The basket on her arm overflowed with herbs before she returned inside again, consulting the receipt book open on a near table though she knew the tincture by heart.

“Good morning to ye, Lark.” The laird stood in the open doorway, startling her. He was in finely tailored Edinburgh garments, his hands caught behind his back.

Seldom did he come here. She hadn’t seen him for a fortnight or better. He was mostly in Edinburgh at the courts of law. Once the distance had chafed. Now she was schooled to its pain. Close as twin lambs they’d once been, beginning when her mother was wet nurse to his. Only back then she’d not known he was a MacLeish, laird of Kerrera Castle. For all she knew he was one of the servants’ children. A ruddy-cheeked, sable-haired barrel of a lad. Nor had he known

she was merely a servant's daughter. Together they'd been weaned then toddled about before running together over the braes like unbridled colts.

Seeing him now, she nearly dropped her basket. "Yer lairdship—"

"Be done with that, Lark."

Sunlight spilled into the space between them. And an unseen wall of reserve. She would not—could not—call him Magnus ever again.

"We arrived late last night. I sent word ahead to ye. Did ye not receive it? About the needed tonic?"

"Nay." She sensed his distress. His stoicism did not fool her. His very presence bespoke something dire.

"To Hades with the post," he said with no small exasperation.

"Dinna fash yerself," she said as in days of old, hating that he seemed so vexed.

He looked skyward, his somberness unchanging. "There's to be no heir for Kerrera."

Her soul went still. Not again. What could she say to this? Six losses. 'Twas the reason the mistress was so grumach. Kerrera desperately needed a babe, an heir. But no remedy or tincture could be had if one's womb was closed, Granny said.

"The doctors have sent Lady Isla here to recuperate. Beyond the stench and noise of the city."

Her hands nearly shook as she blended the herbs at hand. What a predicament! 'Twas no secret the mistress didn't care for the western islands. She found Kerrera uncivilized. Remote. A hue and a cry from her Edinburgh roots. Yet the doctors had sent her back.

The laird ran a hand through unkempt hair, gaze fixed on the sea that gleamed more gold than blue as morning bloomed beyond the castle walls. "What would ye advise?"

“Something calming.” Her gaze lifted to the crocks and jugs on a shelf overhead as her thoughts swirled and grappled for answers. “Chamomile. Lavender oil. Lemon balm.”

“How soon can ye ready a tonic?”

“Some things canna be rushed,” she said. “Ye dinna want a false remedy. Besides, I’ve more than one tincture in mind.” She bent a knee before she brushed past him, leaving the stillroom for a forgotten herb.

“I have faith in ye, Lark,” he told her as she reentered the stillroom. “Mayhap more than in the Edinburgh physics.”

“Yer faith is misplaced, mayhap.” She met his azure eyes for a moment longer than she should have, if only to delve the depths of his pain. “Prayer is oft the best remedy. But this shall help in the meantime.” She handed him a small glass bottle. “Have her ladyship’s maid steep this in the hottest water, then wait a quarter of an hour before drinking it down.”

“What does it do?”

“Rests her ladyship’s womb.” She flushed, hands busy with the next task. ’Twas awkward discussing such matters, but she forged ahead. “Returns her courses.”

He was looking at her expectantly, no hint of embarrassment about him. But clearly flummoxed. Even disappointed. Did he think she could produce a child?

His gaze shifted. Studying the concoction in hand, he merely said absently before leaving, “Bethankit.”

She mulled his bad news the rest of the afternoon, her reverie interrupted when she shut the stillroom door for the day and heard a rustling close behind her. She startled, her heartbeat calming at the sound of an unrefined yet familiar voice behind the hedge.

“Prepare for tonight. The *Merry Lass* is expected. When ye return to yer croft, stretch a bedsheet over yer peat stack

once ye get the confirmation of landing. If the coast is clear I'll shine the light. But beware. There's talk the tax men are about."

Another smuggling run? "I canna—"

"Wheest! So the blether I hear is true then? Ye'll not help? The captain is dependin' on ye!"

Lark sighed, torn between bowing out or doing her part as a fellow islander. The least she could do was spread a simple sheet, aye?

Lord, forgive me.

Giving the news bearer a reluctant "aye," she took the path down the cliff. The mere mention of excise men was enough to stop her cold.



"The *Merry Lass* will be bringin' a load of salt, ye say?"

"Nay, Granny, I didna say. We can only hope."

"God be praised if so!"

Together they sat at their small table, partaking of nettle kail and the last oatcakes slathered with crowdie, before a smoke-stained window. The view was wide and jaw-dropping, even to Granny who'd lived there the longest. Perched on a cliffside, their humble croft seemed in Kerrera Castle's shadow. The castle was above them, the crown jewel of the coast with its splendid pink harled stone and profusion of towers and turrets, a sea marker for ships coming ashore.

"Who's the captain of the *Merry Lass*?" Granny asked.

Lark's stomach somersaulted. "Captain MacPherson . . . Rory MacPherson."

"Och! Mad Dirk's lad?"

"Aye, Granny, all grown up."

"Reckon he'll spare us a sack of salt?"

Lark swallowed another bite of supper, used to her grandmother's repeated questions. "The whole village is in need of such if we're to make it through another long winter."

"The laird willna let us starve." Granny poured tea with a steady hand that belied her age. The steam whitened the air between them, the aroma laden with guilt. Smuggled Irish tea it was, like the smuggled salt to come. "The last lugger brought only whisky. We have no need o' that but for medicine—or to befuddle the excise men."

Salt, on the other hand, was a necessity for preserving the fish to sustain them. And none could afford salt—or tea—since the Crown taxed both nigh to death.

Granny took a sip. "How are matters at the castle?"

'Twas the one query Lark had no heart to answer. "Lady Isla has lost another babe."

"God bless her." Granny's dark eyes narrowed to apple seeds. "The laird too."

"Is there nothing to help beget an heir?"

A faraway look came into Granny's eyes. Lark waited for some remembrance to kindle. In her day, Granny had been the stillroom mistress like Lark's mother had been the wet nurse. "My feeble mind has too many dark corners. I canna ken much."

"Well, if ye ever do . . ." Lark kept her eyes on her tea, wishing babies were as easily gotten as salt.

Where was the *Merry Lass* this twilight eve? Even if she looked hard, the ship eluded her. Painted black with dark sails, the sloop was nearly invisible on a moonless night. For now, the sun rode the western sea like an orb of fire, casting tendrils of light across their empty bowls and full cups.

'Twas calm. Warm. Lark's gaze sought the expanse of beach where the first tubmen were gathering to bring in the cargo. Soon the sand would teem with horses and carts,

island women armed with cudgels and pitchforks to accompany the goods inland.

But before the *Merry Lass* put on all sails and headed straight for them, lookouts must be posted. Then Lark would stretch a bedsheet over their peat stack while someone else onshore shone the light.



The immense sea cave boasted only a few ankers of brandy to one side and empty, shadowed sleeping platforms at the back. As midnight deepened, cold water licked Lark's bare feet and teased the toes of the captain's boots. With the incoming tide, there was precious little time to talk. 'Twas always the way of it. No time. Little talk. Great disappointment.

"So, lass, what have ye need of? Be quick to ask." Dressed in long boots, trews, and a striped jersey, Rory MacPherson had the look of a pirate, pistol and cutlass at hand. He made light of the tax men by calling them names, but the wariness remained. "I'll see no treasure fall into the hands of the Philistines, aye?"

She smiled, Rory's grin infectious. Tonight, the excise men had been outwitted by the free traders once again. The haul had been a roaring success. Forty chests of tea. Thirty mats of leaf tobacco. Eighty ankers of brandy. Two casks of figs and sweet licorice. A great quantity of salt. Oats.

"Salt and oats." Lark imagined Granny's glee. "Molasses, mayhap."

"Aye." Could he sense her delight? Her reluctance? She swung like a pendulum between the two. She nearly said *tea* but feared appearing greedy.

"Tea?" he stated with vigor as if sensing her longing. "A few bricks or a chest?"

“I canna haul a chest—”

“I can. I’m on my way to the Thistle. Ye take the rest.”

Weighted down they were. But she was strong and fleet of foot, oft taking the craggy path in the dark by the lights of Kerrera Castle. Soon the tide would wash away their footprints and return the *Merry Lass* to sea, the braw captain along with it.

For now, breathless, her shawl slipping, Lark followed him up the cliff, the elation of a full larder eaten away by the coming separation. Rory never stayed long. Though he stood hale and hearty, surefooted in his upward climb while dislodging a stone now and again, he would soon be gone, a ghostly memory. It seemed she lost another piece of him whenever he left, till the essence of him was no more substantial than the mist that hovered over the water.

She’d felt that way about the laird when he’d wed. Such a part of her life he’d been till Isla had turned his head. Rory had taken to the sea soon after, and she felt rent in two by both losses. While these men made their way in the world, she stayed the same, bound to croft and castle.

She looked up, the sound of the thundering surf in her ears. Tonight Kerrera Castle shone bright as a lantern just above. She glanced down quickly, then took her eyes off the path—off Rory’s broad back laden with the tea chest—to rest her eyes on the castle’s largest window.

There in sharp relief stood the laird, Magnus MacLeish, looking down at them. She resisted the impulse to throw up a hand. His tall silhouette was more familiar than the captain’s sturdy shadow in front of her. She looked a tad too long. Her foot slipped. Pain seared her turned ankle. Noisy pebbles scattered like buckshot, causing Rory to turn around.

The castle’s cellars sometimes held cargo secreted away when the threat of excise men made it too risky to move the

goods inland. But tonight, with no hazard at hand, they walked free and cargo laden. Breathing hard, she stood taller when they crested the cliff and left the trail, favoring her turned ankle.

“Ye still with me, lass?”

She shifted her burden, the leather straps digging into her back. “Indeed.”

“*Indeed?*” He cast the mocking word over his shoulder. “Why so fancy? Are ye getting above yer raising when a simple *aye* will do?”

She went hot, glad the darkness hid her flush. ’Twas a word she’d heard the mistress say in her crisp, aristocratic tones. Ever since, *aye* seemed too common, like dirt—much like the ancient croft ahead, turned a beguiling white in the moonlight but still simple. Unadorned.

Once there, Rory released the tea chest and Lark gave up her own burdens. Granny cracked open the door, her smile wide despite her missing teeth. “Such as ye give, such will ye get.”

Rory gave a little bow at her hard-won words, to which Granny’s cackling laugh was short-lived. Only during a run did Granny seem to forget her dislike of the captain.

Lark looked about for any lurking shadows as rain began spattering down, promising Rory a wet walk to the Thistle. Granny began taking the goods inside one by one to secret away in a hole beneath a hearthstone while Lark faced the captain. “I thank ye.”

“Is that all ye’ll give me?” he returned.

Used to his teasing, she sweetened her goodbye with a curtsy, but the merry singing of Granny’s teakettle did little to banish Lark’s melancholy as Rory began backing away from her, hat in hand.

“Someday ye must tell me of yer travels. If the French ladies

are as comely as they say. How green Ireland is,” she called after him, her voice falling away in the damp dark.

Small wonder he wanted to be away. The Thistle did more than wet his whistle. She’d heard tales of him charming the tavern wenches there with satin ribbons and bits of lace from foreign ports. He’d not given her such fripperies, naught but salt and tea and oats, a fact that held the appeal of curdled milk.

But her own charms were few. She had no power to hold him. No ale with which to entice him. He was less inclined to talk than the laird of late. But even if he’d paid her attention, her spirit stayed unsettled. All this smuggling—ill-gotten goods—squeezed the very life out of her.

Granny hovered in the croft’s open door, as if chaperoning their parting. “Take thy tea, Lark.”

And so she did.