

THE SALVATION OF REVEREND MCKINNEY

PROLOGUE

It seemed to Andrew McKinney that 1891 would be a good year. He would be graduating from seminary and returning to Glasgow to wed his childhood sweetheart, Mairi Macalister. Upon his return, however, he found her pregnant with his enemy's child. Jaime Westwater, son of one of the wealthiest families in Glasgow, had purposely sought the young woman's attention in an attempt to hurt Drew. When his mother, Mrs. Catherine Westwater, refused to recognize her son's marriage, the problems began. In a drunken rage, Jaime had nearly beaten Mairi to death and caused the miscarriage of their child. Sure he had killed his wife, he fled Glasgow for London and the protection of his mother's family. Throughout her recuperation, Drew stood by Mairi's side, as her friend.

During the criminal investigation of Mairi's beating, Catherine deliberately killed Drew's best mate, Christie Buchanan, a constable for the Glasgow Police Department. Both she and her son were sent to prison for their felonies.

Drew began to hope again that he and Mairi would reconcile and they would eventually wed. Those hopes were dashed when he received word he was being sent to St. Luke's in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The thought of leaving Mairi behind in Glasgow weighed heavily on his mind. When her older sister, Moira, and her husband, Constable Hugh Henderson, were assigned to the Canadian province for one year, Drew's hopes of her joining them grew. It was Mairi's middle sister, Millie, however, who came to Drew's aid and badgered Mairi the most about going west.

CHAPTER 1

“I cannot leave ya alone here, gal. ‘Twouldn’t be right o’ me.”

“But Mil, I’ve got no reason ta think Drew would want me there.”

“Are ya daft? That young man has pined fer ya since he was ten. Dunnot let him get away, Mairi. He loves ya an’ ya love ‘im. Ya hafta come with us.”

Mairi thought long and hard about going, even seeking out the Reverend Alan McLean, her pastor in Glasgow, and asking his advice. “I know ya’ve been through a lot, Mairi. But I also know Drew has not faltered in his love fer ya. If ya just ask him if he wants ya along, his answer will be an emphatic ‘aye’.”

So when the time came in Liverpool, England to board the SS Carthaginian, or let her family and Drew leave without her, Mairi did exactly what Alan McLean advised. Drew had taken her hand in his and asked, “Is there no way ta convince ya ta join us in this great adventure?”

She answered, “Oh, yer such a fool, Drew McKinney! Di’ ya not know all ya had ta do is ask me ta come with ya? I’ve been packed an’ ready ta go fer two weeks now.”

With that, he hugged her tightly, and whispered in her ear, “Oh, Mairi, more than anythin’ in this world, I want ya ta come with me, fer if ya dunnot, I will surely die.”

Suddenly aware of the crowd around them, they nervously let go of each other, but no one missed the tears in their eyes. “Well now,” Hugh said, “shall we head up the gangplank, then?” He offered his arms to Moira and Millie, while Drew escorted Mairi up the inclined walkway.

Once aboard, the five Glaswegians could look out over the Liverpool docks and nearby buildings. “What say we take a stroll around the deck an’ see the last sights o’ England before we set sail?” Hugh said.

Completing their walk of the deck, the group found space at the ship’s bow that looked out over the channel that would take them out to sea. Millie inhaled the salt air and smiled. *Aye, today I’ll start a new beginnin’. A new life, a happy life.*

She felt a tug at her skirt hem and looked down. Looking up at her were sparkling black eyes. Millie knelt down. “Well, hello ta ya, too,” she said, stroking the silky Scottish terrier’s head. “An’ who might ya belong ta?”

“Bonny!” A man’s voice called frantically. “Bonny Belle, where are ya?”

Millie turned then, and caught sight of Bonny’s master. “Well, will ya look at that,” she whispered to herself. Rising up again, she took Bonny’s leash in her hand and flagged the redheaded man down. “Here!” she cried. “I have her here.”

She could see the man sigh in relief as he quickly strode over to Millie. “I am so sorry, miss,” he apologized. “She never leaves my side. I cannot get o’er the fact that she sought ya out.”

“Well, it may have been the mutton chop strapped ta my ankle,” Millie kidded, “or perhaps she just wanted ta make friends with me.”

“She’s a fondness fer mutton, but I think her intentions were the latter,” he teased back. “I’m sorry, I have no manners. Allow me ta introduce myself. I am Caleb Brownin’, o’ Edinburgh an’ this is my little darlin’, Bonny Belle.”

Millie curtsied slightly and smiled at Caleb. “I’m Millie Macalister o’ Glasgow. An’ I’m on my way ta Halifax, Nova Scotia. My yer a big one!”

Cal grinned looking down at Millie whose head barely reached as high as his chest. “I’m fair pleased ta meet ya, Miss Macalister. I’m goin’ ta Halifax as well. An’ yer a wee gal, are ya not?” he said with a wink.

“Oh,” she fretted, “sometimes words pop out o’ my mouth without me even thinkin’. I guess I was just taken aback by the size o’ ya. Please fergive me if I offended ya.”

Caleb chuckled and shook his head. “No offense taken. Back home they used ta call me the ‘gentle giant.’ I will admit I’m completely harmless.”

“That’s good ta know. What takes ya ta Halifax, may I ask?”

“I’m ta be headmaster at the Industrial School fer Orphaned Boys. An’ you?”

“I dunnot know what I’m ta do, Mr. Brownin’. I’m accompanyin’ my sisters an’ brother-in-law there fer a year. I hope ta find sumthin’, but I’ve no special trainin’, so who knows where I’ll end up.”

“Aye, yer the adverturer, then?”

“Either an adventurer or a fool. My family might say I’m the fool. ‘Tis because I enjoy a good laugh from time ta time.”

Caleb grinned. “Ya sound like my kinda gal, Miss Macalister. I, too, like ta laugh.”

“Looks as though Mil has found herself a couple o’ friends,” Drew said, gesturing toward Millie.

“Aye,” Mairi agreed. “What a sweet little pup. Next ta her flowers, Mil loves animals best.”

“But ya never had any?”

“Nae, our father di’not want the bother o’ ‘em. As much as we gals begged, ‘twas not ta be.”

“Well, if ya’d like ta have a pet, ya’ll get no argument from me,” Drew said as he looked out at the sea.

“Such promises,” she mused.

His gaze came back to her. “Ya may have whatever yer heart desires, Mairi. I want ya ta be happier than ya’ve ever been.”

She smiled. “Then I shall ask that ya never doubt my love fer ya, Drew.”

He swallowed hard. “Do ya mean that, Mairi?”

Nodding, she said, “Yes, Drew. I mean it with all my heart. I’ve made many mistakes in my life, but now, I want ta prove that I’ll be worthy o’ ya.”

“There’s no need o’ that. Ya have my undyin’ devotion, Mairi.”

She slid her arms around Drew’s waist and pulled him close to her. “An’ ya have mine, my love.”

Startled by the shrill whistle from the ship’s helm, Mairi jumped. “Hush ya now,” Drew said, “‘tis only the warnin’ fer folks who are not sailin’ with us ta leave the ship.”

“Did ya think I would be amongst them?” she asked.

He smiled. “I prayed ya would not.”

She hugged him harder. “I shan’t be leavin’ yer side any time soon, Drew.”

“Knowin’ that makes this move more bearable.”

“Hey, hey,” Hugh interrupted them saying, “what’s all this billin’ an’ cooin’ goin’ on in the middle o’ the day?”

“Makin’ up fer lost time, mate,” Drew said with a wide grin.

“Who’s the ginger with Mil?” Hugh asked with a nod of his head.

“I dunno, but she has not stopped smilin’ since he came up ta her.”

“What say we introduce ourselves?” Hugh said.

Making their way over to Millie and Cal, Hugh spoke first. “Leave it ta Mil ta strike up a conversation straight away.” He held out his hand to Cal. “Hugh Henderson,” he said, and then pointed to Moira. “This is my better half, Mo.”

Mo smiled.

“Caleb Brownin’, Mr. an’ Mrs. Henderson,” he said, shaking the constable’s hand.

“Let’s not be so formal, mate. We’ll be sharin’ a few days at sea together. ‘Tis Hugh an’ Mo. An’ this lovely couple here are Drew McKinney an’ Mo’s sister, Mairi.”

Drew shook Caleb’s hand. This was the first time he’d seen Hugh look up to someone before.

“Pleased ta meet ya. I’ve been havin’ a grand chat with Millie, here. She’s quite the wit.”

Millie blushed. “We’ve been swappin’ jokes. Cal’s goin’ ta Halifax, too. He’s the new headmaster at a home fer orphans,” she said.

“The Industrial School fer Orphaned Boys,” Cal corrected.

“Yer a teacher, then?” Mo said. “Admirable.”

“Aye, ma’am, I mean, Mo. Tell me, why is it this beautiful sister o’ yers does not have a young beau accompanyin’ her on this trip?”

An awkward silence fell upon the group.

Millie, always quick to cover her sadness, spoke up. “Well, ya see, I have none at the moment.”

Cal could see a cloud had come over them. “I stepped in it, di’ I not? I’m so sorry.”

Patting his arm, Millie said, "Nae, Cal, ya did no such thin'. 'Tis just that I lost my beau recently. He was a constable, like Hugh, but unfortunately, he was killed in the line o' duty."

Cal hung his head and said, "Oh Millie, I am truly sorry fer yer loss."

She reached out again and patted his arm. "No harm done, Cal. Ya di'not know. That's why I'm goin' ta Canada, ta try an put the past behind me."

"An' I go an' open the wounds."

"Ya did no such thin'. Ya asked a question, that's all." Bonny Belle jumped up at Millie again and gave a small bark. "Oh dear, we have been ignorin' the gal who introduced me ta Cal. This is Bonny Belle Brownin', Cal's pup."

"Drew an' I were watchin' her," Mairi said. "She's a beautiful dog."

"Thank ya," Cal said, leaning down to pat Bonny's head. "She's a grand friend, too."

A man's voice came across the ship's speaker, "Last call fer departin' passengers. We will set sail at two o'clock precisely. All ashore that's goin' ashore. Make lively."

"This is so excitin'," Mo said. "I've never been aboard a ship before an' they say we'll want fer nuthin' in our accommodations."

"That's because yer in first class," Millie pointed out. "Mairi an' I are in second class."

"Correction, sister, you an' I an' Drew are all in first class, too."

Drew turned. "Nae, Mairi, I'm in second."

She shook her head. "Yer wrong. I changed our cabins ta first class a week ago, yers, too."

Drew gasped. "Are ya tellin' me, Mairi Macalister, that ya knew as early as a week ago ya were goin' with us?"

"Nae, Drew. I di' not know 'til an hour ago, but that does not mean that I couldn't ha' given ya a great sendoff, had I decided ta stay in Scotland."

Drew looked at Cal. "Women! I am stymied!"

"Join the crowd, Drew," Cal laughed.

"I never did ask if yer travelin' alone," Millie said.

"Aye, 'cept fer Bonny."

“Then why not join us at dinner tonight?”

“I’d be honored. Do ya know yer sittin’ time?”

“Six,” Hugh was quick to answer.

“Then I’ll see ya all in the dinin’ room at six. ‘Twas a pleasure meetin’ ya. I’d best get Bonny back ta my cabin an’ settle in.”

“We should all do the same,” Mo said to her family.

*

*

*

The couples made their way to their staterooms, at first giggling at the sway of the ship beneath their feet. “Ah, here we are, luv, Twelve A,” Hugh said as they approached their cabin.

“Mil an’ I are in Fourteen A,” Mairi said, “an’ you are in Sixteen A, Drew.”

“Thank ya again, Mairi,” Drew said with a nod of his head. “‘Twas right generous o’ ya ta do such a grand thin’ fer me.”

She smiled and shook her head as if to dismiss any thought that thanks was needed.

“Come an’ see our cabin, then we’ll look at the others,” Mo said.

Hugh placed the ornate gold key into the lock and turned it. The large mahogany door opened into an impressive sitting room complete with lush settees and easy chairs. Their feet sank into thick oriental carpeting as they stood in awe.

“I’ve never seen anythin’ grander in my life,” Hugh said.

Mo looked at him, her eyes wide in disbelief. “Nor I, love.”

Mahogany pocket doors opened into the spacious bedroom, which was decorated with maroon velvet curtains at the portholes and flocked wallpaper. The four-poster double bed had a matching comforter covering two thick mattresses. Velvet curtains hung about the sides and foot of the bed, allowing them to be drawn closed to keep out the light or the cold.

Hugh went to the bed and sat down on it. “Oh Mo, ‘tis a delight.”

“Look here,” Millie said, pointing to the right, “yer very own loo!”

The lavatory, constructed of marble, afforded the passengers a small soaking tub, a commode, and a washing sink with brass fixtures. Plush white towels and washcloths hung from shiny brass towel rods.

“This is too much,” Mo gasped.

“This is the best we’ll ever have, Mo. We better enjoy it while we have it!” Hugh laughed.

“Come, let’s have a look see at our rooms,” Millie begged.

Mairi and Millie’s en-suite was set up just as Hugh and Mo’s, but done in creams and beiges. Drew’s was decorated in light blues.

“What am I ta do with all this room?” he wondered.

“Enjoy it,” Mairi said, squeezing his arm.

He looked at her and smiled. “Thank ya again, Mairi.”

“Yer very welcome, my dear.”

Hugh looked at his pocket watch. “’Tis nearly two o’clock. Shall we settle in an’ meet up in our room at a quarter o’ six?”

Everyone nodded. Closing the door behind him, Drew turned back and looked at his suite. “I thank ya, Lord, fer this respite from the turnmoil I’ve been in. But most o’ all, thank ya fer sendin’ my Mairi back ta me.”

*

*

*

They met Caleb Browning outside the dining salon a little before six that first evening. “How are yer accommodations?” he asked.

“Unbelievable, mate,” Hugh said, shaking his head.

“I heard they are spectacular.”

“You should come by after dinner an’ see them.”

Cal put his hand up. “Nae, thank ya just the same. I have a very comfortable room, but I dunnot want ta cry in my soup over what I coulda had.”

The size and beauty of the dining salon took them all by surprise. Their eyes and heads were drawn up to the impressive skylight that ran the length of the room. Ionic pillars supported the white and gold-coffered ceiling. Rich Spanish mahogany, with

inlaid ivory, paneled the walls. Elegant bone china and sterling silver flatware graced the starched white linen tablecloths on each table. Two waiters fussed over them the entire meal. The group had their choice of consommé or beef barley soup. The entrees included roast beef, pan seared duck, or grilled trout all accompanied by root vegetables. A large dessert cart was wheeled around the salon offering the diners chocolate cake, ice cream, or rice pudding.

After dining, the girls hurried to get their wraps and then they all took one stroll around the deck before retiring for the night.

*

*

*

“You should talk ta him about it, Hugh,” Moira said on the third day of their voyage.

“Why me? Yer the one with the ideas.”

“Yer his best mate. He’ll listen ta ya.”

“What do I say, ‘why not wed the fair Mairi before we land so’s as no one is the wiser ‘bout her past’?”

Mo rolled her eyes. “If yer gonna put it that way, just forget about it.”

“So what do I say?”

“Ya brooch the subject delicately, love. Maybe say how romantic it might be bein’ married at sea.”

“Have ya spoken with Mairi? Is she willin’ ta marry him so soon after Jaime?”

“I have not put it inta those terms, but she would not o’ come along, should she not want ta be with Drew.”

“But marriage is altogether sumthin’ different. Why not speak ta her first, then ya can get me ta do yer dirty deeds,” he said with a grin.

“Aye, I will.”

“Ya fancy Caleb, do ya, Mil?” Mairi asked her that night as they prepared for bed.

“Fancy, him? I dunno. He’s a right nice gent, though.”

Mairi smiled. "That he is."

Millie crawled under the comforter in their bed. "I must say when I saw that red hair an' that toothy grin o' his, the feelin' that came o'er me was strange. 'Twas as if I knew he'd be someone special ta me."

"Like a beau, ya mean?"

She shook her head. "I dunno. 'Twas like a comfortin' feelin'. I felt at ease with 'im straight away. Why do ya ask, Mairi?"

She shrugged. "Has not been so long since ya lost Christie."

"Has not been so long that ya were rid o' Jaime, either."

"Aye."

"Do I hafta wait, Mairi? I mean, you an' Drew have taken up again. Our lives both changed 'bout the same time. Is it wrong fer me ta want happiness, too?"

"Nae, 't isn't wrong at all," Mairi said as she crawled into bed next to her sister.

"Ya know I was comparin' 'im ta Christie taday. Both redheads, both lovin' a laugh. An' what is really strange is that they both have the same initials, CB."

"An' the differences?" Mairi asked.

Millie chuckled, "Well, fer one, Cal is twice the size o' Christie both in height an' weight. An' Cal is book smart. He's a teacher. Christie hated school."

"Those differences are not so bad," Mairi said, closing her eyes.

"Nae, they're not bad at all. So am I wrong ta strike up a relationship with Cal now?"

"As ya pointed out, Mil, we both want happiness in our lives now. I, myself, dunnot think 'tis bad timin' fer ya."

"But the others may?" she asked.

"What matters most, Mil, is what *you* want."

