The Mask Revealed The Jacobite Chronicles Volume 2

Example in this ebook CHAPTER I THE PRICE OF A KISS "Stand and deliver!" The words rang out in the gathering darkness of the February evening. The jaded horses, exhausted with dragging a cumbrous chariot through the miry lanes and rugged by-roads of the rough moorland, obeyed the command with promptitude, disregarding the lash of the postboy and the valiant oaths of a couple of serving-men in the rumble. "Keep still, unless you wish me to blow out what you are pleased to consider your brains," said the highwayman. "My pistols have an awkward habit of going off of their own accord when I am not instantly obeyed—so don't provoke them." The postilion became as still as a statue and the footmen, under cover of the self-acting pistols, descended, grumbling but unresisting, yielded up their rusty blunderbusses with a transparent show of reluctance and withdrew to a respectful distance, while the highwayman dismounted, opened the carriage door and throwing the light of a lantern within, revealed the shrinking forms of two women muffled in cloaks and hoods. One of them uttered a shriek of terror when the door was opened and incoherently besought the highwayman to spare two lone, defenseless women. The highwayman thrust his head in and peered round eagerly, as though in search of other passengers. Then, pulling off his slouch-brimmed hat, he revealed a pair of dark eyes that gleamed fiercely from behind a mask, and as much of a bronzed and weather-beaten face as it left uncovered. Black hair, loosely gathered in a ribbon and much disordered by wind and rain, added considerably to the wildness of his aspect, and the uncertain light of the lantern flickered upon several weapons besides the pistols he carried so carelessly. "I shall not hurt you, Madam," he exclaimed impatiently. "Your money and jewels are all I seek. I expected to find a very different booty here and must hasten elsewhere lest I miss it altogether by this confounded mishap. So let me advise you to waste neither my time nor your own breath in useless lamentations, but hasten to hand out your purses and diamonds." "We have neither, Mr. Highwayman," said the other lady in a clear, musical voice, quite free from tremor. "I am a poor widow without a penny in the world, flying from my creditors to take refuge with a relative almost as poor as myself. This is my companion—alack for her! The wage I owe her might make her passing rich if ever 'twere paid—but it never will be." "Do poor widows travel in coach and four with serving-men and maids?" demanded the highwayman with an incredulous laugh. "Come, ladies, I am well used to these excuses. Do not put me to the disagreeable necessity of setting you down in the mud while I search your carriage and—mayhap—your fair selves." The lady threw back her hooded cloak, revealing a face and form of rare beauty, and extended two white hands and arms, bare to the elbow and entirely devoid of ornament. In one hand she held a little purse through whose silken meshes glittered a few pieces of money. "This is all the money I have in the wide world," she said, in a voice of pathetic sweetness. "Take it, if you will, and search for more if you think it worth while—and if you find anything, prithee, share it with me!" But the highwayman scarcely heard her. Through his mask his eyes were fixed upon her beautiful face with a devouring admiration of which she was quite unconscious. Not that such an expression would have seemed at all extraordinary to her, or otherwise than the natural tribute of any masculine creature to the beauty she valued at its full worth. "Keep your purse, Madam," he said, and his voice had lost its harshness; "I will take but one thing from you—something you will not miss, but that a monarch might prize—a kiss from those lovely lips." To be continue in this ebook
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discussed, particularly in those chapters dealing with the relationship between literature and politics. As prevailing notions of royal sovereignty equated open opposition with treason, almost any political activity had to be clandestine in nature, and conspiracy theory was central to interpretations of early modern politics. Factions and cabals abounded in European courts as a result, and their actions were frequently interpreted in conspiratorial terms. By the late eighteenth century it seemed as if this had begun to change, and in Britain in particular the notion of a 'loyal opposition' had begun to take shape. Yet the outbreak of the French Revolution was frequently explained in conspiratorial terms, and subsequently European rulers and their subjects remained obsessed with conspiracies both real and imagined. This volume helps us to understand why.

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