

Excerpt - *Enticing the Weary Warrior*

The man opened the door to the Horseguards and made the long, arduous climb up the stairs. His left leg throbbed, ached, and dragged when he was especially tired. He used a cane these days to help with stability. Thump. Clump. Thump. Clump. No longer was he the stealthy agent he had once been. When he reached the top of the staircase, he paused to catch his breath. The injuries he had suffered at New Orleans, and before, would have killed a lesser man. Had killed lesser men.

At least he looked human now. His once heavy, matted beard had been shorn to only a slight growth, an indication of days when he did not feel like shaving. His hair no longer hung below his shoulders, but brushed his collar. He no longer carried the smell of Jackson's "Dirty Shirts" on his person, and instead smelled like leather and sandalwood. He did not meet with societies dictates, but he dared anyone to say a word to him. After pushing away from the wall, he continued down the hall, reading the signs on the doors until he came to one that read Stuart McKenzie, Director. He let out a sigh of relief, glad that some things had not changed. He entered the outer office. A mousey man looked up at him.

"May I help you?"

"I'm here to see Director McKenzie," the man announced, his Scottish brogue undetectable. He had been taught that the wrong accent could get you killed; therefore, he could speak many accents. So many, in fact, that he felt like he no longer knew who he was, or which one belonged to him.

"He is not in yet. May I give him a message?"

"Mack not at work? Is he dying?"

"Not to my knowledge. One of the twins has been ill."

"Twins?" the stranger asked in shock.

"I'm sorry, but I don't believe I got your name?"

“I don’t believe I gave it. How can I get in touch with him?”

“I’ll let him know that you came by if you will just tell me your name and the matter you wish to discuss with him,” the smaller man said bravely to the giant standing before him.

“That won’t work. I need to speak to—”

“I know I’m running late, Preston. Cassie...” a burly, dark-haired, handsome man entered the small outer office. He looked up and studied the man that stood in front of him. “It can’t be.”

“Mack,” the man said with a nod.

“Liam McTavish?”

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A knock sounded below. It’s early for visitors, Megan thought, as she stretched her stiff muscles after a night of tossing and turning. She dressed quickly so she could take an early morning ride. Megan crept downstairs so as not to disturb the rest of the household. She started to tiptoe out the door when she heard her brother’s raised voice coming from his office.

“What do you mean he’s still alive?”

The reply was muffled, but Megan’s curiosity was piqued. She snuck to the door, feeling like a young girl once again spying on her older brother. It was just that now she knew he had been a spy, and the purpose that his country house served, she couldn’t resist eavesdropping on occasion in hopes of hearing some nefarious plot. She pressed her ear to the oak door, hoping she would be able to hear something.

“He’s alive and on his way. He also hasn’t a clue as to who is here. Mack only told him that this is a training facility, and suggested he stay on and become a trainer.”

“Dammit, how much time do I have?”

“He was to leave London this morning.”

“What do I need to know? How am I going to break this news to my sister?”

“I truly don’t know much of what has happened to him in the time he’s been gone. I do know that he was captured and tortured for almost a year. Who knows what all he suffered at the hands of Bonaparte’s men. Liam is tough and not one to give up information easily, if at all. Then he spent some time in America. Mack said he was there until the end of that war. I can’t imagine what he saw there. I also know that he has been hiding himself in that office for the last month, blocking out the world. He hasn’t even contacted his brother, sister, or uncle.”

The rest of the words the other man spoke were lost on Megan. He said Liam. A buzzing sounded in her ears and spots flashed before her eyes. She blinked furiously to clear them, but they refused to go away. Megan pushed away from the door and slowly turned. She saw her sister-in-law coming down the stairs, saw her lips moving, but couldn’t make out what she was saying. All she could hear was that incessant buzzing. Liam was alive. She moved towards the door, towards freedom. Megan was steps short of the door when she did something she had never done in her life, not even when she had been pregnant—she fainted.