

## Spirited Away

A smirr of rain and fog clung to the city, muffling the bong of the evening church bell. With the raveled selvage of her plaide in a clutch beneath her chin, Maggie gripped tight her basket and wove through the crowded streets of Glasgow's Gallowgate.

The pittance Maggie earned helping the washwomen on the Green paid the quitrent on a damp room she shared with eight others—nothing more than a place to lay her pallet. She earned a few extra pennies selling simple remedies on the street, enough to buy a bannock and bowl of pease porridge on most days. Two years of living a hand-to-mouth existence had brought Maggie to the end of her tether, taking two steps backward for every step forward, never quite able to get ahead.

At fifty paces, a slab of wood painted with a crude portrait of a bearded man in a turban creaked on its hinge. She hurried toward the Saracen Head, the coaching inn where her friend Jenny worked as a scullery maid. She'd agreed to aid Jenny's husband, Angus, one of the barmen in the public room. Angus had injured his hand, and in exchange for treatment, he promised to mend Maggie's sorely worn clogs.

She shouldered the heavy door open. Inside, the pub was snug

with the spice of boiled beef, cabbage, and fresh-baked bread. Maggie waved to Angus, who was busy serving the lone customer at the bar—and she made straight for the fire to warm her chapped hands.

“Ho, Maggie!” Angus bellowed. “Jenny said ye might come.” He was a broad, muscular fellow, with a head of thick curly ginger hair. His cheerful smile missed several teeth—lost breaking up one of the frequent barroom brawls. “Have a seat over by the hearth, that’s the best light. Cider?”

“Aye, cider’d be a wonder, Angus, but I’ll also be needin’ a dram of whiskey, if it’s no bother to ye.” She sat down on a bench at the table he’d indicated. Angus set down a tray bearing a pint of hard cider, one small glass, and a bottle of whiskey. He settled into the chair opposite.

Maggie tipped her pint, taking a moment to savor her first sip for cider was a special treat she could ill afford on her own. She then put the drink aside, ready to tend to business.

“Let’s have a look-see.”

Angus propped his arm, palm up, on the tabletop. Maggie untied the filthy rag wrapped around his hand, discarding it with some disdain onto the straw-covered floor.

“Aye . . . yiv a nasty wound here.” She poked gently at the angry welt slashing across the palm of his left hand. Angus winced.

“I scratched it off-loading casks from the brewer’s cart days ago. Ye can see how it’s festered—throbs somethin’ fierce. Jenny said yid fix it for me.”

Maggie examined Angus’s huge paw cradled in her small, capable hands. “Aye . . . I’ll wager yiv a sliver lodged deep. Help yerself to a dram, lad . . . this is bound t’ hurt.” She dug through her basket and laid a few items on the table—a darning needle, a stubby candle, strips of clean linen, and a small clay pot sealed with a cap of beeswax.

Angus cast a dubious eye on the needle she held in the flame of

the candle and poured a generous amount of whiskey into the glass. "Have a dram with me, Maggie . . ."

"Och, no! The hard stuff was always meant fer you. Now hold still, ken?"

He nodded, sucked in his breath, and averted his eyes as Maggie began probing with her needle. She glanced up. Other than a slight twitching in the muscle of his jaw, Angus bore up.

"Aahhh now, there tis!" Triumphant, Maggie showed him the pus-and-blood-coated shard of wood impaled on her needle. Angus jerked his hand away. Maggie pulled it back. "That was the worst of it, lad, but this wound needs dressin'." She drizzled whiskey onto his palm, slathered on a glob of soothing ointment, and bound the whole thing in a clean bandage. "Take the salve home. Have Jenny bind yer fist with a clean dressing every day—it'll heal quick that way."

"Feels better already." Angus smiled and flexed his fingers. "Tell ye what—the farrier's in the stable right now and he owes me a favor. Give us yer clogs—I'll have him tap on a bit o' leather straightaway."

Maggie felt a bit silly, sitting alone and shoeless in the pub. She focused on finishing her cider—aware she was being observed with some intent. The young man Angus had been serving when Maggie first entered the pub stared rather boldly in her direction. She decided to intimidate him with her best evil-eye glare. To her surprise and dismay, he broke into a smile and sauntered over to her table.

He stood very tall with wavy brown hair caught at the nape of his neck in a sky-blue ribbon. His linen shirt and cravat sparkled white in the dim light. The worsted gray wool of his jacket spoke of quality; the buttons cast silver and the cut well tailored. She noticed the silver buckles on his leather shoes, and tucked her dirty bare feet beneath her chair.

"May I join you, miss?"

"To be certain, I dinna have a care where ye sit, sir." Maggie

shrugged. "I'll be leavin' just soon as Angus brings my shoes."

"Are you married?" he asked, sitting down across from her.

"Married?" Surprised by his boldness, Maggie answered in kind. "That's no concern of yers."

"I'll get right to the point." The rude young man peered inside her basket. "I can see you have a valuable skill and I've a proposition for you . . ."

Maggie flipped the lid closed. "*Feich!* Proposition indeed!" She grabbed her basket and moved to sit at the next table.

Undaunted, the man simply slid his chair over. "My name is Ethan Hampton . . ." He held out a hand. "Just arrived from the Colonies—Virginia to be exact. Hear me out. Let me stand you a drink. I assure you, it's not at all what you think."

Maggie ignored his hand and leaned back in her chair, dropping her guard but slightly now that his odd way had been identified. She'd heard Americans tended toward brash. Her curiosity was piqued, and besides, the cider at the Saracen Head was awfully tasty.

"Barman! A pint of cider for my friend and a pint of stout for myself. Are you hungry?"

Maggie answered with a cautious nod. When the barman brought the drinks, Ethan Hampton ordered a full supper for two. She hadn't eaten meat in over a year, and the promise of supper earned this man Maggie's rapt attention.

"I'm ship's agent for the merchant vessel the *Good Intent*, charged with securing cargo for the return leg, and there lies the proposition I have for you." The American lad settled back in his chair, drink in hand. "Did you know, Maggie, most of the tobacco shipped from Virginia makes port right here in Glasgow Harbor?"

"Aye," she agreed. "Everyone kens tha'."

Ethan Hampton refreshed himself with a pull from his pint. "No shipmaster wants to sail home with an empty hold. There's no profit in that, is there?"

Bobbing her head in agreement, Maggie hurried to gulp down

the dregs of her pint. "Tis all well and good, Mr. Hampton, but unless ye have an ache or malady of some sort, I dinna ken how I can be of any assistance t' ye . . ."

"It is *I* who will be of assistance to *you*." He flashed a brilliant smile. "What I'm offering is a new beginning—the means by which to start a wonderful life in the New World . . ."

"A *Spirit!*" Maggie pounded a fist on the tabletop, drawing the attention of a group of customers stumbling in off the evening coach from Edinburgh. Men known as "spirits" haunted popular gathering places, beguiling young people into servitude with grandiose tales of the Colonies, and then "spiriting" them far away, never to be seen by their families again.

Unperturbed by her outburst, Ethan Hampton signaled the barman for another round of drinks. "Spirit!" He laughed. "Come now . . . do you really think I have the power to spirit you away, Maggie? Against your free will?"

"Na, I'm nobody's fool." Maggie punctuated her assertion with a gulp from her pint.

"Exactly so!" Ethan banged the tabletop. "I can see you've a native intelligence and you're doubly blessed with a pretty face and a marketable skill. Have you been trained in the healing arts, or is it you just possess a knack?"

Maggie blushed, flustered by his compliments and the effects of her bottomless pint of cider. "I was once apprenticed to a midwife of considerable skill. She passed away, and I've had no luck finding another willing to take me on."

"You certainly seemed skilled enough . . ."

"Aye, but I've no repute—considered by most too young, ye ken?"

"I see . . . even though you've a skill, you're not well off. Life for you is a daily struggle . . ."

"Och, aye . . ." Maggie sighed, and toasted her host with a tip of her tankard.

"But, I ask you, who can expect to get ahead here? Only

those of proper lineage, that's who! Those lucky enough to be born into the right class." Ethan Hampton hit his stride. A few of the other patrons edged close to listen in, and he raised his volume.

"Tell me if I've the right of it—no matter how hard you are willing to work, no matter how smart or how pretty you are, Maggie, you are only allowed to go so far in this life. And when you can't find steady work, what will you do to fill your empty belly? Sell your beautiful hair . . . your teeth—or resort to even more desperate means? Do I speak the truth?"

Maggie found herself nodding and the others who'd gathered 'round also grunted in agreement. Ethan reached into his pocket and pulled out a document, which he unfolded with great care and set on the table.

"I offer you Opportunity."

Maggie shook her head. "I canna read."

"It says this—" Ethan smoothed the folds of stiff parchment. "You will receive transport and victuals aboard the *Good Intent* leaving two weeks from this day, heading for Richmond, Virginia. You'll be bound for four years' labor to whoever purchases your contract from the ship's captain . . ."

"And if no one purchases my contract?"

"Not much chance of that, Maggie. There's such a shortage of domestic servants, I'm certain you'll obtain a fine position . . ."

"Ah, no . . ." Maggie shook her head again. "I dinna possess a Character . . ." She'd been deemed unqualified for domestic service for lack of a "Character"—the referral document necessary to obtain such a position.

"You don't need a Character in Virginia. They're clamoring for girls—Scottish girls especially are in high demand. And, Maggie . . ." Ethan edged the contract toward her. "You will be well cared for—three hearty meals a day, a clean, warm bed at night—clothes and shoes whenever you need them."

"Aye? Clothes, ye say?" Maggie bunched a handful of her

threadbare skirt in her fist. She spent much of her spare time repairing the worn odds and ends of her meager wardrobe.

"After four short years, you'll receive your Freedom Dues. It's all listed right here, see?" Ethan pointed out a section on the paper. "At contract's end you're promised three pounds ten shillings, one suit of clothes, stockings and shoes, two hoes, one ax, and three barrels of corn."

"Ha! And why would I be needin' an ax?" Maggie pushed the parchment away. "To protect myself from the Red Indians what come to hack off my hair?"

"Wild tales!" Ethan laughed. "I'll admit there are one or two savage tribes deep, deep in the backcountry, but the few docile natives remaining in Virginia are very tame. No"—he slid the document back toward Maggie—" . . . the tools and such are for starting out on your own. There is land for the taking in the New World."

"A wee bit of land to call my own . . . tha' would be fine." Maggie began to plan the herbs she would plant in her garden. "I could make a living from tha', na?"

"Three pounds ten shillings—an enticing dowry for some young man looking for a wife." Ethan winked. "You're a beautiful girl, and I would be remiss not to warn you—there is no shortage of marriageable young men in Virginia. Be prepared to have your pick . . ."

"Aye . . ." Maggie nodded. "Someone once told me good men are to be found in the Colonies . . ."

"Not only good men—the best men! Strong and handsome—rich . . . oh, Maggie, they're waiting for you . . . a better life is waiting for you! All you need do is sign here . . ."



When Angus returned with Maggie's clogs he found her huddled over the table with the American lad, struggling with a quill to make her mark on a sheet of paper.

"Maggie! What have ye done?"

Maggie looked up, her smile wide. "I'm off to America!"