



COLLAGES EDITION WELLINGTON'S OFFICERS
CONSTANCE J. HAMPTON



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**A MERCENARY
MAJOR Part 2**
The Blessing of Marriage



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PART 2:

THE BLESSING OF MARRIAGE

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CHAPTER 1: A CONSUMMATION

London, October 1814

He turned slowly towards her and touched the side of her face.

She jerked away from his touch and he smiled a bit crookedly. He wondered fleetingly if he was wandering into the territory of Jeffrey, bloody, Burroughs, but suppressed the thought at once. She was his now; to have and to hold.

He stroked her shoulder as if asking her permission. She reminded him of a shy and jumpy filly.

Anthea took a deep breath. It should have been Jeffrey - not this stranger - in bed with her on her quite delayed wedding night.

Her nightshift fell open and she pushed out of it; wriggling her backside, tugging it away from under her buttocks. She dropped it in the bed, never minding where it fell,

not noticing that she was still lying partly on top of it.

He bent his head and kissed her throat, circling down to her lush breasts. He noticed that she shivered and wondered if it was out of fear.

He lost himself in the scent of her silky skin and a rose fragrant perfume.

Wild roses, he mused. How surprising, my new wife is a wild rose!

In the back of his mind a thought trailed, that he should be glad that he liked her scent. He had lost his over-fastidiousness during his time in the army, but for some reason it had rapidly returned. Thank God, his senses had accepted her!

He closed his eyes in ecstasy, running his lips over the soft mounds of her incredible round breasts, nudging a small puckered nipple, licking and sucking, almost gobbling her.

He hardly noticed her sighs and moans, as he was deeply absorbed in his ministrations while he was only savoring the taste and the feel of her.

His hands trailed over her belly down to her mound that was surprisingly fleshy. He felt under the silky hairs to probe the swelling folds.

He heard her moan softly and he wondered again if she was frightened, it could not be... lust, could it?

She held her eyes stiffly closed and he registered that she was biting her lower lip. He wondered again if it was out of shyness.

Intently staring into her face, he probed until he found the exquisitely sensitive nub he had been searching for.

It startled him that she started to move against his searching hand. He had expected her to lie stock-still until he would be done with her. Julia had been like a broomstick

on their first night; actually, she had always been stiff and unresponsive.

He gave in to the surge of his arousal and moved between her legs, his manhood swollen and throbbing. He touched her sensitive nub with the head of his velvety shaft, pushing and pulsing softly.

Suddenly her moves under him became spasmodic and her breath came out ragged. Her hands clawed at his hips.

“Please, please!” she mewed.

He was concentrating too much on his own lust to show any surprise at this odd, not very virginal behavior as he forced himself slowly against her folds, so it hardly registered to him when she cried out.

“Oh god,” she whispered, moving her hips in a sensual way.

He had been hovering over her, using the strength of his arms and his toes not to force himself inside her.

Now he just let go. He thrust deep into her, sheathing into her slick flesh with one swift stroke.

He heard her gasp.

Was it with pain?

For a moment, her body seemed to stiffen.

“Jesus, wife!” he panted, not really knowing what to say more.

He crunched his teeth together. If he did not watch out, he was going to spill like a young pup.

Her eyes shot wide open and she uttered a moan.

He felt his face contort with restraint.

“I will wait a moment, so that you will be less uh... raw,” he managed to say. He felt almost dizzy, as if someone had thrown a cloud of mist over his brain. He knew he moved his lips, but he hardly registered his own words.

“Will waiting reduce the largeness of you, my lord?” she asked innocently.

“I... am... afraid... not!”

He wondered fleetingly if he was losing his speech, as the words appeared with intervals.

He groaned through clenched teeth.

God, this was heaven and hell at the same time! He knew now that he was going crazy! This woman, her bed, her body, it was not at all the way he was used to feel and to react when he was with a woman. It was different, but Jesus why *was* it different? Because she was warm, and clean? Oh, God and why did she move that way?

“D... Don’t...” he croaked

Unable to resist her seductive moist and warm sheath any further he drove himself into her again and again.

“So good!” he mumbled, realizing he said the words aloud. Kit Brondemeire was never a talker in bed, so why was he babbling now?

She cried out again. He heard it through the haze of his own frenzy.

Suddenly he felt her muscles clench around him and she let out a long moan.

“Ah, God!” he groaned, adding a string of tender words he did not even know were in his vocabulary.

He realized then that he could not hold on anymore.

“I... am... going... to ...c...!”

His long body arched and then went rigid when his cock surged and spurted. He almost went mad with the fierceness of it.

He closed his eyes. His teeth had been clamped close with the tension of his movements. He relaxed his jaws slowly.

“Christ in heaven!” he muttered.

Had it ever been as good as this?

He felt her nipples brushing his chest and became aware that he was weighing her down into the soft mattress.

With a muttered exclamation he untangled his body from hers, lifting the nails of her hands carefully, as they had dug themselves deep into the flesh of his buttocks.

He knew he had to let go of her and rolled away from her with a feeling of regret.

His orgasm had been fierce, but the massive ejaculation he just had could not prevent his cock from hardening again the moment he withdrew from her.

This was madness, he thought; bloody pure madness!

They both lay back in their pillows, breathing raggedly.

She was the first to turn her face towards him; it was puffy and her eyes heavy-lidded.

He suddenly remembered something through the haze of this delightful coupling: it was supposed to be her first time!

He rolled on his side and peered at her. Through the shadows the single candle

threw over her face he searched for tearstains, but found none. He wondered if she looked actually dazed... Was it satisfaction he saw?

Impossible, of course; she had been a bloody virgin! She must have been, or?

She turned away from his stare with a soft smile.

Impossible, he thought, at once remembering Julia Fortescue's wails when he took her virginity on that long ago night. Julia had cried for days afterwards, driving him almost to insanity about his so-called cruelty.

He clenched his jaw again, at once rigid with anger.

No virgin!

Bloody hell, he had been cuckolded, indeed! His new wife had been no virgin!

He got up from the bed, checking his penis in the poor light of the candle. It glistened with wetness, but he did not think

there was blood. Not like with Julia; she had bled like a slaughtered pig.

“Damnation!”

“My lord?”

She had turned back to him, her round breasts quivering, her body in a relaxed pose, a smile still hovering on her lips.

Not like a virgin at all!

Damn Jeffrey, bloody, Burroughs to hell!
Damn her!

“You bitch!” he growled, “How dare you!”

She sat up in one movement; her eyes widening to enormous proportions.

“My lord?” she asked again.

His breath caught in his throat. He searched frantically for his robe on the floor.

“You...”

His voice gave and he needed to swallow.

“You, madam, were not a virgin!”

Her brows rose almost to the level of her hairline.

“My lord, I assure you...”

He made a noise full of contempt. It sounded like a bark.

He tugged his wrapper tight and headed for the connecting door to his own bedroom. He did not look back when he slammed it shut.

Anthea stared at the door.

Not a virgin? But Jeffrey had never...

She lay slowly back on the bed, reaching for a damp and crinkled sheet to cover her nakedness.

He knew, she suddenly realized. He knew that she and Jeffrey had indulged in their love-games. Why else would he react so crossly?

She sent an angry stare at the closed connecting door.

How dare he think that she had dallied in such a fashion with another man? True,

what she had done with Jeffrey was not innocent, but they had never gone all the way, never! She had saved herself for him, this... this *lout*!

Lucy frowned when the upstairs maids came to make the bed. There were normally only two maids required for the task, but now four of them filed into Anthea's bedroom. They peered demurely at the bed but Lucy knew they were bursting with curiosity.

She looked up when Higgins entered the bedroom with an expression of importance on his face.

Lady Anthea had breakfasted in her room that morning, *alone*. At seven o'clock she had taken her bath, put on her riding clothes and had disappeared towards the stables. There had been no Viscount Brondemeire in the vicinity.

Lucy wondered if he was still abed. Jenkins had not yet gone down for the Viscount's warm shaving water, let alone to order water for his bath.

It was very quiet downstairs. The girls acted as if they were going through their chores and the footmen busied themselves with unimportant tasks as if they were waiting for something.

Lucy raised her chin and went to the bed. She fished out her ladyship's silk nightshift which was most certainly flattened by somebody partly lying on it. The silk had absorbed a few bloody stains and some white stains that certainly did not belong to the Viscountess herself.

Higgins and the four upstairs maids broke out in a smile.

The deed had been done! The Viscount had consummated the marriage, unlike that despicable Baron Caversham, of yore!

There were some light spatters on the silk sheets and one of the upstairs maids raised her eyes questioningly at Higgins.

“Those sheets need to be saved,” Lucy said hastily, “I don’t think they should be laundered. Just fold them and give them to me.”

She watched when the maids did as she requested. Even Higgins knew that Lucy was on first name terms with her ladyship and thus she ranked almost higher than he did in the household. It was just that Lucy did not seem to care about rankings, only obviously on occasions like those.

Higgins had learned to appreciate the red-haired woman from the North.

God knew there was almost as much talk about her as there had been about Lady Brondemeire. Lucy was nearing her forties but she did not show her age. The downstairs maids used to mutter that she was a spoiled woman in this household. She

did not have to do the normal chores, which were attributed to a lady's maid; there was a laundry barn behind the North side of the house, where two women washed and cleaned on an everyday basis, a seamstress in the house was constantly busy sewing and repairing if the need arose. The laundry women did the ironing as well.

All Lucy had to do was point and command.

As her ladyship did not change her dresses as much as one would expect from a fashionable member of the London Quality, most of the laundering and the cleaning were on behalf of the staff anyway.

It was Lucy's business to do her ladyship's hair, but Anthea was used to going to bed early, instead of showing herself at the nightly occasions such as balls, musicales and the theatre. Because she mostly wore a bonnet in the daytime it could be expected that her ladyship's

coiffure was not a task of immense proportions, either.

Lucy walked into Anthea's dressing room, pressing the soiled night shift and the sheets against her chest. She put them into a drawer that could be closed with a key.

After what she had overheard last night, when eavesdropping in her ladyship's dressing room, while Anthea was being ravished by that man and then to have received such a thundering speech by way of his thanks, she was certain that one day, she would need to produce the items important to this wedding night as they were.

“Men!” she muttered contemptuously.

Lucy had her share of admirers in her life and she had been married for a short time to a handsome sailor who worked on board of one of Cyril Fairfax' ships. He was on the one ship that had gone under, close to the Canary Islands.

The worst day of Lucy's life was not the day when she was notified of her widowhood, but the day when she was informed that her beloved Cerdic had another wife and two children in Portsmouth.

Because Lucy was a very attractive woman with her long reddish-blond tresses and her plump figure she'd had many an admirer, either 'downstairs' or even 'upstairs' at Rotherham.

What Lucy and a select few people hid, was that she had once given her favors to the exceedingly handsome Earl of Rotherham after his wife died. Those few people who knew about this had been the ones who had encouraged her to console the lonely Earl in his bed.

Lucy bit her lip.

Cyril Fairfax had been the love of her life, but she was well aware that she had shared

that feeling with more women than she cared to count.

Anthea was always blissfully unaware of that situation, too absorbed in her own approaching adulthood and her lovesickness for the handsome boy next door.

Lucy was certainly not going to make her any wiser about her bedtime bliss with Anthea's father, as Anthea had adored the ground her father walked on until his betrayal, when he married her off to their despised neighbor Guy Burroughs, Baron Caversham. She had been hurt and confused, not understanding why her father did such a terrible thing to her. Lucy knew now that even that horrible event in Anthea's life had never lessened her adoration for the man who sired her. Of course the whole situation with Baron Caversham had been a short-lived affair. Anthea only had suffered the events on her wedding night and they had not included

anything remotely compared to a coupling with the dirty, terrible man who had not been able to become her husband in reality. In the end Anthea had undergone it as a short, bad dream. Cyril never deemed it necessary to share his reasons for that unequal match with anybody and apart from the fact that Anthea had to ask the House of Lords to annul the marriage, in order to get her huge fortune back that came as her wedding portion, it had not seemed to influence Anthea's life too much.

Lucy had been quite grateful to move back to Petit Versailles after Anthea's marriage so suddenly ended: she had a cynical Earl to service, whenever he felt like it, and the mood came often. The Earl had stopped his privateering after the countess died. Lucy guessed that the Earl suddenly acknowledged how short life was after Annette's demise. He stayed home far

more often, very much to Lucy's gratification.

When he died of a wasting disease, three years later, it was Lucy who almost could not go on, due to a sadness that was to cling to her for months.

Going to London with Anthea had been a great help out of her lingering depression. There had been quite some servants at the Claridge hotel, who had eyed her with longing and invitation and, slightly to Lucy's shame, she had given in to two of them, just because she wanted to experience a man's hands on her body again. Of course those experiences had not been comparable with her bed sport with Cyril, but it had helped her to move on, away from the memories.

Right now Lucy labored under the appreciative looks of the newly arrived John Jenkins, Lord Brondemeire's valet. At the servant's hall he did not seem able to

keep his eyes off her. Or better yet, her quite visible bosom in her not so serviceable ladies' maid dress.

According to gossip he had already inquired where she normally slept.

Although Lucy did think John Jenkins was a handsome devil, she was certain she would turn the key in the lock of her small but very nice bedroom on the fifth floor. That room normally belonged to a governess, but Anthea had allowed her maid that boon, because she did not have a governess in her household anyway, and she wanted Lucy to sleep in the comfort of her very own room, without having to share one with the first upstairs maid, as would in reality befit her rank in the household. Anthea never had to share a bed in her life and it appalled her that servants had to sleep together in a narrow bed, as was 'the done' thing in London.

Lucy decided she was going to play very hard to get for that John Jenkins. She liked him well, oh yes, but she would be damned if she would be another man's toy for a few nights only. Cyril had never even acknowledged his 'knowledge' of her in the daytime at Petit Versailles, which might have been sensible - none of his daughters was to know of his shenanigans with the staff- but it *had* hurt the faithful maid! It had been only a small consolation for Lucy that Cyril, in his better years, had always looked outside the house for his amorous conquests. The reason for that attitude had been the Countess herself. Cyril had known that Annette du Plessis was always suspicious of her wandering husband and that it was best to avoid scenes in the house that had to do with his roving eye. Still, Lucy suspected that she had not been the only one to console the Earl at the time, and she had a hard time accepting that. It was

not easy to acknowledge that she had been a mere plaything for the dashing Earl, because he had such easy access to her in Petit Versailles.

Lucy was now at a stage where she wanted more out of life than a few hasty beddings.

On the other hand, most women of forty looked like their own grandmother in her days. She was lucky to be a beloved lady's maid, first to the Countess of Rotherham and now to Anthea. She never lacked food, and a clean place to sleep, which were exactly the things that kept a woman from growing old too soon.

She was not sure of John Jenkins' age, but she guessed he was at least two years her junior.

She sighed inwardly. There was a rumor that one of the young laundresses was after him. Maybe she should not keep him dangling *too* long. She knew better than

anyone that a man's moods might be fickle if it came to a woman he wanted.

She promised herself that she would think about all that later as right now she had a marriage to save before it had even properly started.

Lucy cast one more look at Anthea's bed, now all made up with fresh sheets.

That man presumed to barge into Anthea's house, taking all her worldly goods and then insult her on their wedding night? Not if she could help it!

Kit awoke with a blinding headache that morning when Jenkins opened the curtains and the sun flared into the room.

Kit made a slow movement with his hand, but Jenkins seemed oblivious to his master's distress. He had recoiled when the musty smell of alcohol and sleep wafted towards him when he entered the bedroom,

but he could now not do more than pretend indifference.

John crawled in front of the bed, where an empty brandy bottle had fallen from the bedside table. He sniffed at the bottle. At least it was not that bad stuff, which could poison a man. There was still hope for the Colonel.

“Hair of the dog, milord?” he asked formally, while Kit was struggling to sit up.

Kit brought his hands to his head and nodded.

Jenkins disappeared quietly into the hallway to prepare his ultimate remedy against a bad hangover.

It was good his headache prevented him from thinking as Kit was still feeling a rush of anger when he woke up.

He preferred not to inquire after his wife, but in the empty breakfast room where he had a slow meal of kippers and coddled

eggs as late as eleven o'clock Higgins' mulish expression spoke volumes.

Unrequited Higgins told the Viscount that his wife had gone out riding early in the morning that she had been working in the library with the steward and had gone out shopping afterwards. She begged his lordship's apologies, but she would be neither at home for lunch nor for dinner. If his lordship would not take dinner at his club, Higgins was to inform Cook about this so that he could have a meal served wherever and whenever he pleased.

Kit scowled but said nothing.

His club! Tony was a member of White's and would no doubt re-introduce him there, as soon as he would be back in town. Unfortunately, he left only yesterday for Andover on a three-day ride at a minimum, and if he went back almost on the same day, he would not be back in London for almost a week.

Kit wondered if the Faradiddle still existed; the club he used to visit when he was a young buck. The problem was that he was a bloody Colonel now, while the Faradiddle was in earlier times a place for ensigns and young lieutenants. It would not do to stand out there like a sore thumb due to his high rank.

He shook his head and lived to regret it, because Jenkins's miracle cure had recovered his appetite, but did not free him from his headache.

So his dear wife had decided to sulk and hide, hadn't she?

He felt anger growing in his chest again.

Well, he would do what every buck in town did; look for a nice piece of horseflesh at Tattersall's and visit a Bond street tailor. He might even run into one of his old army comrades and then he would decide where he would dine that night.

He felt a slight regret that he had sold his own place at Lancaster Square. He did not need to live with her, did he? The bloody cheat!

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Chapter 2: CONSEQUENCES OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

It had been a week since that disastrous wedding night and Anthea had managed to avoid her new husband most of the time. It needed some help from Higgins and Lucy, as well as the servant's stairs, but at least she