

The background of the cover is a romantic illustration. It depicts a man and a woman standing in a garden. The woman is wearing a long, light-colored dress, and the man is in a dark suit. They are positioned in the middle ground, looking towards each other. Behind them is a large, two-story house with a prominent thatched roof. The house is surrounded by lush greenery and trees. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of orange, yellow, and brown, suggesting a sunset or a warm, golden hour. The sky is a soft, hazy orange.

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
OF *THE PERILS OF PURSUING A PRINCE***

# JULIA LONDON

*She was a lovely innocent,  
but she could not resist...*

*The*  
**DEVIL'S  
LOVE**

# THE DEVIL'S LOVE

JULIA LONDON

To Nancy, for making me do it;

Jim, for giving me the time and space; and to Meredith and Christine, for believing I could do it.

## *Prologue*

Mediterranean Sea, 1813

The day dawned bright in brilliant contrast to the previous night's raging storm, which had all but sunk the merchant vessel. An exhausted young man lay sprawled against the hull of the ship, still a little green from his first battle waged against nature's wrath on the high seas. With his eyes closed and his body protesting against the slightest movement, he mused that it had been no less exacting than any battle he had ever fought on the continent.

A commotion above forced him to open one eye. Michael Ingram groaned when he spotted a little girl, dressed as a pirate, scampering about the quarterdeck. A scarf was tied about her dark curls, and her skinny legs were sticking out of a pair of men's pantaloons cut below her knees and belted at her tiny waist. She was barefoot and looked as if she had not seen the inside of a tub in weeks. She also was waving a wooden sword about, the very same wooden sword she had driven into his stomach two days before when she had leapt from behind a barrel yelling "En garde." On this beautiful, clear morning, she was shouting at something beyond the ship—no doubt at whitecaps, as she was fond of doing—and yelling about pirates.

"Good God, look at her," Michael muttered. Amid a pile of wood shavings, the man sitting next to him squinted up at the little girl. "Did you see her last night? In the worst of it, she was up there with the captain, waving that thing around as if she were fighting her make-believe pirates," Michael complained.

The older man shrugged. "She be a little girl, Ingram. You pay her too much heed," he responded in a typically gruff manner. Michael smiled. A bear of a man with fists that looked like hams, the giant had taken to the seas when the estate at which he had gardened most of his adult life was lost in an all-night gaming spree.

When Michael joined the crew, at first he had been very wary of the man. The rough crew outwardly resented the fact that he had been born to privilege. But

circumstances—his father’s oppressive debt, to be precise—had brought him to Carrington, a minor baron his family had known some years ago and a man with a solid reputation for having mastered the seas. He had struck a bargain with Captain Carrington that made the crew his bedfellows, and Withers the most frightening of them all. Yet it was Withers who had saved him from certain bodily injury—if not death—by grabbing the scruff of his neck and yanking him from a scrap with three other men. From that moment forward, Withers had been a staunch ally and protector of the young man.

The little girl spied the two men and waved furiously to them. Neither moved.

“Do not encourage her, whatever you do,” Michael grumbled.

Withers grunted and turned his attention back to his whittling. “She ain’t interested in me, lad. It’s you she admires; that’s why she torments you so.”

Michael groaned again as the girl stooped to retrieve her doll before climbing down from the quarterdeck. Dragging the wooden sword behind her, she began to make her way through the storm debris on deck.

“She is a terror, that one. A bloody hellion. A menace to every man on this ship,” Michael avowed. “Captain Carrington has no shame letting her run amok like that. I don’t think the little beastie even owns a frock.”

Withers glanced up as she began to run toward them. “She’s a spirited thing, all right. Reckon that’s why the captain brought her along when her mama died a few years ago. There’ll be plenty of time for frocks and ribbons,” he muttered as the girl skid to a stop in front of them.

“Did you not hear me? Land ahoy!” she announced breathlessly, then wiped her runny nose with the back of her hand.

Michael glanced at her scabby knees and the dirt caked on her bare limbs. He shielded his eyes from the sun and looked up at the little hellion's face. "There is no land, Abigail," he said with the strained patience of a weary parent.

The girl fisted her hands against her hips and scowled at him. "There is land, and I saw it first! It's a pirate's cove, and we are going to attack and steal their treasure!" she announced triumphantly, lifting her doll high above her head. "All men are to lend a hand to turn the ship about! That's the rule!"

"We are hundreds of miles from land," Withers said impassively.

Ignoring the big bear, Abigail thrust her doll in Michael's face. "She saw land too! Get to your feet, Michael Ingram, or my papa will have you flogged!"

"Abigail, run along," Michael said, waving his hand at her as if she were a gnat. With a swiftness that momentarily stunned him, Abigail dropped her doll and slammed her wooden sword down on his foot.

"Ouch!" Michael yelped, grabbing for the injured appendage. Abigail laughed loudly and raised her sword.

Michael scrambled to his feet and glared down at the little girl before she could do it again. She jutted out her chin, squared her shoulders, and glared right back. That is when Michael did the unthinkable. He grabbed the doll out of her hand and angrily wrenched the head from its socket.

"She cannot possibly see land without her head," he said, and thrust the mangled doll in her face. Abigail's fierce look crumbled into one of horror as she gaped at the maimed doll.

"Good God," Withers muttered to himself as the little girl's mouth twisted into a blood-curdling scream.

Dropping her sword, she whirled about, racing for the captain's cabin and screaming for her papa with each step. Her horrific screams brought half the sailors running toward the main deck looking as if they honestly expected to find pirates.

Withers pushed himself to his feet and clamped a large hand on Michael's shoulder. "Get below, lad. I ain't losing a perfectly good mate over this." He shoved Michael with all his might toward the door leading to the lower decks.

Without argument, Michael quickly disappeared below-decks with the broken doll, making his way through the darkened bowels until he reached his bunk. There he searched for a place to hide the incriminating doll parts. Finally, in desperation, he opened his trunk and buried them beneath his few personal belongings.

"That little beastie will be the death of me yet," he muttered as he threw himself on his bunk and slung an arm over his eyes.

Several days later Michael had a change of heart after seeing the despondent little girl search the deck for her doll. He was not so hard-hearted that the poignant face did not stir him at least a little. Deciding she had paid sufficiently for her crime, he determined he would repair the damage as best he could and return the doll. With some twine, he managed to secure the head to the body, but in the process, he ripped the doll's soiled dress. With a frustrated sigh, he held up the doll and studied it in the dim light of the lantern that swung above his bunk. An idea struck him, and well after midnight, he held up his creation for his bunkmates Withers, Bailey, and Hans to see. He had fashioned a pirate scarf out of the dress and had used a stick to make a peg leg where a cloth leg had once been. He had ripped the hem from the doll's bloomers and fashioned short pants like Abigail wore. With a square of dark cloth cut from his own coat, he had made an eye patch. The doll was transformed into a miniature version of Abigail the pirate.

"Perfect," Hans drawled. "A miniature hellion to haunt my sleep."

Michael laughed and tossed the doll into his trunk. But he never got the opportunity to return the doll to little Abigail. The next morning when the ship weighed anchor off the coast of Italy, Captain Carrington put Abigail on a small skiff to shore. To the collective astonishment of all hands, the little monster was dressed in a fashionable frock with satin ribbons and a lace collar. Rumor belowdecks was that she was too much for even the captain to handle, so accompanied by Carrington's solicitor, she was being hauled off to school, where a host of nuns would try to tame her. Mildly amused, Michael watched from the main deck, the doll dangling at his side. The little beastie stood defiantly in the middle of the small boat, ranting at her papa for sending her away. As the boat made for shore, she shouted at Captain Carrington that she would return with a hundred pirates, stabbing the air with her fist for emphasis.

Captain Carrington laughed and waved. "I look forward to the challenge, sweetheart!" he cheerfully called after her. Michael watched as the beastie accidentally knocked a sailor's cap into the water. The small boat circled round several times before they were able to retrieve it, Abigail screaming at Carrington the entire time. The men on deck laughed uproariously at the comedy below them, but Michael could only shake his head. Good riddance, he thought impassively.

## *Chapter 1*

Portsmouth, 1825

Abbey Carrington stood at the bow of the luxury passenger ship with her hands stuffed into a muff. For the last hour she had watched intently as the coast of southern England grew increasingly larger, as had her excitement. She had anticipated this day well over half her lifetime.

She could not suppress a faint smile that curled her lips as she recalled the things her father had told her about her betrothed. Since she was a girl, Captain Carrington had told her Michael Ingram loved her dearly and could not wait for the day she would be old enough to be his wife. Although Abbey had not seen Michael since she was a child, her papa had seen him often and swore his esteem of her was steadfast.

His assurances had been constant and had begun when, at the age of nine, she had been sent to her first school in Rome. Her father, during a visit the following summer, had gleefully told her of the betrothal, laughing gaily when he told her how fervent Michael was in his desire to marry her one day. Abbey had, of course, been surprised by that, since Michael had grimaced painfully every time she came near him on board the *Dancing Maiden*. Her father had next come at Christmas, bearing a gift from Michael—a violin. Suspicious, Abbey questioned why her betrothed had not written. Captain Carrington assured her that Michael wanted a well-educated wife. He preferred she concentrate on her studies and not be distracted with letters. At the ripe age of eleven, Abbey had accepted that explanation without question.

Two years later her papa had removed her from the school in Rome, complaining it was too rigid. It was his considerable opinion that a girl needed to experience life, a sentiment that Abbey wholeheartedly shared. But apparently a girl did not need to experience life so much as to warrant sailing all the way to India, and her papa had placed her in the care of an old Egyptian friend while he continued east. Depositing her in Cairo, he had ruefully told her that Michael was greatly disappointed he was detained in Spain and could not visit her as he had

planned. In her adolescent fervor, Abbey was quite touched by Michael's bitter disappointment; she had felt it rather keenly herself.

When she was older and had studied deportment and elocution in Paris until she could improve no further, she had been allowed to sail to the Orient with her papa. She remembered her father's sad sigh when he informed her they had missed her betrothed by just a sennight, but he had waited as long as he could for just a glimpse of his heart's love. He had left a message for her that she should continue her classical training on the violin and that he hoped she was enjoying the study of history, a subject he loved dearly. When she had voiced her doubts several months later, her father had chastized her for her faithlessness. Michael, he had reiterated, was quite steadfast in his esteem of her. It wasn't very long after they returned to Europe that Captain Carrington cheerfully reported a conversation he had had with Michael in Amsterdam, during which the young man had professed undying love and impatience for the day he would be reunited with Abbey.

Abbey pulled her cloak tightly about her and peered up through the masts at the dull gray sky. At last deemed old enough to marry, she was now only hours away from seeing the man she had dreamed of and admired since she could remember. Her father's constant compliments of Michael's military career, the enormous shipping trade he had built, and the fact that he was now the very important Marquis of Darfield kept him constantly in Abbey's consciousness. The captain delighted in relating stories of Michael's courage in a world of ruthless shipping magnates and pirates, of fair business practices for which he was exalted among his peers, and of his relentless chase of unsavory pirates, racketeers, and injustice in general.

Her papa had been so admiring of Michael Ingram for the last twelve years that Abbey could not imagine another man who could possibly compare to him. That he wanted her as a wife thrilled her. That she might not measure up mortified her. But her occasional doubts were easily erased with a new letter from her father. The fact that Michael had never written her directly or that she had not actually seen him in all that time did not daunt her. He had been too busy building a fortune, her papa had said, so that Abbey would never want for anything. And naturally the responsibilities of his very important title did not leave him time for leisurely correspondence.

Three years ago her father's consumption had taken a turn for the worse, and he had sent her to live in America with her aunt Nan. She had been waiting patiently since then, believing the captain's letters explicitly when he told her Michael would soon send for her and their days would be filled with love, laughter, and strong, healthy children. She believed everything Captain Carrington told her about the man who was to be her husband.

Fortunately, in Virginia, it had been easy to wait for Michael. Abbey loved living on her aunt Nan's farm with her cousins, Virginia and Victoria. She loved working in the fields by day and tending her small garden in the evening. With no men about the house—except for a few freed men and occasional gentleman callers—life on the farm had been idyllic. At night, while her cousins sewed and Aunt Nan painted, Abbey would play her violin. Or they would sit and talk. And when they grew tired of talking about the farm, the people in town, and the various men that called for them, they would talk of Michael.

In truth, they all dreamed of Michael. They would take turns imagining him standing at the stern of his ship, his open shirt blowing in the breeze, his long, dark hair tousled by the wind. They imagined him, his crew incapacitated, fighting off wave after wave of pirates by himself, and boasted to one another that his skill with the sword was the greatest in all of Europe. They imagined him spurning the attentions of dozens of beautiful women with the excuse that his heart's true love was in Virginia. That particular daydream always had Victoria swooning.

Abbey dragged her gaze from the sky and looked at the coastline where Portsmouth was beginning to take shape. It wasn't until her father's solicitor sent word of his death that Abbey had her first pangs of serious doubt. The solicitor, Mr. Strait, was adamant that Abbey leave for England right away, as the will demanded she settle her father's estate by marriage. Heartsick by the news of her father's death and privately uneasy that she had not heard anything about Michael in more than eighteen months, almost immediately Abbey had begun to fight waves of doubt. What if he had changed his mind and her papa had not had opportunity to tell her?

She pulled her cloak tightly about her as she recalled the day she had pleaded with her aunt to let her remain in Virginia.

“Nonsense,” Aunt Nan had said. “Are you going to leave that poor man standing on the dock in Portsmouth waiting for you, his arms laden with two dozen roses?”

“Yes!” Virginia had cried, “he’ll have his best coach, at least the size of Mama’s parlor, with four grays waiting to take you away!”

Aunt Nan had added he would probably sweep her to the altar that very day, for he would not be willing to wait for her one more moment. Abbey had paled at that remark. Aunt Nan had read her expression and cuffed her on the shoulder, sternly reminding her it was every woman’s duty to follow their husband to the marriage bed, without complaint, and lie there patiently while he did that. Virginia and Victoria had snickered behind their hands as Abbey’s expression had turned to horror, but Aunt Nan had insisted, “You are not the first and you certainly won’t be the last woman to make do with it.”

Otherwise oblivious to the bitter cold, Abbey unthinkingly pulled her hood up over her dark head as a steady rain began to fall, and recalled how her emotions had warred during the voyage. Part of her doubted that Michael esteemed her as her father had claimed. But then again, her papa would never lie to her, so it had to be true on some level. Part of her doubted he was the heroic figure she had dreamed about. After all, how many pirates could one man fell? But her papa had said he was that and more. Perhaps the stories had been embellished, but surely they were grounded in truth.

She sighed quietly as she absently counted the masts bobbing in the port ahead. The part of her that had seen Michael through her father’s eyes all these years had finally won out over the doubts. She had nothing to fear. Michael Evan Ingram, Marquis of Darfield and Viscount Amberlay, loved her with all his heart and even now, was standing on the dock, waiting for her with two dozen roses in his arms.

She abruptly turned on her heel and marched back to her cabin. She was not going to meet the love of her life in anything less than her best traveling clothes.

Michael Evan Ingram did not meet her on the docks of Portsmouth; instead she was met by a severe-looking woman with coarse gray hair and brows knit into a permanent frown.

Despite the jostling crowd of passengers and stevedores that crowded the dock, Abbey found the woman. Had it not been for the wooden sign the woman carried with the words “Abigail Carrington” crudely painted, Abbey would have missed her.

“I’m Abigail Carrington,” Abbey said uncertainly as she bobbed a quick curtsy. The woman’s mouth puckered as she eyed her from the top of her head to the tips of her toes.

“Show your trunks to Mannheim there, and he’ll load ‘em,” she said curtly. She then turned abruptly on her heel and, tossing the sign to the gutter, stalked toward a sleek black coach emblazoned with a coat of arms bearing the name Darfield. Abbey glanced nervously to the man she had indicated, who was every bit as bedraggled as the woman.

She refused to dwell on the fact that these people were the last thing she had expected. For some reason Michael had sent them, and therefore, there had to be more than met the eye. For the moment, she would not allow herself to wonder why he had not met her himself.

“Git in the coach. Too cold out here for a young lass,” Mannheim said through a gaping smile as he struggled with her trunks. Abbey hesitated only briefly, the cold and thickening snowfall propelling her toward the coach. There were no coachmen—only a driver who did not even acknowledge her. Abbey timidly opened the door of the coach and peered inside.

“Git in, git in!” the woman barked, and shivered violently to make her point. Abbey hauled herself up, promptly tripping over her skirts onto a seat across from the woman.

“Mrs. Petty’s the name. I been hired on to see you to Blessing Park,” the woman growled.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Petty,” Abbey replied, relieved the woman had finally spoken and eager to believe she had misjudged the old crone. “I, of course, am Abigail Carrington. Well, actually, I’m Abbey.”

“I know who you are,” the dour woman snapped.

Abbey ignored her nasty demeanor and smiled bravely. If there was one thing she had learned in a life of travel, a sincere smile was welcome in all ports. For all she knew, Blessing Park was halfway across the country, and she faced the distinct possibility that she could be in the company of this sourpuss for some time.

“Are you a relative of Lord Darfield?” she asked in an effort to make polite conversation.

The woman’s red-rimmed eyes narrowed. “Certainly not!” she snapped.

Confused, Abbey bit her lower lip. “Is Lord Darfield at Blessing Park?” she asked in a tight voice, wondering just how far exactly she would have to travel with this woman.

“Don’t know. Just hired on to escort you, not to fill a book on his whereabouts,” she snarled.

Abbey nodded, mouthed the words “I see,” and slid her gaze to the window. The snow was beginning to thicken, which did not help in the least to temper the feeling of pure dread that was beginning to build in her. The coach rocked as her trunks were loaded. Suddenly, the coach lurched forward.

“How far to Blessing Park?” Abbey asked cautiously once she had secured herself again.

Mrs. Petty bestowed a disdainful gaze on her. “Two hours on a good day. Slower in the snow.”

Abbey smiled politely and wondered if her wait of twelve years for Michael Ingram was about to be eclipsed by a more interminable wait of two hours with Mrs. Petty.

They rode in tense silence for what seemed like hours to Abbey. The uncommunicative Mrs. Petty sat rigidly in her seat, staring vacantly out the window. Abbey was dying to ply her with questions but she wisely kept silent and allowed her thoughts to wander to excuses for why Michael had not met her.

Obviously something very important must have kept him, or he would have been there. She further deduced that Michael had been forced to hire an escort, and seeing how this appeared to be a very rural area, he obviously did not have many suitable candidates from which to choose. She guessed that he was now impatiently pacing in front of his hearth, having realized the snowfall would delay her arrival. He was undoubtedly very worried and was probably, at this very moment, calling for a mount, determined to search for her himself...

A jarring of the coach jolted Abbey from her daydream; it took her a moment to gather her bearings. She had sunk down against luxurious squabs. Slowly she pushed herself upright, stealing a glance at Mrs. Petty, who was sneering openly at her. Outside, the world was a blinding white; the thick snow obscured any remarkable feature in the landscape.

“Where are we?” Abbey asked.

“Pemberheath,” Mrs. Petty grunted, then leaned forward to peer outside.

“Pemberheath?” Abbey did not expect her to answer, and not one to disappoint, Mrs. Petty did not. The coach of the door was suddenly thrown open, and the toothless Mannheim shoved his head inside.

“Message says to stay here overnight. Roads are bad,” he said with a grunt.

“Overnight?” Mrs. Petty fairly shrieked.

Mannheim shrugged indifferently. “He left some coin and arranged for two rooms.” With that his head disappeared and the coach door slammed shut.

Mrs. Petty turned a murderous gaze to Abbey as if she had caused the foul weather. “I ain’t no nursemaid, miss. You got to fend for yourself,” she snapped.

Abbey raised one finely sculpted dark brow and, biting back the stinging rebuke that she had never been waited on in her life and certainly wasn’t going to start with the likes of her, answered coolly, “I am quite capable of fending for myself, Mrs. Petty.”

Mrs. Petty mumbled something under her breath before flinging the coach door open. Without a word to Abbey, she climbed out and began to stalk away, taking giant steps in the deep snow. Finally she turned and glanced over her shoulder.

“Well? Come on, then!” she snapped, and disappeared into the white haze.

Abbey sighed wearily, pulled her hood up and climbed down from the coach. She certainly hoped Michael would show himself soon.

Despite the heavy snowfall, the common room of the small inn was very crowded. A group of boisterous men was gathered around the dart board, while

smaller groups of men and a few women were scattered about rough-hewn tables. The stench of ale permeated Abbey's senses, as did the uncomfortable notion that heads swiveled toward her and lips curled at the sight of her.

Mrs. Petty had stopped to talk to a rotund man with a red, rubbery nose and a dirty apron stretched across his ample belly. He bent his head forward, listening, then motioned toward the stairs with the three empty tankards he held in one hand. Without looking back, Mrs. Petty began to make her way up a rickety staircase. Abbey supposed she should follow, and lifting her chin, she marched past the ogling men at the dart board, wended her way through the crush of tables, and up the stairs.

The room in which she found Mrs. Petty was small and sparsely furnished. A single bed was shoved up against one wall, just a few feet from a charcoal brazier that provided the only heat in the room. A mound of dirty blankets was stacked next to the single chair. The only other furnishings were an old basin and a small, tarnished mirror. Abbey glanced at Mrs. Petty, who was standing in the middle of the room with her feet spread apart and her hands on her hips.

She returned a sidelong look at Abbey. "Can't sleep on the floor. Got a bad back," she announced, and tossed her cloak on the bed. The woman was beginning to grate on her nerves. Whoever this old goat was, Abbey suspected she had been paid well enough to see her to her destination and could at least be expected to be civil.

"I will sleep on the floor provided you tell me how far to Blessing Park," Abbey said defiantly.

Mrs. Petty lifted her arms to remove her bonnet and shrugged. "Five miles, not more." She tossed her bonnet onto the chair before stooping to stir the coals in the brazier.

"Is Lord Darfield there?" Abbey asked as she removed her cloak and draped it across the back of the chair.

“I told you, I don’t know. His secretary hired me on.”

Abbey turned to the little window and rubbed the stiffness in her neck. Why on earth was it too much to ask where her fiance was and when he would come for her? Calm down, she told herself. She had waited all these years; surely one more night would not kill her. At least she certainly hoped it wouldn’t.

“Is he going to meet us here?” she asked hopefully.

“You ask a lot of questions, missy,” Mrs. Petty replied rudely.

Abbey groaned with exasperation, picked up the crone’s bonnet, and tossed it on the bed. With a frustrated sigh, she sank into the chair, righting herself when it swayed precariously with her weight. Mrs. Petty was busy with the brazier, and Abbey watched as she fidgeted with the thing, noticing how rough the woman’s hands were. She shifted her gaze to her feet, which were covered by a pair of old, cracked leather boots that looked as if they were as old as the woman herself. She felt a sudden, unwelcome pang of pity and could almost hear Aunt Nan urging her to be charitable. She was stuck with this woman at least for one night, and it would be to her advantage to befriend her.

“I’m rather hungry. Do you suppose they’d send up a tray?”

Mrs. Petty snorted derisively. “This ain’t no fancy inn. You got to go downstairs if you’re hungry.”

“Will you join me? I would rather imagine you are hungry, too.”

“It takes coin to eat at an inn,” Mrs. Petty mumbled.

“I have coin,” Abbey insisted.

Mrs. Petty peered suspiciously over her shoulder at Abbey. “Don’t want your charity.”

“It’s not charity. Consider it my thanks for seeing me through a rather trying day,” she said brightly, trying to make her expression as sincere as she could.

Mrs. Petty considered her another moment. “I ain’t no duenna,” she cautioned.

To Abbey, that suggestion was nearly as absurd as their present situation. “I really did not think you were, Mrs. Petty,” she replied. “Come on then, I’m famished. And do you know, I think I would like an ale. Do you like ale?” Abbey started to move toward the door, and from the corner of her eye she saw Mrs. Petty stand and smooth her plain brown skirt.

“It ain’t proper for a young miss to drink ale,” she muttered disapprovingly as she patted her thin gray hair.

“Why, Mrs. Petty, that sounded positively like a duenna.” Abbey laughed as she opened the door, and when Mrs. Petty passed, she mocked a curtsy fit for a queen behind the sour woman’s back.

They were shown to one of two private rooms in the back of the inn. As they waited for the innkeeper to clear the table, Abbey noticed a man seated in the room next to theirs. He was sitting alone, his long, muscular legs stretched in front of him and crossed at the ankles. He had one hand on a tankard, the other shoved in the top of his buff trousers. He was much better dressed than the other patrons, with a neckcloth tied simply at his throat and a brown brocade waistcoat beneath a tan riding coat. He still wore his hat, and since he was sitting in the shadows, she could not see his face. The only thing she noticed was the red glow of the cigar that

was clenched between his teeth. Suddenly conscious she was staring, Abbey nodded politely, then crowded behind Mrs. Petty into the other room.

Abbey ordered two ales and two pies, and as they waited, she perched her chin atop her fist and eyed the very stoic Mrs. Petty. They sat in complete silence until the innkeeper brought the food. Only then did Mrs. Petty make a guttural sound and attack the food with a gusto that suggested she had not eaten in some time.

And the meat pie was awful. Abbey picked at it while she sipped her ale, choosing to rearrange the carrots to one side instead of eating them. When Mrs. Petty wiped her wooden bowl clean, she eyed Abbey's expectantly until the young woman pushed it across the table to her. "Really, I am not hungry," she said, but it was plain Mrs. Petty did not care if she was or not.

"I was expecting Lord Darfield to meet me," Abbey prompted as she watched the woman dig into her second pie.

"That's a laugh," Mrs. Petty said with a mouthful of food.

Surprised, Abbey asked, "Why is that?"

"Well, to begin with, he's a marquis, and a marquis don't go to the docks to meet his visitor. The visitor comes to him." Mrs. Petty spoke as if she were talking to an ignorant child.

"I see your point"—Abbey nodded politely—"except that I am not really a visitor."

Mrs. Petty stopped her chewing and glanced up. "What are you then?"