

*Giselle Galloway's world, and her reputation as a lady, rests on the broad shoulders of Malcolm MacFarlane, as they are forced into a common mission. Jaded from his poor treatment of her when they were children, can she trust him or will her worlds collide?*

# **Moonhaven Book One: MacFarlane's Lantern**

by Kylie Casper

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Boonhaven

• Book One •

*MacFarlane's  
Lantern*

*Zylie Casper*

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# 1

*Outskirts of Paris, France, September 1659*

"Marcus! Faster, boy! Grab her!"

Giselle's heart thudded hard against her ribcage as she glanced over her shoulder, her rich brunette hair tumbling down her back. The two men were almost at her heels, the younger one closing in. Punishing her lungs with every breath, she urged her legs to work harder. The hem of her skirt caught on a stray branch of a nearby shrub and ripped. Before she could collect up the volumes of her skirt, the tip of her boot slipped into the gap in the fabric and she careened to the ground. Biting her tongue in the process, the taste of iron filled her mouth and she swallowed the warm, coagulating liquid as she scrambled to her feet.

Marcus, the younger of her pursuers, grabbed her and linking his arms through hers, pinned her elbows against her back. She cried out in frustration.

The older pursuer grinned devilishly at her as he neared. Lucian. He firmly grabbed her chin between his rough fingers. The scent of horses and alfalfa filled her nostrils. A terrible gleam flickered in his eyes. "You gave us quite the chase, didn't you?" The corner of his mouth turned up. "Your father would be so proud."

Giselle spat blood at his feet before she choked on it.

"Now that's not very ladylike," he jeered.

"This isn't either!" She leaned back on Marcus behind her, and lifting her feet, rammed them into Lucian's gut. He doubled back and she was able to free herself from Marcus. Her fist connected with Marcus' side and she deftly kicked his legs out from under him. Lucian recovered and charged at her. She blocked his advance with her forearm and pivoted away from him, poised to defend herself. Lucian smiled, narrowed his eyes at her and hunched over into an attack position. Just as Lucian sprang to grab her, a shadow crossed over them and tackled him to the ground.

"Run, lass, run!" a deep Scottish brogue urged her.

"Malcolm! Malcolm! Wait!" Another Scottish voice broke through the chaos.

She turned towards the call and saw a carriage stopped nearby. Kade hung halfway out of the carriage, an amused grin on his face. The sound of dogs barking echoed in her ears. She whipped back to face Malcolm, who still had Lucian pinned on the ground. Rage swirled within her. What was *he* doing here, and why was he interfering with her training? She stood over

them, hands dug into her hips, and glared through narrowed eyes. "Unhand him. Now!"

A look of sheer confusion washed over Malcolm's face. "Excuse me?" he half-stammered, slowly rising to his feet. He was much taller and more muscular than she remembered.

Giselle offered her hand to Lucian. "What were you thinking?" she demanded of Malcolm, helping Lucian, the groom, to his feet. She signaled to Marcus, the young freckled stable boy, to fetch her horse.

Malcolm's face flushed and he indignantly crossed his arms in front of his chest. "Saving you."

She cocked her head to one side, her mouth twisted up in one corner. "I do not need saving, thank you. We were in the middle of a training exercise."

"Well, I see that now." He brushed his finger across the top of his nose and turned to Lucian. "I apologize."

Lucian begrudgingly acknowledged him with a slight nod and aided Giselle onto her horse. With a quick glance at Kade, she reared up her horse and galloped away. A barrage of emotions swirled within her and a flood of repressed memories flashed to her mind. Seeing Malcolm again, she was immediately transported to her childhood.

She was six. Her father had just finished his instruction on offensive swordsmanship to the three of them and left them on their own to practice their techniques. Malcolm and Kade had paired off together, leaving her alone with the practice dummy. Unwilling to appear weak, she insisted on using the same type of swords as the boys, a Scottish Claymore. The blade was taller than she was, and, even gripping it with both hands, she struggled to lift it more than a few inches off the ground, much less swing it. After a few tries, she heard the cackle of the boys' laughter around her. She buried her chin in her chest and summoned all the strength she could muster to lift it again. She thought she raised it a little higher that time. But more snide laughter behind her, and that time just from Malcolm. Then, the scrape of boots on the cobblestones.

"Here," Kade said, "choke your hands up to the hilt." He slid her white knuckled hands further up the grip. "This will give you more control." He stepped back and encouragingly motioned for her to try.

Focused on her hands, she slowly raised her trembling arms up to wield the sword. Her muscles protested as she swung and nearly slipped and fell. Her cheeks felt hot and she blinked back tears of frustration. She tried again and again, never quite hitting the dummy higher than where his shins would have been.

"Forget it, Kade. Unless she's fighting an army of gnomes, she'll never hurt anyone with that!" Malcolm called. His cruel laughter caused her cheeks to burn hotter and her heart to thud with anger.

"Give her a chance, Mal," Kade retorted, and gave her an encouraging nod.

Determined to prove Malcolm wrong, she tried again and again until she could no longer lift her arms.

"I told you. Halfling belongs with her own faerie kind," Malcolm jeered. "Go play with your doll like a good little girl."

Her hands clenched into fists. She threw down the sword and raised herself onto her toes. She shouted back insults, but Malcolm was of quicker wit than she. Burning with anger and embarrassment, she ran away toward the gardens and hid herself in the hedge maze. Among the scent of soil and fresh cut leaves she cried. Montague, one of the stable boys and her dearest friend, found her and comforted her. Lucian discovered them and chided him for it, but that did not stop Montague. Every training session ended like this, despite Kade's attempts to help her; and Montague's tender encouragement.

Giselle swallowed the lump that this memory created as she rode across the lawn and past the gardens to the stables. Joseph, the other groom, and Philippe, another stable boy, helped her down from her horse and she stormed across the courtyard.

Her father waited for her, seemingly prepared to receive her wrath. "How was your training?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"Malcolm interrupted it." She drew a deep breath and stood straighter. She may have had her mother's French poise, but she had her father's Scottish temper. "Were you going to tell me that *he* was coming? I do not appreciate the deception."

Her father rested his hand on her shoulder. "It has been years. You are not still mad at him, are you?"

Before she could answer, a pair of Great Danes bounded around the corner of the house and raced toward them. Lucian was not far behind, attempting to catch their leashes.

"I believe that is our cue to finish this discussion later." Her father chuckled when Malcolm's dogs stopped at his feet.

"Sorry, sir, they are daft little buggers. The footman did not have a firm grip before he let them out of the carriage," Lucian breathlessly explained when he caught up to them.

"And you were the lucky one to wrangle them?" her father lightly teased, affectionately rubbing the dogs' ears.

"Yes, sir. I suppose because they are the size of ponies," Lucian replied with a trace of a smirk playing on his thin lips.

"It seems Malcolm is vexing both of us today, Lucian," Giselle added with a wry smile.

"Indeed, Miss. But to your credit, you would have bested us on your own."

"Thank you, Lucian," she replied with a nod.

Her father glanced at the groom. "I will be sure the dogs are led inside. Go see to the horses."

"Yes, sir." Lucian hastily inclined his head and departed.

While the dogs curiously sniffed Giselle's hands, her father commented, "Beautiful creatures, aren't they? Ares, the chocolate colored one here, is the male, Athena is the female. Malcolm had just acquired them when I went to visit Moonhaven last month."

She remembered particularly avoiding that visit. Malcolm had finished his service with the Musketeers and just returned home to Moonhaven. She gladly accepted a timely invitation for tea with her cousin and friends. All so she did not have to see Malcolm. And now, she must endure a meal with him. At least it was only that and nothing more. As she let her mind wander, she absently ran her hand over Athena's soft, dove gray fur when she heard the familiar creak of the salon doors opening. The dogs darted past her, to get to the open doorway, nearly knocking her over.

"Blasted beasts!" Aunt Fiona cried from the door and sidestepped out of their way.

Her father strode across the courtyard to help her aunt while Giselle meandered across the cobblestones. The courtyard was enclosed on three sides by the light gray limestone manor walls. A lovely scent filled the air. It came from pink-blushed flowering vines that languidly crawled up the walls, adding a touch of whimsy to an otherwise cold exterior. This was her mother's family estate, Aveline, her birthplace. Her uncle and his family resided here, and it was the only home she knew. Giselle stepped into the house and was immediately accosted by her aunt and her maid.

"Giselle," Aunt Fiona exclaimed with a faint Scottish accent. "You are quite disheveled!" Although Aunt Fiona was only three years older than her, becoming a mother had made the age gap wider.

Giselle tucked a few stray strands of her deep brunette hair into place, trying not to snap back at her aunt. It was Malcolm she was angry at, she reminded herself, not Aunt Fiona. "My gown is torn, so I will excuse myself to my room then," she replied coolly. Aunt Fiona followed her, obviously not trusting her to return to join the rest of the family later.

Once inside the room, Janessa, her no-nonsense maid, indicated to the stool with a sharp nod of her head. "Sit, miss, I'll have you fixed up in a tick."

Giselle refrained from complaining as Janessa and Aunt Fiona dressed her in a new gown, fixed her hair, and sprayed her with vanilla lavender oil. Janessa swapped out her earrings for more ornate ones and massaged moisturizing cream into her hands. She finished with a quick flounce of powder on her nose and a dabbed stain on her lips.

"Perfect," Aunt Fiona exclaimed and beckoned to her. "Come now, they are waiting."

Giselle sighed, smoothed her champagne silk gown and followed her into the bright and comfortable drawing room.

Against the backdrop of her father and Aunt Fiona's brothers, Uncle Pierre stood apart in the room; a dark-complexioned Frenchman, impeccably dressed in charcoal satin breeches with a white silk waistcoat. His facial features were similar in appearance to her deceased mother. He seemed small compared to the Scotsmen, clad in kilts of the same color, pattern, and sporrans. Quickly scanning the room, Giselle's eyes flicked to Malcolm. His dogs sat erect on either side of him, and she bit back a wave of anger and resentment.

She tossed her hair, exclaiming in an impetuous tone, "I was not aware we were in the habit of entertaining giants."

A collective chuckle filled the air and her gaze focused on Kade, the youngest brother—her hero. At nineteen, he was several inches shorter than Malcolm, though still formidable in stature. His mischievous smile and sparkling hazel eyes dispelled her aloofness. He was also a terrible flirt, which irritated Malcolm, and so she used that to her advantage. "Kade!" she cried and rushed into his outstretched arms. He swung her into an embrace.

"Och, I've missed you, lass." He planted a quick kiss on her cheek and returned her to the ground. "You are quite grown up since last spring," he replied with his own Scottish accent, slightly stronger than Aunt Fiona's. "And with that blushing glow, you are just as bonny as ever! Tell me, aside from stable hands, how many suitors do you have chasing after you?"

She giggled at his gallantry and relished the ease she felt around him. Kade was adept at reading her, however, so she deftly avoided his question. Best if she dangled some bait. "Oh," she coyly shrugged, "just a merchant son here and there."

He pushed a strand of straight, dark brown hair behind his ear. "And you will break their hearts, I expect." He winked and tucked her arm under his.

She turned to Banner. "It is wonderful to see you again, Captain Monnock," Giselle courteously said.

Banner was a fellow clansman and close family friend, and at thirty-one, he was the same age as Uncle Pierre. There was a rugged, handsome quality to him, like that of a refined stable hand. He bent and kissed her hand. "The pleasure is mine, Giselle," he replied in a thick burr, "though I do not need to remind you that you may address me by my given name."

"Very well, Banner, how is *This I'll Defend* faring?"

"Ah, wonderful. My new first mate is adjusting famously."

Curious, Giselle raised her eyebrow at Kade. "Are you not the first mate?"

"I am now Captain of *Moonlight Raider*."

She smiled proudly up at him. "Congratulations!" Cocking her head to one side, she inquired, "Interesting name for the ship, *Moonlight Raider*. It sounds like a pirate ship from one of the children's fairy tales. Did you choose that name?"

"That would be my contribution, lass," came a deep, velvety baritone behind her.

Giselle released her grasp of Kade's arm and turned to the source of that address. Malcolm. Now that she was not blinded by irritation and disgrace for interrupting her training session, she could fully take in the subject before her. At twenty-one, four years older than her, he was certainly different now. His shoulders had broadened, and his torso narrowed neatly at his waist. His short, dark russet hair and sparkling emerald eyes were striking. Suffice it to say, his appearance thoroughly arrested her, and she craned her neck to meet his gaze.

"Do not tell me you are a captain as well?" she scoffed.

Kade and Banner snorted in amusement at her comment, but Malcolm cut them off. "You are still a feisty lass, no?" he teased, his auburn brow raised.

"Yes, she can be quite a handful," her father quipped. He squeezed her shoulder and gave her a wink. "Malcolm has taken over his father's portion of the business and has moved here to help Pierre and me. He will take my place as the trainer for the Garde."

Malcolm glanced down at her. "Perhaps you can help me prepare, lass?"

Her icy blue eyes met his emerald ones, and in them she discovered a sadness that, despite her stubbornness, softened her ever so slightly. "Hmmm, if I must," she replied coolly, feeling a sting of betrayal toward her father for having kept the arrangements from her. They never had secrets between them.

He laughed softly. "Thank you, Giselle."

Uncle Pierre clasped his hands together. "Now, shall we discuss business over dinner?"

Having endured enough civility between her and Malcolm, Giselle quickly slipped her arm through Kade's.

"Be easy on him, lass," Kade whispered in her ear. "He took the punishment for you when you broke your father's beloved bow."

"I-I did not know he did that." She had broken it at the last training session she had had with Malcolm, nearly a decade ago.

"He's changed since you saw him last. You owe him a second chance."

Clearly. She glanced at him sideways with raised brow but did not reply. A little banter would not erase years of torment. The wonderful, spicy aroma of dinner, however, soothed the pit in her stomach.

Uncle Pierre helped Aunt Fiona into one of the navy velvet chairs before he sat at the head of the large mahogany table. Giselle seated herself at her father's right, where she always sat, with Kade sitting next to her. To her surprise, and dismay, Malcolm swiftly took the empty chair across from her. And now she must look at him while she ate. Why must he be here to vex her? Could he not meet Uncle Pierre and Father elsewhere to learn?

After her uncle blessed the meal, Kade turned to her, "I noticed you have a new book on your desk. *The Book of the City of Ladies*, was it?"

"Yes, by Christine de Pizan," she replied. "Aunt Kianda thought I might enjoy it."

"I am most certain that her dastardly husband does not approve," Kade quipped.

"And that is why I am reading it," she said with a self-satisfied smirk. Anything she could do to irritate Uncle Audelon, she would. He was constantly trying to control her social life behind her father's back, believing that he had the right to since he was a viscount and a member of court.

Her father cleared his throat and they discussed changes in the company. She wished she had chosen to sit next to Aunt Fiona; the men's business "talk" rarely included her. She allowed her mind to wander and sought to acknowledge that Malcolm would now be living under the same roof. However, she was far from accepting it. And she was to train with him! It took every ounce of effort to plaster a civil look on her face when inside she desired to scream. Certainly, her father meant no malice, but it *felt* like he went out of his way to hide this from her. Even Aunt Fiona had kept this from her. It was hardly characteristic—they did not keep secrets either. Despite being married to her uncle, Fiona was her friend first.

"Everything is settled, then." Uncle Pierre's voice broke through her thoughts. "Kade shall have his ship ready within the fortnight. Once Malcolm has a good rapport with the merchants, we shall introduce the other changes."

The matter settled, Giselle engaged Kade in some subtle banter, filling him in on the local gossip in exchange for amusing anecdotes of his travels. She caught Malcolm stealing glances at her and once or twice opened his mouth to speak to her, but then quickly returned to his meal. His behavior vexed and aroused curiosity all at once.

At the end of their meal, Aunt Fiona left to put her children to bed and Uncle Pierre looked to the brothers. "Come, I am sure you would like to settle in. I will have Florian show you to your rooms."

Kade squeezed her hand before leaving with Banner, her father, Uncle Pierre, and Florian, their middle-aged, richly Italian steward, but Malcolm

made no move to rise. She inwardly sighed and rolled her eyes. Why did he insist upon being near her? Could he not recognize when his presence was unwanted?

"Are you not tired?" she turned to ask him, making every effort to appear civil.

Shaking his head, he replied, "No, I would prefer to remain in your company."

The tortured expression on his face should have aroused a semblance of sympathy, but it simply *pinged* off the armor protecting her heart. What to do with him? She could not simply leave him here; that would give him too much satisfaction, to be sure. She was curious as to why he insisted on remaining with her when, for so many years he wanted nothing to do with her. At the very least, maybe a less intimate room would create much needed space between them.

"Would you like to retire to the parlor? The chairs are far more comfortable in there." She walked to the adjacent room and gestured to an overstuffed maroon chair with an intricate pattern of gold embroidery. She chose the chair furthest from him. They sat in awkward silence for a moment before she half-blurted, "So, you resigned from the Musketeers?"

"More of a transfer." He folded his hands in his lap. "What are you learning presently?"

She wondered why he did not want to discuss his military exploits. Most young men did, especially Musketeers. However, she decided it best not to press the issue and humored his inquiry. "Latin, literature, history, and Father gives me the ledgers so I may improve my mathematics."

"That is a great many courses."

"Is it?" she smugly asked. "That is what I have always done. I will have my studies finished by the end of this month. Father has other ventures for me to pursue." She paused, ready to be done with this discourse. "And of course, he insists upon my training as well."

"You are not an expert yet?"

Hiding her irritation with his tone, she replied, "Though I have been training since I was three, there is always more to learn."

"You are not like other lasses, are you?" he teased.

She pondered a moment, trying to decide if it was a backhanded compliment. "If you mean I am not a ninny like most young ladies my age, then, no, I suppose I am not."

Her father appeared in the doorway with the rest of the party. "Giselle does have an eye for style and a particularly garrulous nature."

Malcolm laughed softly. "I do not mind a bit. It is something I took for granted when I was younger."

Her father smiled at her. "Giselle, you have a very full schedule tomorrow. You should get some rest. We will train first thing."

"Yes, Father." At her father's request, it was her responsibility to plan the dinner party for the neighbors and merchants for tomorrow night. This would be her first party, and she had worked very hard over the last few weeks to plan every detail to perfection. She had hoped that Montague would have been able to attend, but he was in the middle of his surgical apprenticeship with his stepfather. She rose from the chair; Malcolm did as well. "Good night." She could not even bring herself to say his name.

"Good night, Giselle." He leaned toward her, but she stepped back and turned to bid good-night to the others.

"Good night, Banner," she said and hugged him.

"Sleep well, Giselle," he replied, releasing her.

She threaded her arms around Kade's waist and relaxed when his strong arms tightened around her. "I am so very glad you are here," she whispered into his chest. "I do hope you are better than last I saw you."

"The worst is over for both of us," he murmured into her hair and kissed her forehead. "Good night, lass."

She smiled warmly at him and turned to her aunt and uncle. "Good night," she said between kissing each of their cheeks. "I love you both."

"Good night, love," Aunt Fiona replied with a quick, warm hug.

"Good night, darling," Uncle Pierre replied, kissing her cheek and embracing her a moment. "My apologies for springing these changes on you," he murmured.

She pulled back and smiled ruefully, replying in a low voice, "I will adjust, just as I did when the children were born." She winked and turned to her father. "Good night, Father. I love you." She stretched her arms around his neck to embrace him.

His bushy chestnut and russet colored moustache and goatee tickled her skin as he bent down to kiss her forehead. "I love you too, *a leannan*<sup>1</sup>." He rested his palm against her cheek. "Let forgiveness permeate your heart."

She released her grasp of him and quit the room. Lingering in the hall, she heard Malcolm say, "Despite the misunderstanding earlier, that went better than I expected, but I do not think she is too happy to be living under the same roof."

"Well, at least you can thank me for warming her up for you," Kade quickly interjected.

"Gallard, I told you that you should have discussed it with her first," Aunt Fiona commented to Giselle's father. Giselle quickly forgave her. She and Uncle Pierre *were* on her side after all.

"I did not expect her to have held a grudge for this long," her father replied with some bafflement.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaelic translation: darling

"Considering she had tea at Audelon's to avoid Moonhaven last month, I would say she is not likely to be open to the idea," Aunt Fiona explained. "Sorry, Malcolm, but you have your work cut out for you."

"Is there anything I may do to ease the tension between us?" he asked in a dejected tone.

"Flowers might help," Aunt Fiona suggested. "She likes magnolias the best."

"Or walks in the garden and perhaps a horseback ride along the estate?" her father piped in.

"Thank you, that is a good start," Malcolm replied.

*Hardly.* But, she sighed to herself, she must make an effort as well. She made a mental note to pray for a softer heart and the strength to forgive him. She closed her door and allowed Janessa to prepare her for bed. Her thoughts were a blur with mental checklists for tomorrow evening, considerations for her new living arrangements, and thoughts of her dear Montague. Perhaps she should write to him. He would have excellent advice. Once Janessa had left her for the night, Giselle bent over her parchment and quill.

September 1659

*My Dearest Montague,*

*I miss you already! Father and I had such a wonderful time with you and your parents. Your stables and grounds are well kept and lovely to ride through! After each visit I am always reminded of how much I miss your family, your company in particular.*

*As you know, our annual ball is tomorrow evening and I am in charge. I know I should be sleeping right now, in preparation for the morrow, but I cannot do so until I rid my mind of vexation, the source of which is Malcolm. I am certain you remember him; Aunt Fiona's elder brother? Father and Uncle Pierre have welcomed him to live at Aveline. He is to learn the business from them and take Father's place as the Garde's training officer. And I am to help him prepare! The nerve of him! How am I to endure this torment? And your poor brother! He first had to endure being tackled by Malcolm and then chase after his dogs because the footman lost hold of them. They are beautiful beasts, Great Danes, but such a nightmare for Lucian to wrangle! Dear Monte, I do not intend to complain. You are always sweet to listen. How I wish we were together. I miss you so very much! I hope to have happier news next time I write.*

*Yours,  
Giselle*

## 2

A rich paradisiac dawn settled around Giselle, bathing her father and her in sunlight. Every day she would usually train in the courtyard with him before dinner, after he returned from the palace, where he served as a training officer for the Royal Garde du Corps. However, the evening's ball required a morning training. The courtyard was silent except for the sound of their rapiers clashing. She felt the hum of the vibration through her wrist when she blocked his advance.

"Aye, lass, flick your wrist, just like that," her father instructed.

They parried a moment longer before she pointedly asked, "Father, is there a reason you continue to teach me new ways to hurt a man?"

Her father hesitated and ran his calloused finger and thumb through his beard before he replied, "I want you to be able to defend yourself, my lass. There was much turmoil in Scotland when I was a lad, and there still is. I saw unspeakable things done to the women of our clan." Resting a heavy hand on her shoulder, he locked his eyes with hers. "I never want you to have to face that. I want you to have the option of escape." He winked and nostalgically teased, "And a wee bit because your brothers never lived long enough for me to train them."

"And that is why you spent so much time with Kade?"

"Aye, and Malcolm, yes. Now. Stalling will not excuse you from training," he reminded her and sheathed his sword.

She sheathed hers and reached for the crossbow from the nearby table. She focused her eye on the brightly painted target which sat in the grass nearly a hundred yards away. She slowly inhaled and exhaled to clear her mind of distractions. Her shoulders strained with tension until she released the trigger of the crossbow. The arrow sailed in a beautiful arc and pierced the target in the circle just outside the bull's-eye. She forgot to account for the slight breeze.

"You are getting better, Giselle," her father commented. "I have trainees that cannot shoot as well as you."

She hastily snatched up another arrow from her quill. The faint chaos of the children playing with their uncles reached her ears. Kade and Malcolm's playful shouts and growls intermingled with the children's shrieks and laughter. She waited for the noise to halt before she raised her crossbow once more. Planting her feet and taking aim, she was determined to hit her mark. She inhaled, then exhaled before releasing the trigger. Bull's-eye. Excellent timing too, for breakfast was ready, and she must face the rest of her day.

The salon was bathed in golden autumn sunlight when Malcolm and Kade entered late the following afternoon. The tables had been impeccably arranged with their finest china and tall sprays of pastel floral topiaries. The polished dance floor and orchestra gleamed under the sparkling chandeliers. Giselle had truly accentuated the architectural details of the high windows, moldings, and casings with her design choices for the tables and floral arrangements. Malcolm had been to countless social events at the Louvre palace but had never seen such subtle opulence and imagined this was close to what heaven must look like. A warm feeling of peace washed over him, and he was grateful for the chance at a new beginning. Today marked the first time since he learned of his ex-fiancée's betrayal that he could not wait to rise from bed. True, he was still overcoming a broken heart, but that was not occupying his thoughts. It was Giselle.

While Giselle flit about the salon with Fiona in last-minute preparation, he studied her with great care, not quite believing the young woman before him was the same little girl he had so mercilessly teased so long ago. Smiling at her with quiet awe, he took notice of the Scottish attributes of her father—her height and ardent character—yet the dark hair and delicate facial features of her French mother. He felt extreme regret at calling her “halfling,” for it was the blending of those features that gave her her unique beauty. After her passable civility toward him last night, he was eager to make amends. However, she had been locked up in here all-day making preparations. He had barely seen her at all—but now the vision before him was worth the wait.

Giselle paused a moment to greet them all, bringing with her that lovely blend of vanilla and lavender. She approached his brother first and grasped the crook of his arm. “Kade, you shall have many ladies swooning,” she playfully exclaimed and kissed his cheek. Her lips left a perfect pink imprint behind. “Oh, dear!” she exclaimed and hurried to find her handkerchief. “I am so very sorry.”

“I would have worn it proudly, lass,” Kade teased and bent slightly toward her.

She carefully wiped his cheek, adding, “That, I do not doubt but if you are to catch any ladies tonight, you must appear to be a bachelor.” Smiling still, she put her handkerchief away. Her eyes flicked to Malcolm and she stepped away from Kade. Malcolm had taken great care to dress handsomely in silk breeches and a matching waistcoat and coat. “You look nice as well, Malcolm. And thank you for the lovely flowers. It was a pleasant surprise to wake up to.”

“It was my pleasure.” He could not help but smile at hearing his name fall from her lips. This warm feeling was something he had been devoid of

for months. The same affections he had held for her years ago began to resurface and he hoped it was not too late to win her heart.

Kade chimed in, "Introduced or no, you'll have suitors chasing after you, lass." He mischievously raised a brow. "Unless there is already a special suitor?"

An attractive blush grazed her cheeks and she turned away. Malcolm wished he could banter with her as Kade did, but the moment was interrupted by the entrance of Celina Charmaine, Giselle's cousin on her mother's side.

"Giselle!" Celina excitedly called from across the salon. Her light honey-colored skin glowed against her straight, jet black hair. Celina was a younger, slighter version of her mother, Kianda. "Oh, my! What a lovely set up you have! I have not seen this room so absolutely breathtaking before!" She wrapped her arms around Giselle's waist.

"Thank you, Celina." Giselle hugged her sixteen-year-old cousin.

"You must do my wedding when the time comes. Now, I cannot wait for the rest of the guests to arrive." Celina's amber eyes sparkled, and she exclaimed, "And you look most radiant! Is this a new gown?"

Giselle fondly smoothed the aqua satin fabric. "Yes, thank you, it was actually one of my mother's gowns when she was younger."

"The color is divine on you!" Celina turned to Malcolm and Kade. "You must be Aunt Fiona's brothers. It has been a long while. My, how you have changed!"

"As have you," Kade replied, winking flirtatiously. "Will your parents be joining you this evening?"

"Oh, yes! They will be along shortly." Her face lit up and she beamed when Banner appeared at Malcolm's elbow. "Captain Monnock, it is such a pleasure to see you again. Mother will be most happy that you are here."

Banner bowed slightly. "Miss Celina, I am honored to see that you are well." He bowed further when Audelon and Kianda joined them. "Lord Audelon and Lady Kianda."

"Oh, Captain Monnock!" Kianda cried in her odd accent and grasped his hands. She was a novelty, like her daughter, with the intoxicating mix of Dutch and distant Iroquois heritage. "There is no need for that with me, please." She smiled warmly at him. "How are you faring?"

"Well, very well, milady. Lord Pierre ensures that my crew and I remain busy."

"And that is wonderful for business, is it not, Captain Monnock?" Audelon interjected with a charming smile.

"Aye, it 'tis, my lord," Banner replied, eyes slightly narrowed at him. "We must keep that title and grand estate running."

Audelon's smiled widened and he turned to Malcolm, "I hear congratulations are in order. Training officer for the Garde! I am certain that Captain Marin will have great use for you, Colonel MacFarlane."

"Thank you, my lord."

Audelon continued. "I cannot imagine why you would prefer to leave a high-ranking position with the Musketeers, though."

Giselle's eyes darted toward his and his heart nearly stopped. Collecting himself, Malcolm stood straighter and held her gaze. "It did not allow time for my other pursuits." He glanced back at Audelon. "I look forward to taking an *active* role in politics and in our company, my lord."

Giselle loudly cleared her throat. "Well, gentlemen, I hate to break up your amusing game, but I must excuse myself to greet the other guests."

"Actually, my dear niece, I shall join you." Audelon placed his hand in the middle of her back. "There is someone I would like for you to meet." With a quick, smug glance at Malcolm, he led Giselle away.

"I apologize for his abruptness," Kianda quickly added.

"You should not have to apologize for him, Mother," Celina softly exclaimed.

Kianda smiled a wide, charming smile and changed the subject. "I hear you have your own ship now, Kade. How wonderful."

"Aye. Banner and I hope to have a crew arranged within the fortnight."

Malcolm wondered at Audelon's behavior and maneuvered closer to them in order to eavesdrop.

"Monsieur LaRoux, this is my niece, Mademoiselle Giselle Galloway," Malcolm heard Audelon say.

"Ah, yes, Gallard's enchanting daughter. Your reputation precedes you, Mademoiselle," Monsieur LaRoux replied, pressing Giselle's hand between his own. "Eduard Devlin has convinced my son to be as enamored with you as he is."

Giselle inclined her head. "That is very kind of you, Monsieur, but Eduard tends to exaggerate."

"Nonsense, Giselle!" Audelon lightly corrected her. "Your father needn't shelter you from society. You have your choice of advantageous matches. There are many eligible merchant sons, including the younger Monsieur LaRoux." He gripped her arm a little tighter. "And it would be a hospitable decision."

"I was not aware that I am now part of our inventory, Uncle." She inclined her head once more and thankfully excused herself to join her father and Pierre.

Malcolm narrowed his eyes at Audelon. He knew more what lay under the public facades of these merchant sons and understood Gallard's

need to protect Giselle from society. They were both inauspicious witnesses to the unseemly and scandalous lives of the nobility and gentry.

Turning his attention from Audelon, he stole glances at her while she greeted her other guests. She did, in fact, look radiant. It amazed him how graceful she was, with not only a sword but also with the merchants. Her father and Gran were correct in their decision to have her take over for her father when the time arose.

"Ooh, I felt the baby kick!" Celina's voice broke his train of thought. "Are you hoping for a boy or girl, Auntie?"

"So long as the baby is healthy, I do not mind one way or another," Fiona replied as she fondly rubbed her belly.

Malcolm strained his ear toward Giselle once more.

"Monsieur Percival, so good of you to come," he overheard her exclaim as she bent slightly to kiss his cheek.

Monsieur Percival was a couple inches shorter than her, like most of the Frenchmen. And, like most of the young merchant sons, he drank in the vision before him. He smiled broadly. "Mademoiselle Galloway, I am most grateful to be in attendance."

"And where, pray tell, is your friend this evening?" she asked.

"Regrettably, Eduard was unable to come. He had a wedding to attend. A cousin of his."

Malcolm bristled at this, knowing full well he meant his ex-fiancée. The devil herself. Not wanting to brood over his mistake, he pushed thoughts of her aside and focused on the present, Giselle.

"I was not aware of any of his cousins marrying," she continued.

"She is from his mother's side – Mademoiselle LeSeuer."

"How lovely. I am certain he will have many disappointed admirers, though."

Monsieur Percival leaned closer to her and lowered his voice. "I will be sure to pass along your regards."

A fleeting look of terror crossed her face—so quick that it was undetectable to those around her. But Malcolm noticed. He knew of Eduard Devlin's exploits and hoped Giselle was not another victim. He stifled a cough and cleared his sore throat. He had felt the onset of sickness before they left Moonhaven but would not allow it to keep him from the party and Giselle.

More guests arrived, and he and Kade drowned in a sea of uninhibited merchant daughters. Malcolm tugged on his collar and felt claustrophobic in the clatter of young women whilst his brother basked in the familiar attention. Kade was a chronic flirt, and the young ladies were well versed with his games. Malcolm preferred a far more straightforward approach, and thus—did not want to miss the opportunity to be near Giselle.

Very late the next morning, Giselle stifled a yawn and entered the dining room for breakfast. Only her father and Aunt Fiona remained at the table.

"Good morning," she cheerily greeted them and settled into a plush chair.

"Good morning, Giselle," her father replied. "I believe last night was a success."

"Yes, it was a wonderful evening," Aunt Fiona added.

Giselle smiled broadly. "Thank you. I am quite pleased with the outcome. However, it is awfully quiet this morning. Where are your brothers?" she asked her aunt.

"Kade and Banner left to crew the *Moonlight Raider*."

Curious, but not wanting to appear to care too much, she asked, "Where is Malcolm?"

"He is not feeling well," Aunt Fiona explained in between bites of fried ham.

"He seemed fine yesterday."

"Yes, well, typical stubborn man waits until he cannot lift a finger before he admits it," she sighed irritably. "He's been sick all week. We have summoned for your aunt." Aunt Kianda was a nurse from the American colonies. It must be serious if they summoned her.

Florian appeared in the doorway with Aunt Kianda behind him. "Lady Kianda Charmaine," he somberly announced.

Her father quickly rose from his chair and greeted her. "Thank you for coming, Kianda."

"Best not to take a chance with sickness when babies are around," she remarked in her queer accent and smiled kindly at Aunt Fiona.

Her father and aunts turned to leave. Giselle rose from her chair to accompany them.

"No, Giselle. Stay here," her father instructed before leaving the room.

She inquisitively peered into the foyer and watched all of them climb the wide, polished oak staircase. The children's whining cries broke the eerie stillness in the house. Once she reached the top of the landing, Aunt Fiona walked straight to the nursery to attend to them.

Giselle heard rough coughing as Malcolm's bedroom door creaked open. Hesitating at the bottom of the stairs, she overheard Aunt Kianda's soothing voice float down to the open foyer. With a softened heart, she hoped it was not the same pneumonia that Malcolm's parents had died of not four years prior. Giselle soundlessly ascended the stairs, uttering a quick, silent prayer for his health. She noiselessly crept into his room, a masculine room with lush gold and green tones.

"I told you to stay downstairs, my lass," her father firmly reprimanded when he saw her hovering just inside the doorway. "Malcolm is very ill."

"I am sorry, Father," she earnestly replied, stepping further into the room. "I just thought I might be of assistance. I have attended Aunt Kianda in the past."

Malcolm turned at the sound of her voice and smiled feebly at her. He was pale. *Very* pale and his brow gleamed with sweat. He had blueish purple crescents under his eyes, and his eyes were glazed over with sickness.

Aunt Kianda laid her hand on her father's arm. "She is right, and Giselle is our only option to care for him at this point. You have your trainees at the Louvre to attend to. I must see to another patient and I do not," she warned, glancing in the direction of the nursery, "under any circumstances, recommend that Lady Fiona remain with him."

"Alright," her father sighed with resignation. "Giselle, you are to take care of him, but be sure to guard your own health."

Giselle nodded and Aunt Kianda left her instructions for his care. "I will return as soon as I can to check on his recovery," her aunt said as she and Giselle's father left the room.

Giselle gently tucked the blankets around Malcolm's shivering body and rinsed the compress for his fever. He closed his eyes while she tenderly dabbed at his flushed cheeks. She rinsed the compress again before she placed it on his forehead.

"Thank you, Giselle," he whispered as he slowly opened his eyes.

"Are you comfortable? May I fetch you anything?" she asked, trying to avoid his gaze.

His "no" was barely audible, but she felt his eyes on her as she arranged his medicines. He weakly asked her, "Did you finish reading Christine de Pizan?"

"Very nearly," she replied, filling the basin. "I would have completed it sooner, but I have been caught up with the ball and helping your sister with the children."

"She is blessed to have your help." He coughed a little and tried to clear his throat. "I am too."

His vulnerable tone and effort to speak softened her further. She dabbed the compress on his cheeks and neck. "I do not mind," she replied with a sympathetic smile. She replaced the compress on his forehead, trying to ignore the look of supplication in his eyes. "I will let you sleep now."

Reaching out, he grazed her wrist when she turned to leave. "Please," he entreated her. "Stay."

Her skin tingled where he had touched it and she melted at his tone. "As you wish." She pulled a green damask chair alongside the bed.

"I feel awful for the way I treated you," he murmured, his fever seemingly creating similar candor that alcohol consumption provided. "I never should have said the things I said when we trained together." Clearing his throat, he continued, "We were children, Giselle, and I acted cruelly. I cannot excuse my behavior, but I ask for your forgiveness. I am sorry."

Her heart pricked at his sincerity and she struggled to let go of the bitterness and resentment. All she had ever wanted of him was the bond that she never had the opportunity to share with her own brothers. Since the moment he arrived at the estate, she had prayed more ardently for the power to forgive him. A scripture came to mind: "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.*" Silently she nodded in response, unable to form words to express her thoughts. A moment that felt like an hour passed before she softly replied, "I forgive you, Malcolm."

Relief was evident in his eyes. "Thank you, Giselle."

She smiled meekly, the knot in her chest slowly abating.

Changing the subject, he commented, "The party was enjoyable. I am quite impressed. You are a wonderful hostess."

"Thank you. Aunt Fiona helped. I could not have done it without her assistance."

"That is not what she told me," he said with a weak smirk.

"Yes, well, perhaps the next one I will be less anxious." She lightly touched his arm. "And perhaps you will allow me to redeem my poor manners and dance with you." Most of the young men her age were shorter and smaller, and she felt like a giantess. Despite knowing Malcolm would be a perfect dance partner, next to Montague or Kade, she refused him when he had asked.

Malcolm chuckled slightly, sending him into a coughing fit. "Well, lass," he said hoarsely when he recovered, "I would be happy to honor you with a dance."

Blushing gratefully, she replied, "Thank you." She tilted the glass of water to his lips and wiped his chin when he was finished drinking. "I have wanted to ask you; how did you decide on the names for your dogs?"

"You haven't seen me for nearly four years, and that is what keeps you awake at night, lass?" he meekly teased.

She giggled. "Touché."

He cleared his throat. "My mother used to tell us stories of Greek and Roman myths when we were young. Ares was my favorite because he was the God of War. I chose Athena as a tribute to my mother; as she was her favorite. She would often press upon Kade and me to marry women like Athena – strong, wise, and pure."

Softening further, she replied, "That is very sweet. I am certain your mother would appreciate the sentiment." She noticed that he sounded and

looked weary. "I would love to visit with you more, but I would be a horrible nurse if I did not allow you to rest."

"As you wish," he feebly replied with a trace of a smile. "Perhaps you could read Pizan to me when I am awake?"

"I would like that. Sleep well, Malcolm," Giselle whispered, gently closing the door behind her.

---

The next few days were spent much the same, though Malcolm seemed to be recovering. His cough decreased and he was able to sleep. The dark circles under his eyes had faded. She finished reading *The Book of the City of Ladies* by the third day and began one of his favorites, *The Canterbury Tales*. By the fifth morning, his fever had reduced dramatically, and the color had returned to his skin. When Giselle entered the room with a tray of food for his breakfast, he sat up in bed and greeted her with a huge smile.

"Good morning," she cheerily exclaimed as she set the tray on the bedside table and fluffed up the pillows behind him. "I was unsure of your appetite this morning." She set the tray on his lap, glancing over his improvement. "I asked the cook to give you some of everything."

"Thank you, Giselle, I am famished!" he exclaimed with a charming boyish grin at the overflowing tray. While he ate, she felt his forehead and cheeks with the back of her hand.

"Your fever has dissipated. How are you feeling?"

He drew a deep breath through his nose. "Better," he exhaled. "I have been cooped up in this room too long," he explained between spoonfuls of porridge. "You do not mind taking a walk with me in the garden?"

"That would be lovely," she eagerly replied, pleased with the prospect of his company. She stepped out of the room and summoned for one of the chambermaids. "Please bring up fresh water and you may air out and clean this room while we are in the garden." The maid nodded and hurried downstairs.

When she returned, Malcolm had readied himself to go outside. He rested his arm atop her shoulders and leaned upon her. She wrapped her arm around his waist while she helped him down the stairs, through the library, and outside to the garden. Once outside, she looped her arm through his, still supporting him as they walked.

"Och, it feels good to stretch my legs." Malcolm took a few long strides, causing her to quicken her steps to keep up with him.

"I am certainly glad you are feeling better. It is nice to have a walking companion."

"I will accompany you anytime you like," he offered. Glancing around him, he curiously asked, "Did you help with the gardens?"

Smiling with pride, she replied, "Yes, I directed the gardener with the various flowers after he sculpted the hedges and topiaries. I helped Uncle Pierre select the statues and benches as well."

"And of the trellis?" he asked, pointing to a jasmine covered archway.

It was her favorite place in the entire garden, her oasis. "Yes, that too. It provides a nice place for reading or sketching in the springtime." She stopped and stroked the lavender petals of a nearby hydrangea, her gaze drifting away from him. The sweet scent reminded her of the clan *kirkyard*<sup>2</sup> at Moonhaven where her mother and brothers were buried.

"Do you enjoy sketching, then?" Malcolm asked. By the expression on his face, it was not the first time.

"Oh!" How many times had he tried to capture her attention? She blushed slightly from embarrassment. "Yes, I do. It relaxes me. Since I am not musically inclined, I developed my artistic talents instead."

"I would love to see your sketches sometime." He quickly added, "If you would like to share them with me, that is. I know some artists prefer to keep their work private."

"Oh, no! I do not mind at all. I will warn you. I am not well accomplished. I merely sketch for my own enjoyment."

"Perhaps after lunch, then?"

"Certainly."

"How do you feel about your involvement in the company?"

She contemplated for a moment. Up until recently, her father had kept her involvement limited to copying the ledgers and inventory records. When Malcolm arrived, her father began to ask her opinion of wares and new ports in which to travel. "I feel quite honored that Father respects my opinion," she replied slowly. "Though, I would love to visit the places from whence we gather our wares."

He gazed down at her with sparkling green eyes. "Perhaps one day you will." His tender tone reminded her of her father. Exhaustion began to appear in his face, and she suggested they return to the house.

Nearing the courtyard, Aunt Kianda approached them. "I expected you to be in bed, Colonel," she exclaimed in surprise, her violet eyes dancing.

He softly chuckled, glancing sideways at Giselle. "I have a very attentive nurse."

"So it appears," her aunt replied with a wink.

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<sup>2</sup> Gaelic translation: cemetery

*My Beautiful Giselle,*

*I cannot believe how quickly time has passed! It was wonderful to visit with you and your father this last summer. The horseback rides with the two of you are some of my fondest memories. Mother enjoyed your company immensely and Stepfather was grateful for the medicinal liquor. I am sorry Vallis was not available. He went on holiday with a young man from school.*

*We must see each other more often at the beginning of the year. Twice a year visits and monthly correspondence is not enough to fill the void of your presence.*

*My deepest apologies that you must endure living under the same roof with Colonel MacFarlane. I remember how much he hurt you. I know you will be able to overcome, my dearest.*

*My apprenticeship with Stepfather is progressing nicely. I am learning so many things that the body is capable of doing all on its own. It is a wonder and constantly amazes me. Stepfather tells me I am a natural healer and I find that comforting and encouraging. I want to learn all that I can to be of better use to those in my care.*

*I am grateful to hear that Lucian is doing well. Please give him my regards. Mother and Stepfather send along theirs to you and your father.*

*I miss you more than I am able to express. Please be strong and know that Colonel MacFarlane has no power over you. I will rescue you as soon as I am able.*

*Yours always,  
Montague*

---

After admiring her mother's landscape paintings on the wall of her father's study, Giselle bent over the ledger while her father and Malcolm discussed the schedule and orders for the next month. In addition to training with her father and Malcolm, and assisting Aunt Fiona with caring for the children, this had been part of her daily routine for the last month.

Malcolm glanced at the schedule in front of him. "Next month we'll be expecting Banner from Egypt and the Mediterranean with the spices and fabric."

"Among other things," her father replied with a sly smile. "Banner and Kade have the liberty of choosing samples of other wares we may want to incorporate into our stock."

"Are we planning for the brandy shipment from Edinburgh?" Malcolm asked. "I know the Scottish brandy will trump the weak French version. And we should consider whiskey as well."

"We will introduce the brandy at the next party. Perhaps whiskey could be obtained after we see how the brandy goes over. For the first shipment, though, we will send Kade on that voyage. Perhaps you would like to accompany him?"

"And what of the Garde?"

"They'll manage without you for a week. I will make the arrangements."

Giselle seized the opportunity to make her own request. "Father, do you suppose I could go along?"

Her father chuckled and glanced at Malcolm, who replied, "I think that is a splendid idea, with your permission, of course."

"I see the two of you have conspired against me." Her father shook his head dismissively. Looking at Giselle, he explained, "You were a baby the last time you, your mother, and I went there to visit. It would be good for you to return and see the country, so long as you stay with Malcolm and Kade."

Her eyes lit up. "Oh! Thank you, Father," she exclaimed. "When are we to leave?"

"*Moonlight Raider* will be at port tomorrow. It should only take a day to prepare for departure." Glancing over the schedule, he added to Malcolm, "Perhaps you would like to visit your grandmother before you leave port?"

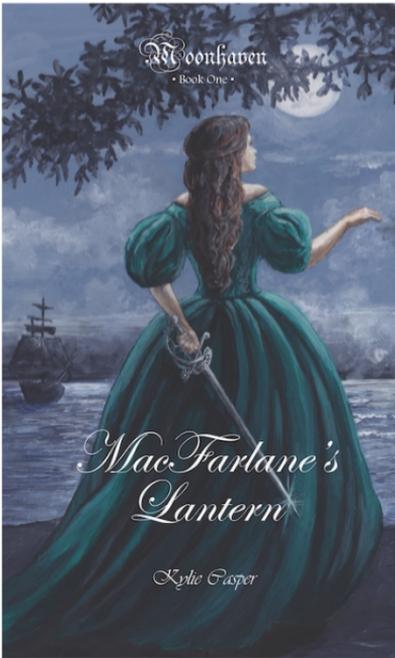
Malcolm nodded. "Aye, that is not a bad idea. I have not seen her since I arrived here."

Too excited to sit any longer, Giselle rose from her chair. "I must begin packing at once!" she exclaimed and began to leave the study.

"Ah, where do you think you are going, my lass?" her father reprimanded, tapping the unfinished ledger with his fingertip.

She opened her mouth to protest, but Malcolm interjected, "I'll finish the ledger for her." He smiled and winked at her.

"Thank you," she enthused before she hurried out of the room, excited for new opportunities that lay ahead of her.



*Giselle Galloway's world, and her reputation as a lady, rests on the broad shoulders of Malcolm MacFarlane, as they are forced into a common mission. Jaded from his poor treatment of her when they were children, can she trust him or will her worlds collide?*

# **Moonhaven Book One: MacFarlane's Lantern**

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