

AWARD WINNING AUTHOR  
CHRISTINA  
COURTENAY

*The  
Velvet Cloak  
of  
Moonlight*

*It's time to confront the past head on...*



# *The Velvet Cloak of Moonlight*

***Excerpt***

***Christina Courtenay***

***Titles in the Shadows from the Past series:***

The Silent Touch of Shadows

The Secret Kiss of Darkness

The Soft Whisper of Dreams

The Velvet Cloak of Moonlight



*Where heroes are like chocolate – irresistible!*

Copyright © 2016 Christina Courtenay

Published 2016 by Choc Lit Limited  
Penrose House, Crawley Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 2AB, UK  
[www.choc-lit.com](http://www.choc-lit.com)

The right of Christina Courtenay to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the UK such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Barnards Inn, 86 Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1EN

ISBN 978-1-78189-312-8

ISBN 978-1-78189-313-5

ISBN 978-1-78189-320-3

# Prologue

*The velvet cloak of moonlight settled over the ruined towers of Raglan Castle, and the shadows beneath them stirred. The souls of those who had once lived here were restless, their tales as yet unfinished.*

*Battles had been fought and the echoes of victory and despair lingered, imprinted into the very stones of the castle's foundations. When the Parliamentarians lay siege to their Royalist enemies within its walls, the conquerors thought themselves victorious, but their triumph was hollow, as fleeting as the shadows.*

*And yet, there were those for whom the events of that long ago summer siege had a different impact. With their legacy now under threat, the time had come to reveal all. But evil, not fully purged by the passage of centuries, had other ideas, and the old stone walls could feel another battle brewing ...*

# Chapter One

*Raglan Castle, 21st May 2016*

Tess hated driving along the A40 towards Raglan. It was an ordinary road, nothing special, except for one small fact – it was where her late husband's fatal accident had occurred. But if you wanted to go to Raglan Castle it was the quickest route and she was tired of hiding from the horror of what had happened.

It was time to start living again.

Had it really been six months since that awful day? The reality of what had happened had hit her hard. And it was real. Giles wasn't coming back, but he was everywhere at Merrick Court, the big country house he'd been so proud of. The echo of his footsteps, the whisper of his voice; they haunted her even if he didn't. And she was more alone than she'd ever been in her life.

Tess tightened her grip on the steering wheel. She was moving on, sorting her life out. She'd be fine, but right now she just needed to get away from the house, do something – anything – other than feeling sorry for herself.

The road was straight with double lanes and mercifully free of traffic. Her sight was a bit blurry and she blinked, trying to focus. As she did so, she became aware of something on the opposite carriageway. A few bits of old yellow tape flapping in the breeze, left over from a cordoned-off area of investigation. The crash site. Tess tried not to look as it flashed past, but it was all indelibly etched into her memory as she'd seen it that day: police cars, a flattened grass verge, skid marks and a mangled car. A beautiful white Porsche. Or rather, what was left of it.

'No!' She mustn't think about that any more.

But her brain supplied a lot of extra images she definitely didn't want – a car swerving dangerously in the rain-soaked darkness, perhaps hitting the barrier in the centre of the road before bouncing to the left and off into the trees. Screeching tyres, the crunching noise of metal hitting metal, then metal hitting wood, screaming ... And all because Giles had been driving too fast again. Drunk.

She knew why, but she didn't want to think about that either.

Tess's heart was racing, her breath coming in painful gasps. She felt her hands slipping on the steering wheel as she broke into a panicked sweat. The rational part of her brain told her she shouldn't be driving at all in this state, but there was nowhere to stop other than the hard shoulder and she'd be vulnerable there. She had to carry on.

A roundabout hove into view and she slowed down, passing the first turnoff, taking the next one. A slip road could be glimpsed only a short way down the road and, breathing a shaky sigh of relief, she drove onto a tiny lane leading up a hill. A sign told her she was on her way to Raglan Castle and, after a hundred yards or so, she entered the car park and the castle's outline appeared above her, silhouetted against the cloudy sky. As she parked under a tree, next to some other cars, the ancient towers seemed to offer temporary sanctuary, as they must have done to countless others in its time. She leaned her forehead on the steering wheel and tried to calm down.

She was safe.

When her heart rate had slowed and her limbs stopped shaking, she got out of the car and looked up at the castle. What was left of the buildings dwarfed their surroundings, a majestic, but sad sight. She must have passed these ruins hundreds of times while driving to and from London, but she'd never stopped to go inside. Yet something about it had called out to her today, tempting her to come and have a look at last.

'Why not?' she muttered. Anything was better than moping around Merrick Court.

A shop on the right doubled as a ticket office. She quickly paid the entry fee and followed the path to the castle, staring up at the two towers flanking the gatehouse. Making her way across the moat, Tess passed through the gateway and into what used to be a large courtyard. The cobbles were uneven, but must once have been a labour of love, covering a large area that sloped downwards at one end. Clumps of grass grew between the rounded stones where horses' hooves no longer kept any vegetation at bay. Tess thought this added charm and softened the look of the surface.

There was something calming about old ruins. Stones that had withstood the ravages of time to show a fraction of the grandeur that once was. There were echoes of past lives here too, but they weren't personal, like the shadows at Merrick Court. Tess relaxed and allowed the peace of the ancient walls to seep into her very core.

Wandering aimlessly, she explored for a while, finding empty, roofless shells of rooms and staircases that either led nowhere or to dizzying vantage points. Eventually she made her way to the hexagonal Great Tower. Seventy-eight steps of a circular staircase took her – out of breath and with burning thigh muscles – to the viewing platform at the top. Three hundred and sixty degrees of amazing landscape surrounded her; undulating fields and hills, trees, hedges and tiny rivers, with the Black Mountains on the distant horizon. It was beautiful, but Tess couldn't stay there. It seemed dangerous and a quick glance down into the courtyard five or six storeys below made her head spin. She stumbled towards the stairs and safety.

Down at the base of the tower she found herself next to what was left of the moat. There was a stone wall which had crumbled away in parts and Tess sank down onto the cool

stones, careful not to lean over too much. She gazed at the tranquil waters and the gently bobbing water lily pads. Timeless beauty. Serenity. Stillness. She felt the tension leave her body again.

The sun came out from behind the clouds and cast a shimmer of light onto the dark surface. She leaned forward a bit, wondering what was hidden in the murky depths. Tiny wavelets stirred the water and she watched, mesmerised, until she felt almost as though the moat was rising up towards her in a surge of liquid. Her head spun again and she felt herself swaying. She put out a hand to steady herself; she was going to fall if she wasn't careful.

She stood up and was just about to take a step away from the moat, when a pair of strong arms grabbed her round the waist from behind and pulled her back.

'Whoa, mistress, don't do that. Nothing is that bad, trust me. There's always something left to live for.'

What the hell ...?

Tess twisted to look at her would-be rescuer, whose strange speech in a thick Welsh accent took a moment to register. Had he thought she was about to commit suicide? That almost made her smile as it had never even crossed her mind, despite the calamity of Giles's accident. But the smile died on her lips as she squinted into the rays of the sun and took in his appearance.

The man standing before her was dressed in an old-fashioned outfit with a long leather waistcoat, white linen shirt with a drawstring fastening and loose trousers tucked into big leather riding boots with the tops folded over. A hat with a somewhat bedraggled plume sat on top of an awful lot of hair, sort of in the eighties' rock band style – very long, dark and wavy. It suited him, she had to admit, but then he had the kind of face that would have looked great with any hairstyle. Handsome, in a rugged way, and with a 'bad boy' twinkle in his

eyes. Tess wondered if he was wearing a wig as she guessed he must be a re-enactor working at the castle, but the long tresses looked real enough. Good grief. A hard core history buff, obviously.

'Please, come inside,' he insisted. 'It's not safe out here.'

'I'm sorry?' What on earth was he on about? Tess looked around, trying to spot any obvious dangers, but saw none. Instead she found that the moat had disappeared and she was standing next to some sort of lake. A shoal of large, brown fish were circling near the surface, some opening their mouths as if waiting for treats. How did she get here? Did the castle have a lake? Thoroughly confused, Tess turned back towards the man and pushed out of his grip, intent on getting back to the moat. She'd only taken two steps when she began to feel light-headed again. Her vision swam. What the hell was going on?

'Mistress? Are you all right?'

She heard the man's voice coming as if from a great distance, then everything went black.

## O

### *Raglan Castle, 21st May 1646*

Arabella Dauncey kneeled by the lake at its northern end where the water garden spread out to her right. She loved watching the greedy carp who came to the surface to see if she'd brought them anything. Pieces of bread were always welcome, sucked into their open mouths with a smacking noise. She tried to feed them slowly, aware that this might be the last time she'd be able to visit this beautiful spot. The war was coming closer to Raglan and she'd been told a siege was imminent. The poor fish would have to fend for themselves, just like everyone who would soon be locked inside the castle.

Would they even survive?

She didn't want to acknowledge that the question might equally apply to the human inhabitants.

She shivered at these dark thoughts and stood up, staring into the water and bending forward for one last look. Just as she was about to take a step away from the lakeside, a pair of strong arms grabbed her round the waist from behind and pulled her back.

'Whoa, mistress, don't do that. Nothing is that bad, trust me. There's always something left to live for.'

Arabella twisted to look at her would-be rescuer and pushed at his chest to make him let go. 'I beg your pardon?'

Had he thought she was about to commit suicide? She must have looked more wistful than she realised. Still, it was none of his business and she was about to tell him so when she noticed his appearance. The words died in her throat.

He was dressed like a cavalry officer with a long leather jerkin, riding boots and jaunty hat. It wasn't his clothing that caught her attention, however, but the man himself. Long, wavy dark hair framed a face she found amazingly attractive. Tall and well made in every way, his broad shoulders filled out his shirt very nicely. She'd felt the strength and muscles in his arms during their brief contact and she found herself wishing she was still being held by them. And his voice, deep and smooth, with a Welsh lilt that caressed the ears, was the kind you could listen to for hours ... She gave herself a mental shake. No, what was she thinking?

'Please, come inside,' he insisted. 'It's not safe out here.'

'What do you mean?' Arabella frowned at him. There hadn't been any reports of soldiers approaching yet or orders to stay inside the castle walls. Although if she listened carefully she could hear what might be musket shots in the distance. Someone practising? And there was a strange smell of burning in the air. Perhaps he was right, but for some reason that

irritated her even further and she stepped away from him.

'Have you brought news? Why did you not say so?' She turned and headed for the nearest stairs up towards the terraced garden. 'I'll go and ...'

But she'd only taken two steps when she tripped on the hem of her long skirt, which must have become wet while she knelt by the side of the lake and was therefore longer and heavier than usual. She stumbled.

'Mistress? Are you all right?'

The man's hand shot out and once again he steadied her. Arabella glared at him and pulled her arm out of his grip. 'I can manage. Thank you.'

It wasn't like her to trip on her own skirts, but the man's presumption that she'd been careless made her cross. She was never careless. Not to mention suicidal. She was made of sterner stuff and so far the horrors of this war hadn't daunted her spirits. Who was he anyway? She'd never seen him before.

As if he'd heard her unspoken thought, he belatedly remembered his manners and swept off his hat as he bowed to her. 'Rhys Cadell, at your service, mistress. May I escort you back inside? Please?' He indicated the stairs she'd been heading for with a flick of his hand and a lift of his eyebrows. They were uncommonly fine eyebrows, perfectly shaped and not too thick, above a pair of sharp, moss-green eyes surrounded by dark lashes.

She felt her cheeks heat up. What was she doing admiring the man's eyes? She'd only come outside for a little while to be alone, something that was almost impossible inside a castle crammed full of people seeking sanctuary from this wretched war. Perhaps she'd stayed too long? She squinted again at the setting sun and realised she had.

'I thank you, but I can find my own way. I will go inside directly.' She nodded a cool dismissal, but the man didn't

budge. He merely held out a hand to help her up the nearby steps and with some reluctance she took it. It seemed churlish not to, but the moment her fingers touched his, she regretted it as it felt as though a current reverberated through her all the way down to her toes. What madness was this?

The green eyes, when she made the mistake of looking into them again, seemed to be glinting with amusement. Was he aware of the effect his touch had on her? She sincerely hoped not. As soon as she'd reached the top of the stairs, she let go of him. 'Thank you.'

She was about to walk away, when he spoke just behind her. 'May I know your name, mistress? I am new to this place so a friendly face would be welcome.'

Arabella hesitated, but it would be impolite to refuse to reply. 'Arabella Dauncey.' She gave him a quick curtsy and almost added 'unmarried ward of the Marquis of Worcester' but stopped herself just in time. Why would he need to know that?

'A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mistress Dauncey.'

She nodded, not wanting to acknowledge that it had been a pleasure meeting him too. Then something he'd said registered belatedly. 'You have just arrived, you said? How can that be? I thought they weren't letting anyone in now.' The marquis had given orders that no one else was to be admitted, as the castle was full to bursting.

He smiled and shook his head. 'Now that would be telling, mistress. And it's not my secret to share.'

Arabella fought to quell her curiosity, which was well and truly piqued now, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction. 'I see,' she managed to say calmly. 'Well, I hope your "secret" will help us all. We could certainly use a few miracles around here. Good day to you, sir.'

Before he could say anything else to upset her equilibrium, she swept off towards the Bowling Green and the bridge to the South Gate. But although she didn't look back, she felt his

gaze between her shoulder blades until she reached the safety of the vaulted entrance.

Who was he? And why should it matter to her?

## Chapter Two

*Raglan Castle, 21st May 2016*

Tess came to when someone bumped into her shoulder on the way down the wooden staircase leading to the moat. She seemed to have passed out – or fallen asleep? – with her head leaning against the railing and now had a crick in her neck. The woman trying to get past sent her a glare, as if it was a crime to sit on Welsh National Trust stairs and doze off, but Tess ignored her. She was too busy wondering why she'd had such a strange – and very vivid – dream or hallucination and how she came to be sitting here when the last she remembered she'd been over by the moat.

No, by a lake? But there wasn't one here.

She stood up slowly and rubbed her neck with one hand. Glancing around, she could see that she was alone apart from Angry Woman. There were no handsome re-enactors in sight; in fact, no men at all. Had she dreamed him up? But he'd seemed so real. And what about the lake? She could see the greedy fish quite clearly in her mind.

No, impossible.

She shook her head. 'Get a grip,' she muttered, but inside her mind more images of the man kept playing, like an old reel of film, with snatches of conversation. The odd word here and there made sense – *Rhys, news, secret* ... Had he told her his name before she passed out? She didn't think so. But he could have done. And why would he give her news or talk of secrets?

It was all so strange and she was gripped by a niggling sense of worry, an anxiety totally unlike the kind she'd been afflicted with in the months following Giles's death. This was different, more real somehow, as though there was something

menacing she needed to be wary of. True fear. Her own worries about her future and what she should do with her life seemed very trivial in comparison.

What the heck was going on? What was there to be afraid of? She looked around again. Nothing. It was as peaceful a scene as you could possibly wish for. No dangers of any kind.

'You're seriously cracking up,' she murmured to herself and dusted off the back of her jeans before heading for the exit.

'Excuse me, but do you have re-enactors on site to give visitors a more authentic experience of the castle?' she asked the lady at the till by the entrance.

'Not today, no. Later during the summer, maybe. Too few visitors to make it worthwhile this time of year.'

'You're sure? Only I thought I saw a man in period costume ...' Tess trailed off and felt her cheeks heat up as the woman sent her a puzzled gaze.

'I haven't seen anyone like that, I promise. He would have had to get past me to go in.'

'Right, well, er, thank you.' Tess hesitated, then dared one more question. 'I'm sorry, but is there a lake near here?'

'No, not unless you count the moat. There used to be lakes at the back of the castle in the ornamental gardens. They're long gone though. Why do you ask?'

'Oh, no reason. Just curious.'

Tess left quickly, too embarrassed to even look at any of the souvenirs for sale. Seeing the crash site again had obviously messed with her brain. It was time to go home and face the empty house and the bitter memories. Time for more action. Maybe ditch the antidepressants completely, even though she'd already cut them down to an absolute minimum? They weren't helping, just numbing her thought processes. And giving her hallucinations?

Tess drove her little Mini carefully along the main roads, trying not to imagine what could so easily happen if you lost

control of your car the way Giles had done. But she wasn't drunk, it was still light and there wasn't a raindrop in sight. No reason why she should have an accident.

She bumped along the smaller, winding roads towards Merrick Court and through the impressive wrought-iron gates, which were open. Bryn Jones, the old gardener, usually closed them before going home for the day, so he must still be around somewhere. Probably in his potting shed or in the greenhouse. The thought was comforting; Tess wasn't entirely alone. And he lived just down the road, in his small, neat cottage. Not far at all.

As she turned into the stable yard, she noticed there was another car parked where Giles's Porsche had always stood. It was also a Porsche, a Cayenne, the large Chelsea tractor variety, and Tess knew only too well to whom it belonged – her sister-in-law. She groaned out loud. 'Oh, hell! That's all I need.'

Taking a deep breath, she got out of her car, then made her way to the kitchen entrance. Her visitors were sitting on the back steps; Rosie and her two teenage kids – Louis and Emilia.

At the sight, it was as though a black cloud materialised around them, reaching into Tess's brain. She tried to shake off the anger that began to swirl inside her, but only partly succeeded. Why did Rosie keep visiting? When Giles was alive they never saw his sister from one Christmas to the next. Now she'd suddenly decided she had to keep an eye on the place and appeared at Merrick Court at regular intervals. She didn't even phone to ask if it was convenient, but then Rosie never thought about anyone's feelings apart from her own.

'There you are, Therese! Where have you been, for goodness' sake? We were starting to think you were never coming home,' Rosie began as soon as Tess was within earshot. 'I tried to call your mobile, but you didn't pick up.'

Tess resisted the urge to say, 'Lovely to see you too,' in a

sarcastic tone of voice, and ignored the use of her full name, which Rosie knew she hated.

'I've been out.' Tess knew that made her sound like a defiant teenager, but really, did she have to account for her every move to Rosie? She had a life. Or she was supposed to have one, anyway.

'Well, we've waited ages! Actually, I think it would be a good idea if you gave me a key. You know, just in case.'

'In case of what? I lock myself out? Don't worry, I have that covered.' Tess walked past Rosie and up the steps, fishing out the keys from her back pocket. 'Hi, Louis, Emilia.' She managed a small smile for her nephew and niece by marriage, who had both stood up.

'Hey, Tess. You okay?' Louis, the only person in that family Tess actually liked, came and put his arms round her for an awkward teenage boy kind of hug. At nearly eighteen, he was starting to get over the teen stage, while his fifteen-year-old sister was in the very worst phase. 'Bet it's all still a bit tough, huh?'

'Yeah.' She hugged him back briefly. He was a nice kid, down to earth and not stuck up like his mother and sister. She noticed Emilia's face remained passive and the girl didn't look like she'd been mourning her uncle. Emilia was only ever concerned with herself, a spoiled little princess.

'Come on in.' Tess unlocked the door and didn't wait to see if they followed her into the large old-fashioned kitchen. It was like something out of a National Trust brochure and most people gawped when they saw it for the first time – faded grandeur with a large iron range, massive dresser, copper pots and pans and a black Aga. And scrubbed pine everywhere, together with enough blue and white porcelain for a battalion of servants, even though they were long gone, just like the money needed to pay for them. 'Are you staying the night?' she asked, trying to dredge up some politeness when really

she wanted nothing more than to tell them to go away and leave her alone.

‘Of course we are. It’s a three-hour drive back to London and you know I don’t like driving in the dark.’ Rosie pulled the door shut with some force.

Tess closed her eyes for a moment, wishing she hadn’t had to deal with Rosie today. Or any day, for that matter. ‘Well, you can have your usual rooms but you’ll have to make the beds up yourselves. I’m a bit tired. I’m sure you’ll understand ...’

‘Don’t you have servants for that? We have a Filipina maid and she does everything,’ Emilia piped up at last, while frowning at her iPhone. ‘And why doesn’t this work here? It’s like we’re in Outer Mongolia or something.’

Tess ignored the first part of the girl’s sentence as Emilia knew very well there were no servants at Merrick Court. ‘You need to log onto the Wi-Fi. It’s the only way you’ll be able to communicate with the outside world from here. We’re in a sort of black hole, mobile-wise, remember?’

‘Well, what’s the password?’ Emilia was stabbing furiously at the little keypad on her phone.

‘Please?’ Tess couldn’t resist. The girl’s attitude was just the final straw.

‘What?’ Emilia looked up and focused on her for a moment.

‘She means they should teach you some manners at your school,’ Louis put in, rolling his eyes. ‘As in, what’s the password, *please*.’

‘Shut *up*, Louis.’ Emilia glared at her brother, then at Tess, who decided the girl was too self-absorbed to even understand irony.

‘It’s Merrick123,’ she said. ‘I’m going to heat up some soup and bread rolls – will that do for dinner? I’m sorry but I wasn’t really expecting guests.’

Rosie sighed. ‘I remember when this kitchen was always filled with cooking smells and the larder overflowing, just in

case. People were forever visiting Mama and Papa, dropping in on the spur of the moment, so one had to be prepared.'

Tess heard the implied criticism but ignored it. 'Well, your parents could probably afford to feed the five thousand. I can't.' She headed for the walk-in larder, which was bigger than most normal people's kitchens.

'Soup sounds great to me,' Louis said. 'I'll help you. Why don't you and Em sort out the beds, Mum?'

'Yes, I suppose.'

'Don't call me Em! How many times do I have to tell you? It's Emilia, or Milla to my friends, so that's not you, obviously.' Emilia was looking daggers at her brother again and her mother wisely towed her towards the hall and upstairs, averting the inevitable row.

'Milla?' Louis trailed after Tess while imitating his sister's snooty voice. 'How pretentious can you get? God, she's so annoying.'

Tess put an arm round his shoulders and gave him another quick hug. 'Never mind. Siblings are always irritating. You've met mine, haven't you? Sarah would beat Emilia hands down in any annoying sister contest, trust me.'

Louis smiled, although Tess noticed the smile didn't quite reach his eyes. 'Hey, are you okay yourself?' she asked, while busying herself heating up soup. Was he still mourning his uncle? Shaken by the suddenness of it all? She hadn't seen the boy for a few months and although they exchanged the occasional email, that didn't tell her much.

'I'm fine. Lots of stupid exams coming up.' Louis shrugged.

'Oh, poor you, that's horrid.' Tess threw a packet of frozen bread rolls to him. 'Here, catch and put those in the Aga, will you, please?'

'Yup, sure.' As if continuing their earlier conversation, he added, 'It was all a bit of a shock, wasn't it? Uncle Giles, I mean. Even though it was a while ago now, I keep thinking

about it and it kind of freaks me out, the way these things can happen so suddenly. It's like ... my mind can't let it go.'

Tess nodded. 'Yes, me too.' She knew only too well that endlessly thinking about the 'what ifs' could really drag you down. Lately she'd been doing better on that front though.

'Aren't you scared, living here alone?'

'No, not really.' She had been frightened at first, jumping at every shadow, but that was when she'd gone to the doctor and been prescribed medication. The antidepressants deadened most feelings and she'd stopped caring. She added jokingly, 'Anyway, if the resident ghosts had wanted to get me, surely they would have done so by now?'

Louis cracked a small smile. 'I guess. Well, you don't have to stay much longer now – I hear the solicitors have finally found the heir.'

'Yes, although I haven't been told when he's coming.'

Merrick Court and the title that went with it – Earl of Merrick – were entailed in the male line. The solicitor had explained it all to Tess after Giles's funeral, and what it meant in practical terms was that she couldn't inherit anything other than the contents of the house, plus Giles's personal possessions. Everything else had to go to the closest male relative, descended in a straight line from father to son. Daughters apparently counted for nothing, so Louis couldn't inherit either. It was all very complicated.

It had taken the lawyers a while to locate the heir, a man who was descended from a younger son of Giles's great-great-grandfather or something, but Tess had been told just a few days earlier that he'd been abroad but had now been in touch. While the solicitors had been sorting things out, she'd stayed on at the house as a sort of custodian.

Louis was quiet for a while then said, hesitantly. 'Well, if you need support when he turns up, just say, okay? I could always come on a weekend.'

‘Thanks, that’s really sweet of you, but I’m sure it’ll be fine.’ She didn’t anticipate any trouble with the heir. It was more a question of getting organised, selling off her part of the inheritance – the contents of the house – and finalising her plans for the future. She didn’t need help with that.

Rosie and Emilia eventually came back to the kitchen and they all sat down to eat.

‘Eeuw, what is this?’ Emilia muttered, wrinkling her nose.

Tess pretended she hadn’t heard and instead looked at Rosie. ‘So what brings you here? Again.’

Rosie’s eyebrows rose in affront. ‘Do I need an excuse to visit my childhood home? And there’s so much to be done.’

‘Done?’

Rosie waved her spoon around, gesturing towards the rest of the house. ‘Yes, everything that needs sorting before you move out and—’

‘I’m perfectly capable of arranging things myself, you know.’ Tess gave Rosie a hard stare. ‘I’m not an imbecile.’

Rosie flushed. ‘I never said you were. It’s just, you’ve been a bit down and we thought we’d help. Sorting out old stuff to take to charity, that kind of thing.’

*Interfering, more like, and trying to appropriate things for yourself.* But Tess didn’t say that out loud. Rosie seemed to think that because some things at Merrick Court had sentimental value to her, Tess would let her have them for free ‘as a memento’. She’d tried that tack a few times already, but Tess had had enough. If Rosie wanted something, she could pay for it. She had a rich husband after all.

‘I’m fine now, but thanks for the thought. And I can manage on my own.’ She didn’t give Rosie a chance to reply, just stood up and went to put her bowl and plate in the sink. ‘If you’ll excuse me, I’m going to bed. Louis, please will you make sure all the doors are locked?’

‘No problem.’

‘Thank you. Goodnight.’

Back in her room, Tess was too restless to sleep, and headed into her en suite bathroom. It was a lovely space, all bright white tiles, claw-footed roll-top bath and ancient sink with bronze taps. She’d added yellow towels and candles to give the room a warmer feel and now it was perfect for relaxing in.

Tess poured herself a bath, adding a liberal amount of rose-scented bath oil, and sank into the warm depths with a contented sigh. Leaning her head against a small, folded towel, she felt the heat of the water seep into her, beginning the process of unravelling the anxiety that still flowed through her.

She stirred the water slowly with her fingers, staring into its depths, and allowed her mind to drift ...

**To continue reading, purchase from your favourite  
online store. [Details here ...](#)**

**Available in paperback and as an eBook from all stores.  
You’ll find it here, too:**

[Amazon](#)

[Apple iBooks](#)

[Kobo Books](#)

[Google Play Books](#)

[Barnes & Noble & Nook](#)

[Wordery \(Free Delivery\)](#)

[Booktopia \(AU\)](#)

[Fishpond NZ](#)

[Books-A-Million](#)

## About the Author



Christina lives near Hereford and is married with two children. Although born in England she has a Swedish mother and was brought up in Sweden. In her teens, the family moved to Japan where she had the opportunity to travel extensively in the Far East.

Christina's debut *Trade Winds* was short listed for the 2011 Romantic Novelists' Association's Pure Passion Award for Best Historical Fiction. *The Scarlet Kimono* won the 2011 Big Red Reads Best Historical Fiction Award. *Highland Storms* (in 2012) and *The Gilded Fan* (in 2014) won the Best Historical Romantic Novel of the year award and *The Silent Touch of Shadows* won the 2012 Best Historical Read Award from the Festival of Romance. *The Velvet Cloak of Moonlight* is Christina's eleventh full-length novel with Choc Lit.

*For more information on Christina:*

[www.twitter.com/PiaCCourtenay](https://www.twitter.com/PiaCCourtenay)

[www.christinacourtenay.com](http://www.christinacourtenay.com)

[www.facebook.com/christinacourtenayauthor](https://www.facebook.com/christinacourtenayauthor)

# *More Choc Lit*

*From Christina Courtenay*



## **The Silent Touch of Shadows**

**Book 1 in the Shadows from the Past series**

*Winner of the 2012 Best Historical Read from the Festival of Romance*

### **What will it take to put the past to rest?**

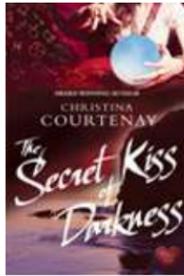
Professional genealogist Melissa Grantham receives an invitation to visit her family's ancestral home, Ashleigh Manor. From the moment she arrives, life-like dreams and visions haunt her. The spiritual connection to a medieval young woman and her forbidden lover have her questioning her sanity, but Melissa is determined to solve the mystery.

Jake Precy, owner of a nearby cottage, has disturbing dreams too, but it's not until he meets Melissa that they begin to make sense. He hires her to research his family's history, unaware their lives are already entwined. Is the mutual attraction real or the result of ghostly interference?

*A haunting love story set partly in the present and partly in fifteenth century Kent.*

*Available to purchase from your favourite store*

[Details here ...](#)



## **The Secret Kiss of Darkness**

**Book 2 in the Shadows from the Past Series**

### **Must forbidden love end in heartbreak?**

Kayla Sinclair knows she's in big trouble when she almost bankrupts herself to buy a life-size portrait of a mysterious eighteenth century man at an auction.

Jago Kerswell, inn-keeper and smuggler, knows there is danger in those stolen moments with Lady Eliza Marcombe, but he'll take any risk to be with her.

Over two centuries separate Kayla and Jago, but, when Kayla's jealous fiancé presents her with an ultimatum, and Jago and Eliza's affair is tragically discovered, their lives become inextricably linked thanks to a gypsy's spell.

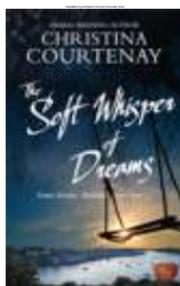
Kayla finds herself on a quest that could heal the past, but what she cannot foresee is the danger in her own future.

Will Kayla find heartache or happiness?

*Forbidden love, smugglers and romance!*

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **The Soft Whisper of Dreams**

**Book 3 in the Shadows from the Past Series**

**Some dreams shouldn't come true ...**

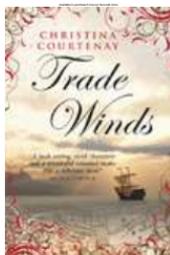
Maddie Browne thought she'd grown out of the recurring nightmare that plagued her as a child, but after a shocking family secret is revealed, it comes back to haunt her – the same swing in the same garden, the kind red-haired giant and the swarthy arms which grab her from behind and try to take her away ...

In an attempt to forget her troubles, Maddie travels to Devon to spend time with her friends, Kayla and Wes. However, it becomes clear that relaxation will not be on the agenda after a disturbing encounter with a gypsy fortune teller. Not to mention the presence of Wes's dangerously handsome brother, Alex.

And then there's the fact that Maddie's dream seems to be coming true ...

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Trade Winds**

### **Book 1 in the Kinross Series**

*Shortlisted for the 2011 Pure Passion Award for Best Romantic Historical Fiction*

### **Marriage of convenience – or a love for life?**

It's 1732 in Gothenburg, Sweden, and strong-willed Jess van Sandt knows only too well that it's a man's world. She believes she's being swindled out of her inheritance by her stepfather – and she's determined to stop it.

When help appears in the unlikely form of handsome Scotsman Killian Kinross, himself disinherited by his grandfather, Jess finds herself both intrigued and infuriated by him. In an attempt to recover her fortune, she proposes a marriage of convenience. Then Killian is offered the chance of a lifetime with the Swedish East India Company's Expedition and he's determined that nothing will stand in his way, not even his new bride.

He sets sail on a daring voyage to the Far East, believing he's put his feelings and past behind him. But the journey doesn't quite work out as he expects ...

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## Highland Storms

### Book 2 in the Kinross Series

*Winner of the 2012 Best Historical Romantic Novel of the year*

### Who can you trust?

Betrayed by his brother and his childhood love, Brice Kinross needs a fresh start. So he welcomes the opportunity to leave Sweden for the Scottish Highlands to take over the family estate.

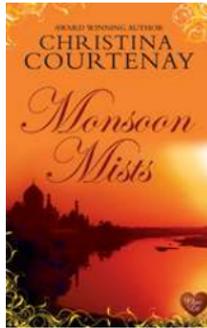
But there's trouble afoot at Rosyth in 1754 and Brice finds himself unwelcome. The estate's in ruin and money is disappearing. He discovers an ally in Marsaili Buchanan, the beautiful redheaded housekeeper, but can he trust her?

Marsaili is determined to build a good life. She works hard at being a housekeeper and harder still at avoiding men who want to take advantage of her. But she's irresistibly drawn to the new clan chief, even though he's made it plain he doesn't want to be shackled to anyone.

And the young laird has more than romance on his mind. His investigations are stirring up an enemy. Someone who will stop at nothing to get what he wants – including Marsaili – even if that means destroying Brice's life forever ...

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Monsoon Mists**

**Book 3 in the Kinross Series**

### **Sometimes the most precious things cannot be bought ...**

It's 1759 and Jamie Kinross has travelled far to escape his troubled past – from the pine forests of Sweden to the bustling streets of India.

In India he starts a new life as a gem trader, but when his mentor's family are kidnapped as part of a criminal plot, he vows to save them and embarks on a dangerous mission to the city of Surat, carrying the stolen talisman of an Indian Rajah.

There he encounters Zarmina Miller. She is rich and beautiful, but her infamous haughtiness has earned her a nickname: The Ice Widow. Jamie is instantly tempted by the challenge she presents.

But when it becomes clear that Zarmina's step-son is involved in the plot, he begins to see another side to her – a dark past to rival his own and a heart just waiting to be thawed. But is it too late?

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **The Scarlet Kimono**

**Book 1 in the Kumashiro Series**

*Winner of the 2011 Big Red Read's Best Historical Fiction Award*

**Abducted by a Samurai warlord in 17th-century Japan –  
what happens when fear turns to love?**

England, 1611, and young Hannah Marston envies her brother's adventurous life. But when she stows away on his merchant ship, her powers of endurance are stretched to their limit. Then they reach Japan and all her suffering seems worthwhile – until she is abducted by Taro Kumashiro's warriors.

In the far north of the country, warlord Kumashiro is waiting to see the girl who he has been warned about by a seer. When at last they meet, it's a clash of cultures and wills, but they're also fighting an instant attraction to each other.

With her brother desperate to find her and the jealous Lady Reiko equally desperate to kill her, Hannah faces the greatest adventure of her life. And Kumashiro has to choose between love and honour ...

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **The Gilded Fan**

### **Book 2 in the Kumashiro Series**

*Winner of the 2014 Romantic Historical Novel Award*

### **How do you start a new life, leaving behind all you love?**

It's 1641, and when Midori Kumashiro, the orphaned daughter of a warlord, is told she has to leave Japan or die, she has no choice but to flee to England. Midori is trained in the arts of war, but is that enough to help her survive a journey, with a lecherous crew and an attractive captain she doesn't trust?

Having come to Nagasaki to trade, the last thing Captain Nico Noordholt wants is a female passenger, especially a beautiful one. How can he protect her from his crew when he can't keep his own eyes off her?

During their journey, Nico and Midori form a tentative bond, but they both have secrets that can change everything. When they arrive in England, a civil war is brewing, and only by standing together can they hope to survive ...

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **The Jade Lioness**

**Book 3 in the Kumashiro Series**

### **Can an impossible love become possible?**

*Nagasaki, 1648*

Temperance Marston longs to escape war-torn England and explore the exotic empire of Japan. When offered the chance to accompany her cousin and Captain Noordholt on a trading expedition to Nagasaki, she jumps at the opportunity. However, she soon finds the country's strict laws for foreigners curtail her freedom.

On a dangerous and foolhardy venture she meets Kazuo, a ronin. Kazuo is fascinated by her blonde hair and blue eyes, but he has a mission to complete and he cannot be distracted. Long ago, his father was accused of a crime he didn't commit – stealing a valuable jade lioness ornament from the Shogun – and Kazuo must restore his family's honour.

But when Temperance is kidnapped and sold as a concubine, he has to make a decision – can he save her and keep the promise he made to his father?

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **New England Rocks**

**Book 1 in the Northbrooke High series**

### **First impressions, how wrong can you get?**

When Rain Mackenzie is expelled from her British boarding school, she can't believe her bad luck. Not only is she forced to move to New England, USA, she's also sent to the local high school, as a punishment.

Rain makes it her mission to dislike everything about Northbrooke High, but what she doesn't bank on is meeting Jesse Devlin ...

Jesse is the hottest guy Rain's ever seen and he plays guitar in an awesome rock band!

There's just one small problem ... Jesse already has a girlfriend, little miss perfect Amber Lawrence, who looks set to cause trouble as Rain and Jesse grow closer.

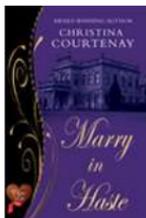
But, what does it matter? New England sucks anyway, and Rain doesn't plan on sticking around ...

Does she?

*A young adult novel.*

*Available to purchase from your favourite store.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Marry in Haste**

### **Book 1 in the Regency Romance Collection**

#### **'I need to marry, and I need to marry at once'**

When James, Viscount Demarr confides in an acquaintance at a ball one evening, he has no idea that the potential solution to his problems stands so close at hand ...

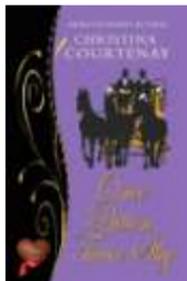
Amelia Ravenscroft is the granddaughter of a earl and is desperate to escape her aunt's home where she has endured a life of drudgery, whilst fighting off the increasingly bold advances of her lecherous cousin. She boldly proposes a marriage of convenience.

And Amelia soon proves herself a perfect fit for the role of Lady Demarr. But James has doubts and his blossoming feelings are blighted by suspicions regarding Amelia's past.

Will they find, all too painfully, that if you marry in haste you repent at leisure?

*Available to purchase from Kindle.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Once Bitten, Twice Shy**

**Book 2 in the Regency Romance Collection**

### **‘Once was more than enough!’**

Jason Warwycke, Marquess of Wyckeham, has vowed never to wed again after his disastrous first marriage, which left him with nothing but a tarnished reputation and a rather unfortunate nickname – ‘Lord Wicked’.

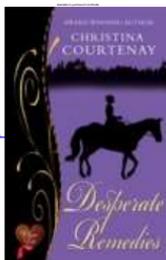
That is, until he sets eyes on lanthe Templeton ...

lanthe lives in the shadow of her beautiful twin sister, Serena, and longs to escape the ‘mindless entertainments’ she is forced to endure in London. She soon finds herself captivated by the enigmatic Wyckeham and tempted by his promises of a new life in the idyllic English countryside ...

But can Wyckeham and lanthe overcome the malicious schemes of spiteful siblings and evil stepmothers to find wedded bliss? Or will Wyckeham discover, all too painfully, that the past has come back to bite him for a second time?

*Available to purchase from Kindle.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Desperate Remedies**

### **Book 3 in the Regency Romance Collection**

#### **‘She would never forget the day her heart broke ...’**

Lexie Holloway falls desperately in love with the devastatingly handsome Earl of Synley after a brief encounter at a ball. But Synley is already engaged to be married and scandal surrounds his unlikely match with the ageing, but incredibly wealthy, Lady Catherine Downes.

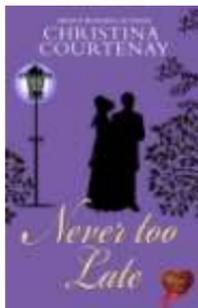
Heartbroken, Lexie resolves to remain a spinster and allows circumstance to carry her far away from England to a new life in Italy. However, the dashing Earl is never far from her thoughts.

Years later, she returns home to find that much has changed – including the marital status of Synley. Whilst the once notorious Earl is a reformed character, the problems caused by his first marriage continue to plague him and it appears that his life may be in danger.

Can Lexie help Synley outwit those who wish to harm him and rekindle the flame ignited all those years ago, or will her associations with the Earl bring her nothing but trouble?

*Available to purchase from Kindle.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Never Too Late**

### **Book 4 in the Regency Romance Collection**

#### **Can true love be rekindled?**

Maude is devastated when the interference of her strict father prevents her from eloping with Luke Hexham. It is not long before she is married off to Edward, Luke's cousin – a good match in her father's eyes but an abhorrent one to his daughter.

Eight years later, Edward is dead. Maude, now Lady Hexham, is appalled to find his entire estate is to go to Luke – the man she still loves – with no provision for either herself or her young daughter. Luke has never forgotten Maude's apparent betrayal, but he has the means to help her.

Soon Maude and Luke realise that perhaps it is never too late for true love. But, even after eight years, there is still somebody who would stop at nothing to keep them apart ...

*Available to purchase from Kindle.*

[Details here ...](#)



## **Marry for Love**

**Book 5 in the Regency Romance Collection**

### **Trapped in an intolerable marriage?**

Delilah cannot bear to watch as her twin sister Deborah marries Hamish Baillie, Fourth Earl of Blackwood. Not only because she knows that her conniving sister has manipulated the poor man into marriage, but also because she has been in love with the Earl since she first set eyes on him ...

Delilah is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to save Hamish from a life of unhappiness – but will her plan work, or will she have to accept that she is no match for her twin's scheming ways?

*Available to purchase from Kindle.*

[Details here ...](#)

# *Introducing Choc Lit*

We're an independent publisher creating  
a delicious selection of fiction.

*Where heroes are like chocolate – irresistible!*

Quality stories with a romance at the heart.

*See our selection here:*

[www.choc-lit.com](http://www.choc-lit.com)

Choc Lit novels are selected by genuine readers like yourself. We only publish stories our Choc Lit Tasting Panel want to see in print. Our reviews and awards speak for themselves.

## **Could you be a Star Selector and join our Tasting Panel?**

Would you like to play a role in choosing which novels we decide to publish? Do you enjoy reading romance novels? Then you could be perfect for our Choc Lit Tasting Panel.

Visit here for more details...

[www.choc-lit.com/join-the-choc-lit-tasting-panel](http://www.choc-lit.com/join-the-choc-lit-tasting-panel)

## ***Keep in touch:***

Sign up for our monthly newsletter Choc Lit Spread for all the latest news and offers: [www.spread.choc-lit.com](http://www.spread.choc-lit.com). Follow us on

Twitter: @ChocLituk and Facebook: Choc Lit.

