

THE WULVER'S ROSE

By Hayden Wand

First Chapter Sample

CHAPTER 1



Scotland, 1752

IN THE YEARS when Scotland was only just recovering from the uprising known as “The Forty-Five,” an astute merchant took advantage of his opportunities and began to make his fortune through trade with the royal houses of Europe.

This merchant, one Gregor Alleway by name, had years ago been married to a young lady of great affluence, whose wealth only increased his own. Though this woman of merit had been struck down in the prime of life by a sudden, violent sickness, she left behind five handsome children who were all beloved of their father and a comfort to him in his bereaved state.

The youngest of these children was a beauty of a girl with wild curly hair and eyes as gray as the mist above the moors. Her given name was Seònaid, but as she was the youngest bairn of the clan, her father had never called her anything more than his “wee bonnie lass,” and as the years flew by, this was shortened simply to Bonnie. A childish name, and long before her thirteenth year Bonnie felt that she had outgrown it, but she was too fond of her father to tell him so.

The family lived in a large house in the town of Burntisland, on the east coast of Scotland. Despite his wealth, the expense of raising five children often drained the merchant's plentiful coffers. Still, there was money enough for pleasure as well as necessities, and the family's existence was more than comfortable. The eldest children enjoyed education abroad, and the merchant knew that he could do no less for his youngest girls.

"I'll never leave you, Da," Bonnie told him determinedly. She was nearly fourteen years of age and had grown up observing her older siblings. Only a few years ago she'd watched her oldest sister, Sorch, go away to school, returning as what seemed to Bonnie an entirely new person. This prospect frightened her. "I don't want to go away."

The family were gathered that night in the drawing room of their beautiful stone-front, terraced house located on one of the best streets in Burntisland. Bonnie sat at her father's feet before the fire, but she now rose to her knees and looked at him, the firelight emphasizing the pleading in her eyes.

"Oh Bonnie," Sorch chided from her place across the hearth, where she sat playing draughts with their middle sister, Maisie, by firelight. "You're too attached to home. It's not healthy in a young lady!" Sorch had only just returned from France and was grown so elegant and aloof. Bonnie could not imagine this new creation of a sister—who sipped her tea with a genteel air and spent her afternoons embroidering cushions—running around the stables the way she had been wont to do in the past. She spoke differently, too.

Bonnie ignored Sorch, keeping her attention fixed on her father. She hated to admit that she was afraid to go, afraid to change. Afraid that she might no longer know herself after a few years in France. She took her father's hand. "Please don't make me go."

"If Bonnie doesn't go, I don't want to either," Maisie, the sister closest to Bonnie in age, asserted, distracted from plotting her next move—a distraction which would surely give Sorch the edge.

"Now, my Margaret," their father said indulgently to Maisie. "You were quite excited about the thought of school yesterday."

"But that was before Bonnie said she didn't want to go! I don't want to be sent to France by myself!"

"Don't be silly, Maisie," Sorch said, shaking her head dismissively. "Your move."

Maisie moved her draught without thinking, and Sorchia swooped in for a victorious finish to the game. Bonnie only half-heard her two sisters' respective cries of triumph and despair as she continued to squeeze her father's hand. "Please, Da," she said one last time.

"It's already been arranged, my sweet lasses," Mr. Alleway said, gently patting his daughter's hand. "And you have a full summer with us still before you must leave. You'll be glad you've had your education when the time has gone by. And you'll be back before you know it, even as we now have our Sorchia home with us again." He beckoned Maisie close and, rising from his chair, kissed both his younger daughters' foreheads. "I don't want either of you to leave for my own selfish reasons. But sometimes we must do things we do not like for the greater good. Now you'd best be getting off to bed."

Bonnie sighed, momentarily defeated. She took up a candle and lit it at the candle on her father's table, holding the light high to illuminate the way as she and Maisie made for the door. "Good night, Da. Good night, Sorchia."

"Don't forget to say your prayers!" Sorchia reminded her. "And be certain to blow out that candle when you're done."

Bonnie, who was a good girl but not entirely outgrown of childish foolishness, stuck her tongue out at her sister and then hastened from the room before she could be scolded. Cupping her hand around the flame to protect it from drafts, she led Maisie up the stairs to the room they shared on the third floor of the townhouse. Obedient to Sorchia's injunction, both girls made for the prayer closet at once—which was not truly a closet so much as a little bench near the window, set aside for pious reflection. Bonnie placed the candle in its brass holder on the bench, and the two sisters knelt on the floor to whisper prayers into the chilly spring-night air. "*Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night . . .*"

Upon whispering a hasty *amen*, they helped each other out of their dresses and into their nightgowns, leaving the candle burning so that they might have some light by which to change. In a hurry to get her bare feet off the cold floor, Maisie made a flying leap to the bed and slipped under the covers, huddling into a ball for warmth. Eager to join her sister before she froze half to death, Bonnie climbed into bed, quickly drew the curtains, and slid under the blankets.

“School might not be so bad, Bonnie,” Maisie whispered between her chattering teeth. “We’ll get to wear fine dresses and have all sorts of lovely things to eat. And maybe we’ll meet husbands, like Sorchu did.”

“I don’t like John,” Bonnie said, thinking of her oldest sister’s intended. “And she didn’t meet him at school. Finishing school is just for girls. How dull must that be?” Bonnie couldn’t imagine life without her brothers. “Besides, Calum says Hetty will foal later this summer, and we’ll miss that if we leave.”

“Oh.” Maisie sounded disappointed. “I hadn’t thought of that. He promised we could name the foal.” She smothered a yawn in her hand and burrowed deeper under the covers.

“Maisie?” Bonnie asked, poking her sister. But Maisie had always been able to fall asleep in an instant and already began to snore. Bonnie smiled to herself, wondering if a French finishing school could do anything to combat snoring.

For an hour—by the count of the clock chiming in the drawing room below—Bonnie tossed and turned in her bed. Through a gap in the bed curtains she saw the glow of the candle she’d left burning on the bench across the room. She really should slide out from under the blankets and snuff the light. But the night was so cold, and the candle would gutter eventually.

She kept thinking of the changes coming up in her life, wishing she might somehow cling to her childhood a little longer. At least Father had decided to keep Maisie back from school for an extra year so that the two sisters might travel together when Bonnie came of age. But the thought brought meager comfort to Bonnie’s fearful heart.

She dozed at last, but awakened when the drawing-room clock downstairs struck eleven. The air felt thick in her throat, and she struggled to draw breath. Her eyes flew open and immediately began to stream and sting. She sat up in bed and shoved aside the curtain, only to see brilliant flames climbing the draperies at her window.

The very window under which she had left her candle burning.

“Maisie!” she cried out, grabbing her sister and violently pushing her from the bed. “Maisie, wake up!”

Maisie woke as she hit the floor, screaming before she even knew what was happening. She gasped and choked on her own scream as smoke filled her lungs. Bonnie slipped to the floor as well, keeping low to the ground where some air still lingered. She could not find the will to move, and the fire climbed her curtain and ate into the wall.

Suddenly her door slammed open, and her brother Calum stood in the doorway. He took in the sight in an instant and, putting his arm around his face, rushed in. He nearly fell over Bonnie, but caught his balance at the last. Grabbing her by the back of her nightgown, he hauled her out into the hall. "Make haste!" he cried. "Tell the others the house is afire and get outside!"

Bonnie obeyed even as Calum darted back into the room after Maisie. Not waiting to see him drag his other sister to safety, she pounded on the doors of the other rooms, shouting at the top of her lungs. In moments, the household was awake. Smoke began to fill the hallways, and terrified servants poured down the stairs from their rooms in the garret. Mr. Alleway put sheltering arms around Sorchas as he led the way out into the street.

Bonnie, caught in the flow of people, cried out for Maisie and for Calum. But not until she stood shivering on the stone street outside the house did she realize that neither her brother nor her sister were with them. "Where are they? Where are they?" she screamed, almost incoherent in her terror. The upper rooms of the terrace house were alight with hellish flames.

"Who? Who do you mean?" her father demanded of her, as yet unable to discern in the strange red half-light which of his family members had escaped from the house and which had not.

"Calum! Maisie!"

Hardly had the names left Bonnie's lips when she saw movement in the house doorway. The next moment Calum crawled into the street, dragging Maisie behind him.

Instantly the men of the household, including Mr. Alleway, rushed forward and hauled the two figures away from the house, onto the stones. Bonnie hastened to Maisie first, collapsing beside her sister where she lay on the cobbles, soot-covered and struggling to breathe. But she did breathe! Oh, thank God above, she *did* breathe!

"Calum!" Sorchas's scream brought Bonnie's head jerking up, and she turned to where her brother lay but a few feet away, her older sister crouched over him. Even in the weird light cast by her burning home, Bonnie could see the terrible, blistering burn that ravaged the whole left side of Calum's face.

The streets of Burntisland echoed with sounds of terror—shouts, screams, and the crackle and roar of the ravening fire. A rattling filled Bonnie's ears, and she felt her arm grabbed by someone—her father perhaps—pulling her out of the way as the fire pump, dragged by a powerful horse, appeared in the street before her home. Volunteers, and men from the houses on

either side of the Alleways', ran with buckets to fill the trough then set to work pumping the handles as hard and fast as they could. A jet of water shot from the copper spout, streaming into the upper windows of the house where fire blazed.

Bonnie wept uncontrollably, not once realizing she did so. The horror of the night washed over her in wave upon wave. She distantly heard someone shouting for the doctor to be brought, someone else shouting for a horse. Two arms wrapped around her, pressing her close, and Bonnie closed her eyes and wept still more.

"We're all alive," Sorchia whispered into the top of her head. "We're all alive. We're going to be fine. We're going to be fine, dearest."

She said the words like a mantra, over and over again, perhaps trying to convince herself as much as her sister. But Bonnie, the screams of the townsfolk resounding in her ears, could think only of the terrible vision she'd glimpsed of Calum's face.

With a roll of thunder, rain began to fall.

End of Sample

[Purchase this story and the rest of the *Five Enchanted Roses* collection.](#)

affiliate link