

A TROUBLED HEART by Tricia McGill

EXCERPT

The next day Finn walked out of the hospital with the proof that he was a free man tucked firmly into his trouser pocket. As luck would have it the injury had turned out to be not broken, but something to do with the shoulder joint having to be pushed back into its rightful position. The doctor who did this told him he had dislocated it when he fell. After the pain from that subsided, he was told to rest it as much as possible. So, no more fighting for some time, was the order given him.

It appeared that when his name came before the Commissariat's office, they realised that his ten-year sentence ended a month or so back and therefore he was deemed free to go wherever he wanted. Just one thing held him back, he had not one penny to his name and possessed just the rags that he stood up in. A young nurse had found him a shirt somewhere to replace the one the doc cut about, but it was not a lot better than the old one. There was the bundle he carried that contained his mug and plate, a worn hairbrush he'd taken from a man who died, and a picture Finn collected somewhere along the way of a place in Ireland called Kilmallock that he kept, as it looked like a nice place to live.

As he pondered what to do next, a soft mutter of annoyance came from behind him and he turned in time to see a woman take a tumble. Landing in a heap at the foot of the steps, her skirts flew about, showing a glimpse of one perfectly shaped ankle. Seldom did females of good breeding travel about alone in these parts so he looked about to see if her carriage driver was here to assist her. A small cart stood not far away, but there was no one else in sight so he went to kneel at her side, asking, "Are you all right miss?"

With a small toss of the head, she looked up at him from the most beautiful pair of eyes he had ever seen. Hair as black as night was pulled back into some sort of roll behind her head beneath the bonnet that she hastily straightened. At a guess he thought perhaps she was about twenty years of age. Not used to being this close to a woman in some time he stood hurriedly and offered a hand, feeling like the idiot he knew she must think him, while he sent up a small prayer of thanks that at least the hand was cleaner than it had been yesterday.