

10 WHEN LOVE CALLS MEN TO ARMS

"Mercy, is it? Hech, ay!"

I happened to look at Mistress Mary. She took young Jamie by the hand without another word, and pushed through the gawping vassals and into the castle hall, sobbing so that we could hear her outside.

By this time darkness had set in, and a fine night it was. The stars came out white and clear, except where the smoke from the ship blurred them, or they paled a wee to the vivid bursts of flame. For the Spanish vessel was now all ablaze. The blackamoors who had come on deck after the oars stopped were skreighing like lost souls, but there were others of fairer colour of face who were still trying to restore order.

There was something very far wrong on that ship. I could see them trying to let down a boat, but their hands seemed to be all thumbs. Two men tumbled into the sea and another laughed loudly and jumped in after them. Not one of the three came up. That seemed to be the signal for a final panic. Two and three at a time the Spaniards jumped overboard, and most of them drowned. This was astonishing to me, for to our Kilellan people swimming is like breathing or walking. But I have since heard that few of the Spaniards with the Armada could swim, and very many of them had never been on the sea before that time. Forbye, some of them wore heavy armour.

I followed the laird and his vassal to the shore.