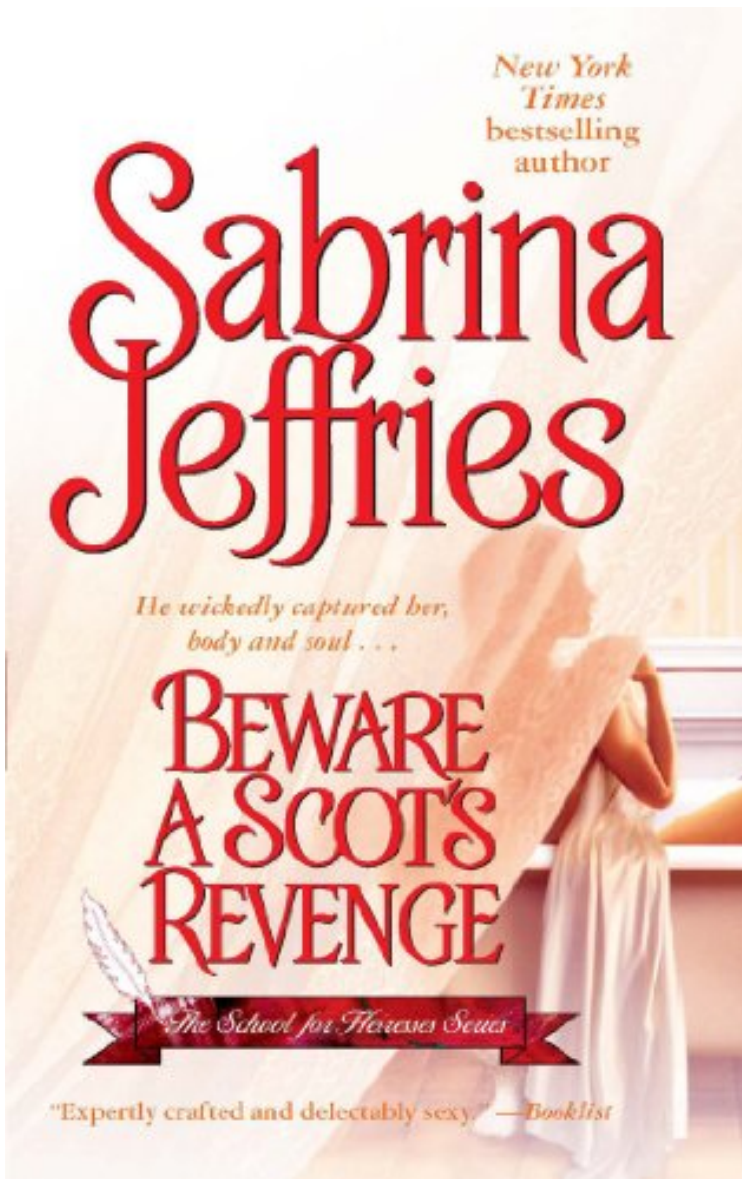


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Beware a Scot's Revenge



Par Sabrina Jeffries
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur "Someone's going to call your bluff someday, Venetia -- you'd better hope it's not a handsome man." -- Mrs. Charlotte Harris, headmistress Lady Venetia Campbell's visit to her childhood home in Scotland takes a dramatic turn when she's kidnapped at pistol point by her father's sworn enemy. Sir Lachlan Ross is widely feared in his guise as The Scottish Scourge, but Venetia remembers her former neighbor as a handsome youth whose attentions she craved. Now a wickedly sexy man, Lachlan's appeal is even more intoxicating...and much more dangerous. Though Lachlan tries to treat her as his foe, his scorching kisses tell another story. And despite his plan to use her as a weapon against her father, Venetia is

determined that Lachlan's lust for revenge will be trumped by an even more powerful desire....

Extrait ONE

Kevin, the same men who killed Stein are after me. Michael Ward's fingers trembled as he lifted his hands from the keyboard. Because he didn't have Kevin's cell phone number, Ward had tried his home a dozen times, but he kept getting the damned answering machine. Leaving a message was out of the question. Even e-mail could be intercepted, so he'd have to choose his words carefully. He needed a cigarette badly. His hand fumbled through his shirt pocket and removed the pack of Marlboros. Only one left. He'd have to get another pack on the way to the airport. He lit the cigarette despite the shaking and took a deep drag, trying to pull every milligram of precious nicotine into his system. He felt the smoke fill his lungs, and the trembling subsided. His attention returned to the words on the screen. He wanted to laugh at their absurdity, but he was afraid if he started he wouldn't be able to stop. A wave of nausea hit him. Ward shook off the feeling. There wasn't much left in his stomach anyway, just half a bottle of Pepto-Bismol he'd drained when he got home. He'd been spending the Friday in his South Texas University office, working and listening to the radio, when he'd heard the news of Herbert Stein's death. The story had been short, but it was enough. An execution-style shooting, the body thrown in a Dumpster. He got sick twice, once in his office trash can and again before climbing into his Mercedes. He didn't feel like a man who was about to retire to the Bahamas with ten million dollars. He checked the progress of his download. The backup of his hard disk to the USB drive had another three minutes to go. With the cigarette stuck in his mouth, he continued typing. Caroline and I are leaving Houston. I think we'll be safe where we're going, but I need your help to be sure. NV117 wasn't a failure. You know the equipment. The key to everything else you need is in your thesis. I made a deal with Clay. May we come in, Dr. Ward? Ward jerked at the sound of the voice. He recognized too well the distinct enunciation of each syllable and his heart started pounding. He turned his head to see two men standing in the doorway to his study. David Lobec and, behind him, Richard Bern, Clayton Tarnwell's men here to finalize the deal. They were early. The meeting wasn't supposed to be for another two hours. He silently cursed himself for not grabbing the passports and running as soon as he got home. He'd been careful not to call ahead in case the phones were tapped, but they'd found him anyway. Five minutes, he'd told Caroline when he burst through the front door. Pack whatever you can in five minutes, then we head straight to Intercontinental and get the first flight out. She'd begun to protest, asking if he'd lost his mind. I'll explain everything in the car, but we need to get the hell out of here. When he'd practically shoved her up the stairs, she'd gotten the message. He was dead serious. Now they were out of time, and Ward's mind raced for options. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the blinking cursor on the screen and realized that the words on the computer might be seen from in front of his desk. Without glancing back at the monitor, he pressed the F4 key as he turned the chair to face his visitors. The message disappeared from the screen. I'm sorry, Mr. Lobec, Ward said, rising from his seat. I didn't hear the doorbell. The waver in his voice betrayed his attempt to remain calm. He took another puff from the cigarette. Lobec smiled and strode in without waiting for the invitation he had asked for. Disgusting habit, he said, plucking the cigarette from Ward's lips. He stubbed it out in a heavily stained brass ashtray. Much better. Now we can all breathe while we talk. He sat in one of the leather chairs. Bern remained standing behind him. Please sit down, Lobec said. You're early, said Ward, lowering himself into his chair. I wasn't expecting you until six thirty. The clock on the study's mantel said 4:23. Of course you weren't. You expected to be far away by the time we arrived. I'm happy to surprise you. He wasn't tall, no more than five foot ten, but Lobec carried a quiet confidence that made him more imposing than a man six inches taller. His thick ebony hair, a marked contrast to his fair complexion and slate-gray eyes, was combed straight back. His gray suit was tailored, perfectly fitting his athletic frame. Lobec was not a handsome man: his nose angled downward and crooked, his chin was weak but his eyes were always alert and focused. Despite being intimidated by Lobec, Ward couldn't help but admire the man's presence. Lobec's younger associate was the same height as Lobec but about fifty pounds heavier, most of it muscle. Bern lacked Lobec's sense of style, wearing an ill-fitting blue suit that looked a size too large. His brown hair was cut in a Marine-style crew, and boredom radiated from his perpetual frown and sleepy eyes. Beyond the visual, Ward knew hardly anything about the man. He'd never uttered more than a few unintelligible greetings. Ward forced a smile, knowing he'd never be able to overpower either one of them, let alone both. Despite his four-inch height advantage over the two men, his large paunch and fleshy jowls clearly marked him as a professor whose sole exercise was swinging a golf club. Since the fall semester didn't begin until next week, he was dressed in the three-hundred-dollar sweatsuit he normally wore on weekends. Otherwise, Ward was the archetype of a distinguished professor, down to the thin, graying hair and wire-rimmed glasses. Judging by Lobec's attitude, he didn't appear to pose much of a threat. I don't know what you mean, Ward said. I was

just finishing up some You do know what I mean. Lobec seemed more amused than annoyed. Weve been searching for you for the last hour. You didnt take your normal route from the office today. Maybe you can tell us why. He had suspected they were watching him, and now Lobecs statement confirmed it. After hearing the news about Herbert Steins murder, Ward had taken the precaution of leaving through the subbasement to another building, hoping to elude his observers for just the ten minutes he needed to hide his insurance. Apparently, he had been successful. How do you know what route I take? Ward was stalling, trying to think. The same way we know how youve been able to afford a half-million-dollar home and a Mercedes on a professors salary. Lobec scanned the tastefully decorated study, with its mahogany desk, black leather sofa, golf awards, and memorabilia, then looked out the window at the gated communitys eighteen-hole championship golf course in the final stages of construction before his eyes returned to Ward.

Although lately your situation has taken a turn for the worse, hasnt it? Mr. Tarnwell mentioned your reputation for successful ventures in the stock market. Its a pity your appraisal of Chromosotics wasnt as shrewd. Wards jaw dropped. He had received a hot tip about a local company called Chromosotics that was about to go to market with a new drug. FDA approval was a sure thing, his source had told him. After the initial press release, the stock soared to four times its original price, and Ward leveraged himself to the hilt to buy more shares. But within a month, a report leaked test results detailing serious side effects of the new drug. With the probability of FDA approval virtually nil, the stock plummeted. Ward couldnt have given shares away. Before the deal with Tarnwell came along, he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Not even Caroline knew. As Ward sat dumbfounded, Lobec continued. I mention these facts merely to impress upon you that our resources for gathering information are quite formidable. Should you and your wife think of leaving Houston, we would find you. Suddenly, Ward remembered Caroline packing upstairs. She should have come down by now. He saw a nasty gleam in Lobecs eyes. Ward jumped from his seat. Caroline! There was no response. He moved toward Lobec. Where is she, dammit? Bern tensed and took a step forward. Lobec, the smile never leaving his face, calmly reached into his jacket and pulled out an automatic pistol.

Mrs. Ward is safe for the moment, but I wouldnt want any rash behavior on your part to jeopardize that safety. You wont shoot me. Somebody will hear. I know as well as you do that you and your wife are the first, and currently only, occupants on this block, Lobec said with a tone that could have frozen lava. I have a silencer, but there really is no need for it. Now, please sit down or Ill ask Mr. Bern to assist you. Seeing that he had no choice, Ward reluctantly sat. The fear that had gripped him moments before was now competing with the anger seething just below it. Despite their problems, Ward loved his wife, and the thought of these bastards manhandling her was repulsive to him. What does Clay want? he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. First of all, he would like the ten million dollars youve stolen from him. I didnt steal it! He paid me that ten million. And hes supposed to pay me another twenty million when he gets Adamas. Second, Lobec continued, we want the names of every person youve told about Adamas. Wards eyes narrowed. If you dont let us go, youll never see Adamas, and Clay will get nothing for his ten million. Spare us, Dr. Ward. We already have the details of your process in our possession. Ward sat back as if slapped in the face. That was impossible. There was only one copy of his notebook, and it was stored in a safe place. The meeting tonight was to go over the specifics of the final transaction. On Monday he was planning to retrieve the notebook, copy it, and give the copy to a lawyer before handing the original over to Tarnwell in return for the additional twenty million. The lawyer would turn the copy in to the authorities only if something happened to Ward. But something had happened to the lawyer first. The lawyer was Herbert Stein, and he had been murdered. Ward sputtered, But you couldnt Youve been observed for the past two weeks, Dr. Ward. Weve also had a chance to thoroughly itemize the contents of your office. We have everything we need. Something was wrong. He had safely hidden his notebook a month ago and hadnt returned to its secure location since then. He certainly didnt keep it in his office, and he doubted even someone as powerful as Tarnwell could retrieve the notebook from its hiding place. Ward needed to know if Lobec was lying. Then you have the videotape as well, I suppose. Lobecs irritating smile finally dissolved. Youre bluffing. There is no videotape. It was Ward smiling now. They had the false duplicate notebook hed written and stashed in his office as a safeguard. So Clay doesnt have Adamas, he said. Thats too bad. When my friends find the videotape and the notebook, Clay is going to see a billion dollars evaporate. That is, if you dont let us go. This time he was bluffing. No one else knew of Adamas or the notebooks location. Lobecs smile returned. Surely you learned what happened to your new attorney, Mr. Stein, or you wouldnt have led us on this merry chase. I must say, Mr. Stein was quite forceful about his need to protect his clients interests. But when I removed his index finger, he told us about your attempt to retain his services in great detail, in fact. No doubt your friends will

be as obliging, with the proper incentive. Despite his horror, Ward tried to feign confidence. You cant possibly know who they are. Thats correct, Lobec said, nodding. But I think youll be willing to tell us. Especially if you dont want to see your beautiful wife damaged by Mr. Bern. Lobec glanced toward Bern and nodded in Wards direction. Wards stomach sank. He now realized they would never let him go. Theyd torture the information about the notebooks location out of him. Once they had that, there would be no reason to keep either of them alive. In fact, with him out of the way, there would be no one to dispute Tarnwells claim that he was the inventor of Adamas. With that realization, Ward knew he had to take whatever chance he saw. Bern, his bored expression unwavering, walked around the desk and bent over to grab Wards arm. As he did so, his jacket fell open and Ward saw a semiautomatic pistol holstered under his left armpit. When Bern wrapped his meaty hand around Wards arm, Ward sagged as if overcome with despair, his 250 pounds throwing Bern off balance in the process. He plunged his free hand into Berns jacket, found the pistol, and yanked it from the holster. Bern snapped back and grabbed Wards wrist, pointing the gun toward the ceiling. To the side, he could see Lobec aiming his pistol at them but not firing, probably not wanting to kill Ward until he got the information he needed. Berns other hand grabbed at the gun. He pried at Wards hand, but Ward gripped the gun with tenacity born of desperation. Ward tried forcing the gun into Berns face. Bern deflected it as Ward pulled the trigger, and a deafening blast rent the air. A chunk of the ceiling hit Ward as Bern whirled them around and into the wall. He pulled Wards arm down, trying to use leverage to wrest the gun away. With one hand still on Wards wrist, Bern slid the other up the guns barrel and jerked downward. Another shot rang out, and the gun dropped to the floor. Bern stepped back to retrieve the weapon. Ward ignored him, his face contorted with agony. A red stain grew on his right shoulder, but it was his left shoulder that throbbed. The excruciating pain spread to his chest. His eyes searched for the source of the agony, but the only obvious wound was from the gunshot. Then he understood. The heart attack Caroline had always predicted. The smoking, the greasy foods, the lack of exercise. Shed nagged him for years. Now it was going to keep Tarnwell from getting what he wanted. He tried to laugh, but the sound came out as only a weak gargle. He staggered forward a step and fell to his knees. Bern stood aside as Ward pitched over. Ward looked up, his vision tunneling. Through the tunnel, he could see Lobecs eyes hovering only a foot from his face. Lobec shook Ward and spoke. Although his voice was only a muddy jumble, Ward felt himself responding, not really understanding what he was saying. He saw Lobecs face turn and start searching, stopping when he came to the computer screen. He followed Lobecs gaze there. The last thing Ward ever saw was the phrase Message sent to: N. Kevin Hamilton. 2011 Boyd MorrisonRevue de presse"Expertly crafted and delectably sexy." -- Booklist