



Romancing the Regency Era

SARA FREEZE

*A Seaside  
Enchantment*

*by*

*Sara Freeze*

## Chapter One

His aunt had a lousy sense of humor Justin concluded after his first night in the rented Victorian cottage. Either he was going utterly insane—and that wasn't entirely impossible given the year he'd just had—or the cottage he was renting was haunted.

Earlier in the day, a walk along the beach had seemed like a good idea at the time, until he'd met with the blustery March winds that perpetually gusted along the Dorset coast. The contrary English weather just loved to mess with him when he was out and about. He raced back to the compact Victorian cottage, pumping his arms and breathing in great gulps of the fresh sea air.

Bursting through the rickety back door that led to the kitchen, he stopped so abruptly, he almost succeeded in propelling himself flat onto the floor.

"What the hell," he muttered.

Before his walk, the chairs around the antique kitchen table had been neatly pulled in. Now, though, they were stacked on top of the wooden surface in a haphazard arrangement.

What exactly was the correct approach when dealing with a ghost? As a tough Florida cop, he was accustomed to working with a wide spectrum of human beings—anyone and everyone from biker gangs to drug addicts to desperate parents. Ghosts, Justin suspected, were altogether out of his league.

His suspicion was confirmed as an eerie moaning echoed throughout the small kitchen. As if to cement the haunting, Justin could distinctly hear the rattling of chains. Now, to Justin's thinking, that was overkill.

He grit his teeth as the chains clanked together persistently, mixing with the ghostly moaning to create a true cacophony of sounds. So much for his restful

vacation.

Well, the only remedy was to face his invisible adversary directly. Whether he was facing a ghost or a human being, showing fear was the surest route to a nasty end.

"I always thought *Poltergeist* was a stupid movie." He waited. Planting his hands on his hips, he slowly circled the table, daring it to make an appearance. After a few minutes, Justin snorted. "Some ghost you are."

"Well, aren't you the discerning film critic?" The crisp English accent of the feminine voice echoed in the small kitchen. "I had not realized twenty-first century men were so cultivated."

It appeared he didn't just have a ghost; he had a ghost with an attitude. How fun for him. His aunt Harriet was going to have a lot to answer for the next time he saw her.

His curiosity aroused, Justin asked, "Who are you?"

"I will ask the questions here. What is your lineage?" The voice had a distinctly imperial ring to it.

He cleared his throat. What the hell did she mean by *lineage*? Did she want him to name every ancestor who ever lived? "My parents are Robert and Pam Stewart of Tampa, Florida."

"I am unfamiliar with this Tampa, Florida." She sounded surprised. "I thought I was well acquainted with the topography of all of the British Isles."

"It's not in England," Justin explained. "I'm an American."

"Oh!" Disdain oozed through the cultured voice. "One of those beastly Americans. How very awful for you."

"Gee, thanks for the sympathy." Justin rolled his eyes. Of course, he would be saddled with a rude ghost.

"And are you a first or second born?"

"What difference does that make?" What a weird lady. Who cared whether he was a first or second child, unless she bought into all that birth order crap.

"Why do you insist on answering a question with a question?"

"Why do you insist on answering my question of your question with another question altogether?" Justin paused. In his quest to irritate his uppity new companion,

he had succeeded only in confusing himself.

“What are you called?”

“Justin.”

“Justin.” The voice sounded reflective. “Hmm, Justin. No, I do not like it. What else can I call you?”

“Now listen here you,” Justin began.

“You may address me as Miss Wentworth.” The voice sniffed delicately. “It would hardly be proper for you to address me as you would a servant.

Justin scowled into the air. “I did no such thing.”

“Yes you did.”

“No, I...” Justin threw his hands up in the air. “I’m not arguing with a ghost. Now, I rented this place fair and square.”

“I was here long before you were, and I shall be here long after you leave,” the voice informed him coolly. “And you must vacate the premises immediately, as I am waiting for a very important arrival.”

With a snort, Justin asked, “So ghosts get deliveries nowadays? The Internet really is an incredible thing.”

“I know not of what you speak.” She paused. “I am awaiting my champion.”

Justin blinked. Her champion? What the hell did she mean by a champion? He cautiously glanced around the kitchen, wondering if yet another ghost was about to come barreling in. And, really, one was enough. It was supposed to be his vacation, after all, not an opportunity to play Ghostbusters.

“Who is this champion guy you’re talking about?”

“I am not entirely certain.” His mystery lady faltered for a moment but quickly rallied as she announced in a brisk tone, “I shall know him when I see him.”

“You mean he wears a nametag saying ‘champion’ or something?” Justin lifted his eyebrows in blatant skepticism.

“Of course *you* wouldn’t understand.” The voice heaved an impatient sigh, as though wondering at the depths of Justin’s ignorance. “My champion is the one who is going to set me free from this wretched ghostly state.”

Justin crossed his arms, annoyed by her casual dismissal of his capabilities. How did she know he wasn’t this champion guy she kept running on about? He had,

after all, survived life in the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment before moving to Miami and serving as a cop for several years.

Feeling certain he was going to regret asking about her mystery champion, but unable to resist, Justin asked, “And how exactly is he going to set you free?”

“All he has to do is perform a spell, travel back in time two hundred years, locate the ruffian who performed the spell the first time, and then vanquish the cowardly fellow.”

“Oh, is that all,” Justin said incredulously. “I’m surprised you haven’t found your guy yet.”

“It’s none of your concern, I’m sure.”

Justin rolled his eyes. “I’m sure it isn’t.” He shrugged nonchalantly. “I guess I’ll just be going then.”

“That sounds like a capital idea to me.”

Without another word, Justin turned on his heel and headed to the door, intent on getting as far away from the snotty voice as he could. As he placed his hand on the rusted doorknob, he paused. Crap. He couldn’t just leave her. What if she really needed his help?

He was probably going to regret this. No, scratch that; he most definitely was going to regret what he was about to do.

Turning back around slowly, he expelled a slow breath, then raised his hands as though surrendering. “Listen, why don’t you at least let me give it a shot? If I screw it up, I’ll help you find this storybook champion you’ve been waiting for.”

“Really? Well, I suppose you’ll do for now.” Beneath the cool tones, Justin detected clear-cut relief. Stubborn woman—she would have let him walk right out the door.

“Really,” Justin said firmly. “Now where do I get started?”

“By going back to where the enchantment all began—England 1810.”

## Chapter Two

“1810?” Justin sounded dumbfounded. “Okay—so you were really serious about the going back two centuries thing.” As always when he was lost in thought, he traced a finger along the pronounced scar above his right eyebrow. Julia eyed the scar. What fearsome battle had he endured to receive such a wound?

“You needn’t worry about inventing a form of time travel. If you will progress to the attic, you’ll find a spell book that will take care of the transportation aspect.”

Justin groaned. “So now I’m supposed to believe in magic?”

“You believe in ghosts, don’t you?”

“I do now.” He threw up his hands in surrender. “Fine. Let’s check out the attic and find that book.” Not waiting to hear her reply, Justin left the kitchen, and a second later she could hear the solid thud of his steps as he ascended the narrow stairway.

Wafting up the stairway ahead of him—it simply wouldn’t do to allow him to precede her into the attic—Julia eyed the cluttered upper regions of the cottage in disgust. Everything was in disarray. Mrs. Knight, her family’s housekeeper, would have had paroxysms at the sight of such a mess. Julia sighed...Mrs. Knight, another reminder of her lost past. Thank goodness her parents had not lived long enough to learn of their daughter’s demise. Her brother, John, was all that remained of her family. Though, he was so caught up in his own affairs, it was probably months before he noticed what had happened.

*Please, please, please, let Justin be the one to set me free.*

Julia jumped as Justin threw open the door with a bang. “Okay, I’m ready to work.” He took in the chaotic landscape of the attic and whistled. “What a mess.”

With a sigh, Julia said, “I do hope it won’t impede our

progress. The book is in an oak chest with my name carved across the top. It used to be against the eastern side of the attic, facing the sea." She scowled, thinking about the previous residents of the small cottage. "Unfortunately, the tenants before you were an unruly bunch. It took me an entire week to scare them away. They left in a hurry, though, and tossed into the attic anything they didn't want."

Justin shrugged. "No problem." He scanned the immediate area surrounding him and began lifting a pair of wobbly chairs to clear the way. "So, since we're going to be working together, what can I call you?"

"Miss Wentworth," Julia swiftly replied. The cheek of the man. They had only been introduced earlier that day. She heaved what must be her fourth disgruntled sigh of the day. Modern day men certainly were presumptuous.

"Come on, lady, lighten up already." Justin bent over and effortlessly lifted one enormous solid oak trunk. Julia scowled, crossing her arms. Ever since Justin had first entered the house, Julia had been unable to resist lingering around him. Whereas in the past, she had found a certain enjoyment in chasing away the cottage's inhabitants—and why shouldn't she, it was her home, after all—she had been strangely reluctant to see Justin go.

Justin bent over again, and Julia very unwillingly recalled a highly improper moment of a few days earlier. As was her custom, Julia was peering out the attic window, mesmerized by the gentle rolling of the waves of the sea. She had been rudely pulled out of her reverie by the banging of a door and the sound of a deep masculine voice cursing at the weather, the wind, the rain, and all things English.

Julia had promptly swooped down the stairs, fully prepared to do battle with the intruder; already, she was thinking of several enjoyable tricks that generally worked well on the impressionable humans who visited. Except, she had stopped in her tracks at the sight of the giant pacing through the front parlor, vigorously shaking himself and spraying droplets across the fine antique furniture.

She had opened her mouth to remonstrate him—a

Hepplewhite chair was *not* immune to the debilitating effects of water—and it had stayed open as he angrily stripped off his shirt.

Although the men of Julia's time had certainly been, well, she supposed the word was *shapely*, none had ever matched the intruder's masculine perfection. Broad shoulders, well-muscled arms, a perfectly sculpted chest—a virtual Adonis. An Adonis, however, marked with puckered wounds and one vertical scar that ran vertically across his stomach. Later, she had realized he was in the cottage to recuperate from a particularly debilitating bullet wound, though Julia only sensed strength when she looked at him.

And look at him she had. Julia had gaped at him until she realized what a compromising situation it was—just because she was ghost did not mean she ceased being a lady—and whirled back up the stairs.

Thinking back to that stirring moment, Julia drew in a shaky breath. All these years as a ghost must be having their effect. He was an *American* of all things, and most definitely not of her world. So why couldn't she drive his image from her mind?

"Hey." The rough masculine voice abruptly pierced Julia's dreaminess.

"Hay is for horses," she replied automatically.

He lifted his eyes to the ceiling, as though praying for patience. He was going to need it. After she was betrayed by her erstwhile suitor and confined to her maddening ghostly state, she had sworn she would never again let down her guard.

"You're a piece of work, lady."

"And that is exactly what I am—a lady. Kindly return to work, please."

Julia shifted back and forth on her feet, increasingly antsy as Justin gradually cleared the way to the antique trunk that housed the solution to her ghostly predicament.

"Is there any way that you could work faster?"

Justin snorted. "And you were the one complaining about being addressed as a servant." Seeing the rigid line of his jaw, Julia knew she would not accomplish anything by prodding him, and with a huff she moved toward the

beveled windows facing the sea.

“So how long do we have, exactly, to track down this old book and figure out the spell?”

“Ahem,” Julia said, wondering if she could evade the question. Seeing he had stopped work altogether, she gave an injured sniff, then said, “Until midnight tomorrow.”

“Are you sh—” Justin cut himself off abruptly. “Are you kidding me? You were going to let me walk right out that door, knowing full well you only had until tonight.”

Well, stated that way, it did seem just the tiniest bit foolish on her part. However, she had made the mistake of trusting the wrong person before, and look where it had landed her—confined to live out eternity as a ghost, forever watching life passing before her eyes but never being able to participate.

Delicately clearing her throat, Julia said, “The same opportunity is afforded me once a century. I have already withstood two centuries; I am entirely certain I could go another two just fine.” Justin didn’t respond, which was just as well. Julia was disinclined to delve into the reasons for her current ghostly status.

Several minutes later, an explosive sneeze echoed through the musty attic. “Hey, I think I found that old trunk you’re looking for.”

Julia quite literally flew to his side—it was one of the few advantages of her ghostly status. “You found it,” she whispered. Tentatively, she reached out a trembling hand to trace the rough wood then snatched her hand back as she remembered the reality of her situation. Solid objects were only for the touch of the living. She cleared her throat gruffly, nearly choking on her next words. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome,” Justin replied, still hunched over the trunk. “So, what do you say we open this and get our little adventure started?”

Julia beamed. “I say yes.”

As Justin struggled to pry open the latches, which had apparently rusted over after decades of neglect, Julia anxiously clasped her hands together. What if the book was gone? She could be doomed to remain a ghost throughout the rest of eternity. She would never be free,

and Price, that wretched villain, would win.

Luckily, her fears were swiftly laid to rest as Justin announced, "I think I've got it." With a flourish, he flung open the lid, and resting right on top of Julia's carefully folded linens was the ancient book of magicks.

Julia squeezed her eyes together tightly. "Thank goodness," she whispered. Quickly recovering her equilibrium, she said, "We mustn't waste any more time. The anniversary of my enchantment is almost upon us; the witching hour quickly approaches."

"Let's move downstairs," Justin suggested. "We'll have better lighting, and we might need some supplies."

As Julia trailed along behind him, she said, "From what I recall of the reversal spell, materials are not required. All that is required is for a gentleman with a pure heart to intone the words of the spell."

"A gentleman with a pure heart, huh?" Justin paused on the stairs and frowned at the musty book in his hands. "I'm not sure that I qualify."

Julia raised her chin. Here was a man who was willing to trust her story and to help her. How dare he question his own worthiness? Besides, she had made up her mind that he would be her champion, and she was rarely in the wrong. "I have faith that you are." She paused, wondering how best to phrase the reason for her initial hesitation to confide in him. "It was my own stubbornness that compelled me to remain silent at first. A man confined me to this ghostly state, so I am not inclined to trust another man to free me."

She squirmed slightly, her conscience pricking her. She was asking a great deal of him, this stranger that she had known for the period of less than a day. Really, he had no reason in the world to help her. And, there was one other major caveat: Assuming Justin could vanquish her oppressor, Mr. Price, she had no reason to believe that Justin could be returned to his own time.

"I am sorry your trust was betrayed," Justin said, his husky tone sending little shivers along Julia's spine. "I'll do everything I can to give you back your life, I swear it."

Julia stared wonderingly at Justin. As jaded as she was after her centuries of confinement, she was tempted to believe him. Again, the demands of her conscience were

urging her to speak, wanting to caution him about the risk he would be taking in performing the spell.

Justin cleared his throat as he gingerly flipped through the thin pages of the book of magicks. Running a weary hand through his hair, he said, "We should get some rest. Apparently, the spell needs to be done when, let's see," he glanced down at the book, "the night hours give way to dawn."

"That sounds like a splendid idea," Julia said. As Justin prepared to enter the guest bedroom, she breezed over next to him. He seemed to sense her, as he stopped his movements and looked into the space she currently inhabited. For one long, electric moment, they stood there, drawn to each other's energy, neither one prepared to break the transitory enchantment.

When they finally separated, Julia drew a shaky breath. What on earth had she let herself into by joining forces with this mortal?

Just before he closed the bedroom door, she said softly. "Julia." He stopped. "Call me Julia."

"Julia," he said slowly. He smiled at the point where she hovered. "I look forward to meeting you Julia."

The rest of the night, as Justin lay sleeping, Julia savored that smile.

At dawn, there was no time for doubts as Justin briskly turned through the book. The sun was just starting to appear over the horizon, and the early morning rays spilled through the dark confines of the downstairs sitting room.

Before Julia could say another word, Justin announced, "Okay, here goes nothing." Julia shut her mouth with a snap.

"Let me set your spirit free. You are the darkness, I am the light. Soon must all things be set right. Away from the present, into the past. This spell will now be recast."

A faint roar, like the distant crashing of the waves outside the cottage, reverberated through the room. Julia closed her eyes as the scene before her faded to black.

### Chapter Three

Justin blinked as he gazed at the bizarre scene in front of him. The sitting room had entirely disappeared, as had the roughly paved road that curved in front of the cottage. Hell, they weren't even in the cottage anymore.

He was standing in front of a red brick town house along a busy thoroughfare. Some of the storefronts looked vaguely familiar, and Justin guessed he was still in Weymouth. He jumped slightly as a carriage drawn by four powerful horses thundered by. No electricity, no cars, no normal-looking people—he was no longer in his own era, Justin surmised.

Even worse, Justin quickly realized, there was no *they*. Julia had entirely disappeared from the scene. Abruptly, his thoughts became more focused—*Julia*. He jerked his head to the right, where he had last heard her voice.

“Julia,” he hissed, ignoring two guys in old-fashioned trousers and coats who gawked at him as they passed.

Vaguely, he heard a door open up behind him, and a feminine tone called out, “Justin!”

Justin frowned. The voice was decidedly familiar, but it wasn't Julia's. Slowly, he pivoted on his heel, his shocked eyes lighting on his aunt's form.

“Aunt Harriet,” he said numbly. He leapt up the stairs; surely, if his aunt was here, she must know something about Julia. Exactly how she came to be there—that was another story altogether, and one he didn't have time for. He had to find Julia. His aunt held out her hands, and he seized them.

“Come in, come in, my dear Justin. There's much to be done, and Regency folks simply aren't accustomed to seeing a man in jeans.”

Quickly loping up the stairs, Justin paused in the doorway. “You have a lot of explaining to do, Aunt Harriet.” He narrowed his eyes. “And so does Julia.”

His aunt winced. "I know, I know." She shoed him in. "And we have so much to do."

"First things first—Julia," Justin said firmly. He had made a promise to protect her, and he was going to keep it, no matter what the cost.

"She's safe for now, I promise you, Justin." She warmly grasped his hands. "I just knew the two of you were meant for each other." Beaming up at him, she added, "And you, my courageous nephew, are the man to set dear Julia free."

Justin rubbed his hand over his forehead. So, his aunt had known about Julia all along? And what the hell was she doing in the past anyway? His parents had never said anything about his aunt traveling through time—he was certain he would have remembered something like that.

"Oh, don't worry so much, dear Justin. You'll give yourself a headache." Smiling beatifically, Aunt Harriet explained, "I'm a witch, dearest. A good witch, obviously. I have the ability to move through time, and depending upon my whim, sometimes I'm here, sometimes I'm in your time, sometimes I'm hobnobbing with the Puritans." She shrugged. "Time is so limiting, really."

"Isn't it, though?" Justin said wryly.

His aunt's eyebrows drew together. "You are reacting remarkably well to being thrust back through time. Are you really all right, my dear?"

Justin chuckled as he rubbed his hand against the back of his neck. "I was a Ranger for five years and a cop for six. And I've been communicating with a ghost lately. At this point, nothing surprises me anymore."

"Mrs. Dobbs. Is everything quite all right here, ma'am?" The stuffy butler guy who approached eyed Justin up and down. His nose twitched, as though a particularly offensive odor had wafted in right under his nose.

Justin directed his best scowl toward the pompous ass, which he knew would cause his scar to look especially pronounced over his right eyebrow. Jeeves, however, was unimpressed. If anything, his nose twitched even more distinctly.

"It's quite all right, Holmes. Mr. Sinclair is my

nephew.”

“I see.” This last was said in the silkiest of tones.

Turning his back on the infuriating butler, and his nose-tic, Justin marched over to his aunt. “One hour, tops, to make me into a gentleman.” Something sounding suspiciously like a snort emanated from the butler’s station by the door. “Then, I need to find Julia.”

One hour and five minutes later—it had taken several extra minutes to wrestle himself away from the histrionic valet his aunt had assigned him—Justin tore the marble staircase to find his aunt. She must have heard the pounding of his footsteps, as Harriet emerged from a sprawling room to the right of the staircase.

“We leave now,” his aunt said. “I’ve already called for the carriage.” She chewed her lip. “We will be arriving just in time I believe, to catch Price in action and to save your Julia.”

Justin was going to remark that she wasn’t his Julia, exactly, yet something about his aunt’s statement just seemed right. Once he succeeded in his quest to save Julia, he would set about making her his.

As Justin hurried out the door with his aunt, he took the time to slyly wink at Jeeves and was rewarded with the furious twitching of the staid butler’s nose.

Maybe hanging out in the Regency era wouldn’t be so bad.

## Chapter Four

For the umpteenth time, Julia peered out the beveled glass window of the Wentworth front parlor. Where was Justin? The spell had transported her back to the exact day when it had been cast. Without Justin's help, she would be doomed to repeat all the events of that day.

"I say, Julia, you shouldn't frown like that." Her brother, John Townley, Baron Wentworth, plucked at the immaculate fabric of his white waistcoat. "Ages you, you know, and you will be on the marriage mart for a second time next year."

"Thank you for the reminder, dear brother," Julia said, the corners of her mouth pulling down. The marriage mart—once again making the rounds at Almacks, Covent Gardens, various routs. It was not a pleasant thought. And, now that she had met Justin, the thought of marrying some dandy and settling into the staid role of Society matron was more repellent than ever.

Julia glanced back toward the window. *Please, please let Justin arrive soon.*

"You should cease the wool-gathering, Julia." John waved an admonishing finger at her. "Shows you might be an intellectual—not very attractive in a lady." With a flourish, he donned a pair of kid gloves.

"Why don't you stay?" Julia tried to hold back the panic bubbling up inside of her.

"Nonsense, Julia," John replied with an offended expression. "Took me four hours to dress, don't you know. It would be a shame to waste all this on my sister." With a cheery wave, he pranced out of the room, and Julia heard his tilbury roll to a stop in front of the large town house. So, there would be no help coming from that quarter.

She could run, but Julia's very nature balked at the idea of such a cowardly retreat. And, her erstwhile suitor, Mr. Henry Price, would surely find her wherever she hid.

Julia closed her eyes briefly as Mr. Price was

announced shortly after her brother went his way. As soon as she heard Price's racy phaeton speed up the drive, Julia clenched her hands, her heartbeat skittered and her nerve almost failed her. With a sly smile pasted across his aristocratic face, the pronounced Roman nose looking more arrogant than ever, Price bowed over her hand. The late afternoon rays of sunshine filtered through his hair, casting him in an almost angelic aura.

"Miss Wentworth, through the generosity of my heart, I've come to give you another chance to reconsider my offer of marriage."

Squaring her shoulders, Julia said, "My refusal still stands. I will not reconsider."

Price sighed, picking an imaginary bit of lint from his expensively cut coat. "You always were an impulsive chit, my dear Julia. As much as it pains me, I see I will have to provide you with some incentive." With a suave flourish of his hands, Price uncovered the now-familiar book of magicks previously concealed in the folds of his greatcoat.

Brandishing the book of magicks, Price slid forward. "I can make things very unpleasant for you if you don't comply. It is time we ended this charade, Julia."

"Take another step toward her, and I'll end you."

Sagging with relief, Julia registered the deep baritone of Justin's voice.

"Whoever you are, you have just made a very serious error. Leave now, or I will see to it that you face the consequences." Price stared down his narrow Roman nose at Justin, his eyes narrowing into a squint.

"I won't be the one facing the consequences. Miss Wentworth has already told you you're not welcome here. I suggest you get the hell out."

"You insult my honor by interfering in a private affair between me and my lady. I shall demand satisfaction. Pick your date."

"No," Justin said, the muscles of his jaws tightening. "We settle this now."

Price's eyebrows shot up. "That is not a part of the gentleman's code."

"I'm no gentleman. And I sure as hell don't care about some code." Justin narrowed his eyes at his opponent. "It's funny, in fact, that you would mention

being a gentleman. I thought gentlemen didn't attack innocent women."

Price's face reddened as he absorbed the insult. Gesturing angrily at Julia, Price said, "I warned her of my power. She has to realize the depth of her error in refusing me. The chit deserves it."

Without warning, Justin launched himself across the short space separating him from Price. Grabbing Price by the lapels of his elegant riding coat, Justin said through gritted teeth, "And you're about to get what you deserve."

## Chapter 5

Releasing his hold on Price's lapels, Justin eyed his aristocratic opponent.

Price sniffed. "Pistols, then. We can adjourn to the nearby field, where we shall have the privacy to conclude this unsavory business." Pivoting on his heel, Price added, "You have five minutes."

As Justin moved to follow Price out the door, Julia grabbed his hand. Some of the aggression drained out of Justin as he looked into Julia's pale face, her aquamarine eyes shining with dread. Tenderly, he took one of her slim hands. "I'm pleased to meet you at last." With a roguish smile, he added, "in the flesh."

Julia bit her lip as a blush swept across her heart-shaped face and down her neck. "And you as well, Mr.—" She paused, a stricken look on her face. "I do not even know your surname."

"Justin will do just fine."

A tremulous smile crossed her lips. "Thank you, Justin."

Some instinct prompted Justin to lean forward and press a brief but passionate kiss against Julia's full lips.

Soon enough, Justin found himself at the appointed battleground. Price had already removed his coat and was priming his pistol. Julia and Aunt Harriet stood under a low elm tree, clasping each other's hands.

As Justin walked up to Price, he recalled one of his favorite scenes from a movie he and his father watched together when Justin just a kid. He figured no one in the nineteenth century had ever heard of *Dirty Harry*, and he'd been itching to say those lines since he was ten. Besides, intimidation was always a part of any battle.

Deciding it'd be okay to improvise a little, Justin said, "Being as this is a state-of-the-art flintlock pistol, the best pistol in the world, and it could blow your little head right off, you've got to ask yourself a question."

Justin stepped forward and narrowed his eyes. “Do I feel lucky? Well, do ya punk?” He almost ruined the moment by snorting when he saw the bafflement on Price’s face.

“I say,” the Regency punk whined, “What the devil do you mean?”

“It means,” Justin said, stepping forward with a menacing look, “that you had better understand who you’re facing.”

Adrenaline coursing his body, Justin took his place and completed the requisite number of fifteen paces. Whirling around, he discharged his pistol at the same time as Price. Bracing himself for the impact of a bullet, Justin relaxed as he saw Price crumple to the grass, a bloodstain spreading across his right shoulder.

For the rest of his life, Justin knew he would relive the next few moments. Satisfied that Price lay harmless and unmoving on the bedewed grass, Justin turned to sweep Julia into his arms. His heart lighter than it ever had been, he swung her around in the air.

Vaguely, he registered his aunt moving away to give them privacy.

“I’m free,” Julia said; her blue eyes aglow with excitement.

“You shall make your own destiny now,” Justin said. “And I hope you’ll share it with me.”

“My champion,” Julia said, “Of course I will.” She glanced over at the waiting carriage. “Shall we leave this place? I wish to be as far away from Price as possible.”

Justin nodded. “No problem.” He stooped to pick up his pistol, and as he straightened, he became distracted with checking the hammer at the top of the pistol.

Too late, he became aware of a movement down the field. As though the sounds were filtered through a tunnel, he heard his aunt’s warning shout, Julia’s cry, the click of Price’s trigger.

Stiffening in preparation for the bullet’s impact, Justin instead felt a soft body crash against his own, and he knew: Julia had saved his life by risking her own. As he fell to the side, he twisted in the air so that he would bear the brunt of the fall.

Stunned and temporarily immobilized, Justin lifted his head and realized a body was lying across his.

“My God, Julia.”

The bodice of her silk gown was soaked through with blood.

Dimly, he heard Price cursing behind him as he cocked his pistol. As carefully as he could, Justin rolled Julia to one side, and in one smooth motion, he rammed one of his remaining bullets down the barrel, cocked the hammer, and fired straight at Price’s heart.

Justin felt a grim satisfaction as he realized Julia’s tormentor was permanently vanquished. Too quickly, the satisfaction was replaced with a hollow feeling in the center of his chest as he looked down at Julia’s motionless body.

Aunt Harriet threw herself onto her knees beside Justin. “She’s still alive,” his aunt mumbled, as she dabbed at the blood with a lace handkerchief. “If we could get her to a modern hospital, she can survive this.”

Julia moaned then, her eyes fluttering open with great effort. Her voice thick, she said, “What happened?”

“Price happened,” Justin said, again feeling a surge of satisfaction that he had avenged Julia’s injury. “But you’re going to be all right, Julia.” He cradled her head in his hands. “I swear it.”

“Julia, my dear girl, you must listen carefully to me. Justin is correct.” Aunt Harriet spoke slowly but firmly, intent on ensuring each word was understood. “If we can move you to a twenty-first century hospital, you can easily survive such a wound. I can get you there.”

Julia nodded.

“But I must warn you, I am unsure of whether you could ever return to your own time.”

Justin sucked in his breath. So, those were their choices, then. There wasn’t much middle ground. Looking down at his new love, the choice seemed easy at this point. “Julia,” he said, tenderly wiping back a strand of pale blond hair from her forehead, “I need you to live. If you come to the twenty-first century with me, I’ll spend the rest of my life finding a way to return you to your time.”

He held his breath, waiting for her reply.

“Take me with you,” Julia said simply. “Show me your century. If we’re together, we can manage whatever

else happens.” During her short speech, her breathing had progressively become more ragged. Her voice almost gone, she whispered, “I trust you, Justin.”

“We’re out of time, Justin,” his aunt said, resting a soft hand on his shoulder. “Which is it? Stay here and hope for the best, or travel to the future?”

“You know already,” Justin said, pressing one of Julia’s limp hands against his forehead. “Please send us forward now.”

“I shall remain here.” Pressing a brief kiss to Justin’s cheek, his aunt whispered, “Good luck.”

As his aunt began chanting a Latin incantation, Justin gathered Julia into his arms, taking great care not to hold her too tightly for fear of jarring her wound. The world around them became a whirl of kaleidoscope colors until finally the colors separated, and Justin once again found himself in the elegant sitting room where they had started.

Wasting no time, Justin quickly arranged for transportation to the nearest hospital. It had been years since Justin had prayed, but as Justin slouched in a clear plastic chair in the waiting room, he whispered entreaties for Julia to be saved.

A few hours later, the doctors finally cleared Julia, and Justin wept unabashedly, thankful that his new love was safe. Once the elation passed, however, Justin wondered about Julia’s adjustment to her new world. Would she regret their hasty decision to return to his century?

Justin’s heart finally stopped hurting when he saw Julia smiling at him from the hospital bed where she lay.

“Justin.” Visibly struggling, Julia tried to raise her head, her eyes focused on Justin. Her dark blond hair lay scattered across the pillow, luminescent against the stark white setting

“Careful, love,” Justin said, striding over to the bed and propping a pillow behind Julia’s head. Satisfied that she was more comfortable, Justin leaned against the rails of the hospital bed and picked up one of Julia’s small hands. “Thank you,” he said simply.

Julia arched one elegant eyebrow. “For what?” She laughed self-consciously. “I cannot imagine I have done

anything to merit it.”

“For living, for saving my life, for taking a chance on us.” Justin shrugged. “Take your pick out of any of those.”

Her eyes alight with love and happiness, Julia smiled. “You gave me back my life; in fact, you gave me a better one than I could ever have dreamed of.”

Leaning down to press a gentle kiss against her forehead, Justin said, “From now on, it’ll be one life, together.”

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Two weeks later, Justin and Julia strolled along the shoreline of the Weymouth beach. Julia had been released from the hospital earlier in the day and immediately requested that she and Justin return to the cottage.

“Do you miss it?” Justin glanced over, trying to read Julia’s expression.

“Miss what?”

“Your own time.”

Julia was silent for a moment, a pensive look crossing her face. “In a way, I do.” She stopped and curled her toes into the gritty sand. “However, I also realize what an incredible opportunity I’ve been given. How many people can say they’ve lived in two entirely different centuries, after all?”

“Well, my Aunt Harriet, for one.”

Julia laughed as she stood on her tiptoes to encircle her arms around Justin’s neck. “Thank goodness for your aunt. I wonder if she is still in the nineteenth century.”

“I’m willing to try to find out if you are.”

Julia nodded. “One life, together, no matter what.”

“Together,” Justin affirmed, wrapping his arms around her in a snug embrace. “Forever, my Julia.”