

In which Sarah and Michael celebrate their wedding

Her hand was moist. It trembled in his hold, and when Michael gave it a little squeeze, her fingers tightened desperately round his. But when they made their vows, her voice was steady if low, and her face glowed when she looked at him. And yet, she clung to his hand like a drowning sailor clings to whatever flotsam he might find.

The priest blessed them, the contracts were duly signed by the hastily assembled witnesses, and with his new wife at his side, Michael left the little church, making for the nearby inn and the celebratory meal.

“Don’t you like it?” he whispered, gesturing at Sarah’s untouched food.

“I do, it’s just...” With a rueful little smile she broke off, ducking her head to hide her face.

“You’re frightened,” he said bluntly.

Sarah nodded, using her knife to prod at the duck on her plate. For the day, her hair was covered by a new coif, a neat little thing that allowed glimpses of her fair hair. Thick and straight, when unbound it fell almost to her waist, and Michael intended taking his time undoing her hairpins and braids, burying his hands in the resulting golden cascade. His wife. He couldn’t quite contain his smile.

“I would never hurt you,” he told her, spearing a piece of the fowl on his knife and offering it to her. She opened her mouth, chewed slowly.

“I know.” Eyes as blue as forget-me-nots met his. “But I...”

“Shush.” He covered her hand with his. “We will take things slowly. After all, we have a lifetime ahead of us.”

“But this is our wedding day,” she said. “And I am your wife.” She emphasised the last word, and for an instant her generous mouth quivered into a smile. “I should...”

“You’re my wife tomorrow as well,” Michael replied. “And the day after, and the day after that, and in three weeks.” But God help him if he had to wait that long. His balls tightened whenever she was near, and to imagine sharing a bed with her without bedding her – well, it was near on unbearable.

Now that they were married, Mrs Mitchell was more than happy to have them sleeping in the same room.

“I believe she’s been sitting outside your door every night to protect your virtue,” Michael whispered to Sarah as they followed their landlady up the stairs.

“Too late for that,” she replied with a bitter edge to her voice. He set a hand to the small of her back – to reassure her, to touch her, to... It pleased him when she leaned back against him. His nose brushed her neck, and he inhaled her warm scent.

“Mmm?” he said vaguely in response to something Mrs Mitchell was saying.

“I said it’s the same rate.”

“The same?” Michael frowned. “It’s only one room, not two.”

“The bed is bigger,” Mrs Mitchell retorted.

“But now you have one more room to rent,” Michael objected. He studied his surroundings, the dark wood of the wainscoting that lined the passage, the fraying wallpaper above. “Maybe we should go elsewhere. As I hear it the Dutchman runs a clean inn.”

Mrs Mitchell hissed and gave Michael an incensed look, clearly upset that a good Catholic should even consider staying with the ungodly Dutchman. Michael shrugged, no more. “Let’s go,” he said to Sarah, taking her by the hand.

“Wait, wait.” Mrs Mitchell fiddled with her collar. “Same rate, but I include dinner as well.” Michael pretended to think. Sarah uttered a strangled sound he suspected might be a giggle. Mrs Mitchell twisted her hands together, looking quite anxious. She needed her boarders, and the old lady had taken quite a liking to Sarah – and in particular Sarah’s skill in the kitchen. His wife – Michael had to suppress a little smile; his wife – was an excellent cook.

“Fine,” Michael said, and Mrs Mitchell’s shoulders dropped. With a little nod in her direction, Michael led Sarah off in the direction of their room – and the awaiting bed.

The incident with Mrs Mitchell had relaxed Sarah. She was laughing when he closed the door, but when he embraced her, she stiffened.

“I...” she said.

“I’ve held you before.” He stroked her cheek. “I’ve kissed you before.” Michael brushed his lips over hers, did it again, and when he kissed her for real, she softened, clinging to him while his mouth devoured hers. She was flushed when he released her. “Won’t you take off your cap?” he asked.

Sarah took a step backwards. With her eyes locked in his, she slowly raised her hands to her head. Her fingers trembled. Moments later, the cap was on the floor. She tugged at one of her hairpins.

“No.” He stopped her. “Let me.” One hairpin, two, and the heavy braid fell down her back. “The first time I saw you, your hair was undone,” he whispered as he undid her braid. He combed his fingers through hair the colour of spun gold. “I saw you, and I was lost.”

“Lost?”

“Utterly.” He kissed her nose. “An earthbound angel stole my heart.”

“Angel?” Sarah laughed, resting her face against his shoulder. “You’re constantly demoting me. From Angel to Venus, from Venus to mermaid, from mermaid to...”

“Wife,” he filled in. He rested his cheek against her head. “That is not a demotion. I am a particular man.”

Standing this close to her made his blood sing. Her warmth, the softness of her curves, the soft scent of limes and fresh water that always seemed to cling to her. He slid his hand down her back, pressing her gently against him, and all of her stiffened. He held her, not saying anything, until she started breathing again. Sweetest Virgin and all her saints, this was going to kill him! In his breeches, his member was standing stiff and hard, and when he tightened his grip on her, he knew the moment she registered his arousal.

Michael took a step back. “Breathe,” he told her, fingers picking at her laces of her bodice.

“Michael, I...” In a gesture similar to that of a small child, she hid her face in her hands. “How can you want me?” she whispered. “I am...”

“Hush.” He prised her hands away, kissed each wrist in turn. “I have wanted you since the day I saw you.” He cleared his throat. At first, a pure carnal desire, but over several weeks and months, that original itch had deepened into something else – a need to possess her, make her his for ever. He leaned forward to nibble at her lip. “Trust me,” he whispered.

“I do,” she whispered back, and he could see in her wide blue eyes that she was telling the truth, while the way her hands gripped at the cloth of her bodice showed just how frightened she was.

Michael regarded her in silence. He wanted her naked, he wanted her now, but something told him he had to allow her whatever time she needed. He stepped back, shrugged out of his coat and hung it on a chair. His new cravat, his belt with its heavy pouch, his dagger and the pistol he rarely went without – each of these items he placed on the table.

“Will you unlace my shirt?” he asked. She nodded, took a hesitant step forward, and then her hands were on his neckline, warm fingers dancing over his skin. “Pull it off,” he said, and his voice was surprisingly hoarse, even to himself. Once he was bare-chested, he took hold of her hand and placed it over his heart. “Feel how it thumps. For you, Sarah, only for you.” She gave him a wavering smile, raised her free hand to trail over his ribcage, through the hair that adorned his chest.

When she dragged the back of her hand downwards, Michael’s head began to spin.

“It darkens the further down it grows,” she said, sounding shy. One long finger traced the narrow trail of hair that disappeared into his breeches.

“Doesn’t yours?” he asked. Were her curls the same gold that adorned her head? The thought left him dry-mouthed with desire. She looked at him from under her lashes.

“You will have to discover that for yourself.” Her voice trembled.

“Will I now?” Michael tilted up her face, kissing first one, then the other eye. “To do so, I must see you naked.”

Her hands twisted into her skirts. “No one...” she cleared her throat. “No man ever has before.”

“And no other man but me ever will.” He undid her bodice, slowly allowing it to fall to the floor. Her breasts rose and fell, her breathing quickening when he slid a finger along the neckline of her shift. “Turn around.”

Sarah complied, and he took his time unlacing her stays. With a soft rustle, they fell to join her bodice, and moments later her skirts and petticoats followed. Sarah stood very still, hands clenched, her head lowered so that her face was hidden by her hair.

“Look at me,” he said. Hesitantly she lifted her face. “I’m going to take your shift of now.” She closed her eyes and nodded, raising her arms when he told her to. And there she was, his wife, and she was a milky white all over, the down that covered her arms and thighs shimmering like gold dust in the afternoon light. She was fair all over, and under her scrutiny the skin on her chest, her neck and cheeks flushed into a soft pink.

“God, you are beautiful,” he groaned, drawing her closer. His member was so hard it was a miracle it hadn’t burst apart, and he couldn’t help himself, his hips pressing demandingly against the swell of her curves. Yet again, she tensed. Michael wasn’t sure what to do. What he wanted to do was sweep her into his arms and carry her to bed, there to plunge himself into her, but instinctively he knew that would be wrong – for her.

He prevaricated by dropping to his knees before her and relieving her of her stockings and shoes. He kicked off his boots, his stockings. When he started fiddling with his breeches, she placed her hand on top of his.

“Let me.” Slowly, excruciatingly slowly, she tugged the heavy woollen breeches down his legs. He saw her eyes widen at the sight of his engorged member, and she bit her lip so hard he feared it might burst.

“Sarah.” Michael cupped her cheek, and she looked up from her crouch. “It will be alright,” he whispered. “If you want, we can wait.” His member roared in protest, his balls squealing in agony.

Sarah shook her head. “No.” She rose. “I want to – have to – do this now.” But there was fear in her eyes, and her hands were curled into tight fists. Michael racked his brain, his gaze alighting on a nearby stool.

“Come.” He sat down, pulled her down to sit on top of him, cradling her like a child. He moaned into her hair when she shifted on his lap, her warm privates now so very close to his thudding cock. “Straddle me,” he whispered. “Take me as it pleases you.”

“What?” She tried to rise, he held her still.

"I want you to set the pace," he murmured.

"But I..." She coughed. "I don't know how to."

He laughed in her hair. "That, I believe, will sort itself."

Michael Connor had had his fair share of women. But rarely had he been as aroused as he was right now, his new bride naked in his lap, her hair tickling his nose. And when she swung round to sit astride him, soft breasts pressing against his chest, he exhaled. She shifted closer, half lifted herself off him, and then, at last, she opened herself to him, her mouth contorting into a little 'o' when his member slid inside.

"Alright?" he whispered when he was fully sheathed in her. She just nodded, hands clinging to his shoulders, eyes burning into his. "Then ride me, wife. Ride me before I disintegrate before your eyes." So she did, and he managed to hold on to himself long enough to see her eyes darken, the tip of her tongue sliding out to wet her lips as she threw her head back. Michael's blood boiled within his veins, his member thrust and thrust, and then, at last, he came.

Somehow, he staggered over to the bed, she still in his arms. Somehow, they fell together in a heap of entangled limbs, of mouths that met. The bed creaked and groaned, her breath was hot against his skin, her hands demanding, her breasts so soft. And when she finally exploded, back arching off the bed as her fingers dug into his hair, she called his name. His name. The only name she would ever say while in the throes of passion.

"So," he said a few hours later, kissing her awake. "Is Mrs Connor satisfied with her wedding night?"

"Night?" She stretched. "And here was I, hoping it had just begun."