

Lady Catherine MacAlister's Hard Struggles: A Short Story about Catherine's Struggles

Graham Lomas

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Lady Catherine MacAlister is content to grow where she has been planted. Raised in MacAlister Castle in Scotland with her father and much beloved half-brother, she has never left the area and prefers it that way. When her father's health declines and she learns that a distant relative will inherit everything, Catherine is understandably shaken. However, the arrival of Edward MacAlister is a blessing in disguise, and Catherine's life changes for the better. A romance blossoms, a marriage ensues, and the pair is faced with several obstacles on the path toward the obligatory happy ending.

Graham Lomas, who has previously published a children's book titled *Five Little Kittens*, has crafted a novel that contains many of the conventions found in popular historical romances: the lonely young woman, the hero who comes to her rescue, the dastardly villain, and the Big Misunderstanding that must be overcome. The combination of these elements has the potential to result in a satisfying and enjoyable tale—unfortunately, in *Lady Catherine MacAlister's Hard Struggles*, the execution does not live up to said potential.

Lomas' story is regrettably hard to find beneath a multitude of structural and grammatical errors; confusing formatting and storytelling are present from the start. Dialogue between characters tends to be combined within single paragraphs and quotation marks are either missing or misplaced. While it is clear that great effort was put into trying to capture the language and speech patterns of the time period, dialogue is nevertheless stilted and unnatural. Combined with the improper punctuation and structural issues, the text is at times rendered nearly incomprehensible.

Characterization is generally flat; thus seasoned romance readers accustomed to strong, confident protagonists may be less than enamored of Lomas' meek, hesitant, and submissive heroine, whose most oft-mentioned trait is her "rare beauty." Catherine does experience some growth as she learns more about the world outside the castle walls, but she slips back into an odd weakness of character. After some time away, she sees her home again and is nearly hysterical at the changes she perceives. Catherine begs her husband to take her away from the seemingly unfamiliar place, clinging to him with childlike fear: "There was a catch in her breath; she was shaken with nervous agitation and exhaustion. ... She did not know that the change was in herself; she thought it was in her surroundings." Catherine needs her husband's firm guidance to convince her that all is well before she becomes "her calm, quiet self again."

Lomas' story does show some promise in spite of its flaws, and would greatly benefit from the guidance of a skilled editor. Even the most determined of readers is unlikely to engage with any novel presented with editing issues, and many of the problematic areas here could be overcome with more attention to the technical and creative craft of writing. As it stands, simply reading *Lady Catherine MacAlister's Hard Struggles* is a struggle indeed.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (February 16, 2012)

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