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Opening extract from

# **Black Heart of Jamaica**

Written by

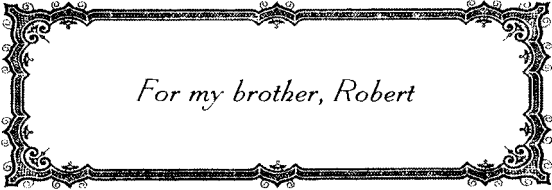
## **Julia Golding**

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## **Egmont**

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*For my brother, Robert*

**CAT ROYAL SERIES**

*The Diamond of Drury Lane* – Cat in London  
(On the trail of a diamond mystery)

*Cat among the Pigeons* – Cat goes to school  
(Pedro comes under threat from his old master)

*Den of Thieves* – Cat in Paris  
(Cat takes up a new career in revolutionary France)

*Cat O'Nine Tails* – Cat at sea  
(Our heroine takes an unplanned journey  
across the Atlantic)

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## THE CRITICS

‘She is a tyger burning bright in the forests of  
literary night’ – WILLIAM BLAKE

‘I wandered lonely as a cloud until I came upon  
the host of her novels, all dancing with wit and  
vivacity’ – WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

‘Mademoiselle Royal strikes a blow for  
emancipation’ – TOUSSAINT L’OUVERTURE,  
SLAVE REVOLT LEADER ON SAN DOMINGO

‘A tissue of lies from start to finish: the black  
slaves in Jamaica are much better off under the  
enlightened rule of white masters. How dare she  
suggest otherwise!’ – BRYAN EDWARDS, JAMAICAN  
PLANTER AND HISTORIAN

‘What clearer evidence could one wish of the  
iniquity of the slave trade?’ – THOMAS  
CLARKSON, ABOLITIONIST

‘Never a discordant note’ – GEORGE  
BRIDGETOWER, AFRICAN VIRTUOSO VIOLINIST

‘Give Cat Royal your vote and I’ll kiss you!’ –  
GEORGINA, DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE, POLITICAL  
CAMPAIGNER

‘Another book from Cat Royal? She’s always  
worth a gamble.’ – JOHN MONTAGUE, THE  
FOURTH EARL OF SANDWICH

‘I prophesy great things from this girl before the  
advent of the millennium’ – JOANNA SOUTHCOTT,  
PROPHETESS

‘Her words weave a pleasing serpentine line  
through the landscape of the imagination’ –  
HUMPHRY REPTON, LANDSCAPE GARDENER

‘She gives me a heady dose of laughter, as potent  
as my own nitrous oxide’ – JOSEPH PRIESTLEY,  
NATURAL PHILOSOPHER, DISCOVERER OF  
LAUGHING GAS

‘On reflection, I think I’ve heard quite enough  
from this representative of the swinish multitude’  
– EDMUND BURKE, POLITICIAN



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CAT'S GLOSSARY

## ❧ NOTE TO THE READER ❧

*Reader,*

In polite company, it is expected that a guide introduce themselves. Allow me to do so now. My name is Cat Royal, daughter of parents unknown, formerly a ward of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London. Imagine we have bobbed curtseys, bowed, shaken hands – now, Reader, we can be friends and I can take you into my confidence.

Until a year ago, I knew little about the world beyond the confines of Covent Garden; now I find myself in the New World, visiting people and places I barely knew existed. I have discovered as rich and colourful a society as that which I am used to back home, also with its underclass hidden from upper class eyes. If you wish to follow me on this adventure into the black heart of Jamaica, you must promise not to make assumptions about people due to class, language or colour of skin. I am confident you can manage this: after all, by now you will have learned not to judge me.

*Cat Royal*

## ❧ PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ❧

### IN PHILADELPHIA

- Miss Cat Royal – Fledgling actress and your guide  
Mr Pedro Amakye – African violinist, former slave,  
a good friend  
Frank (The Earl of Arden) – son of a duke,  
reluctant to take up his title  
Mrs Lizzie Fitzroy – sister to Frank, now wife to...  
Mr Johnny Fitzroy – ex-British lord, American  
citizen, artist  
Miss Catherine Fitzroy – their daughter, and *my*  
goddaughter  
Mr Syd Fletcher – old friend with a powerful punch

### IN JAMAICA

- Mrs Peabody – fearsome manager of acting  
ensemble  
Miss Hetty Peabody – her untalented but pretty  
daughter  
Miss Georgina Atkins (Georgie) – friendly  
mulatto actress from Antigua, my friend  
Mr Jim Brown – Bostonian flautist

Mr Billy Shepherd – old enemy turned planter  
Captain Bonaventure – unreliable French captain  
of the *Medici*

Mr Kingston Hawkins – Pedro's old master, and  
a nasty piece of work

Miss Jenny – a slave with a new mistress

Mr Moses – her father, slave on Billy's estate

Obeah man – wise man of the black community

Mrs Cookie – kindly slave in Mr Hawkins' household

Miss Rafie – capable nurse

Mr Dawlish – deeply unpleasant overseer

#### ON THE *MERRY MEG*

Captain Ol Tivern – smuggler with a soft heart

Mr Kai – Chinese cook

Mr Mickey – bloodthirsty bosun

#### IN SAN DOMINGO

Mr Caesar – courageous driver of the mules

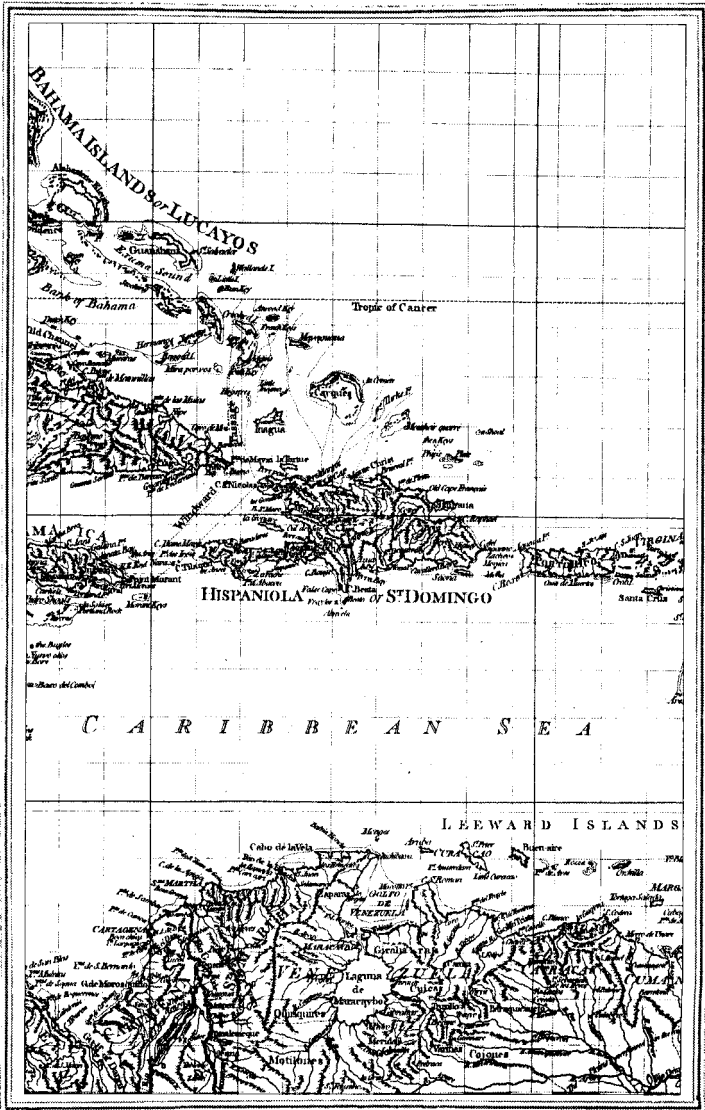
Colonel Deforce – rebel leader of the arms train

Mr Pitt – fatally obstinate mule

Jamaican theatre-goers, rebel soldiers, drunken  
sailors, etc., etc.









Philadelphia, United States of America,  
June 1792 – Curtain rises.



## AUDITIONS

**T**his is the story of how I, Cat Royal, became a pirate.

Reader, before you throw up your hands in horror at this scandalous confession or call the constable, I rush to assure you that my piracy was entirely accidental. When my adventures in the Caribbean began, I had absolutely no intention of pursuing this path; unfortunately events conspired against me, resulting in this most unexpected twist of fate.

The beginnings of my West Indian tale were impeccably correct, which makes the descent into piracy even more surprising, not least to myself. It began with the search for employment. Having foiled a plot to do away with Lord Francis, the son

of the Duke of Avon, my friends and I had ended up in Philadelphia on the east coast of America.\* It was now high time I decided what to do with my future. Should I head home to England with Lord Francis (that's Frank to you and me) and Syd, both of whom had their lives to resume after the unplanned adventure aboard His Majesty's ship *Courageous*? Or should I stay in America with Frank's sister, Lizzie, and her husband, Johnny? As the weeks passed, I realized that I had no desire to be at a loose end in their household. Quite understandably, they were absorbed in each other and their newborn and did not need me underfoot. But neither was I ready yet to return home to England. I felt as if my true life waited but I was not sure where.

'Cat, if you're determined to work,' declared Frank as we sat in the parlour of his sister's snug little house on Market Street one sunny afternoon, 'you'll need to decide on a career.'

He was a pretty sight, nursing his one-month-

\* For full details of that fiendish plot, see my fourth adventure, *Cat O'Nine Tails*.

old niece on his shoulder as her tiny fists gripped a lock of his curly dark hair. With his long limbs and twinkling blue eyes, I predicted that my noble friend would break many hearts on his return to England – particularly if they saw how good he was in the nursery. The Mamas would be moving heaven and earth to wed their daughters to one of England’s most eligible young bachelors.

Yet while his future was certain – to be the fox to all the husband-hunting debutantes for the next few years – mine was far less settled.

‘But what can I do?’ I asked, throwing aside the newspaper. I’d been skimming it for news of the revolution in France.

‘Well, let me think.’ Frank gave me a smug smile as little Catherine drifted off to sleep under his soothing touch. ‘You can pretend to be a boy convincingly, you dance well, sing passably, write amusingly; I’ve seen you climb the rigging like a seasoned salt, and ride bareback like a native – Cat, there really is no end to your talents. And you also speak at least two foreign languages.’

Entering from the kitchen, Lizzie kissed her

brother on the top of the head; Johnny followed carrying the tea tray.

‘You’ve a masterful touch with babies, Frank,’ she commended her brother. ‘What I shame I can’t hire you as a nursemaid.’

Lizzie looked very pretty with her long chestnut locks caught up in a practical chignon and a white apron protecting her light blue day dress. Her new role as American wife and mother was quite a climb down from her days as a British duke’s daughter with hundreds of servants at her beck and call, but the change seemed to suit her. She’d never been one to stand on ceremony; after all, she had befriended me.

‘Sorry, Lizzie, but as much as such skills are worthy of a duke-in-training, I feel a perverse desire to take up my place at Cambridge instead.’ Frank rubbed his cheek against the soft hair of the baby. ‘Tempting though the offer is.’

‘And Father wants you to assume your proper title now you’re at an age to go out into society,’ Lizzie reminded him.

Frank groaned.

‘The Earl of Arden?’ I prompted, remembering his title from our time in Bath.

‘I much prefer “Frank” but it won’t do back home.’ Frank sighed at the thought. ‘Mama delayed the day as long as possible for me but now I’ll have to resign myself to answering to a name that sounds like a coaching inn.’

‘A very superior coaching inn,’ I consoled him. ‘Do you want me to call you Arden, or would you prefer Lord Dog and Duck, or perhaps Lord Jolly Boatman?’

He chuckled. ‘None of the above, thank you, Cat. And the day you refer to me as Arden is the day I start calling you Miss Royal. I insist that you at least stick with Frank.’

The matter of titles settled to our mutual satisfaction, Johnny returned to the conversation that had been interrupted by the entry of the tea service.

‘So what were you saying to Cat about talents?’ he asked as I cleared a space for the tray among the litter of his drawing things.

I rolled my eyes. ‘Frank seeks to persuade me that I am eminently employable.’



To my surprise, Lizzie nodded her agreement. 'Quite right too. You have many skills; you just need to find a suitable situation.'

'Not that you have to work,' Frank chipped in. 'You know my parents will look after you.'

My pride bristled at the suggestion. 'I don't need looking after – well, not much,' I added, remembering how the Avons had taken me in after Drury Lane had been demolished.

Johnny chuckled. 'I'm sure you don't, Catkin. You are a very capable young lady – you've proved that on the high seas and in the wilds of America. But you should also know that you are welcome to stay here as long as you have need.'

'And don't forget that Syd wants you to go home with him,' Frank said quietly for my ears only as Lizzie rattled the tea cups.

I knew full well what he meant. Syd, my oldest friend from Covent Garden, was determined not to let me out of his sight again, not since I had jumped ship from under his nose and given him months of heartache when he believed me lost for good. But his plans for me led to a future marriage

and life as a butcher's wife, something I was not remotely ready to consider – not yet anyway.

'I'm sorry, but I don't want to be wrapped in cotton wool and that's exactly what Syd will do to me; I want to stand on my own two feet – prove to myself that I can make my own way.'

Lizzie poured the tea with efficient grace. 'Speaking of which, where are Syd and Pedro?'

'At the docks,' said Frank, helping himself to a biscuit that he somehow managed to eat without getting crumbs on Catherine. 'I asked them to find out which ships are in harbour. If I'm to go up in Michaelmas term, I have to leave as soon as possible.'

'And what about Pedro? Has he decided to go too?' Johnny asked, toying with his pen. His long fingers never bearing to be idle for long, he picked up a piece of paper and began to sketch his brother-in-law with his baby daughter.

'He's waiting for Cat's decision,' Frank replied. 'Make sure you catch my best side, Johnny.'

'You don't have one, Lord Dog and Duck,' Johnny replied with a wink at me. He was taking

his role of teasing older brother-in-law to heart. 'So, Catkin, what's it to be?'

I spread my hands empty in front of me. 'Any suggestions?'

'You're far too young for a governess,' mused Lizzie as she stirred cream into her tea.

'And the strain of behaving would probably kill you,' muttered Frank. Lizzie swatted his leg, but from her smile I could tell she agreed. For that matter, so did I.

'I would've thought the answer was fairly obvious,' said Johnny, scrutinizing his quick drawing.

What could he mean? There were few professions open to women: teacher, maid . . .

'Surely not a seamstress!' I gasped.

'No!' my three friends said in unison. Then we all laughed. My sewing skills were infamous.

Johnny laid aside his portrait and flipped the newspaper over to the classified advertisements. He pointed to an announcement with the end of his pen. 'Take a look at that. You have years of experience at Drury Lane, Cat. A theatrical company here would welcome you with open arms.'

I studied the page. Philadelphia had a lively social scene with a number of companies providing drama and musical entertainments. Indeed, only last week I had been to a passable production of Dryden's *All for Love*. Now it seemed that one of those companies was taking on new members:

*The Peabody Theatrical  
Ensemble*



*Is proud to*  
Announce its Summer Tour  
*Engagements already secured in the West Indies.*  
*Ladies and Gentlemen of outstanding*  
*abilities sought.*  
*Recruiting now.*



It sounded very grand, but I had my suspicions. Even the top theatres of the world like Drury Lane and Covent Garden were somewhat – all right, *very* – moth-eaten when examined in the light of day. This ensemble was likely to be three stage-struck fools and a cart of props. I read the advertisement

again with greater care. Or perhaps not. If they already had engagements organized abroad, that suggested proper management: the Peabody Ensemble might be worth a closer look.

‘You think they’ll take me on?’ I asked dubiously.

‘I’m sure you stand an excellent chance,’ Johnny confirmed. ‘You have experience both on and off stage; you’re just what a small company like that needs for a tour, able to turn your hand to anything. And it’s not forever. It’ll give you a taste of the life and you can make a final decision as to whether it’s the career for you when you return here in the autumn.’

He was right. It was the perfect opportunity for me to test the waters. I had always seen my future as being bound up with the theatre, but the closure of Drury Lane had prematurely cut off those hopes. Now I had a chance to get back into that life.

My face must have betrayed my excitement for my friends exchanged pleased looks.

‘Well, that’s settled then,’ said Frank, stroking the baby’s back. Catherine gave a most unladylike

burp. 'I imagine it will suit you down to the ground, but I hope you don't decide to stay away from England forever, Cat.'

'Just for a few months,' I reiterated hesitantly.

'Yes, that's right,' said Johnny, returning to his sketch.

'A chance to find out if my talents really do lie on stage?'

'Absolutely,' nodded Frank. 'But I for one have no doubts on that score.'

'All you need to do now is persuade them to take you on,' concluded Lizzie.

Easier said than done.

'That won't be difficult.' Pedro had returned unnoticed and must have been listening from the doorway. He leaned against the jamb, his arms crossed, fingers tapping restlessly as if itching to return to his instrument.

'I'm pleased you have so much faith in me,' I smiled.

'That wasn't what I meant.' Pedro took a step towards the sofa and leant across Frank to steal a biscuit. He waved it in the air like a baton. 'Not

that I don't have faith in you, of course.'

'Thanks.'

'But if we offer ourselves as a duet – you with your talents and me with mine – then I doubt they'll be able to resist.'

I jumped up and hugged him, making him drop his biscuit. 'You'll come with me?'

He hugged me back. 'Of course. You're not getting rid of me so easily, Cat Royal. Not this time.'

My grin must have stretched from ear to ear. The future seemed far less daunting when not faced alone.

'If they turn down the best violinist in the world, and the star of the Paris Opera,' I performed a perfect pirouette, dipping into a curtsy, 'then they are not worthy of us.'

'That's the spirit,' agreed Pedro, rubbing his hands together. 'So when do we start?'

The auditions took place in the Man Full of Trouble Tavern on Little Dock Creek, a humble inn that offered not much more than warm beer and warm beds to sailors passing through port.

The Peabody Ensemble had to cut their cloth to suit their purse and I took this as due warning that this was going to be no luxury theatrical cruise of the West Indies. Yet the modesty of the surroundings did not deter those dreaming of stardom. As we approached we found that a line of hopefuls already stretched around the block. Though I had never joined one before, I'd seen such queues in Drury Lane -- gatherings of the talentless multitude and the talented few, all desperate for their moment centre stage. My confidence took a little dent: with so many trying for a place, would we really be so irresistible? Shoulders back, head up, I steeled myself for the ordeal. We would never find out unless we tried.

Pedro and I attached ourselves to the end of the queue, resigned to a long wait. Syd stood with us, frowning at an inept juggler practising a few places in front. My boxing friend attracted admiring glances from the girls thanks to his muscular frame and handsome -- if a little battered -- face, but today he was oblivious to them.

'Are you sure about this, Cat?' he grumbled,



rubbing his chin. He hated the idea that I intended to stay in the Americas without him. I knew that, if he hadn't had a swindling boxing manager to pursue, he would have abandoned his plans to go home.

'I'm sure, Syd.'

'And you'll come 'ome when you've done this tour?' The anxious note in his voice made my heart ache for him. He was so desperate not to lose me forever, but what could I say when I didn't know what was going to happen?

'I make no promises, Syd. There's nothing for me in London now Drury Lane is closed.'

'Nothink, Cat? There's me – and the lads.'

I squeezed his hand. I could at least provide him with some comfort.

'Syd, I can't imagine living the rest of my life away from London. No doubt I'll be drawn back one day. It's my home after all.'

He nodded.

I tugged on his waistcoat to get his full attention. 'But you promise not to wait for me? It might be years before I return.'

He refused to meet my eyes, instead gazing fixedly at an advert for McLackland's tooth-powder. 'What I decide to do is my own business,' he said stiffly – meaning he fully intended to wait.

'Next!' bellowed a man taking names at the door. Pedro and I shuffled forward a pace. I glanced back but Syd had disappeared into the crowd.

'Pedro Amakye, violinist and dancer, and Catherine Royal, actress, singer and dancer,' Pedro informed him.

The man raised an eyebrow at us both, hearing the unusual accents.

'Both from Drury Lane, London,' Pedro finished.

The man's eyes lit up. 'Well now, ain't that just fine and dandy. I was thinking you'd say you were from Africa.' He eyed Pedro speculatively, taking in the contrary signals of his dark skin coupled with fine clothes. 'My, my, Drury Lane. Mrs Peabody sure will be pleased to meet you two. Go on in, boy.'

*Mrs Peabody* – now that was a surprise. A

woman running a theatre company? She had my immediate respect.

We stepped into the audition room. The juggler had just been summarily dismissed and a pale-faced girl had taken his place.

'Name?' barked a woman seated by the pianoforte.

'Charlotte Potter, Mrs Peabody,' the girl whispered, intimidated by the grim-faced lady of indeterminate years who was glaring at her. Dressed in black, the company manager looked rather like a bald eagle poised to swoop on any theatrical failing, ready to rip reputations to shreds.

'Go on then, Miss Potter, do your worst.' Mrs Peabody nodded to the accompanist. The pianoforte began to tinkle. The girl opened her mouth to sing a ballad in a quavering voice.

The response was ruthless.

'Next!' bellowed Mrs Peabody. 'I suggest you try another profession, Miss Potter, one that doesn't involve singing, and stop wasting my time.'

The poor girl was led away in tears. Mrs

Peabody might be worthy of respect but she also inspired in me a creeping case of stage fright. I glanced nervously at Pedro, but he seemed unruffled by the humiliations inflicted on others – so secure was he in his own talent.

‘Who are you?’ Mrs Peabody enquired with an exasperated sigh as Pedro and I made our way forward. She was evidently tired of the whole business after a morning of disappointment. I was tempted to slip away without trying her patience further.

Before we could introduce ourselves, the man who had greeted us at the door called out:

‘Thought you’d like to know, ma’am, they’re from Drury Lane.’

Mrs Peabody’s face relaxed into an unexpectedly fond smile. ‘Ah, Drury Lane!’ She waved her notes languidly in front of her face as if the memory had summoned up a warm flush. ‘My, my. I was once Mr Garrick’s favourite, did you know? Miss Dorothea Featherstone, famed for my *Desdemona* and *Cleopatra*.’

Strange, I’d never heard of a Miss Featherstone

and I thought I knew all the names of the great actresses of the past.

‘He said no one could match my deportment and diction. My success was certain. That was before I married the late Mr Peabody, of course.’ Her mouth wrinkled into a bitter line.

Pedro and I exchanged looks.

Mrs Peabody flapped the memories away. ‘Well, well, let’s see what you can do then,’ and she sat back to judge our pieces.

Pedro went first. To begin with those waiting in the queue did not give a black boy the courtesy of silence, chatting and laughing loudly at the side of the audition room. That was until he completed his first musical phrase. I was delighted to note the open mouths and pleasantly shocked expressions as the lively piece by Bach wove its spell. Pedro finished to an awed hush, then enthusiastic applause.

‘I think he’s hired,’ muttered the rejected juggler in my ear, not sounding the least bit jealous. ‘She’d be a fool not to snap him up – and Mrs Peabody is no one’s fool.’

I nodded politely but could not answer as nerves had set in: my turn. I couldn't let Pedro down.

My friend gave me a grin, summoning me forward.

Imagine you're back on the *Courageous*, I told myself. They're just shipmates wanting to be entertained.

So why did I feel more like a Christian about to be thrown to the lions?

Pedro ran through the introduction to *Blow the Man Down*. It was now or never. Taking a breath, I began to sing the sea shanty.

I cannot claim the instant success that followed Pedro's performance, but I sang my heart out. The superior quality of Pedro's playing always brought out the best in me. I slipped back into the familiar place with him – the easy partnership of music. As I made eye contact with my audience, I felt opinion shift in my favour. Many smiled, some tapped their toes, others gave me encouraging nods. When I finished I closed my eyes for a second, then turned to face my judge.

‘Well, Miss Royal, I congratulate you: that was very sweetly done.’

My relief at her praise was greater than my pleasure.

Mrs Peabody’s stern face cracked into a smile. ‘Thank the Lord I haven’t completely wasted my morning on nobodies without an ounce of talent!’ ‘At least there are two young people in Philadelphia with skills worthy of the Peabody Theatrical Ensemble. Report to Penn’s Landing on Monday. We’re sailing on the *Running Sally*. My stage manager will give you a list of what is required and settle your wages. I’m delighted you have joined us.’ She waved us aside; and with a hunch of her shoulders, her bird-of-prey stance was back in place, ready for the next victim.