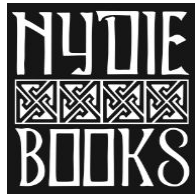


*A Long Wait*

V.E.H. MASTERS

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V.E.H.Masters



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The Long Wait picks up on the story of Gilbert Logie who was Bethia's suitor in *The Castilians* and who also featured in *The Conversos*.

Colours of Silence tells more of the story of Ysabeau and Johannes, servants to the family. Johannes has an important role in *The Conversos* and both feature in *The Apostates*

A Bonny Lass is about Agnes and tells of Grissel's background and relationship to the family.

All three short stories are available only to newsletter subscribers of vehmasters.com.

### *Books by VEHMasters*

#### **The Seton Chronicles:**

The Castilians – the story of the siege of St Andrews Castle

The Conversos – Antwerp 1547; there is no place of safety

The Apostates – Venice 1550, City of Peril

The Familists – Europe 1555; is there no place of safety?

# *A Long Wait*

Gilbert Logie first heard the rumour at his brother's funeral. It was a dreich day in early October, the sea misted by grey cloud obscuring the line of the horizon. The mourners trudged behind the coffin, heads down. On the hillside behind the church the graveyard offered no shelter and the haar crept ever closer until even the silver birch which leant over the dyke, its fallen leaves peppering the skull etched gravestones, was cloaked in it.

Logie held his bonnet in his hand, in company with the scattered group of men, feet braced on the sloping site, as they watched the coffin lowered into the sodden earth. The dull thud as the first lump landed had him swallowing. His brother, when he'd finally accepted he was going to die, had insisted he was to be buried in naught but a shroud.

'I'll no hae good siller wasted on ane o' they boxes,' he'd said. 'Whit use is a coffin tae a rotting body, a lang strip o' cloth is mair than sufficient.'

But Clatto had been an important man locally and his sons, treating his demand as no more than the maunderings of a dying man, had a coffin made ready. A fierce debate then followed as to whether the grave should be marked by an upright heidstane or a four legged flat thruchstane. Logie had withdrawn from the chamber made uncomfortable by the angry whispers, given Clatto was lingering still. Indeed there was no urgency to make this decision which he felt to be no more than posturing amongst his nephews. Like young stirks butting up agin one another, he'd thought.

Later he'd returned and sat alone with his brother, apart from the manservant, Nicol, who stood back against the wall. Logie hoped his eldest nephew would retain Nicol, for he'd been with Clatto since they were lads together but Allan would no doubt want his own people.

Clatto's breathing had grown loud in the quiet of night. Logie could see by the tight puffed out chest and the fierce inward concentration how hard his brother fought, resisting death to the end. He'd leant forward, resting his hand lightly on Clatto's arm and murmuring in his ear, 'let go James. Go easy on yourself man and just let go.'

There had been a silence and Logie wondered if his brother, for once, had taken heed. But then another deep rasping breath came. Slowly the gaps between each had grown longer. Logie had been aware of Nicol shifting behind him, both craning forward in the quiet, then tensing as yet another exhale was forced out. But eventually the heavy silence of death pervaded the chamber. Logie had touched his brother lightly on the arm in farewell and risen as Nicol stepped forward.

'Wake the new laird and tell him his father has gone,' said Logie. He'd noticed the quiver in his voice and coughed to clear it.

'Will I call ma wife to lay him oot before the viewing?'

Although it was posed as a question, Logie had known he was being directed as to what was necessary.

'Aye, do as you see fit,' he said abruptly and left the chamber. He'd walked slowly down the corridor, dimly lit by a single candle in a sconce. It flickered as he passed casting dancing shadows across a portrait of their father. Logie had paused before it. 'That's James coming to join you, look out for him.' He'd felt the tears then and brushed his hand across his eyes. The old bugger stood, arms folded, staring impassively back. Duty had been his watchword and the importance of it had been hammered into his sons from a young age, often physically. Their mother, wary and fey, considered her duty done once she'd given birth to two sons. Even as a child Logie could see his father had doted on his wife, and was hungry for some sign of affection. Somehow it made Father more fierce with his sons, as though having once let himself love unreciprocated, such weakness must be stamped on.

Logie had seen little of his mother, and then only when Father insisted she attend some feast day or other. But that was long ago in the days when the Pope of Rome still prevailed in Scotland. This new religion didn't much hold with feasting and all was about quiet contemplation and strict adherence to the texts. If it was nowadays he would've seen his mother in church at least once a week for close attention was paid to attendance by the presbytery and even the wife of a wealthy laird must show appropriate piety before this Protestant God.

He shook his head. What was he doing allowing such reflections on his long dead mother when his focus should be on his brother as the coffin disappeared below the clods of earth? He thought of his brother's waxy dead face, the gaping mouth tied up by a clout bound around his head; the milkeness of the eye which had sprung open when Logie leant over to touch his lips to his brother's forehead in a last farewell before the coffin was closed forever – or until the Day of Judgment came. He'd jerked back, knocking into the low stool he'd sat on all night and staggered to regain his balance, then made himself press down the eyelid, which closed most unwillingly, and replaced the coin holding it shut, rubbing his fingertips on his sleeve when he was done to wipe off the touch of death. Now thinking on it, he smiled – it was just the kind of trick Clatto had loved to turn, scaring a wee brother ten years younger and chanting 'fearty, wee fearty' at him.

He became aware of his eldest nephew staring at him from beneath lowered brows, feet firmly planted and arms folded as he gazed across the grave. Logie stared back at the jowly face and protruding blue eyes. Allan was laird now. He'd waited long enough to take up the mantle as head of the family especially since Clatto had relinquished nothing, keeping tight control right to the very end. Logie had felt Allan's frustration grow as Clatto moved into his seventies still undiminished. Allan had been like one of those fierce eels caught in a fish trap thrashing around to snap at any one who got in his way. It was difficult to see the wee laddie he'd once been, the laddie Logie had tossed in the air who'd shrieked, 'again, again,' in the belligerent fellow before him now.

The wind swirled, blowing Logie's cloak wide and he grasped it by the edges. The grave was filled now and, with a nod to Allan, he turned away.

No minister, no mass, no prayers, no hymns and no indulgences to hasten his brother's passage through purgatory – for purgatory had been denied. At least that was one aspect of this religion he must now cleave to that he did agree with. That abyss of everlasting fire, the murals of demons and the torment of the sinners which had once adorned the walls of his local kirk, before they were whitewashed over, had hung over him as a child and peopled his dreams. Many a night his nurse had awoken him, releasing his sweating face and body from the tangle of bedclothes and sat stroking his forehead until a gentler sleep overcame him.

It had been a sober and earnest funeral as befitted a sober, prudent and yet somehow bitter man. Privately Logie thought his nephews might have been better to display some of the old symbols on the journey to the graveyard. Not a crucifix of course, but perhaps some sign of their wealth atop the coffin, like the family shield. There had been tales doing the rounds recently that the family coffers were empty. Logie had never raised it with his brother. Clatto would've considered any questions as to his probity a gross impertinence. Yet Allan looked to be a worried man, although he had been lavish with the mourners gathered at the house before the burial, offering French brandy and encouraging all to take a second or third cup with great largesse. At least the funeral could be paid for without need of a roup, unlike a local family who'd recently had to sell all their possessions to pay for their parents burial when they'd died of the sweating sickness within a day of one another. The son had disappeared soon after and Logie had taken the daughter in as a servant, otherwise she would've been reduced to begging or worse,. And a wise decision it had turned out to be, for she was an honest hardworking lass.

He left the graveside, wondering how Allan would manage. Logie himself was comfortably off having been left an inheritance by a childless aunt who he'd been fond of, and she in turn him. His wealth had naught to do with the family holdings and he hoped Allan would not come with his hand out, for Logie would not erode his daughters' inheritance. He smiled wryly. His nephew was more likely to come with a demand than any supplicant's plea but the answer would be the same regardless for, once lent, he doubted any repayment would ever be made.

James of Nydie caught up him with him as Logie took long strides along the muddy path, leaping over the many puddles and hurrying to where his groomsman was waiting with Jessie. Logie had walked from his father's home behind the coffin, as was right and proper, but he didn't want to return there. He'd been too many days away from his own hearth – and was eager to escape the heavy sadness of grief; for all that his brother was a hard man he had loved him.

'A sad day,' Nydie said, glancing sidelong at Logie.

It was some years since he'd seen Nydie and Logie was startled at how wavering his voice sounded, as though the strength to form words was ebbing from him. Nydie had never been robust and now looked as though one strong gust of wind would blow him away. But then they were all old men now.

'Aye,' he said in response. 'A sad day indeed.'

Jessie lifted her head and pushed against his chest. He gathered the reins in his hand and dismissed the groomsman with a nod. Disinclined to linger and as eager to reach the warmth of home as his horse was the stable, Logie checked the saddle

was tightened – a habit he'd acquired after Clatto had loosened the girth in yet another prank when they were lads. On that occasion Logie had got away with nothing worse than a bruised arse and, he supposed, it had taught him a couple of useful lessons; always check your girth... and never trust anyone.

He was aware of Nydie close to his side, and the soft whistle of air whenever he breathed. Why was he dithering here – and blocking Logie's way. There was nothing further to be said.

He waited, kicking the heel of his boot against a rock to remove a clump of mud, and eventually Nydie spoke.

'It is strange, even after twenty odd years, to have no priest at the burial.'

'Minister, you mean.' Then, in softer tones, Logie added, 'no burial rites and indeed no last rites.' He smiled ruefully. 'Not that my brother would've cared for either, the staunch Protestant that he'd become.' He looked at Nydie curiously. 'As are you, I always thought. You certainly suffered enough for your beliefs.'

Nydie looked puzzled and then his face cleared. 'Ah you mean the siege of the castle.'

'I was thinking more of the time you spent on the galleys in consequence.'

Nydie stood arms dangling. Logie knew Nydie had never recovered from his time as a forsare, none of those taken had. There was Will Seton with his sore back, constantly rubbing at it until Logie was sure the skin must be worn away, and John Knox crippled with belly thraw until the day of his death.

The wind gusted, yet the fog they were swathed in didn't dissipate, Logie blinked and wiped his misted eye lashes with the edge of his cloak. He guided Jessie around Nydie and lifted his foot to the stirrup, thinking how little they had in common. Despite the proximity of their childhood homes, facing one another across the River Eden, they'd not had much to do with one another. But then Nydie was a few years younger. He had, though, been a good friend to Will Seton, Bethia's brother.

'Bethia's back,' said Nydie abruptly.

Logie lost his balance, dropped his foot, staggered and grabbed for Jessie's withers barely saving himself from landing face down in the muck. The horse whinnied, dancing away from him and, regaining his balance, he reached up to stroke the line of white between her eyes, trying to calm himself as much as her, and whispering, 'ca canny, lass.'

How could it be that in the moment he was thinking of Bethia Seton, James of Nydie spoke her name? Jessie gazed at him out of those huge, intelligent eyes and nudged his shoulder.

Aware of Nydie at his back, awaiting a response, he turned slowly saying, 'that sounds an unlikely story. Have you seen her?'

Nydie pursed his lips and shook head. He wiped the water droplets coating his face with the back of his hand, eyes fixed on Logie.

'How do you know?'

Nydie took a step back and Logie realised he'd spoken louder than he meant. He drew his own head back and turned once more to mount his horse.

'It's the talk o' the East Neuk and beyond.' Nydie paused, and then said softly,



'I thought you would want to know.'

'Could be naught more than blethers by folk who've nothing else to do than jaw with their neighbours. It is a very long journey for a woman to have made,' said Logie, now safely mounted and ready to escape Nydie's watchful eyes. He would make his own inquiries.

'I thank you for coming out on such a bleak day. My father and yours were ay good neighbours tae one anither.' He spurred Jessie and the horse took off.

'She's definitely back in Scotland,' Nydie called to his fast retreating back.

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Logie's daughter came hurrying into the entrance hall and, taking his cloak, handed him a soft cloth with which to dry his face.

'Did all go well?' she said as Jeannie, their old retainer, shuffled across the flagstones, followed by her equally ancient husband. Jeannie took the wet cloak from Izzy and the damp clout from him.

'A sorry day, maister,' she said, her wrinkled face gazing up at him.

'Aye,' said Logie thinking how much his brother always disapproved of the familiarity Logie permitted his servants.

One of the logs from the overfull basket Alec was struggling with rolled off and thumped onto the flagstones. Alec dropped the basket by the hearth and rested his hands on his thighs as he caught his breath. Logie picked up the fallen log and tossed it into the flames. He spread his hands before the fire as the auld couple shambled away, the echo of their footsteps slowly fading followed by the reverberation of the kitchen door falling shut behind them.

'Can we not present them with some footwear which fits?'

'I have been told they need nae ither and these will see them oot,' said Izzy

'Tell them that I insist.'

His daughter grinned up at him. My she was bonny when she smiled. 'Then you'd best speak with them.'

He sniffed. 'I doubt they'll accord me any more mind. As Jeannie is fond of reminding me, she skelpit ma arse too often when I was a bairn to be feart of the man I've become.

Izzy's face grew solemn. 'How was the burial Faither?'

'Dreich. The diggers had difficulty shaking the mud off their spades to fill the grave.'

'And did Allan manage to contain his joy?'

'Barely,' he said heading for the passageway and the warm comfort of his small chamber with its low painted ceiling. The smoke from the fire had dulled the green and orange celtic knots on the beams over time and the figures of mother and child inserted between were badly faded. Logie had thought to get the colours restored by hadn't had the heart for it. The ceiling had been his long dead wife's passion and somehow he didn't want to touch something she'd taken such pride in. He lowered his eyes and the memory of Bethia's mother's obsession with her painted ceiling and how badly it had ended when the Italian artist had run off with Bethia's friend,

came to him. He hadn't thought of that in years. Was this what was going to happen to him; his peace destroyed because of some foolish blethers by James of Nydie that were probably not even true?

'Helen paid a visit today. She says she will return tomorrow for she needs to speak to you about young Gilbert.'

'Funds?'

Izzy gave a slight nod. 'It is difficult for her with so many children to provide for.'

'And a useless husband to boot.' Logie clamped his back teeth together annoyed with himself to have let that slip out. He generally managed to avoid open criticism of his elder daughter's husband. It was he who was the fool anyway. He should never have succumbed to her pleas that she marry him rather than the older, but financially solid, suitor which was Logie's choice.

There was a scratching at the door and he opened it to let the dogs in. The terrier made for the fire but the bloodhound followed Logie, who sat down in his high backed wooden chair while Izzy busied herself with the decanter of claret. The dog laid his head on Logie knee, looking up with doleful eyes. Logie scratched behind the bloodhound's ears and the animal, satisfied, laid itself down across Logie's feet.

He leant back in the chair and closed his eyes. The last time he saw Bethia was in Antwerp. Her life had been perilous, married as she was to the Converso, and Logie had suggested she return to the safety of her father's home in Scotland – even offered to escort her there – but she refused. Now he was getting maudlin. Aware he was gripping the arms of the chair, he opened his eyes and sat up straight, like his nurse had ay told him to.

'James of Nydie spoke with me as I was leaving. He had some strange information to impart.' He paused – could see from Izzy's expression she already knew. 'I take it the story is true?'

She spoke slowly, almost hesitantly. 'There is a tale of a grand lady arriving in Edinburgh come all the way from the land of the Turks. She's said to be rich beyond our dreams, as rich as Croesus.'

'Rich enough to mint her ane siller, I think not.'

He sat rubbing his temple while Izzy bent to her needlework. There was silence in the chamber apart from the hissing of the fire. The wood must be damp. He would speak to auld Alec to make sure the lad brought it in from the well seasoned log pile and not the stuff that was fresh cut this year. He'd also tell Alec the lad was to deliver it to the fireplace and Alec could supervise, if he must.

Logie reached for the poker and the terrier opened one eye. A few thumps on the hissing log and a slither of flame snaked up. The terrier lifted her head. He hit the wood again. The log split apart, its centre glowing. The terrier laid her head down and began to softly snore once more. He picked up the glass of wine from the side table where Izzy had carefully placed it and twisted it in his hand, admiring the rich ruby red. He'd brought these glasses back from Antwerp ... he counted in his head ... more than thirty years ago. Difficult to believe it was so long since he'd last seen Bethia Seton. He watched his quiet daughter ply her needle in and out,

holding her work close to the flickering candle. After a moment he picked up the book lying on the small table. He opened it and continued reading aloud from where he'd last left off.

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It had been a long wait, far longer than he had ever expected, but he'd always known in his heart Bethia would return. But what did it matter to him anyway? She was lost to him from the moment he relinquished any claim and let de Lange take her – despite her own father's wishes. Aye, but Auld Seton would be happy to have his daughter restored to him; must be well into in his eighties now. Likely Bethia would scarce remember Logie and their times together. He had no call to go to Anster where Master Seton now lived with his younger son and find out the truth of the matter. No, he would stay well away.

And yet, the next day found him saddling his horse, too impatient to wait for the groomsman. Booted and spurred and wearing his new red satin doublet, he set out on the long ride to the East Neuk.

## Glossary of Scots Words

ane – own

agin – again

clout – cloth

dreich – dull and dreary

feart – afraid

forsare – a galley slave

haar – a sea mist

heidstane – grave stone

lang – long

mair – more

roup – an auction

sair – sore

siller – money, silver coin

skelpit – smacked

stirks – a bullock

smirr – fine drifting rain

thruchstane – flat gravestone resting on the ground

Whit – what

## *About VEH Masters*

VEH Masters was born and brought up on a farm a few miles from St Andrews in Scotland. Her debut novel tells the story of the siege of St Andrews Castle in 1546 and closely follows the actual events.



The sequels are set in Antwerp, Venice and Constantinople respectively, and although she has no ties with either city it was great fun visiting them for research. She is currently working on book five of the series.

She's fascinated by the impact of momentous events on the lives of ordinary people.

For updates on her writing and research do sign up for her newsletter here.

<https://vehmasters.com/newsletter>