

THE SCAR GATHERER

Extract from *The Demon in the Embers*

This extract is from chapter 4, when Joe has to change into a smarter set of clothes without giving away the fact that he has no idea what goes with what:

"Right, let's have a look." Lucy's mother opened one drawer and then another. "Ah yes. Here we are." She handed Lucy a shirt with a frill all the way down the front and then two long pieces of lace. Next she lifted out a dark blue velvet jacket and a matching pair of breeches, like a smarter version of the ones Joe was wearing. "You'll need fresh stockings as well," she said, "and there are some galloshios to go with the coat and breeches." She burrowed in the drawer again.

"Take these, Lucy." She held out a pair of white stockings and some shoes of midnight blue brocade. "You can help Joe get changed in your chamber."

Joe followed Lucy into the room next door. Like the first bedroom, it looked out over the street, or to be more accurate, straight into the front bedroom of the house opposite. It was smaller, having had the closet partitioned off, but it was still about the same size as Joe's room at home. It was similarly decorated to the room they had just been in, except that a circular mirror in a gold frame hung over the fireplace on the back wall.

"We're very fortunate," Lucy said. "My father brings all sorts of beautiful things back from Antwerp." She saw him looking at the mirror. "That was my birthday present earlier this year."

She put down the shoes, and laid out the stockings and shirt on her own four-poster bed. Then she took the other clothes from Joe and spread them out too. She sat on the edge of the bed and looked at him expectantly.

Joe blushed. She was waiting for him to undress. He bent to take off his shoes, hoping there weren't any tricky fastenings on anything he was wearing. He had to try not to give himself away.

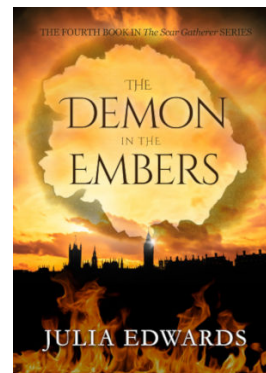
The shoes came untied easily enough, and he undid the garters at the tops of his stockings without difficulty, before removing his coat.

When he began trying to unfasten the shirt, however, Lucy asked, "Aren't you going to take off the falling bands first?"

Joe's fingers stopped moving. What were falling bands? He followed her gaze. She was looking at his throat. She must mean the strips of material that had hung over the front of his coat. He fumbled at the back of his neck.

"Here, let me help you." She stepped round behind him and deftly untied the tapes.

Joe unlaced the neck of the shirt. Suddenly, he remembered his St. Christopher. He peeped inside his shirt as he took it off, wondering how to keep the pendant hidden. But beneath the shirt was a linen undershirt. It seemed ridiculous to be wearing what amounted to a long-sleeved vest in such hot weather. But it was clearly the way things were done here.



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Looking at the clothes Lucy had laid out on the bed, he judged he was meant to keep the undershirt on. That was good. The St. Christopher could stay tucked away out of sight.

Blushing again, he unbuttoned his breeches, hoping that the undershirt was long enough to keep him decent. To his relief, however, he found that unlike Tudor times, he was wearing long, linen undershorts.

"Here you are, then." Lucy held out Peter's shirt. Joe slipped it over his head and looked down at the frill.

"You do up the ties on the inside." She watched him for about half a minute as he struggled with the strings, then said, "Shall I help you?"

"Yes, please." Joe gave a rueful grin. "I'm not used to these things," he said truthfully.

Lucy laughed. "It's much easier than what I wear." In seconds, she had fastened the shirt and tied the new lace falling bands. She handed him the breeches, which buttoned up at the waist, like the pair he had taken off.

"Are there points or something, to fix the shirt to the breeches?" he asked.

"Points?" Lucy put her head on one side. "I don't think so. You just tuck the shirt in loosely."

Joe felt annoyed with himself. He'd been trying to be too clever. Perhaps they didn't use points at all now. From the words they used, it was obviously coat and breeches here, rather than doublet and hose.

He picked up the stockings. They were fine and smooth, and spotlessly white.

"They're silk," Lucy said. "They're lovely aren't they? We keep those for best, so they haven't been worn much."

Joe put them on and tied the garters again, then did up the coat. "Is this right?" he asked. "It seems quite short." He plucked at the expanse of shirt showing beneath it. This was how his other clothes had fitted, but he couldn't quite believe they were supposed to be like that.

"You look very fine." Lucy smiled. "Are the galloshios alright? Not too big?"

Joe followed her gaze down to the shoes. They had heels but no backs, like a woman might wear in his own world if she was going somewhere smart for the evening. "I think I'll manage," he grinned, hoping he'd be able to walk on the cobbles in them.

"All you need is an elegant hat and you'll look quite the young gentleman, although your hair is rather short." She looked abruptly worried. "You're not a Roundhead are you?"

"No." Joe wondered whether to make up a story about cutting his hair to keep the plague away, but thought better of it. "I've always had it like this," he said.

They went back downstairs together.

"My, my!" exclaimed Ellen, as he entered the room. "What a transformation! Lucy, fetch Peter's hat he wears for church. That should finish off the outfit nicely."

Joe took it from her and put it on. It was black, with a wide brim and a ruffle of ribbons on the hat band.

"Perfect!" Lucy cried.

"You must still take care while you're out," her mother said. "And I want you back by six."

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