

LIGHTNING SWITCH

A SHIFT IN TIME, BOOK ONE



VANESSA BROOKS

BLUSHING BOOKS

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For Peter

CHAPTER 1



Duncan Miller rolled over in his bed and cracked one sleepy eye open, mostly asleep, he sighed with pleasure as he became aware of a soft handful of breast resting under his open palm. He moved his fingers over the smooth firm mound, seeking the budding raised nub of flesh, ah there it was. Duncan felt himself stiffen until he was rigid. Without opening his eyes, he pressed his hardened length up against the warm, pliable body that was spooned so invitingly with his. A husky female sigh made him smile and using that as an invitation, he rose over her form, parted her thighs and thrust into her welcoming warmth. After a short time, his partner cried out her pleasure and sighed. Duncan spilled his own release deep within her, then settling behind her, he scooped the girl into the spooning position he had awoken in and, fully satiated, he drifted into a deep and dreamless sleep.

It may have been ten minutes or ten hours later, he had no way of knowing, Duncan's eyes flew fully open. A sudden and shocking realization hit him; he had no idea where he was, he was not in his own bed and, more importantly, he had to wonder who was sharing that bed with him.

Bridey stretched and rolled over. Raising herself up on one

elbow, she studied her husband. He had been most active this past night. He'd taken her twice which was unheard of in their marriage to date. Bridey frowned; her husband looked so young but how could that be? She gazed at his face, suddenly so lean and hard. Yesterday he had looked his fully thirty-five years but this morning he looked ten years younger. A sweet smile curved her soft mouth. Now that she knew the remedy for keeping her husband young, she'd actively seduce him and she'd start now.

Duncan froze as realisation hit him. He had been awoken by his unknown female companion snuggling up to his side. A pretty face framed by tumbling golden curls popped up before him. With a sweet smile teasing her full pink lips, she laid her head down upon his chest. Duncan stared at the girl. He knew he'd never seen her before in his life since he would have remembered such a beauty as this. *What the hell was going on?*

Easing his bed partner off his chest, Duncan rolled to the edge of the bed and sat up. He seemed to be wearing some sort of shirted night gown, which had hitched up around his waist leaving his legs and privates bare. Hastily he yanked the gown down and stood up to walk over to the small paned window and peered out. A muddy gravel area, with what looked like a trough and water pump were below. Chickens scratched about the grassy edge and a wooden barn stood away to the left. Its doors stood open and hay spilled out onto the muddy ground. Duncan could just make out an old-fashioned, covered wooden cart standing within the structure.

Just then a woman came out from the inside of the house; she held a pail which she carried over to the pump, working the handle up and down as she filled the bucket to the brim with water.

What startled Duncan the most was her apparel. She wore an old-fashioned, almost floor length dress. It was made of some sort of coarse brown material over which a presumably once white apron, now soiled and dirty, was tied at the back of her waist. On her head sat a grubby white square cap. The woman glanced upwards and saw Duncan standing framed at the window. She

raised a hand in greeting before hauling her pail away from the pump, turning back towards the house. Duncan stepped back into the room. The young woman from the bed was up and dressing herself, unashamedly déshabillé. Duncan stared at her; she was no older than some of his students. *Where the hell was he? Think man think...*

The last thing he remembered was leaving Wealden University on his bicycle. The sky had been ominously black and thunder had been rolling around the Sussex Weald. Ah! Duncan recalled what had happened. Deciding to make for James and Emily Parker's house, he had cycled out towards Battle. They lived just outside the village of Leafield in an old manor house that nestled at the bottom of a rutted track. His plan had been to shelter there from the storm and thus visit with his friends for a while. After wheeling his bicycle into the barn, he stood in the doorway watching as the rain had turned into heavy hail. The vivid lightning had flashed all around him. Duncan froze, he had been struck. He remembered the heat and searing pain slicing through his body and then... absolutely nothing... until now.

"Um, hello there, did you perhaps find me outside last night... lying upon the ground by the barn?" The blonde beauty stopped in the act of rolling a thick stocking up her shapely leg and Duncan noticed that she lowered her eyes and flushed pink.

"Ooh, I thought that thee had forgotten, sir," she said, her bottom lip quivering.

"Forgotten what?" he asked, intrigued by her sudden emotion.

"My punishment," she whispered.

"*Punishment...*?" Duncan repeated, bewildered.

"Aye, sir. Thee had decreed a switching and thee went to the barn to await me at the appointed hour but... Oh sir, I am that sorry that I was late but I was delayed by Agnes and when I got to thee, lightning from the tempest had knocked thee flat onto the ground. I asked Ham to carry thee in to our chamber but thee seemed to be unhurt and so I left thee to sleep. Thou seemed to recover well

enough during the night, sir," she said saucily, lowering her head so that her mass of curling hair fell forward, covering her face from his view.

Duncan was extremely confused. "I seem to have forgotten an awful lot of... things," he mused.

She looked up and cocked her head slightly, while pushing back the mass of curling hair with a hand. "What do thee not recall?" she asked curiously.

"Well er, *you*, for a start," he stammered.

"Pardon me?"

"I don't recall *any of this...*" Duncan swept his arm out around him.

"You have forgotten *me...* and our home?" She looked incredulous.

Duncan walked around to her side of the bed and sat down next to her. He reached for her hand and held it between his own. "Please humour me and just tell me who you are and *where* we are." Her blue eyes widened but she nodded and squeezed his hand.

"Thou art Hugo Wylde and I am thy wife Bridey. Bridget Wylde, formerly Bridget Tanner and this be our home, Wylde Manor. We were wedded but two years ago and I moved into the Manor with you and your parents. After your father died, some nine months back, you inherited Wylde Manor. Do you truly remember nothing of this, Mr. Wylde?" She gazed anxiously up at her husband.

"No, I remember nothing at all. Yesterday I was a teacher named Duncan Miller and I lectured engineering at Wealden University. How is it possible for me to be here or for you to know me as your husband... this Hugo Wylde?" Bridey shook her head, unsure what to make of this. Perhaps her husband had lost his mind, due to the lightning strike that he had taken the previous evening?

"Let us go and break our fast and perhaps everything will become plain to thee later. I think perhaps the lightning has addled thy wits, husband." Duncan sighed but could think of no other

course of action and looked about the room for his clothing. "What do thee look for, Mr. Wylde?" Bridey asked.

"My clothing," Duncan replied, lifting bedding to look for his trousers.

"They are still hanging where I hung them yesterday eve." Bridey gestured to the far wall where a heavy black garment hung on one of a row of wooden pegs.

Duncan walked to the clothing and fingered the odd looking raiment. "Bridey..."

"Aye..."

"What date and year is this?"

Bridey frowned and looked worriedly across at her husband. "Why today be Tuesday May the tenth in the year of our lord sixteen forty, have thee no recall of the days then, sir?"

Duncan shut his eyes and willed himself to remain calm. All would be well, he would awake soon and this would be only a bad dream. Unfortunately, he knew that this was no dream, a nightmare—yes, but a dream, no. This was real, very real and he was somehow switched into another man's body in the wrong time era. Did this mean then, that the other man, this Hugo Wylde, was now within his own body far into the future of two thousand and four? Duncan gave a huff of bitter amusement. What a shock for the owner of such a place as this with a wife such as his, to find himself in possession of nothing more than a bicycle. Duncan's flat was rented and he had no wife or children. Poor old Hugo would not even be able to do Duncan's job, not with knowledge from sixteen forty!

Duncan had awoken wearing a long white shirt type garment. Bridey handed him a long black velvet waisted doublet, to slip over the top of the shirt. Then he was given a pair of long linen pants, which Bridey called his braies, and a pair of black breeches. Those were then topped off by soft woollen hose. Duncan slipped on some dark leather shoes, which were a little large but more

comfortable than they first appeared. "Bridey, do you possess a mirror perhaps?"

She looked confused, "A mirror?"

Duncan sought another word for mirror that Bridey would understand. "Umm, a-a looking glass perhaps?" he asked triumphantly.

"Aye, I will fetch it for thee." After rummaging inside a large, carved wooden chest, Bridey produced a mirror. Duncan stared at his image in the small hand held glass. His hand trembled as he gripped the mirror tightly. Gone was the cropped blond hair and the green hazel eyes that Duncan knew as himself. Instead a man with shoulder length dark hair was staring out at him. This man had a lean face with dark eyes that were fringed by dark lashes. It was a strong face, with a straight nose and dark brows. The reflection showed that he now possessed a thicker neck and wider shoulders. Duncan tried out a smile and his mouth quirked up more on one side than the other. His new visage was not unattractive but still a dreadful shock to Duncan. How could it be that he was in another man's body and yet still feel so much his very own self? This was absolutely terrifying. Trembling, Duncan willed himself to remain calm. After all he could still suddenly wake up as himself in two-thousand and four. This was probably a complete fluke and all would be well. He might as well enjoy the ride, oops, a rather inappropriate term, especially in view of the night he had just spent with Hugo Wylde's pretty young wife.

"Are thee ready to descend, Mr. Wylde?" Bridey deftly removed the hand mirror from Duncan's grip and cast a decidedly worried glance over him.

Duncan nodded. "Yes, by all means let us descend." He reassured Bridey with a quick smile, my, she really was *very* pretty.

Duncan looked about him with avid curiosity. It was a totally unique experience to find oneself in sixteen forty, even if he didn't quite believe it himself.

The landing was panelled in oak and the floor was boarded with

oak floorboards. A couple of oil painted portraits hung upon the walls, Duncan stopped to look at the subjects. "Who are they, do you know?"

"I call him 'Heartless' an' her 'Sourpuss' but I think they be your grandparents once removed."

Duncan chuckled. "You're a cheeky little thing aren't you? So these people are Hugo's great grandparents. Well, all I can say is that you have them aptly named!" Bridey covered her mouth with her hand and giggled infectiously.

Placing his hand on the oak balustrade, they descended the staircase down into a large dining hall. Duncan stood still as the realisation hit him. In a little over three hundred and sixty years, this very same Jacobean manor house would belong to his friends James and Emily Parker. Duncan perceived that he was in precisely the same location that he had been in yesterday when the lightning had struck him. So it was more than probable that he and Hugo had swapped places when they were both simultaneously struck by lightning.

Duncan mused about the science of the swap that seemed to have occurred between himself and Hugo Wylde. Lightning was electrical; brains were run on electric charges created within the flesh. Somehow when he and Hugo were simultaneously struck by the lightning, the electric charge had swapped their consciousness, their very being. Their personalities were now swapped into one another's bodies.

In the room below there was a huge fire place, with a fire dummy of a stylised Lurcher dog standing on the left hand side. Duncan had only seen these screens once before when visiting Castle Drogo, a National Trust property in Devon. Judging by the thick, stylised ruff that sat about the Lurcher dog's elongated neck, this fire-dummy looked to be an Elizabethan one. The dummy measured about three and a half feet in height. Set against the wall to the left of the fireplace was a heavy oak sideboard fronted with deeply carved cupboard doors. Mullioned windows ran along the

whole length of that left hand side wall of the large open dining and living hall. In the centre of this room was a long oak refractory table, which housed equally long oak benches providing plenty of seating either side. Set at either end were heavy barley twist carver chairs.

Platters of meats and bread were set out at either end of the table. Bridey automatically went to the far end and seated herself in the carver chair. Duncan went to the platter placed at the top end, presumably for Hugo. Picking up the platter he also collected a clay beaker of liquid and then he followed her down the length of the table. Duncan placed the platter and beaker down before sitting on the end of the wooden bench next to her. Bridey jumped to her feet, her cheeks stained with a becoming pink blush. "No, sir! Thou must sit at the head of the table, tis not at all fitting for thee to sit here next to me."

Duncan stretched out his hand and clasped her wrist gently pulling her back down to sit. "Shush, Bridey, it is all right. I want to sit next to you, not away up there. I would have to shout at you in order to talk."

Bridey gave him a strange look. "But, sir, you are vexed with me when I chatter. Thee tells me that I talk far too much!"

Duncan grinned and touched the tip of her nose with his finger. "Is that what I was to punish you for last night, chattering too much?" Fascinated, Duncan watched Bridey's face as she blushed furiously and lowered her eyes.

Her hands gripped one another and she wrung them mercilessly. "No, no, sir, it was, for another thing entirely."

"Ah I see, and what dreadful thing did you do?" Duncan found his pretty young companion charming and watched her open face with amusement. Bridey could not lie, her whole face gave her away. From her candid blue eyes to her pure and unblemished complexion, she was an open book. Duncan waited, watching the indecision warring on Bridey's face. She obviously wanted to avoid

telling him what she had done but found lying too difficult to achieve.

After silence had ticked by for an uncomfortable period of time, Bridey sighed and Duncan could see she was ready to come clean. "I'd been to market and when I returned home, thou had returned and met me and I-I was not wearing my coif."

"Coif?" Duncan looked blankly at her.

"Aye, the cap thou bid me wear to cover my hair when I am out, especially now that I am a married woman. I loathe wearing it but thee insists... quite rightly so, of course," she added hastily.

Duncan winked at her. "Not just cheeky but naughty too!" He grinned and Bridey looked at him with surprise and she smiled shyly back.