

# A BEWITCHING GOVERNESS

SCHOOL OF MAGIC, BOOK 2



PATRICIA RICE



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**Patricia Rice**

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## AUTUMN, 1868



LADY OLIVIA HARGREAVES FOUGHT TEARS BY PICKING AT A LIGHTER BLACK spot in her once-best silk gown. Since Owen's death, everyone and everything looked black to her. The auras of the roomful of men talking at her appeared no more than shadows, and she wondered if she'd ever see the brilliance of a bright spirit like her husband's again.

"You'll understand it's in the best interest of the estate and the tenants," Lawrence Hargreaves said, repeating his father's words. He spoke in an accent so much like her late husband's that she couldn't listen without wanting to fling herself into her brother-in-law's arms and pretend Owen had returned—until she remembered Lawrence's murky aura.

How could Owen have such a weak brother? Only nineteen, Lawrence was as vulnerable to his father's whims as she was in her widowhood.

She cradled her husky son in her arms, glad he slept. At three, he wouldn't comprehend the discussion. The physician had said he hadn't the mental capacity to *ever* comprehend. But Bobby was Owen's son, their own flesh and blood, and she wouldn't trade his happy, loving nature for any child in the world. She kissed his fair hair and tried to pay attention to her visitors.

"A woman can't work with field hands and miners. You'll have riots," Basingstoke said. Father to Owen and Lawrence, the earl was a stout man

she'd only met once, before she married, when she was very young. He'd been no more than a distant figurehead, a wealthy, powerful man in England who had nothing to do with her life here in rural Scotland.

Her husband had owned this estate in Scotland and hadn't been interested in his family home in England, for reasons that were becoming more obvious. She might not see color, but the deep shadows of the earl's aura reflected very little of her late husband's innate integrity.

The sheriff—they'd brought the *sheriff*—cleared his throat. "Without any trust document to the contrary, the case will be decided in Chancery. The earl has the stronger position. Land passes through the male line, and that would be to the new Lord Hargreaves."

Olivia winced at hearing Owen's younger brother addressed by her husband's title. She had no clear idea of what they talked about. As irrational as it seemed, her three-year-old *son* was Lord Hargreaves now. Why did they call Lawrence by the title?

"If Lawrence steps into Owen's shoes, the transition will be scarcely noticeable, and the estate will be in good hands. The tenants will respect the title," the earl insisted.

Respect. . . oh! Now she understood. She felt as if she'd been punched in the stomach.

*The tenants would not respect Owen's son*—or Olivia as executor for the three-year-old viscount. Deep purple shadow filled the room. At least purple was a color—the color of distress, apparently.

The earl didn't have to say what everyone knew. Even should he live to attain his majority, Bobby would never be a leader of men. Her son was defective, mentally challenged, deformed. In the earl's mind, Bobby was better off as dead as his father.

Feeling a quiver of fear at that knowledge, Olivia hardened her heart a little more, and it was a cynical heart to start with.

"The land is mine," she said quietly, willing herself to stiffen her spine and stand with Bobby cradled in her arms. "You may have the title if it pleases you, but Owen left his land to *me* and to Bobby."

"No, he didn't," the earl said angrily. "We've consulted your claim with his solicitor. My son left no trust agreement."

Would this day never end? Warily, Olivia turned to her young

brother-in-law. "You were there, Lawrence. You witnessed our marriage. Owen had the trust prepared at the same time. You witnessed both."

The boy wouldn't meet her eye. He stood at the mullioned window of Olivia's home, studying the estate her late husband had so lovingly tended. "No, I witnessed only a mock ceremony and signed nothing legal."

All the colors in the room turned red with her rage.

