



## What a Hero Dares (The Redgraves Book 4)

By Kasey Michaels

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Desire and loyalty collide in the riveting conclusion to USA TODAY bestselling author Kasey Michaels's series about the Redgraves—four siblings united by their legacy of scandal and seduction...

Punished for his father's crimes and scorned by society, fearless soldier Maximilien Redgrave fights to protect England. But his quest to restore his family's reputation is his own private battle. Trusting the irresistible young Zoe Charbonneau, whose betrayal destroyed his closest comrades and nearly unraveled his covert mission, is a mistake he intends to never repeat. So when the discovery of a smuggling ring compels him to embark on a voyage straight into danger, he's prepared for anything—except to find Zoe on his ship.

Believed to be a double agent for England and France, Zoe must clear her name in order to save her life. Convincing Max of her innocence seems impossible, until inescapable desire tempts them both to trust—and love—again. But a circle of enemies is closing in, and their time together might run out before they outrun danger....

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## **What a Hero Dares (The Redgraves Book 4) By Kasey Michaels Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The lively banter moves the intriguing plot along, as do the fascinating twists and turns of the mystery... Add smugglers, a resurrected Hellfire club, likable characters, as well as a strong adventure, and you have sheer delight."-RT Book reviews on What an Earl Wants

"Michaels has done it again...delectable." -Publishers Weekly (starred review) on The Butler Did It

"Kasey Michaels aims for the heart and never misses." --New York Times bestselling author Nora Roberts

"The historical elements...imbue the novel with powerful realism that will keep readers coming back." -- Publishers Weekly on A Midsummer Night's Sin

"A poignant and highly satisfying read...filled with simmering sensuality, subtle touches of repartee, a hero out for revenge and a heroine ripe for adventure. You'll enjoy the ride." -RT Book Reviews on How to Tame a Lady

#### About the Author

USA TODAY bestselling author Kasey Michaels is the author of more than one hundred books. She has earned four starred reviews from Publishers Weekly, and has won an RT Book Reviews Career Achievement Award and several other commendations for her contemporary and historical novels. Kasey resides with her family in Pennsylvania. Readers may contact Kasey via her website at [www.KaseyMichaels.com](http://www.KaseyMichaels.com) and find her on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/AuthorKaseyMichaels>.

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Maximillien Redgrave had last seen his birthplace from the seat of his curricle as he set off to London and a quiet meeting in a small office tucked away in the bowels of the Royal Admiralty. He felt he'd been traveling ever since, going about the king's business, with only a few, flying visits to London. It was during one of those visits that he'd learned about the Society, so that his work on the Continent now included searching out anyone who might be affiliated with the treasonous hellfire group.

This very night he was returning to Redgrave Manor, the magnificent estate that sprawled nearly to the size of a small English county. Sneaking home, as it were, via the back door.

Not that he'd expected to ride through the front gates heralded by fanfares of trumpets in any case, a roasted boar turning on the spit in the massive kitchen fireplace. A few hearty claps on the back from his brothers, an excited hug from his sister, a half-dozen dogs slobbering on his boots. That would be more than sufficient.

Except for the necessary addition of his irascible grandmother reclining at her ease on her favorite chaise longue, hoisting a wineglass as she sent him a knowing wink. It wouldn't be a proper homecoming without her.

After all, who else but Trixie Redgrave would have thought setting her grandson up as an agent for the Crown held less pitfalls than allowing him to roam Mayfair, wealthy, bored and hot for adventure? To either

her credit or as the result of grandmotherly niggles of guilt, she'd then commissioned her own agents to watch over him, report his every move, his every mission to her. According to Gideon, they all had discreet keepers following them about, guardian angels who happened to be wide as barn doors and carry small arsenals with them. Poor Kate, still living on the estate, had everyone from the potboy to the butler to the tenants sworn to keeping her safe.

Not that Trixie would admit to any such thing.

Not that Max would so accuse her, either, or tell her the number of times he'd escaped those same keepers from the first day they'd set off to Eton with him, employing both fair means and foul. Oh, no, he would simply continue as he'd begun all those years ago, and thus wouldn't tease Trixie later tonight about how their new friend Richard Borders had crossed the Channel and somehow located that one tavern out of dozens lining the water in Gravelines, France, probably to inform him he'd just been whistled to heel by his true master.

*Not now, Trixie*, he'd whispered inside his head, pulling his hat down far enough to cover his distinctive low, winglike brows and long-lashed, sherry-brown eyes as he sidled out the side door and into an alley smelling of everything foul the human body could produce.

There were occasions his almost startling handsomeness was a boon, but not at times like this; right now Max craved anonymity, and having Richard calling out his name or asking the barmaid if she'd seen him could get both the seeker and the sought filleted. *Besides, I've got fish of my own to fry, thank you. I'll be kissing the dear lady's powdered cheek soon enough.*

Max didn't applaud himself as he melted into the darkness, as it had been easy enough avoiding Richard. The man would be looking for someone who appeared very different from the Max Redgrave who had been slouching in a dark corner of the taproom, his hair and beard unkempt, his clothes not much more than several layers of rags beneath a long, greasy cloak, his wide-brimmed hat filthy and sagging over his face. He did have a gold earring, but any bit of sweepings found roaming Gravelines could use his sticker to slit a drunken seaman's ear and help himself to a bit of gold. It was almost expected of them.

"And who was that fine, fair, fat gentleman you just left behind, *mon ami*?"

Max answered Anton Boucher without bothering to turn his head. "Who? You didn't have to follow me. I only came out here to relieve myself," and turned to the wall and unbuttoned his homespun trousers. "You've been at this too long, Anton. You've turned into an old woman, seeing trouble everywhere. It may be prudent of you to step back. The wind, you know."

"It is picking up, isn't it," the man said, retreating a few paces. "And the rain, as well. As long as we're out here and already drenched, we may as well get on with it. Perhaps they won't sail, as a full moon does no one any good when it's hidden behind clouds."

"Admit it, Anton, you're a timid sailor. There's no need for you to travel with me tonight. I won't be returning with you in any case."

"Nonsense, as if I'd leave you with no one to guard your back. Besides, I've gained their trust. Only the one ship tonight, and they won't let you board without me."

Max deliberately kept his tone light. "Braggart. But I suppose you're right. And you're confident they'll have

the same destination as last time?"

"Same godforsaken destination *every* time, just as I told you." Anton smiled, his pale blue eyes seeming to twinkle in the reflection from a streak of lightning overhead. "Missed all the fun then, didn't we, sailing in the trailing boat? Pirates, the captain swore as we turned and raced back here, as if he'd know a pirate from a pickle. Probably just other smugglers, thinking to make an easy profit without the trouble of having to cross the Channel. Can't trust the English, Max, you know that, being one of them."

"The same stands for you, concerning your fellow Frenchmen," Max returned, and Anton's smile vanished.

"Touché. But we don't speak of such things. The past is the past, and the guilty one punished does not bring back the dead, does it?"

Max wished he hadn't spoken. This was no night for unpleasant memories. "No, it doesn't."

They made their way along the docks to the rather questionable-looking vessel their so-called employers had chosen for the run across the Channel. *Borrowed* from a band of English owlers their French hosts were currently entertaining at one of the inns expressly built for their comfort by none other than the emperor himself. Like so many others, having delivered their cargo of wool, all they'd wanted was full tankards and some sweet *mam 'zelles* warming their laps before loading up their cargos of brandy, tea and silk for the return to the beaches of Romney Marsh or perhaps Folkestone before daybreak.

Max had watched from the corner of the taproom as the unsuspecting crew drank down their ale, neatly doctored with laudanum. The fools were now blissfully asleep with their heads fallen forward onto the table-tops, unaware their vessel was about to take a second run across the Channel yet this night. They'd wake to find a friendly gang of ships' carpenters repairing damage they'd discovered on the hull. Not to worry yourselves, my good *messieurs*, they would be told, you can sail for home tonight, and in the meantime, please enjoy the hospitality of these lovely young buds of springtime whose only wish is to please you.

Clever. Bonaparte and the Society, working together for their mutual advantage. God only knew what headed to England, God only knowing what returned with them to Gravelines.

Max wished he'd discovered the truth on his own, but that hadn't been the case. It was only after running down Anton in Ostend that he'd learned about the tactics, if not the cargo or the destination. And it was only when he and Anton had sailed from Gravelines with the Society that he'd glimpsed the familiar shorelines of Redgrave Manor just before the sloop sailing ahead of them was attacked and their mission had been aborted, rescheduled for tonight.

A real piece of work, Anton Boucher, this Frenchman who had thrown in his lot with the English. Never revealing more than he had to, and if not a friend, at least trustworthy. To a point. Max had told him only what he'd wished him to know when he'd asked for his assistance...but never called the Society by name or let on that he'd recognized the area of English coastline that had been and was now again their destination. As far as Anton was concerned, Max was simply carrying out another mission for the Crown.

*No matter how much you trust them, tell them only what they need to know and, if you can manage it, only half of that.* Max had earned that lesson the hardest way possible.

"Are you regretting escaping your watchdogs in Ostend?" the Frenchman asked as he squinted through the downpour, looking up and down the pier. "Don't you miss them?"

"I never miss them for long, unfortunately, as they've somehow made their way here. As far as they know, however, I'm still at my hotel, sleeping off an afternoon of melancholy drinking, just as if the place had only a front door. You're not supposed to notice them at any rate, as my behemoths rather pride themselves on their stealth."

"And now you're about to leave them on the other side of the Channel. Poor fellows. Even hounds can't follow a scent across the water."

"They can make their own way home," Max grumbled as they each loaded yokes holding a pair of small brandy kegs onto their shoulders and advanced up the narrow, dangerously swaying gangplank. *Along with Richard, who'd obviously already found them guarding that same front door.* "Damn, man, we haven't cast off yet, and already you're turning green. It's only a storm, not Armageddon. Don't worry, all we can do is drown."

"Sometimes I do not so much like you, *mon ami*. French stomachs are delicate, not like those of you English, who would eat shoe leather, and probably do."

"Only on Sundays, with quite lovely burnt carrots and turnips. Find yourself a dark corner, why don't you, as I help the others finish the loading."

Ten minutes later they were pushing away from the dock, and ten minutes after that Anton was leaning over the rail, alternately cursing and casting up his accounts.

At least the wind was with them, and they'd be offshore at Redgrave Manor in a matter of hours. Unless the unknown captain's skill faltered, in which case they'd all be at the bottom of the Channel. There was always that. Years ago, Max had been able to brag of being not only the youngest coxswain in the Royal Navy, but had been aboard the *Trafalgar* when the mighty Nelson was mortally struck down. But those who'd been there never spoke of that fateful day, even in whispers.

Just as he could not betray himself now by conking the inept captain over the head with a belaying pin and taking control of the ship.

Cursing the foul weather under his breath, Max leaned against a portion of lashed-together kegs as the sloop seemed to climb skyward on each wave, only for the hull to then slap down on black water turned hard as any board.

There came the sound of tearing sail high in the rigging, and Anton's curses grew louder. A French royalist intent on defeating Bonaparte and returning the monarchy to the throne in Paris, Anton had been secretly working for the English for close to a decade, and he and Max had more than once joined ranks in ferreting out information valuable to the Crown. Worked together, gotten roaring drunk together, laughed together...mourned together.

It was only natural that he would contact Anton for his assistance, and it was Anton who'd first suggested English traitors could be making themselves at home in any of the hotels Bonaparte had ordered built to house English smugglers along the coast, many of them at Dunkirk and Gravelines. Anton had taken out a gold coin and flipped it, with him picking Gravelines when he won.

Max had seen that trick from Anton and his twoheaded coin before, but had never called him on it, just as Max had some small tricks of his own. Anton had information he wasn't sharing, and had made sure

Gravelines was their destination. As long as they both knew each other's tricks they could both pretend ignorance in certain things. It was safer that way, as long as the mission succeeded.

Which, hopefully, it was about to do.

Once in the seaside town, watching and careful listening had resulted in information about one small group of men and their *borrowed* ships. Their runs were infrequent, and loaded with quite singular cargo. Yes, they loaded brandy meant for England, unloaded wool that came from England. But there was something more.

"Men going to England, but not returning with the ship," Anton had informed Max. "My contact told me it's the damndest thing. Sometimes two, three dozen seamen sailing off along with the kegs, but only a handful returning on the next tide."

He'd laughed then, that full-throated laugh of his that rose all the way to his pale eyes. "You don't suppose Boney is invading a score or so at a time? Piecemeal building himself an army on English shores? I always told you, Max, these revolutionists toss words like *liberté, égalité, fraternité* into the dustbin every time they sniff a whiff of power. Drop a crown on their heads, like Boney, and they're even worse, gobbling up other countries like sugar treats. Why else are you here, with the English so concerned about Bonaparte's business, yes?"

Remembering Anton's words, Max squinted into the darkness along the deck, attempting to single out bodies that didn't belong, anyone who seemed out of place. It was impossible to recognize faces from his other crossing, save for a magnificently tall and leanly muscled man with skin the shade of wild honey and eyes the color of sand that stared straight back at him. Max acknowledged him with a ragtag salute, and the man nodded in return, then both looked away.

Friend? Foe? Interested bystander? The man would bear watching.

Other than the crew, he then counted the other men clinging to the ropes, hired from the docks to assist in the off-loading of the contraband once they reached the shoreline. Expendable bodies, like his, and Anton's, hired to do a job of work, or drown in the process.

Except there were too many of them.

There were more than a dozen Frenchmen, four quiet men dressed as Dutchmen. A trio of Spaniards who could be dockside lingerers or hired mercenaries, but currently fully occupied with their rosaries. A short, fairly rotund fellow engulfed head-to-foot in a worse cloak than Max's own and currently hanging over the railing next to Anton, apparently feeding the fish with whatever he'd had for supper.

Lastly, his gaze alit on a slim figure wrapped all in black: black leather trousers, black tunic, overly large black hooded cloak, black gloves, black boots, black muffler covering all but a pair of narrowly slitted eyes.

Not one of the crew. Definitely not hired to wade through the choppy waters to the beach, a brace of kegs tied over his shoulders. Which meant one thing... Max was looking at another part of the cargo, most likely a spy.

And spies could be valuable.

He spent the next three hours making and discarding plans. He knew he wasn't returning to Gravelines; that

had never been part of his plan. But now, on top of successfully stealing away from the shore on his own, he would have to lug an unwilling companion along with him.

There was no other possible conclusion: he had to enlist Anton's help once they reached their destination.

He reminded himself yet again that he trusted Boucher. As much as he trusted any man. Or woman.

Which, Max acknowledged silently, wasn't much. For instance, he still didn't quite understand why Anton, such a sorry sailor, would insist upon escorting him to England in this storm when he could have vouched for him to get him on board, and then waved his farewell from the dock. That didn't quite make sense.

The Frenchman hadn't led him astray yet; his information had all been spot-on. But loyalties could change, especially if money was involved, just as easily as the direction of the wind now blowing toward England, at last leaving the storm behind them. Trust was at a premium in these tumultuous times. It was all too easy to end up betrayed and dead. Both Anton and Max knew that. *But we don't speak of such things. The past is the past, and the guilty one punished does not bring back the dead....*

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