

**HOW**  
the  
**HANGMAN**  
**LOST** *His*  
**HEART**

*Also by K. M. Grant*

THE DE GRANVILLE TRILOGY:

*Blood Red Horse*

BOOK ONE

*Green Jasper*

BOOK TWO

*Blaze of Silver*

BOOK THREE

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LOST His  
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K. M. GRANT



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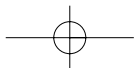
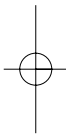
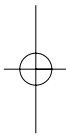
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*In memory of all the nice hangmen in history  
who kept their hands always steady  
and their steel always sharp.*

*It was a horrid job, but somebody had to do it.*

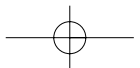
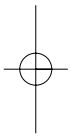
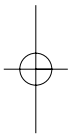


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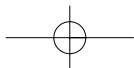
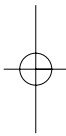
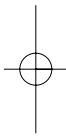
I would like to thank all the children who, having heard me speak of the hapless head of Uncle Frank, encouraged me to write this story.

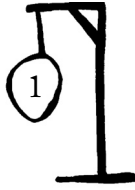
I would also like to apologize to Uncle Frank himself, for digging him up, as it were, yet again.

Sorry, Uncle Frank.



**HOW**  
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**HANGMAN**  
**LOST** *His*  
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*London, August 10, 1746*

When Uncle Frank's head was finally parted from his body, the crowd laughed. It was not nice laughter, the sort that gurgles up when you are happy or have just played a trick. This laughter was the kind you hear in a bad dream and Alice, standing in the crowd, wanted to thump those around her who joined in. It was quite the wrong time for laughter. It was true that her uncle had laughed himself as he was carted over Kennington Common, even though, what with the rope around his neck and his hands bound behind him, his laughter was scratchy as burned toast. Still, it was admirable under the circumstances that he laughed at all. Why, he had even managed to tell a joke! It was not a very good joke, to be sure, and perhaps the funniest thing about it was his face when he couldn't remember the punch line. "What a moment for a memory lapse," he had cried gaily. "The joke's on me!" But that was before. When the executioner had produced the grisly tools of his trade, Uncle Frank had turned green.

Everybody knew that the punch line would never come now.

Alice had not been able to watch after that, but the sighs and appalled groans of the crowd gave an up-to-the-minute commentary as her beloved uncle was first strung up, then cut down before he was dead, sliced open like a halibut or perhaps a herring, and had his innards removed. Only then was he relieved of his suffering and his head. That was when the laughter came and Alice was violently sick all over somebody's shoes. She did not apologize. She was too busy wiping her mouth carefully on her skirt and stiffening her backbone. It would not do to look fainthearted when she went to claim the body.

Dan Skinslicer, hangman and jobbing executioner (prices on request: any method considered), was not an unkindly soul and when he saw Alice, who couldn't help trembling as she approached the gallows, he rubbed his hands on his breeches before showing her the coffin into which Uncle Frank's remains had been tossed. "You here for Colonel Towneley?" he asked, thinking to pat her shoulder, then, seeing that Uncle Frank's blood was leaking from under his fingernails, just nodding at her instead. "The innards are not there," he said sympathetically, taking off his stained apron. "We burn them, see. The fire's behind the scaffold. Just

a small one today, with only the colonel and one or two others to do. Now, have you brought a cart?"

Alice steadied herself. "I ordered a boy to bring one," she said, finding it hard not to look inside the coffin although she didn't want to. "I gave him sixpence, but he's late. Can you wait?"

Dan wanted his dinner, but Alice looked at him with such pleading in her eyes that he found himself nodding and they sat together on the steps of the scaffold as the usual execution-day caterwauling and chaos died away and the last of the nasty jeering boys had spat at Uncle Frank and run away.

Dan leaned over and wiped the gobs carefully off with his apron. "There's no call for that kind of thing," he said reprovingly. "The colonel may have wanted airy-fairy Charlie Stuart on the throne of England instead of our nice King George, but he was a gentleman and he gave me a very decent tip."

"Can't we put the coffin lid on?" asked Alice plaintively. She felt faint and shivery. She had not even paused to pick up a shawl as she ran from her grandmother's house that morning in case somebody saw her and stopped her from getting out at all. Her aunt Ursula thought it much too dangerous for any of the family to witness Uncle Frank's final disgrace and had spent the whole evening clutching her own throat theatrically as if it was she who was facing execution.

By the end, Alice had wanted to strangle her. Stupid Aunt Ursula! *She* was perfectly safe. No self-respecting executioner would ever want to swipe through a neck as scraggy as hers.

The wooden steps creaked as Dan sat down, his legs two solid logs in front of him. He found an apple in his pocket, inspected it, and rubbed at the blood spatters. "Bite?" he offered. Alice made a revolted face and he shrugged. "I haven't had any breakfast yet," he told her, basking in the feeling of a job well done. "Never do, somehow, on execution mornings, although I make sure the wife gives me a good dinner after. Mutton pie tonight."

Another gob of spit landed on Uncle Frank. A latecomer had missed the execution but wasn't going to be done out of all the fun.

"Please," begged Alice, "please can we put the coffin lid on?"

"I'm sorry, but we can't," Dan told her with his mouth full. Clearly Alice had a lot to learn about executions. "I'm waiting for instructions from old Pecksy about his head."

Alice swayed and shut her eyes. She had forgotten, or perhaps just did not want to remember, what they might decide to do to her uncle's head. When she opened her eyes again, six soldiers were clearing a path for Lord Chief Justice Peckersniff.

The Lord Chief Justice didn't waste any time. He dismounted with a dainty flourish and tiptoed up the scaffold steps. "Good job, Skinslicer," he said, carefully covering his nose and mouth with his handkerchief before peering in at Uncle Frank. "Got the pitch pot handy?"

"Here, sir," said Dan.

"Well, stick Colonel Towneley's noggin in it and give him a good dunking. We don't want him falling to bits. His head must be up on Temple Bar tonight and be on display for quite some time as a lesson, Skinslicer, as a lesson I say to all other traitors. We want no more of his sort, I say no more. Now be sharp. I've promised my wife that she can come for a viewing before we have our dinner. She always enjoys your executions, Skinslicer. She only missed today's because she was having new teeth fitted." He tried not to let his nose twitch, but the memory of Lady Peckersniff's rotting gums made him feel queasier than Uncle Frank's corpse. He looked about for something more uplifting and spotted Alice. He had no idea who she was, but, from the lofty height of his important position, he liked to be kind to those he thought of as "the little people." He gave Dan an awkward wink and asked, "Who is your apprentice?"

Outraged, Alice shot up, but Dan pushed her back down. Silly child! Did she not know that being a

traitor's niece was hardly something to be advertised? He smiled, showing one yellow incisor. "She's my sister's girl," he said. "She came to give me this." He held out his apple. Despite Dan's best efforts, Uncle Frank's blood had stained it pink all the way through.

This was not good for Peckersniff's delicate stomach and he rose on his tiptoes and retreated rapidly. Only once settled back in the saddle did he twist his lips into a smile. Always, always keep on good terms with the hangman, his old father had told him, because you never know when he might come for *you*. In these uncertain days, it was best to lay it on thick as mustard. He glanced quickly at Uncle Frank. "Marvelous work, marvelous work, Skinslicer. Such neat slicing! Such tidy chopping! The king—the real king rather than any pretendy one—will be most impressed, I say most impressed." He flapped his hand, then placed his handkerchief firmly back over his nose before cantering away. Oh my, but the smell of the common people was really something awful.

When he was safely out of sight, Dan was very apologetic. "Sorry, missy," he said to Alice, "but it wouldn't do to say you were with the colonel. He's a bit unpredictable, that Justice Peckersniff. The good news is that he only wants your uncle's head, so you'll get a whole body to take home, which is nice. Sometimes traitors are hacked into four bits, you know, and sent off

to different towns. I saw a beautiful leg in Bath last year. Executioner'd done a fine job. It stank a bit and was an odd shade of purple, mind, but you could see the cut was quite clean. Don't know who the hangman was, but that leg had the mark of a real sawbones about it." He threw his apple away, jumped down, and chose a pike from a bundle lying under the gallows. "Now, turn round while I do what has to be done."

After some scraping and a bit of swearing, Dan said, "You can look now," and there was Uncle Frank with the top of the pike poking out of his skull. Alice thought she might be sick again, but luckily she wasn't. Dan himself spat on a bit of cloth and washed Uncle Frank's face with it. "If you want to make yourself useful," he said, "you can rearrange the colonel's hair. I don't expect he'd like to look a mess." Not wanting to be thought unhelpful, Alice obeyed. The hair was difficult to manage, what with being covered in pitch and all, but she did her best and by the time she and Dan had finished, Uncle Frank was really quite presentable. His handsome face had certainly been a little altered by Dan's ax: it was thinner and he looked older than he had only moments before, but at least he was still recognizably Uncle Frank and seemed, under the circumstances, quite pleased.

Alice at once felt better. "You have every reason to be pleased," she muttered as she made final adjustments

to his globby locks. It felt odd to be addressing a disembodied head, but not as odd as she thought it might. “Not many could have endured a martyrdom like that without moaning or screaming or peeing in their breeches.”

It was only when they had finished that Dan stared at Frank with some consternation.

“What?” asked Alice, looking nervously back and forth from Uncle Frank to Dan. “What is it?”

“Well,” said Dan, scratching his head and leaving a lump of pitch on his fringe, “it’s just that most of the gentlemen I execute shut their eyes. Your uncle Frank has kept his open. He’s looking at us. I’ve never seen that before. It’s a bit spooky, to be honest.”

“Well, he’s quite dead,” said Alice tartly, and suddenly she found she was blinking back tears. There had been nobody else in Alice’s life quite like Uncle Frank. He had slipped her silver, let her ride his horse, and, unbeknownst to her parents, on his last visit to her home at Towneley Hall had taken her to see a prize fight between two greased men in the market square at Withinby. How badly she had wanted to go with him when he set off to join Bonnie Prince Charlie. How she had begged. How cross she had been when he declared that her pretty face would only distract men from their proper duty of killing each other. But how she shuddered now, as the smoke from the

smoldering innards stung her nostrils. Imagine if the innards were hers! Imagine if—

She was saved from too much imagining by a piping voice coming from below. “Wagon for Uncle Frank?” the diminutive driver asked, tilting a mop of curly hair above a freckly face. “Sixpence paid, another sixpence to come.”

“Goodness,” thought Alice, for the boy could not have been more than nine. Dan was already hammering down the coffin lid, so Alice held the pike. She had to use both hands, for Uncle Frank’s head was heavier than she expected and the pike swayed dangerously.

“Now,” said the boy, “pile in. You, missy, can sit atop the dead man’s box, unless you think your old captain too sniffy for that kind of caper.”

“He was a *colonel*, if you don’t mind,” said Alice, suddenly prim.

The boy snorted.

Half an hour later, Alice, Dan, the cart boy, the coffin, and Uncle Frank’s head were being pelted with squelchy vegetables as they trundled through the narrow, dank streets toward the river. Some of the rude words that accompanied the vegetables made Dan’s eyebrows shoot so far up they disappeared and, although the pony skittered along as fast as he could go, it seemed an age to Alice before they reached the great stone arches of Christopher Wren’s Temple Bar.

As they drew up underneath, she didn't know whether to be relieved or horrified. Several heads were already displayed on spikes high above the coping that spanned the road and, although the erstwhile owners of the heads were unknown to her, she felt outraged at the indignity of it all.

She grabbed Dan. "Don't put Uncle Frank's head up there. I can't bear it."

"Ouch, missy," said Dan, for Alice's fingernails were sharp. "I must. That's my job, see." He shook the pike to get the head straight. "It's all right for rich people like you"—he wiped some brown mush that might once have been potato off the end of Uncle Frank's nose—"but if I don't work, me and my missus will starve. They might even send me on to the ships." His grimy cheeks went white at the thought because he had once executed a cabin boy whose innards were so slimy they wouldn't even burn. "I couldn't do that."

"But my family would pay you," pleaded Alice.

"I'm sorry," said Dan. He took a firm hold of the pike. "I wouldn't look if I were you."

But Alice could not look anywhere else. With awful fascination she watched as Dan got out of the cart, fought his way through the hustlers and jostlers, and, negotiating the length of the pike as best he could, disappeared into the shop that provided the only access to the top of the monument. Eventually he reappeared

dragging a ladder and climbed up, over the great stone scrolls and onto the roof. Conscious of Alice staring up from below, he did some last-minute tidying of Uncle Frank's hair before raising the head high and easing the pike into its hole, where it wobbled a little before coming to rest. Ever the professional, he couldn't help taking a quick glance at Uncle Frank's unknown neighbor, whose neck, unlike Uncle Frank's, was a real mess. *Honest to God*, Dan thought as he made his way back down to the street, *some people take no pride in their work*.

As he climbed into the cart the clouds thickened and even the hardiest onlookers felt the carnival spirit of the morning evaporating fast. When it started to drizzle, it was clear that the fun was over. Alice's teeth began to chatter, but she would do her duty, just as Uncle Frank would expect. "B-b-b-b-boy," she commanded, "take Mr. S-s-s-skinslicer home first, then drop me and what's left of Uncle Frank at my granny's. Somebody else will take his p-p-p-poor body home."

The boy made a horrible face. "Hope home's not far," he said.

"About 250 miles to the north," Alice told him.

The boy burped. "He'll pong summat terrible by the time he gets there."

Alice thought she had never felt sick so many times in one day before.

The boy clicked to the pony and Alice looked up one last time. She could not help exclaiming at what she saw. The drizzle, persistent now, made it look as though her uncle was crying. “Of course, it’s just the raindrops,” she told herself sternly. “I know it’s just the raindrops.” Nevertheless, she hated to leave him looking so dismal and, unable to restrain herself any longer, burst into just the kind of loud and noisy sobs that she prided herself she had quite grown out of.