

The Boat of Charity:  
The Escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie



By  
Charron Moczygemba  
September 9, 2025

# The Boat of Charity: The Escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie



He approached in the dark of the night, not knowing her for a friend or foe, but he dared to dare the unthinkable. What else did he have to lose? What more could he endure?

He was once proclaimed king, he led mighty men to battle, they all rallied to his call. They had declared him the savior of his people. He had dined on the richest of foods, danced with the most beautiful women, and lived in a life of luxury. With a word men fell to his command, and now he was a former reflection of himself on the run, begging for scraps, pleading to his fellow man for mercy. How might one fall from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows? No longer in command but fleeing to live. What had gone so horribly wrong?

He was destined to lead the people, take back what was taken, and bring dignity to a nation. It all ended on the faithful day of April 16, 1774. A date that would offer promises and end in failure. Defeat would befall him, and all noble men would flee as they were hunted down like dogs. Those who had sworn allegiance would betray him. He was a man on the run, knowing that his hunters were on his heels.

The past two months, moving in the darkest and bleakest of nights, fearing every snap of a twig, every shift in the air, being hunted by those who stole his destiny. There had been many who risked their lives in coming to his aid, they held on to the dream of freedom from oppression; believing in the cause he promised to give. They fought with him and dreamed of a time when they would bring forth a new, free, and hopeful future.

He had barely managed to evade their capture. His faithful companions had delivered him to the Isle of Uist but could aid him no more. Would his fate end here or would he endure? Weary, sick, and utterly desperate; he approached her gently with his closest friends, knowing that this woman held his destiny in her hands. Would she cast him out in his moment of desperation?

He quickly realized she was neither friend nor foe. She had no interest in his cause, and her loyalty lay with her husband to be, who sided with his adversaries. What he feared the most had come true, his fate was sealed. Broken, exhausted, the realization of everything he and his companions had suffered had come to an end, and his life would be handed over to his enemies.

He resigned to the fact that his run for freedom, the dream of his kingdom, would end at this moment. Everything he'd done and failed to do would amount to nothing in the end.

But wait! Was there a glimmer of hope? Could it be that this young woman would become his salvation? She hesitated.

She looked into his eyes and sorrow befell her. Ever so gently, she slowly grasped his hand and held it tenderly. Her eyes held something that he could not describe. He decided then that the young woman before him was an angel, renewing his hope.

He gazed at her, daring not to breathe, lest she change her mind. It was risky, he knew that, and she knew that. She was torn, he could see it plainly, but within seconds she decided. She had a plan, she was going to save him, save the fallen king whose destiny was to be the savior of his people. How has his fate turned?

In the night she had gathered supplies under the nose of her family, betraying her country, and aligning herself to a deception that would save him and cast an ill-fate for her. She took away his aristocratic identity and humbled his status to the station of her Irish maid. No longer a king, but a servant. She became his guide, his savior, and he followed her command. In the end, it had been her act of kindness that had saved his life.

He was ushered into a simple boat, a boat that would become his new future and his freedom. He glanced in the light of the stormy night, catching a glimpse of the face that had saved him, and dared to ask, "Why?"

She looked into his eyes, and with a light shining within her soul, "For charity." With that she pushed his boat into the stormy sea toward the Isle of Skye.

As Bonnie Prince Charlie sailed into the night on June 28, 1746, it was thanks only to Flora MacDonald that he escaped alive. A simple act of charity, a simple boat for a fallen king. He escaped the clutches of the English crown and made his way to France, never to grace Scotland again.

The prince would never know the risk she had taken, nor the cost she would endure for a cause she had little interest in, but Flora's actions would later be memorialized in *The Skye Boat Song*,<sup>1</sup> written in 1884, by Sir Harold Boulton.

*Speed bonny boat like a bird on a wing,  
Onward the Sailors cry,  
Carry the lad that's born to be King,  
Over the Sea to Skye.  
Loud the wind howls  
Loud the waves roar  
Thunderclaps rend the air  
Baffled out foes  
Stand by the shore*

---

<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Ella. "The Skye Boat Song" You Tube. (4:17) 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBSqQPP4aVM>  
August 31, 2025.

*Follow they will not dare.  
Chorus (Speed bonny boat like a bird on a wing,  
Onward the Sailors cry.  
Carry the lad that's born to be King,  
Over the Sea to Skye.)  
Many's the lad fought on that day  
Well the claymore did weld  
When the night came  
Silently lain Dead on Culloden field.  
(Repeat Chorus)  
Though the waves heave  
Soft will ye sleep  
Ocean's a royal bed  
Rocked in the deep  
Flora will keep  
Watch by your weary head  
(Repeat Chorus)*

*By Charron Moczygemba*

