

RENEE
ROSE

The
REDDINGTON
Scandal



The Reddington Scandal

By

Renee Rose

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Spanking and other sexual activities
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only, intended for adults.

Chapter One

London, 1835

Phoebe lay curled in bed, reading a novel by lamplight. It took her a moment to register the sounds she heard from her sister's room next door.

Was that—? Could it be—?

It sounded like flesh slapping flesh. She heard her sister's giggled protests and realized, with a start, that her lover must be spanking her. Maud had taken Lord Fenton, the notorious rake, into her bedroom for the past several nights, enjoying him whilst Lord Reddington, her odious husband, was out of town. From the sound of it, Lord

Fenton had the upper hand on her at the moment.

“Go stand in the corner until you can learn not to be such a selfish cow,” she heard him order. She almost laughed herself, as her older sister was, in fact, extraordinarily self-centered. Fenton’s recognition of it raised him in her estimation. Lord Fenton was quite a prize for Maud, not that she’d keep him long, judging by his notoriety. He was the prize all the unwed ladies tried in vain to win, as he was everything in one package—boyishly handsome, charming, wealthy, titled, and single. But he never courted any lady eligible for marriage, seeming to prefer the already married or widowed for his entertainment.

Though she would never admit it to a living soul, even she had pined for him. But in her case, it wasn't the money or the charm or the title that drew her; rather, an overheard conversation between him and his sister a few years prior. Maud and Reddington had held a Christmas ball and she'd come upon a handsome young man and woman in the corridor. At first, she thought they might be an amorous couple, looking for a moment alone, and she'd drawn back to give them privacy. Then she realized the young lady was crying.

"It's nothing. It's just that no one ever asks me to dance, and..."

"Shh, Wynn timer. Here," he said, producing a handkerchief. "It's only

because you don't bat your eyelashes and say insipid things and play parlor games that have the chance of producing a scandal. And frankly, I'm all the more proud of you for it. If you acted as foolishly as those young ladies out there, I'd take you over my knee."

"Oh, Teddy," she said, clearly not giving his threat any credence. "What do you know about courting? You've never done it in earnest."

"Come here," he said, wrapping his arms around her. "I know you are a beautiful and intelligent young woman and when the right man finds you, he will know you as the gem you are. Now come on, let's go back there. I'll dance with you."

“Dancing with my brother will not improve my prospects!” the young lady exclaimed, but she was starting to laugh and it was clear her brother had lifted her mood.

He put his arm around her shoulders and directed her down the corridor. “Then I’ll send a gentleman over.”

“Please do not. I would rather not suffer your pity.”

Phoebe had stepped out and greeted them, lest they realize she’d been there all along. “Who is that?” she asked Maud when they entered the hall.

“Lord Fenton. Stay far away from him, Phoebe. His only interest in ladies is how quickly he can bed them.”

“No... that gentleman over there?” she’d asked, certain Maud was mistaken.

“Yes, the handsome one. He’s Lord Fenton,” her sister had said before she breezed away.

Phoebe had stood gaping, finding it difficult to reconcile the tender compassion she’d just witnessed with a man known for his scandalous behavior. No family member had ever shown her the warmth and affection she witnessed between Fenton and his sister. It became a fascination for her over the following two years, to imagine what sort of man Lord Fenton really was and Maud’s recent acquisition of his favors made her more jealous than she cared to admit.

The sound of a carriage outside the London house did not draw her particular attention, as they lived on a noisy street, but when she heard the front door open, she sat bolt upright in bed.

“Maud!” she hissed in the direction of her sister’s room. But she had no doubt her sister heard it too, as all voices ceased and she heard a thump as if someone had jumped from the bed. Why was Reddington home at this hour when he was not supposed to return for two nights? She scrambled out of her own bed and threw a robe over her nightdress, heading out onto the landing to provide distraction, if necessary. It was one thing to begrudge Maud her lover, it was quite another to allow her

to be in real danger from her husband.

Lord Fenton slipped out of her sister's room, his cravat hanging untied about his neck and his jacket and waistcoat off. He moved with calm efficiency, his fingers tying the knot at his throat as his eyes swept right and left for the best exit. Maud slipped out behind him, pulling her robe around her shoulders.

"That way," she whispered, pointing toward the servants' stairs, but it was too late.

"What's going on?" Reddington boomed, barreling up the stairs. He had a pistol in his hand, as if he'd expected to find Maud with a lover. "Fenton," he snarled. "I should have known it was

you poaching from my bed!”

Phoebe felt a wave of dizziness. Reddington was going to shoot Fenton, and God only knew what he would do to Maud.

Thinking quickly, she grasped Fenton’s arm possessively. “No one was poaching from your bed, my lord. He was with me!” she gasped.

Reddington’s eyes bulged and, if possible, he appeared even angrier. She knew he considered her a possession as much as he did her sister. Perhaps even more, since he had attempted to force himself upon her every time he could connive to be alone with her. “You?” he intoned incredulously. “No,” he shook his head. “Not you.”

“Yes,” she whispered, trembling so badly her thighs tapped together on their own volition. Fenton must have felt it, because he wrapped his arm about her waist and drew her close. It was an entirely new and satisfying feeling to have a man hold her protectively.

If he had not, Reddington’s slap would certainly have knocked her to the floor. Her vision went dark as pain exploded on the side of her face and a strong arm caught and righted her. When the dark spots in front of her eyes cleared, she saw the two men scrambling about on the floor, with Fenton appearing to have the advantage, despite Reddington’s pistol. He struck Reddington’s wrist against the floor,

causing the pistol to fly loose, and then straddled her brother-in-law, slamming his fist into the man's face.

Vindicated by Fenton's assault on Reddington, she considered the implications of claiming him as her lover. Reddington would certainly throw her out and her reputation would be ruined. If Fenton would not provide for her—and she doubted a man of his rakish reputation would be so scrupulous—her life now meant nothing. She snatched up the pistol and pointed it at the two men. “Stop it! Both of you.”

Neither listened. She lunged forward, waving the muzzle of the gun between their heads so they'd see it. “Stop or I'll shoot you both!”

Her hands shook so violently, she feared she might discharge the heavy firearm by accident. Fenton slowly stood up from his crouch, palms out. “Easy, sweetheart. Give me the pistol,” he soothed, holding out his hand.

When she didn’t move, he reached out and grasped the barrel of the gun, tugging gently. She resisted at first, then allowed him to slide it out of her sweaty grasp, surprised to find herself drawn against him in another pleasing embrace.

“I demand satisfaction,” Reddington huffed. He had also righted himself and now stood, red-faced and bug-eyed.

“He is going to marry me,” she

heard herself say, her voice sounding shaky and far away. It was her only chance. She would ask nothing of him—only his name—but without it, she was utterly ruined. She dared a glance at Fenton, who must surely be horrified at the thought of marrying someone he didn't even know.

He met her gaze and held it. There was no fear or anger in it. In fact, she found only compassion there, reminding her of the way he'd been with his sister. "Yes. Quite right. I mean to marry her," he said, picking up her cue.

She swallowed, unable to look away from the warm brown eyes locked on her own.

"I plan to post the banns

tomorrow.”

She could feel Maud’s horrified expression, and realized the title of Lady Fenton was coveted by nearly every female in London—single, wed, or widowed—both for the wealth and the man who came with it, though she’d had none of that in mind when she’d forced his hand. She could see Maud seething with jealousy, and perversely, it heartened her. For once in her life, she would have something Maud did not. But more than that, more than anything, she wished to be out of Reddington’s house, forever. Surely marriage to Lord Fenton could be no worse than what she had suffered there.

“I sincerely doubt that,”

Reddington sneered.

“Oh?” Fenton gave a rakish grin and shocked her with a kiss full on the mouth, pulling her waist against his body so she arched into him. Never having been kissed before, she froze, then remembered to put on a show and looped an arm behind his neck.

His lips were surprisingly supple for a man's and they opened, repositioned, and kissed a second time at a different angle. His kiss was confident, refined. He was a man who had kissed a thousand women, probably, but for that one moment, she pretended it was just for her. She breathed in the scent of him—spiced soap and wool, with a touch of Maud's perfume around

the edges.

“Enough!” Reddington exploded and Fenton drew his head away with a satisfied smirk, underscoring what she already had known—that the kiss was for Reddington’s benefit, not hers. But he still held her possessively against his body, the firm muscle of his thigh meeting her belly, his protection lending her strength.

Fenton lifted the pistol with a gracefully straight arm and pointed it steadily at Reddington’s head, causing the man to still. “If you touch her again while she’s under this roof—in any way at all—I will kill you.”

She nearly swooned. Reddington’s lip curled in a snarl, but he

did not answer.

“That is a promise.”

* * *

Teddy took Lord Reddington's pistol with him when he left, not because he had any rights to it, but because he didn't trust the man with a weapon in hand. Reddington had been apoplectic when he struck Maud's younger sister and it made him uneasy to leave her with him. In fact, he wondered if he could not pull some strings with the magistrate to wed her without the delay of posting the banns.

It had been incredibly brave of her to take responsibility for his and her sister's misdeed. She had saved his life,

possibly Maud's as well. Though it had never been his intention to marry—he'd seen the folly of it through his parents' miserable union—he realized the necessity of offering his hand to his little rescuer. He wasn't about to ruin an innocent young lady's reputation.

At home, his valet helped him to disrobe and he climbed into his bed, thinking of his young bride. He did not even know her name. She was lovely—even lovelier than her sister. She had the same wavy blond hair, which had cascaded over her shoulders like a mantle of pale silk. Her eyes were wide-set and a different shade of blue than Maud's—cornflower, with violet rims. There had been intelligence there—not

the calculating sort of intelligence of her sister, but rather, an innocent, unworldly sort. She'd brought out the protector in him, which was not a role he often played with women.

He sent a message to the magistrate first thing in the morning and sat down to breakfast with Wynn, his younger sister.

“Good morning,” she said cheerfully. She made no comment on the lateness of the hour he'd arrived home, well used to his habits by now.

“Well, I'm happy to inform you that you will soon have a sister with whom to do your dress shopping.”

“What?” Wynn cried, her face lighting up. “Who? Wait...” Her look of

delight changed to one of confusion as she surely realized he had not been courting anyone, unless one counted the married women with whom he dallied. “What’s going on?”

“I’ve done a terrible thing, Wynn,” he admitted, though his tone remained cheerful.

Her face grew serious. “Is she pregnant? Is she married? Who is it?”

“It’s worse than that, actually.” He looked into Wynn’s anxious face, realizing how much he’d be relying on her support to make his wife comfortable. It would be a reversal of roles for them. Six years her elder, he’d been her guardian and chaperone when she came for the London seasons. But

marriage... marriage was something he was not sure he was capable of managing on his own. He was suddenly grateful she was here with him, to help ease the awkwardness of bringing home a bride he didn't know.

“I’ve never even been with her. I honestly don’t even know her name.”

Wynn put down her fork, her eyes round. “Is this a jest? What happened, Teddy? Do tell me, before I go mad!”

“You may recall I’ve been seeing Lady Reddington?” At her nod, he continued, “Well, last night saw an unfortunate incident at her home. Lord Reddington discovered me there.”

“Teddy, no!” she gasped.

“Yes. He was waving a pistol and appeared prepared to kill me on the spot.”

“Oh, Teddy!” Her tone had an ‘I told you so’ reproach in it.

“But as it happened, Lady Reddington’s young sister was also on the landing where he discovered us, and also in a dressing gown and robe. She saved us both by swearing I had been with her, instead.”

“I see. So now you must marry her,” Wynn said softly, her face pale and serious.

“Indeed.”

“Miss Fletcher. Phoebe Fletcher is her name. I met her once. She is ‘out,’ but she seldom attends any balls—my

impression was that Lady Reddington is none too eager to share the attention.”

“Phoebe,” he said, enjoying the way the name rolled around his tongue. It suited her. “Yes, she far surpasses her sister in beauty, does she not?” he asked.

Wynn narrowed her eyes at him. “Perhaps you will grow to love her?” she asked doubtfully. She knew he had inherited their father’s wandering eye, never content with any woman for longer than a few months. It was the reason he had never married—he did not believe he could be faithful to one lady, and he would never put a lady through the life their mother had led.

A pang of guilt tightened his chest. “Perhaps she will grow to love

me,” he said lightly, to cover it.

“They all love you—that is hardly the problem, is it?” Wynn said drily.

He rubbed his sideburns. “I will do my very best to make her happy.”

Wynn nodded and picked her fork back up, then froze. “Teddy... you don’t think they planned it, do you? I mean, tricked you into marrying Phoebe? Maybe the three of them were all in on it, together—the Fenton fortune is coveted by more than a few.”

He considered, then shook his head. “No,” he said, remembering Reddington’s vicious attack on Phoebe and the way the young lady had trembled against his body. “No, it was real.”

He stood up from the table. "I'm going to see if I can bring her home today."

"Today? Before the wedding? But that's not proper, Teddy!"

"I'm going to wed her at the magistrate's, if I can."

"But Teddy, it will be a scandal!"

"Scandal has always been chasing me, hasn't it?" he said with a wry grin. When she frowned, he said, "It cannot be avoided, Wynn. A hasty marriage is a hasty marriage, but at least there will not be a pregnancy to cause gossip."

"Well, I'm coming along, too, then," Wynn declared with a lift of her

chin.

He smiled gratefully. "Of course you are."

When he received an affirmative answer from the magistrate, he and Wynn took the carriage to Reddington's. He half expected the butler to turn him away, but they were admitted and Lady Reddington and Miss Fletcher entered. He was struck anew at the younger lady's beauty. She was exquisite—her complexion flawless, her features perfectly shaped and proportioned. Her eyes looked almost violet. She dipped into a curtsy, inadvertently providing him with the tantalizing view of her cleavage. Maud stepped directly in front of her sister, holding out her hand. "Lord

Fenton,” she gushed. “How good of you to call.”

He paused before he took her hand, wondering how he could have stood the ill-mannered woman at all. If he'd had any doubt the sisters had plotted together for this marriage, it was now erased. Maud was clearly jealous rather than grateful to her sister for risking her entire future to prevent Reddington from discovering her own infidelity.

He dropped Maud's hand and looked past her. “Phoebe, I've come to take you to the magistrate today, unless you've changed your mind.”

Phoebe recovered swiftly from her surprise. “I have not changed my

mind. I will go and pack my things.”

“You’ll pack nothing,” Reddington clipped from where he loomed in the doorway. “Nothing you’ve acquired under my guardianship.”

Phoebe’s jaw tightened, but she dropped a curtsy. “As you say, my lord.”

“Never mind, Phoebe. I can provide anything you might desire,” he said, leveling a challenging look at Reddington, whose eyes narrowed.

“Thank you, my lord,” Phoebe said with a deep curtsy. “I will return presently.” She drew herself up to walk past her brother-in-law.

It was a full half-hour before Phoebe returned, her maid carrying a few small bags behind her, which

appeared to be mostly books.

“I’m ready,” she said, her face pale and pinched. Maud made a big show of crying as she kissed her goodbye, but he noticed Phoebe did not shed any tears, though she did not appear happy, either.

When they climbed in the carriage, he picked up her little gloved hand. “That was a very gallant thing you did last night. It’s quite possible you saved my life.”

* * *

Phoebe ducked her head, feeling a flush creep up her chest and spread to her neck. She could think of no suitable reply. Fenton put a finger under her chin

and turned her face to the side, examining the bruise left where Reddington had struck her. Her belly tightened as his face turned dark, but he said nothing, instead lightening the mood by teasing, “Did you forget it’s the knight who rescues the damsel in distress, and not the other way around?” He gave her a lopsided grin. “I’m utterly mortified,” he claimed, though she doubted he’d ever been mortified by anything in this entire life. He was the most self-possessed, cocksure man she’d ever met, a fact which she unfortunately found extremely attractive.

She took a deep breath to launch into the speech she’d been practicing all morning. “My lord. Thank you for

agreeing to marry me. Considering it is a marriage neither of us wanted or intended, I have a proposal to make.”

He arched his eyebrows, not allowing her to retrieve her hand from his grasp when she tried.

“I—er... It is well-known you have a very active, ah...” She stopped, her face flushing. This was not the way she’d rehearsed it. For some reason, all words had left her. Fenton turned her hand palm up and absently massaged the heel of it with his thumbs, scattering her thoughts and sending a prickle of warmth across her skin. Miss Fenton looked pointedly out the carriage window, as if to give them privacy.

“You may speak frankly, Miss

Fletcher,” he prompted.

“I know you see a lot of women,” she blurted, inwardly cursing at how three years of finishing school charm seemed to have left her. “And I do not wish to stop you from your... er, activities. So I propose a marriage in name only—with separate bedrooms, you know.” Her cheeks were flaming now, but Fenton appeared completely unruffled.

“If that is your wish, I will oblige,” he said easily. “You sacrificed your freedom to ensure my safety. I am indebted to you, little dove.”

His gratitude came as a surprise, and she lifted her eyes to meet his.

“I intend to give you the best life

I possibly can.”

She stared at him, doubting he was sincere. This must be part of his charm. He could not be sincere, because in her experience, people did not look after anyone's lives but their own. She blinked rapidly, unsure how to reply and he lifted her hand to his lips, kissing her fingers and causing a riotous quiver between her legs. *Dear Lord.* She remembered the overheard conversation with his sister, a shadow of confusion creeping into her mind. Could it be Fenton was not shallow and self-absorbed as most believed him? Or was he so well-practiced with his charm that such assurances simply rolled off his tongue?

After marrying before the magistrate, he took the ladies to tea at a little café and then to the Bond Street Bazaar to purchase Phoebe's trousseau. They stopped first for gloves and hosiery, where he took active part in the discussion with the ladies about which were the best.

"You don't have a say, Teddy, even if you are a dandy," Wynn scolded.

"I most certainly do. I'm buying them, and they will be worn by my wife, so I should think I have even more of a say than you, dear sister." He held up a beautiful pair of pink silk hose for their examination.

“Oh!” Wynn exclaimed at the color.

“I didn’t know they made them in colors,” Phoebe breathed, the look of longing on her face making him want to buy her one hundred pair.

He took an appraising glance at her long legs, imagining them bared to him. She caught his look and turned as pink as the hose, which only furthered the rise of heat under his collar. Appreciating her blush, he gave a slow smile, holding her blue-eyed gaze and watching the rapid movement of her lifted breasts as she struggled to breathe. Her rosebud lips parted, but no sound emerged. He waited a moment before having mercy and releasing her from the

gaze with a wink. She turned even more pink, blinking rapidly as she drew herself up and squared her shoulders.

“We’ll take two pair of these,” he said to the salesman, holding up the pink hose, “and whichever pair of gloves the lady chooses.”

He continued to torment his young bride, insisting on choosing her hat at the milliner, and the color of her ball gown (a deep violet, to bring out her eyes), making a show out of sizing up her features for the best choice. As uncomfortable as he made her, he could also tell she was growing giddy with the large amount of money he was spending on her, confirming his suspicion that Reddington had not allowed her much

freedom. The best part of the afternoon was seeing the way her face lit up when he took the ladies to Lackington Allen & Co at Finsbury Square. It was a large, multi-storied bookstore, filled with every sort of book imaginable.

“The books here are quite affordable, so choose as many as you like,” he told her.

Her jaw dropped as her face shone with rapture. “As many as I like? You will buy them? To own? I mean, it’s not a subscription library?”

He smiled at her excitement. “I will buy them. Just let me see them first, because Wynn and I have already amassed a large collection at home.”

She smiled. It was the first

genuine smile he had seen from her, and it caused an unnerving sensation in the center of his chest—a curious fluttering, along with a warmth and a sense of expansion. It was not the beauty of the smile itself, which was admittedly lovely, but rather the joy behind it, as if he were given a glimpse right into her soul where she hid a passion brighter than the sun.

Sweet Phoebe.

And she belonged to him now. It was a stunning thought—one he never thought he would appreciate.

He had originally thought her proposal of a marriage in name only was ideal. He would be careful not to embarrass her with gossip about his

mistresses, and she could not be hurt when she'd given her explicit permission. They would grow comfortable with one another in a platonic way, much like he had with his sister, or his childhood friend, Kitty Westerfield. Now, though, the idea irked him. Try as he might, he could not seem to put Phoebe into the same category as Kitty and Wynn. He wanted her in his bedroom, to feel the touch of her velvet skin beneath his hands, the slope of her shoulder beneath his lips, the curve of her waist beneath his hands. He wanted that brilliant smile in his bedroom, directed at him on a nightly basis.

After a late supper at home that evening, he entered his bedroom with a

sigh, removing his jacket and waistcoat and dismissing his valet. He must face the nagging issue of consummation. Whether they intended to keep separate bedrooms or not, a marriage was not legal until the couple had lain together as husband and wife. And as beautiful as he found his bride, he had a hard rule against taking an unwilling woman to his bed. In fact, there was nothing more distasteful to him.

Tapping lightly on the connecting door, he did not wait for an answer before he pushed it open. The look of fear on her face as she whirled around pained him, but he entered casually, as if they were perfectly comfortable with one another. She wore the same

nightdress she'd worn the night before, but this time without the robe, and he could see the curve of her breasts, which moved under the thin linen.

“Come, little wife,” he said, holding out his arm. When she did not move, he took a step and caught her hand, tugging her gently to the bed where he sat and pulled her onto his knee. He wrapped one arm around her waist and rested the other on her thigh. She sat stiffly, her fingers twisting together in an anxious knot. He covered the nervous hands, stilling them. She smelled fresh and clean with a hint of roses and he had the sense of her fitting perfectly on his lap—her legs the right length to still reach the floor with her feet, her bottom

soft and wide enough to settle firmly on his thigh.

“Did you,” she began breathlessly, “intend to exercise your conjugal rights after all?” She blinked rapidly and appeared to be holding her breath. Her voice held no trace of the high pitch of youth—it was rich and throaty, somehow both sweet and worldly at the same time.

“Well, that *is* why I am here. But I do not intend to do anything against your wishes,” he assured her.

Her breath began again, moving her breastbone up and down in short intervals.

He picked up one of the blond waves that had fallen over her shoulder

and twirled it in his fingers. It was as fine as spun silk, so much softer than he had imagined. “What I’m wondering is whether we ought to lie together—just once—to consummate the marriage.”

Her innocence showed in her blush, but the tips of her nipples protruded from under her nightdress, making his breath catch. He retracted his hand from her hair, lest he be tempted to fondle what lay below and shifted his weight on the bed to alleviate the discomfort of his rapidly hardening cock.

She swallowed and parted her lips, but no answer came forth.

“If we don’t, we leave the possibility of annulling it later, if one of

us wishes to do so.”

Her eyes met his for the first time, widening. “Do you wish it?”

He grinned. “Wish what? To lie with you or to annul the marriage?”

His jest eased some of her rigidity and her eyes narrowed. “Knowing your reputation, you probably wish for both.”

He threw back his head and laughed, delighted to see the return of the courage he’d glimpsed the night before.

She softened further at his laughter.

“I’m quite sure I would enjoy the first, though I have not defiled an innocent since I was a much younger man.”

“Indeed, everyone knows your preference is for married women.”

He grinned at her. “Yes, yet this is the first time I have been faced with a lady who is both.”

Flustered, she tried to stand up. He tightened his grasp around her waist and held her fast. “Where do you think you’re going, little dove? We are not finished talking. I will not force you into my bed, but you are my wife now, so you have to mind me. I have no compunction about turning a lady over my knee.” In fact, the idea of turning his pretty wife over his knee made his heart beat erratically for a moment.

She went rigid and stared at him as if to gauge whether he was serious.

He allowed one corner of his mouth to turn up and she blew out her breath and smiled. Lifting her hand, she brushed a lock of hair from his eyes and for one moment he truly felt like a married man—glimpsing how it felt to receive simple wifely endearments like straightening his collar or brushing his hair from his face. The idea surprised him with a sense of longing for something he'd not known he'd been missing.

“What *do* you expect of me as your wife?” she asked softly.

“Your absolute love and devotion,” he said immediately, calling forth a low laugh from her lips. He stroked up her thigh and back, admiring

the firm muscle of her elegant leg and ignoring the stiffening his touch incited. “Yes, let’s discuss my expectations. First of all, you must always look pleased to be with me, no matter what you may really feel. And I want you to always be dressed in the latest fashion, with the most expensive sort of shoes. You should be a suitable chaperone for Wynn, and I’ll expect you to find her a husband by the end of the season, and... let’s see... what else do wives do?”

She laughed.

He touched her cheek. “I’ll tell you what I expect of you, little dove. You must speak frankly with me if we’re to somehow make the best out of this rather... *unusual*... situation. As much

as I adore your blushes and lowered eyes, I would very much prefer we were comfortable and honest with one another. I cannot make you happy if I don't understand you, and I'd prefer not to make guesses that might be wrong. So my question to you now is: do you, or do you not, wish to consummate this marriage?"

Phoebe's chest heaved, the tips of her nipples protruding even farther and heat dampening his trousers where she sat upon his leg.

But her knees snapped together and her buttocks tightened upon his knee. "I do not."

Chapter Two

A narrow escape.

How on earth could she live with the charming Lord Fenton—as *his wife*—and not give in to his advances? The easy way he managed her—the way he held her captive on his knee, not releasing her until he wished—had been dominating, yet not controlling. So different from the way Reddington had repeatedly forced himself on her. She shuddered.

She climbed into her bed, still feeling the heat he'd incited in her core. What would it be like to lie with a man like him? With an irrational flare of

jealousy, she thought of her sister and the noises she'd heard from her room. She'd certainly sounded like she'd enjoyed it. But she could not—even if she were willing to give her heart to a unscrupulous rake, she could not bring herself to... she shuddered. Not after Reddington.

The next two days were spent getting to know Wynn, with whom she found an instant rapport. She had spent the three years after her parents' untimely carriage accident (which resulted in their death) in a finishing school financed by Reddington. Though she was nineteen, well past her 'coming out,' he had kept her from attending many social occasions where she might

have the opportunity to meet a husband—most likely to keep her for his own sickening use. She'd had little social contact apart from Maud and her callers since she'd finished school and their talk had consisted entirely of gossip. With Wynn, she found a friend who could discuss her favorite topics—poetry and literature—as well as give her the particulars of London Society news.

Wynn's best friend, Lady Westerfield, came to call on the second afternoon and she found herself nervous, remembering talk of the 'Westerfield affair' which seemed to have involved Lord Fenton. Had they been lovers? What would the lady think of her?

"I sent her a note inviting her to

come and meet the new Lady Fenton, but that's all, so she'll be eager to hear the details," Wynn said as they walked to the sitting room.

Her heart sank into her belly, and she felt as if Wynn were throwing her to the lions. Did she expect her to air her scandal to Lady Westerfield?

"Hello, dear Kitty!" Wynn exclaimed when they entered, kissing her pretty friend on the cheek. "May I introduce the new Lady Fenton!" She extended her hand toward Phoebe, her eyes dancing with mischief.

Lady Westerfield was lovely, appearing to be around the same age as she and Wynn. Her belly protruded with pregnancy—Phoebe guessed she must be

four or five months along. She curtsied, feeling nervous. "Phoebe," she said.

"Call me Kitty." Kitty looked from Wynn to her with an expectant look. "Well," she prompted. "Are you going to tell me how this came about?"

"Come, do sit down," Wynn said, gesturing toward the settee and chairs.

"Well, I married Lord Fenton on Thursday," Phoebe found herself saying inanely.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry for you!" Kitty said. When she only blinked in reply, Kitty went on, "Forgive me, I'm only teasing. We are childhood friends and we still behave like squabbling siblings at times."

Like siblings. Some part of her rejoiced to hear those words.

“So, was it for love or by some other arrangement?” Kitty asked, her directness startling Phoebe. But the lady’s smile was so warm and engaging that she could not take offense.

“Some other arrangement,” she admitted.

“Oh, do tell her—Kitty can be trusted completely,” Wynn said. “If you will not tell her, I will.”

“Yes, perhaps you should,” she mumbled.

“Very well,” Wynn began and launched into the tale. Phoebe enjoyed hearing it from Wynn’s perspective, finding her story recast as one of bravery

and heroism, rather than one rash lie followed by an opportunistic seizing upon the chance to get out of her brother-in-law's keeping. Wynn ended by declaring Phoebe had already informed Teddy it was to be a marriage in name only.

Kitty regarded her with an intelligent gaze. "And that effectively solves the problem of Teddy's questionable capacity for fidelity."

"Yes," Wynn said.

To have her marriage and its issues spoken of so frankly was like having her chest cavity opened wide to bare her organs. Worse still was having the women closest to Fenton confirm he could not hold sacred a marriage vow.

She realized, somewhere in the back of her mind, she'd held a small hope that perhaps someday a real marriage might develop between the two of them.

When Fenton arrived home from Parliament, Lady Westerfield was still there, the ladies having spent the entire afternoon chatting and taking tea.

“Ah, my three favorite ladies,” Fenton exclaimed. “I hope you have not been regaling my new bride with stories of my reproachable behavior.”

He said it lightly, but something must have shown in her face, because he added, “I see you have.” He crossed the room and sat in the armchair near the hearth, his legs sprawling casually, looking as debonair as ever. “It’s

probably all true, little dove, and I'm sorry."

Oddly, he did look genuinely regretful, as if his behavior was a plague he could not help.

"We told her nothing," Lady Westerfield countered. "But you'd best treat her well, as the poor lady has to spend the rest of her life enduring your company."

He grinned his devastating lopsided smile, but something about his eyes looked remote. "I'm sure we'll come to some arrangement that suits her," he said, turning his gaze on her and lingering speculatively until she felt her skin prickle with warmth.

“How is it I never met you before?” he asked Phoebe over dinner.

“We did meet, once,” she said, looking suddenly shy. “At Lord Reddington’s—a Christmas ball. I came upon the two of you in the corridor.”

“Oh!” Wynn exclaimed, covering her mouth, and he remembered the moment. It had been two years prior, Wynn’s first London season, and no one had asked her to dance. Seeing she was upset, he’d led her into the corridor where she burst into tears. He had comforted her, offering his shoulder and then a handkerchief, and finally teased and cajoled her into smiles. He’d

forgotten until this moment that a pretty young lady had passed them and asked if she could help. It must have been Phoebe.

“I remember because it was my first ball, and I’d felt like crying too,” she confessed, giving Wynn a sympathetic look. “And I wished I’d had an older brother to tell me all the men were beef-witted.”

The two ladies laughed and he saw a tinge of pink color Phoebe’s cheeks. Had she found him attractive? The way she stole a look at him from under her lashes said she had. And though blushes and fluttering lashes were so common in his presence he found them insipid, in this case, his blood

warmed. She was full of contradictions—one moment self-possessed, intelligent, and mature; in the next, utterly innocent. He felt protective of her innocence, yet at the same time, wanted to unleash the woman he glimpsed underneath it.

“And why have we not seen you since?” he asked.

The eyes looked past him at the wall behind his head, as if she were remembering something unpleasant. “Tell us the truth, little dove,” he prodded. “Did Maud keep you in?”

Her focus snapped to him in surprise. “What makes you say that?”

“It was Wynn’s assessment, really, but we thought she might not like

you outshining her.”

Phoebe let out one giggle and then another.

“It’s true, isn’t it?” Wynn demanded.

Phoebe clutched at her waist, her corset too constricting for her laughter. “I don’t know—perhaps!” she exclaimed, wiping tears from her eyes. “I think perhaps you’re right.” She struggled to regain her composure. “Forgive me, I don’t know what’s come over me. It was just such a surprise to hear your perspective on the matter.”

Teddy’s plate had been cleared by the servants and he rested his chin on his hand, enjoying Phoebe’s mirth.

“And what about Lord

Reddington?”

Phoebe's smile faded and she looked almost sick. “L-lord Reddington?”

“Did he treat you ill?”

She seemed to struggle to swallow, her face growing pale. “You know,” she said, standing up abruptly, which caused Teddy to scramble to his feet. “I think I'd like a bath before bed. Do you think it would trouble the servants too much?”

“Certainly not,” he said, reverting to formality with a slight bow. “I will send them at once.”

She curtsied. “Thank you, my lord,” she said and swept out of the room.

He raised one eyebrow at Wynn, who allowed her eyes to grow wide as she nodded, the siblings not requiring words to acknowledge what they'd just seen.

He retired to his own room, trying to imagine just how life had been for Phoebe with Lord Reddington. He'd paid for her to attend finishing school for several years, so she had not been completely deprived. Yet she had not been allowed out in society much, either, which was odd for a young lady beyond marrying age.

His valet helped him shrug out of his jacket and waistcoat and was just beginning to remove his cravat when an ear-splitting scream pierced the air,

followed by a second, shorter burst of shrieking from a different voice. It was coming from Phoebe's room.

Dashing across the room, he threw open the door to find his wife stark naked in the middle of the room, dripping wet from the bath, her hands fluttering about her head, eyes rolling toward the ceiling. Her maid stamped her feet, running to and fro like a lunatic. When the maid took in his arrival, she opened the door to the corridor and rushed out, slamming the door behind her.

He crossed to Phoebe's side and observing something moving in her hair, and he pulled her wet body against his as he helped the creature free itself.

It was a bat.

He laughed as he wrapped his arms around his little bride. "It's all right," he said, unable to stop laughing and enjoying the unexpected opportunity to hold his wife's disrobed body against his own. "We'll chase it out. Don't worry. It's out of your hair now," he soothed, trying to contain his mirth.

"It's not amusing!"

"No, it's not amusing at all, is it?" he asked, but could not keep the laughter from bubbling into his voice. "It is not amusing in the slightest—I'm sorry for laughing." He clamped his lips closed, his belly shaking with suppressed laughter against her soft, damp form.

“Stop it, you despicable swine,” she demanded, starting to laugh herself. She pressed herself more closely against him, probably realizing his body was the only covering she had. He looked down the length of her back, enjoying the tantalizing view of her buttocks, his favorite part of the female anatomy.

“I’m stark naked.” she squeaked.

“Yes, little dove, I had noticed,” he drawled, goading her further by stroking his hand up and down the supple skin of her back. “I’ve been determining how to pry you off so I can take a leisurely look.”

“You cannot,” she said, slapping his chest, but remaining pressed against him so as not to reveal herself.

“That’s a shame, because from what I glimpsed, you are absolutely exquisite.” It was true—as he returned to the image seared in his mind, he reviewed her attributes at leisure. Her breasts were more than a handful, the nipples tilted upward in an impudent pout. The curve of her waist was as true without a corset as it appeared with the stays, and her bottom... he peered down along her back for another look. Dear God, how he wanted to squeeze those tantalizing cheeks!

“Stop,” she said, though she sounded vaguely pleased.

His fingertips rubbed a slow circle over her low back. “Mmm,” he murmured. “It’s true.”

Through the fabric of his starched shirt, he felt her nipples pressing into his ribs. They had gone hard, just as his cock had. She shifted on her feet. “Teddy, stop,” she said, a touch of panic in her voice.

“I’m sorry, little dove. I cannot help it—it’s in my nature to admire a beautiful woman.”

“Well, I don’t want your admiration, especially considering how many women it has been heaped upon. I think we’d both be happier if you think of me as you think of your sister.”

“As my sister, hmm?” he spoke softly in her ear as his hands continued to stroke her bare skin. “I can try,” he said doubtfully. He coaxed her face

away from his chest, tilting her chin up to brush his lips across hers. “But I don’t think that’s possible.”

Her cheeks turned pink and she frowned.

He chuckled, leading her backward, toward the bed, where he pulled off the quilt and wrapped it around her.

Relief flooded her expression. “Thank you,” she breathed.

He smiled down at her, pulling the edges of the quilt across her chest and gazing down fondly. “Next time, perhaps,” he said lightly. “I’ll arrange to have another bat placed in your room.”

“You’re not amusing!” she cried, but it came out more as a laugh than

anything.

“I’ll go find that goose of a maid. One might have thought there was a wild boar in here the way she ran out,” he chuckled as he went to the door. “And once you’re dressed, you may wait in my room until the servants have captured your little assailant,” he said, peering up at the top of the armoire, where the bat had disappeared.

“Thank you for rescuing me,” she said, holding the edges of the quilt closed.

He gave her a wink. “It was absolutely my pleasure,” he said.

* * *

Phoebe observed the way his

eyes traced up and down her body, noticing a wetness between her legs that had nothing to do with her bath. She sank onto her bed, feeling slightly dizzy.

She put on her dressing gown and robe without her maid's assistance, unwilling to remain exposed for a moment longer. She didn't consider herself a ninny, but having a bat tangled up in her hair had sent her heart racing, and not wanting to remain alone in the room with the creature, she knocked and entered Teddy's room, leaving the adjoining door open and sitting awkwardly on the edge of the bed.

She heard voices in the corridor, and her maid's knock at her own door. "Enter!" she called out, though not sure

if her maid would hear her from Teddy's room. Teddy opened the door to his room. "Ah, she's in here," he said to the men in the hallway. "Go into her room now to catch the bat." To her he said, "Shut the adjoining door, darling, so it cannot fly in here."

Darling.

He spoke the words so idly, so easily. 'Darling; and 'little dove.' Did he have any idea what those endearments did to her? If only he spoke them sincerely.

He entered the room and shut the door, coming to sit beside her.

"Are you still blushing?" he teased. He touched her cheek. "You don't have to blush with me. I'm your

husband after all, and we live together. Soon we'll know all sorts of embarrassing things about each other, like when one of us gets the vapors and whatnot."

She giggled. "Lord Fenton! You are terrible."

"Teddy," he corrected her. "Well," he said, "at least I made you laugh. And it's true, anyway. But listen." He put a finger under her chin and turned her face toward his. "I may try to seduce you, but I would never force myself on you. You understand the difference, don't you?"

She felt her cheeks color again and his eyes softened. "I'm not sure."

"It's my nature to seduce women.

Well, normally I don't toy with innocents, but the innocent in question happens to be my wife, so I'm making an exception." He flashed his lopsided grin, wringing a smile from her.

"But I will only press so long as my advances seem welcome. If I can see you truly don't wish them, I will withdraw my attentions."

She considered. He had stopped as soon as she'd turned firm. The moment she'd become nervous, he had fetched the quilt and covered her. He was different—completely different—from Lord Reddington.

"Thank you, my lord," she murmured.

She fell asleep that night

remembering the feel of his hands on her bare skin—the gooseflesh he had elicited, the stirring between her legs. *It's my nature to seduce women.* It was his nature to seduce women, and then to leave them. She was *not* going to fall into that trap.

The following day was Sunday, and Fenton escorted the ladies to church and then to Hyde Park, where the *ton* walked about to see and be seen. “I have to show off my new, beautiful wife,” Fenton insisted. “It’s high time to set the tongues to wagging.”

“Then I’m glad I’ve worn my most expensive shoes, Lord Fenton,” she teased and he threw back his head and laughed. “Thank you for your

obedience,” he said, causing a tingle to run up her spine at the implication he was her master. “But if you call me Lord Fenton again, I shall take you over my knee.”

“Teddy!” Wynn admonished and he grinned.

He helped her out of the carriage, his strong hands easily spanning her waist and lifting her down as if she weighed nothing. He helped Wynn alight and held out an arm for each of them. “Soon, I suppose I shall have to take you to Northamptonshire to meet my mother,” he said. “Have you written to her yet?” he asked Wynn.

“Yes, though it should not be my duty, should it?”

Fenton only grinned at the peevish reply. "Of course not and thank you."

"I did not tell her the entire truth of the marriage," she admitted.

"No, no, indeed."

Both brother and sister appeared glum for a moment and she wondered what she had to fear in meeting the dowager countess. Was she overbearing and judgmental? Difficult to please?

Fenton walked her up and down the walkways, introducing her as his new wife and remaining so bright and affable she found it impossible to withdraw, though she desperately wanted to, at the countless arched eyebrows and curious looks. At last,

Wynn said she wanted to feed the ducks, and Phoebe escaped with her to the edge of the pond.

“Do you think it will be a scandal?” she asked her new friend.

“No,” Wynn said too quickly. “Even if it is, it will not last. Just look at the Westerfield affair—it blew over in a matter of months.”

Phoebe pulled off her glove in order to better grasp the breadcrumbs, and tossed them into the water, accidentally throwing her new glove at the same time.

“Oh, dear! Oh, no!” she exclaimed, kicking off her shoes and wading quickly into the cold pond before the glove sank. The water had

been shallow where she'd waded in, but the bank dropped abruptly, and suddenly she found herself completely immersed in water, her legs tangling in her petticoats, the weight of the skirts making it difficult to keep her head above water. She heard Wynn crying her name, then shouting for help before she went under, holding her breath as she struggled to kick her legs underneath her and find the surface. Her lungs felt as if they would burst and still she could not get to the surface. She panicked, flailing frantically as she resisted the impulse to open her mouth and breathe. Little sparks of light danced before her closed eyes and she realized she would swoon shortly and then drown.

A strong arm wrapped around her waist and lifted her head and shoulders above the water. She spluttered, blinking through the cascade of water pouring down her face.

Lord Fenton gripped her firmly, his face creased with concern. Hauling her toward shore, he searched for an area where it was easy to climb out and then helped her to stable ground with his hands around her bottom. He climbed out himself, and without a word, scooped her into his arms and began to carry her toward the carriage.

“Thank you, my lord,” she managed.

“Phoebe, thank heavens!” Wynn said, catching up to them. “Are you all

right?”

“Yes, yes, I’m fine. You can put me down, Lord Fenton, I can walk now.”

He did not answer, but merely continued his long strides in the direction of the carriage.

“My lord?”

“Shh, Phoebe. I’m not putting you down until we reach the carriage,” he said firmly, as if he were saying something she ought to already know.

When they reached the carriage, he lifted her in, helped his sister, and climbed in after them. He pulled the curtains in the carriage and then plucked her from her seat and tossed her over his lap, throwing her wet skirts over her head.

She could scarcely breathe from the shock of it, and seeming to know this, the ties on her corset were loosened, just before the loudest slap she could possibly imagine resounded through the carriage.

The driver and horses surely heard it as well, because the carriage took off, bouncing along as Fenton's hand cracked down again on her sopping wet drawers. She squeezed her bottom, flinching from the sting.

“Teddy!” Wynn hissed. “Stop that!”

She could say nothing herself; all speech had been shocked out of her. Another slap struck her wet bottom and then another, a burn beginning to set in

as if she'd sat upon a stinging nettle. Again and again he spanked her, his hand beating a loud rhythm to the cadence of the horses, with Wynn's sharp protests the counterpoint.

"Ouch!" she finally managed, trying to squirm away.

"Yes," he said mildly, continuing to spank as if he might never stop, each blow surely leaving the print of his hand upon her raw flesh. It hurt, the pain growing exponentially as he went on. Just when tears began to burn in her eyes, he stopped.

* * *

"You risked your life over a glove?" he demanded, untying the string

to her wet petticoats and lifting her to her feet, holding her waist so she would not topple over as she stood. Her hands flew up behind his head to brace against the carriage wall so he had the perfect view of her décolletage. He yanked off the sopping fabric, hoping to avoid her catching cold. "I can buy you a new glove, you silly hen! You might have drowned with the weight of your skirts in there!"

He could tell she was close to tears, and he did not wish her to lose composure, so he kept her busy, turning this way and that as he pulled off her wet stockings and garters, then wrapped her from the waist down in a warm blanket he kept under the seats, holding it in

place as he reached underneath and tugged off the wet drawers as well. When at least her bottom half was warm and dry, he pushed her back into her seat, removing his own wet jacket and overcoat.

“Give me your wrap, Wynn,” he ordered.

“No, no, it’s all right,” Phoebe said, but he hushed her, taking Wynn’s wrap and drawing it around her shoulders.

“He’s an absolute tyrant, isn’t he?” Wynn offered to comfort his poor bride, who looked unsure how to react.

He picked up her hand, which was bare since she’d lost her glove, and kissed it. He could feel it tremble

against his lips and he pulled it into his lap and held it in both his hands.

“You frightened me,” he offered by way of apology.

“Yes,” she said breathlessly, her chest still heaving, her hair plastered to her slender neck. He plucked out several hairpins dangling precariously and pressed them into her hand, which he still held captured on his lap.

“I’m glad you’re all right.”

She blinked rapidly, but did not manage to look at him again.

He ordered a warm bath for her the moment they arrived at home and sent hot chocolate up to her room.

When they met on the landing to go to dinner, he offered his arm. She

took it, blushing and lifting her eyes only as high as his collar.

Preferring to address things directly, he touched her hand. “Still blushing over your spanking?”

That caught her ire. She frowned up at him. “Was it supposed to make me sorry? Because it didn’t—it only vexed me.”

He laughed. “I imagine that’s because I let you up too soon. If you like, I can take you into my room and do it properly.”

She flushed a deep shade of pink.

He softened. “No, little dove. It wasn’t to make you sorry; it was merely an expression of my frustration.”

He stopped and turned to face

her, picking her hand up off his arm and lifting her fingers to his lips. He held them there until she dragged her eyes up to meet his.

“You frightened me.”

Her eyes filled with tears, but she blinked them back.

“Forgive me my temper,” he said coaxingly.

She shook her head, and he thought she would say she could not forgive him, but instead she shrugged, “I saw no temper. Though if that’s how you behave when you’re frustrated, I should hate to feel your hand when you’re truly angry.”

He released her hand and cupped her face, tracing the line of her jaw with

his thumb. "You never will, love."

Her chest began to heave, straining against the constriction of her stays and he wondered what reaction she was having to those words. Or perhaps it was his touch that incited her.

"Forgive me my ill grace," she murmured.

"You were as graceful as can be expected of a young lady who's been upended over a man's knee. Are you hurt at all?"

She shook her head. "Just my pride."

He grinned. "It's probably reparable. I will let you spank me later to put me back in my place."

She blew out her breath with a

low laugh. "I might like that."

He wagged his eyebrows. "Well, you know where to find me," he said, leading her down the stairs and into the dining room.

"Were you really so worried about me?" she asked, as if she could not believe it could be true.

He stopped and stared at her. "My heart did not beat the entire time you were in the water. Does that seem surprising?"

"Well, I suppose you would have felt so if any lady had fallen in the water."

He lifted an eyebrow. "Are you fishing for a compliment, dear lady?" Ignoring her flush, he went on. "No, I am

growing rather attached to *you*, my love. I have no intention of losing my new bride tragically or otherwise.”

Still blushing, she shook her head. “You say such things,” she mumbled.

When they sat down to eat, he addressed both ladies. “Do you know what we should do?”

“No, what?”

“Hold a reception to celebrate the marriage. You know, like Kitty and Harry did, after their affair.”

“Yes, that’s a splendid idea!” Wynn exclaimed. “Do you think we could entice Mother to come? Then perhaps she will not feel as though she missed out.”

“Yes, perhaps we can. If you ladies set the date, I’ll write her a letter she cannot refuse.”

“What will she think of me?”

He admired Phoebe for asking.

“She will love you.”

“No, I meant...”

“She will be disappointed you don’t plan to produce heirs, but she will adjust.”

Phoebe’s eyebrows drew together. “Are you disappointed?” she ventured.

“Heavens, no. I never planned to marry, so I never planned to produce heirs.”

“But who will inherit the title?”

He waved his hand. “I have

loads of cousins. And even if they all happened to die, my father left a string of bastards from here to Scotland and back again.”

She froze, her spoon halfway to her mouth. She set the spoon back down and considered her soup a moment. He knew her question before she asked it.

“Do you have any bastards?” She kept the timber of her voice natural and light, though her body was still, waiting for his answer.

“None. I’ve been very careful and with a dash of luck as well, have never fathered a child, as far as I know.”

Her shoulders relaxed. “Well, that must be a comfort to you,” she said snidely.

His stiffened, setting down his fork and staring at his food. He'd lost all appetite. Something about her remark was all too familiar. No, it was the tone—the same his mother always used with his father. They had this sort of marriage—biting words and cold silences, all related to his father's philandering. This was the kind of marriage he'd tried so hard to avoid. A sense of panic overcame him—this was the beginning of it for them. Not even one week of peace before it started, despite her offer of his freedom to take other women.

His mind cast about for solutions—putting distance between them, even separate residences, but all of it smacked of the same misery he'd been

raised in.

“Forgive me. That sounded quite rude, didn’t it?”

He looked up, surprised.

She shook her head. “I have no right to judge.”

He sat back in his chair and tossed his napkin on the table. “Of course you have a right to judge,” he said, sounding more bitter than he intended. “Isn’t that a wife’s duty?” He stood from the table and gave a slight bow. “If you’ll excuse me, ladies,” he said and escaped without awaiting a reply.

Chapter Three

*Courage is no more
than spots in the eye
A brief and thirsty burst—
and when it is spent
and time already rent
there is nothing save pain
evermore*

Phoebe sighed and scratched out the word ‘pain,’ searching her mind for a different word. It was the first evening she’d had alone since she married three weeks earlier. As much as she enjoyed Wynn’s company, she’d been anxious to have a stretch of time alone with her poetry. When her sister-in-law had

invited her to go to a ball with the Westerfields, she'd begged off, eager for the opportunity to indulge in her secret passion uninterrupted.

She sat at Fenton's desk, her poems sprawled across the mahogany surface, the mere sight of them warming her, as if they were the faces of dear friends. Fenton had an expensive tortoise-shell pen with a perfect quill tip, which made writing all the more delicious. She sat with her eyes half closed, words dancing around her, each with its own nuance, each with its own story. They seemed to buzz at her, enticing her to pick one of them to be scrawled on her fine paper.

Except her thoughts kept spinning

on words like ‘spank’ and ‘husband.’ The mere memory of the wet-bottomed spanking he’d given turned her stomach to butterflies. She’d gone over the scene in her mind again and again, trying on different reactions she might have had to it—like slapping his face, or begging him to stop. Or laughing.

What reaction had he expected of her? An apology? Sulking? Try as she might, she could not understand the nuance of it all. Had it been a punishment? Or for him was it part of a seduction? She found herself imagining a real punishment at his hands, the embarrassment of accepting his authority somehow titillating to her.

Perhaps she should have

apologized.

She'd seen little of Fenton since the night when she'd asked if he had any bastards. He'd taken offense to her critical remark, which she admitted had not been merited. There was no love between them, nor a promise of fidelity. He owed her nothing in that manner, yet she'd still lashed out at him.

They'd fallen into an uneasy but polite existence since then. Breakfast together, then he left for Parliament whilst she and Wynn received callers or made calls. Lord Fenton returned home for dinner, but then often went out again until late in the night. Whether it was because she'd offended him or if that was his normal daily rhythm, she did not

know, and she could not bring herself to ask Wynn or one of the servants.

Perhaps he left to meet with his mistress. Or mistresses.

The memory of her sister's giggles floating through the wall into her bedroom from their tryst surfaced and caused her to press too hard on the quill, breaking the tip. White-hot jealousy burned in her chest at the idea Maud may still be indulging her fancies with Fenton—with *her* husband.

Please, God, no. Anyone but Maud.

She suddenly wanted to scratch her sister's eyes out.

The door to the study clicked open and she gasped, jumping. It was

Lord Fenton, himself, who looked just as surprised to catch her in his chair as she was to be found there.

“Oh! Excuse me, my lord!” Blotting the ink, she hurriedly shuffled the poems into a stack, abandoning the ribbon that usually bound them, and shoving them into her little wooden box.

Fenton smiled a slow, predatory smile, prowling around the desk, looking satisfied to catch her looking guilty. “What are you doing, my dear?” he drawled.

“Nothing! Nothing at all. I—I was just leaving. Forgive me.”

He blocked her exit from behind the desk. “Writing something?”

“No! I was just—” she cast her

mind about wildly, “reading some old school notes. My studies, you know.”

Fenton laughed, slipping past her to sit in his chair with his arm catching her waist. To her shock, he pulled her face down over his lap, slapping her upturned bottom as soon as she arrived.

She kicked her legs. “What? Stop it!”

“Never lie to your husband, Phoebe. He does not take kindly to it.” He slapped several more times in rapid succession, then threw her skirts over her head, causing her real panic. She squirmed to free herself.

Fenton was chuckling. “No, there’s no getting free. You’ve earned your spanking, now you’ll have to take

it.”

To her utter mortification, he parted the slit of her drawers, exposing her bare bottom to the cool air and continued spanking her with hard, stinging slaps. She could not breathe at all.

“Lord Fenton! I mean, Teddy!” she gasped.

He chuckled again, smoothing his large palm over her bottom, which prickled with heat. “Thank you for remembering. I do believe I promised you a spanking for that mistake, as well.” He opened his desk drawer.

“Unlucky girl. I have tools in here, like rulers and such.” He snapped what must be a wooden ruler across her

cheeks, and she felt a searing pain.

“Ow! Please, my lord!”

“Hmm. Can you breathe? Let’s open this,” he said, pulling the laces of her corset. “There. Now I can spank as hard as I like.”

“No!” she exclaimed as the ruler smacked down on her bare skin in another flurry of spanks.

“Please!”

“When I ask you a question, I want an honest answer, little dove. What were you writing? A love letter?”

“No!”

He applied the ruler again, five times in rapid succession.

She whimpered. “It’s poetry!” She braced herself, though whether it

was from ridicule or the ruler, she wasn't sure.

“Poetry,” he repeated, sounding interested. “That you wrote?”

When she didn't answer, he smacked her three more times with the ruler.

“Yes!” she exclaimed.

He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again, the humor was replaced with what sounded like honest interest. “May I read it?”

“No!” she cried immediately.

The ruler snapped down on her again, beating a steady rhythm, causing her to buck on his lap in a vain attempt to escape it. “Wrong answer, my love. Don't you know, you cannot refuse the

man who holds the wooden ruler?" With the next spank, though, the ruler cracked, and she could not help but giggle. The rich sound of his laughter filled her ears, warming her, as if they were sharing some kind of joke that made this humiliating event easier. He rubbed her smarting bottom.

"Well, I still have my hand. Would you care to try that answer again? Or shall I continue to spank?"

"No—I mean yes!"

He chuckled, rubbing a slow circle over her bare skin. "Yes, I may read your poetry?"

She hesitated. She certainly did not wish to be spanked any longer. Nor did she wish to turn over the pages that

contained her very heart and soul to him. Except some small part of her did long to share her writing, as terrifying as the idea was.

He waited patiently for her answer, stroking and massaging her buttocks with one hand, as the other caressed the nape of her neck.

“Yes,” she answered at last in a small voice.

“Thank you,” he murmured, and pulled her up to stand beside him, one hand still under her skirt, cupping her bare bottom. He picked up the poem on top and began to read it as if it were the most absorbing thing he’d ever laid eyes upon, while his finger began absently tracing the line of her cleft. She could

not breathe—the invasion of his finger no less disturbing than waiting for his assessment of her poem. Her knees felt weak and her upper thighs trembled. The hand moved to stroke the place where thigh met buttock, delving closer to her most intimate core. She tried to wiggle away, but he gave her sore cheek a sharp automatic slap, then looked up as if only just realizing he'd been holding her captive beside him with this hand most inappropriately up her skirt.

* * *

His hands had wandered. Sometimes they did that of their own accord. “Oh, my!” He hurriedly retracted his fingers from where they

cupped the perfect curve of his wife's sweet bottom and, realizing he'd been completely remiss in offering her comfort after her spanking, reached for her waist and pulled her onto his lap, drawing her knees up as well, so she lay curled in a fetal position against him. "Come here, little dove. You certainly deserve a cuddle after the ordeal I just put you through."

Her body trembled and she buried her face in his shoulder, as if too embarrassed to look at him. "Yes," he said soothingly, stroking her silky hair, "hide your face so you don't have to see me—that's it." He planted little kisses all over the top of her head. "Poor little dove."

He rocked her, holding her snugly and murmuring endearments.

His.

There was a satisfaction in holding her, knowing she was his wife. The burden of responsibility he felt for her was tempered by the possibility of more of this sweetness. He had always chosen experienced, worldly women. Phoebe's innocence inspired a tenderness and protectiveness he was not accustomed to feeling.

Her poetry was beautiful. He wanted to tell her in a way she would believe him. After a moment, he tipped her head up, cradling her face in both hands. "I love your poem," he whispered, and bent his face toward

hers, his lips seeking hers, brushing lightly first, then kissing more firmly. Her hand came up to touch his cheek, and he caught and held it against his face, his tongue probing her lips.

But she spooked, the hand at his face suddenly pushing him away as she straightened, her eyes wide and frightened. "Please," she whispered hoarsely. "Let me go."

He was incapable of denying her anything, though giving up the feel of her warm body on his own was a great disappointment. He helped her to her feet, and stood himself, as a gentleman should.

She reached to snatch up her little box, but he covered her hand to

stay it. "I would like to read them all, Phoebe. May I take this box? Just for the night?"

Her eyes searched his, the movement of her pulse rapid on her slender neck.

"Please? I promise you, I read with the utmost respect."

Her head fell back slightly, as if her neck was too weak to hold it. She swallowed. "Yes—all right," she said. "Just for the night?"

He nodded, removing his hand so she could slip hers out. He picked up the box and dropped it into his jacket pocket. "Goodnight, sweetheart."

She dropped a curtsy. "My lord," she murmured and turned and left the

room, her tail tucked a little as if she wished to hide the part of her anatomy he had just chastised. He felt a curious ache watching her go. She'd produced it in him from the very start—from the first night he met her—and it had kept him from lying with any woman since the day he'd wed, though she'd offered him freedom and he itched for release. He'd been to the gambling halls and had been urged to join gentlemen on their way to brothels, but he could not bring himself to seek pleasure there.

He wanted his little bride.

Against all reason, she'd become the one thought he could not press from his mind. And now he possessed something that might help him understand

her. He carried the little wooden box to his bedroom and asked his valet to light every lamp.

Poring over the poetry, he absorbed the essence of her. They reflected a deep appreciation for the natural world, clever understanding of the human one (including some witty depictions of her sister) and an overall buoyancy of spirit. The light he'd glimpsed in her face at the bookstore shone clearly here. She poured her passion onto the page, revealing a perfect balance between romantic and practical. She was as unique as her eye color, a treasure meant to be held in the light. He read until late in the night, organizing and sorting her poems into

little piles, placing them in different orderings and reading the effect.

In the morning, when he heard her stir, he opened the door between their rooms without knocking and strode in, carrying the poems in the order he'd sorted them. She had the back of her nightgown lifted and the slit in her drawers parted and was twisting around to look at her buttocks.

“Did I leave marks?” he asked, trying not to smirk.

She gasped, dropping the hem of her nightdress and whirling around, her face far redder than her bottom had been the night before.

He ignored her embarrassment. “Come here, I want to talk to you about

your poems.” He grasped her hand and pulled her to sit upon his knee on the bed.

“You cannot just burst in here!” she spluttered.

“I cannot?” He plucked her off his knee and gave her bottom two sharp slaps, then plunked her back down again. “If I were you, I’d think twice before getting saucy with a man who’s just had you over his knee.”

She glared at him, and he smiled back, his eyes glancing down at the steepled tips of her breasts pressing through her nightdress.

“One of these days I will be forced to give you a proper spanking and then you’ll know better than to defy me.”

Her face still red, she demanded, “What is a proper spanking?”

He grinned. “A proper spanking is when I take your drawers off and use a strap or a switch until you cry. It’s for real punishment.”

She swallowed with apparent effort. “Would you really—? I mean, what would merit such a punishment?”

He winked. “Oh, you’d have to be very naughty for that.”

She stared at him for a moment before crying indignantly, “I do believe you *like* spanking!”

He flashed a broad grin. “Perhaps I do, little dove. All the more reason for you to obey, isn’t it?”

It was no doubt true—he’d been

spanking women, or at least getting a swat or two in where he could since even before he'd first made love to a girl. He loved ladies' backsides and he certainly enjoyed the sight of a woman bent over his lap and the feel of her soft flesh under his hard palm.

“But listen, I want to talk about your poetry.”

She sat up straighter. “Yes?” She swallowed again. “Yes, my lord?”

“It's beautiful. I think I should take it to a publisher.”

She stared at him as if not comprehending what he was saying.

“I've got it sorted. I think there may be two volumes here, if we go by topic.” He produced the stacks of poems

he had sorted. “This group is about nature, so I thought you could come up with a clever title, and this could be a volume all its own. These are more about human nature, the art of living, that sort of thing, so they could be a separate volume. In this last stack are the poems that seem unfinished or too delicate—not for publication at this time.”

She continued to stare at him and did not move to take the stacks he was trying to hand her. “Publish? Me? Or do you mean under your name?”

He made a scoffing sound. “Under my name? Don’t be ridiculous. Under your name.”

“But who would publish poetry by a woman?”

“Well, I’m not sure exactly, but I know it happens. There are many female authors. Look at Jane Austen, or Mary Shelley.”

The cautious hope in her face tore at his heart. “But... would it be embarrassing for you, to have a poet for a wife?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Nothing would make me more proud. Your work is lovely, Phoebe. It belongs in the world.”

Tears sprang up in her eyes and she flung her arms around his neck, nearly strangling him with her enthusiasm. He kissed her throat. “Stop it, Teddy,” she said softly, drawing back. Not hearing a true rebuke, he

kissed again. This time she withdrew her embrace completely. “Why do you do that?” she asked, searching his face.

“Because I want to,” he said, the familiar ache getting stronger.

Her lips parted and he watched her eyes lower to his lips, and leaned forward slowly, so she could stop him if she wanted. She jumped to her feet.

“Please don’t.”

* * *

“Good morning!” she greeted Teddy at the breakfast table, as if he hadn’t just been in her room. Despite the confusion of his continued... courtship, nothing could possibly ruin her exuberance that morning. He thought she

should be published. Lady Phoebe Fenton—a published poet. It was the most exciting prospect with which she'd ever been presented.

“I left your box in my study. I think it would be best if you made a copy of each first, before I bring them round anywhere.”

“Copy of what?” Wynn asked.

Phoebe flashed a look of alarm at Teddy. She felt shy enough showing him, and she was not ready to share with Wynn, too.

“Oh, we're working on the invitations to the ball. Do you think the two of you could finish up the guest list today?” Teddy covered for her with graceful ease.

“Yes, of course,” she promised, thinking of nothing other than the thrilling task of copying her poems over so he could take them to a publisher.

When Teddy stood to leave, he kissed her on the cheek, his thumb stroking the opposite cheek as he cradled her head. He kissed Wynn on the top of the head and bid farewell.

Wynn eyed her curiously. “You both seem to be in a fine mood this morning.”

She felt her cheeks grow warm. “It’s nothing!” she exclaimed too quickly. “I mean, yes, it is a beautiful morning. Let’s work on the invitations, shall we?”

What an absolute jinglebrain.

She gave herself an inner kick. Now Wynn most likely believed she had been intimate with Teddy, when in fact, she had done nothing of the sort. Though the idea made her feel defensive, as if she ought to have been intimate with Teddy. Except that wasn't her plan, was it? Giving into the charm of Lord Fenton was a certain recipe for heartache. She knew it, Wynn knew it, Kitty knew it, and if she'd understood correctly, their mother knew it, as well.

They managed to finish the invitations, and she was able to plead a headache and sneak up to her room to work on copying her poetry. The day flew by, and supper was a pleasure. Lord Fenton did not disappear

afterward, either.

It seemed nothing could destroy her happy mood until she heard the sound of a woman's voice from Fenton's room.

"I don't recall inviting you," she heard the slow drawl of her husband.

Inviting? Who says such a thing to a woman who has been let into his bedroom?

"Yes, well, it's been a long time since you've come to the bordello. I've missed you."

A light-skirt. *Damn him. Damn her. Damn them both.* How dare he allow her to entertain him here, in his home, with her in the room next door?

"In other words, you need a few

coins.”

“Don’t be cross, my lord,” she said, her voice sultry and coaxing. “It’s not as if you haven’t invited me here before.”

“Yes, but I did not invite you this time.”

Anger bubbled over and she got out of bed, throwing the door open and standing in it, her hands on her hips. The lady was a high-class courtesan, dressed in satin, with a string of pearls around her neck. For some reason, that bothered her even more. “Get out!” she said coldly. “Get out of my house!”

“Teddy? Is this your sister?”

“No,” Teddy said sardonically. “She is Lady Fenton, my wife.” He

placed a bookmark in the book he'd been reading and set it on the bed. He did not stand up, but merely lounged on the bed, looking from the courtesan to her with amused interest.

“I asked you to leave. If you will not, I will have you thrown out of this house.”

The light-skirt looked at Teddy, as if expecting him to defend her right to be there. Anger produced a rushing sound in her ears. She strode over to the prostitute, fully prepared to slap her. Perhaps guessing what she had in mind, Teddy chose that moment to rise to his feet. He raised his eyebrows. “You heard her. The lady of the house asked you to leave. You will do so. Now.”

She clenched and unclenched her fists at her sides, gritting her teeth through the woman's low curtsy and departure. When she shut the door, Phoebe turned and glared at Teddy, picked up one of the books from his shelf and hurled it at him.

He dodged it. "Phoebe, that is not acceptable."

Not acceptable? Entertaining a 'Bit 'o Muslin' in one's own home was not acceptable. She picked up another book and hurled it.

"Enough. Put that down," he said sharply when she picked up the looking glass. But the satisfaction of breaking something was too strong. She hurled it against the wall, disappointed when it

only broke into a few pieces, rather than providing a full shatter. His silver snuff box fit in her hand like a heavy stone, and she threw it at him before she could think properly. It struck his head with a thud that rattled her own teeth. She gasped, covering her mouth with both hands, all her heat turning cold.

He stumbled backward, cursed, and hit the wall, doubling over for a moment with his hand over his forehead.

“Forgive me,” she whispered. Fear coursed through her veins, turning her hands to ice. She had hurt him—badly. She felt terrible—she hadn’t meant to hurt him. How angry would he be? Would he turn violent?

He stood upright with another

curse, his hand covering his forehead, a trickle of blood spilling from underneath it. But he did not appear out of temper. Apart from the blood, he looked as unruffled as he had when she'd entered the room and ordered the prostitute to leave. He withdrew a handkerchief and blotted the blood from his head and hands.

“I will punish you for that, Phoebe,” he said coolly.

The words bounced around the walls of her head as they sank in. Why was it so hard to decipher whether he was serious?

“Bring me my razor strap,” he ordered, pointing at the dressing table where she stood and erasing all doubt of

his sincerity.

“No!” she cried immediately, horrified.

He raised one eyebrow. “Will you admit you were very naughty?”

She eyed the gash on his head, which was already rising into a goose egg. She felt terrible for hurting him. Her shoulders sagged. “Yes, sir.”

“Then bring me the strap.”

She snatched up the strap from the dressing table and crossed the room, thrusting it his face like an angry child. He took it from her hand, his face completely impassive.

A sob rose and erupted from her throat. She covered her mouth, tears spilling from the corners of her eyes.

Before she could blink, she was in his arms, pressed against his warm torso.

“I know you’re terribly upset,” he murmured, shocking her with his kindness. “And I will allow—in fact, I will insist—you tell me all about it.” He stroked her back. “But first we have this issue of disobedience to address.”

She didn’t want to leave the circle of his arms. He led her to the bed and pulled her down across his lap, tucking a pillow under her torso. She could not seem to stop crying.

“What did I say would happen if you were very naughty?” he asked.

Still weeping, she didn’t answer. She felt her nightdress lifted, baring her legs.

“What did I say?” he repeated softly.

Was he really going to make her say it? She took a deep breath. “You would take off my drawers and use a strap until I cry.”

“That’s right,” he said. “I suppose we already have the crying part accomplished, don’t we?” he mused, not unkindly, and his fingers probed for the tape to her drawers. Finding it, he tugged them off. If she had been mortified the night before at his opening the slit of her drawers, she was beside herself this time. Completely bared to him, she had never felt more vulnerable in her life. She squeezed her buttocks together as if it might somehow protect her from his

strap.

“Please,” she pleaded.

He rubbed a tiny circle between her shoulder blades. “Shh. It’s all right, little dove. It’s a spanking, no more.”

His words reassured her, some of her panic ebbing simply at the calm in his voice. She heard no anger, just the same confidence he always projected.

“Shall we say twenty strokes?”

She gripped the pillow under her chest tightly and squeezed her eyes closed. “Yes, sir,” she whispered. “Yes, my lord.”

The first bite of the strap was sharper than she’d imagined, and her entire body lurched forward despite her resolve to be stoic. Another sob escaped

her lips but was cut off when she gasped at the second stripe. She didn't breathe at all until after the third stripe had bit into her flesh. He was working his way higher on her bottom, where the flesh was more sensitive. Five stripes up, five back down. She bit the quilt, sobbing into it, her bottom blazing with pain. She tensed, waiting for the next set, but instead felt Teddy's hand stroking her blistered cheeks. She flinched at his touch, though it was gentle.

* * *

“Phoebe,” he said softly. “Do you want to change our arrangement? The one you proposed on the day we wed?”

“No!” she gasped immediately.

He slapped her striped bottom, spanking her with his hand. He had promised her twenty with the strap, but could not give her more than ten. “Wrong answer, love,” he said, beginning to spank a rhythm with his hand. “I find it hard to believe you wish to go on that way, if this is your reaction when a woman turns up in my bedroom.”

He stopped the flurry of spanks and rubbed again. “Am I right?”

She didn’t answer. He gave her three more spanks with his hand. “What is it you wish, little dove?”

“I don’t want you to see my sister!” she exclaimed.

He stopped, surprised. Did she

think he had been with Maud? Did she fear it? He delivered five more spansks, shaking his head in wonder. Her jealousy pleased him, though he was sorry it had given her such pain. "I promise I will never see your sister again. Now what else?"

"I don't want you to bring women here," she sniffed.

"As you wish. I will never, ever bring a woman into our home. What else?"

"I don't wish you to see other women at all," she wailed.

He paused again. Lifting her gently, he sat her on his knee and brushed her hair back from her face, trying to make eye contact. She resisted,

burying her head into his shoulder.

“You wish me to be a faithful husband,” he clarified softly.

She sat very still for a long moment, then she nodded into his shoulder.

“And you will come to my bed?”

Her breathing increased in tempo, but she nodded again, this time lifting her head from his shoulder, though her eyes remained on his chest, rather than his face.

He stroked her hair out of her eyes and lifted her chin. When her eyes reached his, he quirked a little smile. “I would prefer that arrangement, sweetheart.”

He claimed her lips, stroking

them with his own, parting them with his tongue. She accepted his kiss, but didn't kiss back. He cupped her breast, rubbing his thumb over the tightened nipple, noting when she arched for more. Dragging up the hem of her nightdress, he stroked his hand up her side to touch the bare skin of her breast, enjoying the catch of her breath. He kissed along the elegant curve of her collarbone, up the side of her throat to her jaw, sliding the nightdress over her head. She immediately turned shy, covering her breasts with her forearms and huddling on his lap.

“Come, love, climb under the covers. I'll extinguish the lamps, so you will not feel so exposed.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, obeying him.

He watched as she crawled to the head of the bed, her buttocks bearing the mark of his punishment, the striped cheeks beckoning to him. He extinguished the lamps and climbed under the covers with her. She trembled under his touch, but he quickly realized it was not from desire—it was from fear. She lay stiff, accepting his ministrations, but not warming to them.

Could her request for a non-traditional marriage been out of fear of sex? He had assumed it was because she doubted his ability to be a fit husband. Or because she did not love him, and had no interest in giving herself to a man

she did not know or love. He crawled beneath the covers, parting her thighs with his hands. She gasped and tried to snap them closed again, but he held them wide, licking her velvet lips with his tongue. Her sex grew plump, despite the thrashing he took from her thighs. He inserted one finger and found she was wet and slick. She cried out in surprise and tried to squirm away again.

“Easy, easy, love. It feels good, doesn’t it? Just relax. I promise I will not hurt you. I promise, little dove.”

He moved his finger slowly in and out of her as his tongue sucked and licked the little bud of pleasure at the juncture of her inner lips. She clutched at his hand and shuddered—a quick and

small climax, but a climax, nonetheless. He took it as a small victory. He kissed up her belly until he reached her breasts, where he squeezed one as he flicked his tongue over the nipple of the other. She mewled and rolled on the bed, arching into him, yet pulling away at the same time.

He reached his fingers back to her sex and found it had gone dry. Kissing her neck, he settled beside her and wrapped his arms around her. It was enough for one night. It was her first time, and she was nervous. He did not need to rush her.

She lay stiffly beside him for a while until she seemed to realize he had abandoned his conquest. "My lord?" He

heard the sound of her swallow in the darkness. “Why didn’t you go on?”

“You weren’t ready, little dove. We’ll go slowly, to be sure you enjoy it.”

Her voice cut through, sounding offended. “How would you know if I’m ready?”

He smiled in the darkness. “Your body gives off certain signals.”

“It—what? In truth?”

He chuckled and traced around the arc of her ear with his finger. “Yes. When a woman is ready, her sex opens like flower. It swells and becomes moist, to ease the way. It doesn’t mean I could not still take you—I certainly could ignore my findings, but it would

be far more painful for you.”

“Oh.” She sounded stunned. “I—I never knew that.”

And then she astonished him by bursting into tears.

“Phoebe. Phoebe, my sweet,” he soothed. “Don’t cry, little dove.” He rolled on top of her and pinned her down. “Don’t cry, you silly little duck, or I’ll lick you,” he threatened, dragging his tongue from her jaw to her temple.

“Ew!” she exclaimed, trying to turn her head away and giggling through her tears.

“No more tears or I’ll lick your whole face.”

“You are incorrigible.”

“Mmm, that’s what my mother

always said,” he said lightly.

Chapter Four

Shame burned her throat as she lay in the circle of Teddy's arms listening to his breath slowing to slumber. She'd thought she could do it—she wanted to do it—Dear God, how she'd wanted to do it! And he'd offered her fidelity!

But it was impossible. All she could think of was Reddington, catching her alone in his library when Maud was out. She'd known the moment he closed the door that something was amiss—he'd been eyeing her in an unwholesome way ever since she'd come to live with them after she graduated from finishing

school. She'd stood up from the chair.

"Phoebe," he'd said. "You have grown into a lovely lady."

"Thank you, my lord," she'd said, dropping a curtsy and stepping backward.

"I think you've turned out even more beautiful than Maud." His voice had been a dangerous velvet as he advanced slowly toward where she stood.

"Oh, I should think not!"

He reached her and his hands shot out and grasped her arms. He made a clucking sound with his tongue. "Don't contradict. You are lovely. I should like to see all of you."

"Well, you cannot!" she'd

snapped in a panic.

“Can’t I?” he said, sounding unruffled. “I will not take your virtue, I just want a peek.” One of his large hands had plunged into her dress and pulled out her breast.

“No! No, my lord. Please!” she’d cried, but quickly realized she’d had no options. It was Reddington’s home and he was her guardian. If she angered him, he could turn her out, and with her parents both dead, she had nowhere else to go.

So she’d let him. He hadn’t taken her virtue, but he’d pawed her breasts and had put his fingers into her drawers, and though she’d wriggled about too much to allow him to access to her sex,

he had jabbed and poked at it whilst they'd struggled. It had been terrible. And she'd known he would try again unless she removed herself from his home.

Teddy's touch was gentle—expert, she was sure—but it reminded her too much of Reddington, just the same. She just could not trust—could not allow her body to be used in that way by a man. It was too revolting to her. No, it was best to return to the arrangement they'd had before. Besides, despite his promise of fidelity, it was clear no one expected it of him. So even if she had been able to give herself to him, he only would have broken her heart. He could not be trusted.

But she would not tell him tonight. For just one night she would sleep in his bed and know what it was like to be a wife.

She slept lightly, not used to the feel of another body beside her, but enjoying the feel of his heavy hand on her waist, the sound of his breath deepening in slumber. When he woke, she scampered out of bed, only to find his two hands around her waist, hauling her back. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“To the privy?”

He released her. “All right, then. But I don’t want you to burrow back in your hole like a scared rabbit.”

“Scared rabbit?” she exclaimed

with indignation, tapping his shoulder with the back of her hand. He slapped her bottom as she slipped away and she could not help but giggle. His taunt did make it impossible for her to deliver the speech she'd silently rehearsed about returning to their previous agreement. She would have to tell him later, after he'd gone to Parliament and returned. It would give her the chance to put some distance between them.

But when he returned, he was in a fine mood, greeting her with a kiss on the lips, his hand at the nape of her neck drawing her close. Her entire body turned to pudding and her resolve fell away.

“I’ve brought you something, little dove,” Teddy said, tapping his jacket pocket. “But you’ll have to wait until after dinner.”

“Oh, he’s a terrible tease, isn’t he?” Wynn exclaimed, looking at them with interest. Phoebe’s face grew warm. She had planned to speak with Teddy before anyone else in the household thought they were living as man and wife.

Her stomach fluttered all through dinner as she stole glances at her handsome husband, already sick with longing for what she knew she could not have. When the meal ended, Teddy

beamed at her. “Are you ready for your gift?”

Feeling stifled in her long-sleeved dress despite the autumn chill, she pulled at her fingers. “Yes. No—I mean, could we have a word in private?”

Teddy lifted an eyebrow suggestively. “My bedroom or yours?”

“Teddy!” Wynn admonished.

“How about your study?”

“As you wish,” he said jauntily, holding out his arm to escort her.

She took it, and he beamed a smile down at her, sparking a fresh flush of heat, this time in her center core. He shut the door and led her to the settee, sitting upon it and pulling her into his

lap.

“Must I sit on your knee?”

“Would you prefer to lie over it again?”

The suggestion made her bottom tingle and incited a curious clenching between her legs. “Teddy, please! I have something serious to discuss with you and I cannot—I’d just rather not sit upon you.”

He laughed easily, and helped her to stand, patting the velvet cushion beside him. She sank into it and pressed her knees together.

“Presents first,” Teddy insisted, reaching in his pocket and pulling out a long rectangular box tied up with a yellow ribbon.

“What is it?”

“Open it,” he said, his boyish enthusiasm even more charming than his usual flirtatiousness.

She pulled the end of the satin ribbon and opened the box, expecting to see a necklace or bracelet. Instead, it contained a beautiful tortoise-shell quill pen, much like his own.

“I noticed you broke the quill of mine and when I took it to be mended I thought, as the writer in the family, you deserved your own.”

“Oh, Teddy!” she exclaimed, overcome. “That was so thoughtful. Thank you!” Her chest felt as if it would explode. It was infinitely better than a piece of jewelry. It was exactly the thing

she had most coveted in Teddy's entire, well-appointed house. To think he knew her well enough to have picked the perfect gift... well, it was overwhelming.

Teddy must truly see her, truly understand her for who she was. No one, in her entire life, had ever noticed anything about her. Her parents had been like Maud—primarily self-interested. She had made a few friends at finishing school, but the girls were only focused on finding husbands, or talking about fashion, and she'd always felt like a fish out of water, preferring to be reading or daydreaming or writing poetry.

Not only did Teddy really see her, but he must appreciate her as well,

else he would not support her so. “I love it,” she whispered, her lips trembling, her vision growing wavy. “I absolutely love it.”

He ran a finger over her lips, then bent to brush his own across them. She should not let him, but she simply could not make herself move out of his reach, wanting to experience more of the floating feeling he created in her. But no. She shook herself and drew sharply back, blinking. It took all her resolve. Forcing herself to relive a moment of Reddington’s horrid hands pawing her body, she steeled herself.

“Teddy, listen. I have changed my mind. Again. And I’m sorry.”

He crossed one elegant leg over

the other and rested his arm on the back of the settee behind her shoulders. "What is it, love?"

"I mean for us to go back to our original arrangement—where you see other women and we sleep in separate beds."

The legs uncrossed and he sat up straighter. "What?" he asked sharply. "Why?"

"It doesn't matter why, it's what I wish."

He shook his head. "It's not what I wish."

She frowned and took a breath, not having expected a quarrel. "Well, you promised you'd do your best to make me happy, didn't you? This will

make me happy.”

His brows drew together. “How will this make you happy?”

“It’s what I want, all right?” she snapped.

“No.”

As when he’d spanked her, she experienced the curious reconciling of the easy-mannered, affable gentleman with the lord and master who was still very much in charge. Suddenly she felt as powerless as she had living with Maud and Reddington. “Do you mean to take away my choice?” she asked, her voice cracking.

* * *

“No, of course I don’t!” he said

irritably, standing up and pacing the room. “I would never take a woman against her will. I just want to understand why. Are you afraid I will not be faithful?”

“It doesn’t matter why!” Phoebe stood as well, drawing her hands into fists at her navel.

He felt a crushing sensation in his chest, alerting him to just how much her surrender the night before had meant to him. What was she hiding behind her bravado now? He could see her distress, but he wasn’t sure how to ease it. He crossed the room to her and grasped her two shoulders. “Are you afraid it will hurt?” he asked gently.

She swayed on her feet, her chest

heaving unnaturally, as if her corset was constricting her breath too much. He held her firmly, lest she swoon.

“I promise I will not hurt you. We’ll go very slowly, and I will not push if you’re not ready.”

She shivered under his hands. “Please let me go,” she whispered, her eyes bright with tears.

He released her. “Phoebe,” he entreated, but she had already whirled to make her escape, slipping through the door and closing it before he could speak again.

The crushing in his chest grew even heavier, like an enormous stone lay upon it, and he cast his eyes about the room, as if the answer to this mystery

might lie in one of his books or papers. The little box with her pen lay on the settee where she left it. He picked it up and twirled it in his fingers.

Did she not love him? Or was she afraid of making love? Or was it the deeper issue of fidelity?

Hell, who was he to promise her faithfulness, when the longest he'd ever been with the same woman was five-and-a-half months? And yet, he'd never felt this way about a woman before. He was utterly captivated by her. She was all he could think about—not a moment of his day passed when he wasn't remembering something she'd said, the way she looked when she was at ease, or a line of her poetry. For once in his

life, the attraction was not purely physical. In fact, though he'd spent many years swearing an opposition to virgins, he cared not at all about her acrobatics in bed—not that he wasn't burning with dark desire for her.

Though he could not be sure, he thought with Phoebe, it might be different. He might not be fated to recreate the same miserable marriage his father had. And yet... what if he was wrong? What if he broke the heart of the one woman he'd ever... loved? It was true—he did love her. He loved her all her incongruences—the sweetness and the fury, the passion and the temperance. He loved the intelligence, the depth of her personality. He loved having her in

his home, having her at his side. He wanted to possess her fully—mind, body, and soul.

Yet, what did it matter? She was not willing to share any of them, anyway. It seemed he could not win her trust. Perhaps because he was not trustworthy.

Miserable, he took the pen with him to his room and asked his valet to pass it to Phoebe's maid as soon as possible. The sensation of a stone on his chest did not leave. He spent the next few weeks in a fog, as his sister and Phoebe prepared for the reception ball, and he hid in the gambling hall.

But the arrival of his mother forced him to put on a good face. He found her in the sitting room with Wynn

and Phoebe when he arrived home and he spread his arms wide, a broad grin on his face. “Mother, my mama!”

She stood up, laughing. “Listen to you—‘Mama’—you ridiculous boy!”

He kissed both her cheeks after sweeping her into a grand embrace. “Yes, of course I’m still your ridiculous boy. Sit back down, you must be exhausted.” He settled her back into her chair and crouched beside her, holding her hand in his. “Did Crandall take good care of you on the drive?”

“Yes, yes, you know he did. Pull up a chair, Teddy.”

He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed the back of it, then stood and planted a kiss on both Wynn and

Phoebe's cheeks as well. "I see you have met my charming wife?"

His mother was peering at him intently. "I did," she said. "And she is quite charming."

He hesitated, wondering whether the ladies had told her the truth yet. Better now than later, he supposed. "Have they told you how I tricked her into becoming my wife?" he asked lightly.

"No, I haven't heard the story yet. Do sit down and tell me."

He glanced at Wynn, who gave a tiny shrug. He drew a chair closer to his mother's and settled in it, taking her hand into his lap. "Well, as it turns out, when she's not being a lady of

considerable accomplishments, she takes on the duties of knight in shining armor.”

He saw Phoebe roll her eyes and grin and he gave her a wink.

“And so it happens I was cuckolding her sister’s husband, when said husband arrived home, and the lovely Phoebe claimed me as her own lover. So you see, having ruined her reputation to save me from the pistol pointed in my face, she had no choice but to take the title of Lady Fenton and make the best of it.”

“Oh, Teddy,” his mother said. He could hear the disappointment in her voice and it hurt as much as he’d known it would.

“I know, Mama. I know.” He

looked across the room and caught Phoebe's eyes, the beautiful cornflower blue set off by the deep blue dress she wore. For a moment, a message ran between them, his regret, and perhaps on her part, forgiveness. She gave a faint smile and he lost all track of his thoughts, caught only in desire to hold her in his arms again, to claim her as his wife—his real wife. Except she didn't want that.

“Phoebe has requested a marriage in name only. In which we're each afforded certain... freedoms.”

The sadness on his mother's face was more than he could bear. He stood up abruptly and paced the room. When no one spoke, he turned back to the

ladies. "I'll just go freshen up before dinner. I'll see you at the table," he said with a bow.

* * *

Maud and Reddington would be at the reception. She didn't care a bit about the rest of the guests, but seeing her former family had her stomach in knots. Maud had not called on her once since the day she wed. Not once. She had sent a few notes with the suggestion that Phoebe come to call on her, but Phoebe could not bear to return to that house. She had replied politely, ignoring Maud's suggestions and making it plain she was welcome to call upon her. Of course, she never had.

Now, as she peered into the looking glass while her maid pinned her hair into the seed-pearl tiara the dowager countess had brought, it was all she could think about. She wore a dress of lavender silk. The neckline was open all the way to the shoulders, with huge poufy sleeves that narrowed just below her elbow where they met her gloves. Teddy had bought her new white gloves, and she wore white calfskin boots beneath the full gown. Ribbons in the same lavender adorned the dress in bows at the sleeves and at her low back. The center of the gown dipped into a low 'V,' showing off her corseted waist.

Living in the easy comfort of Lord Fenton's house made the life she'd

left stand out in sharp contrast. Here, her every wish was granted—she was the lady of the house, after all, not that she'd truly stepped into the role. Still, she did not have to defend her desire to have a bath brought up, or ask permission to drink chocolate. She and Wynn had the use of their very own carriage to make calls or go shopping, and Fenton had opened accounts for her at the stores on Bond Street. But it was not the wealth that stood out. Reddington had money too; it was just that he was loath to share it. Or perhaps it was that he relished the control he wielded over her life by not allowing her any.

She didn't want to see him again. How would he act? What would he say

to her? Would he be polite and pretend nothing had happened? Would he leer at her as he used to?

Teddy waited for her on the landing, looking dapper as always in a finely tailored black suit with a white cravat. He'd looked troubled since she had told him she wished to return to their first arrangement, and since the arrival of his mother, he had looked positively haunted. The dowager countess's disappointment in the marriage had been palpable, though it was not directed toward Phoebe, but rather, Teddy.

His devotion to his mother was heartwarming—the way he knelt beside her chair and held her hand, his attention to her every need. It was the same

affection that had moved her when she'd seen him comforting his sister at the Reddingtons'. Again, such a capacity for tender relationships seemed at odds with his philandering. Clearly there was much love in their family, but there was a sense of shared tragedy as well. It had been as if Teddy and Wynn wished to protect their mother from his marriage, yet she had not seemed scandalized by it in the least. If anything, she seemed to have expected this sort of outcome for Teddy. She wasn't sure what to make of it.

“For you,” he said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a strand of seed pearls that matched the hairpiece she wore. She rather liked that he'd not

presented them in a box as a grand gesture, because it made the quill pen he'd given her all the more special. "Will you allow me?" he asked, his manners perfect and formal. She turned around and offered her neck, feeling the brush of his sleeve as he deftly fastened the clasp. She froze when she felt his lips at the nape of her neck delivering a light kiss. It produced a shiver of pleasure and heat pooled between her legs as she straightened her back to hide her reaction. She exhaled, turning to take his arm.

"You look lovely," he said, his voice rich and low, reverberating in the very center of her being. "That dress brings out the violet in your eyes."

She lowered her lashes, feeling suddenly shy. His appreciation should not mean so much to her, but it did. For a moment, she pretended he was a suitor coming to call on her, and allowed herself to experience the giddy pleasure of his attention, breathing in his masculine scent, stealing glances at the handsome angles of his face. For just a moment she pretended they were courting, rather than a married couple who kept separate beds.

They went downstairs and she took her place beside him, meeting their guests, doing her best to remember names with faces and to put all her finishing school manners to use. Maud and Reddington arrived, and she

stiffened, but Teddy handled it with the same aplomb he managed everything, welcoming and effectively dismissing them all in one breath.

“Ah, my new sister and brother-in-law,” he said, bowing. “Welcome. We’re so glad you could join us. The band is about to begin if you’d care to dance.”

When the majority of the guests had arrived, Teddy led her out for a waltz, holding her close as he gracefully led her in the three-step dance. His body felt powerful against hers, the heat of his hand on her back nearly melting her. She was sorry when it was over, because it was the first time that evening she left his side and she felt momentarily lost.

Feeling a need to escape the crowd, she slipped up to her room to have her maid replace a few pins that had fallen out of her hair. When she stepped out of her bedroom, she stopped short. Reddington stood there, an imposing threat written on his face. She drew back with a gasp, but not wanting her maid to overhear, shut the door and stood facing him.

“Does he know?” he asked softly.

She tried to regain control of her breathing, lest she swoon in her tight corset. “Know what?” she managed.

“About us.”

Her mind spun around on itself. Did he imagine they'd been *lovers*? Had

he twisted what he'd done to her into some sort of *relationship*? More important, how should she answer? She did not want to encourage any bizarre notion he had about the nature of their past, nor did she want him to reveal it to Teddy. Realizing the latter was more important to her, she breathed. "No. He doesn't. And I'm not going to tell him."

"How could you have—" Reddington began, but stopped short at the sound of a throat being cleared.

She glanced up and her heart stopped. Teddy stood at the top of the stairs, his face pale in contrast to his dark eyes as he took them in. Dear God—what had he heard?

"Teddy!" she exclaimed, rushing

forward. "I was just looking for you."

* * *

"Were you?" Teddy asked mechanically, but he allowed her to grasp his arm so he could lead her back downstairs. He could scarcely breathe. Never before had he made such a misjudgment in his life.

Phoebe and Reddington.

He should have known it, but he had not seen. No wonder Reddington had been so angry with her the night he found Teddy at his house. She must love Reddington deeply—too much to continue living under the same roof whilst he was married to her sister. She'd done the right thing seizing an

opportunity to get out, but God, he'd been had for a fool! And it was no wonder she didn't want to consummate their marriage when her heart belonged to someone else!

When they reached the refreshment table, he handed her a glass of champagne before downing one himself. Her hands trembled so badly, she sloshed the liquid down the front of her dress trying to bring it to her lips. When she met his eyes, there were tears in them.

Though he felt as if a giant fissure had severed him in two, he could not fault her. She'd never pretended to love him, though she had fooled him into marriage. She'd been living in a painful

situation and she used him as a means to get out of it. But it didn't change the fact that she had pulled him out of a tricky spot. So they each owed each other. Or perhaps they were even now.

“It's all right, little dove. Here,” he said, taking out his handkerchief and dabbing at the liquid on her dress. “It will be all right.”

She searched his eyes, as if trying to ascertain if he meant the dress or their sham of a marriage. She opened her lips as if to say something, but then closed them again. “Thank you,” she murmured miserably, taking the handkerchief from him and dropping her eyes to her dress where she studiously applied her attention.

He could forgive her, he could have compassion for her, but he could not stand there with her any longer with the pain in his chest only growing by the minute. "Will you excuse me?"

She looked up, worry clouding her face, but she answered immediately, "Yes, of course."

He walked in the direction of his study, inviting Maury Stanley, his childhood friend and Kitty's brother, to join him.

"Why did you do it, my friend? I thought you always swore you weren't cut out for marriage. You look positively miserable."

"Do I?" He poured two snifters of brandy and handed one to Maury,

swirling his own. “It’s just a sham marriage, that’s all.”

“Ah. I see. Care to tell the story?”

He gave Maury the bare details, leaving out the part about seeing her with Reddington that evening. Airing his own scandals was one thing, but he would never reveal hers.

“Well, it sounds like you’re both prepared to make the best of it. And considering she’s offered you complete freedom, I cannot see you have much to complain about.”

“No, you’re quite right,” he agreed glumly.

He did his duty as the host for the rest of the evening, charming the crowd

as was his gift, but it was a relief when they all left. He stood outside, leaning on the lamppost, watching as the servants extinguished the candles.

“You love her, don’t you?” his mother’s voice asked softly from behind.

“Mother.” He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his side.

“I can tell by the way you look at her.”

He sighed. “Yes, but she’s in love with someone else. Someone she cannot have.”

His mother was silent.

“You think I deserve this, don’t you?”

“Of course I don’t, Teddy. Why

would you say that?”

“For all the hearts I’ve broken?”

“I’m sure there have been plenty of those, but from what I’ve observed, you’ve never been dishonest. Sometimes hearts cannot be protected, and sometimes hearts get broken. But that doesn’t mean we should lose our faith in love.”

He was surprised to hear she still believed in love. “Wise words from a woman who lived with heartache her entire marriage.”

“Yes, I loved your father. But he never loved me.”

Teddy turned to face in her surprise. “No?”

“No. He married me for my

wealth, no doubt. He charmed me like he charmed everyone, but I was no different from any other woman he kept.”

She touched his chest. “You *love*. I can see it. Don’t give up on her. Marriage lasts a very long time, long enough to win a woman’s heart.”

He bent to kiss her graying head. “I love you, Mother.”

“You’ve always been my shining boy, Teddy. I know how hard you tried to tease me out of my sorrow. I’m sorry I wasn’t a happy mother to you.”

His breath caught to hear her speak so frankly. Her words caused his heart to contract with a painful lurch. “You were a perfect mother. Always. I’m sorry I could not have been more for

you. I know I was a disappointment.”

“No! Teddy, that’s not true. I’ve never been disappointed in you.”

But it was true and they both knew it. They stared out at the moonlit yard in silence.

“I saw him in you, it’s true,” she admitted at last. “I guess I hated that. You charm just like he did—you win over the ladies and then you pass them by when you grow weary of them.”

He exhaled slowly. “Everyone expected me to be like him. You did, he did, every family member and friend did. How could I not become what was expected of me? All anyone ever said about me was, ‘He’s just like his father.’ What if I’m not like him at all? What if I

am capable of loving one woman for the rest of my life?”

His mother turned to him, her face almost stern. “Fidelity is a choice, Teddy. As I said, marriage lasts a very long time. You don’t stay in love with your wife your whole life through. You fall in love and you fall out of love and you fall in love again. When you feel attracted to someone else, you remember it happens, and you *choose* not to act on your feelings. That is the honorable thing to do.”

Shocked at this piece of advice from his mother, he allowed it to sink in.

“You are honorable, Teddy. If you choose to be faithful, you will be. Of course you are capable of it!

Womanizing is not some disease you inherited; it's a behavior that was taught to you and condoned by your father. Habits can be changed by anyone with a will of his own."

He nodded soberly. "Thank you, Mother."

Chapter Five

A dinner party at the Reddingtons' was the last place she wanted to be. Teddy had informed her that morning they were attending. Wynn had left to escort their mother back to the country, planning to return with the Westerfields, who were going to their home in the same vicinity in a week. Teddy had had a hollow-eyed look ever since the ball, but had been as polite and attentive as ever, never mentioning Reddington. She was still unsure how much he'd overheard, but she knew it had been enough for him to believe she had a relationship with her brother-in-

law. Unfortunately, she could not disabuse him of the notion without telling him what had truly happened, and she was planning to take that secret to the grave.

She could not fathom why they'd been invited to a dinner party at her sister's, much less why Teddy should accept it, but she could not see she had any choice in the matter, so she was dressed and ready by the time he returned from Parliament. The one fear that kept churning through her mind was that Teddy had decided to begin things anew with Maud. Though she knew it was unfair, she could not stand the thought of him being intimate with her sister.

He greeted her with his standard peck on the cheek. “You look as if you are ready.”

“I am.”

He held out his arm. “Let’s go, then, shall we? I have some news to share with you when we’re in the carriage.”

He helped her into the carriage, settling across from her. It was the first time they’d been in a carriage together since the incident at Hyde Park, and she found herself blushing at the memory of it. As if he knew precisely what she was thinking, the corners of his mouth turned up faintly.

“Did you say you had news?” she asked to distract him.

“Indeed. I have found a publisher for your poems.”

She heard a wild howling of wind at her ears. “Pardon me?”

“Your poems are to be published, in two volumes, as I’d suggested.”

“Teddy... no! In truth?” She covered her mouth with her hands, not trusting herself to say anything coherent. “Well, it cannot be! Are you sure?”

He grinned broadly. “Yes, quite sure.”

She threw herself across the carriage at him, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Thank you! Oh, thank you, Teddy! I cannot believe it. I just cannot believe it! They read them? Did

they read them or are you paying them to publish it?"

He laughed. "The editor read them and he found them as delightful as I did. And no, I'm not paying for them to be published, but I do think the publisher is hoping my influence will help to sell the volumes."

"When will it be ready?"

"I'm not sure, love, but you will be the first person I tell when I hear the news."

Recovering her wits somewhat, she sat back down, smoothing her skirt over her knees. Joy gave her courage. "Teddy?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Are you involved with my sister

again?”

His eyebrows snapped together. “Don’t be a goose. I told you I would not see her again and I will not.”

“Yes, but...” she swallowed. “That was before—”

He rescued her. “Ah, yes. Well, I intend to keep my word, regardless of your constant changes to the rules.”

His words were sharp, but when her eyes shot to his face, he winked. She released her breath in a rush.

“It’s not that—I mean, I don’t mind about other women. But perhaps not her? I know I have no right to ask it —”

“Phoebe, enough,” he cut her off curtly. He shook his head with his eyes

closed as if he were very tired.
“Enough.”

“Forgive me,” she said in a small voice.

“Phoebe—”

“Yes, my lord?”

Teddy looked as if he had a bone stuck in his throat. “Phoebe, I just want you to know...” He tugged at his cravat. “If you wish for the same sort of freedom you have offered me, I will grant it.”

She gaped at him, stunned. “My lord?”

“If you wanted to be with a man, I would not begrudge you it. I should not like it if you produced heirs that weren’t mine, but...”

“Never mind!” she exclaimed. “I have no interest, thank you very much.” Her face burned with shame. She understood—he was offering her Reddington. That explained why he’d accepted the dinner party invitation. Her chest constricted.

The carriage clattered to a stop in front of the all-too-familiar home. Just seeing the front door made her stomach drop to her shoes. How she hated it here. Teddy climbed out of the carriage and lifted her down. There was never a single courtesy he left off, always treating her like the finest lady with his solicitous manners.

Just as it had been at their ball, Teddy’s charm saved her from ill grace

when they greeted Reddington and Maud. The dinner party was large—seven couples in all—so once they were admitted, she found it easy to hide amongst the other guests. After the meal, the party adjourned to the parlor, where Maud played the pianoforte and sang, showing off her accomplishments as if she were an unmarried lady seeking a husband.

“Phoebe, run upstairs to my room to find the rest of my sheet music, will you?”

Sighing, Phoebe stood, falling into the aggravating role of her sister’s maidservant again. The familiar smell of the rooms conjured oppressive memories, not just those of Reddington,

but of living under Maud's rule, too. She stopped outside their room, suddenly hating her sister for sending her on this errand. She could have sent a maid for it! She grit her teeth and gripped the doorknob, turning it and entering. The music was right where Maud said it would be, but as she turned to leave, she froze.

"I thought I saw you come up here," Reddington said, looming in the doorway with a leer that made her mouth go dry.

"I came for Maud's music. I have to go back now."

He shut the door. "I'm sure there's no rush. I've missed you."

Missed her? No, he didn't miss

someone he never bothered to know. Missed the opportunity of pressing himself on her inappropriately was more accurate.

“Oh?” she said, anger giving her courage. “I have not missed you.”

She marched toward the door, which he stood blocking and had the wind knocked out of her when he snatched her up around the waist with both arms, lifting her feet off the floor.

“Let me go!” she shrieked, panic overriding caution at being overheard. “Let me go—I don’t ever want to see you again! Get your hands off me or I’ll scream!” She wrestled against his hold, as one of his hands pawed between her legs.

The door flew open and Teddy burst in. He threw himself at Reddington, his hand catching the man's throat and carrying him backward till he hit the wall, still dragging her along with him.

"Let her go," Teddy hissed. Gone was his easygoing demeanor, replaced by a single-pointed aggression. He appeared deadly.

Reddington's arms only tightened at first, but then they fell open and he made a gurgling sound, as Teddy's hold cut off his air intake.

Teddy pulled him back and then slammed him against the wall again. "What were you doing with her?" He looked over his shoulder at her as if

trying to understand the situation. “What did you do?” Suspicion had crept in his tone, as if he’d already guessed her terrible secret.

Reddington made another gurgling sound.

“Teddy!” she cried, fearing he would murder Reddington.

He looked at her. “Did he force himself on you? Before?” He turned his attention back to Reddington, pressing his own face close to his. “Did you?”

“Teddy!” Reddington’s face had turned a shade of purple.

He relaxed his hold, but did not release him, allowing Reddington to draw a breath.

“Did he, Phoebe?” Teddy asked

softly this time as Reddington coughed.

“N-not fully,” she whispered, tugging at her corset to allow her ribs to expand for her own breathing.

“He pressed himself on you, but did not succeed, is that what you mean?”

“Yes, my lord.”

In a flash of movement, Teddy spun Reddington around and kicked out his legs, so he dropped to his knees before her. He yanked his head back with a fistful of hair. “Apologize.”

Reddington made a horrific growling sound.

Teddy clapped his two hands together on either side of Reddington’s ears, causing the man to howl. “Apologize to her. *Now.*”

“I—I’m sorry,” Reddington grunted.

“Teddy, let’s go. Please. Let’s go?”

Teddy’s lip curled looking at Reddington, but he released him, and with an arm around her waist, swept her from the room, down the stairs and out the front door before anyone could stop them.

He lifted her into the carriage and sat beside her with his arm around her, pulling her close to his side. She trembled on the thin cushion, feeling as if she desperately needed to cry, but shock prevented any tears from spilling.

“Are you hurt?” Teddy asked, his eyes sweeping her face and upper body.

She shook her head.

“You’re all right?” he asked again, as if needing reassurance.

“Yes.”

He looked positively stormy but he continued to hold her close beside him, rubbing her arm in comfort.

“I’m sorry, Teddy.”

He sighed and shook his head. “You should have told me, Phoebe.”

She hid her face in her hands. “I could not.” The truth was out now—what would he think of her? He would realize she had not claimed to be his lover to save him; in fact, it had been to save herself. She’d taken undue advantage of his gratitude for something that had been manipulative and selfish.

And it seemed all the worse now, because she realized he was right—she should have trusted him. He had defended her from Reddington—demanded he apologize to her *on his knees*. Despite her reluctance to believe it, Teddy had always been worthy of her trust, it had been she who was flawed—she who refused to believe he could care about her.

She drew courage enough to remove her hands and steal a glance. He sat staring fixedly at a spot on the carriage wall opposite him, his expression dark.

“I tricked you into marrying me, didn’t I? You thought I rescued you, but actually it was I who needed saving.”

He blew out his breath and stabbed his fingers through his hair. “Do you think I would not have rescued you if I’d known?” he demanded, sounding deeply wounded.

“I didn’t think it then, but I see that I was wrong.”

“I should’ve killed him that first night. Why didn’t you let me?”

“Because I don’t want to see you hanged!” When he said nothing, she repeated, “I’m sorry.”

He sighed. “I’m not angry with you, love. I’m just... frustrated.”

Remembering the last time he’d said those words, she offered, “Would it help to spank me?”

He let out a short chuckle of

surprise. “Well,” he said, considering, “a good spanking always helps me feel better.” He turned a smile on her. “I’m not sure it would improve your disposition, though.”

As usual, he wrung a smile from her. She shivered a bit, considering the prospect of being over his knee, but she wanted him to spank her, especially if it helped him feel better. She wanted to be on the right side of the one man who deserved her trust, the one man who seemed to care about her.

He led her upstairs, his solid arm at her waist, her heart pounding in fluttery anticipation. She wasn’t afraid; more nervous and perhaps even a touch excited. He took her to his room and

pushed her to sit on the bed, surprising her by bending to remove one of her slippers. He flexed it in his hands, giving her his lopsided grin and a little lift of the eyebrows to let her know what he intended to do with the slipper. She gasped as he grasped both her ankles and hiked them completely in the air, exposing her backside when her skirts and petticoats fell away. She reached to cover her bottom with both hands, then moved them to cover her face instead, peeking through her fingers at her husband's handsome face.

He snapped her little leather slipper across one cheek. She gasped at the sting, though in truth, it sounded worse than it felt. He snapped it across

the other cheek. He began to punish her bottom and the backs of her thighs with her slipper, the sharp crack of the leather sole causing her to squeal and lift her bottom into the air.

“You should have told me,” he said again, gritting his teeth in mock ferocity as he pummeled her backside with a rapid flurry of spansks. “Then I would have understood why you were distressed by making love.”

“Ooh!” she cried, flinching from his spank. “I know! Forgive me!”

“You let me think—” He stopped and blew out his breath, then picked up his tempo of spanking again. “I thought you loved him.”

“No!” she exclaimed. She

reached back and covered her smarting buttocks. “I’m sorry I let you believe that. Teddy, I’m so sorry.”

He tapped her hands with the slipper. “Kindly remove your hands. Place them under your back if you cannot keep them out of the way—I’m not through spanking you.” Something about the authority with which he directed her made her limbs go weak and heat flood her entire body.

She obeyed him, slipping her hands beneath her low back, cringing at how exposed she felt. To make it worse, Teddy reached down and found the tape to her drawers, sliding them off her legs.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “Spanking on the bare is so much more satisfying.”

Her sex pulsed in response. Teddy enjoyed spanking her and though she ought to be indignant at the perversity of it, she was not. Rather, she lifted her legs back in the air, making an offering of her bottom. He caught hold of her ankles, kissing her calf before he began to spank again, this time on her bare flesh, the little slipper striking a small surface area but packing a sting worse than his hand. At times it struck her exposed sex and she gasped at the sensation, heat flooding her inner thighs.

“Ow... ow,” she whimpered, though in truth, the sting was only skin deep.

“Did it happen more than once?” he asked, looking serious as he tossed

the slipper to the floor and began using his hand instead. His palm imparted less sting but more impact and, in the humiliating position he held her, was more painful than when he'd spanked over his knee. He caught her eye and held it as he spanked, awaiting her answer.

“No. I could see he was always watching for a moment to get me alone, though. It seemed just a matter of time before...”

He looked troubled. “I should have killed him,” he muttered. He looked up sharply. “Did your sister know?”

She flinched, lifting her bottom in the air, bucking against his hold.

“Did she?” he pressed, spanking even harder. “Did she, Phoebe?” He dropped her legs abruptly and walked away, as if realizing his blooming anger was misdirected.

“I don’t know!” she cried, sitting up.

He walked back and crouched beside her, tears in his eyes. “Phoebe... darling. I’m sorry you had to endure such a thing. Dear God, I’m sorry! I wish I could change it for you,” he said, his voice anguished.

She leaned forward and wrapped her arms around his neck, the water in her own eyes due only to gratitude and wonder at the level of his caring. She pressed a kiss to his neck and in an

instant, his mouth was upon hers, pressing at her lips with a bruising kiss. Gripping her firmly by her hair, he tipped her head backward to expose her throat and dragged his open mouth down her neck, stopping to suck just above her collarbone.

Something spasmed between her legs, a simmering need ignited with his passion. He lifted her head up and met her lips again, pressing his tongue between her lips, plundering her mouth with a demanding kiss.

She made a soft moaning sound, leaning her body against his. His hands were rough, yanking her dress open and freeing her breasts from her stays. A little cry escaped her lips as he pushed

her back on the bed, falling upon her, his hips positioned over hers, his mouth claiming her earlobe, sucking it into his mouth with a violence that caused her to lift her hips against his in an instinctual response.

Somehow her dress was wrenched from her body and his jacket and waistcoat came off as well, but before she could remove her corset, he was upon her again, forcing her thighs open with the nudge of his knee, squeezing her burning bottom as he nipped at her neck.

The last time she'd been in his bed he'd been seducing—his lovemaking an art form designed to elicit something from her. This time, all art

was absent. He demanded, he plundered, he claimed her like an animal in heat. There was no finesse, only burning passion and it lit in her a desire so hot she writhed in agony, desperate for release. He lifted her legs in the air, the way he'd held her a moment before, this time applying his tongue to her exposed sex, swirling it over her ready flesh, penetrating her until her thighs shook and her hips bucked against the torture.

“Please,” she pleaded. “Please. Now.”

When at last he freed his length and plowed into her, the explosion of sensation nearly blinded her. There was pain as her flesh parted to allow him entry, but the pleasure overtook the burn

after several slow strokes, and she wrapped her legs around his back, urging him in deeper, harder, wanting the release her body seemed to know would come.

“Oh, God—Phoebe,” he groaned.

At the sound of her name, she exploded, yanking him deep within her as the muscles of her sex spasmed all around him in a burst of pure satisfaction. She held him tight against her with her legs until the earthquake ended, then released her legs and threw her arms above her head on the bed, sprawling open for his pleasure. She understood, at last, what it was her sister found appealing about making love.

He slowed his rhythm, gliding in and out of her and watching her face, smiling a little when she began to writhe on the bed again as the discomfort built again. When he pulled all the way out of her, she sat up in protest.

* * *

He chuckled. “Roll over. Onto your stomach, little dove.”

She obeyed him, looking unsure of his intent. He gave her bottom a slap and she squeezed her cheeks together, but when he pressed into her from behind, she lifted her hips to meet his, her sex sore, but still more than eager for his re-entry. The friction of her thighs created a new pleasure, the unique angle

providing a different feedback. Phoebe held still, her bottom lifted, her entire body seeming to listen to the fresh lesson in lovemaking. Soon she was rocking against him, making keening sounds for more. He wrapped his arms under her and gripped her shoulders for leverage, giving it to her deeper, harder, and faster until he reached his own climax and she convulsed again with a satisfied yelp.

She collapsed beneath him, as limp as a rag doll. He held his weight on his forearms so he didn't crush her with his body. "Roll on your back, Phoebe." She obeyed immediately, looking up at him with wonder shining in her eyes.

He smiled at her expression and she laughed and then started to cry.

“How did you do that? I didn’t think about him once.”

“Shh,” he said, pressing his lips to hers. “Don’t speak about him in this bed. This is our bed, only for us. Don’t ever let him in here.”

Her arms twined around his neck and she clung to him as if for her very life, emitting little sobs and then laughs. “I’m sorry! I don’t know what’s come over me.”

“Let it out, sweetheart. Cry as much as you need, you’re safe with me.”

She cried and hiccupped, giggling at times, burying her face at times. He held her until the emotion had been spent and her breath turned into the soft sighs of sleep.

He stroked her hair, relishing the feel of her body nestled against his, his anguish over her mistreatment eased by the release of his pent-up desire.

He woke in the morning to find her studying him.

“Teddy?”

“Yes, angel?”

“Can you forgive me?”

“We’re already whole, little dove.”

“You were angry with me.”

“No, sweetheart, I was frustrated because I care so much. If I had only known—if you could have told me—I would have protected you, and I would have been more sensitive to your feelings about sex. But I wasn’t angry.

And I'm sorry if I frightened you.”

She shook her head. “I wasn’t afraid. Well, I was a bit afraid of the spanking, but not of you.”

“The spanking didn’t hurt so much, did it?” he prodded, already knowing it had not. It had been an act of taking control from her, nothing more.

Her face flushed, but she didn’t lower her eyes. She stroked his cheek with her thumb, answering without words. It had been what she needed. What they both needed. A way to clear the air and start afresh.

“Phoebe?”

“Yes?”

“Will you be my wife?”

She giggled and he kissed her

nose.

“My true wife?”

She nodded, her eyes shining.

“Yes, my lord. I will be your wife.”

“I hope so, because the marriage has been consummated, so there’s no annulling it now.”

“I never wanted to annul it,” she murmured, and he leaned in, claiming her mouth in a victory kiss, which she answered with enthusiasm.

When he pulled away, she looked at the light coming in the window. “You should get up, else you’ll be late to Parliament today.”

“I’m not going in. I’m staying with you, little dove.”

She smiled, stroking his hair

from his eyes, making him shiver with the realization she really was his wife now, in every sense of the word.

They spent the day enjoying each other's company, walking in Hyde Park, holding hands. When they sat upon a bench, he said, "Phoebe, when I said you should not talk about Reddington, I only meant in our bed." Feeling how she'd stiffened beside him, he clasped her hand in both of his, pulling off her glove to stroke her bare skin. "I do wish you to tell me everything—I know it pains you. But the more you can talk about it, the less hold it will have over you."

Her lower lip trembled and she dropped her chin. He put a finger under it to lift it. "Not today—we'll not ruin

today with it, but soon. All right?"

She searched his face, for what, he could not tell.

"I promise I will help you heal this."

"I—" her voice cracked. "I'm not sure I can tell it."

"You can. Because if you don't, you're keeping him between us. And he does not deserve that honor."

"No," she laughed, tears spilling down her cheeks. "He certainly does not."

That evening, as bedtime grew near, he felt tension radiating from her. He had already ordered the servants to move her things into his bedroom, not wanting to give her the opportunity to

hide from him.

“You don’t have to be afraid,” he murmured as he led her to the bedroom. “Remember? It’s just you and I in here.”

“Yes!” she exclaimed too quickly. “Well, what if I don’t like it tonight?”

He smiled slightly, though he understood her anxiety was real. “Well, why did last night work better than our first attempt?”

She turned away from him, examining the books on his night table. “You took away my choice.”

He recoiled momentarily, but then thought he understood. He walked behind her and held her shoulders lightly. “Do you think you were

responsible for what happened between you and Reddington?”

Her body stiffened and a little cry came from her mouth. “I didn’t know what to do—I didn’t want to let him touch me, but...”

“You were not responsible. The guilt is all his—only his. None of it belongs to you. He was your guardian and he should have protected you. Instead he tried to force himself on you. It was not your fault.”

She turned, shaking with sobs, throwing her weight against him so hard he stumbled backward. He wrapped his arms around her, rocking slightly on his feet. “It’s not your fault,” he whispered in her hair.

“I did not know what to do—I let him touch me. I just—I did not know what I should do.”

“Yes,” he murmured, stroking her hair. “I understand.”

He lifted her chin to see her violet-rimmed eyes. Her lashes were wet and she blinked them, but she looked hopeful. “But if it helps you to have all choice taken from you, I am happy to oblige,” he said, sweeping her legs up in the crook of his arm and carrying her to the bed.

He tossed her onto it, eliciting a squeal of protest. Throwing up her skirts without preamble, he unhooked one of her silk stockings from the garter and slid it off her leg. She leaned up on her

elbows, watching with a smile. He pulled it between two hands, testing its strength. "Hold out your hands, wrists together."

Her eyes widened, understanding his intent, but she held out her hands with a smile. Tying her wrists together, he fastened them to the bedpost. "There. Now you are nothing more than my plaything. And I shall do as I like with you all night long."

He watched closely to see if his words aroused or dampened her mood, but they seemed to arouse. Her breath had quickened and a spot of color appeared on each cheek. Her eyes were bright as they watched him. Twisting her onto her side, he unhooked the tiny hooks

on the back of her dress, then realized he had no way to remove it with her arms strung up.

“Hmm,” he said and she giggled, realizing his dilemma. “Never mind, I have a better plan.”

He untied her wrists and pulled the dress over her head, then used the stocking to cover her eyes, winding it around twice to block out all light and tying it snugly behind her head. “How is that, little dove?”

She smiled in response.

He hesitated, realizing without her vision, his touch might remind her more of Reddington. He would have to be sure to speak often and keep her in the moment. “Now listen carefully. Now

that you're my wife, you'll never have a choice anymore. Your duty is to give yourself to me whenever, wherever, and however I demand it of you."

She wriggled on the bed, her hands coming up to the area of her breasts, then shying away. "Hold your breasts," he ordered, enjoying the tiny gasp that came from her lips. She tentatively placed her hands over her breasts, still captured by her corset. "Take them out." His voice had deepened with desire.

She reached inside her stays and lifted her twin orbs out of her undergarment.

"That's it," he murmured appreciatively.

He pulled her drawers off. “Show me how you touch yourself between your legs, Phoebe.”

Her lips parted and her head fell back. Her hand crept slowly toward her sex, which he could see was already glistening with nectar. She touched the outer lips of her sex tentatively.

“Is that how you do it?” he murmured as he crawled up next to her on the bed, settling on his side with his head resting in his hand.

“No,” she whispered.

“How do you do it, Phoebe? Do you put your fingers inside?”

“No.” Her brow furrowed and he sensed he had tread on dangerous ground.

“Just show me how you do it.”

“Well,” she hesitated. “I lie on my stomach.”

He smothered a laugh. “Roll over, then, and show me what you do.”

She rolled over, her hand between her legs. She did not penetrate her sex with her fingers, but kept them all cupped together, undulating in a wavelike motion over her mons. Her hips began to grind, pressing her mound into her hand.

He unfastened her corset, taking care not to distract her. “Now that I shall be prohibited from frequenting the brothels, I’ll have to teach you to please me like a light-skirt. Do you think you could do so, Phoebe?”

She made a little whimper of protest, but her hips hurried their speed, belying her excitement. “Have you ever heard the term *cada orificio*?”

She made a negative sound. Her corset completely opened, he trailed his fingertip down her spine. “It comes from the Italian whores. It means every orifice. It means they take a man into all three of their largest orifices.”

She made another moan. His fingertip had reached the cleft of her buttocks and he slid it down to her thighs, then back up, this time deep within her cheeks.

“Did you know you can take a man here, Phoebe?” he asked, applying a small amount of pressure on her back

hole.

She gasped and squeezed her cheeks together. He leaned close and made a tsking sound in her ear. “No, no, little dove. Remember, you cannot refuse me now. I’m your husband, and I’ll take you any way I please.” He licked his finger, applying ample saliva, and returned it to her rear entrance, pushing in with an insistence that brooked no opposition.

She mewled, tightening and then opening, her hand fluttering wildly between her legs.

“That’s it, Phoebe,” he whispered, pressing his finger in and out to the keening sound of her pleas. With a guttural cry, her legs scissored together

and she arched, squeezing around his finger as a great shudder ran through her entire body.

Chapter Six

Never in her life had she experienced such pleasure and, like the previous night, she had not thought of Reddington once. She was spent, yet hungry for more, eager to have Teddy moving inside her, wanting his pleasure as much as she wanted more of her own. But she did not take charge, as she loved the bliss of surrender she'd found in his wresting all control.

To her delight, he pulled off her blindfold and flipped her onto her back. She could feel the bulge of his hardened length as he climbed over her and ravished her with his lips. His shirt flew

off, followed quickly by his trousers and within seconds his shaft was between her legs, pressing insistently for entrance. She spread her legs wide and opened for him, grasping his shoulders with her fingers, pulling him into her.

“That’s it,” he rumbled, his voice thick and hoarse, his eyes glassy. She loved seeing the animal in him—it was so different from the polished charm he could so glibly put out. This was real—she had no doubt in her mind he was beyond all control, hungry for her, and not about to stop for anything.

“Yes, Teddy!” she urged, and he growled, pumping into her harder than she thought was possible, the pain only pleasure as he drove on and on until he

erupted with a groan. As it had been the night before, his climax provided a second one for her, and she delighted in the sensation of her muscles squeezing his sex, milking it for seed.

“Oh, Teddy,” she gasped.

“Phoebe,” he laughed, panting. “I don’t think it will take long to train you.”

She slapped his arm and he chuckled, burying his face in her neck for a wet kiss.

They spent an entire week that way, though Teddy did return to Parliament. It was a honeymoon, and having Wynn away made it all the easier to pass their hours in bed, exploring one another’s bodies at leisure. She did not have any more trauma related to her

memories of Reddington's abuse, and Teddy had no trouble teaching her the many ways to give and receive pleasure.

Yet, as each day wore on in perfect harmony, a nagging voice in the back of her mind told her this ecstasy could not last forever—that she should not put her trust in Teddy, because nothing good ever came to her, or because she did not deserve it. So it was not altogether surprising when the letter came.

The butler had mistakenly handed it to her with the notes and invitations that had arrived for her. It was addressed to Teddy on fine paper and it smelled of perfume. She knew, the instant she saw it, what it must be: a

love letter. She stared at it for a long time, debating whether she ought to open it. It was all she could think about the entire day, and she found her need to know what lay within that envelope was greater than any sense of compunction she might have about opening a letter not addressed to her. She took it upstairs to their room and slid her thumb under the waxy seal to pry the edges open.

Dearest Teddy,

I have been waiting for you in my bedroom for five nights hence. Where have you been? I cannot believe you are still busy with your new wife. Surely you have tired of her inexperience. Remember all the

pleasure we've found together...

*Yours forever,
Veronica*

* * *

Veronica. Her heart thudded in her chest. Who was Veronica? A mistress, clearly. The sensation of betrayal was like her organs being ripped from her body through her mouth. She could scarcely breathe or move or think as she sat holding the wretched letter. Hot tears spilled without her notice as her mind spun over the past week she'd spent with Teddy, realizing none of it meant anything to him. She'd been a fool to trust a rake.

This was what he did.

She was just one of hundreds of women he'd taken to bed.

The white-hot scorch of betrayal blazed through her and she snatched the covers from the bed, dragging them to the floor and stomping on them. Finding satisfaction in the act, she tore open his closet and threw his fine clothes on the floor, trouncing on them as well. She flung his books from the shelves, wiped the dressing table of all contents—his shaving accoutrement, cufflinks, and snuffbox flying all directions.

Curse. Him.

A thousand curses! She should have known better than to give her heart to a rake! Yanking her own clothes out

of the closet, she hauled her dresses into the adjoining bedroom that had been hers until a week prior.

“Lady Fenton?” the timid voice of her maid grated on her nerves.

“What is it?” she snapped.

“Do... do you require some assistance?”

“Yes. Here, take these,” she said, foisting the heap of dresses into her arms. “I am moving back into my own bedroom.”

“Yes, of course, ma’am,” came her reply, muffled through the fabric of the dresses.

She strode back in his room, intent on finding something else to destroy. Spying the letter opener, she

snatched it up and attacked his pillows with it, rending the fabric to release a plume of goose feathers into the air. Ah. She ripped another, shaking the pillow to release every last feather from its container, filling the entire room with white fluff. She laughed—a bitter sort of sound, metallic and empty.

She looked at her maid standing in the doorway, surveying the mess with wide eyes. “Do not allow anyone to clean this mess,” she commanded regally. “I’m going for a walk.”

“Do you wish me to attend you?”

“No. Thank you. Just fetch my shawl and I’ll be off.”

She walked quickly out onto the street, as if she had somewhere to be,

when in reality, she did not even heed which direction she was headed. She walked until her feet ached and her mind had grown weary of her own thoughts.

She told herself she was really no worse off than she had been a week ago, except now Teddy knew her darkest secret. She loathed she had shared any intimacy with him at all, but aside from that, the rest was as expected—she had bargained for a loveless marriage.

She stopped and looked around, trying to get her bearings. After a moment more of walking, she realized she was on the Westerfields' street. The thought of paying a call on Kitty Westerfield cheered her, and she quickened her pace to arrive at her door.

She was shown in immediately and tea and pastries were brought out, which was a relief, as she realized she was famished.

“Are you lonely without Wynn or has Teddy done his duty to amuse you?”

She winced inwardly, thinking of Teddy’s amusements. “I grew lonely today,” she answered honestly. “Kitty?” she croaked, her voice sounding hoarse to her ears. “Do you think Teddy pretends to love all his ladies?”

Kitty looked startled and she instantly regretted her question, but her new friend looked thoughtful. “No, I don’t believe he pretends to love any of them. I think he’s quite honest about his own character, don’t you?”

Her emotions were too tangled to be able to answer. "What do you suppose makes a man like Teddy?" she blurted, not expecting Kitty to have an answer.

"His father was the same way, and it made his mother miserable. Lord Fenton was rarely home, always off gallivanting with his mistresses. It fell on Teddy to cheer his mother, or so he felt. He'd already developed that charm when we were just children, and he doted on his mother and Wynn, as if he felt he must make up for the lack of attention they received from his father."

She allowed that information to sink in, thinking it explained a great deal about his relationship to them. "But if he

disliked his father's behavior, why would he emulate it?"

Kitty gave a delicate shrug of her shoulders. "Why, indeed? I don't know, I think his charm made him seem so much like his father, and everyone told him so, over and over again. And I think he did inherit his father's... *admiration* for the female sex. But even so, there's been an emptiness to the life he leads, and I believe he knows it."

"Do you—" She trailed off, not sure if she could bring herself to ask the question. "You don't believe he could ever be faithful to a wife, do you?"

Kitty's face grew shrewd. "Is that why you requested a marriage in name only?"

The tip of her nose tingled and she lifted her teacup to her lips to hide the quiver in her chin. When she'd swallowed, she nodded. "I have no desire to live as his mother did," she admitted.

* * *

"My lord," his butler, Standish, greeted him at the door with a pinched face.

"Yes?"

"Lady Fenton is in her room—she is not feeling well."

He frowned. "Thank you, Standish."

Standish looked as though he wanted to say more, but when Teddy

lifted his eyebrows, his butler gave a tiny shake of his head, as if to say, “Never mind.”

Concerned, he went immediately upstairs, where he found his bedroom door ajar and the room in shambles. The maids were already hovering nearby, as if knowing he would call for them.

“Her ladyship ordered us not to clean it, my lord,” the maid said with a small curtsy. “But I will begin now, if you wish.”

He stared at the room, aghast. The pillows had been slashed open, feathers everywhere, and his belongings were knocked from every surface. His first thought was she’d been attacked—by Lord Reddington or a ruffian, but that

didn't track with the way the servants were acting. "Did she do this?" he asked, his mouth dry and a thrum in his temples tightening his scalp.

"Yes, my lord." Another curtsy. Several other servants hovered in the corridor, as if to watch his reaction. The house seemed an unearthly quiet.

He kept his face impassive.

"Where is my lady?" he asked softly.

"She moved her things to her bedroom, my lord."

"I see."

"Shall I begin to clean it now?"

"Not just yet, thank you," he said, entering the room and closing the door after himself. He stood perfectly still,

assessing the damage, his mind spinning. Not seeing any clues, he sighed, and opened the door to Phoebe's room.

She sat by the window, reading or pretending to read, her face drawn and tight. She put a marker in her book and turned to face him. "My lord," she said, standing up. "I no longer wish to have marital relations with you." Her voice was formal, and had the sound of a rehearsed speech. "I have moved my things into this bedroom, and we shall return to our original arrangement."

"What happened?" he croaked.

Her lips tightened in a thin line. "Nothing I wish to discuss with you. I have made my decision, and this time it will be final."

“Did someone come here? A woman? What happened to upset you? Tell me, Phoebe.”

She flinched at his use of her first name, as if he no longer deserved the familiarity of it. “I said I do not wish to discuss the matter. It is not worth our time.”

He strode forward and reached for her arm, but she drew back as if he were a snake that might bite. He sucked in a breath to calm himself. “What happened, Phoebe?” he asked through clenched teeth.

She turned her back on him.

“I have not been unfaithful to you. Is that what you think? I have not. If you’ll just tell me what has you so riled

—”

“Just leave,” she said, without turning.

“I will not leave. Nor will not accept this change in arrangement. You will tell me what happened. Now.”

Even his most authoritative tone did not move her to turn and speak to him.

Exasperated, he cast his eyes about the room, looking for any clue he might find about her behavior.

And then he saw it.

Lying on the dressing table was an opened letter. He could see the feminine scrawl of the writing and smell the perfume on the paper. Dammit.

He didn't need to know the

particulars—who it was from or what it contained. He could guess it was a letter from an old lover and Phoebe had jumped to a false conclusion. He snatched up the letter and read it quickly.

She whirled around at the sound of it and folded her arms over her chest, lifting her chin defiantly.

He held up the letter. “Is this why you’re upset?” When she didn’t answer, he went on. “I have not been with Veronica in at least three years, despite her silly attempts to entice me,” he said. “Read it again,” he said, thrusting the letter under her nose. “Does she claim we have been together recently?” He didn’t wait for her to answer. “No, in fact, she refers to my

new wife as a reason for my continued refusal. Should that not comfort you?"

He crumpled the letter and tossed it into the hearth. Flames licked the paper, curling it at the edges before the entire letter caught fire at once and disappeared into ash. He sighed. "Phoebe, letters like this will probably always arrive. They may arrive for years. There is nothing I can do to guarantee you will not read another. You knew when you married me that I've had many lovers."

Phoebe's lower lip protruded and her eyes were still hard.

He caught her eye and held it. "It does not mean I have been or will be unfaithful to you."

She cast him a withering look as if she'd expected him to say such a thing, and did not believe a word.

“Sit down,” he suggested, indicating the reading chair. “Will you sit down and hear me out?”

Her gaze was defiant, but he detected an uncertainty—a twitch of her lip, as if tears were hidden just below her bluster.

Darling Phoebe. He should have told her how much he loved her.

He took her hand and tugged her gently toward the chair, then crouched beside it, looking up into her pinched face.

“I haven’t been with another woman since the day we wed, despite

your offer to allow me my freedom.”

The back of her neck lengthened in exaggerated disbelief.

“Phoebe, you are the only woman I want—no, that’s the God’s truth. You are the only woman I’ll have. I promised you my fidelity, and I will keep that promise. I will put it in writing if that helps you to believe. I am yours, and yours alone.”

She bit her lip as a tear spilled down one cheek. She dashed at it with the back of her hand. “I don’t believe you,” she sniffed.

He picked up her hand and kissed the salty moisture on her skin. “I love you. I should have told you sooner, and I apologize. I love you, little dove.”

Her eyes rounded and her pouting lips parted as she stared at him with a doubtful expression.

“It’s true,” he assured her.

Flinging herself at him, she nearly knocked him backward with the force of her embrace, her arms wrapped around his head. He sat back on the floor, pulling her into his lap to cradle her.

“I love you,” he whispered.

She could not seem to speak, burrowing her face deep in his shoulder. After a few minutes, she emerged, blinking shyly at him. “I suppose I jumped to conclusions, didn’t I?”

“Yes,” he answered wryly. “You did.”

“I’m sorry about your room. I—I wasn’t myself. I’m afraid I acted quite like a child.”

“Our room,” he corrected. “And yes, you acted like a very naughty child.”

“I beg your pardon. I never gave into anger or any other emotion when I lived with my family or Reddington. I was the perfect lady in finishing school—I didn’t ask for anything. But you—” She stopped and bit her lip. “You make me feel so much more.” She looked up shyly through her lashes. “I’m not saying that to excuse my behavior.” He heard her swallow. “Are you going to punish me?”

He stroked her hair. The idea of administering real punishment held no

satisfaction to him at the moment, but certainly was deserved. “What do you think I should do?”

“Oh, Teddy,” she murmured, pulling away and dropping her eyes. “Are you truly going to make me say it?”

* * *

When Teddy didn't answer, she twisted her fingers in her lap and whispered, “Spank me.” Her stomach gave a jolt as she spoke. She realized a spanking was what she'd been demanding with her tantrum in his room that afternoon. Like when the light-skirt had visited, she'd lost control of her emotions, and she'd secretly craved Teddy taking up the control for her, to

change the way she felt and make things right again. She'd been like the child who purposely acts naughty, just to guarantee a reaction from her nursemaid.

Teddy's hands stroked lightly up and down her back. "Stand up and take off your clothes."

The command sent shivers down her spine. "Take them off?" she asked uncertainly.

"Yes. From now on, you will be fully bared to me when you're punished."

Her face grew hot to hear that pronouncement. In fact, heat flushed every inch of her skin. He helped her to her feet with his hands at her bottom, then stood and turned her around to

assist with the buttons on her dress and the laces of her corset. Then he sat on the edge of the bed, watching. Turning away from him, she dropped the garments to the floor, removing the garters and stockings last.

“Turn around,” he said softly.

She turned around, her fingers wrestling each other in front of her sex.

“Phoebe, there will be times we misunderstand each other. And there will be times you will be hurt by me or angry with me—it will be inevitable. When it happens, I expect you to come to me and speak your mind, so we may solve our problems together.” he said, giving her a stern look that made her insides turn molten. “Otherwise, how do

you think our marriage will grow?"

She felt dizzy at the idea that he wanted their marriage to grow. In fact, she was still off-balance as a result of his entire declaration of love and oath of fidelity.

"That will be my first rule in this marriage."

She raised her eyebrows. His authority was not new, but she could not be quite sure he was serious.

"My second is to forbid tantrums that involve you throwing any object."

This time she detected humor in his voice and his lips curved slightly at the edges.

She felt her cheeks grow hot. "Yes, my lord," she said, and curtsied.

A faint smile acknowledged her submission.

“Fetch my razor strap from wherever you flung it in there.”

Her knees went weak at the command. She obeyed, feet feeling clumsy. Awkward in her nudity, it took her some time to concentrate enough to find the leather strap under the mess of feathers and other thrown items. The sound of Teddy’s door opening made her jump upright to find Teddy’s valet halting in the doorway and taking in the sight of her, fully naked, holding the strap so obviously to be used for her punishment. Like any good servant, he immediately lowered his eyes, mumbling “excuse me, my lady,” as he backed out

the door and closed it behind him. She stood rooted in utter mortification, imagining he was already informing the entire staff of her impending whipping.

Well, she deserved it. She certainly had treated them to quite a display with her tantrum. She bowed her head and carried the strap back to her room, handing it over with another curtsy.

He took the leather strap and looked up at her, as if considering. She felt her face grow hotter and a bit of moisture dripped on her thigh. Dear Lord, what was that? Was that what Teddy had described as her body preparing for sex? But why would the threat of punishment make her body

willing?

“You’ll be bared to me when I punish you. You will accept your punishment without quarrel. If you fight it, I will repeat the same punishment the following day, which will be far worse on a sore bottom.”

She opened her lips, then shut them, not certain if a protest would be considered quarreling.

“You may speak, love.”

Love. He loved her. The memory of his words filled her with another wave of warmth, this time on the inside. It helped her remember this stern man was the same who had just held her. “But what if the punishment is unfair?”

“You may argue your case, but if

I say enough, you will accept my decision.”

Talking about punishment made her feel even more awkward than being punished, and she suddenly longed to be over his knee, receiving whatever it was he thought she deserved, hopefully bringing the return of her husband’s good humor.

She gave another curtsy, bowing her head. “Yes, my lord.”

“You will not reach back and try to cover. If you do, I shall spank the backs of your legs instead, and I promise you will not like that.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Repeat to me the rules of punishment.”

Oh, heavens.

Her insides were pure liquid by now, and her knees barely held her up. Moisture continued to leak from between her legs.

She took a deep breath and willed her voice to be steady. "I will be bared to you. I will not quarrel. I will not reach back and try to cover."

"Good girl."

"Why are you being punished?"

"For throwing a tantrum instead of coming to you with my anger."

"Thank you."

He opened his legs and twisted them toward the bed, patting the knee closest to the bed. "Show me you are sorry."

She never thought she'd be eager to place herself over his knee, but in this case, it was almost a relief to lie over his lap and hide her face in the bed. The relief did not last, however, as she remembered this was not a spanking with his hand or her slipper; this was a strapping, which he had promised would produce tears. He clamped his free leg over the top of her two legs, effectively pinning her in place. She tensed, waiting for the first stripe, but instead she felt his hand, rubbing a circle over her bottom in a warm caress. The wetness between her legs increased.

Confound it, why did she find this so arousing? It was going to hurt and it was utterly humiliating, yet she could

almost drop her pride with Teddy. He had already seen her darkest secret and had not flinched. So what more was it now, to offer her obedience, her submission to him, the man who showed he loved her with both action and word?

A sharp slap brought her out of thought. Teddy began peppering her bottom with rapid smacks, causing her to wiggle under his grasp. He managed her easily, though, with an arm around her waist and his leg holding her legs down. She held her breath, then let it out with a cry, then held it again as the fire began to spread across her vulnerable flesh.

“Oh, Teddy!” she cried.

“Shh,” he said, though his hand continued to rain down on her sorry

bottom. “Take your punishment, Phoebe.”

She clenched her cheeks and struggled, fighting the pain and the continuing onslaught.

“When two people are married they must work together,” he said, never stopping the lesson he was meting out with his hand. “Turning your back on me only makes problems worse.”

She thought of what Kitty had said about his father—how much he had stayed away to avoid his mother, and she realized this was an important issue for Teddy. But what he asked of her seemed almost impossible—it seemed she only knew how to pretend a problem didn’t exist, or she completely lost her temper.

In her family, they'd swept problems under the rug, covering them up with cheery lies. What if she had told her sister about Reddington? Or complained when Maud made her angry? It seemed absolutely impossible to imagine.

Teddy stopped the spanking and rubbed her smarting cheeks. She remembered how he'd forced her to talk the night the prostitute had come into his bedroom. He'd held her over his knee and spanked, questioning her until she'd admitted what she wanted from him.

“Teddy, what if I cannot?”

“Cannot what, my love?”

“Can't talk to you when I'm angry?”

He continued stroking her

bottom, which was beginning to burn even more now that he'd stopped. He squeezed her cheek and shook it a bit, then slapped it.

“Oh!”

“Well, you will learn, little dove. Even if it's over my knee.”

She felt tears stinging her eyes and Teddy began to spank with his hand again. It hurt more after the break, and forgetting his rules, she reached back instinctively to cover her bottom.

“No, Phoebe,” he reminded her. The pain of his hand smarting the backs of her thighs caused her to cry out and snatch her hands back, tucking them under her torso so she would not be tempted again.

* * *

He wanted to spank her long enough with his hand first, so he did not have to strap her overly long to produce tears. Dragging out the beginning of the spanking by asking her to take off her own clothing and repeat the rules also helped bring her closer to surrender. Judging from her question, she was thinking about her punishment and what she might have done differently.

He stopped spanking with his hand and picked up the strap. He considered making her count the strokes out loud, but he wanted her thoughts to remain where they were, not fixed on a certain number. He brought the strap

down, making a stripe at the top of her bottom, just where the cleft began. She howled in pain and he feared the entire house would know he was chastising his wife. But that could not be helped. He laid the second stripe just below the first, and the third fell right in the center of her bottom, across both cheeks.

Bent over his lap as she was, he could not apply the strap with the full swing of his arm, but even so, the leather was leaving puffy raised marks where it struck. He continued making neat lines down her bottom, the last coming across the backs of her thighs, causing her to moan, “No, no, no, no. I didn’t reach!”

He smiled. “You’re right, little dove, you didn’t. I will sometimes still

spank you there to make an impression, but your protest has been heard.”

He striped his way back up her bottom and her moans grew louder.

“I’m sorry! Teddy! Please! Oh! No!”

He striped back down, and she grew quiet again. Eighteen strokes so far. She was close, he could tell. He applied the strap to the juncture where her bottom met her thigh, the place where she would remember his spanking every time she sat. He struck the same place over and over again, five times, six times until he heard a sob. He dropped the strap but continued to spank that same place with his hand, first the right side, then the left, listening to the

sound of her tears erupting in great heaving sobs. He spanked her for another minute, giving her time to release her tears, then rubbed her bottom lightly. It was a deep plum color, with striated marks from the strap.

To his surprise, she pushed herself up immediately, wrapping her arms around him and burying her wet face in his neck. He kissed her head, running his hands over her bare back, the feel of her skin intoxicatingly soft. “Phoebe,” he murmured softly.

“I love you, Teddy,” she said in his ear.

He pulled her legs around his waist so she straddled him, his sex rock hard from the feel of her naked form

against him. She felt it and moved her hips so she pushed the moist slot of her sex over his bulge. He groaned. He had not planned to urge her into sex so soon after her punishment, but she seemed to want it. He hurried to free his length from his trousers, letting it spring out. She wasted no time positioning herself over it, clearly not requiring any encouragement or instruction on the new position.

He gasped when she lifted her hips and sheathed herself over him, her moist heat enveloping his shaft all at once. He cupped her swollen bottom, pulling her into him and she responded eagerly, grinding faster and harder. He began to lose control, the rhythm

growing rough.

“Yes, Teddy,” she urged him and he exploded into climax, yanking her against him and holding her there until he’d filled her with his seed. She did not climax, but did not seem to mind, leaning forward to kiss him. It was an aggressive kiss, the first she’d initiated, and he reveled in the gift.

“Are you sorry you married me now?” he teased.

“Yes, I shall be sorry every time I sit tomorrow.” Her face grew serious and she stroked a finger down his cheek. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“For what?”

She shrugged. “I need you.”

“I need you too, Phoebe.”

* * *

Later that night, she sat brushing her hair, dressed in her nightgown. Her bottom was sore from her spanking, but her heart overflowed with warmth and a desire to please her husband. “Are you going to teach me about the ‘*cada orificio*’ tonight?”

Teddy choked on his warmed milk and gave her an enormous grin. As it had been, they’d stayed in bed until supper, Teddy giving orders for their room to be put back to rights.

Her heart beat against her ribs, quickened by her own boldness and his reaction to it caused a flush of heat to spread across her skin.

“I’d love to,” he said, his voice low and seductive. “But first, I think I’ll call for a bath. It is more pleasant if we’re freshly washed.”

The tub was duly sent for and filled and he dismissed the servants.

“You will bathe first,” he said, lifting the hem of her nightdress, stroking her bare flesh as he slid it up her body and over her head. She caught her breath when she saw the dark, hungry look on his face. She slid into the warm water and sat down. Teddy knelt beside her, picking up the washcloth and stroking it across her chest, then circling her breast with slow, sultry attention. Watching, she could see the emphatic thump of her heart in the way it moved her peaked

nipple. She rested her elbows on the edges of the tub and allowed her head to fall back. Teddy continued his caressing, stroking the cloth over every peak and crevice of her body until he reached the juncture between her thighs. There, he abandoned the cloth, allowing his fingers to glide over the sensitive pleats. One leg jerked in reaction, but she let her knees fall open to him. Teddy teased her, just lightly brushing her intimate folds with feather touches, enough to make her jump and jerk and yearn for more. Heat flooded her inner core and she found herself panting, uncomfortable in a needy sort of way.

“Does she want more?” he murmured, sensing her mounting

distress.

“Who? Oh!” she cried, realizing he was personifying her sex. Embarrassed, she bit her lips, unable to answer him.

“Step out of the bath.”

She stood so quickly she saw stars, but Teddy took her arm and steadied her as she stepped out of the tub and he towed her off with an attention that made her feel as if she'd had too much wine. When she was dry, he said, “I'll just be a moment,” and stripped out of his clothes, stepping into the water.

She stared at him, realizing it was the first time she'd seen him or any other man in full nudity. His chest was broad, dusted with hair, muscles

standing out in bold definition. His manhood was thickened and ready, lengthening even more when he observed her focus. She knelt beside the tub, gingerly reaching her hand in the water to grasp it. Teddy drew in his breath as his length surged in her hand, growing well past her wrist. Emboldened by his reaction, she met his eye, wondering what to do next. His eyes were dark as he wrapped his hand over hers, showing her to grip at the base, then move it down the length of his shaft, over the mushroom head and back up again. She continued after he released his hand, fascinated by the hot pulsing under her fingers, and the power she seemed to wield as she coaxed shaky

breaths from her husband.

“Enough,” he said abruptly, his voice low and guttural. She sat back on her haunches, watching him stand up out of the bath and quickly dry off. He climbed up on the bed, sprawling back on his elbows. “Come, little dove.”

She swallowed, feeling a sudden case of nerves. She crawled up over him, grasping his cock again and slowly lowering her head. “That’s it,” he whispered as she tentatively opened her lips. She placed just the end of it in her mouth, wondering at the contradiction of soft skin over a hard organ. “Yes, Phoebe. Go deeper,” he urged.

She glanced up at his face and, seeing the dark, animal desire there,

opened her jaw and took him deeper. His groan served as her encouragement. She slid her mouth back up, then tested the effect of her tongue on the head of his cock.

“Oh, Phoebe,” he groaned.

She smiled, flicking her tongue faster, watching as a tiny drop of fluid beaded up. She lapped it up, tasting a salty tang, then continued circling the entire head of his cock before she opened her mouth and took him in again, earning another deep groan.

“Phoebe,” he said hoarsely. “Turn around.”

“Pardon?” she asked in confusion, turning to look behind her.

He sat up and reaching for her.

“Give me your legs.”

Still perplexed, she crawled toward his head. His hands took her by the waist and directed her until she was lying upon his chest backward, her bottom facing his head, her mouth at his cock. She bucked when his tongue hit her sex. “Oh!”

A gentle slap fell upon her very sore bottom. “Keep sucking, darling.”

She made a small whimpering sound as she opened her mouth to take in his length, unable to concentrate when his tongue slid between her outer lips. “Oh, Teddy!”

Another slap. “Focus, little dove.”

“How can I when you are

distracting me so?”

Three slaps in the same spot made her yelp. “Naughty wife. Do as you’re told,” he commanded, gripping her hips firmly so she could not move and applying his tongue with vigor. She squirmed and slid her own mouth over his sex with equal vigor, her enthusiasm growing as the need built within her.

When his finger pressed inside her, she froze, listening.

“Go on, naughty girl!” he laughed.

“Oh!” She returned to her duty, hardly able to track what she did as her mouth plunged over his long, hard shaft while his finger plundered her sex. When another finger pressed into her

back hole, she lost her mind completely, her head bobbing, so she took him deep into her throat before pulling off with a cry. Teddy had given a cry of his own and he continued his assault on her nether region—a finger thrusting into each hole, his tongue teasing her frantic sex until she nearly screamed from the sensation and the crashing climax that shook her to the very center of her being.

Wasting no time, Teddy slapped her backside again, slipping out from under her and pulling her to her hands and knees. In a moment he was plunging into her so deeply she thought she'd split in two and then his triumphant cry echoed through the room.

Chapter Seven

In retrospect, she should have recognized the gray mare tethered in the stable. Returning from a carriage drive the following day, her hand clasped firmly in Teddy's, the idea of a guest came as a pleasant surprise, and she alighted from the carriage with a smile.

Standish greeted them at the door. "Lord Reddington is here to see you, my lord. He has been here all morning, insisting he wait for your arrival."

Teddy's face snapped closed. "Go upstairs to our bedroom, love. I will see to your brother-in-law."

She nodded, mounting the steps slowly, her mind whirling. What could Reddington want? The last they had seen him had been that horrible night when Teddy had nearly choked him to death. Could it be he'd come for some kind of revenge? She paused at the top of the steps. If so, she must intervene.

But Teddy clearly hadn't wanted her within listening range, or he would have suggested she wait in the parlor rather than sending her all the way up to their room. She clutched her fingers, paralyzed with indecision. The memory of Reddington's apoplectic face when they'd last seen him spurred her to action. She took the stairs back down swiftly, and stood outside Teddy's

study, listening.

She heard nothing. Turning the handle slowly, like a thief entering a darkened house, she opened the door just a crack and peered in. What she saw made her throw the door open and bolt through it.

Teddy was on his knees, bleeding from his temple, a pistol pointed inches from the middle of his forehead. His expression was one of cold fury.

No.

Her heart beat in her throat. “What are you doing?” she gasped.

“Killing your husband, Phoebe. Demanding satisfaction.” There was something decidedly wrong about

Reddington. He didn't look angry, he looked crazed. His cheeks were flushed and he was sweating profusely, moisture running down his sideburns and wetting his collar and cravat.

She would have to somehow calm him. She took several tentative steps in his direction. "Killing him will not bring you satisfaction, Clayton," she said, keeping her voice low and even.

His eyes shot up to her, surprised at her use of his first name.

She continued her slow approach. "What you want is me, isn't it?"

Reddington's gaze darted from her face to his intended target and back again. He shifted on his two feet and

swiped at the sweat with the back of his sleeve. Then his arm shot out and grasped her by the hair. She gasped.

“Don’t touch her!” Teddy growled, but when he made to move, Reddington tapped his head with the muzzle of the gun.

She squirmed in his grasp, trying to alleviate the pain in her scalp. He pulled her closer and yanked her head back so her face gazed up at his.

“You chose this dandy over me?” Reddington sneered, giving Teddy a kick to the stomach.

“Leave him alone!” she screamed. “You were married,” she improvised desperately. “I wanted to stay, but you’re married to Maud, my

own sister—how could I choose you?”

Reddington looked confused, his face overly expressive as it flashed to a childlike hope before the cruel coldness returned.

“I would have rather had you than a dozen Mauds! But it’s too late now,” his face grew redder, “now that you’ve been—you’ve been—*sullied!*” He emitted a spray of spit directed toward Teddy with the last word.

Teddy’s face was positively murderous.

“No,” she lied. “We keep separate bedrooms. I—I offered him his freedom with his mistresses. I only married him for the title.”

Reddington stared at her now, a

pleased, calculating gleam in his eye.

She darted her eyes nervously at Teddy, hoping he understood her tactic.

“You’re hurting me,” she mewled softly, fluttering her lashes a bit.

He released his grip on her hair.

“Let him go, he’s nothing to me,” she pleaded. “Leave Fenton, I’ll go with you.”

“The hell you—”

The crack of Reddington striking Teddy on the side of his head with the muzzle of the gun cut off her husband’s protest.

“No!” she shrieked as Teddy fell onto his side, his eyelids fluttering, then closing.

Dear God, let him be alive.

Please, let him be alive, still.

“That is not necessary, my lord! Please calm yourself and think about this situation. If you kill Fenton, you’ll be hanged for manslaughter.” Bile rose in her throat, but she kept her voice steady. She plucked at his sleeve. “I don’t want you hanged, Clayton,” she lied, making her eyes wide and innocent, trying to appear like the naïve girl she had been before he’d nearly ruined her. She slid her arm through his elbow. “Come. I’ll go back with you. Let’s leave here before he wakes.”

Reddington glanced doubtfully at Teddy, then at her. She again offered her best doe-eyed gaze. He frowned and extricated his arm from where she held

his sleeve. A wave of disappointment and dread coursed through her, but then he gripped her upper arm with a bruising clasp and started toward the door, dragging her beside him.

Thank God—Teddy would be safe.

Reddington slid the pistol into his jacket pocket, then tilted the pocket so she could feel the hard muzzle pressing into her side. “Let’s go. If you say anything to the servants—anything at all—I’ll shoot you, and then I’ll come back and shoot him, too. Understand?”

She nodded, her corset constricting her ribs so tightly she felt lightheaded. He eased his grip on her arm, taking her elbow in a feigned

gentlemanly gesture and leading her out through the house. The hard metal of the pistol pressed through the layers of her dress and corset, keeping her on edge as she imagined trying to make eye contact with Standish. But Standish was not there, and they let themselves out without an opportunity for her to signal to anyone about Teddy's unconscious condition, or her predicament.

In the stable, Reddington eyed his mare.

"We can take the carriage," she offered quickly, walking toward it.

Hensley, the driver, came bustling forward. "To the Reddington's house, my lady?"

"No," Reddington clipped at the

same time she'd chirped "yes."

She didn't know what Reddington had in mind for her, but she'd already decided the safest place would be his home, where her sister and the servants might protect her and where Teddy would surely look for her. *If Teddy lived.*

She pressed back the image of Teddy lying still on the floor. At this moment she needed to keep Reddington from slitting her throat and dumping her in the Thames. "Take me home," she appealed to Reddington, as if his house were still 'home' to her, and cringing at the same time wondering what Hensley would think of all this.

Reddington blinked.

“Maud will understand my marriage just didn’t work,” she appealed.

Reddington gave a decisive nod. “To my residence,” he ordered in the authoritative voice that made his servants scurry. She felt faint again with relief.

“Yes, my lord,” Hensley said, not able to hide his searching glance at her. He helped her into the carriage and Reddington followed.

Reddington sat beside her and picked up her hand, squeezing it so tightly she had to bite her lip to keep from gasping. How different from the idle manner Teddy had of playing with her fingers in his lap, or massaging the

thick muscle of her thumb. Reddington's hold was cruel, possessive.

The ride was short—too short. She wanted to beg Hensley to stay, to somehow communicate her plight to him, but she could think of no way to do it. Instead, she dismissed him and followed the brutal squeeze at her elbow as Reddington led her inside, directly to his study.

The knot in her belly twisted ever tighter as she looked at the familiar surroundings, the smell reminding her of the oppressive life she'd led there. The flush in his cheeks confirmed her fear—he planned to have her straight away.

* * *

Phoebe.

He scrambled up from the floor too quickly, the rushing in his head causing him to topple back to one knee before he staggered to his feet.

Where was she? Where had they gone?

He bolted out of the room, ignoring the dizzying pain in his head.

“Phoebe?” he bellowed.

“She’s gone, my lord. With Lord Reddington,” said Sarah, one of the maids.

He cursed. “How long ago?”

“Well, it was just after they left your study, my lord.”

“When was that?” he snapped, unable to contain his panic.

Sarah looked frightened. “My lord, you’re bleeding!”

“How long ago?” he shouted.

“Just a little while. I don’t know—fifteen minutes?”

Standish hustled forward at the sound of the shouting. “Send a man to the magistrate’s office, tell him I’ll need a Bow Street constable to meet me at Lord Reddington’s. And send Doyle and Hartford with me now. I’ll meet them in the stable.”

“Yes, my lord. What has happened?”

“Reddington has kidnapped my wife,” he snarled through clenched teeth. Running back to his study, he retrieved the pistol he’d taken from Reddington’s

that first night he met Phoebe and slid it into his jacket pocket.

His carriage was gone, with Reddington's mare still waiting. He mounted her, waiting for his two manservants, who were both young and agile enough to serve as his backup muscle.

When they'd arrived and found their mounts, the three took off, urging the horses as fast as possible on the busy streets of London. He prayed she was at Reddington's. If not, he did not know where to begin to look. When they arrived, he cursed at not finding his carriage there. But perhaps Reddington or Phoebe had dismissed Hensley. He dismounted, palming the pistol and

striding to the door where he made a sharp rap.

When the door swung open, he leveled the pistol directly in the doorman's face. "Take me to my wife," he hissed.

The servant's eyes flew wide and he stumbled back, an advantage Teddy quickly took, following him into the house and looking round as he trained his ears. He poked the doorman with the muzzle. "Where?" he hissed.

"In—in the study, my lord."

He did not wait to be shown in or announced, taking long strides down the corridor with Doyle and Hartford following closely behind. The door was locked. "Help me," he said, throwing his

shoulder against the door. “One, two, three...” He and Doyle smashed their shoulders against the door, to no avail. “Again, one, two, three.” This time it crashed open at the same time as a shot rang out and hot pain seared through his upper arm.

“Teddy!” Phoebe screamed, wrenching free of Reddington, her dress and corset gaping open to reveal one breast as she dashed forward. He caught her in his arms, pulling her against him with the arm that had been shot, aiming the pistol and firing at the enraged Reddington, who was already launching himself toward them.

The bullet caught him in the throat, and he fell in a heap at their feet

with a strange gurgling sound.

In an instant, the doorway filled with servants, whom Doyle headed off by shouting, "Stay back! No one comes in. It's over. The constables are on their way."

Phoebe clung to him, trembling, seeming unable to speak. "It's all right, it's over," he repeated Doyle's words to her in a whisper. "Everything is all right. He'll never touch you again."

"I'm sorry, Teddy," came her anguished reply and his heart constricted.

"It's not your fault. None of it is. The man had gone mad."

Maud pushed her way into the room and let out a bloodcurdling

scream.

“Shut up, Maud!” Phoebe snapped, lifting her head from his shoulder. He felt a surge of pride, knowing it was not her habit to stand up to her sister.

“Get her out of here,” he ordered the crowd of servants. “She should not have to see this.”

“What happened?” Maud croaked, her face white.

“He shot me, so I shot him back. He tried to steal my wife.”

Maud’s eyes widened and she covered her mouth with her hands, holding back a sob that shook her chest.

“Oh, Phoebe!” she cried, coming toward them. He thought he saw regret in

her expression, confirming his suspicion that she had known what her husband had been doing to her sister. “Phoebe,” she repeated, looking lost.

“Go lie down, Maud,” Phoebe said dully.

Maud nodded and left the room, sniffing.

Phoebe pulled away. “You said he shot you—” she trailed off, taking in his arm, which was now dripping with blood. He caught her as she swooned, staggering, as his own feet were less than steady. Hartford rescued them both by drawing a chair up under him so he could collapse into it, Phoebe inert in his arms.

He lost track of time, vaguely

noticing Doyle and Hartford closing the doors, telling the servants nothing should be touched until the Bow Street Runners appeared.

Phoebe's eyes fluttered open and she sat up on his knee. "Teddy, you were shot!"

"It's nothing, sweetheart. Are you all right?"

"Teddy, you were *shot*." She turned to Doyle. "Send for a doctor, straight away!"

"Already done so, my lady," Doyle answered.

"I'm all right, Phoebe. I'm all right. I promise." He spoke the last two words softly, as tears began to spill down her cheeks.

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

“Teddy...” Her voice was soft, full of emotion. He loved the sound of his name in that tone.

Two constables arrived from the magistrate at Bow Street. Doyle and Hartford gave the story as they knew it, and Phoebe filled in her part. He was beginning to shiver, feeling weak from shock. The doctor arrived in the midst of it and Phoebe took charge, ushering him over.

“Here he is, doctor. He’s been shot in the arm.” Phoebe had already eased his jacket and waistcoat off, leaving the blood-soaked shirt on under the linen the maids had fetched to press

against his wound.

“It’s just a nick,” he said, giving Phoebe a wink to ease her tension.

“I’d like to get you to a bed, my lord.”

“Well, I prefer to go there with my wife, but if you insist, I will take you to my bed just as soon as we can get to it.”

“Teddy!” Phoebe chided, though he could hear a trace of mirth in her voice.

The doctor chuckled. “Well, I’m glad to hear you’re still in humor, my lord. Let’s have a look at this,” he said, ripping the sleeve from his shirt to expose the wound.

He winced as the doctor lifted

his arm and twisted it to inspect it from different angles.

“You’re very lucky, my lord. Very lucky, indeed. The bullet has only gone through the fleshy part of your arm, no bone or major arteries seem affected, and I see no trace of lead still in you.”

Phoebe breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank God!” she exclaimed.

This is what is to have a wife. Warmth filled his chest, as his vision dimmed.

* * *

She sat between their bed and the window, watching the street below while Teddy slept. The doctor had seen him settled in his bed the night before

with his wound cleaned and bandaged, leaving instructions for the changing of the bandages and applying of poultices. Teddy had slept all through the night, through the changing of his bandages and now past noon without waking. Mrs. Reeves, the housekeeper, said not to worry, that he hadn't a fever and was resting well, but still Phoebe fretted.

To think he could have been the one shot dead the night before chilled her to the bone. And she could not shake the sickness in the pit of her stomach over Reddington touching her again. She had been tormented in the moment, deciding if it was best to fight him or let him have his way with her. Like a coward, she had chosen to let him have

his way, reasoning it might be her only chance of escaping alive. Now, she felt she had betrayed her husband.

Turning to glance at him, she was startled to find him watching her.

“You are awake!”

“You look beautiful in the morning light,” he said with the soft murmur of a lover.

“It is hardly morning, love, it is half past two!”

He smiled. “That’s the first time you have called me ‘love.’”

She stood from her stool and perched beside him on the bed. She ran her forefinger down his cheek. “Love,” she repeated softly. “How do you feel?”

“All right. A bit of a headache,

that's all. Nothing for you to worry about." He lifted his thumb to her forehead, stroking the line between her brows.

She caught his hand and brought it to her lips, kissing it.

He grinned. "I should get shot more often—I had no idea you could be so attentive."

She smiled and kissed him. "Silly man."

His face turned serious. "I am so sorry I did not get to hold you last night." He looked at her with concern. "I fell asleep before they all left the bedroom, didn't I?"

She nodded.

"Tell me what happened after I

blackened out in my study.”

She took a breath, praying Teddy would forgive her. “I told him I would go home with him, that I would leave you. I’m sorry—he just seemed so insane—”

Teddy stiffened. “And then what happened?” he prompted.

She smoothed her skirts over her thighs. “He took us to his home in your carriage.” Remembering Hensley had overheard what she had said to Reddington, and fearing he might repeat it to Teddy, she explained. “I told him to take me there, that my marriage had not worked. I had hoped Maud or the servants might help me there, you see...”

Teddy’s face was dark. “And

then what?"

She fidgeted with her hands in her lap, fearful of his mistrust. "He took me directly to his study." Out of nowhere, tears sprang to her eyes. "I let him touch me. I did not fight, just like I did not fight him the first time. I was a complete coward!"

Teddy wrapped his arms around her, pulling her torso across his so he held her cradled in his arms. "No, you are not a coward. You were very, very wise. He had a gun and he would have killed you if you had fought him, Phoebe. You did the right thing, and I am proud of you."

A sob of relief broke in her throat. "I felt I had betrayed you," she

wept into his chest.

“Shh. No, you saved my life and your own with your quick wits.” He rocked her side to side in his arms. “I am so sorry I did not protect you from him. I am so sorry.”

She sniffed and lifted her head. “But you did, Teddy,” she croaked. “You saved me.”

“Did I—get there in time?” His question was barely more than a whisper.

She nodded. “Yes, my lord.” She saw relief on his face as she nestled her cheek against his chest. “Are you angry with me?”

“Of course not. You are the victim in all this—you always have

been. Reddington alone is to blame.”

She exhaled. She had a great deal to learn from him about trust. He had never doubted her for a moment. “And Reddington’s dead now.” Which reminded her of another nagging anxiety—the fate of her sister Maud.

“I suppose Maud will have to move in with us now, will she not?” she asked tentatively.

He hesitated. “Is that what you want?”

“Well, I do not think she will be able to stay at Reddington’s—the title and property all pass to a cousin of some sort, since she was never able to conceive.”

“Yes, I understand it will fall to

me to support her, but do you wish her to live here, with us?"

A sharp stab of jealousy caused her to set her teeth. "You promised you would never..."

Teddy chuckled. "It is a promise I intend to keep. But we don't have to have her here with us, love. I could buy her a widow's cottage, or send her to live with my mother. She does not have to live here if you do not want her."

She felt her cheeks grow warm. "Is it terrible not to want her?"

"I certainly do not want her!" Teddy exclaimed, causing her to laugh with relief.

She tipped her head up to gaze at him. "I adore you, Lord Fenton."

“And I, you, Lady Fenton.” He bent his head to hers and met her lips with a soft, adoring kiss.

Chapter Eight

Phoebe's pale face was pinched with nerves. Perched on the settee in Teddy's study, she clutched her first volume of poetry, which was fresh from the press. She leafed through the pages with a glassy-eyed, frantic quality.

"Phoebe," he said gently. "You don't need to keep preparing. You already picked out the poems you are going to read."

She ignored him and continued the quick fluttering of pages.

"Phoebe."

She did not look up or stop her manic behavior.

He opened the drawer to his desk and pulled out the ruler he'd gotten to replace the broken one, smiling to himself. She hardly noticed him sit down beside her, but when he upended her over his knee, she gave a howl of protest.

“Teddy! What are you doing?”

He lifted her skirts over her head and slipped his hand in the slit of her drawers, rubbing lazy circles over her bare skin.

“Teddy, I don't have time for this!”

He opened the slit of her drawers wide and picked up the ruler. “That was the wrong thing to say, little dove,” he scolded, bringing the wooden

ruler down with a snap.

“Ouch! Teddy! Stop!”

He continued to spank with the ruler. “No, love. I think this will help you focus and relax. And besides, this is how it all began, do you remember?”

She wriggled on his lap, her frustration obvious. “How what began?” she asked, sounding exasperated.

“Your book. Remember? I found you at my desk, and—”

“Yes, yes, I remember! Ouch! Teddy, do stop!”

“You should know by now, telling me to stop will do you no good. If I intend to spank you, I shall.”

Her squirming bottom was turning a lovely shade of pink and the

inviting sight of her dewy sex made his cock grow hard. He stopped the assault on her quivering cheeks and ran his finger down the cleft of her buttocks. “I have not taught you to take me here yet, have I?” he asked, circling the little flower of her anus. She gave a little shriek and clamped her cheeks closed, holding them together. He picked the ruler back up and applied it with more force for five strokes.

She continued to squeeze, now twisting back to try to cover with her hand.

He made a tsking sound. “What is my rule about covering?” he asked, applying the ruler to the backs of her thighs, which caused her to howl.

“I’m sorry! Teddy, *please*! Do stop!”

“Tell me what you fear about the reception.”

“I fear they will hate me!”

He gave her three sharp spansks with the ruler. “They will *not* hate you. What else?”

“I fear I will lose my place when I am reading.”

He gave her two more swats. “I forbid you to lose your place,” he said with mock authority.

She giggled.

“What else?”

“I fear Maud will say something to make me feel like a goose.”

He rubbed her bottom. “If Maud

says one thing to demean you, I shall drag her into the study and apply a ruler to her backside until she screams for mercy.”

She giggled. “I would *almost* enjoy that. Except I seem to recall you have spanked her before and the thought makes me mad with jealousy.”

He felt a pang of regret. “I wish I had never, ever had your sister. I am sorry the thought hurts you.”

“Well, if you had not had my sister, I would not be your wife, now would I? So I am not sorry. But I am sorry you are spanking me now. Are you quite finished?”

He gave her several hard smacks with the ruler. “Impertinent! I think the

lady needs to be put in her place.” He lifted her off his lap. “Get on your knees,” he said sternly.

Her face was flushed from being bent over his knee, making the blue of her eyes stand out as she blinked at him in surprise.

“You heard me. On your knees, bending over the settee.”

She slowly bent to comply as he stood up and lifted her skirts once more, pulling down her drawers to expose her plump, chastened bottom. He knelt behind her and reached his hand around the front of her to stroke her sex, eliciting a shiver and moan. Her slit was ripe for the taking, swollen and dripping with her natural juices. He made slow

circles around her nub of pleasure, feeling it harden and lengthen under his fingers. Applying a generous amount of saliva to the head of his cock, he parted her cheeks.

“Teddy!”

He responded with a small slap to her sex. “Naughty wife. Take your punishment.”

“O-oh!” she grunted as he applied pressure to the tight ring of her anus as his fingers moved rapidly over her slick sex.

“Open for me. Push back a little,” he coaxed. “That is it. Good girl.” He breached the opening and slid in.

Phoebe gave a strangled cry.

He increased the tempo of his fingers in her sex and her muscles relaxed and opened for him. “Good girl,” he repeated, moving slowly, gently.

“Yes, Teddy! Teddy!” she gasped.

The idea of taking his wife in this manner was as intoxicating to him as the feel of it, and he found he was ready to climax remarkably soon. Slapping at her sex with quick little spans, he drove himself to climax, her keening, pleading cries the music that sang him home. When he reached his summit, he gave a cry and Phoebe tightened her muscles with her own, constricting his cock in a stranglehold that made him shoot his

seed with a ferocity he had not expected.

When it passed, he eased carefully out of her. "Sweet Phoebe," he crooned softly. "My little poet. You are amazing."

She twisted to smile over her shoulder at him, her hair falling out of her pins so the silken waves fell over her flushed face.

"Do not move," he said softly.

"Why not?" she asked, looking perplexed.

"Because I wish to remember the way you look just now—you are so beautiful."

She laughed. "Somehow, I doubt this is how I ought to show up at the Westerfields' for the reception," she

said.

He smiled fondly. “Probably not. Do you feel better now?”

“Much,” she said and it was clear she did. Her face and shoulders had relaxed and there was a glow to her now that made her look lovelier than he’d ever seen. “Is it time to go?”

* * *

Teddy stroked her hair back from her face. “Yes, love. Why don’t you go get ready while I call the carriage?” He helped her to her feet, and held her elbow as she walked unsteadily at first out of the study. Her bottom was warm from the spanking, and her anus felt sore as well, but a sense of bliss was

coursing through her body.

She climbed the stairs on wobbly legs and sat at the dressing table to repin her hair. All her nerves about the reading and reception the Westerfields were holding for her that afternoon were gone. Instead, she was filled with a calm sense of grace. The peace stayed with her for the carriage ride and meeting the guests Lady Westerfield had invited.

She did not even swoon when Lady Westerfield introduced her to the entire gathering and invited her to read. It was as if she floated on a cloud looking down at them all—Teddy, Wynn, Kitty—three new people in her life who truly cared about her. People she was beginning to believe she could

trust. They were all smiling at her encouragingly. Maud was there, too, but she did not ruffle her. As if in a dream, she opened her book of poetry and began to read:

Bulrush

*Today I'll set my insides free—
Seep fuzz from ears and mouth
Explode cotton from the crown
of my head.*

*It's been a long summer,
sucking sunlight, storing the
Season. I've bided my time,
keeping the outsides neat.*

*How the ladies will stare at my
weasel-pop spring.*

She read several more poems before returning to her husband's side, where he took her into his arms and kissed her full on the lips in front of everyone.

“You were splendid.”

“I love you, Lord Fenton.”

He smiled, tracing her lower lip with his thumb.

“Thank you for this—for publishing my poems.”

“I did not publish your poems—the credit only belongs to you,” he said, gazing at her as if she were the most interesting lady in the room.

She melted at the attention. After two months of marital bliss, she still could not believe he was really hers,

and yet there he was, doting on her, taking charge of her in the bedroom, demanding she give her whole self to him and giving his entire being back to her. “The only act I will take credit for was tricking you into marrying me, Lord Fenton, for it was the most clever move I’ve ever made.”

He smiled indulgently. “The damsel who rescued her knight. I shall never live it down.” He bent his head to deliver another kiss. “You saved my life in more ways than one that night, little dove.” He turned her around so she faced away in the direction of the crowd and gave her bottom a little pat. “Now go and be congratulated by all your new fans.”

The End

Disobedience at the Dressmaker's

Note: This is a bonus short story set in the world shared by The Westerfield Affair and The Reddington Scandal.

“Kitty,” Lord Westerfield said, a deep furrow between his brows. “Didn’t I just forbid you to have any new ball gowns made without first asking my consent?” He was holding a bill in his hand, which must have just arrived from the dressmaker’s.

A knot twisted in her stomach. She’d fretted all week over her brash

rebellion, in which she had purposely disobeyed him out of ire. She'd seen the folly of her actions as soon she'd acted, but by then it was already too late. Her ribs pressed against the boning of her corset as she filled her lungs and blew out her breath. All the snappish retorts she'd prepared to throw at him on that day dissolved and no words rose to take their place. "Oh—well... I must have ordered those before you forbade it," she stammered.

He frowned at the date on the bill and then looked up, eyes blazing. "Are you *lying* to me?" he demanded incredulously.

She winced, shocked back into good sense. "Yes, that was a lie, but I

wish it were true,” she confessed with her more characteristic frankness. “I...” she pursed her lips. “I ordered the gowns without permission because I was angry with you. It was a foolish thing to do.”

Harry looked mystified. “Angry? Over what?”

Her jaw tightened, her anger still unabated. “*The letters*,” she hissed. “In your dresser.”

Comprehension dawned on his face. A week earlier, she’d discovered a box of letters in his drawer written in a female scrawl, calling him ‘dearest Harry.’ Her fingers had turned ice cold as she plucked out the pages one by one, turning them over to catch damning

declarations of love. “Harry?” she’d croaked, her throat constricted. “What are these?”

He’d glanced over from where he was donning his cufflinks and smiled, as if a box of letters from another woman was something amusing. “Ah, those are from Catherine Hart, my childhood sweetheart.”

“Who?” she’d demanded.

“My first lover. A girl from the village where I grew up.”

Her fingers had trembled as she unfolded one of the letters, scanning for a date. Harry appeared entirely unconcerned. “Are you still in contact with her?”

He had snorted. “Do not be

ridiculous. I went to university and she married a village boy. I haven't even seen her in at least ten years."

"Throw them away," she'd demanded, thrusting the box at him.

"What? No. I like to remember."

Her heart had slammed against her ribs. "Then I will throw them out. There is no reason for you to keep them!"

"I wish to keep them, Kitty. Now put them back," he had commanded, his voice and gaze growing firm.

She had stared at him, angry heat rolling over her in waves, alternating with chills.

Seeing her defiance, he had pointed back at the dresser and raised an

eyebrow. "Put them back, Kitty."

He looked at her now, considering, the angles of his face still hardened from anger. "Go and fetch the letters," he ordered.

"What?"

He did not repeat himself, but merely leveled her with a stare that turned the soles of her feet itchy. She whirled with a toss of her hair and marched out of the room, defiantly obedient. When she returned with the letters, he had taken a seat on the settee, from which he beckoned her. She thrust the bundle of letters into his hand, the skin of her face tightened with emotion. He flung them into the fire without a word.

She spun around to witness their demise, surprised at this unexpected turn. Silence stretched between them as she stared at the curling pages, sensing his gaze upon her. A tug on her wrist pulled her down into his lap.

“Kitty,” he began, a caress in his voice. “I’m sorry. I did not mean to hurt you with those. I thought you knew that you are the only woman I have ever loved.”

Her eyes filled with tears, but pride made her look stubbornly away. He caught her face and turned it, tenderness in his gaze. “I should have allowed you to throw them away. I apologize. She means nothing to me—it was a fond memory of coming into my

manhood, but I can see how keeping those letters would offend you.” He stroked her lower lip with his thumb. “I was madly jealous when I thought you had feelings for Fenton,” he said, referring to her best friend’s brother with whom she had once purposely sparked Harry’s jealousy. “I should have realized you would feel the same way.”

Her chin quivered and she lowered it to hide the betrayal of emotion, but his hand cupped and lifted it. “You were angry so you punished me by ordering dresses?” She thought she detected a trace of amusement on his face.

“Well, I was defying you. I have no doubt it is my backside that will be

punished,” she said wryly.

“If I had known you were willing to get your bottom blistered over those letters, I would’ve burned them when you asked me the first time.”

Her face grew warm. “Thank you,” she mumbled.

He leaned back on the settee, his fingers interlaced around her waist. “What should you have done, instead?”

She swallowed and lifted her eyes to his. “I should have told you how angry I was.”

He nodded. “You must remember I am daft when it comes to understanding women.”

She nodded. They’d had this conversation before.

“How shall I punish you?”

She chewed her lip. Was this a real question? Or rhetorical? She stole a glance at his handsome face. He seemed to be awaiting an answer.

“With a very small spanking?” she suggested.

His lips twitched, but he shook his head. “I don’t think so, kitten. Not a very small one. You disobeyed me and you lied. It was the lie that most offended me.”

She shook her head. “That was very foolish. I apologize.”

He nodded. “If you had not come clean immediately, I would switch you,” he said, threatening the implement that most terrified her. “I think I will spank

you once for the lie and once for the dresses.”

She shuddered.

“Come, let’s go to the bedroom,” he said, nudging her to stand. He wrapped an arm around her to guide her out, as if he knew that her knees wobbled beneath her. “Don’t swoon on me,” he murmured in her ear. When they reached their room, he turned her around and unhooked her dress and corset. “Take off all your clothes and bend over the side of the bed,” he commanded, then left.

The air in the room seemed to leave with him. Kitty stood in the emptiness, needy of his presence despite her mounting fear of the two spankings

he'd promised. With effort, she made the statue of her body move, stripping her clothing and bending over the bed as he commanded, cringing at the vulnerability of her position, her bared bottom facing the door so that anyone who entered or was passing by when her husband entered might see it.

* * *

Harry fetched a large wooden spoon from the kitchen, earning shocked looks from the cook and serving girl. He opened the bedroom door and drew in his breath at the intoxicating sight of his wife prostrate over the bed. It was this very view that had tempted him into taking her before they married, adding to

the scandal surrounding their engagement.

His Lady Westerfield was maddening and frustrating and absolutely adorable. He loved her with his whole heart, and he regretted that his actions had hurt her. Still, he couldn't allow her misbehavior to go unpunished. He shut the door and stood behind her, running his hand over the soft skin of her bottom. "How many strokes, Kitty?"

"Ten?" she suggested hopefully.

He chuckled. "I don't think so. Let's say fifty for the lie, and we'll deal with the dresses when they arrive. You can put them on and prance around for me. Do you know what they do to horses to make them show better?"

Kitty turned to look over her shoulder, a wrinkle between her brows. “No.”

“They put a piece of ginger in their arse. It’s called figging. It makes them step lively. I imagine it will make for a memorable experience.”

“Har-ry,” Kitty groaned, burying her face in the quilt and squeezing her cheeks together. He smothered a laugh and gave her bottom a slap, the sound echoing through the room as her body absorbed the impact. He gave her several more slaps with his hand and then switched to the spoon, applying it swiftly, the small surface area making it necessary to repeat the blows in close proximity to cover the lower half of her

bottom.

“Ow! Harry!” she protested. After twenty smacks, Kitty reached back with both hands, covering her reddened cheeks, forcing him to stop short to avoid striking her fingers. He lowered his aim and smacked the backs of her thighs instead, earning a howl of protest.

“Kitty, go stand in the corner,” he said.

Kitty scrambled up, looking remorseful. “I’m so sorry,” she pleaded, and rushed to hide her nose where the walls met, her chastised bottom showing the color from his spanking. “I’ll be good, I promise. I won’t cover.”

He smiled and had to steel himself not to go soft on her. After

letting her wait for several minutes, he stood behind her. “You silly, silly woman,” he murmured, wrapping his arms around her from behind. It took great restraint not to explore her bare breasts or stroke her silky skin, but her punishment was not finished.

“Go and climb onto your forearms and knees,” he ordered, guiding her back toward the bed, enjoying the blush that spread across her face. She obeyed, lifting her hips in the humbling position, her knees spread to reveal the tender pink heart of her sex. He closed his eyes to marshal his resolve and then began to reapply the spoon to her backside, the backs of her thighs, and even the tender flesh of her

inner thighs. She yelped and whimpered, but true to her promise, held still like a good girl.

When the fifty strokes had been duly applied, he left her in position a few extra minutes to suffer in humiliation and anticipation of further punishment. When he touched her back, she jumped. He pulled her to her side and kicked off his shoes to curl his body around hers.

She took his hand and pulled it up to cover her breast, holding it place with her own. “Your naughty wife is very sorry,” she said, her voice thick. He chuckled and pinched her nipple.

“Tell me that you still love me,” she said, rolling to face him.

“Of course I still love you,” he

murmured. “I’m sorry that I hurt you with those letters. I just—didn’t understand what they meant to you.”

The tears she had not wept during her spanking now welled in her eyes. That they had come with his apology and not with his punishment made his heart constrict. “Please don’t cry—it pains me to see you cry.”

“I can’t help it,” she sniffed, the tears rolling from her eyes on a diagonal down her face.

“All right, all right, cry, little kitten. Get it all out,” he said, stroking her hair and arms, holding her close until she began to press her hips against him in a way that did not seem to reflect sadness.

He nuzzled her neck and she looked up at him, eyelashes wet, but eyes hungry. He reached around and cupped her bottom, feeling the heat from her spanking. “This is the bottom of a very naughty wife. Do you know what happens to naughty wives with sore bottoms?”

She giggled. “What?”

“This is what happens,” he growled, roughly squeezing her punished cheeks as he rolled on top of her, smothering her mouth with the promise of a heated kiss.

* * *

The delivery of three beautiful ball gowns might normally have been an

exciting occurrence, but in this case, Kitty groaned. “Take them upstairs and put them away in my trunk,” she ordered her maid.

“You don’t want to try them on first?” her maid exclaimed in surprise.

She glanced over her shoulder toward the study where her husband was reading, hoping he hadn’t heard, only to find him leaning in the doorway with a satisfied smirk. Her heart did a backflip.

“No, not this time, thank you,” she said quickly.

“Leave them on the bed,” Harry instructed the maid, then gave her a heavy-lidded gaze. “I am looking forward to seeing you try them on for me.”

She squeezed her buttocks together, remembering clearly what he had in mind. “I had hoped you had forgotten about that. Surely you’ve forgiven me by now?”

He walked forward and put his arms around her waist, brushing a kiss against her neck. “Certainly, darling. But that doesn’t mean I won’t follow through on a promised punishment.”

Just the word ‘punishment’ made her heart beat harder against her ribs and she clicked her lips nervously. “When? Today?”

He smiled broadly, enjoying her discomfort. “Right now. As soon as I make a visit to the kitchen.”

She lifted her chin, realizing

there was nothing to do but make the best of it. “Fine. I’ll be waiting upstairs for you.”

Perhaps it would not be as horrible as it sounded. But she found herself stomping her feet a bit on the way up the stairs. She couldn’t believe he was actually going to stick ginger up her arse like a horse!

Her maid was waiting for her, the dresses laid out on the bed. One was a navy, another a maroon. The last was a dark green. She had given the dressmaker specific design elements to include, and they had turned out perfectly.

“Shall I help you out of your day dress, my lady?” her maid asked.

She sighed, turning around to offer her back. "Yes, please." When she was divested of the dress, she told her maid that Harry would help her with the rest. Fortunately, it was not such an odd pronouncement, as it was a quirk of her husband's that he preferred to be the one to undress and dress her. She smiled thinking of the dark intensity, the almost reverence with which he disrobed her, as if unlacing her corset was a privilege to be savored. Yes, he sometimes punished her, but it was with that same passion and was always followed by the most tender care.

He'd been looking forward to this punishment, which had irritated her on her way to the bedroom, but now

made her soften. It couldn't be so horrible if it caused such a gleam in his eye. She looked at herself in the glass and pulled the pins from her hair, rubbing her lips together to bring out their natural color. She did not remove her corset, since it would be needed for trying on the dresses, but she did remove her drawers, leaving only the stockings and garters on below her waist. Then she curled up on the bed between the dresses to wait.

Harry opened the door and leered appreciatively at the sight of her. His eyes had gone dark and she could see a bulge tenting his trousers. "That's my kitten," he murmured.

He walked straight to her,

leaning over the bed to press a hard kiss on her mouth as his hand delved inside her corset to seek her breast. Then he pulled abruptly away, shaking himself, as if not wishing to be sidetracked. He tossed one of the dresses on top of another to make room for himself and sat down, patting his lap. She crawled over it obediently.

His hand came down on her bottom with a loud crack and she jumped. He continued to pepper her backside with spanks.

When he struck her thigh, she protested, "Harry! Unfair!"

He gave a low chuckle. "Yes, kitten, but I could not resist. Besides, you might prefer it to what is coming

next.”

She squeezed her buttocks together so tightly her legs lifted straight out.

He gave her cheek a pinch and held it. “None of that, or I’ll give you a slippering. Relax this,” he said, shaking the pinched flesh.

She released the muscular contraction slowly.

“That is it,” he encouraged warmly. He kneaded her bottom, causing the tingling warmth he had created on the surface of her backside to spread into her core. She opened her thighs slightly in hopes he might reward her there. Instead, he parted her two cheeks, spreading them wide. She flinched and

started to squeeze again, but he slapped her right between the legs, smarting her sex with the reprimand.

“Ooh!”

Before she could recover, her cheeks were parted and a hard, cool object was pressed against her anus. She froze, listening intently.

“Relax and open for it,” Harry commanded.

Instead she started to squeeze again, but he pressed insistently so that she was forced to open to avoid pain. It felt better the moment it entered, with the same satisfying and slightly frightening feeling of having his finger there—a feeling of being too full and too excited all at once. There was a slight burning

around the ring of her anus where the ginger touched her flesh, but it was not too uncomfortable. If this was all he had in mind, it was not so bad. Still, she didn't want him to think it was a failure, so she made a few more 'ooing' sounds and rolled around on his lap, enjoying the feel of his hardened cock beneath her.

"It takes a bit for it to start working," he said, dashing her hopes that it had failed. "So I think I'll spank a little more while we wait."

"No!" She kicked her legs. "My lord, I don't require more spanking!" She changed her tone to a more suggestive timber. "Perhaps you could think of something *else*?" She spread her

legs wider on his lap.

He rewarded her with another slap directly on her sex, which had grown moist with the stimulation of her back hole. “Ah, I think you like that,” he remarked, slapping her there again.

“What makes you say that?” she snapped, but her body had already betrayed her. Not only had she not closed her thighs, but she was arching back at him, as if eager for any kind of touch there, even if it was a spank. He obliged, delivering several more swift slaps, which jostled the ginger, creating more of a burn, as well as more arousal.

“Harry!” she gasped.

* * *

Harry stroked his wife's beautiful bottom, letting his hand caress the backs of her thighs and travel back up again. "Yes, kitten?"

She didn't answer, but he could tell she was growing more and more aroused, perhaps as the sensation of the ginger was beginning to increase. He knew from the stable hands that it took a half an hour to take effect for a horse. He had no idea if it was the same for humans, but the idea of keeping her draped over his lap for thirty minutes certainly had its appeal.

He allowed his fingers to dip between her thighs, not surprised to find her folds swollen and slick. She moaned and pushed back eagerly. He chuckled

and gave her another light slap there, knowing by the way she'd groaned his name she was already looking for release. But he planned to make her wait. Which didn't mean he couldn't tease her a bit. He slid his fingers between her legs again, circling the sensitive bud and spreading her juices around. She writhed against his cock, which strained with excitement. Sliding two fingers deeper within her, he pushed in and out a few times before withdrawing completely, eliciting a grunt of protest. His handprints had already faded from her bottom, so he set to work leaving new ones, at the same time moving the ginger in and out of her back hole with his other hand.

She grew more and more agitated, not even protesting when he slapped the backs of her thighs, which she hated. She clawed at the covers, rubbing her face in it like a cat with catnip. He had to purposely calm his breath, so great was his desire to forget the rest of her punishment and simply skip ahead to his reward. With a great effort, he stopped spanking and thrusting the ginger and ordered her to stand.

It took her a long time to obey, and he guessed her mind had been far away by the way her body trembled. A sheen of sweat had gathered on her low back as the ginger heated her insides.

She tottered to her feet with his assistance, her face flushed, her eyes

glassy and wild.

“I am ready for you to show me the dresses now.”

She stared at him as if the words traveled a very long distance to reach her brain, but then curtsied, mumbling “yes, my lord” with slack lips before she began to shift from foot to foot in discomfort. She walked stiffly to pick up one of the gowns, a lovely dark green satin, which she pulled over her head, returning to him for help with the buttons. She fidgeted more and more as he fastened her, her breath coming in hisses and gasps. When the gown was fastened, he gave her bottom a slap, knowing full well it would further embed the ginger. She gave a cry and

jumped, just as a spirited horse might. He grinned. "Go on and prance for me, kitten."

"Prance?" she asked doubtfully, perspiration glistening on her lovely décolletage. He gave another slap and she seemed to know exactly what he meant by prance, stepping quickly away from him, then sashaying about the room as if she were, indeed, a show pony.

"Lovely, lovely, dear. I do like this dress. Show me another?"

She gave a little whimper but obediently stepped to him, turning around so he could unbutton her. He helped her into the second dress and then the third, watching as she took several turns about the room, looking almost

drunk with agitation. When she came to him to remove the third dress, she fell forward into his arms. “Oh, Harry,” she moaned, the wanton note in her voice driving him mad with desire. “I need you, Harry,” she begged.

Unfortunately for the new dress, he lost his mind, popping every button as he tore it open in the back. It fell to her feet in a fluffy pool, trampled under both their feet as he spun her around and folded her over the bed.

“Please, Harry,” she pleaded, reaching between her legs and rubbing her fingers frantically over her dripping sex as he pulled his cock free of his trousers. “It’s so warm,” she moaned. “I need you so badly.”

He thrust into her without another second's hesitation, groaning to finally be inside her hot, swollen sheath.

“Yes, Harry!” Kitty gasped, keeping her fingers between her legs and using them to frantically rub her nub of pleasure, then to scissor around his cock, providing a new tighter sensation as he moved in and out of her.

With her level of excitement, he was not going to last long. He slammed into her, his flesh slapping the exposed end of the ginger, pressing it in her back hole as he pressed in her luscious sex.

“Harry... Harry... Harry... *yes!*” she crooned, bucking underneath him as her legs gave way and she climaxed. He could not wait any longer, the milking of

her muscles sending him over the edge, causing him to spend inside her with his own cry of ecstasy.

When at last their shudders had stopped, he withdrew from Kitty and turned her around. She flopped backward on the bed like a rag doll, her arms splayed out at angles, her thick glossy hair fanning out from her head. Her eyes were half-closed with satisfaction.

He flopped beside her, burying his face in her silky hair. “Sweet little kitten,” he murmured. “You make for a spectacular pony show.”

The End

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More Books by Renee Rose

Betrothed

Young Lady Julia is offered by the king as a war prize to the duke of Pembridge after her father tries to forcibly take the duke's land. Worried that she will suffer as a result of his animosity, she runs away dressed as a page, only to unwittingly end up in the very same Duke's army.

Bronson, the duke of Pembridge, is not fooled by the little page's disguise for a moment, and offers the lady his protection, not realizing that he is the man she is hiding from. As the attraction between the two grows, Julia is

ultimately forced to face her fate and learn her place as the wife of a man she's come to love.

Loving Lucia

Marco Donarati, the count of Parma, had no interest in taking a new wife. He got his pleasure from the working ladies, and that suited him just fine. Marco's greatest passion is reserved for his fledgling winery, and therefore he cannot bring himself to refuse when Italy's leading winemaker, Don Edoardo Dante, offers him a source of funds with which to improve his vineyards. In return, the count reluctantly agrees to make Dante's redheaded daughter Lucia the next countess. When

he makes the deal, Marco never suspects that he might actually grow to care about his lovely young wife.

Passionate and eager to please, Lucia must navigate her new role as countess to a husband who holds her at arms' length. When the count becomes guardian to her twin sister as well, things really heat up. Tested by trials, betrayals, and jealousy, Lucia and Marco must find their way together and often the quickest route is with her bent over his knee for a bare-bottom spanking. Will her wholehearted submission and love be enough to break down her husband's resistance and win his heart for her?

Courting Celia

Celia Dante is notorious for her headstrong ways and getting into mischief. This time, she's out to seduce Tomi, her brother-in-law's handsome steward and the man she cut her teeth flirting with as a young girl. But in addition to losing her virginity to the rakish duke of Tuscany, her colorful past includes joining her twin sister and brother-in-law in their bed, a fact which Tomi has a hard time swallowing.

When Tomi seems to reject her, Celia's pride spurs her to set herself against him, in spite of the fact that he does not hesitate to pull her over his knee for a sound spanking. As her spirited actions escalate, Tomi must

decide whether he's willing to put aside his jealousy and fully take her in hand, or whether he will let her go and leave Parma forever.

Deathless Love

Kate Strand has always had a crush on Dominic, the owner of the club where her band plays, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that he's a vampire. But when he sniffs out her predilection for spanking and brings her fantasies to life one night, she falls head over heels. The trouble is, Dom is allergic to relationships, or so it seems.

Dom loves knowing how to turn Kate on and domination comes naturally to him. But he believes he likes Kate

more than is good for either of them. In his mind, mortals and vampires don't mix, and the best thing he can do for her is stay far away. But when another vampire targets Dom, Kate gets tangled in the dangerous web and Dom finds himself prepared to sacrifice his own life to save hers. Can he get her back alive? And if so, will they find a way to be together?

Pleasing the Colonel

Trapped in a crevice after a carriage accident, Amanda Downy is not sure whether she'll ever see the light of day again. With her tongue loosened by a fellow passenger's flask of brandy, she reveals several well-guarded secrets

about her life as a governess at Colonel Watson's residence, including the fact that she falsified her references to gain her employment.

The next morning Amanda is horrified when she finds that the passenger who saved her life after the carriage crash is sitting at the breakfast table at Colonel Watson's estate, and it appears that he is the long-absent colonel himself! Amanda is certain that she will be immediately dismissed, but the colonel has a different sort of discipline in mind for her...

The colonel soon learns that in spite of the deceitful manner with which she obtained the position, Miss Downy is an excellent governess and is much

loved by his children. After a firm dose of the leather strap on her bare bottom, he lets her know that she may keep her position as long as she is truthful with him in the future. As time passes, though, the colonel finds himself thinking of Amanda as he has not thought about any woman since his beloved wife passed away. Though he has no intention of ever marrying again, he cannot deny his growing need for her.

Amanda has a longstanding dislike for stiff military men, yet she warms to the colonel, discovering that underneath his gruff exterior he is kind and generous. As she wonders if the attraction is mutual, another suitor makes his interest known. Should she accept his

offer? Or should she wait to see if the colonel will ever make his move?

The Knight's Prisoner

Danewyn, a tavern prostitute, has always been cursed with the Sight—the ability to see into the unknown. It is a trait she has learned to keep hidden from others, but a moment of anger finds her blurting out a prediction about the Red Fox, the rightful king of Britain. Unfortunately, her prediction is overheard by one of the Red Fox's men, putting her in grave danger.

Captured and carried off for questioning, she finds herself prisoner to Sir Ferrum, an enormous knight who bears the scars of an old injury upon his

face. She finds Sir Ferrum to be firm and unyielding, but his treatment of her also reveals a gentleness which she has difficulty reconciling with his harsh discipline. To her dismay, her feelings for him continue to grow, and Dani must decide whether to continue her plans for escape or accept her new role as Sir Ferrum's woman and Seer to the Red Fox.

Under Siege (Included in the book Lords and Ladies: Two Medieval Spanking Novellas)

For Lady Camilla, the only thing worse than managing Falconworth castle on her own would be her overlord discovering that she is a widow and

marrying her off to his wretched nephew. Keeping her husband's death a secret is a top priority, right up there with ensuring that troops from a rival castle don't break down her curtain wall gate with their battering ram.

Yet when a devilishly handsome knight by the name of Sir Balen rides to her rescue, she is reluctant to turn over the control she has become accustomed to wielding. The attraction between them is palpable, but his arrogant assumption of the position and duties of her late husband irritates her, especially because those duties seem to include spanking her bare bottom!

Can she swallow her pride and propose the marriage which she knows

would be best for all involved, or will her stubbornness cost her and the people of Falconworth dearly?

The Devil of Whiskey Row

Forced by miserable circumstance to work in a gold-rush brothel, Cora Underhill hates what her life has become. When a fire sweeps through, she welcomes death as an end to it all. But then Jake Diggory crashes through her window for an unwelcome rescue, offering her shelter and a paid position at his establishment. She accepts, in spite of Jake's fearsome reputation as 'The Devil Diggory,' and soon sees another side to Jake—the firm but caring side of him which led his girls

to name him 'Daddy Diggs.'

Life at Daddy Diggs' is an entirely new experience for Cora. Jake has strict rules which he backs up with over-the-knee discipline, but he will not tolerate any mistreatment of his girls and he can go from playing beautiful music on a piano to defending them with his bare fists. The strangest thing of all, however, is the fact that every girl at Daddy Diggs' swears that Jake has never slept with her, or with any other woman for that matter, since his fiancée's death back in Ireland fifteen years ago.

The other prostitutes at Daddy Diggs' enjoy the power they hold over men, enjoy making money, and even find

pleasure in sex. Cora attempts to emulate them, but she still finds no pleasure in the company of men... until the day she inadvertently arouses the passion of The Devil Diggory and his fierce lovemaking thaws some frozen part of her. But it seems Jake is only attracted to her because she resembles his dead fiancée. Confused by his new feelings for Cora and guilt over his broken vow of celibacy, Jake pushes Cora away. Can he come to terms with his past and claim Cora for his own, or will his grief keep them apart forever?

The Westerfield Affair

Reserved to the point of being aloof, Lord Westerfield never attended

balls or even considered taking a wife... until he met Miss Kitty Stanley and his orderly world turned on end. Determined to have the beautiful and animated sister of his friend from the gambling hall, but doubting his ability to effectively court her, Westerfield strikes a bargain with her brother for her hand.

When the gentlemen present Kitty with the deal, she is furious with them both for neglecting to consult her, but her brother insists he will withdraw his support if she does not comply. Angry, she acts out at a ball, causing a scandal that mushrooms further when Lord Westerfield drags her unchaperoned to his home for a firm spanking.

Upon baring her for

chastisement, Westerfield is swept away by desire, and before he can stop himself he has taken her innocence and completed the ruin of her reputation. He offers to release her from the betrothal contract, but her brother insists instead on a hasty marriage. As they attempt to recover from the scandal that becomes known as 'the Westerfield Affair,' their marriage is clouded by his shame and her insecurities. Will they be trapped forever in a loveless marriage, or will they have the courage to move past their rough beginning to kindle the passion they both crave?

Safe in His Arms

For as long as she could

remember, Becca dreamed of a dominant man to take her in hand, and Zac, the handsome Marine she met at her sister's wedding, filled the role with aplomb... for a weekend. Then the fling came to an end, Zac went off to war and died for his country, and Becca learned she carried a child who would be born without a father.

Seven years later, Becca has done her best to move on and forget about Zac... until the day she walks into her kitchen to find the man she believed she would never see again locked in mortal combat with her son's nanny, and realizes everything she thought she knew about Zac was a lie.

Like all Black Ops agents, Zac

doesn't exist in any government record. His life is a series of deadly missions, and relationships of any kind are unsanctioned. But he keeps one secret. He watches over Becca, the beautiful daughter of a rogue agent, and Parker, the six-year-old boy he fathered that fateful weekend. When he spots a known assassin in their apartment posing as a nanny, he's forced to reveal himself and take them to safety... whether Becca likes it or not.

While Becca may have enjoyed his dominance once, bending her to his will again may not be quite so easy. He is determined to keep her safe, however, and if a long, hard spanking is required, he is more than willing to oblige. Having

Becca over his knee rekindles more than his passion, though; even when the immediate danger has passed, he finds it much more difficult to ‘ghost out’ on his family again. Must he resign himself to protecting those he loves from afar, or can he find a way to be the man Becca needs and longs for, the man who is worthy of her submission and her love?

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