

A PROMISE OF LOVE

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## CHAPTER ONE

*New York City, July 1817*

Miss Genevieve Elizabeth MacGowan, Jenny to her close friends and family, poured a cup of tea and handed it to her father as he settled back against the leather chair, which was his habitual seat in the drawing room. "Have you a date for the *Elizabeth* to sail yet, Papa?"

"Tuesday next." Angus MacGowan nodded as if in approval. "But you'll have to be aboard the night before. She'll sail with the morning tide."

Tuesday next? "Papa, that's in three days!" Leave it to her father to think packing for a trip of several months can be accomplished in a matter of hours.

"That it is. But the cargo we were waiting for has arrived, and I can't delay the ship."

She studied him closely, looking for any signs he might not have recovered from his illness. "Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Aye, lass. I'm as fit as a fiddle." Even after more than twenty years in the United States, her father still had his Scottish brogue, and his ability to hide the truth.

“So you say,” she scoffed.

“I am sure he will be fine,” Sarah Brodhead, Jenny’s aunt said. “One cannot grow older without any problems.”

“Leave it to you to mention my age,” her father scowled. “I don’t see you getting any younger.”

Jenny hid her grin behind her tea cup. Sarah had come to live with Jenny and her father four years ago, after Jenny’s mother’s death. Her aunt, only a few years older than she, had her own house, her circle of friends, and was not financially reliant on anyone. Only Sarah’s firm belief that Papa was not to be trusted to successfully chaperone her niece and secure a successful match had made her leave her home for theirs. Unfortunately for Sarah, despite having escorted Jenny to all the major cities from Washington, D. C. to Maine, she had yet to find even one gentleman she wished to call husband. Occasionally Jenny thought that she might be too picky, then she remembered she would have to live with the man and be intimate with him. Better to find someone she loved. It would be easier to overlook any flaws he might have, and he could overlook hers as well.

Silence had fallen over the room, prompting her to fill it. “I hear that Paris is lovely this time of year.”

“It will be now that there is no more fighting,” Sarah responded tartly and glanced at Papa. “It’s a good thing I have already sent our measurements and a list of what Jenny and I will need to that modiste in Paris.”

“Well,” Papa said, clearly ignoring that last remark, “at least Napoleon kept most of the English away from our shores. It would have gone much worse for us if old George and his son hadn’t had the French to keep them busy.”

“Very true.” Sarah’s tone held a touch of bitterness which Jenny understood well. “The French are our true allies. Something many here would be well served to remember.”

Between Jenny's mother's family, who had fought in the Revolutionary War, and her father, whose family had once been outlawed by the English, she had been raised with no love for England or its people. Then a few years ago, English soldiers had occupied her maternal grandmother's house, causing the lady to suffer a heart attack and die. Sarah had been there when it happened.

When one of her friends had suggested London as a place to look for a husband, Sarah had given the woman a very chilly set-down.

Unable to help herself, Jenny asked, "What about that earl you once met?"

A slow blush crept up her aunt's neck into her cheeks. "He was quite nice, actually. Not at all like those redcoats that took over our house during the war. Then again, he did not believe our country had been treated fairly, so it was easy to be in charity with him."

"That explains it." Jenny half wondered if the earl would somehow show up once she and her aunt arrived in France. She set her cup down and began to rise. If she were to leave so soon, there was much to do. After all, they would be gone almost a year.

"Isn't he the one," Papa asked, "who said that Wellesley fellow didn't think his country should have attacked us the last time?"

"Indeed he is." Her aunt puckered her brow. "Although, I believe he is the Duke of Wellington now."

"The earl?" Papa demanded.

"No, Wellesley. He pulled himself up by the bootstraps from what I understand."

"Not that I think we need the peerage, mind you, but it's good for a young man to find his own way."

Abruptly, Aunt Sarah stood. "I have a great deal to attend to tomorrow if we are to depart so soon. I shall bid you a good night."

After the door had closed behind her aunt, her father turned to Jenny. "I will miss ye, lass."

She stepped over to her father giving him a tight hug. "I'll miss you as well. If you would prefer that I—"

"No, no. I want ye to see some of the world. If ye find a man to love ye, then all the better."

"And if I do not, what will happen to the company?" Although perfectly capable of running the business herself—she had, after all, been her father's assistant for years—she knew that even men she had known and actually done business with would never accept her as the director of MacGowan Shipping Enterprises.

"I'll think of something." He lowered his bushy red brows at her. "What I don't want ye doing is marrying unless you're in love. The French are more used to that sort of thing than the English, so it's a good thing you're going there first."

"First?" Whatever could he be thinking?

"You can't tell me that Sarah hasn't decided to visit London at some point."

London was the last place Jenny wanted to be, yet she wondered if her father was right. "If she has, she has kept her plans from me."

"Aye, well, she has her own fish to fry. As long as she does right by ye first, I'll have no complaint." He hugged her tight, as if she was leaving on the morrow. "Now give me your word that if you bring back a husband, ye'll love him, and he won't be an Englishman."

"I shall promise you that if I marry, the man I come home with will have my love *and* the ability to run the company." She shuddered. "The very idea of an Englishman touching me is enough to make me feel ill."

"Ah, lass," he sighed. "From your lips to God's ears."

Rising on her tip toes, she pecked his cheek. "It will all work out the way it is supposed to. Isn't that what you always tell me?"

"There ye go again. Throwing me words back at me." He grinned. "Just keep them in mind."

Tears pricked her eyes as she hugged him once again. "I will. Good night, Papa."  
He kissed her cheek. "Sleep well, my love."

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*London, April 1818*

"Congratulations." Jenny glanced from her beaming aunt to the equally happy Geoffrey, Earl of Warwick, and summoned a smile. She had known this was coming, and was a little surprised it had taken so long for them to announce their decision. The only problem was that their marriage would delay her journey home.

Shortly after they had arrived in Paris, the earl had joined them and bullied his sister, the Countess of Heathcote, whom Jenny had *not* been invited to call Penelope, to sponsor Jenny in Paris society. Paris, however, had been a disappointment. Although there were several gentlemen she thought might be eligible, they had all turned out to be indolent. In fact, it had astounded her that there were so many worthless gentlemen in what Geoff called 'Polite Society.' Even many of the younger sons were merely looking for an heiress to support them. They were more interested in living a life of leisure than working for a living like a good New Englander would do.

In her ignorance, she had mentioned moving to America to one or two likely prospects, but the men had been horrified. It was as if she had suggested they live in the jungles of South America. As for the appalling number of English in France, well, she had no desire to see any of them again. They were worse than the French and had behaved as if there was something wrong with working for a living. One of them had actually had the gall to call the United States a country of merchants.

Against her wishes, they had arrived in England after Christmas with the intention of introducing her to the *ton* while Geoff and Sarah planned their wedding. Unfortunately, there was no escape. With gales prevalent in the northern Atlantic,

winter was not the time to sail back to New York. "When do you plan to marry?"

"Sometime in the next two weeks," Aunt Sarah replied. "Geoff must obtain the special license, Penelope has decided to host the wedding breakfast, and there will be a ball."

"We do not wish to wait long though," he commented as he gazed down at his betrothed.

Sarah had blossomed under the attentions of the earl, and had become a great favorite of his sister and other members of the *ton*. Jenny did want her aunt to be happy, and she was thrilled that Sarah had finally found her true love. However, it posed a slight problem for Jenny. Someone would have to be hired to accompany her back to America.

"Of course not." She hugged and kissed her aunt, then embraced Geoff. "I am exceedingly happy for you. I'll wait until you are wed before I sail home."

"Oh, my dear." She could swear her aunt was beginning to sound English. "I really think you should remain for the Season. After all, you never know whom you might meet."

Jenny wanted to argue, but she could not very well disparage Englishmen with Geoff present. Instead she raised a brow and made her only other argument. "You know as well as I do that I have already met the cream of the *ton*, and none of them meets my requirements."

"Aside from that," Sarah continued as if Jenny hadn't spoken, "it will take a while to find a suitable companion who is willing to travel to America. Geoff and I would go with you, but I shall have a great deal to do at Warwick. It has been left without a mistress for too long."

Her aunt was definitely picking up an English accent. Well, that was probably for the best as she'd be living here.

Jenny would arrange for her own passage, preferably on a MacGowan ship, and

find a way to hire a companion. Then she would kiss her aunt and new uncle farewell. "I shall remain for a month, no longer."

"I know you will find the right gentleman for you." Her aunt took her hands and squeezed them. "I can feel it."

If only she had her aunt's certainty. The one thing Jenny did not want to do was fail her father. Perhaps she would meet a gentleman from Scotland she could love. They must have a Season there as well. Surely she had relatives who could help her. The only problem was that her father had not maintained in contact with them, saying it was dangerous.

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*April 1818, London*

Lord Francis (Frank) Trevor glanced around the brilliantly lit ballroom wondering what the devil he was doing there. As the second son of the Duke of Somerset, one might suppose he would be used to the *ton*. And one would be mistaken. Other than the brief period of time he had spent on the Town during a university holiday, he had been acting as his father's factor. A job that by rights belonged to his eldest brother Damon, Marquis of Hawksworth. His father's heir. One could not even state with confidence that his father had any good reasons for doing what he did. Mostly the duke's behavior was the result of sheer pigheadedness.

Frank hadn't even had a holiday from running the dukedom's estates. Not only that, but he was chafing at running in his father's harness. It was not in his nature to be constantly under another man's boot. Lately, he had been searching for a way to change his life.

He had also become a bit short tempered. Not a state of mind that pleased him. Perhaps that was the reason that as soon as Father had departed for Scotland with a few

of his cronies, Mama had decided Frank could benefit from a touch of Town bronze. How the hell that was supposed to help him when he dealt mainly with crops and animals, he had no idea.

He might as well realize he was trapped in a life he did not want and had no hope of employment outside of slaving for his father. He should have been allowed to buy a commission or take a position in government as other younger sons did. Add to that, after Damon's marriage to Meg Featherton at Christmas, their father had it made very clear that in the future he would be making any necessary matches for his children.

Frank heaved a sigh. Ergo, being here was a waste of time and money, though, thankfully, not his own.

A glass of wine was pressed into his hand. "Frank, you are supposed to be having fun." His brother, Damon, had the same lazy smile on his face he'd worn since marrying Meg. "Not looking as if you're facing a hanging."

Frank took a long pull on the wine. "I am merely having trouble knowing where to start. How did you manage to talk father into this visit?"

"Ah, well." Rather than answering his question, his brother scanned the crowd. "Your mother decided it was time you were introduced to some of the ladies. I believe she also felt you were due for a little time away from the estate."

As if he would really be allowed to choose his own bride. "Did she happen to send you a list of ladies of whom father would approve?"

"Ah, no." Damon languidly raised his hand, and they were almost immediately joined by Meg, his wife of four months, and the young lady she had in tow.

Frank pushed himself off the wall. He thought he'd already seen all of the ladies present. How had he missed her? She was beautiful with enough curves to entice a monk. Maybe being in Town wasn't such a bad idea at that. He ignored the small voice in his head telling him his father would not approve.

"My love." Damon held his hand out to Meg. "We must have forgot that Frank

doesn't really know anyone in Town."

"Aren't you fortunate that I have a remedy?" She gave Frank an innocent grin.

She was up to something. The former Miss Margaret Featherton was the only female that had ever bested his father. "Miss MacGowan, may I introduce you to my brother-in-law, Lord Francis Trevor. Frank, Miss MacGowan. She has been traveling the Continent and, like you, is not acquainted with many people here."

The woman smiled politely, but there was a hard glitter in her blue eyes as she held out her hand. As if she didn't wish to be here. "A pleasure to meet you."

The moment their hands touched Frank caught his breath. He took another look into her eyes and could now see they were the color of a Scottish lake, and not nearly as cold as they had been a moment ago. A hint of lavender and lemon wove its magic, capturing his senses, and his hand warmed where her long slim fingers rested in his palm. Her thick, auburn hair was arranged on top of her head, with tendrils curling down to frame her oval face. He imagined running his fingers through her silky tresses. He didn't know how long he just stood there, but someone coughed, and he remembered he had to bow and say something polite. Obviously, telling her he wanted to carry her off to his bed wouldn't do. His sharp desire for her didn't even sound like him. Other than a liaison or two with a widow in a neighboring town, he had not had much experience with women. Yet, this lady's mere presence brought all his senses to the fore.

"It is my pleasure, Miss MacGowan." He was surprised he could speak at all, nonetheless in a calm voice.

For a moment, she stared at him, as if she was feeling the same strange sensations that had attacked him. Then she grinned ruefully, a look of consternation on her lovely face. "Dear me, you would think I'd know this by now." She lowered her voice to a whisper, as if speaking to herself. "What do I call you?" After a moment, her brow cleared. "Oh, yes. Lord Francis."

He had the feeling she had not forgot at all, but was insulting him. The question was why when they had just met. "I actually prefer Lord Frank." Then, lost as he was by her flaming hair and flawless milky skin, he said the next thing that came into his head, "You do not sound Scottish."

She laughed. A lilting sound that made him want to laugh as well. "That is because I am not. I have Scottish antecedents on my father's side, English on my mother's side, and a great deal of Dutch mixed in." Her tone became defensive and challenging at the same time. "I, sir, am an American."

American? Frank stilled for a moment. The only American woman he had heard of was . . . "From New York?" Holding her chin high, Miss MacGowan inclined her head slightly. "The one who was in Paris last autumn?"

"Exactly." Her tone was as sour as a lemon. "The American heiress." She leaned in confidingly. "You had better watch yourself. I might whip out my tomahawk and scalp you."

The one who had been, from all accounts, exceedingly difficult to please. His sisters kept up with any and all gossip and had regaled him with what they discovered. Even he knew the stories of the English and French peers who had traveled to Paris to seek her hand and her fortune. She was obviously not a particularly happy lady and probably wouldn't even dance with him. Still, there was something about her that called to him. She seemed as alone as he felt and no more happy to be here than he was. "I see."

"Really?" She tilted her head to one side, but her voice was as dry and brittle as an autumn leaf. "What exactly do you see?"

"Jenny." A woman a few years older than Miss MacGowan suddenly appeared. "You must not quiz a gentleman you have only just met." The admonishment was firm but kind.

Miss MacGowan pressed her lips together for a moment, then laughter filled her

expressive eyes. "Thank you, Aunt." Turning to him, Miss MacGowan said, "I am sorry. I think I must be very homesick to have become so unmannerly, not to mention surly."

Frank blinked. He had met spoiled ladies, ill-mannered ladies, and ones who merely simpered, but he had never met a woman who would apologize so quickly and succinctly, with a sense of humor. "Not at all." He discovered he was still holding her hand, and decided not to return it. "The fault was mine. Will you dance with me, Miss MacGowan?"

Once again, she gave him a quizzical look. "I shall be delighted to, Lord Frank. However, first" —she glanced at the other woman who had been joined by a gentleman— "Aunt Sarah, may I introduce you to Lord Frank Trevor?" After the introductions to Miss MacGowan's aunt, Meg, and the gentleman had been made, she smiled. "My aunt and Lord Warwick are to be married next week."

The violins had begun the prelude to a waltz, and Frank found that more than anything he wanted Miss MacGowan to himself for a while. "I wish you happy." Quickly, before they could be drawn into a wedding conversation, he placed Miss MacGowan's hand on his arm. "We should join the other dancers."

She inclined her head. "Certainly." Once they were a few steps away, she whispered, "Thank you. I love my aunt, but I am sick to death of the wedding preparations."

That was an odd thing for a lady to say. At least the ones he knew. Then again, it was becoming clear that she was an unusual lady. One he wanted to know much, much better.

Taking their places, he bowed and she curtseyed, then he placed his palm on her waist. Fighting the urge to pull her body flush against his, he wished more than ever before that he was free to fall in love. Or knew a way to escape his father.

## CHAPTER TWO

Jenny stifled a gasp as she sucked in a breath, inhaling Lord Frank's clean scent along with it. No perfumes for him—simply an herbal soap and the musky scent of male. The palm of his hand burned through her silk gown and petticoats. The short stays she had worn gave no protection at all from his touch. The dance had begun, and he was soon expertly leading her around the floor. She had never felt so weightless or secure in a partner. Which was a very good thing as her knees felt a little like jelly. What a shame he was English. Papa would never approve.

“What is your idea of a perfect wedding?”

She gazed into his deep blue eyes. Other than his size, large and broad without a bit of fat, Lord Frank did not look much like his brother, who had dark hair, eyes, and complexion. A lock of golden blond hair fell over his forehead. Some women would want to push it back into place, but she decided it looked good there. “I would want something such as we have in our family, a simple ceremony at home and perhaps a few people to have dinner with afterward. We do not need all the parties you have here. The purpose, after all, is to marry one's true love. On my wedding day, I would not

wish to share him with others.”

“I understand you. I sometimes think there is more interest in the entertainments than in the ceremony itself.” He seemed to pull her closer to him during the turn. “Are all weddings in America like the one you described?”

“Not all. Much depends on where a family is from. If their former home country had large parties, they would as well.” He had an almost square jaw with a dimple, and a straight nose that was not overly large for an Englishman. She tried not to look at his mouth, which was wide with perfectly formed lips. “What do you do?”

“I am in charge of my father’s properties.” His tone was flat, as if he was not pleased with his position.

Most likely he was another one who did not wish to work at all. How disappointing. Then again, he *was* an English gentleman. “Do you not like the job?”

“It’s not the position. That is extremely gratifying when my advice is taken. It is that my older brother should have the responsibility. He is the one who will inherit from my father, not I who am the second son. My father is in good health. Therefore, the situation leaves me to find something else to do when I am no longer young and Hawksworth is duke.”

At least he wanted to be occupied. If Lord Frank was being truthful, then his father was making life difficult for not only his heir, but his second born. “I fail to understand your father’s decision. It does not make sense to me.”

A travesty of a smile twisted his lips. “I doubt anyone understands how the Duke of Somerset thinks, not even my mother.” He was silent for a few moments before he said, “He is not a pleasant topic of conversation. Perhaps we could talk about something else. Have you seen much of London?”

Despite her aversion to the English, she found herself liking Lord Frank or at least feeling for his position. She wondered if there was some way she could discover more about the duke, which, in turn, would tell her more about his second son. “Other than

the shops on Bond and Bruton Streets, I have not seen much at all. Although, I have been promised a great deal if I remain in London. The most I've been able to do is to escape in the morning for a walk in the Park."

"The Park is pleasant," Frank replied. "It reminds me of the country. However, I think you would enjoy Green Park as well. It would be my honor to show you the sights. Would you care to accompany me on a carriage ride?"

She had not been to that particular park, but she had heard about it. "Is that the place that has cows with milkmaids?"

"Indeed." He smiled suddenly, and all she could think of was how handsome he was. "You may drink a cup of fresh milk."

It had been a long time since she had tasted milk directly from a cow. "I'd love to."

"Are you free tomorrow?"

"Yes." Jenny could not understand why she was so drawn to Lord Frank. Normally Englishmen did not appeal to her. Even Geoff, although very nice, was not to her taste. Yet, Lord Frank seemed to be different. Well, she would see if he was or not. "I have nothing planned in the morning."

"Can you be ready by nine o'clock?"

A smile hovered on his lips, and she wondered if she was being quizzed. "I was under the impression that gentlemen and ladies did not rise from their beds until after noon."

"Ah, but I am not a typical gentleman and will inevitably find myself up much earlier than that." His brow rose in a definite challenge. "Unless *you* are not an early riser."

"I, sir, am dressed and have broken my fast by seven in the morning." That should put him in his place. He was probably joking her. Even Geoff, who was the only good Englishman she knew, liked to linger in bed.

"Seven it is, then." He twirled them through a turn again.

She could not believe he had taken her at her word. What she had actually meant was that she was dressed in a day gown that she could put on herself. If only Rosie, her own maid, was here, but she suffered so much from sea sickness that she could not have made the journey. The London maid that had been hired for her was going to be unhappy about having to have Jenny's clothing ready by that hour. Still, she couldn't very well turn down a dare. "I shall be waiting."

Miss MacGowan's chin rose, and Frank knew he was being tested. Then again, that was fair. Even though nothing would come of it, wasn't he assaying her as well? She was beautiful, wealthy, and not likely to take a younger son as a husband. She was probably expecting a title. He should not be wasting her time dancing with her, or asking her if she would like to accompany him to Green Park, or anything else. On the other hand, she had rejected several peers. What did she want? "Are you residing at Lord Warwick's town house?"

"No, we are presently visiting Lady Heathcote." Miss MacGowan said the lady's name as if it were somehow distasteful. "However, when my aunt and Lord Warwick marry, we shall reside with him."

That sounded like another not entirely happy notion. Then he remembered her earlier comment.

*"Although, I have been promised a great deal if I remain in London."*

Did that mean she did not wish to remain in London? And if so, where would she go? He did not want to consider the possibility that she would depart before the Season was barely underway. Had she not, after all, come to this side of the Atlantic Ocean to find a husband? She gave him a polite smile, yet he had an uneasy feeling she was ready to return to America. And *that* was not what he wanted. It was time to find out more about Miss MacGowan, and he knew just who to ask.

When the set ended, he returned her to her aunt, who was still speaking with Meg. If he knew his sister-in-law, she would already be conversant not only with Miss

Brodhead's entire history, but Miss MacGowan's as well.

They stood for several moments not saying anything as the others continued to talk, then her aunt turned to Miss MacGowan and said, "We should be getting back to our party. I am sure Lady Heathcote has arranged for several other gentlemen to stand up with you."

A militant look appeared in Miss MacGowan's eyes. "Indeed." Frank almost shivered at the chill in her voice. "I do not recall giving Lady Heathcote permission to accept engagements for me."

She was definitely strong minded. He liked that in a lady. Although, he had a feeling her aunt was none too pleased.

"Jenny," Miss Brodhead said in a voice a hint above a whisper. "She is only trying to help."

That did not seem to mollify Miss MacGowan at all. She closed her eyes for a second, before replying, "We shall discuss this matter later." As they moved to leave, she stopped in front of him. "Until tomorrow."

He inclined his head. "I shall look forward to it."

Her aunt turned back, "Jenny?"

"I'm coming." The last was said with such bad grace that he had to hide a grin. Still, he should not laugh at her. She was clearly unhappy, and he intended to discover the reason.

"Meg." He sidled closer to his sister-in-law. "What do you know about Miss MacGowan?"

She pulled a face. "The short version is that she is homesick, does not wish to marry a peer, and detests most of the English."

"Homesickness I can understand." He felt a little that way as well, and he was still in England. He had never heard of a lady who didn't want a title. "But why does she dislike us?"

“Well, not *all* of us. She has particular enmity for Lady Heathcote and the gentlemen who attempted to court her in Paris, as well as English soldiers. Apparently her grandmother died after a troop was billeted with the lady. Quite understandably, Miss MacGowan blames her grandmother’s death on the soldiers. Also, many of her relations fought in both wars, and her father is from a clan that an English king declared outlawed. Other than that” —she shrugged lightly— “I haven’t the faintest idea.” Meg’s forehead creased, and she rubbed a finger between her brows. “I almost forgot. She has no use for idle aristocrats.”

That was a comprehensive list, and he could not really blame the lady for most of her feelings. He had no use for those who allowed their lands to fall into disrepair or gambled away their holdings. “Yet she came to London?”

“Against her wishes.” Meg sighed. “Her goal was to find a French husband to take back to New York. The Americans are quite fond of the French, but none of the gentlemen she met were interested in leaving the Continent, and that is the extent of my knowledge. If you had been gone longer, I could have discovered more. Although, it took me long enough to glean that much as Lord Warwick and Miss Brodhead were reluctant to part with even those crumbs.”

Leave it to Meg to dismiss what she had discovered as crumbs. Frank laughed. “I’d say you did very well considering the handicap you were under. Someday, you’ll be as frightening as Lady Bellamny is said to be.”

Before Meg and Damon’s marriage, Frank had only known of Lady Bellamny because his father had several times ranted loudly about what a meddling besom she was. His mother had finally explained that Lady Bellamny, his brother Damon’s godmother, was a female of definite opinions and had the ability to know almost everything about everyone. She, as well as Meg’s grandmother, the Dowager Viscountess Featherston, and that lady’s longtime friend, the Duchess of Bridgewater, had assisted in Meg and Damon’s courtship.

“I do hope so.” Meg smiled wickedly. “How dull life would be if one could not help others.”

Damon choked and snatched two glasses of champagne from a passing footman. “Please do not give her ideas. My life is interesting enough without my wife involving herself in the love affairs of friends and family, not to mention perfect strangers.”

She took the glass he handed her and focused her attention on Frank. “You seem to be extremely interested in Miss MacGowan.”

Oh, no! He wasn’t falling for that trap. “I find her unusual. I wonder a bit at the gossip about her.”

“As you probably know” — Meg raised a brow — “most think she is beyond pleasing.”

Or, perhaps, no one had yet offered her what she was looking for. She did not appear to be a lady who would settle. “Why did she want a Frenchman to go to America?”

His sister-in-law’s other brow rose and her eyes widened. “I have no idea. Perhaps you should ask her.”

He considered Miss MacGowan’s enmity for the English, and discovered he was not as shocked as he should be. Many of his countrymen and women spoke dismissively of the former colonies. That was sure to set her back up. He wondered why she had agreed to go to Green Park with him. Was it merely an excuse to leave Lady Heathcote’s house, or did she think he was different? An Englishman with whom she would like to spend some time? What was she looking for in a husband, and did he truly wish to know?

He was attracted to her, but if he discovered his feelings were stronger than mere desirability, there were definite problems to overcome. After all, what sane woman would agree to live in the same house as his curmudgeonly father? None he could think of. Especially not a lady such as Miss MacGowan.

He did not even want to think of his father's reaction to him wishing to marry an American. The duke had no love for the former colonies. Now he was getting way ahead of himself. He had no idea if he and the lady would even suit, or if he would like her enough to attempt to persuade her to set aside her dislike of the English. Well, he'd find out tomorrow if his initial impressions were correct. He gave himself a shake. What the deuce was he doing? Meeting an American had obviously made him reckless. Still, he would stay the course for the immediate future.

## CHAPTER THREE

Jenny's eyes popped open at six o'clock exactly. Or so the clock on the mantle told her. She had an hour to be ready for her trip to Green Park. However, after having had to stand up with several gentlemen of Lady Heathcote's choosing, Jenny wasn't sure she could stomach being in the company of another Englishman. They appeared to believe that she should be honored to spend time with them. Still she had agreed to the outing, and it would be rude to back out at this late date.

She tugged on the embroidered pull then rose from the bed. Fortunately, the fire had already been stoked, so only the wash water was chilly.

Several minutes later, just as she was wondering where her maid, Jasper, was, the door opened, and the servant stepped into the bedchamber. "Miss, are you ill?"

Naturally that would be the only reason for a lady to be up this early. "No, I have an engagement and must dress."

For a moment, the maid appeared stunned, then she turned to the wardrobe. "Are you going for a walk or a drive?"

"A drive. I must hurry if I am to break my fast before I leave."

Jasper took out a carriage gown of Pomona green, laid it on the bed, and tugged the bell-pull. "I shall have breakfast brought to you immediately." A moment later, another maid knocked on the door before opening it. "Miss MacGowan requires a baked egg, toast, and tea as soon as possible."

Jenny was stunned. The lady's maid had never before seemed so eager to please. "Thank you, Jasper."

"It is a pleasure to serve you. Now, allow me to dress you and arrange your hair."

What could have gotten into the woman? "Thank you. I must be ready no later than seven."

"That early!"

In less than twenty minutes, Jenny was ready.

"I am surprised Lord Pomfry rises so early," Jasper said as she arranged the breakfast dishes on the table.

Lord Pomfry? Who was . . . Oh, yes. Jenny remembered now. Lord Pompous. The man had been good looking in a soft sort of way, spoke with a bored drawl, and talked of nothing but his family's illustrious history and horses. Horses she could understand. She liked them as well. Still, the idiot had actually had the nerve to ask her if she'd met one of his younger brothers, a captain in a unit that had been stationed in New York during the last war. "I have no idea when his lordship rises." And she did not care to know either. "I have an engagement with another gentleman."

The maid's eyes widened. "But I was told the earl had expressed an interest in you and will call today."

Like pieces of a puzzle falling in place, Jenny understood why Jasper was being so helpful. She would expect to remain with Jenny when she married, and how much more prestigious to be lady's maid to a countess. "I hate to disappoint you, but I am not interested in Lord Pomfry. In fact, I doubt I shall be here when he arrives." If at all possible, she must make plans to remain gone until late afternoon. "Thank you, you

may go.”

She tucked into her breakfast as the maid practically ran out of the room. Obviously someone was going to be notified that Miss MacGowan was being difficult. She missed her own maid. It was never necessary to actually have to dismiss Rose. She just knew when to leave. She also wouldn't tell on her. Glancing at the clock, Jenny was pleased to see the hands had moved. She had less than ten minutes before Lord Frank arrived. She brushed her teeth, donned her bonnet, mantle, and gloves, then made her way to the hall, just as the front door was opened by the senior footman.

Lord Frank handed the servant his card. “I am here to collect Miss MacGowan.”

“My lord the ladies are—”

“I am ready.” Lord Frank smiled at her and for some strange reason, her heart began beating faster and butterflies took up residence in her stomach. He looked as handsome in his buff pantaloons and dark blue jacket as he had last night in evening wear. Even more so.

Smiling, he offered her his arm. “Shall we go?”

When she placed her fingers on his arm, her whole hand seemed to become warmer. She couldn't help but to smile back. “Yes, indeed. I am looking forward to our excursion.”

“Miss,” the footman said. “May I inquire as to your destination and when you plan to return?”

“I shall be perfectly safe with his lordship.” Even though she didn't wish to worry her aunt, she did not want Lady Heathcote to be able to find her.

A few moments later, she was seated in a glossy dark green curricle with gold piping. He took the reins, and started the pair of horses.

“This is a very nice carriage.”

“It's my brother's. I do not own one of my own.”

“It was good of him to lend it to you.”

"I agree." Frank glanced at Miss MacGowan. He'd never been rushed out of a house so quickly in his life. "Why do I have the feeling I am helping you escape?"

Rather than looking at him, she arranged her skirts. "Because you are."

Despite the way his body reacted to her light touch, part of him, the responsible part, seriously considered returning her to Lady Heathcote's home. The other part asked, "Will you tell me the reason?"

"I have the distinct impression that her ladyship is attempting to arrange a match between Lord Pompous and me."

Surely he had not heard her properly. "Lord Pompous?"

She had the grace to look the slightest bit guilty. "Lord Pomfry. I make names up for most of the gentlemen with whom I am forced to dance ." Miss MacGowan was quiet for a moment then looked at Frank. "Not you. I wanted to stand up with you."

He had never had such a remarkable conversation with a lady in his life. Were all Americans so direct? Now what was he to say? "Thank you."

A sparkle entered her eyes, her lips tilted up, and she laughed. Not the type of laugh one expected to hear from a member of the *ton*, but one that came from deep inside her. "I should explain. This morning, the lady's maid who is assigned to me told me that Lord Pomfry is to call on me. I do not wish to see him. Therefore, I have decided to remain gone all day."

Extraordinary. She was the most refreshing person he had ever met. "I must confess, I would not wish to have to spend time with a man I had nicknamed Lord Pompous."

A slight blush stained her cheeks. "I should not have said that to you. I hope I have not shocked you."

"Not at all." Frank was actually surprised it was the truth. He had been raised very strictly, but he understood the need to rebel. After all, that was what he was doing in Town. Despite what his mother had said, he was positive his father had not agreed to

him leaving the estate. "Will your family worry about you?"

She gave a light shrug. "My aunt knows I am with you. At some point, I will send a message that I shall not return until late this afternoon." He raised his brows, and she blushed again. "Not that I mean *you* must remain with me all day. I could not expect you to dance attendance on me for that long."

Why not? He had nothing better to do, and it would give him the opportunity to get to know her. To sort out whether the physical feelings he was having were simply caused by her beauty or if there could be more. "We can make that decision later if you wish."

A smile returned to her lovely lips, and it was as if the day was bright as summer rather than an overcast day in early spring. "Thank you."

"Have you had much experience with cows?"

"A bit. My grandmother had cows, and we used to visit her." Suddenly her joy was gone. This must have been the grandmother who died. "She is no longer with us."

He should probably leave well enough alone, but again, some force inside him needed to know more about her. "Was she quite old when she passed away?"

"No." Her lips thinned. "British soldiers occupied her house during the last war. Her heart was already bad, and she suffered an attack."

He'd been told that Cromwell's soldiers had done much the same to his family. He didn't think anyone had died, but the house had been ransacked. To this day his father hated the Roundheads. Did she detest the English that much? "I am surprised you decided to come to England."

"It was not my choice. I wanted to go home, but my aunt and Geoff decided to marry. Now I must wait until a suitable companion can be hired to return with me."

Or a husband, but would she agree to marry one of his countrymen? "You have no desire to remain here?"

She shook her head. "I cannot. My father needs me."

Then why had she traveled to Europe, and why was she looking for a husband over there rather than in America? "Miss MacGowan, I do not wish to be impertinent, but if you planned to go home, why are you husband hunting on this side of the Atlantic?"

Her head turned slowly and she stared at him for a moment. "You are the first man to ask me that. Do you really want to know the truth?"

He did, but it occurred to him that her reasons may indeed shock him. He took a deep breath and let it out. "I do."

"My plan was to find a husband who would be willing to return to New York with me and help me run our family's business. As in most places, a woman would have a hard time running a shipping line. Even our oldest customers and suppliers would not approve of me being at the helm in such a public fashion."

Now he understood why she was having difficulties finding a husband among the *ton* and the French aristocrats. Even if they were in love, very few of the men he knew would give up what they had here and live in the colonies. As a wife, she would be expected to remain in her husband's country. "That is disappointing for you."

"It is, but I am a practical woman. I shall deal with what I have."

And now for the other problem. "You have no reason to love the English. Could you even bring yourself to care for one of us?"

Yet another question no one had bothered to ask Jenny. She liked Geoff well enough, and her aunt had been able to fall in love with him. Sarah had even more reason to hate the English than Jenny did. Sarah had been there when her mother had died.

Jenny searched Lord Frank's face. Would the fact that he was English stop her from falling in love? Would that be fair? She did not even know if he agreed with either the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812. Although none of the English she had met seemed to understand that was America's second war of independence. In fact, they looked at her strangely when she mentioned it. Was she rushing? After all, she had

known the man for less than a day. Then again, Mama said she knew right away. "I'm not sure. I guess it would depend on the man."

"We are here." He stopped the curricle. "You lad," he called to a street urchin. "There is a yellow bob for you if you will watch the horses."

"You've got it, guvnor." The boy grinned as he went to their heads and took charge of the pair.

The next thing she knew, Lord Frank was lifting her down. By the time her feet touched the ground, Jenny was ready to fall into his arms. Oh, dear. She had never been affected like that before. She ruthlessly shoved the attraction she was feeling down, tucked her hand in his arm, and grinned. "On to the cows."

The beasts were just being led into the park when they arrived. "Miss," Lord Frank said to the milkmaid. "We'd like two cups."

The young woman deftly milked the cow and handed them cups of still warm milk. Even on her grandmother's farm, Jenny had rarely had milk warm from the cow. She took a sip, then drank the whole cup down. "That was excellent."

"I frequently visit our dairy when the cows are being milked. Nothing can compare." He finished his cup as well, and gave it back to the milkmaid. "Shall we stroll for a while?"

"Will your horses be safe?" Once again, she tucked her hand into his arm. She had never felt as comfortable with any gentleman before. It was a shame she could not spend the whole day with him, but that would be too much to ask. After all, they had only met last night.

"Yes, the children are accustomed to watching them, and we will not be overly long. It is a small park. Where would you like to go next?"

She jerked her head around so fast it should have hurt. "Are you sure you do not wish to take me home?"

"Quite positive." His blue eyes seemed to warm as he looked at her. "You said you

have not seen much of London. It would be my honor to escort you around."

For the third time this morning, her cheeks became warm. "Thank you. It would be my pleasure to accept your escort."

"I suggest that before we leave Mayfair we stop at my brother's house so that you may write a note to your aunt."

She really should tell Sarah where she was, still his suggestion surprised her. He really must be used to taking care of people. "Very well."

Not an hour later, Jenny found herself being ushered into a moderately-sized town house. Lord Frank handed his hat and gloves to a staid-looking butler, then he removed her mantle and took her gloves. "Saunders, has his lordship come down yet?"

"Yes, my lord. He and her ladyship are in the breakfast room."

"Thank you." Lord Frank took her hand. "We shall join them."

She glanced around the freshly-painted hall. "Everything seems new."

"It is. My brother and sister-in-law bought this house late last winter after he married. Our father has a house in Town, but Damon and Meg thought they would have more privacy in their own home." Lord Frank grimaced. "My father is not the easiest of persons to get along with, and he still does not approve of their marriage."

How odd. As far as Jenny had been told, Lady Hawksworth came from an old, well thought of and respected family. "I do not understand. They seem perfectly well suited."

"They are extremely happy. I do not think my brother could have made a better choice. The duke, however, is difficult to please."

Jenny's hackles rose. The man would probably not think an American was good enough for his son. "How sad for your family."

"Damon and Meg are able to ignore him." His lips formed a line. "I wish the rest of us were as lucky."

The breakfast room was hung with pale yellow silk, making it bright and cheerful.

Doors and windows to a small garden filled one wall. A sideboard held a number of chafing dishes, and Lord and Lady Hawksworth were seated at one end of the table sharing a newspaper.

Lord Frank cleared his throat. "I brought a guest."

His brother rose as his sister-in-law grinned up at Jenny and Lord Frank. "Miss MacGowan, welcome. Please have a seat. I shall ring for more tea. I am delighted to see you are an early riser as well."

"Thank you, my lady." She allowed Lord Frank to lead her to a seat on the other side of his brother.

"Can you eat again?" he asked as he pushed in her chair.

"Yes, please." She watched him as he strolled to the sideboard. No mincing steps for him, but a long, confident stride.

"Please call me Meg. My husband is Damon. I do not think there is any reason we cannot be informal when we are alone."

Jenny dragged her gaze from Lord Frank. "My name is Genevieve, but I am called Jenny."

Lord Frank glanced over his shoulder. "If we are going to be on a first name basis, I insist you call me Frank."

This was the first time since she'd met Geoff that she had been asked to call anyone by their first name. A little thrill of pleasure at being so easily included ran through her. "Is there anything interesting in the paper?"

"Not much outside of Britain," Damon replied, handing her a sheet. "You must miss your own country's newspapers."

She took the paper as Frank—how lovely it was to be able to call him that—placed a plate filled with eggs, ham, and roast beef before her. "I do miss it. It's so hard to find a newsheet that has much about the United States in it."

Meg chewed a piece of toast then swallowed. "How long do you plan on staying in

England?"

Yesterday at this time, Jenny would have said not longer than a week, but now it might be worth remaining just a little longer. . . She resolutely kept her gaze from Frank. She should not stare at him so much. "At least until my aunt marries."

Or until she discovered what her feelings for Lord Frank Trevor were, and if he could have any feelings for her.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Penelope, Countess of Heathcote, rushed into the breakfast room while Sarah and Geoff were enjoying an intimate, quiet breakfast. Sarah sighed. Only one more week, and she would be in her own house and not subject to Penelope's complaints about Jenny.

"She is not in the house," Penelope announced in an insulted tone.

Resisting the urge to roll her eyes, Sarah glanced up. "By *she*, I assume you mean Jenny."

"Yes, the wretched girl. I had plans for her today." Penelope took her seat at the head of the table, signaling for fresh tea to be brought. "My maid told me she left with a man at seven o'clock this morning and refused to say where she was going. It is now past eleven, and she has not returned. What am I to tell Lord Pomfry?"

Sarah had never known her niece to break plans she'd made with someone, yet she would not have put it past Jenny to ignore Penelope's plans. The two had not got along since the day they'd met. Jenny saw no reason to placate a spoiled peeress, and Penelope was not pleased with what she considered to be Jenny's lack of respect for her rank.

“Did he make arrangements to visit her?” Geoff asked. He and Sarah had just been having a conversation regarding his sister’s interference with her sister.

“He asked me last evening if he could call on Miss MacGowan, and I assured him she would be delighted.”

Oh, dear. Sarah closed her eyes for a moment trying to remember who Lord Pomfry was. Yet before she could respond, Geoff asked, “Did you inquire as to whether Jenny wished to entertain Pomfry?”

There was something in her betrothed’s voice that made Sarah wary. At the same time, an image of a tall thin man dressed like a dandy entered her mind. Definitely not the type of gentleman who would interest her niece. A Corinthian would be much more to her liking.

“No, why should I have?” Penelope’s tone was too haughty and more than a bit defensive. “The girl must find a husband, and Percy is perfectly eligible.”

“Percy is a fop. He doesn’t even visit Jackson’s,” Geoff stated baldly. “I, for one, cannot see Jenny wanting anything to do with him. I don’t want much to do with him.” His brows drew together as he scowled. “Penelope, your attempts to find a husband for Jenny must cease. It is painfully obvious that you and she do not get along, nor do you have an understanding of the type of gentleman who would please her. Try looking for someone more like me.”

“As long as I am sponsoring her and she is under my roof, she must follow my advice.” As quickly as Penelope had flounced into the room, she flounced out.

Blowing out a breath, Sarah turned to Geoff. “I think Jenny and I should move to a hotel.”

Taking her hand, he pressed a kiss on her palm. “You may be right. I shall make arrangements for you to move tomorrow.”

She held her hand to his cheek. “Let us plan for today. Jenny sent me a message informing me she is with Lord Frank Trevor. I shall let her know to have him bring her

to the hotel. That way we can avoid having another confrontation between Jenny and Penelope.”

“Hmm, Lord Frank you say?” A calculating look came into Geoff’s eyes. “He might be the perfect match for Jenny. From what Hawksworth says, he is hardworking and has no desire to remain living with the duke. Perhaps he would not mind moving to America.”

“No interference from you, either. I do not like the idea of some man attaching himself to her for the sole purpose of bettering his life.” Geoff glowered at her and Sarah laughed. “Jenny must find her own heart’s desire.” She kissed the palm of his hand. “Just as I found you.”

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“Miss MacGowan.” Saunders entered the morning room where Frank, Jenny, Meg, and Damon had gathered. “I have a message for you.”

Jenny took the note from the silver salver the butler held out. “Thank you, Saunders.”

Using her fingernail, she popped off the seal. “My aunt and I are moving to the Pulteney Hotel today.”

“Does she say why?” Frank asked. After what she had told him about the way Lady Heathcote treated her, Frank was just as happy to have Jenny living elsewhere.

“No, but I assume Lady Heathcote threw a temper tantrum when she discovered I would not be there to meet Lord Pomfry.”

“Pomfry?” Damon’s black brows rose. “Why the deuce would she think you might be interested in him?”

“If I recall,” Meg said, her lips forming a moue as her index finger tapped the table. “he is the brother of one of her dear friends. Like many peers, he is land rich and cash

poor." She glanced at Damon. "My love, there is no reason Jenny and her aunt cannot stay with us. We have the room, and it would be much more comfortable for them than a hotel."

Frank had the distinct impression that his sister-in-law was matchmaking. He and Jenny were getting along wonderfully, but this was too much too soon. He took Jenny's hand in his. "Unless you would prefer not to."

His brother and Meg moved to the desk at the other end of the room. Jenny seemed to search his face for a few long moments. "I already feel very welcome and comfortable here, but I would not wish to impose. We have not known one another long at all."

He must be going mad. Suddenly, he didn't care what Meg was doing. He wanted Jenny with him. "Very true. However, as you said, you feel at home with us. That must be better than being at a hotel." Not that he had ever stayed at a hotel. "They are so impersonal."

He waited on tenterhooks as she furrowed her brow, clearly thinking the proposal over. He liked having her with him. It was hard to believe they had only met last night. What he didn't want to think about was his father's reaction if he discovered Frank was courting an American.

*Courting.* Was that what he was doing? He had never considered that he would ever woo a lady, and of his choosing no less.

Finally, she nodded to herself and said, "I would be pleased to accept your kind invitation."

"I'm glad you have decided to stay with us." Frank squeezed Jenny's hand and warmth filled her.

What had she done? Granted, her feelings for him were growing by the minute, and the small voice in her head was telling her they were meant to be together, but . . . No, she was right to accept the offer. She did not have much time, and if it turned out they were not meant to be together, then she would return to New York. At least now she'd

have a chance to discover if they could fall in love, and she no longer had to worry about Lady Heathcote's interference.

"Do you have a lady's maid with you?" Meg asked.

"Only one that Lady Heathcote hired. I do not trust her. Unfortunately, my maid at home could not accompany me."

"In that case, I have a young woman here who is able to take care of you."

"Thank you." Jenny breathed a sigh of relief to be rid of Jasper and her ladyship in one fell swoop. Jenny could not abide personal servants who were not loyal. She gnawed her bottom lip. Perhaps she was making a mistake staying here. Frank's brother and sister-in-law seemed to be lovely people, but what did she know about them? This could be worse than at Lady Heathcote's house. And if Jenny decided she and Frank did not suit, who would protect her from him? She gave herself a shake. In for a penny, in for a pound, as her grandmother used to say. She would know how she felt soon enough. As for today, she planned to enjoy sightseeing.

She glanced up at Frank. "What should I see first?"

"The museum. That will take up most of the day. If you would like, we can visit the Royal Menagerie in the morning."

If he worked, she did not understand how he had so much free time. Had she been mistaken about him? "Do you not have duties to attend to?"

"Like you," he grinned, "I am on a sort of holiday. Naturally, if something urgent were to occur, I would need to take care of it. I only hope that my time here is not cut short."

"How far from London do you live?" She hoped it was not a long way. There was no way she could travel by herself out of London.

"Far enough." His jaw clenched as if the idea bothered him greatly. "It is a three day journey, and if I was called back, I would not return to Town. Let's not think of that now."

“Very well.” She had the feeling there was something he was not telling her, but decided not to ask. If it was important, it would come out eventually. Although it was clear they may not have much time...

Damon glanced at her and his brother. His look was almost as grim as Frank’s. There was definitely something going on.

“I’ll call for the carriage.”

She shook off her concerns and smiled. “Please do. If the museum will take most of the day, we should be going.”

A few minutes later, he once again handed her into the curricle, and once again her fingers tingled at his touch. They would miss luncheon, but since they’d eaten breakfast twice, she wasn’t hungry.

About twenty minutes later, he pulled up in front of a large brick building. As before, a young boy took care of the horses, and soon her hand was tucked in his arm.

“First, I’ll show you the Elgin Marbles, then we can look at the paintings.”

“Are those the statuary and frescos that Greece and some other countries want returned?” Well that was rude. She didn’t know what had prompted her to say that, except that the redcoats had tried to steal art from America. Still, she would not apologize.

“The very ones. My brother’s friends are attempting to convince our government to return them, but he doesn’t have much hope.”

“His friends?” She glanced at Frank. “Why does he not involve himself?”

“Damon is not yet a peer. Therefore, he cannot vote in the House of Lords. The most he can hope to do is influence those who can vote. He and Meg have hosted several small dinners and other entertainments with that in mind. He also owns an estate and is able to apply some pressure on the local member of Parliament. Fortunately, it’s not a rotten seat. The problem is that the government spent a great deal of money to acquire the marbles.” He glanced at her. “You are quite well informed.”

For an American, he hadn't said, still the thought was there. She couldn't very well tell him that she made a point of discovering the wrongs England had done to other countries. "I try to stay *au courant*. How do you feel about the subject?"

He shrugged. "It really doesn't matter. I own no property, and, therefore, I have no vote at all."

"That is horrible!" She infused her voice with all the outrage she felt on his behalf. "In America, one does not need to own property in order to vote."

"I have often thought that the founders of your country tried to remedy some of what they thought was wrong in England."

"That is indeed the case. In fact, it is stated in our Declaration of Independence." She scowled. "Although they did not listen to Mrs. Adams and allow ladies to vote." He said nothing as they entered a large room filled with statuary. "Are these the infamous marbles?"

"They are, indeed."

"I must admit, they are impressive." She had never seen such depictions of naked and mostly naked figures, not even in a book. She wondered how Frank would compare. If the muscles in his arm were any indication . . . Oh Lord, where was a fan when she needed one, and why was she having those thoughts in the first place? It was probably seeing the boys and men swimming in the river near her grandmother's house.

"You seem a little warm." His voice was low, and a bit wicked.

Afraid of what she'd see in his face, she couldn't bring herself to look at him. Lady Heathcote had frequently made mention of how provincial Americans were. Yet it was not the marbles that made Jenny's heart beat faster and caused hummingbirds to take up residence in her stomach. It was wanting to see him naked. She had to stop thinking about that. "Do you swim?"

He leaned back. "I do."

Why had she asked? Now she felt even hotter. She had to get out of here. "It is a bit stuffy in here."

"Ah, yes. I agree." His breath tickled her ear, making her want to lean into him. "Perhaps we should view the rest of the museum."

Frank grinned to himself. The moment Jenny had seen the marbles her face had become quite rosy. He should probably have warned her about their lack of clothing. He wondered if he would ever have the opportunity to see her without her gown, petticoats, and chemise.

His member stirred at the thought. Had his growing desire for her been behind him wanting her to live at his brother and sister-in-law's house for the rest of the time she was in Town? Part of his attraction to her was lust. The question was how much was purely physical and how much was true caring. He did enjoy being with her.

Marrying her would be one way to escape his father. In fact, it would be the quickest way to be disowned by the duke. Still, if he could not love her, and she could not love him, he would be exchanging one hell for another. And that one would be an ocean away from his family. What would it be like to live in America? To be respected for working instead of pitied? To spend every night in bed with Jenny in his arms?

He guided her into a room where paintings from the Dutch masters dominated the walls. "Tell me what it's like living in America."

She gazed up at him, her head tilted to one side. "Do you mean how it is different from England?"

"Yes."

"As I see it, the main difference is that one is not as defined by his or her status at birth as much as one is here, and with hard work, one can change one's financial status. By the same consideration, one can lose everything and either wallow in failure or build one's fortune again. Using one's God-given abilities is valued more than what family one comes from." She seemed to study the paintings for several moments then said,

"We have our problems. There is poverty and children begin work at an early age, but there is also opportunity. My father arrived from Scotland as a young man with almost nothing, and he has built a shipping line. He is also investing in a steamship company that runs up the coast. One day, the steamships will cross the ocean."

Another type of lust, that for a life that could participate in such ventures as ocean crossing steamships, coursed through him. "And men can vote."

He hadn't realized how much that meant to him until she had mentioned it.

"Yes, men can vote. Someday, women shall have the vote as well. Is that something you would support?"

He thought of his mother, Meg, and the other strong women he knew. "I would."

Jenny nodded. "I believe you."

Their eyes met, caught, and held. More than anything, he wanted to kiss her. Taste her lush, deep pink lips. He started to bend his head, when the clicking of heels caused him to jerk his head up.

"Lord Frank." *Oh, God. Just when I thought my luck was in.* "What are you doing in Town?" Lord Thornfield, one of his father's oldest friends, entered the room, accompanied by his wife. "I am sure the duke didn't mention it when we saw him last week." The man's white brows drew together. "I am sure he would have given me a message for you."

What he meant was that the duke would ask his friend to see what his son was up to. This was not a conversation Frank wanted to have. Yet, how was he to get rid of the older couple. He bowed. "My lord, my lady. I hope you had a pleasant stay in Scotland."

"Always do. A pity your mother couldn't remain longer."

He schooled his countenance to hide his mirth. Mama always managed to have an emergency at home that she must attend to. With fourteen children, that was not difficult. "Indeed, what happened?"

“One of your brothers or sisters. Putrid sore throat or some such thing.”

Lady Thornfield gave Jenny a pointed look, and he knew he could not escape from introducing her. Then he made a decision he would no doubt pay for later. On the other hand, if Americans had no rank, then there was no reason she should be subordinate to Lady Thornfield. It would not be his fault if her ladyship mistook Jenny for a viscount’s daughter. “Miss MacGowan, may I introduce Lady Thornfield and her husband, Lord Thornfield. My lord, my lady, Miss MacGowan and her aunt are visiting my brother Hawksworth and his wife.

Lord Thornfield bowed. Frank tried not to chuckle when Lady Thornfield curtsied.

“A pleasure to meet you,” Jenny said with a polite smile.

“We had better move along.” Frank bowed slightly to the Thornfields. “I promised to have her back in good time for this evening’s entertainment.”

He had just about managed to extract her from the Thornfields when a shrill voice called out, “There you are.”

Jenny’s groan was so light, he barely heard it. “Lady Heathcote?”

“Who else.” Jenny kept her voice low so only he could hear her.

“I suppose that popinjay with her is Pomfry?”

“In the flesh.”

A strange feeling crept up his spine. He had to get her away as soon as possible, even if he did not understand the reason. “Quickly,” he said. “Introduce me.”

She flashed him a confused look, then did as he asked. “My lady, allow me to introduce Lord Frank Trevor. Lord Frank, this is the Countess of Heathcote.”

Using all the haughtiness he had learned watching his father, he inclined his head toward her ladyship, raised his quizzing glass to Pomfry and drawled, “And you are?”

“Pomfry, my lord.”

His lordship had been ogling Jenny, but now he seemed to squirm a bit under

Frank's perusal. Which was exactly what he wanted.

The idea that man milliner might attempt to touch Jenny made Frank want to punch the man in the nose.

*Mine.*

He didn't know where the certainty of his feelings came from, but he knew it was true. If Jenny MacGowan would have him.

"Indeed." Infusing his voice with a dismissive tone, he focused on the other man's elaborately tied cravat and high shirt points for a moment before lowering his quizzer.

Next to him Jenny went still and quiet as if trying to escape notice. Although at the moment, both Pomfry and Lady Heathcote were focused on him.

"Trevor?" Her voice had risen an octave, making her tone almost painful to hear.

"The Duke of Somerset's son," he replied using his driest tone. "You must excuse us. My sister, Lady Hawksworth, is expecting Miss MacGowan and me. We are already late."

Frank tightened his grip on Jenny's arm as they walked swiftly toward the door. Once outside, he took a deep breath. "That could have been a disaster."

"I understand why it would have been one for me," she replied tartly. "She would have insisted I accompany them. I fail to see why it affected you."

"That is because you don't know my father."

He lifted her into the carriage, then went around to the other side, flipped the boy a coin, and climbed in.

Her eyes narrowed. "Are you doing something you should not?"

"That is an excellent question. The problem is I am not sure of the answer."

Still, he had a feeling that in not much more than a week, a fortnight at the most, he would either be on his way to America with Jenny as his wife, or back in Somerset under his father's boot.

He was fairly certain she felt something for him, if only on a purely physical level.

The question was, could she put aside her dislike of the English and wed him. Or perhaps, since she appeared to get on well enough with her aunt's betrothed, she might be willing to make another exception. No matter what happened, he must keep his father away from her until a decision was made.

## CHAPTER FIVE

What on earth could Frank mean by not knowing the answer? Jenny had never heard of anything so ridiculous. Maybe he thought she was unable to understand his circumstances because she was American. Quite frankly, she had experienced more than enough of that sort of disdain from the English.

She crossed her arms over her chest, then had to grab on to the side of the curricle when he made a turn. "Please explain yourself."

"My mother sent me to Damon. She said I needed some Town bronze. However, my father was, and possibly still is, away in Scotland. I am not at all sure if he knows I'm here. But I'll wager anything that Lord Thornfield will write to him about our meeting."

"You must be in your late twenties. I do not understand why he'd care."

"That is where knowing my father comes in. He keeps all of us under his thumb. Except for Damon, and my brother only made his escape this past Christmas."

"But your brother was a military officer." One Jenny had been pleased to hear did not think the regent should have sent troops to her country.

“He was, and, unlike me, he is not dependent on my father for funds. The duke threatened to cut him off from all contact with the family if he did not do as he wanted.”

“Just so your father could have his way?” When Frank nodded, she gasped. “That is reprehensible. What an old reprobate.”

Suddenly he laughed. Thank God she was angry and not afraid. “You are in good company with that opinion. Meg agrees with you.”

Jenny liked Meg and found it almost impossible to believe that any father could not want her for a daughter-in-law. “That doesn’t surprise me. She is an intelligent woman.” For a few minutes she listened to the clop of the horses and the sounds of vendors hawking their goods. “Thank you for getting me out of the museum. You were very impressive.”

He flashed her a quick smile. “It was my pleasure. She clearly would have stuck you with Pomfry. That wouldn’t have done at all.”

“No. I have little desire to spend any time at all with him.” In fact, his lordship would be a great waste of her time. Even if she was interested in him, which she most decidedly was not, she would not remain here, and he would not move to America. Frank, on the other hand, had great possibilities. She had only three things to ascertain. Could he leave his family, was he willing to work for a living, and would they fall in love.

She already had strong corporeal feelings for him. Not that she could admit that to anyone. Before her mother died, she had explained the physical side of marriage to Jenny, and told her how wonderful it could be. Mama had also said that lust was not a good basis for marriage, but it did help separate the wheat from the chaff.

“Why do you not find other employment?”

She watched him carefully for any indication he did not care for her question. After a few moments he glanced at her. “I’ve considered it several times, but my father would

make sure I was never able to. As I think I may have mentioned or alluded to, he wants to control us.”

She had heard of a wealthy industrialist who attempted to treat his children that way. One of his sons had followed frontiersman Daniel Boone west and had never returned. Then his daughter ran off with a gambler. After that, he’d changed his tune. A duke must have the same type of power. It could actually be worse. England wasn’t as large as the United States, and there was that whole peerage thing. “What would you want to do if you could? Does not having an occupation appeal to you?”

“No.” He gave her a rueful grin. “I’d go mad without something to keep me busy. I like organizing, and planning. I enjoy finding ways to increase the estate’s income.”

“You mean that you like making a profit.”

“Good heavens!” He gave a dramatic shudder. “Do not, I pray, let anyone hear you discussing trade.”

For the first time in a long while, she laughed. “But that is it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, although no one in the *ton* would use that term. Even pinching pennies is frowned upon.”

“Well, that type of attitude makes no sense to me.”

“I’m beginning to think it does not make a great deal of sense to me either.” He kept his attention on the horses, but his voice was thoughtful.

She smiled to herself. Maybe, just maybe, she was making a convert of Frank to the good old New England way of thinking, as her mother would say. At least they’d be living in the same house. That would give her an opportunity to know him better.

“We shall be back at my brother’s townhouse soon.” Jenny had gone so quiet, Frank wished he could steal a look at her. Something was going on in that clever head of hers. He merely wished he knew what it was.

A few minutes later, he pulled up in front of the steps. A footman ran out and took the horses as he jumped down and went around to assist Jenny down. Yet, the moment

she was in his arms, he didn't want to let her go.

His hands were still on her waist, when she smiled up at him. "I had a lovely outing. Thank you."

One digit at a time, he forced his fingers off her soft body. Finally, he had enough command of himself to place her hand on his arm. Thank God she'd be staying here. It would give them time to see if they wanted the same things. "We should discover if your trunks have arrived."

"And my aunt."

"Indeed." The door opened, and Saunders executed a stiff bow. "Miss, my lord, you are expected in the morning room."

"Have Miss MacGowan's bags been sent over?"

"His lordship wishes to speak with you." He took Jenny's coat. "I believe Miss Brodhead is present as well."

As Frank and Jenny left the hall, he glanced at her. "That's the worst thing about butlers—they won't even give you a hint. I wonder what Damon wants." Something was going on, and he had a feeling he wasn't going to like it. "Does your family have a butler?"

"We do, and before you ask, he is just as bad. Possibly worse." Her fine dark brows drew together as if something were bothering her. "Do you . . . do you help your servants find better positions?"

"As in rising through the ranks?" he asked, not sure what she meant.

"No, I mean jobs in business." She sounded confused.

This must be yet another difference between England and America. "Being in service is considered extremely good employment. Upper servants have the same respect, if not more, than a middling shopkeeper. Most of our servants have been with us for several generations. It is safe and, unless a servant is dishonest or cannot do the work, the position can be held for the rest of their lives."

She glanced at him, her eyes widening. "I had no idea. At home, being a servant is a beginning for many of the poor, but in only a few cases is it something one wishes to do for the rest of one's life." She fell silent for a moment. "Perhaps Americans and those who come to my country would rather take the risks needed to improve their lot. Opportunity is the reason many of them come over in the first place."

How different from here, where most people wished to maintain the status quo. Or at least that was what the landowners wanted. He opened the door, standing back while she entered. His brother and the Earl of Warwick rose. Miss Brodhead had a tight smile on her face, and Meg didn't look at all happy.

By the time Frank and Jenny had taken a seat on the small sofa, tea arrived. After Meg had served, Miss Brodhead looked at Jenny and said, "As much as I appreciate the invitation to reside here for the next week or so, we cannot accept." Her chin took on a mulish cast, and her aunt hurried on, "I have had our possessions moved to the Pulteney Hotel. We shall be quite comfortable there until Geoff and I marry." Miss Brodhead looked at Meg. "After that, if you have decided to remain in England for a while and the invitation is still open, I will have no objection to you visiting her ladyship."

*Hell and damnation!* That would give every gentleman in London access to her. There was no way the hotel would be able to keep them out. Frank opened his mouth to say as much, when Damon caught his eye and gave an imperceptible shake of his head.

"Jenny." Meg smiled more warmly this time. "Our invitation stands. You are welcome here at any time, and for as long as you wish."

"Thank you." As the others began to talk, Jenny whispered furiously to Frank, "I am twenty-four years old. I do not have to abide by my aunt's decision."

"The difficulty is that if you remain here, which would please me immensely, your aunt would not be able to stay at the hotel alone. It would also appear odd. I assume that returning to Lady Heathcote's home would be insupportable."

“It would be.” Her tone was still angry, but her chin had lost its stubborn appearance.

“There is nothing to stop me from calling on you, if you would like me to do so.”

Her gloved hand found his, and she squeezed his fingers. “Call as often as you wish.”

It was probably too soon for his next question, but ever since he’d run into Lord Thornfield, Frank felt as if he was on borrowed time. “Whom do I ask for permission to court you?”

Jenny searched Frank’s face, looking for any indication that he was not serious. He knew what she needed in a husband. Was he truly willing to leave his family and move across an ocean? A hint of fear lurked in his light blue eyes, but there was also friendship and liking that might become love. As Papa said, nothing ventured, nothing gained. She swallowed. “You ask me.”

He turned so that his body blocked the others from seeing his face and hers. “Miss MacGowan, may I have permission to court you, woo you, and discover if we were meant for one another?”

Somewhere in the vicinity of her heart, a hummingbird took up residence. The fear fled his eyes, replaced by warmth that was directed entirely at her. Other men had asked to court her, but none of them had known she wanted a husband who would return home with her. Frank knew, and he asked anyway. “Yes, Lord Frank Trevor, you may.”

They stared at each other, unable to drag their gazes away. If they had been alone, he would have kissed her. Then something made a strange sound, and a gray kitten jumped on his lap. Frank laughed. “How did you get in here, my lady?”

Jenny reached out to stroke the cat, but it drew back, looking at her with large yellow eyes. “Cats generally like me.”

“Don’t be offended. This is a Chartreux. They are known for being standoffish to

strangers. She'll warm to you soon. Jenny, meet Lady Quimby."

"How do you do, my lady?" She glanced at him. "Quimby?"

"Ah, yes. We've always had a cat by the name of Quimby. Some of them were Lord Quimby. It's a name Damon came up with as a child, and the rest of us followed suit."

"I can see why. It's a fun name."

"It was also useful in other ways."

"Jenny," her aunt said as she rose, "we should be getting to the hotel. I have accepted Lady Hawksworth's invitation to dine with them before we attend the ball this evening."

Frank set the kitten on the sofa, stood and held out his hand. "Will you save me two waltzes?"

"If I had my way, I would only dance with you." None of the other men she'd stood up with had been half as entertaining or danced as well as he did. "Would you like the supper dance?"

"Do you plan to stay that long? I seem to remember you slipping out early last night."

"I shall remain if I am to dance with you." When she rose, they were standing much closer than propriety allowed, but no one said anything. "At least this evening I shall not be plagued by the *gentlemen* Lady Heathcote has selected."

"I still think you'll have to beat them off," he murmured in her ear as they entered the corridor. "Perhaps I shall stand over you the entire evening and glower at the other men."

If only he could, but Sarah and Geoff would probably not approve. And right now, Jenny was so happy she did not want anything to interfere with her mood.

Before assisting her into the town coach, Frank kissed the palm of her hand, closing her fingers around it. "Until this evening."

She wished she did not have to leave, but at least she'd see him soon. "Until then."

Once she was settled, he shut the door, and Geoff used his cane to tap on the roof. The carriage lurched forward, and they were soon traveling through Town. She glanced out the window, wishing again that she had not had to leave, but perhaps a little distance would do her and Frank good. At his brother's house, it would have been hard to stay away from him. And, if she was honest, out of his bed. Now that temptation was gone. After all, she had only met him last night. Normally, she was slow to take to a new person, but he had captured her interest almost immediately. She also had a great deal to think about. It occurred to her that many of the wealthy land owners did work, although they would not call it that. Perhaps she had been unfair.

"You seem quite taken with Lord Frank," Sarah said.

Jenny wasn't sure if she was ready to share her feelings yet. Her aunt might think it was too soon to feel so much for a man. She gave herself an inner shrug. It was her life and her decision. "I am. He has asked if he could court me, and I gave him permission."

Across the short expanse of the coach, Geoff barked a laugh and held out his hand. "You owe me a guinea, my love."

Sarah fished a coin out of her reticule, handing it over.

"You wagered on me?" Jenny could not believe what had happened. "You *never* gamble."

A blush stole up Sarah's neck into her cheeks. "Yes, well, I did not think I would lose. Therefore, it was not wagering."

"But you did lose," Jenny pointed out, taking more than a little satisfaction from the incident.

"Genevieve Elizabeth MacGowan," her aunt said tartly, "you have been wooed by handsome wealthy Americans, equally handsome and wealthy French nobles and aristocrats, and none of them has turned your head. You meet Lord Frank Trevor, a hated Englishman I might add, and in less than twenty-four hours you are smitten. Of course I did not believe it." She shook her head. "You are perverse. I do not understand

you at all.”

A smile pulled at the corners of Jenny’s lips. “That is just it. I think he *does* understand me. We may not agree on everything, but he listens to me, and tries to find ways to bridge our differences.”

“Does he know you intend on returning home?” Geoff asked.

“I told him today. I do not think he is very happy with his situation.”

“In that case” —a concerned tone colored her aunt’s words— “make sure he is not courting you to run away from his life.”

Jenny’s happy mood fizzled. Could that be what he found so attractive about her? The fact that marrying her would give him a completely different life? She straightened her shoulders. Well, she would have to find out, and quickly. She promised her father she would marry for love, and that is what she wanted as well.

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Frank watched until the town coach Jenny was in turned the corner before strolling back to the morning room where Damon and Meg were still in conversation. “Did Miss Brodhead say why she and Jenny could not stay here?”

Meg nodded. “She and Lord Warwick agreed that it would give an odd appearance for Jenny and her to leave his sister’s house and move here. The hotel gives Miss Brodhead an opportunity to receive ladies for visits and more control over their wedding breakfast. I should have realized at once the plan would not work.” Meg pressed her lips together. “It was just that you and Jenny seem so comfortable together. I wanted to . . .” She shrugged and pulled a face. “So much for *my* attempts at matchmaking.”

“You wanted to help.” Frank went to the sideboard, poured a glass of wine and held up the decanter. When his brother and sister-in-law both nodded, he poured two

more glasses. "I appreciate your gesture. I do want to know her better. My concern about the hotel is that it is not as safe as a house." Visions of men popping out from behind potted plants and laying siege at Jenny's door flooded his mind. He never knew that caring for a lady would make him so fanciful or so possessive.

Damon took the glass Frank handed him. "I don't like the idea of a hotel either." He raised a brow. "Too many ways to stage an ambush."

His brother had been in the war and frequently used military analogies. In this case, Frank agreed with him, even if it did make him sound a bit mad.

"How so?" Meg asked.

"Jenny's an heiress." Damon took a sip of wine. "There are some who would not hesitate to attempt to force her hand."

"She has no close family or connections," he continued. "And no one to scare away the fortune hunters and rogues."

Perhaps Frank wasn't being so cockled-brained after all. "Except us. No matter what ends up happening between Jenny and me" — which he hoped was a great deal — "we can take care of her."

"We will surround her with our friends," Meg added. "That way she will be safe from the Pomfrys of the *ton*."

"That will work when we are at the same entertainments, my love." Damon poured himself another glass of wine. "However, it does not address the problem of the hotel."

"I will take that watch." Frank grinned. "I asked her if I could court her, and she gave me permission."

"How wonderful!" Meg jumped up and hugged him. "You two just feel right to me."

"If only you could have seen that with us, my love," Damon drawled as she wrinkled her nose at him.

Now, all he had to do was find out how deep his feelings about Jenny were, and

how deep hers were for him.

## CHAPTER SIX

Shortly after Jenny and her aunt arrived at the hotel, Jenny made arrangements for one of the hotel's servants named Suky to act as her maid. Geoff had also given Jenny a letter from her father.

She opened the message.

*My darling Jenny,*

*All is well here, but we'll be glad to have you home again. As you've not written me about any young men, I am guessing that you haven't found anyone to your taste. Speaking of which, your Rose has decided to marry a man she met not long after you left. I'm sorry to say you'll have to look for another maid when you return.*

*Your loving Papa*

*P.S. The 'Elizabeth' should be in London soon. Her captain will wait on you when they arrive.*

That answered one of her concerns. She knew how she was going to get home. Jenny watched as Suky put away her clothing. Perhaps if she did a good job, the woman

might like to go to America.

“Which gown will you be wanting for this evening, miss?”

“The yellow one should do.”

“Aye, that’s a good choice. I’ll just give it a bit of a press.”

There was something about the woman’s accent that was strange. “You’re not from here?”

“Nay, I’m from up in Yorkshire, but there’s not much there but working in mills and mines, so I decided to come south.”

Bearing what Frank had said in mind, Jenny asked, “Is working as a lady’s maid what you have always wanted to do?”

Suky shrugged. “It’s what I’m good at.”

“But?” Jenny smiled encouragingly.

“I had thought to save enough to get my own shop, but with having to send money home, there’s not much left over.”

Jenny nodded thoughtfully. Now that she knew how hard it was for people to improve themselves in England, there might be some way she could help the maid.

“Perhaps your luck will change.”

“My da always said hard work is better than luck.”

“My father says a little luck will never go amiss.”

“That’s true enough, miss. Now I’d better finish up here.”

A few hours later, with her hair arranged more beautifully than it ever had been before, Jenny and her aunt waited for Geoff to fetch them.

Although the time had passed quickly, she found herself missing Frank more with each passing minute. Under the guise of tugging her spangled shawl tighter, she gave herself a hug. He’d begin courting her this evening, and she could not wait. Jenny even hoped he did hover over her all night. For she truly did not wish to stand up with anyone else. Her aunt must be wrong that Frank might be interested in her because he

wanted to escape his father. She had learned to recognize the look in a man's eye when he was calculating what she could give him, and she had not seen any of that in Frank. No, every sense she had told her that he really did want only her. Still, she would continue to watch him for a while longer. It wouldn't do to make a mistake.

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Frank strode to Jenny the moment her party was announced. "I missed you. Does that sound strange?"

She pulled her lower lip between her teeth, and blushed. "Not at all. I missed you as well."

"Would you like a glass of wine?" he asked, leading her into the drawing room.

"Yes, please."

Once he handed her a goblet, they moved to one of the two window seats. She sat, while he leaned against the wall. She seemed shy, something he had not noticed in her before. "Is everything alright?"

"I received a letter from my papa," she replied.

Something, the tone or quality of her voice, told him the letter was important.

"And?"

"One of our ships will be in London soon. The captain is expecting to take me home."

Frank let out the breath he'd been holding. This was it then. There would be no time to see the rest of his family again. Even if his father was still in Scotland, he dare not go home. If his father had received word of Jenny, who knew the lengths the duke would take to keep him away from her. "I understand."

She rubbed her temples as if they ached. "I must know if you would do almost anything to leave home."

He studied Jenny for a moment. Something was worrying her. Sliding a look at her aunt, he found the lady staring at him. Perhaps the woman didn't approve of Jenny aligning herself with him. "The question would be easier to answer if you tell me what exactly is troubling you."

After a few strained moments of silence, she said, "It was suggested that you might be using me to escape your father."

"My love" —he paused for a moment realizing that he meant the words—"there is no escaping my father. He shall do all he is able to punish me for choosing you. He will attempt to use his influence even in America. Realizing that, I still would not change a thing. The real question is whether you would still want me knowing he will make trouble if he can." If she actually wanted him at all.

"Thank you for being honest with me." She smiled at him, and he had never seen a more beautiful look or a more exquisite lady. "And I do not care at all what your father might try to do. He has no power in my country."

He did not agree with her last remark, but decided to let it pass. There was no way he knew of to convince her how dangerous the duke could be. "I'm glad you asked instead of allowing it to continue to bother you. Still, I know it wasn't easy." In situations like this, it rarely was. There was too much of a chance to have one's feelings hurt, and the urge to protect herself must be strong. "I would like to have complete honesty between us."

"As would I." Her deep blue eyes studied him. "With our countries being at war twice and our dissimilar cultures, we already have so many differences."

"Then we are agreed." Taking her hand, he kissed her fingers. "We shall not hide our concerns or feelings."

"We are agreed." Jenny glanced up almost shyly.

He would have liked to take her out to the terrace, but his brother's butler announced dinner. Meg had very helpfully seated him and Jenny together, giving him

the opportunity to select from the dishes the footmen brought around for her before they were set on the table.

“What is dinner like in America?” he asked as he placed some of the peas in lemon sauce on her plate.

“Nothing so elaborate”—she slid him a playful look—“not at my home in any event.”

There would be a great deal to learn and get used to if she agreed to marry him. “I assume you have been mistress of your father’s house. How would you have planned the meal?”

She finished swallowing the bite she’d taken. “As here, I would begin with a soup. The next course would be either some sort of meat, fish, or poultry, as well as vegetables or a salad. For dessert, we’d have a pie or fruit.”

“Simpler more than different.” He watched as she daintily dabbed her mouth with the serviette.

“Yes. I suppose that’s it.” They ate quietly for several moments. “I take it you have a large family.”

“I have fifteen brothers and sisters including Damon.”

“Are you”—her fine dark brows drew together slightly—“are you close?”

Suddenly honesty was not all it was cracked up to be. “Yes, it will be difficult not to see them again. I’m used to having the younger ones around almost every day.” He wished dinner was over and he could speak to her alone. “However, if things work out between us, they will understand. What I mean to say is that my brothers and sisters would not expect me to lose you.”

She gave an imperceptible nod. “I think I understand. Even though my aunt will miss her friends and family, she must follow her heart.”

Damon, who was on Jenny’s other side, leaned over slightly. Keeping his voice low he said, “I will assist in any way I am able.” He grinned. “You never know when

someone in the family might take it into his or her head to visit America.”

Her shoulders dropped as if the tension Frank had seen rising in them fled. He gave his brother a grateful smile. “I know you will.”

The gentlemen decided to take their port and brandy into the drawing room when Meg rose, signaling to the ladies it was time to withdraw.

When the men entered the corridor, Frank gathered Geoff and his brother. “I fully expect trouble from the ducal member of my family.” Frank’s gaze focused on the earl. “If you cannot bring yourself to defy my father, I’d ask that you do not hinder our efforts.”

Geoff returned Frank’s look. “I have come to think of Jenny as my family. I would no sooner desert her than I would my own sister.”

That was what Frank had hoped the man would say. “Thank you.”

Damon then told Geoff how the duke had attempted to stop Damon and Meg from marrying first by hiring a former suitor of Meg’s to abduct her, and then by trying to compromise them both by having other people enter their bedchambers the night before the wedding.

“Good God!” Geoff said. His voice full of disgust. “He really will stop at nothing.”

Frank was relieved the man seemed to understand the threat to Jenny. “She must be kept safe in the hotel.”

“And elsewhere,” Geoff agreed. “Hawksworth, could I borrow a couple of your larger footmen?”

Frank was glad the earl was taking the threat seriously, but he couldn’t convince himself that Jenny would be safe even if he told her all his father was capable of.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Jenny entered the ballroom on Frank's arm and surrounded by his family. Still, she was dismayed to see not only Lady Heathcote and Lord Pomfry were present, but Lord and Lady Thornfield as well.

"This is what comes of attending early," Frank whispered in a frustrated tone. "One cannot blend into a crowd when it has not yet assembled."

Despite the irritation she had been feeling, Jenny giggled.

In front of them, Meg signaled to someone across the room. "Never fear. We shall have more than enough help to keep the wolves at bay."

In less time than Jenny had imagined possible, they were surrounded by friends of Meg and Damon.

Damon turned to Jenny and bowed. "Miss MacGowan, may I introduce you to the Earls of Stanstead and Beresford." Two tall gentlemen, one with blond curls, the other with dark hair, bowed.

"I am Nick Beresford," the dark-haired man said.

"And I am Rupert Stanstead," the blond said. Another man with almost identical

hair stood next to him as well as an older man. "My cousin Robert, Viscount Beaumont, and my step-father, Lord Malfrey."

"I am pleased to meet you." Jenny smiled and held out her hand, pleased when the men in turn shook it.

Meg touched Jenny's arm, and she was suddenly face to face with an older lady dressed in the most vivid red gown she had ever seen. "My lady, this is Miss MacGowan whom I hope will soon join our family. Jenny, Lady Telford."

"Oh, no, my dear." The lady turned to a tall gentleman who appeared to be in his fifties. "I told you we should have made the announcement earlier. I am now Lady Sudbury. Miss MacGowan, I must tell you that I adore Americans. May I introduce my husband?"

Once again, Jenny had her hand shaken without the look of distaste she'd received before. "My pleasure."

"I'm not sure you should say that so quickly," Lady Sudbury said. "He's an old roué. Although I am quickly reforming him."

Jenny grinned. These people were much more entertaining than anyone else she'd met in London or in France. In a short period of time she was made known to, Vivian, Lady Stanstead, Serena, Lady Beaumont, Silvia, Lady Beresford, Marcus and Phoebe, Marquis and Marchioness of Evesham, and Lord and Lady Thornhill. To Jenny's surprise and delight, she was invited to call all the younger ladies by their first names.

Lady Thornhill shook Jenny's hand. "I understand you have already had the misfortune to meet Lord and Lady Thornfield. It's a pity our names are so similar. They are as stuffy as we are liberal."

The opening set was a country dance. Lord Pomfry got almost close enough to ask Jenny to dance, when Lord Stanstead stepped in front of the man. "Would you do me the honor of dancing with me?"

She smiled gratefully. "I'd be happy to."

For the rest of the evening, every time one of the gentlemen she had not wished to dance with approached their circle, one of Damon and Meg's friends stood up with her. Frank, of course, claimed the waltzes, and she once again felt as if she were floating on air.

This time, he did hold her too tightly and too closely. "You are going to cause talk."

A wicked look entered his dark blue eyes. "It is hard to be chastened when I enjoy holding you so much."

"Devil." She tried not to smile, but felt the corners of her lips turning up.

"Flattery?"

"No, the truth." His warm breath brushed her ear. "There *is* a reason I am courting you, and it has nothing to do with my circumstances."

So he thought now, but what of later? Would he truly be able to leave his large and close family? Or would he begin to resent her for not being able to live in England? If only it did not feel so right to be in his arms, and to be able to talk so easily with him. No matter that they had met only a little over a day ago, she felt as if she had known him all her life. If only she could be certain that if he asked her to marry him and she agreed, that they would be happy. Then again, even if they were from the same county, there were no guarantees all would be well.

Perhaps she should do as her father had advised and follow her heart. On the other hand, Papa also told her not to bring home an Englishman. She winced inwardly. Frank had been so concerned about his father she had not wanted to tell him about hers.

"Jenny, my love, what is bothering you?"

She wished they had not agreed to be completely honest. "Aside from the possibility of me taking you away from your family if we wed, nothing. Except that my father told me not to bring home an Englishman."

He lifted his gaze to the ceiling. "And here I thought all our problems were on this side of the ocean."

They danced without speaking for a few minutes as Frank pondered Jenny's concerns. He would miss his family. There was no doubt about it. Yet, his father would not live forever, and all but the youngest ones would understand. Even his mother would want him to marry for love, and he did love Jenny. As to being an Englishman, well, America could give him several things Britain could not, chief among them, the right to vote. The ability to make a difference. "What must one do to become an American?"

She stumbled, but he held her steady. "You would give up your citizenship?"

"I dearly want to be able to vote, and I doubt I could do it without becoming an American." Jenny stared up at him as if in shock. "Am I correct?"

"Yes—yes, you are." A faint line appeared in her forehead. "All that is necessary is for you to declare yourself an American, once you arrive, that is."

Then that is exactly what he would do, if she agreed to marry him. That also solved the problem of her bringing home an Englishman.

The set ended and he led her back to their circle. Glancing around, he noticed Jenny's aunt and Geoff were not present. A shrill voice caused him to look toward the stairs where Lady Heathcote stood next to her brother and Sarah. "I have the feeling Geoff is bearing the brunt of Damon and Meg's maneuvering."

"Oh, dear." Jenny turned and frowned. "I do feel sorry for him. She can be such a shrew." She clapped her hand over her mouth. "I should not have said that. I am probably just as much at fault for us not getting along."

"Somehow I do not think her temperament has anything to do with you." Frank watched as the earl said something to his sister, and the lady's expression changed from petulant to interested. But interested in what? He shook his head. "I believe it is warm enough to brave the terrace, if you would like to stroll."

"I would be delighted." Jenny tucked her hand into the crook of his arm. "Lead on."

They wove their way through the now crowded ballroom toward the French

windows. Once outside, he noticed that he and Jenny weren't the only ones seeking relief from the heat of the room. Torches lit the way down the steps and out into the garden where lanterns hung from tree limbs and from stands. Birds, nightingales most likely, sang, and white flowers sent their perfume into the air.

"It's beautiful," Jenny said, leaning more heavily on his arm. "Almost like a fairy world."

"What do you know of fairies?" He stopped and stared down at her in surprise.

"You must remember my father is from Scotland." She laughed. "Fairies may be beautiful, but they can be dangerous and sometimes cruel. I have always preferred to focus on their beauty and forget the rest."

"Could that not be dangerous?" A smile played around the edges of his strong well-shaped lips.

She tucked her arm more securely in his, and began to stroll. "More dangerous than ambling down a dark garden path with a gentleman?"

"I suppose that depends on how far down the path you intend to go." His voice, deep and rich as warm maple syrup, caused her to shiver with anticipation. Would he kiss her?

They had reached an arbor and he drew her into the shelter and his arms.

"Jenny?" His breath warmed her cheek, and one finger gently caressed her jaw. She lifted her chin, staring into his dark eyes, and his lips brushed hers.

"Yes." She didn't know if she was giving him permission or asking what he wanted, yet it didn't matter. His lips touched hers again, this time more firmly, and she kissed him back.

Time stopped. She slid her hands up his strong shoulders, tangling her fingers in his hair. His tongue swept along the seam of her mouth, and she opened, allowing him to take possession of her in a way she had never experienced before. Frank slanted his head, deepening the kiss, holding her closer. Her breasts rubbed against the finely

embroidered satin of his waistcoat. Tingles turned to fire as her skin heated, drawing her toward his flame. Oh, God. She rubbed against him, like a cat seeking more attention.

He started to pull back. "Jenny, my love, we must—"

"No." Cupping his face, she drew him back to her. This . . . his touch . . . their kiss, her first one, felt so good. Like nothing she had ever experienced before. "I don't want to stop." Then music floated out into the garden. Another set must be starting. She could not even remember who she was promised to.

His chuckle was wicked, as he nibbled her lower lip. "If it was up to me, I would remain here all night, yet someone will notice we are missing. Unless you wish to be compromised into marrying me, we must return."

Was this one of those differences between their countries, or perhaps Frank did not wish to have to marry her. The idea was unsettling and a little hurtful, particularly as he had asked to court her. Then again, he may have done that to see if they would fall in love and have enough in common to have a good marriage. It wasn't as if she was interested in any other man. They had only known each other for a very short time. Although, she knew some people fell in love at first sight and had splendid marriages.

She stifled a sigh. "No, I would not want that."

Frank heard what sounded like a small breathy sigh. Was he wrong to take such care of her reputation? No. He did not wish anyone to think they were marrying because they had to. Perhaps he should declare himself to Jenny now. Yet if he did, and she refused him, that would make it difficult for them to continue. He might lose her, and that was not an outcome he could or would accept. If he discovered his father knew of her or his plans for her, Frank would get her shackled to him in short order. But for now they should merely enjoy one another and find other places to kiss. She clearly had never been with a man before and that pleased him more than he'd thought possible. Maybe they could remain in the garden a little longer. Beaumont was to have partnered

with her for this set, and he would not mind dancing with his wife instead.

Frank leaned down and kissed Jenny again. When she yielded to him, he wanted to crow. A soft moan escaped her lips as he caressed her back, stopping just before her tempting bottom found its way under his palm. He swept his tongue into the warm cavern of her mouth. She tasted of wine and woman. His body tightened as desire, the need to make her his, rushed through his veins. God how he wanted her! Wanted to see her fiery hair spread out against his pillow, to have her naked beneath him. He brushed his thumb against her breast and she shivered, sinking even deeper into their kiss. If he didn't stop now, he wouldn't return her to the ballroom at all.

His breath beat the same tattoo as his heart. If they didn't stop now — "Sweetheart, we should go back."

"Yes." Her voice was breathy as if she had trouble speaking. "You are probably right."

He kept his arm around Jenny's waist, holding her close for a few moments longer, before placing her hand on his arm. "Lest you think otherwise, I could easily have remained until the ball ended."

Her eyes widened as if in surprise, but her lips, still swollen from his kisses, curved up. "I'm glad you told me."

"You should know I would not have minded being caught with you. However, you would be subjected to unwanted gossip." Nor did he want others to gossip about her more than they were already doing. She was his to protect. His to love.

"And I have had more than enough of that."

"The next set is our second waltz, after which we go down to supper." He paused at the door, not wanting to rejoin the ball. "If you were staying at my brother's, I would suggest we depart after eating."

Jenny searched his face, and he wondered what she found there. "I don't think we'll be allowed another stroll in the gardens. Perhaps we could just amble around the room

and talk.”

If only he could kiss her one last time, but eyes were already turning their way. “I would enjoy that.”

What she did not seem to understand was that by allowing him to keep her by his side, they were already making their preference for each other clear. Then again, she may know and not care, or things could be different in America. If only he knew what she was thinking.

Their friends, standing near the windows, formed a circle around them. Jenny’s aunt looked ready to ring a peal over their heads.

Meg tucked her arm in Jenny’s, a show of support Frank silently applauded. “I had to stop your aunt from going after you.”

“I had no idea we’d been gone so long.”

“No, I dare say you didn’t.” She grinned. “Yet unless you are ready to announce your immediate betrothal, a half hour is enough to cause talk.”

“For a mere thirty minutes?” At first, Jenny appeared surprised, then her countenance took on a militant cast. “I’ve never heard the like, and I—”

“It’s my fault.” Frank cut in before she could continue. She would not take the blame for their being together. “I know the customs here. Jenny does not.”

“Nevertheless,” Miss Brodhead said in a frustrated whisper, “it must not happen again. There are some people”—she cut her eyes briefly at Lady Heathcote who was staring at them—“who are waiting for you to make a misstep.”

The overture to the next set began, and he took Jenny away from his sister-in-law. “Let’s forget this and enjoy the dance.”

Or, in his case, enjoy being able to hold her once more.

“Thank you.” She smiled gratefully. “That would be perfect.”

She had always fitted him whenever they stood up together. But since they’d kissed, and he knew what she felt like when her body touched his, he couldn’t stop

himself from holding her a bit closer. He glanced around watching for anyone who might be paying them too much attention, but saw nothing and relaxed. Miss Brodhead had likely overreacted, and Meg was simply attempting to be diplomatic.

“A penny for your thoughts.” He looked down, and Jenny grinned.

“I was just thinking how well we fit together . . . when we dance.”

A tinkling of light laughter bubbled from her. “Is that what you call it?”

For the first time in years his neck grew warm, and he knew he was flushed.

“They do say Americans are forward,” a young lady near them murmured just loud enough for him to hear.

Jenny must have heard the girl as well. She stiffened, and her lips were drawn into a thin line. “She insulted me.”

“I would not make too much of it. She is probably jealous.” He smiled. “Did you see the coxcomb she’s with?”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Jenny relaxed again. “If he is anything like Lord Pompous, she’s welcome to him.”

This time it was Frank who laughed too loudly, causing soft comments. “I fear we are neither of us as well behaved as we should be.”

Her eyes twinkled with mirth, and he was glad she was happy again. Would that he could save her from all her troubles, but she was a strong woman and would not appreciate being smothered by him or any man.

At the end of the set, as he was escorting her to supper, Damon put his hand on Frank’s arm. “Meg is tired. She suggested that we all adjourn to the house. Cook can find something for us to eat.”

Jenny cast a concerned look where Meg sat on a chair. “Yes, of course we will come.”

A few minutes later they had bid adieu to their hostess and were in the town coach. Sarah and Warwick had decided to remain at the ball.

Jenny laid her hand on Meg's knee. "You may take me back to the hotel if you'd like."

"Oh, no. I shall feel much better once I'm home." She paused, but it was too dark for Frank to see her expression. "The noise and heat were bothering me. Nothing more. I am feeling better already."

"I abhor disagreeing with you, my love," Damon said. "But Jenny brings up a possible solution. If there is a prospect of a cold collation at the Pulteney, then we would not have to worry over someone seeing Frank escorting her to the hotel in a closed coach."

"I am quite sure the kitchens are open at all hours," Jenny said.

"It is decided then. I have always wondered if the food was as good as it is reputed to be."

Damon and Meg had neatly danced around the subject, but Frank had the distinct feeling that he and Jenny had been the subject of talk. *Well, hell!* They would simply have to be more circumspect when in public. He would not allow her to be pushed into marriage. That was a choice she would be free to make. Even if he did not like her decision.

Suddenly, what Jenny had said earlier came crashing back to him. *Perdition!* They did not have much time at all. One of her father's ships would be here soon ready to take her back to New York, and Frank had every intention of being on that ship with her when she left. Five days more. That would have to be enough. On the sixth day, he would ask her to marry him, and hope the ship didn't arrive before then.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Four days after the ill-fated ball, Jenny left the book store, stepping onto the sidewalk. Brian, her footman, was behind her carrying the rest of the books she had purchased in preparation for her journey home. She turned right toward Geoff's town coach that had been loaned to her for the excursion. She really had had no idea she and Frank could have caused such a stir by having fun with each other. These people obviously did not have enough to keep them busy.

On the other hand, except for Pomfry attempting to accost her at the hotel, the other gentlemen Geoff's sister had introduced her to had stopped bothering her. Unfortunately, she and Frank had not been alone since. One would think that he could have arranged *something*.

*Does he or doesn't he?* Jenny sighed softly so that no one would hear her. Perhaps it should be *does she or doesn't she?* Lord Frank was everything she had been looking for in a husband. Funny, handsome, nice, and he kissed extremely well. And danced well. She mustn't forget that. And she was afraid she was falling in love with him. Actually,

if she was honest, which she did not truly wish to be at the moment, she had already fallen. Hard.

If only he wasn't English. Papa would not be at all happy about that. Then again, he did trust her judgment. If not, he would never have agreed to her proposals regarding the settlement agreement she brought with her. Papa was a dear, and she loved him with all her heart, but he could be a bit old fashioned when it came to women and property. He had not agreed that she could keep everything that was hers, until she had pointed out that it would keep fortune hunters away. Now that that was no longer a problem, she had to make up her mind.

The question was whether Frank loved her. He was attentive and seemed to have a great deal of fun in her company, but others had pretended to as well . . . until she had mentioned living in New York. Something *he* appeared to have no concern about. Nor had another man kissed her. God, how he'd kissed her. And he was courting her. If only he would say the three little words she wanted to hear, everything would be settled.

Then again, despite feeling as if she had known him all her life, it had been less than a week since they'd met. Her aunt would be marrying in another two days. He was courting her, she reminded herself again. If Frank did not declare himself by the time Sarah wed, Jenny could not move to his brother's house. In that case, she would simply propose to him. She nodded to herself, happy to have made the decision.

Her new maid stood in front of the millinery shop and signaled by lifting her chin. She probably would have waved if her hands had not been full. Suddenly, a boy bumped into her and her books began to fall. Before she could lunge to save them, a large, meaty hand grabbed her arm. Jenny screamed, the man's hand covered her mouth and she bit down, tasting blood.

*"You'll pay for that, bitch!"*

Digging her feet into the cobblestones, she was able to slow him down. Where was

he taking her? The next thing she knew, he shoved her into a coach. She took a breath, intending to scream again, but the boot she landed on caught her stomach, making it difficult to breathe, much less shout.

Strong hands gripped her shoulders, lifting her, and setting her on the seat opposite the boots.

“Take shallow breaths and you’ll be fine in a minute,” a cultured, but unknown voice said. “I should have told the brute not to treat you roughly.”

The carriage had started, and Jenny couldn’t do anything until she could breathe again, so she did as instructed, and in a few moments was able to suck a deep breath of air. Once she felt in possession of herself, or as much as possible considering her heart was still clanging inside her chest, she faced her captor. He was tall with brown hair and eyes. He had a straight, almost military bearing. “Who are you and what do you want with me?”

His eyes crinkled as he smiled. “I should have thought that was clear by now. I plan to marry you.”

*Insane! The man is insane!* “I don’t even know you.”

“That will be remedied soon enough.” He glanced out the window as if having explained everything he thought she should know, that was the end of the discussion.

She tamped down her rising fear. “What is your name, and where are you taking me?”

He looked at her, a bored expression on his face. “You do ask a great many questions.”

Insufferable Englishman. She tried to copy the haughty tone Frank used at times, but couldn’t keep the rage infusing her body from her voice. “It is my life. I have a right to know.”

The man sighed. “I suppose it won’t hurt. There is nothing you can do about it in any event. You are already irreparably compromised by being in the coach with me, not

to mention the abduction took place on Bond Street. We shall travel to a tavern at the edge of Town, where I shall arrange a separate room for you." He gave a sardonic grin. "Naturally, the door will be locked. Don't think to try to talk the innkeeper around. I have concocted a plausible story for him. He will not assist you."

"Naturally." Jenny wanted to spit at his smug expression. No matter what happened, or what she had to do, he would not win. "Please continue."

"I shall inform your aunt, that I intend to wed you. She will be forced to agree. After all, Warwick will not want a scandal tainting his wife." He raised a brow. "Have you any more questions?"

Too many, but first . . . "Who are you, and why me? I am absolutely positive we have never met."

"I am Major Reginald Upton, late of His Majesty's House Guards." He may not have been in one of the units that had invaded her country, but she would *never* allow an English soldier to touch her, much less marry him. "You are correct," he continued in the same bored tone. "We have not been introduced. As to the reason you were chosen, it appears you have become much too friendly with a certain duke's son, and his grace wants you out of the way."

Frank's father. She . . . they . . . had expected him to do something, but not this soon. There was, however, one thing neither the duke nor the major had considered. She didn't care about her reputation in the *ton*, and neither Sarah nor Geoff could force her to marry this blackguard. If only she had made an arrangement to meet Frank this morning, he could save her. But she hadn't. Well, she simply needed to find a way to get back to Mayfair herself.

Fortunately, unlike the usual unmarried English lady, she had a fair amount of money with her and wouldn't hesitate to bribe her way out of the inn. If only she had brought her pistol. Yet who took a weapon to Bond Street?

The major had returned to his perusal of passing scenery. Obviously, he wasn't

concerned about her causing him any trouble. Therefore, she surmised, as long as she appeared to go along with his plan or act as if she had no choices, she was in no immediate danger. She looked out the other window, noting landmarks that would assist her on her way back to Town.

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“What the devil just happened?” Frank bellowed, not caring who heard him. Jenny’s safety was more important than street gawkers.

“Miss, she was taken.” Jenny’s maid wrung her hands. Books lay on the pavement and in the street.

“Yes, but who took her?”

“I don’t know, my lord. I got a quick look, but I never seen him before.”

A young man came running up carrying several more tomes. “What can I do to help?”

Ah, the footman Jenny had brought from America. “Help her” —he pointed at the maid and noticed a group of people had begun form— “back to the hotel. Tell Miss Brodhead what has occurred, and ask her to notify my brother. I am going after your mistress.”

Thank God he had stopped at the Pulteney to see Jenny and had been told she was shopping. Otherwise, who knew how long it would have taken to discover she was missing.

Frank gave the horses their office and set out after the coach. Keeping it in sight but not attempting to stop the conveyance. Whoever had her would not want her harmed. At least not until they had her tied right and tight. He’d dawdled long enough. As soon as he could manage it, they were getting married. He only hoped she loved him as much as he loved her.

About forty minutes later, the coach turned off into the yard of a busy inn, and Frank drove in right behind it, throwing the ribbons to an ostler, as he jumped down. "Walk them. I won't be long."

A tall, dark haired man climbed down from the coach, then turned, but Jenny had already hopped down. Ignoring the offer of his arm, she glared up at the cur. Thank God she was no missish lady.

Frank strode up to her, took possession of her arm, and addressed the bouncer who abducted her in a loud voice. "Thank you very much for accompanying my betrothed this far. I shall take it from here."

For a moment the cur seemed confused, then his brows snapped together. "Betrothed?"

Smiling brightly, Jenny leaned into Frank. "Had you given me an opportunity, I would have told you he was meeting us here." She gazed up at him, fluttering her lashes. "I cannot wait to become Lady Quimby."

Frank almost choked. Clever of her to have remembered the story he'd told her about his family's cats. "Indeed, my love. It will not be long now."

"Quimby?" the other man asked incredulously, as his eyes narrowed.

If looks could kill, the blackguard would be dead. Although Jenny's expression was calm, her eyes shot daggers. "You see, there was no need for your employer to worry."

Before the other man could react, Frank had her in the curricle, and headed back to Town at a much faster pace than he'd arrived. "Are you all right?"

"I am now." She pressed her lips together. "But you are not going to be happy."

"Who was that man?"

"He is Major Reginald Upton, late of His Majesty's House Guards. Your father hired him to abduct and marry me."

It was as if Jackson himself had punched Frank in the gut. His vision blurred, and a red haze colored the landscape. He had never wanted to murder anyone before, but this

time his father had gone too far. Upton was probably a half-pay officer who'd needed the money and had willingly become his father's tool. "Blo—blasted bas—old man!"

"Please feel free to curse him as much as you please. I assure you, I have heard worse around the docks."

*Bloody, bloody, hell.* "You may have heard it, but I am not going to . . . rubbishing commoner."

She cracked a laugh. "That is probably the worst insult you could give him."

He slid a glance at her and was amazed to find her grinning. She had just gone through what would have terrorized any other lady of his acquaintance, with the possible exception of his sister-in-law, and she was laughing. "Jenny MacGowan, you are the most remarkable woman I've ever met, and—and I love you."

She swung her head around, so quickly her long slender neck might have snapped. "What did you just say?"

"I said I love you, and I want to marry you if you'll have me. I'd get down on one knee, but I'd rather put some distance between the good major and us. If he's got any brains at all, he'll figure out who I am before long." Frank turned off the main road toward the market town his brother Quartus had recently moved to.

"Where are we going?"

"To one of my brothers whom I believe will help us."

"And defy your father?"

"Quartus and my father are not speaking at the moment." Frank thought about the argument his brother and father had had before the duke had gone to Scotland. "My brother is a vicar, and had one of my father's livings. When my father wanted him to use his position to support a bill in the House of Commons my father was attempting to further, Quartus refused. The duke threatened to remove Quartus from the living, then departed for the north, obviously thinking he would come around. About a week ago, Damon received a letter informing him that our brother had taken another living and

was residing not far from London." Frank wished he could study Jenny's face but, unfortunately, the pair needed his attention.

"At the rate your father is going," she commented drily, "he might find himself alone."

"There are fifteen of us. One can only hope he'll become more intelligent with time."

They reached a toll booth and Frank blew the horn. As soon as Jenny handed the keeper the two pence, they were on their way. If the major was following, they would not be hard to find. He just prayed the man didn't find out until he had her safe.

After two or three miles, Frank slowed the horses. He didn't want to stop to take the time to change them, and blowing them would do no good at all. The sun was directly overhead. With luck, they'd reach the town in another hour.

Then he remembered that instead of giving him an answer, she'd changed the topic. Tension and fear infused him. He had never thought he'd love anyone as much as he did her, and didn't know what he'd do if she rejected him. "Jenny, will you marry me?"

Her jaw dropped, and she began to laugh again.

What in all of damnation was so funny about his proposal that she'd —

"No, no, don't scowl so. Yes, I'll marry you." She placed her slim fingers on his arm, and he started to relax. "I love you, too, and I want nothing more than to spend the rest of my life with you. It is just that this fleeing business has muddled my brain a bit." She kissed her fingers, placing them on his cheek. "Now, what is your plan?"

"When we get to my brother's house, I'll write Damon and Meg. He will be able to secure a special license so that we can be married immediately." Jenny nodded. "Meg can go to the hotel and fetch some clothing for you."

"Then what?"

"Then . . . then we can reside with Damon until we make other plans or your father's ship arrives."

"I agree we must tell Damon and Meg what has happened, but I think the message should go to my aunt." Frank opened his mouth to argue, and she held up her hand. "What if your father is having your brother's house watched? You said the major might figure out that you are not Lord Quimby."

"In fact, both the house and hotel might be watched."

"I agree, but Geoff can come and go as he pleases, and he has more of a reason to procure a special license than Damon has. Sarah can contact the office that handles my father's ships' schedules in London, and ask if the *Elizabeth* has arrived. If not, she can book passage for us on another vessel."

For some reason, this was the first time Frank had thought about actually sailing away. It was a strange feeling, and he did not quite know what to do with it. He'd be leaving everything he knew. Yet, if he wanted Jenny, and he did, that was exactly what he was agreeing to, had already agreed to. It would be a new start for him. A chance to discover if he had what it took to make a go of a business. In America no one would defer to him because of his father's rank. In fact, having a title would do him little good at all. "You are right. We should contact your aunt first. However, the messenger must remain in Town until we are wed."

"Yes, that way no one can follow him to us. After we marry we can slip into the hotel."

He mulled the plans over again. "I'll have my trunks sent there."

"There are so many guests coming and going, no one will notice." She chewed on her bottom lip for a moment. "This is a perfect plan."

*And everyone knows what happens to perfect plans.* Frank sent a prayer to the deity.

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An hour later, Frank and Jenny arrived at the rectory to find his brother surrounded by

boxes. Yet, instead of removing items, he was putting them in the crates. This was not good. Jenny glanced at him and he shrugged.

“Shouldn’t you be unpacking?” he asked after the door had been closed.

His brother glanced up scowling. “You, of all people, ought to know what has occurred.”

Frank raised his hands warding off his younger brother’s ire. “I have been in London for the past two or more weeks. I only knew you were here because of the letter you sent Damon.”

“Then someone else told Father.” Quartus swiped a hand down his face. “I’ve been sacked from my new position and ordered back home.”

For a few seconds, Jenny was silent, then she scowled. “No one should be allowed to have that much power. Your father should be horsewhipped.”

There was his democratic American! Tugging her against him, Frank barked a laugh.

His brother stared at her for a moment before a slow smile formed on Quartus’s face. “Horsewhip a duke. What an interesting idea. Frank, would you care to make the introductions?”

Taking her hand, he said, “My love, allow me to introduce my brother Quartus. Quartus, this is my betrothed, Miss Jenny MacGowan of New York.”

“Oh, Lord.” He plopped himself on a crate. “It needed only that. Does our father know?”

“Yes. Unfortunately. Probably not that we are actually engaged, but he has expressed his disapproval of the idea.” Frank grimaced. “I had to rescue Jenny from a man who said that our father had ordered him to abduct and wed her. We came directly here. I had hoped we could remain here with you until I was able to obtain a special license and you could see us married.”

“Are you mad? What would you do?” Quartus’s brows had drawn together as he

scowled, and Frank prayed his brother was not going to oppose them. A rift with one family member was enough. "How would you live?"

"That is the easy part," Jenny said. "We are going back to New York."

Quartus gazed at her for a moment, a grim look on his face. Then he glanced at Frank. "How did you arrive?"

"I have Damon's curricule and pair." Frank slipped his arm around Jenny's waist, and she stepped closer to him.

This was so much worse than he had ever thought it could be. His father was treating peoples' lives as if they were his to play with. He had always known the duke could be ruthless, but had never seen it directed at him or his younger brothers and sisters. Damon had always seemed to be their father's sole focus.

"I have to leave in the morning." Quartus raked his fingers through his hair. "I suggest you take the mail coach to London. You are less likely to be followed. I'll bring the carriage and horses to Town tomorrow. There is nothing suspicious about me visiting my brother before heading west again. As soon as you are able to get the special license, I shall be honored to perform the ceremony."

Frank let out the breath he'd been holding. "Thank you, but won't it make your situation harder?"

Quartus grinned. "If it becomes insupportable, I shall merely hop a ship and come to you."

"You could join us, if you'd like," Jenny said unexpectedly. "I'm sure your credentials will be honored in America."

"Thank you. It is a generous offer." He shook his head and stood. "Come, I'll make sure the horses are settled, and walk with you to the inn where you can catch the mail."

## CHAPTER NINE

An hour and a half later, after eating a hasty meal at the tavern, Jenny and Frank were on the crowded coach heading toward London. She had been able to obtain a seat inside the conveyance, but Frank was on the roof. Taking his advice, she sat next to the window, but was still crowded by a large man who smelled strongly of onions. The woman across from her held a basket with a chicken in it, which would not have been bad if the animal had not felt it necessary to relieve itself. Perhaps when they stopped, she would join her betrothed. A little fresh air would be nice.

She grinned to herself as she thought of Frank's ruffled feathers when she insisted on paying for their fair.

"I should be taking care of you," he said in a hushed tone as they finished their meal.

"You are protecting me. I just happen to have the ready funds. Pay me back when we get to London."

"I won't continue to take your money. I have some put aside, and I shall earn enough to support us."

"I know you will." She softened her tone. Male pride could be hurt so easily.

He'd harrumphed, but stopped arguing. She prayed that the money issue would not be a problem for them in the future.

Tucking her reticule between her skirt next to the side of the coach, she closed her eyes, and to her surprise, slept.

The next thing she knew, the coach was stopped and Frank was there.

"Jenny." His hand cupped her jaw. "Come on, sweetheart. We've arrived."

She rubbed her eyes. "I can't believe I slept so soundly." Touching her skirt, she found her reticule. "Where are we?"

"The Bull and Mouth in the City. We'll take a hackney from here."

"To the Pulteney?"

"Yes." He helped her out of the coach and into an odoriferous old carriage that had most definitely seen better days. "The Pulteney Hotel," he ordered, before getting into the coach. "Around in back."

"You got the fare?" the driver shouted.

"Oh, for the love of God," she grumbled. "Yes, now go!"

The hackney lurched forward, jerking her back against the seat. Frank, who had taken the bench across from her, fell, landing almost on top of her. She moved to one side of the coach. "Sit next to me. He doesn't seem to be a very good driver."

"As long as he gets us where we're going, I'll be satisfied." He placed his hand over hers. "I never imagined getting married would be quite this fraught with danger."

"Danger?" Surely the hackney driver wasn't that bad.

Turning his head, he glared at her. "Need I remind you that a mere few hours ago, you were abducted?"

"Oh." There was that. She cuddled next to him. "I have decided that I don't like your father."

"I don't like him much at the moment either." He snaked his arm around her waist,

pulling her closer.

Jenny enjoyed his warmth and being held by him. She'd like being kissed even more, but that would mean removing her bonnet. She sighed. Kissing would have to wait. She felt a slight tug, and the ribbon under her chin loosened. The hat lifted from her head and stopped.

"What's holding it on?"

"A hat pin." She pulled it out, affixing it to her bodice. A moment later, her bonnet landed on the opposite bench.

Just as she was about to ask how much time they had before arriving, Frank's warm, firm lips covered hers, teasing and nibbling until she opened to him. His tongue tangled with hers. Her blood heated as he lifted her onto his lap. When he cupped her breast, she gasped with pleasure, wanting more. Wanting him.

"We're here," the jarvey called.

Jenny scrambled off Frank's lap, jammed her hat on, and tied the ribbon. "That will teach us."

Tossing the hackney driver some coins, he lost no time getting them out of the carriage and in the back door to the hotel. "Where do we go from here?"

Biting her lip, she glanced around, seeing a plain set of stairs. Much better than going up the main staircase. "This way. Sarah and I have rooms on the third floor."

"That's almost in the attic," he said, as if he'd been insulted.

"My third, your second." She grabbed his hand as they ran up the steps. Yet another difference for him to become used to. They might both speak relatively the same language, but there was still room for many misunderstandings. It was a good thing they'd decided to always be truthful with each other.

When they reached the floor her rooms were on, Jenny glanced around. "I don't see anyone."

"Perhaps Fate has chosen to be on our side after all." His voice was barely a

whisper.

“It’s the third door on the other side of the main stairs.”

This time he took the lead, moving so slowly she thought she’d scream. “I hear someone below. Run. Quietly.”

She opened the door to the parlor she shared with her aunt and pulled Frank through, closing the door behind them. “Thank God, we made it without being seen.”

Frank leaned against the door, bringing her against him. They’d not run far, but their hearts beat rapidly, and their breath ragged.

“Jenny, Lord Frank, what is going on?” Geoff rose, striding toward them.

“Oh, thank heavens.” Aunt Sarah reached Jenny before Geoff could and embraced her. “Your maid came back saying you had been abducted. “Then” — she waved her hand in the direction of the fireplace where Meg and Damon had risen — “Lord and Lady Hawksworth arrived. We were just about ready to call the Bow Street Runners.”

“Lord Frank.” Geoff pressed a glass into his hand. “The two of you look as if you’ve had quite a time of it.”

Jenny took the other glass in Geoff’s hand. “You might need one as well.”

“Meg, Damon,” Frank said after taking a sip of wine. “Father had Jenny abducted with a plan to marry her off.”

Within a few minutes, they’d told their relatives what had occurred and what they planned on doing.

“Quimby?” Damon laughed. “That was brilliant thinking, Jenny. Though you realize as soon as Father hears the name he’ll know you were rescued and by whom.” He leaned against the mantel. “Thank you for not abandoning my cattle. I’ll ensure we have a room ready for Quartus.” He held his hand out to his wife. “Meg?”

“Give me a moment.” She glanced at Sarah. “May I write a note?”

“Yes, of course.”

A few minutes later, Meg handed Geoff the letter. “Have this delivered to

Featherston House. My father will be able to notify the *Elizabeth's* captain or make other arrangements for the passage more easily than Sarah can." She glanced at Jenny. "I'm glad you are safe. I wish the circumstances were better, but we are dealing with Somerset."

"There is no problem in securing a special license." Geoff drained his glass. "I'll go now."

"If you take my advice," Damon said, "you will not wait for our brother to arrive. I have someone in mind that could perform the ceremony almost immediately."

"And who will not suffer later for it," Frank replied. Quartus was going to have enough problems as it was. "I'd like to go with you."

His brother seemed to study him for a few seconds. "Very well. It will also give you an opportunity to change. Your clothing is rather worse for wear."

"The only seat I could procure was the top of the mail coach."

"That explains it." Damon grinned. "Ladies." He bowed to Jenny and her aunt. "We'll see you in about three hours. If not less."

"I shall remain here," Meg said. "That gives you an excuse to return, in the event your father is having our house watched."

"And gives us just enough time to prepare," Sarah said as she ushered the men out the door.

"What are you thinking?" Frank asked his brother as they made their way down the corridor.

"How did you enter the hotel?" Damon asked.

"From the mews."

"Good. We shall depart that way as well."

"Even me?" Warwick asked.

"Yes. If my father is having us watched, they will most likely be looking for us to leave from the front. The longer we can keep the old man guessing, the better." When

they reached the mews, Damon and Warwick called for their carriages. Luckily, Damon had brought his town coach, enabling Frank to hide his presence.

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The mid-afternoon sun streamed through the window of the Duke of Somerset's study as he tapped his fingers on the massive old walnut table that had been handed down through six generations of dukes. He narrowed his eyes at the filthy specimen before him. "You are certain that neither of my sons is aware that chit from the colonies has been abducted?"

"Ain't seen Lord Francis, Yer Grace, but the marquis didn't seem to be in any hurry when him and her ladyship left their house."

"Good. Then all is going as planned. Return to your post. I shall expect another report later this evening."

"Yes, Yer Grace. I'll keep me peepers pealed on that door."

Once his hired tool had left, Somerset leaned back against the leather chair. His duchess had been correct. It was time to find a wife for his second son and ensure that this time no one interfered with his choice. Reaching out, he tugged the bell-pull. A second later, the door opened and his butler bowed. "Yes, Your Grace?"

"Tell Belling I wish him to attend me."

"Yes, Your Grace."

A few moments later, Somerset's secretary entered carrying a notebook. "You wished to see me, Your Grace?"

"Take a seat. I shall dictate the requirements needed for the proper mate for Lord Francis, then I want you to provide me a list of likely candidates. As long as he is in Town, he may begin courting the lady." He pressed his fingertips together. "Passably pretty. A great beauty will have higher expectations, and I cannot expect my son to

marry a lady with any obvious defects. Malleable. I will not have a woman taking my son's side against me. She must have the usual accomplishments, and her father must be willing to support me in the Lords."

After a few moments, Belling stopped scribbling. "Anything else, Your Grace? Fortune?"

"Not a large fortune. She and her family must be grateful to have her marry a younger son."

"I shall have a list to you by the end of the day tomorrow."

"You may go."

The door closed, and once again Somerset turned his thoughts to his second son. What the devil had Francis been thinking to take up with an American? It was a damn good thing that old gossip, Thornfield, couldn't keep anything to himself. When Somerset had arrived two days ago, his neighbor had had the infernal gall to ask when the wedding would be. Well, the answer was never. At least not to that woman and never to an American. No son of Somerset would bind himself to a heathen traitor.

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Once back at his brother's home, Frank had sent his valet on an errand that would take at least two hours, possibly more. He had no doubt, the servant would report anything he was doing to his father in the most expeditious way possible.

Frank entered Damon's study. "I have an unexpected problem."

"What is it?"

"I cannot imagine my valet agreeing to remove to America, and I am not at all proficient at taking care of my own clothing."

Leaning back in his chair, Damon said thoughtfully, "What you require at present is someone akin to a batman."

Frank mulled the idea over. A servant who could care for not only clothing, but a multitude of other things as well. "Where am I going to find one at this late date?"

"I have a man here. A former soldier whose officer was killed. He's working as a footman, but he might be interested. Shall I call for him?"

"Please do." He sat in one of the chairs next to the fireplace.

Several minutes later, a man in his late twenties arrived. "You wanted me, my lord?"

"I did indeed. Frank, this is Perkins. Perkins, my brother is getting ready to sail to America. He needs a batman. Would you be interested?"

A slow smile spread over the footman's face. "I'd be more than happy to take the position, my lord."

One more problem settled. Frank grinned. "In that case, I am more than happy to have you. Your first tasks will be to help me change, change out of your livery, and pack my trunks. We shall be departing soon." He started to leave the room and stopped. "Not a word to anyone, especially my old valet. Hawksworth, I'd appreciate it if you found a way to send the man home. He will only cause problems if he remains here."

"I'm sure I can come up with something."

Less than an hour later, Frank was bathed and dressed as any gentleman making a call would be. He'd wanted to wear something more suited to the occasion of his marriage, but Damon had been right. If Frank was seen, it might cause questions to be asked. With luck, it would not take long for Warwick to obtain the special license.

Just as he left his bedchamber, a footman topped the main staircase. "My lord, his lordship asked that you come right away."

"Thank you." He quickened his steps, arriving at Damon's study in time to see him hand a glass of claret to a gentleman around his age. "Is everything all right?"

"It is. Frank, meet Mr. Henley. He will be performing your wedding ceremony."

The man rose, facing Frank. Lines, such as his brother had, formed at the corners of

Henley's eyes and mouth. "I've heard a lot about you over the years. All to the good, I might add."

Frank stuck out his hand. "You must have served in the army with Hawksworth."

"Indeed I did, and I'm happy to do him a service."

"I don't want to rush you." Damon nodded at the glass of wine. "But I'd rather see my brother married sooner than later."

Henley tossed off his wine. "In that case, we should depart."

Once again, they left from the mews behind Damon's house. Frank sat on the rear-facing seat out of respect for his brother's friend. "Thank you for agreeing to officiate."

The man cocked a brow. "If old soldiers don't stick together, who will? Aside from that, I will enjoy poking a stick in the duke's wheel. Any man who can treat his children as he has does not deserve my respect." A sly grin tipped his lips. "And he does not have the power to hurt me in any manner whatsoever."

Unlike how Father could make Quintus suffer for helping Frank and Jenny. They fell silent for several moments, and he reviewed their plans. His biggest fear was that his father would discover they intended to leave England and attempt to stop them. The duke would be furious to be thwarted in the matter of their marriage, but Father would be enraged when he discovered they'd left the country. An image of him red-faced and shouting down the house came to Frank. Yet, for the first time, he simply did not care. He would no longer be ruled and dictated to by an ill-tempered old despot who thought nothing of anyone but himself. And Jenny was worth everything to him. She was the most determined, intelligent, beautiful, funny woman he had ever met, and he thanked God she was his.

"You're smiling," Damon remarked drily. "It's not over yet. Trust me when I tell you our father will stop at nothing to have his way."

"I am well aware of what he tried to do to you and Meg." He glanced out the sliver of the window available to him. "Still, I can't help but feel as if I've been freed."

“I know what you mean. Even after I learned of my inheritance from my mother, I was still under the old man’s boot. Then I met Meg, and nothing else mattered. I had to have her in my life.”

That was exactly how Frank felt about Jenny. He couldn’t imagine living without her. He already had visions of red-haired children. Children who would be free to choose their own paths.

When the coach came to a stop, he jumped down. Soon they were in the corridor outside of Jenny’s apartments. The door flew open, and a moment later, Jenny was in his arms.

“Geoff just returned with the license.” Her voice was breathy, but she had a wide smile on her lips.

“We brought the clergyman.” Frank brushed a kiss against her lips. “Are you ready to be married?”

“Yes. More than ready.”

“In that case, there is no reason to delay.”

Soon she would be his forever, and nothing his father could do would stop that. Yet once they left England, he would still have her father with whom to contend. A man who did not love the English.

## CHAPTER TEN

Jenny's cheeks hurt from smiling so much, but she couldn't help it. Before the men had returned, Sarah had arranged for champagne and light foods from the kitchen. Suky had dressed Jenny's hair in a knot high on her head, with ringlets framing her face.

"Give us one minute," Sarah said, pushing Jenny into her bedchamber.

Meg took off a brooch that had been pinned to her bodice. "It will not do to ignore tradition. Wear this for something borrowed."

Sarah placed an old sapphire necklace around Jenny's neck, then handed her the earrings. "Your mother wanted you to wear these at your wedding."

Tears pricked her eyes. "They are beautiful. It never entered my mind that she would think of it."

"It was her heart's desire to see you marry a man you loved." Sarah gave Jenny a quick hug. "No crying now. I had meant to buy you something special for this day. Unfortunately, the handkerchief I just purchased will have to do."

Jenny took the fine linen trimmed with lace. "It's lovely."

A knock came on the door. "Are you about finished?" Damon asked. "It appears we

have forgotten something important.”

“What is it?” Jenny asked.

“The settlement agreements.”

“Give me a moment.” She opened a small trunk which held a few books, her jewelry, and the documents she’d brought from home.”

Jenny, her aunt, and friend walked into the parlor.

She handed Frank the papers. “This is the settlement agreement my father and I decided upon before I left New York. Please take a look at it, then tell me if you agree with it.”

He broke the seal, and with Damon and Geoff crowded around Frank, perused the documents. After several minutes, he glanced up. “This is perfect. It protects you, which is all I care about.”

“It also ensures that if anything were to happen to Frank, our father could not touch any of Jenny’s fortune.”

Frank grinned. “Even better.”

“Which is the reason Papa and I drafted it.” Jenny linked her arm with his. “Shall we?”

Frank’s warm blue gaze held her breathless for a moment, before he murmured, “Yes.”

“If you will gather here, we will begin.” Mr. Henley took his place between two vases of flowers.

With everything she and Frank had been through today, she was amazed at how calm they were as they said their vows. When the vicar got to the part about Frank worshipping her body, a wicked gleam entered his eyes, warming her from her cheeks to her toes. Tonight, they would be together for the first time, and she found that she was a little nervous, but looking forward to it. The only question was where they would be.

A half an hour later, as their little party was drinking champagne and eating lobster

patties, a knock came on the door. Geoff opened it, and a tall gentleman who looked to be in his early thirties entered.

“Kit!” Meg rushed over and hugged the man. “Jenny and Sarah, allow me to introduce my brother Mr. Kit Featherton. Kit, my new sister, Lady Frank Trevor—”

“If you don’t mind,” Frank cut in, “I believe she would rather be known as Mrs. Frank Trevor-MacGowan.”

For a brief second, Jenny couldn’t speak. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. That he would want to take her name was more than she could have imagined. Her father would be beside himself with joy. “Are you sure?”

He circled his arms around her, holding her tight. “I’ve given this a great deal of thought. Your father has no male heirs. I believe that even in America a man would wish for his name to continue.”

“Yes. Yes, he would.” For the second time that day, tears threatened to fall. Her throat tightened, making it hard to speak. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Someone cleared their throat, recalling them to the others in the room.

“Now that that’s settled,” Damon drawled. “Featherton, this is Mrs. Frank Trevor-MacGowan.”

Mr. Featherton’s lips twitched as he bowed. “It is about your passage that I have come. The *Elizabeth* is in London Pool. I caught the captain as he was getting ready to search for you. She is taking on cargo and will be ready to depart tomorrow on the evening tide. I explained to the captain that you are anticipating a departure from England as soon as possible. He will expect your baggage to be delivered early tomorrow morning and be ready to receive you and your husband aboard tomorrow afternoon. The tide changes at five fifty-one.”

Jenny clapped her hands. “Perfect! Everything is working out exactly as it should.”

“My dear,” Sarah said. “It might be best if you do not count your chickens before

they are hatched. You must still manage to board the boat without Frank's father trying to stop you."

Jenny was sure she and Frank would be able to trick the old man. "I have faith he will not find out we're gone before we've sailed."

Or at least, they'd do their very best to get aboard without him knowing. Still, nothing would stop them from going home.

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Somerset's secretary took the seat in front of his desk. "I have the list almost completed."

"Do you have the information on that American?" Not that he would need it. The chit was well on her way to being wed by now.

"Yes, Your Grace. Would you like to read the dossier, or shall I recite it?"

"Tell me. I shall read it if I have to."

"Her father is originally from Scotland. He built up a shipping company with trade mainly between the Continent and the Americas and the Caribbean. Although he does trade in Britain, it is only a small part of his business. I received word yesterday that one of his ships has arrived to take on goods. Once that is accomplished, the ship will return to the colonies."

Somerset tapped his fingers on the desk. "Have you seen or heard from Lord Francis?"

"No, Your Grace. The persons watching the house have not seen him enter or leave. Neither has Lord Hawksworth returned home."

It was almost dinner time. If Francis cared about the girl, surely Hawksworth would have sent to inform Francis she was missing. All seemed to be going as planned, but Somerset had the feeling something was not right, and he always followed his

feelings in these matters.

A scratch came on the door, and Somerset's butler opened the door. "Your Grace, Major Upton wishes to see you."

What the hell was Upton doing here? He should be off making sure he was shackled to that woman. He's better have a damn good excuse for being in Town. "Show him in."

The dratted man strolled into the room, and bowed. "Your Grace. Apparently we were mistaken about where Miss MacGowan's attentions lie. When I stopped at the inn, a gentleman by the name of Quimby drove up. She is betrothed to him."

Somerset clenched his jaw. "Lord Quimby?"

"Yes, Your Grace. When he arrived she went on about how she wanted to be Lady Quimby."

The damn cats!! Of course Francis had told her about the cats! *Bloody hell.*

"*Imbecile!*" It was a blasted shame he was too old to jump over the desk and strangle the major. "That was my son."

"Belling."

"Your Grace?"

"Find Lord Francis."

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When Jenny walked into the parlor, Frank knew she was the most beautiful woman in the world, and he the luckiest man. The pale yellow silk made her skin look like rich cream. The sapphire necklace was the same color as her eyes. And when he'd said his vows, the one about worshiping her with his body brought up an image of her on his bed, her hair a riot of color against pristine white pillows.

He was glad Featherton had arrived with the news Frank and Jenny could depart

on the morrow. The festivities seemed to go on forever, but once their families had left the hotel, and Sarah had retired to her room, he'd ushered Jenny into their bedchamber.

He couldn't wait to unwrap her. He wanted to kiss and caress every inch of her gloriously naked body. "We wouldn't be married without their help, but thank God they've finally left." He'd expected one of her witty retorts, instead when he glanced at her, a pale face and nervous eyes met him. Taking her in his arms, he kissed her. "I'm sorry. The idea of sharing a bed with me must be a bit frightening."

She rested her head on his chest. "I'm not afraid, precisely. It's just that we have not been alone very often." A smile trembled on her lips. "Except lately when we've been running around the countryside."

"I . . . we shall take this as slowly as you wish. Will that make you feel better?"

"I think so," she replied. Her tone still hesitant.

*Hell.* Why hadn't he thought about this possibility before? He did not have vast amounts of experience, but she had none at all. Not to mention that they'd only known each other for a week. Even if it did seem as if she was the lady he'd been waiting all his life for.

"Let's begin with what I know you like."

He kissed the top of her head, and when she raised her face to him, he feathered kisses from one corner of her mouth to the other, praising the deity when she opened her lips to him. Their tongues tangled, and she speared her fingers through his hair. He pulled out one hair pin, dropping it on the thick carpet when a soft curl escaped, falling past her shoulder.

"Jenny, love," he murmured, pulling out the rest of the hair pins, unable to wait to see her shining red tresses flowing free.

Slanting his head, he deepened the kiss, and she moaned. Surely that was progress. He carefully allowed his hands to slowly move from her waist to her breasts, caressing the full mounds. She inhaled sharply, and just as he wondered if that was a sound of

enjoyment, she rubbed her hands over his chest.

“So hard. May I remove your jacket?”

*Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!*

“If you wish,” he replied with credible calm.

He helped her tug the garment off then removed his cravat and waistcoat. Her clever fingers lost no time pulling his shirt out of his pantaloons. Soon his shirt joined her hair pins on the floor, and her fingers played with the curls on his chest.

“My love, may I unlace your gown a bit?”

“Umm.” Her voice was muffled as she placed kisses on his chest. “I adore your chest.”

Deciding to take that as permission, Frank quickly unlaced her dress, enjoying the view as the bodice and petticoat began to sag, then fall, with a little help from him, to the carpet. She rose onto her tip-toes, rubbing her body against him. Next, he untied her stays that followed the growing pile of clothing, then her chemise.

He touched his tongue to her breasts, and she stilled.

“What are you doing?” Her tone slightly hesitant.

“Worshipping you with my body,” he said, reminding her of his vows.

“Oh. That’s all right then.” Her voice not entirely steady.

He probably should have asked her how much she knew, but he didn’t want to give her time to become even more nervous. Kissing her, he slowly walked her back until they were close enough to the bed for him to pick her up and lay her on the thick mattress. She was just as exquisite as he’d thought she would be. Generous breasts led to a slender waist that flared into full hips and a rounded stomach.

“You are beautiful.”

“As are you.” Jenny could not believe how natural it felt to be almost naked with him. “I should remove my stockings.”

“Allow me.” For the second time that day, his smile was wicked.

He placed light kisses up her leg, creating flames wherever he touched her. Then he moved over her, possessing her mouth again. She felt his hard ridge against her, and heat coursed through her, making her want—no, need—him.

When he licked her breasts, she arched up, encouragingly. “So good.”

Flames licked at the apex of her thighs, and his hand moved to cover and caress her mons. He inserted one finger into her passage, then another, stroking when she pushed her hips up wanting more.

“I want to see all of you.”

Holding her eyes with his, he removed his pantaloons. His member jutted out large and stiff from a mass of golden curls. Before she could think much more about it, Frank was kissing her again, and she was ready to become his in body as well as in mind.

His member pushed against her sheath. “I’ll be as gentle as I can be.”

“I know you will, and I love you.”

“I love you.”

Taking her in a searing kiss, he entered her, filling her. Then he pushed hard, and she felt a sharp pain.

When she tensed, he stopped. “Let me know when you’re ready.”

Jenny nodded. “It’s better now.”

He moved slowly, allowing her to get used to having him inside her. Then the flames were back, heating her, coiling the tension until it exploded and coursed through her, making her cry out.

Frank tensed and pumped in one last time before she felt his seed fill her. Falling off to her side, he hugged her close, nuzzling her hair. Her mother had been correct. When one makes love with the right man, it is heaven.

“Jenny, my love. Are you all right?”

Cuddling closer to him, she smiled against his chest. “I am perfect. After searching for so many years, I had given up even hoping I’d find love. I didn’t even want to come

to London.”

“I didn’t want to either.” He pulled the covers over them. “I saw no point in it. Yet I’m glad I did.”

“When I think of how chance our meeting was . . .” She gazed up at him.

“And how uninterested you were at meeting another Englishman . . .”

“And the way you found me so quickly when I was abducted . . .”

He kissed her tenderly, as if she was the most precious thing in the world to him, as he was to her.

“It was Fate,” Frank muttered against her mouth. “I should, however, send Lord Pomfry a letter thanking him for being so pompous.”

“We mustn’t forget one to Lady Heathcote for being so hateful to me.” She started to laugh. “Oh, I agree. It must have been Fate. Think of all that could have gone wrong.”

“But it didn’t and now we’re together.”

Jenny gave him what she hoped was a leer. “Yes, and I would very much like to do something about that.”

“Who am I to deny my wife’s wishes?” He rolled her beneath him. “Particularly when they coincide so nicely with my own.”

She had been timid before, now she had the confidence to show her passion for him. This time when they made love, there was no pain, only love and joy.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

The following afternoon, Jenny, Frank, Damon, and Meg arrived in the Hawksworth coach to the part of London's massive port used by the *Elizabeth's* crew and captain. Sarah and Geoff followed in his smaller town coach. Jenny and Frank's trunks had been sent earlier in the day, accompanied by their personal servants.

It seemed like such a long time since she'd been at a dock. She was used to the scent of fish, brine, and tar, but the Thames was reputed to be used for dumping not only refuse, but dead bodies as well, and the warmer weather hadn't helped. Competing with the stench of the river were the spices, tobacco, and other cargo.

"How can you stand it?" Meg held a scented handkerchief to her nose.

"I've been around docks all my life. Although, I will say that the Hudson River is not nearly as odorific."

Sarah joined them, also pressing a handkerchief to her nose. "I need not pretend I enjoy the smell any longer."

"Don't tell me you were afraid of Papa teasing you?" Jenny asked, hardly believing that her aunt had hidden her distaste all these years.

"Not your father. Your mother." Sarah pulled a face. "She would have been merciless. Where are we to meet the captain?"

"Here at the London Dock." The ship was anchored in what was called London Pool. After several moments, she spotted the distinctive bow of the MacGowan ships. "Frank," she pointed, "do you see the ship with the long high bow and the American flag on the stern?"

"Yes. Is that the *Elizabeth*?"

"It is. She is named after my mother." Jenny's voice caught as she remembered how her mother had loved that ship.

Frank raised her hand to his lips. "We'll be on her soon. I must speak to my brother before we leave."

Blinking back her tears, she nodded. A few minutes later, a short man with salt and pepper hair in his mid-forties approached. "Captain Jones, how good to see you. I thought you were going to take the *Scotia* to China?"

He gave a curt bow. "My plans changed. I have been commissioned to bring you home, Miss Jenny."

"Not Miss any more." She grinned. Glancing around, she saw Frank with the other gentlemen. He looked up at the same time, and she beckoned to him. Once he was next to her, she tucked her hand in the crook of his arm. "Captain, this is my husband, Frank Trevor-MacGowan. Frank, this is an old and dear friend, Captain Jones."

Frank held out his hand, and the captain shook it. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

"Trevor-MacGowan is it?" the captain said thoughtfully. "Your father will like that. It's a pleasure to meet you, young man. We all wondered if our girl would finally settle down. Well, we'd best be off. My cook is making something special for this evening." The man winked at Frank. "A celebration as it were."

"You fraud." Jenny gasped. "You knew all along I was married."

"It was the valet for his former lordship here that gave it away." He chuckled. "I

couldn't let you get one over on me."

Shaking her head, she turned to hug her aunt and Meg farewell and saw instead a rough looking thug grab Frank. He slammed his fist into the cur's face, and another man wrapped his arm around Frank from behind, dragging him away toward a black carriage.

Damon, Geoff, and Captain Jones dashed in to help, when a loud whistle broke the air.

"Cease!" A tall, broad shouldered, elderly man stepped down from the coach. "I told you to bring him to me. If he is damaged, you will suffer."

Frank shook off his attacker. "Father."

Jenny glanced from her husband to the old man. So this was the Duke of Somerset.

His cold blue eyes cut to Frank. "Did you think I would allow you to marry a colonial? A heathen?"

Frank stood as still as a statute. Only the tick in Frank's jaw betrayed how angry he was. His gaze was as icy as his father's and his voice even colder. "My *wife*" —he let the word hang for a moment— "is every bit as educated and cultured as any lady of the *ton*. I will not allow you to disparage her."

The two men stood staring at each other for several moments.

"*You* will not allow *me*—?" his father finally said. "I can see you are being corrupted already. Get in the carriage," the duke commanded. "I'm taking you home where you cannot get into any more mischief."

"No." Frank's hands curled into fists, but Jenny knew he would not strike his father.

When he didn't move to obey, Somerset nodded to one of the men, and the bouncer seized Frank's arm.

"Father," Damon cut in. "He needs to live his own life."

"*You* stay out of this." The duke glowered. "You are not the head of this house yet."

The confrontation had caused a group of dock workers and bar patrons to gather around them. No doubt enjoying the show. Yet, even though money could be seen exchanging hands, no one spoke.

Well, this wasn't accomplishing anything. If she didn't do something soon, she'd have to chase her husband across England. Not only that, but the Duke of Somerset had just gotten on Jenny's very last nerve. Frank had saved her from an abduction. It was her turn to rescue him.

Frank filled with pride as Jenny strode to his side. She took his free hand, and faced the duke. "As my husband has already told you, we are married. You have no right to interfere with the decisions we make."

The old man's jaw moved, as if he was grinding his teeth. His gaze moved slowly from Frank to Jenny.

The duke perused her from her bonnet to her shoes, as if she were a piece of filth he'd like to scrape off his boots. "I have every right. I am a peer of the realm. *You*, however, have no right to speak to me at all."

She raised her chin, glaring right back at the duke. "Not in my country, you're not. In my country, you are naught."

At that moment, Frank could see the generations of her family who had fought for their freedom from a system that would allow men such as his father so much power by the mere chance of birth. He admired her and all she stood for.

"You are a tyrant," she continued in a hard voice, "who has nothing better to do than make your children miserable."

Frank shook his arm free from the thug and started to move them away from his father. "Come, my love. We have a ship to catch."

The blackguard grabbed him again. In a flash, Jenny had pulled a pistol from her reticule, leveling it at the duke. "Release him."

There was a shocked silence, and for a few seconds the only sound was the gulls

screeching and horses' hooves clopping on the cobblestone. Even Father seemed to be having trouble taking in the fact that a young woman held a gun directed at him.

"You won't shoot me," he sneered.

Jenny raised one dark brown brow, meeting the duke's cold gaze with one of her own. "Are you sure about that?" she taunted. Frank was proud of how calm her voice was when he could feel her pulse beat so quickly he was afraid she'd swoon. "I am, after all, an American heathen. And I don't particularly like you. Do you truly wish to test me?"

Father moved his gaze to Frank. "If you leave with her, you are dead to me."

Knowing that would be the threat, he was glad his father had finally made it. He hoped his mother and brothers and sisters understood his decision. Damon would explain it to them. "So be it." He took her hand, cold even encased in a glove, in his warm one and whispered, "Don't put the pistol away until we've reached the dory."

"I won't. He really isn't trustworthy, is he?"

"Not in the least. If he wasn't a duke, he'd have been hung by now."

Quartus strode up to them, wrapping his arms Frank and Jenny. "I'm sorry I was unable to attend the wedding. We'll miss you, but you have made the right choice. Have a good voyage."

"Quartus," their father said, "I'll not have another son in Town. You are coming with me.

Grinning, he winked at Frank and Jenny before responding, "I believe I'll stay with Damon and Meg for the Season. I am quite sure you can go on without me."

While Quartus continued to argue with his father, Frank and Jenny quickly said adieu to their families. Just as quickly, Captain Jones got them on to the dory, and then out to the ship.

"Good God, girl." The captain's voice boomed. "Remind me never to tangle with you."

She grinned, a blush making her cheeks rosy. "Sometimes one must fight for those one loves."

Frank had known she was strong, perhaps even stronger than he, and he'd never been prouder of her. They had only one more hurdle to jump, that of her father.

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Two months later, after having sailed down Cape Verde, across the Atlantic to the West Indies where the ship took on cargo, then north, they pulled into the MacGowan docks in New York City.

Frank's first thought was that this river smelled much better than the Thames. During the passage, the captain and crew had taught him how to sail and navigate. Jenny taught him about the business side of shipping. He'd been surprised at the position she held, unofficially, in her father's company.

"Aren't you angry that although you are perfectly capable of running the business, you are not allowed to because of your sex?"

She heaved a sigh. "Yes. Of course I am." Then she grinned. "But with you at the head after Papa, I can still be involved."

"More than merely involved. Full partners. I do not know what I would do without you."

Tears filled her eyes. "I am so glad I married you."

He took her in his arms. "I'm glad I married you, too." They were in the luxurious owner's cabin they'd been assigned, making sure the rest of their belongings were packed. "Will your father greet us?"

"I expect so." She looked anxious. "He can be a bit gruff at times, but he has a good heart."

Unlike the duke.

After speaking with Captain Jones, Frank had already decided on his course.

“Mrs. MacGowan, Mr. MacGowan” — it hadn’t taken long for the crew to shorten the double name to one familiar to them — “the captain said he’s ready for you to disembark.” The man lowered his voice to a whisper. “Your father’s waiting.”

Frank took Jenny’s hand. “I’m looking forward to meeting the man who gave me such a beautiful and brilliant wife.”

“He will also be glad to have a grandchild on the way.” Touching her still flat stomach, she smiled.

She walked down the gangboard ahead of him to a huge, bear of a man with red hair, who folded her into a hug. “Jenny, me love! I’ve missed ye.”

For a moment, Frank wondered how he would fit into this already close family, then he remembered how Meg’s family had embraced Damon, making him one of their own. Frank hoped he would be as lucky.

“Papa, I’ve missed you as well.” She extracted herself and turned to Frank. “I’ve brought you two presents. This is my husband, Mr. Frank Trevor-MacGowan.” Her father’s eyes narrowed slightly, and she hurried on. “And in about seven months, you will be a grandfather.”

The man’s eyes rounded with pleasure. “A grandfather? Jenny lass, you’re with child?”

“Yes.” She grinned widely. “Aren’t we clever?”

“I’ll see how clever ye are when I’ve met this man ye’ve married.”

Frank stuck out his hand, but dropped it almost immediately when it didn’t look as if MacGowan was ready to shake hands. “I am, or was, Lord Frank Trevor, second son of the Duke of Somerset.”

“You’re English?”

He glanced down, making sure he was on dry land as he had been told he must be. “Not any more. I am now an American.”

“And you let my Jenny talk you into taking my family name, even though we were outlawed for years by the English.”

“Papa—”

“You hush, lass. Let your man speak for himself.”

A mulish look formed on Jenny’s face, but she said nothing.

“She did not ask or mention it. The decision was mine and she agreed.”

Her father stroked his chin. “So you think you’ll sit back and let her and me do all the work like the fine laird ye are?”

“Not at all, sir.” Meeting the older man’s eyes, Frank resisted the urge to shuffle his feet. Being under his father-in-law’s scrutiny was much different than being called to account for himself before his father, where he was always found to be lacking. “I have spent the last two months learning to sail the ship and run a company. I was in charge of my father’s estates and know a good deal about managing a large business as that is what the estates are. I am ready to take any position you wish to offer me, or find another job on my own.”

After what seemed like an eternity, Mr. MacGowan nodded and held out his hand. “Welcome to the family, son.”

Frank’s throat closed painfully as he gripped the older man’s hand. Jenny’s tears rolled down her cheeks as she hugged them both, bringing them all together.

“Now, Jenny love, you’re not supposed to be crying,” her father said.

“You know they are tears of happiness.” She took the handkerchief Frank handed her, and blew her nose. “You have no idea what Frank went through to be with me. His father cast him off.”

“From what I’ve heard about the Duke of Somerset, that might not be all bad.”

Frank’s jaw began to drop, and he clamped it shut. “You know of my father, sir?”

“I know about the part he played in the House of Lords during the War of 1812. That was enough for me.”

He grimaced. His father truly disliked Americans, and now Frank was one of them.

"Let's go home," Jenny said, taking them both by the arm.

"Good idea." Her father beamed. "I'll let you two get settled. Next week will be soon enough for me to start introducing my new son around." A few yards away the captain stood talking to another man. "Jones," Mr. MacGowan called. "You were right. She did us proud."

"First Captain Jones and now you," Jenny grumbled to her father. "I might have known you would have talked to him before putting poor Frank through an inquisition."

Her father shrugged unapologetically. "I had to know if he could stand up to me, lass."

Until Frank had met Jenny, he'd never let himself dream of the life he had wanted. But if he had, it would be this, a wife he loved, a child on the way, and a father who would be proud of him.

## EPILOGUE

*Seven months later.*

Snow drifted onto the window sill outside, but a fire roared in the fireplace, making the bedchamber warm enough for the two babies Jenny held in her arms. A boy and a girl. Apparently, twins ran in her family.

The birth, the mid-wife said, was not hard, but you couldn't have proven it by her father and husband. The first time she screamed, they both burst through the door, only to be soundly routed by the doctor and mid-wife. Now she and the babies were clean, she'd nursed them, and they were sleeping peacefully like little angels.

The door opened and, almost sheepishly, the two men she loved the most entered the room.

"Jenny." Frank kissed her before stroking the cheek of the child nearest him. "Are you well?"

"I'm fine, as are the babies."

Her father kissed her head, then the top of the baby on that side of the bed. "I know we've gone round and round with names. Have you settled on them yet?"

She looked down at the little girl who had a light covering of red hair on her head.  
“I would like her to be named Elizabeth Catherine. After our mothers.”

Frank nodded. “I agree. What about our son?”

That was harder. When she’d broached the idea of naming a possible boy after her father he’d replied, “Nay, Angus. I’m honored, but it’s not an easy name to have.”

Naming a son after Frank’s father never came up in discussion, although his brother Damon’s name had.

“I would like to call him Daniel, after Mama’s father.”

“What would be his second name?” Frank asked.

“I thought Andrew, after your maternal grandfather.”

“Daniel Andrew it is.” Her father beamed. “By the way, I received a letter from Frank’s mother” —for reasons completely unknown to Frank and Jenny, her father and his mother had begun a correspondence— “It seems your brother Quintus’s bride is going to present her with a grandchild in the spring.”

“Quintus?” Frank’s mouth dropped open.

“But who did he marry?” Jenny asked, remembering their departure from London.

## ABOUT ELLA QUINN

USA Today bestselling author Ella Quinn's studies and other jobs have always been on the serious side. Reading historical romances, especially Regencies, were her escape. Eventually her love of historical novels led her to start writing them.

She is married to her wonderful husband of over thirty years. They have a son and two beautiful granddaughters, and a Portuguese Water Dog. After living in the South Pacific, Central America, North Africa, England and Europe, she and her husband decided to make their dreams come true and are now living on a sailboat. After cruising the Caribbean and North America, she completed a transatlantic crossing from St. Martin to Southern Europe and will be sailing the Med for the foreseeable future.

Want to find out more about Ella's books? Visit her website at <http://www.ellaquinnauthor.com>. You can also keep up with her on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

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Madeleine's Christmas Wish

**An excerpt from Three Weeks to Wed**

## CHAPTER ONE

*End of February, 1815, Leicestershire, England*

The sky had darkened and wind rocked the carriage, causing at least one wheel to leave the road. Hail mixed with freezing rain battered the windows. Lady Grace Carpenter pounded on the roof of her coach, trying to make herself heard over the storm. "How close are we to the Crow and Hound?"

"Not far, my lady," her coachman bellowed over the wind. "I'm think'n we should stop."

"Yes, indeed. Make it so." She huddled deeper into her warm sable cloak. When they'd started out this morning, the weather had been dry and sunny, giving no indication a storm of this magnitude would come on.

She was only an hour or so from her home, Stanwood Hall, but they wouldn't make

it. It was better to trust in the Crow and Hound's innkeeper's discretion than risk her servants and cattle to this weather.

A few minutes later, they turned off the road, and her coachman bellowed for an ostler. Moments later, her coach's door was quickly opened and the steps let down. Her groom, Neep, hustled her from the carriage to the open entrance of the inn.

The innkeeper, Mr. Brown, was there to greet her. Saxon blond, with blue eyes and of middling height and age, he shut the heavy wooden door against the weather. "My lady," he said in a surprised tone, "we didn't expect to see you this evenin'."

"For good reason." Grace whipped off her damp cloak and shook it. "I didn't expect to be here. I was visiting an elderly cousin, and the storm blew up on our way back."

"It's as they say, my lady," he said, nodding, "no good deed goes unpunished."

"Well," she blew out an exasperated huff, "it certainly seems like that at times. Thank God, we were close to you. I have my coachman, groom and two outriders"— Grace grimaced—"but not my maid." She prayed no one would discover she was there without her lady's maid, Bolton, who was sure to give Grace her *I told you so* look when she finally made it home. "I shall require the use of one of your girls. It should go without saying you have not seen me here."

"Yes, my lady." He nodded, tapping the side of his nose. "You were never here. Don't expect to see anyone else in this weather. You and your servants will sleep warm

and dry tonight." He pointed to the door next to the stairs and within easy reach of the common room. "I'll put you in this parlor for dinner."

She gave him a grateful smile. "Thank you. That will be perfect."

Susan, one of Brown's daughters, showed Grace to the large chamber at the back of the inn on the first floor. She handed the girl her cloak to dry, then shook out her skirts. "I'll call for you when I am ready to retire."

"Yes, my lady. Anything you need, just pull the bell." Susan bobbed a curtsy and left.

Grace glanced around. Although she had stopped here any number of times on family outings, she'd never spent the night. The inn had been in the Brown family for several generations. The building was old, but it was clean and well maintained.

She took a book and Norwich shawl from her large muff before descending the stairs to the parlor. Although it was early, not much past two o'clock, Mr. Brown had closed the shutters, and a fire was lit, as well as sufficient candles to brighten the room.

An hour later, warm and dry, she was engrossed in *Madelina*, the latest romance from the Minerva Press. Over the storm, sounds of another carriage arriving could be heard. Grace lowered the book, wondering who the newcomer could be.

The inn door slammed opened. Moments later, Mr. Brown's agitated tone and that of another man, a gentleman by his speech, reached her.

Her heart skipped a beat. Worthington? Could it really be him? She hadn't heard

his voice for four years, but she'd never forget it.

Opening the door slightly, she peeked out. It was him. The man she'd wanted to marry her whole first Season and had never seen again. His dark brown, almost black, hair was wet at the ends where his tall beaver hat had failed to keep it dry. If he turned, she knew she would see his startling lapis eyes and long lashes.

"Could you not just ask the traveler in the parlor if I might share it with him?"

Worthington asked the landlord, his tone strained, but still polite. He was probably already cold and wet, and the common room would be chilly at best.

The kernel of an idea began to form. Swallowing her trepidation, Grace stepped boldly into the hall. "Mr. Brown, his lordship is welcome to dine with me."

"If you're sure, my . . ."

She flashed him a quelling glance. If he said "my lady," there'd be too many questions from Worthington. Whatever happened, he could not know her identity.

"Ma'am."

She tried not to show her relief. "Yes. You may serve us after his lordship has had time to change." Grace dipped a slight curtsy to Worthington and returned to the parlor.

Closing the door, she leaned back against it. This was her opportunity, maybe her only one, and she was going to take it.

*"What are you doing, my girl? Are you out of your mind?"* her conscience berated her.

No one will know. Brown will deny I was here.

*“How do you expect to preach propriety to the children when you are—”*

“Oh, do be quiet,” Grace muttered. “When will I have another chance? Answer me that. All I want is to spend some time with him. What is the harm in that?”