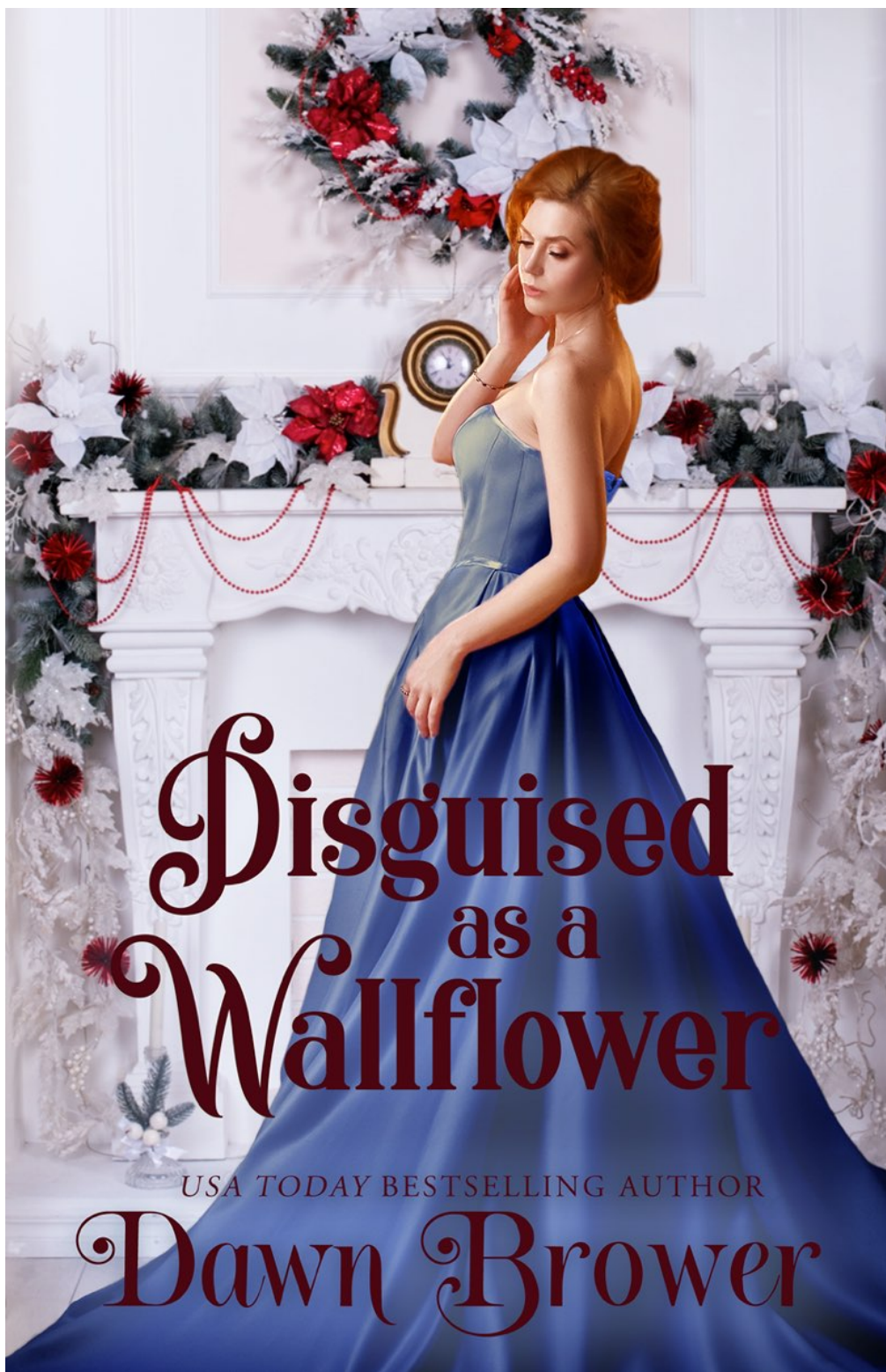


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USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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WALLFLOWERS AND ROGUES

BOOK THREE

DAWN BROWER



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For all those that find strength when they need it most. Do not give up. You never know what you might discover in the middle of your journey.

You must be the best judge of your own happiness.

— JANE AUSTEN, EMMA

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Prologue



Lady Seraphina Bell strolled toward a nearby tree on her father, the Duke of Wharton's estate. It was her birthday and she was now three and ten—she been counting down the years until she could be officially launched into society. She craved entertainment and the permission to attend balls, picnics, and soirees. Sera longed to dance... She adored dancing.

She'd been walking and the sun had become unbearable and that tree looked like a wonderful spot to take a respite. So she'd decided to rest under the shade for a little while. If she were brave enough she would consider walking a little farther to the little pond and swim. She would have to undress though and that would be most improper. Should she dare to anyway? Her father wouldn't approve at all.

She nibbled on her bottom lip. There was no one around and Sebastian wasn't supposed to return for a few days. Her father had informed her of that earlier that day. He was also bringing friends with him. Two of his closest school chums. Sera was glad that her cousin was making friends. He had a difficult time at school and some of the meaner boys had picked on him.

After careful consideration she decided to go to the pond. It was unusually hot and she wanted to take a swim. Her father would forgive her the impropriety. He might not like it, but he was never horrid to her. All she would get was a long stern lecture from her. If she had been born a boy this wouldn't even be a concern. But no, she'd been born female, and that made the rules far more strict for her. She wrinkled her nose. Sometimes it truly was abysmal to be a girl, but she did so love dresses. That made up for some of the worst aspects of being female.

She rushed toward the pond. Once she reached the water she slipped off her shoes. She sat down and removed her stockings and struggled to undo her ties in the back of her dress. "Drat," she said in a soft tone.

"What are you doing?"

She froze. That was a decidedly male tone, and not one she was familiar with. Sera turned to glance at toward the sound and sucked in a breath. He was...beautiful. His hair was a rich golden blond kissed by the sun. The locks were thick and she wanted to run her fingers through them to see if they were as soft as they appeared to be. As gorgeous as his hair was—that said nothing about his eyes. They were an ice blue. So cold they made her shiver instinctively.

"Who are you?" she said in her most prim tone.

He lifted a brow. "I'm the Duke of Riverdale. You should address me as Your Grace."

"Should I?" she lifted a brow. "And why would I do that?" Her father was a duke and she knew the proper etiquette, but something screamed at her not to give in to this beautiful boy. He was perhaps a few years older than her—maybe seven and

ten. She could be wrong though. Was this one of Bas's friends?

"Because I'm a duke," he sputtered.

"And?" she smirked at him. "I'm a duke's daughter. You are not that special."

He furrowed his eyebrows together. "You're quite rude."

"Thank you," she said in a smug tone. "Then I do believe I'm done here." Sera stood and bent over to collect her shoes, but slipped and went tumbling into the water.

She sputtered and flailed in the pond. It was much deeper than she remembered and her dress was making it difficult for her to swim. She struggled but still began to sink despite her efforts.

"I suppose you think I should save you now," the duke said in an aggravated tone.

She couldn't very well answer the aggravating duke to do that when she was fighting for her life. If she made it out of the water she was going to smack him hard. How dare he mock her when she might die. She popped to the surface again and noticed him pulling off his boots. He tossed them to the side and dived in. He swam over to her with ease, but she had somehow managed to remain afloat.

"I don't need you," she spat at him.

He sighed heavily. "You're the most contrary female..."

"Go away," she said and tried to move past him. He didn't allow her to though.

"Don't be difficult. You're not going to be able to swim in that gown." He wrapped an arm around her waist and dragged her to shore, then picked her up and tossed her onto the muddy

bank. Her hip hit hard and she moaned as the pain shot through her. He was so bloody awful.

“And you called me rude,” she said as she spit pond water out of her mouth. Why had she thought swimming would be a grand idea. “Why are you here anyway.”

The Duke of Riverdale pulled himself out of the pond and slid down next to her. “I didn’t plan on this impromptu swim that’s for certain.” He wiped a hand over his wet blond locks. It didn’t look as silky as before but that didn’t make him less appealing. If anything those wet clothes made him...far more attractive. She could see, well, everything. That led to some very unladylike thoughts. If her father could see inside her head he’d send her someplace to make here rethink everything.

Why him? He was horrid. She’d never laid eyes upon anyone and instantly been attracted to them. “That doesn’t tell me anything.” She glared at him. “Are you going to answer me?”

“No,” he said. “I don’t think I will.” He stood then picked up his boots. “I trust you can find your own way back or is that too much for you too.”

Oh... She wanted to throw something at him, but there was nothing easily on hand. She’d give anything for a stone, hell a pebble. Something. “I hate you.”

“Back at you sweetheart,” he said in a droll tone. The duke saluted her and then left her alone at the pond. He had to be Bas’s friend. She would have a long talk with her cousin when she saw him. He had terrible taste in friends... Sera hoped she never saw the rude duke again.

One



Seraphina stared out the coach window and frowned. She wasn't overly fond of traveling, even when the reason for it was a sound one. Seraphina was on her way to a wedding. Not her own of course, but her dear cousin Agatha's. She had only recently discovered that Agatha was family, but not many were privy to that particular secret. Seraphina would never announce their relationship, but neither would she deny it. That was something for Agatha to decide upon, and Seraphina would respect her cousin's wishes. Agatha was very dear to her—more like a sister than a cousin.

The wedding was to be held at her father's, the Duke of Wharton's, country seat. The vicarage has been preparing for the upcoming nuptials since the announcement of Agatha's betrothal to the Marquess of Huntington. The banns were read appropriately for three Sundays, and now Agatha and the marquess could properly say their vows. They both had wanted to marry immediately, but Seraphina's father—the Duke of Wharton—had insisted they wait a little longer than mere days.

There would be no quick, special license wedding for the two of them, instead they had been forced to wait two whole months—and she was certain that that wait had been excruciating for Agatha and the marquess. Everything had to

look above board for Agatha to gain her meager inheritance though. Not that her cousin wanted those funds for herself... She fully intended to use them for some charitable project she had planned.

Seraphina sighed.

She had been in London since the end of the house party at her cousin Sebastian's country home. She should have left London sooner, but she hadn't wanted to be at Wharton Castle while the Duke of Riverdale was in residence. He was going to be at the wedding and had been invited to stay at the castle. Seraphina was tired of fighting with the Duke of Riverdale, and after her father's last lecture she had needed some time to herself. She had to prepare herself for the upcoming time in the company of the duke that proved to be the bane of her existence. He brought out the worst in her, and she desperately wished she could rein in the need to gain his attention. She hated how much she craved even the worst of scathing retorts from him. If he were ever nice to her...she'd be lost.

It wasn't as if she wanted to bicker with Riverdale. It just...happened. All she had to do was breathe in his presence and she frustrated him. She wanted to have a peaceful accord with him. If only she could discern a way to make that a reality. Why did she have to have that affect on him? He was the last man she wanted to make irritable. Seraphina wanted something entirely different with him. Something of the more romantic variety...

Unfortunately for her... That was unlikely to happen. He didn't see her the same way she did him. To the Duke of Riverdale she was the antithesis of everything good. She would never measure up to his expectations, and therefore, Seraphina didn't even try. What was the point? If he saw her

as irredeemable, then darn it, she would be. She was not a shrinking flower that would wilt in the face of adversity.

As far as her heart... Well one day it wouldn't hurt so much. It would take time, more time than she would like, but it would mend. And maybe, just maybe, one day she would find someone to love that didn't dislike her on sight. It would be lovely to be gazed upon with admiration instead of antipathy. The trip back to Wharton Castle would give her time to acclimate herself. Somehow she would find the serenity necessary to endure Riverdale's company. She only had a few more weeks until the wedding, and a good part of that would be traveling.

Suddenly, the carriage jolted sideways and Seraphina's hip hit the carriage wall so hard she yowled in pain. Then the carriage rattled and shook and then it tipped over. Her head bounced against the side of the carriage several times. Ringing filled her ears and everything spun around her. What the blazes... She tried to move, but she couldn't. Her entire body ached and she could not form any coherent thoughts.

Cold seeped into the carriage. The blanket she'd had draped over her lap had fallen beside her. Seraphina wanted to reach for it and cover herself, but even that slight movement was more than she could bear. Was she going to die there? Alone and without ever telling the one man she adored how much she loved him? Her fate was not to be a happy one... She wanted to scream at the injustice of it all, but no sound escaped her. It was just her, the frigid air enveloping her, and the pain spreading through her body to keep her company.

There were sounds echoing around her but none of it made any sense. A man shouted something... She stilled and tried to listen but the infernal ringing wouldn't allow her to decipher

anything. Seraphina opened her eyes but the spinning hadn't stopped either. Sickness overcame her and if she couldn't get the rotations to stop she might retch.

The carriage door, now above her, swung open. A chilly wind flew into the carriage and she began to shake from the frosty breeze. Seraphina didn't look up. It hurt too much and with her eyes closed at least she could control the swirling sensations a little bit.

"Seraphina," the man said. Anxiety filled his tone and he practically shouted at her. His voice sounded so familiar. Was it the carriage driver? Where was the footman?

Warmth spread through her. Didn't that happen when one became so cold? They no longer felt the frigid weather, and became pleasantly heated? She was surely dying now. Should she embrace that warmth and topple into it?

"Damn it," the man cursed. "Don't go to sleep. Stay with me." The urgency in his tone had her opening her eyes. His image was blurry, but she could almost make out his features. His blond hair and ice blue eyes were ingrained in her mind. This was a man she would never forget. Of course her imagination had conjured him when she needed him most.

"Riverdale," she croaked out his name, but it was barely above a murmur. At least she had the chance to see him one last time before she died. Maybe he didn't actually hate her...

"Of course I don't hate you," he ground out the words. "Stop talking nonsense." He wrapped her in her blanket and then pulled her out of the carriage. She was especially warm now.

"Thank you for not hating me," she mumbled. She hadn't realized she'd said those words aloud. "It would be horrid to

die knowing you loathe me still.”

He cursed something under his breath but she couldn't hear it. She was closing her eyes again. The world was going dark and she was embracing it. Riverdale didn't hate her. Her heart leapt at that knowledge. If only it was more than that though. She wanted his love, and it was the one thing she would never have. Oh, well, one couldn't always get everything...even in death.



CALEB TURNER, THE DUKE OF RIVERDALE CURSED. THIS WAS a nightmare. One he never could or would have imagined. When he had began the journey to Wharton Castle he had been inwardly cringing. He had known that once he arrived he would have to spend some time in Lady Seraphina Bell's company. It was required as she was the bride's cousin, and actually lived at the residence where the wedding was being held.

He hadn't liked it one bit.

But as he could do nothing about that he'd set his feelings aside. One of his closest friends was marrying the woman he loved. With his two dearest friends settling down he should consider doing the same. His mother had certainly thought so. She'd been hammering the idea into him ever since she learned the Marquess of Huntington had become betrothed. He should find a bride to and all that. Caleb had tuned most of it out and did his damn best to ignore her lectures.

He didn't want a bride, and he certainly had no intention of finding one just to appease his mother. Even with his mother harping on him daily he'd still delayed his journey to Wharton

Castle. It was far better to listen to the dowager duchess than to cross paths with Lady Seraphina.

If only he'd left sooner... Then maybe he wouldn't be in his current predicament. Then again... If he hadn't delayed then he might not be around to help the one woman who he had trouble resisting—he couldn't imagine a world where she wasn't a part of it. He shuddered at the thought of losing her. *Damn it.* She would not die. He refused to allow such a tragedy to happen.

“Seraphina,” he said her name softly. “Sweetheart. Open your eyes for me.” He wrapped her in the blanket that had fallen beside her and pulled her against him. Her skin was ice cold and had lost all color. He had to warm her and fast or he might actually lose her.

He stood and held her against him as he carried her to his carriage. Her carriage driver had tried to steer the carriage when the wheel broke, but it still had ended in disaster.

“Your Grace,” the carriage driver called out to him. “What should we do?”

His leg was broken, and the footman was unconscious near the side of the carriage. Caleb should help them, but his main concern was Seraphina. “Once I have her in my carriage I'll come back to help you.” He'd send his own footman over to assist in carrying the two men to his carriage. With the storm raging above them they would have to take a slow pace. They couldn't afford another carriage to fall apart on them.

“Davy,” he said to the carriage driver. “Open the door for me and then go see if there is something we can use to brace the carriage driver's leg. We will need to keep it stable until he can be seen by a doctor.”

“Yes, your grace,” Davy replied, then he went to the nearby forest for a sturdy branch or stick.

“Edmond,” Caleb called to the footman.

“Yes, your grace,” Edmond said immediately.

Caleb was busy settling Seraphina into the carriage. He pulled her blanket over her, and then grabbed one he had in his own carriage to go over that. After he was satisfied she would be as warm as possible until he returned he gave the footman his full attention. “We need to move the two men over to our carriage. One of them is currently unconscious, and the other has a broken leg. I will need your help to move them.”

“Of course, your grace,” Edmond replied. Just then Davy came back with a large branch. Edmond gestured toward the tree branch. “We have a bit of rope in the carriage we can use to secure that to his leg. I’ll fetch it.”

They worked quickly to help the two injured men. Once they had both men in the carriage Caleb finally started to breathe a little easier. He could return to Seraphina and ensure she was all right. “How far is the next town?” They had to find room at an inn and send for a doctor immediately.

“It’s a good hour away,” the carriage driver admitted. “There is an estate near by. I believe it is the residence of the Earl of Moreland.”

Caleb blew out a breath. He was familiar with the earl and while he didn’t particularly agree with some of the man’s habits, he was at least tolerable. He would assist them and that was all that mattered to him for the moment. “Then go there. Moreland will receive me.” And if he didn’t the man would regret that decision.

The carriage driver nodded. “We’re less than a half hour from the estate. Please try to find some comfort until then.”

He doubted he would find anything of the sort for some time. Caleb couldn’t think of anything other than Seraphina. She still had not opened her eyes and he feared what that meant. Caleb stepped inside his carriage and closed the door, careful to avoid the other carriage driver’s splinted leg. He lifted Seraphina into his arms and settled into the seat, keeping her secured in his embrace. If anything his warmth might aid her. She was still too cold for his liking.

She moaned a little bit and nestled against him. Caleb released a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and leaned his head against the seat. She was still alive, and for now that would have to be enough. Soon they would be at the Earl of Moreland’s estate, and there he would find the help she needed. After that he could go back to ignoring her. He could not allow himself to be too close to her. If he did...he might do something that he would regret.

Two



Her head ached something fierce... She should open her eyes but she feared that it would only prove to increase her current pain. Something wasn't right and she couldn't quite discern what, and that...frustrated her.

“Seraphina,” a man said quietly. “I know you’re awake. Open your eyes.”

He was being rather rude. She wasn't entirely certain she liked that. No. She was certain. She did not like it one bit and she had a mind to tell him that. Instead she held her tongue. Mainly because she had a feeling that giving him a tongue lashing wouldn't aid her current predicament. Slowly she lifted her eyelids and regretted it immediately.

She opened her mouth but couldn't make a sound. Her throat was dry and she couldn't actually form words. What was wrong with her?

“Don't speak,” the man ordered.

He was rather good at that. The blasted man seemed to think he had the right to order her about. Why was that? Who was he? She turned toward him and drew in a sharp breath. He was so bloody beautiful—his blond hair and ice blue eyes were striking. Something about him seemed familiar... Should she know him? Seraphina swallowed hard. Her mind was

fuzzy and she couldn't shake the feeling. "Drink," she managed to ask. Instead of pondering on the things she couldn't unravel she would focus on what she could fix.

He shook his head. "We need to help you sit up first."

She glared at him but conceded he was right. She wouldn't be able to drink properly laying down. He stood to help her sit up, but she pushed his hands away. This man may seem familiar but she didn't know him. Hell, she didn't even know herself. He'd called her Seraphina but was that really her name? Damn and blast...she didn't know her own name. She should be more terrified of that fact, but she couldn't focus on that just yet.

"You need help," he said in an irritated tone. "Let me help you."

She shook her head defiantly. There was not much she had control over but this she could do herself. Seraphina pushed her hands into the mattress and then slid herself into a sitting position. Her breathing was more ragged than if she'd allowed him to aid her, but she was proud of this accomplishment. She met his gaze and smiled.

He blew out a frustrated breath. "Why do you always have to be so bloody obstinate?"

Should she answer that? She didn't think he really wanted her to answer him but she felt almost compelled to reply. Seraphina held back though. Instead she glanced around the room hoping her surroundings would trigger her absent memory. Nothing seemed familiar except him. The room was plush and ornate. The walls were a sapphire blue with gold trim. Curtains of velvet brocade were a darker blue than the walls but had gold threaded ties. She suspected there was a theme to the room... Even the blankets were shades of blue

and gold. She turned back to the man with ice blue eyes and asked again, “Drink?”

He sighed and went to a nearby table and poured water from a pitcher into a glass then brought it over to her. She reached for it but he didn’t hand it to her. “You’re too weak yet. Let me help with this at least.”

Seraphina took the time to meet his gaze. There was concern there that she hadn’t seen before. He did seem to be worried about her. Who was he to her? Should she be nicer to him and accept the help he so readily offered? What would it hurt? She nodded at him instead of trying to speak again.

He lifted the glass to her lips. She opened her mouth and swallowed the blessed liquid down her parched throat. It felt so wonderful she wanted to gulp it all down.

“Not so fast,” he said in a firm tone. “You don’t want to drink it only for it to come back up. Take slower sips.”

He may be right. Her stomach was already roiling a little bit. She pushed the glass away. Later she would have some more. That had been enough to help with her dry mouth and throat. It would make talking a bit easier.

“Glad you’re being more agreeable.” He frowned. “I don’t know if I should be concerned or not. This isn’t exactly like you.”

He seemed to know her well. Did she always make things difficult for him? Why would she do that? “What happened to me?” It seemed like a reasonable question. She had so many she hadn’t known where to even begin with them.

“You were in a carriage accident,” he told her. “You’ve been sick for over a sennight now. The fever finally broke yesterday, but you still slept. I’ve been so worried...” He

swallowed hard. “I haven’t been able to send word to your father yet. We’re stuck here until the snow stops. This has to be the worst blizzard in years and doesn’t show any signs of slowing yet.”

“Where are we?” Who was her father? Should she ask him that? “How far are we from my father?”

“We’re at the estate of the Earl of Moreland. He has graciously offered us his hospitality for as long as we require it.”

She nodded. “I’ll have to thank him.”

“No need,” he said. “I’ve already done so for the both of us.”

He was so high handed... “I’d still prefer to do it myself. It’s rude not to do so.”

“Then by all means when you’re well enough extend your gratitude. You always do as you wish regardless of what I suggest.” There was a bitterness to his tone.

“Have I offended you?” She narrowed her gaze. “You must forgive me but I don’t recall...” Recall what? Everything? How should she proceed? “I don’t...” She placed her hand over her head. “It hurts to think.”

“Then don’t strain yourself. We can discuss this all later. You need time to heal, and this is taxing you.”

She turned her gaze toward him. He was back to being concerned or her. He was such a confounding man. Why did were his moods so mercurial? He went from being concerned to irritated with her from one word to the next. “I...” She swallowed hard. She was afraid to speak her fears. What would he do if she admitted she didn’t know who he was?

Seraphina had to be brave. She took a deep breath. “You called me Seraphina,” she said in a quiet tone.

“My apologies,” he said in a scathing tone. “I didn’t think we needed to be so formal at your sick bed.”

“No,” she said. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Then enlighten me.” His tone was bitter. “What have I done wrong now?”

Her heart skipped a beat. She wanted to glance away but couldn’t. Something about him was so mesmerizing. “I mean...I don’t...” She licked her lips. “Remember who I am?” She tilted her head to the side. “And who are you, and why do you seem to care about me?”

His mouth fell open and surprise filled his gaze. He didn’t say a word and her heart started to beat even more rapidly. Would he ever speak again?



HE HAD TO HAVE HEARD HER WRONG. CALEB NEVER COULD have anticipated this. Seraphina didn’t know who she was, and didn’t know him... She had to be terrified. Some things seem to hold true. She had been obstinate, but not as much as usual. She didn’t quite seem herself. “You don’t know your name,” he asked. Mainly so he understood what was happening with her.

She shook her head. “You said I’m Seraphina.”

“You are...” He frowned. Should he tell her what her full name was or should he wait for a doctor to examine her? They hadn’t been able to send for one yet. Caleb had taken to caring for her himself over the past several days. Lady Moreland had

helped him so he could get some rest. She should be returning soon to relieve him for a little bit.

“Why are you not answering me?” She stared at him wide eyed and a little terrified. He couldn’t leave her completely in the dark.

“I’m not sure where to start and if I should tell you everything...”

“Why would you hold anything back?” She narrowed her gaze. “What purpose would that serve?”

“What if it hampers you from remembering anything properly?” He was a little scared himself. Caleb wanted to protect her and he had no fathomable idea how to do that. This was beyond everything he knew...

“I don’t think knowing my own name will do that,” she said in a soft tone. “Please help me.”

He had trouble denying her anything on a good day, but a pleading, soft tone from her... That might just be his undoing. Caleb had never experienced this side of her. That was his own fault and he bloody well knew it. They had started off wrong and never found a right path. They were constantly at odds and he didn’t know how to fix that. “You’re Lady Seraphina Bell,” he told her, and then for reason he couldn’t explain he added, “my fiancée”

“We are not yet wed?” She frowned. “You shouldn’t be alone with me then.” Then she tilted her head to the side. “Were we traveling together?”

He shook his head. “No,” he told her. “We were on our way to a wedding, but in separate carriages. I thought you would already be at Wharton Castle.” He had prayed she

would be... Caleb hadn't wanted to interact with her more than he had to. Why the hell had he claimed to be her fiancé?

"Was it our wedding?" she asked.

"No," he told her. "It was your cousin's" And one of Caleb's closest friends... "She's marrying the Marquess of Huntington."

"My cousin..." Seraphina frowned. "I don't remember."

She might not recall that Agatha is her cousin. That was a newly revealed secret the Duke of Wharton had kept to himself. "It's all right. Don't strain yourself. It will all come back when it is supposed to." He hoped that was the truth anyway. "I should leave you so you can rest." He had a lot to think about himself. She would be well enough to get out of bed soon, and Seraphina, even this more reasonable version would insist on that.

"Wait," she said before he could leave. "Don't go."

"You need to rest," he reminded her.

"It seems as if I've been doing plenty of that for days now. I need you to stay a bit longer at least." She nibbled on her bottom lip. He nearly groaned at that sight. He had wanted to kiss her for some time now and he ached to watch her abuse those lovely lips so.

"What can I do for you?" He asked her. Caleb didn't walk back over to her bedside. "Do you need more water? Would you like something more substantial to eat? I've managed to get you to drink some broth but not much else."

"Some toast and tea would be lovely, but not just yet." She took a deep breath. "You claim we are to be married..." Was she questioning that? She should, as it was a complete fabrication. He still didn't know why he had lied to her...

“Yes,” he said. He kept his tone as neutral as he could. “Do you doubt that?”

“No,” she said. “I mean I have no reason to...” She sighed. “It’s just...” She nibbled on her lip again. Damn she had to stop doing that. “I don’t know your name.”

He chuckled. Why had he not realized her dilemma? She didn’t know her own name why would he know his? He smiled, then said, “I am the Duke of Riverdale.” He walked over to her and leaned down. “But you call me Caleb.” Another lie but he wanted to hear her say his name.”

“Caleb?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for caring for me,” she said a little breathlessly.

“It was my pleasure.” Then he did another foolish thing. He closed the distance between them and pressed his lips to hers. Nothing of the passionate sort like he craved to do...but enough to satisfy his need to feel her lips under his. Later he would kiss her properly, and if he went through this farce of an engagement she would be his wife. Caleb almost hoped she never remembered their past. This might be the very thing that saved him from his past deeds. She didn’t know the arse he’d been in the past. He could win her heart and love her the way he had wanted to for many years now—if he hadn’t messed up to begin with...

“I’ll leave you to rest,” he told her. “Lady Moreland may come and check on you. She’s a lovely woman. I’ll let her know you wish to try tea and toast.”

She licked her lips and he nearly groaned. “Thank you.”

He nodded but didn't trust himself to speak. Instead he turned on his heels and left the room. He was a bloody fool, but he felt hope. Something he had thought was lost to him might just be possible...

Three



Seraphina was tired of staying in bed. Surely she was well enough now to leave it... A maid had brought her tea and toast, and it had been wonderful, but not as substantial as she would have liked. The Duke of Riverdale hadn't returned to her bedchamber. He really shouldn't have been there in the first place—betrothal or not... She couldn't bring herself to even think of him by his given name. That seemed so intimate, much like that brief kiss. It hadn't been anything she should overly think about, and yet, she couldn't shake it from her mind. He had said that Lady Moreland would check in on her. Where was the countess?

If the countess did come by surely Seraphina could convince her to help her escape the confines of the bedchamber. She wanted to leave, the sooner the better. Not the house of course. If there really was a snowstorm in progress that would be a foolhardy endeavor. Maybe she should ring for a maid in the meantime. She could at least get dressed and sit up in her bedchamber.

A knock echoed through the room forcing Seraphina out of her thoughts. She didn't have time to reply before the door swung open and a petite blonde woman with light green eyes stepped into the room. She was truly lovely, but Seraphina didn't recognize her. That may or may not be due to her failed

memory. “His grace mentioned you were awake.” The woman smiled warmly. “I’m Lady Moreland, but you may call me Eden.”

Seraphina studied the woman. She tried to hide it but there was some sadness in her eyes. Lady Moreland stepped into the room letting the door shut behind her. She sat down in a chair near Seraphina’s bed then turned her attention to her. “How are you feeling today?”

“I’m much better, thank you,” she told the countess. “I must apologize in advance. If we’ve met before I do not recall.”

“We’ve never been formally introduced,” Lady Moreland replied in a friendly tone. “My marriage was arranged by my father and I never had an official season. I would have been married at ten and eight, but my husband was in mourning from his father’s passing and we had to wait a year.”

That was a lot... “Were you disappointed you had to wait?” Seraphina couldn’t help her curiosity. The words were out before she could prevent them.

Lady Moreland shook her head. “No. It wasn’t a love match and waiting for the day to marry didn’t bother me.” She smiled. “It was actually a nice year for me. I didn’t have to go out in society and look for a husband. I could instead stay home and focus on things I would much rather be doing—like reading and painting.”

Seraphina wrinkled her nose. “My cousin likes to read.” Where had that come from? She couldn’t remember much of anything, but she recalled that with ease. Was that the same cousin who was getting married soon? She would have to ask the duke.

“But you do not?” Lady Moreland asked.

“It’s all right but I’m not upset if someone says I cannot read.” She frowned. That didn’t seem right either. There was someone she would be upset with on principle for not allowing her to do something, but she couldn’t recall who... She shook the thought away. “Truthfully, I don’t know what my likes and dislikes are. My memory isn’t that reliable at the moment.”

Lady Moreland tilted her head to the side as she studied her. “You were unconscious for several days—it might take a few more days for your memory to become what you are accustomed to. The duke was quite upset at how ill you had taken and cared for you the entire time. I had to force him to rest. He must love you very much.” She placed her hand on Seraphina’s. “You’re lucky to have a man like that care for you. He’s quite honorable.” Suggesting her own husband wasn’t?

“I suppose he must at least care for me,” Seraphina said. “He did say we are betrothed.”

“Yes,” Lady Moreland said. “I assumed as much though he didn’t offer many details, and even if you were not, his actions would necessitate such a union. He was alone with you over an extended period of time.”

While she was ill... Surely society wouldn’t think anything untoward happened while she fought to survive. She almost snorted. Of course none of that would matter. Seraphina was thoroughly compromised. Maybe they hadn’t been betrothed before this incident and he only assumed he would have to marry her. She would have to ask him that the next time he stopped in to visit her. Which reminded her... “Lady Moreland...”

“Eden,” she reminded Seraphina.

“All right,” she agreed. “Eden, I would very much like to leave this room. Can you have a maid help me dress?”

“I don’t know...” She nibbled on her bottom lip nervously. “The duke...”

“Isn’t my husband yet,” she said in a stern tone. “I do not need to follow his dictates. I have not promised to obey him and I need to see more than the walls of this room.”

“Very well, if you’re certain...”

“I am,” Seraphina said firmly. “and if it is all right I would like to join everyone for the evening meal.”

“That would be lovely,” Eden told her. “We do have other guests. My dearest friend, the Countess of Harewood and her husband are here for a visit. You’ll adore Claire. She’s the sweetest person you’ll ever meet.”

Seraphina didn’t know anything about Lady Harewood, but Eden was very nice and she hoped they would become friends. “I look forward to making her acquaintance later this evening.”

“I’ll leave you be for now. I’ll send in Mary, my maid to assist you.” Eden stood and headed toward the door. “If you require anything else ask Mary. She’ll see to your every need.” With those words she left Seraphina alone and exited the bedchamber.



CALEB WANTED TO GO UP AND LOOK IN ON SERAPHINA BUT held himself back. He had already taken liberties that were unacceptable. They were not officially betrothed and she would be livid with him once her memory returned. He should

never have told that lie. It made his heart race every time he thought of it—which was constantly. How was he going to rectify this without Seraphina flaying him alive?

“You look anxious,” Lord Moreland said as he strolled into the game room, followed closely by his companion. Caleb should have found another room to seek refuge but he hadn’t been thinking clearly. Of course Moreland and the Earl of Harewood would gather in the very room designed for a gentleman to have a spot of fun. The two earls seemed to enjoy each other’s company. Caleb wanted to avoid them both. Moreland had always given Caleb a bad feeling in his gut. If he’d had another choice he would not have brought Seraphina to his door.

“Not at all,” Caleb replied smoothly. “I was about to pour me a snifter of brandy. Would you two like some as well?” That at least was the truth. There was plenty of liquor available in the game room and the earl’s brandy wasn’t half bad.

“What a splendid idea,” Harewood said. “Yes, I do believe I will join you for a drink.”

“Count me in as well,” Moreland drawled. He strolled over to the billiard table and scrutinized it. “Should we play a game as well?”

“I’d rather not,” Caleb replied. “But you two should. Billiards isn’t a game made for three after all.”

They both stared at him, but then the Earl of Moreland conceded. “You’re correct of course.” He turned toward Harewood. “Would you like to play?”

Harewood considered the option for a mere moment then nodded. “I do believe I would.” They both took sticks off a

nearby board, and then Moreland set the balls on the table to set up the game. Caleb lost all interest in their actions—not that he ever truly had any to begin with. Harewood seemed a decent sort. It was Moreland that had little to no scruples.

“How is your lady doing?” Moreland asked as Harewood set up his shot.

“She’s doing well,” Caleb answered nonchalantly. He didn’t want to give that particular earl anything to gossip about. He would surely run to the nearest gossipmonger and spread tales. Which had sealed his fate really. Seraphina might not like it, but they would have to marry to save her reputation. She wouldn’t fight him on it with this memory loss of hers. The real her...the woman he has always known. That woman would rather live her life with nuns than become his bride.

And what did that say about him that he missed her barbed tongue...

The Seraphina with memory loss was almost sweet damn her. She wasn’t biddable exactly, but it wasn’t—her. He liked their battle of wits. It made things inherently more interesting. He didn’t want a docile and obedient Seraphina. He wanted *his* Seraphina.

“That is good to hear,” Moreland said. Caleb had gone back to ignoring him and had forgotten the man was even nearby. He was taking his turn at the table and Harewood was now studying him. What was that expression on his face? Concern? For Caleb? He wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

“It is,” Caleb replied more because it was expected than anything else. “We can leave as soon as the weather permits it. Her father will be worried when we do not arrive in time for the wedding.” He did not add that it was the Marquess of

Huntington's wedding to Miss Agatha Cartwright that they were going to. He would rather let Moreland believe it was his wedding to Seraphina.

"When is the wedding anyway?" Harewood asked. "Shouldn't you have departed London sooner? And why is Wharton not escorting his daughter?"

All very good questions. Some he didn't even have the answer for... "I was delayed on some estate business." That was a total lie. He should have left sooner. "Seraphina had her own reasons for leaving late. She was traveling with outriders from her father's estate, as you know. We were not traveling together. It was only happenstance we met on the road. I thought she had left far sooner than I had."

He shouldn't have to explain any of this to them. They were curious though and would come to their own conclusions if he didn't give them something. Why hadn't Seraphina left sooner? He'd ask her if she didn't have memory loss. He wondered if she were lying about that, but why would she? What would she have to gain by pretending?

"I'm lucky I found them after their carriage accident." He sighed and ran his hand over his face. He couldn't shake that terror from his mind. When he first saw that carriage and realized Seraphina was inside... "They would have all died." He shook a little at the memory. "The wedding can wait. It is far more important that she heals."

"So the deadline itself doesn't matter?" Moreland said. "That's good to know."

What did he mean by that statement? If he were more himself he'd inquire more, but he just didn't care enough. "No. The wedding is still two weeks away. We have time to arrive before it is supposed to happen. Provided the weather allows."

He hoped they did. The duke *would* worry about his daughter and Seraphina loved Agatha. She'd want to be at her cousin's wedding. Caleb hoped that he could ensure they both arrived safely for it.

"My wife says that Lady Seraphina hopes to join us for dinner." Moreland left that little bit of information hanging as he took another shot on the billiard table.

Caleb swallowed the contents of his glass and set it down hard. "Does she now?" He'd have to talk to her about the wisdom of that decision. She was in no condition to be walking around and sitting at a dining table pretending as if she hadn't almost died. "If you'll excuse me I have to go speak to my fiancée." He didn't bother to ask them if they minded at all. Their opinion meant little to him and he did not give a damn if they were offended by his abrupt exit.

Four



Seraphina hadn't even considered what she would wear when she asked for a maid to help her dress. Thankfully she had not been required to handle that decision. The duke had arranged for her trunks to be retrieved and brought to the Moreland estate. The snow hadn't been coming down continuously as she had presumed. It had stopped shortly after they arrived but he had deemed her to ill to travel. It wasn't until the day she had woken up that the snow had begun to fall again. It was almost as if fate had decided she needed to be trapped at this particular estate for some unforeseen amount of time.

With her own gowns available the maid selected one and pressed it for her to wear as Seraphina bathed. The warm bath water felt good on her clammy skin. She sat in the water until it cooled and even then she debated remaining inside the tub. The maid would return soon and it would be better if she were already up and ready to dress for dinner. She slid out of the water and reached for the drying cloth. She slid the towel over her wet skin and tried herself, then grabbed her dressing gown and wrapped herself inside of it. She hadn't dried herself very well and some of the dampness remaining on her skin seeped into the thin fabric making it nearly translucent.

A knock on the door caught her attention. She turned toward it and called out, "Come in." The maid had arrived to help her dress and not a moment too soon. But she was wrong it was not the maid that entered the bedchamber.

"Seraphina," the duke said as he entered. He stopped dead in his tracks and stared at her. He swallowed hard as his gaze remained glued to her in the center of the room. His voice was hoarse when he next spoke. "I didn't mean..."

"It isn't your fault. I thought you were the maid." He was clearly undone by her near nakedness. That was definitely desire that had filled his gaze. He may or may not love her, but he definitely wanted her. Was that enough to base a marriage on? Seraphina didn't know one way or the other. She had nothing to compare it to.

"I should leave," he said in a husky tone. He didn't move at all.

"Yet you're still here," she chided him. She fought a smile. "What is preventing you from departing my bedchamber?"

He closed his eyes and took several breaths. "You're so bloody lovely." His tone was barely above a whisper. He opened his eyes and his gaze nearly seared through her. "I find it difficult to leave you when you're dressed. With so little to cover you it is almost an impossibility."

His breathing was still ragged. "We are to be married are we not?"

"Yes," he said in a tone that meant nothing would change that outcome. Nothing would dissuade him from claiming her as his wife. It sent a tingle down her belly and heated her from the inside out. "You will be mine."

She smiled. “Then there’s no harm in you seeing me nearly naked is there.”

“What if I want to see you without even the benefit of that sheer material?” His tone was husky as he spoke. “I want to touch you.”

“Not today, Your Grace,” she chided. “We have not said our vows, and it’s best we don’t do anything we might regret.”

“Oh,” he said as he took a step toward her. “I promise you I wouldn’t regret a thing.” There was a wickedness in his gaze that sent shivers down her spine. “And when I touch you.” He took another step. “Because that, sweetheart, is an inevitability...” Caleb moved even closer and her breath hitched with every movement he made. “You won’t regret it either.”

There was nothing she wanted more than to fall into this man’s embrace and let him touch her in every way his gaze promised. She was certain that she would enjoy every second of his ministrations, and she feared she wouldn’t care if it thoroughly ruined her. If they were to marry it wouldn’t matter if she lost her innocence a couple weeks before they said their vows would it?

“That may be true,” she began. Her tone was a bit breathy. The things this man did to her and he hadn’t even touched her yet... “But we should still consider the ramifications of such a decision.” Why was she being the voice of reason when all she wanted to do was give into her desire?

“Darling,” he said in that wicked tone. “You’re thinking too much. Come closer and let me help you forget about everything but me.”

Oh, God... “I already have forgotten so much. I’d like to remember what little I already do.”

He stopped cold and closed his eyes again. “I’d forgotten the reason I came in here to begin with. I have no business touching you.” He cursed under his breath but she couldn’t be certain of the words. She did hear him mumble the words bloody and fool. He opened his eyes again and pinned her with that unyielding gaze. “You should not come down to dinner. After being so ill it will be too much for you.”

“I think I am capable of making my own decisions regarding my health. Mere moments ago you were determined to strip me of this dressing gown and have your wicked way with me. If I hadn’t reminded you of my memory loss you might have done just that.”

“You’re right,” he conceded. “My desire for you almost overrode my facilities. I won’t let that happen again. You’re well being is my highest priority.”

She rather liked the wicked devil more. Seraphina wanted that man back. She should have kept that memory bit to herself. “Then you’ll be happy to know I’m well enough to sit at a table and dine with our hosts. My maid will be here shortly. You should go before she arrives.”

He grated his teeth together. “I don’t like this.”

“Not my problem,” she told him. “Go now. I’d like to dress for dinner without your disapproving gaze.” Seraphina glared at him then decided to goad him. “Unless you would like to watch me dress. You did express an interest in seeing my naked form.”

The duke groaned. “Have it your way. I’ll see you at dinner.” With those parting words he left her alone in the

room. Not long after that her maid arrived to help her dress. At least the evening meal would also be interesting. She would dress with the duke in mind. She wanted to goad that contrary man a bit more. That part had been far too fun.



CALEB COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT HE HAD ALMOST DONE IN Seraphina's bedchamber. If not for her illness... Hell if she hadn't been injured she wouldn't be there to begin with. They wouldn't have ever been in the same room or in the position to almost do anything. He wanted her so damn much and he could have had her. Might still be able to have her. But what kind of man would that make him to take advantage of her when she didn't have all the information. Seraphina didn't know that they were more often at odds with each other than not.

He had left her alone to dress because that was the right thing to do. It was a good thing that he hadn't given in to his desire for her. Better for her, and agony for him. Caleb had returned to his own chamber and dressed for dinner. If she was going to be there then he bloody well would be too. Someone had to ensure she would be all right because she clearly didn't have the sense to do it for herself.

After he was dressed he left his chamber to go to the sitting room. It was where they all gathered before dinner. At least the few times he had joined everyone for the meal. Most of the time he had stayed to watch over Seraphina and a maid had brought him a tray of food. He hadn't been in a socializing mood and had preferred to keep his distance. Lady Moreland had convinced him to join them twice for the evening meal. It

hadn't been terrible, but not pleasant either. He'd been too worried about Seraphina to notice much of anything.

"Your Grace," Lady Moreland greeted him. "I'm glad you're able to join us this evening. Is Lady Seraphina fairing well?"

"The last I saw her she was," he told her. "She hasn't joined everyone yet?" He thought perhaps she would have dressed faster than him and already been in attendance. He'd been wrong. It wasn't the first time he'd been in this position regarding Lady Seraphina Bell. Caleb never could predict her all the time. She was the one person that constantly surprised him.

"Mary went to help her dress after she was done with me. I'm sure Lady Seraphina will join us shortly." Lady Moreland smiled at him. "She's a lovely young woman. I spoke with her earlier today."

Caleb liked Lady Moreland. She was far too good for the Earl of Moreland, but then the earl had always been the lucky sort. He used to start trouble at Eton but never was the one punished for the misdeeds he incited. "Then I hope you have time to get more acquainted. The snow seems to be allowing for that happy outcome anyway."

"The snow can be quite a nuisance," she said. "But yes, meeting Lady Seraphina is a good thing it brought to our door. I'm glad we were here to help her in her time of need."

Caleb was glad for that too. He might not like Lord Moreland, but he was grateful he'd been living nearby for him to seek aid. Seraphina was far more important than his need to avoid someone he found distasteful. "Your help was most appreciated."

Lady Moreland didn't have a chance to reply. Seraphina entered the room and his breath hitched inside his throat. She was so bloody lovely it made his heart ache to look at her. She wore an indigo gown of rich silk embroidered with silver threads around the bodice. Her reddish gold tresses were wound into an elegant chignon, but a few tendrils curled around her face. The blue dress brought out the color in her eyes and made them sparkle—almost like jewels of the same shade. She glanced in his direction and tilted her lips upward into a wanton smile. Caleb wanted to pull her into his arms and kiss her until her gaze lit with the same desire that burned inside of him.

She moved over to them and stopped at Lady Moreland's side. "Thank you for sending your maid to help me. The bath was exactly what I needed."

"It was my pleasure," Lady Moreland told her. "I'm glad you're feeling more yourself."

"Not as much as I'd like," she said in a wistful tone. "But at least I don't feel like I'm on my deathbed any longer."

Thank God for small favors... She hadn't brought him into their conversation so he had the pleasure of gazing at her unencumbered. Seraphina seemed unaware of the feelings she was invoking in him. Perhaps that was a good thing. He didn't like the idea of her having so much power over him. If she were her normal self she'd take advantage of that.

"Come with me," Lady Moreland said. "I'd like to introduce you to Claire—Lady Harewood."

Seraphina didn't speak to him at all. She barely acknowledged his existence. It was almost like she remembered him. Had she? He would have to seek her out

later and ascertain the truth. Caleb didn't think she had, but he'd been wrong before.

She moved over to the other side of the room as Lady Moreland introduced her to the other countess. The one who had no trouble not honoring her wedding vows... She had offered herself to him earlier that year at one of the few balls he'd attended. Caleb hadn't deigned to reply to her invitation. Instead he'd walked away with her and didn't look back. She was not the type of woman he'd ever willingly take to bed.

There was only one woman he wanted to share his bed and he wasn't certain he could have her. He hoped he was mistaken about her. Caleb needed to be wrong. For now he'd watch over her, and if she was meant to be his, then she would be. He could be patient.

Five



Dinner had been... Seraphina wanted to say lovely, but that seemed too simple of a word. It didn't quite fit what she'd been thinking. Not that it hadn't been lovely... The conversation flowed well and they all seemed to have a jovial time. She just didn't feel right. Not health wise but in her mind. She kept thinking that her relationship with the duke was more complicated, or maybe less so. Why couldn't she remember anything? What would cause her to forget everything about herself? She needed answers and from someone other than the duke. Unfortunately for her there was no one else around she could trust. Someone from her own family—a person who knew her better than she now knew herself.

The duke claimed to be someone she could rely on, and in some way she supposed she could; however, she couldn't shake the feeling he was holding something back from her. He watched her every move and appeared to care deeply for her. She wanted to trust him. She even believed she loved him. When they were next alone she would ask some more questions, and he would answer them. She refused to allow him to treat her as if she were a child. Just because she'd been ill did not mean she was incapable of taking care of herself or making any decisions that might affect her life. She would not

let anyone, even a man she may love, dictate her every action without asking what she wanted. She wanted a say in her own life. Was that too much to ask?

They had left the gentlemen to their own after dinner amusements. Seraphina joined Claire and Eden in the sitting room for drinks and gossip. That was all Claire seemed to care about. She seemed nice enough, but not as kind as Eden had been. They were as different as night and day. Claire had dark hair and eyes so blue they were almost purple. Seraphina envied that shade. It was unique and mesmerizing. She must have been sought after during her season—and she'd chosen the Earl of Harewood. Did Lord Harewood think himself lucky to have won her hand? He seemed to adore his wife, but Claire didn't seem to feel the same way. She was almost dismissive of him and his feelings.

Nothing at all like the golden haired beauty that was the Countess of Moreland. Eden was truly lovely inside and out. Why did she not see Claire the same way Seraphina did? She wouldn't push her own thoughts and beliefs on the woman though. She cared for her friend and it wasn't Seraphina's place to dissuade her from that relationship.

“How is Roslyn?” Claire asked. She sipped on her sherry as she waited for Eden to answer. Who was Roslyn? Seraphina knew little about these women and felt oddly out of place.

“She likes the school that William chose for her.” Eden stared at her own sherry but hadn't taken one sip of it. “He adores her as you know. I've never seen a brother dote on his sister as my husband does. She didn't want to go away to school, but he convinced her it was for her future. It is the best finishing school for young ladies in all of England.”

“Didn't you attend that school?” Claire asked.

Seraphina should really leave these two ladies alone. She couldn't contribute anything to their discussion and she had no desire to drink any sherry. The one sip she'd taken was making her head swim.

"It is," Eden answered. "I learned a lot while there." She didn't sound too happy. Was the school not as pleasant as she claimed? "I trust Roslyn is having a much better time than I did though. My family isn't nearly as prestigious or wealthy as hers is. The only reason William and I were betrothed is because our fathers were close friends. They wanted their families to be related in the only way they could manage it."

"I remember that," Claire said. "Now they share a grandson. They must dote on little Caden." She turned to Seraphina as if she just recalled she was in the room with them. "Have you met Eden's son? He's what a year old now?" She asked Eden.

"Yes," she confirmed. "But he's in the nursery most of the time. Lady Seraphina's illness hasn't allowed her to meet him." She turned toward her and asked. "Would you like to meet my son? Do you like children?"

She didn't know if she liked them or not. It would seem rude to say she had not interest in meeting a boy who probably couldn't string many words together though. "I'm sure your son is wonderful. If you wish for me to meet him I'd be honored to." She might not remember much about herself, but at least she had better manners than the Countess of Harewood.

"He's sweet like his mother," Claire said. "I hope he remains that way. His father can be quite boorish."

"Claire," Eden admonished her. "You shouldn't speak about William in that manner. This is his home. Please don't

be rude.”

Claire wrinkled her nose. “You deserve a better husband than him. I wish your father had never insisted you marry him.”

Eden turned away. Seraphina got the feeling this was a long running conversation that went no where. “There is nothing to do about it is there. Discussing it is a futile endeavor. I’m married to him for the rest of my life. There’s no changing that.”

“I suppose not,” Claire signed. “George adores me, but I don’t love him. He deserved a better wife than me. We’ve both made decisions we will have to endure haven’t we. The difference is I fully intend to do my best to enjoy my life. You’ve resigned yourself to unhappiness.”

“I’m not unhappy,” Eden said. Then turned toward Seraphina. “Please pardon Claire’s rudeness. This is not something you should have to endure listening to.” She pasted a smile on her face. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m much better, thank you.” She didn’t bother addressing what she said about her friend. “I appreciate your hospitality while I convalesced. The duke says he believes the weather will be much improved tomorrow and we should be able to depart the day after that.”

“You’re welcome to stay as long as you like of course,” Eden told her. “It hasn’t been any hardship having you and the duke stay with us.”

She couldn’t very well thank her again. This conversation was getting rather ridiculous. “And we both appreciate your kindness.” She set her sherry down. There was no point in pretending she was going to drink it. “If you’ll both excuse me

I'm going to retire. I'm afraid I may have done too much this evening and I have grown weary."

"Of course," Eden told her. "Please don't feel the need to rise for the morning meal. I can have a tray sent up."

"Thank you," Seraphina said and left the two ladies alone. She wasn't actually tired, but that conversation had made her uncomfortable. Perhaps she could find the library and borrow a book. Anything to help her forget the last hour and help ease her mind—she did need to sleep if she hoped to convince the duke she was well enough to travel. She wanted to leave Moreland Manor, and the sooner the better. She had to see her family if she hoped to regain her memory.



CALEB WAS DONE WITH THE TWO GENTLEMEN AND THEIR INANE conversation. Moreland was a moron and Harewood his dupe. He couldn't be certain, but he was willing to bet that Moreland was having an affair with Lady Harewood. The way he leered at her had been telling. Of course they may not have gone to bed together—yet, but it seemed an inevitability.

"Should we play a game of some sort?" Harewood asked.

"We could," Moreland agreed. "You should play billiards with His Grace." He gestured toward Caleb. "He didn't have a chance to play earlier."

And he didn't want to now...

"You're right," Harewood agreed. "And I did win earlier." He turned toward Caleb. "That means you have the opportunity to trounce me."

Harewood wasn't a bad sort but Caleb did not want to play billiards with him. He only wanted one thing—to check on Seraphina and make sure she didn't overdo anything. She had only just awakened fully that morning. In his opinion she shouldn't have joined them for dinner. Of course she would emphatically disagree with him.

“I'm not in the mood for billiards.” Caleb said in a surly tone.

“You're just upset because your fiancée isn't being the meek little flower you want her to be.” Moreland grinned. “That one has never been a wallflower and won't hide in corners for anyone.”

Caleb wanted to put his hands around Moreland's neck and squeeze that arrogant grin off his face. He was right of course. Seraphina was no wallflower. Even this more docile version of her wouldn't hide in anyone's shadow. She could try to disguise her true nature, but in the end it would always shine through any façade she portrayed to the world. “If you want to continue breathing you won't speak about Lady Seraphina in any discourteous manner.” He should have kept those thoughts to himself, but he really did dislike the Earl of Moreland. He wanted to hit him and hoped he gave Caleb a reason to.

Moreland held up his hand. “My apologies. I did not mean to offend you.”

He needed to rein in his anger. It wouldn't help him or Seraphina if he beat the earl into unconsciousness. Even if it would feel good in the moment, Caleb knew better. Moreland didn't mean his apology. He'd said what he did to get a rise out of Caleb and it had worked. Instead of addressing him he turned toward Harewood. “One game and then I'm retiring.”

Harewood nodded. “I'll let you go first.”

“Not necessary,” Caleb told him. “We will play a normal game without either of us starting with an advantage.”

They grabbed sticks and went to the table. Harewood set up the balls for play, and Caleb remained aware of his surroundings. It didn't escape his notice that Moreland left the room. He wasn't certain why but he could guess. The earl had wanted Caleb to keep Harewood busy and he had obliged. Who was the moron now? Though he didn't think that Moreland would have nearly as much time as he thought he would. He had only agreed to one game with Harewood, and if Moreland hoped to seduce Lady Harewood he'd have to do it much faster than any man would like. At least if he wasn't a selfish lover... Moreland might very well be just that.

They played for a half hour. The score kept bouncing back and forth in each other's favor. Though to be fair Caleb was distracted. He should concentrate more and end this game. He had given that fool Moreland all the time he needed to seduce Harewood's wife. Finally, the game ended with the earl winning. Caleb just didn't care enough. “Good game,” he told the earl. “Thank you for not making it intolerable.”

Harewood laughed. “You did seem preoccupied. I trust Lady Seraphina is doing as well as she appeared.”

“I believe so,” he said gruffly. “Not that she would listen to me if that wasn't the case.” He sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. “I would like to check in on her before bed.”

“You worry about her.” Harewood nodded. “I understand. My wife means a lot to me.” He had a harried expression on his face. Did he realize his wife's affection for him didn't match his for her? Caleb wouldn't ask. It wasn't anything he needed to know one way or the other. “Lady Seraphina does seem to care about you. I noticed how the two of you watch

each other. I must admit I'm envious of that. I wish my relationship had something like that." He sighed. "But we all can't be so lucky can we."

Caleb frowned. Seraphina watched him? How had he not noticed that? Was that because her memory was failing her or had she always done so? He couldn't know for certain. Not unless or until she regained her memory. Was he a fool for hoping she loved him and always had? If she did then maybe had a chance with her. One that he thought he'd lost all those years ago by his young, asinine attitude. Sometimes it was too difficult to erase the mistakes of youth and he'd been failing at that for some time now regarding Seraphina. He just kept repeating the same mistakes. No one could push him to the brink of irrationality faster than the only woman he had ever loved.

"Perhaps you should tell your wife that," Caleb suggested. "Maybe there is hope if you only ask for what you want."

"You can't make someone love you," Harewood said in a resigned tone. "A person's feelings are their own and no one can control them." He took a deep breath. "And yet the heart wants what the heart wants." He met Caleb's gaze. "You should perhaps follow your own advice. At least you have a chance at love. Tell her how you feel now. Start your marriage off right."

If they married... That wasn't actually a given. "I'll consider it. Good night Lord Harewood, and good luck with your wife." He would need it. Especially if his hunch about Moreland and Lady Harewood was correct. He left Lord Harewood alone in the game room. After he checked on Seraphina he would retire to his own bedchamber. He

wouldn't be able to sleep until he was certain she was sleeping well. She meant more to him than anything else.

Six



Seraphina had tried to sleep. She really had. But her mind made it damn near impossible. She couldn't stop thinking. And all of her thoughts centered round one man—the Duke of Riverdale. She was drawn to him, and if she were to be honest with herself, she didn't want to stop thinking about him.

So instead of sleeping, she decided to seek out the library as she had thought about doing earlier that day. She didn't really want to read anything. Books didn't appeal to her a whole lot, but she thought one might help her relax enough to sleep, or perhaps even entertain her while she failed to rest. It certainly couldn't hurt...

She pulled on a dressing robe over her nightgown and grabbed a nearby candelabrum. Once she realized she would be unable to sleep she had lit the candles and sat in a chair in the room trying to decide what she should do. Tossing and turning in her bed wasn't doing her any good after all. So now she was about to leave her room and go exploring in a manor house she knew next to nothing about. She had no idea where the library actually was. She had only found the sitting room earlier because the maid had given her directions.

She opened the door and peered both ways down the hallway. Not that she felt guilty for leaving her bedchamber,

but a certain duke would attempt to make her feel that way. He had a way about him. She would prefer to not cross paths with him on her scavenger hunt.

Scavenger hunt... Why did that somehow seem familiar? It was probably nothing. Besides looking for the library was hardly much of a scavenger hunt. Hopefully she found it soon and could return to her room without any hassles. She walked as quietly as possible down the hallway. Luckily it was covered with a plush carpet that helped mute her footsteps. She started down the steps to the main floor and continued to keep a slow pace. There was no rush, and the last thing she'd need was to fall down any steps. That might set back her healing even further, and then where would she be? Back in bed at Caleb's insistence... Her supposed fiancé could be quite dictatorial.

When she reached the bottom of the stairs she considered her options. If she went straight she would go more toward the sitting room, and she didn't think the library was anywhere near that. She turned and went in the opposite directions. It was strange strolling through a house she wasn't familiar with. Though with her memory loss it wouldn't be either way. Her own home would probably seem wrong to her. She hoped this wasn't how she was going to go about the rest of her life. Everything would be new and she would never have anything from her past to rely upon.

The sound of muffled voices made her stop. What was that? She frowned and then shook her head. Someone was in a nearby room. Since she didn't want to talk to anyone she kept walking past that room. If it was the library, then she would just have to return without a book. She walked a little farther down the hallway until she came to the end. There was an

entrance and the door was open. She peeked inside and smiled. Now this was what she'd been searching for.

Seraphina stepped in and studied the room. There were several wooden bookcases in the room. Most of them lined the back wall, but there were a few shorter ones near a desk on the opposite side of the room. She thought perhaps this room might also double as a study for the Earl of Moreland. The books on the smaller shelves must be ones he used when he did estate business. So she ignored those and went toward the back wall. She started on the far right and studied the tomes on the bookshelf. She plucked one off and flipped it over to read the title—*The Scientific Study of Agricultural and Sheep Farming*. She wrinkled her nose. Now that sounded positively boring... Seraphina put the book back on the shelf. That was not for her.

There had to be something fictional in this library. Eden didn't seem the type of lady that enjoyed factual reading material. She moved down the shelf and took another book. *Pride and Prejudice*? The book was new. The spine didn't seem like it had even been opened. It was by a lady—literally. That is all it said for the listed author. How fascinating... Who was this woman and how brave of her to have a published novel. She must read it.

She flipped open the book and read the first couple of lines in the candlelight. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." She snorted. How utterly ridiculous... Maybe they would require a wife at some point in their life. Especially if one was of the aristocracy—titles had to be passed down and such. But there was not certainty that any man actually *wanted* a wife.

And how would she actually know that? Perhaps she hadn't lost all of her memories. She did seem to understand what good manners were and how to interact in society. She had done well at dinner and managed to not make a fool of herself. It was just basic information about herself she appeared to be missing. Perhaps she didn't want to remember and that was the true problem or she could be overthinking everything. That seemed to be what confounded her at the moment.

Seraphina sighed. She could take this novel back to her room. The first sentence had entertained her anyway. The rest would surely keep her riveted. This lady had misconceptions or at that could be the concept of the book. It was titled *Pride and Prejudice* after all. Maybe that first sentence was just the path that leads the characters to their downfall. Now she was even more intrigued....

She tucked the book under her arm and turned to leave the library. When she turned she shrieked in surprise. She was not alone in the library, and the realization made her heart beat heavily inside her chest. In her fright she dropped the book and fumbled with the candelabrum. She might have dropped it if the duke hadn't reached out and plucked it from her hand. "What the hell are you doing down here? You should be sleeping," he chastised her.

Damn and blast... What was he doing there? She jutted her chin out. "Shouldn't you be doing the same? Why are you here?"

He narrowed his gaze and glared at her. "Don't evade the question. Come with me. You're going back to bed."

She had been intending to go there anyway, but the blasted man didn't need to know that. He had to learn that he couldn't dictate to her this way. She had a mind of her own and she

would never be a simpering lady who did what a man demanded. Seraphina knew that was true deep down even with the holes in her memory. “I’m fine where I am.” She leaned down and picked up her book. “Put my candelabra on the table. I’m going to read for a little bit.” She was being difficult on purpose and she knew it.

“You’re going to do what?” He inhaled deeply. “You are not dressed properly for lounging in the library. If you really must read return to your bedchamber.”

“No,” she said like a petulant child. “If you’re tired you go to bed. I don’t want to sleep.” She had...that was why she went in search of a book to begin with. Seraphina had hoped it would settle her mind.

“You don’t even enjoy reading,” he said. “Why are you really here?”

He must know here well if he could utter that statement with certainty. She had believed it of herself, but he confirmed it. “Maybe I’ve changed. This book seems fascinating. I’ve read a bit already and want to continue.” That much was true... “You may leave now.”

“I’m not going anywhere. If you insist on staying so will I.” He set the candelabrum on the table and turned back to her. “Let me see this book of yours. Maybe I’ll read it with you.”

She stared at him. What game was he playing with her now? He wouldn’t be interested in this book. At least she didn’t think so... How much did she really know about the duke? Nothing. At least not this version of her... “Then you can read it when I’m finished.”

The duke stepped closer to her. The little bit of light in the room from the candelabrum didn’t show her nearly enough of

his handsome face. His ice blue eyes nearly glowed in the candlelight, and his blond hair seemed more golden somehow. She swallowed hard. Would he kiss her again? The last time he had pressed his lips to her it had been more chaste than anything. Seraphina wanted to know if there was passion between them. Did this man desire her or was she a mere possession he wished to claim?

She licked her lips and he stared at her mouth. He did want to kiss her. She could feel it deep inside. Everything inside of her ached and she wanted him to touch her. Seraphina wanted to press herself against him, and claim him as hers. Her voice was husky as she spoke, “What are you doing?”

He didn't answer her. Caleb reached down and took the book from her, then placed it on the table next to the candelabra. Then he slid his fingers up her arm slowly. His touch was so light she barely felt it and it sent shivers down her spine. Need pooled between her legs. He had barely touched her and she was a quivering mess. What would happen once he actually kissed her or did more than press feather light touches on her dressing gown. “You're so lovely,” he said hoarsely. Caleb cupped her cheek in his hands. “So bloody lovely.”

He leaned down and slanted his lips over hers. His kiss was gentle and light at first. Until she moaned—out of pleasure and frustration. Seraphina wanted more than this gentleness. She wasn't a broken doll that needed him to be tender with her. Not that she didn't appreciate that tenderness, but she wanted everything this man had to offer, and she knew this wasn't all of him. “Caleb,” she said. Her tone was raw with unfulfilled desire.

“Yes, love,” he said. His mouth hovered over hers, and his arm was circled around her waist. Her breasts were so close to his chest. If he pulled her a little closer she would be pressed against him. She craved it. “What do you want?”

“You,” she said. “I want you.” She reached up and placed her arm around his neck. “Please.”

He groaned and then pulled her against him. Her hard nipples ached as they pressed into his warm heat. His kiss deepened as he pushed his tongue into her mouth. She tasted him and it was a heady experience. Her skin heated and her desire for this man was going to consume her.

Seraphina wrapped both arms around him and lost herself in their kiss. She could kiss this man for the rest of her life and never tire of it. Even if she never remembered him, she would gladly fall all over again. She was falling. It hadn't been but a day and she knew she could, and probably did, love the duke. How could she not? He clearly cared for her, and no one could feign desire this potent.

She pulled back reluctantly. Seraphina knew everything she needed to. She would marry him, and she would be happy. He was perfect for her, and she was ready to dive in and follow his lead.

“You should go back to your bedchamber now,” he said gruffly. His breathing was a little ragged as he spoke. “We've already gone farther than we should have.”

She nodded. “I'll just grab my book. Will you walk me back.”

He nodded but didn't speak. She didn't need a vocal reply. It was enough that he would walk with her, and in the morning

they could talk. For now the night had been perfect, and she hoped the rest of their life together would be as well.

They exited the library in silence. It wasn't an awkward quiet, but a contentness that nothing could destroy. She frowned as she heard some muffled voices. Was that the same voices she had heard earlier?

"How could you," a man yelled.

Caleb cursed under his breath. "You might need to go to your bedchamber yourself."

Where were those voices coming from? Was that the Earl of Harewood? Who was he yelling at? A nearby door flew open and someone stood at the entrance.

"It isn't what you think," the Earl of Moreland said.

"It isn't," came a scathing retort. "You weren't just shagging my wife?"

"Darling," a man said. "Can't we talk about this?"

Lord Harewood ignored his wife and shoved Moreland. Seraphina gasped. How were they going to move around this? There didn't seem anyway to escape what was about to happen.

"Do something," she hissed at Caleb.

"What do you propose I do?" He lifted a brow, and sighed. "They're going to brawl no matter what I do, and frankly, I don't blame Harewood. I'd do more than hit a man that had an affair with my wife."

The two men were fighting in truth now, and while Seraphina conversed with Caleb she hadn't been paying attention. If she had been she might have avoided what happened next. She didn't know exactly what happened. One

minute she was standing next to Caleb, and the next her head was hitting the wall and everything went dark.

Seven



The two men didn't stop fighting even when Seraphina had fallen. They just started moving in the opposite direction. Caleb didn't give a damn about any of them. He didn't even notice when their argument started to move farther away from him. All he was concerned about was Seraphina. "Darling are you all right?"

She moaned and lifted her hand to her head. "What happened?"

Lady Harewood walked out of a room. When she noticed the two of them she paused. Her face was white with shock. Not that Caleb gave a damn. She deserved the guilty cursing through her. Though to be fair she wasn't the first woman to cuckold her husband. It was a common practice in the aristocracy. There were no love matches in society, and if they happened, they were rare. It was why Caleb had been reluctant to marry for so long. His mother had been harping him for over a year now to find a wife. Caleb's response was to avoid her as much as possible.

She'd have her wish though. He would marry Seraphina, and the sooner the better. "Darling," he said again. "Tell me you're all right." He ignored her question. He couldn't think straight at the moment.

“I’m perfectly fine,” she said in an irritated tone. She sat up and met Lady Harewood’s gaze. “Why are you still standing there staring at me?”

“I...” She cleared her throat. “I wanted to ensure you’re well.”

“I am.” Seraphina shook her head. “Shouldn’t you do something about your husband and your lover?” She lifted a brow. “Or are you hoping they’ll kill each other?”

A crash echoed throughout the house. The two men were somewhere else. Had they actually gone up the stairs? For what purpose? A loud crack ricocheted around them. Caleb stood. He knew what that had been. “Stay here,” he ordered the two women. “One of those fools has a pistol.” He hoped that neither of them were dead, but where anger was involved anything was possible.

He took large purposeful strides toward where the sound had come from. He entered the game room. There was no light in the room other than the moonlight streaming through a nearby window. One of the men was on the ground, and the other hovered over him. Caleb took a moment to grasp the situation. Lord Harewood was standing, and Moreland was on the ground. “Did you shoot him?”

Harewood turned to him. “The bastard meant to shoot me,” he said in a dull tone. “We fought over the pistol and it went off. He basically shot himself.”

“Is he dead?” Caleb kept his tone neutral. He had to have all the facts. This wasn’t his first time dealing with a mess such as this. He had done enough spy work for the Duke of Wharton to know how to handle it. He just didn’t expect he’d have to or particularly want to.

“I don’t know,” Harewood admitted. “I’ve been too afraid to check.”

Caleb sighed and moved over to Lord Moreland. He kneeled on the floor and leaned down. There were no signs the man was breathing. He pressed his finger to the man’s neck to check for a pulse. There was no thumping to indicate life. He was definitely dead. “The roads should be passable enough. We need to send for the magistrate.” This was a damned mess. “Leave the pistol and return to your room. Take care of your wife.”

“I don’t want anything to do with her.” Lord Harewood’s tone was filled with bitterness. “She’s nothing to me.”

“By law she’s still your wife,” he told the earl. “Still your responsibility.”

The earl sighed. “That may be true, but that doesn’t mean I have to be in her presence. She can return to the country estate and remain there. No more London society for her.”

“That’s your business,” Caleb said. “This looks to be an accident but the magistrate will have questions. You can’t leave until after you’ve spoken to him.”

“I understand,” Lord Harewood said. “And I am sorry.” He frowned. “Lady Seraphina...”

“Will be all right.” Caleb didn’t need to hear any more apologies. “Go. I have this.”

Lord Harewood nodded and then left the room. Caleb picked the pistol up and set it on a table. The noise would have awakened the servants. They would probably come into the room soon.

He would send one of them for the magistrate. He rubbed his hand over his face. The end of his evening had gone far

better than he could have planned. He'd finally kissed Seraphina the way he'd been dreaming—only to have reality come crashing down around them. Quite literally... Now he had to clean up this mess. He couldn't wait to depart Moreland Manor.

Hell... How was he going to tell Lady Moreland she was now a widow? Caleb didn't know what was worse. That her husband was dead or that he'd been having an affair with one of her close friends. The woman would be devastated with the dual bits of shattering news.

"Your Grace," a servant said from the doorway. "What has happened?"

The butler stood there staring at Lord Moreland. Did the man think Caleb had done this? Probably, but that couldn't be helped. "Bivens is it?"

"Yes, Your Grace," the butler confirmed.

"There's been an accident. Have someone sent for the magistrate." He took a deep breath. "Then have someone carry Lord Moreland's body to his bedchamber. His wife doesn't need to see him like this."

"Your Grace..." The man visibly swallowed hard. "He's gone then."

"Yes," he confirmed. He always hated this part. "You should have a servant check on Lord Harewood to. He may have injuries as well or have his valet go to him." He hadn't thought to check himself. Besides he might not have been able to see much in the low light.

"Yes, Your Grace," the butler said. "Do you require anything?"

Some bloody peace...and he should look in on Seraphina. He had to make sure she was truly all right. She hadn't spoken much after she'd hit her head. Everything had happened so fast.

"I'll wait in the library for the magistrate. Send him to me as soon as he arrives," Caleb ordered. "I don't require anything else."

As soon as he was done with the magistrate he was packing Seraphina in a carriage and taking her home. It was not safe for her at this manor, and it would soon be a house filled with grief. It was not a place for someone healing to convalesce.



IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN HER HEAD HITTING THE WALL OR THE JOLT of everything that happened...whatever it was—Seraphina no longer had any holes in her memory. She didn't say anything to the duke—to Caleb. He'd never been Caleb to her before, and he certainly was not her fiancé. He'd lied. Why had he lied? What game was he playing with her now?

There had been nothing but schemes between them. They had always wanted to one up each other. He'd play a trick on her, and she create an even more devious one in return. If they were not doing that, then they were bickering about everything. There was never peace between them.

Yet...he'd cared for her. He'd made sure she had gotten well personally. He'd been pleasant, and he'd...kissed her. Truly kissed her. Seraphina didn't know what to make of that and she had never been so confused in her life. What should she do?

She leaned against the back of the chair in her bedchamber. Caleb had told her to wait for him, but she hadn't. She didn't think he even realized that she'd left. Something terrible must have happened to keep him away. That sound... She'd recognized it too. Her father had enough hunting parties at Wharton to know, and he'd also made sure she knew how to fire a pistol. She understood why too.

Her father often did things for the government that were distasteful. It was how her cousin Sebastian had taken on his fool persona. They investigated things most people didn't even know about. Seraphina's father had wanted to ensure she could protect herself if necessary. How could she have forgotten about her family?

Agatha... She groaned. Were they going to make it in time for her cousin's wedding? Seraphina was supposed to be one of her attendants—actually her only attendant. Drat. How would she ever be able to make this up to her cousin? She shouldn't have stayed in London as long as she had. Her reasons were ridiculous. She'd hoped to avoid spending too much time with the Duke of Riverdale—and look what had happened. She was in a false betrothal with him and couldn't escape his company if she tried.

Seraphina was no fool. He wouldn't let her leave without him, and she suspected the silly man did intend to marry her. He probably thought he had to save her reputation. She didn't give one fig what society thought. Marrying to save herself wasn't something she ever intended to do. If he didn't love her then there would be no wedding. She would not say any vows she couldn't actually love with.

It didn't matter that she loved him. Seraphina didn't believe for one second he felt the same way. He had a sense of

honor and nothing more. That kiss, while wonderful and passionate, did not mean he felt anything but desire. That wasn't enough to base a marriage on. She wanted and demanded more from a husband.

It had been nice to see a different side of him. One that he'd never shown to her... She had suspected that he would be different with other people. Why else would her cousin Sebastian be so loyal to him? He couldn't be a total arse to everyone.

She sighed. She'd been trying to read *Pride and Prejudice*, and she'd made some progress with the book. Mr. Darcy was a right arse too. She couldn't help drawing some parallels to her life and the book. It was almost as if the lady author had a sneak peek into Seraphina's life. She argued with Caleb much the same way that Elizabeth Bennet did with Darcy. She had to wonder what their ending would be, and yet she couldn't completely focus on the words before her.

The sun started to stream through the window. Seraphina hadn't been able to sleep, and now it was pointless to even try. She should go down to breakfast. Eden might need someone to talk to if word of her husband's deeds reached her ears. She'd be hurt. By her husband and her closest friend... The two people she should have been able to trust—had mistreated Lady Moreland in the worst possible way. How sad was that...

She would attempt to dress herself. There had to be a gown in her trunk that would not require the assistance of a maid. Seraphina went and found a dress that would serve her purpose. It was a day dress that she could manage the buttons on herself. After she donned her gown she sat at the vanity and worked on her hair. She brushed her red-gold locks and then plaited it, after that she wound it into a simple coiffure and

pinned it in place at the nape of her neck. It was serviceable, but perhaps not the most attractive hairstyle. It would do.

Satisfied with her appearance, Seraphina slid her feet into her brown boots and secured the fastenings, then left her bedchamber. She went down the stairs quietly. She hoped she would be alone for at least a little while longer. Soon she would see Caleb and she wasn't certain she could pretend with him any longer. Once he realized her memory had returned, the boorish duke would too. She wanted to have the wonderful man she'd become accustomed to a little longer. Was that too much to ask?

It might be, but she hoped she could keep up the appearances regardless. Maybe even long enough to get through Agatha's wedding. She could do it. She would just have to bite her tongue and watch what she said. Resigned she entered the dining room and stopped short. There was no one in there and no breakfast at the side bar. What were the servants doing? What had she missed?

A servant came out of the room and stared at her. "My apologies, Lady Seraphina. Would you like to break your fast? I can have cook prepare something."

This was odd... "I don't need much. Perhaps just some tea and toast." She didn't want to be a bother. "What has happened?" She had to ask. This was not at all what she'd expected.

"I'm not entirely certain," the man answered. "All I can say is that Lord Moreland has died, and Lady Moreland refuses to leave her bedchamber."

Oh, hell. The pistol shooting... poor Eden.

Eight



It had been a hell of a night, but everything was settled. The new widow had been informed and of course had broken down. After all the formalities had been taken care of Caleb had arranged to leave. He'd inform Seraphina as soon as she was awake for the day. He had already asked a maid to pack her trunks. They would leave as soon as possible. He wanted to push as much distance between them and Moreland Manor.

Wearily he left the library and started for the stairs. He stopped suddenly when he noticed Seraphina standing before him. Had he conjured her by just thinking of her? She was so lovely. He wished he could pull her into his arms and kiss her until he forgot about the horrors of the previous evening. He didn't have the right to seek comfort in her arms. She deserved better than him—always had.

“Hello,” she greeted him. Her eyes were wary as she met his gaze. “I was just informed of what had happened. Are you all right?”

He wished he could have told her about it all himself, but perhaps this was better. “I've had better nights,” he said in a nonchalant tone. “There is nothing to concern yourself with. How are you.” He lifted his hand to touch her head but she

jerked away. Caleb frowned. Was her head paining her? “What is it?”

“I don’t want you to muss my hair. It took a while to tame” She pasted a smile on her face. He didn’t trust her answer fully. She was hiding something. “I’m all right. I promise.”

He would just have to trust her for now. He’d watch her as they traveled. She wouldn’t be able to hide from him if she was in pain. “I asked a maid to pack your trunk. We will leave as soon as everything is loaded on the carriage.”

“Is that wise?” she asked. “Shouldn’t we stay longer to make sure that Lady Moreland is all right?”

Caleb shook his head. “She’ll be fine. I’ve made all the arrangements that can be done for her. The servants all know what to do. We need to return. Your father is expecting us and we have to attend your cousin’s wedding.”

“Right,” she said but didn’t meet his gaze as she spoke. “Then I suppose I’ll say my goodbyes...if Lady Moreland will see me. I will leave the arrangements in your care.”

She turned to leave and couldn’t shake the feeling that something wasn’t right. There was something he was missing but he couldn’t figure out what it was. It would probably come to him in time, but for now... Hell, he was tired. He was probably missing a lot.

“Don’t be long,” he called out to her. “I don’t expect it to take long to load the carriage. We don’t have much to pack.” He’d only brought a small valise with him, and she had one trunk. She probably had plenty to wear at Wharton Castle. She wouldn’t need to travel with much.

“I won’t be,” she said in a sweet meek tone. She was almost...shy. That wasn’t like her at all. What had he done to

get this version of her? She almost acted like a timid wallflower that wanted to hide in her own shadow. That wasn't Seraphina. His Seraphina had fire and would never hide from anyone. What did she hope would happen by disguising her true nature? Had she remembered something?

He couldn't be certain. There was no way to tell without her outright saying she remembered, or for her to slip up somehow. It was bound to happen eventually, and he was probably seeing something that wasn't there. He'd been working as a spy far too long. It was time to hang up his past and move forward, and if he was lucky enough Seraphina would be his future.

"After you're done with the countess meet me in the foyer. I'll wait there for you." He smiled at her and hoped it wasn't the sort that would terrify her. As tired as she was it might be more menacing than welcoming.

"I shouldn't be long. She may not even wish to speak with me."

He nodded. "The carriage has already been brought around. I'm ready to leave. It's been quite trying..."

"I imagine it has been," she agreed. Her smile was almost serene. "First you had the terrifying task of caring for me while I was ill, and then the horrifying chore of dealing with infidelity and death. I would bet you're more than ready to put this manor in your past." She placed a hand on his arm. He stared at her hand in bewilderment. "I promise I won't make any difficulties for you. It won't be trying on our trip to my father. You do not need to worry about me."

That was cryptic. She wasn't being snarky with him so she couldn't have remembered. Seraphina wouldn't be this nice if she'd regained her memories. She'd be far more belligerent.

Especially if she realized he'd lied about their betrothal. She'd be livid at his high-handedness. He didn't look forward to that clash of wills. She might not like the idea of being his wife, but she would be. They had no choice. Her father would demand he marry her if he didn't offer to do it. Their marriage was the only acceptable outcome, and he couldn't even be mad about it. He wanted to marry her.

Caleb nodded. "Good." He tried to sound happy or at least content, but it didn't quite come out that way. "My apologies in advance if I get surly. I'm afraid I'm more difficult when I'm tired."

Her lips twitched as if she fought a smile or even laughter. What had amused her? "No need to explain. I didn't sleep well myself. We'll probably both fall asleep in the carriage. It might even be a relief. Perhaps you're right and we need to leave this place. It doesn't hold fond memories."

He had some good memories. Her kiss and them not arguing.... He wouldn't tell her that though. She wouldn't understand if she didn't recall how they used to be. He was the problem, not her. If he hoped to keep everything between them good he would have to watch himself. He would win her love. He had to.

"Go," he said. "Say your good byes to Lady Moreland. I'll be waiting here for you."

She smiled and then turned away from him and went up the stairs. He couldn't look away from her. She was his everything, and if he didn't play this right he could still lose her. He refused to let that happen.



THEY HAD BEEN TRAVELING IN THE CARRIAGE FOR SEVERAL days now. Seraphina had lost count. They didn't stop at any inns overnight. By some unspoken agreement they had decided to only stop long enough to either rest the horses or change them where it was possible. She didn't much like the idea of traveling this way, but if they hoped to make it in time for the wedding it was their only option.

She slept as often as possible. Caleb made a wonderful, warm pillow. He held her as she slept and she'd never felt more safe. It also helped that if she kept her eyes closed she could pretend a little longer that her memory hadn't returned. Another couple of hours and they would be at her father's estate. Once there it would be impossible to pretend any longer. She wouldn't be able to do it. Agatha would need her and she couldn't act as if she didn't know her dearest cousin. She was her closest friend and she adored her.

"How are you," Caleb asked.

He would never just be the duke to her again. He'd given her freedom to think of him as more and she couldn't stop. Seraphina adored him and it hurt a little to think she might lose him. This softer, sweeter side of him was so wonderful. She hated how much this hurt.

"Stiff," she admitted. "How much longer do you think until we arrive?" She knew the answer of course but she wanted to keep this peace between them a little bit longer.

"Not much farther now," he told her. "Your father will be happy to see you. Have you thought about what you're going to tell him?"

"About?" She was confused.

"The accident..." He stared at her in expectation.

Was he testing her? Did he suspect she had regained her memory? He must...how could he not. "I don't know what happened with that. Shouldn't you explain it to him?" That was the truth really. She didn't recall the actual accident. It was all a blur to her. She remembered leaving London and traveling up until the point of the carriage careening off the road, but the rest...blank.

"I don't know how it all happened, but I suppose I can tell him what I do know." He frowned. "I don't think we should say too much. We don't want to spoil your cousin's wedding."

Seraphina nodded. "That's true. We can save any explanations until afterward. Do you think they'll be all right with that?" She didn't think any of them would be. Her family was a demanding lot, and that included the Marquess of Huntington—Agatha's fiancé and Sebastian and his wife Evangeline. None of them would sit meekly by and not ask any questions. Their biggest concern would be what had happened to make her and Caleb get along so well. It was going to be a nightmare.

"Maybe..." His voice trailed off, then he scrubbed a hand over his face. "Hell who am I kidding? They won't do anything of the sort."

That was her thoughts exactly... She blew out a breath. "Then there's nothing else we can do. If you want I'll let you explain everything to my father, and I can try to do the same with my cousin. She'll need me with her don't you think?"

Seraphina knew Agatha would, but that wasn't why she suggested this particular strategy. If they divided up the task then no one would see them together, and that would lessen the questions. She wouldn't hold back with Agatha. There wasn't anything she couldn't tell her cousin, and if she tried to

lie to her she'd see through it anyway. Agatha knew her too well.

“It’s a reasonable plan,” he agreed. She held back a snort. Seraphina knew why he’d so readily agreed. He had come to the same conclusion she had. If she still had no memory, and claimed to be his fiancée then how would he explain that to her father? Caleb had never asked her to marry him. He had just declared they were betrothed. He’d taken advantage of her memory failure and if he hadn’t asked her, he sure as hell hadn’t spoken to her father. The Duke of Wharton would be livid. “The wedding is tomorrow.” He said that for her benefit. She was supposed to have forgotten after all. “We’ll arrive at Wharton Castle before the evening meal. I’ll go to your father immediately and leave you to talk to Agatha.”

“All right,” she agreed. “I can’t wait until we arrive. I need to be out of this carriage.”

She also needed some time away from him. With him so near it made it difficult for her to think. She loved snuggling into him, but it was dangerous too. Seraphina had to stop herself from begging him to kiss her. When his lips touched her it was like a heady drug and made her stupid.

He chuckled softly. “I can relate to that. It won’t be long now, love.”

Her heart ached. Did he mean that endearment or did he say it because it was expected? She wanted to ask him desperately, but couldn’t form the words. Later. After the wedding she would have an honest conversation with him. Agatha’s happiness was important to her, and Seraphina would not ruin her wedding.

She didn’t speak again. The castle finally came onto sight. They were there, and she only had to pretend a little while

longer. She could do this... And if she kept telling herself that perhaps she would even believe it. Seraphina closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She prayed for strength and courage. She'd need all that she could muster to get through the wedding, and then confront the Duke of Riverdale, the love of her life. If she was lucky enough at the end of it all, she'd have her own happiness in sight.

Nine



Traveling for days with Seraphina had not gone as well as Caleb would have liked. She seemed to have closed herself off. Conversations with her had become stilted and difficult. She didn't offer anything and getting her to actually answer any questions had been trying. Something was off with her but he had no way of discerning what. She didn't seem herself at all—even with the memory loss she'd retained her true nature. This timid creature wasn't the woman he'd fallen in love with, but he didn't have the faintest clue how to bring her back or how he'd lost her to begin with.

They had finally arrived at Wharton Castle. As expected her family had been worried when she hadn't arrived, but had believed the storm delayed her. They were not wrong, but that wasn't the entire reason. Explanations had been as long and tedious as the actual journey. He scrubbed his hand over his face. His life was a bloody mess and he didn't know what to do next. Neither one of them had explained that she'd lost essential parts of her memory. She'd remained quiet and withdrawn even with her relations. Caleb didn't like any of it.

He did know one thing with certainty. There would be more than one wedding—it would just take some time to arrange his to Seraphina. He would also have to speak with her father and explain how she'd been compromised and that he

would do the honorable thing and marry her; however, that wasn't the reason he wanted Seraphina for his wife. The duke deserved to have complete honesty. Should he disclose Seraphina's memory issues? Would that prevent the duke from giving his blessing? He'd hold that part back until he had no choice but to tell her father. Caleb would marry her even if he had to abscond with her to Scotland.

“What has you so distracted?” Huntington asked him. “Was traveling with Seraphina that terrible?”

Caleb blew out a breath and turned his attention back to his friend. “It wasn't all pleasant, no.” That was quite the understatement. He didn't know how much he should burden the marquess with. They were friends, but the man was marrying the love of his life in the morning. Surely that type of information could wait—perhaps until after the wedding trip. “But we both survived and we are here in time. Isn't that what matters?”

Huntington shrugged. “I think there is a lot that you are not telling me, but as I do have an important engagement, as you have already stated, I'm not going to make a nuisance of myself.” He slapped Caleb's back lightly and then gestured toward the Earl of Somerset—Seraphina's cousin. “That's what he's for. I hope you're prepared for a thorough interrogation.”

Caleb rolled his eyes. “I do believe I can survive Somerset's questions. We were both trained by the same man.” The Duke of Wharton was quite the task master—he would prove far more difficult than Caleb's two friends. “Do your worst.”

“I think we need brandy for this. You look like you might need the entire decanter.” Somerset when to a nearby bar and

poured brandy into three glasses, then carried them over to distribute between the three of them. “What has my dear cousin done now?”

Caleb narrowed his gaze. “What makes you think she’s at fault? I could have been the one in the wrong.”

“Oh, I’m certain you are.” Somerset sipped his brandy. “Too,” he added at the same of that statement. “Since we’re being honest and all. The two of you have been at war of sorts for years now. But something is different this time. She was different. What happened between you?”

Should he mention that she had trouble remembering her life and the animosity that normally brewed between them? No. Not yet anyway. After the wedding he would tell everyone if she hadn’t already. This was not the time to concern everyone about her lack of memory. Instead of answering Caleb shrugged. “Nothing more than the usual.” He’d only kissed her and come close to stripping her naked and loving every inch of her. The way she had looked after her bath—that had nearly undid him. He closed his eyes to try to erase that from his mind but he feared it was permanently etched there. “You don’t need to worry about me or your cousin. Nothing has changed.” Yet. It would completely once he married her.

“Why don’t I believe you,” Huntington narrowed his gaze. “You’re not telling us everything. That’s only going to make us wonder even more.”

They both knew him too well. “Perhaps,” he conceded. “But I don’t wish to discuss it right now. We have plenty of time to unravel the past couple of weeks later. Now if you’ll pardon me I’m tired. It’s been a long, long time since I slept well. I’ll see both of you in the morning.” He nodded at both of them. “Good night.” Then he left them alone to discuss him

behind his back. It was much better than trying to avoid answering questions. Besides he still needed to speak with the duke.

Caleb walked to the duke's study and rapped his knuckles on the door. "Come in," Wharton called out. Caleb opened the door and stepped inside.

"Ah," he said in greeting. "I was wondering how long it would take you to come see me."

"I hadn't realized you were waiting for me," Caleb said in a solemn tone. "My apologies. I would have come sooner."

Wharton waved his hand dismissively. "There was no rush. Come sit, tell me everything."

There was no way in bloody hell he was going to do that. If the duke knew how much he lusted after his daughter he'd lose his mind. Caleb rather liked his head attached to his body. "I came to ask permission to marry your daughter." It was better to let the duke know his intentions from the start. That would make the next bit of conversation go smoother.

Wharton leaned back in his chair. "And why the sudden change of heart. I thought you and Seraphina had mutual distain for each other."

He couldn't answer for her but he never had felt that way about her. "She's been compromised. After the carriage accident she was alone with me many times. If anyone that was at Moreland Manor speaks of it, she'll be ruined."

"And that's the only reason you wish to marry my daughter?" Wharton lifted a brow. "I don't believe that. Tell me the real reason."

"Why does there have to be more?" He wasn't ready to make any declarations but Wharton might not give him much

of a choice. He sighed. “Are you going to give your permission?”

“No,” the duke said. “It’s not up to me. If Seraphina wants you then I won’t stand in her way, but if she says no that’s going to have to be your answer. I won’t force my daughter to marry anyone. Her reputation may be slightly damaged, but as the daughter of a duke she can still have her pick of any gentleman she wants.”

It was as good as he was going to get. “If she says yes than you won’t stop us.” He had to make sure that he understood correctly.

“That’s correct.” The duke smirked. “But you will not gain her compliance so easily. My daughter can be quite... stubborn.”

Caleb snorted. “I am aware.” Though she wasn’t the daughter he remembered. Something significant had changed, and it wasn’t just her memory loss. “I’ll speak to her after the wedding tomorrow if that’s all right with you.”

Wharton nodded. “Have her tell me her answer once she’s given it. I’ll need to know if there is another wedding to be planned.”

After the duke finished speaking he waved at Caleb to depart. They were done talking and it didn’t matter if Caleb had anything left to say. He blew out a breath and left the duke’s study. Now he just had to convince Seraphina. She already thought they were betrothed. How hard could it be?



SERAPHINA SAT WITH AGATHA IN THE SITTING ROOM WAITING for the maid to tell them to go to the ballroom. The wedding was going to take place in a half hour. Agatha had never looked lovelier. Her dress was a pale green that brought out the color in her eyes, and she even had a new diamond pendant to wear with it. She was a blushing bride with flushed cheeks and eyes filled with excitement. She clearly adored the marquess and couldn't wait to marry him. "It's almost time." Agatha sighed wistfully. "I am glad we're not going to the chapel for the ceremony as we originally intended. The weather is abysmal."

"It is," Seraphina agreed in an absentminded tone.

"Are you going to tell me what is going on with you?" Agatha asked. "It's clear something is bothering you and it's making me anxious. Should I be worried?"

The last thing she wanted was for her cousin to worry about her. This was supposed to be Agatha's day. "It's nothing," she said in her most reassuring tone. "At least nothing that can't wait."

"You don't seem yourself," Agatha said.

She didn't much feel like herself; however, she didn't know quite how to explain that to her cousin. "You know everything that happened. The carriage accident, my convalesce, Riverdale saving me..."

Agatha tilted her head to the side. "Is that what bothers you? Because it shouldn't. I'm so glad he was there. I cannot imagine my life without you. I'll be forever grateful he was there to help you."

Should she tell Agatha the rest? How she'd lost her memory and the duke's kiss? Seraphina sighed. "I may have

left out a few details.”

“Such as?” Agatha lifted a brow. “That you’re love with him?”

She lifted her head and met Agatha’s gaze. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not a fool. None of us are.” Agatha sighed. “Why do you think the two of you fight so much? It’s clear neither of you wanted to admit your feelings. Did this accident force you both to open your eyes?”

“Not exactly,” Seraphina said. “There was a brief time that I couldn’t remember anything. That made it easier.”

“For the two of you to let your guard down.” Agatha nodded. “I can see how that might smooth the way for the two of you. So have you told him how you feel?”

“When did you get so wise?” Seraphina blew out a breath. “He doesn’t know I’ve gotten my memory back, and well, he told me we were already betrothed.” She met Agatha’s gaze again. “We both know that’s a lie.”

“That’s...interesting.” Agatha frowned. “Why haven’t you told him that you remember everything? Are you hoping for a wedding before he discerns the truth?”

Seraphina shrugged. “I’m afraid.” If he knew the truth he might not want her anymore. “What if it was all an illusion?”

Someone cleared their throat catching their attention. They both turned to see Caleb standing there. Had he heard everything? What was she going to do? “It’s time,” he said. “They’re waiting for you.”

“Caleb...” Seraphina said.

He shook his head. “Now isn’t the time. We’ll talk later.”

Had she ruined everything? God she hoped not. He was right though. The wedding shouldn't be interrupted. "All right," she conceded, then turned to Agatha. "Let's get you married."

They left the sitting room and went to the ballroom. The servants had done a wonderful job of decorating the room. There were several chairs placed in the room for the guests to sit and witness the vows. After the wedding there was a breakfast bar set up at the other side of the room. Guests could mingle and eat until early afternoon. Then the bride and groom were to leave for their wedding trip. Seraphina would miss her cousin but she was happy for her. If only she could find her own happiness—something she may have ruined.

The wedding went by in a blur. Seraphina couldn't recall one second of it. She'd become numb after Caleb had walked in on her conversation with Agatha. Did he hate her now? How could she repair what she had broken? She wandered toward one of the tables filled with treats. There were biscuits, little cakes, and fresh fruit for the guests to eat. The other table had savory meats, cheeses, and bread.

"You don't really wish to eat do you?" Caleb asked from the other side of her.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, then opened them and turned to face him. "I have no appetite." She wouldn't be able to eat until this was settled between them.

He held out his arm to her. "Come with me."

She placed her hand on his outstretched arm and allowed him to lead her away. They walked until they were in her father's library. No one was around and perhaps this room was appropriate somehow. They had kissed for the first time in, at least a real kiss, in a library. She didn't really count that chaste

kiss he'd given her as the first time. He gestured for her to sit on the settee.

Where should the begin? "Caleb..."

"No," he said. "Let me speak first." He lifted his hand and cupped her cheek. "I knew something wasn't right. It had occurred to me that you're memory had come back."

"I should have told you..." She swallowed hard. "I'm sorry I didn't."

He shook his head. "I understand why you didn't. It is my turn to say I'm sorry. I didn't know how to fix what I had broken. I'm the reason we have been so difficult with each other. My foolish actions has kept us apart this entire time. I cannot say I'm sorry enough."

She closed her eyes and just let those words wash over her. "I've not made it easy for you. We're both in the wrong."

"If I could turn back the clock and redo it all I would, but I cannot." He pulled her hand into his. "I need you. I don't want to fight with you, and I sure as hell don't want to hide what I feel anymore." His ice blue eyes seemed so warm and welcoming. It nearly broke her heart...

Her emotions were choking her up and she couldn't find words. "I don't want to do that either." She moved closer to him. Her mind was racing with everything she wanted to say. "I'm hopeless for you. I always have been. We have wasted so much time."

"I promise not to repeat those mistakes," he said. "If you'll agree to be mine forever I'll spend every hour, every day, we have together making sure you know how much I love you. I want the privilege of keeping you safe and loving you." He took a deep breath. "I realize I said we were already betrothed,

and you know that for the lie it is. I hope you'll agree to make it a truth. Will you marry me?"

Seraphina wanted nothing more. A tear fell down her cheek. He lifted his hand and brushed the tear away. "Don't cry love."

"It's happiness nothing more. I didn't dare hope for this. That accident, while scary, brought us together. I won't be losing anymore sleep worrying about what may or may not be. You're the reason I'm still breathing. My heart beats for you. How could I not love you too? It's been my truth for a long time now but I was too afraid to admit it to you. I thought you'd laugh at me..." She sighed. "I want to marry you. The sooner the better."

Caleb pulled her into his arms, then slanted his lips over hers. Their kiss was full of passion and all the love they had for each other. She had worried over nothing. Now she knew she had a future with the man she loved. She didn't have to disguise who she was or what she felt for him any longer. Which was good a thing because Seraphina was no wallflower, and never would be.

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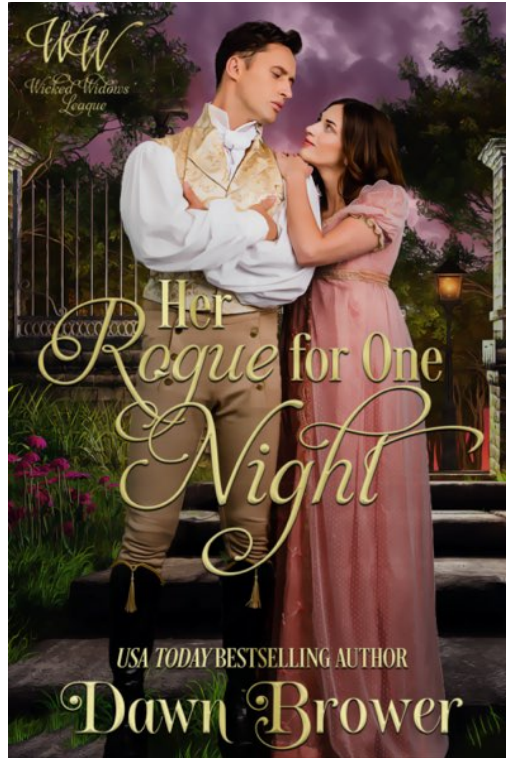
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*Excerpt: Her Rogue for One
Night*



WICKED WIDOWS' LEAGUE BOOK TWO

DAWN BROWER



Prologue



Claudine Grant glanced up at the dark clouds in the sky. They were an omen of some sort. She had a feeling in her stomach that unsettled her, and had since she'd woken earlier that morning. That feeling of dread wouldn't go away, and as the day progressed it worsened.

Even if the clouds were not an omen of bad things to come they did alert her to one thing with certainty. A storm was brewing. She should go back inside, but she couldn't make her legs move.

She had a letter from her husband, James waiting for her inside. Claudine hadn't opened it yet. Letters from James rarely came. He was away at war fighting against Napoleon. It seemed like an endless war and she feared she would never see him again. What if this was the last letter she ever received from him?

They married one day before he left for war. Their marriage had been quick. Well, as quick as it could be done. The banns were read and after the third week they said their vows. They'd had one night together, and then he had to leave. Then she was alone in their small home. Claudine had two servants—a maid and a cook. James was the third son of a

viscount. His commission had given him his rank and position. He was a lieutenant in the Calvary.

All Claudine wanted was for her husband to return to her. She should read his letter. She glanced up at the sky once more and headed home. It didn't take her long to reach the entrance. She went inside and to her writing desk. Claudine pulled out the letter and broke the seal. Folded inside the letter from James was another note. It only had her name scrawled across it. Her hands shook as she picked it up. It wasn't in James' handwriting. Who else would be sending her a letter?

She set it aside and ran her fingers over the words James had written her. His handwriting was so familiar to her. She finished unfolding it and started to read it from the beginning.

My Dearest Claudine,

Today was a good day. There are not to many of those here. The sky was a brilliant blue and the sun bathed us in its light. The warmth felt wonderful against my skin. I wish I could have enjoyed it more. I wish I could have spent this day with you cradled in my arms.

This letter I'm writing out of necessity. These words should come from me. If the worst should happen... God I can't imagine the worst. Everyone should be able to live their lives with the freedom of not considering that possibility. As a soldier I am not so fortunate.

If I had not chosen this life I would be with you.

But if that possibility should happen I don't want to leave anything unsaid. My wonderful, beautiful wife—I adore you. There are no words that can adequately describe how much I love you. The greatest day of my life was when you agreed to be my wife. Our wedding day will be forever honored in my memory. As far as regrets go, that is one thing that will not be tallied under that column. My heart will forever be yours. I will always belong to you, and only you.

My hope is that this letter will be fodder for a fire one day and you will never read it. That soon I'll be home and kissing you, loving you, and spending the rest of my days by your side. However, I must be pragmatic. If you are receiving this letter, then my love, I am no longer amongst the living. Confirmation will come from someone of authority, but for now, this will have to do.

Before I left I ensured that all my particulars were in order. You will be taken care of, and if you so choose you may remain in the home we selected together. If it doesn't suit

*you, sell it and find another. And my love...try
to let me go. I want you to be happy.*

All my love,

James

A tear fell down her cheek. She should have avoided reading the letter longer. She could have remained in blissful ignorance. This couldn't be real. James was not dead. Claudine refused to believe it. She picked up the other folded piece of paper. There was a quick note jotted down there. Almost as if an afterthought...

She needed to read the letter. Claudine's hands shook as she stared down at the parchment. The missive wasn't long. Perhaps that meant it wasn't the news she feared? No. That possibility was unlikely. She had to read it and find out. All the supposition was not helping her.

Dear Mrs. Grant,

I served with Lieutenant James Grant. He is...was an honorable man. He died in service to his country. You can be proud of the man he was and all that he did. His actions saved the lives of several men in our unit. Without him, there would be more men being mourned. I am sincerely sorry for your loss. Lieutenant Grant will be missed by us all.

Yours truly,

Colonel Andrew Roberts

This letter sounded far more official. She should visit James' father. Perhaps he knew more. She closed her eyes and held back the tears that threatened to fall. Now was not the time for giving in to tears. It was time to plan and get answers.

Claudine glanced out the window. The storm had rolled in. The sky had opened up and rain poured down. It beat against the window like a constant beat of a drum. The roads would be muddy in the morning making them nearly impassible. She would not let that fact stop her. This trip was too important. She'd pack and go to London in the morning. There she would visit the viscount and find the truth. Whatever that truth might be...

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About Dawn Brower

USA TODAY Bestselling author, DAWN BROWER writes both historical and contemporary romance. There are always stories inside her head; she just never thought she could make them come to life. That creativity has finally found an outlet.

Growing up, she was the only girl out of six children. She raised two boys as a single mother; there is never a dull moment in her life. Reading books is her favorite hobby, and she loves all genres.

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