



Woman In
Chains
Isabella Jordan

WOMAN IN CHAINS

“Do you know how difficult it is to be dependent on others for everything? For your very survival? When my father died, I was at the mercy of my cousin. When I became a threat to him, he sold me into slavery. And now another man is buying me back. I am not a possession to be bought and sold! I am a person! And I want a say in my life!”

Anthony knew pride at her words, even as his body throbbed.

“Then have a say.”

“How?” she demanded. “I’ve two choices. If what you say is true, I can agree to be Adam’s mistress or I can live on the streets.”

“You have one more option to consider.” His eyes locked with hers. And just like that, his mind was made up. He had to have her no matter what he had to do or how long he had to wait. “You can come with *me*.”

ALSO BY ISABELLA JORDAN

Claiming Michelle
Electrical Storm
Elegant

WOMAN IN CHAINS

BY

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WOMAN IN CHAINS
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For Jim...

CHAPTER 1

The Loire Valley France, 1816

“Cette fille est jolie.”

Mia Emmerson knew the word “*jolie*.” The French word for “pretty” or “beautiful.” Unfortunately, there weren’t very many other words in the language that she understood. She struggled to translate the rest of the sentence as thick fingers lifted her chin.

Madame d’Entremont’s gray eyes were sharp and assessing. The leering scrutiny of the large, garishly dressed woman made Mia uneasy. Her full, over-ripe body seemed ready to burst from the revealing scarlet gown that she wore. A dark shade of red that reminded Mia of blood, stained the woman’s lips and cheeks, accentuated by the dramatic upsweep of her sable hair. And Mia had never seen jewels as fine as the impressive spray of rubies and diamonds glittering across the creamy expanse of the woman’s cleavage.

She turned Mia’s head to afford a view of each side of her face,

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evaluating her as if she were a bauble being considered for purchase. Mia thought of pulling away, but the gray eyes moving over her flashed a warning. The woman's warm fingers caressed her jaw covetously before falling away and a wave of apprehension swept over Mia.

"Edward?" Mia swallowed nervously, looking to him for an explanation.

"Quiet!" Edward Cross hissed, running a pudgy hand through his thinning black hair. His eyes were the same shade of black, and were hard and mean as they bored into her.

The woman stepped closer until her enormous breasts pressed against Mia's arm and the heavy musk of her perfume enveloped them both. Before Mia knew what was happening, the woman's hands boldly began to move over her body, squeezing her breasts, her backside. One hand slid down to cup her through the thin muslin skirt of her dress, fingers probing through the fabric and between her thighs. Gasping in shock, Mia yanked away.

Madame d'Entremont laughed at the flush of humiliation that warmed her face. "*Elle est plutôt gênée.*"

"What are you saying?" Mia asked, trying to keep the fear from her voice.

The woman looked to Edward before returning her sardonic gaze to Mia. "You do not speak French?" she asked, her English heavily accented.

Mia lifted her chin a notch. "No, I do not," she replied tersely.

With her heart thundering in fear, Mia stared at Edward, damning him for the nightmare turn her life had taken since her father's death the year before. Within a fortnight of her sire's passing, Edward had arrived at their home in Cornwall and proclaimed himself the impoverished baron's heir. There'd been no one to stop him. Her father, who'd always enjoyed good health, had never had a will prepared and the fever to which he had swiftly succumbed had left no time to see it done. It had been all too easy for his nephew, Edward

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Cross, Earl of Lester, with his vast fortune and immense arrogance, to lay claim to all that had belonged to her father. Specifically his land.

Unfortunately that included her, too. Edward was her guardian now and in control of her future. That was the taunt he constantly threw at her anyway.

“No matter,” Madame d’Entremont continued with a dismissing wave of her hand. “My clientele will not care if you speak at all. *Oui*, some of them would prefer that, *ma belle anglaise*.”

Mia’s mind reeled in confusion. “Your clientele?”

Edward shot her a hostile glare. His velvety tone, however, held only a thread of warning. “You have been unhappy in my care, Mia. It has been quite obvious to me since I arrived at your door to save you from being tossed out into the streets. You’ve been exceedingly unpleasant when you should have been damned grateful to have someone like myself looking after your welfare.”

Only fear kept her from laughing. Unpleasant was she? What had he expected? That she would be grateful for the way he’d swept into her life and lied to her, stolen from her?

Taking a menacing step toward her as if he thought she might flee, his short, bulky body tensed. “I told you that I controlled your future, didn’t I? I have arranged for you to reside with Madame d’Entremont. She manages a very successful business. You will work for her.”

“Work for her?” Mia realized a shiver of panic. “But I couldn’t—”

“You will develop the skills I require in time, *ma joli*.” Madame d’Entremont leaned forward and lowered her voice. “And you will learn them well.”

Mia felt sick as the realization of what was to happen to her sank in. The woman wanted her to work as a courtesan. She began to tremble as she recalled the scantily clad women they had passed on their way to the office. Why had she not been more suspicious of her cousin’s motives? The unexpected journey to France, his unusually pleasant mood of late. The mysterious events of the last several weeks began to

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make sense.

At least she had managed to get a note out to Adam Wood before they had left, so someone would know where she was. Adam would try to help her, would know something wasn't right. The young, gentle viscount was her friend.

But until he came to look for her she would be at the mercy of the lewd woman standing before her and the countless men who frequented her establishment. Mia had only the faintest idea of what privately transpired between a man and a woman. And she couldn't speak French well at all. That would only serve to make things worse. The thought that she would give herself freely to strange men for money made her stomach clench.

Mia could barely speak. "Why?"

But she knew the answer. She had caught the eye of Edward's French lover, Philippe. Her cousin's vulgar paramour made no secret of the fact that he enjoyed men and women equally, though what that specifically entailed she wasn't certain. She did understand the advances Philippe had made toward her in the last few weeks. So did Edward. Understanding heightened the sickness she already felt. Her cousin wanted to punish her for being his unwitting rival.

Edward's lips thinned in anger. "What else am I to do with you, cousin? My dear uncle, your father, left me very little money and a pitifully neglected residence. Did the old fool think I would devotedly care for you out of the goodness in my heart?"

"My father didn't leave you anything," Mia said with heavy bitterness. "You took what you wanted."

His thin lips curled into a snarl. "It's mine," he growled.

He had what he wanted. And he definitely wanted to rid himself of *her*. The thought gave her a moment of hope.

"Let me go." Mia hated herself for pleading yet it was her only chance. "Please, you have Gavin Hall, the money. You will never see me again. I swear it."

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His brows shot up in surprise. “Why would I allow that to happen when Madame d’Entremont has offered me such a handsome sum for you?”

The woman’s amused smile confirmed his words. “You are a virgin, *oui*?”

Coloring fiercely, Mia glared at her cousin. “You bastard,” she said in a choked voice.

She held her head high as she watched his eyes darken with fury, his face redden with rage. He drew back a large hand to strike her.

“*Non!* Not her face!” The woman rushed forward to prevent the blow. “This.”

A stunning punch to the stomach rewarded Mia for her efforts, the blow nearly bringing her to her knees. The woman’s meaty fist hovered before her face, threatening more. Mia didn’t move.

“You have spirit, *ma jolie*.” The woman bent to whisper in her ear. “It will not serve you here. You understand, *oui*?”

Mia fought a wave of nausea. “Yes,” she croaked.

“We have an agreement then?” she heard Edward ask as the woman released her.

“*Oui*.” Madame d’Entremont’s voice was cold and exact. “She pleases me.”

Mia managed to glance up in time to see the madam opening the parlor door, signaling to someone beyond it. When she turned back, her eyes focused on Mia. “Her virtue will no doubt earn me a small fortune, but her face and her tight little body...” The woman’s face lit up with evil glee. “She will be most popular.”

Two young men in matching uniforms entered the room, heading for Mia. Panic rioted within her as they each grasped one of her arms.

“Edward,” she begged, looking to her cousin as she struggled against her captors. “Please, don’t do this.”

Edward watched the scene with a look of undisguised satisfaction as she was pulled from the room.

CHAPTER 2

“Thank you, my lords, for whatever you can do,” Adam Wood’s high voice pleaded. The willowy youth could be no more than twenty, Anthony guessed. He looked much younger.

Anthony Montford, the fourth Duke of Ashton, scowled at his friend as the young viscount left his study. “You think me so bored in exile that I will jump to do that whelp’s bidding? I don’t care how much bloody money he offers.”

“So you plan to spend the entire winter feeling sorry for yourself? Or do you plan to break the monotony now and again by drinking yourself into a stupor?”

“I am indulging in neither self-pity nor drink. Is it so difficult to understand that I simply desire to live in solitude?”

“Liar,” Nicholas accused as Anthony drained his glass.

Nicholas Wolfe, Viscount of Carlingford, shook his head. Leaning back in the wing chair across from Anthony, he stared at the half-empty brandy snifter he held as if in deep thought. “Well, you might have told

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me earlier of this great need for solitude.” He placed ugly emphasis on *solitude*. “And spared yourself my tedious company.”

Anthony almost smiled at his friend’s half attempt to make him feel guilty. Refilling his glass with the fine brandy he’d been enjoying since early evening, he sighed. He knew where Nick was going with this and he wasn’t certain he could stomach the lecture again. He felt no regret for the way he lived his life. He didn’t owe anyone a damned thing. All he wanted was to be left alone. Nick had been his closest friend since childhood and perhaps his only friend now. And while he grudgingly admitted to enjoying his friend’s occasional visits, he could live without them.

“Don’t, Nick,” he warned.

The threat in his tone would have humbled any other man. Anthony knew from the few visits he had made to the nearby town that the rumors had followed him to France. The townsfolk were careful to keep their distance, regarding him as they would the devil himself. Even his servants moved warily about him, criminals and whores themselves, scrambling to do his bidding and ready to flee at the first sign of displeasure.

Unimpressed, Nick smirked at him from his chair. He knew Anthony better than anyone, knew he had nothing to fear. As if reading his thoughts, Nick said, “It has been three years since the trials and Julianna’s death, Tony. You—”

“Save your speech tonight.” Anthony’s tone was icy. “It bores me.”

“Ah.” His friend took another sip of brandy, his eyes sparkling with amusement. “So you are bored with me, too. You are hard on one’s ego, old man.”

Anthony fought the urge to throttle him. While he was certain he could pound his friend into leaving him in peace, he was in no mood for the pummeling that he would have to endure in order to do it. Nicholas was damned near his equal in size and strength and loved a good fight.

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Frustrated, he raked a hand through his hair. “Go to hell,” he growled.

Nick chuckled dryly. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“At the moment, yes.”

“I have a better idea,” Nick offered, leaning forward. A lock of raven hair fell over his forehead. Absently, he tugged at his cravat as if it were too tight.

Anthony stared at him. “No. I’m not wasting my time on that boy.”

“Yes, you will.” Nicholas’ face split into a wide grin. “That boy has a bloody fortune at his disposal.” Nick’s broad shoulders blocked Anthony’s view of the fire as he spread his arms wide in an extravagant gesture. “All you have to do is fetch his poor maiden, ensure that her pederast guardian never troubles her again and you’ll have enough coin to return to your pirating if that is your wish.”

The proposition did hold some appeal. When Anthony had fled England three years before, a convicted pirate and murderer, he’d been able to take very little of his wealth with him. The country chateau where he currently resided was the only holding left in his possession, his coffers ever dwindling. The money the viscount offered for so simple a task would offer him freedom. To return to the sea, to do whatever he desired. And Nick was probably right. Perhaps such an evening of revelry would make him feel better. He’d missed those days from his youth when such evenings were common and he’d been so carefree...

Slowly, Anthony shook his head. Years ago he would have accepted his friend’s invitation. But fate and time had made him a different man. Guilt over the death of a woman who’d loved him had made him a different man. No longer did he view the world as an endless well he could draw pleasure from. Now he saw only a sea of faces filled with fear and loathing.

“No, I don’t think so.” Anthony used a cool tone to give the impression of indifference.

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But Nick played at not hearing that. And he did it badly. “I wonder why the girl means so much to him that he would offer such a sum for her rescue?”

“Probably didn’t have the chance to rut between her legs before she was snatched away.” Anthony eyed his friend, curious. “Why are you so interested? You’ve no plan to be involved.”

“I’m not a known criminal,” Nick winked at him. “You are. But that aside, I remember how much you once craved adventure. He’s offering money, which you need, adventure, which you used to enjoy. And it is all taking place right here under your nose, in the village. All you have to do is take the girl back and you’ll have enough money to do whatever you want. It will get you out of this damnable place and out of your cups anyway.”

Setting his snifter aside, Nicholas slowly rose from his chair, straightening his navy blue coat. He’d neatly trapped Anthony and he knew it. “Just think about it, Anthony. But don’t take too long. Dear Mia is waiting.”

With a knowing smile, Nicholas gave him a quick wink before quitting the room.

Well, hell.

CHAPTER 3

Anthony smiled as he accepted a snifter of brandy from Madame d'Entremont and settled back into the chair she offered him, relaxed. It had been surprising to learn that the girl had been delivered to such a notorious brothel. The house was known far and wide throughout France for offering the most decadent delights of every kind.

And since business had brought Anthony here...well, why not enjoy it? If the house wench he'd just enjoyed or any of the other staff members knew his identity, they said nothing. It was all about money, he knew. As long as he had the coin, they wouldn't say a word. And he had a nice bag of coins from his young patron.

The madam took a seat across from him, her painted mouth curving into a smile. "You wished to see me, my lord?" Her tone was edged with concern. "Was Cosette not to your liking?"

Releasing a sigh of satisfaction, Anthony returned her smile. The buxom blonde could do incredible things with her hands and mouth. "I assure you, Madame, she was very much to my liking."

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“Then how may I help you?” she asked.

Anthony appreciated her direct approach. “You are known for being able to grant most any wish your clients have. Mine is simple. While the women of France are beautiful and...talented, I find myself homesick for an English rose. I don’t suppose you have such a flower in your garden.”

Her grin widened wickedly. “You are a virile man, no?”

“Indeed,” he took a sip of the fine brandy.

Madame d’Entremont’s gray eyes gleamed with interest. “I do have such a rose in my garden. But the girl is fresh. A virgin. I have set a high price for the privilege of being first to sample her charms.”

Anthony frowned. “I think you place too much value on innocence. Do the majority of your clients really find it so appealing?”

The woman eyed him speculatively.

“If not, they would still find this girl to be irresistible. She is a rare beauty.”

“But inexperienced,” he pointed out.

“If you seek to bargain with me about the sum I demand for this rose, our meeting is over.” Her face became a mask of implacable calm. “Besides, you are hardly in a position to ask for concessions.”

Anthony’s fingers tightened around the fine crystal.

“I know who you are.” Her eyes met his squarely. “Why should I allow such a dangerous man to pluck my rose?”

Biting back the nasty retort that immediately came to his tongue, he said only, “Because I will pay your price. I’m sure that you are anxious to see a profit from your investment.”

It was a risk, he knew, to subtly point out that she bought and sold young women like cattle. Ah hell, it was the truth. And unless he missed his guess she’d paid a substantial amount for the girl he came for. But if the madam were offended, she took pains to hide it.

“Very well, my lord,” she finally said. “Let us make arrangements. I will demand payment in advance.”

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“Agreed,” he said easily. It wasn’t his money after all.

“And...I wish to watch.”

That caught him off guard. He felt the sting of resentment once the surprise faded.

“At least for a while,” she added quickly.

“You fear I will harm her?” His tone turned menacing. “Did I hurt your other wench?”

That she was apprehensive was plain enough in her expression. But there was something else. He watched the woman absently smooth her hair. Her smile was small, secretive.

“Or is that you are very fond of your rose?” Anthony suggested, receiving his answer in the interested gleam of her eyes. So she wanted the girl herself. It piqued his curiosity.

It would complicate matters greatly to go along with her wish. But what choice did he really have?

“Watch then.”

He fished the bag of coins from his coat and tossed them into her lap.

“Shall we adjourn to my garden, my lord?” The madam’s response was eager.

It was done then. She would take him to the girl. Pleased with himself, Anthony drained his glass, enjoying the feeling of the brandy burning its way towards his stomach.

“Yes, let’s adjourn.”

CHAPTER 4

Mia shivered before the roaring blaze in the fireplace, its warmth unable to soothe her shaking limbs. Her stomach clenched tight as she glanced about the room behind her.

The huge, four poster bed was the centerpiece of the room done up in shades of dark red and gold. Soft light reflected off the shiny surface of the counterpane, glittered off the golden threads woven into the draperies. The intricate pattern of the carpet beneath her knees matched perfectly the rich perfection of her surroundings.

Mia had hoped her newness would buy her some time to plan an escape. She hadn't been prepared for the fact that she might be entertaining a gentleman her first night.

The sound of heavy footsteps echoed beyond the door and she fought to keep her fragile control. She wanted to run as fast as her feet would carry her but it would only go worse for her, she knew, if she attempted unsuccessfully to escape. As if anticipating that she would try, the madam had posted guards outside her door and one several feet

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below the room's single window.

Please don't let him be an ogre, she prayed, her heart racing as the footsteps stopped outside the door. At least she had hoped he would be kinder than the hard faced retainers that the madam employed. Slowly, Mia turned her back to the door and faced the fire from her place on the floor.

The door opened soundlessly. Mia did not know he had entered the room until she heard the door close. She bowed her head, hiding her face behind a curtain of dark hair. Underneath her own heavy cloak, she trembled violently. *Please let this be over soon.*

The sound of footsteps resumed, lighter now. Mia shuddered as she felt him standing over her, chilled by his shadow.

"Are you trying to hide, little rose?"

Mia closed her eyes. He was an Englishman, his voice deep and velvety smooth. Anxiety pulsed through her as she felt him kneel next to her. His breath was warm in her hair.

"Let me see your face."

The soft caress of his voice sent an involuntary chill down her spine. Strong fingers cupped her chin and slowly turned her face.

His face was only inches from hers, his expression stilled and serious. While Mia had prepared herself for all sorts of monstrosities, nothing could have prepared her for the man before her. His face was boldly handsome with firm, sensual lips. The flickering light of the flames reflected off the tawny waves of his hair, dancing wickedly over the bronze of his skin. The eyes that studied her were shades of amber and gold, and held a glint of wonder.

Slowly, he rose from the floor, his powerful well-muscled body moving with ease. His white, linen shirt hung open to the broad expanse of his chest. Sleek black breeches smoothed over his slim hips and long legs. The large hand that had held her face extended to her. Mia hesitated, glancing up at him as a tumble of confused thoughts assailed her. In all her wild imaginings the last several hours, this

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possibility had never entered her mind. Never had she seen a man so strikingly attractive.

Absently, she placed her small hand in his. All too late she remembered the golden manacles around her wrists and the chain she wore beneath the heavy cloak.

Lifting the lightweight chain in his other hand, he stared. His golden eyes met hers but Mia tore her gaze away from his and stared at the rug at her feet. Preparing herself for the humiliation that would follow, she tried to focus her thoughts on her home in Cornwall, on anything but the man standing before her.

With agility she wouldn't have expected in such a large man, he grasped the hem of her cloak and eased the folds over her shoulders to reveal the indecent costume she wore.

Mia trembled and forced her arms to remain at her sides. She felt warmth flooding her face as she stood before him in the thin, revealing layers of fabric. Dressed as a slave girl, only her breasts and lower body were covered by solid panels of shining gold, while her arms and legs were wrapped in diaphanous layers, hiding little. The small bodice of the costume scooped low revealing the tops of her breasts and ending just beneath them, leaving her waist and the tender flesh of her belly completely uncovered. No one had ever seen her so exposed. She wanted to pull the cloak around her body once more, shrink into its depths.

His eyes darkened as they seductively moved over her. He used the costume chain to pull her closer, his scent a pleasant blend of sandalwood and brandy. His fingertips grazed her cheek, his touch almost unbearable in its tenderness.

“She pleases you, *oui?*”

A muscle at his firm jaw twitched and some dark emotion crossed his features for a fleeting moment.

He smiled at Mia then, a flash of straight white teeth smoothing out the cleft of his firm chin. He was incredibly handsome when he smiled.

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“Indeed she does,” he replied, his gaze never leaving Mia.

Why was Madame d’Entremont there? Surely she didn’t mean to remain.

But apparently she did. Mia glanced helplessly from the smiling woman, who took a seat in a chair by the bed, back to him as his hand found her nape, disappearing under the spill of her long dark, hair. He towered over her, more than a head taller than she. She almost welcomed the strong arm that slid around her beneath the cloak, offering her support. She didn’t know how much longer she could rely on her shaking knees to hold her up. A torrent of emotions, not the least of which his disturbing nearness, threatened to consume her. Unfamiliar warmth clashed with anxiety as it spread through her body. His fingers teased the flesh at the small of her back as his lips lowered to hers.

He took her mouth with tantalizing intensity, his lips caressing hers softly. Her heart jolted as he crushed her against him, his tongue tracing the seam of her lips. Despite her fear and the lewd woman watching them, her traitorous body began to relax against his long, hard form. Her submission only encouraged him as he pressed her tightly against him with the hand at her back. The hard ridge of his arousal moved provocatively against her naked belly.

Coaxing her lips apart, his tongue began a slow exploration of her mouth. Mia froze, fear reclaiming her. This was beyond her experience. Dear God, heat and chill assaulted her body like fever.

Feeling her tremors, his head lifted. Amber eyes studied her intently. His gaze moved down her body, stopping at the exposed skin covering her ribs. Mia knew he had spotted the ugly, purple bruise from the madam’s blow, the powder applied by the girls who had dressed her a futile effort.

For a moment his expression was grim, dark. But just as quickly, his seductive smile was back. His hand slid up over her ribs, slowly over her breast to the clasp of her cloak. Mia shivered again as it fell to

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the floor.

“Let us make you more comfortable,” he whispered, grabbing the golden chain and pulling her toward the bed. When Mia resisted, he yanked the chain sharply and sent her sprawling across the huge bed.

“Ah, ah, my lord.” Madame d’Entremont’s voice penetrated the veil of fear around her. “You must be careful with my rose.”

“As you have been?” There was a thread of menace in his tone.

Mia tried to scramble away from him on the bed, but he caught her easily, looping the chain that linked her wrists over a thick hook in the wall, obviously intended for that purpose. Her heart pounded in her chest as he pulled her flat on the bed, her arms stretched over her head. A large hand slid over the flat plane of her stomach to cup her breast and she turned her head toward the small table by the bed and the curiously shaped glass objects placed on it. But no matter what she tried to focus on, think about, her body wouldn’t let her ignore the sensations his fingers were creating as they slid into the bodice of her costume. Rough fingertips delicately teased her nipple as he lowered his body to hers.

She jumped when the warm wetness of his mouth found the slim column of her throat. His lips caressed the soft flesh below her lobe, then his tongue traced the outer shell of her ear. Mia twisted beneath him, pointless she knew, her actions only bringing his weight more firmly upon her. The unyielding hardness of his thigh pressed between her own, applying gentle pressure and causing an unfamiliar ache to build in her core.

What was wrong with her? While her heart raced in fear and her mind fought to shut out what was happening to her, her body had a will of its own. His hands on her flesh, his body pressed to hers, inspired a hunger she’d never encountered. The realization brought her to shame as his fingers pulled back the bodice to reveal her full white breast.

Mia’s eyes flew back to him and she nearly came off the bed when his mouth closed over her nipple and his tongue teased the tip with

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gentle lashes. His thigh pressed against her center in a ceaseless rhythm as his mouth laved and caressed her. The sensations building within her nearly took her breath away. Propriety demanded she resist him, with her mind at least, since she could not physically, but in the silence, her body grew taut under the gentle torment.

A rustle of silk pulled her back to reality and the madam, all but forgotten, to Mia's shame, moved to sit by her on the other side of the bed. The man who held her captive seemed not to notice or care that the madam watched them with gleaming gray eyes. His mouth never ceased as it moved to suckle the other breast he had bared, and the heat of his loins relentlessly continued to nudge against her. The madam's hand slid across the coverlet to caress Mia's thigh at the same moment one of his hands slid down her body, his fingers gliding into her most private place to cup her through the thin fabric.

"Please," Mia begged, fear replacing incredible sensation as Madame d'Entremont edged closer to her. The woman's hand traveled up her body like a loathsome insect, her fingers finding the flesh of her breast, still damp from the man's ministrations.

The man's lips trailed up from her other breast to return to her ear. "Just another moment more," he whispered.

Mia had no idea what he meant and no time to consider it. The madam's mouth closed over her breast, wiping her mind clean of anything save shock. She'd barely recovered when the man's weight lifted from her.

His fist connected with the madam's nose, knocking her back off the bed. He was on her before she could cry out to the guards. Mia could see his arm draw back before delivering another solid blow to the woman on the floor. There was blood on his hand when he returned to the bed. Mia jumped in fright as he worked to release the chain from the hook above her head.

"Did you kill her?" Mia asked before she could stop herself.

"No." He hauled up the bodice of her costume to cover her breasts

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the moment he'd freed the chain. "I broke her nose. She will not be happy when she comes to."

He pulled Mia from the bed, bent to snatch her discarded cloak from the floor and hastily wrapped it about her, his large fingers shaking as he wrestled with the clasp.

"We are leaving," he said in a tone that would brook no argument. "I'm going to lower you out the window."

"But there is a guard down there," she pointed out as she fought to bring her trembling body under control.

He pulled her to the window and clasped her jaw in his large hand, forcing her gaze to meet his.

"I know. And that is no short distance to the ground. He will be forced to catch you. Do you understand?" He continued at her nod. "He'll have little time to act when I come down after you. When he drops you, run. Run toward the garden gate. One of my servants will await you there."

Mia shrugged out of his touch and took a step toward the window, relief that she would at least escape the madam's establishment washing over her. She couldn't deny she wanted to escape this man as well, for she feared the things he had made her feel, feared *him*.

As if he could read her thoughts, his hand caught her jaw again. The pad of his thumb gently skimmed across her cheek. Mia didn't miss the fact that his hand trembled. The intensity in his golden eyes mesmerized her.

Just as suddenly, his hand dropped and he motioned toward the window. "We haven't much time."

And with that he flung open the window and helped Mia to climb out.

CHAPTER 5

The one small window of the room Anthony had secured for them looked out over the poorest part of the village. The inn with its coarse wooden walls and dingy atmosphere housed whores and cutthroats nightly, their ribald laughter echoing up the stairs. It was the safest place for them to be. By now the madam's men would be looking for him at the chateau and, not finding him there, would expect that he would flee the valley.

Anthony seethed with mounting anger as he stared out the window into the winter night. It was well past midnight and he could barely make out the dim outline of the landscape beyond. It didn't matter. In truth, he stood before the window enjoying the pocket of cool air surrounding it, willing the throbbing in his loins to recede.

Damn Nicholas. He would throttle his friend the next time he saw him. It was high time his friend learned the consequences of interfering in his life. Anthony had made his wishes quite clear; he wanted solitude. His jaw clenched as he recalled numerous times he'd tried to

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explain his need to Nicholas.

Nicholas would have a good laugh at his expense if he could see him now. Hard as stone and alone with the beautiful object of his lust.

He turned to where she sat in the room's single chair, wrapped in the heavy dark cloak from neck to knee, only the slim lines of her ankles and the little gold slippers she wore revealed to him. She didn't move. Her head bowed so that she was hiding beneath a sleek curtain of dark hair. He wanted to see her face, needed to prove to himself that the brandy he'd consumed earlier had temporarily made her into the lovely creature of fantasy he'd held and kissed earlier. His hands shook at his sides. If he touched her, he feared what he might do.

"Look at me," Anthony said quietly, aware of the tremor in his voice.

Slowly lifting her head, she peered up at him. Anthony's breath caught. He stared in astonishment at the perfect, delicate features of her face. The smooth ivory of her skin was flawless. Her cheekbones were high and exotic, her rosy lips full. Her large, moss-green eyes were arresting, fringed with thick dark lashes. Gleaming, dark hair the color of chocolate fell in graceful curves over her shoulders.

He couldn't tear his gaze away from her. No amount of spirits could have produced such beauty. Gazing at her closely, he realized that she was even lovelier than he had imagined.

Slowly, his gaze slid downward over her slight form wrapped in the simple cloak. He'd thought having her fully covered would allow him to talk more intelligently with her in his semi drunken state, make her less tempting. The cloak didn't change a damned thing. He knew what the simple garment hid. Too easily he could recall the smooth creamy skin, the soft inviting curves. The searing heat surged anew through his loins.

Anthony couldn't remember the last time he'd wanted anything as badly as he wanted her.

"We'll stay here until morning. Then I'll take you to your...friend."

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When she stared at him mutely, he turned back to the window. He'd just resumed plotting his revenge on Nicholas when she spoke.

"Who?" Her voice was small, frightened. "Who sent you for me?"

Unwanted, the image of the horrible bruise at her ribs entered his mind. Her kisses had confirmed the madam's claim of her innocence. The boy's portrayal of her as the victim of a scheming pederast cousin brought into vivid light the fact that she'd weathered much in a short period of time. Including being sold to a brothel.

Anthony handed her the mug of ale he held in his hand.

"Drink this."

Mia accepted the mug and took a tiny sip.

"More," he bade her. "It will calm your mind."

She took another small sip, her eyes never leaving him.

"Lord Claythorne will be happy to see you," Anthony said.

"Adam," she whispered, some of the fear fading from her expression. Anthony felt a rare stab jealousy. "Are you a friend of his?"

"Not exactly." And that was all he needed to tell her.

"He hired you?" she pressed on.

While it was the truth, being in the employ of the dainty young man in question pricked at his pride. Anthony knew he should ignore the question, turn back to the window and spend the night in silence.

Some inner demon wouldn't allow it.

"As a matter of fact, he did," he responded. "And he's paying me very well for your safe return."

Mia nodded, took another drink of the ale. He was impressed with the way she handled the bitter brew. Her gaze focused on some point around his feet as he watched her.

"I suppose it was much too dangerous for him to come alone," she thought out loud. At Anthony's nod, she went on. "Still, I would've thought..."

"Thought what?"

"That he would come for me himself," she explained, her eyes

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gleaming with unshed tears when they met his. “Even if he had to bring someone with him, I would have thought he would be there.”

Anthony shrugged nonchalantly. “Well there is a lot more to consider in his position,” he threw out. “There is danger, yes, but there is also his reputation to consider. His family is among the oldest and most respected in England. If he’d come for you and that fact was ever discovered, the scandal would be most damaging. To his family, to his fiancée.”

“Fiancée?”

Grateful to Nicholas for sharing that little tidbit, he nodded. “Certainly. She comes from an equally notable family.”

Anthony wanted to brush away the tear that spilled over her cheek but wouldn’t allow himself to do so. He regretted adding to her pain, but it was best she knew. The more she knew, the better her decisions would be regarding her future.

“Do you love him?” he couldn’t stop himself from asking.

“Yes, he’s a dear friend. I—”

“Only a friend?” Anthony wanted to know.

Her cheeks colored in the dim light of the room. “Yes, but I had hoped...”

“You had hoped he might be a way out of your circumstances,” he voiced his understanding. Marrying the wealthy young viscount would have answered all her problems.

“Yes.” Her green eyes dropped to the mug she held before meeting his gaze again. She took another sip. “Isn’t that terrible?”

“Not at all.” Anthony, if anyone, understood what one would consider when their options were limited.

“So what happens now?”

The healthy drink she took from the mug then had him reaching for it once she was finished. Too much and she’d be ill come morning.

“I’ll let you discuss that with Lord Claythorne,” he said simply, turning back to the window. “I’ll take you to him in the morning.”

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Long moments stretched out. When she spoke again, he didn't miss the bitterness that had crept into her tone.

"You may take me to see Lord Claythorne in the morning, and while I'm grateful for his...efforts to help me, I do not see that I have anything to discuss with him about my future. He can play no part in it."

"He can offer you protection." Anthony knew he fanned her anger. "Make you his mistress."

"His mistress?"

Outrage pulled her to her feet and when Anthony turned to face her he no longer saw the timid woman he'd known so far. Anger deepened the mossy pools of her eyes as she glared at him. Her hands grasped and wrung the costume chain that still connected her slim wrists.

"You lie," she accused. "Adam knows me. He knows I would never agree to such an indecent proposal."

Anthony took a step toward her and was pleased when her ire remained.

"Why not? He's offering an indecent amount of money for your return. Do you not think he will want something for his investment? You know now he never intended to make you his bride."

Mia surprised him by taking a step towards him. Her little nostrils flared.

"Why should I believe *you*?"

"What reason do I have to lie to you?" Anthony pointed out. "My part in this play is over. I've freed you from your desperate situation as agreed. I've no further investment in this."

But he *did* have an interest, so his words weren't exactly truthful. His hard, aching loins could attest to that. The taste of her lips and skin were still in his mouth.

Her eyes searched his face as she considered his words.

"Do you know how difficult it is to be dependent on others for everything? For your very survival? When my father died, I was at the

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mercy of my cousin. When I became a threat to him, he sold me into slavery. And now another man is buying me back. I am not a possession to be bought and sold! I am a person! And I want a say in my life!”

Anthony knew pride at her words, even as his body throbbed.

“Then have a say.”

“How?” she demanded. “I’ve two choices. If what you say is true, I can agree to be Adam’s mistress or I can live on the streets.”

“You have one more option to consider.” His eyes locked with hers. And just like that, his mind was made up. He had to have her no matter what he had to do or how long he had to wait. “You can come with *me*.”

Her short laugh had an angry bite to it. “And be *your* mistress?”

“No.” Anthony began to walk a slow circle around her, leaning close to speak. “You would not be bound to me in any way.”

Some of the fire went out of her demeanor. “But you would expect—”

“I would expect nothing,” he lied. Of course, he expected to share her bed. But he wanted her to want him, crave him, as he craved her. “Your will would be your own.”

“You believe me to be witless?” Her voice sharpened. “You would expect something.”

Anthony smiled, his bluff called. “Would it be so terrible then? You enjoyed my touch. I felt it. Why not be with a man who can pleasure you? Who can protect you and give you the freedom you crave?”

“Freedom?”

She smells wonderful, he thought as he lifted a silken lock of her hair and came to a halt before her. He had every intention of making what he offered happen, he realized. She was so beautiful, so perfect. Her inexperienced reaction to his touch promised endless fire and passion waiting to be unleashed. He couldn’t imagine tiring of her for a couple of decades.

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“I leave France tomorrow as soon as my business is done. I plan to travel far away, to Jamaica. I’ve been there before, it’s beautiful. I can live comfortably there for a long time on Lord Claythorne’s reward money. So could you.”

Her breath came faster as he pulled one side of the cloak back over one shoulder and planted an open mouthed kiss on her white skin.

“If he truly means for me to be his mistress, he will give you nothing for taking me with you.”

Anthony nodded, his lips searing the side of her throat. “We’d have to plan it carefully.”

“Plan—”

His mouth closed over hers in a devastatingly gentle kiss meant to coax, meant to entice. She yielded to him after only a moment’s hesitation, her full breasts pressing against him as her body began to relax.

Anthony wanted to shout in triumph as her taste, the feel of her, made him spin out of control. She would be his...

CHAPTER 6

“Wait.” Mia struggled to break free of his drugging kisses. Planting her hands on the hard plane of his chest, she pushed away from him with all of her might. And it took effort. His amber eyes were dark with desire, determination.

Her mind was spinning. If she were to believe this man, Adam, her one hope in the last few dismal months of her life, was lost to her for any decent arrangement. Perhaps he helped her out of friendship, she reasoned, and that’s why he’d hired the dangerous man before her to be her rescuer. But she couldn’t imagine Adam asking her to be his mistress. And if he did...

Mia had always thought she could have fulfilled her wifely duties as Adam’s wife, though her feelings for him extended only to friendship. But then she had little idea of what that meant exactly. After her experience with the man who still held her in the circle of his arms, watching her intently, she wondered now if she really could have. She couldn’t imagine Adam’s hands on her body, his mouth teasing her

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flesh.

But this man, well, he made her feel things that surely weren't decent. The forbidden sensations he provoked were intoxicating and though she was ashamed to admit it, she wanted more. Wanted to let him...

He'd offered to take her with him. That could easily be a lie, she knew. Wouldn't he say anything to get what he wanted? Once he had it, he could easily leave. And where would that leave her?

But if she refused him, would she be any worse off? Her traitorous body wanted him to finish what he'd started, to feel his touch again. If he disappeared the next day, she'd still have no home, no family. No one to care for her.

But she had her freedom. What happened in her life was now her choice. She didn't have to live under the cruel control of her cousin now and she was free of the brothel and its loathsome mistress. And Adam? She'd asked for his help, but he couldn't force her to be his mistress. He had no claim to her at all.

She could choose to let the beautiful stranger before her have his way with her body as easily as she could choose to reject him. For the first time, she felt empowered, free.

"Who are you?" she wanted to know before another thing was said or done.

"Anthony is my name." His voice was soft, as was the graze of his fingertips across her cheek. "And if you knew anything more you would run away in terror. As far and as fast as you could."

Mia nodded her agreement. "I know."

He pulled her against his body, hard.

"No, you don't know." The features of his face hardened. "I've been living in exile here. I'm a—"

"It doesn't matter," Mia said, cutting him off, her decision made. Whatever he was, he would have hurt her by now if that were his intention. Instead he offered pleasure, and she didn't want to live with

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the regret of having refused him.

Leaning into him, she pressed a kiss to his shoulder, feeling the warmth of him through the linen shirt. Her lips had barely touched his throat when his arms encircled her like steel bands and she felt herself tumbling backwards onto the small, lumpy bed.

Anthony's lips claimed hers in a fiery kiss as his hands worked frantically at the clasp of her cloak. The fabric ripped as he yanked it sharply from her body, revealing her as she had been in the brothel. His breath was harsh as he pulled back to look at her, devouring her with his eyes. His large, rough hands slid under the bodice of her costume, his fingers closed over her breasts, and he lowered himself to her again.

"Mia," he whispered as the tip of his tongue flickered against her lips. He nibbled at her lower lip, his teeth closing gently on the soft curve. Anthony possessed her mouth with slow, intoxicating kisses, pausing to brush kisses on her eyebrows, her temple, her cheeks.

Mia shivered as his lips scorched a trail down her throat to her shoulder. She wanted to wrap her arms about him, pull him closer to her. She struggled awkwardly beneath him with the costume chain.

"I want to touch you," she whispered.

There was a trick to unfastening the manacles and he managed it easily.

Once her arms were freed she slowly wrapped them about him. Never before had she been so aware of a man, the hard muscles beneath the white linen, the power he held in check as his lips and hands caressed her. Mia clung to him as he tore the bodice from her with a savage yank and feasted on the creamy mounds of her breasts. He pulled the points into his mouth, gently biting, suckling, making her moan in pleasure.

It was then that she felt his hand trailing up her thigh to the sensitive cove he'd touched earlier. The bottom of her costume went the way of the top, a scrap of gold flying off the bed. Anthony again took her lips as his fingertips brushed the dark satiny curls at the top of

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her thighs, lightly at first, then delving deeper into her velvety wetness. Mia gasped into his mouth as his fingers teased and explored her, centering on a spot so sensitive that she nearly threw him off. Relentlessly, his finger teased the center of her pleasure, building again the excruciating pleasure that she'd experienced in the brothel. Only now, she feared she'd expire from it. She needed something...couldn't bear it if he stopped.

His moan was a low growl in his chest as he watched her with amber eyes. Mia jumped when he kissed her ear, so sensitive she was. His warm tongue and breath teased the delicate shell as his fingers continued their gentle assault.

“Would you like me to kiss you there, Mia?”

His laughter was rich and deep at what must have been a shocked expression on her face. But it didn't deter him as he slid down her body, his lips tasting and tantalizing her ribs and flat belly as he went. Mia tried in vain to push him away as he settled himself between her legs. But Anthony wrapped his muscular arms about her thighs, holding her in place and open to him. His warm breath pelted her before he pressed a kiss into the dark thatch of curls.

When his tongue began to slowly stroke her sensitive flesh, Mia knew she would expire from the pleasure. Her hands clutched the coarse tawny locks of his hair, writhing beneath him as his tongue traced the inner petals of her sex. He took his time tasting her, teasing her, finally lapping delicately at the nub where all sensation intensified, making her feel as if she would shatter into pieces.

Mia's cries were barely audible over the din of the bawdy tavern. Something was coming, she knew, as she squirmed in his grip, unable to bear more of his sensual torture. Her body tensed, her nipples tightening almost painfully as the sensation climbed to an impossible summit, then exploded. Strong waves of exquisite feeling washing over her.

His masculine weight moved over her body, and she welcomed it,

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clinging to him as the intense pleasure relaxed its grip on her. Something hard and hot and velvety smooth brushed her inner thigh as his knees insinuated themselves between hers, spreading them wide. Mia shuddered in anticipation as she felt pressure at her center, felt him pushing his way into her tight, virginal opening. At first the stretching was slightly uncomfortable and he soothed her with soft kisses to her shoulders, her face. Then came sharp pain as he buried himself inside her as far as he could go, sealing his mouth over hers to take her cry of pain.

Mia felt him grow still above her, allowing her to stretch inside to accommodate his incredible length, his thickness. She had no idea if a man was supposed to feel as he did inside her; she only knew that she couldn't possibly bear it if he were the tiniest bit larger.

The pain faded quickly and she relaxed. Anthony obviously sensed the moment she did, and began a gentle sliding in and out of her. Her slick passage closed around him tightly, stroking him as his movements became a driving rhythm that had her writhing again, wrapping herself around him. His kisses were slow, skillful explorations of her mouth as he moved inside her. Mia's fingers plucked at the buttons of his shirt, darting underneath to slide on his slick, warm skin. She felt vulnerable but decadent being naked while he was clothed, riding high on the sensations that were building once more.

Mia clung to him, rubbed herself wantonly against him, as the sensation grew and he hauled her up to tongue her nipple when it tightened to a sharp point. Mia hung onto him as her climax overtook her; she could do nothing else, her nails digging into his flesh. He deepened his strokes at just the right moment, pushed more firmly to prolong her release and she cried out over and over as he held her in place and kept driving on.

Anthony's movements quickened, his arms tightening almost painfully about her. He threw back his head when he found his own release, moaning loudly as he pushed into her one last time and held.

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Mia struggled for breath as he rolled off to lay by her side, his own harsh breath fanning her hair. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so relaxed and she'd never felt so beautiful, so womanly.

“What is that smile about?” she thought she heard him ask.

But Mia didn't answer. She was fast asleep.

CHAPTER 7

Mia awoke to the sound of the room's door opening and she scrambled to sit up in the bed, to pull the crude quilt up to cover her breasts. A beam of moonlight shone through the room's window to cast light on her, but she couldn't see as her eyes adjusted to the darkness.

"Oh, don't do that." Anthony closed the door behind him. His voice was soothing. He carried a candle in one hand and a cracked blue bowl in the other. Placing both on the table by the window, he said, "No need to be shy now."

Why indeed, she thought, watching him dip a cloth into the bowl and wring water from it. Unceremoniously, he approached the bed and pulled the quilt back to reveal her body.

"What are you doing?" Mia grabbed the quilt to cover herself again.

He blocked her with a powerful forearm. "Let me."

Awkwardly, she allowed him to pull her legs apart and cleanse her where their bodies had joined. The cloth was warm as he caressed her sensitive flesh and bottom with it. She had relaxed by the time he

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wiped her thighs.

Anthony leaned forward to capture her lips in a light kiss. “How do you feel?”

“It doesn’t hurt.” She couldn’t believe they were discussing what had happened between them. “Just a little soreness when I move a certain way.”

“What a blush!” He laughed. “You’ve nothing to be ashamed of, Mia. What we did was rather tame compared to what you would have experienced at Madam d’Entremont’s.”

Mia had a hard time believing that. “What else is there?” she wanted to know.

His grin was devilish. “Oh, Mia. There is so much I want to show you, do with you.”

She watched him rise from the bed and walk back to the window. He picked up something he’d pulled from his shirt when they’d first entered the room, something wrapped in a dark cloth. He returned to the bed with it, his clothed thigh brushing hers as the bed accepted his weight.

“What is that?” she asked.

Holding it in his open palm he allowed her to pull the cloth away to reveal one of the trinkets from the table of her room at the brothel. The long, smooth object was made of shining glass and oddly shaped—round with a cap on one end that reminded her of a mushroom. Mia carefully lifted it in her hand, studying it.

“I don’t understand.” She glanced up at him curiously. “What is it for?”

“Allow me to show you.”

Anthony pulled her into his arms, dazzling her mouth with a passionate kiss. She clutched the trinket tightly in her hand as his mouth raced down to her nipple, tightening it with swirling touches of his tongue. He pressed her onto her back as his tongue dipped into her navel. He traced wet circles around it before plunging in and out in a

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mimic of the sex act. His fingers skimmed up her leg to find the moisture at the apex of her thighs. He teased her to bring forth more moisture, more heat. His kisses trailed down her belly, joining his busy fingers, while his tongue devastated the center of her womanhood. He slid first one, then two fingers into her tight body.

Release approached swiftly and she clasped the glass object tighter in her hand. She'd almost reached the summit when he stopped kissing her, touching her.

"Not yet," he whispered as he freed himself from the black breeches he wore and pushed into her, finding her ready to accept him.

Mia gasped as his hot flesh filled her and quickly rebuilt the craving. He braced himself on his elbows above her, watching her face as his body moved in and out of hers slowly, deliberately. Mia's head tossed on the pillow as release approached again.

And again he denied her.

Locking her thighs around him, she tried to pull him back into her but he wouldn't allow it. Instead he took the glass object from her, his gaze intense as he watched her.

"Trust me," he bade her, and rolled the object in his large hands.

Too late she realized what he intended to do. Slowly he nudged the mushroom end of the glass against her opening until she felt it sliding in. Panicked, Mia tried to swat his hands away.

He silenced her with a kiss. "Trust me," he said against her lips. "I will not hurt you."

Mia was uncertain, but she tried to relax as she laid back. Her thighs trembled as the glass slid slowly into her body, filling almost as much as he had. It was hard, unyielding in her body. And not too unpleasant.

"That's right," he whispered, smiling. "Relax. And I'll give you incredible pleasure."

Anthony lowered his mouth to her, his tongue tracing her opening in unbearably light circles all around the smooth glass. Her thighs clasped about his head, the sensation nearly unbearable. He wouldn't

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allow it. He pressed her slender legs open with his hands and held them wide. He devastated her with his tongue, gently moving the glass in and out of her at the same time until she wanted to jump out of her skin.

He brought Mia to first one climax then another this way, seeming to be in no particular hurry. She believed him to be done with her when he pulled himself up into a sitting position, but he left the glass in place and urged her onto her stomach.

“Please,” she begged, “I want to feel *you* now.”

His laughter was a low rumble. “As you wish.”

She spread her thighs in anticipation as she felt him move her from behind. She waited for him to pull out the glass, wondering if the act could be done with her lying on her stomach. Her answer came quickly when she felt the hot smooth head of him pressing against her, sliding up to her bum and back on the wetness her body had produced. She felt the glass move within her, several smooth strokes. But he did not pull it from her as she expected.

He had something else in mind.

“No!” Mia squeaked as she felt the head of him pressing against her bum, probing into an area she wasn’t sure was meant to entertain a man. But he’d anticipated her fright. His weight held her in place as he gently slid into that other opening, causing her to burn and stretch uncomfortably as he went.

“It hurts!” she cried.

“Not for long,” he whispered into her ear, his tongue delving into its center playfully. “Relax, Mia. I promise you will like this.”

Long moments passed as her body accommodated him in one opening and the glass in the other. One of Anthony’s hands slid beneath them to find her flesh, to gently tease the center of her pleasure. Mia began to writhe under his touch, her movements making her aware of the hard glass and his hard body. Slowly he began to move within her, his fingers never ceasing, and Mia clutched the quilt beneath her as intense sensation ravaged her body. More than anything she wanted

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him in her center, not the unyielding, unmoving glass. But as the moments quickly passed, she was crying out, release near. He'd allowed her to pull her legs together, making the glass more of an exquisite pleasure, as he moved in and out her bum. His fingers drove her to madness, as her body soared, powerless to stop it.

Anthony moved in her a few times more before crying out his own release. He slid the glass from her body gently before pulling her against him as he joined her on the bed.

He pressed a kiss into her hair. "Any other questions?"

"No more." She could barely speak, barely breathe.

"Go to sleep then," he whispered. He wrapped her in his strong arms and, overwhelmed by his lovemaking, she did just that.

CHAPTER 8

“I thought she would be with *you!*” Adam Wood’s outraged voice rang through the room Nicholas had rented for his stay. “And you leave her all night in the company of a pirate! A murderer!”

Mia’s jaw dropped as she looked to Anthony for an explanation.

And if you knew anything more you would run away in terror.

His words from the night before played in her mind as her gaze met his. Anthony’s handsome face was a mask of implacable calm, his steady gaze showing no surprise at Adam’s accusation.

“Anthony is no murderer,” Nicholas Wolfe said, jumping in.

“Of course he is!” Adam’s high voice reminded her of a whining child’s. “He murdered a woman in cold blood in London!”

Her heart leapt into her throat. How could that be? Her dark lover had murdered someone? An innocent woman?

“Mia, are you all right?” Adam asked with concern as he took her hand and pulled her away from where Anthony stood.

“I’m fine,” she said as his blue eyed gaze raked over her.

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Anthony had managed to find her a decent muslin morning dress to wear with her torn cloak. He'd brought her fruit for her breakfast, and had slowly made love to her as she'd awakened. He'd murmured endearments to her all the while, telling her he'd protect her always, take care of her.

Was he a killer?

Satisfied that she was unharmed, Adam pulled a great bag from a corner of the room and shoved it rudely at Anthony.

"Take it and leave," he said with a sneer.

Anthony's mouth was a grim line and she could tell he fought himself to keep his silence. His eyes flashed a message to her as he headed for the door with Nicholas.

All you have to do is leave, Mia. Once he's given me the money and I've left with it, leave. I'll be waiting for you.

But did she dare? Was he truly a pirate and a murderer?

Her heart pushed her to run after him, flee Adam's company. Mia's heart sank as she watched Anthony quit the room. Wasn't he the man who'd had the courage to save her from the cruel fate her cousin had planned for her? In a single night he'd taught her about passion, made her realize she had choices after all.

But had he told her the truth about the young man before her who she'd considered a friend?

"I'm so glad you are safe, Mia." Adam took her cold hands in his and smiled. "I was terrified when I learned what Edward tried."

Mia nodded, her eyes searching his. "Thank you, Adam. I don't know that I'll ever be able to repay you for this kindness. But I'm getting ready to start my life over. And if there is ever any way that I can be of help to you, all you need do is find me."

She easily read the confusion in his boyish face. "Find you? Mia, where do you plan to go? Edward still holds your father's lands and wealth. You've nothing. What will you do?"

"I'll find a way," she assured him, watching his ever pleasant

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features darken.

“Mia,” he began, his thin hands clasping her arms. “Be realistic. Unless you plan to work as a servant, you’ll be living out in the streets.”

“What’s wrong with being a servant?” she asked. “It’s a noble living.”

“You were meant for finer things,” he said through his teeth, his growing agitation clear.

Mia smiled at him through her disappointment. “Is that a proposal, Adam?”

She could have laughed at the expression of panic on his face if she hadn’t felt so unhappy with his betrayal. And she’d believed him so she had herself to blame as well. The moment stretched out painfully until he finally answered her question.

“I cannot marry you, Mia.”

“That’s right.” She pulled herself free of his grasp. “You already have a fiancée.”

His jaw locked. She’d never seen him like that. Gone was her smiling, gentle friend and in his place was a skinny, hard-faced stranger. Mia’s heart began to beat out her growing alarm.

“Mia, that doesn’t mean we can’t be together.” Adam again caught her arms in his hands, willing her to meet his gaze.

“That doesn’t mean I can’t be your mistress, you mean?” she spat, again shrugging out of his grasp. “No thank you.”

She turned on her heel to flee, blinking back tears. At least Anthony had told her the truth. She’d just reached the door when Adam grabbed the back of her dress. The fabric ripped in his thin hand as he stopped her from leaving.

“You can’t just disappear, Mia.” Adam’s face twisted into a cruel mask. “Not after what I paid that blackguard to fetch you.”

“I beg to differ,” Anthony’s voice broke in.

Mia’s heart swelled with hope as Anthony’s fist connected with the

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smaller man's jaw and sent him sailing across the floor. Adam struggled to pull himself up after a moment. Then his eyes rolled back in his head and he fell limp.

"Anthony!" Mia flew into his open arms, feeling at home. "You were a pirate?"

His expression was grim. "Yes."

"And a murderer?"

Anthony's expression was serious. "I've killed men, Mia. That I won't deny. But the woman whose murder I was convicted of didn't die by my hand."

Mia wanted to believe him, her heart told her to believe. Hadn't he told her the truth about Adam? The hard lines of his face were unyielding, but his amber eyes were gentle as they moved over her face.

"How did she die?" She had to ask.

He swallowed hard before he answered her.

"I was not in time to save her." His voice was low. "She was the widow of a wealthy merchant in London. She and I saw each other for a time. I had enemies, clever enemies. They killed her to get to me and set the stage for my conviction.

"I've never admitted that to a soul, Mia. Not even to Nicholas, my closest friend. I've never given a good damn what people thought. The reason I tell you is because I do care what you think. I want you to be with me."

So much emotion flashed in his eyes. Mia lifted her hand to gently touch his face and Anthony turned his cheek into her palm. The simple gesture telling her he sought her acceptance, absolution.

"I want to be with you, Anthony."

His smile transformed his grim countenance and had her heart racing. He lowered his mouth to hers, promising with his kiss to protect her, to please her. His arms held her possessively and she pressed into him, savoring his heat and strength. In that moment Mia knew that she

WOMAN IN CHAINS

would follow Anthony anywhere...

And then, hand in hand, they made their way out into the sunshine to begin a new life together.

ISABELLA JORDAN

Isabella Jordan is the author of several published short stories and articles. By day Isabella is an instructor at a university in her native Virginia. By night she writes erotic tales and fantasies—and eats chocolate! In her spare time she enjoys life. While Isabella enjoys spending quiet time with her family and reading, she also enjoys bungee jumping, hiking, walking in the rain, rock 'n' roll and volunteering at her local women's shelter.

Isabella would love to hear from readers. Please visit her web site at www.isabellajordan.com or write to her at isa@isabellajordan.com.

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***Don't miss Electrical Storm, by Isabella Jordan,
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Alison Tholl knew she'd lost the best thing in her life when she ended her relationship with Paul Walker a year earlier. Still not over him, she returns to the scene of their parting. Time couldn't heal the wounds to her heart, but could it rip open and give her another chance with her lover?

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