

ELLORA'S CAVE *Legend*



**BAD** *Sitty*  
DEBRA GLASS

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Bad Kitty

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# ***BAD KITTY***

**Debra Glass**

## **Chapter One**

*London, 1820*

“Oh my dear, he isn’t received,” Lady Martha Ashcroft whispered under her breath to Lady Emily Blevins.

Katrina Hartford had never been one to be entertained by idle gossip but Lady Ashcroft’s harsh condemnation of another party guest snared her attention.

“Indeed?” Lady Blevins inquired, squinting to view the subject of scandal.

“I’m shocked to see him here. He has the most deplorable reputation.”

Katrina would have passed them by on her way to hear one of the local girls play the pianoforte but instead, out of curiosity, she lifted her gaze to see for herself about whom the ladies spoke so harshly.

It was a mistake.

Even amidst the crowd of summer season party attendees, Katrina knew immediately which one held the deplorable reputation.

Taller than the others and with a head full of wavy black hair, the man was arrogant, too proud in his stance. Although his coat was tailored to his body perfectly, he was far too big and broad to have been bred a gentleman. Instead he had the physical build of a man who knew hard labor, who worked outdoors. His skin was as dark, as olive, as that of a gypsy. A commoner.

His dove-colored breeches strained, leaving little to the imagination, and when Katrina realized she was gaping at the bulge at his crotch, she chided herself and tore her gaze away.

And yet there was something graceful about his movements, the way he held his brandy snifter, his posture, which revealed the breeding of a gentleman.

Katrina swallowed. He had the look of a predator – a sleek, black jungle cat on the prowl who captivated his prey with hungry eyes.

There was something else about him Katrina could not put into words. Because of Lady Ashcroft's condemnation and Katrina's own intense aversion to cocksure men like this one, she stopped to hear more.

"Oh yes," Lady Ashcroft continued, her rouged lips pursing with self-superiority. "That is Bram Barclay, Earl of Wiltshire, the only son of the Duke of Whitfield."

"The man looks coarse," Lady Blevins added.

"Ha!" Lady Ashcroft chided. "Coarse is hardly the word to describe Wiltshire."

Katrina wished they would get on with their gossip. She couldn't hover behind the two ladies long without attracting their attention and subsequently being foisted as a potential marriage partner on their grandsons and nephews.

No. Katrina had no desire to marry. Her parents had both left her a comfortable inheritance. Although at twenty-two, she was still a ward of her father's brother, Jasper Hartford, she hoped one day to settle into a small estate and pursue her passion for writing.

Already she had a following, anonymously writing political satire under the decidedly male pen name of Alistair Allenby. Katrina was an avid fan of Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and believed as she had that both women and men were responsible for the inequalities between the sexes. Why women would allow themselves to be coddled, patronized and, above all, controlled by men was beyond Katrina.

"Do tell," Lady Blevins encouraged her friend.

*Yes, get on with it*, Katrina thought impatiently.

Lady Ashcroft leaned closer, as if she had a precious morsel to impart, the decorative ostrich plumes in her hair partially obscuring Bram Barclay from Katrina's view.

Katrina assumed the man in question was having an affair with this or that married woman or widow. She never expected the next words that came out of Lady Ashcroft's wrinkled lips.

"He delves in debauchery at its worst! He uses women for his own sadistic pleasure and then tosses them aside like so much garbage. And the height of it is—no woman will turn him out!"

"Debauchery?"

Lady Ashcroft's eyes narrowed as if Lady Blevins should understand without her having to spell it out. "Women seek him out...for the act of being...*punished*."

Katrina's lips parted. Her gaze darted to the subject of gossip and her heart skipped a beat when she realized Bram Barclay was looking directly at her. A torrid blush rose to her cheeks and she looked away, pretending she wasn't listening to Lady Ashcroft prattle on about him.

"Punished!" Lady Blevins exclaimed. "Whatever for?"

Lady Ashcroft patted her friend's arm to quiet her. "For—dare I even say the words? Carnal pleasure."

"That's ridiculous," Lady Blevins scoffed. "Where did you hear such a thing?"

"Mary Myrtle Merriweather's maid left her service after ten faithful years to go to him. They say he forces his maids to submit to all manner of degrading acts."

Katrina's fists clenched at her sides at the idea of a man *forcing* a woman to do anything, much less unspeakable sex acts. But there was something else unfurling inside her she did not recognize, something warm and sinuous and curious.

Something dangerous.

"What does his wife think of all this lewdness?" Lady Blevins asked.

"He has no wife. And no reason to marry. He's well set and I daresay he pays his maids a pretty penny for their obedience—and their silence."

Lady Blevins nodded in disbelief as her gaze roved over the man.

“Didn’t you hear about the Earl of Rochford’s daughter?” Lady Ashcroft asked, the bobbing of her head setting her plumes in motion.

“No! You know very well that I have been ill these past months.”

“Well,” Lady Ashcroft began. “Apparently she was forced to go to the country. In disgrace, I might I add. The man never lifted a finger to do right by her. Her reputation is completely ruined.”

Katrina caught the blackguard’s eye again, and again she quickly looked away. What kind of fiend would leave a woman in dire straits—especially when he was the cad who had put her in that position? Katrina could not stand to look at him, knowing what he did to and with women. Besides, the man’s gaze had moved over her pale blue India silk dress as if he knew exactly what she looked like underneath the thin fabric.

It was positively indecent.

Her pulse accelerated. But worse, her nipples tightened almost painfully against her stays.

This was ridiculous. She had stood here eavesdropping far long enough but for some odd reason, she could not force her feet to move. Finally she shook herself free of the thrall the fiend had on her and walked away with Lady Ashcroft’s whispered words at her back. “Spankings, blindfolds, restraints, a dungeon in his cellar...”

Katrina knew she should be horrified, even appalled to be in the same room with a person who engaged in those types of...activities.

Her own parents had never laid a hand on her. There had been no need. She had always been the perfect child, the rule follower, always completely in control of her actions. However, stormy images of being thoroughly exposed and bent over, receiving smack after smack from that brute of a man, filled her brain and her body with unexplainable and unwelcome sensations.

Angry at herself for succumbing to such carnal fantasies, she resolved Alistair Allenby would be the one to tell the world what kind of crass man lived in their midst.

Through her *nom de plume*, she could call the earl to the carpet and demand he do right by the woman he had wronged by exposing his wicked lifestyle.

As she passed by him, Bram inhaled the unique scent that belonged only to the woman in the deep blue silk dress. Lavender and...something else. Something that reminded him of fresh linen.

He had noticed her watching him, listening while those two peahens undoubtedly gossiped about him. Even though the dress she wore boasted overly modest décolletage for Bram's tastes, the color set off her eyes and even when she had been across the ballroom he had been able to discern their indigo color. He knew she was the type who did not want to draw attention to her femininity, yet ringlets from her blonde hair spiraled down like arrows, guiding the eye to the swell of her pale breasts. His cock strained against his tight breeches and he shifted from one foot to the other.

Despite everything inside him that warned the woman was not of his caliber, he could not force himself to take his eyes off her. Small steps, taken so that her hips did not sway seductively, revealed she was a woman who was always in control of herself. She would never be the type to give herself over to experience the pleasures of the body.

Although she did not look back as she left the ballroom, Bram relished the fact that she was aware of his gaze on her back.

"Katrina Hartford," Bram heard Henry Hamblen say.

Reluctantly he tore his gaze from the intriguing woman's bottom and looked at Hamblen.

"She's not your...sort, Wiltshire."

Bram already knew that but he asked anyway. "How so?"

"She's refused the suit of any of the eligible beaux in the county."



That fact only piqued Bram's interest. Was she picky or frigid? Perhaps she was merely holding out for the right man. One corner of his lip curled in a self-deprecating smile. He was hardly the right man for a proper, sheltered lady like Katrina Hartford.

Yet her posture, her hauteur, everything about her screamed that she was more like him than any of the other curious and willing women in the room.

He downed the contents of his brandy snifter and was just about to get another when the bewitching, raven-haired Duchess of Blakemore caught his eye.

She gave a slight gesture with her head for him to follow and then she left the ballroom.

Bram made certain the Duke of Blakemore was nowhere in sight before he deposited his empty snifter with the nearest servant and followed the duchess through the double doors onto the veranda, and then into the shadowy garden.

"Bram." He heard the harsh whisper from behind the hedges.

His blood heated at the thought of rutting the duchess again but his thoughts were consumed with the prim, proper Katrina Hartford.

However, the duchess was here. Willing. Ready.

When Bram stepped behind the hedges she was already bent over, her skirts raised to expose the enticing curves of her rump.

"No bruises this time," she bit out as, with a growl, he freed his cock and thrust it up her eager cunny.

The duchess had a taste for the exquisite pleasures of torture and Bram knew her body well. His hand traveled up the gauzy fabric of her dress, where he pulled her bodice down and found her nipple, squeezing until she cried out.

A growl escaped her throat as she covered his hand with hers. "Harder," she urged.

"If we weren't in earshot of your husband's party guests, I'd bend you over my knee and spank your luscious arse."

At his ribald speech, the duchess squirmed on his cock and Bram gripped her hip with his free hand, not caring about her warning not to bruise her. This is what she really wanted. To be fucked hard and fast. Rough. To have her nipple tugged and pinched while he pummeled her.

She melted, mewling as he felt the muscles in her passage clench around him. Bram continued fucking her until the last spasms eddied away and then he withdrew and began to do up his breeches.

For the first time in his existence the desire to finish left him, and he couldn't for the life of himself explain why. He glanced over his shoulder at the duchess, who was smoothing down her champagne-colored dress. One inky ringlet escaped her previously well-ordered chignon and Bram bit back a grin. Although no one could *prove* he'd had her, everyone would know he'd fucked the duke's wife in his own garden.

"Did you not achieve satisfaction?" The duchess raised an eyebrow and looked at Bram.

He graced her with a low bow. "I refuse to find my own pleasure until I am buried to the hilt in your tight arse, Your Grace."

The duchess chuckled as she slipped past him and back to her guests.

Bram stared after her as she climbed the steps to where the light was spilling through the open French doors. Graceful, in command of herself, exhibiting the bearing of royalty, the duchess was a formidable foe and a willing bed partner. Bram should have been thrilled that she was one of his conquests, one of the many ladies of the *ton* who came to him for his expertise in pleasurable taboos that gave a woman permission to fully enjoy the fruits of her body.

And still his thoughts kept returning to the coltish Katrina Hartford, who had probably never known a man's kiss much less had any interest in carnal delights. Blonde, wide-eyed and innocent...

Wouldn't he like to have her bare bottom beneath his palm?

Bram's cock lurched at the thought of discovering how to unlock Katrina's virgin secrets. Would she like to have her rump reddened with his riding crop or was she the type who found pleasure in a good arse rogering? Would she like to have her nipples nibbled? Did she prefer to be restrained or, better yet, forced to stand still, submitting to all manner of tantalizing tortures?

There wasn't a woman alive who didn't like some sort of bondage play.

Bram inhaled and rubbed his burgeoning cock with his hand. "What a rakehell you are," he muttered to himself. Going after virgins wasn't his style.

He had already waited the customary few minutes before returning to the party himself. He straightened his clothing and rejoined the fray.

Katrina had bitten her bottom lip so hard, she tasted the metallic tang of blood. She swallowed and let out the breath she'd been holding. She couldn't believe what she had just witnessed.

That vile man had defiled the duchess between the bushes like a common scullery maid. It was unthinkable!

Still, Katrina had seen the whole disgusting episode from where she sat in the shadows on one of the many garden benches. A furious blush rose to her cheeks when she recalled the depraved words the fiend had uttered to the duchess.

*If we weren't in earshot of your husband's party guests, I'd bend you over my knee and spank your luscious arse.*

And the duchess...

Katrina drew in a sharp breath. She'd had a view of the duchess's face. Never would Katrina be able to erase the memory of the woman's closed eyes, the rounded lips, the furrowed forehead or the harsh sound of her breathing punctuated by every forceful thrust. Obviously she had experienced something...exquisite.

No. The fiend had to have some hold over the duchess. He had to know some secret and he was forcing her to submit to his will in return for his silence.

Why else would a woman willingly surrender to such disgraceful acts?

Surely what Katrina had just witnessed was not really what happened in the dark between a man and a woman.

Her aunt had told her it was a woman's duty to lie back and silently but fervently pray while a man took care of his needs. No woman *enjoyed* the act of sex. Did they?

No. It wasn't possible to enjoy having a man see your most private recesses, much less poke and prod them.

Renewed spite for the man burned through Katrina's veins and she resolved that she would do everything in her power to expose him and rescue women like the duchess from his evil clutches.

## Chapter Two

With her spectacles on and disguised in the common attire of a maid, Katrina waited nervously in the hallway outside Bram Barclay's study.

This was a mistake.

It was stupid.

She had certainly gone mad to be here like this. She had never dreamed the fiend actually interviewed potential servants himself.

Instead, she had assumed she would be whisked in to work anonymously until she could get enough information for her article and then she would make good her escape like a quick hare from the hounds.

She had been wrong. For here she stood, wringing her hands while she waited to be summoned into the devil's lair.

The estate itself was the largest she had ever seen, with sprawling, well-manicured lawns and a massive manor house. While she had entered through the servants' entrance, Katrina had still gotten a grand tour just walking from the head housekeeper's office to this hallway.

Her gaze scanned the gleaming paneled walls that stretched upward to the impossibly high ceilings. The Barclays were an old, old family with strong connections to the crown. It only stood to reason their lands and estates would reflect their wealth.

Katrina's breath caught when the big door swung open and a maid skittered out, rubbing her backside with both hands. Katrina felt her eyes widen as the maid gave her a red-faced look and then disappeared down the hall.

Heavens. What had she gotten herself into?

She had dressed like a boy to spy on various men of the *ton* to get fodder for her articles. She had eavesdropped on ladies while recording their conversations in her notebook. But she had never gone this far before.

Never.

The fiend himself appeared in the doorway. His sun-burnished cheeks were flushed and one corner of his full lips twisted up in a smug smile.

*Oh God, what did he just do to that woman?*

Katrina's heart pounded.

"Miss...*Hartley*, is it?" he asked, his eyes narrowing almost imperceptibly as he took in her appearance. His smile faded.

Katrina cleared her throat. Her gaze clashed with his before she reminded herself she was supposed to behave like a maid. Standing, she kept her chin and eyes down as she dropped into a curtsy.

Bram flattened himself against the door to admit her but not so much that Katrina could not pass by him without her arm brushing his broad chest. Common sense screamed at her to turn and run from this place as quickly as her feet would carry her but she tamped her terror down.

Once this initial meeting was over, she could go about her business of collecting information for her story. She could save other women from the humiliations this man foisted on ladies like the unfortunate duchess and that poor maid who had left this room like a whipped pup.

A shiver tore through Katrina when she heard the door close behind her. Heart fluttering, she felt like a fox pursued by bloodthirsty hounds as the fiend stalked up behind her.

His hands cupped her shoulders and Katrina jolted at the unexpected touch. Heat from his palms radiated through her black cotton sleeves, mingling with the furious burning of the blood in her veins as it raced from the back of her neck to her cheeks.

She tensed.

“What is your given name?” he asked, his mouth only inches from her ear.

“K-Kitty,” she stammered, using the nickname her father had called her before his death.

“Well, Kitty,” he purred. “You are aware why women sign on in my service, are you not?”

She swallowed. Hard. “Yes.” Really, she had only a naïve inkling.

“Good. Then there will be no mistaking my commands,” he said and gave her shoulders a little squeeze before he released her and moved behind his desk.

With grace that seemed impossible for a man his size, he sat in his chair and appraised her.

Kitty kept her eyes lowered. She didn’t dare look at him.

After what seemed like an eternity, he spoke. “You don’t seem like the women who usually come to me. Are you certain you are in the right place?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“Then what am I to call you?” She made the mistake of lifting her shocked gaze to his.

A half-smile played on his lips. “You may call me...Master.”

That heat in Kitty’s face began to trickle downward. She resisted the urge to bite her lip and instead, she pushed her spectacles up on her nose.

“Once again, *Kitty*,” he said, emphasizing her name. “Are you certain you are in the right place?”

“Yes.”

The fiend raised a black eyebrow.

“Yes, Master,” Kitty added.

His gaze moved down her body with deliberate slowness and despite herself, Kitty felt her nipples tightening against her cotton chemise. Her thighs trembled as if the lecher could see straight through her clothes.

"I am a difficult man to please," he said, and Kitty had the distinct feeling he was baiting her.

But for what reason?

His gaze traveled back up to her eyes and Kitty once more lowered her gaze.

"When are your menses?" he inquired bluntly.

Somehow, she stifled a gasp. "Pardon me?"

"Your menses. Your curse. When is it?"

Her face flamed. "What does...that...have to do with anything?"

He laughed as if she should know the answer to that question. "I need to know when to give you the week off. Now, when is it?"

Kitty still could not comprehend his meaning. Did he think menstruating women were unclean? Did he find them distasteful? New ire for him smoldered within her. "If you must know, I had my courses just this last week."

He stared as if awaiting something else.

Realization flooded her. "Master," she added quickly.

He relaxed into his chair. "Take off your clothes."

Kitty's gaze collided with Bram's. "Sir?" Certainly she'd heard him incorrectly.

"My dear, are you hard of hearing?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, Master."

"Take off your clothes. Strip. Down to your drawers. Now. I shall not repeat myself again, Kitty."

Her lips parted to ask him why but he leaned forward in his chair. "Now!"



Kitty stared, debating. She could leave now. She could refuse. But then she would not have her story.

But dear Lord, what would he do to her?

Fear swamped her and she trembled as she reached for the buttons at her throat. She could not tolerate this. She could not submit to this.

“Get on with it,” he urged.

Her breathing quickened as, with shaking fingers, she undid the row of buttons down the front of her dress. Whatever was the purpose of this?

The earl gestured with his hands. “Off with it, girl.”

Hesitantly, Kitty pushed one sleeve down and then the other until her bodice hung around her waist and she stood with her top bared to her thin cotton chemise. Without looking down, she knew her nipples were pebbled and blatantly visible and the way his gaze fixed on them made Kitty even more aware of her breasts. She moved to cover them.

“Don’t you dare,” he warned, his gaze warming as it lifted to hers. “The skirt as well.”

Kitty’s breath left her body in a ragged rush. *No!* Her brain screamed the word and yet her fingers untied her apron and let it fall to the floor. She could hardly believe it when her hands began unhooking the fastenings of her black broadcloth skirt. The fabric whispered downward, settling in a pool around her ankles.

Bram stood and Kitty’s knees went weak. Would he bend her over his desk and take her like he had the duchess?

Somewhere in Kitty’s mind it occurred to her if word got out that she, a chaste woman, was standing here in dishabille in this lecher’s study, she would be ruined, without any prospect for marriage.

But what did that matter?

She never intended to marry anyway and there was her article to think of.

“Is your thatch as blonde as the hair on your head?” he asked.

“Sir!” Kitty said, aghast.

Every muscle in her body grew taut as he came around the desk, his eyes narrowed into slits. “That is a fine chemise for a servant girl,” he said knowingly.

Kitty tore her gaze from his and cast her eyes to the floor. She had already overstepped the boundaries of any servant. She shook as he came impossibly closer.

“I paid you a compliment, girl.”

“T-thank you...Master.”

His devilish chuckle infuriated Kitty but she kept her eyes down while her mind raced at what he might do next. She was in over her head and she realized it. Common sense told her that as soon as she got out of this room, she should leave this place and forget she had ever come here.

“Now, are you going to answer my question or am I going to have to coax it out of you?” Bram asked, dragging her back to the present.

“Question?” What had he asked her again?

“Your thatch,” he ground out.

Kitty’s breath caught. “I’m not sure, Master,” she muttered. She was not about to confirm it was, in fact, the same color. What did he take her for? The same sort of licentious libertine as himself?

“Then let’s have a look at it.”

Her gaze swiveled to his. He could not be serious.

Oh, but he was.

This close, she could see that his eyes were the color of polished silver. This close, she could smell the scent of him, of his masculinity tangled with something spicy and clean. His hair was the blue-black of a raven’s wing and one dimple played on his otherwise chiseled cheek. A combination of chills and perspiration trickled down her spine.

“Draw up your chemise, Kitty,” he said, his voice low and husky like the rough nap of velvet brushed backward.

Everything Kitty had ever been taught about propriety and being a lady simmered beneath her frightened surface but still her hands were already clenching the flimsy fabric, pulling it up, higher and higher.

Cool air brushed her stocking-clad legs and the tops of her thighs, which were bare. Underneath she wore short cotton drawers, the only barrier preventing him from seeing her femininity.

“Remove your chemise, Kitty.” It was a command.

Something deep inside her clenched in anticipation as she drew the fabric up and over her head. Instinctively she attempted to cover her bare breasts with her chemise but Bram took it, tossed it across the room and caught her hands in his before she could move.

Kitty could hardly swallow as his eyes drank in the sight of her breasts, of her diamond-hard nipples. She held her breath, afraid of the slightest movement.

His hands were hot as coals on her wrists and she wondered what that same heat would feel like if he cupped her breasts or if he tugged on her nipples the way he had the duchess’s.

“Do not cover yourself,” he said as he released her.

A surge of something akin to disappointment swept through her at the sudden absence of his touch.

“Now,” he said. “Take down your drawers.”

Kitty’s heart ran wild as she tugged the drawstring that held up her cotton drawers. She even felt as if her pulse were beating in the crevice between her legs but the thought of exposing herself to this rake suddenly became unthinkable. How dare he ask her, a supposed maid in his service, to represent herself to him this way!

“No,” she said with authority.

He laughed and Kitty's cheeks burned with shame and anger. She clenched her fists to keep from slapping the grin right off his face. This was enough. She had no business here. She started to dip to retrieve her clothes but he caught her and, before she could cry out, he had her bent over his desk.

His knee pushed between hers, prodding her legs apart as he easily held both her wrists in one hand and pinned them behind her back.

Kitty bucked until a resounding slap landed on her buttock. Shock immobilized her. Heat radiated through her bottom and, as the sting subsided, something else replaced it.

Something delicious that seemed to prick that throbbing between her legs, making it more acute, almost painful.

Part of her was humiliated beyond belief and another part of her yearned for him to do it again.

Would he?

She struggled.

Once more, the firm hand found its target.

Kitty heard a sigh and realized it was her own voice, sounding very reminiscent of the moans the duchess had made in the bushes that night. This should have been the most humiliating moment of her life and yet Kitty's body rebelled against propriety, wanting more.

"Are you ready to pull down your drawers and show me your cunny, Kitty?"

Her pulse thrummed through her veins in a slow, steady, thick throb and all she could think about was assuaging this yearning between her legs.

What was she considering?

This man was a fiend. A deviant!

But he had her in a vise hold and there was nothing—absolutely nothing—she could do or say now other than yes. Her total loss of control filled her with dark desire she could not explain.

She simply could not agree to it, though. When she had come here to spy on him, to reveal all the horrible things he had done, how could she willingly pull down her drawers like a common doxy and show him her virtue?

“No,” she said, knowing he would surely punish her for insubordination and instinctively her bottom raised a fraction of an inch, awaiting the sting, the throb, the heat.

“So that’s the way of it, is it?” he asked, his voice terse, strained.

Kitty swallowed thickly, listening to the hoarse sound of his breathing, feeling the tension of his thigh that was pressed against hers. But there was more... Oh God, no.

His phallus!

And it was hard as stone.

But there was no time to consider what he might do with that thing. His palm fell on her bottom and she pressed her lips together to keep from crying out. Again and then again.

Kitty’s forehead fell to the cool, polished wood of the desk. Her channel tightened over and over until she felt something wet oozing down her thigh. What was happening to her? She should be horrified at herself. Any sane person would have already agreed to his demands. It was almost as if, by her refusal, she was giving him permission to...spank...her into submission.

With each new slap she whimpered, dying for the fire between her legs to be quelled.

His hips rocked against her thigh and she suddenly knew she wanted that thing inside her. She wanted him doing to her what he had done to the duchess—and the

shocking realization she wanted such a thing made her think she deserved the punishment the earl was meting out to her.

“Do you burn for me?” he demanded. Again his voice was rough. “Do you tingle here?”

Kitty gasped as his fingers sought through her drawers the part of her that ached for him. She rocked toward his hand like an animal but he quickly withdrew it. Inside she was screaming, begging for him to touch her, as if his touch could somehow magically make this carnal ache go away.

He released one of her hands. “Touch yourself.”

“I can’t.”

“Do it, now. Pleasure yourself,” he commanded.

When she hesitated, another slap landed on her buttocks.

And then, as if she had lost all sense of control and decorum, Kitty pushed her hand between her legs and began to furiously rub the hard little nub that so ached for this man’s touch.

*It feels so good...*

She had never known a person could find such pleasure at their own fingertips, and while she struggled to attain something she did not yet understand, Bram soothed her stinging buttocks, kneading and rubbing and encouraging her.

“I smell your cream,” he muttered, rocking against her thigh. “Are you close, Kitty? Yes, that’s it, darling. Let it come.”

Kitty’s knees buckled as something wonderful exploded between her legs, sending waves of mind-numbing bliss through her body. She rode it, feeling herself growing even wetter through her drawers and then, when the last of the spasms in her channel melted away, she grew still.

Shame flooded her.

How could she have willingly committed such lewd and sinful acts?

Bram released her other wrist and moved away, leaving her feeling completely fallen and disgraced. "Get off my desk. Dress yourself."

Some part of her wanted to play the game again, wanted him to ask to see her, wanted him to throw her down on the carpet and rut inside her to bring her to that bliss all over again.

He moved to the window with his back to her. "Are you certain you want to remain in my service?"

This was her way out. She should grab this opportunity and tell him what she thought of him and run for her life.

Instead, she said, "Yes, Master."

### Chapter Three

*Bloody damn hell.*

Bram kept his back turned while he heard her scraping up her clothes and donning them.

He knew if he turned around, she would not make it out of this room with her virginity intact. He inhaled sharply and immediately wished he had not done so. The room was fragrant with her cream, with the scent of her unsullied sex.

He swallowed. What on earth was a woman like Katrina Hartford doing disguising herself as a maid?

It made no sense.

Unless she, like so many others, sought him out for the taboo pleasures only he could provide them...

He had known from the beginning she was not Kitty Hartley the maid, but instead the haughty creature he had seen at the Duke of Blakemore's party.

But why was she here? Most women who sought his services were married and had long since become bored with their bed partners.

Bram recalled his friend telling him that Katrina Hartford had refused the suit of anyone who'd proposed courtship to her. That did not sound like a woman who wanted what Bram had to offer. No. There was certainly some ulterior motive that had brought the curious Miss Hartford to his doorstep.

Bram's conscience prodded him to turn around, to expose her identity and send her packing, but the memory of her body convulsing on her own hand—and knowing full well it was the first time she had ever known such sensations—filled him with the desire to learn more, to watch *her* learn more.



He had seen women in the thrall of deriving pleasure from punishments but, by God, he had never before seen one so thoroughly succumb to the sensual delights the body had to offer. Not like that. Not so quickly.

He shifted from one foot to the other, clenching his teeth at the swell of his cock struggling against the confines of his breeches. An image welled in his thoughts of bursting through her maidenhead and then finding *the little death* inside her treasures.

Every muscle in Bram's body grew taut.

Of course, he would not fuck her.

He was a beast but he was not a goddamn beast.

No. He would and could control his libido and Katrina Hartford would leave here as the virgin she had arrived. There were many other things two people could do that did not involve the actual act of copulating.

Still, the desire had welled in him so strongly, it had taken every ounce of restraint he possessed not to rip off her drawers and plunge his cock up her cunny. Something told him she would have allowed it. Welcomed it even. Propriety be damned.

He had offered every opening for her to leave, to stop, but she had not. She had stayed. She had pulled off her clothes with the exception of her drawers, she had submitted to being spanked.

But he had not broken her will.

Not yet, anyway.

He glanced back at her just in time to see her fastening the last of the buttons at her throat. Here was his opportunity to tell her he knew her ruse, to send her back from whence she came. Instead, he could not believe the words he uttered. "Go find Mrs. Bush. She will instruct you as to your duties."

Kitty started to drop into a curtsy and Bram could have kicked himself for what he said next. "Tell her to assign you to my private suite."

Bram watched her eyes widen dramatically before he turned away from her again.

“Yes...Master,” she said, and then he heard the door close behind her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once she was outside Bram Barclay’s study, Kitty leaned against the wall and struggled to catch her breath. Her entire body quivered with what had just happened. She had been practically naked in front of a man who held the worst reputation in all of England and for the first time in her life, she had felt alive.

It was as if something inside her had taken over her body, had come to life, awakening her to sensations she could never have imagined.

Now she understood those faces the duchess had made. Those rounded lips and closed eyes were expressions of ecstasy. Bram had not been blackmailing her. Quite the contrary.

He had been pleasuring her.

An odd pang of envy rattled Kitty that Bram Barclay had bestowed his affections on another but still, Kitty’s channel spasmed at the thought of having inside her that steely flesh she had felt against her thigh...

Sudden shame flooded her cheeks. What was she thinking? Had she, in the span of half an hour, become a fallen woman given to coarse pleasures of the flesh?

She inhaled.

This was ridiculous. She was too intelligent and far too modern a woman to fall under the spell of Bram Barclay. She was here to collect information, not play his parlor games.

But then, she reminded herself, she hadn’t exactly been given a choice. Somehow that lessened her part in it and left her with pride intact.

Even modern novelists wrote about the taboos behind closed doors, and besides, Kitty knew she had to experience firsthand what Bram Barclay was all about so she could be thorough in her article.

She stood and straightened her clothes and hair and went to find the housekeeper, Mrs. Bush.

Bram was the son of a living duke and thus had not yet inherited his title, however, he was known as the Earl of Wiltshire, one of his father's lesser titles. Rumors abounded that the duke had little, if nothing, to do with his son and would have cut him from his will were he not the only heir to the title.

Despite the duke's opinion of his son, Bram lived in opulent surroundings. Kitty's gaze traveled up the polished walls replete with portraits of grim-looking ancestors. Intricately woven tapestries hung here and there. An occasional vase or sculpture was displayed on an ornate pedestal.

Not even the Duke and Duchess of Blakemore lived on such a luxurious estate.

Kitty feared she would get lost or turned around in Bram's manor but she managed to find her way to the servants' area at the back of the house.

Mrs. Bush seemed surprised to see her again. "So, he took you on, did he?"

The way the old woman's eyes narrowed as she perused her gave Kitty the distinct impression Mrs. Bush knew exactly what had transpired in the study. Had more than one potential servant opted not to remain in the earl's service after that initial interview?

Kitty shifted from one foot to the other, reminded of the creamy wetness dampening her drawers. She swallowed. "Yes ma'am."

"Hmph," Mrs. Bush snorted. "You seem a bit impertinent to me but perhaps the master likes that in a servant. Did he say where he wanted you assigned?"

"His private chamber." Kitty's face flushed hot and she knew Mrs. Bush noticed.

"I shall speak with him about that," she said. "For now, I am assigning you to the kitchen."

Kitty's lips parted but she did not dare say a word. Although kitchen placement was less prestigious, kitchen servants tended to be free to talk amongst themselves

more. She would certainly be able to learn more about Bram there than picking up after him in the chamber.

Still, the idea of toiling in the kitchen instead of seeing the bed in which Bram Barclay slept sent a tendril of disappointment spiraling through Kitty.

“Come,” Mrs. Bush said tersely. And as she began a brisk walk toward the kitchen, she laid down the household rules. “When the master speaks to you, look at him. Keep your hands still and at your sides.”

Kitty’s insides tangled at the reference to “the master”.

“Never engage in idle chatter with other servants around the master. We are to be seen and not heard. Never engage in discourse with the master. If he drops an item, you are to return it on a silver salver – or however he instructs you.”

“Yes ma’am.” The unspoken meaning of Mrs. Bush’s last statement was not lost on Kitty.

“I take it he has informed you how you are to address him?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“If you forget it, you will be duly reprimanded.”

Kitty grew taut at the thought of being *reprimanded* by the master. Heat swelled in her bottom.

“The master is not interested in your opinions. Do not offer them. If he passes you in the hallway or anywhere else in the house, make yourself as indiscernible as possible. Avert your eyes. Do not speak to the master unless he speaks to you first. If you are required to carry something for him, walk a few paces behind him.”

Kitty struggled to match Mrs. Bush’s frantic pace.

“Punctuality is a must. While here, you will receive no visitors. There are few male employees here but fraternizing with them is strictly forbidden on charges of dismissal. Damages to household items will be deducted from your wages. Do you understand, Miss Hartley?”

“Yes ma’am,” Kitty said breathlessly.

Mrs. Bush suddenly stopped and turned to her. “And Miss Hartley, no matter what the master tells you or requires of you, know this – he is your better. Do not take on any childish hopes he will take you as his wife, or even as his mistress for that matter.”

Of course that was the furthest thing from Kitty’s mind but, oddly, Mrs. Bush’s statement angered her. She was not a maid. She was a member of the *ton*, albeit a lowly daughter of a baron. Still.

“Do you understand?” Mrs. Bush asked.

“Yes ma’am.” Kitty understood all too well. That was why she was here. Had Mrs. Bush’s warning lent truth to the rumor Bram had indeed used and left the Earl of Rochford’s daughter in a predicament?

“Good. I feel certain there will be no need for this conversation again then,” Mrs. Bush said before she descended the stairs into the bustling kitchen.

Kitty followed, at once surrounded by the aroma of meat roasting and the pungent fragrances of exotic spices. Heat radiated from the brick ovens and steam rose from a bubbling pot on the hearth.

The kitchen was one of Kitty’s favorite places at her uncle’s house. There, they only had two servants, Holt and Laura, whom Kitty loved like they were her own family. Here at the Earl of Wiltshire’s, Kitty counted at least twenty in the kitchen alone.

And she quickly saw why Mrs. Bush had placed her in the kitchen instead of in Bram’s private chamber. All but one of the kitchen staff were older, unattractive types. For some reason, Mrs. Bush sought to keep Kitty out of Bram’s clutches.

Kitty should have been grateful. Instead, she was irritated. She told herself it was because she would not be able to watch Bram Barclay herself, but the shadow side of her knew it was because her body longed for that all-encompassing feeling only he had ever tapped. In the short time he had known her, Bram had been able to strip her defenses until she was a mewling ninny bent naked over his desk.

After a brief introduction to the head cook, Mrs. Bush left.

“Alice will show you the ropes,” the cook said, gesturing with her knife toward a bright-faced girl who was chopping carrots.

Kitty nodded.

Alice wiped her hands on her apron. “I’m Alice. There’s a knife for you there,” she said, pushing half the carrots on the chopping block toward Kitty.

Kitty took her time, watching how Alice held and chopped the carrots. She had no experience in a kitchen and hoped she could pull this off. She doubted being reprimanded by the robust head cook would be as gratifying as the reprimand she had received from Bram.

Kitty knew Alice was watching her as she struggled to hold and chop the first carrot but, thankfully, by the time she picked up a third, she had grown adept enough not to draw too much attention to herself.

“So the master hired you on himself, did he?” Alice whispered.

Kitty nodded.

Alice wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. “That’s why you’re in the kitchen.”

Kitty quickly saw her opportunity to learn more. “The master wanted me on staff in his private suite.”

“All the more reason for Mrs. Bush to cast you into the kitchen,” Alice said. “She’s hoping he’ll forget about you.”

“But why?”

“She doesn’t care for anyone the master takes to.”

Heat flamed in the back of Kitty’s neck. The master had *taken* to her? Some part of her was thrilled. Another part tried to reason that a man like Bram Barclay was only *taken* with her the same way a cat was taken with a mouse.

“Does that include women like the Earl of Rochford’s daughter?” Kitty asked conspiratorially.

“Silence!” the head cook yelled.

Kitty jumped but did as she was told, disappointed that her first real source had been quashed.

Maybe the kitchen was not going to prove the fount of information she had originally thought. Somehow, she would have to get herself noticed by Bram again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bram stared blankly at the estate’s account books. Normally he had the figures ciphered and everything balanced in a matter of minutes. Now the day had waned as he’d agonized over the same column of numbers for hours—and still could not concentrate on anything but those thin cotton drawers concealing Katrina Hartford’s luscious behind.

The defiant look in her midnight eyes had aroused him beyond sanity. And her breasts...

He inhaled.

Her breasts were perfection. Small with large, dusky nipples, ripe for the touch. It had taken all his self-control not to cup them in his hands, tweak her nipples between his forefingers and thumbs and tug each one until he learned her threshold.

He had sought only to frighten her away but she’d stood her ground and, when she had openly challenged him, he had not been able to resist moving to the next step.

What spell had this bespectacled virgin cast over him?

Bram banged his fist down on his desk and slammed his account book shut. Damn, damn and damn again!

He should have called her ruse. He should have exposed her on the spot and declared she leave immediately. This was no place for a virtuous girl of her age.

Still, he could not drive her from his thoughts.

Her willing submission...

The fragrance of her cream...

He had felt her heat through those drawers and knowing he was the one who affected her, who had driven her to the edge of desire, made his cock swell painfully.

Bram leaned back and stretched one long leg out straight in a futile attempt to assuage the pressure. His gaze fell on the tiny stain on the crotch of his breeches. Damn it all to hell. He was already oozing for her.

Debating, he considered taking this matter into his own hand. Right here. Right now. But it had been years since he had been humbled to the behavior of a boy in the throes of puberty.

Perhaps he should go straight to his rooms and show her the beast that raged between his legs. Maybe then she would be frightened enough to tuck her tail and run.

He shot to his feet and strode with purpose toward his rooms. "You there!" he snapped at a shocked servant.

When she turned though, he saw that it was not Katrina. "Where is she?"

"Who, Master?"

"The new girl."

The maid gulped, staring.

"The new girl. Kitty Hartley," Bram said.

"I am not familiar with a Kitty Hart—"

But Bram was already headed toward the housekeeper's office. Perhaps Katrina had come to her senses and made good her escape. Common sense told Bram that would be the best thing. He should not be entertaining ideas about virgins when there was a plethora of other women willing and able to do his bidding.

The long walk to Mrs. Bush's office did little, however, to calm his rampant lust. He pushed the door open without knocking and eyed a stunned Mrs. Bush. "Where is Miss Hartley?" he demanded.



Instead of dropping into a curtsy, Mrs. Bush stiffened, her resolve incongruous with her thin, birdlike body. "I sent her to the kitchens."

Bram stared. "The kitchens?"

"I thought her impertinent and cheeky. A day in the kitchens will do her no harm."

Bram inhaled. "Woman, how dare you defy me?"

"You sent no note with her. No letter of recommendation. How was I to know she wasn't merely being deceitful? It wouldn't be the first time—"

Bram cut her off. "It is your business to know. And if it happens again, I shall send you packing."

At that, Mrs. Bush lowered her gaze. "I will transfer the girl at once, Master."

Bram started to turn to leave but then he stopped. "That won't be necessary. I'll get her myself."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty had come to the conclusion that Mrs. Bush hated her. There was some reason the woman had secreted her away in the kitchen, openly defying the earl's orders. Cook had kept such an eye on Kitty and Alice that neither of them had the opportunity to talk.

After stirring the venison stew, Kitty set the heavy wooden ladle aside and then wiped the perspiration from her brow. She peeled her sweat-drenched bodice off her chest. The kitchen was doubtless as hot as the fires of hell.

One of the male servants opened the door and brought in a bushel basket of potatoes. Upon seeing the basket, Kitty resisted the urge to groan. No doubt it would be her job to prepare the potatoes.

Her gaze drifted past the basket to the open door and the late-afternoon light spilling in. She could leave right now if she wanted to. She could slip out that door and disappear and no one would ever know...

Was any story worth this?

Perhaps she could just write what she already knew and investigate Bram through some other avenue of information.

A quick glance around the kitchen told her no one was paying her any attention. It was now or never.

Wiping her hands on her apron, she moved toward the door. Toward freedom.

“Kitty Hartley!”

The booming voice nearly made her jump out of her skin.

Kitty whirled, stunned when her gaze fell on Bram Barclay.

Her breath caught.

Unable to conceal their shock, every other person in the kitchen bowed at the sight of their master. Kitty openly gaped.

Bram’s massive frame dominated the doorway, almost completely blotting out the light from the other side. His face was hard and set, his eyes riveted only on her, and when her gaze met his, something possessive sparkled there that shook Kitty to the core. It was almost as if he seemed relieved to find her. Glad.

His gaze traveled down the length of her body and then lifted once more, making Kitty burn with the awareness that he had not only seen her practically naked, he had spanked her bottom and then demanded she pleasure herself while he watched.

Everything inside her grew so impossibly tight she thought if she moved, she would literally snap in half.

“Am I going to have to leash you like a dog, Kitty?” Bram asked.

She swallowed. Hard. “No...Master.” Something about referring to him as her master made Kitty’s insides turn to molten liquid that pooled in her abdomen.

“I assigned placement for you in my private chamber, did I not?”

Kitty’s face flamed. “Yes, Master.”

“Then what are you doing in the kitchen?”

Kitty knew better than to snitch on Mrs. Bush. Any answer she gave him would result in being...reprimanded. "I cannot say, Master."

He appraised her for a heart-stopping moment. "Come with me."

Kitty's pulse pounded in her throat as she readily followed Bram, almost having to run to keep up with his wide strides.

Why had she not left when she'd had the chance? This was insanity. How could she be chasing so willingly after this blackguard when she knew what he was capable of?

He pushed open a door and Kitty found herself standing in a suite of sumptuous rooms.

"All others, out! Now!" he commanded and the servants scurried to do his bidding.

Awareness washed over Kitty. He was indeed going to punish her for her infraction. Now that they were alone, he could do anything he pleased to her. No one would heed her screams. No one would come to her rescue.

This was beyond mad.

It was dangerous.

And already, she felt her cream gathering in anticipation.

The door finally closed behind the last of the servants. Kitty's heart hammered so hard, she could hear it pounding in her own ears.

Bram circled her and it was all she could do to force herself to remain still, to keep her eyes fixed on a decanter of liquor on a table across the room. She knew her breasts were heaving with her quick breaths but she could do little to lessen her rising panic.

*Just tell him! Confess! Put a stop to this!*

Finally he stopped in front of her. One of his long fingers caught her under the chin and he lifted her face so that she was forced to look into his eyes. "Have we met before?" he asked, his voice dropping into that sultry, black velvet drawl.

"No," she said truthfully. While she had attended the same party, she had not been formally introduced to him.

Something diabolical flashed in his eyes. "Raise your skirts, Kitty."

"Sir?"

"Now!" he roared, leaving Kitty with no choice but to comply.

Trembling, she pulled up her skirt.

"Bend over," he said.

Her blood thickened and, as she bent, her channel began convulsing in expectation.

He moved around to her side, his gaze appraising her as she stood in this disgraceful, vulnerable position. "Do you know why I am punishing you, Kitty?"

"No," she squeaked.

He snorted. "That's two," he said.

She jerked when he began to carefully, almost tenderly arrange her bunched skirts on her waist so that her backside was thoroughly exposed. Cool air tickled the backs of her thighs, drifting into the loose legs of her drawers.

"I'll ask you again, Kitty," he said, his voice dropping even lower in timbre. "Do you know why I am punishing you?"

Waiting for it was madness. She ached between the legs and trembled to feel his hand come down on her buttocks. Tears welled in the corners of her eyes that she was submitting to this, that she desired it. "No," she whispered.

"Three," he said with a wicked chuckle. "Have you forgotten that I am your master?"

Realization flooded her along with the memory of Mrs. Bush's words. *I take it he has informed you how you are to address him?* "No...Master."

"That's better," he said, and all the while his caressing hand moved over her rounded buttocks as if he were her lover instead of her nemesis. "You know you are to refer to me as master."

Her legs and back strained from being bent. Her fists ached from clutching her skirts.

“Three violations,” he murmured seductively.

Heat radiated from his body, along with that spicy male scent that belonged only to him. It was driving Kitty out of her mind. She felt as if she had drunk too much wine. Wetness trickled down one of her thighs.

“For each breach of our agreement you have committed, you will ask to be punished,” he told her, while his fingertips traced her cleft through her drawers, down, down, stopping just when she arched toward his hand.

A hot blush burned in her cheeks. She could never *ask* him to spank her. It was beyond cruel of him. But right now, she would have done or said just about anything to get him to put his hand back on her *there*.

“We will stand here like this until you feel you deserve your punishment, Kitty.”

She squeezed her eyes shut, wringing the tears from her eyes. She could not do this. She simply could not ask – out loud – for this even though her body burned for it.

“Are your legs growing weak?” he asked. “Does your back ache?”

*Yes...*

“All you have to do is ask,” Bram said. “All you have to say is, ‘I deserve my punishment, Master. Please spank me’, and it will all be over.”

*No...*

What would happen if she just dropped her skirts and ran for the door? Would he allow her to escape or would he chase her down and plunge his member into her?

His hand slid between her legs, pushing up hard against her most private place, that place that so ached for his touch. “Do you burn here too, Kitty?”

*Oh God, yes.* Kitty struggled to keep from losing her balance when all she wanted to do was spread her legs wider so that he could pleasure her. Heat raced up her spine, settling in her neck and face, and it no longer seemed to matter that he had coerced her to humiliate herself. But just when it seemed as if he might touch her the way she’d

touched herself earlier, he withdrew his hand. Kitty ached from the absence of his teasing fingers. She whimpered.

“Tell your master what you want.” His voice was hypnotic. Insidious.

“I deserve my...punishment, Master,” she managed. “Please...”

“Please what?”

“Please...spank me.”

No sooner had she uttered the words than a hard, stinging slap descended on her buttocks.

Surprised, she yelped, nearly stumbling. This was not like the earlier spanking. He had turned it up a notch but the burning pain quickly subsided into delicious warmth that spread through her backside and down the backs of her legs. *Oh yes.*

“One,” he said, breathlessly.

Kitty swallowed. She was bent with her skirts hiked around her waist but, when she asked for her *punishment*, she was in control of everything he did to her. Everything. “I deserve my punishment, Master. Please spank me.”

A thrill rushed through her body as the second blow fell. This time she heard herself moan. The sharp sting carried her totally into her body, stripping the shame, taking away the choice, giving her permission to *feel*.

There was no humiliation. No guilt. There was only this wonderful heat that made her aware of every inch of her body, of her inner desires she had feared and sought to quell.

*One more...*

“I deserve my punishment, Master. Please spank me,” she said with more authority this time.

Her heart skipped a beat as she waited...and then his palm made contact again and once again fire moved through her bottom, throbbing into a pulsating heat that traveled all over her body.

Her channel clenched and she yearned to bring herself to that bliss once more but disappointment surged when he yanked down her skirts.

“Now, fetch me some wood for the fire.”

She stood and glared at him. How could he be so flippant? How could he just dismiss her after that? Her gaze dropped to his crotch, where it was evident he was also aroused. It made no sense that he had the capability of arousing her body to a fever pitch and then could so easily become the master of the house instead of the master of her pleasure.

What twisted satisfaction did he get out of humbling others?

Kitty debated refusing just to see what he would do but anger had already replaced need. Instead, she ground out, “Yes, Master.”

Bram watched her leave the room. Maybe after that, she would leave his house and disappear from his life—but something inside told him she had thoroughly enjoyed it.

He rubbed his cock as he dropped into his favorite comfortable chair. She was most certainly a novice at the business of being punished. Still, he had never seen a woman succumb so quickly, so willingly, so wantonly.

Her mere curiosity could not be what had prompted her to don those ridiculous spectacles and try to fool him into believing she was a maid. She had to have some ulterior reason for being here—some reason other than to raise her skirts so he could paddle her bottom.

Was she some spy sent by his father? That was a very real possibility but his father would have used a real commoner instead of sending a noblewoman. Perhaps Katrina was one of those women who wrote those torrid novels under an alias and was merely researching a character.

Bram liked that idea better than thinking his father had sent her. He knew his father was mortified at Bram’s reputation and Bram had to wonder if that was because the man was afraid his own dirty secrets would get out.

There was a vast difference in pleasurable punishments and plain cruelty.

Bram shuddered. No. He would not think about that. It was better to avoid the old duke and just wait for him to die.

Surely he would not have anything to do with Katrina's being here. But making inquiries about her would only raise suspicion. How on earth had she gotten away from wherever she lived to pull off this farce?

Bram propped his feet on the footstool, still stroking his aching cock through his clothes. *If she comes back...*

No. Blast! He could not fuck her.

And yet the thought of her saying the words, "Yes, Master, I want you to fuck me," made him shudder from the inside out. He groaned out loud. The least he could do was get her to frig him. Yes. That might frighten her enough to get her gone.

And if that failed to work...

He sighed. He would simply have to get her to talk. Any sane man who thought himself a gentleman would have already asked her straight out. Bram knew he was no gentleman.

Curious as he was, playing this game with a virgin was a damn dangerous thing.



## Chapter Four

For what reason on earth did the fiend need logs for his fire? He had doubtless sent her on this errand to get her out of his rooms. All she had wanted was a smidgeon of satisfaction.

After what happened in Bram's study and chambers, Kitty realized she would not be satisfied until she knew all the pleasures her body had to offer.

Anger raced through her veins as she lugged the heavy load up the back stairs and through the servants' entrance into the master's suite—anger that she had so easily succumbed to her desires and anger that Bram Barclay was the man who had awakened this dark side of her nature.

Again, she could have just kept walking. She could have gotten the clothes she had stashed in the barn near the lane, changed out of this miserable maid's uniform and cut and run for home. As it was, her aunt and uncle would not miss her. She had told them she was accompanying Lady Ashcroft, whom she knew was visiting a friend in nearby Turneyville.

What else was there to be gained from exposing herself to the lecher? So far she had little that she could include in her article, other than he forced his maids to do all sorts of unspeakable, lewd acts.

Her unsatisfied passage shuddered at the thought. What if she refused to refer to him as master? What if she purposefully challenged him?

The idea of it heated her blood.

No. She would not leave this place. Not until she'd gotten all she had come here for.

Her breath caught in her throat when she walked into his sitting room and saw him lounging in his chair, his feet up in a totally masculine but relaxed pose—with his breeches agape and his naked member in his hand.

Her stomach tightened into a knot and she nearly dropped the wood she was carrying.

“Throw that wood on the fire and come over here,” he commanded languidly.

Kitty took her time carefully placing each log on the fire. Her heart ran wild. What if he wanted to copulate with her?

What if he did not?

The idea of it both thrilled and terrified her. Still, no one would ever know she had lost her virginity because she did not intend to marry. But what if he, God forbid, got a child on her?

“Make haste, girl,” he snapped.

Kitty stood and smoothed her skirts as she moved toward him. Try as she might, she could not keep her eyes off his phallus. Although she was no stranger to the beasts mating in the fields, she had never laid eyes on a man’s member before. She had expected to find a man’s penis shameful to look upon. Distasteful.

Bram’s was anything but shameful and distasteful. It was, in a word, stunning. Thick, the monster filled Bram’s large hand, which moved up and down over it, causing glistening liquid to bead at a tiny slit in the mushroom-shaped top. One large vein meandered around the swollen shaft and Kitty found herself wetting her dry lips in anticipation.

“Haven’t you seen a cock before?” he asked.

“No...Master.” She only added his title because she feared what he would do this time.

He stood, his breeches gaping so that she could see the black curls at the base and just the hint of his scrotum. The thing protruded proudly as he moved toward her.

Kitty shook.

“On your knees,” he said.

Without question, she sank to the floor so that she was now eye level with his jutting phallus.

"Look your fill at it," he told her.

Kitty swallowed.

"Do you like what you see?"

*Oh yes...*

"Kitty?" he prodded.

"I have nothing with which to compare it but those of the jackasses in the fields, Master."

He chuckled and took a step closer so that the glimmering head was only inches from her face. This close, she could smell him and the fragrance was driving her crazy with need.

"I'm aching to fuck you," he murmured.

Kitty's gaze shot from his cock up to his eyes.

"You're a virgin, aren't you?" he asked.

Unable to speak, she nodded. Her thoughts ran rampant. Had she answered correctly? She should have told him she was as seasoned as any whore but she had the distinct impression he knew better.

"Why are you here, Kitty?" he asked, stroking his shaft all the way down to his scrotum, drawing the skin over the head so tight, the flesh turned the color of a ripe plum.

Kitty's tongue darted out and wet her lips.

"Why are you here?" he asked and took another step closer.

Kitty gasped when his hand caught the back of her head so he could trace her lips with the tip of his cock. Instinct surged and she fought the desire to open her mouth and take him inside it.

"It's all right, my dear. You may taste me if you like."

She clamped her lips shut.

“Why are you here?” he asked again, his fingers burrowing into her hair, teasing the back of her neck, loosening her chignon.

“To work for you, Master,” she uttered, her lips brushing his cock as she spoke.

He sighed and Kitty got the impression he was exercising inhuman control to keep from rutting her mouth the way she had seen him rut the duchess’s private parts. Terror welled that he might do just that. Equal terror welled that he might not. Mixed with both was fear that he knew her secret, that he knew she was not really a maid, but instead Katrina Hartford come here to expose him in an article penned by Alistair Allenby.

His cock prodded her lips again and Kitty wrestled against the hand that held her fast. Realizing resistance was futile, she stilled.

“Did you have *this* in mind when you decided you wanted to work for me?”

“No.”

He gave her hair a hard tug.

“No, Master.” Her voice rose with her hysteria.

“Certainly you knew of my reputation,” he said.

“Reputation?”

“Don’t be coy, Kitty,” he said, tracing her lips again so that she opened her mouth ever so slightly.

He growled. “Don’t be coy,” he said again, this time lower. “I’m a bad sort, a defiler of women. I’m damn debauched is what I am.”

Kitty quaked.

“Touch me,” he commanded and at once, her hand replaced his on the thick shaft.

Kitty’s breath left her lungs in a ragged rush. His skin was velvety soft, sheathing the hard steel underneath. She could actually feel his blood pulsing through the bulging vein running its length.

“Squeeze it. Harder. That’s it.”

She whimpered as flames licked her inner thighs. She wanted his member inside her passage rather than in her hand. It no longer mattered that he was the fiend she had come here to burn. He was making *her* burn instead.

“Move your hand up and down,” he instructed, placing his around Kitty’s to guide it.

She watched, mesmerized as more of the shimmering liquid beaded at the head, and instinctively she knew it was a lubricant to ease the movement of her hand over him.

“Why did you come here?” he asked again.

She could not answer him. Anything else she said would be an obvious lie. Instead, she opened her mouth and engulfed the head of his cock. The taste of him was salty yet sweet. Power and lust surged through her as she flattened her tongue and licked him, tugging at him with her lips, impulsively sucking.

His hand tensed in her hair and she seized hold of his shaft with both hands, anchoring him in place while she rolled her tongue and lips all over the luscious head as if she could not get enough of it.

His body shook and Kitty scooted closer, reaching behind to cup his buttocks, to draw him closer as she took more and impossibly more of him into her mouth. The head drove toward the back of her throat but she did not care. Somehow she knew she could give him that same feeling she had given herself earlier and then, suddenly, hot liquid filled her mouth and she gulped it down.

His hips rocked toward her and the most sensual sounds Kitty had ever heard came from deep within Bram’s being. He uttered words she had never before heard. He growled. He groaned. He moaned. And then, he breathed her name. “Kitty. Yes, Kitty. Goddamn, suck my cock.”

Bram's vision cleared and he looked down at the beautiful woman laving every last drop of his essence with her pink tongue. Something tender twisted inside him as he pulled away and did up his breeches.

Kitty's blue eyes grew stormy as she looked at him askance.

Bram stared, shaking.

"W-what about me...Master?"

He drew in a deep breath and blew it out slowly. If he really wanted to torture her, he would turn his back and tell her to fend for herself. As it was, his nostrils were filled with the sweet scent of sex and his mind was filled with the sight of her lovely, swollen, cock-sucking lips.

Why was she not leaping up off the floor and running? Did she not realize the peril she was in?

Apparently not. She was drawing up her skirts, reaching underneath to push her drawers down.

The fool.

Bram groaned as he dropped to the floor and, as if they were dancers who knew the steps to some intricate performance, Kitty reclined on the rug. As she pulled her skirts up to her waist, Bram slid her underthings down over her stockings, over her black shoes and off. He breathed in the sweet, feminine scent of her as he slanted his head down, down, to her already creamy cunny.

Her thatch was indeed the same pale blonde as the hair on her head and as much as he wanted to take his time, to savor this untasted treasure, he knew her need.

Kitty's thighs trembled as Bram pressed a soft kiss to the little crest peeping proudly from her folds.

Her fists tightened on her skirts. A whimper escaped her lips. "Please," she begged, shuddering. "Taste me, Master."

*God in heaven, what did I do to deserve this precious morsel?*

Bram dipped and suckled her clitoris, running his tongue downward to dart in and out of her damp opening. So sweet. So damn sweet.

He could not be gentle. It was not in his nature. With an animalistic growl, he gripped her pale thighs and parted them before he dove on her crimson clitoris, sucking, gnawing, laving. He knew just where to apply pressure, just where to tease and just where to titillate. Kitty shook and then suddenly, her hips tilted and she was rolling up, holding her bottom off the ground, pushing herself up on tiptoe, toward his hungry mouth.

Bram seized her hips and buried his face in her essence while she rode out the first climax she had ever experienced at the touch of a man.

As she sank limply to the rug, he followed, kissing her, licking up her honeyed nectar. Resting his head on her thigh, he closed his eyes, still holding her hips, still fanning hot breaths on her center.

What had he done?

And what sort of power did this woman have over him that he had gone against the rules he had set for himself? He had sworn never to defile a virgin, especially a member of the *ton*. Yet here he was, thoroughly unmanned and wedged between her legs like a lovelorn suitor instead of the man in control he forced himself to be.

This was no maid he could tumble at a whim. She was a lady.

A misguided lady but a lady nevertheless.

A lady he had no business tonguing to orgasm.

Now was the time to release her. Now was the time to announce he had been aware of her deception from the beginning.

But what deception? What was her purpose here? The thought struck that perhaps she was here to land herself a husband and, while the thought of marriage to Katrina Hartford was not entirely repugnant to him, Bram had made a vow to himself that he

would never marry as long as his father was alive. He would not give the old duke the satisfaction of thinking his bloodline would continue after his death.

Bram inhaled sharply and his senses filled once more with the scent of his virgin lover.

No. Now was not the time to expose her.

He drew away from her and clambered to his feet. "Undress yourself."

She stared up at him, dazed, her legs still spread wantonly wide, displaying her glistening folds. Beautiful. Wet. Ready. Willing. Bram's cock leapt and his unquenchable, uncontrollable desire infuriated him.

"Blast, girl, get up and take off your clothes!"

Scrambling, Kitty lurched to her feet and began shucking her apron and dress. This time there was no hesitation as she yanked off her chemise.

*Good Lord, she wants it!*

Bram stared, knowing she wanted him to fuck her – knowing *he* wanted to fuck her. Why could he not control what words sprang from his lips? Damn and blast!

"Get in my bed." Inside, he cringed. That was the last place she needed to be. Naked and warm and curious – and in his fucking bed. Had he gone completely mad?

Uncertainty flashed in her deep blue eyes before she bent to pick up her discarded clothing.

"Leave them," he said, holding her gaze as she straightened and then moved toward his bed.

"Take down your hair and take off those bloody spectacles," he ordered before he scooped up her clothes and tossed them on the fire.

She gasped and his gaze shot to her once more. Shockingly beautiful, she stood, her blonde tresses curtaining her shoulders, her swollen lips parted in surprise.



“You won’t be needing those anymore,” he said as he poured himself another drink. This was sheer insanity. But until he found out her reason for being here, he could not have her amongst the other servants.

Forcing himself not to watch her crawling into his bed, he returned to his chair. Before he lifted his snifter to his lips, he savored the taste of Kitty’s cunny once more. It would be heaven to sink his cock into her, to feel her arms around him, her fingers weaving through his hair...

The fantasy was a new one. Normally he imagined bending a woman over, and once he had aroused her to a fever pitch with welcomed punishments, he would fuck her into oblivion and then leave her until the next time she came begging for more.

With Kitty, he wanted something more. He wanted to share the experience instead of controlling it.

The need rattled him to the core. He had never been unsatisfied after expelling his seed, but this time was different. He still wanted to fuck more than her pretty mouth. And the care, the tenderness with which he had made certain she had achieved satisfaction was so uncharacteristic he hardly knew himself.

He glanced at his bed. At least she was still. She was probably already sleeping. But Bram knew that one word, one plea from her pouting lips, one entreaty to partake of the treasure between her legs, and he would be at a perfect loss.

No, he thought as he swirled the amber liquid around in his snifter. He would spend the night right here in his chair. Turning up his glass, he downed the contents, chasing away the taste of Kitty’s cunny from his mouth and the ragged urge to fuck her from his body.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sleep was impossible. Kitty had no idea how much time had passed since Bram had sent her to bed. For the first hour she awaited him to join her. She wanted him to come

to her and strip off his clothes. She wanted to feel his skin against hers, his fingers probing her, his mouth on her breasts and on that place between her legs again.

Squeezing her thighs together, she twisted under the soft covers.

He had thrown her clothes on the fire. All of them. Some part of her thrilled that she would remain naked in his service and she anticipated all the things he might do.

Just this morning she had been intent on exposing him. Now she was the one who was so utterly and thoroughly exposed.

She bit her bottom lip, recalling how he had buried his face between her legs and suckled her. She had never in her life felt anything so exquisite, so perfect. And Kitty knew she would do and say anything to get him to do that to her again.

The hillock between her legs pulsed and Kitty raised herself onto her elbows and peered through the darkness but all she could see of Bram was his forearm, bare where he had turned up his sleeves, and his long fingers relaxed on the arm of his chair.

What would he do if she went to him? Would he take her in his arms? Would he bend her over his knee like a wayward child and give her a sound thrashing?

Her heart raced at either option.

But then something ugly ripened in her thoughts. What if this initiation was for every maid in his service? What if she was not special?

She drew in a deep breath and then blew it out. What could possibly come of this other than appeasing her curiosity and gathering fodder for her article?

Mrs. Bush's words echoed in her head. *Do not take on any childish hopes he will take make you his wife, or even as his mistress for that matter.*

Kitty's breath froze in her lungs. What was she thinking? Surely she was not considering, even fantasizing, about being Bram Barclay's wife! That was stupid.

Would any other man could command her mind and body the way Bram did?

Now that she'd had a taste of physical pleasure, Kitty longed for more. So much more.

Before she could stop herself, she threw back the covers and padded quietly across the room to where Bram slept in his chair.

Asleep, he lacked the hard lines that were etched into his face during the day. He looked younger and Kitty realized she had not given any thought to what his age might be. Here, in the flickering firelight, he looked to be in his early thirties.

In one hand he loosely gripped the neck of an empty brandy decanter. His snifter had toppled to the floor by the edge of his chair.

Kitty resisted the overwhelming urge to brush the lock of black hair away that had stolen across his forehead. He had removed his neck kerchief and his shirt gaped open to reveal a smattering of black down on his chest. Without his vest and coat, she could see his taut stomach. What would those rippling muscles feel like under her palms?

Cream gathered in her channel and she realized she was standing naked before one of the most debauched men in all of London. Oddly, her nudity no longer bothered her. Instead she felt free and, although for all practical purposes she was the earl's prisoner, this experience had liberated her in a way she had never dreamed possible.

Boldly, Kitty moved closer. The sharp, woody scent of brandy met her as she eased the decanter out of his fingers to place it on the floor.

He jolted awake and his eyes widened.

Kitty did not hesitate. She took his hand in hers. "Come to bed."

He rubbed his face with his free hand as he stood but he allowed her to lead him. Kitty's heart thundered as they neared the bed. Her entire body shuddered with the need to feel his hard, masculine length, his heat, near her. But there was also fear. In a bed, under the covers, she knew if he pursued her sexually she would submit willingly. The idea of opening her thighs, of feeling his thick heat move over and then into her, sent waves of desire undulating through her.

Bram sucked in a breath and Kitty wondered if he was truly awake or blindly allowing her to lead him. Once he reached the edge of the bed he stumbled, and Kitty

caught his shoulders and righted him. His breathy groan told her he was practically sleepwalking.

“Take this off,” she whispered, unfastening the buttons down the front of his shirt. His fly was mostly undone but she managed to loose those buttons as well to get him out of his clothes.

Light from the fire illuminated his body and Kitty’s breath caught in her throat. He was glorious. Naked, he looked leaner than he did in clothes. His musculature was as perfectly sculpted as Michelangelo’s *David*. Broad shoulders, strong arms. The flat plane of his chest was dusted with sparse black hairs, which tapered into a line aiming at his phallus. Kitty longed to taste that part of him again. Only this time, she wanted to explore those other fascinating parts of his body. His heavy scrotum swayed as he climbed onto the bed.

Kitty followed him and drew the covers over their bodies.

He emitted a velvety moan as he dragged her into his arms, pulling her head down on his chest. Kitty’s breath froze as she grew accustomed to being so intimate with a man. For some reason, this was far more personal than the sexual escapades they had shared. Sleeping with someone meant giving up far more than control. It meant trusting someone implicitly.

Disappointment that he did not claim her vied with relief and Kitty knew this was insane but, above all else, she wanted it. She wanted to sleep here in this man’s arms, to feel the slow, even rise and fall of his chest, to breathe the scent of his skin and his sex.

She closed her eyes and slept.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Kitty opened her eyes the next morning, realization flooded her that she was naked and snuggled against the back of a man who, for all practical purposes, she was supposed to loathe. She froze, too terrified to move, but when her eyes focused she was unable to stifle a gasp.

Etched into Bram's back were deep, old welts that, on closer examination, Kitty realized were scars. She bit her lip. Who had inflicted these wounds on him? Some ardent lover?

Someone like the Duchess of Blakemore?

Something ugly roiled inside Kitty and she could not believe she would be envious over a man like Bram.

These scars were evidence of torture, however. They were nothing like the sensuous spankings Bram had meted out to her. Each welt was proof that his skin had been ripped open and had bled. Kitty bit her lip. He had been ripped open enough to leave deep, disfiguring scars. Unable to resist, she lifted her hand and traced one of the welts with the tip of her finger.

Bram abruptly flipped around, his eyes wide and fierce.

Kitty shrank.

For a moment he seemed confused. His gaze raked her face and bare shoulder and then he looked down at his naked chest. His eyes narrowed as, obviously, realization flooded him. "What happened?" he demanded, his voice rough with sleep.

"Nothing..."

His eyes turned to cold steel. "What did we do?"

"Nothing...Master."

And then, as if he did not believe her, he sat up and jerked back the covers. Kitty's cheeks burned as she realized he was looking for the blood of her maidenhead on the sheets.

He seemed relieved when he did not find it and then he slid out of the bed, immediately turning so she could not see his back. Kitty tried not to stare as he drew on a burgundy silk robe but it was hard not to look upon his exquisitely sculpted body. In the daylight, he was far more comely even than he had been in the glow of the fire and Kitty struggled to shake the haze of lust in order to think clearly.

Why would it matter to a man like him if he sullied a lowly maid's honor? And, more importantly, what had happened to his back to cause those unsightly welts? Everything inside her screamed to ask him what had happened and why, but she knew better.

"What am I to do, Master?" she asked softly.

He turned and Kitty felt gloriously naked under his lurid gaze. The muscles in her thighs tightened and for a moment, she thought he might ravage her.

"Set this room to rights," he said, dashing her hopes as he gathered his clothes and then left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Kitty stared after him. Bram Barclay was a man who harbored more secrets than she had ever imagined.

## Chapter Five

Bram had never once dressed himself in any room of this house other than his own. His jaw clenched as he tugged on his suit coat. He had never intended to sleep next to her. He had never intended to let her get that close.

Something warm spiraled downward inside him at the memory of her naked in his bed. Her blonde hair looked so beautifully soft and inviting, fragrant with the warm scent of her. He had wanted nothing more than to roll her onto her back, climb on top of her and thrust his cock into her sheath. His body tensed at the thought.

When had he crawled into bed with her?

He rubbed his aching temples. His head was pounding. Vaguely he recalled he had drunk far too much.

How stupid and how dangerous!

He sank into a chair in the guestroom and buried his face in his hands. The rough stubble on his jaw scratched his palms and it occurred to him that he needed a shave but today, he would just have to forego it.

Bram sighed. This was ridiculous. It was time to put some respectable clothes on her and send her away. If it was a wedding ring she wanted, then maybe he could arrange something with an acquaintance. She was certainly attractive enough.

*I deserve my punishment. Please spank me, Master...*

His cock jerked against his breeches.

Finding a husband for her would not be a problem. It was time to put this farce to an end.

Inhaling, he stood and stepped out into the hallway.

"My lord," his personal servant, Cavanaugh, called.

Bram turned.

"There's an urgent matter for you to attend."

"What?" Bram asked impatiently.

"The Duke of Whitfield's barrister, Montgomery, is in your study."

Bram stared. The well-trained valet showed no emotion on his face whatsoever so Bram could not read him. Still, why would his father's attorney be *here*?

"Shall I tell him you will see him?" Cavanaugh asked.

"Yes, yes," Bram said, torn. "No. Wait. I will go directly to him. Please see that...the woman...in my room gets some breakfast and has absolute privacy."

Cavanaugh inclined his head, spun on his heel and set off while Bram strode toward his study.

As he reached for the knob, his stomach knotted with tension. The reaction irritated him. Blast, he was an adult. His father had no power over him anymore. Steeling himself, Bram pushed open the door and faced his father's barrister with his chin held high. He strode to his desk, ignoring the barrister's respectful bow. "State your business, man."

Long and thin with sparse hair the same color as his ruddy skin, he stood, clutching his satchel and glancing at a chair, awaiting Bram's invitation to sit. He looked rather like a weasel.

Bram gestured with his hand and Montgomery sank into a chair.

"Your father has drawn up a marriage proposal for you to offer," the weasel said.

Bram could hardly contain a burst of laughter. He leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers under his chin as he leveled his gaze on Montgomery. "Marriage?" he asked, though he was hardly surprised.

Katrina Hartford's presence here suddenly made perfect sense. But why her? She was only the daughter of a baron and, despite her beauty and intelligence—and



incontrovertible sensuality—marriage to her could not possibly offer him any advantages socially, politically or financially.

No doubt his father had hoped he would compromise her and then be forced to marry her. A pang struck Bram in the heart but he quickly quelled the unwelcome emotion. He had resolved long ago never to let his father hurt him again.

“Listen up, Montgomery,” Bram said, looking down his nose at the scrawny weasel. “I know all about the old duke’s plans. You can go back and tell him I have not sullied the girl’s reputation in any way and that he cannot force a marriage on me.”

Montgomery’s forehead crinkled. “I am certain I do not understand.”

“Does he take me for an idiot as well as a lecher?” Bram asked, anger replacing the earlier hurt he had felt.

He wondered how far Kitty was in on this scheme. Quite the actress, indeed. Bram burned when he thought of how innocently she’d looked at him with her dark blue eyes, how responsive she had been. Oh, how well they had trained her!

Somehow he knew this was all his father’s doing and that Kitty was an innocent victim. She seemed so sincere. There would be far worse things in life than marrying Katrina Hartford. Still, the idea his father had tried to cuckold him scorched Bram to the core.

“You go back to my father and tell him for me that I won’t have his little baroness. No matter what his reasons,” Bram said.

“Baroness? The Duke of Whitfield requests you make the proposal to the Earl of Marchester’s daughter.”

Bram stared. The Earl of Marchester? How could he have been so wrong? He inhaled sharply. “Just as well. I have no intention of marrying.” Impatient, he shot to his feet.

“My lord, I think it is imperative that you know your father has...ulterior reasons for wanting this marriage contract.”

Bram scoffed.

Montgomery cleared his throat. "Sir, your father is dying."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty sat in bed and devoured her breakfast of rolls with butter and jam, a rasher of bacon and tea with lemon. Even a tray of fruit had been provided.

She had not realized until now just how ravenous she was.

After she finished, she placed the napkin embroidered with Bram's initials over the remains on her plate and crawled out of bed. It felt odd to be completely naked during the day. Liberating.

Bram had told her to set his room to rights and the idea of doing it without clothes on seemed strangely exciting.

A little thrill trickled through her as she began making the bed. Cool air brushed her legs and her bottom, reminding her of the sting of Bram's palm on her backside and the radiating heat that settled between her legs, enticing her to cream.

As she drew up the covers and arranged the pillows the way they had been before she had gotten into bed, Kitty debated slipping back under the sheets to pleasure herself the way she had yesterday but a part of her wanted to wait for Bram.

She hoped he would be pleased when he saw how nicely she had straightened his room.

Kitty bit her bottom lip as a disconcerting thought occurred to her. If she pleased him, he would not...*punish* her. She squeezed her thighs together in an attempt to assuage her desire but it only made it worse.

Shocked, she realized she wanted him to bend her over and paddle her bottom again. She wanted his mouth on her and more. Her blood warmed and thickened in her veins. What could she do to incite him?

A slow smile pulled at her lips and she jerked the covers back down before she pranced through his rooms, pulling open drawers, scattering his neatly folded clothes,

throwing shoes to and fro, pushing paintings off-center and making it look as if a tempest had swept through the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

They were the words Bram had longed to hear all his life. *Your father is dying*. But now that he had heard them, now that it was a reality, the satisfaction he had thought he would feel at the knowledge his father was dying was not there.

The truth of the matter was that he could not identify what he was feeling. There was some strange hollowness inside him, something he wanted to chase away in the arms of a woman.

*Kitty.*

He inhaled sharply and walked with purpose toward his rooms, ignoring the accounts, the books, the matters of running a vast estate. All that mattered was losing himself – with her.

A stranger.

The door banged against the wall when he opened it and he heard her gasp.

Relief flooded him at the sight of her. She stood, completely nude, in the center of his room with his empty brandy decanter in her hand.

At once, his gaze took in the disarray of his room. Realization struck. She had done this on purpose, specifically to defy him.

His cock surged as his gaze connected with hers.

All he wanted to do was shuck off his clothes, take her in his arms and fuck the daylight out of her but she, on the other hand, wanted to play his game.

Kitty's chin lifted defiantly.

"What have you been doing all this time?" Bram asked. Warmth rushed through his limbs, chasing away the unfeeling numbness of the news he had recently received.

Her breasts heaved with her deep breaths. "Not much."

Bram's gaze slid down her body to her slender waist, her shapely hips, that beautiful golden thatch and those long legs that had been spread wide for him just the night before.

He moved toward his chair and took a seat. "Come here," he commanded.

Her dark eyes flashed and he knew at that moment that everything had just changed. She was his.

Her throat constricted as she swallowed but she came toward him.

"You've turned my rooms into a shambles," he said, allowing his gaze to rove over her creamy skin and lift to her eyes again. "You should never be higher than I am. On your knees."

She dropped.

"You've been a very naughty servant, Kitty," he said, teasing her with his voice. "I think perhaps you know this, don't you?"

"Yes, Master."

He reached out and cupped her cheek in his hand. So smooth and soft. Why had he not yet kissed those luscious lips of hers? "Since you are aware of your behavior, I think you should choose your punishment."

Her eyes widened but the irises grew large. Black. She wet her lips with the tip of her pink tongue. "I *have* been rather naughty."

Letting her choose was a terrible mistake and he knew it. What if she chose for him to fuck her? Now who was the one in control?

"I think...I deserve to be...spanked," she whispered.

Bram's cock hardened even more but he scooted to the edge of his chair and gestured for her to bend over his lap, which she did readily. Her hair curtained her pretty face and her body trembled with anticipation. Bram thought he would erupt on the spot when she raised her rump to give him complete access.

He had never seen anyone so beautiful, so perfect. He cupped one of her breasts and she moaned, arching to press her soft flesh more fully into his hand. With the fingertips of his other hand, he traced her spine down to the cleft between her cheeks.

Instantly she spread her legs.

Normally he would have laid waste to such an inviting, turned-up arse. Instead, he wanted to turn her over, to kiss his fill of her mouth and lose himself in her body.

Bram breathed a sigh and fingered one of the blonde curls that rested on her back. His fingers loosened on her nipple and instead of squeezing, he caressed.

She twisted and looked up at him. "Master?"

He swallowed. Hard. "Say my name."

Her forehead furrowed and then a knowing smile claimed her lips.

Impatience surged and a rogue need arose in him with an intensity that shook him to the core. He did not want to play games with her. Not now. He did not want to be in control. He wanted to be a part of this moment, of her. "Say my name, goddammit," he said, sliding to the floor and taking her with him.

Kitty's breath left her lungs in a rush as she was twisted onto her back. He moved over her, pinning her to the thick Aubusson rug, his legs between hers. His body pressed into hers and her eyes widened with the realization only the barrier of his clothes prevented him from taking her.

His eyes searched hers. "Say my name, Kitty. Say it. I want to hear it on your lips," he murmured.

"Bram," she uttered just before his mouth found hers.

Kitty had never been kissed before but instinctively, she opened her lips to admit Bram's tongue. Stunned, she hardly knew how to respond to the passion, the desperate need with which his mouth claimed hers, and yet something inside her fused a link between her mouth and her sex. Her arms encircled his shoulders and she clung as his hand slipped under her head so he could hold her at his mercy.

His body urged against hers and she moaned when his length hardened. She had long since bypassed adhering to any sense of decorum or propriety. She was naked and underneath a man who was kissing his fill of her mouth and grinding his phallus into her and all she could think was she wanted him inside her. Kitty rocked against him, hooking a leg around his hard calf to draw him closer.

A growl tore from his throat and a wild thrill spiraled through Kitty when she felt his hand wrangle between their bodies so that he could unfasten his trousers.

She tensed when she felt his flesh against her opening. When he prodded, she whimpered and he dragged his mouth from hers.

He stared as if he could not believe what was happening and then he shifted to get off her—but Kitty seized his shoulders and pulled him back down. Opening wide her thighs, she reached between their bodies and took his shaft in her hand, guiding it back to her cleft.

His eyes flashed silver and his breathing grew harsh as he gripped one of her shoulders and one of her hips—and drove with one powerful thrust through her maidenhead.

Kitty cried out but the pain was short-lived. It was done. There was no turning back. Wrapping her arms around his broad back, she felt him trembling as she pulled him down to her. While this experience was new to Kitty, she could not help but wonder what it would feel like to take him from behind the way the duchess had, or to have his palm swatting her backside while he claimed her like a stallion covered a brood mare.

Possibilities ran wild in her head and Bram's mouth moved to her ear. As he plunged into her over and over, he told her how wonderfully good she felt. Although the floor was hard beneath her backside, Kitty spread for him, meeting his forceful, quick thrusts, taking as much pleasure in his brute physical power as she did in the connection between their bodies.

And as suddenly as he had claimed her, his body convulsed once, twice, again...and then he was still.

Instinctively Kitty threaded her fingers into his hair and pressed a kiss to his cheek. Something had just changed between them, and now she knew she could never hate him as she had previously intended. Instead, there was some other emotion welling within her – one she could not dare identify.

Her passage clenched around him and a shudder tore through his body. He propped himself on his elbows and looked down at her and instead of passion clouding his stormy eyes, Kitty saw ice. A muscle in his jaw twitched as his gaze moved from her eyes, down their bodies to where they were still connected.

Kitty nearly blurted that it did not matter that he had taken her maidenhead, that she never intended to marry, but Bram lifted himself off her and gaped at the blood tingeing his member.

“Bram,” she said, as something foreboding washed over her.

His gaze collided with hers. “I—” His voice stopped short and then, as he did up his breeches, he stepped over her and marched out of the room.

Kitty’s insides hollowed as she stared at the closed door. Just when she’d thought he had grown a gentleman’s heart, he left her cold.

And ruined.

All in a matter of minutes.

She swallowed hard and pushed herself off the floor. Fluid oozed down her thigh and when she raked her fingers through it, she realized the liquid was a mixture of her blood and his semen.

Good God, what had she done?

Kitty trembled as the ramifications struck with brutal force. She had lain with him. With Bram Barclay.

Staggering against the chair, she fought to keep her head from swimming. Anger flamed against Bram but Kitty knew there was no one but herself to blame. Hot shame flooded her cheeks when she recalled how wantonly she had curled her fingers around his phallus and guided him into her body.

Her insides clenched violently at the memory of his determined thrusts. Kitty shuddered. She had been utterly foolish. What if she were now with child? Her stomach twisted at the thought.

And even if he had not gotten a child on her, her life would never – could never – be the same after this.

How had he enticed her to behave so shamelessly? She had sought only to find the inner quiet she had discovered at the way he stripped her will away. She had not ventured to lose her virginity to him. Not really.

An image of him rearing above her crested in her mind and Kitty squeezed her eyes shut as if she could drive away both the image and the response it evoked in her body.

It was a useless gesture.

He had fucked her and left her without so much as a word and now, she felt stupid and alone and used.

Naked.

She clenched her fists so tightly her nails bit into her palms. The hateful bastard!

Eyeing the bed, she stormed toward it, snatched off the sheet and wiped her crotch clean with it.

The doorhandle rattled and Kitty gasped, whirling, clutching the stained sheet to her chest.

Mrs. Bush entered Bram's suite of rooms, her face set and grim – but Kitty's gaze riveted to the neatly folded clothes in the housekeeper's arms. Panic surged.

"You have been dismissed. Clothe yourself and leave immediately."



\* \* \* \* \*

When she finally closed the door to her own bedroom in her uncle's house, only then did Kitty shed the first tear. "Fool!" she called herself, swatting the tears away.

She would not cry. Not over a fiend like Bram Barclay.

After all, she was the one who had gone to his estate to gather material for her article. Well, she had gotten information and more. Perhaps she could save some other poor creature the misfortune she had experienced at his hands.

Kitty slid into her chair, the soreness between her legs a painful reminder of what had transpired earlier this morning. She sighed. There was no time to dwell on what she had lost. She had an article to write.

She withdrew her paper, pen and ink and set to work. The words flowed as never before as she told the tale of the innocent servant and the dastardly duke's son, even comparing him to the Marquis de Sade in his cruelty.

Without another tear dropping, she detailed everything from the beginning of her service to Bram until she was dismissed by Mrs. Bush. Kitty felt as if she were outside herself, watching the events of her own life as she folded the finished article and slid it into an envelope.

After sealing it, she stood and made her way down the stairs and to the post office. The sooner Alistair Allenby's article was in print, the better. All of England would know the truth about Bram and his reputation would be blackened even further.

Anger and hurt vied for prominence as she dropped the letter in the box and set off on foot back to her house.

She had hoped to feel some sense of triumph upon penning the article but instead, she felt empty inside.

His words echoed in her head. The feel of his palm landing time and again with only the thin barrier of her drawers preventing his skin from touching hers rolled through her in waves. She inhaled sharply when she recalled how it had felt to have

him inside her, filling her, stretching her, his pounding thrusts nailing her to the floor with bruising force.

The birds twittering in the trees faded from her hearing. The muddy lane blurred. Kitty's heart twisted. Mrs. Bush had warned her not to harbor any hopes about Bram.

But wait! That was ridiculous. Kitty refused to believe she had done anything other than gather fodder for her article. She did not care for him! He had proven himself deserving of the rotten reputation he held. Stripping down to her drawers and bending over, submitting to be spanked had only been done under the guise of research. Besides, there would have been little she could have done about him taking her virginity. Doubtless, he would have raped her if she had refused.

But then the memory of how he had hesitated and of how she, herself, had taken him in her own hand to guide him to her channel flooded her thoughts. Heat rolled up spine as she turned onto the lane that led to her house.

As she stepped through the front gate, she stopped short at the sight of a massive black destrier hitched to the post outside her house.

Intuitively Kitty knew the horse belonged to none other than Bram Barclay.

## Chapter Six

What could he possibly want here? Kitty's first thought was to flee but then she decided she would slip in through the servants' entrance and eavesdrop. Her plan was short-lived. As she neared the house, the door flung open and Kitty froze when she saw Bram's hulking frame in the doorway.

His eyes widened at the sight of her and she shook as her uncle appeared behind him. The top of Jasper's head barely reached Bram's shoulder. The old man waddled out of the house, his face reddening as he trotted toward her. He raised his fist threateningly.

Kitty gasped as he rushed toward her. "Harlot! You fallen woman! How dare you defile my house while living under my roof!"

Bram, riding crop in hand, was close on the old man's heels. "You will not lay a hand on her! Do you hear me, old man?"

Uncle Jasper gaped breathlessly.

"I am to blame," Bram told him, his voice stern.

Kitty was incredulous. He had known all along she was a lady and not a servant? Anger quickly replaced surprise. "What are *you* doing here?" she demanded.

Bram's gaze slid to hers and her body's reaction infuriated her. Everything inside her constricted with the unsolicited need to feel him connected to her again, with the memory of what had happened only hours earlier.

"He's come to make an honest woman of you, you...you strumpet!"

Kitty's gaze darted from her uncle's to Bram's. "What does he mean?"

Bram's lips parted to speak but Uncle Jasper interrupted. "He's going to marry you before word gets out that you've fornicated with him."

Kitty felt her face grow scarlet. She stared, disbelievingly. Bram wanted to marry her?

*Her?*

But...

She warred with the joyous knowledge the man who had awakened her body to physical pleasure wanted to marry her, and the fact that she was supposed to hate this man and everything for which he stood.

"N-no," she uttered.

"No?" both Bram and Uncle Jasper asked in unison.

By this time Kitty's aunt had appeared in the doorway, holding a handkerchief over her nose and mouth.

Kitty lifted her chin. "I do not wish to marry."

Now it was Bram's turn to be angry. Clutching the crop, he marched toward her with long, purposeful strides, not stopping until he was toe to toe with her, her chest pressed against her breasts.

Kitty swallowed thickly.

"You have no choice in this matter."

The masculine scent of him wafted around her, reducing her to putty in his hands. She struggled to maintain her composure.

"It has already been arranged," he told her and then he spun on his heel, turning toward Uncle Jasper. He slapped the crop with such force on his thigh it made Kitty shudder. "See that she is before the vicar on the morrow."

Jasper nodded.

"And if there is a mark on her, I will hold you to account," Bram warned as he stalked toward his horse.

Kitty stared as he unhitched the monstrous beast, swung himself into the saddle and galloped away.

When he was out of sight, she looked at Uncle Jasper. "I refuse to marry him."

\* \* \* \* \*

Bram paced in the front of the church. Where was she? Surely his bride would come to her senses and arrive willingly at the altar. After all, she was the daughter of a baron and marriage to a duke's heir would be to her advantage.

The church bell had already tolled the hour and the priest stood by looking a bit bewildered.

Bram had known better. He never should have fucked her. He never should have let her stay past the initial interview.

He heaved a sigh. He had never intended to marry and wondered if he had not compromised Katrina simply because he knew it would infuriate his father. He was both marrying below his station and *not* marrying the woman the old bastard had chosen for him.

Possessing Katrina had been on his mind since the first time he had laid eyes on her at the Duke of Blakemore's party. With chagrin, he recalled not being able to finish with the duchess. That had been days before Katrina had turned into bespectacled Kitty, the curious servant girl, and had requested employment at his estate.

He stopped pacing and looked toward the door. Nothing. "Where are they?" he ground out and resumed walking back and forth.

Bram's thoughts returned to his father. He was going to be furious when he found out Bram had married a girl who was barely a step above a commoner. Still, the old duke was not looking for a political connection. Not really. He was looking for grandchildren.

Bram squeezed his eyes shut. Children. That was another thing he had never planned—but there was no sense in dwelling on children when the bride had not even bothered to show up.

The church door opened and Bram whirled, his pulse accelerating when he thought he might see Kitty dressed in her bridal finery.

Instead his gaze fell on her fat, balding little uncle. Bram clenched his teeth as, hat in hand, Jasper Hartford slunk down the aisle.

"Where is she?" Bram demanded.

Hartford shrugged apologetically. "She has locked herself in her room, my lord."

Bram drew in a sharp breath.

"She refuses to come out. She says she will not marry. I am contemplating sending her to a nunnery. You are certainly not obligated to—" Hartford's words halted as Bram shoved past him.

"Oh, there will be a marriage today. Mark my words."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty raced to the window when she heard hooves thundering up the lane. She was hardly surprised to see Bram but the look on his face was terrible. He glanced up at her window and Kitty shrank back as if she could hide from him.

Her heart thudded against her rib cage as he dismounted. Seconds afterward, she heard the front door open followed by the sound of footsteps racing up the stairs.

Clutching the skirt of her day gown, she stared at her locked bedroom door.

Bram pounded on the wood. "Come out of there, Kitty!"

"No!"

Why had he not just given up and gone back to his estate to forget she ever existed?

"I will give you until the count of three to unlock this door," he said from the other side.

"Go away!"

"Blast, Kitty—"

"Go away. I shall not come out and I certainly shall not marry you."

“Bloody damn hell!”

He did not count at all. Instead, the door splintered as it flew open and slammed against the wall. Bram stood, shoulders heaving with his deep breaths, face flushed, black hair mussed and eyes flashing like summer lightning. His look was murderous.

Kitty clutched the foot rail of her bed.

His gaze raked her from head to toe. “Why are you not dressed?”

She lifted her chin defiantly although on the inside, she quaked. “I told you, I do not intend to marry you or anyone else.”

He had the audacity to laugh. “Yes you will. I command it.”

Kitty inhaled. “You, sir, are no longer my master.”

Two strides and he hauled her into his arms. Kitty gasped as he jerked her against the unyielding length of his body. “I will *always* be your master, Kitty Hartford.” His voice was smooth as black silk as he rocked his hips so that his phallus pressed into the softness between her legs. “And you know it.”

Chills swept Kitty from head to toe. Everything in her body seemed to whirl downward, liquefying her, and while her sex screamed at her to spread for him, she did not. “Unhand me.” She cringed at the meek sound of her own voice.

His gaze dropped to her lips and then returned to her eyes. “I should fuck you right here. Better yet, I should bend you over and give you that spanking you begged for yesterday.”

Kitty swallowed thickly. Dampness oozed from her channel at the thought of him swatting her backside.

“You won’t deny me,” he said, lowering his mouth dangerously close to hers.

What was this power he held over her? Kitty struggled against the desire to allow him to do anything and everything to her despite the fact she hated him. Why could she not cling to the venom she had possessed while writing the article yesterday?

Realization flooded her – the article would destroy them both.

Her breath caught. Although she had not named the Earl of Rochford's daughter, she had accused him of sullyng a woman's honor and then not marrying her.

If he forced this marriage, then everyone would think she was the woman and assume Allenby had depicted her as a maid to protect her identity. She had wrongly laid blame on him, for if he were the cad she had called him, he would not be here demanding her hand in marriage.

But what of the Earl of Rochford's daughter? Before she could stop herself, she asked him that very question. "Why did you not offer the same consideration to Rochford's daughter?"

Bram stared. His eyes flashed with spite. "So you've bent an ear to the gossips?"

Kitty trembled but she could not back down now. "Sir, one cannot help but overhear what is spoken so plainly."

"Did you believe it?"

When Kitty did not answer, he gave her shoulders a shake. "Did you?"

Her mind swept back over the scene she had witnessed in the garden, her stay at Bram's manor, her quick dismissal—and the article she had written. Yes. She had believed it.

"Is it true?" she asked. "If you are proposing marriage to me, I think I have a right to know."

"I do not, nor have I ever, wasted my time dispelling rumors about my character," he snapped.

Kitty's heart sank. He was the blackguard she had guessed he was.

"However," he began. "You are correct. You do have a right to know the truth."

Kitty's lips parted.

"The woman sought to entrap me. I never sullied her. The father of her bastard is a stableboy in her father's employ."



She searched his eyes and instinctively knew he was telling the truth. Something inside her twisted into a hard knot. Why had she acted so hastily?

It was imperative she write her publisher and retract the story immediately. Imperative.

“You are the only lady I have ever...ruined,” he said, his eyes raking her in blatant appraisal. “And while these are not the most advantageous of circumstances, I intend to make you my wife.”

“I...I cannot marry you,” she blurted.

“I do not wish to play games with you right now, Kitty,” he said, a muscle in his jaw clenching. “There will be plenty of time for that later.”

Her channel twisted. *Yes, yes, oh God, yes...*

“No!” she cried.

“If it’s dominating you want so badly, I will give it to you,” he said impatiently as he spun her around and bent her over the foot rail of her bed.

Kitty gasped as she felt her skirts being tugged up. This time he did not request she take down her drawers. With one hard yank, he tore them down her legs.

There was no buildup, no insidious caresses. Instead, he swatted her bottom hard and fast.

Kitty did not struggle. She grabbed fistfuls of her covers and buried her face in them, spreading, arching, giving him complete access as the searing heat spread through her backside. This is what she wanted from him. Complete control. To have her will stolen away until she was free to enjoy her body.

The spanking finally stopped and she felt his hand delve between her legs, felt at least two fingers push up hard inside her.

She moaned and spread her aching legs even wider.

“Is this what you want?” he asked. “To push me to this? To reduce me to begging you, Kitty?”

She wriggled farther back on his hand, willing him to fuck her with it.

“Marry me, Kitty. Let me take you to the vicar,” he murmured while his fingers teased her below.

“I do not wish to marry any man,” she whimpered as liquid heat thrummed through her veins.

“That’s foolish,” he growled and withdrew his fingers, only to rub her cream up and over her most private recess. “You *will* marry, and you will marry *me*.”

Kitty stilled as the heady heat was replaced with icy panic. Surely he would not invade her there.

But oh—he did.

She tried to surge upward as his fingertip twisted its way into the tight little aperture, but with his free hand, he pushed her back down on the bed.

“I will find your breaking point,” he warned. “If I have to shove my cock in your arse, I will coax you to consent to this marriage.”

Kitty’s pulse accelerated as she felt his finger push inside her until his balled fist was pressed hard against her bottom. Pride caused a hot blush to flame in her cheeks. Shame flooded her—but she was not ashamed because he was doing something so debauched to her. She was ashamed because it felt so good she did not want him to stop.

The nub between her legs throbbed painfully and she shifted restlessly, as if her movements could assuage it.

“Please...” she groaned.

“Will you go with me to the church?” He worked his finger in and out, driving up hard to grind his fist against her bottom. Her hips swayed with the motion, further inflaming her clitoris.

Her channel clenched with need.

She cried out when a hard slap landed on her backside. Too much. This was too much. The sensations of his finger up her hole and the sting of his palm on her bottom were overwhelming.

Her pulse slowed to a steady, thick throb and she wondered if she refused him, if he would shove his big cock in that same sensitive hole. The hand that had slapped her traveled up her back and then his fingers entwined in her chignon. He pulled. Hard.

Kitty's head came off the bed, her back arching impossibly, lifting her backside for even deeper penetration. She yelped.

"I will end this torture if only you will acquiesce."

Kitty melted when his free fingers swept her aching folds, teasing her. She tried to rock back against his hand but the way he was holding her prevented it.

"Say yes and I will pleasure you," he said, his voice hoarse.

Her stomach tightened. Her breathing quickened. "Yes, damn you! Yes!"

At once he released her hair. Her head fell to the bed. But none of that mattered as he shifted between her legs, pushing them wide apart with his knees. One hand latched on to her hardened clitoris and he pummeled her anus with the other.

Kitty's knees went weak as she felt that now familiar sensation building, cresting, and then, "Oh God in heaven!"

Her body went limp as bliss shattered her from the inside out. Peace. She sighed.

But her peace was short-lived. He hoisted her over his shoulder, jerked her gown down to cover her still-spasming bottom and carried her down the stairs to his awaiting horse.

\* \* \* \* \*

The wedding was a complete and utter disaster. Kitty had never been more miserable in her life. Dressed in the simple, ruffled day gown she had been wearing when Bram had stormed into her room, she had recited her vows, fully aware of the fact her drawers were still lying in a discarded pile on her bedroom floor.

Her aunt and uncle had looked on, their faces red with shame.

When the vicar had asked Bram if he had a ring, Kitty had expected him to dispense with that part of the ceremony. Instead Bram had produced a gargantuan ruby, which he had slid onto Kitty's hand with trembling fingers.

The ring was stunning but Kitty had been absorbed with Bram's reaction. Why was he trembling? Because he was so angry? Because he had rather been doing anything in the world besides marrying a strumpet who had lied to him?

Kitty bit her lip, her mind drifting to her article as Bram tersely recited his vows. He would be furious when it hit the papers. Livid. Doubtless he thought she had infiltrated his service staff to ensnare a husband. Nothing could be further from the truth but here she stood, wearing the ring of a man she had sought to destroy.

"You may kiss your bride," the vicar said without emotion.

Kitty turned to Bram and lifted her gaze to his. She expected him to crush her against him and devour her mouth as he had the morning before. Instead, he brushed a hasty, cold kiss across her lips, snatched her hand in his and dragged her from the church.

There was no carriage to whisk her away. Only the monstrous horse on which Bram had brought her here. He hefted her onto the saddle and then climbed up behind her. Without a word, he dug in his heels and rode the animal hell-bent for leather toward his estate.

The closer she came to her new home, the sicker inside she became, and by the time he halted the horse at the front steps of his home, Kitty was filled with fear.

Bram slid her down the horse's side and she stumbled to right herself as he easily leapt down beside her.

"She is my wife now," Bram told the footman. "You will address her as Lady Wiltshire."

“Yes, my lord,” the uniformed boy said with a low bow before he took the horse’s reins.

“Inside,” Bram said curtly as he clasped Kitty by the elbow and ushered her up the stairs and into the open door.

No one seemed more surprised than Mrs. Bush and, despite her own trepidation, Kitty took wicked delight in the old woman’s sneer.

Bram gave her the same instructions he had given the footman but Kitty could tell the normally austere housekeeper struggled to hide her shock.

“I will send one of the footmen for her things,” Mrs. Bush managed to say.

“That shan’t be necessary. She won’t be needing her things.”

Kitty gaped at Bram. What could he possibly mean by that statement?

“Make sure she gets a bath,” he said, and with that, he strode away.

“Follow me,” Mrs. Bush said and started up the stairs.

Numbly, Kitty climbed the stairs behind her. Her life had turned upside down in a matter of days and nothing was ever going to be the same. She was married to a man she hardly knew—a man whose reputation she would make worse by her article—a man whose touch inflamed her body beyond comprehension.

Kitty recognized the door to Bram’s room as she followed Mrs. Bush past to the next door. Mrs. Bush opened it to reveal a suite of such opulence, Kitty could not stifle a gasp. The room was decidedly feminine with its floral wall covering, paintings of sprawling gardens and delicate furnishings. “This is lovely,” she said, feeling suddenly small and inadequate in the luxuriant surroundings.

“The Duchess of Blakemore had it decorated,” Mrs. Bush said, pinning Kitty with a knowing look.

Kitty cringed as she recalled Bram’s tryst with the duchess in the garden. Mrs. Bush was baiting her and she knew it.

“She is...or rather *was*...a frequent visitor here,” Mrs. Bush said snidely. “But I imagine she’ll be back...once the master tires of you.”

At first Kitty shrank – but then she remembered she was no longer playing the part of a servant and that she was married to a titled heir. She lifted her chin. “You’ll do well to remember your place, Mrs. Bush.”

The older woman snorted. “Did you bring your lady’s maid with you or shall I send one?”

Kitty had never had a true lady’s maid. She bit her bottom lip, knowing Mrs. Bush was taking another stab at her. “Send Alice.”

“Alice?”

“Yes, Alice, from the kitchen.”

Mrs. Bush laughed. “You’ll not want that little bawd to serve you unless you are looking to keep your husband occupied elsewhere.”

Kitty narrowed her eyes. “I am not interested in your opinions, Mrs. Bush. Send Alice.”

Mrs. Bush inclined her head and left the room.

Kitty hugged her arms to herself and gazed around her rooms. Any woman should be pleased to be in her station. Kitty was miserable.

Her eyes swept the gold, floral-printed coverlet with its intricate embroidery and matching tester lining. A blush pink settee was situated by the hearth, over which hung a massive painting of white peacocks in a garden.

The more Kitty took in the decided touch of a woman in her new rooms, the sicker she became inside. This was wrong. She did not want to be married. Not to Bram or anyone else.

But she was, and there was little she could do about it.

However, now that she knew he was innocent of ruining Rochford's daughter, she should pen a quick letter to her publisher to retract the story she had written as Alistair Allenby.

A quick search of the mahogany secretary yielded pen and ink and Kitty sat to write the letter before Alice arrived to prepare her bath. And then the thought occurred to her that she could not trust this information with a servant. Servants were known for prying and gossiping. Word could not get back to Bram about this. Not ever.

She would simply have to take it to be posted herself.

The letter office was less than a mile away. She could make it there and back within the hour – long before Bram missed her.

After she finished the letter, she stole through the servants' hallway and out the side door. No one would ever know she was gone if she hurried.

But Kitty had only made it halfway down the long drive before she heard hooves thundering toward her. She did not have to glance back to know it was Bram. He would be furious if he read her letter – and read it he would!

Her heart pounded as she drew up her skirts and raced toward the hedgerow, throwing the letter into the thick shrubbery just as Bram bore down on her.

Breathless, she whirled, fearing the massive beast would trample her.

Bram's expression was black. "Where do you think you're going, my good lady wife?"

She could never tell him the truth. "Back to my uncle's," she blurted, unable to think of another excuse.

His eyes darkened. "He won't have you, and *I* won't have you blackening my name any further than it already is. Now turn around and march your arse back to the manor."

"Not until I get my things," she added, hoping he would at least allow her to return for her belongings.

Bram straightened in his saddle. The horse snorted as if its master's foul mood were contagious. A wicked smile spread across Bram's face and he walked the horse an impossible step closer.

Kitty spun to get out of the beast's way but when she did, she felt the sharp sting of Bram's riding crop on her bottom. "I told you that you would not be needing any of your belongings," he said.

She gasped and shot him a hateful look while she rubbed her offended anatomy.

"To the manor," he ordered. "Move or I shall make you pull up your skirts so that I can swat your bare bottom while you walk back."

Kitty's clitoris heated at the thought of it but there was no telling how many curious servants would see her backside displayed while Bram thoroughly spanked her with his crop. Still, the idea of exhibiting herself sent tendrils of desire through her limbs.

Anger vied with the craving to be dominated. When he was like this, it was difficult not to challenge him, not to drive him to tear down her exterior and assuage that yearning between her thighs. Still, now was not the time. If she put up a fight, he might notice the letter she'd hastily hid in the shrubbery.

"Very well," she snapped as she started back toward the manor.

After he passed his horse off to a footman, he followed her to the door, but instead of escorting her to her chamber, he took her elbow and led her to his study. Terror rose as he drew her behind his desk. He pushed on one of the wall panels and the bookcase swung open to reveal a dark, narrow hallway.

Panic surged.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"To make certain you won't try to run off again."

Kitty's pulse pounded as she looked down the hallway with dread. She swallowed thickly. "What is this place?"

"The bridal suite," he said with a sarcastic edge as he ushered her in front of him.



Kitty stumbled as he urged her along but his tight grip on her elbow kept her upright.

When they arrived at the end of the hall, Kitty gaped. She was in a chamber – no, a dungeon – lit dimly by torches. On one wall hung chains. A small bed was pushed against another wall, and Kitty gasped at the sight of black sashes tied to the posts. Various other items lined the shelves on a third wall and although she had never seen such things before, Kitty knew they were devices designed to inflict exquisite tortures.

In the middle of the room was a raised dais. It looked, to Kitty, like some sort of stage designed for...*spanking*. A smooth, rectangular block was positioned in the center and Kitty knew, without a doubt, she would soon be naked and on her knees, with only that block to support her as Bram punished her. Manacles tethered to chains were fastened down with big bolts at each corner of the dais. Kitty's cream gathered at the thought of being chained there and at Bram's complete mercy.

"Take off your dress," he said tersely.

Kitty's pulse rioted. She stared, shocked. "Here?"

"I won't have you running off again."

Kitty laughed, trying to hide her fear. "Do you propose to keep me naked for the rest of my life?"

One black eyebrow arched wickedly. "If need be."

He snatched her dress at her hips and yanked it upward, chemise and all, pulling it just over her head and then twisting it so the sleeves caught her arms. She stood facing him, completely bared with the exception of her stockings and slippers, her arms trapped behind her head. A slight tug backward caused her to arch toward him.

At once, her nipples tightened and swelled.

He pushed his knee between hers and pulled her closer so that she was riding his thigh. "Now, you will be a good Kitty, won't you?"

Another twist of the fabric caused her breasts to brush the rough brocade of his vest. Kitty moaned, relishing the coarse graze to her nipples and the heat emanating from his thick thigh.

“Won’t you?” he purred again.

There was no use in fighting. She wanted to give in to what her body craved. “Yes,” she whimpered, wanting more.

With a twist she was free of her dress but he spun her around so that she had to brace herself against the wall to keep from falling. A sharp swat landed on her buttocks.

Kitty arched, ready for more as warmth spread through her sensitive backside and down the backs of her legs.

“Have you forgotten how you are to refer to me?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten!” she snapped and then bit her bottom lip, bracing for another blow.

His palm caressed the curve of her hip as he leaned in close to whisper in her ear. “Climb onto the dais, Kitty.”

She glanced once more at the imposing dais and the block. Her heart thundered against her rib cage. The idea of being restrained, bent for whatever punishment he wanted to mete out to her, both thrilled and terrified her.

“Go and bend over the block and I’ll give you what you want.”

Common sense screamed that she fight him but she did not want to do that. She wanted to bend over that block and be chained at wrists and feet, to subject herself to his whims. Before she could stop herself, she was walking toward the dais, climbing onto it and laying her body across the smooth, cool wood. It was just long enough to support her trunk and head and just the right height so that her hands and knees braced on the dais, the block slightly declined so that her backside was thrust higher into the air than her head.

“Spread your legs.”

Instantly she complied, trembling in anticipation of what he would do next.

Cold steel clamped around one ankle and then the other.

Her center pulsed maddeningly. She tried to swallow but could not.

“Give me your hand,” he said in that velvet voice.

Kitty stretched out one arm, allowing him to shackle her. She could not believe she was so willingly submitting to this but when he came 'round the dais, she offered the other hand without protest. In the back of her mind, she justified that if she got this over with as quickly as possible, she could escape once more to retrieve her letter and get it to the post office.

As it was, she was now completely at his mercy. In this position, he could spank her, tongue her, fuck her anywhere he wanted and there was little she could do about it.

Bram caught her chignon and lifted her head off the block until she was looking into his eyes. “You will not run from me again. Is that understood?”

She stared defiantly, willing to play his game.

When she didn't answer, he snorted and let her hair loose before he went to the shelf.

Kitty watched as he gathered several items and brought them back to her. He laid them in a row on the dais. A little whip made of ribbons. A leather paddle. Something that looked like a phallus with a belt on it to hold it in place. Curious little pieces of jewelry. “I'll let you think for the time being about what your punishment might be.”

Kitty's eyes grew wide. He was leaving her here?

Like this?

No!

But she watched him walk away, listening to the sound of his footsteps as they faded.

Kitty wanted to scream. She ached for him to touch her, to torture her until she throbbed between the legs. She wanted him to shove his cock up inside her and bring her to that feeling again.

Most of all, she desperately needed to get her letter posted.

Damn him!

\* \* \* \* \*

Bram returned to his study, trying to ignore the voice in his head that told him to go back to that room, unchain Kitty and fuck her in his bed.

Such ideas were insidiously threatening. He had made her his wife against his better judgment. He damn sure was not going to let her under his skin.

There was plenty of paperwork to do before he returned and gave her the sound thrashing she deserved for trying to make a fool of him. Had she merely been testing him, wanting him to ride her down and drag her back, or had she really wanted to get her belongings?

There was only one way to find out.

But first on his agenda was penning a letter to his father's barrister to inform him of his recent marriage.

The old duke would not like it but there was little he could do about it now that Bram had ruined her.

She had gone willingly onto the platform. She had prostrated herself to receive her punishment. Bram inhaled. He could go back there right now and bury his cock to the hilt in her. Maybe filling her full of his seed would dampen this fire in his breeches.

He had thought as much before but one taste of her had only made him mad for more. Then, he had been consumed with roiling emotions. He had made a fool of himself, rutting her like a hound to a bitch. But now...

Now he was in control. He would show her what a good fucking he could give her and have her on her knees begging for more like a seasoned harlot.

His cock lurched against his tight breeches and he shifted in his chair. The words on the paper in front of him blurred but somehow, he managed to write the letter to the barrister. There would be no looking over the accounts. Not today.

Not while his newlywed wife was chained and waiting for her punishment.

## **Chapter Seven**

After Bram dispatched a crew of servants to collect Kitty's belongings, he checked his pocket watch. It had been a full hour since he had left her to contemplate her new surroundings – to grow wet and ready for anything he desired to mete out to her.

As he made his way down the hallway to the dungeon room, anticipation set his every nerve on edge. He had toyed with more than one willing participant in this room. Why was Kitty any different? What about her made him as giddy as a love-struck teenager?

Kitty jerked when he entered the chamber. "You bastard!" Fire danced in her dark gaze. Redness encircled her wrists and ankles where she had struggled against her bonds. Tendrils of blonde hair meandered wildly over her back and shoulders. With her thighs spread and her rump in the air, she was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. Her golden mons glistened in the dim light and although Bram chuckled, all he wanted to do was lose himself in her beautiful, supple body.

"How does it feel to be chained and spread for your husband?" he asked.

She growled.

"You are absolutely beautiful, Kitty," he said. Her skin was flawless and white and the thought of turning her bottom bright red made his cock rock hard.

He moved around the front of the platform and watched her eyes as he reached down to the dais to finger the whip. While the ribbons looked rather benign and playful, the little knots tied along the lengths were deceptively lethal in creating the perfect sting. But her eyes did not widen with alarm or warm with desire when he touched that particular toy.

He then reached for the phallus. "Would you like this fake cock shoved up you, Kitty?" he asked. "Perhaps I could fuck your arse with it and bury my own cock in your delectable little cunny. Would you like that?"

He lifted it, holding it in front of her face. She twisted her head as he rubbed it along her cheek.

"You're the very devil," she seethed, rattling the chains with her futile struggles.

Bram placed the dildo back on the table and then he lifted the leather paddle. Kitty's eyes widened.

Her cheeks flushed pink.

Ah yes. She did so love to be spanked. "This will be our plaything of choice today," he drawled.

Her body shivered as he slid the tip of the paddle up her arm, over her shoulder, down the length of the back, over the enticing curve of her ass and down the back of her thigh.

"I want you to tell me why you ran away," he said.

"To go home," she said. "To get my things."

"I told you that you would not need them." Bram knew exactly how hard to apply the first swat. The sharp slap of leather on skin reverberated through the room.

Kitty cried out but it was not a cry of pain. Instead, it was a tense cry of need.

Behind her, he could see that the crevice between her legs was already damp. He inhaled, breathing in the sultry scent of her sex.

"Does that feel good?" he asked. "Do you feel the heat, the sting of the paddle?"

She moaned.

"Would you like another?" he asked as he teased the tip of the paddle up her inner thigh and patted her golden mound with it.

Her body tensed. She had obviously not expected to have a choice. And he had not expected to give her one. The power she held over him was intoxicating. Dangerous.

“Yes,” she hissed.

Bram drew the paddle back and swung it with a little more force. She sucked in a breath when it made contact with her bottom. Her fists clenched and her legs shook.

The imprint of the paddle on her ass cheek deepened from red to crimson. Bram’s cock grew as stiff as a steel rod in his breeches.

“You are the wife of the heir to a duchy. Whatever could you want with your old belongings when you have the world at your beck and call?”

“Another!” she cried. “Give me another, Master.”

*Slap!*

“Tell me, Kitty.”

“No! Another. Spank me!”

*Slap!*

“Oh yes,” Kitty groaned. Her nether lips quivered as she tried in vain to squeeze her thighs together.

Bram ground his teeth. Damn, he wanted to sink his cock in her and give her the sound fucking she deserved. But no. He wanted her begging for it. He wanted to break her will, to have her crawling on her knees and pleading with him to grant her a climax.

But Kitty was not broken. Not yet.

Her breaths came in great heaves while her entire body trembled. “Another,” she mewled.

This time he swung harder. The stinging slap echoed and when Bram withdrew the paddle, he saw the plethora of bright red marks left behind on her pale buttocks.

Kitty sucked in a sharp breath and wrestled against her bonds. “Yes, like that, Master. Again and again. Do not cease!”

Bracing herself, she laid her head on the block and gripped the chains hard in her fists while Bram paddled her cherry red ass. With her blonde hair askew and her teeth set hard in her bottom lip, Bram thought she was the most beautiful creature he had



ever seen. Her willing submission affected him like the strongest liqueur, dragging him back to his past, back to a time when he had been forced to submit to such treatment.

Only he had not enjoyed it.

He had tolerated it. He had bit his tongue and held his tears while his father thrashed him for minor infractions.

*Cry, boy!* his father had shouted. *I will not halt until I see your tears.*

But Bram had not cried. Not once. He had never given in.

And neither would Kitty.

The fight gone out of him, Bram dropped the paddle and kneeled on the table behind his bride. By now, crimson welts had formed on her skin. She was so still he wondered if she had lost consciousness. He traced one with his fingertips and she shivered.

Bram trembled himself as he began to kiss the marks marring her pretty flesh. The desperate need to comfort her inundated him and he felt tears stinging his own eyes as he kissed and caressed her heated skin.

Kitty moaned. "I want you inside me, Bram," she uttered, her voice but a whisper. "Fuck me. Fuck me now."

Still kissing her bottom, he undid his breeches and freed his turgid cock. Out of habit, he slid his fingers through her folds to see if she was ready. Her cream dripped and Bram's cock pulsed.

He swatted his own tears away. "You want me to fuck you like this while you're chained and at my mercy?" he growled, teasing her with his fingers.

"Yes."

"You're wet enough for me to slide my cock up your arse," he said, raking the head of his phallus through her drenched lips and up to prod her anus.

Kitty trembled.

"I can bring you to climax like that," he uttered. "With my cock in that hole."

Flipping her loosened hair over her shoulder, she twisted to look back at him. "I want you in my cunny."

He pushed inside her and she let out a sound that was more animal than human. Her tight sheath felt like wet velvet, drawing him deeper and deeper within her. Bram shook and clutched her backside, fighting the desire to explode.

His wife. His lover...

Fuck.

How many women had he had over the years while they were tied, bent impersonally away from him? That was not how he wanted Kitty.

He wanted to feel her touch, to watch her face, to kiss her mouth.

Abruptly he withdrew his cock. She voiced her protest but Bram stood and unfastened her chains while Kitty watched, bewildered.

"Get up from there," he ordered.

"No—" she began but he lifted her bodily off the block and stepped down from the low dais with her, carrying her to the bed.

He laid her gently on the mattress and then he began shucking off his clothes.

"What are you doing?"

"This *is* our wedding day," he ground out.

Kitty gaped. What had come over him? At once, the hard, controlling Bram had grown sentimental and...tender. And while Kitty thoroughly enjoyed his sexual domination of her, she wanted to explore this side of her husband as well.

As he joined her on the bed, she reached for him, drawing him down to her. His knees parted hers and with one slow and determined thrust, he was buried to the hilt inside her. Kitty gasped. This was not like the last time. This time there was no pain. Only pure, pure pleasure that made her want to weep with joy.

His hands moved over her body, stopping to gently tug her nipples, to squeeze, to caress. Kitty gazed up at his face, realizing for the first time that he was more than just a

handsome man. This beautiful god was her husband and a sense of possessiveness flooded her, surprising her. She welcomed his lips as they covered hers. As he slowly dragged his phallus in and out of her, he continued the assault on her mouth with the same deliberate intensity.

Kitty met each thrust, tilting her hips upward, writhing beneath him as her instincts cried for more.

“Patience, my sweet,” he murmured in her ear.

But the way his body shook told Kitty he struggled with patience himself. While the sensations she experienced were wonderful, the emotions roiling to the surface were frightening. Being with him like this, Kitty realized she was a willing participant in her own pleasure.

Then again, had she not always—always—bent for him when he commanded it, spread for him, submitted to him?

He dragged his mouth from hers and gazed into her eyes. Kitty stared back as the shocking realization washed over her that she had always been the one in control of her own pleasure. He had never dominated her. Not in the way she had thought.

She had always been a very enthusiastic contender in their games. She had even consented to their marriage and now that she understood it, everything had changed.

She cupped the hard line of his jaw and studied his face. His eyes were moist and the soft gray of a mourning dove. A lock of his hair stole forward to graze his forehead and she gently brushed it away. His expression was one of lust and admiration and Kitty wondered how she could not have seen this before.

Sudden passion consumed her and a wave of heat swarmed up her spine. Kitty hooked her legs around his and entwined her arms around his back to draw him down to her. The skin on his back was rough under her palms and she recalled the scars she had seen there. But this was not the time to dwell on past hurts. She could ask him about that later.

Their mouths fused again as he withdrew almost completely and then surged into her with such force her body was propelled up the bed.

Kitty's concentration swirled downward, culminating in one magical spot inside her channel. Every time he dragged the head of his phallus against it, tremors swept through her. She writhed, following his thrusts to keep him on that one spot a fraction of a second longer.

Again and again. Faster and faster.

The muscles in her bottom burned with her movements and her mind flew back to the fierce spanking he had dealt her. Each skillful blow had been harder than and superior to the last, filling her with desire to have him embedded inside her. Chained and spread as she was, he could have easily slipped his cock in the hole where his finger had been just that morning.

Kitty envisioned it and suddenly her channel convulsed as violent spasms emanated from that spot inside her, rolling in waves throughout the rest of her body.

"That's it, my sweet," he whispered in her ear. "Milk my cock."

And before the last spasm eddied away, Bram tensed. He pushed up hard inside her once and then again. A groan tore from his throat and Kitty opened her eyes to watch him rearing above her, his face contorted in ecstasy. When his eyes opened and his gaze found hers, Kitty realized something between them was different.

Breathless, she lay underneath him, overwhelmed with the desire to draw him down to her and kiss him. Instead she remained quite still, watching him. His eyes warmed as they moved over her, down to her breasts, to where they were connected.

"I want to keep you here in this room, in this sanctuary," he said. "Here, no one can touch us, and here, I can teach you all the delights your body has to offer."

It would be marvelously wonderful to stay here ensconced in virtual darkness and wrapped up in his arms, to forget about society, reputations, her secret life as Alistair Allenby...

A twinge of panic surged that she desperately needed to retrieve the letter she had hidden and have it posted before the defaming article she had written about her husband went to print, but it was dispelled by warm hands cupping and squeezing her breasts.

His mouth dropped to her ear. "I am still hard inside you."

Kitty's stomach tightened as he began to move restlessly inside her once more.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Bram awakened her with a kiss sometime the next day, Kitty opened her eyes and snuggled more deeply into his warm embrace. She could have remained here but for the audible growling of her stomach.

Bram gave voice to a hoarse little laugh. "I was beginning to think you planned to sleep the entire morning away."

Kitty's cheeks heated when her eyes met her husband's. The memory of yesterday would have seemed distant were it not for the delicious soreness between her legs. He had taken her over and over, sliding down between her legs to taste her and then returning to impale her. Twice during the night he had awakened her as he turned her onto her side and slid into her from behind.

Then, there had been no words. Only muffled moans and the drive to fulfill a deep-seated, primal need.

"Is your cunny raw?" he asked as his hand skimmed her hip and dipped to cup her mons.

She blushed even more. "Yes."

"Then as much as I would love to plow into you right now, I will allow you to recuperate," he said with a smile that twisted Kitty's heart.

What was this sudden intimacy between them? To be certain, she had always found him handsome but now...

Now she was beginning to grow fond of him.

Would it be so terrible to be fond of one's own husband? She swallowed thickly.

"Come," he said as he sat and drew her up with him. "I will take you to your room."

Kitty gasped. "Like this? Naked?"

He laughed and the sound was so rich and genuine, Kitty melted. He cupped her cheek and brushed his thumb across her bottom lip, which was swollen from kissing him. "There are stairs leading to your chamber, my darling Kitty."

He climbed off the bed and stood, obviously at ease with his nudity.

Kitty followed, relishing the chill on her bare flesh.

"This is our secret place, my pet," he said, gazing hard into her eyes. "Speak of it to no one. Not even the servants."

She nodded.

A wicked smile crept onto his face and he spun and strode to the shelf. When he returned, he held a long silver chain in the palm of his hand. "When you want to come here, all you need do is don this jewelry. It will be your unspoken invitation to me."

She nodded again.

"Turn around and lift your hair," he said and, as she complied with his request, he slipped the chain around her neck and fastened it so that it fit snugly around her throat. The chain was so long, it unfurled nearly to the floor. At first, Kitty feared it was a leash.

"Turn around and spread your legs," he whispered.

The delicate chain swung against her buttocks as she turned. Bram reached between her thighs, grasped the chain and drew it up so that it rode between her folds. Kitty's channel pulsed as she noticed the chain veered into a Y with a tiny clamp on each end.

Bram bent and took one of her nipples in his mouth, sucking, nibbling, teasing it until it stood erect and diamond hard. But before Kitty could entangle her fingers in his hair to hold his mouth there, he fastened one of the clamps onto her nipple.

She cried out from the exquisite pleasure-pain as shards of desire circuited between her breast and her clitoris, and as he teased the other nipple, she looked down at the bauble and chain suspended from her breast.

After securing the second clamp, he stood back to admire his work.

Kitty shifted and the chain slid enticingly between her legs. Her eyes threatened to close as renewed and heady desire rolled through her in thick waves. She fought the urge to climb back onto the platform so he could spank her while her nipples were pinched deliciously with his jewelry.

“I thought you would enjoy that,” he said smugly. “Do you think you can wear this for me when you want me to join you here?”

“Yes.” She moaned the word. It felt so...wicked...she wanted to wear it all the time.

“I have other...*devices* I will ask you to wear from time to time, as well,” he said as he slipped his arm around her waist to lead her toward the wall. He patted her bottom. “Devices that will ready you to take me here.”

*Now, do it now!*

But disappointment surged as Bram moved away from her to find the latch that opened another secret door. Every step was breathtaking torture as the chain and clamps tugged on her nipples and the cool silver slid between her damp labia. Kitty wanted to bend over on the spot and let him take her like he had fucked the duchess. She wanted to give him access to the spot he had so recently threatened to invade, to see how it would feel to have his cock filling her there in the most taboo of places.

Somehow, she knew he was fully aware of the torment he was inflicting on her and she knew he would refuse her – for now.

When they reached the top of the winding staircase, he unfastened the clamps and then unhooked the chain from around her neck. Kitty pouted in protest as she cupped and squeezed her own breasts.

“There will be time for more later,” he said, pressing a kiss to the nape of her neck as he slipped the chain into her hands. “Now it is time for you to eat breakfast and bathe. I will see you at tea.”

He gave her shoulders a squeeze before he disappeared down the narrow hallway. Kitty stared after him for a moment and then she reached for the handle of her door.

She was hardly prepared for what she saw in her chamber.

All her meager belongings were spread out and waiting for her instruction as to where they should be placed.

\* \* \* \* \*

“My lord.”

Bram whirled to discover one of the servants coming toward him bearing a silver salver. “Yes?”

“This was discovered outside in the hedgerow.”

Bram’s gaze dropped to the envelope on the salver. His first reaction was to wave it away—but then he recalled how Kitty had run for the hedgerow. The envelope was addressed to a Mr. William Gray in care of *The London Truth*.

*The London Truth* was a society rag. What reason could Kitty have for sending a society newspaper a letter?

And then the thought occurred to Bram that she probably wanted to have their marriage reported as soon as possible in order to protect her reputation. A little smile tugged at the corner of his mouth as he slid the envelope into the pocket of his waistcoat. A reputation did not matter when one was the heir to a duchy—unless one had a wife whose reputation one wanted to protect.

Bram turned to walk away. “Thank you.”

The servant cleared his throat. “My lord, there is also a message from Willingham Hall.”



Bram's eyes shot to the servant's and he struggled to maintain his composure. No doubt the old duke had by now heard of Bram's nuptials and intended to reprimand him for not marrying the woman of his choice. "You can send a message back to the duke for me," Bram said flippantly. "I have legally wed—and have very thoroughly consummated the marriage."

The servant's expression did not change a fraction—but the title by which he referred to Bram did.

"Your Grace, the duke has died."

## Chapter Eight

After her bath, Kitty reread the note she had found amongst her belongings instructing her to keep what she wanted and discard the rest, but to be aware that a seamstress had been commissioned to make her an entire new wardrobe. The note was signed *B.B.*

Bram Barclay.

She brushed her thumb over the initials. Guilt flooded her that she had lied to him about her reason for trying to leave the estate. Her gaze swept the few crates that held her things. She had never possessed very many dresses and only two that were suitable for the season's parties. Her shoes were in abysmal shape and in dire need of a cobbler. She had only four hats to her name and while she had taken great pride in the few items she possessed, they all seemed shabby in these opulent surroundings.

She pressed the vellum against her breast and sighed as she walked toward the window.

New fashions were a necessity for a woman in her present station but she felt terribly guilty about being the recipient of Bram's goodwill when she had scathed him so thoroughly in her article.

Her stomach tensed when she recalled how tender he had been during the night. The intimacy between them had been obviously so much more than physical. Kitty had felt need in his touch—need that ran deeper than the desire to assuage one's passion.

But why? Why would a man like Bram Barclay *need* anything or anyone?

Still, she regretted writing the letter now with all her heart.

She clenched her fists.

Where was that Alice? It had been at least an hour since Kitty had sent her out to search for the letter she had stashed in the hedgerow. That should have been ample time for Alice to find it and take it to the post office. Peering through the glass, she looked outside for her maid but did not see her. Where was she and why had she not yet returned with news the letter had been successfully posted?

Something was amiss.

Gathering her robe close, she began to pace. Was there still time to write another letter?

That would certainly be the most prudent thing to do. It would not hurt for her publisher to receive two letters instructing Allenby's story be discarded.

Kitty rushed to the secretary and just as she was about to sit, Alice burst breathlessly through the servant entrance.

Kitty whirled. "Did you find it?"

"No ma'am," Alice said. "But I have other important news."

Fury welled. "The letter is important! Go and look again."

"Ma'am, the Duke of Whitfield has died."

Kitty stared at Alice's wide eyes.

"The master has done rode out on his way to Willingham Hall to make the funeral arrangements," Alice added.

Kitty could not shake the cobwebs from her head. She gaped, trying to absorb it. Bram's father had died and Bram had departed for the family estate...without her.

He had not told her goodbye. Kitty's heart twisted. "He must be in a terrible state," she muttered. "I must go to him."

"He left word that he would return as soon as possible and that you are to make yourself comfortable in your new home."

Kitty shook her head. A good wife would never allow her husband to grieve alone. "No, pack my things. I shall go to him."

\* \* \* \* \*

Bram clenched his fists to keep his hands from visibly trembling as he followed his father's staid old butler, Hobbes, up the stairs.

He had wished for, waited for, prayed for this moment his entire life and now that it was upon him, he felt once more like a frightened little boy cowering under the threat of the strap. A shudder tore through him at the memory of his mother's helpless and frightened face. Bram had known even as a child that if he cried, his mother would intervene on his behalf, and then she too would face his father's wrath.

The bastard.

The dead fucking bastard.

And even though Bram hated the man with a vengeance, it was as if some piece of him had died along with the scoundrel. He had grasped at hate and thoughts of revenge all his life and now, all that had suddenly vanished, leaving behind an aching, vacuous hollowness inside him.

He inhaled as they reached the top of the stairs. What if the old man was not really dead? What if this was just a cruel mistake? A trick.

Bram cleared his throat. Mourning drapes covered the mirrors. A black wreath had greeted him at the door. The duke was dead all right.

Hobbes pushed open the door to the duke's chamber and Bram followed him inside. He had not intended to look upon the corpse but his eyes were magnetically drawn to the figure stretching the length of the bed. Try as he might, he could not tear his gaze away from the waxen image of the man who looked so much like an older version of himself. Hands clasped, the duke appeared to be in a light sleep rather than a permanent one. In this state, he no longer looked like the fearful, raging bastard he had been in life. He seemed frail and almost pitiable.

Bram felt the muscles in his face twitch as he struggled to maintain his composure.

"Would you care to pay your respects in private, Your Grace?" the butler asked.

Bram never looked away from his father. *Your Grace*. The mention of the title finally seeped in that he was now the Duke of Whitfield. "No need."

With years of experience, Hobbes was adept at hiding his obvious shock but Bram knew the old servant thought him as callous as his dead father.

"Send for the undertaker. The sooner we get him in the ground, the better," Bram said coldly before he spun on his heel and left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty rushed down the stairs, followed by a bevy of servants carrying a trunk containing her things. Even if Bram was not ready to present her as his wife to the public, at least she could be there to support him.

She clutched her second letter to her publisher. Hopefully this one would arrive in time to put a halt to the foolish article she had written.

Mrs. Bush stood ramrod stiff at the bottom of the stairs.

Kitty lifted her chin, taking a small amount of pride in the fact that she was now a duchess.

"Might I inquire as to where you are going, Your Grace?" Mrs. Bush asked.

"To Willingham Hall," Kitty replied.

Mrs. Bush sneered. "I see. The duke requested your presence then."

Kitty's lips parted slightly. The woman was trying to bait her still.

"Please pass on my condolences to the new duke," Mrs. Bush said without a smidgeon of sincerity. "The circumstances under which his father died are tragic, to say the least."

"Circumstances?" Kitty inquired.

"Forgive me," Mrs. Bush said. "You were not aware the former duke died when he heard of your nuptials to his son?"

Kitty stared, not knowing whether to believe the old housekeeper or not. If that were true then Bram must be very upset. An image of the morning he had taken her virginity rose in Kitty's thoughts and shame heated her cheeks when she recalled how she had taken his phallus in hand and guided him into her channel.

She had not tricked him into marrying her. Quite the contrary. He had actually abducted her from her home in order to whisk her away to the vicar. There was absolutely no reason for her to feel guilty but Kitty wanted to turn and flee back to the sanctuary of her room.

Instead, she cleared her throat. "Mrs. Bush, if that is the case, there is little that can be done about it now."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty gaped at Willingham Hall as her carriage rolled to a stop on the pavement. She swallowed thickly. She had seen grand estates before but the idea that this vast place belonged to her husband sent a tremor of terror through her.

And if Mrs. Bush was correct, then every servant here knew she was the cause of the old duke's death.

She wondered how Bram would react when he saw her. Would he be angry? Would he also blame her for his father's death?

Or would he be happy that she had come?

She inhaled as a footman rushed forward to help her down from the carriage.

Other servants rushed to line up to greet her and guilt surged that she had not gone through the proper protocol. It was customary for all the servants to present themselves for introductions to a new family member – especially the new duchess.

Circumstances, however, had not permitted it and she'd swept past the line with a curt nod of her head. The head butler escorted her into the manor and Kitty was forced to stifle a gasp when she took in the soaring ceilings, tapestries, marble, sculpture,

polished wood and thick rugs. She could scarcely believe she was the mistress of all this.

A frail old butler met her in the entryway. "Your Grace, I am called Hobbes and I am at your service."

"Thank you, Hobbes," she said. "The journey was long and tiresome. I would very much like to see my husband."

"Follow me," Hobbes said and led her up the seemingly never-ending staircase and down a maze of hallways. "The duke has been in the nursery since he arrived."

"The...nursery?"

"His former nursery," Hobbes explained.

Kitty's heart turned over hard. "Is he...alone?"

"Yes ma'am."

She quickened her pace and hoped the butler would do so as well but as they neared the door, her heart began to race. What if Bram sent her away? What if he was angry?

Hobbes pushed open the door and held it as Kitty crossed the threshold. After she was inside, he closed the door behind her.

Kitty's gaze drank in the decidedly childish decorations, the small furniture. The toy soldiers and faded red wooden rocking horse. The fact that these things had belonged to Bram when he was a child touched something nostalgic inside her.

There was nothing left from her own childhood, nothing much by which to remember her parents. Nothing like this.

But where was Bram?

"Bram?" she called, the intimacy of using his first name sending tendrils of heat rushing up her spine.

She took several steps into the room and then she saw him. Red-faced and surprised, he sat staring from a rug in the corner of the room.

Kitty rushed toward him.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded as he shot to his feet and made an attempt to compose himself.

Kitty stopped. “Your father... Oh Bram, I’m so terribly sorry.”

His face hardened. His eyes narrowed into vicious slits. “Why did you come here?”

A cold chill traversed Kitty’s spine. “To... Because...I thought it was my place.” She took another step toward him, reaching, but when her fingers brushed the sleeve of his shirt he jolted, upsetting a child-sized chair.

“Bram?”

He stared, shaking.

Intuitively Kitty knew his reaction was not due to her coming here. Closing the distance between them, she laid her palm on his arm. “Bram, you don’t have to be stoic. Your father has passed away. When my father died, I was heartbroken. I felt so lost and –”

“I hated him.”

Kitty’s breath froze in her lungs.

“I hated him, Kitty. I am glad he’s dead.”

Her first reaction was to urge him to forgive his father. She stifled it. Instead, she listened.

“I hated him,” Bram said again. This time, his voice cracked.

Kitty could scarcely believe this was the strong man who had carried her bodily to the vicar the day before and who had tumbled her like a milkmaid all night long. In the wake of his father’s death, he seemed vulnerable. Human.

At once, she drew him into her arms. He jerked as if he might pull away and then he half collapsed, dragging her to the floor with him. Kitty scooted against the wall and pulled his head against her breasts. She threaded her fingers into his hair and held him there while he clung like a frightened child.



“Did you... Were you able to make peace with him?” Kitty asked cautiously.

“No,” he said, his voice muffled by her dress. “He was a cruel man. He destroyed anyone who ever dared to love him.”

Kitty swallowed, letting one hand glide down to his shoulders—and then she recalled the raised welts on Bram’s back. Realization flooded her. Her impression that those scars had not been the result of sexual play was correct. Bram had been beaten. Severely. *By his father?*

Her blood turned icy despite the warmth of her husband’s body. She slid her hand down his back. “Did he—”

“Yes.”

Her stomach lurched and she swallowed the burning bile back down. “When?”

“I was twelve.”

Kitty sucked in a breath. She did not want to hear any more.

Bram’s arms tightened around her and she felt his shoulders tremble as he stifled a sob. “I wanted him dead. All my life I’ve wanted him to die and now...” His voice trailed off as he raised his head and looked into her eyes. “Now that he is no longer alive, it’s as if...as if I have *become* him.”

Kitty shook her head. “No, Bram. You are not him.”

“But the things in which I take pleasure...”

“I cannot begin to comprehend how the mind works, but I know you do not take pleasure in inflicting pain on others. Had I not been...responsive...you would have stopped.”

Bram searched her eyes. She was right. He would have stopped. Her desire to be dominated had driven him onward. Hell, it had driven him mad enough to wed her and he still had not yet found her threshold.

“You are not him,” she reiterated. “You will never be him.”

His heart warmed and, looking at her innocent face, her pink parted lips and her wide indigo eyes, he realized his feelings for her were more than admiration of her spirit and her will. He was falling in love with her.

Was it possible?

Her hand came up to cup his cheek and she gave him a tiny, almost imperceptible smile. "When I saw that you had gathered my belongings and had them brought to my room, I was overcome by your capacity for compassion."

"It was the least I could do for you."

Her eyes rimmed with dampness and then a single tear spilled down her pale cheek. Bram brushed it away with the pad of his thumb. "Thank you for coming here," he whispered.

"How could I not?" she asked, and that was all the impetus he needed.

His mouth sought hers and she responded at once, opening for him, her tongue meeting and sparring with his, even as he dragged her the rest of the way down to the rug.

Wild need reared within him and as he kissed her, he pulled up her skirt, freed his cock, drew her drawers to the side and plunged inside her sheath. She gasped into his mouth at the sudden invasion but spread for him, welcoming him, clinging as he assuaged his lust.

\* \* \* \* \*

With Kitty's support, Bram handled the details involved in laying his father to rest in the Barclay mausoleum, where so many Barclays had been interred before him. And while the old duke was already becoming worm fodder in his coffin, Kitty had helped Bram to exorcise his ghost as well.

Bram had never known another person's true love before but when Kitty had come all the way to Willingham Hall to find him, he had been touched in a place inside that had never before been touched.

She had come to him with nothing, and yet she had brought him everything. She had shown him how to let go of the past and she had taught him that he was not his father.

At the end of the day, when he crawled into the bed beside her, when he sought refuge in her body, terror flooded him that he had put so much trust in another, that he had risked his heart.

During the past few days she had offered her quiet assistance, delivering compassion with her body instead of with words, and although there was much for him to do at Willingham Hall, he could not stay away from her for long.

His respite was her arms, her body, and he often found himself distracted with thoughts of taking her back to his own estate – to their sanctuary.

He saw the desire in her eyes as well, unspoken and soft. She yearned for those things of which she'd had only a tiny taste. She needed it in order to free herself from the bonds of the teachings of society, where women were instructed not to heed the sexual urges of their bodies.

But here, in his father's house, it was neither the time nor the place for boudoir games.

After he had sated himself inside her early one morning, he gave her nipple a firm tug. She sighed and he felt her channel clench around his cock.

"I will take you home very soon. I give you my word," he murmured as he kissed her a final time before arising to dress. "Would you like that?"

"Very much," she said as a sleepy smile claimed her lips.

"Maybe later this afternoon we will embark for home."

Her dark eyes came alive. "Really?"

"As duke, I can request the business come to me, can't I?"

"Yes, Your Grace," she said with a giggle.

He pinned her with a look of mock chagrin. “Bad, bad Kitty. Have you again forgotten how you are to refer to me?”

A blush tinted her cheeks. “I haven’t forgotten,” she said softly, gazing up at him mischievously from under her golden lashes.

“I shall remember that little transgression when we return home,” he said, before he went to bathe and dress.

On his way to breakfast, he instructed Hobbes to have his and Kitty’s things readied for the return trip home.

Kitty had opted to enjoy breakfast in bed but Bram had wanted to get an early start seeing to the accounts so they could return home as quickly as possible. As soon as he sat down at the table, a servant arrived with a covered tray and placed it in front of him. Another servant set out an array of juices and teas while yet another brought the morning papers fanned across a silver salver.

Bram noticed one paper on top that he did not usually read. *The London Truth*. Where had he seen that name before?

Curious, he picked it up and unfolded it and when he did, he stared at the headline, stunned.

*The Dastardly Earl of Wiltshire.*

Bram shook with anger as he scanned the article, which maintained he had ruined not only the Earl of Rochford’s daughter and refused marriage to her, but had also claimed a servant girl’s virginity and then had sent her packing. The article left nothing to the imagination and had been written with such venom, it made Bram wonder who could possibly hate him that much.

His first thought was for Kitty’s reputation. To be certain, he had done some reprehensible things in his life but he had never, not ever, done anything that was not consensual. And the fact that someone would write such filth, such untruths—that someone would endanger Kitty’s character—caused fury to storm inside him.

He looked back up the column to find the author's name. Alistair Allenby.

His appetite lost, Bram stood, gripping the paper so hard it crumpled in his hand. By the end of this day, he vowed, Allenby would either retract his vicious words or die.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty had hoped to share the long carriage ride home with Bram. Instead the servants had told her that he had business in London and would be home as soon as possible.

For some reason, as the carriage approached her new home, the feeling that something terrible was about to happen began to gnaw at her. Perhaps it was just that she knew she would have to face that hateful Mrs. Bush again.

Mrs. Bush, however, occupied Kitty's thoughts the least. Since his father's death, Bram had become more open and easy with her. The difference in him was something wonderful, albeit frightening.

When she had first met Bram, he had looked upon her with lust in his silvery eyes. But now, although the same lust burned there still, Kitty saw something else—a deeper connection, a tenderness, a wonder.

She swallowed thickly as the carriage lurched to a stop. Did she dare to hope that it might be...*love*?

Her stomach knotted and she could not repress the little smile that tugged at her lips.

As she stepped out of the carriage, she gazed up at the gray stones that made up the home she now shared with her husband. Once so forbidding and ominous, these old walls now seemed welcoming.

Her thoughts drifted to the room deep and hidden within these walls and she could not wait to return to its dark respite where the outside world did not exist—where she could bare her body and soul.

She greeted the staff graciously but as she climbed the stairs to go to her room, all she could think about was donning the wicked jewelry Bram had given her so that he would know she was ready to return to that room, ready to give up all control.

Her channel pulsed with desire as she thought of the delicious bite of the nipple clamps and the teasing slide of the silver chain between her legs. Bram would see the chain clasped around her neck, although sweet torture would be concealed under her clothes.

She inhaled as she entered her rooms. Just the thought of it made her want to pleasure herself in anticipation of his return but she decided she would force herself to wait.

Alice met her with a hasty curtsy. "Welcome home, Your Grace."

"Thank you, Alice," Kitty said. "It is good to finally be home."

But as her gaze found Alice's face, she noticed the young maid's worried expression. "What's the matter?"

Alice bit her bottom lip. "You did not see the article in today's *London Truth*?"

Kitty's heart plummeted. A cold chill swept over her limbs. "Which article?" But she knew very well which article.

"Alistair Allenby wrote a scathing article about the duke. It was on the front page."

Blackness washed in front of Kitty's eyes and she shook her head to keep from fainting. Her knees buckled and she sank into the nearest chair. Was that Bram's business in London? Had he seen it?

There was no doubt in Kitty's mind that he had seen it. A man like Bram would soon discover that she was the poison pen behind Allenby's article. She inhaled sharply.

"Leave me, Alice," she muttered.

At once, the maid curtsied and disappeared.

"Oh God, oh God," Kitty said, burying her face in her hands. Bram would hate her. The letter of retraction had not arrived in time.

Heart pounding, she shot to her feet and began to pace. What could she do to make things right? She had to do something to show him she had been wrong and that she was truly, truly sorry.

## Chapter Nine

Bram's horse was exhausted by the time he dismounted that night.

What had Kitty been thinking? His heart twisted when he remembered how he had rode hell-bent for leather to protect her reputation this morning...

Only to find out *she* was Alistair Allenby.

Her publisher, William Gray, had been only too willing to give her up, and even though Bram was furious with his wife, he was even angrier at that spineless Gray. It had not even taken any threats or coins to get him to talk.

Bram inhaled. He had read Kitty's numerous other contributions to *The London Truth*. With the exception of the horrid article about himself, her satire had been spot-on and her grasp of politics and social issues was impressive.

The other thing Gray had given up was the desperate letter Kitty has obviously posted the same day she had left for Willingham Hall.

Bram shut his eyes for an instant as the memory of her running toward the hedgerow rose in his thoughts. She had not been returning to her house to gather her meager belongings. She had been trying to get to the post office to mail the letter he had stuffed in his coat pocket and forgotten.

Had she really thought him so callous?

He strode into the house and shot up the stairs two at a time. Shame flooded him when he recalled how he had sent her home without a word. Of course, he had known she was Katrina Hartford and not some servant girl whom he could tumble at will. Even then, he had known he would do right by her.

Hell, he had known that before he had taken her. He had known that first day when she shucked her dress and bent over his desk and begged to be spanked.



Even given his own feelings for her, what was she to think when he took her virginity and then sent her home? His actions had confirmed all the gossip she had heard and if his reputation suffered because of Kitty's article, then he deserved that and more.

He twisted the knob and opened her door. "Kitty!"

Her bed was made. Her room was neat as a pin.

Kitty was nowhere in sight.

Panic welled as he rushed through the library, the dining room, the conservatory. None of the servants had seen her since her arrival.

And then realization sank in.

Bram accessed the playroom through his study—and what he found took his breath.

Kitty was spread and bent over the block, the silver chain meandering down her spine and through the cleft between her legs. She tensed when she heard him approach.

"There you are," he said as relief washed through him.

His gaze took in the leather paddle on the dais.

"I have been a very naughty Kitty," she said. "I deserve my punishment."

"Naughty indeed." Bram smiled as he took up the paddle and licked the back of one of her thighs softly. "Do I need to restrain you or are you willing to take your punishment?"

Kitty's heart leapt in her chest. Her pulse seemed to beat in her throat. The idea of him chaining her was torturously appealing but she knew submitting to whatever punishment he meted out would sweeten her apology that much more. "There will be no need for restraints."

A sudden, stinging slap landed on one side of her bottom. Kitty yelped more at the abruptness of it than anything else. Instinctively she spread her legs a fraction wider. "I was wrong to write such a nasty article, Master," she said, cutting her gaze back to him.

Bram's gaze slid to hers. "I see."

Kitty could hardly believe that he did not seem to be angry with her.

"I read your little article," he said, eyes sparkling in the torchlight.

She bit her bottom lip as he drew back the leather paddle and swatted her again. Warmth spread through her bottom and thighs. Two more hard licks landed on her backside and Kitty closed her eyes and moaned. "Yes, yes," she cried. "Punish me!"

She clenched her fists and curled her toes as the paddle found its target several more times. Flames licked Kitty's thighs and bottom. She no longer questioned how she could possibly enjoy such sweet torment. Now she only reveled in the sensation spreading through her body like wildfire.

Here, with Bram in this room, Kitty could relinquish her need to be in control, to be ever vigilant of her actions, to do what society deemed proper. This outlet was very much like the persona of Alistair Allenby – anonymous and free to expound on ideas unbecoming of a lady.

Bram knew it all. He knew everything about her. He knew her deepest, darkest secrets. He knew how to please her, how to rattle her until she begged him for more. Always more.

Fingers teased her mons and Kitty jerked, pushing back, only to be disappointed when the fingers withdrew.

"Your cunny is wet," Bram drawled.

*Slap!*

Kitty bucked and groaned. *More. Oh God, please give me more...*

"Why did you do it, Kitty?" he demanded.

"You turned me out."

*Slap!*

"Why did you do it? What's the real reason?"

"You ruined me and sent me away."

*Slap!*

“Dammit, Kitty! Why did you write those things about me? What drove you to it?”

Emotion flooded Kitty and she knew she could no longer contain it. Flipping her hair over her shoulder, she twisted to look back at him. Unexpected tears filled her eyes. “Because I love you.”

Eyes locked with hers, Bram drew the paddle back once more and Kitty braced for the blow. Visibly trembling, he hesitated, and as he did, his eyes softened. His hand dropped and the paddle clattered to the floor.

Before Kitty could take her next breath, he hauled her into his arms. His mouth sought hers and his fingers tangled into her hair as he held her head in place. Kitty’s heart soared as he shifted between her legs so there was no mistaking his desire.

She reached between them, furiously undoing his breeches to free his cock. He hooked a hand under one of her thighs, lifted her bottom onto the block, thumbed the chain to the side and impaled her on his cock all at the same time.

Kitty entwined her legs around his, lust and love and the bite of the clasps on her nipples mingling within her to produce the most exquisite sensations she had ever in her life known.

In this position, his body rode up hard against the sensitive hillock at the apex of her sex and Kitty arched to give him total access. Digging her nails into his arms, she clung as he rutted rhythmically inside her until bliss shattered her from the inside out. Her moans fused with his and she felt him pulsing deep within her channel.

With his last thrust, his mouth found hers again and he kissed her deeply. Thoroughly.

Finally, Bram dragged his lips from hers. “I’ve loved you from that first moment you came into my study dressed in that ridiculous maid’s costume,” he said, his voice hoarse with passion.

Kitty searched his clouded eyes. "I never would have written the article had I not been hurt or convinced that—"

He pressed his finger to her lips. "I know. You need not apologize. One of my servants brought me the first letter you tried to send to your publisher."

Kitty swallowed, still clinging to him, still aware of his throbbing cock inside her.

"And Gray showed me the second letter."

A little smile of relief pulled at Kitty's lips. "I suppose he—and you—no longer want me to write my column."

Bram laughed, the rich sound filling the room. "On the contrary, my dear. I am now the owner of *The London Truth*. And Alistair Allenby is now the editor."

Kitty stared as Bram's words sank in. "You bought the newspaper?"

He nodded. "I realized I had not given you a wedding gift."

She shifted on his phallus. "You bought *The London Truth*?"

"Yes, my love. And now it is yours."

Kitty cocked her head to the side. "But...why?"

"I read Allenby's—your—other contributions," he said, slipping out of her and setting her gently on her feet. "You are a wonderful writer, Kitty. Talent like yours should not be subject to the whims of a man like Gray. You are intelligent and witty. Your eye for social injustice is spot-on."

"But I am your wife now. It would not be proper for me to run a newspaper."

"Blast propriety, Kitty!" he exclaimed. "I would never presume to take away that outlet from you."

Kitty was ecstatic. "I...I don't know what to say."

"Are you pleased?"

"Very!" she cried. "It is the sweetest thing anyone has ever done for me."

Bram smiled. "I am glad."

“And you...liked...my articles?”

“Yes, indeed,” he said, but then he arched a wicked eyebrow. “All save one.”

Heat rushed into Kitty’s cheeks and her bottom tingled in anticipation. “I see, Master.”

Bram patted her backside playfully. “Shall I use the restraints this time, bad Kitty?”

“Yes.”

*Heaven have mercy. Yes.*

## **Epilogue**

"It's quite all right, my dear," Bram said as he urged Kitty through the door of the Ashcroft estate.

Kitty gulped as every guest in the room turned to look at them.

"Hold your head high," Bram whispered in her ear. "There are few in this room of your station. And fewer still who can touch our wealth."

But Kitty took little comfort in that. She had known these ladies and gentlemen all her life. Being a duchess did not change the fact she had been forced to marry. She reminded herself that it should not matter. Not to her, anyway. She loved her husband. In truth, she had loved him before she had married him.

She lifted her chin and nodded to Lord and Lady Ashcroft as Bram escorted her into the ballroom. "Good evening," she said and allowed Lord Ashcroft to kiss the back of her gloved hand.

The banter started up again and Kitty was relieved that the curiosity she and Bram caused had abated. At least for now. The scent of mulled wines and delectable pastries filled the room. Cheerful music wafted from the violin quartet in the corner.

Kitty flashed a smile of relief at Bram.

"Whitfield!" a man's voice boomed from across the room.

"Darling, will you be so good as to excuse me? I'll only be a moment."

Kitty trembled at the thought of him leaving her side but she forced a nod. As soon as Bram walked away, Kitty moved to the refreshment table and took a glass of wine from one of the servants.

"Your Grace, how lovely to see you here tonight."

At first, Kitty did not realize the salutation had been directed at her.

"Your Grace?"

"Oh!" Kitty exclaimed, turning. But when she saw who had made the address, her blood ran cold.

It was the Duchess of Blakemore – and she looked as stunning as ever.

"Your...Grace," Kitty stammered.

The duchess's lips stretched into a smile that did not reach her eyes. "May I speak to you? In private?"

"Of-of course." Kitty shot a glance to her husband's back as the duchess guided her toward the veranda. Surely the woman only wanted to congratulate her on her recent nuptials. Still, Kitty's pulse pounded.

Once they were outside, the duchess's eyes flashed. "Who do you think you are? We all know you entrapped him!"

Kitty swallowed thickly but anger simmered in her veins. She parted her lips to speak but the duchess hardly gave her a chance.

"You do realize that he will continue to be *my* lover, despite the fact that you wear his ring?"

"I – Bram loves me."

"Loves you?" she said with a laugh and then the duchess's eyes narrowed into menacing slits. "That conniving bitch. I paid her well to make certain no one got to him."

This time, Kitty was smart enough to remain silent. She could glean far more by acting unintelligent than by divulging information.

The duchess snorted indelicately. "Loves you?" she asked again. "Do you really believe a man like Bram Barclay is capable of love?"

"Yes," Kitty replied simply.

"Lydia," Bram called as he stepped onto the veranda.

Kitty's shoulders sagged as she let out a bit of the tension she had been holding.

Bram continued. "I assume the *conniving bitch* would be one of my servants."

Trembling, the duchess whirled on Bram. She crossed her arms over her chest and flipped her head so that one inky tendril wisped away from her forehead.

Kitty stared, her gaze darting between the two of them. Had perhaps Alice been a spy placed in Bram's house by the duchess? Kitty's lips parted.

"I've known for quite some time of Mrs. Bush's disloyalty," Bram said as he moved around Kitty and slipped his arm about her waist.

Mrs. Bush! The snide remarks. The fact she had assigned Kitty to the kitchen despite Bram's request. Mrs. Bush was a spy for the duchess.

"Bram, don't be ridiculous," the duchess said in a blatant attempt to cover her folly.

"It is *you* who is being ridiculous, Lydia," Bram said.

The duchess smirked. "Don't think I won't go to that gossip columnist, Allenby, with everything I know about you, Bram Barclay."

Bram laughed heartily and Kitty had to fight to suppress a snicker.

The duchess's face grew redder by the second and then she spun and stalked back into the Ashcrofts' ballroom.

Bram turned to Kitty and lifted her chin with his index finger. Kitty gazed into his eyes.

"You have stolen my heart," he said, his eyes warming and chasing away any memories she had of him with the Duchess of Blakemore.

Kitty's insides tightened as they did every time he looked at her with such love and adoration in his eyes. He slanted his head down and pressed a sweet kiss to her lips. How could he be so tender at times and in such total control of her pleasure at others? Her head swam with sudden desire.

"It appears as if you have your first unpleasant task tomorrow as mistress of our estate," he said as he brushed his thumb along her earlobe.

"Unpleasant?" Kitty asked.



Bram's sensuous mouth drew into a smile. "On the other hand, you might enjoy terminating Mrs. Bush."

"Most assuredly," Kitty told him.

The laughter left his eyes and he drew in a sharp breath as he took her hand and pressed it to the bulge in his breeches. "Half an hour. Mingle with Lady Ashcroft's guests and then meet me in the garden."

Kitty's nipples tightened underneath her chemise. Warmth spiraled downward and pulsed between her legs. The thought of him bending her over and taking her behind the shrubbery made her want him right now. "Half an hour?"

"Do not be tardy," he warned. "Not even a minute—or I will most certainly punish you."

Kitty smiled. "Yes, *Master*."

## **About the Author**

Growing up in the south, where the air is thick with stories steeped in legend and truth, Debra came by her love of romance novels honestly. Well...sort of. At an early age, she pilfered from her grandmother's extensive library and has been a fan of the genre since.

A full-time freelance writer, Debra especially enjoys combining history, mystery and a touch of taboo to weave stories with unforgettable, haunted heroes.

She lives in Alabama with her sexy real life hero, a couple of smart-aleck ghosts and a diabolical black cat.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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