



*Twelfth Night:
Epiphany*

By Jackie Barbosa

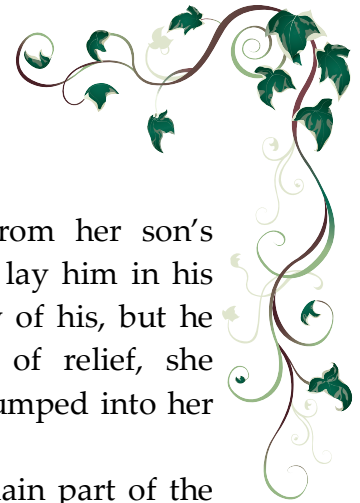


Twelfth Night: Epiphany

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Twelfth Night: Epiphany
Copyright© 2010 Jackie Barbosa

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.



January 6, 1818

Louisa de Roche gently disentangled her hair from her son's reflexive infant grasp and rose from the rocking chair to lay him in his cradle. He stirred and snorted in that adorable baby way of his, but he didn't waken when she set him down. With a sigh of relief, she straightened and turned to leave the room...and nearly bumped into her husband.

Alistair stood in the doorway that separated the main part of the nursery from this small bedchamber, looking breathtakingly handsome, as always. Though still clad in the dark maroon frock coat and forest green breeches he'd worn for their Twelfth Night soiree, he had removed his cravat and opened the first few buttons of his shirt, revealing the bronzed skin of his throat and upper chest. His green eyes glittered in the flickering glow of the hurricane lamp, sweet with love, hot with desire.

Her breath stalled in her chest, and desire blossomed thick and full in her belly. For the briefest moment, it was as it had been before Christopher was born. She was ready to drop her dressing gown and bare herself to his touch, to his gaze, in the fullness of the light.

And then she remembered.

Instead of dropping it, she pulled her dressing gown tighter over her too heavy breasts and gave Alistair a tight smile. "Has everyone gone now?"

He nodded, a lazy grin spreading across his chiseled features. "Thank God. I thought they'd never leave."

There could be no misinterpreting the husky undertone in his voice. He wanted her. As she wanted him—oh, so very much.

But not in the light.

She glanced down at Christopher. He'd already found his mouth with his thumb and was busily sucking away, his dark lashes resting peacefully above the pale skin of his cheeks. She couldn't use him as a delaying tactic. Not tonight.

Alistair moved to stand beside her, wrapping one arm around her

all but nonexistent waist. "Thank you for my son," he murmured, nuzzling at her neck.

She shivered as gooseflesh spread down her arm. "You had a little something to do with it, you know."

"Hmmm." He slipped behind her and pulled her close until the curve of her arse was snug against him. The hardened ridge of his cock nestled there, weakening her knees and her resolve to postpone their encounter until she could be certain of the cover of darkness. "You've never referred to it as 'little' before. Should I be offended?"

A whoosh of laughter escaped her, and she twisted in his arms. "You know that isn't what I meant."

He arched an eyebrow. "Do I? It's been awfully long since you've gotten a good look. Why don't we retire to our chamber so you can give the matter a proper examination?"

Heat undulated beneath the surface of her skin. Oh, how she wanted to accede. He was right. It had been ages since she'd been able to properly appreciate his body when they made love, for though the darkness saved her the indignity of displaying her own defects, it also prevented her from enjoying his sculpted perfection.

Her mouth actually watered at the thought of gazing upon the silky-hard length of his cock again. Her other senses had become insufficient to her need, and yet...how could she allow him to see what she had become?

She looked away. "I'm sorry, I can't. The baby—"

"—is sleeping like a baby," Alistair put in smoothly. He stepped back and took her hand, twirling her about until she faced him, and then he encircled her with his arms. "There is no reason for you not to come to bed with me. Now."

There was *every* reason, her mind screamed. The faded but still visible marks striping her belly and thighs. The flabby bulge of her belly that wouldn't quite go away. The embarrassing enlargement of her breasts and nipples, which had begun while she was pregnant but only gotten worse since her milk had come in.

Her body wasn't her own any more, it seemed, and it certainly wasn't the one Alistair had grown to know and love. It wasn't even the

ungainly, distended one he'd worshipped when she carried Christopher within her. She shuddered with pleasure as she remembered how much he'd enjoyed watching her body change day by day as their child grew within her. And how, once her morning sickness had eased, their carnal bouts had become an exciting exercise in finding new and different ways to work around her growing belly. It had been fun then, both of them a little amazed and awed by what was happening within her body...and without.

But now, after more than four months, her body wasn't changing anymore, and she was none too pleased with the results. It was, in a word, ugly.

He seemed to sense her reluctance, for he placed his hand under her chin and angled her head up so she was forced to meet his eyes. "Please, Louisa, don't refuse me. Not tonight."

Something in the plea—the edge of need in his voice, perhaps—melted her resistance. Saying no to Alistair was always difficult, especially when sex was involved, but tonight—the final night of Christmas—it was impossible.

She nodded, tears that were half joy, half dread thickening her throat. Joy that he wanted her so much. Dread that he might not in the future. That it would be him, not her, who wanted to make love only in the dark.

Alistair took her hand firmly in his and led her out of the nursery and down the hall to their bedchamber. Although technically Louisa had her own chambers as befitted her station as a countess, she rarely slept there, preferring to spend her nights in Alistair's bed, even when her condition precluded sexual congress.

The sight that met her eyes when he opened the door, however, made her gasp in surprise.

The large room was aglow with candles and oil lamps, so many that the illumination within bordered on daylight. There would be no hiding in the shadows, no quick ducking beneath the covers to shield her flaws.

But worse than the candles were the mirrors. They were everywhere. One on each side of the gargantuan bed and one at its foot,

and most shocking, a large plate affixed to the ceiling over the bed.

She stopped in the doorway and turned to stare at her husband, aghast. "What's all this?"

He tugged her inside and kicked the door shut behind him. "Your gift for Twelfth Night."

Her eyes widened. "My gift? Are you mad?" Or worse, mocking her.

"Not mad, only determined to show my beloved wife she's still as beautiful in my eyes as ever."

His words, delivered with gentle sincerity, struck her hard. He *knew*. Understood her fear though she had never expressed it to him.

No wonder she loved this man so fiercely. And yet...he couldn't understand, not really.

"But I'm not," she protested, her voice cracking. "You haven't seen..."

"No, I haven't," he agreed softly. "So, show me."

She blinked and bit her lip, unbalanced by the simple request. Instinctively, she knew there was no escape. Never had been, really. But her hands simply wouldn't cooperate, wouldn't take the steps necessary to reveal herself to the light, to his gaze. To the mirrors and her own unwilling eyes.

"Shall I help you?" he asked when she didn't respond for several long seconds.

Squeezing her eyes shut, she bit her lip and nodded.

His hands brushed against her collarbones as he pulled open the neckline of her dressing gown. Though the room was far from chilly, cool air rushed across her nipples as he bared her breasts.

She tensed as he cupped one globe in his palm, relieving her of its weight, and then she felt his humid breath against her skin as he pressed his lips to the flesh just above her nipple.

"Remember our first afternoon together?" he asked, his voice soft and gravelly.

"How could I forget?" Every steamy moment of that forbidden encounter was scorched into her memory. It had been her introduction to the vast and varied pleasures of sex, and a remarkably full one at that. She

clenched her legs tight together in an effort to quell the rising ache between them as she recalled the way he'd taken her that first time, fucking not her pussy, but her arse in an honorable if ultimately unnecessary effort to preserve her virginity for the man he'd thought she was to marry.

"I told you then your breasts were beautiful, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," she whispered in response as his tongue grazed the stiff crest. Though no longer as sensitive as it once had been, the brief contact sent another sharp twinge of desire spiking to her core.

"Open your eyes, my love." His tone was soft but commanding, and she did as he asked.

Somehow, without her realizing it, he had maneuvered her so that she stood in front of the mirror on the nearer side of the bed. In it, she saw Alistair's golden head bent over her chest. He released his hold on the breast he teased with his tongue and fondled the other, tweaking the nipple between his fingers.

"Do you find them ugly now?"

"A...a little," she admitted.

"Why?"

"They are so big and...they leak sometimes." As if to illustrate her point, a drop of liquid trickled from the breast he caressed.

Alistair lifted his head and smiled at her. "My love, there is no such thing as too big when it comes to breasts—at least not in this man's opinion—and as for the leaking..." He wiped away the droplet with his finger. "...you feed our son with this and have made him big and strong. You must think me a selfish man if you imagine I find that anything less than beautiful."

Louisa found herself blinking again, this time not in confusion, but to hold back tears of gratitude. Still, her oversized, leaky breasts were only one small part of the problem.

As if in response to her unspoken lament, he knelt in front of her and opened the dressing gown down to her navel. She almost doubled over in a giggle when his tongue snaked unexpectedly into the divot, tickling her.

"I remember when this poked out by at least half an inch," he said,

grinning up at her like a schoolboy. "I liked that, but I like this, too."

"Well," she admitted with a half-smile, "that went back the way it was, but..."

"But not this," he said, sliding his hand down to cup the mound of her belly. The mound she hated.

It wasn't as if she'd ever been thin, of course. She'd always been generously proportioned, and that had applied to her stomach just as much as everywhere else.

But there was a difference between that and this...this pouch. It made her feel like one of those strange Australian creatures called a kangaroo, except her offspring didn't even need it.

"It's horrible, isn't it?"

Instead of answering, Alistair spread the dressing gown all the way open and pushed it off her shoulders. It fell to the floor behind her, leaving her completely exposed. All her secrets revealed.

He lifted his hand and laid his cheek against her belly. "Not horrible, my love, no more than these..." His fingers lazily traced one faded welt above her hipbone, then another beneath it, then another and another. "I adore each and every one of these. Perhaps it's selfish of me, but I think of them as my marks on you." He followed his fingers with his lips, dotting kisses across her hips and abdomen and down her thighs.

At first, the kisses were light and teasing, but then he turned his head and nuzzled the mound of her sex with real purpose. She clutched at his hair, her knees wobbling as his tongue snaked out and laved the outer folds of her pussy.

"Spread your legs wider. I want to taste you properly."

His name escaped her lips on a whimper, but she did as she was bid. He angled his head and stretched her open with his fingers before touching his tongue to her sensitized flesh. God, he knew just how to do this to maximize her pleasure, how to bring her to the edge of release and hold her there until at last she fell over and splintered into light and bliss.

Her eyelids fluttered as she fought to maintain her balance while the tension coiled and built. Just when she thought she might collapse, she caught her reflection in the mirror. Her skin was flushed, her breasts heaving, her stomach flexing with impending orgasm while her husband's

golden head bobbed between her thighs. Unable to look away, she stared at herself as her climax broke over her, fascinated by the way her eyes darkened, her mouth opened, her body shook.

She had never seen anything more erotic—or more beautiful—in her life.

Alistair got to his feet and lifted her off the floor in one smooth motion, as though she didn't still weigh more than a stone more than she used to.

"So, countess, have you decided you like your present after all?" His lips curled into a devilish grin, but his eyes were almost as dark as her own had been, and she could feel the weight of his cock straining against her thigh.

She threw her arms about his neck and laughed. "I have decided I quite heartily approve. Although," she added, glancing up at the mirror hanging over the bed, "I must admit I am a bit uncertain about that one. How, exactly, am I meant to benefit from it?"

He pressed a kiss to her mouth, then dropped her on the bed with a mischievous wink. "If you'll give me a moment to undress, I'll be happy to demonstrate."

Louisa rolled onto her side atop the fine muslin coverlet to watch him disrobe. How silly she had been to deny herself the pleasure of gazing upon his body. He was so lovely—in a purely masculine way, of course—from the corded muscles of his back and arms to the flat plane of his abdomen to the tight curves of his arse. And, most of all, the long, thick shaft of his cock, which sprang free from his drawers, upright and proud. She smiled as she recalled thinking when she first heard the word *cock* that it was an apt name for such a showy organ.

Alistair followed her gaze, the corners of his mouth pulling down in a mock frown. "I pray you are not thinking again how 'little' my contribution is."

She stifled a giggle and raised her eyebrows in mock surprise. "Is that another word for it you haven't taught me yet?"

Stretching out her arm as he approached the bed, she ran her fingertip across the downy head, then wrapped her palm around its rigid length. The contrast between the softness of the skin that covered his

contribution and the steely hardness beneath never ceased to amaze and impress her. What he could do with that combination of soft and hard impressed her even more.

The slit at the tip welled with slippery fluid, and, as he was close enough, she leaned over and lapped it up with her tongue.

He sucked in a breath, his cock jerking at her touch. "Keep that up, countess, and my contribution is likely to be small, indeed. Not to mention brief."

She released him and rolled onto her back, allowing him to climb onto the bed beside her. He stretched out alongside her and propped himself on one elbow, allowing the other hand to drift over her hip and ribs to her breast.

"Gorgeous," he murmured, and she flushed with pleasure. She'd be damned if she didn't believe him with the way he caressed her breast with an intensity approaching reverence.

When he lowered his head toward her, she first thought he intended to take her breast into his mouth as he had earlier, but instead he captured her lips in a long, lazy kiss. She opened her mouth, allowing his tongue to sweep inside and dance with hers. Heat flared at her core, sweet anticipation singing beneath her skin.

She squeezed her eyes shut, intent only on sensation—on the whisky-rich flavor of his tongue, the soap-and-starch scent of his skin, the sheer rapture of his mouth on hers while his hands continued to work their extravagant, erotic magic.

His hand left her breasts after torturing each tip to a peak and made its way down to her mons, and she opened her legs in response. He played there, circling her aching clitoris for what seemed an eternity before at last touching her there, tweaking her and sending her crashing into a hard, fast climax that left her breathless and limp, yet wholly unsatisfied.

She needed him inside her, wanted him to stretch and fill her, couldn't bear another second of emptiness.

Eyes still closed, she whispered, "Fuck me now, Alistair," knowing he loved it when she used the coarse, carnal vocabulary he'd taught her the first time they'd been together. Words like *pussy* and *cock* and *arse* and

fuck. Words for her what had once been her most unspeakable desires.

She felt him position himself above her, braced on his arms, the head of his cock teasing the damp, swollen lips of her pussy. But he didn't surge forward as she expected.

Opening her eyes, she looked up into his face. His expression was tight with barely leashed control. "What are you waiting for?"

"That," he said on a grunt. "Look up."

Oh. The mirror. Right.

She focused on their reflection just in time to see the muscles of his back and arse bunch together as he thrust his cock inside her, seating himself to the hilt in one smooth, elegant motion. His muscled relaxed, then corded against as he began to fuck her in earnest.

As before, the sight heightened her arousal, made her slick and hot with the need to come again.

"Do you see now?" he asked gruffly.

"Very well, thank you."

"Shall I show you more?"

"There's more?"

"Definitely."

He withdrew and rolled onto his back. "You on top now."

Puzzled as to how she could see more with her back to the overhead mirror, she started to straddle him nonetheless.

"No. Your back to me."

"Ohhhh," she breathed, comprehension washing over her along with another wave of heat.

Turning around, she placed one leg on either side of his thighs, grasped his cock, slick with her juices, and placed the head at the opening of her pussy. Then, looking into the mirror at the foot of the bed, she slowly sheathed him, watching in wonder and delight as her body stretched to accommodate his girth.

"Now 'tis your turn to fuck me, my lady. I am yours to do with as you wish."

And fuck him she did. Although, she had to admit, he helped, thrusting his hips upward to meet her downward movements, pulling back when she moved up. The sensations were exquisite, but magnified a

thousand-fold by the fact that she could *see* the soft, pink flesh of her pussy engulf the shaft as he worked her, in and out, up and down. He used his fingers between her thighs to spread her lips wider, so she could see even more clearly the place where they joined, then parted, then became one again.

The thought that she was a voyeur in her own pleasure brought her to the brink of orgasm, her skin too tight, her breathing too rapid, too uneven. She couldn't keep up this pace much longer, but she couldn't come, either. And oh, how she needed release.

Sensing her distress, Alistair pressed his fingers to her clitoris, rubbing in time with her movements until she reached the point of no return and the climax burst over her. As she trembled and shuddered, he held her steady and fucked her, fast and furious, bringing her almost unbelievably to another orgasm before surrendering to his own.

She caught her reflection in the mirror at the exact moment when his hot seed pulsed into her womb. And damned if she wasn't every bit as beautiful as Alistair claimed.

Because she was loved.

Epiphany, indeed.

The End

Author Bio

When Jackie isn't trying to be a writer—and even when she is—she's a happily married mother of three who makes her living writing technical training materials for the software industry. Jackie has been telling stories since before she learned to write—just ask her mother! You can read more about Alistair and Louisa in *Carnally Ever After*, which is available at www.cobblestonepress.com, and learn more about her other published short stories and novellas at www.jackiebarbosa.com.