



Victorian Brats

*Volume One*

*The Virgin Widow  
To Catch a Thief  
The Problem Solver*

Melinda Barron

**VICTORIAN BRATS  
VOLUME ONE**

**THE VIRGIN  
WIDOW**

**TO CATCH A THIEF**

**THE PROBLEM  
SOLVER**

**BY MELINDA BARRON  
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BARRON**

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# **THE VIRGIN WIDOW**

**BY MELINDA BARRON**

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BARRON**



# CHAPTER ONE

London, Fall 1885

“There she is, Charlotte Hudson, a widow AND a virgin.” The large woman held a fan in front of her face and tittered. I thought I was going to slap her. If she was going to talk about me the least she could do was make sure that I didn’t hear her.

“Rumor has it that she killed her husband on their wedding day.” The other woman sitting next to her was small and mousy looking. My mourning had been over for four days and I had made sure to attend Lord Essex’s party, since I knew half the ton would attend. And I’d made sure to wear something that would catch everyone’s attention.

My red satin dress was low cut and very frilly. Let the old hens gossip. All I wanted was to be in something besides black.

The first woman spoke again. “Look at that dress. Husband hunting again, I would say. And barely out of mourning. Barnard left her money, quite a bit of it I hear. But I’m sure she wants more. Perhaps she should choose an old husband who is about to die. Then she could have his house and blunt and wouldn’t have to worry about living with her first husband’s father anymore. She’ll just need to be sure she makes it to the marriage bed before she kills off this one.”

I turned and stared at her, recognizing Lady Chesterfield. “You’re right, Milady, I’m looking again. But I want someone young, not someone old. Do you have someone in mind? Perhaps your son? I hear he’s looking for a young virgin. Should I offer myself?” My voice was high and several people in the vicinity turned to stare.

Several of the gentlemen laughed boldly and the woman I was addressing gave me an evil stare. “You little hussy, you don’t deserve to be here. And you stay away from my son!”

I returned the stare. “Perhaps I don’t, but Lord Essex invited me just the same. Perhaps I should ask him to seat me next to your son at dinner. His name is Tarleton, correct? I wonder, though, if he would know what to do with a virgin. Several stories I have heard indicate otherwise.”

Lady Chesterfield stood, her bulk quivering with indignation. “I shall have you removed at once you insolent little tramp. Murderer, that is what you are!” She pointed her finger at me and the laughing that had taken place at my comments about Tarleton Tupin, the future Lord Chesterfield, died down.

“I find it hard to see how I can be a virgin and a tramp at the same time,” I said, glaring at her. I started to add more to the statement but I felt a hand on my elbow, squeezing gently and looked up to see Lord Essex staring at me. Our host has mischief in his eyes as he shook his head at me, indicating that I should stay quiet.

“Ladies, ladies,” he said softly. A crowd had gathered to see what would happen next. “It is early in the evening. I believe that if we are to have a disagreement it should come after dinner. Lady Chesterfield, as much as I enjoy your company I would also request that you refrain from calling my guests murderers. It makes me most unhappy.”

Lady Chesterfield turned her glare from me and smiled up at Lord Essex’s handsome face. “Do forgive me, milord. I lost my temper.”

She turned and glared at me again.

“I think, Lady Chesterfield, that the person who deserves an apology here is Mrs. Hudson,” Lord Essex’s voice was like melted chocolate. “After all, she is the one who had been branded a murderer with no evidence to support the idea.”

Lady Chesterfield looked as if she would gag on the words but she uttered an apology, which I accepted. Then her friend took her by the arm and led her away. The crowd was dispersing. I knew they were talking about the incident and that by morning it would be in every gossip sheet in London. After all, my husband had died on our wedding day, after falling from the rooftop of his father’s home. and I had been seen on the roof, talking to Bernard before he died. His father was now my guardian, as I had no other relatives.

I looked up at Lord Essex. He was a very handsome man, about 35 years of age, muscular with dark hair and eyes. My friend Layla said he was the very essence of the phrase “tall, dark and handsome.” Seeing him now I realized that she was right.

“Forgive me, milord,” I whispered softly. “I will gather my wrap and take my leave. Perhaps you could tell my friend Layla, Lady Thomas, where I have gone?”

Lord Essex’s face broke into a large grin. “On the contrary, Mrs. Hudson, this little incident will liven up what has been a rather dull affair. You will not leave. You will stay. And you will enjoy yourself at dinner and at the dancing afterwards. If you do not save me a dance I will be most unhappy.”

He took my hand and kissed it gently, smiling at me as he did so. And then he was gone. I watched him walk up to two of his well known friends, Lord Beaton and Lord Cannonberry. They put their heads together and began talking animatedly. Layla appeared at my shoulder, laughing as she tried to get my attention.

“My goodness I can’t believe you have caused such a fuss on your first night back in society.” She followed my eyes to the trio of Lords standing in the center of the room. “Isn’t he handsome. I think you should set your cap for him. He obviously fancies you, inviting you to his ball, knowing the exact day that your mourning was over. That means he’s kept track of the time. Perhaps he wants the virgin widow in his bed.”

I laughed and turned to look at Layla. She looked stunning this evening in a blue satin gown. She reached up and tucked back one of my dark curls and I shook my head. “He is rather handsome but I think he is a bit out of my league. I mean really I’m the daughter, and widow of a merchant, a well-known merchant whose family moves in society, but a merchant nonetheless. I don’t see Lord Essex inviting me to his bed.”

Layla smiled. She had landed a Lord during her second season and recently presented him with a son. “And would you go to his bed? Would you give yourself to the handsome Lord?”

“Of course not,” I whispered, shaking my head. “I will go to my wedding night a virgin.”

Layla laughed again. “I have news for you Charlotte. You’ve already had your wedding night and you’re still a virgin. I think you should find a way to move out of the Hudson home and live on the money that Barnard left you. Surely someone, perhaps Lord Essex, could help you do that. And then invite him to your bed. You won’t regret it.”

I was staring at Lord Essex as he talked to his two friends. All three were very handsome. Lord Essex was as dark and handsome as his friends were blond and handsome. I stared at Lord Essex again. I wondered what it would be like to lie under him, or any man for that matter. His hands were large and I thought about them caressing my breasts, slipping between my thighs. I wondered what a man looked like without his clothing on.

As if he could sense what I was thinking Lord Essex turned and looked at me, smiling, a seductive twinkle in his eyes. We locked eyes for a moment and I felt my breath catch in my

chest. Then he smiled and turned, nodding at Lord Cannonberry, who grinned. They left the room together.

Layla leaned in closer to me and whispered in my ear. “Do it, Charlotte, do it. Think about it. You’re 23 years old and still a virgin. You’ve spent the last year in mourning. I’m sure that Lord Essex would gladly take you to his bed. The man obviously wants you. I’ll cover for you during your trysts.”

I shook my head at her and smiled. “I couldn’t possibly Layla. What would he want with a silly little virgin like me? I’m sure he has many willing women to warm his bed.”

I tried to change the subject. “I hope they have me sitting near you during dinner. I don’t think I can stand it if we’re not. One can only be called a murderer so many times during a day.”

We laughed and moved into the main room. Then Layla’s husband came to claim her, smiling at me and kissing me on the cheek, and I was alone again. The guests were staring at me, turning their backs and talking low. I had that effect on people. My father, Joshua Martin, was a partner with Raymond Hudson, my late husband’s father. They had matched us up to keep the business in the family. My father had died two months before Barnard and I had married.

After Barnard died I’d done the only thing I knew to do. I moved in with Raymond Hudson and his wife, Sarah. The whispers of murder had started two days after Barnard’s death. Several people said they’d seen me on the roof before Barnard had fallen. It was true, but he had been alive when I left. When the actual incident occurred I’d been downstairs with Sarah, making sure the wedding dinner was ready to be served.

But the ton had ignored Sarah’s denials, saying she would have protected me since I was married to her son. I had been branded a murderer. The authorities had not seen fit to charge me, but during my mourning period I had been shunned. No one except Layla showed up for tea, when someone met me out shopping they’d turned their backs. Even Sarah and Raymond had begun to distance themselves from me, even though I lived in their home.

When the invitation to Lord Essex’s ball had arrived I’d been shocked. I couldn’t believe he was inviting me to what was one of the biggest events of the season. Sarah told me I couldn’t attend, because of my mourning. I’d pointed out to her that my mourning period would be over four days before the ball. Then I’d ordered a red dress that was so low cut my breasts were barely covered and taken the family carriage, while Sarah and Raymond had declined to attend.

I stood near a group of women and thought about joining their conversation. Two were friends of mine from school, Rachel Adams, now a mother of three, and Amanda Williams, a new bride. Both turned their backs on me without saying a word.

I looked around for the refreshment table, thinking a drink of lemonade would improve my mood. I moved to the table where a handsome young man about my age handed me a cup. Before I could find out his name his mother came and snatched him away, sending me a look that could have melted ice.

I sipped my lemonade and made my way around the room. No one made an attempt to talk with me. I stood alone for a few moments and then decided that maybe Sarah was right. I shouldn’t have come. I’d caused a ruckus, and Layla was busy with her husband and his friends.

I looked around for Lord Essex, planning on giving him my regrets and taking my leave. I couldn’t find him. I sat down my cup and left the room. The house was enormous and I wondered where he might be. He had stood up for me but I was sure Layla was wrong. He was only being polite to his guest. He didn’t have designs on me.

I moved down the hallway and looked at the paintings on the wall. Scenes of fox hunting and landscapes. I didn’t recognize any of the artists but the paintings were well done.

I took another right down a corridor and realized that the crowd had thinned. In the main hallway people had been mulling around me, trying to ignore me. Now I was alone. I continued

looking at the paintings. The doors were shut and dark underneath, except for one room at the end of the hall. A light was visible under the doorway.

I wondered if Lord Essex was in the room and that's why lamps had been lit inside. I knocked and received no answer. I knocked again and turned the handle. The door opened inward to reveal a library. It was warm and cozy; a large table with several chairs around it lined the far wall. Two of the other walls were lined with books. A warm, toasty blaze crackled in the fireplace. I stepped inside. I loved to read. It was a great passion of mine that my father had indulged. Several large wingback chairs were placed around the room. The Persian carpets looked expensive and gave the room an exotic feeling.

I stopped in the doorway. I could go inside and invade Lord Essex's privacy, or I could go back to the main room and be ignored, listening to people brand me a killer. I stepped inside and closed the door.

There was a large mirror nestled in between the bookshelves on the far wall. I stared at my reflection. The dress I was wearing was beautiful and the dressmaker had made it perfectly. It conformed to my curves. Sarah said I was too plump but I disagreed. My breasts were large and full, as were my hips. My corset held in my waist, as men liked. My dark hair was piled on top of my head, little ringlets coming down the sides. I knew I looked lovely. It was too bad no man wanted me because of the nasty rumors that were making the rounds.

I turned around and around, staring at my reflection. Perhaps I should do as Layla suggested. If I propositioned Lord Essex would he turn me down, laugh at a silly little girl who no longer wanted the burden of her maidenhead? Layla said the initial penetration was painful. I wondered how painful. I wondered what it would feel like. Layla had tried to describe it, but failed.

"You feel very... well... very full." The words hadn't inspired me with a desire to have a man between my thighs, until now.

I went to the near wall and ran my fingers down the leather spines of the books. They were absolutely beautiful, and very expensive. I made my way around, admiring the books and running my hands along the cool wood of the beautifully polished table. I knew that Lord Essex was rich but this room was beyond anything I had ever seen.

I took a few of the books off the shelves and sat down in the chair. Perhaps I wouldn't leave, I thought. Perhaps I would just disappear for a while. Give everyone something to talk about. Make them think I was trysting with someone in the gardens. Add a bit of spice to the gossip. Leaving was too much like running away. I was never one to run away. Besides, I thought, enough gossip and Raymond might set me up in a house of my own. I liked that idea.

I opened one of the books and began to read. I didn't recognize the author but the book was an adventure story, of treasure lost and found. I was just finishing the first chapter when a noise at the doorway broke my attention span. Someone was coming in. I realized that I shouldn't be here, that I shouldn't have made myself at home in Lord Essex's library.

I grabbed the book and ran to the back of the room, crouching behind one of the chairs. Just as I settled myself down the door opened fully and Lord Essex and Lord Beaton stepped inside. I tried to control my breathing. My palms were sweating. Lord Essex had defended me with Lady Chesterfield, but would he do so when he caught me in his private rooms?

They were talking but I couldn't hear exactly what they were saying. Moments later the door opened again. I peeked around the chair and saw Amelia Turnston, a young widow, enter just ahead of Lord Cannonberry.

Lord Cannonberry shut the door and Lord Essex's voice boomed out.

"You may kneel in the center of the rug, Amelia." I gasped, and then quickly covered my mouth, afraid my gasp had been heard. When no one came my way I looked out again. Amelia

Turnston was kneeling in the center of the room, her hands clasped behind her back, her head bowed.

The three Lords were standing around her in a semi-circle; all three had stern looks on their faces.

“You’ve broken the rules of the Club, Amelia,” Lord Essex said. “Do you have anything to say in your defense?”

Amelia’s voice was low. “No Milords, I do not. Please forgive me for my indiscretion. Please punish me as you see fit.”

I stared at the scene in front of me. The Club? What Club? And punish her? I knew I should stand and make myself known. But I couldn’t. All I could do was stare at Amelia as she knelt, her head bowed.

“Very well, Amelia,” Lord Essex said, his voice stern. “Go and stand in front of the table.”

He made his way toward a cupboard near the far wall where I was hiding. I wondered if he would see me. I crouched down lower, feeling the hard ends of my corset digging into my stomach. The uncomfortable feeling caused me to gasp again and I thought I saw Lord Essex glance my way.

But he did not come over. Instead he smiled and then pulled out a drawer, taking out a long thin strap of leather. I realized at that point what was happening. They were going to spank Amelia with the leather. I looked toward Amelia. She was bent over the table. Lord Beaton was pulling up her skirts to reveal her rear end. Lord Cannonberry was taking hold of her drawers and pulling them down. Her bum was now naked.

Lord Essex walked up behind her. “Hands above your head, Amelia.”

I was on my knees now, still hidden behind the chair but I had a perfect view. Amelia raised her arms above her head, her hands flat on the table. I was in shock, I knew I should cry out, stop this before it went any further. But I was glued to the spot. I wanted to see what was going to happen next.

Amelia’s soft voice was barely audible. “Please forgive me, Milords. I’m sorry for my indiscretion. I pray you, show me my place.”

The leather made a swishing noise as it sailed through the air and landed on Amelia’s bare bum. She moaned softly. “Thank you Milord for showing me my place. May I have more correction, please?”

The leather landed again and again and again. Each time I heard it sail through the air my breath caught in my throat, as if the leather would land on my bum. After each swat Amelia thanked Lord Essex and asked for “more correction.” After a few minutes Lord Essex handed the leather to Lord Cannonberry, who continued the spanking. After a few more minutes he handed the strap to Lord Beaton, who took his place. I could hear the tears in Amelia’s voice. She was thanking them and then begging for more correction in the same breath, her crying very noticeable.

I wanted to jump up and yell for them to stop. I wanted to scream and run from the room, telling every person in the drawing room that a woman was being whipped in the library. But I didn’t. I knelt and watched. The sounds of the leather and of Amelia’s moans were causing my belly to clinch. They were also causing a queer feeling in my quim. It quivered with each moan. I stared at Lord Essex. He was standing off to the side, watching his friends whip the young widow. I wondered what it felt like, what Amelia was feeling.

When Lord Beaton finished the spanking the room was silent except for Amelia’s soft sobs. I could hear myself breathing heavily. I was fascinated. She seemed to love what they were

doing to her but why, I wondered, were they whipping her? What gave them the right? Why did she permit it?

There was silence and I saw Lord Beaton hand the strip to Lord Essex. He took it and lightly began to caress Amelia's rear, which had bright splashes of red spread across it.

"What is the first rule of the Club, Amelia?" Lord Beaton asked, his voice stern.

"Milords are in charge," she whispered. "Their word is law."

"And why were you punished today?" Lord Cannonberry's voice held the same sternness.

"For breaking the rules," Amelia said. "I disobeyed an order from Lord Beaton today."

"And what order was that?" Lord Essex asked.

"Lord Beaton ordered me to his home for a spanking today, and I couldn't make the appointment." Her voice was soft. "Please Milords, forgive me. Don't make me leave the Club. I couldn't get away from my family. I didn't mean to miss the appointment. Please forgive me. It won't happen again."

I watched as the three of them exchanged glances. Lord Essex nodded. "Very well Amelia, we will give you one more chance. You will receive ten more strokes from each of us now. Then you will come to Lord Beaton's home at precisely two tomorrow. Do not be late. Do not miss the appointment. You will take whatever punishment Lord Beaton gives you. Do I make myself clear?"

Amelia sniffled. "Yes, Milord, I will do as you say."

I listened as the swats were delivered, one right after the other. Amelia's moans were growing louder.

"Please Milords, please, I need release." Her voice was loud, her tone pleading.

"Release is for good little girls," Lord Beaton said. "Perhaps I will allow it tomorrow, but not tonight."

The swats ended and Lord Essex's voice rang out. "You are to make yourself available to any member of the Club when they ask Amelia, is that clear?"

"Yes, Lord Essex, it's very clear. Thank you for the correction, Milords."

"Very well," Lord Cannonberry said. "We'll see if you've learned your lesson tomorrow. You may stand now."

I watched as she stood, her legs wobbly. Lord Cannonberry supported her on one side, Lord Beaton on the other. Both reached up and gently pushed hair away from her face. Lord Essex moved in behind her and talked softly in her ear. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but she was sighing with pleasure, showing that she enjoyed whatever it was he'd whispered.

Essex then took the leather strap and stepped back. I slipped back down behind the chair. Cannonberry and Beaton were helping Amelia straighten her skirts and fix her hair. The four of them stood in the center of the room and talked for a few moments.

I heard the door open and shut. I leaned my head against the back of the chair, trying to catch my breath. I had not been discovered, amazingly enough. I had started to rise when I heard footsteps coming across the room. Lord Essex had the leather strap in his hands. He crossed the room and sat down in the chair I was hiding behind.

"You may come out now Mrs. Hudson," he said sternly. I stood up and he turned around to face me.

"My, my, my, what a naughty little girl you are," he said, laughter in his voice. "Whatever am I going to do with you?"

## CHAPTER TWO

Lord Essex had taken off his coat and loosened his shirtsleeves before the spanking. Now, sitting in the chair with the leather draped casually across his lap he looked wicked.

I shivered, trying to find my voice. "Please forgive me, Milord," I said in a mimic of Amelia's words. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I was simply looking for a quiet place. I won't tell anyone what I've seen. I swear."

Lord Essex's smile deepened. "Oh I know you won't say anything, Mrs. Hudson. It would further harm your already damaged reputation. I'm not worried about you saying anything. I'm wondering how to punish you for prying into my private affairs."

He wiggled the leather in his lap and smiled.

"Oh no!" My voice was quivering. I tried to put conviction in my words. "I will not allow you to do THAT..." I stopped and pointed to the table, "to ME. And I did not pry. It was an honest mistake."

And he laughed. He actually laughed at me. He stood and walked toward me, the leather strap hanging from his hand.

"Oh my dear Mrs. Hudson, you will allow it, and much more before we are finished. And, if it was an honest mistake you should have made your presence known." He crossed behind me and gathered me into his arms, using the strap to pull me back against him. The leather was resting against my stomach and I shuddered.

His lips were near my ears. Never had a man held me this closely, not even Barnard.

"My sweet Mrs. Hudson, I simply cannot allow you to witness what you just did without any punishment."

I tried to wiggle out of his arms and he pulled the leather tighter. I could feel his manhood pressed against my bum. It was hard and much larger than I thought it would be. It caused a wave of what I could only assume was desire that made my knees go weak. I wanted to turn around and touch it. To see it. The feelings scared me and thrilled me at the same time.

"Release me," I said softly. "I promise you I won't say anything. Please, release me."

He kissed my neck, just below my ear and I moaned. He dropped the leather at my feet and his hands went up to my breasts, gently caressing them through the satin material. Then he pulled on the bodice and my nipples spilled forth. They were hard and aching. He gathered them in his fingers and gently twisted them. I pushed myself back against him and laid my head on his shoulder.

"Mrs. Hudson how I look forward to training you." He continued to caress my nipples. "Your sweet bum calls to me even now. However we don't have time. Dinner will be served in moments."

My breathing was coming in short gasps. I knew that I should try and break out of his arms but I didn't want to. "Please."

He laughed lightly. "Please what, my sweet Mrs. Hudson?" His lips were in my hair, his fingers twisted my nipples harshly and I cried out.

"Please. Stop. No. More." His voice was deep, his breath tickling my neck.

"Which is it, Mrs. Hudson, stop, or more?" I didn't answer. I couldn't answer. All I could do was press my breasts against his hands.

He twisted my nipples again and whispered in my ears. "We'll walk in the gardens after dinner and discuss this predicament." He turned me around and looked in my eyes. His were heavy with lust and I knew that mine were probably the same. Watching Amelia being spanked had caused feelings of warmth to spread through my belly. His handling of my breasts had increased that feeling.

He leaned down and took one of my nipples in his mouth. I gasped and tried to pull away and he bit gently. Then I moaned and felt myself melt in his arms.

"After dinner, Mrs. Hudson," he whispered. "We'll dance and discuss." He pulled my bodice back up, positioning it to cover my nipples again. I was speechless, unable to answer. I didn't want to wait until after dinner. If he was going to divest me of my maidenhead I wanted him to do it right now, before I changed my mind. I could feel the dew on my quim.

He stepped back and offered me his arm. "Shall we?"

I looked down and he lifted my face back up gently. "Soon, Mrs. Hudson, soon. Your training must come first, but soon I will fulfill what you are feeling now. Give it time."

And then he turned and headed for the door, offering me his arm again as he opened it. "Shall we?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Dinner seemed to last an eternity. I'd been seated next to two older gentlemen that I did not know. Happily for me they did not shun me. Both included me in conversations and were polite and attentive.

But I was unable to eat much. My stomach was in knots. I pushed the food around on my plate and thought about Lord Essex's hands on my breasts. I thought about Amelia bent over the table in the library, the three Lords punishing her behind with the leather strap. I looked down the table at her. She was laughing and happy, a rosy blush on her cheeks. She was seated next to Lord Beaton, who leaned over repeatedly and whispered in her ear.

The longer I watched them the madder I became. How dare Lord Essex try to drag me into his debauchery? I didn't care if he and his friends spanked every one seated at this table. They would not spank me.

I smiled at the ancient Lord seated next to me, and then turned and shot an evil glare at Lord Essex. He had been looking at me already, a twinkle in his eye. That twinkle deepened upon seeing my scowl. Then he took his knife and rapped it repeatedly against the palm of his hand, mimicking a spanking motion.

I couldn't believe that he would be so blatant. If he thought I was walking in the gardens with him after dinner he was sorely mistaken. Just because I'd melted when he'd explored my breasts didn't mean I was interested in him. I was 23 years old. I was a virgin and a widow. I would have melted if the old man sitting next to me had played with my breasts. Then I took another look at the aging man. Well, maybe not melted.

I glanced around the table. The women were clearly uninterested in me. The men, however, were very interested. I did have money. I stared at the gathered Lords and gentlemen, trying to decide whom I could flirt with after dinner. Perhaps the flirting could turn into something more permanent.

I glanced down the table again and received a shy smile from Geoffrey Edwards. Geoffrey was the second son of a Duke, untitled but still a good catch. I decided he would do nicely. Then I attacked the remaining food on my plate.

Lord Essex could go to the devil. He could walk in the gardens with someone else. I had other things to attend to.



\*\*\*\*\*

The second dance of the evening was in full swing when Geoffrey Edwards appeared at my side, asking me to join him on the floor. Lord Essex scowled at this turn of events. He had been dancing with his aunt, a woman barely ten years older than himself who was acting as his hostess.

Geoffrey led me to the floor but I felt none of the exciting shiver when he took me in his arms that I'd felt in the library.

"You look very lovely this evening, Mrs. Hudson," Geoffrey said. "I'm glad to see your mourning is over and you will be able to join us more often."

I smiled up at him.

"Why thank you Mr. Edwards," I whispered. "It is most gratifying to be able to move about in society again." I lowered my eyes and sneaked a glance at Lord Essex. He was still dancing with his aunt.

I pushed myself closer to Geoffrey. "Not that I don't miss Barnard, but one does get tired of wearing black."

Geoffrey laughed and tightened the arm he held around my back. "Perhaps I might call upon you sometime? We could go for a ride in the park, or perhaps to see a play? I will ask your father-in-law for permission, if that is acceptable to you."

I smiled up at him, but before I could say yes, a hand on my shoulder stopped us both in the middle of the floor.

"Forgive me, Edwards," Lord Essex said, his voice dripping with anger. "If you don't mind Mrs. Hudson and I have something we need to discuss."

Geoffrey dropped his arms immediately and I stepped back.

"Actually," I said. "I do believe we have finished that conversation, Lord Essex."

The handsome lord's eyes darkened even more.

"Mr. Edwards has just invited me to a play this weekend," I turned and beamed at Geoffrey. "I'm sure my father-in-law would agree to our outing. Shall I look for you around seven?"

Geoffrey bowed and kissed my hand. "The pleasure will be all mine, Mrs. Hudson."

Then he nodded to Lord Essex and left the dance floor. Couples had been mulling around us, trying to overhear the conversation. Another little tidbit for the gossip columns.

Lord Essex gathered me in his arms and we began to dance. "Mrs. Hudson, you're not playing by the rules. You've seen what I do to those who don't obey the rules."

The laughter that had been in his eyes at dinner was gone. He was guiding us toward the open doorway that led to the gardens. The cool spring air was flowing inside. I could smell the flowers that were in bloom. The feeling of warmth in my stomach had returned.

I fought the feeling down and looked up at Lord Essex.

"I told you before I will not play your games. Your secret is safe with me, however."

He kept his arm around me as we moved out onto the stone landing at the top of the gardens.

"Yes, you did say that," he said, keeping his arm around me. "However, I don't accept that. You are not in charge of this situation, Mrs. Hudson, I am."

He had his arm around my waist and we were moving toward a bench that was nestled near the rose bushes. I could push him away and cause another scene. Several couples were also headed toward the gardens. I knew there was nothing he could do to me physically. It was too

public of an area. I was worried, however, about what he could do to me mentally. My ability, and desire, to resist him was hanging by a thread.

All it had taken was the feel of his hand against the small of my back. I had not had this giddy feeling when Geoffrey Edwards touched me. He sat on the bench and pulled me down beside him, nestling me close against him.

“If I were you, my sweet, I would break your plans with Geoffrey Edwards for Saturday evening,” he was whispering in my ear, leaning very close. I was sure every couple nearby was straining to hear what he was saying. “I believe you are going to be otherwise engaged.”

I shook my head. “Geoffrey is a very sweet man. I plan on keeping the engagement. Lord Essex, although I appreciate your interest, I do believe we are not suited for each other.”

I could see Amelia in my mind, bent over the table. Lord Essex was swinging the leather toward her behind. I shivered and he drew me closer. “Say it all you want, Mrs. Hudson, but we are very suited to each other.”

He pulled back and lifted my face so that our gazes met. “Come tomorrow, at tea time. My aunt will welcome you, and then she will give us time together, to get to know one another.”

The anger that I’d felt at dinner returned. “How dare you just assume that I will be at your beck and call! I have other plans for tomorrow.”

I stood and turned. Layla and her husband, Martin, were in the doorway, watching us with great interest. Lord Essex pulled me back down onto the bench and I almost lost my balance. Only his outstretched arm kept me from toppling backwards.

“Mrs. Hudson, tomorrow’s engagement is not an invitation, it is an order.” His voice was steely. Layla and Martin started toward us. “This is my only warning, my sweet. Do not cross me.”

He leaned in and kissed me on the cheek, pulling me to my feet just as Layla and Martin reached us.

Lord Essex turned his smile on the pair. “A beautiful night, isn’t it? If you’ll excuse me I must attend to my other guests.” He kissed my cheek, and then kissed Layla’s, shaking hands with Martin before he disappeared into the ballroom.

My hands were shaking. His voice had held a determination that I had never heard. Layla looked at me questioningly. Martin had a smug smile on his face. “It seems you’ve captured the attention of Lord Essex,” he said.

I looked at him and smiled. Inside I was thinking it was the most stupid statement I had ever heard. Everyone had noticed the attention I had received from Essex. Layla looked at her husband and shook her head, a smile on her face. Then she leaned in as if to kiss my cheek. “What did I tell you? And when do I need to create an alibi for your first tryst?”

She laughed and Martin joined in, even though he didn’t know the joke. I smiled at the both of them and felt my insides quaking. An order indeed. We would see who would win this battle of wills. I would not go gently into Lord Essex’s plans. He could kiss his order goodbye. I would be otherwise engaged at teatime tomorrow.

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“My goodness what a scandal you’ve caused,” Sarah said at breakfast the next morning. She had a lineup of gossip sheets by her elbow. I would say she was angry about what she was reading but truthfully I think she was thrilled that I was the focus of attention. It would make her all the more attractive to members of the ton.

“Listen to this,” she said to no one in particular. Raymond was eating his toast, his mind not on what his wife was saying.

“Which lovely widow, who never made it to her wedding bed, attracted the attention of one of the ton’s most eligible bachelors during a stellar extravaganza at his home yesterday eve? The young miss, resplendent in a sparkling gown of red cut low and revealing, even made it into the gardens with the handsome Lord. The obviously smitten host also rescued the pretty young lady from a battle of wits with another of his female guests who dared to use the M word where the young lady was concerned.”

Sarah took a drink of tea and cleared her throat before she continued. “If Lord E plans to continue his pursuance of the young lady perhaps he should make sure that he doesn’t go onto any rooftops with her.”

She slapped the paper down on the table and began to laugh. “My goodness Charlotte what ever did you say to the ‘other female guest?’ And who was it?”

I took a bite of my eggs and tried not to grimace. “Lady Chesterfield seems to think I’m a hussy who shouldn’t be allowed back into society.”

Sarah’s smile disappeared. “My goodness, Charlotte, you fought with Lady Chesterfield? She is one of the most influential persons in society. We will we banned from every affair in London. Perhaps we could make some amends somehow. Raymond, what are you thoughts on the matter?”

Raymond grunted and continued to eat his breakfast. It was obvious he could care less about Lady Chesterfield. Or the fact that the gossip sheet had practically said I’d pushed Barnard off the rooftop.

“I’m going shopping with Layla,” I announced. “I will take tea at her house. I have also declined the Smyth’s party tomorrow, and am attending a play with Geoffrey Edwards on Saturday.”

I stood and straightened my skirts. “If you will excuse me, I will see you later this evening.”

I left without giving Sarah a chance to answer. I knew she was angry about Lady Chesterfield but I was also sure she would fight her way back from the setback. Sarah would never give up. Just like I would never give in to Lord Essex.

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By 3 p.m. I had ordered ten new dresses in varying vivid colors. Of course I had purchased matching slippers, bags and undergarments. Layla and I had been talked about in every store we entered. For once no one was overly rude, which surprised me. But we were certainly the center of attention.

Shopkeepers were happy to see me arrive. I was so tired of black that I went overboard. When teatime came at 4 p.m. Layla and I retired to her home, laughing and gossiping the entire time.

“Did you see Lady Ingle look at you while they were fitting you for that peacock blue dress? It was obvious that she wanted it, but she wouldn’t be caught dead wearing something you would wear, if you pardon the pun.”

We dissolved into laughter as we sank onto the couch in her study.

“Lord Essex will love you in the blue,” Layla said, gasping for air. “Perhaps you should wear it on the night he takes your maidenhead.”

I had tried not to think of Lord Essex all day. But unfortunately I had failed. Each dress I had purchased I’d wondered what he would think. Would he like the color? The cut? Would he appreciate the matching corsets and petticoats?

I shook my head vigorously. “Lord Essex will not take my maidenhead. And I have no plans for a tryst. I’m going to the theater with Geoffrey Edwards Saturday evening. Are you and Martin attending the play?”

Layla stared at me, a cucumber sandwich halfway to her mouth. “You’re joking, right? Geoffrey Edwards? Over Lord Essex? Have you lost your mind?”

“I would have to say she has,” Lord Essex replied from the doorway. “I very nicely asked Mrs. Hudson to have tea with my aunt and myself today and she missed the appointment. So I had to track her down.”

He stepped into the room with Martin right behind him. “I must say Lady Thomas you look very lovely.” Essex kissed her outstretched hand and I could do nothing but outstretch my own. He kissed it gently and then gave me a wicked smile that only I could see. That smile clearly said that he had won, and would continue winning until he got what he wanted.

Layla was staring at me with her mouth open. “Charlotte, why did you not tell me you were to have tea with Lord Essex? Milord, please forgive me. If I had known...”

Lord Essex cut her off with a wave of his hand. “Lady Thomas, please, call me George. And of course I know you didn’t know. It’s Mrs. Hudson, Charlotte, who is playing hard to get. But I do love a challenge.”

He sat down and helped himself to a plate, which he proceeded to heap with sandwiches and cakes. A maid brought in two new cups, giving Lord Essex a shy look as she placed a cup in front of him. He leaned back in his chair, crossing his long legs at the ankles and digging into his food.

“George came by early this afternoon looking for you two,” Martin said. “Seems he went by the Hudson home to offer his carriage for the tea engagement and was informed that Charlotte was not there. We’ve been waiting for you for several hours.”

Layla gave me a look that caused me to cringe. She was very angry with me. If she knew what I knew, however, she would understand why I was working to stay away from Lord Essex.

I looked at him and felt my stomach muscles tighten as they had the night before. I saw Amelia’s reddened bottom. I heard the leather swishing through the air. I heard its popping noise as it hit, her cry of pain and then her apology for breaking the rules. The palms of my hands began to sweat.

“I apologize, Lord Essex,” I whispered, trying to think of a quick excuse. “But I thought that perhaps after seeing the gossip sheets this morning you would rescind the invitation.”

He popped a cake into his mouth and swallowed quickly. “Nonsense, Mrs. Hudson. A few words do not bother me. In fact I found them quite amusing.”

He wiped his hands on a napkin and took a drink of tea. “Those few words seem to have had quite an effect on society’s hostesses. When I went by the Hudson’s this morning Mrs. Hudson, the elder Mrs. Hudson, was eagerly going through a plethora of invitations that you have received, not the least of which was to the Ellington crush this evening. I promised Mrs. Hudson that we would leave around eight. I hope that time is good for you, Mrs. Hudson. Or should I call you Charlotte, to make things simpler? All these Mrs. Hudsons are making my head swim.”

He laughed and popped another cake into his mouth. There was no way I could refuse. He had already made the arrangements with Sarah. If I backed out now there would be serious questions raised about my sanity.

“And now, Charlotte, I will carry you home in my carriage so you can prepare for this evening.” He stood and offered me his hand. I stood and took it.

Once we were inside his carriage he gave me a cold stare. “I am not used to having my orders disobeyed Charlotte.”

I looked out the window and saw that the carriage was not headed toward my home.

"Tell the driver to take me home," I whispered.

"Not quite yet," he said. "You have a spanking coming to you and it will be delivered this afternoon."

I stared out the window. I knew we would be at Lord Essex's house in a few short minutes. I weighed my options. I could scream and cry for help, attracting the attention of everyone on the street. That would cause quite a stir in the gossip sheets.

I could run the moment we pulled up but I had little doubt that Lord Essex would follow me and bring me back to his house by force. I could sit inside but I also had little doubt that he would pick me up and carry me inside. Or I could calmly walk inside.

I looked at Lord Essex. The determined look was still upon his face.

"I know what you are thinking Charlotte." His voice was soft but firm. "I know that you think someone on the street will help you escape your punishment but I can assure you that is not the case. You would do better to walk inside the house on your own. If you choose not to you can be assured that I will carry you inside."

I wondered what kind of scene that would cause. The gossip sheets would be full the next day.

I straightened my head and looked him square in the eyes. "Very well, I will go into your home. But you should know that I will not submit to a spanking. You have no authority over me."

He didn't respond. Instead we stepped from the carriage and went into the house. Several people were on the street, looking at us as we went inside. I knew the gossip would be flying by the beginning of the Ellington crush tonight.

He told the butler that he "didn't want to be disturbed," and then headed toward the room where Amelia had received her spanking.

I stepped over the threshold and he shut the door, shucking his coat and vest and rolling up his shirtsleeves. He leaned against the table and crossed his arms across his chest.

"Now, Charlotte, you have control over how the spanking proceeds from here. We have little time, so if you obey my orders and take what is coming to you we can finish this part in short time."

"What do you mean by 'this part?'" My voice quivered a bit.

Lord Essex smiled. "You will receive a small spanking this afternoon, forty or fifty strokes." He said it nonchalantly and I balked. Forty or fifty? Was he kidding? That was a small spanking?

He continued, ignoring the look of disbelief on my face. "Then we will continue the rest tonight, after the Ellington party."

I stalled for time. "And what is the rest?"

He plastered a wicked smile on his face. "Let's just say that the title of 'Virgin Widow' will not fit you any longer."

Without waiting for an answer he went to the couch and sat down.

"Come here, Charlotte, right now. If you refuse I will come after you. It will be harder for you."

I took a few steps and then stopped. Fear gripped my insides, but there was also something else, something I couldn't identify. I refused to let him see me cringe. If Amelia could take it so could I. They had used leather on her and I noticed no strap. That meant he planned on using his hand. It would not be too bad.

I stopped in front of him and he motioned me to his side.

"Lay yourself across my lap."

My hands were shaking as I straightened down my skirts and lowered myself. I could feel his hard thigh pressed against my quim. His manhood was pressed against my side. It sent a chill through me.

I started to squirm as I felt him gathering my skirts up. He intended for my bottom to be bare and I was unprepared for that. I knew that Amelia's had been, but I hadn't expected him to raise my skirts. I tried to stand and he used one hand to hold me down. My skirts came up above my head and I heard the material of my under-alls tearing, bearing my backside.

"Stop that! Stop that this instance! No! No!" I could feel the cool air on my skin and moments later I felt a resounding slap, followed by four more. I tried to move but Lord Essex was holding me down.

"This is for spying on me." Slap, slap, slap, slap.

Tears were stinging my eyes as I felt heat rush through my exposed bum. I also felt a warming in my quim, something I had never felt before.

Slap, slap, slap, slap, slap.

"And this is for not following orders this afternoon." Slap, slap, slap, slap, slap.

I continued to squirm, begging him to stop. But I realized that each time he slapped me I was squirming to try and press my quim harder against his thigh. The pressure on my quim, coupled with the sharp slaps was producing a most enjoyable sensation.

"Are you going to be a good little girl for me, Charlotte?" slap, slap, slap, slap. "Answer me!" Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Yes," I whispered.

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Louder, and you will call me Master George when we are alone together." Slap, slap, slap, slap. "Answer me, now!"

"Yes, Master George, yes."

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Yes what, Mrs. Hudson?"

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Yes, Master George, I will be a good girl."

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"You will be my good little girl, say it."

He slapped my bum several more times.

I was crying now, my tears staining my cheeks. But the pressure I had been feeling in my quim had intensified. I wanted more. Much more. I found that I loved the contact with him, loved the feelings, both physical and mental, that were rolling through my body.

"Yes, Master George, I will be your good little girl, I promise." The words made me tingle and I moaned.

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Lift up just a little bit Charlotte, and spread your legs."

I did as I was told without a fuss and sighed as Lord Essex's thumb pushed its way inside my quim. He used his other hand to rub my reddened behind and whispered for me to "relax, relax and enjoy."

His thumb began to move and his fingers began rubbing at the front part of my quim. A tingling sensation began to spread through my belly and I sighed through my tears.

Slap. "Spend for me Charlotte." Slap. "Relax and allow it to happen." Slap. "That's it my sweet, move your hips." Slap.

I was bucking myself against Lord Essex's thumb, begging him to continue. I had never felt anything so wonderful in my entire life. He moved his fingers and slid his thumb in and out

of me as he continued to slap my behind with the other hand. Moments later I cried out in pleasure and Lord Essex slapped my behind continually until my moaning subsided. I was sobbing silently when he turned me over and gathered me in his arms, wiping away my tears.

“Did you enjoy your first lesson Charlotte?” Without waiting for an answer he kissed me and laughed. “Of course you did. There is more to come my sweet. Just wait and see. Much more.”

Then he stood me up and made me bend over so he could inspect my behind.

“Very nice,” he whispered and he slapped it again, several times. “We’ll see how it looks after tonight.”

I hiccupped as my sobbing subsided. The waves of pleasure I had felt were still rolling through my body. “I can’t take it again tonight.”

“You forgot to say ‘Master George.’” I could hear the humor in his voice. “Obviously the first lesson didn’t take very well. We may have to repeat some of it. Don’t worry Charlotte, I will make sure you are trained properly before you are introduced at the Club.”

“What Club?” I whispered.

“Why The Spanking Club, of course.” And then he laughed.

## CHAPTER THREE

My bottom ached. I had pointedly tried not to grimace every time I sat down that evening but I knew I failed miserably.

My peacock blue dress had arrived on time and it fit me well. On Sarah's command my maid had tightened the laces on my corset until I had trouble breathing. My breasts were pushed up high and the low-cut dress showed them off wonderfully. The maid had ignored my reddened behind but I knew it would be the talk of the household staff.

Lord Essex had arrived on time and our entrance at the Ellington crush caused quite a stir. Sarah loved the attention we received arriving in Lord Essex's carriage. I had tried to melt into the woodwork but Lord Essex had pulled me close. Geoffrey Edwards had given me a look of betrayal.

Now we were sitting at dinner. I had Lord Beaton on my left side and Lord Cannonberry on my right. Both had leaned in and kissed me on the cheek when we sat down and whispered "Welcome to the Club, Mrs. Hudson." And our host, Lord Ellington, had also saluted me with a glass of wine. He was a widower, a very handsome man whose 20-year-old daughter Charity acted as his hostess. I wondered if she had done the seating arrangements, or if he had.

What was going on? Was Lord Ellington part of these events? The trio had punished Amelia because she had broken the rules of the Club. I wondered who else was part of this Club. I looked around the table, trying to guess who else might enjoy spanking women. Lord Essex caught my eye and smiled wickedly at me. I intended to ask him these very questions tonight.

And I felt my stomach tighten. Tonight. He was going to take my maidenhead tonight. I would get to see his manhood, which has felt so wonderful pressed against me earlier today. I blushed and looked down at my plate. When I looked back up he was still looking at me and I knew that he knew what I had been thinking about. He winked at me and turned to speak with Laura Winston, who was seated next to him.

Was she part of the Club? How many of the women sitting at this table had their bottoms reddened on a regular basis? How many of them wiggled on Lord Essex's lap while he played with their quim?

My own quim ached at the thought. Although the spanking had been painful the feelings that had come with it were extraordinary. I was torn with the desire to give myself totally to Lord Essex and the desire to run as far away from him as I could.

It was during the dancing that I received the first answer to one of my questions. Lord Essex had claimed me at the first and refused to allow me to dance with others. This caused quite a bit of gossiping among those attending. I felt particularly bad about Geoffrey Edwards. I was sure I would receive a note from him in the morning breaking our theater engagement for Saturday evening.

After the fourth dance, Essex led us to the gardens, where he promptly headed toward the back of the house, opening the double doors that led to Lord Ellington's study, despite my objections.



“We can’t,” I said, pulling myself back. “Lord Ellington will be angry.” But Lord Ellington was not angry. He himself pushed open the door and ushered us inside. Lords Beaton and Cannonberry were seated on the couch.

“Welcome, my dear,” Ellington said, kissing me lightly on the cheek and slapping me soundly on the bum. “You are very lovely. I can see why Essex set his sights on you.”

He crossed the room and sat down in a large leather chair that was situated between two couches. “Please sit.” He gestured toward the unoccupied couch. I looked at Lord Essex and he nodded, leading me toward the trio. My heart beat rapidly. Would I be spanked here, as Amelia was spanked at Lord Essex’s party?

Ellington was clearly in charge. “Essex tells me that you enjoyed your spanking, and put up little fuss. I’m encouraged to hear that. He has had his eye on you for more than a year. Of course he had to wait out your mourning.”

I turned and looked sharply at Essex, who smiled at me and winked.

“A founder must approve a new member,” Ellington continued. “Lord Buxton, who is out of town, and I founded The Spanking Club some 15 years ago. You would be surprised at the number of women who enjoy a good spanking, as you did this afternoon.”

I looked at him with new understanding, and then I turned to Essex. “You knew I was in the library that night. You set up the scene with Amelia, knowing I would see, wanting to know how I would react.”

Lord Ellington laughed, his blue eyes alight with humor. “Very good Mrs. Hudson. Yes, Essex wanted to see how you would react. And you reacted just as he hoped you would. You watched because you were fascinated. You wanted to see what was happening. And you didn’t stop it. You didn’t yell. You just watched. And today you put up little fuss, yes?”

I nodded and looked at Essex.

“I have to admit it was put together at the last minute,” Essex said. “Beaton saw you go into the library and we gathered Amelia quickly. She is always willing if she is going to have her bottom tanned. As you could see, she loved it, just like you did while you were squirming on my lap this afternoon.”

I lowered my head as I felt a blush come up.

“I called you in here tonight because I wanted you to have all the information, Mrs. Hudson,” Lord Ellington said. “We have never before initiated a virgin in our Club. The rules are simple. Widows and wives only. The wives must have permission from their husbands. Each woman will come when she is summoned and submit to a spanking from the member who summoned her. A married woman must have permission from her husband, and many times her husband will go to watch. But you have to admit, a virgin widow is something we’ve never seen before.”

I squirmed on my seat, my blush deepening.

“Answer me truthfully, Mrs. Hudson. Did you enjoy the spanking you received this afternoon?”

I wanted to say no, scream that I did not. I thought of Lord Essex’s fingers on my quim. Of his hand slapping my bum. I felt my quim stir. No, no, say no, my mind shouted. Instead I heard myself softly whisper. “Yes, Lord Ellington. I enjoyed it.”

“Very well, Mrs. Hudson.” He sounded very pleased. “Essex will continue your education and training. You will make yourself available to him at all times. The full initiation will be here at my house, in about a month.”

I looked at Lord Essex, who beamed at me. He gently stroked my hair.

“What is the full initiation?” My voice was a bit stronger than it had been moments ago.

“You will receive a 100-stroke spanking from your sponsor, who of course is Lord Essex, in front of the entire Club,” Ellington said. “There are eleven members.”

I could feel myself shaking. Eleven men were going to watch me be spanked? Would I be naked? In front of them? I gasped softly at the thought, shaking my head to show my displeasure.

Lord Essex rubbed his hand against my knee. “You’ll be fine sweet one. You will do just fine.”

“I do have a question,” I said softly.

Lord Ellington stood looked at me inquiringly. “And what is that Mrs. Hudson?”

“Are the members required to, well, um...” my voice faltered. I wanted to ask but was embarrassed to talk about so private a subject in front of three men I hardly knew. I should have kept it for later.

George laughed and pulled me close. “I know what you want to ask sweet, and the answer is no. It’s the Spanking Club, not the sex club. Members are faithful to their spouses. If a single member wants to make herself available to another single member than that is another story, and between them only. That does not mean you won’t spend in front of others. Just as you spent so beautifully for me this afternoon. And you may be spanked by others, but only if I give my permission.”

I blushed furiously at the mention of my pleasure. All four men laughed and I turned away, the blush creeping down my throat.

“She’s perfect, Essex. I’m terribly jealous,” Lord Cannonberry said.

George laughed in response. I wondered what all this training would contain. And the thought of the public spanking scared me half to death, and thrilled me at the same time. Even more pressing to me, however, was the fact that tonight I would know what it was like to have a man between my thighs.

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Around midnight Lord Essex and I left Lord Ellington’s party. It was early and Raymond showed his pleasure that Lord Essex and I were “spending some alone time together.” I thought he might as well say “take her to your bed and make her yours. Get her off my hands.”

I did not make a fuss when the carriage headed to Lord Essex’s townhouse. I was more than ready to lose my maidenhead. My about turn from earlier this morning sent my head spinning. I knew it was from feeling Lord Essex’s hand on my quim while his other hand slapped my behind. Never had I felt something so wonderful.

But when Lord Essex shut the door on his bedroom my bravado disappeared. My hands shook. I looked around the room. It was huge, and decorated in warm brown tones. A large four poster bed was centered on a four-step dais. A couch and chairs were centered in front of the fireplace, which took up most of the far wall.

I turned to Lord Essex, who was watching me intently.

“I don’t think I can do this,” I whispered. “You can tell Lord Ellington for me. Rest assured I will not disclose your group.” I started backing toward the door.

Lord Essex just smiled. “You forgot my proper title when we are alone, Charlotte. What is my title? How do you address me when we’re alone? Tell me Charlotte, now.”

I shook my head. “Please, I’ve changed my mind. Just take me home, please.”

“What is the proper address, Charlotte? You remembered it this afternoon. Tell me now.”

I turned and reached for the doorknob but Lord Essex grabbed me from behind and moved me toward the bed. He climbed the four steps, lifting me up and depositing me on my stomach in the middle of the soft mattress where he promptly straddled me, raising my arms above my head.

"There is no turning back, Charlotte," he said. "Now, how do you address me when we are alone together?"

"Let me up," I shouted. "You can't force me. I've changed my mind."

He sighed heavily. "It's a shame to ruin your new clothing, Charlotte." His voice was like steel. "You will answer my question and then I can have a maid help you disrobe. Or you will continue to be disobedient and I will rip your new gown from your body. How will you explain that to your mother-in-law?"

I gasped. "You wouldn't!"

He laughed. "Oh, I would. Your already tarnished reputation would be totally ruined when you leave this house in borrowed clothing. Now tell me, what is the proper address?"

"Master George." My voice was soft. I loved this dress. I didn't want it ripped.

"Very good Charlotte. Now, I'm going to let you up and I will summon a maid who will help you take off your dress. I want you to leave your corset and stockings on, though. When she leaves you will stand in front of me with your legs spread and your arms clasped behind your back.

He rang for a maid and I felt myself shiver. The feelings I was experiencing frightened me greatly. But I refused to show it to the servants. I raised my arms as the maid undid my stays. Essex watched from his chair, an angry look on his face. When the maid was done I wore only my tight corset and my stockings, tied around my thighs.

"Leave." At Essex's command the maid scurried from the room, taking my dress with her. I stood in front of him, my legs spread and my arms clasped behind my back. I didn't want to anger him any more than I already had.

"I know your defiance comes from fear, Charlotte, but you must be punished for it just the same." His brown eyes looked almost black as he talked. "I thought to give you a taste of leather some other night, but I think it is warranted now. You will walk to the dresser and select a strap of leather. There are several there. Whichever one you choose will help me decide how many strokes you will receive."

I couldn't run now. She had taken my dress. I walked toward the dresser and opened the top drawer. The leather inside looked very scary. There were six straps, some thicker than others.

"Choose wisely my sweet. The thicker one hurts more, but if you choose the smaller one I will spank you longer. It is your choice."

I selected one in the middle. It was about 1 1/2 inches thick and 12 inches long.

"Bring it to me." I was determined now to not put up a fuss. I had wanted this earlier. It was silly for me to allow a little fear to make me act like a child. I was a woman, 23, and a virgin. But not for long.

I handed Master George the leather and then looked at him questioningly.

"Kneel in front of me." I did as I was asked. He stood and placed the strap in front of my face. "Kiss it, Charlotte, show me that you accept your spanking."

The leather was cool against my lips. Master George walked behind me and rubbed my behind with the strap. "On your hands and knees Charlotte. We will do the first thirty or so down here. Do you remember the words Amelia used during her spanking?"

I was on my hands and knees and Master George was rubbing the leather against my behind. Every once in a while he would lightly slap me with it, as if preparing me for what was to come.

“Something about thanking you for the correction,” I said. He slapped my bum again and I yelped. The slaps were deepening, increasing in strength.

“You will say ‘Thank you Master George for the correction.’” He slapped my bum again. “Say it, Charlotte.”

“Thank you Master George for the correction.”

Whack. The strap came down hard and I groaned.

“Thank you Master George for the correction.”

“Very good, my sweet, very good.” Whack. Whack. Whack. “You only need to say it during the pauses.”

I muttered the words again. Whack. Whack. Whack. Whack.

I groaned loudly, the pain spreading through my bum. “Please, I don’t think I can take it. It hurts too badly.”

I tried to sit up but Master George’s knee pushed me back down. Whack. Whack. Whack. Whack. “You will say the proper words, and call me by my proper title. I decide what you can take and when you’ve had enough.” Whack. Whack. Whack. Whack.

“Thank you Master George for the correction.” The words were shaky and the pain was spreading through my bum. At the same time I felt the warm wonderful sensation spreading through my quim. I was still frightened, yes, but I didn’t fear for my safety. I was just nervous about what would happen next.

Whack. Whack. Whack. Whack. I whispered the words through my tears. “How beautiful your bum looks Charlotte. Do you feel the dew on your quim? I know I can smell it. It smells wonderful sweet Charlotte.”

“Yes, Master George, I can feel it.” Whack. Whack. Whack. Before I could get the words out I received five more swats, harder than anything he had given me in the past. I muttered the words through my tears and the leather was gently rubbed against my burning backside.

“Just a few more, Charlotte. So very beautiful.”

I mumbled my disagreement and the strap came down again, and again, and again, and again, each one harder than the last.

“Please stop, please.” I tried to rise but Master George again held me down. “Who’s in charge, Charlotte?”

“You are Master George.” Whack. Whack. Whack. “Who decides when it’s over?” Whack. Whack. Whack. Whack.

“You do, Master George.” I thanked him for the correction and the leather came down again and again and again. While I was thanking him the strap appeared before my face.

“Kiss it, Charlotte, show me you are mine. Do as you are told.”

I kissed the leather that had reddened my behind, which was burning. My quim, on the other hand, was begging for attention.

I stared to stand and was ordered to stay where I was. I heard him moving around behind me and heard the unmistakable sound of him removing his clothing.

“You may stand now, my sweet.” I stood and he pulled me back against him. I could feel his hardness against my hot bum. He rubbed it against me and I moaned with pleasure. He gently kissed my ear and pushed me away, and began gently kneading my behind. His hands felt wonderful on my sore bottom.

“Did you like the feel of my cock, Charlotte?”

“Yes, Master George.” I started to turn but he turned me back around.

“Stay where you are until I say otherwise.” He pulled me against him again and rubbed his hardness against me.

“Tell me you want my cock inside you, Charlotte. Tell me you want me to fuck you.”

I gasped. Could I say those words? Nasty words no well-bred woman would use.

“Say it, Charlotte, or you’ll taste the strap again. Say it, now.” He rubbed the leather against the side of my thigh.

“I want you inside me, Master George.”

He pushed me off and bent me over. Whack. Whack. Whack. I cried out in protest. “Say it Charlotte, tell me you want me to fuck you. Say fuck me, Master George. Fuck me now.”

Whack. Whack. Whack. “Say it!”

“Fuck me!” I screamed. “Fuck me now Master George! Please!”

He threw the leather on the couch and picked me up in his arms. We made the short trip to the bed. My head was swimming. I wanted him inside me, now. “Please, please, hurry.” My voice was low and he laughed, lying me down on the mattress.

“Ouch, ouch.” My bum made contact with the sheets and my already aching behind started aching more.

He spread my legs and knelt between them. “Look at me, Charlotte, look into my eyes.”

He lowered himself and I felt his cock slip inside my wetness. We locked gazes and he leaned down and kissed me softly. Then he leaned up and looked at me again

“Who do you belong to Charlotte? Tell me.” His voice sent shivers down my spine.

“I belong to you, Master George, only to you.”

And then he pushed. A sharp pain ripped through my belly and I cried out. He pressed his mouth down on mine and gently stroked my hair. The pain was receding and I had never felt so full. He began to move gently, his mouth still covering mine, his tongue invading my mouth.

He pulled up long enough to say, “Wrap your legs around me.” I locked my legs around his hips and he dipped farther into me. I moaned with pleasure and his thrusts came faster and faster. He wedged one of his hands between us and began rubbing my quim. The feeling from this afternoon returned and I voiced my approval. The wonderful feeling came quickly, spreading through my body, forcing away any pain I was feeling from the tearing of my maidenhead. The thrusts increased and moments later I felt Lord Essex shudder, and collapse on top of me.

He leaned up and kissed me gently. “You’ll only feel the pain of entry this once, my Charlotte.” He kissed me again, his tongue probing for entry. I opened and then when he sucked gently I pushed my tongue into his mouth. He wrapped his lips around my tongue as slid out of my quim. Then he kissed me gently several more times.

“You’re more wonderful than I thought you’d be sweet Charlotte.” He kissed me again and we fell asleep, entwined in each other’s arms, my legs still wrapped around his hips.

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I woke up sore and alone. Master George had covered me with a blanket, and was supervising the drawing of a bath in a huge bathtub that would fit the two of us. I listened as he ordered breakfast delivered to the room.

I looked at the windows. It was obviously daylight. If I thought the gossip sheets were bad before I knew they would be terrible now. I would be leaving a man’s house in the same clothes that I’d worn the night before.

When the servants left, I sat up. Master George smiled at me, and then crossed the room to kiss me. “Good morning, my sweet. How are you feeling?”

“Sore.” I whispered, and then looked down. Dried blood stained my thighs. I gasped and he laughed.

“Let’s wash together and then we’ll eat. It’s early still, most of fashionable London is still abed. But the gossip sheets don’t need this incident to proclaim us as a couple.”

He reached over to the side table and handed me a newspaper. The headline screamed VIRGIN WIDOW NO MORE? Then it went on to tell how Lord Essex and I had left the party together at an early hour and disappeared inside his townhouse.

“At press time the Virgin Widow had not reappeared. But can she still be called a Virgin Widow, or simply just a Widow now? Or perhaps the mistress of Lord Essex? Only time will tell, but we predict the later.”

I gasped. Of course they would expect that. My reputation was ruined. I would never be allowed back in society again.

I lay back against the bed. Lord Essex laughed and made his way toward the tub. “Come, my sweet. We’ll bath and eat. I’ve already sent for some clothing for you to wear for the ceremony. Sarah is picking it out. And I’ve already dispatched for an emergency license and set the wedding time. We will have your things moved in this evening, after the wedding.”

I stared at him. “You don’t mean to set me up as your mistress? You mean to marry me? How dare you make all these decisions without me! Do I not have a say?”

He laughed, ignoring my questions. “At first I had planned on the mistress path. But after last night I decided I had to have you at all times. You will make a fine Lady Essex. We are meeting the Vicar at 3, so you should hurry and rise. I’ve sent word to your in-laws and to Lord and Lady Thomas, who will meet us there. And don’t forget, Charlotte, you belong to me now. These decisions are mine, and you will abide by them.”

I started to balk and then stopped. This was my way out of the Hudson household. No one in society would shun me when I was Lady Essex, and I could have my quim played with every night. The thought sent a shiver through me. “Very well, milord.”

Essex cocked his head at me and grinned. “Very well who? Have you forgotten so soon? Do you need a reminder?”

He walked to the bureau and drew out the strap. “Bend over the bed, Charlotte.”

I stood quickly and crossed to Essex, grabbing his arm. “Please Master George, please. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

He looked down at me and smiled. “I know it won’t, Charlotte. Now go and bend over the bed.”

I did as I was told and received five sound smacks with the strap. Against my sore behind the strokes hurt worse than anything I’d felt since this affair had started. Tears stung my eyes but I didn’t want to give him an excuse for more swats.

“Thank you, Master George, for the correction.”

I could hear the smile in his voice. “Very good, sweet Charlotte. Now, let’s bathe and go and wed.”

I swallowed hard. I was out of the Hudson household, but not quite as I expected. I would be a Lady. But would people still brand me as a murderer?

## CHAPTER FOUR

The wedding went off without a hitch, considering it was put together in less than seven hours. Raymond put up a token argument about Lord Essex “ruining” me, but you could tell he was thrilled to be rid of me.

Sarah found a beautiful lavender gown that looked wonderful with my dark hair. Layla and Martin were our witnesses and Lords Beaton, Cannonberry and Ellington were in attendance.

For the wedding dinner we ate roast duck at Lord Ellington’s home, and then attended a crush put on by the Duke of Waterfield. Our appearance brought a round of applause and hearty congratulations from those attending. From everyone except Geoffrey Edwards. The scowl he gave me seemed overly done, just because he was upset that he would not be able to accompany me to the play Saturday evening.

People who ignored me two days ago lavished me with praises about my dress, my hair and my jewelry. Lady Chesterfield herself told me that my lavender gown “was exquisite. You must give me the name of your dressmaker, my dear. Perhaps we can take tea together tomorrow or later in the week?”

“Why Lady Chesterfield, I’m surprised you’d invited a suspected murderer to tea,” I said loudly. “Isn’t that what you thought of me a few days ago, before my marriage to Lord Essex?”

Lady Chesterfield blustered and blushed. “My dear, a most unfortunate misunderstanding, you must forgive me.”

I prepared to tell her she could seek her tea companions somewhere else when a dark voice boomed out behind me.

“Indeed, Lady Essex, were you ever cleared in your first husband’s death?” I turned and stared at Geoffrey Edwards. The sarcasm in his voice when he said Lady Essex still hung heavy in the air.

“Perhaps your latest husband should have contacted the local authorities before he rushed into a hasty marriage with you. It seems they never quite decided what happened to Bernard Hudson. But perhaps you’re just very talented, and news of your ‘virginity’ was highly exaggerated.”

I could feel heat rising in my cheeks. Several of the ladies standing near me gasped. The hatred in Geoffrey Edwards’ eyes caused me to take a step backward. Before I could answer him Lord Essex grabbed him from behind, swung him around and slammed his fist into his face. Edwards fell to the floor and only Lord Cannonberry kept my husband from pulling him up to continue pummeling him.

“You will retract your statement sir, or we will continue this disagreement at another time, with our seconds,” George’s voice was full of rage.

Edwards wiped blood from his mouth and turned an evil stare my way. “My apologies Lady Essex, I wish you many happy returns.”

He stood and stormed from the room. All eyes had turned our way. George shrugged away Lord Cannonberry’s hold on him. The anger in his face caused me to cringe. When he looked toward me, however, his face softened. He pulled me close and ran his fingers gently down my face.

“Are you all right, my sweet?”

I nodded, unable to say anything. I couldn't believe what had just happened. Why was Geoffrey Edwards so angry about my marriage to Lord Essex?

"Perhaps we should go," I whispered.

George kissed me lightly, causing titters from the surrounding crowd. "Nonsense. I will not allow that man to ruin our wedding day. We will stay and dance and enjoy ourselves."

Our host came up to enquire as to our safety.

"My apologies, Lady Essex," Waterfield said. "I hope this event will not spoil your special day. You must save me a dance."

Then he ordered everyone back to the party and George gathered me in his arms. "It's all right my sweet, it's all over."

Somehow I knew, however, that it was not over.

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The days flew by. George had my meager belongings delivered to my new home and installed in his bedroom. When he announced that we would be sharing a room, I was not surprised. It was the normal custom for a husband and wife to have separate bedrooms, but I knew that George was anything but normal.

We were very popular at all the events we attended. It was hard for me to be polite to the people who just a few days earlier had turned their backs on me and branded me a murderer. We didn't see Geoffrey Edwards at any of the events and Lord Barton, another friend of George's, informed us that he had not been included on any invitation list after the scene at the Duke of Waterfield's ball.

Several days after the wedding George and I were lying in bed. I'd just received a sound spanking, and a sound fucking, something I'd come to love on both accounts. It amazed me that using the word fuck didn't bother me anymore, either. I yelled it out quite a bit at George's command. He said he liked to hear me be naughty for him. George was playing with my nipples, alternating between pinching them and sucking them.

He drew one into his mouth and bit gently. "Tell me about the night Bernard died."

A cold chill went up my spine. "Why?"

He bit harder. "Because I want to know." He moved to the other nipple and bit it. "Don't want it to feel left out," he whispered. "Tell me."

I took a deep breath. "We were married at noon. Bernard and I were not exactly in love. We married because our parents wanted us to. Our fathers were partners. Our marriage assured that the store business would stay in the family."

He licked between my breasts. "And do you own part of the business?"

"My portion of the business went to Bernard upon our marriage," I said softly, bad memories floating back. "It came back to me when he died. Raymond bought it from me six months later."

He turned on his back and pulled me on top of him, his hands kneading my abused buttocks. "And how much of the business did your father own?"

"Seventy-five percent," I whispered. "He put most of the money in at some point when Raymond was having difficulties."

George pushed his hand down and pinched my sweet button. I moaned in response.

"Did he give you a fair price?"

"He gave me 100,000 pounds," I said. "And he gave me the 50,000 pounds he was going to give Bernard and I for our wedding. I think he meant to kick me out of his house as soon as



possible, without losing face in society. I have money, if that's what you're asking, Master George."

I could feel George's cock hardening underneath me. "It's not the money, you know that. I have money. It's just an idea I had," he whispered. "And how did Bernard die?"

I tried to move so I could take his cock inside me.

"Not yet sweet," he said, pulling me back from my goal. "Tell me, how did he die?"

I shook my head. "He fell from the roof. I was with Sarah in the dining room at the time. The authorities think someone pushed him. Others think he jumped. I hate to think he hated the thought of being married to me so badly he would kill himself right afterward. Of course rumors spread that I had pushed him so I could get the money. I had been on the roof earlier in the evening, but I wasn't there when the accident happened."

"You think it was an accident?" He rubbed his palms against my nipples.

"Yes, I think it was." My voice was soft, the bad memories returning. The questions and the accusations. I could feel tears threatening my eyes. I didn't know why. I liked Bernard, but I didn't love him. Still, I hated that he had died.

George pulled me forward and smacked my already reddened bum. "Does my sweet need another spanking?" He slapped my behind again and I moaned in agreement.

"Yes, Master George, please."

I stood up and bent over the bed, assuming the position where my bum would be high in the air.

"Oh no, sweet, we're going to try something new. Stand at the end of the bed."

I moved toward the end, clasping my hands behind my back. Master George turned me and gathered my hands in front of me, wrapping them in a length of my hose. He then turned me toward the bed again and raised my hands above my head, tying the hose to the bedpost.

He grabbed my hips and pulled me backwards until my feet were at the edge of the first step.

"Spread your legs, my sweet, and stay in that position. Don't move back toward the bed."

"Yes, Master George," I whispered. I felt vulnerable and very excited. It was amazing to me that a week ago I had been a virgin. Now I was tied to a bedpost and begging to be fucked nightly.

I felt something smooth and cold rub against my backside. It was the feel of polished wood. It seemed to be about four inches wide.

"Since you're already taken one spanking tonight we'll keep it short," Master George whispered in my ear. "About thirty or so? Maybe more. I like you in this position. We may use it more often."

He continued to rub the wood against my ass and then paddled me with it lightly several times. I was enjoying the warm feeling when I heard a swooshing sound and the board landed firmly on my behind. I jumped and yelped. Against my already spanked bum the board caused considerable pain.

"No, no, no," I whispered. "Too much. Please no." I pulled against my restraints, trying hard to break free. I edged closer to the bed.

The swishing sound came and the board landed again. "How quickly you forget. I'm in charge Charlotte." Smack.

"Stay in the position I put you in." Smack. "Move back right now!" Smack. Smack. Smack. Smack.

I moved my feet back to the edge of the step.

"I decide when it's enough." Smack.

“And you know how I love to see your reddened ass.” Smack.

He gave me ten quick smacks that brought big tears to my eyes. By the eleventh I was begging for more, begging for release.

He gave me ten more for forgetting his proper title, something he said I would probably never remember. Then he pulled me back against him and entered me quickly, harshly squeezing my cheeks as he took me.

I found my release after the first few minutes, screaming out his name as the waves of pleasure spread through my body I pulled against my bonds and he laughed.

“You’re my captive. The virgin widow, mine forever. Always at my mercy. He pumped me harder and then found his own release, his hands moving around to caress my breasts.

“Forever my captive.”

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We were awoken the following morning by screams coming from downstairs. George threw on a robe and ran out the door. It was still dark outside and lamps lit the hallways. I pulled on my robe and followed him out, wondering what had happened.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs I gasped. The front door was wide open. George was kneeling near a prone body. I took a step closer and saw that the body was Geoffrey Edwards and he was very dead.

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“And the last time you saw Mr. Edwards was several nights ago, when he verbally assaulted your wife at the Duke of Waterfield’s, is that correct Lord Essex?”

The Inspector from Scotland Yard was sitting on the couch. A constable was sitting next to him, taking notes.

“That is correct, Inspector. He implied that my wife was a murderer, associated with the death of her first husband.”

The Inspector turned his gaze on me.

“Yes, I wired the authorities in Lennox, Lady Essex,” he whispered. “They indicated that your first husband’s death was ruled as accident, but only due to a lack of evidence. They seem to think your husband was pushed.”

I cringed. It was happening again. “Where were you Charlotte? Had you and Bernard fought? You didn’t really want to marry him did you? This was your way out.”

George took a step toward the Inspector. “I don’t think I like what you’re implying, Inspector. My wife was in bed, with me, when Edwards was dispatched.”

I blushed that he was being so blunt.

“Well, as it turns out Mr. Edwards was stabbed,” the Inspector said. “Due to the lack of blood we assume that he was killed elsewhere and brought to your doorstep to cast suspicion your way.”

The Inspector turned to me. “There is one more thing I would like to know, Lady Essex. Were you and Mr. Edwards close? I understand that he was quite upset about your marriage.”

I sat up straighter. “We had made arrangements to attend a play before Lord Essex and I...” I stopped, unsure what to say. Before Lord Essex took me over his knee? Before he showed me how pleasurable coupling could be? “Before my relationship with George began.”

George sat down next to me and put his arm around me, pulling me close and kissing me lightly on the temple.

“And have you seen him since the disagreement at the Duke of Waterfield’s, Lady Essex?”

I shook my head, tears clogging my eyes as the memory of my first wedding day took center stage in my mind. “Are you sure you were downstairs, Mrs. Hudson. Did you and Bernard fight? Did that fight get out of hand? Did you push him in anger and he accidentally went over the edge?”

I shut my eyes, tears streaming down my face. When I shut them I could see Geoffrey Edwards’ body on the front steps. I felt myself shudder.

“My wife has had enough, Inspector,” George said. “She’s received a terrible shock, as have we all. These questions, however, are upsetting her and I cannot allow that. You may return at another time if you wish, but I want you to leave now.”

The Inspector gathered his things and he and the Constable stood.

“My apologies, Lady Essex,” he said, “I did not mean to upset you further. If we have more questions we will return.”

After they had gone George gathered me onto his lap, kissing me and pulling me close.

“Don’t worry my sweet, I won’t allow this to hurt you. You had nothing to do with this.” He pushed me away gently and gave me a wonderful smile, raising his eyebrows. “And you have a wonderfully red ass to prove where you were last night.”

He laughed and I tried to do the same. He knew that, but did anyone else?

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We attended a party at the Duke of Mamouth’s house that night. I had argued that we should stay home but George would not hear of it.

“We will not hide ourselves away like guilty people,” he said. “We have nothing to fear. We are part of the offended parties here. Someone dumped Edwards’ body on our doorstep. I intend to find out whom.”

The room at the Duke’s house fell into silence when we entered. His Grace came over and greeted us, relieving some of the tension.

“Lady Essex, I am very sorry for the shock you received this afternoon.” He leaned over and kissed my hand. “It is a good thing you have Lord Essex to watch over you. If you will excuse me saying so trouble does seem to follow you.”

George laughed. “So it does. It makes life more interesting.”

I forced a smile in return. I did not think there was anything funny about the situation.

Lord Ellington and Lord Beaton greeted us, and then led us into a quiet corner.

“My dear I hope you are suffering well,” Ellington said. He turned to George. “We have already started inquiries and have come up with some interesting facts.”

We sat down in a grouping of chairs. I could feel people’s gazes following us. I could hear them talking about the fact that another body had fallen at my feet.

“After his behavior at the Duke of Waterfield’s party Edwards was banned from invitation lists,” Ellington said. “He spent most of his time in the gaming hells, and at his mistress’ house.”

“And her name?” George’s voice was harsh.

“She calls herself Michelle White,” Beaton said. “Whether or not that is her real name is unknown. However, my sources tell me that she has been searching for another protector, even before Edwards’ death. Seems Edwards owes quite a bit of money for gambling debts, and has for some time. I believe she thinks that he has, excuse me had, not been paying her enough attention, or giving her enough gifts.”

“So he needed money,” George said. “Pardon me for saying so my sweet but that may have been why he wanted to press his suit on you He had to have known that you received quite a bit of money when Bernard died.”

The thought upset me but I knew it was probably true.

“Still, who would kill him and place him on our steps?” I looked at the three men seated around me. “What purpose would that serve?”

Ellington cleared his throat. “Perhaps he told the person he owed money to that he would have his hands on your money soon. When you married Essex that person would have been angry, thinking you had cheated him out of his money. He may have killed Edwards and dumped him to make sure the authorities did not look in his direction.”

George shook his head. “It seems too easy, that he thought he could marry her so quickly.”

Beaton laughed. “You did. Very quickly.”

We all laughed at that remark.

Ellington leaned in. “How is your training going, Charlotte? Have you tasted the leather?”

I nodded and blushed heavily.

“And loved it, from the looks of it.” Ellington patted my leg. “The strap leaves wonderfully lasting welts. The initiation is getting closer. We’re all looking forward to it.”

He leaned in and kissed my cheek and then nodded to Essex and Beaton before leaving.

“We need to find out who Edwards owed money to,” Beaton said. “I’ll ask around but I do believe it is probably Simpson. He owns three of the most popular gaming hells. I’ll go now and make inquiries. I’ll meet you back at your home around midnight.”

When we came into the main room Layla and Martin had arrived. She rushed to gather me in a hug.

“I wanted to come by this afternoon but I had to have tea with my mother-in-law.” She wrinkled her nose. “Are you alright? What happened? Who killed Geoffrey Edwards?”

I told her that we didn’t know, and then recanted the questioning from Scotland Yard.

“It was awful, Layla,” I whispered. “All I could think about was Bernard and it was happening all over again, except of course that Geoffrey was not my husband.”

I glanced at George, who was talking with Beaton and Martin.

Layla hugged me again. “We’ll go shopping tomorrow, that will take your mind off things, and give you a chance to spend some of your new husband’s money.” I agreed and we both laughed.

We ate dinner, although the food tasted like paste to me, and then left before the dancing started.

When we were in the carriage George ordered the driver to “make turns around the park until told differently.” Then he smiled at me wickedly.

“You need something to take your mind off things my sweet.” His voice was deep with desire. “And I want to teach you something new. Kneel in front of me.”

I knelt, trying to keep my balance against the gentle rocking of the carriage. I watched as he took out his cock, marveling again at how I loved the sight of it.

“Hands behind your back, Charlotte.” I obeyed and watched greedily as he stroked himself to hardness.

“Lick me.” I stared up at his face, not believing what I had just heard.

“Lick your cock?” I knew my voice was trembling. “I could never do that.”

“You can and you will,” George said, his voice firm, his hand still stroking his hard cock. “You will do it now. I will not spank you in the carriage, Charlotte, because it would be

difficult to bare your bottom. But you can rest assured that if you do not do as you are told immediately I will give you a taste of the leather like you have never felt before when we arrive home. Now lick me.”

I leaned toward him, finding it hard to keep my balance in the moving carriage with my hands clasped behind my back. I tentatively ran my tongue along the tip of his cock, and then pulled back.

“Harder and longer, Charlotte, lick until I tell you to stop.”

I sat back. “George, this is...”

“George?” His eyebrows were raised. “Goodness do you think the rules only apply in the bedroom? You’ll receive twenty for that little slip. Lick me, now.”

I bent my head again and ran my tongue along his cock. It felt strange to do be doing this, and yet it brought me a delicious thrill.

After a few moments I heard George sigh. “Take me in your mouth. Suck it gently.” I inched closer and took the tip of him inside. He placed his hands on either side of my head and pushed me further down. “Suck me, Charlotte. Be my hussy. Suck me deep.”

I tried to rise up but his hands held me in place, moving my head up and down on his cock. “Tighten your mouth, suck harder my sweet hussy” He began bucking his hips up to meet my mouth as it came down, filling me totally. I tried to rise up to ask what I should do when he neared completion but he would not let me. His hands held my head firmly in place as I continued to suck.

Moments later I found out what to do as I felt the first of his seed hit the back of my throat. “Swallow it, swallow it all.” The taste was salty and I swallowed quickly, trying to keep it from going elsewhere. It seemed to last forever. George was moaning his approval, telling me what a sweet hussy I was, how he loved seeing me on my knees before him, how he planned to use every hole in my body for his pleasure.

When he finally released my head I lifted up. His head was leaning against the back of the seat.

“Lay yourself across my lap, Charlotte.” The command was harsh.

“You said you wouldn’t spank me in the carriage,” I complained.

Master George looked at me and grinned. “I lied. I wanted my pleasure first, and you should not question me. That’s forty when we arrive home. Now do as you’re told.”

Once I was in place he raised my skirts and lowered my under-alls. After ordering me to remain silent he delivered twenty sharp slaps to my behind with his hand. Then he delivered twenty more, “just because I can.”

He rubbed my behind. “Do you belong to me Charlotte?”

“Yes, Master George, I belong to you.”

“And do you enjoy our time together?”

“You know I do, Master George.”

He slapped my ass again and I squirmed, trying to rub myself against his thigh.

“Stop that Charlotte.” He slapped me again and then ordered me back down on my knees.

“One of the things we need to work on in your training Charlotte is that spending is for when you obey me without question. You questioned me tonight, so you will not find release. Do you understand?”

I nodded, pouting at the thought and George laughed.

“Pout all you want sweet one but that is a rule, and I have been too lax in following it,” George said. “That laxness won’t continue.”

I deepened the pout in hopes of coaxing George into changing his mind. Instead he looked out the windows, and then rapped on the top of the carriage, indicating for the driver to take us home.

“When we get home you will disrobe and place yourself at the end of the bed,” George said. “I want to bind you to the bedpost before I deliver your forty swats. I do so love you in that position.”

“And before you pout too much I have a surprise for you tomorrow night, something that will ease you into your initiation,” George said. “You had better behave yourself or I will cancel it.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

“I think you need one in peach also.” Layla’s voice was giddy as she fingered the material in the dressmaker’s shop. During lunch she had announced that she was again with child. I wondered when I would be able to make the same announcement.

Would George be happy when I did? We had not discussed children before marriage. We had not discussed anything. We had bedded and then wedded. I didn’t know anything about him, really. Except for the fact that he had taught me many things about pain and pleasure.

I watched Layla pick out more material. Did she and Martin do the things that George and I did? Was she taken over a knee? Tied to a bedpost? Spanked in a carriage after she had taken her husband in her mouth? I shivered at the memory of the previous night. It seemed that I craved the things he offered more and more.

“Are you even listening to me?” Layla’s voice was sharp. “I said you need to order one of these dresses in peach, and in blue.”

I nodded at the dressmaker who quickly went to gather materials for accessories, hoping to extend the sale.

“You were a million miles away,” Layla said softly. “Are you all right? Don’t worry about Geoffrey Edwards, George will take care of everything. Don’t you agree?”

I nodded. George was at that moment roaming the streets of London with Lord Cannonberry, searching for Edwards’ mistress. I wondered what she would tell them. I wondered if Edwards’ death was somehow linked to Bernard’s. Lord Beaton had come to our home at midnight as planned, with Lord Barton in tow. They’d told George that Geoffrey Edwards owned more than 60,000 pounds to a man named Simpson. It reinforced the idea that he wanted to wed me to get his hands on my money. But what did any of it have to do with Bernard?

I shook my head and then turned and smiled at Layla. Then I turned and smiled at the dressmaker. George had told me to forget about everything, to enjoy my afternoon and “buy something to surprise him.”

The dressmaker smiled at my request while Layla gasped

“My goodness, you have come a long way from being the ‘Virgin Widow,’ haven’t you,” she laughed.

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“I cannot believe that you won’t tell me what you’ve found out. It’s not fair.” My voice rang through the carriage. George was sitting on the other side, picking lint from his pant leg. He had a lazy smile on his dark, handsome face.

“You look very lovely in your blue dress, my sweet,” he said. “I was the envy of every man at the playhouse. Tell me, are you looking forward to this evening?”

“How can I be when I don’t know what to expect?”

George laughed. “Being surprised is half the fun, Charlotte. You will love tonight, trust me.”

I indeed loved to be spanked. George made sure I loved it. The pain was intense but it was always followed by intense pleasure. But tonight would be different.

He ran his hand over his cock. I could see the hardened outline of it against his trousers. We were on our way to a late gathering at the Duke of Wickham's home. As I did when I met anyone new lately I wondered if Wickham was a member of the Spanking Club. Would he be one of the men watching while George spanked me. Would I be naked in front of him? The thought sent a chill down my spine.

I looked back at George. He had taken his cock out of his trousers and was stroking it. He banged on the carriage top twice, a signal for the driver to not arrive at our destination until he was told.

"Suck me Charlotte, show me what you learned last night." I smiled at Master George and got down on my knees. Clasp my hands behind my back I lowered my head, and heard him groan in response.

"You are a quick learner, my sweet wife," he sighed, bucking his hips to meet my mouth. "A very quick learner."

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"My dear, how awful it must have been for you." The Duchess of Wickham gathered me against her giant bosom and pulled me close. I thought it strange that just two short weeks ago the Duchess, and others of her standing, would not have said two words to me. All it took were the simple words "I do" to make me a good person, incapable of murder in their eyes. I thought it interesting also that the Duchess called me "my dear," as she was only a few years my senior.

"I do hope that you are faring well," she whispered. "Of course with a wonderful man like George to protect you, you should fare very well. He knows how to whip things into shape." She pulled back and gave me a knowing grin and told me to call her Ellen. So much for the question about the Duke of Wickham's participation in the Spanking Club. Obviously he enjoyed membership, as did his wife.

George looked at me and smiled, and then motioned me toward him. He was talking with Barton and Cannonberry. He kissed my cheek when I arrived and the four of us headed toward the gardens. Lord Ellington joined us soon after.

"Reports?" Ellington said after bussing my cheek.

Barton told Ellington about Simpson and the money that he was owed.

"Edwards' father will make good on the debt," Ellington said. "That will keep his son's name from being sullied any farther."

George smiled. "I don't know about that. Edward and I found out some interesting tidbits from Michelle White, Edwards' mistress, this afternoon." He nodded at Lord Cannonberry, who took up the tale.

"Edwards and Bernard Hudson were lovers." Cannonberry's words shook me to the center of my core.

"That's not possible," I whispered. "He married me. He couldn't have been lovers with another man."

George shook his head. "I am sorry my dear, but it could be true, what Michelle White say, and we have no reason not to believe her. According to Michelle White, Edwards and Hudson would come over frequently. Edwards would bind Hudson and torment his cock. Then he would force him to watch while Edwards and Michelle had sex, tormenting him with words. Other times, well..." his words dropped off. "Let's just say that Michelle saw them coupling, on several occasions, with Hudson always acting as the woman."



I turned my head in disgust. It would explain many things. Bernard had not even tried to kiss me, much less try any thing else. I had wondered at the time what was wrong with me. Now I knew that it was just the fact that I was female.

George grasped my hand and Cannonberry continued. "Mrs. White says that while drunk one night Geoffrey confessed to her that he had pushed Bernard off the roof."

I felt the air go out of my lungs. "The plan, she says, was that you and Bernard would marry." Cannonberry nodded at me. "Then when Bernard had your share of the store, and your money, he would kill you. When his father died he would have everything and he and Geoffrey could be together."

I felt numb. He had planned on killing me?

"But why? Why did he push Bernard off the roof?" My voice was low and quivering.

"She says that Geoffrey told her that he and Bernard had met on the roof to, um, well, pleasure one another." I shook my head at Cannonberry's words. "After they were finished Edwards reportedly told Hudson that he thought they should keep you around, that you were a tidy little morsel that could take Michelle's place. They fought and when Bernard said he would no longer share Edwards with anyone Edwards pushed him off the roof. End of problem."

Ellington stroked his chin. "But that brings up a new problem. Edwards still needs money and he is obviously attracted to you, dear Charlotte. So he waits his year and makes his move at the first chance he gets, at Lord Essex's party. He knows that if he marries you he will get control of your money, and your part of the store, which I understand, is quite profitable. Of course he probably didn't know you'd sold your interest in the store to Raymond Hudson. Edwards must have been terribly angry when you took up with George."

I nodded. It was all a blur.

"That doesn't explain who killed Edwards and left him on our doorstep," George said. "Edwards had to have another lover, someone he was planning on sharing the money with who was angry when he lost you. Someone who no longer needed, or wanted, him around."

Barton spoke for the first time. "But are we looking for a male, or a female?"

I sat up straighter. "Obviously it could be anyone from the sounds of it. The man was a pig. Both of them were pigs." I was so angry I thought I would scream. "First Bernard wants me for my money, and then Edwards." I looked at George. "And you?"

He laughed. "Don't worry my dear, I only want you for your pretty reddened bum. I have my own money." Everyone laughed, including me. It was true, I knew that George didn't want my money.

"Maybe Michelle White killed him," I said.

Ellington shook his head. "I don't think so Charlotte. I think it was a man. It would take someone with a private carriage to move a body from one place to another with no one seeing, and it would take a man to lift a dead body and leave it on your doorstep. We need to talk with Mrs. White again. Perhaps she can shed more light on the situation. Cannonberry, you seemed to get on with the woman well. Go back tomorrow and see what else you can find out."

Cannonberry smiled. "With pleasure. She was a tasty little tidbit. And she is looking for another protector."

Ellington smiled. "Then we'll meet again Friday afternoon, during the first part of Buxton's house party."

George gathered me in a hug after everyone had left. "Don't worry my sweet, it will all be over soon."

He kissed me soundly. "And I want you for more than your bum. Plus, I have a surprise for you tonight, remember?"

I thought of the garment I had ordered that would arrive Friday morning. I had a surprise for him, too.

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It was late when we went back inside the Wickham's house. The Duke, a very handsome blond man about 40 years old, was saying goodbye to the last of his guests. I watched as he and George exchanged a look and my heart beat faster.

The Duchess gave me a sweet smile and motioned George toward the back of the house. He led me toward a sitting room, a beautiful room with a warm fire. Furniture had been moved aside and in the center of the room sat two large wooden horses, both perched on curved wood that would make them rock back and forth. The bodies of the horses were short, the legs a little shorter than a persons. I stared at them and George just smiled.

Ellen entered with a maid.

"Undress me first," she ordered, "and then you can undress Lady Essex."

The maid nodded her agreement and went to work on the Duchess's stays. By now I figured out what was happening. The Duchess and I would be bound to the horses, one on each, and whipped by our husbands. I felt sweat build up on the palms of my hands and butterflies move around my stomach.

Could I do this? Being spanked in private was one thing, but with another woman? And then I remembered the upcoming initiation, where I would be naked and spanked in front of eleven men.

When I looked up again the Duchess was naked. The maid moved toward me and George gave me a look. I knew what it meant. He didn't want me to put up a fuss. I raised my arms and the maid undid my stays. She was just lowering my corset when the Duke appeared.

The handsome man ran his eyes over my bum. "She's beautiful, Essex, very beautiful." He looked at his wife. "My dear?"

Ellen, a large curvy woman with long dark hair, stepped upon a platform under the horse. It rocked slightly and she sat down so that her quim just barely touched the edge. Her legs were bent slightly. The maid bound her legs to the legs of the horse at the ankle, and then bound her arms around the horse's neck. In this position her bum was sticking up, and her body was lying across the horse. When her legs were stretched out, she was not in contact with the horse. When her knees were bent, her quim was resting on the horse.

"Charlotte, my dear, you're next," George said, motioning me toward the second horse. I stepped up and did as Ellen had done. The maid bound me similarly and my heart was beating wildly.

"Don't worry, Lady Essex," the Duke said. "You'll love this game."

He dismissed the maid and walked to a large wooden cabinet. I knew it would hold the horses when they were not needed. He withdrew two riding crops and handed one to George. They looked lethal, long and covered with braided leather. Both had a short whip on the end.

"Now, Charlotte, during this game you will call me Milord Stephen, is that clear?" I replied loudly that it was. "The rules for this game are simple. You ride the horse until you climax. Your husband and myself will encourage you. Let us demonstrate."

He motioned George toward Ellen.

"Ride the horse Ellen," George said. Ellen began rocking the horse back and forth, her quim coming into contact with the end. George swatted her behind with the crop. "Faster. Faster." She rocked faster and George continued his assault. She began to moan, begging for more, slamming her quim into the saddle that covered the wood. Milord Stephen stepped up and

added his crop to the mix. The sharp slaps made a resounding sound as Ellen continued to rock back and forth. Moments later she cried out in ecstasy and the slaps stopped.

The Duke stepped up behind her and I watched with awe as he caressed her backside, whispering in her ear. There were tears on her face and a huge smile on her lips. "Thank you Master Stephen, Thank you Milord Essex."

Both men muttered "your welcomes," and then turned to me. The Duke had a wicked smile on his face. Then he turned to my husband.

"May I whip your wife first, Essex?"

I heard George laugh and say yes. Moments later the soft leather rubbed against my rear.

"Ride the horse, Lady Essex, the whipping will stop when you spend."

I started rocking the horse, encouraged by words from Ellen and George. The crop hit my behind sharply and I cried out.

"Goodness, she's a little jumpy," the Duke said. "Still very new to spanking. We'll have to work on that."

Slap, slap, slap, slap. "You had best move yourself up and down, or you won't be able to sit down for a week, Charlotte." The Duke's words rang out and I tried to mimic Ellen's movements, rocking the horse back and forth and slamming my quim down on the saddle.

Slap, slap, slap, slap. "Ride faster Charlotte, ride faster." I increased my pace and as I did the crop hit the back of my thighs. I cried out in pain.

"Faster, faster," the Duke encouraged. George was standing off to the side, watching with a smile on his face.

Off to the side Ellen was telling me to "move my quim faster on the saddle. Bring your clit down on it, harder, harder."

Each time the crop hit I brought my quim down harder. The heat began to spread and after a few more resounding slaps from the Duke I yelled out in pleasure, earning words of praise from my husband and the Duke.

"Thank you Milord Stephen," I said, my breath coming in ragged gasps.

"You're very welcome pretty Charlotte," the Duke said. "And now, on to round two."

I looked at George who was still standing by the side of the room, laughing. A wicked grin lit his face as he crossed over to us. Immediately he and the Duke began slapping our asses with the crops. Ellen groaned in pleasure and began bouncing on the horse once again. She spent almost immediately and begged her husband to continue.

Taking her lead I began to bounce, the pleasure mixing with the pain and causing wonderful feelings to spread through me. After Ellen had spent again I groaned as I felt both crops on my behind, sometimes striking at the same time, something taking turns.

"The whipping ends when you climax, Charlotte," George said. "Do it soon, or you may have to stand for the remainder of the week."

I bounced harder and when I finally spent I thought I would die. The pleasure was unlike anything I had ever felt in my short life of feeling sexual pleasure. Ellen thanked her husband and George, and I did the same. Before they untied us they rubbed cool cream into our burning behinds.

Once we were free Ellen grabbed me and hugged me, kissing me gently on the cheek.

"I hope you can come and play again," she said, looking questioningly at first her husband and then at George. Both men nodded their assent. And after a few moments of silence, I did also.

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We were still asleep the next afternoon when Cannonberry knocked on the bedroom door.

“Come down now,” he yelled. “We need to talk, immediately.”

I was walking very slowly. My behind was so sore I felt I could barely move. George tried to talk me into staying in bed but I wanted to hear what was being said.

Cannonberry and Barton were partaking of tea that had been set before them. Sitting with them was a striking woman in her middle 30s. I knew from the descriptions that I had heard that this was Michelle White. I thought about the things that she had said about Bernard and I wanted to confront her. I didn’t want to believe what she had said, even though George was sure she was telling the truth.

She stood and bowed slightly to George. “Lord Essex.” She turned to me and didn’t bow. Instead she gave me a sneer. “Lady Essex.” The contempt in her voice was evident. Now I really wanted to confront her, and slap her.

George moved me toward the couch before I could take a swing at her.

“Someone tried to kill Michelle last night,” Barton said. “They broke into her rooms and tried to slash her with a knife.”

“Too bad they missed,” I said, not trying to mask my anger. “She’s playing you all for fools. She lied about Bernard and Geoffrey and she’s lying now. She wants one of you to take care of her, that’s all.”

As if on cue Michelle White began to cry, loudly. Cannonberry shot me a look and handed her a handkerchief.

“Someone did break in,” he said defensively. “I saw the disruption in her home when I went to question her again about who could possibly be involved with Edwards. There was blood.”

George was staring at her. I could tell that he did not trust her. He and Barton exchanged a look.

“Mrs. White, do you know anyone else that Edwards was involved with?” George’s voice was soft.

The woman continued to sob and buried her head in Cannonberry’s shoulder. I wondered if she had indeed found her new protector.

“No, no one milord.” She turned her tear-filled blue eyes on my husband. “He never said there was anyone else besides Bernard. Except he did say once that Charlotte Hudson helped him cover his tracks when he killed Bernard.” She shot me a look of triumph, and then burned her face back in Cannonberry’s shoulder.

Before I could voice my anger at her statements Barton cleared his throat. “Did Edwards tell you that before you stabbed him, or afterwards, while he lay dying?”

She pulled her head up quickly. “How dare you sir!”

A new voice from the doorway rang out. “I will dare say it, Mrs. White. You and Simpson killed Geoffrey Edwards, and had one of Simpson’s lackeys dispose of his body here, to make trouble for Lady Essex.”

We all stared at Inspector Wilcox. Behind him stood the constable who’d been with him the first time.

“You see Mrs. White several of your neighbors were very forthcoming,” he continued without missing a beat. “They saw Geoffrey Edwards enter your home on the night of the murder, but never saw him leave. They did, however, see two men known to be in Simpson’s employ enter your home later, and leave with a very large bundle.”

Michelle White’s face was a mask of fury. She turned on me. “This is all your fault. The plan was perfect. Simpson and I had it all planned out. Once Geoffrey had control of your money

I'd get it from him one way or the other, and then we'd dispose of him. But you ruined everything by taking up with him."

She jerked her head in George's direction. Then she turned to Cannonberry. "Will you help me?"

She leaned into his shoulder and he pushed her away. "I'm afraid not, Mrs. White. It was I who told the authorities about Simpson's men being at your home. We were trying just now to get you to say things to implicate yourself. I guess it worked.

The Inspector nodded. "Indeed, Mrs. White. We had no real evidence against you until now. I do believe your words will be enough to send both you and Simpson to the gallows."

Wilcox instructed the Constable to bind Mrs. White's hands and take her away. She couldn't resist the chance to once again scream that everything was "her fault," lunging at me.

The constable pulled her away and George took me into the comfort of his arms.

I turned to Inspector Wilcox. "Tell me, Inspector, was what she said about my first husband true? Was he really lovers with Geoffrey Edwards?"

The Inspector looked at George, and then he turned a look of pity my way.

"I'm afraid that it is true, Lady Essex. The same neighbors who told us about Simpson's men also told us that Geoffrey and your late husband were regular visitors at Mrs. White's house in the years before Hudson's death."

I turned away, tears threatening my eyes. The Inspector shook hands with George and then with Barton and Cannonberry.

"I thank you for your help gentlemen. Lady Essex, I am sorry for any pain you are feeling."

He turned and left. Barton and Cannonberry quickly followed suit and George rang for tea.

"It's over, my sweet," he whispered in my ears, taking me in his arms. I could feel tears running down my cheeks.

"I always thought there was something wrong with me," I whispered. "He never tried to kiss me, or hug me. Now I know why."

George pulled me closer, picking me up and depositing me on the couch.

"There is nothing wrong with you my sweet." He kissed me, his tongue invading my mouth. He sat down and pulled me on top of him so that my legs were on either side of his hips. "And you have nothing else to worry about. I will take care of you, always."

I knew that he was right. He would always care for me. And he didn't want me for my money. To drive that point home he lifted my robe and pushed himself inside me.

"I love you, Charlotte, and don't you ever forget it."

I sighed as he drew himself in and out.

"I love you too, Milord, I love you too."

## CHAPTER SIX

I fell into a sort of melancholy. The information about Bernard was hard to take. I felt as if he had come back from the grave and kicked me in the stomach. Raymond and Sarah were shocked at the news, at first refusing to believe it. Once the reality set in they were apologetic to me, as if they had something to do with things.

One good thing about it, however, was Geoffrey Edwards' father, The Duke of More. He had enough power to cover things up. The trial against Simpson and White was swift and private. Their executions came quickly. No news of either Geoffrey or Bernard made it into the papers. Both men went to their graves with spotless records.

It was reported that Simpson and White hatched the plan to use Geoffrey to get to my money. I was saved, the papers said, by my loving husband.

And they were right. George and I were closer than we'd ever been. But I still felt guilty over what had happened. People were talking about me, I knew. I cancelled engagements and refused invitations. George was supportive at first but after a week went by he began to show anger, telling me we needed to go back out into society. I refused and he didn't push too hard, although I knew that he would, sooner or later.

A few days before the trial began the dressmaker had delivered my special order. She had not backed down once from what I had asked for. I put it in a box and shoved it in a corner. Now, two days before Lord Buxton's house party I brought it out. I wanted to surprise George, who was angry at me for my behavior the last week. When George came home that evening it was to find that I had again cancelled our evening engagements. When he came upstairs to ask me why he found me kneeling in the middle of our bed.

I was wearing a black whale-bone corset, laced tightly to enhance my figure. My breasts were bare and I had tied little red ribbons around my hardened nipples. Red ribbons hung from the corset, ending in golden chains. My black stockings were the latest from France, held high on my thighs by red ribbons. A black lace collar was around my neck. Hanging from it was a red ribbon, that ran down between my legs and up my back, tethering at the back of the collar.

The ribbon was pulled tight so that when I moved it rubbed against my clit and into my bum hole. I had taken one of George's riding crops from the drawer and when I heard him coming up the stairs I knelt in the middle of the bed, the crop in my mouth, my hands held behind my back.

When he came in he stopped and stared. Then he smiled and walked over to the dais, climbing the steps until he was at the bed.

"Looks like my wife wants to play."

I nodded in response.

"I love your new corset, sweet wife." He climbed up behind me and pulled me back against him. "Did you buy this just for me?"

I nodded again and moaned as he reached around and began pinching my nipples, pulling off the ribbons.

"Charlotte needs a good spanking," he whispered in my ear. "Charlotte needs a good fucking, too." I moaned and pushed myself against him. Then he bent me over and began kneading my backside, pushing apart my thighs and inserting his fingers inside my wetness.

"Please," I whispered around the crop. He laughed.

"Please what sweet wife?"

He pushed another finger, and then another inside me, wiggling them around.

“Tell me what you want Charlotte.” He reached down and took the crop from my mouth, bringing it around to rub against my bare ass.

“I want you to spank me.”

“And?”

“And fuck me.”

He slapped me with the crop. “Remember your place!”

“I’m sorry Master George. I want you to spank me Master George.”

Slap, slap, slap. “Tell me Charlotte, beg for it.”

He withdrew his fingers from my quim and then reinserted them, slipping them farther inside.

Slap, slap, slap. “I’m waiting.”

“Fuck me Master George,” I whispered. “Please.”

He quickly withdrew his fingers and slapped my ass with the crop repeatedly. I gripped the bedclothes and moaned.

“Louder!” Slap, slap, slap.

“Take me, please Master, please.” He continued to spank me, taking me over his lap and bringing the crop down harder and harder. I could feel the welts coming up on my ass. I could also feel the ribbon sliding across my clit and into my bum. The sensation was incredible.

“This is where you belong, Charlotte,” he said harshly. “Across my knee. You need a good sound spanking every day, to remind you that you belong to me. Bernard is gone, and you will not hide your head in shame over what happened any longer, do you understand me?”

“Yes Master George, I understand,” I said, tears flowing down my face. I knew he was right. What had happened was not my fault, I had nothing to do with it. I was a victim in the process, rescued by my husband.

The crop sailed through the air and hit and I repeated my cry for him to fuck me, but he just continued to spank me, over, and over, and over again.

“We will not hide any longer, do you understand Charlotte?”

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

“Yes Master George.”

“You belong to me, Charlotte, do you understand?”

“Yes Master.”

“What? I didn’t hear you.” Slap, slap, slap, slap.

“Yes, Master, I belong to you.”

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

“Don’t every forget it, Charlotte, ever.”

He moved me off his lap and had me kiss the crop. Then he quickly shed his clothing. I knelt before him and took him in my mouth, savoring the taste of him, loving the way he moved under my tongue.

“Lie across the bed, wife.”

I scrambled up and bent over the bed, spreading my legs.

“Good girl,” he said softly. “Do you feel your welts, Charlotte? Do you know they are my marks?”

He covered my body with his and my reddened bum cried out in protest.

“Yes, Master George, they are your marks. I love you.”

“And I love you, sweet wife.”

He entered me quickly, pumping me until I was at the edge. Then he withdrew, picked up the crop and slapped my behind ten more times. He pushed himself inside and slapped my behind while I felt him pulse inside me. I groaned my approval.

“You are truly mine now Charlotte.” He began to move slowly at first and then more rapidly. He had not removed the ribbon and he grasped it, pulling it tighter so that it slid repeatedly over my wetness as he slide in and out of me.

Never had I felt anything so wicked, so wonderful. He rode me harder and I felt my climax spill forth, the ribbon pushing into me and causing extreme pleasure.

“Master George, sir, yes, wonderful.”

He spent moments later, pushing himself farther inside me and emptying his seed. He pulled us over onto our sides, still buried deep within me.

He kissed my temple and pulled me closer. I could feel his cock throbbing.

“Do you promise me that you’ll be good?”

“Yes Master George, I promise.”

“Do you promise me that you will stop thinking about Bernard and Geoffrey?”

“Yes Master George, I promise.”

“Spankings can go both ways, Charlotte,” he whispered. “Since you enjoy it so much I can deny you a spanking if your behavior does not improve.

I sat up and looked at him.

“You wouldn’t!”

“Oh I would, if I thought it would get my point across,” George’s voice was firm. “Or I could call on another member of the Club, make you watch while I spank her.”

I frowned at the thought of George spanking another woman. Of course I knew that he had done so in the past, and that as a member of the Club he would do so in the future, but I did not like the idea. I wanted George’s spankings to be for me only.

“Do I make myself clear, Charlotte?” He lifted my chin so that our eyes met.

“Yes Master George, very clear.”

“Good, then we will just add a little more emphasis to the matter. Go and pick out a piece of leather.”

And so I did.

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We left for Lord Buxton’s house party that Thursday morning. I was very worried about my initiation, which would be at Lord Ellington’s house the next Monday evening. George had just smiled at me when I mentioned it, asking again who would be there.

“You’ll see, sweet wife, you’ll see.” While we traveled I tried to think of who I knew was in the Club. Lord Ellington said he and Lord Buxton had founded it some time ago. He said there were eleven members. I counted six that I knew of, the founders, my husband, Lords Cannonberry Beaton and Barton, and the Duke of Wickham.

That meant there were four men I didn’t know who would be watching while my husband spanked me. The thought both thrilled and frightened me.

“George,” I said. “Tell me how the Spanking Club came into being. I know that Lord Ellington and Lord Buxton formed it, but how did it grow? How did you become a member?”

George laughed. “Ellington and Buxton were the first two members, of course. They were the only two members for years. They discovered, while sharing a woman one night, that they both enjoyed spanking a woman’s behind.”



“At first it was some sort of joke, I believe.” George’s voice was light. He said the two would spank their latest conquests, taking turns, and soon discovered that some women loved it as much as they did.

The Duke of Wickham was the next member to join.

“Soon there were many other members,” George said. ‘I joined about five years ago, after Cannonberry told me about it. Men will talk, you know. And, we have a new male member. That brings us to twelve now.’”

George went on to say that male members had to prove that they were spanking for pleasure, and not to inflict pain, and that they had to prove they could spank without breaking the skin.

“This, after all, is the Spanking Club, not the Beating Club,” my husband said.

“And do you often make use of the female members?” I tried to keep my voice even but the thought was not one I wanted to entertain.

“Jealous, wife?” George smiled at me. “I have been known to spank a few of the female members. But as Ellington told you sex between the members is frowned upon, unless they are attached.”

“But spanking me always makes you hard,” I said. “How does it not make you hard with the others?”

George smiled. “It does, but you don’t always act on it. That’s one of the reasons I’m very thrilled that you, who I was attracted to, enjoy spanking as much as I do. Not all members require their ladies to call them Master, either. That is something I enjoy, along with the Duke, as you found out.”

I blushed. “It thrills me that you wanted me. Me. A lowly merchant’s daughter.”

George lurched across the carriage and pulled me to him in a deep kiss “A lowly merchant’s daughter with beautiful eyes and a gorgeous bum.”

We collapsed onto the seat in a fit of laughter. Moments later the carriage pulled into Lord Buxton’s country estate. It was large and somewhat foreboding.

Our host greeted us and instructed a footman to take the bags to our room. We freshened up and then made our way to the drawing room. George gave me a smile before he opened the doors, revealing a long table where four ladies were bent over, their naked bums in the air.

I gasped and he laughed. “I’m afraid that I’ve deceived you a bit, sweet wife. Your initiation is today. The ‘house party’ is really a gathering of the Club, to welcome our new member.”

I looked around the room. In addition to the members I knew sat five gentlemen, The Duke of Salisbury, The Duke of Chesire, Lord Graham, Lord Shaw and Lord McIntyre. All the women in the room were wearing sheer robes and nothing else. I recognized Ellen, the Duchess of Wickham. She smiled at me and waved.

Lord Buxton was standing behind the ladies bent over the table, a large wooden paddle in his hands.

“Lady Essex, you’re just in time.” He rang for a maid. “Please help Lady Essex disrobe. Then, Milady, you may only watch until after your initiation tonight. But I’m afraid Club rules require all women to be clad only in the robes during playtime at the house parties.”

Once I was wearing the robe George led us to a chair and pulled me onto his lap. Lord Buxton smiled, and then turned to the foursome who awaited him. Without uttering a word he pulled back and smartly swatted the behind of the first woman. He gave her fifteen resounding slaps and received a smattering of applause from the audience.

Then he moved on to the next and repeated his moves. When he got to the end of the line he went back to the front and started again, giving each woman twenty swats. Their backsides

were reddening and I felt wetness forming in my quim. He repeated the spankings a third time, giving each woman twenty-five swats. I looked around the room. Several of the men had taken a lady over their laps for a spanking. Lord Shaw eyed me and raised his eyebrows, laughing as I gasped. The Duchess of Salisbury was climbing onto his lap, begging to be spanked.

When Buxton was finished the ladies stood up. I recognized three prominent widows and the Duchess of Chesire. All four knelt and thanked 'Milord Buxton' and kissed his hands. Four ladies scrambled to take their places at the table and Lord Graham took up the paddle, performing the same way Lord Buxton had.

Master George began playing with my quim during Lord Graham's second time round the table. I wanted desperately to spend. I also wanted to be one of the women bent over the table.

"Are you watching them sweet Charlotte?" George's voice was low in my ear. "See how they enjoy it? Just as much as you do."

He continued to play with my quim as I watched Lord Graham paddle Amelia, who was squealing with delight. I leaned my head against George's shoulder and listened to her cries of pleasure, wishing it was me bent over that table. When Master George's fingers brought me to a climax I heard loud applause. I hadn't realized that everyone was watching us, that all spanking had stopped.

Amelia was turned toward me, giggling and squealing. I blushed furiously to know that everyone had watched me climax.

"I do believe it's time for Lady Essex's initiation," Lord Ellington said. "Ladies, if you would kindly kneel by your husbands or sponsors, we shall finish our business"

The ladies all sat by their men, sending me knowing smiles. I shivered upon my husband's lap. He held me close, whispering in my ear about how he was looking forward to this, how he wanted to show everyone that I was his.

Lord Ellington offered me his hand and I took it, standing and following him to the middle of the room. I was told to kneel and I did so. All eyes were upon me.

"Lady Essex," Lord Buxton said. "Have the rules of the Club been explained to you?"

"They have, Milord Buxton," I said softly.

"Very well," he continued. "You will bend over the table. Your husband has chosen to spank you with a wooden paddle for your initiation. There are no bindings as this is a voluntary initiation. You will make no noise during the spankings except to count each stroke. At the end of the spanking you will pledge to follow the rules of the Club. Is that clear?"

"It is, Milord Buxton." My heart was beating wildly. I knew that each man was watching me eagerly.

I was led to the table where I was bent over. Buxton turned and said loudly, "Let the initiation begin."

The assembled group clapped and I kept my gaze turned forward. George stepped up behind me and lifted the robe so that my bum was naked. I shivered at the idea that men, and women, were seeing me naked.

George ran his hand across my backside, and then I felt the cool of the wooden paddle slide across my skin, which still bore the marks from last night's punishment.

Swish. The first stroke landed and I counted out "One."

Swish. "Two."

Swish. "Three."

Swish. "Four."

Swish. "Five."

When he got to ten the tears were flowing freely down my face. My bum was still aching from the previous night. But despite the pain I was very excited. I could hear men and women murmuring as each swat landed. It was a thrilling feeling.

Smack. "Eleven."

Smack. "Twelve."

Smack. "Thirteen."

Smack. "Fourteen."

Smack. "Fifteen."

When George reached fifty he stopped and rubbed my behind. The crowd applauded lightly and I felt a stirring of pride. It had been hard to stay still as the paddle landed but I had not wanted to embarrass George. I wanted him to be proud of me. I wanted to please him.

The next twenty-five strokes were delivered quickly and then George paused and rubbed my behind with the wood again. Only twenty-five to go and I would be done. George would be proud and I would be a full-fledged member of the Spanking Club. I wondered what other surprises, like the spanking horses, awaited me.

When we reached ninety George spoke for the first time since we'd started. "Count very loud sweet wife."

Whack. "Ninety-one." My voice was a whisper and my ass was on fire.

Whack. "Ninety-two." Only eight more to go.

Whack. "Ninety-three." I fought the urge to look back at George.

Whack. "Ninety-four." My voice broke on the words. George's swings were getting harder. I began to sob, trying to keep it quiet but failing. The men in the room began to utter encouraging words.

"You're almost there, Charlotte, don't lose it now."

"Just a few more little one, just a few more."

"Don't tense up, just relax."

Whack. "Ninety-five." The crowd applauded and I smiled.

Then, without warning the remaining five were delivered quickly without giving me time to count. My tears were fully in bloom, and applause filled the room.

Master George sat me on my feet and grabbed me in his arms and told me how much he loved me, and how glad he was that I had done so well.

The ladies and men all congratulated me in some manner, with hugs, kisses or sharp slaps on the behind, telling me how happy they were that I was now a member of the Club. Several of the ladies wiped away my tears, asking to see my reddened behind.

"I do believe we need time to get ready for dinner," Lord Buxton said, moving people out the doors.

George and I went to our room where he inspected my behind. He ran his fingers across the welts, telling me how beautiful they looked.

Then he laid me across the bed, with my bum in the air. My eyes were still stinging with tears but I knew that George was pleased, and so was I. Each stroke had been incredibly painful, but incredibly thrilling. I remembered the clapping and the words of encouragement from those who were watching. I wondered what it would feel like to be on the other end, watching a new member be initiated. The thought pleased me greatly.

I gasped slightly as George rubbed a cool cream into my aching behind. The cream cooled the fire somewhat. I lay where I was as George removed his clothing. He lay down on top of me and I cried out at the contact.

"How sweet you look, how delicious," George said. He was already hard. Spanking me always made him rise and I could feel him pressed against me.

He moved himself back and forth so that he rubbed against my fiery backside. I heard him moan in approval as he moved my thighs apart and slipped into my wetness.

“How I love you Charlotte,” he whispered in my ear. “Fate dealt us a good hand, don’t you think?”

George began to move and I sighed. “Yes Master George, a very fine hand.” It took mere moments for me to find my center and when I did so did George, both of us collapsing into the bed and laughing.

“What happens for the rest of the house party?”

George rolled us onto the bed so that I was pulled into his chest, his arms wrapped protectively around me.

“Why spankings, of course. A great number of spankings. I will have a lot of requests for you tomorrow but I don’t think I’m going to allow it. I don’t think I’m ready to share your sweet bum quite yet.”

I laughed as he spoke.

“Are there other things, like the horses?”

He looked down at me and grinned. “Oh yes, my sweet. There are several things. We can try then, or we can watch. We might do a lot of watching this weekend. I don’t want to overwhelm you.”

I grinned up at him as he leaned down to kiss me. I had never felt so warm and wonderful.

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George and I were lying on a blanket in the backyard of Lord Buxton’s house. He was behind me, his hands wandering below the thin robe, his fingers stroking breasts and my quim.

We watched as Amelia Turnston was shackled to a wooden horse. Lord Cannonberry was on one side, Lord Barton the other. They began whipping and she began riding, her cries of pleasure ringing out across the lawn. I smiled as I nestled my own naked, reddened bum closer to my husband. I remembered my own experience with the horse and how much I had loved it.

Was it possible that just a few short weeks ago I had watched while those two men and my husband whipped Amelia while I watched? I should really thank her for helping bring us together.

Did I really fight him? Tell him no? Try and keep myself away from him? If I knew then what I knew now, I would have not only gone for tea the first day, I would have never left. Of course really, I went for one spanking and never left.

I turned my head and looked at George.

“Did you really plan for me to watch you whip Amelia that evening?”

He laughed. “Not exactly. I planned to make a play for you, and that little scenario just presented itself to me. It let me see right away that you and I are very suited for each other.”

He kissed me and I smiled.

Across the way we watched Lord Ellington lead Talia Barrows to a tree where he made her choose a branch and strip away the bark. Then he sat down on a bench and took her over his knee.

I thought of the handsome Lord and the way that he had treated me the past few weeks. Always kind and sweet. I smiled.

“We need to find a good woman for Lord Ellington,” I said. “Someone who will be as happy with him as I am with you.”

George pulled me closer. “Say it again.”

I looked at him questioningly. "Say what again?"

"That you're happy with me."

"Oh yes, Master George, I'll say it again. I'm very happy with you."

And then I turned to him and grinned. "And if I say that I'm not? What happens then?"

For an answer he pushed me over and swatted my behind soundly. "Why Charlotte, I do believe you haven't been introduced to the tree yet. Do we need to make a visit?"

I giggled and moaned as he slapped my behind again.

"Will you say it again, Charlotte?"

I sighed. "Oh yes, George, again, and again, and again. I'm very happy with you."





# **TO CATCH A THIEF**

**BY MELINDA BARRON**

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BARRON**





# CHAPTER ONE

London Spring, 1886

Tristan Mallory, Lord Ellington, was bored. He looked around the full ballroom at the colorful skirts and laughing ladies and felt not one whiff of interest. At the ripe old age of 45 he'd lost all interest in the fairer sex.

OK, he admitted to himself, not all interest. As a founding member of the Spanking Club he still enjoyed reddening a woman's behind. He attended Spanking Club meetings and did just that several times a month. But he no longer availed himself of the charms of the single female members. And it was all Lord and Lady Essex's fault.

Ellington looked over at his friends as they talked, Charlotte reaching up to whisper in George's ear, her words earning her a laugh from her husband. That's what I want, Ellington thought, love. It had been so long since his wife died that he'd forgotten about love. Seeing the Essexes's happiness in the past year had brought the feelings back full force.

And Charlotte, bless her heart, had tried to find someone for Ellington to love

She'd not so subtly invited him to tea when her single friends were there. There had been house parties with his room situated between two different widow's rooms, both of them vying for his attentions during the night. And there had been dinner invitations, where it was just George and Charlotte, Ellington and one other lady. And although Ellington appreciated the effort not one of the ladies had raised his heart rate. He couldn't imagine one of these sweet females across his knee, his hand coming down on their backsides.

Ellington stood and ran his hands down his muscular thighs. He knew he wasn't bad to look at. Tall, muscular, blond hair, blue eyes. Why couldn't he find a woman whom he could take over his knee, and then take to his bed?

He made his way across the ballroom to his hosts. Charlotte smiled at him as he appeared. Her green eyes were flashing mischief and beside her George groaned, shaking his head.

"Lord Ellington, I have someone I want you to meet." Without waiting for an answer Charlotte grabbed his arm and made her way to a pretty little blond whom she introduced as Shelia McCoy.

"Shelia's late husband was Scottish, and they lived in Edinburgh. He passed several months ago and she has only been in England for a few days. I thought maybe you could show her the finer sights of London." Charlotte smiled at him as he bowed low over Shelia's hand, murmuring his condolences on the death of her husband. She was a pretty woman, but her eyes did not make him quiver.

"Milord," Shelia whispered, letting her hand linger in his own. "Lady Essex tells me that you're quite a horseman. I enjoy riding myself. Perhaps we could take a turn around the park some afternoon."

Ellington kept his smile in place, despite the fact that he thought the woman's offer a big suggestive. After all when you were seen in the park with someone it was obvious to society that there was something between you.

Dinner was announced at that time and Ellington was saved from making a response.

“May I escort you into the dinning room Mrs. McCoy?” He offered his arm, which the woman took. Inside the dinning room he found his place right next to the pretty blond. He looked at Charlotte who giggled. He really was going to have to have a talk with her about this. Although he appreciated the effort he would find a woman on his own. He just didn’t know where.

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Carin Piper flattened herself against a wall and held her breath. Who knew that one man would have so many servants? She knew that Lord Ellington’s daughter had recently married and moved to her own house. Why did one man need a large household staff? This was the third servant she’d seen since breaking into Ellington’s home. Why wasn’t he like most people, giving them the night off when he was out?

She sighed as she waited. Here she was almost 35, unmarried, dressed like a man and breaking into people’s houses. This was not what she thought her life would be like.

Carin peered around the corner and, saw that it was clear and crept toward the area where she assumed the library would be. That would be where he kept all his important papers.

The door opened quietly and she slipped inside. An oil lamp illuminated the room, showing that her assumption had been correct. Walls of books lined two walls. And sitting near the French doors was a large roll-top desk.

She moved quietly across the room, taking hold of the cover and pulling. The desk was locked. She smiled to herself. She did love a challenge. Taking out her picks she went to work, freeing the lock in seconds and pushing the cover up silently.

She hoped that this time she would find what she was looking for. This was the fourth house she’d broken into this week. One of these men had been responsible for the death of her father, and she intended to find out who it was.

She picked up papers and began to read. She figured that she had at least three more hours before Ellington came home, enough time to look through the desk, find the Lord’s bedroom and see if he kept anything of interest there.

After coming up empty in the desk search, Carin made her way quietly upstairs, hoping that another servant didn’t come around the corner. She found Ellington’s bedroom and entered quickly. A strong scent of cinnamon and sandalwood hit her nose. She’d seen Lord Ellington from a distance while she was watching the house. Even from across the street she could tell he was a handsome man. Too bad they were not in the same class.

She wondered what it would feel like to be with a man like him. To have him caress her, kiss her, love her. The thought of Ellington laboring above her brought back memories of her husband Mark. He’d been dead for five years, leaving her with nothing. But her husband had been a good man, gentle and strong.

When Mark had died her father, sweet man that he was, taught his daughter to fend for herself the only way he knew how: through crime. He’d taught her how to be silent, blend into the woodwork and take what would bring good money. But Carin had rejected that life of crime. She’d found a job as a seamstress assistant. When her father had been killed she’d decided to use his knowledge to bring his murderer to justice.

Carin sighed and took a candle from the pocket of her trousers. She lit it and sat it on the bedstead, and began searching the drawers.

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“I never knew that London was so dangerous,” Shelia said, sliding closer to Lord Ellington. “I’ve read in the newspapers that more than a dozen homes have been broken into in the past few days. It’s just terrible.”

She shivered and smiled at Ellington. He in turn took a sip of his wine and groaned into the glass.

“Actually Mrs. McCoy, the burglaries have dropped off as of late. Six months ago they were quite common. They stopped for a while, and have started again. But one’s servants should be up to guarding the house while their master is away.”

“You’re so very knowledgeable, just like Lady Essex said. Perhaps we could share a dance after dinner?”

Ellington eyes popped wide open as he felt her hand slip up his thigh, dangerously close to his cock, and gently squeeze. The woman really was very bold, offering her favors after just meeting him. “I’m sorry, but I don’t believe I’m going to stay for the dancing. Perhaps another time.”

Shelia pouted, squeezed again and then smiled at him. “Of course, Milord. I’m to attend the Duke of Roth’s crush tomorrow night. Will you be there?”

Ellington confirmed that he would be and then felt relief sweep over him as George stood to announce that dinner was over. Shelia excused herself and Ellington made for the doorway.

“Leaving already?” George came up behind him and clasped him on the shoulder. “Don’t like this latest prospect either?”

Shaking his head, Ellington smiled. “I have to hand it to your wife Essex, she is persistent. I appreciate the thought, but I’m afraid that perhaps my years of love are behind me. I’m happy now that Nancy has a husband and house of her own. The house is empty without her, but I think I can find things to occupy my mind. Horses and such, you know. Some gambling. Perhaps I’ll spend more time at my home in the country.”

Essex smiled. “We’re having a Club meeting here next Monday. Will you be attending?”

“Of course,” Ellington replied. “I may not be able to find love, but I can find a nice bottom to spank. Amelia is always willing. Perhaps I can give her a double dose of what she likes.”

The two men laughed.

“Perhaps you should think about marrying her. She would make a good wife. And it would make Charlotte happy to think that you’d found someone.”

Ellington shook his head. “I enjoy Amelia’s company but I want more. Love. True Love.”

Essex nodded his head and Ellington excused himself before Charlotte could come alone and detain him.

Once inside his carriage he shook his head. Perhaps young Mrs. McCoy wouldn’t be too bad. His cock had stirred, just slightly, when she’d squeezed his thigh. He thought of taking her over his knee, raising her skirts and revealing her bare bottom. The idea did not cause him to smile and he groaned softly. He was setting his standards too high. He wanted what Charlotte and George had. And that came along once in a lifetime. He thought of his wife Maura. How she loved to be spanked. How happy they had been together. But she’d been dead for 15 years.

He shook his head. Perhaps he would call on Mrs. McCoy tomorrow and take her for a ride. It would be better than sitting around and doing nothing. And she’d made it perfectly clear that she was willing to offer her charms. The problem was, Ellington knew, he was not willing to partake of them.

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Carin sat back on her heels and shook her head. Not one piece of paper that indicated that Ellington was the man who hired, and then murdered, her father. There wasn't anything.

She sat down on the floor and covered her face with her hands, tears silently slipping down her face. Her father had been gone four months now. Four months since the Inspectors had shown up to tell her that he'd been found dead in a fashionable neighborhood. Killed in a botched robbery.

But Carin knew that wasn't what happened. Her father was the best cat burglar in the city. He would never have botched anything. And three months before his death he'd told Carin that a high-ranking member of the ton who had a gambling problem had hired him. That person needed money. He paid Carin's father to steal items and sell them. The fancy Lord provided information, and Carin's father did the legwork. And they split the money.

"It's good blunt, Carin," her father had said. "He lets me know when people are going to be out of their homes, and what they got that's worth taking. You'll see, no harm will come from it."

But it had. Her father was now dead, and Carin intended to find the person responsible and bring him to justice. But how would she do that? Finding out who it was should be easy. Carin was as skilled at breaking into people's homes as her father was. Bringing that person to justice might prove a bit harder.

She stood and stretched. She could mark Ellington off her list. She had six more possibilities. Two of those possibilities would be at the Duke of Roth's party tomorrow night. Did she dare try two houses in one night? She would have to. She wanted this done and over with.

She moved toward the doorway and then stopped in her tracks as voices filtered through the portal.

"Milord, you're home early." A woman's voice rang out. "I'm sorry, I've yet to turn down your bed or light the lamps. Let me see to it, straight away."

A deeper voice came and Carin nearly melted on the spot, her heart leaping into her throat.

"It's all right Mrs. Walker, I can take care of those things myself. Take yourself off to bed."

Carin wheeled around, looking for a place to hide. The room was large, filled with a huge bed that sat high off the floor, a wardrobe and desk. She looked at the French doors and the balcony. She didn't think she had time to open the doors and climb down the balcony stairs before Ellington appeared.

Her breathing became labored as the doorknob turned. She moved quickly toward the bed, ducking down and throwing herself under the frame of the huge four-poster. She lifted the bed skirt and watched as a pair of black boots walked along the floor right near her face, and then she gasped, covering her mouth with her hand to try and stifle the sound.

The candle. She'd left it on the bedstead. A stupid mistake. He would see it and know that something was amiss.

She heard him mutter to himself softly. Then he lit the lamp on the bedstead and moved toward the doors. He opened them and cool evening air flooded the room.

Carin held her breath as he moved around, opening and shutting drawers, mumbling to himself. She gauged whether or not she could make it to the window before he saw her and decided against trying. He hadn't raised an alarm so maybe the candle had not seemed strange to him.

The sounds of undressing soon filled her ears. He shrugged out of his coat and hung it over the chair. She could hear the buttons popping on his cuffs. Perhaps he came home early because he was tired. He would go to sleep and then she could slip out the French doors. Hopefully he left them open all night.

Ellington continued to move around the room. Once he was shod of his shirt he sat down and began to take off his boots.

Carin's eyes widened as she watched him. Before all she would see were legs. Now that he was sitting she could see all of him. And he was the most handsome man she'd ever laid eyes on. His chest was bare, covered in light blond hair. She wanted to run her fingers through that hair, smile up at him as he pounded into her. She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts.

His arms were full of muscles, his face well formed with a full chin and big blue eyes.

The boots hit the floor and Ellington made his way toward a doorway that Carin was sure was his bathing room. When the door opened and he slipped inside she quietly moved out from under the bed, quickly stood and made a run for the French doors.

But Ellington had other ideas. He came out of nowhere, grabbing her around the waist and slinging her roughly onto the floor. She hit the wood with a thud, her breath leaving her body in a heavy exhale.

"You little blackheart, how dare you break into my home! We'll see what the authorities have to say about this."

Carin tried to stand and run for the doors again but Ellington grabbed her arms. She tried to pull away and he laughed softly.

"Why you're nothing more than a little boy," Ellington said. "You have no muscles at all. Why you're soft as a..." His words trailed off and he pulled her to him. She heard him gasp and then laugh as she tried to break free of his grasp.

"A woman?" She fought against his arms as he held her close, one of his hands going up to pull her hat from her head so that her black tresses tumbled around her shoulder and down her back.

"Well I'll be damned," he said. "I've caught myself a thief. A female cat burglar. Perhaps we don't need to bring the authorities into this after all."

"Let me go! I didn't take anything, I swear!" Carin continued to struggle against him but she knew that it was no use. The man was strong, built like an ox.

"Then what are you doing here you little thief? Why would you break into someone's home and not take anything?"

He moved to the bed and threw her into the middle of it, straddling her hips and pinning her arms on either side of her head. He looked into her face and smiled. She could tell he liked what he saw, her long black hair, dark brown eyes. An upturned nose and a full mouth. She had to think of a way out of this situation, and fast.

"Tell me what you're doing here. If you didn't come to steal something, then what?"

"Go to hell!" She screamed. "Let me go!"

"I should go to hell?" The laughter in his voice filled the room. "That little mouth of yours needs washing out with soap!"

A knock on the door caught both of their attentions. "Milord, is everything all right?"

"Yes, Temple, everything is fine," Ellington answered. "I have company for the evening and don't wish to be disturbed. Go back to your bed."

Footsteps echoed down the hallway and Ellington turned his attention back to his captive.

"Answer me. Why are you here if not to steal?"

Carin thought quickly. She had to keep him from summoning the authorities.

“I was going to take things, but I didn’t find anything, I swear. Please let me go. I won’t come back. Please.”

“You’re a bad liar my little cat burglar. First you tell me you didn’t want to take anything. Then you say you were going to steal things. Which is it?”

“I was going to take things. I looked for jewelry, but didn’t find anything.”

Ellington threw back his head and laughed. “Try again. My late wife had loads of jewelry, all sitting in that drawer, which you left partially open, showing that you did look through it. So tell me another lie, little cat.”

Carin stirred under him, his weight causing uncomfortable feelings of desire to build in her lower region.

“Please let me go,” she whispered. “I won’t come back. I can give you money.”

He laughed again. “Do you think I need your money? You’re stealing from me, remember?”

When Carin didn’t answer he stared into her eyes.

“A punishment is in order.” When her eyes widened he smiled. “But I won’t call an inspector. I will deliver the punishment. On your bare bottom.”

Carin’s eyes widened even further and Ellington grinned. “It is your choice little cat. You can willingly submit to a bare-bottomed spanking, or you can be handed over to the Yard. Which will it be?”

“They will take me to Newgate.” Her voice was soft, frightened.

“Yes, and they will probably say you have committed all the burglaries of late. Have you?”

She shook her head furiously, weighing her options. If she went to Newgate she would be locked up forever, unable to find her father’s killer and get her revenge. She had no choice, really. And how bad could it be? He would slap her behind five or six times and it would be over.

“Very well,” she said. “I will submit to your spanking. But not on my bare bum.”

“The deal, little cat, is not negotiable,” Ellington’s voice was soft as he moved his lips near her ears. “You will be bare assed for the spanking, or you will go to prison.”

Carin’s mind reeled. She really had no choice. She nodded her head and Ellington smiled, standing up suddenly and leaving her lying on the bed. He walked to a divan and sat down in the middle, stretching his long legs out in front of him.

“Come here my little cat burglar.”

She stopped in front of him and he looked up at her.

“What is your name?”

“Carin.”

“Very well Carin. Undo your trousers and pull them and your underclothes around your knees. Then place yourself across my lap.”

Carin’s trembling fingers worked at her laces, her fingers slipping in their effort to hurry. She stopped fumbling with the laces and glanced toward the open doors.

“I know what you’re thinking and it’s really not worth the effort,” Ellington said. “I will catch you before you make it to the doors, I assure you. And your spanking will be that much harder. Now do as your told, before I send Temple after the authorities.”

Carin finished undoing her trousers, and then squared her shoulders. She refused to show him that she was frightened. She slipped her thumbs inside her clothing and pushed them down to her knees, underclothes and all.

Ellington threw out his arms and nodded his head toward his lap. Carin looked down. She could see a bulge where his hardened cock was pushing against his own trousers. She felt wetness form between her legs. To try and hide it she quickly lowered herself onto his lap.

“Raise your arms above your head and place your hands on the couch,” Ellington ordered. “Keep them there or I will restrain you.”

Not trusting her voice, Carin nodded. She shivered when Ellington’s hand began caressing her bum. His hands were soft, yet firm.

She relaxed slightly at the touch, yelping out in pain when the caress turned into a hard thwack.

He brought his hand down over and over, and Carin began to squirm.

“Stop, stop! It hurts too much!”

He slapped her behind repeatedly, the loud cracking noises competing with her sobs to fill the room.

“Please Lord Ellington, I’m sorry, please stop!”

She reached her hands back to try and block the spanking but he grabbed them with his free hand. He’d remained silent the entire time. Now with her hands caught behind her back he continued to spank, his right leg coming round to hold her own trembling ones down.

“Tell me the truth Carin. Tell me what you’re doing here.”

He delivered more slaps while he waited for her answer

She gasped around her sobs and whispered. “Because of my father.”

Ellington delivered a few more whacks and then whispered. “What about him. Who is your father? Tell me.”

“He was a thief,” she cried softly. “He was in the employ of an influential man of the ton. That man killed him.”

Her words were coming out in short bursts, her crying more pronounced as Ellington continued to spank her.

“And you think I’m that man?”

He slapped her behind harder and Carin groaned. The spanking was hard, but the feelings it was producing were incredible. She hadn’t felt need for a man in ages. But she wanted Lord Ellington. And she wanted him now, buried between her thighs. She knew that he wanted her. She could feel the evidence of his arousal pressed against her stomach.

“I don’t know who it is,” she whispered. “I’m searching for evidence.”

Ellington began caressing her behind, his hand soft against her burning orbs. “How many houses have you broken into?”

He slapped her ass several more times. “Four, including yours.” Carin began to rub herself against Ellington’s thigh and she heard him laugh softly in response.

“Then you are not the burglar taking things. Do you know who is?”

He slapped her ass again and she shook her head.

Carin sighed as he caressed her again, and then sobbed as he slapped her behind again and again and again, his hand coming down harder with each smack.

She begged, pleaded with him to stop but he paid her no attention. And the stream of wetness that was flowing between her thighs turned into a river.

“We have more of a problem than just you breaking into my home,” Ellington said, slapping her ass again. “You will stay here tonight, and receive another spanking in the morning.”

Carin groaned, shaking her head furiously. Her cries were filling the room.

“You have no choice, Carin,” Ellington said. “I need time to think, and you deserve more of a punishment than this small spanking.”



“Small spanking? My bum is on fire!”

He began slapping her ass again, harder and harder. Carin’s cries grew louder and she begged him to stop.

“Please, I can’t take anymore!”

He laughed. “You’ll get used to it.” He sat her up on her feet and ordered her to pull her trousers up.

“I thought...” she whispered.

He lifted her chin with his thumb. “You thought I would take you, ease the need in your quim?”

She blushed at his words, and then nodded.

“Not tonight little cat. But soon, very soon.”

She felt her blush deepen. The look in his blue eyes sent her senses reeling.

“You assume too much.” Her words were unconvincing and he laughed.

She gasped as he pulled her toward the bed, taking a sash from the bed curtains and tying her hands around the post at the bottom of the bed.

“You will wait here while I go downstairs and think. I will return.”

He left quickly and Carin yelled for him to come back. She worked at her bonds and then fell back against the bed. He had not given her time to pull up her trousers so she was lying across his bed, her bare red ass in the air, her arms tied around the frame. She sobbed and slumped onto the mattress, silently begging for the aching in her behind to end.

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Ellington took a pull on his cigar and a swig of his brandy, pondering the little vixen that was tied to his bed. Could he have been any luckier? He wanted a woman to quicken his blood and when he found her she was a thief. What kind of luck was that?

His cock was still painfully hard. He should go upstairs and ram himself into the little minx. But he couldn’t. He needed to get a hold on his emotions.

There were other issues at hand also. He wanted to keep her around. She stirred him as none had done in a long time. But to keep her here, he had to help her find the man responsible for her father’s death. And how would he do that? He could go up to his friends and say, “Are you bankrolling a cat burglar? Did you kill that same man?”

Perhaps he could set her up as his mistress. Lord knows she’d enjoyed being spanked just as much as he enjoyed spanking. He smiled as he remembered her squirming, her cries of pain that turned into cries of need. Her reddened behind. And the wetness that had left a spot on his trousers.

He drained his glass and made his way upstairs. When he reached the door to his room he pushed it open and let out an angry breathe.

Carin was gone, the tie he’d used to bind her lying on the bed in her place.

## CHAPTER TWO

“Bring me that bolt of lavender fabric, and don’t forget the buttons that match.”

Carin cringed as her boss, Margaret Thompson, issued her sharp orders and then disappeared into the main part of the shop. It had been two days since Lord Ellington had taken Carin over his knee and her bottom still ached. And she’d been too upset by the whole incident to continue with her plan to find her father’s killer.

Every few minutes Carin was looking over her shoulder, afraid that Ellington was so upset by her escape that he’d called the authorities and they’d tracked her down.

She’d had two opportunities to break into houses and look around. But when she got close to the houses she’d turned around, thinking of the handsome Lord, afraid that she would be caught again.

Carin shivered at the thought of her recent failure. And truthfully it was not just from fear of Lord Ellington finding her. She was afraid of the feelings of desire that she felt. The desire of wanting what he’d done to her to happen again, and again, and again. She’d even walked around Ellington’s neighborhood several times, trying to catch a glimpse of him. All she’d seen were several Lords that she recognized as Essex and Cannonberry going in and out of the house.

“Carin, dear, the fabric if you please,” Margaret’s voice floated to the back room and Carin smiled. Someone rich must be up front. Margaret’s usually shrill orders were soft and undemanding.

Carin parted the curtains and moved into the other room, stopping dead in her tracks. Lady Essex, Lady Thomas and a blond woman Carin didn’t recognize were looking over various patterns. Bolts of red, blue and green fabric were spilled across the table

Margaret gave Carin a look that would have stopped a train in its tracks, gesturing for her to put the cloth on the table with the others.

Carin’s mind reeled as she moved across the room. Lady Essex was not a regular customer, and she was sure that it was not a coincidence that she was here today. It was only yesterday that Carin had seen Lord Essex going into Ellington’s house.

This “happenstance” could only mean one thing. Lord Ellington had found her and he’d sent a spy in to let Carin know she’d been located.

The bottom fell out of Carin’s stomach. Why hadn’t he just come in on his own? Was he waiting outside with the police, ready to take her to Newgate?

She walked silently across the room, dropped the fabric on the table and placed the buttons into Margaret’s waiting fingers.

“I believe, Lady Essex, that this fabric will look quite stunning on you,” Margaret said. “Of course I have others that Carin can fetch. Would you prefer a different color? We have an absolutely dazzling green satin that would look beautiful with your skin tones.”

Lady Essex cleared her throat. “No thank you Mrs. Thompson, I believe the lavender will work well for that walking dress I selected. But, if you don’t mind, I do need to make use of your water closet.”

Margaret stood quickly, eager to do the bidding of her newest, and richest, customer.

“Of course, milady, this way.”

But Lady Essex shook her head. “No, please stay with Mrs. McCoy and discuss the dresses she has selected. Your assistant can help me. Carin is it?”

Lady Essex turned innocent eyes her way and Carin cringed. She nodded at the elegant woman and they made their way to the back of the shop.

“Why didn’t he just come in himself?” Carin’s voice was soft as she pointed out the room Lady Essex was seeking.

In return Charlotte sat down in a chair near a worktable. “He was afraid that you would run.”

Lady Essex gave friendly smile, and Carin felt her fears lift slightly.

“He doesn’t mean to turn me over to the authorities?”

Charlotte laughed. “On the contrary, he has a proposition for you, to help you find your father’s killer.”

Carin gasped and Charlotte nodded. “Don’t worry, he told no one but our inner circle. You’re to be at his house tonight at nine sharp. Don’t be late.”

Lady Essex left the room in a swirl of blue skirts and Carin sat down in the seat she had vacated, her head swimming.

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Carin was furious by the time she pounded on Ellington’s door that night, much earlier than 9 p.m. She was still wearing the dress she’d worn to work that day, mainly because everything else she owned was gone from her rooms.

Her landlord had smiled at her, expressing surprise at seeing her again. “Your guv showed up this afternoon, paid your rent plus two months more to make up for losing you. He took all your things. Figured he was setting you up someplace more fancy.”

He’d winked at her and Carin fumed.

“How dare you give him my clothing! All of my books, my father’s things! How dare you!”

The man had just smiled. “He gave me all the money I needed to do the daring, and more so. So be off with you. I’ve already rented out the rooms, and there’s nothing left of yours.”

He’d slammed the door on her and Carin had walked around the park for an hour to try and calm down. That had not worked. She was still fuming as she stood on Lord Ellington’s doorstep.

Carin lifted her fist to knock again and the door opened quickly. She ran past the butler, turning at the staircase to stare at the startled man.

“Where is he?”

Ellington’s laugh filled her ears. “I’m here Carin. Don’t shout at Temple, he doesn’t like it.”

The butler gave her an offended look, shut the door and left without saying another word.

“Give me my things, now.” Carin’s voice was full of fury and Ellington walked by her, pointing toward the library.

“I’ve had Mrs. Walker prepare some food, cold meats and cheese with some bread. You must be hungry.”

He continued down the corridor and Carin followed in his footsteps, her anger rising. “You had no right! No right whatsoever. Do you realize what you’ve done? How hard it is to find rooms?”

Ellington shut the door of the library after she'd entered. He moved toward the table, taking a glass of wine and indicating that she should take the other.

For a moment Carin's anger disappeared as she eyed the food on the table. She was hungry, very hungry.

"Take a plate and fill it. We have much to discuss and you need a full stomach." Ellington said, helping himself to some cheese. "We can discuss the situation after you've eaten your fill."

Carin rounded on him. "The situation? The situation that you caused!"

Ellington shook his head and sat down in a chair. He was very calm and that caused Carin to relax somewhat.

"You started the situation by breaking into my house. Now I want you to sit and eat, and tell me about your father, his death, and why you think a member of the ton is involved."

He took another bite of cheese and Carin could no longer control her hunger. She piled a plate high with food, sat down and picked up a piece of bread, took a bite and sighed deeply.

"You know you took all my money today, everything I had. You left me with nothing."

Ellington laughed. "I knew that would get your attention. I wanted you here, tonight."

"How did you find me?" Carin took some cheese and meat, trying to eat daintily, as she knew the ladies of the ton would eat.

"It wasn't hard," Ellington replied. "I had an acquaintance of mine check death records for a man who'd been murdered, and had a daughter named Carin. You should have lied about your name, little cat."

She shook her head and Ellington continued. "From those records I learned that your father's name was Winston Piper. He'd been to Newgate twice for burglary."

Carin took a sip of her wine. "My mother used to say that father didn't know how to spell the word legal, much less live that way."

Her words caused Ellington to smile, but he recognized the pain behind her eyes. "Go on."

"The last time father was in prison, the police said he would never be released. That's why when he came home seven months ago I couldn't believe my eyes. When I asked him what happened he just smiled and said he was lucky. Several months later he told me about his 'employer.' A month after that he was dead."

Ellington frowned. "This man secured his release from Newgate? He must be very influential. It shouldn't be hard to find out who he is."

"Not hard for you," Carin answered. "But for me? All I can do is try and find out by searching for evidence."

"By breaking into homes of influential members of the ton," Ellington said. "I'm flattered that you included me in those numbers."

Ellington reached over and put more cheese and meat on Carin's plate, smiling at her. She forgot her ideas of behaving like a lady and began eating quickly. She hadn't had lunch that day and she was starving.

"And what do you plan on doing with that evidence? Do you think anyone is going to believe you? Listen to you? A shopkeeper's assistant against a member of the ton?"

Carin sat down her glass, large tears forming in her eyes. "He was thief, but he was my father."

Ellington leaned over and ran the pad of his thumb across her cheeks, wiping away the tears. "Then let me help you. My friends and I have thought up a plan. We'll set it in motion after I send Cannonberry to Newgate to find out who secured your father's release."

"Why would you do that?" Carin's voice was soft. "You don't even know me."

A smile lit up Ellington's face. "I enjoy mysteries and riddles," he said. "Besides, you stir me more than a woman has in ages. I want you Carin, over my lap and in my bed."

His blunt words hit Carin like a strong gust of wind. She opened her mouth but no words came out.

Ellington ran his hands along her arms. "I enjoyed spanking you Carin. And you loved receiving that spanking. The stain you left on my trousers was proof of that."

Carin blushed furiously, jerking her arms away from his grasp.

"But I can't stay here, with you. You'll be disgraced."

Her statement brought a bark of laughter from the handsome Lord. "You are correct dear. I am high up in the ton, and my position means no one cares whom I bed. Besides, I have thought of a cover for you. No one will know who you are, don't worry."

He stood and crossed the room, picking up a piece of leather that caused Carin's eyes to widen.

"You will be punished tonight, sweet little cat." His voice was husky with desire. "Punished for breaking out of your bonds two nights ago. Fifteen strokes on your behind. And fifteen on your upper thighs. Quite painful, but sufficient to teach the lesson I believe you need to learn. After that, I'm going to take you."

Carin's voice was low, the fear evident in her voice. "You can't be serious. You have no right."

"I have the right because I claim you, Carin," Ellington said. "From now on you are mine. I will provide for you, care for you, and discipline you."

Carin's eyes widened, her now full stomach clenching.

"Come here Carin, come and bend over the table."

Carin sat where she was, pondering the situation. She should run, hide, get away from him quickly. But where would she go? She had no family left, no friends. Mrs. Thompson wouldn't take her in. She had no choice but to stay with Lord Ellington. And was that so bad, really? The truth was she wanted the spanking. And she wanted him inside her.

She walked slowly to the table, stopping where he indicated and bending over, the wood hard against her breasts and stomach.

She felt her spine stiffen as he lifted her skirts above her waist, taking hold of her underthings and pulling them down to her knees.

"You need to keep count, Carin," Ellington said. "I will be otherwise engaged. When I reach fifteen let me know. That is your responsibility. If we go over the fifteen it is your fault, not mine. Do you understand?"

"Yes milord," she whispered.

And Ellington laughed. "You may call me Sir when you are being punished, and Tristan otherwise."

The leather came down without further warning and Carin let out a yelp of pain. It stung like the dickens and before she could say anything else it came down again and again and again. She stared to squirm, voicing her disapproval loudly.

"If I were you Carin I would worry more about counting and less about this not being right," Ellington said.

"We're at fifteen, then, fifteen," her voice was trembling and Ellington chuckled. "We're nowhere near fifteen my sweet. Start counting now."

"But that's not fair."

The leather came down again and again and Ellington said, "then start now, after this one."

They counted out fifteen strokes, Carin clenching her fists. That wonderful feeling was burning deep in her womb and she whispered, "take me now milord, please."

Tristan gently rubbed her behind and she trembled. "We're not finished yet Carin. You have fifteen more to go."

Carin shook her head furiously. "I can't take any more, I can't."

"You can and you will. Stand up."

She stood and looked at him questioningly.

"The last fifteen will be on your upper thighs," he said. "I have a special place for that to happen."

Tristan took her hand and led her toward the center of the room. Carin frowned at the piece of furniture that he indicated, surprised that she had not noticed it before. It was oddly out of place standing in the middle of the room. But before she'd been too angry. Now she'd been spanked, and truthfully, wanted more, no matter what she said to him.

"What is this?"

"I call it a thigh popper," Ellington said. "A friend of mine and I invented it. It's tall enough for you to bend over so that the sweet area between your thighs and bum will be very exposed."

Carin let out a sharp intake of breath, her eyes bulging out as she tried to back away. But Tristan had her hands in his. "I'll make it quick. You bend over the wood. I'll bare your backside. Place the palms of your hands against the floor to brace yourself. And don't forget to count."

"No." Carin's voice trembled as she tried again to back away. But Ellington held her firm.

"Now little cat. Don't make me add to the fifteen."

The threat sent Carin stumbling for the "popper." She knelt over it, placing her hands on the rug, her toes barely touching the floor.

Ellington lifted her skirts above her head so that her already aching backside was visible.

The first swat came without warning and Carin cried out, the pain shooting straight to the center of her womanhood.

True to his word Ellington delivered the fifteen strokes to her thighs in quick order, not stopping to tease her or prolong the spanking.

When he reached fifteen, Carin cried out and he quickly lifted her in his arms, taking her to the sofa and dropping her down onto it.

Her bum screamed in protest as it came in contact with the divan.

"Hurts," she whispered. "It hurts so bad."

But Ellington wasn't listening. "Are you virginal?" He was fumbling with the stays on his pants, working furiously to free his hardness.

Carin shook her head, opening her arms and spreading her thighs.

He entered her with one swift stroke and they both moaned at the motion. Each thrust sent her aching bum into direct contact with the sofa so Carin felt as if she was reliving every stroke.

"More, more," she growled. "Give me more."

Tristan lifted up onto his knees and placed his thumb on the center of her quim. Carin moaned with pleasure as he rubbed it, timing the pressure he placed on it with his thrusts.

"Spend for me my little thief." Carin had no idea what he meant but moments later her body burst, as if fireworks were popping inside her. She screamed out his name and Tristan laughed, emptying himself into her wetness and then collapsing on top of her.

“Do you remember what I said?” His breathing was labored as he looked into her eyes. He placed a kiss on her lips and Carin smiled.

Carin’s voice was equally labored. “You claim me?”

Ellington pulled her closer and they rolled onto the floor in each other’s arms. “Indeed I do. You are mine now.”

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The bed was warm and comforting, and Carin snuggled down further under the covers. She had never felt anything so soft. She could hear Ellington’s voice as he gave orders to Mrs. Walker about dinner. His tone was happy and light, nothing like the voice Mrs. Thompson used while addressing her help.

She gasped, setting up quickly, clutching the blankets to her bare chest.

“What time is it? If I’m late Mrs. Thompson will turn me out!”

Ellington laughed and dismissed the housekeeper. “I’ve already sent word to Mrs. Thompson that you will no longer be employed at her shop. You no longer have to worry about working, Carin. Remember I said I would care for you. Would you like some breakfast?”

He sat down at a table filled with tea, eggs, toast and jams. “I thought we’d have a light breakfast, since it’s after noon already. Mrs. Walker will fix a nice supper for just the two of us while we get better acquainted.”

Carin laughed. Better acquainted? The man had already spanked her twice. And they’d made love several times last night. She should fight with him, at least put up a little fuss since he obviously intended to put her up as his mistress. But she didn’t want to fight it. She wanted to give herself over to his care, his loving, even his discipline.

She looked around the room. “Where are my clothes?”

Tristan laughed in response. “Your clothes are in storage upstairs. I have a seamstress, unknown to you, coming in today to measure you for new dresses that will be appropriate for dinners and balls. She will make a whole wardrobe for you.”

He handed her a shirt and she slipped inside it. The material came to her knees and she smiled. He really was a bear of a man. Of course she’d found that out last night while she was cuddling against his chest after he’d been inside her.

“Tell me about more about yourself,” he said, pouring each of them a cup of tea.

“What do you want to know?” She sat down and winced, standing up to rub her hands against her aching bum.

“You’ll get used to it little cat,” Ellington said. “Bend over and let me see.”

Without hesitation Carin presented her backside to him and he ran his warm fingers over the welts. She shivered and moaned as he voiced his approval.

“You look beautiful my sweet. Now sit and eat.”

She sat back down, beaming at his approval, and sipped her tea. It was warm and strong, much different than the weak tea she made in her rooms.

“You were married?”

Carin nodded. “Mark was a good man. He worked at the docks and caught a fever. We couldn’t afford a doctor and he died soon afterward.”

Ellington frowned. “I’m very sorry that a man had to die simply because he could not afford a doctor. Something needed to be done about that. Did you have any children?”

Carin carefully chewed her toast and swallowed. “No, we were never blessed with children. We were married for six years before Mark died. I was 29 and went to live with my

father. He'd just been released from prison. He went back to prison six months later and I lived by myself until he was released recently."

Tristan smiled as he watched her eat. She was nothing like the ladies he knew. They were prim and ladylike. Carin was eating with gusto, her elbows on the table, her bites bigger than was proper. And what she'd been through in her life had made her strong.

A knock on the door startled her and she dropped her fork. Ellington shook his head with a grin. She was strong, but nervous. Temple entered on his command.

"Lords Essex, Cannonberry and Beaton are here to see you, milord. Shall I have them wait in the library?"

Ellington stood. "Finish eating. The seamstress will be here in an hour. I will return shortly."

After he'd gone Carin looked around the room. Was it really possible that she was in this fancy of a home, eating breakfast after spending the night in the master's bed?

She thought about her aching bum and smiled. The spanking had been painful but it caused the most exquisite feelings. She could hardly wait for another one.

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"Someone influential enough to have a prisoner released would cover his tracks well," Essex said. "We can try to find him that way, but I don't think it will be possible."

Ellington nodded. "I had thought of that. But if we put pressure on the warden he will give us the name. Cannonberry, you and Beaton visit him this afternoon. Tell him I want the name or he will answer to me"

Cannonberry shook his head and smiled. "Where is the little vixen? When can we meet her? Will she be a member of the Club?"

"Questions, questions," Ellington said with a smile. "She is upstairs, eating and waiting for a seamstress. I'm going to escort her to Buxton's party tomorrow night, introducing her as my new ward."

"Charlotte says she's really quite lovely," Essex said. "I suppose you gave her a sound punishment for breaking into your home?"

A grin was answer enough for all the men in the room.

Cannonberry shook his head. "I don't understand what is going on with you all. First Essex, now you, saddling yourself with one woman. It's much more fun to have all the single ladies of the Club at your disposal."

"You're young yet Cannonberry," Ellington answered. "Yes, the ladies of the Club are very entertaining, and if one of them had suited my desires I would have married her, but they didn't. I'm lucky that Carin came along."

"You can't be serious," Beaton said. "Are you planning on marrying the little minx?"

Ellington smiled. "Indeed I am. She doesn't know it yet, but before long she will be Lady Ellington."

Essex leaned back and smiled but the other two men stared at their host.

"She's a shop worker."

Beaton's words earned a frown from Tristan. "It doesn't matter to me what does, it matters to me who she is, and how she makes me feel. She makes me very happy. I knew from the moment that I saw her hair tumbling around her shoulders that she would be my wife."

"Good show," Essex said. "I had the same feelings with Charlotte. And you, Cannonberry, might consider making the same arrangement with Amelia. You keep company with her quite a bit. Make a honest woman out of her and get yourself some children."



All three men turned to stare at Essex.

“Do you mean...?”

Ellington’s words trailed off and Essex smiled in return. “Yes, Charlotte is with child, which will arrive after the new year.”

They all offered hearty congratulations and a knock at the front door announced that the seamstress had arrived.

“Cannonberry, you and Beaton head to Newgate,” Ellington said. “Essex, see if you can find out if any of our peers have a gambling problem that has left them in desperate need of money.”

“And you?” Beaton asked.

“I’m going to work on turning my little seamstress assistant into a lady,” Ellington replied. “The lessons might require some correction, which will make the both of us very happy.”

## CHAPTER THREE

Carin held onto the bedpost and grunted as the dressmaker's assistant pulled tighter on the corset's laces. This had to be the most uncomfortable piece of clothing she'd ever worn.

Ellington was sitting at a table, nodding his approval. The seamstress was standing by, waiting for the proper undergarments to be fitted before she began her measurements.

The older woman smiled to herself. Lord Ellington's ward? She thought not. Not many guardians watched while their wards were laced into corsets. Not that it mattered to her. Money was money and Lord Ellington had told her he was planning on ordering a whole wardrobe, as long as she remained silent about the job.

"We'll need at least ten ball gowns to start, perhaps more" Ellington said with a smile. "And I want all of them in bright colors. That will look stunning with her black hair. We'll need the first one, in red I believe, ready by tomorrow evening."

The seamstress nodded her approval and Carin stared at him, unable to catch her breath long enough to put together a sentence. It was going to be a long afternoon.

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"And just where is it I'm supposed to wear this red gown, in your bedroom?" Carin's voice was soft as she took a sip of tea. The seamstress had poked and prodded her until she thought she would strike the woman.

Ellington had watched the entire event, his eyes gleaming, nodding approval or disapproval for fabrics that were presented. He'd finally selected material for fifteen ball gowns, seven day dresses and two riding habits.

When Carin had looked at a pattern for sleepwear he'd taken it out of her hand and whispered, "you won't need that," causing her to blush furiously.

Now he sat back and admired his new companion. She was again wearing nothing but one of his shirts, and she looked delicious. He felt himself stir.

"We're going to a party at Lord Buxton's home," he replied. "He's one of my closest friends. It will be your first foray out into society so we need to work on your social skills this afternoon."

Carin's jaw dropped. "You must be joking! Me, at a party given by a member of the ton! And how will you introduce me? As your new mistress?"

Ellington laughed. "You, my dear Carin, are the daughter of a friend of mine. He moved some time ago to New York and has lived there for more than 15 years. He died recently. But before he died, he sent you to me for care, until we can find you a husband, that is."

"Aren't I a little old for a guardian?"

"No woman in the ton is left alone," Ellington answered. "Your father was your only family, and you've never married. Now stand up."

Carin stood and Ellington frowned.

"Stand up straight, shoulders back, head up. There, like that."

He came up behind her and ran his hands along her shoulders. "We are going to make sure that you know how to present yourself. We will work on your story, your posture, your table manners and your social skills."

Carin groaned and Ellington laughed.

"You will want to pay particular attention my little thief, because mistakes will be punished with a sound spanking at the end of the afternoon. Now, shall we begin?"

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"Get your elbows off the table, cat," Ellington said. "I do believe that little mistake puts you up to 35 swats."

Carin's feet were hurting, as was her lower back. Ellington had made her walk back and forth in front of him, standing ramrod straight, several times that day. Now she was sitting at the table, also ramrod straight, trying to remember which fork to use with which course.

"Why are we doing this?" Her voice was tired. "How is this going to help us find the man who murdered my father?"

Ellington took a sip of his wine.

"Tomorrow night is just a test," he answered. "You'll be going to many parties and dinners with me. You need to know how to act."

Carin's shoulders slumped again and Ellington frowned. "I do believe we're up to forty now. You really need to pay more attention."

And so she did. For the rest of the meal she sat up straight, kept her elbows off the table and took small dainty bites of food. She didn't want to add to the spanking. But at the same time she could hardly wait for it, and for the wonderful loving that would come afterwards.

Once the meal was cleared Ellington ordered that the door be closed and that they not be disturbed. He pushed his chair back from the table and Carin tried not to stare at his swelling crotch.

"Come here, Carin." She did as she was told, excitement building inside her. "Stand in front of me, then turn around and place your hands on the table, bending over slightly."

Carin did so and shivered as Ellington pushed his shirt up, exposing her bum to his view.

"How do you think I should deliver your punishment, Carin?" His voice was soft, yet firm. "You've already had a hand spanking, and one with the leather. I want to make sure you remember this one so you don't forget your lessons before tomorrow evening."

Small tremors ran through Carin, but she stayed in the position Ellington had put her in. She could feel wetness forming between her legs.

"When I was a young boy my father used to correct me with a paddle," Ellington said, standing up and going over to the sideboard. He opened a drawer and withdrew a wooden paddle. "I'm afraid it can be quite painful, but I do think it will get the job done."

He came up behind her, placing a hand in the small of her back. "You will remember to count, won't you my little thief?"

And without waiting for an answer the board came down with a loud "thwack!"

Carin jumped and yelled out one, and nine more swats followed in quick order.

"Tell me the first rule of walking like a lady," Ellington said.

"Head held high, shoulders straight." Carin's voice was shaking.

Thwack.

"And?"

"Spine straight, don't slump."

Thwack, thwack, thwack.

“Which fork do you use first?”

Thwack, thwack.

“The one on the outside. You use the smallest and work your way in. Napkin on your lap. Elbows off the table.”

Thwack. Thwack. “Good Carin, good.”

He remained silent until they reached thirty, then he gently rubbed the polished wood against Carin’s burning behind.

“Would it surprise you to know there are many people, both male and female, who enjoy spanking?”

Carin turned her head and gave him a questioning look. “Yes, I suppose it would. I’d never thought of it, until...”

Her words dropped off and Tristan laughed. “Until I took you over my knee? Well it’s more common than you might think. Be a good girl and I’ll demonstrate that for you tomorrow night.”

The remaining ten swats were delivered in swift fashion and Carin sighed with pleasure as Ellington rubbed her behind and then slipped himself inside her wetness. He reached around and took hold of her hand, guiding it to the center of her core and rubbing her fingers gently down the hardened nub.

She tried to pull her hand away, embarrassed that she was touching herself so intimately, even if it was under his guidance.

“Rub it, push on it, pinch it gently. Do you like the feelings?” She moaned that she did and he thrust harder. “I like to think of you doing it to yourself while I’m inside you. It will make you have the same feelings you had the other day. That feeling of completeness.”

He sat down in the chair, pulling her back on top of him. “Keep rubbing,” he whispered in her ear as he pulled her back so that one of her breasts was at his mouth. He took the nipple in and Carin felt as if she would melt in his arms.

He used his hands to propel her back and forth on his length as he sucked and Carin cried out as that wonderful feeling broke over her body again. She heard Tristan laugh, and then groan around her nipple as he thrust harder and she felt him empty inside her.

Truly, she thought, I’ve died and gone to heaven.

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“I can’t breath,” Carin said, trying to adjust the corset as the carriage bounced along the street.

Ellington laughed. “But you look beautiful little one, just beautiful.”

The dress was stunning, yards and yards of red satin, cut just low enough to show a hint of pushed up breasts. The bustle felt strange against her bum but she didn’t care. Tristan had promised her a surprise if she behaved during the evening and she was excited to see what it was.

The carriage pulled into the line at Lord Buxton’s house and Carin’s excitement turned to nerves.

“What if I mess up? What if someone recognizes me?”

Tristan laughed. “I don’t meant to disparage your work my dear, but Mrs. Thompson is not exactly THE dressmaker to the ton. She caters more to the middle class. The only ladies of society to go in there were Charlotte, Lady Thomas and Shelia McCoy and that’s because I sent Charlotte to give you a message. So I assure you none of them will recognize you. Except Charlotte, of course, and she won’t tell.”

He ended the sentence with a grin and Carin felt her nerves lessen somewhat. They'd worked on her manners, speech and posture again that day until Carin thought she would scream. The only upturn had been fifteen swift strokes given by Lord Ellington's hand when Carin had bowed her shoulders while engaging in a conversation with him.

The carriage door opened and a footman offered Carin his hand. She placed hers gingerly in his and lifted her skirts as she alighted the vehicle, earning a smile of praise from Tristan.

Carin took his arm and they walked into the crush. Many people turned to look at them, some of the women giving Carin a look of thinly veiled hostility.

Tristan handed her wrap to a waiting servant and bent down to whisper. "Relax, I'm a very eligible bachelor. I expected some hostility from a few of the females. You'll do fine."

Their host, Lord Buxton came up to greet them, giving Carin an approving look.

"You seem to have endured your journey well, Miss Piper," he said loudly. "Do accept my condolences on the death of your father. He was a good man."

Carin lowered her eyes and whispered her thanks. Ellington moved her around the ballroom, introducing her to Lord this and Lady that. She knew the names, of course, but wondered if she would ever remember all the faces that went with them.

When they came upon Lord and Lady Essex standing with two gentlemen Carin finally let go of her pent-up breath. Finally, someone she knew.

"Carin, my dear, you know Lord and Lady Essex. And this is Lord Beaton, Lord Cannonberry and Lord Barton," Ellington said. "I'm going to take Carin for a turn in the gardens, if you would like to join us."

They all made their way toward the open doors and Carin shivered, feeling eyes on her as she walked. She looked around the room, her gaze coming to rest on those of the blond woman who'd been with Lady Essex at the dressmakers. What had Tristan said the woman's name was? Shelia McCoy.

The look she was getting from the blond was a little more than the hostility she'd received from the others ladies of the ton. It was pure hatred.

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The group found a quiet spot in the garden, the ladies sitting on the stone benches.

"Well?" Ellington's one word question brought smiles to the other men's faces.

"All the warden had for me was the name of a man of affairs," Cannonberry said. "And that man of affairs was not willing to give out the names of his clients. But when he went out for the afternoon Barton and I helped ourselves to his files. He has three clients that are members of the ton. Lord Simon, Lord Wicker, and the Duke of Rafferty."

Essex sat down next to his wife. He gave her an enquiring look and she smiled. Then he turned back to his friends. "Of those there are two who have high gambling debts. Lord Simon and the Duke of Rafferty. Lord Wicker leads a frightfully dull life, never visiting the gambling hells."

"So either Lord Simon or the Duke of Rafferty is responsible for my father's death," Carin said softly. "Let me go into their homes and I can find the evidence we need."

Ellington laughed. "You tried that before, remember my little cat burglar? Not that I'm complaining about the results, because it brought you to me, but we need to try a different tactic."

Carin blushed as the others smiled at her and Ellington continued. “The Duke of Rafferty is throwing a crush in two days to celebrate his daughter’s engagement. We will use that time to search for what we need. Finding our way into Simon’s house will be somewhat more difficult.”

Barton nodded. “He is a bachelor who does not give parties.”

“Then I will have to break into his house,” Carin said. “There is no other choice.”

The look Ellington gave her showed that he was not pleased with her words. “I will decide what we do. For now we need to go in and enjoy dinner while I think.”

When they reached the end of the garden the others made their way inside and Ellington took hold of Carin’s hand and pulled her back. “Don’t forget who makes the rules, Carin. Don’t question me again.”

She threw him a look over her shoulder, her eyes gleaming with mischief. “What are you going to do? Spank me in front of all these people?”

Ellington laughed. “Don’t tempt me.”

He guided her into the building, neither of them noticing a small blond woman who stepped out of the shadows, a frown etched onto her face.

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Carin didn’t make one mistake at dinner. And afterward, she toured the dance floor with several handsome young gentlemen. But none of them stirred her blood when they took her hand or placed their hand on her hip. What stirred her was the way Ellington watched, making sure that none of them put a toe out of line.

When Ellington pulled her onto the dance floor toward the end of the evening she sighed with exhaustion.

“Have I played the part right,” she whispered as he held her close.

“Indeed you have,” he replied. “And you have earned your surprise. Do you remember when I told you that many women enjoyed spankings?”

Carin nodded, excitement gripping her insides.

“Buxton is planning on giving Lady Turnstall a birthday spanking tonight. And several of us are invited to watch.”

Carin missed a step as she looked into Ellington’s eyes. “I don’t think I understand.”

“There is something I need to tell you about,” he said. “A Club, made up of fourteen men and about seventeen ladies, comprised of widows and wives. A club devoted to men who enjoy giving, and ladies who enjoy receiving, spankings.”

She leaned in closer, afraid that someone would hear their conversation.

“Do you mean we’re going to watch Lord Buxton spank Lady Turnstall?” Her tone of voice showing she was very shocked at the very idea.

Ellington nodded. “The party is about at a close. The event is scheduled for 2 a.m.”

The music ended and Lord Barton came up to claim her for a dance.

Ellington handed her over with grace and made his way toward the refreshment table, smiling at Carin’s shocked reaction to her first news of The Spanking Club.

He picked up a glass of wine and turned, nearly knocking over Shelia McCoy as she pressed closer to him.

“Milord, I have missed the pleasure of your company tonight,” Shelia said, her eyes running down to his crotch and back to his eyes, the invitation clear. “And of course I missed you at the Duke of Roth’s party. I must say I’m surprised at the news of your ward. Charlotte didn’t tell me about her.”

“I have just heard of my old friend’s death when Carin arrived,” Ellington said, stepping backward. “Of course I plan on doing everything in my power to see that she is well cared for.”

Shelia smiled at him, batting her eyes. “Does this mean that I will miss that ride you promised me?”

Ellington felt his anger rising. “I never promised you a ride, Mrs. McCoy, either on horseback or in any other fashion.”

Shelia’s smile slipped, and then came back into place quickly. “But I can assure you Lord Ellington that I am the finest horsewoman around. Much better than I’m sure your ward is.”

Ellington didn’t answer. Instead he bowed low and moved off, his anger evident. Shelia turned to stare at the black-headed woman dancing with Lord Barton. She was sure she’d seen the woman somewhere before. She just couldn’t remember where. And she’d be damned if she’d lose a rich man like Ellington to some old maid he was passing off as his ward. That relationship would soon be over, Shelia would make sure of it.

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“Do you mean to tell me that we’re to watch Lady Turnstall receive a spanking at the hands of Lord Buxton?”

Carin entered the door that Ellington held open. Inside were several people, including Lord Cannonberry, Lord Barton and Lord Beaton. Tristan selected a chair, sat down and pulled her onto his lap, gently caressing her back.

“Our cover.” She whispered, shocked at the intimacy he was showing.

Ellington laughed. “Everyone in the Club knows the truth, so don’t worry my love.”

He kissed her gently and Carin practically purred.

“One of Lady Turnstall’s little proclivities is that she enjoys being spanked in front of people,” Ellington said, running his fingers up and down her back. “Buxton is her sponsor in The Spanking Club, so he provides her with what she likes on her birthday. The only other time she receives a public spanking is at Club meetings.”

Carin felt herself blush. Tristan had explained to her the workings of the Club. But it still shocked her that widows would allow themselves to be spanked by men who were not their husbands. Or that husbands would spank their wives in front of other people.

Then she stopped to think about herself and Ellington, and about the first time he’d spanked her, and how much she’d loved it. How much she craved it. The meaning of the Club meant much more after those thoughts passed through her mind. Still she was nervous at the thought of watching a spanking.

The door opened and Lord Buxton entered, Lady Turnstall following behind him. Buxton was a handsome man, tall and dark. Lady Turnstall, the widow of Lord Turnstall, was small and fair. She was blindfolded and had a big smile on her face.

Buxton led Lady Turnstall to a divan set in the center of the room. He sat down and immediately turned her across his lap, raising her skirts to reveal her underclothes.

Then Carin watched with wonder as he picked up a small wooden cane and began smacking her bottom through the material. The lady in question moaned with approval, counting each stroke and asking for more.

When they reached twenty Buxton stopped and the assembled group clapped. Then he pulled on her underclothes, baring her bottom. Lady Turnstall giggled like she’d heard a good joke and asked for the rest of her spanking. Lord Buxton delivered twenty more swats before the room broke out in applause again.

“Since it is Lady Turnstall’s fortieth birthday I have delivered forty swats,” Buxton said aloud. “Now she will receive a bonus spanking of fifteen more swats.”

He delivered the “bonus” quickly, the cane popping against her bare bottom. Lady Tunstall moaned and begged for more. When Buxton was done he sat Lady Turnstall on her feet and led her from the room accompanied by applause.

“Does she not want to see who is here?” Carin asked as Ellington caressed her arms.

“No, part of the pleasure for her is not knowing who is watching,” Ellington answered. “She told me once she enjoys meeting people at a party and wondering if they have watched her receive a spanking. It excites her. Has it excited you to watch?”

Carin nodded.

“Good, then let us return home and have our own little meeting of The Spanking Club.”

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Later that evening they lay in bed, their limbs entwined. They had indeed had their own meeting of The Spanking Club, with Ellington delivering a hand spanking that caused Carin to moan and wither with pleasure.

Now she sighed as she ran her hands through the soft hair on his chest.

“How did The Spanking Club start?”

Ellington laughed as he pulled her closer. “Buxton and I were randy little whelps. In our early 20s we went to Paris, where we found a brothel that catered to rich men. One of the ladies that I visited asked me if I wanted to spank her. I’d never thought such a thing was possible. I told her so and she’d laughed. Then she guided me through my first delivery.”

“I enjoyed it so much that when we came back to London I found young widows who also enjoyed that particular sport. When I confided to Buxton that I liked it he told me that he too enjoyed it, and with many of the same widows. We, um, shared a few ladies, and the Club was born.”

“The first meeting of The Spanking Club was Buxton, The Duke of Wessex myself, Lady Turnstall and Lady Walton, who has since become the Duchess of Wessex.”

“I married a few years later and my wife joined into the fun.”

Ellington gathered Carin closer to him and kissed her soundly.

“So you formed a sex club.”

His laugh filled the room. “Nonsense. It is not an orgy. It’s a spanking. Sex is not a regular part of meetings. Single members who wish to have sex work that out with other single members. The Club respects marriage vows. Spankings help spice up the members’s lives. And the members trust each other. Trust is a very important part of The Spanking Club.”

“And how have you found members?”

Carin’s voice was soft as she nibbled her way down Ellington’s neck toward his chest. She nipped at his nipple and he sighed, lying down flat on his back as she straddled him.

“Through our friends, of course.” His voice was deep with desire and Carin saw his cock stirring. “Men have a tendency to talk, you know, with their friends. If someone we consider trustworthy expresses an interest in the activity the members talk amongst themselves to see if an invitation should be proffered.”

“And the ladies?”

Carin’s tongue dipped down toward Ellington’s crotch, her excitement growing. Mark had tried to get her to do this once but she’d declined, saying that was not something a lady did. But she wanted to do it now. She wanted to please Tristan. She wanted to feel him inside her mouth.



“The ladies are widows that ask for male company, and express an interest in spanking.” Ellington thought of Shelia McCoy and her not so subtle hints of warming his bed. Perhaps he should suggest a member of the Club to fulfill her needs. Buxton, or maybe Lord Topper, a new member. Both of them were single and of the right age.

He took a sharp intake of breath as Carin’s tongue ran up and down his cock, forcing his thoughts back to what was before him.

“You little minx!”

She giggled and took him inside her mouth, sucking gently. It was an incredible feeling, his hardness encased in her soft mouth. She moaned as she moved her head up and down, enjoying the sensation and the feeling of control that it gave her.

“Am I doing it right?”

Ellington moaned. “Indeed you are my little thief. Continue with what you are doing.”

She lowered her head again and then raised it, giving him an evil grin. “Of course I did it without permission. Perhaps I should be punished.”

Ellington returned the grin, and then pushed her head back to her task. “I believe you are right. A punishment is in order. After you’re done.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

When Carin woke the next morning Ellington was gone. Mrs. Walker informed her that he'd left early and would be back in time for tea.

"He said for you to rest, as you would be attending a play tonight. I'll bring up a tray."

Carin went to the French doors and opened them. The balcony looked out over the gardens and she breathed in the fragrant air. How her life had changed in the past few days. Earlier this week the stench of the Thames would have reached her nose when she awoke. Now it was the sweet smell of flowers. Was it really possible that Ellington planned on keeping her in his life?

What happened when they found out who had been responsible for her father's death? Would he put her out on the street? She could always find more employment, despite the fact she would receive no recommendation from Mrs. Thompson.

But could she live without what Ellington had introduced her to, spankings? Could she live without cuddling up to his chest at night? Could she live without him, the wonderful feelings that he caused in her body, in her mind?

She quickly ate, bathed and then dressed in a yellow day dress that had been waiting for her when she woke up. She had just finished tying back her hair when a knock came at the door.

"Miss Piper, Shelia McCoy has arrived to see you. Shall I tell her you are unavailable?" Temple's voice was soft and he gave her a questioning look.

Carin's mind went into overdrive. What would Tristan want her to do? He hadn't said she couldn't receive anyone. Perhaps this woman had something to do with either Lord Simon or the Duke of Rafferty and Carin could try and get information out of her.

"Give me a minute, Temple," she said. "I'll be downstairs soon."

The butler nodded. "I'll have her wait in the drawing room, the second door on the right. Mrs. Walker will prepare tea."

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Shelia walked around the room and surveyed her surroundings. Lord Ellington's house was fantastic, full of rich and beautiful furnishings. When she was Lady Ellington she wouldn't change a thing.

She picked up a vase and examined it closely. It was worth a great deal of money, she knew. All this would be hers one day. Ellington wasn't young, maybe 45 to her 28. And he was handsome. Very handsome. Much more so than her late husband. She would give him a child, a son, and make him very happy. By the end of the week the hussy would be gone, and Shelia would be in Lord Ellington's bed.

The door opened and Carin came inside, stopping to shut it and smiling at her visitor.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. McCoy," she said softly. "This is a surprise."

Shelia turned a pretty smile toward Carin. "Well I also am new to London and don't have many friends. I thought we could spend some time together."

Carin sat down in a chair and indicated that Shelia should sit on the sofa.

“How long have you been in London?” The idea that Shelia was new to London caused Carin’s plan to deflate. She wouldn’t know anything about many members of society.

“For a few weeks,” Shelia said, examining the older woman. Where had she seen her before?

Carin poured them each a cup of tea and settled back in her chair, an uncomfortable feeling settling in the pit of her stomach. The woman was looking at her as if trying to memorize her face.

“And how are things in America?” Shelia asked, sipping her tea. “Was your journey back terrible?”

Carin sat her cup down and tried to gather her thoughts. These were questions that she was not prepared to answer.

“Things are fine,” she replied. “And the trip wasn’t too bad. Long, but not overly unpleasant.”

“What ship did you come over on?” Shelia gave her an innocent look and Carin knew immediately what she was doing.

“I don’t remember the name,” Carin said. “I was in shock, you know, from my father’s death.”

Shelia gave her a nod, her eyes saying that she didn’t believe the lie. “And how did your father and Lord Ellington meet? I deduce from your age that your father would be quite a bit older than Lord Ellington.”

Carin was prepared for that one, thanks to Tristan. “My father and Tristan went to the same school, if some years apart. They’d been friends for years.”

Shelia opened her mouth to speak and closed it quickly when the door opened.

“Miss Piper,” Temple said. “Lady Essex and Lady Thomas to see you.”

He opened the door wider and the two ladies stepped inside. Charlotte eyed Shelia warily and then smiled at Carin, who asked Temple to have more teacups brought.

Carin had dodged the unpleasant questions but she had to tell Tristan that Shelia McCoy was nosing around. Carin nodded as Charlotte and Layla sat down. She wondered what Shelia McCoy’s relationship was with Tristan. Was she his mistress, thrown over when Carin had arrived on the scene? Or was she just a curious busybody?

Either way she could cause problems.

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“I don’t understand why you received her!” Tristan’s voice boomed through the drawing room. Carin was standing near the chairs, her hands on her hips.

“You didn’t say I couldn’t receive anyone,” she replied calmly. “That would make her suspicious, wouldn’t it? I’m sorry, but Miss Piper does not receive visitors.”

Tristan slammed his tall frame onto the couch. “She is already suspicious or she wouldn’t have come.”

Carin remained standing, staring at Tristan. “Is she your mistress? I think I have a right to know.”

A bark of laughter broke the tension. “No little thief she is not. She is a woman looking for a husband who has set her sights on me, and my fortune. I met her, in fact, the night I met you.”

Carin smiled at the memory.

“I’m sorry Tristan,” she said softly. “Please forgive me.”

He grinned at her in return. “We’ll discuss this little transgression later. Right now I have new information for you. Come and sit next to me.”

She settled close to him, breathing deeply of his scent.

“The Duke of Rafferty did not hire your father,” he said. “Which means that Lord Simon is our man.”

“How do you know this?”

Tristan took a lock of her hair in his fingers and gently twisted it. The little gesture caused Carin to moan in pleasure and he laughed.

“I made a little visit to the man of affairs today,” he said. “He informed me that Lord Simon hired him to go to Newgate and secure your father’s release.”

Carin raised her eyebrows. “He told you this of his own free will?”

Ellington grinned and she didn’t push the subject.

“What do we do now?”

“There will be no way to tie Simon to your father’s death.” Ellington’s words were soft and he caressed Carin’s arm.

Tears were forming in her eyes, falling down cheeks. “Then he gets away with my father’s murder and gets to keep the spoils. Where is the fairness in that?”

Tristan’s voice was still soft. “I didn’t say he wouldn’t be punished. He can be exposed for his thievery. He has obviously hired a second thief to take your father’s place, as the burglaries are continuing, and he has money for gambling. He will probably not serve any prison time but his reputation will be ruined. He will be forced to leave London. But the plan may take a few weeks to execute. You must trust me. Don’t do anything you’ll regret.”

Carin turned to stare at the fireplace.

“Promise me Carin, promise me you won’t go off and do something foolhardy.”

“I promise Tristan.” Her voice was low.

“Very well, then it is time to discuss your decision to meet with Shelia McCoy. A decision that may bring us problems.”

Carin stood, anger over what she’d just heard mingling with the unfairness of Tristan’s anger over her receiving guests.

“You never said I couldn’t receive guests. Should I have sent her away? What of Lady Essex and Lady Thomas? Would it look right if I received them and not Mrs. McCoy?”

Ellington knew she was telling the truth but he also knew that Carin needed a spanking, a good one. The news that her father’s murder would not be avenged had made her very angry and a sound spanking would relieve some of her tension.

“You should not have received anyone, until we had discussed it.”

“So now I have to ask for permission to speak to someone? I don’t think so.”

“You put yourself in a situation where our little lie could be found out,” Ellington replied. “Do you not think Mrs. McCoy will be checking ship’s manifests for your name? She is determined to get her hooks into me.”

The idea caused him to seethe. He needed to talk with the lady and explain that he was not interested in her charms.

“Well perhaps you caused this problem, then.”

Tristan raised his eyebrows. “So now you’re blaming this on me? Your small spanking just grew in proportion. I was going to deliver it here, but I have decided that we need to retire upstairs to my playroom.”

Carin’s heart leapt in her chest. Playroom? “And where is that?”

Ellington walked out the door without replying and Carin followed him to the bottom of the stairs. He climbed up, not looking back and when he reached the first landing he stopped and turned toward her.

“Follow me Carin.” His voice was soft and the knot in Carin’s stomach doubled. She moved up the stairs, watching while he moved past the bedroom door and opened the third door down the corridor. He leaned against the doorjamb and said, “After you.”

Carin stepped inside and stopped in her tracks. Playroom indeed. Different spanking implements, including leather straps, canes, crops, paddles and even switches from trees hung from the wall. The “thigh popper” was in the center of the room. A large wooden horse was in the corner. A single chair and a divan were pushed against the wall.

Carin’s heart beat wildly and it nearly leaped out of her chest when Tristan shut, and then locked, the door.

He began to undo the laces on the back of her dress.

“This isn’t going to be a small spanking, is it?”

Ellington didn’t answer, his fingers working the laces on her dress. When it was undone he slipped it off her shoulders and told her to step out of it, and her petticoats. Instead of pulling her underclothes down he undid the stay so that her bum was exposed.

He walked silently to the wall, running his fingers up and down various implements as if testing their effectiveness. Finally he choose a thick strap of leather and doubling it up in his hands he turned toward Carin.

In response she turned and bolted for the door, but before she could undo the lock Tristan grabbed her and threw her over his shoulder.

“You have this coming Carin so don’t fight it.” His voice was harsh and Carin beat on his back and tried to throw her legs up in the air. The stays from her corset were biting into her stomach and she yelped in pain.

“Save that for later,” Ellington said with a laugh. He sat down on the couch and pulled her across his lap. “Don’t ever blame me for your mistakes.”

Whack. The leather came down sharply and Carin moaned, her moans turning into cries as the strap landed again and again and again.

“You should have refused your callers until you had a chance to discuss it with me.”

Whack. Five more strokes were delivered swiftly, the burning spreading through her aching bum.

“This is not fair! You can’t blame me for this.” Her words rang out loudly. Silently she cried out, more, more, more.

As if hearing her silent pleas Ellington brought the leather down repeatedly, varying the intensity of the strikes.

After twenty strokes were delivered he laid the leather across her back, rubbing the welts that crisscrossed her behind. “What did I tell you Carin? What?”

Carin was crying softly. “Please don’t stop,” she whispered.

“You will get more but you must answer my question. What did I tell you?”

A hiccup escaped from Carin’s throat. “That you would take care of me, provide for me, and discipline me.”

“That is correct, little thief. Now I want you to go and put your nose in the corner. Think about what it means for me to care for you, provide for you. Who is in charge, Carin?”

“You are, Tristan.”

“Very good, now go.”

Once she was in the corner Carin ran her fingers over her aching bum, a smile coming through the tears.

“Are we going to...”

“Shush, don’t speak, just think.”

The wheels in her mind turned over and over. Carin marveled that she loved his discipline, loved the way the leather felt as it crossed her behind, loved the way he rubbed her fiery behind. Loved the way he made that behind ache.

How could she have grown so close to this man in a matter of days? Did she love him? She knew that if he let her go tomorrow her heart would die of hunger, hunger for him. Not for his house, not for his furnishings or money, but for him. His hands, his lips, his eyes, his heart.

“Tristan, I love you.” The words slipped out and in seconds he was behind her, pulling her close to his body.

“I love you too little thief. Don’t worry, I will never leave you. I’ve told you before that you are mine, and I meant it.”

He turned her around and pulled her close, his mouth covering hers, his tongue invading the space. He pulled back, nipped her nose and then kissed her again.

“Now, go to the wall and pick a switch with which to finish your punishment.”

They locked gazes and Carin nodded, going to the wall and running her fingers along the switches in much the same way that Tristan had. She selected a trim switch and brought it back to him, handing it to him tentatively.

“Do you trust me?” She nodded and he smiled.

“Then go to the popper. Take down your drawers and bend over it, hands flat on the floor.”

When she was in position Tristan ran the switch along Carin’s already abused flesh. “Have you ever been spanked with a switch?”

The limb made a swishing noise as he pulled it back and it landed smartly on her backside.

“No.”

“I selected these switches this morning, in anticipation of this event.” The switch came down again and Carin cried out. Her womb clinched in desire as the thin implement came down again and again, Tristan alternating the landing between her behind and thighs.

When he was done he pulled her up in his arms, carrying her to the divan.

“I want to marry you, Carin,” he whispered in her ears, standing up to quickly undress.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks. “You can’t be serious. I’m the daughter of a thief, a shop girl. I’m a nobody.”

Tristan pulled her up and smartly slapped her behind over and over. “You are the woman I love. And don’t you ever forget it.”

He sat down and pulled her on top of him, impaling her softness on his hard staff. “You are mine Carin, and my heart belongs to you. Do you understand?”

He thrust upwards and she groaned. “Yes Tristan, I understand. And my heart belongs to you, too.”

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Shelia McCoy alighted the carriage and stepped into the shop. Her mood had not improved since leaving Lord Ellington’s house. Charlotte had been apologetic about getting Shelia’s hopes up about Ellington

“I’m sorry, who knew this turn of events would come about? I’m sure we can find someone else to pique your interests.”

Shelia had smiled but inside she'd been steaming. She didn't want anyone else. She wanted Ellington. Wanted his title, his house, his money, and that wonderful body.

She stepped into Mrs. Thompson's shop, her anger rising when no one came forward to greet her.

"Hello." She called out. Mrs. Thompson ran from the back of the shop. "Mrs. McCoy, please excuse me. Your order is finished. My assistant will bring the dress. Martha!"

A young blond stepped out of the back of the shop, disappearing again with orders to bring up Mrs. McCoy's purchase.

Shelia frowned, and then a smile lit her face. "You have a new assistant?"

Mrs. Thompson nodded. "Yes, my old one left one day and didn't return. Very irresponsible."

"Indeed it is. What was her name?"

"Carin."

Shelia took the package offered by the new girl and smiled at her. "Yes, I remember now. She was an older woman, with long black hair. Do you know where she went?"

"No, all I know is that I received a message saying she wouldn't be back. May I help you with anything else, Mrs. McCoy?"

The blond woman smiled. "You already have, Mrs. Thompson."

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The theater was packed that night. Carin had chosen to wear a beautiful peach dress full of ribbons and flowing lace. She felt like a queen and everyone who greeted her did so with a smile

He loved her. Tristan loved her and planned to marry her. She would be a lady. A member of the ton. Was that really possible?

She barely heard any of the dialogue of the first act of the play, her mind drifting to what her life would be like after the ceremony. Would they have children? She knew that Tristan already had a daughter. And Carin thought herself too old to have a child. It was something they needed to discuss. She would be happy if it was just the two of them for the remainder of their days. She wondered if he would be as happy.

When the intermission came they stepped outside the box and Lady Essex immediately grabbed her in a hug.

"I'm so happy for you and Tristan," she whispered in her ear. "He is a wonderful man and the two of you will be very happy together."

Carin smiled in return and Lord Essex put his finger to his lips. "Still a secret my sweet. Don't say anything too loudly."

Charlotte giggled and pulled Carin along behind her as they headed for the necessary room.

"I want to hear the whole story from you some day," she said softly as Carin tried to keep up. "Did he really catch you breaking into his house and take you over his knee?"

Carin blushed and nodded and Charlotte laughed. "I'll tell you my story someday. These gentlemen of ours are wonderful at meting out punishments."

She laughed at Carin's upraised eyebrows. "Oh yes, mine too. We'll have a long chat someday. Oh wait, I need to talk with the Duchess, please excuse me."

Carin shook her head and smiled as Lady Essex melted into the crowd. A voice at her ear erased that smile.

“Carin, could you help me please? I seem to have popped a button and you are so skilled at sewing.”

Shelia McCoy gave Carin a calculating stare.

“I beg your pardon?” Caron’s voice was shaky.

“Oh don’t bother, Carin,” Shelia said. “You may have fooled everyone at the party the other night but I know that you’re nothing more than a seamstress, trying to use what’s between your thighs to better yourself.”

Shelia kept her voice low and Carin could feel her blood boiling with each word.

“But what will Lord Ellington say when he finds out the truth?”

Carin’s voice caught in her throat and Shelia laughed. “That’s what I thought. He might even have you arrested for trying to swindle him.”

“My relationship with Tristan is none of your business,” Carin replied. “And I hate to tell you this but he already knows who I am. So talk to him. It won’t matter one way or the other.”

Shelia’s smile disappeared, and then reappeared seconds later. “Maybe he doesn’t care but the other members of the ton care. His reputation will be ruined. The great Lord Ellington taking a whore to his bed is one thing. Moving her into his house is something altogether different.”

Carin blushed at being called a whore but she knew that Shelia was right. If the ton found out that she was not the “daughter of an old friend,” Ellington’s reputation would suffer.

“So you see Carin, the best thing for you to do is slip away, and leave him alone to live his life as he was meant to. With me.”

Shelia looked over her shoulder at Lady Essex who was moving in their direction, a frown upon her face. “Do give my regards to Tristan.” Then she vanished into the crowd.

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“I think that actor in the third act being naked was a bit over the top, don’t you my sweet cat burglar?”

Carin nodded. “I believe you’re right Tristan.”

Ellington snorted. “Just as I suspected. You haven’t heard a word I’ve said since intermission. There was no naked actor.”

“What? Naked actor?”

Tristan shook his head. “What’s wrong little one?” He pulled her onto his lap and smiled. “Thinking of getting more of what you received today? I think we should let your bum recover a bit. This afternoon’s session left quite a mark on those pretty little orbs.”

He looked toward the bed. “Although some loving will do wonders for both of us.”

His lips pressed against her neck and she shivered in response. How she loved him. Needed him. But could she stay and let him be ruined? He would hate her if she destroyed his place in society.

Carin shivered as began undressing her, clothing dropping to the floor. When she was naked he pulled gently on her hairpin and her black tresses fell down her back.

“I love your hair,” he whispered, twisting strands around her fingers. He took her hand and pulled her toward the bed, lifting her on top of the mattress before shedding his own clothing and joining her.

“How I love you.” He kissed her again, his lips caressing their way to her breasts and down to her stomach. When he pushed apart her thighs and ran his tongue along her quim she shivered with delight. And when his tongue touched the bud that brought her so much pleasure she cried out in delight.



“And I love you Tristan. More than you’ll ever know.”

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There was no moonlight coming through the French doors. The sounds of Tristan’s breathing filled the room and Carin cried softly as she opened, and then closed the door.

Once in the hallway she opened doors until she found the steps to the attic. Her old clothing was lying on the floor, packaged in neat bundles, cleaned and folded. She opened the top one and took out a pair of trousers and a shirt, quickly dressing before gathering up the rest of the bundles in her arms.

She went back down the stairs and stopped as she passed Tristan’s door. Should she leave a note, let him know why she was leaving? Or would it be easier to just go, and not look back. She hated the fact that she’d hurt him by doing this but she had no choice. She wouldn’t allow Tristan to be ruined because of her.

She tiptoed down the stairs and then stopped at the door, her hand near the knob. She couldn’t run. She couldn’t leave him. She loved him too much. What had he said? She needed to trust him. Was she trusting him by running? She should turn around and go back upstairs, wake him and tell him everything.

But she couldn’t. She took a deep breath and twisted the knob, pulling it open and shutting it quickly when a deep voice sounded behind her.

“Where do you plan on going at this time of the night?”

Carin turned her eyes on Temple, standing at the bottom of the stairs with a book in one hand, a candle in the other.

“I have to leave. Tonight.”

Temple shook his head. “First you break in and now you’re breaking out. Should I give Lord Ellington a reason for your leaving?”

Carin smiled at the older man’s words. “If I stay Tristan’s reputation will never be the same. He’ll be ruined.”

Temple laughed. “You don’t know the members of the ton. His reputation may go up. Before you go let me tell you something. I’ve been with the Master for sometime now. And I haven’t seen him this happy in years. He loves you. And he needs you. And I believe that you need him.”

Carin took a step into the hallway, Temple’s words running over and over through her mind.

“But if he is hurt by that love I could never forgive myself.”

Temple smiled. “He will be more hurt if you leave like a thief in the night.”

He nodded at her and she slumped back against the door. Was what Temple said true? Would her leaving hurt Tristan more than her staying? And could she live without him?

She sank down onto the floor and hugged her bundles of clothing next to her body. Then suddenly she stood.

“Temple?”

The butler had started to walk back toward the library. He stopped and stared. “Yes milady?”

She walked toward him and handed him her bundles. “Would you burn these for me please?”

He took the bundles and smiled at her. “With pleasure.”

At the top of the stairs Tristan smiled to himself and then moved toward the bedroom. He wouldn’t have let her leave, but it meant much more to him that she was staying on her own.



## CHAPTER FIVE

“I think you might be interested in this little tidbit my sweet little thief.”

Tristan handed Carin the newspaper and she scanned the page. She read a few lines and a large grin broke out onto her face.

“Read it to me,” he said, taking a sip of his tea.

She giggled again and began to read.

*It looks like a member of the ton has taken to crime to support his habits. Sources say that Lord Simon, a well-known gambler, is being sought for questioning by Scotland Yard in connection with a string of burglaries at some of London’s most fashionable homes.*

*Investigators say Simon reportedly hired thieves to break into houses and steal precious items. When the items were sold Lord Simon would pocket more than half the profit to help pay his gaming debts.*

*The Yard confirms that Simon used his information about who was attending what party to give his thieving employees time to break in and take the items.*

*Lord Simon, though, fled the country upon hearing of the investigation and has yet to be found.*

Carin threw the paper down and ran to Tristan, pulling him close and kissing him over and over. “Thank you! How did you do it?”

Tristan laughed and kissed her back. “I do have friends at the Yard. And at several newspapers. I am sorry that he won’t be held accountable for your father’s death.”

Carin sat down on Tristan’s lap and laid her head on his shoulder. “He is ruined. It is far worse that he has to spend his life running from the Yard.”

Tristan stroked her hair. “Speaking of running...”

His words caused a chill to run up Carin’s spine. “You know?”

“I felt you leave the bed. I heard your conversation with Temple. And you should know that if you hadn’t come to your senses you wouldn’t have made it past the front step.”

Their eyes locked, and Carin shivered. “I was frightened. Frightened by the idea that your reputation would be ruined if Shelia let everyone know I’m a shop girl. And not only a shop girl, but the daughter of the thief who died taking things from their homes. Please forgive me.”

“I do sweet one,” Tristan replied. “But I believe a lesson is in order, to make sure you remember what you learned last night. Go and get the hairbrush, and then drape yourself across my lap.”

The walk across the room seemed to take forever. Carin could feel Tristan’s eyes on her, studying her as she picked up the object. Her heart leapt as she studied the wooden brush. It had a large polished back and she shivered as she imagined what it would feel like falling against her backside.

She handed Tristan the brush and then raised her robe to bare her backside, lying down across his thighs. Her shivering intensified as Tristan rubbed the bristles of the brush against her bare bum.

“Do you trust me Carin, truly?” He continued to rub her behind.

“I do, Tristan.”

Tristan turned the brush over and rubbed the wood against her behind. It felt cool and Carin shivered in delight, anticipating the wonderful feelings the spanking would cause. Without warning the brush came down, again and again and again and Carin moaned.

“Why didn’t you trust me to take care of matters with Shelia?” Whack, whack, whack.

“I am very sorry, please forgive me.”

Tristan did not answer. Instead he brought the brush down repeatedly, not letting up on the pressure until Carin sobbed for his forgiveness.

“This is punishment, Carin, discipline for what happened. You will remain silent until I think the penalty for your transgressions has been paid.”

Whack, whack, whack.

The brush came down over and over and then Tristan turned it, rubbing the soft bristles against the bruises. Carin was crying openly but she remained silent. She knew Tristan had a right to be angry. She should have trusted him more. The pain was harsh but that wonderful feeling of need burned deep inside her.

Tristan placed the brush on the table and stood Carin up, pulling her down into his arms and caressing her arms until her crying stopped.

“Don’t ever try to leave me again,” he whispered in her ear. “For the next time it will be a wife leaving her husband.”

Carin jerked her head up and stared at him. She wiped away tears. “When?”

“Our wedding will take place in three hours, so we need to prepare. I’ve had a beautiful violet dress made for you. George and Charlotte will be our witnesses.”

Carin smiled. “Don’t you think you should have asked me if I thought the time was right?”

Tristan bounced her up and down and she moaned at the contact. “Saucy for a wench who just have her bottom reddened. Do I need to add more swats to correct that attitude?”

“I’m a nobody. A shop girl whose father was a criminal. You’re a Lord. You can’t marry me. I realized that last night. I could be your mistress.”

Tristan took her face in his hands and brought them nose-to-nose. “You are a little thief that I caught in my house. And the only thing you stole that night was my heart. I love you Carin. I can and I will marry you. I have the license already, and everything is in order. I spent most of yesterday making sure that everything was ready for a beautiful ceremony.”

Her heart swelled. She would be a lady. Could she live in society? Follow their rules?

Tristan stood her up, pushed aside his robe and then brought her down, sliding into her and then pushing her up and down on his shaft.

“You will be a lady in public and my little whore in private.”

Carin shivered. “And what if I make a mistake and embarrass you?”

He slapped her ass as she bounced up and down on him. “Then I have just the right way to correct the situation.”

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The wedding was beautiful, except for Carin’s nerves. Her hands were shaking so badly that the flowers she held were moving. When she handed the bouquet to Charlotte many of the flowers were missing petals.

She couldn’t believe this was happening. She’d never planned to marry again, much less marry Lord Ellington. She would be a Lady now, a member of society. No more breaking into homes or worrying about working.

And she had a daughter now, a 19-year-old woman who had surprised them all by being at the church and hugging Carin before the ceremony began.

“Thank you for making my father happy,” Nancy had whispered in Carin’s ear.

Tristan had smiled at his daughter and her husband, who themselves had been on their honeymoon until two days ago.

Carin had smiled as she watched them, once again wondering if she was too old to have a child of her own.

Tristan gently squeezed her hand to bring her back to reality and answer the priest’s questions about loving, honoring and obeying.

Her eyes held a glint of mischief as the last word slipped out and he grinned in response. She might need some help with that vow.

\*\*\*\*\*

They arrived late at the Duke of Rafferty’s crush so as not to steal his daughter’s thunder. Carin had changed from her violet dress to one of deep green. Everyone had heard about the wedding and congratulations were proffered at every turn.

Carin was welcomed into society with open arms, the ladies and gentlemen smiling and offering invitations to teas and dinners. Everyone was very happy for them. Everyone except Shelia McCoy.

The blond woman had stared at the couple as they’d entered. She was wearing a beautiful blue dress that emphasized her figure. The look that she gave Carin told the older woman it was obvious that Shelia intended to follow through on her threat to expose her as a fraud.

Shelia moved toward them, an angry look on her face. She stopped and smiled as the Duchess of Wickham came up to stand next to her. Shelia leaned over and whispered something in the Duchess’s ear. The Duchess’ eyebrows raised and she went off to find her husband.

“She’s telling people,” Carin said softly. “Before the evening is out everyone will know that I’m not who I pretend to be. You’ll be ruined.”

Tristan laughed and gathered her close. “Don’t worry so much little cat. Did you not notice who she was standing next to, who she entrusted to start the little rumor?”

“The Duchess of Wickham,” Carin replied, and Tristan laughed.

“She and her husband are active members in The Spanking Club. Things have already been arranged. You must trust me.”

Carin smiled as she talked to Lady Thomas, and then watched as Lord Buxton went to Shelia and offered her his arm. She took it with a smile and the couple walked toward the garden.

After they’d been gone for ten minutes Tristan escorted Carin outside, turning away from the populated area down to where large bushes provided privacy.

He stopped outside one, listened for a moment, shook his head and moved on. A few minutes later the sounds of a hand slapping flesh reached Carin’s ears.

“Stop this instance! You have no right! Stop! Stop!”

Carin recognized Shelia McCoy’s voice. She also recognized the moment her cries of pain turned into cries of need. She imagined the young widow over Buxton’s knee, her skirts above her head, his hand coming down over and over.

“You’ve been a bad girl Mrs. McCoy,” Lord Buxton’s voice rang out. “Someone needs to teach you a lesson. You will keep the information about Lady Ellington to yourself, do you understand?”

The spanking continued and Carin giggled.

“I understand, I won’t say anything,” Shelia said moments later. “Please stop. It hurts. Please.”

Buxton’s hand continued to find its mark. Murmured words were exchanged and then Shelia’s cries of pleasure filled the area.

“I think Buxton’s found himself a new friend, don’t you?”

Tristan kissed her and then led her toward the house. Thirty minutes later Buxton came back in, a beaming Shelia McCoy on his arm. Her cheeks were rosy and there was a large smile plastered on her face.

Buxton made his way toward the Ellingtons and stopped, giving Shelia a look.

“Do you have something you wish to say to Lady Ellington?”

Shelia leaned over and lightly kissed Carin’s cheek. “Congratulations Milady.” Her words were soft. “I’m sorry for any trouble I’ve caused.”

Buxton laughed. “Very good my dear. Now if you’ll excuse us, we’re leaving early. Shelia and I have things to discuss.”

Tristan laughed as they walked off. “Let’s hope it’s not a double initiation ceremony.”

Carin looked at him in confusion. “Initiation ceremony?”

“Your initiation into The Club, of course. I don’t want Shelia horning in on it.” And he wiggled his eyebrows.

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The days flew by. Authorities had not been able to find a trace of Lord Simon and Carin smiled as she thought of him on the run, always looking over his shoulder.

Tristan had taken her to a meeting of The Spanking Club, where she watched various ladies of the ton take spankings of different degrees.

She’d been amazed at the high-ranking members of society who were involved in the activity. Tristan had told her she would be shocked but she hadn’t believed him. And all the ladies were laughing, enjoying the club meeting.

Tristan had been right about other things, too. There was no sex involved in the meetings, only flesh being warmed by crops, leather and other implements.

An hour into the meeting the Duke of Wickham announced that the initiation would begin.

Carin, clad only in a thin robe, was led to a table where she bent over. Her bum was bared to everyone in the room. She shivered at the idea of being on view, but relished the idea that she was doing something that Tristan wanted. How she loved him. How he had changed her life.

Tristan had informed her that the initiation was one hundred strokes from her sponsor, which was of course her husband.

“Lady Ellington, do you wish to become a member of this Club?” The Duke’s voice was harsh and Carin answered that she did.

Tristan came up behind her and placed his hand on the small of her back. He’d told her earlier in the evening that he had chosen to use a small wooden paddle.

He started spanking her lightly and Club members urged him to “pick up the pace.”

At Carin’s urging he increased his pace and her pleasure increased. It was fascinating to think that people were watching her. They could see her behind as it turned from a soft white to a bright red. She wanted more, much more.

When Tristan delivered the final stroke he pulled her up into his arms and kissed her as Club members applauded and congratulated them both.

“I want to experience all of it,” Carin said into his ear. Her backside was throbbing and she didn’t think she would be able to sit for a week. Yet she’d never been happier in her life. “I want to please you.”

Tristan smiled back. “I will see to it little one. And you already have pleased me, more than you know.”

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Carin never knew how many parties members of the ton attended. There were balls and plays and dinners, not to mention shopping and taking tea with the ladies. Her days were full and Tristan filled her nights.

It was after a boring play, in which Tristan had let his fingers roam while they were sitting in their box, that a crack came into their world. They both knew the moment they arrived at the house that something was wrong. No lamps had been lit in the windows and the front door was ajar.

Ellington bounded up the stairs after helping Carin from the carriage. Temple was lying near the front door, his arms bound behind his back.

Tristan knelt down next to him and Carin ran for the back of the house. “Mrs. Walker, are you all right? Mrs. Walker!”

The older woman was in the kitchen, bound to a chair.

“They took everything,” she said. “Jewelry, silver. Everything.”

Tristan and Temple entered and Carin stared at him.

“What does this mean?”

“It means,” Ellington said, hands on his hips, “that Simon is still in town. And he knows I’m the one responsible for his downfall.”

“So what do we do?” Carin’s voice was shaky.

“We don’t do anything,” Tristan replied. “We’re just lucky the other servants had the night off, and that no one was seriously injured.”

“But you can’t let him get away with this!”

Tristan shook his head. “I won’t. Don’t forget that I said you needed to trust me.”

“And you must trust me,” Carin replied, “I have an idea that might work.”

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The smell of flowers wafted in through the open French doors, carried by the night breeze.

Carin ran the brush through her hair, her backside aching. It had been a week since her initiation and she was still feeling it. And every little twinge brought a smile to her face.

The break-in and implied threat from Lord Simon a few days after that had put a damper on her mood, but she knew that Tristan would take care of everything. She trusted him to see to her safety. But of course she’d made a few plans of her own.

“Your father would be pleased. Of course he taught you everything he knew, didn’t he? Was stealing your way into society included in your education?”

Carin turned to Lord Simon, who was standing in the middle of the bedroom. His dark hair had been cut severely and he was wearing dirty clothing. No one would recognize him as a member of society.

“You ruined everything you little bitch! No one cared that your father died. No one. They didn’t even investigate his death. He wasn’t worth anything. Just a thief, nothing more.”

Carin held back the tears that threatened to fall down her face. “He meant something to me, no matter what you say. Did you kill him yourself? Or didn’t you have the guts?”

Simon sat down in a chair, his dark eyes burning with anger. “And why would I have dirtied my hands? Besides, you should know that it was his fault. He was greedy, wanting more money. He threatened to turn me over to the Yard if I didn’t give him at least half of each take. As if I couldn’t find another thief to take his place, which I did as you know. It took me a little bit of time to find another one with such skill but he’s done me proud.”

“But that time cost me money, money I couldn’t afford to lose. People who run gambling hells aren’t very giving when it comes to repaying loans. And I’m way overdue on a few of mine.”

“Do you expect sympathy from me? You won’t get it, you know.” Carin’s eyes were blazing with anger.

Simon laughed. “Do I care? The items we took from your husband’s house will provide quite a bit of blunt, but I need more. If I take you with me tonight I wonder how much he’d be willing to pay to get you back. His little whore. Stupid, and arrogant, of him to leave you alone. Did he think I wouldn’t come back?”

When Carin didn’t reply Simon’s smile faltered.

“You’ve become awfully snooty in the last few weeks,” Simon said. “Let’s see if we can’t take you down a few notches. Parker! Come and tie the lady up. Then we can take her down the back way so no one sees us. Having stairs off the balcony comes in very handy. But as a thief, you would know that. Parker!”

A silence fell and Simon began to look nervous. Then he laughed. “Good help is hard to find. Parker! Get in here, now!”

When no one entered the room Simon stood and walked toward the door. “Parker! Did you hear me?”

The door slammed open and Ellington tackled Simon, sending him reeling across the floor.

“You owe my wife an apology,” Tristan said, his fist slamming into Simon’s nose. “And make it quick.”

“Go to hell!” Simon said. Blood was spurting from his nostrils and he tried to dislodge the large man who was sitting on top of him.

Ellington drew back his fist to hit Simon again but Carin’s voice stopped him.

“Tristan, he’s not worth it.”

“She’s right, Lord Ellington,” said Inspector Wilcox of Scotland Yard. He was standing in the doorway. “We have a place for Lord Simon all picked out. There is no room for his servants, however, so he’ll have to fend for himself. But I’m sure that a few of the residents at Newgate will be glad to help him become accustomed to his new surroundings.”

The Inspector motioned for his constables to take Simon into custody.

“You’ll regret this! All of you will.”

Wilcox nodded and Ellington took Carin into his arms.

“I must admit Lady Ellington that I had some trepidation about leaving you here as bait,” Wilcox said. “You’re a brave woman. He could have harmed you.”

Carin shook her head. “No, Inspector, I don’t think he would have. You heard him say he wouldn’t dirty his hands to kill my father. Simon is a coward at heart.”

Wilcox nodded. “And let me assure you again, milady, that your secret is safe with me. Good night to you both.” He tipped his hat and left.



“It’s over,” Carin whispered to Tristan.

“All except your punishment for thinking up this little scheme.”

“It worked, didn’t it?”

Tristan sat down in a chair and stared at her. “It did, but it just as easily could have gone astray. I need to remind you of whose in charge. You going to Wilcox without my knowledge could have caused considerable damage. To you, in particular, which would have caused damage to my heart. I can’t believe I let you talk me into it.”

He stood and crossed to her quickly, gathering her for a kiss and then throwing her over his shoulder.

He left the room and took long strides toward the playroom.

“You can’t be serious,” Carin said. “It’s only been a week since my initiation. I’m not ready for this.”

He opened the door and closed it quickly, setting her down on her feet.

“I want you naked. Now.”

“Tristan, please! Can’t this wait?”

She watched, her hands shaking, as he selected a short riding baton from the wall.

“If you continue to disobey me I shall have to select more than one instrument Carin. Do as you’re told.”

Carin quickly undid her stays, allowing her clothing to drop until she was wearing nothing but her corset. Then she gasped in surprise when Tristan opened the French doors, threw her over his shoulder again and headed down the steps into the garden.

“You can’t be serious. Tristan. The servants will see us!”

“Then I suggest you be silent my little thief.”

He moved fast, despite the fact that he was carrying her over his shoulder. He walked quickly through the maze until they reached a small enclosure with a bench along one wall.

He sat her down and pointed to the bench. “Bend over.”

She shivered in the cold. “I can’t believe you’re punishing me because my idea worked. It’s so unfair!”

“I’m punishing you to remind you of who’s in charge,” Tristan said. “You went behind my back when I specifically told you that you would not be used as bait.”

“But you went along with the idea when Inspector Wilcox came by the house! I can’t believe this!” She stomped her foot and Tristan snorted.

“Present me your backside now, or increase your punishment.”

Carin let out an angry breath and then bent over the bench. The stone was cold against her legs and her corset felt as if it would pop her in two.

“This is for the little tantrum you just threw.”

The bat came down and Carin cried out. Her backside was still smarting from her initiation and the bat caused a sharp pain.

Whack, whack, whack. It came down over and over and Carin bit her lip, not wanting to cry out.

“Whose in charge Carin?”

“You are.”

The words caused a warm feeling to start in Carin’s belly and spread throughout her body.

Whack, whack, whack.

“You will never put yourself in a dangerous situation again, do you understand?”

Whack, whack, whack.

“Yes, Tristan.”

“Stand up.”

Tristan sat down in her place and without being told she put herself across his knee.

The bat came down again and again.

“You are a lady now,” Tristan said. “You will follow the orders of your husband. Or did you forget that you promised to obey?”

“I did obey. I bent over the bench. I bent over your lap. You’re spanking me, aren’t you? So don’t say I can’t follow orders.”

Whack, whack, whack.

“Don’t talk back to me. Do you understand?”

Whack, whack, whack.

“Do you?”

Whack.

“Yes Sir, I understand.”

That familiar warm feeling was spreading through her body and Carin began rubbing herself against his thigh. In return, Tristan rubbed the bat against her backside.

“How beautiful you look,” he whispered. “Moonlight showing off your red marks. Your gorgeous hair falling down your back.”

He tumbled them to the ground, climbing on top of her as he worked to free himself from his clothing.

She giggled and then cried out as he entered her.

“Are you going to be a good girl?”

“Will you spank me if I’m good?”

Tristan stopped thrusting and gave her a calculating look.

“Good girls don’t need spankings.”

“Then I think I shall be a bad girl. A very bad girl.”

Tristan laughed and kissed her. “Thank heavens for that.”





# **THE PROBLEM SOLVER**

**BY MELINDA BARRON**

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BARRON**



# CHAPTER ONE

London Spring 1887

“Amelia my sweet, what is wrong? Usually you don’t cry during our time together. Tell me what is troubling you. Why did you ask me here if you don’t want to play?”

Amelia Turnston shook her head, trying hard to stop the tears that were falling down her face.

“Please forgive me Edward. I do care for you and I love our time together. But I can no longer see you. And I need to be released from my membership in The Spanking Club.”

“You cannot be serious.” Edward Morton, Lord Cannonberry stared at the beautiful woman in front of him. “You love that club. Whatever would cause you to want to leave us? I insist that you tell me right now!”

Cannonberry stiffed as Amelia’s tears turned to sobs. He gathered her in his arms and patted her head gently. “Tell me sweet one. Let me help you.”

Amelia pushed away from him, wiped her tears and walked to the desk on the opposite side of the room.

“I received this message today.” She sniffed and handed Cannonberry a piece of foolscap. The frown on his face deepened as he read the short missive.

I know about your little club. You will give me £10,000 by Friday or the entire ton will know about your group and their nasty little habits. Wait for more instructions.

The note was unsigned and Edward frowned. “When did you receive this?”

“This morning. Please forgive me Edward. Someone has found out about The Spanking Club and it is my fault. Why else would they send the message to me?”

“Why indeed?” Edward crossed the room and sat down on the divan. “If someone knows about The Spanking Club it is not your fault.”

Cannonberry frowned as he stared at Amelia. She was standing in the middle of the room, her face buried in her hands, sobs racking her body.

“Come here sweet one,” he whispered, smiling as she crossed the room quickly and burned herself in his arms. “It’s not your fault, truly. And you should have trusted me to take care of this. You will not leave the Club.”

He gently pushed her hair away from her face and ran his hands over her wet cheeks. “As my wife your membership in the Club will be mandatory.”

Amelia pushed herself away and stared into Cannonberry’s eyes. “Wife?”

Cannonberry smiled. “I should have done this long ago. I love you, Amelia. I have no desire to be with anyone but you. When you are my wife I can care for you properly, and you needn’t worry about things like this.” He rattled the paper, and then kissed Amelia softly.

“Oh Edward.” The words were breathed against his lips and Cannonberry laughed.

“There is the little matter of trust. Of you not trusting me enough to take care of this problem. Instead you took matters into your own hands with this ridiculous idea of leaving the Club, and me. Now it is time to take matters into my hands with a punishment spanking.”

Amelia stood, gathering her long skirts around her waist. She undid her underclothes and bared her behind, placing herself across Edward's lap so that her bottom was fully exposed.

"This is going to hurt Amelia." Cannonberry's voice was low. "I'm disappointed that you thought so little of me."

"Please forgive me Edward," Amelia said, sobbing lightly as Edward's hand began to fall on her bum. "I'm so sorry. I love you."

"And I love you sweet one. Now count."

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"Did she say how it was delivered?" Julian Gregory, Lord Buxton, eyed the piece of foolscap in his hand.

"A maid found it on her doorstep this morning, wedged under the mat." Cannonberry took a sip of his port. "We need to check with the other single female members of the Club to see if they received similar messages."

Buxton stood and walked to his desk and picked up two similar pieces of foolscap.

"Margaret Walker and Hannah Morrow. These notes were delivered in the same manner that Amelia received hers. Our ladies sent them to me this morning, desperate for help. I checked with three other single ladies. None of them have received missives. The only member left to check is Shelia McCoy."

"She has received nothing." Jonathan Barrow, Lord Barton, stepped into the room and closed the door. "I thought I would check with her on my way over here."

Buxton smiled at the young lord as he took a seat. "So that's why you're late. I'm glad to see that the two of you are getting along so swimmingly."

"You were a fool to let her go Buxton," Barton answered. "She's quite delicious."

"Yes, well, let's just say we didn't see eye to eye. So three of our single female members have received notes of blackmail. We need to plot our next move carefully."

"Pay off the notes and it all goes away," Barton said, taking a glass of port from the table.

"On the contrary," Buxton replied. "If we pay off the blackmailer he, or she, will continue to seek money. We need to find out who this person is and contain the situation before it gets out of hand."

"And how do we do that?" Cannonberry's voice was harsh. "I don't want to see Amelia hurt, or frightened, any more than she already is."

Buxton smiled. "I agree, about all our ladies. I'm sure our anonymous friend will send more instructions later in the week. I say we make it look like we are complying with his request. And we set up someone to watch the situation and report back to us about who arrives to pick up the money."

"Then we take that person down," Cannonberry said. "But who do we get to watch the area where the transaction is scheduled to take place? Someone smart enough to deliver the notes at night will not go out in broad daylight to pick up blackmail money."

Buxton laughed. "Correct again my friend. That someone will more than likely set up the payoff at night, while we are otherwise engaged at a party. If he sees any one of us he will run. No, I know someone who could do the job for us. Let me handle it."

"And is this man discreet? We're taking a very big risk here." Barton sat his glass down and eyed his friend.

"It's not a he, it's a she," Buxton replied. "And I know she will be very discreet."



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“To what do I owe this surprise visit, Lord Buxton?” Alice Hamilton gave her guest a cup of tea, took up her own and sat down. “I must admit your note came as quite a shock. I don’t often have contact with such high members of the ton as yourself.”

Buxton tried not to stare at the lovely vision sitting across from him. He had no idea that Hamilton’s widow was so beautiful, or so young. Hamilton must have been in his 50s when he died. The woman sitting before him now couldn’t have reached her 30th birthday.

He looked at her with open admiration. A curvy brunette with full breasts and hips, she was a woman in every sense of the word. Beautiful brown eyes looked at him with undisguised curiosity.

“I was a business association of your late husband,” Buxton replied with a smile. “I have missed him since he passed.”

Alice laughed lightly. “Joseph has been dead for some time Lord Buxton, almost two years now. Surely you are not here to pay a condolence call.”

Buxton laughed. “No, I believe I missed that time. And I’m very sorry for that. I hope you will forgive me.”

Alice nodded at him and smiled, her silence encouraging him to continue.

“Your husband helped me solve quite a few problems,” Buxton said, setting his teacup on the table. “And he told me that you assisted him with some of his cases.”

A chill ran up Buxton’s spine as she laughed. It was a light, feminine laugh that he could tell she felt deep in her heart. My God how she affected him.

“It’s true,” Alice replied. “Joseph taught me everything he knew. He was a very good man. And a very good problem solver. Unfortunately no one wants to use a female to solve their problems. I have been very bored of late.”

“Perhaps I can give you something to do that will relieve some of that boredom,” Buxton replied.

Alice took a sip of her tea and smiled at the man sitting across from her. His presence was unnerving and she was trying hard to hide it. He was very handsome, tall and muscular. Dark hair and beautiful green eyes. She raised her eyebrows at him to encourage him to continue.

“Several female friends of mine are being blackmailed,” Buxton said.

“Lovers?”

Buxton smiled. “Something like that. I’d rather not go into too many intimate details.”

“Sometimes the devil is in the details, just as the old saying goes,” Alice replied calmly, despite the fact that her stomach had dropped at the idea of his having several lovers. “If you wish for me to help you Lord Buxton then you need to be open and honest with me. I can assure you I will tell no one.”

“Very well Mrs. Hamilton,” Buxton replied. “Several members of the ton, influential members, are involved in a Club whose activities would be frowned upon by others. These ladies are part of that Club, as am I.”

Alice swallowed visibly and Buxton suppressed a laugh.

“Is this a sex club?”

Buxton’s laughter filled the room. “You’re nothing if not blunt. Not exactly. I would rather not tell you those particulars until the time comes. We just need to work on finding the blackmailer.”

“And you plan on paying this blackmailer?”

“No, I plan on making it look like we are paying him,” Buxton said. “I want you to watch the site where the transaction is to take place. Then report back to me on who showed up to collect the money.”

Alice nodded approvingly. “I can do that Lord Buxton. It seems straightforward enough. You are telling me the truth?”

Buxton laughed. “Indeed I am. And I’m prepared to give you £5,000 for your assistance.”

“I have no need of your money Lord Buxton,” Alice replied as she twisted her hands in her lap. “As you see Joseph left me very well off.”

“Indeed he did,” Buxton replied, looking around at the comfortable surroundings. “But every little bit helps Mrs. Hamilton.”

When she didn’t reply Buxton gave her an appraising look. “You had another idea in mind Mrs. Hamilton? Or may I call you Alice?”

“You may.” Alice continued to twist her hands. The idea had come to her on the spur of the moment and she was fearful of putting it into play. But did she have a choice? An opportunity such as this may never present itself again.

She took a deep breath and then said quickly, “Lord Buxton, how well did you know my husband?”

“It’s Julian,” Buxton replied. “And I thought I knew him very well. Although it seems I’m about to find out differently.”

“My husband may not have been a member of the ton but he was well known, and well respected. I don’t want anything to tarnish his memory.”

When he nodded Alice looked at the floor and continued. “Would it surprise you to know that in the nine years we were married Joseph never touched me as a husband touches a wife? I was not to his, um, liking.”

She raised her eyes to look at Buxton who looked confused, until her meaning cleared his mind.

“Ah. I see. I’m sorry Alice, truly sorry.”

Alice glanced down at her lap. “Joseph was a good husband, in every way but that. He found me on the streets and took me in. He married me because he needed a woman in his life. People get suspicious otherwise. I loved him dearly and he took very good care of me. My point Lord Buxton...”

“It’s Julian.”

She looked at him. Gone was the confident woman who asked him about his lovers. This woman was frightened, asking for something that made her very nervous. Asking for something that she wanted very badly. His cock swelled as she looked at him. He imagined her across his lap, her bottom reddened from his spanking. Such a beautiful woman to have been untouched all these years. The thought was almost unbearable.

“My point, Julian, is that I have been a widow for almost two years now. It is time for me to wed again but I don’t want the man I marry to know that I’m still virginal. I won’t dishonor Joseph’s memory in that way. But if you take my maidenhead then the person I marry doesn’t need to know about Joseph’s preferences. Only you need to know.”

Alice looked at the handsome man before her. “My husband trusted you. He spoke of you often. I believe I can also trust you. Unless, of course, your preferences run as Joseph’s did.”

She lowered her eyes again and Buxton laughed out loud. “I can assure you Alice that my preferences do not lie where your late husband’s did. Do you need proof?”

He stood and Alice looked up at him, her eyes followed his hands as they ran down his thighs. His hardened cock was very visible as it strained the seams of his trousers and she

gasped. It looked huge and extremely hard. What was she getting herself into? She looked at him nervously and he smiled.

Buxton crossed to her and pulled her from her seat, lowering his lips onto hers gently, pressing them together until she sighed in pleasure. Then he reached up and cupped her breast, rubbing the nipple through the material until she moaned.

“Help me discover who is causing my problem Alice and I will rid you of your little problem.” His voice was soft and husky against her lips.

“Keep my secret Lord Buxton and I will keep yours.”

“It is a deal, then,” Julian replied, and he kissed her again, his tongue gently probing her mouth. She rose up on her tiptoes to try and gain more access to his mouth and he laughed softly.

“You’re going to be a wonderful pupil Alice. I have much to teach you about what happens between a man and a woman. Some things you would never have thought about.”

“Can we do it now?” Her hands were on his chest and her voice was breathy. Buxton laughed.

“Not yet little vixen. After the problem maker is identified I will teach you all sorts of new things. I promise.”

Julian ran his fingers down her cheeks. Then he pushed her head up with his thumbs. “You do know that people are bound to find out we are enjoying each other’s company.”

Alice smiled. “I do, and I don’t care if they know we are lovers. I just don’t want them to know I’m a virgin.”

He kissed her again. “Very well little one. I’ll be in touch.” Then he left and Alice sagged down onto the couch, her knees shaking with excitement.

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“How do you know you can trust this woman?” Tristan Mallory, Lord Ellington, looked at his best friend and frowned. “This is a huge risk. I think perhaps we should just lie in wait for the person and take care of it ourselves.”

“Would that not also pose a risk? This way we can get some idea of who is behind the blackmail. We put packing into a bag and leave it for the person to collect. They think it’s the money and take it. They won’t stop to count it in public. Mrs. Hamilton follows that person and we have our blackmailer.”

Ellington allowed his eyes to stray across the ballroom until they found the form of his beautiful wife Carin. He smiled to himself as he watched her talk with Amelia Turnston, whose engagement to Cannonberry had been announced the night before.

“Does it not worry you, Julian, that only the single female members of the Club received the blackmail requests? Those of us higher up in society could provide more money. Why would a blackmailer choose a widow to blackmail?”

“Because he knows those widows are well off,” Buxton replied. “Perhaps he thought those widows would not come to us. Our reputations alone would show this person that we would not sit still for blackmail. But a lonely widow engaging in activities of this nature would pay up to save her name.”

Ellington nodded and pulled out his pocket watch. “The bag should be in place by now. I hope your little friend is capable of following through on what you hired her to do.”

Buxton smiled as he imagined Alice Hamilton, her curvaceous form hidden in men’s clothing as she waited to see who picked up the bag. Then he imagined her moaning as he spanked her behind. She would beg him for more and he would give it, gladly. He intended to do more than rid the sweet little vixen of her maidenhead.

“That’s what I thought.” The laughter in Ellington’s voice rang out and Buxton shot him a confused look.

“Thought about what?”

“I asked you what Mrs. Hamilton was like and you ignored the question. You’re obviously lost in thoughts of bedding the woman. Do we have a new member of the Club on the horizon?”

Buxton smiled. “It’s a distinct possibility. And before you ask no, I haven’t bedded her. Yet.”

Julian smiled to himself. He had every intention of keeping Alice’s virginity a secret. But Ellington knew him too well. There would be no hiding the fact that he would tumble with the young widow.

He shook his head as he thought about Joseph Hamilton. He would never understand how a man could prefer the company of another man over a woman, especially a woman like Alice. Soft and supple, warm and willing, eager to learn.

He’d been very tempted to stay the other day, but knew that was a bad idea. He wanted her first time to be sweet and memorable. He felt himself harden and he shifted to make room.

“That good huh?” Ellington laughed at Buxton’s discomfort.

Julian smiled in return. He wouldn’t say it to Ellington but the deal he had with Alice was the sweetest debt he would ever have to pay.

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“Where are you going?” Alice whispered as she followed the young lad through the park. The bag had been left around midnight and about ten minutes later the young boy had come across the lawn and scooped it up.

She studied him as he moved. No more than fourteen she would guess. Not the blackmailer, that was for sure. The blackmailer had hired him to pick up the bag. Which meant the blackmailer was smarter than they’d given him credit for being.

She hoped this turn of events didn’t ruin her chances of seeing who eventually got the bag. And she hoped that if the deal was botched that wouldn’t negate her deal with Lord Buxton. She’d spent the last three days dreaming about lying under him. Would the initial penetration hurt? She would have to ask him how they could be certain to prevent pregnancy. Surely a man of his experience would know. She didn’t want her future husband to raise another man’s child.

She hid behind the trees and watched as the young boy sat down the bag near the empty lane, stretch and then walk away. The bag sat on the walkway and Alice smiled. The boy was walking her way and when he came into view she got a good look at his face. She was sure she could recognize him again if need be.

The boy left the park without seeing her and she turned her attention toward the bag. She sat in the shade of the tree and waited. About twenty minutes later the clomping of horses hooves echoed through the night.

The horse came to a standstill in front of the bag and its rider dismounted. Alice could tell it was a woman, tall but thin, trying to hide her curves behind a cloak. She picked up the bag and opened it, letting out a scream of frustration when her hands encountered old clothing.

“Bastards!” The woman looked around the park frantically and Alice flattened herself against the tree. Then she got an idea.

She pulled her hat lower onto her head. Following the advice her late husband had given her many years ago she’d worn padding under her clothing so that she appeared to be an

overweight male dressed in ratty garments. She moved quietly to the path and then began walking toward the woman, who was already mounted back on her horse.

When the woman saw her she called out. "You, boy, come here!"

Alice walked toward the woman, careful to stay away from the gas lamps. When Alice reached the rider she bit her lip to keep from letting out a gasp of recognition.

"Have you seen any members of the ton about? Answer me!"

Alice fought to keep her voice low. "No, ma'am, not a one. If it's help you need you can hire me. I'll run and fetch someone for you if need be. Or deliver a message."

The woman let out a sigh of anger and then wheeled her horse about and left. Alice headed in the opposite direction. She was set to meet Julian at his home in an hour. She hoped he would be pleased with the results of her investigation. And she hoped she would receive her payment tonight.

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"It makes no sense. Are you certain it was her?"

Alice turned an icy stare on Lord Ellington. "I may not be a member of the ton but I have attended the theater. Celia Howell is one of the most famous actresses in London. I've seen her in several plays."

"Please forgive me, Mrs. Hamilton," Ellington replied. "I should not doubt your information."

Alice acknowledged his apology and turned toward Julian. "What happens now Lord Buxton?"

"I'm not sure," he replied. "I need to think. Tristan meet me here tomorrow at noon."

Ellington nodded and strode from the room after muttering goodbyes.

"It's not what you wanted to hear," Alice said, her voice soft. She pulled her hat from her head and her long hair tumbled around her shoulders. She hoped that Buxton liked it unbound. "I'm sorry. But this should not negate our deal. Will you take my maidenhead tonight?"

Julian threw his head back and laughed. "Not tonight sweet one."

Alice stomped her foot and put her hands on her padded hips. "That's not fair! I did as you asked and brought you the information. You should pay your debt! I thought I could trust you."

Julian looked at her with a grin. "Are you throwing a tantrum with me? I didn't say I wouldn't do it, just not tonight. I don't believe Mrs. Howell is the real blackmailer. And I believe I will need your help in other things as this matter unfolds. And I don't like tantrums. You behave yourself, do you understand me?"

Alice continued to stare at him, his grin causing her anger to rise.

"Behave myself? Why should I do as you say? You're a liar! You promised! I trusted you with my secret and you've betrayed me."

She could see the anger rising in Julian's eyes. He crossed to her and pulled her close, and then pushed her away with a laugh.

"You need a bath. I've had my housekeeper draw one for you upstairs. Second door on the left. Go and bathe and I'll give you a taste of what you desire."

Alice's spirits lifted. "Truly?"

"Truly, sweet Alice, but just a taste. And you should know that your little tantrum is going to cost you."

A look of disbelief came over Alice's face. "Cost me? In what way?"

"Young ladies who throw tantrums get punished."

Alice's stomach plummeted to her knees. "Punished? Punished how?"

Buxton kissed her forehead and smiled to himself. "With a spanking, of course. Now go and bathe."

"You mean to spank me?" The idea sent a thrill through Alice and she sighed as he nodded. Then she gave him a look that was half fear, half anticipation, and scurried from the room and up the stairs.

Buxton watched her as she rounded the corner. She'd reacted to his news about her continuing virginity just as he'd hoped she would, with anger and a tantrum.

Now he had an excuse to spank her. By the time he got upstairs she'd be nice and clean, and naked. His cock throbbed at the thought and he rubbed it absently.

She would still be a virgin at the end of the night but she would have pleased him, as he would please her, after he'd reddened her pretty little fanny.

## CHAPTER TWO

Alice wrapped the bath sheet around her body and shivered. It was a little chilly but it was not the cold that caused the quiver. It was the fact that she was naked in Lord Buxton's bedroom.

She wondered when the handsome lord would come up and take her in his arms again. She laughed as she remembered his earlier comments. Spank her indeed! He was trying to take her mind off the impending intercourse, and the pain that was sure to accompany that penetration. He was trying to make her think about something else. And it had worked, for a while.

She imagined him caressing her. She closed her eyes, dreaming of his touch, sighing in pleasure. Then suddenly the caresses turned to slaps on her bum. She wondered what it would feel like. She imagined his hand coming down again and again, the sharp feelings spreading through her body. She shivered again and the door opened.

"I love finding a naked woman in my bedroom," Julian said, giving her an evil grin.

Alice smiled, and then frowned as he moved away from her toward the divan near the fireplace. He sat down in the middle of the sofa and stretched out his arms along the back, crossing his legs and giving her a wicked smile.

"Come here my innocent one."

She crossed to him quickly, smiling as she stopped in front of him. She bit her lower lip and looked at him inquiringly. When he didn't say anything she sighed and dropped the bath sheet to her feet.

Julian's sharp intake of breath gave her courage and she sat on the place where his leg crossed over his knee, leaning in to kiss him softly. He pulled her closer and kissed her deeper, his hands roaming her thighs, bum and back.

She moaned and then broke the kiss. "Don't you want to use the bed? If you're worried about getting blood on your bedclothes we can put the bath sheet under me. That way I can take it tomorrow when I leave and your housekeeper need not know you had a virgin in your bed."

Julian was running his hands up and down her bare back and Alice felt the thrill of need building in her center. She smiled at him as he studied her, and then the bottom dropped out of her stomach.

"There will be no virgin blood spilt tonight Alice," Julian said, his voice low. "I've told you that already. But there will be pleasure. But there is the little matter of your spanking to take care of first."

Alice tried to stand but Julian's hands held her firmly in place.

"Let me go. If you don't intend to abide by the bargain that I will leave." Shame was burning in her cheeks. How could she have done this? Was she so desperate to lose her maidenhead that she had thrown herself at the first available male? Now that male was betraying her. She sat naked on his lap and he mocked her.

Buxton pulled her closer, his lips mere inches away from hers. "I do intend to abide by our bargain Alice. But if you remember the bargain was that when my tormentor is identified

then your problem will be gone. The blackmailer is not yet identified therefore payment can't be made. Yet."

Alice started to struggle against his hold. "Let me go. The deal is off."

Julian tightened his grip on her waist. "On the contrary Alice the deal is very much on. And you have been a very, very naughty girl tonight. Tantrums are not acceptable behavior. Neither is questioning my actions. I am in charge here Alice, and I intend to show you that right now."

A sense of excitement, mixed with a sense of fear, filled Alice's stomach as Julian placed both feet on the ground and turned her so that she was across his lap, her bum high in the air.

She struggled to rise and he slapped her ass, causing her to cry out in surprise.

"Let me go! Let me go now!"

Her cries were punctuated with several more hard slaps against her bare behind. Buxton remained silent as he spanked her, alternating cheeks, his free arm working to keep her legs down as she struggled.

"I hate you! Stop that this instant! You have no right!"

Slap, slap, slap, slap, slap. "I have every right. You offered yourself to me. I took you up on that offer."

Slap, slap, slap, slap, slap, slap. "As far as I'm concerned you belong to me now Alice." Slap, slap, slap, slap.

Alice lost count of the numbers of slaps that hit her bottom. All she knew was that it hurt like the dickens. By the same extent it was causing a warm, wonderful feeling in her womanhood. She could feel wetness forming there. Desire spread through her body. What was happening? The spanking was painful yet she wanted more. Much more. She began to moan and rock her hips.

She knew Buxton felt the change immediately. Her cries turned into soft moans and sobs. She stopped kicking her legs and rubbed herself against his thigh. He continued to spank her, alternating between harsh slaps and soft stings.

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Do you like this sweet Alice? Tell me."

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

"Yes Julian, yes, more please. Oh Lord more."

Slap, slap, slap, slap.

When her breathing grew heavier he pulled her upright onto his lap and searched for the button between her soft folds. She was slick with desire and his fingers slid through her wetness.

"Julian, Julian, oh please take me." Her breath was soft in his ear and she thought he might give in to her demands.

Instead, he continued to rub. "Spend for my sweet Alice. I want to see it. I want to feel your body quake."

She sighed and then she came, shuddering in his arms as she called out his name and begged for more. He smiled into her hair and kissed her gently as she collapsed onto his chest.

He gently stroked her back until she lifted her head up and looked him in the eyes. She was smiling; her eyes alight with humor and delight. Then she looked down at his bulging crotch.

"Would you like to help me?" His voice was soft in her ears and her fingers went to work on his trousers. He laughed at her eagerness and then settled back to allow her to undo his tight trousers. When she'd freed him he sighed with relief, and then took several sharp breaths as she caressed his hardness.



“I don’t know what to do.” She looked at him questioningly. He wrapped his hands around hers, and then wrapped them both around his cock, moving them up and down as they continued to gaze into each other’s eyes.

His orgasm hit almost immediately and he groaned out his pleasure as she giggled and continued to pump him gently. When it was done she leaned down and ran her tongue around the tip, moaning her approval at the taste.

Julian pulled her back up to his mouth. “What a little vixen you are. You belong to me now Alice. I’ll let no other man have you. Do you understand?”

She nodded her assent, her eyes as big as saucers. He carried her to the bed, putting her down gently before going to undress and wash himself.

When the room was dark he gathered her close to him under the bedclothes and she sighed with pleasure. Then she looked up at him and smiled.

“Tomorrow?”

He laughed and kissed her. “When we find the blackmailer sweet Alice. Only then will I take your maidenhead. But we will play before then. And play hard.”

“Then we need to get to work first thing in the morning. I want you inside me Julian.”

Buxton groaned and then he smiled and kissed her again. “There is no where else I’d rather be sweet one.”

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“I thought you understood me last night when I said that you belonged to me now.”

Alice turned away from the looking glass at her dressing table and gave Lord Buxton a smile.

“Good morning Julian. I hope you’re feeling well today.”

“How dare you leave without my permission.”

Alice’s back bristled like an angry cat. “I’m not used to asking permission to come and go. I needed to come home and change clothes and that is what I’ve done. Forgive me for breaking the rules.”

She could see by the look on his face that he didn’t like the tone of sarcasm in her voice. “We’ll discuss punishment later.”

Butterflies began swimming around in Alice’s stomach at the thought of a repeat of last night’s pleasures, including the spanking.

“You cannot punish me for coming to my own home.” Even as the words came out Alice knew they weren’t true. A bond had been formed last night. And Julian was definitely in charge of that bond.

“I can punish you for leaving my bed without permission. Let me make myself perfectly clear Alice. You are mine now. You are under my protection. You will obey me in all things. Do you understand?”

“You are not my husband. I do as I please.”

“I am not your husband yet, but that situation can be rectified very quickly. So I ask again. Do you understand me when I say you are mine now?”

“Our bargain was not about marriage.” The words almost caught in Alice’s throat. Did he really mean to marry her? “I am under no man’s control.”

Buxton pushed out his chest and narrowed his eyes. “We shall see about that Alice. We shall see.”

He took a step toward her and Alice thrilled at the idea of what was going to happen next. Thrilled that was until the door burst open.

“Mrs. Hamilton!” The young maid stopped dead in her tracks at seeing Lord Buxton standing in her mistresses’ bedroom. She gasped and then dropped into a curtsy.

Alice bit back a smile. “Yes Jane, what is it?”

The maid looked between Alice and Buxton, then she glanced at the bed and blushed. “Lord Ellington and Lord Essex are here.”

The arrival of two high-ranking members of the ton had sent the young woman into a tailspin. Not to mention there was already a Lord in her mistresses’ bedroom.

“Show them into the library. We’ll be down shortly.” Jane acknowledged Buxton’s command with a soft “Yes, milord,” and another curtsy. Then she fled from the room.

“Giving orders to my staff now Julian?” Alice’s voice was low. “My household may not be as large as yours but it is mine. I ask you to remember that.”

“It is yours until we integrate it into my own. Now shall we go downstairs?”

“We can finish discussing this after they have left,” Alice said, knowing full well it was an argument she would not win. If she pushed him hard enough would he spank her again? She’d loved the feelings that had accompanied his punishment. And the pleasure that had followed had been extraordinary. She’d never felt anything so wonderful in her entire life.

But she didn’t want him to know that. She was certain that he knew full well the effect he’d had on her. There was no way she could marry a member of the ton. She was the widow of a problem solver. Marrying Buxton would cause a problem for him. He would realize that once the heat of last night wore off.

She pushed past him quickly and he fell into step behind her, his silence making her very uneasy.

They found Ellington and Essex in the library. Jane placed a tea set on the table, her hands shaking.

“Mrs. Hamilton,” Essex said as the two rose quickly. “A pleasure to meet you. May I offer my appreciation for your help in this delicate matter.”

Alice nodded her assent and took her seat after pouring each of them a cup of tea.

“I assume our tormentor has made contact again?” Buxton stared at his two friends and Ellington nodded, passing a sheet of foolscap to him.

“This was delivered to my house this morning. It came in the same manner as the other notes were delivered.”

*Did you think I would just go away? I want my money. To prove my point I suggest you read the gossip sheets tomorrow morning. And the price has now doubled. Ignore me again and your secret will be on the front page of the newspapers.*

“May I?” Alice took the sheet from Buxton and examined it. Then she shook her head.

“I don’t believe this writing is that of a woman. The strokes are too firm, too deep on the paper. This note was written by a man.”

“I agree,” Buxton said. “And I think we need to make the next move. We need to let Mrs. Howell know that we are on to her. Fancy a matinee today my sweet?”

Alice blushed at the endearment, knowing that Essex and Ellington now knew about her relationship with Julian. Then she mentally slapped herself. Whatever “Club” was in danger of being exposed they were all part of it, therefore they probably already knew Buxton had taken her to his bed last night.

“Don’t worry Mrs. Hamilton, your secret is safe with us,” Essex said softly.

Alice turned a look on Buxton, who shook his head slightly and she smiled in reply. He had kept his word. His friends may know they were intimate but they didn't know she was a virgin.

She sighed with relief and then gave them all a shy smile.

Ellington broke the silence. "I think we should all go today. Show a united front. I'm sure Carin would enjoy the adventure."

"As will Charlotte," Essex said as he rose. "She's been itching to get out of the house since young Dalton was born. She's been to one party and it only whetted her appetite for more."

"How is your son?" Alice noticed the interest in Buxton's voice. She wondered if it was because he wanted a child.

"Healthy and happy," Essex replied with a grin. "And very good at waking his parents up in the middle of the night."

Ellington laughed. "It's been years since I was a young father but I do remember it gets better. You'll get some sleep soon."

After they'd left Alice turned to Buxton. He was still seated on the divan, his eyes focusing on something that wasn't there.

She crossed to him quickly and sat down, lightly running her fingers down his thigh.

"Have you no children?"

Buxton shook his head. "My wife died in childbirth. I never remarried. I never thought of it, until now."

He looked at her and she blushed.

"Julian, I..."

"Is the idea so repulsive to you?"

"No, not at all," Alice replied softly. "But surely you should marry a member of society. A respectable young woman who could give you heirs."

"Why should I not marry a respectable young widow who could give me heirs?"

She leaned in and kissed him and he laughed against her lips, pushing her back to look into her eyes.

"A young widow who is very forward." He pulled her across his lap and gathered her skirts around her hips. She didn't fight him, and actually sighed with pleasure when he bared her behind.

"Not bad," he whispered, running his hands across the orbs he'd reddened the night before. "You take a spanking very well my sweet."

He slapped her behind several times and she groaned. "More."

"No time my innocent one," he said softly, lifting her to her feet. "We need to pick out a dress for you to wear this afternoon. And I need to go home and change. But I can assure you, you will receive a punishment for leaving my bed this morning."

Alice shivered at the thought of punishment. She watched as Julian moved toward the doorway.

"Julian? This Club of yours, what is it called?"

Buxton grinned at her. "The Spanking Club. And you're going to enjoy all the benefits of membership."

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Alice felt a huge rush of delight run through her body when she arrived at the theater on Julian's arm.

Friends of hers were openly staring as she and the handsome lord made their way toward the Ellingtons and Essexes, who were waiting in the foyer.

Julian had picked out a beautiful green gown for her to wear. He'd then sat in a chair and watched Jane lace her into a corset and dress her. Jane had been appalled. Alice had been thrilled.

She hoped, no prayed, they would identify the blackmailer tonight. If she had to wait much longer to feel him inside her she knew she would die of need.

"It's so wonderful to meet you," Lady Essex pulled her into a hug and Alice murmured, "Thank you milady."

"No, no, call me Charlotte. And this is Carin. I'm sure we're all going to be fast friends. And we are grateful for your help." The look on Charlotte's face let Alice know that Charlotte was a member of The Spanking Club.

Alice turned to Carin, who smiled shyly. Both of these women were members? How many members did the Club have? When she'd tried to ask questions Julian had waved them away and told her he would answer them all later.

They made their way to a box, attracting attention from everyone in the lobby. High-ranking members of the ton usually didn't attend matinees. And for Alice Hamilton to be accompanied by Lord Buxton? It was simply too shocking for the members of the middle class to comprehend.

The play passed quickly. When it was over the couples pulled back to the end of the receiving line to greet the actors. When they came into view Celia Howell swallowed visibly, but the look on her face remained passive.

"She's a good actress," Julian said in a low voice.

"Mrs. Howell, a lovely performance." Buxton leaned over the actress' hand and kissed it softly.

"You're too kind milord," Celia replied. "And I'm thrilled that you and your friends came to see me this afternoon. It is a wonderful compliment."

"I'm sure the papers tomorrow morning will mark on it," Buxton replied.

Celia's eyes flashed briefly and then she turned to Alice.

"Have we met madam?"

Alice could tell that she looked familiar to the woman, who tried hard to place her.

"We have not," Alice replied, lowering her voice to that of the "young man" from last night. "But I have seen several of your performances. You are a wonderful actress."

The actress frowned as she recognized the "boy" from the previous night.

"If you'll excuse me, I'm not feeling well." She left without waiting for an answer and the men all laughed.

They made their way to the carriages and Alice watched Buxton talk to a young lad loitering outside the theater. The boy disappeared into the alley and then reappeared moments later, following another young man.

"What's going on?" Carin said.

Alice smiled. "Our friend is sending a message to her accomplice, letting him know that we are on to her."

"And our young employee is following the messenger, to see where he goes," Buxton said. "We are one step closer to finding our blackmailer."

Alice sighed in relief and Julian laughed loudly. She replied by slapping his chest, must to the delight of the other members of their party.

"I do believe you've met your match Julian," Charlotte laughed. "Now, supper at our house? We'll see you there around eight?"

When they were in the carriage Alice sat on Julian's lap and kissed him.

"Tonight?"

"You're eager for my cock, but not eager for my hand in marriage. That is a great blow to my ego."

"Marriage was not part of our deal. And most men would be happy that a woman was so eager to spread her legs for him."

"Does it have to be part of our deal for you to want it? I would hope that after the past few days you would feel something of an attraction for me besides my piercing your maidenhead."

Alice smiled at him. "I do Julian. But you and I both know that it won't work. I'm not in your class."

"I don't care about class," Julian said. He pulled her closer to him. "I find my attraction to you almost unbearable. I know I won't be able to stop after taking your virginity. I'll want more than that. And I always get what I want Alice."

His words sent shivers through her and Alice pulled him in for a deep kiss. "Ask me again in a few days, when I've had time to consider it."

"There is no need for you to reconsider it," Julian replied, kissing her back. "I plan on making sure you feel the same way. And as I said I always get what I want."

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"There is no way it could be Shaw," Essex said, frowning at Buxton and Ellington. "He has been a member of the Club for years."

"That is where the messenger went," Julian replied. "But Shaw has been on the continent for three weeks now. It must be a member of his staff."

"We've never held a meeting there, how would they know?" Ellington frowned and sipped at his drink. "We need to ask our single ladies if Shaw has entertained them at his home."

"I have our young messenger from this afternoon watch Celia Howell's home to see who comes and goes," Julian said. "We'll know by tomorrow which member of his staff has betrayed him."

Alice watched the men as they talked amongst themselves.

Dinner had been a treat. Alice had spent so many years alone since Jonathan died that she'd loved watching the word play between the friends seated around her. They joked and laughed with each other as they ate their roast beef and drank their wine.

That feeling of joy spread when they had included her in conversations and acted as if they'd known her for years.

After dinner the group retired to a drawing room. She sat down on a couch and then gasped when Julian pulled her up and kissed her soundly. Then he sat down and pulled her onto his lap.

"We're going to give you a small demonstration of the Club," he whispered in her ear. "Relax and enjoy little one."

"Let me give you background on our organization," Julian continued. "Ellington and I started the Club more than fifteen years ago. We found several of our friends enjoyed spanking women. And we have found throughout the years that many women enjoy having their behinds reddened."

Alice wiggled on his lap to show him she agreed with that statement. He laughed in response.

Across the room Charlotte and Carin were bending over a long table. Their husbands were pulling up skirts, leaving their underclothes in place.

Alice stiffened slightly and Julian rubbed her arms. "Relax. Our female members enjoy being spanked while others watch. And contrary to what you are thinking right now The Spanking Club is not a sex club."

"When you first came to see me you said several female friends of yours were being blackmailed," Alice whispered. "Are they not your lovers?"

"No, not all of them. And the one that I have been intimate with was some time ago," Julian answered. "I have spanked them, and caused their orgasms through those spankings. But members of the Club do not engage in sexual activities unless it is with single members. And only then by mutual consent."

"How many members do you have?"

Julian grinned at her, his hands gently roaming her arms. "We have about thirty-five members, male and female. Female members must be widowed or married. If they are widowed they must have a male sponsor."

Alice stiffened as the sounds of a paddle hitting the women's behinds filled the room. Charlotte moaned in approval as her husband spanked her and Alice watched intently.

"Do you remember how wonderful it felt when I spanked you sweet Alice? You fought it at first but I know that you enjoyed it." Julian's voice was low in her ears. "Would you like to feel the paddle on your behind?"

Carin's soft moans began to fill the room as her behind came into contact with the paddle. The dual slaps were loud and Alice moaned softly.

"Answer me."

"Yes, yes I would." Alice trembled as she realized that her words were true. She wanted to be next to them. Wanted to be spanked by the man who held her in his arms right now. "Spank me Julian, please."

The spankings across the room had grown in intensity. Alice stiffened as Ellington made his way toward them, paddle in hand. Without saying a word he handed the wooden board to Buxton. Then he went back over and began spanking his wife with his bare hand.

Julian stood and led Alice to the other side of the table. She bent over and he gathered up her skirts, leaving her underclothes in place.

The first swat with the paddle hurt like the dickens and Alice let out a sharp yell. Julian didn't let up. He delivered ten hard full swats and when he stopped Alice noticed a dreadful silence had filled the room.

She raised her head to find the four other occupants studying her intently. They began to clap and she laughed and then buried her red face in her arms.

## CHAPTER THREE

When Alice woke the next morning she was sore but smiling. The spanking had not been so bad, considering it had been done over her underclothing. But she still felt a small ache from the contact with the paddle.

Had she really been spanked in front of others, and enjoyed it? The thought both frightened and thrilled her. Several days ago she would never have thought such a thing was possible. But that was before Julian Gregory had walked into her life. Was it really possible that he had transformed it so much?

She could feel him next to her, feel his warmth. Hear his even breathing. She'd never slept next to a man in her life. It was something to which she could become very accustomed.

She sat up and stretched, the cool air feeling wonderful against her naked skin.

"Don't even think about it." Julian pulled her down against his chest. "You already have a punishment coming for leaving my bed without permission yesterday. You don't want to add to it today."

"You can't be serious. Julian that is so unfair!"

Buxton laughed. "I say what's fair. We didn't have time for it yesterday. But I don't forget when punishments are needed."

He kissed her hard, his tongue probing into her mouth and she sighed as she remembered the pleasures from last night. When they'd arrived at her home Julian had made it very clear that he was staying, and Alice had not objected.

They'd kissed, licked, caressed, probed and stroked until Alice had shuddered in his arms several times. Each time a climax had hit she'd begged him to enter her but he'd refused.

"The deal vixen, the deal. You have to identify my tormentor first." The words still echoed in her ears.

"Woolgathering?" Julian's voice was low in her ear. "Did you just hear a word I said?"

Alice shook her head and smiled.

"Well then I say that adds to the punishment. I said that I couldn't give you the proper punishment at your house. So we will stay at my home tonight. I want you to be prepared and let your staff know early."

Alice gave him an uncertain look. "You can spank me here."

Julian stroked her hair. "This is more than a spanking innocent one. This is a whipping for yesterday morning. The privacy here is not as I would like it to be. Your maid comes in too often."

"She will not come in while you are here. And you can't be serious about punishing me."

He reached up and kissed her. "I'm very serious Alice. Surely you realize that by now."

Julian got up from the bed and crossed to Alice's dressing table. She loved seeing his naked body. She watched as he picked up her hairbrush and tested its weight in his hands.

"Just a few strokes now, to make sure you think of me when you sit today. It will also heighten your anticipation for tonight's punishment."

Alice was too shocked to answer. She watched as he took a few practice swings with the brush. Then she gasped as he turned to her with a wicked grin.

"Bend over the bed Alice. Don't make me tell you twice."

“Spankings are one thing. Whippings are another. I will not consent to a punishment whipping.” Her breath was coming out in short gasps. Was it fear, or excitement that she was feeling? She wasn’t sure. She just knew that her quim was wet once again.

Julian shook his head and walked toward the bed.

When he reached the end Alice let out a shaky breath. Why was she resisting? Everything he’d introduced her to so far had brought great pleasure. Of course she’d never heard the word punishment come from his lips before.

She opened her mouth to talk but Julian held up his hand.

“Do you trust me Alice?”

She nodded her head vigorously.

“Then you must learn to obey me. I know you’re used to being independent but now you must learn to give control over to me and not question my authority.”

Alice dropped the pillow she had been clutching to her chest. She scooted herself to the end of the bed and then flipped over so that her feet were on the floor and her bum was in the air.

“Stretch your arms out above your head.”

The bedding felt cool against her sweaty palms and Alice sighed. Then she let out a soft moan when Julian rubbed the bristles of the brush against her bare bottom.

That moan turned into a soft sob when he turned the brush over and began smacking it smartly against her bare skin. She’d counted ten on each side and was preparing herself for more when there was a soft knock at the door.

“See what I mean?” Julian growled deeply. Then he boomed out “Go away!”

Alice wiped the tears that had fallen from her eyes and rose quickly. Pulling a wrapper around her naked body she went to the door and opened it enough for Jane’s head to appear.

“Mrs. Hamilton please forgive me but Celia Howell is here to see you. She said it is most urgent.”

The look on Jane’s face reflected her surprise. First three lords, one of which had slept in her employer’s bed the night before. Now a famous actress. Jane didn’t know what to make of the situation.

“An interesting turn of events,” Julian said from the other side of the room. “It must be very serious for her to appear before calling hours. Let’s see what she wants.”

“Give us a moment Jane. Then you can come and help me dress.”

Alice shut the door. Julian was almost fully dressed.

“I should see her alone.”

“Out of the question.”

“Julian, we don’t want to give her any more ammunition against you than she already has. If she sees you in my house at this time of the morning she will know that we are lovers. Everyone will find out.”

“I don’t care. I won’t let you see that little she-devil by yourself.”

“Then wait in the gardens. I’ll have Jane open the doors and you will be able to hear everything. If you feel I’m being threatened you can burst in and be the hero. You must trust me in this. She will open up more to another woman.”

Julian grinned at her. She had turned the tables on him. “Very well. But I don’t like it.”

After Jane had dressed her and reported to the library to open the doors to the garden, Alice turned to Julian and kissed him. Then she walked slowly to the library where Celia Howell sat with a cup of tea.

“I expected you to be up and about by this time of morning,” Celia said, raising the cup to her lips. “Late night?”



Her implication was clear but Alice did not rise to the bait. She poured herself a cup of tea and sat down opposite her visitor.

“May I help you in some way Mrs. Howell?” Alice sipped her tea and eyed the other woman over the rim of her glass.

“I just wanted to see the look on your face when you read this.” The actress reached into her reticule and pulled out a folded sheet of newsprint. She passed it to Alice and then picked up her cup.

Alice stared at the sheet and then smiled. She wondered what Julian was thinking as he hovered near the windows. She cleared her throat and began to read.

Rakish members of the ton are known for taking advantage of young women of the lower classes. A case in point, according to sources, is that of young Mrs. H., whose late husband was known for his ability to make problems disappear.

Rumor has it that Mrs. H. has allowed herself to become involved with handsome Lord B, who could well leave her with a problem of her own to clear up.

We would like to urge Mrs. H to use caution in the situation. Trying to rise up above one’s station could prove problematic in the future.

Alice sat the paper down and picked up her teacup. She took a sip and then she smiled at her guest.

“Very much like reading your last review, wouldn’t you say?”

“And what do you mean by that? My last review was very favorable.”

“Yes, it just goes to show that you can’t believe everything you read in the papers.”

Celia’s face turned red and Alice gave her a shy smile. Then the actress gained hold of her senses. She sat up straighter and glared at Alice.

“We had planned something different for the morning papers. Something more to the point about your friends and their debauchery. But we decided to strike against you and give them another chance to protect themselves. Everyone will now know that Buxton has been rutting between your thighs. You will stay away from this situation. We don’t need you mucking about.”

“Who is ‘we’ Mrs. Howell?”

When the actress did not answer Alice shook her head. “Are you upset about losing the money Mrs. Howell? Or are you more upset that Lord Buxton is ‘rutting between my thighs,’ and not yours? Are you doing this because you have been rejected by a member of the ton?”

Celia rose quickly, her teacup smashing to the floor as she stood. “How dare you! You are nothing but an insolent little tramp. Now that your reputation has been harmed perhaps you will learn to mind your own business. A female can never do the job of a problem solver. And this is one problem that will not go away.”

She slammed the door to the library just as Julian strode in from the gardens.

“Well done sweet one. But I don’t like to think of what I do as rutting.” He came around to the back of the divan and began massaging Alice’s neck.

“I wouldn’t know, would I? You haven’t been between my thighs.” Celia turned her head toward Julian and pouted.

“Yes I have my sweet, just not the way you want. It will happen soon enough. And hasn’t the wait been delicious?”

He leaned down and kissed her neck, his arms coming around to cup her breasts in his palms.

She moaned with delight and put her hands over his to encourage him further. He was nibbling on her ear and kneading her nipples through her bodice when the door burst open.

Jane let out a sharp gasp and ran from the room.

"Get back here," Julian screamed out. "You need to talk with that girl. She can't keep barging in on us."

"Don't scream at her. She's not used to having a man around the house. Especially one who is playing with her employer's breasts."

Jane popped her head around the door. "Forgive me milord. But you have guests."

Essex strode through before Jane could announce him. "Thank you my dear. I'm sure the great debaucher of women will receive us."

Ellington followed him into the room and threw a newspaper onto the table.

"You cad. Shall I defend your honor Mrs. Hamilton? Pistols at dawn?"

Alice laughed so hard she couldn't answer.

Buxton flopped himself onto the couch and stared at his friends. "Funny that only my name was mentioned. You two deserve as much credit for debauchery as I do."

"Not us," Essex answered. "We're married men."

"And I will be soon enough so you can spare me the sanctimonious lectures."

Ellington raised his eyebrows in Alice's direction. She smiled at him and shook her head.

Julian frowned at her. "She hasn't said yes. Yet. But she will."

Alice smiled at him and lowered her eyes. "Shall we discuss what has brought us together this morning?"

"I thought that's what we were doing," Julian answered. "But then again I guess not. Do we have any idea who Celia Howell is working with?"

Ellington took a cup of tea from Jane, who shot a fearful look in Buxton's direction. He lifted up and growled at her and she fled the room. He relaxed against the sofa and laughed.

"Stop that!" Alice slapped his leg and he made a yelping noise.

"You two don't need to get married," Essex said. "You already act like an old married couple."

Julian laughed like a little boy and Alice felt a thrill go through her. Essex was right. They were comfortable with each other. Very comfortable.

"Back to the subject at hand," Ellington said with a grin. "Shaw has four males on his household staff. Two stable boys barely older than 16. They can't possibly have the brains to think up this caper. His retired butler, Hamil, is almost 80 and can barely walk. Shaw keeps him on to honor his years of service. The new butler, however, has been with the household staff for about a year. He's in his early 30s and is called Rogers. Benjamin Rogers. One of the maids told Barton that he is friends with Celia Howell."

"Well there we go," Buxton said. "Let's go and visit him."

"There is a twist, however," Ellington said. "The maid also told Barton that Shaw and Celia Howell are lovers."

"Are, or were?" Alice stared at the three men.

"She said are," Ellington replied.

"I don't believe Shaw could have anything to do with this," Essex replied. "He's been loyal to us for years. What would cause him to try and blackmail Club members?"

"As far as I know he's not having any financial trouble," Buxton replied. "Perhaps we should make some inquiries about town to see if he has been hitting the hells."

"And losing." Ellington added.

"Cannonberry and Barton need something to do," Buxton said. "And in the meantime I do believe that I will visit with the new butler."

"And I will come with you," Alice said.

"Oh no," Buxton replied. "I won't put you in a potentially dangerous situation."

"And I wasn't in danger while I was waiting for a blackmailer to pick up his money in a park at midnight? What harm could a visit to a person's house entail? I can help you with the questioning."

"I don't need your help with questioning," Buxton replied, his anger rising. "I have questioned a few people in my lifetime. I know what I'm doing."

"I didn't say that you didn't," Alice's own temper was causing her face to turn red. "You came to me for help and I won't be shut out. I am going with you."

Before Buxton could answer Ellington stood, his shoulders shaking with laughter. "You've got your hands full with this one Julian. I do believe that you and she are a match made in heaven."

Julian locked eyes with Alice, who held his gaze. Anger flashed in her eyes.

"I think you're right," he replied. "But I know the remedy for ladies who insist on disobeying me."

"Spank me all you want," Alice replied. "I'm still coming with you. I'll go and change now."

She stalked from the room, male laughter following in her wake.

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"Don't for one second think that I will forget about the spanking that you are owed." Julian's voice was low. "This makes two punishment spankings you will receive so you will be sore for some time to come."

The carriage bumped along the London streets and Alice tried to hide her smile.

"Do you think this is funny? I'm not used to having my commands ignored."

"Then perhaps you should become accustomed to the notion," Alice said firmly. "I will not be ignored, nor shoved in a corner. You asked for my help and I intend to give it."

Buxton pressed his lips together in vexation. She was right, of course, he had asked for her help. He just hadn't expected her to be demanding about being kept in the inside loop.

"Just the same when I give an order I expect it to be followed." The carriage pulled up in front of Shaw's house and Julian sighed. "We will finish this discussion when we arrive at home."

Alice fought back a smile at his use of the word home. Not "your home" or "my home" but "home."

They waited on the front stoop for almost five minutes before Julian knocked again, a frown spreading across his face.

A few moments later Hamil opened the door. He leaned against the frame and let out an expanse of breath. "Milord Buxton, welcome. Lord Shaw is not at home at present."

"Hamil where is the new butler? What is his name, Rogers?"

Hamil let out a wheeze of breath and Buxton took his arm to lead him toward the library. Once they were seated the older man looked much more comfortable.

"Rogers has not been seen this morning," the older man said. "A maid just informed me that he hasn't yet arisen. I was about to go and investigate when you arrived."

Julian frowned at Alice and then patted the older man on the shoulder. "Just point me in the right direction Hamil and I'll check on him for you."

Hamil gave Buxton directions to a room on the third floor. Once Julian was gone the butler looked at Alice.

"Lord Shaw is not expected back for at least another week," he said softly. "He is in Paris. If you have come to call upon him you are to be disappointed."

Alice smiled and didn't answer. Moments later Julian reappeared, a grim expression on his face.

"We need to summon the authorities Hamil. Rogers is dead. Murdered by the looks of it."

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The library at Julian's home was warm and cozy, yet Alice felt cold and frightened. She hadn't argued with Julian when he'd sent her to his house before the authorities could arrive. She didn't want to have to answer questions, especially after the little bit about her in the morning paper.

She'd been here more than two hours though and Julian had yet to put in an appearance.

Her imagination was getting the best of her. She wondered what was happening. She hated to be on the outside of the investigation. At the same time she knew that it was for the best.

Essex, Ellington and their wives arrived before Buxton. It felt strange to be in his house, playing hostess to his friends. They accepted it as if nothing was different from the day before.

It was another hour before Buxton arrived. Alice stood to greet him and he gathered her in a warm embrace.

"Well?" Ellington's voice was deep with concern.

"Stabbed to death. The Inspector believes that a woman did it.

"Celia Howell perhaps?" Alice handed Julian a cup of tea. He took it and smiled.

"A distinct possibility," Buxton answered, taking a sip of tea. "But why would she kill her accomplice before they received any degree of success with their plan. She made it perfectly clear this morning that "they" intended to keep trying to extort money from us. It seems to me she would wait until after they'd received money, then kill him and keep all the money for herself."

"Which brings us back to Shaw." Essex's words were low, reflecting the unhappy thoughts that accompanied them.

"I still don't believe it," Buxton answered. "Besides he's still in Paris."

"Hamil says he won't be home for another week," Alice said softly.

"Supposedly," Ellington answered. "I pray that he's not already here and causing trouble for his friends."

They all frowned as the silence filled the room.

"Where do you suggest we go from here?" Essex looked pointedly between Buxton and Ellington.

Buxton was the first to answer. "I do believe that we should check on his exact whereabouts for the past few weeks. Check very discretely."

Alice cleared her throat. "Hamil told me that he has been in Paris, although he didn't say which hotel."

"If he has been in Paris finding out which hotel he's been staying at shouldn't be hard," Julian said. "I will send out messages tonight."

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The room was quiet as Alice waited for Julian to come upstairs. He'd kissed her softly and told her to wait for him in the bedroom. That was an hour ago. She opened the French doors and looked out over the gardens.

The soft smell of the flowers filled the room. She knew that he was going to punish her tonight and she was excited. More excited than she had ever been.

Tonight's spanking would be the first of two "punishment" spankings. Alice felt closer to Julian than she had ever been with anyone in her life. What he had planned for tonight, she knew, would only deepen the bond that she felt for him.

She sat on a chair near the open doors and breathed deeply. Not for the first time she wondered how he felt about her. Sure he had mentioned marriage but it was not unusual for members of the ton to marry for reasons other than love.

She took another breath and frowned. But what other reason would he have? She wasn't rich. She didn't have a high position in society. She didn't even have a ready-made family, a child that he could use for his own heir.

Alice shook her head. She was a 32-year-old virgin who couldn't wait to have her status changed.

"Relaxed?" Julian's voice was low in her ear.

"When did you get here?"

"A few moments ago. I was enjoying watching you take pleasure from the evening air. You look very beautiful sitting in the breeze."

Alice blushed. "You sent your messages?"

"Yes, three of them, to the finest hotels in Paris. Shaw would have stayed at one of the three."

Julian ran his fingers through Alice's hair and she shivered.

"You know what's coming next, don't you my love?"

His use of the word love caused her to tremble. "I do."

"This first spanking, sweet Alice, is for what reason?" He continued to stroke her hair and Alice sighed.

"For leaving yesterday morning without permission."

"Right my sweet. When I rolled over to find you gone I was devastated."

"Truly?" The word came out as a whisper.

"Truly. I don't think you realize the effect you've had on me Alice. I've never met a woman quite like you. Strong. Independent. Loyal. And when you offered me your maidenhead I wanted to take you right then and there."

"Then why didn't you?" Alice's voice was heavy with emotion. "And why haven't you done it yet? You know how badly I want it."

"Yes, I know," Julian replied. "And I want it just as badly. But I want to be able to give you my full attention. Until this case is solved that won't happen. You must be patient my love."

Alice nodded, her blue eyes gleaming.

"Do you really love me Julian?"

"Yes sweet Alice, I do. May I ask the same question of you?"

Alice sighed softly. "I never thought I would be capable of love. Although Jack loved me in his own way he left me with very unrealistic expectations when it comes to men."

Julian sat down next to her on the love seat. "I hope that I have changed those expectations just a little bit."

"You have," Alice whispered, leaning over to kiss him softly. "And I do believe that I love you. Strange that it could happen so quickly."

"Not strange," Julian said, gathering her close. "When there is a connection between two people love can come quickly. I do believe there is a connection between us, don't you?"

"Yes, Julian, I do."

"Then let's strengthen it further. There is a small paddle sitting on the stand near the bed. Go and get it."

Alice walked across the room quickly, finding the paddle and bringing it back to Julian. He looked so handsome sitting in the breeze that Alice felt a catch in her throat.

He stretched out his legs and smiled. "Across my lap Alice. It is time for a little discipline."

## CHAPTER FOUR

The wood of the paddle felt cool in Alice's hand. She crossed back over to where Julian sat on the divan in front of the open doors.

The smile he gave her was almost chilling. Julian took the paddle and then spread his arms to indicate his lap.

Alice gathered her skirts around her waist and lay down, her hands shaking. The shaking increased when Julian undid her under garments and bared her bottom. He ran his hand along her smooth flesh and sighed.

"You're so sweet Alice," he whispered. "I want you to keep your hands above your head. Don't clench up your fists. Just leave your palms on the couch."

"Yes Julian" Alice did as he instructed. She took deep breaths to try and calm her nerves.

"We'll do this in intervals Alice," Julian whispered. He'd started to rub the cool wood against Alice's bare behind. "I want you to count the first twenty-five swats silently. No sounds or words can come out of your mouth until we get to twenty-five. Do you understand?"

"Yes Julian."

The first swat came down swiftly, followed quickly by five more. The intensity was not too bad and Alice smiled to herself. Then the seventh one came harder and Alice let out a soft "oh."

"Hush Alice or I will start over."

Alice nodded and then clenched and unclenched her fists. The swats were coming down harder and harder and Alice could feel tears forming in her eyes. Her brain registered twenty-five but her mouth wouldn't work. Julian kept swatting her behind and finally Alice took a deep breath.

"Twenty-five, actually more like thirty." The words came out on a soft sob and Julian caressed her reddened behind.

"It is your duty to count Alice. The extra swats are just that. Extra. They don't count toward the next set."

Julian continued to rub the paddle against Alice's behind. "Will you leave my bed again without permission Alice?"

"No Julian, I won't. I promise."

"Very good my love. Now count the next twenty-five so that you truly understand what I am saying. And if I were you I would pay more attention to the numbers. It's your behind that will be feeling this tomorrow."

The paddle came down again and again and again and Alice worked hard to keep track and stay silent. The burning in her behind was increasing but so was the sweet feeling in the pit of her stomach and center. Wetness was forming between her thighs and she sighed deeply when she called out, "twenty-five."

Her behind was on fire. She could feel the marks on her bum as Julian ran his hands over them.

"Now, these next swats will continue until I'm satisfied you have learned your lesson," Julian said softly.

Without warning the paddle came down again and again and again. Alice began to squirm, her cheeks burned and her eyes filled with tears. She kicked her feet up and down to show her distress and clinched her fists.

“Please Julian please, I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

But Julian didn’t stop. He continued to spank her as her sobs filled the room. The paddle came down many more times and then suddenly the spanking stopped.

Julian righted her quickly and pulled her into his arms. He cradled her head against his shoulder and ran his fingers through her hair.

“I believe the first lesson has been learned. Am I right?”

Alice hiccupped out the words, “Yes Julian.”

“Then let us sleep my sweet.”

He undressed them both quickly and then gathered her close to him under the bedding.

Julian’s fingers found her center quickly, his expertise sending her over the edge before she even knew what was happening.

“Better?” He held her close and stroked her hair.

Alice nodded vigorously. “But what about you?” She gently stroked his hardness and Julian groaned.

“We’ll think of something. And before you ask, no. Not yet.”

Alice’s pout caused Julian to laugh. He kissed her gently and then deepened the kiss, thrusting his tongue in and out of her mouth until soft mewls of pleasure filled the room.

“Please Julian, please.”

He laughed softly. “I’m going to teach you something new Alice. Did you enjoy what I just did with my tongue?”

“Very much so milord.” The throbbing pressure on her behind was temporarily forgotten as Alice gave Julian a saucy grin.

He lay down on his back, his manhood tenting the sheet. He pushed the material aside and smiled at her.

“Pretend my sweet that my cock is my tongue.” He kissed her again and then pushed her head gently down his body.

When she reached her goal Alice licked him gently. She marveled at the way that small movement made him shudder. Tentatively she sucked the tip into her mouth. The feel of him was wonderful and she sighed in pleasure.

“I may need some lessons milord.”

“Which I will give with pleasure sweet Alice, with great pleasure.”

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“Shaw is on his way back home,” Essex announced the next day. “He has indeed been in Paris for the last few weeks, in the company of a beautiful widow.”

Buxton grinned despite himself. “I knew he was loyal. Who is the widow?”

“Lady Ellen Franklin.”

Alice let out a soft cry. She had moaned quite a bit this morning before their guests had arrived. Sitting down had been quite painful. She’d looked at Julian and shook her head. He’d just laughed and reminded her that she had another punishment spanking coming that evening. That had brought on another moan. This latest moan, however, was from hearing the name.

“But that cannot be. Lady Ellen is engaged to marry an Earl in Scotland. Her parents arranged it after the death of Lord Franklin.”

“This earl’s name?” Ellington asked.



"I don't remember," Alice responded. "It meant nothing to me at the time. I read it in the newspaper."

The door of the sitting room burst open and Amelia and Lord Cannonberry came inside. Amelia was visibly shaken and Cannonberry was frowning.

"The price has gone up," he said, handing a sheet of paper to Buxton. "They now want £15,000 per note, for a grand total of £45,000. But they're being generous. They've given us a week to pay this time."

Essex let out a soft whistle.

"It's quite brilliant really," Buxton said. "Young Lady Franklin falls in love with Shaw. To keep from having to marry the Scottish Earl she leaves with Shaw for Paris. Once the little trip has been discovered the Earl will be humiliated. The Earl, who is obviously a man with mental acuity, much like ourselves, does his research and finds out that Shaw is a member of the Spanking Club."

Alice smiled. "Then our mystery Scotsman uses Celia Howell to gain entrance to Shaw's home. She romances the butler, uses him to deliver notes and when he becomes a hindrance she kills him. Using Shaw's butler would throw suspicion on him."

Amelia frowned. "Are you talking about the Earl of MacIntosh? He is indeed engaged to marry Lady Franklin. She disappeared three days ago, however. No one knows where she is."

"Shaw must have left first, then she went to join him," Ellington said. "A week to pay up. Well my dear Carin, I believe that gives us a chance to throw a party. And invite MacIntosh. We'll let him know that we are on to his plans."

"Excellent," Carin said. "I love throwing parties. I will expect some help, of course." She glanced at Charlotte and Amelia. Then she turned to Alice. "And from you, too, Alice."

Alice shook her head. "I couldn't possibly attend a party at your home. The gossip that would fly from that would rival what is already flying around after the little item in yesterday's newspaper."

Buxton shook his head. "Don't worry Carin she'll be there. And she would love to help."

Alice opened her mouth to object again and shut it quickly, her aching backside reminding her that she had yet another punishment spanking coming tonight. If she disagreed with Julian again he would surely add yet another spanking to his list. And she didn't think her behind could take three in a row.

She smiled at Carin shyly.

"We need to go dress shopping this afternoon," Charlotte said. "We will call for you at two. Amelia I hope you'll join us."

"I have quite a bit to do yet for the wedding on Saturday." Amelia blushed and looked up at Cannonberry who gave her a deep smile.

"I think you should go and enjoy yourself Amelia. Take the afternoon to shop and enjoy tea with your friends."

Once arrangements had been made for the excursion and everyone had left Alice turned to Buxton.

"I cannot attend a society party with you," she said, her voice low. "How would it look? The little tidbit in yesterday's paper will still be fresh on everyone's mind. I'll be looked at as an interloper trying to rise above her station."

"Your station is with me," Julian answered. Then he cocked his head and gave her a grin. "Do we need a punishment session to show you what I mean?"

"No Julian. I'm still recovering from last night's session." Alice laughed softly.

"And let us not forget tonight's." When she looked nervous he kissed her quickly. "You will go with your new friends today and shop. Have the shopkeepers send the bills to me. They

all read the gossip sheets so they will have seen yesterday's snippet. And buy more than one dress. Make sure one is suitable for Cannonberry's wedding on Saturday."

He kissed her again and left the room. Alice stared after him, marveling once again at the changes in her life.

She was still grinning when Julian stuck his head back into the room. "Don't forget to buy several nice lacy corsets to match your dresses."

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The teahouse was crowded by the time the shopping expedition was done. But the proprietor quickly found a spot for the party once he saw it contained Lady Essex and Lady Ellington.

Several ladies whispered behind their hands when Alice walked by their tables. She was used to the reaction by now. Shoppers and shopkeepers alike had whispered about her all afternoon.

But the shopkeepers were more than happy with the money she spent. At first Alice had balked at prices and the number of dresses that Charlotte, Carin and Amelia helped her select.

But Charlotte had talked her into the dresses, matching corsets, hats, gloves, purses and stockings. When Alice asked that the items and the bills to be delivered to her home Charlotte had laughed.

"Julian will kill me, and you, if we allow that to happen."

So Alice had changed the delivery point to Buxton's house and her three companions had tittered with laughter.

Now she drank her tea and watched the women interact. She wanted desperately to ask them about the Spanking Club but she knew that now was not the time or place.

They were finishing their tea when Celia Howell breezed through the doorway. With a theatrical wave of her hair she glanced around the room with a big smile on her face. When she saw Alice the smile froze in place.

The actress made her way across the room, stopping to talk with various women as she walked. When she reached their table Alice nodded in acknowledgement.

"Mrs. Howell won't you join us?"

Without answering the question she greeted the ladies of the ton. Then she turned an acid smile on Alice.

"Mrs. Hamilton I am surprised to see you out, considering what I read about you yesterday." Her voice was loud and several people turned to stare.

"On the contrary Miss Howell I don't allow vicious gossip to stop me from enjoying life. I was just telling Lord Buxton today that you can't believe everything you read. For instance didn't one interview say you were an actress in her 30s? Clearly the writer was low by about ten years or so. Perhaps it was a typographical error."

Fire flashed from Celia's eyes. "Take care Mrs. Hamilton. You've spent so much time abed lately I fear that you are unaccustomed to the afternoon air and it might be dangerous to your health."

Charlotte started to stand but Alice put her hand on her arm and gently shook her head.

"The afternoon air is perfect for me Mrs. Howell," Alice said, sugar dripping from her voice. I am well rested and in perfect health. And I do so enjoy shopping. And Julian is a very generous man. Say what you will about our relationship but I assure you that I have never experienced such joy as I have when I am in his arms."

Her blunt words stopped the actress cold and Alice smiled, not at the look of anger on the older woman's face but at the truth her words. She loved Julian. Truly loved him. And she didn't care who knew."

"Yes I do believe you should spend Lord Buxton's money while he still has it," Celia said in a voice only the women could hear. Then she gave an evil grin to all the woman and left the store without ordering tea.

"The poor woman actually believes she has the upper hand," Charlotte said after she'd left. "But we won't let her spoil our day. Let's go to a few more shops. We still need to find Alice a dress for the wedding."

Alice sipped her tea, the significance of what just happened seeping into her bones. Everyone in the shop now knew that she and Buxton were lovers. Of course anyone who read a newspaper already knew. She smiled at the women who were grinning at her.

"But I plan on wearing the lime green dress that we just ordered to Amelia's wedding."

All three women laughed.

"Not my wedding," Amelia said. "We're looking for a dress for you to wear to your wedding to Lord Buxton."

When Alice didn't answer the three women giggled. Charlotte was the first to recover.

"Don't worry Alice the men in our lives swept all of us off our feet. We know it is no different for you. Mark my words, you will be Lady Buxton before the end of the season. I've seen the look in Julian's eyes when he watches you. He loves you."

"Now do you want white, or cream?" Charlotte smiled.

"Perhaps peach," Carin added.

"No, I would say lavender," Amelia said softly.

And Alice sighed. Love. He truly loved her. And she loved him. The feeling spread from her stomach to the rest of her body, warming her and sending shivers of delight down her spine. When he mentioned marriage again she would say yes. With no hesitation.

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"Is this all?" Buxton's eyebrows furrowed in disbelief. "Four dresses and their accessories? Surely you bought more than this."

Alice shrugged her shoulders. "I have two more dresses on order. One will be ready for Amelia's wedding. The second should be ready sometime next week." She failed to mention that the second dress would be a perfect cream-colored wedding dress.

"Four dresses will not last the season," Buxton said. "You need to go back out tomorrow. Take Charlotte. She is a great shopper, or so Essex says. I want a whole new wardrobe for you. My wife deserves nothing less."

Alice's eyes beamed at the words and the warm feeling she'd had that afternoon returned.

"I don't want to marry before Cannonberry," Julian continued. "He and Amelia deserve their special day. Shall we say a month from now?"

Julian gathered Alice in his arms and kissed her gently. "Does that time frame meet with your approval?"

Alice bit her lip and nodded. A big smile spread over Julian's face. "Who caused you to change your mind? Was it Charlotte? Or Carin?"

"Actually it was Celia Howell." Alice laid her head on Julian's chest. She could hear his heart beating against her ear and the sound caused her own heart to flutter. He pulled her back

and gave her a confused look. She described her afternoon encounter with the actress and Julian threw back his head and laughed.

“Damn! I bet she enjoyed hearing her age battered about in public. But how did that change your mind?”

“When I was talking to her I realized that I wanted to defend you, defend your reputation. If I cared that much about your reputation then I knew that I cared for you more than I was letting myself realize.”

“Perhaps I should send Mrs. Howell a thank you note.” The teasing note in Julian’s voice belied his feelings. “We will move your things in tomorrow. All the members of your staff will find work here.”

“Julian, we can’t live together before the wedding. It’s unheard of!”

“We can and we will sweet Alice,” Julian said. “I want you near me at all times. That is the end of the conversation.”

“I won’t do it. What will people think?” Alice’s voice was rising. Julian was walking away from her toward the bed.

“You will do as I say. There will be no discussion on the matter.” He sat down on the edge of the bed and began unlacing his boots.

Alice worked hard to control her rising temper. “Is this how it’s going to be? Will my thoughts always be rejected in favor of yours?”

“Nonsense,” Julian replied, his fingers beginning to work on his shirt buttons. “You have to trust me to know what’s best for you Alice. For us.”

“You mean I have to trust you to take over,” she retorted. “I will not be bullied.”

Now half-naked, Julian placed his hands on his hips and frowned deeply. “Bullied? Is that what you think I am, a bully?”

“A bully that does not allow me to express my opinions. And when I do express them you disregard them as if they mean nothing.”

Tears were forming in Alice’s eyes, threatening to fall down her cheeks.

“Am I bully for wanting you near me? For wanting to hold you close to me at night? For wanting to wake up next to you in the morning? For not wanting to wait a month to experience these things?”

“A bully for disregarding my thoughts.”

Julian shook his head. “Do you love me Alice?”

The question came from out of the blue. Alice nodded and then added in a firm voice, “Yes Julian, I love you.”

“And I love you. Don’t for one second think that I don’t respect your opinions and feelings. But if we are to be together I will be in charge. Is that clear?”

Alice shook her head even as a smile appeared on her face. “Yes milord, it’s very clear. But what will others think? They will think that I have bamboozled you. That I am taking advantage of your position and your money.”

“I care not what others think,” Julian said softly. “What matters is what we think of each other. I don’t want to spend another day without you under this roof Alice.”

“But I have been under this roof Julian,” she said softly. “Why can’t we continue to operate two households until after the wedding?”

“Because I want everyone to know that you are mine.”

Alice felt as if she had been punched in the stomach. The breath left her lungs and she gulped deeply to try and recapture it.

Julian gathered her in his arms and held her close. “Take deep breaths sweet one. It will be fine.”

After her breathing had returned to normal Alice gave him an impish grin. “Do I receive punishments for speaking my mind?”

He kissed her forehead and tucked her head under his chin. “Never for speaking your mind. That is one of the things that I love about you. But you still have a punishment coming for arguing with me about going to Shaw’s house.”

“But I was punished yesterday.” Alice’s hand strayed to her still aching bottom.

“Yes, for leaving my bed. This is a totally different situation. Take off your clothing and we shall begin.”

“Now? Before dinner at the Essex’s house?”

“Yes now,” Julian replied, picking up a thin strap of leather. “Half before dinner. Half when we return home. I want you to remember this while we are eating. I want you to think about me while you are sitting. To think about us. I want you to anticipate what will come afterwards.”

Alice undressed herself as quickly as she could. She bent over the end of the bed and smiled when Julian’s hand began to caress her backside.

“Tell me why you’re being punished Alice.”

“For arguing with you yesterday.”

“Twenty-five now, and twenty-five after dinner,” Julian said as his hand caressed her behind. “Remember to tell me when we reach the right number.”

The leather came down without warning and Alice jumped. It came down again and again and again, landing on her behind, her upper thighs and the tender crack in between the two.

Alice gathered the bedding in her fists and tried not to push herself back against the strap. The feeling that it was bringing to her was exquisite. The sharp slaps of pain gathering in her core and spreading out in waves of pleasure.

But it wasn’t the strap that was bringing the pleasure. It was Julian. It was Julian’s hand that caused these feelings inside her.

Twenty-five came and went and Alice continued to moan. Tears were flowing down her face, not from pain but from joy. The joy that was Julian and the connection that she felt toward him. When he reached thirty she cried out for him to stop and he did so instantly.

His kisses were sweet and soft as he cuddled Alice against his chest. “The rest after dinner,” he whispered as her tears subsided.

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Dinner at the Essex house was uneventful. The men talked strategies about what would happen when MacIntosh was at the Ellington party. The ladies talked of babies and clothing.

Baby George made an appearance with his nanny and was passed from person to person, a big smile on his face.

On the way home Alice burrowed against Julian’s chest. “This is what I always wanted.”

Her voice was low and Julian waited for her to continue. “Jack loved me but there was never any affection, any touching or caring. Tonight was wonderful. Being part of a couple. Being accepted by your friends.”

“I hope our children are like George, happy and content. But of course with you as their mother how could they be otherwise?”

Julian kissed her forehead and Alice glowed up at him. “I never thought I would have children.”

“We will have as many as you want my love. Just say the word and they will be running all over the house.”

“A boy with beautiful green eyes, as handsome as his father.”

“And a girl with beautiful blue eyes, as beautiful and smart as her mother.”

He kissed her again, reaching down to cup her breast through the satin bodice of her new gown.

“Is your problem solved yet Julian?”

Julian’s laughter shook his chest. “Yes my sweet I believe it is. Dealing with MacIntosh will not be hard. And you did identify the problem by remembering that he was engaged to marry young Lady Franklin. I do believe our deal has been signed, sealed and delivered.”

“Does that mean you’ll take my virginity tonight?” Her words were rushed and breathy.

“Indeed it does my love,” Julian answered. “But only after your punishment tonight. Your little problem will go away tonight. Mine will go away Thursday. And we will live happily ever after.”

“Then tell the driver to hurry because I don’t think I can wait much longer.”

Julian rapped on the carriage’s roof and the horses picked up speed.

Alice cuddled against him, safe in the knowledge that the man who held her so closely loved her, and that no harm would ever come to her while she was in his arms.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The fire was lit in Julian's bedroom when they arrived. Candles blazed on the mantle, desk and bed tables.

"How did you arrange this?" Alice's voice was low as she surveyed the romantic scene.

"I sent a message ahead," Julian whispered in her ear. "The staff is very well trained."

Alice shivered as his fingers began to work the laces on her dress.

"Shouldn't we call a maid?" Her bodice was already loose and falling from her shoulders.

"No, I want to do this. I want to watch the clothing fall from your body, feel it slip through my fingers. Feel your bare skin against my fingertips."

Julian caressed Alice's shoulders and neck.

"Punishment first, then pleasure." His words were low and Alice trembled.

"Please Julian, no more punishment, my behind is so very sore."

"And so beautifully red," Julian replied, as he gently stroked the naked orbs. "I'm sorry my love but I don't forgive punishments. You have twenty-five more swats coming. If you disagree with me again I will increase that number. Do you understand me?"

"But Julian..."

"That's ten more."

"Julian!"

"And yet another ten. Do you want to continue my love?"

Alice shook her head. The thought of forty-five more swats swam around her brain. But right behind the frightening idea was the notion of Julian taking her as a man took a woman. She had loved the sensations she'd had as his cock throbbed in her mouth the night before. She could hardly wait to feel that cock between her thighs.

Julian rotated her head around and kissed her gently. "Do you see that piece of furniture in the middle of the room?"

Alice nodded as she stared at the stand. It rose on two wooden legs with a wooden bar stretched between them. She knew immediately that she would be bent over that furniture for her next punishment.

"That stand is a 'thigh-popper.' It will give me perfect access to your delicious behind, and to the sweet area between your bum and thighs." Julian's voice was soft and comforting. "These swats will hurt dearly but they will get my point across. Twenty-five with a thick leather strap. The other twenty with a slender riding crop."

Alice began to tremble. "Julian." The word came out on a whimper and Alice could hear the fear behind her voice.

"That's ten more my sweet. Don't make me add more. Go and bend over the thigh-popper. Once you are bent over plant your hands firmly on the floor in front of you so as to hold yourself in place."

She did as she was told, her body quivering from excitement mixed with fear. Once Alice was in place Julian caressed her behind gently.

He walked to a dresser behind her and Alice imagined him selecting the leather and the crop from the drawer where he kept his "punishment implements."

“Tell me why you’re being punished Alice.” Julian ran the leather across her bum.

“For arguing with you about going to Shaw’s house,” Alice whispered.

“And?”

“I don’t understand. Is there another reason?”

Julian sighed. “Why have more swats been added on Alice?”

“For disagreeing with you earlier.”

“Exactly,” Julian said. “Count the twenty-five Alice. Remember to stay silent until I reach that number.”

The leather came down gently, and then the intensity of the swats increased. Alice’s already bruised behind cried out in alarm and she moaned loudly.

“Please Julian I can’t take it. Please stop.”

“That’s ten more for speaking when I told you to remain silent. You will learn to obey me Alice. I won’t hurt you permanently but you will remember this punishment for a long time to come. Stay silent until you count to thirty-five.”

Alice bit her lip as she counted, the swats stinging her behind and upper thighs.

Julian did not falter. He swung the leather with such intensity that each time it struck her behind Alice jumped.

When he delivered the thirty-fifth swat Alice cried out the number.

“Good girl, very good girl. Remind me again sweet one why you’ve had thirty swats with the riding crop added to your whipping.”

“For arguing with you about my spanking.” Alice’s voice was soft and she sighed as Julian’s hand caressed her fiery skin.

“Who is in charge Alice?”

“You are milord.”

“You will accept my punishments without hesitation or argument. Do you understand me sweet one?”

“Yes milord.”

Alice felt a moment of despair when Julian walked back to the chest. She wanted him next to her. She felt naked, alone. When he returned she sighed with pleasure.

The riding crop felt small when he rubbed it on her ass. “These will hurt very badly Alice. I’m going to keep my hand on your back so that you stay in place. Count to yourself sweet one.”

The crop came down softly on her behind and Alice smiled.

Swish. The second swat made a loud noise and then landed on the valley below her behind and above her thighs and Alice cried out.

Swish. The third one was harder and landed in the same area and Alice moaned louder.

“You may make noise Alice but remember to count. All these strokes will land in the same area.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“I can’t, I can’t. Please stop! Please milord stop!”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“Will you disobey me again Alice?”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“No milord no, please stop. Please!”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“No what Alice? No you won’t disobey me? Answer me with a full sentence.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.



The swats came down hard and landed in the same sensitive area. Alice's tears fell freely.

"No milord, I won't disobey you. Please no more. Please."

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

"Good, I'm happy to hear you will be obedient. Have you been counting?"

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

"Yes milord. That's twenty-nine." The words came out on sobs as another swish sounded through the air and the crop landed firmly on her thighs.

"Relax my little one, shush, shush, it's alright, I'm almost done." Julian's hand was cool against her burning bottom.

"You said thirty you are done," Alice sobbed. Then she remembered why the extra swats had been added. "I'm sorry milord. Forgive me. Please, I'm sorry."

"It's alright sweet one. I just want to give you a few more so you remember this. Relax your muscles."

Alice tried to follow his directions but the moment the crop swished through the air she tensed up again. The leather landed again and again and again and she moaned in protest.

Julian swiftly delivered another fifteen swats and then he dropped the crop and pulled Alice up into his arms. He stroked her hair as she cried into his shoulder. The shushing noises he made into her ears made her shiver.

"I love you Alice. Do you love me?"

"Yes Julian, I love you."

He lifted her lips and kissed her. "Then never disobey me again. Who's in charge Alice? Who do you belong to?"

"You Julian."

He picked her up and carried her to the bed. After he laid her down he quickly stripped out of his clothes. When they were on the bed together he kissed her again and pulled her close.

"Cry all you want little one. I don't want to punish you like that often but I will if I have to. Do you understand?"

Alice nodded. A few moments later her tears slowed and she hiccupped.

Julian kissed her, his tongue probed her mouth as his hand moved down to caress her breasts. Alice voiced her approval as his mouth moved down and captured first one nipple and then the other.

"Sweet Alice," he murmured as his fingers dipped into her center. "How wet you are for me. Do you want me sweet Alice? You haven't said as much tonight, although you've been very vocal in the past. Do you still want me?"

"Yes Julian, I want you inside me." Alice ran her hands up his chest as he raised himself above her.

"You are mine sweet Alice," he whispered as he leaned down and kissed her. He gently bit her lower lip and she giggled softly.

"Does your red behind feel hot against the bed sheet my Alice?"

"Yes milord, it stings."

"That sting reminds you of your punishment. Of the bond we share." Julian moaned and pushed himself inside her warmth. When he met the barrier that he knew was there he kissed her again and thrust harder.

"No, ouch, Julian."

"Hush sweet Alice. It's all right." He pushed in deeper and they moaned together, she in pain mixed with pleasure, he in total abandon.

When they had settled into a sweet rhythm he kissed her over and over and over. He guided her legs around his hips and Alice moaned with approval as he sank in deeper.

“I love you Alice. Never forget that.”

“And I you,” Alice whispered as her climax spilled from her body. Moments later she felt his seed spill into her body as he cried out his own release and collapsed on top of her.

The weight of his body made Alice forget the ache of her behind. Never had she felt so wanted, so needed, so loved. He was still nestled inside her and she felt abandoned as he slipped out of her, and out of the bed.

He returned with a warm, wet cloth.

“I’ll have the bedclothes changed,” he whispered as he ran the cloth between her legs. “You are truly mine now Alice.”

She laughed as she reached up to kiss him. “And I always will be yours Julian. Forever.”

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The Ellington house was bustling with activity when Julian and Alice’s carriage joined the line to the front door.

“Have we heard anything from MacIntosh?” Alice flattened out her skirts and looked at Julian.

“Not a word. It makes me a bit curious. I do believe he’s up to something.”

The carriage moved forward and Alice grinned. “Perhaps your problem is not as solved as we thought it was. I received payment before the job was done.”

Julian gave her a saucy grin. “Taking your maidenhead was not payment Alice. It was a pleasure. A distinct pleasure. And I don’t think I could have waited any longer.”

Alice blushed as she remembered the number of times Julian had taken her over the past few days. He’d surprised her in the library, the sitting room and the gardens.

“After you’re my wife I’ll take you in each room in the house,” Julian whispered in her ears as he’d pumped himself into her on the great room sofa. “And I’ll spank you in every room too.”

His mention of spankings still thrilled her. Her behind was aching from the two punishment spankings she had received back-to-back. That feeling brought a smile to her face. Julian’s spankings always made her feel warm, needed and wanted. She marveled that the punishment spankings rivaled the “pleasure” spankings for the wonderful feelings that they brought.

Julian had decided to wait until after Cannonberry’s wedding to consolidate their two households and Alice was happy about that. She had told her staff that they would soon be part of the Buxton household and all had been pleased. Except Jane.

“Mrs. Hamilton,” Jane had whispered as she helped Alice pack clothing to take to Julian’s home. “Lord Buxton frightens me.”

“You needn’t worry Jane,” Alice had answered. “I would not marry Lord Buxton if he were a person to be frightened of.”

Jane had given her a look of uncertainty and then quietly finished her task. Alice worried that the girl would try and find another position once the wedding was behind them.

“You’re a million miles away,” Julian said from the other side of the carriage. “Is something wrong?”

“I’m worried about Jane leaving me. She confided to me that you frighten her.”

Julian laughed and then shook his head. "I'll have a talk with her. I have increased your staff's salaries so that will be an extra incentive for her to stay after the wedding. And I promise I'll be good. I'll just torment her once or twice a day."

He raised his eyebrows in a menacing way and Alice giggled.

Once they were inside the glittering ballroom all thoughts of staff and salaries disappeared. Brightly colored dresses filled the room and Alice once again smoothed down the skirts on her own green frock. Her hands were shaking and the movement stilled her nerves somewhat.

Everyone in the room was staring at them. The first bans for their marriage had been published yesterday and well-heeled ladies of the ton were talking behind their fans. Alice was sure "fortune-hunter" was the word being bandied about.

"Relax," Julian whispered in her ear. "Or we'll go upstairs and I'll give you something to be worried about. I believe your behind would protest greatly if I were to redden it again so soon after your last punishment. I'm sure Ellington has a crop I could use."

Alice shook her head vigorously. "I'm sorry."

"We'll discuss it later," Julian said. "But expect a punishment when we return home."

Carin came up and pulled her into a hug. "You look beautiful Alice. I'm so happy that you're here."

Lady Ellington patted Buxton's arm flirtatiously and then pulled Alice into the room. "Let me introduce you to some of the ladies present. They're anxious to meet you."

"You mean anxious to see who has taken a marriage prospect away from their daughters," Charlotte laughed, joining the two women.

Alice smiled and then her head swam as she was introduced to Lady this and Lady that.

"There's no way I can remember everyone," she whispered in Charlotte's ear. "Some I already know but not all of them. I never knew there were so many members of the ton."

"You'll learn the names quickly enough," Charlotte responded. "After you and Julian are wed you'll be expected to host parties and dinners. It's so much fun. You'll love it and we'll help."

When the dancing started after dinner Alice marveled at the way the young ladies of the ton flirted with the eligible men. Alice herself took to the floor with Julian and several of his friends.

She was taking a sip of lemonade when a hand on the small of her back caused her to frown.

"Mrs. Hamilton," a low voice said. "May I have the pleasure of a dance?"

Without waiting for an answer the man swept her into his arms and onto the dance floor.

"Do I know you sir?" Alice asked as she tried to follow the quick steps. They were near the garden doors and the cool breeze blew past them.

"You know of me," the man answered. "My name is MacIntosh."

Alice swallowed visibly and the man pulled her closer. "Don't make a scene Mrs. Hamilton. Just be a good girl and come with me."

MacIntosh laughed when Alice tried to push herself out of his arms when they entered the gardens. When she opened her mouth to protest a strong male hand clamped over her mouth. MacIntosh pushed her backwards into a strong chest. Arms closed around her and pulled her into the shadows.

MacIntosh followed. When he was close enough Alice looked up into blue eyes that were glittering with hate. "Your husband and his depraved friends have robbed me of a wife. Shaw has made me a laughing stock among the ton. Now I plan to rob them of their money. And you're going to help me."

Alice shook her head and body violently, trying to free herself from her captor's arms.

"Oh yes, you will. And when I have money I still plan to let everyone know about their little club. Take her to my hideaway. And don't let anyone see you. And don't harm her. I want that pleasure for myself. I have to go back inside and be seen. Until later my dear."

A foul-smelling cloth was placed over Alice's mouth as she continued to struggle. The last thought that she had before the darkness came was that she would probably never see Julian again.

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"I've checked his house and Howell's house," Barton said, as he and Cannonberry burst into the sitting room at Buxton's home. "She's not at either place."

The look on Buxton's face could have killed a man at thirty paces and Barton stepped back and gulped.

"He has to have some other residence somewhere," Essex said. "We could check deeds tomorrow..."

"NO! I want her back NOW." Julian worked to overcome the anger that was threatening to swallow him whole. "I will kill him myself if there is one wrinkle on her dress, one hair out of place."

Essex took a step forward. "We will find her Buxton. Ellington will be back soon with Celia Howell. Her performance ended about ten minutes ago. She will tell us where she and MacIntosh tryst. I'm sure that's where he is holding Alice."

Moments later Ellington slammed through the doors, a young street boy in tow.

"Celia Howell did not perform tonight," he said through clinched teeth. "But this young man helped her move clothing today from her house to a house near the Thames."

The young boy was shaking and Essex stepped in front of Buxton, who moved to storm across the room toward the cowering youth.

"Tell me where," Buxton said menacingly.

The youth sputtered and Buxton shook his head. "Just take us there. Now."

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"Do you really think that MacIntosh will marry you?" Alice continued to struggle against the ropes that held her hands captive behind the chair. "He is an Earl. You are an actress."

"Yes," Celia said, lounging against the back of the couch. "And you are a whore marrying a Lord. Or you would be marrying him, if you were still alive on the wedding day. I'm sure that Tosh has wonderful plans for your death. I hope he lets me watch."

Alice stared at the beautiful woman sitting in front of her and smiled.

"Julian won't allow that to happen. You and your friend underestimate him, and his friends."

"And you underestimate us," Celia replied with a smirk. "Tosh's name is not linked to this house. Nor is mine. Your lover will not find you here. Once we have the money on Saturday Tosh and I will leave for Scotland. Nothing will link us to your death. Or to the downfall of Buxton and his perverted little club."

The door opened and MacIntosh walked in. A frown was etched upon his face and for the first time Alice saw a crack in the smile that had lit Celia's face that evening.

"Where have you been?" Her voice was low.

"I don't have to answer to you," MacIntosh answered. "Has anything untoward happened?"

Celia shook her head. "I want to know where you have been. I want to know now!"

MacIntosh stared at her and then turned an evil smile on Alice. "Seems your future husband doesn't care about you as much as you thought. I would figure he would have found you by now. Maybe he's not even looking."

Alice shook her head and then turned her eyes on Celia. The actress seethed with anger.

"I won't be ignored," Celia shrieked. "You've been with another woman haven't you?"

"Silence!" MacIntosh screamed. "Do you think I give a damn about you? I searched you out after I found out that you had a relationship with Shaw and he threw you over for my future wife! You were the perfect way into his household. If you wish to keep breathing you will keep your mouth closed."

Celia began to cry. Long wails of anger filled the room. "Bastard! Bastard! You said you loved me! You made me watch while you killed Rogers. You insufferable whorson!"

Alice cringed as MacIntosh crossed the room and pulled Celia from the couch. He slapped her twice and then threw her back down.

"The only reason you are not dead yet is because I need you," he said, his voice like steel. "Be a good girl and I won't kill you later but I will not tolerate your current behavior. Do I make myself clear?"

Celia nodded as tears fell down her face. The actress cringed as MacIntosh pulled her up again.

"I do find you very entertaining in bed," he said loudly. "That sweet mouth makes a perfect hole for me. Should we put on a show for Mrs. Hamilton? Give a good performance and I might consider letting you live."

Alice cringed as MacIntosh began unfastening his pants. Celia shook as she followed MacIntosh's orders to get on her knees. She gave Alice a pleading look, and then turned her eyes toward her tormentor.

Alice closed her eyes and prayed for Julian to save her.

"Watch Mrs. Hamilton," MacIntosh said, his eyes fastened on Celia. "Watch how a real whore behaves."

A low noise from the doorway pulled Alice's eyes open. She sighed softly as Julian quietly stepped into the room and stopped, his keen eyes taking in the scene.

He gave Alice a smile and put his finger to his lips. Near the couch MacIntosh and Celia were so engrossed with each other that they hadn't noticed Julian's entry.

Alice watched Julian nod toward the garden doors. Essex, Ellington and Barton were partly hidden by the shadows.

Celia's yelp as MacIntosh grabbed her hair and yelled, "suck me whore," broke the silence. Julian nodded and the garden doors burst open.

Julian ran across the room and tackled MacIntosh, who struggled against the pants that were down around his ankles.

MacIntosh screamed out a name as Julian's fist came down on his face over and over and over.

"Behind you!" Alice screamed as the man who had abducted her ran into the room.

Essex and Barton tackled the man as Ellington tried to pull Buxton off MacIntosh.

"Enough Buxton! Stop!" Ellington yelled.

“Julian!” Alice’s voice stopped Buxton’s fist in midair. He sprang to his feet and pulled her up into his arms, chair and all

“Alice my love did he harm you?”

Alice shook her head and then laid it on Julian’s shoulder.

Cannonberry entered the room with police constables trailing behind him.

“He killed him!” Celia yelled out, pointing at MacIntosh. “It was him, not me!”

The constable looked confused. “Killed who?”

Buxton quickly untied Alice and then gathered her in his arms again. He kissed her repeatedly until she felt as if her lungs no longer had breath in them.

“Ellington will tell you everything,” he said to the constable. “Tell Inspector Wilcox to come to Lord Buxton’s house in the morning. Right now I am taking my fiancée home.”

Without waiting for an answer he picked Alice up into his arms and walked out of the room.

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“Amelia made a beautiful bride, didn’t she?” Alice sighed as she snuggled against Julian’s chest.

The carriage was moving slowly through the London streets toward Buxton’s house.

“She did indeed,” Julian said. “But not as beautiful as you will look in three weeks time.”

Alice snuggled down further. She felt safe in Julian’s arms. MacIntosh was to be tried for Rogers’ murder. And the best part was that Celia Howell had refused to back up his claims about blackmailing members of The Spanking Club.

“I don’t know what he’s talking about,” she’d told Inspector Wilcox the next morning. “He wanted to use a member of that circle of friends to hurt Shaw. Mrs. Hamilton was the easiest person to get to.”

Even Alice had been convinced by her performance.

“My sweet Alice needs a spanking,” Julian said as he helped her from the carriage. He pulled her closer, caressed her face and kissed her.

“Have I done something wrong?”

“No,” Julian said with a smile. “But I am in the mood to give you a rousing spanking, to remind you that you are mine.”

“Whatever you say milord.”

Julian took her hand and led her through the house into the gardens. The moonlight provided little light as they walked toward a sitting area that sat in the middle of a copse of trees.

Alice shivered in anticipation when he stopped in front of a bench.

“Over the knee first,” he said when he sat down on the stone. Without further instruction Alice placed herself across his lap.

Goosebumps rose on her behind and legs as Julian raised her skirts and bared her bum.

His hand landed on her behind swiftly and Alice cried out in surprise. It came down again and again and again and she began to squirm in delight.

“More milord. More.”

Julian chuckled. “My little spanking whore.”

Slap, slap, slap, slap. Julian varied where the slaps landed between the left and right cheeks and upper thighs.

“I like giving you a good hand spanking,” Julian said, his hand coming down again and again and again.

Alice lost track of the number of times his hand landed. She only knew that her quim was aching for attention.

“Julian,” she whispered, her voice breathy. “Take me please.”

“Not yet Alice. As I said I like hand spankings. But I also like to see you reddened by the crop. Stand up Alice.”

Alice groaned as she stood and he answered with a chuckle.

“I know what you were thinking. That I had no implement.” Julian reached under the bench and brought out the crop. He placed it under her chin and lifted her lips to his.

“I planned ahead.” His lips continued to dance around hers, landing lightly, his teeth nipping at her gently. “Thirty or so should remind you of what Alice?”

“That I belong to you Milord Julian.”

“Good my sweet. Place your hands on the bench and bend over. Make sure your legs are spread wide and count the first ten silently.”

Once she had assumed the proper position Julian against raised her skirts to bare her behind.

The first ten swats from the crop were light, almost teasing.

“Count the remainder out loud,” Julian said, bringing the crop down sharply.

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

Alice moaned as the pain increased.

“A week after the wedding you will be initiated into The Spanking Club.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“And what will that entail?” Alice’s voice was soft.

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“I will spank you in front of the entire membership.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“One hundred strokes. I think this crop will work nicely for the event.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“I can’t take that many!” The fear in Alice’s voice was almost visible.

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

“Then I guess we will have to practice often between now and then.”

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

Without being told it was thirty Julian dropped the crop. Alice sighed as she heard him undo his breeches. He entered her swiftly, his hands roaming over her reddened bottom as he thrust back and forth.

“I think a daily practice will prepare you sufficiently sweet Alice. Do you agree?”

Alice moaned as he continued to thrust. “Whatever you say Milord Julian. Whatever you say.”





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