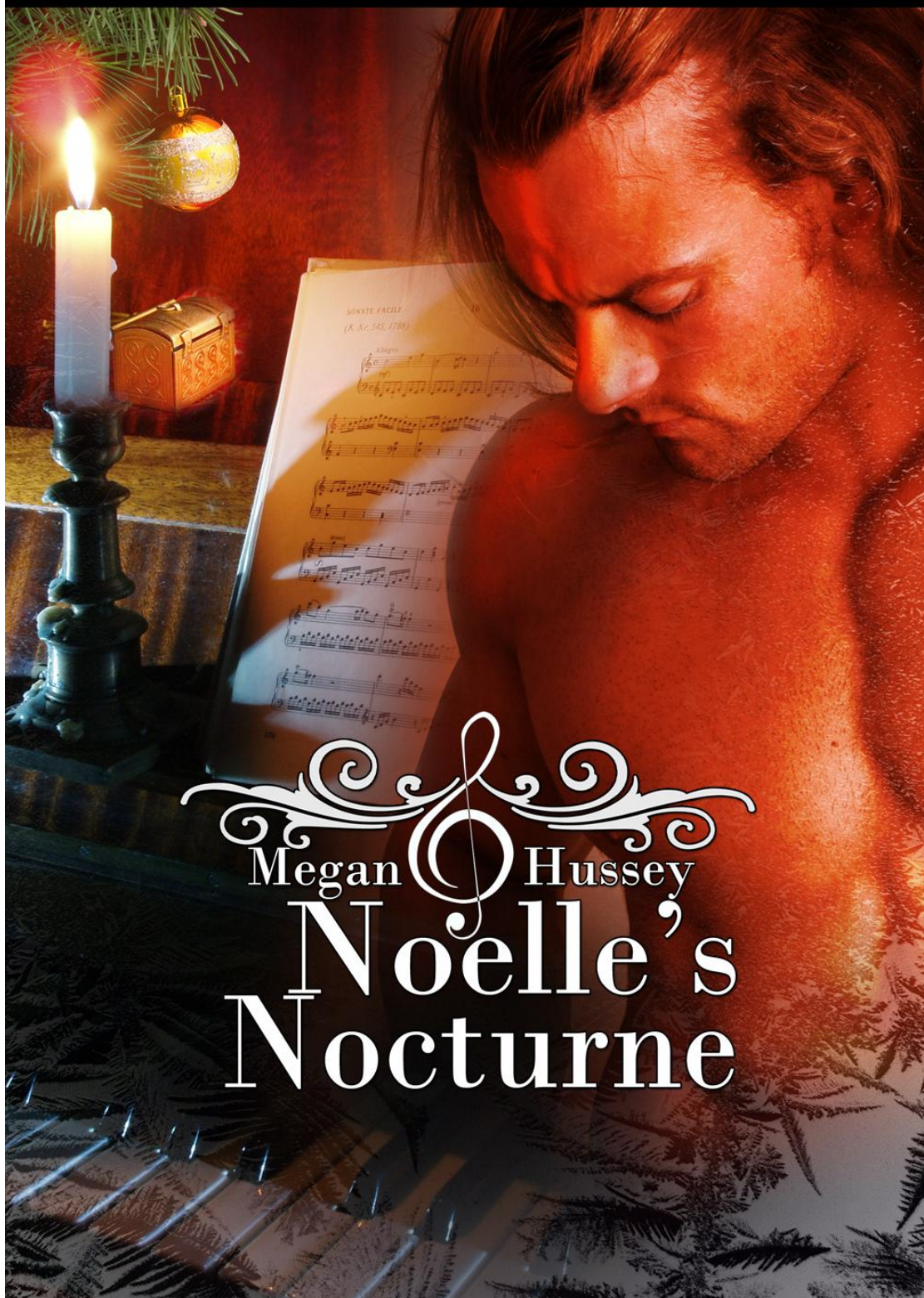


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Noelle's Nocturne

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Book Blurb

Lord Gerard is a gifted pianist who also happens to be a lord of the night. His lonely life is brightened and transformed when he meets Noelle, a plus-sized, no nonsense spinster. The two celebrate the holidays with laughter, music, and a passionate affair; yet can Noelle truly accept and love this creature of the nocturne?

Noelle's Nocturne

By Megan Hussey

London, December 1860.

At midnight, Noelle wandered far from the sanctity of her home, venturing forth into a night that both alarmed and seduced her.

Madness to leave the safety of her family's manor house at such an ungodly hour, to run through dark, rolling hills toward a clandestine destination—but she went.

"Yet speaking as a twenty-eight-year-old spinster, if the most *clandestine* thing I ever do is listen to some handsome bloke play his piano, I'd say I'm doing passing well." Gathering the fabric of her scarlet-hued skirts into two chubby hands, Noelle raced toward the grounds of a neighboring estate, headed for a multi-tiered home that glowed bronze in the light of the moon.

Ignoring the broad porches, arched windows, and tall turrets that distinguished the impressive homestead, she ran to the back of the estate, coming to an abrupt halt beneath a second-story window.

For the past four months, this remote spot had served as a retreat, of sorts, for the busy Londoner; a place where she could forget the daily stresses of her job as a seamstress and of her family life, a life she shared with an elderly aunt who watched Noelle's every move.

"If I was at home, she would be pressing me to start planning the family Christmas party." Closing her eyes, Noelle threw her head back to bask in the breeze of a chilly, London night. "She can't reach me here." And soon enough, her senses basked in an altogether different sensation.

Flowing free from the overhead window, the smooth, lilting piano music bathed her psyche, every note transporting her to another, better world.

"And if I am indeed going to venture to another, better world, he is the one I'd want to venture *with*." Her eyes flying open, Noelle stepped forward into the light

afforded by the moon above her, sneaking a forbidden glance at the man who produced such an ethereal sound.

Sitting at the bench of a mahogany piano beside the open window, the man stared with intent eyes at the keys.

"Intent" – Noelle grinned – "and obscenely blue."

While his eyes were Noelle's favorite feature, she also admired the long, blond hair that shone gold in the light of the moon, and the tall, muscled form hunched low above the piano.

Although dressed in a dark evening suit that would befit an evening out, the stranger never seemed to leave his room.

"I wish I knew your name," she murmured, her eyes devouring his flawless face as he played his lonesome ballad.

Although she never saw the stranger at a tea or a ball, he was a frequent topic of conversation among her neighbors in the ton – socialites who wondered why such a wealthy, handsome man lived alone in his manor house, never venturing out to mingle in society.

"Oh, he's been seen at a house party or two." Noelle pursed her lips in thought. "Never in the light of day, though."

Adjusting her spectacles, she took a long, last look at the object of her wonder. Then, wiping an errant snowflake from an auburn curl that hung just over her forehead, she turned to leave.

She froze, seconds later, at the sight of three tall figures gathered on the hill behind her. All bore large stones and menacing stares and looks directed toward the angelic man whose song filled the night around them.

Feeling strangely protective of the beguiling stranger, Noelle advanced up the snowy hill with fists clenched.

"Who are you and what do you think you are doing?"

Her grimace dissolved as one of the figures stepped forward into the light, revealing a boyish face and an expression riddled with something akin to fear.

"Cousin Eli?" Noelle shook her head. "What in the blazes are you doing here?"

Eli gritted his teeth, pulling the folds of his sable grey coat tight around his slight form.

"I'm sorry, Cousin Noelle." The 16-year-old boy shuffled his feet. "My friends and I were told the son of the devil lives here." He hoisted his rock upward, aiming it for the open window. "He's evil, and we have to scare him away from our city."

He swore outright as Noelle tackled him, grabbing the rock from his grasp, and pinning his hands behind his back.

"This gentleman has never done harm to anyone!" She looked up to see Eli's "fearless" co-conspirators running from the scene, screaming with terror. "Why do you trouble him?"

"I'm sorry, Cousin Noelle." Breaking away from her, Eli raised conciliatory hands between them. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I do," Noelle blurted out, then wondered at her own lie.

Eli fixed her with a speculative look. "Fine, Cousin, in the interest of some jolly ol' Christmas spirit we'll leave your friend alone," he turned to walk away, adding over his shoulder, "As a frolic, though, you might ask to see his fangs sometime."

Noelle gaped, watching speechless as Eli rushed after his friends.

"And for me, speechlessness is a strange state indeed." Noelle cocked her head.

She gaped more still, a moment later, when the piano music flowing from the window above her abruptly subsided, replaced, strangely enough, with a round of applause.

With wide eyes, she turned toward the source of the sound, coming face to face with the object of her intense curiosity and her desire.

Her heart pounded as she stared into the wide, azure eyes that shone like gems in the night, accenting a flawless, sculpted face and reams of golden hair.

A sweet smile completed the picture, making more than just her heart pound. Indeed, a few of her more private parts were getting some long overdue exercise as well.

"Bravo, Madame." He inclined his head in her direction. "My brave, beautiful rescuer."

Grinning in spite of herself, Noelle stepped forward to get a better look at her apparent admirer.

"Brave, I am. Beautiful, not so much, at least, not in the eyes of the ton." Her gaze raked the beauty of her host, taking note of his tall, muscled form. "I apologize for my cousin's foolish actions."

"He's a site more than foolish, I daresay." The man stared after the retreating boys with a furrowed brow. "He could have hurt me with that rock."

Noelle nodded.

"I know, and I'm so sorry." She bit her lip. "Of course, I owe you an apology as well. I have no business trespassing." She tore her gaze away from him and turned on her heel. "I'll bother you no more."

"Wait!"

She froze at the stranger's insistent tone.

"The night is young, my lady. And you are no longer a trespasser. You are my visitor."

Turning slowly, Noelle sucked in a breath as she saw the sweet invitation apparent in the stranger's eyes.

"You'd like me to come in the house?" She shook her head. "No, I couldn't possibly, not at this late hour. It would be unseemly." She nodded with certainty as she turned away. "I bid you good night, sir."

With that, Noelle raced into the sanctity of darkness, never to return

Not for a week, at least. The following days proved stressful ones for the busy seamstress, who faced a multitude of orders for holiday party dresses and winter coats. And when she wasn't sewing, she was preparing menu and decorations for her Aunt Tillie's Christmas party.

"If I have to tie one more bloody pine bough" She grumbled one evening, closing her eyes and leaning against the gold brocade fabric of her aunt's sitting room

couch.

Soon, her familiar surroundings dissolved, giving way to an ethereal dreamscape that seized her imagination. All she saw was golden hair and sweet blue eyes, and an even sweeter smile; all she heard were the powerful tones of a stirring piece, played with precision on a grand piano.

Suddenly, her eyes flew open, and she walked in a dreamlike trance toward the front door and escaped once again into the darkness of night. In a matter of moments, she stood beneath the stranger's window.

"This is madness." She chided herself, shutting her eyes as her senses filled with a soft, vibrant song.

For a time, she reveled in the sensual rhythm of some sweet night music. Her heart raced; her body swayed; sweat broke out across her brow.

The sensation, although heavenly, proved momentary. She froze as the music abruptly ceased, leaving an uneasy silence that made her cheeks flush.

"May I at least know the name of my sole audience member?"

The deep, sensual voice penetrated her psyche, stiffening her spine as her eyes flew open.

"My beautiful dancer?" He added.

Again, she came face to face with the source of her temptation – the nameless stranger who filled her dreams.

Dressed this evening in a burgundy coat and smart, brown pantaloons, he greeted Noelle with a sexy smile.

"Tell me your name, dear lady."

"Why? So you can report me to the constable for trespassing?" She gritted her teeth.

The stranger sighed.

"I told you, Madame, you are my rescuer. You are more than welcome here," he said. "Just please, tell me who you are."

Noelle turned away, throwing her last words over her shoulder as she retreated

up the hill.

"I'm Noelle Canturbury." She tossed out a rush of frenzied words that—to her ears, at least—made little semblance of sense. "You play sublimely and are simply too gorgeous. I bid you good night."

* * * * *

One week later.

As usual, Noelle occupied her favorite chair in her aunt's sitting room, hard at work on a gold lamé dress as the clock struck midnight.

This room, with its lace curtains, upholstered seats, and rainbow-colored floral arrangements, had proved her refuge in the past week, a place where she could settle her senses and concentrate on the duties at hand.

Doing her work, she reasoned, was not as exciting as flirting with a mysterious lord.

"Not that sewing the perfect seam isn't anything short of intoxicating." She shrugged. "Still, in the overall scheme of things, the golden-haired pianist ranks higher."

Even so, she mused, her work was something she knew and understood, unlike the man who inspired forbidden sensations that kept her awake at night.

"Blast those forbidden sensations." She struggled to focus on the task at hand, jumping when a tap at the front door disrupted her efforts.

"Who could it be at this hour?" She rose from the couch, crossed the room, and stared out the stained glass window that distinguished her front door.

"No one there." She frowned in confusion, unlocking and opening her door.

Her gaze, somehow summoned to the ground before her, beheld a vibrant bouquet of dew-glistened roses, divine florals, whose scarlet hue and sweet scent stirred her senses.

Stooping to retrieve the bouquet, she saw a note attached to a thorny stem; an

elegantly penned missive read: *Sweet Noelle, it seems you need a written invitation to step into my domicile. Well, here it is. Please come to my home tomorrow evening for a private concert performed in your honor. Yours, the Gorgeous Insomniac Pianist.*

Grabbing a nearby coat and scoffing, Noelle scooped up the invitation, leaving the flowers at the door as she ventured into the night.

"I'm ending this madness tonight," she said, making fast tracks up the hill.

Soon, she stood once again beneath the stranger's window, fixing him with an assessing stare.

"I thank you for the flowers." Her rebellious gaze scanned the length of his muscled, flawless form, seated, as usual, on the cushioned bench of his mahogany piano. "Even so, I'm not sure that I should venture unescorted into your bedroom."

"Just think of it as a concert hall." He motioned toward the piano, then swept his fingers across the keys, producing a light, airy sound that lifted Noelle's spirits.

"Well, as you know, I do love to hear you play." She nodded, smiling in spite of herself. "I guess I could stay a few moments."

"I insist." The man motioned toward a ground-level door. "The servant's quarters should be open. I shall meet you upstairs." He charmed her with a gracious bow. "By the way, I go by Lord Gerard."

* * * * *

Soon, Noelle sat on a floral settee, basking in the midst of a Victorian paradise. Above her hung a crystal chandelier, complete with glowing candles, and a vaulted ceiling adorned with a painting of angels in repose. Before her was a feather bed with a silken comforter and lacy pillows, overseen in grand fashion by a sheer lace canopy.

Beside her sat the man of her fantasy. Gerard's long, golden hair flowed in ringlets across his sturdy shoulders, framing a face with carved cheekbones and full lips.

And there are those blasted eyes again. Noelle beamed as he graced her with his

azure gaze; she didn't resist when he took her hand in his.

"Do not fear me, miss." He kissed her hand in a gallant fashion. "I mean you no harm." He shrugged, pinning her with a boyish grin. "I just had to get to know the spirited beauty who saved my life."

"What would you like to know?" It was Noelle's turn to shrug. "As I told you, my name is Noelle Canturbury, and I am a seamstress by trade. I live with my aunt in a manor house on the other side of the hill."

"A Canturbury." Gerard nodded with approval. "Your father was an industrialist, was he not?"

Noelle smiled, picturing the friendly faces of her departed parents, Helmond and Francine.

"My parents worked side by side at a number of business ventures, and they involved their only daughter as much as possible." She beamed at the memory. "They always told me I could be and do whatever I desired."

Gerard clapped her back.

"That's wonderful." His voice was full of praise. "I never understood those fools who tried to stifle women." He made her tremble with a gaze both warm and admiring. "And from what I've heard, you make beautiful frocks."

"Thank you." Noelle fingered the golden threads of her sleek, scarlet dress, a velvet effort with shiny buttons and a flowing train. "I dressed my grandmother for the last cotillion of the summer season."

"Ah, but you didn't go yourself." Gerard stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I know; I've never seen you at any balls or cotillions." He charmed her with a sexy wink. "I would have remembered you, darling."

Startled by his familiarity, Noelle sat back on the settee.

"I haven't willingly gone to a ball in three years." She looked away, focusing on a blazing, stone-mantled fireplace in the corner of the room. "I grew weary of forcing a smile for the benefit of snobbish lords who overlook me anyway, in favor of younger, thinner misses who hang on their every word." She rolled her eyes. "To sod with all of

them. I'll stay home and do what I love."

"Bravo!" Gerard applauded her. "To hell with the ton. A bunch of gossiping hens, the lot of them." He paused, regarding her with intense eyes. "I fail to understand, though, how those lords could neglect such an enchanting woman."

Noelle had heard enough.

"Come now, you barely know me." She pursed her lips. "And I know nothing of you, only some people say —" She fell silent, fumbling for the right words.

Gerard rolled his eyes.

"You heard that I'm the son of the devil." He yawned, revealing as he did a razor sharp set of ivory white fangs. "Yes, yes, I get that one a lot."

Gaping, Noelle jumped from the settee, shaking her head in sheer disbelief.

"It's true," she whispered, regarding Gerard's fangs with wide eyes.

Instantly, she recovered, forcing a small smile for her host's benefit as she turned for the door.

"It's been lovely talking with you, but I fear I must go," she told him, her steps quickening with every second. "I bid you good evening, sir."

Casting a cautious glance over her shoulder, she froze, watching a sad frown cross his otherwise flawless features.

"Very well, miss." He waved her away. "I did hope you'd be different from the others, that at least you'd give me a chance." With a resigned sigh, he returned to his piano bench. "I see I was mistaken. I bid you good night."

Rolling her eyes, Noelle crossed the room, plopped down on the bench beside him, and folded her arms before her.

"Does that line work on all the chits, milord?" She cocked a curious eyebrow. "Go ahead, then. Tell me how you got the malicious molars."

Gerard guffawed outright.

"It's so rare to meet a lady of the ton with such incredible spirit." He squeezed her shoulder.

Noelle raised her hand to cover his, then drew back as she felt a white-hot

current pass between them. The touch of his skin seared her senses, making her heart pound and her clitoris throb.

And he felt it too. She knew this as she stared into his eyes and recognized an undeniable spark that betrayed his deep desire.

Without a word, he raised his hand to stroke her hair, leaning toward her until their lips were dangerously close.

This is madness. Noelle bit her lip, fighting the wave of sharp desire that assailed her with full force. *I know so little about him, except for the fact that he's insanely gorgeous and, well, there are those infernal fangs, of course . . .*

Aloud she breathed, "Who did this to you, Gerard?"

Dropping his hand, he met her words with a deep sigh.

"Five years ago, Noelle, I was a prince of the ton." He smiled slightly at the memory. "A duke, more specifically, part of a wealthy London family that served the crown and ruled the social scene. I danced at every party, romanced every lady –"

"All right, I won't be needing anymore details about that part," Noelle interrupted, cheeks heating furiously.

"Sorry, my lady." He graced her with a playful nudge. "As it happens, though, my rakish ways are integral to my story, as they landed me in great trouble." His head bowed low above his keyboard. "One night, I bedded the wrong woman, and she changed my life forever."

Noelle grasped his hand, sensing his distress.

"I have heard rumors, whispered among the ton, about a strange woman who was making the rounds at our balls and parties last year. A countess with violent tendencies." She kept her tone low and comforting. "A bachelor uncle of mine took her out for the evening, and although she did no permanent harm to him, he refused to speak of the evening they shared, or to spend another moment in her presence." She shrugged. "He did say she was beautiful, which is all that seems to matter to most gentlemen."

Gerard shook his head.

"That's not true, Noelle." He cringed in spite of himself. "That woman's 'beautiful' face curses my dreams to this day. She took from me my life."

Noelle stared at him, confused.

"Aside from the fangs, you look marvelous," she blurted, then cringed at the sound of her awkward sentiment. "So" – she went on quickly – "did this woman bite you?"

She jumped as Gerard brought his fist down hard on the piano.

"She murdered me!" His blue eyes flashed. "With one bite, she drank my life's essence, transforming me forever." Leaning forward, he impaled Noelle with his gaze. "After that creature was through with me, I could not venture out into the light of day, for fear my skin would burn. I cannot eat normal food. I cannot see my own reflection."

Though Noelle maintained her strong hold on Gerard's hand, she edged away from him on the bench. "I have heard stories such as yours before, legends whispered amongst the ton. So I fear I must ask you" – she drew a deep, sustaining breath – "Gerard, do you drink blood?"

Gerard shocked her with the release of a deep, sharp chortle.

"Aside from red wine and the occasional rare steak, I avoid scarlet refreshment." His tone sounded assuring. "I'm not that variety of vampire, dearest."

"Forgive my ignorance" – she stroked her chin thoughtfully – "but just how many varieties exist?"

She took in her breath as he swung toward her, searing her with a sultry stare.

"I, my lady, am a vampire of the incubus." His voice lowered to a seductive whisper. "I seek my nourishment from the sensual satisfaction of women." He accentuated his words with a wicked grin. "The better she feels, Noelle, the better I feel."

Noelle closed her eyes as erotic shockwaves coursed through her entire being. Sweat broke out across her brow as her pulse pounded, and her pussy gushed; suddenly, she desired this man more than words could say.

And blast, if he didn't notice.

"Just relax and let it happen, my lady." He slipped his arms around her waist,

pulling her close to him. "I know you are a maiden, so let me do everything." His feather-soft hair brushed against her chest as his hands caressed her back. "Everything . . . for your pleasure." He growled the last words, bringing her desire to a fevered pitch.

She did not resist as he gathered her to him and covered her mouth with his. With smooth strokes, his lips massaged hers; his tongue snuck forth to tangle.

For a moment, she succumbed to the feeling of her raw desire, clinging to his muscular chest as his kiss romanced and seduced her. Taking a deep breath, she made a last, valiant effort to fight temptation.

"Wait, wait." Painfully, she pulled away, avoiding his gaze, even as her hands braced his massive shoulders. "You still haven't told me what brought you here." She leaned her head on his shoulder. "Just don't go back anytime soon."

A chuckling Gerard nestled her neck.

"Sadly, Noelle, my family could not accept what I'd become. They asked me to vacate the family manor and find a new home. I've been alone here ever since, with nothing but my music to keep me company." He planted his fingers on her arms, searing her with an imploring gaze. "I don't want to be alone, Noelle. Please stay with me tonight."

Noelle put her hand to her mouth, overwhelmed by both his blatant seduction and her own rampant yearnings.

"This goes against everything I've been raised to believe" — she spoke more to herself than to him — "and to do."

"And by God I'll make it feel fantastic." Gerard growled, tossing his sleek, leonine hair over one shoulder and crooking his finger in her direction. "Just tell me what you want, Noelle." He took her hand and rubbed it between his own. "Tell me how I can fulfill your deepest, most secret desires."

Noelle thought a moment, then nodded decisively.

"Fair enough." She assumed a matter-of-fact tone. "I have thought of something."

* * * * *

Moments later, Gerard pounded away on the keys of his piano, a pained expression on his face. "I'll gladly do as my lady bids." He bowed to Noelle. "Even so, this isn't what I had in mind, dear."

Noelle didn't answer, only closed her eyes and smiled, as Gerard's song bathed and enticed her senses.

"You do love to hear me play, don't you?" Gerard's agile fingers continued to deliver a seamless melody. "I compose original pieces, all in the nocturne style."

"Nocturnes." Noelle smothered a grin. "How appropriate." She sobered as Gerard's lilting notes continued to lull her senses. "You play beautifully, Gerard."

Pausing, he turned away from the keyboard and took her hands in his, kissing her upturned palms.

"My music brought you to me," he whispered, cupping her cheeks and planting sweet, baby kisses across her flushed face.

"It did." Noelle threw her head back, basking in his attentions. "Your music makes me feel like I'm in a dream." He took in his breath as she gave him a smile of sweet invitation. "Complete the dream, Gerard. Make love to me."

"Thought you'd never ask, my lady." Sweeping her up in his arms, he plied her trembling lips with a warm, sweet kiss, his tongue coaxing and massaging, as his hands followed suit.

He laid her across the cushioned piano bench, and peeled away his jacket and shirt, revealing a massive, bronzed chest and sculpted abs. His pantaloons came off next; soon, he stood naked in the moonlight that flowed through a nearby window.

He likened an angel in heavenly glow, his golden hair and gem blue eyes glowing in this light.

He stood still for a moment, allowing Noelle's admiring gaze to devour every inch of him.

"Enjoy love," he whispered. "Everything you see is yours."

He frowned, moments later, as her smile dissolved, and her body shifted on the

seat.

"What is it, darling?" Kneeling to her side, Gerard hugged her to him.

"It's just that . . ." Noelle bit her lip. "You're so . . . so large." She motioned toward his shaft. "I'm not exactly a young maid; I can hold my own, thank you very much. Even so, I'm not the most experienced, and all this is a bit overwhelming"

A smiling Gerard slipped his finger across her cherry lips, then kissed those lips with kindness and care.

"Relax, my sweet." His tone was low and hypnotic. "Make no mistake, I can't wait to be inside you. That will come with time." Moving to the opposite side of the bench, he bowed at her feet and shot her a look that screamed pure seduction. "For now, my only wish is to excite you, girl. Beyond all thought or reason."

Slowly, he stripped off her slippers and stockings, edging her skirts above her knees and taking her foot in his hand. She sighed as he licked and suckled her toes, murmuring in invitation as he slipped off her knickers and nibbled her knees and thighs.

His tender ministrations sent chills up her spine, a feeling he enhanced when he leaned between her legs and blew softly across her nether curls.

"Oh, Gerard!" She gasped. "I'm about to explode."

"Then do allow me to relieve you." He purred, ducking his head and laying a resounding lick across her feminine folds.

She opened eagerly for him, trembling as he kissed and licked her soaking nub. Fixing his full, moist mouth around her femininity, he continued to suckle her as his tickling fingers played her thighs.

Noelle threw her head back, savoring the building pressure that seized her privates, spreading upward to bring her nipples to hard, erect peaks. Beads of sweat layered her brow as he continued to devour her; lost in a haze of ecstasy, she arched her back to give him greater access.

Seizing this intimate offer, he brushed the tips of his sharpened fangs across the surface of her clit, eliciting from her a squeal of approval.

"That's it, love, enjoy it." He reached up and caressed her breasts through the surface of her corset. With a long, last lick, he sent her hurdling across the bounds of ecstasy; her body exploded in the throes of her first climax.

With a startled cry, she fell from the piano bench, landing in Gerard's arms. Her body shook and quaked from the effects of this intense pleasure; she barely noticed when he swept her up in his arms and carried her to his bed.

She definitely noticed, a moment later, when he tossed her body in the satin sheets of his feathered, mattress. With a girlish giggle, she wriggled in the depths of the soft, slick sheets, staring with wide eyes at the lavender lace canopy that oversaw his bed.

Soon enough, her vision was filled with another ethereal spectacle: the sight of a muscled, golden Gerard as he hovered above the bed.

"Tonight is yours, my love." His divine, deep voice penetrated her ecstatic haze. "I'll do anything for your pleasure."

He covered her body with his, sweeping her into his arms and pulling her closer than close. She clung to his shoulders to bring him even closer, basking in the feel of his hard chest, his long, trim legs as they tangled with hers, and his mouth, as he kissed and suckled her breasts.

"This is heavenly, Gerard." She ran her hands through his long, blond hair as she bucked her hips, coming into contact with the hard length of his stiff shaft. "I want you inside me."

Gerard took her hands in his and kissed them fiercely, all the while, gyrating against her.

"I plan to make this good for you, my lady." He kissed her lips, consuming her in a warm hug as their hips and thighs locked. "You will know no pain. Only pleasure."

He devoured her with a passionate kiss, softly shifting his lips against hers as his hands massaged her breasts and rounded tummy.

"So beautiful," he said, cupping her femininity as she sighed with delight. "Let me show you just how beautiful you are, darling."

Slipping two agile but gentle fingers in the midst of her tight sheath, he pressed and probed his way along her vaginal wall, creating a slick wetness that prepared her for things to come.

Cradling her in his arms, Gerard positioned himself between her legs and planted sweet kisses on her cheeks and neck. Then he held her gaze as his long, hard cock merged in full to the depths of her sleek, wet pussy that contracted tightly as she took in her breath.

He cringed as her face contorted in pain, and quickly rubbed his fingers against her nub, as if seeking to create a pleasurable sensation that would mask her discomfort.

Noelle moaned seconds later, and not from pain; Gerard's erotic touch, combined with the gentle, probing movements of his cock, produced a feeling of divine oneness that drove her insane. Throwing her head back, she released a savage growl, her fingernails raking the length of his back as she jarred her hips against his. Their chest and hips also bound, producing a delicious friction that drove them over the edge.

Gerard voiced an inhuman howl as he plunged within her, pumping her as their hands joined and their gazes locked. With a final surge of erotic energy, they came together. When Gerard climaxed, Noelle saw the odd darkness that filled his eyes, and the way his fangs lengthened in the wake of his fulfillment.

Still, she knew not to fear him, especially, when they collapsed together in sweet, satin sheets, rolling together across the bed as they shared a passionate kiss.

Moments later, they rested easy in one another's arms, sharing intimate whispers that filled the air above them.

"I thank you, my lady." He kissed her forehead. "I've been so lonesome here, for so long." He brushed a stray curl from her cheek. "You've filled my heart tonight."

"Ah, and you've filled me as well" — Noelle chuckled — "most literally." More seriously, she added, "Gerard, I'm just as much a creature of the night as you are. I have my lonely moments. I'm definitely misunderstood." She shrugged. "Only somehow it doesn't trouble me much. I live as I please, I do as I like" She brushed her fingers across his lips. "And now, finally, I've found someone to share with."

"I feel like I've known you forever," he said, pulling her closer to him. "I want to spend more time with you, Noelle. I want you to come back here, every night, if you can." He charmed her with a shy grin. "Noelle, dear, would you fancy spending Christmas Eve with me?"

"I'd love to Gerard." Noelle hugged him.

* * * * *

Two weeks later.

The eve of Christmas found Noelle at the home of Lord Gerard; though, this time, she entered through the front door, where the lord promptly issued her up the stairs and to his boudoir.

"Your gift is up here." He winked over his shoulder.

"I'll just bet." Noelle rolled her eyes.

Soon, she stood before the fireplace in Gerard's bedroom, facing a lavish Victorian Christmas tree that stole her breath.

A fine spruce bedecked with silk pink ribbons, the tree also boasted floral fans, lush strings of silver and gold garland, and ornaments that ranged from a ball of red velvet to a whimsical toy soldier.

"It's beautiful." Noelle breathed the words, adding over her shoulder to a beaming Gerard, "The only thing it lacks is the presence of gifts."

Her lover took the gift Noelle had brought with her — a long box wrapped in silver foil — from her hands and motioned for her to sit beside the fireplace.

"I have two gifts for you, my dear." Taking a seat on his piano bench, Gerard made quick work of the foil wrapper and opened the white box that lie beneath it.

"Neither, I'm sad to report, fit under the tree."

He fell silent as he beheld his gift, a lush evening coat of azure silk, lined with black buttons and complete with a velvet collar.

"Noelle" He ran his fingers across the fabric in long, loving strokes. "Did you make this for me?"

Noelle nodded.

"I worked on the coat day and night, to have it ready for Christmas." She smiled. "I especially love the fabric; it matches your eyes."

Those eyes filled with tears as Gerard donned the coat, languishing in its softness.

"I'll treasure it always," he told Noelle, "but not as much as I treasure you."

Turning toward his piano, he placed his fingers on the keys.

"This is my first gift to you, my lady." He nodded toward Noelle. "I call this piece 'Noelle's Nocturne.'"

Soon, Noelle was lost in a seamless melody, a series of notes that flowed beautifully together in tribute to her. Every tone, every cadence, resounded its perfection, leaving her breathless.

Noelle greeted the end of the song with mad applause and then open arms.

"Come here, you brilliant man." She wiped away some errant tears as he came to stand before her. "No need to worry about a second gift, darling. The first was beautiful."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll love this one as well." Searing her with a sultry gaze, Gerard stripped off his smart, blue coat and tossed it onto the floor.

"Now wait just a moment!" Noelle gestured toward the coat. "I worked well and hard to make that. You may wish to be more careful —"

Her objections were silenced when he took off his shirt, revealing his bronzed chest and flawless abdomen. Holding her gaze, he stripped away his sleek black pants, revealing the package far too big to fit beneath a Christmas tree.

Making quick work of her dress, a self-made frock of rich, pink satin with lace cuffs, Noelle then launched herself into Gerard's arms. They clung to one another in the light of the fire, their bodies merging in a radiant whole as they kissed with deep passion.

With gentle hands, Gerard laid Noelle across the length of his ivory carpet, kissing his way up her stomach and over her breasts as he settled between her legs.

She sighed with delight as he nibbled her neck, feeling the gentle brush of his sharpened fangs as they grazed her sensitive skin. Her hungry hands massaged his back, drawing her to him as she wrapped her legs around his trim waist.

Growling his desire, Gerard pressed their bodies together and captured her lips, engaging her in a heated kiss. Soon, their tongues joined in a smooth tango, and the rest of their bodies following suit. With a labored breath, Gerard penetrated her, his cock surging into her pussy as the fire blazed beside them.

Noelle's own fire blazed within, singeing every inch of her body as Gerard moved within her. For just a moment, they parted and stared into one another's eyes; he gave Noelle a tender smile that showed his ivory fangs.

She'd never seen anything more beautiful.

"Merry Christmas, Gerard." She kissed his sweet lips.

"Merry Christmas, my lady." He pulled her to him. "My thanks to you for bringing some light to the life of the dark lord." He looked deep into her eyes. "And by the way, I do love you."

~The End~

About the Author

Megan Hussey is a feminist erotica author known for writing paranormal-based fantasy romances and for her leadership of the Playgirl Posse, a group that supports Playgirl, PlaygirlTV, as well as the concept of quality erotica for women. You can learn more about Megan online at <http://goldenmuse@tripod.com>

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If you enjoyed Noelle's Nocturne, you might also like the following book from Megan Hussey and Noble Romance Publishing:

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