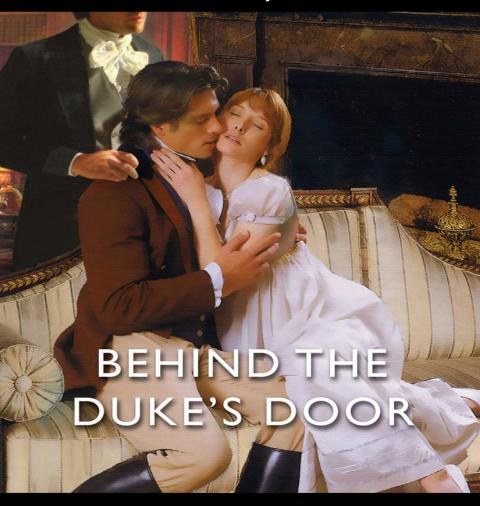
Lynne Silver



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Behind the Duke's Door

Lynne Silver



On her wedding day, Lady Elizabeth Fentworthy knows that while Harry Reedburn, Duke of Walthingburn, is marrying her, his kisses are reserved for his lover, Arthur. Their convenient marriage will save Elizabeth from becoming an old maid and give Harry an heir—though their wedding *night* does not go as planned….

Harry needs Arthur to become aroused—and Elizabeth feels an unexpected desire seeing the two men together. Is adding Arthur to their marriage bed the key to unleashing the passion they need?

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CHAPTER ONE

Ominous rain clouds hovered, but did not dare break over London on Lady Elizabeth Fentworthy's wedding day. Her mother forbade it. The sky stayed dry and Saint James Church hosted its nattily dressed occupants with its usual venerable standards. After all, it was not every day a firmly on-the-shelf old maid of twenty-two married the catch of the season, the sixth duke of Walthingburn, Harry Reedburn.

Lady Elizabeth stood, knees shaking, in front of the large crowd and looked up at her new husband's handsome face. He didn't notice.

He was too busy scanning the room for his own lover, Arthur.

She passed a discreet glance around the room also. Ah, there he was. "Fifth row from the back on the right side,†she whispered under her breath to Harry. As the third son of the earl of Mayhue, poor Arthur could not be seated toward the front of the church. Her mother reserved those seats for the very highest levels in the ton.

Harry responded with an easy grin at her that had the romantics in the audience pressing lacy handkerchiefs to their eyes and sighing about young love. Elizabeth wished for a hankie herself, because she was the sole occupant of the room, save Arthur and her brother, who knew that while Harry's grins were for her, his kisses were for Arthur.

What had she signed herself on for? When this past February Harry had suggested a marriage between them, she'd agreed with her eyes wide open, but now she stood in church and felt the lie pressing in on her soul. She'd recited her vows in a daze and barely heard Harry do the same. He'd pecked her on the cheek, a fitting dignified ducal kiss, and now he placed her hand on his brocade coat sleeve and she put one foot in front of the other to the exit of the church.

She saw her brother's gaze on her and sent him a consoling smile he'd see right through. *lâ*€™*m fine. Worry about yourself.* He'd no doubt be in Harry's position in a few years' time, with a false bride. She stepped past her family and smiled blindly at the rows of well-wishers and gawkers. The vast room was a sea of stone dotted with brightly colored hats and flowers. Cheers and good wishes passed through the pews and bounced off her like coins in a fountain. She felt numb to anything save her own thoughts.

One person's gaze managed to penetrate her fog; Lady Violet Blackstone sat near the back, malice dripping from her false smile. Elizabeth raised a brow at the overdecorated girl wearing a violet hat and gown of the same shade, her signature look. A fashion affectation unbecoming in a fellow debutante. Giddiness washed through Elizabeth as she realized she'd never again have to sit on the side of a ballroom listening to Violet's snide and cutting remarks hidden in the guise of

witticisms.

It hadn't always been this way. Two seasons ago, both girls had debuted and

became more bitter and hostile. Elizabeth's marriage to the Elusive Duke must be the icing on the cake, and Violet now saw her as an enemy.

She turned away, but not before Violet's seat companion tossed her a wink and a snide smile. Elizabeth narrowed her eyes at the young man. Did she know him? Oh, yes, that was Michael Finchley, Harry's heir. Harry must have seen the wink also, for he hurried his step to block her view of his cousin, and bodily pulled her away

supported each other through the endless torture of holding up pillars and potted plants, while waiting for an invitation to waltz. But as the years progressed, Violet

from Finchley and "Lady Violent,†as she'd been dubbed for slapping one too many maids,

Harry pulled his bride along till they stumbled out the church doors and into the gray, muggy day. His magnificent, glossy black coach stood waiting steps away, six

matched bays stamping and sweating in the unusual spring heat.

"Up you go,†Harry said, launching her into the carriage with all the delicacy of a child throwing a ball.

"Oof,†she gasped as she landed on the plush cushions. Burgundy fabric

swathed the seats and walls of the sumptuous carriage. Thick, leaded glass bedecked with ivory curtains allowed plenty of light into the carriage. She slid over to make room as Harry followed her up into the enclosed space, crushing the train of her wedding gown.

"Right, sorry †bout that,†he told her.

Trust him to detect a detail like that. She'd once danced an entire set with a suitor who'd caught his sleeve button on the lace of her dress and did not notice till the set ended and he tore her gown in his exit. Luckily, a maid in the ladies' retiring room had been able to repair the damage. No detail like that would escape

Harry's attention. He prided himself on his first-in-stare appearance; it would take some effort and several hours per day to keep up with her dandyish new husband. No matter; it was worth it. Becoming the duchess of Walthingburn and escaping the snickers and pitying glances were worth any amount of trouble. She promised herself a trip to the best modiste as soon as possible. Harry had given her a chance to

escape the stares and whispers of the ton. She'd repay him by molding herself into the perfect duchess.

"Arthur's going to meet us at the wedding breakfast.â€

She smiled and nodded at this bit of superfluous news, and leaned over to pat Harry's hand. "It was a lovely ceremony.â€

"Do you think we accomplished our goal?†Inbred arrogance threaded his voice with just a touch of hesitation.

She nodded. "Everyone seemed convinced. Lady Hesterbridge even unbent

She nodded. "Everyone seemed convinced. Lady Hesterbridge even unbent enough to offer her felicitations on landing you, the Elusive Duke.â€

He grimaced slightly at her reference to his popular nickname circling Society, but squeezed her hand between his. "Have I thanked you today for doing this?â€

"No, but you did three times yesterday and once last week.â€

He smiled and met her eyes. "As soon as I have an heir, you'II be free to

go find your own Arthur.â€ She smiled at his promise to release her from the tight strictures of marital fidelity. Slightly wasted on a virgin, really, but appreciated nonetheless. A frisson of fear at the

actual heir-making rattled through her bones. "Harry, how will it work?â€

lovers for you.â€

She felt a blush crawl from her forehead down to her mostly exposed bosom. Drat this new fashion for low-cut gowns. "l meant how will the heir-making work? I understand from my brother and his proclivities that you won't be interested in me

"Just like we discussed. Once you give me an heir, Art and I will vet potential

in your…your bed. So how…?†She trailed off, waving her hand between the two of them, sure the coach would explode into flames from the heat generated from her cheeks. He looked momentarily disconcerted, and then shrugged. "l haven't

figured out all the details yet.†A smile lit up his face. "l have an idea. Come here.†As he spoke, he reached over to pluck her off the carriage seat and onto his long, lean lap. Surprise had her reaching and grasping for a handhold. Her hands found his

shoulders and dug into the surprisingly warm, taut muscles filling out his coat. Before she could react to the unfamiliar strength and scent of a man holding her, his lips pressed into hers. A shocked gasp escaped her, and then she leaned into him, eager to fully experience her first kiss.

His clove scent invaded her and expensive brandy laced his breath. When his tongue pushed into her mouth, the bold liquor taste grew stronger. She allowed him his libertiesâ€"after all, he was her husband. And besides, he seemed to be an

excellent kisser. Some of her married friends indiscreetly confided the indignity of kisses their husbands pressed upon their persons. Drooling tongues, sharp teeth. lck. Elizabeth pulled herself back from these intruding thoughts and refocused on Harry.

around his broad shoulders. She slid her tongue closer to his and they engaged in this most fascinating of dances. Her breasts felt shockingly tight and heavy. When he reached one finger into the bodice of her gown and flicked a pebbled nipple, she

Hesitantly, she followed his lead, then grew more bold, daring to wrap her arms

pulled back in shock. His expression mirrored the way she felt. Harry gave her a wry smile as he lifted her off his lap onto the seat next to him.

"Damn me. Never felt that before.â€

Elizabeth lifted a brow at him, and then giggled when he gestured to her breasts.

"You seem to have a lovely pair, but then l'm no connoisseur, seeing how

those are my first and probably last set.â€

Gales of laughter erupted out of her despite the embarrassment and residual tinge of arousal coursing through her. "Oh, Harry, you sweetheart. You don't need to

pretend for my sake. I know you love Arthur.â€ He smiled at her. "lt's difficult to pretend that,†he said, and shifted his bottom, causing her to notice a distinct bump near the fall of his trousers that had

She hadn't thought it possible to flush further, but her body managed splendidly. "l didn't know you'd react like that.†She wasn't totally clueless: she did have an older brother and had lived in the countryside for years. Harry shrugged. "Well, it puts my mind at ease about tonight.â€ "Have you never…been with a lady?†It was perhaps a bit forward to ask,

most definitely not been there before. "l was thinking of Arthur, though,†he

admitted sheepishly.

but curiosity ranked high on her list of faults. Shouldn't a certain degree of liberty be granted to guestions for her husband? He shook his head. "No. l've always known I prefer men. Arthur tried it once with a woman. He made a concerted effort to be normal before we met.â€

"Harry, you are normal,†she said, fascinated by the little glimpse into his world.

â€Well, you're the only person l've met with such a liberal mind-set. The rest of Britain would just as soon tear me to pieces than allow me to live how I please "You could have, you know,†she pointed out. "Simply put out a false,

on my estate,†he said with bitterness in his tone. tragic story about a childhood love dying. Devastated Duke Swears Never to Marry. I can see the society pages now.â€

Finchley, with his threats. Can't let him take the dukedom.â€

"A sound plan, and something l'd love to have done, if only… Blasted

Her hand covered Harry's larger one. "We won't,†she promised.

CHAPTER TWO

Oh, Lord. Night had finally fallen. Elizabeth pulled the coverlet just a bit higher till her lips kissed the rich silk fabric, and wiggled her toes, which could now almost peek out the bottom of the bed. Despite her earlier bravado to Harry, she lay terrified in her room, the duchess's suite.

Swaths of teal and ivory silk hung from the windows. The wallpaper was festooned with curlicues and a decorative motif, the exact blue as the drapery fabric. The alluring fragrance of wildflowers and grass wafted in through the open windows, carried on a cooling spring breeze.

Harry had insisted on driving to his property just outside London after the wedding breakfast. He refused to "do his duty†in the gossipy confines of his London

town house. At first, his decision relieved her. Her jaunt into the surreal seemed

easier on unfamiliar ground than in the harsh familiarity of loud, noisy Town. But now, surrounded by darkest night and chirping crickets, she wished for the familiar calls of the hackney drivers, or the clacking of carriages heading home after a ball. The hidden, wall-papered door leading to the ducal suite creaked open and

Harry's head popped around it. "Hallo. Settling in?â€ "Quite well. The room is lovely.â€ "Liar,†he said, and strolled in clad in only a loose burgundy silk robe.

"Your face is as white as the cover you're trying to hide under.â€ She attempted a brave smile at his lightheartedness. She'd done the right

thing in marrying him. Really. Was there a better man, other than her brother, in all of Britain? She thought not. She'd be a duchess, have a child and gain a great friend in her husband. What lady could ask for more? Not her, certainly. And if a tiny part of her dreamed of passion and kisses and…more, well, she pushed those thoughts to the very back of her mind and scooted over to make room for her husband on the bed. Her marital bed. The one where she would soon lose her virginity. To a

man who liked her, but did not want her. Oh, hell. "You're frowning,†Harry observed. "Am l?â€

"Yes. Having second thoughts?â€

performer and Harry still wouldn't care.

"No. Let's do it.†In an act of bravery, she pushed the comforter down to her waist, baring the decadent negligee her mother insisted she include in the trousseau, her mother having no idea she could wear the costume of a Drury Lane

He untied the knot at his waist and slipped the robe off, letting it pool on the ground at his feet. His broad shoulders spoke volumes about the hours spent in fencing practice, and his flat stomach showed no excess of dining that so many of his

peers suffered. Elizabeth stared at his penis, curiosity overcoming her shyness. He

have one of those types. She guessed she preferred his softer, more approachable looking member. Harry raised a knee onto the bed and hoisted himself next to her, then slid under the covers. He wrapped his arms around her, pressing the two of them together from head to toe, and kissed her cheek. Elizabeth turned slightly to kiss him back on the lips when he abruptly pulled away. "Hang on,†he told her, and slid off the bed,

seemed nicely formed; a shaft about the width of her wrist hung down between his legs. She'd heard rumors of hard protruding parts, but Harry didn't seem to

striding back toward his own rooms. "This isn't going to work,†she heard him mutterina. He disappeared into his room while she clutched the covers to her breasts. Had

she blundered? Was it over? A few minutes passed before he entered the room again, and this time she understood the whispers and rumors of protruding parts. His penis no longer hung

down his leg, but stood at attention, pointed straight at her. She felt her mouth drop open in amazement, but before she had time to take a second look, Harry was under

the covers and on top of her.

Her nightrail bunched at her waist and Harry's penis poked at her belly before he lifted her right thigh. Then she felt him between the lips of the most intimate part of her. A deep breath relaxed her slightly, but his thrust at her entryway forced her to clench her muscles tightly against his invasion. She offered up an encouraging smile,

visage. Suddenly his eyes flashed open. "Wait here,†he ordered, and exited the bed

but he missed it. His eyes were closed and concentration marred his handsome

one more time for his own room. Her body protested the sudden cold at his absence. "What is going on?†she

asked the cherubs smiling down at her from their painted perch on the bedroom

ceiling mural. Their arrows pointed toward Harry's room, so she followed the advice. She slid off the bed, straightening her nightgown back to virginal modesty, and crept toward Harry's suite. One finger, then her whole hand pushed open the connecting door.

"Harry?†she called, peeking her head in to look for her absent husband.

"ls everything all rigâ€lâ€ Harry stood facing her. Arthur perched on his knees in front of him, his mouth on

Harry'sâ€"Oh, my. Elizabeth froze, her eyes wider than quineas. She should move, leave them to their privacy. But somehow her feet took one step, then another, until her body stood fully in the duke's bedchamber. Her voice trailed off as shock

and another, unfamiliar emotion careened into her like a phaeton running a race. Desire?

Harry's eyes opened to lock on her, and he immediately pushed Arthur away.

"l'm sorry,†he murmured. "lt was the only way I could stay haâ€"â€ She cut him off. "lt's all right. lâ€|†She closed her mouth firmly on what

Arthur swiveled his head to grin up at her from his position on the floor. "Welcome, Lizzie.â€ He was the only man who could get away with calling her that. She remained

Elizabeth to everyone but this charming roque. "l think she should stay.†Arthur rose to his feet, and Elizabeth noticed he

was sans shirt. Though not quite as muscular as Harry, his physique was pleasing to

her eye. He was on the thin side, but quite fit, with little hair on his chest. Her breasts reproduced that heavy, tingling feeling they'd had in the carriage earlier that day when Harry had kissed her, and her breath came in quick little pants.

"Lizzie, come join us,†Arthur insisted.. Heat glinted in his eyes, confirming

rumors of his hedonism. Her arousal and interest spiked at his eager invitation.

she wanted to say. Keep going. I liked seeing you with Arthur.

"Art,†Harry warned.

"Harry, think about it. She hasn't run screaming for the dower house yet.

This might be the solution to your problemâ€!.†His bold hand caressed Harry's

shaft, which jumped to attention at the touch. A quiver shot through Elizabeth and she felt an unfamiliar pressure between her

legs when Arthur touched Harry so intimately. Individually, each man was handsome. Together, their effect was breathtaking. Like a portrait of fierce militia men. She took a tentative step forward.

CHAPTER THREE

Harry and Arthur stood as still as Elgin's marbles while she tiptoed closer. Arthur continued to grin. A serious expression tightened Harry's lips.

"Elizabeth? Are you sure? Do you even understand what Arthur's talking about?â€.

No words rose to her lips, so she simply shook her head. No, she was not sure, but it seemed the thing to do if they were ever to accomplish their goal. She took

another step closer to the men. "Good girl, Lizzie,†Arthur encouraged. "Slip off your gown. Here, l'II help you.â€

"l'll help. She's my wife.†Harry reached her just as Arthur's hands lifted her hem. Together, the two men raised her nightgown up over her head till she stood before them nude as the day she was born.

Curiously, she felt no shame, only interest in what came next. Seeking courage, she placed her hand on Harry's broad bicepS and used him to hold up her quavering body. He noticed her dilemma and solved it by leading her over to his large bed, covered with dark blue and ivory quilts. Art followed, stripping off his britches as

he walked. Harry helped her onto the massive bed. "What will you have me do?†she whispered softly.

Harry's smile felt like a blessing. "Nothing. Lie back and relax.â€

She smiled up at him and gasped when Arthur's weight joined his on the bed, each flanking her prose form. Her eyes widened as Arthur leaned over her to give

Harry a deep kiss. It was petty of her, but someday she wanted to be kissed like that. With love and passion. As one, both men turned their attention from their kiss and back to her.

Arthur used one finger to circle her nipple. Harry followed suit, and she bit her lip against the pleasure of their gentle touch and the visual effect of both masculine hands touching her very sensitive chest. Who knew her nipples could inspire such a reaction in the rest of her body?

"Art. l'm ready now,†Harry announced, and made as if he was going to lie on top of her again.

"No.†Arthur stopped him. "She's not ready yet. I promise if we take a bit more time to touch her it will go better for all of us. All right, Lizzie?â€

She mutely nodded at them.

Arthur's fingers continued their exploration around her breasts, then lowered to her belly. He leaned down to place tiny, nibbling kisses across her shoulders and

down to her bosom. Oh, my. It felt marvelous. Goose bumps that had nothing to do with the temperature nearly rose off the bed of its own volition. Harry used one hand to caress her thigh in long, sweeping strokes, each time coming closer to her vagina. Her thighs started to fall open, but she clenched them back together.

dotted her skin. She released a languorous sigh and shifted and arched till her spine

"No,†he told her. "Let go. Spread your legs. Please.â€ Her fists clenched into the covers at her sides and she lay still for a minute,

debating. Then, inch by inch, her legs spread, opening up to the men's view. She turned her head, not wanting to see their reaction, but then when the silence dragged

out she couldn't help but wrench her gaze back to them. Harry knelt at her side, staring down at the intersection of her legs, a studious look

on his face that felt completely incongruous to the moment. "Harry?â€ "Hmm?†He kept staring.

"Harry!â€ He looked up, startled. "What?â€

"Please stop staring. You're making me uncomfortable.â€

A stripe of scarlet stained each of his cheeks. "My apologies. l've just

never seen one up close before.â€

Now it was her turn to blush. She could feel her face flame, and when she glanced down, she could see the pink spreading from her neck to her breasts.

A burst of laughter from Arthur had both Harry and her whipping their heads around to see the joke. "Harry, the consummate scholar. Only *you* could turn this

intimate adventure into a scientific moment.â€ Love carried in every syllable of Arthur's teasing words. "May I remind you, you are about to deflower your virgin wife. A little focus if

you please,†Art reprimanded. "Oh. Right.†Harry shut his mouth and went back to caressing her thighs.

Finally, one of his hands grew bold enough to tickle the curly, crisp hairs that shielded her.

She could feel dampness spread as one finger traced a line from the top to the bottom of her sheath. His finger stroked lightly, then a little bit harder.

Her skin flushed at Arthur's trailing kisses along her collarbone and breasts.

"Ohh,†she moaned, and spread her thighs just a little more. "That's it.†Art encouraged. "ls she getting wet?â€

Harry nodded as she felt another wave of pleasure at Arthur's scandalous question. How did he have such knowledge of a woman's body?

"Now, gently put a finger in her,†he told Harry. "l'll show you.â€

She felt herself yield and open to his probing finger. Her eyes closed and she

pushed all thoughts out of her mind save concentration on her body's response to

Harry's and Arthur's attentions. Excitement grew, as did the pace of Harry's finger movement. In and out. Ohh, had anything felt more thrilling?

through her made her think of fireflies and lightning andâ€oh, God, she was nearing a precipice of some sort. Without warning, Harry removed his finger from her and sat back on his haunches.

"You like that, don't you, Lizzie? You're getting so soft and wet.â€ She could form no words to Arthur's whispered question. The pleasure rolling

Art raised his head from Elizabeth's chest and pulled her up by her shoulders to a sitting position. Deftly, he slipped to sit behind her, becoming her pillow. "Lean back against me, darling,†he whispered in her ear, his beard-

"Arthur. We're ready. Help me.â€

stubbled cheek grazing her skin. She complied. His arms encircled her and his hands covered her breasts, massaging gently. Harry loomed over them and it seemed the most natural thing in the world to plant

her feet wide and open herself to his hips. He took his shaft in hand and guided it to her damp entrance. She felt filled to the point of pleasure-pain as he pushed into her passage. Her gasp was missed at first by both men, who kissed ardently over her

shoulder, squeezing her tight between their embrace. Arthur rubbed her upper arm. "lt's all right, Lizzie. It'll only hurt this first time.â€ His grin took some of the discomfort away and let her focus on the whorl of

sensations enveloping her. Every inch of her body, both front and back, felt heated, and tingled from the two men she lay between. Bliss rained down on her and covered every bit of skin. Then

Harry began to thrust. Each push of his hips brought her buttocks back against Art, whose naked body

cradled hers. His erection pressed in at the crevice of her backside, adding an extra layer of sensuality to the moment. Harry and Art had been lovers for years, and their comfort and ability with one another was on display for her. All she had to do was lie

back and enjoy the ride. And what a ride it was. Harry slid deeper and harder inside her, increasing his

pace until she clung to his shoulders. She felt no instability, since Arthur anchored her firmly, thrusting up against her and keeping pace with Harry's rhythm. The three of them climbed higher and higher until Harry let out a shout and gave a last shove into her.

She moaned and released her hold on reality as her body spiraled onto a plane of pleasure she'd never dreamed possible.

She collapsed back against Art, her mind a mush of scattered thoughts mostly focused on the amazing sensual experience.

She barely felt Harry gently lift her and place her to one side on the bed. Eyes closed, she lay back and slowed her breathing, enjoying the little flutters of sensation still jumping in her. A male groan had her opening her eyes and looking around.

Nothing could've prepared her for the shock of seeing Harry on all fours, with Art on his knees behind him. Arthur's penis slid deep inside Harry's buttocks.

Elizabeth jumped off the bed. She opened her mouth to excuse herself and leave

them to their privacy, but only a squeak emerged when she tried to force words from her suddenly drier-than-a-desert mouth. Leaving her nightrail crumpled on the carpet of Harry's suite, she slammed the

door between their rooms, leaped nude into her own bed and yanked the covers over her. Shivers trembled through her body and she began to giggle, while tears ran down her face. She'd done it. Was no longer a virgin. And it had been marvelous, so much more than she'd expected. Her mother had whispered of pain and indignity. Elizabeth had felt only bliss, like a foreign princess with two handsome subjects to

serve her. However, the conclusion of the bedroom activities chafed her the wrong way. How she wished she hadn't fled. What must they think of her? But it had seemed too overwhelming, too foreign to stay and watch Harry and Art make love.

A knock at the door made her sit up with the counterpane pulled tighter than a

corset against her. "Yes?â€ Please don't let it be her new maid. Harry had refused to allow Lucy, her

childhood maid, to accompany her here. He maintained a very small trusted staff that knew or guessed about his proclivities. An unknown face could disrupt the harmony he'd worked for, and provide more grist for the gossip mill. Elizabeth understood

only too well how servants' gossip could tarnish the reputation of their masters. Hadn't her brother and family suffered that harsh lesson? No, she'd bent to

Harry's wishes and left Lucy at her parents' home, but oh, how nice it would be to see a familiar face right now. The door opened and two handsome faces poked into the room. "Lizzie? Are you all right? Can we come in?†Art asked, walking over to

perch on the foot of her bed without waiting for her acceptance. "You left in such a hurry.â€

Harry stood behind him, one hand resting on his shoulder, the other stroking his hair. For proprietv's sake, both men had donned robes before entering her

rooms. She appreciated their discretion, though the sight of their muscular, hairy legs still titillated her. "l'm fine. I was just…†She trailed off, feeling her cheeks flame. How kind of them to come express concern for her when they must think her a complete trollop. A virgin old maid was supposed to lie still and remain compliant, not moan

and thrash about as she'd done. Only at the very end had she displayed any modicum of decency.

"Don't be ashamed, Elizabeth,†Harry told her. "You are my wife, and anything we do in the privacy of our bedchamber is our business alone.â€

"l for one enjoyed myself thoroughly,†Arthur declared, stretching out on the

bed, a decadent portrait of Dionysus. "Were you fine with everything we did? What made you run?â€

"The last bit,†she admitted, Art's casual manner disarming her. "lt

looked as though you needed some privacy.â€

of red staining his cheeks. "That last part was spontaneous. l'm sorry you had to see me like that.â€ At his words, Arthur jerked to a sitting position. "Don't apologize, Harry. That's the way we make love, and there's nothing wrong with it.â€ Elizabeth had never heard such vehemence in his tone before. Usually he was all laughter and teasing. Clearly, Harry had hit a sensitive spot. Or there was more depth

Arthur and Harry exchanged a deep look at her words, and Harry shrugged, a bit

a rift between the two men. She reached out a hand to both. "No, don't fight. The last part was just…surprising. l…l didn't suspect—†She stopped abruptly, words failing her. Arthur relaxed and laughed. "Well, of course not. You were an innocent. Not like your governess covered that particular topic.â€

to Arthur than she'd previously suspected. Oh dear, she didn't want to cause

"l should say not,†Elizabeth huffed, a smile creeping onto her face. "And l'm no longer an old maid, thanks to you two.â€ "That's right,†Harry said. "l propose we celebrate Elizabeth's

status as the duchess of Walthingburn. No longer will she be relegated to the corner of ballrooms, enduring stares and whispers. As my duchess, she will waltz proudly in any ballroom. What do you say, Elizabeth? How do you want to celebrate?â€

She grinned at Harry's suggestion. He was right, a celebration was in order. "A ball,†she decided. "Lord and Lady Jamesian are hosting an

engagement ball for their daughter a few evenings hence. Let us go there.†She neglected to mention that Sarah Jamesian had been one of her primary tormentors,

always whispering and repeating rumors of Elizabeth's ineligibility for marriage

due to her brother's "unnatural†ways. Let Lady Sarah choke on her own bile

when Elizabeth sailed in as a duchess, while she contented herself with a mere baron.

CHAPTER FOUR

From her perch at the top of the stairs, the ballroom looked like a garden in full summer bloom. Fanciful feathers topped women's elaborate hairdos and male dandies wore coats of lilac, primrose and every other color found in a flower bed. Dancers and gossipers alike swayed and twirled from an invisible breeze.

"The duke and duchess of Walthingburn,†boomed the butler's voice, announcing their arrival. A silence descended in the ballroom as everything froze, immediately followed by the roar of hundreds of whispers.

They'd only been married recently.

Howdid she bring the Elusive Duke up to snuff?

No wedding trip?

Elizabeth leaned into the solid strength of her husband, who gripped her arm and escorted her down the stairs. Thank goodness for his strength, because, although she'd never looked more elegant, she could barely breathe in the costume Arthur had dressed her in.

"Stand tall,†Harry murmured. "You look beautiful.â€ His words lodged a smile in her heart. It was true, she'd never looked finer.

Pastels went the way of her virginity when Arthur arrived a few mornings past with a dressmaker in tow. According to Harry, no expense was to be spared in finding her the most elegant, most beautiful gown for the evening. Arthur's charms worked wonders on a sour-faced seamstress, and she'd remade a dress into an emerald-hued wonder.

Elizabeth felt every inch the duchess wearing the gown into the ballroom, though she had to remind herself to stand tall and keep her hands at her sides. They kept involuntarily creeping up to cover her bosom. The dress and new corset created a miracle in showing her breasts to their best advantage. The one disadvantage being she felt a bit faint from the upward pressure of the corset.

"Shall we dance or show you off first?†Harry murmured as they entered the fray of people too eager to offer their felicitations on their newly married state. Only a bold few dared to offer a comment that implied surprise at seeing the couple at a ball so soon after the wedding.

"Dance,†she said, sticking to their plan of making an appearance, then leaving early to set off rumors that they couldn't stand to be out of their bedchambers too long.

As they swept toward the dance floor, she caught the attention of a tall American sea captain who'd been cutting a swath through the ton this season. Even she had not been immune to his tall, dashing good looks. She tossed him a smile behind a deft maneuver with her lacy fan. Her attention to the captain did not go unnoticed by Harry, who raised a brow at her little flirtation.

"Walthingburn. Lady Elizabeth.†He inclined his head just the right amount to display his deference as well as his long-standing friendship with Harry. No evidence of the sexual passion between the two men was in sight. They clearly had practice at this deceptive game. As for herself, Elizabeth whipped out her fan again and waved it violently in a bid to cool off her memories of their earlier bedroom activities.

Quite a few debutantes' stares followed his progress across the room.

At that moment, Arthur walked up, perfectly turned out in black coat and daring new full-length trousers. He looked every inch the dashing gentleman about town.

"May I steal your new duchess for a dance?†Arthur addressed Harry.

He nodded and relinquished his hold on her arm. Elizabeth followed Arthur's lead to the melee of couples engaged in a lively country dance. With ease, he

inserted her into the line of dancers and off they went.

A delighted grin grew on her face. Though she'd attended balls for years, she'd been a pariah relegated to the corner, and rarely stood up with anyone other than her brother, or Harry when he'd bothered to dance at all. Usually he

could be found discussing horses or property management with other gentlemen closer to her father's age. It was lovely to be partnered with one of the more handsome, dashing men in the room.

"Eyeing the American, Captain Bradington?†Art teased at their first close circle. "Careful, Lizzie, we don't want gossip spreading.â€

His jest made her laugh. As if Captain Bradington would notice the likes of her. Though, dressed as she was, with her newfound knowledge of sex, she felt she could conquer any man in the ballroom.

She whirled, spun and moved more lightly on her feet than ever before, until one turn took her face-to-face with Lady Violet. A smile that looked more mean than

brother or other relative. She could afford to be generous to Violet, who remained unmarried with few prospects. Her dowry was not enough to make potential suitors overlook her nasty reputation. Few men Elizabeth knew wanted a harpylike shrew managing their households.

duke and was safe now from the threat of becoming a poor relation dependent on her

Elizabeth continued to smile at Arthur and dance as if nothing was amiss, but Violet couldn't leave well enough alone.

"Enjoy your time as a duchess. It will soon be over†she threatened on the

"Enjoy your time as a duchess. It will soon be over,†she threatened on the next spin.

Surprised by her words. Elizabeth stumbled, but Arthur's inpate grace and

next spin.

Surprised by her words, Elizabeth stumbled, but Arthur's innate grace and athleticism caught her misstep and guided her into the next movement.

All the other dancers faded away in her mind, save Violet and Arthur. "What are you talking about?†she gueried on the next go-round. She focused on Lady

Violet's next words.

destured to Harry across the room, who hastened over. "My lady, are you ill?†Harry inquired, all solicitousness, as befitted his station.

"Finchley is arranging things. Soon *l'll* be duchess and you'll be a

Elizabeth numbly continued moving her feet, but without grace. For the first time, she noticed Violet's dancing partner. Michael Finchley, Harry's odious cousin. That was twice now she'd seen them togetherâ€"first at her wedding, and now here. What could this mean? Her face flushed and suddenly her elegant gown constricted her breathing and tangled around her ankles, making her feel caught in a

Arthur noticed her difficulty and swept her off the floor, hurrying her toward the back of the ballroom, where open doors out to the balcony allowed in a cooling breeze. He

laughingstock.â€

boa constrictor's embrace.

"l'm fine,†she gasped out. "My gown is too tight and the heat overcame me.†She fanned her face and leaned into Arthur's strength. "Nonsense, Lizzie. That horrid cow said something to you. Don't lie to us. Tell us what she said to upset you so.†Arthur continued to support her weight, but angled his head to look into her eves.

She bit her lip, reluctant to mar the evening with Violet's bile, but Arthur's and Harry's weighted stares forced her to speak. "She told me to enjoy my time as a duchess for it would soon be over. She said Finchley was â€arranging

things.†What do you think she meant by that?†Anxious, she glanced at Harry, to gauge his reaction to the threat. He nodded soberly. "lt's as I suspected. My cousin does not see the

wedding as enough of an impediment to his threats to out me as a molly. We'll have to think of some way to completely disprove him.†He took Elizabeth's arm

away from Art and guided her to a low bench framing the back wall between glass doors. After seating her, he sank down beside her. Arthur followed and crouched in front of them, resting on his haunches. "l have

an idea,†he said, with an entirely too wicked grin livening up his handsome face.

Harry and Elizabeth looked at him, waiting for whatever dastardly, brilliant plot

he'd come up with.

Arthur leaned in closer. "Here's what you'll need to doâ€!.â€

CHAPTER FIVE

"Are you comfortable?†Harry asked for the second time.

"Perfectly,†Elizabeth replied. Though in truth, she was glad the room was dark except for a candle or two. She felt sure her skin flushed bright red where the bodice of her dress gaped open, revealing her breasts to Harry's gaze, and any who happened upon Lord Jamesian's library. Which according to her calculations should be any minute.

Right on cue, Arthur's booming voice echoed down the hall. "l do not mean to doubt the veracity of your words, Lady Hesterbridge, but I am positive the sonnet you refer to is Sonnet Seventeen, not Twelve.â€

A few indistinct murmurs classified Lady H.'s voice, and some higher pitched ones indicated she and Arthur had gained an audience.

And the show was on.

As the voices and footsteps drew closer, Elizabeth and Harry stepped into an embrace, kissing with passion. Harry's cravat and waistcoat lay discarded over the back of the sofa they leaned against. His shirttails hung free of his trouser waistband.

They made sure to stand in profile to the door, so there would be no question as to whom the Elusive Duke was kissing. Harry pressed his hips against her belly and drew her close, wrapping his arms around her waist and placing his hands on her lower back. Elizabeth tried to incorporate all she'd learned of kissing in the past few days.

Their tongues dueled while her breath quickened. Though she knew the kiss was for show, her body couldn't help its response. It remembered all too clearly the amazing sensations of Harry's penis deep inside her, with Arthur massaging her breasts. She wanted that feeling again. Craved it and would do nearly anything to gain it once more.

She felt Harry's body harden in reaction to her ardor, and he deepened the kiss. They were so wrapped up in each other, they barely noticed the second act of their quickly written farce, when Arthur opened the door gallantly for Lady Hesterbridge.

A loud gasp from the woman and a quiet cough from Arthur brought Elizabeth and Harry back to their position in the library. Exactly how they had planned it. Caught by the biggest gossip in the ton.

Harry stepped away from her and shielded her from view, after ascertaining all visitors got an eyeful of their dishabille. "Lady Hesterbridge,†Harry exclaimed, invoking her name with all his ducal airs. "Pardon us. I felt overcome with passion for my new wife. l'm sure you understand, and remember well the early days of your marriage.â€

Lady H. sniffed. "l'm sure I don't know what you're talking about. Hesterbridge and I had an arranged marriage. None of this love foolishness to mar a

the library door opened and Arthur walked in, an earsplitting grin on his face. "Well, the stage is set and the audience believed it. I left Lady H. with a group of her closest friends. She couldn't wait for me to walk away.†â€œExcellent.†Harry beamed.

Elizabeth remained silent Wonderful Now all of London would think her a trollon.

䀜Excellent.ä€ Harry beamed.

Elizabeth remained silent. Wonderful. Now all of London would think her a trollop willing to tup her husband in public. She'd agreed to the farce, because it thwarted Violet and Finchley, but it still burned to have literally and figuratively exposed herself as she did. Her silence attracted the men's attention.

"Lizzie, don't be sad,†Arthur comforted her.

"l'm not,†she replied.
"Then what is the…oh.†Arthur nodded in sudden understanding, though she hadn't said a word. "Harry, your wife is aching.â€
An alarmed look passed over Harry's face. "Are you ill?†He reached

An alarmed look passed over Harry's face. "Are you ill?†He reached out to place a hand on her forehead. "Not that kind of ache, you fool. The kind of ache you have. Don't think I haven't noticed that cockstand in your trousers.â€

all of a sudden. What shall we do about it, since there is no

find myself aching all of a sudden. What shall we do about it, since there is no possible way to return to the ball? l'll never recreate Harry's magnificent cravat without Addison's help. And, after Lady Hesterbridge's gossip, it is

expected you escaped to your carriage to finish.â€

Elizabeth's mouth dropped open as her staid, regal husband yanked his shirt off over his head and pushed his trousers down.

"Wife?†He extended a hand to her and waited with an expectant air.

Who was she to disappoint him? After all, it was her legal wifely duty to submit to

Harry grinned, a devilish glint in his eye. "Elizabeth, do you remember what Arthur did to me to other night?â€

"How shall we do this?†Art asked as he unbuttoned his long trousers.

Her mind raced with the possibilities. "When he put his…in your backside?â€ "No, not that. l'm talking of when he was on his knees in front of me with

mv cock in his mouth.â€ His blunt language shocked her to her toes and set her skin on fire. The image of Harry's large penis in Arthur's mouth was blazoned on her memory. She

nodded in silence. "l want that,†Harry ordered. Disappointment boiled in her. Watching was okay, but she'd wanted to

participate. Then Harry said, "Are you willing?â€

What was he asking? Did he want her or Art? Her confusion must have shown, because Harry took charge of both his lovers in the room.

her husband's desires.

He turned to Arthur. "Art, please take care of Elizabeth. Make sure she's

wet enough for me to enter. I want to watch you in her mouth. Okay, love?†He paused to embrace Arthur with an openmouthed, tongue-sucking kiss that had Elizabeth panting and dying to join in. Harry's take-charge ducal personality was coming out. It was a total change from his first hesitant foray into bed with her. Gone

was the tentative lover and in his place was a masterful commander.

Art pulled back from the kiss, a grin on his face, ready to obey his betters. "C'mere, Lizzie.†He gestured to her with a crooked finger.

She stepped eagerly toward him. The bodice of her dress drooped around her waist from their early charade. It was the work of minutes for Arthur to unbutton the rest and help her out of it. She stood, skin dotted with goose pimples, in the darkened room. Arthur walked her around to the other side of the sofa and bade her to sit. He knelt in front of her, grasped each of her ankles and hooked them over his shoulders.

She felt completely exposed to his view and his touch, but waited with bated breath for him to do something. Nothing happened. With a whimper, she daringly lowered her own hand to the lips of her vagina and tapped with one finger. Arthur

followed her movements with an intent look. "Patience, Lizzie. l'm just planning my strategy.†He turned to look up at

Harry. "What is your desire, sir? Fingers or mouth?â€ Mouth? Lizzie wondered. Whatever could that mean? He was going to talk her into pleasure? Her ignorance was removed a few seconds later when Arthur lowered

his head and lips to kiss her curls. She opened her mouth to object. This love play was altogether too shocking, and

besides, it hadn't felt particularly good. Her protest died a quick death when Arthur's tongue flicked out to roam deeper between her vaginal lips. Her head fell back against the sofa and she unintentionally tightened her legs around Arthur's

His tongue worked magic on her, petting and caressing till she was a mindless mass of woman writhing on the couch. Her inner muscles clenched and spasmed with their proximity to that elusive, fantastical pinnacle of pleasure. Just as she reached the precipice and felt her body about to leap over the edge, Arthur pulled away. "She's ready, Harry.â€ Elizabeth's eyelids flew open. How dare he stop? She looked to Harry to lodge a complaint about his tease of a lover, but only a whimper escaped as she saw

shoulders, forcing his head even closer.

both his hand and her own hand could fit around it. In factâ€|she wanted to stroke it. Now. She sat up and reached out to him, but he shook his head. Still in his masterful mood, he ordered Arthur to lie flat on his back on the rug. "Elizabeth, kneel between Arthur's legs,†Harry commanded.

her husband standing a foot away, cock in hand. He'd obviously enjoyed watching Arthur pleasuring her. His penis looked larger and harder than before. She estimated

Dutifully, Arthur spread his legs, making room for her to get on her knees. It was hard to miss his penis jutting from the juncture at his legs. It stood out from a nest of blond curls. "Art, show her what you want.â€ Arthur reached a hand and tugged her head down till his cock nearly touched her

nose. "Open your mouth, sweetheart,†he whispered. "Do what feels natural. Make me feel good.â€ His hypnotic voice drew her in. She was dying with curiosity to touch him. Their

earlier foray into bed had not assuaged her interest in the male body. They'd allowed her to lie back and be touched. Now she got to do some touching of her own. With one hand, she reached out and stroked his phallus. Arthur smiled

encouragement. "Tighten your hand around the base,†he instructed. "Then use your mouth.â€

She followed his orders, fascinated by the silky smoothness of his skin. Yet the muscle under it was hard as wood. It made for a fascinating contrast. Slowly, she leaned down and flicked her tongue over the smooth tip of his penis. Warm, slightly salty.

"More,†Arthur moaned. She complied, taking as much of his cock into her mouth as she could manage. In

order to fit more, she had to lower her torso and raise her bottom into the air. She wondered what Harry was doing behind her. If he still had his hand on his privates. His hands on her rear startled her and she choked slightly on the shaft in her

mouth. But she shifted into a moan as Harry knelt behind her and rubbed her exposed intimate flesh with his penis. She remained wet from Arthur's earlier attentions,

and the head of Harry's penis probed slightly, stretching her.

From this position, it was easy for him to slide all the way in, filling her. He gave her no quarter and immediately began to thrust up against her backside, pushing her mouth deeper onto Arthur. For several minutes, silence reigned, punctured only by her high feminine gasps of delight and deeper male moans of pleasure. A musky scent of arousal permeated the air, mixed with Arthur's cologne and the spiciness of a brandy Harry had drunk earlier.

Harry moved in and out harder and faster, till she was pushing back against him, loving the slap of her bottom against his hips. Arthur, too, demanded her attention,

lifting his hips off the floor to keep her mouth covering the majority of his shaft. She broke first, releasing a scream as an orgasm rippled through her. And still Harry continued his relentless thrusting. Arthur let out a shout suddenly and her mouth

filled with a warm, slightly thick liquid, which she swallowed in her surprise. Arthur's shout gave way for Harry to push once, then twice more before releasing his thick, hot seed into her. She collapsed under his weight onto Arthur, and

Harry followed suit, once more squeezing her between their lovers embrace. "Fantastic, Lizzie. You're a natural,†Arthur groaned. "The only question remaining is how do we escape without being spotted?â€ She began to giggle at their predicament, but her ever practical and take-charge husband sorted through the piles of discarded clothes. Soon all three were dressed

and tiptoeing through the hallway, out a side door and around to Harry's waiting carriage.

CHAPTER SIX

Three weeks later

Elizabeth sat down at her husband's elbow and glanced at his plate, piled high with ham slices and eggs. Her stomach conducted an unpleasant little flip and she waved off the servant delivering her usual breakfast.

"Just toast, please,†she instructed.

Harry lowered his newspaper to peer at her. "Everything all right, dear?†he inquired.

She nodded. "Just a touch of a stomach ailment. l'll feel fine after a good ride through the park. No Arthur today?â€

"He's calling on his brother this morning regarding some estate business.

He'll meet up with us later.â€ She nodded again and began to nibble at the dry slices of bread set in front of her.

Her mind wandered in and out of memories of the past weeks being mistress of her own home. It was everything she'd dreamed and more. She'd imagined planning weekly menus and flower beds with the housekeeper and gardener, but the passionate nights with her Harry and Arthur had never even entered her thoughts, yet, oh, how delicious they were. Perhaps today in the park she could convince the men to wander down an unused path to see where it took them.

Harry's newspaper rustle disturbed the direction of her thoughts. She turned to

him. "Elizabeth, I just read something that has me thinking â€

She looked at him and waited for him to continue.

"l read an announcement that Lord and Lady Firthingham have been delivered of a son.â€

"Lovely news for them,†she commented. "Elizabeth, do you think you could be with child?†His cheeks reddened, as if

such a subject was too indiscreet at the breakfast table. Laughable, really, when one considered just last night he'd had his fingers deep in her arse.

She paused to think about his question. Her stomach had been a bit queasy lately. "When was your last monthly?â€

She counted the weeks, then her eyes widened as she grinned at Harry. "You know, I just may be. I am about two weeks past when I should'veâ€|you know.â€

"That's marvelous. Now you won't have to put up with my

perversions.†He lifted up his newspaper again, shielding his face from her view. Her heart sank at his thoughtless words. Of course Harry thought she'd be happy about this. Most Englishwomen would be appalled at the bedroom activities

she'd engaged in, all to keep her husband happy and able to perform. The trouble was she wasn't like most Englishwomen. Never had been. She'd discovered She yanked his newspaper down. "Harry, you are not perverse, and l…†A smile lit his face. "Can I take that blush to mean you've enjoyed your time with Arthur and me? â€~Cause we've loved being with you. Even if you are

and would be terribly sorry if it were to end.

a sensuous side to her that thrilled at exploring new boundaries with her two lovers,

pregnant, feel free to knock on our door anytime.†â€œWell, it's only guesswork at this point. Perhaps we should continue our bedroom activities until we are absolutely certain.†She took a large bite of toast to feign nonchalance at Harry's response. As if it didn't matter one whit if her

same, I trink it best if we went strolling instead of riding in the park this atternoon. I know you'II never keep your horse at a sedate walk but will go hieing off to all and sundry. I should've known what I was getting into from the moment you fell out of the tree and on top of your brother and me.â€

She laughed at his recollection. When her brother arrived home on school holiday

She laughed at his recollection. When her brother arrived home on school holiday with his handsome new friend, heir to a dukedom, she'd followed them around like a puppy. They'd allowed it with grudging tolerance, but one afternoon they'd crept off by themselves. She'd been unable to resist following. And look where it landed it her. Privy to the duke's most personal secret and now his

A few hours later, her nausea having subsided, she and Harry strolled arm in arm through Hyde Park. The sun shone overhead and the chirp of mama birds to their hatchlings was truly divine.

hatchlings was truly divine.

For appearances, Arthur strolled a few paces back with a young debutante and her overprotective mama. He was marvelous at lavishing attention on all young women equally, while never giving false hope to any one of them. Or more importantly, their mothers. Being a third son, with few prospects other than his charm, he was

their mothers. Being a third son, with few prospects other than his charm, he was viewed as a boon escort around Town, but not a target for the marriage mart. Which was just as he liked it.

Elizabeth and Harry strolled, nodding and calling greetings to other walkers. She couldna€™ thelp but notice that most return greetings were punctuated with whispers.

Elizabeth and Harry strolled, nodding and calling greetings to other walkers. She couldn't help but notice that most return greetings were punctuated with whispers, giggles and stares. She glanced up at Harry to see if he noticed the strange behavior. What could be the cause? Some overzealous mothers even pulled their daughters out

of their path so as not to be tainted by conversing with or acknowledging them.

This was certainly different treatment then she'd become accustomed to. Had

Lady Violent made good on her threat to discredit her? Elizabeth thought not. Lady Hesterbridge's on dit about catching the elusive duke in flagrante delicto with his new wife had been on the lips of every member of the ton for the past weeks. Surely

to turn around, but Finchley's next comment froze him in place. "l'm surprised you're out walking this afternoon. What with all the rumors swirling.â€ Harry raised a brow. Often Elizabeth thought heirs to dukedoms must take lessons in eyebrow raising. It seemed the higher one's rank, the farther up the forehead one's eyebrow could climb. Harry's very near touched his hairline. "l'm sure I don't know what you're talking about,†he replied to Finchley's strange remark. Lady Violet giggled behind a lacy lavender glove. "The rumors about your wife… What? Oh, I didn't see you down there, Lizzie.†Finchley tossed off the remark casually, though the glint in his eye said he'd been planning this moment for some time. "You will address my wife as Lady Elizabeth or Your Grace,†Harry said. "Though it will please me if you do not address her at all. Good day.†He turned to leave, but Arthur stopped him with a quiet word. "Harry, there is a vicious lie circling the ton. I only heard of it just now.†He gestured back toward his debutante companion and her mother, who eyed the group

Finchley and Violet couldn't think to discredit and disparage Harry now.

"Hallo, cousin,†Finchley said. "Enjoying the weather?â€

pace so as not to miss a word.

As if on cue in a theatrical or farce, Lord Michael Finchley sped up in a brand-new, gleaming phaeton. Lady Violet sat cozied up next to him. He pulled back on his horses to stop alongside Harry and Elizabeth. From behind, Arthur quickened his

"Verv much.†Harry replied in a flat voice. He tugged at her hand and made

ordered.

Violet chose this moment to insert herself in the conversation. "Oh, Elizabeth, l'm so sorry your husband has to hear this way.†She coated her words with sugary sweetness, but her eyes and hard edges of her mouth told a different story. Delight filled her at any misfortune to Elizabeth.

"What does the duke need to hear?†Elizabeth asked sharply.

with suspicion. "They couldn't discredit you, so they set their sights on our

exchanged a long, silent communication with Arthur, who nodded in accord.

Harry's grip on her arm tightened and a muscle in his face clenched. He

"You will tell me now of any unfounded rumors regarding my wife,†Harry

Lizzie. I suspect Finchley is the source of the rumor.â€

"Why, about your indiscretion.†Violet giggled. "My what?â€ "Sorry, Your Grace. Guess you weren't man enough in the bedroom for

her,†Finchley said.

"Elizabeth, I was so torn when I saw you in the garden at the Hustons' rout

last week.†She shot a glance at Arthur. "But I knew it my duty to tell Finchley, His Grace's heir, when I saw you engaged in an indiscretion with His Grace's

serious. As if she and Arthur had done anything private without Harry's complete knowledge. Perhaps Violet had seen something in the garden, but she'd missed Harry standing behind a bush, about to join the tryst. Harry was remembering the incident as well, if his clenched jaw was anything to go by. "Finchley, you go too far,†he warned. "You'll name your seconds

or take back this lie about my wife.â€

dearest friend. After all, he'd want to know if you carry another man's child.â€ Elizabeth had never wanted to be a man more than at that moment, so she could challenge Violet to a duel. She'd be tempted to laugh if it wasn't so deadly

His words spurred elation in Finchley, who grinned and said, "Done. l'm feeling generous. l'll even break form and allow you to pick the weapons.â€ "Sabres.â€ A slight flicker of his smile was Finchley's only hint he knew of Harry's expertise with sabres.

Elizabeth listened to the turn of events with horror filling her. He couldn't fight a duel over a ridiculous lie. He mustn't. She tugged at Harry's coat.

"Elizabeth, don't you see, I have to do this for us? All three of us and any future children.â€ She turned a mute plea to Arthur, to have him make Harry see reason. But the

reckless traitor was already nodding eagerly and agreeing to be Harry's second.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Elizabeth threw down the ridiculous little book of poetry with disgust. A restless energy alternating with lethargy consumed her. She'd been up all night pleading with Harry to abandon the duel over her honor. If he lost, she'd argued, all thev'd accomplished would be for naught, and Finchley would get the estate.

they'd accomplished would be for naught, and Finchley would get the estate.

Finally, Arthur kicked her out at midnight so Harry could get some sleep. Perhaps her husband found comfort in his dreams, but she'd lain in bed all night silently arguing with the cherubs on her ceiling. At last she'd dozed, and woken to a

houseful of servants, but devoid of Harry and Arthur.

They'd left at dawn for a fencing studio where they would face Finchley.

Women were strictly verboten. How Elizabeth wished for some company, anything to distract her from this endless waiting. Surely no morning had ever moved this slowly before. So now she sat in the library, staring at open books without seeing their

A clatter of hooves on the gravel driveway and the creak of a metal gate opening had her rushing up and out to the front hall. The butler frowned at her haste, but softened his expression. It seemed the servants knew how their lot may change if Harry had lost this morning's duel.

Oh, God, please let her husband be all right. She squeezed the fabric of her

dressing gown tightly in her fists to contain her nervous energy. Arthur's voice carried through the imposing wood door, but she could hear nothing of her husband. Just when she'd reached out to fling open the door herself, Arthur did the job.

The two men entered, windblown and flushed with victory. A minor scratch marred Harry's cheeks and Arthur wore no cravat.

At her questioning glance, he frowned and explained, "Had to use my cravat to

At her questioning glance, he frowned and explained. "Had to use my cravat to stop Finchley's blood.â€

She felt faint at his words. "ls he…dead, then?†Horrible scenarios

assaulted her mind. Harry stripped of his title. Or arrested for murder. Or worst of all,

Harry arrested, then hanged for murder and sodomy. "Nope,†Arthur proclaimed cheerily.

aeœnope,ae Artilui proclaimed cheenly. "He has some serious injuries, and he will think twice before speaking ill of me

words.

or you in the future.†Harry spoke for the first time. He continued walking toward the stairs. "lf you'll excuse me, dear, I wish to bathe before breakfast.â€

She and Arthur followed in his wake. When they arrived at his rooms. Harry

She and Arthur followed in his wake. When they arrived at his rooms, Harry entered, Arthur on his heels. For some reason, she paused at the threshold. She hadn't been invited in. Not really. But perhaps the men were feeling an excess of energy they'd be looking to work off.

The door opened a crack and she stepped into the entry in time to see Harry push Arthur onto the bed and yank his trousers down. Without ceremony or preliminaries.

She bit her lip at the sight of Arthur's arse in the air, waiting to be plundered. Harry reached into a night table drawer and removed a small bottle of something he rubbed into his hand, then onto himself.

he ripped open his own trousers and released his engorged cock.

Elizabeth's legs wouldn't support her much longer, and she sank down onto the plush carpet, relieved that she wore only a light spring dressing gown. Without fear or shame, she lifted her hem and spread her legs. She'd done this

only once before, in the secret dead of night, when her girlish body had first begun to change into womanhood.

Now she felt the subtle differences, and with a surer hand she parted her fuller line.

Now she felt the subtle differences, and with a surer hand she parted her fuller lips and rubbed one gentle finger over her tiny pleasure nub. Excitement grew as she watched Harry press his front to Arthur's backside and sink his cock deep inside.

Wetness spread easily on her finger and throughout the delicate folds of her sheath. Her legs spread wider and her back pressed against the wall for leverage. The silk carpet abraded her bare buttocks. The faster Harry moved in and out of

Arthur, the faster her finger circled that special tiny point, which grew taut with

stimulation.

When Harry wrapped an arm around Art's waist and took his partner's cock in hand, it was her undoing. She took an exploring finger and probed herself while rubbing a thumb over her clitoris, as Arthur had called it.

Still watching the men, she continued squeezing one finger tight with her inner muscles and pleasuring herself. Thousands of pulses of pleasure broke her apart and

Still watching the men, she continued squeezing one finger tight with her inner muscles and pleasuring herself. Thousands of pulses of pleasure broke her apart and she sobbed out in delight.

The two men whispered to each other in their own language of love. A language, she was coming to realize that did not include her. They had eyes only for the other.

she was coming to realize, that did not include her. They had eyes only for the other and did not take note of the lonely woman in the corner. At last she understood the difference between making love and being in love. Harry and Arthur were in love. She rose and slipped away to her bedroom, leaving her two males to seek their own joy.

EPILOGUE

One year later

Elizabeth circled the ballroom, champagne flute in hand, delighted to be back in the glittering whirl of the season. Though she missed her son, Reed, safely ensconced at home with his governess, it was good to be among grown-ups again.

She nodded to Lady Hesterbridge, holding court in the center of the room, and averted her eyes from acknowledging Lady Violet, now Lady Sewells, who stood

frowning while her portly husband eyed the buffet table.

Debutantes gazed in rapture at Arthur's grace on the dance floor, while Harry stood in the corner talking to a small group of men. Politicians, no doubt. And, hmm, one tall American sea captain. Elizabeth made her way over to the tight circle.

As soon as he saw her, Harry extended a hand to draw her in, and smiled at her, brown eyes tracking her movements. Reed's eyes. What a wonderful father Harry was, and what a wonderful friend. He and Arthur were making good on their promise to help her find a true love like they shared.

"Gentlemen, may I present my lovely wife?†He placed a possessive hand on her bare shoulder and leaned down to whisper in her ear, "You'II remember

introduction.

Elizabeth found herself acknowledging a greeting from the tall, dark-haired man.

Almost taller than Harry and a bit more muscled in the shoulders, Mr. Bradington was

Captain James Bradington, here from America.†He raised up to make the

Almost taller than Harry and a bit more muscled in the shoulders, Mr. Bradington was a presence in the room.
"Your Grace.†He bowed. "I am delighted to make your acquaintance.â€

a€œLikewise,†she murmured. "Llizabeth, Bradington was just commenting on how he's never seen a

true English garden. I would take him on a tour myself, but I don't know a dahlia from a daisy. Why don't you escort him and show him?â€

The gentleman in question looked startled. "l'm sure we would be able to

see nothing at night.†Then his tone lowered. "But if the lady has anything she wishes to show me, l'm delighted to partake.†He reached out to hook her hand onto his arm.

She flushed at his double meaning, but felt intrigued enough to latch on to him and allow herself to be propelled out of doors. As she reached the exit, she turned to capture Arthur's gaze. He tossed her a wink and made a shooing motion with his hands.

A delighted peal of laughter escaped and Mr. Bradington peered down to discover the joke. She smiled back up at his handsome face. For months both before and after delivering Reed, she'd held no interest in bedroom sport. But recently, her body had reawakened to its potential.



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