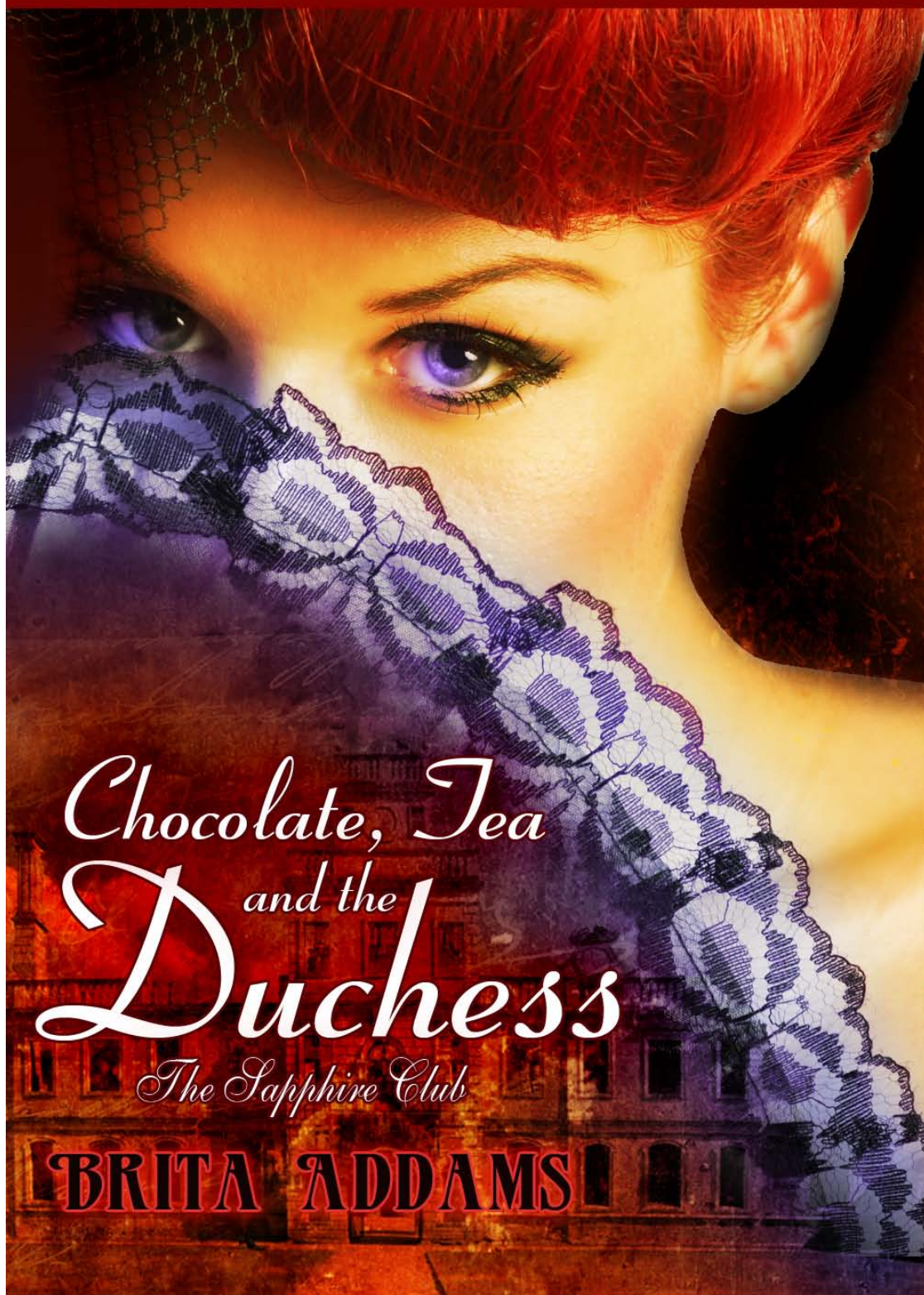


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Chocolate, Tea and the Duchess

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Book Blurb

Phillip Allard, the Duke of Thornhill, is caught in a compromising situation not of his own making, with Lady Felicity Linden. He finds himself honor bound to marry the girl, who is twenty years his junior. Everything tells him this is a course that can only lead to heartache, for Phillip has a secret. Yes, he fancies women, but he also fancies men.

He finds physical fulfillment with Haynes, a man at the Sapphire Club, but it is only for sex. When the liaisons with the man end, Phillip meets the enigmatic and handsome Alexander Chilton, and he discovers he needs this man. His need extends beyond the sex, when he realizes how the man makes him feel.

The problem is, how does he explain this need to Felicity? Will she feel he doesn't want her? His explanation proves quite simple and poignant. Sometimes you might want a cup of chocolate in the morning and sometimes you might want tea. But there are times when you want both.

Will Felicity understand this and can Phillip live with a decision that is anything less than complete acceptance? Is there a place for another person in their marriage?

Chapter One

London, Autumn, 1817

Phillip Allard, the Duke of Thornhill, meandered along the periphery of the ballroom with a drink in hand and no particular destination in mind. His only goal at the moment was to avoid Lady Plimmswood, who'd fancied her daughter, Felicity, becoming the Duchess of Thornhill, since the poor girl was in her pram.

If pressed, Phillip would say the young woman was most beautiful. Her auburn hair and violet-blue eyes gave her an exotic look, and combined with her adorable freckles, she was a woman most men would want at their side. Phillip Allard, however, was not most men.

For several weeks he'd successfully avoided Lady Plimmswood, but as he lounged against a Corinthian column on the far side of Lord and Lady Estbury's marble and crystal ballroom, he heard the annoying trill of the woman's voice, a sound that would forever grate on his nerves.

"Your Grace, good evening." The woman gushed, the ostrich feathers on her ridiculously coifed hair bobbing up and down as she attempted a curtsy, a feat hampered considerably by her rather stubby legs.

Phillip bowed stiffly, though against his better judgment, as he looked down his nose at the pudgy figure before him. "My Lady Plimmswood, it is indeed a surprise to see you at this glorious fete."

The woman giggled uncontrollably behind her fan, the sarcasm of his comment totally lost on her.

"I do hope you have reserved your dance with my Felicity, Your Grace. She would be devastated if her card filled up and your name was not on it."

"I am sure you would find a place for me, my lady." He hadn't reserved a dance with Lady Felicity or anyone else for that matter. He hated dancing.

Waving her rather ample arm, Lady Plimmswood motioned for her daughter.

"Oh, Felicity, dear, do come over and greet His Grace."

Phillip's ears rang with the shrill sound of the marchioness's voice.

Lady Felicity Linden walked to greet the duke, eyeing her mother with a look that could kill. With a discernable hesitancy, she curtsied before Phillip, a flawless display he thoroughly hated. He bowed, though she was still deeply into her curtsy, then offered her his hand, hoping she would take it, which would successfully ease her out of the ridiculous position she was in.

"I do hope you will honor me with a dance, Lady Felicity." His teeth ached at the thought of prancing around a dance floor, but he was nothing if not polite. Actually, he wasn't particularly polite by nature, but tonight he had no wish to send the young girl into a state of melancholy over what would be deemed his blatant rejection of her mother's less than subtle suggestion.

"I would be honored, Your Grace." Then she curtsied again.

Phillip rolled his eyes skyward.

They settled the particulars, after which Phillip excused himself. He had a sudden, intense need for a change of scenery. In the brisk evening, he welcomed the autumn air after the overheated miasma of perfumes, beeswax, and body odors of some of the less than fastidious personages of London society.

Phillip Allard vastly preferred his own company to that of others, though a member of Boodles, in name only. He did not give dinner parties at his Grosvenor Square townhouse and spent at least three nights a week in St. John's Wood at the Sapphire Club. He felt most at home there, for his sexual gratification came second only to his obligation to the House of Lords.

That gratification came in many forms, for which he would never apologize. He pitied the man who would dare call upon him to do so.

As he'd strolled through the ballroom this night, he'd recognized no less than one hundred and fifty men and women, all members in good standing with the Sapphire Club. Those same nobles would loath having their membership revoked for any reason, for their sexual proclivities were as perverse as his were.

The Sapphire Club was a diamond amongst the rocks. Though little talked about at society events, most of the attendees at this ball would, at some point this evening, find their way to the sprawling estate, owned by Lucien Damrill and his wife, Serenity, in St. John's Wood.

Phillip had been a member for many years, having been one of the first to endorse the club, a place where every imaginable sexual fantasy was brought to life. The hefty membership fee kept mouths shut, which provided an atmosphere of complete security. Phillip had seen most everyone in this ballroom naked and in various stages of sexual congress, as they had seen him. Consequence or title mattered not; creatures of the flesh made up London society. Those not currently members, would be at some point, once they learned of the club's unique offerings.

The music waned, signaling Phillip that his dance with the lovely Lady Felicity was imminent. With a ducal sigh, he pushed himself away from the white stone balustrade and dragged himself back into the brightly lit ballroom. The young lady stood but ten feet away, trying to look as though she held no intention of throwing herself at him. No doubt, her mother had placed her there after her last dance, lest Phillip decide to renege upon the obligation.

"Lady Felicity, I believe the next dance is mine." He bowed. Her smile was charming, though a bit tentative.

"Yes, Your Grace, I believe it is." She curtsied yet again.

The couples positioned themselves for the country dance as the music began to swell. Phillip considered it a small blessing there was little opportunity to converse if he was forced into dancing in the first place. Aside from the music, only the sounds of feet scraping the floor, some heavy breathing, and the swishing of silks and satins filled the air.

Phillip noted his partner's adeptness; she glided through the figures with grace and acuity. Her smile seemed natural and not the least bit shy, as earlier in the presence of her mother. Her laugh floated pleasantly upon his ears, making him follow her with his gaze as she executed dance steps away from him.

When she once again came within his arms, the scent of lavender permeated his senses. He felt particularly lecherous, considering she was young enough to be his daughter. The thought of introducing her to the pleasures of the Sapphire Club took root, something he would have to dislodge, once she was again safely under the control of her overzealous mother.

Phillip Allard was not, nor would he ever be, in the market for a duchess. His brother had a stable of heirs, ready and able to assume the weighty mantle of the Thornhill legacy.

As the music once again waned, Phillip's heart felt a bit heavy. He found himself dreading the end to this surprisingly enjoyable interlude. "Might I request a waltz, Lady Felicity?" he asked before he could change his mind.

"I would be quite pleased, Your Grace."

"I shall fetch you for the dinner dance."

She curtsied again. When she rose, her smile lit the room. A momentary distraction, but her presence made this otherwise insufferable affair tolerable. He bowed and watched as she made her way across the ballroom. Her gown caressed her bottom, and her hips swayed just enough to retain his interest.

With at least an hour before the waltz, Phillip had time to peruse the card room. Mayhap, he'd play a hand or two of whist. Time would pass much faster. He found himself looking forward to his waltz with Lady Felicity. It had been years since he'd looked forward to anything really, save his weekly thrashings at the club. Upon reflection of his need for them, he pondered just how perverse that was.

Against all hope, a game of cards wasn't going to be peaceful.

"Thornhill."

The unwelcome, wine-soaked voice stopped Phillip in his tracks. He turned to face Viscount Westerhouse, a vision that would likely keep the duke from his sleep. Dressed in an outlandish coat in the color of something evacuated from one's stomach, the rotund man presented the very picture of overindulgence.

"Westerhouse, what brings you out on this fine evening?"

"In search of a bride, Thornhill, but then I suspect you are doing the same."

"Not in the least." He spoke dismissively, emphasizing the point with a blatant flick of his wrist.

"Well, I am getting on, you know, and I must secure the title. There isn't a decent heir amongst my brothers."

"Indeed, there isn't, *save one*."

Westerhouse raised an eyebrow, almost to his receding hairline. "You can't mean Lucien. For God's sake, man. He is a fourth son and look what he does. He's a purveyor of the flesh."

"You make it sound as though he's a madam at a brothel."

"Quite."

"Not close. His establishment simply caters to the desires of its members. All is consensual and no money ever changes hands, as you well know."

"Yes, I understand that, but *of course*, he has barred *my* membership for years."

"So you aren't against what he does, just that he doesn't allow you to participate."

"I suppose you could think of it that way, but I simply don't understand why he won't accept me as a member."

"I believe that he simply doesn't wish to have you within a reasonable proximity of his person. Has he not sent unmistakable signals as to his reluctance to have you about the club? Why would you wish to be somewhere you are not welcome?"

"The sex, man, what other reason could there be?"

Phillip's skin crawled. If ever two brothers were disparate, it was Simon and Lucien. Lucien was blessed with dark, brooding good looks while Simon was short, squat, and unkempt. His premature baldness did not help the picture, and he had a propensity not to betray a single uneaten morsel of food. For his years, the man was obscenely obese.

Changing the subject, Phillip said, "I am sure one of the lovely young ladies here tonight would cut off her right arm to become your viscountess, Westerhouse."

"I am not of that opinion. It seems I will have to up the settlement to be made

upon the lucky lady's family."

"Well, I shall leave you to your quest." Without waiting for a reply, Phillip sought out a table and took his place. He still had time to play some cards before the waltz with Lady Felicity and realized he looked quite forward to holding her in his arms.

* * * * *

Felicity Linden watched as the Duke of Thornhill approached, her stomach hosting hordes of butterflies. No one in the room matched his elegance; his aloof air appealed to her for so many reasons. In truth, he had to be nearly twice her age, but she simply couldn't abide the immaturity of the young men clustered together on the opposite side of the ballroom. They fairly drooled whenever a young lady passed by, making comments, and one of them had even pinched Emily Farrow's bottom.

No, Felicity had maturity in mind, and if good looks came with that attribute, so much the better.

The duke dressed in an understated fashion, black coat, trousers, cravat, and shoes with a white linen shirt and silver waistcoat. His dark hair was laced liberally with silver, particularly at the temples. His patrician nose, full lips and dark, mysterious eyes, made her heart flutter. To put it simply, he took her breath away.

She steeled herself for his arrival at her side, determined she would converse if he so wished, without the usual simpering taught her by her mother. At nineteen, she found her friends being led astray by their marriage-minded mamas, who all seemed to favor stupidity over education. If a young woman went into a marriage knowing how to embroider, play the pianoforte, and to paint, she satisfied her mother with the upbringing she'd been given.

Felicity's mother had been much the same, but she'd had the foresight to send her daughter to Mrs. Ellery's School for Young Women, a fine establishment, where Felicity had not only learned the refinements required for her station, but much more,

including a rather well-rounded education in the art of making love, though, to this day, she'd yet to perform the act. Quite assuredly, Mrs. Ellery and her esteemed staff would have been appalled that such a course of study was available, pursued after hours within the confines of the dormitory.

Felicity had been a great listener and upon occasion, a voyeur, on those somewhat frequent occasions when a young man visited one of the naughtier girls at the school.

Since the first time such a delicious opportunity presented itself, Felicity had thought of little else but the curves of the man's backside, the magnificent protuberance emanating from the nest of dark curls, and the sac, which hung directly below the man's aroused flesh. Why, just thinking about the gentle rolling of his hips as he thrust in and out of Agnes Dye's quim was enough to moisten her drawers, even now.

She consciously cut the memory off, fearing an unattractive blush as the duke came within her space.

"Again, good evening, Lady Felicity."

He bowed, setting her heart aflutter. He smelled of sandalwood, a scent she would forever associate with him.

He offered his arm, upon which she laid her shaking hand. A naughty thought crossed her mind, recalling how another hand had encircled the aroused penis of a young lord and the look on his face when Agnes had drawn her hand up and down his engorged cock. Yes, she had even learned the words for all of the pertinent body parts and had practiced saying them aloud in the privacy of her bedchamber. She could do so even today, without so much as a hitch in her voice.

Her aspiration to be a bawdy wife was one she treasured. She often had wondered if the rumors about the duke were true, that is, concerning his membership at the Sapphire Club. She'd heard her father's friends speak of the club, in graphic terms reserved for conversations where they thought themselves alone. She'd listened at the dining room door many an evening, while her mother entertained the wives of the men taking port and cigars with her father. She'd never failed to become moist just hearing

about the things that went on there.

When mention of the duke met her ears, her interest had been greatly heightened. Now, she wondered if she could use this dance as an opportunity to ask him to take *her* to the Sapphire Club.

Chapter Two

The duke swept her onto the dance floor, his strong arms making her feel secure, though she trembled terribly. Excitement raced through her so wantonly, she feared he'd hear her heart beating, for she certainly could.

"Are you quite well, Lady Felicity?" Thornhill asked, his face exhibiting a curious expression.

"Quite, Your Grace."

"Do I make you nervous? You're shaking like a leaf."

She felt like a leaf about to lose its grip upon the branch. She couldn't recall how long it had been that she'd harbored an attraction to the much-older gentleman in whose arms she wished she could stay forever. God, he smelled so good.

"I—I'm not nervous, Your Grace."

"If that is not the case, my dear, you give an admirable imitation."

His smile seemed to be one of concern, if that indeed were possible. She wanted it to be so, for to have the Duke of Thornhill concerned for her well-being indeed would be a wonderful thing.

He proved very agile on his feet, circling her amongst the other couples; no other woman's partner seemed nearly as attractive as hers did. She wished to ask him her provocative question about taking her to the club, quite dearly in fact, but now, in his arms, she feared spoiling the moment.

His leg brushed against hers as they danced, his arm encircling her waist, his breath sweet with a hint of brandy; she likened her time in his arms to time in heaven. She closed her eyes, taking in the smell of him, that all-male aroma that set her cunny to

tingling and her breasts to aching.

" . . . and the season."

She then realized he'd been speaking.

"I am sorry, Your Grace. I became lost in the music." A lie, but she couldn't very well tell him the truth, that being she'd become completely lost in *him*.

"I wondered if you are having a nice stay in London and enjoying the season."

She wanted to say, "I am now," but instead said, "Yes, I always enjoy London, and Mama has kept me so busy, I've hardly slept."

He smiled. She recognized the look of polite amusement, for she saw a similar one on the faces of all the men her mother had attempted to snag in her marriage trap.

"I suppose having a young lady of marriageable age must keep your mama much busier than usual."

"She worries over the disgrace of having a daughter of twenty, which I will be soon, being on the shelf."

"Twenty seems so young from where I stand, my dear, and your beauty would never allow you to be placed on a shelf. There must be young men lined up at the door eager to take your hand. Your poor papa will be fending them off with sabers and Mantons."

It sounded like a compliment, which made her giggle.

"I suppose, Your Grace, but I am not interested in any of them. They are too . . . young." She hoped he would understand her thinly veiled attempt to engage his attentions.

"Why, my dear. Am I to gather that you would prefer an older man?"

Her face heated. "Yes, I suppose I am saying just that."

"I see."

And he did see, only too well. Her mama had taught her well—flatter, blush, and agree. If he were anyone else, she might be all for which he could ask. *This* man, however, could ask much more, and a girl young enough to be his daughter wasn't on

his list of favored things.

He'd never wished for a wife, particularly since his sexual tastes included the occasional liaison with a man.

His mind drifted, thinking how several days had passed since his last visit to the Sapphire Club, and he grew anxious to quit this social engagement and make his way to St. John's Wood.

His cock stirred to attention with thoughts of what would transpire later in the evening. Phillip's thoughts had been of little else but of Haynes, his flawless ass quaking beneath Phillip as he plundered the handsome young man. Yes, indeed, he wished to engage in the activity, after a good thrashing, of course, but then that went without saying.

The dance ended and Phillip escorted Lady Felicity back to her mama, who no doubt awaited news of an engagement. She would be sadly disappointed.

"Lady Felicity, you are indeed a delightful dance partner. I do hope you will spare me a dance when again we meet."

The girl raised her chin. "I will . . . if you ask me *nicely*."

"Felicity!" Her mama bellowed, attracting the attention of those nearby. "I am ever so sorry, Your Grace." She curtsied, then required his aid to recover herself to standing.

"No harm done, but I have been known to bite young girls for such insolence." He turned and winked, sure only Felicity could see. His action caused her to giggle.

Lady Plimmswood fanned herself with a fury, obviously flustered by her daughter's impertinence. Felicity whispered, "I hope not *too* hard."

"Just hard enough." He spoke the words before he could govern himself and regretted it in an instant. He'd been flirting with her, something he'd not done with a woman in years.

He broke the moment with a curt bow and walked away, lest his errant cock take further notice of the feisty young lady.

He found his hosts and made his excuses. He needed to get away from this place

and off to the place he felt most at home. He had energy to work off this night, and he hoped Haynes wasn't otherwise engaged.

Half an hour after he'd walked away from the lovely Lady Felicity, he gathered his cloak, walking stick, and hat from the butler, who already had sent a boy to summon the duke's carriage. The coachman pulled up as Phillip reached the bottom step.

"St. John's Wood."

The footman opened the crested door, and Phillip climbed into his beautifully appointed carriage. He took the seat facing the horses and tapped the roof with his walking stick, the universal signal to the driver to be on his way.

A squeak caught his attention as the carriage jolted. He jerked to attention, finding he was not alone. Though in shadow, the noise indicated his companion was a woman.

"State your business, whoever you are."

He received only a startled gasp.

Faint wisps of moonlight filtered in through the small windows, shining briefly upon the cloaked figure sitting in the corner of the opposite seat.

"I said, state your business."

Slowly, she raised her arms, and with delicate fingers removed the hood from her head. Phillip raised a brow. His visitor was none other than Lady Felicity Linden.

"I wish to speak to you, alone, Your Grace."

He lifted his walking stick to tap on the ceiling, but she grabbed it before he could do so. "Please don't."

"Does your mama know you are here?" His suspicious nature wouldn't put it past her mother to have placed her in a compromising position.

"No, of course not, Your Grace. I told Mama I was spending the night with a friend."

"Where does *your friend* think you are now?"

"Well, there is no friend. I mean, I made the story up."

"I see." He didn't like the way this conversation was trending.

"Please let me explain."

"I advise you do so quickly, so my driver may take you home."

"I wish to go with you."

"*With me?* My good young woman, I fear that is quite impossible."

"I know where you are going, and I wish to accompany you. I wish to learn about the Sapphire Club."

"What could you possibly know about the Sapphire Club?"

"I know enough, and it is my fondest wish to learn more."

Taken aback by her declaration, he cleared his throat, before reaffirming his conviction. "I fear that is quite impossible." He again raised his walking stick, and she again deterred him.

"Please, Your Grace. I respect you, and I wish you to be my escort. I will go alone, if you insist, but I *will* go."

"I'll see to it you are not admitted. You are much too refined for such activities."

"Am I really?"

Phillip shuddered, hesitant to read too deeply into her meaning. "I daresay you are."

"There is much you don't know about me, Your Grace."

"There is much I have no interest in knowing, my lady, and there is much a young woman such as yourself shouldn't know. Believe me, the Sapphire Club is not a place for you."

"I know more about sexual affairs than you think I do."

Phillip coughed. That was the last thing he'd expected to hear.

She jumped over into the space next to him and began to slap him on the back.

"Are you all right?"

He couldn't answer, but he gave her a stern look. Finally, the cough calmed, allowing him to catch his breath. She rubbed his back, sending frissons of something unwelcome straight to his cock.

"I am fine; now please, go back to the other seat." He attempted to shoo her away. "I will take you home."

"I don't want to go home."

"Please, Lady Felicity. I have business and wish to see you safely home. You are in a very precarious position."

"I would enjoy being in just about any position with you, Your Grace."

Phillip looked at her, incredulity coursing through him. "You have no idea of what you speak. You are too young to be thinking about such things."

"I am of a marriageable age, and as I said, I know more about the matters of the marriage bed than you or anyone else might suspect."

Bent on putting an end to this ridiculous conversation, he decided to be blunt. "Is that so? Well then, tell me all about it."

Lady Felicity swallowed, perceptibly hard from what he could see. He suspected she was blushing also, though the moonlight was too dim to determine that with any certainty.

Her voice cracked just a bit as she answered. "Well, I know the participants must remove their clothing."

"Have you ever removed your clothing for a man, my lady?"

"I should say not."

"Well then, how do you know such things?"

"I have watched."

"You've watched? What does that mean? You've watched your parents?"

"Oh my God, no! That remark, sir, is the product of a very dirty mind."

"Now, you have the right of *that*, little lady. You have *no* idea just how dirty my mind really is, and I have no intention of allowing you to ever find out."

"I would certainly like to learn all about you."

"I daresay, if you knew any more about me, you'd run in the other direction."

Her hand settled on his knee. He looked at her with what he knew was a blank stare.

"Please remove your hand." He spoke slowly, lest she miss his meaning.

Phillip felt the fabric of his trousers shift under her touch as her hand moved slowly toward his thigh.

"I don't believe I will, Your Grace. Are you absolutely sure you wish me to do so?"

Actually, he *wasn't* so sure anymore. But he was no despoiler of young women. "Yes, I am."

Her hand moved and so did his traitorous cock. He prayed she wouldn't slide her hand farther. With no idea as to how experienced she was, Phillip wondered how often she'd done this sort of thing. It had been some time indeed since he'd been alone with a woman outside of the Sapphire Club. Even with Evelina, his mistress, they'd always gone to the club, as they'd enjoyed the same activities. What could a girl of nineteen know of the reaction she was causing?

"You are playing with fire, miss, the kind that burns severely."

"Are you hot, Your Grace?" Her hand moved again.

He ignored the seductive tone, trying to concentrate on the feeling she was evoking. All thoughts of Haynes left him, and he began to wonder what her breasts looked like. He salivated at the thought but remained still, knowing if he raised a hand, let alone touched her, his resolve would be lost.

"What is it you want, my lady?"

"What are you willing to give me?" The heat of her hand continued to sear a steady path upward.

"Nothing." He knew he'd go to hell for lying, but then again there were grounds to commit him to purgatory just for the thoughts he entertained at the moment.

"Oh, I don't think that is quite true."

One more inch and his secret would be told, or could she tell already? His skin prickled with the want of laying her across the seat, the skirts of her expensive ball gown lifted, and him ravaging her within an inch of her life. His palms itched to bare her bottom and spank her until she screamed for mercy. Then a humorous thought

crossed his mind – she'd probably enjoy either one of those actions. He would too, way too much.

As they rumbled through the London night, the sway of the carriage lulled Phillip into a frame of mind that bordered on the dangerous. Felicity had stilled her hand, but he was under no illusion that she'd stopped her progression. In fact, he was almost sure he didn't want her to stop. If she didn't though, indeed he would ravish her and send her back to her parents ruined, at her own request.

He could frighten her by proceeding to remove her clothing, just to gauge her reaction. However, common sense told him she would encourage him to do just that. Instead, he placed his hand on hers, stilling her further movement.

"I must insist you go back to where you came from, my lady."

"No, I don't think I will." Her brass was amazing.

"I must insist."

"All right, but do one thing for me before I do."

"What?"

"Kiss me."

Chapter Three

Phillip felt his brows arch high at the suggestion, or rather, the demand, from his young companion. "Kiss you?"

"Yes, kiss me."

"Pray tell, why should I wish to do such a thing?"

"Because I asked prettily."

She batted her eyelashes!

"You didn't ask at all. You are trying to extort a kiss from a man who has no interest in kissing you, at all."

She attempted to move her hand again, but he held fast. In the dim moonlight, he looked into her eyes, tried reading her thoughts. He saw sincerity only, or as close as

he'd ever been able to read the emotion. He moved in closer, hearing her breath hitch. He prayed she hadn't heard his do the same.

The moment was fraught with tension, hesitation, and the assumed regret he would have the moment their lips met. Unable to stop himself, he touched his lips to hers, intending a chaste kiss, something impossible to interpret as a prelude to all the lecherous thoughts playing havoc in his brain . . . and inside his trousers.

Bad judgment, however, won out over good sense, as he wrapped her in his arms and took her lips with a hunger for which he would later despise himself. He heard her moan as she leaned into him. His tongue split the seam of her lips, boldly seeking the warmth of her mouth, meeting *her* tongue, sliding over it, savoring the fervor with which she answered.

He pulled her tighter to him, their angle awkward. He turned to face her, to hold her, when he felt her hand slide home, covering his cock through the fabric of his trousers. From deep within, his gut gave up an involuntary gasp. He pulled away from her, breaking the kiss he had so enjoyed.

"We must stop this, now." He made his voice stern.

He moved to the opposite seat and proceeded to straighten his clothing. He tried to affect anger but could muster only resigned amusement at this late hour. "Young woman, I daresay you are the boldest chit I've ever had the misfortune to know. What are you about?"

"I find you infinitely more attractive than the *boys* my age. I believe I wish you to be my first."

"Your first what?"

"Need I explain in detail?"

Phillip knew exactly what *first* she proposed, and warning bells clanged loudly in his ears. He raised his walking stick, banged sharply on the ceiling. The trap door opened in an instant.

"Yes, Your Grace?"

"Take me back to the ball."

John Coachman nodded and closed the hatch.

"I don't wish to go back. I want to go with you."

"Young lady, you will not go with me. You will go back to the ball, and we will forget this little excursion ever happened. You are much too forward a girl to be let out alone. One day, you might find yourself in grave trouble."

In a whispered voice, she said, "I would like to find myself in trouble with you."

"You must put thoughts such as that out of your head. Seek out one of those gangly creatures that pass for young men, marry him, and experiment upon his less than fully grown body all you like. Believe me, he will appreciate your zealousness."

"I wish to have a mature man, one who has years of experience and who can teach me the ways of the marriage bed."

Thornhill laughed, but not as though she'd made a jest. Twenty years before, he would have jumped upon her more than willing body. Years had taught him, however, that not everything was as it seemed.

"What do you *really want*, my dear?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"I believe you do. Are you here at your mother's behest, to get me to compromise you?"

"I've told you, she knows nothing of this. If she did, she'd spank me soundly."

"I just might do the same before we get back to the ball." The thought did have a certain appeal.

"Mmm."

Was that an *mmm* of interest? "Does a thorough spanking interest you, my lady?" Where had that question come from? He closed his eyes, exhaled slowly.

"Under the right circumstances, it might."

Silence stretched between them, Phillip not knowing what to say. He wished to be alone, out of this young woman's company, before he succumbed to her charms. It would be ever so easy to lift her skirts, tumble her over his lap, and give her a spanking she'd never forget. He'd like to do just that too, with no other motive.

His ass tingled at the thought of receiving like treatment. He could no longer feel the sting and burn of the last thrashing he'd gotten, and he wished to renew that awareness. He'd intended to do so at the club, before he'd been waylaid by Lady Felicity and her childish games.

The carriage slowed. John pulled the horses to a stop in the shadows, down the street from the mansion where the ball took place. Phillip opened the door and stepped out, reaching in to offer his hand to the young lady whom he now had to return to the ball unseen.

"Come." He crooked his fingers sharply. She sat steadfast, arms crossed over her middle. "I said come, before someone sees you getting out of my carriage."

She sighed and allowed him to hand her down. He checked the area, making sure no one looked on before escorting her to the back of the townhouse. He opened the door, which he guessed led to the kitchen, and ushered her inside quickly.

"Go straight to your mama, make an excuse for not being with your friend, and don't ever do this sort of thing again. Not every man is a gentleman."

She opened her mouth as though to say something, but stopped. He heard her inhale sharply. "Behind you," she said, just as another person spoke.

"Well, isn't this a fine state of affairs."

Thornhill closed his eyes against the words he knew would change his life. He didn't turn to face their accuser, at first. He recognized the accursed voice and knew the woman would do anything to ruin him. Their parting had not been a pleasant one.

Phillip then turned around. "Evelina, how unpleasant to see you again." Their association had lasted for over three years, and she was privy to many of his darkest secrets. He'd feared the jewels he'd given her at the end might not have been enough to keep her wrath contained.

"You mustn't be so cruel, darling. Your little lady bird here will think you more miserable than I know you to be."

"She is not my lady bird. What is it you want?"

"Oh, I believe your future misery will suit me quite nicely. Really, Phillip, I never

thought you were the type to despoil virgins. Deary, beware of his sexual tastes. I do believe you are entering waters beyond your depth."

"Stifle it, Evelina. Have you been following me?"

"You bet your fine *red ass* I have. I know *all* about where you go and what you do. I suggest you make your way to Lady Felicity's father and plight your troth, or I shall be forced to make a public announcement as to what I have just seen." She glared at Phillip, then turned her pinched gaze at Felicity. "Either way, our score is settled, Phillip, darling. Once you've said the vows and shackled yourself to this neophyte, I will rest at night knowing of the misery in which you live."

He'd always been so careful, never to be alone with a woman vulnerable to ruination — until now. His innocence in this matter would be irrelevant, for he was caught as surely as though he had in fact ruined her.

He gripped Felicity's wrist, without bidding his former mistress adieu. "Come," he said. "We have something to discuss with your father."

As he dragged her through the kitchen and down a dimly lit hallway, he ruminated upon the precipitous course his life had taken, but there was nothing to be done for it now. He was honor-bound to make this situation right, though he'd had nothing to do with its start. Oh, she will pay with her ass, he thought, wishing only to turn back the hands of time.

He faintly heard her plea for him to stop, but his fury propelled him forward. With no warning, she stopped running, jarring him from behind. His forward movement must've tumbled her nearly to the floor, for he found her righting herself as he spun around.

"What are you doing?" He shouted.

"We must talk about this."

"I believe it was your *talking* that now has us in this muddle. The only talking left to do is with your father."

"Your Grace, I swear to you, this was not my intention."

"I don't believe you nor shall I ever believe you. However, the point is moot, is it

not? There is nothing for it but to make this right, before your reputation is completely ruined. I just wish now, that I had done something truly dastardly to deserve having to spend a lifetime with your mama as a connection."

Felicity began to cry, he noted; her first sign of weakness in his presence. "She means well."

"She means to have a duke as a son-in-law, and now, she shall have one. Come, before I change my mind and seek refuge in Italy until the gossips go on to the next great *on dit*."

Felicity continued to stand fast for several minutes.

"You can't do this, Your Grace."

"I have no choice."

"You do." She struggled against his hold. "I will deny it was me should anyone say anything. My parents think I am with my friend. Once I tell her what's happened, she will not betray me. I can go to her now, and no one will be the wiser."

"You're a child if you think that. Come."

He kept a tight hold on her wrist. *Lord, how did this get so out of hand?*

They located Lord and Lady Plimmswood, who were engaged with a small group of people. Phillip and Lady Felicity had succeeded in calming themselves before their approach. Phillip stepped up to Lord Plimmswood and whispered something, drawing the man's attention.

"Excuse me, but I'm needed." He took his wife by the hand and together the four of them sought out the nearest empty room.

Once the ladies were settled, Thornhill came to the point. "Lord Plimmswood, I wish to offer for your daughter."

Lady Plimmswood began sputtering and tapping her daughter's hands. "Oh, my darling, this is wonderful news."

Phillip attempted to ignore the lone tear that streaked down Felicity's porcelain cheek.

"Well, Your Grace, I'm honored that you would find our Felicity to be worthy of

your consideration to take to wife. She is a fine girl, indeed."

"I wish to accomplish this as soon as possible, if you don't mind. I will procure a special license and shall we say, three days hence, the ceremony will be performed at a venue of your choosing?"

Lord Plimmswood gave his wife a deferential look. The lady bobbed her head up and down in agreement with her future son-in-law. "Yes, we will have the ceremony at our home, but I had so wished to see her married at St. George's."

"That is quite impossible, madam." He didn't want a display. It was bad enough to be forced to marry; he wasn't about to celebrate the fact before all of London society.

"Very well, Your Grace, we shall have the wedding in three days." The woman turned to Felicity. "He must love you very much to be in such a hurry to say his vows."

Felicity burst into tears.

Phillip remained unmoved by the emotional display. "I will have my solicitor contact you with the settlement papers. I bid you good evening."

He bowed and walked out of the room without a word to Felicity. He feared his anger would overset his tongue. There would be plenty of time to harangue her for the behavior that had trapped them both in a marriage neither wanted.

Decisions needed to be made and his head was a muddle. He made his way to his carriage, still parked under the copse of trees, where he'd thought naively it would be unseen—they would be unseen.

"St. John's Wood!" His bellow rent the quiet night air.

As the monotonous clacking of the wheels over the cobbles lulled him into a painful reverie, his anger grew dark. If murder were in his nature, Lady Evelina Townsend would be dead at this moment. He'd underestimated her ability for revenge.

There had been a time when he fancied himself in love with her, given her sexual tastes were aligned with his own. Pragmatic to his core, he'd never expressed his deepest feelings. After all, men simply didn't love their mistresses; why, that would be the complete antithesis of the purpose of a mistress. However, he'd sought an end to their arrangement for almost a year. She'd gotten too attached, expected him to forsake

his need for men, which would never happen. Finally, he purchased a very expensive emerald necklace, bracelet, and earring set and unceremoniously gave it to her after a particularly satisfying fuck.

She'd seemed happy enough with the gift, but had promptly thrown him out when he made the purpose of the gems plain. He'd assumed she would calm and see their end as inevitable. How foolish he'd been, and that foolishness would cost him his life, for at that moment he felt he'd given up everything.

Chapter Four

Many hours passed before Felicity was allowed to seek the comfort of her bedchamber. Her mother and father congratulated her on her success in capturing the Duke of Thornhill's attention. Her mother would be dragging her off to Madame Devalcourt's in the morning, as a proper trousseau needed to be sewn immediately. "We will pay whatever it costs," her father had said, for three days was surely not enough time to make all her mother intended to purchase, not without properly greasing the necessary palms.

She was attracted to the duke, undoubtedly, but she hadn't been afforded the time to decide whether or not she wished to be married to him. Now, the decision was completely out of her hands. Her impetuosity once again had landed her in trouble. Her future husband was furious with her. If she were honest with herself, she couldn't blame him.

She'd been quite forward, trying to imitate what she'd observed at school some time ago. She sensed *Phillip* was a man of great sexual needs, though she had nothing more to go on than the bulge in his trousers he'd so cleverly tried to hide from her. She tried to imagine him in the throes of passion, but even with the knowledge she had, she could get no further than the one kiss they'd shared. He seemed so staid and she wondered what she could do to make him cast all to the wind and make love to her with abandon.

His lips had been hard at first, but slowly they'd softened, until the kiss felt as though he would swallow her whole. She'd wanted him to, truthfully. He was everything she imagined her first lover to be, a bit rougher than the boys who constantly tried to feel her breasts when they got her alone at balls. They groped with such hesitancy she was certain they'd never before seen a woman's breast. Men liked to touch breasts and kiss them; she'd seen that first hand when Agnes Dye and her swain had stripped naked and engaged in the acts she foresaw herself doing with the Duke of Thornhill.

Her quim clenched at the very thought. She wished she knew more about how to please him. Most women must wonder what it was men liked so much about a woman's body. She felt like such a school girl. She'd be expected to submit her body to her new husband in three days time, and she hadn't a clue what to do. Agnes had much more experience. Though Felicity knew the goal, getting there was what she needed to learn.

The kernel of an idea began to form in her head, one sure to lead to even more trouble, but she didn't care. She'd gotten them into this mess; the least she could do was sexually satisfy her husband.

Her body tingled at the thought of implementing her plan. Only one place existed she could think of to get the answers she needed – *the Sapphire Club*.

* * * * *

Phillip arrived at the club at just past midnight. The night had been interminable, making the time seem later than it actually was. Hampton, the club's butler, took Phillip's hat in his usual polite manner.

"Is Damrill in?" he asked as he walked in the direction of the library.

"He is, Your Grace, shall I announce you?"

"No, I'll do that myself."

The click of his heels rang in the marbled entrance hall as he made his way to the

giant double doors. Without a knock, he flung them open to see Lucien Damrill sitting behind his desk, chatting with Prentice Hyde, Marquess of Wycroft.

Lucien smiled. "Please, come in, Thornhill. Would you care for a brandy?"

"If it is that fine French you usually have."

Lucien nodded at the footman standing unobtrusively to the side. He presented a snifter with quiet efficiency, something Phillip appreciated.

"You seem agitated, Thornhill?"

Phillip was agitated and made no effort to disguise the fact. "As you must have been, upon discovering your long-lost wife had returned to your doorstep."

"I certainly was, but all has worked out well. What has you so on edge?"

Phillip related the entire story to his two friends, holding nothing back. At this moment, the gossip mills undoubtedly churned with the unfortunate news of his precipitous removal from the lists of marriageable titles.

"She is certainly getting the most *charming* of all England's lords." Wycroft said, his voice conveying his usual teasing manner.

Indeed, the Duke of Thornhill had been greatly deprived of charm at birth, though he had more than his fair share of good looks and money. Even he recognized his shortcomings and dismissed the knowledge as unimportant. "Yes, well, she'll get what she gets. She's brought this about with her foolishness. I've never wanted to be married, you know that."

He allowed his rage to surface, for in the company of these two men, he felt at home. In the years of the Sapphire Club's existence, their sexual escapades had been renowned amongst the members. He needed to share his fury, and share it with others who would understand.

"Are you here for some activity, Your Grace?" Lucien asked.

"Yes, and if I ever needed it, it would be now. Is Haynes around?"

"Yes, I believe he is. You go on to the room, and I will inform him of your arrival."

Phillip swallowed the last of his brandy and stalked out of the room. He went to

the second floor, walked down the red carpeted hallway, passed the erotic drawings and paintings adorning the walls. He'd passed these same pieces hundreds of times, and they'd never failed to titillate him. There was no illusion this establishment was anything but a wonderfully operated sex club, full of consenting adults, whose only purpose was to play sexual games.

Tonight, he would receive a thrashing, followed by the fuck he'd intended to pursue when the night began. The Sapphire Club had become important to the Quality, a place they could go and play out their sexual fantasies with no one the wiser. Certainly, some of the upper ten thousand appeared appalled by day with the club's goings on, but by night, they bared their asses and did exactly as he intended to do.

For Phillip Allard, having his backside lashed was as important as breathing or as his position in Parliament. He'd never been able to explain why to himself and certainly would attempt no such thing with anyone else. His consequence allowed him wide berth. His sexual peculiarities were, frankly, none of anyone's business.

Of late, he'd engaged the services of a young man, Haynes. Previously, Evelina had done the honors, and he'd gladly reciprocated, spanking her errant bottom raw, but with their parting of ways, he'd been left with no partner.

All must be consensual at the club. He'd taken a fancy to Haynes, a young man who at one time had served as a footman. Haynes had been given greater opportunities when he began to take on his own clients.

As always, Phillip chose a room that accommodated the more depraved activities at the club. He'd been a devotee of thrashings, whippings, and the occasional lighter spankings since his years at Eton. He was sure his buttocks were calloused, and yet he insisted on painful thrashings.

The room held a contraption resembling a ladder, to which the duke could be tied, his legs spread wide and secured in that position. He'd endured many a whipping thusly trussed and would again tonight.

Haynes entered the room after a quick knock. "Good evening, Your Grace."

"Good evening." He winced inwardly as he realized his clipped tone.

Haynes, who appeared to hold no judgment toward him, made Phillip comfortable. Though the intimate nature of their arrangement had made Phillip face something about himself: a sense of shame. As much as he loved the act of fucking a woman, he was equally enamored with men, something upon which he and Haynes were in complete accord.

Haynes, a man of seven and twenty, was younger than Phillip by some thirteen years, though that difference had never mattered. Haynes had never refused him anything, and had delivered on his end of the bargain. Haynes's wrist was sure, his attitude resolved, making his sessions quite satisfying indeed. And the fucking . . . oh my God . . . some of the best sex Phillip had ever enjoyed.

"What shall it be tonight, Your Grace?"

Pain. Phillip eyed Haynes. "I wish for you to make that decision. I only ask it be harsh. Do you understand?"

"I believe I do. Get out of those clothes." In the blink of an eye, Haynes's demeanor changed and he took control.

Phillip's heart raced.

Haynes gathered several implements from the walnut armoire that occupied a fair space along one wall.

When Phillip stood naked, Haynes directed him to the apparatus. He placed his stomach against the padded rungs, his legs spread wide. His cock engorged immediately.

After strapping Phillip's legs and arms in place, Haynes lay on the flogger. Phillip's ass burned, no doubt bleeding, as he felt warm liquid creeping down his legs. He winced, gritting his teeth, as he always did through the first few lashes. Once into the lashing, he succumbed to the pleasurable high.

After he'd lain on a preset number of lashes, Haynes stopped. Phillip remained quite still for several moments. "Have you something on your mind, Haynes?" he finally asked.

"No, Your Grace."

"I thought we agreed that when we are alone, you would call me Phillip."

"We did."

"So what is going on inside your head, Haynes? You were quite extraordinary with that flogger."

"I was simply doing as you requested. I hope I didn't hurt you." He talked as he released Phillip from the restraints.

Thornhill reached back to touch his ass. "Not at all. Now, how about you shuck out of those clothes?"

"Wouldn't you rather I speak with Fortune or another of the ladies."

Phillip walked up to Haynes and placed a finger beneath the younger man's chin. "No, I wouldn't. I want to see *your* ass beneath me."

Phillip was sure he saw resentment in the man's eyes, but chose to ignore it. He unbuttoned Haynes's waistcoat, unraveled the cravat, and finally raised the man's white linen shirt over his head.

He noticed Haynes's hands shaking as the man unbuttoned the fall of his breeches. Impatiently, the duke slipped them down to Haynes's knees and bent the younger man over the bed. "Hold yourself open for me."

Haynes did as he was bid, as Phillip oiled his cock.

"I've thought of little else all day," Phillip said, as he positioned himself at Haynes's entrance. "You do enjoy me fucking you, do you not?"

"Yes, Phillip. I do."

"As I thought." With persistence and little gentleness, Phillip pushed his way into the man's ass, allowing little time for Haynes's muscles to accommodate him. He heard a gasp when he hilted himself with a groan.

His thrusts brutal, his mind full of angry resignation, he fucked as though setting down ground rules for his marriage. Each stroke pounded out the way of it. *I. Will. Not. Give. This. Up.* He'd not felt the fear of such a circumstance, until just then. He wouldn't—no, he couldn't give up his desire for a man, never. Marriage be damned.

Phillip brought himself to completion with a roar, not worrying for the pleasure

of the other man. Caring was for lovers, and Haynes was far from a lover.

When he stood, he realized Haynes had taken himself in hand. Phillip turned his back and began to wash. After slipping on a club-supplied dressing gown, he relaxed in the comfortable, overstuffed chair. "When you recover, I would like to watch you do that again."

"What do you mean?"

"I wish to watch you as you manipulate your cock."

Haynes looked away. He was a relatively shy man. Phillip had noticed as much, but he'd also noted a bit more of an open manner about the man, of late.

Haynes poured them each a drink.

As he took the glass, he stroked the back of Haynes's fingers. He watched the man's eyes, thought he saw lust, tinged with something he didn't recognize.

Phillip slouched in the chair and watched as Haynes made himself comfortable in the chair opposite. The other man licked his bottom lip, spread his legs wide, and began to stroke his cock, which became aroused rather quickly. Phillip took his own erection in hand, matching the rhythm set by Haynes.

"You don't like to fuck women, do you?" Just above a whisper Phillip asked, his eyes riveted on the other man's swift movements.

"No."

"How long have you known?"

"All my life, I suppose."

Phillip's heart raced.

"Do you like women, Phillip?"

"Yes."

"How long have *you* known?"

"I don't know." His answer pained him, for he'd known much longer than he cared to admit.

"Which do you like better?" Haynes asked.

Phillip had no answer, so he shrugged. His breathing quickened as he pumped

his cock. He was in no hurry. He enjoyed watching Haynes, a beautiful young man with a massive cock. He'd entertained a fleeting thought about being fucked by that cock. He'd never allow such an act though, somehow justifying his attraction to men as only wishing to fuck their asses, something of which he would never ask of a woman.

Always, Haynes had welcomed him.

"I'm getting married." His breath hitched as the pull toward release grew stronger.

"Congratulations, Your Grace." Haynes's voice sounded suddenly cold.

"None due."

"I don't understand."

"You don't have to, Haynes. It is my disaster, not yours." As his head lolled back against the chair, Phillip pulled his attention from Haynes. He pumped himself to release, feeling emptiness and desolation.

Chapter Five

Felicity returned from Madame Devalcourt's modiste shop completely and utterly exhausted. She'd been poked, prodded, measured, and stuck with pins, until she could bear no more. Her wedding gown was to be quite beautiful, though she was taking no particular joy in it.

Her mother had ordered massive amounts of undergarments, as well as an inordinate number of new dresses, saying, "We should take advantage of your father's generosity one last time. You know, my darling, your new husband is even wealthier than your father, and will see you in fine dresses, made in the latest styles."

At the time, she just smiled at her mother and wondered if that was the only thing of importance occupying her mother's mind.

At other times in her life, the knowledge that she would be buried in silk, satin, linen, and velvet, before the week was out, would have given her great joy, but given the circumstances, she garnered no solace from her good fortune. All she could do now

was resign herself to her circumstances and make the most of it.

"Excuse me, Mama, but I have a blazing headache. I wish to lie down."

"Fine, darling. Papa and I are going out this evening, but I will arrange for a meal to be brought to your chambers. Will that suit you, dear?"

"Quite well, Mama." She kissed her mother on the cheek and made her way to her room. Time to implement her plan and her mother wouldn't be the wiser.

* * * * *

An hour later, a non-descript carriage pulled up in front of the Sapphire Club, and a darkly cloaked Felicity floated out and onto the stone porch. The door opened and she entered. Only upon the closing of the door did she remove her hood, which had effectively hidden her face from even the hackney.

"Good afternoon, madam," the butler said. "How may I help you?"

"I wish to see Mrs. Damrill."

The top-lofty butler's brows knitted together. "I will see if she is receiving."

"Please tell her it is an emergency."

"Of course it is, madam."

Several minutes later, the butler returned, silently gesturing to Felicity, indicating she should follow him. He led her down a hallway and into a beautiful room, furnished with a great many nude statues and paintings.

Before her stood a lovely woman, older than Felicity, with dark brown hair dressed in a knot at her crown. "Good afternoon," the woman said, extending her hand in greeting.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Damrill, I am sorry for this unannounced call, but I am desperate and didn't know where else to go."

With a slight nod, Serenity dismissed the butler, who closed the doors to the parlor as he left.

"Well, might we start with your name? Mine is Serenity."

"My name is Felicity Linden. I am the daughter of Lord and Lady Plimmswood, and I am about to marry the Duke of Thornhill."

Felicity observed that Serenity was not surprised by this news, which could mean only one of two things: the duke had already been here or the gossip was more rampant than she'd suspected.

"I offer my best wishes, Lady Felicity. How may I be of help?"

"I wish to learn more about my husband-to-be and what to do when he wishes to have sexual congress with me."

Serenity smiled broadly, her ice-blue eyes sparkling. "I cannot speak specifically about the duke, but I believe I can instruct you on some of the finer points of pleasing him."

"Oh, yes, that is what I would like. I know so little, though more than most girls my age. I went to a school with older girls, you see."

"Yes, I believe I understand. Now, why don't you tell me what it is you know, so I don't find myself repeating knowledge you already possess."

Felicity related the tales from school.

"You know the basics, my dear," Serenity told her gently, once Felicity fell silent. "But you have much to learn."

They spent the afternoon discussing the mechanics as well as the finer points of lovemaking.

"You were right. There is so much to learn," Felicity said, amazed at how much she hadn't known.

"Lovemaking is pleasure-making. Each partner should learn the other's desires."

Felicity couldn't imagine her duke caring about her pleasure, which saddened her. However, she would make him happy he married her, especially since it was her fault the entire marriage had to take place.

"You do know what goes on here at the club, do you not, Felicity?"

"I know people come here and engage in sexual congress."

"Yes, that is true, but there is much more. People come to the club to do what

most can't do in their own homes. Have you ever been spanked?"

"Well, when I was a child, my governess used to spank me when I was naughty."

"Sexually speaking, spanking can be a very erotic game, played between two consenting partners."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"Oh, yes, but the pain is an aphrodisiac."

"Does your husband spank you?"

"Twice every day."

"And you enjoy it?"

"I crave it. More often than not, I ask him to spank me earlier than our scheduled time. It is always followed by the most wonderful lovemaking."

"How would I convince my husband to spank me?"

"I have a feeling, my dear, that convincing him will not be a problem."

"Are you saying he comes here to spank other women?"

"I'm not saying anything of the kind. Would you care to see a spanking? It is about time for mine, and I wouldn't mind at all if you observed."

Felicity felt her quim tingle. This was a whole new aspect of marriage about which she knew nothing. Somehow, she couldn't imagine her father taking her mother over his knee and spanking her.

"I wouldn't mind observing."

"Well, come then. My husband will be expecting me, and I mustn't keep him waiting."

Serenity ushered Felicity into the library. "There is a passageway leading to our third floor residence. My husband had the third floor staircase blocked after he bought the estate, lest members decide to travel about the house freely."

When the women reached the third floor, Serenity led Felicity down a hallway, to a room at the end. When she opened the door, Felicity saw a man standing by the fireplace, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

Before he could say anything, Serenity walked to him, kissed him quite

passionately, then turned to introduce Felicity.

"Darling, this is Lady Felicity Linden. She is the lovely young woman who is about to marry the duke. Felicity, this is my husband, Lucien."

"It is very nice to meet you, Lady Felicity." He bowed politely, then looked at his wife.

"Felicity wishes to observe my spanking. I have explained to her that spankings can serve as an enhancement to lovemaking."

"They certainly do and I am itching to get started." Lucien began to unbutton his wife's dress. "Spankings are always conducted on the bare, Lady Felicity. No clothing at all. I suppose you can see the benefit of that, can you not?"

Felicity's mouth was agape, as she watched the playfulness between husband and wife. "Yes, I suppose," she said, though she didn't understand any of this.

"Please, you may sit in the chair over there," Lucien said, pointing to an overstuffed chair not far away. "We will act as though you are not here, if you don't mind."

Felicity walked to the chair and sat. There was no shyness between the couple at all. Serenity seemed quite comfortable in her nudity, and Lucien appeared to come alive at the sight of her body.

"Oh, my!" Felicity gasped before she could govern herself.

Both the Damrills met Felicity's gaze, with quizzical looks on their faces.

"What is wrong?" Serenity asked.

Felicity pointed awkwardly. "You have no hair, you know, there."

Lucien and Serenity laughed. "No, I don't, as my husband wishes it so."

Lucien smiled. Felicity said nothing more.

Lucien smacked Serenity's bottom and her smile broadened. "Bend over the chair and get your arse high."

Serenity did as she was bid. Felicity reasoned the woman had done this countless times before as she positioned herself just so. Her husband rubbed her already reddened cheeks and dipped a hand between her legs. Serenity cooed at his touch.

Felicity found herself envious of that touch and more so thinking of what was to come.

"Spread your legs wide for me." His tone sounded solicitous. "That's it. Now don't move or you will be on the bench."

"Oh, the things you promise."

Lucien chuckled as he hit her with his hand, leaving a print on her right buttock. Serenity barely moved. Several more smacks hit her in rapid succession, her flesh reacting with increasing color. She seemed lost in the moment. Lucien again dipped into her quim, teasing her nub.

"Yes." Serenity's voice was barely audible.

"Now your favorite, dear."

"Hard, please, Lucien."

"As you wish."

With a leather strap in hand, he cocked his arm back and let fly with a snap across both her already reddened buttocks.

Felicity's eyes widened, her mouth gaped. She found herself stunned, while her heart thrummed with excitement.

Lucien continued to spank Serenity with the strap, her moans giving every indication of sexual arousal.

Felicity noted a change in the severity of the strikes, each one coming much harder. The veins in Lucien's neck bulged through the last three. Now, Serenity was begging him to take her, right there, as she was, bent over the chair. She gasped for air, fidgeted from foot to foot.

Lucien turned to Felicity, his brows raised. Realizing she was no longer welcome, she stood on weak legs and removed herself from the room. Sounds of their lovemaking filled the hallway. Her heart beat wildly; her quim pulsed with excitement. She tried to take herself away from their door, but her innate curiosity drew her closer to listen. She'd become quite agitated during the spanking, wishing to touch herself, to relieve an ache she didn't quite understand. Hearing the Damrills in the throes of passion, she'd reached the limit. She needed something, not really understanding what she was

feeling.

She paced, trying to walk off the pressure she felt in her loins. Walking had no effect. Leaving appealed to her, but she'd not paid attention when Serenity brought her to the third floor and had no idea how to get back. At any rate, so many questions troubled her mind.

She found an upholstered bench a short distance from the door. As she began to think Serenity would never emerge, she did, looking flushed and quite happy.

Serenity acted as though nothing untoward had happened. She seemed quite used to having someone observe her husband savage her bottom. "You waited, I am so glad."

"Yes, I have so much to ask you."

"I have a suggestion. I give spankings and wondered if you would like me to spank you, just so you can see if spanking might be something you wish the duke to do for you."

Felicity thought for a moment and agreed. Her bottom itched with a need she'd never experienced.

"When Lucien comes out, I'll take you back into the room. We will conduct a session, just as though you were a client."

"I would like that." There was no doubt she was afraid, but she wanted to make Thornhill a good wife, and if she offered herself in this way, maybe he would not be so angry with her for having to marry her in the first place.

The ladies chatted for several minutes, until Damrill came out of the room, looking fresh and well-groomed. He kissed his wife, bid Felicity adieu, and disappeared through the wall panel.

"Come, let's get you prepared."

The room seemed smaller now and took on a different meaning than just an hour ago.

"I won't ask you to disrobe, Felicity, but I will spank you on the bare. We will start through your dress, so you can get an idea of the feeling, but when I really spank

you, it must be on your bare bottom."

"I understand and agree."

"Please bend over the edge of the bed, and I will spank you with my hand."

Felicity did as she was bid. She bent forward, resting her upper torso comfortably on the bed. Her feet were firmly on the floor, knees tightly together.

"It might be better for your balance if you spread your legs a bit."

Felicity did as she was bid.

"Now, I will start." The words were barely out of her mouth before the first strike connected with Felicity's buttocks.

"Ow!" She cried, but stayed in position.

Again, Serenity struck her. After the first few strikes, Felicity rather enjoyed the pain, slight as it was. When she'd received ten spanks, Serenity stopped.

"Pull up your dress to your waist."

Felicity bent to grab the hem on both sides of her body and brought the voluminous fabric up and over her back.

"You're wearing drawers. It is my experience that no husband likes these things. My advice is to not wear them when you suspect an intimate moment between you and the duke." She laughed. "I have lost many a pair when my husband has torn them from my body."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

Serenity untied the ribbon at Felicity's waist, and the silk undergarment fell to Felicity's ankles.

Serenity situated herself to the side. Felicity felt the woman's arm cross the small of her back. "I will finish this spanking with my hand, since you are not used to being spanked, or do you wish the strap?"

"I believe your hand."

With no further conversation, Serenity finished the spanking with ten more spanks, showing no mercy. Felicity wiggled and cried, but Serenity kept about her

business until she'd finished with three, much harsher smacks.

Reduced to a blubbering mass, Felicity had undergone her first real spanking.

Minutes later, after she'd calmed herself, Serenity asked her, "Are you well?"

Felicity answered quickly. "I have never been better."

Chapter Six

Phillip paced before the hearth at Plimmswood House, as the lord and lady of the manor fluttered about settling the guests who'd arrived to see him sent to his figurative death. He smiled slightly when introduced, dreading the hours that would unfold with painful slowness, until the time came when he would take his new duchess away from this place and ensconce her as the mistress of his home and the anchor around his neck.

Much muttering went on; he suspected speculation as to the precipitous nature of the nuptials. He rather liked the idea that only he and Felicity knew the real story and neither were likely to inform the rest of these vultures. She could well be incubating his child at this very moment for all they knew. Nine months from now they would have to admit to themselves how wrong they'd been.

"I will go see what is keeping her," Lady Plimmswood announced, as she scurried out of the large drawing room, where all had assembled and waited for the bride — his bride — oh God, his bride. He hadn't seen her since the ball. He frankly hadn't wanted to see her, nor did he feel any closer to wanting to now.

The tap, tap, tap of Lady Plimmswood's slippers on the marble in the entrance hall heralded the arrival of the young woman whom God had placed in his path to answer for all of his many and varied sins.

"She's coming. She's coming." Then there she was.

Despite his less than benevolent feelings, his heart fluttered when she made her appearance. She was dressed in an ivory silk, high-waisted dress. A veil of lace adorned her head, nearly covering her auburn hair. She held a simple posy.

He was struck by how demure she looked, young, naïve, and dangerous — mostly to his heart. If he'd ever wanted a wife, admittedly, he'd want her to look like Felicity. As she neared, he saw her adorable freckles peeking out from under whatever cosmetic attempt was made to cover them. He'd always had a weakness for freckles.

He walked to greet her, bowed his finest ducal tribute, and offered her his arm. None of these biddies needed to know he felt as though the noose was tightening. He made every attempt to look happy, but since he'd rarely experienced the feeling, he had no real idea what might make him appear so.

A fire raged in the grate, appropriate since he felt as though he were being condemned to hell. The vicar waited for them in front of the fireplace, his smile making Phillip wish to slap the man back to reality. However, he didn't wish to give the gossips more to talk about so he stifled the urge.

With Felicity's hand resting on his arm, the ceremony began.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here"

Phillip looked ahead, standing ramrod straight. He felt Felicity shift slightly beside him.

"Marriage is the union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind. It is intended for their mutual joy."

He could think of only one of the three, and he'd almost guarantee neither would experience joy.

From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Felicity looking up at him. He didn't return the gesture.

"Who gives this woman in marriage to this man?"

Lord Plimmswood stood, puffed his chest out, and proudly declared before God and the assemblage. "Her mother and I do."

"This relationship stands for love, loyalty, honesty, and trust, but most of all, for friendship. Before they knew love, they were friends, and it was from this seed of friendship that is their destiny."

Phillip's stomach rebelled; he swallowed hard. Lord, he didn't even know the

color of her eyes, nor sadly, did he care.

"Marriage is an act of faith, and a personal commitment, as well as a moral and physical union between two people."

Felicity's hand tightened on his arm at the mention of their physical union.

"Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her"

He was about to lie, because he didn't love her, which would give her no comfort. Marrying her was the most honorable thing he would do . . . and keep her? In misery, maybe.

"I will," he said, the words burning like acid as they slid over his tongue and left his mouth.

The same question was asked of her, to which she answered with a subdued, "I will."

The rest of the ceremony flew through his head as a rush of noise. He danced from one foot to the other. He thought he'd heard Felicity whimper and sniffle, but too afraid to look in her direction, he never confirmed – not even with a quick glance.

Simply heartsick, no longer was he angry, at least not with her. They were bound to each other with no hope of ever fulfilling the vows as the vicar had presented them. He was positive he wouldn't know love if it slapped him in the face.

"What – therefore – God has joined together – let no man put asunder."

And it was done. He'd acquired a duchess and she'd acquired a husband who would surely make her life a living hell.

The room exploded in joyful shrieks from the bride's mother and proud pronouncements from her father, while the bride and groom forced smiles for the sake of propriety.

The wedding breakfast seemed never-ending. Phillip held a gag at bay as guests toasted with champagne, wishing the couple years of happiness and many children. Whatever happiness was to come to them, would do so on this day, for once alone, their misery would start in earnest.

After what seemed to be hours of eating and drinking, Felicity's mother ushered

Felicity away for what he understood was a change of clothing. She reappeared in a short enough time, saving him from a lengthy conversation with her father on his desperate need for grandchildren, given that he and his wife had only been blessed with the one child.

Her eyes seemed to plead with him for an end to this misery and for the beginning of the next. More than happy to oblige, he announced he'd be escorting his new bride to their home in Grosvenor Square. He'd had no time or any inclination to plan a wedding trip. Grosvenor Square was far enough away. They could be unhappy anywhere, to be sure.

But for the horses hooves on the cobbles and the occasional order shouted by John Coachman, the carriage ride was short and silent. Phillip knew they'd have to talk at some point, but what was there to say, really?

They'd go through the motions of a wedding night; though, he dreaded the consummation and the inevitable pain it would cause Felicity.

* * * * *

Upon their arrival at Thornhill House, Phillip introduced her to the household staff, but all the names and faces were a blur. When shown to her bedchamber, she felt nothing short of relief.

She stood in a beautiful room, complete with the requisite adjoining door, papered in sunny yellow watered silk, a color that *definitely* did not reflect her disposition. The plush rug beneath her feet was a combination of garden colors – reds, yellows, greens – in every imaginable shade. Large, heavy furniture in dark woods populated the space in vivid contrast to the ivory velvet draperies at the long, mullioned windows. Paintings of flowers hung on the walls, bringing spring indoors, despite the chill of autumn outside.

This would likely be the room in which her husband would make love to her for the first time, possibly where her first child would be born. It would also be the place

she would cry rivers of tears, for she shouldn't be here; she had no right. Phillip had not chosen her, and she'd never felt more unwanted in her life. He'd not given her any idea as to how the rest of this day would be spent, nor had he spoken a word to her since they left her parent's home.

He'd engaged a lady's maid, who greeted her downstairs and showed her to this room, but Felicity had dismissed the maid before they'd had time to acquaint themselves with one another.

The desire to dissolve into fits of feminine hysteria threatened to overwhelm her. She felt desperately sorry for herself and for her new husband, who, above all, was an honorable man suffering for her impulsive immaturity. She wouldn't blame him if he *never* spoke to her, instead making her suffer in silence for her misdeed, while he continued with his life as before.

She walked around the room, touching the small keepsakes that had once belonged to someone else. Nothing in this room was hers, save for the clothes she now wore. Even they hadn't been in her possession long.

Her life had taken an unseemly turn, one she'd never considered for a single moment when she'd surreptitiously hidden in his carriage. It all seemed so foolhardy now, so immature . . . so permanent. Too permanent.

* * * * *

Phillip sat before his fireplace, trying to suppress his rage at their unfair situation. Though early in the day, he held a glass of brandy in one hand, his other arm hanging over the arm of the settee.

Glancing into the mirror that hung low over the fireplace, he noticed he'd raked his fingers through his hair since his return so many times he looked as though he'd just gotten out of bed. Still clothed as he was for the wedding, he slouched on that settee, not even having removed his coat or cravat.

Stunned, in shock . . . hazy . . . dead inside. Almost as though during the

ceremony, he'd watched someone else saying the words that sealed his fate. He'd felt nothing but the strong urge to run, far and fast.

The woman he married was incidental to his feelings. She seemed pleasant enough, certainly beautiful, but apparently, just as miserable as he. They'd been dealt a nasty hand, indeed, but dealt it nonetheless. He now had a duchess. Young, in no way did she resemble any duchess he'd ever met. She undoubtedly knew nothing of the running of a ducal household, managing servants – or him, for that matter.

Then came the matter of all his secrets, and as the good Lord knew, those were in abundance. Was this the death knell to his visits to the Sapphire Club? Was he destined to spend the rest of his miserable days attending balls and Sunday dinners with Lord and Lady Plimmswood? The thought made his stomach roil.

He took a deliberate, long draught from his glass, hoping to numb his mind against the myriad thoughts that fought for prominence. He thought of Haynes's splendid ass, its welcoming warmth wrapped around his cock, massaging the release from him.

His cock stirred beneath the trousers he'd worn for his goddamned wedding. Sadly, it hadn't done so for the young, virginal woman in the next room. Instead, he wished to bury himself inside a young man, for whom Phillip held no more feeling than for the furniture in this room. Haynes was a vessel – that was all – a faceless, soulless vessel.

He touched the bulge his thoughts had created; shame flooded over him. A man of forty with a wife of nineteen should be smiling and anxiously anticipating being the first man to plunge into her virginal quim. Instead, he sat thinking about a young man's ass.

One didn't turn those feelings off simply because one acquired a wife – his penance for a foolish hour. He *was* who he was, a man who enjoyed a woman's charms as well as a man's. He needed a thrashing as surely as nature called each day, and he wished to inflict spankings as often as possible on a willing bottom. He would never apologize for those needs nor would he give them up. The question was, could he ever

tell his wife of those needs? He'd never had to explain himself or his desires to anyone before this day. Was it necessary to start the unsavory practice now? Was it possible for them to live separate lives? Certainly, he would consummate the marriage, tonight in fact, lest the legality of the union be questioned. But after that, could he conduct his life apart from Felicity's, leaving her to bear the burden of her impetuosity? It all seemed so unfair to them both.

Yet, they'd share this purgatory they'd created. And they both had played a part, for he could've chucked her out of the carriage upon discovering her presence. His honor as a gentleman hadn't allowed him to do such a reprehensible thing, and that same honor forced him into this marriage.

She'd become his responsibility. He was her husband now, and his duty was to be that husband. He would find a way to explain his sexual proclivities and assure her, despite where he might spend several evenings a week, he would return to her side, and for all the world, they would be the Duke and Duchess of Thornhill.

He dragged himself from the settee and rang for Densham, his valet. There were preparations to be made for a wedding night to remember.

Chapter Seven

Felicity's maid, Emily, informed Felicity she was to share dinner with her husband in his chamber. Her heartbeat increased, glad to know she wouldn't spend her entire wedding night alone. Emily had come to her with the news and had helped her into clothing more appropriate for the occasion. Her luggage had been sent along even before the ceremony earlier in the day, and apparently, all her belongings had been put in their proper places. Emily brought with her a nightgown made of the sheerest silk Felicity had ever seen, along with a matching wrapper and slippers. Without the security of her stays and the many layers of clothing she wore each day, she felt positively, embarrassingly naked.

Emily took the pins from Felicity's hair and brushed the auburn locks until they

shone. She left them down, pulled them back to Felicity's nape, and secured them with a delicate ribbon.

"When we are finished, Your Grace, you are to join His Grace."

She had only a slight idea as to what to expect. But she wished to see him, to explain how sorry she was and to beg him at least not to hate her for what she'd done.

On legs that felt like water, she walked toward the adjoining door. After knocking twice, she waited.

"Enter." His voice sounded deep and powerful.

She gripped the door handle and pushed down on it tentatively. As much as she wished to see her husband, she was afraid as well. Her stomach lurched as the large door swung open to reveal a room bathed in candlelight. The shadows from seemingly hundreds of candles dancing merrily on the walls and ceiling, danced faster with the sudden movement of air she'd caused.

Masculine smells of sandalwood combined with beeswax assailed her nostrils. She stepped into the room, seeing Phillip leaning against the mantel, dressed in a dark blue and gold dressing gown. She noted he still wore trousers but had replaced his shoes with black kid slippers. He smiled when she turned toward him.

"Good evening, my dear. Please, do come in."

"Thank you." Her voice stopped short, for she didn't feel she belonged there, despite his invitation.

Phillip pushed away from where he stood and walked toward her. He extended his hand in welcome and guided her to a round table set up in the middle of the room. Domed, silver-covered dishes gleamed in the firelight, beckoning her toward them. Her stomach rumbled quietly, making her realize how hungry she was.

"Please, my dear, sit down, and we shall sup. You must be starved."

"I am. Thank you, Your Grace."

"Please, call me Phillip. We are man and wife now."

She detected no animosity in his voice, no censure, but she looked up at him from down-turned eyes. As meager as their acquaintance had been, she had nothing on

which to base his current behavior. He was most cordial, most solicitous, but could she trust this?

"Thank you, Phillip." She smiled as he pulled her chair out and saw her comfortably seated before taking his own just opposite.

"I believe we need to find some common ground if indeed we are to survive the next thirty or forty years."

"Yes, I suppose we should." She hesitated before continuing. "I'm sorry for the trouble I've caused, truly I am. I tend to act before I think, but never did I suspect my actions would lead to trapping you."

"We mustn't think that way, Felicity, or neither of us will survive this. We must make good on what we have pledged to do, on our commitment to each other. I cannot say that I will love you, for I fear I am incapable of such emotion. However, I will respect you and protect you. I will treat you as befits your position as my wife. I pray I shall never do anything that causes you a moment of unhappiness, though I cannot promise that much."

"You needn't promise anything."

He smiled. "I *can* promise that this food is excellent. I employ the finest cook in all of England." He served her a portion of a wonderful looking pigeon pie, the savory aroma tantalizing her nose. He poured wine for her then served himself.

"Please eat before it gets cold." He encouraged her by taking a bite himself.

She tasted the pie tentatively, then with zeal. "This is quite good."

He responded with a smile. He had a wonderful smile. She said a silent prayer that she would be able coax more from him.

"On the night of the ball, in the carriage, you eluded to some knowledge as to what to expect of the marriage bed. Would you care to share with me what you know?"

Now wasn't the time to be missish, a trait she simply loathed in young women. "I know that we are made to fit together. My mother said it hurts, and that you will be the only one to derive pleasure from our coupling. She said I must endure for your sake." She didn't divulge anything else, waiting to hear what he would say.

"Yes, we are made to fit together; yes it will hurt, but only the first time, and I say, with all due respect to your mother, you will experience as much pleasure as I will, for I shall see to it."

"Is that possible?"

"But, of course, it is possible."

She thought back at her conversation with Serenity and of hearing the woman's moans of delight as she and her husband engaged in their lovemaking. Her quim clenched, her breasts tightened.

"Do you know about your maidenhead?"

"Yes, I know that you will break it and that will hurt terribly."

Phillip's smile appeared sympathetic. "My dear, it is no wonder that marriages are so notoriously unhappy, with poor, uninformed girls entering into marriages with their mother's advice as their only guidance.

"Yes, it will hurt as I break through the thin membrane inside you, but shortly after, it will hurt no more. I cannot tell you the degree of pain. You will have to tell me and I will act accordingly."

"I'm not afraid."

Phillip rose from the table and offered his hand to Felicity. She rose as well and was surprised when he swept her into his arms. He towered over her, something she hadn't really noticed until just then. She'd been somewhat aware during their dance, but the magic of that moment had negated any relevant thought.

He leaned in and whispered, "You are quite beautiful."

The warmth of his breath against her ear sent shivers throughout her body. He was rocking her slightly, pulling her closer and closer to him. Her head was full of his scent and thoughts of what was to happen next. Fear and want consumed her.

His hand slid down her back, coming to rest just above her buttocks. With a light nudge, he pressed her against his erection. Her immediate thought was to thank Agnes Dye for the lessons in school because Felicity knew what he was doing.

"Do you feel my want of you?" he asked, kissing her forehead.

"Yes." Her mouth went dry. She stood with her hands still at her sides, not sure what to do with them. God, how she wished she'd watched Serenity and Lucien! That was the lesson she really should have had, though she'd rather enjoyed the spanking.

Phillip dipped his head and found her lips, taking them with tenderness. His tongue lightly moistened her bottom lip then nibbled just enough to awaken her from her thoughts. She raised her arms to his shoulders, encircled his neck, and pulled him closer to her mouth. Her tongue ventured out, touching his, savoring the taste of the wine he'd drunk at dinner. Once engaged, they kissed, bit, and licked.

Felicity felt his fingers in her hair as he untied the ribbon. Backing away slightly, he combed through her locks, spreading them down her back and some over her shoulders.

"You smell of lavender," he said.

His observation amazed her.

Then he let her go and went to ring for the servants. She stood alone, in the middle of the room, stunned by the enigma that was her husband. Densham scratched at the door moments later, and Phillip instructed him to remove the table and to bring more wine.

His orders were accomplished within minutes. When the last footman left, Phillip locked the door. "We don't want anyone accidentally coming to check on us, now do we?"

"No, I suppose we don't."

He walked back to her and untied the wrapper she inadvertently held tightly about her body. "Are you cold?" He asked.

"No, not really."

"You mustn't be shy. We are married." His large hands slid the silken garment over her shoulders, her arms. It fell to the floor in a fluffy billow.

He placed one of his hands on her shoulder, the other covered a breast. Her nipple, already hard against the nightrail, he pinched between his thumb and forefinger, the sensation sending arousing tingles throughout her body.

"This enhances the pleasure of the touching," he said, as he dipped his head to take her nipple in his mouth through the fabric. He bit down on her, scraped his teeth along the sensitive skin. Tingles slid down her spine, her toes curled. Oh, my, she'd had no idea lovers did such things. Yes, she could indeed learn to enjoy this.

He moved to the other breast, doing the same, making her legs weak. Before she knew what had happened, she stood before him with her nightrail pillowed at her feet. If she should feel self-conscious, she didn't.

"You have a lovely body, Felicity, and I intend to use all of it." He was now standing behind her, his hands sliding down her arms. His mouth was beside her ear, his whispered words evoking any number of fantasies. He put her hair over one shoulder and bent low to kiss her back. She hadn't moved a step since she'd risen from the table, yet her legs felt as though she'd walked for miles.

His lips and tongue kissed down her spine, skittering shocks with each touch. She didn't know how she would remain standing if he continued. She felt a shift in his height and then felt his breath at the small of her back. He licked the dip just above the rise of her bottom as his hands covered both cheeks. He kneaded them roughly, making her suck in air as she was reminded of Serenity's ministrations.

"Am I hurting you, dear?"

"Just a little."

"I am sorry." He kissed her left cheek and then cleared his throat. "Well, what do we have here? Has someone been a naughty girl or was this a parting gift from your father?"

She closed her eyes, for the first time allowing the cobwebs to clear enough to remember she hadn't wanted him to see what Serenity had done. She didn't want him to know she'd gone to the club.

"Yes, it was from my father. I disobeyed his wishes."

"Oh, really. I would have thought nothing you could do would cause him to resort to such measures, considering your raised circumstance with our marriage. Tell me, what have you done that earned you such a beautifully red bottom?"

She stammered, something she always did when she lied. Finally she said, "I would rather not say."

"No, we won't play like that. Tell me."

His voice was soft, almost playful, she thought, but she knew she was caught. She'd gone to the club for him, so she could learn to be a better wife. He might be happy she'd been so forward.

"All right. I was spanked."

"Yes, dear, I can see that." He rubbed and squeezed ever so slightly. "What I want to know is, who spanked you and why."

He continued to hold her cheeks in his hands, kissing them as he pressured her for the answers to his questions.

"I went to the club and Serenity spanked me, at my request."

Phillip stood and came around to face her. His face looked serious, though she couldn't detect anger. His voice was level, almost seductive. "You went to the club? Why would you do that?"

"I wished to find out how to please you." By this time she was shaking, fearing his anger and rejection.

"So you asked Mrs. Damrill to spank you?"

"She told me about her marriage and how she enjoys being spanked. She said the sexual congress afterward is enhanced by a spanking beforehand. She even let me watch while her husband spanked her."

"I see. So my little wife is curious, is she? Well, I am flattered, but what makes you think I am interested in spanking you?"

"Nothing makes me think that. I just thought that if you were, then I should be prepared."

"It looks like you had quite a thorough spanking. You are still quite red. Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes, I enjoyed it, though it hurt."

"Mmm, well, as it happens, I do enjoy spanking. Is that something you wish to

experience by my hand?"

No longer feeling like an errant child, she stiffened her spine, raised her chin and did as she suspected would make Serenity Damrill proud. "Yes, husband, I believe I would like to be spanked by your hand."

Phillip smiled at her, a wide, toothy smile that sparkled in his eyes. He took her by the hand and guided her to the bed. "Well, then, my dear, bend over the bed, and let me see if I can't please you in yet another way."

Chapter Eight

Phillip's heart beat recklessly. His young, little wife wished to be spanked, a wedding gift he never expected to receive. They would discuss her trip to the Sapphire Club later, at a less sexually-charged time.

He'd guided her to the bed, where he instructed her to bend over the side. Just the words — *bend over* — thrilled him. To see her nicely reddened bottom available to him made his cock jolt. *If only* He dismissed the thought almost as fast as it transpired. Women didn't do such things.

He had Felicity rest comfortably, her legs spread wide. He used his hand and, using half his strength, spanked both cheeks several times. With the other hand, he touched her quim and found her drenched.

He noticed her hands clenching the counterpane, he heard her breath catch with each strike.

"Tell me what you feel, dear," he said in a tone that bordered on a whisper.

"I feel heat and a sting. I confess, I love it."

He spanked her thoroughly, rubbing her cheeks between swats, each time dipping low to tease and to touch. "I love it too," he said, not confessing whether he loved giving or receiving. He dreaded the day he would have to tell her his greatest secrets.

She moaned and yelped occasionally, which only spurred him on. Finally, after

she had taken twenty very respectable swats, he stopped. He knelt behind her and kissed her enflamed bottom, his way of showing his appreciation. He allowed his hand to slide along the crease, testing her reaction. He thought she'd raised her bottom toward him, but he wouldn't take the chance he was wrong.

He helped her up, stood her in front of him and kissed her with a need he'd rarely experienced. He ravaged her mouth, while his hands held her head steady. She answered with a demand of her own. She boldly took his mouth with hers, as she tugged at the belt holding his dressing gown together.

He broke from her to shuck out of the garment, while she tugged at the fall of his trousers. He liked her aggressiveness and knew she was acting on pure instinct. He'd never had a virgin, something he'd consciously steered clear of, but Felicity excited him. Her fearless approach, lunging squarely toward the pain she knew would come. She'd taken his spanking with relish, a bright spot in this otherwise blighted day.

"I wish to see you, Phillip."

"All right, get onto the bed."

She situated herself on the pillows as he stripped out of his clothes. He stood on the side of the bed, his cock jutting skyward, bobbing against his stomach as the wretched thing sought relief.

"Come to me." She beckoned with her arms open wide.

His weight caused the bed to dip as he crawled toward her.

"I must touch you." There was no time between her saying the words and her wrapping her little hand around his organ. Her tongue licked her bottom lip as she slid her hand down his length, exposing the purple head. A small amount of liquid oozed from the tiny slit. "Oh!" She exclaimed, causing a hearty laugh to escape Phillip.

"Taste it," he told her, delving into unknown territory.

"Really?"

"All the time."

She bent her head to him, allowing her tongue to jut out and capture the fluid.

"Tell me what it tastes like." His voice halted as he absorbed the pleasure.

"It's a little salty and tangy."

"Let me see," he said, as he pulled her to him, kissing her, his tongue searching her mouth. "Mmm, so it is."

He'd not planned such a thorough education during her first sexual encounter, never suspecting she would be so adventuresome. Encouraged, he decided to take her lead and go as far as she allowed.

She skimmed her hand down his chest, coming into contact with his nipple. She circled it with her fingernail, and he flinched.

"Does that hurt?"

"No, not hurt."

"Is it sensitive?"

"Yes, I would say it was."

"Good." She giggled and proceeded to pinch, bite, and suck until he closed his eyes so as to concentrate on the varying sensations.

She was playful, which he found delightful. Such a rare time in his life that things were anything less than serious, even urgent. Yes, he wished to plunge into her warmth, but he found he wasn't hurried with the wanting. He wanted her first time to be at her own pace. The shock of the coupling would come soon enough, a fact he was dreading, for he didn't wish to hurt her.

She lay sprawled across his body, one hand on his cock, absentmindedly stroking him while she sought out his other nipple. She nipped until he reacted vocally, then she giggled and did it again. He swatted her bottom and she wiggled, inviting more. She was an absolute delight and dangerous to everything he was. She threatened all he knew of himself.

She bit down on his nipple, only stopping when his attention returned on her.

"Ow, you little imp, I'll show you." He flipped her over onto her back and savaged her breasts, giving them the same treatment she had given his. He nibbled with his teeth and lips, his tongue never stopping. He suckled her hard, feeding on her like a hungry babe.

He slid his hand over her flat belly and lower, tangling in the auburn curls protecting her mons. He teased there awhile, combing through the wiry hair. "This must go," he told her.

"You wish me to be as when I was born?"

"Indeed I do, duchess of mine. On the morrow, you will have Emily do that for you."

"As you wish, oh, duke of mine."

They laughed, but he punctuated his demand with, "I mean it."

The moment was not broken, because he immediately ran a finger through her moistened folds. "Are you ready for me?"

He saw her swallow hard and sought to reassure her. "I don't believe it will hurt as the spanking did and it is for but a short time, or so I understand. I promise I will make it as pleasurable as I can."

"Is it possible for me to do it, to control your progression?"

He thought for a moment. "Yes, I believe it is." He rolled himself over onto his back. "Straddle me." She did as he instructed and he placed her over the juncture of his torso and legs. "You can lower yourself onto me at your own pace."

She nodded. He took himself in hand, guiding his cock to her entrance. She lowered herself onto him, taking her weight on her bent knees. The head slipped inside her. She gasped.

"Are you all right?"

"I've never felt anything like it in my life."

"There is so much more to feel, dear. When you are ready, lower yourself onto me."

She began immediately. Soon she came to the barrier, and she hesitated. "There it is."

He placed his hands on her thighs. "It's up to you, now. I will not move until it is broken."

She felt wonderful, wrapped around him. She had such a trusting look on her

face. He hoped this would not be completely terrible.

She leaned forward, placing her hands on his shoulders. She gripped him tightly, digging in with her fingernails. He saw the fear in her eyes, as she inched her way down. She began to bounce ever so slightly, then suddenly raised up and plunged back down, emitting a muffled scream. She collapsed on his chest, still gripping his shoulders tightly.

After a few minutes, she laughed slightly. "I'm not a virgin anymore."

He could feel the muscles of her cunny hugging his cock. He fought for control, concentrating on her, rubbing her back and her bottom, trying to sooth the pain away.

"How badly does it hurt?"

"It burns."

"It should subside shortly. I understand it lasts only momentarily."

"Did it last momentarily for you?"

"I've never experienced anything like it, love."

"My point exactly."

He chuckled, allowing her charm to envelop him.

A few minutes later, she attempted to move and found the pain had eased. "It doesn't hurt." She smiled at him.

In a languid movement, he rolled her onto her back. "Open your legs wide for me, Felicity."

She did as he asked, raising her knees and making room for him.

"You are so tight." He'd never taken such a tight cunny. "It reminds me of . . ."

"Of what?"

He ignored her, as he rolled his hips, treasuring each sensation. Her canal fit around every inch of him, like a glove. Every sensitive spot was being worked, transmitting shockwaves of pleasure throughout his body. No woman had ever felt this good; it simply hadn't been his experience.

His pace increased as the need rose within him. Her moans encouraged him; he wanted her pleasure.

"Open your eyes," he said, as he felt her body tense around him. "I want to see your eyes."

He felt much tenderness for her. He kissed her, while stroking long and deep. Her face seemed to tell the story; her enjoyment was in her smile, her moans.

He wanted her; her body thrilled him. Her fulfillment became the most important thing.

He rocked his hips, short strokes, as he kissed her forehead, cheeks, lips. He'd placed his hands on her cheeks, wishing to study her face, wanting her to take away the "other" thoughts, the "other" needs. In this moment, he wanted her, truly wanted her to be most important in his life.

"You all right?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, quite." Her answer sounded desperately breathless.

He lifted his body, changing the angle, finally giving her what she truly needed, though she had no idea what that was. He saw when the fire hit her eyes, the recognition that something new was happening – different, unexplained, inexplicable.

"What is happening?" she asked, gasping. "I'm on fire, Phillip."

"Yes, isn't it wonderful?"

She didn't answer. He began to thrust harder, though not much faster. She'd closed her eyes, seemingly lost in the web of heat and lust he wove around her.

Her body tensed, her fingernails dug deeply into his back. He smiled at the pain, which acted as a whip. Their union became a conflagration. He pumped, long, hard, watching, sensing, feeling, knowing the moment she was beyond sanity.

"Let it go, my girl," he groaned, "let it go."

Her answer was a gasp. Her body went taut; she pulled him closer still, fingernails scraping against his skin, her body fully responding to his. Her shouts of release were like music to Phillip, for he wanted her pleasure nearly as much as he wanted his own. His came amid bellows of gratification, the long strokes at the end punctuated by the sharp staccato thrusts afforded him one of the most powerful orgasms of his life.

He held her close, feeling her arms around him as well, felt her panting breath that matched his own. He felt moisture against his cheek, assumed it was sweat. His body relaxed, as if liquid.

He rolled to his side, taking her with him, not wishing to separate from her just yet. She remained wrapped in his arms, his brave little wife. He knew their life wouldn't always be like this, for this was an exception, not the rule. He wasn't made to be a husband, at least not the man he'd just been. He wasn't a caring, thoughtful sort, who saw to other's needs before his own. He was a selfish bastard, who this lovely young thing would come to hate. He had not doubt.

They dozed for a time, still bound by what they'd shared. He opened one eye to find her staring up at him. He'd never had a lover do that before. But then again, if he were honest, he'd always left after the fucking, which indeed is all it had ever been. He never lounged with a lover before, something that made him uncomfortable for numerous reasons, none of which existed at the moment.

"What are you looking at?" He recognized his voice as rusty, heavy.

She smiled, her fingernail scraping across his growth of beard. "This will have to go," she stated, with a twinkle in her eye.

"So it will." He kissed her lightly, wishing desperately he could be the man he saw in her eyes. Though he'd rarely seen it, he thought he recognized adoration and knew he didn't deserve that from her.

She rested her head on his shoulder and shortly after, he heard the sound of her even breathing, felt her body finally relax completely, and reveled in her warm breath against his skin.

He kissed her forehead, wanting to feel connected to her, willing it to happen. He couldn't speak the words he knew he *should* say, and somehow, he knew he never would. He'd been alone all his life, even while growing up, separated from his mother and siblings by a father whose only goal was to raise him to be the duke. Phillip grew to be a cold, unfeeling boy, and those attributes only heightened as he aged.

He was selfish and felt a sense of entitlement. On any other day, he would have

taken what he wanted, with no thought otherwise. But this girl, who had, through a single act of impetuosity, embroiled them in a scandal that could've proved socially lethal, deserved more than Phillip Allard, the goddamned almighty Duke of Thornhill ever would.

She deserved a man who spent a few hours on her wedding day, treating her as though she was special. Every bride should have such consideration taken on her behalf, her needs attended to, her pleasure realized. What the hell kind of husband takes a woman to wife, fucks her, and leaves her to grow bitter and cold, then complains for forty years because she is as he created? Unfortunately, he knew of too many marriages just like that.

He wouldn't ever be the husband she deserved, for she was far too beautiful for God to have ever seen fit to award him with her. But they were a part of each other's lives now, till death do they part. He had an obligation to her to see her safe and secure.

As she slept, the few candles that still struggled to burn showed her to be like a delicate flower, though he certainly knew better. She was brave and sturdy, someone he'd be proud to have on his arm. Yet, he knew he'd disappoint her, for even now, his thoughts were veering toward the Sapphire Club and his eternal quest for what?

Though early morning, he knew the club would be operating. It always was. He needed the attention only Haynes provided. The man was bloody efficient with a flogger, and that's what Phillip needed. Muddled with thoughts to which he had no right, as well as thoughts dark enough to bring about the downfall of the young woman who lay beside him, he sighed. He didn't deserve the life that Lucien Damrill or Prentice Hyde had with their wives; that obvious bliss they immersed themselves in day in and day out. Their wives shared their sexual cravings, the more perverse side of themselves.

He could never share that with Felicity, for if he did, she would look at him with disgust and revulsion. The looks she'd given him this day were as she saw him, not as he actually was. Indeed, he dreaded the day she learned the truth.

Chapter Nine

As Phillip stepped into the entrance hall, the club seemed quiet. All assignments had long ago been arranged and rooms no doubt filled to capacity. The *ton* loved its sex raw and often, though to hear them talk, one would think their children had been born by immaculate conception.

Hampton took Phillip's great coat and hat. "Don't you ever sleep, Hampton?"

"Yes, I do, Your Grace."

"You are always here."

"Yes, I am, Your Grace."

Concise conversation with no information imparted. *Good man, Hampton.*

"Is Haynes about?"

"I believe he is, Your Grace."

"Could you find him and ask him to go to my room?"

"I will do that, Your Grace."

Phillip walked across the entrance hall, the loud clicking of the grandfather clock's pendulum and his heels striking the floor the only sounds he could hear. A fleeting thought that he might have just asked Hampton to rouse Haynes from his bed crossed his mind. Then he dismissed it, not particularly caring if that was the case. He had need of the young man, and he *was* the Duke of Thornhill.

His usual room was dark, but for enough glow from a single moonbeam to allow him to light a candle. He'd have Haynes set a fire in the grate, for the room had a chill.

While he waited, his mind drifted back to Grosvenor Square and to his wife. Good God, *his wife*. Never had he thought to have one. Not even now, after a most satisfying wedding night, did he particularly care to have a wife. He saw no benefit and great detriment, particularly to her, but none of that mattered now.

A light tap sounded on the door, and a rather disheveled Haynes entered the room. He *had* roused the man from his bed.

"Good evening, Haynes. I am sorry to have awakened you."

"Are you, Phillip?" Haynes yawned and seemed rather brusque.

He deserved that. Haynes spoke truthfully, instead of the constant deference to title and consequence.

"Not really. Could you set a fire?"

Without a word, Haynes knelt before the grate, arranged the wood and set the fire. It all looked so simple to Phillip, yet he'd never done such a thing in all his life. He felt a degree of shame wash over him, then dismissed it as foolishness.

"What can I do for you, Phillip?" Haynes's tone had more than a tinge of irritation.

"I got married today."

"You woke me to tell me that?"

"No." His reason for coming here at this hour was rapidly becoming ridiculous. However, he was here and he would get that for which he came. He began to disrobe.

"I have great need of you, Haynes." Phillip removed his trousers, his erection leaving no doubt as to his intention.

"I can see that; however, that will have to wait. I believe there is something else to attend to first."

As Haynes retrieved the strap, Phillip stripped away the rest of his clothing. In this room, he felt at home. The dark agonies he'd experienced here drew him back to himself, like the beckoning fingers of a wraith. The more pain he got—the more he wanted.

He positioned himself as always, legs spread wide. Haynes fastened the restraints, though for effect only, for Phillip wasn't about to forego what came next.

He hoped Haynes was irritated enough that his anger would come out in his lashes. Phillip wanted to feel every strike, every sting. He wanted it to burn for days, for through that, he felt alive, reminded constantly of what he was and who he'd never be.

No respite between strokes, indeed Haynes laid the lashes on nicely. Phillip gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, relishing the sound of the wide leather strap as it slapped his skin. Even the whistle it made flying through the air held significance. He

concentrated, not wanting to spend his seed during the thrashing. He had other plans.

The first of the last strikes bit hard, laid over the tender skin of his ass. The second snapped in the air and Haynes placed it precisely over the others. The third was orgasmic, bringing tears to Phillip's eyes. Then, all too quickly, it was over.

He always liked the feeling just after the lashing ended, when the burn was at its peak. On weak legs he shook, but his soul was salved.

Haynes released the bonds and disrobed without saying a word. When Phillip turned around, gathering his strength, he saw Haynes had bent over the edge of the bed. Such a blatant invitation, one that said, "Fuck me and get it over with."

If Phillip were a considerate man, he'd allow the man to go seek his bed once more. However, he *was* the Duke of Thornhill, and all of London knew he was *not* a considerate man.

Phillip bathed his raging erection in oil and then did the same to the willing man's anus. He slipped two fingers into Haynes's rectum. "How does that feel?"

Phillip knew Haynes well enough to know his anger wouldn't upset the man's need for release. He enjoyed a good ass-fucking as well as Phillip enjoyed giving it to him.

"Your cock would feel better."

"As you wish."

Phillip took his time, slowing inching himself into Haynes. Once past the restrictive muscle, he used quick, hard thrusts, pounding his cock into Haynes's ass. Animalistic in nature, the grunts and moans, guttural and raw, resounded in the room.

This was a fuck for fucking sake. This had nothing to do with emotion. Phillip simply wanted the feeling and release, tight, forbidden, and empty.

He unleashed a savagery he'd not shown Haynes before. He slapped the man's pale ass cheeks with each stroke. Haynes groaned.

When Phillip came, he screamed like a wild man, taking his pleasure with blinding cruelty. Once spent, he didn't linger, pulling out straight away. This was his habit, for no emotional attachment resided between him and his vessel.

Haynes stood and Phillip looked into his eyes. The darkness he saw there appeared threatening but appealing as well. On impulse, Phillip pulled the man's head toward him and kissed him hard. Haynes kissed him back, matching the urgency, bringing his arms around Phillip's neck.

When they broke apart, Haynes said, "Bend over."

The words shot warmth through Phillip, unexpected yet welcome. He'd never allowed what he thought Haynes proposed, and yet, he found himself complying without hesitation.

He bent over the bed, right where Haynes had been moments before. He heard a drawer slide and felt cold liquid as Haynes applied the oil. A slathering noise told him Haynes was lubricating his own cock.

"Hold your cheeks open, Phillip, and spread your legs wide."

He'd never heard Haynes speak with such authority. The man growled the words. Phillip complied, soon feeling the pressure of Haynes's finger pushed into his virginal ass. He should end this, before he had full confirmation of who and what he was. Shame threatened, but Phillip pushed back with force.

Haynes removed his finger and inserted two. The burn surprised Phillip, he'd no idea. He willed himself to relax, to submit. His heart hammered; he could hear the blood rushing through his head. He licked his bottom lip as the fingers were pushed in harder, and Haynes began pumping them in and out.

Haynes leaned over him, his lips touching Phillip's ear. "I'm going to fuck your ass, Phillip, hard, just like you did to me. Do you like to play rough, *Your Grace*?"

Phillip could feel the other man's cock poised at his entrance. Haynes rocked against the opening, each forward movement more forceful.

"Do it."

"As you wish." Haynes's voice carried a mocking tone.

Haynes thrust forward, breaching the ring of muscle. Phillip grunted — loudly — the burn bringing tears to his eyes.

"Does it hurt?" Haynes asked with little compassion in his voice.

"Yes."

"Good. That's when it feels best."

Haynes never stopped rocking, ploughing farther inside, inch after inch, with each forward thrust. Phillip had an unbearable urge to push the man away. He gripped the counterpane to dispel that impulse. The feeling of fullness was so foreign, the piercing pain much more than he'd realized. Yet, as he forced himself to relax, the pain disappeared and uncomfortable pleasure consumed him.

Haynes fucked him in earnest now, the sound of their bodies slapping together with each pounding stroke. He gave Phillip no quarter. He felt the man's ballocks smacking his own. He had an intense urge to take his own cock in hand, but he couldn't. He tried to rock his body, but Haynes was giving him little leeway. Haynes left no doubt just who was in control.

He could do nothing but take what Haynes gave. He knew the man's release neared, as the pace increased. First long, easy strokes, then short, staccato thrusts, and finally, frenzied pounding as climax overtook Haynes. He emitted loud, needy groans as he spilled his seed into Phillip's ass, the pulsing felt throughout Phillip's body.

Before Phillip could gather his thoughts, Haynes removed himself, gathered his clothes, and went to the door. Weakly, Phillip stood and turned. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"We are done, for good. Go home to your wife, *Phillip*. Show her what I've just shown you."

Phillip stood stunned, dazed at the man's bitter tone. He'd learned much tonight in this room. With a sudden feeling of loss, he looked after Haynes as the man walked away. But even though the door's click echoed the tone of finality, he refused to believe Haynes would end what was between them. The man would come around. Phillip felt certain of it.

* * * * *

Felicity stirred and realized the soreness, an ache between her legs and deep inside, reminding her she was now a married woman. She patted the space next to her, searching for the warmth of her husband's body, but his side of the bed lay empty and cold.

As she rubbed the sleep from her eyes, she sat up. The sun had risen, tiny fingers of light creeping into the room through the slight separation in the draperies. A fire crackled in the grate, and she heard a clock ticking somewhere in the room.

She took a moment to orient herself. She'd not seen much of this room last night, for she truly had eyes only for Phillip. He'd been so kind and so gentle. Dare she think he'd been loving? No, he'd simply been solicitous of the fact that she'd been a virgin. Now, however, she knew enough to be considered well-seasoned, for he'd barely left her alone. She'd learned many things about the marriage bed and about her husband.

She climbed off the high dais the bed was sitting upon, found her clothes, and returned to her room through the connecting door. Emily puttered around the room, having already laid out Felicity's clothing on the bed.

"Good morning, Your Grace. I have had a bath prepared for you."

"Thank you, Emily."

The girl curtsied and smiled toothily.

"Have you seen His Grace this morning, Emily?" Felicity asked as she slipped a toe into the steaming hip bath.

"I have not seen him, myself, but I believe Densham was at his station when he came in this morning."

"Came in? This morning?"

"Yes, Your Grace."

The bath became secondary to her urge to see her husband. Where had he gone after she'd fallen asleep? It had been so late when they'd made love the last time. She remembered hearing the clock chime, was it once or twice? She assumed he'd slept and risen early.

Within thirty minutes, she finished her bath, dressed, and was prepared to find

Phillip. She had no idea how to approach him with what she'd learned. He'd lived a good many years without having to answer for his comings and goings. Did she have a right to hold him accountable now? Did she really have any expectation of fidelity or love? He'd not promised such.

She wanted to be a part of his life, to share that which was important to him. No, she wouldn't burden him with her foolishness; she'd done enough of that already. Her greatest fear was that he'd disregard her standing as his wife and conduct his life as he'd always done. She wanted desperately to show him she could be a good wife, a good duchess, someone he'd be proud to have on his arm, whether they attended a ball or were guests at Carlton House. She was the Duchess of Thornhill now, and she was obligated to fulfill that role with aplomb.

After checking the pier glass one final time, making sure each auburn strand was in place, she opened the door and began her first full day as the mistress of the house.

Chapter Ten

Phillip felt like shit. He'd returned home as the sun rose, dressed in day-old clothing, and reeking of sex, brandy, and despair. He regretted going to the Sapphire Club, and shame clung to him like a shroud. The dread of seeing Felicity was almost as profound as Haynes's last statement as the man left the room. "We are done. Go home to your wife, Phillip. Show her what I've just shown you."

That would never happen. His ass burned and ached at this moment from his own introduction. No small degree of indignation, either.

Could he continue to live this life with Felicity now a part of it? Like it or not, they were bound together. Poor child had no idea what a bastard she'd taken on.

He raked his hands through his hair for the hundredth time, trying to formulate a plausible explanation for his disappearance. By now, she surely knew he hadn't spent the night in the same bed as she, which might not seem so bad if he didn't look so goddamn terrible.

In the end, rather than deal with the issue head on, he decided it wasn't any of her business. He would not change his life to accommodate a woman, no matter if she was his wife. He didn't want a wife, never wanted a wife, and that's the way it would be . . . until he saw her, pretty as could be, smiling at him as though he'd hung the moon.

"Good morning, Phillip." Her voice was like a song, and she had not a hint of anger or revulsion in her eyes.

"Good morning, dear. Are you getting settled?"

"I have an appointment with Mrs. Landon this afternoon. We will go over the household accounts. Please be patient with me; I'll learn to manage the household in due time."

"I have an efficient staff, Felicity. They will show you everything you need to know."

"Yes, so they have assured me. Is there anything I might get for you? You look as though you have slept badly."

Shaking his head, wondering how she could be so . . . sweet . . . given he looked like hell and smelled worse. "I could use a bath."

Wrinkling her freckled nose, she said, "Yes, you could." She rang for Densham, then informed him of all the duke's needs.

Phillip tried to veer around her on his egress from the room but apparently, she had other ideas. She hooked her arm in his and went with him to his bedchamber, into his dressing room and waited until the bath was prepared. She then dismissed the footmen, the valet, and the butler.

He had no idea what to do, but he knew he didn't want her to see the evidence of the thrashing he'd received. He also didn't know if he carried outward signs of what Haynes had done to him. He very much needed to be alone.

"Here, let me help you, darling." Her voice surrounded him like a spring breeze, pleasant, light, and unassuming. She unbuttoned his coat and helped him remove it. Then she moved to unbutton his shirt—

He put his hand on hers. "Please, I can undress myself."

"Is that why you employ a valet?"

Definitely more to this young girl than he suspected. She wasn't intimidated by him, which was, at this moment, much to his disadvantage.

"Please, I wish to take my bath in private. I will join you after I have readied myself for the day."

"Do you intend to have Glennon bathe, shave, dress, and otherwise groom you?"

"Why, of course, that *is* the man's job."

"Well, I mean to do all those things for you, at least for today."

"You can't, Felicity. I won't allow it." He hated to show his temper, but his head pounded, and she was being obstinate. Most times people jumped when he even *thought* of giving an order. She completely ignored him, bent on having her own way.

"I truly do wish to help you. Now please, allow me to remove these wrinkled trousers —"

"Get out!" He could see the hurt on her face as his harsh words echoed in the small room.

She raised her chin, but acquiesced when he pointed in the direction of the door. In her own calm way, she turned on her heel and walked out, indicating neither anger nor disappointment. Simply hurt, which, to Phillip, was the worst of all.

* * * * *

Once she'd cleared Phillip's line of vision, she ran to her bedchamber and dissolved into tears. She didn't know whether to be angry, hurt, or murderous. He was hiding something, already, and only one day into their marriage. Granted, theirs was no love match, but last night had been so special. Yet, he'd disappeared in the middle of the night and returned looking like a man who had . . . no, she refused to think that way. Besides, he could do as he pleased. No, she didn't want that. He'd done as he pleased for too many years.

She'd so enjoyed everything they'd done on their wedding night and was sure he had too. He gave her a delicious spanking, which truly enhanced their lovemaking, just as Serenity Damrill had told Felicity it would. What more could she do? She wanted to please him, more than anything. Anyone could run his household, for heaven's sake; his staff had been doing it for ages. She wanted to be a wife to him, to make him realize he needed a wife, which she knew would be a most difficult task.

She couldn't act like a child every time he got angry; after all, he must get angry often. No, she had to learn about him, learn his likes and dislikes, sexually and otherwise.

A thought popped into her head, something she truly thought might please him. She would give him time, then approach him with her suggestion. He would see her as a wife trying to please him, and if she pleased herself in the process, so much the better.

An hour later, she heard voices in the room next door. She opened the door just a crack. Phillip stood with a man, whom she assumed must be Glennon as the man helped Phillip into a coat. From her perspective, he looked considerably better than he had earlier.

"That's all, Glennon," she heard Phillip say, then she heard the door leading to the hallway close. Her husband was alone.

Quickly, she removed her clothing, surprised she'd accomplished such a feat with no help from Emily. She dabbed lavender water behind her ears, under her breasts, and in the vicinity of her quim, all in the hopes that Phillip would take notice. She slipped a tissue-thin nightrail over her head before she tapped on the connecting door.

Phillip opened it almost instantly, clean shaven and smelling of sandalwood. "Hello." He sounded surprised to see her.

"Hello to you. May I come in?"

"Yes, please." He motioned with his hand to enter, closing the door behind her. She reached around him and locked it, the click resounding in the nearly quiet room.

"I am sorry, Phillip, for presuming to supplant your wishes earlier. I promise, I

will never do so again."

"That would be greatly appreciated." Though his voice sounded calm, it retained its usual authoritative tone.

"I will learn, I promise."

He nodded but looked as uncomfortable as she felt.

She walked up to him and placed her hands on his chest. Even through the layers of fabric, she could feel his heart beating wildly.

"I truly enjoyed last night, Phillip."

"As did I, Felicity." He placed a hand over hers, staying her progress to his cravat.

"I was wondering if we could maybe repeat some of the things we did."

"You were wondering that, were you? What is it you'd like to repeat?"

She hated sounding coy, but she knew no other way to accomplish this.

"Well, I thought we could repeat it *all*."

His eyes brightened, a sparkle that had been absent until now.

"Yes, Phillip, *all*."

His arms came around her, and he dropped his hands directly to her bottom. She was sore but felt amazingly pleasant, having the reminder of his hand with each step she took.

"I can't say I am adverse to your proposal."

"I'd hoped you wouldn't be. I find I would very much like to be across your knees."

He dipped his head down to kiss her, while she stood on tiptoes. Finally, he scooped her into his arms, taking her at least a foot off the ground. He never relinquished his hold on her, nor did she want him to.

As he held her, he wondered what he had ever done right in his life to deserve her. She could be a terror, having been forced into marriage, but instead, she tried in every possible way to please him. She wanted him, from all appearances at least, which

had an endearing affect on him.

As he held her, she felt light as a feather and very kissable in his arms. And he found, he *wanted* to kiss her. He wanted to do more to her than she would ever allow. A nice romp, however, on this cold morning would suit quite nicely.

He carried her to a settee near the fireplace and sat down, placing her on his knees.

"I somehow feel like a father about to discipline my young daughter."

"I'll play that game if you wish."

His heart lurched just a bit to see her anxious face.

"You are my wife, not my daughter, Felicity. We mustn't fall into that game. I never wish you to look at me as anything but your husband."

"All right, Phillip. I will do as you wish."

He kissed her again, leaning her back over his arm. He touched her breast, squeezed her nipple hard. She responded by placing a gentle hand upon his face. *Dear God, her innocence will be my downfall.*

"Lay across my lap."

She accommodated him immediately. He pushed her nightrail, over her calves, the backs of her knees, her thighs and then over her deeply pinked bottom until he brought it to rest at her waist. "Oh, yes, my dear." He couldn't keep himself from rubbing her cheeks, the side of his hand following the cleft between them, closing his eyes against the thoughts over which he seemed to have no control.

"Spank me, Phillip."

He spanked lightly, playfully, at first, until she groaned. "Please."

Then he became serious, and her buttocks quivered under his hand. She cried, but Phillip didn't stop. She'd ask when she'd had enough. As it went on and on, he thought she'd never ask; he felt like a beast. Yet her breath caught, she tensed and moaned, making him believe she was nearly orgasmic. He'd never felt more powerful.

"Thank you," she whispered, barely audible. She didn't move, but lay across his lap whimpering. He held her and rubbed her bottom, the side of his hand dipping

deeper into her crease.

Felicity began to move in response to his hand. Phillip took a risk by doing this, he risked everything, but he couldn't stop.

"Darling, may I touch you here?"

She nodded and poked her bottom up.

"Come over to the bed."

He situated her comfortably, her belly resting on pillows. His heart raced as his imagination became consumed with possibilities. He would never hurt her and would not take his own pleasure at this time. He was testing her, seeing how far she would go.

He opened a small bottle of oil and gently parted her cheeks enough to apply a liberal amount to the small, pink pucker. She waggled and purred.

He spoke gently, encouragingly. "Relax, I won't hurt you."

"I know that, Phillip." She rested her head on the counterpane, not the least bit self-conscious, as he prodded her anus with the smallest of his fingers.

She hissed when he entered her. "It burns."

"I know, but it won't for long." He stilled his progress and soon she encouraged him to move, which he did, slowly, as she began to rock her hips back and forth against his hand.

He reached to her quim, rewarding her with an orgasm that rivaled any she had experienced the night before. When she begged him to take her from behind, while his finger remained, he could do nothing but quickly release his cock from his breeches and do as she asked.

His little wife was fast becoming a sexual being, much to his delight. But darker practices teased his mind, at once warning that to bring them to light would destroy the growing trust Felicity had in him. Still, he saw no way to reconcile his need for men and his inadvertent growing fondness for his wife.

Chapter Eleven

In the many weeks that followed the wedding, Felicity had fallen into a rather routine life. Still learning her way around the ducal mansion she shared with her husband and at least fifty servants, seeking out privacy wasn't always easy, even for the Duchess of Thornhill.

The Christmas holidays had come and gone, with all the commensurate parties and dinners. They'd entertained Phillip's friends, as well as her family, and she'd felt pride, as he'd complimented her on being the perfect hostess.

Her birthday was the next day, on February the seventeenth, and she knew Phillip had no knowledge of it, for he had never asked, nor did she find it necessary to tell him. Her parents, of course, would pay a call, she being their only child and all.

Her life with Phillip had settled into a predictable rhythm. One night they would make love, then for the next three or four, Phillip was either distant or absent. When alone in his bedchamber, they were wonderful together, but in the presence of others, their relationship appeared merely polite. No secret looks, no unspoken shared knowledge, nothing. They were just a man and a woman living under the same roof with nothing but the occasional lovemaking to show for their marriage.

Phillip was never disrespectful to her, but he wasn't "husbandly" either. She'd become afraid to approach him for anything, never knowing the reaction she might evoke and dreading the day when he would look at her blankly and wonder from where on earth she'd come. A dilemma she wished to solve before her feelings completely disengaged, something she feared but prayed would never happen.

Quite early the next day, Emily had come to Felicity's room, opened the heavy draperies, and roused her from her slumber. "Your mother is here, Your Grace. She insists you attend her at once."

Still in a sleepy haze, Felicity removed the bedcovers and was assaulted by the cool air rushing to chill her bed-warmed body. Emily got her dressed and groomed, making her mother's wait just under an hour. Not until Felicity entered the drawing room downstairs and was greeted with a hug and kiss from her gregarious mama, did she remember this day commemorated the twentieth anniversary of her birth.

"Oh, what a glorious day this is my darling daughter, twenty years old and a duchess, who would have ever believed it?"

"Yes, I suppose," she said with not a little attitude in her voice.

"What is it, my peach? Are you unhappy? Thornhill hasn't hurt you, has he?"

"Of course not, Mama! It's just that you woke me so early and made me think something was amiss. You could have called at a decent hour, really."

"I came to take you shopping for your birthday, dear. I wish to buy you something sinfully expensive to mark this momentous occasion."

Shopping had, at one time, been one of her most joy-filled preoccupations. Her father had always been extraordinarily generous, willing to spend a small fortune on all the fripperies that make women happy.

"Fine then, please excuse me, I'll be but a moment."

Felicity left her mother and went to the entrance hall. Densham was at his post and she asked for her cloak, her bonnet, and her husband. "Oh, I am sorry, Your Grace, His Grace left for Lords some time ago."

She nodded and set about tying the ribbon on her bonnet. With that accomplished, she went to fetch her mother. At least she'd have a day away from the house that was all too quickly closing in on her.

* * * * *

Phillip had taken care of the needed business and was presently sitting in Boodles, nursing a glass of very fine whiskey and reading the newspaper. Not often did he retreat to this all-male bastion, a fine English tradition dating back to 1762. He periodically deigned to spend an hour or two within the smoky environs so he might enjoy the society of gentlemen whom he knew from Parliament. Today, there was sparse company to be had, but the atmosphere was pleasant enough.

His thoughts inevitably settled upon his young wife, about whom he had only the most pleasant of thoughts. They'd fallen into a nice pattern, leaving him to feel

better about the entire matrimonial box in which he'd been placed. He spent his requisite three nights at the Sapphire Club and made sure to spend a night or two a week in Felicity's bed. She seemed satisfied.

As always, she remained pleasant, her smiling face greeting him across the dinner table or in the drawing room on the evenings he was at home. She seemed to understand his evenings out, making his mind clearer to enjoy the sport at the club. He didn't deprive her of the bed play in which she had come to blossom, but neither did he allow his wants to go unattended.

Tonight would be spent at the club, after a dinner with Felicity. Last night had been particularly satisfying in her bed, though he had not spent the entire night with her. He'd ended the practice shortly after they married, feeling much more comfortable alone as he slept.

Having a wife was a tremendous emotional responsibility, one with which he had not achieved complete comfort. He'd decided early on to gauge her disposition by her demeanor. He must be doing everything right, because she always seemed happy.

Swallowing the last of his whiskey, he made the decision to go home. He'd have to fill several hours yet before he would take his leave and go to the club. He could, therefore, get some work done in his library before dinner.

As he boarded his carriage, he smiled, thinking how well things were progressing. *Having a wife isn't as I thought at all.*

His return to Grosvenor Square was unceremoniously received. Upon inquiry, he found his wife away from home, having left no word as to her expected time of return. All the better, as it allowed him to delve through the mound of correspondence that plagued a corner of his desk.

The afternoon passed into the dinner hour and still Felicity hadn't returned. He didn't worry, as Densham had informed him she had gone out with her mother. "*Better her than I,*" he muttered as he went about consuming a lone supper.

Not seeing any reason to forestall his departure for the club, he gathered his greatcoat and made his way to the carriage. Haynes would be expecting him, and he

intended to arrange for them to spend the entire evening together.

* * * * *

Felicity had spent the day and evening in her mother's company, which was taxing to say the least. When she returned to her bedchamber at just past nine, she could think of nothing but seeing her husband. She primped in the mirror before going to the connecting door, which stood ajar.

Upon entry, Glennon turned in his haughty way and informed her that his master was not at home. No, he didn't know when he would return. Yes, he believed he'd gone to the club.

A bit of loneliness, tinged with envy, irritated with a thorn of jealousy prompted Felicity to call for Emily. She changed into a beautiful black silk gown, which made her look much older than her newly-minted twenty years. Emily redressed her hair, making her look sophisticated, and completed the ensemble with a simple diamond necklace and earrings.

Emily handed her the black, fur-lined cape her husband had given her for Christmas as she dashed out the door, calling for a carriage, post-haste. Once she was on her way, she began to rethink the wisdom of her impulsivity. A sudden giggle rose in her throat. She must be maturing, as it was the first time in her memory she'd *ever* thought before she leaped. However, all the thought in the world wasn't going to keep her from *this* night's appointed rounds.

As the carriage rumbled its way to the Sapphire Club, she rehearsed what she would say to Phillip when she saw him. *I wish to have you show me around the club. Tell me all about what you do here. Can we do things together?* She began thinking of this excursion as a birthday gift to herself.

She'd wanted to see what went on there but had been afraid to ask Phillip to escort her, especially since she'd done exactly that to compromise herself. But he loved the club, so why shouldn't she become a part of what he loved so dearly?

Finally, the carriage passed down the tree-lined drive, having been admitted at the gate by a bewigged, liveried footman. The manor house was breathtaking even in the dead of night. Windows ablaze with candlelight, the sounds of voices and faint strains of music permeated the chill night air. Immediately, Felicity felt the electricity; the charged atmosphere that was the Sapphire Club.

Her quim tingled at the thought of conducting an assignation with her husband here. As she approached the large door, it opened to reveal the butler she recognized from her previous visit.

"Good evening, Your Grace," Hampton said, bowing deeply in deference to her consequence.

"Good evening, Hampton. I've come to join my husband."

"Yes, Your Grace, he is in his usual room."

"I am afraid he forgot to tell me where the room is located."

"I would escort you but—" Just then, several more people arrived. "It is on the second floor, turn left, last door on the right."

As she scurried up the marble steps, she remembered Serenity telling her about viewing rooms. She'd even pointed some out as they'd walked. Upon reaching her destination on the second floor, she easily located the viewing room door and entered.

The room was no bigger than a small closet, fitted with two comfortable chairs. She removed her cloak and placed it in one of the chairs. She sat in the other. Immediately before her were small, rectangular cutouts, used to see what took place in the adjoining room. She leaned forward slightly.

Her heart began to pound as she saw her husband, standing in front of the mantel, sipping from a brandy snifter. He looked so handsome. Soon the door opened and a handsome young man entered. She could hear them speaking in greeting, though neither smiled.

"I'd hoped you hadn't meant what you said, about being done with me, that is."

"Just get out of those clothes," the younger man said sternly, as he walked away.

Phillip complied, neatly folding each garment until he stood naked, his cock

erect. Before her mind could formulate an idea as to what was happening, the young man spoke again. "Go over to the ladder."

Her husband walked to a wooden contraption that looked similar to the ladder she'd seen the gardener use to trim the trees. Though, the contraption appeared different in that the rungs were padded. Phillip leaned his long body against the padding while the younger man kicked his feet apart and secured them to the wooden legs. Phillip's arms were wrapped around the other side and strapped in place.

Felicity blinked, then blinked again, not believing what she was seeing. *What is happening?* She kept asking herself over and over again.

The younger man picked up an implement with several tails, which appeared made of leather. He stood off to the side of her husband and snapped it in the air.

Soon she heard Phillip's voice. "Lay it on, Haynes."

With that, Haynes, whose name she'd just learned, struck Phillip with all his might across the buttocks, leaving red marks. Phillip's head lolled forward, a groan emanating from him. He was struck again and again, his buttocks becoming a dark red. She saw blood and nearly lost control of her senses. Why was this man whipping Phillip? It was quite confusing and not a little upsetting.

Haynes stopped the thrashing and freed Phillip, who remained standing against the ladder. Haynes put the whip away then stood silently until Phillip turned around. His cock still erect, Phillip had a feral look in his eyes.

With a nod of Phillip's head, Haynes removed his clothing, just as Phillip had done minutes before.

"Bend over the bed."

The young man complied. Felicity thought her husband would now thrash Haynes.

"Spread your legs wide." Phillip's tone was not angry but masterful. Haynes, a well-built, muscular man, did as he was bid, his buttocks high, certainly in the proper position for a spanking.

Phillip went to the drawer in the bedside table and took out a small bottle,

poured some on his fingers, and then to her shock, inserted two fingers into Haynes's rectum. The man grunted, but stayed in place.

"I do love your tight ass," she heard her husband say, as he swatted the deep pink skin and pumped his fingers in and out.

A sense of foreboding came over her as the situation before her took on more meaning. In a single moment of clarity, her whole life crashed down around her.

Chapter Twelve

She wanted to close her eyes to the truth that was playing out before her. Her husband liked men. Certainly, he had been a wonderful lover to her, but what did she really know about such things? He'd given indications that he enjoyed her bottom, but he'd never gone beyond the one time, though she wouldn't have minded if he did.

She'd never heard of men who preferred other men. Despair overwhelmed her, as she continued to watch, seeing her husband position himself behind Haynes and plunge his massively engorged cock into him. Haynes gave a loud grunt, then lifted himself just slightly. Phillip's hands gripped the man's hips, holding him steady, as Phillip, his eyes closed, pounded into the younger man over and over again.

It soon became a frenzied coupling, as her husband apparently came to his climax. He shouted as he finished, then pulled free of the other man. Her eyes were riveted on her husband's naked body as he walked toward the washstand. Her attention was drawn away by the orgasmic sounds coming from Haynes. She watched him taking care of his own pleasure as her husband washed himself.

Finally, Haynes stood and walked to the washstand as well. The two exchanged no affection, which left her feeling empty for them.

Without another word between them, Phillip dressed, leaving off his cravat, and left the room. She heard his footfalls pass right by the door to the room she sat in, stunned and more in need of sexual release than she had ever been before.

This explained so much, but evoked questions aplenty. Is that what he wished to

do to her? Why wouldn't he just introduce it as a part of their marriage bed? Her mind was jumbled and her heart ached.

She felt an intense need to go home, before he arrived and discovered her gone. She grabbed the cloak and slipped out of the room, retracing her steps as she made her way to the entrance hall.

As she got to the bottom of the stairs, she heard voices and recognized one as that of her husband. Panic momentarily replaced the jumbled emotions she'd heretofore been feeling. She raced for the door, dropping her cloak. Upon hearing footfalls coming closer, she didn't want to chance retracing her steps to retrieve the garment, so she dashed out of the door, down the steps and into her carriage. Not until she was well on her way did the chill air overtake her, leaving her teeth to chatter all the way home.

* * * * *

Lucien escorted Phillip into the entrance hall, the two chatting about the innocuous things that men talk about. Phillip was relaxed, more so than he'd been in days, but then again, his sessions with Haynes usually had that effect.

Lucien bent down to pick up a black garment that was piled on the black-and-white-marble tiles. "I wonder what this is doing here."

Phillip's attention was drawn to the fur, and he recognized it immediately, though he had no idea how it could have gotten there.

"It looks like the cloak I had made for Felicity for Christmas. May I see it?"

Lucien handed it to Phillip, who examined the area around the neckline. There in gold threads were the initials, FAL, the A larger than the rest. "I'll take this, Damrill." Phillip was out the door before Lucien could answer, conjecture and anger building in equal measure.

His mind splintered into a million pieces at the implication of finding Felicity's cloak. Had she been at the club? The answer seemed quite plain. Also obvious she'd left in a hurry. He had a passing thought as to how cold she would be on the drive back to

town.

However, all too soon, his concern turned to all-out anger. What if she'd seen him with Haynes? *Those infernal viewing rooms!* How would he explain? He had no defense, and he knew all would be lost.

He'd grown used to Felicity's smile, her warm body. He didn't want the acrimony that could develop between them if she confronted him with what she might have seen.

His life had been so ordered, so predictable. He'd like it that way. He always knew what to expect from each day. He'd argued powerfully in the House of Lords over many issues through the years and had always been able to make his opposition see his point of view. He feared he could argue until his face turned blue, but Felicity would never understand his need for fucking men. Good Lord, *he* didn't understand it. Further, he didn't want to understand it, nor was it required of him. Simply a fact, he wasn't about to try to explain, it was what it was.

The carriage seemed to fly to Grosvenor Square, with Phillip lost in his thoughts and excuses. He had no idea what to say once he entered his home, but confront Felicity he must. If she had followed him to the Sapphire Club, she must be chastised.

The door to his home opened as he approached. A wave of satisfaction washed over him, as there was always someone on duty to attend to his every whim. He paid well for the privilege and expected the impeccable service he got.

Without acknowledging the sleepy footman who'd opened the door, Phillip made his way up the stairs to his wife's bedchamber. He'd decided to confront her with the evidence and see where the night went from there. She could hardly deny the cloak was hers, now could she?

He entered the room to find Felicity lounging before the fire on a settee. She was wearing a wrapper, her hair was still pinned up, and she still wore her stockings.

He walked to her and without saying a word, wrapped the cloak around her shoulders. He sat in the empty space beside her and took her hands in his. "You must be freezing. You really shouldn't go out without your cloak."

She looked at him and all he saw were sad, dark eyes with a glimmer of moisture lurking in the corners. She looked beaten, which told him all he needed to know.

"Ask me anything you wish and I will answer as honestly as I can." Though he had entered the house on the defensive, one look and he knew he owed his wife more than his anger. Somewhere inside him, he wanted her to understand. Then maybe she could help him to understand, and they could go on as before.

"I'm sorry, Phillip."

"Sorry for what?"

"I followed you, to surprise you. I wanted to see more of the club, to maybe experience why the club is so important to you. I wish to learn, but tonight, I learned more than"

"You shouldn't have gone there, Felicity."

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

"No." What else could he say? He'd never intended her to find out. His mortification was complete with her next statement.

"You prefer men to women, yet you married me. You have made love to me, all the while wishing I were someone else. How am I to feel about that?"

He stood and began to pace the room. His mind was a jumble, negating the effects of the thrashing that usually helped to put things in perspective.

"The answer isn't as simple as you assume it to be. If only it were. It isn't that I only prefer to be with men, it's just —"

She interrupted before he could continue. "It is either one or the other. How can it be both?"

"I don't know the "hows" and the "whys". All I know is the truth. When I am with you, it is wonderful, but when I am with a man it is wonderful too."

"Do you care for Haynes?"

Strangely, relief came over him. For whatever the outcome of this discussion, she'd know what he was. He had no clue why her knowing felt so important to him, but suddenly it seemed paramount. Living with the lies and secrecy had taken its toll.

"Why did you go to the club?"

"I wanted to be with you. It's my birthday and I wanted to spend it with you."

"Your birthday? Why did you not tell me?"

She shrugged.

Now, he felt like the greatest sort of cad, as well as all the other horrible things he felt. He should have been with her, not dipping his cock into . . .

"I am sorry, dear. I didn't know. You must inform me of these things."

"It is a bit beside the point, is it not?"

"I suppose it is, yes, but I should have known. Tomorrow, I will take you shopping. I will buy you anything you want."

"What I want can't be purchased."

His heart lurched. Her statement was ambiguous, but the implications clear.

"What do you want, Felicity?" There it was. For better or worse, he'd just opened himself up for disaster.

"I want to be your wife, as I promised to be."

"And you are."

"Not if you wish to be with someone else. How do I compete with a man, Phillip? I have nothing with which to fight back."

"I would never ask you to compete. It is something about which I'd hoped you would never learn. I can't explain it."

"You never answered my question. Do you care for Haynes?"

As Phillip thought about her query, he knew the answer would paint him in yet another very bad light. Lord, it made him feel like a complete lout.

"No, I don't."

"Then why? Was that your first time with him? Why does he thrash you so before you . . . ?" Her eyes looked glazed with emotion. Her voice broke, yet her back remained straight.

"I ask him to."

"It wasn't the first time?"

"No, not at all."

"You enjoy being whipped like that?"

"Yes, I do." He hated the self-examination she forced upon him, but he did feel a strange sense of relief.

"You know, I can understand, I think, about that. I have come to crave your spankings. I look forward to them. Is that the way you feel?"

He moved to the window, looked out over a sleeping Grosvenor Square. "I suppose it is. I've never really examined it, Felicity." He felt shame, embarrassment, fear. Her acceptance or rejection of him at this point was pivotal. He wished his secret not to become public knowledge. "Felicity, this is not something I wish you to discuss with anyone, do you understand? We will talk until the sun comes up if that is what you wish, but I must ask, and I admit I have no right to do so, but I must ask that you don't mention this to your mother or anyone."

She rose from the settee and joined him at the window. She placed a tiny hand on his arm; he looked down, met her gaze.

"I promise you, I will never tell anyone what I saw tonight. But you must promise me that we will sort this out together, please. I wish to know how you think and feel."

No one in his life had ever cared how he thought or felt. He'd been raised to be the duke, which was all that had ever mattered. For as long as he could remember, he'd been instructed on the proper behavior of someone of his station, what was expected of him and what he should expect from others.

He'd always done his duty. Though his tenants had rarely, if ever, seen him, he had always taken care of them. The Sapphire Club was the one thing he did for himself, for which he would never apologize. Not even to his wife. However, that attitude didn't negate the shame or the fear he felt.

"We can talk all night, Felicity, if it is what you wish. However, I will say before we start, that I will not stop going to the club. You must not ask that of me. I would sooner send you back to your parents; you must understand that."

Felicity smiled up at him in the way he'd come to appreciate. Her eyes sparkled with such genuine concern, it tore at his heart.

"I'm not broken, Felicity." He couldn't keep the sadness from his voice.

She patted his arm. "I never said you were."

Chapter Thirteen

Felicity didn't comprehend anything she had seen or heard during her visit to the club, but she was determined to understand. She'd realized that she'd grown to care for Phillip, which meant she owed him time to explain.

Their late night conversation had produced no real understanding, but rather numerous questions. She sensed reluctance on Phillip's part to delve deep within himself and reveal to her what was really going on. It made her wonder if he even knew.

She hadn't been completely honest with him either. She hadn't told him of her excitement, as well as bewilderment, at his coupling with the young man at the club. She wanted to know it all – what he was thinking, feeling, expecting from the man. Was it only physical or was it emotional as well? Did he love his man? Did the man love Phillip? His answers had not convinced her of anything.

After she'd left Phillip to find her bed, she had lain awake, trying to make sense of everything, with no success. She knew not how to convey her feelings to Phillip about that night and about him. Though the drive home from the club had been cold, it had helped to clarify for her where Phillip stood in her life and in her heart.

Though not loving, he was a kind man who'd always seen to her pleasure before his own. The very few times she'd heard him laugh were indeed glorious. His smile, on the infrequent occasions he deigned to show one, endeared him to her as no one else's ever had. Did she love him? She was certain she didn't, but she cared for him and wished to see him well.

When she woke in the early afternoon, she knew Phillip would have been long

gone from home. He'd mentioned several appointments, all to do with Lord's business. He said he wouldn't be home for dinner, but assured her he wasn't going to the club. With that knowledge, she leisurely prepared for the day.

Never one to allow grass to grow beneath her feet, she called for an unmarked carriage and made her way to St. John's Wood. A visit with Serenity Damrill was in order. She needed insight and knew if there was anyone to help her, Mrs. Damrill was the person.

Upon her arrival, Hampton ushered her into the same drawing room she'd been shown to on her prior visit. Serenity was seated on a dark green settee, sitting next to a most beautiful woman with blonde hair and the greenest eyes Felicity had ever seen. It appeared she was quite large with child as well. A twinge riffled through her, a longing she had not realized she possessed.

"Felicity, I am so happy to see you." Serenity stood and came forward, extending her hand in greeting. She covered Felicity's hand with both of hers and squeezed warmly. "Dear, allow me to introduce Lady Wycroft. Desiree, this is Her Grace, the Duchess of Thornhill."

Desiree, who was the wife of the Marquess of Wycroft, Prentice Hyde, attempted to rise.

"Please, don't get up, Lady Wycroft. I wish you no difficulty and I see it would indeed be so."

"I must admit, Your Grace, getting down is enough of a problem, but getting up these days requires some aid. My poor husband is constantly lending me a hand." She chuckled amiably, setting the tone for the visit.

"I am sorry for bursting in on you, Serenity. I had no idea you were entertaining. I really should come back later."

"Don't be silly. Desiree and I are old friends, and I know you will grow to love her as I do. We are all friends here, what with our husbands so deeply involved in the club."

Felicity couldn't keep her facial features schooled enough, and Serenity sensed a

problem immediately.

"What is it, dear?" She motioned for Felicity to sit in the chair adjacent to the settee.

Felicity looked at Desiree, silently trying to indicate her discomfiture at speaking of such a delicate subject in front of a stranger. "I'm not sure I can speak of it after all."

Serenity smiled. "Is it about your lost cloak? I understand it might have been dropped during a hasty retreat."

She knew her eyes told the entire story. She felt mortified her actions had been summed up in such terms, but Serenity had the right of it.

"No, I have the cloak. My husband returned it to me last night, much to my eternal embarrassment. I had no intention of him ever knowing I was here."

"Yes, so I surmised when my husband told me of His Grace finding the cloak spread over the tiles in the entrance hall. It sounds like something I might have done. I don't suppose I ever told you about how I crept into the club through the kitchen entrance and hid in the library, waiting for my husband?"

"No, you didn't. Did you really do such a thing?"

Serenity laughed heartily. "I most certainly did. Desiree, tell our friend what you did in pursuit of Prentice."

Desiree smiled and said, "We wouldn't wish to bore our friend by telling my old tales. In retrospect, it was more to get him to pursue me, but it all comes to the same thing, doesn't it? Tell us, what have you done or are you just thinking about doing something?"

Felicity worried her gloved hands, unsure of what she should say but inexplicably wanting to tell all.

"Well, you see, yesterday was my birthday, and I wished to spend the evening with Phillip, ah, His Grace. I was out all day with my mother, and when I returned home, he wasn't there. The servants told me he had come here. I freshened up and came here as well, thinking to surprise him, only I was the one who was surprised."

"Oh, dear," Serenity said. "It was you who Hampton sent to the second floor

room to meet His Grace."

"Could it be anyone else? What are you saying?"

"No, no, that isn't what I meant. When Hampton told me a woman had come to meet the duke, I suspected it had to be you. By the time I found out, the room was empty. Tell us what happened to make you run out so quickly you should drop your cloak."

"Do you know what my husband does in that room? Please be honest with me."

Desiree and Serenity looked at each other and they nodded in unison. "It is difficult to keep secrets at the club, Felicity, though those same secrets are guarded outside these walls."

She felt relief and a tinge of embarrassment, which clearly had to have shown on her face. "I hadn't expected to see what I saw. I don't know what I expected. I couldn't resist the temptation to spy, and when I did, I was sorry."

"What is it that is bothering you? Believe me I wish to help." Serenity sounded concerned and Felicity was comforted by that.

"First, he asked to be flogged and then —"

"And then he had sexual congress with another man?"

"You *do* know. Oh, my." Felicity covered her face with her gloved hands. She sat for several moments, before she said, "I don't understand why he does that. Am I wrong for saying that? Oh, what is wrong with me?"

"In a word, nothing. I must assume His Grace thinks quite highly of you. Sometimes, though, a person needs more. Something else that speaks to a part of ourselves we often deny. Tell me, have you told His Grace that I spanked you?"

"Yes."

"And what happened?"

"He seemed pleased."

"Have you allowed him to spank you?"

"Oh, yes, and you were right. It does enhance our"

"Yes, I understand completely. Now, I am going to ask you a very personal

question, and you certainly don't have to answer."

"What is it?"

"Has His Grace ever touched your bottom?"

"Of course, after he spanks me he rubs my bottom quite gently."

"Is there anything else he does?"

Felicity felt her face grow warm.

"Once, he asked me if he could touch, ah, and well, I told him yes. So he put some oil on it and put his finger inside me."

"How did it feel?"

This day was going to be one long, continuous blush, she could feel it. "I-I liked it a lot, but he hasn't done it again."

"I believe, my dear, your husband has an anal fixation." Desiree spoke from her own personal knowledge. "Believe me, it is a good thing. Between us ladies, my husband is obsessed. I do believe I would have lost him ages ago if I hadn't become obsessed as well."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember what he did with Haynes?"

"Quite well."

"I suspect he wishes to do the same with you."

"If he wishes to do so, why doesn't he simply ask? Why does he do it with Haynes?"

"Possibly because Haynes welcomes it. It could also be that there is no particular emotional connection with Haynes or it could be that there *is* such a connection. I have known your husband to enjoy the pleasures of women and men, Felicity. This should come as no surprise to you, as he is much older."

"I have no illusions that I was his first. I know he had a mistress, and I suppose he has had more than one. But he is a wonderful lover, very considerate of me. I will do anything for him, but you ladies must advise me."

"Excuse me for a few moments, Felicity."

"Surely." Serenity left the room, leaving Felicity alone with Lady Wycroft.

"My lady, do you really enjoy having your husband, ah, enter your bottom?"

"Darling, we don't need to be so delicate here. Indeed I do, almost as much as Serenity loves for her Lucien to do the same. It adds so much to our lives and means so much to our husbands. It is an experience that once tried, will become a part of your life. You will crave it, beg for it, demand it!"

"I wish to be all I can be for Phillip, I truly do. I am not shy with him at all. I fear he thinks I am *too* wanton."

Desiree patted Felicity's hand, chuckling. "No man ever thinks his wife is *too* wanton, believe me. It flatters a man when he knows his wife wants him sexually. All that old nonsense about sexual congress being only for procreation was fabricated by women who had never experienced true pleasure at the hands of a caring and considerate man."

"You sound quite enamored of your husband, my lady."

"Please call me Desiree. We are friends now, and yes, I most certainly am. My husband is a wonderful man, and I am blessed to have him."

"Is he excited about becoming a father?"

"Oh, my dear, I should say he is. He is constantly talking to his son, giving him advice and instructions. He'd have me on my back, in bed, resting every minute if I didn't *insist* on coming here."

"I don't suppose there is much you can do, now that you are so far along."

"Oh, I get my daily spankings, and we have managed ways of giving each other pleasure, while it is a bit uncomfortable for me."

"Daily spankings?"

"I wouldn't have it any other way, Felicity. Try it and you will understand what I am saying."

As Felicity pondered Desiree's last words, Serenity came into the room, looking conspiratorial. Desiree laughed at her friend, while Felicity looked on, completely mystified.

From behind her back, Serenity pulled an interesting object that immediately got Felicity's attention.

"I would like you to meet 'Little Lucien'."

Desiree said, "Ah yes, the infamous phallus."

"Are you trying to tell me that—?"

"Yes, I am. It is a wonderful way to prepare your anus for your husband. It makes for some very interesting games in the bedchamber, believe me."

Immediately, Felicity asked, "Where can I buy one?"

"I will give you the direction of a man on Akeman Street in Westminster. It isn't far from here, actually. Tell him I sent you and he will know what you want. I would recommend you purchase several in increasing sizes. Eventually, you will wish for the real thing, but these are wonderful for bed play."

"Do you think if I have these Phillip will find me to be enough?"

"Dear, you *are* enough. He has a need that he may not be able to explain, even to himself. If the thought doesn't repulse you, you might consider joining him in the activity."

Serenity handed her a slip of paper with the address of the man who made the phalluses. She would suffer through the embarrassment and make the purchase before returning home.

"I have much to think about, but I really should be going. I don't want Phillip to know I have been here—again."

Just then the door opened and Lucien walked in with a very handsome blond gentleman. "Oh, Your Grace, I had no idea you were visiting our wives. It is nice to see you again."

"I was actually just leaving, but it is nice to see you again, Mr. Damrill."

"Pardon my rude friend, duchess. I am Prentice Hyde, Lord Wycroft. I am married to the luscious creature to your left."

Desiree beamed as her husband took her hand and kissed it slowly, licking between each finger. Tingles went up Felicity's spine and a deep-seated need to have

her husband look at her as Wycroft and Damrill looked at their wives.

Clutching the paper in her gloved hand, she bid her friends a good day. She had a new purpose and excitement fueled her need to begin this new quest.

Chapter Fourteen

Phillip sat facing the fire, in shirt and breeches, sipping brandy and wondering where to go from this point. The hour was late, as he'd heard the chimes ring twelve seemingly hours ago.

Felicity had long ago bid him good night, taking to her bed shortly after their dinner. She'd been in good spirits, chattering away about preparing the spring garden and the book she'd been reading. He'd heard little and cared less. He knew she was finding things to talk about to keep from confronting the topic that loomed so large.

He'd survived what he thought would be abject mortification when Felicity witnessed his session at the club. She'd been understanding or at least seemed to be. For a woman of little experience or years, she might well be the one really right thing in his life.

Her gentle hand held his as he agonized over giving her the explanation she fully deserved, an explanation he hadn't ever been able to give himself. On the surface, he reasoned that he enjoyed anal sex and could never ask a woman to participate in such activity. He had contented himself with that for years, until Haynes turned the tables on him. Since then, he knew it was so much more. As much as he enjoyed the taking of another man, bent over and willing, he'd treasured his own taking, more than he allowed himself to admit.

He wanted more, so much more, and yet, he had no idea how to go about having all that he desired. He knew if the Fates hadn't dealt the hand they had, he'd have never married. If he'd never married, his dilemma wouldn't exist. He'd have carried on with Haynes or someone, ad infinitum, with no thought to emotional connection or even the feelings of another person. His honor dictated he concern himself with Felicity's well-

being, both mental and physical. She was entitled to a husband who cared *about* her if not *for* her.

Thoughts of sex, in any form, became prevalent, causing his cock to stir, untamable monster that it was. Could he rightfully waken Felicity for a romp?

Never having been a person of great moral conscience, he finished his brandy and went to the connecting door. Several days had passed since he'd even thought to spend a night with his wife, but as the idea bloomed, so did his cock, which was all the answer he'd needed.

A low fire crackled in her grate, a clock ticked faintly. The bed was on the far wall from the door, the span of floor covered by a large, plush rug in the colors of autumn. His mother hadn't been a particularly feminine woman, preferring earthier colors, and Felicity hadn't made her preferences known as yet.

He walked to the bed, silently praying she would welcome him without him having to initiate the encounter. As he neared, he heard her even breathing and knew she was peacefully asleep.

He felt compelled to touch her hair, as it laid spread across the white pillow. The stark contrast made him smile, as he realized how attractive she was with her beautiful auburn locks.

He wrapped his fingers in her curls, soaking in the silky texture and the clean smell of lavender. She was irresistible. Was it the fact of her availability or was it Felicity herself, who drew him to her side this night? He honestly didn't know. Maybe, he simply didn't wish to be alone. She made him feel normal, something he was sure he'd never been.

He knelt down beside the bed and brought a handful of hair to his nose, filling his senses with her scent. She stirred, opened her eyes, looked at him with such innocence. He felt almost guilty for waking her. Almost.

"Hello," she said, so sweetly it tugged at his heart. "Are you well?"

"Yes, dear, I am well. I am sorry to wake you."

She brought a hand to his whisker-stubbed face, gently rubbing her thumb over

his cheekbones and around his eyes.

"I'm glad you did. I've missed you."

He chuckled. "You just saw me a few hours ago at dinner."

"That was a few hours ago."

He leaned in to kiss her and was welcomed as though their relationship was normal and sane. He'd never felt much of either. He hungered for her, his cock threatening to burst through the placard holding it captive.

His tongue forged deeply into her mouth, encouraging hers to join in. Hers did, and soon the kiss ignited the fires of passion.

"I want you," he said roughly as he removed his shirt and then the breeches. She struggled with the voluminous nightrail, but he made short work of it as she lifted her body to make it easier.

He covered her body with his, kissing her face, neck, and then came to settle on a creamy, white breast. He suckled hard, ravenously nipping and licking. She responded by arching her back. After giving each breast like treatment, which seemed to set Felicity on an orgasmic journey in itself, he slid low on her body, until his chin nudged her shaved mons.

"What are you doing?" she asked hazily.

"You shall see, my dear. Tell me if you like this." He licked her sensitive folds. She reacted explosively to that simple touch. He marveled at her responsiveness.

"I will take that as a yes." He did it again as he slipped a finger inside her quim. She was wet, drenched in fact. He removed the one finger and replaced it with two. As he ate at her, he moved his hand in and out, which seemed to send her into another world. She moaned and gasped, making him feel like the greatest of lovers.

"Oh, Phillip," she gasped, as he took her clitoris into his mouth, sucking deeply, flicking with his tongue.

His hands were on her hips, his thumb rubbing her smooth, sleep-warmed skin. She felt like heaven under his hands. Her orgasm shook her; she quaked beneath his touch, endlessly, as he continued to tease long after her release.

He slid his hands down to her knees and lifted her legs up, widening them as he did. He was hard as granite.

"Do you want this?" he asked her, as he teased her entrance with his cock.

"Yes." There was no hesitation, only reassurance.

"Tell me what you want."

"I want you inside me, Phillip, please."

He thrust his hips forward, until the head entered her and then he stopped.

Felicity groaned.

"I'm inside you, just as you asked."

"Please, Phillip." She attempted to inch closer, to rock her hips, anything to entice him to action, but he was adamant in his torture.

"Tell me."

"I want you to take me hard."

Phillip felt as though his ears had not heard correctly. "You want me to take you hard?"

"Yes, slam into me and keep slamming into me."

One hard, long thrust and he was inside her moist channel, her tiny muscles encouraging movement, making it impossible to be still a moment longer.

"Is this what you want?" He thrust so hard, her body moved toward the huge headboard.

"Oh, God, yes," she cried out.

His hips moved in long, deliberate strokes, each punctuated with a grunt, though Phillip couldn't tell if it came from him or from her. She felt so unbelievably good, her warmth wrapped around him. Her reactions were endearing and made him want to give her his all.

He increased his rhythm, hearing her breathing become shallow as she gasped for air. He leaned over her, taking his weight on his forearms. His mouth was near her ear, his hips now driving into her with staccato thrusts.

"Let it go," he whispered. "Give me everything you have."

She began to pant, her eyes closed.

With fluid, determined strokes, Phillip brought them both into the abyss, all flashes of light and color. His climax, a more subdued reaction, eclipsed by her shouts of abandon, as though she could hold onto the feeling no longer, proclaiming the joy aloud.

Their gasps for air, panting, involuntary jolts of orgasmic reaction characterized the next few minutes, as they lay holding each other, lightly kissing and licking, coming down from their mutual journey to the heavens.

He rolled off of her but kept her close, not wishing to break the connection quite yet. This coupling was what he wanted it to be. It was uncomplicated yet intense. It involved simply coming together and filling the needs that had gone for want of late. He was contented.

His arms enveloped her. She rubbed and patted him. He could stay like this forever if it would hold the demons at bay, but he knew it wouldn't, for his need would rise soon, and he would find himself at the club, slamming into Haynes once more.

He shook his head to bring himself back to the present. He had more wrapped in his arms at that moment than most men could dream of in their entire lifetimes. Indeed, something was wrong with him if all he could think of was

He snuggled into Felicity's neck and soon fell asleep. Tomorrow was another day. Tonight, he was where he wished to be.

Felicity didn't know what to think of Phillip's appearance in her chamber and his apparent need to have her. It felt wonderful to be sure, but she sensed there was more to this interlude, which had been so special, made her feel so wanted.

She'd thought to tell him of her newest acquisitions, but decided to set the stage for it on another night. She wanted to plan ahead and make it special. If the use of the phallus earned the complete attention of her husband, she was more than willing to do so. She was anxious to experience the rapture Serenity and Desiree had told her about.

Her feelings for Phillip had grown since their wedding. She'd always admired

him across ballrooms and even saw him once at the theatre and was consumed with envy when she saw a beautiful woman on his arm.

She was determined to garner his full attention and distract him from Haynes, for she was sure it wasn't the man Phillip was interested in, not if what Serenity and Desiree had told her held any validity at all.

She snuggled closer, if that was possible, and allowed her thoughts to drift into nothingness, as sleep came upon her with an unexpected bonus — her husband slept close by.

* * * * *

Phillip sensed the day had progressed into late morning as he opened his eyes to see those of his wife boring into him. She had the most endearing smile, as though he was all she wished for at that moment.

"Good morning, sleepyhead." She chirped. He'd always hated the early morning birds outside his window, but somehow with her sing-songy tone, she sounded pleasant and it cheered his heart.

"Good morning, yourself. Have you been awake long?"

"Just long enough to enjoy watching you sleep. You have the nicest little snore." She laughed as she tapped his nose lightly with her finger.

"Oh, do I now? Well, I must tell you that you sound like a bellowing lion when you sleep."

"I do not."

Her lip poked out in a pout that grabbed at him. He couldn't resist and pulled her down for a kiss.

"All right, not so much a lion as its cub."

She swatted his arm, which caused him to wrestle her onto her back. Then things changed from playful to serious. She hugged him and whispered, "Make love to me, Phillip." He was lost. He buried himself in her and rocked them both to shattering

climaxes. God, what a perfect way to start the day and something he'd never experienced before Felicity. He'd always left Evelina's home long before daybreak. He couldn't remember ever falling asleep with her by his side. It just wasn't done.

"I wish we could stay like this forever," Felicity said, as she lay wrapped in Phillip's arms.

"Do you really?"

"Yes. You are so warm and make me feel so alive."

He hugged her even tighter and kissed her forehead. He then attempted to get up, but she pulled him back to her.

"I'd love to resume this tonight. Possibly we could have dinner in your chamber?"

"No, I'm afraid that won't be possible. I won't be home for dinner this evening." Wednesday was one of his usual nights at the club.

Chapter Fifteen

Felicity was devastated, frustrated, and confused. Granted, she hadn't told him about her little surprise, but after he'd come to her chamber, she thought there was hope for them. Now she had no idea what to do, if indeed there *was* anything to do.

"Will you be home very late?"

"I don't know, dear."

He sounded as though he was discussing the weather. There wasn't one indication that he knew what he was saying had brought them to yet another impasse.

He walked through the adjoining door, his tall, well-formed body making her salivate despite her knowledge of his impending visit to the club. He wasn't going to play cards or drink with friends, as he might at Boodles. No, he was going for an assignation with Haynes. She dissolved into a fit of tears, hiding her wailing in a pillow. She had nowhere to turn. If he preferred cock to quim, there was nothing she could do.

* * * * *

Feeling every bit the lout he knew himself to be, Phillip spent the day attending to business before heading to the Sapphire Club. He'd been very aware of Felicity's tears and had no idea how to comfort her. His mind compelled him to attend the club and no one or nothing would deter him. In his harsher moments during the day, when he allowed his guilt to surface, he felt quite badly, but his indignation took center stage, and with it, the attitude that Felicity would simply have to accept him as he was.

He was certain the competition in his head would drive him mad and drive his wife from his life. *So be it.* There was nothing for it.

Lucien Damrill met him upon his arrival and delivered a blow he hadn't expected. "Haynes will not be available henceforth."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, Your Grace. He informed me of his decision and I did not question him further."

"I see." Phillip had no idea where to go from here.

"There are other members with the same tastes, I assume?" Since he had no particular emotional attachment to Haynes, one man was as good as another.

"Of course. I've already thought of someone. He attends often, but hasn't found a suitable partner. I believe you may find him to your liking."

"Is he about?"

"He is. I invited him tonight specifically to meet you, without telling him anything. That way, if he doesn't suit, there will be no negative feelings."

"Are you available for the thrashing?"

"Yes, Your Grace. I had assumed you would wish such. Baron Upton could observe, if you wish, or I could introduce you and arrangements could be made between you."

"Meet me in the room first. I will attend to the arrangement myself." With that, Phillip turned on his heel and made for his room on the second floor. He was tense, this

new situation not something he'd anticipated in the slightest.

Phillip was prepared when Lucien entered the room. He'd situated himself and awaited the punishment he craved. As the flogger struck his buttocks, he groaned in relief. His mind began to clear, making him sure of the path he'd chosen for himself and by association, for his wife.

He'd always been an unhappy man, one who never felt worthy of that elusive commodity women constantly spoke about as though one could purchase it on Bond Street. Being unhappy was who he was and always would be. There was nothing for it, it was just so.

Lucien lay on the lashes, making Phillip realize how he'd missed the man's hand. There had never been anything sexual between them, but Lucien had often been reliable with a flogger.

The pain leached through Phillips extremities as the leather straps connected time and again with his skin. Phillip used to insist upon an equal distribution of lashes between back and buttocks, but of late, had restricted them strictly to his hindquarters. It allowed him to concentrate on what he wanted them for to begin with. It related more to sex than to punishment. It always made the sex more profound. There was nothing like it, and he would never forfeit it for the sake of his marriage or for anything else.

It was over all too soon, leaving his ass burning pleasantly.

Lucien released the restraints and handed Phillip a dressing gown. "Shall I ask the baron to join you now?"

Phillip struggled to catch his breath and regain the steadiness in his legs. "No, I shall dress. Could you ask him to join me here, in say, half an hour?"

Lucien nodded. When the man finally left, the knots in Phillip's stomach became massive. He forbid himself to think of what he was actually about to do. He wanted a man and would arrange such. The fact he had a beautiful young wife at home played no part in what he wanted at this moment.

He redressed in trousers and shirt. He washed his face and combed his hair, reminding himself of a primping female. The excitement of meeting a new man was

somewhat overshadowed by the reality of the purpose. However, he put it from his head as a knock shattered his quiet reverie.

"Come," he said in a somewhat subdued tone.

The door opened to reveal a tall, handsome, thirty-something man with a bright, appealing smile. Phillip kept his outward appearance schooled, but inside, his stomach lurched. His cock stirred, then came to full attention, making Phillip pleased he hadn't tucked in his shirttails.

Walking confidently into the room, he went straight to Phillip, standing at the fireplace. "Good evening, Your Grace, I am Alexander Chilton. Mr. Damrill told me you requested a meeting with me."

Phillip's breath caught. The man was devastatingly handsome upon closer scrutiny, muscular, with a commanding presence. He shook the younger man's hand, trying not to show his instant attraction to him. "Nice to meet you, Chilton. Damrill said you are a baron?"

"Yes, but it is actually a courtesy title, though it has proven advantageous upon occasion." A wide smile revealed an openness and easy manner.

Phillip smiled, feeling more at ease. "Please, shall we sit and have some brandy while we talk?" He asked the question as Chilton took the closest chair. Phillip poured the brandy in the club's distinct snifters, with the stems that resembled a woman's torso. After handing the other man his glass, Phillip assumed the chair opposite.

"Are you aware of why I requested this meeting?"

"I only know that Mr. Damrill thought we should meet. Similar interests, I believe he said."

Phillip swallowed hard. This was more difficult than he thought it'd be. After taking a fortifying sip of his brandy, he proceeded. "Let's be frank with each other. Agreed?"

Alexander nodded. "Absolutely."

"We both attend the club for the same purpose, I assume." Phillip raised an eyebrow, but received no confirming gesture from his guest. "Please tell me about

yourself, as far as your sexual self goes."

Chilton sat looking relaxed, legs crossed. Phillip felt his body respond in a like fashion, a foreign reaction to be sure.

"Well, Your Grace, I'm comfortable with men or with women, to be honest. Of course, one day, and soon, if I were to listen to my father, I must marry. Presently, however, I have a need for the company of a man. That's why I've come to the Sapphire Club. I understand there are like-minded people here and the secrets of the members are safe."

Phillip felt Chilton possessed a sincerity that was as attractive emotionally as the man was physically. Alexander made him comfortable, a feeling not in any way common in his life. With no compulsion to be cautious, Phillip spoke with a frankness that was refreshing in the extreme. "Safety is the primary reason I hold a membership here, aside from the obvious, of course. There are many people who would use our preferences against us. However, I have a wife, and though she knows and accepts me for who I am, I wouldn't wish her to suffer the scorn of others."

"Damrill assured me that safety is his prime concern for all his members. I have never heard a word spoken that would contradict that. Therefore, I feel our *preferences*, as you call them, are safe within these walls."

Phillip felt a surge of lust, pure, animalistic need. He'd come to the club with the intention of fucking Haynes. He'd leave no less satisfied. His cock told the tale. And he sat in such a way to make that obvious.

Phillip watched Alexander's eyes rake over his body. He hadn't acquired a paunch like so many men his age and he prided himself on being well groomed and expensively clad. He was older yes, but to his mind, not a bad bargain.

With his eyes on Phillip's crotch, Alexander said, "Your Grace, I find you exceedingly attractive, if I might be so bold."

Phillip felt the dance begin.

"And I you."

"What shall we do about that?"

Phillip pushed himself to standing and approached. Alexander stood and the two men faced each other. He could smell the bergamot the man wore to great advantage, allowing it to fill his senses. His stomach lurched with a need to taste the man. With eyes closed, almost experimenting, Phillip pressed his lips to Alexander's, no other part of their bodies touching. The other man's arms wound around Phillip, and he knew immediately he wanted more. The kiss quickly became more, as Phillip pulled Alexander closer, and each man vied for supremacy.

Their tongues dueled, tasting the first blush of passion. Phillip pulled himself away with great reluctance. "Remove our clothing, slowly. I want to see every inch of your body."

Alexander smiled as he began to undo his intricately tied cravat. Phillip watched the man's elegant, long fingers tug at and finally release the knot. He dropped the starched cloth at their feet. Chilton moved on to unbuttoning his shirt. He raised the garment over his head, revealing a well-muscled chest, with dark hair that Phillip had the need to touch. So he did, his hands teasing the dusky nipples puckered either against the cool air or for the man's arousal.

Phillip watched as Alexander slipped each ivory button of his placard through its mooring and slowly slipped his trousers down his slim hips, stopping just short of revealing his cock, which Phillip could see bulged and begging for his touch. His mouth watered, calling his attention to the fact he'd never had that reaction before. Phillip was being thoroughly seduced, and he wanted to be.

As his gaze skimmed over the exquisite body before him, he stalled on the as yet unrevealed cock. "Don't make me wait; the punishment could be severe." Despite his best attempt, his voice was shaky.

"Do you promise?"

"Oh, I see we have something else in common." Nothing more, innuendo sufficed.

"It appears we do." With a smile, Alexander began to pull the trousers back up, when Phillip's hand stopped him.

With a flick of his wrist, Phillip said, "I suggest you make short work of those. I want you naked."

Without further ado, Alexander stripped out of the offending trousers, leaving him beautifully bare, standing before Phillip, his erection bobbing and weeping against his belly.

"You teased me, dear boy, and for that you will pay with your ass."

"So be it." Alexander raised an eyebrow and Phillip caught a smirk.

"Go to the bed, bend over, and grip the footboard."

After having assumed the position requested, Alexander asked, "Does this please you?"

"Oh, I have no doubt it will. Bring your legs back and spread them wide."

"Yes, Your Grace."

The sight of Alexander bent over, his ass ready to accept the spanking Phillip so desperately wished to give him, caused his cock to engorge beyond bearing. He'd never felt like this before with a man. It had always been about the fucking, and now . . . Lord . . . now, he wanted to devour Alexander, every inch of him, slowly.

"You have a fine ass, Alexander," Phillip said, as he rubbed and pinched.

"Please, call me Alex."

"Fine Alex, I am, Your Grace."

Alex chuckled. "Yes, *Your Grace*."

"Do you want me to punish you, Alex." Phillip had not stopped rubbing Alex's ass, dipping into the cleft, teasing the tight muscle, then moving away.

"Yes." Alex's voice sounded strained.

"How?"

"I look forward to whatever you deem appropriate."

"I feel a rather harsh spanking would suffice, given the audacity you displayed in your teasing."

"Yes, harsh." Alex's breath hitched.

Phillip used his hand to spank Alex with no mercy. The man groaned sensually,

gutturally.

Several minutes passed with Phillip's hand becoming redder. The sounds, not only of Alex's reaction, but also of Phillip's own hand striking the man's skin, made his groin ache with an unbearable need.

"Oh, God, Your Grace. Fuck me. Please, fuck me now."

Phillip could no longer force himself to tease or to seduce. He wished to feel Alex beneath him, surrounding his cock with pulsating muscles, feel Alex's body turned over to him, completely.

Phillip removed his clothing quickly. After he lubricated Alex's anus, he slipped a finger inside, feeling Alex's immediate tensing.

"Relax," Phillip whispered. "Is this your first time?"

"No, it is not." The words were spaced, a huge breath taken between each one.

"Then you know what to expect, do you not?"

"Do I?"

"Point well taken."

Phillip replaced the one finger with two, fucking Alex slowly, despite his desperate need to plunge inside the man. With three fingers, he stretched the tight muscle, feeling Alex finally relax, despite the tension that appeared to remain in his arms and legs. Phillip leaned down and kissed the reddened skin on Alex's ass, kissed him all over, licking, feeling the heat on his tongue.

"You take a spanking quite well."

"I give as good as I receive."

"We will indeed investigate that prospect." His heart quickened.

"Please, Phillip, fuck me."

Phillip noted the familiarity and grinned.

Phillip positioned himself, though he was still finger fucking Alex. He pulled his fingers out and replaced them with his cock, slipping the head in easily. He then stilled.

He closed his eyes against the sensations, wishing to memorize each one, each nuance, each sound, each breath.

"My God man."

"Give me more."

Phillip held Alex's hips, clenching them tight, moving his own hips back, then forward, then a bit deeper with each stroke. He rocked against Alex's ass, sure the burn would add to Alex's pleasure.

The feeling was unbearable for Phillip, though he'd bear it over and over again, if given the chance. Alex hissed with each stroke. Phillip grunted, emphasizing each movement. He knew this wasn't just fucking. He wasn't sure what it was, but he knew he cared for the other man's pleasure. Beyond that, it was a world of sensations, clearly delineated, sharp.

"Alex," he murmured, as he leaned over Alex's upper body, thrusting his hips with purpose, deeply, each stroke punctuating his need for this man and this moment in time.

He wished he understood why Alex was different, but he simply was.

"Fuck me, Phillip, fuck me hard."

His name on Alex's lips sounded like a benediction. He wanted to possess this man's body, to own him.

Phillip stroked deep and slow, seeking Alex's soul. He would brand this man, spoil him for anyone else.

He moved Alex's hips, changing the angle. Alex reacted immediately, increasing his own backward thrusts. "Phillip, please."

He felt the rise of culmination, the tingle at his back, the tension building in his legs, his ballocks, his cock. He wanted the release, but didn't want this to end. He would reach a point of no return, and he strove for that, all the time hoping this wouldn't be the last time.

The speed came on its own, the natural progression, the want, the need to get to the end. He groaned and allowed himself to tumble over the edge. His hips slammed into Alex, as Phillip held the man still, not permitting even an inch of movement. His body stiffened, his ballocks contracted, his cock throbbed, and with a shout of ecstasy,

Phillip spent himself. His body shuddered, over and over again, waves of pleasure washing over him. He thought it'd never end, relished each and every quake and quiver.

Phillip leaned over Alex's upper body and wrapped his arms around the man's torso. He wanted to say, "You are mine," but simply held Alex instead.

"I must come," Alex said.

Phillip released Alex, who took his own cock in hand and stroked savagely. Phillip stood by, weak, breathless, wishing he'd brought himself to do the deed for the man.

Within moments, Alex came with a roar. Phillip observed taut sinews, muscular arms, closed eyes, gritted teeth. Had Haynes done those same things? He'd never paid the slightest bit of attention, and yet, he couldn't tear his gaze from Alex.

Alex seemed embarrassed by his reactions, not meeting Phillip's eyes as he began to come back to his own. Instead, he walked to the washstand and began to clean himself. Awkward, Phillip thought.

Alex finished with the washing and began to gather his clothes, putting them on, silently. A sense of panic washed over Phillip, making him wonder if he'd done something wrong. If he had, he wouldn't be surprised.

He quickly washed and followed Alex's lead, slipping into his own clothes, sans cravat.

"Care for another brandy?" He didn't want the interlude to end, not yet, not until he'd said the myriad things that sat on the tip of his tongue.

"That would be nice."

Phillip turned his back and closed his eyes in gratitude. He'd been granted a few more minutes.

"Shall we sit?"

They assumed the same chairs they'd taken before

Awkward. The only word Phillip could think of that described what he was feeling—well that, and, "Might I see you again, Alex?"

Alex grinned, almost shyly. "Thank you for that."

"What?"

"I had no idea how to ask the same question."

A humorless laugh followed, from both men, dispelling somewhat the pall that had fallen over them.

"I would very much like to see you again, Phillip." Alex sipped his brandy, settling into the chair a bit more.

Phillip wished to be, well, Phillip, taking charge, planning, controlling. He sensed, however, that this situation called for patience, a commodity he lacked in spades.

"A week from tonight, this room?"

Alex gave him a toothy smile and stood. "Yes, a week from tonight. I shall be here."

He finished the last of the brandy in his glass, bowed, and went to the door.

Phillip already began counting the hours and the man hadn't even left his sight. "I'll arrange some supper. Eight o'clock?"

"Eight o'clock it is."

The door closed quietly and Phillip felt oddly bereft.

Chapter Sixteen

Phillip met Alex at the Sapphire Club once a week for the next several months. The attraction had grown to something more than just a good thrashing and a great fucking, though those were certainly a part of the entire package. They had meals together, talked politics, a shared interest, as well as travel and Alex's interest in anything to do with India.

The friendship that ensued was one of only a few Phillip had ever experienced in his life. Though he called Prentice Hyde and Lucien Damrill friends, they really only had the club in common and rarely, if ever, saw one another outside the confines of the

St. John's Wood estate. No, it was within the boundaries of *friendship* that he thought of Alex. They shared sex, but they also shared other interests. Each man enjoyed a rousing discussion, making their points loudly at times, learning to disagree amiably, while respecting the other man's point of view.

Phillip learned that Alex lived alone, tended to stay clear of his family, lest the marriage conversation be the only commonality of their visits. Yes, Alex wished to be married one day, but like Phillip, he wasn't willing to deny his profound need for a man in his life as well.

"It is too bad my wife doesn't have a sister." Phillip chuckled to himself.

"You say she understands your need?"

"Indeed she does."

"An extraordinary woman, you are a fortunate man."

"I have come to realize that since our marriage" Phillip smiled, silently congratulating himself on his fine *choice*. "You must meet her one day."

"I would very much enjoy that, Phillip. She is who I share you with, is she not?"

Alex's statement struck Phillip profoundly. Indeed, under the strictest terms, Phillip not only shared his time but also his body with both Felicity and Alex. A thought began to foment, one that began to take root before he could caution himself against it.

"Yes, she certainly is, Alex. She is very important to me, though, as I've told you, I hadn't seen myself married before she came along. Didn't see myself married to *her* either, but, well, you know that story."

"I would say you did well." Alex's placed a hand on Phillip's thigh and patted, an intimacy Phillip truly enjoyed.

"She would like you, I believe, and you her. With your leave, I shall arrange dinner next week, for the three of us. It is time you met each other. It's been, what, six months since *our* meeting?"

"Six months, next week, as a matter of fact."

"Keeping track, are we?"

Alex's eyes turned dark, heavy-lidded. "I count the hours between our meetings, Phillip. Always have."

Phillip was unsure how to react, lest he give away his own feelings. He cleared his throat, finding his emotions difficult to swallow. When he was sure his voice wouldn't betray him, he said, "Well, I do believe I am in need of a good thrashing."

The night ended with both men sated, having fallen into a rhythm that satisfied each of them. Phillip had learned to give pleasure and rather enjoyed giving Alex the oral gratification he so craved.

He'd never allowed Alex to fuck him and Alex never seemed to mind. He had no doubt it would happen, one day, but it took more trust than Phillip was capable of mustering, even with Alex. He wished to explore the growing relationship with Alex before he submitted himself in that way.

Though he arrived at his home well past midnight, he had the uncontrollable compulsion to talk to Felicity. He smiled when he saw light under the adjoining door when he entered his bedchamber. His thoughts had taken on a life of their own. With his heart in his hands and fear in his heart, he knocked, and waited for her to admit him.

"Come in," she said, her voice as sweet as ever.

He cracked the door open slightly and saw she'd been sitting in bed, reading.

"Good evening, my dear. How are you?"

"I'm doing fine. Just reading Byron's latest. How was your evening?"

"It was fine. As a matter of fact, I wish to tell you something, but I wish you to hear me out before you comment or throw a vase at my head."

"All right, but do I get to choose which vase?"

He laughed. "I suppose I could hide the really solid ones."

When the joviality calmed, he took her hands and put forth his most serious mien.

"One week from tonight, I wish for you to join me at the club."

"Really?" She patted his hand. "And what, pray, have you in mind, Your Grace?"

"I have arranged for you to meet Alex." He had told Felicity about the man he met every week, but had given her little but his name and the fact they seemed compatible.

Felicity's eyes widened and her jaw dropped. "You wish me to meet him?"

"I do."

"Why?"

This was the most difficult part of the conversation. Acknowledgement of feelings for another, especially to someone to whom he was pledged for a lifetime, seemed somehow unfair, yet, she'd always been so understanding.

"Over these past months, Alex has become a friend as well as someone with the same interests. You are my wife and I wish to have you know one another."

She seemed to be thinking about what he'd said, and he noted she wasn't searching the room for porcelain projectiles.

"If you wish it, Phillip, I will be happy to meet him."

He finally expelled a breath. "I am happy to hear that. Now, one thing I wish you to know is that he has an interest in men *and* women."

Her mouth fell open, just before she covered it with her hand. "Much like you?"

"Yes, dear. I have concluded that Alexander and I are very similar in that regard. I am nothing if not attracted to you and your myriad charms." His gaze raked over her, then he lifted her hand and placed a kiss on each knuckle.

Felicity sat up straighter, raising her knees, which Phillip then wrapped in his arms.

"What does this all mean?" she asked.

"Well, without going into details, I have begun to feel a connection with Alex that I've never felt with anyone, other than you."

Again, Felicity's mouth dropped and she gazed at him with more than inquisitiveness. "You feel a connection with me?"

"Please don't look so surprised. You have to know that my feelings for you are more than those for someone who lives under the same roof."

"No, I don't know any such thing, though I'd hoped you enjoyed our relations as much as I."

He took her face in his hands, rubbing her cheekbones with his thumbs. "Yes, I more than enjoy our *relations*, Felicity. Have I not made that apparent?"

"Yes, I suppose you have, but then you go to the club, and I am again filled with confusion."

"I am not sure that one really has to do with the other. I suppose in other marriages it could be explained that simply, but ours is different, because of my other needs. I need you Felicity, I have come to realize this, but I need another as well, and I believe that other person is Alex."

"What are you proposing, Phillip?"

"I wish to see if there is room in *our* lives for another, for Alex."

He'd never been so candid with anyone. He'd cut his chest open and bared his soul. Waiting for her response was horrendous, and she took her time in answering.

Felicity didn't say a word, but instead looked deeply into his dark eyes. He looked more vulnerable than she'd ever seen him. He sought her approval, her acceptance.

She wanted her husband – all of him, with his quirks and his differences. He was the most honest man she'd ever known. Phillip was caring and generous, but he was also deeply troubled. She suspected she knew the cause of that conflict, and she wouldn't contribute to furthering his pain.

"What are you asking of me?"

"I want you to meet Alex. I've arranged for the three of us to have dinner at the Sapphire Club in one week's time. I am not sure where things can go from there, but I wish to discuss it. I very much wish to explore the possibilities, but it will take the three of us to determine if we can all co-exist or not."

Felicity was surprised, but found she wasn't adverse to what she thought Phillip was proposing. She wanted to please her husband, and the idea of another man in their

relationship was oddly pleasing to her as well. Before she could say a word, Phillip continued.

"I will never ask anything of you that you are not willing to give. I am not sure how I feel about the possibility of another man touching you, and I will not allow it if you are adverse, but I confess, at my peril, the idea intrigues me."

Wishing to please him and knowing for a certainty their marriage would suffer if she didn't at least agree to talk about this, she finally said, "I am willing to explore this with you."

Phillip's eyes lit up with his smile. He leaned forward and kissed her, a sweet, chaste kiss.

"I will not force anything on you. You are free to make up your mind and I will respect your thoughts and feelings. Nothing needs to be decided now. We will have dinner with Alex, along with a frank discussion. You may interject as often as you wish."

"I look forward to meeting him, and you know, I never have a lack of thoughts or opinions." They laughed together lightheartedly. It felt good to laugh with him.

"You are quite a girl, my Felicity."

"I am afraid when I show you what I have purchased, you might have a vastly different opinion of me."

"My entire fortune is at your disposal, my dear. You may buy whatever you wish."

"Before I show you, I want you to know that I bought them because of you. I hope what I propose pleases you."

She leaned over the drawer in the table beside the bed. She removed a long, black velvet pouch and laid it on the bed beside them. When she opened the pouch, she took out three more pouches and set them side by side on the bed.

"What is this?"

She picked one up and handed it to him. "Open it."

He did just that and removed the object from its pouch. In his hand he held a

clear glass phallus. His eyes darted between the object and Felicity.

"Where did you get this?"

"Serenity Damrill gave me the direction of a man in London who makes them for particular clients."

"Yes, I have heard of him. What are these pouches?"

In order of size, she uncovered the other two as well. "I thought you might use these on me," she said in a tiny voice.

Phillip's reaction apparently left him speechless. She'd never seen Phillip so stunned. "I have heard anal sex is wonderful and I wish to learn."

"Where would you hear such a thing?"

"I had a discussion with Serenity and Lady Desiree. It appears you have been keeping something quite glorious from me, and I wish to put an end to that, immediately."

Phillip had picked up each phallus in turn. They were in graduating sizes, until the third was nearly as large as he was in both girth and length.

"I wish to one day accept you in that way, Phillip."

Phillip felt his heart and his cock lurch. How could one young girl have such a profound effect upon his life?

"You wish to have me —"

"Yes, Phillip."

"Why?" He could say no more, for his tongue was firmly tied.

"At first it was to please you. I thought it was what you wanted at the club, and if I could provide it for you, you wouldn't need to go there. However, after a discussion with Serenity and Desiree, I realized *I* am curious."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I am more than sure. My new friends told me it is wonderful, once you get used to it, and I wish to get used to it."

She winked at him and melted the heart he thought had long ago turned to

stone.

"You are an amazing young woman, my duchess. How did I ever earn the right to have you?"

"I simply allowed you to compromise me and the deed was done." Her eyes twinkled, and her smile brightened the room.

"You are indeed an adventurous one, aren't you?"

She picked up the smallest of the three phalluses and held it in her hands. "I believe we should start with this one."

Electricity flashed through him. Could this really be happening to him? Could his wife be this amenable? He'd never imagined anything but disaster, which was why he'd never married. He deplored having to explain himself, especially when he had no explanation. He was who he was. Then this wonderful woman burst into his life and makes him feel less an oddity and more a man than he'd ever felt before.

"Do you know how special you are, my beautiful Felicity?"

Innocently, she shook her head.

"My life is very complicated. I have feelings I've never truly understood, though I have acted upon them. I've been alone most of my life because of those feelings. It was when the Sapphire Club was established that I began to feel at liberty to be who I feel I really am. I am now coming to feel that I am safe with you as well."

Absently playing with the phallus and gazing into his eyes, she spoke. "You are entitled to the feelings you have as are we all. No one should try to make us who we are not. My mother has tried that with me for years. I have always been somewhat of a rebel, and I believe you are too. I care for you, Phillip, more deeply every day, and my fondest wish is for your happiness, for in that, my own is won. I will ensure the safety of your secrets and your heart, for I wish only to spend all my days with you, in whatever way you deem fit. I am your wife."

"You will consider Alex as part of our relationship?"

"I will consider him, but only if he is half as handsome as you are."

Phillip laughed. "I fear when you see him, I will pale by comparison. He is quite

handsome and much lighter of heart than I."

"I rather like your darker side, darling duke. You always make me wonder what it is you are thinking."

He took the phallus from her, rubbing his hand over the glass that had been warmed by her hands.

"Can you guess what it is I am thinking at this moment?"

"I believe, sir, our thoughts are in accord."

"If that is true, my dear, let me help you out of that gown."

Chapter Seventeen

As their carriage rolled closer to the club one week later, Phillip confessed his nervousness at the impending meeting. Felicity seemed outwardly calm, holding her chin up and smiling, as always. Phillip hoped all would be well. He began to fear his own anticipation and his need to have Alex become a permanent part of his life – their lives, as could possibly be.

He and Felicity had continued their discussion throughout the last week, awakening him to the reality that was the woman he'd been forced to marry. She'd given him not a moment to regret that event – quite the contrary. She accepted him for who he was, something even he had been unable to do.

He wanted the three of them to find common ground. To find a way to live out the fantasies he'd held so close to his heart. He needed to have both Felicity and Alex in order to feel whole.

Felicity looked particularly beautiful this evening, dressed in a rose-colored gown, short sleeves, her arms covered with a white shawl. Her hair was done in a loose chignon at her nape. Simple jewelry and a particularly fetching smile. He'd found she looked older, but it could just be the maturity he seen grow in her.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"I am thinking about your friend and whether he is as handsome as you are at

this moment."

"Flattery will buy you jewels, madam."

"Will it buy your heart, sir?"

"You already have that, my dear Felicity, if for no other reason than you are here with me now."

"I wish to be no other place or with any other person."

"Remember, you needn't agree to anything you feel uncomfortable with, darling. I will understand."

"Will you understand if I agree to it all?"

He looked at her and realized he had no idea what "it all" was. "I am not sure what I wish your role to be or what your involvement with Alex *should* be. I only know what my fantasy is, but you will need to decide for yourself, I suppose, or should we decide together?"

"We will decide together, when the time comes."

The carriage slowed, preparing to stop in front of the Sapphire Club.

They were ushered into the entrance hall by Hampton. "All the arrangements have been made, Your Grace."

"Thank you, Hampton. Has my guest arrived?"

"I don't believe so, Your Grace, but I will escort him personally when he does."

Phillip nodded sharply and guided Felicity to the room on the second floor. She suddenly appeared somewhat nervous, as her hand fluttered upon his arm.

"Please, don't be afraid," he implored.

"I wouldn't say I am afraid." Her voice seemed to quiver.

"What is it then?"

"Just curious as to how this will go. I will be fine, please, don't worry about me." She patted his hand and smiled, though he sensed she was more trying to convince herself than him.

When they entered the room, he noted how beautifully it had been done. A table sat far from the huge bed, decorated with candles and a linen cloth. Crystal goblets and

heavy silver cutlery marked the three table settings. Wine and glasses sat on a small pier table nearby.

"Would you like a glass, dear?" Phillip asked, pointing to the cut-glass decanter.

"I believe I would, if for nothing than to calm the butterflies in my stomach."

"I knew you were nervous," he teased, which earned him a raised eyebrow and another of Felicity's sweet smiles.

He poured her a glass and took one for himself. He watched as Felicity looked over the ladder device that stood in a corner. He wondered what she was thinking but didn't dare ask.

She continued walking about the room, her tiny fingers gliding over furniture and objects d'art. Salacious sculptures of men together in a sexual act caught her attention, and she spent several minutes examining it closely. She gave him no indication as to her feelings as she rubbed over the one figure bent over and holding onto a tree as the other stood behind, obviously with his cock inside the other man.

"I would wish to see this done," she said and looked squarely at him.

He stammered for what seemed to be an eternity. "You would?"

"Indeed I would."

A knock sounded at the door. Phillip's heart pounded as the handsome Alexander Chilton sauntered into the room, dressed as elegantly as he had been every other time Phillip had seen him.

"Your Grace," Alex said, and swept into a bow.

Upon rising, Phillip introduced him to Felicity, who received the same treatment.

"Your Grace, you are as lovely as Phillip said you were. It is my honor to meet you."

"It is nice to meet you as well, Mr. Chilton. Please, call me Felicity."

"I shall, if you promise to call me Alex."

Felicity smiled, which not only lit up the room, but Phillip's heart as well.

"It will be my distinct pleasure to call you Alex."

While drinking wine, the three chatted awkwardly about the weather and the state of British politics, several footmen came into the room carrying trays laden with food. The meal was to be *a la francaise*, where all the food was laid out on the table at once. Each of them served themselves and then settled into further general conversation.

It was discomfiting at first, but soon Phillip could see Felicity relaxing, which eased his mind. Alex had quite a sense of humor, which kept Felicity laughing at his jests and innuendos.

No one ate with any real interest in the food and when finished, Phillip rang for the servants to remove the remnants. They repaired to the settee and chairs, where more wine was consumed and the frank discussion began.

Having negotiated with heads of state, Phillip knew he must take the lead. With enough wine to give him courage, he began.

"Alex, I have discussed our growing relationship with my wife. She has always been gracious in her approval."

"For that, Felicity, I am most grateful," Alex said, raising his glass in acknowledgment.

"I wish my husband to be happy."

Phillip smiled at his wife and continued. "I wish to propose a relationship between the three of us."

"Is the lady amenable to what you are proposing?"

"Ask me yourself, Alex." Felicity's voice was light; she seemed relaxed.

With a slight blush upon his darkly handsome face, he rephrased his question. "Are you amenable to what it is your husband is proposing?"

"I am indeed," she said confidently and without hesitation.

Phillip was taken aback. He closed his eyes briefly, measuring his good fortune at having fallen victim to that one act of Felicity's impetuosity. When he opened his eyes, he saw her beaming face looking at him with more adoration than he surely deserved.

After clearing his throat to insure his voice had strength, Phillip said, "Alex, please express your feelings, lest we get ahead of ourselves."

Alex crossed his long legs, one over the other, assuming a very relaxed posture. "May I be frank, my friends?"

"Positively," Felicity said.

"I find you both beyond attractive, and my heart is filled with anticipation of the glorious times we might share."

It was Felicity's turn to blush and to ask questions.

"How do you see the relationship between you and me playing out?"

"I believe that will be up to you and your husband." Alex and Felicity looked at Phillip.

"I will leave that up to my wife, for she seems to have a firm grasp on what is being proposed here."

Felicity turned to Alex. "Would you mind stepping out into the hallway for a moment?"

"Of course not."

He rose and left the room. Phillip turned to Felicity questioningly.

"Is something amiss?"

"Not at all. I feel we should settle this so we might enjoy the evening. I like him very much." Her gaze fell to his crotch. "I dare say, you have developed quite a tendre for him as well." She leaned over and touched him. "I wish to see you put this to good use, my darling. Would do that for me?"

She rubbed her hand over his erection.

"How do you wish to see it used?"

"So that I can *see* it being used." Her smile grabbed his heart. "Tonight, I wish to have one of my *own* fantasies fulfilled and that would be to have you make love to Alex as I watch. I am not inclined to join, though I would appreciate your services when we get home."

"You amaze me, my darling."

"Please ask Alex to return."

Phillip sensed something more from Felicity. She removed herself to a chair situated in a corner. It didn't take long before he found out, much to his delight, exactly what she had planned.

Just before the door opened and Alex was readmitted, she told Phillip, "Pretend as though I'm not here."

Alex walked in and surprised Felicity when he immediately kissed Phillip. She saw her husband respond and saw how very important Alex had become to him. The kiss was different than any she'd shared with him. It was more primal, animalistic.

She'd never seen two more masculine men in her life, making her wonder who was the more dominate of the two and was it necessary that either one be? They were both men who were confident in themselves, with nothing to prove to anyone, least of all, to each other.

Since she had made her request to observe, she decided to take the lead.

"Alex, I have asked my husband to make love to you while I watch. I assume this would be a part of our proposed arrangement, would it not?"

"Yes, I believe it would."

"In that case, I wish to see your body, all of it."

The man had a natural smile that made her quim tingle. He looked straight at her, as though he'd known her for years. "My dear Felicity, it will be my pleasure."

"Phillip, I would have you undress him."

Phillip smiled and nodded, then reached for Alex's pale gray cravat. Felicity stifled a laugh, thinking that Phillip had rarely removed his own cravat, and now, she was asking he play valet to another man.

With the removal of Alex's coat and waistcoat, she began to see a picture forming of what she suspected was a well-toned male body. She'd only seen Phillip's, which was beyond impressive, and now, she was being treated to the sight of yet another gorgeous man, who seemed quite willing to dance to her whims.

Alex removed his boots and stockings after which Phillip unbuttoned the fall of his breeches. Felicity's heart rammed against her chest when his cock was revealed. Phillip knelt and dragged the black linen garment over Alex's narrow hips and bottom, which was inconveniently hidden from her view.

Her eyes widened as Phillip stayed on his knees and began licking Alex's cock. Alex stood with his legs parted just so, his hands riffling through Phillip's hair. Phillip's eyes were closed, his mouth covering the head of Alex's enormous erection. Enraptured, Felicity stared, awestruck at the beauty of the sight before her.

The contrast between Phillip's fully clothed body and Alex's glorious nakedness excited her, to say the least. Her body reacted fiercely. Her bodice grew tighter and the ache between her legs made watching difficult.

Now that she'd gotten things started, she determined to allow the two men to handle the progression on their own, and she wasn't in the least bit disappointed in her decision.

Phillip glanced up as Alex closed his eyes. He continued to suck and lick Alex's cock. He'd grown to enjoy giving and receiving fellatio since meeting Alex, another acknowledgement of his own acceptance of who he truly was.

With gentle hands, Alex drew Phillip to standing, kissing the duke's mouth with his tongue.

"Do you taste yourself on my lips?" Phillip asked, as Alex pulled Phillip's head in closer.

"Oh, yes, and once you get out of these cumbersome clothes; I shall taste *you* on mine."

In between kisses, Phillip was divested of his clothing. Alex looked at the duke's body, his eyes heavy lidded. "Beautiful," he murmured, as he began touching, running his hands down Phillip's arms, his torso. He flicked his long fingers over Phillip's nipples. Phillip's breath caught. Alex leaned in to kiss Phillip's throat, his neck, his cheek, licking, then blowing his warm breath over the moistened skin, sending Phillip

into his mind, as he had nothing to compare this to.

Sliding his hands down Phillip's body, Alex kissed lower, gliding his tongue over the flat plane of Phillip's belly as he covered Phillip's ass with his hands, kneading, holding, possessing.

Alex knelt, his tongue lashing against Phillip's cock, as his hands cradled Phillip's buttocks, rubbing his inner thighs. Phillip couldn't keep his head from lolling back in ecstasy at the other man's touch. The sensations assaulting all senses, equilibrium failing, heart racing, logic and reason lost.

"You have a magnificent cock, Your Grace," Alex said, as his expert tongue treated the sensitive underside.

"And you possess a magnificent tongue, my lord." Phillip moaned audibly, feeling mindless need welling up, tense, but relaxed, wanting, yet wishing this to never end. His fists clutched and unclutched Alex's hair, desire and lust burning through his body.

Alex nibbled, startling Phillip from his misty world. "I fear, Your Grace, I should be punished for such impertinence."

"How do you see this punishment taking place?"

"You are the aggrieved party, sir, you should have the retribution you deem appropriate."

Punishment always thrilled Phillip. Even now, when he could have easily fucked Alex, and enjoyed doing so, he found the thought of spanking him as exciting as any other.

Easily falling into the role of punisher, Phillip said, "Yes, I fear you have violated the rules of aggression. Go to the armoire and bring back the strap."

Alex smiled, walked to the armoire, and removed a leather strap. He slapped it against his naked leg, the sound seeming to echo in the room.

He brought it back to Phillip, handing it over with a flourish. Phillip nodded, trying to maintain a stern face.

"I believe a few lashes with this will show you your proper place."

"I believe, sir, you are quite right." Alex's eyes were dark, mysterious, his voice flirtatious, daring.

"Bend over the Biedermeier."

Chapter Eighteen

The beautifully crafted Biedermeier settee, with its thickly padded rolled arms, was the perfect piece of furniture for what Phillip had in mind. Lucien Damrill had had the pieces made in Germany and shipped to England, equipping the club with several dozen. They'd proved ideal for spankings and lovemaking.

Alex chose the higher of the two rolled arms to drape his luscious body over. Phillip kicked his legs wide apart and reached down to fondle Alex's stones. They were warm to his touch and tightened slightly under his ministrations. He rubbed his fingers over the base of Alex's cock, eliciting a groan from the man who was now so very vulnerable.

The leather strap cracked over Alex's buttocks, followed by an "Oh, yes," that rang a peal in the room. The sound of both skittered through Phillip's body, prompting the second strike.

"Harder." Alex cried, in what sounded to Phillip as frustration.

The next three were as hard as Phillip dared deliver. "You've been punished enough, Alex." Phillip couldn't bear to inflict any more pain on his man.

Alex did as he was instructed. "Not nearly enough, but there will be other times."

"Indeed there will." Phillip rubbed Alex's ass, reveling in the warmth he'd created.

Alex in turn roughly slapped Phillip's ass, bringing a smile to his face. He'd almost thought to forego the thrashing he'd craved all day, but now realized he could not. He handed the leather strap to Alex and bent over the settee arm.

"Don't give me a measly five."

Alex went to work, his lashes hard and stinging. Alex had no compunction about

making the strikes hard and blistering. The sting and burn overwhelmed Phillip's senses, drawing his complete attention. He thought of nothing other than the next strike, the intoxicating sound of the strap as it impacted his body. There was nothing akin to it. He'd always want it.

Phillip's cock was rampant, aching, throbbing with need. The pain was stimulating, filling his mind with depravity to be played out upon Alex's body. He received the full twenty lashes, relishing each one. Though he usually hated for the thrashing to end; now, something even more exciting waited for him.

As Alex backed away, allowing Phillip to stand, Phillip murmured, "Go over to the bed."

The two men walked to the bed. Alex waited, not sure what Phillip wished him to do. "Lie down on your back with your ass on the edge of the bed. Bring your knees up." Phillip retrieved the bottle of oil he kept in the drawer nearby.

Phillip rubbed oil onto his cock and turned to face Alex, who was smiling an unbelievably seductive smile.

As he applied oil to Alex's anus, in a voice barely audible, Alex said, "Fuck my ass, Phillip."

"With an invitation like that, how can I refuse?"

Phillip stepped closer, placed the man's legs on his own shoulders and steadily pushed himself into Alex's opening. Alex's loud, needy groans prompted Phillip forward, finally pounding into him, as Alex grasped the counterpane and shouted. "Harder."

"Is this what you want," Phillip asked, as he mercilessly ground into him, over and over again, long, slamming thrusts, his powerful hips beating against Alex's groin. Phillip had never fucked like this, as though he were going to come through the other side of Alex's body. He'd never seen the other man's face as he fucked him, and he'd never felt as though he couldn't get close enough.

Alex's hand held his own cock, as he tried to keep a steady rhythm. Phillip made it next to impossible.

"God, Alex, you are so fucking tight." His cock was surrounded by warmth and tight muscles, which made prolonging this pleasurable experience near to impossible.

In a crescendo of low-timbered groans, they came together, Phillip pounding into Alex and Alex pumping his own cock with abandon. Sweat poured from them both, their ragged breathing loud in the room. Phillip savored several long moments of continued closeness, before he pulled away and collapsed on the bed next to the man he'd just ravaged.

Eyes closed and breathing heavily, the two men found each other's arms. Felicity sat mere feet away, badly in need of release. She felt a surge of love for her husband as he lay in the arms of someone who, like her, accepted him for who he was and not for the title he carried. Their coupling thrilled her, the power, the sheer animalistic fervor.

The men stirred, Phillip raising his head and calling to her. "Darling, come here."

Felicity got to her feet slowly and walked to the bed, finding she was quickly overcome with emotion. Tears formed in the corners of her eyes. The wiping of them garnered Phillip's attention. "What is it, love?"

She sniffled. "I've never seen anything so beautiful."

He pulled her down next to him, as Alex left the bed to clean himself. In whispered tones, they talked. "What do you mean?" Phillip asked.

"Alex was so receptive and you were so masterful. I can never be the way Alex was, Phillip. I see why you need him."

"I need you too, and if I should have to chose, I would choose you, my dear wife. I do pray you never ask me to do that, but you are most important to me."

Felicity kissed him, pouring into him all that her heart felt. She loved this man, for he had acted with grace, dignity and honor in marrying her. The honesty that could have destroyed him in proposing Alex as a part of their relationship had touched her deeply.

Alex began to dress, the rustling of his clothes attracting Phillip's attention.

"Where are you going, Alex?"

"I thought to leave you alone with Felicity."

Phillip smiled, gazed into Felicity's eyes. The look was so tender, it caressed her soul. He raised his brow and she understood, as though they shared a secret language. With a slight nod, she conveyed to Phillip her thoughts. "I am not sure the lovely Felicity wishes you to leave—ever."

Alex's mouth displayed an elegant gape, his eyes darting from Phillip's to Felicity's. "What does that mean?" His voice sounded hopeful.

Felicity lifted herself to rest on her elbows. "Alex, I wish to have you as a part of our family."

Alex raked his fingers through his hair, taking a step back before turning to pace. Felicity looked at Phillip, worried that her bluntness had ruined what seemed so promising for Phillip.

Minutes passed as Alex continued his aimless ambling about the room. He seemed to be muttering to himself. Phillip held Felicity tight, kissing her forehead. She took his gesture as reassurance, something she needed desperately.

When Alex turned to them once again, Felicity's heart raced. He seemed so serious as he approached the bed.

"You do understand, at some point, I must marry."

Could this be what she thought? Was he saying yes?

"I realize marriage is in your future, Alex. It happens to the best of us." Phillip kissed Felicity's cheek. Felicity leaned into Phillip, and the comfort she felt overwhelmed her. "Until such time, I would have you occupy a suite of rooms at Thornhill House."

Alex's answering smile lit the room. The bed dipped as he took his place to the right of Felicity. "It would be my great honor."

"You will be our guest tonight and we will discuss the particulars in the morning."

In turn, Alex kissed both Felicity and Phillip and the three hugged. Felicity felt an emotion toward her husband she hesitated to define. She'd always admired him, but

this was more. She'd keep her own counsel, lest she do anything to upset the glorious balance that was her marriage.

* * * * *

Felicity sat quietly in her bedchamber a few weeks after Alex had taken up residence at Thornhill House. Over these weeks she had watched her husband with Alex and reveled in the subtle changes she saw taking place. Phillip seemed more comfortable with himself, more likely to smile instead of frown, and was more attentive toward her, though she honestly had never felt neglected.

She'd not been with Alex sexually, not quite able to adjust fully to the dynamic that existed or the tension she felt when Alex was in the room. Phillip encouraged her, expressing his desire to see her with Alex, but Felicity held back, spending much of her time assessing her own feelings.

She'd grown positive that she loved Phillip. He was all she'd ever dreamed a husband should be and so much more. She was sure most wives would have no more idea how to deal with him than she did at times. He was strong, self-assured and so handsome. Her heart nearly stopped whenever he entered a room. Just hearing his footfalls set her quim to clenching.

His lovemaking, in the weeks that followed Alex's taking up residence, had been extraordinary. He'd left her breathless and sated at every turn. His promise that she would not be replaced in his affections had been kept and then some.

He never pushed her toward Alex, but instead, let her know the choice was hers. To say their situation was unique was an understatement. Her parents had asked about the addition of Alex to the household, in passing, of course, and Felicity explained that he was a relative of Phillip's who her husband insisted upon helping with his living arrangements. They were satisfied, though far be it from them to question the mighty Duke of Thornhill.

A knock shook her from her quiet reverie. It was her maid, Emily. "Your Grace, I

came to check on you. Is there anything you need?"

"I believe I would enjoy a bath."

"I will have it taken care of for you immediately."

The process of filling the hip bath with buckets of steaming water was a tedious one. She'd always felt badly for the young footmen who carried bucket after bucket up the many stairs. She'd been taught to appreciate the people who worked for her parents and had never taken for granted their loyalty and dedication to even the most mundane of tasks.

Soon, the wonderful aroma of lavender oil, which Emily had poured into the steamy water, filled Felicity's chamber.

"Emily, you may retire for the evening."

"Thank you, Your Grace."

After helping her out of her dress, stays, and chemise, Emily left her to her quiet soak. She rested her head against the rim of the metal tub, closing her eyes to take in the wonderful warmth. The next thing she felt was soft fabric being placed over her eyes and tied behind her head. She'd never heard the door open or close. Nor had she heard the footfalls as the Aubusson carpet obviously had absorbed the sound. "What are you doing?"

"Shh."

With a linen cloth and a cake of fragrant soap, he bathed her, carefully, slowly, seductively. Whenever she asked a question, he placed a finger over her lips and repeated his admonition, "Shh."

It was wonderfully sensual, this silence. His hands, of course, did more than wash her body. He glazed over her sensitive breasts, taking time to roll each nipple in his fingers, sending delicious waves of sensation to her quim. He went lower, until the cloth he held rubbed against the engorged nub she so desperately needed to have stroked. She wasn't disappointed when he found it and circled lightly at first but then with purpose.

The slow burn started in her feet, building, then ebbing, delicious in every way.

The sensations were maddeningly wonderful. Her tongue jutted out, over her bottom lip, which he captured with his teeth and bit down gently. In a whispered entreaty, he said, "Come," as he brought her over the edge into bliss. Her body stiffened as her legs trapped his hand between them.

"Pure heaven," she purred, her breath still shallow.

He kissed her lightly and helped her from the now-tepid water. Wrapping her in a linen sheet, he dried her and led her to the bed. When she attempted to remove the cloth that covered her eyes, he silently admonished her, pulling her hand away and kissing each knuckle.

Felicity's bed had been turned down, and now, she was being laid on the cool, clean sheets. The feeling was in stark contrast to her body, which had been warmed by the water and the towel.

The silence in the room was seductive, erotic, alluring. The lack of sight heightened each movement, each touch. She heard fabric rustling. She assumed he must be removing his clothes. Then the mattress dipped beside her. She could feel his breath against her skin, warm, with a hint of brandy.

He kissed her neck, licking and biting gently. She moved her head to the side to give him greater access. Freshly shaved, his skin was soft. He teased her nipple, soon replacing his hand with his mouth. He flicked his tongue over the sensitive tip, sending wave after wave of delicious sensation through her body.

The darkness made her focus on what *he* was doing and only that. She could feel his skin against hers, warm, inviting, smelling of sandalwood, a fragrance she had come to adore. She again attempted to touch him, searching for the one thing in the world that would make the ache between her legs abate. Clever man knew her intent and moved away. She made to speak, but he again covered her lips with his finger.

He stopped his progression and before she knew what happened, her arms were brought over her head and with soft fabric, tied to the bedstead. Her meager protest was ignored as he situated himself between her legs, opening them wide with his strong hands. He moved lower, over the flatness of her belly, trailing kisses, licking her

navel. His chin grazed the smooth skin, his warm breath *almost* enough to push her over the edge again. Her body rose off the bed, an attempt to encourage him. He continued in his own way as he palmed her mons, the pressure he exerted nowhere near enough, not until he found what she so badly wished him to find.

With his thumbs he opened her wide. He licked, his strong tongue sending fire through her legs. Something new; he'd never done *this* before.

Chapter Nineteen

"Phillip?"

"Shh."

"I must know if you are Phillip."

No answer, but she knew. She wasn't angry, for she'd fantasized about being with Alex. Even when she demurred at Phillip's suggestion that she entertain him in her chamber, she wished each time that she'd said yes.

"Alex?"

"Yes, love, it is me. Do you wish that I stop?" He licked deeply, curling his tongue around her clitoris.

"Don't you dare."

"As the lady wishes."

She could visualize his bright, teasing smile. "Please take off the scarf and the restraints."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

He removed the cloth, tenderly kissing her wrists and her eyelids. She pulled his head down, capturing his lips, tasting herself on them.

He took control, kissing her as she'd seen him kiss Phillip. She was floating along on a cloud of seduction, wanting him, wanting *Alex*, as much as she'd ever wanted Phillip.

He again slid down her body, teasing and pleasuring her with his mouth and hands, until he resumed his position between her legs. With an expertise she prayed would be reserved strictly for her, he sent waves of bliss washing over her, time and time again. He could perform magic with his tongue. She'd never dreamed such joy could be had.

He slithered up her body, covering her. When he took her mouth, her own musk was on his lips. His kiss was demanding, as much as Phillip's.

With his curly, brown hair cascading over his forehead, he was so unbelievably beautiful. He smelled of sandalwood and she then realized that was how he'd fooled her, for Phillip had a preference for the spicy scent. Alex's green eyes had turned dark, almost black, as he fixed his sight on her. He looked as though he were searching her face for the answer to an important question.

"I want you, lovely Felicity, but only if you want me."

Felicity's mind was reeling. This would be their first time together like this.

"Does Phillip know?"

With reassurance, he said, "Yes, love, he does."

She answered with a kiss of her own, allowing herself to once again completely fall under his spell.

When the kiss broke, he whispered against her mouth, "Roll over."

She giggled and did as he bid. He got off the bed then immediately back on, slipping his arm underneath her, encouraging her onto her knees. "Rest on your elbows, little one."

His deft fingers found the tiny puckered entrance, applied oil and slipped a finger inside her. "I understand you have desires that include this." She felt the cold, rigid glass of her phallus as he ran it over her bottom. Phillip must have given it to him, because the set was kept in Phillip's bedchamber.

"Yes, I have been known to enjoy its use."

"Do you believe you might enjoy its use now?"

Not trusting her voice to be steady, she nodded. He slipped his finger out and

replaced it with the smallest of her phalluses, easing it into place. She hissed at its entrance, savoring the burn it invariably produced. He stroked it smoothly, deeply, eliciting pleasure sounds from her. She had grown to love anal play, as Phillip had accommodated her often with the phalluses since their purchase, but they'd never gone further.

"You take this quite well, love. Tell me what you feel."

His voice was low, deep, seductive. She feared she could be lulled into telling him just about anything.

"Full and excited. The stroking makes me delirious with want."

"What is it you want, dear?"

Knowing this situation should be awkward, she should at least feel shy, but feeling none of it, she said, "I want you, Alex, inside me."

She'd thought of this moment, how she'd feel, what she'd say. Now that the moment was imminent, it felt natural, right. This is what Phillip wanted for her, for them.

He removed the phallus and positioned himself to take her from behind. "Is this how you want it, Felicity?"

"No, I want to see you."

He helped her to roll once again to her back, then raised her knees and entered her with controlled slowness. She was no virgin, but he treated her with commensurate consideration. She savored every inch of his progression, watching him struggle with his own arousal. She felt his body tense and saw his eyes close when he stopped for a moment. When he was fully seated, he became forceful, commanding. His strokes were long and deep, hungry and needy. Once his rhythm was established, he leaned over her, resting his weight on his forearms, his hands cupping her face.

He smiled at her as he made love to her, for that is what it was. He was taking her for the first time, within the bounds of their arrangement, and she relished each shattering thrust. He was different than Phillip, but she realized no less wanted. In this moment, there was only the two of them. Odd as the situation might be to others, lying

with Alex seemed as normal to her as was her time with Phillip.

Alex was a part of them, because they wanted him to be. She wanted him inside her, now, thrusting himself home within her warmth. She closed her eyes to better feel, but he insisted upon seeing her as he brought her to her release. "I want to see your release in your eyes, at the very moment you fall into the abyss."

It didn't take long. He kissed her as the fire overtook her, her body melding into his. In that moment, they were one, as surely as if they were married. A part of her heart was lost to him then, and she feared should he ever walk away from Thornhill House, that part of her would go with him. She then understood why he was so important to Phillip. She finally understood everything.

* * * * *

Alex had left her for his own quarters, which was conveniently situated in the same wing as the family chambers. She lay alone, contemplating her time with Alex and reveling in the gloriously sated body that was her own.

With a sudden urge to see her husband, she threw her nightgown over her head and slipped into his room. He was sitting in bed, reading, but looked up when she tiptoed across his floor.

"Did you enjoy your evening?" he asked, winking at her.

"I did. Tell me how you feel about it now that it has happened."

He removed his spectacles, which she had never seen him wear, and set his book aside. He motioned for her to come into his arms, which she did with fervor. He kissed her forehead and spoke as softly as one might to a small child.

"I have wanted it to happen, because as with anything, the anticipation is always worse than the reality. I feared you would feel an obligation to me and resist Alex. I want him to be equal in your affection, much as I feel a deep affection for both of you."

"Are you not angry that someone else has had your wife?"

"I will ask *you*, are *you* not angry that someone else has had your husband?"

Examining her feelings honestly, she found no anger at all. "No, I'm not."

He looked at her and smiled, his eyes lighting up. "I'm not, either. I think of us as a family, albeit different from the typical structure. I wish you to be comfortable with Alex. This is important to me, my love, very important."

"You seem so happy since Alex came into our lives."

"I'm not like other men. God only knows, I wish I was. I have something inside of me that needs you but I also need Alex. I feel things make sense now. I'm more alive, not just muddling through."

Felicity had never doubted Phillip's concern for her, though love seemed out of the realm of possibility. Her next question stuck in her throat.

"Do you think you will come to love Alex?"

"I don't know, but I am in strong lust with him and you." He laughed, successfully deflecting the seriousness of her question.

He hugged her close, making her feel that anything was possible. "It is like I have two husbands, is it not?"

"I would say it is more like you have two lovers, but only one husband. I fear I know many women who would envy you considerably."

His jest was lost on her. "Will you never be jealous of my time spent with him?"

"Are you jealous of *my* time spent with him?"

"I suppose I am a bit envious, because I wish to spend all my time with you, but I'm not jealous. Is there a difference?"

"I don't see it differently, so I am not sure what that says about me. Sometimes you have a craving for chocolate in the morning more than tea. You haven't changed your affinity for tea, nor does it mean you will never have tea again. You simply have, on that particular morning, a wish for a nice cup of chocolate. Then again, there might be mornings or nights, when you have deep wish for both."

Her heart thrummed, her body aware of all manner of glorious sensations. "For both? Hmm, the possibilities."

"Have you thought about that, my heart?"

"I admit the thought occurred, but having never been with anyone but you, I hadn't dared dream of it."

"Well, what about now? Is it something you might consider?"

"I believe so."

Phillip kissed her and she melted. "Stay with me tonight," he said as he kissed her nose.

"I'd like that."

He flipped the covers back so she could settle in next to him and then tucked them around her. He extinguished the candle, and they settled into their slumber, dreaming of chocolate, tea, and all the possible combinations.

* * * * *

By the time the duke and duchess found their way to the morning room, Alex had already had his breakfast. He'd settled into the household nicely, charming the staff with his easy smile and flirtatious manner.

He rose from the table as Felicity entered, on the arm of her husband. Alex had the urge to kiss them both, but two footmen lurked nearby, rendering the intimacy out of the question.

The servants went about preparing plates while the three made small talk about weather and a possible drive in the park. When they were served, Phillip dismissed the servants, leaving the three to a conversation of a more intimate nature.

"I understand from my wife that your little surprise was well received last night, Alex."

Alex smiled at Felicity and winked. "I would say it was well received by us both."

"I am glad that it finally happened."

"As I am," said Felicity, smiling sweetly at both of them.

Alex sat back, sipping his morning coffee, a habit he'd acquired when he spent several years in the colonies. He looked intently at Phillip, admiring the older man's

sculpted face. He'd been attracted to him the moment he'd entered the room at the Sapphire Club. Phillip's mastery over him was complete the first time they'd made love, the remembered feelings, ones he wished to hold dear always.

Phillip seemed to sense his gaze, for he turned his head away from his plate and smiled. Warmth and lust charged through Alex's body, fueling a need he'd long since given up trying to understand. He sensed Phillip's feelings as well, the sparkle in his eyes told the story, the ever so slight lift of his eyebrow, which always seemed to indicate a need.

Then he looked at the lovely Felicity, almost able to feel her body still in his hands. Her response to his ministrations had been extraordinary.

He'd had the feeling she thought he was Phillip, which would have been perfectly normal under the circumstances of her being blindfolded. It was when he removed the scarf from her eyes that the evening began for Alex, when she knew it was him and still wanted his attentions. Her acceptance had been longed for, and he did fear it would never come to fruition.

Her dramatic auburn hair and expressive, violet-blue eyes made his heart flutter. He'd always loved freckles and her ready smile always showed in her eyes.

Like Phillip had said of himself, Alex needed something more and hadn't realized how abundant life could be until he'd met Phillip and Felicity.

Could they live the life of which Phillip assured him? He had no real idea. All he knew was he wished to share life with these two extraordinary people for as long as they would have him.

Phillip broke into his contemplation. "I wish for you to join me at the club this afternoon, Alex."

"Your wish is my command. It has been a great many days since we have attended to your *other* need, has it not?"

"Yes, it has."

"Is there any reason you can't attend to it here, darling?" Felicity said.

"You know there is, dear, the servants. As loyal as they are, we mustn't depend

upon their discretion in all matters."

"I suppose you are right. May I accompany you and possibly I could visit with Serenity *or* I could watch if you wouldn't mind."

"Indeed I wouldn't mind. I might even have a little task for you."

"Oh, tell me, Phillip, what is it?"

"No, I believe I shall keep it a secret until the proper time."

"When did you become such a tease?"

"Since you became so inquisitive." He wagged an eyebrow.

They laughed together, the three of them. Alex's heart was warmed by the familial tenor of the household. He'd not had much of that growing up in Hampshire. He'd struck out for London at five and twenty, establishing himself as part of society, while always feeling as though he lived on the very fringe.

His desire for men *and* women had created a need to seclude himself, but for the infrequent forays to some of the more discreet brothels in town, the ones that catered to men with as diverse needs as his own.

The discovery of the Sapphire Club had created a new life for him, and meeting the Duke of Thornhill and his beautiful wife had indeed changed his life, hopefully forever.

Chapter Twenty

Phillip had sent word ahead to the club, so that certain preparations could be made for their arrival. He anticipated this day would forever change the lives of those closest to him, as well as his own. It would solidify the bond between them.

Upon their arrival, they were greeted as usual, then made their way to the second floor room. When Phillip opened the door, the room was as he had asked it to be. A massive bed had replaced the smaller one and there were flowers everywhere, his attempt to make it welcoming for Felicity.

He watched as she sniffed seemingly every flower and commented on the

wonderful scent. He chuckled at how such a simple thing seemed to please her so much.

Alex went to the pier table and poured each of them a glass of wine. Phillip had informed him of what he had in mind, then set down plans for how it was to be accomplished. They chatted as they drank their wine, the sexual tension in the room palpable.

Phillip was anxious to move along. He'd looked forward to the thrashing, something he knew he would always need. His body craved the pleasurable pain as surely as sexual release. As elusive as an explanation might be, for him the lash was a part of his life.

Phillip waited for Alex's command and it came with roughness of voice. The sound gave Phillip a thrill like no other he'd ever heard.

"Strip out of those clothes," Alex said authoritatively.

Felicity started to help Phillip, when Alex stopped her. "What are you doing, love, I said, strip out of those clothes."

"You meant Phillip, did you not?"

"I meant both of you."

Phillip looked at her precious face as confusion suffused it. "You'd best do as the man says, or I fear the retribution will be severe."

Phillip saw the moment when Felicity realized what was happening. He bit back a smile, and his heart flooded with emotion.

"I fear I will require help," she said to Alex. While Phillip removed his clothing, Alex aided Felicity, fumbling with the ties and buttons, but making a seductive game of it.

Unabashed, Alex palmed a breast and licked the nipple, then cupped Phillip's ballocks and gave them a tight squeeze. Phillip realized this had to be heaven. He felt more at home in this room, with these two wonderful people, than he'd ever felt in his forty long years.

"Felicity, restrain Phillip at the ladder and then sit in the chair underneath." As

Felicity went about her assigned chore, Alex retrieved a strap and a paddle from the armoire.

"Pick your poison," he said cavalierly to Phillip.

"The strap." There was something about the sound it made as the leather struck his skin.

"Fine." He put the paddle aside.

The first strike came suddenly, as was Phillip's preference. Alex caught him off guard, unbraced and his buttocks relaxed. The crack resounded in the room, the snap loud and satisfying.

Three more and Phillip was hard as stone. His cock protruded between the padded rungs.

"Felicity, take Phillip in your mouth."

Without question, she did as Alex ordered; the warmth of her mouth was heavenly. With his concentration torn between his aching ass and his worshipped cock, Phillip had no idea which one felt better. His cock plunged deeper into her mouth with each slap of the strap.

Phillip received twenty lashes with the strap, leaving his ass with that familiar sting that reminded him of who he was. The difference was he no longer felt unworthy of happiness. He enjoyed the harshness of the punishment because it got his blood pumping, his heart racing. The sting reminded him of what was to come, and now, of the man who'd inflicted such wonderful pain.

Alex released the restraints and stopped Felicity before she brought Phillip to completion. After a moment to reorient himself, Phillip picked her up in his arms and kissed her tenderly, his way of telling her she had pleased him. When he put her again on her feet, she went behind him and kissed his reddened buttocks.

"He really reddened you, my love."

"As I plan to do to you, right now."

He patted her lightly on the bottom as he brought her to the chair.

"I fear I have neglected you, my darling."

Alex stood to the side, watching. Phillip was quite aware of his presence, the tension building.

"Would you prefer to administer her spanking while I hold her, Alex?"

"Indeed, I would."

"I thought you might wish to do so. Turn and face me. Place your hands on my shoulders and don't let go."

She nodded and raised her arms high to grip Phillip's shoulders.

Alex said, "Bend forward and spread your legs wide, dear," just before the first whap of the paddle struck her bottom.

Felicity was rocked to her core when Alex let fly with the paddle. Phillip leaned forward to kiss her forehead and whisper encouraging words.

"Don't tense," he said, as another wallop struck her.

"That really stings." She cried, tears streaking down her face.

"Yes, but it makes what comes later so much better, you remember that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes."

Alex stopped momentarily and placed two fingers inside her quim. "You are really enjoying this, aren't you?"

"I always do," she said, her voice ragged, her breath shallow.

"Yes, I believe Phillip has indoctrinated you properly." Another strike hit her unawares. Her bottom stung, her quim throbbed, yet she wanted more.

"Don't stop."

Three in rapid succession tested her resolve. Her legs shook, her fingers bit hard into Phillip's skin. He'd put his hands on her elbows to support her, while Alex spanked her. It was glorious.

When Alex finished she had no doubt she'd been well spanked. She'd come to look forward to it, just as Serenity and Desiree had said she would. It pleased her husband when she asked for them, and she looked forward to asking Alex as well.

Phillip pulled her into his arms and held her there while she cried. Spankings were a catharsis, a way to focus on her needs. Within minutes, she was composed, her bottom deliciously on fire.

She walked to Alex, who stood with one elbow perched on the mantel. She kissed him and thanked him for her spanking. While Phillip donned a dressing gown and poured himself another glass of wine, Felicity began to undress Alex. She wouldn't allow him to do a thing for himself; she took care of it all.

As she removed each piece of his fine clothing, she folded it slowly and deliberately, and placed it on the chair. With his muscular chest bare, she teased his nipples, sucking, licking, biting. She wasn't gentle; she was sure he wouldn't wish her to be.

She placed her hand on the fall of his trousers, massaging his erect cock through the fabric.

"It would seem your cock has some expectation of what is to come."

Alex's eyes widened. "Phillip, did you hear our little one, here? It would seem she's picked up some of our bad language."

Phillip simply nodded and chuckled. "She never ceases to amaze me."

"Nor me. And, my dear, to answer your question, we both have great expectations, and I dare say, with your help, they shall come true."

"Presumptuous, don't you think, Phillip, darling?"

"Alex is nothing if not that, my dear."

She had Alex slip off his shoes as she took her time unbuttoning his trousers. Her heart flipped with excitement. She hooked her thumbs in the waistband and dragged the garment down over his slim hips and bottom and legs. When they reached his feet, he stepped out of them. With the removal of his stockings, he stood before her gloriously nude.

His body was firm and well-shaped. She walked around him, touching and pinching as was her wont. His bottom held particular fascination for her, for she lingered behind him, pressing herself against him while holding his cheeks in her

hands.

She looked over at her husband, who smiled approvingly. She felt a surge of great pleasure at being able to give him this life.

"Phillip, I believe he is all yours."

Phillip stepped forward and took up the strap Alex had left on a table. Felicity's quim clenched when she heard the words she knew could make Phillip erect in a second.

"Bend over the back of the chair, Alex, and brace yourself on the arms."

Alex's legs were stretched out and spread wide. The sight was beautiful. He had enthusiastically posed himself, his wonderful ass high.

Felicity thought to distract Alex, so she knelt in the chair and played with his hair, kissed him, even placed her breast in his mouth. Phillip applied the strap and Alex took each lash, moaning his approval.

Felicity counted ten and removed herself from the chair, going around to the side and underneath Alex. Phillip stopped momentarily as she settled herself. She wrapped her hand around his cock and said, "Oh, my, it seems you like this," mimicking what he had said to her earlier during her spanking.

"Vixen." He growled, as the strap came down hard once again. She took his cock in her mouth and sucked him, his taste salty on her tongue.

Felicity knew she lived an aberrant life, if one was to judge, but it was her life and that of her husband, whom she'd grown to love. Then there was Alex, who had come into their lives, almost as a gift. He made Phillip happy, and as an added bonus, she had grown to care for him as well.

She teased Alex's cock with her mouth, as Phillip lashed his buttocks with three last, harsh strikes. When he finished, Felicity rubbed, licked, and kissed the inflamed flesh. Alex turned, lifted her to her feet and kissed her, his tongue seeking the warmth of her mouth, his lips claiming a part of her. It was a long, passionate kiss, one that filled Felicity with tingles. Felicity felt him reach just beyond her shoulder. She turned her head and saw Alex had grabbed Phillip and was drawing him closer. She felt

sandwiched between these two extraordinary men. It was an amazing feeling.

Alex took Phillip's mouth as fiercely as he had taken Felicity's. Phillip clung to Alex, their arms entwined around each other and around her.

Alex broke the kiss, his body tense, his breath coming in gasps. He skimmed his hands over Phillip's jaw, his thumb rubbing Phillip's kiss swollen lips. Felicity saw him smile, and then he whispered, "I want to fuck your ass, Phillip, bend over."

Alex had never been so hard or so desirous of intercourse in his thirty years. Phillip's lashes had been like kisses, promises of things to come. He was invigorated, in need of the connection with Phillip that only intercourse provided.

Phillip went to the bed and bent over the side. The two men temporarily forgot about the lady in the room, while their savage need to be together overshadowed all rational thinking.

"I'm going to fuck you until you can't see straight," Alex said, as he oiled his cock and Phillip's anus. He jammed two fingers inside Phillip, the other man groaning as the burn must have taken him by surprise. Roughly fucking him with his fingers, Alex tried to relay to Phillip the need he was feeling.

"Prepare yourself, Phillip."

"I've never been more ready."

Alex placed his cock at the entrance and slowly, steadily pushed forward without stopping. Phillip clutched the counterpane, emitting groans, sounding needy. Alex couldn't prevent himself from pushing with such force, knowing he was making it difficult for Phillip to remain on his feet. Each thrust hitched Phillip forward. Alex buried himself inside Phillip's body, stroking ever deeper.

His need was primal, intense. Phillip fully responded, pushing back when he could, otherwise, taking the pounding. Alex had thought of little else all day, the dark need for Phillip coloring every thought, every action. He knew he wouldn't last, so he took his pleasure with ferocity. No more than five thrusts later, he came with a growl. He ground into Phillip's ass, taking every bit of his due, Phillip's muscles milking every

drop from him.

His body spent, his muscles tense, yet causing him to shudder again and again, he bent over the body of his partner, his lover, his friend. Emotion bubbled to the surface as though he'd held it back for a lifetime.

Into Phillip's ear, he whispered, "I love you." Words he'd never spoken to another living soul. He'd finally found someone worthy of hearing them.

Phillip twisted his head toward Alex's licks on his ear. Alex leaned in, Phillip turned even more, until their lips met in a deep kiss that touched his soul, the seal, the implied agreement, the pledge to care for Phillip for as long as they both still wanted. Phillip's response held all he needed to know, even without the words.

Quiet moments passed, as the men recovered from the frenzy of their love making. Then Alex spoke. "Come into our lair, little one. There are surprises that await you."

Felicity dropped the wrapper she'd been wearing and got onto the large bed. She was positioned in the middle as each of the men took their places to her sides. Together they kissed her, suckled her breasts until she seemed to lose her mind with pleasure. Alex teased her quim, while Phillip broke away momentarily, bringing back the largest of the phalluses. It was well-oiled. Alex saw her eyes grow large as he turned her over onto her stomach and helped her to her knees.

He inserted two fingers inside her bottom, stretching her as she fidgeted, undoubtedly against the burn. "Relax, darling," he said soothingly, as he removed his fingers and Phillip replaced them with the glass phallus.

"Stop," she said, her breath a gasp. Alex felt her body release the tension and soon she began to push back and then rock her hips, taking the phallus to its hilt. Alex's thumb circled her clitoris as Phillip fucked her ass with the phallus, in preparation for the biggest surprise of the night.

Alex watched the faces of the two most precious people in his life, amazed at how fortunate he was to be in their company. The intimacy they shared solidified how right he was for them. He cared not what others might think; this made their lives

worth living. Phillip smiled as his wife received the gift for which she'd begged. Felicity seemed lost in a world of pleasure.

Alex continued to pleasure Felicity until he eased her into her release. Her body seized, and each man coaxed her through the spasms that overtook her. At her peak, she screamed, and Alex knew that was a sound he'd never tire of hearing.

As she recovered, they cosseted her, holding, kissing, whispering low, words that really didn't matter. Later, as they lay in each other's arms, in momentary rest, Felicity turned and kissed her husband. "I love you, my dearest darling, I love you."

Phillip seemed taken aback, but quickly recovered. He held Felicity's face gently in his large hands. "My dear wife, I could not love you more. You have given me that for which I had no right to ask. I shall spend the rest of my life showing you that I do not take the gift of acceptance lightly."

They kissed again, the emotion in the room high. She then turned to kiss Alex as well. The men exchanged kisses, at the end of which Phillip surprised Alex by saying, "I love you, too."

Through the tears that inevitably followed, a bond was forged. They held each other, kissed, hugged. Alex had never been so sure of any turn his life had ever taken. He'd never expected to be a part of such a wonderful partnership, but then, luck had never been in his favor.

Putting aside the past, he wrapped his arms a bit tighter around the two people who had so quickly become his entire life. They dozed, recouping their collective energy.

With the tension gone, relaxation having taken its place, Felicity spoke at last. "All right, gentlemen, I believe I'm in the mood for chocolate *and* tea."

~The End~

About the Author

Brita Addams grew up in upstate New York but has lived in southern Louisiana for many years. She is an avid reader, particularly of biographies and anything historical. She loves to travel, which she and her husband do as often as they possibly can. From her earliest school days, writing was always a part of her life, though while raising their family, it just seemed to hum in the background. Now, with the encouragement of her hero – her husband – and her children, she has been fortunate in being able to create the stories she's always longed to write.

To learn more about Brita Addams and The Sapphire Club Series, visit <http://britaaddams.com/>

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