



The Virgin Widow

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Category: Historical

Description: Agatha Pennybrook is desperate to regain control of her life. In order to avoid another arranged marriage, she's set on learning to be the most skilled mistress in London.

Sebastian St. Claire, a bastard by birth, has grown up in his mother's brothel. He might think he's seen it all, but nothing has prepared him for the curvy and bold young widow seeking his mother's advice.

But who better to teach the virgin widow the art of seduction than himself. When Agatha finds out she's nothing more to Sebastian than a pawn in his plan of revenge, she's heartbroken because not only did she give him her innocence, she also gave him her heart.

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Lady Leblanc's Brothel, London, 1850

Agatha Pennybrook had always followed the rules. She'd never argued with her parents, never fought their direction for her life. At the tender age of nineteen, she'd married the man they'd selected for her despite the fact that he'd been forty years her senior. When her new husband had died a week after they'd married, she'd immediately gone into mourning and kept her black veil for the required two years.

The mourning period had given her time to think, time to plan and to come up with a solution for her predicament. Because as it seemed from her parents visit this morning, they were planning to marry her off again. Time to refill their coffers, it would seem. Never mind the fact that Agatha was now one and twenty and certainly old enough to decide her own future. It was past time for her to be in control.

Which was why she had consulted the council of her dearest friend, Violet Weatherford.

"What you need is a wealthy benefactor," Violet suggested. "And if you will not allow me to be that person, then we can find you one."

This was not the first time she'd made the offer to gift Agatha with monies. Violet was richer than Croesus.

Agatha shook her head. "I cannot be beholden to you, my dear friend."

“If you do not wish to be a wife, you should be a mistress instead. That way you have the benefits of financial support and some protection, but the kind of freedom that most marriages do not afford.”

Agatha’s heart pounded. She opened and closed her mouth several times as if she were a fish trapped on land. She’d never broached the subject with Violet. In fact, she’d never told anyone, but her friend should know. She’d done so much for her.

“I do not think I can do that, Violet.”

“Whyever not?”

“Because I am a virgin.”

It was Violet’s turn to look like a beached fish. “I don’t understand. You were married.”

“For only a handful of days before Albert died. And he was quite ill in that time. He was never able,” she exhaled and shook her hands out in front of her. “That is, it simply did not work between us.”

“As unusual as your situation is, I don’t think that precludes you from being a mistress.”

“Except of the part where I have no experience when it comes to matters of the flesh. I wouldn’t know where to begin.”

Violet tapped her finger on her lips. “There is a solution here, I can feel it.”

“If only there were books on such matters. When I wanted to learn more about astronomy and mathematics, I simply read a book,” Agatha said. “But I don’t believe

they have such texts at any of the lending libraries.”

“Likely not, but that does not mean they do not have such books. Somewhere.” Violet looked up at the ceiling as if searching for divine intervention.

“I do not believe prayer is the answer in such a situation,” Agatha said. “If not a text, then a tutor.”

“Yes, a tutor!” Violet jumped to her feet. “That’s precisely what you need.”

“A lovemaking tutor? Violet, I was jesting. They don’t have such things.”

“Not officially, but I suspect that Lady LeBlanc would be the perfect person to hire for such skills instruction.”

“The madam?”

“Who better than the most notorious madam in all of London,” Violet said. “Her establishment caters to all the wealthiest gentlemen.”

“She is still a prostitute.”

“I don’t believe that means anything significant for what we’re discussing. Presumably she’s seen and done everything imaginable in the bedroom. Why could she not simply instruct you.”

Agatha’s heart pounded fiercely in her chest. Could the solution be that simple? Well, not that visiting a brothel was simple for a lady in Agatha’s standing. But still. She had some funding she could afford for instructions. It was a plan that just might be worth considering. If her options were this or marry the odious Duke of Lancaster, she could muster up the courage to brave a house of ill repute.

Which was why she was currently waiting on the front stoop of London's most infamous brothel. The answers she needed were sure to be found within these sin-filled walls. She'd tried to think of any other solution to her problem, but none had come to fruition. Still donned in her mourning attire, she waited patiently for the door to open. The black dress and veil were no longer required of her as of today, but they did provide somewhat of a disguise for her so she wouldn't be recognized. She didn't want to cause a scandal until she was certain she could turn it in her favor.

Finally, a tall thin woman answered the door. She looked down her sharp beak-like nose and peered at Agatha with small, dark eyes. Instantly, Agatha was reminded of a rodent. She shuddered.

"Thinking you're lost," she said with a voice scratched and deep. Her heavy cockney accent made deciphering the woman's words a challenge.

"I need to see Lady Leblanc," Agatha said.

Those dark eyes narrowed to slits.

Agatha held up the bag of coin. "I'll pay for her time, of course." She withdrew two coins and held them out to the woman. "And your assistance."

Bony fingers grabbed at the money, then she moved out of the way and granted Agatha entrance.

The dimly lit, smoke-filled room was nearly empty. It was nice to know that Lady Leblanc's customers waited until a more appropriate hour for their debauchery. Agatha continued to follow the thin woman as she wove through the large parlor and then into a corridor. The faint sounds of pleasure came from behind the various doors. Women moaning and men grunting. Agatha felt her cheeks heat. Finally they stopped in front of a closed door.

The woman nodded towards the door. "In there."

"I should just go inside?" Agatha pointed to the door.

Those small black eyes rolled upwards so slightly. "You said you wanted to speak to Lady Leblanc. That's her office."

Agatha nodded. "Very well." She opened the door and found a stunningly beautiful woman sitting behind a large, heavily carved desk. "Lady Leblanc?"

Lady Leblanc's perfectly curved brows arched. "What can I do for you, pet?" Her words showed remnants of her rumored French heritage. She beckoned Agatha with a wave of her hand. The door slammed behind her and Agatha jumped with a squeak, but moved towards the desk.

As Agatha approached, the notorious madam came better into view. She still had a youthful look about her, with clear eyes and skin. Her golden hair was pulled up in an artful coiffure and the red gown highlighted the pale green of her eyes. "You're beautiful."

Lady Leblanc chuckled with a husky purr. "Thank you, darling. Now what can I do for you?"

Agatha exhaled slowly. "I need lessons in seduction and I thought you would probably be the very best person to ask. I can pay you."

"Who are you?" Lady Leblanc asked with a narrowed gaze.

Agatha lifted the veil covering her eyes and pushed it back. "My name is Agatha Pennybrook and I am the widow of Lord Tolley."

The older woman clapped her hands together, then leaned forward, bracing her chin on the tips of her fingers. She was obviously a woman of great intellect as her eyes shone with shrewdness. “A widow? Why then do you need seduction lessons?”

The pounding in her heart echoed in her ears. Agatha opened her mouth, then closed it. She cleared her throat. “I am still young. Still of a marriageable age, but I do not wish to allow my parents further control over my person. I should like to be in charge of my choices from now on. But I feel as though I need the protection of a man.”

Lady Leblanc’s smile widened. “You intend to become a mistress?”

Agatha nodded. “I believe it is the best and simplest way for me to retain control over my fortune and my future.”

“And your husband did not teach you properly how to please a man?” the madam asked.

“He...he died before...” Agatha’s voice came out in a whisper.

Lady Leblanc eyed her a moment, then sat back in her chair with a nod. “He died before you consummated your marriage?”

“Yes.” She bumped her chin up to project an air of confidence she did not feel. “I am still a virgin.”

A deep male voice swore from behind her. Agatha whirled around to see a settee in the darkened corner of the room. A giant of a man stood and walked towards her.

“I didn’t realize you were entertaining. Your servant—the woman who gave me entrance—said for me to just come in,” Agatha said, glancing back and forth between the madam and the approaching giant.

Lady Leblanc chuckled. “Not entertaining, pet, that’s my eldest son, Sebastian.”

It was that moment he breached the darkness and she could clearly see his features. His hair was golden, like his mother’s, and if Agatha wasn’t mistaken his eyes were the same mossy green. He was young, and so handsome, Agatha could not turn away from him. Her hands began to shake and she felt awareness all over her body. It was unlike any sensation she’d ever felt. Inexplicable, because he had only spoken one word, an oath, and he was simply standing there staring at her.

She was very much aware of his height and broad size. Agatha had never been a small woman. While she wasn’t particularly tall for a woman, she wasn’t short either and she’d always had what her grandmum had called a sturdy frame. Her mother had, instead, referred to her as portly. Agatha swallowed hard as the man came to stand right in front of her.

His ethereal eyes slid from her face and scanned her body. On their way back up over her frame, they lingered over her breasts. Her black mourning frock was high cut and revealed no skin at all so she couldn’t imagine what he was staring at. Perhaps he thought if he looked hard enough the dress would melt away.

Lady Leblanc clicked her tongue. “Sebastian, don’t be rude, introduce yourself.”

He bowed slightly, then boldly stared at Agatha’s eyes. “Sebastian St. Claire.” He reached over and took her hand, then bent his head over it, pressing his warm mouth against the glove-covered flesh. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Her mouth had dried up and she had—momentarily—forgotten how to speak. At least she hoped it was not a permanent condition. She nodded, but said nothing despite her mouth hanging open like a beached fish.

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Sebastian smiled. He couldn't help himself. This tightly wound bit of fluff had utterly enchanted him.

He glanced over at his mother. "May I?"

She waved her hands, then stood. "I need to go check on something. I'll return shortly."

The lovely Agatha Pennybrook blinked her dark eyes several times, but never looked away from his face. The door closing behind his mother finally rattled her out of her stupor. She frowned.

"I know you came here for my mother's instruction, but it seems it would be more to the point to get a man's perspective." He stepped closer to her. Her hair was so dark it was nearly black and combined with her ivory skin, she was striking. She wasn't conventionally beautiful, he supposed. Her eyes were too wide-set, her mouth too full, but her lush body was made for passion and it was a shame she'd never experienced it. "You do want to learn how to pleasure a man? How to entice him into your bed?" He searched her face and he could see the rapid intake of her breath. "Is that correct?"

She visibly swallowed. "Yes." Her pink tongue licked at her lips, wetting them enticingly.

He hadn't been this attracted to a woman in ages. But everything about Agatha made

his skin heat, his blood boil. He wanted her.

“I will teach you,” he declared.

Her frown deepened and she shook her head. “What?”

“I can teach you everything you need to know about pleasuring a man.” Not to mention, teaching her about how to take pleasure for herself. He wanted to take this prim and proper bird and ruffle every last one of her feathers.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why is that?” He reached over and cupped her face, slid his thumb across her bottom lip.

Her brown eyes widened and she sucked in a breath. Oh yes, she was responsive. She wasn’t frigid or repressed, she simply needed to learn all about the pleasures of the flesh. And what glorious flesh she had. He couldn’t see much, not an inch of skin other than her face and a small portion of her neck. But underneath her mourning garb she hid the kind of body he could lose himself in. Voluptuous curves, pale, creamy flesh. His cock twitched against his thigh.

“I do not know you.”

“We can remedy that rather quickly. Because I very much want to know you.” He cupped her other cheek, then brought this mouth down on hers. He forced himself to go slow, to seduce her lips, rather than devour her as he desired. So he placed gentle kisses on her plump mouth, sipping at her lips, coaxing her into a response.

Her hands found their way to his chest, initially he expected her to push him away, instead she clutched the fabric of his shirt.

That was all the invitation he needed to deepen the kiss. He slid his tongue against her lip, asking for entrance. She gasped, her lips parted. He cradled her head and slicked his tongue against hers. She made some soft squeaking and mewling noises, but did not make any moves to push him from her. But she did not participate with her tongue. She simply allowed him to explore her warm mouth.

She tasted of honey and strong bitter tea and he growled into her mouth, pulling her flush against his body. By now she could no doubt feel the heaviness of his erection pressing against her belly. Damnation, but he could bend her over his mother's desk and take her right now.

But she was untouched, and she wanted to learn. So he forced himself to end the kiss.

He tilted her chin up to meet his gaze.

“Let me teach you, Agatha. I can show you pleasures you’ve only dreamt of.”

She licked her lips and nodded.

He fought the urge to pump his fist into the air in victory. “Leave your address with my mother and I’ll make my first call soon.” Without thinking he dropped a kiss to her forehead, then turned and left the room.

Agatha kept her eyes locked on the cup of tea in her hand. The fine bone china warmed her palms and though she longed for it to do so, the murky brown liquid did nothing to sooth her nerves.

“Perhaps if you’d talk to me about whatever is eating at your mind, you wouldn’t need to stare at that tea quite so hard. Besides your cup is too full for you to even see any leaves to read.” Violet tapped her spoon on the side of her teacup, then took a small sip.

Agatha watched her friend and debated how to even broach the subject.

Violet’s eyes lifted over her cup and met Agatha’s gaze. “My dear friend, you know I only offer a gentle ear. I have little room in my life to point fingers or toss stones.”

Agatha took a deep, cleansing breath and blew it out slowly. “I took your advice.”

“Always a risky endeavor,” Violet said.

A smile tugged at Agatha’s lips.

“Which advice are we speaking about? Because you know I hand out unsolicited advice as if they were pamphlets outside of Parliament.”

This time Agatha chuckled and it released the knot of tension that had coiled in her neck. “I’ve decided to take a lover. If I must rely on a man for protection and income,

then I would like him to be one of my choosing.”

“Brava, my darling. So who did you select?” Violet sipped her tea, then set the saucer down on the table between them.

“No one, yet. But I’ve made the first step. Except I fear I was little too overzealous in my efforts and I’ve made a mess of things.”

Violet grins and looks very much the cat that ate the canary. “I’m going to need the entire story.”

“Right. Very well. I went to see Lady LeBlanc to inquire about her services in teaching me how to seduce a man, how to be a good lover. I suspect those skills, in particular, are what makes a good mistress.”

Violet’s eyes round. “You went to a brothel? Alone?”

Agatha winces, then swallows. “I did. In hindsight perhaps it was not my safest decision, but I wore my full mourning attire so no one recognized me.”

“Did she turn you away then?”

“Not precisely. Did you know she was a mother?”

One perfectly sculpted brow arches over Violet’s pretty blue eyes.

Agatha releases a nervous laugh. “As it turns out, she has two grown sons, twins, it would seem. I met one of them. And well, somehow he convinced me that he would be a better instructor for such lessons since he is, in fact, a man.”

Agatha risks a peek at her dearest friend and finds Violet’s lips squished together

clearly repressing a laugh.

“Oh do make fun, my dear, I deserve it. What was I thinking?”

“Tell me more about the man?” Violet asked. “Is he young and handsome? Or old and bald and rotund?”

“He is undoubtedly the most devastatingly handsome man I’ve ever seen. It bordered on ridiculous. Of course his mother is gorgeous so it should not be surprising that he’s dashing.”

“I fear I’m missing the problem in this scenario. So a beautiful man volunteered to teach you the ways of seduction and you somehow think this is a problem?”

“Well, yes, I do not even know him and he kissed me!”

Violet’s careful restraint on her amusement cracks and a laugh bubbles up her. “What a dastardly thing to do to a woman who has sought out the most notorious madam in all of London at her brothel, no less, to hire out for lessons in love making. The cad!”

Agatha can’t help but grin in return. “Yes, yes, it is all very hilarious. But I do not know this man. I can’t simply decide to have relations with him.”

Violet’s hands rest in her lap and she levels a shrewd look on Agatha. “My darling, you are attempting to become a mistress, remember? All in an effort to claim control and power over your own life and decisions. If this man—the most handsome man in London evidently—offers to pluck your virginity, why the devil would you say no?”

“I didn’t say no. He kissed me and I nodded like a fool. But I’m going to tell him that I’ve changed my mind. I believe I prefer your original suggestion of seeking out the council of Miss Andrews. You said she was a very popular mistress in her day?”

“She was and a dear friend of my aunt’s, God rest her soul.” Violet frowns. “I understand you’re nervous, but I still think you should reconsider.”

“I will think on it, but I don’t know. There’s something about that man that makes me terribly nervous.”

“Describe him to me.”

Agatha frowns. “Why?”

“Because I’m a lonely old spinster who must live vicariously through her slightly younger widowed friend.”

Agatha rolls her eyes. “You are so dramatic.”

“Indeed. Now details, please.”

“Very well. He was ridiculously tall and broad and I suspect he has a physical job of some sort because his chest was incredibly firm to the touch.”

“You touched his chest?”

Agatha waves her hand dismissively. “During the kiss.”

“His hair is unfashionably long and golden—like his mother’s—and he wears it tied behind him in a queue. The room was rather dark, but I believe his eyes were a sultry green. Perfectly sculpted cheekbones and jawline and a deliciously plump mouth. I’ve never before noticed a man’s lips, but his were decidedly kissable.”

Violet fanned herself with her own hand. “Yes, I can see why spending intimate time with a man like that—naked—would be tedious.”

“I can’t explain it, Violet, but there was something about him. Have you ever met someone and known that they had the potential to irrevocably change your life?” Agatha puffed out a tight laugh. “That doesn’t even make sense. I might as well read those tea leaves.”

Violet’s features softened. “I tease you, my dear friend, because it is how I love. But the truth is, if this man makes you too nervous to enter into an arrangement with him, then I think we can find another solution for you.”

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“Look at my beautiful boys,” Sebastian’s mother cooed.

“You don’t have to say that to us every week, Mother,” Spencer said.

Their mother smirked and shrugged. “I’m getting older and I need to be nice to you so you’ll make sure to take care of me when I’m too old to do it for myself.”

Sebastian chuckled. “So you’re resorting to bribery.”

“My love, I built an empire on my back and raised the two of you heathens, I am not above bribery.”

Spencer groaned. “Mother, please do not remind us of your former occupation.”

“Don’t be sure a prude, Spencer,” their mother quipped. “And I never said it was a former occupation.”

Sebastian chuckled again and looked down at the napkin in his lap.

“Can we change the subject?” Spencer asked.

Their mother clapped her hands. “Yes because we haven’t yet discussed your brother’s new endeavor.” She leveled her green eyes on Sebastian, their gaze so familiar as they mirrored his own.

Spencer turned to face Sebastian. Though they were twins, they could not look any more different from one another. Spencer was dark, where Sebastian was light. In looks only, their personalities were the exact opposite. Sebastian swallowed a laugh as he considered the number of times over the last few years when he'd expected his brother to declare he was going into the church to do God's work instead of living like sinners the way Sebastian and their mother did.

Instead, he became an artist. It suited his more sentimental and sensitive nature. Spencer has the heart of a poet. Whereas Sebastian has the heart of a, well, he wasn't even certain if he had a heart.

"What is your new project, dear brother?" Spencer asked. He meticulously cut his egg into tiny pieces.

"I was meeting with mother yesterday in her office and a woman arrived to inquire about hiring mother to teach her how to seduce a man. As it turns out the little bird wants to be a mistress and thought the best place to learn how was at the hands of Lady LeBlanc." Sebastian shrugged. "I simply explained to her that learning to please a man would work much better if she had a man for an instructor."

His words came out casual as if his entire world hadn't shifted on its axis in the last twenty-four hours. He'd had barely a moment without a thought of Agnes Pennybrook.

"Darling, you're leaving out some key elements," their mother said. "The part where she admitted to be not just a widow, but an untouched widow."

Spencer made some sort of strangled laugh noise. "How does a widow remain a virgin?"

"Not the point, Spence," Sebastian snapped.

“No, the real point is the fact that her parents want to marry her off to the Duke of Lancaster.”

Spencer swore.

Their mother sat back. Her eyebrows raised as she stared at Sebastian.

“So you’re, what, planning to use this poor girl in an effort to get some kind of ill-conceived revenge on the man who fathered us?” Spencer asked.

Sebastian felt his lips curl in response. “That is not at all my plan. This has nothing to do with that asshole, except to perhaps save this naive woman from marrying him.” He shoved his plate away from him. “Furthermore, they’re not officially betrothed and she does not wish to marry him. I’m simply giving the girl what she wants.”

And taking that which he could not deny himself.

“Out of the benevolence of your heart, I suppose?” Spencer asked.

“No one at this table is under the delusion I’m doing this out of anything resembling kindness. But it’s not about Lancaster either.” At least not entirely, that’s merely a happy side benefit. “I’m intrigued by the woman. I will not deny being attracted to her. I believe this will be a worthwhile activity.”

“How can anyone live the way you live and still complain of boredom?” his brother asked.

“I never said I was bored. I simply require more activity than standing at a bloody canvas all day with only my thoughts to entertain me.” He stood and tossed his napkin on the table. “I have a meeting with some investors at the club.”

“Sebastian, love,” his mother says.

He turned to face her.

“Do be careful. She’s not merely an innocent in her body. You are a beautiful man and certainly if I’ve taught you boys anything it’s that when you are physical with a woman without payment of any kind, you risk her falling in love with you. So take care with that girl’s heart.”

“I’m not planning to touch her heart, Mother.” With that, he strode from the room.

The moment Agatha stepped into the dining room, it was painfully obvious, that this was an ambush. Not only was this “family” dinner blatantly not merely her family, but she suspected she was given a slightly later time so that there would be only one remaining seat left at the dinner table.

Right next to the abhorrent Duke of Lancaster. She couldn’t quite put her finger on why she found him so unappealing. He wasn’t even as old as her deceased husband. He wasn’t unattractive, quite the contrary. For a man likely nearing his fifth decade, he was remarkably fit and well put together. His dark hair was perfectly placed with not even the gleam of too much pomade. Still there was something about the man that Agatha found to be alarmingly unsettling.

Perhaps it was the way his narrow eyes followed her every moment when they were in the same room. The way his tongue would slip out to wet his lips.

She supposed this was the third or fourth time she’d come in contact with him, but her nerves never ceased.

She shot a look at her mother who pretended not to notice. But there was no doubt in Agatha’s mind that this was very much an orchestration of her mother’s doing.

The duke stood and pulled her chair out for her. He even behaved the perfect gentleman, still she knew something wretched hid beneath all his polish.

“Thank you, my lord,” she said as she sat and waited for him to push her seat

forward.

Warm, sticky breath hits the exposed skin between her ear and shoulder.

“You look lovely tonight, Agatha,” he said.

A shudder traversed her body and she could do nothing to stop it. Perhaps to an on-looker it might appear to be a reaction to his nearness. Well, that is precisely what it is, but it’s not a good reaction.

Not at all the way her body lit up with pleasant shivers simply from hearing Sebastian St. Claire’s voice. She really must push that man out of her mind. She could not afford to get distracted by a man and a situation that wouldn’t solve her current problem.

There are two other couples at the table besides her parents, all married. And then her and the duke. He leans closer, draping her napkin across her lap, lingering with his arm entirely too close to her breasts. Yes, her chest was completely covered, not even a hint of cleavage. She was still wearing her mourning garb. No reason to buy new clothes at the moment, when these were still in perfectly good shape. And she hadn’t worn her veil, merely a black gown. One with fabric all the way up to her neck.

She grabbed the bottom of her seat and pushed herself forward, effectively jarring his arm so he moved away. She resettled her napkin. After the footman served her plate, she immediately dove in. Chewing meant she wouldn’t have to converse.

So for the better part of an hour she sat there next to the duke and amidst all of these other married couples over-chewing her food while nodding politely. No doubt she looked every part of the glutton, shoveling bite after bite of food into her mouth all in an effort to avoid a simple conversation.

Once the meal had finally ended, she rose, ready to make a hasty departure. She could address this evening with her mother at a later time. At the moment, she only wanted to flee and return home. The men retiring to the study to enjoy cigars and port would be the perfect escape.

Only the moment she came to her feet, the duke gripped her elbow.

“Walk with me in the gardens, Agatha. The moonlight is bright and unencumbered this evening,” the duke said.

It was on her tongue to graciously reject him, when her mother appeared as if she’d popped up from beneath the Persian rug.

“She would be delighted to, my lord,” my mother said.

I take the opportunity to shift my stance so that I “accidentally” step on my mother’s foot.

“Pardon me,” I say. “I’m afraid I’m quite tired, my lord.”

He loops my arm into the crook of his elbow. “We will take a short walk then.” He nods to my mother. “Thank you, Ranetta, for such a lovely meal.”

Her mother curtsied and gave the duke a broad grin. Agatha tried not to roll her eyes. As much as she didn’t want to go on this walk in the moonlit gardens with him, she has no legitimate reason for saying no.

At least he seemed content to hear himself speak. His voice rattled on as they depart the house and step down into the garden. He droned on about the weather and the moon on their way into the garden area. This wasn’t a large garden you’d find at a country estate. Since they were in London, the size was about a fourth of that.

Though Agatha knew her mother did none of the actual work herself, she takes great pride in the quality and vibrancy of her London garden. She employed three gardeners to attend to its every weed and bloom. The lush spot sits behind their townhome and was bordered by a great stone wall.

“I had not realized you were shy, my dear.” He helped her down the steps and then they were on the stone walkway that meandered through the small garden.

She’s wasn’t. Shy. Instead she was simmering, waiting to pounce on her mother. This kind of meddling was to be tolerated when she was a child. But she was a fully grown adult widow who did not need her mother continuing to stick her fingers in Agatha’s life. She wasn’t surprised, by any measure. This was the reminder she needed that either she became a self-sustaining mistress or her parents would have her walking down another marital aisle.

This garden with its brightly colored flowers and lush green vines was always her favorite place at this house. Tonight, however, things felt decidedly different. For starters, she wasn’t alone. And her companion wore entirely too much cologne and standing this close to him the scent seemed to overwhelm her senses. Even away pushing the pleasant smell of the springtime blooms.

“Have you ever been to Cornwall?” the duke asked.

“I don’t believe I have.”

“That is the location of my largest estate, but then I also have holdings in Wales, Scotland and down on the coast near Brighton. You would, of course, be free to visit any and all of them, making whatever decorative changes you see fit.”

She stopped in her tracks and looked up at him. “I beg your pardon, my lord?”

“When we’re married.”

She opened her mouth and shuts it several times.

He chuckles. “I can see that I surprised you. But certainly you parents have mentioned being in discussions with me regarding your future.”

“Yes, but no one has asked me anything.”

He tilted his head and a frown quickly crossed, then left his features. “I was under the impression since you’re not a simpering miss in her debut year that romance and the like would be unnecessary.”

He led her over to a stone bench and they sat. Agatha inhaled slowly, trying to settle the uneasy way her dinner sat like a rock in her stomach.

“Are you saying you’re going to insist I waste my time courting you?” His voice was sharp with his question.

“Not at all, my lord. I was merely pointing out that if we are to marry, then the discussion should be between the two of us, not you and my parents. As you said, I am an adult, not a simpering miss.”

His chuckle sent another uncomfortable shiver up Agatha’s spine. “Very well, we can discuss this. I don’t think I’ve been shy about my interest in you, Agatha.” He grabbed her hands and held them with his own.

“No, my lord, you haven’t. But I would be remiss if I didn’t point out that you are still young and handsome enough to pick a younger, more attractive female. One who hasn’t already been married. I know you still seek an heir and my marriage, though brief, did not result in a pregnancy for me.” Of course that has everything to do with

the fact that her virginity is still firmly intact, but Agatha did not dare mention that secret. She'd already shared enough of that for one week.

“You weren't married long enough to determine if you're incapable of having children. And as I've mentioned, I don't have the patience for a younger girl with foolish thoughts of the romantic notion. You and I both know this wouldn't be a love match. There is no need to pretend otherwise.”

That one statement was the most appealing he'd said all evening. She might find him intolerable if she was expected to pretend to be the loving wife.

He brought one of her hands to his mouth and his breath was hot and moist against her bare skin. “That said, I do not want you to mistakenly believe that I do not find you desirable. You, perhaps, could afford to eat less biscuits and cakes, but you are a very handsome woman, Agatha.”

Handsome, but portly, evidently. That was a terrible way to hand out a compliment. No wonder her mother approved of this match, that was precisely the same way she gives praise.

“Thank you, my lord. Your praise is kind, but unnecessary. As you said, if we were to marry, we wouldn't have a love match.”

“You keep saying ‘if,’ you can consider us betrothed. You don't need to be careful around me.”

“My lord, that is also very kind, but premature. We are not yet betrothed. You have not asked and I have not agreed. Until both of those things happen, we are merely two acquaintances enjoying the fragrant scent of my mother's blooms.”

“Are you hinting that I need to compliment you more? I am unaccustomed to such

things. I can't promise anything as fleeting as romantic love, but I can promise you passion." His eyes fall to her bosom, which was completely covered, but even fabric and a good corset can't disguise the fact that her breasts are rather large.

With that he jerked her wrist, that he was still holding, and leaned down for a kiss.

On instinct, she raised her free hand with the intent to strike him, but he caught her. His brows rose and his grip tightened on both hands.

"You have fire in you, my dear." Again his eyes traveled down to her breasts.

Her dinner rolled over in her stomach and she fought the urge to gag.

"I like a woman with some fight in her. Makes things more interesting in the bedroom." Then he released her hands and stood. "I have a trip that was already scheduled that will take me out of London for the next two weeks. You have that length of time to come to terms with the fact that you will be my wife."

With one finger, he tips her chin up to face him.

"Take heart, lovely Agatha, being my duchess will give you a handsome allowance and plenty of pretty things with which to surround yourself." He gives her a slight bow and turns to go. Then he paused, and looked over his shoulder. "Do try to stay out of trouble while I'm away."

She remained on the stone bench waiting for the duke to leave her parent's townhome before attempting to make her own escape. But today she must be due for punishment because her mother slipped out the backdoor and swiftly made her way to Agatha's side.

She's all smiles and tittering laughs when she delicately flounces onto the bench.

"How did it go? Did he officially propose?" Her mother's question feels like sour milk in Agatha's stomach.

"No, he did not." Thank goodness because she truly needed an alternative to being his duchess before she could say no when he finally got around to asking.

Her mother's features narrowed. "What did you do? Did you say something foolish?" Then her eyes trail over Agatha's body. "And why are you still dressed as the grieving widow? Your husband has been in the ground for two years. You are no longer required to wear black."

"This dress is perfectly acceptable for a dinner with my parents, which is what you told me tonight would be. Not a blatant attempt to throw me into the duke's lap."

"That sassy tongue of yours. It's a wonder the duke will even entertain the idea of marrying you." Her mother's lips pursed. "At least you look pretty in dark colors. Though you could have at least found one that showed off some of your finer assets."

Yes, the well-known mourning gown with décolletage. Agatha once again fought the urge to roll her eyes.

“Mother, I do not appreciate being ambushed. Perhaps I would have worn something more to your liking had you told me up front that this was a dinner with His Grace.” Of course she probably would have worn a slightly less flattering gown and even added her veil had she known.

“You are wasting time with this,” her mother snaps. “Your father and I are not going to give you money. I’ve warned you this.”

The truth was, her parents had enough money to last them a lifetime. Still, they’d made it abundantly clear, she would receive none of it. They’d married her off once, and that had been her opportunity to secure her own income. That had failed when her husband died before she’d secured an heir.

Upon his death, his entire fortune went to his nephew, who promptly kicked Agatha to the curb. Well, she gladly retreated to the curb after he made it abundantly clear she could stay if—and only if—she warmed his bed.

Horrible man.

Her parents had made it known then that she was not welcome to return home but that they would do their best to assist her in finding another suitable match.

“I am not wasting time. I have not agreed to marry the Duke of Lancaster, nor has he officially asked for my hand. He is out of London for the next two weeks so it seems irrelevant tonight that I’m not engaged. Have you ever considered that I do not wish to marry him?”

Her mother leaned back as if Agatha struck her. “Don’t be naive, child. We were

fortunate to marry you off the first time with that mouth of yours. This time, you're older and already used goods, as it were so it proved a challenge. But I found the perfect man for you. You would so boldly toss that gift back at me."

Agatha released a humorless laugh. "The duke is hardly a gift, mother. A man I did not ask for."

"All right, if you're so independent, tell me how you're intending to support yourself? You cannot live with that strange friend of yours forever. People will talk. And then you'll never be able to find a man."

"Perhaps I do not need a man."

"Do not be an idiot, Agatha. Women have no power in this world behind that of their fathers and husbands. Where our power lies is in our ability to withstand horrible situations and make the best of them. Do you think I love your father? He was not a love match for me. Our union was an advantageous one. Nothing more, nothing less."

"You have no way to afford living in London without a husband. It is your only choice."

"Not precisely," Agatha ventured. "I could..." her voice faltered. She cleared her throat, then rounded her shoulders. Reminded herself that she could do this. She could stand up for herself to her mother. "I could become a mistress. Have my independence with the financial security and protection from a man of my choosing."

Her mother gasped.

Agatha was surprised the woman didn't strike her.

"You would whore yourself out in such a way. I did not raise you to be that kind of

woman.” She stood. “I cannot speak with you anymore this evening, you are making me far too angry.” Her mother’s gaze was heated with fury. “You would do well if you went home and counted the last of your monies whilst making peace with the fact that the Duke of Lancaster is your best and only choice.”

And for the second time that night Agatha was left in the garden alone.

If Sebastian was completely honest with himself pursuing Agatha had nothing to do with his sire or even her request. It was entirely and wholly about the fact that he had to have her. He didn't quite understand it himself except he knew that he would drive himself mad if he didn't get to touch her voluptuous body and teach it how to sing.

All of that was why he was currently standing on the front stoop of her residence waiting to be let inside. After a stodgy butler inquired for his name and purpose of visit.

Eventually he's led into a parlor towards the back of the house. It's surprising to find her living in such a sizable townhome. He'd assumed her meager widow's allowance would not have afforded her such a home in this affluent neighborhood. If she can afford this house, why are her parents insisting she marry again?

"I cannot imagine that anyone is calling upon me, Violet. Certainly your butler is mistaken."

"Let us just see," another woman's voice said. .

And then Agatha steps into the room with another woman inching in behind her.

He can't take his eyes off of Agatha though. If she captured his attention wearing mourning rags and a veil, she's mesmerized him wearing a green muslin day dress that looks soft to the touch.

Her features widened with shock as she sees him lounging on her settee.

“What are you doing here?”

The other woman’s eyes round and she hides a giggle behind her hand. “Oh my, Agatha, is this him?”

“Have you been talking about me, little dove?” he asked.

He stands and prowls towards her. The other woman suppresses a cackle, then taps Agatha on the arm. “This is simply too delicious. I’ll leave you two alone.”

“Violet,” Agatha hisses. Her dark hair is pulled up in a loose chignon and wisps of nearly black curls play by her ears.

“I told you that I would pay a call on you.” He glanced around the room and motioned to the large wall of windows overlooking a balcony with stairs leading into the gardens below. “This is a very nice house, Agatha.”

She stiffened slightly. “Yes. This is my friend Violet’s house and she kindly has allowed me to stay here with her since my husband passed away.”

“I can presume that that,” he points to the now closed parlor door, “was Violet?”

“Yes.”

“If you’re residing here and not in the residence you shared during your brief marriage, am I to assume your husband had an heir? Or did he not have any holdings or income to pass along?”

Her fingers gather at the fabric of her skirt, bunching bits of it from her waistline into

her palms, then releasing it again. “A nephew.”

“This nephew insisted you leave? He did not offer to take care of you in your husband’s absence?” Sebastian asked.

Her eyes cast downward. “He offered for me to warm his bed.”

Her words curdle in his stomach. “That did not appeal to you? Seems a perfect solution to your problem.”

She visibly bristled. “Mr. St. Claire,” she begins.

He held up a hand. “Sebastian.”

“Very well, Sebastian. I believe I was rather hasty in my decision to agree to you assisting me in my education. But it has come to my attention that there are other ways I can learn the necessary skills.”

He returned to the settee, in no hurry to leave her presence. He sat, spreading his arms across the back of the brocade fabric. “Did you find another tutor, then?”

“No.”

The relief that swept through him was jarring. He chose to ignore it. It didn’t mean anything other than he was very interested in bedding her himself. “Then what are these other ways for you to learn? Do you intend to watch other couples in hopes that you’ll absorb the information that way? Because I can assure you, little dove, watching—while highly arousing—is not the same as doing.”

Her mouth opened in blatant shock. “Do people do such things?”

He glanced down at his hand, inspecting his fingernails. Through her eyes, he would likely appear bored with their exchange. He was anything but. Showing her his eagerness, however, would never do. The truth was, though, he was practically salivating to teach this woman the pleasures of the flesh. She was ripe for the picking and he wanted to delight her. He wanted to hear her scream his name in pleasure.

“There are rooms at my mother’s establishment that allow such things. Of course everyone must agree to such a thing.”

She swallowed visibly and stepped closer to the settee.

“So if that’s not your chosen method, do tell me, Agatha, how do you intend to learn to pleasure a man?” He leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees. He made certain to spread his thighs, his tall form poised as if to pounce on her at any moment. “Because the truth of the matter is, we can tell when a woman is inexperienced. We know when a woman is untouched. You’ve said yourself that you remained a virgin. How do you intend to explain that to your first lover?”

Her shoulders rounded and she looked over her shoulder at him. Haughtiness personified. She definitely had fire in her. That alone was enough to have his cock stirring inside his trousers.

“I’m certain I can find books on the subject matter. The pleasuring a man, that is. My virginity is none of your concern.”

“You are correct to assume that there are such texts. Ancient texts from the Orient and Ancient Greece, all of which detail several different ways and positions to enjoy congress. You might be able to glean quite a bit of knowledge that way.” He stood and walked to her.

With one hand, he twirled one of her ebony curls around a finger. “You should

consider what to do about your maidenhead blood when you leave it on your first lover's bedding." He lifted a shoulder. "Perhaps he won't notice it there, but he'll most assuredly notice the smear of red on his cock."

Her pupils are blown and her breathing has become shallow.

"My proposition for you. Let me have you tonight. I can show you what your body is capable of. I can pleasure you in several different ways before we even remove all your clothing. I'll make certain your body is ready to take a man so it will be as comfortable as possible." He leaned down and placed a kiss at that sweet spot where her shoulder met the hollow of her neck.

"One night, Agatha," he whispered.

"Why?" Her voice came out in a whisper. "Why do you want to help me?"

"This isn't about help, little dove. This is about me wanting you. From the moment I laid eyes on you, I've wanted to peel you out of every layer of clothing. I want to lick and suck and kiss every inch of your skin." To prove his point, he bit her gently in that spot, then licked and sucked until he earned a throaty moan from her. "I can't promise what other lovers will do for you, but I can guarantee you'll cry my name with pleasure before the night is over. I can show you how amazing your body can feel."

"Only one night?" she whispered.

"One night if that is all you want."

He nearly fell to his knees in thanks. That should be enough warning for him to get the hell out of here. He'd never begged a woman before. Never had to. Perhaps that's why he found this particular woman so damned intoxicating.

“Where’s your bedchamber?” he asked.

“Upstairs in the left wing.”

Without another word, he scooped her up in his arms, cradling her to his chest.

“You do not need to carry me.”

“Consider it part of your seduction.” He followed her verbal instructions out the parlor and up the stairs, which he took two at a time. He was done pretending that his desire for her was casual. He was nearly choking on the need to pin her against something and take her mouth.

Her bedchamber was large with an elaborately carved four-poster bed draped with creamy white linens. He set her down, then locked her bedroom door behind them.

“Did your husband touch you in any manner before he died?”

She swallowed, then shakes her head. “Your kiss,” she started, then stopped, biting down on her lip.

“My kiss what?”

She licked her lips.

His cock pulsed in his trousers.

“It was my first,” she said. “Aside from the chaste press of his lips at our ceremony. He was already ill when we married, though I didn’t know that at the time.”

Knowing he would own Agatha’s firsts made this entire evening all the more

enticing. He didn't need another reason to desire her, still her confession pulsed through his body. He'd stolen her first kiss, but now he would take the rest of her firsts at her request.

"Should I call for a maid to assist me with my dress?" she asked.

"No, I'll do it. Would you feel more comfortable if we started with that, or do you want to build up to it?"

"I'm not certain which would be better. I fear I'll be nervous regardless."

"I'll stop anytime you want me to." He slid his hands up her arms and gave her shoulders a gentle squeeze. "Do you trust me?"

Her lips quirked in a smile. "I probably shouldn't."

He stared down into her warm brown eyes. "That's not what I asked you."

"Yes, in this particular situation, I trust you."

"Turn around, little dove."

Without hesitancy, she turned away from him, presenting him with her back. From just below her neck down to her waist, he found a string of tiny buttons.

"So many buttons seems superfluous," he murmured.

She glanced at him over her shoulder. "I know they can be tedious. I can call for a maid."

"I do not wish to be deprived of the pleasure of undressing you, Agatha," he said.

Her mouth formed a perfect ‘o,’ then she turned back around.

One-by-one he unfastened the buttons, the fabric of her dress gaping open to reveal her corset and chemise underneath. He pushed at the sleeves of her dress until he dragged it down to her wrists. From there it slipped off her hands and pooled to the floor.

Before beginning to untie her stays, he leaned forward and ran his nose up the side of her neck.

“You’re a very attractive woman, little dove.”

“Is that my name now?” she asked with a breathless chuckle.

“Tonight it is.”

She shivered against the brush of his lips against her shoulder.

“I’m going to put my mouth all over your body.”

“Oh my.”

He loosened her corset enough to unhook the front and remove it leaving her in her chemise, drawers and stockings. The thin fabric of her chemise did nothing to hide the sharp beading of her nipples. He dropped to his knees in front of her to suck one into his mouth through the delicate material. He cupped the other while his tongue and lips wet the fabric on her other breast.

He leaned back to examine his handiwork, then moved to the dry breast to give it the same attention until her chemise was damp and molded to her generous breasts and tight-tipped buds.

She panted and stared down at him with such wild abandon and blatant desire that his cock hardened instantly. Some women were born with passion in them and only needed to learn how to set it ablaze. Agatha Pennybrook was one of those women. It was going to be a fucking pleasure teaching her how to unleash her desires.

“I want to make you climax,” he said. “Have you ever made yourself orgasm before?”

Her eyes widened, and she shook her head. “No.”

“Have you ever tried? Slipped your hand between your legs in the middle of the night because it felt too damn good not to?”

Again a shake of her head. “Shouldn’t this be about your pleasure?”

“Oh it is, little dove. But you have to understand that a man can find pleasure anywhere, but to get him returning to the same woman, you have to bring something special.”

“What’s that?”

He grinned at her. “You. The way your body trembles with pleasure, the way you cry out with your release. That will bring a man back to your bed, again and again.”

“So how do you want to come for the first time?” Do you want to sit in my lap and kiss and rock your pretty cunt against my cock until you release? Or do you want me to use my hands on you?” He leaned in and licked across her collarbone. “Perhaps instead, I want you to come all over my mouth.”

Her head shook and she swallowed hard.

“What’s it going to be, Agatha?” He slid a finger beneath the strap of her chemise and bared her shoulder to his teeth.

She moaned and bucked against him. “Please make it stop?”

“Are you aching, love? Does your cunny feel empty?”

“Yes,” her word came out in a soft exhalation.

“I’m going to taste you tonight. But let us get you a little more relaxed, shall we?” He situated them on the oversized wing backed chair by the fireplace. There was a stack of books on the small table next to it. In fact, there were stacks of books on nearly every surface in this room. A fact he might comment on if his dick didn’t feel as if it was going to break off it was so damned hard.

He sat in the chair and brought her onto his lap so she straddled his hips. With one swift movement, he removed her chemise and dropped it on the floor behind her.

Her breasts were perfect. Heavy and round with rosy centers and firm nipples. He leaned forward and clasps one in his mouth, while he shifted her bottom. The slit in her drawers enabled him to press her open needy flesh against the hard length of his need. The musky scent of her arousal was heady and he groaned into her breast.

He rocked his pelvis against her to show her how to find her pleasure, then he cupped both of her breasts, pinched her nipples and brought his mouth to hers.

He’d never been one for kissing. He’d much rather skip ahead to kissing a slick quim than a woman’s mouth. But with Agatha, he had an unquenchable need to put their mouths together. Her tongue slid against his and she rocked herself awkwardly against him. After a few moments of her clumsy movements and their heated kissing, she found her rhythm. Her hands gripped his shoulders as they continued to kiss.

She pulled back from their kiss, arching her back. Her head tossed back, and a throaty moan sounded around him. It was the single sexiest thing he'd ever heard. Having grown up in a brothel, he'd become quite accustomed to the sounds of pleasure. But something about Agatha's innocence was driving him wild.

"You're getting close, little dove, aren't you? I can feel how hot and wet your cunt is as you rub against me and it feels so good. You keep going until your body falls apart. That's it, love." He pinched her nipples again.

Her head tilted back to face him and her eyes widen as her mouth fell open.

"Sebastian," she whispered.

"That's it, love, you're almost there. Keep rocking against me. Soak my trousers."

Then she shuddered against him as pleasure pulsed through her body. She cried out, her voice hoarse and her breasts thrust forward, a comely flush covering her perfectly pale skin.

"Gorgeous," he murmured.

She collapsed against him, her mouth nestled against his throat. "I didn't know my body could do that."

"Your body can do a lot more than just that." He helped her stand, then pulls down her drawers until she steps out of them. One at a time, he rolled down her silk stockings. They were nice quality, but clearly aged. Every new expanse of her creamy skin he revealed made him even harder.

He had to make her come again though before he took her. He was a big man, all over, and he wanted to hurt her as little pain as possible.

When she stood before him completely bare, he leaned back in the chair and lets his eyes take in the glorious sight of her.

“You are a beautiful woman, Agatha,” he said.

“Thank you,” her voice came out in a hushed whisper.

“Get on the bed now.” He stood and began to unbutton his shirt. He removed all of his clothing, leaving it all on the chair before walking to her.

Unlike some women, she hadn’t scurried to hide beneath the coverlet, instead she’d sprawled herself on the bed, and blatantly stared at his body.

His cock, hard and heavy, jutted from his body. The sensitive tip already leaked for her. He gripped the shaft and squeezed the base to try to reign in his control.

He walked to her, hand still wrapped around himself. “Spread your legs, let me see that pretty cunny.”

The dark triangle of curls at the apex of her thighs looked bold against the paleness of her skin.

Her eyes haven’t left his cock, but she followed his instructions. Her legs part.

“That’s it, little dove. Look at how wet you are for me.” He leaned down and placed a kiss right at her navel against her soft rounded stomach. “I’m going to make you come one more time before I take you. We want you even wetter so you can easily take my cock.”

She nodded, but didn’t say anything.

“Bend your legs and brace your feet on the bed.”

She opened herself to him fully. “You’re so pink and swollen for me, glistening with your nectar.” He gripped his cock again. He needed to keep his patience, but he was dying to sheath himself inside her wet heat.

Instead he lay on his stomach and maneuvered himself so that he lay right between her legs, mouth inches from her pussy. He parted her folds using both thumbs until he could see the tight entrance he was waiting to breach.

“Are you certain this is done? I mean with women who are not employed for such things?” she asked.

“You’re wanting to know if women of good breeding participate in such things?” he asked.

“I suppose. My mother certainly never mentioned anything of the sort to me before I wed.”

He nibbled at her thigh, licking and sucking the sensitive skin between her legs without reaching anywhere near her most delicate and sensitive skin. He chuckled. “I don’t imagine she did. I will not brag about any of my previous experience, but I can assure you that plenty of women in the ton have lifted their skirts for such an activity.” Slowly, he slid one finger inside her. She was hot and slick and impossibly tight.

She squeaked and bucked against his hand. Then he swiped one thumb to the side of that tight bundle of nerves.

“Oh God,” she breathed.

That was all it took and he couldn't wait any longer to get his mouth on her. He licked up one side and then the other as he slowly pumped that single finger in and out. Then he swirled his tongue around that little nub.

She moaned and he did the movement again and again until her fingers carded through his hair.

She was tangy and salty and sweet. He rocked himself against the mattress to try to ease some of the pressure in his sack. He added a second finger inside her, scissoring his digits in an attempt to stretch her a little.

"Sebastian." Her fingernails dug into his scalp and he growled against her tender flesh. Then he sped up his movements, curving his fingers towards the front of her soft wet space and rubbing, rubbing at the perfect spot. Then he sucked her little nub into his mouth. He pulled on the sensitive flesh with his lips and she rocked against his face faster and faster.

"It's too much," she said as she tried to shift away from him.

But he knew it wasn't. She was so close to breaking. He held her hips in place and kept this rhythm steady, rubbing and sucking, rubbing and sucking.

She released a shrill noise before her voice was muffled. Fresh wetness slicked over his fingers as her climax rocketed through her.

Pleasure still coursed through Agatha's body as Sebastian climbed his heavy body atop her. He notched his member against her entrance and slid inside. He didn't take his time, he didn't warn her. He just thrust all the way in. The pain was sharp and she tensed against him, but he cupped her face and looked into her eyes.

"I've got you, little dove. Relax. That pain will fade and in a moment you'll be begging me to keep going."

He gave her a warm smile that she was certain was genuine. She nodded.

"You're gripping me so tight and you feel amazing. I'm going to move now."

She exhaled slowly. He pushed back, withdrawing from her for a moment, then slid back in. Shallow at first, then deeper. He was right, the discomfort faded quickly and soon she was panting beneath him.

"Wrap your legs around me, Agatha," he instructed.

She lifted her legs and crossed her feet at the ankles behind his back. They were intimately connected

He was glorious, so beautiful with his sweat glistened skin and intense mossy eyes. He'd done wicked things to her body and brought her to places she'd never known possible. Her mother had certainly never mentioned any of those things. Nor had she mentioned how pleasurable the act of love making could be. But with the steady

thrust of his hard shaft rubbing all of the places inside her and the angle of his body, rubbing against whatever that bit was down there that made her explode and she knew it wouldn't be long before she shook in rapture again.

"I can feel your cunny getting tight. Are you going to come for me again, little dove?" he asked. He gave her a cocky grin, then he leaned forward and sucked a nipple into his mouth. He sucked hard, swirling his tongue over the turgid tip.

And that was all it took, she gripped his bare bottom and held him to her as she shuddered against him.

He leaned back on his heels, withdrawing from her, then gripped his member and worked his hand over it until he growled his release and spent on her belly. She watched in fascination at the milky white liquid pooling on her stomach.

"No need to make a bastard of my own," he said. Then he flopped on his back next to her. "I suspect you will make a pretty damn good mistress." He stood and went to the basin, then brought a wet cloth to her and cleaned her belly, then wiped between her legs.

She looked down at his softening member and saw the smear of her virgin blood along the ridge of him.

"Sore?" he asked.

She licked her lips and swallowed. "A little, but not bad."

He had done what he'd offered, he'd brought her pleasure, shown her how sex could be and he'd taken her virginity.

And she supposed, he'd given her the seal of approval to become a mistress.

Sebastian threw another punch in the direction of Banks, his sparring partner, nailing the man on the left side of his chin.

“Christ, Sebastian, what the devil is the matter with you today?”

What was the matter with him? The matter was he’d nearly spilled himself inside of Agatha last night. He’d wanted to. Perhaps more than he’d ever wanted anything.

His mother had hammered into he and his brother the importance of being careful with such things. In a world where entitled men carelessly fathered bastards, Spencer and he had been taught at an early age to always be on alert. She’d taught them about preventative methods and which were the best to use. He’d never failed to use at least one.

Until last night. He had pulled out, but he hadn’t wanted to. Fuck the consequences. In that moment it had felt so good being inside her, he’d been willing to risk a pregnancy. At least that would have tied her to him for good.

What was he even thinking?

He was not meant to be a father let alone a husband. He needed to have his head examined.

At that moment, Banks hit him with an upper cut that rattled his teeth. Maybe that would knock some sense into him.

Despite his carelessness the previous evening, he knew he wasn't done with the delectable Agatha Pennybrook. There was more exploring to do of her body. More ways to bring her to earth shattering release. It was easy enough to acknowledge that he could get addicted to bringing that woman pleasure. So he needed to tread carefully.

Agatha was doing her best to avoid her friend's gaze. She wanted to discuss what had happened last night with Violet, but she wasn't certain how to bring up the subject. Especially whilst they sat breaking their fast. It didn't seem to be the sort of conversation two women should have over eggs and toast.

Violet stirred her tea, the clink, clink of her spoon on the side of her teacup and their unusually quiet morning only amplified the noise.

"It would seem that your gentleman caller stayed well into the evening," Violet finally said. She sipped her tea and eyed Agatha casually over her cup. As if she'd merely mentioned the newest fabric trends to come out of Paris.

Agatha felt her cheeks heat and knew they must be stained bright red. She stared down into her own cup of tea before venturing a glance at her friend. "My sincerest apologies if you'd prefer I not entertain guests at such late hour, I can refrain."

Violet rolled her eyes heavenward. "Don't be daft, Agatha." She leaned forward closing the distance between them at the table. "Now, you must tell me everything this instant. According to some gossip I overheard between the maids, there were some unique and rather carnal noises coming from your bedchamber."

Agatha's cheeks flamed anew. She dropped her face into her hand. "Oh my goodness, how humiliating."

"Oh nonsense. My aunt had many lovers. The staff here is discreet and quite

accustomed to such behavior.”

“Perhaps, but I am not accustomed to that behavior. And I do not have lovers,” she said the last word as if it tasted poorly on her tongue.

“I take it things were pleasant then? Considering the noises?”

Agatha peeked at her friend through her fingers. “Yes, it was quite pleasant. He’s rather skilled at...” she waved her hand, “whatever you want to call it.”

“Intimate concourse?”

“Among other things.”

“Honestly, Agatha, if you intend to be a mistress, you truly must be able to speak of such things without blushing. And you’re barely even speaking, you’re merely listening to me.”

“You’re right. I know you’re right.” She exhaled slowly. “I think I need to make a list of well, physical activities, then perhaps I shall repeat them aloud several times until I become immune to them.”

“That’s an interesting option. I do think it’s time to pay a visit to my Aunt Felicity’s friend though. She should be able to help you.”

Agatha nodded, and wondered what she should ask the former mistress because certainly she was a treasure trove of useful information.

“When will you see your gentleman caller again?” Violet asked.

“Oh,” Agatha frowned. “I don’t believe I will see him again. We came to an

arrangement for him to merely provide me with an evening of pleasure. Only that one evening.”

Violet’s features furrowed. “Why would you not continue to learn from him? Was that his offer? Only one night?”

They had previously spoken about how Agatha had come out of her marriage untouched. Whereas Violet was a self-proclaimed spinster who had had a brief tryst with a poet a few years before.

But Agatha had never asked her friend what she and the poet had done together specifically. Though she couldn’t be certain, she didn’t believe that every coupling provided as much pleasure for the woman as she’d received under Sebastian’s touch. And his mouth. And his...well, she supposed she was a bit tender in her most intimate places. The skin between her thighs was pink and irritated from his beard, but the mere thought of his face down there made her face flame and moisture flood her core.

Good heavens, he was a most dangerous man. Did Agatha dare tell her closest friend that everything about Sebastian made her nervous? That being near him made her want for things she had no business wanting?

“I’m not certain what you’re thinking about over there, but it does appear to be blush-inducing,” Violet said with a grin. “If it was that pleasurable, why would you not want to entertain him again?”

Agatha shook her head. “He served his purpose. He deflowered me so now I will not have that embarrassment hanging over my head. And he properly introduced me to carnal delights, as it were. Now, I need to learn as much as I can from your aunt’s friend, then set about finding my first...” she frowned.

“I believe the word you’re searching for is lover,” Violet said.

Agatha swallowed. “Yes, well, my first one of those.”

“Good gracious, Aggie, if you can’t say the word, how on earth do you intend to seduce a man?”

Agatha opened her mouth, then closed it again. “I don’t suppose I considered it as such. I merely thought that you make it known that you’re looking for a lover,” there she said it and barely tripped over the word, “and the men would come to you.”

Violet sighed. “Perhaps you should bring something to take notes with. I believe Felicity will have much to share with you.”

Half an hour later, they were led into a very nice parlor of a townhome on Collins street. A few minutes after that a lovely older woman swept into the room and walked purposefully to Violet. She was tall for a woman and though her figure had obviously softened with age, she was still rather thin. Her dark hair, streaked with silver, was up in a simple chignon and dress was quite obviously from previous fashion trends, but still in excellent shape.

It was easy to see that this woman must have turned heads when she was younger. It was no wonder she was a successful and much sought-after mistress. Agatha wasn't unattractive, but she would never be considered a stand-out beauty.

"Oh my dear, how lovely it is to see you," she embraced Agatha's friend. Then she turned a smile to Agatha. "And who do we have here?"

"Felicity, this is my dearest friend, Agatha Pennybrook. We've come to seek counsel on an important matter."

Felicity's brows rose, then she rang the bell on the table and ordered tea and cakes. After which she took a seat on her settee while Agatha and Violet sat in adjacent chairs.

"Now then, what can I do to help you ladies?" Felicity asked.

Violet glanced at Agatha and inclined her head, a clear indication she wanted her to proceed. In other words, Violet wasn't going to do this for her. Very well, she would

need to learn to stand on her own as it was.

Agatha swallowed and folded her hands in her lap. "I am a widow and I wish to become a mistress."

Felicity's brows rose even higher this time. "Indeed?"

"Violet said that you have a similar past and suggested you might be able to give me some advice."

"Might I inquire as to why you want to do such a thing? You're young and handsome enough you could find another husband."

Agatha's head shook before Felicity had even finished her sentence. "I do not wish to marry again."

"Did you love your husband?"

"I barely knew him. He was many years my senior and died only after we'd been married a month. I have just come out of my two years of mourning. Unfortunately, I have been relying on Violet's hospitality to provide me with suitable living arrangements. I have a very small amount of savings and do not wish to find myself yet again in a marriage not of my choosing."

"I have told her repeatedly that I have plenty of money and room and she can stay with me indefinitely, but she is stubborn," Violet said with a smirk.

"Perhaps she is interested in attributes you do not possess, my dear."

Just then a maid rolled a tea cart in and set everything up, then curtsied and left the room.

After fixing herself a cup of tea, Felicity leaned back on her settee. “Now then, what specifically can I help you with, Agatha?”

“I am not very well versed in matters of the flesh and I’d like to know what I need to know in order to find the best patrons,” Agatha said.

“Lovers,” Violet corrected.

Agatha waved a hand dismissively.

“Being a mistress is certainly about pleasures of the flesh, so I’d say the most important thing is that you need to be comfortable with your own body. You need to understand what a man needs from a woman—something they don’t always understand themselves. You need to be a good listener because men love to hear themselves talk. You mustn’t be jealous, in particular if your lover is married. It is common among the aristocracy for men to take a mistress in town while their wives are in the country with the children or here in town as well, but otherwise indisposed. Not very many marriages in this town are happy ones and men have needs.”

Already Agatha was feeling overwhelmed. What did men need that even they didn’t know about? And why were men’s carnal needs more necessary than a woman’s? Certainly those wives wished to enjoy the pleasures of their marriage bed.

“You need to enjoy the acts themselves. If a man wants to bed a frigid, still woman, he can bed his wife. What he wants from a mistress is a warm, willing and participating woman. If you can’t do that, you’d be better served as a wife. A husband protects your name as well as your income.”

Agatha was writing down everything so quickly she was certain she’d dull the tip of her pencil. They hadn’t even been here half an hour and she felt more unprepared and ignorant than she had when they arrived.

“Do you enjoy bedroom acts, Agatha?” Felicity asked.

Agatha exhaled slowly. She knew she was blushing, her cheeks heated with just the thought of last night’s acts. “Yes. Very much so.”

“But you said you do not have much experience.”

“Correct. I don’t. I’ve had one singular experience with an experienced man. I believe he taught me plenty about pleasure.” How much more could there be? He’d pleased her three times with three different parts of his body.

“I see.” Felicity sipped her tea thoughtfully.

“What would be the most important thing for a mistress?” Violet asked. “I’m assuming it would be something about not falling in love.”

Felicity shook her head. “Actually, my dear, you do want to fall in love. You need to fall just a little bit in love with each of your lovers. Find that thing about him that creates a spark in you and nurture it as you would a seedling. But do not allow it to grow too much else it will weed and choke out the entire garden.”

Agatha contemplated those words. They felt wise and important, but she doubted she understood the entirety of their meaning. Fall in love but only a little bit. How did one measure that? Or prevent oneself from falling further? This was all far more complicated than she’d imagined.

Perhaps she should simply marry the duke. Certainly that would be the simplest of all solutions. She shuddered. The thought of his hands on her body, his mouth on hers—no. She could never do that.

He would undoubtedly make her miserable and she’d lose every bit of freedom she’d

enjoyed over the last two years. Not to mention her parents would benefit financially from such a union and she'd had enough of aiding them in any capacity. It was one thing if they legitimately needed the funds, but they did not.

Abruptly, Felicity stood and walked to Agatha. She held her hand out to the notebook and pencil. "May I?"

"Of course," Agatha handed them over and watched the older woman return to her seat with them. Then she proceeded to writing in it swiftly over the next several minutes. When she was done, she closed the book and turned to Violet.

"I do hope it won't take you this long again to come and visit me."

"Where is my beloved?" A man's booming voice sounded from the hall. Then a very large and jovial man lumbered into the room. He wasn't precisely portly, just large all over. He walked straight to Felicity and bent to kiss her cheek. "There you are, my love. Are you entertaining?" He smiled at both Agatha and Violet.

"We are finished," Agatha said, coming to her feet. She stepped over to Felicity and held out her hand. "Thank you so much for your assistance."

The older woman handed over her book. "I wrote down a few skills you might want to grasp before you proceed. Do let me know if you have any further questions." She smiled genuinely. "It was a pleasure meeting you. And seeing you again, my dear, Violet. Don't be a stranger."

Sebastian leaned back in his office and eyed the other three men in the room. They were known as the Notorious Bastards, a moniker they readily accepted though never used themselves. They were bastards though. Each and every one of them sired by a wealthy and powerful member of the aristocracy, none of them claimed, for obvious reasons.

Regardless of what initially brought them together—ignoring the fact that one of them was his own twin brother—he counts all of them his closest friends.

They met weekly for no other reason than to drink and gossip as if they are women. Occasionally they'd meet in public merely to set tongues wagging about their notoriety.

“What the devil are you smiling about today, St. Claire?” Tennyson asked.

Among their joint friends, as the eldest twin, he was known as St. Claire, his brother though was relegated to using his given name. Sebastian doesn't think Spencer much cared one way or another though.

Sebastian leveled his gaze at Ten. “Was I smiling?”

Jameson nodded. “It's rather off-putting.”

“Pitiful,” Spencer muses. “Had I not gotten all of the handsomeness, perhaps your smiles would be more welcoming.”

“Bugger off all of you,” Sebastian said.

“It’s this new bird, isn’t it?” Spencer asked with a grin.

“New bird?” Jameson asked.

“I take it your first lesson went well?” Spencer said. He swirled his glass of amber liquid and raised a brow at his brother.

“Let us gossip then,” Ten said. “Then onto business.”

“There is nothing to gossip about. I am assisting a woman in her quest to learn how to become a mistress.” He lifted a shoulder in a casual motion. “It will no doubt be a short lived affair, but admittedly for the moment, I’m entertained.”

His words sounded hollow and false even to his own words. He couldn’t afford to entertain notions of anything long-term with Agatha. A dalliance with him would certainly soil her reputation.

“As is she, I’m certain,” Spencer said.

Sebastian glared at his brother, then turned his gaze to Ten. “Be glad you have a sister instead of a brother. Brother’s are from the devil.” But even Sebastian couldn’t keep a straight face with that statement.

“If you ladies are done with your gossip, we do actually have important matters to attend to,” Ten said. He glanced at Sebastian and Spencer and gave a slight nod. “I took our contribution and invested it and now we have tripled the monies.”

Jameson frowned. “What are you talking about? I never put in a contribution.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “Unless you caught me when I was soused.”

“No, we pooled some funds together and Ten invested it in whatever he does and now we have a larger chunk to put towards your invention.”

Jameson’s mouth opened, then his frown deepened. “I told you that I did not want a loan from any of you.”

Sebastian shook his head. “Not a loan. Consider us investors. Most inventors have them. Benefactors, if you will. It is a worthwhile contraption that we would all benefit from at some point in the future.”

Ten pulled out an envelope with bank notes and handed it over to their friend.

Jameson exhaled slowly. “I don’t even know what to say.”

“Say thank you, asshole,” Spencer said.

“Thank you, asshole,” Jameson repeated.

Sebastian listened while his friends continued to discuss the safety lift that Jameson had been designing. The man had a mother who could no longer walk on her own. Moving her up and down the stairs of her home had become impossible so she was either confined to her bedroom upstairs, or could have reign of the downstairs with the aid of her wheeled chair. A lift that could carry her and her chair up and down the stairs would solve any number of problems. It was a worthwhile investment to be certain.

His thoughts wandered back to the night before and Agatha laid out on the bed, positively glowing with pleasure. Her pale skin had taken on a rosy hue and he’d never seen anything so beautiful in his life. He was hungry for her again. And he was thankful that his brother hadn’t mentioned her name or the would-be connection with their father.

The previous evening, he'd persuaded her to give him a single night. Now he was back for more, intending to convince her she had more lessons to learn.

Sebastian knocked on the front door and waited for entrance. It was early enough in the evening that Agatha should be home even if she had plans to attend and parties. He didn't know if she did that sort of thing, but considering she was the widow of an earl that did put her as a member of proper society.

Presumably that was where his father was courting her. If what she'd said at their initial meeting had been true. That her parents wanted her to marry the Duke of Lancaster. The thought of that arrogant prig putting his hands anywhere on Agatha made Sebastian's hands clench at his sides.

The door opened and the butler's brows rose, but he seemed to catch herself and nod.

"I'd like to see Lady Tolley, please," he said.

The butler nodded. "Follow me." He led Sebastian down the corridor and up the stairs to the left. Opposite the direction to Agatha's bedchamber.

Finally they stopped outside a pair of wooden doors. Once opened, they revealed a sizable room lined, floor-to-ceiling with bookshelves. Agatha and the other woman—Violet, he believed—sat at a table, heads together peering over a small book.

“Lady Tolley,” the butler said. The sound of his voice started both of the women and they jumped nearly simultaneously.

Agatha’s eyes found his and hers widened in surprise. Quickly, she pulled off the spectacles perched on her nose, then dropped them onto the tabletop. She came to her feet. “Sebastian.”

The way she breathed his name felt so intimate, so necessary, that his own breath caught.

The woman next to Agatha stood and came around the table. “Woodsey, would you be so kind as to have a tray of refreshments brought up?” she asked the butler.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Violet Weatherford,” she held her hand out to Sebastian. “Very nice to meet you, Mr. St. Claire, is it?”

He smiled, liking Violet immediately. She was no doubt an excellent friend for Agatha. “Sebastian is fine. No need for formalities with me. I’m a mere bastard owner of a den of debauchery and sin.”

Violet tilted her head back and laughed heartily. “Indeed? Do you allow women to patronage this establishment?”

“Not in the manner in which would interest you, I’m afraid.”

She clicked her tongue. “Pity. Very well, then, I shall leave you two to it.”

Agatha frowned. “You’re leaving?” she asked her friend.

“I do believe Sebastian here would be a much more useful source of information for your current project, my dear.” She winked at Sebastian, then left the room.

He didn’t wait for Agatha to invite him to help, he merely made his way to the table and sat in the chair that Violet had abandoned.

“What is your current project?” he asked. He craned his neck to look at the open book with the slanted and feminine penmanship scrawled across it.

Agatha fell into her chair and put her hands on top of the book, covering his view. “Violet overstepped by suggesting you could assist.”

A maid entered the room, rolling in a tea cart that had one wobbly, creaking wheel. The sound seemed to echo through the substantial room making him all too aware of the woman next to him. And that momentarily they would be alone again. It was an unusual feeling, wanting a woman this intensely. He’d been inside her a mere twelve hours before, still he craved her as he had no other.

Normally once he’d had a time between a woman’s thighs, he moved on to someone else. He was selective and careful, but he’d never been with a woman that made him want her again and again. Not like Agatha, where one taste of her and he had a running list of things he wanted to do to her voluptuous curves.

Once the maid left and closed the library door with a resounding boom, he turned to face Agatha.

“Little dove, show me what is in the book.”

She shook her head, her vivid chocolate eyes wide and watching him.

He fought the urge to smile because he didn’t want her to think he was teasing her.

“Does this have to do with you wanting to become a mistress?”

Her pink tongue slipped out and slicked across both of her lips, wetting them.

He surpassed a groan and the urge to pick her up and toss her on the table and feast upon her body for hours. Christ, what was the matter with him? Perhaps it was her innocence. That was what was so appealing about her. He'd never before bedded a virgin, that could be why he wanted her so much. The fact that she'd been untouched save his mouth and body made him insatiable for him. He could seek his mother's council on that theory, but he truly didn't want to inform her of his intense feelings.

That bright-eyed naivety that made him crave her as he did a strong drink or a good night's sleep.

He reached over and put one of his hands on top of hers and with the other he pried the book away.

Agatha laid her head in her hands, hiding her face against the table's wooden surface.

He glanced down at the script writing and noted immediately that it was a list. A most interesting list.

Smoke his pipe

Gentleman's saddle

Part the globes

Bareback

Play backgammon

Side-saddle

“Little dove, what is this list?”

Agatha’s head turned. She stayed laying across her hands, but peered at him. She blew out a breath. “Well, I don’t actually know. I went to visit a friend of Violet’s aunt’s who was a mistress for many years. I asked for some advice and she gave me this list, but I believe she was having a bit of fun at my expense.”

“My sweet Agatha, this is a legitimate list, though her language is creative to say the least. She should have explained it to you.”

She sat upright. “You understand it?” Her brow furrowed and she glanced down at the book. “Violet and I thought we’d deciphered the gentleman’s saddle, but I’m not certain.”

His brows rose. “And?”

“To ride astride a man, in his lap, as it were?” She bit down on her plump bottom lip.

“Precisely.” He glanced back at the list and suppressed a groan. He would be fortunate if he survived this conversation without spilling himself in his trousers. He was already partially hard, as it was. And nothing significant had been said.

Her frown deepened. “This is a carnal cipher and I find myself completely baffled. So then the side-saddle?”

He chuckled. “I’ve not heard it called that, but I suspect it means the position where you are both laying down and the man takes the woman from behind.” He leveled a gaze at her. “Or from the front, that can work too with the right partner.”

Her mouth opened and formed a perfect 'o.'

He'd need to merely get through the list, then perhaps he could convince her to try a few items.

"Parting the globes does not work with every woman, but I dare say you have the perfect breasts for it."

She glanced down at her chest, then put a hand up as if to ward off his stare.

He reached over to her and placed his hands on either side of her breasts, then gently pushed them together. "When a woman is endowed enough up here, then she can do this and a man can slide his cock in between them. It's very erotic."

Her eyes were locked on his hands and damned if he didn't wish they were naked so he could simply demonstrate each item.

"Which leads us nicely into smoking his pipe."

"I cannot abide the smell of smoke," she said tartly.

Damnation, but she was adorable. "In this scenario, the pipe would also be the man's cock."

"And you like women to blow upon it?"

He nearly choked. "Not precisely. The thing I did to you last night where I licked and suckled you to completion?"

Her brown eyes darkened to nearly black. "Yes?"

“A woman does that on a man’s cock.”

“And you enjoy that?”

He groaned. “All men enjoy that.”

“I believe I should like to learn how to do that, then.” She looked back at the list.

“The thing you did to me, is that smoking my pipe?”

He did laugh then, he couldn’t help it. “No. It’s not called that.”

“Which one is it?”

“It’s not on that list.”

“Is that because it is not a skill I need to know, but rather something men do?”

“It is not something all men do. Some do not enjoy it.”

“A pity. It is quite enjoyable to experience.”

Again he laughed. He’d never enjoyed a woman’s company in this manner. With both of them fully clothed.

He tapped on the book. “It would seem I have more lessons to provide you.”

“You are amenable to teaching me?”

“Of course. You are a most excellent student. Tomorrow evening I wish for you to join me at the opera.”

She frowned. “But there is nothing you can teach me when we are in public.”

“Quite the contrary. There is much you can learn. Not only that, but being seen with a bachelor in public will aide in you building your reputation as a mistress.”

“What of tonight? What shall you teach me?”

He leaned forward and caught the back of her neck, pulling her in for a heated kiss. He wanted nothing more than to bury himself inside her again, but he knew she’d be sore. He did not wish to cause her any pain.

She whimpered into his mouth, arching her body towards his.

He forced himself to end the kiss. Then he reached beneath the table and lifted her skirts. “Give me your hand, Agatha.”

He took her hand and pressed it into the opened slit of her drawers.

“Are you wet?”

She nodded.

“Show me.”

She moved her hand, then lifted it up towards him.

He leaned forward, catching her sticky, wet digits into his mouth and sucking them clean. He released them with a pop.

“Tonight your lesson is to explore your body. When you slip into your bed, do so completely naked, feel the caress of the sheets against your sensitive skin. Touch

your breasts, pinch your nipples. Bring your fingers between your thighs and touch that little nub until you come.”

“What does that have to do with me being a mistress?”

“You must be in charge of your own pleasure. A woman he demands to be pleased rather than merely laying there and taking it is a far more interesting bed partner.”

She gasped. “The woman from earlier today said something very similar.”

“See, I know what I’m talking about. Make yourself come tonight. Then tomorrow night you can whisper to me about it in the dark confines of our opera box.” He stood, placing a kiss on her forehead. “Until tomorrow, lovely Agatha.”

Agatha was still uncertain why Sebastian had instructed her to meet him at the opera house. He had reserved a private box and told her that having people see her with him in public would only assist her in building her reputation as a mistress.

His argument held some merit, she supposed. Though shouldn't she be looking for more affluent men who could offer her protection? Still the thought of being intimate with another man the way she'd been with Sebastian made her feel ill, but that was a concern for another day.

He'd escorted her to the box and they were waiting for the opera to begin. She'd only been to the opera one other time and she'd found it pleasurable enough though admittedly she'd preferred the theatre.

But as the lights dimmed, she found herself feeling on edge with anticipation. Something about sitting so close to Sebastian in this public setting.

He was so very handsome. Nearly every woman, young and old, turned to stare when he walked by. Their journey through the opera house lobby had turned heads. He was the very image of virility; tall and muscular with that square jawline hidden behind a day or two's worth of whiskers. His perfectly full lips and those startling green eyes. Simply put, the man was beautiful. Though with his golden beauty, she'd wager he resembled more the Norse gods rather than a mortal man.

And he had a twin brother, he'd mentioned that. Though he said they looked nothing alike. Still, if there were two men this attractive in London, they would have their

selection of whatever women they wanted.

He was here with her, though. She hated that that thought warmed her insides, but it did. She would not fool herself into believing this was special for him. He likely took all women he's shared intimacies with to the theatre or the like. Being born on the wrong side of the blanket, as it were, meant he wouldn't be welcomed into polite society. But a public outing such as this, his money worked just as well aristocratic money.

Felicity had suggested, as a mistress, she fall just a little bit in love with each man she took as a lover. The problem was, Agatha could see too many things to love about Sebastian, the least of which was his handsomeness.

Obviously, he was a gifted lover. Even without experiencing another man's touch, she knew Sebastian's would be different. Most of the men she'd met were far too selfish and self-absorbed to be as dedicated to their partner's pleasure the way he was.

He had a lovely sense of humor. She'd never expected to laugh during intimate activities, but she legitimately had fun with him. Judging from the way he'd assisted two elderly women up the stairs of the opera house, he was also kind. She'd watched a handful of "gentlemen" walk right past the two women without a second glance.

Sebastian, though, had helped her to the top, then immediately marched down the stairs to aide them.

"Little dover," he breathed into her ear. Gooseflesh covered her body and her nipples pebbled beneath the many layers of her clothes.

What would he think if he knew she'd been sitting here mentally extolling his virtues. She was a ninny.

“Can you see any of the other people in the boxes around us?”

She squinted and peered into the darkness. With the lights on the stage, it was nearly impossible to see anything around her. She turned to whisper to his ear, but nearly crashed right into his face he was so close to her. She licked her lips. “I don’t think so. Who am I supposed to be looking for?”

“No one. Not being able to see anyone is the very point. Now we’re going to play a game.” The deep timbre of his voice was like the finest of silk against her skin.

“I don’t think we can play a game in here. We won’t be able to hear one another very well.” Did people normally play games at the opera?

“Yes, lovely Agatha, we can. Now then, I’m going to do something to as you. Your duty is to be still and as quiet as you can. Do you think you can do that?”

“I don’t know.” Nerves skittered through her body, though she felt no fear. She trusted him implicitly. “What are you going to do to me?”

“It’s a surprise.” He leaned closer and placed several heated kisses along her neck, just below her ear.

She was already so aroused simply from his nearness that she’d probably soaked her drawers.

“You smell good, little dove. Now the challenge tonight is two-fold.” His lips were right next to her ear as he spoke. “One, we want to see if you can lose yourself in the sensations of your body despite your environment. Two, if you can do that, you should try to be quieter than you were the last time.” His chuckle felt like a lick across her nipples. “Be a good girl and keep your eyes on the stage.”

This man was pure sin. And heaven help her, but she loved it.

The performers on stage sang beautifully. Though, in a language Agatha did not understand, she watched the characters move across the stage with their powerful voices.

Her heart pounded so rapidly she was tempted to look down and see if the fabric of her dress moved with the beat.

Sebastian shifted in his chair, and then he was gone. On the floor in front of her. Oh no, he couldn't possibly think he would... big, warm palms slid up the backs of her stockinged calves, then gripped the backs of her knees. He forced her legs to spread further as he disappeared beneath the yards of material that made up her skirts. He maneuvered her body so she was more forward on the chair, allowing her legs to fall open and his head to move into place.

Oh, my heavens, he was actually going to lick her here in front of everyone. No, no one could actually see them, but still. A thrill shot through her at the thought of someone seeing or hearing. Surely that meant she was just as wicked as he.

A finger spread through her folds, then slid inside of her. She clenched around his finger and bit down on her lip. Her eyes glued to the stage, she watched the people move around, their voices loud and melodic, but she had no idea what was happening.

And then his mouth was on her. She placed her hands on her dress over his head. His tongue lapped at her, circling that hidden bud as his finger thrust in and out of her. She kept her teeth secured into her bottom lip to keep herself from moaning. She couldn't however, prevent herself from rocking her pelvis towards him.

The pleasure tightened in her belly, moving lower into a tense spiral. The players on

stage hit a particularly moving part of their music, but Agatha's focus had narrowed to her core where that wicked, wicked man hid beneath her dress licking her until she thought she'd go mad.

She was getting closer, she could tell, felt her womb tightening on his finger. He responded by inserting a second finger, then he curled them both and found a spot on the front wall of her womb. He rubbed those fingers and licked her nub, over and over and over.

Finally she shattered around him, gripping his head and shaking in her seat. She knew she was likely manning, but it couldn't be helped.

Then the lights flipped on inside the theatre and she froze. Sebastian stealthily slipped from beneath her skirts and came up holding a pair of glasses.

"Here you go, my dear, I found your glasses."

She knew she was blushing fiercely, but there was nothing to be done about that. She opened the fan dangling from her wrist and popped it open to wave it in front of her face. Perhaps any onlookers would simply think she'd overheated.

She should be angry with him, but the truth of the matter was she felt nothing but pleasure and amusement at his antics. Perhaps she had the right temperament to be a mistress after all.

One glance at the wicked man next to her and her body heated all over again. He was watching her, his blue eyes nearly black with desire. Her gaze lowered to the front of his trousers. Even in his current seated position, she could see the pronounced urge hidden within. He had his fingers at his mouth and he was methodically licking them clean.

She swallowed, then licked her lips.

“You are a wicked man,” she said.

“Oh, little dove, you have no idea.” He leaned a little closer. “What I’d like to do is bend you over the railing of this box and pound into you from behind. I don’t care who watches. I’m so bloody hard for you right now I’m close to making a mess in my trousers.” His face hardened and he nearly looked angry. “I do not ever lose control. But the taste of your sweet cunny drives me to near madness.”

His words produced a fresh wave of moisture to her core. And she found she didn’t want to wait any longer for him to be inside her. She forced herself to wait until the intermission ended and the theatre fell dark once again.

“I believe I’ve come down with a headache. Perhaps we could leave early. I suspect the nice dark confines of the carriage will be more pleasurable for me at the moment.”

He swore, then stood and faced her while he readjusted his pants to better conceal his arousal. Then he held his arm out to her. “I’m sorry you’re feeling unwell.”

They did not speak again until they were enclosed inside her carriage. He’d barely sat on the bench seat before he’d pull her into his lap. Straddling him proved momentarily challenging because of her dress, but he was able to shift her skirts in a way that nestled her against the hard ridge at the front of his trousers.

She bucked against him, trying to alleviate some of the pressure in her core.

“I’m taking you back to my townhome. I’m going to fuck you on every surface I can.”

Agatha sucked in a breath. “So very wicked,” she whispered.

He bucked against her effectively rubbing himself where she needed him most. “I don’t hear you objecting.”

That, she couldn’t deny. He kissed her then. Long, and deep and slow. A kiss that seemed to make promises she knew that neither of them could keep. This, what they had, wasn’t going to last. They were a comet, burning bright. Hot and fast, then disappearing without even a streak across the sky.

Though Agatha couldn’t ignore that tiny voice that warned her repeatedly that this—that he—could leave a lasting and significant scar on her heart.

The truth was she couldn’t afford to worry about such matters. Whether or not her heart was broken at the end of their tryst didn’t change anything about where she was right now. He was providing her with skills she’d need to know if she wanted to take control of her future. This was the only way she could claim any power over her life. And it didn’t matter that the thought of another man touching her the way Sebastian did made her want to run away to a nunnery.

She’d have to rely on the things that Felicity shared with her. Presumably, Agatha would be able to fall a little in love with every man she made an arrangement with. It certainly hadn’t been hard to fall for Sebastian.

She could do this. In the meantime she would enjoy the things that Sebastian could teach her about her body and about men’s bodies. She would absorb that and all the pleasure he brought her because there was no guarantee that any other man could illicit such feelings in her.

His big palm cupping her breast broke her out of her thoughts. She arched into his touch. His lips left hers and trailed down her throat until he reached the cleavage

peeking at the top of her gown. He nibbled on the tender flesh here.

“How do you want me to take you first?”

She cleared her throat and tried to concentrate on his words enough so that she could answer him. It was challenging though because his mouth anywhere on her body made her brain lose focus. “I think I’d like to try the position you mentioned in the theatre.”

“You want me to bend you over something and take you from behind? Is that what you want, little dove?”

His words painted a vivid picture in her mind and she whimpered. “Yes.”

“I should like to do that very much. Grip onto these wide hips.” He did so then with her still on his lap, his fingertips digging into her dress-covered flesh. “I believe I’d like that view. Watching your plump arse jiggle as I push in and out of you.”

The carriage rolled to a stop and he assisted her down from the rig. His townhome was large and not all that far from Violet’s.

“Do you live here alone?” she found herself asking.

“My brother and I share the home. He has one wing and I have the other. That way we don’t get in each other’s way. We keep very different hours. My job keeps me up at all hours of the night, while Spencer, being an artist, prefers to work during the daytime so he can make usage of the lighting from the sun.”

“He’s an artist?”

“Indeed. A member of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. We’re very different to have

shared a womb.”

She laughed at his jest. He led her through the front door and into a room off the pain corridor.

“This is my study.” His hand gripped the thick arousal still visibly pressed against the front of his trousers. He glanced around the room. “I’m trying to decide if I shall bend you over my desk or that settee.” He nodded to the brocade settee near the bookshelf. It would be a good height, she thought.

“But first, I want you completely undressed. I want to see every creamy inch of you bared to me.” He approached her and spun her around to face away from him. His tongue clicked against his teeth. “Always with the buttons.”

Her face heated and pleasure swarmed her. Admittedly she’d selected this very dress because of all the buttons along her spine—from neck to waist—a tight line of tiny pearled fastenings. Her breath grew more rapid with each one he slipped from its confines.

This woman and her rows of tiny buttons would be the death of him. Normally he was quite patient, but with Agatha, he found himself wanting to get her naked and keep her that way so he could rut her anytime then need took hold. Which he knew would be often. What was it about this woman that had him so twisted into knots?

Perhaps it was her innocence with all things carnal. She was a proverbial blank slate. He'd avoided virginal women his entire life, assuming they'd be tedious in bed, simpering and tearful. But Agatha was wide-eyed and passionate and held an adventurous spirit that matched his own.

He was half tempted to make her his own mistress. Be damned about this plan of hers. He had plenty of money to keep her clothed in pretty gowns. Then he could slake his need for her.

His slid her current gown off her shoulders, then methodically unlaced her corset, removed her chemise and drawers. He left her garters and stockings because the sight of her wearing only that stole his breath. Her wide hips accented the dip of her waist. And the rounded plumpness of her arse made him want to fall to knees and bite into that perfect flesh.

Instead he ran a single finger down from the back of her neck all the way to the top of her crease.

“Where to take you. Christ, Buttons, you look perfect standing there like that.”

She glanced over her shoulder at him, all dark hair and pale skin with those vibrant green eyes staring back at him. He needed inside her now. His patience was gone.

He tore off his jacket and tossed it onto one of the chairs, then unbuttoned his shirt. He removed that as well, but only bothered unfastening his trousers before he led her to the desk and bent her over, pressing her breasts and face to the polished mahogany surface.

His cock was already weeping for her and he slid his hand up his length.

“Spread your legs, Agatha.” He ran his cock through her slick folds, wetting himself on her arousal. She arched her back and pushed back towards him. He continued to move himself through her folds, not breaching her entrance just yet. The sight of her puckered hole made his teeth clench. He rubbed a thumb over that part of her and she stilled.

“Men will want to take you here. They’ll try because it’s so tight and there’s no worry about pregnancy” He’d seen too many of the women that were in his mom’s employ get injuries because the man didn’t take the time to properly ready her. He chose to not identify the motives of why he’d warned Agatha from such a thing. “Don’t let them. Do you hear me?”

She nodded, but said nothing.

He watched his cock disappear, inch-by-inch inside her, until he was finally seated. Her hot, wet channel gripped him so tightly. Her palms spread wider on the surface of his desk, her fingers flexing and he began to thrust inside her. His hands squeezed her hips as he pumped into her. Her fleshy backside jiggled with every moment.

It was the perfect view.

“Damnation, you feel so good. Can you feel how deep I am inside you with this position?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

“Feel good?” he asked.

“So good.”

Thank Christ because he wasn’t certain what he would have done had she said no. He moved one hand off her hips and rubbed it down the middle of her back. Still he thrust in and out of her. The room filled with the sound of their flesh slapping together and their moans.

“Sebastian, oh, oh. Don’t stop, please don’t stop.” She rocked her body back into his with every push. The inner walls of her pussy tightened, and then she cried out. Her cunny squeezed his cock so tight as she climaxed around him and he had to concentrate to not come with her.

When she finally went boneless beneath him, he pulled out and picked her up and flipped her over so that her back was on his desk. He bent one of her legs and placed her foot firmly on the desktop, then he grabbed her other leg and straightened it up against his chest. He nipped at the tender skin her ankle. Then he thrust inside her again from this position.

God, he’d never get tired of the way it felt to be inside her. That should alarm him, but he was too aroused, too much in the moment to worry about anything but finding his own release.

He put one hand at the top of her mound and slid his thumb next to her hidden nub so that with every thrust, he’d tease that bundle of nerves.

Her eyes widened as he fucked her and he found he very much liked watching her face and her breasts bounce as he thrust in and out of her. Her hands slipped up to grab her own breasts and tweak her nipples.

“You like that, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“I like it too. You look so beautiful playing with your nipples like that. So damned beautiful.” He was getting too close and he needed her to climax again so he took another finger and rolled it over her clitoris. Her mouth opened and she exploded around him, her body shaking as waves of pleasure shot through her.

He wanted, more than anything, to stay right where he was and empty his seed inside. But he never did that. He would not make bastards like his father had. So he forced himself to pull out of her. Then he gripped himself and moved his hand over his cock until he poured his seed all over her stomach.

Agatha marveled at what had become of her life over the last two weeks. She had not slept a night without Sebastian in nearly that entire time. Most nights he'd come to her—or send for her—and he'd ravish her until they were both boneless and sated. Then he'd pull her body close and they'd sleep.

She knew when he decided she had learned enough—when he bored of her—her heart would shatter. But she'd decided that Mr. Tennyson was right and it was better to have loved and lost than to have never known love. She did too. She loved Sebastian with every part of her.

Last night he'd come to her bed and they hadn't made love, he'd simply held her. He'd been gone this morning when she woke, She'd missed seeing his cranky, sleepy face, as he complained about the brightness of the sun and the speed with which dawn came.

“Mind if I join you?” Violet asked before lowering herself into a chair.

“Of course not, this is your home.”

“It is your home too for as long as you want it to be.”

She smiled, but didn't say anything. She would love to stay here and for Sebastian to keep calling on her, but she knew their time was limited.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Violet asked.

“I’ve fallen in love with him,” she said.

“I feared as much. How do you feel about that?”

Agatha released a watery laugh. “Conflicted. He’s amazing. Truly. But I know this won’t last forever. I know that up here.” She tapped on the side of her head. “In here though,” she pressed her palm against her heart. “In here I imagine all of the ways he’ll confess his undying love for me too and we’ll be together forever. I am a fool.”

Violet reached over and squeezed Agatha’s knee. “No, you are not a fool. Love is never wasted. Loving him has changed you. Being loved by you has no doubt changed him. There is no foolishness there. And you never know how things will end up. I’ve seen the way he looks at you, Aggie, he very much looks like a man in love.”

Agatha snorted. “I doubt that very much. You’ve seen him. He could have any woman he wanted.”

“Perhaps. But perhaps not. You are forgetting he is a bastard. One of the Notorious Bastards, no less. He has been judged and ridiculed for that his entire life.”

“My lord, you cannot simply barge in—” the butler called from out in the hall.

Then the parlor door swung open to reveal the Duke of Lancaster.

“Can I not leave town for a fortnight without learning that my betrothed has begun a relationship with one of my bastard sons?” he boomed.

“Oh, dear,” Violet said.

The duke entered the room and glared at Violet. “Privacy with my soon-to-be-bride, if you will.”

Violet didn't move. "I will not. I don't care who you are or what your title is, this is my home and I will occupy whatever room I wish. Furthermore, Agatha is not your betrothed and I don't like the tone in which you're speaking to her. So I believe I shall stay right where I am." She crossed her arms over her chest for good measure.

"Insolent," the duke muttered. Then he turned his ire back to Agatha. "I hope you realize that whatever promises he made to you mean nothing. He is doing this merely to annoy me. I do not publicly claim him and it's always angered him. His brother doesn't seem to care one way or another. But Sebastian," he practically spat the name. "You would shame me in such a way?"

But Agatha couldn't even bother to be embarrassed, she was still reeling from the news that this was Sebastian's father. She felt sick. He'd used her and she'd fallen for him like a brainless twit.

"I will still marry you, but we need to secure a special license and marry immediately to salvage this situation."

Agatha said nothing. Just sat feeling hollow and undone. She took a shaky breath, then came to her feet. "If you're excuse me, my lord, I'm suddenly not feeling well. I believe I need to retire to my bedchamber and lie down."

She left the duke sputtering about her audacity and climbed the stairs. Somehow she made it into her room, then went to stand next to the bed. She picked up the pillow where Sebastian had slept and brought it to her nose, inhaling deeply. The masculine scent of him lingered.

All this time she'd thought he agreed to tutor her out of the goodness of his heart, when in reality he'd been playing a game of revenge. She'd been nothing more than a pawn on his chessboard.

Sebastian sat on the settee in his study considering his options. He couldn't look anywhere in this room or his bedchamber and not think of her. She was imprinted on every surface. She was imprinted on his very soul.

He sighed heavily. He needed to tell Agatha the truth. She needed to know his connection with her would-be suitor. The thought of her ending up in that arsehole's bed made Sebastian want to burn all of London to the ground.

"You're so glum, my darling, his mother said. Whatever is the matter with my beautiful boy?"

He stared up at his mother. She was a force, this woman. She'd found herself penniless and pregnant with twins, the father unwilling to marry her because she came from a merchant father and an actress mother. So she had done what she could to provide a life for her boys. She'd created a safe haven for women where they had access to food and shelter, but also medical care. Yes, she'd been a whore, probably still considered herself one, but all Sebastian saw when he looked at her was love. She had done everything for him and Spencer. That was the true measure of her character.

"Oh dear," his mother said, then she took a seat next to him on the settee. "You love her."

He met his mother's gaze, so similar to his own. "I believe I do. I don't know how it happened."

“You don’t need to know how. The reality is that you love her. Now what you going to do about it?”

“I need to talk to her. Tell her the truth about who my father is. Tell her how I feel. And let her decide. I know I’m not good enough for her, though.”

“Bollucks!” She smacked him on the back of his head. “You are just as deserving of love as she is.”

“Mr. St. Claire, I’m afraid you have a visitor,” the butler said.

“Send her in,” he said, then came to his feet and waited for Agatha to breach the doorway. Instead Violet entered the room.

“My apologies to visit you at your home, Sebastian, but something has happened and I thought you should know about it straight away.”

He led her to a chair. All the while his heart thundered in his chest. “Is she harmed in anyway? I can go to her.”

Violet shook her head. “The duke came to my house earlier today to visit her. He was angry about her...association with you. Claimed you were using her as some form of revenge.”

“Son of a bitch!” he swore.

“Indeed,” his mother said. “What I saw in that man, I will never know. Well, that’s not true, it was his damned pretty face and his rather large?—”

“Mother!” Sebastian snapped. “Where is she now?”

“Her parents sent for her, they wanted to speak to her immediately. The duke

mentioned something about a special license. I think they're going to force her to marry him."

Anger heated his blood, spreading fire through his veins. He wanted to wrap his hands around that arrogant prig's neck and squeeze.

"He would have to see an archbishop for that kind of license," his mother said. "I'll send a messenger with some inquiries." She hurried out of the room.

"She loves you, Sebastian," Violet said.

"My mother? Yes, she is a good woman."

Violet chuckled. "No, you daft, beautiful man, I meant Agatha. She is in love with you."

"Are you certain?"

"She told me herself. I am assuming you love her as well?"

"More than air itself. She is my only need." He rubbed a hand across his chest, trying to alleviate the aching. "I will crave her until my last breath."

"Then we must find her before she ends up being your new step-mother," Violet said.

"That is not amusing."

Violet grinned at him. "It was humorous in a small measure."

He rolled his eyes. "Shall we?"

"Yes, my carriage is waiting outside."

It took them nearly an hour to finally track Agatha and the duke down. Her parents had, indeed, planned to marry her off to the duke today. Sebastian just hoped, as he stormed up the steps to the church, that he wasn't too late. Even if he was, he'd steal her away. They could go anywhere and be together.

"Sebastian!" Agatha said when he slammed open the church doors. "You found me?"

Immediately he went to her, pulling her into his arms.

"You cannot be here!" a woman screeched. He assumed she was Agatha's mother, but he paid her no mind.

"Anything to get back at me, is that what this is, Sebastian? You knew I wanted her for my wife and you seduced her right out from under my nose," the duke hissed his words.

"This has nothing to do with you," Sebastian said. He moved Agatha so she was behind him, putting himself in between her and his father. "I don't ever give you a second thought, let alone devise some plan to get revenge. Get revenge for what? Not having your name? You not claiming me and Spencer in public? I have news for you, Father," he spat the last word. "You mean nothing to me. I don't need, nor want anything you have."

"Then you won't mind if I marry the chit," the duke said.

"I very much mind. But what I'd really like to know is why her? I see her worth, but I know you've not even looked close enough to notice. So what did her parents promise you in return if you married her?" He stared at the duke, then eyed Agatha's parents. "I'm assuming the two of you were looking for better invitations to balls and soirees and sought him out for that. But what did you offer him to take your widowed daughter off your hands?"

Her father cleared his throat. “There is a small patch of land we own in Devonshire. It backs up to his lordship’s property and he wants the entire plot. Something about underground resources.”

“He wants to expand his silver mines,” Sebastian explained. “Agatha is mine. Find another woman if you’re so desperate for a wife.”

“You are doing everything you can to live up the name of being a bastard, aren’t you?” the duke asked.

“I would rather be a bastard than have you publicly known as my father.” He glared at her parents. “I’ll send you her new address in a week. You can call on her then, if and only if, she wishes to speak with you.” Then he grabbed Agatha’s hand and pulled her straight out of the church.

Once the stepped outside in the crisp London air, he cradled her face. “I love you, little dove. I don’t want you to be a mistress. I want you to be my wife.”

She smiled through her tears and nodded. “Yes, I want that very much. I love you too.”

Violet gave them a ride back to Sebastian’s townhome, the women giggling and laughing the entire drive.

“You know you’re always welcome at my house if this one starts to grate on your nerves,” Violet said.

Agatha’s bubble of laughter was like a balm to his soul. He’d nearly lost her.

He carried her straight to bed where they stayed for nearly two days. And every time he released inside of her, knowing—and perhaps wishing—there was a chance of a baby.