

A man and a woman in period clothing are shown in a romantic pose, about to kiss. The man is on the left, leaning towards the woman on the right. They are outdoors, with a stone building and trees in the background. The woman is wearing a red dress and white gloves, and the man is wearing a white shirt and dark vest.

Timeless Kisses

**Sabrina York
Bronwen Evans
Julie Johnstone
Tammy Andresen
Monica Burns
Gina Conkle
Shana Galen
Vanessa Kelly
Amanda Mariel
Meara Platt**

A collection of kisses because...

*You never forget your
first kiss.*

Timeless Kisses

Excerpts by

Sabrina York

Julie Johnstone

Bronwen Evans

Tammy Andresen

Monica Burns

Gina Conkle

Shana Galen

Vanessa Kelly

Amanda Mariel

and Meara Platt

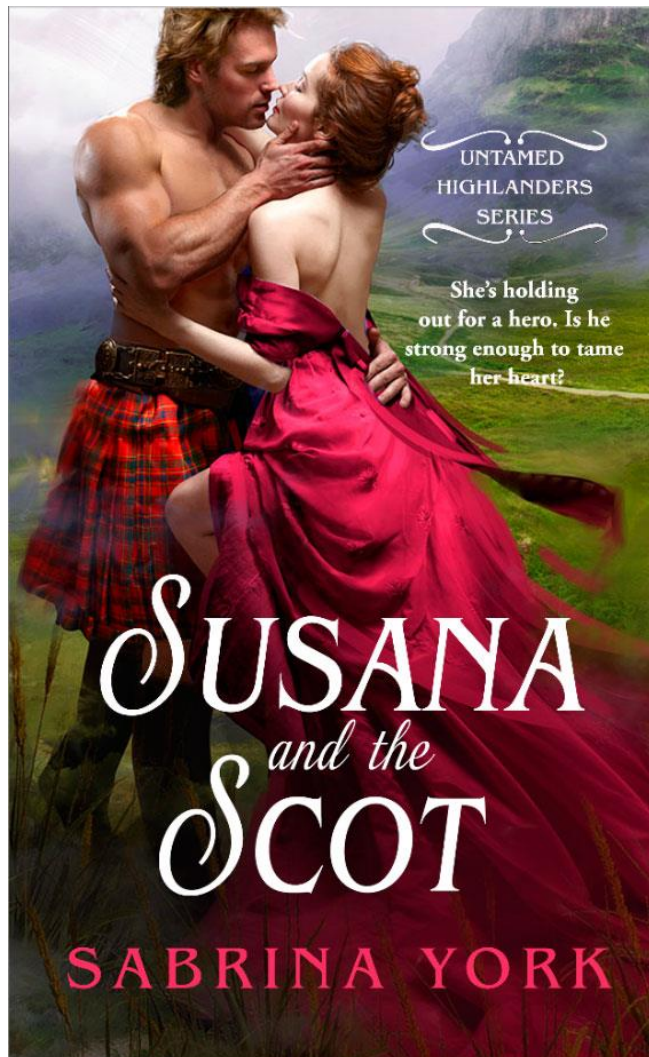
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Cover Design: Tammy Andresen

Kathi B. Scearce DBA Monica Burns – Maroli SP Imprints
P.O. Box 75072
North Chesterfield, VA 23236

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A SCANDALOUS TEMPTATION

Andrew Lochlannach is famous for his conquests, on and off the battlefield. When a fellow warrior challenges him to a kissing contest, he wastes no time in planting his lips on ninety-nine lovely lasses-an impressive feat of seduction that gets him banished to the hinterlands. Still, Andrew has no regrets about his exploits-especially his embrace with the most beguiling woman he's ever met...

AN UNDENIABLE PASSION

With flaming red hair and a temper to match, Susana is not some innocent farm girl who gives herself over easily to a man, even one as ruggedly handsome as Andrew. The wicked Scot may have won a kiss from the headstrong beauty in a moment of mutual desire, but Susana refuses

to be just another one of his conquests. Andrew must convince the fiery lass that even though he is not playing a game, losing her is not an option...

Susana and the Scot

by Sabrina York

The First Kiss

Susana's eyes flared as Andrew advanced on her, like a skulking fox that had spotted a plump rabbit. She didn't mean to retreat, but she had to. She'd seen that expression in his eyes before and she knew what it meant. Something within her howled: Run.

Perhaps it was the expression in his eyes, or the knowledge that she was playing with fire, or the sudden realization that she'd foolishly come here, to this deserted loft with the most dangerous man she'd ever met, but she couldn't still the urge to whirl and pace to the far end of the room to peer out of the smudged window. She was aware he followed. She felt his presence like a fire in a forge.

Desperation prompted her to continue their conversation, to put some space between them, to raise a shield. "The room is perfectly habitable," she proclaimed. "And once we have pallets brought in, it will serve you well."

"Will it?"

His voice was low in her ear, a whisper almost. And far too close. She wanted to turn, to confront him, but she knew, if she did, they would be face to face, perhaps lip to lip and she could not allow that. She could never allow that.

The last time he'd kissed her, it had been her undoing.

A pity he didn't remember.

"My men willna like being housed with the dogs." Holy God. Was that his hand on her hip? His thumb tracing her waist? "Nae doubt they will all want to find...other beds to welcome them."

Susana stilled as his words sank in. The threat was clear. And it was rather horrifying. A horde of randy warriors set loose on the innocent maidens of Dounreay? That his hand had slid over to toy with the small of her back, to tangle in the skeins of her hair, didn't help.

Her pulse thudded and her knees went weak. She couldn't have it. She couldn't have this man touching her. She sucked in a breath and slipped to the side, out of his grasp. When she was far enough away for some measure of safety, she turned to face him, a reproachful look fixed on her face. "Are your men so lacking in discipline?" She hoped her frown, her reproofing tone, would bring him to heel. She should have known better.

He grinned and stepped closer. His eyes glinted, as though needling her was an amusing sport. "They are verra disciplined...when their needs are met."

She crossed her arms, as though that could protect her, and pretended to study the room. Pretended she wasn't aware of his thrumming presence, his heat, his intent. "Well, I shall hold you responsible for any...improprieties." She took a step toward the staircase, only a tiny one—surely not an attempt to escape.

He chuckled—chuckled, the bastard—making it clear he recognized her cowardice for what it was. And he paced her.

“They’re all good men. They all volunteered to come with me. Each and every one of them is dedicated to the cause of protecting Reay from the villains who have been plaguing you. However...”

The way he trailed off derailed her retreat. She stilled. Glared at him. “However, what?”

“However, they do have...needs. Surely you can find better lodgings.”

She blew out a breath. “In time.” In time.

In time, he would be gone, God willing.

He stepped toward her again, although nonchalantly, as though he were not chasing her across the room. It occurred to her they were engaged in something of a macabre dance. It set her nerves on edge. She hadn’t realized what a long room this was, or how far it was to the stairs.

“Doona leave it too long.” His smile was heinous. It made all kinds of shivers dance over her skin. “My men are...restless.” She had the chilling sense he was talking about himself.

“I shall...do my best.” Like hell. “And now, if you will excuse me, I have things to do.”

His brow quirked. She tried not to notice what a perfect brow it was. “Ah, but I thought you and I could...talk.”

“Talk?” She didn’t intend to squawk, but she could tell from his predatory stance, a conversation was not the primary urge on his mind. At least, not one with words.

He nodded. Though his features were patently earnest, the sincerity was patently affected. “About the defenses you have in place...so I can decide what needs improvement.”

Aggravation rippled. It displaced her concerns about being here, with him, all alone. Fury did that, she'd often found. Overrode common sense and led one into dangerous waters. Her hands curled into fists. She strode toward him until they were nearly nose to nose. "Nothing needs improvement," she snapped. They didn't need him. Or his men. Or his stupid ideas.

"Nonsense. Now that we're here, we intend to make a statement to Stafford, or whatever miscreants are lurking out there thinking Dounreay is an easy target. But before I set my plans in motion—"

"Your plans?" He already had plans? Och! He was so exasperating.

She barely noticed that he stepped closer...until their chests brushed. He was hard and hot; the touch made her tingle. His voice, low and luring made her tingle as well. His gaze skated over her face, then stalled on her lips. "Let's meet and discuss—"

Her pulse skittered. "I doona have time to meet with you. Not today." She took a step back. He followed.

"Nae?" A whisper. And his caress over her shoulder, that was a whisper as well. Like a panicked fawn, Susana eased back again. And again. He matched her, step for step. She swallowed heavily. "I... You have descended upon us with no warning—"

"My brother sent a letter."

He was too close. Far too close. She swallowed heavily. "Twenty-five men that now need to be housed and fed. On top of that, I have many other duties that need attending."

He cocked his head to the side. "Which duties?"

“Many duties.” She frowned and glanced toward the staircase. Ah, lord. It was so far... He was too warm. Too broad. Too alluring. Though she didn’t intend to, she took another step back and—

Oh hell. He’d backed her against the wall. That he couldn’t stand straight in the low-ceilinged room was a small consolation.

“Susana,” he said as he leaned closer. His breath was a tantalizing trail over her face.

An unholy thrill snaked through her. Surely that wasn’t anticipation? Hunger? Need?

She could not allow him to kiss her. She could not—

Her knees nearly melted at the touch of his lips. His warmth, his taste, his scent made her mind whirl. Thank God he had his hands on her waist and was holding her steady, or she might well have collapsed.

It occurred to her that she should push him away, fight him, but she couldn’t. Something, something deep within her resisted. Something deep within her needed him. Needed this.

And ah, it was glorious. As glorious as she remembered.

His lips were soft, gentle, questing as they tested hers and then, with a groan, he pulled her closer, melding their bodies together. He deepened the kiss, sealing his mouth over hers and dancing his tongue over the seam.

She opened to him. She couldn’t resist. He filled her senses with his presence, his heat. With tiny nibbles, sucks and laps, he consumed her, enflamed her. All sanity fled. All logic and resolution and anger flitted away as Andrew tasted her, tempted her.

His hands were not still. They roved over her body from her shoulders, down her arms to her waist. They tangled in her hair and stroked her cheek and chin.

Heat blossomed, skittered through her veins. Her body softened, melted, prepared for him.

She should not have responded the way she did. She should not have pressed against him, rubbed against the hard bulge on his belly. She should not have explored the hard flesh of his back, cupped his nape, raked his silken scalp. She should not have moaned.

Surely all these things would only encourage him.

He lifted his head and stared at her, an odd mixture of befuddlement and awe in his eyes. His tongue peeped out and dabbed at his lips, snagging her attention. Surely she didn't lean toward him in a mute plea for more.

Was she truly so weak?

Aye. She was.

Purchase *Susana and the Scot* for [iBooks](#)

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About Sabrina

Her Royal Hotness, Sabrina York, is the New York Times and USA Today Bestselling author of hot, humorous stories for smart and sexy readers. Her [titles](#) range from sweet & sexy to scorching romance. Visit her webpage at www.sabrinayork.com to check out her books,

excerpts and contests. Get updates and alerts from Sabrina here: [HotSheet Sign Up: http://eepurl.com/bj8tKb](http://eepurl.com/bj8tKb)

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT SABRINA YORK'S UNTAMED HIGHLANDERS

Bold and steamy—Publisher's Weekly

A stunning tale from beginning to end—Love, Life and Booklust

Top Pick—Night Owl Reviews

York turns her talent for sizzle to men in kilts—and the women who love them—in her newest sexy romp—RT Magazine

Untamed Highlanders Series

Hannah and the Highlander

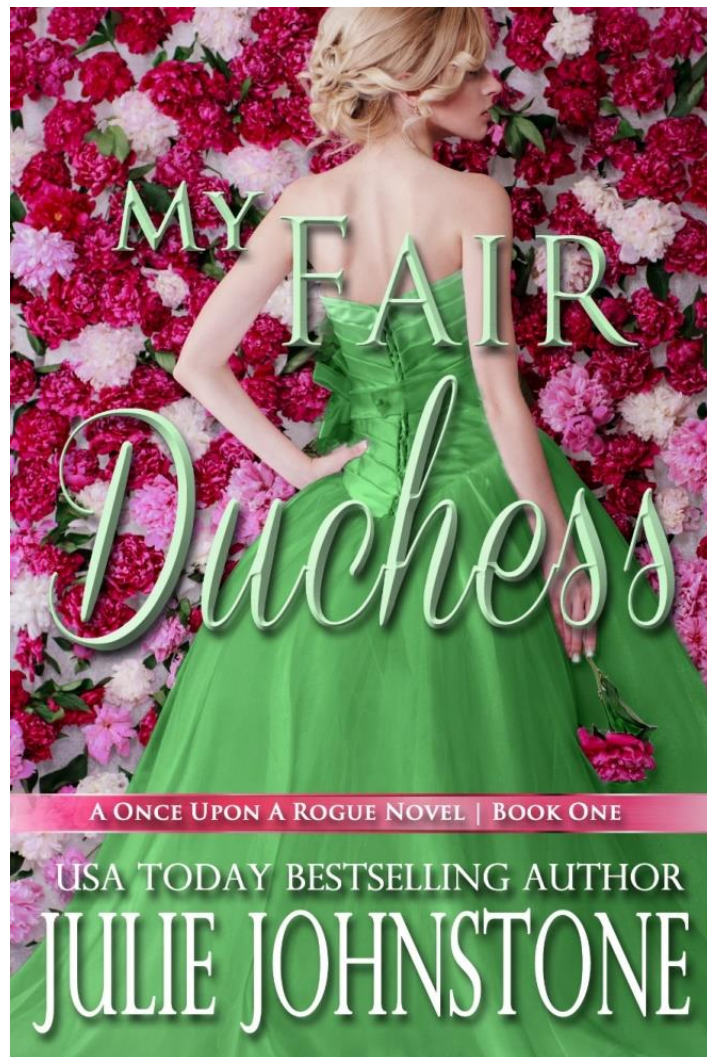
Susana and the Scot

Lana and the Laird—Coming in May 2016

Want More Highlanders by Sabrina York?

Laird of her Heart--Highland Time Travel

Tarnished Honor--Waterloo Heroes Romance



After years of playing the rogue to hide a dark family secret, the Duke of Aversley feels tainted beyond redemption and cynical beyond repair. Never does he imagine hope will come in the form of a quirky, quick-witted lady determined to win the heart of another aristocrat.

Thanks to a painfully awkward past, Lady Amelia De Vere long ago relinquished the notion she was a flower that had yet to blossom. But when her family faces financial ruin and the man she has always loved is on the verge of marrying another, she'll try anything to transform herself to capture her childhood love and save her family—including agreeing to participate in a bet between her brother and the notorious, dangerously handsome Duke Of Aversley.

Bound by the bet, Amelia and Aversley discover unexpected understanding and passion beyond their wildest dreams, if only they can let go of their pride, put trust in each other and chance losing their hearts.

This is book one in the Regency Romance series *Once Upon a Rogue*.

My Fair Duchess

by Julie Johnstone

The First Kiss

Amelia watched as Colin stalked Charles all the way to the door. Colin's back was to her, and for a moment, she feared he might simply leave her standing there without saying a word. Very quietly, he shut the door and turned to her. His face had taken on the look of a marble effigy. He paused in front of her, a grim smile spreading across his lips. "Very well played, Amelia."

She frowned at him. "What?"

"You will have an offer for your hand from him in no time. I could not have planned it better had I thought of it. Leaving the ballroom was a brilliant stroke. I suppose you knew he had been watching you and would follow."

Her stomach twisted into a tight coil. Colin thought she had planned this to get Charles alone? To what? Tease him, make him jealous? Sadness filled her. Of course, he would think such a thing because he believed women were inherently wicked, and well, because she had

inadvertently nourished that conviction by agreeing to be part of that stupid wager. "No, Colin, I—"

He pressed a finger to her lips. "There's no use denying it. I saw how you were looking at him."

"How was I looking at him?"

"With longing. And triumph."

Good heavens, the man was jaded and completely wrong and would never believe her if she told him so. What to do? She sucked her lower lip between her teeth and raced through possible options, discarding them as quickly as she had thought of them. The only thing to do was to turn the tables on him.

She cared for him, and the only way she knew to possibly get through to him was to show him, beyond any doubt in his distrustful mind and wounded heart, that she was never going to hurt him. And that if he would let her, she could love him with all her heart if only he would give her his. Yet, to accomplish her goal she needed him to see that even if she had a hundred marriage offers from a hundred dukes just as lofty as he was or even more so, she would want him. Only him. Always him.

"Kiss me, Colin," she demanded, making her first move in a plan that was sketchy at best.

"Kiss you? What for? Your prey has flown the coop."

Her cheeks heated, but she forced herself to speak. "I need to practice in case Charles and I become betrothed. I wouldn't want him to cry off because I didn't entice him."

"He wouldn't dare," Colin growled. "You need no practice."

She purposely licked her lips, feeling foolish but pushing forward. His suddenly bulging jaw muscles made her want to cheer in victory. She was getting to him, even if only to his baser side. For now, that would have to do. War was often won with small maneuvers, and softening Colin's heart certainly felt like combat. "You promised to transform me," she continued, knowing that would get to him. The man was honorable, whether he liked it or not.

"One kiss," he said in a stern tone.

"Yes. Just one."

"I find you impossible to resist," he muttered.

She bit her cheek to keep from grinning and forced herself to stay silent.

Grunting, he crooked his finger at her. "Come here."

Suddenly, her legs trembled and her heart beat wildly. She judged the distance between the two of them. It was three steps at the most. Could she make it? She'd never experienced anything like the giddy anticipation racing through her that was leaving her this weak.

A devilish smile played at his lips. "Changed your mind, have you?"

With that, she moved toward him on legs like jelly. His dark, glittering gaze met hers, and her heart turned over in response. He slipped his hands up her arms and brought her closer to him, until her chest brushed his, and she inhaled harshly at the contact. His breath rang in her ears, sharp and uneven. The dual pressures of his warm hands coming to the small of her back and the base of her skull sent a shiver through her. With shaking limbs, she clung to him, having no desire to escape his embrace.

He leaned near, and his lips touched hers like a feather being dragged gently over her skin. "Amelia." Her name was a groan of need from his mouth.

Deep within her, raw ache sprang to life and took her breath away. Unable to form words, she twined her hands in his hair and dragged his lips to hers, a silent plea that he fulfill his promise. His lips captured hers once more, demanding this time, and devouring the little bit of self-control she had left. Their tongues met and swirled in a tangle of urgency and longing.

The pressure on her back increased until he crushed her to him so that she felt the savage beating of his heart. Her head rang with the sound until the beat of her own heart took up with his and the world seemed to slip away. She skimmed her hands down his neck, over his shoulders and the muscular planes of his back, just to press her fingertips against his hard body.

His mouth left hers and moved with rapid-fire precision down her neck and to the skin of her chest exposed by her low-cut gown. Every place he touched burned, and when his tongue flicked out to trace across the top slope of one breast and then the other, she moaned deep in her throat.

A loud knock yanked her back to the library and her insufficient senses. Luckily, Colin seemed fully aware of the scandal of which they were on the verge. Before she had even blinked, he was across the room and behind the settee as a voice called out, "Aversley, are you in there?"

Purchase My Fair Duchess for [iBooks](#)

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About Julie

Julie Johnstone is a USA TODAY best-selling author of Regency Romance, Victorian Romance, and Scottish Medieval Romance. She is also the author of an urban fantasy/paranormal romance book. She's been a voracious reader of books since she was a young girl. Her mother would tell you that as a child Julie had a rich fantasy life made up of many different make believe friends. As an adult, Julie is one of the lucky few who can say she is living the dream by working with her passion of creating worlds from her imagination. When Julie is not writing she is chasing her two precocious children around, cooking, reading or exercising. Julie loves to hear from her readers. You can find Julie at these places:

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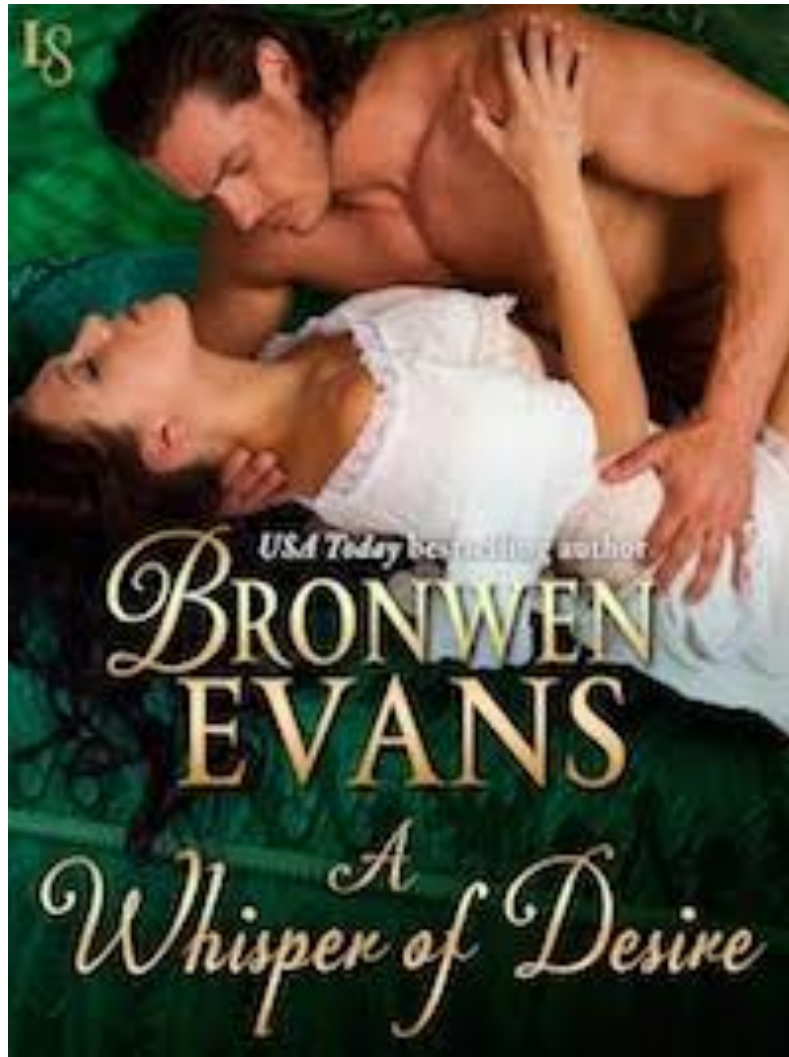
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Sensual heat melts the ice in the new Disgraced Lords novel from USA Today bestselling author Bronwen Evans, as a marriage of convenience leads to delightful pleasure—and mortal danger.

Lady Marisa Hawkestone's nightmare is just beginning when she wakes up naked, with no memory of the night before, lying next to Maitland Spencer, the Duke of Lyttleton—a man so aloof and rational he's nicknamed "the Cold Duke." A scandal ensues, in which Marisa's beloved beau deserts her. As a compromised woman, Marisa agrees to marry Maitland. But on her wedding night, Marisa discovers the one place the duke shows emotion: in the bedroom, where the man positively scorches the sheets.

Taught from a young age to take duty seriously, Maitland cannot understand his new wife's demands on his love and affection. Marisa's hot-blooded spirit, however, does have its attractions—especially at night. In retrospect, it seems quite silly that he didn't marry sooner. But being one of the Libertine Scholars requires constant vigilance, even more so when the enemy with a grudge against his closest friends targets Marisa. Now Maitland must save the woman who sets his heart aflame—or die trying.

A Whisper of Desire

by Bronwen Evans

The First Kiss

Marisa's feet were beginning to hurt, so she looked around for a place she could sit without being observed and spied a private alcove. She moved toward it while dreaming of becoming Lord Rutherford's wife and learning about passion. Her untutored woman's body warmed with desire just thinking about what it would be like to share a man's bed. To be naked with him. To let him . . . To her horror, instead, Maitland's face flickered in her head.

She put her hands to her heated face and turned, promptly colliding with what felt like a wall of rock. She looked up and her pleasant thoughts vanished. Maitland Spencer, the Cold Duke, gripped her waist to stop her from sliding to the floor. Her hands lay against his chest, granite beneath her fingertips.

"My apologies, Lady Marisa. You should look where you are going."

She'd known His Grace since childhood, and still he referred to her as Lady Marisa, always so formal. She disliked the deep voice void of any emotion, but it still sent shivers down

her spine. Why, after her improper thoughts, did it have to be Maitland, of all men? Anger spiked at the implication she was at fault.

She looked up into features too cold to be thought handsome, yet there was something compelling about him. She studied the strands of dark copper hair cut slightly longer than acceptable—the man did not conform to any of society's dictates. The hint of silver at his temples added to his air of remoteness, not making him look old, merely distinguished. She knew he was the same age as her brother, thirty. He was not smiling. His face in its severity was a conundrum of hard cheekbones and strong jaw, yet his eyes were almost feminine, with long, dark eyelashes highlighting eyes the color of newly cultivated grass after the snow melts. She almost lost herself in their glare.

Suddenly conscious of her hands still resting upon his chest, she pulled back as if burned.

His mouth tightened into a thin line, but his bottom lip hinted at a devastating smile that could change his demeanor if only he had an ounce of fun and flirtation in him. She wondered if he ever smiled. In all the years he'd been coming to see her brother, she'd never seen any joy in his features. There were certainly no "laughter lines" around his eyes.

"Your Grace, always a pleasure." Marisa smiled sweetly at him while wanting to kick him in the shins. "Perhaps you shouldn't sneak up on a lady if you don't wish to have her fall into your arms."

He looked at her thoughtfully, as if assessing her person. She ran a hand over her hair, checking to see if anything was out of place. He continued to gaze down at her with a peculiar look upon his face. "If a woman is as beautiful as you, I don't mind her falling into my arms."

Marisa only just stopped her mouth from gaping open. Never had Maitland ever openly flirted with her; the other Libertine Scholars, her brother's friends, of course had playfully bantered with her, but never Maitland. They were all exceedingly handsome men, and all that attention could go to a girl's head.

Maitland Spencer, the Duke of Lyttleton, had always simply been her older brother's somewhat handsome yet standoffish friend. He'd never shown an ounce of interest in her, or her in him. She looked him over. "Are you ill?"

Perfectly arched eyebrows lowered into a frown. "I'm very well, and you?"

"I'm stunned, actually. You're flirting with me."

"I wasn't flirting. I was merely stating a fact."

Of course he was. Literal was his middle name. "Then perhaps you can unhand me, sir," she said, looking pointedly at his large hands still firmly holding her waist, "unless you *do* have intentions of flirting with me."

To her dismay, he did not take his hands from her; instead, they tightened and pulled her close, and he gently moved her into an alcove, away from prying eyes.

"What if I decided I did want to flirt with you? Perhaps even declare my suit? Don't look surprised, you are one of the most sought-after debutantes this season."

"Has Sebastian put you up to this? There is no need for him to pester me. I know who I will marry, I'm simply waiting for him to ask."

Maitland's eyes roamed her face, stopping at her lips. "A beauty such as you should not have to wait. I would decline him on principle. What would you do if I got down on bended knee here and now?"

Heat flared over her skin. Flustered, she didn't know how to reply. What had come over His Grace tonight?

"I suspect I would think you in your cups, Your Grace. In all the years I have known you, you've never looked at me twice."

He pressed closer. "That's not true, little one. It would have been inappropriate for me to notice you until I knew my mind. I find that tonight I know exactly what I want."

His eyes flared with something she'd swear was heat. Perhaps their dance earlier had affected him as much as it had affected her.

"I'm not for the wanting, so you can stop this silly flirtation."

"I have no need to flirt, little one. When I want a woman she is left in no doubt as to my intentions." His mouth trailed up her neck until he reached her ear. He softly added, "And they rarely deny me."

This wasn't the Maitland she knew and usually ignored. Normally they traded—actually nothing—he was not one to engage in banter, nor tender touches and breathless entreaties. However, this Maitland, this man who held her captive with his presence, was all fire and ice and had her undivided attention.

His seductive words, coupled with the hard body she found herself pressed against, twisted something in her stomach. Her body heated and her pulse raced like a feather tossed by a hurricane. She licked her lips. For one crazy second she wanted to press closer, wanted those velvet lips on hers.

Then sanity returned. She hated how he referred to her as "little one." He'd called her that since her fifteenth birthday. She'd grown tall, taller than most men. She hated her height,

and that was why Rutherford was so perfect: He was taller by several inches. She noted His Grace was taller still. Why did that thought enter her head?

Goodness, if Rutherford found her like this, if anyone found her like this . . .

“Maitland” —she must be flustered; she never referred to His Grace by his first name — “Maitland,” she repeated more firmly, “stop this game at once. You are toying with me and I won’t have it. What would Sebastian think?”

He drew back and she looked into his eyes, and another shiver passed over her at what she saw there. Heat and fire flared, nothing like the iceberg she thought him to be.

“That’s what I am trying to tell you. I’m not toying.” He stroked the upper swell of her breasts with his finger and she gasped. “You *are* very beautiful. You are a woman fit to become my duchess.”

She slapped his hand away while her body betrayed her—her nipples hardened against the silk of her chemise. His touch ignited a yearning she knew well. A yearning she normally associated with Rutherford. What was wrong with her? Why was the stuffy Maitland having this effect on her tonight, of all nights? “I cannot believe you just did that. My brother would skin alive any man who touched me so inappropriately.” She leaned forward to smell his breath. “If I didn’t know better, as I said before, I’d say you were in your cups, yet I cannot smell any liquor on your breath.”

One of his long, elegant fingers touched her peaked nipple through her dress. “The woman does protest too much. Your body recognizes how it could be between us.” He pressed her against the pillar at her back. One hand stroked down her neck while the other continued to

hold her waist. "Have you ever been kissed to the point you lose all sense of right and wrong and you can barely stand?"

What a question! Rutherford had kissed her, but she suspected his kisses were tame in comparison to what Maitland was suggesting. Her knees had never buckled from Rutherford's kisses. He respected her too much to push for more, *unfortunately*.

"Of course I have been kissed," she brazened.

He leaned his inviting lips so close they were almost upon hers. "Liar."

"I do not lie. If I were a man I'd call you out."

"But you're not a man, Marisa. You are very much a woman."

With that he ran the tip of his tongue over her bottom lip. She drew in a deep breath, surprised at her body's sudden, feminine reaction to his words. Her stomach clenched into a tight, silken fist. Never before had the sound of her name from Maitland's lips evoked such overwhelming sensations. Her body hummed with desire. Maybe it was just the way his voice seemed to caress, deepening to a low, dark pitch that was almost dangerous. Maybe it was the sudden glint of need she caught in his eyes that made her wonder how a man with obvious fire in his soul could let the world think he was cold and aloof. How had this powerful man's upbringing shaped his life, and why did she suddenly care?

It was as if a strong ocean tide was pulling at her—she knew she wanted to swim, but she was scared she'd drown in the undertow.

Her mistake was to look into his clear green eyes, for they trapped her with pure heat. Unable to resist, she leaned in and her tongue slipped out to touch his. At the small sigh that unintentionally escaped from her, the normally cool and contained duke disappeared, and with

a groan so filled with longing he pulled her deep into an embrace and his lips firmly but gently took hers in a kiss that was—oh, goodness—so much more than anything she'd ever experienced in her life. It thrilled and frightened her. Frightened her because she was consumed with want and need and hunger . . . and this was Maitland Spencer, the Cold Duke.

“Open, little one,” he commanded in a voice laden with desire, and she did. His tongue swept into her mouth and each relentless stroke was like heaven. She'd never tasted a man before. He tasted of brandy and cheroots, everything addictive to a woman who craved more.

His hands were wrapped tightly in her hair, holding her head exactly right for his invasion. His body pressed her back against the pillar, and she welcomed the cold marble to combat the heat he generated. She felt something hard and long pressing against her stomach; she knew she should be appalled, but his mouth was creating such amazing sensations that she simply pressed closer, wrapping her arms around his neck and whimpering for more.

He gave her more. His tongue thrust deep into her mouth in a dance that demanded she follow. She dueled for dominance, her tongue entering his mouth like a queen at the head of her army. He welcomed the invasion, and another groan echoed deep in his throat as he ground his hardness against her.

This was heaven. She never wanted the kiss to end, and, blast it all to Hades, he was right, for when his clever fingers found her hardened nipple, her knees gave out and she sagged in his arms.

Only then did he break the kiss. There was no gloating in his gaze or upon his features, merely heat, want, and need, surely matching her own.

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About Bronwen

USA Today bestselling author, Bronwen Evans grew up loving books. She writes both historical and contemporary sexy romances for the modern woman who likes intelligent, spirited heroines, and compassionate alpha heroes. Evans is a three-time winner of the RomCon Readers' Crown and has been nominated for an RT Reviewers' Choice Award. She lives in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand with her dogs Brandy and Duke.

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Jessie Walsh is desperate...

A bad marriage has left her in ruins and running for her life. She answers an ad for a Texas cook and nanny. Donning a disguise to hide her identity, Jessie can only pray that she has run far enough.

Jake Tate doesn't need another problem...

He has his hands full with a daughter, a ranch, cowboys, Indians and cattle. But the longer Jessie stays, the more intrigued he becomes. What is this tough woman hiding underneath her large coat and square spectacles?

As passion ignites between them, the real question becomes, how long do they have until Jessie's past threatens to destroy their future?

Midnight Magic

by Tammy Andresen

The magic of the first kiss

Later that evening, Jessie floated in the river her mind desperately seeking the right choice. Her mouth ached to let her secrets tumble from them but her brain held it closed. Jake cared for her but she was certain that he would not once he knew the truth about her past.

She should run. It would keep everyone safe. But for the first time, another choice presented itself. She could fight. She could help Ed Tate put her father-in-law in jail. She had already passed some information to Jake's brother. There was so much more she could share that would be the key to her freedom.

How could she possibly explain all of this to Jake? It would ruin their blossoming feelings. But so would running. She sighed to herself.

At least if she ran he wouldn't know the truth.

A rustle nearby caught her attention and she dipped lower in the water suddenly alert. A shadowy figure caught her attention and she held her breath, trying to be unseen. She

thanked the waning moon for not shedding very much light. She let the water carry her behind some rocks.

"Jessie?" Jake's voice whispered nearby in the darkness.

"What are you doing?" she hissed back. Heat immediately began to rise in her body but he couldn't see her without her clothes. Her secret would be out. Not that he didn't suspect already, but that was different from knowing. Thank goodness she was behind the rocks.

She heard his deep chuckle and her body automatically responded to his baritone. She clenched her teeth and cursed herself.

"I know you come out to swim and I needed to talk to you. I'd say it's about time you let me know what's going on." Jake's voice was not angry but it carried the air of authority that came naturally to him. It let her know he would not accept no for an answer. She heard clothes rustling but she focused on what she would say.

She had her own tools of conversation, however, and she would not reveal more than she should. The sexual tension between them brought out the *old* Jessie who knew how to deal with a man.

She smiled to herself. Apparently being naked in this conversation was an asset. She felt beautiful and she would use those feelings to her advantage. "I am sorry if I worried you." Her husky voice purred.

She heard Jake's slight intake of breath and her smile broadened. "I'm fine honestly." Her voice cajoled and simpered. "Thank you for concern. It's just..." An artful intake of breath let Jake know that she was about to confide in him. She could actually feel him moving closer.

"It was a year ago that we found out my husband was ill and..." She stopped. Lying to Jake made her insides twist and she suddenly hated what she was doing. She never wanted to lie again. But the truth was just too hard.

She hadn't realized how close Jake had gotten until his face was directly in front of hers, a large boulder was the only thing separating their bodies.

"What was his name again?" Jake's voice did not hold the sympathy that it should have and a small frown creased her brow.

"Edward." Her voice was level but she was sensing danger.

"Yes. Edward Walsh." His lips moved closer as he leaned over the rock and he gently placed them on hers. It was a small light kiss but it sent shock waves through her body. He pulled away from her ever so slightly and then kissed her again with more pressure. Several times his lips touched her own, each time with more force until he slanted her mouth open and his tongue gently touched her own.

She heard herself moan unable to control her reaction. Her arms, which had been resting on the rock between them, snaked around his neck.

One of his hands held her face as he kissed her fully and deeply and she felt an intense longing beginning to build. She found herself scooting around the rock to press her body to his.

He ended the kiss before she got there and his hands clasped hers behind his head. The hold kept her from pulling away. Their faces were only an inch apart. "Why were you really jumpy today? Why did Stew leave?"

Jessie blinked several times before she could think but a small smile touched her lips. He was good. She had better give him some version of the truth.

"I told you I am estranged from my father-in-law. I am afraid he is trying to find Liz and Stew went to check if I am being followed."

"That still does not explain your jumpiness. Has he given you some signal that he is following you?" Jessie tried to pull away to get some distance but his hands held tight. He was too good at this. She was losing. Suddenly being naked was making her feel vulnerable instead of powerful.

It was not a sensation she liked. She had played this game many times before only she was always on the other side. She used attraction for manipulation. She pulled away from him again, harder this time. She had to clear her head.

He sensed her move and used her momentum away from the rock, to swing her around the boulder and through the water.

Damn. She thought to herself until their bodies touched. He had taken off his clothes too. Then all thought left her head as he kissed her again. His chest was bare and his skin felt absolutely delicious against her own. He was warm and his muscles were rock hard. She fit against him perfectly. She rubbed her body against his and a shutter travelled through his body. A deep growl escaped his lips.

Jessie smiled under his lips. She wasn't the only one feeling the attraction.

"It has been a long time and I am not inclined to be terribly patient. Why don't you just tell me what is going on with you so we can move on with our relationship." As he said this he trailed kisses down her neck until he reached her breasts.

A groan ripped from Jessie's mouth. "Please understand. I have never felt like this before, if I could tell anyone it would be you but..."

"But what?" He kissed her chest again. She wanted to burst from the pleasure of it.

He put his hands around her waist and murmured. "So tiny."

Her eyes popped open and she pushed away from him. The last of her disguise had fallen away and she suddenly felt very vulnerable.

He reached to pull her back and caught her arms. "I have known for a while that you were hiding under that coat, but I had no idea that you were this tiny." Jake chuckled. "You were smart to keep it secret."

He pulled her closer and then linked his hands around her back. "I haven't forgotten that I came out here to talk..." He stopped his hands running up and down the many scars that crisscrossed her back. "Jesus Christ Jessie! What the hell happened to your back?"

Even in the dark she looked away. Shame rose like bile in her throat. "It's not something I like to talk about. It is too..." She paused for the right word when a scream ripped through the night air.

Purchase *Midnight Magic* for [iBooks](#)

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About Tammy

Tammy Andresen lives with her husband and three children just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. She grew up on the Seacoast of Maine, where she spent countless days dreaming up stories in blueberry fields and among the scrub pines that line the coast. Her mother loved to spin a yarn and Tammy filled many hours listening to her mother retell the classics. It was inevitable that at the age of 18, she headed off to Simmons College, where she

studied English literature and education. She never left Massachusetts but some of her heart still resides in Maine and her family visits often.

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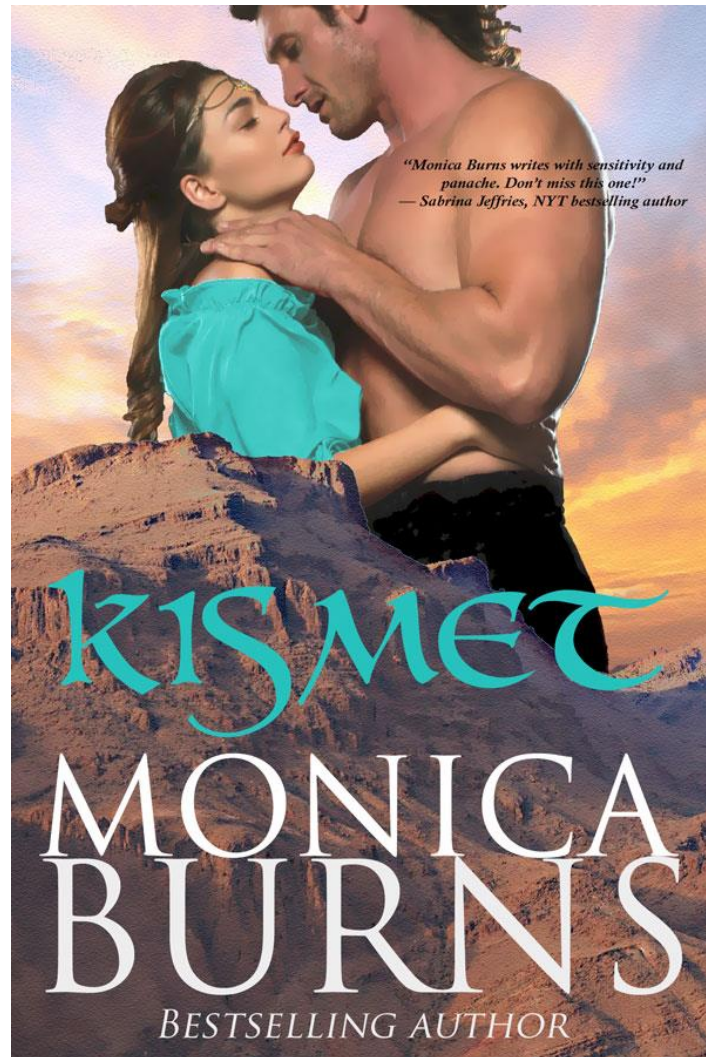
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WARNING: A dark, seductive sheikh with a tortured past fights to control his obsession for a woman who offers him a wager he refuses to lose. What happens between them is...KISMET

2010 CAPA – Best Erotic Historical

Raised in a brothel at a young age, Allegra Synnford quickly learned that survival meant taking charge of her destiny. Now, a renowned courtesan skilled in the pleasures of the flesh, she chooses her lovers carefully—vowing never to be vulnerable to any one man. Until a mesmerizing Sheikh strips that control from her...

Sheikh Shaheen of the Amazigh has been hiding from his past for a long time, but not enough to forget how another courtesan he wanted as his bride made him abandon his life as the Viscount Newcastle. It's why the yearnings this dangerous temptress ignites within him are so troubling. Worse, thoughts of Allegra pervade his every fantasy, threatening to undermine his cover. With

old enemies circling, experience tells him he must resist her charms at all cost. In fact, he's betting on controlling his obsession for Allegra. It's a risky wager when it comes to a woman of pleasure. But Allegra has her own reasons for playing games...with a man who can't afford to lose.

Kismet

by Monica Burns

The First Kiss

With the grace of one of the Sultan's dancers, she put several feet between them before facing him again. The moonlight draped its softness over her entire body and he was certain the move was a calculated one. Somehow she knew the pale light would only heighten the sensuality of her figure. Silently, he watched her fingers brush across the side of her neck in a slow stroke. It was the same type of caress his own hand itched to perform.

Lips parted in a small, knowing smile, she closed her eyes and allowed her hand to fondle her skin in a light caress. Mesmerized, he watched her continue the stroke downward to the base of her throat and beyond until two fingers slid into the valley between her full breasts. With a leisurely stroke, she caressed the darkened slit in an up and down movement that had his body howling for release. He dragged in air between his clenched teeth in a soft hiss, and she opened her eyes at the sound.

Across the small space between them, she met his gaze with a sultry smile and his heartbeat thundered in his ears. Eyes gleaming with confidence, the tip of her tongue slid out to lick her upper lip in a quick stroke, leaving it glistening in the moonlight. It wasn't just an invitation; it was a goddamned command performance. White-hot need lashed through him

and he swallowed hard. For the first time, he understood completely why her name was uttered with such fascination by other men.

Her skill at seduction was extraordinary. But she wasn't dealing with a weak-willed Englishman she could manipulate to her own ends. He wasn't one of her infatuated admirers she could control. The dramatic presentation she'd just shown him illustrated that she fully expected him to fall in line like every other man she'd ever been with. But for the first time, Allegra Synnford had met her match. With a nonchalance he didn't feel, he clasped his hands behind his back and arched an eyebrow at her.

"An exceptional performance, *chérie*. I confess it's quite possible I'll be receiving the better end of the bargain."

In a split second, her expression went flat and lifeless, but the way she held herself rigid revealed her anger. "For anything even *resembling* that performance, *monsieur*, you would need to *give* me your horse, not his seed, and I confess I no longer have interest in either."

She whirled around and stalked toward the doorway leading back into the drawing room. Despite his surprise, his quick reflexes allowed him to reach her in two strides. His arm snaked around her waist and he dragged her backward into the shadows with him.

"Let me go," she snapped with hushed fury.

"And if I gave you the horse, *chérie*?" He couldn't believe he'd just offered her Abyad for a single night in her bed. He had to be mad to offer her such a proposal even if his entire body ached for a physical release. That she could stir his desire so easily infuriated him. Well, he was damned if he'd let the tempting witch get the best of him.

"I believe I made myself perfectly clear that I have no intention of conducting *any* business

with you, *monsieur*." She struggled against his hold, and he deftly twisted her around to face him, while holding her tight against his chest.

"Surely, you're not afraid, Allegra."

"Of you? Not at all," she responded with a vehement shake of her head and glared up at him.

"You should be, *ma belle*."

"And why is that, *monsieur*?" The sneer in her voice almost covered her trepidation, but not quite.

"Because I'm not like your other lovers," he murmured. As her gaze locked with his, he smiled. "I'm the one man you won't be able to control."

§ § §

His words and the dark emotion glittering in his intense brown gaze sent fire streaking though every inch of her body. From the first moment she'd heard the seductive familiarity of his voice echoing out of the shadows she'd known exactly who he was. At the railway station, he'd been dark and dangerous, but tonight—tonight he epitomized everything male she knew to avoid.

Pinned against his chest, it was impossible not to breathe in the warm spicy scent of him. The effect he'd had on her senses earlier today was nothing compared to what she was experiencing now. Wickedly handsome in a barbaric fashion, the sheer power of his presence sent her blood flowing hot and fast through her veins.

Black, wavy hair brushed against his shoulders at a length that was almost heathenish, but she found herself wanting to lace her fingers through the silky-looking curls. The headdress he'd worn earlier in the day had hidden his strong, narrow nose and the way it emphasized the fullness of his mouth. His high forehead ended in a widow's peak, and a thin scar crested across the browned skin of his cheek in a vivid white line. The mark gave him a rakish air that she found far too tantalizing for her own good.

He was right.

She should be afraid of him.

This man wouldn't be satisfied until she was in his bed. And it didn't help matters that she was sorely tempted to give in to his demand without her usual forethought. That was something she never did. She swallowed hard. She could always cry for help, but she was too stubborn to let any man get the better of her. No, she would find some other way out of the situation.

"I'm afraid, *monsieur*, that it's you who doesn't understand the rules of this game. I pick my lovers, and I *never* enter into a liaison on such short acquaintance."

"And I never take no for an answer," he murmured.

She struggled to suppress a tremor. God, but the man had a wicked voice. She immediately clenched her teeth. It irritated her that she couldn't control her reaction to him. Over the years, there had been many men who had arrogantly declared they intended to become her lover, and they'd all failed. But this man's confidence unnerved her. She believed him when he said he wouldn't take no for an answer.

The worst of it was she knew a liaison with him could have devastating consequences. Just

the way her body responded to his told her it would not be a simple dalliance. He would bend her to his will, and not since Arthur had rescued her from Madame Eugenie's had she allowed any man to do that.

"It would seem we are at an impasse," she said, trying desperately to keep her voice steady.

"Are we? Then one of us must yield."

Something about the determined glint in his eye kindled a firestorm of panic inside her. He narrowed his gaze at her, his mouth curved in a seductive smile. As his hand captured her chin, her trepidation vanished in a wave of heat and she barely suppressed her whimper of desire when his thumb stroked her lower lip. Dear God, what was wrong with her? She needed to end this madness now, before she really did surrender to him

"I shall be happy to have *you* yield to me, *monsieur*," she said in a breathless rush.

"Doing so is not in my nature. But for a kiss I might be persuaded otherwise." The amusement in his voice made her stiffen.

"A ki—you arrogant beast. I have no intention of—"

The scents of cedar and anise drifted across her senses just before his mouth silenced her. The outrage holding her rigid evaporated in an instant, replaced by a sharply pitched desire.

Up until this moment, pleasure had been a simple, uncomplicated experience for her. But this was something altogether foreign. It was raw. Primitive. Completely out of control.

His tongue laced across her lip until she willingly parted her mouth for him. He tasted hot and savage, just like the desert. She'd always enjoyed kissing, but this was a hedonistic assault. He didn't take—he cajoled.

Every stroke of his tongue was a dance of seduction that heightened each of her senses until what little control she had left spiraled away into oblivion. A rush of heat made the insides of her thighs slick, and she gasped as his mouth skimmed across her jaw and down the side of her neck.

His touch demonstrated just how precarious her position was where he was concerned. For the first time in memory, she wasn't the one doing the seducing, and it made her feel powerless. The realization set off alarm bells in her head and she wrenched herself free of his embrace.

The harsh sound of her breathing echoed loudly in her ears as she stared up at his features, visible in the light spilling out from the palace drawing room. He appeared completely unaffected by the kiss. Not even a hint of desire darkened his expression. Horrified, she pressed her hand to the base of her throat. *She* was always the one who seduced. The one in control. Men succumbed to *her* not the other way around. She flinched at the small smile slowly curving his mouth.

"It would seem we have resolved the question of who will yield," he murmured.

Purchase Kismet for [iBooks](#)

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About Monica

Monica Burns is a bestselling author of spicy historical and paranormal romance. She penned her first romance at the age of nine when she selected the pseudonym she uses today. Her

historical book awards include the 2011 RT BookReviews Reviewers Choice Award and the 2012 Gayle Wilson Heart of Excellence Award for *Pleasure Me*.

She is also the recipient of the prestigious paranormal romance award, the 2011 PRISM Best of the Best award for *Assassin's Heart*. From the days when she hid her stories from her sisters to her first completed full-length manuscript, she always believed in her dream despite rejections and setbacks. A workaholic wife and mother, Monica is a survivor who believes every hero and heroine deserves a HEA (Happily Ever After), especially if *she's* writing the story.

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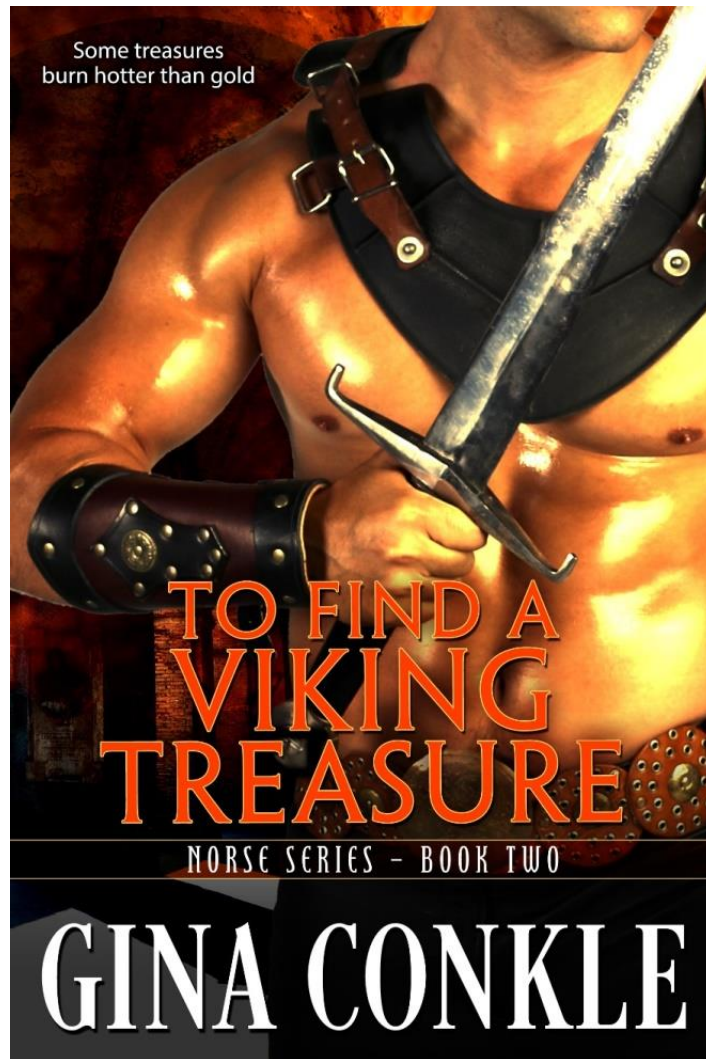
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A thrall since birth...

Sestra's lived by her wits, but she wants security, the kind found with a strong lord who leaves her alone. Uppsala's in turmoil and a buried treasure means life or death for many. The red haired slave unwittingly holds the key, and for the first time she hears whispers of freedom.

A rough-hewn Viking...

Brand wants to sail away. His plans don't include saving anyone, especially the lushly curved, sharp-tongued thrall. Yet, he vows to protect Sestra and recover the stolen hoard. The two have always traded barbs; now they must share trust.

On the hunt, secrets come to light, unearthing riches brighter than gold.

To Find a Viking Treasure

by Gina Conkle

The First Kiss

She scrambled out of the shelter and spun around, her gaze darting everywhere. Trees encroached. The forest floor chilled her feet. Brand's clothes were gone, but hers hung from the same low branch he'd put them on last night.

Shivering, she yanked on her underdress and snatched her tunic to her chest. Her boots, the small knife, she bent to grab them, when her ear caught a sound.

Whistling. From the beach.

Tunic and boots clasped to her bosom, her bare feet trod a careful path toward the music. When she came to the edge of the grass, her heart lurched.

A perfect male form rose from the water.

Jaw dropping, she inhaled sharply. Brand. He hadn't deserted her. He stood waist deep in the channel, his big hands rubbing sand everywhere.

She ducked behind a tree and breathed a prayer. "Bless the Vikings for their need of cleanliness."

Sand made a natural cleanser for tables and cooking pots. Why not enticing male?

She could go back to the shelter. Wait for him. But water splashed, and his whistling drew her like a lodestone for another peek. This time Brand rinsed himself. Morning light glinted on water beads meandering down his body. She'd linger too, if she were a droplet.

Ink black hair sprinkled his chest. A natural crease split his torso down the middle, separating muscle born of hard labor. She followed the crease to its end in water and pressed full, sensitive breasts into the tree. This wasn't fair.

Brand faced the shore, revealing a nasty, apple-sized bruise on his waist. She covered her mouth. Yesterday. The other Viking's hammer had struck him. Brand had protected her. She searched him from her hiding place behind the tree. Plenty of scars marked his body, tell-tale signs of his brutal, warrior's life. A big white scar slashed his ribs. Another one snaked over his shoulder.

He dunked in the channel and emerged again, wiping water from his eyes. Hair slicked back, he waded toward the beach. Water swirled around him. Carved hips gave way to long, sinuous thighs, and between his legs, black hair and his---

"Morning, Sestra," he drawled.

Heat crept up her neck and face. He caught her staring.

Brand pulled his trousers off a rock, his ever-present weapons gleaming in the sand.

"Slept well?"

"Very well. And you?" Skin tingling she came out from behind the tree.

"Well enough." He grinned and put one leg in his trousers, facing her in all his male glory.

"Pagan Northmen," she scoffed under her breath. No concerns at all about modesty and flesh.

Nor did she like how in command he was...how utterly undisturbed at being naked and alone with her. Last night he'd wanted her yet chose not to act. He was gentle, thoughtful because of her lack of sleep and what happened on the cliff.

She strolled across the beach, sand crunching between her toes. It was pure feminine pride, but she wanted him to have his way with her...to ply her with those skills he lavished on high born ladies.

Why not her?

Brand calmly belted his trousers. He ought to be as agitated as her. She stopped a hands breadth from him, her clothes a barrier between them. Sun shined on his wet chest.

One finger swiped sand off his nipple. "You missed a spot."

His skin pebbled everywhere. Air hissed through clenched teeth.

She gloated through the veil of her lashes and kept up her delicate assault. Brand's chin dropped to his chest. His ribs expanded and contracted under her tender torture. She dropped her clothes and raked her nails in the furrows of his ribs. With both hands, she skimmed his midline to his navel.

He grabbed her hands. "Sestra."

A storm brewed in Brand's tarnished silver eyes. She loved the way he said her name, his voice hoarse and needy.

"This---" He glanced at her hands folded into his. "---right now isn't a good idea."

"You mean last night would've been better? Exhausted as we were in your hudfat, a sleeping fur that barely fits you," she argued. "Only squirrels could've had fun."

Brand laughed a deep rich sound. "Last night you thought differently."

She nipped her bottom lip. "And this morning I have my regrets."

"Then what I have is not lacking."

"Nothing about you is lacking."

His mouth turned in a sweet, crooked smile. Standing this close, her heart fluttered at the joy writ all over his face. Happiness came in short supply for Brand. How good it was to bask in this moment. Rugged yet perfect. Like him.

How could she have missed this? Thought him too hard?

He studied her face, her hair, his gaze wandering lower. He let go of her hands and traced her collarbone.

"You have dried blood here," he said gruffly. "I should've taken better care of you."

"It's nothing. You vanquished three marauders and saved my life. Just another day for you."

Brand ignored her quip and brushed back curls loosened from her braid. "What's this?"

His thumb caressed the scar curving around her neck. Few ever noticed it. She didn't pull away, a flummoxing thing since the mark embarrassed her.

"From days past in the land of the Franks."

Daylight sparkled on droplets clinging to his shoulder. He smelled of water and earth, the effect warming her better than the sun.

"What happened?"

"I was required to wear an iron collar to keep me from running away."

He scowled at the scar. "You never told me about this."

She tried to smile, but his thumb stroked feather light touches, sending bursts of light and pleasure through her body. Head lolling sideways, she murmured, "Now you know there was a time I desperately wanted my freedom."

"When you were a young girl."

She nodded, her eyelids drifting low. This piece of her past, a truth she shared, freed her.

"I wanted to run away," she admitted. "Now I want to be free and---"

Brand's mouth was on her skin. Caring. Sensual. His lips caressed her scar, healing soul-deep damage. Hidden places on her body melted like hot wax. Lingering kisses grazed the slope of her shoulder, his mouth in no hurry to reach hers. Ticklish whiskers scraped the high curve of her breast, and she laughed the sound frothy as sea foam. Brand's warm mouth traveled higher, his breath hot on her flesh. Her hand cupped the back of his head, drawing him close for a true first kiss.

Brand nibbled the corner of her mouth and she shuddered all the way to her toes.

"*Ohhh.*" Her knees buckled, but he caught her by the waist.

The surly Viking nibbled her as if she were a tasty morsel. Safe in his arms, her head tipped back and her body yielded to his strength.

Silver eyes flashed at her. If Brand was a beast of the forest, he'd drag her to his lair and never let her go. This must be a glimpse of the warrior who spent much time alone in wild lands. She wanted him. Badly.

She wrapped both arms around him and whispered, "Please. Kiss me."

His lips molded to hers for one long, deep kiss, soft yet hard like the man. Her heart soared and her body rubbed his. Heat burst inside her. Their legs tangled. If the beach was beneath her feet, she couldn't feel sand anymore.

She was free.

To Find a Viking Treasure will release in May but you can purchase the first book in the series, *Norse Jewel* for [iBooks](#)

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About Gina

Gina Conkle writes Viking and Georgian romance. A staunch history nerd, she loves museums and castles --- the older and moldier the better. When not investigating ancient sites, she dabbles in gardening and exercise. Gina married her favorite alpha male, Brian. The two live with their boys in Michigan.

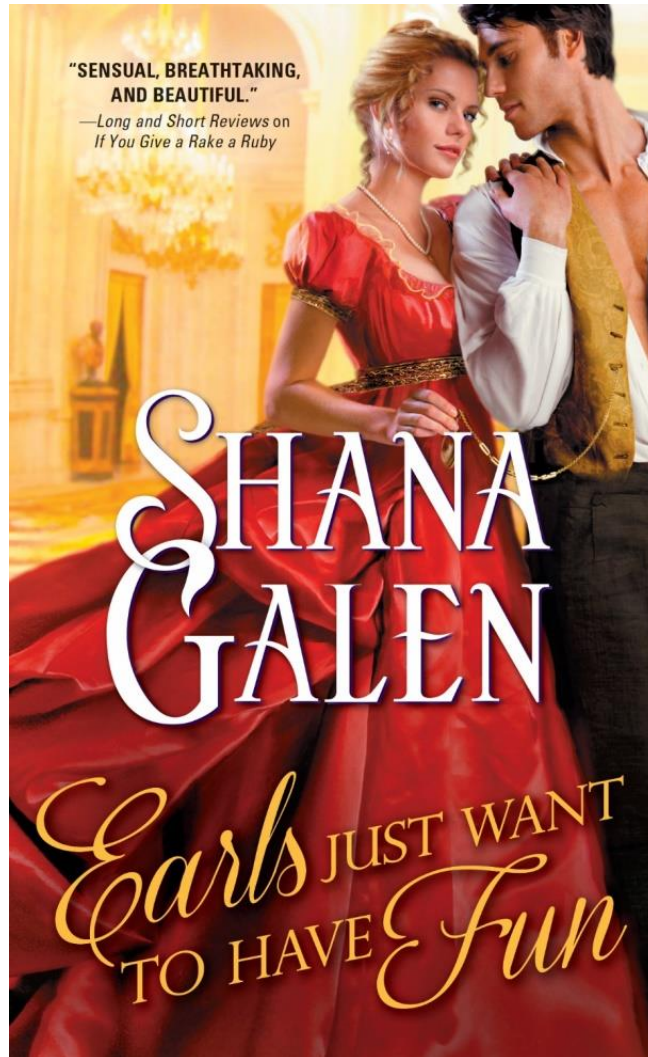
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Marlowe runs with the Covent Garden Cubs, a gang of thieves living in the slums of London's Seven Dials. **But there was a time she went by a different name** and when a private investigator thinks that she may be the missing daughter of a lord and lady, she is introduced to the spectacle of Society.

Maxwell, Lord Dane, is intrigued when his brother ropes him into his investigation of the fiercely beautiful hellion who is believed to be the lost daughter of the Marquess of Lydon. He teaches her how to navigate the social morass of the ton, but Marlowe will not escape the Cubs so easily. Instead, Max is drawn into her dangerous world, where the student becomes the teacher and love is the greatest risk of all.

Earls Just Want to Have Fun

by Shana Galen

The First Kiss

"I feel a bit warm," she said, her voice husky and breathless. Dane wanted to groan aloud. He'd known dancing with her would be a mistake.

"Perhaps we should step outside."

"Yes," she said with a nod. He turned her until they were near the doors to the garden, and then he took her hand and led her through one of them. A footman nodded at them and offered a tray of champagne, but Dane waved it away. They stepped into the cool night air, and it felt refreshing against his heated skin.

She wore gloves, and he could not feel her flesh, but he could feel the way her hand trembled in his. She was as affected as he was by the dance. He should lead her back inside, perhaps give her another moment to catch her breath, but that was all. The lights from the ballroom lit the garden, with aid from several lanterns, and he could see she was struggling to catch her breath.

One minute more, and he would bring her back inside.

"Shall we walk?" he asked. No, that was not what he'd meant to say. He should take it back.

“More walking?” she asked.

“Yes, but this time we won’t speak of the weather.” They wouldn’t speak at all, and that was why he should take her back inside. He should play the gentleman. He knew the rules. A gentleman did not lead a lady into the darkness, where the couple could not be observed. A gentleman did not draw a lady against him. A gentleman did not steal kisses from someone to whom he was not betrothed.

But Dane could not stop himself. He didn’t understand it. He’d never had trouble resisting such temptations before. But with Marlowe, Dane suddenly felt so bloody sick of playing the gentleman. He paused in the darkness behind a hedge and turned to face her. In the shadows, he could see little of her, save the white of her gloves. He took a step toward her, pulling her into his arms. She didn’t resist. He wished she would. He wished someone would stop him, because he feared once he took this step, he would never be able to go back. Once he kissed her, he would never be able to resist doing so again.

But she went willingly into his arms, her body soft and supple against his. She was so delightfully warm, so petite, so lush. He wanted to ravish her and protect her all at the same time. The rush of sensations was enough to make him curse. Instead, he bent his head and did the one thing he knew would shut out everything else.

He kissed her.

The moment his lips brushed hers, everything inside him came alive. It was as though he’d been wearing a heavy cloak, one that weighed him down and muted all sensation. Now he’d shrugged it off, and he could feel again. He was so damn light that he could have run for miles and not tired. He brushed his lips against hers again, feeling the frisson course through

his entire body. He was suddenly too warm and yet not warm enough. Had he ever been warm before? Nothing could compare to the heat he felt with her body pressed against his. His hand flexed on her back, and he wished he'd taken off his gloves so he could trace her skin with his bare fingers.

Marlowe's hands, which had been at her side, moved now. She brought them to his chest and rested them there. He half-expected her to push him back, but she didn't. She didn't kiss him back, either. She simply stood, seemingly undecided. Dane wanted to crush his mouth to hers, to sate the need building every time his flesh brushed against hers. But he couldn't forget he was a gentleman, and she—whether she was Lady Elizabeth or not—deserved his respect.

"I apologize," he said, releasing her. "I overstepped." She didn't remove her hands from his coat, and he tried to discern her expression in the darkness, but her head was lowered, and he couldn't see. "Allow me to escort you back inside. I assure you this won't happen again."

Now she looked up at him, and he saw the flush of her cheeks and the way her breathing was uneven and fast. "Why?"

"I beg your pardon."

She shook her head, probably annoyed at his politeness. "Why won't it happen again?"

"I...because I overstepped."

She shook her head. "I don't understand. You don't want to kiss me?"

He stared at her. Hell, but he wanted much more than that. "I do want to kiss you."

"Then why apologize?"

“Because this”—he indicated the dark, deserted section of the garden—“is not appropriate. I’m a gentleman and should respect—”

She slid her hand up his chest, resting her finger on his lips, effectively silencing him. “I’ve never had much use for gentlemen.” She stepped closer, so her body was flush with his again. “All of this talk—*overstepped* and *pardon* and *appropriate*—means nothing to me. Kiss me again.”

Now it was Dane’s turn to question. “Why?”

“Because I finally understand what Gideon meant about sparks. Kiss me.”

Who was he to deny a direct request? Her arms wrapped around his neck, and he lowered his lips, pressing them against hers. She let out a soft sigh, and he closed his arms around her body, feeling it tremble against his. He needed to take this slowly, so as not to frighten her. He had no idea what sort of experience she had—if any. His own was not extensive, but the women he’d known had never trembled in his arms. Could she be an innocent? He supposed chastity was not reserved for the upper classes. He moved his lips against hers gently, carefully, resisting the urge to delve inside and taste her.

Her fingers threaded into his hair, and she pulled him down. Dane lifted his head. “Marlowe—”

“Kiss me,” she said, her voice low and ragged.

“I don’t want to frighten you.”

“With that? I wouldn’t even call that a kiss, much less a frightening one.”

Dane raised his brows. “Is that a challenge?”

“Too much of a gentleman to take it?”

Dane pulled off his gloves. "You tell me." Throwing restraint and his gloves to the ground, Dane yanked her against him and claimed her lips with his. This time he didn't wait for her to accustom herself to his touch, he teased her lips open with his tongue and entered her. She let out a small gasp, but he didn't retreat. His hand slid up her back, and there was that silky skin he'd been longing to touch. He spread his hand over the cool skin of her back, tracing it until he reached the nape of her neck. He closed his fingers protectively around her, angling her head for better access. His tongue tangled with hers as his mouth slanted over hers. She tasted of champagne, and when she tentatively stroked her tongue along his, he almost lost all control. His hand fisted in her hair, and he deepened the kiss until he was drowning in her.

Every fiber of his body was alive. He could feel the soft thickness of her hair on his fingers, the smooth satin of her gown, the whisper of the night breeze, and hear the low strains of the orchestra inside the ball. And he could feel her breaths coming short and ragged, and his own matched hers. If he allowed this to continue, he'd lose his last ounce of control, lay her down, and take her right there. Instead, he drew back, keeping one hand about her waist to steady her. He drew in a labored breath.

"That was a kiss," she said, her voice breathy. "Do it again."

Purchase Earls Just Want To Have Fun for [iBooks](#)

§ § §

About Shana

Shana Galen is the bestselling author of passionate and adventurous historical romances, including the RT Reviewers' Choice *The Making of a Gentleman*. *Kirkus* says of her books, "The road to happily-ever-after is intense, conflicted, suspenseful and fun," and *RT Bookreviews* calls her books "lighthearted yet poignant, humorous yet touching." She taught English at the middle and high school level off and on for eleven years. Most of those years were spent working in Houston's inner city. Now she writes full time. She's happily married and has a daughter who is most definitely a romance heroine in the making.

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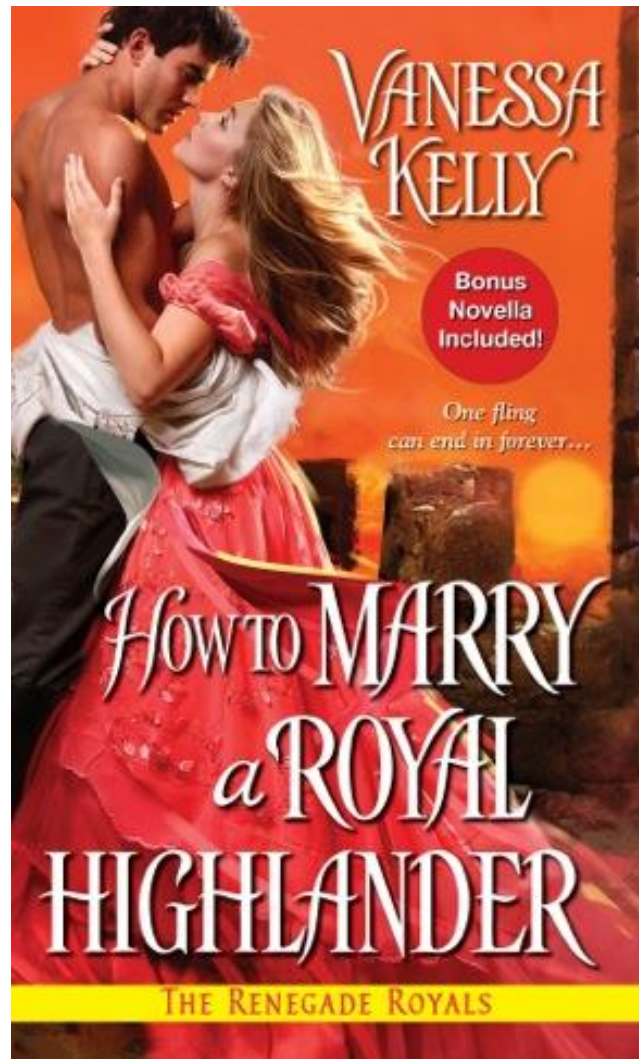
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At sixteen, Alasdair Gilbride, heir to a Scottish earldom, fled the Highlands and an arranged betrothal. Ten years later, Alasdair must travel home to face his responsibilities. It's a task that would be much easier without the distracting presence of the most enticing woman he's ever met...

After one escapade too many, Eden Whitney has been snubbed by the *ton*. The solution: rusticating in the Scottish wilderness, miles from all temptation. Except, of course, for brawny, charming Alasdair. The man is so exasperating she'd likely kill him before they reach the border—if someone else weren't trying to do just that. Now Eden and Alasdair are plunging

into a scandalous affair with his life and her reputation at stake—and their hearts already irreparably lost...

How to Marry a Royal Highlander

by Vanessa Kelly


The First Kiss

He sighed. "I'm sorry, Edie. I didn't think you'd mind engaging in a mild flirtation with me. After all, you have legions of suitors in London, and you never seemed to mind keeping all of them dangling after you."

She stared up at him. "You did not just say that."

"Why? What did I say?" he asked, looking puzzled.

She had to bite back an oath. God save her from thick-headed Scotsmen. "You just accused me of being a flirt."

He looked startled. "No, I didn't. I implied that you *like* to flirt. There's a difference, you know." 

She eyed him in disbelief. "I suppose I should ask you to explain that difference, but you would just confuse us both. What I really want to know is why you were flirting with me in the first place, and doing it in such an outrageous fashion in front of your entire family and your

betrothed. And," she said, starting to get wound up again, "did you really think I was going to flirt back with you in those circumstances?"

He winced slightly. "I suppose I hadn't really thought that far ahead."

She shook her head in disgust. "And you call yourself a spy. I can only imagine the fixes you got yourself into if last night is any indication of your talents."

"I never had to deal with a fiancée on any of my missions," he said. "Only Frenchmen trying to kill me."

"I suspect that almost everyone at the table wanted to kill you last night." Edie paused, remembering the different reactions she'd seen. "Except for Miss Haddon. She didn't seem to mind at all."

He crossed his arms over his chest, waiting quietly while she thought it through. And piece by piece it was finally becoming clear. "Oh, good God," Edie exclaimed. "You're trying to make her angry enough to break off your engagement, is that it?"

He smiled at her, as if she'd just done something splendid. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to spell it out for you. It is rather an awkward situation, you must admit."

"Awkward, indelicate, and insanely stupid," she said, coming to her feet.

Edie was so furious she could barely see straight. She was tempted to box his ears, but she'd probably damage her hand on his thick skull. She settled for jabbing her finger at his chest instead.

"How dare you manipulate me like that?" she raged. "And how dare you treat your fiancée in so shabby a fashion? What in God's name must she think of me? Of all the stupid . . ."

She tried to push past him, blinking her eyes against a sudden rush of tears. After

everything she'd gone through, this was the final humiliation. And the fact that it had come from him, the only man for whom she'd ever developed real feelings, made her want to hide in the nearest dark corner.

He stepped in front of her. She tried to slip past him, but he was just too blasted big. Clenching her teeth, she refused to look at him as she tried to will away the tears.

"Edie, let me explain," he said. "I swear it's not as bad as it sounds."

His hands came up to her shoulders. Then one slipped behind, gently cradling her neck. The other moved to her chin, nudging it up and forcing her to look at him. His handsome face, looking as unhappy as she felt, swam at the edges, blurred by tears.

"Ah, lass," he said in a low rumble. "Please don't cry. You'll kill me if you cry." When his fingers stroked along the edge of her jaw, it made her shiver.

"I'd like to kill you," she whispered. Her throat was thick and tight. "Alec, how could you?"

His mouth pulled taut and a muscle twitched in his hard jaw, as if he were clenching his teeth. The hand at the back of her neck moved up, his fingers digging through her hair in a gentle grip. She couldn't escape if she tried.

And when his gaze went dark and smoky, she didn't want to.

"Because," he rasped, "I'm a great Scottish oaf."

And then his mouth came down on hers in a kiss that knocked her heart straight into her ribs.

§ § §

For a few horrible seconds, the most exasperating woman Alec had ever known stood as rigid as a post in his arms, her lips firmly closed against him and his clumsy attempts at apology. He was no doubt making things worse by kissing her but couldn't seem to help himself. The pain on Edie's sweet face and the shine of tears behind her spectacles had ripped through his heart like a mortar shell. She'd started a riot in a society ballroom and still come out strong, for Christ's sake, and yet he'd managed to wound her. Those tears had told him just how much.

Oaf was too kind a word, for him.

He was half-expecting a knee to the bollocks when she breathed out a funny little whimper that vibrated softly against his lips. Hands that had been balled into fists and pushing against his chest suddenly relaxed. Her fingers opened, trembling as they grasped the fabric of his coat.

And, miracle of miracles, her mouth finally softened. A moment later, she was kissing him back with an eagerness that almost took him out at the knees.

He cradled her head, his fingers tunneling through her silky hair as he adjusted the fit. His other hand slid to her waist, holding her gently against him as he began to explore the lush promise of her mouth. Teasing, he slicked his tongue across her lips, tasting honey and cinnamon, an intoxicating, perfect mix. Every nerve and muscle in his body silently urged him forward, straining to further plumb her luscious depths.

When Edie hesitated for a fraction of a second, Alec's heart stuttered with dismay. But then her hands slipped up to his shoulders and she slowly parted her lips. He surged in, taking too much too fast, but she didn't retreat. Instead, she tangled her tongue with his, going up on

her tiptoes to meet him.

He was finally getting her measure. Edie had enough charm and confidence to launch a thousand ships. But innocence lurked behind that bold façade, as did an entirely unexpected vulnerability. Her kiss was eager, open, and without artifice. It was all Edie, wild and sweet, giving as good as she got with a heady promise of more to come.

He had every intention of taking her all the way down that road.

She let out an engaging little moan and snuggled closer, brushing her full breasts against his waistcoat. Sensation bolted through him, driving what felt like every ounce of blood down to his cock. Instinctively, he slipped his hand to her delightfully round bottom—good God, the woman was a lovely handful—and nudged her into him, flush against his erection. Then he picked her up and took a step forward, trapping her between his body and the passage wall.

Edie froze in his arms. Alec went still as well, suddenly all too aware that he was preparing to make love to a virginal spinster—in a corridor, against a wall, in broad daylight.

Jesus.

Then she came to life in his arms, and not in a good way. She jerked her head away and a funny little growl issued from her lips.

“Get off of me,” she hissed, trying to struggle her way out of his embrace. “Are you deliberately trying to destroy my reputation?”

Alec mentally sighed. He almost wished someone would catch them, since it would make things a damn sight easier for both of them, although she had yet to realize it. But now that a small portion of his blood was finally heading back to his brain, he realized what an idiot he was. If he had any hope of winning Edie over, this certainly wasn't the way to go about it.

She was worse than a nest full of French spies when it came to playing havoc with his plans. It was time to get the situation—and her—under control.

“Do I have to kick you in the shins to make you let me go?” Her cheeks were pink and her eyes shot daggers at him. But her full mouth was rosy and damp from his kisses, and her breasts heaved against her trim bodice. She looked so damn tempting that it took every ounce of his discipline not to carry her off to the nearest empty bedroom and have his way with her.

That was the most enticing image to come into his brain in a very, very long time.

No, ever.

“Stop wriggling about like a worm on the end of a hook,” he growled.

“I cannot believe you just called me a worm,” she snapped, wriggling harder as she tried to escape.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake.” He wrapped his hands around her waist and picked her straight up off her feet. She squeaked out a startled protest, but he simply plopped her back on the padded window bench and braced himself in front of her to prevent her from bolting.

Her eyes flashed from behind her spectacles, promising all sorts of retribution, but her lenses had gone partly foggy.

“Can you even see?” he asked.

“Confound it.” She whipped off her spectacles and rubbed them on her sleeve before jamming them back on her nose.

Her gaze said quite clearly that she would like to rend him, limb from limb.

“You needn’t look at me like I’m some sort of ogre,” Alec said, “or like I’m going to ravish you right here in the hallway. I promise you, I’m not.”

She stared at him a moment longer, then looked down pointedly at the fall of his breeches. “Really? You could have fooled me,” she said.

Alec had to bite back a disbelieving laugh. Only Edie would have the nerve to comment on the state of a man’s equipment at a time like this.

“I sincerely hope you’re not in the habit of making that sort of comment to other men of your acquaintance,” he said. “It’s not exactly the most appropriate thing one could say under the circumstances.”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “Of course I’m not! But in your case, one could hardly fail to miss it . . . that.”

Her words, coupled with her reluctantly fascinated gaze, had the predictable effect. Repressing a sigh, he turned his back to her and adjusted himself.

He heard a slight, choking sound from behind him. Glancing over his shoulder, he lifted an ironic eyebrow. “Is something wrong, Miss Whitney?”

Even though her cheeks were now bright red, she still managed to meet his gaze with a defiant one of her own. He had to give her credit—Edie never backed down from anything.

“Nothing at all,” she responded sarcastically. “Except for the fact that you’re the rudest man I’ve ever met.”

Purchase *How to Marry a Royal Highlander* for [iBooks](#)

§ § §

About Vanessa

Vanessa Kelly is an award-winning author who was named by Booklist as one of the “new stars of historical romance.” Her Regency-set romances have been nominated for a number of awards, and her second book, *Sex and the Single Earl*, won the prestigious Maggie Medallion for Best Historical Romance. Her current series, **The Renegade Royals**, is a national bestseller. Vanessa starts a new series in August with *My Fair Princess*, book one of **The Improper Princesses**.

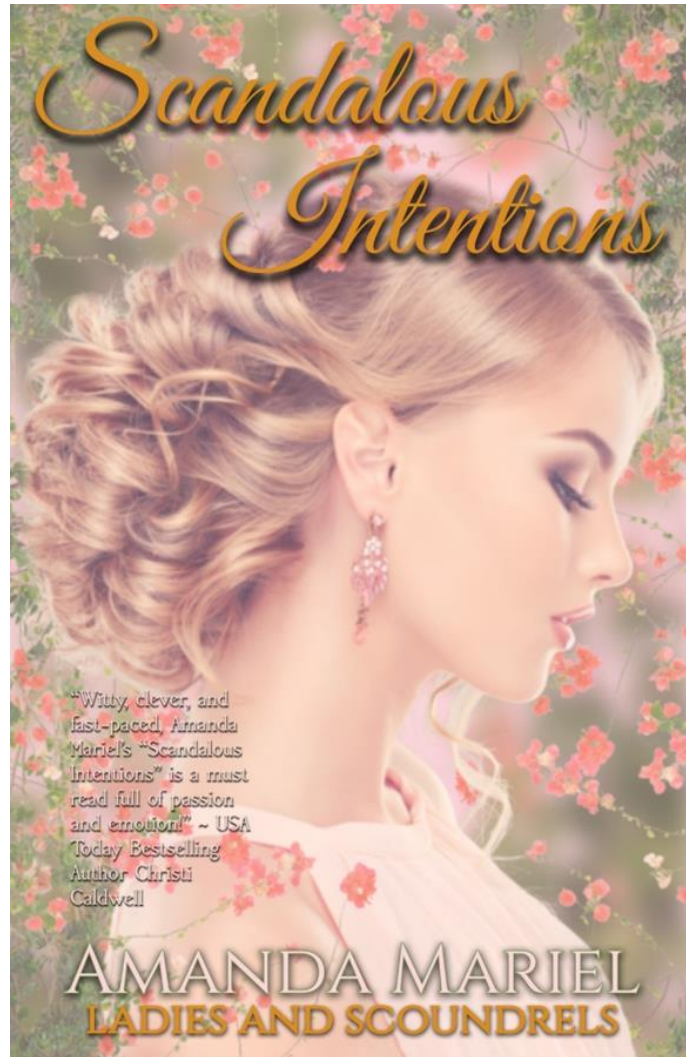
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When faced with losing his father's support, notorious rake Lord Julian Luvington sets his sights on Lady Sarah. She is as respectable as they come, just what his father ordered. But the lady shall not be easily won.

Lady Sarah Roseington is determined to marry for love or not at all, and she will do anything to obtain the freedom granted to men. A blackguard like Lord Luvington could destroy her hard-won reputation, but marriage to him also offers her the opportunities she cannot achieve on her own. What's a lady to do?

When Lord Luvington refuses to abandon his pursuit, Lady Sarah proposes an arrangement. Only the price may be more than either bargained for. Lady Sarah could lose more than her social standing and Julian could lose his heart.

Scandalous Intentions

By Amanda Mariel

The First Kiss

Sarah tossed and turned the entire night as she mused over all that had happened since her introduction to Lord Luvington. She could not help but want to save him after meeting his father, but could she sacrifice her chance to be loved in order to do so?

By the time she departed the garden party, it had become clear Lord Luvington held her heart. Would her love for him be enough to carry her through the rest of her days? Perhaps she could love enough for them both.

Sarah shook the foolish thought from her muddled mind and focused her attention on the drive leading to her townhouse.

Grace would be here to fetch her any time. A light breeze brushed Sarah's skirts around her ankles. She glanced at Mother. "The weather is lovely today. Perhaps we should go for a ride this afternoon." Small talk, but at least it distracted her from her other line of thoughts.

"What a wonderful idea, dear. I should love to." Mother tipped her chin. "The Duchess has arrived."

The Duchess of Abernathy's carriage approached. Sleek and black with her crest in gold leaf on the side. Sarah's stomach tightened. She had no desire to spend the afternoon in the Duke of Tisdale's company. At least she would have Mother by her side. The Duke invited Papa as well, but they were to hunt before tea. Did Papa enjoy the Duke's hospitality, or did he itch to break away? She could not imagine how he could not.

Sarah and Mother made their way over and allowed a liveried footman to assist them into the carriage. Grace grinned as they settled in. "Lady Sarah, Lady Havenshire. You both look splendid today."

"You make a smashing vision yourself, Your Grace." Mother tilted her head.

Something about the pleasantries made Sarah laugh, releasing the tension that hung in the air. The other ladies soon joined in. The merriment soothed her nerves, but it would not last.

Grace knocked on the carriage roof. It jolted forward as the driver urged the horses into motion.

"I wonder how Papa is getting on with the Duke of Tisdale."

"Marvelously, I am sure." Mother straightened her bonnet ribbons. "Your father is an avid hunter, and I am certain the duke holds prime hunting lands."

"Yes, but the Duke is ghastly. You did not witness the way he treated Lord Luvington yesterday." Sarah leaned back against the plush upholstered seat. "My heart broke for him."

Grace patted Sarah's glove covered hand. "I fear you have an inaccurate idea of the Duke. He is really a splendid man who loves his son a great deal. He only wishes to see Lord Luvington settled. I do hope your opinion of him is changed after this afternoon's tea."

Sarah pulled her brows together.

“Truly, dear, you cannot judge a man until you know him well. The Duke was a perfect gentleman when your father and I were introduced to him.” Mother smiled at Grace. “It is possible you had the misfortune of meeting him at a bad time.”

Sarah opened her fan. “All the same, I do not see my opinion changing.”

“Will Lord Luvington be joining us?” Mother asked, a sparkle in her eyes.

Sarah rested her fan in her lap as a wide grin stretched her lips. Heaven help her, she could not help the joy springing forward in her. “I have it on the best of authority he will.”

“Splendid. I do enjoy his company.” Mother folded her hands on her lap.

Grace tossed her head. “Pardon me for what I am about to say.” She glanced at Sarah and smirked. “Wild horses could not keep him away from our dear Lady Sarah.”

A flutter took up residence in her heart. Sarah closed her eyes and willed her body to behave. If only Grace’s words were true, she would accept his proposal and gladly become his wife. Alas, they were not. Lord Luvington saw her as nothing more than a means to an end. It had nothing to do with love.

“He does seem to be rather fond of my darling daughter. It would be superb if they made a match.” Mother reached over and patted Sarah’s hand.

Sarah sighed. “It is a lost cause, Mother. I am not interested in Lord Luvington.”

“We shall see.” Mother smirked before looking out the window.

The carriage turned into a long drive lined with sycamore trees. Sarah gazed out the window in anticipation. A grand manor house came into view, all pillars and stone. It stood at least three stories high and sported elegant embellishments.

The carriage came to a stop in front of a sprawling stone porch with a solid carved wood door at its top. She swallowed down the lump forming in her throat. They had arrived.

§ § §

Sarah sat across from Lord Luvington clutching her silver-rimmed teacup. Tension hung thick in the air around her. The Duke and Duchess of Tisdale sat at each end of a sprawling mahogany table trading furtive glances. Mother and Grace were on either side of her, and Papa sat next to Lord Luvington. The tea had just arrived, and already, she wished to escape.

“Julian must marry before month’s end. He wishes to wed Lady Sarah, and I see no reason to wait.” The Duke grinned at Sarah’s father.

Lord Luvington stood up, his chair grinding against the floor. “The lady has not accepted my suit. For heaven sakes, I have not even proposed.” His voice rumbled through the room.

Sarah jerked her gaze to him. Her cheeks warmed. How could a loving father corner his son in such a way? Twice in as many days. She looked at the Duke her heart breaking for Julian.

“There would have to be a proposal before there could be a marriage.” Papa set down his teacup and glanced at Sarah.

“Of course Sarah would be happy to entertain the offer, should it be made.” Mother tipped her chin at Sarah then beamed at the Duchess of Tisdale.

Lord Luvington cleared his throat. “Lady Sarah has made it clear she is not interested in my proposal.” He turned then strolled from the room without pause.

Sarah's heart plummeted. She glanced at Grace, who nodded, then stood and followed Lord Luvington's path.

"Shall we arrange the suit?" The Duke's voice filled her head, followed by the others, though she could no longer make out what anyone said. She did not care a whit anyway.

Sarah grabbed her organdy skirts and lifted them slightly to keep from tripping as she went after Lord Luvington. She darted out of the house and ran across the lush grass toward him. Her heart hammered harder with every step.

"Lord Luvington, wait. Please wait for me."

He continued to move into the distance.

"I have something to tell you. Please, stop."

He froze in place, turned and stared at her with his hands on his narrow hips.

Sarah pushed herself to move faster. She needed to state her mind before she lost her nerve.

He dropped his hands to his sides and began walking toward her with purposeful strides. She wished she could make out the expression on his face.

As the gap between them closed, Sarah slowed her pace and released her skirts. He stopped mere inches from her. The warmth of his body radiated between them, sending a tingle through her. "I have changed my mind."

"Pray tell, about what?" His gaze heated, holding hers.

"I wish to make a deal. An arrangement of sorts." She fought the urge to glance away.

He leaned in so close his breath fanned her ear. "I do not want your pity, Lady Sarah." Before she could reply, he turned away from her.

Sarah reached out, grabbing his shoulder. "It is not pity. Quite the opposite." She wet her lips. "I want something from you, and you need something from me. We can help each other."

His roguish smirk made her stomach flutter. "Go on, state your terms."

"I must have freedom, the right to come and go as I please, as well as to continue my studies."

"And if I agree to your terms, you will marry me?" His eyes held a challenge she did not understand.

"That is but part of the bargain. I wish to remain in control of my dowry as well." She looked out at the landscaped lawn, nibbling at her bottom lip. "And I require you to give up any mistresses you may have."

He placed one large hand on her shoulder. "I agree to your terms but have a demand of my own."

She released her lip and met his gaze.

Again, he leaned in close. His breath caressed her earlobe and neck. "You will grace my bed every night."

Her cheeks flamed. How she wished to be snug in his bed, wrapped in his strong arms with his lips upon hers. Would he find her to his liking? What if he did not? She swallowed and lowered her eyes.

"What if we are not compatible in such a way?"

He reached out with both hands, grabbing her by the hips and pulling her close to him. His mouth came down on hers, firm and demanding.

Sarah arched against him as his heat seeped into her. Her head spun, and an ache formed in her core. When he ran his tongue across her lips, she opened for him on instinct, allowing him to deepen the kiss.

She wound her arms around his neck, twining her fingers in the hair at his nape. Her legs shook, and her heart threatened to escape her chest as it pounded against her ribs.

He pulled his lips from hers to blaze a trail across her cheek to her ear. A small moan escaped her when he drew her earlobe into his mouth. Would it always be like this?

“It seems compatibility shall not be an issue for us, my pet.” He released her and stepped away.

Legs like plum pudding, Sarah stared at him, breathless. Already, she missed the warmth and strength of his embrace. “I dare say I agree with your interpretation. Now, we have only one thing left in our way.” She wrapped her arms around her waist. “You must propose.”

He chuckled, his deep baritone seeping into her. “Do you desire me to do so now, or would you prefer to return to the house first?”

It would be nice to solidify their arrangement before returning to the others. She did not want to share this moment with the Duke though her parents would wish to see it.

Grace would be rather pleased with the outcome of today’s tea. Sarah knew her friend hoped for a match. If only it were the love match she herself had always wished for. Perhaps in time, he would come to love her as she had him.

“Very well, let us return to the lion’s den.” Lord Luvington held out his arm.

She gazed at him for a moment but made no attempt to take it. “I would prefer for you to ask for my hand first.”

“As you wish.” He dropped onto one knee. “My dearest Lady Sarah, I cannot imagine going forward through my life without you by my side. Would you do me the honor of becoming my wife? I want you in my home and in my bed from now until the day death parts us.” He grinned rakishly.

His words were eloquent but sent a pain straight to her heart. He did not love her. Theirs would be a union of convenience, nothing more. She swallowed back the pain and forced a grin in spite of it. “I shall be honored to wed you, Lord Luvington.”

I hope you found Sarah and Julian's first kiss to be gripping and romantic. Purchase Scandalous Intentions today or read it free with Kindle Unlimited.

§ § §

About Amanda

Bestselling author Amanda Mariel dreams of days gone by when life moved at a slower pace. She enjoys taking pen to paper and exploring historical time periods through her imagination and the written word. When she is not writing she can be found reading, crocheting, traveling, practicing her photography skills, or spending time with her family.

Amanda lives along the Lake Huron shoreline in northern Michigan with her husband and two kids. She holds a Master of Liberal Arts Degree with a concentration in literature and has a long-standing love affair with sugary junk food.

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Ewan Cameron, estranged grandson of the Duke of Lotheil, is in London because of a deathbed promise made to his father and has no intention of staying beyond his three month obligation. Nothing can tempt him to remain, not even Lily, the beautiful bluestocking determined not only to restore relations between him and his grandfather, but to turn Ewan into a proper gentleman. Ewan, proud of his Scottish heritage, refuses to admit that Lily, a blue-eyed, English girl, has claimed his heart. It doesn't matter that his big lump of a sheepdog is madly in love with her. Nor is it significant that Ewan can always tell Lily apart from her identical twin sister. Always.

Lily Farthingale, the scholarly twin, dreams of becoming the first female member of the Royal Society. She grabs at the chance when the elderly Duke of Lotheil approaches her with a proposition - he'll admit her into the Royal Society, if she helps him to establish a relation with his estranged grandson, Ewan Cameron, a very rough-around-the-edges Scotsman who hates everything English. Between shootings, explosions, and Lily's abduction, Ewan ends up falling in love with Lily in this Pygmalion-inspired story.

My Fair Lily

By Meara Platt

The First Kiss

“Is she feeling any better?” Lily asked Ewan, rising from her chair in the duke’s library where she had been left to wait for him. After departing Madame de Bressard’s shop, they had climbed into Eloise’s carriage—the one loaned to her and Meggie for their shopping outing—and gone straight to Lotheil Court. The carriage was still waiting outside. She could have used it to return home, but she wanted to stay close at hand until Ewan assured her that Meggie was settled in her bedchamber and moderately calmed down.

He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “She’s a little better. I’ll take you home now, lass. I ought to have done it first.”

“No, Meggie was hysterical and it was important to take care of her right away.” She had been happy to wait in the library, at first thinking to skim through the duke’s vast array of books. Ewan had also ordered refreshments for her, but she hadn’t touched them. Nor could she concentrate. So while he was upstairs with his sister, she settled in one of the overstuffed chairs beside the massive hearth and did nothing but stare into the fire. She’d needed the warmth of the flames to chase the cold that had set into her bones after the incident with his cousins.

"You don't look all that well yourself, Lily." He knelt beside her, offering the glass of warm milk still sitting on the silver tray beside her. "Drink this. It's laced with a smooth, aged whiskey to help calm your nerves. Have you ever had spirits before?"

"Of course," she said, though she hadn't really. Nothing more than a mild champagne was all that had ever touched her lips. She took the glass from his hand with a muttered thanks and managed a sip. *Ugh!* It was vile.

He let out a pained laugh. "Och, Lily. Drink it slowly."

She nodded and took another, more careful sip.

"Better?"

She nodded again, for he was kneeling beside her and gently stroking his thumb along the palm of her hand. She took another sip. More of a gulp. Actually three gulps. She gagged, then let out a strangled cough.

Sighing, Ewan removed the glass from her hand and set it on a nearby table. "Excellent, lass. I think you've had enough. Let me take that from you." He remained beside her, his expression tense and worried. "How is your shoulder?"

Painful. Throbbing. "It's just fine."

"I'll take you home now."

"No need. Eloise's carriage is just outside."

"Lass, if ye think I'm going to let ye ride back alone, well, think again. And I'll stay with ye until I'm sure your uncle has tended to yer injuries and confirmed no broken bones." His face was close to hers, his brow furrowed, and his brogue thick and husky, those deep, melodic

tones as soothing to her insides as that vile concoction of warm milk and whiskey that now had her entire body buzzing. Like a little bee. A little drunk bee.

A very drunk bee.

Which explained her next inexplicable actions. And had she been sober (alas, she wasn't, for the whiskey had roared through her bloodstream like a raging current), she never would have closed her eyes, leaned forward, and kissed him squarely on the mouth, that beautifully shaped mouth almost hidden by the auburn bristles of his beard. But she did close her eyes, pucker her lips, and let out that breathy moan as her lips touched his. There was no taking it back. Not that she wanted to. Goodness, no. His mouth felt exquisitely warm against hers, and the soft, bristled hairs of his beard tickled her nose.

A delightful heat welled within her as Ewan deepened the kiss. Or was she the one doing all the kissing? Then something less delightful welled within her... rather, it heaved upward from the bowels of her stomach. She heaved again.

Ewan unlocked his lips from hers. "Och, lass." He reached for one of the duke's priceless Chinese urns that stood beside the hearth and stuck it under her chin at the same instant she gave a third and final heave that thrust everything she'd eaten since the day she was born—nineteen years worth of digested food and stomach juices—in a perfect arc into that urn.

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About Meara

Meara Platt is happily married to her Russell Crowe look-alike husband, and they have two terrific children. She lives in one of the many great towns on Long Island, New York and loves it, except for the traffic. She has traveled the world, works as managing partner in a boutique law firm in NYC, occasionally lectures and finds time to write. Her favorite place in all the world is England's Lake District, which may not come as a surprise since many of her stories are set in that idyllic landscape, including her Romance Writers of America Golden Heart award winning story. Learn more about Meara, or download a free Farthingale novella, by visiting www.mearaplatt.com.

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