

A Time Travel Regency Romance

Lord Darver's Match



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To my husband, John.
This is for you, with love.



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Chapter 1



Who on earth am I in bed with?

Hillary Logan peeked at the large, muscular—and hairy—arm curled around her ribs, then swiftly shut her eyes again.

Oh, dear God, this isn't happening. Couldn't be happening.

She stifled a hysterical urge to scream. Her husband's arms weren't hairy. Which meant... this arm did not belong to Jim.

She took another look, just to make sure the man wasn't her husband. Blood drained from her face. No! In no way, shape, or form was this sleeping giant her Jim.

But who was he—and how did she get in bed with him?

The man pressed closer, breathing softly in her ear. Frozen with terror, Hillary stuffed her fist in her mouth to prevent a scream from escaping. The last thing she wanted to do was awaken this stranger.

She had to get out of here; she had to find Jim.

Where in the world was Jim?

After a quick glance at her surroundings, she choked back another taste of fear.

Where am I?

She was supposed to be in a motel room at The Moon and Magic Inn located near Stonehenge in Great Britain. Not typical tourists, she and Jim planned to continue driving to London where Jim had a business meeting.

But warm, rustic furnishings had replaced The Moon and Magic Inn's cool contemporary decor. Even the plush pink carpet had vanished leaving dark wooden floorboards.

What on earth had happened?

Hillary frowned. Well, maybe he had left her here. He'd done worse.

But what about the décor?

What about the man?

He moved closer. The shift of his weight caused her to roll into him. Inadvertently, her bare bottom bumped against his thigh. Although totally inappropriate, burning heat flashed through her loins. How could she possibly be sexually excited by a total stranger?

Calm down. Think. Think! Try to remember what happened.

She swallowed her fear and counted to ten. First things first. She slowly pulled her nightshirt down over her rump, careful to pick up the man's

hand, extricate herself, and gently lay the hand back down.

Other than a murmured protest, he continued to sleep.

So far, so good. Hillary sat up and inched her way toward the edge of the bed. From the size of his exposed arm, the man had to be absolutely huge. If he wanted to, he could probably snap her skinny body in half. So the last thing she needed was to awaken him. What if he turned out to be a modern-day Jack the Ripper?

Now poised at the edge of the bed, she rubbed beads of sweat from her upper lip. How in heaven's name did she get into this room—into this man's bed?

She jumped to her feet, refusing to look at the stranger. Cold air reminded her the nightie only covered her to mid-thigh. And she wore nothing underneath—nothing but enormous goose bumps. Her suitcase was nowhere in sight. Neither were her clothes.

A richly brocaded robe draped on a wooden bench beneath the window seemed to shout at her. Navy and beige clothing lay piled in a heap beside it. A pair of shiny black boots stood guard. She tiptoed over to the bench, put on the robe, and cinched the tie. While the robe swam on her, a musky, masculine scent reminded her of its owner.

The man.

Although with five swift steps, she could've hightailed it out of the room, for some reason, she stopped. Maybe she should have a better look at her bed partner. If she had to testify in court that this man abducted her, she should be able to identify him, right? "Yes, your honor," Hillary pictured herself saying, "this is the man who fought Jim for possession of me, then carried me away to his room!"

She blew out a resigned sigh. Right. That was a laugh. As if Jim cared enough about her to fight. Even after six years, he still called her Holly, his first wife's name.

Hillary shrugged. Her husband would never change, so why not bury that old hurt?

She'd better get going. Although careful as she stepped toward the bed, the floorboards creaked a loud warning. She froze. But by the rise and fall of the sheets, the man's breathing still appeared slow and even.

She inhaled with caution and tried again. This time she reached the bedside, then looked down at him. The man filled the small bed; outstretched, he would've had to dangle his feet off the end of the mattress. How had there been enough room for her? Although thin, she measured almost five feet six inches. She must've been wedged against him.

Her face sizzled with heat.

The man's visible arm was richly chiseled with muscles, and the cords in his neck showed

tremendous strength, even as he rested. His thick black hair obscured part of his face. Morning stubble marred the long line of his jaw, but his profile showed an arrogance and sensuality.

No ninety pound weakling here. Hillary extended her hand to brush back his hair for a better look. Strong fingers suddenly clamped around her wrist.

“Ouch!” Startled, she tried to pull away, but the man maintained his vise-like grasp. He leaned up and rested his weight on his free elbow. The white bed sheet fell back to reveal a muscled chest covered with black, curly hair.

Hillary drew in a sharp breath, and tugged on the human handcuff. If this man didn't look like seduction personified, she didn't know who would.

He leisurely raked her with his gaze, taking in every last inch of her. “What is your haste, my dear? You have only just arrived and wish to leave so soon? Although I did not specifically request company, you are a pretty filly, so let us enjoy. We shall pleasure each other.”

Hillary gasped.

His grip tightened on her wrist. “I assure you, m'dear, I do not bite. At least, not very hard!”

Oh, great! He thought she wanted to join him in bed! He thought she was a hooker! Prim, sedate Hillary Logan—a hooker. Was someone playing a cruel joke on her?

She yanked her arm again, but he held her fast. This couldn't be "Candid Camera," could it? Did the British have that television show? He sounded like he performed for "Masterpiece Theater," anyway. All formal and precise.

But, again, how had she gotten here? First, she had to get away—then she'd figure this mess out.

Twisting around in one more attempt to free herself, she tripped on the hem of the voluminous robe.

"Oh! Oh, this damn...." She almost bit her lip. Jim hated for her to use profanity. But then Jim wasn't here, was he? He never was around when she needed him.

Before she could recover her dignity, the man leaned forward, easily lifted her off the floor and set her down on the bed. Her left wrist, however, was still imprisoned.

"I must admit my chamber robe is not suited to your slender proportions." He leered at her, then gave her a wink. "Perhaps you can remove it?"

Brother! She was in no mood for an early morning Lothario, no matter how good looking he might be and no matter how suave he sounded. With her gaze averted, she toyed with the top button on her nightshirt and stammered, "Pl... Please, let go of me. There's been some kind of mix-up here. This isn't my room."

She looked around the room and frowned. In addition to the bed, two massive panel-backed

oak chairs rested against the rough white walls. The chairs looked like thrones. Along with a candle in its wax-filled holder, a chipped pitcher and large bowl decorated the top of a sturdy dresser. These items, plus the bench, were the sum total of the Spartan furniture.

She decided to take a chance and ask him. What did she have to lose? "Do you know how I got here?" Even to her ears her voice sounded little girl lost.

The man shook his head, obviously still believing she earned her money on her back. "I assumed you walked through the door."

Unwanted tears welled in her eyes. So much for bravery in the face of the unknown. "Listen, I don't know what's going on. My husband, Jim, and I arrived at this, um, motel last night. We're from Tampa, the U.S., and today we have business in London. But because of the r... rain, we had to stop. Our room was different from this one, though, and I w... woke up here. I don't know where Jim is."

To hide her tears, she rubbed the long sleeve of the robe against her cheek. When the man didn't speak, she glanced at him from under her disheveled hair. A few of her long, spiraled brown hairs showed up dark against the white of the indented pillow next to his. He picked one up, inspected it, and compared it with hers.

Hillary flushed again. Now he knew they had

been sleeping together—intimately. He released her hand and reached up to turn her face toward his. The touch of his fingers sent electric thrills through her body. She reluctantly raised her gaze to meet his.

His steel grey eyes seemed hypnotic. He tilted his head. “Motel, you say? You mean the inn.” His eyes narrowed. “So, mine innkeeper did not send you to me?”

Mine innkeeper! This guy spouted phrases from a B movie! “Why would the clerk do that? Last night he gave us the key to room thirteen. Jim balked a bit, he’s a little superstitious—number thirteen you know, but I said, ‘What could possibly happen?’”

She remembered last night’s scene clearly.

Not to miss a minute of work, Jim placed his laptop computer on the clerk’s counter. Looking up from the keyboard, Jim focused his gaze on Hillary long enough to say, “Bad omen, Holly. Number thirteen—that means trouble. Get us another room.”

Hillary felt her cheeks heat up. Plain as day, she had signed the inn’s registration book as Hillary Logan. Sometimes she thought that was the reason he married her: so he wouldn’t have to remember a new name. Holly—Hillary, it was all the same to Jim.

In a refined way, the round-faced clerk had coughed quietly. “I regret, Mr. Logan, that all our

other rooms are presently occupied. Only room thirteen remains vacant.”

A soft chuckle followed the man's very proper British words. Oddly enough, the clerk then winked at her and beamed a smile as if she and he shared a secret.

Before she had a chance to question the man, Jim's muttering captured her attention. She watched him save his architectural design on a floppy disk as she gnawed on her lip. He planned to leave—she just knew it.

“Don't see your parking lot filled with cars,” Jim challenged the clerk. “Maybe you don't like Americans.”

Hillary groaned; she couldn't help it. People like Jim gave Americans abroad a bad name. Rude, crude, and socially unacceptable.

“My sincerest apologies, sir,” the clerk said smoothly. “Tonight, The Moon and Magic Inn has only one available room. However, I assure you, number thirteen is a favorite haunt of our regulars.” He grinned again with a smile that lightened his whole face.

Under his breath, Jim mumbled, “I have a bad feeling about this place,” and turned to leave.

Hillary held on to his sleeve. The thought of returning to the storm-drenched road had made her bold. “It'll be all right, Jim,” she'd wheedled. “After all, what could possibly happen?”

She now wanted to bawl like a baby. What

could possibly happen except to wake up in a strange room, in bed with a strange man? Jim had been right, hadn't he? Room thirteen had turned out to be pretty unlucky.

Hillary stood and wiped her eyes. No sense dwelling on the past. "Well, I guess you don't know how I got here either." She shrugged, again. "Sorry to trouble you. I have to find Jim."

One step later she remembered how she was dressed—or undressed. Her arms flopped about in the large sleeves. She gestured to the dresser. "I don't suppose my clothes are in there?" A quick check revealed empty drawers. Great.

Hillary plopped down on a chair, then immediately stiffened. The wooden seat had no "give" in it whatsoever.

"Now what?" she asked, more to herself than to her companion. She chewed on her lower lip. What a morning this was turning out to be! At least the man wasn't ruled by his hormones. But how on earth had she ended up in his bed?

The man cleared his throat. "If I may offer a suggestion?"

She looked at him. He probably never had a woman forget him when he was in the room; he was that handsome.

He relaxed his shoulders against the headboard, his broad chest half-exposed. Even unshaven and with his hair tousled, he appealed to her. Pure unadulterated man.

A wave of desire swept through her. Hillary licked her lips. Self-conscious, she raised her gaze from him and concentrated on the bedpost. Such lusty between-the-sheets thoughts would get her into even worse trouble—and lusty thoughts were as foreign to her as this trip to Great Britain.

Except for those lusty thoughts a moment ago when I was cuddled by his side. A fleeting grin lightened her lips.

Be still my beating heart!

She gave her libido a smack. Back to business. “Um, sure. Go ahead. I could use any suggestion at this point.”

His eyes twinkled at her. “I do not usually rescue damsels in distress, but I believe I shall make an exception in your case.”

His lopsided grin weakened her all the way down to her knees. Good thing she was sitting. Why was she responding this way?

“My man, Finch, should be up and about by now,” he continued. “With your permission, I shall summon him to make inquiries on the whereabouts of your *husband*.”

His man? How odd! He still thought she was a prostitute, though. He stressed the word “husband” as if she didn’t have one.

She had to smile; no sense getting into a huff. Jim was no longer her idea of a husband anyway. Her ideals, like her love for him, died long ago.

Relaxed in the chair, she postponed any

thoughts about Jim's reaction to learning she had spent the night with another man. Why worry about it? Although she was blameless, he'd retreat into his personal shell even further.

"That's a great idea. Thanks. Then Jim can bring my suitcase and I can dress." And have breakfast, too. Her stomach was beginning to rebel against its empty state. Food was becoming a priority.

"There is one problem, however." The man sounded amused.

There was always a price tag. One didn't get something for nothing. She narrowed her gaze. "What's that?"

"Unless you return my robe, I am afraid I shall reveal more of me than you might care to see." The man smiled and shifted in bed. The sheet slid further away, now only covering him from the waist down.

"Oh, no!" Hillary jumped up. "I mean, yes, of course! Here." Without thinking, she pulled off the robe and gingerly handed it to him.

Instead of putting it on fast, he seemed to take forever. He eased one arm into a sleeve, then languidly the other one. All the while he kept his gaze on her.

Her cheeks radiated heat. She knew her face had to be the color of her nightshirt—shocking pink. She was standing there half-naked in front of the most desirable man she'd ever come

across—and a stranger to boot. Brother! Her dear mother was probably turning over in her grave. Hillary's nightie also had two slits up the meager sides. Not much protection against his probing stares. If she sat down, who knew how much leg she would expose? No, she had to stand.

She fingered the long line of buttons at her bodice. "I wish you'd hurry. I'm uncomfortable enough as it is without you eyeballing me."

Her frankness surprised her. She shrugged it off as a case of the nerves. Who, in her position, wouldn't be nervous?

The man unsuccessfully turned his laughter into a cough, and then he gave her that lopsided grin again. "Certainly, my dear. Although I must say I have never heard such a quaint manner of speaking. I find the term 'eyeballing' quite expressive, to be sure."

She tapped her foot. How dare he make fun of her speech when he sounded so... so British!

His eyes gleamed with mischief. "And such unusual night attire. I have never seen the like. Not that you do not look fetching."

Hillary wanted to strangle him. Through clenched teeth, she commanded, "Hurry up!"

"Impatient, m'dear?" He completed his task and, properly covered by the robe, sauntered over to the door. "May I suggest you take position behind the door? When it comes to females, Finch can be disapproving. He does not understand that

women can be necessary at times.”

The man knew he was infuriating. He knew it. Hillary frowned but followed his suggestion. The man’s gaze moved over her bare feet, lower limbs, knees, and partially exposed thighs. She tried to pretend his scrutiny didn’t bother her but if her face got any hotter, she’d scorch her eyebrows.

He chuckled. “By the bye, shall I have a bottle of champagne sent up? To celebrate our good fortune? Or rather, my good fortune!”

She balled her fists. What she wouldn’t give to floor the man. But she was in no position to argue.

Eyeing her combat-ready hands, he raised one eyebrow. “No champagne? Perhaps you do not favor things that are French?”

“If you please.” She spat out the words.

He grinned, opened the door, and called out into the corridor. “Finch. Finch, old boy, are you up?”

Hillary heard a shuffling noise down the hallway. The shuffling stopped at the door and a man asked, “Did you require me, my...”

“My good man,” her bedfellow interrupted. “I have a commission for you this early morn. I have an unexpected companion with me—a charming one, I might add. It seems she has misplaced her husband, Jim.”

He turned to her and used the door as a barrier to hide her from Finch. “Jim what, my dear?” he asked, not bothering to hide his amusement.

His eyes crinkled merriment at her predicament.

Damn the man! Hillary concentrated on keeping her voice cool. "Jim Logan," she said succinctly.

With his back to Finch, the man curved a finger under her chin. "I have been remiss. We have not introduced ourselves. Simon Altmont, at your service." He waited for her response.

She met his gaze and ignored the fluttery sensations that zigzagged down her backbone. Hoping she showed no emotion, she raised her chin. "And I'm *Mrs.* Logan."

His hearty laugh shook those massive shoulders. Releasing her chin, he bowed. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, my dear."

Finch's shuffle announced that he still waited. Mr. Altmont turned back to him. "I need you to ferret out this Jim Logan—discreetly, of course. If you have no success, then you must find some suitable clothes for Mrs. Logan to wear." Mr. Altmont took another look at Hillary and gave her a wink. "Her proportions are similar to those of Ivy Sinclair."

Ivy Sinclair? Probably a girlfriend. No disguising that lusty look on his face.

He paused and outlined his upper lip with the tip of his tongue. "Yes, quite similar."

As if that wasn't embarrassing enough, Hillary caught a whiff of freshly baked cinnamon bread rising from downstairs. Her stomach decided to roar. Even Finch must have heard it.

"Oh, and Finch," Mr. Altmont drawled, "do

bring Mrs. Logan and me some breakfast. We have worked up an appetite!”

Speechless, she stared at him. Had she heard right? How dare he imply....

He reached over to gently close her opened mouth. “Nothing French, however, Finch. She has an aversion to potables with a Gallic flavor!”

In that moment, there was nothing Hillary wanted to do more than to murder the man.

Chapter 2



Simon Altmont, the Marquess of Darver, studied the woman sleeping in his carriage. He placed his well-polished boot on the opposite squabs and ran his fingers up and down his jaw. The woman puzzled him, that much was certain. It was not every day that he awoke to find an unknown, desirable woman standing over him in a state of provocative undress. But she had refused to share his bed—or rather, reshare his bed. And she seemed disoriented, to say the least. A puzzle, to be sure.

Simon pulled on his eyebrow. In her sleep, the woman had fallen against the carriage wall and neither the jolts nor the thunderous pounding on the roadway awakened her. So much for her incomprehensible distaste for his vehicle.

True, his fashionable drag had the sturdiest springs money could buy; he expected his passenger to find it comfortable. But the woman's expression at her first sight of his carriage had been one akin to horror. "We're traveling to

London in that?" she squeaked.

Damme, cut a man's wheels and his cattle, and you cut into his manhood! His equipages were known throughout the realm—all drawn by prime bits of blood. No finer horses around than those in Lord Darver's stable. And yet Mrs. Logan took one look, grimaced, and had stepped into the drag as if she were stepping into a torture chamber. Preposterous! Was she accustomed to traveling in finer circumstances—the Prince Regent's carriage, for Gad's sake?

Her lack of clothes and costly jewels answered that question. Simon smiled.

I think not.

He leaned back on the plush cushions and cocked his head. Why wasn't she impressed by his fashionable coach with his family's noble crest proudly emblazoned on the side doors? After all, the Marquess of Darver was no mean position to raise one's nose at. Who was this... this upstart who purportedly remained unaffected by him and his possessions? He had not been this intrigued by a woman in years. A novel sensation, that.

He continued his scrutiny of the woman. Her unrestrained, curly hair tumbled down to her breasts. The soft rise and fall of that chest kept Simon mesmerized. The borrowed blue merino gown fit her tightly. He could discern her ample curves, and, if he stared hard enough, her nipples

swelling beneath the thin material.

This will never do. Exercise some control.

He picked up the woolen shawl he had procured, and covered her bodice from his sight.

It was not her fault she was improperly dressed. Finch assured Simon 'twas all the innkeeper's lady had on hand. Now Mrs. Logan appeared in the guise of an impoverished gentlewoman, but for her unruly hair and appealingly rounded bosom. She was real—vibrant and alive, not at all like the die-away females he was acquainted with. Hence the need to hide her charms with the shawl. After his trip up the coast, he was in need of some feminine company, and Mrs. Logan fit his desires to perfection.

However, he had been on the town long enough to perceive Mrs. Logan was no gentlewoman. She had a far different calling, no matter what she stated. What other reason could there be for warming his bed?

From the safety of the other side of the carriage, Simon glanced at her again. The woman's thick lashes caressed the soft of her cheek. Sleep gave her the innocence of a newborn babe. But, of course, he knew better. A prickly little filly, wasn't she? Pluck to the backbone. What a Banbury tale she professed to be the truth! A husband, indeed! Although a slim gold band on her third finger did glisten in the mid-morning sunlight.

A wedding ring did not necessarily make a

bride. More likely this Jim of hers was a flesh-peddler out to secure a tidy sum from Simon for a night of pleasure with the “wife.” He took the precaution of alerting Finch to drop the “my lord” from his speech. No sense giving this Jim ideas on hoodwinking a marquess.

But Mrs. Logan... and all her delightful charms; that truly was another matter. Simon envisioned the possibility—no, probability—of bedding her. Her many blushes this morning only made him more eager. He had awakened with a vague memory of skin that felt like velvet. Her sweetly perfumed scent had penetrated his dream-fogged sleep.

Desire rose in him.

You shall have to be patient, old boy.

He shrugged his shoulders to dismiss his schoolboy enthusiasm, then stared out at the forest of pine trees waving their leafy branches as the drag rumbled past. Perhaps he should have ridden astride instead of sharing his carriage with this mysterious beauty. But no, just as he knew he could not have left her at that inn, stranded without her “husband,” he knew he had to make her a proposition. Mrs. Logan had no place to go.

When Finch had returned to the room without news of Jim, her eyes revealed her confusion. However, she had made no demands on Simon; no requests for money; no commands that he remedy her dilemma.

Truly an unusual woman. Mrs. Logan touched him—in a way no woman had before.

Naturally, he offered her transportation to London, as that was his destination also. And since he already had a preview of her feminine wiles, he looked forward to offering her *carte blanche* and sampling all her wares—over and over again! Quite a pleasant diversion from this war business. After trudging up the coast gathering information, he deserved a pleasant interlude.

Simon rubbed his hands together and smiled. As soon as Mrs. Logan awakened, he would suggest she take up residence in the little house he owned on Thames Street—kept for just such a purpose. How could she refuse? Indeed, a *chère amie* of a marquess insured patronage by the *ton* for life. Mrs. Logan would have nothing to complain about; he was known to be quite generous to his mistresses. Most probably she was on tenterhooks awaiting his offer. Ivy Sinclair was beginning to bore him anyway.

With a yawn, Simon stretched, then pulled out a week-old newspaper to pass the time. He was well pleased with the unexpected events of the morning.



Hillary opened her eyes with a sudden start. For a second, she experienced the disorientation that

follows deep, dreamless sleep. Knitting her brows, she tried to piece together the most recent events in her life. She was in England, on business—Jim's business, and was currently going to London in a horse-drawn carriage with a stranger who had shared her bed. Whew! What a television script that story would make!

Her companion, Mr. Altmont, stayed buried behind a newspaper. Good, she didn't feel like talking. Since this morning, everything she had seen and experienced had an unreal hue to it. Everything was weird—bizarre. Who, in this day and age, traveled in a horse and buggy? Not that this coach was a buggy, but it was odd to prefer a coach to a car.

Hillary glanced at Mr. Altmont's clothes. Definitely odd. She approved of the tight pants and boots; all the better to see his taut thighs! She swallowed a giggle. But that short jacket with tails and complicated white arrangement of cloth around his neck. How artificial—like something a man would wear to a costume party.

And what about her gown? A high waisted, tight bodiced thin wool contraption that extended all the way to her ankles? The shoes were little more than slippers. She felt as though she was still in nightclothes. And Mr. Altmont must've thought she was scantily dressed, too, the way he kept looking at her.

She shifted on the cushions. Goodness, she

needed to use the bathroom! She couldn't believe there wasn't one at that motel or inn. As reluctant as she had been to ask a man about its location, she had finally worked up the courage—and modesty be damned.

“Bathroom?” the clerk had repeated blankly. “Why, miss, there be a pitcher and pot in yer room.”

Pitcher and pot! Brother! Everyone at work had told her the English were peculiar and less material-minded than Americans. But no bathrooms?

Hillary sighed and looked out at the parade of trees. Not one sign of modern living in sight. No cars, no streetlights, not even an asphalt road. The English took “getting back to nature” too seriously.

Newspaper rustling brought her attention back inside the carriage. Mr. Almont folded his reading and smiled at her. She smiled back. Maybe her situation wasn't so unpleasant after all.

Her conscience nagged at her. Jim would have her head for traveling with a stranger. But she had no choice. How else was she to get to London? There was also one tiny other matter on her mind: where was Jim?

“If I may say, you look well rested after your nap, Mrs. Logan. I trust the ride has been comfortable so far?”

“Oh yes, I hadn't planned on falling asleep.” Unexpectedly, she winced. A murmur from inside

her body reminded her of its urgent need. “Will we, by any chance, be stopping soon?”

Mr. Altmont leaned over and patted her hand. “Certainly, my dear. How thoughtless of me. The village of Godstone is just ahead. We shall stop at the White Hart and partake of its unsurpassed kidney pie.”

“Fine.” She turned toward the door to hide her expression. Kidney pie? Oh, well, as the saying went, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. But kidney pie? No wonder her stomach churned at her.

Mr. Altmont signaled to one of the outside riders. Hillary watched and admired the cut of his thick hair curling against his neck. He turned, catching her gaze.

She flushed. To cover her embarrassment, she spoke hastily. “This is really very kind of you to let me ride in your carriage, Mr. Altmont. I just wish I knew what happened to me and where my husband is.” She caught her lower lip on her teeth. “He must have driven on to London. He’s left me behind before, you know—several times. Jim gets so caught up in his work he forgets everything else.”

Mr. Altmont’s lifted eyebrow conveyed his disbelief.

“I don’t mind,” she said quickly—perhaps too quickly. “It’s just Jim’s way. His work is his life.” She better explain. “You see, today’s very

important. Jim has a meeting scheduled with the Historical Preservation Society. That's why we're here. Jim's under consideration to repair the Royal Pavilion at Brighton. He's an architect, you know, one of the best."

She had to be fair; Jim was one of the best. Probably because he focused all his energy into his work. Unfortunately, that meant little time left over for his family. Not only for her, but his two daughters from his previous marriage. The girls treated Jim as a stranger, and he didn't mind one bit.

Mr. Almont's face was devoid of expression. "So you have seen Prinny's palace. What do you think of it? Did you have a personal interview with him?"

"With whom?"

Tersely, he replied, "The Regent. Although I venture he is not tired of Lady Hertford—yet."

Hillary wrinkled her brow. "I really didn't talk to anyone. Jim had all the appointments. His designs seemed to have made an impression on the Society. As far as I can recall, I didn't meet the Regent, whomever he is."

Relaxing against the cushions, Mr. Almont chuckled. "You would not forget the Regent if you met him, my dear! So, what are your thoughts on the Pavilion?"

"Well..." How could she say this diplomatically? "The old Pavilion's certainly lavish.

Everything's huge and on a grand scale. Very unusual design."

A vision of the Royal Pavilion, complete with its turrets and domes appeared in her mind. It reminded her of the Taj Mahal. Only the Indian edifice had been built for love. The English palace had been built for... for what? Love of the bizarre? "Too bad it's fallen into disrepair."

"Unusual and lavish, yes. But it is hardly old, Mrs. Logan. And disrepair? Is that what they are saying to justify the remodeling of the Folly?"

She shrugged. It was all a matter of relativity. An almost two hundred-year-old structure probably seemed new to the English, whose history stretched back thousands of years. Just look at Stonehenge—that megalithic monument built about four thousand years ago.

Stonehenge, such an eerie place. When she had stood near the gigantic rocks—trilithons, Jim called them—she felt as if time had no meaning... as if Stonehenge's builders would miraculously return from the grave, and pick her as a human sacrifice. She got prickly bumps thinking about it even now.

And when the moon had appeared from behind a cloud, it seemed to shine only on her. A fellow tourist looked at Hillary, shuddered, then made the sign of the cross. She had a few choice thoughts about Jim for insisting they travel to that ghostly set of building blocks!

Maybe that was when she made her wish—her wish for a happy marriage. Her wish to have a husband who really cared about her.

One corner of her mouth tugged upwards. How naïve of her to believe life could have a happy ending.

Mr. Altmont's knee brushed against hers. A hot wave flashed through her body. She sat up straight and wiped unexpected sweat from her forehead.

He gave her a lazy smile. "But let us talk about something more interesting, my dear. I know you must find yourself at point-non-plus right now—no husband, no funds, and no prospects. As it happens, I have a little house on...."

Point-non-plus? There he goes again!

Hillary held up her hand. "Please. That's so nice of you but I really can't impose any further. Really. I'm sure Jim's at the Historical Society. It's just like him to rush ahead without me. I'll be fine."

Mr. Altmont's concern for her predicament had her eyes stinging. He was so decent and polite—so unlike Jim Logan. A tear slid down her cheek.

For goodness sake, what was the matter with her? She carefully rubbed her face with her hand to erase the tear.

The carriage slowed its pace. She watched the picturesque village come into view—picturesque but medieval-looking. From the top of small one-

story structures, red and white flags flapped in the breeze. Any minute Hillary expected to see a knight in shining armor charge out on his steed, point his lance at the carriage, and then challenge them to a joust.

As the carriage entered the town, a few people stopped in their tracks, then bowed their heads. Some even got down on their knees! Hillary looked for other vehicles and spotted only three horse-drawn carriages. No excitement around them, though. So why was Mr. Altmont's coach special? Perhaps because he had four horses pulling his carriage instead of one or two? What did these people do when a fancy car traveled the road? Run along side the vehicle to get the driver's autograph?

She bit her lip.

Get a grip.

To cover her nervousness, she said, "How pretty Godstone is. So... unspoiled. Is that small building the White Hart?"

A white-walled structure sat apart from the other brick and tile cottages. Some horses stood tied to posts and nibbled at abundant grass. No cars clashed with the tranquillity of the scene. Not a one.

The carriage stopped in front of the building. Before Mr. Altmont could notice her shining eyes, Hillary opened the door and jumped down to the dirt walkway. "I can't wait to stretch my legs."

Unfortunately, from her point of view, everything inside the White Hart seemed on par with this morning's disaster-filled inn. The people who rushed to greet Mr. Altmont were dressed the same archaic way, the Hart's decor had that homespun, candlelight quality about it, and not one modern convenience disturbed the countrified atmosphere. Darn. That meant no bathrooms, either. Talk about period setting!

Disappointed, Hillary moved over to Mr. Altmont. After waving the inn's employees away, he stood in front of the anteroom mirror. As he straightened the points on that white thing around his neck, a line of concentration appeared on his forehead.

Since he was so fussy about his appearance, she looked at her own image, patted a few of her tight curls, then exhaled in exasperation. Without a drop of makeup on her face she looked as good as could be expected—wan and uninteresting.

She gestured toward his neck. "What is that... um... thing called?"

"This?" He continued to fiddle with two silky bits of material. "This is the *Mathematical*. Blasted difficult to maintain. After a lengthy carriage ride, it tends to sag in the middle. Most inconvenient."

He frowned at his reflection, and his dark brows met at the bridge of his nose. "Should have arranged it *à la Oriental*. Finch insisted I would regret my choice."

She pursed her lips together to keep from laughing. Whatever that thing was around his neck, it could reduce a grown man to a sulking child. "It looks fine to me," she offered.

"Faith, upon my rep, I should be laughed out of my club, dare I show my face."

What a mouthful of words! Was he for real? He'd been so nice to her though; she couldn't repay him by giggling in his face.

But he spoke so earnestly, she couldn't help screwing up her own face. Was that cloth all he had to worry about?

Though she didn't mean for him to see, he must've spotted her expression in the mirror. He stilled and dropped his hands to his sides. "Mrs. Logan, you are a wonder. You think me nothing more than a fribble or a fop. And rightly so! The day a man is judged solely on the tie of his cravat is the day I quit London society and repair to my country estates—permanently. You, on the other hand, obviously have no qualms about appearing in public in a neglected state. I thank you for so eloquently opening my eyes."

It took her a second to recognize the insult, and her mouth slacked open. A slam hidden within a compliment! Altmont's gaze roamed the length of her and she felt as if she was dressed in only her nightshirt again... or worse. She pulled her shawl tighter across her chest and gulped down hard. A wolf in sheep's clothing was still a wolf. And

Simon Altmont was definitely a wolf.

Time to beat a hasty retreat. "I think I'll go freshen up now."

Conscious of him watching her, she stiffly walked past him toward the room he reserved for her. Why had he shown his wolf's teeth? Because he thought she was making fun of him? Touchy, wasn't he?

Over in a corner, Finch paused in his talk with the White Hart's manager to look at her. His expression radiated hatred! Finch's gaze met hers, then his features slackened. He returned to his conversation.

Shaken, Hillary shivered. Had she really seen that? She hugged her shoulders and ran to her private room. For some reason, Finch hated her... and Altmont himself thought nothing of ridiculing her—in his wordy and particular way. A fine bunch of companions!

She closed the oak door to her room, then leaned against it. Maybe this was all a nightmare: indigestion caused by last night's Cornish hen. Oh, well, she learned one positive thing—that mass of white around Altmont's neck was called a cravat.



In the public taproom, Simon Altmont drank from his pewter tankard, glad for the chance to

relax. In some unfathomable way, being in that woman's company disturbed him; brought out the worst in him. He could not remember ever being in such high dudgeon because of a woman. She actually had the temerity to find amusement in his choice of cravat. Harumph! A cheeky wench was not the best of bed partners. Perhaps he would reconsider offering her *carte blanche*.

No, no, that was shabby of him. What he said to her was unforgivable—like tormenting a defenseless kitten. She could not help the way she was dressed. In fact, he could claim responsibility for her present less-than-serviceable state. Although if it had not been for his ministrations, she would still be wearing that provocative pink nightshirt.

Memories of the sensation of her smooth skin against his thigh resurfaced and his emotions stirred. No, he must not make a hasty decision. Maybe he would do her the honor.

Biddable females had their drawbacks, especially in bed. In no way could he consider Mrs. Logan biddable. She would give him a devil of a ride!

A large hand slapped down hard on the heavy, round table, spilling part of Simon's ale. "Darver, you old dog! What brings you to these parts? Last time I saw you, you were plying your charms with a golden Cyprian!"

A man's beefy face stared into Simon's.

“Dewitt! By all that is wonderful!” Simon half rose, gesturing to a chair. “Join me in a mug.”

Neville Dewitt pulled an oak chair away from the table, determined it would support his sturdy frame, and eased himself down onto it. A cracking noise ominously sounded throughout the room. White Hart patrons ceased their discourses, eyed Dewitt's massive bulk, and waited for the chair legs to give way. Even Finch hung silent and watched the proceedings. When the chair refused to surrender, the inn's conversations resumed.

“Never understood why furniture is made so flimsy, Darver. Damme, in the old days....”

“Over a millennium since the Viking days, Dewitt. That is the only bric-a-brac that would fit the likes of you! Admit it, you have increased your volume by three stone since I saw you last.” Simon took another drink.

The blonde-haired giant sighed mightily. “Aye, you've the right of that—I'm a quiz, I know. You, on the other hand, look like perfection, as usual. But tell me, what are you doing south of London? Still working for the government, ain't ya?”

Simon clapped his hand to his forehead. He doubted Dewitt had ever heard of the word “discreet.” Quickly he placed his finger over his lip; Simon wiped away imaginary foam and hoped his friend figured out the need for caution.

Good. From across the table, silence greeted him. Raising his gaze above the rim of his tankard,

Simon took a cursory glance around the taproom. For a second, only a second, he perceived a drop in the decibel level in the conversations to the left and right of him. Dewitt's voice matched the rest of his dimensions; his words could have easily attracted the attention of a sinister party.

Simon exhaled relief. An argument ensued one table over, and the other near fellow drinkers were chirping merry—too befuddled to follow anything more than a “How do you do?” Innocent enough.

Signaling for another round, he murmured, “Must have a care, Dewitt. Now that Boney has escaped from Elba, England is swarming with his agents. One can never feel safe.”

Dewitt reddened and polished off his mug. He flicked a crumb off the sleeve of his canary-colored topcoat, kept his gaze down, and mumbled, “Dash it, I do apologize. Damme, my brain has always been the slowest part of my bod.”

After thanking the innkeeper for the refill, Dewitt stirred it with his thick finger.

“Ye gods, man. Who taught you your manners? And where did you learn how to dress?” Simon did not consider himself a dandy, contrary to what Mrs. Logan thought, but he did draw the line at appearing in that nacky shade of yellow. Devil take it, if he didn't half-expect his friend to lick the ale off his finger.

Dewitt guffawed, then wiped his wet hand on his offensively colored sleeve.

Simon groaned.

“I ain’t no town swell like you, Darver. Don’t have to be—ain’t no marquess. Just a country squire, m’boy. Plain ‘mister’ for me and damn glad of it.” He dropped his bushy brows. “Which brings me back to why you’re here in my part of the country, eh?”

Dewitt was as staunch an Englishman as they came. Simon had no qualms in answering the question. He lowered his voice further. “Just came up from the seaside. Rumor has it Boney’s planning to march or set sail from France. Spies abound, so they say. Lord Castlereagh is having us scout the coastline for traitors.”

“The Foreign Secretary himself? I’d no idea matters were this serious. I mean, the war just ended—after twenty years, for Gad’s sake. Served my King and country, don’t you know. Was looking forward to a little peace.” He growled. “That Corsican Devil!”

Simon clasped his friend on the arm. “Take heart, old boy. I venture Boney is not as strong as he pretends.”

From the taproom door, a streak of blue merino caught Simon’s eye. He gulped down the last of his brew. Some inner sense told him that Mrs. Logan was about to enter the public taproom and by doing so, she would expose herself to insults. Rubbing his chin with his hand, Simon stood. The current Marquess of Darver seemed to be making

a habit of rescuing damsels in distress. At least one damsel, anyway.

But, then again, he did look forward to his reward.

After beckoning Finch to attend to that unconventional woman, Simon reached out and shook Dewitt's hand. "Duty calls, my good fellow. I must be off. Next time you are in the city, stop at my club."

Neville Dewitt also stood, his attention arrested by something beyond the taproom door. He sucked in his cheeks. "So! You've led me to believe you're all business and no play, eh, Darver? Then what's that bit o' fluff out there? A prime article, indeed! I always did say you were a lucky dog! Methinks you might be seeing me in London sooner than you expect."

Simon shrugged and bid farewell to his friend. Dewitt obviously thought Mrs. Logan was Simon's latest paramour. Not yet, but the deed was just as good as done. He would offer her that position posthaste.

Striding into the anteroom, he raked his gaze over Mrs. Logan. She looked so pitiful in that meager borrowed dress. Clutching her shawl close against her breast, her violet eyes seemed to flash an appeal at him. Big, deep, violet eyes. Unusual color. He lingered looking at her, then took a step towards her. Her lips begged to be kissed.

The tiny hairs on his neck stood, and he spotted Finch staring at the woman; his hostility evident. Dammit, the man was a woman-hater from the word "go."

Simon grabbed his great coat and roughly draped it over Mrs. Logan's shoulders. "Come along," he ordered. "The sooner we arrive in London, the better."

Chapter 3



Hillary settled onto the coach's upholstered seat and avoided looking at Altmont. Every sway of his horse-drawn carriage carried them closer to London, and she still hadn't spotted one car, truck, or train. Not one. Nada. Zilch. Downright spooky! And Altmont acted as if he traveled in a horse and buggy every day of the week!

She trembled. It didn't take a genius to figure out something was radically wrong here.

"Chilly, Mrs. Logan?" Without waiting for her reply, he scooped up his coat that she'd set aside, and covered her shoulders again. The warmth from his fingers burned through the thin material of her dress.

She pulled away from his touch and primly held the coat's edges closed. Time to get some answers. "Mr. Altmont, I would like to ask you a few questions."

"Indeed? What a coincidence. I believe I have a question to ask you."

He ran the tip of his tongue over his upper lip in such an intimidating way that her first thought was to huddle inside his coat—to hide from his penetrating gaze.

She folded her arms across her chest. No, she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of seeing how he affected her. Bravery slowly returned. This wolf wasn't going to fleece this little sheep! The shock from this morning's events was starting to wear off.

Before she had a chance to speak, he raised his dark eyebrow. "May I say, Mrs. Logan, I own I would be most pleased if you answer yes!"

Altmont had an uncanny knack of reducing her to a tongue-tied ninny. He looked so precise, self-assured, and picture-perfect in his navy-blue waist-length jacket and tight beige pants. Even his cravat stayed glued around his neck. But in what type of picture was he appearing? He seemed more suited to an old-time oil painting, like one of those fussy Gainsborough portraits than a modern, clear-cut snapshot.

Hillary squared her shoulders. "If I may ask my questions first?"

"As you wish."

She snaked her hand out from inside his coat, then pointed to her surroundings. "Mr. Altmont, none of this makes any sense to me. This carriage, these roads, these old clothes—they're all wrong. Where are the cars? The highways? Is there some

kind of historical festival going on?”

Altmont stroked his chin; a strange look darkened his eyes. “Cars? Highways? You mean high roads, perchance. Never fear. As we near London, we shall encounter more... er... conveyances.”

He looked at her so oddly, a quiver of unease shook her frame. His gaze flickered, probably in acknowledgment of her tension.

Turning toward his discarded newspaper, Altmont picked it up. Very casually, he stated, “As for festivals, there are none this time of year that I am aware of.” He yawned. “But then I have been out of this area for some time.”

Hillary tapped an impatient beat with her big toe. Altmont had dismissed her—just like that, without really answering her questions. He perused the paper as if she was no longer in the carriage.

She cleared her throat. “I may be only a tourist, Mr. Altmont. An American one at that, but I expected rural England to be more... more, well, more with it. My co-workers warned me, but I’ve got to say I never expected anything like this.”

As if to emphasize her words, the carriage roughly lurched to the left. The momentum bounced her off her seat, onto the floor. To add to her troubles, she heard a loud rip. Her dress seam tore under the arm. Great.

Altmont set his paper aside and helped her up.

“Thank you,” she mumbled, not feeling very appreciative.

“Perhaps I do need a new carriage,” he admitted. Focusing his steely-eyed gaze on her, he ran his fingers over his hair. No trace of that lopsided grin now. “You are a most peculiar woman, Mrs. Logan. Odd’s life, I have never met the like. What, exactly, do you mean by ‘with it’? An imprecise term, ‘with it.’”

The pulse in his neck throbbed visibly. He obviously wasn’t done speaking. “And, as for my clothing, I assure you it is far from old. Just had Weston complete the fit on my tailcoat last week. Fine as five pence, so I believed. Ought I register a complaint with Weston? Call him out, perhaps? You are not one, I hope, that favors the French manner of attire?” His nostrils flared. “No, I think not—you dislike champagne.”

Oh, brother, she had offended him again. She never saw such concern over clothes—not with a man, anyway. “No, no, I, um, I’m not talking about fashion.” Was Altmont dense? Or was he just pretending to misunderstand her?

She sighed. “Let me try to explain again. When Jim and I landed in Brighton... um... three days ago, everything there was normal looking, you know, contemporary. Well, except Stonehenge—we took a side trip there. The site was ancient, of course. But even Stonehenge has modern turnstiles.”

“Where did you ‘land’ from?” he interrupted.

“Tampa, you know, in Florida. But what does that have to do with anything? As I was saying, ever since this morning, it’s like I’m in another world... or another century!”

Altmont’s eyes seemed to twinkle—a sudden change from his previous expression. “Tampa, Florida. In the States, you say?”

“Yes!” She couldn’t help answering brusquely. With all that was happening to her, did he want a U.S. geography lesson, too?

His grin reappeared. “And you and your husband were visiting the Royal Pavilion in the hopes of remodeling it?”

“That’s right, but what has....”

“Then I believe this article will interest you.” Altmont leafed through the paper and found a page. About to hand it to her, he stopped. “Do you read?”

He asked that question in all seriousness! “Of course!” She took the newspaper and read the headline. “Nash Chosen To Rebuild Royal Folly.”

Hillary looked up at Altmont. “But that can’t be.” She lowered her gaze again and continued, “John Nash given the nod to redesign pricey, princely palace.”

She shook her head. Nothing made any sense. “This is so strange! Jim just spoke with the officials. They all but said he had the job!”

Altmont sat quietly, clearly entertained by her confusion.

“But why...?” No use talking to him. He

smirked as if her entire life had been turned upside down for his amusement. Unfortunately, her own sense of humor seemed to have deserted her.

“What’s the date of this article?” she murmured, and looked at the top of the page. “April seventh. Hmm, a week ago. But...”

Frowning, she tossed the paper over to Altmont. “Look at this typo—1815! How could they get the year wrong like that?”

Altmont leaned back, stroking his chin. “What year do you believe this to be, Mrs. Logan?”

She couldn’t believe his response. “You don’t find that typographical error... unusual? It might as well read ‘1515,’ for goodness sake.”

Patting her hand, he didn’t bother to hide his thoughts. And his thoughts said that Hillary Logan was bonkers.

She pulled her hand away. She wasn’t the one who was crazy around here. If only she could wipe that smirk off his face.

Trying to put some dignity into her voice, she said, “I suppose you think this whole situation is comical. Well, I have news for you—it’s not.”

Without any inclination to sleep, she closed her eyes anyway. She’d had enough of Mr. Perfect. “I think I’ll rest until we arrive in London.”

“Pity,” she heard him say. “I was finding our conversation extremely... diverting!”



An insistent tapping on her arm disturbed Hillary's rest. With eyes still closed, she brushed at the annoyance and hit sturdy fingers. She woke up in a hurry and found Simon's handsome face smiling down at her.

"Oh, please, excuse me!" She didn't know why she apologized. The warmth of his breath and his nearness seemed to sweep away all her self-restraints. Her traitorous heart pounded with the intensity of a hurricane.

Quickly she clasped her hands in her lap. She inhaled, straightened, exhaled, then looked over at him. The setting sun threw shadows along his jawbone and his eyes shone darkly in the dwindling light. Her heart beat faster, and she suddenly decided to study her fingernails.

"Mrs. Logan, I apologize for awakening you, however I must pay a call at Richmond House." In the confined space of the carriage he shrugged his shoulders into his large, caped coat.

Hillary glanced outside. She spotted graveled pathways, manicured lawns and bushes, and a beige brick building surrounded by a high brick wall. Civilization, at last!

"Is this London?" In the distance, she saw an entryway into a compound and large buildings beyond. "Yes, it must be. Which one is Richmond House?"

Then she noticed the people. All who strolled,

chatted, or stood within those walls were dressed in old-time costumes—the same as the people at the inns! Finer clothes, perhaps, but costumes all the same.

“No, this can’t be London. Why is everyone wearing antique clothes?”

Altmont put on a top hat. It reminded her of Abraham Lincoln. With a paternal smile, Altmont spoke with a superior air, “But, yes, my dear, this is the big city. All these buildings belong to the Duke of Richmond. We are inside his privy gardens.”

He tilted his hat to a rakish angle. “As for antique clothes, I am afraid, my dear, not everyone can be as fashionably dressed as you!”

She turned away from Altmont. Ouch! Well, maybe she deserved that remark. Sinking her chin into her hand, she blew a strand of hair from her forehead. Was she going insane? Or were all these other people crazy?

She focused on a woman entering the compound. The woman’s hair reached as high as Altmont’s hat, yet no one found her coiffure extraordinary. Weird.

Hillary slowly shook her head.

I'm the one that's crazy. I've died and gone to a mad man's hell.

Altmont also looked outside. “Like an oasis, is it not? An oasis in the midst of the rigors of the Whitehall district. I always find it quite peaceful here.”

The scenery was restful, she had to admit that. She could get used to the absence of car horns and traffic noises.

He sighed. “Ah, well, to business. I must confer with His Grace. Wait here, I shan’t be long. When I return, we shall continue on to Thames Street.”

As he ran his fingertips down the length of her cheek, his gaze seemed to caress her. “You will like it there. We shall talk more about it later.”

A cool blast of wind entered as he opened the door to step outside. Goose bumps raised on her arms. Were they from the drop in temperature or the warmth of Altmont’s touch?

She watched him walk toward the brick building, and pulled her shawl tighter. Thames Street? Why did he think she would like it there? The Historical Preservation Society was located off Waterloo Station; that’s what Jim had told her.

Jim. Damn. She’d forgotten about Jim. He had better be at the Society’s headquarters. There was a lot of explaining to do—leaving her at that motel. Just who did he think he was? And why did she matter so little to him?

The more she thought about Jim’s actions, the more determined she became. She would file for divorce. The longer they were married, the more empathy she felt for his first wife. No one liked to admit failure—and marriage was the ultimate commitment. Goodness knew, Hillary had tried and tried to make the marriage work, but Jim didn’t

care whether it did or not.

Perhaps the hardest thing to deal with was Jim hiding the fact that he couldn't have more children. After two daughters he had signed up for surgery.

Hillary brushed away a tear. No children. No babies to love.

Jim had said he'd forgotten about the operation. Like hell, he'd forgotten! How could someone forget about that? She had undergone several medical tests—some of them downright painful—to find out why she couldn't conceive. Only when her doctor suggested a sperm count did Jim “remember” the truth.

She wanted to have children; she longed for motherhood. That loss hurt more than knowing he never loved her.

She relaxed against the comfortable cushions of the carriage and closed her eyes. It was too late now for regrets. She'd file for divorce when she got out of here—wherever “here” was. Just her luck to stumble into some forgotten corner of the Twilight Zone.

She sat up thinking she had seen Altmont on the graveled walkway. No, as the man neared, she could tell the difference. No comparison to Simon Altmont.

Vivid sensations from this morning raced up and down her body. Burning urges settled in her loins.

She smiled.

Let's face it. Waking up next to Simon Altmont hadn't been all that unpleasant!

She bit her lip at the guilt. Married women weren't supposed to have such thoughts. Well, when she returned to Tampa, she'd take care of that. She wanted out of her loveless marriage.

A rustling noise from outside startled her. Someone rapped on the carriage door, then opened it slowly. Hillary stared at the lined face of Altmont's grumpy employee, Finch.

"Pardon me, madam, but I carry a message for you from your husband."

"From Jim?" She almost squeaked the words. Who ever thought she'd get excited at the mention of Jim Logan's name? "Where is he?"

Finch shuffled self-consciously. "The innkeeper told me Mr. Logan would meet you at the Rosebud Tavern this evening. Your husband had unexpected urgent business requiring his departure this morning, so the innkeeper said."

Hillary noticed Finch avoided looking her in the eye. But then, his behavior all day indicated his disapproval of her. No matter. Soon he wouldn't have to put up with her company and she would no longer have to tolerate his.

"Where's the Rosebud Tavern?" she asked.

He pointed to the privy gardens' entryway. "Through the gate, follow Whitehall until it curves right. Turns into the Strand. The Rosebud Tavern is at Villiers Street and the Strand—four

streets up. 'Tis about a quarter hour's walk."

Finch then coughed quietly. "Begging your pardon, ma'am, but no telling how long my... er... my master will be gone. Best leave now."

With the sun sinking fast, Finch was right; she had better get started. He assisted her exit from the carriage. Contact with his hand made her jump—this time a very unpleasant sensation.

Smoothing the wrinkles out of her gown, she heard his feet shuffle again. Couldn't the man keep still? She glanced at his spindly legs and protruding middle. With a narrowing gaze, she confronted him. "Finch, why didn't you tell me this earlier? I was worried sick."

Finch contemplated his dull black shoes. "Mr. Altmont sometimes concerns himself when he oughtn't. I did not wish for him to become involved."

She screwed up her lips. Spoken like a true servant. It made sense though. She probably was a bother to Altmont.

But today had been no picnic for her, either.

She shrugged and tossed her head to flip her spiral curls over her shoulder. Thoughts of taking a hot soak in a hotel room tub were becoming an obsession! "I see. Well..."

She scanned the brick buildings for Altmont but he was nowhere to be seen. "Well, I'll be going then. Please thank Mr. Altmont for me and tell him where I've gone, okay? When I get settled,

I'll give him a call to thank him."

"Yes, ma'am," Finch woodenly responded.

"What's his phone number?"

Finch's blank stare chilled her more than the falling temperature. Without speaking, he made it quite plain he considered her an imbecile.

She pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders and sighed. "Don't trouble yourself. I'll look it up in the phone book."

What was the man's problem? Remaining silent, he waited for her to leave.

She took a deep breath and glanced around one last time for Altmont. No dice. But shadows around the gardens were lengthening; daylight wouldn't last much longer.

After saying good-bye to Finch, Hillary headed for the Duke of Richmond's exit gate and beyond. God give her strength, she hoped the Rosebud Tavern wasn't too far away. How she looked forward to giving Mr. Jim Logan a piece of her mind!

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Susanne Marie Knight

Being a writer means first being a reader. My love of books started at the age of nine, when I devoured science fiction short stories, especially novels by Issac Asimov. In high school I began reading Regencies by Georgette Heyer. The tone and the language of the era fascinated me. Where else could you refer to a drunken man as someone who was “chirping-merry,” “three parts disguised,” or “a bit bosky”? From avid reading, I graduated to writing. I wanted to combine fantasy with my own particular kind of reality.

The idea for Lord Darver’s Match began one dark morning with me snuggling in bed next to my husband. What would happen, I theorized, if the man I woke up next to was not my husband? This idea developed into Hillary Logan’s plight transporting her to early nineteenth century England... and the Marquess of Darver’s bed.

When I’m not writing, editing, volunteering at my daughter’s school, working in public relations for a PBS television show, or doing household chores—I sleep! Oh, I also play computer games, browse bookstores, swim, and watch TV’s “X-Files.”

I love to hear from my readers. My address is P.O. Box 28114, Spokane, WA 99228.



Susanne Marie Knight

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