



A DREW
FARTHERING
MYSTERY

Death
-at-

THORBURN HALL

JULIANNA
DEERING



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To the One who is loving
toward all He has made

— One —

Madeline Farthering gripped her husband's arm a little more tightly as they made their way through the mass of people crowding Waverley Station, certain that if they were separated in this chaos she'd never be able to find him again. Drew said something to her, but she could only shake her head and shrug.

He repeated whatever it was he had said, but the crackling announcement of a delayed train arrival blaring through the station made it impossible to make out.

She pressed closer to his side. "What did you say?"

By then the announcement had ended, and her shouted question drew the attention of several passersby. A blush heated her cheeks.

Drew's gray eyes were warm and laughing. "Having fun, darling?"

She pursed her lips. "Not yet. Is Edinburgh always like this?"

"It's a fairly busy place most of the time, I expect, but people come from all over for the tournament."

She smiled, enjoying his excitement. “I’ve always wanted to see the British Open.”

“*The Open, darling,*” he corrected. “Ever and always, *the Open.*”

“Oh, yes, of course.” She managed to keep from rolling her eyes. “Anyway, I’ve been to our Open, the U.S. Open, and I’ve been to the PGA. They started a new tournament in Georgia, too. Last year.”

“Ah, yes, at Augusta. I remember reading about that one. Well, if they’re still having it in the next year or two, perhaps we’ll toddle on over to the States and have a look. How would that be?”

She beamed at him. As much as she loved her husband and his beautiful country, she sometimes missed the sounds and sights of her native land. “That would be—”

“Monstrous!”

Madeline blinked, and she and Drew both turned toward the heavily accented voice.

“Monstrous,” the man repeated, this time on a heavy sigh as an elderly porter, obviously ill at ease, looked at him. “And yet it must be borne, must it not?”

He was somewhere in his late thirties, tall and slender, with a pencil-thin mustache and a look of pale tragedy about him. An actor or artist, Madeline decided. His ivory silk suit was flawless and quite expensive. He must be extremely successful. Either that or he had a wealthy patron. She couldn’t decide exactly what sort of accent he had. Perhaps Russian.

“Can you believe, madam,” he said, catching her eye, “I come here to this great country to escape oppression and corruption, and what do I find?”

Yes, the accent was definitely Russian. Madeline shook her head. “I’m sure I don’t know.”

He opened his mouth and then stopped short, a look of pure delight suddenly on his face. “Ah, you are American, no? I am certain such things never happen in your country.” He swept the stylish hat from his pomaded head and held it over his heart. “Not to so heavenly a creature as you, madam.”

There was only the slightest tension in Drew’s smile. “Is there some way we might be of help?”

“You are too kind, sir, but I fear there is no help to be had.” Again the foreigner heaved a tragic sigh. “One can only grieve and carry on.”

“I’m very sorry, sir,” the porter said, a Scottish burr in his voice and his rheumy eyes anxious. “We have looked everywhere. Once the train has emptied, we’ll make another search and send it along to you the minute it’s found.”

The Russian pursed his lips. “And what until then? I present myself for dinner this evening looking as if I have just come from the jungle? From being three weeks lost at sea? It cannot and must not be done.”

“But, sir—”

“Misha! Misha!” A portly little woman in her mid-fifties waved from a few feet away and then bustled up to them, puffing with exertion but still triumphant. “Look what I have,” she singsonged, and she presented the foreign man with a small leather toiletry case.

The porter heaved a sigh of relief as the Russian clasped the case to his chest with one elegant white hand and used the other to bring the woman’s heavily ringed fingers to his lips. “Oh, madam, once again you have saved me from utter ruin.”

“Will there be anything else, sir?” the porter asked as the woman stood simpering.

“That will be all, my good man.” The Russian gave him what

could only be described as a regal nod of dismissal, and then he faltered when the old man stood looking expectantly at him. “Ah, er . . .” He patted his breast pocket and looked with some distress at the woman. “I hesitate to trouble you, madam, but it seems . . . uh . . .”

She looked at him for a moment, obviously puzzled, and then realization dawned in her eyes. “Oh. Oh, yes. Yes, of course.”

She popped open her beaded handbag and rummaged through it, finally coming up with an assortment of small coins that she pressed into the porter’s gnarled hand. “There you are. We’re so sorry to have caused you any bother. My husband had accidentally put it with our things. Such a silly mistake, isn’t it, though it does look rather like his. But no harm done in the least. You’ve been a great help.”

The little man touched his fingers to the brim of his blue cap and then wove his way into the crowd.

Drew gave the woman a polite smile. “If there’s nothing else . . . ?”

“Oughtn’t you to introduce me to your friends, Misha?” she said, turning appealingly to the Russian.

“Merely passersby, ma’am,” Drew said with a tip of his hat. “If you have everything sorted here . . .”

“Oh, yes. Certainly. It’s too good of you to try to help. Poor Misha, he can’t be troubled with practical matters, you know. The brain of the artist is simply too profound for the trivialities you and I must deal with. I’m sure you understand.”

The man was standing now with his hand spread across his shirtfront, his brow furrowed as if his recent near-tragedy had quite overcome him.

“I’m certain he bears it as bravely as he is able,” Drew told the woman, somehow managing to look earnestly solicitous.

“I am never one to complain,” the Russian said dolefully.

“No, of course not,” the woman soothed.

“The past is gone,” he sighed, “and we must carry on.”

“Good man,” Drew said with hearty finality. “Stiff upper lip and that, eh? Well, I’m afraid we have a car waiting for us, so we’d best be off. Good luck to you both.”

“Oh, dear,” the woman said, standing tiptoe as she attempted to see over the crowd. “Where is Alfred now? I don’t want them waiting dinner for us.”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Madeline hissed, tugging her husband’s arm.

He followed her toward the station exit, looking baffled.

“You were going to go back and help her. Don’t bother denying it.”

“Nonsense. I was merely trying to see where Nick had got to.” He lifted his head, looking back toward the train. “I thought I saw him just over there.”

She pressed her lips together. “And what would he be doing over there? The way he bolted off the train, you’d have thought it was on fire.”

It was too loud in the station to hear her husband’s low laughter, but she could feel the soft rumble of it in his chest. “He *was* rather worried about not being on the platform when Carrie’s train comes in. I don’t think he much cared for her coming all this way alone, and I can’t blame him.”

“Judging by the telegram she sent from the dock, she got along just fine. And she wasn’t exactly alone.”

But she was alone. Carrie Holland had been her best friend for just ages. Carrie’s father had walked Madeline down the aisle at her wedding, taking her own late father’s place in the ceremony in giving her to Drew. She had teased and scolded

Carrie's little brother as if he were her own. But now both father and brother were gone. Her mother had passed on years ago. Carrie had no one left.

Drew squeezed her hand. "I know you're worried about her, darling, but I'm hoping this visit is just what she needs to put things right."

"I'm hoping it won't be just a visit."

He gave her a wink. "That, my love, is where Nick steps in."

Madeline nodded. Poor Nick. He had fallen hard for Carrie three years ago when she and Madeline had come to Drew's Hampshire estate, Farthering Place, as part of their European tour. Madeline had stayed and married Drew, while Carrie had gone on with her tour and then returned home. After a year of letters between her and Nick, she had come back to England to visit. Absence had certainly made their hearts grow fonder, but then the loss of her brother made it necessary for her to return home once more to care for her grieving father. Now there was nothing in America to hold her, yet were letters enough? After two more years apart, would things be the same between her and Nick?

"He should have asked her to marry him long before now," Madeline said.

Drew shrugged. "It was a bit awkward when she left the last time, you know. She had her father to deal with along with everything else, and he didn't want to make it any more difficult for her, trying to keep her in Hampshire when she needed to see to things at home. And you wouldn't want him to pop the question via telegram, would you? That would be shockingly vulgar."

She giggled at the look of melodramatic horror on his face. "I suppose there are more romantic methods."

“Mine, for example.”

She stopped short, one hand on her hip. “Yours? Your method was to nearly get yourself killed so I was forced to stay and keep you out of trouble.”

He looked positively smug. “It worked, didn’t it?”

She lifted an eyebrow and then started them walking once more. Feeling him laugh again, she prodded him with her elbow and nodded toward the platform they were approaching.

“You’d better go rescue Nick before he topples off.”

Hat in hand and tawny hair ruffled by the wind, Nick was leaning out over the track, obviously looking for any sign of the train.

Drew hurried up beside him and pulled him back a little. “Best look out there, old man. It’d be a bit of a letdown for your Miss Holland if she finds you under the train rather than waiting beside it.”

Nick’s smile was more nervous than convincing. “Just wondering why the deuced thing isn’t here yet. You don’t think there was a breakdown or anything, do you?”

“Of course not.” Madeline took his arm and gave her husband a look that discouraged a flippant response. “It’s not even due yet.”

“Isn’t it?” Nick looked up at the station clock and then gave Madeline a rather sheepish grin. “I suppose it isn’t.” Then his expression became urgent. “She *is* coming, isn’t she?”

“You have her telegram, don’t you?” Drew asked.

Nick beamed and patted his breast pocket, eliciting the crackle of paper. “Shall I quote it for you?”

Drew turned to Madeline, shaking one accusing finger at her. “I hold you responsible for every bit of this, wife. Here I thought I had a fine estate manager and stout fellow for any

emergency, and you arrange for him to be turned into some helpless form of jelly.”

She looked at him with disdain. “Carrie and I came to Hampshire on vacation. Any jellification on the part of either of you is entirely your own fault.”

“I see,” Drew said gravely. “When we go home to Hampshire, I will see that inquiries are made.”

Knowing her reply would never be heard over the sudden clatter of the approaching train, Madeline merely wrinkled her nose at him. As soon as the train began to slow, Nick loped alongside, looking into the first-class compartments for any sign of a diminutive American girl with a sweet face and strawberry-blond curls.

Madeline tugged Drew along behind him, pausing from time to time to stand tiptoe to peer into the soot-grimed windows. With a squeal of brakes and a hiss of steam, the engine came to a stop, and Drew nodded toward the open door of the compartment they had just passed.

“Carrie!” Madeline slipped her arm out of Drew’s and hurried over to her friend. “You’re here. You’re really here.”

“I’m so glad to see you.” Carrie hugged Madeline tightly. “I thought the train would never get in.” Still with one arm around Madeline, she reached for Drew’s hand. “How are you, Drew?”

“Pleased you could join us.” Drew gave her slim hand a squeeze, his gray eyes holding just a hint of humor as he glanced toward the front of the train. “Though I daresay not as pleased as someone I could name.”

Nick was coming back down the platform, his hat wadded in both hands and an uncertain smile on his pale lips. “Hullo.”

A tinge of eager pink came into Carrie’s cheeks. “Hello.”

Hiding a smile, Madeline moved back to her husband's side, leaving a clear path between Carrie and Nick.

"Shall I . . . ?" Nick cleared his throat. "Shall I see to your luggage?"

Madeline glared at him. *Don't be an idiot. Don't just leave her standing there. Don't—*

An instant later, she knew she needn't have worried.

With a whisper of her name, Nick took Carrie into his arms, and she melted against him, twin tears slipping from under her closed eyelids.

"Come along, darling," Drew murmured, tucking Madeline's arm into his own. "I'm sure they'll join us in a moment. Plumfield will see to the bags."

They walked out into the damp and blustery June afternoon, leaving the long-parted couple still clasped together, oblivious to anyone and anything outside their embrace.

"Mr. Farthering?" A liveried chauffeur stepped away from a sleek black Triumph saloon and touched the brim of his cap. "I'm Phillips, sir. Lord Rainsby sent me for your party."

"Ah, excellent." Drew looked back toward the station. "There are two more of us just coming now."

Madeline turned to see Nick and Carrie walking hand in hand, eyes soft and voices low. Then, realizing they were observed, they both laughed and quickened their pace. In a few minutes more they were all driving along the coast of the Firth of Forth.

"It's nice of your friends to let me come up to Scotland along with you all," Carrie said, looking out over the waving grasses that thinned onto a wide sandy beach, which in turn sank into the blue-green water. "Will it be a large party?"

"I'm not really sure," Drew admitted. "Being the week of the

Open, I'd be surprised if they didn't have more people staying, but the Rainsbys didn't particularly say."

"Still, it's nice." Carrie gave Nick a shy glance and then smiled at Madeline. "It'll give us a chance to catch up." She blushed at Madeline's knowing grin. "Uh . . . have you known the Rainsbys long, Drew?"

"Lady Rainsby, all my life," Drew said, "but I haven't seen her often."

"The last time was at our wedding," Madeline said, "though I don't think she and Lord Rainsby stayed for the reception. I was introduced to her, but there were so many introductions that day, I really don't remember her at all."

"I was twelve the last time I had a chance to talk to her for more than a few minutes," Drew told Carrie. "It was at my father's funeral."

Carrie's expression clouded.

"Sorry." Drew looked at Madeline, eyes anxious. "I didn't mean—"

"It's all right." Carrie took a deep breath and managed a smile. "Really. Daddy wouldn't want me to be sad remembering him, and I'm not going to be. We're going to have fun and not think of anything dreary."

"Of course we are," Nick said with a fierce look at Drew. "Despite certain ham-fisted remarks."

"No, really," Carrie said, her earnest voice softened by her South Carolina drawl. "I don't want you all tiptoeing around me all the time. It's not as if Daddy passed just the day before yesterday. And it's not as if it came as a surprise."

"I just wish I could have been with you all the way over," Nick said.

Madeline huffed. "She didn't come from America all by her-

self, you know. Just this last part on the train. All the rest of the time she was with Frannie and Amy Haslett and their mother.”

“I’d have felt better if their father had come along,” Nick muttered.

“You never met their maid, Miss Hannah,” Carrie said, giving his hand a squeeze. “She’d intimidate anyone.”

“You’re safely here at any rate,” Drew said. “Even if golf doesn’t much interest you, it should be a jolly nice time. Little Gullane ought to be bustling just now.”

They drove through the village, which was indeed bustling, and out toward the golf course. They saw a few homes along the way, tiny cottages and farmhouses, a grand old manor house, and one extremely modern one with its back at the very edge of a high, rocky outcropping overlooking the water.

“Look at that one.” Carrie pointed to the tall cylinder of a structure, gleaming white with large curved windows that must have stretched from floor to ceiling in the rooms on the top three levels. “I’ve never seen one like it.”

Madeline wrinkled her nose. “It’s that terribly modern style I’ve seen in some of the magazines. All the architects are doing it. Guimard is one of the famous ones, isn’t he?”

“Lovely for the Paris Metro or a Radio City Music Hall, but as a home?” Drew shrugged. “Rather cold looking.”

“I like the old historic ones,” Carrie said, still staring at the house. “Like the one back there at the crossroads. What’s Thorburn Hall like?”

“I’ve never seen it.” Drew leaned toward the front seat. “I say, Phillips, how long before we reach the Hall?”

“Just coming to it now, sir.”

The chauffeur turned onto a long drive that curved up to the white house perched on the overlook.

Drew winced slightly and cleared his throat. “Ah. Yes. Thank you, Phillips. Grand place, I’m sure.”

Madeline covered a giggle with her gloved hand.

“Well handled,” Nick said in a snide stage whisper. “Very subtle.”

The chauffeur chuckled. “I expect you were thinking you’d see something a bit more traditional, sir.”

“Yes,” Drew admitted. “I was.”

“It used to be, sir. A grand Jacobean manor house. Not so large as some I seen, but very fine. It burnt to the ground a few years ago. Nothing left but the little Grecian-looking folly out beyond the garden. Her ladyship had them build this new house with everything sleek and modern. Said she could never abide the old one. Too dreary and all that.”

“My wife says the same thing about our place,” Drew told him.

“Not the house, darling,” Madeline said sweetly. “Just you.”

“Ah. I knew I’d heard it somewhere.”

Madeline giggled and kissed his cheek, making him grin.

Carrie pursed her lips, but there was a glint of laughter in her blue eyes, and some of her anxiousness seemed to fade. “It’s so good to be with you again.” She colored faintly and didn’t look at Nick. “All of you, I mean.”

“I can’t wait till we get settled in,” Madeline told her, “and you and I can really catch up.”

In just a few minutes, the chauffeur pulled up in front of the house. The butler, a small, rather bent elderly man called Twining was waiting at the door. He led them through the spacious white entry hall and into the equally spacious and equally white drawing room. There on a white velvet chaise longue sat a woman of unmistakable style and breeding. She had to be Lady Louisa Rainsby.

“Mr. and Mrs. Farthering, madam,” the butler intoned. “Miss Holland and Mr. Dennison.”

Lady Rainsby was immediately on her feet, hurrying to them with both hands outstretched. “Drew, darling, how are you? You look more like your father than ever. Hello, Madeline, dear. With everything that was going on, I’m sure you don’t remember me at your wedding. I’m glad we’ll have a chance to get acquainted.”

“Of course I remember you,” Madeline said, and now that she saw the woman again, she did have a vague recollection of her, tall and dark, no longer young but lovely in tasteful orchid silk and a cloche hat with a diamond clasp. “Thank you for having us, Lady Rainsby.”

“Oh, Louisa, please,” she insisted.

“Lady Louisa,” Madeline said, liking her already.

“It’s my pleasure, I’m sure. Lord Rainsby insists on going to the Open every year, and it’s that much more fun if we make a bit of a party out of the week.”

“You remember Nick Dennison,” Drew said, pulling Nick up next to him.

“Oh, yes. The best man.” Lady Louisa’s smile was just the tiniest bit forced, but she gave Nick a gracious nod. “We’re happy to have you with us, of course. And you must be Miss Holland, Madeline’s friend.” She looked at Carrie, friendly but the slightest bit puzzled. “We have met before, haven’t we?”

“She was my maid of honor,” Madeline explained, and the older woman’s face lit.

“Of course. I thought you were the loveliest thing in that pale robin’s-egg satin.” She squeezed Carrie’s hand. “I hope we shall all become the best of friends. You know, Lord Rainsby teases me terribly about it, but I so enjoy having people to

stay. We're not having a great many guests this time, but that will give us all a better chance to become acquainted, don't you think?" She turned to the man who had risen from an overstuffed, white velvet chair in the corner. "Do allow me to introduce Gerald's friend and business partner, Mr. Reginald MacArthur."

MacArthur was a solidly built man, fiftyish but active looking, his clothes stylish but not fussy, his skin weathered as if he preferred to be outdoors whenever possible. He shook hands all around.

"It seems we're to have a bit of weather for the tournament," he said, smiling from under his heavy reddish mustache. "I trust you ladies shan't mind too much."

"It should be interesting to see how the players do once they get on the greens," Madeline said. "They'll be soft and hard to read. I just hope they don't suspend play due to the wind."

MacArthur's smile broadened. "You must be a golfer, Mrs. Farthering."

"Oh, not really. I never can hit the ball without taking out a chunk of grass with it. But I've heard my husband complaining enough about his game to know what's what. And I do enjoy the tournaments. My father used to take me to some of them when I lived in America."

"You're a lucky man, Farthering. A golfer whose wife appreciates the sport is to be envied."

Before Drew could reply to that, the bell rang. A moment later the butler returned to the drawing room door. "Mr. and Mrs. Pike, madam, and"—he grimaced almost imperceptibly—"Count Kuznetsov."

"Louisa!"

Drew glanced at Madeline in disbelief as the portly, bright-

eyed woman from the train station bustled into the room and straight into their hostess's outstretched arms.

"Elspeth. I thought you'd never arrive." Lady Louisa reached out to the heavysset middle-aged man beside her. "Mr. Pike, so good to see you again."

He bent awkwardly over her hand. "Good afternoon, Lady Rainsby," he said in a gravelly, deep bass voice. "It's good of you to have us." He gave the languid Russian accompanying them a disdainful glance. "All of us."

"Welcome back to Thorburn Hall, Count Kuznetsov." Lady Louisa slipped her hand out of Pike's and extended it to the younger man. "Elspeth has told me so much about you since your last visit. What a tragedy."

The Russian bowed his head, a look of pain shadowing his mobile face. "You are too kind, madam. Such pleasantries as we shall have here are a most welcome distraction."

Seeing Drew and Madeline, Mrs. Pike clasped her plump hands. "Isn't this just the most delicious coincidence, Alfred? This is the very kind couple Misha and I met in the station. I thought at the time that they were just the sort of young people Misha might find amusing. *They* wouldn't sneer at a fine artiste."

"Neither would I," Pike muttered, half under his breath, "if I were ever to meet one."

"You know, we never were introduced," Mrs. Pike chattered on, and Lady Louisa made sure everyone knew who was who.

"Madam Farthering," the count said, bowing over Madeline's hand. "Again I am enchanted. And you, sir." He took Drew's arm. "You absolutely must tell me everything about yourself and your charming wife. I am certain we shall all be the dearest of friends."

"Misha is writing a symphony," Mrs. Pike said, her eyes wide and sparkling as if she was writing it herself. "It's wonderful."

“And maybe one day we’ll actually hear a note or two,” Pike grumbled.

Madeline gave Drew a subtle elbow to the ribs and a look that warned him not to laugh.

“I’m sure it will be wonderful,” Mrs. Pike insisted cheerfully. “We mustn’t be impatient, must we, Misha? Art simply cannot be rushed.”

The count released Drew’s arm so he could press her hand with a fervent kiss. “Ah, my so perceptive muse.”

Pike snorted and then shook hands with Drew. “If I’m not mistaken, you’re the Farthering who sorted out that nasty business in Yorkshire last year.”

Drew shrugged. “Along with my wife and Nick here, we managed to help out a bit.” He glanced over at Carrie and, seeing a touch of pensiveness in her polite smile, quickly added, “But that’s old news. I’m much more interested in watching Henry Cotton win another Open.”

“It should be a fine match. Do you play?”

“Now, now, Alfred,” Mrs. Pike scolded playfully, “you boys will have plenty of time to talk about golf the whole week long.”

“Why don’t we all get acquainted?” Lady Louisa suggested, indicating the sleek-lined sofa and chairs situated in front of the wide, curved window. “And I’ll ring for tea.”



“This should be entertaining,” Drew said when they were dressing for dinner in their very modern all-white room with its almost-clinical white bathroom en suite. “What did you think of them all?”

Madeline smoothed the aqua lamé silk of her gown, looking

at her reflection with a critical eye. “I like Lady Louisa very much. Tell me again how you’re related?”

“Her grandfather and my great-grandfather were brothers. So I suppose that makes us second cousins once removed. I’m still not quite sure why she invited us, though. It’s not as if we’d met more than a time or two since I was a boy.”

“We wanted to see the Open. She wanted to get better acquainted. There’s nothing wrong with that, is there?”

“Of course not.” He took out his pocket watch with their wedding sixpence hanging from the chain and checked the time. Just five minutes to the hour. “We ought to go down soon.”

Madeline turned her head to one side and picked up two earrings, one pearl and one antique gold, and held them up, one by each ear. “Which one?”

“The pearls,” he said without hesitation.

“You always choose the pearls,” she huffed, putting them on.

“The pearls suit you,” he said, leaning close. “Always lovely, never out of style. Rich but not gaudy.”

There was a sudden hint of mischief in her periwinkle eyes. “Unlike Count Kuznetsov, who is gaudy but not rich.”

Drew chuckled. “Inquisitive chap, isn’t he, deviling all of us for our life stories?”

“And entertaining,” she said. “His impersonations of the English, German, and French politicians were too funny.”

“Somehow he’s clever enough to find himself a soft berth for just the price of a bit of artistic posturing. Though if he’s been a guest at the Hall before now, I’m rather surprised Lady Louisa and, indeed, everyone else in the house didn’t hear about the count’s tragic past, whatever it is, during the first visit.”

“Maybe he doesn’t have a tragic past.” Madeline considered. “Or maybe he just doesn’t like to talk about it.”

“Oh, he has one,” Drew assured her. “And I can promise you he loves to talk about it.”

“Well, he seems to make Mrs. Pike very happy without being more than an annoyance to Mr. Pike, so I suppose it works out nicely for everyone.”

“One wonders how anyone has the brass to simply expect to be supported in such a way,” Drew said. “But if the three of them are happy . . .”

Madeline unstopped one of her perfume bottles, and the smell of gardenias filled the room. She touched the tiniest bit to her wrists and behind both ears, only enough to intrigue, enough to draw a man closer rather than drive him away. Drew breathed it deeply, smiling at her reflection.

“I, on the other hand, would object most strenuously if you took up with a confidence trickster and brought him to Farthering Place to live.”

“Do you think he is?” she asked, eyes bright as she turned to face him. “A fraud, I mean?”

Drew scoffed. “Oh, he plays it well, and I don’t suppose there’s any real harm in him, but I shouldn’t like to hold my breath waiting for his symphony to be finished.”

“Now you’re sounding like Mr. Pike.” Madeline stood up, looking him over. “You’d better go get Nick before we’re late. I’ll see if Carrie’s ready. Beryl is over doing her hair, as if she needed help.”

“She’s like you, my love,” Drew said, dropping a kiss on her delicately powdered cheek. “Whether it takes you five minutes on your own or three hours and a brigade of handmaids to make yourself presentable, you always look as fresh and artless as a newly budded rose.”

She only laughed at that, but it did bring the pleased color

to her cheeks. “After two and a half years of marriage, you’re supposed to have left behind the niceties and become a thoughtless brute.”

“I shall put forth a better effort,” he promised.

She nestled into his arms for just a moment. “How long have Lord and Lady Louisa been married? And what’s he like?”

“He was at our wedding, too, you know. Not that I’ve had more than a few polite words with him. Nice enough chap as far as I recall. They must have been married well more than twenty years, I’d guess. Perhaps we’d better go downstairs and get better acquainted with them and everyone else.”

“You just want to find out more about that so-called count.” She slipped her arm into his. “And so do I.”