

THE DAUGHTERS *of* BAINBRIDGE HOUSE, BOOK 2

*A* FLIGHT  
*of* FANCY

LAURIE ALICE EAKES

*A Novel*

  
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To my husband,  
who deserves to have every one  
of my books dedicated to him,  
but especially this one.

*The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;  
and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

*Psalm 34:18*

# 1

*August 1812*

Crowds swarmed around and jostled against the Whittaker carriage, slowing its progress from a trot to a crawl. Thick, oily smoke from torches penetrated the interior. Velvet curtains and cushions reeking of pitch felt ready to smother Miss Cassandra Bainbridge, who was already hot on this August night.

“I think we would be better off walking in the crowd than riding in here.” She clutched her rose satin reticule in one hand and gripped her fiancé’s arm with the other, as though ready to spring from the vehicle at any moment, which she was. “Perhaps we could take refuge in someone’s drawing room until these bacchanalians go home.”

Beside her, Lord Geoffrey Giles, Earl of Whittaker, chuckled and covered her hand with his. “Only you would use a word like *bacchanalian* to describe a crowd of drunken debauchery.”

“It is the proper word for those who have celebrated too freely with drink.” She glared at him down her long Bainbridge nose, though she could see little of his face in the gloom inside the carriage. “What should I call them?”

“The right word, of course.” Whittaker shrugged, then moved

his hand from her gloved fingers to her nose, to the place where her mirror warned her a crease was already forming between her eyes.

Not that what her mirror said mattered much to Cassandra. That crease came from hours of honest study.

She gripped her reticule more tightly, as it held the efforts of her latest project—the design of a balloon—and leaned toward Whittaker’s hand. Since the renewal of their engagement in June, the slightest brush of his fingertips came close to distracting her from thoughts of ballooning and Greek translations, and most definitely from wild, celebratory crowds worked to a fever pitch over Wellington finally winning a decisive battle against Napoleon’s troops in Spain. If Whittaker moved his hand to her cheek—

A throng of young men slammed against the side of the carriage, tilting it onto two wheels. The horses whinnied and the coachman shouted. Cassandra screamed, a short burst of a cry, and Whittaker wrapped his arms around her, upsetting her elaborate coiffeur and sending her hair tumbling around her shoulders. Her hair and Whittaker’s shoulder shielded her face against his coat lapel.

“Le’s ’ave a ride,” the drunken youths shouted in speech so slurred as to be scarcely comprehensible. “Don’ be selfish, arishtocrat.”

“Lord Mayor’s already stingy with t’luminations.”

“More light. More light.” The chant grew deafening.

Cassandra shivered now despite the heat. The men sounded angry, not celebratory. “They’re angry over too few illuminations to celebrate the victory?”

“C’mon, Whittaker, open up.” The rattle of the door handle accompanied the command. “We ’eard yer lady.”

“They know your carriage.” Cassandra raised her head. “But why would they assault you over too few lanterns and torches and such?”

“It’s not me personally. The celebration seems to have gotten a bit rough, is all.” Whittaker stroked her hair. “Hush now. The doors are locked, the coachman and footman are armed, and I have a brace of pistols here in the carriage.”

Shots rang out at that moment, the crack of a pistol, the boom of a blunderbuss fired into the air. Whinnying again, the horses lurched forward. Without Whittaker’s arms around her, Cassandra would have slid to the floor. She grasped his shoulder with one hand and twisted her fingers through her reticule strings with the other.

The jostling and demands ceased, though the crowd did not disperse.

“Perhaps we should have gone home with Christien and Lydia,” Cassandra said, maintaining her hold on her fiancé and folded plans. “Christien is a trained soldier, after all.”

“But this was the first opportunity we’ve had to be alone together for a week.” Whittaker flashed her a smile, then kissed the crease between her brows. “This wedding is keeping you from me so much I think we should have eloped like your sister.”

“They did not elope.” Cassandra rubbed her head against Whittaker’s shoulder. “They simply got married by special license. But this is my first marriage and Mama wants everything just so.” She shuddered. “I hate every dress fitting and shopping excursion as much as I dislike this crowd.”

Her ears strained for signs of the rough youths returning. She could distinguish nothing of them over the general din of the throng.

“Where will I wear all those gowns in Lancashire?” she added.

“You will need them when Parliament is in session and we are in town.”

“But that’s not until spring.”

“With the Americans declaring war, it is going to be this autumn.”

“But you promised.” She started to pull away.

“I did not declare war.” Whittaker tightened his hold and kissed her cheek.

“And all spring the Luddites kept you away.”

“I did not go smashing up looms either.” He kissed her lips.

She decided to stop arguing with him for the moment. She forgot about the rowdy revelers outside the carriage. This, after all, was why Cassandra had taken Whittaker’s equipage instead of sharing one with her elder sister and her new husband—to be alone with her fiancé for a few minutes of tenderness, for some time of forgetting that Mama wanted her to buy one more fan or pair of gloves, that Whittaker’s mama needed to introduce her to half a dozen more relatives, that Cassandra herself wanted to talk to her fellow aeronaut enthusiasts about her design. She simply wanted to remember this man whose glance, whose smile, whose touch, turned her heart to tallow. She needed moments like this like she needed nourishment for strength and air for breath.

Except he robbed her of breath.

Gasping, laughing, she drew back from his embrace—and began to cough. Nearby, something larger than torches blazed, the smoke heavy and sharp, thick inside the carriage. Around them, laughter and cheers had turned to bellows and protests, commands and threats.

Cold perspiration broke out beneath the sleeves of her pelisse and trickled down her spine. “Whittaker . . . what’s wrong?”



“I cannot be certain.” He leaned forward and lifted a corner of the window curtain. “A fire. That is obvious.” He sounded calm.

Cassandra moved to the other side of the carriage so she could peek out the curtains too. Fire indeed. A carriage blazed in a side street. Men and women swirled around it, roaring incomprehensible but angry-sounding words, as though about to burn a body in effigy—or worse.

“This was a celebration for Salamanca,” Cassandra protested. “Why the anger?”

“Too many people and too much spirits combined can cause trouble.” He knelt before her and took her hands in his, letting the curtains fall over the window, leaving them in darkness—a private, sheltered cocoon despite the smoke. “We will be out of it soon and safely back to Bainbridge House.”

“I was hoping we could go to the Chapter House. It’s perfectly respectable, and I have my plans to give—”

“I am not taking you to a coffeehouse tonight. Your friends will have to wait for their balloon plans.” Beneath the tumult around the carriage, Cassandra thought he muttered, “Forever.”

They had enjoyed such a pleasant evening with Lydia and her husband, she did not want to argue with Whittaker. He did not like her ballooning enthusiasm, but she would change his mind once they were married. Then she would have more freedom to move about, not constantly under her mother’s eye. Whittaker, not Father, would dictate her movements, and Whittaker was no dictator.

Unless he did intend to stop her from pursuing aeronautics.

She pursed her lips and squeezed his gloved fingers with her own, then released one of his hands to clutch at her precious reticule. “I think Lancashire will be perfect for ballooning once the harvest is in. All that flat land and the sea breezes.”

“I think,” Whittaker said, “you will have no time for balloons once we are wed. Mother intends to leave the running of the house to you. She wants to travel, visit friends, but with the trouble with the Luddites, she has been afraid to do so.”

“But—” Cassandra released his other hand. “I know little of household management. I thought she would be there, help me. Geoffrey, when were you going to tell me this?”

“Mama was going to when she takes you to Gunter’s tomorrow.”

“Oh, that.” Cassandra did not admit she had forgotten the engagement. “One of my ballooning friends—”

“Enough about balloons. It is as much a passing fancy as was your translation of Homer.”

“Homer was not a passing fancy at all.” Cassandra raised her chin. “I finished it. Then I saw the balloon and aeronautics—”

He silenced her with another kiss.

“What was that for?” she asked when she could catch her breath.

“To ensure I am no passing fancy.”

“You know you are not.” Because she had broken off their betrothal in the spring, she leaned forward this time and pressed her cheek to his, slipped her arms around his shoulders.

He drew her off the seat so they squeezed into the footwell between the two benches. The cacophony of the crowd, the oiliness of smoke, and the jostling of the carriage ceased to matter, may as well have ceased to exist. Always he won her attention this way, sending the world packing, even her scholarly interests and now her enthusiasm for flight. If he was in the same room, she could not bear to be more than inches from him and felt as though a piece of her were missing every time he left.

“I love you so much it scares me sometimes,” she murmured into his ear.

A shudder ran through him. She understood why. He felt the same. Their profound attraction had gotten them reprimanded more than once, mostly by Cassandra’s sister Lydia. But now seven endless days stood between them and their wedding. She wished it were seven hours, or, better yet, seven minutes.

They would reach Cavendish Square in little more than seven minutes unless more crowds stopped them. Chaperonage and separation. Annoying, dull dressmakers would crowd between them. Tea and cakes with his mother and embarrassing conversations with her own . . .

Cassandra dropped her reticule so she could bury her fingers into Whittaker’s thick, dark hair. “Only a week,” she whispered.

“Too long.” He drew her closer.

Her hair tumbled over his hands. His cravat and her gown would be hopelessly crushed. Mama and her companion, Barbara, would lecture about proper conduct for a young lady. Her younger sister, Honore, would give her sly glances and giggle. Father would scowl at Whittaker and draw him aside for a “manly” conversation about propriety and dishonor. Cassandra did not care. Whittaker loved her despite her need to wear spectacles most of the time, despite her eccentric interest in Greek poets and flying machines. Surely once they were wed, he would understand she would die of boredom overseeing the household and stillroom and all those country housewife things, or, worse, being the London hostess for a member of the House of Lords. She accepted his proposal when he was plain Mr. Giles, a younger son. His becoming the earl due to an unfortunate accident to his elder brother did not change her. It certainly did not change his feelings for her. Alone in

the carriage, every time they were alone, he made that amply clear. Marriage would be even better. So much—

The carriage rocked again. More drunken voices shouted through the panels. The door handles rattled.

Cassandra gasped. “Geoffrey.”

“Stay down. I’ll fetch my pistols.” He started to rise. A strand of her hair caught on his cravat pin, halting him for a second.

And in that moment, the window glass shattered.

Cassandra screamed and ducked. Whittaker grabbed for his pistols. His feet tangled in Cassandra’s skirt, and they fell against the door—the door at which several revelers tugged. With their combined weight pushing and the bacchanalians pulling, the latch gave way. The door burst open.

And Cassandra tumbled into the arms of a torchbearer.

## 2

The ruffian dropped his torch and ran. Blazing pitch landed against Cassandra's skirt. Delicate muslin smoked, flared. She screamed, leaped back, fanning the fire.

"Don't move!" Whittaker grabbed her arm to hold her fast with one hand, tore at the buttons of his coat with the other. No use. Too slow. Coat too tight to remove without help. No choice. He flung her to the street, thick with mud, droppings, nameless detritus. He rolled her in it, smothered the flames with his own body and then a horse blanket someone tossed over them.

And the screaming continued—women from the crowd and terrified horses. Crowd and horses bolted.

Cassandra lay in the street silent and still. Too silent. Too still. Gorge rising in his throat, his eyes burning from smoke and moisture, Whittaker knelt over her. He touched her cheek, so smooth beneath the soot of tar fire. Despite the heat of the night and the fire, the smoothness felt as cold as shaded marble. Too cold. Too—

"No! God, You would not do this to me." His voice emerged in a hoarse whisper yet sounded loud in the hush that had fallen over the remaining onlookers.

"God does what He wills," someone murmured a yard away.

Others hushed the woman.

Whittaker slid his fingers from Cassandra's cheek to her neck, that silky skin he forever thought of kissing. A pulse, faint, irregular, fluttered beneath his fingers. "Thank You, God." He glanced up and saw the footman and coachman glancing back from the carriage, now a hundred feet away, as they fought with the team lunging and flailing their hooves, making the vehicle rock. Even with the distance, their faces shone ashen in the carriage lamps.

"Samuel, come down here," he shouted to the footman. "We need to get her into the carriage and get her home. Then you can run for the apothecary."

"Best let 'er die," a man in the throng said. "She gonna wish she were dead if you bring her 'round."

Whittaker gritted his teeth against the cruel truth of the man's words. Charred shreds were all that remained of Cassandra's gown and pelisse. Little more of the blanket held together, along with the blackened remains of a man's coat. His coat. He did not recall finally removing it from his shoulders. He did not want to remove it from Cassandra's legs. He did not want to see what lay beneath. Blistered, reddened flesh, burns serious enough, painful enough for her to have lost consciousness. He prayed she would stay that way.

She did not. The moment he tried to lift her, her face contorted. She moaned and struggled in his arms.

"I am so very sorry, my dearest." The moisture in his eyes scalded, threatened to spill down his cheeks. He blinked to remove it. He tried to speak. A fist seemed to have lodged in his throat, robbing him of speech.

"Le' me 'elp you, milord." A wizened little man with breath reeking of spirits took hold of Cassandra's ankles. "She be better off iff'n we carries 'er 'ome and not to t'carriage. 'Ow far?"

“I do not know.” Whittaker glanced around, disoriented. The once overly bright and crowded street now appeared dark and deserted.

“It’s a block or two, milord.” The footman had leaped from the rocking carriage and reached their side. “Better to carry her with the nags so restless.”

“Less jostling,” the old man agreed. “Iffin she ain’t too ’eavy for you.”

Cassandra too heavy for him to carry a block or two? He could carry her a mile or two, a league or two, however far necessary to get her help.

“My dearest,” he murmured. Aloud, he said, “I can carry her. Samuel—”

But the footman had slipped into the crowd, and the coachman had charged off with the horses and vehicle. Surely gone for help, not fleeing in fear.

“’Tweren’t their fault, milord,” the old man said. “’Tweren’t nobody’s fault.”

“No.”

Except his, for taking liberties he knew better than to allow, going home alone with her with the full intent of taking those liberties.

His gut wrenched and twisted as though between the blazing tongs of a blacksmith. He loved her so much, adored her so intensely, he could not stop himself from touching her. And with the marriage a week away, surely a few touches weren’t unacceptable. And if they were, why would God punish her? Whittaker should be the one burned, groaning and gasping in agony as Cassandra was. She should have remained unconscious, oblivious to the pain.

“She should not be hurt at all, God,” Whittaker cried aloud.

“God ain’t got nothin’ t’ do with it,” the old man said, puffing between each word.

Like her elder sister, Cassandra was not a small female, slender but tall and broad in shoulders and hips, blessed with womanly curves. The more they jostled her over the rough cobbles of the street, the more she cried out and struggled in their hold.

“We need a third man.” Whittaker glanced around for someone to recruit. Other than a few shadows hidden in the darkness of areaway steps, no one showed himself. Torches had gone. Houses and shops lay in darkness. Only the remnants of the burned carriage lent illumination to the scene. No one wanted to be blamed for injuring a lady.

“Where is Cavendish Square?” Whittaker asked. “I do not know London.”

He’d spent too much time in the wilds of the north of late, too much time away from Cassandra. If she died . . .

“This-a-way.” The old man released Cassandra for a moment to gesture to the right.

She cried out and began to struggle. “It hurts. Make it stop. Make it stop.” She was sobbing now, gulping wails that echoed off the tall, deserted houses.

Whittaker could not stop the moisture from forming in his eyes again, a few droplets from trickling down his cheeks. He saw little of the path before him, heard Cassandra’s whimpers and wails in turn, felt the ripples of chills racing through her body, her fading efforts to push away from him.

“Go to sleep, my love,” he said in a soothing tone, as though speaking to a child. “Sleep.”

“She needs a good dose o’ gin,” the old man said. “Kills t’ pain every time.”

“I would never give her gin.” Whittaker realized how haughty



he sounded, condemning the man who stank of the spirit, and added more gently, “Her mother will have laudanum at hand.”

“What’s the difference?” The man shrugged, making Cassandra shriek in pain. “Gin or opium? Both’ll kill ye.”

So could burns. Gangrene. Sepsis. Amputation.

Cassandra without one or both of her legs?

Whittaker choked on something suspiciously like a sob. His hands shook. His body shook. He feared he might be sick like a drunkard. He stumbled along like a drunkard, gut churning, heart racing, conscience . . . Oh, his conscience stabbed him like a rapier in a duel he had lost. He’d come too close to dishonoring Cassandra, justifying it with the closeness of the wedding.

“Lord, please do not let her die, suffer, be scarred because I was careless,” he mouthed to the night. “Dear God, please.”

He feared his words reached no higher than the mostly blank chimney stacks of the houses. Then the buildings parted to reveal the round, grassy area of Cavendish Square and Number Sixteen close at hand, brightly lit in front, unlike most of its neighbors. Scarcely anyone was in town right now, but Lady Bainbridge wanted at least one of her daughters married in St. George’s Hanover Square. Lydia had avoided that twice. Cassandra would not be so fortunate.

“If she had gotten herself married at her parish church in Devon,” Whittaker cried aloud, “this would not have happened.”

But other things may have. The countryside afforded so many opportunities for privacy.

His conscience twisted in his chest, and he gasped as though he were the injured party. Cassandra seemed to have lost consciousness again—a blessing.

They reached the bottom step of Bainbridge House. The door flew open and what seemed like a dozen people swarmed out of

the opening—porter, housekeeper, butler, Lady Bainbridge, and her companion, Barbara Bainbridge. They knew. The apothecary was on his way. A bed had been prepared. Someone had sent for Lydia and Christien . . .

Information, instructions, and people swirled around Whittaker and Cassandra. Then suddenly she no longer lay in his arms and the little man had disappeared. Coatless, his shirt and waistcoat dotted with scorch marks and burn holes, Whittaker stood in the center of the entryway like a beggar seeking a favor from Lord Bainbridge. They had removed his lady from him, leaving him feeling as though the most precious part of his life had been wrenched away.

“Come into the library.” Lord Bainbridge spoke from the depths of the hall behind the staircase. “Let the apothecary do his work while you tell me what happened.”

Whittaker’s ears heated beneath his hair, which was too neglected and shaggy for fashion. He intended to have it barbered before the wedding, though Cassandra loved to bury her fingers in it—

His whole face grew hot. The dimly lit entryway might disguise his blush. No matter. Bainbridge was no fool, and Whittaker had learned this past spring that he himself wasn’t the best of liars. He had honesty too instilled in him to play the role requested of him. How Christien had kept up his work for a decade, Whittaker could not imagine.

“You will not help her standing there catching cold.” Bainbridge strode toward the entryway. “And the womenfolk will never let you near her.” In the candlelight now, the older man’s face appeared gray, haggard, the lines on either side of his mouth more deeply etched than earlier that day. “We need a coherent explanation of what happened. The coachman arrived babbling like a lunatic.”

“The unruly crowd.” Whittaker’s voice was hoarse and tight from the smoke he breathed and the tears he would not shed in front of another man. “May I have some tea, my lord?”

“Already ordered.” Bainbridge gripped Whittaker’s shoulder and steered him toward the library.

“I am all over mud and soot. I’ll ruin the furniture.”

“One of the maids is bringing down a sheet. We can place it—ah, here she is. That’s a good child.” Bainbridge took the sheet from the pale maid and continued into the library. With a firmness that suggested no one should open it without his permission, he closed the door, then flung the sheet over a chair. “Now sit before you fall. Are you in need of the apothecary?”

“No, my—Lord Bainbridge.” Whittaker’s right arm began to throb, blaze with the raw pain of a burn. He ignored it. It was nothing compared to Cassandra’s hurts. “Sir, I must know . . . It looked so bad . . .”

“All in good time.” Bainbridge pushed Whittaker into the chair. “Start from the beginning. Why did you not leave the party with Lydia and Christien?”

Whittaker met his future father-in-law’s dark gaze without flinching—much. “We have not been alone together in weeks.”

“No, and with good reason.” Bainbridge smiled, but tightly. “The two of you seem to exercise little self-control when you are alone together.”

“No, my lord.” Whittaker wanted to close his eyes and avoid the hard, dark eyes with their gaze that probably set the new prime minister, Lord Liverpool, quaking in his Hessian boots.

“Have you dishonored my daughter?” Bainbridge inquired in a deceptively quiet voice. He still stood, his fists clenched against his thighs.

“No, my lord. That is—” Whittaker’s face heated again, a flush that spread down his torso. “Not as I think you mean.”

“I see.” Bainbridge stalked across the room and stood at the curtained window without parting the draperies. He clasped his hands at the small of his back, and the knuckles gleamed white in the lamplight.

“We were ignoring the roughness of the crowd,” Whittaker began. “Then someone threw something through one of the windows and Cassandra fell out of the door. She collided with one of the rioters with a torch, and he dropped it against her skirt.”

“An accident?”

“What?” Whittaker shot to his feet. “What are you suggesting?”

“That you have enemies, Geoffrey Giles of Whittaker. You did not make friends in the north this past spring.”

“But they would never attack Cassandra.”

Yet they had pushed on the carriage, had mentioned his lady inside, had thrown the missile through the window, knowing she was there. And all the while, he thought of nothing but having his hands on her.

Bainbridge turned on him so swiftly Whittaker had to clench his own fists against his thighs to stop himself from jumping back. “I should call you out for this, if what you are implying is true. I should have called you out last spring when you and Cassandra were too close in this very room. But you are less than half my age and, I think, not skilled with weaponry.”

“No—no, sir. I was the scholarly one of the family.”

The reason Cassandra said she had first taken an interest in a younger son rather than his dashing older brother, John.

“I never thought I’d become the earl. Though,” he added with a need to defend himself a bit, “the Luddite rebellion taught

me a bit more about the use of firearms and blades. Still, I am not in your class.”

“And if my daughter so much as loses a toe, let alone dies from her burns, I will be sorely tempted to forget that fact.” Despite the harshness of his tone and words, Bainbridge’s eyes glistened with unshed tears.

He was a harsh and often dictatorial father, but no one, not even the daughters who complained of his strict rules, doubted that he loved them, especially after the events of the spring.

Whittaker held the obsidian gaze. “It would be nothing less than I deserve, my lord. I fully confess that I am in the wrong.”

Not that Cassandra had protested against his advances. On the contrary. She read things in Greek and Latin her family would never approve of. Probably things a Christian lady, let alone a single one, should not read at all. Things no lady should read, perhaps. She was curious, something he loved about her and despaired over at times.

If she died, he would have worse things over which to despair—guilt, the hole her absence would leave in his life . . .

He suddenly had the urge to run out of Bainbridge House and seek the quiet shelter of his house in Grosvenor Square, where he could send out his valet on a trumped-up errand to give himself the privacy to release his fear and pain in unmanly tears.

He swallowed down the impulse and held his ground. “I love Cassandra and will marry her no matter what happens, so long as she lives.”

And she would live. Whittaker vowed to get on his knees and pray for a day, a week, however long it took to ensure Cassandra did not succumb to any of the ways people died from serious burns.

“The wedding,” Bainbridge pronounced like a judge giving

a prisoner his sentence, “will of course be postponed yet again. You may leave now. We will keep you informed as to her condition and progress.”

Whittaker stared at the older man. “I cannot stay to see what the apothecary says? I would like to see her.”

“I expect she has been dosed with laudanum.” Bainbridge’s mouth twisted and his jutting chin grew more firm. “For the pain.”

“Of course.” Whittaker’s arm began to pulse with pain too. It was one blister the size of the pad of his thumb, big enough it would leave a scar but nothing serious, nothing debilitating. But Cassandra’s entire skirt . . .

Unable to hold back the lump rising in his throat, he swung toward the door. “Send someone for me with news, please.”

“Of course.” Bainbridge was as cold as the torched gown had been hot.

Whittaker hurried to the front door. He did not wait for the footman to open the portal but flung the latch up himself and raced into the night, to the cooler, if not fresher air of the city. Not until he reached his house in Grosvenor Square did he realize he had forgotten that his coachman and footman had vanished into the night. No matter. They would come home, and he could send them for news.

But when they arrived in the mews, shame-faced and contrite, having missed him at Bainbridge House, they did not have any information other than the apothecary calling in a physician. Other than them arguing between the use of ice or oil on the burns. Other than both agreeing Miss Bainbridge should be kept sedated, for she cried out in pain when awake.



The wedding was postponed too late to stop half a dozen of Whittaker's relatives from arriving in town. Whittaker sent his mother to Bainbridge House to make enquiries. Five days had passed since the celebrations that ended in riots and burnings in protest over too few illuminations to honor Wellington's victory. Five days since the torch caught Cassandra's skirt on fire. Five days since Whittaker's conversation with Lord Bainbridge in the library. No one had sent him word of any kind, and his own enquiries had gone unanswered. When he called at Cavendish Square, the porter told him the family was not at home, which was too absurd a lie for response. But surely they would allow Lady Whittaker into the house, if not the sickroom.

They did. An hour after departure, Mother returned home, her beautiful face blotchy, her eyes puffy as though she had been weeping.

"I am so sorry, my son." She pressed a damp cheek against Whittaker's. "Lady Bainbridge's companion and Miss Honore received me. Miss Honore gave me this." She handed him a folded but unsealed piece of foolscap. "And yes, I did read it." She dabbed at the corners of her eyes.

Whittaker sat down at his desk, the strength having left his bones. Mother would not be crying if Miss Honore had conveyed something good.

She hadn't. The note was short and scrawling, as though penned in a hurry.

*Cass wants me to tell you, W, that she never wishes to see you again. HB.*