

SWEET AS
THE *Devil*

SUSAN JOHNSON



BERKLEY SENSATION, NEW YORK

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SWEET AS
THE *Devil*

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CHAPTER 1



London, May 1893

“JAMIE, DON’T YOU *dare* leave! I *need* you. *Jamie!*”

Already sliding from the bed, James Blackwood turned back, leaned over in a fluid ripple of honed muscle, and kissed the countess’s pouty mouth. “I would stay if I could, darling,” he said, sitting up and smiling at her. “But I’m already late. Drinks at eight. John’s new wife was quite emphatic.”

“Pshaw on little Vicky,” Countess Minton peevishly noted. “What about me? I haven’t seen you in almost a year. And it’s only drinks. You won’t miss dinner, I promise. You can’t say you’re not *interested*,” she murmured, her sultry gaze drifting to Jamie’s blatant erection, her smile sly and knowing.

“You keep a man interested, Bella—no doubt about that.” The voluptuously nude woman sprawled in the shambles of the bed was well aware of her sensual allure. And her charming capacity for innovation was also an accomplishment of no small merit. “Unfortunately,” he said with a truly regretful sigh, “duty calls.” There were degrees of lateness and politesse apropos his cousin’s wife, and he was pressing the boundaries of both. He began to turn away.

Rolling up on one elbow with breathtaking speed, Isabella seized Jamie’s upthrust penis in her pink-nailed grip, swiftly bent her head, and seized the moment.

Christ! Jamie’s breath hissed through his teeth, his cock oversensitive after hours of fucking, Bella’s assault a shock to his nerve endings. But a heartbeat later, his twitching nerves adjusted with indecent speed to licentious pleasure and he softly exhaled. *Now what?* With Bella performing fellatio in her usual masterful fashion, assessing the relative merits of duty and lust required a degree of rational observation that was fast eluding him. Yet—a modicum of reason still remained in the nether reaches of his brain; he glanced at the clock.

Bella suddenly nibbled a trifle overzealously or perhaps deliberately, and an unexpectedly sharp jolt mauled his senses.

He gasped, the fine line between pleasure and pain not only taking his breath away but also effectively ending his debate. *What the hell.* Shutting his eyes, he gave himself up to prodigal sensation.

One good turn deserved another, et cetera, et cetera, and an hour later, lying facedown on the bed, panting, Bella gasped, “No more.”

Sprawled on his back beside her, laboring to drag air into his lungs, Jamie finally became aware of the censorious voice inside his head that had been trying to warn him for a considerable time that—*Vicky's going to be furious!* Silently swearing, he lifted his head from the pillow, took a disgruntled breath, and sat up. Why had he made plans? He never made plans. Raking his fingers through his dark, ruffled hair, he wondered how much time had passed since he'd been so felicitously persuaded to tarry.

Oh Christ. The face of the small bedside clock jerked him back to reality. Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, he scanned the floor for his trousers.

"Don't go."

He glanced at the flushed woman who could keep his cock hard indefinitely. "You said no more."

Her smile was Circe's. "I take it back."

His dark lashes lowered slightly. "Be reasonable. I'm already later than hell."

"I don't care. Stay—*please, please.*"

For a moment he actually debated staying; it was incredibly late. He still had to return to his apartment and change—which would make him even later. Dare he ignore Vicky's invitation? And risk his cousin's displeasure? Knowing the politic answer, he twisted back with the fluid grace of an athlete, whispered in Bella's ear, and quickly quit the bed before his libido regained the upper hand.

He found his trousers where they'd been hastily discarded that morning after he'd stopped by to talk to Charlie about a prime cavalry mount he wished to buy and had found Isabella in dishabille instead.

Charlie was out of town, she'd explained with a seductive smile. "But there's no reason to hurry off, Jamie dear," she'd purred. "We haven't seen each other in ages. Do tell me all the gossip from Vienna."

She hadn't meant it of course.

She'd meant something else entirely.

And now he was damnably late for Vicky's dinner.

HE MADE HIS excuses to Vicky and his cousin, John, Baron Reid, and to all the guests who'd looked up from their desserts as he'd entered the dining room and greeted him with sly smiles and curious gazes. No one believed for a minute that he'd been detained because of an accident on the Windsor road, since Vicky had chanced to mention over drinks that Jamie had gone to see Charlie Bonner on the matter of a horse, to which Freddy Stockton had pointed out that Charlie was in the country. Everyone also knew that Isabella had a penchant for handsome men and Jamie Blackwood in particular.

But since the fashionable world viewed fidelity in marriage much as they viewed children—as something to be ignored—amorous peccadillos were not only commonplace but also generally regarded with amusement.

So after the initial raised brows and roguish scrutiny, conversation reverted to the usual tittle-tattle and gossip that passed for social intercourse in the frivolous world of the beau monde. Several earlier courses were brought up from the kitchen for Jamie

while the other guests indulged in a sumptuous variety of sweets. John's chef was superb, the wine free-flowing, and famished after having exerted himself at stud all day, Jamie tucked into his meal with gusto.

"Worked up an appetite, I see," Viscount Graham sportively noted.

Jamie turned a bland gaze on the man to his left. "There's no opportunity to eat when your carriage's stalled in traffic."

"The road to Windsor, you said?" the viscount pronounced with unsullied cheer.

"Yes, Windsor." Jamie set down his knife and fork, his dark brows lifted faintly. "Would you care to ask me something?"

Graham smiled widely. "Hell no." While Jamie served officially as attaché to Prince Ernst of Dalmia, he was, in effect, bodyguard to the prince, and in that capacity had gained a reputation for efficiency, or more pertinently, violence.

"I didn't think so." Jamie signaled to have his wineglass filled, and returned to his meal.

MUCH LATER, WHEN all the guests had departed and Vicky had gone off to bed, Jamie and his cousin retired to John's study to share a decanter of whiskey.

"Allow me to apologize again for arriving so late," Jamie immediately said. "It was —"

"Bella's engaging charm?" his cousin interposed with a grin. "Along with her inexhaustible desires?"

"Indeed." Jamie dipped his head. "Not that I'm complaining. You no doubt speak from experience."

"Previous experience. I'm a happily married man now."

Jamie raised his glass in salute. "To your brilliant marriage. You love Vicky and she obviously loves you. A nice change from the beau monde's penchant for marriages based on balance sheets and quarterings." With a smile for his cousin, he drank down his whiskey.

"Thank you. I consider myself very fortunate. *You* should consider marriage. I heartily recommend it. Women are always in hot pursuit of you," John said with a lift of his brows. "Why not let yourself be caught?"

"No thanks." Swift and certain. "The Isabelles of the world suit me just fine."

"So it seems. My personal bet was you wouldn't make dinner."

"I almost didn't. It was a matter of not wanting to disappoint your lovely new bride."

"And you were fucked out," his cousin perceptively remarked.

Jamie smiled. "That, too."

"Someday the right woman is going to change your mind about marriage."

Jamie gently shook his head. "Don't waste your breath. Unlike you, I've never been enthralled with the concept of love. Several of your youthful infatuations come to mind," Jamie added with a grin, "if you'd like me to refresh your memory."

"God, no. In any case, Vicky's different."

"Which is why you married her. I'm not questioning your sincerity. I just lack the necessary sense of devotion." Leaning forward, Jamie picked up the decanter and

refilled his glass.

“I used to think as much.”

Jamie shot his cousin a jaundiced glance, but rather than argue his cousin’s past history with women, Jamie set down the crystal container and politely said, “Even if I were inclined to endorse the notion of love and marriage, *at the moment*, I’m up to my ears in risky ventures. As you well know, the Habsburg Empire’s in decline; every petty despot with influence or an army at his back is jockeying for position.”

“Including Prince Ernst.”

“Including him.” Leaning back in his chair, Jamie met his cousin’s gaze with his usual immutable calm. “He’s as ambitious as the rest. And why shouldn’t he be? Twenty generations of Battenbergs have ruled that piece of prime real estate, offered up their resources and sons to the emperor when needed, and played a significant role in the Habsburg prosperity.”

“As your family has for the Battenbergs.” Jamie’s forebears had fled Scotland after the ’45 defeat and sold the services of their fighting clan to the duchy of Dalmia.

“With due compensation,” Jamie serenely said, John’s red hair gleaming in the lamplight always reminding him of his mother’s. Shaking off the melancholy that always overcame him on recall of his mother’s unnecessary death, he pushed up from his lounging pose and said, “You heard, of course, that Uncle Douglas came back from India with a fortune.”

“And a native wife.”

“A very beautiful wife. He’s looking to invest his money. I told him to talk to you. You’ve guarded my investments well,” Jamie said with a grin.

“Anyone could. Other than upkeep on your Dalmian estate, you don’t spend any money.”

“I don’t have time. Guarding Ernst is a round-the-clock commission.”

“Speaking of guarding, who’s protecting Ernst in your absence?”

“He’s on holiday with his newest paramour, who rules a principality of her own with a small army and a top-notch palace guard.” Lifting his glass to his mouth, Jamie arched his brows. “Adequate deterrent to any assassin,” he murmured and drank down half the whiskey.

“Which explains *your* holiday in Scotland.”

“A much needed holiday,” Jamie softly replied, lowering his glass to the chair arm.

John looked surprised. “Do I detect a modicum of frustration? Is Ernst spending too much time in libertine pursuits—silly question.”

“Let’s just say he doesn’t have his father’s sense of responsibility.”

“Or any responsibility at all.”

“He was perhaps too indulged.” Jamie shrugged. “A problem at a time when Dalmia could use a ruler of insight and diligence.”

“What of his heir? Rupert appears to be of a sensible nature.”

“He’s still young, and tiger hunting in India at the moment with his friends. But even if Rupert wished to take a hand in the administration of the duchy, Ernst wouldn’t let him. Like your queen, Ernst has no wish to share power.” The Prince of Wales was almost sixty and still not allowed to participate in Queen Victoria’s government. “In any event, at twenty, Rupert’s probably too young to effectively deal with the political scheming in our corner of the world. It’s reached new, ruthless heights.”

“How so? Haven’t the Balkans always been a tinderbox?”

“It’s worse now. The emperor’s totally oblivious to the political realities of the world. He’s a blundering dyed-in-the-wool reactionary with fifty million subjects from a dozen nations itching to rise in revolt. His enemies are simply waiting in the wings, nurturing their ambitions. With the crown prince dead and the new heir a witless dolt, once Franz Joseph dies, all hell’s going to break loose. And after three assassination attempts in the past few years, the emperor’s death may come sooner rather than later.”

“Like Rudolf’s. Some say it wasn’t suicide.”

“More than some. The crown prince was too liberal for those in power. His advisors were impatient for him to depose his father and take the reins of empire. Rumor has it that he and his mistress were shot with a sniper rifle while they slept”—Jamie arched one brow—“or were passed out. Rudolf was addicted to morphine.”

“Because of his unpleasant disease.”

“Yes—a bright young man killing himself slowly.” Jamie grimaced. “But screw it. I’m not in Vienna, I’m here. Tell me about your thoroughbreds instead. I heard that your chestnut brute’s going to take all the major races next year.” The last thing Jamie wished to dwell on was the crumbling Habsburg monarchy.

“You should plan on being here for the derby next year,” John pleasantly said, urbanely shifting topics. “Shalizar’s going to win by ten lengths. You can bet on it.”

“In that case,” Jamie drawled, “I shall—heavily.”

“As will I. A pity you don’t have time to see my stud at Bellingham.”

“Next time. I promised Davey I’d meet him day after tomorrow. He’s coming down from the hills to meet me.”

The two men, long friends—their family resemblance clear despite their disparate coloring—went on to discuss the merits of various horses and trainers, bloodlines and jockeys. The quiet study was peaceful, a temporary hermitage in a quarrelsome, perilous world, and the fine Highland whiskey served its purpose well in lessening Jamie’s disquiet. Neither touched on the serious or personal, both careful to keep the conversation companionable, and toward dawn, cheerfully drunk, the two men parted ways.

John went upstairs to his wife.

Jamie strolled to Grosvenor Square, entered a large house through a back door, conveniently unlocked, took the servants’ stairs to the second floor, and entered a shadowed bedchamber.

“I didn’t know if you’d come,” Isabella drowsily murmured, gazing at Jamie from under her lashes.

“I said I would.” Quietly closing the door, he slipped off his swallowtail coat, dropped it on the floor, and pulling his shirt studs free, moved toward the bed.

“How nice.” Pushing up on her elbows, Isabella smiled. “I don’t believe I’ve ever met an honest man.”

Jamie grinned. “I have an excuse. I live outside the fashionable world.”

“Too far outside at the moment,” she purred, tossing the covers aside. “Do come in . . .”

CHAPTER 2

THE NEXT MORNING, the air heavy with the promise of rain, Sofia Eastleigh was cooling her heels in a small drawing room off the entrance hall of Minton House and becoming increasingly agitated. She didn't as a rule agree to paint society portraits, finding those in the fashionable world too spoiled or difficult to sit the necessary hours required to complete a painting. But Isabella, Countess of Minton, was one of the reigning beauties of the day—not to be discounted when it came to publicity—and she was generous as well in terms of a fee.

She'd give her five minutes more, Sofia resentfully decided, and then the countess and her money could go to hell. With her artwork much sought after, Sofia didn't *need* the money. Nor did she appreciate being kept waiting like a servant for—she glanced at the splendid Boulle clock on the mantel—damn it . . . *thirty-five* minutes!

Rising to her feet, she was slipping on her gloves when the drawing room door was thrown open by a liveried flunkey, Isabella was announced, and a moment later, a radiant, blushing countess, obviously just risen from bed, swept into the room, trailing lavender mousseline and a cloud of scent.

“Good, you're still here. A matter of some importance delayed me.”

The countess's partner in that important matter strolled into the room behind her and offered Sofia an engaging smile. “I'm sorry you had to wait. Please, accept my apology. Bella tells me you're an artist of great renown.”

“The baron will keep me company while you paint,” the countess briskly interposed, ignoring Jamie's apology. “We're quite ready if you are.”

Understanding that Bella viewed an artist as a trades person, consequently not due the courtesies, Jamie introduced himself. “You're Miss Eastleigh, I presume. James Blackwood at your service.”

Even with her temper in high dudgeon, Sofia couldn't help but think, *Wouldn't it be grand to be serviced by a big, handsome brute like you*. The man was splendid—tall, dark, powerfully muscled, and all male, with the languid gait of a panther and the green eyes to match. Now there was a portrait worth painting. She'd portray him as he was, casually dressed in the remnants of last night's evening rig, his dark hair in mild disarray. He wore a cambric shirt and black trousers, the shirt open at the neck, his long, muscular legs shown to advantage in welltailored wool, his feet bare in his evening shoes.

A faint carnal tremor raced through her senses.

Commonplace and not in the least disconcerting.

She found handsome men attractive and in many cases, useful.

A modern woman, a bohemian in terms of cultural mores, Sofia enjoyed lovemaking. But on her terms. She decided if a man suited her; she decided when and

if to make love and whether to continue a relationship—mostly she didn't, preferring men as transient diversions in her life. Although, for a gorgeous animal like Blackwood, she might be inclined to alter her rules and keep him for a time. He had the look of a man who was more than capable of satisfying a woman. And the fact that the countess—who had a reputation for dalliance—was obviously captivated by him was testament to his competence.

Taking jealous note of Sofia's admiring gaze, for a brief moment Isabella debated canceling the sitting. On second thought, the pale, slender artist was hardly the type of woman to appeal to Jamie, who preferred women of substance who could keep up with him in bed. The little painter looked as though a good wind would blow her away. "Come, Miss Eastleigh," Isabella crisply commanded. "I have another appointment after your sitting."

Following the women from the waiting room, Jamie contemplated the stark differences between the two beauties, the lively contrasts of blonde femininity intriguing. Miss Eastleigh was slender with hair the color of sunshine on snow, her pale loveliness poetic and ethereal—like an Arthurian Isolde who might bruise with the slightest touch. Isabella, on the other hand, didn't bruise at all, as he well knew after two days of wild, untrammelled sex. Bella's golden splendor was that of a robust flesh-and-blood Valkyrie, passionate, impatient, demanding. He understood why Charlie preferred his sweet, young mistress in Chelsea from time to time if for no other reason than to rest.

A few minutes later, they entered the small conservatory where Sofia had set up her easel. Isabella disposed herself on the chaise in David's *Madame Recamier* pose, waved Jamie into a chair opposite her, and sweetly cajoling, murmured, "Darling, tell me how I might tempt you to stay. Surely, your Highlands can wait for a day or so." She spoke as if Sofia didn't exist. "And don't say you must go immediately because you don't when you're here for an entire fortnight."

"If Davey wasn't coming down from the hills to meet me, I could change my plans, but it's a long, rough trek for him. It wouldn't be fair to waste his time."

"He's your gillie for heaven's sake. Send him a telegram. He can wait for you in Inverness for a day or so."

"We can talk about this later," he quietly said.

"Why? Oh, you think Miss Eastleigh is mindful. Of course she isn't." A duke's daughter would, of course, hold such an opinion; servants were invisible.

"That's enough, Bella."

The countess offered her lover a sultry smile. "Will you beat me if I don't obey?"

"Of course not."

He spoke with soft restraint, but something in his tone apparently struck home, for the countess said with a complacent sigh, "Very well. You must always have your way." She smiled. "For which I've been extremely grateful on any number of occasions, my masterful darling."

"Are you quite done?"

"I suppose I must be with you frowning so. Was Vicky pleased last night that you finally arrived?" She knew when to be accommodating, particularly with Jamie. While they shared mutual pleasures, he wasn't in the least enamored or adoring like so many of her lovers.

“Vicky was very pleasant,” he said, relieved Bella was finally minding her manners. “John’s a lucky man.”

“His wife is lucky as well. You and your cousin share a certain charming expertise. I was surprised when he married.”

“He’s in love.”

“You don’t say. How quaint.”

“It happens.”

“But fortunately not to you”—she smiled—“or me.”

“Could we talk about something else?” *Or not talk at all?*

“Of course, darling. Did you hear that Georgie Tolliver left his wife for his children’s governess? Isn’t that droll?” At which point, Bella lapsed into a gossipy discussion of their various acquaintances who were involved in affairs of one kind or another—the favorite amusement of the aristocracy.

Sliding down on his spine, his eyes half shut, Jamie replied in a desultory fashion to her comments. He was tired; two days of carnal sport and little sleep had taken its toll.

Bella seemed not to notice, absorbed as she was in her frivolous recital, or perhaps she was simply content to have Jamie near.

It was like watching a bored animal, Sofia thought as she captured the countess’s pretty features on the canvas, Countess Minton’s lover politely biding his time, listening with half an ear to the countess’s chatter, appearing to doze off on occasion. Although, apparently, he didn’t, for he always managed to respond when required. Politely. With a cultivated civility at variance with his lassitude. He’d open his eyes and answer even the most banal queries with good humor.

The conservatory armchairs were gilded faux bamboo, the attenuated metal dangerously light for a man his size.

Would or wouldn’t the chair collapse beneath his weight?

Would he or wouldn’t he actually fall asleep? Sofia wondered as if she were somehow his keeper. Or the countess’s. As if either of them cared what she thought when they apparently dealt very well together.

Wresting her gaze from the stunning couple, Sofia curtailed her contemplation of the two lovers and applied herself to her work.

And so the sitting progressed, Bella chattering, Mr. Blackwood largely inanimate, Sofia finishing the depiction of the countess’s large blue eyes and beginning to sketch in her nose with quick, sure strokes. Having defined the shape to her satisfaction, she was gathering a dab of pale pink paint from her palette for the highlights when the door to the conservatory abruptly opened.

A stylish young lady dressed in ruffled, beribboned white muslin burst in, using her parasol to shove aside a flustered servant who’d arrived in her wake.

“Your man, Walters, wasn’t going to let me in, Bella,” she irritably proclaimed, casting a censorious glance on the innocent footman who’d followed her on the butler’s orders. “I knew perfectly well that you were at home with Jamie in town.” She swung around in a rustle of silk. “Hello, Jamie, *darling*.” Her smile was both dazzling and gloating; she’d successfully run her fox to ground. “You’re looking utterly gorgeous as usual. Do give me a kiss.”

While the countess scowled, Lady Winterthur, flushed with triumph, swiftly advanced on her prey, her parasol swinging from her wrist. “I should be in a pet with

you, darling,” she sweetly said with feigned chagrin. “You didn’t stop by to see me.”

James Blackwood had come to his feet before the lovely brunette reached him and, taking her hands in his, suavely saved himself from her embrace. Bending, he bestowed the requested kiss, held her at arm’s length, and smoothly lied. “I’m just passing through London or I would have called.”

“Since you’ve chosen to disturb our sitting, do sit down at least, Lily,” Bella ordered, anxious to separate her rival from her lover. “And don’t distract the painter,” she said with annoyance. “We are under a time constraint. I have another appointment after this.”

Taking a seat next to Jamie, Lily Chester slanted a sly glance at the countess. “How perfect! I’ll take Jamie off your hands then. We’ll find something to do to amuse ourselves, won’t we, darling?” she brightly said, smiling at her quarry.

“You’ll do no such thing,” Bella snapped. “He’s staying here!”

“Ladies, I prefer not being handed around like a Sacher torte,” Jamie drily said. “I’m off to Scotland at five in any event.”

“What a shame. We won’t have time to *play*,” Lily murmured. “You’ve been terribly selfish, Bella,” she chided, turning on her hostess, “keeping him all to yourself.” She glanced at Jamie, her gaze openly avaricious. “Perhaps on your return to London, darling, we could share a *moment or two*.”

“We’re done here,” the countess rapped out, her color high.

It was unclear to whom she was speaking, until she rose from the chaise and dismissed Sofia with a flick of her fingers. “Really, Lily, have you no shame?” she hissed, turning a vengeful eye on her guest. “Do I intrude when you have company? We are *done*, Miss Eastleigh,” she repeated, sharply.

“She’s putting her brushes away, Bella. Be civil.” Rising from his chair, Jamie walked toward Sofia, stopping just short of her easel. “Ignore her,” he softly said. “May I help?”

“Thank you, no,” Sofia replied, wiping her brushes. “This will take just a minute.” Dropping her brushes one by one into a jar of turpentine, she closed the lid on her paint box.

“I apologize for them both.”

“You needn’t. I’m familiar with—”

“Outspoken females?”

He’d formed the word *bitches*, Sofia noticed, but changed his mind. “Yes,” she said, giving her hands a last wipe.

He nodded toward the painting. “The likeness is superb.” “The countess is very beautiful.”

He smiled faintly. “Let me see you to the door. I’ll be right back, Bella,” he called out, ignoring his lover’s scowl, offering Sofia his arm.

As they exited the room, he said, “My apologies again. Lily is always troublesome, and Bella is—well, Bella. She’s a spoiled child.”

“And yet?” Sofia shot him an amused glance, the faint scent of the countess’s costly perfume lingering on his clothes.

He grinned. “I have no excuse. Have you been painting long? You’re very good.”

“All my life if you count amateur efforts. Both my parents are artists.”

“Ah. That explains it then. My forebears were all soldiers.”

“That explains it then,” she said, echoing him. “You have a powerful physical presence. As an artist, I notice such things.”

He could have said most women noticed his size, but on his best behavior, he said, instead, “I hope Bella’s paying you well for her discourtesy.”

“Yes, very well. I’m quite content, and no offense, but I don’t really listen to women like her. Aristocratic women are entirely wanting in occupation.” She grinned. “Which is where you come in I expect.”

“It does pass the time,” he said with a broad smile.

“But you’re on your way to Scotland.”

“Yes, and none too soon.”

“I noticed your boredom.”

“Too much of a good thing,” he drolly replied. “I’m looking forward to little conversation and fewer people at my home in the Highlands.”

“Then I wish you safe journey.”

They’d reached the front door, where two flunkeys were waiting.

Jamie nodded to them.

The door was opened, and with a graceful bow he sent Sofia on her way.

CHAPTER 3



WHETHER IT WAS her artist's eye, Jamie's dark good looks, or the fact that she'd been celibate for the rare interval of a fortnight, Sofia found herself dwelling on the splendid James Blackwood as she walked home.

He was exceptionally kind and well mannered as well.

Not that either of those qualities necessarily prompted her reverie apropos the darling man. Rather, it was his undiluted sexuality on display in the countess's home, as if it were unremarkable for him to serve as stud to female passions. Common and habitual in fact. His composure told the tale.

He knew women wanted him.

In this case, two women.

And Sofia didn't doubt if he hadn't had a train to catch, he would have satisfied them both.

Now *that* would have been a fetching painting—the large, powerful, dark-as-sin Jamie Blackwood engaged in carnal congress with a voluptuous blonde and brunette.

A shiver of arousal rippled through her vagina.

She *could* represent them in mythological guise, him in full rut with two nymphs or goddesses. Perhaps the Judgment of Paris would serve, although she'd have to add another woman. She drew in a sharp breath at the thought of Jamie Blackwood servicing three women, an involuntary flush warming her body. Quickly glancing around, she took note of the pedestrians in her vicinity and heaved a sigh of relief. Thank God, the nearest was several yards away.

Heavens! How long had it been since she'd made love? Too long if she was indulging in such lewd fantasies!

There was no point in any event in fantasizing about Jamie Blackwood; he was leaving London. And unlike the interfering Lily, she most definitely could not expect a visit upon his return. Although, she rather doubted he'd be calling on the lovely Lily either. *Too much of a good thing*, he'd plainly said.

Unlike most aristocrats with excess leisure, he did not appear to construct his life around sexual amusements. The countess *had* referred to him as *baron*. A Scottish title most likely with a name like Blackwood.

Not that it mattered.

She'd never see him again unless he happened to be at another of the countess's portrait sittings. Which was unlikely.

So there was absolutely no earthly reason for her to detour to Bruton Street Books to query Rosalind about the baron James Blackwood. But she knew the Duchess of Groveland was originally from Yorkshire—which bordered Scotland. Oh hell, he'd said he was from the Highlands not the Lowlands. Perhaps Fitz knew him.

She found not only Rosalind in her office at the store but also Isolde, Oz Lennox's