



Enjoy this exclusive excerpt for Seductive Musings readers of

ALWAYS A TEMPTRESS by **Eileen Dreyer**

the third book in her historical romance series, *Drake's Rakes*.

Setting the scene: Harry has kidnapped Kate in order to get her secrets. Mudge, Harry's batman, has just brought Kate light and food:

“Oh, Mudge,” Kate mourned, laying her hand on the boy's arm. “You're wasted on the army. You should come work for me.”

The wide-eyed boy blinked as if he'd seen a vision. Kate wasn't surprised. She hadn't recovered her trunks, and she hadn't changed her dress, but she had candles. She felt reckless with relief, and Mudge was a beautiful boy. Which meant that she was enjoying a bit of flirtation with the breakfast Mudge had just brought. After all, Mudge was the one who had saved her.

Oh, all right, Harry had ordered the candles, but Mudge had brought at least a dozen. Kate's first instinct had been to set them on every surface in the room and light each one so she could banish the last of the shadows. She knew better, though. Harry could just as easily order them away. So she lit two and pocketed the rest until she could hide them where Harry wouldn't find them.

It helped that dawn had come and gone. Not that she could precisely see it. But she'd felt it in her marrow, like an atavistic clock, stirring her senses awake, pushing the monsters back into their corners. The light effervesced in her blood, brewing giddiness. Freedom, even the illusion of it, coursed through her like a drug.

“Mudge is immune to you, Kate,” Harry said from the doorway.

She made it a point not to acknowledge him. Her attention was on his improbably beautiful batman who stood staring at her as if she were an exotic species of animal he'd never seen before. “How old are you, Mudge?”

The boy shrugged, his Rifleman green uniform pulling oddly across his shoulders. “Not sure, ma'am. Twenty?”

She nodded, flashing him a blatantly insincere smile. “A good age. The

age of wonder. The decade of discovery. You'd love to be in my employ, Mudge. You'd meet such interesting people. See such interesting places. *Do* such interesting things."

She knew she shouldn't torment the boy this way. He wasn't up to her weight. Harry, on the other hand, was, and he was obviously irritated with her. The tighter his brow grew, the more reckless she felt.

"For instance," she said, leaning close to Mudge, "do you know what I've recently acquired from Josephine Bonaparte herself? Well, not from her hand, poor dear. She died before I had the pleasure of meeting her, which I consider a tragedy." She sighed, knowing exactly what it did to her bodice. "Just think of the secrets we could have shared, her the mistress of the most rapacious ruler of our age, and me...."

Chuckling, she quirked her eyebrows. Mudge smiled. She didn't need an interpreter to see that the smile was impersonal. Mudge really was immune. She was glad, actually. She liked the boy.

"Don't," Harry warned her.

She turned her smile on him. "You don't want to know, Harry? After all the effort you've gone to over the years to cement my reputation, at least in your own mind? Of course you do."

She didn't move, didn't turn away from the man who had defined her adulthood. "I got it from her estate," she continued brightly. "Josephine's. Her things were up for auction, and I snagged a real prize. A psyche mirror." Turning back to Mudge, she leaned in close, as if imparting secrets. "Do you know what that is, Mudge?"

Mudge shook his head, looking exactly like a man enjoying a confidence. "Imagine you're about to tell me, ma'am."

She smiled and put every suggestive thought into it. "A psyche mirror," she said, her voice pitched lower, her hands sweeping through the air in punctuation, "is an oval mirror on a stand. A *tall*...oval mirror. The

innovation is that in it I can see a reflection of my entire--" She swept her hands down, mimicking her own contours, still smiling. "Self. All at once. Scandalous, don't you think? I keep it in my boudoir."

"Mudge," Harry interrupted.

The boy started and turned, as if he'd completely forgotten that Harry was there.

"Did you get supplies?" Harry asked.

Mudge blinked. "Yessir."

Harry nodded. "How about some food, then? The men will be hungry."

Mudge bobbed his head and turned to give Kate an abrupt, rather clumsy bow that endeared him all the more to her. "Y'r Grace."

She held out her hand as if he were a viscount on a morning visit. "It has been a pleasure. Don't let Harry intimidate you, my dear. He's all uniform and no sword."

Touching her fingers, the boy flashed her a bright grin. Then, he fled.

Harry waited until Mudge was well out of sight before stepping into the room. "I'm afraid your efforts were wasted on him," he said, leaning against the doorjamb in a pose of insouciance. "He's not your type."

"Not my type?" Kate retorted with a quirked eyebrow. "You truly think there is a man alive who's not my type? I must be losing my touch."

"He's a soldier in the king's army, and would not be well served by any of the men hearing him called 'dear'."

Kate strolled over to the boarded-up window, as if she could see out of it. "How on earth did Mudge find himself in the army?"

"It was that or Botany Bay. He was caught stealing bread."

Kate wished she could say she was surprised. “Why, Harry,” she said, turning back on him, her own eyes wide. “You've taken him under your wing, haven't you? Altruism? I'm not sure it fits you.”

“I reserve it for people who deserve it. Mudge has no idea how to lie.”

“And I'm so very good at it you see no reason to protect me.”

“I never said you were lacking in intellect, Kate.” Straightening, he offered her a chilly smile. “It's almost noon. Are you going to cooperate, or will this get difficult?”

“Oh...” Kate gave the appearance of considering his question. “Difficult, I think.”

He stared at her, obviously fighting for control. She held her breath, not sure what she wanted him to do. She wanted to fight him; to tear strips off his skin for the insults he'd delivered, the assumptions he made. She wanted to get past him and escape.

He shook his head. “Don't push me, Kate. I'm not in a good mood.”

She smiled. “Good heavens. If kidnapping your favorite nemesis doesn't put you in a good mood, Harry, I fear you've lost the knack for happiness”

The minute she said it she regretted it. She saw his mouth go white and braced herself.

“You just won't stop, will you?” he snarled.

A shiver of fear chased down her spine; a shudder of anticipation as he stepped right up to her.

“Is that what you want?” he demanded. “For me to lose my control?”

Was it? His eyes, those soft sky blue eyes were the color of hot flame. He seemed to fill the room. She stood her ground; Joan of Arc. Boedicea. Except she didn't think those valiant women had been holding out against

the confusion of desire.

He stood so close she could feel the wash of his breath against her cheek. "You want me to take it from you?" he asked. "Is that the taste you've acquired over the years? Would you like me to control you? Maybe tie you up, or get out my riding crop? I know that some women like the sting of it across their sweet little asses. How about you, Kate? Is that what you're waiting for?"

Suddenly the room went cold and Kate couldn't breathe. Her skin crawled; the blood draining from her face to leave her unpardonably dizzy and clammy. "Thank you, Harry," she managed to say, holding perfectly still. "You've finally made me glad I didn't run off with you."

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