

"Listen to me, Sara. I have a plan. It won't be one either of our fathers likes but it might work."

She pulled away. Peering into his magnificent eyes clouded her judgement. His green-brown orbs reflected a sadness in the faint lights that matched her own. "Tell me."

"We announce that we intend to marry others."

"I've already left two men alone before the vicar. Now there's this gossip in the *Gazette*—?"

"Forget those other two men. And hang them at the *Gazette*."

She put a hand to her hip. "We'll send them new stories. Marvelous. I dislike your thinking, Harry. Totally. Marry another? Ba! Precisely *who* did you have in mind?"

He gave her a look that said he had the right answer. "A man who makes you tingle."

"Of whom there is no one." *Which is a lie.*

"For each woman, there is a man. A perfect match."

"I've not found him in four years. Why now?"

"You will lure him."

*By some folly, to be sure. "How?"*

A wicked gleam lit those iridescent eyes. "With kisses."

"You expect me to kiss men?"

He shrugged a shoulder. "How else will you discover the right fellow?"

"How else will I go down as a scarlet woman? I've climbed enough fences barring me because I am of the dreaded merchant class. Papa's money might continue to buy me entry, but if I degrade myself further, no one will touch me!"

He tipped up his chin. "You will be discreet. I will help."

"You'll bar doors?"

"And divert traffic."

She scowled at him. "You've been away much too long, sir. You think me so brave. I am different from that child who tagged along behind you and tucked frogs in your pants."

He scoffed. "Remind me. Who came to me night before last in her nightrail?"

"Dressing gown."

He waved that away. "Exactly my point."

Exasperated, she huffed. "The fault, dear Harry, is not in our stars, but in myself."

"I agree."

Oh, he infuriated her! "I do not know how to kiss."

"And so you will learn."

*Only one way.* She could barely say it. "By doing."

"Indeed." He winked. "With me."

That way lay disaster and hopeless ruin. She'd should return to this party, because this was hopeless. She'd given up wanting him so long ago. Or thought she had. She threw up her hands. "Absurd."

"Is it?" He took a step toward her, so near she inhaled his scent, imbibed his familiar allure that she could not allow to thrill her. "You said my kiss left you with no...what is the word?"

"You know perfectly well the word."

"Tickle?"

*If only.* "Tingle."

"Well then, my darling." With one hand he caught her wrist while he swept his other hand around her waist. "Let's see if this fits the bill."

"No, stop!" *Wonderful.* Now she sounded like the village crier.

"There, there. Don't be shy. An experiment, eh?" He lifted her hand toward his mouth. "Or shall we call it..." he murmured, as he put her index finger, fully gloved, against the neat cleft in his chin, "...a demonstration? Visible to the naked eye."

He smiled. Or was that the show of teeth of a predator? A creature who...gloated?

He caught the point of her glove between his long white incisors. The act of a male bent on taking a bite of her, he tugged. The fabric slid along her finger, silk on silk, a glissade of shivering delight. Her glove glided from her elbow in a silent skim of her nerves. She shivered.

He halted. Glanced up at her, those long dark lashes of his rising to reveal the facets of a Harry she'd never known. A ravenous devil appeared there, one who pulled at another fingertip, starving for more of her until her hand was bare. Nipping her third finger and the next, he sent tremors up her spine. Her mouth fell open as he took her smallest finger, fabric and all, and bathed the whole of it in his hot moist mouth. His tongue served as succor—and as torture.

She panted as if she'd run a mile. Her gaze glued to his voracious teeth, she dare not look away or lose a second. What he gave, she took. If it was instruction, it was also a revelation. Though she knew not how to interpret his lips to her fingers as lips to lips, she reveled in whatever he'd choose next.

With a yank of his teeth, he pulled, and her glove slid slowly down her arm and fell to the floor. She was bare to the night air, chilled and burning, as he caught her fingers and pressed them to his open mouth. He cupped her elbow, and her wrist was once more his. Bare skin gave him no pause, but encouragement to lift her hand once more.

He groaned and crushed her torso fully against him. His possession, from her breasts to her hips, left her pulsing.

He put her palm to his lips and licked the hollow of her hand. She moaned at his luscious homage and her knees gave way. As he caught her up, he bit the heel of her hand. She yelped. He gave a grunt, nigh unto laughter or triumph, she knew not which, then wrapped her arm around his waist. As he sweetly backed her to the wall, his hair fell loose over his brow and he focused on her lips.

Then he took them.