



*Special Glimpse!*

## *Along Came a Rogue*

### **Chapter One**

*London, England  
March 1816*

In the shadows of the private opera box, Nathaniel Grey lowered the glass of whiskey from his lips and smiled down at the beautifully coiffed head bobbing at his crotch.

Oh, Lady Margaret Roquefort was a lovely woman with a deliciously wicked mouth whose company he enjoyed immensely. Luckily, she also

shared his interest in opera, finding far more fun in the activities that occurred in the dark boxes than in whatever happened onstage.

The rising notes of the aria drowned her soft moan of pleasure as her lips closed tightly around him. Shutting his eyes, he let himself savor the moment.

He wasn't meant to be here, two boxes down from the Prince Regent, taking pleasure in one of the most beautiful ladies in English society. Not him. Not an orphan so inconsequential to the world that the lie he chose to tell about himself—that he was the runaway son of a blacksmith—was a decided improvement over the truth.

But in his life, he'd more than earned the right to be among the gentlemen of the *ton*, having killed—and nearly been killed himself—to protect all of them, without a word of thanks. Yet while he could dress like them, gamble with them, drink their best whiskey, and bed their finest ladies, he would never truly be one of them.

And he didn't give a damn if he wasn't.

In fact, he liked it. Living on the periphery of society gave him a freedom he would never have as one of the quality, and freedom meant everything to him.

"Grey," Margaret moaned. He reached down to stroke his knuckles across her cheek.

He smiled at the irony as arousal throbbed hot through his veins. Would Lady Roquefort be pleasuring him right now if she knew the truth about him? He choked back a laugh. Knowing Margaret, she would have been sucking even more eagerly in rebellious glee.

A baroness and an orphan... Wouldn't that juicy bit of *on-dit* send scandal rippling through the *ton* if anyone found out?

But he'd made damned certain no one ever would.

Even at just ten, when he ran away from the orphanage, he knew how to lie about himself and lie well enough to talk his way into a job as a stable boy at Henley Park, where he had a roof over his head, food in his belly, and an education thrust upon him by the Viscountess Henley. When he turned eighteen, he purchased an officer's commission and enlisted with the Scarlet Scoundrels of the First Dragoons.

*That* was the man Margaret thought she was enjoying tonight. The army officer who led charge after charge on the Peninsula, only for a single bullet to end his cavalry career and force him to once again reinvent himself, this time as a War Office agent. Losing his command had been damned hard, but the end of the wars had created a need for trusted agents, and he was good at spy work. So good, in fact, that he'd been offered a coveted position on the Continent. If all went as planned, he'd be in Spain by next month.

Success was so close now that he could taste it. He *craved* it, in fact. Everything in his life had led to this opportunity, and he planned on seizing it for all he was worth.

But for now he was here, with Margaret's eager mouth and hands on him, enjoying himself immensely.

The soprano reached her last trilling notes. Pulling a rasping breath through his clenched teeth, Grey shuddered and released himself. Margaret swallowed around him as her hot mouth milked his cock. When she'd finished, he pulled away and handed her the glass.

As she drank the remaining liquor, he fastened up his trousers. Ah, how much he enjoyed the opera! And one of these nights, he fully intended to watch a performance.

"Ugh—whiskey!" Margaret made a disgusted face as he took her elbow and helped her to her feet. "You know I can't stand the stuff, Grey. Why don't you ever drink port or brandy—something I enjoy?"

"I never drink brandy." His mouth twisted with distaste. "Not anymore." The stuff reminded him of the French, and he'd done everything in his power to put the war behind him and to focus instead on his future.

Applause thundered around them as the audience rose to their feet and filed from their boxes for intermission. The mindless chatter among the blue bloods rose nearly as loud as the opera singers.

"Port, then." She set the glass aside and smoothed her hands down her skirt to press out any telltale wrinkles. His lips twitched in amusement at her expense. Oh, how much he enjoyed women like Lady Roquefort! Those well-bred ladies of the *ton* who were always so proper and fashionable, even when on their knees. He would miss their sort when he was in Spain. "Next time, bring me port."

He gave her a charming smile, this woman who meant absolutely nothing to him except as an evening's entertainment, and stifled a contemptuous laugh because she thought she could order him about.

"Of course, my lady." He reached out to trail his fingers over the top swells of her breasts, revealed by the daringly low neckline. Her breath quickened beneath his fingertips as he purred, "Anything you desire."

She trembled against his exploring hands. "All the ladies were gossiping about you earlier in the retiring room."

"Hmm...and what did they say?" She expected him to ask, so he indulged her, yet he couldn't have cared less about those gossipy hens.

“They wondered what Major Grey was like as a lover, if he’d singled out anyone to be his mistress or if he prefers being promiscuous.”

“Promiscuous,” he murmured with mock solemnity, dipping his head to trace the tip of his tongue into the valley between her breasts. “Definitely promiscuous.”

With a flirtatious laugh, she swatted at his shoulder and forced him to step back as the noise of the milling crowd grew louder. She adjusted her long gloves. “How do I look?”

“Stunning.” He raised her hand to his lips. “As always.”

The flattery was empty, but it pleased her. Which was all that mattered. He needed to keep her happy only so he could enjoy Mozart again with her next week.

Her eyes shining at the compliment, she leaned back against the wall. “Quite a coup, securing a private box all to yourself. However did you manage?”

“I’ve always appreciated the privacy of a reserved box,” he expertly deflected her question.

He’d long ago grown used to the backhanded compliments leveled at him by her sort. They no more bothered him now than getting caught in a warm summer rain. But he wasn’t foolish enough to open himself to further criticism by admitting that the box belonged to Edward Westover, Duke of Strathmore and his former colonel in the Scarlet Scoundrels.

No doubt Margaret thought she’d been utterly scandalous tonight by having her mouth on him. She was right, of course. Even the rank of major wasn’t enough to gain status among the quality when he had no fortune or family name to accompany it. Neither did he care. He was free to bed whomever he wanted, whenever he wanted—and in the case of Lady Roquefort, *wherever* he wanted—and answer to no one but himself.

“Now, be a good girl—” He turned her toward the box entrance, happily done with her for the evening. “—and return to your husband before the old baron discovers you’re missing.”

With a satisfied grin and a playful slap to her ass that made her jump, he was gone, stepping through the curtain into the milling crowd in the hallway and leaving her behind without another thought.

The hour was still early. Plenty of time yet for cards at one of the clubs since he no longer had any reason to linger at the opera. After all, he certainly hadn’t attended to hear the music.

Maybe he’d rouse Thomas Matteson from whatever dull evening he’d planned and bring him out with him. After all, Thomas had mellowed too much for Grey’s tastes since they’d served together in Spain, where they’d saved each other repeatedly from both French soldiers and Spanish husbands.

Grey’s brows drew down slightly. Odd to think how much their lives had changed in the past two years. He had become an agent while Edward and Thomas had both moved into the ranks of the peerage, with Edward becoming Duke of Strathmore and Thomas gaining the courtesy title of marquess when his father unexpectedly inherited a duchy. Yet their lives were going to change again. Grey was heading back to Spain, and Edward—God help him—was going to become a father.

Best to squeeze in as many good nights as possible now, Grey decided as he made his way downstairs, slipping between groups of operagoers gossiping in the hall and on the wide stairs curving into the grand lobby below. He nodded his head at the handful of acquaintances he knew among the crush, but they only returned bewildered stares, as if surprised to see him.

As he skirted a group of pastel-donned debutantes at a safe distance, a shocked whisper rose from behind a flutter of fans. “The marquess!”

Lots of marquesses among the quality, Grey dismissed. He paid the comment no mind as he descended the stairs and passed a group of gossiping hens with the same shocked expressions, the same frantic flitting of their fans in agitated excitement as they stared in his direction. Just as with the debutantes, he gave the hens a wide berth. The last thing he wanted to sour his mood tonight was those disapproving glances that society matrons were so skilled at sending rakes like him.

Snippets of conversation wafted up to him as he reached the lobby. “So terrible...the marquess...dying like that...”

Hmm. A dying marquess. So *that* was what stirred such excitement tonight. Fresh news about the Marquess of Dunwich. The old man had taken to bed a few days ago with the same fever that had claimed both his son and grandson, leaving the title without an heir apparent, and the entire *ton* buzzed with speculation over what would become of the title when he died. Based on the titillated anxiousness floating through the crowd tonight, the old man must have finally given up the ghost.

He nodded at the Earl of St James’s and his mother as he passed, doing his best to catch the eye of Baroness Sydney Rowland, standing next to them. The young widow was beautiful and exactly the kind of woman he preferred—

A man stepped directly in front of him, stopping him abruptly.

Grey couldn’t remember the man’s name but recognized him as a distant friend of Thomas Matteson’s from university. “I daresay, major,” the man said, perplexed. “I’m damnably stunned to see you here tonight.”

Grey shrugged. “I enjoy the opera.” He grinned with private amusement. “Especially the arias.”

The man’s face scrunched into a deep frown. “But I thought, with today’s events—surely, you’d be at Chatham House tonight.”

Ah, of course. That’s why everyone was eyeing him so oddly. Alistair Crenshaw, Marquess of Dunwich, had been distantly related to the Matteson family through the marriage of Thomas’s sister, and most of Mayfair knew that he and Thomas had served together on the Peninsula. It was Thomas who had shown him the intricacies and potential of a rake’s life among the quality once they’d returned to England, and their friendship gave him a grudging acceptance within the *ton*. Everyone must have thought Grey would be giving his condolences to the family tonight.

He shook his head. “Decided on the opera instead. I’ll pay my condolences tomorrow.”

The man blanched. “But—but the marquess!”

“Dead, apparently. Terrible shame.” Then he moved on through the crush, ignoring the completely astounded look on the man’s face.

He neared the door, longing for the coolness of the night outside—

“The marquess was so young.”

He stopped instantly, his head snapping up. A *young* marquess?

The man who uttered that news stood only a few feet away with a group of bejeweled ladies and gentlemen. Grey forced a lazy half smile that belied the rising unease inside him as he sauntered over. “Which young marquess?”

“Chesney.” The man blinked, surprised that anyone in the opera house could possibly not have heard the news. “Shot in the street at sunset. No one knows—”

*Thomas*. For a moment he stared in disbelief, his stunned mind unable to comprehend the words falling from the man’s mouth. Then his blood turned to ice as panic sped through him and

the air squeezed from his lungs. *God no...* it couldn't be. Not Thomas—but the expression on the man's face was too certain to be wrong.

Grey ran for the street.

When he reached Chatham House, the townhome was ablaze with candles and lamps, and his heart stuttered with dread. Two saddle horses stood tied in the front, along with the massive black carriage marked with the Duke of Strathmore's coat of arms.

He raced up the front steps of the stone portico and pounded on the door. Jensen, the Chatham butler, opened the door but did not step back to let him pass.

"The house is closed tonight, Major," Jensen told him, his ashen face drawn and his gray brows knitted with worry. "Please return tomorrow."

When he tried to shut the door, Grey shoved his shoulder against it and pushed his way inside, forcing the butler to stumble backward to make way for him.

Had it been any other night, he never would have caused such an uproar. He would have returned the next day as asked, just to keep peace. But tonight, he refused to stand on politeness.

"Where's Chesney?" Grey demanded. "Is he here?"

"Major, please!" Jensen glowered at him. "The house is closed upon order of His Gr—"

"Jensen." A commanding voice from the upstairs landing cut through the scuffle. "Let him pass."

The butler glanced up at Edward Westover, Duke of Strathmore. With an aggravated *humph* beneath his breath at having his authority undermined, he stepped back to let Grey into the house.

He raced up the curving marble stairs, his heart pounding with fear. "Thomas?" he rasped out.

"He's here," Edward informed him solemnly, keeping his voice low so he wouldn't be overheard by the servants. "The surgeons are with him."

"He's alive?" Grey gripped the wrought iron banister to steady himself.

A grim solemnity darkened Edward's face. "Barely."

He exhaled a long, shaking breath. "Jesus...what happened?"

With a glance at Jensen still lingering in the foyer, Edward nodded toward the nearby billiards room. Grey followed him inside and accepted the scotch his former colonel poured from a bottle on the table just inside the door, the half-filled glass beside it telling him that Edward had already sought out his own liquid strength.

As he raised the glass, he tried to hide the shaking in his hands. "Was it the French?" he asked quietly.

Edward and Grey were two of a handful of people who knew that Thomas had continued to dedicate himself to his country after leaving the army, signing on to work secretly with the War Office. If the French had discovered he was spying, they might have attempted an assassination.

Edward shook his head. "He'd been visiting at Strathmore House and was on his way home when a footpad shot him." He reached for his glass and took a long swallow. "A groom heard the report and found the man rifling through Thomas's pockets."

Grey steeled himself. "How badly is he wounded?"

Edward's face turned to stone. "Gutshot."

The air rushed from his lungs, and Grey leaned against the wall, squeezing his eyes shut against the mix of fear, dread, and fury swirling inside him, unwilling to believe the worst. *Dear*

*God*...not Thomas, not like this. Not after they'd faced down death together in Spain, only to be killed two streets from his own home.

"The surgeons are operating now. Thank God that groom came upon him when he did, or he would have bled out right there." Edward studied the amber liquid in his glass. "Jensen sent a messenger to the house. When Kate heard, she insisted on coming with me to attend the surgeons."

New worry spun through him for the duchess. "In her condition?"

Edward's lips pressed together grimly at the reminder that his wife was expecting. "You try stopping her when she's set her mind on something."

Taking careful breaths, concentrating on the air filling his lungs and forcing back his growing grief, Grey tried to steady himself. But his heart kept pounding harder, his stomach roiling. *Gutshot*... Thomas was alive, but he'd most likely be dead by dawn.

"Damnation!" Edward slammed down the crystal tumbler so hard the liquor splashed onto the table. He rubbed his thumb and forefinger at his forehead, at that moment appearing as if he'd aged decades. "I sent him away tonight. Kate asked him to stay with us for dinner, but I wanted an evening alone with her." Guilt stiffened his shoulders as he shook his head. "If I hadn't—if I had just invited him to stay, offered another drink..."

"It wasn't your fault, Colonel," Grey assured him.

"I know," he agreed quietly, "but it damned sure feels like it." He shoved his glass away. "I've sent a messenger to his parents at their country estate."

"He has a sister, too, near York—Emily," Grey reminded him as an image from five years ago flashed through his mind of a stick of a girl with blond braids who had adored her doting older brother. She'd want to know, would want to be by Thomas's side... "We need to send a messenger to her, too."

Edward nodded grimly, although both men knew the harsh reality of the news that wouldn't reach Thomas's family for days. By then, he would likely be past whatever comfort they could give. "I've hired Bow Street to track down the footpad and ordered Jensen to close the house to visitors. There's nothing else to do but wait."

Grey stared at him, the grief inside him turning into fury. *Wait?* Like hell he would. Downing the rest of the scotch in a single, gasping swallow, he shoved himself away from the wall and charged toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Edward called out after him.

He glanced over his shoulder as he strode from the room, his calm outward appearance belying the white-hot rage burning inside him. "To find the man who did this."

Edward followed him. "Let Bow Street take care of this. They have access to Mayfair."

"I have better contacts. I'll have my men in the streets within an hour."

"Grey." Edward put his hand on Grey's arm as they reached the stairs, and repeated pointedly, "Bow Street has access to Mayfair."

Grey clenched his jaw at the unspoken meaning undercutting Edward's comment. The runners would be allowed into any house in Mayfair if they said they were investigating the marquess's shooting, while he and his War Office men wouldn't be allowed past the front door.

His eyes narrowed icily at the reminder that he would never belong to English society, no matter how hard he worked, no matter how many promotions he earned. He'd never cared before tonight, and the truth had never cut more deeply than at this brutally frustrating moment when being an outsider made helping Thomas impossible.

“I will find that man,” Grey repeated, wrenching his arm away from Edward’s grasp and charging down the stairs toward the front door. “I might not have the same access to Mayfair as a Bow Street runner or a blue blood,” he bit out, “but I also have nothing to lose. And if Thomas dies, I’ll make that bastard regret the day he was born.”

“Grey—”

“I *have* to, Colonel. I have to do something to help, however I can.” He paused at the bottom of the stairs to glance back at Edward. His chest tightened with anguish and helpless frustration as the adrenaline coursed through him. “I won’t simply stay here and wait for him to die.”

Then he strode out the front door into the black night.

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Grey shifted uncomfortably on the chair in Thomas’s bedroom as the morning sunlight shone around the pulled drapes. His muscles ached stiffly, and he winced as a sharp pain stabbed into his lower back.

One week had passed since the shooting, and he’d spent yet another sleepless night at Thomas’s side, keeping watch, leaving the house only to help Bow Street track down the man responsible. He’d found the footpad himself in a seedy tavern in Spitalfields, bragging about how he’d robbed a gentleman in Mayfair, still possessing the watch he’d stolen from Thomas’s pocket. *Bastard*. Two runners had to pull him off the man to stop him from beating the son of a bitch to death right there in the tavern, only for him to stand before the gallows at Tyburn yesterday morning and mercilessly watch him swing.

Perhaps war had hardened him too much. Perhaps he had no compassion left after all the atrocities he’d witnessed in the wars. Because when he watched the shooter die, he’d felt glad. And relieved, knowing the man could never harm anyone else.

The door opened quietly, and Edward Westover stepped into the room. His tired gaze found Grey’s and held it in a moment of shared concern, then drifted to the bed and to Thomas’s weak body lying there as comfortably as they could make him.

But how comfortable could Thomas be given the hell he’d been through in the past week? And given that his arms and legs were bound to the bed to keep him from tossing about in fitful bouts of feverish sleep and ripping open the sutures. Kate Westover had insisted on that, the young duchess crying in choking fits as she begged the two men to tie him down. They had done it without a word, without a glance at the other, knowing it had to be done even as their chests filled with guilt.

His gaze swung back to Grey. “You spent the night here again.” Not a question, but a grim accusation.

“Yes.” And he’d spend tonight here, too. Although, he thought, grimacing as he shoved himself from the chair and rubbed at his stiff neck, the least Jensen could do was offer to bring in a cot for him. But he wouldn’t complain, not with Thomas lying so still, so pale in his bed.

“How is he?” Edward asked quietly.

“Better.” He’d slept through the night at least, for once not thrashing about in the bed nor crying out in his sleep. That was due to the receding fever and the longer and more frequent stretches of wakeful consciousness that came as he slowly regained his strength. But the color had yet to come back to his sallow cheeks, his face still as pale as a ghost’s.

Edward moved slowly to the side of the bed and frowned down at Thomas and the ugly black sutures marring his side. “At least the swelling has gone down. Kate will be glad of that.”

“Is the duchess here with you?” Grey stepped up beside him. Together the two men stared solemnly down at their friend, helpless to do anything more than continue to hold their vigil.

Edward shook his head. “She wanted to come, but I made her stay home. She’s exhausted and needs to rest, both for her sake and the baby’s.” Then he frowned. “But most likely she’ll be back this afternoon. I doubt I can keep her away for long.”

Grey nodded, his chest swelling with appreciation and gratitude for the duchess. She’d insisted on being at Chatham House nearly as many hours as he had, and far more than Dr. Brandon, the official physician tending to Thomas. “Don’t keep her away too long, Colonel.” He said softly around the knot in his throat, “Thomas is better when she’s here.”

Edward heaved a heavy breath and nodded. “He likes it when she feeds him.”

Despite the heaviness weighing in his gut, Grey crooked a half grin. “He likes looking down her dress when she leans over to put the spoon to his mouth.”

“That, too.” Edward grimaced. “When he’s healed, I plan on pummeling him for it.”

Grey’s eyes moved slowly over Thomas, his body so still except for the faint, steady rise and fall of his chest. So impossibly pale... “Then I hope you get to beat the hell out of him very soon,” Grey said quietly, his teasing words dull with grief.

“Me, too,” Edward murmured.

A clatter of noise went up from downstairs and broke the post-dawn silence of the still-sleeping town house. The front door opened loudly. Footsteps rushed in and out of the house as muffled shouts sounded outside. Then an angry voice called through the halls.

Edward slid a sideways glance at Grey. “Chatham’s arrived.”

“Apparently,” Grey muttered, not looking forward to seeing Thomas’s parents. They had never approved of his friendship with their son, and certainly not after the incident five years ago when they’d caught him kissing their daughter. They tolerated him now only because they didn’t want to alienate Thomas.

Moments later, his mother ran into the room. Mary Matteson, Duchess of Chatham, halted when her eyes landed on her son. A soft sob tore from her throat. She came forward slowly toward the bed, her hand shaking violently as she reached for Thomas’s cheek.

“Thomas?” His name was a pleading whisper between choking sobs. “Thomas, can you hear me? Darling, it’s Mother...please...please wake up...”

Soft cries poured from her, her already red-rimmed eyes revealing the tears she must have been crying for days, ever since the messenger arrived with news of the shooting and along every mile from Lancashire as they raced back to London.

“He’s so cold and pale,” she breathed in an anguished whisper, her fingertips stroking his face. “My baby—my poor baby boy...”

The two men looked on helplessly, before Grey had to turn away, his eyes blurring.

Edward placed a hand gently on her shoulder. “He’s out of danger now,” he assured her, his quiet voice calm and steady. The same timbre Grey remembered from Spain whenever



Edward spoke to the wounded men after a battle, to give them whatever comfort and courage he could. “Dr. Brandon confirmed it. Thomas will be just fine.”

Then her cries of worry turned to ones of relief. She grabbed Edward’s hand and squeezed it tightly. “But—but he’s not waking up...”

“He’s been sleeping deeply all night,” Grey interjected gently, yet keeping his distance. He wasn’t welcome here, but he wanted to ease her suffering however he could. “Sleep is a good sign. It means his body is healing.”

She glanced over her shoulder at him, and surprise crossed her face, as if she hadn’t noticed he was there. Then her lips pressed together tightly, and she nodded to acknowledge his words before turning back to Thomas.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she told Edward. “Your friendship means more than Chatham and I can ever express. Thomas is alive because of you.”

“And Major Grey,” Edward corrected gently, his gaze glancing over her head to meet Grey’s.

Grey could have told him to save his breath. He held no delusions that if Edward hadn’t been in the room, she would have already had the footmen toss him out on his ass.

“Thomas!” John Matteson, Duke of Chatham, strode into the room. His face was pale with worry, and his hands clenched helplessly at his sides.

A tall and imposing man with the same military bearing as Thomas, the duke had served in India with the East India Company, acting as a military liaison to the local maharajas for a decade before returning to England with his second wife and infant son, where he served as an administrator until he unexpectedly inherited. What struck Grey every time he saw the man was how much Thomas resembled him physically, but how little in temperament and character.

He took his wife’s shoulders and stared down at his son. “Mary, how is he?”

She choked back a cry and whispered, “He’s alive.” She turned her head and buried her face in her husband’s shoulder as she sobbed. “Our boy’s alive...”

“Thank God,” Chatham breathed out, then his arms slipped around his wife to briefly hold her close. “I told you that all would be fine.” He released her and stepped back, ending the uncharacteristic display of emotion. He glanced around the room. “Where’s Emily?”

Edward cleared his throat. “I dispatched a messenger to her. He returned three days ago with this.” He lifted a letter from the fireplace and handed it to her father. “She plans to come as soon as she’s able.”

Chatham unfolded the letter and scanned it quickly. His shoulders stiffened, but he nodded at Edward with a stoic expression. “Thank you.”

Grey knew what that letter said. Thomas’s sister Emily had thanked Edward for the news of the shooting, grateful beyond words that the colonel had thought to contact her, but claimed she was unable to travel to London. Still in mourning over her husband’s unexpected death last fall, she was too ill to travel, the roads in the north too treacherous in the spring rains, but she would come as soon as she could. *Tell Thomas I love him, and always will...*

Damned lies, all of it. When he’d met her five years ago, she’d openly adored her older brother, who in turn doted on her and affectionately referred to her as “the brat.” That young woman would have done anything to be at her wounded brother’s side, not letting sickness nor the weather stop her.

But the recently widowed woman who sent this letter—apparently, Grey didn’t know her at all anymore.

“Mother...” The word was little more than a breath on Thomas’s lips, but the soft sound pierced the room.

Mary Matteson sobbed and cupped her palm against his cheek as she sat beside him on the bed. “I’m here, Thomas. Father and I are both here.”

His eyes remained closed, but he licked his dry lips as he slowly woke. “I’m sorry...I’m so sorry...”

“No, darling, no.” She leaned over to kiss his forehead as fresh tears rolled down her cheeks. “It wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t—”

He tried to move to reach for her, but the ties held him down.

She pulled back and glared accusingly at Grey through tear-glistened eyes. “Get these things off him!”

Anger pierced him at the indictment on her face, mixing with the horrible guilt he already carried for having to tie down his best friend in the first place. But he held his tongue and said nothing, knowing now wasn’t the time to defend himself to Thomas’s parents. And not in his sickroom.

“Mary,” Chatham told her, “he wouldn’t be tied down if Dr. Brandon didn’t think it necessary.”

Instead of reassuring her, his explanation only made her weep harder.

Thomas’s eyelids fluttered open heavily, taking all his strength to open them. “Don’t cry, Mother,” he whispered. Then he rasped out, “Water...please.”

Mary nodded and reached for the pitcher and glass on the stand beside the bed, but her hands shook so violently that she nearly spilled it.

“Here, let me.” Grey stepped forward and took the glass from her, then carefully slipped his hand beneath Thomas’s head to raise it from the pillow. He held the glass to Thomas’s parched lips and tipped it just enough that he could take several swallows, then eased his head back down onto the pillow.

Unfocused, Thomas’s blue eyes swept around the room. Bewilderment flashed across his pale face. “Emily...?”

“She’s coming as soon as she can,” Grey assured him with the lie, knowing the truth would only upset him. That most likely she wouldn’t come at all. During the past two years, Thomas and Emily had fallen out and rarely communicated, although Thomas had always refused to say why exactly other than that Emily had gotten married. “The weather is bad up north, and she can’t travel yet. But soon.”

His answer didn’t calm the agitation in Thomas’s eyes. “I need her, Grey...I need Emily.”

Grey stared down at him, his chest ripping open painfully beneath Thomas’s soft pleading. He was still so weak, with the loss of blood leaving his skin nearly transparent and his muscles still too fragile to move from bed. Every breath was a struggle.

“Bring the brat to me...please...”

Grey nodded, not trusting himself to speak. He knew what he had to do.

“We’ll send our own coach and escort for our daughter, Major,” Chatham interjected. “This is none of your concern.”

Grey ignored him and cast a glance at Edward, whose solemn expression signaled his complete understanding of the unspoken question that passed between them. He nodded once.

Turning on his heels, Grey strode from the room, through the house, and out the front door. His jaw was set hard, his mind determined.

“Send a message to Arthur Hedley at the Horse Guards,” he ordered the groom who brought out his horse from the stables, then tossed the man a coin to make certain the message was delivered. “Tell him to follow me north to Yorkshire.”

Knowing the former sergeant would catch up with him by nightfall, he mounted his horse and set off. Thomas wanted Emily by his side, so that was exactly what he would do. Put her at Thomas’s side.

No matter what it took to get her there.

*Find out what happens  
to Grey and Emily...*  
<https://amzn.to/3zJKmOs>