

PROLOGUE



The Duchess of Richmond's Ball
Brussels, June 15th, 1815

“CAPTAIN STERNE, I believe I am feeling a little faint. Will you escort me to a quiet room?”

Her eyes were gleaming with predatory intent, and she ran her hand along the scarlet wool of his best dress uniform as if she were inspecting the quality of the firm muscle underneath. Had she not been a lady of the highest rank and birth, Leo Sterne would have called her dress positively indecent—pink muslin so sheer that he could see every generous curve of her body through it. Her décolletage was threatening to escape its thin cloth confines with her every breath. He'd known women who followed his regiment around the battlefields of Peninsular Spain who wear more respectable clothing! Well, for a short time, at least.

As she was a lady, however, and he a captain of the 1st King's Dragoon Guards, he would merely call her clothes fashionable, and idly wonder if they were as easy to remove as they looked.

He escorted her from the dancefloor of the large converted coach house that the Duchess of Richmond had hired for this ball. Around them swirled the dresses of those English ladies who had been brave enough to travel to Belgium to accompany their husbands as they attempted to put a stop to Napoleon once and for all.

Here, away from the strict patronesses of fashionable Almacks, ladies of all ages danced the scandalous waltz with their scarlet-coated partners. They revelled in the wildness of the spins and turns, held so closely by unfamiliar hands. Spirits were high tonight; the Duke of Wellington was in attendance and nobody feared any danger. Napoleon and his army were miles away, and they could enjoy their revels in peace.

The scarlet coats of the many officers that had been invited provided vivid splashes of colour in the large, hot room, and the music from the orchestra battled with the thunderous sound of laughter and conversation from those too busy gossiping to take to the floor.

“Over there,” his companion said, indicating a door with her fan. “And quick about it!”

They passed unnoticed amongst the crowd. Few here would know him, anyway; his captaincy was new. He’d been promoted through the ranks, replacing men killed at Salamanca and Vitoria. The eldest son of a prosperous country lawyer, he’d been commissioned as a cornet, the lowest officer rank, back when he had joined the regiment.

His companion paused in front of the door, flicking her fan open with a practiced snap of the wrist, the painted silk hiding her face from any in the crowd that might recognise her.

He opened the door smartly and she walked through, letting her free hand drift across the placket of his trousers. He drew in a breath as she squeezed his member, indicating quite precisely the nature of the escort that she required him to provide.

A gentleman never refused the request of a lady, or so he had been taught!

He hurried through the door after her, shutting it firmly behind him. It led to a dark corridor, lit dimly with candles spaced at large distances along the walls.

"Push that table against it," she ordered, calling over her shoulder as if she were addressing a footman, rather than a lover.

Oh, the minx would pay for that!

The sturdy wooden table was heavy and required his full strength to shift into position. It would block the door quite adequately, preventing anybody discovering their removal from the dance floor.

He hurried to catch up with her. The corridor led to a small room which was decorated in a suspiciously comfortable way for an ante-chamber to a coach house. Candles were already lit, sitting in small candelabra on various surfaces. There was a chaise-longue with several plump pillows, and bowls of flowers lent a pleasing perfume to the air. There was no fire in the grate, as the muggy June night was too hot for the comfort of most, but a pretty arrangement of candles and sea shells decorated the sparse surface.

"Lady Allen, I do believe that you have had this room prepared," he said, trying to keep a straight face.

"Me?" she gasped, fluttering her fan in front of her face in a fair approximation of innocence.

The lascivious look in her eye gave her away. Several years older than him, but still very attractive, this lady was clearly an expert in the art of seduction. She'd selected him, managed an introduction and manoeuvred him onto the dance floor with all the tactical skill of Wellington himself. For a man such as Leo, used to taking charge of the women he dallied with, this was something of a novelty.

It did not do to grant her too much power, however; it was time to put her in her rightful place. Over his knee!

"Such bad behaviour for a lady," he said, his voice dropping to a

low rumble as he stepped forward and took hold of her wrist, plucking the fan from her fingers.

“It is a shame that nobody has ever seen fit to punish you before,” he went on, stepping forward so that she was forced to back up against the wall of the room.

Her eyes gleamed at the word ‘punishment’.

“You’re going to punish me?” she breathed, shamelessly arching her back so that she pressed her breasts against his broad chest.

He leant in and nipped the lobe of her ear, causing her to squeal excitedly.

“Naughty girls need to know how to behave,” he told her, taking her unresisting hands and pinning them above her head, pushing her firmly against the wall.

He was still speaking directly into her ear, bending his head to rub the stiff bristles of his short beard against the delicate skin of her neck. She shivered and rolled her head to the side, allowing him access to more of her exposed flesh.

This was all the permission he needed; he pushed one of his legs between hers, providing a broad, muscled thigh for her to rock against. She would be dripping already if he was any judge. She moaned and rubbed against him, gasping when he started to make his way down her neck, interspersing stinging bites with soft kisses.

He tugged the bodice of her dress down with his free hand. Her breasts, full and round, tumbled free and he caught the nipple of one between his fingers. He squeezed, gently enough to make her moan and then sharply enough to make her scream.

He kept the pressure on her until she was writhing helplessly against him. Her former arrogance was gone now; no longer was she commanding him to move furniture or follow her, as if she was the one in charge. She had been reduced to the throb between her legs and the transformation was breath-taking.

“Please,” she moaned, rubbing against him.

“What is it that you want?” he asked.

She could only groan, the stimulation overpowering her ability to speak coherently.

"Lady Allen," he said in clipped tones, the same as he used with his horse when he dared to disobey. "Answer me, Lady Allen, or I will stop."

The air of command in his voice worked wonders.

"No!" she said in alarm. "Don't stop, I beg you!"

"You want more?"

"Yes!"

He let go of her nipple and gave her breast a smart spank. She screamed at the unexpected pain.

"I am Captain Sterne, Lady Allen, and you will address me as such. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Captain!" she said, still in shock at the sudden spank.

He removed his thigh from between her legs, noting with amusement the small wet spot on his white trousers. He'd wager that the spank had brought about that proof of her arousal. What she would be like when he had finished with her backside, he could only imagine!

Keeping the grip on her gloved wrists, he brought her away from the wall. He towed her to the chaise lounge, then sat upon it, bringing her down over his knee in one sudden movement.

She did not have time to react; her wrists were pinned to the small of her back and her skirt was hiked to her waist before she could do anything but gasp. Her bottom wobbled with the impact of his first smack and she yelped in shock of the blow, but she could do nothing but wriggle as his hand came down again, and again, and again.

Lady Allen was naked beneath her flimsy dress, so there was no protection for her bare bottom against the firmness of his hand.

She howled in protest and kicked her legs in the air, which only served to amuse him.

"None of that noise will save you from your punishment," he

warned her, delivering a stinging set of smacks to that tender area just below her bottom.

He was wearing his good, kid leather gloves, white, like his trousers. Perhaps that added something to the experience for her; it did stop the stinging in his own hand that a good spanking caused. He had a mind to test how wet she really was, however, and he did not wish to sully his dress uniform.

Once he felt her bottom had reached the perfect shade of pink, he let go of her wrists. This enabled him to remove his gloves, which he set down on the chaise longue. "Now then," he said briskly. "Let's see how wet that spanking has got you, shall we? Spread your legs."

She obeyed, but didn't answer, which got her another hard smack. This one left the shadow of his hand on her plump backside, which he admired for a moment as she let out an aggrieved scream.

"I told you to address me as Captain Sterne," he reminded her.

"Yes, Captain Sterne!" she said breathlessly. "I'm sorry!"

She pushed her backside up in the air, presenting her wet channel for inspection. His middle finger slipped easily inside, followed by his index finger. He pumped his fingers in and out several times, enjoying the pants and groans it prompted. He sought out her little bud and rubbed it a few times. His hands were rough and callused from his years as a soldier, but they always seemed to make a woman happy when he fondled her most intimate parts.

It was no different with Lady Allen. She started to moan quite happily when he played with her bud and she wriggled so much across his lap that his member started to strain at his fly buttons. That would wait, however; his mentor in the amorous arts had given him very good advice for situations like these. Ladies first, in all things!

All women were different; the lightest touch would bring some off, while others needed a much firmer hand. Some needed a few

flicks, others a finger-cramping constancy of application before they found their pleasure.

Lady Allen responded well to rough handling, it seemed, and she was helped along her way with a few more spanks to her flushed backside. She screamed and clenched down on his hand when she finally came, trapping it between the flesh of her plump thighs.

He did not give her much time to recuperate. His own patience was becoming rather thin—there was a limit to how much a man could take, after all!

He rose, scooping her up as he did so, and looked about the place for a suitable surface. Not the floor—for all the room's decoration, he rather suspected that it contained too much dirt and grime to risk his white trousers with tell-tale spots on his knees. It would have to be over the chaise, where the curve of the back reached the highest point.

As his intentions had been pressing most intimately into her for the last ten minutes, she did not express any surprise at his actions. Indeed, she hiked up her skirt herself, and bent as far forward as she could over the chaise, grabbing the cushioned base for support.

She sighed when he pushed his cock into her the first time, her soft warmth welcoming his hardness as he sank his full length in. He was glad that she was no nervous virgin—he could fuck as hard as he wanted without worrying about her discomfort. His length and thickness could be a deterrent as often as an enticement, he'd discovered.

He paused when he'd breached her fully, listening to her sighs turning to pants as she accustomed herself to him. He reached forward and took her breasts in his hands, pulling at her nipples and laughing as she squealed and wriggled, impaled as she was on his cock.

He stayed still, his self-control pushed to its limits as she squirmed under him, her channel gripping and squeezing him as she moved.

"Please, Captain Sterne!" she said, her breath coming in pants.

"What is it you want, Lady Allen?" he asked.

If his voice lacked a little of its previous tone of command, he could be forgiven, he thought. He was seconds away from snapping his hips back and forth and fucking the breath out of her. It would be better, though, he knew, if she said the words he wanted to hear first.

"Fuck me!" she wailed. "Please! I beg you!"

"Say it again," he said, through gritted teeth, squeezing her nipples a little harder.

"I beg you!" she said, half pleading and half screaming as she rubbed herself against him. "Fuck me, please, I beg you!"

That was what he needed. He let go of her breasts to grip her hips and he began the pleasurable business of ploughing into her, his hips working furiously as he slammed his length again and again into the wet heat of her depths.

He kept his own pleasure at bay for as long as he could; he wanted to savour this moment for as long as possible. He'd never taken a tumble with a lady of birth and breeding before, and to have one with the mark of his hand on her backside begging him to ram her as hard as he could was an achievement to be proud of!

He could feel the muscles gripping him begin to tighten again; her position over the top of the chaise must have let her rub against some helpful carving, for she was reaching the peak of her pleasure again. He could feel his own orgasm building, the pressure in his balls causing them to tighten.

He would not spend inside her, as tempting as it was. It would be bad form to leave her with a remembrance of their encounter to explain to her husband. He withdrew, causing her to cry out in loss. She knew what he was about, however, because she scrambled for some of the loose cushions on the chaise before righting herself. She dropped them to the floor and knelt on them, preserving her dress, as she took him in her gloved hand and guided him to her mouth.

His thrusts were shallow, at first, as not to overwhelm her, but Lady Allen was eager to please him and grabbed at his buttocks, urging him to thrust more deeply. He was lost as soon as the head of his cock reached the back of her throat. He groaned deeply and came, his seed spilling from the side of her lips as she greedily sucked it from him. She licked him clean, and tucked his depleted member back inside his trousers, buttoning them before placing one last single kiss to the top button.

He helped her to her feet and found her reticule and fan while she righted her skirts and felt for any dislodged hair pins. She took out a small handkerchief and dabbed at her mouth, removing any traces of him from her lips.

"I must say, Captain Sterne, you really do live up to your name," she said, all traces of deference gone.

He bowed. "I live to serve, my lady," he said, and she laughed and tapped him with her fan.

"You are most delightful," she pronounced. "I look forward to renewing our acquaintance at the next suitable occasion. Now wait here for ten minutes while I make my entrance back into the ballroom, won't you?"

"I'll move the table for you," he agreed. Protecting her reputation was paramount. Although ladies of the nobility took lovers quite freely after providing their husbands with an heir, it was not something to be shouted from the rooftops. Discretion protected all parties.

He accompanied her back up the corridor to the blocked door. Something was wrong, however. Instead of music and laughter, all that could be heard was alarm and the hurried thunder of running feet.

She stepped back into the shadows as he shoved the table aside and opened the door. Throughout the ballroom chaos reigned as officers from all regiments were hurrying away, kissing their crying wives and calling for their horses.

"Sterne! Come on!"

A fellow captain in his regiment clutched at his arm.

“We go to Quatre Blas,” he said urgently. “Napoleon is on the move. It’s bad, Sterne.”

Leo looked back over his shoulder at Lady Allen, hiding in the shadows. He nodded briefly to her, and then took off after his fellow officer.

The time for playing was over. It was time to fight once more.