THE WICKED ORPHAN

DECEIT & DESIRE, BOOK TWO



VIOLA MORNE

BLUSHING BOOKS

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-829-2 Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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CHAPTER 1



HAWTREY HALL, YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND, 1816

iss Coraline Graham, contemplating further wickedness, prowled restlessly around the drawing room. Everything displeased her, from the tasteful china ornaments on the mantel to the heavy gold brocade curtains framing a view of the graveled drive. The staid and lifeless room felt like a mausoleum, and she was entombed. She wanted to break something.

What Cora needed was a new distraction, something to quell the churning of her emotions before they got the better of her, which invariably led to misdeeds. Her temporary guardian, the Earl of Hawtrey, would make her pay dearly because he always found out. Perversely, Cora found it reassuring. She couldn't fool him, no matter how much she tried.

Perhaps that was the reason for her disquiet. The earl had been away for over a month, and the devil of it was, she missed him. Every square inch, from his broad shoulders and long legs to the golden hair falling over his brow. Not that she would ever let him know it. Cora took another agitated turn around the room, her primrose muslin dress swishing around her legs. There must be some mischief she hadn't got up to yet. It only wanted a bit of reflection to decide on what it would be. Suddenly, the door behind her swung open.

Cora caught her breath as Lord Hawtrey strode into the room. Her heart even skipped a beat. A shame that she couldn't trust him, or anyone else. She pasted a look of boredom on her face. "Oh, you're back, my lord." Cora looked him over with an air of insolence. "You're very brown." She sniffed audibly. "And you smell like horse."

Lord Hawtrey's beautiful blue eyes glinted, causing Cora to catch her breath. It was a look that didn't bode well for her, especially when his lordship found out exactly what she'd been up to during his absence. Served him right for deserting her.

He bowed very correctly. "I beg your pardon for coming in with all my dirt. Bunting wrote to me. He has been concerned about you."

Cora sketched a curtsy as she swallowed, her throat suddenly dry. The butler couldn't wait to inform on her. "How very kind of him," she said between her teeth.

"It is his duty to care for the members of this household."

Cora sniffed. "Stuffy old busybody."

The earl's gaze sharpened. "I beg your pardon?"

Had she said that aloud? Her stupid, unruly tongue. "I'm sorry, my lord," Cora said hastily, "I didn't mean to..."

"Impugn the name of the faithful family retainer who cared for you in my absence?"

"Yes, sir." Cora lowered her eyes, her fingers clutching her skirts. There was no coming back from this.

The butler entered in Lord Hawtrey's wake, bobbing in the background like he always did.

"Bunting, pray enlighten us as to Miss Coraline's recent activities."

Cora jerked up her chin, her eyes pleading with the butler, but Bunting looked over her head, refusing to meet her anxious gaze.

"I am sorry to inform you, my lord, that Miss Coraline has been very naughty. She put India ink in her maid's hair pomade. The young lady has fair hair, and the effect was disastrous. The maid subsequently left your employ, threatening to go to the press. Next, Miss Coraline was observed by several members of the staff while swimming in the river in a state of um... nature. Finally, last week she paid a village boy a shilling to shout '*Fire*' in the dead of night, rousing the household in a state of terror..."

"Shut your gob, old man!"

A stunned silence followed Cora's outburst.

"Evidently," the earl said evenly, his voice as cold as ice, "manners in England for young ladies have altered a great deal in my absence. I assure you that kind of insolence will not be tolerated."

Cora didn't speak. What was the point? It wasn't as if Bunting was lying. She was guilty of every accusation.

"You will begin by apologizing to Bunting."

Cora looked down at her feet, becomingly shod in blue kid slippers trimmed with seed pearls. "I'm sorry, Bunting. I was rude and horrible. Please forgive me."

Bunting nodded stiffly and, obeying his master's gesture, left the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

"A very nice apology, Coraline. Now..." Lord Hawtrey paused for a long moment.

Cora sighed heavily. It was so like her guardian to make Cora a participant in her own punishment. She walked over to the desk, laying herself over the top. Then, she shimmied up her frock and petticoat, leaving her bottom bare, and waited for the first blow to fall.

The earl stood behind her, not touching her. What was he planning to do to her? Cora prayed it was not the cane, though she probably deserved it. She clenched her buttocks, her pulse hammering. Lord Hawtrey took a deep breath. When would he

touch her? The passage between her legs pulsed with sudden longing. She had missed feeling his hand on her, knowing he cared enough to punish her. She might be a constant source of aggravation for the earl, but he never faltered in his duty. Some of her guardian's requirements struck her as peculiar, but he was squarely in charge, no matter how much she might enjoy defying him. He moved closer. Cora closed her eyes, nearly moaning with anticipation.

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THE GIRL CALLED Coraline lay over his brother's desk, revealing a pair of deliciously plump and creamy cheeks. Major Alastair Pierce swallowed, his gaze trained on the prettiest bottom he'd ever seen. His cock hardened. What the devil was going on? She offered no explanation, seemingly content to await her punishment. His hand tingled. Coraline shifted on her feet, the air thick with expectation, until finally Alastair cleared his throat. "I await your apology," he told her.

She took a deep breath and shook her loose curls off her forehead. Her hair was a dark lustrous brown, very nearly black. Her clear gray eyes were large and bright, sparkling with vitality. Alastair found himself distracted by a mole at the corner of her full lips. She was extremely pretty.

"I was thoughtless, bad and rude, and I am deeply sorry," she rattled off, with all the feeling of a schoolgirl reciting lines.

Alastair contemplated her bottom. "You don't sound very sorry." She was quite petite, but deliciously rounded.

"I am," Coraline said earnestly, turning to look at him over her shoulder. "It's the delivery of my apology that's amiss. Allow me to try again." She cleared her throat. "Dear Lord Hawtrey, I am so dreadfully sorry for my bad behavior. Please accept my abject apology." She lowered her lashes. "Is that better?"

Alastair swallowed a laugh. "You didn't promise not to do it again in the future."

"Well," Coraline said earnestly, after a moment's reflection, "that is because I cannot make such a promise, when I am very likely to break it."

"Why?"

"Because I am headstrong and rash and altogether a complete hoyden. At least, that's what you told me last time."

Alastair struggled to hold in his laughter. The little chit was very outspoken. In fact, he had never met a girl quite like her. A shame he was only impersonating her guardian, his twin brother, Theo.

"Aren't you going to spank me?" Her bottom quivered enticingly. Was it with fear or anticipation? At any rate, he wasn't the man to refuse such a delightful challenge.

"Indeed, I am." Alastair smacked her across both cheeks. Coraline flinched, her little hands curling into fists. Adorable. He spanked her again, admiring the pink flush of her skin, which was extraordinarily soft. What was her usual punishment? Ten smacks? That seemed a reasonable number.

He struck one perfect globe, and then the other. Another spank made her clench harder, her back rigid. Alastair ran a soothing hand over her bottom. "If you don't relax, it will hurt much more." Coraline nodded, her body softening. Her thighs parted, revealing a glimpse of her pussy. Good Lord, she was bare, not a hair to be seen. His cock throbbed in response as he wondered what it would feel like to slide between her creamy thighs. Alastair took a deep breath, delivering the rest of her spanking with a firm hand, without stopping. Coraline whimpered but held still.

"Good girl," he said, soothing her plump flesh, reddened and slightly swollen. He pulled down her skirts and helped her to stand. Tears stood in her beautiful gray eyes. What was he supposed to do now?

As he hesitated, Coraline dropped to her knees in front of him and unbuttoned the fall of his breeches. Alastair sucked in a breath. His cock, fully erect, nearly burst from the buckskin. Coraline took him in one hand, bending her neck to lick the wet tip.

Alastair recoiled in shock. "What are you doing?"

Coraline sat back on her heels, a frown creasing her brow. "Am I doing it wrong? I always do this afterward."

Alastair swallowed. "You do?"

"Have you bumped your head, sir? Your memory is not what it was."

"No doubt due to my advanced age," Alastair said dryly, while his brain scrambled to understand what was happening. Coraline was a beautiful, gently-bred girl. What was she doing on her knees in front of him?

She blushed prettily. "I understand. You want me to tell you, as part of my punishment."

Alastair, mentally grasping at straws to comprehend the extraordinary situation, nodded stiffly.

"Whenever I am truly naughty, after I am spanked, I take your cock in my mouth or a plug in my bottom to reinforce that you are in charge, and that I am desperately in need of discipline. Without punishment, I fear I will be very naughty again." Her eyelids fluttered. "You must remember how I was the despair of my aunt and uncle."

"Of course." What the hell kind of a guardian had his brother been?

"I was upset when they first sent me to live with you, but I understand why they had to do it. I was quite unruly and headstrong. I am ashamed when I consider some of the things I did."

Said the maiden on her knees, ready to suck my cock, Alastair thought.

"Now, they seem happy with my improved behavior. May I begin?"

Alastair ought to refuse. He didn't even know this girl. It would be wrong to let her... the tip of Coraline's tongue ran along her bottom lip, where his seed glistened. All thoughts of

propriety fled. He wanted her mouth on him. God help him, he nodded.

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CORA FROWNED as the earl jerked his head. His attitude was very strange. Usually at this point his member would be halfway down her throat. It had taken months to get to the point where she could accept him without gagging, but Cora had persevered, wanting to please him.

She leaned forward, taking more of his length into her mouth. She licked the thick vein on the underside, her tongue swirling around the head. He was very wet, his seed seeping from the tiny hole at the head of his member. No, *cock*. That was the word he insisted on her using. Cora sucked on him deeply, and Lord Hawtrey moaned. The sound went straight to her pussy—another word he insisted she used. Heavens, she might go up in flames if he kept making that sound. Usually the earl was much more reserved, his hands on her hair directing her movements. Perhaps his lordship had missed her during his absence. The fleeting thought brought a sliver of warmth to her heart; an organ Cora believed had dried up during her years at the orphanage.

Her mind wandering, her teeth grazed the earl's cock, and Cora re-focused her attentions on her actions. Such daydreaming had led to painful punishments in the past. She dared a glance at Lord Hawtrey, who for once seemed oblivious to her error, his head thrown back and eyes closed. Blessing her luck, Cora renewed her efforts, sucking his cock in deeply as her tongue stroked along its length. He pulled out a little, Cora's tongue flicking over the head in light, teasing strokes.

The earl groaned, thrusting into her mouth again with a fierce stroke that curled her toes. Yes, that was it. She rose higher on her knees, her hands grasping his thighs for balance. He permitted that as well. Then, he grabbed her face, his fingers molding to her

cheekbones, pressing in and out, harder, faster. His cock swelled, and Cora tasted his seed on her tongue as he spent himself in her mouth. She sat back on her heels, holding his cock with one hand while she cleaned the head with long, languorous strokes.

"Coraline."

She opened her lips, and he pulled out. Was the earl displeased? Cora glanced up at his face. His expression was quite strange—his eyes almost soft, a flush of red along each cheekbone. His hand slid through her curls. And then, he stepped back, setting himself to rights and buttoning up his fall. He kept looking at her, pulling a handkerchief from his jacket to wipe her mouth.

"I..." Lord Hawtrey stopped, shaking his head, "you are dismissed." He helped her to stand.

Cora shuffled her feet beneath her gown, suddenly awkward. "Have I displeased you, my lord?"

"Not at all. Your punishment is at an end. You may go to your room. I-I want to see much better behavior in the future."

"Yes, sir," she murmured and walked to the door, sneaking a peek over her shoulder. The earl still stood in place, a frown on his lean features. Well, whatever was going on, he hadn't chosen to share it with her. She pulled open the door and left the room, climbing the stairs to her room on the second floor.

This was an elegant, spacious chamber overlooking the extensive gardens at the back of the house. She had never had such a beautiful room before coming here. Coraline trailed a hand over the cherry wood dresser, polished to a high sheen. Blue silk hangings surrounded a four-poster bed with matching window hangings. A window seat heaped with cushions sat beneath a large casement with a view of the garden and the river beyond. Miss Austen's latest work lay face-down on the seat.

Cora drifted over to the window. She pushed it open, allowing the warm, summer breeze to play over her face. The air was redolent of cut grass and roses. She closed her eyes, her mind returning without conscious decision to the dirty yard of the orphanage. It had been a high narrow building in the east end of London, the attic room she'd shared with a dozen other girls freezing in the winter and broiling during the summer. She could scarcely remember her life before that: the barest hint of her mother's perfume, the comforting embrace of her nanny, the pleasing rumble of her father's voice. And then, her parents were gone, and everything had crumbled away. Home, family, comfort, love. Yet, somehow, Cora had survived the years of institutionalized neglect.

One morning, after the usual breakfast of thin gruel, Cora had been summoned to the beadle's office, where she was greeted by a man of middle-age, his plump form encased in a greatcoat with three capes, fastened with large silver buttons and sporting a nosegay. The gentleman looked her over as he sniffed the flowers.

"Coraline, this is your cousin, Sir Walter Cripps," the beadle said. "He has recently learned of your whereabouts and would like you to make your home with his family."

Cora had blinked, unable to process what Mr. Hamilton was saying.

Sir Walter smiled at her then. "Coraline, I am pleased to make your acquaintance." As if they were meeting by chance in the street. "I hope you will be very happy with us."

And everything was settled, just like that. Cora's meager possessions were hastily packed, and Cora herself was bundled into an illfitting cloak and stuffed into Sir Walter's carriage like so much extra luggage. The carriage traveled the narrow city streets for some time, before they reached Mayfair in the west end, with its wide avenues and beautiful homes. Cora stared out the window, entranced by this view of a world she never knew existed. Finally, they arrived at a town house with a shiny black door and a brass knocker. The door swung open to reveal a man in livery waiting at the top of the stairs.

Sir Walter climbed down and stood looking at her through the open door of the carriage. "I must take my leave, Coraline. The coachman will convey you to my estate in Yorkshire. Good day." He

nodded briskly and walked toward the house. A footman closed the door behind him, and the coach rumbled into the street once more. She was ten years old, bound for a strange house far away, and she had never felt more alone. It was a feeling that had never left her, not until she came to live at Hawtrey Hall under the earl's strict rule. Outwardly, Cora had chafed against Lord Hawtrey's strictures, but his rules and punishments made her feel safe for the first time since her parents died. She only hoped that one day he wouldn't tire of her as well.

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ALASTAIR COLLAPSED into his brother's chair. The little minx had made his knees shaky. He had never come so hard.

"Theo, where the hell are you?" Alastair muttered to himself. He hadn't been concerned about his brother's absence when Bunting, Theo's butler, had first contacted him. But now, he felt a growing uneasiness about his twin's disappearance. Theo was too conscientious to leave his estate, his staff, and his ward in the lurch. Something must have happened to him.

And, what had Theo been up to with Coraline? Had he become such a rake that having a gently-bred girl like Coraline trained to suck his cock and offer up her bottom for punishment was a normal course of action?

Bunting had mentioned some papers that needed attending to. Alastair opened several drawers in his brother's desk, revealing a set of account books, extra quills and pots of ink, reams of engraved paper. The last drawer was locked. Curious, Alastair looked for a key, finding it under the blotter. It turned easily in the lock, revealing a small rosewood box and several glass pots of something that looked like ointment. Alastair opened the box and whistled. He'd never seen anything like this outside of a brothel. The box contained a set of five ivory rods, the smallest the size of his thumb, increasing in size. They were too small to be dildos. Great heavens, why did Theo have a set of anal plugs in his desk drawer? Wait, what had Coraline said about her punishments? Theo must have used them for her. Intrigued, Alastair ran a finger along one of them, the surface smooth and cool.

A knock on the door preceded the appearance of Bunting, holding a tea tray. Alastair slammed the box shut and stuffed it back in the drawer. He would consider that part of the problem later. Right now, he was more of a mind for the brandy bottle, but he accepted a cup.

"Now, Bunting, what the devil has been going on around here?"

The butler took a deep breath. "Major Pierce, thank God you have come."

"Steady, Bunting. You wrote that Theo had gone away, and I was needed to fill in for him. Now you tell me that no one can know he is still absent, and that I must impersonate him. Where in hell is he?"

"I'm afraid, Major, that the earl is missing."

"Missing? How can it be possible?"

Bunting wrung his hands. "His lordship left more than a month ago to visit friends near York and he has not returned."

"Steady on, man, no need to panic."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you don't understand. The earl must be here in three days' time."

Alastair arched a brow in query.

"He must sign the marriage settlements, or his betrothal will be rescinded."

"Theo's planning to marry? He never said a word to me." In fact, they hadn't corresponded in many months.

"I don't know about that, sir. The earl received an invitation to visit the country house of an acquaintance. He was supposed to be away for only a few days. After a week went by without a word, I was anxious. His lordship had never done anything like this before. I thought, at first, that..."

"You thought he was involved with another woman."

"I could imagine no other reason for his silence, Major." Bunting cleared his throat and continued, "Another week passed, during which I sent a message to his last known destination. The footman returned with the news that the house where the earl had been staying was closed up, no staff in sight. He inquired in the local village, but no one knew the family who was staying there, Starling their name was."

"Peculiar."

"Indeed, sir. I rode over myself, and it was just as Jeffers reported. I found the fellow who rented the house to the Starlings and he supplied me with their address in London. I wrote to Mr. Starling, and my letter was returned as not deliverable. Something terrible had happened, I was sure. I hired a Bow Street runner and then wrote to you."

"The runner was unable to find Theo?"

"No, sir, but he is still on the case. I'm afraid I fear the worse."

"Nonsense! If something terrible had happened to my twin, I would know it. He is probably in some scrape and will turn up eventually. In the meantime, I take it my part is to continue to impersonate him until he shows up, in order to protect his wedding plans."

"Just so, Major. His lordship would be very upset if his betrothal was called off."

"Who is the earl's intended?"

"Major, I thought you knew. His lordship wishes to wed Miss Coraline."

His brother planned to marry the girl he'd just spanked, who'd sucked him off with an expertise usually seen in a high-class whorehouse?

"My lord agreed to a temporary guardianship of Miss Coraline when her aunt and uncle couldn't control her," Bunting explained. "A few months later, he requested her hand in marriage. All parties agreed, and then, Lord Hawtrey went to visit the Starlings and never returned." "Damn the tea, Bunting. I need a drink."

Alastair was kept occupied for the rest of the day as he dealt with Theo's neglected business. The household had managed well enough in his absence, but there were always decisions to be made. After reviewing the estate ledgers with his brother's agent, he had ushered the fellow from the study and collapsed on a chair. He hadn't been trained to run the estate. Papa had seen to that.

He must find Theo. His brother was the lord of the manor and he could damn well deal with his own affairs. Alastair had his own life, one of honor and duty. He was due back from his leave in a month. It was a deadline that could not be missed. The British Army did not tolerate its officers being absent without leave. He would not destroy his career, not even for Theo.

And as for Coraline, lord, what a mess that was. Alastair could still feel the wet, silken heat of her mouth. No, he mustn't think of it. She did not belong to him. She belonged to his brother.