

Mastering His Marquise

By

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Published by Blushing Books®,
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ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Morne, Viola
Mastering His Marquise

eBook ISBN: 978-1-62750-481-2
Cover Design by ABCD Graphics & Design

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Part One

Spain

All the Spanish whores called him the Angel because of his fair hair, his ice-blue eyes, and his sweet smiles, which convinced any woman to abandon her principles and open her legs. And he sampled as many as he could, because Leighton Frost was young and vital, and he was at war. The ever-simmering threat of bloodshed and violence lent him an edge that more experienced women found irresistible.

That all ended the night Frost met *her*, and finally discovered what an angel really was. A dark angel, with raven hair, and eyes the color of pale jade. She was the mistress of a French general, and she would change his life, forever.

She called herself Madame Leclair; she claimed to be the widow of a minor noble from Normandy, whose death had left her impoverished. Madame Leclair was a fervent supporter of the emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, and she loathed the English.

None of it was true.

Chapter One

The Peninsular Campaign, San Paciano, 1812

The cantina was small and crowded, the scent of humanity blended with the stench of cheap wine and even cheaper cigars. Frost had smelled worse things in the army. He scanned the crowd for the agent that his commander, Major Winter, had described. There were plenty of black-haired women in the place. But where was the woman in the green scarf?

Frost finally spotted her at a table in the back. She had a deck of cards and was absorbed in laying out a game of patience. He ordered a bottle of wine and carried it over to the table, along with a couple of glasses. Frost kicked out a chair and sat down. He pulled the cork with his teeth and splashed the wine into the glasses.

The woman continued her game, as if unaware of his presence. He took a sip, swished it around his mouth, and grimaced before swallowing. A tiny snort, like a smothered laugh, escaped the woman. She still hadn't looked at him.

"The red bird flies at dawn," Frost murmured in his spotty Spanish. He felt ridiculous. That code phrase must be the major's idea of a joke. This time, he definitely heard a giggle.

Frost swore. "Damn Winter's hide. I should nail him to the wall."

Finally, she looked up. Her eyes brimmed with laughter. "Do you think you could?" She spoke in English--a low, throaty voice that promised sultry nights filled with sin.

Frost stared. She looked back at him, her slanting eyes the color of pale jade, shaded by long, dark lashes. The effect was extraordinary. Frost felt as if someone had taken a hammer and struck him right between the eyes. His stomach lurched. Those lashes swept down and then rose again. He swallowed, instantly hard. He wanted to throw her over his shoulder, leap on his horse, and ride away with her. To some secluded spot, where he could throw up her skirt and...

"Lieutenant Frost, I presume?"

He cleared his throat. "And you are?"

A small, tantalizing smile played over her lips. Christ, that mouth. Perhaps a trifle too wide for classical beauty, but with plump, red lips and even, white teeth. Her nose was straight

and a little long, her cheekbones high. Her skin was exquisite.

“Do you think you will remember me if we meet again?”

Frost felt himself flush. He stared at her like some saphead seeing a woman for the first time. He couldn't help it. She was so fucking beautiful. And he desired her, with an intensity that was foreign to him. He wanted her more than anything.

The woman delivered the information she had gathered and left the cantina with a sway of her hips. He had to see her again.

But the major refused to let Frost meet with her. “It's too dangerous. The fewer people involved the better.”

Frost chafed at the restriction. His off-duty hours were usually spent in the bedrooms of the beauties who pined over him. Now, those ladies looked for him in vain. If he couldn't have the woman in the green scarf, he didn't want anyone else, as crazy as that seemed. The major wouldn't even tell him her name.

And then, one night, Frost did see her again, quite by chance. He returned to San Paciano after meeting with Lt. Colonel Grant, Wellington's intelligence officer. The town was occupied by the French, but his mission was to meet with a Spanish official sympathetic to the British. Frost, in the guise of a French soldier, crossed the square in front of the church, and there she was, his mysterious beauty, on the arm of a French general. He slipped into the shadows to watch General Marchand pat her hand, an indulgent smile on his face, while the woman sparkled up at him. Was that her cover, or did those jade eyes hide the stare of a traitor?

Major Winter reassured him. The woman with the exotic green eyes was a spy for French royalist forces and their ally. Her position as the general's mistress allowed her access to vital intelligence. Who she'd been before the war, Winter didn't know, although he suspected she was married. The major couldn't see the general messing about with an unmarried woman.

So the lady Frost longed for was both married and the mistress of a powerful man. What a waste of his time. He'd forget her and move on. Frost had yet to meet the woman he couldn't put behind him with a bottle of wine and another warm, willing body.

#

“Is the general in?” Marchand's aide leaped to his feet when Angeline stopped at his desk

in the foyer of the house the general had commandeered as his headquarters. She hid a smile. He was so very young.

“Alas, Madame Leclair, he has been called away to meet with King Joseph in Madrid. He expected to be gone several days.”

Angeline nodded and climbed the stairs. Relief washed over her. She could take off her mask for a few hours. Angeline kicked off her slippers and dropped into a chair. She let her green scarf fall to the floor. Her maid, Lisette, bustled in, picked up the scarf, and put it away, clucking like an old hen.

“You look tired, petite. What is that terrible odor? You smell like a tavern.” Lisette had been her nurse and was still looking after her. “Let me bring you a nice cup of chocolate.”

“That sounds wonderful, Lisette. Thank you.”

Angeline hadn't always been “Madame Leclair.” Before the revolution, her family, though noble, had lived at their estates deep in the country. Her parents had no interest in life at court. They had scraped through the revolution, though they were left nearly destitute. When Angeline turned eighteen, her parents married her off to a nobleman who had returned from Austria following the revolution. Philippe was handsome and rich, and the young Angeline was romantic and susceptible. Her happiness lasted about a month beyond the honeymoon. Philippe seemed never to be home. Gambling and whoring were his chief pastimes, and a lonely young wife, without social prominence or witty conversation, was only a hindrance.

Now, at her husband's insistence, she was stuck in Spain as the mistress of a man thirty years her senior. Philippe could be very persuasive.

Fortunately, General Marchand was a busy man, and not often to be found in his quarters. Marchand was one of Napoleon's generals in charge of securing Spain for the emperor's brother, Joseph Bonaparte. Marchand was charmed with her--the beautiful wife of a French aristocrat. Angeline gave dinner parties, where she mixed with his senior officers and Spanish officials loyal to the French. She was deft and competent, assisting the general with several of his duties, including his correspondence.

Her activities still allowed her time to meet with British intelligence and pass along the information she gathered. Angeline's contact was a Major Winter, a giant of a man with the instincts and manners of a rogue. Their partnership had flourished. The major commanded a small but elite group of British intelligence officers, dubbed the Cold Hearts because of their

ruthless dedication to duty. Angeline passed on enough information to assist the British and their allies, but not enough to betray her true allegiance to the French crown.

Until today, only the major had known her identity. But he was called to the front, and Angeline had been forced to take a risk and meet with one of his lieutenants instead to pass on her information. His name was Leighton Frost, the major had told her. What he hadn't mentioned was that Leighton Frost was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. Not that it made any difference.

“*Tiens, ma petite.* Lisette has made it just the way you like it.” She poured a cup from the steaming pot. The odors of cinnamon and chocolate made her mouth water. Angeline took the proffered cup and sipped it gratefully. Lisette beamed at her and then left on another domestic errand.

Once the war was over, Angeline would go back to France. She would leave her pig of a husband...and then what would she do, without any money or property? But at least she would be free. Now, she was forced to do her husband's dirty work. It had all begun the night Angeline's husband shattered her life.

Angeline had waited for him to come home, tucked into a wing chair beside the fire in his bedroom. He stumbled in around four o'clock in the morning, reeking of brandy, smoke and another woman's perfume. She was surprised that she felt nothing but disgust.

“Why did you marry me, Philippe?”

He started and turned around. “I didn't see you. What are you doing, sneaking around my rooms?”

She ignored him. “Please answer the question.”

Philippe stood in front of the cheval mirror and untied his cravat. His eyes met hers in the glass and then slid away. “*Cherie*, why do you torment me with these questions? I am tired and a little drunk.” He pulled off his shirt, and threw it on the floor. “Or have I been neglecting your needs? Does my lovely wife need a tumble?” He read the disgust on her face, and his mouth tightened.

“Too good for me now? You forget how I found you practically rolling around in your ancestral sty.”

“If I am so repulsive, why did you marry me?”

Philippe undid his silk breeches and pulled them off. “Because my mother's uncle

threatened to disinherit me if I didn't settle down and get married. He gave me a list of potential wives. You were certainly the poorest, but the settlement my uncle decided on was generous. You were the prettiest, and I wanted to fuck you." He shrugged. "There is no need to be dramatic."

Angeline pulled her dressing gown tighter around her throat. Sometimes nothing was as cold as the truth.

"Take off your gown."

Angeline stared at him. "I'm not going to sleep with you."

"My dear, sweet wife, you will do anything I wish. Now, take it off. I want to see your body."

"You haven't seemed very interested in seeing it lately."

Philippe raised a brow. "Jealous, my lovely? No need, I didn't marry any of the others. I am all yours."

She wanted to cry, but she wouldn't give the bastard the satisfaction.

When he finished, he rolled off her body and lay staring at the ornately plastered ceiling. "I've come up with a solution to our financial woes. I've been offered a position."

Angeline held her tongue, though the idea of Philippe working for a living was ludicrous. He was at once too vain and too lazy. His reckless spending and gambling had frittered away most of the marriage settlement.

"I've decided to work with the loyal forces of our king-in-waiting, Louis XVIII. I've agreed to head an intelligence unit in Spain. We leave in three days. You will make ready to depart with me."

Whatever she had expected, it wasn't this. "What will I do in Spain?"

"You speak Spanish, do you not?"

"Yes, and Italian, and English."

"Then you shall be very useful to me in Madrid."

The beatings came later, when Angeline refused to do his bidding. Eventually, a black eye and two cracked ribs convinced her.

#

Frost had barely fallen asleep when the sentry shook him awake. A woman was asking for him. Frost cursed and rubbed his eyes. What woman would come looking for him in the British camp in the middle of the night? He grabbed his jacket and stumbled out of the tent. She stood by the sentry's fire, eyes wide with shock and clothes splashed with blood. It was the woman in the green scarf.

“What the hell are you doing here? It isn't safe.”

“I know, I'm sorry. I can't find Major Winter, and I need help.”

“What kind of help?” Frost didn't want to get dragged into her affairs.

She grabbed his sleeve. “My husband has been wounded, badly. He works with me. We ran across a party of French soldiers on patrol, while we were meeting with the guerillas in the mountains.” Her mouth trembled. “I was recognized. There was a fight...” A sob escaped her, hastily muffled. “The French are all dead, but Philippe was slashed by a sword. Please, Lieutenant Frost, will you help me?” Her beautiful eyes were filled with tears.

Frost swore again, and then he sighed. “Where is he?”

The woman led him to a wagon filled with a straw. She'd tied up the horse beyond the picket line. Her husband was hidden in the straw, unconscious. The moonlight was dimmed by clouds, and the man's face was in shadow.

Frost rubbed his jaw. “I know of a physician who works with the British. If we bring him to the convent, the sisters will care for him until I round up the doctor.”

Relief loosened her expression, which had been tight with worry. “Yes, this sounds like a good plan. Where do I find the convent?”

Frost pulled on his jacket. “You get your lovely ass up on the cart and keep your husband quiet. I'll drive.”

She opened her mouth to object. He shook his head, and she nodded. “Thank you, lieutenant.” He grabbed her by the waist and dropped her on the back of the cart. She scrambled into the straw, pulling it over both of them. Frost climbed into the driver's seat and grabbed the reins. The convent was three miles away on a rutted road with a fitful moon that made their passage barely visible. What the hell was he thinking?

The old horse plodded onto the track and they set off, the memory of his hands on her yielding flesh burning in his brain.