



This had been, Georgiana decided, a no-good, horrible day. She had just lost five hundred pounds. Her stern Methodist uncle was bound to find out and Kit would likely tear a strip off her as well. Not that Kit would care that she'd played, just that she'd lost. He'd taught her better than that.

She looked at her opponent with consternation. She felt as if she should know him, but she couldn't place him. He wasn't fashionable, though his clothes were obviously from the best tailor. No one with that much money should look like that, she thought.

From his wide-shouldered, well-sculpted chest, narrow waist and muscled thighs, he was built like a laborer but he dressed better than the prince regent. You'd almost think he was a gentleman, she thought, except for his raven hair, which though gleaming, was too long to be fashionable, as it fell not just past his collar but past his shoulders.

"I was hoping you'd be up for another game." He leaned forward in his chair and raised an eyebrow arrogantly. She wondered if they taught that look to men in school. Her brother could give her the same look. Usually when he knew she was lying about something.

"As much as I would love not to have to explain to my uncle why I need to withdraw the funds, I really shouldn't play with you. I have nothing left to offer," she drawled, then chastised herself. She should not be flirting with this man. She had no excuse. Your aunt and uncle are trying to marry you off to an old goat, a little voice in her head reminded her. That is no excuse, she told it.

"Darling," he purred, "I think you have a lot to offer."

Goosebumps rose where his dark eyes roamed over her, caressing her. Her chest flushed when his gaze lingered on her breasts.

"But I am unwilling to wager my body to your pleasure."

"I promise you, when you give yourself to me it will be for pleasure not because you lost a wager. When I take you to bed, it will be because you want to be there, beneath me. You want to feel me inside of you."

She was spellbound by his bold words, and the heat uncurling in her belly. She didn't notice when he reached out and pulled on the ties of her mask. It dropped to her lap.

"No hiding, love." He grinned at her. "The choice is yours."

He didn't have piggy eyes or fetid breath, she'd give him that. He was strong and virile, and she realized she was being offered an unparalleled opportunity.

With the safety of anonymity inside this room, she could afford whatever the evening held. She thought of her uncle threatening to marry her off. She was a spinster after all, and had only been kissed three times. *How can I afford to say no?* she wondered.

"Deal the cards, Captain."

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