



***SECRETS OF THE HEART***  
**BY AUTHOR JILLIAN KENT**

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*It is a sort of waking dream, which, though a person be otherwise in sound health, makes him feel symptoms of every disease; and, though innocent, yet fills his mind with the blackest horrors of guilt.*

—William Heberden, English physician, 1710–1801

**PROLOGUE**

**Yorkshire, England**

**1817**

“Who’s there?” Lady Madeline Whittington reined her horse in and listened. She looked into the dense, wooded edge of the forest of Richfield, her family home. “Did you hear something, Shakespeare?” She petted her gelding’s neck.

The horse’s ears pricked forward. She studied the fading sun. Darkness would close in soon. It would be unwise to tarry over long.

The forest edges, thick with bare brambles now, would become heavy with foliage in the next few months. If she was fortunate the blackberries would return. Last years winter had been harsh and she’d had to go without that succulent treat.

A shadow flitted from within causing a branch to tremble.

“Come out.” Madeline hardened her voice. “Come out at once.” Papa had taught her to be firm and bold when encountering the unknown, but also cautious. She reached for the revolver in her pocket wishing she hadn’t sent Donovan, their groomsman, on ahead. But she’d desperately wanted to ride alone for a few short minutes.

Two huge brown eyes in a tear-streaked and muddy face peered between parted branches held back by long slim fingers. Blood trickled from scratches on the girl’s arms and hands.

“Who are you? Why did you not answer me?”

The eyes grew wider.

Madeline's heart softened along with her voice.

"It's safe. I won't hurt you." She tore a hunk of bread from a leather pouch strapped across her shoulder. "Are you hungry?" She offered a large portion. Crumbs fell.

The girl took a step toward her, and worried her lower lip. Bruises colored the young woman's wrists and ankles, her only covering a torn chemise and ill-fitting shoes with no laces.

"What's your name? Can you understand me?"

Brown Eyes held out a hand.

"You are hungry. Of course you are. Come closer. I'm going to toss the bread to you. Is that all right?"

The pitiful creature nodded and held out both hands.

*She understands me.* Madeline aimed and carefully threw the bread.

The silent stranger caught it and stuffed the bounty into her mouth so fast that Madeline feared the girl might choke.

"Will you come with me?" Madeline held out her hand. "You may ride with me."

Brown Eyes stepped back.

"Don't go. It's dangerous. You cannot stay here. I won't hurt you."

The girl looked into the woods, at the lowering sun, and then at Madeline's outstretched hand. Brown Eyes stepped backward. One step. Two steps.

"Wait." Madeline unbuttoned her cape. "Take this. It's far too cold with only a chemise to cover you. You'll freeze to death." She threw the long, fur-lined wrap to Brown Eyes.

The girl gathered the offering and backed into the forest, keeping her eyes locked on Madeline's until she turned and ran.

"No! Wait. Please wait." Madeline searched for a way through the thicket. Not finding any she pushed her mount farther north until she found an entry. How to help this girl without scaring her out of her wits? She found the girl's path. Darkness chased them.

"Where are you?" Madeline shouted. "It's too dangerous."

Shakespeare's ears pricked forward and she caught the sound of scurrying ahead and then spotted Brown Eyes. Low-hanging branches attacked Madeline, clawing her with their long-reaching arms as she herded the girl toward a nearby hunting cabin. Minutes later they broke through the trees and entered a clearing where the outline of a small hunting cabin was silhouetted against the fast-approaching night sky.

Pulling her mount to a stop Madeline kicked her booted foot out of the stirrup at the same time she moved her other leg away from the side-saddle horn, nearly catching her skirt on it as she slid to the ground.

"I won't hurt you." Madeline called. The girl hesitated, and then ran again. Hitching up her skirts, Madeline chased after her, grabbing for the cape that trailed behind. She easily caught the girl, who fell to the ground in a heap and rolled into a ball with the cape wrapped around her.

Madeline knelt beside her and spoke gently. "Please don't run. I'm not going to take the cape from you. It's yours. A gift."

Brown Eyes panted with fear.

"It's all right. I'm not going to hurt you. I want to help." Madeline patted the girl's shoulder.

She flinched.

"I'm sorry you are afraid. I want you to stay here. See the cabin? You can stay here."

The girl peeked out from behind the cape, her ragged breathing easing from the chase through the woods.

She looked at the cabin and then at Madeline.

"I know you've suffered something horrid. Come. You'll be safe here. Trust me." Madeline stood and offered a hand up.

Brown Eyes took her hand and followed her into the cabin.

## CHAPTER 1

*Each one sees what he carries in his heart.*  
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Have you ever made a mistake?” Madeline settled into her saddle, avoiding her friend’s probing gaze. Anxiety rippled through her as she stroked the neck of her large bay gelding while they waited for the hunting horn to sound.

“Not to my recollection,” Lady Gilling gathered her reins. “I’m quite good at avoiding them.”

“I shouldn’t have come.” Her gloved hands trembled. “I hate hunting.” She’d tried to avoid the ride today. She wanted to visit her brown-eyed fugitive and she’d been unable to take food to the girl this morning because of the hunt. Mother had insisted Madeline rejoin society *this* morning and she’d enlisted Madeline’s best friend Hally, Lady Gilling, to be certain that she rode today.

“You used to love the hunt.” Hally circled her dappled gray mare around Madeline’s horse, inspecting Madeline as though she were about to enter the ballroom instead of the final hunt of the season.

Madeline shook her head. “You’re wrong. I love riding, not hunting.”

“Perhaps. However, at one and twenty, you are far too young to give up on this world. And even though I’m only two years your elder, I’ve had my sorrows too, and I have found ways to battle the pain. You must do the same.”

“I’m sorry, Hally.” The heat of shame spiraled into her cheeks despite the sting of the cold, early spring air. She thought of her brother and sister who had died during the past two years and of Papa who had joined them last year. What could be worse—losing siblings and a parent, or a beloved husband, as Hally had only two years ago?

Madeline’s horse pranced in rhythm to her rising anxiety. “Easy, Shakespeare. Easy boy.” She tried to focus on the gathering outside Lord Selby’s manor house where horses and riders crowded together in a flurry of anticipation. She took a deep breath to rein in her frustration and hoped her mount would settle down along with her. “Hally, you pick the most difficult of times to discuss such personal issues.”

Hally edged her mount next to Madeline’s horse. “I do this because you have been in hiding ever since your father died. If you refuse to mix in polite society they will refuse you.”

“Have I become a ghost?” Mist floated over fetlocks, a dreamlike ground covering that made it seem they waited in the clouds. “Do you not see me?” She wanted to slip away from this show of re-joining society. She wanted to check on the girl. She wanted to leave. “Does society not see me here today?”

“For the first time in a year at the hunt.” Hally reached over and pushed back the netted veil that covered Madeline’s face, tucking the material into her hat. “There, that’s much better. Now everyone can see you.”

“And that’s supposed to make me feel better?” She reached up to pull the veil back into place, but Hally stopped her.

“Your mother worries, Maddie. Since your father died you have refused to mingle, you have refused to travel, and until today you have refused to ride with the hunt. Your father would have scolded you for such behavior.”

Madeline’s chin trembled. “That was cruel. I enjoyed the hunt because Papa loved it when I rode with him. He’s gone now. I don’t have to hunt to ride.”

Hally lowered her voice. “I’m sorry. I know you miss him, but society’s prescribed period of mourning is quite enough. I’ve always believed six months far too long, and here you are six months after that. You need not suffer further isolation.” She leaned closer and whispered. “For heaven’s sake, Maddie, your mother is out of mourning.”

“I’m afraid she thinks of allowing Lord Vale to court her.” There, she’d said it aloud. “May God forgive her. She dishonors Papa’s memory.”

“So that is what worries you. Your mother is interested in a man.”

“He’s not just a man, Hally. He’s Lord Vale, and there’s much speculation about his actions and investments. Yet, here I am, pretending all is well.” Madeline lifted her chin and watched her breath dissipate like puffs of smoke on the wind.

“Pretending is a fine art.” Hally smiled. “Everyone must pretend to some extent, dear, or life would be far too complicated.”

“I wonder where *life* will lead now? Mother isn’t thinking clearly and allows Vale too much time with her at Richfield. I no longer know where I belong, but certainly not in this world of gossip and gowns.”

“We will discuss your fears later, my dear. But for now your mention of gowns is a subject that warrants further consideration. I think it is time we turn our thoughts toward lighter matters, and talk of fashion will do nicely.”

“Fashion?” Madeline scrunched up her nose. “Please tell me you jest.”

“Fashion is always important.” Hally tilted her head in thoughtful study. “Your black wool riding habit does nothing to draw attention. Green would set your hazel eyes ablaze, or, at the very least, a lush russet to show off the highlights in your hair.”

“Why does this matter so much to you?” For the first time that day, Madeline studied her friend in turn. A dark lavender velvet riding habit enhanced her figure. The fabric against the gray of her horse together with the soft early morning light provided Hally an air of regal confidence. Confidence Madeline envied. She was already looking forward to the end of this event.

“Because you are my friend, and melancholia does not become you.”

“Nonsense. I used that emotion up long ago.”

“So you say.” Hally scanned the area. “The chill has bestowed you with blushing cheeks, a most charming quality that will endear you to the male population. There are some very eligible and very handsome gentlemen here today. I shall be most pleased to make an introduction.”

Tentacles of panic snaked through her. “I don’t believe that is required today.” *Nor any other day.* The thought of an introduction to a gentleman terrified her. She’d witnessed Mother’s agony when she’d lost her children and then her beloved husband. Why allow the heart such vulnerability to begin with? “Really, Hally. Do you never grow weary of your matchmaking schemes? Do you not find such things awkward?”

“My James was a rare man. I’ll never stop missing him ... and the children we might have enjoyed. I want you to experience that kind of love, Maddie.”

Sorrow shadowed Hally’s blue-green eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be so selfish.” The last thing she had wanted to do was cause more heartache.

Hally waved a dismissive hand. “It’s all about love, dearest. Don’t forget that.”

“But love is—”

“Necessary. Not awkward. You must accept that. . You missed your London season four years ago. I know many at this event. As a respectable widow I can be a great help.”

Madeline didn’t argue. “I appreciate your concern.” She hoped to get through the hunt and the social gathering unscathed by men and their unwanted advances. The gathering after the hunt could prove difficult. Many men would drink and some would drink too much, making themselves perfectly obnoxious. “Perhaps we can just ride today and think on these matters another time.”

“Forgive me, dear. I’m overzealous when it comes to you. I will not speak of *opportunities* again this day. But I pray you’ll think about what you are doing, think

about your future, think about your life. If you continue to hide yourself away you will not be accepted by polite society. And since your mother is ready to begin living again, should not you as well?"

The budding tree branches swayed gently in the early morning breeze, and bending toward her, seemed to hesitate on the wind, awaiting her reply. "I am in no mood to meet anyone."

"We'll speak of your moods later." Hally smiled. "Let's enjoy the present."

Bright streaks of sunlight burst through the cloudy, late March sky. Madeline contemplated her friend's advice. "You're right. It's a beautiful morning. Time to imagine the future. As for now, I'm just not certain how to proceed."

Hally reached across her mare and patted Madeline's hand. "I'll be happy to show you the way."

Lord Selby's raucous laughter roared through the crowd as he muscled his way through with his horse. Another rider crashed into her while trying to get out of Selby's way, causing Madeline's mount to lurch sideways into Hally, nearly unseating each of them. Madeline's breath caught, but she quickly tightened her reins and gained control.

"Easy, Shakespeare. It's all right, boy." She stroked the gelding's neck to calm him and looked to see if the other rider had recovered his balance.

A pair of green eyes, wide with concern, locked on her. The beginning of a smile dimpled the man's cheeks. A strong chin, straight nose, and clean-shaven face provided him the good looks of a gentleman in a Van Dyck portrait. She felt the heat of a sudden blush, and not trusting her voice held her tongue.

Apology etched his handsome face. "I beg your forgiveness." He arched a single black brow. "Are either of you hurt?"

Madeline sucked in a deep breath to calm her nerves and brushed her skirt free of imaginary grime. "I am unscathed, sir," she assured him, pulling her gaze away. "Lady Gilling?"

"No injuries here." She pushed her purple plumed hat back into place.

Madeline turned back to him. The sudden urge to chuckle surprised her, but instead of laughing, she molded herself into a woman of politeness and poise. "It appears that we have survived the excitement."

"I'm afraid Lord Selby is already in his cups this fine morning." The charming stranger maneuvered his mount closer and lowered his voice. "Hippocrates here found Selby's

bellowing objectionable.” His smile radiated genuine warmth. “I must concur with his animal instinct.”

The blare of the hunting horn filled the air. The fine gentleman tipped his hat and disappeared into the crush of riders. A twinge of disappointment tugged at Madeline’s heart.

“Are you certain you are unharmed?” Hally asked, as they trotted their horses out of the gate. “You look a bit pale.”

“I can’t help but think I’ve seen that man somewhere before. Does he look familiar to you?” Madeline searched for him as they rode out.

“No. I don’t believe so. Could it be that you just met a gentleman of importance with no introduction from me at all?”

“Strange. I can’t recall where, but I’m almost certain.”

“The hounds are on the move,” Hally said. “We must discuss your newly made acquaintance later. We’re off!”

The baying hounds drowned out the possibility of further discussion. A glimmer of anticipation lightened Madeline’s heart. The challenge of the ride distracted her from other concerns and strengthened her spirit. *Perhaps I have been a bit melancholy of late.*

Her worries lessened with each stride of her horse and with each obstacle cleared, but flashes of the past whirred by her as swiftly as the hunting field. The horses in front of her threw clumps of dirt into the air as they pounded across the countryside in pursuit of a fox she hoped would evade them.

A pheasant burst from its nest. Startled, Shakespeare faltered as he launched toward the next stone wall. Madeline leaned far forward and gave him extra rein in an attempt to help him clear the barrier, but she knew immediately he was off stride.

The crack of rear hooves against the top of the wall thundered through her heart. Shakespeare stumbled and went down on his knees, tossing her over his head. Madeline landed with a jarring thud on her left side. She struggled to get up, but racking pain paralyzed any attempt at movement.

“Maddie!” Hally dismounted, ran to Madeline, and knelt at her side.

She rolled onto her back and groaned. *A fine mess.* “Shakespeare? Is he hurt?”

“Are *you* all right?” Hally clutched Madeline’s hand. “Maddie?”



She lay still, trying to assess the damage. “I believe I may have broken my arm.” Tears stung her eyes. “Where’s Shakespeare?” She prayed he bore no serious injuries.

A shadow fell over Madeline. “I’ve already looked at him. He’s shaken, temporarily lame, but on his feet. He will be taken to Selby’s stables to begin the healing process. Unlike your horse, young lady, I suggest you not move.”

The gentleman had returned. And here she lay, flat on her back, riding skirt disheveled, an indelicate position, indeed. She did not need a man now, especially this very interesting man.

She squeezed Hally’s hand. “I’m not presentable,” she whispered.

“This is hardly the time to be concerned about one’s appearance,” Hally whispered back, smoothing Madeline’s skirt down toward her ankles, a gesture that reminded Madeline of her maid making the bed. She’d have laughed if she weren’t completely mortified and on the verge of fainting. Her arm felt like glass under pressure, about to shatter.

“You took quite a tumble.” He dropped to his knees. “May I be of assistance?”

Madeline tried to sit up again, determined not to appear weak. She prided herself on her independence and strength, but her body rebelled and collapsed as if she were a marionette whose strings had suddenly been severed. “Who are you, sir?”

“I’m Devlin Grayson of Ravensmoore. Where does it hurt?”

“My arm.” Madeline gingerly cradled her left arm and tried to blink back the tears. “You’re Lord Ravensmoore?”

He nodded.

She felt suddenly vulnerable, looking into this stranger’s intense gaze. “I couldn’t prevent it.”

“Lie still, please.”

“Everything happened so fast. It’s been so long since I’ve been on the hunt field,” Madeline said, embarrassed. “Poor Shakespeare. I hope he’s not hurt. I’m such a fool.”

“You are no fool. This could happen to anyone. And your horse appears to be recovering from the shock. A fine horse. And you have given him a fine name.”

She gazed up into his caring green eyes. “Thank you.”

“May I ask your name before I examine you? That is, if I have your permission?”

She found it difficult to concentrate. “Lady Madeline Whittington.” Her head throbbed. “Examine me? Are you a doctor? No, that wouldn’t be right, would it? Not if you’re Ravensmoore.”

“I will be soon.”

Fleeting thoughts of Papa suffering in the hospital filled her mind with fear and anger. The doctors had not helped him. He had died under their care. The slightest of remembrances bubbled to the surface of her thoughts. She turned her face away from him and looked at Hally.

“Lady Madeline,” Hally pleaded, glancing across at Ravensmoore. “He is offering you his medical skills.”

Madeline turned back and looked him in the eye, trying to catch the elusive memory. Where had she seen him before? “Something is not right.” The memories, one after another, tumbled into her consciousness and revealed themselves as they broke through her defenses and exploded into the present. “I remember you.”

“Remember me?” He paused and studied her, searching her face for details, some recollection of the past.

“You were at the Guardian Gate when we took my father to the hospital.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “You killed him.”

Ravensmoore paled. “What do you mean?”

“Lady Madeline. What an unkind thing to say.” Hally looked at Ravensmoore. “She must have hit her head. Maddie, have you lost all reason?”

“My father, Lord Richfield, bled to death because of your ineptness.” A ripple of pain burst up her arm.

“Lady Madeline—of Richfield?” he asked, turning a shade paler. “Your father? I . . . I do remember. I’m very sorry.”

Hally gently touched Madeline’s cheek and wiped away a tear. “He is only trying to help you.”

“I don’t want his help.”

“I assure you, madam, I am not a murderer. I am most sympathetic to your loss. I promise to be gentle.”

“A fine promise,” she scoffed. “But I have no confidence in your abilities, sir. It is regrettable, but it is the truth.”

He pressed on. "The bone might be broken."

"I do not need your attention," Madeline snapped. "It's most unnecessary."

A pulse throbbed at his temple. "You don't understand." He recovered his composure. "If you refuse to let me examine you, then I must insist on escorting you to Lord Selby's home where you can rest."

Madeline groaned in frustration. "I refuse to return to that man's home. He's drunk." The two of them outnumbered her. "I want to go home." She allowed them to assist her to a sitting position.

"She accepts your kind offer, sir," Hally put in.

"Lean against me, Lady Madeline, until we see if you can stand," Ravensmoore said.

"I appear to have little choice."

Ravensmoore put his arm around her waist and gently guided her to her feet. The strength of his body proved an unexpected comfort.

"That's it. Keep your left arm pressed against your side," he instructed.

The last thing she wanted to do was lean against this man who dredged up bitter memories of Papa's death. "I'm fine, really," she lied, in hope of escaping him. Her body betrayed her in a sudden burst of pain that forced her to stiffen. She repressed a moan and fought to keep her balance. Emotions from the past and present collided in a haze of confusion.

Madeline pushed away from him. "Lady Gilling will assist me." She held her hand out and stumbled. Ravensmoore caught her.

"And you will pull your friend to the ground with you."

How could she have considered this man attractive? The thought made no sense now that she had put the pieces together. Yet, he seemed kind, not at all how she remembered him, wearing that horrible blood-spattered apron. Her father's blood. She squeezed her eyes shut trying to ward off the image. "I don't want your help," she said through clenched teeth. "I can ride by myself."

"You're not strong enough. I'll take you home." Ravensmoore skillfully lifted her in his arms, careful to keep her injured arm protected. "You'll ride with me."

Madeline sat in front of Ravensmoore for the ride home. She tried not to lean against his chest for support but found the effort impossible. She'd never been so close to a man, his

breath kissing her cheek. She straightened and had to smother a moan of agony when pain radiated through her arm.

When the high stone walls of Richfield came into view Madeline sighed in relief, grateful to be close to home. The great manor house spread before them, the additional wings on either side providing a sense of comfort and safety. A maze of hedges to the left of them and soon-to-be-blooming gardens magnified the opulence of Richfield. To the right of the edifice stood stables and paddocks for the horses and housing for those who tended them.

Madeline swallowed hard. She'd just returned home with the man who'd killed her father. Whom she held responsible for her father's death. Betrayal weighed heavy on her heart, for this is where Papa had loved and raised his family.

Madeline longed to be in her bed as they drew near the entrance. She vowed to escape from this horrid day and to her room as fast as she could manage.

"Are you ready?" Ravensmoore asked.

Startled from her pain-filled thoughts she said, "Yes." But that was a lie. Madeline's head throbbed simultaneously with the beating of her pulse. She fought for control and blinked back tears when the three of them reached the steps leading into the arched entrance. She nearly crumpled when Ravensmoore dismounted and she clung desperately to the pommel of the saddle. He reached for her. "It's all right. I'll help you."

"There is no need to coddle me, sir. I assure you, once again, that I am perfectly able."

"Excellent! Then this should not be too difficult for you."

Madeline fell into his arms, light-headed and shaky. She wobbled when her feet touched the ground. He held her, keeping her safe.

"Allow me to carry you, Lady Madeline."

Pain sliced through her arm from the jolting ride. "There's nothing wrong with my legs, sir. I *can* walk." She took two steps and swayed precariously.

"I think not." Ignoring her protests, Ravensmoore scooped her into his arms again. His warmth and scent—spice, leather, and sweat—mingled together in a balm for her pain.

Her mother, Grace, the Countess of Richfield, ran down the steps to meet them. "Madeline, you're hurt!" Her mother placed a hand on Madeline's cheek. "What happened?"

Madeline bit her lip, trying not to reveal the depth of her pain. "It's nothing, Mother. I took a spill off Shakespeare." She would not be the cause of further anguish. Mother's grief over the past two years had been more than many tolerated during a lifetime.

“She’ll be fine, Countess,” Hally said. “We’ve brought a doctor with us.”

“A doctor? Thank God. Follow me, sir.”

Now, beyond caring, she laid her head on his shoulder. Once again his breath whispered past her cheek as he took the stairs and delivered her safely into the embrace of her home.

“Phineas, bring some willow bark tea,” Grace instructed the butler. “Bring her into the sitting room, sir.”

The Countess continued her directions while fussing over Madeline. “The settee will do nicely. That’s it, gently.”

Ravensmoore’s hand lingered a moment on hers as Madeline sank gratefully into the plush green velvet cushions. Surely the man would leave her in peace now.

Her mother pushed back the gold damask draperies and muted light filled the room. A fire burned in the hearth, and she shivered, perhaps from the lack of the body warmth she had shared with her rescuer on the ride home.

The butler returned with a pot of tea. He poured the hot liquid into a rose-patterned cup and cautiously handed it to her. “There you are, Lady Madeline.”

“Thank you, Phineas.” Steam rose from the cup. Madeline watched her mother. “Please don’t worry so. It’s not serious.”

Ravensmoore knelt beside her. “I recommend you take a swallow of that tea as soon as you can.”

“Sir, your services are no longer needed. And I will drink my tea when I am good and ready, thank you very much.” Madeline spoke more curtly than she’d intended, but she longed to be alone.

“Drink the tea, young lady,” Mother ordered. “The willow bark will help you relax and ease your pain. And you *will* permit the doctor to examine you. Do not argue with me on this matter.”

“But, Mother. You don’t understand. He—”

She touched her daughter’s hand and their eyes met. “I understand enough.” She turned to Ravensmoore. “What can we do, sir?”

“Allow her to rest a few moments. Then remove her riding jacket so I may examine her arm. Is there a place I might wash up? I must have left my gloves on the field and don’t want to cause further distress by smudging a lady’s clothing.”

“Of course. Phineas will show you the way.”

As soon as he'd left the room, Madeline looked to her mother. “Let me explain. You must know that he”—she pointed in the direction he'd just gone with cup in hand—“was the *physician-in-training* who allowed Papa to bleed to death in London. I remember him quite clearly. I am sorry to have brought him here.”

“I didn't recognize him.” A veil of sadness shrouded her mother's eyes. “I didn't think to see any of them again.” Even the worry lines that creased her mother's brow could not diminish the sculpted features of a woman who resembled a Greek goddess, though she seemed utterly unaware of her beauty. The name Grace suited her.

“He's not a doctor ... yet.”

Grace plucked a pair of shears from a nearby sewing basket. “You have made that perfectly clear. Now, allow Lady Gilling and me to cut away your jacket. You might have broken your arm and there's no point in causing you any more pain.”

“You still want him to examine me?”

“Of course. I must think of your welfare. The past is the past.”

“But—”

“He may be able to help you. It will take a servant a long time to ride into town, locate a physician, and return with him. Let this doctor help you.”

Madeline looked from one to the other, then handed Hally the teacup. “Do be careful.”

“Of course we'll be careful, dear.” Grace cut away the jacket in moments.

“Oh, Maddie. I'm so sorry this happened.” Hally handed her the teacup again. “It's entirely my fault.”

“That is not true.” Madeline finished the tea. “Don't be silly.” She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I am quite dizzy.”

Ravensmoore returned, and she willed herself to open her eyes. He looked taller. His black hair, thick and unruly, increased his appeal. A dark curl fell over his forehead when he leaned toward her. Madeline's heartbeat ricocheted in her chest and confusion merged with pain.

“How are you feeling?” His brilliant green eyes searched hers.

“I think I should go to bed.” A sudden wave of nausea attacked. She groaned and prayed not to get sick. “Please leave.”

“Lady Madeline.” He sank to his knees next to her. “Does your head hurt?”

“Yes.” She could no longer fight back the pain. “Dreadfully.”

“A possible concussion. Is your vision blurry?” He placed his hands on both sides of her face and stared into her eyes as if he were trying to read her thoughts. An unpleasant prospect.

“Yes.”

“You may indeed have a concussion. You’re unstable on your feet, and your vision is blurred. In addition to that your head aches. If the pain continues beyond two days I will want to see you again. Now ... for the arm.” He gently examined her arm, his fingers sliding skillfully over the silk fabric.

“I don’t believe your arm is broken, although it may feel as if it is. I’m afraid the sprain is most severe.”

Madeline wondered why the room tipped. She had not moved. A moan escaped her lips. Then she felt all strength drain from her body like the emptying of the soul. The cup slipped from her limp fingers and tumbled to the carpet.

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