

Sapphires Are an Earl's Best Friend: Epilogue
by Shana Galen

Ten years later

It was not often the six of them could come together. The Dukes of Pelham and Ravenscroft had responsibilities in Parliament. Fitzhugh had a post in the Foreign Office. The Duchesses of Pelham and Ravenscroft, for all of their years in the forefront of Society, preferred to live quietly now. They stayed with their children in the country or traveled to London, but did not seek amusement among the ladies and gentlemen of the *ton*.

Of course, this made them all the more sought after. Mrs. Fitzhugh enjoyed traveling with her husband. They were often out of the country on government business. If the reigning Society queen could secure the elusive Fallon's promise to attend a ball or musicale, she knew the event would be an instant success.

If the Society matrons had known about this informal house party, they would have sacrificed their own children for a chance to sit down to tea with the ladies. As it was, the six of them had managed to keep the holiday to themselves. They had come together at Ravenscroft Castle because Fallon and Warrick had to come in from London and Juliette and Will had to travel south from Yorkshire. Nottinghamshire seemed the most central location.

Not to mention, when they'd met in London two years ago, there had been a riot outside Fitzhugh's home, comprised of people wanting a glimpse of the renowned Three

Diamonds.

The *former* Three Diamonds, Juliette had pointed out, but it had not seemed to matter. They were the stuff of legend now.

Lily did not feel like a legend. She felt like a mother who had an eight-year-old daughter who thought she knew everything, and a five year-old boy who seemed to jump up and down continually. Finally the boy had fallen asleep and was still sleeping—for a little while at least. The girl had tossed her hair and stomped into her own bedchamber, complaining that she was *not* a child and should not be treated as such. She'd slammed the door, and Lily clenched her fists and made the decision to leave the girl to her governess and check on her later. It was hard to believe that such willful little wisp of a thing could look so sweet and peaceful in her sleep.

She started down the stairs and was joined by Fallon, who looked equally weary. "How are the boys?" she asked her friend, who had four, not counting her husband.

"I have washed my hands of them. I told Warrick to threaten them within an inch of their lives."

They heard a crash and a shout of "Beat to quarters!" and Lily raised a brow.

"It sounds as though he took that order literally."

Fallon sighed. "The boys probably convinced him to play one last game of pirate. I have abandoned ship."

"We shall have to devise even more activities for the morrow." Lily gestured to the drawing room as they reached the last stair. "Something to really exhaust the children."

Fallon rolled her eyes. "That was the plan today. Is Juliette already in the drawing room?"

"I imagine she's been there for ages. Her angels were asleep an hour ago."

"How she ended up with three just like Pelham is beyond me."

Lily shook her head. "I don't know. The baby shows potential."

Fallon laughed. "Did you see her this afternoon? She had her fists balled and her little face was all red and she was wailing so loudly I thought the glass might break."

"Juliette isn't bothered in the least," Lily pointed out. "But Pelham doesn't know what to make of the child."

“Give her a few more months. Once she is walking and talking, she’ll wrap him around her finger.”

Lily opened the door and smiled at Andrew, who was standing across the room, conversing with the aforementioned Duke of Pelham. They were both holding brandy snifters, and Juliette sipped from a glass of Madeira.

“You started without us?” Fallon sounded indignant.

Juliette rolled her eyes, but Pelham pulled out his pocket watch. “Lily said nine, and it is now five after.”

Lily sighed. “Why will those children not keep to a schedule?”

Juliette covered her mouth, probably to hide a smile, and Pelham glanced at the door. “Where is Fitzhugh?”

“I believe he is defending the British navy,” Fallon remarked. She looked pointedly at Andrew. “No brandy for me?”

Hastily, he reached for a snifter. Lily suspected he was more than a little intimidated by Fallon. “Just because your wife is with child and tosses up her accounts when she hears anything stronger than tea, does not mean I shouldn’t indulge.”

“Of course.” Andrew handed her a snifter.

“Your sympathies are much appreciated, Fallon.” She went to Andrew, standing beside him and resting her head on his shoulder. She was weary tonight, and her back hurt. She probably should have gone to bed, but it was so wonderful to be with friends.

Juliette rose. “Fallon, do be kind to poor Andrew. His sister has just written that she will visit soon.”

“Jules.” Andrew frowned at the former Duchess of Dalliance, but Lily brightened.

“Emma is coming? Wonderful! You will be civil to her husband this time, won’t you?”

“I am always civil,” Andrew said, and then murmured, “Not that Flynn deserves it.”

Pelham, always one to keep the peace, cleared his throat. “I see you’ve made some improvements to the nearby farms, Ravenscroft. Are you using any new farming techniques?”

Juliette sighed. “Will and his farming.” But she smiled at him and took his hand.

“The son of one of the local farmers presented me with some rather inventive ideas a couple of years ago. I took them and we have seen a great deal in the way of improvements in drainage and crop yield.”

“I’d like to speak to this man.”

“Of course.” Andrew glanced at Lily. “His name is Dawson Musgrove.”

Juliette cut her eyes to Lily, and Lily nodded. She could never acknowledge the young man as her son, but she was as proud of him as she was of her other children. He was bright and charming and all the ladies were in love with him. His parents did not know who she was, and she learned his grandmother had died before she had become the duchess at Ravenscroft Castle. It was too bad. She would have thanked the woman for giving him a name that kept some small part of his mother close to him.

The door opened and Warrick entered. He’d lost his coat and his shirt was loose, his cravat hanging down his waistcoat. He looked a bit like the pirates he had been defending against. She hadn’t worked with him for years, and he was no longer an agent for the Crown—at least not that she was aware of—but every time he stepped into a room, she felt safer.

“You look like you need a drink,” Andrew said.

“Rum?” Juliette said with a smile.

“Are they asleep?” Fallon wanted to know.

“I should hope so,” Pelham remarked. “It is quarter after.”

“Put your watch away until after I’ve had some brandy,” Fitzhugh said to Pelham. Andrew handed him a snifter, and he sipped it then wrapped an arm around Fallon.

“They are in bed. As to whether they will sleep, that is anyone’s guess.”

“Look at us,” Lily said, gesturing to their cozy circle. “We are all together again. Finally!”

“I only wish the countess could be here with us,” Juliette said.

Fallon touched her arm. “After the earl passed away, she was never the same. She’s with him now.”

“And she’d be happy we are together and thinking of her.”

“No, she wouldn’t,” Fallon said. “If she was here, she’d tell me to stand up straight, you to sit down since you’re breeding, and Juliette—well, she never had much

criticism for Juliette.”

“Yes she did!” Juliette protested.

“Name one piece of criticism,” Fallon challenged her. “One.”

“I, for one, am glad Lady Sinclair is not here,” Warrick said. “She always frightened me.”

“Thank God,” Pelham remarked. “I thought perhaps it was just me.”

Lily turned to Andrew. “You weren’t scared of her, were you?”

“Terrified,” he said. “Remember when Susan was born? The countess came and took over the residence while you were indisposed. I didn’t dare contradict a thing she said.”

“So that’s why my breakfast was warm and on time for once.”

Andrew gave her a warning look, and she laughed. Around them, their friends continued to reminisce and to create new memories. Lily watched them, sighing happily.

“I must be the luckiest man in all of England,” Andrew said in her ear.

“Of course you are,” Lily answered. “But why specifically?”

“I am here with The Three Diamonds, the most notorious courtesans that ever lived. And the most beautiful of the three is my wife.”

“You mean the most charming,” Lily corrected. “Juliette is the most beautiful and Fallon the most mysterious and seductive.”

Andrew pulled her close. “I mean all of the above, Lily. I love you, more now than the day we married.”

“That much?” She looked up at him. “As I recall, you loved me quite a lot then. I don’t think you allowed me any sleep for two days.”

“I’m much more the gentleman now, although I seem to recall a few sleepless nights rather recently.”

She touched her softly rounded belly. “As do I. Here is the proof.”

“Do stop whispering and play whist with us,” Fallon entreated them. “Pelham has letters to write and you know Warrick never plays.”

“All right,” Lily agreed. “But you know I don’t play very well.”

“I know,” Fallon said. “That’s why I’m partnered with Ravenscroft.”

“Thank you very much,” Juliette said, but she gave Lily a hug.

The four of them took seats around a small card table, and Andrew dealt. “I must tell you about the perfect shop I visited the last time I was in Bath,” Lily began. “The milliner’s use of ribbon is unlike anything I’ve ever seen.”

“Really?” Juliette asked. “I do need a new straw hat.”

“Where is the best place in Bath to buy gloves?” Fallon asked. “I know a wonderful shop in Brussels—”

“Oh, yes!” Lily agreed. “The pair you brought me last year was unparalleled.”

Andrew looked over his shoulder. “Save me!” he called to Pelham and Fitzhugh.

“I’m not venturing over there,” Warrick said.

“You’ve made your bed,” Pelham admonished him.

They all had, Lily thought. And she, for one, was very, very happy to be sharing that bed with Andrew.