

He was going to hell. *Shame*, Flynn thought, dangling from the third-floor window of a town house in exclusive Grosvenor Square. It was his birthday tomorrow, too. Actually, given the time of night, he'd already attained his twenty-seventh year.

His hand slipped, and he felt the moisture gathering on his fingers. He could not hold on much longer. Perhaps his death was for the best. It wasn't as though anyone would mourn him. It wasn't as though he had anything to live for.

Still, it seemed harsh even for one such as Beelzebub to claim him when he was hanging naked from the window of one of the most prestigious addresses in Mayfair.

"Flynn!" a woman's voice hissed. His name was Henry Flynn, and he was the new Lord Chesham, but everyone called him Flynn—that was, when he wasn't called something far less complimentary.

"Still here," he answered through teeth clenched with the effort of maintaining his hold.

A cloud of blond hair appeared above him, and he felt her hand on his. "Quick! Climb up before he returns."

*He* was her husband, a duke of enormous wealth and power. If *he* found Flynn in the duchess's bedchamber, he'd ruin Flynn and the entire Chesham family. The danger of discovery hadn't deterred Flynn from accepting the duchess's invitation, though. In fact, the more risk, the better. He should simply let go of the ledge and get it over with. Then he could stop looking for death.

Instead, he squeezed his eyes shut and hauled himself upward. His arms shook with the effort, but he managed to gain the leverage he needed, and the duchess made a show of hauling him the rest of the way inside.

"Where are my clothes?" he asked without preamble.

"You cannot think to leave now," she protested. She was dressed in a frilly robe, cut low to display her generous cleavage. Her blond hair tumbled down her shoulders, and the color in her cheeks was high from the excitement of near-discovery. But if he looked closer, Flynn could see the duchess was a bit past her prime. Their close call had stolen Flynn's desire for the distraction of a dalliance.

"I *do* think to leave now, Your Grace." He looked about for his clothing. It had

been scattered about on the floor by her bed, but now it had vanished. He did not want to walk through the ball naked as the day he was born, but he would do so if it became necessary. Let the duchess explain that to her guests. Of course, the *ton* expected nothing less of the man they'd proclaimed the Viscount of Vice.

"But, my lord," the duchess protested, extending a long, elegant finger to stroke his chest. "You have not yet fulfilled your promises. This was to be a night I would not soon forget."

Any lingering desire he might have felt revolted at her touch. "It is a night *I* will not soon forget," he replied. "And one your husband will not soon forget if I'm forced to exit dressed—or rather, undressed—like so."

"That would be unwise, Flynn," she said, raking her gaze over him. "One look at you, and the female attendees would swoon. You are an excellent specimen of manhood."

"Thank you. My clothing?"

She folded her arms across her chest. "Certainly. As soon as you fulfill your promises."

Flynn narrowed his eyes. She thought that sort of veiled threat would persuade him? Even if she'd been the queen herself, Flynn was not going to bed a woman he did not desire. He had not sunk that low. "Very well, Your Grace," he said with a nod. She smiled and reached for the tie of her robe. Flynn walked right past her, ignoring her squeal of protest, and stopped to retrieve his beaver hat, which he'd spotted under a side table. From that angle, he spied his trousers under the bed, and one of his boots behind a curtain. Thus attired, Flynn stepped into the corridor outside her bedchamber and closed the door firmly behind him.