



Tall, Dark, and Wicked: Wicked Trilogy

By Madeline Hunter

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A wickedly wonderful new romance from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *His Wicked Reputation*

Most women will give him anything he wants. She is not most women...

As a well-known barrister and the son of a duke, Ives confines his passionate impulses to discreet affairs with worldly mistresses. A twist of fate, however, has him looking for a new lover right when a fascinating woman shows up in his chambers, asking him to help save her father from the gallows. Unfortunately, he has already been asked to serve as the prosecutor in the case, but that only ensures close encounters with the rarity named Padua Belvoir. And every encounter increases his desire to tutor her in pleasure's wicked ways...

Having always been too tall, too willful, and too smart to appeal to men, Padua Belvoir is shocked when Ives shows interest in her. Knowing his penchant for helping the wrongly accused, she had initially thought he might be her father's best hope for salvation. Instead, he is her worst adversary—not least because every time he looks at her, she is tempted to give him anything he wants...

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Tall, Dark & Wicked*

“Refreshingly, the lovers banter without barbs. Accompanying the romantic and legal plot lines are the deepening relationships among Ives and his brothers, who, despite their flaws, are witty, decent, and attracted to intelligent women.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Hunter's novels are memorable because they are unconventional in plot and character. They are always smart, witty, thought provoking and incorporate intriguing historical details. This is another wonderful read."—*RT Book Reviews*

“Ives and Padua are the kinds of lead characters I love reading about—they're strong, honest, determined, and not afraid to admit their feelings and talk things out. It was a joy to follow their road to love. *Tall, Dark & Wicked* is a book that is truly hard to put down.”—Fresh Fiction

About the Author

Madeline Hunter is a two-time RITA award winner and seven-time finalist, and has twenty-five nationally bestselling historical romances in print, including *The Accidental Duchess*, *The Counterfeit Mistress*, and *The Conquest of Lady Cassandra*. A member of RWA's Honor Roll, her books have been on the bestseller lists of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Publishers Weekly*. More than six million copies of her books are in print and her novels have been translated into thirteen languages. Madeline is a regular contributor on *USA Today*'s Happily Ever After blog with her Romance Unlaced column. She has a PhD in art history, which she teaches at the university level.

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Praise for the novels of Madeline Hunter

Love titles by Madeline Hunter

Title Page

Copyright

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Special Excerpt from The Accidental Duchess

CHAPTER 1

Loyal

Good-humored

Intelligent

Uninhibited

Passionate

Accommodating

Lord Ywain Hemingford—Ives, to his family and closest friends—read the list of the qualities he required in a mistress. He had jotted them down, in no particular order, during an idle moment the day before. Only the first one deserved its ranking without question. In fact, it should be underlined. There were other qualities that attracted him, too, but these six, he had learned through experience, were paramount.

He tucked the paper behind some pages, to be returned later to its current duty as a marker in his book. He settled into his favorite chair, propped his legs on a footstool with his feet aimed toward the low fire, and again turned his attention to a novel he had been meaning to read for four months now.

Vickers, his manservant, set a glass and two decanters, one of port and the other of water, on a table next to the chair, then stepped back out of view.

“If your brother the duke should come by this evening, sir, should—”

“Deny him entrance. Bar the door. I am not home to him. If God had any mercy he would have inspired Lance to remain at Merrywood Manor, not allowed him to venture back up to town where he will be a nuisance to all whom he encounters. I am done with being his playmate, or his nursemaid.” At least for a while, he added to himself. After a recent, renewed week of barking, the hounds had again retreated, but they had not given up the hunt.

Ives did not mind being his brother’s keeper. He resented very much playing the role for a brother who treated his advice like it came from an old aunt. One would think that a man under suspicion of murder would be more circumspect in his speech and actions, and want to create favorable impressions, not stick out his tongue at society whenever he could.

“Very good, sir.”

Padding steps. A door closing. Peace. Ives closed his eyes and savored for a moment that rarity in his life—freedom to do whatever he damned well pleased, whenever he chose, with nary a claim on his time or attention.

Several developments allowed this respite besides the dwindling interest in Lance by magistrates out for blood. No cases awaited his eloquence in court for at least a fortnight. By coincidence his mistress had a week ago been most disloyal, giving him the excuse he had sought for some time to part with her.

That left him free of her too. Of attending on her. Of purchasing gifts. Of feeding her vanity. Of joining in little parties that she liked to hold that bored him more than he ever let her know.

It did, of course, also leave him free of a sexual companion. That was not a situation that he by nature welcomed, but he did not mind too much. Contemplating with whom to end his abstinence would give his forays out on the town an enlivening distraction.

He anticipated a glorious stretch of pointless activity. Several long rides in the country beckoned, following whim more than roads or maps. A stack of books like this one waited, too long unread. He could indulge in regular practice with sword and fists, to improve his prowess at fighting with both. And he looked forward to at least one good long debauch of drunkenness with old friends too long neglected.

“Sir.”

Vickers’s voice, right at his shoulder, surprised him. He had not heard Vickers return.

“Sir, there is a visitor.”

“Throw him out, I told you.”

“It is not your brother. It is a woman. She says she has come on business. She says you were recommended to her.”

Exhaling a sigh, Ives held out his palm.

“She gave me no card, sir. I would have sent her on her way, but she would not indicate just who had recommended you, and the last time such an unnamed recommendation came your way it was from—”

“Yes, quite right.” Damnation. If someone, or even *Someone*, thought to interfere with the next fortnight by having him running around England on some mission or investigation, *Someone* was very much mistaken. Still, he should at least meet this woman and hear her out, so he could construct a good reason why he could not help her.

He stood, and looked down at himself. He wore a long banyan over his shirt and trousers. The notion of dressing again raised the devil in him. Hell, it was long past time to call at a lawyer’s office, even if *Someone* recommended him. He would be too informal for a stranger, or for business, but he was hardly in a nightshirt. This woman would just have to forgive him his dishabille. With luck she would realize she had interfered with his evening, which she rudely had, and make quick work of whatever she wanted.

He walked to the office. She was probably a petitioner for some reform cause, or the relative of a friend looking for his advice on which solicitor to hire. Her mission this evening no doubt could have been completed more humanely by writing a letter.

He opened the door to his office, and immediately knew that his visitor had not been recommended by anyone significant, let alone *Someone* really important. Her plain gray dress marked her as a servant. He could not see one bit of adornment on either it or the dull green spencer buttoned high on her chest. The simplest bonnet he had seen in months covered her black hair and framed her face.

Eyes lowered, lost in her thoughts, she had not heard him. He considered stepping out just as silently, and telling Vickers to send her away. He placed one foot back to do so.

Just then she lifted a handkerchief to her eyes—glittering eyes, he could not help but notice, with thick, black lashes that contrasted starkly with her pale skin. Radiant skin, as it happened, giving her face a notable presence, if he did say so, even if she was not a beautiful woman. Handsome, however, even if somewhat sharp featured.

She dabbed at tears. Her reserved expression crumbled under emotion.

He hated seeing women cry. Hated it. His easy sympathy had caused him nothing but trouble in the past too. Still . . .

Hell.

He waited until she composed herself, then walked forward.

* * *

Padua sniffed, and not only to hold back the tears that the day tried to force on her. She also checked for the tenth time to discover if her garments smelled.

Newgate Prison reeked. The stench that London gave off seemed to concentrate in the old city, but Newgate smelled like the source of it all. She had never experienced anything like it. It remained in her nose, and she worried that it had permeated her clothing.

She sat rigidly on the chair the servant had pointed out. Her surroundings caused some trepidation. She had perhaps been rash in following the advice to seek out this lawyer. Probably so, considering the person who had given the advice had been a bawd incarcerated in the prison.

Normally, she would not take advice from a prostitute or a criminal. Yet when that woman called her over as she found her way out of the prison, and showed sympathy, she had not been herself. Just talking to someone eased her distress. After hearing her tale of woe, that woman advised she get a lawyer, and even provided the name of one who had aided a relative who was wrongly accused. Suddenly the prostitute appeared as an angel sent by Providence to offer guidance out of the Valley of Despair.

Now she awaited that lawyer's attendance. Not only a lawyer, but also a lord. She thought it odd that a lord was a lawyer. She would assume the bawd erred on that, except the servant here did not blink when she used the title in requesting an audience.

Now that she was here, she could believe the lord part. Although she sat in his chambers, this was no apartment, nor merely a set of offices. Rather she sat on the entry level of what appeared to be a new house facing Lincoln's Inn Fields. There had been nothing to indicate that others lived or worked above. This lawyer had a good deal of money if this whole building was his home.

The mahogany furniture and expensive bookbindings said as much. Her feet rested half-submerged in the dense pile of the carpet on the floor. Her rump perched on a chair that must have cost many pounds. Real paintings decorated the walls, not engravings done after famous works of art.

His fees were probably very high. She doubted she could afford them. The bawd had guessed as much. *If you've not the coin to pay him, he'll probably take other payment, dear. Them that works our side of the Old Bailey almost all do.*

Could she agree to that? She recoiled from the idea. Then again, it would be no worse than the bargains most women struck in their lives. Had her mother not taught her that the loveless marriages to which most women were subjected were merely economic arrangements prettied up by legalities? Experience of the world had shown that view to be harsh, perhaps, but essentially accurate.

She closed her eyes, and immediately was back in the prison, peering into a cell full of men. The stench, the dirt, the ugly sounds all assaulted her senses again. Hopelessness and death reigned in Newgate Prison. No one would leave a loved one inside it, if she had the means to get him out.

Tears pooled in her eyes. She dabbed them away with her handkerchief, and fought for composure. She never cried, but this was not a normal day in so many ways.

"You asked to see me."

The voice jolted her out of her reverie and drew her attention to the man suddenly standing ten feet in front of her.

Oh, dear. Goodness. He was not what she expected. Not at all.

She had pictured a man of middle years with gray hair and spectacles and a face wizened with experience.

He would wear dark coats and a crisp cravat and be accompanied by a clerk or two.

Instead the man assessing her—there was no other word for the way his gaze took her in—could be no older than thirty or so. He possessed classical features and fashionable locks of dark brown hair of an enviable hue. He wore a long banyan that could pass for a greatcoat if not made of midnight brocade instead of wool.

An impressive man. His green eyes captivated one's attention. Very attractive eyes. Intelligent. Expressive. This lawyer was not merely handsome, but handsome in a way that made fools out of women when they saw him.

She found her wits, lest she appear just such a woman. "Are you Lord Ywain Hemingford?" She had no idea how to pronounce Ywain. Surely not *JA-wane*, as the bawd had. She tried *EE-wane* instead. His subtle wince said she got it wrong.

"I am he. It is pronounced *eh-WANE*, by the way, at least by my family. There are half a dozen options. Almost everyone chooses the wrong one, so I long ago retreated into the name Ives. Think of me by that name, if it is easier." His perfect mouth offered a half smile. "By either name, you have me at a disadvantage."

"My apologies. My name is Padua Belvoir." She took in his informal dress. "I have intruded at the wrong time. I am sorry about that too. I have been so distraught I have not paid proper mind to the hour, and I could not rest until I sought the help I need anyway."

"You told my man you were recommended to find me. May I ask by whom?"

By a prostitute in Newgate Prison. "I do not think she wants me to tell you her name."

He strolled across the chamber. "I assume you are here regarding criminal matters."

"How did you know?"

"Because that is the only reason she would not want her name used, and because I believe you visited the prison today." Ever so calmly, he opened one of the windows. A crisp breeze poured in.

She felt her face burning.

"Please, do not be embarrassed. The prison is a fetid place," he said. "I had a coat that had to be burned after I wore it there one summer day."

"It is not only fetid, but horrible in every way. The conditions are disgraceful. The inmates are wretched."

He settled his tall body into a chair near hers. He sat in it like a king might sit on a throne. His arms rested along the tops of its sides, and his hands hung in front of its carving. "Have you come to request a donation, perhaps to further a campaign to improve those conditions? I will contribute, but I must warn you that yours is a noble yet futile quest. People tend not to worry overmuch if criminals are not comfortable."

"I am not here to ask for a charitable donation, although someday I hope to have the time to devote to such good causes."

"A budding reformer, are you?"

"There is much in our society that could use some reform."

“As there has been in every society down through time.”

Oh, dear, he was one of those. The kind who saw no point in trying to better the present because such efforts in the past had failed. “I know history, sir. I have received a liberal education. With our superior knowledge, I think we can be more enlightened than our forefathers.”

He resettled himself in that chair, and angled his head. “I would ask which reforms you want to see first, but let me guess instead.” His gaze scanned her from head to toe. “Workers’ rights. Educational reform.” He scanned again. “Universal suffrage, including the vote for women. If you are educated, you would not like being denied a right enjoyed by others who have no more training of their mental faculties than you have.”

“Your conclusion is accurate. However, my reasons are less elevated. I simply believe that since there are many men who now vote who are stupid and ignorant, there can be no logic in denying the right to any others, stupid or ignorant though they might be as well.”

He laughed lightly. An appealing laugh. Quiet. Warming. His eyes showed new depths. “I do not think I have ever heard it said that baldly before. Like a wily math tutor, you have insisted that a different equation be solved, one that puts me at a disadvantage should I want to disagree.”

His insight with that math tutor comment unnerved her. How had they veered onto this topic? “My opinions do not signify, of course. My original point was that not everyone in that prison is a criminal, so the suffering there cannot be excused.”

He offered that half smile again, no more. “Since you do not want money, and you do not want to discuss reforms, perhaps you will explain what you do want.”

“I want your eloquence and skill to help my father, who has been so affected by prison that he is too weak to help himself. He has been wrongly accused of a crime.”

He did not actually sigh at hearing this most predictable topic, but his expression retreated into one of bland patience. “How long has he been there?”

“At least two weeks, but perhaps a month. I only learned about it yesterday. I received a letter, from whom I do not know, telling me. Normally I receive news from him at least once a month. It has been some six weeks since I last received one of his letters, so I had become concerned.”

“Why did you not visit him, and see what was wrong, if the letter did not come?”

“We are somewhat estranged. There was no argument between us. He is just much engaged in his own pursuits. I could not visit, because I do not know where he lives in London.”

“Did you see him when you went to the prison today?”

“I was allowed to visit him. He is in a large cell with many rough fellows. He is unwashed and unshaven and frightened. I fear he will get ill there. So many others are sick.”

“Why was he put there?”

“He would not tell me. He only said to leave and not come back.” Her voice almost caught on the last sentence. The visit had been horrible. If an iron door had not separated her from Papa, she thought he would have physically driven her away.

The green of his eyes darkened while he thought. She did not take the pause as a good sign. Not at all.

“Miss Belvoir, I am sure you were dismayed to find your father in a cell with men unsuitable for polite society. However, if you do not know the crime of which he is accused, how can you know that he is wrongly accused? His refusal to speak of it even with you suggests the opposite.”

“My father is no criminal, sir. He is a scholar. He has taught at universities throughout the Continent and had a position as a teacher at Oxford until he married my mother. He spends all his time on his research and his books. There can be no justifiable reason for him to be imprisoned, unless being an intellectual has now become a crime. A serious miscarriage of justice is about to occur.”

It poured out nonstop, the way her excitement sometimes betrayed her. Lord Ywain—Ives—just sat there, listening, exerting a presence that crowded her despite his sitting six feet away. He did not appear especially interested.

“You are sure of this?” he said.

“I am positive.”

“And yet you do not even know where he lives in London.” His words did not dismiss her outright, but his expression almost did. His eyes had narrowed with skepticism.

She felt her best chance to help her father slipping away.

“I told him that his silence was foolhardy. That is why I am here. I was told that some people have lawyers at their trials now. I was told that you at times speak for those accused.” *Slow down. Stop gushing words.* “My father is incapable of defending himself, and may even be unwilling to do so. The accusations are insulting, and he is the sort to refuse to engage in the insult by refuting it.”

He had not moved during her impassioned plea. Those hands still rested at the end of the chair’s arms. Attractive, masculine hands, as handsome as his face. His gaze had not left her, and the shifts regarding what he looked at had been subtle but unmistakable. Not only her face had been measured. She did not think she had been as closely examined in her life, let alone by a man such as this one.

She was not an inexperienced young girl. She recognized the purpose of that gaze, and could imagine the thoughts that occupied part of his mind. A small part, she hoped. She trusted at least some of what she had said took root amidst his masculine calculations.

In a different circumstance she might be flattered, but the bawd’s words made the attention dangerous. He did not appear of a predatory nature, and such a man hardly needed to take advantage of an accused man’s female relatives if he wanted to satisfy carnal needs. However, she experienced some alarm and a good deal of confusion. The latter resulted from the undeniable and inappropriate low stirring his attention evoked. She did not want to acknowledge it, but it was there. He was the kind of man who could do that to a woman, no matter how much she fought it.

“You do not know the accusations, so you cannot say they are insulting,” he said.

“Any accusation of a crime would be insulting to a man like my father. If you met him you would understand what I mean. Hadrian Belvoir is the least likely criminal in the world. Truly.”

The smallest frown flexed on his brow. His attention shifted again, to the inside of his head. She ceased to exist for a long moment. He stood abruptly. “Excuse me, please. I will return momentarily.”

Then he was gone, his midnight banyan billowing behind him.

* * *

Hadrian Belvoir.

Ever since his visitor introduced herself, an indefinable something had nudged at Ives. The pokes implied he should know her, yet nothing about her was familiar.

Hadrian Belvoir. That name did more than poke.

He strode up to his private chambers, to a writing desk there where he dealt with personal letters. He rifled through a thick stack of old mail, discarding it piece by piece, frowning while he sought the letter he wanted. Finally he found it.

He flipped it open and held it near the lamp. There that name was, buried amidst a casual communication. *You can expect to be asked to be prosecutor for a Hadrian Belvoir, once his case is brought forward. It would please us if you accepted.*

He checked the date. This had been written a month ago. No wonder the name had not been in the front of his memory. If Mr. Belvoir resided in Newgate Prison, why had this informal approach not turned into a formal one by now? It was possible his victims had hired their own prosecutor, of course, but if that were likely, these sentences would never have been written.

It would please us if you accepted. Considering who had written this, it went without saying that acceptance was assumed, and would indeed be given.

He would have to inform Miss Belvoir that she must look elsewhere.

He returned to the office and the bright-eyed Miss Belvoir. He had realized, while she talked and talked, that her eyes sparkled even when she did not cry. He had also calculated that if she stood, she would be willowy and long limbed. An idle curiosity had crossed his mind, about what it was like to take a woman who was a good match for his own height. His mind had pictured it, making the necessary adjustments . . .

No sooner had he walked into the chamber than she began speaking. "I think you can see that a great injustice will occur if my father does not receive your help, sir. I beg you to consider accepting his case. I am prepared to pay you whatever fees you require."

Not likely, from the looks of that dress and spencer. "Miss Belvoir, allow me to explain that no barrister will accept financial remuneration from you for defending in this matter."

She went still. Her lips parted in surprise. He felt bad that his refusal shocked her, but there was nothing else for it.

She looked up at him, confused. "Are you saying you will do it for free?"

"I am saying that barristers do not get paid by clients; they are engaged by solicitors who take care of such things. Barristers will be insulted if you offer to pay them like they are tradesmen."

"So I must first find a solicitor and have him ask you. Instead of one lawyer I must hire two."

"You must find a solicitor to investigate, but I will not be the barrister he engages to argue the case in the

courtroom. I cannot be the defending lawyer. When you mentioned your father's name, I realized I have already been approached to serve on the other side."

"Other side?"

"Prosecutor."

She absorbed that. Her full, deep rose lips mouthed the word.

She stood, which brought her close to him. Her crown reached his nose. Yes, she was unusually tall. The scents of Newgate no longer cloaked her. Rather that of lavender wafted subtly, as if by force of will she had conquered the ill effects of the day. Since the glint in her eyes no longer came from tears, he guessed she had, in many ways.

She strolled away, thinking. She moved with notable elegance and a subtle sway. She wore her unusual stature the way a queen might wear a crown.

She turned and faced him. He pictured her in a white diaphanous gown that flowed down her long body, one bound under and around her breasts in imitation of the ancient deities. Only, from the expression she now wore, she might also wear a helmet and shield, like Athena, goddess of both wisdom and war.

"This is awkward," she said. "However, it is not without value to speak with you."

"Since I have not even seen the brief, there is nothing to learn from me."

"It is always useful to meet one's adversary. Had I not made the error in coming here, I doubt I would have had the chance. I would have arrived at the trial, with you a total stranger."

"I am not your adversary, Miss Belvoir. You are not the one who will be on trial."

"We will have opposite goals, so I think the word is accurate."

"I am sure you will find a worthy lawyer to take up this case for you, as you intended."

"Having met you, I am not sure I will find one worthy enough. I dare not leave it all in another's hands now."

Her gaze penetrated him. He had the sense of his soul being searched by an intelligence as sharp as any he had ever met. Whatever she found, it lightened her expression. Softened her. The unusual beauty that had drawn him into this chamber became much more visible. The sparkles in her eyes implied humorous conclusions.

He knew what she had seen. An acknowledgment of it passed between them in an instant of naked honesty. Hell, yes, she was sharp. He had been nothing but restrained. A bishop could not have hidden his sensual speculations better, but she had still sensed them in him.

She turned those eyes on him fully. Ives recognized the expression of someone about to offer a bribe. A few had come his way in the past. He waited for hers.

Resolve flickered. Boldness flashed. Then, in the next moment, both died.

"I am sorry to have taken your time, and at an unsuitable hour at that. I will leave you to your evening." She

walked toward the door.

“I will find out about the charges,” he said. “That way you will know what he faces, at least. Leave your address with my man, and I will make sure you are informed.”

She turned. “Thank you. That is very kind, coming from someone I must now see as an enemy.”

“I am only an enemy if the truth is, as well.”

That amused her. “Noble words to soothe the helpless woman’s fears, sir? That is generous of you. However, truth depends on the equation, too, doesn’t it? Different variables yield different solutions.”

CHAPTER 2

By the time Padua slipped through the garden behind the house on Frith Street, the last of dusk’s light showed. High-pitched voices leaked from the building’s second storey, where the girls ate their supper. If she moved quickly enough, she could take her own chair in the dining room without attracting much notice. If she were very lucky, Mrs. Ludlow would be none the wiser about Padua’s activities today.

She did not fear Mrs. Ludlow, the gentlewoman who owned this building and school, and in whose hands rested her ability to support herself. Generous to a fault, and as warm as a mother, Mrs. Ludlow suffered from a level of absentmindedness that made her quite benign. Learning one of her teachers had left the property would distress her, however, and Padua did not want to do that.

She checked the garden door, and was relieved to find it still unlocked. She strode through the back sitting room, removing her spencer while she walked. She rolled it up and tucked it behind a chair in the reception hall before mounting the stairs.

Assuming an expression of confidence, she entered the drawing room that now served as the dining room for Mrs. Ludlow’s School for Girls. She made her way to the head table and slid into her chair. She drew no particular attention from the others already into their meals. Only Caroline Peabody’s gaze followed her conspicuously, first with a little frown, then with visible relief. Caroline was one of three girls Padua tutored in higher mathematics. Those lessons were not part of the curriculum, and took place late at night after Mrs. Ludlow retired.

She enjoyed the extra work, because it meant these girls could discover what their minds could achieve. She found contentment in doing for them what her mother had done for her. The pay at this school might be low, but it was a respectable living, one for which she held excellent qualifications. The employment also permitted her to squirrel away some money for the plans she had.

“Miss Belvoir.” Mrs. Ludlow’s address drifted down the table, past the other teachers. “Please join me in my chambers after dinner. I would like a word with you.”

Padua finished her meal while the room emptied. She then made her way to Mrs. Ludlow’s chambers. The door to the sitting room stood open, as it usually did in the evening. Once she entered, however, Mrs. Ludlow closed it.

Padua loved the sitting room. Small and tidy, its upholstered chairs and patterned carpet created a cozy den. She and Mrs. Ludlow sat near a low fire, in two of those comfortable chairs, with a small table between them. On the table sat a tiny glass of sherry, which Mrs. Ludlow indulged in “for her health.” The chair, of

decent size for a person of Padua's height, almost swallowed short, plump Mrs. Ludlow. If not for a footstool, her feet would have dangled.

Fifty and filmy-eyed, with a cloud of fair hair that resisted taming, Mrs. Ludlow forever appeared perplexed. Indeed, the world confounded her on a regular basis. She lacked constancy as a result, which Padua at times found exasperating, but often also found useful. The school had many rules, as schools do, but Mrs. Ludlow could be swayed by tears or promises from the girls, or threats from the parents upon whom her fees depended. Or logical persuasion from her teacher, Padua Belvoir.

"You left the premises today." Mrs. Ludlow spoke an observation more than an accusation while she bent to tuck a throw around her feet. Contented with the result, she sat back into the fat embrace of the chair's cushion, and reached for her sherry.

"I had a family matter to attend to."

Mrs. Ludlow sipped, then cradled the fragile glass in her fingers. "I do ask that you inform me and receive permission. Those are the rules, Miss Belvoir. Without rules, where would the world be?"

"As you know, I think that, as an adult, I should not need permission. None of my classes or charges were neglected, and I returned before nightfall."

"Barely. Had you walked in ten minutes later—" The very thought had Mrs. Ludlow flustering. "What would the parents say if they learned my teachers went abroad in town at night alone? I would be entertaining a long line of them as they came to get their girls. Really, you must see that." She flushed, and patted her hand on her heart. "Why, we would all be ruined, Miss Belvoir. Ruined. I would have been forced to release you, in an attempt to stave off the worst."

"There is no reason for any parent to know our business, unless we lack discretion," Padua said. "Yes, the world needs rules, but as independent women, we should make our own, and ensure they are practicable."

"Make our own? Oh, dear girl, that is rich. And so like you. As for discretion, allow me to enlighten you on the limitations of that. I needed to speak with you tonight about more than your absence today—and, truly, Miss Belvoir, I cannot have it, you know I cannot."

Padua avoided making any promises. The situation with her father prevented that. "What other matter concerns you?"

"I have received a letter today, from a parent, complaining."

"Not about the lessons, surely. Your curriculum is far superior to what is normally found."

"As it happens, that was the complaint." Mrs. Ludlow sighed, then sipped again. "This father expressed dismay that his daughter wrote to her brother like a braggart about her lessons in geometry. It appears the boy has not yet mastered that at the same level, and he is a year older."

"We cannot be blamed for either the brother's lack of ability, or his tutor's lack of attention."

"Quite so, quite so, and yet—this man had not expected such a thing. Well, they never do. Sewing, drawing, music, French, basic ciphers—you know the sort of lessons he wants." She looked over, all confusion and little confidence. "Perhaps he is correct. Maybe—I am not sure. It is so hard to know. There can be no harm, I think, then I receive such a letter and . . ." She looked around her sitting room as if expecting some figure of authority to emerge from a wall and tell her the best course of action.

The parents expected the curriculum the school had before Padua arrived. She had quickly convinced the impressionable Mrs. Ludlow to allow a few changes. Now she wondered if she would be reduced in the future to teaching basic arithmetic to girls who could do much more.

“His objection to the mathematics only served as a prologue,” Mrs. Ludlow continued, her hand flashing gestures of distress. “After that, his letter became much more pointed. Indignant, he was. Aghast. His girl, it seemed, also wrote to her mother, this time about a fascinating pamphlet a teacher had loaned her. She encouraged her mother to find it and read it for herself.”

Padua wished she did not know what was coming. Only she did. “She asked to borrow it. I told her not to let anyone know.”

“Oh, dear. I had hoped . . .” Mrs. Ludlow patted her heart again. “Did I not tell you that you must not teach your ideas about women’s rights to the girls? I am sure I did.”

“I have not taught the girls anything. I have not openly discussed such things, although for an educated female to be ignorant of such arguments is comical. However, I have kept those ideas out of the schoolroom.”

“But not out of the school. You must do so in the future.”

What a bizarre suggestion. The ideas were in her head, and she was in the school. There was no way to keep the ideas out of the school, unless . . . Better not to point out the obvious. Mrs. Ludlow was a dear woman, and good at heart, but she was also afraid.

“She saw the pamphlet among my books. She asked to borrow it. I allowed it, but warned her to be discreet.”

“Hence my first words, about the limitations of discretion,” Mrs. Ludlow said sadly. “I would be sorry to lose you, Miss Belvoir. Most sorry. However, those pamphlets must be locked away, so the girls cannot see them. And you must obtain my permission before leaving the school in the future, and explain your purpose in doing so, lest I get more letters.”

Padua bit her tongue. Of course she could not tell Mrs. Ludlow that she intended to leave again tomorrow, to bring food and clothing to her father *in prison*. If Mrs. Ludlow learned of his situation, she would surely send Padua packing by morning. She would have no choice.

Padua did not argue. She excused herself and retired to her chamber. Jennie waited for her there.

“Did she let you go?” Honest concern showed in Jennie’s blue eyes. A young widow of good birth, Jennie was as dependent as Padua on her situation at Mrs. Ludlow’s. Handsome, blond, and well-bred, she taught the girls comportment and etiquette. Her relatives may not give her a penny, but Mrs. Ludlow liked dropping their names to parents of prospective students.

“No. She said she does not want to either.” But she would, if necessary. Padua knew that.

“Then you must not do this again. Where did you go?”

Jennie was the closest thing to a friend that Padua had, but they were not so close that she would admit to Jennie that her father was in prison. “I thought I knew where to find my father, so I might see him.”

Jennie shook her head sadly. “He avoids you so he does not have to give you any money, Padua. I have told you that.”

It was why Jennie's family avoided her, so she assumed it was a rule that governed all lives. "I know he has nothing to give. Anyway, I had to try."

Jennie turned to the door. "I must go. I am going to tell those girls not to sneak in here tonight, for those extra lessons. You do not want to risk forcing Mrs. Ludlow into making a choice, Padua."

"Skipping a night or so might be wise."

After Jennie left, Padua knelt beside her bed. She reached under it for a valise she stored there. Opening it, she removed a little purse that held her money.

These coins had a purpose, but she doubted now that she would ever save enough to pay for her passage to Italy, and to her namesake city, where her mother had studied and her parents had met. Not when these coins were required to pay for the lawyers to help her father now, and to procure him what little comfort she could while he lived in his current abode.

She had saved almost enough once before, when she was younger and teaching at the school in Birmingham that she had attended as a student herself. After three years of scrimping, she had the passage. Then she had met Nicholas and fallen in love. Beautiful, glorious love. The kind of love her mother and father had known, and about which poems are written. She had loved totally, freely, and without guilt or worry.

Three months later Nicholas was gone, with her money in his pocket.

She stared at the coins. Her father had been cold to her for ten years, ever since her mother had died when Padua was fifteen. He had sent her away to that school then, at a time when she wanted to be with what family she had left. She had only seen him a few times a year since then, even after she moved to London in order to be closer to him.

He did not want her help. He did not even want her company. She should just leave, and go to Padua and apply to the university and make her mark if she still could. Papa might even respect her then.

Her mother's voice came to her, frail and trembling from the consumption taking her life. *He is like a child, Padua. You must promise me you will watch over him, as much as he will allow. For a man who has traveled extensively and read the great books, he knows almost nothing about surviving in the world.*

A long sigh escaped her. *Oh, Mama, what a promise to demand*—to care for a man who did not love her. To demand a place in his life when he would prefer she had none.

She thumbed fifteen shillings aside, then returned the rest to the valise.

* * *

Given a choice, most lawyers would never sully themselves with criminal law. The result was those who did usually were the lawyers who could not find something more lucrative to do.

Ives was a rarity, a lawyer who argued criminal cases out of a sense of duty. There was no criminal bar, and his colleagues in the endeavor consisted of a motley assortment of lawyers whose primary work involved other courts and pleadings. Like him, only on occasion did they arrive in regalia at the Old Bailey or other criminal courtrooms to lend their eloquence and legal knowledge to the deliberations therein. Solicitors, sergeants—there was no limitation on who appeared to defend.

If one saw a trained barrister in the Old Bailey or Newgate Prison, most likely he served as prosecutor, either

one hired by the victims or by the state. Some judges now allowed the accused to have lawyers, too, but not all did. In many cases judges held to the tradition that a defendant could provide his own defense by simply speaking the truth.

Today Ives entered Newgate by way of a door through which most of those other lawyers were never received—that of the house of the gaoler, Mr. Brown. Being Lord Ywain had its privileges. Within minutes he was sitting in Mr. Brown's office, explaining his purpose.

"Belvoir is being held here, while further investigations are pursued," Mr. Brown confirmed. "He has been here going on four weeks."

"If charges have been laid or are imminent, I would like to know what they are."

"Coining, it was. It will be the noose for him, or at best a life on the hulks."

Ives was not sure what he had thought the crime would be. Something political he supposed. As an intellectual, to hear his daughter describe him, Mr. Belvoir was the sort to take to radical ideas and company, and get swept into some misstep against the laws in place to control that sort of thing now.

"What is the evidence?" Coining, or counterfeiting money, was among the most serious offenses. Counterfeiting undermined the health of the economy, and was viewed as a type of treason.

"Caught him red-handed, is how I hear it," Brown said. "Found the bad money in those rooms he keeps on Wigmore Street."

This was not looking good for Hadrian Belvoir. Ives expected he would dispatch the entire trial in less than an hour. "What has he said for himself?"

"Well, now, that is the rub. He hasn't said anything. Magistrates and others keep asking him, and he refuses to cooperate. Unwise of him, isn't it? He might garner some mercy if he turned on his colleagues in crime. You know how that works, sir."

He did indeed. Criminals laying down information about other criminals was the oil that made the wheels of the criminal courts turn.

"We even showed him the old press in the yard, to frighten him. Usually the mere threat of torture works wonders," Brown said. "With this strange one, nothing. If anything he became more stubborn."

"Strange, you call him. Is he perhaps demented?"

"I wouldn't say so. As for strange, well, come see for yourself."

The gaoler rose. Together they walked into the prison proper and its long corridors of cells, or wards.

Enough of a breeze penetrated through the small windows today so it did not smell as bad as it might. Still, when hundreds of people crammed damp cells, the mere odors of humanity's existence became concentrated and offensive. The smell of human waste alone overwhelmed the senses. Add to that the effects of unwashed bodies, rotting food, and the almost sweet odor of illness, and it produced a mix strong enough to leave men retching.

As they approached a crossway in the corridors, a woman sped past on the other path. Padua Belvoir, tall and proud, walked with determination toward the exit, a handkerchief to her nose. She headed down past wards

holding women, some of whom mocked her with lewd calls and cackles. Ives paused in the crossway and watched her run the gauntlet.

“That is his daughter, or so she says,” Brown commented. “Showed up yesterday, asking to see him. She brought him some food, clothes, and books today. Them that care about Belvoir’s case were very interested in this woman’s sudden appearance after all this time. I expect they are hoping she was sent by those he worked for.”

“She really is his daughter.” Ives spoke with more authority than he could claim. He hardly had proof of the fact. Yet there had been very little dissembling, and considerable concern, in the woman who intruded on his evening. Should she cajole her father into cooperating, it would be a good thing. That she had now attracted the attention of the authorities alarmed him, however.

After a few more turns, Brown stopped in front of a cell. Like many of the others, it held at least twenty men, all of whom lived, slept, ate, and wasted away in it. For a price a man could have better lodgings. The wretches here could not afford it.

“That is him, in the corner.”

Ives did not need the gaoler’s direction. The man in the corner stood out from all the others. Although he sat against the wall, with his manacled ankles pulled close to his body, one could tell he was very tall and very thin. He wore a waistcoat and frock coat that, while disgusting and dirty now, had once been those of a gentleman. Presumably there had been no beard when he entered that cell, and his steely gray hair had been better groomed too.

The most notable thing about him, however, was not his appearance, but rather his activity. In his corner, beside his hip, stood a little stack of books. Belvoir read one so intently that he did not notice the gaoler and Ives peering through the door’s iron grate.

Beside the books rested a wrapped package, and a small basket of fruit. The other men in the cell eyed the last item with lust. Ives assumed Belvoir would soon be relieved of the fruit, and perhaps the package of clothing. No one would want the books.

“When he first came, and I took down his information, he identified his occupations as teacher, scholar, gentleman, and mathematician.” Brown found it amusing. “Funny how they never say forger, coiner, murderer, or thief.”

Ives looked at those books. Hadrian Belvoir would not even notice his surroundings until they were all read, he guessed. Then read again, if no new ones were brought by his daughter.

“That daughter, if she is a daughter, wanted to buy him a better place,” Brown said. “She had the coin for it. I said I would check to see if that is allowed. My guess is they want him here, and as uncomfortable as possible.”

Ives did not think it would matter now. Anyone who saw him could tell that Hadrian Belvoir had entered a different world from the one in which he sat. His mind had been freed even if his body still suffered.

* * *

Padua pushed through the crowd waiting to hear the news from the Old Bailey’s trials. She found a spot near the end of the building, where she could pause and compose herself.

She would never grow accustomed to seeing her father in that place, but his condition was not what agitated her. Rather she carried a deep anger away from her meeting. She had brought him some items to relieve his suffering, at notable cost to herself, only to have him once more reject her help. Oh, he had taken the food and books, but there had not been one word of thanks, and he had once again ordered her not to return.

The only reason she had not lost her temper and upbraided him was the way he looked at those books, and then at her. His relief had been palpable and his eagerness visible. When his gaze rose to hers again, she discerned some gratitude, and also embarrassment. Then he had flipped through them hungrily, and almost smiled when he found the paper and pencil secreted inside one of them.

Other than that vague expression in his eyes, had he acknowledged her love and concern, though? Not at all. And his words had been cruel and sharp. *I said not to come here again. Do not disobey me this time as I say it again.*

“Miss Belvoir.” The call came from the other end of the building, from beyond the line of people waiting to petition to see their relatives. Her gaze snapped to a waving hat, and a man on horseback. Ives. He had given her leave to think of him by that name, and she had taken to doing so most of the time.

He trotted toward her, and the line split like the Red Sea to permit him to pass. Fifty yards from her he dismounted, and approached on foot with his steed in tow.

Decked out like the wealthy aristocrat he was, Ives proved quite a sight. In the sunlight his face proved no less impressive, but the raking illumination showed the fine lines on either side of his eyes and mouth. Laugh lines they were called, yet they made him appear less friendly not more so, and gave his classic beauty a hard edge that the soft haze of candles had not revealed.

“Miss Belvoir, it is fortunate to find you here.” He made a little bow. “I have learned a few things that you should know. Walk with me, and I will tell you all.”

Of course she walked with him. Together they strolled along the edge of the square.

“You visited him again today,” he said. “Did you learn anything?”

“If I had, it would be unwise to tell you.”

“Anything he says in his own defense will aid him. The Crown is not without mercy.”

“Do you have reason to think he will need mercy?”

He stopped walking and faced her. “I regret that I do. It is worse than I thought, and I think worse than you feared. The pending charge is for coining. It is very serious, and the evidence is solid.”

Coining? Her father? Hadrian Belvoir? She could not keep a laugh from emerging. “That is ridiculous. He has no sense of money, and little use for it except to buy paper and books. Anyone who knows him would know—”

“The counterfeit money was found in his home. They have him dead to rights. He is only in prison, instead of tried and convicted, because they hope to get him to reveal the rest of the scheme. No one counterfeits on his own. It is a complicated procedure that requires specialized skills.”

“If there was bad money in his possession, he probably received it from some shop and was not aware it was bad.”

The less friendly aspects of his handsome face hardened. "Do not assume the law is upheld by fools. A few pounds do not a counterfeit charge make. If they have him in prison, a good amount was found in his possession, Miss Belvoir." His expression softened. "You must prepare yourself."

Prepare yourself. It was the kind of thing said to relatives of the dying. She stared at this man who would be the agent of her father's destruction. Fury at her father collided with fury at him.

"How kind of you. How sympathetic. You lower your voice and pretend concern, but when his trial opens you will be there in your wig and robes and convince the jury to convict him and the judge to damn him. His life will be over for a small crime barely worth noting."

His countenance turned very hard indeed. "Miss Belvoir, I am truly sorry for you, but not for him. Counterfeiting is not a minor crime. It is never small. It is normally undertaken on a large scale, because it requires significant skill and investment. If your father did this, as it appears he did, I will indeed convince the jury to convict him. My sympathy is for you, as it is for all relatives of criminals, but to expect sympathy for the criminals themselves is expecting too much from me or anyone else."

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