



A DREW  
FARTHERING  
MYSTERY

Murder  
-at the-  
MIKADO

JULIANNA  
DEERING



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To the One who remembers me  
according to His love



## — One —

A ctors,” the barman muttered to no one in particular as he wiped a freshly washed glass.

The Knight and Steed was empty but for the dozen or so customers clustered around the big table in the middle of the room and two others off by themselves in the corner. From the gramophone, a quartet sang the jaunty American tune “Nobody’s Sweetheart.”

They all knew one another, of course. All of them came from down the street at the Tivoli. Mostly they came in late, after performances, with the rest of the theater crowd. But Mondays, when the theater was closed or when they’d had an early rehearsal, they might come in for a little something, often with friends and hangers-on.

This was one of those early days. It wasn’t even five o’clock yet, a grim, blustery afternoon, and they’d only just started to drink. The large group was boisterous, chatting and laughing, sometimes roaring when one of them displayed a spark of wit. The two in the corner were huddled together, talking

so low no one could have heard them even if the others had been utterly silent.

The man was well known, lead actor and owner of the Tivoli. His leading-lady wife was sitting at the large table with the others. The woman with him was a reporter for one of the local scandal sheets. As he spoke to her, his eyes gleamed with a passion that had nothing to do with love or even lust, yet it was vivid and urgent all the same.

“Not much more,” he was saying when the barman brought them a second round, sherry for him and pale ale for the woman. “It’s exactly what they want, you’ll see. And it’s got plenty of—”

He broke off, glaring until the barman hurried away. Then he and the reporter put their heads together, conspiring once more as the group at the large table called out their orders.

“Coming,” the barman singsonged. “Coming.”

Before he was again behind the bar, the door swung open with a jingle of the bell and a rush of November wind and then clattered shut again. A tall woman swathed in furs hurried over to the corner table.

“Fleur, darling.” The actor smiled lazily and did not rise. “I didn’t think we’d see you again so soon.”

Seeing he was not going to take her coat, the woman removed it herself, revealing an alluring body clad in the latest fashion. She brushed a few determined snowflakes off her sleek black hair and looked pointedly at the unoccupied chair next to him.

He shrugged. “Some other time, love. I have business to attend to.”

She sat anyway, ignoring the other woman at the table. “We have to talk, Johnnie. I mean it.”

His wife glanced at him from the middle of the room, her expression a mix of boredom and disdainful amusement, and then she turned, laughing, to her companions again. The actor lifted his glass to her and took a sip of sherry before turning his attention back to his uninvited guest.

“You’d best get used to the idea, love. I’m absolutely going to—”

He scowled at the barman, who had brought the other table their drinks and was making a great show of not listening in, and then he dropped his voice. The conversation was again low and intense, until the lady reporter gave a shrill, mocking laugh.

The room fell silent. With a dull screech of chair legs, the newcomer sprang to her feet and snatched up her furs.

“You don’t really want to do that, Johnnie.” Her black eyes snapped in her pale, perfect face. “I promise you don’t.”

The actor merely gave her a wink and a grin. “Do pop round again, darling, when we’re not so busy, eh?”

“Come on, Fleur,” cried one of the men from the other table, a character actor, bald and rotund. “Have a drink with us. Leave those two to their plotting. It’s all monstrously dull. Come and hear all about when I played Hamlet in Berlin. I was all of twenty-two.”

“Don’t be absurd,” said the bored young man who played all the juvenile leads. “When you were twenty-two, Hamlet hadn’t even been written.”

“Yes, do join us, Fleur,” the leading lady drawled over the good-natured jeering that followed his remark. She leaned back so she could pull up a chair from an empty table. “Johnnie seems to be quite done with you.”

With an icy glare the other woman shrugged into her furs and stalked into the cold.

“Oh, dear.” The leading lady traced one slender finger over the rim of her wineglass. “What a shame.”



“Lovely as always, darling.” Drew Farthering took his fiancée’s hand and pressed a light kiss to the back of it. “You look a positive angel in that gown.”

Madeline Parker’s blue eyes sparkled, and she did a half turn, displaying the cream tulle interspersed with little satin motifs like swallows’ wings. “Like it?”

“Very much. Mrs. Landis is bound to ask the name of your dressmaker.”

Madeline stopped before the mirror in Farthering Place’s upper hallway and smoothed her already flawless dark hair. “What’s she like anyway? Have you met her?”

“No, but judging by Landis, she’s comfortably forty, extremely pleasant, and absolutely respectable. I’m certain you two will get on famously.”

He moved over beside her, studying the totality of the reflection. In the stately surroundings of his ancestral home, he saw a beautiful girl with a sweet face and eyes that showed more than her fair share of intelligence and good humor. Beside her was a young man who looked far happier than he deserved. Well, why shouldn’t he look happy?

It was November, and the grim events of the past summer were behind them now. His company, Farlinford Processing, had survived embezzlement, fraud, and near bankruptcy, and now, under experienced management, it was recovering nicely. He had himself—through what seemed little short of a miracle—survived near death. And after a whirlwind courtship, though he couldn’t help thinking her consent was

because of that near death, Madeline had at last agreed to marry him. In just one month she would be forever his own. What more could he want?

She brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his shoulder and straightened his tie just a fraction of an inch.

“How are you and Plumfield getting along?” she asked.

He chuckled. “Perhaps you ought ask how he and Denny are getting along. I’m not used to having a valet, even though it has been a local scandal the past decade, but Denny has enough to do just to look after the house without having to tend to me, as well. I believe there is a silent war going on between him and Plumfield over whether I should wear gold cuff links or platinum and whether having them monogrammed is overly ostentatious.”

“Oh, dear,” she said, feigning horror.

“Yes, it’s been frightful. I feared I would have to wear one of each, you know, just to keep the peace. But now I wonder if that might not have actually brought them to blows.”

He offered her his arm and was accepted.

“Where is Aunt Ruth?” he asked as they turned to go down the sweeping stairs. “Shall we go and fetch her?”

“No need to fetch anyone, young man. I’m coming.”

Ruth Jansen bustled down the hallway, always swift and purposeful, despite her cane. She wore black as she always had since she had come to Farthering Place as Madeline’s chaperone, as she had since losing her fiancé just before their wedding some thirty years ago, but her gown was simple and attractive.

Drew made a slight bow. “Good evening, ma’am. You’re looking quite charming this evening.”

“Flatterer,” she said half under her breath, yet there was a

twinkle in her eye as she took his free arm. "I hope you and this Landis fellow aren't going to talk business all night."

"We'll try to keep it to a minimum, Aunt, I give you my word on it." He patted her hand. "And I promise you'll like Landis. He's a good man. He's done wonders with Farlinford already. You know I know nothing about the oil business, and he's come in as if he'd already been there twenty years. Things are improving exponentially. By the time he's been there a year he'll have saved us at least three or four times the price of his salary, I'm certain of it."

"Hard worker, is he?" she asked, eyes narrowed.

"Decidedly. But you needn't worry he'll talk business all night. He's far more likely to tell you at length about his little son."

Madeline beamed at him. "A little boy? How old?"

"Four, I believe. And a marvel unmatched in modern memory, if I've heard properly."

Madeline laughed. "Oh, I think it's too sweet. I like Mr. Landis already."

At that, the front bell rang, and Dennison crossed the foyer to the door. In another moment he came to stand at the foot of the stairs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Landis, sir."

Drew escorted Madeline and her aunt down the last few steps and into the foyer, smiling at the amiable, fortyish-looking man waiting there. Brent Landis's hand was already outstretched.

"Mr. Farthering, good evening. So good of you to have us. Afraid we're a few minutes early. I hope that's not too much of a bother."

"Heavens, no, Landis. Not at all. Good of you to come."

Drew shook his hand. "Aunt Ruth, Madeline, darling, this is Brent Landis. Landis, my fiancée, Madeline Parker, and her aunt, Miss Jansen."

Landis bowed to the ladies, and Aunt Ruth gave him a serene nod.

Madeline also shook his hand. "Drew tells me you've done wonders at Farlinford already."

"It's been only four weeks, Miss Parker. Wonders take at least five." Landis chuckled and then looked around. "Now where's my wife got to? Come along, darling. You look glorious as always."

Mrs. Landis turned from the hall mirror, still patting the thick black hair that was twisted into a chignon at the nape of her neck. Her lips, as red and glistening as rubies, were pursed into a knowing little smirk, and her black eyes gleamed as she held out one slender hand.

Drew's smile faltered. "Fleur."

She dropped her chin to her white shoulder, giving him a coy glance from under her black lashes. "Surprise."

Landis looked at her, then at Drew, then at her again. "You and Mr. Farthering know each other, do you? Why didn't you tell me?"

Her smile was hardly more than a knowing quirk of her full lips. "Well, I thought it would be rather fun to surprise you both. It's been simply ages, hasn't it, Drew?"

"Rather," he replied.

No one said anything for a moment, and then there was the sound of swift footsteps on the stairs as Nick Dennison came to join them.

"I do beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen. I had a bit of estate business to see to and couldn't get away." He slicked

back his tawny hair, still damp, and looked at Drew. "Introduce me, won't you?"

"Certainly." Drew nodded stiffly. "Mr. and Mrs. Landis, this is Nick Dennison. He is taking over the managing of the estate and otherwise gets me into and out of mischief. Nick, Mr. and Mrs. Landis."

Fleur smiled at him with a pretty tilt of her head.

"Mrs. Landis." Nick obliged her with a look of somewhat-stunned recognition, and then he and Landis shook hands. "Good to meet you, Mr. Landis."

Just then the bell sounded, and as his duty as host required, Drew offered Fleur his arm. "May I, Mrs. Landis?"

She accepted, her slim hand white against his dinner jacket, and with a bow, Nick held out his arm and escorted Aunt Ruth.

"Miss Parker?" Landis said, and with an uncertain smile she took his arm and went last into the dining room.

Madeline and Drew took their places at opposite ends of the long, gleaming table, with Landis and Nick on Madeline's right and left and Fleur and Aunt Ruth on Drew's.

Drew glanced at his guests. Just as he and Nick did, Landis wore eveningwear that was absolutely correct in every respect. Fleur was wearing a beaded net gown, black to show off her pale, perfect skin, the daring bodice open to the waist in back and on both sides, and the skirt slit up high on the right. He was used to seeing women in such gowns. Bare backs and arms and sides were all the fashion these days, but Fleur . . . Fleur was Fleur, and there was always something a bit bold, a bit wild about her, even when she was seated quietly at the dinner table as the soup was served.

Madeline was her near opposite, demure in creamy white

tulle, the ruffled, transparent sleeves flowing like angel wings from her shoulders. He smiled across the table at her, a subtle, intimate smile just for her, and she returned it just as subtly before turning to Landis.

“How have you liked working at Farlinford, Mr. Landis? Drew tells me it was in a bad way before you came.”

“Oh, it wasn’t too terribly bad, Miss Parker. Certainly there were some places that needed shoring up, a few rather thorny knots to untangle, but nothing that can’t be put right in time.”

Drew nodded as he took a sip of mock turtle soup. “You see, darling? I soon won’t be needed at Farlinford at all. Then you’ll have to figure out how to keep me entertained day in and day out.”

“You never go in to work as it is, and you seem to have no trouble getting into mischief all on your own,” Aunt Ruth observed with a twinkle in her eye.

He laughed. “I suppose not, ma’am, but at least when I do I won’t have to worry about the business going south, as well.”

“Drew tells me you have a great deal of experience in the oil business, Mr. Landis,” Nick said.

“About twenty years now,” Landis replied. “I’d been with Anglo-Persian Oil for the past sixteen, but I thought it was time I tried something new.” He glanced at Drew, a touch of sympathy in his expression. “Well, after everything that happened this past summer, I knew it would take some work to get Farlinford back running as she should, and I thought that was just the challenge I’d like to take on. I’m glad Mr. Farthering agreed to let me give it a go.”

“No doubt Anglo-Persian wasn’t at all pleased with me stealing you away from them,” Drew said. “But all’s fair, eh?”

Fleur huffed, looking only good-naturedly put out. "Must you discuss business all night, Brent? Don't you have enough of that at the office?"

Landis bowed and said, "I beg your pardon, ladies."

"Sorry," Drew added. "How about something a bit more congenial, darling?"

"Well, Mrs. Landis has told us hardly anything about herself." Madeline took a taste of her soup. "How long ago did you and Drew meet, Mrs. Landis?"

"Oh, heavens." Fleur's laugh was light and silvery. "Such ancient history. How long ago was it, Drew, love? Five years?"

"Six." He knew the word had come out more sharply than it should have, and he forced his expression into something more pleasant. "It is six, I believe. I remember because it was my first term there."

"What children we were." Fleur dipped her spoon in her bowl, toying with it. "But what lovely times we had. I so enjoyed Oxford. So pretty and so, oh, I don't know, just brimming with knowledge. One could feel it in the air, didn't you think so, Drew?"

"I know I learned a great deal there, yes."

Madeline was looking at him, trying to read his thoughts as always, and then she turned to Fleur. "Were you at the university too, Mrs. Landis?"

Again Fleur laughed. "I was with a repertory company there in the city. Light opera. Gilbert and Sullivan mostly. It was great fun."

Madeline glanced at Drew once more, but kept her attention on Fleur. "That must have been terribly interesting. Do you still act?"

"Oh, no." She bit her lip, and a certain wistfulness came

into her eyes. "I left it all for dear Brent." She looked at her husband, her lips turned up on one side. "And then we had Peter, and that was the end of my time before the footlights. Of course, a woman's figure is always a bit frumpy afterward."

With a regretful pout of her full lips, she slid one hand from her slender waist to her hip and looked at the men seated at the table, obviously waiting for at least one of them to object. Nick glanced at Drew, smirking slightly. She knew exactly how she looked, and it certainly wasn't frumpy.

"Nonsense, sweetheart," Landis said. "You haven't aged a day since we met. If anything, you've grown only more beautiful."

"There, you see? That just proves that love is in fact stone blind." She laughed softly and lifted her wineglass in a silent toast to him. "You turn my head terribly, darling."

He toasted her in return, a sudden warm softness in his brown eyes. "It is one of the great pleasures of my life, my love."

She gave him a secretive little smile and then faced Madeline again. "I suppose Drew is just as bad. Worse, I'd guess. He was always such a romantic when I knew him back at Oxford."

"I trust we've all grown up a bit since then," Drew said.

"Oh no." Fleur wagged one finger at him. "I know your type, Drew Farthering. Death before dishonor. Utterly devoted. Quietly and deeply passionate. Eighteen or eighty, you'd be just the same."

Drew ate another spoonful of soup, hoping his face wasn't turning any uncomfortable shades of red. Madeline, bless her, was quick to shift the conversation to something not so awkward.

She turned to Landis. "I understand you and Mrs. Landis have a little boy."

"That's right." Landis's eyes lit. "Peter. He turned four this summer, and I tell you, the boy's smart as a whip."

He reached in his jacket pocket for his wallet, and Fleur rolled her eyes.

"Oh, dear. Please, Brent, you mustn't bore everyone with your pictures."

"Just one, Fleur."

"I'm so sorry," Fleur said to Madeline with good-natured regret. "I told him before we arrived—"

"Oh, I'd love to see." Madeline leaned toward Landis, waiting for him to find what he was looking for. "Four is such a darling age."

Landis beamed at her and handed her a photograph. "Sorry, my dear, but I can never resist. A bit proud, don't you know?"

Madeline gave him a warm glance and then looked at the picture. "Oh, how sweet. Look, Nick."

Nick leaned over to look, too. "Cute kid."

"Aunt Ruth, you must see."

Madeline passed the photo to her aunt.

"A lovely child. He favors you, Mrs. Landis," Aunt Ruth said. "Very much, apart from the blond hair."

Fleur patted her black chignon and gave Aunt Ruth a pert grin. "You'd never know it to see me now, Miss Jansen, but my hair was just as blond when I was that age. I'm afraid it didn't last, and yet I've never cared for bleaching. It seems so . . . so false."

Drew looked over at the photograph Madeline's aunt still held. It showed a fair-haired little boy holding a stuffed rabbit. His expression was solemn for the camera, but there was

a brightness to the eyes and a sweetness to the mouth that were altogether appealing.

"You've every right to be proud, Landis," Drew said as Aunt Ruth handed the picture back. "He's a fine little chap."

"All right, dear, I've put it up." Landis replaced the photograph in his wallet, a touch of mischief on his face. "Won't happen again."

Fleur leaned forward in her chair to get a better view of Madeline around Nick. "You mustn't misunderstand me, Miss Parker. I'm quite the doting mother myself, but I know how tedious hearing about other people's children can be."

"I think Peter is charming," Madeline assured her. "Anyone would be proud to claim him as his own."

Fleur simpered as if Madeline were thirty years her junior rather than just seven or eight. "Isn't she sweet, Drew? Just the sort of girl you were looking for when you were at Oxford."

"True enough," Drew told her, keeping his expression bland. "But I've found since then that they're exceedingly rare."

The creamed chicken, spinach, and new potatoes arrived, and the conversation shifted to food and then to staff. Landis and Aunt Ruth discussed Chicago at length, since Landis had visited there many times on business, and Fleur told several amusing stories about her time onstage. By the time the pears a la conde and then the port were served, Drew let himself relax, at least a little. It seemed the evening would not be a disaster after all. At least it wouldn't be until he had to talk to Madeline alone, and he was sure from the look in her eyes that she would insist on it.



Once the Landises were gone, Aunt Ruth retired for the night, and Nick, claiming some estate business to attend to, made himself scarce. Madeline sat beside Drew on the sofa in the drawing room, her hand on his arm. She had once teasingly accused him of never believing a woman could do any harm.

“Oh, no,” he had told her then. “I’ve been taught to know better. I have the scars to prove it.”

“I’ll want to know someday,” she’d said to that, her voice tender and sympathetic. She hadn’t pressed to know more, and he had known she would wait until he was ready to tell her about those scars.

He sighed. Now that someday had come.

“Madeline . . .” Why did this have to be so difficult? “Madeline, I—”

“You both handled it extremely well. I think her husband believed her story.”

He shrugged. “It’s true, you know. Everything she said. We met about six years ago when I was at Oxford. I haven’t seen her since.”

“But that’s not the whole story.”

“No.”

She studied his face for a long moment. “I suppose it was exactly what I’m thinking it was.”

He nodded. This was supposed to be behind him. God forgive him, did it have to come up just now? Right before the wedding?

Her mild expression did not change. “Will you tell me about it?”

“There’s not much to it.” He drew a deep breath. “I was eighteen. I’d been away at school before, of course, but I was just beginning to feel as if I were truly on my own. I saw Fleur

in a production of *Ruddigore* at the local theater. I thought she was amazing, but I never expected to see her except on the stage. But when my friends and I went to have dinner afterward, there she was with three or four other girls from the troupe. I just went to tell her how much I had enjoyed the performance, and she asked us all to join them.”

There was a touch of wryness in Madeline’s faint smile. “And you were smitten.”

“I was. I won’t deny it. But I never thought anything would ever come of it. I didn’t think we’d ever even meet after that, but the next day I ran into her in a tea shop near my college, and again she invited me to sit with her. Here she was, an older woman by five years and an actress, God save us, just the sort I’d been warned away from, and she was as sweet and ladylike as any of the girls I’d been told were proper company. I asked if she’d dine with me after her performance the next night, and she said she would. I saw her almost every night after that. We’d go to dinner after the show was over and talk for hours about nothing.”

“Sounds harmless enough.”

“Perhaps. It should have been. It was.” He shrugged again. “It was until a couple of weeks later. I had taken her to dinner at a little French place, and I could tell the whole time that she was upset. She kept saying it was nothing, but when I took her to her door, she started to cry. She held on to me and cried as if her heart were breaking. I couldn’t leave her that way, so I took her inside. I’d never even stepped foot in the place before. It’s . . . well, it was something I was always careful never to do with any of the girls I saw. Call me Victorian if you like, but I’d seen too many of my friends get into trouble too easily. Anyway, that night I told myself it would

be all right, that I couldn't just dump a lady on her doorstep when she was in such a state."

Madeline nodded. "So you took her inside."

"I did." He let the air seep out of his lungs. "At first she wouldn't tell me why she was so upset. Then she said it was because the troupe were moving on after the Saturday night show and we'd likely not see each other again. I told her if she married me, she wouldn't have to go with the troupe at all. Then she was kissing me and, well, it wasn't anything like the good-night kisses we'd shared before." He felt his face getting hot. "Do I need to say anything more?"

She shook her head. "Did you love her?"

"I thought I did. I was infatuated with her. I wanted her. But, no, I didn't love her. There was always something . . . distant about her, as if she were playing a role and not letting me see her true self."

"And that didn't bother you?"

His smile turned bitter. "It was a very charming role."

"When you were with her, why didn't you just stop?"

"I couldn't. I . . ." He trailed off, laughing faintly. "Forgive me, darling. I mean to be always and entirely honest with you, and that's not precisely true. I didn't stop because I chose not to. Whatever else I've told myself since, that's how it was. I thought we were in love. I thought we were going to be married. I thought that would make it all right. There are a lot of little decisions one makes between good night at the door and good morning under the coverlet, and I made all the wrong ones. Still, that was the last time I saw her."

She squeezed his arm. "At least that was the end of it."

"The end of it," he said, "but not the worst of it."

There was a touch of wariness in her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Afterward, though I knew it would be a scandal back in Farthering St. John, I proposed to her. I thought surely she would want to marry me then. I thought surely we must be in love. After what we’d just done, what else could it be?” He leaned over, elbows on his knees, head in his hands. “The more fool me.”

“Why do you say that?”

He cringed inside, his pride smarting from what he’d already told her, but she deserved to know it all. She shouldn’t, God forbid, hear it from anyone else.

“When I said I would be quite honored if she would consent to be my wife, she only laughed and said her husband wouldn’t think much of the arrangement.”

Madeline’s eyes went wide. “She was already married?”

He nodded, searching her face, trying to read her thoughts.

“To Mr. Landis?”

He shook his head. “Her name was Hargreaves then. I believe her husband was an older chap, MP or something, though they were already living apart. I didn’t much care by then. Whether he died or divorced her at that point, I can’t say.” He gave her a grim little smile. “I got the distinct impression at the time that I wasn’t her only intrigue, so maybe it wasn’t solely because of me that the marriage ended. The divorce ruined his political career too, I’ve heard.”

“Either way, she must have married Mr. Landis not long after.”

“Right.” Drew sat up straight again, forcing his expression into more pleasant lines. “He mentioned they’d been married five years now.”

She didn't say anything to that, and for a while they just sat there. She studied her engagement ring, the one his grandfather Elliot Farthering had given to his grandmother Amelia. The band was an elegant crisscross design filled with round channel-set diamonds, accented with round pave diamonds all the way around. Crowning it was a brilliant square-cut white diamond, lavish without being gaudy. Over the past three months he had grown accustomed to seeing it there on her hand.

"What are you thinking?" he asked finally.

She shook her head, still staring at her ring.

"Come on, darling." He pushed a stray lock of her hair back behind her ear. "Tell me what's on your mind."

"Nothing really. Nothing important."

"It must be important to put that look on your face." He looked at the ring and then into her eyes. "Regrets?"

Again she shook her head, and he bit his lip. What was he to say to her?

"Darling, I have no excuses for you. I was foolish. I hope you can forgive me."

"She's very beautiful, isn't she?" Madeline smoothed the cream-colored tulle of her dress. "And very . . . dramatic. It's no wonder you were taken with her."

"One always knows when she's in the room," he said with an attempt at lightness. "I daresay she was born to be on the stage."

Madeline looked at him, her gaze piercing. "Are you sorry you couldn't marry her? I mean, if she hadn't already been married, would you have truly wanted to marry her?"

"I did at the time, certainly. I'm sure after . . . after that night, I would have. As wrong as it was, I thank God now

that she was married already. I can only think it would be torment to be her husband.”

“Mr. Landis seems taken with her.”

“He does, poor chap. Perhaps, and I hope so sincerely, she has changed her ways. Sometimes motherhood has a settling effect.”

Madeline shrugged. “And sometimes people merely grow up.”

He was silent for a long moment, and then he put his arm around her. “Do forgive me, darling. If there were any way I could change the past, I swear I would. I wouldn’t hurt or disappoint you for all the world.”

Her fingers were light and gentle in his hair. “You were still just a boy. You made a mistake.”

He looked away from her. “It was cheap. It was tawdry. Good heavens, I was looking for something grand and glorious and real, and she was only playing.”

She turned his face back to her. “It’s been six years, darling. I think it’s time you forgave her and yourself.”

He searched her eyes. “And will you forgive me, as well? For not being the paragon you were looking for?”

“I was looking for a man, darling. You’re already nearly too perfect anyway. And if you were any better, what would you want with me?”

He chuckled. “Not perfect, my love, as you well know, but perfectly happy and perfectly in love.”

The sparkle came back into her periwinkle eyes. “I don’t suppose I could ask for more than that, could I?”

“Not and reasonably expect to be satisfied, no.”

She looked into his eyes for a moment more. Then her lashes fell to her cheeks. “Will you do something for me, Drew?”

“If I am able, yes. What is it you want? Buckingham Palace? The Taj Mahal?”

She shook her head, completely somber. “I would like it very much, though, if we didn’t have to have the Landises to dinner again.”

He winced. “That would be rather awkward at this point, wouldn’t it? Consider it done. If I need to socialize with Landis, I’ll have him round to my club. How would that be?”

She put her arms around his neck and smiled into his eyes once more. “That would be perfectly perfect.”