



A DREW
FARTHERING
MYSTERY

Dressed
-for-
DEATH

JULIANNA
DEERING



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To the One who is forever faithful

— One —

Tell me again why I let you talk me into this?” Drew Farthering tugged at the starched cravat tied high under his chin and made a face at the little boy sniggering at him from the back seat of the Morris Eight passing on the other side of the road. He felt all kinds of fool driving through Hampshire dressed like a Regency buck, beaver hat, walking stick and all, but those were the rules. At least it wasn’t a long drive.

Madeline swatted him with one white-gloved hand. “Leave that alone. Plumfield did a beautiful job tying it, and I don’t want it ruined before we even get there.”

He sighed, and she leaned over to kiss his cheek.

“You let me talk you into this, darling,” Madeline said, “because you adore me and it was the only thing I wanted for our anniversary.”

“Ah, yes, the ever-glorious tenth of December, 1932. Still, six months isn’t a proper anniversary, you know.” He huffed, hiding his smile from her. “You’re just trying to set Nick up with your friend Carrie again.”

She did look perfectly fetching in her white muslin dress and short Spencer jacket. A broad-brimmed straw hat, trimmed with silk violets and held on with a wide cherry-colored ribbon just the shade of the jacket, finished the picture. She obviously knew just how tempting she was.

“Not again,” she said. “Still. And this time he won’t have to be running around seeing to everything at the estate. They’ll both have a whole week of enjoying themselves and getting to know each other better.” She slipped her arm through Drew’s and snuggled against him. “I’m glad your friends don’t mind if we bring them along.”

“Old Cummins? Of course he doesn’t mind. The more the merrier, that’s his motto. His wife’s a bit quieter, but I’m sure you’ll like her. They’re both perfectly grand. A bit Victorian, mind you, yet not stuffy. Oh, Tal and his fiancée will be there, as well. He and Nick and I will have a chance to catch up. Haven’t seen him since Oxford.”

“What’s he like?” Madeline asked, resting her head on his shoulder.

“He’s a good chap. Good at history and languages, though no head for figures at all. He’d have punked out in mathematics if Nick hadn’t pulled him through. Can’t tell you I was much better. Oh, I say!”

The Rolls-Royce crested a hill, giving them a glorious view of Winteroak House, the Cummins estate. It gleamed white in the lush sea of green grass surrounding it, a grand manor house in the Georgian style, three floors high and at least fifteen windows wide. The entrance was grander still with columns and a marble bas-relief of the family coat of arms above the doorway. No matter if the family belonging to the coat of arms happened to have sold the house decades before.

“I’ve always thought it a nice view of the Solent,” Drew said, and she frowned.

“What’s that?”

“The Solent? It’s right there, between this shore and the Isle of Wight over there. We used to go bathing in the water every day when we came down here. And we’d dig fossils on the beach and in the old caves. It was grand.”

Madeline sat up, eyes shining as she looked down on it all. “How long has it been since you’ve been here?”

“Oh, several years now. I’d forgotten how nice it is. Tal had Nick and me down from school during the hols a few times. That is when we weren’t up at Farthering Place. I think my parents spent some time here with Mr. and Mrs. Cummins when they were first married, but mostly the Cumminses came up to visit us.”

“I hope Nick won’t be late,” she said, looking back at the road behind them. “Carrie’s ship was supposed to be in at two-ten.”

“Don’t worry, darling. There’s no chance he’ll miss that ship. Not since he knows Carrie’s on it. Once they get in, though, they’ll all have to change into the right togs before they come out here. And you know how girls are about taking forever to dress.”

She pursed her lips. “And you swore it was worth the wait.”

“I said *you* were worth the wait.” He squeezed her a little closer to him. “And I’ll stand by that statement, but I can’t answer for anyone else. I suppose they could have gotten here before us, but we won’t know till we get inside.”

By then they were at the park gates. A bewigged and liveried servant bowed deeply as Drew brought the Rolls to a stop.

“Good afternoon, sir.”

He held out his hand, and Drew gave him their invitation.

“Welcome to Winteroak House, Mr. and Mrs. Farthering.” He opened Madeline’s door and handed her out as another servant swung open the gates. “If you would go through, madam, sir, Dryden will drive you down to the house.”

Dryden, standing beside a vintage barouche pulled by perfectly matched bays, tipped his hat.

Drew frowned and got out of the car. “Wouldn’t it be easier if we drove to the house? I mean, I wouldn’t want anyone to have to bother with the Rolls and all that.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the first man, “but Mr. Cummins is very particular on this point. He says we’re not to allow anything less than a hundred years old past the gates. Guests excepted, of course. Jimmy here will see to your car and have your luggage brought up nice as you please.”

Drew glanced at the boy, who couldn’t have been older than sixteen, then at the Rolls, and then pleadingly at Madeline. Eyes twinkling, she took his arm and drew him toward the barouche.

“It’ll be fine, darling,” she murmured as the boy handed Drew his beaver hat and walking stick and then hopped behind the wheel.

“Not to worry, gov,” said the boy as he revved the engine. “I’ll treat ’er better than me own gran.”

Then with a spatter of gravel he and the Rolls were gone.

Drew looked longingly after them and sighed. “All right, Mrs. Farthering, shall we?”

She made a brief curtsy, head modestly lowered. “Thank you, sir.”

Before they reached the barouche, another car came over the rise and pulled up to the gates. It was Nick in the Daimler, with Carrie Holland in the front seat beside him. Drew

didn't recognize the young man, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old, who sat in the back.

"Madeline!" Carrie called, waving a white lace handkerchief.

Nick pulled up to the gate and handed over the appropriate invitation. Before the servant could get around to open the door for Carrie, she let herself out. With a squeal she ran to Madeline, and the two girls embraced.

"Oh, it's good to be back in England," Carrie said. "You've got to tell me everything about your honeymoon. Paris and Berlin and Venice, too. How utterly romantic!"

"You'll have to see my album," Madeline told her. "We have so many lovely pictures, don't we, Drew?"

"Now, now, none of that," Drew pretended to scold. "You know there were no photographs during the Regency. You two will have to talk about something else."

Madeline wrinkled her nose at him. "Well, Paris and Berlin and Venice were there, at any rate. We can talk about them."

"Certainly, just no photographs. Though I would have to say Miss Holland is certainly a picture in her own right."

Carrie laughed and blushed just the slightest bit. "And you're still a flatterer."

Nick smoothed down his tousled sandy hair, scrambled in the front seat for his tall hat and buff gloves, then came up beside her, taking her arm. "The truth is never flattery."

She was dressed in white muslin, just as Madeline was, but instead of a Spencer jacket and straw hat, she had on a moss-colored pelisse coat and a scoop-shaped capote hat trimmed with crocheted lace. One strawberry-blond curl fell artlessly down the side of her neck. Judging from Nick's rather smitten expression, the effect was not lost on him.

Madeline gave Drew a discreet elbow in the ribs, and with a cough he wiped the knowing grin from his face.

“It’s lovely to see you again.” He bowed over Carrie’s hand, just brushing it with his lips in fine Regency style. “And who have you brought along?”

“This is my brother, Billy.” She waved the boy over. “Daddy’s got some important business matters to see to and couldn’t get away. He wouldn’t let me come alone, so we thought Billy would do just as well. I hope it won’t be any trouble.”

She gave Drew an appealing smile, and he shook his head. “Not in the least, I’m sure. Our hosts are expecting a number of guests this week. I daresay, in a house this size, one more will be no problem. Billy, good to meet you.”

The boy was considerably taller than his diminutive older sister and had hair that was rather chestnut in color and eyes the same. All in all, he seemed rather typically American, sturdy and capable looking and, even though it wasn’t too obvious just now, of a naturally cheerful disposition. He looked almost swallowed up in his frothy cravat and too-large green tailcoat with brass buttons, but he was clearly doing his best to carry off the look with dignity.

Drew held out his hand, and the boy shook it, frowning slightly.

“It’s William,” he said, his South Carolina drawl very like Carrie’s. “My sister’d have you all think I was some hick from the backwoods.”

“William,” Drew amended. “Will?”

The boy finally cracked a smile. “Yeah. Will would do.”

“Will it is.” Drew gave him a friendly swat on the shoulder. “Best come along now. Nick, old man, you’ll have to leave the Daimler here. I’m told nothing newer than 1833, though preferably not later than 1820, is allowed past the

gates until the week is up, and no exceptions. Ladies, our carriage awaits.”

They all piled into the barouche and piled out again at the door of Winteroak House. Mr. and Mrs. Cummins were waiting for them, she in a lace mobcap and shawl, and he in buskins and an amber velvet smoking jacket.

“Ah, young Farthering!” He stepped onto the drive, his sturdy hands outstretched and his craggy face softened with a wide smile. “Come in, come in. And the lovely bride. Welcome!”

He gave a hand to each of them and leaned down to kiss Madeline’s cheek. “You must forgive us for not being able to come to the wedding, my dear, but perhaps we can make it up to you here, eh? And who have you brought along with you? I remember that young scoundrel there. Running Farthering Place these days, I hear. Always thought you’d come to a bad end.”

Nick grinned and shook hands with him. “Mr. Cummins. Very good to see you again, sir.” He made a slight bow to the lady of the house. “Ma’am.”

She positively beamed at them all. “Dear Drew and Nick. Whatever has happened to my young lads? Oh, it’s been far too long.”

“This is Miss Carrie Holland, Mrs. Farthering’s friend from the States, and her brother, Will,” Drew said. “Carrie and Will, our hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Cummins.” He, too, bowed to the lady of the house and then kissed her cheek. “Very good of you to have us all, ma’am.”

Mrs. Cummins looked at him fondly. “Do come in. All of you. Some of the guests have begun to arrive already. Beddows will show you all to your rooms. Your valet and Mrs. Farthering’s maid came with your things about an hour ago,

Drew dear, and I suppose the rest of you will have to fend for yourselves.” She patted Drew’s hand. “I’ve put you next to Tibby. I thought you’d all like to be together.”

“Mother, must you?” Talbot Cummins hurried down the steps, tall and lanky as ever, exasperated but smiling. “I suppose some pet names can never be got away from.”

His mother put her hand over her mouth. “Oh, dear, I’ve done it again, haven’t I? You must all forgive me even if my son can’t. Old habits, you know.”

“Come along now, Margaret,” Mr. Cummins said. “Perhaps we ought to see to our other guests and let the boys catch up a bit. All of you, make yourselves at home.”

Tal chuckled once his parents had gone inside. “She’s an old dear, even if she does forget I’ve been out of the nursery some while.”

Drew shook his hand. “Tal, old man, good to see you. Has Bunny got here yet?”

“Come and gone,” Tal said with a chuckle.

“What’s that?”

“Got his dates mixed. He showed up in full Regency kit Monday last, inexpressibles and all. When we told him the party wasn’t for another week, he said that was all right because he suspected he was meant to be in the Argentine before the weekend anyway. And so off he went.”

Nick shook his head. “He never got to the church when Madeline and Drew were married, you know. Got lost in Basingstoke somehow.”

“Sorry you missed the wedding, Tal,” Drew said, “but you absolutely mustn’t miss the bride.”

“That’ll teach me to spend a year on the Continent. Last I heard, that Daphne Pomphrey-Hughes had set her cap at

you. Looks as if you made a fortuitous escape.” Tal bent over Madeline’s hand. “Best wishes, Mrs. Farthering.”

“Call me Madeline, please,” she told him, “and I promise I won’t call you Tibby.”

“It’s a bargain, Madeline. Nick, how are you?” Tal and Nick shook hands. “And who’s this you’ve got with you?”

“This is Miss Carrie Holland,” Nick said, “and her brother, Billy.”

Carrie curtsied. “Thanks for having us, Mr. Cummins.”

“Will, if you don’t mind,” Will said, glaring at Nick as he and Tal shook hands. “You’re not the only one who’s outgrown his nickname.”

“Don’t be silly,” Carrie said, and she smiled at Tal. “He’s been Billy all his life.”

“Well, come along,” Tal said, leading them into the grand foyer, where the tall windows spilled sunlight onto the pale marble floor. “Get settled in. Tea will be served in about half an hour. After that, I thought we of the younger set might enjoy—”

“Tal! There you are at last!”

A sylph of a girl, pale and wispily blond, glided partway down the stairs in ballet flats and a perfectly ordinary blue frock.

“What are you doing, Alice?” Tal called up to her, only half scolding. “You’d best not let Father catch you out of uniform, as it were. But come down and meet some people now that you’re here.” He turned back to his guests. “I suppose it’s rather silly, but you know how the old governor can be. If we’re to have a Regency house party, then we shall certainly do it up right, and no cheating.”

The girl came to his side, her blue eyes enormous and darkly shadowed. He slipped his arm around her waist.

“Drew and Madeline Farthering, Nick Dennison, Miss Carrie Holland and her brother, Will, darling. Everyone, this is my fiancée, Alice Henley.”

There were hearty congratulations and best wishes all around.

“So you see, Drew,” Tal said, fond eyes on Alice, “you’re not the only one who’s decided to take the matrimonial plunge.”

“I can’t wish anything better for you than that you both will be as happy as Madeline and I are.”

“Thank you,” Alice said softly, looking from Drew to Madeline and then up at Tal. “We . . . we need to talk.”

He furrowed his brow and shook his head almost imperceptibly.

“Tal,” she pressed. “I need you to—”

He managed a bit of a smile. “Go and get your party things on, darling. We’re all supposed to be enjoying ourselves this week. Leave the serious bits for afterwards. How’d that be?”

She nodded, wilting a bit, a shy apology in her expression. “Sorry I’m a bit out of sorts just now. It really is lovely to meet you all.”

Before anyone could make a proper reply, she scurried back up the stairs and was gone.

“Don’t mind her,” Tal said. “She’s generally steady as a stone, but this past week or two she’s been rather on edge. I’m hoping the party will take her mind off things for a while.”

“She seems quite a nice girl, Tal,” Drew said. “Everything all right?”

Tal glanced at the rest of the group and then shrugged lazily. “You know how girls are, old man, especially the engaged ones. We’ll work it out. Now come along. I’ll show you all where you’ll be staying.”

Drew and Madeline found themselves situated in a room

with an enormous four-poster hung with airy white linen bed curtains, a match to the ones that fluttered at the high windows. The room itself was rather heavy, paneled and floored in oak and softened with a Persian rug in creams and tans.

“Oh, it’s a lovely room,” Madeline said. “Nice and sunny like ours at home.”

“Splendid.” Drew scanned the titles on the well-stocked shelf built into the window seat. “I’m glad we have this.”

“I’m glad we have *this*,” she replied, peeping into the adjoining bathroom. “How many people do you think will be here this week?”

“Thirty or forty, I expect.” He came over to her, wrapping his arms around her from behind and nuzzling her neck. “I didn’t think you’d want to spend our anniversary with a whole crowd of people.”

She turned to face him, her periwinkle eyes sparkling. “Well, as you said, it’s not a proper anniversary.”

“So long as we’re properly husband and wife,” he said, touching his lips to hers, “I don’t care about the anniversary.”

“I am glad we came, though. It’s going to be such fun. I didn’t expect Mr. Cummins to be so strict, though. Not really.”

“It was printed right on the invitation. ‘Regency dress required at all times.’”

“Funny that your friend’s fiancée wasn’t dressed yet,” she mused. “What do you suppose she wanted to talk to him about?”

“Something that’s none of our business, I’m certain.” He tapped her nose with one finger. “And we aren’t going to make it our business.”

She pulled away from him with a laugh. “I’m not the one who finds sinister plots at every turn.”

“I’m well aware of the sinister plot you have in mind for this week. Step carefully, my girl, or you’ll very likely spoil something that’s progressing quite nicely all on its own.”

“You’ve seen it, too.” She threw herself against him again, arms around his neck. “Nick and Carrie are perfect together, don’t you think?”

He smiled into her eyes. “Darcy come to woo Miss Elizabeth Bennet, eh? Well, she will probably have at least one opportunity to fling herself into Nick’s arms and burst into tears on his chest.”

“I hope so, as long as it’s not because of anything too bad. But they’re more like Jane and Mr. Bingley, I’d say. Everything sweet and uncomplicated and both of them easy to get along with. He’d never be the brooding Mr. Darcy type. Not like you.”

He laughed. “Me? I don’t brood. I don’t stand about at parties and look cross, and I certainly wasn’t as slow as he was to realize the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow. Of course, he hadn’t the glorious inspiration I have.”

“Carrie’s right,” she said, just a hint of a blush coming into her cheeks. “You *are* a flatterer.”

“Oh no. The truth is never flattery. Didn’t you hear Nick earlier? He got that one from me, you know.”

She feathered her fingers through the hair at the back of his neck. “I believe, sir, that you are one of those fellows who, when he is alone, amuses himself with making up compliments he might spring upon unwitting young ladies who would suppose them extemporaneous.”

“Well, you truly must make up your mind, darling. Am I meant to be Mr. Collins or Mr. Darcy? Shall I flatter or shall I brood?”

She pursed her lips, her blue eyes twinkling. “I think you shall flatter me outrageously when I am with you and brood when I am not.”

He considered for a moment and then nodded. “Fair enough.”

Without warning he dipped her backward, making her squeal.

“My dear Mrs. Farthering,” he breathed, his eyes fixed on hers, “you must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

She giggled, though her breath was a little bit faster than usual. “You, sir, are a plagiarist.”

He brought his lips close to hers and then, with a grin, gave her a smacking kiss and set her upright again. “The truth is never plagiarism. And it is true, even if that Darcy chappie said it first.”

She sighed and put her still-gloved hand to his cheek. “No wonder Miss Bennet wasn’t able to resist him for long. I hope Nick is as familiar with Austen’s works as you are.”

“Oh, very nice. All the while I’m kissing you, you’re thinking of Nick.”

“I was just thinking how it might help him with Carrie. Besides, it wasn’t a proper kiss anyway.”

“Not a proper kiss? I see.”

He gave her a smoldering glance, eyes focused on her lips that turned up a little at the corners, and kissed her most thoroughly.

“Better?” he murmured against her ear as she melted against him.

“Scoundrel,” she breathed. “You know it’s almost teatime and we’ll be expected.”

“Yes, I know.”

With the tiniest hint of a smirk he stepped back from her and adjusted his cravat. Then he offered her his arm and escorted her downstairs.



They found most of the guests already gathered in the library, a spacious room with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and tall windows that let the June sunshine pour through.

Madeline paused as they stepped inside. “It’s like going back a hundred years. Isn’t it pretty?”

“Apart from the girl reading that contraband edition of *Silver Screen*, very charming.”

The room itself dated well before the Regency, and to see it filled with men in cravats and top boots and ladies in silk slippers and French muslin dresses was quite an experience. There were about twenty people here already. A few were mutual friends of Drew’s family and the Cumminses, but most were strangers to Drew himself. Their host was quick to remedy that, situating himself between Drew and Madeline, linking arms with them both, and introducing them here and there. Then his eyes lit.

“You two simply must meet Monsieur Laurent. Rémy!”

Cummins dragged them both to an S-curve love seat elegantly placed in the library’s bow-window area. Just as elegantly placed was its occupant, a man of stylish middle age who lounged with a black-lacquer cigarette holder in one hand and a graceful curl of smoke dissipating over his pomaded head, watching his fellow guests with faint amusement.

Seeing Madeline, Laurent tapped his cigarette against the ashtray on the little table at the end of the love seat and rose. “Ah, Sterling, do introduce me to your charming friends.” He

smiled slyly, adding in a low purr, “*C’est une femme exquis que j’aimerais mieux connaître.*”

“My wife is exquisite indeed,” Drew said with a cool smile, “*et je ne m’inquiète jamais des individus qu’elle choisit pour lui tenir compagnie, à condition que ce soit véritablement elle qui les choisisse.*”

“Ah, yes, of course. A lady should always be allowed to choose the company she keeps.” Laurent’s lips twitched under his thin salt-and-pepper mustache. “Monsieur speaks French like a Frenchman.”

Drew inclined his head slightly. “You are too kind. And, in any language, I see my wife is given the respect she deserves.”

“An admirable trait. *J’espère que ce n’est pas contagieux.*”

Cummins chuckled. “I really must learn that talk, Rémy. I always feel I’m missing out on the best bits of the conversation.”

Madeline pursed her lips. “So do I.”

“Your husband and I were just discussing your dazzling loveliness and his good fortune in having met you before I did,” he said, the elaborate lace of his sleeve falling just so as he made a courtly bow and kissed her hand. “Madame, I am enchanted.”

“This is Mr. and Mrs. Farthering,” Cummins said. “They hail from Farthering St. John near Winchester. Drew and Madeline, this is Rémy Laurent. If my collection of wines is the finest in Hampshire, it is solely due to his good counsel and even better contacts on the Continent.”

“My family have been in the wine trade for nearly three hundred years,” Laurent said, “and Sterling and I have known each other for nearly that long. Since his son was just born, eh?”

“About then, yes.” Cummins cleared his throat, looking around the room, and then waved at a fidgeting rotund man

unmistakably dressed as the Prince Regent. “Oh, there’s old Ploughwright. Looks as though his wife managed to get him into that rig after all. Excuse me, will you? Ploughwright!”

He strode away, hands extended to his long-suffering friend, and Laurent smirked.

“You English. How you love the . . . disguises? No, the costumes. I have done business in your country these twenty-five years now and still sometimes the good English does not come to me.”

Madeline gestured to the roomful of people in Regency dress. “Do you also enjoy disguises?”

“Ah, madame, such pretenses are not for me.” Laurent ruffled his starched cravat with one hand. “I wear this because my friend he asks, but for me?” He shrugged. “I take a sip of claret and all the world knows whether or not it is a good year, and I need not speak a word. I see a beautiful woman?” He gave her a sly smile. “I cannot help that the husband grows angry when I am politeness itself.”

“You are misunderstood then.” Her expression was all gentle sweetness. “I am certain we will have no misunderstandings between us, seeing each other as clearly as we do.”

The Frenchman bowed in resignation. “Madame is most eloquent. I have often thought—” He broke off with a smile. “Do excuse me, both of you. My fool of a valet seems intent on interrupting. Yes, Adkins?”

He waved over a stocky young man with a sullen face, who had been lurking near the door.

“Beg pardon, sir,” Adkins said in a broad northern accent, “but I’m told it’s urgent you come to the telephone. Business, sir.”

“Ah.” Laurent bowed once more to Madeline. “It seems I am not to have even a holiday to myself. *Quel dommage*,

madame, but I am certain we shall meet again.” With a subtle smile he slipped out of the room, his valet scurrying behind him.

“I see Dad has introduced you to his pet wine expert,” Tal said, coming up to Drew and Madeline. “Have you met everybody else?”

Drew looked around the room. “Not strictly everybody. I suppose we’ll get to know them all over the course of the week. As Miss Austen says in *Emma*, ‘One cannot have too large a party.’”

“My Alice tends rather to agree with her Mrs. Elton. ‘There is nothing like staying home for real comfort.’”

Madeline scanned the room. “Drew and I were talking about *Pride and Prejudice* earlier. Is that Mr. Collins there?”

A stolid-looking young man somewhere between the age of twenty-five and thirty sat on the end of a sofa, talking to an elderly lady wearing a turban of orange and violet silk with an egg-sized ruby in front. The man himself wore a suit of somber black and a very plain white cravat, and on his lap was a broad-brimmed black hat.

Tal grinned. “That’s our vicar, Philip Broadhurst, and his mother. Come meet them.”

The vicar stood as Tal introduced him and bowed, hat over his heart. “Very good to meet you both. Tal has mentioned you before, Mr. Farthering. I wondered if you were the same Farthering we’ve read about in the papers the past few months.”

“I fear so,” Drew admitted, shaking the man’s hand. “But I assure you their accounts are often highly romanticized.”

“Here in Armitage Landing,” the vicar said, his fondness for the place obvious, “it’s unlikely you’ll have to deduce much more than which cards to play at loo.” He bowed to

Madeline. “Best wishes, Mrs. Farthing, on your marriage. I pray it will be a blessed one.”

Mrs. Broadhurst patted the sofa beside her. “Come sit down, my dear, and tell me about yourself. You are newly married?”

Madeline did as she was bidden. “A little more than six months now. I suppose that makes us newlyweds still.”

The older lady’s eyes were kind. “I was married to Philip’s father for thirty-two years, and all that time he kept surprising me with things I didn’t know about him yet. I never had a chance to get bored.”

There was a mischievous twinkle in Madeline’s eye. “My husband is always looking for crimes to solve. I think after another year or so, I’ll be glad not to be surprised.”

Drew cleared his throat. “Will you both be staying the week, Mr. Broadhurst?”

“Call me Philip,” the vicar replied. “Anyway, I realize we’re supposed to be back in Regency days and all that, but we’re not so formal here most of the time.”

Drew smiled, liking him already. “Philip then. Do call me Drew. I suppose your wife is about somewhere?”

“Actually, I haven’t got one.”

His mother lifted her eyes to the heavens but said nothing.

Broadhurst lowered his voice to a stage whisper. “I fear Mother agrees with that truth universally acknowledged. But since I have no fortune—good, bad, or indifferent—I fail to see how it applies to me.” He shook his head when his mother sighed. “I tell you, Mother, I will know the right girl when I meet her.” He turned again to Drew. “Be glad you’re already married.”

Drew chuckled. “But where is your bride-to-be, Tal? Madeline and I would love to get to know her better.”

“I suppose I ought to send out a search party,” Tal said with

a sigh. “I don’t know what’s got into the girl. She’s not usually like this. Of course, she’s been helping Mother with all the arrangements for the party, so they’re both a bit out of sorts.”

“And what all is planned for the week?”

“Oh, they’ve got it all set out. Every day we’re to do something from the Regency period. Dinner and cards most evenings, though we’re on our honor to play nothing but faro, whist, loo, macao and rouge-et-noir. That’s all we have on for tonight, so everyone should have a chance to get settled in and meet everyone else. Tomorrow night, Mother’s arranged for charades or a pantomime of some sort, and if the weather stays fine we’re to cruise up to Beaulieu on Wednesday on Monsieur Laurent’s yacht.”

“Oooh,” Madeline said. “That sounds lovely.”

“The river’s the private property of Lord Montagu,” Tal said, “but we’ll try not to do it any permanent damage. There’s the Palace House and the Abbey Church to see, too. We rather thought our American contingent would enjoy visiting our modest local sights.”

“Ah, excellent,” Drew said. “Should be fun.”

“And there’s to be riding and a picnic on Thursday,” Tal added. “A small troupe of actors is to come perform on Friday evening—can’t remember the name of the play—and on Saturday we’ll end with a grand ball. And if you’re not thoroughly sick of playing dress-up by Sunday morning, that’s your own lookout.”

Madeline smiled up at him. “It all sounds delicious. This is my anniversary present,” she said to Mrs. Broadhurst, “so my husband isn’t allowed to complain about the clothes or the dancing.”

“Oh, about that.” Tal glanced at Drew and coughed. “About the dancing.”

Dressed for Death

Drew noticed that Madeline was taking great care not to look his way. “Yes?”

Tal shrugged a bit. “Well, I’m afraid Mother has arranged for all of us to have—”

“I’m not taking dancing lessons!”