

Chapter 1 - It's a Mouth of Many Talents

The prior year had been a terrible one for the battered Berwick estate—a year of tragedy and turmoil. Both the earl and viscount had been killed in an accident, and the new, younger earl had been reluctant and untested. His Dallas fiancée had resisted the new situation, and his younger brother had seethed with resentment over his older brother's inheritance. The earldom itself had been on the brink of insolvency.

As the new year dawned, things were looking better. The new Earl of Berwick had quickly come up to speed and had organized investors, including his fiancée's father, to find a way forward for the struggling estate, and his fiancée had come to terms with a new life that would include being a countess in Scotland. As for the brother, he was living in Nice, away from the temptation to make trouble.

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“I’m going to put the engagement announcement in this weekend’s newspaper,” said Lady Catriona, looking across the dinner table at her son, Kade, the new Earl of Berwick, and his fiancée, Cassandra, known to her friends as Cassie. A lengthy announcement had appeared in the Dallas newspapers a couple weeks earlier, but Cassie’s mother, Cissy, had left it up to Kade’s mother to do the one in Scotland, where announcements were usually much shorter and simpler.

“That’s fine,” replied Kade.

“You realize, darling, that you’re of interest now, so the newspapers may well turn it into a full story.” She watched as Kade grimaced.

“You’re an earl now,” pointed out Cassie, who’d been mostly silent up until now. “Can’t you just tell them not to?”

Kade and his mother both laughed. “It’s not that simple,” answered Kade, his eyes crinkled in amusement, “although god knows it would be much easier if it were.”

“Well, whatever turns up in the paper, Mama will want a copy.”

“We’ll make sure she’s kept in the loop,” Lady Catriona assured her. “I’m looking forward to meeting her.”

True to Lady Catriona’s prediction, the newspapers did indeed pick up on the story that the new Earl of Berwick was planning to marry a young woman from Texas, and the result was a lengthy article complete with several photos that was run in most of the major newspapers in Scotland. After all, who didn’t like a romance between a tall, dark, and handsome earl and his smiling blonde Texas lass?

Cassie dutifully bought several copies of the Inverness paper and cut the articles out to send to Cissy. She also saved one for her own scrapbook that she was planning to make.

A hundred and fifty miles to the south, the Earl of Morleton was reading an article in *The Scotsman*, an Edinburgh newspaper, about the new Earl of Berwick up by Inverness and his fiancée from Texas. As he read, he frowned slightly. His own son, Quinn, the viscount, had married a young woman from Houston a couple years earlier, and while he’d come to accept the situation, especially after she gave birth to an heir, he still didn’t fully approve of bringing outsiders into an

old and venerable tradition. He shook his head as he set the paper aside. He knew it was a sign of his age, but he missed the old ways.

In his own house on the estate, Quinn was reading the same story but with a very different reaction.

“Have you been matchmaking in your free time?” he asked his wife, Mandy, with a twinkle in his eyes.

“What do you mean?”

“It seems you’re getting reinforcements. The Earl of Berwick is engaged to a young woman from Dallas.”

“Really?” It was almost a squeal. Then she frowned slightly. “I’ve never heard of him before. Does he live around here?”

“No, lass. He’s up by Inverness. Do you remember several months ago when an earl and his son were both killed in an accident?”

She nodded, and he continued. “This is the new earl, who’s in his early thirties.”

“Do you think we could meet them?”

Quinn smiled at her again. “Well, I can send him a congratulatory note and mention the Texas connection, but we really can’t push ourselves on them.”

“It’s not pushing,” replied Mandy. “His fiancée might like to meet someone else from Texas who married a Scottish peer. I’ll fill her in on all the dirt.” Quinn raised his eyebrows and she giggled.

“I’ll send him a congratulatory note.”

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Kade had been working hard on some of the preliminary plans for the first round of the Berwick transformation, a project that would take many years. One of the first undertakings was turning an old seventeenth-century house into a museum with a shop attached. Cassie was going to oversee the design of the museum and choose the displays, and her own sketchings would be the feature of the shop.

Kade wanted to go look at similar museums on other estates, so he’d been doing some research, and the one that seemed the most like what he envisioned was down by Edinburgh on the Morleton estate. He sent the earl a note asking if they could come look at it and ask some questions, and the following week he received a courteous reply inviting them to come at their leisure and to simply let him know ahead of time so he could receive them.

Since the Earl of Morleton had just the week before read the engagement announcement, he was aware that the Earl of Berwick was quite young, so he asked his son, Quinn, to be the one to handle the visit. Quinn smiled as he agreed, knowing that Mandy would be delighted. The Earl of Berwick and his Texas fiancée would visit the week after next.

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Cassie was happily caught up in the plans for the new museum and shop. Kade gave her keys so she could go into Dowager House as well as Grieve House, two of the other houses on the estate, anytime she wanted, and he promised to take her back to another unused house, too.

“So, now that it’s for work, I should be able to go into Linwood whenever I want, too,” she announced, looking at him expectantly. Linwood was the huge estate house that traditionally would have been the earl’s residence, but it was in very bad condition and hadn’t been lived in for at least three generations.

“You think that, do you?” Kade asked her, his eyebrows raised.

“Yes, I do. You can’t expect me to work without full access to materials and ideas.”

“Nice try, but no go.”

Because of potential dangers, Kade had put Linwood strictly off limits unless he was with her, but several months earlier she’d snuck in and spent several hours sketching views of the beautiful old house, an escapade that had earned her a sound spanking from Kade.

“If you’re not going to give the artist access to the scenes to be sketched, how do you expect to have drawings to sell?”

“I expect you to concentrate on the other houses plus the outdoor vistas, including exterior views of Linwood. There’s no immediate rush, you know. We don’t even have the museum going.”

“What if I promise to wear a helmet?”

“You just can’t stand it when someone tells you ‘no,’ can you?”

“I just can’t stand it when someone interferes with my work.”

Kade chuckled in spite of himself. “You know, they say the best art comes from tortured souls—from people whose lives are full of turmoil and passion. Maybe I should play the mean earl role and see what happens to your artistic vision.”

“I thought you already were playing that part.”

“Not yet, but I’m certainly getting inspired,” he answered, smiling at her perversely.

“I might decide to take another trip,” she announced huffily. “What do you think about that?”

“I think it’s a great idea. I was going to talk to you about it.”

Cassie stared at him in amazement. After Kade had become the earl and she’d fully realized how much that changed their future plans for a life in Texas, she’d returned to the States to think things through, and the relationship had come close to breaking.

“You’re supposed to want me here, not send me away,” she grumbled, a pout on her face.

“I do want you, totally and completely, but I still think you need to take another trip. I’ve been thinking about it, and I think you should let your mother help you choose your wedding dress. She was very gracious about giving up her wedding plans so the wedding could be here, but that’s something you could let her participate in. What do you think?”

“If you send me back to Dallas in the winter, I probably won’t come back until the weather here is nicer again.”

“Then I’ll have to come get you again.” He paused and looked at her seriously. “I hate the idea of your being gone again, but I think your mother deserves to participate as much as she can. If you go back there to dress shop, you two can do some other planning, too. Just because the wedding’s over here doesn’t mean she should lose out on being an active part of the planning.”

“Why couldn’t she come here?” Cassie asked. “That would give her a chance to see the church and reception location, and then we could go to London to shop. What do you think?”

“That would be a good idea, too, but I wasn’t sure she’d want to come.”

“Winter isn’t exactly Scotland’s finest time, but she’ll want to see the locations. Of course she’ll probably talk your mother to death, so maybe it’s not such a great idea after all. People here might not like me after they meet her.”

Kade looked at her with a frown. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but haven’t you gotten in trouble before for talking disrespectfully about your mother.”

“If it’s the truth, it’s not disrespectful.”

“Where did you get that gem from?”

“It’s common sense.”

“So if I comment on someone’s body odor, it’s not rude because it’s true?”

Cassie giggled. “Do you know a lot of people with body odor?” She got up and went over and sat down on Kade’s lap. “How about me? Do I have body odor?” She rubbed herself against him playfully.

“Is that your way of telling me this conversation is at an end?” he asked, putting his hands around her small waist. He wondered momentarily what she’d look like coming towards him in a beautiful bridal gown and wished he didn’t have to wait until June to find out.

“Do you want me to ask my mother about coming over?” she asked as he wrapped her in his arms and pulled her close.

“Yes. I think she should come spend at least several weeks, maybe more. What do you think?”

“I think you’ll be sorry,” she giggled.

“Her daughter may be, too, if she’s not careful.”

“Is this the mean earl act?”

“No, it’s the my-fiancée-better-behave act.”

“Well, then, you’re lucky, because I wouldn’t know how to be any other way.”

Kade snorted. “Lying is a sin, you know.”

“What kind of lying? Lying with my fiancé? Is that a sin? Because if it is, you’ll have to find somewhere else to sleep tonight.” She shot him a look of pure challenge.

Kade set her on the floor and stood up, then reached down and picked her up in his arms. “I think we should move this conversation to the bedroom. It’s about run its course here.”

“I can go on and on.”

“I know you can, which is why we’re moving to the bedroom. I’d much rather see your boundless energy used for better purposes.”

“Is the earl in a randy mood?”

Kade laughed.

“What’s so funny?”

“Randy has a second, archaic meaning in Scotland.”

“Is it good or bad?”

“Neither, just different. In the old days it meant rude and aggressive.”

“So we’re back to the earl act,” she said, grinning.

Kade put her down on the bedroom floor, then gave her a playful smack on her bottom. “I must be totally crazy to marry a woman with a mouth like yours.”

“It’s a mouth of many talents,” she retorted, batting her eyelashes at him and giving him her best seductive look.

“That it is, lass. That it is.”

Chapter 2 - Is There a Sanity Test for New Earls?

“This is like being in the wilds,” commented Cassie as she looked out the car window. They were on their way down to the Morleton estate near Edinburgh, and the roadway ran through the western edge of the Cairngorn National Park. It was the first week of February, and they were lucky that the weather was clear, leaving the snowy mountains visible and the driving good.

“Where in the world would you shop if you lived out here?” she wondered.

Kade chuckled. “The same kinds of places all those people in Wyoming and the Panhandle do, I suppose. You’d learn to plan ahead, that’s for sure.” Kade had taken her to visit family ranches in both of those places, and she’d been dismayed by the emptiness of the land.

“Have you ever met the people we’re visiting?”

“No, but remember, I’ve been out of the loop for a number of years. It’s quite probable that my grandfather met the earl at some point, and the Morleton estate probably sent condolences when my uncle and cousin died.”

“So do all the earls know each other?”

“They generally know *of* each other, but, at a personal level, no, they don’t really know each other.”

“I hope this isn’t some crotchety old guy.”

“I told you that his son is the one we’re going to mostly deal with. We’ll probably meet the earl, but it’s the viscount who has the wife from Houston.”

“You won’t have a viscount until we have a son, will you?”

“No. Did you want to get started on that project?”

Cassie laughed. “Hold your horses, big guy.” She looked out the window at the winter scenery and then turned towards him again. “Will our son automatically be a viscount, the way you were automatically the earl?”

“No. I’ll have to give him the title, and I probably won’t do that until he’s older. I can’t see any reason for a four-year-old to be a viscount.” He looked amused.

“But if you died, would he automatically be the earl, even at age four?”

“Yes.”

“What a crazy system!”

“You’ll keep that thought to yourself while we’re visiting the Morleton estate, won’t you?”

“Maybe.” She gave him one of her mischievous smiles, and her eyes sparkled with imagined possibilities.

“Please remember we’re the ones asking a favor here,” he reminded her, glancing over at her with what she referred to as his ‘earl look.’ “Insulting our hosts would be a very poor way to repay them.”

“I have no intention of insulting this viscount,” she replied indignantly. “Anyone smart enough to choose a Texas wife is probably a very good guy.”

Several hours later they checked into The Caledonian in central Edinburgh, a luxury hotel in the Waldorf-Astoria chain. Kade was intent on making sure Cassie enjoyed her visit to Edinburgh, and so had planned a trip of several days, allowing time for her to get acquainted with the capital city, shop, and visit some restaurants.

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“I could live here,” announced Cassie that evening as they returned to their room. “It’s old, but there’s a lot more here than in Inverness. I liked Debenham’s, and Poncho Villa’s wasn’t bad.” She’d been delighted to discover a restaurant that had fairly good Tex-Mex food. “Maybe we could live here and you could commute.”

“Nice try.”

“We could keep a list of all the different cities we make love in,” she suggested, half jokingly.

“That’s a much better suggestion.”

As she frequently did, Cassie moved seamlessly from subject to subject, and now she tried a third. “Are you going to leave Blaire in the Dallas office permanently?”

Blaire was Kade’s younger sister, and after Kade had unexpectedly inherited the earldom, he’d sent her to Dallas to help do what he’d been doing when he’d met Cassie, which was looking after his mother’s inherited business interests in America.

“I’m not sure what’s going to happen there,” he replied, picking up the room service menu to check for a bottle of wine. “Why do you ask?”

“She’s going to be my maid of honor, and I’d like to have her back here while we’re planning the wedding.”

Kade grinned at her. “Shall I close the office until June?”

“Blaire’s part, yes,” she replied, choosing to ignore the fact he’d only been kidding.

“You can’t talk to her on the phone?”

“Well, that’s a lot of fun! I want to go shopping with her and things like that. If I have to live in exile with you, the least you can do is let me have some company.”

He wouldn’t admit it to her, but he probably would bring Blaire back if that’s what she wanted. After how close he’d come to losing her recently, he was very conscious of trying to make her transition to Scotland as easy as possible.

“How about a bottle of Côtes du Rhône?”

“Whatever. I’m not a wine expert.”

“Nor am I, but this should be pleasant for just sitting and sipping.”

“We could get smashed,” she suggested, laughing.

“And why would we want to do that?”

“Just for fun.”

“Why don’t we wait until we’re at home to get smashed, as you call it. I need to drive, and I think it would be nice if we didn’t turn up tomorrow morning with hangovers.”

Cassie gave him a small pout. “Ever since you became an earl, you sound like a dry old schoolmaster.”

“Is that so?” His eyebrows were moving, and he had a smile on his face.

“Yes, that’s so.”

“Perhaps you’d like a demonstration of how this dry old schoolmaster makes love.”

“That would work.” She came over and climbed onto his lap, grinning.

“So, should I order the wine, or would it be wasted?”

“Probably wasted. I want to see your schoolmaster skills.”

Kade smiled. “How about if we start with some maths—subtraction, for example.” He looked over her clothing and then slipped off her shrug. “Five minus one is...”

Cassie looked at him as if he were crazy, so he pulled her face close and kissed it. “Scottish schoolmasters can be very unforgiving of pupils who can’t answer simple questions.” He started unbuttoning her silk blouse, but Cassie grabbed his hand.

“I’m going to have to report you to the school board if you continue with this shocking behavior.”

Kade freed his hand and continued unbuttoning. “Shock comes later. We have to finish our maths lesson first.” He completed his task and slipped the blouse off, laying it next to him on the bed with the shrug. “All right, that’s two items now, so five minus two is…”

“Is there a sanity test for new earls?”

“No, my pretty,” replied Kade, giving her his best impression of an evil laugh. “We inbreed and inbreed until we’re all quite barking mad, and then we lure young innocents into our lairs.” He rubbed his hands together gleefully and then added, “Of course, since you’re not innocent, you needn’t worry.”

Cassie punched him in the arm, and he grabbed her fist and held it. “Dry old schoolmasters frown on being hit and normally return the favor.”

“You won’t,” answered Cassie confidently. “You’d never hit me like that.”

“You’re right, I wouldn’t hit you like that, but I have no problem turning you over and spanking your impertinent little bottom. In fact, I’d say it’s probably way overdue for some attention.”

“What makes my bottom impertinent?”

“Because it’s yours. Everything about you is impertinent.”

“Well, if I’m impertinent, then you should be used to it by now.” She smirked at him and then added, “That would be a good book title: *The Schoolmaster and the Impertinent Miss.*”

“Lass.”

“What?”

“Lass. You’re in Scotland, so it should be *The Impertinent Lass*, and I warned you earlier about Scottish schoolmasters. When I was young, you didn’t want to mess with them.”

“You put in the engagement announcement that you were educated privately.”

“I was, but there were still schoolmasters.”

“Well, I don’t know about *them*, but the one who started undressing me needs to get me a sweater, because I’m cold.”

Kade immediately pulled her against him and wrapped his arms around her. “Is that better?”

“Mm-m.”

“All right, I’ll hurry up.” He stood her in front of him again and had her step out of her wool slacks, leaving her in only her ‘littles.’ She shivered slightly, and he leaned forward to unhook her bra.

“We need to toughen you up, lass. You can’t be shivering in a heated room.”

“Or maybe I’ll go back to Debenham’s and buy some of those flannel-lined granny knickers I was laughing at, and some undershirts to go with them. I wonder how sexy I’ll be then.”

“Sexy enough to still keep this old schoolmaster coming around,” he promised, looking highly amused.

“Well, I’m done. I’m going to get under the covers.” She moved past him and crawled into the big, inviting bed with its thick duvet.

“I didn’t finish undressing you.”

Cassie moved around under the covers and then brought her hand out holding the tiny aqua panty. "Here. I finished your homework for you." She grinned as she threw it directly at him and then giggled and pulled the covers over her head when he tried to grab her.

"I'm going to have to teach you some manners, aren't I?"

"Good luck with that."

"I have very effective teaching methods," he replied, smiling suggestively as he stood up and started stripping off his own clothes. Then he blew on his hands, rubbed them together in anticipation, and pulled back the covers enough to slide into bed next to her.

He barely had pulled the duvet back over him when he felt a soft body snuggle up next to him.

"If this is the way you teach in Scotland, I'm surprised you don't have a bigger population," she said, giggling as she put her arm on his chest. He rolled over on top of her and started kissing and nibbling on her neck. Then he slowly started working his way down, disappearing under the covers as he went. He kissed all around her chest and then took turns sucking on her taut nipples.

"Your body is a work of art," he took time to say. "Maybe we should sell pictures of you in the new shop. That should garner some attention."

"In my new flannel knickers?"

"I had something else in mind."

"So you're going to rescue the estate by selling porn pictures of your wife? That should make you a name over here. I wonder if the viscount tomorrow is as weird as you are?"

"Oh, at least as weird, I'm sure." He chuckled. "He married a Texan, right? We must be a crazy bunch."

Cassie reached for whatever she could get hold of and pinched him.

"Hey! I've told you before, no pinching."

"He who insults gets pinched," she replied primly.

"And she who pinches might get herself spanked," he replied, pinning her hand to the mattress.

Cassie sighed. "What would you do if you couldn't threaten me, I wonder?"

"Take action and forget the words," he answered, smiling. "We can try that if you'd rather."

"I thought you were going to be a lover tonight, and instead you're harassing me again."

"Poor baby." Kade disappeared under the covers and resumed his attentions, kissing her all across her stomach and running his hands slowly up and down her thighs. He caressed her body, admiring its soft curves, and then slipped his hand between her legs.

"Your body seems happy enough with me," he commented. He kissed her then, still keeping his hand in place, and as he felt her quiver, he increased the pressure of his hand and took a nipple in his mouth once more, feeling her squirm with the sensation. He retreated further under the covers, opened her legs, and buried his face in her treasure, first teasing her with his tongue, and then, as he felt her start to stiffen, covering her warm, wet folds with his mouth and kissing with soft ferocity.

Cassie's surrender came quickly. "Oh, god, oh, god," she moaned as wave after wave of pure pleasure undulated through her body. He kept his mouth on her until he felt the last ripple fade, and then he joined her and held her as her breathing returned to normal.

"Wow," was all she said, but her smile spoke several languages.

They lay there quietly for several minutes, entwined, and then Kade started kissing her again, this time exploring her mouth deeply, and she responded strongly. Cassie's high energy for life translated into her being the most interesting sexual partner Kade had ever had—passionate,

teasing, responsive... definitely unique. Now, as he held her and kissed her, her hands played softly over his body with a whispery touch, driving his own passion forward.

“Are you ready for me?” he asked.

“Always,” came her seductive answer, and he entered her, feeling again the magical union he always experienced when they were truly united. He held her for a moment just to relish the oneness, and then they started moving, slowly at first but gradually being overwhelmed by the passion. They clung to each other tightly and breathlessly as they soared in unison, temporarily enveloped in their own private world that included just the two of them.

Later, as they lay together, Kade thought as he always did how lucky he was. Their world had almost shattered, but they’d found their way back again, and he would make sure they stayed that way.

“Good night, love,” he whispered in her ear.

“Night,” came the sleepy reply. She snuggled more closely against him, and he put his arm around her more tightly to hold her. The last words he heard were, “Now we can add Edinburgh to our new list.”