

SCANDAL ON THE ORIENT  
EXPRESS

THE RUTTINGDON SERIES  
BOOK SIX



LOUISE TAYLOR



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Louise Taylor

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's  
advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

*To Anna, the eternal optimist, who believes that one day I will truly  
love the gym.*

*Also, many thanks to Amy and Karlie, who gave up their time to  
translate the French in chapter six.*



## CHAPTER 1



*LONDON, 1884.*

THERE WERE FAR TOO many Queen Elizabeths in the ballroom, that was the problem. She should have known; who better for a demure young debutante to dress up as at a fancy dress ball other than the Virgin Queen?

If Evangeline had her way, this particular queen would no longer be a virgin at the end of this interminable evening; instead she would be the fiancée of Archie Cunningham-Waugh, the slightly dim heir to the Duke of Kendal. He was just stupid enough to be caught deflowering an innocent virgin, and in such cases an engagement always immediately followed, especially if the innocent virgin came with a lineage like her own.

She'd been flirting with Archie with all the subtlety of a half-brick to the back of the head since their introduction at the start of the Season. He was one of the wilder set of young men about Town, but a good natured one. His mother was as strict as Evangeline's aunt, it seemed, and he seemed deter-

mined to slip her grasp at every opportunity. Evangeline encouraged him and had been the first to suggest they escape boring ton parties to escape to the music halls of the East End of London. The rough, crime-ridden neighbourhood added an air of delicious danger to their escapades, and the bawdy songs and ribald jokes of the music hall stage had expanded her education dramatically.

Despite these adventures, she had never been able to get Archie alone. He was always accompanied by a gang of friends and the women they had persuaded to join them at the music halls. They all piled into one carriage and she always made sure she was forced to ride on Archie's lap to their destination, but apart from a furtive grope of her breasts under the cover of her shawl, she had yet to get Archie into a position where he would have to offer her marriage.

Perhaps it was wrong of her to manipulate him in this way, but she firmly ignored those flickers of conscience. If she didn't do it, a hundred girls would, and better her than them. She at least would be kind to Archie once they were married and let him have his fun.

Simply put, Evangeline had to get married. Although long past the age of majority, her fortune was in an iron-clad trust which forbade her inheriting it until she was married. Her guardians were paid a handsome stipend until she married, so it benefitted them to keep her unmarried as long as possible. The only way out of her situation was to wed, but she had no desire to exchange one set of unwelcome restrictions for another. She couldn't marry just any man – it had to be a man she could control. That translated to somebody dimmer than average, but rich enough so her fortune was not immediately swallowed up by his family to repair a sagging stately home or crumbling castle. Young men were notoriously unwilling to marry at the best of times; trying to find a

marriage-minded man of limited intelligence and generous fortune was something akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Evangeline had been trying for several Seasons to hunt out a suitable husband, and with Archie Cunningham-Waugh, she rather thought she had found a perfect match.

This costume party had seemed like the ideal opportunity to put her plan in motion. She'd bribed a footman to pass a message to Archie telling him to look out for an opportunity to slip away with Queen Elizabeth that night, but she'd watched in horror across the press of bodies in the ballroom as Archie had good-naturedly approached every Elizabeth in his path and attempted to tempt them away to a side room. He didn't have the sense to look at the faces of the women; his eyes were inevitably drawn to the expanse of skin between their neck-ruffs and their low necklines.

Archie was not a subtle man, which suited Evangeline, who did not have the patience for subtlety.

It was obvious who Archie was, despite the Roman gladiator's outfit he was wearing. He had not bared his flesh as the real gladiators had, choosing to wear a tunic for modesty's sake, along with shin guards that covered most of his legs and lace-up sandals. However, no other man of the ton had arms and legs that seemed so out of control of the owner, and he hadn't bothered to try and disguise the riot of blond curls that erupted from his head in every direction. Most Elizabeths, when presented with this unlikely gladiator leering at their breasts, recoiled and cast about for their mothers to save them. The Elizabeth that Archie had cornered by the lemonade table seemed more receptive to his clumsy advances than most, however, and Evangeline increased her speed across the room.

She wasn't about to let some other woman snatch up her prize, not when she had worked so hard to snare him in the first place!

By barging past a Little Bo-Peep and dodging the wide embrace of a leering musketeer, Evangeline was able to reach Archie before he made the mistake of leaving the ballroom with the wrong queen.

“Archie!” she said loudly, tugging on his arm.

He smiled widely when he saw her, and wider still when he saw just how low the dressmaker had cut her neckline. Too deep a breath and she would positively burst from her gold-tissue dress, but that was a risk she was willing to take.

“Evie!” he said happily. “Such fun – I thought I was already speaking to you, what?”

“I could see,” Evangeline said, staring daggers at the other woman, who snapped her fan haughtily and left.

“Wonderful party, don’t you think? Shall we dance?”

“Later, perhaps,” Evangeline said, staring at the suspiciously authentic-looking gladius hanging at his hip. She didn’t want to take the risk of the sharp sword bashing into anybody on the dance floor, Archie either having already lost its scabbard or, more likely, deciding not to use it because he wanted everybody to see just how shiny his sword was.

She sighed, realising not for the first time just how much work Archie would be as a husband. He’d be faithful for a week, perhaps, before the latest pair of pretty breasts tempted him away, and she would have to keep a careful eye on the estate ledgers to make sure he didn’t invest his inheritance in chocolate teapots. It would be worth it, however, for the independence being married would bring her. Archie wasn’t a bad man. He wouldn’t treat her harshly. It wasn’t as if she loved him and would be hurt by his eventual infidelities.

“Later, then,” Archie agreed obediently.

He stole another look at the swell of her breasts straining at the edge of her bodice and licked his lips. Evangeline sighed and steeled herself for the events to come. She had



enlisted the help of her cousin to do the honour of “discovering” them and alerting the party to the scandal of it all. The gossip would spread like wildfire, and before the end of the month she would be Lady Cunningham-Waugh, the future Duchess of Kendal.

Her cousin had agreed to it on the understanding that Evangeline’s rapid social rise would produce some material benefit to her. Cousin Catherine could be as unpleasant as Aunt Augusta, but she was nothing but pragmatic. This sort of thing happened at least once every Season, and nobody ever remarked on it once the wedding-bells had rung. Better that they should benefit from it, Catherine had said, shrugging her shoulders, then anyone else currently searching for a husband. Once firmly ensconced on a higher rung of the social ladder, Evangeline would help Catherine secure herself a rich and titled husband of her own.

“Why don’t we go and find somewhere quieter to talk?” Evangeline suggested, sliding her hand up Archie’s arm. “It’s so dreadfully hot in here.”

“Right-ho,” Archie said, casting about the ballroom for somewhere to sit. “Where?”

“Why not the library?” Evangeline said brightly. “There won’t be anyone in there.”

There wouldn’t be, because she had stolen the key from the library door the last time she and her aunt had paid their afternoon calls to the lady of the house. It was a sad and neglected room, not at all used by the family. She’d slipped away at the start of the party and locked the room, ensuring her privacy with Archie later. Of course, in the heat of their passion they would neglect to lock the door behind them, allowing them to be discovered in due time.

Archie, eager to get his hands on her, followed her instructions to the letter. Before many minutes had passed they had left the crowded ballroom and wound their way

along the corridors of the house to the deserted library. As soon as the door had closed behind them, Archie made his move. He swooped down and kissed her eagerly, pulling her tight against him.

Evangeline had been kissed by several gentlemen in her previous years as a debutante, her plan to escape the confinement of her guardians' care not being exactly new. Archie did not compare well to his predecessors, bringing more enthusiasm than skill to the procedure, but the haste with which he bundled her onto the waiting sofa promised a swift conclusion to her plan.

She landed on her back, and Archie mounted her, tugging on her bodice. Her corset had not fit properly under the old-fashioned style of the dress, so she had not worn it. Her breasts slipped out of the thin gold tissue of her gown, her nipples immediately hardening in the cool air of the room. Archie put his hands on her breasts, delighting in how their fullness escaped his palms. He caught her nipples between his fingers and squeezed them gently, causing her to moan.

It was a calculated moan, prepared and practiced under her bedcovers in order to make Archie think he was more skilled a lover than he was. Evangeline was surprised at the quick jolt of pleasure that his touch brought, a bright shock racing down her spine to the bud between her thighs. Emboldened by his success, Archie squeezed again, and this time the moan was real, as was her determined wriggle beneath him.

He kissed her again, all lips and tongue in a frenzied mash against her mouth, but this time he moved his mouth lower, past the irritatingly scratchy ruff at her neck and down to her breasts. She was surprised to realise that it was not at all unpleasant. Perhaps with some time and tutelage she could train Archie's enthusiasm into something more fun for the both of them.

One of his teeth scraped her nipple and she started in surprise. It had hurt, although before she could register the sting of pain a little buzz of pleasure followed, causing her back to arch and for her to press herself even closer to Archie. Her immediate desire was that he should repeat the action so she could experience it again. Who knew that pain could bring pleasure in such a way?

Archie rose from her, and for a second she panicked, thinking his good sense had suddenly returned and he was detaching himself from a dangerous situation. She needn't have worried, however; he was merely fumbling with his tunic and drawers to release his member.

Evangeline had been kissed before, and she had allowed one prospective husband to glide his hand over her clothed breasts, but she had never got this far with one of her plans. She had an idea of what to expect, thanks to some informative conversations with her maid and the bawdy jokes of the music hall shows she had slipped away with Archie to watch. It was one thing to have the theory, though, without the practice.

Eventually Archie's fumbling paid off and his member sprang forward, poker straight. Evangeline pulled herself into a sitting position and gave into her natural curiosity, reaching out to touch it.

"Oh my," she said softly, as Archie groaned above her. "It's so stiff, yet so soft to touch. Like a steel rod wrapped in velvet."

Men liked to be flattered, her maid had advised.

*"You can lay it on as thick as custard on a trifle, miss, and they'll believe anything you say. They all want to think themselves the biggest man in the world, if you get my meaning, and the more you pretend they are, the more they believe it themselves. Get a good enough grip and you'll get anything you want out of 'em."*

She was perhaps being a little kind to Archie, who was

boasting less of a steel rod and more of a thick darning needle, but he seemed large enough for her purposes. All he had to do was push it inside her and spend there, after all. She suspected the experience would be uncomfortable for her enough without the worry of a larger member to deal with. Her maid had told her all about that, as well.

"Rub it," Archie begged, taking her hand in his larger one and guiding it up and down.

Evangeline did as instructed, curious to see the effect it had on him. His face was screwed up as in a moment of fierce concentration, and his pale skin flushed red with exertion.

"Oh yes," he groaned. "Harder!"

She quickened her pace, gripping him more firmly. This was her mistake, she later realised. She had not understood the signs that Archie was reaching his climax. She should have laid back and raised her skirts, exposing her pink folds to him. Even someone as dim as Archie would have known what to do then.

Archie gave one last long, low moan and emptied himself over her, covering her hand and breasts with his seed. She was so shocked at what had happened that she could do nothing but sit there and splutter as he sprayed his last few drops over her before quickly tucking himself back into his tunic and drawers.

"Sorry I haven't got a handkerchief," he apologised as he searched for his discarded sword. "I don't think gladiators used them."

"What?" Evangeline said, once she retained the power of speech.

"You're an awfully good sport, Evie," he said earnestly. "Best I leave now, and be seen in the ballroom for a bit. Protect your reputation and all that, what?"

He beamed at her and planted a kiss on her cheek before disappearing out of the door. Evangeline was still in shock.

How could he leave her, bared to the waist and covered in his seed, without doing the honourable thing? Or at least, why hadn't he stayed around long enough to behave with no honour whatsoever and finish the job?

Fuming, she mopped herself up as best she could and tugged her breasts back into her costume. She had just made herself presentable when her cousin barged into the room, talking loudly to three other young women. Evangeline pleaded a migraine as the reason for sitting alone in the dark, and her acting skills were good enough to convince one of the witnesses to go scuttling off to retrieve Aunt Augusta from the buffet table.

"Not go to plan?" Catherine whispered.

"Not at all," Evangeline said, frowning.

She was clearly going to have to come up with a better plan!



"...AND it's no wonder you've taken ill, parading around in a dress like that! If your dear father could see the hoyden you've turned into, he'd weep!"

Evangeline sat upright in the carriage, letting her aunt's scolding wash over her. She was used to them all by now, and could practically recite them all from memory. Tonight's example was a lecture on her choice of dress, which was usually too bold, too forward and too brightly coloured for her aunt's tastes. She was sure she would receive the lecture on proper etiquette at parties before they arrived home, and a bitter sermon on the rudeness of slipping your chaperone's vice-like grasp and disappearing for suspicious lengths of time.

Her aunt had come to the party dressed as Cleopatra, complete with asp. It was difficult to accept lectures on moral probity from someone famous for marrying her brother and having passionate affairs with two of Rome's most famous men, but Evangeline decided not to point out the irony. Her aunt did not have the sort of mind that could cope with the concept.

Evangeline passed the time by counting the number of relatives she had lived with since the death of her parents. Her father had died first, leaving her a vague memory of a beard that smiled and a respectable fortune in trust. Her mother had remarried almost as soon as she was out of mourning, and she had lived long enough to present her new husband with two sons before dying in childbed with the third.

Her stepfather had never liked her particularly, and could not wait to send her back to her grandmother, who had lasted six months before she died too, leaving Evangeline another healthy fortune to add to her first as well as the vague sense that she caused the deaths of those she loved. It was easier not to love anybody, she had decided, with the ruthless logic of a child. It hurt less that way when they died.

Her childhood had seen her transferred between various aunts, uncles and other relations who all did their best to cope with the sullen, difficult child who had been deposited on their doorsteps. It was not their fault Evangeline made no effort to get to know their own children, or take part in family life. She was a horror of a child who made rude noises during church services and put spiders in her governesses' beds. Once she grew too difficult for one aunt to handle, she was put in a carriage and transferred to the care of another.

Her father had been prescient enough to leave detailed instructions for the care of his only child should both of her parents die when she was too young to care for herself. A

generous stipend, funded by some very secure investments, was at the disposal of whoever cared for her. The money was enough to keep most of her guardians gritting their teeth and putting up with her outrageous behaviour, at least for a while.

She had been a guest in the home of her Aunt Augusta for the last five years, ever since the great-aunt she'd been acting as companion to had died. It was not a happy arrangement for anybody involved. If they could get away with locking her in the attic, they would, Evangeline decided. As it was, her aunt was too well known in London society not to allow Evangeline to move within it as any unmarried lady would. Evangeline's recent penchant for slipping away from parties and exploring the seedier side of London was a reaction to the strict control her aunt had over her, as well as a way of proving just how fun she could be with Archie, who adored slumming it amongst the working people of the East End.

Her current guardians were her seventh set, she counted, as her aunt shifted into the final part of her lecture on proper behaviour. Perhaps if she had been more personable as a child, she would have a more enjoyable life now. Perchance she would have met a suitable young man and fallen madly in love with him, and be the proud mother of several children with her dark hair and vivid blue eyes. She would have a pleasant, honeysuckle-covered house in the countryside and spend her days visiting the sick of the parish and making jam.

She shuddered. What a dreadful thought!

Secret assignations in dark libraries and illicit trips to forbidden, dangerous pleasures were far more to her liking. The thrill of avoiding chaperones and sneaking back into the house unnoticed was far sweeter than any jam she could possibly make. Plus, if she played her hand wisely, she could end up a duchess!

It was with this thought firmly planted in her head that she listened in silence to her aunt's lecture and did nothing more than murmur a few words of apology before she got down from the carriage and went straight to her bedroom. Her maid helped her out of the ridiculous costume and freed her from the itchy red wig that had completed her royal ensemble. She used the hot water the maid had brought to sponge herself clean of Archie's seed, which had also begun to itch as it had dried and flaked on her skin.

Her plan hadn't been a complete failure. She had shown Archie just how much fun she could be, and she had to capitalise on that before he was distracted by another woman. The good thing about being in London during the Season, other than spending her guardians' stipend on daring clothes, was that there were always parties going on every night, usually two or three of them, all vying for the same guests. She would no doubt see Archie at whatever party her aunt had decided they would attend tomorrow. She would just have to see if he could be persuaded to sneak out early and have a different sort of fun!