

HARRY'S LITTLE ROSE

DECEIT AND DESIRE, BOOK THREE



VIOLA MORNE



LOOK INSIDE

“I want you to lean over my desk and present your bottom for chastisement.”

“Now?”

“Now,” he told her sternly. He saw how she reacted to his tone. Her shoulders went back, her chin firmed as she approached the heavy oak piece. In some perverse way, Rose wanted this punishment. She wanted him to take control of the situation and her. He was doing the right thing.

Rose draped herself over the desk, her small feet shod in kid slippers braced at an angle. Yes, she was familiar with being punished. He thought the gravity of what had occurred required a response surpassing a spanking by hand. Harry had cut a birch switch this morning while walking through the shrubbery. Now, he plucked it from the hearth and slashed it through the air. Rose jumped at the sound.

“Wh-what is that?”

“A switch. Did your father never use one?”

“No, he preferred his hand. Mrs. Grieve liked a wooden paddle.”

“You will find this implement has more of a sting. It is more painful when plied over skin already spanked. It will hurt, Rose.”

She laid her head down, submissive, waiting. "Yes, sir."

Harry approached, turning up her skirts and sliding her drawers down around her ankles. Her fair skin was unmarked, which gave him a peculiar qualm. It had been too long since she'd tasted his hand on her. Perhaps that was part of the problem. He would do better from now on, just as he'd promised Francis.

Lord, she was beautiful. And, for the moment, she was his. Harry set the switch on the desk in Rose's view and smacked her hard across one globe. She twitched, but remained in place, her buttock reddening. He spanked her other cheek. Then he laid five more in quick succession across her whole bottom, quite hard. Rose whimpered a little. Three more smacks, slower and even harder. Harry ran a hand over her crimsoning flesh. It felt hot to the touch. Yes, she would remember this.

"I'm going to use the switch now," he warned her. Rose nodded, her little fists opening and closing. She shut her eyes, surrendering to her fate and his hand. The switch sang through the air, landing on her swollen skin. Rose gasped. The switch had made a lovely dark stripe across her rosy bottom. He laid another one parallel and paused, fingering the welts while Rose shifted her feet.

"Does it hurt, my dear?"

"Yes, sir. It's quite painful."

His response was to land another stroke on top of the others. How many? Ten to match her spanks, that seemed a good number. He gave her the rest, not hard enough to break the skin, but with sufficient power to make her squeak, tears gathering on her long lashes. When it was over, he rubbed her bottom with both hands, soothing her until she moaned. Ah, her punishment aroused her. But for now, she had had enough. He fixed her clothing and helped her to stand.

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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.

CHAPTER 1



HAWTHORN HOUSE, BERKSHIRE, APRIL 1815

Rose, Lady Colby, inched a black-gloved hand toward her bodice. The stiff lace that edged the bombazine frock made her skin itch. Mrs. Grieve had found the gown among Mama's old things, and Rose could almost smell her mother's perfume. She had a vague memory of a lovely face with a cloud of fair hair, but that was all Rose recollected about her mother. Now her father was dead as well, and family and friends were gathered for a cold collation after the funeral Rose had been forbidden to attend, due to custom. Poor Papa, at least he was with Mama now.

If only Francis were here, with his warmth and charm, greeting their guests and taking control of the gathering. But her brother was serving in the British Army on the continent, far from home. He had visited during his last leave and then sent word that he was marching into the Low Countries. Wellington, allied with the Prussians, was set to battle Emperor Napoleon, who had escaped from his confinement on the island of Elba and made it to Paris, where

the French had greeted him with rapture, and the war had begun again.

“Stop scratching,” Mrs. Grieve hissed at her, flashing her long yellow teeth.

Rose sighed. Although Mrs. Grieve held the title of companion, she was more like a keeper.

“You must act the lady at all times,” the older woman scolded. “Your father would have expected it.”

Yes, she was indeed acting, Rose thought bitterly, pretending to be a grown-up woman in this nasty, uncomfortable frock. She longed for the security of her nursery and her soft, pretty dresses, the comfort of her dollies and books.

“My dear, I am so sorry for your loss. Your father was a fine man.” Mrs. Killigrew was an older woman, a childhood friend of her mother.

“Thank you.”

Mrs. Killigrew smiled at her kindly. “Please send me a note if there is anything I can do to help. You must know your welfare is dear to my heart.”

Rose nodded; her voice suspended by tears.

Next, a well-dressed gentleman, not young, approached her, his face composed in an expression of compassion beneath a crop of scented and pomaded hair brushed forward in the Titus style. “Lady Colby, please accept my deepest condolences.” Lord Wolston smirked in an oily fashion as he bent over her hand.

At least, as a grieving daughter, she wasn’t expected to smile at the fellow. Lord Wolston had become more fixed in his attentions during Papa’s illness. He would visit several times a week to console her, telling Rose that she shouldn’t be alone. Once, he came perilously close to declaring himself, but fortunately, Father’s valet had come to fetch her to his bedside.

“Owens told me that dog Wolston was sniffing around again,” her father had growled, his thin fingers plucking at his blanket.

“Yes, Papa. He visits quite frequently.”

"Trying to insinuate himself into your affections, because I'm not well enough to show him the door," Papa fumed. "Damned puppy. Once Francis comes home, he'll put a stop to that nonsense. The fellow only wants a rich wife and a stepmother to his children. I'll not allow it."

"No, Papa." Rose pressed her father's hand gratefully. She was happy to be back home, safe in her nursery. When her husband had been alive... no, she wouldn't think of it.

"Child, you know I only want your happiness. I cannot forget how I failed you..." He shook his grizzled head. How frail he had become, losing his high color since he'd been confined to bed.

"Papa, you never failed me. You saved me." A flash of memory assailed her, Papa and Francis breaking through the front door of her house in Mayfair, Papa's face white with fear and anger, Francis brandishing a pistol. Rose blinked, banishing the fragment of memory.

"You're a good girl, Rose," Papa said gruffly. "Francis will care for you once I am gone." He patted her cheek. "Now, puss. Don't cry. The doctors tell me it's only a matter of time. I lived a full life and I miss your mother. We'll be together again." A sudden cough racked him. Rose wiped his mouth with a handkerchief and pretended not to notice the blood stains.

"Yes, Papa."

He passed away in his sleep only a week later. Everything would be all right when Francis came home. He would take care of her, as he always had.



THE LOW COUNTRIES, near Brussels, June 1815

CAPTAIN HARRY GREY squinted through the smoke wafting across the battlefield. Damn, he recognized one of the soldiers lying on

the field. Francis Bristow lay sprawled in the dirt, his coat dark with blood. Harry strode to his side, yelling for a surgeon as he dropped to his knees.

Bristow's blue eyes narrowed in recognition. "That you, Harry?"
"I'm here. The surgeon is on his way."

Bristow winced. "Not sure he can help, old man. I've caught it this time. Blew the other fellow's head off though."

Harry used his sleeve to wipe the blood and grime from Bristow's face. "Save your strength."

"No, I have to say this. My sister, Rose, doesn't have anyone else. I want you to look after her when I'm gone."

"You can do it yourself, once we get home."

Francis shook his head. "I've seen enough wounds on the battlefield to know what happens next. I've had a good run. It's my time. No regrets, I can accept that. It's Rose I'm worried about. I've made arrangements... I meant to tell you... will you accept this charge? Will you care for my sister?"

Harry pressed his shoulder. "Of course, old man."

"You promise, Harry?"

"I promise."

The surgeon reached them, bending over to do a hasty examination. Francis Bristow coughed, blood staining his lips. Harry looked over at the surgeon, who shook his head. It wouldn't be long now.

Francis clutched Harry's hand. "Swear on everything you hold dear."

"I swear."

"Rose isn't like other girls. Father kept her... like a child. It was for her own good."

Harry didn't understand what Francis was saying, but it didn't matter. "I'll take care of everything. Your sister will be safe."

"Thank you. You're a good sort, Harry, strong and steady like a rock."

Francis Bristow drew a long, shuddering breath and another, and then, he was gone, a look of mild surprise on his face, his eyes

devoid of light. Harry closed his friend's eyelids and sent up a brief prayer. Another good man, gone too soon.

"Captain Grey, I've found the colonel." The young ensign bent over gasping for breath. "He's asking for you."

Harry swore. He'd been separated from his commanding officer in the thick of battle. "How is he?"

"In a bad way, sir."

"I'm coming."



IT WASN'T until several months later that Harry received the letter from Captain Bristow's solicitors, confirming that Harry had been left the guardianship of Francis' sister, Rose, Lady Colby, along with the duties of executor and administrator of the estate.

"Blast it," Harry muttered as he scanned the missive from a Mr. Hancock. Men said things in the thick of battle, especially when they lay dying. Harry had promised to take care of Bristow's sister, and he meant to keep his word, having a vague notion of visiting the girl at some point in the future to ensure she was well-cared for. A formal legal arrangement was something Harry hadn't considered. He didn't want the responsibility. He told the colonel as much, while his superior recovered from the wounds he'd sustained at Waterloo.

The colonel stared at him for a moment and then, his shoulders began to shake. "I'm sorry, old man, it's just the image of you as guardian to anyone, let alone a young girl. How old is she?"

"Twenty-one. She is a widow, living in their family home."

"Not a child, then. I imagine she will be glad to have you to lean on. Are you well-acquainted?"

"I don't even know the chit," Harry confided over a glass of port after dinner that evening. "And God knows why Francis Bristow ever thought I'd be an appropriate guardian for a young woman."

"He knew your sense of duty and fairness," the colonel said.

“Captain Bristow died with the comfort of knowing his sister would be cared for.”

The study opened and a very pretty woman peeked around the edge of the door. “How horrid. You’re still drinking your port. I’m all alone in the drawing room.”

Colonel Arden smiled at his wife and held out a hand. “Join us, my love. We were speaking of Harry’s ward.”

Julia crossed to her husband’s side, taking his hand and holding it to her cheek for a moment before settling on the sofa beside him. “Gracious, who is she?”

“Lady Rose Colby.”

“I knew her in London.” A shadow crossed Julia’s face. “Poor thing. Lady Colby made an unhappy marriage. Her husband passed away several years ago, and I’m afraid to say it was a happy release for her.”

Harry frowned. “I never knew him.”

“He was a brute,” Julia said bluntly. “He would say the most poisonous things in the nicest manner. Once, I found her in tears after he ripped into her at a dinner party, but there was nothing I could do. The poor thing was loyal to a fault.”

Harry’s protective instincts were roused. Rose transformed suddenly from an unwanted burden into a helpless female who needed him. And Harry, as his friends well knew, needed to be needed.

“I suppose you’ll travel to Berkshire then?” said the colonel, amused by the sudden light in Harry’s green eyes.

“I must,” Harry said.

“Of course. While you are traveling, perhaps you could stop in and check on Major Pierce? He was supposed to visit his brother’s home for a week or so, but it’s been some time since we’ve heard from him.”

Since the major was generally regarded as one of the worst rakes in the regiment, Harry wasn’t surprised to hear that Pierce had disappeared. He was probably off chasing some pretty light-

skirt. Still, he didn't want the colonel to worry, so he set off for Yorkshire the following day. Some weeks later, having reassured the colonel as to Major Pierce's continuing health—although Alastair did find himself in an intriguing scrape—Harry finally headed to Hawthorn House to see Lady Colby. He had dreaded returning to England because he would be faced with this new responsibility. If this girl needed him as much as Bristow believed, Harry had no choice. As the coach grew nearer to his destination, Harry pulled out the letter to read it again:

DEAR HARRY,

If you are reading this letter, then I have departed this earth, and you have agreed to take on the guardianship of my sister, Rose. She is a sweet, warm-hearted girl but impulsive and prone to rashness. She requires frequent discipline to help her achieve an equanimity of spirit.

Once you meet her, you will be surprised to learn that Rose is one and twenty years of age. My father kept Rose in the nursery since she returned home following her marriage.

Rose's husband was cruel; he tried to break her bright spirit. Two years ago, she was widowed and has lived quite happily as a little girl since then. It soothes her. Of course, the polite world will require her attendance at some social events. Afterward, she will be anxious and will only be happy again once dressed in her little-girl clothes and returned to the nursery. Her companion, Mrs. Grieve, will assist you in every way possible. But a companion's care is not sufficient. Rose needs a papa, who will guide her, using discipline as necessary, but with affection as well. I hope, for her sake, that you can be that man.

I thank you with all my heart for taking on this responsibility. I know you will not let me down.

*With sincere regards,
Francis*

. . .

WITH A STROKE OF THE PEN, Harry's life was transformed, at least in the short term. His interview with Mr. Hancock had opened his eyes to his new duties. George Bristow, the younger son of a baronet, had made his fortune in the East India Company and, upon returning to England, had made even more money establishing himself as a shipping merchant and marrying an heiress. The number of companies and investments were bewildering. It would take him months just to settle the estate. Rose was the sole beneficiary and an extremely wealthy woman. She would be a target for every fortune hunter in the country. And if she proved to be as fragile as Francis believed, it would be up to Harry to protect her from that as well. Perhaps a second marriage to some respectable suitor would solve both their problems.

Strange to consider that such riches brought its own set of difficulties. The younger Harry, the bastard son of some London lady and an unknown father, had never had anything of his own. No family or home. He'd been fostered in the country with some old family retainers who appreciated a monthly stipend from his mother's family but hadn't cared much about him. He hadn't let that hinder him. An unexpected bequest from the grandfather he'd never met had enabled Harry to purchase an army commission, and he never looked back, fighting tooth and claw for each promotion he received. He'd invented a new family, father and mother decently wed and subsequently deceased, to keep the secret of his parentage. A wealthy bastard whose father acknowledged him could go far in the service. A penniless one, not so much.

Harry didn't find the men under his command to be a burden. Rather, they were a responsibility, which he had a duty to fulfill. But a young and sheltered woman, wholly dependent on him, was a different kettle of fish. He didn't want this, but just like receiving an order from his own commander, he had no choice in accepting his charge. He had given his word to Francis Bristow, and he would not break it. Harry had already received a leave of absence to assist

the colonel. He might even have to sell out just to fulfill Bristow's wishes.

Poor girl, losing the last of her family. He could not help but pity her. Francis had said she lived in virtual retirement. Perhaps if Harry encouraged her to rejoin society, Rose could make new friends, becoming less dependent. Harry was not her father or her brother. He could not make the same commitment to her which they had possessed. In any case, her situation sounded quite extraordinary. A grown woman content to live in the nursery. What if she was mad? He could find a caretaker, someone kindly who would make the poor little thing comfortable. There were certainly funds for that. He would never commit her to an asylum. No, she would stay at home to be cared for and kept in happy security. It was the least he could do for the man who had given his life for his country.

Rose would never know she represented the dream Harry once kept hidden in his heart. The dream of a home and family, a wife he could cherish and protect. Frances had left him to take care of everything that a younger Harry had yearned for, though it would never be truly his to claim. He could only hope that he would prove equal to the challenge.



HAWTHORN HOUSE WAS AN IMPOSING BUILDING, built of honey-colored Bath stone and set in a carefully tended park. It had been built by George Bristow some thirty years ago in the Palladian style, boasting a symmetrical facade with many windows and a central front door painted a glossy black. The door sprung open as Harry's hired chaise halted on the graveled drive and several footmen hurried down the steps to take his bags. A groom ran up to take charge of the horses. An elderly man greeted him at the door.

"Captain Grey, we've been expecting you. I am Porter, the

butler." He took Harry's hat and greatcoat. "May I offer you some refreshment?"

"Thank you, no. I'd like to see Lady Colby."

Porter paused. "Of course, sir. Miss Rose is presently in the nursery. Her companion, Mrs. Grieve, would like to speak with you first."

Harry wanted to see the girl, but if her situation was as unusual as Francis described, it might be best to get the lay of the land from the companion. He frowned, considering his options. No, dash it, he was in charge, and he would see the girl.

"I believe I'll see Lady Colby. Pray give Mrs. Grieve my compliments and tell her I will speak with her later. I'll go up now, if I may."

Porter bowed. "Very good, sir. Third floor, first door on the right."

Harry mounted the stairs, his guts twisting. Bound to be an unpleasant scene, the girl grief-stricken, no doubt. He fervently hoped she wouldn't cry—ghastly thought. Harry tried to concentrate on the business matters to sort out, amid the dozen other things he didn't know anything about. Still, at least he had the colonel to call on if things got too complicated. He knocked on the door and, taking a deep breath, entered the room when a sweet soft voice bade him enter. Harry had imagined her—when he'd considered Rose at all—as a thin, pale little thing, shrinking into the background. He could not have been more wrong.

Rose was exquisite. A complexion of porcelain and rose, deep gold hair curling around her shoulders, big eyes, the deep blue of a twilight sky. Harry felt a little dizzy. A simple dress of white muslin was tied beneath her breasts with a blue ribbon, lace pantalettes peeped beneath the hem. The sight of them was curiously arousing. Perhaps it was the idea of them covering her thighs and leaving her pussy bare. He imagined sliding his hand along her leg under the fabric, slowly, until he reached the hot and wet apex. Would she whimper, protesting his touch? Or would she

spread her legs and welcome his intrusion? Christ, what was wrong with him? Francis depended on him to protect his sister, not prey upon her. Harry willed his hardening cock to subside while his gaze slid to the pristine white stockings covering her slim calves and the small feet encased in blue kid slippers with beaded toes.

Rose had been sitting on the rug by the fire, holding a dolly. When Harry entered, she dropped the doll and stood. "You are Captain Grey." Harry nodded, and Rose clutched her little fingers together. "You were with Francis when he died? I received a letter from his commanding officer that mentioned you."

"Yes. I am so sorry."

She gazed over his shoulder, not meeting his eyes. "I felt his passing. We were always close. Did he suffer?"

"No, he was wounded in the chest. He expired quickly. His last thoughts were of you."

"Thank you," she said softly. "I'm glad he wasn't alone."

"Captain Bristow died bravely, defending his comrades. He was a hero. You should be proud."

"I am, of course. But he is still gone, and I am alone."

Harry crossed the room to pick up her limp hands. "You will never be alone, I promise you. Your brother asked me take care of you."

Rose stepped back. "But you are a stranger."

"I hope one day we may be friends."

"I don't have any friends."

Harry hesitated. He didn't need any emotional scenes. "Why is that?" he asked, after an awkward pause.

Rose turned away. "People can be unkind. It's easier to be by myself."

"Easier, perhaps, but not better, I think."

"I have not expressed any interests in your thoughts, Captain." Her words were accompanied by a cold stare over her shoulder.

Harry had faced down men years older and pounds heavier. "I

am sorry for your loss, but it doesn't give you license to be rude to me. I am only trying to help."

Rose sniffed. "I don't want your help. Please leave me." She turned her back.

"Rose, we must try to get along. I am not only your guardian but the executor of your brother's estate."

"I don't understand what that means."

"It means I am in control of his business interests, his fortune, and yours as well."

She spun around, cheeks pink with indignation. "What? How could Francis do that to me? I won't put up with this."

"You have no choice in the matter, Lady Colby. Come," he extended a hand, "let us try to work together."

Rose lashed out, slapping his hand away. "Get out!" she screamed.

"Lady Colby..."

"Don't call me that." Rose picked up her doll and threw it at his head. "Get out."

Harry ducked, the porcelain head shattering against the heavy oak door frame. The damned girl was a lunatic after all. What the hell was he supposed to do now?



THE DOOR WAS FLUNG open and a middle-aged woman of formidable aspect bustled over the threshold. "Rose, go and sit in your chair." When Rose remained in place, glaring at both of them, the woman said sharply. "At once, Rose, or there will be consequences."

Rose turned on her heel and stomped over to a small wooden chair set in the corner of the room and sat down, her pretty mouth pulled into a straight line.

"I am Mrs. Grieve. I apologize for Miss Rose, Captain Grey. This is a difficult time for her."

"Understandable, I'm sure."

Mrs. Grieve held up an admonishing finger. "Sir, I know you are new to this household and, particularly, the custody of Miss Rose. This outburst is a symptom of an underlying problem that must be checked. If you will forgive me, I must inform you that the girl needs a strict hand, else she become quite unmanageable."

Harry frowned. "I'm not sure I understand."

Mrs. Grieve walked over to the large window overlooking the garden and beckoned him to join her.

"Mr. Francis told you her father kept her in the nursery," she said in a low voice.

"He did, though I'm not sure..."

"Miss Rose lives as a little girl, Captain. She dresses in pinafores and pantalettes as you can see. She plays with dolls and toys. I also punish her as a little girl. It keeps her secure. Will you allow me to demonstrate, sir?"

When Harry nodded, still bewildered, Mrs. Grieve added, "I must ask that you not interfere in the proceedings."

"Agreed."

Mrs. Grieve's voice rose. "Miss Rose, come here."

The girl rose hesitantly and joined them by the window.

"Why didn't you wish to speak with the captain?"

Her pretty face flushed. "I don't know him. I don't want him here."

"Miss Rose, that is rude."

The girl stomped her foot. "I don't care." Her fingers were curled into fists, and Harry could see she was shaking with emotion. He opened his mouth to suggest he return later, but Mrs. Grieve shook her head, her mouth set in a firm line.

"I wish he was dead, just like Francis!" Rose faced Harry for the first time. "I hate you!" she screamed. "I wish you were dead!"

Harry took an instinctive step toward the door, urged by the typical masculine dislike of feminine drama.

"Rose, go get your hairbrush and come back here."

Rose pushed out her lower lip. "No."

"You know things will go much worse for you if you don't obey me."

The fight went out of her. Shoulders drooping, Rose walked to the dressing table and picked up the ivory-backed brush and brought it to her companion. She caught the girl in a firm grip and sat on the window seat, pulling Rose over her knee.

"You're going to get a spanking, Miss Rose, because you were rude to your new guardian and disobedient. Do you understand?"

Rose heaved a small sigh. "I understand," she said in a soft, sad little voice that brought an ache to Harry's heart.

"Good." Mrs. Grieve pushed up the girl's skirts and tucked them around her waist. Then she untied Rose's pantalettes and pulled them down around her ankles, revealing a heart-shaped bottom of porcelain skin. She raised the hairbrush and brought it down across both cheeks. Rose gasped, kicking out a little.

"Stay in place," Mrs. Grieve told her sternly, waiting for her charge to subside. Rose's head dropped, her hands on the carpet. Mrs. Grieve spanked her with the hairbrush several times, as Rose jerked with each impact. Her cheeks rapidly grew red.

"Captain, would you like to come and inspect her bottom?"

Harry cleared his throat and walked over to them. The girl sobbed quietly over her governess' lap, those lovely globes now a bright red.

"The purpose of the punishment is to instruct Rose and to improve her future behavior," Mrs. Grieve said. "It might be unusual, but Mr. Bristow and I found this was the only way to reach her." She pulled up the pantalettes and adjusted Rose's frock. "Up you get, Miss Rose, and make your curtsy to Captain Grey. He has traveled a long way to see you. I'm sure he would appreciate an apology."

Rose scrambled off Mrs. Grieve's lap, rubbing her eyes with her knuckles. Her lower lip quivered. "I'm sorry for my bad behavior, Captain Grey. I was quite distraught." She peeped up at him, dark

blue eyes shining with tears. Harry swallowed. He had never seen such a beautiful girl.

"I accept your apology, Miss Rose. This has been a difficult adjustment for you. Francis Bristow was one of the finest men I ever knew. His loss was a profound one."

"Thank you," Rose said gratefully. "I am glad you knew him. I wish I had been with him at the end."

"Your brother wanted to be sure you were well taken care of in his absence. I gave him my word that I would do so."

"Dear Francis, how I miss him." Her tears welled up again. Mrs. Grieve surged to her feet, giving Rose a handkerchief.

"Now, Miss Rose, that's enough for today. Why don't you go play with your dollies in your bedroom while I speak to the captain?"

"Yes, Mrs. Grieve." Rose opened a door at the far end of the nursery and walked through, closing it carefully behind her.

"There, sir, you see how she is better now. Once she gets in a state, discipline is the only thing she responds to."

Harry could see that the companion's punishment had worked to calm Miss Rose, but it seemed rather drastic.

"If she becomes truly distraught," Mrs. Grieve continued, "she is plugged and sent to the corner."

"Plugged?"

Mrs. Grieve crossed the room to a cabinet set into the far wall. She opened the door and waved her hand. Displayed inside were straps, paddles, switches and several canes of various thickness. The lower shelf held a display of oblong-shaped glass objects, varying in size from the size of his thumb to much larger.

"These are anal plugs. They help Miss Rose achieve her submission. They have a calming effect."

He had seen dildos in French brothels and enjoyed using them on the girls, but this was different.

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"I take great care to ensure that it doesn't. The plug is lubricated

with cream before being pressed into her bottom hole. With patience and care, the object is seated without difficulty. It is a useful tool in dealing with her megrims. In a pinch, a wet finger may be substituted.”

“Good God,” Harry said, astonished. “I’ve never heard of a gently-bred girl being treated in such a way.”

“Believe me, Captain,” Mrs. Grieve said grimly, “you will be heartily glad of any assistance when the mood is upon her.”

Harry’s hands clenched. “I am all at sea, Mrs. Grieve. I cannot believe I am the proper person to be in charge of the girl.”

“You are a military man, Captain, accustomed to the judicious use of discipline. I am sure you will do well. I shall do my best to support you. Come, there is no one else. The girl needs you.”

Harry blew out a breath. “I gave my word and I won’t go back on it, Mrs. Grieve. I will do everything in my power to keep Miss Rose safe.”

“That is all anyone could ask of you, sir.” She offered him a brief curtsy and followed Rose from the room. What the hell had he gotten himself into?