

Midsummer Eve at Rookery End Short Story Anthology

Excerpt from **Siren's Daughter...**



Deborah jumped when she heard the door creak. She had been enjoying the humid, sweet-smelling air, the silence broken only by the hooting of an owl drifting in through the door that opened onto the garden. The conservatory housed a magnificent display of plants – roses, lilies, citrus trees, numerous brightly coloured geraniums and delicate ferns – and was built along gothic lines. Arched windows rose up to a vaulted glass roof, through which Deborah could see pinpricks of starlight.

Footsteps on the tiled floor announced someone's approach and, sweeping aside the fronds of a climbing vine to investigate, Deborah cannoned into a broad masculine chest. Firm hands shot out and grasped the top of her bare arms. The breath was driven from her body after colliding with this wall of muscle, but also from the sensation of her breasts being crushed against the dark evening coat covering that solid torso. She was aware of the rise and fall of his chest and of warm breath stirring the curls next to her ear. To Deborah's embarrassment, beneath her gown's silk bodice the tips of her breasts peaked in pleasurable response. Sensual awareness danced through her veins like liquid fire and although she had not yet looked up into the face of the gentleman who was holding her tightly, she recognised him on an elemental level.

Furious with herself and with Sir Benedict, Deborah allowed her gaze to travel slowly upwards. First, she saw the snowy folds of a carelessly tied cravat and a strong tanned neck; a firm jaw line followed, covered with the faint shadow of stubble; her gaze moved onwards and noted the tiny cleft in his chin which – oh God, how she blushed to recall it now – she had once loved to kiss; a thin-lipped but sensuous mouth, curved in a mirthless smile, came into view next; then his patrician nose and, finally, those remarkable hazel eyes which looked down into hers, a mocking expression in their depths.

Feeling dazed, Deborah swallowed hard. He had not slackened his grasp and his fingertips seemed to sear her skin where they touched it. She tried to speak, but her tongue felt as if it had cleaved to the roof of her mouth. Deborah put out the tip of her tongue to moisten her upper lip, aware that Sir Benedict watched the movement intently. It was ironic, given the many angry diatribes she

had rehearsed in anticipation of this moment, that her first words sprang into her head from nowhere and sounded idiotic even to her ears.

"Y-you have an ant on your cravat," she whispered.

Sir Benedict's leonine gaze shifted lower. "So I have – it must have fallen from one of the plants," he said in a deep, mellifluous voice.

He flicked the insect away with one finger, but did not lift his eyes back to her face and Deborah, blushing furiously when she realised Sir Benedict was being afforded an excellent view of her breasts, stepped back out of his hold. "I cannot say this is a pleasure, Sir Benedict," she snapped. "Why have you followed me here? I don't wish to speak to you."

"But I wish to speak to *you*," he replied.



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