

What happens when a nearly betrothed duke discovers an unexpected “package” delivered to his estate?

SCARRED BY LOVE: As recently divorced Alexandra waits for her flight to London, she has no idea her actual destination will be in the past. Will she be able to overcome her culture shock and learn to entrust her future to a most persistent duke?

DROPPED ON THE DOORSTEP: When Malcolm, the Duke of Milcaster, finds Alex on his estate, he immediately intends for her to be his new mistress. Alex, however, has other ideas on the subject. Can he overlook her peculiar ways and convince her that they are meant to be as one?

Prologue

Present Day:

For the third time in ten minutes, Alexandra Stanford checked her wristwatch, then glanced up at the wall of windows paneling the airport lounge. Just where in the world was that plane? Surely the stormy weather wasn't *that* bad to delay it so long. Tapping her high-heeled shoe with impatience, she twirled a long strand of hair around her finger. If that darn jet didn't taxi in soon, she would just...just burst!

To be truthful, waiting at Newark International Airport for her London flight normally wouldn't have bothered her. After all, good things were worth waiting for, and over the past few months she'd worked hard to be selected for this plum assignment. Going to England was a dream come true. And to represent the firm at an important art and Egyptian artifact auction sponsored by the British Museum--well, surely she'd died and gone to heaven. *Except for one tiny detail...*

"Don't worry your pretty little head about the delay, Alex." Vaughn Lemonde, the firm's main broker, patted her hand in a proprietary way. "This electrical storm will pass. Snafus like these are common on international flights, you know."

She burned at his touch. No other way to describe it, she sizzled with rage. No, she didn't mind waiting, over an hour now, for her late flight. It was sitting next to Mr. Octopus Arms that she ground her teeth over.

Newly single, Alex had suffered her fair share of trouble with men. But that was all in the past; good riddance to bad rubbish, to use an old cliché. For the time being, she was through with men--all men.

So why do you put up with Vaughn Lemonde's smarmy advances? Just because he's the head broker? Just because you're on your own again after that unexpected divorce?

She shook her head. Maybe this trip *wasn't* worth the price of admission. Here she was, almost thirty...and still she had to deal with obnoxious rutting males--this one in his fifties, yet. Too many of these guys, young and old, thought they really were the king of the jungle. *Me, Tarzan, you Jane. Ugh!*

Sighing, she bent over to retrieve her handbag she'd stashed under the chair. It was too late now for regrets. For almost a week she would be in the exclusive company of Vaughn "Conqueror of the World" Lemonde. Lucky, lucky her.

A low, strange sound caught her attention. Was it a wolf whistle? She turned to find Lemonde staring at her uncovered knees. By leaning over, she had inadvertently caused her straight skirt to inch up on her thighs. *Sheesh!* His eyes bulged out and his watery mouth gaped open as if he were in the throes of some type of medical emergency.

Good God. *Grow up*, Lemonde. She tugged on the skirt material and slid her carry-on blue suitcase next to her at the same time. Why hadn't she listened to a hunch she'd had this morning telling her to wear slacks?

Alex shrugged. What was done was done. Glancing out the windows, she watched busy flight line workers in concealing rain gear, plus overloaded tugs, maneuvering in the crowded areas between airport gates. If only the jet would arrive; then she could take a much needed breather. Thank goodness her seat assignment was in coach, far away from Lemonde's first class seat.

"Won't be long now, Alex," he wheezed as he moved closer to her. "Hold on, I think I see a plane coming in now. Maybe it's ours."

Talk about having personal space violated. With him so near, she could smell his hair tonic, spicy aftershave lotion, and his recently finished coffee.

"I sure hope so." *And that was God's honest truth!* To avoid looking at him, she pawed through her handbag. "I'll get my boarding pass ready."

Even if the approaching plane was their flight, it would still be a while before they could board. She slipped on her headphones to listen to a CD. Not only did the relaxing music muffle airport noises, but it isolated her--cocooning her in her own little world.

Ahh, she should've done this an hour ago.

Odd thing though. Static bit through the melodious tune as if she listened to a radio, instead of a CD player. Maybe the electrical storm was stronger than usual.

The boarding pass clenched firmly in her hand, she closed her eyes to concentrate on visualizing the upcoming trip, minus Lemonde, of course. If only...

Squawking sounds from the terminal's speaker system penetrated her personal music, but she ignored it, keeping her eyes shut. Lemonde moved jerkily about in the seat next to her, but she also ignored him. He probably drooled over some woman's cleavage, or belly button, or something infantile anyway.

Noises grew louder, but she refused to leave her private meditation. But then someone in back of her yelled, which set off a chorus of screams. *What on earth...?* Alex blinked her eyes open to see a plane, probably the one she'd prayed for so urgently. But the plane wasn't taxiing into the gate as it was supposed to do. Instead, at who knew how many miles per hour, it zoomed in...straight for the terminal.

She whipped off the headphones. "Oh my gosh!" Never mind the terminal, it headed straight for her! And in that frozen moment of time, the realization hit. In one more second, she'd become history, and there was nothing she could do about it.

As the plane's huge nose splintered through glass and steel, ripping away everything in its path, Alex had just enough time to duck.

Chapter One

England, 1802:

On the road approaching his main estate, Malcolm Prescott, the fifth Duke of Milcaster, eased his favorite horse to a stop, then wiped perspiration from his brow. Damn it all, the day was unusually hot for the end of August. He leaned forward to rest his forearms against the pommel of the saddle and gaze out at the dense forest in the distance. How he looked forward to bathing away his travel dirt plus the rigors of his nonstop journey from London.

With houseguests due to arrive tomorrow, he personally wanted to oversee arrangements for the weekend party; hence his haste in pounding the dirt to return to Milcaster Manor before they arrived. Of all the gala events he had hosted in recent memory, Friday's small gathering was to be the most important. Tomorrow, Lady Cynthia Ellingsby would grace the Manor. And by tomorrow night, she would be known to polite society as the future Duchess of Milcaster.

Demon, sleek as only a purebred Arabian could be, snorted at this unplanned respite. Either the animal grew fatigued from the trip, or impatient to be on their way.

"Easy, boy." Malcolm stroked the steed's gleaming black mane, and sweaty flank. "Soon you and I both will feel the comfort of cool water refreshing our weary..."

A terrible rumble interrupted his words. As if the earth was literally being torn in two to reveal its bowels, an ear-splitting growl of thunder shook the road and the leafy beech trees in the forest. Good Lord, even as he watched, something actually plummeted down from the clouds! Then, crimson lightning, almost blinding in intensity, shot up from those very same beech trees, filling the northeast corner of the sky with an unholy glow.

"What the devil?" Reluctantly wrenching his gaze from this bizarre sight, Malcolm tugged on his horse's reins to quiet the frightened animal. Skittish as a kitten when it came to unexpected noises, Demon made several urgent attempts to bolt in the opposite direction.

"Cannot turn tail and run, old fellow," Malcolm soothed. "Our lands, you know. I must investigate." Unfortunate that he was not closer to Milcaster Manor. He would have preferred to examine the scene with a complement of stable hands just in case the reddened lightning had sparked fire.

But time was of the essence. "Let us see what all the fuss is about." Urging Demon forward, Malcolm set the speed at a bruising pace over open fields and curving hills into the forest. What the devil had he just witnessed? Did something actually plunge down from the sky? If so, there was bound to be a tremendously huge crater.

Sometimes a man had to give thanks for small favors. In this case, the favor was that this thing, whatever it was, had the good sense to happen today, instead of tomorrow. He was also thankful that it crashed far enough away from the Manor. For if it had not...

Malcolm loosened his cravat. His houseguests would not have taken kindly to being pulverized into thin air, that much was certain.

Cautiously making his way through the tangle of trees, he spotted clouds of smoke rising, but no fire. Good. He dismounted the horse and tied Demon's reins to a gnarled branch, then proceeded into the white haze. A pungent, metallic smell filled the air, stinging his eyes and causing him to cough. Hell and blast, the cloud was thicker than evening fog in London. *Just what is going on here?*

Spots of color splashed the forest floor; a bit of crystal here, a dash of silver there. Nothing large, though. As he walked, the debris grew thicker and the soles of his boots crunched broken glass and twisted metal. Positively eerie how there were no other sounds except those he made, which then echoed all around him.

Up ahead, a small blue box and even smaller leather bag, covered with rubble, caught his eye. He carefully cleared away the litter and lifted the box by a sturdy, attached handle. It looked innocent enough, as did the leather pouch. Surely these were not the cause of the disaster?

A soft moan filtered over the crackling glass. *Good Lord, someone is here, hurt.* "Where are you?" he called. No reply, only an incessant groan, male or female; who knew?

Swiftly picking through the wreckage, he noticed a new color: cream or biscuit or...*dear sweet Lord! A leg!* A pleasantly curved limb, sans shoe, stuck out of a pile of rubbish. Approaching the leg, he discerned the rest of the woman. There could be no mistake that this hapless person was indeed a woman. At first seeing all arms and legs, he now viewed the rest of her deliciously feminine form.

A young woman lay at odd angles in front of him. Her eyes closed, she remained disturbingly still.

"Miss?" He removed a jagged piece of wood from the mahogany strands of her hair. "Miss, can you hear me?"

No response. But by the rise and fall of her breasts, hidden by a strange, silky type of bodice, he knew she was alive. Turning her face toward him, he saw the large gash on her forehead bleeding freely, and a bruised swelling on her jaw, disfiguring the smooth line of her comely face. He quickly applied a handkerchief to the wound.

Dear Lord, she looks so young, so defenseless, so...

As he swept his gaze over the rest of her, an inappropriate rush of desire hardened his loins. Her skirt, if such an inconsequential piece of material could have been called that, was bunched up around her small waist, exposing long legs, bare to her slender hips. A brief undergarment of the most intimate sort glared up at him in varying shades of green, and in response, he licked his lips.

"Damn it, control yourself, Milcaster," he muttered as he brushed away bits of sharp, piercing objects lodged on the curve of her stomach, hips, and...beyond. Here he was, a seasoned nobleman of five and thirty, with more mistresses to his name, past and present, than most debauched members of the bon ton, but nonetheless, he dribbled over the sight of this injured woman's female charms.

However, to be fair, how could his senses not become enflamed over such a divine, unexpected treat?

As gently as he could, he pulled down that slip of a skirt to prevent his gaze from lingering any further. "Milcaster, you lecherous old dog," he scolded himself. "Time enough to collect your reward."

The unnatural pallor of the unconscious woman's skin bleakly contrasted with the dark of her long, unkempt hair plus the paint from her rouged lips and cheeks. More to the point, the white linen handkerchief around her forehead could no longer be called white, but blood red. Indeed, the first order of business was to transport this unexpected bundle to Milcaster Manor and send for the country physician to take care of her wounds.

The chalky smoke lingering in the forest began to dissipate, revealing only the usual inhabitants of a forest: trees, trees, and more trees. No peculiar crater or large, intact object disturbed the monotony of the woodland floor. *Most peculiar.* The largest item in sight was this woman. It was almost as if she appeared by magic.

He rubbed his jaw. If he had not heard the thunder and witnessed the strange lightning, he would have never believed that anything untoward happened. However, there could be no denying the woman. And as provocatively dressed and painted as she was, she could, in no way, be called a lady.

Leaning down, he lifted the woman so that her head lolled against his chest. She was light, so light that he had no trouble stepping through the debris and returning to Demon. With little effort, Malcolm mounted his horse, arranging the woman in front of him. A subtle scent of flowery jasmine drifted up to him and he briefly rested his face against her hair to inhale her fragrance.

Damn it all, but she felt good in his arms!

Demon needed no incentive to leave the forest, and soon they pounded dirt back to the road. Invigorated by this unusual experience, Malcolm pondered the mystery he held in

his arms. Who was she? How had she gotten here? Why was she on Milcaster lands, almost deposited on his doorstep?

That she presented a delicate problem caused him to rub his chin once again. In all likelihood, this woman was somebody's light-skirt. Someone with very unusual tastes in the way he desired his ladybirds to be dressed. Lifting the woman's right hand, he appraised the square-cut emerald jewel on her third finger. Surrounded by tiny diamonds, the ring was very fine in quality. Indeed, jewelers Rundell and Bridge's on Ludgate Hill in London would have been pleased to add it to their collection for sale. Evidently this woman had a generous and wealthy protector; but Malcolm could be generous as well.

He glanced down at her bruised and bleeding face. Given the proper inducement, he had no doubt she would switch her loyalties to him. After all, he *was* a duke. He pressed her closer, enjoying the sensation. Hopefully she would soon be restored to good health.

Which left only one problem; tomorrow Lady Cynthia Ellingsby would arrive at Milcaster Manor. Once she became his fiancée, she would not take kindly to finding his mistress also housed under the same roof. Indeed, having the two of them present at the same location *was* bad ton. However, the woman did need a place to recover.

A dilemma, to be sure. After diligently searching through the available female members of polite society for the attributes he sought in a wife, he did not wish to queer the deal. Lady Cynthia had all the requirements he desired for such an important match. Good breeding, a noble title, generous curves, and most important, the ability to bear him sons. A voluptuous widow with two young boys, Cynthia passed that particular prerequisite. Plus, she had already indicated she would be more than willing to produce sons for him. And if there was one thing he lacked, it was an heir.

Malcolm frowned. All he had to show from his disastrous first marriage was a bothersome seven-year-old daughter.

An indistinct murmur arrested his attention. With eyelids partially open, the woman gazed up at him, puzzlement on her brow and a question on her lips. "Who are...?" Before she could complete her question, she passed out again, slumped against his shoulder.

Adjusting his position so she would be more comfortable, he smiled down at his new light o'love. Yes, he had a feeling she would please him immensely. The very darkness of her hair promised a passionate fire burning within her most bountiful breasts.

Before approaching the impressive oak doors to Milcaster Manor, Malcolm bent down and stole a kiss. He smiled; sweet, like honey. Perhaps he would steal more tomorrow night.

But tomorrow night was Friday, the night he had been waiting for, ever since his period of mourning was over. *Damn.* He sighed. Oh well, he would just have to be patient, that was all. Once Cynthia left, he could then enjoy the favors of this, no-doubt, high-spirited filly.

In the shadow of the Manor, he eased off his horse and ignored the stable boys who hurried out to attend to Demon. Indeed, the expression of surprise and curiosity on their faces would have been comical except for the fact that Malcolm did not care for his future mistress to be ogled in this fashion. For how could the servants not ogle the sight of her deliciously shapely, exposed limbs?

Treadwell, the butler, met him at the door. "It is good to see you again, Your Gr-Grace." As Malcolm entered the entryway with the woman, the butler's eyes widened like bright guinea coins. Normally unflappable, Treadwell could not hide his astonishment at his master's unexpected armful. "Shall I, er, carry the young miss for you, sir?"

"That will not be necessary." Malcolm held the woman closer, relishing the sensation. "I happened upon an unfortunate accident," he stated as an explanation. "I shall place this woman in the...gold bedchamber. Send a maid up there to attend to her needs."

The gold bedchamber at the far end of the house would be a goodly distance from the other guests. "And, Treadwell," Malcolm continued, "I shall require Doctor Bailwick. The woman has lost a good deal of blood."

"Yes, Your Grace." The butler quickly recovered from his shock, bowed, then left to execute his tasks.

Knowing he left a thousand questions in his wake, Malcolm carried the woman up the marble staircase. He looked forward to her regaining her consciousness so they could reach a mutually beneficial agreement concerning her future. Truth be told, he grew impatient to see what lay behind those deliciously wicked panties.

* * *

Alex lazily stirred under the covers. Never one to just leap out of bed, she reveled in the sheer luxuriousness of the sensation. Maybe it wasn't time to get up. Maybe she could go back to sleep. Maybe...

It was no use. Something nagged at her, urging her to wake up.

Oh, leave me alone. She brushed aside her inner voice. The bed felt so comfortable, so soft, so...*different.*

Wait! That was it; this wasn't her bed. Opening her eyes, she gazed out at her surroundings. It was a bedroom all right, but unlike any she'd ever seen. She lay in a four-poster bed, covered by a burnished gold comforter, and propped up on a fluffy,

lemon-scented pillow. Yellow posies decorated the wallpaper and across from her stood a huge, unlit fireplace.

She continued to scan the room which was filled with heavy antique furniture. Nothing new, nothing contemporary jumped out at her, like a television, or phone, or even a clock-radio. In fact, the room oozed old-world charm; complete from the top with huge brass chandeliers to the bottom with a fleur-de-lis patterned carpet.

Where on earth am I? How did I get here? Scraps of recent events surfaced just long enough for her to grasp at the memory, but then vanished back into the recesses of her mind. She wrinkled her nose, trying to recall a thought, any thought. *Wait. I'd been sitting at the airport, scheduled to fly to London, but that's all I can remember.*

Alex made a move, then thought better of it. The sound of the subway at rush hour relentlessly roared through her head. As if that wasn't enough, the left side of her face throbbed as if she'd had a root canal or two.

Whatever happened obviously had knocked her senseless.

Voices penetrated through her discomfort. Low and buzzing, she couldn't make out the words. Shifting position slightly, she spotted two women by the fireplace. One was only a young girl, but both were dressed in long dark gowns. The girl had on a full white apron, while the older woman wore an ivory cotton cap covering her greying hair. What strange costumes to be wearing! The women weren't talking to each other, but paying attention to...

Alex squinted her eyes to see. Oh, okay. Now she could view two men. The smaller man had thinning hair and a rather ample stomach. But the weirdest thing about him was what *he* was wearing--knee breeches. Heaven only knew the man didn't have the figure for them, not with spindly lower legs!

But the other man...goodness! He actually took her breath away. Casually resting against the fireplace mantel, this man was obviously the one in charge. All three people seemed subservient to him. Hair the color of a moonless night, he had the physique and the demeanor of an Olympian god; probably only a few years older than she was, too. Maybe he was thirty-five. His dark trousers tautly strained against his thighs, revealing powerfully lean muscles. And although he wore high, military style boots, there was no way *he* had spindly lower legs. Even at this distance she could see broad shoulders and biceps to die for.

The strange thing about it was that he looked vaguely familiar; a hazy image of a frown...and maybe even a kiss. No, she must've been mistaken, for how could she have forgotten kissing that handsome hunk?

She wet her lips. But why dither about him? Men were men, and this guy's costume was bizarre in the extreme. His jacket had tails, plus he wore one of those old-time cravats.

Had she stumbled onto a movie set or something?

Wincing with pain, she lifted her shoulders slightly higher on the pillow. It was time to quit playing Sleeping Beauty and join the real world. "Ah, hello?"

The older woman slapped her hands to her wrinkled cheeks and came running to the bed. "Lawks a-mighty! You be awake!"

Talk about an uncomfortable situation. Suddenly Alex felt as if she was front and center on a Broadway stage without the slightest idea of her next line.

Fortunately the chubby man hurried over, then bowed, of all things. "Er, hello, my child." He removed a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped at his high forehead. "I am Doctor Bailwick, and I am here to urge you back to health."

The man in the tight trousers didn't move from the fireplace, but all the same she knew he was curious about her, just as she was curious about him. Putting her interest on hold though, she turned her attention to the doctor. He had a British accent, which probably meant her plane landed in London, but then why couldn't she remember the flight?

"Thank you, Doctor Bailwick. I appreciate that." She gave him and the two women hovering by the bed a small smile. "I'm Alexandra Stanford, and I'm afraid I don't remember very much. Other than I feel like something the cat dragged in! Do you know what happened to me?"

The young girl giggled while the older woman clucked in sympathy.

But the man by the fireplace wasn't amused. His eyes, dark and cold, glittered mysteriously at her. "A pity, Miss Stanford. That is precisely the information we require from you."

The doctor quickly lifted Alex's left hand and touched the crease above her elbow. "Now, Your Grace, we must be patient. She has suffered an extreme head injury, resulting in a putrid fever. It has been quite a shock to her system." His high forehead covered in perspiration and his eyebrows raised, he looked as if he was pleading for her to confirm his words.

Why was he nervous? He basically had it right; except for the putrid fever part. So she nodded in agreement. With her right hand, she gently fingered the swelling on her jaw. *Darn*. Somebody or something had used her as a punching bag.

But then the doctor's words finally sank into her unfocused thoughts. Your Grace, the doctor had said. As in...duke? No kidding, this man was a real, live British duke? She tilted her head to take in every last inch of him; how very, very interesting.

"Er, just leave everything to me, Your Grace," the doctor rattled. "I will soon have her feeling better, and her memory will return in no time at all." He reached down into a bag at the side of the bed.

The duke, if that's what he actually was, stared at her so intently, almost as if he saw her naked. A flush of self-conscious heat burned her cheeks. She was overreacting, but just the same, she glanced down to make sure everything remained hidden under the covers. But maybe she had it all wrong. Maybe he stared at her because she looked really gruesome with her swollen jaw and bandaged head.

Since she was the object of everyone's undivided attention, she felt obligated to speak. "I sure hope so, doctor. The last thing I recall was waiting at the airport for my flight to London." There was more, much more, but she just couldn't put her finger on the memories. "This is England, right? So obviously I arrived, but I don't remember--"

While the two women whispered furiously, the doctor cut Alex off. "Do not pay any heed, Your Grace. This nonsense is common with brain fever. Sara, hold Miss Stanford's left arm; tightly, if you please."

Alex shook her head. "What nonsense? I don't understand." The older woman must have been Sara. She did as she was told and held Alex's arm too securely for Alex to even think about pulling away.

What Alex also didn't understand was why the doctor washed an area of skin over her elbow crease, dried it, then applied a tourniquet to her upper arm.

No one answered her. To add insult to injury, the duke headed for the door.

"Now then, Miss Stanford." The doctor removed something from a bottle, then held it up to the light. Try as she might, she couldn't see what he had in his hand. "This bloodletting will relieve..."

"*What?*" Alex's voice raised up ten octaves. "Bloodletting! You can't be serious!"

The duke stopped in his tracks, evidently not expecting her opposition to this "medical" treatment. But Doctor Bailwick wasn't affected one bit. Lowering his hand, she now saw what he held. Brown, sleek, and slimy, there could be no mistake. It was a--ugh--leech.

"A *leech*? Are you for real? Good God, oh no you don't." Sara's grip be damned, Alex scooted to the edge of the bed, dragging the woman with her.

If she had hoped for someone to come to her rescue, she was sadly, sadly disappointed. The two women were obviously puzzled, plus they seemed slightly scandalized by Alex's behavior. Not so the doctor; he was impatient. Placing the leech into a jar, he got ready to invert it onto her arm. The duke, on the other hand, well, she couldn't read his impassive expression. But all these people had something in common;

they all broadcasted their belief that bloodletting was normal. To them, it was she who was way out in left field, so to speak. Which meant, of course, these people were completely, and without a doubt, certifiably crazy.

Heaven help her. How was she supposed to talk rationally to irrational people? The answer came to her in a flash: humor them.

Right. "Ah, listen, doctor. I appreciate your concern and all but, actually, I'm feeling, um, fine; much, much better."

The doctor seemed to take Alex's protest as a personal affront. He darted his gaze at the duke. "Never in all my born days has anyone taken exception to my 'cupping' a patient. 'Tis a proven cure for a number of ailments. His Royal Highness, Prince George, regularly undergoes cupping, Your Grace."

Prince George? Who in the world was Prince George? And who were these people? Why didn't they leave her alone? Suddenly exhausted, Alex shut her eyes. Now she knew firsthand what Alice in Wonderland must've felt when she tumbled down the rabbit hole: madness. Inexplicable madness.

Closing her eyes wasn't a good idea, for when Alex opened them, the duke, tall and forbidding, cast a disinterested glance her way, then spoke to the young girl. "Mary, help Sara restrain Miss Stanford. Doctor Bailwick, you may continue with your treatment."

"No. No!" Alex struggled, but two against one just weren't fair odds, especially when the stuffing had been knocked out of her. If only her head could clear so she could think.

The doctor came closer with the plump, squirming leech, until it almost touched her. Talk about having your life flash before your eyes. She gulped down hard. "Wait! I have to tell you...bloodletting, and well, medicine in general is against my religion."

A divine inspiration on her part; she prayed that her subterfuge would work, for if these weirdoes thought leeches were okay, then who knew what other type of "medicine" they practiced?

Her heart in her throat, she waited for their response. *Please, please, pretty please?*

The young girl, Mary, gasped and stepped away from the bed, as did Sara, who also released Alex's arm. The doctor worked his mouth, but no words came out. Reaching into his pocket with his free hand, he removed a handkerchief and wiped his forehead again.

The silence in the room was thick enough to cut. Everyone turned toward the duke, Alex included. Her fate was up to him, and she wasn't above begging. *Please.* She sent him an urgent, unspoken plea. *Make that doctor and his disgusting leech leave me alone.*

The duke stood for the longest time, stroking his chin in a thoughtful manner. Finally, he said, "Doctor Bailwick, I believe there is no further need for your services tonight. Mary will see you out." Then the man gestured toward the older woman. "Sara, you may go tend to my daughter, but leave the communicating door open in case Miss Stanford should require you."

Putting the slippery leech back into a bottle and packing his bag, the doctor mumbled to himself but didn't protest his dismissal. Maybe he was relieved that he didn't have to deal with such an uncooperative patient.

Everyone obeyed the duke's instructions. The room was cleared, except for him.

Phew. That had been much too close...and much too strange. But she'd better remember her manners. Alex leaned forward on the bed. "I must thank you--"

He held up his hand. "I trust this example of defiance will not repeat itself in the future. If we are to come to an understanding, remember, only agreeable behavior will be tolerated."

After that bombshell, he strode out of the room and closed the door.

Alex stared at the closed door. "Come to an understanding? What kind of understanding and about what?" Well, whatever it was that he babbled about could wait. Now that she was in no danger of donating blood to a leech, all she needed was some R and R. Come morning, she'd feel just fine; maybe even sooner than morning.

Easing down on the bed, she snuggled under the covers. She had her work cut out for her, that was certain. First, she had to find out what had happened to her and where she was. Next, she had to get back on track and make arrangements to attend the auction at the British Museum.

Her head began to ache once again. Of course there were more things to do that she purposely neglected to think about, like call the office, find out where Vaughn Lemonde was, let her friends know she was okay; all that kind of stuff.

Just as she was about to drift off to sleep, an amazing idea struck her. Back at the airport, she had innocently made a wish to continue the trip without her obnoxious boss. What if...what if somehow her wish had been granted, in some strange and fantastic way?