

Copyrighted material. This is a preview only.

An Excerpt From: LOVE IN EXILE

Copyright © SAMANTHA KANE, 2009

All Rights Reserved, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.

Chapter One

“Ah, I see the native has returned.”

Gregory Anderson turned toward the drawling voice, the other man’s malice barely contained beneath his bored, slightly amused tone. It was Hardington. Gregory’s first foray into polite society since returning to England and he had to run into one of his least tolerable acquaintances. He hadn’t seen Hardington since just after the war. Gregory had spurned his advances, and his offer to invest in Gregory’s first voyage. The man was completely untrustworthy.

Gregory raised a brow coolly as he met Hardington’s stare and then insolently ran his gaze down the other man’s form. Hardington was tricked out beautifully, of course. The man knew the only likeable thing about him was his looks. He was tall, dark, brooding, well built. Too bad his mind was a cesspool.

“You are still astoundingly unappealing, Hardington,” Gregory responded politely, “and the answer is still no.”

There were gasps from several people standing near and unabashedly eavesdropping. Hardington’s face went rigid with dislike as his cheeks turned red. Gregory sighed inwardly. As if his appearance wasn’t fodder enough for the gossips, he had lost control of his unruly tongue again. But since they were going to be talking about him over tea tomorrow anyway, he might as well make sure the gossip was as spectacular as he could possibly make it.

Hardington stepped closer. “You are in my world now, Anderson,” he ground out quietly. “I would be very careful if I were you.”

Gregory looked away from Hardington, disgusted with himself almost as much as the other man. Then he caught sight of Daniel Steinberg smiling at him broadly from the other side of the ballroom and he forgot completely about Hardington’s presence.

“Excuse me,” Gregory said to no one in particular and moved across the room toward Daniel. It was like swimming against the tide. The brightly colored gowns and waistcoats in the ballroom shone in the candlelight reminding Gregory of the brightly colored fish of the South Seas. And like startled fish, people darted out of his way as he passed.

He knew he was imposing at well over six feet tall, with shoulders so broad his tailor despaired. But he also knew it wasn’t his physical presence that made the people around him nervous. It was fear. He was, after all, half savage, and God knew he could revert to his base nature at any moment. He scoffed as two colorless debutantes scuttled out of his way. They need have no fear. He had no desire to throw them down and plunder their inviolate innocence. They appealed to him about as much as Hardington.

Daniel fought through the crowd and met him halfway. “Gregory,” he cried in obvious delight. “When did you arrive in town?” He stuck his hand out and grasped Gregory’s in a firm handshake as he reached up and squeezed Gregory’s shoulder with the other.

Daniel’s greeting was so warm that Gregory forgot the cold welcome he’d received so far. “Only yesterday,” Gregory replied shaking Daniel’s hand with both of his. “God, Daniel, it’s good to see you.” He knew his smile was as broad as Daniel’s. He had missed his old childhood friend these many years he’d been gone.

“Palu,” was all Daniel said, a world of meaning in the old childhood name.

Gregory could see understanding in Daniel’s eyes before he let go of Gregory’s hand and grabbed his arm, pulling Gregory toward a group of people looking at the two of them with undisguised interest. “Come on, let me introduce you to some new friends, and there are some old ones here who will be thrilled to see you again.”

“So you’ve finally decided we are not all bad and are going to grace us with your presence,” an amused voice drawled from the middle of the group as they walked up, and Simon Gantry smoothly stepped between two people to stand in front of Gregory.

“Simon,” Gregory cried, and shook the offered hand. “How are you?”

“How am I?” Simon said with a laugh. “Well I’m quite all right, seeing as how I’ve been stuck here in England while you sailed the world, discovering new lands and seducing innocent natives.”

Gregory laughed for the first time since arriving in the chilly ballroom. “That would be discovering new plants, and being seduced by natives.”

Simon waved his hand airily in front of him with a snort. “The distinction is negligible.”

“Not to the plants,” Gregory replied seriously, earning another laugh from Simon.

Simon turned then and pulled a voluptuous, chestnut-haired beauty out of the pack. “My dear, let me introduce you to Mr. Gregory Anderson. Gregory, this is Mrs. Neville, Phillip Neville’s wife.” The lady smiled widely and Gregory bent over to kiss her outstretched hand.

“Mr. Anderson,” she said, and her voice was sweet and deep, like dark rum. “I’ve heard so much about you. And might I add that you live up to your well-deserved reputation.”

“My thanks,” Gregory replied with a grin. “I think.” She appeared to be with child, although her dress masked most of it. Perhaps that was why she seemed to glow with health and exude sensuality.

She laughed just as Phillip Neville and Jonathan Overton stepped up. Neville held out a glass and his wife took it gratefully. Gregory noticed that Overton stood at her other side, his hand on her arm proprietarily. So, he had read Daniel’s letter correctly. The three were together. Interesting.

“Anderson,” Overton said somberly, shaking his hand. Then he grinned, and Gregory was struck by the difference in him. He had always been serious to the point of morbidity. Neville and his

beautiful wife seemed to have brought about a miraculous change. “It’s good to see you again. When did you return?”

“In London, only yesterday,” he replied, realizing that he’d be repeating it all night. “But we docked at Liverpool over a month ago. I paid my respects to my aunt and uncle and cousins before coming here.” He shook his head with disbelief. “And somehow Wilchester got wind of it and sent round an invitation. Where is the happy couple?”

To say Gregory had been shocked to receive an invitation to the ball the Earl of Wilchester was giving to celebrate the marriage of his nephew Ian Witherspoon was an understatement. When he had arrived at his London townhouse to find the invitation he thought surely there was a mistake. But the earl, a patron of the Royal Society, had included a handwritten message urging him to come. He could hardly refuse.

“Dancing around somewhere,” a feminine voice said from behind him, with no little disgruntlement. “Apparently we are all expected to dance our feet off.”

“Very,” another woman’s voice said quietly.

Gregory turned to see Kate Collier...no, it was Lady Randall now...standing a few feet away, smiling at him. She was still arrestingly beautiful with her white-blonde hair.

“Lady Randall,” he said, stepping toward her at the same time she stepped forward.

Her smile was genuine. “Mr. Anderson, how delightful to see you again.”

“My congratulations on the birth of your son,” Gregory said.

Lady Randall beamed. “Thank you. Yes, Anthony. He’s a delight. But I must say a baby has turned the house on its head.” She laughed as she turned to the woman standing behind her and pulled her forward. She was young, but it was clear that she was going to lead some man a merry chase very soon. Tall, slim, shapely, with lustrous dark hair and eyes that snapped with intelligence and deviltry, the young lady’s gaze traveled up and down his person with obvious admiration. “May I introduce my niece, Miss Thomas?” Lady Randall said.

The young woman curtsied gracefully, somehow managing to keep her eyes on him the whole time. “How do you do, Mr. Anderson,” she drawled with a flirtatious grin. “It is absolutely delightful to make your acquaintance.”

Gregory bowed from a safe distance. He preferred to admire her type from afar. Alluring and just spreading her wings to begin exploring the games men and women played. He didn’t venture into those waters if he could avoid them. “Miss Thomas,” he replied politely.

The young beauty spotted someone in the crowd behind him and her eyes lit up like stars fallen from the skies. For a moment Gregory was a little put out, hypocritical though it may be. But relief chased those feelings away. He wouldn’t have to worry about pursuit from this quarter.

“Hello, Anderson,” Wolf Tarrant said, and Gregory couldn’t hide his surprise. Kensington was nowhere to be seen, and it was clear that Wolf’s presence around Miss Thomas was proprietary. Things had changed a great deal in his prolonged absence.

Miss Thomas scooted up to Tarrant's side and tucked her hand around his arm. "Several of us attended a lecture at the Royal Society last month, Mr. Anderson, that was based on your latest pamphlet from the Pacific."

Lady Randall moved to stand next to her niece with a subtle shake of her head. Miss Thomas let go of Tarrant reluctantly. It was amusing how alike the two women were in looks and temperament. There was affection between them, but clearly Lady Randall wasn't too happy with the chit's obvious favoritism. Through it all Tarrant remained cool and distant, but his eyes followed Miss Thomas as she stepped around her aunt and put some distance between them.

"Did you?" Gregory replied, bringing everyone back to the conversation.

"Oh, yes," Lady Randall answered. "We were quite popular because we knew you personally." She laughed. "Although I must say Dr. Appleton was disappointed to find out that we were woefully ignorant of your research."

"Anderson?" Gregory felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and Ian Witherspoon was standing there, grinning at him.

"Gregory!" Ian laughed. He threw an arm around his shoulder and hugged him. "It is you! Did you come all the way from the South Seas to wish me well?"

Gregory laughed with him. "Hardly. I'm here to study the mating patterns of the native English aristocracy," he joked.

One of the only Englishmen who could look Gregory in the eye walked up and glared at him. "Don't even think about setting up an observation post at our house, Anderson," Derek Knightly growled. "I shall have to skin you alive and eat you like one of your islanders." Ian pulled away from Gregory to stand next to Knightly and Gregory was struck again by Ian's blond elegance against Derek's dark, ruffian good looks. He was a bit surprised to see the two still together after Witherspoon's marriage.

"Well, I'm told I taste rather good," Gregory replied benignly, and most of the men laughed. He belatedly realized that Miss Thomas and Lady Randall were still standing there and he blushed.

Miss Thomas smiled wickedly at him and then turned hot eyes on Tarrant, who just motioned behind her. A young gentleman stood there, mouth agape. He was flanked by Jason Randall and Tony Richards. Miss Thomas sighed like the put-upon heroine of a gothic novel. "I suppose you're here to claim a dance?" she asked with ill-disguised irritation. She looked at her dance card. "Mr. Rutherford? Is that right?"

"Very," Jason Randall growled warningly.

Miss Thomas ignored Randall as she curtsied with a polite smile and held out her hand to her poor unwanted dance partner, who stumbled through an apology, although Gregory wasn't sure for what, and led her off. Gregory watched with fascination as she turned to look longingly at Tarrant, who was watching her like a bird of prey seeing his latest meal stolen away from under his nose.

"Hello, Anderson," Tony said warmly. "It has been too long." He shook Gregory's hand with

affection. "We have all followed your journeys with great interest."

Just then the Earl of Wilchester walked up with yet another stunningly beautiful woman on his arm. Good lord, had Englishwomen gotten more attractive since he'd left? Or was he just starved for anything English? That thought was a little depressing, since he himself was barely considered English by most of his countrymen.

"Anderson," the earl said with a nod in his direction. "Good of you to come on such short notice. I hope your voyage home was a good one?"

Gregory bowed slightly. "Yes, thank you, sir. Fair weather and calm seas."

"Good, good," the earl said with a polite smile. He turned to his nephew and the smile grew to one of genuine affection. "I am returning your bride, Ian. She could not be parted from you any longer." As an afterthought he turned back to Gregory. "So sorry, Anderson. You haven't met my dear niece, have you?" His affection for the young woman on his arm was obvious. "My dear, let me introduce you to the famous Mr. Gregory Anderson. His father was the renowned naturalist Gordon Anderson, who sailed with Captain James Cook. And his mother was a native of the Friendly Islands. He is," he looked at Gregory as if for confirmation, "a bit of a famous naturalist himself these days, eh?"

Gregory merely smiled politely. He knew lineage was important to these people, the ballroom filled with the cream of the English aristocracy. He should be used to feeling like the ill-bred oddity among them, a curiosity his father had brought home from his explorations. But his stomach felt uneasy, and his smile was forced.

Mrs. Witherspoon held out her hand shyly, a blush staining her cheeks, nearly drowning out the freckles there. "How do you do, Mr. Anderson?" she spoke softly. "I have heard so much of you from Ian and Derek, and Very could not stop talking about the lecture she attended last month." If possible her blush deepened. "I am sorry that I couldn't attend with her." Her dark auburn hair flamed in the candlelight and she bit her lip nervously as if expecting a setdown. From him? Could she not see him in the dim light of the ballroom? He was hardly one to criticize.

Derek stepped forward, a scowl on his face, and Gregory remembered what she had just said. She had heard so much about him from Ian and Derek. He shook his head with a small laugh. What on earth had happened to prudish England while he'd been gone? Derek's scowl deepened and Gregory looked over to see Ian and the earl glaring at him. He realized he'd been silent too long.

He stepped forward and took Mrs. Witherspoon's hand in his, smiling broadly before he politely kissed it.

"I am not sorry," he told her firmly, "because now I shall be able to bore you at length in person with my latest discoveries." She smiled timidly at him. "My congratulations on your marriage, madam. I wish you good luck." He looked askance at Ian and then Derek, and turned back to her with a commiserating shake of his head. "You shall need it."

She laughed then, a trill of feminine delight that made Derek's eyes darken as he looked at her with pride and possession. Gregory was so shocked at that look he gaped in astonishment.

Ian stepped up and took her hand from Gregory and placed it on his arm. "Thank you, uncle," he said, the same pride and possession in his voice that Gregory had seen in Derek's face. Mrs. Witherspoon gazed up at Ian with adoration, and then bestowed the same look on Derek. Gregory could almost feel how much she wanted to grasp Derek's arm as well. The earl cleared his throat, breaking the spell.

"Yes, well, that's an excellent idea, Anderson," he boomed a little too loudly. "Sophie and Ian must have a reception for you. It is the perfect introduction for Sophie as a hostess. Now that you are no longer in mourning for your brother, my dear, you can have a small fête." Mrs. Witherspoon paled noticeably.

"I'm not sure I'm up to anything grand, Mrs. Witherspoon," Gregory rushed in to say. "I've only just returned home to England, and am having a bit of a time reacquainting myself with the customs here." He smiled self-deprecatingly. "We wouldn't want the native to forget his manners in front of society, would we?"

Mrs. Witherspoon's brow furrowed as she regarded him soberly. "I am quite sure that we have no need to fear any such thing, Mr. Anderson," she assured him quietly. "And were a slip to occur, handsome and brilliant will often overrule manners." She looked tellingly at Derek, who shrugged innocently.

Gregory was amused by the byplay. "Yes, well, you are too kind, Mrs. Witherspoon."

"Hmm," she replied with a smile. "Sometimes I think so, too."

Her sly candor delighted Gregory. Where had Ian found her? Ian and Derek, he amended.

Just then Brett Haversham walked up. "Good God, Anderson!" he cried. "What ill-tide brings you back to our shores? Old Nick must be skating on the ice." Gregory shook his hand, looking at the petite woman on his arm. She had wildly curling dark hair surrounding a sweet face with eyes as full of mischief as the dancing Miss Thomas'. On her other arm was a tall, gorgeous, redheaded man. He had a regal bearing, an amused expression, and blue eyes that Gregory thought he could get lost in. Brett turned to them both. "Let me introduce you to my—" He stopped suddenly and cleared his throat, blushing. "That is to say, may I introduce the Duke of Ashland and his wife?"

Gregory could only laugh in utter delight. Oh, yes, he was going to enjoy this new England.