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An Excerpt From: PRISONER OF LOVE

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Veronica dragged her hand through the water as she glided around the lake in a small punt. The water was as still as a looking glass. She glanced behind and saw the ripples from her hand and the ones from the boat's passage merge behind them.

She allowed herself the luxury of watching the man propelling their punt around the lake with a long pole. Wolf was quite handsome. Dark blond hair that gleamed with red sparks in the sun, ice-blue eyes and a lean, aesthetically pleasing face, interesting rather than too pretty. He was her wolf, a predator who desperately wanted to devour her.

"What are you smiling about?" Wolf asked. He sounded amused. She liked that, liked that he was amused by her rather than exasperated. Everyone else seemed to lean toward exasperation. She wasn't that bad, was she?

"You need to scold your tailor," Very told him. "Your coat is too small in the shoulders." The material stretched and wrinkled with each smooth pull on the pole. He was tall and lean, with the body of a fencer or a dance master. But he was definitely more muscular than he'd been a few months ago.

Wolf raised a brow at her. "So now you are going to cost me the price of a new wardrobe?"

"Me?" Very asked in astonishment. "What have I to do with the size of your coats?"

"You've had me out on this bloody lake at least three times a week all summer. You do realize that it is work punting you all over on a regular basis? The size of my shoulders is in direct correlation to the amount of work."

"Huh," said Very, pretending confusion. "Are you trying to confuse me with your science, Mr. Tarrant?"

"I am trying to tell you, Miss Thomas, that when next we spend time together I should like to do it on dry land."

Wolf's response was said in such a dry, long-suffering tone that Very had to bite her cheek to keep from laughing. She looked over at the shore at the small group of people lounging in the shade waiting for them. Her Aunt Kate sat on a bench with Anthony Richards. Tony was her aunt and uncle's lover, and had lived with them since their marriage three years ago when Very was sixteen. He was as much an uncle to her as her aunt's husband, Lord Jason Randall.

Jason leaned against a tree not far from her Aunt Kate and Tony, his sharp eye never leaving the punt. Her uncle was more vigilant than any real father could ever be. He seemed to think that Wolf had nothing else on his mind but dragging Very off and dispensing with her maidenhood. Which, when she thought about it, and she often did, seemed like a very good idea indeed.

“You’re smiling again,” Wolf noted.

Very pointed to the shore, and Kate waved. “That is why I insist on you taking me out on the lake, Wolf darling. Without our watery expeditions we would never have a moment alone.”

“You call this alone?” Wolf asked. “When we are on display for all to see in the middle of a lake, in the middle of Hyde Park? Perhaps I need to explain the meaning of alone to you.”

Very gave him what she hoped was a seductive look. “Oh, I wish you would. With illustrated examples.”

Wolf closed his eyes with a pained expression. “You enjoy tormenting me, don’t you?” When he opened his eyes his expression was intense and left no doubt that he would like to forgo the illustrations and use a more personal demonstration technique. “You know every night I lie in my bed imagining doing all manner of wicked things to you when I finally manage to get you alone.”

“Like what?” Very challenged him. “I can imagine far more wicked things than you can, I’ll wager.”

This was what she loved about their time on the lake. In front of the entire world she and Wolf tormented one another with their deliciously naughty, forbidden fantasies, and no one was the wiser. She loved it. Loved that she drove him mad with desire. But she hated that she could do nothing more. Because she loved him and she desperately wanted to be with him. Jason, Aunt Kate and Tony were too smart for her, however. She’d admitted defeat. There was simply no way for her and Wolf to sneak off and enjoy one another. She was a veritable prisoner.

“Last night I imagined taking you roughly, Very. You drove me to distraction the other day, brushing up against me, dropping your reticule four...no, five times and bending over to retrieve it, waving that shapely bottom of yours in my direction. So last night in my dreams I gave you what you so richly deserved. A good, hard spanking.”

Very laughed. “Not hard enough, if I know you. You’re so afraid of breaking me, Wolf. I won’t break, you know. You can spank me harder.”

Wolf tilted his head to the side and observed her with a little grin that made her heart skip a beat. “Funny, that was what you said in my dream. ‘Spank me harder, Wolf.’”

“Really?” Very asked casually, though her heart was tripping all over the place now. He’d never told her this fantasy before. “And did you?”

Wolf nodded. “Yes, I did. I spanked you until you cried out, spread across my lap, that marvelous soft, plump bottom reaching for the flat of my hand. Your skin was bright pink, fiery to the touch, and you were so wet, Very. Every part of you was begging for it.”

Very was breathing heavily. “I don’t beg.”

“You’ll beg for me when the time comes,” Wolf promised quietly. “And you’ll love every second of it.”

Very looked at Wolf's erection pressing against the tight front of his trousers and then let her eyes travel up his trim figure until his heated gaze caught and held hers.

"I don't doubt it," she whispered. "I would beg if you'd give me what I want."

"What do you want, Very?" he asked, his voice so low she only knew what he said because they'd played this game so many times before.

"I want you, Wolf," she told him. It was what she always told him. And she meant it. Every time. She wanted him in every way, not just physically. She wanted to be with him forever. He smiled in triumph and she nearly swooned, not that she'd tell him that. God, she loved when he looked at her like that, like she was treasure to be pirated away and plundered.

"Just me?" he asked.

Very bit her lip. Then she slowly shook her head. It was hardly possible, but Wolf's look grew more heated, enough to singe her toes as if she were dipping them in the fires of hell. Which a great many people would tell her was exactly what she was doing. And she didn't give a fig what they thought. She loved the burn of the forbidden, to do what she was told she couldn't, shouldn't. She'd do what she wanted, and she'd do it with Wolf. And with Kensington.

"I want to be with you and Kensington," she whispered. "I want you both in my bed."

The memory of the last time the three of them were together came roaring back, as it did every time she and Wolf spoke of Lord Michael Kensington. It was over a year ago, the day her friend Sophie had married Ian Witherspoon, and Very had learned of the abuse Sophie had suffered as a child. She'd inadvertently upset Sophie, teasing her about the wedding night, not knowing that Sophie was terrified of being intimate with her new husband. Very had set off a chain of events with her teasing comments that had resulted in Sophie running from her wedding breakfast in tears, Ian chasing after her. Very had felt guilty, and so, so angry. Angry at the world for what Sophie had suffered, and angry at herself for ruining Sophie's wedding day.

Michael had found her in her Uncle Jason's library that evening, ripping up a pillow in her anger and frustration. And he'd made it better. He had a knack for doing that, for soothing Very's fiery temper and impulsiveness. But this time, it wasn't words that had soothed her, though she remembered every word he'd said.