



A MOST SERIOUS GENTLEMAN

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Chapter One

Yorkshire, England

Late summer, 1919

Millie lightly touched the white rosebuds in her short black hair. She smiled at her maid's reflection in the oval mirror. "You've done a wonderful job of it, Daisy. Thank you."

"I'm so pleased you like it, Miss. It has to be perfect for today of all days." Daisy fussed with her hair a bit more.

"Are you all packed?" Millie watched her thread another pearl stud hair pin in place.

"Yes, Miss. It's all downstairs ready to go to the station."

"And you said farewell to your family?"

"I have, Miss." Daisy's smile didn't waver. "My mother will be at the church, anyway, Miss, to see you on this important day."

"That's so kind of her."

"The whole village is coming out I should think. They want to send you off with their best wishes."

“I’ll be happy to see them.” She opened a small brown velvet box. Inside, glittered diamond earrings, a gift from her intended groom. It was so thoughtful of him and unexpected. She paused a moment and thought of Jeremy, the man she was to marry in under an hour. How had it happened so fast? A man she’d known for years, but never really thought of as husband material, never really thought of him as someone other than her father’s friend. A man she had seen at every social event, and at most times seated along the dining table in her own home.

Lifting the earrings from their satin bed, she admired them in the morning light.

“They are beautiful, Miss.” Daisy sighed dreamily, staring at them.

“I am most fortunate.” Donning them, Millie’s gaze went to the door as it opened and in came her two sisters, Prudence and Cecilia, and their cousin, Agatha. Excited voices filled the room, as they circled around Millie where she sat at her dressing table.

“You look like an angel, Millie,” Agatha said softly, hesitant as always to make herself known.

“Thank you, dearest. You all look lovely, too.” She gazed at their dresses of palest blue satin.

“This is the saddest day of my life!” Prue, always dramatic, flopped onto the poster bed and hugged a corner post forlornly. “I cannot believe that tonight this

room will be empty forever. You'll never be just down the hallway, or at your place at the breakfast table. Why must you marry? Is it because of the shortage of men after the war? You'll not be left on the shelf you know, not you. You're too pretty, too *good*, to be overlooked by the men who did come back." She tossed her head angrily. "That bloody war. And I will say *bloody* because that's what it was. Destroying families, our whole generation of fine young men, or maiming them beyond any use to anyone!"

"Prue!" Cecilia gaped, her face paling. "Do be quiet. That is cruel. It's not their fault. When I think of those poor men, our *friends*, who will never be the same. It fair breaks my heart. You know I saw Robbie Simmons the other day in the village? Blind. I couldn't, *wouldn't* believe it. He was jolly enough, of course, but I was beside myself with the pain of it. And he could ride so well, and shoot, and now what has he got?"

"Some lovely girl will fall in love with him." Agatha said softly. "Some people can see past things like that."

"Yes, but what if we can't? Then suddenly we are awful with no compassion. It's a disgrace," Prue snapped. She turned back to Millie. "So is that why you said yes to Sir Jeremy? Because he came back whole? Well, nearly whole. They say he's even quieter than ever, *tormented*, perhaps, by what he's seen and done."

“Prue, please,” Agatha murmured, giving Millie a horrified look.

“That’s enough, Prue. We’ve been through this.” Millie glared at her sister. “Do you wish to ruin my day?”

“No... but really, Millie. Why not marry someone young and dashing? There are some left, I assure you. Pick one of our friends instead of Sir Jeremy Remington. Tom Rollings and Henry Pinkerton both came back without a scratch and so did Arthur Healy and— ”

“Prue!” Cecilia’s warning went unheard as Prue launched into another rant on why marrying Sir Jeremy was the wrong thing to do.

“But he’s *so* old.” Prue protested.

“He’s thirty-five.” Millie sighed. Anyone over the age of twenty-one was old to Prue.

“He lives in a crumbling old manor.”

“Hardly a ruin.”

“And we’ll never see you!”

“I’ll be only ten miles away. We will see each other all the time.”

“He’s father’s friend, not ours.”

“We’ve all known him for years. And you,” she pointed a finger at Prue, “have always got on well with him!”

“Yes, I do, but it doesn’t mean I’d marry him!”

“He didn’t ask you.”

“Well, you cannot deny that he’s sour. I swear I’ve never seen him laugh. All we get are twitches of his lips when something is amusing. He’s handsome enough, I suppose if you like them to be cold and distant with it.”

“Prudence Violet Mary March.” Their mother’s voice from the doorway had them all turning to her. Prue flushed guiltily.

Viola March stepped into the room. “Out now, all of you. Give Millie some peace.” She stepped aside as the three bridesmaids filed towards the door, but before Prue could leave their mother touched her arm. “Not one more word from you today unless it is to say something pleasant. Don’t you dare spoil your sister’s special day anymore than you already have. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Mama.” Prue turned back to Millie. “I’m sorry, Millie, really I am. It’s just that I’m terribly sad you’re leaving us. Nothing will ever be the same again...” Tears filled her eyes.

“I understand, dearest, I do.” Millie walked over to her younger sister and hugged her briefly. “Everything will soon settle down again though, I promise.”

“Go now,” their mother butted in. “Your father is waiting outside with the carriages.” Walking over to the dressing table, Viola smiled at Daisy. “You’ve done a magnificent job, Daisy. Miss Millie looks just as a bride

should. Thank you. And I wish you well in Sir Jeremy's establishment."

"Thank you, Madam." Daisy bobbed a curtsey and left the room.

When they were alone, Millie took her mother's out-stretched hand. "So, Papa is ready to leave then?"

"Ready and waiting impatiently as always."

"Do the carriages look lovely?"

"Oh, indeed. There's enough white satin bestowing the carriages and horses that if the wind was strong enough we could all be flying to the church. I blame your grandmama, of course."

Millie grinned. "Grandmama loves a bit of bunting."

"A bit?" Her mother raised an eyebrow. "We'll look like a carnival caravan coming into town. I do not comprehend her at times, truly I don't. Never one to show off, bad manners, she always tells us, yet the minute I mention you wanted to travel to the church in the carriages and not the automobiles, she is ordering enough bolts of satin to cover the entire house. I dread to think what the church looks like."

"It'll look beautiful. Grandmama has excellent taste."

Her mother took a deep breath. "Are you all set to go, dearest?"

“Yes.” Millie stood and smoothed down her ivory silk and lace gown, while her mother adjusted the veil at the back of her head.

“You do look beautiful, my darling girl.” Her mother’s voice caught with emotion. “Exactly as I imagined you would on this day.”

A flutter of nerves gripped Millie’s stomach. “I hope Jeremy thinks the same.”

“Of course he will. No male could think otherwise.” Her mother smile’s slipped a little. “You are completely certain this is precisely what you want?”

“Yes, Mama. Why?”

“Well, you know Papa and I will support you if you want to change your mind.”

“Why would I?”

“Because Jeremy, as nice as he is, he’s not of your set, is he? I mean, he’s not like Frank Bloomingdale or Arnold Botham. Jeremy was always your father’s friend. Not a—”

“Mama please don’t worry. I have thought long and hard about this decision. I confess I was surprised by Sir Jeremy’s proposal, but with due consideration and the chance to spend some time with him, I do believe this is a good match for me.”

“Indeed it is a very good match. But have you spent *enough* time with him? He went to the continent

straight after your engagement party. You've barely had more than a dozen days together."

"It was unavoidable that he returned to France so soon, but he had to find out about his properties over there. After years of war, he had a right to be worried that there'd be nothing left of his family's chateau and the winery."

"He could have waited, what was another few months after not seeing it for nearly five years?"

"He wanted peace of mind. I agreed that he should go and find out what was left of it."

Her mother sighed. "All I'm saying is that he could have taken you with him after the wedding."

Millie shook her head. "No. Jeremy explained that travelling through a devastated country was not the type of honeymoon he envisaged for us, especially with the Spanish flu about."

"No, instead you're going to a hotel in Scarborough. Why not London or down to Cornwall, or Dorset? It seems a poor choice to me."

They left the bedroom and walked along the gallery. "Jeremy has been through a war, Mama. He wanted to stay home, after years away, but he felt I need something to remember the occasion by. The hotel is the best in Scarborough. We won't have to travel far to get there and we'll have lovely walks by the sea. It'll be

wonderful and safe. And I think that is what Jeremy needs. Somewhere safe, peaceful.”

“Promise me you’ll get in touch if you find he has...if he is... What I mean is that he’s...they say he’s not...” Her mother blinked rapidly. “Some say his injuries are not physical, but more mental and I worry enormously that he may not be who you think he is.” She let out a breath, her grey eyes expressing her concern.

“I trust my judgement, Mama, that and my instincts. Jeremy is a decent kind person. He would not inflict such a...disability on me. I’m sure of it. Papa thinks very highly of him and he would know if Jeremy is not alright mentally. They talk a great deal.”

They stopped at the top of the stairs.

“Yes, but your Papa isn’t the one marrying him. You are. And you know what that entails. This man. Forever. Sharing your life. Sharing his home, his bed... Marriage can be difficult enough when both parties are well, but should one not be...”

Millie smiled gently at the anxiety on her mother’s dear face. “All will be well, Mama. I know it will.”

“And if it doesn’t work out as you expect, then you are to come home. We’ll arrange something.”

She kissed her mother’s soft cheek. “Shall we go?” Jeremy Remington twitched his shoulders as though his officer’s uniform didn’t fit correctly, but of course it did

for it was made by the best tailor in London's Savile Row. The coolness of the church calmed him somewhat, not that he was nervous. He didn't get nervous. Well, not normally, but then, it wasn't every day that you got married.

Married.

He still couldn't believe it. He was getting married. And to Millie March, the one lady he thought he would never have. His heart did a little flip as it always did when he thought of her.

How long?

How long had he admired her, his friend's eldest daughter? He'd watched her mature from a young lady into a beautiful woman and the whole time he never expected to be the one to take her hand in marriage. He assumed she'd be snapped up the minute she turned eighteen, but the years went by and the war took away the world they were used to. When he returned home he was eager to see the woman she had become in his absence, and he wasn't disappointed. Millie turned twenty-three during the summer and not long after, the army sent him home for good. It only took one look, a few seconds in her company the day he called to visit them for the first time since the war ended and he knew it was time. His time to make a move.

He'd been patient long enough. He'd wanted her long enough. Discreet enquiries gave him the answers

he sought. She wasn't waiting for anyone to return to her. She'd spent the war doing the good deeds women of her class did at such times, for her father had forbidden her to join the nursing corp, which apparently had been her desire. And he was glad she'd been stopped.

He shuddered slightly. The thought of his lovely Millie seeing the atrocities he'd witnessed filled him with cold fear. He quickly cleared his head of the images that threatened to blind him. No, not today. Today was a joyous occasion. His wedding day. The nightmares could wait, as he knew they would, ready to grab him in the darkness and choke him. God, could he put Millie through it? Should he have told her? Would she despise him for crying out into the night, for his shakes?

"Ready, Rem?" His best man, Isaacs, joined him by the altar, smiling hesitantly, looking as anxious as though he was the one making his vows.

"I'm ready." He nodded once, determined to not let his emotions show. He was more than ready to take a wife, to take Millie, to start a life that would fill him, fill the emptiness that had opened up inside him since the war finished. No, he wasn't going to think of the war today. It was done, over. Now it was time for new beginnings. A new life with Millie. If anything could help banish his night terrors it would be her. The sweet

smell of her, the soft feel of her lying beside him would cure his dreams.

His chest tightened at the thought of lying in her arms, sated with love, whispering his heart into the shadows. He hadn't survived the spray of bullets, the blast of bombs, the loneliness of the dark quiet nights in muddy trenches, the boredom, the endless paperwork, the death and the bloody sheer waste of it all not to be rewarded now. Millie was his reward. She would heal him

He turned to look over his shoulder and nodded at several guests taking their seats. The pews were filling up rapidly, the time was approaching. He swallowed and took a deep breath, straightening his back as though ready for an assault. No, he had to relax, to smile, for Millie. He mustn't do anything to spoil this day, or worse still to make her change her mind. He knew he wasn't like the young men of her circle. He didn't find it easy to laugh at nothing, or joke and make fun so effortlessly as her friends did, as *she* did.

Why had she said yes to his proposal?

Why had she agreed to tie herself to him of all people? He knew his faults and was trying desperately to change his ways. People thought him cool, detached, but beneath that hard exterior he was warm, loving, he knew he was, and he would prove it. His mother had died young, but he remembered her kind eyes, her soft

voice as she sang him songs in the nursery. Her loving embraces were the last he had received.

He ached to be loved again and to love in return. He cherished Millie and would spend every day of the rest of his life proving it to her, if she gave him the chance. For years something in her manner alerted him to her gentleness, her compassion. He'd discreetly studied her for so long he knew her inside out. He admired her strength of purpose, her humour, the way she cared for others, her determination to win at tennis, even when she knew she was a dreadful player. She had character. She went through life laughing and enjoying herself and he wanted to be a part of that. He wanted her happiness to seep into him and change his life.

The organ started to play and the elderly vicar appeared from a side door with his verger walking solemnly behind him. Jeremy looked up at the stone vaulted ceiling. He wasn't a praying man. He didn't really believe in God, not after the horrors on the battlefield, but now he wanted to ask, beg even, that if there was some deity watching over them that it would grant him this wish.

All he wanted was for Millie to love him.

Could he have that?

Did he deserve it?

He'd killed men...

“Here we go then.” Isaacs coughed quietly and adjusted his uniform sleeves. “Good luck, my friend.”

Jeremy let out a deep breath and smiled at him, the first true smile he’d felt for a long time. Saying, ‘Good luck, my friend,’ was what they said to each other before going ‘over the top’ and each time they had survived it. Nothing else Isaacs could have said would have been as welcomed as that.

The music swelled filling the small church. He turned slowly and watched his bride, *his beautiful bride*, walk towards him on her father’s arm. In all his thirty-five years he had never felt as proud as he did that moment.

Chapter Two

Soft music drifted on the breeze across the garden. The weather was still summery for the last day of August, of which Millie was most pleased about, but if it had rained then they'd have just taken the tables inside the house. Her mother would have nothing ruin this day and her staff knew it. Millie smiled at John, a poor harried footman, who passed by with another tray of drinks. He looked ready for a sit down and a cup of tea. She would have to go thank them all later, before she left.

“My dear, you seem a little lost.”

Millie kissed her grandmama's soft cheek. “Not at all, Granny. I was just thinking, that's all.”

A look of horror came over her grandmama's face. “Good lord, dear, don't start doing that. You're married now.”

“Granny!” Millie couldn't help but laugh. Her grandmama, Violet Fordham, was a faded beauty, but

she had the wit and backbone of a woman who had seen and done things that most could only guess at. Millie adored her. She had grown up listening to her grandmama's stories of her adventures abroad and the men she loved.

Violet leaned in close. "Have you done the right thing, dear?"

"Gran."

"No, I don't mean to be nasty, you know that. I greatly admire Sir Jeremy. The man is a war hero, for heaven's sake, and your father's good friend. A decent man all round, everyone knows it, but he's..." she paused, frowning, selecting the right words, "he's so serious, my dear, always has been, even before the war. Only children are like that, you see. He's never had the chance to fight with a sibling, and we all know how much that benefits one's character."

Millie grinned at her. "He was sent to boarding school at a young age, I'm sure that compensated somewhat in that area."

"It's not the same at all, my dear. Chums at boarding schools couldn't possibly replace the familiarity of a

sibling's emotional blackmail." Her gran paused, frowning. "He's so unlike you. It worries me."

"I don't think I would want to marry someone the same as me anyway. We'd be bored with each other before the year is out. We do have things in common, naturally, but it's also stimulating to find out our difference and learn about them, too."

"Spoken like a true innocent." Gran nodded wisely, adjusting the dove grey lace at her throat. "You'll learn, my dear. Just make sure you don't let him steam roll right over you. Men do that. They can't help themselves, it's as natural as a dog lifting its leg to pee."

"Gran!" Millie spluttered her laughter.

Her grandmama screwed her face up and then laughed with her.

"It'll be fine, I know it will. Please don't worry." Wiping her eyes, Millie shook her head at her grandmama's foibles. "We have managed to talk quite a bit since his proposal and we get along rather well."

"He is intelligent and so are you, but you can't talk forever."

Millie grinned. "Why ever not?"

Violet sniffed and fiddled with her emerald brooch. "It's not natural, my dear." She tapped Millie's hand. "You'll soon find out that there are times when words are not needed, or useful."

"You mean in bed?" Millie hid another smile.

Shocked, her grandmama's eyebrows rose. "Indeed I do not mean that at all! Talking in bed is most interesting, as you'll find out. I was talking about the times when fate makes life difficult, that's when you will know if you've made a mistake or not. It's those times when you don't need conversation you just need each other and it's those times when you learn if you can depend on that person or not."

"And you think I won't be able to depend on Jeremy?"

A long sigh escaped her grandmama. "I think you can depend on him with your life, my dear, but can he depend on you with the same?"

"I would like to think so."

"Yes, yes of course you would. I don't doubt it, really. You're my granddaughter, after all, and you're

strong like me. Just remember though, dearest, men are funny creatures and not like us at all. I think you'll find Sir Jeremy is the right man for you despite the differences."

"Like our age difference?"

"Life experiences, Millie. He's a man who has been to hell and back."

She tapped Millie's hand again and then lifted her head and gaze about at the crowd. "I had best go and mingle. Why your mother had to invite half the county is beyond me. The Sherwoods, for instance! He collects bird's eggs and she sleeps with a bottle of gin under her pillow. Their son draws nude women by bribing their housemaids and their daughter eats chalk. Need I say more?" She tilted her head thoughtfully before giving a tiny smile and wink before walking away.

Millie watched her go, laughter bubbling in her chest.

"It's nice to see you smile." Jeremy came silently to her side. "You do it so well." His own lips twitched.

She looked at him, her new husband, and had a moment of feeling none of it was real. The guests, the

marquees of food, the music, the sunny day, and Jeremy himself, it all seemed a dream.

“I hope you will always be smiling,” he said softly, an earnest look in his eyes.

“I’m sure I will.”

“Have I told you how beautiful you look?”

“I don’t believe you have. Thank you.” Her heart did its little flutter it always did when he looked at her so intensely. Why had it never behaved in such a way with other men before? There had been numerous opportunities for her heart to be affected by a handsome man, she’d known enough of them growing up. Certainly she had danced with every man in the district and not once had any of them stirred her beyond friendship. How had Sir Jeremy Remington done it? She must have been blind to him all these years.

“It is near to the time we ought to be leaving. I’ve already sent my man, Dobson, and Daisy, to the station with the luggage. They’ll get to the hotel before us and have everything ready.” His gaze roamed the gathering. “I don’t think we’ll be missed now, do you?”

She looked for her mother and found her smiling and talking to a circle of friends. Her father wasn't too far away doing the same. No, they wouldn't be missed. "I shall go tell Mama."

Within a short space of time Millie had changed her gown into a smart blue dress and jacket and their guests crowded around them wishing them well and calling goodbye and good luck. They were bundled up into Jeremy's automobile, a brand new cream-coloured Napier and more rice and rose petals were thrown over their heads. The Napier's top was down so they could wave all away along the drive until they disappeared from sight around the curve of ash trees.

Jeremy was driving, something Millie found she was extremely comfortable about. Previously they had gone for a drive with Jeremy at the wheel, and she liked the intimacy of it. No driver to listen to their conversation no matter how discreet they were. Besides, Jeremy told her that he much preferred to drive the vehicle himself, have the control of the speed. He relied on his skills, his intuition, and so far, she agreed with him. He was an excellent driver. She sat beside him in the front and for

a while they didn't speak, but lapsed into companionable silence.

She thought of what lay ahead, their first night together. She wasn't frightened, or awed by the possibility of climbing into bed with this man, her new husband.

What was wrong with her?

Why wasn't she nervous?

Casting a quick glance at his profile, a tingle of...excitement trickled down her spine. Shocked, she realised she was eager to find out what the whole experience would be like. Good or bad.

“What are you thinking?”

She blushed and looked away over to the passing countryside. “Do you think our hotel room will be nice?” It was the first thing that came into her head.

“Of course. Why wouldn't it be? I asked for the best and paid for the best.” He changed gear as they slowed to turn right onto the road which would take them to the coast. “These hotels have been closed for the duration of the war. They are eager to get their reputations and

businesses up and running again. We'll be treated very well."

"Yes, I'm sure we will." She flashed him a smile and was pleased when he responded the same way.

Although money was never a topic discussed by anyone at anytime, everyone knew who of their circle was, through no fault of their own, in dire straits. And never once had Jeremy's family been talked about in that way, or at least that's what her father said. And he would know. Nothing got past her father when it came to money, who had it and who didn't.

"Are you hungry?" Jeremy flicked her a worried look after they'd been travelling for nearly an hour.

"We can stop at the next village and find somewhere to eat."

"But we aren't far from Scarborough now, are we?"

"No, not much further to go, but we have a few hours of daylight left so we can stop if you'd like to."

"That would be nice. I'm not hungry, more thirsty I think."

"Right. Will do."

Within minutes they were slowing into a village that Millie didn't catch the name of but seemed a nice settled place. One of those little communities nestled in the Yorkshire moorland countryside where everyone knew each other and was likely related to them too.

Parking the automobile in front of the only pub in the sleepy high street, Jeremy helped Millie out and they stood and stretched a little. The sunshine coated the front grassed area of the public house, inviting passers-by to take a seat on the wooden benches, and Millie did just that. Another bench was occupied by two old men drinking large glasses of frothy ale.

“May I have one of those, but perhaps not so large?” She asked Jeremy.

He frowned. “Ale?”

“Why, yes.” She laughed at his shocked expression. “I’ve had it before. My cousin, Eddie and I often went riding long distances in the summer and we’d stop at some little place somewhere and have a glass of ale to refresh us.”

“You do surprise me.” He grinned.

“Good. I’d hate to bore you within hours of marrying you,” she joked.

Jeremy leaned down close to whisper in her ear. “I very much doubt you’ll ever bore me, my darling.” Then he was gone, disappearing into the dim interior of the pub.

A little flustered, Millie looked down at her hands and tried to stop the tingling running through her body. Heavens. A mere whisper from him had her quivering. How did that happen? She’d known him for years, enjoyed dinners, dancing, picnics, shoots and every other entertainment in the heady days before the war started and not once did she feel like this. Granted, even back then she was aware of him. It was hard not to; such an interesting and powerful man drew attention wherever he went. If she was totally honest she knew he had watched her, or more accurately observed her from afar. He always made sure he talked to her at least once at any event they attended, and always claimed one dance at a party.

She thought for a moment and realised they had never danced more than once at a party. Why was that?

Why, if he ever thought of her as a future bride, did he not dance more than once with her at balls?

She gazed at a fat bee drifting from flower to flower that filled the tub by the door. There was so much she didn't know about her husband. Oh, she knew the main things, his pedigree, his family, his mother died when he was a child, his father six years ago, and his cousin too, on the Somme. She knew of his Eton schooling, his love of automobiles, yet he was still devoted to his beautiful black hunter, Magic. She knew he liked to read the classics, though he'd confessed to her that sometimes he didn't always understand them and that annoyed him, so he'd read them again to overcome the challenge. She'd seen his sporting abilities on hunts, on the cricket field and on the tennis court – though he'd never partnered her, instead usually picking Prue. From her father she knew he was smart in the business world, and that he had distinguished himself on the battlefield.

But what was in his heart?

Jeremy came back outside and placed a small glass of ale beside her on the wooden table, but held his larger glass. He raised it to her. "Cheers."

“Cheers.” She raised her glass and then sipped from it, enjoying the cool invigorating taste. “Why did you never dance more than once with me? In the past I mean, before the war. All those parties and we only ever danced just once each time.”

“I think you had many willing partners, don’t you?”

“So?”

His honey brown eyes darkened. “One dance was enough.”

“It was?” She didn’t know what to make of that.

“Discipline.”

“Pardon?” Now she was confused.

“I had to discipline myself.” He glanced away towards the village green where a mother was shepherding her young children away from the duck pond.

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“Why would you?” With a huge sigh he turned his attention back to her. “I’ve admired you for years, from afar.”

Millie stared at him, shock rippled through her. He’d just confessed he’d admired her for years? “But-but.”

“No one knew. I made sure of that. I would have asked for your hand a lot sooner had not the war started. I was terrified of leaving you a widow, had you accepted, which I doubted you’d have done. I was also terrified of leaving you without declaring myself and that you’d fall in love with some handsome young officer.” He gazed down at his ale. “I spent the entire war terrified of one thing or another, but mostly of hearing the news you’d found a man to love.”

“Oh, Jeremy.” She couldn’t say anything more and when he looked at her the depth of his feelings was clear in his eyes, on his face. Shakily, overwhelmed by this quiet man, she stood and took his glass from his hand. On tiptoe she reached up and kissed him softly on the lips. His whole body tightened and he groaned low in his throat. She smiled into his eyes. “Let’s go to the hotel.” Taking his hand, she led him back to the Napier.

As they hummed along the dusty winding roads towards Scarborough, all Millie could think about was his declaration. To think all those years she knew

nothing of what he was feeling towards her.

Admittedly, he hid it well.

She turned to stare at him, her heart fluttering a little. The wind ruffled his brown hair that only had a touch of grey in it, and she had to grip her hands to stop them from reaching out to brush it down. She liked that his nose wasn't completely straight, but had a slight bump as though once he had broken it. His full bottom lip invited kisses and just like back at the public house, she had the urge to kiss him again, only this time she didn't want to stop.

This handsome man was hers!

And he had wanted *her* for years. Incredible.

“Why are you staring at me?”

Unable to prevent herself, she laid a hand on his arm. “We are married.”

“Yes, I know. I was there.” His lips quirked in that half smile he was famous for in their circle.

“What I mean is...” Lord, what did she mean? Her fingers rubbed the soft leather of his driving coat.

Jeremy's arm moved beneath her fingers as he changed gears, slowing the Napier down until he pulled

over onto the side of the road. In one swift movement he turned in his seat and took her into his arms.

His kiss was completely different from any they had shared before, which weren't many and simply chaste kisses of the kind people give when they not sure of the other. However, this time, Jeremy held her tight to him. His lips were soft, yet demanding, urging, seeking and she instantly surrendered to the delicious enjoyment of being thoroughly kissed by a man who knew how to do it so fittingly.

Every sensible thought flew from her mind as her body responded to the attentions Jeremy was paying her. When his hands encircled her waist, drawing her even closer against his chest, she couldn't help but moan softly into his mouth. She nestled further into his arms, unable to bear any space between them. Everything in her life shifted at that moment. She suddenly became aware of what her body was wanting – this man.

After what seemed an eternity, Jeremy drew away, breathing heavily. "My darling..." his fingers brushed

away a strand of hair which had escaped from under her hat.

Try as she might, she couldn't form the words she wanted to say. She didn't even know what she could say. All she knew was that if being married to Jeremy meant enjoying kisses like that, then she would be very content indeed.

"We should go." He seemed as reluctant to let go of her as she was of him.

"Yes..."

He kissed her again, softly, tenderly, almost reverently. "We have tonight."

"Yes." Couldn't she manage to say anything else? What was wrong with her? "Jeremy?"

Kisses rained over her face. "I know, my darling, I know."

"You feel it too?"

"Yes. I always have." He stroked her cheek with a finger. "Thinking of kissing you was all that kept me sane in France. I've imagined doing this for so long."

"I wish I had known."

“It wasn’t the right time. I didn’t want to take the chance that you might not find my proposal welcoming.”

“But you hardly spoke to me, or anyone for that matter. You were always the ‘serious friend of father’s’. If you had spent more time with me, before the war, I would have thought so differently about you.” She looked down at the brass buttons of his uniform, trying to say what she didn’t understand herself. “I always admired you. I...I did find you...attractive in a distant kind of way...”

He tilted her chin so she was looking into his eyes. “You weren’t ready back then. I knew that, and so would have everyone else, especially your parents. The war allowed us both to change, I suppose.” His lips tilted into a semblance of a smile. “I’m trying to still change, be a better man. Not be so...distant.” He frowned, withdrew a little from her. “Millie, there is something you need to know.”

“Oh?”

“I should have mentioned it to you before, before we were married.”

“I see.” She didn’t of course and became worried. Then, seeing the despair cloud his eyes her heart melted. “You can tell me anything, I won’t judge.”

He gripped her hands and stared down at them as though the answers he sought were in written on her gloves. “I have nightmares.”

His simple statement made her fall in love with him even more. Three words. Three little words coming from such a strong man everyone admired, yet he was frightened to death of her reaction.

She let go of him and placed her hands on his face so that he looked straight at her. “I can help you with that.”

“You don’t understand. They occur quite often and can be most violent. I would never hurt you,” he added quickly. “But I can’t control them.”

“Maybe not, but perhaps having me beside you will lessen the severity of them.”

“I can only hope.”

“Jeremy.”

“Yes?”

“I think I have fallen in love with you, I hope you don’t mind?”

The dead light left his eyes and was replaced by sheer happiness. “I don’t mind at all, my love, for I feel the same.”

“Good. I think we’ll rub along together quite well, don’t you?”

It was his turn to touch her face and he cupped her cheek to bring her lips closer to his. “I’m banking on it, my darling.”

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Anne was born of Yorkshire parents and has a large family in England. She lives in Australia and is a full-time writer. She has been writing since 1997. She specialises in historical women's fiction and modern women's fiction. Her books are set mainly in Yorkshire, England.