

YASMINE NASH

Tempting the Duke

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Author's Note

Hi there! Thanks for downloading this exclusive sneak peek of *Tempting the Duke*, my upcoming novel. Please be aware that this book has not been released yet, and as such, minor formatting, design, and text changes may occur prior to publication.

I hope you're already signed up for my newsletter, but if not, you can easily subscribe here: <https://yasminenash.ck.page/>

And if you want to gain access to reading the entire thing early, shoot me a line at yasminenashbooks@gmail.com. I'll choose a few lucky readers to receive a free, **complete** advanced copy of the novel.

All right, enough of that. Here's Chapter 1 from *Tempting the Duke*. I hope you enjoy!

Xoxo,
Yasmine

* * *

Chapter 1

Sir Jonathan Wallbridge, Duke of Devonshire, was in a terrible mood. He had been riding on horseback for four hours straight, the sun shining in the sky hadn't been deterred by his riding hat and had given him a blistering headache, and, worst of all, he was nearing his destination. Sir Jonathan would rather have a hundred headaches than complete the errand he had ridden out to perform. It had all started with the dreadful letter he had received from his attorney in London a few weeks back.

Your Grace,

A rather interesting bit of news has been brought to my attention. I was visited this morning by an attorney from Haverton, who has apparently been looking for me for quite some time. Or rather, he's been looking for you. It seems you are the closest male relation to the recently deceased Walter Kellynch, a most respectable gentleman by all accounts. His affairs were all tied up rather complicatedly, but we've sorted it out, and suffice it

to say, you are heir to both his estate and roughly 100,000 pounds. I shall follow up this correspondence with more details, however, I don't believe it will require a great effort on your part to sort out his affairs. The late Mr. Kellynch seems to have a particularly reliable steward. Were you to ride out to Haverton, it should only take you a few weeks to sort the whole situation out.

There is one other aspect to this business I must inform you of. Although both Mr. Kellynch and his wife are now deceased, they left behind a young daughter. Because his affairs were entailed, all of Kellynch's fortune will pass to you, which leaves the poor girl in an unfortunate situation. She has no other relations on her mother's side. According to every interpretation I can make of the law, you are her guardian. But as I say, we shall discuss this more in person.

*Your ever faithful servant,
J. Blake*

In other words, Jonathan was inheriting a ward and a fortune all at once. At 28, Jonathan had no desire to become guardian to anyone, much less a young girl who would surely hate him for inheriting rather than her. And he had money enough without this unexpected wrinkle. He had resolved it with himself that, as soon as he could settle the affairs at the estate, he would send the girl off to finishing school and put the entire business from his mind as best he could.

Jon had left his valet behind, hoping to take his trip as quickly and with as little effort as possible.

His horse crested a ridge and there, several miles of green

open land between them, lay the village of Haverton.

* * *

Louisa Kellynch was furiously mixing cake batter in a bowl while her thoughts jumbled together inside her head. Every once in a while, little bits of chocolate batter spat out from the bowl, spattering her blond hair and pert nose, but Louisa was too preoccupied to notice. She had gotten word just this morning that her late father's heir had been discovered at last and would be arriving at the estate within the next week. To take stock of his new property, no doubt. Louisa would very much have rathered he stay lost.

As difficult as life had been the last few months, and as much as she mourned the loss of her parents, Louisa had grown accustomed to independence and she wasn't eager to give that back. She didn't have to answer to anyone about how she spent her time. If she wanted to spend half the day out horseback riding alone, she could—and often did. She didn't have to suffer through social engagements with her insufferable neighbors for the sake of politeness, nor was she forbidden from spending time in the kitchens because that behavior was “unladylike.”

But now her father's heir had finally been tracked down. And some stranger, this old duke, would be coming here and rearranging her life. As her guardian, he would have control over every detail, from where she lived to whether she could marry. It was so unjust!

Louisa could not even run away, even if she'd had a notion to, because she didn't have a penny to her name. All her father's wealth had been tied up in the estate and would therefore pass to

the duke. And the 5,000 pounds her mother had left her would not be at her disposal until Louisa turned 21 years old—a whole three years away. Until that time, she had no choice but to be the duke's property and hope she didn't displease him or do anything to cause him to mistreat her.

The batter mixed to within an inch of its life, Louisa poured the cake into a round metal tin and placed it in the wood oven. The cook, who by this point had grown used to Louisa invading her kitchen whenever the young mistress was in a mood, merely looked on. Louisa removed the messy apron which had preserved most of her white gown from getting dirty, and placed it on a stool. "Would you mind taking that out of the oven once it's baked?" she asked the cook. "I feel in need of some fresh air. I think I'll take Peppercorn out before the entire day is gone."

"I'd be glad to, ma'am," the cook said.

Peppercorn was the name of Louisa's gray mare, a gift from her father on her 15th birthday. Louisa didn't bother to change into her riding habit or use the sidesaddle. Her mother had always despaired of her daughter's improper behavior when she was still alive, but her father would just laugh. "*We're far from the prying eyes of the ton. Let her do as she wishes,*" he had said more than once.

Louisa chose one of her favorite routes today, hoping the fresh air and quiet greenery of the countryside would soothe her mind. Peppercorn trotted along gamely with little direction needed from her rider; the horse had memorized the path. Louisa allowed her eyes to close, savoring the feel of the breeze across her face and the smell of spring in the air. This could be one of the last times she experienced this freedom.

Eyes still closed, Louisa felt a few wet drops land on her face.

She reopened them. More drops came down, until they became a steady sprinkle. With a laugh, Louisa pushed her legs into Peppercorn's sides, urging the horse to go faster.

* * *

Jon was still at a distance from the village when the rain started. He cursed his luck. If it had only begun half an hour later, he would have missed the downpour entirely. He was so caught up in his grumblings that he almost didn't notice the woman on horseback who galloped by a few yards away from him. Her white dress flashed in the corner of his eye and he turned his head to see as her horse stumbled on some uneven ground, nearly pitching its rider off.

Jon immediately spurred his horse in her direction. "Miss!" he called when he was in earshot. "Are you all right?" Horse and young lady had come to a stop now and she seemed to be leaning over its neck, whispering something. As soon as he was near enough, Jon hopped off his horse and walked up to the woman. "Miss?" he said again.

Up close, her gray mare seemed fine, if a little skittish. The woman turned her head to look at Jon in apparent surprise. She must not have heard him calling to her in the rain. She was sitting astride the horse, he realized in some embarrassment. Certainly not a gentlewoman then. Her gown had been pulled up past her knees so she could sit comfortably, revealing shapely legs covered only by thin white stockings. Either she was embarrassed by her state as well, or the rain had caused a flush to arise in her pale cheeks.

Even so, she sat up very straight and said in a commanding

tone, "Would you be so kind as to help me down? I'd like to examine my horse for injury before I ride her any further." He proffered a hand and she took it, soft palm resting in his. Once she was on the ground, the girl walked around the horse a few times, checking its legs and whispering soothingly to it.

"Peppercorn seems to be all right," she finally said in a relieved tone, coming to Jon. "I should have known better than to ride her like that in the rain. I couldn't have forgiven myself if she'd been injured." The shower had ended as suddenly as it had arrived, but both Jon and the young woman were still wet. Her blond hair must have come loose during her ride, for it hung in sultry curves down her back and framing her face. A damp white cotton gown clung suggestively to the curves of her body, leaving very little to the imagination. It took an effort to keep his eyes fixed firmly on her face, instead of wandering down to her full bosom and rounded thighs the way he wanted to.

"She is a beauty," Jon said, still looking at the woman. "Your horse, I mean," he added hurriedly.

"You're not from around here, are you?" the girl asked.

"No, I have business in the town. I'll be staying in the tavern," he said, not wanting to get into any more of the particulars. Something about this woman made him want to toss all propriety aside. "I'm Jon," he said, hoping she wouldn't be offended by his familiarity.

She smiled a little shyly. "Call me Lou."

"A pleasure," he said with a bow.

* * *

"Are you on your way to the tavern now?" Louisa asked Jon.

"It's notoriously difficult to find, tucked away in a little alley behind the blacksmith's shop. If you follow me, I can show the way." Without another word, she placed a hand on his shoulder to steady herself while she swung onto Peppercorn's back again. His shoulder was firm and she allowed her hand to linger there an extra delicious second before grabbing her reins. "Come along then," she said with a grin.

She kept the horse at a reserved pace, still a little skittish by Peppercorn's near injury.

Jon—she felt a shiver at the illicit familiarity of calling him by his first name—kept pace beside her. They didn't talk much, but she watched him from the corner of her eye as they made their way to the village. The sun had begun setting, lighting his handsome face with a brilliant glow. Few villagers were out and about by the time the two had reached the tavern.

She saw brief surprise flash across Jon's face when she climbed off her horse and led the way inside. "I think I fancy a drink. Don't you?" she asked him. She rarely entered here, and never after dark. Haverton may have been a nice town, but a tavern was no place for the daughter of a gentleman. Louisa was feeling bold tonight though. Maybe it was the rain, or maybe it was because she had run into this handsome stranger, but electricity was coursing through her veins. Even so, she let out a silent breath of relief when the tavern turned out to be empty, except for an old man she didn't recognize.

Louisa led Jon to a table in a darkened corner, while the old man went into another room and returned with two large mugs of beer. She tried sniffing her mug surreptitiously. It smelled earthy and acrid. Louisa took a tentative sip and nearly spit it out. It tasted disgusting! Nothing like the sweet, watered wines she was used to drinking.

Jon was gazing at her with interest, looking as though he were trying his best not to chuckle.

"I guess I'm not a fan," she admitted to him.

"This isn't exactly a fine brew," he agreed, taking a swallow and grimacing. "Does your family live here in the village?" he asked.

Her family—or lack thereof—was the last thing Louisa wanted to talk about right now. She could just picture the horror that would have appeared on her mother's face, had she still been around to see her daughter sitting unchaperoned with a strange man.

"No," she said quietly. "Just me." She sought around for a way to change the subject before he probed further. A grin curled Louisa's pink lips. "I have an idea. What do you say to a little competition? The person who drinks their glass the fastest, is the winner."

"And what prize does the winner receive?"

She raised one eyebrow and looked at him pointedly. "That's up to the winner to decide."

His dark eyes flashed in the dim firelight. "You'd better be warned: I have some thoughts about what I'd like to do if I win, and they're not entirely proper," he said in a gravelly voice, causing her to shiver. She was suddenly conscious of her still-damp gown which made it only too-easy to see her curves.

She raised her mug to her mouth, eyes locked with Jon while he did the same. Bracing herself, she drank the sour beer as quickly as she could, placing her empty mug on the table as soon as she'd finished. Jon's glass slammed against the wooden tabletop a moment before hers. He took one look at the grimace still on her face and laughed.

"It wasn't as bad as that," he said cheerily.

“Oh, it certainly was,” she assured him. “But I so hate to lose. I’m very competitive.”

“Then I declare you the winner. A gentleman always lets a lady win, even when the facts say otherwise. Name your prize.”

Louisa clapped her hands in delight, then gazed around the empty room trying to decide. The old barman had disappeared into the other room again, so it was just her and Jon sitting in the near dark, with only firelight and greasy candles to cast light around them. He was watching her patiently, dark gray eyes shining in the light of the fire. She let her eyes wander from his floppy black curls to his broad shoulders, all the way to the strong, large fingers still gripping his mug. She felt the blood rushing to her face and gulped. Perhaps the alcohol had gone to her head.

“A kiss,” she said, more boldly than she felt.

* * *

Jon gripped his glass so tight he thought the handle might shatter. Had he heard her right? Or had his desire, which had been growing steadily since he’d first seen her with her dress hiked up to her knees on her horse, made him temporarily deaf?

“For my prize, I want you to kiss me,” she said breathily.

He knew it was improper. He would be taking advantage of a young woman with no family nearby to protect her. She was likely a housemaid, possibly even employed at his new property. All these reasons passed through his mind. Yet he had seen the way her eyes had studied him, lingering on his shoulders and arms. And after all, it was her suggestion, not his. She bit her pink lip while he wavered, and that decided him. All concerns

flew out of his mind and his pulled his chair closer to hers.

"Your wish is my command," Jon said softly, unable to break his gaze from that pink mouth. It opened just slightly and he leaned in to kiss her, inhaling her scent of rain and lavender and—unaccountably—chocolate cake. She sighed a little into him and kissed him back, but when Jon ventured his tongue exploringly along the seam of her lips, she froze a little. So she wasn't as worldly as she seemed. No matter. He'd soon teach her.

He gently coaxed her mouth open further, taking one lip lightly in his teeth. He wanted to run his arms all along her body, but he resisted, satisfying himself with gripping the back of her head and letting his fingers play in her curls, which were still streaming loose around her neck. She sighed a little louder and lifted one hand to grip his shoulder, tentatively reciprocating with her own tongue. After several minutes of this, they both needed to raise their heads for a breath.

When the kiss was over, the two sat staring at one another in shock for several moments. His heart was pounding and—bloody hell—he had a situation in his pants. He was just contemplating whether he should ask her to stay the night in his room when Lou rose, a little unsteadily.

"It's getting late," she said, her voice hoarse. "I need to be getting back or I'll be missed." She grinned a little wickedly. "Thank you for the prize."

Jon stood as well. "Allow me to escort you back to your home. It's not safe for a young woman to be wandering around at night alone."

Lou chuckled throatily. "Yes, I could find myself beset by another handsome stranger. Don't worry, I'll be fine. I insist," she said firmly, when he began to argue. Seeing himself

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defeated, Jon just bowed deeply and kissed her hand.

It was only after he listened to her horse's hooves clatter off that he realized he had no idea how he would ever see her again...

End of Preview

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Tempting the Duke will be released July 2020. It is currently available for pre-order [here](#).

Also by Yasmine Nash



Her Secret Scandal

A Former Heiress...

Heiress Alexandra Morland lives a charmed life until her mother reveals a life-shattering secret on her deathbed. Alexa's world is immediately turned upside down by the revelation. Kicked out of her former home, she arrives in London in near ruin, with

barely more than the clothes on her back.

A Man With Ambition...

Henry Northam can't stand to sit idle. Even though he's the heir to a large fortune and title, Henry has ambitions to make a career for himself in the law. His family doesn't approve and he knows a wife wouldn't either—he's had his heart broken enough times to prove that.

Their Bond Will Be Tested...

One day Alexandra and Henry meet by chance and sparks begin to fly. Can Henry let his guard down and trust Alexa with his heart? And how long will Alexa be able to hide her scandalous secret from the man she is starting to love?