

To Sin With A Scoundrel

(Bonus Material)

By Cara Elliott

The rain had stopped and the moon had broken through the clouds, dappling the garden below the balcony in a shimmering, silvery glow. The drops of water glistened, pale pearls of light against the dark foliage.

Lady Ciara Sheffield lifted her face to the still-damp breeze, and as the lilting notes of a waltz drifted out from the ballroom, she felt a slightly desperate laugh well up in her throat.

She should never have agreed to this insane bargain. She didn't belong here.

Especially in the company of London's most notorious rogues.

Despite the coolness of the night, her cheeks began to burn. The guests inside were no doubt busy gossiping on why the Earl of Hadley—Mad, Bad Hadley—was squiring the Wicked Widow around Town. Well, no matter how scandalous their speculations, they would never guess at the real reason she had made a deal with the Devil . . .

“Your drink, Lady Sheffield.”

The touch of the earl's gloved hand sent a shiver snaking down her spine. “B-but I requested for ratafia punch,” she murmured staring down at the crystal champagne glass.

“Yes, well, the punch looked sadly flat,” said Lucas, joining her in the shadowed nook of the terrace where she had taken refuge. “And I thought you could use a little sparkle in your lovely eyes.”

Her body began to tingle. He was standing far too close for comfort. “Please don't bother flirting with me, Lord Hadley.”

“Why not?” he asked in a husky murmur. “We are here and the night is young, the wine is flowing, the music is enchanting. I see nothing wrong with simply relaxing and enjoying each other’s company.”

“That is the difference between us, sir,” said Ciara.

“There are any number of ways in which we are different,’ he drawled, letting his gaze slide along the low-cut line of her ballgown.

To her dismay, she felt a flush steal over her flesh.

“Some are more obvious than others,” he continued. His lips curled up at the corners. “Was there one in particular that you had in mind?”

“They are too numerous to name,” she replied, trying not to stare at the sinuous shape of his mouth. Of course he was devilishly attractive, she reminded herself. But she knew all too well how a handsome face could hide a multitude of sins. “Suffice it to say we are . . . complete opposites.”

“You are a scholarly scientist, Lady Sheffield. So correct me if I am wrong—but isn’t there a scientific principle that says opposites attract?”

She looked away from his laughing blue eyes. “And you, sir, are a renowned rake. So correct me if I am wrong—but didn’t you recently tell me that you couldn’t care less about abstract ideas?”

“Quite likely,” replied Lucas cheerfully. He shifted his stance, casually leaning a hip against the stone balustrade. “I prefer to concentrate on things that have shape and substance.” His voice dropped a notch. “Things that I can get my hands around—so to speak.”

Ciara thinned her lips as a long, muscled leg brushed against her skirts. “As I said, you are wasting your legendary charms on me, Lord Hadley. Let us not forget that this charade is merely a business arrangement.”

“Is it?”

As his lazy, lidded gaze met hers, she suddenly found it very hard to draw in a gulp of the lilac-scented air. Flames from the torchiere danced around his sin-

dark hair, the play of light and dark accentuating the chiseled planes of his features.

Raising her glass, she took a tiny swallow of her wine, only to find the bubbles burned like fire against her tongue. “Yes,” she assured him, angry that she couldn’t muster more force to her voice. “It’s business, nothing—NOTHING—more.”

“There’s no reason business can’t be pleasurable,” he replied softly. “If you would loosen the laces of your corset, you might find these evenings enjoyable.

“Never,” she whispered.

“Come, a lady of your intellect should know better than to make sweeping presumptions about the outcome of an experiment.” A gust ruffled through the ivy vines, and suddenly his fingers brushed her cheek as he caught a loosened curl and tucked it behind her ear. “I was under the impression that a scientist should always keep an *open* mind.”

She flinched away, her skin feeling singed. “That’s quite enough of your teasing, Lord Hadley. I mean to put an end to it this instant—please take me back inside.”

“As you wish, Lady Sheffield.” Lucas straightened from the railing and offered his arm. “But a word of warning, my dear . . .” His laugh tickled against the nape of her neck, “It’s not the end, it’s just the beginning.”