

*My Lady,  
My Spy*

*A Secrets and Seduction book*

*by*

SHERIDAN JEANE

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## DEDICATION

For my family.

Both the ones created through blood bonds and the  
ones forged through life experience.

You mean the world to me.

SHERIDAN JEANE

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SHERIDAN JEANE



## CHAPTER ONE

*London, January 6, 1854*

“Do you think the Russians—” Josephine stopped speaking mid-sentence the moment she caught sight of Frederick Woolsey weaving through the crowded ballroom. She’d recognize his dark hair and the way his tall form moved anywhere... even in a sea of men wearing black formal coats. What was he doing here at the Koliada Ball? He’d sent her a message only this morning saying he wasn’t coming. Surely he hadn’t lied to her. He wouldn’t have.

Would he?

She hated that she doubted him, even for an instant.

“Lady Harrington? Is something wrong?”

“What?” She dragged her attention back to her friend and gave him a distracted smile. She’d momentarily forgotten about him. “The embassy is appallingly warm,

Tristan. I wonder if the Russians are in the habit of overheating their rooms. I find myself quite parched." She licked her dry lips.

A flicker of a frown crossed Tristan's face. Did he suspect she wanted to send him away on some useless errand simply to rid herself of him? If so, his good breeding prevented him from saying anything. "Would you permit me to bring you some punch?"

She smiled her thanks. "That would be splendid."

Josephine waited until he disappeared from sight and then hurried toward a spot where she could intercept Frederick and his brother. She was only halfway there when the Duchess of Eckley stepped in her path, barring her progress.

Fiddlesticks. There was nothing like a duchess with a determined gleam in her eye to put one's plans in a muddle.

The young duchess's eyes were bright with excitement. "I'm so glad I found you," she said. "You're acquainted with Mr. Woolsy, are you not?"

"You know I am," Josephine replied, frowning. She hoped she wasn't blushing.

The duchess's lips barely twitched as she raked her gaze over Josephine, taking in every detail of her celadon-blue gown. "Did you hear about the dreadful accident? It's quite shocking. Lord Tamworth and Mr. Woolsy were injured in a fire on the patio. It happened only a few minutes ago. Poor Lord Tamworth's injuries are rather severe. He's being whisked away in his carriage even as we speak."

Josephine gasped. "That's horrible. Are you certain the second man was Mr. Woolsy? I just saw him with Lord Wentworth, and he didn't appear to be injured."

"Quite certain," Lady Eckley said, "but Mr. Woolsy's

burns are said to be relatively minor in comparison to poor Lord Tamworth's."

Josephine glanced across the room to the spot where she'd last seen Frederick and caught sight of him entering the grand foyer. Now that she knew what to look for, he did seem slightly curled in on himself as though in pain. He held his right hand protectively against his chest and cradled a white bundle of cloth. Perhaps a bandage?

"That's dreadful," Josephine said. "How did it happen?"

Lady Eckley pursed her lips in disapproval. "It was that oaf, Lord Percival. He's three sheets to the wind tonight. He managed to knock over an oil lamp and set an entire table on fire."

Josephine shook her head. "That man is a menace."

"Yes, I— oh, there's the ambassador. I simply must find out what he plans to do about their misfortune. He's the host, after all. He bears some responsibility." She darted away before Josephine could say another word.

Josephine searched the room for Frederick but couldn't find him. For a moment, she considered forgetting she'd seen him. He'd abandoned her all week, leaving her doubting where she stood. She let out a frustrated sigh. This would be her best opportunity to speak with him. She couldn't let it slip away.

With nothing more than a glance, Frederick Woolsey had the power to make her feel like a *débutante* rather than a widow, which she found most unsettling. Most unsettling indeed. Following her husband's sudden and pointless death in a hunting mishap, marriage no longer held any particular interest for her. Never again would she consent to be tied to a man she barely knew.

But her opinion on the matter had undergone a reversal one short week ago.

In one night, Frederick had managed to alter her thinking on the subject. One *memorable* night.

An undeniable attraction toward one another had drawn them together over the past few months. When she'd finally agreed to the tryst at Lord Saxon's country house last weekend, they'd been discreet. No one guessed that Frederick had crept into her room both nights.

Both blissful nights.

Frederick had been a divine lover. Skilled and caring. Thinking about him now allowed images from that night to invade her mind. She almost gasped as her toes began to curl in her dancing shoes.

Her. Curling toes. Ridiculous! Widows shouldn't have curling toes.

She set off toward the grand foyer to search for him, weaving her way between the guests as she followed the path he'd taken.

In the bedroom, the late Lord Harrington had been nothing like Frederick. John believed a lady should abhor sexual intercourse. Apparently, she was supposed to find it base and beneath her. One night early in their marriage she'd almost enjoyed having marital relations with him, but he'd pulled away from her and called her wanton and unnatural. After that, she'd learned to suppress any enjoyment in their intimacy, but that hadn't been particularly difficult. He only came into her bed briefly to perform his duty, as he referred to it, and once the act was complete, he quickly escaped back to his own chambers.

The nights with Frederick had been a revelation. He'd actually wanted her to find pleasure in their union. In fact, he'd withheld his own release until he'd helped her find her own. The experience had been eye-opening. And toe-curling.

He'd also introduced her to an item she'd only heard mentioned in scandalized whispers. A French letter— a mere slip of a thing to cover a man's— well— his most private part. He said it would prevent her from becoming pregnant. They'd used a number of them over those two nights. More than she'd imagined possible.

He'd left her bed that last morning with kisses and plans and promises, but had avoided her ever since. She hadn't seen him in a week.

Not until tonight.

Josephine finally escaped the crowded ballroom and entered the foyer. She looked around, but found no sign of Frederick or his brother. They'd both disappeared.

Movement above her on the balcony caught her attention. Was that Frederick? When he spotted her, he ducked out of sight, but she'd seen him. Of that she was certain.

Why had he gone up there? Was he merely curious about the building's renovations? She dismissed the idea. There was more than mere curiosity driving his actions.

She moved toward the staircase, intending to follow him, but a large footman stepped in front of her, blocking the way.

"Upstairs area is restricted," the man said in a thick Russian accent. "No guests allowed."

Josephine glanced at the balcony again, but couldn't spot Frederick. She knew better than to mention his flouting of the rules to the footman. Frederick must have evaded him by taking an alternate route upstairs.

She acquiesced and stepped away, glancing around the grand foyer. She spotted a door on the far side of the room leading toward the embassy offices. It wasn't guarded. Perhaps she'd find another staircase e back there.

A children's choir began singing. The other guests around her moved. As a group passed between her and the man guarding the staircase, Josephine slipped through a side door and found herself in a corridor lined with embassy offices. There should be another, less opulent staircase nearby.

The office doors were all closed, but about halfway down the hallway she noticed one standing slightly ajar. She hurried closer to open it and when she discovered a servants' staircase, she grinned. Frederick must have taken this route.

Josephine lifted the hem of her skirt and crept up the stairs. Her night around would end in disaster if she ran into one of the embassy's servants. Those Russian footmen looked intimidating.

She paused when she reached the landing. The door leading to the corridor was closed, but she heard someone just outside. She paused as she tried to identify the odd shuffling sound that seemed to be moving away from her.

Cautiously, she edged open the door and peeked into the hallway. A man was sliding a cloth along the floor with his shoe, wiping up what appeared to be water.

Not just any man. Frederick.

She pushed open the door and stepped through.

At the sound, he spun to face her. His jaw dropped as his piercing blue eyes widened in surprise. "Josephine? What in blazes are you doing up here?"

"You canceled our plans for tonight. Imagine my surprise when you strolled through the ballroom." She gave him a frigid smile. "Shall I give you an opportunity to explain yourself before I set the dogs on you, or will you only use it to lie to me again?"

## §

Frederick stared at Josephine in astonishment as she stood glaring at him. Her exquisiteness stole his breath away for a moment— her pale blond hair, her lush form in her signature shade of celadon blue, her angry blue eyes that crackled with recrimination. She was a vision, yes— but not a welcome one. Not at this precise moment.

She must have followed him.

She raked her gaze over him, and he had the sense she didn't miss any details. "What are you doing with that cloth?"

He glanced down at the rag he'd been sliding across the floor with his foot and was startled into giving her a direct answer. "I dripped a trail of water down the hallway and now I'm wiping it up."

"Water?"

He lifted his hand, which was wrapped in sodden cloth. "This used to contain a bundle of ice."

Her angry expression softened. "I heard you were burned. Is it bad?"

"Bad enough."

Her forehead furrowed with concern as she moved closer. "May I see?"

"You shouldn't be up here. It isn't safe."

She ignored him and continued to approach. His entire body reacted to her proximity. With effort, he tore his gaze away from her and glanced down the corridor. The water droplets were gone. He'd managed to wipe away all evidence of his presence.

He glanced back and met Josephine's expectant gaze. With a heavy sigh, he lifted the wet cloth from his hand.

She let out a sympathetic hiss of pain, causing him to glance down at his hand. He wasn't surprised by the large white blisters on the fingertips of his right hand. The skin around them was an angry red.

She cradled both his hands in hers. Gentle. Careful.

Their connection was immediate. Intense.

Desire coursed through him.

His body knew her.

Wanted her.

Craved her.

She seemed unaware of his reaction as she focused on his left hand. A blister was forming along the outside of his smallest finger, and the pads of all his fingertips had been seared by the flames.

Then she turned her attention to his right hand. "Oh, Frederick," she whispered. She grazed her fingertips over his wrist, keeping well away from the burns.

As she let out a sigh, she held her hand above his fingers as though she wanted to touch them, but she withdrew. Even the heat of her skin hovering near the burns had aggravated them, but some perverse part of him relished the pain because it had come from her deep concern for him.

Her gaze met his, her eyes full of anguish. "Have you taken anything for the pain?"

He swallowed. Now that he'd examined his hand, ignoring the pain was becoming more difficult. "A glass of whiskey," he replied. He glanced around nervously and realized they were too close to the balcony. Someone might see them from below. See her. His chest tightened. He couldn't take that chance. What if she were caught? Questioned? He moved closer to the wall, tilting his head



for her to join him. “Josephine, you aren’t safe here.”

“Only one glass? You’ll need to drink more than that if you want to dull the pain.”

She pushed open the nearest door and didn’t hesitate before walking inside. Was she mad?

She turned toward the small table next to the door. With brisk efficiency, she extracted a match from a box she found there, struck it, and lit the candle she found there as well.

“There must be a decanter of whiskey in here somewhere,” she murmured, “or perhaps vodka since this is the Russian embassy.” She tipped the candle and used it to light an oil lamp sitting on a dressing table. “Russians are known for their vodka, aren’t they?”

“What are you doing?” Frederick asked, following her through the doorway. “You can’t simply walk into someone’s bedroom.”

“Fiddlesticks. I’m looking for something for you to drink. I’m sure the ambassador wouldn’t object, considering you were injured at his embassy.”

The woman was mad. Absolutely mad. But he had to admit there was a certain logic to her argument. What did that say about him?

He took in the room. His gaze danced across the pristine white coverlet on the bed. In a flash, he imagined Josephine draped across the snowy expanse, naked, a smile of invitation curving across her lips. He quickly turned away. How could his mind conjure such carnal images when he was injured, in the middle of an important mission, and at risk of being discovered at any moment?

He forced himself to focus on the details of the room. The empty dressing table. The fireplace laid and ready for a match. The leather satchel near the door. Yes, the room

was occupied. Probably by a visitor, not a resident, judging by the lack of personal items.

He checked the corridor. Empty. At least they hadn't been spotted. He needed to get rid of Josephine before she attracted the wrong kind of attention. Attention that could ruin his mission and provoke a declaration of war. He gently pushed the door shut with the back of his hand, wincing as the latch made a sharp noise.

She grinned with delight as she spotted the bottle next to the oil lamp. "Voila! Vodka!"

She splashed a large amount of the clear liquid into a tumbler and handed it to him. "Drink it all," she directed him. "It will help dull the pain."

He took it gingerly in his left hand, frowning at the contents. "Not a good idea," he muttered. He needed a clear head. He could bear the pain until he and his brother managed to remove the book they were stealing from the embassy grounds. "I'm not a good drinker. I tend to get maudlin and a bit testy, so I try not to imbibe."

"In that case, I'll remember to avoid you for the rest of the evening. Now, drink it all. I insist."

He frowned at her. Josephine could be stubborn once she'd made up her mind, and he didn't have time to argue with her— not if he wanted her out of here quickly. Given his current situation, submitting to her demand would be the most expedient course of action. Plus, she was right. His hand hurt as though the devil himself had flayed it open. His plan had been compromised. That meant he needed to adjust. Adapt. Improvise.

He took the glass gingerly in his left hand and gave it a disapproving frown. He made a decision and downed the fiery liquid, then contorted his face in distaste. He'd never been fond of spirits.

His sleeve brushed her shoulder as he reached past her to set the tumbler back on the dressing table. Standing this close to her made him pause. The heat from her body filled the space between them, drawing him to her as their eyes met. Lord, this woman was irresistible.

Her lips quivered, and then she gave him a tremulous smile. “You smell of cigars, whiskey, smoke, and bay rum.” Her words were forthright, as though they had burst from her without being first considered. He knew from her sharp intake of breath that their close proximity affected her as well.

“Just like every other man who sat outside with Lord Percival tonight.” He kept his tone light, even as he breathed her in. Josephine had her own distinctive scent. With her standing so close to him, it invaded him. She smelled of lavender and freesia. She’d once told him she’d had the perfume blended especially for her, which hadn’t surprised him at all.

He’d discovered that when they made love, the scent lingered on his skin, even after he’d bathed. At Lord Saxon’s country house, it had remained with him all the following day, constantly reminding him of her. Luring him back to her.

He wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around her now, drag her onto that bed, and relive the time they’d spent together.

Instead, he forced himself to pull back. Restraint might be painful, but it was smarter. Safer. Hadn’t he already reached this same conclusion earlier this week? He shouldn’t involve himself with Josephine. Not her. Not anyone.

He could quash his attraction to her with time. With distance. A strategic retreat. An adjustment of the pieces on the board, rather like castling one’s king in a chess

match.

He needed to stay focused. Both tonight on this mission, and in the future. Josephine deserved a man who would never lie to her— who would be wholly dedicated to her— not a man with split loyalties. He could never be that man.

On their last night together, she'd confessed how much she detested being lied to, deceived, or manipulated. She'd stared at him as she said it, and the pressure to reveal his secrets had been difficult to ignore, but he hadn't told her.

He couldn't bring himself to confess he was a spy working in the service of Queen Victoria's Foreign Office. That he'd been hiding this from her all along.

Yes, Frederick Woolsy, younger brother to the Earl of Wentworth, was a spy. This information was a carefully guarded secret, and he planned to keep it that way.

He'd been forced to lie to her again and again over the past year, but he'd had little choice. He'd been hard pressed to fabricate excuses for the clandestine meetings, the sudden short jaunts to boring locales, his month-long trips to first Paris and then Edinburgh, his inability to follow through on plans due to last-minute "conflicts." He often put her off by saying "I'll keep you informed" regarding some event she hoped they'd attend together. When duty called, he disappeared like vapor, not even leaving a lingering scent behind.

Why was he tarrying with her now when war was at stake? He should leave.

There was that word again. *Should*.

Josephine picked up a fresh, dry cloth lying next to the washbasin and gently began bandaging his hand with it. "We need to talk about last week."

He blinked. Of course they did. "You're right, but can

it wait just a bit longer? I need to find my brother. Something urgent has happened— an emergency. He and I need to leave immediately. I promise we'll talk, but not now."

"You also told me you wouldn't be here tonight. You lied to me."

A band tightened around his heart. It was more than that. He'd originally told her he'd escort her here. "My plans changed at the last minute. I didn't intentionally mislead you." But that was a lie too. He *had* tried to mislead her. He'd hoped she'd decide not to come to the Koliada Ball after all. Failing that, he'd hoped to be gone, his mission complete, before she arrived.

She looked doubtful.

"Please, Josephine. Go now. I need to leave immediately. My business is urgent."

She narrowed her eyes, and something seemed to shift in her gaze. She looked more focused. More determined. "On one condition."

"What's that?"

She moved closer, slid her hands up his chest, wrapped them around his neck, and rose to her toes. "I need to remind you of something."

As she pressed her lips to his, she sent a tremor of want coursing through him. She slid her fingers up the nape of his neck and into his hair, scraping her nails against his scalp in exactly the way he loved.

For a moment, he forgot the pain in his hands, his brother, his mission. All that mattered was the woman clinging to him. He could lose himself in her forever. With a sigh, he slid his arms around her, and then his sigh turned into a gasp of pain.

Josephine stumbled back. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. It was me. I forgot I was injured."

“See? The vodka worked.”

“It wasn’t the vodka,” he said, his voice rasping and gruff. It was *her*. “You need to go.”

She let out a small sigh. “Fine. I’ll leave. I hope my reminder has left you with something to ponder.” She gave him a saucy grin and swept out into the hallway, causing her skirt to swirl and sway around her in an alluring way.

He followed her to the entrance. A noise came from somewhere down the hallway— a door opening? When he glanced toward it, he saw nothing. He turned back to watch as Josephine opened the concealed door leading to the servants’ staircase and disappeared through it, closing it with a whisper of sound.

Frederick backed into the bedroom and shut the door behind him. Carefully, he wiped down the tumbler he’d just used, hiding any sign they’d been there. He gathered up the sodden cloth. He even tucked the spent matchstick into his coat pocket. He glanced around the room one last time and then bent to blow out the light.

He needed to find his brother now. Did it really take Robert this long to pick a lock and snatch a book?

