

EXCERPT ONE

Mid-April 2010, Paris

In the gray spring rain, he stood in the Place d'Alma staring down at the tunnel where she had vanished from his life on the last night of August 1997. He came here whenever he was in Paris. He counted the pillars until he reached number thirteen, the one that had taken her life. Tears formed behind his eyes, as they always did in this place. But he refused to let them overflow. Instead, he took a long breath of fresh rain mixed with the exhaust of cars speeding through the tunnel.

When the big black Mercedes entered its skid that horrible night, his last living link to Deborah had been taken from him. Diana and Deborah, West Heath girls, friends forever. Deborah had been dead since 1994, but he had lost her long before she became his wife, three years after he met her at Diana's wedding to the Prince of Wales in 1981. How many nights had he spent talking to Diana about his marriage, about her marriage, about his guilt over Deborah, and about the impossibility of being in love? Too many to count. He ached to tell her now how empty his life had become without either of them.

EXCERPT TWO

Conference rooms are all the same. As are airports. On a cold, wet, mid-November afternoon, His Grace, the Eighteenth Duke of Burnham, decided that those who thought running the Burnham Trust was a glamorous job should go from London to Paris to Brussels to New York seeing only conference rooms and airports. He was now trapped in one of the beastly things on the twenty-eighth floor of the Manhattan offices of Craig, Lewis, and Weller, studying the deepening early twilight through the sheets of glass that formed the walls. His mood was as black as the coming night.

He looked down the nine-foot glossy mahogany conference table and wondered why it took five lawyers to sell a house to a girls' school. And why weren't any of them the one he wanted to see? His operative had named Taylor Collins, a partner in the Craig, Lewis real estate section, as was the one likely to know where Diana's tape was. He bet she looked at least forty-five and was twenty pounds overweight. And probably chain smoked and had a face like a bulldog. He didn't look forward to dealing with her.

The massive, dark mahogany door to the conference room opened, and another female suit stepped inside. A pair of eyes the color of spring violets were fixed on him. Very like Diana's eyes, but deeper.

"My partner, Taylor Collins, Your Grace."

His heart was racing so fast, he had difficulty speaking; so he merely nodded in response. He wondered what color La Perlas she was wearing, but he longed for more than sex. He desperately craved the impossible: time alone and the chance to know who

she was beneath the lawyer facade.

EXCERPT THREE

His amazing golden eyes held hers. She wanted to look away, but she couldn't.

"We've a great deal in common," he observed.

"Such as?"

"We each lack a family. And we both wished for one."

Taylor felt as if he had sent an arrow into the deepest part of her soul. But ever the professional, she remained impassive. "I don't understand. You have your ward—and Ellen and her husband. And you could marry whenever you wish and produce many Carey heirs."

"It isn't a matter of merely procreating," Nicholas said. "If I married anyone—and I'm not going to do that—I would want to be in love." His eyes held hers until she felt uncomfortable. She had papered over her past with a thick set of lies, and she had told them so often sometimes she herself mistook them for the truth. No one had ever guessed she was lying. But could he?

Better change the subject in a big way. "Why did meeting Deborah make you happy that you'd inherit the title after you'd been so miserable over being brought back from America?"

His golden eyes looked directly into hers and studied them for several seconds before he spoke. "Because she didn't love me. Everyone loved her, and everyone wanted her. But I knew I'd get her in the end because I was going to be the Duke of Burnham,

and she loved the idea of being a duchess. Despicable, wasn't it?"

He immediately realized he'd backed her into a corner. "I apologize. I shouldn't have said that."

Taylor thought of the wedding photos: Nicholas gazing at Deborah with his heart in his eyes while she looked coolly at the camera. "I wouldn't say 'despicable.' You really loved her. You weren't just offering her a title. You were offering her your heart."