

CHAPTER ONE

THE INFAMOUS DUKE OF Winston's brush with death had been on every tongue in Paris for days, and as Millicent Germain waited to be shown upstairs to his chamber, she half-hoped the crumbling building that nearly killed him might have also damaged his privates.

The duke's Parisian salon was empty of people but filled with gilded furniture and nudes, nudes, nudes. *Everywhere* nudes: statuettes, portraits, vast paintings and plasters on the ceiling. There was nowhere to rest one's eyes.

Winston does like to have his fun, Philomena had laughed, even as she'd waved away Millie's violent objections to the employment Philomena had *found* for her. Forced her into, rather, but that was neither here nor there now. The employment would be a disaster—there was no doubt about that—but by the time it was finished, Millie would have what she wanted.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

A bawdy statue of frolicking nymphs on a nearby table, and the duke's renowned penchant for debauchery, mocked Philomena's description of him:

Intelligent. About what subjects? Copulation?

Respected. By whom? Libertines?

Wealthy. And therein lay the crux of the matter. His money, in exchange for her medical services during his journey to Greece.

Well, in exchange for *Mr. Miles Germain's* medical services. She may be desperate, but she wasn't mad. His Grace's household was no place to be perceived as female. Thankfully, her simple features became entirely nondescript against the background of a bagwig and coat.

This wouldn't be the first time she'd passed for a man.

She smoothed her palms across her breeches, anticipating the butler's return at any moment, and glanced up at a pair of entwined lovers on the ceiling. It seemed almost certain she would be required to witness one disgusting exhibition after the next all the way to Greece.

Beggars can't be choosers. And she was very much a beggar. But in a matter of weeks she would be a stone's throw from Malta and the surgical school that waited there, with enough wages from this employment to begin the life that only days ago she'd believed was lost to her forever.

All she had to do was restore a spoiled, depraved peer of the realm to health. Which would be a simple matter, because he'd probably exaggerated his injuries in the first place.

If he hadn't, she would end up coddling His Grace's ego even as she attempted to prevent his condition

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

from declining, which she could never accomplish if he was constantly indulging in wild fornication parties, as he was rumored to do—

“His Grace will see you now, Mr. Germain,” the butler announced from the doorway behind her.

Millie bolted from the chair and turned to face the tall, fair-skinned man who’d introduced himself as Mr. Harris. There was still time to change her mind, flee to Philomena and beg for help finding a different employment—

You don’t want a different employment. You want to go to Greece.

“Very good,” she said a little hoarsely, and cleared her throat. “Thank you.”

She tugged the sleeves of her jacket, glancing down, double-checking that her waistcoat was properly buttoned and her curves were truly concealed. Then she picked up her medical bag and followed the butler out of the salon.

They were halfway up the main staircase, with its elaborate, polished stone balustrade, when a shriek of laughter drifted from somewhere in the recesses of the upper floors.

Mr. Harris didn’t seem to notice.

“I understand the stones from the crumbling building facade resulted in numerous injuries to His Grace’s person,” Millie said to him.

“Indeed,” Mr. Harris confirmed. “His Grace was most fortunate not to have received the kind of fatal blow that other poor soul received.”

“Yes. Very fortunate.” According to the stories, the man walking just behind the duke had been struck directly on the head and died immediately, God rest his soul. “Are you aware of whether any of His Grace’s

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

injuries in particular have...affected his mode of living?"

There was another shriek, louder now that they'd reached the top of the stairs, followed by an eruption of laughter.

Mr. Harris's pleasant face sank into a frown. "His Grace was abed with fever for three days, Mr. Germain. I can assure you it has affected his mode of living enormously." He lowered his voice and added confidentially, "I only hope you can aid the situation more effectively than the other physician."

She heard the voices now—a growing hubbub of them as Mr. Harris led her down a corridor past carved doors of rich, burnished wood.

From the sound of things, the situation had been aided already.

"This way, please, Mr. Germain." Mr. Harris ushered her through a door and into a room teeming with activity—His Grace's dressing room, apparently, where a pair of lavishly dressed women were peering at their faces in a glass, a trio of sporting men were making a game of tossing coins into a whore's cleavage from half a room away, and a man with a laughing woman pinned beneath him was on the verge of tumbling off a love seat and onto the floor.

Mr. Harris led her through another doorway into the adjoining bedchamber just as a familiar shriek and burst of laughter came from a table by the window, where a man with a buxom brunette on his lap was apparently playing at more than just cards. A chambermaid collected dishes, a maidservant poured tea, another fussed with the fire in the fireplace. A monumental bedstead of intricately carved wood and lush, midnight-blue draperies dominated the far wall. A

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

man paced near its foot, holding forth in rapid French, while two elaborately coiffed courtesans chatted nearby on a chaise longue.

Finally, Millie's attention landed on the man who lay sprawled against a mountain of pillows.

"You'd best reform your behavior," he was laughing, calling to one of the courtesans on the chaise longue, "or I might decide you need a punishment." His smile was a wicked flash of white teeth in a face that rendered the word *handsome* entirely inadequate—except for a nasty scrape down his right cheek and faint smudges beneath his eyes. He wore a banyan in blue patterned silk and a pair of trousers that rode up just enough on his right leg to give her a glimpse of dark hair sprinkling a thick, solid calf.

The courtesan fluttered her fan near the edge of her décolletage and smiled at him, leaning forward so that her breasts practically spilled from their stays. "*Viens-toi,*" she taunted, "*si tu peux.*"

But the duke made no move to get up and carry out his threat.

Mr. Harris guided her forward and stood with her at the bedside. "Mr. Miles Germain, Your Grace."

And now, eyes black as sin flicked over Millie with calm disinterest. "I should have known any medic recommended by Philomena would be of the youthful variety," he drawled, and amusement touched the corners of his mouth. "Tell me, Mr. Germain...do you have any medical experience beyond the careful examinations you've doubtless conducted in Lady Pennington's bed?"

A sharp answer leaped to her tongue. He thought she was inexperienced?

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

“Your Grace.” She swallowed back her initial reply and bowed, even though he hadn’t bothered with courtesy himself. Her eyes glanced off large hands that had doubtless groped any number of chambermaids and went to his left arm, which lay in a sling. “My condolences for the situation in which you find yourself.”

This self-indulgent profligate could question her credentials all he liked, but she was going with him to Greece.

He accepted a glass of something—cognac, perhaps—from one of the courtesans and let her fuss with some nonexistent problem with his banyan. “How old *are* you, Mr. Germain?”

“Three and twenty.”

“Three and *twenty*.” Amusement deepened in his eyes. “I might rather have suspected three and ten, would you not agree, Deschamps?”

The man who’d been pontificating at the foot of the bed laughed. “*Tenez*, I fear you offend,” he said, gesturing toward her magnanimously.

“Not at all,” Millie said evenly. “Perhaps it will comfort you to know that I served four years as a ship’s surgeon. I can assure you, I’ve tended men in far worse condition than yours.”

“And do any yet live?”

“All that could be saved, Your Grace.” She thought a shadow passed across his eyes, but it was there and gone so quickly she couldn’t be sure.

“Hold out your hands,” he instructed.

Her hands? She did as he asked, holding them palms down in front of her until he bade her stop with a wave of his hand. “At least you don’t shake like the last one. Bloody drunkard—I endured twice the pain from all of

his bumbling around.” He grimaced and put a hand to his shoulder. “Come and see what’s wrong with this sling. Damned arm’s been aggravating me all day.”

She could already see the sling was tied too tightly. She put down her medical bag, and the courtesan returned to the chaise longue to allow Millie room at the side of the bed. Mr. Harris withdrew to an unoccupied space by the wall.

“I understand Your Grace has just recovered from a fever,” Millie said as she reached across him. Up close, she could see the thick lashes that framed his dark eyes and the laugh lines that creased their corners as he exchanged a few loaded remarks with the women.

“Give him something to increase his desire,” one of them instructed her in French, laughing.

“You could never endure it if he did,” the duke shot back, and then, to Millie, “The fever? Three days of utter misery. Yes, that’s right.”

“And the wounds? How are they progressing?”

“The wounds are on my back, Mr. Germain. I couldn’t possibly tell you.”

She glanced at him as she loosened the sling. “Did you ask no questions of your physician?” If he was going to act as if she were stupid, she’d be happy to do the same. “He must have given you some report. Is there any sign that pus has developed?”

There was a horrified squeal from the chaise longue.

“Good God, Mr. Germain,” the duke said. “That kind of talk will drive away my company.”

Which had just become her first order of business. She adjusted the sling, eased his elbow out a smidgen. “I don’t suppose Your Grace has considered that solitude and rest might be enormously beneficial.”

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

He laughed at that. Deep lines cut at the sides of his mouth, and those blackish devil eyes came alive with alarming intelligence.

A sensation whispered through her body: A slight heaviness in her breasts. A faint stirring at the juncture of her thighs.

Dear God.

“Mr. Germain,” he said, “if you were in my place, would you be anxious to rid yourself of this particular company?”

She fixed her attention on his arm. After a moment, the unexpected sensation passed. Yes...it passed completely.

“Were I in your position,” she replied, “my foremost concern would be the fastest possible recovery of my health.” Another quick adjustment, but then—

She leaned closer, sniffing, and frowned.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Oil of turpentine.”

“My physician has been using it on the dressings.”

Aha, so he *had* received a report. “Yes, of course, but...” Still?

“But *what?*” he said irritably.

“I shall need to see the state of the wounds, but I rather suspect a different ointment would be more to your advantage at this stage. How does the sling feel?”

He shifted his arm the tiniest fraction, frowning. “Much better.”

Suddenly she was more aware of his arm flexing beneath her fingers than she’d been a moment before, of warm muscle and sinew warming her fingertips through two thin layers of silk and linen. A tiny nerve pulsed way down low in her belly.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

“I must warn you,” she said in her direst tone, straightening and stepping back from the bed, “that rest is important above all else.” She thought of the only medical volume she owned, a surgical treatise that was tucked away in her bag at this very moment, and how accurately its advice matched her own experience.

“Mr. Germain,” he said irritably, “I’ve been abed these four days.”

“A proper diet and a healthy air are important as well, naturally,” she went on gravely, still too aware of her own fingertips, “but there should be no excitement of the senses. Nothing to arouse the passions.”

A commotion went up from the card table, and one of the women bolted from her chair on a peal of laughter, only to be brought firmly down onto the lap of one of His Grace’s friends.

“Perish the thought,” the duke said drily, and reached for his drink.

“I’m quite serious, Your Grace. ‘Disturbances of the mind are great enemies to the health of the body,’” she quoted from the book.

“Your medical types are all the same, with your morbid admonishments. But you may rest easy, as nothing would disturb me more than to be deprived of entertainment.” His lip curled a little, and her eye went straight to it, and now she noticed the shape of his mouth in a way she hadn’t before even though there was nothing unique about it—nothing at all.

“And you should know that I cannot work with onlookers,” she added now, in case he imagined she would conduct an examination of his person with all of these people milling about.

He laughed. “No? *I’ve* been known to perform rather well with an onlooker or two.” He tossed a

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

wicked grin at the women on the chaise longue, then took another drink.

Millie watched his tongue catch the moisture from his lips as he lowered the glass. Realized she was holding her breath.

His eyes found hers.

She couldn't look away.

"Harris," he drawled, lifting his glass to his lips once more, "show Mr. Germain to his rooms. Find out his fee and pay him a month's wages in advance."

"YOU'LL HAVE a difficult time convincing His Grace to follow a straight and narrow path, even when his health is at risk," Mr. Harris told her with a knowing grin when they had returned to the corridor. "But I daresay you'll find his sporting activities lead to any number of beneficial consequences, if you understand my meaning."

She glanced over her shoulder and through the doorway just in time to see one of His Grace's friends catch a courtesan around the waist and plant a dramatic bite on her neck.

Oh, yes. She understood all too clearly.

"He keeps less company now than before the accident, I regret to say—" That was *less* company? "—although hopefully, now that you're here..."

They exited the anteroom and returned to the corridor, only to be stopped by a footman.

"Mr. Germain's bags have just arrived," he said to the butler.

Her bags? "That isn't poss—"

"And this letter, for you, sir." The footman handed her a note and bowed.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

Millie recognized Philomena's writing immediately and tore open the letter, skimming fast.

...decided to leave Paris today instead of Thursday...

No. No, it wasn't possible.

"Put Mr. Germain's things in the yellow room," Mr. Harris was saying to the footman.

...certain you will find yourself very comfortably appointed with the duke...

"Very good." The footman turned back toward the stairs.

Philomena had left Paris. She'd sent Millie's bags without waiting to learn how the interview had gone, and she'd *left Paris*. For a moment Millie experienced that same sensation as when a ship fell after rising on a large swell—as if the deck was falling from beneath one's feet.

Not that she had any intention of throwing herself on Philomena's mercy again—not when she had done more than was required in securing Millie this position in the first place. But...

"Is there a problem?" Mr. Harris asked.

There would be no question now. "No," she said slowly, refolding the letter and tucking it inside her jacket. "No, not at all."

Mr. Harris nodded and led her a short distance away, opening another door. "Here you are, then. These will be your rooms."

Her attention shot to the left, toward the direction they'd just come from. Her chamber was just down from His Grace's rooms. *Adjacent* to His Grace's rooms, if she estimated correctly.

She didn't like that. Not at all.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

She followed Mr. Harris inside, endeavoring to remain calm. There was no reason *not* to be calm, really. “Surely there must be accommodations below stairs that I could occupy,” she suggested. A memory snaked in—the reason she’d left service in the first place, and one of the many reasons she’d balked at the idea of returning.

“His Grace has ordered that you be installed here for his convenience,” Mr. Harris said. “You wouldn’t want to be down there, anyhow. The opportunities are fewer and of a quite a different caliber.”

She managed a halfhearted smile—it wouldn’t do for him to think her completely uninterested in the *opportunities* he valued so highly—and looked at the wall she almost certainly shared with His Grace’s bedchamber. There was no adjoining door, but a large curio cabinet stretched across half its length and rose at least seven feet.

“In any case, as I was saying, I’m already seeing signs of improvement, and I expect His Grace’s social calendar to return to full capacity very shortly.” Another grin, this time accompanied by a wink. “Not to put you on the spot, but Sacks and I are counting on you.”

“Sacks?”

“His Grace’s valet. And not to worry...I’ve no doubt there’ll be plenty of, shall we say, *incentive* in it for you, as well.” The footmen returned upstairs with her things—just a small trunk and a bag—and deposited them on the floor in the lavishly furnished dressing room done in three shades of gold and yellow.

She cast her eye about the room, into the adjacent chamber that included a bed draped in gold damask, and suddenly had trouble breathing.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

“His Grace asked me to discover your fee,” Mr. Harris said now.

Her fee. Of course. Her mind raced for a figure that might make this all bearable and named an outrageous sum.

Mr. Harris didn’t bat an eye. “Very good. I shall return with your advance wages.”

And then she was alone in her new accommodations, with the sounds of the duke’s entertainment filtering through the wall and not a single alternative in all the world.

She strode to the window. Looked out at Paris with its mishmash of buildings, houses, cobbled streets, wagons, pedestrians, all bathed in a gloomy drizzle. The truth was, she did have an alternative, and she was looking at it now.

The streets of Paris. Penniless, to make her way alone in a city that would show no mercy. Out there, without any references or money, the only position she would find would be in a brothel.

In here, on the other hand...

She looked over her shoulder at the room’s grand furnishings, paintings, statuettes, trinkets. Just one or two of the pieces here would go a long way toward financing her education. Not that she would ever consider stealing from him.

But he had what she needed—money—and he would pay her an exorbitant wage to attend him. Before she left his service, she would make sure that he wrote Miles Germain a letter of introduction, as well.

She tightened her hand around the windowsill, looking out at Paris but imagining the Mediterranean’s great cities: Venice, Athens, Constantinople.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

With the duke as a reference, her identity as Miles Germain would be cemented for as long as she could maintain her disguise. She could come and go freely, unaccosted, because all the world would believe she was male.

Within a few years, armed with knowledge from Malta's renowned School of Anatomy and Surgery, Miles Germain would be a well-respected surgeon in practice for himself, and nobody—*nobody*—would ever take that away.

All she had to do was continue in his employ and make sure that he made a full recovery.

A sudden knock startled her, and she turned quickly from the window to find another of the duke's servants—a very young man wearing a tidy wig and an expectant expression.

"*Monsieur,*" he said with a bow. "*Je suis à vous.*"

But she didn't *want* him at her disposal! She started forward. "*Merci,*" she said, "but—"

"I shall put away your things—" He started toward her trunk and bag.

"No," Millie said quickly, hurrying to block his way. "No, that won't be necessary," she told him in French. "I shall put them away myself." The duke had assigned her a valet?

"I have been placed at your service, *monsieur,*" the man said firmly. "You have only to tell me what you need. A change of clothes, perhaps..."

"I don't need a change of clothes. And I won't need anyone at my service."

Just then, Mr. Harris walked in. "Ah, excellent. Bernet has found you."

Already she was imagining the man lifting away her wig to find her shoulder-length hair stuffed inside—

damn and blast, she should have cut it completely off—whisking off her shirt and discovering the cloth she'd wound around her breasts beneath her shift to flatten them, and realizing that a maid, not a valet, was the appropriate help.

“Mr. Harris, I absolutely will not require any assistance. I am perfectly capable of looking after myself. In fact I'm used to it.”

“Of course you are,” Harris said, handing her an envelope that doubtless contained the ridiculous sum she had demanded. “But there's no need, while you're here. Bernet's been only too anxious for an upstairs assignment,” he added with a wink. “I'm sure you'd hate to disappoint him.”

“Perhaps he could look after one of the guests—*Attendez!*” Bernet was kneeling in front of her trunk with his hands on the latches. She rushed to stop him. “I've got half of an apothecary's shop in there,” she said now. “Very delicate—I shall need to unpack it myself. Truly.”

That seemed to satisfy him. He inclined his head, stood up and backed away.

Now she lifted her chin and summoned a tone she'd heard Philomena use often enough to dismiss servants. “That will be all for now.”

“*Très bien,*” Bernet said with a bow.

“You may give me a list of any supplies you'll need for His Grace's care,” Harris said now. “Otherwise, you have only to ring if you need anything, and Sacks will let you know if His Grace requires your attendance.”

The moment they were gone she dropped to her knees in front of the trunk, jerked the lid open, dug through shirts, waistcoats and pairs of breeches and

men's stockings. Yanked out the shifts she should never have kept. And at the very bottom, a tiny box with a pair of dangling silver earrings, and the two colorful scarves she hadn't been able to part with. She paused, running her hand over their silken texture, letting her fingers play with the bright blue fringe at the ends, remembering that day at Constantinople's grand bazaar—she, Katherine, Philomena and India.

The scarves and earrings had been a silly indulgence. She'd never even worn them.

With the shifts and scarves wadded in her hands, she hurried into the bedchamber, threw back the drapery at the back corner of the bed and stuffed them beneath the mattress.

It would do until she could find a better place, which she would have to do before the maid came tomorrow morning to make the bed. She returned to the dressing room

Now what? Would the duke expect her to return to his rooms or wait to be summoned? Would his guests ever leave? And what would happen if they did?

He would be alone, and bored, and may well seek out more company or an impromptu medical examination.

She touched the hilt of the smallsword at her hip. What good fortune that a fashionable man wasn't dressed without one. But if the duke sought her out at night, perhaps finding his way into her rooms while she was abed and not fully dressed...

That simply could not happen. She would not give up the freedom of her disguise that easily, not even if she had to sleep fully clothed. Still...

She went to the door and turned the latch. But, of course, he would have a key.

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

She spun on her heel. Surveyed the room: one door led out, another led to her new adjoining bedchamber, where there was yet another door she would need consider.

Moments later, she dragged a chair over and shoved it against the door that led from the dressing room to the corridor, and then stood back. Tonight, after she'd gone to bed, that might work. But...

She looked suspiciously at the curio cabinet. Some grand houses had secret passageways, or so she'd heard. Furnishings that were merely false fronts. She inspected the edges of the cabinet, running her finger along the seam where it met the wall, finding no discernible space. Muted laughter drifted from the other side. Was not his bed directly opposite? So there couldn't possibly be any kind of...

Of course there could. The entire house could have a network of secret passageways through which His Grace made surprise visits on unsuspecting guests.

She got another chair, dragged it next to the curio cabinet and climbed up. Reached to the back paneling and tapped—lightly, so she wouldn't be heard—but could determine nothing. She reached to remove a bronze obstacle but snatched her hand back, seeing now that it was a sculpture of a man with his face buried between a woman's—

Ugh. Disgusting.

Tap-tap-tap. Did the wall sound hollow?

She moved a benign porcelain horse instead and tried a different section of paneling.

Tap-tap-tap.

Behind her, a man cleared his throat.

She whirled around, losing her balance, grabbing for the cabinet to keep from falling. The duke stood in the

A Promise by Daylight, Alison DeLaine

doorway to the bedchamber, watching her with amused interest.

“Please,” he said, holding up his hand. “Do not let me interrupt.”

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. *A Promise by Daylight* will be released on August 26, but you can preorder a copy now. Just click one of these buying options or purchase from your favorite retailer. You’ll get it as soon as it’s available!

[Amazon](#)

[Barnes & Noble](#)

[Books-a-Million](#)

[Indie Bound](#)

You can also click [here](#) to join my newsletter. You’ll be notified when I have a new book out or when there is something important to share. You will *not* be spammed. Promise.

Thanks again – I appreciate every reader!

Alison DeLaine