

hadn't yet been sacrificed to the store keeper in an attempt to pay the bills.

As he headed toward the door that led to the big parlor, the young woman stopped him. "Garrett," she said softly so only he would hear, "I think you should know what's been going on while you were away. Mrs. Weber has arranged for Tabby to marry —"

"That little sea urchin, David Osborne? I know that. I've come home to rescue her."

"How fortunate for her," she said. "I wish you luck."

"Thank you," Graydon said and turned away. The large parlor of Kingsley House was full of people dancing and laughing, and Graydon in his tan trousers and short jacket fit right in. Many people greeted him by the name of Garrett, most of them expressing surprise that he was there so much earlier than expected.

"Where's your brother?" a few asked.

Graydon covered himself by saying, "Which one?" He assumed they meant Captain Caleb, but he wasn't sure. He looked over the heads of the dancers to see if he could find Valentina/Victoria, but he didn't see her.

In the far corner was the little girl, Ali, with her drawing pad. She was sitting on the cushioned window seat that just an hour before Ken had taken apart. Graydon made his way across the room, and after asking permission, he sat down beside the pretty little girl. He didn't have time to make introductions. Besides, he assumed Garrett and the child were acquainted. "Was there a woman here with you?"

"Tabby," the girl said. "Her mother is angry at her. She doesn't want Tabby to marry you."

"I know," Graydon said, "but in this life, she *can* marry me. Where's this man Osborne?"

"Why don't you remember him?" Ali asked.

He leaned back against the window sill. He needed time to settle his mind and really *look* at what was going on around him. Could it really be possible that he was back in time? And if he was, how long would he stay? "Ali," he said softly, "I like your drawings very much. Would you please give me one of them?"

She picked up one from the pile beside her and handed it to him, but he didn't take it.

"I want you to sign your name to it, put the date on it, and drop it down here." He moved the cushion back to expose where the seat wasn't finished. When the molding was put on, the gap would be closed.

"Like Tabby's key?" the child asked.

"Exactly like that." Graydon stood up, but turned back. "Ali, I want to ask a favor of you." She was quite young and he doubted if she'd remember what he was about to tell her, but he could try. "When you are twenty-three-years old, I want you to have your portrait painted and put it in a big frame. Have your father make it so it has secret compartments in it. I want you to write about and draw pictures of the houses you and your husband create and hide everything inside the picture frame."

He paused as he thought about what was to come. "Tell your dad to hide the documents well. We don't want any kids to open it by mistake. I just want to make sure the future knows who you are and what you two did. Do you think you can remember all that?"

"Yes," Ali said and nodded in that way children do when something nonsensical makes perfect sense to them. "Who will I marry?"

Graydon smiled. "Valentina's big, healthy boy," he answered, then with a final wave, he left the room.

When Graydon got to the front hall, he couldn't resist a look in the dining room. How did the dinner he and Daire made compare to this one? Picking up a plate, he sampled a few things. The taste was glorious! But then these people had ingredients that hadn't been put through rigorous government inspections, and none of the food had been shipped from thousands of miles away. Fresh, home-grown, never frozen or even refrigerated.

When no one paid much attention to him, it began to hit Graydon that right now he was not a prince. He didn't have the weight of a whole country on his shoulders. Who he married, where he lived, every word he spoke, was not going to be scrutinized, questioned, weighed and measured. Any slip of his tongue would *not* be tomorrow's headlines in the Lanconian newspapers. Being seen with a pretty girl wouldn't show up on the Internet with the caption "*Is This the Next Queen of Lanconia?*"

"Garrett!"

He heard a familiar voice and turned to see his brother. Rory wasn't exactly like Graydon, but enough like him that they must cause comment. "Rory," he whispered.

"Rory?" he said, laughing as he gave Graydon a masculine shoulder clasp. "I haven't heard that nickname in years." He turned to the woman on his arm. "Right after I was born, Cousin Caleb said I 'roared like the wind' and the name stayed with me. Until I was an adult, anyway."

Graydon hadn't at first noticed the woman with his brother, but when he looked at her, his eyes widened. Unless he missed his guess, she was Danna — and she was heavily pregnant.

"Graydon," she said, "you're looking at me as though you've never seen me before. Have you forgotten your own sister-in-law?" She was laughing at him.

"It's just that your beauty astonishes me afresh every time I see it," Graydon said and kissed her hand.

"That's enough of that!" Rory said as he looked at his wife. "Why don't you go sit down for a while? I need to talk to my cousin."

When she was out of hearing distance, Rory looked at Graydon. "Have you heard what Lavinia Weber is up to?"

"In detail. So how long have you two been married?"

"Did you hit your head on one of Caleb's anchors?"

"Indulge me," Graydon said.

"Eight years and we have three cabin boys-to-be. I sail away, return, she gets in the family way. I guess it's magic."

Graydon didn't smile at his joke. "You two are happy together?"

"She is my life. But you know that. What about you and Tabitha? Did you hear that her mother is selling her to Osborne? If you want her, you need to make your move *now*. You can't postpone it for another voyage. Where's Caleb?"

"Hiding somewhere, I guess. Have you seen Tabby?"

"She was here a few minutes ago, but I didn't talk to her. It seems that the dress she's wearing has the ladies on fire with gossip. Did you bring it home to her?"

Graydon was looking around the room. "I had it overnighted from Lanconia."

"Lanconia? I've heard of the place, never been there, but I do know it takes longer than one night to get from there to here. Are you sure your head is all right?"

"I think I just saw Tabby. See you later, twin," Graydon said and made his way toward the front door.

Rory shook his head as he watched his cousin leave the house. The two of them had always looked alike, but they weren't usually called "twins." But he didn't blame Garrett for acting strangely. He knew from experience that love did odd things to a man.