

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Country Matters

Tesni Morgan

Contents

Cover

Title

Copyright

Dedication

Prelude

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

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Tesni Morgan



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In real life, make sure you practise safe sex.

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To Dorothy, with thanks for your help, advice and encouragement.

Prelude

England

It was the falling hour of the day when the shadows grew long and the slanting light was amber. It struck across the deep emerald lawns, and the old house brooded, golden-grey in the light, purple in the shadows.

The young man was nervous. He stood under the impressive arch of an oak door, staring at it through his glasses, waiting for someone to come. It was chilly, and he shivered, but with anticipation not cold.

Would she be there?

Closing his eyes, he saw her against the darkness of his lids, could feel her soft fingers caressing him, hear the whisper of silk, see the flash of scarlet satin as she moved her foot. He could almost smell the scent rising from her skin, musky and potent.

Tremulously, he had asked that disembodied voice down the phone, 'Will she be present?'

There had been silence, followed by a man's level reply. 'She may. I can't promise. You must come.'

The young man had obeyed. A novice as yet, earning his colours. He felt a stirring in his groin, and swallowed hard. He must not disgrace himself on this, his first visit.

He tried to keep his mind focused, almost wishing he was back at his VDU; safe, coping with the familiar, not tormented by this teasing, exciting sensation of fear that prickled along his nerves and made him harden.

It was impossible. The woman. He had met her once only. Long, silky blonde hair, her body elegantly draped in the richness of velvet. His fingers tingled as he remembered

lightly brushing against it. He had longed to trace her curves through it, but had not dared.

Then, beneath the hem of her gown, he had glimpsed her feet. In a moment of blinding revelation every dream, fantasy and yearning that had bedevilled him for years had combined in one single, burning shaft of desire.

And, to his horror and shame, he had known that she knew. Her crimson lips had curved into a little, musing smile and she had lifted her skirt slowly, so agonisingly slowly that his breath had stopped in his throat. The light had caught the dazzle of satin and scintillated on the tiny rhinestone buckles of a pair of court shoes with six-inch heels, thin as daggers.

The young man groaned, caught in the web of memory. He leant a hand against the granite surround of the door. He was rock-hard, in deep distress; shaking with the thrill of anticipation, hovering on the edge.

Suddenly the door opened and he came out of his dream, just in time to prevent the disaster of a premature explosion.

A pale faced, androgynous-looking creature dressed entirely in black stood within the hall. One bony white hand beckoned the young man. He stepped over the threshold, the door shut and a soft, silken scarf was tied about his eyes. Blindfolded, he felt himself being led, his feet encountering tiles, the deep pile of carpet, and the hardness of stone as the acolyte guided him down a staircase.

It wound steeply and the young man felt damp fingers of air touching his face. The way levelled out. Flagstones echoed his footsteps. The smell of incense filled his nostrils. The guide's hand on his arm indicated that he should stop. The scarf was removed.

The underground chamber was long and grey-walled. Smoky flares in cressets pierced the gloom of fan-vaulting. The young man blinked, acclimatising his eyes to the light.

He was being closely observed by a man and a woman, both robed in black from head to foot, their faces concealed by masks. Only their eyes and mouths were visible. They stood a few feet away from him and silence stretched through the vault like a protracted yawn.

Then the robed man stirred. He was tall and powerfully built, his shoulders held back. 'You've done well, my friend,' he said, his voice deep and cultured, with a cool, drawling tone. 'We have decided to reward you.'

'Thank you, master,' the young man whispered, looking up at him with anxious eyes, then immediately glancing toward the woman.

She lifted her black-gloved hands and unfastened the ruby clasp at her throat. The robe slithered from her shoulders, falling slowly to form a velvet puddle at her feet. She stepped away from it, her movements graceful as a ballet dancer's; her slim, angular body and her arrogance suggesting royal ancestry.

Her breasts rose naked from the cups of a tight scarlet satin basque that cinched her slim waist, the nipples red and prominent. The lace edging brushed her pubis, denuded of hair, the dark lips of her sex folded neatly, like the petals of some exotic jungle orchid. Black, gilt-trimmed suspenders stretched across her thighs where they were attached to the tops of stockings of so fine a weave they resembled grey mist.

As she strolled closer to the young man, the scent of her flesh enfolded him, like a pungent drug which made his head spin. His glorious mistress. The Adored One.

Her outrageous attire did not detract from the impression of quality. It added to it. The ice princess was transformed into the whore, but no common streetwalker; a powerful priestess, perhaps: Astarte, Isis, Kali -

The young man's eyes were riveted to her feet. She wore black patent leather ankle boots with pointed toes, spurs, and heels so high that her instep was curved in an

unnatural, almost perverse manner. He gasped, shuddering with the need for her to raise an imperious foot and drive that spiked barb into his flesh.

Slowly he sank to his knees like a supplicant before an altar. His hands caressed leather and metal as he prostrated himself at the feet of this divinity.

Chapter One

America

'Let's toss for it,' Lorna said, as she and Nicole pored over the photographs spread out on the shiny surface of the wide teak desk.

'OK. Heads or tails?' Nicole fished a coin out of her purse and threw it in the air. It flashed in the late afternoon sunshine.

'Heads,' Lorna shouted.

'Don't you have all the luck?' Nicole complained, straightening up, and flicking back her auburn bob. 'He's drop-dead gorgeous, but not our usual type.'

Indeed he isn't, Lorna thought, glancing down at the picture in her hand. A welcome change from the muscle-rippling hunks who queue up at our doors. She turned it over. On the back was his name - Sean Kealy - and a phone number. She and Nicole Paxton and the team at *Image*, had interviewed many applicants for the forthcoming contest, but this one was outstanding.

He was slim yet broad shouldered, attired in the costume of an army officer from the Jane Austen period: not a pretty toy soldier but a scruffy, untidy one, a battle-scarred warrior. He had long dark hair and blue eyes with that sparkle in their depths common to most sons of Erin. His cheekbones were pronounced, his lips firm and humorous, while the lift of his cleft chin suggested stubbornness.

A European, almost one of her own, though from across the water that linked Ireland to England. Nostalgia dragged at her gut, sudden and unexpected.

Nicole shrugged on her jacket. 'Give him a call,' she suggested. 'Maybe he'll come round tonight. You're not

doing anything, are you?’

‘No. You know Ricky and I have split up.’

‘I’m glad you got rid of that creep. I’ll ring later and you can report in,’ Nicole said, and a smile curved her perfectly outlined lips.

She came over to put an arm round Lorna, giving her a hug. Lorna felt the pressure of a pair of small breasts, and heard the soft rustle of silk against her own more casual cotton T-shirt. Nicole was always immaculately tailored, favouring crisp suits with French labels that emphasised her position.

Lorna owed much to her. They were close friends, too. Now she said, ‘I’d rather come to the publishers’ shindig with you. I’m lumbered with listening to another aspiring star’s pitch.’

Nicole chuckled. ‘My heart bleeds for you. It comes with the job, honey. Enjoy. Use the camcorder, then we can both watch the video. Don’t forget to lock up.’

‘I won’t.’ Lorna followed her, closing the door when Nicole disappeared into the noisy New York street.

The crime rate was higher in summer, the heat that rose from the pavements trapped among the canyons between sky-high buildings, their turrets disappearing into smoggy mist. Tempers became frayed beyond air-conditioned walls.

Just for a moment, she savoured a memory of soft rain falling on leafy green lanes that wound between hedgerows, thatched cottages with gardens where wild flowers rioted; old, timbered houses that seemed rooted in the soil as if they had grown there. Fields of corn undulating like the sea; waves bashing the rocky Cornish coast; Stratford-on-Avon, Shakespeare country; even grubby old London. England – her birthplace – and she had not seen it for five years.

New York had become her home, in particular Brooklyn, where the honk of horns mingled with salsa blasting from car speakers, and grey-suited office workers ogled girls in

miniskirts bathed in the glow of WALK/DON'T WALK traffic lights.

Lorna had adapted easily, her activities centred on this warehouse that had been converted into the headquarters of *Image*, a successful magazine catering for fans of romantic novels. Nicole was the brains behind it. It was her baby and, year by year, had gained in popularity and helped keep that genre afloat in the erratic, stormy seas of the book trade.

Lorna glanced round the office, which was filled with state-of-the-art hardware. Computers hummed, fax machines clicked and answerphones recorded messages. The next deadline was upon them, coupled with the complicated organisation of the annual convention, a huge trade extravaganza which was to be held in Texas this time round.

The reception area's decor leaned towards Victoriana, except that instead of lithographic prints, the walls were hung with framed and enlarged covers from some of the genre's bestsellers. Slick and smartly executed, these depicted clinching couples wearing period costume, with female bosoms very nearly bare to the nipples and naked manly chests with ruggedly defined pectorals.

Lorna smiled to herself, cynically observing that this was a dream factory, nothing like the real thing.

She walked into her own apartment, which led from the main building, slipping off her shoes and pulling her black T-shirt over her head as she went. She had succeeded in creating an English atmosphere; searching for antiques in the secondhand markets, choosing chintz and old lace, watercolours and delicate china.

One day, she promised herself, when I'm really settled, I'll indulge my love of Gothic architecture, rich velvet drapes, Pre-Raphaelite paintings and art nouveau. I'll give full rein to my obsession with the decadent, *fin de siècle* ambience of the late nineteenth century. Maybe I'll frame copies of

Aubrey Beardsley's obscene drawings from the notorious *Lysistrata*.

She caught sight of herself in a gilt-framed mirror. Not too bad considering, she mused. Her figure was trim. She was strong-willed and had steadfastly refused bagels and the sugary confectionery which seemed to be the staple diet in the office. She saw reflected a leggy, twenty-four-year-old brunette with a shaggy mane of curls and green eyes that slanted slightly at the outer corners. Willowy and narrow hiped, she possessed a pair of firm, upward tilting breasts.

Cradled in a black bra, they rose proudly, the nipples still erect from contact with Nicole. Placing a hand under each, Lorna lifted them gently, brooding on Sean Kealy.

The name had an adventurous ring; Errol Flynn, that 1930s heart-throb of the silver screen sprang to mind. It was essential for a male model posing for this market to have an exciting name. Something to conjure up visions of dashing heroes, pirates, highwayman and knights in shining armour. Would he, like that departed demigod of love once voted the sexiest man in the world, leap to iconhood?

No doubt, like the rest of the applicants, Sean was an ambitious actor. She wondered whether he should be selected and entered as a contestant at the Mr Image Cover Model Pageant, the highlight of the convention, the prize an opportunity to be featured on the jackets of the steamy novels the magazine promoted.

Female readers would fall in love with him as they feasted on the purple prose, picturing themselves as the lovely, spirited heroine in his arms. Aching with lust and unrealised dreams, they would bring themselves to orgasm while their insensitive, overweight husbands snored in front of the sports channel on TV.

She had never dreamed she'd wind up promoting romances during her years at university. Once she, too, wanted to write, and imagined producing some meaningful opus that would set the world on fire. Instead, she had

arrived here, via several other magazines and a helping hand from an editor who fancied her. The rest was down to her own ability, and she had made it.

Now, she was Nicole Paxton, a right-hand man, 'person' to be politically correct. She had plenty of scope for exercising her journalistic skills. And not only those.

She wandered into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Ice-cubes tinkled in orange juice as she carried a tumbler back to the living room. Slipping out of her skirt, she stood in her briefs and bra as she flipped through her CD collection. She was putting off ringing Sean, tired of young men falling over themselves to pleasure her if only she would give them a chance at the contest.

One could have too much of a good thing, she mused. That was half her trouble. There had always been too many men and none of them exactly what she wanted. The problem was she didn't know what she wanted.

She was still bruised by the final row with Ricky Carlyle, an executive who had wanted her to be as much his property as the construction company he owned. She had spent the past six months as his official girlfriend, but had decided to call a halt to the relationship, recognising that her self-worth was on a downward spiral. Nevertheless, Ricky's absence left a yawning gap in her life. As usual when going through a trauma, Lorna turned to music.

Now she selected Maria Callas singing an aria from the opera *Andrea Chenier* by Giordano, used to poignant effect on the soundtrack for the Oscar-winning *Philadelphia*. The music soared, and her tiredness melted away. One good thing that had come out of her involvement with Ricky was the box at the Met he rented to impress clients. He had magnanimously agreed that she continue to enjoy it.

Glorious sounds swept through the apartment, and Lorna listened, completely absorbed, tears rising in her eyes. By the time it was over her faith in human beings was restored and she was ready to take up the gauntlet again, the

thought of Sean beginning to appeal. At the very least she would enjoy talking about home with him. They would be able to laugh together, sharing that dry, quirky sense of humour peculiar to the British.

She supposed she would sleep with him and the anticipation of a new sexual partner was always exciting. No two sets of genitals were alike; they varied as much as facial features. Male, female, their uniqueness made them an enthralling study.

Would Sean's penis have a foreskin or would he be cut? Lorna never could make up her mind which she liked best - the circumcised male or the one who was *au naturel*. A coil tightened in her womb and her clitoris pulsed as she thought about this.

Naked now, she stepped into the wet embrace of the shower, leaning against the white tiles with a long sigh. The water cascaded over her breasts, droplets standing out on the bunched nipples before dribbling down across her flat belly to run between her thighs and soak the triangular wedge of fuzz covering her pubis. Lascivious watery fingers dipped between the pink furled wings of her labia, and tickled the passion bud crowning the dark slit. Pleasure coursed through her, her groin heavy with need.

She reached up to push her wet hair from her forehead, face raised to the jets. It felt like warm rain, caressing and cleansing her, washing away the gritty annoyances and petty disasters of the day.

There was always high drama, rising to fever-pitch as publication day drew near. And the date of the convention was fast approaching; the air would quiver with pheromones as the contestants postured at the costume ball.

None of this mattered now. She was free; free to indulge herself, to *be* herself, no longer having to keep up the pretence of being the oh-so-cool and efficient Miss Lorna Erskine. Somehow, because she was English, they expected her to be unemotional and in control. She wore a permanent

mask. Sometimes it was fixed so tight she was sure her face was about to crack like plaster. Only Nicole had an inkling of the untamed depths beneath that calm exterior, but even she did not realise the extent of Lorna's need for a change of scene, lifestyle and purpose.

It must be wonderful, Lorna thought, to hand over one's will to someone else. Is this what sadomasochism is all about? It was a field of experimentation in which she had never yet been involved, and certainly would not want to. She was an independent woman, who would never submit, she protested indignantly.

Yet somewhere, locked away in the secret heart of her self, were shameful, unnamable yearnings: things she would not admit, even to herself; wanton actions that manifested only when she was asleep and dreaming.

Lashes lowered and spiky with water, she reached out for the shower-gel. After wiping the back of her hand over her eyes to clear them, she squeezed a puddle into her palm, the sharp, spicy odour of ylang-ylang joining that of her own musky scent. It was a heady brew. Herbs and sea-washed shells, female juices seeping from her vagina, the odour trapped in the tangled curls of her wet bush.

Slowly, luxuriously, she massaged her breasts and belly, shoulders, lower back and thighs. Her nipples rose at her touch, the feel of her own fingers tapping the reserves of desire which were always there.

The perfumed gel was slick and smooth, and she parted her legs, rubbing it into her pubic floss, making twirling patterns. The ache in her belly was more insistent, and she probed between her lower lips, pretending to wash herself there. In reality she was fondling the satiny folds, deep pink now from the heated water and her own friction which sent the blood flowing through them. The twin wings swelled and her clitoris rose from within its tiny hood, raising its eager head, demanding attention.

She delayed the inevitable moment, knowing she was going to bring herself to orgasm. She fondled her breasts, making her clit wait a while. She anointed them, weighed them, jiggled them, rested them in her palms but left her thumbs free to rub across the tingling nipples. They responded instantly, a hotline shooting straight down to her rampant bud. The soapy liquid moved over them with delicious ease, back and forth till they ached. Then she pinched them, rolled them, looked down to watch them rise, tight and hard, their rose hue darkening to reddish brown.

She could not remember when she had last felt so horny. She shivered as she stroked her nipples, longing for a tongue to lick her folds and dip into her furrow. Someone with a feather-light touch. A face sprang to mind; a woman's face with dancing violet-blue eyes and tawny blonde hair.

Cassandra Ashley. She had not consciously thought of the woman in a carnal context for years. Her first female lover, who had taught her so much about her body's needs. If only she was with her now; soft limbs entwined, soft fingers seeking out her erogenous zones, and that darting, knowing tongue. Cassandra, who took her pleasures where she fancied and, with carefree insouciance, had encouraged Lorna to do the same.

Smiling at the recollections pouring in, Lorna yielded to her craving, her fingers idling over her smooth wet skin till they contacted her crisp pubes. As she shifted her feet to part her thighs, her sex-lips opened wider, engorged and slippery and needful.

She inserted her middle finger, working round the stem of her love-bud, then letting the tip gently massage its head. The pleasure was immense, the urgency all-consuming. She knew she would not be able to hold on for long, though sometimes she could play with herself for an hour or more, keeping her climax at bay so that when she finally came it was in a roaring cataclysm of sensation.

Not this time, though, with the jets driving hot against her breasts and those delicious rivulets trickling each side of her clitoris, adding to the delight of her touch on its crown. Moaning with pleasure, she sank down on her haunches, knees wide apart, her pulsating bud protruding like a miniature penis. She held back her labia with her other hand, making her clit strain from its cowl, ever more proud and erect, as she bent her head to watch its performance.

It demanded a harder friction. She obeyed. Faster now, and faster still her finger moved. The waves rose, high and sharper, flooding her very being. With a stifled cry, she abandoned herself to a fierce orgasm that left her gasping and convulsing. She sank down, her head reeling as the last precious spasms died away.

She sat there for a moment, her breathing gradually slowing, then she rose, killed the spray, stepped out of the stall, wrapped herself in a fluffy white towel and reached for the phone.

She was seated in the reception area, reading Sean Kealy's CV and glancing over his portfolio when he came in carrying a sportsbag and a sheathed sabre. The door had swung open at his touch after he had spoken to her through the intercom.

Hello, she thought, looking up and admiring the way he walked, the way he held himself - part natural, part the result of drama school training. He was light on his feet; agile, too. Remembering how he had looked in costume, she could imagine him taking part in duelling scenes and the vision gave her goose-bumps, raising the hair down on her limbs.

Now he was casually dressed in a draped linen suit and pale shirt with a loosely knotted tie. He wore Cesare Paciotti loafers, and his whole outfit breathed class. He hadn't bought that off the peg.

‘Good evening,’ Lorna said, rising and holding out her hand.

‘Miss Erskine?’ He took it in his and retained it, a half-smile on his lips, blue eyes twinkling.

His deep voice shivered right down to her epicentre; a lovely masculine voice with the trace of a burr as it penetrated her core as surely as if he had already entered her body. I’ll bet he can sing, she thought. An Irish tenor?

‘Call me Lorna,’ she said, rather unsteadily. ‘Won’t you sit down?’

‘Thank you,’ he replied. An electric thrill shot through her at the skin to skin contact as he turned her hand and kissed her wrist where the pulse beat rapidly.

She met his eyes, then freed her fingers and moved over to where a cretonne covered chesterfield stood in the bay. Beyond was the patio and garden, secure and secluded behind high walls. The sweet smell of night-scented stocks and jasmine drifted in at the window. The traffic sounded distant now and, from way overhead, a jet plane purred, its lights twinkling faintly in the plum-blue dark.

She settled herself, her legs tucked up under her, the long diaphanous skirt she wore floating round her. She was achingly aware of her nudity beneath, the way her floss brushed her thighs and the evening air breathed on the scented avenue between. Sean sat beside her, not too close as yet, subjecting her to an amused stare.

He was conspicuously attractive: of medium height and spare build, with what she suspected was an all-over tan. He resembled the designer stubbled, rougher end of the leading man market, except that his hair was glossy clean and his suit by Armani. His style was a cunning blend of streetwise edge and elegance. He scanned the room like a panther on the prowl, almost staking out his territory.

Slow down, lover boy, she thought. This isn’t a foregone conclusion, charming and full of blarney though you are. A tad too confident, perhaps? Used to women throwing their

legs round you and impaling themselves on your prick. Mr *Image*? A champion heart-breaker and bastard no doubt with your brains in your balls.

'I've studied the material you submitted,' she said, ice-cool on the surface but burning within, all too aware of his arm lying across the back of the settee just beyond her shoulder blades.

'You have? Sure and that's fine,' he vouchsafed.

He moved a little nearer and she caught a whiff of *Ricci Club*, blended with the clean scent of his hair and the freshly showered yet pungently male odour of his body. She was glad she had had the foresight to masturbate or this combination might have proved overpowering. She needed a level head to evaluate his suitability.

She opened the file and ran an oval fingernail down a page. 'I see you've had experience on English television and the West End stage,' she said. 'And done some work with the RSC.'

'I took theatre-craft at college, and managed a stint at the Abbey Theatre. That's in Dublin, you know.'

'I know where it is,' she reminded tartly. 'I'm familiar with the plays of O'Casey, Synge and Yeats. Just because I edit a women's magazine doesn't mean I'm a complete moron.'

'I didn't think it did,' he continued, unperturbed. 'Anyway, I went to London, worked as an extra, did anything I could to get a foot in. I was lucky. Happened to be in the right place at the right time when ITV were casting for a series set during the Napoleonic War. Battle of Waterloo, and all that. Didn't get a speaking part, only a walk-on, but it was a start. That led to commercials.'

'Why d'you think appearing on book jackets will help your career?' she asked, and leant a little nearer.

Her top was brief, with a deep scooped neckline. She had not worn it to be alluring but to satisfy her own aesthetic recognition of the contrast between the white stretchy material and her sun-kissed skin.

‘Anything that keeps you in the public eye is bound to be OK.’ His voice was husky as his eyes fastened on her nipples pressing darkly against the tight top. ‘I’d like to get to Hollywood.’

‘But don’t you think English films and TV are the best in the world?’ she asked, trying to be businesslike though she could feel herself growing warmer, looser, a melting feeling starting in her belly and spreading to her vagina.

‘Sure I do, but Hollywood’s where the money is. This may get me noticed. What do I have to do, Lorna?’ he murmured, and she was fascinated by the fineness of his skin and the length of the sooty lashes hedging his eyes. ‘Shall I give an audition? D’you want me to read a script?’

‘Not now, though I’d like to see you in costume,’ she replied breathlessly.

‘I’ve brought the soldier’s outfit. You like that?’

‘Very much. You wear it well. The Regency period is wonderful for uniforms, and so many romance books are historical. But first, let’s have dinner, then later you can change while I get the camcorder running. This is to show Nicole Paxton. She’s my boss and has the last word.’

She had laid out a simple meal of salad and pizza sent in from the nearest delicatessen. That was one advantage of living where she did. One could send out for food twenty-four hours a day, any type of food: Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Thai, Lebanese. The cuisine of the entire world was at her doorstep.

‘The only thing it’s impossible to get is a properly made cup of English tea,’ she said, when they reached the dessert stage. She topped up her glass with red wine. ‘No one knows how to make it except the English.’

‘Or Irish,’ he protested. ‘The water’s got to be boiling. Come back to my place, Lorna, and I’ll brew up for you – sweet and dark and strong – just how you like it. Is that how you like your loving, too?’

Her eyes met his, and she paused in raising the glass to her lips. 'I don't think that's any of your business,' she said frostily.

'No?' One arched brow shot upwards. 'Not now perhaps, but one day, *acushla*.' Then he mitigated the use of this endearment by adding with a grin, 'Once you've tasted my tea, you won't be able to control yourself.'

I can hardly do that now, she thought, feeling the nectar oozing from her vulva to wet her bare inner thighs. Shower gel and talc, mingled with the tell-tale odour of recently enjoyed orgasm, wafted up across her mons. As she smelt it, she wondered if he could, too.

'Would you like another Guinness?' she asked, clawing her way back to rationality. 'I'm sorry it's only bottled.'

'Don't worry about it,' he assured her, with a wide smile. 'I'll take you to Dublin one day, and we'll go on a pub-crawl down Grafton Street and drink some of the real stuff.'

The wine was strong, and her head was spinning. The prospect he presented to her seemed a delightful one. Maybe he would be something more than a one-night stand, but she balked at commitment. Hadn't she tried that with Ricky?

'Maybe we will, Sean,' she said, promising nothing.

She had been indulgent with the dessert, ordering ice cream with cherries, fudge and nuts, and tiny bite-sized eclairs bursting with whipped cream and rippling with dark sweet chocolate and mocha chantilly.

Without taking his adventurer's sensual, hungry eyes from her, he scooped up a spoonful of the latter and held it out, nodding as he did so. She hesitated for an instant, then opened her mouth and permitted him to fill it with sweetness.

The confection was cold, bitter-sweet; the warmth of brandy, pastry melting on her tongue. She relished the taste, closing her eyes and murmuring her appreciation. It

slipped down her throat and she lifted her lids, met the full blue blaze of his eyes and said, 'Don't you want some?'

He extended a sinewy, sunbrowned hand and wiped away a tiny trace of chocolate from the corner of her lips, transferring it to his own, his fleshy tongue working round his fingers in such a suggestive way that her face flushed and her womb contracted with longing.

'Not from a spoon,' he said. 'I'd like to smooth it over your breasts and then lick it off. Would you like me to do that, Lorna?'

This was going too far too fast, she decided, and pushed back her chair. He was there to help her as she rose. She could feel him standing behind her, his breath on her neck, his hands coming round to cup her breasts and rub his thumb-pads over the hard tips.

'We've work to do,' she gasped, but could not help pushing back against him, her buttocks contacting the high ridge of his erect penis.

'Can't I have my pudding?' he whispered, his tongue caressing the velvety rim of her ear and setting the pendant earring swinging.

Without waiting for an answer, he came round to face her, hands at her waist, pulling her gently towards him. She opened her lips as he kissed her, tongue tangling with his as he probed and explored the cavity of her mouth, savouring mocha and chantilly and saliva, potent as love-juice.

Without releasing her from his kiss, he reached down, found the edge of her crop top and pushed it up. The air played over her naked skin, the jersey material strained across her chest like a wide white strap. Her nipples stood out, roused by the change of temperature and the excitement roaring through her loins.

Sean eased back and looked at them, his famished, almost gloating expression making her labia swell and her clit ache. It was as if he was already feasting on her, sucking

the buds into his mouth, tonguing them with the avidity of a baby.

'You've glorious breasts,' he breathed and, though she knew he had perfected his charm in acting school, she somehow wanted to believe he was sincere.

Before she realised his intention, he reached for his plate and her flesh crept. Her nipples were hard as diamond-capped raspberries as he started to coat them with chocolate and ice-cream. His fingers were amazingly skilful, lingering and smoothing. His head tipped to one side as he considered his masterpiece, the confectionery his paints, her breasts his canvas.

Lorna stood rigid, spine arched towards him, head tipped back, eyes slitted. Sean hunkered down in front of her, bringing his face level with her nipples. His tongue protruded, the tip lightly brushing over the almost painfully sensitive teats.

'Oh . . . oh . . .'

A shuddering moan escaped Lorna, and she buried her hands in his long, thick hair, making certain that he did not move as he knelt there, worshipping at the fount of her breasts.

He took his time, licking diligently till every particle had been devoured. Even then he did not stop, sucking strongly, rolling the nipples between his fingers, brushing them, tormenting them till she was on the point of begging for release.

It seemed that he was concerned with nothing but her pleasure, his own gratification of no importance. Yet, glancing down, she could see the swelling behind his fly, the thick baton of his penis lifting the loose material at an angle. It slanted upward, almost to his waist.

With a final, leisurely massage of her aching breasts, he got to his feet, carefully adjusting her top to cover her. The fabric immediately darkened, stained by the damp residue of his saliva.

‘Did you say something about work?’ he said huskily, hands hanging loosely at his sides. She marvelled at his control, for his phallus maintained its hardness, an iron-hard weapon needing a sheath in which to plunge.

‘Yes . . . of course . . . work,’ she stammered, blinded by the need to take his cock into her mouth and sample its flavour. ‘Umm . . . you can change in my bedroom.’

‘Sounds good to me. Over there?’

She nodded and he moved lithely to the door. While he was gone Lorna set up the camera.

Her heart was beating rapidly. She could feel the jersey cloth chafing her sensitive nipples, and moisture lubricating her secret lips. Concentrate! she told herself sternly. Work first and then pleasure. And pleasure there will be, for I’m determined to have him.

When he returned she did a doubletake. Jesus God! she whispered to herself. Will you look at that? I’m blasé, but even so I’m panting and raring to go. What will he do to less sophisticated readers when he strides across a book jacket? They’ll genuflect, half fainting in his presence.

He was indeed magnificent. The bottle-green uniform suited his swashbuckling good looks. He was so beautiful and so frightening, with that suggestion of power in his stance.

His costume was that of a hussar, with a short, frogged and braided jacket and a loose, fur-lined dolman slung over one shoulder. Skin-tight breeches underscored his cock, exaggerating it in an outrageously sensual way. His firmly muscled buttocks and long, lean thighs with the fascinating hollows were a sight to tempt a nun.

A kalpac was set at a jaunty angle on his head, the peak part covering his eyes. Shiny black Hessian boots met his knees and a sabre swung at his left hip.

‘What d’you think?’ he asked, swaggering across and posing for her, hand resting on the sword hilt, his legs

widely planted, giving an uninterrupted view of the impressive package between.

Lorna walked slowly round him, pretending to be interested in camera angles, while in reality possessed of a crying need to handle the goods so temptingly displayed.

At last she ran her fingers over the smooth woollen cloth covering his biceps. She felt him tense, heard his sharp intake of breath. Want curled in her groin and sent the blood rushing to her core.

They stood together, so close that her nipples made contact with his chest. Heat emanated from him, and she was very aware of his shaft almost, but not quite, pressing against her belly. She moved her hips ever so slightly and his arm came out, gripping her waist, hauling her up till she could feel his manhood, hot, damp and urgent through their clothing.

She raised her eyes and stared up at him. His jaw was tense, his mouth a hard line, his eyes a sharp, smarting blue. 'Well?' he said huskily. 'D'you like what you see?'

She had the presence of mind to bring up her hands and wedge them between his chest and her breasts, then she stepped back a pace. 'You look the part. Yes, I think the cover artists will enjoy having you as a model, and we'll pair you up with some gorgeous girls.'

'So it's settled then? I can enter the contest?'

She strolled away from him, then stood, hands on her hips, looking him up and down like a prospective buyer viewing a slave on the auction block. 'Very nice, Sean. But have you ever considered taking part in, shall we say, frank and explicit movies?'

'Porn, d'you mean?' He laid the rapier aside, but kept to his role as a victorious soldier.

'Erotica, which is rather different. Nothing crude. We're dealing with female fantasies here, not hard porn for men. There's at least one woman director in Hollywood who specialises in tastefully filmed sex scenes, with a fairly

convincing plot. Would you care to try and enact one with me? This will be recorded, you understand.'

Lorna's heart was pounding like a drum. Beneath the flimsy fabric her breasts rose, the nipples puckered, her clit yearning for the touch of his mouth, his teeth, his fingers. She could feel the honeydew pooling at her vaginal entrance.

'I'll give it my best shot,' he said with a slow smile and it was as if some devilish stranger had already taken over, an enemy warrior indeed, ready to plunge into and ravish her.

Lorna's desire cooled a little at the predatory look in his eyes, though this was just fine for her purpose. She fixed the tripod so the camcorder was directed at a divan positioned against one wall. It was draped in tapestries and heaped with bolster-shaped cushions.

'OK,' she said. 'Here's the scenario. You're one of the Duke of Wellington's officers and I'm a French lady you've just taken prisoner. It's down to you to rob me of my virtue, in the most seductive way possible.'

'I'll be a pleasure, Lorna,' he replied, his gaze sending prickles down her spine. 'Do I get to act out the whole thing? Or is this a fake screw?'

'Let's see how it goes, shall we?' she murmured, presenting her back to him as she sashayed towards the divan.

He caught her by the shoulders, turning her to face him and she was helpless in that powerful grip. His hands were impatient now, roaming over her entire body, dipping between her thighs. His touch made her shiver, a warm glow suffusing her entire self, culminating in the moist depths of her womanhood.

'Shall we begin?' he asked, close to her ear, his breath a caress in itself.

She nodded and started to struggle. 'Let me go!' she cried, pretending to be a frightened but feisty lady. 'Don't