

Kate slipped away down the path away from the sounds of the party. One part of her was still afraid Daclyn would be mad that she'd snuck off from his family's masquerade – he'd expended enough effort convincing her to attend, after all. The rest of her knew he'd be more annoyed that she hadn't brought him along on her escape.

There were just too many stares. And questions. And whispers. His family was proper— rank and riches giving them an iron wall to shield them from criticism. They were established, well-founded, accepted as a vital part of society. She was...not. The rather scandalous midwife just barely on the edge of social acceptability as a single woman without a male relative in the household, Kate wouldn't have attended without Daclyn's constant haranguing. Worse than an old woman, she'd called him. Stubborn as a mule, he'd shot back.

"It's a masquerade - wear whatever you want," Daclyn had said in the end. "Just please don't leave me alone with those people."

Kate had dressed in costume, the fine green brocade of her dress foreign enough. Despite her cursing of the corset on the way over, the look in his eyes had been worth the effort, the soft laughter when he saw the rest of her outfit an added bonus.

"You'll understand if I handle with care," Daclyn jested, one hand running down the stays covering her spine.

"I should hope you'd do that anyway," Kate had parried in return.

Daclyn took her hand, and they'd danced, bespelled by one another. Until other voices started to seep in. Scandal. Inappropriate. Unbecoming. Surely just a youthful dalliance. Gone soon enough. The words that didn't cross their lips echoed from their minds, even if they didn't realize that Kate could hear what lay behind the polite smiles, the deferential dip of a head in Daclyn's presence. So she'd murmured a nicety and slipped away to the woods.

Kate reached out with her right hand, fingertips trailing along the bark of a nearby oak tree. This she knew. This was solid. Not the gossip, and biting of tongues amongst the finery in the house.

"Crowd too much for you, then."

Daclyn stood on the path before her. A corner of his mouth turned up, and she half-smiled in return. He offered his arm, and she looped her hand into the crook of his elbow.

"I was going to go back in a minute," Kate said softly. "You didn't need to come get me."

"Come get you?" Daclyn feigned surprise. "There are about twenty girls of marrying age whose mothers have been eyeing me all night. You're pretty enough Kate, but I fled for my own sake."

Kate laughed out loud at that. "Thank you so much." She drew a deep breath. "Why. That's what I don't get. Any of those twenty girls would be perfectly happy to be the next Lady Nolan. Why on earth did you insist on me being here, when they would make your life so much easier?"

Daclyn stopped walking, his hold halting Kate's progress at the same time. Drawing her into the circle of his embrace, he pressed his lips against her forehead before speaking.

"Because the other girls wore wings."

