

# *Revealed*



KATE NOBLE



BERKLEY SENSATION, NEW YORK



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*Berkley Sensation Titles by Kate Noble*

COMPROMISED  
REVEALED

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KATE NOBLE



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*To my father and brother, the two wisest  
and most unflappable gentlemen I know.*

## *Prologue*

THE setting sun reflected off the inn's bronze door knocker, blazing orange light like a beacon to the weary traveler. He had been on the road for days, on the trail of his enemy, and at last, the inn at the end of the road beckoned him as if to say, "This is it. The final place."

It would end now. He was certain of it.

The building sat on the jagged edge of land and sea. He felt, he feared, it was the right place. His sinking stomach told him it was. He took a swig of water from the leather pouch he kept hooked to his waist. Squaring his shoulders, he ruthlessly combed his fingers through his hair, willing himself out of exhaustion. Then, as he approached, the building came into focus.

His instincts had been right, and tonight there would be blood-shed. But would it be his or his enemy's?

His contact's information was very good, he thought, as he read the choppily carved text beneath the inn's name on its mast-head. Fin de Rue Poisson. Literally translated, End of Fish Road. His contact had told him that the encoded communiqué they had intercepted had been translated to say "fish fin." And thus, he had been searching every stall, every ship, every pub in every small coastal village in this northern region of France for a "fish fin." The Fin de Rue Poisson may not be a literal translation, but as an amalgam of English and French, it fit the bill.

The sea lapped jawfuls of water nearly at the base of the inn. If he looked hard enough, stared long enough, could he see England? Could he see home?

No. All he could see was the water and the looming building, beckoning him closer.

It was time to find the man who had eluded him for so long.



The Frenchman stood at the window in the westernmost room of the uppermost floor of the seaside inn at the end of the rue Poisson. He faced the cobbled street that led from the village to the seashore, the farthest corner of the structure, yes, but it was strategic. Here, he could see what was coming. The copper sun burned his eyes, but he had to remain vigilant, had to stay aware, had to stay alive.

He knew the man they called the Blue Raven was due to arrive. He knew, because he had leaked the clue to the safe house whereabouts himself.

Tonight he would prove his worth.

The Frenchman glanced at his pocket watch. Who knew it would take so damned long?

Movement on the street caught his eye. The Frenchman squinted into the sun and leaned into the glass, searching. His heartbeat quickened, the blood rushing to his temples, his muscles tensing, ready for fight or flight.

The clacking of horse hooves on cobblestones reached his ears as a carriage came into sight, a large, burly man driving the team. His face was shaded by an oversized leather hat, his form covered by a heavy cloak. The Frenchman watched and waited as the carriage approached . . . and turned a corner, out of sight.

A breath held too long fell from his lungs in a staccato rhythm. The Emperor had waved the white flag at Waterloo nearly a fortnight ago, but he knew the loyal were still being hunted. He was still too used to that rush of noise in his ears that woke him up in the dead of night. They would come together again. They would not surrender as easily as their leader. But for now, he kept his hand on the beautifully scrolled pistol at his waist, squeezing its cold, hard length for comfort.

“That will not help you now,” said a deep, rasping voice from the door.

The Frenchman turned, his hand remaining still on his belt, and took his first look at the Blue Raven.

He was dressed in the worn oilskins of a local fisherman, but the ornate pistol leveled at the Frenchman’s fair head was not part of a fisherman’s costume. That deadly weapon, as a matter of fact, was an identical match to the one he held at his waist.

“So,” the Frenchman spoke in perfect if accented English, “the little pigeon has arrived. Finally.”

“I apologize if I kept you waiting,” the Englishman replied in perfect if accented French.

The Frenchman leaned back in the comfortable, leather, winged chair. “I must say, you look different than I expected.”

The Englishman’s eyes narrowed. “You look exactly as I expected.”

“Do I?”

“Yes, but then again, I have the advantage. I saw you once at a distance.” The Englishman cocked the pistol, the metallic click echoing in the small room. “You were slitting the throat of one of my countrymen.”

A sudden flash of feeling ran down the Frenchman’s spine, so unfamiliar, it took him a moment to identify it as panic.

He knew, in that spare second, that he had greatly miscalculated his adversary. He had neglected to factor in the hate he saw burning in the Blue Raven’s eyes.

“You’ve been tracked through cities and across battlefields,” the Englishman said, his voice breaking with bitter spite. “And too many lives have been taken or destroyed

by you.”

“Monseieur,” the Frenchman said, managing a cold smile in spite of the wildness of his heartbeat. “Surely we can settle our dispute as gentlemen.”

The Englishman regarded him, his arm and gaze steady and strong. “No,” he replied. “I tire of being a gentleman.”

The Frenchman’s hand came up in a blur of movement, and the air rang with the sound of gunfire.



The Blue Raven remained standing in the doorway until the weight on his leg gave out. The hole three inches above his knee leaked smoke, then a warm red spurt began trickling down his calf. But the Frenchman, the adversary he had hunted for the better part of a decade, who had seduced secrets from England’s top leaders and spilled the blood of those who weren’t so easily charmed, remained seated.

He wouldn’t be getting up any time soon.

The red stain grew and spread on the white lawn of the Frenchman’s shirtfront. His eyes were opened in surprise.

Until the end, he had believed he would win.

The Englishman hobbled over to the Frenchman’s body and removed the pistol from that man’s limp hand. He stuffed it ruthlessly into the waist of his trousers, reuniting it with its mate after so many years. A small glint of metal from around the dead man’s neck caught his attention. He pulled it free of the bloody shirt: a crucifix. Quietly laying it back on the man’s chest, the Englishman took a moment and then gently closed his enemy’s eyes.

The Blue Raven straightened, wincing as his weight fell on his wounded leg. He didn’t have much time; the English had won the war, but he was still on French soil. He could hear the innkeeper’s boots on the stairs already; there was only time for one last detail.

From the pocket of his oilskin overcoat, he pulled out a black feather and laid it gently on the dead man’s lap.

As he departed the inn via a window, he couldn’t keep the elation from flowing, adrenaline overcoming his injury and powering his escape.

It was over.

Finally.

### ***One Year Later***

“Will this work?” the first man asked, more nerves in his voice than he liked. He prided himself on maintaining an air of nonchalance, but the jostling evening crowd at the Bull and Whisker and the company of the man next to him had him slightly on edge.

“But of course. While your English imagination is lacking, I see clearly,” his companion answered, his French accent smoothing over the cruel bite of his words. “But I’m counting on your English prejudice.” He rapped his knuckle on the bar once more, and the beefy man behind brought over the bottle and refilled his glass again.

The first man held up his hand, refusing to let his own drink be refilled. “I don’t think imbibing so much is good for our . . . operation.”

“*C’est la difference*. England seems to have better French brandy than France. Even in this”—he gestured at the crowded, common merriment about them—“place. I will take my share of its pleasure. The pigeon robbed me of much, but he did not rob me of that.”

“But when—”

“When it is necessary that I be sober, I will be. For now, we are nothing more than two *commoners* meeting for a drink. So I suggest you have another,” the Frenchman bit out. “*Non?* Fine. As for our arrangement, I am prepared. I suggest you prepare as well.”

And with that he stood, picking up his silver-handled walking stick, and turned, perfectly balanced. He loped to the door with the grace born to those of his nationality, and exited.

The first man turned back to the bar, signaled the man for another drink. He let out a low, unsteady breath.

He knew what he did was for his good and the good of England.

But damned if he wasn’t making a pact with the devil.



Outside the Bull and Whisker, it was a generally quiet evening, as evenings down at the docksides go, Johnny Dicks thought, chewing the stub of his cheroot. He watched as the sober went into the pub, nodding as they doffed their caps to him as they passed, and then watched them leave, drunk and sloppy. Sometimes he had to stand up off his somewhat comfortable stool and keep the rougher sort from entering the Bull; sometimes Marty would poke his head out and bring him inside to remove someone who became a bit rougher with drink than Marty liked.

When he and Marty were mates in the Seventeenth Regiment, he was a rum one for a good fight, but ever since he bought the Bull, he'd said the cost of replacing all the broken chairs and crockery made the fighting a touch less the crack.

So it was that Johnny Dicks was contemplating the last time Marty had bemoaned a splintered chair and how his brother-in-law the carpenter was like to bilk him, when the reedy gent came strolling out the Bull and Whisker, swinging his stick like he owned the world and the sky above it.

"Have a good evenin', Cap'n," Johnny Dicks called out and nodded as the man passed. The man swung around wildly, his cane connecting with Dicks's shin.

"Hey!" he called out. "That hurt, that did!"

"What did you call me?" the reedy man spat out, his Frenchy accent slurred by drink. The man held himself together when walking well enough, but with his temper up, the drink showed through. Johnny Dicks gained his feet. The height and weight that made him an imposing doorman was put to work now, leaning over the Frenchy. But the Frenchy's face took on a peculiar sheen, a glint of anticipation in his eye.

"I am not your captain," the Frenchy bit out. He swung out with the stick, like a cricket bat. Johnny caught it in his hand and swung with his meaty fist. But the Frenchman was faster, ducking and landing two quick blows to Johnny's body, one to his liver and one to his spleen. The silver-headed cane clattered to the ground as Johnny Dicks fell to his knees.

"The pigeon did not end me; neither shall you," the Frenchy spat out, and with one swift, vicious motion, his heavy Hessian boot landed on Johnny Dicks's jaw.

Johnny fell back, tasting the grime of the cobblestones. He lay on his side, breathing heavily, his jaw on fire, and watched as the Frenchman picked up his cane and, easy as you please, strolled down the way and disappeared around the corner.

"Oy! Johnny!" came a high, soft voice. Johnny rolled over and saw Miss Meggie, a local "lady"—couldn't be more than twenty years old, but long since initiated in her professions of part-time prostitute and full-time pickpocket.

"You all right? That bloke just felled you like you was made o' sawdust!" Miss Meggie said, helping Johnny to sit up. Johnny felt his jaw, happy to find it unbroken, but he found it necessary to spit out a small bit of blood and a tooth or two.

"What'd you say to 'im?" Miss Meggie asked.

"I said good night."

"Yeah, and I reckon he said it right back," Miss Meggie snorted.

"Actually he said somethin' odd—somethin' about a pigeon." Johnny's brow furrowed, only a little painful. "Meggie, you think you can follow the gent? I have a mind to find out more about 'im."

"No worries, Johnny; there ain't been a gent yet that Meggie could'na track down."

And with that, Miss Meggie left Johnny sitting on the ground, ducking into the alley

after the gent and disappearing in the shadows.

Fifteen minutes later, Johnny was installed back on his stool outside the door of the Bull and Whisker, two teeth fewer than before and developing three good-sized bruises, when Miss Meggie came walking out of the shadowed alleyway.

“What happened?” he asked.

“I caught up to ’im in the high street, but he hopped in a hansom that was waitin’ for him. It took off too fast for me to follow.”

“Which way did it head?” Johnny asked.

“West.”

“Well, that’s somethin’ at least.”

“Yeah,” Miss Meggie said with a smile, “and so is this.” She pulled out of her skirt pocket a folded-up bit of foolscap. “Ah, ah, ah!” Miss Meggie said with a smile, holding the paper out of Johnny’s reach until he produced a coin and traded her for it.

“What’s it say?” Miss Meggie asked, leaning over Johnny’s shoulder as he unfolded it. Johnny was not the best reader—his talents lay in other areas—but he knew Miss Meggie was no reader at all. Willing to satisfy her curiosity, he concentrated on the slanted, educated writing.

“Its . . . it’s a list,” Johnny replied.

“What’s it a list of?”

“I dunno,” Johnny said. His mind knew he had pieces to a puzzle. A Frenchy who spoke about a pigeon; who hit with the precision of a sharpshooter, even when in his cups; and now this list. He had the pieces, but he didn’t know how it all went together.

He turned to Miss Meggie. “But I know a gent who might.”

## One

EVERYONE agreed that Mrs. Phillippa Benning was a beautiful young woman. Stunning even, with her cornflower blue eyes and cornsilk hair. One poetic gentleman had likened her teeth in shape to perfect corn kernels, but that perhaps was taking the metaphor too far.

Mrs. Benning simply sparkled. Her wit and humor and gay *joie de vivre*, gave her entrée into the most exciting crowds in the Ton, a place that lady enjoyed and intended to stay. So, if she was occasionally seen as being too forward in her thoughts and too ambitious in her flirtations, it was easily forgiven as the capricious combination of youth and beauty, for when Phillippa Benning smiled—a sultry pout known to cause married men to forget their wives’ names—no one could find fault in her.

Indeed, everyone thought well of Mrs. Phillippa Benning. And they certainly would have done so even if she were not so rich and so conveniently widowed.

All the world knew Phillippa Benning’s short marriage had been the stuff of fairy tales, merely lacking the ever after. And after mourning her husband of five days for a full year, Phillippa had discovered it was exceedingly pleasant to no longer require that smothering protection unmarried ladies lived under, and took to her life as a young woman of independent means with verve.

She liked all the same things other women liked but made them artlessly hers. She read the latest gothic novels by M. R. Biggleys and Mrs. Rothschild, but whenever she commented that the hero of one was far too bland for her taste or the setting of another was spine-chilling, it was automatically taken as fact and quoted by scholarly ladies and gentlemen alike as such. She could affect sales of fabric as much as a drought or rainy season would affect a crop: If Phillippa Benning declared lilac watered silk to be *déclassé*, sales of such material would plummet; conversely, if she was seen strolling the park in mint green sprigged muslin and butter colored walking boots, two dozen such costumes would be on order at the best modistes the next day.

It was uncommon for someone so young to rule the Ton (she was just one and twenty), but when it came to Mrs. Phillippa Benning, it was unquestionable. Her favor could make or break a novel’s success, a modiste’s reputation, a hostess’s event, a young debutante’s popularity, or a young buck’s heart.

And she knew it.

“I absolutely refuse to attend Mrs. Hurston’s card party. She insists on wearing that feathered violet turban, and I have taken the trouble twice to tell her how it does not suit her,” Phillippa said as she looked through her opera glasses, scanning the crowd lined up along the parade route.

Phillippa’s best friend, Nora, clucked her tongue and shook her head, supressing a delicate giggle beneath a tiny hand.

Nora was an adorable little creature Phillipa had picked up this year. She was eighteen, in her first Season, and could have turned out disastrous if not for Phillipa's intervention. Miss Nora De Regis was very rich, born and raised English, but suffered from a touch of dark coloring inherited from a Greek grand-father and from a mother who refused to allow the child to dress in anything other than eyelet cotton and stiff corsets. Phillipa simply made certain the world saw Nora's dark eyes and olive skin as exotic and steered her mother to more expansive modistes. Now mother and daughter alike would not be caught dead in anything but the latest fashions. Nora, at the beginning of the season, also had a rather innocent and open nature, which Phillipa was teaching her to suppress.

Nora was proving a very apt pupil.

"No Phillipa Benning at Mrs. Hurston's party?" Nora replied archly. "She'll lose more face than if Prinny himself failed to appear. Maybe that will shock the good Mrs. Hurston into taking your advice more seriously."

"Really," Phillipa replied, lowering her opera glasses, "you would think they would know by now."

Normally, Phillipa was not one to partake in organized outdoor activities before noon. But then again, there were very few social events whose express purpose was the ogling of men, and a parade of militia was one of them. Patriotism was all the rage. Her companion, Mrs. Tottendale, could not be roused to attend, but Nora was always game for assessing young men's attributes. And besides, Phillipa's other best friend, Bitsy, her Pomeranian, could use the fresh air.

The red woolen coats slashed with gold epaulettes glinted brilliantly in the sun, but none of that distracted Phillipa from her view of a dashing gentleman in a dark green coat watching the procession from the other side of the thoroughfare.

"Did you spot him? The Marquis of Broughton?" Nora craned her neck, trying in vain to see over the throng gathered at the park.

"He's just across the street, to the right," Phillipa replied, never looking directly at him but always keeping him within her view. After all, she did have all of these dazzling redcoats to look at. Bitsy shook delicately in Phillipa's arms, his emerald collar jangling with the dog's nervous energy.

Nora went up on tiptoes and leaned over far enough into the thoroughfare to nearly be knocked over by an outside fife player. Finally, she spotted the object of Phillipa's intensely purposeful inattention.

"Oh! He's simply delicious!"

"I know," Phillipa purred, letting a small smile play about her mouth, soothing Bitsy with long, gentle strokes. "Where has he been keeping himself? The past few seasons would have been so much more interesting if he had been around."

"The past few seasons have not been dull for you, Phillipa; admit it," Nora replied, wide-eyed and mocking.

It was true. Phillipa had thoroughly enjoyed her first season as a widow. Oh, she

had enjoyed her original season, too, but it had ended rather abruptly with Alistair's death, and as such, Phillippa had been determined to regard her emergence from mourning as a fresh start. She knew she would marry again—the hazy vision of a quiet country life with rug rats loomed over her like a cloud threatening rain—but her first season as a widow had been such an overwhelming success, she refused to settle down before giving herself another. She was accountable to no one. Her funds were her own, having inherited her trust upon her marriage. There was something unbelievably luxurious about being untethered. She could flirt with no dreadful repercussions. She could dance until dawn.

Oh, her parents, the Viscount and Viscountess Care, were hopeful that she make a match, of course, and provide them with a few grandchildren to dote upon and make heirs. But Phillippa informed them she required the perfect specimen of man for her to even consider marriage: rich, titled, a leader of the Ton. And until that man arrived, her parents could do nothing more than throw up their hands and go back to their own lives. Her father to the estates and playing the market, her mother to Bath or Brighton, where the waters were as invigorating as the men, she'd say.

But her parents would be very pleased when they learned of the Marquis of Broughton's arrival on the scene, and how very perfect Phillippa had found him thus far.

"Rumor has it, Broughton's been locked up at his estate, poor thing," Phillippa pouted saucily.

"Which one?" Nora asked. "They say he has a dozen."

"Does it matter? It only matters that he wasn't here before, and now he is." A small, satisfied smile lifted the perfect bow of her mouth.

"Well," Nora conceded, "if he's as *delicious* up close as he seems to be from a distance . . . Have you been introduced?"

"Not yet," Phillippa said, as the last of the militia trooped past, leading cheering revelers in their wake (luckily, the parade had been horseless, else the revelers might suffer a misstep and a smelly fate). "But he'll introduce himself shortly."

Nora's brows shot up in surprise. "How can you know that?"

"Watch."

As the last of the revelers passed, Phillippa let go of her coyness and turned, catching hold of the Marquis of Broughton's hawklike gaze and holding it.

*One . . . two . . .*

She arched a brow, slightly, allowed the faintest upturn to the corner of her mouth.

*Three . . . four . . .*

Never did his eyes lift from hers. Never did she allow the heat of his gaze to cause more than the faintest of blushes to paint her cheek.

*Five.*

With one last fractional brow raise, Phillippa pointedly turned away and addressed Nora.

“He’ll introduce himself shortly,” she repeated. She didn’t even attempt to hide the smugness she considered well-deserved. “In the meantime, shall we get some ices? Its unbearably hot among all these”—she flitted her hand—“people.”

Phillippa handed a squirming and eager Bitsy to his liveried attendant for walking, and taking Nora’s arm, she gently steered her toward the shops that lined the park. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the Marquis of Broughton approach them. He was still a good twenty feet away but moving like a hunter stalking his prey. Surreptitiously, Phillippa reached over and grabbed one of Nora’s gloves out of her hand (she certainly wasn’t about to let her own glove get muddy) and dropped it, all without Nora noticing. The Marquis was behind her now, out of her line of sight.

She slowed, and then counted.

*Five . . . four . . .*

He would be a few feet from the glove by now.

*Three . . . two . . .*

Bending down, he’d have picked it up.

*One.*

“Excuse me, madam?” an unfamiliar, deeply masculine voice addressed them, a warm drawl coloring his expression.

Phillippa turned, sly smile and coy look at the ready to lay claim to . . .

Someone who was not the Marquis.

“You seem to have dropped this,” the incredibly tall man with the deep voice said, holding up Nora’s small, now-soiled glove.

“Thank you,” Nora said, accepting the glove with a polite smile. “I hadn’t realized I dropped it, Mr.—”

“Mr. Worth,” he replied before tipping his hat.

“Mr. Worth,” Nora repeated, doing the conversational duties Phillippa had abdicated.

Abdicated, because her gaze had narrowed and locked onto the Marquis of Broughton, who, like them, had attracted his own barnacle of sorts, as she watched him hand a reticule back to a vaguely pretty female who lightly touched his arm at discreet intervals.

It seemed he had “accidentally” been bumped into by none other than that treacherous harlot herself, Lady Jane Cummings.

## Two

THE rivalry between Phillippa Benning and Lady Jane Cummings was of such long standing, no one knew its origin. Some were certain that a young buck must have, at one point in time, favored one over the other. Others with keener memories knew they had been rivals at Mrs. Humphrey's School for Elegant Ladies, ruling opposing factions of adolescent girls with strong hands, witty remarks, and imaginative pranks, which would have been unbecoming of young ladies of their station . . . if they had ever been caught. Still others thought the rivalry had begun in the womb, as both their mothers were notorious in their own exploits in their beautiful youth. Whatever the cause, Phillippa Benning's hatred of Lady Jane and vice versa had the effect of setting every tongue in London wagging.

Phillippa, of course, had thought herself removed from Lady Jane at her coming out; Phillippa had debuted at seventeen, and Lady Jane's mother, the Duchess, would not hear of launching her only daughter into society until she was eighteen. But, while Phillippa married, then mourned, Lady Jane had debuted, and then was shocked into nursing and soon mourning herself, when her own mother took violently ill and suffered for weeks before finally succumbing. And so, the seasons had passed, and Phillippa and Lady Jane found themselves again staring each other down in society.

It was highly annoying.

Phillippa had the advantages of the freedoms of widowhood, but Lady Jane, although the exact same age as Phillippa, had the impression of youth and newness. And there was nothing so alluring to the Ton as something new.

Every lady of marriageable age was either in Phillippa's camp or Lady Jane's, and every gentleman knew what it was to walk the line between them. So when one gentleman caught both Phillippa and Lady Jane's eye, it was certain to cause a commotion.

But due to her great advantage in height, Phillippa was absolutely certain she had seen him first that day in the park.

"The Marquis of Broughton," announced the imperious butler at the door of Lady Plessy's parlor.

She also had the good luck to be the only one of them invited to this dinner party.

Lady Plessy's dinner parties were entirely Phillippa's arena. The people who populated them were fashionable, eager, and determined to have their fun. Lady Jane would be wholly welcome in that circle, if not for Lady Plessy's allegiance to Phillippa.

Phillippa Benning was nothing if not determined. They were gathered in the parlor before walking in to dine, milling about talking of the eventful nothings of the day. As Broughton made his bow to their hostess, Phillippa walked directly up to him,

extended her hand, and spoke.

“Good evening. I’m Phillippa Benning. And you are . . . ?”

Sometimes the direct approach had its advantages.

Broughton blinked once, then twice, then let out a short guffaw and bowed over her hand, saying, “Broughton, Mrs. Benning. Terribly pleased to see your gloves are none the worse for wear.”

That earned a brilliant and knowing smile from Phillippa.

Having sweetly bribed Lady Plessy with promises of an introduction to her famed mantua maker, Madame Le Trois, Phillippa earned the honor of sitting a mere seat away from that good lady, and therefore opposite Lady Plessy’s other favored guest, the Marquis of Broughton. He was certainly making a splash in society, a mere three days introduced.

Phillippa let him lead the conversation, her clear blue gaze finding his a dozen times throughout the meal. As he spoke of his exploits hunting, his fencing prowess, his pride in Britain’s victories abroad (although he had taken no part in them), and his homes and estates (careful to gloss over their net worth in the way of polite people), he kept turning to her, seeking her out in the flow of words between them. Phillippa couldn’t help but smugly think, *Lady Jane doesn’t stand a chance.*

He led her to the floor after dinner, his hand lightly brushing the back of her neck and sending a delighted frisson down her spine, causing a small hitch to her breath and curve to her lips. She felt a greater willingness to hold on to his hand through the turns of the quadrille, the effortless stepping of place to place, his movements graceful and perfect.

*Lady Jane who?*

When the party broke up to go on to others, Broughton leaned over Phillippa’s hand, this time lingering, the heat of his thumb caressing the tips of her fingers.

“I do hope to see you again,” he said in a deep rumble. “At Almack’s, perhaps?”

“Almack’s?” Phillippa replied on a cough.

“Almack’s,” he repeated, a decided twinkle in his eye. “Should I wager for you or against you?”

And at that, all she could do was smile.



“But you hate Almack’s! You always say the patronesses look down their noses at you,” Nora said in a rushed whisper. They were seated in the ladies’ retiring room of the next party—was it the Hurstons? No, Phillippa had refused to attend that one—