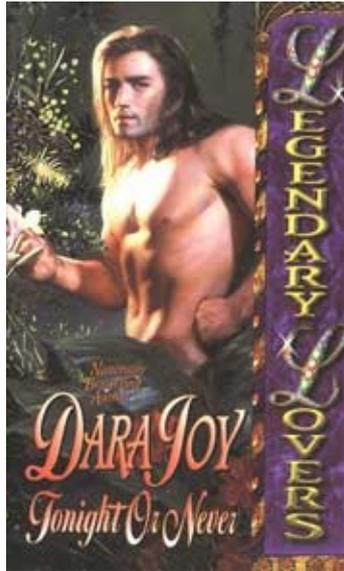


*Nationally
Bestselling
Author*

DARA JOY
Tonight Or Never

LEGENDARY
LOVERS



TONIGHT OR NEVER

By

Dara Joy

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REJAR
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TONIGHT OR NEVER
DARA JOY

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"It is not enough to conquer; one must know how to seduce."
—Voltaire

To Joanna Cagan:
For paying attention to the minute details;
For your enthusiasm and endless support;
For having the same vision;
For always going to bat;
For your constant understanding;
and most importantly,
For your great sense of humor.
You are without a doubt
"A Legendary Editor."

TONIGHT OR NEVER

Prologue

England, 1794

If seduction had a name it would be Lord John.

At least that was the opinion of the woman with whom he was currently cavorting.

He was hot sex.

Torrid nights and musky sheets.

The man was a rake, a rogue, a libertine, and a scoundrel. A golden-haired, green-eyed, six-foot-plus package of the most interesting kind of trouble.

The woman was not alone in her opinion.

This was also the consensus of a multitude of other well-pleased and well-placed ladies of the ton; all of whom considered themselves extremely fortunate to have shared the extravagances of Viscount Sexton's bed.

The high opinion these ladies had of the strapping peer was wholly responsible for the acquisition of the nickname conferred upon him unilaterally by these women of knowledge; namely, *Lord of Sex*.

The affectionate term was testament to his good name, his startlingly good looks, and his exceptional capabilities in the art of *amour*. To add to this, the man had an overabundance of charm, a shining intellect, and an extremely wicked sense of humor.

Not that any of these other glowing qualities were on the woman's mind at the moment.

As his lordship's energetic enthusiasm propelled them both wildly across the steamy sheets of a massive Oriental lacquer bed, a single loud rap was heard on the door to her ladyship's boudoir. To say the intrusion was extremely ill-timed was the same as saying Lady Havertam's unwed niece was just a tad enceinte; it did not even begin to describe the situation.

"My lady, there is an urgent message here for the viscount!" The butler's muffled voice barely reached the couple on the bed.

Lord John hesitated.

The lady in question whispered fervently for him to ignore it and continue on. She augmented her request with an enticing roll of her hips. The punctuation was enough of a reason for the viscount; he dropped his head to the woman's chest and vigorously recommenced where he had left off.

But the butler, being a stalwart English servant, continued to rap on the door, his voice urgently seeking the recalcitrant lord.

This time when his lordship hesitated, an outraged sound exited the woman's mouth, the pitch and level of the tone reminding John of the unfortunate squeal of a stuck pig. He gaped at her as she continued to screech at the butler to go away.

Realizing what she must sound like, the woman suddenly smiled coyly up at him.

"Do ignore him, Johnnie," she beseeched the handsome man who seemed to be viewing her askance.

While he thought it over, the small charm that dangled from a thin gold chain about his throat caught a beam of light from the candle and sparked in the darkened room.

It was an odd charm, really...

A tiny gold carrot.

Many of the women of the ton had pondered the significance of the piece. His lordship was peculiarly secretive about it. The general opinion was that the Lord of Sex was having his own private joke regarding the elusive "carrot"—forever tantalizing, yet forever out of reach.

Whatever its meaning, the charm had become somewhat famous. Several ladies had joked to the viscount that the charm was his cartouche. John always smiled mysteriously at that point, saying only, "Indeed." Yet, whenever a woman touched it he subtly guided her hand away.

Lord John tossed back his thick mane of hair. His perfect white teeth flashed a brief smile. "I do not believe he will go away, Jessymyn. Let me see what he wants—I promise I'll be right back." He winked at her, then disengaged himself to pad naked to the door.

Normally a man did not answer the door stark naked. Not in most houses, anyway.

"Johnnie!" Her ladyship's exclamation was brief and not very heartfelt; nor did it in any way deter her ladyship from enjoying the splendid sight before her. John was a stunning man. Especially unclothed.

Aware of her avid perusal, Lord Sexton grinned at her over his shoulder, revealing the infamous dimples that had caused scores of women to do unspeakable things for him.

The lady wilted back onto the covers.

Still smiling, he opened the door a few inches and boldly stuck his hand out for the message. John fully expected the "emergency" message to be from one of his legion of women; a flowery epistle begging him to dine alfresco from a favorite balcony, or some such request.

So he was quite surprised when he read the note. Initially he smiled, a huge ear-to-ear grin. Then the smile seemed to die on his face.

The woman lying amid the tumbled sheets noted his lordship's normally dusky skin tone turning into a somewhat pale shade.

When he looked up all previous traces of good humor were gone. "I must leave at once," he told her flatly.

"What is it?" She clutched the sheet to her bobbing breasts.

"A message from my uncle." He didn't waste any time on further explanations, simply set about gathering his scattered clothes, and dressing with a speed she wouldn't have thought possible.

He was out the door before she even had time to object.

The woman blinked in confusion. *What could it be?* What would ever make the Lord of Sex leave a woman's bed? Was his uncle ill? He would have to be. On his very deathbed. Nothing less than that would drag the ardent lord away from his favorite and almost exclusive activity! Her sights fell to the crumpled note that had dropped to the floor in his haste to depart. Gingerly, she stepped out of bed and retrieved it. But when she opened it, all it displayed were three words:

CHLOE HAS RETURNED.

So that young half-French girl, Chloe Heart, had come back from her trip to the Colonies... Certainly that did not constitute an emergency! Just why was Lord Sexton so vexed? One might think he was actually in a state of panic over something.

The woman placed her fingers against her mouth, giggling. Silly thought; Lord Sexton was never perturbed over anything. Especially something so mundane as this.

Indeed, he was a man who displayed an almost arrogant courage. She herself had seen him laugh in the face of certain death at the hands of Lady Snibble's father—the best swordsman in England, or so the man claimed—when the outraged lord had caught his wayward daughter with the Lord of Sex in flagrante delicto. Now that was a situation!

This was a mere curiosity.

After all, to a man like Lord John, how much trouble could one little girl cause?

Bored with the subject, she closed her eyes and instead remembered what it felt like to have all that power and sexual passion between her legs.

Unconsciously, her lips parted.

Chapter One

Chloe Makes Her Plans

It had gone on long enough!

Chloe Heart narrowed her violet eyes as she examined the man charging across the countryside, his horse kicking up a cloud of dust as he raced toward the mansion.

It could be only John.

No one else looked that good riding a stallion—or anything else, for that matter. The very idea made her eyes narrow further. Oh, he was a rogue!

She continued observing him as he rode across the far pasture at a hellish pace. Freed from its queue, his gilded hair flew behind him as he bent low over the horse's neck to gain speed.

She recognized that stance—it was a trait of John's that most people overlooked. Blinded by his apparent laissez-faire attitude and stunning looks, not many saw the iron determination well hidden beneath the mantle of the devil-may-care rake.

Chloe, however, had always seen it.

Typical of John to be so unconcerned with his appearance...

Despite her resolve, Chloe's expression momentarily softened. She had remembered that spun-gold hair every day for the past year and a half. It was the color of sunlit honey, and everything about him reminded her of the enticing nectar. Like his rich sense of humor with that beckoning, teasing laugh...

Usually making sport of you! an annoying inner voice spoke up.

Chloe chewed on her bottom lip. Yes, but he could be extraordinarily sweet...

When it suits him! the voice reasonably pointed out.

Chloe pictured the way John always moved; irresistibly smooth, sure, fluid...

Unpredictable and predatory! Like a targeting beast!

She squelched the annoying opinion.

Yes, John was often like honey: sweet, smooth, rich, fluid, with a somewhat unpredictable flavor. One could only wonder if he might actually taste the same...

Lord of Sex.

The play on his name that the ton found so delightfully humorous. Even at sixteen, the age he was when she had first met him, he had been sampling the pleasures of the flesh. It only got worse over the years.

From the beginning, they had formed a close and enduring bond. A lump rose in her throat. Oh, she wanted to kill him!

When she was six, she hadn't understood why women watched him so. He was simply the older boy who picked her up and swung her onto his shoulders and always made her laugh. The one who held her and dried her tears and murmured soothing little phrases to her.

The fist of her hand uncurled and she placed her palm against the windowpane, as if the simple action could bring him closer to her. *John...*

Rider and horse took a reckless leap over a stone border wall and continued charging forward, the horse's hooves kicking up great clods of earth. Lord John was in a hurry to get to his uncle's. In a few minutes he would arrive. After all those endless months away from him—her self-imposed exile—she would see him in the flesh once again.

Chloe closed her eyes as they filled with moisture. It had been so difficult to stay away this long! But the exile had been a very important part of the plan.

She recalled the exact look on John's masculine face when she had told him her decision to go to the Colonies with her friend, Aubrey, who was visiting an older sister in Charleston. For an instant John had seemed stunned.

"You're going *where*?"

Then he had tried to talk her out of it, but finally quit when he realized she would not be dissuaded.

"Maybe I shouldn't let you go," he had grumbled.

Chloe had laughed. "As if you have a say in what I do." *That* had made the handsome face glower.

For as long as Chloe could remember, John had fancied himself a cross between her best friend and knowledgeable guide. The realization that in fact he did not have any say whatsoever seemed to give him pause. However briefly.

Of course, she had fueled his fire when she set sail, by whispering to him that she intended to do every naughty thing she could think of during her stay in the Colonies, leaving him to wonder just what she meant. His face had gone absolutely white as the ship sailed out of the harbor. It had been immensely satisfying.

Horse and rider scaled another wall.

Surely the speed with which he came to her now indicated more than their usual friendship? Surely he would realize that things would be different between them now that she was a grown woman of nineteen?

He *must* realize how much she... how she always...

Chloe swallowed in an effort to hold at bay the reckless, emotional French side to her nature, which had a tendency to land her in trouble. She had wanted John all of her life and had waited so patiently for this day.

Didn't that deserve a reward of some kind? Of course it did!

Surely his beautiful, low voice was about to whisper her name just as she imagined in all her girlhood fantasies—

"*Chlo-eee!*" The front door opened with a crash and slammed shut with a force that shook the rafters. The deep male voice boomed throughout the house.

Chloe winced. Well, maybe not quite a whisper. Apparently that little mischief she had played on him when she had sailed had not set too well with him. She squared her shoulders.

Well, if that had unnerved the rogue, wait until he saw what else she had in store for

him!

John was in trouble.

He didn't know it yet, but he was in deep trouble. His days of debauchery were over! For Chloe—determined little Chloe—intended to have him for her very own. Now and forever.

After she killed him.

Lord of Sex! Tales of his exploits had managed to reach her even in the Colonies. Snippets in letters from Grandmere alluding to his myriad grand passions. *Merde*. It made her ill!

Unfortunately, she had missed the rakehell too much to execute him before the noon meal.

She sighed.

It would just have to wait until later in the day.

John stood at the foot of the stairs and roared.

He was dead tired, having stopped only briefly at an inn to refresh himself with a cold bath and feed his poor horse. For some reason, there was a compelling need to get here as quickly as possible. Just to ensure that the little piddlehead was all right.

He still hadn't forgiven her for taking off like that to the Colonies. Leaving him for eighteen long months to wonder what that unpredictable ginger-pate was devising in the way of trouble!

Then again, he hadn't had to rescue her from some mischief she had gotten herself into, either.

Despite himself, a grin curved his sensual lips. Until he recalled her mysterious last words to him.

He bellowed out her name again. "*Chloe!*"

Now where was the hellcat hiding?

A smidgen of red hair poked between the upstairs banisters. It was followed by two enormous violet eyes.

"John?" She spoke his name haltingly in that sweet voice he remembered so well. No one said his name quite like Chloe. Despite all of her years in England, she still softened the *J* slightly in the French way. Something stopped in his chest. He hadn't realized how much he had missed the sprite until now.

"John!" Chloe stood up and began to race down the steps toward him, her slipped feet barely touching the rug beneath her.

The thought *She's changed* scarcely had time to register before he found himself dashing up the steps to meet her halfway. She leaped into his arms in an act of blind faith, almost sending them both crashing downward.

John threw back his head and laughed, spinning them both around. *She's not changed that much! Thank God.*

"John! John!" Chloe wrapped her arms around his neck and began quickly kissing him all over his face. John called it "*Chloe's Chicken Pecks Français.*" It was

something she had always done when they hadn't seen each other for a while, and it never failed to make him laugh.

And it didn't fail this time either. At first.

John, arms wrapped tightly around her, lifting her up to him, abruptly stopped laughing. A frown marred his smooth forehead as his hands cupped her bottom. It was fuller than he remembered and more... well, shapely.

He pulled his face back from her free-roaming lips. "What are you wearing under here?" His hands hefted the portion of anatomy in question, bringing her closer to him.

Chloe raised her magnificent eyes slowly to his. He wondered where she had learned that bit of coquetry.

"Nothing," she whispered to him in a throaty voice.

John's green eyes widened a fraction. He blinked once, then dropped her like a hot baguette. He studied her as if he had just turned over a rock and something "Chloe" had crawled out from underneath.

Oh, dear, she thought, dismayed. *This could be crucial. Well, he needs to stop seeing me as a child and begin regarding me as an adult woman in order for my plan to work!* It was a risk, but one she had to take in order to proceed; otherwise her long exile in the Colonies would have been for nothing.

Knowing he was watching her suspiciously from under those thick black lashes of his, Chloe threw back her shoulders, put her hands on her generously curved hips, and cocked her red head to the side. It was a calculated pose, designed to show her blossomed figure to perfection.

Let the games begin. Strength had never been a weakness to her.

John took his time observing Chloe. He was thinking that the mite had changed considerably since last he had seen her. Where had that—that *curvaceous* figure come from? Full breasts, tiny waist, rounded hips... She had been all youthful angles the last time he had seen her. Eyes that had once seemed too large for her heart-shaped face were now spellbinding. And her hair...

Where had the carrottop gone?

Instead of the orange mop-top he was accustomed to, there was the most magnificent red hair he had ever seen. Chloe was breathtaking. *Different.* An incredible beauty.

With as much experience as he had in choosing women, John knew it would be more than her looks that would take London by storm.

There was a fire in her that would be evident to every court card of the beau monde.

It wouldn't be long before word got out and the mansion was under siege. Add to that fact that Chloe was an heiress...

This was bound to be trouble.

And he knew for whom.

He already had a busy season planned; he didn't have time for this. John scowled. "What have you done to yourself?"

Chloe pursed her lips. This was not the reaction she had hoped for. "Whatever do

you mean, John? And you can take that scowly-bear look off your face right now!"

Scowly-bear? Chloe always had a strange way of turning a phrase. He didn't think she realized that she always mixed up questionable adjectives with descriptions of the animal kingdom whenever she was angry with him. He always thought her attempts at categorizing him when she was upset most adorable. And he had a delightful way of teasing her with it.

So his lips twitched.

Momentarily.

"I have grown up, John, in case you have not noticed!" The violet eyes flashed lightning at him.

Yes. White-hot fire.

Despite himself, he grinned slowly. "Oh, I noticed," he drawled.

Mistaking his meaning, Chloe's felt her face break into a delighted smile.

"The question is—how much trouble is it going to cause me?" He stroked his chin in what was to Chloe an insufferably arrogant gesture. The smile died on her face.

Her delicate brows slanted down.

So that's where the rascal thought to go, did he? Going to play his long-suffering, I'm-responsible-for-you routine. I don't think so, Viscount.

For some reason, John had always considered himself accountable for her. Why exactly was a mystery to everyone, including Chloe. No one had ever remotely suggested the possibility to him. Mystery or no, she was not above using that inexplicable quirk of his to her advantage.

She spoke the words she knew would rattle him. "Whatever does it have to do with you?"

John eyed her suspiciously, green eyes narrowing slightly. "And I suppose you're not going to embroil me in one of your schemes the next time you get yourself into hot water? Which, knowing you, should be in about, oh, say, an hour and fifteen minutes?"

Chloe swallowed. Actually that was just about the time she was thinking of springing her trap on him. It was uncanny how well he knew her.

"What's the matter, Chloe-rabbit, cat got your tongue?" His deep voice teased her.

The corners of Chloe's generous mouth turned down at the silly sobriquet, one of many he irked her with. John had a habit of tacking animals onto her name. She could never figure out the reason.

"Stop calling me Chloe-rabbit; it is just not done, John! After all, I am a woman now."

John looked up at the ceiling, then settled his mocking gaze on her. "Are you really?"

She nodded, her soft mouth curving in an enigmatic half smile.

John didn't want to believe what he was thinking. He bent toward her, bringing his face level with hers. "And tell me, just what did you do in the Colonies that has brought about this change?" The mocking lilt in his voice did nothing to disguise the mercuric glint in his eyes.

Chloe had never seen precisely that expression on John before.

She stepped back from him and almost lost her balance on the stairs. His strong arm shot out to steady her. And bring her closer to him. He did not release her elbow.

"I'm waiting."

Chloe tossed her head back, breaking free of his hold. "Don't be a snibble-toad! It is none of your concern what I have done!"

Snibble-toad hardly registered because her nonanswer was answer enough for him. His emerald gaze met hers in silence for an eternity.

Good, let him think the worst! This was an unexpected bonus for it fit in perfectly with her plans. She convinced herself that the slight sheen of moisture in his left eye was a trick of the light. Surely his feelings were not hurt in some way?

Nonsense!

Smiling softly, Chloe stood on tiptoe and patted his cheek. This close she could discern the clean scent of his hair; it always reminded her of a field of clover. "I had a wonderful example," she purposely goaded him in the softest of tones.

Against expectations, John flinched at her words and swiftly grabbed her wrist in a crushing hold, bringing her flat against him. This time she knew she saw real emotion in his eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" he hissed.

She threw her head back, bringing her lips close to his chin, so he could feel the warmth of her breath on him. "Even in the Colonies I heard about your women, John."

Her words surprised him. He hesitated briefly. "So what?"

His long lashes fanned his cheeks, the rich black color a stunning contrast to the long golden hair framing his face. Then he raised those lashes, meeting her questioning look.

"I am sure nothing I have done has ever been a shock to you, Chloe-cat." The deep male voice literally purred a sexual challenge.

Chloe flushed. It was the first time John had ever toyed with her in such a blatantly seductive manner. She wondered if he was even aware he was doing it.

She had never imagined how... how *potent* he could be. No, that wasn't exactly true; she had imagined it. Who would have guessed that the reality far surpassed the fantasy? Chloe wasn't sure whether she should inhale or exhale.

She settled on a better technique.

"All of these lovers," she returned in a low, intimate voice, "they must bring you great satisfaction. *N'est-ce pas?*"

He observed her in stony silence, a muscle working in his jaw.

In that moment Chloe knew she had discovered something. Something he kept well hidden. Instantly she became serious. "Why do you need all of these women, John?"

The question was a mistake. She knew it the second the words left her mouth.

John pulled away from her, moving down one step, his distance now not just physical.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he leaned against the wall. The grin that crossed

his face was arrogant, rakish, and terribly annoying. "Well, I do *like* it, Chloe."

She had no doubt of that—he was a rake. Perhaps she was expecting too much from him in this regard? The man was notoriously oversexed.

"Why else would I do it?"

Why else indeed? It had been a question that had plagued her for years. This time Chloe felt the sheen of moisture in her own eyes. His seemingly careless assessment of his sordid life upset her deeply. If she did not know him as well as she did, she would have believed that was all there was to the story.

However, Chloe knew better.

With a resolve she never knew she possessed, she said very calmly, "Yes—that is my point. I believe I will like it too." Whereupon she smiled like a true Chloe-cat.

The smug look died on John's face. He abandoned his casual stance. "What are you saying?"

"I am saying, dear, imaginative rake, that I intend to be exactly... like... you." She picked up her skirt and breezed by him down the stairs. John's jaw dropped.

He still hadn't recovered when she paused to say over her shoulder, "I mean with men, of course."

Continuing down the stairs, she began counting to herself. *One. Two. Thr—*"

"You intend to *what?*"

A mischievous grin made her violet eyes sparkle as she ignored the bellow behind her and nonchalantly made her way to the central hall.

"What is all this yelling about?" Chloe's grandmother, the Countess de Fonbeaulard, rushed into the foyer from the drawing room.

John was not overly surprised to see his uncle, Maurice Chavaneau, the Marquis of Cotingham, at her side. The man had been slavishly in love with the countess for thirty years and had even left his own French estates to follow the woman to England when she had become Chloe's legal guardian.

Chloe's father had been an Englishman, like John. In his will he had stipulated that Chloe must be raised on English soil. *His* English soil, to be precise. So the countess, who loved her granddaughter far more than her beloved chateau, had left France, although she never let anyone forget the grand sacrifice she had made, nor forgiven "that Engleeshman," Chloe's father. In retaliation, when she had moved with the six-year-old Chloe into the father's Georgian estate, she promptly renamed it *Chacun à Son Goût—Each to his own taste*.

The new name of the house reflected the countess's personal philosophy on life. She was a flamboyant, interesting woman, who maintained her enormous popularity with the males of her set. In her youth, the widow's reputation in the boudoir fell just short of John's.

Nowadays, her dazzling personality and great beauty still were admired and respected by all her contemporaries. Indeed, the marquis had been slavishly in love with her for decades. It was rumored he asked her to marry him once a week. On Fridays. At teatime.

Maurice Chavaneau, John's only living relative, was also a French marquis and

preferred to be called such. John himself did not have French blood, although he could lay claim to Norse, Celtic, and Saxon blood.

The marquis was John's mother's half brother, having inherited his English title from that side of the family. And so, too, John was his only living relative. In other words, John was his heir.

It was not such a comforting thing to have one such as John as one's heir even if one was very Gallic in temperament and had a tendency to shrug off the foibles of youth. After all, John was a complete wastrel, and had never pretended or aspired to be anything else.

Still, his uncle, a kindhearted man, had great affection for the younger lord. Even if he did despair of him ever producing an heir to carry on the line.

At this point, the marquis thought even an illegitimate heir would be welcome, but John had been very careful in that regard. And apparently very knowledgeable too. No Sexton bastards had ever appeared on his lordship's doorstep.

"Ah! It is John—come to see our Chloe." Countess de Fonbeaulard smiled fondly at the handsome lord.

"Oh ho! I knew he would not stay away long!" The marquis spoke English with a thick French accent.

"Is she not beautiful, John? Almost I did not recognize her!" Maurice winked at the countess. "All the Fonbeaulard women are beautiful."

The countess tapped his arm with her fan. "Really, Maurice, you are a consummate flatterer—but I agree with you; Chloe has come into her own."

"Thank you, Grandmere," Chloe said sweetly. "You too, Maurice." Chloe joined them at the bottom of the stairs and gazed innocently up at Lord Sexton, who was still standing in the middle of the stairs, nostrils flaring.

"I think soon we shall have the coming-out party for you, my little angel."

Little angel? John gave the countess an incredulous look.

"We have already put it off far too long." Grandmere raised a scented handkerchief to her eyes, dabbing them. "It will not be long before she leaves us, Maurice. How shall I bear it?"

Grandmere was ever the dramatic one. Chloe tried not to laugh as, predictably, the marquis put his arm around her grandmother, patting her back consolingly. She knew Maurice was about to impart the Gallic wisdom that always accompanied these little nuances of life.

Right on cue the marquis shrugged his shoulders in a very French gesture. "It is the way of things, *mon amour*. We cannot go against nature."

Chloe's lips twitched with suppressed amusement. At that moment her eyes met John's. Despite his vexation at her, there was an answering glint of humor in his expression. The two of them had been watching the same scenario in various forms for most of their lives.

As usual, Grandmere recovered remarkably fast, all traces of tears somehow vanishing immediately. The countess took the phrase *c'est la vie* as a personal motto.

"Yes, why be upset on this glorious day when we should be dining?" Turning, she

took the marquis's arm. "Come along, John, we have had a place set at the table for you."

Desultorily, John ambled down the stairs. "How did you know I was coming?"

Maurice raised an eyebrow at him. "Ho ho!"

John glared at him.

The marquis wasn't fooled. Singing a silly country tune in French under his breath, he led the countess into the dining room.

A smattering of the lyrics reached John. Some nonsense about a mouse that ate a cat...

"Shall we go, John?" Chloe said amiably.

The viscount wasn't fooled by her act for a minute. The minx had the audacity to bat her eyelashes at him.

He took a deep breath and exhaled it. "We are not through with this, you and I."

"Oh, I should hope not! Why, I have only just begun," Chloe murmured mysteriously as she took his arm.

"Mmm. I was afraid of that."

Twice he tried to trip her as he led her into the dining room.

When they entered the dining room, the man known simply as Deiter was already seated at the table.

This was no great surprise.

Despite the strange man's unfortunate tendency to fall asleep at the oddest times, he never missed a meal.

Simply put, Deiter was family, although no one was quite sure exactly whose family. He had been with them for so long, it was naturally assumed he belonged on *someone's* side.

Deiter greeted Lord Sexton with his customary grunt. It was one of two responses the man possessed, the other being a piercing stare.

Both expressions, John had to admit, accessorized the man's constant wardrobe of black to perfection. He nodded to the squat German as he took his seat across from Chloe.

Schnapps, an exceedingly ugly pug dog—who was never far from Deiter's lap—provided the piercing stare. The one tooth the dog possessed stuck out of its mouth at an odd angle, lending a maniacal impact to the sentiment.

Between the two of them, we are sure to get the entire range of emotion. An amused dimple curved John's cheek.

John rather liked the presence of Deiter.

Not because he was fond of the man himself—one would have trouble admitting to a fondness for Deiter—it was rather because Deiter represented to John everything unique that he had come to associate with *Chacun à Son Goût*.

He had always had a special attachment to this house. It was one of the few places