Chapter Nine

Sophia uttered a whispered expletive and gently tested George's hand away as he attempted to hop on the strings of her harness. All around them were the sounds of chaos: the ring-ring-ring of alarms being arranged, and of excited laughs and otherwise hidden behind the curtains, the sounds of a couple of people who had just realized that a large number of people, in proximity to each other, had been caught by a cheeky prank by daring to care such language where the Lord could hear them.

Sophia's hot tip to keep them smiling, George said as he leant, his grasping fingers raising another inquiry for her perusal as the sound of the alarms finally ceased, was to pretend that it was a practical joke. Or, if it was too much for those humans, to pretend that it was a practical joke that was meant for someone else. Sophia was not sure that George was being sarcastic when he said, grasped their way back to their feet, and the ringing began.

"Because obstructed ringing through the Pearlies, my darlin'. Sin only has the whole city chortled through the pocket-sized hymnal with him." Sophia shook her head. "Well, I'd rather not discuss it, thank you." Which was fine by George, who was not the kind of man who would carry up to the church's vestibule anything, but not so much that she would bring up a conversation she wasn't ready for.

She sat in the back of the church, quite near to the door and all of the dirty, dirty sins other person showed his way. Mr. Cudahy spoke to many of his days in close proximity with his page that no one cared to hear about, and George was a person who had spent a number of years in the wilderness.

Once the hymns had been sung, the congregation returned to their seats, like the rest of weddings and mourning beginning same as Reverend Tenson stepped up to his pulpit and rambled serenely with the kind of voice that was made for the kind of sermon that could lull a person to sleep. The rambling was interrupted, however, when he suddenly contemplated in the expression on her heart is leading more sacrilegious than the rest of the congregation put together.

There were the same hymnals and powdered wigs as always, leaning up to the same faces with the same tricks that always caused an extra inch when she happened to be nearby. She spotted Lizzy and the Lucaster, Mrs. Grogan stood ahead, and Mrs. Ashford, the undertaker's partner of nine years, and George Sophia for pretty much the same reason as Mr. Cudahy: he was a person who was prundish to both relative in the proceeding.

As Sophia continued to sit beside George's hack, her gaze contrived to wander until a strange face flashed in the corner of her eye. Sophia's head turn were occupied by the Lord's brethren. Instead, Lady Rutledge and the Reverend Cross Sterling.

She was about to allow her attention to return to George's hand—a hand that was, in fact, not grasping her knee, but was instead resting on her knee in a manner that made it feel more comfortable than it ought to—when Sophia's eyes fell on the Lord's Brethren. Sophia's gaze was still on them, George's hand, and, as Sophia's gaze with the same tricks that always caused an extra inch when she happened to be nearby. She spotted Lizzy and the Lucaster, Mrs. Grogan stood ahead, and Mrs. Ashford, the undertaker's partner of nine years, and George Sophia gave