

SEVEN NIGHTS IN A ROGUE'S BED

By Anna Campbell

Excerpt

Devon Coast, November 1826

Sidonie reached the debris-strewn end of the beach and reined Kismet to a quivering stop. She turned in the saddle to watch Merrick's thundering approach. The big bay reared to a halt behind her. Merrick's easy control over the highly strung horse shivered awareness through her. Those skillful hands that calmed a restless horse would soon touch her body.

As he leaned to pat the horse's satiny neck, he glanced up at her. A light in his silvery eyes indicated he divined the tenor of her thoughts. Of course he did.

"Feeling better?" That slight twist of his lips cut straight to her heart.

She blinked. Her heart? No, no, no. Her heart wasn't involved. She veered close enough to disaster bartering her body.

He saw her perturbation. "What's wrong?"

She bit her lip and chose dangerous honesty. "I keep forgetting you mean to destroy me."

If she hadn't watched so carefully, she might have missed the troubled frown that darkened his eyes. It struck her that, if Merrick could read her, she was learning to read him. This encroaching intimacy leached resistance, but she didn't know how to fight it.

"Nothing quite so drastic, surely," he said mildly. "This gothic setting plays with your imagination."

The gelding edged closer until Merrick's leg bumped hers. He reached to curl his hand behind her neck, tangling his fingers in the strands of hair loosened in her reckless gallop. Heat tightened her skin.

Oh, Lord...

Nervousness crashed through her like a landslide. That cursed promise to allow him access was a mistake, but it was too late to renege.

"Merrick..." She stiffened without drawing away.

"Jonas."

She narrowed her eyes. "Jonas, then. Let me go."

Holding her with gentle implacability, he loomed nearer. His answer was a whisper upon her tingling lips. "Oh, no, Sidonie. Never ask me to let you go. Not yet. Not before we've discovered paradise."

"Stop it." Her heart thumped so hard, she thought it must burst.

"I would if I could."

She tensed against his grip. "Balderdash. You're just playing with me."

"Most definitely, tesoro. But your dilemma is your own fault. You're so irresistible and I find myself unable to...resist."

"Command your willpower, Mr. Merrick. Defeat this weakness."

"I try, dear lady. I try."

"I'll bite you," she said savagely, although she didn't move.

"I'll bite you too before I'm done." His gaze sharpened upon her lips, making her heart hammer a panicked warning. "Eat you like a ripe peach, all juice and sweetness. And lick my lips afterward."

She knew enough to recognize he meant sin. More than kissing, that was certain. For a rogue like him, kissing must be small beer indeed. "You're...you're frightening me, Mr. Merrick."

Although fear was only part of what she felt. License had never lured her. She'd never imagined she'd give her body to a man. But something about Merrick charged her blood with inchoate longing, despite what she knew of him and what he intended for her.

"Seize your courage, Miss Forsythe." He mocked her formality. Even she felt idiotic calling him Mr. Merrick when he was about to kiss her. Ruthlessness hardened his jaw. "No more preliminary skirmishes, Sidonie. Let's start the games. To the victor the spoils."