

# EVER SINCE THE BALL

## Kate Ellington

As Miranda approached the drawing room she heard men's voices, and neither of them was her father's. She guessed Mr. Tolwood had stopped by and brought someone with him, but when she strode into the room she nearly gasped aloud.

George and Ebenezer Rockford stood chatting with her parents, glasses of sherry in their hands. So this was why her mother had insisted she change. Nobody looked Miranda's way when she entered the room and she wanted to tiptoe out and send Cassandra down with a message that she was ill. Very ill. She sighed. It would never work. Mentally preparing herself for an atrocious evening, she walked to her father's side.

"Ah, here she is at last!" Mr. Harlake said, taking her arm.

Miranda fixed a smile on her face as he steered her over to stand beside Ebenezer.

"You remember Mr. Rockford, don't you, Miranda?" Mr. Harlake asked, eyes twinkling.

"Yes, of course. Good evening." Miranda hadn't seen him up close in a long time. He had dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a short beard. She'd never been fond of beards.

Mr. Rockford took her hand and kissed it. "Good evening to you, Miss Harlake."

She went to pull her hand away, but he showed no sign of relinquishing it.

"Call her Miranda. So much friendlier," Mrs. Harlake said with a wide smile.

"Then she must call me Ebenezer." He motioned to George. "You know my nephew, George? Why, you two must have gone to school together."

Miranda was glad to remove her hand from Ebenezer's grip as she turned to face George.