

# The Greatest Lover Ever

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## Extract

Georgie moved as far from the bed as she could manage. Not that it would make any difference to Steyne, but it made her feel better. She snatched up the Chinese vase from the mantel, tested its weight. Too delicate to do any damage and probably priceless into the bargain. She set it down again.

But the tall, dark-haired figure who entered was not Lord Steyne.

It was his cousin, her former fiancé. Marcus Westruther, Earl of Beckenham.

He stood there for what seemed an age, silhouetted against the doorway. She couldn't see his features clearly in the shadows but she didn't have to. They were as sharp and clear in her mind's eye as they had ever been in the flesh.

For several moments, the shock of seeing him again suspended her faculties. Her lips parted but no sound came out.

Emotion flooded her chest, a swirling mass of reactions that could not be separated into constituent parts. The strength and tumult of her feelings made her light-headed.

What could she say to him? She'd avoided a meeting between them for years, and now, to see him in such fantastical circumstances... Could anything be more disastrous? She dreaded to imagine what he'd think if he discovered her identity.

Ought she simply tell him the real reason she was here?

Could she trust him? Instinct told her yes. He was the most solidly dependable person she'd ever known.

But why on earth should he help her, even if she told him her troubles? He'd washed his hands of her years ago.

She'd rejected him as a husband, dealt a severe blow to his pride, made them both the talk of the Ton. As far as Beckenham was concerned, there could not be a more unforgivable crime than that. He was a man who prized honor and loyalty above all other qualities.

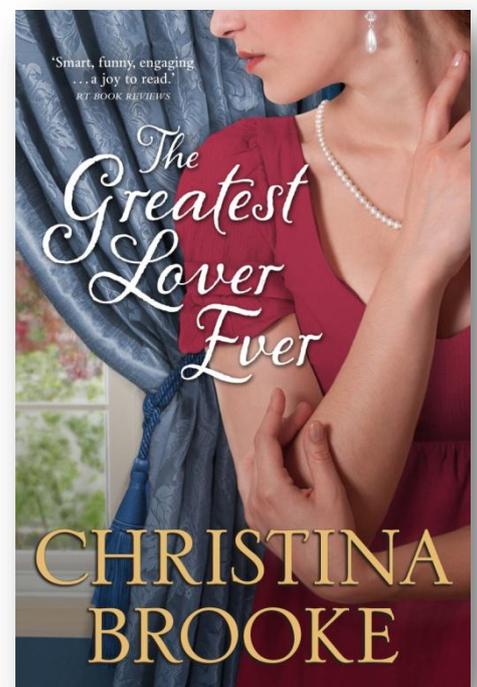
So she waited in the silence. She would follow his lead.

Her awareness of him was so heightened that the slight tilt of his head as he studied her made her heart zing about her chest like a firework. She heard nothing but her own breathing. The unruly hitch in it seemed to echo in the silence.

He moved into the room, then closed the door. 'I hear you've been looking for me.'

His deep voice resonated through her body, stirring the embers of a fire that had long lain dormant. *Yes, but never in my wildest dreams did I think you'd be here.*

She didn't answer. Oh, God, it was awful and humiliating and. . . and *wonderful* to see him. She hadn't laid eyes on him since that dreadful night when she'd released him from the engagement. Almost by tacit agreement, she lived in Town while he'd largely kept to his estate. She'd heard he'd attended Lady Cecily



Westruther's come-out ball in London last season, but of course she hadn't been invited to that auspicious event. Most pointedly not invited.

And now here he was, with her. In a quiet bedchamber in the midst of a raucous, licentious party. But it didn't feel as if they stood in any kind of oasis here. It felt like the eye of a storm.

Her mouth dried as he reached up a hand to loosen his cravat, flick it open and pull the long strip of linen from around his throat. Then he walked over to the wash stand, where a pitcher of water and a basin stood as if ready for guests.

'Take your clothes off,' he said to her over his shoulder. 'I'll be with you in a moment.'