

S E X Y S H O R T S T O R I E S

The Duke's Return

An erotic Regency Vignette by Eve Elliot

performed by

EVE'S GARDEN & FENRANN

The night was as cold and dreadful as any she had ever known. Wind howled through the joints of the house, gusted down the flue and threatened to douse the fire, made the house creak and the cat bolt, ears back, under the sofa.

Esme sat by the fire, her bare feet curled up underneath her, a large wool blanket tucked about her. It was such an odd feeling to be so warm when it was so blustery and unforgiving outside. And so decadent, somehow, to be in one's bare feet.

She had dismissed Nora early, and bade Mr. Hawkins retire for the night as well, although it was their usual custom to wait until she had gone to bed before locking up the house. This was another decadent thing about being mistress of her own home. She could do whatever she wanted.

So few women could, she knew. Most women were under the lock and key of husbands and fathers and male guardians of every sort. And while she would not have wished her freedom away for anything, one small thought worried at the back of her mind, as though it were a sliver her fingers kept returning to time and again. There was one man whose company she would be more than happy to keep. One man she wouldn't mind sharing her home with. One man alone who might make it worth her while to abandon at least some of her liberties.

She lowered her head to her bent elbow and gazed into the fire. *The Duke of Norwich*. She could scarcely believe it, even as she rolled the title around in her mouth, savouring it, as though she were kissing him, tasting him, remembering the heated silk of his mouth on hers.

All this time, he had concealed his title from her, from everyone, and she hadn't the faintest idea why. His consequence in the world he inhabited would be trebled, quadrupled, if anyone knew. He could live in a much grander house, could command the respect and patronage of just about everyone in the ton. And women...

She felt her stomach tighten at that thought. That was one benefit she certainly did not want to see him enjoy. There would literally be no stopping the flow of women to his door if his true title were revealed, every one of them angling to become his Duchess. Or even just his lover, she thought. Jewels, extravagances, fine dining... a woman could benefit greatly from being mistress to such a man.

As she was.

The pounding on the door startled her so much that she jumped, knocking her tea cup and saucer to the ground. She turned to look at the doorway, half expecting Mr. Hawkins' long, lean form to drift by on his way to answering. But she remembered he was abed, and uncurled herself from the warmth of the blanket. The pounding grew louder, and fearful that it might waken Nora and Mr. Hawkins, she took a candelabrum from the table behind the sofa and hurried to the door.

The candle danced wildly in the draughty hallway, casting leaping shadows along the wall as she wrapped her robe around her more tightly and reached for the large brass lock. She unlocked the heavy bolt with a solid thunk and cracked open the door, squinting against the pelting rain that managed to sting her eyes even through the slim crack. She peered out into the darkness, at the figure standing on her stoop, rain drenching him to the bone.

Sebastian.

She gasped as the door flew open, not knowing whether she had flung it wide or whether he had pushed it open, but it swung inwards and he was striding inside, a gust of fresh, cold air swirling in around his long dark coat as it billowed around him in the wind. She took two or three steps backward, blinking up at him in complete wonder as he flung the door closed and advanced towards her. He said nothing, didn't smile or laugh or greet her in any way that she would consider suitable given their relationship. But the look he fixed on her, the heated, piercing gaze as he tossed his sopping hat to the floor and flung off his sodden gloves, was more than suitable.

His lips quirked only slightly as he came to a stop before her, towering above her, rain dripping off his slicked hair, down his nose, off his chin, to splash down on her. And then he kissed her.

In a quick, urgent, almost desperate move he covered her mouth with his, moving against her with masterful strokes of his tongue, plunging into the warmth of her mouth and groaning with the pleasure of it. A groan of pleasure that also spoke of pain, and longing, and sweet, sweet relief.

She kissed him back until they were both breathless, until she had to tear away from him, panting, and gaze up into his smouldering eyes. He still said nothing, but his eyes drifted down to her lips again before claiming her again, this time enveloping her with a succulent, sensual kiss that was just as hungry, just as raw, but somehow even more exquisitely tortured than the one before.

He pulled her to him, nearly lifting her up off her feet as his strong arms surrounded her, his hands moving over her body, cupping her bottom, caressing her breast, feeling every part of her.

“Upstairs,” he whispered urgently as he breathed hot and desperate against the shell of her ear. “Now.”

It wasn't a command. It was a plea. It was as close to begging as she'd ever heard him.

She turned and ran up the stairs, feeling him taking the stairs two at a time behind her, hurrying her on, and just when she thought his impatience might make him scoop her up and carry her the rest of the way they reached the top and she let a laugh escape on her hurried breath. But she didn't have time to catch it, for as soon as she came to a stop he was kissing her again, cupping her cheek and savoring her mouth like a starving man, even as he took slow, deliberate steps towards her chamber and she had to take slow, deliberate steps backwards as he advanced. His mouth never left hers, his hands reached and felt and touched all he could as he worked to discard his wet clothes, until they were at her door and she fumbled behind her for the door handle. It opened with a click and he backed her into the darkened room.

She was glad for the dim light cast by the fire that Nora had lit for her a few hours ago, for in the warm orange glow she was able to see every inch of skin that his fumbling hands revealed as they worked at the buttons of his shirt. A button even popped off in his haste, bouncing off the floor as he tore the wet shirt from his chest. Drops of water glistened in the darkened swirls of damp hair, and his muscles tensed and moved beneath his still-bronzed skin. He was magnificent. Shadows and lines danced among the definition of his muscles, outlining the pure male power of him as he tossed the shirt to the floor and came towards her, gathering her into his arms and lowering his mouth to hers for another hot, sensual kiss.

There was so much she wanted to say, but she said nothing, enjoying instead this passionate, silent moment of pure hunger that sparked between them. He lifted his head from her to gaze down at her robe, assessing it briefly before pulling the tie loose and spreading it wide. Beneath it she wore only her chemise, and she watched with a thrill of feminine satisfaction as his eyes widened at the sight of her peaked nipples beneath the soft cloth. His mouth was on her then, seizing one pebbled nipple through the fabric, suckling her until the cloth grew damp. She gasped from the unfamiliar sensation, and could have stood there for hours as he stroked and sucked and teased her to the point of madness. But in his movements, in the cadence of his breathing, in the heat of his eyes, she saw that tonight there was no time for a sensual exploration of each other. He pulled down her chemise and captured her other nipple between his teeth, laving her with his tongue and sucking the hardened tip until she almost lost the ability to stand.

On a throaty groan he lifted her and turned to drop her on the middle of the bed. She bounced once and laughed, but the laugh died in her throat as he came down on his knees at the edge of the mattress and pulled her hips towards him, running his warm hands along her thighs to spread them. He pushed her chemise up to her waist

and fell upon her heated center, his fingers deftly caressing and adoring even as he parted her folds and lowered his lips to her.

She arched with the sudden sting of pleasure as his tongue lapped at her, swirling and laving and devouring with a sensuous rhythm. He slipped a finger inside her, a tortured moan escaping him, and he began to stroke her in time with the pace of his wickedly agile tongue. She clutched at the bed sheet as her head arched all the way back, muffling a cry of pleasure against the pillow. She had never felt so consumed, so utterly devoured by him, as though he had thought of nothing else since they'd parted but doing precisely what he was doing now.

And what he was doing...good Lord, the pleasure was all-consuming. It rippled through her, waves and waves of it, building higher and higher as she writhed beneath his lips and hands and soft groans. He moved as she did, never allowing her to escape him, even as she arched and curled and cried out her pleasure in soft little gasps. She grasped his hair, sinking her fingers into it as the pleasure mounted and her legs began to tremble. He pushed her back then, flattening his palms on the back of her thighs and spreading her even wider, bending over her and lavishing her with the soft, silken heat of his tongue until she shattered, curling up towards him as the spasms of pleasure tore through her. She shuddered as the sensations splintered through her, as her own voice caught on a high pitched cry of ecstatic agony. Breathless, she fell back against the sheet and shivered as his lips brushed the softness of her inner thighs and left her.

She hardly knew herself in that moment, could hardly gather her thoughts into the here and now. Her body tingled with an airiness, a feeling of glowing lightness, as though she were made of stardust. But before she could even draw in a deep, pure breath of sweet satiation, he was rising before her, gripping her knees with his strong hands, the muscles of his bare forearms standing out in rigid relief as his own desire coursed through him.

He thrust himself into her, sliding easily into the heated silk his tongue had just brought about. He groaned out a harsh curse as he buried himself in her, his cock filling her and stretching her with delicious heat, before withdrawing almost completely, enough to make her ache for the loss of him. Then he plunged back into her with a deep, languid stroke, and withdrew again, finding his rhythm quickly and beginning to rock against her.

He gazed down at her as he gripped her legs and buried himself in her over and over again, his thrusts increasing in speed and depth, his breath coming faster and faster, in ragged pants as his hips ground against hers. In seconds he was thrusting wildly, his hips bucking, sharp, hissing pleasure escaping his lips as he squeezed his eyes shut against the pleasure. He threw his head back and jutted into her, his slick thighs slapping against her backside with a sound that was primal and unmistakable and intoxicating.

The bed creaked beneath them, and she felt her whole body moving jaggedly in time with his deep, rapid thrusts, pleasure roiling through her again, subtly different than the pleasure his mouth had wrought. Every time he filled her and withdrew, every second she felt him within her and then pull back, every keening moan that

thrummed through him as his breath grew faster and heavier, sent her spiralling ever higher, until she was arching against him again, exploding around him in wave after wave of exquisite pleasure.

She muffled her cries against the salty heat of his skin, pressing her mouth to his collarbone as he moved over her, as water drops fell from the tips of his hair and splashed on her face. And as the last tremor of pleasure rippled through her, as her cries became moans of release, he arched back from her and came hard, jetting himself into her with cries of his own, so loud and earthy and indescribably primal that she thought the whole neighbourhood would share in his ecstasy.

When he finally shuddered out the last of his release he fell against her, breathless, his chest heaving as he pressed his cheek against her breastbone and tried to recover his breath. She lay, just as breathless, and let her hand fall against his damp hair, stroking him gently as he panted. His skin was molten against hers, the heavy weight of him against her was so familiar and right that she didn't care if it made it harder for her to breathe. She could even feel his heart thundering in his chest as he lay against her, and it filled her with a sensation almost as deliriously wonderful as the ecstasy she'd just experienced.

He lifted his head and gazed at her, his ragged breath beginning to calm. His eyes shone with a heavy-lidded pleasure, the drowsy look of a man well-pleasured. Until a frown creased his brow and he lifted from her, sliding his hand down the middle of her breastbone as if making certain she were still whole.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Did I hurt you?"

"Oh no," she smiled, splaying her hands along his sculpted chest and letting her fingers savour the tight muscles. "That was wonderful."

He smiled, then bowed his head to recover his breath fully, before lifting his head again to meet her gaze. "Truly, you must forgive me. I hadn't planned to...I just..." he faltered, bending to graze a kiss against her lips. "I just couldn't help myself. I've thought of nothing but this for two weeks."

A surge of something like happiness flared in her, and she smiled at him. "Likewise."

He laughed, and then shifted off her, falling onto the bed beside her and throwing his arms over his head. He breathed out heavily, and she knew he was feeling that sweet, airy satiation as well, that breathless euphoria that she knew couldn't be found anywhere else.

When he finally turned on his side, curling his elbow beneath his head, he looked at her with a remorseful smile. "I think I have a lot to apologize for."

"Oh?" she quirked her lips. "Not from my point of view you don't."

He reached over and smoothed a tendril of her hair that had fallen over her face. "Well I did rather burst into your house a moment ago. I didn't even greet you properly."

She let the phrase linger for a moment before broadening her smile. "As greetings go, this was divine."

He smiled too, his fingers releasing the tendril of hair and then trailing down her neck to rest on her collarbone. He wasn't in the mood for jesting, she realized, and so she sobered a little, giving him a gentle smile. "When did you get back?"

"We docked an hour ago."

An hour ago? She had expected him to say they had arrived this morning, possibly even yesterday. But an hour ago? That meant-

"So you came straight here?"

He nodded slowly, his eyes roaming lazily over her face. "Two weeks is a long time."

"I thought you were meant to be gone for a week," she said, careful not to make sound like a complaint. "Was your business delayed?"

"Yes," he replied, his hands softly rounding her shoulder. "The damned attorneys kept us tied up with endless changes to the contract. And then the weather kept us in dock another forty-eight hours."

"Whatever did you do with yourself?" she asked, thinking of the boredom he must have felt, stranded in a city he disliked.

"Thought of you."

She smiled, half-burying her face in the crook of her own arm in bashful delight. "You did not."

"I did too. I imagined every way in which I plan to make use of this bed," he said, gazing up at the canopy. Then a devilish smile crooked his lips and he looked back at her. "And the floor. And the settee. And the bathtub. And my carriage. And your carriage..."

She put a finger to his lips and laughed. "Stop. You'll spoil the surprise."

He pressed his lips to form a kiss against her finger, a wicked smile making his eyes sparkle.

"Did you at least conclude your business to your satisfaction?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said carelessly, his eyes drifting down to where his hands were now skimming lightly, over the tops of her breasts. "It was well worth the trip. If only for the sweetness of...anticipation."

She watched his eyes darken then, as his hands firmed over her breast. His thumb brushed over her nipple and she started, giggling. She was still so sensitive, her body still hummed with pleasure from his lovemaking. But his body, it seemed, was more than ready to enjoy her again.

"You did seem to enjoy *ending* the anticipation," she teased gently, reaching to run her hand down the centre of his chest, over the hard planes of his muscles and down to the softer flesh of his flat belly. As her hand drifted lower she felt that soft part of him tense and his breath hitch. His cock surged at the nearness of her hand, and when she closed her fingers around him he let his eyes flutter closed on a breathy sigh of pleasure.

"Oh, God," he groaned softly. His eyes moved beneath his closed lids as she pleased him, his brows pinched together in a kind of exquisite pain when she adjusted her stroke and ran her finger over the straining head.

As she slowly stroked him, as her hand slid up and down the hard shaft and caressed the silken skin that covered it, she watched his face with a smile she couldn't hide. Then he opened his eyes and regarded her, reaching down to still her hand by gently clasping her wrist.

"Yes, I certainly did," he said, his voice a low, throaty hum of male desire. "But I had other things in mind, too."

He lifted himself up on one elbow and leaned over her, lowering his head to hers so that their foreheads brushed. His nose gently bumped hers and he smiled. Then he angled his head and kissed her, a light, delicate, searching kiss of lips on lips.

Where his first kiss had been hungry and desperate, this kiss was gentler, lazier. He didn't sweep his tongue against hers, or groan against her mouth as he had downstairs. This time he savoured her lips, kissing the edges of them, kissing her chin and cheeks and eyelids before finding her mouth again.

The warmth of his mouth on hers, the feel of his heated skin next to hers as he moved them both further up the bed sent a wash of new desire flooding through her.

He laid her down against the pillows and settled himself around her, his long body pressing against her, his arms surrounding her, as though they had been designed to fit each other in just this way. As he gazed down at her, his hand skimmed over her breast, sensual fingers shaping and caressing and igniting her with pleasure and desire as they found her nipple and lingered there.

As she sighed out her pleasure he took her mouth again, and his kiss grew into something deeper, something richer. His tongue dipped into her mouth with sweet, teasing swirls, until her soft moans mingled with his and he drew out each long, languid tangling of their tongues with delicious intensity. Although their bodies were touching, although his hand was caressing her breast and teasing her nipple, she could feel nothing but the sensuous heat of this kiss, this searching, yearning kiss as it burned on and on, as his mouth slanted over hers and moved with a rhythm, a cadence, of pure desire and of pleasures long-denied.

She was hardly aware of the moment he slipped into her. They were simply one, his body filling hers, moving inside her with slow, deep strokes that matched the silken thrust of his tongue against hers. She let her hand drift down his lean, muscled back to trail over his hips as they moved in a languid rhythm, the muscles of his rear tensing and flexing as he sank into her over and over again. His body was a masterpiece, so lean and hard, sculpted perfection. The feel of his thrusting hips, even in this slow, easy way, spoke to her on a primal level and her desire flared.

She slid her hand up and down his back, loving the play of muscles as he moved, loving the feel of his heated skin. As he filled her, stretched her, stroked into her, she moaned from the incandescent feeling of it, the feeling of being so utterly filled, completed, of joining so thoroughly with this man. Somehow the slowness of his rhythm was more intoxicating than his desperate thrusts of a moment ago had been. It made the pleasure build in her slowly, but with a strength and certainty that only grew with every deep, sensuous stroke.

He broke the kiss and lowered his head to the sheltered spot on her neck, just below her jaw, and breathed against her, his breath leaving him in small, ragged bursts. He moaned with each breath, his muscles tensing as he found a rhythm that was more exquisite than any other, so exquisite that he could only give into it, give over his whole being to it, close his eyes and breathe against the intense pleasure of it.

His hips surged fluidly, driving him into her over and over again, so deeply, so completely, with a relentless rhythm that neither quickened nor slowed. The steadiness of it reached some hidden depths in her, made her tense and grasp his arms, made her arch towards him and strain to be closer, closer, to feel all of him, to feel every delicious stroke until she shattered around him again, curling up towards him on a cry of desperate relief and falling back down to the bed. He gazed down at her, his breath coming fast and uneven, and she watched his release claim his eyes first. Pleasure shot through them, pleasure and pain and torturous, exquisite release and he lowered his head again and shuddered, breathing out his climax on soft, quiet groans that were almost sobs.

When he finally stilled, when she could finally feel his thundering heart begin to slow, he pressed a kiss to her neck, and then another, until his lips found her earlobe and gently suckled. She shied away from the ticklish sensation and laughed. He lifted his head and smiled down at her, but he didn't withdraw from her. She could still feel him, hard inside her, even though he had just spent himself twice in the last half hour, and it was a strange, welcome, comforting feeling. They weren't making love, but they were joined, and she thought that she could stay like this all night if he'd let her, surrounded by him, filled by him, deliriously pleased and pleased by him.

"You are divine." he whispered, pressing a kiss to her jaw, and then her lips. "I've never known such pleasure."

She felt her throat tighten. She couldn't have spoken even if she'd known what to say. A kind of euphoria filled her at his words, and she closed her eyes to savour them the better. Perhaps all gentlemen said this kind of thing to their mistresses, she thought. Perhaps that was the very reason men took mistresses, for the sheer pleasure lovemaking with them could bring. But she couldn't manage to care very much at that moment. For she had never even imagined such pleasure was possible, let alone experienced it, and she wanted to just drift for a moment longer, in his arms, joined with him, feeling his lips press light little kisses against her skin.

When she finally pulled away she felt the loss of him, and immediately ached for his return. He settled beside her, pulling her into his arms and cradling to him, stroking her hair as the drowsiness of their shared afterglow overcame them both. She laid her head against his chest, and listened to the slow, easy cadence of his heart.

She awoke a short time later, the night still dark and swirling with wind and rain outside her windows. She should have risen to close the shutters against the storm, but lying next to Sebastian, listening to him as he breathed deeply in sleep, she wouldn't have moved even if the roof had caved in.

It was remarkable how beautiful he was, she thought, taking in the firm, straight line of his jaw. She ran a finger lightly along the stubbled plane, knowing he wouldn't awaken from such a light touch. She paused, reflected how lovely it was to know a person so well as to be privilege to such an intimate knowledge. She let her hand fall to the bed lightly, feeling the heat of his muscled arm seeping into her skin as she rested beside him. Even his skin was beautiful. Warm and rich, it looked almost like bronze in the low firelight, the lines of his muscles standing out in fine shadows and valleys.

He turned on his side, grasping the pillow with his arms, and looked at her. He looked ruffled and sleepy and boyish, in spite of his thirty-five years.

"Am I still alive?" he asked, his voice thick with sleep. "Or did some heavenly goddess slay me with her favours?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I think some heavenly god might have slain me with his."

He smiled, that beautiful smile that transformed his face with light. He reached for her idly, caught her hand with his and twined their fingers together. His hand was so much larger than hers, his fingers long and strong and solid between hers.

"I..." she swallowed, knowing somehow that this was the only moment she'd have to find the courage to speak. "I have something to say to you. Something I..."

She thought perhaps her inarticulate attempt might have caused him to frown, or to worry about what she might say next. Certainly after lovemaking like they'd just enjoyed, other women in his past had probably blurted out their love for him, or thought it safe to start asking for favours of a different kind. But if any of this passed through his mind, his face revealed none of it. He simply regarded her, his eyes soft and drowsy, from pleasure or sleep or both.

"I have to thank you," she said, finding her voice again. "Please allow me to ___"

"You're welcome," he said almost soundlessly, and smiled at her.

"No, no, not for this," she smiled, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "Although, thanks are not entirely out of order."

He grinned, pleased with himself, and removed his hand from hers to skim over her hip and into the dip of her waist.

"No, I must thank you for...for your service to my family," she said. She swallowed, gathering her courage, and then smiled cautiously. "*Your Grace...*"

His hand stilled. His eyes sharpened and the smile, so rare, so beautiful and so fleeting, fell from his face.

The End