

SYNOPSIS - LORD RUIN

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London, 1818. Former soldier Ruan, duke of Cynssyr, survived Napoleon's war and is home with his physical wounds long healed. But he's changed, and most would say not for the better. This cynical rake believes love is merely the delusion that a man's not lost his freedom and a woman's that she's gained hers. A night of unforgettable passion is about to teach him that the love of the right woman will heal the wounds he can't see.

Anne Sinclair is a pretty woman born to a family of beauties. The eldest of four girls, she believes duty to her father and sisters means denying herself what she wants most in the world: love, marriage and children of her own. That conviction is put to the test during a visit to the country estate of Devon Carlisle where everyone expects Ruan will propose to Anne's youngest sister. But Devon, who fell in love with Anne four years ago and still wants to marry her, has other ideas about Anne's future.

Injury and mistaken identity lead Ruan to Anne's bed and the most intense sexual experience of his life. The next morning, Anne's safe, predictable life is upended along with her hopes for a future with Devon. Ruan, too, faces a life he never expected, with a woman who does not meet his standard of beauty, though he allows she is reassuringly practical and sensible.

Ruan leaps at Devon's suggestion that he send Anne to an estate near Town. That way, that he can create the appearance of a blissful marriage while he deals with matters in London, including the case of a man falsely accused of

a series of kidnappings plaguing London.

After a hasty marriage, Ruan and Anne discover they agree on at least one thing– the inconvenience of emotion. Their decision to make the best of things ends on an unexpected note; Ruan makes love to Anne. Despite knowing he has not satisfied his shy and still reluctant wife, the depth of his pleasure surprises him. He's used to women whose beauty and accomplishments cannot be questioned, and Anne, for heaven's sake, hardly falls into that category.

The grandeur of Ruan's London home does little to allay Anne's doubts about her suitability to be his duchess. She knows full well his reputation for breaking hearts and that no woman is ever adjudged a beauty until he pronounces her so. One private, intimate supper with her husband demonstrates why so many women have loved him. Never mind that he's handsome as the devil, he's nothing like the dilettante of gossip and reputation. His political ambitions are well grounded in experience, dedication and intelligence. In spite of her belief their marriage cannot succeed, she is not immune to his charm.

Nor is Ruan immune to Anne. True, she has yet to let go of her reserve, particularly in bed, but she's easy to talk to and without realizing it, he opens to her as he has not to anyone since the war. They even discuss his progress, or lack of it, in finding the man responsible for the kidnappings.

At a ball in her honor, Anne acquits herself well. She impresses nearly everyone, including the Marquess of Thrale and most, if not all, of the men whose political support Ruan needs. On this night Ruan has his first

intimacy that his reaction to Anne is more than sensual. Up until now, he has had her to himself. He does not like that other men admire her, and that's something that never mattered with other women.

A young viscount has a bit too much to drink. When Anne leaves the ballroom, he follows. Too late, she realizes his intentions go further than telling her tales about her husband's mastery of women. Though drunk, he's bigger and stronger, and she only just manages to escape him. In her moment of fright and turmoil, it's Ruan she wants. Whatever he feels for her and whatever the state of her heart, the truth is, she needs his comfort.

When at last she finds him, he is not alone. He's with one of the most beautiful women she's ever seen. Anne is no fool, she understands this is his mistress, but she can scarcely credit as true his claim he's dismissed her unless he means to replace her with another. Ruan makes some deductions of his own, and it doesn't take him long to have her confession about the viscount's attempts on her.

For Ruan the night steadily departs from the triumph he envisioned. He failed Anne when she needed his protection and, having been interrupted with his mistress, he can hardly blame her for withdrawing even further. He doesn't see how things can get worse, but they do. In come Devon and Anne's brother-in-law Ben. Both think he is mistreating Anne, and to top it all off, it's quite clear Devon still loves Anne. There's only one remedy Ruan can see, and that's to make his wife fall in love with him. If she were to love him, why, he'd never feel jealous of her friendships with anyone, Devon included.

A signet ring implicates the Marquess of Thrale in the kidnappings, and

Ruan involves Anne in his investigation. She elicits valuable information from previous victims that points toward Thrale as the culprit though there are other suspects, at least one of whom has a reputation for violence.

Another kidnapping ends in the tragic death of a young woman.

Ominously, the house in which the victim is found belongs to Thrale. His guilt seems incontrovertible when another victim provides physical evidence in the form of a button engraved with Thrale's crest. Though the Marquess has an alibi, Anne's belief in Thrale's innocence convinces Ruan to look further.

Ruan has long been aware that his feelings for Anne are far more than the effect of passion. Since the war, he's deadened himself to emotion to the point where he sometimes wonders if he might really be dead. With Anne, not only is he safe to feel, his memories of the war cease to haunt him. He's in love with his wife, and he cannot stop himself from telling her. His confession comes too soon, he knows it, but he tells her anyway. She's not ready to believe that Lord Ruin, infamous for breaking hearts without a shred of conscience, could possibly be sincere in saying he loves her.

One of the suspects warns Ruan that Anne will be the next victim. Her safety comes before everything, even his heart, perhaps even especially his heart. Ruan immediately sends her out of London. When Thrale brings the unexpected news that he found her abandoned carriage, Ruan knows the worst has happened. Anne has been kidnapped.

Ruan and his friends arrive barely in time to prevent what appears to be an assault by the kidnapper. But another man is there too, and he begs Ruan to shoot the kidnapper before it's too late. Anne's life depends on which man

Ruan believes. Either choice will likely end in his own death. It's no choice at all. He'd die for Anne. Anne's quick thinking gives Ruan time to save them both and see the kidnapper and his accomplices brought to justice.

Hardly recovered from her ordeal but even more aware that her heart is at grave risk, Anne discovers Ruan in a horribly familiar scene. "Will you have me back?" her husband pleads with his mistress. "A divorced man in love with another woman?" The truth comes home with a vengeance, if she does not say what's been in her heart all along, she will lose him. For once, the choice between safety and love seems like no choice at all. She tells him she loves him; a lifetime with Lord Ruin won't be nearly long enough.