

SEE NO EVIL, MY PRETTY LADY

By:

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See No Evil, My Pretty Lady

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Other Books by Miss Mae available at Smashwords

Dove Island, 2nd place Winner in 2009 P&E Readers Poll for Short Story Romance. "...My kind of hero, Christopher risked his own life to rescue Roxanne...Miss Mae has spun another exciting tale that will keep you on the edge..." Laurean Brooks, author of *Journey to Forgiveness* and *Jonquils in the Snow*

CHAPTER ONE

Dorcy rushed through the doorway, grabbing the hand railing to keep from falling down the slippery steps. Swirling fog cocooned her, the impenetrable moisture abruptly halting her frenzied flight.

Mr. Davenport!

The scream resonated long and loud inside her mind. With stunning clarity the image she'd seen rammed into her consciousness—a figure sprawled on the library floor, white shirt soaked with blood, the hilt of a knife stuck in his belly.

Numb with shock, she stood unmoving as the air erupted with noise. Hooves clattering against the cobble-stoned street signaled an approaching rider. Through a parting in the shifting fog she stared toward the corner gas lamp. Beneath its arcing light trotted a snorting gelding, a shrunken visage of a man hunched over the animal's neck.

"A body's been found in Mitre Square." Raising his prune wrinkled face, the old man shrilled out his warning. "Lock yer doors. Stay inside."

He spurred the horse down the street and the pair disappeared into the mist. His high, thin cry merged with the fading echo of the steed's departing hoof beats.

Dorcy inhaled a shuddering breath, the sudden odor of human body sweat alerting her to someone's presence. A deep, unfamiliar voice said, "Madame, I have some business with you."

Gasping, she whirled to flee. But a strong hand gripped her arm and flung her against the wall of the house. Knocked breathless, she opened her mouth to scream.

"Oh no, my pretty lady." Vise-like fingers clamped on her throat, preventing sound. "I think you'll be telling no one that you saw me."

She clawed at the attacker's hand, her nails slashing his flesh as she fought to loosen his hold. Through the ringing crescendo of blood in her ears she heard the barking of a dog. The man jerked back and Dorcy twisted away. He grabbed at her, clenching her shoulder. She lashed out, her fists beating against the rough texture of his jacket. Strength born out of terrified desperation she tore herself free, squealing with pain as his fingers raked down her arm.

Terror guided her as she raced blindly through the fog-shrouded streets. Stumbling over an unseen object, she paused, whipping a disoriented look across her shoulder. A raspy cough rattled the air, and she jumped back. The mist thinned and a bulky shape materialized in front of her.

"Miss Edwards. You're out and about early, ain't you now?"

"Mr. Butterfield." She clutched at his solid form, tears of relieved recognition springing to her eyes. "It's you." Unable to restrain herself, she fell against his generous girth and wept against his shirt collar.

Clearing his throat, he muttered, "Now, now child. Whatever's the matter?"

"There—there was a man." Dorcy hiccupped a trembling breath and wiped her cheeks with one shaking hand. "He tried to—"

"A man?" Mr. Butterfield's voice rumbled with wary concern. "Out in this fog? What happened, child?"

Dorcy sniffed and tried to swallow down her tears. "He attacked me."

The older man wrapped a protective arm around her. "Here, let me take you inside. Mother has a hot pot of tea ready." He ushered Dorcy up a flight of low stone steps and entered the house first, leading her into a shadowy hallway. Dropping hat and woolen muffler on a nearby chair, he called out. "Mother? Where are you, dear?"

The pink, fleshy face of Mr. Butterfield's wife poked around the doorjamb of a room that opened off the hall. "I'm here, Father." She exchanged her term of endearment with him while she peered at Dorcy over the rim of small spectacles. "Who's that with you? Oh. It's Miss Edwards." A welcoming smile broke across her features and she hurried forward with outstretched hands.

The warmth of Hazel Butterfield's embrace comforted Dorcy like a downy quilt. She rested her wet cheek against the soft fabric of the older woman's blouse, a delicate scent of lilac soap rising off the lacy collar.

"Let's take her into the parlor. We need some tea to warm her up." Mr. Butterfield smoothed his white side-whiskers along the length of his own padded jaw line, moisture from the fog shining like dewdrops atop his mane of snowy hair. "She's had a bad fright."

"Fright?" The woman pulled back to look into Dorcy's eyes. "My child, what happened?"

"Shall we?" Mr. Butterfield gave no time for Dorcy to answer. He led the way into the room from which his wife had emerged. Walking straight to the fireplace, he turned his backside toward the crackling flames. Hooking his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, he nodded at the tray that set on a table before the couch. "Pour a cup for Miss Edwards."

"Surely." Despite the rotund bulges around her middle, Mrs. Butterfield moved lightly on her feet as she hurried to pour steaming liquid from the china pot. Extending a small cup toward Dorcy, she smiled. "Sit down, dear. Oh, my." Her mouth fell open in concern as her round-eyed gaze took in Dorcy's appearance.

Mr. Butterfield cleared his throat and looked at the far wall. "Perhaps she'd care for a shawl, Mother."

Dorcy wondered at the couple's apparent discomfort. Raising a hand to her shoulder, she fingered the torn strips of her dress. Embarrassed heat flooded her cheeks as she realized an ample amount of bare flesh obviously showed. Gratefully, she accepted the muslin wrap Mrs. Butterfield picked from the end of the couch and handed to her.

"How did that happen, child? You know you can tell us." Mrs. Butterfield's soft voice offered maternal reassurance.

Dorcy took a slow sip of her tea. The well-lit room with its comfortable furnishings and warm fire tempted her to believe she'd imagined it all. Could the bloodied figure of Mr. Davenport and the unknown attacker on the street be only scenes conjured from a half-awake fantasy?

"That killer's struck again," Mr. Butterfield spoke, interrupting Dorcy's musings. "Gus Tumblety rode by announcing a new attack at Mitre Square."

"Mitre Square?" His wife gasped, clutching her throat in a display of horror. "Here in the city?" As if the thought just came to her, she turned a stunned look on Dorcy. "Oh, dear child. Tell me you didn't meet up with that butcher we've read about in the papers."

"I don't know." Bowing her head, Dorcy squeezed her eyes shut, tears of fright sliding down her cheeks and dripping off her chin. She tensed into one hard knot as she struggled against her fears. *Who was that outside Mr. Davenport's house?*

A loud knocking erupted on the front door. Mr. Butterfield jumped visibly. "Who can that be?"

His wife grasped his hand and looked up at him with a pleading gaze. "Don't answer it. Please, don't answer it."

He snorted and threw back his rounded shoulders with a show of bravado. "I'm not a coward, Mother." His stride firm and purposeful, he walked into the hallway.

Dorcy held her breath, straining to hear the latch of the door as Mr. Butterfield released it. Sounds lapsed, and then his voice called out, "Mother! Look who's here."

Dorcy sat with her back to the hallway and watched Mrs. Butterfield's expression as she looked at the entrance. A relieved smile stretched her mouth wide, rounding her cheeks like a well-fed chipmunk's.

"Do come in." She clasped her plump hands together in a gesture of delighted surprise. "We're that glad to see you, Mr. Davenport."