

# A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT

By Susanne Marie Knight

“What you need is a husband!”

At her best friend’s provoking words, Deirdre Livingston dropped her needlework and gave her full attention to the vivacious dynamo who was also, at present, her hostess. “Emma Fairmont, whatever are you talking about?”

“Darling, I am worried about you.” Emma whirled around her elegant drawing room as a spinning top might, after just being launched. “With your dear brother, Thomas, now gone, there is no one left to take care of you.”

Even after five long months, the pain of losing Thomas still stabbed at Deirdre’s heart. To regain her composure, she blinked her eyes and stared at the snow-capped fir trees huddled outside the large latticed window.

Emma laid a comforting hand on Deirdre’s shoulder. “Dee, you must admit, a woman alone at your advanced age is at the mercy of...dastardly scoundrels—of the worst type!”

Sighing, Deirdre picked up her needle and thread to continue embroidering the handkerchief. To some, the age of six-and-twenty might be advanced, however she did not fear a strand of grey or two marring the darkness of her hair. “Are there any other kind of scoundrels?”

Emma was not amused. The lacy mobcap denoting her married status fairly vibrated with her outrage. “This is exactly what I mean. Here you are, talking gammon! A husband would surely provide a stabilizing influence for you.”

*Pull the reins in on me, more like,* Deirdre thought mulishly. However as she was a guest of Sir Hector and Lady Fairmont—her dearest Emma had married well—Deirdre wisely withheld her reply.

A slight movement near the white alabaster fireplace caught her eye. There, behind the plump, upholstered chair, hid a small child eagerly devouring every adult word! But who had the audacity—?

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