

## Sinful (Risque Regency Novella)

Sharon Page



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Some sins are impossible to forgive...

Ruthless and devilishly handsome, former Bow Street Runner Trevelyan Foxton has been hired to find a missing debutante. But the woman who holds the key to the girl's disappearance is the one woman Lyan vowed he would never see again. After all, when a young man proposes marriage and gives his virginity to his beloved, he's going to be furious when she steals his money and runs away.

Some men are impossible to resist...

Haunted by dark secrets, Estelle Desjardins was forced to desert Lyan ten years before, take half his money, and disappear. She has built an independent life as a dressmaker and secretly helps young ladies escape loveless arranged marriages. When Lyan comes back into her life, she must lie to him all over again. But he suspects the truth and wages a campaign of seduction and pleasure that melts all her defenses...

A shorter version of this story was published as "Gretna Green" in the Mammoth Book of Regency Romance, 2010. This novella is greatly expanded and hotter.

Length: 20,500 words/84 pages

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A pin jabbed her tongue. Estelle spat them all into her hand. The attention of every woman in her salon was riveted on Lyan, but he had eyes only for her as he slowly stepped into her shop. He took off his beaver hat as he ducked under the doorway, revealing his striking coal-black hair and the one streak of white that began at his temple and followed the sweep of his unfashionably long tresses to his shoulder.

"Madame Desjardins," he said, with a perfunctory bow. He straightened, then ensured he closed the door behind him. A sardonic smile lifted his lips as the bell tinkled. "Is it intended to mean 'Star of the Gardens'? I like that very much."

Her stomach almost dropped away. What did Lyan want? "May I help you, Mr. Foxton?"

The buzz began.

"Goodness, Mr. Foxton is a Bow Street Runner," whispered Lady Amelia to her bosom-bow, Lady Caroline Trent.

Lady Caroline put her gloved hand to her mouth and her blue eyes glittered with thrilled delight. "What is he doing here? Do you think there's been a crime here?"

"Other than the prices?" muttered Lady Caroline's mother.

"Have you heard?" one young lady whispered. "It is said that Mr. Foxton is the heir to the Earl of Delamore."

Estelle froze. She took care to know the gossip of the ton. How could she not have known this? Yet if there was any ordinary man who possessed the autocratic beauty of a gentleman of the ton, it was Lyan.

"That cannot be true," declared the voluptuous Countess of Bournemouth. "I heard that he grew up in the East End stews. It is rumored he has a very sordid past." She said it in a breathy purr, as though "sordid" was a commendable thing.

"I think he is trying to look down Lady Armitage's bodice!"

That would not surprise her. Lyan had always enjoyed playing the rogue. At this very moment, he appeared to be enjoying shocking her clients. "Madame Desjardins," he began, in a voice that had deepened and roughened and grown even more magnetic in ten years. "I hate to trouble you, but I would like a private word."

The ladies gasped, for that meant he must walk through her shop, past the curtained rooms in which women stood in various states of undress. Estelle squared her shoulders and banished her quivers. She had learned to be strong to survive in London's stews. She would not let Lyan's presence make her feel like an uncertain girl again.

"Miss Sims, advise the ladies to keep their curtains closed," she instructed her best seamstress. With brow raised and what she hoped was a cool, placid expression firmly fixed in place, she turned to Lyan. "Mr. Foxton, you may come to my office. I assume a respectable representative of Bow Street will keep his eyes averted."

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