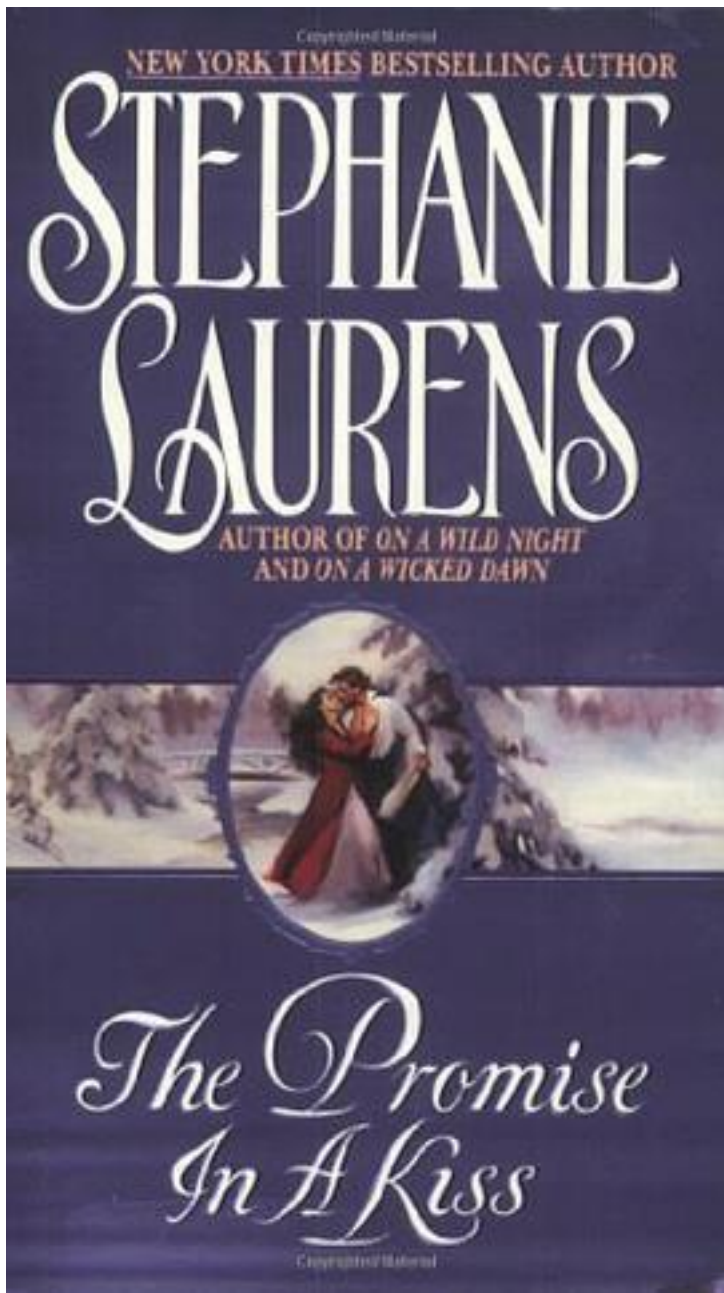


The Promise in a Kiss



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"What would you do if you were kissed by the most handsome stranger you'd ever seen? And what if that man was a Cynster?" Every girl--even convent-educated ones--dreams of forbidden kisses. So when a man literally falls at Helena's feet as she's walking through the courtyard one moonlit Christmas Eve, the pretty, young comtesse d'Lisle knows he's up to no good. He's clearly a bit dangerous... and obviously caught in the middle of a clandestine rendezvous. Why else would he have risked his neck and jumped out of a window into the snow? It's wrong, it's outlandish . . . and it's the most utterly "romantic" gesture she's ever seen. So when the good sisters rush up, demanding to know if she has seen a man on the grounds, Helena ignores the years of strict upbringing that insist she reveal his presence. "To lie would be a sin, but 'no one can be good all the time.'" As a reward for her silence, the stranger takes her in his arms and enticingly, unforgettably kisses her--and then departs, leaving a lingering if unspoken promise of all that might be, should fate decree that they meet again. Although Helena doesn't know it, her wild Englishman is Sebastian Cynster, Duke of St. Ives, a nobleman who will prove to be her destiny. Seven years later, Helena has been transformed from a pretty schoolgirl to an aristocratic beauty. Her sparkling wit has made her sought after by London's hostesses; her considerable dowry has made winning her hand the aim of many a gentleman . . . but she is deadeningly aware of how "boring" so many of these gentlemen are. Her manipulative guardian has unexpectedly allowed her to find a husband of her own choosing, and she has no intention of marrying any man who tries to tame her. There must be someone perfect for her . . . someone who can live up to the promise of that long-ago kiss. Then, at a ball, fate strikes. Once again, it is the Christmas season, and across the crowded room Helena stands transfixed . . . for there is the man whose kiss she has never forgotten, the man of her memory whom no other has ever been able to supplant. Her wild, mysterious Englishman, Sebastian Cynster, Duke of St. Ives. One look, and he's determined to reclaim her

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