

How a Rivalry is Born

Deleted Scene from IN BED WITH A ROGUE

Sebastian turned nine-years-old only days before Mr. Russell, his father's man of business, ushered him outside to the family travel coach for the journey to Eton. The Thorne crest emblazoned on the coach door was a potent reminder of what was expected of Sebastian in the coming years. He was the first Thorne to attend school, and his father had collected on several debts owed him to secure a place for Sebastian at Eton College. After all the trouble his father had gone to, it made no sense that he was still in bed rather than making preparations to travel with Sebastian. Father hadn't even roused from his stifling dark chamber to say good-bye.

Mother and his sister Eve followed Sebastian to the drive and stood side-by-side in awkward silence. His mother's eyes were shiny with tears.

"Will you bid Father farewell for me?" he asked.

"Of course I will, Bastian. You must know he is very proud of you."

Mother gathered him in a hug, and he clung to her, as he knew was unacceptable for a boy his age. She didn't chide him, however. Instead, she wrapped her arms tighter around him and kissed the top of his head. "Be strong, my little man. Mind your studies and prove yourself while you are away."

He sucked in a fortifying breath to keep from crying and reluctantly let go of his mother. "I will." How could he do otherwise given his family's history? Blue blood did not run through his veins.

Sebastian's paternal grandfather had been a doctor by profession, good enough to tend wounds gentlemen sustained in duels or attend the births of their offspring, but Grandfather had been too low born to be accepted as one of elite. Nevertheless, that hasn't stopped his grandfather from striving to move his family up the social ladder.

With these noblemen's money fattening Grandfather's pockets, he had purchased a commission for Sebastian's father and urged him to distinguish himself. As a young officer, Father had set out to make his own father proud, and he had accomplished his aims. He returned from Ireland a hero and was rewarded for his service to their King.

All the barony had cost Sebastian's father was his sanity.

Sebastian swiped his nose with his sleeve then squared his shoulders. Now it was his turn to do what his father asked of *him*. He would prove the Thornes were worthy of the title granted by His Majesty. Some day Sebastian would be the second Baron Thorne. He was nobility, just like every other boy at Eton, and he would make his father proud.

"I promise to work hard, Mama."

His little sister stood at their mother's side. Her bottom lip trembled and tears flooded her eyes. "I don't want you to go." She flung her arms around his waist, nearly knocking them to the ground.

"Eve," he said in a harassed tone as he corrected his footing, but he couldn't help hugging her back. She was four years younger and given to silly emotional displays, but he supposed he could tolerate it this once. Roughly setting her away, he reached to tug a dark curl. "Be good for mother and father or they will sell you to the gypsies."

"Sebastian," Mother scolded then put a comforting arm around his sister. "We will do no such thing, precious."

When Mother wasn't looking he mouthed, *They will*.

Eve stuck her tongue out before a small smile curved her lips. His little sister secretly wanted to become a gypsy dancer when she was older. He knew she would see being sold to the gypsies as a grand adventure rather than a frightening prospect. Otherwise, he wouldn't have said it when they were parting.

"Come along, Master Thorne." Father's man of business hustled him into the coach and climbed in behind him. He smiled and reached into his jacket as the carriage drove away, pulled a lemon drop from his pocket, and passed it to Sebastian. Mr. Russell seemed to have an endless supply of sweets on hand for him

and Eve. And he had taught Sebastian to fish and shoot rabbit. It seemed Mr. Russell spent more time with him than his father, and sometimes Sebastian wished he were the man's son.

Sebastian popped the candy into his mouth as the carriage jostled over the ruts in the long drive. "Why isn't Father taking me to school?"

Mr. Russell looked out the window. "Your mother wouldn't approve of speaking with your mouth full."

It was more a statement than admonition. Mother was always reminding Sebastian to mind his manners. She wanted him to become a proper gentleman like her father.

"Sorry," he mumbled around the candy.

Mr. Russell grinned instead of scolding him. "Your father would like to see you off to school, but he did not wish to risk having one of his spells along the way. Do not judge him too harshly."

The reminder that Sebastian's father wasn't well did not soothe his hurt feelings, but Sebastian was a tiny bit grateful his father hadn't come after all. He didn't want his classmates to know of his father's ailment.

He cocked his head to the side and regarded Mr. Russell, the most plain-speaking man he had ever known. Mr. Russell had served in Ireland alongside his father, but he never seemed to have any of the same troubles Father had. "Do you ever forget you are home and think you are back in Ireland fighting?"

Mr. Russell blinked. "No, but I was delivering a message when the Battle of New Ross occurred. Your father isn't the only one that suffers, Master Thorne. Many soldiers find it hard to live with what happened that day."

Sebastian nodded as if he understood, but he didn't. When he heard others speak of war, it seemed something to be proud of—an honor to serve one's King. He and Mr. Russell spoke of many things on the long journey to Eton, but Sebastian avoided mentioning his father again.

When Mr. Russell left him in the headmaster's care late that afternoon, Sebastian handled himself admirably. He held his head high, answered the headmaster's questions, and he remembered to say thank you like Mama had

taught him. He was dismissed and dutifully followed an upper classman assigned to show him to his quarters with his back straight. He ignored the stares from the other boys, and their whispers. Their curiosity was normal, he told himself.

His bunk mate—a mousy lad with nearly white hair and a splattering of large freckles that stood out on his pale skin—stood wide-eyed across the chamber when the upper classman introduced them. And when they were left alone, Timothy McGregor had the audacity to ask if Sebastian’s father liked having bats in the Belfry, or if he just couldn’t get rid of the pests.

Sebastian’s fist answered on his behalf, slamming into the boy’s stomach and doubling him over. He never had another problem with Timothy. Unfortunately,

Timothy’s older brother was twice as large and possessed a blood-thirst not easily quenched.

Patrick McGregor and his two friends made Sebastian’s life hell his first month at Eton. Every day they managed to trap him in an isolated area, and he’d take his lumps. When the headmaster called Sebastian to his office to question him about his scrapes and bruises, Sebastian claimed his injuries were sustained in accidents.

“Master Thorne,” the headmaster said with a scowl, “do you expect me to believe you have fallen every day this week?”

Sebastian squared his jaw. “I’ve a tendency toward clumsiness, sir.”

The headmaster sighed, perhaps sensing the futility in trying to convince Sebastian to tattle on his classmates. “Very well. Do try to be more careful. And if it so happens you incur injuries from something other than a fall, you should report it at once.”

Sebastian nodded, but he would never come to the headmaster for help. Instinctively he knew tattling would only make matters worse. He had to handle the situation himself.

In the middle of Sebastian’s second month, Patrick and his henchmen accosted him outside the stables. Sebastian loved riding. It was the only time he relaxed and felt happy at school, and now the brutes were trying to take that pleasure from him.

Fists formed at Sebastian's sides. "Stand down, you bloody bastards." His voice no longer shook when he warned off his enemies. He knew he could withstand the beatings, even though he dreaded them.

"Or what?" Patrick sneered. "You will bruise my knuckles with your ugly mug?" His cronies cackled, thinking their bigger friend clever.

Sebastian lifted a brow. "My ugly mug? Have you looked in a mirror, McGregor? Looks like your mother was bred with a beaver."

The henchmen howled with laughter and Patrick's face blazed red. His lips parted to bear his enormous buckteeth, and he charged Sebastian with his fist raised. Sebastian ducked the first swing and blocked a second, but bare knuckles slammed into his back and his knees buckled. He landed in the dirt with a thud.

One of Patrick's friends had struck him from behind.

"Get up, Miss Molly." Spittle flew from Patrick's mouth. "Get up so I can make you pay for your insult."

The searing pain in Sebastian's back ebbed; he struggled to his feet. This would end today. Either they would kill him, or he would send them crying to their mamas.

He raised his fists.

The boys surrounded him.

"Get him!" A barrage of punches hammered his body.

He landed a solid hit and elicited a yelp. Patrick and his friends would think twice before ambushing him again.

He split one of the smaller boy's lips before he was knocked to the ground. He pushed to his feet, determined to give as good as he received. He punched the boy again before Patrick kicked him in the stomach.

Sebastian landed in the dirt on his hands and knees, panting. His body screamed in pain, but he refused to surrender. He wiped a sleeve across his bloody mouth and stared at Patrick, fury burning in his heart. Never had he hated another person like he hated this jackass.

Sebastian almost gained his feet when a blond fellow dashed into the circle and slammed a fist into Patrick's cheek. The bully's lower jaw shifted to the side while

his upper teeth remained in place and gnashed his lip. For one hilarious moment, Sebastian thought he had been wrong about a beaver. Patrick's mother must have been covered by a horse.

The older boy made fast work of Sebastian's tormentor, and when Patrick lay on the ground in a lump, he turned to Patrick's friends and asked if they wanted the same treatment. They slunk away like dogs with their tails tucked. Patrick lumbered to his feet with a groan and limped away as quickly as he could.

His rescuer offered a hand up to Sebastian, but he stood without help and dusted off his trousers.

The older boy smiled. "We have not been introduced. I am Anthony Keaton."

"I know who you are." He was the Earl of Ellis, and he was a year ahead of Sebastian in school. He enjoyed a friendship with the Duke of Foxhaven's youngest son, Andrew Forest. Both boys were out of Sebastian's social realm.

"I heard a ruckus when I approached the stables. I am headed out for my morning ride," Ellis said. "Are you coming or going?"

"Going." Sebastian picked up his hat from the ground and wished he hadn't taken Onuris out already, so he could ride with the earl.

"I take my horse out every morning at this time," Ellis said. "Maybe we could ride together sometime."

Sebastian returned the earl's crooked grin. "How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow it is."

Sebastian strolled back to the dormitory with high hopes that his days at Eton were improving and that he had made a new friend.

The next morning he timed his arrival at the stables to coincide with Ellis's usual morning ride. He headed in to saddle Onuris, breathing in the scent of musky horse and pungent hay as someone else might savor the smell of fresh baked pie.

Peace settled in his bones.

Oddly, there were no grooms about, so he retrieved the tack himself. He was setting the bit in Onuris' mouth when he heard a stirring behind him. He tossed a grin over his shoulder and froze. His smile tightened then crumbled.

Patrick and his cohorts were blocking the stall door. “Where is your wet nurse, Thorne?”

Sebastian’s gaze flicked toward the closed stable door at the end of the aisle.

“Looking for your mama?” Patrick taunted, lightly smacking a riding crop against his meaty palm. “Ellis won’t be here to save you today. He has better ways to spend his time.”

A bitter taste rose at the back of Sebastian’s throat. He looked once more toward the door, hoping Patrick was lying about the earl, but Sebastian was alone in his fight once again. He took a beating like he had never known before.

Over the next few days, his tormentors’ attacks increased in intensity and duration. Sebastian lay in bed at night with the taste of his own blood feeding desperation. He couldn’t stop fighting back. If he did, he would always be a victim, but it was clear he needed to do more to break free of the belief he needed a protector.

He didn’t need Ellis. He didn’t need anyone. He only needed to prove he was better than Ellis. At fighting. At riding. At anything and everything. Sebastian couldn’t stop trying to best the earl until he proved to everyone he was superior. Soon Sebastian’s enemies would fear him more than they ever feared Ellis, and he would never suffer at someone else’s hands again.

Before Christmas break, Sebastian established a reputation for fighting like the Devil’s spawn, and everyone began to leave him alone. By the time he moved on to Oxford, challenging Ellis had become a game of sorts. One Sebastian had enjoyed playing and winning until he lost Gabrielle—the woman who could restore his sister’s position in Society and ease his troubled conscience.

If you would like to read more about Sebastian, Anthony, and Eve, their stories are available in [RIVAL ROGUES](#).