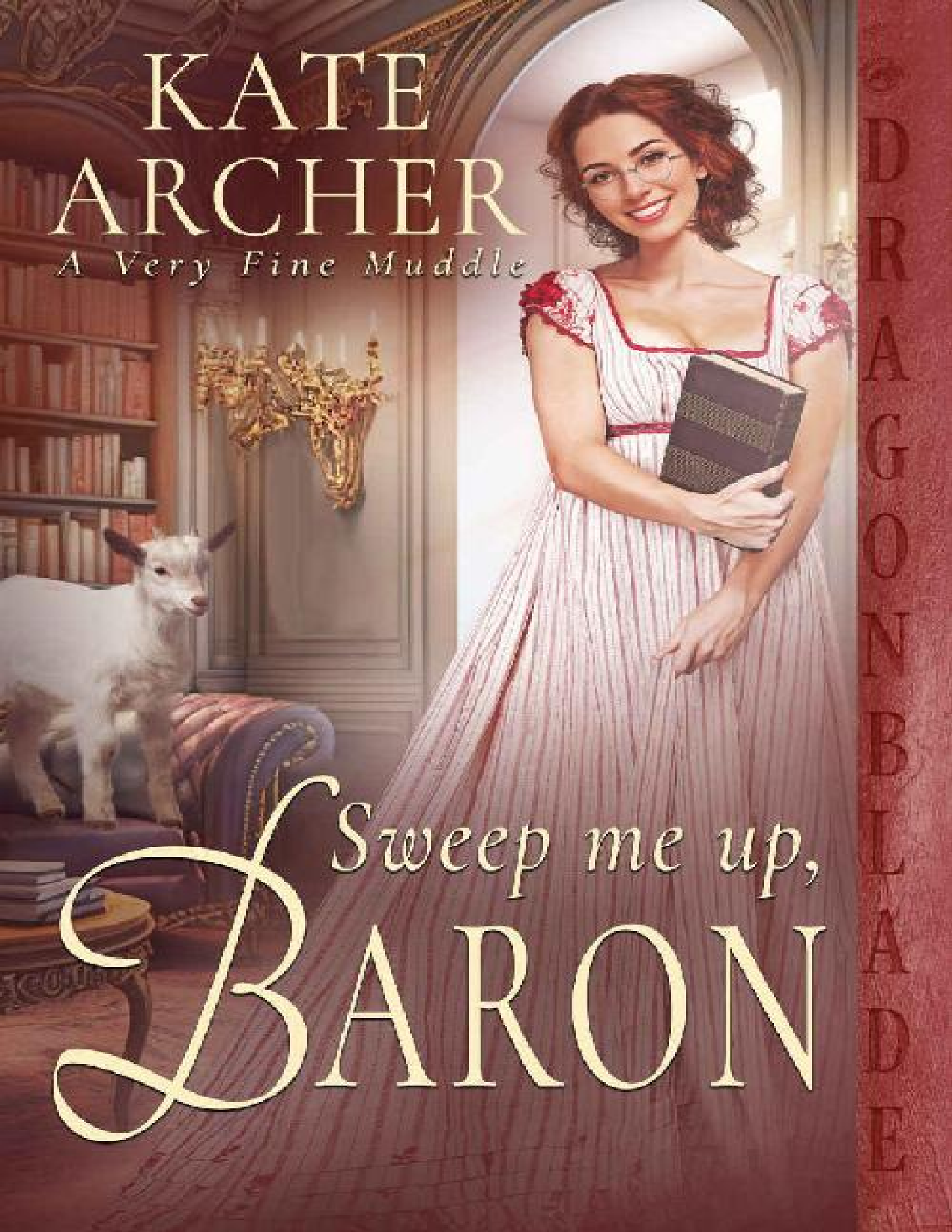


# KATE ARCHER

*A Very Fine Muddle*



*Sweep me up,*  
**BARON**

D  
R  
A  
G  
O  
N  
B  
L  
A  
D  
E

# **SWEEP ME UP, BARON**

**A Very Fine Muddle  
Book Four**

Kate Archer



# **SWEEP ME UP, BARON**

## **A Very Fine Muddle Book Four**

Kate Archer



© Copyright 2023 by Kate Archer

Text by Kate Archer

Cover by Dar Albert

Dragonblade Publishing, Inc. is an imprint of Kathryn Le Veque Novels, Inc.

P.O. Box 23

Moreno Valley, CA 92556

[ceo@dragonbladepublishing.com](mailto:ceo@dragonbladepublishing.com)

Produced in the United States of America

First Edition November 2023

Kindle Edition

Reproduction of any kind except where it pertains to short quotes in relation to advertisement promotion is strictly prohibited.

All Rights Reserved.

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons dead, is purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

License Notes:

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook, once purchased, may not be sold. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it or borrow it, or it was not given to you and given as a gift for your use only, then please return it and purchase your own copy. If a book was purchased on an unauthorized platform, then it is a pirated and/or unauthorized copy. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Do not purchase or accept pirated copies. Thank you for respecting the author's hard work. For subsidiary rights, contact Dragonblade Publishing, Inc.

© Copyright 2023 by Kate Archer

Text by Kate Archer

Cover by Dar Albert

Dragonblade Publishing, Inc. is an imprint of Kathryn Le Veque Novels, Inc.

P.O. Box 23

Moreno Valley, CA 92556

[ceo@dragonbladepublishing.com](mailto:ceo@dragonbladepublishing.com)

Produced in the United States of America

First Edition November 2023

Kindle Edition

Reproduction of any kind except where it pertains to short quotes in relation to advertising or promotion is strictly prohibited.

All Rights Reserved.

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

License Notes:

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook, once purchased, may not be resold. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it or borrow it, or it was not purchased for you and given as a gift for your use only, then please return it and purchase your own copy. If this book was purchased on an unauthorized platform, then it is a pirated and/or unauthorized copy and violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Do not purchase or accept pirated copies. Thank you for respecting the author's hard work. For subsidiary rights, contact Dragonblade Publishing, Inc.



## **ARE YOU SIGNED UP FOR DRAGONBLADE'S BLOG?**

You'll get the latest news and information on exclusive giveaways, excerpts, coming releases, sales, free books, cover reveals and more!

Check out our complete list of authors, too!

No spam, no junk. That's a promise!

[\*\*Sign Up Here\*\*](#)



*Dearest Reader;*

*Thank you for your support of a small press. At Dragonblade Publishing we strive to bring you the highest quality Historical Romance from some of the best authors in the business. Without your support, there is no 'us'. We sincerely hope you adore these stories and find some new favorites along the way.*

*Happy Reading!*

*CEO, Dragonblade Publishing*



## **ARE YOU SIGNED UP FOR DRAGONBLADE'S BLOG?**

You'll get the latest news and information on exclusive giveaways, exclusive excerpts, coming releases, sales, free books, cover reveals and more.

Check out our complete list of authors, too!

No spam, no junk. That's a promise!

[\*\*Sign Up Here\*\*](#)



*Dearest Reader;*

*Thank you for your support of a small press. At Dragonblade Publishing, we strive to bring you the highest quality Historical Romance from some of the best authors in the business. Without your support, there is no 'us', so we sincerely hope you adore these stories and find some new favorite authors along the way.*

*Happy Reading!*

*CEO, Dragonblade Publishing*

# **Additional Dragonblade books by Author K Archer**

## **A Very Fine Muddle**

[Romance Me, Viscount \(Book 1\)](#)

[Be Daring, Duke \(Book 2\)](#)

[Stand With Me, Earl \(Book 3\)](#)

[Sweep Me Up, Baron \(Book 4\)](#)

## **A Series of Worthy Young Ladies**

[The Meddler \(Book 1\)](#)

[The Sprinter \(Book 2\)](#)

[The Undaunted \(Book 3\)](#)

[The Champion \(Book 4\)](#)

[The Jilter \(Book 5\)](#)

[The Regal \(Book 6\)](#)

## **The Dukes' Pact Series**

[The Viscount's Sinful Bargain \(Book 1\)](#)

[The Marquess' Daring Wager \(Book 2\)](#)

[The Lord's Desperate Pledge \(Book 3\)](#)

[The Baron's Dangerous Contract \(Book 4\)](#)

[The Peer's Roguish Word \(Book 5\)](#)

[The Earl's Iron Warrant \(Book 6\)](#)



# **Additional Dragonblade books by Author Kate Archer**

## **A Very Fine Muddle**

[Romance Me, Viscount \(Book 1\)](#)

[Be Daring, Duke \(Book 2\)](#)

[Stand With Me, Earl \(Book 3\)](#)

[Sweep Me Up, Baron \(Book 4\)](#)

## **A Series of Worthy Young Ladies**

[The Meddler \(Book 1\)](#)

[The Sprinter \(Book 2\)](#)

[The Undaunted \(Book 3\)](#)

[The Champion \(Book 4\)](#)

[The Jilter \(Book 5\)](#)

[The Regal \(Book 6\)](#)

## **The Dukes' Pact Series**

[The Viscount's Sinful Bargain \(Book 1\)](#)

[The Marquess' Daring Wager \(Book 2\)](#)

[The Lord's Desperate Pledge \(Book 3\)](#)

[The Baron's Dangerous Contract \(Book 4\)](#)

[The Peer's Roguish Word \(Book 5\)](#)

[The Earl's Iron Warrant \(Book 6\)](#)

# Table of Contents

Title Page

Copyright Page

Publisher's Note

Additional Dragonblade books by Author Kate Archer

*Prologue*

*Chapter One*

*Chapter Two*

*Chapter Three*

*Chapter Four*

*Chapter Five*

*Chapter Six*

*Chapter Seven*

*Chapter Eight*

*Chapter Nine*

*Chapter Ten*

*Chapter Eleven*

*Chapter Twelve*

*Chapter Thirteen*

*Chapter Fourteen*

*Chapter Fifteen*

*Chapter Sixteen*

*Chapter Seventeen*

*Chapter Eighteen*

*Chapter Nineteen*

*Chapter Twenty*

*Chapter Twenty-One*

*Chapter Twenty-Two*

*Chapter Twenty-Three*

*Chapter Twenty-Four*

*Chapter Twenty-Five*

About the Author

*Chapter Nineteen*

*Chapter Twenty*

*Chapter Twenty-One*

*Chapter Twenty-Two*

*Chapter Twenty-Three*

*Chapter Twenty-Four*

*Chapter Twenty-Five*

About the Author



## PROLOGUE

SO MANY YOUNG ladies of the *ton* find that their road to love is not the stroll they had imagined it would be. Perhaps there is resistance from the part of parents which must be overcome. Perhaps the lady goes for some time unsure of her dashing fellow's feelings and intentions, until he declares himself. It might even be the case that there is some disagreement regarding the marriage contract that must be settled.

All nerve-inducing problems for the gentle young lady, to be sure.

The Bennington sisters took a somewhat different approach to it. Theirs was no hiccup or small delay or wistful week of wondering. Bennington style of traveling to an altar was more akin to climbing an Alp by one's fingertips, ignoring all signposts warning to turn back, teetering at the summit, flying blind down the other side on the wing of an avalanche, and somehow surviving the inevitable crash into a ravine.

These startling adventures were all led forward by Miss Eloise Mayton, the matron who had come to the aid of the earl and raised his daughters since their own mother had died in childbirth.

Miss Mayton was an original sort of person. She favored dress in widow's weeds, though she had never married. Her stories of past romances were even worse (and probably less true) than the best of the literature she favored. She insisted on being addressed as "Miss," though her age gave her the right to "Mrs." and one would have thought a lady in widow's weeds would prefer it.

The lady was so loosely related to the earl as to make it undiscoverable—everyone having settled on her being a very, exceedingly astoundingly, incredibly distant cousin of some sort.

But then, as the earl found out when he'd spoken with some of his relations, it would require an interesting sort of person to agree to shuffle five young girls through their youths. The prevailing opinion on such matters was that one youth was tolerable, two of them was barely tolerable, three

beginning to be a burden, four had definitively arrived at burden, and one looking for rooftops to fling oneself off of, thereby mercifully erasing all. So, eccentric Miss Mayton might be, but she had a certain grit about her for blithely taking on the task.

Prior to coming to the earl's house all those years ago, Miss Mayton claimed to have suffered several tragedies of the romantic variety while living on the continent. Nobody quite understood what she'd been doing, but she'd ever traveled to Transylvania, but everybody could agree that her weeks there had gone abominably badly.

The young Bennington ladies were raised on Miss Mayton's plentiful tales of lost love and they were inspired to have such abject devotion for their own. An outsider might find themselves faintly alarmed to hear the details of these tragedies. One after another of Miss Mayton's would-be suitors somehow come to an unfortunate and final end—mistaken hanging, untimely blows, foolhardy poisonings, an unnecessarily dramatic impalement, and even a regretful leap off a cliff.

The young Benningtons were able to overlook the more gruesome details of these various demises and only felt the romance of it—all of those who were overcome and finally defeated by an overwhelming passion. How they should like to inspire that sort of passion in some gentleman they've never seen. Though it must be said, they were determined to keep the overconfident passionate fellows alive so they might marry them. *Threats* to do a violent thing to oneself would be entirely sufficient in proving one's devotion.

Passion aside, the sisters had other standards they would insist on. Beatrice knew just the type of gentleman she sought out and was determined to marry him. Beatrice's list of requirements turned out to be so long that the father finally just threw up their hands and delivered Van Doren.

Rosalind had been insistent on courageousness, and if she had to do almost anything, these things happen.

Viola had one thing on her mind—loyalty. If her lord had even noticed that loyalty had led him to standing on a green for three duels the same morning...that really could not have been predicted.

Fortunately, it was Cordelia's turn at a season and her necessary preparations were far more straightforward. She simply wished for a man of action.

five setwished for her very own Corinthian.

nding it He would do everything expertly, of course—hunt, box, sail, race  
out her—all with the greatest of ease and aplomb. She would wave to him  
window as he rode off to do some sporting thing, then he would retur  
Maytonvictorious. Of an evening, he would relax in a chair, bone tired, wh  
7 whileentertained him with her scene from *Othello*, that poignant moment w  
1 doingis lost for Desdemona.

ess why He would be soothed by it, rediscover his energy, sweep her i  
er timearms, and carry her up the stairs.

In fact, he was always carrying her about the house and she woul  
oignantto wonder that her own feet still worked, so little did he allow her  
'or theirthem.

etails of What a glorious life they would have—she, his own dramatic actre  
ors hadhe, the sportsman extraordinaire.

ngings, She must only find him.  
ramatic

details  
fellows  
e love.  
!  
me and  
violence

n. Each  
to have  
ites had

arrange  
e, well,

entually  
s on the

quality  
on. She

wished for her very own Corinthian.

He would do everything expertly, of course—hunt, box, sail, race, fence—all with the greatest of ease and aplomb. She would wave to him from a window as he rode off to do some sporting thing, then he would return home victorious. Of an evening, he would relax in a chair, bone tired, while she entertained him with her scene from *Othello*, that poignant moment when all is lost for Desdemona.

He would be soothed by it, rediscover his energy, sweep her into his arms, and carry her up the stairs.

In fact, he was always carrying her about the house and she would begin to wonder that her own feet still worked, so little did he allow her to use them.

What a glorious life they would have—she, his own dramatic actress, and he, the sportsman extraordinaire.

She must only find him.





## CHAPTER ONE

*The Lamb at Hindon, 1805*

CORDELIA VIEWED THE months in Somerset between the London lively indeed. They had all together had a jolly time in Scotland for family elopement with Lord Baderston and then waved them off to the estate in Sussex before returning home.

The Earl of Westmont's house, which had in the past only been with the sounds of five young ladies, had changed its tone entirely.

It was true that Beatrice, Rosalind, and Viola had married and house, thereby removing their vocalizations from the sounds of the place it was also true that their trips to London invariably brought them into with some poor creature who needed a place to call home.

They had begun with four cats, then added the dog Bess and one offspring. Then, last year, they had taken in darling Chester—a scarlet who had a lot to say for himself. Between cats hissing and dogs barking Chester would shriek the word “murder” which, unfortunately, he meant “almonds.”

If someone were looking for peace and quiet in the countryside would be well advised to trot by Westmont House at a brisk pace.

Amidst all the barking and hissing and screeching, there were through the wood from Westmont House to Faversham Hall. There they would find their eldest sister Beatrice ensconced in the nursery with infant daughter Lily. Often, they would find Van Doren there too. The viscount had already been defeated by Beatrice, and now he appeared in clay in his daughter's pudgy little hands too.

Rosalind and the Duke of Conbatten came for a fortnight's visit and thrown the house into a delightful topsy-turvy. The duke's valet, Herr arrived a full five days ahead of time to ready things for Conbatten duchess, and it was well he did. It was no easy thing in a country h

assure that a duke had accommodations that included an attached room at the location of a tub that would be filled with water heated to ninety-eight degrees. He liked to bathe with his wife, she only wearing a tiara, and he had very specific standards on how it was to be done.

They'd had hopes that they might entice Viola and Lord Bader come for a visit, though they were so recently married. As it happened, it was up to her eyes in things to do at her new house. She was determined to manage the dowager, a project that seemed well underway, and she was equally determined to keep her lord safe at home after rescuing him from three different duels.

seasons  
Viola's  
their own. Their absence was thought to be no great matter—they would see their own in Town.

n filled  
left the  
ice. But  
contact The family had since set off for Portland Place, leaving Beatrice and Van Doren, and the menagerie of animals behind. Darling Lily was too young to travel, so Beatrice would spend a quiet few months watching her grandchild smiling at Van Doren as he mooned around the nursery.

Their own cats and dogs were comfortable where they were, roaming the estate and coming in when they were tired or hungry.

of her  
macaw  
marking  
thought Chester, their very charming parrot, had proved himself to be a good traveler—regularly falling off his perch and seeming as if he was a macaw. However, he had also proved himself exceedingly fond of Clara, a housewife who would stay behind and look after him. Chester would shout “noisy” and Clara would laugh and shout back, “Murder yourself, you wretch.”

le, they As Chester did not understand the words comprising the sentence, he only the friendliness of the tone, he was delighted with Clara.

re trips  
e, they The earl's carriages had meandered and detoured and stopped and started in their usual roundabout manner, arriving at The Lamb at Hindon square after they set off.

with her  
cranky  
d to be  
and had  
pri, had  
and his  
ouse to It might have taken them even longer, but they had finally developed a method of ensuring that Juliet's book of odes did not get left everywhere they stopped, as had been the usual situation. Van Doren had taken the book after she'd left it in the drawing room, drilled a hole in the corner of it, and slipped a ribbon through. Now, Juliet might carry it in her wrist and had only lost track of it twice.

Cordelia was rather surprised by the scene that met her father's carriage at the innyard of The Lamb. It was usual that when they arrived, the

room for the largest party going, and perhaps the party thought to have the precious pockets. These two ideas generally resulted in all hands very quickly to jewelry disposal.

But that was not the case this time. A party had arrived before the stone seemed to take everyone's attention. It was only one carriage, and it was small, Viola it only carried one lady and her maid, but whoever she was, she was destined to an outsize impression.

He was. Finally, a groom had been convinced to provide his service from Benningtons, though he'd seemed loathe to part with the mystery carriage.

Cordelia wasted no time inquiring of him. She leaned out the window and Viola said, "Young man, who is that lady, if you will?"

The groom looked at her in some surprise, as if it she were rather young, Vanask it.

"That is Mrs. Jordan. Mrs. Dorothy Jordan, you understand. At once and staying the night. Dorothy Jordan prefers *our* inn."

Cordelia sat back. Dorothy Jordan was one of the great actresses living the age! How fortuitous that they should encounter one another. They must

What with Mrs. Jordan's experience performing on the stage and her terrible experience performing in the drawing room, they would have much to discuss about.

Of course, being an earl's daughter, Cordelia herself would never "murder" the boards at Drury Lane, but that did not mean she could not handle the beating heart and emotional soul of an actress.

How many times had she entertained her family with Desdemona's dying words? She had perfected it, she thought privately. Shakespeare started to be proud of her interpretation, she thought very silently. She made it six days to look as if she were surprised by the applause at the end of one performance, though she really was not.

"Cordy," Juliet said, "wait until Mrs. Jordan understands there is a new actress at the inn. You might act out Desdemona for her."

"I am sure she would be delighted with it," Miss Mayton said.

"I'll not argue it," Cordelia said, "but first we must be introduced to her then invite her to dine."

They watched the lady descend from her carriage. She was a striking carriage personage and wore a hat sporting several exceedingly long ostrich plumes. It was the sort of hat that waved to the world and proclaimed, "I am no

deepest to be noticed." This would be a bold thing on a usual day but was just at their even bolder now. The lady was visibly with child.

Naturally, nothing would be mentioned regarding her expansion and waistline. For one, it was not a thing that was ever mentioned to the seemed strangers. But for a very important two, there was no *Mr. Jordan* who could be made comfortably responsible for such a state.

If there were a baby on the way, that baby would be the Duke to the Clarence's issue. Mrs. Jordan had long lived with the duke at Bushy Park. Their children were too numerous to count.

Now and Cordelia put all those ideas aside. Whatever was Mrs. Jordan's position in life, she was an actress first. She was an actress in her heart and soul.

Miss Mayton called to the groom. "Do let us down," she said. Turning to Cordelia and Juliet, she said, "Come, my girls, we do not have a moment to lose in our inn, lose."

Out of the carriage, they hurried across the innyard to come upon the Duke's side of the Jordan just as she was being led into the inn by the innkeeper himself. They first met. "Maisie dear, is that you?" Miss Mayton said, reaching Mrs. Jordan from her own side.

The lady turned and said, "I am afraid you are mistaken, my good lady."

"Heavens, so I am," Miss Mayton said. "I haven't seen my dear cousin for over twenty years, but you are so like, I hardly imagined there could be two such beauties in all England..."

Mrs. Jordan, and Cordelia supposed every other lady in the land, would be as immune to such a compliment.

"You are very kind, I'm sure," Mrs. Jordan said smiling.

Miss Mayton dramatically staggered and cried, "Wait! I know where you are. How did I not perceive it at once?"

This was taken as a further compliment, and Mrs. Jordan smiled another condescendingly.

Miss Mayton turned to Cordelia and Juliet and said, "This is the essence of Mrs. Dorothy Jordan of the stage. The greatest comedic actress who has ever acted and tread the boards."

Cordelia and Juliet curtsied very low.

"Really, madam," Mrs. Jordan said, "you are too effusive."

"Not at all," Miss Mayton said, shaking her head. "I am rather known for my times. It is not afraid of passing about unearned flattery. If I say a thing, I *mean* a thing."

perhaps “I see,” Mrs. Jordan said, appearing very pleased to hear it. “Are you?”

standing “Miss Eloise Mayton, and these are the Earl of Westmont’s daughters, Lady Cordelia and Lady Juliet.”

to might “Charmed,” Mrs. Jordan said. Cordelia could not help noticing Jordan’s eye taking in Miss Mayton’s widow’s weeds and then hearing her say she was a “miss.” People who were unacquainted with her aunt’s tragic and romantic adventures always did wonder about it.

“If I am not being too forward,” Miss Mayton said, “we would ask you to dine with us this evening. The earl will not wish to miss a chance to meet a great lady herself.”

“Oh, I...”

“Please do, Mrs. Jordan,” Cordelia said. “Papa should be heartbroken if you do not.”

“Well, I *am* traveling with just my maid...”

“Our father does admire you so,” Juliet said, “he often mentions it.”

“It cannot be comfortable to dine alone,” Miss Mayton said, “but we always do make up a very jolly party.”

“Mrs. Jordan nodded her acquiescence, and the thing was settled. Cordelia’s cousin in Bennington was to dine with the greatest actress of the time.”

“Was not life marvelous?”

was not



PERCIVAL GRANGER, BARON Harveston, reread the note he’d just opened. He thought that if anyone to have viewed him as he did it, they might describe his experience as a unique combination of dubiousness and dread.

As the founding member of *The Society for Serious Intellectual Examination*, or the *SSLE* as it was called by longstanding members, Percival often found himself in receipt of odd communications.

There were those gentlemen all across England who sought to make their names known as an intellectual. They’d drum up an original idea and then they’d go to their libraries trying to prove it by hook or by crook, no matter how tenuous or outlandish the alleged proof seemed to be. These theories eventually found their way to his door, hoping they might

and you an invitation to become a member of the SSLE.

He had only last week received such a theory from Sir Lawrence Lighters, proposing that Shakespeare was actually two people. Twins, in fact.

Lawrence gave as his evidence that Shakespeare wrote both comedy and tragedy and no writer could do both. He supposed that the writers were twins because their styles were similar—one preferring serious and the other light. The further evidence that they were twins was that anybody to see—all known portraits of the bard were very like.

“You to It was preposterous.

“Meet the Sadly, it was not as preposterous as the note he just read.

Lady Rawley, a lady who every year took one of Shakespeare’s plays and rewrote the ending to suit herself and then performed the ill-advised play for her friends, wished to join his society.

Her theatrical evenings had gained a following of sorts, not because there was anything worthy in them, but because so many viewed them as delightfully ludicrous.

and we Last season’s offering had been *Much Ado about Nothing*, in which she lost her mind, murdered Claudio at the altar, and seemed none the worse afterward. He supposed she ought to have retitled that one to *Much Ado about Something Very Bad*.

There had been others, of course. Romeo and Juliet living happily ever after and naming their firstborn Romio had been much talked of.

He did not himself attend the evenings, his excuses getting ever more creative with each passing year. Lady Rawley was under the impression that Baron Harveston carried a heavy weight of duties upon his shoulders, his attention pressed upon with ancient traditions that must be seen to on his estate in Kent. There had been a “spring steward’s ceremony,” whatever that was supposed to be.

literary Fortunately, she never inquired into the details.

he was Unfortunately, Lady Rawley also happened to be his aunt.

He read the note again, searching it for any escape tunnel he might make through or a secret door he might use as an exit to this untenable proposition.

in closet  
no matter My darling boy—

various I, of course, know how devastated you are to always miss  
to garner theatrical evenings. (A baron is called to take on so many  
responsibilities, my departed earl was never so busy!)

e Veld,  
act. Sir  
dy and  
e twins  
e other  
ere for

*I write you to tell you that I have had a smashing idea—I will  
your society of literary people. In fact, I thought I would invite  
entire acting troupe as it is only a handful of ladies.*

*This year's offering at my little theatrical soiree will be Othello  
and we will be glad to hear the various opinions of your members  
how I intend to improve on the ending.*

*All my love,  
Aunt M*

Improve on the ending of *Othello*? Good Lord, what would the man  
say and think of it? And then, not just his aunt would descend upon him,  
but a collection of ridiculous ladies who join her in her fever dream of improving  
Shakespeare's work?

Worse, there was another letter in his pile and it was from his mother  
as was very afraid it would be some directive to humor his aunt's latest  
idea.

He dug it out and tore it open.

Percival allowed it to drop from his hand and flutter to the desk. The  
letter exactly what it said. Couched among the sentiments of the important  
family and supporting one another, there it was. His mother would be  
ever appreciative if he would welcome Lady Rawley into his little club.

She'd called it a "little club."

He felt a heaviness descend upon him as he contemplated his  
future. Lady Margaret Rawley, butcher of Shakespeare, was to join the

The first salon of the season was next Tuesday. Did she know it?  
The last she just turn up?

Could he ignore the letters from Lady Rawley and his mother and  
it on the post?

Makepeace softly knocked and entered the room. "My lord, do  
you require anything?" he asked.

Percival sighed. He would have to break the news to his  
Makepeace was an intellectual in his own right and a long-standing  
valued member of the SSLE.

The society did not discriminate against any man—a man's merit  
what was evaluated. A pirate or a grocer might gain entry, if there were  
a man of suitable knowledge and discernment. Makepeace might be a

join my but he was a learned fellow with a razor-sharp intellect and in-  
my opinions.

ello Having been well acquainted with Lady Rawley over the  
ello Makepeace would take it as a heavy blow.

son "My aunt has decided to join the SSLE," he said.

Makepeace staggered just the smallest bit and then steadied him  
putting his hand on the mantel.

"Lady Rawley?" he whispered.

Percival nodded.

embers "But, my lord, an offer of membership to the society is extended  
but herwho has proven...and it is presumed all the members see the value...a  
provingcannot simply *decide* to join."

her. Hemother." "My aunt has very conveniently overlooked that point, as I  
her. Hemother."

est bad "We do not even have any lady members, but for Madame d'Arbl  
that lady only sends letters from Paris. We have never had a wom  
salon, in the actual room, in person."

hat was "That is the least of our problems. Should a lady be of a refin  
ance ofeducated mind, I see no reason why she should not attend my salor  
e mostHightower has always been welcome to join, if she ever chooses to do

Makepeace nodded. Lady Hightower was indeed an intellectual,  
liked to read and study in a solitary manner and had no interest in  
ry nearabout it at a club.

SSLE. There were a few others, too. There were two matrons in particul  
Wouldhe would have welcomed, but they had no interest in it. As far as I  
could tell, they had both allowed their husbands to imagine that they w  
l blamebrains of the operation and did not wish for the illusion to be shattered.

Someday though, he would encounter a lady with a keen intelle  
do youwas the right age and not yet married. He looked forward to that day  
would not hesitate in his pursuit of her. He was determined to marry  
butler.lady.

ng and After all, how else could it be? He must marry his intellectual eq  
when he did so, he would afford her every opportunity to pursue her e  
nd wasinterests. Theirs would be no ordinary dining table, but rather fille  
re suchinteresting and erudite conversation.

butler, He had not met such a lady yet, but he was confident that he would



sightful year, ladies as yet unknown to him arrived to Town to take their part in the society. Perhaps she was even now in a carriage, poised to enter his life in a few years, "Does Lady Rawley know about the salon next Tuesday?" Maltravers said quietly.

"I do not know, but there is worse news," Percival said.

Maltravers said, "There cannot be," Makepeace said, thereby summing up his opinion. Lady Rawley joining the society.

"Oh, I can assure you there is," Percival said. He handed Makepeace a note to read for himself.

His butler read the missive and Percival noted perspiration springing from his brow.

"She brings her *troupe*?" he said.

Percival nodded sadly.

"She rewrites the ending to *Othello*?" Makepeace whispered.

"Indeed," Percival said. "So, perhaps Desdemona does not die after all."

"Lord help us."

"I certainly hope so," Percival said, "as I do not know who else will help us."

1. Lady Rawley said so."

but she was talking

lar who Percival were the

ect who and he such a

ual and ducated ed with

d. Each

year, ladies as yet unknown to him arrived to Town to take their place in society. Perhaps she was even now in a carriage, poised to enter his life.

“Does Lady Rawley know about the salon next Tuesday?” Makepeace said quietly.

“I do not know, but there is worse news,” Percival said.

“There cannot be,” Makepeace said, thereby summing up his opinion of Lady Rawley joining the society.

“Oh, I can assure you there is,” Percival said. He handed Makepeace the note to read for himself.

His butler read the missive and Percival noted perspiration spring upon his brow.

“She brings her *troupe*?” he said.

Percival nodded sadly.

“She rewrites the ending to *Othello*?” Makepeace whispered.

“Indeed,” Percival said. “So, perhaps Desdemona does not die after all.”

“Lord help us.”

“I certainly hope so,” Percival said, “as I do not know who else could help us.”



## CHAPTER TWO

CORDELIA HAD SOUGHT out her father and he'd been apprised that the actress Mrs. Dorothy Jordan was to dine with them that evening.

He did not meet the idea with the same unbounded enthusiasm everybody else did, but then he did not fight against it either. The Westmont was a comfortable and calm sort of person and unless something was on fire, he was not likely to be unhappy. He had long operated on the idea that once a thing his daughters thought up got going, turning it back again would be as pointless as Sisyphus pushing his boulder.

The earl's butler, Tattleton, had been at the earl's side when the news was relayed, and that person had rather stronger feelings about it.

Tattleton had gasped and whispered, "An actress!"

But then, poor Tattleton had seemed to grow more tremulous every year, so Cordelia could not take the sentiment too much to heart. Neither she nor they knew what affected him so, but their relocation to Town always seemed to bring on his frayed nerves.

Cordelia thought perhaps the noise and bustle of the town was too much for his constitution.

They were already seated in a private dining room when Mrs. Jordan was escorted in by what seemed to be half the staff of the inn.

They'd since had a jolly dinner and Cordelia thought her father enjoyed himself more than he thought he would. Mrs. Jordan, being of a certain bent, was a wit of the first order. Her repartee flew like lightning from her mouth.

The dessert course came round and the innkeeper brought in a bottle of port for the earl.

"Ah, Mrs. Jordan," the earl said, "shall you take port? I ask because I once did dine with a French lady once who indulged in it. One never knows how various people's habits might be—I suppose the theater has its own traditions."

“The Frenchwoman was Madame Tussaud,” Juliet said for clarification. “You might have seen her wax figures at the Lyceum two months ago. She was very fond of port and drank three glasses in a matter of minutes.”

Mrs. Jordan said, “I am not opposed to port on occasion, but when I am...in a certain condition, I lose all taste for it.”

This silenced the party, as nobody wished to inquire into the Earl of Clarence’s whereabouts while his mistress traveled the countryside alone.

“Mrs. Jordan,” Miss Mayton said, always willing to step into an awkward breach, “you are in for quite the treat this evening. We will have something special surprise, but first I will read aloud from a novel we have just brought on the road.”

“It is *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale*,” Cordelia said. “It tells of a duke hopelessly in love with his gentle governess. Her father, Mr. Denbrow, lives in the dale and refuses to sanction the marriage. We are entirely surprised by that turn of events because her father is the poorest man in the county and the duke is the richest.”

“That does seem surprising,” Mrs. Jordan said.

“Doesn’t it just?” the earl said. “But then we discovered that Mr. Denbrow was willing to part with his daughter for all the money the duke offered—making *him* the richest and the duke the poorest.”

“The duke has agreed to it,” Juliet said. “What else could he do, I suppose, when he is in love?”

“But there is one thing that troubles Mr. Denbrow, who is now very much so,” Cordelia said. “The duke would only agree to the idea if he were named as Mr. Denbrow’s heir.”

“Ah, very sensible,” Mrs. Jordan said. “The duke will get his money and enjoy it in the end.”

“Yes, but when is the end and how is the end?” Miss Mayton asked, seeking mysteriously. “This is what lingers in Mr. Denbrow’s mind.”

“He’s terribly tortured over it,” Juliet said happily.

Miss Mayton nodded. “All right, chapter three.”

*Mr. Denbrow should have been a happy man. He had entirely transformed what had been a ramshackle hovel into a place of luxury and comfort.*

*And yet, there were ideas that insisted on troubling his mind*

further disturbing his sleep. He knew that the duke and his own daughter  
ten years ago lived in poverty now. They still had a grand house, but they'd had  
killed all the servants and they now lived exclusively in the drawing  
room to save on firewood. They had to chop the wood themselves  
never I themselves these days and neither of them were very good at it.

While the duke seemed satisfied with the arrangement, his  
daughter appeared rather less sanguine to find herself a duchess with  
nothing to show for it. Her unhappiness was nothing, though,  
compared to the duke's fired servants.

More than half the village had been employed in that house  
the stares and threats Mr. Denbrow got from those persons were  
terrorizing. More alarming, the duke was named his heir. He also  
got the feeling that somebody might murder him to get their job back.

It was beginning to drive him mad. At night, he could not sleep  
the imagined footsteps outside his window. During the day, he had  
dared to venture out, as some disgruntled person might catch  
alone and unawares.

It was such a burden to be rich!

His kitchen maid hurried in with a note. "This just got slipped  
under the door," she said. "Probably another one of those notes  
about how you're gonna die."

"Stop saying that, you wretch!" he said, ripping the note from  
hands.

The kitchen maid shrugged and left him alone. He tore open  
note and was despondent to see that the kitchen maid had been right.  
It was another message about how he was going to die. This time  
somebody proposed that he would be tied to a tree and covered  
honey near a beehive and then after he was stung so many times  
he was weakened he would be thrown down a well.

Miss Mayton closed the book. "So, now we wonder, will Mr. Denton  
murdered and if so, will it be a villager or perhaps even the duke himself?

Mrs. Jordan snorted. "That is...a unique piece of literature. It is  
to know if it is a comedy or tragedy."

"All these books do end happily, if that is a clue," Juliet said.

"Happily for who?" Mrs. Jordan asked.

After  
d to  
ring  
own  
his  
with  
ugh,  
and  
ere  
lost  
ck.  
for  
rdly  
him  
ped  
otes  
her  
the  
ght.  
me,  
l in  
that  
row be  
elf?"  
difficult

“The romantic couple—the duke and his gentle governess,” Juliet seemed faintly surprised that she would have to explain that point.

Mrs. Jordan laughed and said, “That won’t do Mr. Denbrow much

“We cannot fathom how it will all play out, Mrs. Jordan,” the earl said. “The books Miss Mayton finds for us are always so filled with twists and turns. I quite lose sleep over them sometimes.”

Mrs. Jordan nodded to the earl, looking vastly amused.

“Now we come to the special surprise I mentioned earlier,” Miss Mayton said.

“There is another story even more surprising than Mr. Denbrow’s difficulties?” Mrs. Jordan asked.

“Ah yes,” Miss Mayton said, “and it is a story you will know well. Cordelia, and this is the great surprise, is *also* an actress.”

Mrs. Jordan turned to her. “An earl’s daughter? On the stage?”

“Gracious no,” the earl said. “I would never allow such a thing.”

“I only perform for the family,” Cordelia said. “But I do it often.” She added for further clarification.

“She’s Desdemona,” Juliet said. “You will not believe your eyes.”

Cordelia rose and attempted to ignore the fluttering in her stomach. She was not at all nervous as a performer, but this *was* Mrs. Dorothy Jordan.

“Now, what I have done, Mrs. Jordan,” Cordelia said, “is refashion Desdemona’s tragic death scene by removing the other actors’ parts in it.”

She noted Mrs. Jordan’s brow wrinkle, so Cordelia hurriedly explained. “As I am always my entire troupe and do not have other actors to employ.”

“Ah, yes, I see,” Mrs. Jordan said.

“Also,” Juliet added helpfully, “it’s faster and more exciting than having to listen to Othello drone on and on.”

“Yes, it would be,” Mrs. Jordan said, a smile playing at the edges of her lips.

Cordelia walked to the fireplace and draped herself elegantly against the mantel. “Alas!” she cried. “He is betrayed and I undone! O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!”

She raised her head and took on a faraway look, as if she were viewing the afterlife ahead of her. Cordelia raced across the room, bowed dramatically and turned to her audience. “Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight! But half an hour! But while I say one prayer!”

et said, Cordelia viewed Mrs. Jordan and became very encouraged; the lady leaning forward in her chair. Now, it was time for the final poignant moment good.” She ran to the inn’s window and banged dramatically on it. “O, my lord, I have been falsely murdered! A guiltless death die I! Nobody, I myself. Fare you well and commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!”

Cordelia slowly sank to the ground and lay still.

Among the loud applause from her family, Mrs. Jordan roared with laughter.

Cordelia opened one eye. Mrs. Jordan was clapping along with the rest of the company, but she was laughing too. What did it mean?

She scrambled to her feet. Mrs. Jordan rose and walked to her, grasping her hands. “That was astonishingly good, Lady Cordelia. It is a shame that you will never walk the boards of Drury Lane, you have a natural gift for acting —you could have been one of the best.”

Cordelia was nodding and smiling, but thoroughly confused. “How can it be, then,” she thought, “that Mrs. Jordan taken Desdemona’s tragic death as comedy?”

The lady turned to the table. “Earl, you have a charming family. I really do appreciate the entertainments you have provided this night, it is so rare to find a man who can ever truly entertain. I bid you all a fond goodnight as in my country we do need my rest.”

She curtsied to the earl, blew a kiss to Juliet, patted Cordelia’s cheek, and then swept out of the room.

After the door closed behind her, the earl rose and said, “Welcome home, Cordelia. Now, I think we should follow Mrs. Jordan’s lead and retire to bed. We are fresh in the morning.”

As Cordelia fairly staggered up the stairs to the bedchamber she shared with Miss Mayton and Juliet, her sister patted her arm and whispered to her, “I am afraid Mrs. Jordan is not very familiar with *Othello*.”

“Even so,” Cordelia said, “how on earth could she think it a comedy?” As they entered the chamber and Lynette shut the door behind them, Miss Mayton said, “It occurs to me that while actresses can seem as if they have many original ideas, they are only reciting what they have memorized. They do not need to have the slightest bit of real intelligence.”

“So,” Cordelia said slowly, “you think Mrs. Jordan did not understand the live interpretation of Desdemona because she is stupid?”

“Well, I do not see what else it could be,” Miss Mayton said.

dy was “Really, it is the only explanation that fits, Cordy,” Juliet said.  
oment. Cordelia nodded, somewhat soothed over the idea that Mrs. I  
falsely, Jordan must be a dolt.  
irewell!



ed with PERCIVAL HAD TAKEN Pericles to the park, which would suit them both.

His horse was a bay stallion descended from Highflyer and wo  
he rest, tolerate being exercised by grooms for too many days together. On t  
occasions he had been, he'd been known to kick down a stable door c  
rasping off his rider.

me you As for himself, Percival found riding alone very conducive to th  
comedy Pericles' steady gait soothed him and allowed him to examine w  
matter was on his mind.

low on They both preferred the early afternoon, before the crowds strea  
for the great parade of the *ton*. During that time-honored tradition, ger  
greatly would showcase their horsemanship in a ridiculous fashion, no  
e that annoying their horses. Ladies would come dressed in their best  
dition I pretending they did not think they would encounter anybody on the

Conversations about nothing of import would be had and gossip wo  
ek, and traded like tea from the Far East. He found the whole thing tedious.

In the relative quiet before the rush, he was pondering his opinions  
I done, SSLE's current salon topic—what was the real relationship b  
e so we Shakespeare's lost play *Cardenio* and Theobald's play *Double Fals*

Had Theobald ever really had *Cardenio* in his possession and edit  
e would become *Double Falsehood*?

ispered, He expected there to be wide-ranging views on the matter, whi  
excellent. An intellectual salon was not very interesting if all parties  
ly?” on a topic.

n, Miss As Pericles followed the carriage road without requiring di  
have so Percival's thoughts meandered through everything he knew or suspe  
d. They the subject.

From somewhere outside himself a voice clamored for his attention  
and my “Percy! Percy, dear!”

As if being pulled by a rope, he was instantly yanked from his p



reverie and into the present day of the park.

Dorothy     And his aunt's carriage.

              And his aunt hanging out the carriage window and waving to him.

              She was directing her coachman to approach him. What could he  
              her? He had not answered her letter about joining the SSLE. He'd plan  
              but he'd found it impossible. He did not want to be unkind and tell her  
              away, and he did not want to be a liar by telling her she was welcome.

uld not     He'd wished the whole thing would just go away on its own. A  
the fewLady Rawley was a flighty sort of person, might she not have changed  
or buckmind and decided to try out hot air ballooning instead?

              “My dear nephew,” she said.

inking.     “Aunt,” Percival said. “You are early to the park.”

hatever     “Yes, well you see, I went to your house and was told you were

              Lady Rawley said.

med in     “Makepeace told you?” Percival said, working to keep the surprise  
ntlemenhis voice. He would have thought his butler would have closely guard  
doubtlocation from his aunt.

t while     “Goodness, no,” Lady Rawley said. “You know Makepeace—grim  
outing.undertaker as always. I sent him into your library to fetch a book I wi  
ould beread. It's called the *Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale*. Lady Agatha s  
very good.”

s on the     “I am absolutely certain no such book would make an appearance  
etweenlibrary.”

ehood?     “As I thought, but I knew it would occupy Makepeace for a s  
ed it toamount of time. He said you'd never have it, but I said you did and h  
go and look. Then I worked on your footman. Goodness, the poor fell  
ch washaken when I threatened to dismiss him. How on earth did he think  
agreeddo it?”

              “Dismiss him?” Percival asked, his incredulity apparent.

rection,     “Never mind that,” Lady Rawley said, “after he told me where  
cted ongone, I explained I could only dismiss my own servants but never  
heart for it, then I gave him a guinea and he was right as rain.”

1.           “Aunt, I would ask that you refrain from—”

pleasantRawley said, waving her hands. “I really was forced to it as it was ne  
that I speak with you.”

“Oh?”

“You did get my letter, did you not? About your little literary club?”

“*The Society of Serious Literary Examination* is not a ‘little’ club, I should say to Percival said stiffly. “It is comprised of England’s most accomplished to, intellectuals who take an interest in literature and wish to exchange ideas with other likeminded people. We hold salons where that activity takes place.”

“Excellent, the salon, just as I thought,” Lady Rawley said. “I’ll be there after all, Tuesday, is it not?”

“Well, I...”

“Of course it is, I wrangled that out of your young footman too.”

“Aunt, I really do not know if my salon is, well I’m not sure if it will be...you see, it’s likely to be rather dull to someone of your temperament here,”

“Say no more, my dear nephew, I understand you perfectly.”

“Do you?” Percival asked, both perplexed and cautiously joyful. “I’ve been used to see from whole thing just gone away?”

“I will do it, have no fear on the front.”

“Do what?” Percival asked, beginning to fear on that front.

“I will keep my enormous creativity under wraps. I realize your lack of imagination is not likely to excel at imagination, being so mired in facts all the time. I shall not intimidate them with my prowess—it’s not their fault!”

Intimidate them with what? With her imagination?

Percival gripped his reins until his knuckles were white. He felt like he was trapped in a net fighting for an escape.

“I will even go so far as to speak to the other ladies I will bring them to you. After all, your intellectuals do not tread the hallowed boards as if they were allowing our creative visions to soar. You already know Lady Agnes and I could Mrs. Robinson of course. And then I intend to invite a certain Miss Mayton and her niece, Lady Cordelia Bennington. I’m certain they will accept.”

“Miss Mayton?”

“Very helpful woman, she assisted me several times when I found myself in a bit of a pinch. But goodness, perhaps you know her already. She is Darden’s aunt and I had quite forgotten you were a member of that little club.”

“*The Young Bucks Club*,” Percival said stonily.

He certainly did know Miss Mayton. Everybody either knew her or had heard of her. She was a spinster dressed in widow’s weeds who spun out

tales of suicidal lotharios knocking themselves off in one absurd way  
?" another. Nobody could quite figure out if she were senile or an inveterate  
club," or just liked to amuse herself by shocking people.

plished My God, it was bad enough that the members would be faced with  
as with aunts and her two cronies, but Miss Mayton too! It was a nightmare  
e." out in real life.

It is on "Now, what is it we will be discussing on Tuesday?"

"Whether Theobald's *Double Falsehood* is really based on Shakespeare's  
*Cardenio*," Percival said dully.

"I've never heard of either play, but I am looking forward to meeting  
t would your friends. I *will* need their input for this year's theatrical! And do  
ent." me you cannot attend me this time—I checked with your footman and  
he's not heard of any spring steward's ceremony scheduled for this year.  
Was there quite free, is that not delightful?"

Lady Rawley rapped her cane on the roof of her carriage and  
"Smith, carry on!"

As Percival watched his aunt's carriage depart, he had a sinking  
feeling his salon would never be the same again.  
time. I

be a fish

; along.  
we do,  
tha and  
Mayton  
"

myself  
s Lord  
'ellow's

or knew  
rageous

tales of suicidal lotharios knocking themselves off in one absurd way after another. Nobody could quite figure out if she were senile or an inveterate liar or just liked to amuse herself by shocking people.

My God, it was bad enough that the members would be faced with his aunt and her two cronies, but Miss Mayton too! It was a nightmare playing out in real life.

“Now, what is it we will be discussing on Tuesday?”

“Whether Theobald’s *Double Falsehood* is really based on Shakespeare’s *Cardenio*,” Percival said dully.

“I’ve never heard of either play, but I am looking forward to meeting all your friends. I *will* need their input for this year’s theatrical! And do not tell me you cannot attend me this time—I checked with your footman and he says he’s not heard of any spring steward’s ceremony scheduled for this year. You are quite free, is that not delightful?”

Lady Rawley rapped her cane on the roof of her carriage and said, “Smith, carry on!”

As Percival watched his aunt’s carriage depart, he had a sinking feeling his salon would never be the same again.



## CHAPTER THREE

MISS MAYTON AND Juliet had spent the passing days in the convincing Cordelia that Mrs. Dorothy Jordan was an idiot who would know a tragic and poignant scene if it hit her over the head with her overdressed bonnet.

Her confidence having been greatly restored, Cordelia found rather sanguine over the matter. For one, so many of her relations adopted interpretation of Desdemona's demise. The only person who was not over by it was Beatrice's husband, Van Doren. The viscount was such that if Mrs. Jordan chose to align herself with him, well that was unfortunate comment on the lady's judgment.

For another, they were closing in on London. Somewhere in the was her Corinthian. Somewhere was a strapping gentleman with a muscular that his tailor almost despaired of encasing them in material. Corinthian was no doubt doing something sporting at this moment wondering when his lady would present herself. *He* would adopt Desdemona.

And then as a further distraction, she, Juliet, and Miss Mayton had come upon a remarkable scene at The Angel at Hindon. The earl was in the yard, no doubt conferring with the innkeeper regarding their dinner when they had been drawn to the door to the kitchens over what they'd heard.

The smallest and loveliest of gentle calls, the kind only a baby and some sort could make.

They peeked round the doorframe and were delighted to see an gentleman holding a kid, the baby goat certainly being no older than days.

"Can't you help me out? His ma died this morning," the man said.

"We are not serving goat at The Angel," the cook said.

Juliet gasped. Cordelia grabbed at Miss Mayton's sleeve.

"Serving?" the man cried. "I just want some milk for it! Just en-

hold me over until I can sell the little mite.”

The cook took a moment to realize that the goat was not being prepared for somebody’s dinner. He said, “I see your plight, old fella, but I can’t give out food and drink to everybody who comes along and asks. You’re dismissed.”

“I don’t know what to do,” the old man said, shaking his head. “This is the last goat and a billy at that, all but useless as we won’t get no milk from it. Aye, the wife wants to cook him up but I can’t bring myself to do it. I would not say I’m soft and I’m afraid I am.”

Cordelia looked at her aunt and Juliet. They looked back. They all nodded.

They burst into the kitchen. Cordelia said, “Sir, we cannot allow that darling little baby to suffer. You must tell your wife that a bowled creature has been adopted into a loving home.”

“Adopted?”

“This is Lady Cordelia and that is Lady Juliet, daughters of the Westmont. I am Miss Mayton,” her aunt said, “I can assure you that an enchanting creature shall live in the lap of luxury.”

“Luxury?” the man asked, seeming as if he had not considered the outcome as a possibility.

“We will pay you handsomely,” Miss Mayton said. She turned to Cordelia and Juliet. “Your father still gives me a clothing allowance, but I can only wear the black bombazine.”

“You are so good, Aunt,” Cordelia said. She turned to the gentleman and said, “Tell us, what is the little fellow’s name?”

“Name?”

“Goodness, he does not even have a name yet,” Cordelia said.

“My own name is Jim Carpenter,” the man said, doffing his hat.

“That does not help us, I do not think,” Cordelia said.

“I think we should call him Lord Darling, Marquess of Basingstoke,” Juliet said.

“Oh that is perfect,” Cordelia said. “Lord Darling.”

“Lord...”

“Here is three pounds, Mr. Carpenter,” Miss Mayton said. “Now, how much will we require? How much milk will we need for Lord Darling?”

Mr. Carpenter took the money and handed Lord Darling into Cordelia’s arms.

arms.

proposed He was a lovely little thing, round eyes drooping with sleep and li  
n't givewagging.

I'd be "I brought a glass bottle, works just fine, been using it for year

Carpenter said, pulling out a small bottle from his coat. "You're gonna  
his heremixture of half milk, half buttermilk, dosed with a bit of sugar. He dr  
lk fromlast of what I had not an hour ago so he should be set up for now."

it. She The cook had been looking back and forth at the goings-on, and p  
wishing everyone would leave his kitchen. Miss Mayton said to him,  
ll threeprepare the mixture, my good sir, and have it ready for when we dir  
may put it on the earl's bill."

you or The cook nodded, and Cordelia got the feeling he viewed then  
dorableeccentric. They were not though—who could leave adorable Lord Da  
the winds of fate?

"Now," Miss Mayton said, "we'd best go and acquaint your fath  
Earl ofthis turn of events."

ou, this "Poor Papa," Juliet said. "He is bound to be very surprised."

Mr. Carpenter looked alarmed over the idea of the earl being su  
ed thatHe said, "No returns!" and fled the kitchen.

Cordelia carefully carried Lord Darling into the inn, while Juliet ar  
ned toMayton cooed over him and petted his head.

hough I "Papa," Juliet said, stepping in front of Cordelia just as their fath  
inside. "A very surprising thing has happened that absolutely could  
elderlyavoided but you are not to worry as it has all come out right."

The earl was such an even-keeled sort of fellow, but even he mus  
concern when a young Bennington explained that something was sur  
could not be avoided, and there was no need to worry.

"Oh dear," he said, "what has happened?"

Juliet stepped aside and Cordelia said, "This is Lord Darlin  
;stoke," discovered him in terrible straits in the kitchen."

"In the kitchen?" the earl said. "He is very young for that!"

If their father had somehow, and entirely on his own, come  
conclusion that Lord Darling had just been rescued from a stew po  
w whatneither Cordelia nor Juliet ever liked to correct their father.

"Never fear, Papa," Juliet said, "he is ours now."

rdelia's "Well, hmm, of course, I am not opposed to having a goat on the

there is plenty of room, but there is the matter of getting him the little tail should not wish to turn back now. We are nearly at London's door and taken almost a fortnight to get this far."

s," Mr. "No, of course we would not turn round," Cordelia said. "We should need him to Town with us. He will like the back garden, I think."

ank the "You ought not worry over anything, Papa," Juliet said. "We bottle and understand the recipe for milk. We have things well in hand probably As the earl generally did not like to worry over things, his brow "Please and he shrugged. The innkeeper approached and he said, "My lady, ie. You take the kid to the stables for the night?"

"The *stables*?" Cordelia said, clutching Lord Darling to her breast. "A poor baby cannot sleep in the stables."

rling to "He cannot?" the innkeeper asked.

"Certainly not," Cordelia said. "He must be kept warm and we must be with him every few hours and most of all he must feel secure that he has a family that will care for him."

"Can you imagine what he would think if he were to find himself surprised in the stables, with only horses looming over him?" Juliet asked.

"I cannot imagine," the innkeeper said resignedly. "I will make every arrangement. A basket with bedding, I suppose."

"Soft bedding, if you please sir," Cordelia said. "Lord Darling has a cold and must rest."

not be Lord Darling nuzzled her and surely he knew he had been lucky in coming upon the Benningtons. It seemed that wherever they went, the animals were to present themselves. They were very like Saint Nicholas, calling all orphaned creatures to their side.

"He will stay in the back garden?" the earl said softly. "In Town, he will not be in the house?"

ig. We "He will adore the garden, Papa," Cordelia said. "I am sure of it."



to the  
t, well, THE SERVANTS' HALL of Portland Place had emptied, only leaving the  
remaining at table.

Horace Tattleton, butler to the Earl of Westmont, had spent his life on the estate,



re. Weintervening months between the London seasons in a slow recovery  
d it hasharrowing ordeal.

Shocking rumors, three proposed duels, an elopement en masse-  
all takeone butler stand up to all of it? If that butler be in service to the Benni  
there seemed to be little choice.

have a It had been usual that the quiet of the countryside would rest  
.” shattered nerves following one of the Bennington ladies having gone t  
clearedher season and then somehow got married by the end of it.

, may I Unfortunately, the countryside was no longer very quiet, what wi  
cats, two dogs, and a parrot milling about the place.

t. “This Really, though, it was the parrot. He would never get used  
creature. He would never be comfortable entering the drawing room  
having “murder” shouted at him.

ist feed He had been grateful to hear that they were to leave that bird to t  
; a newof a housemaid. At least he would not be shrieked at while he was in T

Just now, Tattleton scolded himself for his foolhardiness in think  
alone inwas fortunate to get away from the parrot. Of course they could not p  
arrive to Portland Place without some pathetic creature in tow. It ha  
e somebeen his mistake to never have imagined it would be a goat!

How? How had they possibly found a goat that needed taking in?  
as been His name was, supposedly, Lord Darling. He was, supposedly, to  
the back garden and be no trouble to anybody.

But then had come the details accompanying the “no trouble to an  
needyclaim. According to Lady Cordelia, the kid was too young to stay alon  
Francis,back garden just yet, would require a proper bed in the servants’ hall, i  
kept cozy, and would need feedings every few hours of a warmed and  
I mean.mixture of milks and sugar.

Oh, no trouble at all!

He stared down at the little creature, who was just now doing sor  
odd. It would attempt a hop and then stumble and try again. Where  
think it was going? The ceiling?

“There we are, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, coming in, “eve  
e butleris settled above stairs and the maids and footmen had gone to their bed

He nodded and poured them both a brandy.

ent the “I suppose we must be cheerful over not having had to prepare a  
dinner on the night of our arrival. Lord Darden is not expected back t

from until the morrow and so we have had a quiet and easy night of it. Tomorrow will be time for bustle.”

—could “Easy, you say?” He pointed at the goat, who was just now chewing on the corner of the tablecloth. “Where do you think this is going, Mrs. Huffson?”

Do you believe this creature will ever really move to the back garden?” Mrs. Huffson’s brow wrinkled and Tattleton well knew what to do through her. The lady did not like to predict disaster, but she could not help face the facts! They had a goat in the servants’ hall and it was not likely to be anywhere else. What it would do, as he knew from past experience with such creatures, was grow, get into things, and cause no end of trouble.

to that “Perhaps to cheer yourself, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, “you must remember that Lady Cordelia is far less likely to get herself into scrapes than others were. She claims that all she looks for is an athletic sort of exercise. It seems straightforward enough.”

own. Straightforward. Mrs. Huffson was an eternal optimist. The Bennings had never done a straightforward thing in their lives. Straightforward possibly did not set off for Town and then pick up a goat along the way!

and only “I reckon there will be no end of fellows fitting the description,” Mrs. Huffson said. “All she need do is pick out the one she prefers, easy on the eye.”

live in Tattleton shook his head. “I am very sorry to say it, Mrs. Huffson, but I am beginning to think you are a touch naïve.”

bybody”

e in the

must be



specialCORDELIA HAD LEAPT out of bed early that morning. It was her first pro- in Town as a lady who was out in society and it felt marvelous.

She’d run down to the kitchens to see how Lord Darling was getting on. Nothing Charlie, Cook’s righthand in the kitchens, had taken a shine to the little one he did it. Of course, he would. It had been Charlie that had brought them the kittens who had since grown into marvelous specimens. It had been everybody that had helped Bess birth her pups when it was very suddenly realized she was pregnant.

After seeing Lord Darling had been given his breakfast and was full-on determined little hops round the servants’ hall, she gave him all the good-byes and returned to Town.

narrowseemed to require and went above stairs to the breakfast room.

Miss Mayton had come down early too, quickly followed by Julie  
ving onspent a marvelous quarter hour going through the invitations that had  
uffson?arrived.

” Miss Mayton suddenly exclaimed. “Oh, I knew it should be so  
roubledknew it.”

ing the “What is it, Aunt?” Cordelia said, leaning forward.

7 to go “Lady Rawley. You will remember that I have stepped into the br  
h otherher theatrical evenings several times.”

“You think of your triumph last season as Benedick in *Much Ado*  
u might*Nothing*,” Juliet said, buttering a piece of toast.

han the “Just so,” Miss Mayton said. “Well, listen to what she writes me no  
fellow.

*My dear Miss Mayton—*

ingtons *Words cannot express the thanks I owe you for your past assistanc*  
people *my little theatricals. I feel as if we are one thespian speaking*  
*another. Who could forget your inspired turn as Benedick? Who c*  
,” Mrs. *not still dream of your dazzling portrayal of Cymbeline—*  
as you *expressions of surprise so elegantly increasing to shock and the*  
*dramatic fall to the ground!*

n, but I *I pray you feel the honor of what I am now to convey to yo*  
*would be delighted if you would consent to join my troupe of actor.*  
*a permanent member. You would attend all our rehearsals, pla*  
*part on the night, and come with us to Lord Harveston’s liter*  
*salons.*

per day *We have recently joined the Society for Serious Liter*  
*Examination and we look forward to gathering opinions from th*  
ing on. *learned people. (Just a note on that, though—I have assured L*  
le lord. *Harveston that we will work to keep our superior creativity*  
eir four *imagination under wraps so that we do not intimidate any of*  
Charlie *members with it.)*

ed that *Now, I do realize you have your own duties to attend to, be*  
*chaperone to the Bennington girls. I have been told this season i*  
making *be Lady Cordelia’s. Do you suppose she would not m*  
pets he *accompanying you to our little activities?*

*If you are amenable to this invitation, please do write back in*

haste. The literary salon is on Tuesday and I could convey you there in my carriage.

t. They  
already

Margaret Rawley.

! I just “That is marvelous!” Cordelia cried.

“Just wait until she finds out you are an actress too, Cordy,” Juliet

“Yes, indeed,” Miss Mayton said. “I will write her back and make each at clear. Goodness, we are to join an acting troupe.”

“And my glorious Corinthian gentleman will likely come to about Rawley’s theatrical to see me,” Cordelia said. “Then, he will know expect when we are at home and he requires entertainments after an day of sporting.”

“What do you suppose you will do at a literary salon?” Juliet asked

“Perhaps our aunt could read from *The Dreadful Doings of L* e at *Dale*?” Cordelia asked. “They’re probably always looking for s literature and nobody knows how to find them as well as you do, Aunt

“That is always a possibility,” Miss Mayton said nodding. “I course, the members may well wish to see your Desdemona if they ar mood for something particularly poignant.”

In the distance, they could hear the front doors crash open. Juli from her seat. “Can that be Darden already? So early in the day?”

“Goodness, we did not expect him until dinner,” Miss Mayton said

Lord Darden himself came into the breakfast room and braced him the onslaught of sisters. It was a deal more manageable than it had been past, as only Cordelia and Juliet remained in the house.

Cordelia had leapt up and threw her arms around her brother, as Juliet from the other side.

“Our dear brother.”

“Dear Darden.”

“My sisters, Miss Mayton, I am so pleased to see you,” Darden said somewhere behind someone’s India shawl.

“How is it you are here so early?” Cordelia asked.

“I was only in Kent, and I set off before sunrise,” Darden said. Cahill and Dunston, we were staying at Dunston’s house you understand my sisters were arriving and I must not tarry.”

“You are a very good sort of brother, Darden,” Cordelia said.

ere Darden laughed and said, "Now unhand me so I can be a still *br* sort of brother."

They did unhand him and took back their places at the table. Darden filled a plate from the sideboard.

"Father is not yet down?" he asked.

said. "Not yet," Miss Mayton said. "I believe the journey tires him, the like that is too good to say so."

Darden returned with his plate and sat down. "How long did it take Lady this time?" he asked.

what to "Thirteen days," Juliet said.

arduous "Thirteen?" Darden said laughing. "From Taunton? I suppose managed to entertain no end of people."

l. At that, the uncomfortable memory of Mrs. Dorothy Jordan came to embrace everyone's mind.

superior "We only dined with an actress," Juliet said. "I do not know if you know this, Darden, but they can be rather stupid."

then of "Nothing between the ears at all," Miss Mayton confirmed.

e in the "I suppose that's why they have such a terrible reputation," Juliet said. Darden snorted. "Yes, that must be why."

et leapt "I wrote an ode about it," Juliet said. "*Ode to Incomprehension.*"

"I see," Darden said. "Well I am surprised Cordelia did not know a famous actress."

self for Cordelia took on a stoic look and said, "I am afraid Mrs. Jordan and I are in their different spheres, with different understandings."

"Yes, I suppose you would," Darden said. "Any other adventures Cordelia did I do not see any wildlife roaming about so that seems a good sign."

Tattleton cleared his throat from the sideboard. "We have acquired a new lord."

"Surely not, Tattleton," Darden said.

id from The butler let out a long and protracted sigh to indicate his seriousness.

"His name is Lord Darling, Marquess of Basingstoke," Cordelia said, glad to be off the subject of Mrs. Jordan.

"I told you so," Darden said. "He is not even a week old and the most charming little thing you have ever seen," Juliet said.

"I suppose he's roaming round the garden," Darden said.

"Hah!" Tattleton said, then turned on his heel and stalked out.

*eathing* After the butler had closed the door rather loudly, Cordelia said  
Darling *will* be in the garden when he's grown a bit and is strong enou  
, whilenow, he's in the servants' hall."

Darden nodded. "That explains Tattleton, then."

"Guess what else, Darden," Juliet said, "Cordelia and our aunt are  
ough hean acting troupe."

"Acting? As in acting on the stage?" Darden said, his concern writ  
ike youover his features. "You did not get that idea from Mrs. Jordan?"

"Do not worry, Lord Darden, it is all very respectable," Miss D  
said. "We are joining Lady Rawley's acting troupe, for her famed th  
se youevening."

"Ah, the theatrical evening..." Darden said, "I did not realize  
ame to famed."

"And guess what else?" Juliet said. "The acting troupe is to atten  
u knowHarveston's salon on literature."

"The SSLE?" Darden said, seeming a bit incredulous.

"The very one," Miss Mayton said.

aid. "We wonder if Miss Mayton will be asked to read from *The D  
Doings of Dembric Dale*," Cordelia said.

"No," Darden said, "definitely not. Not one of our aunt's books  
t fancybooks would not be suitable for such a salon. Really, I am not cert  
should go at all. It will not be the right...environment...to showcase  
id I livedon't know what I'm saying."

"The salon is on Tuesday," Miss Mayton said, "Lady Rawley has  
of note?offered to take us in her own carriage."

Seeing as how his reservations were entirely ignored as if they'd n  
a goat,spoken, Lord Darden smiled weakly.

"I suppose you've sorted out Cordy's voucher for Wednesday, D  
Juliet asked.

ness. The lord nodded. "Almack's is well in hand—vouchers secur  
ia said,tickets purchased."

"Excellent," Miss Mayton said. "We feel very sure that Co  
ve everCorinthian will be in attendance."

"You're still stuck on a Corinthian," Darden said.

Cordelia nodded. "Of course I must be, Darden. A gentleman such  
is, well, he is everything!"

, “Lord “Perhaps,” Darden said, “but there are not that many of them. N  
gh. Forones, anyway.”

“Cordy only requires one of them, Darden,” Juliet said, as if her  
had somehow thought she required more than one.

to join Tattleton opened the door and led the earl to his place at the head  
table. “What ho!” the earl said, upon seeing Lord Darden. “The err  
itten allarrives without having to be summoned out of his club!”

“It is very good to see you, Father,” Darden said. “I was in  
Mayton Naturally, I set off early to be with you all.”

eatrical They went on to have a very merry breakfast, with Lord Darden on  
all the activities his club had been up to. The Young Bucks Club had  
it was founded by Darden himself, and they were now up to thirty members.  
still had not figured out how to approach Conbatten about joining, but  
id Lord *had* formed a committee with the patronesses of Almack’s to do good

If Lord Darden was left to wonder why his father seemed not at all  
over having a goat in the house or a daughter who was determined to  
theatrical, he did not say anything of it.

*readful*

. Those  
ain you  
...oh, I

kindly

ot been

arden?”

ed and

rdelia’s

as that

“Perhaps,” Darden said, “but there are not that many of them. Not real ones, anyway.”

“Cordy only requires one of them, Darden,” Juliet said, as if her brother had somehow thought she required more than one.

Tattleton opened the door and led the earl to his place at the head of the table. “What ho!” the earl said, upon seeing Lord Darden. “The errant son arrives without having to be summoned out of his club!”

“It is very good to see you, Father,” Darden said. “I was in Kent. Naturally, I set off early to be with you all.”

They went on to have a very merry breakfast, with Lord Darden outlining all the activities his club had been up to. The Young Bucks Club had been founded by Darden himself, and they were now up to thirty members. They still had not figured out how to approach Conbatten about joining, but they *had* formed a committee with the patronesses of Almack’s to do good works.

If Lord Darden was left to wonder why his father seemed not at all vexed over having a goat in the house or a daughter who was determined to act in a theatrical, he did not say anything of it.





## CHAPTER FOUR

PERCIVAL SURVEYED THE drawing room. It was set up as it always was SSLE salon.

The far end wall was lined with sideboards of meats, cheeses, biscuits, cakes, nuts, and both fresh and dried fruits, alongside wine, lemonade, coffee, and tea. He left the selections up to Makepeace butler knew what he was about.

The evening might be cerebral, but Percival had learned long ago even a learned man preferred to be watered and fed. Wine, in particular, seemed to grease the wheels of intellectual debate.

Tables and chairs were set up in groupings of four and six, where members might settle to thoroughly discuss a point and posit their own theories and opinions.

The night would begin with a review by Makepeace of Theobald's play made in 1727, of having in his possession the lost Shakespeare manuscript *Cardenio*.

Did Theobald in fact base his play *Double Falsehood* on the play *Cardenio*, which was itself based on an adventure in *Don Quixote*? Percival would posit his own opinion. That should spark various discussions on the matter.

He looked forward to anything new he would hear. A list of topics for the next season's salons were always sent out over the summer so that there was ample time to prepare.

If he understood his members sufficiently, research had been conducted, trips to various sites made, more than one study of linguistics concluded, perhaps letters of inquiry sent to descendants of Theobald.

In the distance, he heard the door knocker. Who on earth could be knocking? His members were not due for another hour and they all made an effort to be precisely on time. This was not the sort of evening where one might stroll in late. And *no* evening was the sort of evening where one

stroll in early.

Well, Makepeace would handle it, whatever it was. Probably a tra who could not locate the servants' entrance.

Makepeace himself hurried in, practically at a run. "I have delaye with the footmen, who are taking their coats."

"Who?" Percival asked.

His butler looked very pale to be asked. "Lady Rawley's frien s for an whispered, "Mrs. Robinson and Lady Agatha."

What? Why?

Percival thought these things, but he did not say them aloud, as punch, knew Makepeace would have as little idea as he did himself.

A footman led the two ladies into the drawing room.

"Lord Harveston," Lady Agatha said, coming forward. "How chari go that are to join your little society."

"So charmed," Mrs. Robinson said, hurrying to catch up to her frie rticular,

Percival bowed. "Ladies," he said, declining to comment on ye people people referring to his society as "little."

He cleared his throat and said, "I am afraid you have been misin ies and regarding the time. The salon is scheduled for eight and...it is seven."

"Oh yes, we know all about it," Lady Agatha said. "Our dea s claim, Rawley commissioned us to turn up early to help you."

"Help me?"

"One understands how a bachelor host does require assistance. original ? Then, Robinson said. "There is no shame in it, Lord Harveston! You will fin sions bride soon enough and she will take over these duties and elevat sufficiently. For now, you may rely on *us*."

"Goodness, where are the flowers?" Lady Agatha said. "There i for the ould be vase in sight."

"Precisely the sort of thing we feared," Mrs. Robinson said, shak ducted, head sadly.

"The room is rather austere," Lady Agatha said.

"It needs a woman's touch," Mrs. Robinson said, examining pape ould be the Royal Society stacked on a side table.

Lady Agatha turned to Makepeace and said, "Well, let us at least ade an ere one look at the sideboard and see how far you've got on your own. We'll e could up somehow."

Makepeace looked positively affronted. "How *far*? Prop it up?" he desmanincredulously.

"Put the cook on notice," Lady Agatha said, "instructions and them incoming shortly!"

Mrs. Robinson looked round the room. "Is this really the comfortable arrangement, I wonder?"

"Ladies!" Percival said, though it might have been closer to a shout, "We really are quite fine as you find us."

"Fine, Lord Harveston?" Lady Agatha asked. "Is *fine* really what we were going for?"

"Precisely what I was going for," Percival said. "The salon members were very used to this set-up, and they should not like to experience any change."

Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson looked at each other. It seemed the same idea was occurring to them both. They nodded knowingly.

"Say no more, Lord Harveston," Lady Agatha said.

"Our dear Lady Rawley did not take into consideration the state of membership and we failed to remind her of it. That must be laid at our door. I'm afraid."

"How did we not think of it?" Lady Agatha wondered.

"Think of what?" Percival asked, though he was rather afraid to hear more of these two ladies' thoughts.

"Our dear Lady Rawley has mentioned that creativity and imagination will not be your people's bailiwick, as it were," Lady Agatha said.

"Of course we shouldn't wonder if these people would be thrown by any sort of change," Mrs. Robinson said. "Our dear Lady Rawley has not mentioned that scholars have an unfortunate habit of becoming very glib."

Percival pressed his lips together. Their dear Lady Rawley had been a thorn in his side, but she was speedily becoming a battalion's worth of swords in his side.

"Well!" Mrs. Robinson said to Lady Agatha. "We are here now, and it would seem entirely silly to leave and come back again. I suppose we should have to have some wine and ponder literary questions?"

"Let's do," Lady Agatha said approvingly. "I've finally got my hands on a copy of *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale* and I can tell you

e asked masterful.”

The ladies set off for the sideboard. Makepeace stared at their back will bewas probably fortunate that he could not shoot arrows out of his eye they’d both be dead on the carpet.

e most Quietly, Percival said, “I am going above stairs to change clothes. footman run up a brandy. A large one.”

t than a



at you

CORDELIA HAD NOT been certain what one ought to wear to a salon ar ders are Mayton had not had any ideas on the subject either, but for the noti nges in widow’s weeds were very convenient as one did not have to decide.

On the one hand, Darden had explained to her that the evening wa is if the to be peopled by dry and dusty types who spent their lives with their h books. He did make an exception for Lord Harveston, the host of the s. he said that gentleman was exceedingly learned but was not always th of your it in people’s faces. He was a member of the YBC and forever helpf ir door, thorny problems around the budget.

On the other hand, this would be Cordelia’s first encounter wit Rawley and her troupe of actors. She wished to make the best imp ear any possible. Her aunt had written the lady that Cordelia was in fact a actress and now she would discover what Lady Rawley thought about gination In the end, it had been Juliet who had swayed her selection of a dre sister had rightly pointed out that while she would meet nobody intere i off by the salon, anything could happen on the way there. Perhaps she wo ley did descending from her carriage and her Corinthian would trot by—in rigid. Itaken by the sight of her and demanding of onlookers to know the n the lady. Perhaps they would throw a shoe and he would gallantly c gun as a the rescue. The fates were at their work and absolutely anything orth of happen.

She had chosen a deep blue silk, very plain in its decoration but f 7 and it perfection. Cordelia felt the color did something for her hair, as e ought family’s modiste. Mrs. Randower said her hair was a very forward color and must be managed carefully lest it present itself too loudly.

ands on The shade was a deep and vibrant auburn and one did not pair th: ou it is

with a pastel. White was fine for a day dress, but they would not venture and anything approaching a pastel yellow or pale blue for gowns. It would be, else clownish and Mrs. Randower could not entertain the idea of any dresses appearing so.

Have a Lady Rawley's carriage had arrived after a quarter hour of Co pacing in the great hall and a quarter hour of Juliet and her aunt tell that her nerves were for nothing. She was a lovely and talented actress anybody must be pleased to make her acquaintance.

She'd taken a deep breath and followed Miss Mayton to the carriage and Miss Settling themselves in, Lady Rawley said, "How pleased I am on that Mayton, that you have agreed to join us. And of course, Lady Cordelia an added delight to understand that you were not without your own interests likely treading the hallowed boards."

leads in "Indeed, my lady, I am most interested," Cordelia said. "My sisters alone, as Miss Mayton have praised your theatricals to the skies."

growing "We are simply delighted to receive you," Lady Rawley said. "We would never had a young person playing in the troupe and I have a notion must add a certain charm."

h Lady There. She'd said it. Cordelia Bennington was officially a member of the profession troupe.

skilled She was a professional actress. Or, if not professional, then something very close to it.

ess. Her The rest of the carriage ride was not overlong, as Lord Harveston listening at Bedford Square. Cordelia was quiet for most of it, as she would be listening to Lady Rawley and Miss Mayton rehash the events of last night so instantly theatrical.

ame of When they arrived, they found a line of carriages and Lady Rawley some to positioned that intellectual types were likely tied to their clocks. It might Harveston said eight o'clock, then they would turn up at the precise time.

Fortunately, Lady Rawley had sent Lady Agatha and Mrs. Randower to head to arrive at seven and assist Lord Harveston's arrangements. Cordelia did the Rawley was determined to provide the lord with any little service he might find useful.

They were helped down from the carriage and Cordelia thought it was a very fine house Lord Harveston lived in—quite bigger than she would have imagined for a bachelor. She supposed it must be part of the family's

ure intorather than a house rented for the season.

ld look A rather serious-looking butler escorted them to the drawing room of herRawley, Miss Mayton, and Lady Cordelia Bennington,” he intoned went in.

rdelia’s The crowd of people in the room turned like a school of fish and aing hervery surprised to see them.

ess and “Ah,” Lady Rawley said very quietly, “they see they have new m and feel the compliment of it.”

ge. Cordelia was not certain what they felt about it. She was dubious c 1, Missidea that they appeared complimented. Some of them looked confused 1, it wasof them rather dismissive. Then there was the stern-looking mien of erest intall man. A very handsome tall man, were he not quite so serious.

If there were any faces that appeared unreservedly enthusiastic ov ers andarrival, it was Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson. They hurried over.

“Miss Mayton,” Lady Agatha said, “we are so pleased you will j /e have little troupe.”

1 that it “And we understand Lady Cordelia will too?” Mrs. Robinson said.

Cordelia nodded. “Lady Rawley has been very gracious.”

r of the Lady Agatha leaned in close and said quietly, “Now, my dea

Rawley, you will know that we did as you asked and came at nethingUnfortunately, poor Lord Harveston refuses to admit that he requires h

“He is quite stoic about it,” Mrs. Robinson said, “and I think that b ived onhis supports his wrongheaded ideas. We did point out the lack of v hted toflowers and they both looked at us as if we’d just arrived from the moc

: year’s Cordelia glanced at the sideboard, which looked very well put to

and the general air of the room, which was perhaps more masculine t Rawleywould like but well done all the same. She could not think what the f Lordwould have modified beyond their idea of flowers.

ne. “The point is, you tried,” Lady Rawley said graciously. “Now, 1 obinsoncomes.”

s. Lady The “he” Lady Rawley had referred to was the tall and serious gen e mightThe handsome gentleman.

Goodness, she would not have thought that was Lord Harvesto t was aimagined a person running a literary society and helping Darden w ld haveclub’s books would be a short and bespectacled sort of person.

s estate, “Aunt, Miss Mayton,” he said, delivering an elegant bow.

“Dear nephew,” Lady Rawley said, “do be introduced to the . “Lady member of our little acting troupe—Lady Cordelia Bennington as they Darden’s sister, if you will recall.”

Cordelia curtsied. She felt nervous. Why did she feel nervous? appeared “Lady Cordelia,” he said, his voice oddly deep but with a silken tone. It practically sent a shiver over her.

embers “Lord Harveston,” she said. “You are very gracious to allow us to your literary society.”

over the The lord laughed just a little and said, “My aunt was so good as to l, some inform me that she and her friends would be coming.”

‘ a very Cordelia willed herself not to redden over the realization that th crashed their way in. From the comment, it did not appear th er their Harveston rejoiced at their arrival.

“Pay no attention to my nephew, Lady Cordelia,” Lady Rawley sa in our is a great one for jokes.”

Cordelia glanced at the lord and could not at all see that he was jok

“Perhaps you will avail yourselves of the sideboard,” Lord Ha said. “We will be set to begin in a few minutes.”

r Lady Another party had come in after them, two very old and scholarly- seven gentlemen. Lord Harveston bowed and moved off to greet them.

elp.” Lady Rawley led the way to the sideboard. While Cordelia had i utler of intention of drinking wine this night, she changed her mind. It would ases of to have something to settle her.

n.” She felt exceedingly unsettled.

gether, It had seemed as nothing to come to a literary society. All her ner han she been firmly aimed at impressing Lady Rawley and her troupe of actors

e ladies The literary society was only where it would be done. She had nc it any thought at all.

here he “Aunt,” Cordelia said in a whisper as they moved away from the “look at that.”

tleman. She directed her aunt’s gaze to a placard set up on an easel. It read:

n. She *Tonight’s debate—*

with the *Did Theobald base his play Double Falsehood on Shakespeare’s work Cardenio?*

the latest Lord Cordelia said. “Who is Theobald? What is *Double Falsehood*? What is *Cardenio*?”

“Gracious,” Lady Rawley said next to them, “he told me that was the subject of debate, but I thought he was joking.”

Miss Mayton squinted at the placard and shrugged. “Perhaps Theobald is here and can shed some light on the subject.”

Cordelia did not answer, but she did not think that likely. There would be much of a debate if Mr. Theobald could simply answer the question

simply. Though she knew of Shakespeare, as of course everybody did, and she had perfected Desdemona’s dying scene, she had not come across one he had called *Cardenio*.

In truth, while she had vowed she would study all of Shakespeare’s plays from the moment she had become aware of Lady Rawley’s theatrical id. “Heavenings, she had not got as far with it as she would have liked.

Lady Rawley was in the habit of reimagining the ending of a Shakespearean play, and so Cordelia had been most diligent about studying those endings. Her education was just the beginnings and middles she had not got to.

She supposed it did not signify, since the debate was to be about looking *Cardenio* and she did not even know the ending of that one.

Lady Rawley had led them to one of the groupings of tables and Cordelia gratefully sat between her aunt and Lady Agatha. She would blend in and disappear and felt more safe between the two ladies.

The truth was, she felt entirely out of her depth. All round her, she could hear snippets of conversation. Learned conversation she understood little. Who was Fletcher? Why had one gentleman just said, “How do you account for the lack of subplot?” Why had another said, “It’s all about given linguistics!” Or another said, “Come now, the theory regarding Tom has been thoroughly debunked.”

What were all these people talking about?

Her own education, while being very jolly, had not been particularly rigorous. Her aunt had overseen various tutors, but only kept on the ones she found genial. She had also allowed all the sisters to pursue their own interests. It had resulted in a great deal of time studying the end of *Othello* and the poignant death of Desdemona, but perhaps not as much time on other worthy things.

Cordelia felt she was on a slowly sinking ship. In fact, she rather



*denio?*” the chair she sat on this moment *would* sink through the floor. What  
to do if someone asked for her opinion?

was the



ps Mr.

PERCIVAL GLANCED ROUND the room and noted that his aunt and her “  
ould nothad all placed themselves together.

That would be for the best. He had no idea what they would  
thoughamong themselves, if anything, but he doubted it would be of a sort  
s a playother members would find edifying.

Lady Cordelia, though. How had that lovely lady become embro  
s worksLady Rawley’s theatricals?

Of course he knew how—her aunt, Miss Mayton. Everybody kn  
lady had enthusiastically stepped into the breach at a few of the thea  
espeareNow it seemed she’d become a regular part of it and dragged her r  
lings. Itwith her.

Darden really had such a run of remarkably pretty sisters. One wa  
roundattractive than the last. This one had the most enchanting hair, and  
eyes...well, he ought to stop thinking about that. He had a society me  
chairs.run.

Percival dinged his glass. “Gentlemen...and ladies, we will con  
the first society meeting of the season. I welcome you all and look for  
e couldhearing your learned and considered views this night. As always, Mak  
tle of. will lead us through the question, and then we will debate the  
do youanswers.”

Makepeace stepped forward. “In 1727, Mr. Lewis Theobald claime  
son hasin possession of a lost play by Shakespeare named *Cardenio*. We know  
play of that name was in fact performed in Shakespeare’s time, by h  
company. We also know that the play was itself based on an episoc  
icularly*Don Quixote*. Mr. Theobald wrote a play named *Double Falsehood*, w  
nes sheclaimed was *Cardenio* edited and made better. However, though he c  
ir ownto have original manuscripts of *Cardenio*, and he claimed he woul  
Dthello,them as proof, he never did show them as proof. Lord Harveston?”

“Thank you, Makepeace,” Percival said. “I look forward to hearing  
had not considered and am open to changing my opinion. For no  
wished

was she opinion is this—Theobald did have a manuscript named *Cardenio*, I believe it was co-written by Shakespeare and Fletcher based on the similar writing found in another of their collaborations, *The Noble Kinsman*. I believe Theobald thought he was improving on Shakespeare and Fletcher's work by doing away with the subplot and the usual complications associated with "troupe" with Shakespeare. Though, I think we can all agree that *Double Fault* does not accomplish the aim of improving on Shakespeare. I speculate that Theobald refused to show the original manuscripts because he was either that theas confident of his work as he claimed, or that he had obtained the manuscripts in some manner less than usual. Perhaps there was even word piled in on them as to where they had come from."

Percival paused and looked round the room. It seemed everyone had settled themselves where they wished to be. The gentlemen who would be theatricals studied the linguistics were already together, those that would have a piece in through records and gathered correspondence had already various papers out, a certain group who were all friends had taken up a corner, and as more there were his newest members—his aunt and her "troupe."

"Discuss and debate," Percival said, "while I circulate the room." An immediate chatter rose up. Makepeace made his way to the gentleman who had laid out their records. Percival went to the board for a glass of wine and surveyed the scene.

It was very gratifying to see so many brought together with their thirst for knowing. It had always been so with himself. His father had variously complain that most young men had to be chased into a schoolroom, where he had to be chased out of it.

There was so much to know, and one life would never be enough to know all of it.

He smiled to himself when he thought back to how hard he'd worked to master those things the *ton* valued. He'd learned to ride creditably, which he really did enjoy it, but he'd come at it with full concentration and effort. He claimed might be mastered in as little time possible.

Taking up a sword had been a straightforward effort, as he'd found it to pick up. The same with shooting bird.

He was a good shot, at least he used to be—he could not remember how, my last he'd bothered with it. As for hunting fox, that was where he'd been put foot down. People could be hired to do it and he thought it the stupidest

believe of time in the world to go riding all over creation for a full day and  
ities of return with nothing to show for it.

. I also All his childhood, aside from some of his tutors, he'd been surround  
etcher's people who did not spend much time in a library. For him, the library  
ociated been a sanctuary away from the doings of the household. It had been  
lsehood the great joys of reaching his majority to surround himself with like-  
ate that people.

her not These days, he did not always closet himself away with a book  
ied the learned that was not a very good way to go on. He enjoyed balls and  
ritten as much as the next man, and he valued the friendships he'd made t

Darden and the YBC, but he must have his intellectual pursuits too  
ne had would feel very empty.

ld have As he thought which group he might eavesdrop on first, as th  
e raked always what he did on such a night—act the magpie collecting bits ar  
ers laid of ideas—his aunt's grouping kept pulling at his attention.

nd then He'd thought they'd all be looking around and rather lost, but the  
heads together and talking.

Perhaps he had been wrong about the ladies. Perhaps he ough  
rouping ashamed of his assumptions. He did not like to misjudge people.

of wine He walked over. "Ladies, might I listen in on your debate?"

All of them looked up, very startled to see him. Lady Cordelia  
e same almost frightened to see him.

used to Lady Rawley was the first to speak. "Nephew, we do not have t  
hile he idea of anything Makepeace said just now."

Percival nodded, and he had to admit to himself that he'd been unf  
time to the other members had months of time to look into the question. The  
could hardly be expected to know much about it.

arked to "This is understandable," he said. "I send out a list of literary  
and he over the summer and so everybody else has had ages to prepare."

ort so it He signaled to a footman, who hurried over. "James, please retrie  
copies of our schedule for the ladies."

l it easy "That is most kind, Lord Harveston," Lady Cordelia said.

He nodded, feeling somehow proud of himself, though he could  
er when why. "Perhaps, for this evening, you might all simply enjoy the offer  
put his the sideboard?"

it waste "Oh, you are not to think we do not have our own subject to c

usually Lady Rawley said. "In fact, I'll have a look at your little list of pr  
topics and see if we might fit in some of our own suggestions."

ided by "Suggestions?" Percival asked warily.

ary had "Indeed," his aunt said. "My dear, you must admit that this night's  
one of is rather...dry."

minded "Dry?"

"Yes, Lord Harveston," Lady Agatha said, "rather dry. Now, you  
k. He'd to feel downhearted about it. A bachelor cannot manage everything  
parties own."

through "I see," Percival said, feeling less sympathetic to the group by the  
or life "And your suggestions would run along the lines of?"

"Well, take us talking just now, Lord Harveston," Mrs. Robinson  
at was "We are having a lively discussion over *The Dreadful Doings of L*  
nd bobs *Dale*."

"Is someone going to kill the duchess' father?" Miss Mayton said  
y were it be the duke?"

"It is a rather gothic romance, quite titillating," Lady Rawley said.

t to be "What would a gothic romance have to do with a society that ex  
respected literature?" Percival asked through gritted teeth.

If his aunt had any notion of interfering with his society, of ir  
looked herself and her dreadful taste in books, well, he would quash that  
firmly.

he first "I've had a notion," Lady Rawley said, "what if we shake the dust  
little society of yours? What if, at the next meeting, we introdu  
'air. All fascinating book?"

e ladies "Absolutely not," Percival said.

The footman came hurrying back with the sheets of paper outlin  
debate topics for this season's meetings. He handed them round.

"Come now, nephew," Lady Rawley said. "Do not be such a stic  
ve five must be continually open to new ideas. We ought to at least try it out."

"As I said, absolutely not. Aunt, ladies, if you wish to discu  
dreadful doings in a dale, you are encouraged to start your own societ  
not say drive will never darken my doors."

ings on He turned on his heel. Before he could get too far, he heard Lady  
assure her friends that he was "likely to come round."

lebate," He would not come round. His mother could not write enough le

proposed the importance of family for him to come round. Somehow, he must  
aunt and her friends out of his society.

subject

are not  
on his

minute.

on said.  
*Membric*

l. "Will

amines

inserting  
notion

off this  
ce this

ing the

rk. One

iss any  
y. Such

Rawley

tters on

the importance of family for him to come round. Somehow, he must get his aunt and her friends out of his society.



## CHAPTER FIVE

CORDELIA FELT HUMILIATED. They had all, quite naturally, been entirely the subject of *Cardenio*. They had briefly ventured a discussion of *Quixote*, as certainly they had all read it. But, it seemed nobody had read it, though they all owned to starting it at some point.

That result had, also very naturally, led to a discussion on what they were all reading at the moment, since of course it was not *Cardenio* or *Quixote*.

Her aunt had mentioned *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale* and to everybody's delight, it was discovered that Lady Rawley, Lady and Mrs. Robinson were reading it too.

That had all been very wonderful. Then, Lord Harveston had joined and was most sympathetic to their unfamiliarity with *Cardenio*. And he inquired into their unfamiliarity with *Don Quixote*.

It had been very charming of him actually. Very kind, she thought. If only the conversation had ended there!

It had not ended there, though. Lady Rawley had insisted that she introduce *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale* to the society.

It had, at first, seemed a worthy idea. She would like very much to discuss and debate the twisting plot and the way the author made one guess what would happen next.

That was, it had seemed a worthy idea until she saw Lord Harveston's expression upon hearing it. He'd been outraged. He looked down upon the book, though he had clearly never read it.

It was the type of book he looked down upon.

This somehow felt a reflection on herself, and on her tastes. As if she were not sophisticated enough or learned enough. As if she were not to countenance such a book.

She supposed a gentleman like Lord Harveston would never read such a book.

“Do not fret over it,” Lady Rawley said. “Young gentlemen pretend themselves to be invincible, but the truth is they have very fragile feelings. His selection has been pronounced dry and he feels the sting. Harveston take the time to reflect on my suggestion and then he will see the sense of it.”

“But Lady Rawley,” Cordelia said, “he did seem so...so firm in his opinion. Perhaps the gentlemen here would not like to hear of our country doings in the dale? Perhaps they are satisfied with the topics that Harveston has composed for them?”

Don With that idea, they all looked down upon their papers.

Actually If there were any of the ladies who understood any of the topics presented they did not say so. Cordelia, herself, was entirely lost.

My were “This might as well be written in Greek,” Mrs. Robinson muttered.

or Don “Greek would be a deal more understandable than this!” Lady Rawley said.

and then “It is the precise evidence proving that my nephew has gone mad,” Lady Rawley said. “Certainly, nobody would wish to discuss St. Thomas Aquinas’ idea that no man can be a judge of himself and how it relates to Aristotle’s opinion that most people are bad judges of their own case?”

did not “Oh dear,” Mrs. Robinson said, “I am very afraid that the people here tonight come out of loyalty to Lord Harveston, but are fast becoming disillusioned. It is almost inevitable that they will begin dropping out, one by one—excuses as to why they cannot attend.”

at they Lady Agatha nodded. “One suspects poor Lord Harveston is probably beginning to hear of sick relatives and unforeseen circumstances.”

much to “They’ll wish to let him down gently,” Miss Mayton said.

guess at Cordelia glanced round the room. She felt as if she were not viewing what the rest of the ladies were viewing. As far as she could see, Harveston’s guests were entirely engaged.

upon the “Perhaps, though,” Cordelia said, “their tastes are just very different from our own?”

Lady Rawley held up the paper containing the topics to be discussed at future meetings. “Goodness, nobody’s tastes could be *this* different!”

silly to



such a



propose TATTLETON NOTICED THAT it was becoming more regular these days to d  
eelings.himself in unforeseen circumstances.

on will This evening only highlighted that idea, as when he began his care  
e in it.” butler, he could not have envisioned finding himself in a drawing roo  
in his the youngest lady of the house and her newly-acquired goat.

lreadful “Now, Tattleton, I can see you are against it,” Lady Juliet said  
at Lordwritten all over your face.”

“I only say, my lady, that the drawing room may not be the prop  
for what is, in the end, a farm animal.”

oposed, “A farm animal!” Lady Juliet cried, as if he’d just pronounced the  
criminal. “Lord Darling,” she said, cupping his face in her hands, “I w  
to forget you ever heard such a thing. You are the Marquess of Basin  
Agathaand, as such, have every right to be in the drawing room.”

Tattleton sighed. Lord Darling might be a new-minted marquess,  
astray,” did not seem to know anything about the use of a water closet. Th  
Thomasreeked of his intemperance already and that carpet would be stained fo  
lates to “Tattleton,” Lady Juliet said in a rather plaintive tone, “you do

’ circumstances these days? I have always been surrounded by my  
le hereBeatrice, Rosalind, and Viola have all married and left the house. C  
makingCorinthian and marry too. I am quite alone these days.”

If there could have been anything Lady Juliet might say to pul  
ised toheartstrings, she had found it and said it.

She was alone and he felt very sorry over it. He might have lament  
her dreadful ode-writing on more than one occasion, but he always did  
viewingsoft spot for the youngest.

e, Lord “You will always have Miss Mayton by your side, my lady, until y  
marry and depart the house.”

nt from Lady Juliet sighed. “Oh yes, I shall find my poet. Then, wh  
happens, you shall only have Miss Mayton and Papa to look after.”

issed at *That* idea did more than pull at his heartstrings. It fairly brought  
his eyes. What a future! Just the earl and his nutty cousin.

How had he not thought about that before?

“Let us only think happy thoughts for now, though,” Lady Juliet  
an encouraging tone. “While Cordy and my aunt and Papa are out an  
in the town, we shall make merry in the drawing room. We could

discover footmen in and play cards!”

“The footmen? I do not know if that would be—”

“Oh, do say you will, Tattleton. I really do not like being lonely with Darling does his best and he is everything charming, but I would feel much better if I had company that could talk.”

Tattleton was certain he ought not be playing cards with the footmen in the drawing room. But what could he do? There was already a goat in the parlour—were footmen so much worse?

In any case, he supposed he could not allow Lady Juliet to suffer.

the goat a  
want you  
ing stroke



“WILL YOU ATTEND Almack’s this evening, my lord?” Makepeace asked, but Percival thumbed through papers on his desk.

“Yes,” he said absentmindedly. “It is not worth the trouble to create a room for patronesses, and in any case, I do not mind it.”

“Yes, yes,” Makepeace said quietly, “always looking for *her*.”

Makepeace of course referenced his so far unfruitful search for a lady who could call his wife. His butler knew what he looked for—his intended here equal.

“If only Madame D’Arblay was very much younger,” Makepeace said at his elbow. “And unmarried. And not living in Paris.”

This was Makepeace’s usual comment, as if Madame D’Arblay had overheard Fanny Burney, was the only lady on the earth that had sufficient wit to hold her own at his table. Makepeace regularly reread her novels and treasured the letters she sent to the society.

The Madame certainly did have wit about her, her letters were delivered in some original fashion by an unusual person she’d consigned to take on the task. As far as Percival could tell, the letters would pass through a number of hands on their way to someone heading to London.

“Shall you wish to ride to Almack’s, or will you take the carriage?”

“I will ride, as I always do.”

His butler had been asking him questions he already knew the answers to in less than ten minutes. Now, the fellow stood ramrod straight, staring at the far wall.

call the

“Out with it, Makepeace,” he said. “What do you wish to say?”

The butler’s shoulders slumped just the littlest bit. He said, “It was my Lord that I wondered what your view might be regarding Lady Rawley’s never so party continuing to attend our literary society meetings.”

“My view? My view is it is a dashed inconvenience, and I would have devised a polite way to get them out.” He paused, then said, “Though I had not thought how to accomplish it yet.”

Makepeace nodded gravely and Percival was certain his butler would acquaint him with some idea that he was not yet acquainted with.

“What?” he said.

The butler cleared his throat. “There was somewhat of an unfortunate circumstance last evening. Mr. Haventops was sadly situated close enough to Lady Rawley’s grouping and was forced to overhear several things.”

Silence hung in the room and Percival wondered if he would dare cross them to ask what the several things were.

“First,” Makepeace finally went on, “there was some discussion of dreadful doings in a dale somewhere. Haventops almost believed that the ladies were discussing a fellow about to be murdered—he was most intelligent. Then he surmised it was a piece of dreadful storytelling, rather than a dreadful doings.”

“Yes, they mentioned the book,” Percival said, preferring to leave the news that they’d wanted to introduce his members to such a thing.

“Then,” Makepeace said, “he overheard them discussing how they would shake up our society and make it more interesting and this was for your good. There was also mention several times that there was a distinct bouquet of flowers in your drawing room.”

Makepeace sighed, as if he had wrested a terrible confession from himself and felt the lighter for it.

Those ladies were so meddling! At least, the older ones were. He did not fault Lady Cordelia too very much; she was just being swept along by Miss Mayton.

In any case, he did not suppose anybody could stay angry with them for long. She really was very pretty. It was clear enough that she could dabble in any particular intellectual pursuits, but she could not be blamed for it. She was, after all, only a product of her environment.

No, *she* was not the problem. It was the other four of them.

“As well...” Makepeace said.

“There is more?”

Makepeace shook his head sadly. “They reviewed the schedule of for the coming season and pronounced it Greek and unintelligible.”

“I’ll bet they did.”

“Further, they were very afraid that all your members would quit boredom.”

“If only *they* would quit out of boredom.”

“Naturally, after Haventops relayed all of this in the hottest possible, I acquainted him with the idea that Lady Rawley is your aunt. Unfortunately she had just barged in, dragging her troupe in with her and there was little enough to do about it.”

Haventops was a temperamental fellow, so Percival doubted he could really be won over with any sort of equanimity.

“Well? What did he say to it?”

Makepeace appeared grave indeed. “He said he would take steps.”

“What steps?”

“He would not say. I’m not certain he knew, but I would gamble that he was spending every waking minute thinking about it.”

Percival tented his fingers. “We have got to get my aunt and her out of the society.”



she would  
 her own  
 lack of

CORDELIA HAD GONE straight to her bedchamber after coming home from a literary society meeting. She’d found Juliet curled up asleep there and it was certain her younger sister had made a valiant attempt to wait up, but nobody to talk to it had been all for naught.

She and Lynette had been ever so quiet as she was undressed, so as not to wake her sleeping sister.

Cordelia would not have admitted it, but the reason she did not wake Juliet was that she did not yet know how to even discuss the meeting she’d just attended.

Lord Harveston had made his feelings about their troupe clearly known. They were not wanted there. Their attendance had been met with disap-

Somehow, though, it felt as if she were the only one to have perceived

Lady Rawley viewed her nephew as misguided. She was determined to make his society more lively. She was convinced that Lord Harv subjects for debate were one long bore.

Cordelia was very afraid of where that idea would go.

Worse, she felt Lord Harveston viewed *them* as the bores.

It was very upsetting to feel as if one did not measure up. It felt as if she were just stumbling around in the dark.

Cordelia had not ever considered the possibility that she might be laid to bed upon for what she did not know.

She had thought she would be judged by her looks, which Miss I had told her were very good, and her clothes, and dancing, and at making charming conversations. Her acting out Desdemona's poignancy was meant to be the special surprise treat on top of it all.

Now, she was beginning to wonder about it. She was beginning to wonder what Lord Harveston would make of her Desdemona. She began to suspect that he would make nothing of it at all.

Of course, she should not mind that he thought so little of her accomplishments, such as they were. He was not her Corinthian after all. He was not at all interested in such a bookish fellow.

Though, somehow she did mind that his opinion was so dismissive. How could she have possibly explained all that to Juliet?

She had lain awake for quite some time before finally falling asleep. The morning dawned cloudy and gray, and she might have slept very peacefully if it were not for Rosalind slipping into the room and jumping into bed with them.

"Have you brought Conbatten with you and left him in the carriage room?" Cordelia said sleepily.

"I have not," Rosalind said. "I left him in his morning bath with me, monitoring the temperature to keep it at ninety-eight degrees precisely." Juliet yawned and said, "Too bad, I was wanting to ask him how he was enjoying reading the ode I wrote for your wedding."

"He adores it, and it is hung up in our new family room. Is he not approving of it?" "He adores it, and it is hung up in our new family room. Is he not approving of it to think of designing a room that is for our special things? I cannot imagine anybody else has such a room."

it. “Very clever,” Juliet said, “though sometimes I wish everyone who entered into the duke’s house could read the ode.”

reston’s “And view the wedding portrait that Viola painted,” Cordelia said.

Rosalind nodded. “He insists that those private family things must be private. In any case, it is just as well I did not bring him along this morning. There is a goat standing on a sofa in the drawing room—did you know if there appeared to be sizing up how to climb the bookshelves. I asked Tattleton if he had noticed this, but he only said he has given up trying to hold on to his rationality.”

looked “Ah, that is Lord Darling,” Juliet said. “We found him in Basingstoke. He is a poor orphan.”

Mayton “He does look darling, but how does Papa view him having run away from his family to house?”

it adieu Neither Cordelia nor Juliet ventured an answer on that question.

ning tonot “Ah, I see,” Rosalind said, laughing. “Well, it is not a housefire, but I do not think it should be too put out about it, I do not think.”

egan to “Lord Darling is supposed to be in the servants’ quarters, as he is too young for the garden yet,” Juliet said, “but then I did find my father on the lawn last evening and I brought him up. I suppose he developed a fondness for the drawing room.”

. Cordelia rolled over. “Poor Jules, it cannot be comfortable to be the youngest and have everybody leave you.”

p. “Was it terribly dreary all by yourself last night?” Rosalind asked.

ery late “I thought it would be, but then it was not. First, I retrieved Lord Hamill. Then I told Tattleton that he must fetch the footmen so we could play cards with Benny and Johnny were enthusiastic over the idea and we had a rousing game of lottery tickets.”

rawing “Then you shall do just the same tonight,” Rosalind counseled. “Cordelia will be off to Almack’s to find her Corinthian.”

1 Henri “Do you suppose he will be there?” Cordelia said.

.” “I cannot know if *your* particular Corinthian will attend, as we do not know in what direction your heart will go, but I know of at least one

Corinthian who will be there—Lord Hamill. He is a friend of Constance’s. He is clever and my dear husband complains that the fellow never sits down. If the club believes at the club for coffee at ten, Hamill has already been out riding at a boxing match.”

o came “He sounds perfection,” Cordelia said, stretching out under the bla  
“What will you wear?” Juliet asked. “I know you have gone ba  
forth on the subject.”

st stay “I have indeed,” Cordelia said, “but it occurred to me that I ought  
orning.worrying over it and just take Mrs. Randower’s advice on the subje  
w it? Itsaid the green silk was the right one for Almack’s.”

on if he Rosalind nodded. “I think you are right to follow her counsel, C  
d on toour modiste is never wrong.”

oke, he NOW, AS THE carriage trotted through the streets, Cordelia glanced dow  
gown she had selected, relying on Mrs. Randower’s advice. The sha  
i of the the deepest green, like moss in a shaded forest. Subtle embroidery  
same color created a vine and flowers motif on the edges of the s

Other than that, the gown was unadorned, just as Mrs. Randower liked

so he’ll Rosalind had increased Cordelia’s already strong faith in Mrs. Ra

by mentioning that Conbatten was very approving of the lady’s desig  
eally is was so particular with his own dress, and Rosalind claimed his vale

self so was a madman on the subject, that he must be considered an

ondness Gentlemen across London, including her own brother, were  
attempting to discover who his tailor was.

be the “I feel I have made this speech many times now,” the earl said j

“but I will counsel you to throw off any nerves you might have comir  
you, Cordelia. They are unnecessary, as the three sisters before yc

Darling,discovered.”

7 cards. “Just do not order someone to take you into supper like Rosalin

g gameDarden said.

“But she ordered Conbatten to do it,” Cordelia said, “and that tur

ordelia rather well.”

“It did, but could just as easily gone terribly,” Darden said.

“I do not believe our Cordelia will have to direct anybody  
not yet anything,” Miss Mayton said. “Her Corinthian will see that she has

ast one and that his life is to be changed forever, and he will proceed accordi

atten’s “Ah! You are firmly set on a sporting fellow, then?” the earl said.

ey meet “Not just any kind of sporting gentleman, Father,” Darden sa

nd in a Corinthian! I have already told her there are not that many of them t

nkets. around. It's very difficult to be good at absolutely everything."

ack and "Rosalind says Lord Hamill is a Corinthian and that he will be  
Cordelia said. "Naturally, I cannot know if the signs of true love will  
to stopme, but they might."

ct. She Miss Mayton had schooled them all very thoroughly on the signs  
love so that they might recognize it when they were felled by that em  
lordy—one felt as if one's hair had been struck by lightning, and one was dr  
but taking in more air, and one's heart sped up though one felt well. It  
specific that Cordelia had no fear of not recognizing the condition.

n at the Of course, she would add one more symptom. It seemed to be a  
ide was trait that one felt ill.

of the "Hamill?" Darden asked. "I really do not think he is in the mark  
sleeves. wife. He always seems too busy and he's not said anything about it."

it. Miss Mayton laughed at the idea. "Goodness, Lord Darden,  
ndower suppose poor Hans was looking for love when he threw himself off t  
gns. He of a mountain? What about Gregorio or Phillipe or the Transylvanian  
t Henri No, they were all just going about their lives before we encounter  
expert. another and then they were quite suddenly struck."

always Cordelia nodded with enthusiasm. "Who knows, Darden—perha  
will be struck by someone this evening."

ovially, As she knew it would, this set off a paragraph of mumbling havin  
ig upon with Darden being busy with his club and of course he would get to i  
u have was foolhardy to pin a date on it.

id did," Cordelia was beginning to think her brother wouldn't pin a date on  
her father absolutely pressed the matter.

ned out So far, the earl had been indulgent. But certainly that could not  
forever.

"Here we are!" Darden said, in a tone that was far more enthusias  
one generally employs to announce an arrival.

to do  
arrived  
gly."

aid. "A  
anging



around. It's very difficult to be good at absolutely everything."

"Rosalind says Lord Hamill is a Corinthian and that he will be there," Cordelia said. "Naturally, I cannot know if the signs of true love will strike me, but they might."

Miss Mayton had schooled them all very thoroughly on the signs of true love so that they might recognize it when they were felled by that emotion—one felt as if one's hair had been struck by lightning, and one was drowning but taking in more air, and one's heart sped up though one felt well. It was so specific that Cordelia had no fear of not recognizing the condition.

Of course, she would add one more symptom. It seemed to be a family trait that one felt ill.

"Hamill?" Darden asked. "I really do not think he is in the market for a wife. He always seems too busy and he's not said anything about it."

Miss Mayton laughed at the idea. "Goodness, Lord Darden, do you suppose poor Hans was looking for love when he threw himself off the side of a mountain? What about Gregorio or Phillipe or the Transylvanian duke? No, they were all just going about their lives before we encountered one another and then they were quite suddenly struck."

Cordelia nodded with enthusiasm. "Who knows, Darden—perhaps *you* will be struck by someone this evening."

As she knew it would, this set off a paragraph of mumbling having to do with Darden being busy with his club and of course he would get to it, but it was foolhardy to pin a date on it.

Cordelia was beginning to think her brother wouldn't pin a date on it until her father absolutely pressed the matter.

So far, the earl had been indulgent. But certainly that could not go on forever.

"Here we are!" Darden said, in a tone that was far more enthusiastic than one generally employs to announce an arrival.



## CHAPTER SIX

PERCIVAL COULD NOT remember when he had ever encountered Lady Rawley at Almack's on a Wednesday. He could not remember, because it had never happened.

She was here now, though.

His aunt spotted him and was making fast headway in his direction. Almost as if she'd been waiting for him.

He suppressed a sigh. He'd just handed off his coat and had not even reached all the way into the ballroom yet.

"My dear nephew," she said.

"Aunt," he said, working to keep his tone pleasant, "I am surprised to find you here."

"You would be, I never do attend. But then, I had an excellent notion. I have just got myself an invitation. Lady Rondeleigh secured me a stranger's card. What a palaver, you would think Lady Castlereagh was the queen of the world."

"You said you had a notion?" Percival asked warily, ignoring the question she asked him.

Lady Rawley did not appear to be paying attention to him. Her eyes were fixed on the doors behind him.

She very suddenly smiled and waved. "Ah, and here is the notice you were talking of coming in."

Percival turned his head to see the Earl of Westmont, Darden Mayton, and Lady Cordelia approaching.

Lady Cordelia was looking rather smashing in a dark green dress. Unlike the other ladies in attendance who were dressed in pastels and she was like a queen of the faeries come to have a look at her flowers.

Percival was very suddenly filled with dread, his mind catching up with his aunt's words.

She'd said she had a notion. Of course that had instantly caused

attention. Whenever she mentioned having had a notion, it was always a notion and more of a very bad idea.

Now he was to discover that Lady Rawley had clearly been waiting for Miss Mayton and Lady Cordelia to arrive. *They* were the notion.

Why? Did it have something to do with their acting troupe?

Would Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson be springing out from behind the drapes, the whole company descending upon Almack's?

Rawley Had they all come here to advertise their theatrical? Or worse, attend and never perform any of it?

Both scenarios would be entirely absurd, but that would not slow Lady Rawley. Her ill-advised notions had run far and wide for as long as she could remember. Lord Rawley used to live in terror of her notions.

Had she not had a notion to host a dinner comprised of fourteen courses, even got to serve chicken? Poor Lord Rawley had not known of the plan so he'd been just as surprised as his dinner guests. He'd told Percival afterward that the dinner conversation had run along the lines of, "Goodness, I'd like to see a dinner with chicken."

Then there had been the time she wished to change their notion and Rawleystone, feeling it had a better sound to it. Lord Rawley had been obliged to outline the cold, hard fact that one could not just change a ticket of the evening. Only three years ago, she'd paid to have her "novel" published, which turned out to be just a listing of the unpleasant qualities of one person or another that she did not like, with the names thinly veiled. Lord Rawley had scoured the town, bought all the copies, and then burnt them in the garden.

Percival was of the opinion that her adventure in novel writing was over, and that she had finally done his uncle in.

Now, though, Lord Rawley was long gone and that meant his attention was free rein with her notions.

"My dear Lady Rawley," Miss Mayton said. "I feel you must know the names of the most of the earl and Lord Darden?"

a forest "Indeed, I do," Lady Rawley said. "And of course, the lovely Lady Cordelia."

Up to his ears in Darden had greeted Percival and swiftly introduced him to the earl.

Then, the dreaded excellent notion that Lady Rawley had mentioned landed on the ground with a thud and began to take its shape.

Lady Rawley said, "Dear Lady Cordelia, I know this is your first time to Almack's—nerves must be aflutter!"

Her father smiled and said, "I did tell my daughter there was no need to worry, Lady Cordelia, reinforcements have arrived! I have arranged with Lady Castlereagh that my nephew may put himself down to your card. Naturally, he will take you into supper. It will be comfortable to you to dine with a gentleman who is already known. As for the rest of the evening, I will be standing by to assist if you have the slightest need!"

Percival was stunned. Had she really been so bold as to arrange for him to take Lady Cordelia into supper?

It was not that he was opposed to the idea as a general thought, though he had no particular lady he'd had in mind to ask. But she had no right to do that. He was blasted high-handed.

"Now, dear Percy," Lady Rawley said, laying a hand on his arm, "Cordelia has not even retrieved her card yet. Do see to it."

See to it? Now he was to retrieve her card like a dog going after a pheasant?

He very much wished to pull his aunt aside and speak to her regarding her audacity. However, the earl was smiling pleasantly at him, which Darden looked a bit wide-eyed.

He'd have to make the best of it. For now.

Percival turned on his heel and worked to hide the fact that he was backstomping off, though he was definitely storming off.

After waiting in a line of people who had just come in, he finally found the holder of a card. When he returned to the party, he found Lord Hamill had joined them, looking just as strapping as he always did.

Percival had penciled his name in on Lady Cordelia's card and had taken it to her as Miss Mayton said, "Lord Harveston, I suppose you know Lord Hamill? You are both in Lord Darden's club, I believe?"

"Yes, of course," Percival said. Hamill nodded his acknowledgment. "We are so pleased to have a real Corinthian in our midst," Miss Mayton said.

Percival forced a tight smile, as clearly nobody was referring to him in such a manner.

It always filled him with irritation that men such as Hamill were g

outing the glory. Hamill raced around, hunting, sailing, boxing, driving, and said to be extraordinary.

ed—” What did the fellow have between his ears though? Percival had overheard a passing conversation with Hamill at the club and asked him his opinion already. Wordsworth’s new poem. The man had claimed he “left reading on his own sister.”

ring to “I hardly lay claim to any title of the sort, Miss Mayton,” Hamill said. He said it with ridiculous modesty that nobody was meant to believe.

Percival’s opinion. If Hamill was not a Corinthian he would like to tell him to who was.

“I have heard from my sister Rosalind,” Lady Cordelia said. “I am here where Conbatten becomes tired from just hearing what you’ve accomplished do it! Itten in the morning.”

Hamill laughed. “I like to be up with the sun and the duke do it,” Lady Cordelia said. “Ladysurely that is no great accomplishment.”

“I suppose you must be quite tired after a full day’s exertion, Percival,” Cordelia said.

Why was she wondering if Hamill were tired at the end of the day? It was a sternly all the world to be fascinated by a sporting fellow?

“I am never too tired to dance, though,” Hamill said gamely. “Lady Cordelia? Lady Jersey has given me leave.”

Lady Cordelia nodded prettily. Was she to be impressed because the man left the house before ten in the morning? It seemed a rather limp yardstick.

Percival paused. Why were his thoughts running so heated? Yes, it was a constant annoyance that a gentleman like Hamill had his talents out everybody could see them while an intellectual’s accomplishments were hidden away under a flag for everybody to notice. However, he was not in a competition for Lady Cordelia’s approval.

What care he if she was bowled over by the sportsman? “I see you have surged ahead and secured Lady Cordelia’s favor,” Hamill said.

Percival nodded. It was a small victory, but at least he’d won some ground. He did not suppose he would come out victorious on any matter when it came to Hamill, lest it involve a debate.

“I arranged it all,” Lady Rawley said proudly.

nd was     And...his small victory just went up in a puff of smoke.

          “Miss Mayton,” the earl said, “shall we repair to the card room and trounce another couple at whist?”

nion on     “Let’s do,” Miss Mayton said. “I will tell a few stories from my collection to his the continent—that always does throw the play in our favor. We will concentrate on the cards when they are in the midst of pondering the point. Did Gregorio deal himself a deadly blow? I will just see that Cordelia believes, intaken on the floor for the first.”

o know     Though Percival might have expected any rational person to be surprised at Miss Mayton’s mention of Gregorio and his deadly blow, he only nodded genially throughout.

l before     “I should very much like to see the sideboard,” Lady Rawley said. “Earl, you would not mind escorting me in that direction. I would not be opposed to securing a plate of sweets.”

          “Oh no, Lady Rawley,” the earl said, shaking his head sadly.

” Lady     “No?” Lady Rawley asked.

          “Come, dear lady, and I will acquaint you with the offerings here. May I, please, lead you to the card room?” the earl said, leading the lady toward the card room.

          Apparently, his aunt was not aware that the patronesses wore the ‘May I’ offerings as some badge of honor. Lady Rawley would soon discover that, though.

          Darden said, “Miss Mayton, I will escort you both so that my sister can be introduced to Lady Jersey. Harveston, Hamill.”

          Percival bowed and found himself left with Hamill.

it was a     “Very pretty little filly,” Hamill said, watching Lady Cordelia stroll together with her brother.

did not     Percival did not answer, though he could not imagine that any lady would like to know she’d been called a filly, pretty or otherwise.

          “Darden tells me she’s set on a Corinthian; I suppose that was what Mayton had me dragged over.”

supper,     Lady Cordelia was set on a Corinthian, was she? The idea was exceedingly annoying.

e sort of     “Gad, though,” Hamill said, “before you arrived with her card, she had otherme for my views on Desdemona and whether that lady ought to have done so.”

          “And what did you say?” Percival asked.

          “I said I did not know Lady Desdemona. Do you?”

“Only at a distance,” Percival said drily, “when I have seen her from the grand playhouse.”

“Well, you won’t see her there anymore. She is dead, apparently.” Percival pressed his lips together. What world did he live in that allowed a body accomplishing physical feats while the mind attached to it hung that around its skull like thin porridge?

What world did he live in when a woman like Lady Cordelia determined to chain herself to such a man?

Percival sighed. England’s *ton*. That was the world he lived in. The earls were not poised to break one’s neck or be run through with a sword. One’s face boxed in, one was not very interesting.

aid, “if,  
not be



CORDELIA HAD BEEN very confused by what had occurred upon entering Almack’s. Lady Rawley had all but forced Lord Harveston to put her down for her supper.

He’d not liked to do it, she could see that very well. What had been the lady’s aim? It had all been so awkward. Then, after Lord Harveston was sent off to retrieve her card as if by a footman sent on an errand, Miss Mayton pointed out Lord Hamill. After that, she had urged Darden that he ought to wave him over.

There he was. Lord Hamill, the Corinthian. He certainly met what her thoughts had imagined. His arms did look as if his tailor must be brought to the edge of despair in attempts to encase him. He was broad chested and it looked as if his wide shoulders strained the seams of his coat.

He was very pleasant too. And yet, he had seemed to think that Desdemona was a contented lady. He claimed he did not know her but that he was always sorry that somebody had died.

Cordelia found herself disturbed by that. She also found herself difficult to notice that her nerves were a bit shaken at anticipating dining with Lord Harveston. He was bound to talk about things she had no knowledge of. She really did not wish to be embarrassed and could not imagine what

er at aRawley had thought to arrange it.

She had then been introduced to Lady Jersey and got through creditably. It seemed that Rosalind having married a duke had laid improved veneer over the Benningtons. Cordelia was not asked anything passed about herself, though Lady Jersey was most interested in hearing of Conbatten.

lia was Darden had since wandered off in search of ladies' cards.

Miss Mayton leaned over and whispered, "I believe Lady Rawley is doing some matchmaking in mind."

or have "Matchmaking? With Lord Harveston?"

"Yes, I believe so. We cannot blame her, it is a very great compliment to you that she should think of it. Of course, she does not know of my proclivity for a Corinthian."

"No, I suppose she does not."

entering "Lord Hamill secured your first, I noticed. Very good sign."

himself "Yes, yes it was," Cordelia said.

She had imagined that she would be thrilled by such a development. A Corinthian approached and took her first. It was exactly what she had dreamed of.

re were Yet, she was not as thrilled as she ought to be.

er aunt His arms were everything perfection, just as she'd seen those appear in her thoughts. He was exceedingly handsome, anybody would say how was it that she was not stirred by him? Lightning had not struck her, it looked as if at all and she certainly did not feel as if she was drowning with more arms about her. Perhaps she'd only been thrown off by Lord Hamill failing to comprehend that when she spoke of Desdemona, she had meant the heroine of a Shakespeare play.

It was even possible that there was a living Lady Desdemona in London somewhere, and now she had given Lord Hamill the impression that the lady was dead.

After all, he'd said he did not know the lady, not that he had never heard of the lady. If he had heard of a Lady Desdemona living amongst the nobility, it was the most natural thing in the world that his mind had gone to her. She was not to *her* Desdemona.

y Lady "Yes, I really ought to like him," Cordelia said with resolution.

"That is good, for the musicians have done their tuning and Lord



approaches,” Miss Mayton said. “Now, leaving you in good hands enough to repair to the card room and join the earl. Goodness, we are on our way for another happy visit to the altar!”

With that, Miss Mayton promenaded her black bombazine across the ballroom floor and disappeared into the card room.

Lord Hamill led her to the floor and the dance began soon after.

He was skilled at it, as he must be with anything to do with motion and physicality.

He made general conversation about how excellent Darden’s club was.

It was all very...as it should be?

Cordelia said, “My lord, I believe I may have inadvertently given you the wrong impression when I mentioned Desdemona’s death. I was referring to Desdemona from *Othello*. Shakespeare’s *Othello*.”

“Ah, Shakespeare,” Lord Hamill said, seeming as if the clouds had parted from his misapprehension. “I’ll suppose it is not one of his comedies you have never seen it. In truth, I do not attend the theater very often, I get out—here as I like to be doing something, rather than watching other people do something.”

“I see, yes, of course,” Cordelia said.

That was something she’d not considered about a Corinthian. He would, very naturally, always like to be doing something.

So. But she had thought that at the end of the day her Corinthian should relax and watch his wife perform Desdemona’s death scene.

“Do you, yourself, enjoy the theater, Lady Cordelia?”

“Goodness, yes,” she said, unable to resist speaking on her favorite subject. “In fact, I find acting to be almost in my blood. I have recently been invited to join Lady Rawley’s acting troupe.”

“Ah, the theatrical she puts on every year,” Lord Hamill said. “I have never gone myself, but my father goes regularly. He says he would not go for the world.”

This cheered Cordelia quite a bit. Lady Rawley’s troupe had done well, then enthusiasts.

“He claims it is positively hilarious, and my sister seems to think so,” Lord Hamill said.

“Hilarious?” Cordelia asked, not at all sure what could be hilarious.

Hamill them. According to Viola, last year’s offering had been *Much Ado About Nothing*.

, I will *Nothing*, in which Hero had murdered Claudio at the altar. Surprised way to course. Amusing? She did not see how it could be.

“Mind you,” Lord Hamill went on, “my sister is not yet out and so she has lost the gone herself. My father goes and then describes the thing to her and she laughs and laughs. I never know what is so funny, but she says I would not be familiar with the original play. Apparently Rawley takes shocking liberties with Shakespeare’s words.”

Everything Cordelia was hearing was most unsatisfactory. Lord Hamill was not the least interested in watching a play. Then worse, his sister was interested, only so that she could laugh at them!

But surely his sister, and his father for that matter, were misguided. Rawley was so experienced in putting on her theatricals. Miss I have praised them to the skies. If an audience member did not perceive the intention of a piece, then that must be laid at their own door. It spoke of a lack of understanding and finer feelings.

“I suppose your sister is also a sporting type of person?” Cordelia asked. “I suppose she is a very great rider?”

She must suppose so. It was one thing for an older gentleman to fall a little carried away by the emotion of Lady Rawley’s theatrics, but she could not. They find anything else to account for the lord’s sister not grasping the thing.

“Theodora?” Lord Hamill said, laughing. “You’ll not find her like to horse when a carriage is available. She’ll happily climb in with a stack of books and then spout facts out the window at me.”

“Do you say she is an intellectual, then?” Cordelia asked, realizing how it could be so.

“I do not say it, though *she* is very free with the description,” Lord Hamill said. “She claims, and we all do think it is rubbish, she will only make an intellectual equal.” He seemed to find great amusement in the idea.

“Someone like Lord Harveston, I suppose,” Cordelia said quietly.

“Yes! They would make a fine match,” Lord Hamill said laughing. “They might go on, both heads buried in books and never realizing there was something going on outside their doors.”

Lord Hamill shook his head sadly. “Honestly, how some people choose to live, I will never understand.”

Cordelia nodded to the statement but said nothing.

This was all most unsatisfactory. Nothing was going as it ought. :

ng? Ofnot feel as she ought on her first night out on a ballroom floor. She  
feel as she ought, dancing with her Corinthian.

has not She felt prickly.  
nd they  
dn't get  
y, Lady

Hamill  
ter was

d. Lady  
Mayton  
he true  
lack of

asked.

il to be  
uld not  
.  
atop a  
pile of

illy not

Hamill  
rry her

. "They  
vas life

oose to

She did

not feel as she ought on her first night out on a ballroom floor. She did not feel as she ought, dancing with her Corinthian.

She felt prickly.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

PERCIVAL HAD MADE his way through the evening, dancing with ladies. Some he knew, and some he had just been introduced to as the recently arrived.

As always, his conversation attempted to uncover how a lady worked. At least, he did so with the ladies just met.

The ladies he was already acquainted with had various interests he would wish to speak about. Lady Marie wished to talk of her roses; Ellen preferred guiding the conversation toward novels and possibly weather, and of course Lady Mary had an unpleasant interest in gossip.

He was a gentleman, therefore he did his best to accommodate, but none of it was interesting to him.

With the ladies just met, he was always hopeful of uncovering an interesting mind. An educated mind. A mind that had read widely. He was certain he would come across such a lady sooner or later, though this night was not to be it.

One of them had been hardly able to answer a question and certainly no questions of her own. How many times could a lady laugh and say, "I am sure I do not know?" He'd been very tempted to say, "Why do you not tell me what you *do* know and we can talk about that?"

He had not, of course.

Now he was to escort Lady Cordelia to the floor. He did not know what she'd have to say for herself, but at least she was rather glorious to look at.

Further, it had begun to dawn on him that perhaps it was not a bad idea that he would take her into supper. Perhaps there was a way to plant the seed of retreat in her mind. Perhaps if *she* thought the ladies ought to exit first, she might plant that seed in the other ladies' minds.

After all, they had indicated amongst themselves that they were better than the literary society meeting they had already attended. At least, according to Mr. Haventops' recounting of it to Makepeace. Certainly there might

way to provide a graceful and face-saving slipping out of the door.

Why should she wish to go on with it anyway? It was not as if a Corinthian would be found in his salon.

He approached Lady Cordelia, who was fairly surrounded by gentlemen lamenting that they had not secured a dance and pestering her to vow that she would allow them on her card at the next ball in which they encountered another.

various The usual dramatics arisen from the minds of foolish fops.

they were Of course, he would not say so aloud, as some of them were from the club. He got along famously with Darden and some others, but then in his mind those members who were a little too happy and carefree for his tastes.

“Lady Cordelia,” he said. “If I may?”

As they they He held his arm out, gently nudging one of the fops to the side. Lady Cordelia, much sighing, they allowed her to pass and he led her to the floor.

As they they As they waited for the music to strike up, he said, “I understand your father’s estate is in Somerset?”

though It was the sort of vague conversation he could use to pass the time until he found his opportunity to hint at an exit from the SSLE.

incisive “Yes, Westmont House is just west of Taunton,” Lady Cordelia said.

to retain he “That is not too bad a journey to Town, I trust it was pleasant?”

is not to “It was most pleasant,” Lady Cordelia said. “We encountered several travelers who were genial, and then dear Lord Darling was so gently had we’ve taken him into the house. Never was there a creature more aptly named, y, “I’m—he really is a darling.”

not tell Who was Lord Darling? He’d never heard of the gentleman. And how had this Lord Darling managed to insert himself into the household?

What Percival began to see how it might be so. Certainly, he was some creature with what the earl’s.

look at. “I suppose he’s very old then?” he said. “A friend of your father’s?”

old thing “Lord Darling old? Goodness no,” Lady Cordelia said. “He’s young and full of fun. As for my father, he is so good-humored that he tolerates them from the Darling, but it is I and my sister who are smitten with him.”

Good Lord. What was going on in that house?

looked at “Miss Mayton does not mind?” Percival asked, working to kindle incredulousness out of his tone.

What he be a “Why should Miss Mayton mind?” Lady Cordelia asked. “Lord Darling?”

hardly the first we have met upon the road and taken in." She paused; if herthen said, "Though he really is the most darling. Now, I will not say against Chester, but he does have the habit of screaming quite a bit."

gentlemen Chester? Who were these men? What was Chester screaming about that shedid the earl allow it?

red one Percival was silent, attempting to make sense of what he'd just heard. One would have thought, if such scandalous things were going on, any person would not speak publicly about it!

his own Of course, there had always been talk of some sort regarding the Benningtons. The eldest sister had collected a whole pile of germs, mooning about her drawing room, then chucked them all out and married a country neighbor.

e. With The second sister had allegedly arranged her own kidnapping. Conbatten might rescue her, though since the queen had expressed yourdispleasure over the story nobody talked about it publicly.

Then the third sister had come along and managed to get Barbara beforeengaged for three duels on the same morning; somehow they didn't come and then the whole family eloped to Gretna Green in some sort of migration.

Did any of these husbands now married to a Bennington know anything severalChester? Or the more recently arrived Lord Darling? They must be special thatcould not exactly hide a houseguest. Especially not a screaming one.

named Their turn came and Percival led Lady Cordelia through the steps. She was very graceful on the floor, as all the Bennington ladies seemed to do, and then could not say the same for himself. He felt rather...discombobulated.

ld? Finally, the dancers had all completed their steps and the people in the ballroom turned as if they were a tide and headed toward the dining room.

Percival never could understand why there was such a hurry to get through there would be nothing good found upon arrival.

ing and They passed two of the gentlemen who had surrounded Lady Cordelia when he'd gone to collect her for the dance.

They both bowed low. One rose and said, "Until we meet again."

The other followed suit with, "I shall not sleep."

leep the He led Lady Cordelia to open seats and motioned for a footman to bring whatever dreadful offerings were to be had.

irling is As he did not wish to revisit the subject of Chester and Lord Darling,

sed and residing in her house, he said, "I see you have now met the more d  
a wordfellow who haunt these halls."

"Dramatic?" Lady Cordelia said. "In what way?"

t? Why "Oh, you know, they surround a lady and pretend they will die  
takes no notice of them. Shall not sleep, indeed."

heard. "I thought the gentlemen all seemed very pleasant," Lady Cordelia  
, that a It was a general sort of statement, but her tone had been rather sh  
had only been attempting a conversation.

ing the "Certainly, you are not offended that I characterize them so," F  
ntlemensaid. "You did not take it to mean any particular comment on yourself?

ried her "I did not take it to mean anything at all, other than you do r  
them."

ing so He got the particular feeling that she *had* taken offense, though h  
sed her not think why.

Attempting to smooth things over, he said, "I only say, a lady ha  
derston careful of what she takes to be true. She may well be hearing a song t  
me off, been sung to many a lady before her and is only for amusement."

of mass "I am warned," Lady Cordelia said curtly.

"Excellent," he said. Though, he was beginning to think tha  
v about Cordelia could be rather prickly. And unpredictable. One minute s  
do, one casually talking about two unknown men living in her house very che  
the next she was irritated by a pointing out of a very obvious fact.

ps. She He stared at the sour lemonade that had just been delivered to h  
be. He must stick to his purpose. He must find a beginning to ousting his a  
her friends from the literary society.

e in the "My aunt is a very interesting woman," he said. "She is always da  
g room. try new things when others might shy away. And then, she does h  
here, as good sense to drop a thing that has not proved as interesting as she'd

So many people feel they must stick with a thing, just for sticking  
Cordelia There really is only good sense in dropping a thing when it does not su

He waited for Lady Cordelia to answer, but she did not. Rather, s  
staring at her slice of dry cake as if to crumble it with her eyes.

Finally she said, "One wonders what this mysterious thing is."

o bring What did that mean? Did she know his meaning or did she not?

As she did not comment further, he came to the conclusion that tr  
Darling hint round the idea was getting him nowhere at all. He'd best just be di



“Lady Cordelia,” he said, “not every club or society is meant for every person. For example, I should not fair very well at Boodle’s—the country clubs that are so enthusiastic about a hunt or a race simply do not capture my interest. Now, I did recall that my aunt and her friends were all readers of the same book. About a dale and some terrible doings there, I believe. Had you considered founding a club to gather all like-minded ladies together to discuss it? A book club, of sorts?”

“Rather than attending your own society meetings,” she said.

Finally, she had perceived his point. “Precisely,” he said. “All people do have different abilities and proclivities. There is no shame in being different. Lady Cordelia stabbed her cake with her fork, then she laid that down. “Lord Harveston,” she said, “you have done everything possible to even things up to make me feel small. If this is an example of an intellectual’s wit and manners, then I am sure I do not know why you are so impressed with yourself. This cake is insufferable, and *you* are insufferable.”

She rose and said, “I will find my aunt and Lady Rawley, they will be better company.”

Lady Cordelia turned on her heel and stalked off.

What had just happened?

He was insufferable? Because he’d attempted to give her some thoughtful hints?

Though he did not feel he was in the wrong, his face grew rather hot. Lady’s abrupt exit had not gone unnoticed. There were various people looking in his direction, not the least of which were the sharp eyes of Hightower.

aring to  
ave the  
hoped.



THOUGH CORDELIA HAD claimed she would go to find her aunt and Lady Rawley, she had felt entirely incapable of it and sought out the ladies’ rooms.

There, after telling the maid she needed no attendance, she found a quiet and private corner at the far end of the room, pulled the curtain, and sat on the velvet covered bench provided for those who merely wished to fix their hair. She sobbed silently, not wishing to make a sound, lest she be overheard.

r every other lady come in and hear her.

entry set Never had she been treated so. It was not so much what Lord Hamlet had said, it was what she knew he meant by what he said. She, along with the Rawley's acting troupe, were not wanted. They were judged unworthy and their interests were deemed stupid, *she* was deemed stupid.

rather to In fact, he thought her to be so dense as to not understand that some flattery from a group of young gentlemen was not a proposal of marriage if the most obvious thing must be explained to her.

after all, He found her tiresome and unaccomplished and did not even bother to hide it, as she was of so little consequence.

utensil Then, to further heap on the misery, she'd felt nothing at all for this Hamlet. He was genial, to be sure, but she could not be in love with his

habits All in all, she felt exceedingly stung by the events of the night and withstood indeed.

When Beatrice and Rosalind and Viola had made their debut at Alton and had all gone stunningly well. She felt like some sort of failure that she could not claim the same.

From outside her little corner, she heard the door to the retiring room open. A lady's voice, a very commanding voice, said, "Where is she?" Cordelia could only imagine the maid had pointed to her location and heard footsteps approaching. Very determined footsteps.

not. The Was it a patroness? Was she in trouble of some sort for leaving Harveston alone at the table? Had she broken a rule and was about to be lectured?

She could not bear it, not this very moment.

A lady came round the corner and Cordelia instantly recognized Lady Hightower. She had not ever been introduced to the lady, but she had seen her in the park when Lady Hightower had inserted herself into the middle of Rosalind's pickpocket arrangement.

retiring "I recognize you as a Bennington girl," Lady Hightower said.

"Yes, Lady Hightower, I am Cordelia Bennington," she said, attempting to hide her sniffles.

it down "Hah! And you will know me from the day your sister very dramatically fainted into Conbatten's arms when she lost her handkerchief from her pickpocket."

Cordelia nodded, though she was not entirely sure why Lady Hightower

seemed amused by the recollection.

Harveston “My lady,” she said, wishing to get whatever scolding was coming and Ladyover with, “am I in trouble for leaving Lord Harveston at table?”

7. Their “In trouble? Goodness, no. I merely saw the state you were in when I left him and thought I ought to assure myself that you were alright.”

8. Her mild “At this kindness, Cordelia burst into tears all over again.

9. As Lady Hightower ordered the maid to bring all the handkerchiefs to her place. She sat on the bench next to Cordelia and began handing them to her one by one.

“That’s right, cry it out,” Lady Hightower said, “it never does a man or Lordgood to hold it in and the young have a great propensity for feeling things sharply.”

10. Very Though the lady had given her leave to cry as much as she liked, Cordelia did make an effort to regain her composure.

11. Mack’s “You must think me a terrible ninny,” she said.

12. What she “Well, that entirely depends on what you were crying about. Did Lord Harveston spill something on your dress or some other easily recognizable roommatter?”

13. “No, of course I would not collapse over such a small thing,” Cordelia said. “I really should not have collapsed at all, I do not know why his insult has stung me so, he is nothing to me.”

14. Lord “And what opinion was that?”

15. It to be Cordelia mopped at her eyes and said, “He thinks me very stupid.” “He did not say so!”

“Not in those words exactly, but his meaning was clear enough.”

16. Her as Lady Hightower sighed, and Cordelia thought it was rather a dismal she had sort of sigh.

17. The scene “If it will soothe you at all to know it,” Lady Hightower said, “Harveston thinks almost everybody is stupid.”

This idea did soothe. In truth, Cordelia began to feel less injured and less empty more angry that he should have behaved in such a manner.

“I have observed for some time that he values pure intellect above all else. This is to his detriment, of course, as he fails to see his own failings. He has blinded himself with facts.”

This cheered Cordelia even more. Lady Hightower was right because he’d read all sorts of books did not mean he was perfect. It

mean he did not have faults.

g to her Other than a propensity for rudeness, she did not know what those faults were, of course, but certainly he had them. He probably had j  
ien youthem.

“Lord Harveston has carved out for himself a narrow lane to live through,” Lady Hightower said. “This will be his downfall if he d  
s in thecorrect it. Books are always a very one-sided conversation—they  
to her, cheer you on, nor soothe you when you are ill.”

“Yes,” Cordelia said, feeling very encouraged. “Books are not even  
a bit of Lord Hamill told me he does not even read them at all.”

g things Lady Hightower snorted. “Yes, well, Hamill is another story altoğ  
she said. “Now, dry your eyes, take deep breaths, and stay here. I w  
ordelia Miss Mayton and the earl and tell them you have a headache. We w  
your carriage called. You will miss nothing by skipping the patro  
offerings. By the by, next time sit by me—I bring a sugar mixture  
id Lord over everything to make it more palatable. They know it but they dare  
medied anything about it.”

Cordelia nodded and said, “Lady Hightower, you have been most  
ordelia put up with me.”

opinion “Nonsense,” the lady said, “what is one of the oldest bats in the ra  
do if not come to the aid of a weeping young woman in a retiring re  
happens more often than you might imagine. In any case, I always do  
Bennington girl interesting.”



sgusted

PERCIVAL HAD NEVER had a lady become so offended by his wor  
rveston supposed it was his hinting that Lady Cordelia and her troupe of actor  
to form their own club that had done it.

red and At least, that was all he and his butler could make of it. Mal  
theorized that Lady Cordelia suffered from an ailment of the nervous  
ove all and might become upset over practically anything.

ngs. He That might be true, of course. She *had* seemed unpredictabl  
moment waxing on about Lord Darling and the screaming Chester, t  
it—just naming him insufferable and rushing off.

did not

Certainly, her condemnation had not been rational. While his  
se othermight have been direct, he had not been insufferable.

piles of No, he could not have been insufferable. He would have know  
were being insufferable.

his life He might have been the least little bit irritated. He supposed mer  
oes nother searching for her own Corinthian had grated, as he never did see th  
cannotin it. Irritated, yes. Insufferable, he could not see it.

Now, Makepeace had just come in and handed him a letter that ha  
ything.delivered.

Percival saw that it was from Lady Hightower and became the s  
gether,”bit uncomfortable. She had been staring at the scene when Lady Corde  
ill findrun off. She had risen herself and followed the lady. She had stared  
ill havewhen she came back.

nesses’ He opened the letter.

to pour *My dear Lord Harveston—*

kind to *I pray you do not view this as an intrusion, but as I have known  
since you were a schoolboy and I am a friend of your mother’s, I  
not hesitate to write and point something out to you.*

ifters to *Your behavior last evening was insufferable.*

om? It Percival dropped the paper. Lady Hightower pronounced him insul  
o find a too! But how could she know? She did not hear the conversation. She  
have only been told Lady Cordelia’s side of things and that lady had  
herself unpredictable.

He picked up the sheet to read the rest of it.

ds. He *To have reduced a young lady just out in society to tear  
s ought outrageous. I did not need to hear from Lady Cordelia any of  
details of your conversation beyond the idea that she understands,  
think her stupid.*

cepeace *Then, I knew as much as I needed to.*

variety *You have become so blinded by your perceived intellectual  
e—one that you are beginning to forget how to be a proper gentleman. W  
he next can be found in books is not all that can be found in life. Furti  
there are more kinds of intelligence than you are aware of. Do*

words *become so enamored with your knowledge that you gain reputation of being insufferable on a regular schedule.*

n if he *Rectify this, Harveston.*

tion of *Regards—an irritated old bat*

ie sense “I cannot believe it,” Percival said quietly, handing the letter to Makepeace. “Can this be right?”

ad been His butler read through the letter and laid it down on the desk. “How does she mean?” he asked. “How does one become blind to the lightest intellectualism? It is those who do not learn and think deeply who have had blinded!”

at him Percival would have thought so himself.

“What do you suppose she means by saying there are more kinds of intelligence?” he asked.

Makepeace rubbed his chin. “Well, animals have a certain intelligence built into them.”

you “Their instincts.”

I do “Just so.”

“But why should she point that out?” As he asked it, he thought he had to get an inkling. Lady Hightower had said he was forgetting how to be a gentleman. Did she mean he was losing his instincts as a gentleman? That could be true?

fferable He’d thought he’d said things politely last evening, if not directly. It would be proved on the other hand, Lady Cordelia had come away with the idea that he thought himself stupid. He had not wished that.

s is He did not even think it. At least, not entirely. He thought the troupe silly and absurd and he thought Lady Cordelia not particularly intellectual. But that was a far cry from stupid!

the And yet, he’d made her think it. That must be laid at his door and Lady Hightower was right. He ought to rectify it.

you How he would do so, he had not the first idea.

ism “Well, Makepeace, it seems I’ve made a misstep and must fix it. I don’t go about making ladies cry, it’s just not the done thing. Not by a gentleman anyway.”

that her, not Makepeace sighed so long and deep it sounded like his last breath before leaving his body and he was making his journey to the great beyond.

the suppose this means they will continue to contaminate our society meet  
“Yes, I suppose so, though I do not think ‘contaminate’ is really the  
word. Now, I just have to figure out a way to fix this somehow, let  
Hightower begins writing me every day.”

Makepeace sniffed. “Perhaps you ought to get hold of that book  
rather so wild about?” he said, his tone dripping with sarcasm. “Perhap  
ought to look into these dreadful doings in a dale.”

“What Though his butler said it with the express intention of throwing  
led by condemnation upon Lady Cordelia and her friends, it was not a bad  
who are he could engage on a topic she was interested in, he might show that  
been misunderstood.

Percival tented his fingers. Yes, of course that would do it. A  
inds of apology and then a hint dropped that he was reading a book of interes  
must fix the thing.

ligence “Makepeace,” he said, “get me a copy of that book. The dreadful  
of something or other dale.”

“You jest,” Makepeace said, looking as if he’d been asked to go  
hire a murderer.

e began “I do not. I want a copy on my desk today. In fact, get me a copy c  
to be a book that author has written. It would be well to go even beyond wha  
? Could be duty; Lady Cordelia could not hold out against such a gesture. S  
footmen out in all directions.”

On the  
light her

acting  
early an

d Lady

cannot  
tleman,

ath was  
ond. “I

suppose this means they will continue to contaminate our society meetings.”

“Yes, I suppose so, though I do not think ‘contaminate’ is really the right word. Now, I just have to figure out a way to fix this somehow, lest Lady Hightower begins writing me every day.”

Makepeace sniffed. “Perhaps you ought to get hold of that book they’re all so wild about?” he said, his tone dripping with sarcasm. “Perhaps you ought to look into these dreadful doings in a dale.”

Though his butler said it with the express intention of throwing another condemnation upon Lady Cordelia and her friends, it was not a bad idea. If he could engage on a topic she was interested in, he might show that he had been misunderstood.

Percival tented his fingers. Yes, of course that would do it. A proper apology and then a hint dropped that he was reading a book of interest to her must fix the thing.

“Makepeace,” he said, “get me a copy of that book. The dreadful doings of something or other dale.”

“You jest,” Makepeace said, looking as if he’d been asked to go out and hire a murderer.

“I do not. I want a copy on my desk today. In fact, get me a copy of every book that author has written. It would be well to go even beyond what would be duty; Lady Cordelia could not hold out against such a gesture. Send the footmen out in all directions.”





## CHAPTER EIGHT

LADY HIGHTOWER HAD been as good as her word. She'd found her at her father, and the carriage had been called to take them home. Darcy left behind, as he was well able to make his own way back.

Cordelia had expected that her father would wish for some explanation or assurance about her condition, but it was not so.

Lady Hightower had seen them off and Cordelia had heard her say earl, "Remember my counsel, my lord, do not enquire into it."

Her aunt had told her later that Lady Hightower had explained to her father that it was nothing to be concerned about, just a womanly problem.

Cordelia had thought it was only her and her sisters who used such a strategy when they did not wish to explain a thing, but apparently it was a well-known strategy amongst women.

Her dear Papa had not the slightest wish to hear of womanly problems and so did not press her for information. He'd just stared out the carriage window, pretending nothing was amiss.

Her aunt, on the other hand, would not be put off, nor did Cordelia dare to put her off. They'd found Juliet still awake and lounging on her bed. Lynette brushed out her hair and put it in a braid, Cordelia had poured out the whole wretched story for both of them.

"You were very right, Cordy," Juliet said, "he *was* insufferable."

"I am very surprised at Lord Harveston," Miss Mayton said, shaking her head.

"I am even more surprised by my own behavior," Cordelia said. "Should I run off and cry, simply because some gentleman recently might not approve of me?"

"It was the shock of not being approved of," Juliet said. "You've always been approved of, you must have felt staggered when all of a sudden somebody did not."

She *had* felt rather staggered. And, she was becoming aware that :

been particularly staggered because the disapproval had come from Harveston.

“You see, Cordy,” Juliet went on, “not every family is like our. I think of the Grant sisters—they are always ready to tear each other’s hair out. We’re different, we all approve of one another and so you have got to be it.”

What Juliet said was true. She could not ever remember any of her aunt and uncle fighting with one another. She did not see why they ever would—it was too much fun to be in one another’s confidence.

“Just think,” Juliet said, “when I first began writing my odes I was very good at it. Could I ever have got to where I am now without the cooperation of my sisters? I am not sure that I could have. And what about Rosalind’s yodeling to the pianoforte or Viola’s painting?”

“You girls are all so talented,” Miss Mayton said.

Lynette suppressed a snort.

“Do not tease us, Lynette,” Cordelia said. “Juliet is right, I have just become too used to being enveloped in the loving arms of my family. Not even a stranger can be like us.”

“That is the truth,” Lynette said with a giggle.

Cordelia ignored Lynette, as the maid did like to tease for her amusement. Everything Juliet had pointed out made so much sense. Why should she be so struck by Lord Harveston’s stance, even though she was a bit rude? She had not just been surprised and offended, she had actually been hurt. As why should his opinion matter to her?

She really had no idea.

“I wonder if we should apprise Lady Rawley of this shameful incident,”

Miss Mayton said, tapping her chin with her forefinger.

“Oh, no, let us not, Aunt,” Cordelia said hurriedly. “I’d much rather keep a few people know of it as possible.”

“Why not?”

“Well, yes, I can certainly understand that, my dear.”

“But that will also mean that you both must keep attending his literature society,” Juliet pointed out.

That was true, and though she was rather delighted to hear Juliet name the stupid society, she could not be enthusiastic about continuing to go when she now clearly understood Lord Harveston’s opinion regarding her attendance.

On the other hand, were they to be driven out? Was she to wave the flag of defeat?

And then she had an idea. "Aunt, we were at a severe disadvantage last meeting because we did not know what the subject matter would be used to have the printed schedule."

Cordelia hopped up, wresting herself away from a sighing Lynette. Her sisters found the paper on her writing desk. "Here it is. We are to discuss Thomas Aquinas' idea that no man can be a judge of himself and how that relates to Aristotle's opinion that most people are bad judges of themselves. It was not a case."

"Ugh," Juliet said. "Two ancient fellows who could not write a word to one another."

"I am afraid I do not know the first thing about it," Miss Mayton said. "Did any of your tutors ever say anything about either of those gentlemen?"

Cordelia sat back down at Lynette's urging and let her carry on with everyone else. She was certain that they had been told of these two fellows whenever one of their tutors droned on about some uninteresting period event, it slipped out of her mind as fast as it had slipped in. Mr. Cramden was used to likening her mind to a sieve.

"Jules?" she said.

Juliet shook her head. "Mr. Cramden probably waxed on about them for an hour. He was very good at finding the most boring people in history and talking about them for an hour."

Miss Mayton nodded sadly. "I did not care for Mr. Cramden, myself. The earl was doing a favor for the vicar in employing him. I did point out several times, that he always smelled like fried bacon."

"He used to keep it in his pockets, wrapped in paper," Juliet said. "I caught him eating it a few times."

"He used to get it from Cook," Lynette said. "He always said he found it stupid if he did not have bacon and Cook did not want to find out if it was true."

"Interesting," Juliet said. "Perhaps he had a medical condition we should know about?"

"He did always seem pale," Miss Mayton said.

"I suppose we will never know, but all this reminiscing about Cramden does not help us much," Cordelia said. "However, just because

he whitedid not learn about Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas then, does not m  
cannot now. We have a whole library downstairs.”

he at the “Goodness, we do,” Miss Mayton said. “I always forget about that  
e. Now “On the morrow, we will begin our studies. We will learn sor  
about these fellows. Then, when Lord Harveston attempts to paint us  
tte, andhe will find out otherwise.”

uss St. “He will be shocked to his insufferable shoes,” Juliet said, soundi  
how itsatisfied by the idea.

eir own “And, as an antidote to our tedious studies,” Miss Mayton sai  
expect Viola and Rosalind to dinner on the morrow and afterward I w  
decentfrom *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Dale*. It will be a palate cleans  
we have struggled to understand two old men and their ideas about  
on said.themselves.”

se two Cordelia felt infinitely better about things. She would show  
Harveston just how mistaken he’d been. And how insufferable he’  
with herwhich had now been established as an incontrovertible fact.

ws, but  
rson or  
ramden



TATTLETON HAD A vague sense of unease. Of course, there were  
aplenty for such a feeling. For one, it seemed it was to be a regular ha  
em. HeLady Juliet called him, Benny, and Johnny to the drawing room to pla  
g aboutafter the earl, Miss Mayton, and Lady Cordelia had gone out.

He could not believe that the earl would be approving of it, but  
elf, butdid sympathize with Lady Juliet’s plight. It was just nerve-wracking w  
int out,time grew late and he must keep one ear out for the sound of carriage  
stopping at the front of the house.

said. “I He did not like sneaking around!

It also seemed to be becoming a habit that Lord Darling, that  
elt faintcreature, was to come to the drawing room. He attended the card gan  
e.” one had to watch him carefully as he liked to make off with cards an  
did notthem up. When he wasn’t doing that, he was chewing on the curtain  
was a butler to explain frayed curtains?

It seemed Lord Darling was to have the run of the house now and  
out Mr.him in the garden was looking like an impossible dream. He could  
use we

lean we contained and Tattleton was forever discovering him in the most u  
places.

room.” Whatever they set up below stairs to keep him from wandering (n  
nothing soon defeated. The devilish kid managed to jump over everything.

stupid, No, not even jump—it was more like a springing straight up in th  
defied the laws of nature!

ng very So far, he’d found the thing standing on a sofa, attempting to balan  
windowsill, and standing on the earl’s important papers on his desk  
id, “we library.

ill read It had been no easy feat to dust off hoof prints from the earl’s  
er after Tattleton was just grateful the wretch had not eaten them.

judging And then, it had taken to chewing on things. It seemed particular  
of tablecloths and the bottoms of curtains.

v Lord All Lady Juliet had to say of it was that he was still a baby.

d been, Yes, he was still a baby. What sort of havoc would he create as he  
This was all disturbing enough, but something else had happened  
him on edge. Something had happened at Almack’s. He did not know  
but he’d known Lady Cordelia since she was a baby. She’d been cryin  
What could she have been crying about?

reasons “There now, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, “I know the little  
bit that a handful, but even you must admit that Lord Darling *is* rather darlin  
y cardshe’s sleeping.”

The creature was curled up on the bedding the ladies Cordelia an  
then he had set up for him. Finely-made bedding that ought to be on actual bec  
hen the “I need not admit any such thing, Mrs. Huffson,” he said, sipp  
wheels brandy.

“Well, think of it this way,” the housekeeper said, “whateve  
Darling is, what he isn’t is four cats underfoot, and he isn’t a dog po  
cheeky have a litter of pups, and he isn’t a bird who screams ‘murder’ at ev  
nes and who walks by.”

d chew Tattleton was rather surprised that Mrs. Huffson would bring to his  
s. How the creatures that had plagued him during other seasons. As if th  
supposed to ease his mind!

putting He eyed the now-sleeping Lord Darling. Oh yes, he looked so harr  
not behis repose. The morning would bring a different story, though.

Tattleton sighed and said, “I would be most gratified if that creatu

unlikely the only thing weighing heavily upon me, Mrs. Huffson."

"Oh dear," Mrs. Huffson said, "has something occurred?"

off was "Not yet, but I can only feel that something is in the offing,"

"When Lady Cordelia returned home last night, she had been crying. I  
e air. It Mrs. Huffson. What could have caused her to cry at Almack's? I  
esteemed institution."

ice on a Mrs. Huffson was thoughtful. "Naturally, I cannot know, but I mu  
c in their had to do with a gentleman."

"A gentleman? What has caused you to think it?" Tattleton asked.

letters. "It is always because of a gentleman."

That was very true. It was always about a gentleman.

ly fond "I expect," Mrs. Huffson said, "that whatever has occurred, it wi  
over."

"Blow over? Blow over, Mrs. Huffson? When did they ever allow  
grew! to blow over?"

l to put It really astounded him at times how Mrs. Huffson seemed to  
v what, remember the past.

g. "Oh my, you do not think...they would not...surely not..."

Now it was occurring to her.

mite is "That's right," he said, "they will devise a plan. And what do w  
g when about their plans, Mrs. Huffson?"

"They are always bad. Very bad," Mrs. Huffson said sadly.

d Juliet Tattleton nodded gravely. They were always very bad.

ls. "And what do you think Lynette told me before she retired for the  
ing his Tattleton asked.

Mrs. Huffson was now looking very alarmed, which calmed hin  
r Lord were to be alarmed, it was soothing to have somebody else alarmed wi

oised to "What did Lynette say?" Mrs. Huffson asked in a whisper.

veryone "They require use of the library on the morrow. They are going to :

"They are? Study what?"

s notice "Lynette was not altogether clear, she said it was something about  
at was *Judges*, Mrs. Huffson! Are they planning to involve us in the courts no

"I do not see how they would."

nless in "No, we never do see how it will be. It is always a shock, Mrs. H  
Always a terrible shock."

re were



ie said. CORDELIA, JULIET, AND Miss Mayton had been in the earl's library for  
Crying, hour. At the breakfast table, Cordelia's father had been most surpris  
It is an they planned to spend their morning in that location. He'd been eve  
taken aback that they intended to embark on a serious study of Aristoc  
st think St. Thomas Aquinas.

Darden had joked that Oxford would shudder to hear of it, but t  
had frowned at him and he said no more.

The earl had been so good as to pull all the books from his shelv  
would be of interest to them, and it was quite a few books, all c  
ll blow unusually heavy.

The first half hour had been grueling, each one of them squinting  
a thing dense text and struggling through the first few pages of the book  
picked up.

o never They'd speedily come to the conclusion that they could not go on  
a manner and did several things to remedy the situation. They had T  
send in a tray of tea and biscuits to sustain them, then brought Lord  
in to entertain them while they worked.

e know The second half hour had been far more pleasant, but Cordelia  
think they made much headway in their quest to understand Aristotle  
Thomas Aquinas.

"The problem, as I see it," Miss Mayton said, "is that these fellow  
night?" in circles."

"Yes!" Juliet said. "Can they not simply say what they mean?"

1. If he Lord Darling hopped up on the desk and surveyed the room, a  
th him. further confirm those assessments.

"This does seem rather hopeless," Cordelia said, only three pages  
study." book she'd picked up. "Perhaps I *am* stupid and have no business atte  
to understand Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas."

judges. "Do not say so, Cordy," Juliet said. "As a writer myself, I can t  
w?" that these men wrote like this on purpose. They do it to sound smart  
they actually are. Just like Mr. Peabody does at home. They n  
luffson. befuddle, thereby tricking you into believing they've said som  
remarkable."

“Goodness,” Miss Mayton said, “Mr. Peabody. I do not understand of what that fellow says.”

“Because you are not meant to,” Juliet said. “He hurls out a hurried words when three would do, all to make him seem highly intelligent.”

“You might be right, Jules,” Cordelia said. “The last time Viola and I saw him in the village he insisted on stopping us so we very nearly made general conversation as a matter of courtesy. Viola mentioned the earl having rather pleasant weather.”

“Oh yes,” Miss Mayton said, “there we were, for a quarter of a year hearing about different kinds of clouds on a day there were none in the of them.”

Cordelia nodded. “He walked away looking very pleased with himself. But if Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas worked to make their g at the unintelligible, what are we to do?”

“I think we ought to come to our own judgments, just as women they’d very sensibly been doing since the beginning of time,” Juliet said.

“I see,” Cordelia said. “The question is should a person be able to in such themselves? We might just see what we think about it.”

Darling “That does sound a deal more pleasant,” Miss Mayton said, looking forlornly at the book in her lap.

Lord Darling seemed to be in complete agreement with this new idea and St. let out one of his interesting sounds—sort of a muffled and raspy bl sounded as if it were a far off cry for help.

And so, they spent the next hour discussing their ideas regarding vs write judging themselves, interspersed with passing rather stern and condensed judgments on Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Mr. Peabody, and as if to Harveston.

into the  
empting

tell you  
ter than  
mean to  
nothing



“Goodness,” Miss Mayton said, “Mr. Peabody. I do not understand half of what that fellow says.”

“Because you are not meant to,” Juliet said. “He hurls out a hurricane of words when three would do, all to make him seem highly intelligent.”

“You might be right, Jules,” Cordelia said. “The last time Viola, Aunt, and I saw him in the village he insisted on stopping us so we very naturally made general conversation as a matter of courtesy. Viola mentioned we were having rather pleasant weather.”

“Oh yes,” Miss Mayton said, “there we were, for a quarter of an hour, hearing about different kinds of clouds on a day there were none in the sky.”

Cordelia nodded. “He walked away looking very pleased with himself. But if Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas worked to make themselves unintelligible, what are we to do?”

“I think we ought to come to our own judgments, just as women have very sensibly been doing since the beginning of time,” Juliet said.

“I see,” Cordelia said. “The question is should a person be able to judge themselves? We might just see what we think about it.”

“That does sound a deal more pleasant,” Miss Mayton said, looking rather forlornly at the book in her lap.

Lord Darling seemed to be in complete agreement with this new idea. He let out one of his interesting sounds—sort of a muffled and raspy bleat that sounded as if it were a far off cry for help.

And so, they spent the next hour discussing their ideas regarding people judging themselves, interspersed with passing rather stern and condemning judgments on Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Mr. Peabody, and Lord Harveston.



## CHAPTER NINE

PERCIVAL LOOKED OVER the pile of books on his desk. Makepeace, though he had been reluctant to do it, had secured every known novel by the author Lord Roydon.

There were *The Terrible Goings-on of Montclair Castle*, *The Happenstances of Grimwood Hall*, *The Harrowing Homecoming of Harrowbridge Hall*, and finally the subject at hand, *The Dreadful Deeds that have been Done in Dembric Dale*.

None of the books were very long and they seemed rather cheaply produced. The publisher appeared to be a small operation in York. The descriptions were entirely absurd. Aside from the doings in the dale, two of them featured a duke and a gentle governess. Harrowbridge Hall even featured two dukes. The dale had one duke and a gentle governess who was not a duchess, saddled with a father who was wondering if he would be murdered.

From the looks of it, they were all meant to have a gothic flavor to them. Like Shakespeare, they were not.

“All right, Makepeace,” Percival said, “it will be our task to discover some redeeming qualities in these books.”

“We?” Makepeace said softly, as he poured Percival a coffee.

“I cannot read all of these on my own,” he said. “My head would explode in a hundred bits. No, we must divide and conquer. You take *Montclair Castle* and *Grimwood Hall* and I’ll take the other two. Come back with some interesting things I might say about them.”

Makepeace picked up the two volumes he’d been assigned, and Percival thought he was being rather dramatic about it—he held the books with his arms straight out as if they were two live vipers.

Percival ignored his silent histrionics. Then he ignored the not-so-subtle histrionics that went on in the hall. He very clearly heard Makepeace’s footman, “I will be in my room, reading these. If you encounter me later, I seem to have lost my wits and can no longer speak in full sentences,

doctor I was assaulted by crass writings.”

The poor footman agreed that he would do so, and Makepeace presumably wandered off.

Percival opened the dreadful doings of the dale, feeling he might tackle that one first since it was the current favorite amongst the ladies

The next hour found him rubbing his eyes to be certain he'd read what he thought he did, occasionally snorting, saying things to himself though he'd read it. “Certainly not, no do not tell me, oh yes that's where it is going.”

Richard Among his thoughts on the ludicrous situations in the book, it occurred to him to wonder not just who would bother to write it, but who would bother to read it. That did give him pause, as he knew very well who was reading it. His aunt, her friends, and Lady Cordelia.

ings of They saw something in it, but what was it?

He did not know. All he did know was he would have to find something cheaply positive to say about it.

ok. The There was a soft knock on the door and Makepeace came in looking stern.

ven had “Yes, I realize,” Percival said, “these books are dreadful.”

ow the “Allow me, my lord, to bring you current regarding the terrible goings on at a place named Montclair Castle,” Makepeace said.

o them. He said it in a controlled fury and Percival wondered that there was steam blasting out of his ears.

discover “Go on,” he said. “I wish to know enough to be able to speak credibly on it.”

“Very well,” Makepeace said, hands clasped behind his back and steam exploding back and forth. “Though what could be creditable about it escapes me, Montclair seems there was a one-eyed duke widower. Very predictably, he took with a governess for his children. Even more predictably, this young governess described as being very gentle, though I've never known a gentle governess in my life. The question of the story, which is repeated numerous times with the case the dull readers of such books have failed to perceive it is called allegedly gentle governess love a one-eyed duke?”

o silent Percival poured himself another coffee, as he was fairly certain he would need it.

iter and The butler stopped in his tracks and turned. Holding a forefinger up to tell the air, he said, “And here is where it becomes somewhat less predictable.”

turns out the duke has two perfectly good eyes and is only a madman because he imagined he'd lost an eye. He's been walking round with an eye patch which does not require."

as well. Makepeace waited for that news to sink in. Percival shrugged and said that seemed to be no answer to make to such nonsense.

what he said. "Now, the unanswered question of the story whipsaws to if this all like a gentle governess can love a madman with two eyes. Which, happily, she can."

So, they go on, pleased as Punch, while the new duchess spends her time reminding the mad duke about which body parts he has, in fact, not lost. She then concludes the goings-on of that particular castle. I challenge you to find anything something creditable about it."

Makepeace pulled the book from his inside coat pocket and dropped it on the desk. "Now, I will repair to my rooms to discover what nothing happenstances have beset Grimwood Hall."

As his butler made his exit, Percival would have almost laughed at the very situation. Except he really would need to pull some sort of compliment out of the air for these books.

Somewhere in Dembric Dale, there must be some little nugget of something that could be commended. He just must find it.

was not



creditably. CORDELIA FOUND HERSELF much cheered by the time evening came. How could she not? She'd spent the day in the company of Juliet and her aunt, and in the evening would see Viola and Rosalind coming. They would only be a few minutes from home. It dear Beatrice, who was at home with her new baby and Van Doren.

had a Lord Darling had followed them everywhere they went through the house that day, including into the drawing room as they awaited her sisters. He was a charming little thing, though if one looked closely, one might begin to see the wear and tear regarding his interest in chewing on the furnishings.

can this. The earl came into the drawing room and stopped short, staring at Lord Darling.

he would. "Now, Papa," Cordelia said soothingly, "our poor Lord Darling is not out in the garden any day now, but he is still too young and in too delicate a condition right this moment. Charlie says, and you do remember that, don't you?"

an who grew up on a farm, that he would catch a chill and he would not catch it without company.”

“I see, yes, well, as to all that I am sure I cannot say,” the earl said. Juliet gently nudged Lord Darling away from the hem of the curtains and eyed him. “I just wonder, at least I did think, that he would be downstairs in the servants’ hall.”

“Of course, he is usually there,” Juliet said, “but just now, with the day preparing dinner, he would be underfoot.”

“Now, I do like to be agreeable,” the earl said, “but I feel forced to say that the aroma in here is rather like a barn.”

“Well it would be, I suppose,” Miss Mayton said. “Nothing a window might not remedy?”

Benny hurried to the aforementioned window and threw it open.

“Papa,” Cordelia said, “one of the things I find most wonderful about the Benningtons is that we are always willing to be a little inconvenient out of service to others.”

Her father’s brow wrinkled. “Naturally, service to our fellow man is of well and good,” the earl said, “but he is a goat, Cordelia. I really feel point that out.”

Cordelia glanced at Juliet. She said, “Though, this particular inconvenience is also *helpful* in some ways.”

“Is it?” the earl asked.

“Well, I didn’t like to say,” she said, “as it’s to do with wind and these problems.”

“It is?”

Cordelia, Juliet, and Miss Mayton all nodded gravely.

The earl, always helpless in the face of womanly problems, which as such a series of mysteries he would very much like to remain mysteries, was at a loss for words. “We’ll say no more about it.”

Lord Darling bleated at him, as if to confirm that he’d made a poor choice.

The drawing room doors opened and Viola, now Lady Baderston, will be with her new husband.

Viola crossed the room and was with them in a trice, throwing her hands around her sisters. Lord Baderston greeted the earl. Then he said, “you’ve got a goat in here.”

do well     The earl looked askance at the goat. Cordelia thought that, for willingness to overlook Lord Darling's presence on account of what she said, as problems, he was not that eager for his newest son-in-law to notice it. he was     "That is Lord Darling, Lord Baderston," Cordelia said, "as I know you are in the best of a particularly genial and liberal gentleman, I am convinced you will not mind it."

h Cook     Lord Baderston, having been named both genial and liberal, could of course mind it. He nodded as if it were the most usual thing in the world to say     Cordelia heard more noise from the front hall—the more difficult she had arrived. Conbatten.

n open     Rosalind floated into the room on the arm of her duke. "Sister dear," she cried. "How I have longed to see you. Dear Aunt, you are so so so marvelous."

out the     What commenced over the next few minutes was a flurry of embraced examinations of dresses, interrogations regarding health and happy explanations as to Lord Darling's presence, and flighty giggles.

n is all     Those things having run their course, Conbatten, who stood ever ready. I must put together and taking in the scene from under his hooded eyes, said, "I should be surprised at noticing a goat here, and yet I am not."

rticular     "My darling Conbatten is so rarely taken off his guard," Rosalind said. "Just the other day, I brought home two Chartreux kittens and they so naughtily got into his neckcloths and made a frightful mess of it. He is so manly lose his equanimity for even a moment."

          "I dared not," Conbatten said, "My valet was in a state of apoplexy and one of us had to keep our head."

          "Poor Henri," Rosalind said, "Always threatening to throw himself into the Thames over the slightest mishap."

ved his     Darden came into the room and once more there was a flurry of greetings. "Well! We are the merry party, are we not?"

a wise     "We most certainly are," the earl said.

          "I see Lord Darling has weaseled his way in," Darden said laughing.

entered     "Yes, well as to that," the earl said, "it was unavoidable. Ah, thank you, Tattleton giving me the signal. We can go through."

er arms

          "Gad, DARDEN WAS OF COURSE right—they were a very merry party. News of a

all his was exchanged, and Miss Mayton recounted the final words of Gomen's before he perished on his library floor after dealing himself a deadly

Neither Lord Baderston nor the duke challenged the story, very unlike you to Doren who was always trying to shoot it full of holes.

Conbatten even said, "He was admirably effusive, Miss Mayton, his lifeblood was fast draining into the carpet."

Miss Mayton nodded and murmured, "A man in love always is, not of the circumstance."

Cook had done a first-rate job on the dinner and Tattleton was at hand and upright best. Cordelia was certain they were both cognizant of his!" she duke in the house, especially Tattleton.

Finally, the dessert course was going round and they were coming to when the ladies must retire and leave the men to their port.

Cordelia wished to say something though, before they must retire. Happiness, wished to ask something. The situation with Lord Harveston was constant little itch in her mind.

Was it a situation, though? What was it, exactly?

Cordelia was not certain. She only knew that it irked her in some way that he held her in disdain. It irked her that knowledge wrung from her mouth said to be the yardstick with which she was measured.

"I would like to ask the gentlemen a question," she said. "And of course, did not you too, Papa."

The earl smiled. "I am flattered to be named one of the company and gentlemen at table."

"Oh, you do know what I mean," Cordelia said, laughing.

"Indeed, I do, my dear."

"I wonder, is it better that a gentleman spend all his time with his meetings a book, or should he spend all his time on physical activities?"

"Must it be either or?" Lord Baderston asked.

"It is not that it *must* be either or," Cordelia said, "it is just that son of a gun. it is either or."

This did not seem to clear things up for Lord Baderston. Dard looking just as befuddled.

"Perhaps," Conbatten said, "it would be quicker to the finish to just name the two gentlemen in question?"

She had not thought she would be asked to name them.

regorio “It’s Lord Harveston and Lord Hamill,” Juliet said.

y blow. “Ah, is there a rivalry between them for your heart, Cordy?” R  
ke Vanasked.

though “No! Certainly not! I was just wondering about...the merits of the  
“Were you?” Viola asked. “I am surprised, though, Cordy. Lord H  
a Corinthian and Lord Harveston is...well, I do not know what he is.  
) matterserious, I’m afraid.”

his stiff “Harveston is a good friend,” Lord Baderston said.  
“I second that,” Darden said. “He is just, well he’s the sort of  
aving athat...becomes a good friend on further acquaintance.”

“And Hamill?” Cordelia asked, hoping they would tell her someth  
g closewould intrigue her.

“Hamill is a jolly fellow,” Darden said.

se. She “Always good for sport,” Lord Baderston said.

like a “If he is on his horse, I lay my bets in his direction,” Conbatten sai  
“I have only noticed that one of them reads everything and the othe  
nothing,” Cordelia said.

fashion “There is no point in comparing them, I do not think,” Conbatte  
oks was “They are two ends of a spectrum. One somehow stumbled his way t  
Oxford and the other would stumble in a boxing ring.”

course “That reminds me, you never did say, Cordelia,” Darden said, “h  
and Miss Mayton made out at Harveston’s literary salon.”

any of Cordelia certainly did not know why stumbling through Oxi  
stumbling in a boxing ring should remind Darden of them going to the

“We were lost ducklings bobbing in the ocean,” Miss Mayton s  
Shakespeare play nobody has ever heard of, then another play by  
nose infellow and did he have the first play in his possession? It was rather g  
until we ladies decided to have our own more pleasant conversations.”

Cordelia noted Conbatten suppressing the smallest smile. In a  
netimesdefensive tone, she said, “We could not know anything about it, as we  
have the schedule of discussions as everybody else did. We are fa  
en wasprepared for the next salon.”

“They were in the library for above an hour this morning,” the ea  
st nameas if to back up her claim.

“Goodness,” Rosalind said, “what were you studying?”

“It is not so much what we were studying,” Miss Mayton said, “a



what we decided we would not study.”

osalind “We decided to use womanly judgment,” Juliet said in a defiant tone. “Women have been doing since time began. I dare Aristotle to write anything.” about *that*.”

amill is Before anybody could comment on Aristotle writing an ode at that date in his history, Benny raced into the dining room, breathless. “The duke he said. “He’s gone out the open window in the drawing room!”

The gentlemen sprung out of their seats and raced through the doorway, the earl trailing behind. The ladies were not far behind them.

They must find Lord Darling! He might be run down under a carriage wheel or stolen or lost and wandering round forlorn!

Cordelia did not stop for her cloak but ran out the doors and to the street with Juliet on her heels.

Lord Darling was on the street and not so much lost as he was refused. He might be caught. Conbatten ran one way, Darden the other way, and Lord Bamber readstook up the rear.

The dear little goat trotted this way and that and occasionally sprang through the air for good measure. He seemed to look upon it as a very good game. As the scene unfolded in front of her, Cordelia heard hooves approaching from behind her.

How you She turned so she might warn the rider to steer clear of the chaos. She stopped short.

ford or “Lord Harveston?”  
salon.

aid. “A  
another



truelingHow PERCIVAL HAD come to be at Portland Place, he could not precisely explain. He did not know anybody on that street except for Darden, and he had rather he been invited to any house on that street on this particular night.

He did not Hours before, he had plowed ahead in his reading of the ladies’ novels and even taken the second book into the dining room. There, he read of the two dukes, one of which was an impostor, and the aged earl said, who thought he was dismissed but was too nearsighted to find his luggage.

As if that hadn’t been bad enough, Makepeace had chosen that moment to give him his assessment of the beleaguered inhabitants of Grimwood House. It was

His butler paced the room as Percival helped himself to a plate of t  
one, “as “The duke is in love with, guess who? That’s right, another  
an odegoverness. There is no impediment to the couple, as his original duc  
dead at the bottom of the well. Oh wait, there is the small matter of the  
his lategoverness not being entirely sure if the duke has murdered that lady cu  
e goat,” residing in the well.”

Percival downed his wine and motioned to the footman. His gla  
rs, withspeedily refilled.

“Do not fear,” Makepeace continued, “our gentle governess is no  
arriagewonder long! Why, you wonder? Because the duchess is not dead at :  
she was knocked out and left in a cave by the housekeeper who, na  
e streetshas designs on the duke. An old crone who lived in the woods discove  
duchess and nursed her back to health. Isn’t it always an old crone li  
ising tothe woods? One wonders how these old crones manage to eat, liv  
derstonthemselves in the woods as they do!”

Percival ignored Makepeace’s wonderment over the old crone.  
ig up inleast it breaks the mold a bit, does it not? The duchess is restored  
ne. gentle governess does not win her man.”

ofbeats Makepeace laughed, a sardonic sort of laugh. “How naïve! Of cou  
gentle governess marries the duke. How can that be? It seems the c  
s. Thenbecomes enraged upon discovering her duke’s love for the governess,  
ensues, and the duchess accidently goes over the side of the well. Dea  
bottom of the well after all.”

“Surely not?” Percival asked, certain his butler was just making th  
to express his displeasure over the assignment.

“Surely so,” Makepeace said. “I feel as if my brain has shrunk thro  
reciselyin the contemplation of it. Those ladies must be driven out!”

nor had By ladies, he was perfectly aware that his butler was not talking at  
gentle governesses, but rather his aunt’s acting troupe.

avored “But, what happened to the housekeeper who started the whole th  
he hadleaving the duchess in a cave?”

l butler “Nothing happened! They do not even look for her. They are in lo  
age. do not wish to sit through a trial!”

ment to Percival had then directed his butler to take the rest of the night  
fall. help himself to the good port amidst the snorts of the footmen. Thoi  
footmen both admired and feared Makepeace, they could not help but :

oeef. histrionics endlessly entertaining.

gentle Percival had spent the rest of his dinner mulling over what both chess is Makepeace had read.

gentle All he could come up with was that the plots were so improbable that currently could not possibly guess where they were going.

Perhaps that was it. He might comment upon the twists and turns that were ridiculous twists and rather stupid turns, but he need not include adjectives.

Relieved that he had at least come up with one thing he might do about it all! No, ordered his horse, determined to ride out and clear his head.

As he walked his horse down one avenue after the next, taking in the fresh night air, his thoughts kept drifting to Lady Cordelia's household.

He really could not understand it. Darden seemed such a sensible man, and the earl too, for that matter. Why on earth would they allow

gentlemen into their house to stay? It was a particularly bad idea, considering that there were eligible young ladies in the house.

Percival did not suppose that Chester, whoever that fellow was, had very far if he had designs on one of the ladies. A gentleman screaming

at the time would be hard-pressed to inspire any sort of feeling beyond irritation. This Lord Darling, though. He did not know the man so could not

judge him in these circumstances, but he was a lord, after all.

Where had he come from? Was he Scottish?

Lady Cordelia, at least, found him eminently charming. Did the earl and Darden not perceive the danger?

Perhaps not, perhaps they were encouraging a match. Still, to have a gentleman move in seemed rather...shocking, he supposed.

Unless, of course, he was some kind of relative. A distant cousin perhaps. That must be the likely answer.

Somehow, his horse turned down Portland Place. He thought he could turn round, as the street was enclosed and did not lead to another.

He did, though, feel the urge to go past the Bennington's house. He could not say what he thought he would see there. Maybe he would spot

Darling coming or going. But what then? And why did he concern himself with it?

What he ended up seeing was not something he could have conjured up in his imagination.

Lord Darden, Lord Baderston, and the Duke of Conbatten had surr  
he anda kid who was leaping into the air as if taunting those gentlemer  
Mayton stood in the doorway with the earl, cheering them on.  
hat one Lady Cordelia and another lady, who he presumed to be her y  
sister stood just before his horse as he reined him in.  
s. They “Lord Harveston?” Lady Cordelia said.

le those

say, he

g in the

fellow  
random  
sidering

had got  
g all the  
ion.  
t assess

arl and

ave the

erhaps.

ught to

e could  
ot Lord  
himself

ured in

Lord Darden, Lord Baderston, and the Duke of Conbatten had surrounded a kid who was leaping into the air as if taunting those gentlemen. Miss Mayton stood in the doorway with the earl, cheering them on.

Lady Cordelia and another lady, who he presumed to be her younger sister stood just before his horse as he reined him in.

“Lord Harveston?” Lady Cordelia said.



## CHAPTER TEN

SHE WAS LOOKING very pretty in the moonlight, dressed in a simple y cut muslin with embroidered roses round the bodice. He had an overwhelming feeling of wishing to begin again, to erase the end they'd had and just start over.

Her sister turned and looked him over. "So this is Lord Harvesto said. Her tone did not convey that she found anything good about beir Harveston.

He wondered what she'd been told.

Probably that he was insufferable.

"Lady Cordelia, Lady..."

"Lady Juliet."

"Good evening. I am sorry, I seem to have intruded upon..."

Lady Cordelia had turned back to look at the scene. "Ah, there. Co has got him, that naughty little boy."

Lady Juliet called out, "Papa, do see that the window is close cannot escape again."

The earl gamely nodded and disappeared into the doorway.

"The goat escaped from your house?" Percival said.

"Well, he would have," Lady Cordelia said, "he is our goat aft Standing on her toes, she said loudly, "Very well done, Conbatten! Y Darden and Lord Baderston. Well done, gentlemen."

Two other ladies raced out of the house to greet the returning her Percival recognized them as Lady Rosalind, now Conbatten's duche Lady Viola, just recently become Lady Baderston.

It seemed the whole extended family was in attendance on the r goat, but for Lady Van Doren, who he understood was at home countryside.

Percival began to feel as if he had intruded upon a family party, w supposed he had. He should probably not be surprised that a Ben

family party included a goat hopping around on the street.

“What brings you this way, Lord Harveston?” Lady Juliet as-  
sume you call on one of our neighbors.”

Percival felt he was being cornered. She was rather bold for a you  
not yet out.

“I was merely exercising my horse and did not pay too much atten-  
tion where I was going.”

et well- Both Lady Juliet and Lady Cordelia looked critically at his horse,  
almost ascertain how much the beast was enjoying wandering round Town  
ounters destination in mind.

“As I have very accidentally encountered you, Lady Cordelia,” he  
n,” she determined to have his say on some recent books he’d read, “I ha-  
ve been thinking of recommending some books—”

“Recommending books?” Lady Cordelia said, in what he was cert-  
ainly an offended tone.

“We know all about your books, Lord Harveston,” Lady Juliet said  
write in circles, hoping to befuddle their readers into thinking they’re  
something remarkable. A bunch of Mr. Peabodys—we’ll depend on  
womanly good sense, thank you very much.”

nbatten Who was Mr. Peabody?

“Jules, do stop,” Lady Cordelia said. Though she admonished he  
l so he she also looked amused.

“I was thinking of the novels written by Richard Roydon,” Percival  
determined to plow ahead, “but then it occurred to me that you would  
be aware of those works. I had not realized that *The Dreadful Do-*  
er all.” *Dembric Dale* was one of his when my aunt mentioned the title to  
you too, butler has since brought me a copy.”

Both ladies’ brows wrinkled.

oes and “Do you mean to say that you enjoy those stories?” Lady Cordelia

ss, and “I say I must admire the author’s originality,” Percival said. “There  
are many twists and turns, one can hardly keep up.”

unaway “That is what my father admires in them, too,” Lady Cordelia  
in the thoughtfully.

Good Lord, the earl read that drivel?

hich he “Our aunt, Miss Mayton, reads them to us,” Juliet said. “She’s a  
nington storyteller.”

“Indeed, I have heard it said,” Percival said. He did not mention it. “Absolutely everybody had heard that particular thing said of Miss Mayton in the stories she told.”

“Harveston,” Lord Darden said, approaching them.

“Darden,” he said. “I was just exercising my horse.” It sounded stupid, even to his own ears, but he felt compelled to invent some excuse for being there. He could not say how or why he’d really come, as he was not at all certain, but it seemed to need some sort of explanation.

“Lord Harveston was just telling us that he enjoys reading the stories our aunt reads to us,” the very pert Lady Juliet said.

“Really?” Darden asked, all surprise. “Dreadful doings and incidents have happened here?”

“Awful happenstances, Darden,” Lady Cordelia corrected.

“Ah, yes,” Percival said, wishing to show his familiarity, “the events taking place at Grimwood Hall. Very ironic that the duchess fell down a well through her own doing.”

“That is what my father thought!” Lady Cordelia exclaimed.

“Well, if you are such an admirer,” Darden said, “you ought to come. Miss Mayton is poised to read to us and father says we’ll have our port in the drawing room so as not to delay further.”

“I do not wish to inconvenience, I am not at all dressed—”

“No inconvenience at all,” Darden said. “A man in his riding clothes is welcome in our drawing room. Is that not right, Cordelia? We are already in informal party tonight. If you have not yet had your dinner, I’m sure the kitchen will fix up a plate for you.”

Lady Cordelia did not look particularly enthusiastic, but said nothing. Lady Juliet did not say anything either, though her expression spoke volumes. The gist of it was, “go away.”

“I have already dined, and I really do not wish to—”

“Benny,” Darden called to a footman, “take Lord Harveston’s horse to the stables. Johnny, tell Tattleton we will need an extra glass for port.”

Cordelia said

WHILE PERCIVAL FOUND himself in the Benningtons’ drawing room, he did not fathom how it had happened. He’d just taken his horse out to the carriage head, then somehow turned down Portland Place, then witnessed a



on that escape and subsequent capture, and now was poised to listen to the ver-  
ton and that he had struggled through earlier in the day.

The goat, and he still had not been given any rational explanation  
why there was a goat in the house, had been sent to bed in the se-  
cond very quarters. One of the footmen had carried him off, his bleats eventually  
use for to nothing.

is not at Though the goat was gone, his particular scent lingered on. The  
could not help but notice that a footman had come in and used the fi-  
e same shovel to swiftly dispose of the goat's last fond farewell to the party.

Why did they have a farm animal in the house? He could not think  
so horrible usual!

He glanced round the room. Lady Cordelia was sitting very  
between Lady Juliet and Lady Baderston. Lady Juliet was scri-  
bling awfully furiously in a diary of some sort. The duchess and Conbatten were sc-  
ending up together in an oversized chair and appeared very happy to be so. Dar-  
Baderston were talking of YBC matters in low tones, the earl was  
in repose, eyes half closed. Miss Mayton held the book in her hands, r-  
ome in address her court.

It in the There was no sign of either Chester or Lord Darling and no ment-  
been made of those two houseguests. Percival was burning to ask about  
but could not think of a way to introduce the subject.

Others is If these gentlemen were relations of some sort, the conversation w-  
just an very comfortable. But what if they were not? How to bring up the  
we can without casting some sort of aspersion on the situation or hinting that  
odd or not quite the thing?

Nothing. "As we know," Miss Mayton said, "the duke gave up his fortune  
in volumes. Denbrow in order to wed his daughter, but he insisted on being nar-  
Denbrow's heir. Now, the duke and duchess are living in poverty and  
Mr. Denbrow is rich, he is also fearing for his life. Will one of the  
e to the servants the duke was forced to dismiss attempt a murder? Or might it  
duke himself, in order to regain his fortune? The kitchen maid had  
delivered another note full of threats. Chapter four."

e could  
lear his  
goat's

*Mr. Denbrow could not go on as he was. He rarely slept, and when  
did, he had one eye open. He was exhausted and it was very hard  
enjoy being rich when one was exhausted.*

ry story

*He was determined to get to the bottom of the threats be delivered one after another. But how to do it?*

in as to  
servants'  
fading

*The kitchen maid came once again to his library. "Here's another one," she said, dropping it on his desk. "They's comin' in like birds to roost."*

hen, he  
replace

*Mr. Denbrow ripped open the paper and read it. Again, another threat! This time, he would be tied to a tree and coated in bear grease. Then, a bear from the circus would be let loose very near. After he was sufficiently mauled to death and half eaten, whatever was left of him would be used as fishing bait.*

it at all

*"Ya seem upset," the kitchen maid said.*

prettily

*Mr. Denbrow glared at her.*

ribbling

*"I'm only sayin' you ought to take steps. If you was to marry and have a son, then that little fella just born would be the heir, no matter what you signed."*

ueezed

den and

in his

eady to

*"Is that true?" Mr. Denbrow asked, clutching at the idea as if it were a branch that might pull him out of swift water.*

ion had

it them,

*The kitchen maid nodded. "And what would you say to marrying a girl who already proved she can produce a babe?"*

ould be

subject

t it was

*The girl turned and showed her profile. Mr. Denbrow had noticed it before, what with his own problems to think about, but he was very clearly with child.*

to Mr.

ied Mr.

l, while

e many

t be the

as just

*"We hitch up at the altar and then three months later, you get a son on the ground."*

*"But wait, you cannot know it is a boy."*

*"Oh, I know it," the girl said. "I'm carryin' low."*

he

d to

*Could that be the answer to his problems? It was not perfect course it was not. For one, he'd have to marry the kitchen maid. He did not even know her name, and he was fairly sure he did not know her. For another, it would really only solve the problem of the duke murdering him to get his fortune back. It would do nothing to appease the villagers who had been dismissed from the duke's service.*

*"I reckon," the maid said, "that you get a son and then take your piles of money and your wife and babe and move away so as no one can touch you. I heard Spain is always sunshine, it don't hardly rain there."*

ing

*Spain? That would be a nice change of pace. The dale seemed trap clouds and rain overhead. And then, could any of the disgruntled servants chase him to the continent? He couldn't think they'd have the means to do it!*

her  
irds

*He would be free. He would be able to sleep.*

ther  
con  
rby.  
ver

Miss Mayton laid down the book. "So now we wonder, will Mr. D marry the kitchen maid and move to Spain to escape the clutches of would-be murderers?"

Percival, of course, already knew the answer to that question. And an answer it was.

and  
tter

"I'm always left on tenterhooks over it," the earl said. "What says Lord Harveston?"

All eyes turned in his direction. He said, "I find it simply astonishing." "Well said," the earl answered.

if it

Lady Juliet stood. "I suppose you'll want to hear the ode I composed?"

n' a

"I could not rest if we did not," Conbatten said.

Percival could not tell if the duke was joking or not.

not  
she

Lady Juliet held her book up to read. "*Ode to a Traveler.*"

ot a

*He turns this way and that with no direction in mind*

*Walking and trotting, through London they wind*

*His horse is confused and thinks 'where do we go?'*

*Less confused is the gentleman, who already knows.*

, of  
He  
like  
like  
ase

My God, was that about him? Did she suggest that he meant to escape Portland Place? That it was by design?

The party clapped, and so did Percival as he knew not what else to do. Perhaps nobody had thought to connect him to the ode. That was, if not an ode was not too lofty for whatever that had been. Where do we go indeed.

our  
ody  
rain

"Ah, that sounds very like you, Lord Harveston," Miss Mayton said. "Suddenly turning up like that."

"No, of course not, I was only wandering, I never thought to—"

"You are always welcome, Lord Harveston," the earl said jovially.

*d to* Darden's friends are welcome, however they end up here."  
*rese*  
*nink*



*enbrow* THOUGH IT MIGHT not be usual that one's married sisters accompany  
*of his* above stairs, both Conbatten and Lord Baderston were not at all surpris  
*id what* ed to be left waiting in the drawing room while Rosalind and Viola went up.

The sisters had all crowded into Cordelia's bedchamber while she  
fussed with clothes and hair.

"What did you think of my ode, Cordy?" Juliet asked, eyeing her sister.

"I think you hinted that Lord Harveston arrived here by design," Cordelia  
*ay you,* said. "I am sure he was galled by the idea. You have managed to punish  
*ng."* as I could not and he seemed to know it. Well done."

"But I did not do it only as a punishment," Juliet said.

"Ah, you think he *did* mean to come here," Viola said.

*I just* "So it is not even the plot at Dembric Dale that thickens," Rosalind  
said. "Cordy's plot thickens too."

"There is no plot," Cordelia said. "There is no reason why Lord  
Harveston should mean to end in front of our house, it was a  
happenstance."

"Bosh to that," Juliet said. "If he were to be out simply exercising  
horse, there are far better routes."

"That is true," Viola said. "He is at Bedford Square. He might have  
a very pleasant ride round Russell Square."

"Yes, that is the route I would have chosen too," Rosalind said.

*id up at* Conbatten and I ride out, he always puts me just ahead of him so he  
watches out for danger, so I often choose the route. Certainly, that is the  
route  
*to do.* I would have gone."

*iming it,* Viola propped her chin on her hands as she lay across Cordelia's  
bed. "Conbatten is still intent on saving you from things then, Ros?"

*'goes,'* "Terribly so. I adore him for it."

*n said.* "And the baths?" Cordelia asked.

"Still precisely ninety-eight degrees with chilled champagne."

"Lovely," Viola said.

*"All of* "Now, Viola," Rosalind said, "I know you have written that you

famously with Baderston and it surely looks so, but now that we are sisters, how is it for you?"

"We are two peas, same pod," Viola said with the slightest blush. "I am such a loyal fellow—we really do not like to be apart."

ied one "And your difficult mother-in-law?" Rosalind asked.

rised to "Far less difficult. She's given up the fight and when she does n she is very pleasant. She often asks about Papa and I think she admires Lynnettestill."

"Did I tell you I just got a letter from Beatrice? She says her cor still Van Doren's first concern and that Lily has him entirely conqu Lordeliadear little Lily babbles anything even remotely sounding like Papa, ish himpuddle."

"When we see them over the summer," Viola said, "I am going t Lily, even though Van Doren has claimed it will be over his dead bc they hang it anywhere in the house. I wrote Beatrice that I would be h and said, hang it over his dead body if that was what he is insisting upon."

"Van Doren," Rosalind said, laughing, "he never changes. y Lordgoodness Bea is delighted with him."

as just "All right," Juliet interrupted, "everybody is deliriously happy an blah, blah. The question at hand is what does Lord Harveston m sing hispushing in tonight?"

"He hardly pushed in, Jules," Cordelia said. "Darden practically c re had ahim in. You were there, you heard our brother."

"He could not have been dragged if he had not been there," Juliet "Whenout. "Furthermore, do you not think it odd that suddenly he is intere e mightthe books that *you're* interested in?"

e way I Cordelia paused. That had been a surprise, of course. She h imagined that Lord Harveston would be the least interested in the d i's bed.doings in the dale.

"Perhaps I have only misjudged him," Cordelia said. "He can be rude and I believe he is very impressed with himself, but it may hav wrong to jump to the conclusion that I knew absolutely everything him."

Juliet sighed, though it was really more of a groan. "Are you all bli get onis trying to apologize for his wretched behavior. I'd lay money on t that the first time he picked up one of those books was today. He w

just undetermined to work it into a conversation.”

He *had* been determined. Could Juliet be right? If her sister was  
“He is what did it mean?”

She did not know, but she could not help but admit that he’d been  
more pleasant this night than he had been before. And that he’d looked  
at fights mashing in his riding clothes.

res him It certainly would be a lot of effort, if he’d read the books only  
account.

nfort is “Mark me,” Juliet said, “Harveston has designs. That’s right, I  
ered. If Designs.”

he is a “Surely not,” Cordelia said, hoping her cheeks had not gone red.

“Surely so,” Juliet said. “I tell you to put you on your guard. I want  
to paint like him to trick you into something and then you wake up one morn  
ing only that realize you’ve wed a bookish gentleman. You will not be happy un  
happy to marry a Corinthian, you’ve said so many times.”

Cordelia was thoughtful. Softly she said, “Do you suppose there are  
Thank more of them? Corinthians? Aside from Lord Hamill, I mean.”

“Lord Hamill does not cause the signs of love?” Miss Mayton asked  
id blah, “No, unfortunately Lord Hamill does not cause the signs of any  
mean by cannot think why, but it is so.”

“Then, we must dig up more Corinthians,” Viola said. “Rosalind  
dragged Conbatten about it, surely he will know.”

Rosalind nodded. “He did say Lord Jeffries was returning from  
pointed America from some business or other having to do with mining. He s  
uggested in lord will require purchasing more horses and he has very specific sta

That sounds Corinthian-like, does it not?”

had not “It really does,” Miss Mayton said. “Perhaps all this palaver that  
readful on was just the fates’ way of passing the time before your real Cor  
could make his appearance.”

terribly “Trust in the fates, Cordy,” Rosalind said. “They always have  
ve been happiness in mind.”

g about Cordelia felt very buoyed by the idea. An as yet unknown Corinthian  
making his way to London. Surely, she would feel the signs of love with  
ind? He encountered him.

he idea Miss Mayton’s maid, Fleur, poked her head in the door. “I’ve been  
as very a desperate message from Johnny to deliver to you. The duke says he

a violence to himself if he is parted from his duchess longer. Lord Basset right, agreed and said he will do a violence to himself if he cannot go home to bed.”

The sisters burst into laughter. Viola and Rosalind jumped from their seats and rather and kissed their sisters and Miss Mayton.

They hurried down the stairs to stop their husbands from doing a violence to themselves out of desperate love, desperate boredom, or a bit of both.

said it.



TATTLETON HAD BEEN accustomed to understanding his own feelings and would not come upon him. In truth, his feelings had always been comfortable and straightforward. Happy, unhappy, content, not content.

What a whirl of emotions overtook him now!

On the one hand, the duke and his duchess had been to dine, a time many might speak about in those instances when he encountered one of his

Cook had held up his end and rolled out a dinner fit for any palace. Tattleton had brought up the most sublime wines from the cellar.

If he were to only examine those facts, the dinner had been a great success.

There were other facts floating around, though.

That goat had been seen by the duke, and no doubt smelled by the illustrious personage too. The Duke of Conbatten now understood that the Horace Tattleton was a butler who presided over a drawing room after standards. a farm animal.

Worse, the despicable little creature had the temerity to draw attention to himself even further by leaping out a window just as Tattleton was taking a drink of the dessert wine.

It was an affront! He'd selected a superior German ice wine with lavender, apricot and honey, a choice he was certain the duke would approve of.

It was a duke to approve of a butler's wine selection if he was a nobleman. It was undignified on the street trying to catch a goat as if he were a lowly farmer.

Just now, the butler glared at the creature, fast asleep on good behavior. He meant for people, as if he hadn't done a thing wrong.

That goat had no conscience.

will do

derston Mrs. Huffson sat down beside him, the rest of the staff finally  
e to his beds. He poured her a large brandy.

“I understand you had a time of it tonight, Mr. Tattleton  
the bedhousekeeper said comfortably.

“To call it ‘a time’ is to underestimate what I have experience  
violence Huffson.”

h. The housekeeper glanced over at the sleeping goat. “The little mit  
a nuisance of himself. Well, that cannot be laid at your door, the young  
did insist on having him in the drawing room.”

“The duke noted there was a goat in the drawing room. The c  
as they room I oversee. Then, the duke was forced to run round the street in th  
ortingly unbecoming manner possible to catch it.”

Mrs. Huffson nodded sympathetically. “The whole palaver make  
Mayton’s terrible novels seem not so bad, does it not?”

hing he “Is that what we’ve come to? Hoping other unfortunate circum  
s peers seem not so bad by comparison?”

attleton Mrs. Huffson shrugged. “What I wonder is, how did Lord Harves  
up here? Nobody just passes by Portland Place on their way to  
rousing destination.”

This idea seized Tattleton’s mind in the most uncomfortable man  
was certain the ladies were up to something, they were always  
by that something. Earlier in the day, they spent an hour in the library, teari  
od that the books off the shelf only to decide they would depend upon w  
ided by judgment when it came to intellectual questions. Then Lord Harvest  
host of an intellectual salon, unexpectedly turns up.

ntion to What was going on?

g round “I cannot say how or why Lord Harveston arrived at our door, b  
know that gentleman is in for a surprise. Miss Mayton and Lady C  
hints of have determined that they will rely on their own judgment as it relate  
f. How great questions being asked at his salon.”

running “Rely on...their own judgment?” Mrs. Huffson said, concern c  
mer? into her tone.

lankets “Their own judgment alone, Mrs. Huffson. Aristotle and Thomas A  
cannot be counted upon.”

“Oh dear.”



in their

n," the

d, Mrs.

re made  
g ladies

rawing  
re most

es Miss

stances

ton end  
another

ner. He  
up to  
ng half  
omanly  
ion, the

ut I do  
ordelia  
s to the

reeping

Aquinas



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

FOR THE MOMENT at least, all thought of Lord Harveston and his sale his opinions were entirely absent from Cordelia's mind. She and Mayton were attending their first rehearsal in Lady Rawley's drawing

"Now, Miss Mayton and Lady Cordelia," Lady Rawley said, "I have brought you two cups of tea, "as my dear friends Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson know, this first meeting is about concept."

"We always delight in the announcement of the concept," Mrs. Robinson said.

"We never guess where it is going," Lady Agatha said.

Lady Rawley nodded graciously. "It is very fortuitous that we have two esteemed new members to our troupe this season, as it is a particularly special year."

"You said it would be in your last letter," Lady Agatha said, "I'll tinker with it."

Cordelia could only be pleased that this year would be somehow special though she did not yet know what the specialness might be.

"I had a notion that there is one Shakespeare play in particular that we always needed the most work. I have acted upon that notion. We will be acting troupe, bring our new vision of it to life. I bring you, *Othello Re*

*Othello!* Cordelia could hardly stay seated. How she longed to play her Desdemona on the stage.

"I think we can all see where Shakespeare went so terribly wrong with that one," Lady Rawley said.

"I must admit," Mrs. Robinson said, "it is not a favorite, with everybody dying or going to prison."

"Yes, indeed," Lady Agatha said. "Why should Desdemona die if she's done nothing at all wrong?"

"My thoughts exactly," Lady Rawley said approvingly.

Cordelia was entirely stumped. Desdemona does not die? How wo

do her death scene, the scene she'd practiced and perfected, if Desdemona does not die?

"This is very exciting," Miss Mayton said, "I have never thought it possible that Desdemona does not die."

"I propose that Desdemona has been secretly in love with Cassio," Lady Rawley said. "So, when Iago plants her handkerchief in Cassio's room and arranges for Othello to discover it, he has inadvertently pushed the husband and lovers together. Naturally, Othello will wish to kill Desdemona, but she can be one step ahead. She announces she will drink poison. She seems dead in the room. It is only a sleeping draught."

Cordelia's forehead wrinkled. That sounded very like Juliet's escape with Romeo. On the other hand, though Desdemona would not die, it would look like she's dying. Surely, something could be made of that.

"Then," Lady Rawley said, "Iago's wife makes her appearance and reveals it was Iago who planted the handkerchief. Othello raises his sword and kills Iago, and they kill each other."

"Leaving Desdemona and Cassio free to marry!" Lady Agatha exclaimed. "Just so," Lady Rawley said, seeming very pleased. "Lady Agatha will depend upon you for Othello. Mrs. Robinson, you will play Iago."

The two ladies looked at one another. "Goodness, we're to have a fight!" Lady Agatha exclaimed.

"Miss Mayton, I know you shall be brilliant at Emilia, Iago's wife," she reveals the shocking secret.

"Oh, I do love a shocking secret," Miss Mayton said.

Cordelia felt her heart pound in her chest. It seemed an unreal dream. "I will do it," she would play the Desdemona who lived. Inspiration was flying at her from all directions.

"Lady Cordelia, you have my full confidence as Cassio. I, of course, will play Desdemona."

Cassio? She was not to be Desdemona? She was to be Cassio?

Lady Rawley's butler opened the doors to the drawing room and announced, "Lord Harveston, my lady."

Lord Harveston?

Cordelia's thoughts could not keep up with the new ideas presented. She was to be Cassio, not Desdemona, and Lord Harveston had just arrived? What was happening?

lemona



ought it

OF ALL THE letters Percival had received from his aunt, none had been so cryptic as the one that had just arrived. His attendance was requested, no, it was insisted upon, at seven o'clock. It must be two o'clock as it was of the utmost importance.

She'd not bothered to explain what was of the utmost importance, but he could make a reasonable guess at it.

He'd made Lady Cordelia upset at Almack's. Plenty of people had already made her opinion decidedly known, and Lady Hightower had already made her opinion decidedly known. He supposed others were commenting on it and, if his aunt had not objected, she'd since been told about it.

She wished to call him on the carpet and demand an explanation for the incident, but it was insufferable.

It was odd, though. Lady Rawley was pushy and intrusive, but he'd never known her to be stern and scolding.

Nevertheless, he would not make things worse by not attending to the matter. He would simply go and explain the situation, including the steps he'd taken to remedy it.

In fact, somewhere in that conversation, he might be able to work out an idea that his salon was really not the right venue for her acting troupe, which was unlikely to take that news as the affront that Lady Cordelia had.

Lady Rawley's long-suffering butler, Jones, led him into the dining room.

He stopped short when he noted his aunt's entire acting troupe gathered around a tea tray.

"My dear boy," she said, rising and coming to his side.

"Aunt," he said, by way of greeting.

He felt fairly transfixed where he stood. Lady Cordelia was staring at him as if he were a ghost. He rather wished he was a ghost and could slip through one of the walls, making a speedy exit. This felt like some kind of trap.

Lady Rawley turned to her friends. "I have been holding this back as a surprise, but look who has come to assist us!"

Assist? What on earth was she talking about?

“My dear nephew, once apprised that we would be employing you, I could not but wish to provide instruction. I hardly needed to even ask.”

Hardly needed to even ask? She had not asked at all! His mind moved at a rapid pace. What did she mean? How to remove himself from what that meant? Instruction? With swords?

“Swords?” he said.

“Indeed,” Lady Rawley said cheerfully. “Othello and Iago kill each other as you see.”

He was afraid he did see. His aunt, as had been her habit, found herself dissatisfied with a Shakespeare ending and had taken to rewriting it. He supposed to only suppose Desdemona somehow lived happily ever after. Another

Shakespeare’s greatest works was set to go spiraling down a drain in the drawing room.

“Now, Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson,” Lady Rawley barked never “come to where we will have the stage and let us block out that sword

Miss Mayton, you had best come too, since it will be your words that she fight. Lady Cordelia, if you would be so kind as to pour a cup of tea for my nephew and apprise him of the plot, that would be very helpful.”

It was a trap. But why? Why did his aunt wish him to assist in the butchering of Shakespeare?

As he could not turn on his heel and run out of the room, though he very much like to, he approached the table and sat down.

His aunt, Lady Agatha, Mrs. Robinson, and Miss Mayton had crossed the room and were heads together. Blocking out the sword fight, he supposed

Lady Cordelia poured him a cup of tea and handed it over. He was surprised, Lord Harveston, to find you wish to help your aunt with her

That statement felt like a trap too. If he said he thought the enterprise ridiculous, which he did, she would be insulted.

“I am rather surprised myself,” he said, “as I have just found out that I am.”

“I see,” she said.

It was a noncommittal statement, and Percival could not determine what she meant by it. Perhaps he could not work it out because he was spending too much of his thoughts on examining an escaped wisp of hair that she had tucked very charmingly on her forehead. A very pretty color hair too, which prompted the outrageous thought of what it might look like if all the

swords, were to suddenly fall out of it.

What was wrong with him? He pinched the side of his leg to avoid looking at himself back to the matter at hand.

He did feel that he had made strides the evening before to atone for his behavior at Almack's. He did not wish to slide backward now.

"Lady Cordelia," he said, wishing to get through the thing as quickly as possible, "I could not help but notice that I discomposd you at Almack's. I must apologize for my behavior."

"I was not at all discomposd," Lady Cordelia said. "I merely pointed out that you were rude. Do you make a habit of it?"

"A habit...no, I do not believe so. Though, I must think I sometimes do express myself badly—I did not intend to cast any aspersions on anybody."

Lady Cordelia nodded and he got the feeling he'd got as far as he could go, going to get.

"I believe my aunt wished you to apprise me of the new plot?"

She set off

for tea for



Lady Cordelia felt she'd been left in a trap somehow. Lord Harveston had unexpectedly turned up, at least, unexpected by her. Then, Lady Rawley would whisked everybody else to the other side of the drawing room, leaving her alone.

Miss Mayton had claimed that she thought Lady Rawley may have been imagining a match between her and Lord Harveston. Cordelia had dismissed the idea.

"I admit, but perhaps her aunt had been right all along? It would be a play." But what an idea! How had Lady Rawley even thought of it? The whole was ill-suited. Even his apology had been a bit of weak tea.

She glanced at him. It was not that he was not handsome, he was handsome as it happened. He was very tall and lean, he might even be a smidge taller than Conbatten. And then, he did have a lovely smile, which on a few occasions he chose to show it—his eyes crinkled in a rather delicate manner.

But his arms were quite usually proportioned, his tailor would not have rested to encase them. As well, nobody talked about Lord Harveston's prowess in the boxing ring, or atop a horse in a race. He was not a Corinthian. In the end, he pins

was not at all a sporting man, as far as she could see.

And his manner! That was another thing entirely. He was rude, condescending and full of himself. He looked down upon other people for his not deemed as sophisticated as he was. It was very bad, indeed.

Of course, he had not seemed quite so bad the evening before. He had quickly as worked to make himself pleasant. And then, he had made some awkward apology just now.

A small light, like a far-off flame, lit itself in Cordelia's mind. It occurred to her that what really bothered her about Lord Harveston was that he did not admire her or her accomplishments. Even if she did not admire him, sometimes she felt that he did not admire her.

She felt herself pink as she thought it, as she knew it was not a quality she could brag of.

Now he wished to know the plot to *Othello Redux*. It felt like a good opportunity for him to display a little looking down the nose.

"Well," she said, "Lady Rawley is against having Desdemona die. I think she really can see her point."

Lord Harveston nodded. "It was deeply unfair, as she was so young and very innocent."

"Exactly," Cordelia said, feeling a little encouraged. "So when she is very stupidly believes Iago and wishes to kill his wife for her supposed adultery, she pretends to take poison. Then Iago's wife reveals she has been Othello and Iago kill each other."

"It's not the worst idea my aunt has had in rewriting Shakespeare. I suppose they both deserve it," Lord Harveston said. "Iago for his villainous deeds and Othello for not realizing he was being tricked."

"Othello could have realized it though," Cordelia said. "That has always bothered me."

"You say he should have believed his wife's denials? I am inclined to agree. Especially over a man who was a malcontent."

"It should never have come to Othello choosing who to believe," Cordelia said. "If he had understood his wife's heart to begin, there would never have been a question of believing or disbelieving Iago. He would have known the truth."

Cordelia stopped talking. How had they begun to talk of hearts? It felt somehow intimate.

And the way Lord Harveston was looking at her! It was indeed and discomposing.

“So this particular Desdemona lives,” he said. “Though if she did love Othello, she must be unhappy at this turn of events.”

“Well, no, not in this version. I mean, in the original she loves sort of and he should have seen that. In this interpretation, she has always loved Cassio.”

Lord Harveston’s look of surprise was unmistakable.

“She would not have acted on it, of course,” Cordelia hurried on. “Iago, having planted the handkerchief, has pushed them together. And with Othello dead...”

Cordelia trailed off. It had sounded so much more logical when Rawley had explained it.

“I see,” Lord Harveston said. “I wonder if that is a common condition for a lady regretting her marriage.”

“No, I cannot think it would be,” Cordelia said. “As long as they are married for love. I speak of *true* love, obviously.”

“And how does one distinguish between true and not true?”

Cordelia really did not know how they came to be talking this way. It sounded almost...inappropriate. Though, she could not explain why.

“I ask because I do not know,” Lord Harveston said. “It is not a thing I have learned from books.”

Cordelia felt very vindicated by that statement. What he said was perfectly correct—there might be all sorts of information found in books, but the truth of the human heart would not be there no matter how hard you looked.

“I think one can rely on what is being experienced,” she said. “Do you ever feel as if one is drowning and yet has more air, and that their hair has been struck by lightning, and their heart has sped up and yet they feel well?”

“I have never heard anything like that described,” Lord Harveston said, looking at her quizzically.

Cordelia nodded. “It is a very difficult matter to describe, but my own exceedingly gifted in putting it all into words. Oh, as well, my sister reported feeling a bit sick.”

Lord Harveston appeared very struck by the information. Cordelia seemed well pleased that she’d been able to inform him of something he



s very know.

“I suppose you will step forward as this new, triumphant Desdemona,”  
indeed he said.

Cordelia blanched. “Actually, I will be playing Cassio.”

Othello Lord Harveston sighed. “I am sorry to say that I believe my aunt has  
secretly a little miscasting.”

Cordelia would not for the world agree to such a statement. At least  
out loud. Of course, in her heart, she thoroughly agreed.

n. “But It felt very complimentary that Lord Harveston should have perceived  
id then, so quickly.

It felt somehow that there had been a warming of temperatures between  
n Ladyher and Lord Harveston. It felt as if they were on more equal footing than  
she had been able to educate him on something he did not know. Per-  
tion—a course, that he rightly thought she ought to be Desdemona.

Perhaps he was not quite as bad as she’d originally thought.

he lady



way. It PERCIVAL HAD NEVER spent such a strange afternoon in his life.

For one, he had somehow been bamboozled into helping his aunt with  
ng I’ve theatrical—*Othello Redux*. As far as her usual ideas went, it was absolute-  
ly not the worst he’d heard of. However, it was not one he would care to  
id was with any of his more intellectual friends. There was not much danger  
oks, but hearing of it, as even if they had been invited to the theatrical they  
ong he would have attended.

Though the general idea was not as terrible as it might have been, Percival  
oes one became exceedingly alarmed when he understood the scope of the swiftness  
as been they were planning on. They wished to use real swords and hide bags of  
blood under their clothes. Lady Agatha had been strangely enthusiastic  
on said, “blood spewing everywhere to the shock of the audience.”

He wondered if they would end up inadvertently murdering each other.  
aunt is That certainly would put the period at the end of the sentence for his  
rs have troupe.

Percival would not be sorry to see the end of it, though he’d rather  
lia was there via two dead matrons on the floor.  
did not

All of that had been alarming enough, but then there had been Cordelia?” Cordelia.

He’d felt he’d made further strides in rehabilitating himself with Cordelia, though he’d also found himself uncomfortably bested by her in a done some manner. He’d grown used to feeling like the intellectual superior today she had spoken of things out of his ken.

She very glibly spoke of that whole mess called human emotions were not the least thing to fear. As if putting oneself in another’s position was not an exceedingly dangerous thing to do.

He knew it was though. He’d seen it with his own eyes. His father had dallied with a housemaid and the result of it could now have been more different than night and day, depending upon what floor of the house one laid one’s head.

Above stairs, everything went on as it always had. His parents were cordial to one another, but nothing more. It was very like two people who acknowledge each other as acquaintances and always put their best foot forward—painfully polite.

Though he should not have, Percival had reason to know what was going on below stairs too. His set of rooms had an old staircase running down to the servants’ hall. It was at the back of a narrow dressing room, behind a door that was absolutely closed and Percival was certain nobody remembered it was there.

The door in the servants’ hall had been walled over so he could not have used the staircase to enter that domain. The wall was thin though he never had taken to sitting on the bottom step and listening of an evening what was supposed to be said.

He was certain he should never have been eavesdropping, he knew he was doing it then. He just could not help himself. He lived in a cold and quiet household of cold and quiet tutors and cold and quiet parents. He had no siblings he could have sought company from.

All he had was the company of the servants, even though they did not know he was there.

Life below stairs was anything but cold and quiet. It was at times rather dull, other times it was complaining, other times filled with stories from the village. Often, it was a reporting of the family’s doings—the mistress had ripped another hem and her maid wondered if she did it on purpose or the baron was so out of sorts he drank three glasses of port though it cost

n Lady little good.

He had even once heard of one of his own misdeeds. He'd broken the Lady's bowl and had been spied by a maid hiding the pieces in the ash of a fire. Her in Percival had been very cheered by how sympathetic they'd all been for, but crime. One of the footmen claimed he'd clear it out first thing in the morning and nobody would be the wiser.

as if it He had begun to think of them all as friends, though they did not touch her. He'd wash him that way.

But then one night, a pall had settled over the servants' table. The news came out in bits and pieces, and what a terrible story it was. Dora, one of the housemaids, was with child. She would have to leave service. She was left with nothing—no money and no reference. The child would be unacknowledged.

She was meant to be already gone, but the butler and housekeeper were the kind people and had discussed it between them—they would hide her best. Foot arrangements could be made for her to travel.

Percival had been outraged at how Dora was being treated. The servant involved must be forced to marry her. That was, until he heard what the fellow was.

Dora's harsh punishments were caused by *his* father. The baron was the father of the unborn child.

And then even worse, the poor young woman's heart was broken. She'd never been in love with his father and could not understand how he could think when he was out.

Percival could not understand it either.

That was the night he'd stopped using the stairs. Instead, he'd set himself into his studies. They were the ideal way to avoid thinking about what he'd heard. They were a reliable excuse to avoid even looking at his father or doing the sporting things the baron liked to do. Mostly, it was the ideal way to stick to the facts and keep feelings at arm's length.

He never did find out what had happened to Dora, though when he'd inherited the barony, he'd hired a firm to track her down. All that he'd discovered was that she'd first gone to relatives in York and then married. She'd moved away.

Now here was Lady Cordelia, talking about the human heart as if she had nothing at all to fear.

She was either incredibly naïve and did not know the things he knew, or she was not naïve and she knew things he did not know.

To consider that she might know something he did not want to know was unsettling. He knew feelings and human behavior were a weak spot, but he would not be when he'd been determined to avoid them. He surrounded himself with the sort of intellectuals who would not delve into those topics either, so it had not often been brought to his notice.

He would attend Lady Hightower's musical evening this night. He would not skip it, not after her hair-raising letter regarding his manner of the presumed Lady Cordelia would be there, showcasing whatever musical talents she'd managed to acquire.

Would she speak more about the human heart?

He was not certain whether he wished it or did not.

er were

er until

his fellow

who the

was the

en. She

show her

thrown

g about

g at his

was an

en he'd

ould be

ied and

it were

She was either incredibly naïve and did not know the things he knew, or she was not naïve and she knew things he did not know.

To consider that she might know something he did not was very unsettling. He knew feelings and human behavior were a weak spot. How could they not be when he'd been determined to avoid them? He'd surrounded himself with the sort of intellectuals who would not delve into those topics either, so it had not often been brought to his notice.

He would attend Lady Hightower's musical evening this night. He dared not skip it, not after her hair-raising letter regarding his manners. He presumed Lady Cordelia would be there, showcasing whatever musical talent she'd managed to acquire.

Would she speak more about the human heart?

He was not certain whether he wished it or did not.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

LADY HIGHTOWER'S DRAWING room was filling up. Cordelia had been briefed by her elder sisters on what was required on such a night—something and make it not too long, the audience always appreciated a piece.

Cordelia was not at all intimidated by the prospect. She played piano adequately. She was not, of course, her sister Rosalind, and so a career through the world of music was out of reach. But that would not be expected.

Lady Hightower had asked her outright if she played in Rosalind's style and seemed strangely reassured when she could not claim the skill.

Cordelia's thoughts on other topics were, as they seemed always these days, in a bit of a jumble. Mr. Jeffries, the Corinthian returning from America, was expected to attend. She could only wonder if she would spark upon viewing him.

Darden said he was a jolly fellow and well-liked. Her brother was a good judge of character, so that was promising.

But then, there was Lord Harveston. Why would that fellow never occur in her thoughts?

As they had talked at Lady Rawley's house, he had seemed so...gentle. Very naturally, she must feel a little sorry for him having to admit to such a little of matters of the heart. The poor gentleman had not even known the signs of love!

And then, of course, it had been amusing to watch him take in Lady Rawley's ideas about the sword fight and Lady Agatha's wish to see the flying everywhere.

All Cordelia could think of was that she would not like to be in the front row of the production, lest those persons leave with red-stained clothes on account of Lady Agatha's enthusiasm.

"Lady Cordelia, Miss Mayton," Lady Hightower said, "I would have known Miss Bretherton."

Cordelia curtsied to the young woman.

“Miss Bretherton’s father is a bishop,” Lady Hightower went on, “must say there is something to the education of women brought up by She is *exceedingly* well read, a thing one does not often come across days.”

Cordelia smiled, but felt herself a little resentful of Miss Bretherton’s excessive reading. It was almost as if Lady Hightower had spied her in her father’s library, attempting to understand Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Play getting nowhere with it.

“I am sure I do not deserve such accolades,” Miss Bretherton said meekly.

“Well, who can tell?” Miss Mayton said.

Miss Bretherton looked very surprised to hear it. Cordelia suppressed a giggle—her aunt could suddenly say a thing that threw a person’s style off occasion.

“Ah, look who we have here, Lord Harveston,” Lady Hightower said. Cordelia had the uncomfortable feeling of her heart speeding up, at the same time wishing to push Miss Bretherton under the sideboard.

“Lord Harveston, this is Miss Bretherton,” Lady Hightower said. “An exceedingly accomplished young lady—I defy anyone to best her knowledge of Royal Society papers.”

Now the woman was reading Royal Society papers? Where did one get Royal Society papers? What was in them? She had heard of the Royal Society of course.

It was yet another learned group raising questions and attempting to answer them. What the questions were, she had not the slightest idea.

Cordelia supposed she should be grateful that she at least knew something of the Royal Society.

When she had first heard of it, she had assumed it was a new society dedicated to reporting on the king and queen. Her father had corrected her when she asked how they might get a copy.

“You might even think of extending an invitation to your literary friends after she has married and can move about society freely,” Lady Hightower said.

“Naturally, the bishop could escort her now, as he is equally learned,” the gentleman said. “On the gentleman is so busy with his duties I doubt it would suit. Even on the evening, I have been tasked with acting as Miss Bretherton’s chaperone.”

“More guests arrive, I will leave you to it.”

Lady Hightower drifted away. Cordelia watched Lord Harveston

how he would react to this womanly paragon of information.

“and I—” “Very good to know you, Miss Bretherton,” Lord Harveston said. “I am a clergyman. Cordelia, Miss Mayton, I trust you have recovered from the first meeting. How do you like the acting troupe?”

“Perhaps the better question is,” Cordelia said boldly, “how long has Miss Bretherton recovered, Lord Harveston?”

“Not entirely,” he said with a laugh.

“Acting troupe?” Miss Bretherton asked, her tone faintly shocked.

Cordelia found herself annoyed over the lady’s shock, as if she had been caught inventing it to seem more principled or delicate or...something.

“Yes,” she said, “My aunt and I are both actresses. We will travel to London to perform on the sixteenth in *Othello Redux*. Desdemona lives, by the by.” Miss Bretherton appeared further shocked, though Lord Harveston was clearly amused. He said, “Perhaps more of a clarification is in order. My aunt, Lady Rawley, puts on a theatrical every year in her private household by invitation.”

This information seemed to soothe the delicate sensibilities of Miss Bretherton. Her brow cleared. “Ah, I see. My father has often let his children perform scenes from the bible for close friends and family. Tableaus from the bible, indeed. I will be glad to witness them, if you will.”

Tableaus from the bible, indeed. Cordelia was certain she was more even more religious as the next person—she gave her full attention to the Lord’s service, as she was in church. But there was no reason to go making tableaus about the bible. Miss Bretherton was certain that Miss Bretherton’s tableaus were insufferable.

“We will have a swordfight,” Cordelia said, “right in Lady Rawley’s drawing room.”

“We are hoping for a lot of blood,” Miss Mayton put in helpfully.

As Cordelia observed Miss Bretherton’s reaction to the idea of hoping for a lot of blood, which was predictably shuddering, a hulking sort of woman slapped Lord Harveston’s back.

“Harveston!” he said in a rather booming voice.

Lord Harveston turned. “Jeffries,” he said, “when did you get back from this? So this was Mr. Jeffries. Of course, she should have known it in time. Ah, He was powerfully built, and his arms did likely cause his tailor to struggle over how to encase them.

“I landed a month ago,” Mr. Jeffries said. “Had to go to my father’s



and see it ticking along smooth before I commenced spending all his  
. “Lady in Town.”

“I will introduce you to Lady Cordelia Bennington, Miss Mayton  
Miss Bretherton.”

Mr. Jeffries bowed. “Ladies. Charmed. I suppose we will hear from  
you this evening?”

Miss Mayton was terribly flattered by the idea. She laughed and  
“Only the young ladies, sir.”

“Then I cannot believe you will not be among them,” Mr. Jeffries  
gallantly.

“You are a flirt, sir!” Miss Mayton said, tapping him on the arm with  
her fan.

It was such a charming scene, and Cordelia could not imagine what  
Bretherton had just grimaced.

“Now, what will we hear from Lady Cordelia and Miss Bretherton?”  
Jeffries asked.

“I will be on the pianoforte,” Cordelia said, “and play something  
short. My sisters have all told me that an audience always does like it short.”

Mr. Jeffries roared with laughter. “Yes, it is the sort of thing that  
nobody will admit it. Your sisters have very good sense. And you  
Bretherton?”

“I will play the harp,” she said stiffly. “I will perform an original  
composition of *Psalm 119*.”

The harp. Of course she would play the harp. It was supposed to be  
a difficult instrument to master, though Cordelia could not see why. And  
*Psalm 119*? That could go on for a quarter of an hour!

“Well,” Mr. Jeffries said, “no doubt the audience will be in the mood  
for longer pieces too. Especially on the harp.”

Cordelia was both admiring of Mr. Jeffries’ courtesy and irritated by  
what she was not, though, was in love with Mr. Jeffries. Or even  
way there. She had no symptoms of love whatsoever. He was a genial  
man, but she was not struck by him.

“Everyone,” Lady Hightower said from the front of the room, “if you  
despair, arrange yourselves. The ladies playing will be in the front, the rest  
recall that the seat you choose does not need to be perfection. You will  
sit in it for eternity. I say something along those lines every year, with see

money little effect.”

on, and



in all of PERCIVAL HAD NO idea he would be so amused at Lady Hightower’s  
evening. Lady Cordelia was a bold little minx. It was immediately a  
id said, that she did not care for Miss Bretherton and had gone about attempt  
shock.

ies said He could not be too condemning of her stratagems, though  
Bretherton was as so many ladies were that had come before—seric  
with her dull. Probably a deal like himself, as he supposed he was viewed  
serious and dull too.

ly Miss If Lady Hightower believed Miss Bretherton had the wits to j  
literary salon, then no doubt she did. He just did not particularly wish  
1?” Mr. He was certain that she would find herself shocked by some  
conversations that were had. Whatever his members were, falsely  
g short, they were not. If the decision came down to making a point or ob  
courtesy, well, courtesy had flown out the window more than once.

is true, Percival paused, an uncomfortable idea arising in his mind. Had  
u, Miss said a hundred times that he would only wed a highly educated lad;  
now here was one dangled in front of him and he did not have th  
original inclination for it.

She was endorsed by Lady Hightower as having a mind sharp eno  
e a very his salon, she was well read, she played the harp, which was no  
l *Psalm* accomplishment assuming she played it well. She was modest, well br  
every inch a lady. Miss Bretherton was precisely what he’d said he  
ood for for.

And yet, she was not.

oy it. She played the harp just now and it seemed as if it would go on f  
on her His hair would gray and he would lose an inch of stature and de  
fellow, paunch, they’d be carving his gravestone in order to be ready  
imminent attendance, and here he’d still be, waiting for Miss Brethe  
rou will finally conclude.

of you, The idea of struggling through such an evening at home with a  
l not bewell it did not seem very appealing.

mingly

Finally, Miss Bretherton did come to an end of her musical through *Psalm 119*. Gentle applause commenced, though he noticed Grant had to be woken up to participate in it.

“Excellent,” Lady Hightower said. “So accomplished. Now, we will have a musical from Lady Cordelia Bennington.”

Lady Cordelia rose. As she made her way to the pianoforte, she said, “Please do not nurse hopes that I can equal that skilled performance. I am only playing a short reel.”

Upon hearing the word “short,” Percival saw the many approving looks of the audience. He began to think that, whatever the deficiencies were in Cordelia’s education, she did have a particular knack for understanding people. A knack he did not excel at himself.

If Miss Bretherton had been all disciplined skill and serious execution, Lady Cordelia was all liveliness and fun. People sat up straighter in their chairs, Lord Grant even toe-tapped. And, just as she had promised, the performance was short. The applause was distinctly enthusiastic.

He watched her laugh and curtsy, assured of her approval. The salon and the Royal Society might be *his* milieus, but this was *hers*. This was her milieu.

As Lady Cordelia was the last to play, everyone rose from their seats. At least he was seated near the back, but he was suddenly gripped with a determination to make his way to Lady Cordelia and dispense his congratulations.

He could see that Jeffries had already done so. He supposed that she was always so jolly, was making a good job of it, which was rather irksome. He weaved round Lord Grant and was waylaid by Lady Hightower, who wished Miss Bretherton.

“Lord Harveston,” Lady Hightower said, “have you ever heard anything like Miss Bretherton on the harp?”

“It was very accomplished, Miss Bretherton.”

Miss Bretherton blushed, as if she had not been aware that it was his rigueur to collect compliments after performing musically.

“It was just a little piece I hastily scribbled the notes to,” Miss Bretherton said.

Now that was going entirely too far to be believed. Percival had observed the work that went into that endless piece, but he was certainly not slaved over it for months.

journey “Do not dim your own light, my dear,” Lady Hightower counseled  
 d Lord Out of the corner of his eye, Percival could see Jeffries joking with  
 Cordelia. He wouldn’t mind dimming Jeffries’ lights this very moment  
 will hear “Are you quite well, Lord Harveston?” Lady Hightower asked  
 seem out of sorts.”

ie said, Out of sorts? It seemed that he was. What was wrong with him?  
 e. As it He cleared his throat. “Not at all, Lady Hightower.”

Before he could make his escape, he watched Miss Mayton lead  
 ooks incharge out of the room. Lady Cordelia waved to him.

in Lady He waved back.

ig other “You know,” he said, hardly knowing where he was going with  
 think I ought to escort Miss Mayton’s carriage home. The road between  
 ecution, and Portland Place can be...unpredictable.”

in their “Unpredictable?” Lady Hightower asked.

it was “Well, one never knows,” he mumbled. “Two ladies on their own...  
 He sounded very foolish at the moment.

literary “Now, I see what you say,” Lady Hightower said. “Miss Bretherton  
 Peoplefather brought her here and her maid is here as well and I was meant  
 her home, but goodness I am very tired. When I think of calling  
 hats. Hecarriage, well, I wonder if it would suit if a hansom was called a  
 ination escorted the lady home? After all, her maid will be with her and will  
 protecting from danger atop your horse, I am sure it would be all right.

fellow, Escort Miss Bretherton? He did not wish to escort Miss Bretherton  
 e. “What do you say, Miss Bretherton?” Lady Hightower asked. “I  
 ver and suppose your father would approve the idea?”

“Oh, yes, I suppose so,” Miss Bretherton said.

nything “Excellent. It is settled then. Come along, we will retrieve your maid  
 call a hansom and you will be on your way.”

was de



therton THERE HAD BEEN some delay in departing Lady Hightower’s house. Cordelia  
 and her aunt waited for a quarter hour for their carriage to come round  
 had not longer than usual but not wholly unexpected—one could never be  
 n she’d certain what went on after a coachman let one out somewhere. Some

they lined the street and were easily in view, other times they were with Ladysomewhere. Miss Mayton had suggested that the coachmen must sit together in the stables and have their own party to pass the time.

“You know wherever Sandren had been, it did not seem as if it had been to her. But then, their coachman generally did sport a stern mien.

Lady Hightower had come out with Miss Bretherton and Lord Harveston. Apparently, Lord Harveston was to escort the lady home.

The idea made Cordelia feel a little sick, which was the stupidest thing in the world. Why should she be discomfited to find Lord Harveston sitting over by the educated bishop’s daughter? Of course he would be, she thought, “I probably traded a hundred facts already.

Once again, she felt she must be very conceited. What else could she do for being put out that one was not admired by one who was not particularly admired? Did she suppose the whole world should be in love with her?

“Cordelia paused. Where had that idea come from? Where did the love come from?”

As Miss Bretherton’s hansom trotted away with Lord Harveston driving to take following it, Sandren jumped down from his box and a groom opened for my carriage door.

They were settled in a trice and on their way home.

“You gave a wonderful performance, Cordelia,” Miss Mayton said. She was nearby Lord Grant and overheard him say to his lady, ‘that woman knows what’s wanted at these sort of things.’ The applause was pronounced.”

“I think my sisters were right in advising me,” Cordelia said, “perhaps like it to be short.”

“And Mr. Jeffries found the idea so amusing and he was so quick on his feet to congratulate you at the end. What did you think of him? Is he a Corinthian?”

Cordelia sighed and gazed out the window. “I am afraid not, Aunt, not struck by him at all.”

“That is a shame, but the heart will not tell tales.”

“I am beginning to be worried though,” Cordelia said. “Darcie has mentioned several times that there are not many eligible Corinthians in the town to begin. What if I end the season without meeting that special person? The one who is meant just for me?”

ent off “I shouldn’t worry over it,” Miss Mayton said, “he’s bound to  
all geteventually. You must simply go forward until you encounter a gen  
who occupies your thoughts.”

a party. Cordelia bit her lip. She had already met a gentleman who occup  
thoughts—Lord Harveston. Though, he occupied it for the wrong reaso  
veston. “But do you not think that a gentleman could occupy one’s thoug  
other reasons?” Cordelia asked.

hing in “Not for long,” Miss Mayton said, laughing.

bowled Cordelia was exceedingly perplexed with herself. Or with her hea  
they’dheart seemed to not know what it was doing or what it wanted!

It was being so very obscure about things. Rosalind and Viola ha  
accountsingle-minded. Rosalind must have her duke, Viola must have  
icularlyBaderston.

’ Another idea came to her. Not a particularly welcome idea. Her  
idea ofsister Beatrice had not known her own heart for quite some time.

Of course, it was absurd that Cordelia Bennington, of all people,  
utifullynot be in very close communication with her heart. She was an actre  
ned theinterpreted the words of Shakespeare to evince the emotion and make  
to life.

“You seem very tired, my dear,” Miss Mayton said.

said. “I “Yes, I believe that must be it. I am only very tired and it has m  
youngthoughts go round in circles.”

as *quite*

ople do

κ on his  
ne your

t. I was

len has  
s in the  
person?

“I shouldn’t worry over it,” Miss Mayton said, “he’s bound to turn up eventually. You must simply go forward until you encounter a gentleman who occupies your thoughts.”

Cordelia bit her lip. She had already met a gentleman who occupied her thoughts—Lord Harveston. Though, he occupied it for the wrong reasons.

“But do you not think that a gentleman could occupy one’s thoughts for other reasons?” Cordelia asked.

“Not for long,” Miss Mayton said, laughing.

Cordelia was exceedingly perplexed with herself. Or with her heart. Her heart seemed to not know what it was doing or what it wanted!

It was being so very obscure about things. Rosalind and Viola had been single-minded. Rosalind must have her duke, Viola must have Lord Baderston.

Another idea came to her. Not a particularly welcome idea. Her eldest sister Beatrice had not known her own heart for quite some time.

Of course, it was absurd that Cordelia Bennington, of all people, should not be in very close communication with her heart. She was an actress. She interpreted the words of Shakespeare to evince the emotion and make it come to life.

“You seem very tired, my dear,” Miss Mayton said.

“Yes, I believe that must be it. I am only very tired and it has made my thoughts go round in circles.”



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PERCIVAL WAS FEELING very prickly as he escorted Miss Bretherton home. He'd wished to escort Lady Cordelia home but had been boxed out by Lady Hightower.

After the lady so recently having lectured him on the attributes of a gentleman and that he was not coming up to the mark, there had been no room to slip out of it.

Begrudgingly, he had ridden his horse behind Miss Bretherton's carriage. Until that was not deemed sufficient, apparently.

Miss Bretherton had opened a window and told him she would feel more secure if he rode next to her and if the hansom driver would slow down.

The boy hanging on the back of the hansom had snorted, the driver had ignored her though she'd said it very loud. Percival had done as asked. Unlike the driver, he could not see how to refuse.

"To pass the time, Lord Harveston," she said, her head at the window, "I wonder about your views on Reverend Fordyce's *Addresses to Young Gentlemen*."

Of course, Percival had read them, and his advice to young ladies did not suppose, though, that Miss Bretherton wished for his real opinions on the sermons.

His actual estimation of Fordyce was that the fellow had looked at his own family and social sphere, thought about what annoyed him, concocted a recipe of behavior that would be for his own personal convenience, and written it all down.

As he did not answer immediately, Miss Bretherton said, "I have never been permitted to read the addresses to young gentlemen yet, as they are addressed only to young gentlemen, but my father says he will use the advice as a yardstick in measuring any gentleman who comes calling."

Percival pressed his lips together to hide a smile. If the bishop was using such a yardstick, he wished for a very dull sort of person.

His hands tightened on his reins. *He* was a very dull sort of person.



least, he must suppose so. He dearly hoped that neither the bishop nor Bretherton were looking in his direction.

“My father says that Reverend Fordyce rightly points out that a gentleman does not like frittering away time on gambling or box-horseraces. He says that so many gentlemen pretend they like such things to go along. But Lady Hightower tells me you do not pretend at it.”

This was hitting a little too close to the mark. Had Lady Hightower to her singing his praises? At least, the sort of praises that Miss Bretherton had in by approve of?

Why? Was it some sort of revenge for his recent bad behavior of aAlmack's?

no way Blessedly, the hansom slowed and then stopped. They had arrived at the bishop's house.

arriage. Just as he thought he might tip his hat and turn his horse round, a moment he spotted a footman at the doors, a whole bevy of people descending the steps.

1. The crowd was led by what he assumed were the butler and housekeeper. “A hansom!” the butler said, his voice wavering like he might cry out. “And who is this, Miss?” the housekeeper said, looking askance at Percival.

down, “I As Miss Bretherton was helped down, she apprised the staff of her *Men?*” Hightower's fatigue and how other arrangements had been made. She too. He escorted by Lord Harveston, and it had all been very respectable.

nion on The expressions on their faces were priceless. One sniffed, another wide-eyed, a maid clutched at her fichu. One would have thought that Hightower had sent the girl accompanied by a dozen rakes on a ship bound for the Americas.

nd then They then promptly surrounded Miss Bretherton and escorted her to the house. One of the footmen looked over his shoulder at him as if he had not been chase after them and murder them all.

dressed He turned Percival and urged him to a trot. He noticed he did not hardstick do much urging and supposed his horse was just as befuddled as himself.

indeed What a household.

What a difference from the Bennington household.

son. At Had he escorted Lady Cordelia, he might well have found that

or Misschasing after a goat again, as the earl looked on and cheered.

Sensing his sudden thoughtfulness, Pericles slowed to a walk.

ny true Why had he been so determined to escort Lady Cordelia home any  
xing or Her family was odd, to say the least. But then, they had somethi  
ngs justnever had. They were warm. Even the duke had not seemed so ducal  
midst.

er been For all his mother's talk of family and how they must suppo  
t wouldanother, he'd not seen much of that in his household.

Lady Cordelia herself was so different!

avior at He was ashamed that he'd initially taken on a condescending opi  
her intellectual abilities. In her letter, Lady Hightower had mention  
d at thethere were more types of intelligence than he was aware of. I

Makepeace could not quite work it out and had settled on instincts.

ind the Perhaps they had been wrong though. Perhaps Lady Co  
scendedintelligence was of a harder to define sort. It was not anything pulled  
book or based on a fact. It was not analytical. It was something else. It

eeper. if she could see into a person's thoughts, though they had not spoken t  
over it. He ought to stop thinking of the lady so much. He ought to stick

ance athe had planned—he would wed a highly educated lady and they woul  
to have lively intellectual debates.

of Lady Though, he could not ignore that the idea of sitting across a br  
he wastable from Miss Bretherton, discussing Fordyce's advice to young gen  
made him feel a little sick. It also made him a bit queasy to think c  
ier wasCordelia's future.

it Lady She would end merry with Lord Darling, or even perhaps Jeffries.

o to the Stupid men.

into the

e might



LADY RAWLEY HAD been determined that she would once more take C  
have toand her aunt in her own carriage to Lord Harveston's literary salon.

he was They would arrive on the early side of things, but Lady Rawley  
them that his nephew would not mind it. In any case, Lady Agatha an  
Robinson would already be there to assist the bachelor in his preparati

Now, as they stopped in front of the house, they found both o  
e duke

ladies pacing in front of it.

They hurried to Lady Rawley's carriage. Lady Agatha said, "We way? you asked and have been here for a full half hour."

ng he'd "But my dear Lady Agatha," Lady Rawley said, "What do you do in their pavement? Hadn't you have been better served to be inside to examine Harveston's arrangements?"

ort one "We have been barred from the house," Lady Agatha said.

"Positively barred," Mrs. Robinson said. "I was here. I heard it my

"It was that butler," Lady Agatha said, huffing with the outrage of nion of said Lord Harveston told him to not open the doors until eight precisely that he was just following his orders."

He and "Well," Lady Rawley said, being helped down from the carriage sounds like a misunderstanding. My nephew probably forgot you Cordelia's arriving to help. After all, he has struggled on as a bachelor for the past few years. And Makepeace, he can be difficult at times."

was as Cordelia was not so certain that Lord Harveston *had* forgotten them. Agatha and Mrs. Robinson would turn up early.

to what Mollified, Lady Agatha said, "Now I suppose that is right. Servants do go on getting it wrong so often."

"We've brought flowers, they are in Lady Agatha's carriage, just breakfasted," Mrs. Robinson said. "I daresay if we can get in now we can settle them, up in good time."

of Lady "Say no more, Mrs. Robinson," Lady Rawley said. "I will lead the Miss Mayton was helped down, and then Cordelia. Reluctant followed the determined group of matrons to the doors. Lady Rawley rapped on the door knocker very forcefully.

When there was no response, she called, "I know you are in there, Makepeace. Open this door at once!"

Slowly, the door opened. The butler stood there grave and said, "I will open the door for you at eight o'clock."

"Stand aside, you saucy man," Lady Rawley said.

assured Makepeace did stand aside, though he did not look very happy and Mrs. They entered the house and Lady Rawley pointed at the two footmen. "If you bring the flowers in from Lady Agatha's carriage, the other footmen will bring those every vase in the house."

The footmen looked to their butler for confirmation of these

Makepeace nodded reluctantly.

She did as Lady Rawley, seeming victorious over the whole thing, started. Makepeace and said, "Now, we will have a look at the sideboard and see on the what we think of it."

The Lord Makepeace had his hands balled into fists and Cordelia was certain he'd like to throw himself in front of Lady Rawley to stop her progress. She could do so without becoming unemployed.

herself." She sailed into the drawing room and Cordelia reluctantly followed her. "He The sideboard looked as it had last time—very well composed and orderly and Rawley eyed it critically, while Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson took up of the incoming flowers and vases.

, "it all "It will do, I suppose," Lady Rawley said.

you were Makepeace turned on his heel and stalked out of the drawing room. Cordelia supposed he would take himself to some far away closet, closed the door, and shout for a few minutes.

at Lady "Goodness," Miss Mayton said, watching the activity around her, "an awful lot of flowers."

ants do Her aunt told no tales—Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson had laid out enough flowers to fill a farmer's cart. Lilies, delphinium, and over all as you peonies dominated, though there was also a large pot of sage. Cordelia let them laugh, guessing sage was thought to be appropriate for an evening discussion.

way." Lord Harveston entered, trailed by his incensed butler. Cordelia's eyes shined up though she willed it otherwise. He was looking very well in his close-cut coat. His neckcloth was superbly done in an understated red. Goodness, she always forgot how tall he was.

there, The lord looked about him and said, "Aunt, this is completely unnecessary."

It is not "Nonsense, my boy," Lady Rawley said. "Just look at how much more cheerful and welcoming it is."

"It smells like a hothouse," Lord Harveston said.

doing it. "Well it would," Lady Rawley said, brow wrinkling. "It's from the flowers. By the by, Makepeace barred us at the door, Nephew. I don't fetch positively barge my way in."

"I gave Makepeace instruction that the doors were not to open until ten o'clock. There was no cause for anyone to arrive before then."

“Yes, yes,” Lady Rawley said, waving her hands, “but we are not interested in *anyone*.”

Before Lord Harveston could say whether he thought they were or not, the footmen began to lead in guests as they arrived.

Cordelia was perhaps more astute about what she was seeing than she had been the last time. On their first attendance she’d known so little about what to expect or who would attend. Now, she could see that certain gentlemen were eager to see one another.

Nobody seemed particularly interested to see Lady Rawley’s party. Cordelia and Miss Mayton began to feel as if they were being treated as if they were the only ones there. That feeling was further confirmed by the various glares at the vases of flowers, which nobody seemed to appreciate.

Therefore, she was very surprised when an older gentleman who she had taken as a bit ornery last time approached their party.

“Ladies,” he said, “I will be so forward as to introduce myself. I am Mr. Haventops, Oxford Fellow.”

Cordelia curtsied. At least one gentleman had some manner of friendliness.

“May I speak for my fellow salon members when I say we were well prepared for your arrival last time. This time, we hope to do better.”

Lady Rawley nodded condescendingly. “You are very good sir,” she said. “And we have tried to do our part by bringing in some flowers.”

Mr. Haventops glanced around. “Yes, yes indeed. Now, what I propose is that our new members cannot isolate further! We must have them integrated into our debates.”

Though she had initially taken him to be mannerly and friendly, there was something about Mr. Haventops that began to give Cordelia pause. She did not put her finger on it exactly. His words were pleasant. The tone in which he spoke them was pleasant. But, there was something that made her feel uneasy.

“Mr. Haventops, you are too good,” Lady Agatha said. “Now, you do not think to know everybody. This is Lady Rawley, she is Lord Harveston’s daughter-in-law, and here is Miss Mayton and Lady Cordelia, and there is my friend Mrs. Robinson. I am Lady Agatha.”

Mr. Haventops bowed. “Charmed,” he said. “Now, I suggest that you proceed as follows. Lady Cordelia and Miss Mayton, you will sit over

hardly That is my group, we are a freewheeling set—we discuss whatever interesting about the topic. Lady Rawley, Lady Agatha, Mrs. Robi yone or would send you that way. Those fellows always bring along some fasc document of some sort.”

she had Lady Rawley said, “I do recall that last time, there was a third ut what They sat over in that corner of the room. What do they do?”

sets of Mr. Haventops said, “Ah yes, well they are all friends and a rather group. I do not think you would enjoy their company, as they keep ver acting to themselves.”

pariahs. Lady Rawley nodded. “Mr. Haventops, you have been ases of accommodating.”

Mr. Haventops bowed. “Until then, ladies.” He moved off and C o she’d felt further uneasy, noting the small smile that played upon his lips.

“It was just as I suspected,” Lady Rawley said. “The poor membe Bertram so taken aback when we arrived last time. As we know, these s intellectuals are not particularly good at thinking on their feet. Now the rs and had time to take in our presence and have nominated Mr. Haventops to honors.”

ere ill- “But Lady Rawley,” Cordelia said, “I am worried about our partic Have any of us really studied the question at hand?”

he said. “Oh dear,” Lady Agatha said, “I had presumed we would all be t in our little circle and have further discussion about *The Dreadful De would Dembric Dale.*”

ive you “We are as one mind, Lady Agatha,” Mrs. Robinson said. “I thou very same. I was planning to comment on the effrontery of that ere was maid.”

e could “She is rather forward,” Lady Agatha said, “but then her idea of i which to Spain is not a bad one.”

ier feel “But what about Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas?” Cordelia praying that somebody knew something they might impart.

u really All eyes turned to Lady Rawley. She said, “I haven’t thought t reston’s thing about it, nor do I even recall what the question was.”

y good “It was to do with Aristotle’s idea that people are a bad judge of th case,” Cordelia said, “and how it relates to St. Thomas Aquinas’ idea hat we man can be the judge of himself.”

r there. “Cordelia and I spent an hour in the earl’s library, but we could not

seems heads or tails of it," Miss Mayton said.

erson, I "We ended agreeing that we should be guided by womanly  
inating Cordelia added. Though, it did not sound as brilliant an idea as it ha  
they'd thought of it.

group. "It is a ridiculous question," Lady Rawley said. "I propose we en  
strategy that has always worked well for me. A dodge the question  
closed strategy."

y much Cordelia had never heard of such a strategy.

"When one is asked a question one does not know the answer  
n very simply doesn't wish to answer," Lady Rawley said, "one can resp  
several ways. My own preferences are: 'One wonders' or 'that is a v  
ordelia question that requires much thought' or 'that certainly deserves  
investigation.' I always used it to great effect with my husband when  
rs were inquired into a bill from the dressmaker or milliner."

orts of "Yes, I see," Miss Mayton said. "As well, one might answer a q  
ey have with a question. For example, one might say 'perhaps the more im  
do the point is, what do *you* think about it?' I also find one might almost alw  
to a gentleman, 'I defer to your superior judgment.'

ipation. "Oh, yes," Mrs. Robinson said, "they always do like that!"

"Of course," Lady Rawley said, "if one finds oneself in  
together uncomfortable corner, one might simply change the topic altogether  
ings of worked wonderfully well in my marriage. My lord would be wavin  
bill or other around and I'd say, 'How do your hounds get on, my love  
ight the Cordelia was feeling more uncomfortable by the minute. They v  
kitchenspeak on a subject none of them knew the first thing about by using v  
and hoping nobody noticed? And then, there was something abc  
moving Haventops' friendliness that she did not trust.

Though she told herself she was in no real danger, regardless of  
asked, way the evening turned, she almost began to feel as if they were  
Romans being thrown to the lions.

he first At the front of the room, Lord Harveston dinged his glass.

"Well," Lady Rawley said, "we'd best sort ourselves into our res  
eir own groups."

that no Cordelia's heart sank. There was something very wrong here. She  
wish to join Mr. Haventops' group. Though, she supposed she did n  
ot make much choice.

sense,”  
d when



PERCIVAL, OR RATHER his butler, had been successful at keeping his employ a friends from invading his drawing room before eight o'clock.

sort of Not that it had not made much of a difference—the room was filled with flowers and he could see very well what his members thought of it. His aunt had not had time to meddle with Makepeace's sideboard.

r to or Percival had presumed that his aunt and her friends would stay so long from the rest of the members and carry on their conversation regarding weighty doings in the dale.

further He had even planned on occasionally taking part in the discussion, but he made his way round the room. Though, beyond noting that the party was unpredictable, which he had already said to Lady Cordelia, he had no question thought of any other positive he might remark upon. But certainly something important would come to him.

ays say Lady Cordelia was looking very well this night. She wore a simple dress of silk with only a thin gold chain round her neck as adornment. Her auburn hair was swept up and kept in place with a gold and pearl comb. She was a very elegant really.

r. This It occurred to him that she always did look elegant. It was as if she had a certain confidence of restraint. She did not add what was not necessary.

?”” As he was admiring her person, Percival had been quietly alarmed when Mr. Haventops approached the ladies. His alarm had been for naught, for the ladies were laughing as they'd seemed to have a civil conversation.

ut Mr. Mr. Haventops could be ornery in the extreme, but apparently he'd been so off since the last salon. He imagined the fellow had managed to recover from which his initial outrage and decided to make himself pleasant. After all, he had ancient sought connections and Lady Rawley was exceedingly connected.

At least, that's what he'd thought. Now he was not so certain.

pective Wishing to bring them into the fold was rather too big a turnaround for what he believed from Mr. Haventops.

did not What was he up to?

ot have Whatever it was, it seemed to come as a surprise to the other members.



who clearly were not expecting to find a lady beside them.

Makepeace ended his description of the question of the night Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas theorized, is it in fact hopeless for a man to judge his own case?"

Percival said, "At this moment, I usually give my opinion on the question. Though, I am not entirely sure where I've landed on this one. On the other hand, it seems clear that a person cannot always be objective when the outcome will materially affect them. On the other hand, if one sets out a set of rules to live by, then one need only follow them rigorously and thereby enforce objectivity. So, I will be interested in hearing the range of definitions on the matter. Begin the discussion."

As he spoke, Percival retrieved a glass of wine from the sideboard and drifted toward the table where his aunt, Lady Agatha, and Mrs. Robinson had seated themselves. Mr. Royford was laying out various documents. Sir Frederick said nothing. Rawley, I would know your assessment of the points both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas set out to make."

Lady Rawley shook her fan at Sir Frederick. "Well, Sir Frederick, I would know is your view on Desdemona's death in *Othello*. Was not it a very bad job of it?"

"One wonders," Mrs. Robinson said.

"It certainly merits further thought," Lady Agatha said.

The other members, including Makepeace, looked entirely flummoxed to see as was Percival himself. How had she worked in *Othello*?

He was certain his members were about to be taken on a ride they would not enjoy. However, he was all confidence that his aunt and her two companions could defend themselves sufficiently, if not rationally.

He was more concerned about Haventops.

always

groups.

and to be

members,

who clearly were not expecting to find a lady beside them.

Makepeace ended his description of the question of the night. “As Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas theorized, is it in fact hopeless for a man to judge his own case?”

Percival said, “At this moment, I usually give my opinion on the question. Though, I am not entirely sure where I’ve landed on this one. On the one hand, it seems clear that a person cannot always be objective when an outcome will materially affect them. On the other hand, if one sets out clear rules to live by, then one need only follow them rigorously and that must enforce objectivity. So, I will be interested in hearing the range of debate on the matter. Begin the discussion.”

Percival retrieved a glass of wine from the sideboard and drifted over to where his aunt, Lady Agatha, and Mrs. Robinson had seated themselves.

Mr. Royford was laying out various documents. Sir Frederick said, “Lady Rawley, I would know your assessment of the points both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas set out to make.”

Lady Rawley shook her fan at Sir Frederick. “Well, Sir Frederick, what I would know is your view on Desdemona’s death in *Othello*. Was not Othello judging his own case and doing a very bad job of it?”

“One wonders,” Mrs. Robinson said.

“It certainly merits further thought,” Lady Agatha said.

The other members, including Makepeace, looked entirely flummoxed. As was Percival himself. How had she worked in *Othello*?

He was certain his members were about to be taken on a ride they would not enjoy. However, he was all confidence that his aunt and her two friends could defend themselves sufficiently, if not rationally.

He was more concerned about Haventops.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PERCIVAL MADE HIS way over to Mr. Haventops' grouping.

"May one presume that both Lady Cordelia and Miss Mayton have read Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas widely?" Mr. Haventops asked them.

"Presume whatever you prefer, Mr. Haventops," Miss Mayton said. "I always think things are made a deal more pleasant when one allows others to carry on with their presumptions."

"Do you say then," Mr. Haventops went on, "that you have or have not?"

"One wonders," Miss Mayton said.

"Yes, one *does* wonder," Mr. Haventops said.

"I say, Haventops," Mr. Genterly said quietly.

Mr. Haventops disregarded the warning. Percival could see Lady Cordelia's cheeks redden. He would have to put a stop to this.

"I am only trying to assess the ladies' knowledge of the subject," Mr. Haventops said with a shrug. "This is a salon, not a rout, and we have the right to expect certain standards are met."

"Haventops," Percival said in a warning tone. "We will follow the standards of conduct here."

Mr. Haventops said in a tone that meant to convey that his behavior was unacceptable and would not be tolerated. He would throw the man out of the room if it became necessary. It was one thing to conduct a fierce, argument bordering on rude, debate with an equal challenger. It was quite another to bully a weaker opponent.

Lady Cordelia sipped her wine and set it down. She was looking more embarrassed than she had been. She was looking rather furious.

"Mr. Haventops," she said calmly, "I would be delighted to acquit you with my knowledge of the subject. Both Aristotle and St. Thomas *are* correct—a man cannot be a good judge of his own case. This revelation has crystallized for me just now, as I have seen with my own eyes that a man does not realize he is acting ungentlemanly, petulant, and spiteful."

then, one must assume such a gentleman does not have a wife or sister at home who might point out and soften such flaws before they are advertised so publicly.”

Mr. Genterly snorted. Sir Matthew said, “Touché, Lady Cordelia.”

Mr. Haventops looked as if his very head would explode into bits. He stood and said, “I need not remain here to be insulted in such a manner.”

“If one does not wish to be parried, one ought not swing one’s sword.”

Lady Cordelia said coldly.

“Yes, you did start it, you know,” Miss Mayton said. “We were prepared to be civil and only say ‘one wonders’ or ‘what do you think?’”

“I might long.”

Mr. Haventops turned on his heel and stalked out of the room. Percival was rather stunned by this turn of events. How on earth had he not?”

Cordelia bested Mr. Haventops?

She was positively marvelous.

“Lord Harveston,” Lady Cordelia said, “I apologize if I have driven away some of your members from your drawing room.”

Percival surveyed the group. He said, “Please raise your hand if you are despondent over the departure of Mr. Haventops.”

There were some very decisive snorts, but no hands were raised.

“Now that piece of business is dispensed with,” Sir Matthew said.

Cordelia, how did you know Haventops had no wife or sisters?”

Percival sat down in the chair beside Lady Cordelia that had so recently been vacated by Mr. Haventops. He was rather wondering about that himself.

While it might be his usual habit to circulate, this was far too interesting to him. He briefly wondered if he ought to go and see how his aunt and friends were faring. He dismissed the need, though. Lady Rawlins was entirely capable of steering the ship wherever she was and he assumed she was far more

discussion of *Othello* than anything else.

“I instantly suspected the gentleman lived alone,” Lady Cordelia said.

“Oh dear, yes, I see what you say,” Miss Mayton said.

What did they mean? It was as if they were speaking a foreign language. Only they understood.

The rest of the gentlemen leaned forward, looking as perplexed as Percival.

“But then you say,” Mr. Genterly volunteered, “that a man cannot be a good judge of his case without womanly intercession?”

sters at “How else can it be?” Lady Cordelia asked. “If a man lives alone, advertised on his own mountaintop, so to speak. Everything he does and says is right, as there is no differing opinion.”

“But what if he lives with another man, rather than a woman? Does he live with his father, or his brother?” Sir Matthew asked. “Would that accomplish the same aim?”

“sword,” Lady Cordelia and Miss Mayton looked at each other, appearing amused by the idea.

perfectly “Why were they amused? It seemed a very rational and logical argument all the

“The tone in the house will not be conducive to it,” Lady Cordelia said. “Goodness, the tone,” Miss Mayton said. “I’m manly, no I’m even manly, wait I will be manlier still! Before you know it, somebody has killed Lady a bone or caused a ghastly offense.”

Sir Matthew rubbed his chin. “I think I begin to see what you say. It has been a thing in my house that I am both cognizant of and incognizant of. I am even one not the same man I was when I married, though I could hardly tell you what happened.”

you are Lady Cordelia and Miss Mayton nodded approvingly.

“And then!” Sir Matthew said, seeming as if an idea had just hit him like a lightning bolt. “And then, there is this thing my lady says that I had noticed, “Lady really noticed...but now I think of it, that phrase has guided me quite well these years.”

recently “What is the phrase?” Mr. Genterly said in a whisper.

himself. “Well, I’ll say something or other, some opinion, and she’ll just snort. Interesting. say, ‘Perhaps keep that just between us.’ And so I do keep it between her. Often, time will pass and I’ll think to myself, *What a stupid opinion, I wish I didn’t blather on about it at my club.*”

and there “Gad,” Mr. Genterly said. “My wife says, ‘You will see you do not know it when you’ve had your dinner.’ It makes me pause, even when dinner is served. It does not seem to have any material effect.”

The other gentlemen nodded, as if they heard some version of the phrase in their own houses.

“So you theorize, Lady Cordelia,” Sir Matthew said, “that it was a question of whether a man can be his own judge, but that it is a foolish question. Good judgment is a soup that will not come out right if it does not contain two ingredients, rather than one. It must depend upon both the

he lives and female point of view. Or tone, as you called it.”

must be “I fear you have said it far more eloquently than I ever could have said it, Matthew,” Lady Cordelia said. “I simply feel what I feel.”

Say he “This is a thing both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas did not cover, that not Mr. Genterly said, all enthusiasm. “How on earth did they miss it?”

How *had* they missed it? Was it true to begin? Percival thought he was in no way of knowing, as he did live alone. There was no woman in the household to tell him a phrase if his opinions had veered off the road.

ment. What if his opinions had done just that but he was blinded to them? He said. Well, Lady Hightower had written him a letter about it.

in more “Harveston,” Sir William said, “will you weigh in with an opinion on this broken idea?”

“I am afraid I do not possess the information to fully form an opinion on it,” Percival said. “I believe I will stay quiet and take in what I hear. Sometimes one is the debater, and sometimes one is the student.”

How it



Like Cordelia had practically skipped out of Lord Harveston’s house. She had not ever been trepidatious when Mr. Haventops suggested her group of ladies would all up to join the other groups. She had not a thing to say about Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

She had felt a distinct and growing sense of unease regarding the conversation with Haventops.

But then, a rather marvelous thing had happened. Mr. Haventops had seemed so glad to embarrass her and her aunt. She’d seen that had been his plan all along.

She’d realized that she’d known it before she’d known it. That had given her the confidence to express her views, despite those views not coming from her own book.

Cordelia had been certain Mr. Haventops lived alone. No gentleman would become such a curmudgeon unless left to his own devices for too long.

The other gentlemen had seemed fascinated that she’d known it, and she had never further interested in her ideas.

Goodness, they even wondered how Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas had missed such a point.

He male

And then Lord Harveston, putting himself forward as a student r  
ave, Sirlearn from her!

It was all very gratifying. Lord Harveston had been very gratifying  
sider!” There had even been a moment, as the conversation went on, wh  
gone to fetch her a glass of wine and their hands had brushed one an  
had nothe exchange.

It had been lightning on the horizon. That feeling when the air i  
with a charge of what was coming and the hair on one’s arms stood up

Had he done it on purpose? She could not be certain, but she kne  
her sisters that it was an age-old gambit. Was he flirting?

Then, she was sure he’d nudged his chair just a bit closer to h  
could practically feel the heat from him, the vitality of him.

Now, she trotted up the stairs to her bedchamber with Miss May  
her heels. Her dear aunt had talked to her all the ride home, but it had  
difficult to attend to it. Her mind was full to bursting with all that ha  
on.

Juliet rolled over in Cordelia’s bed as they came in. She yawned a  
“I do not suppose you found your Corinthian at Harveston’s little meet  
he had “Not one in the whole house,” Miss Mayton said, “though we d  
be splitrather a delightful evening. Your sister was an absolute triumph.”

“Triumph?” Juliet said, sitting up. “About Aristotle and T  
Aquinas?”

Cordelia jumped on the bed. “I took your advice, Jules. Really to  
trusted in my womanly judgment.”

“Cordelia spoke of the woman setting the tone in the house  
l along. Harveston was so admiring of it,” Miss Mayton said.

“It was as if he’d never heard of the idea before, which I really t  
out of a had not,” Cordelia said. “Goodness, where would Papa and Dar  
without us?”

“Positively floundering,” Juliet said.

“It made them rethink their initial opinions,” Miss Mayton confirm

Juliet narrowed her eyes. “Was Harveston flirting again?” she aske

“Flirting? Flirting *again*?” Cordelia asked, wishing to hear  
as had opinion before she gave her own.

“You know what I mean, Cordy,” Jules said. “First he so  
magically arrives at our house though he cannot explain how, then he

eady to he admires the book we're reading, though I do not believe it for a m

Now he's applauding your ideas at his salon. If that is not flirting, I know what is."

en he'd "I did wonder about it, actually," Cordelia said. "He brushed m  
other in when handing me my wine, which of course might have been acciden  
then I am sure he pulled his chair closer to my own."

is filled "There you have it!" Juliet said. "I told you he was flirting.  
designs, but he is not your Corinthian."

w from "No, he is not my Corinthian," Cordelia said thoughtfully. The  
probably no less of a Corinthian in the whole town.

er. She And yet, she'd been so pleased that he had regarded her ic  
approvingly and he'd stayed at their group. It was her understanding  
yton onused the gatherings to wander from group to group, he'd said so him  
been so that first night. He'd done that very thing on that first night.

ad gone He hadn't wandered this night. He'd stayed right by her side.

Now she felt that they were on equal footing. Firm equal footing. I  
ad said, they were, were they not? She had one sort of knowledge and he had a  
ing." He had finally recognized that fact.

id have Or was it, that she had finally recognized that fact?

How ever it was, she was grown in confidence. He did not intimic  
Thomas now. She did not feel small or less than.

Somehow, his coming down in her estimation or her rising in h  
ok it. I estimation had made him more attractive.

Cordelia really could not help but be impressed with her own know  
e. Lord She'd hardly known she had it, it had just come out.

Perhaps she knew even more that she did not yet recognize. Perh  
hink he might learn even more than she already had.

den be It was one thing to depend upon her womanly judgment, which rea  
turning out to be very good. Might she not learn other things?

To her surprise, she'd had no trouble at all debating the men thi  
ed. She could only imagine where she might get to if she put some eff  
d. picking up new knowledge.

Juliet's "Aunt," she said, "might we go to Lackington & Allen on the morn  
"The bookstore?" Juliet asked. "Cordy, do not tell me you will try  
me how yourself into an intellectual on account of Lord Harveston."

claims "Not an intellectual, exactly," Cordelia said, "just to know more th



moment at this moment. And it is not for anybody but myself.”

do not “Books? Goodness,” Miss Mayton said.

Juliet threw herself back on the pillows and stared at the ceiling. “I shall handremember, when it is my season, I will seek out my poet. I shan’t go to the theatre. But I shan’t be so easily changed. I shan’t think well, now, that fellow has just invited me to my shoes, I think I’ll decide to like *him*.”

He has “Nobody said anything about liking anybody,” Cordelia said.

Though, she was growing rather to like Lord Harveston. It was a mere whim, but there it was.

least so  
that he



himself on THE DRAWING ROOM had emptied out and Percival had taken a last glass of wine before the sideboard was cleared.

Makepeace surveyed the footmen at their work and said, “I have lived because of a shell of a man. I am living inside a nightmare. I am awake and it unfolds all around me. There is no escape!”

The footmen turned their heads and Percival was certain they were laughing. He said, “Come now, your evening could not have been *that* late. My aunt can be rather a lot to manage, but I will hardly believe she reduced you to a shell of a man living inside a nightmare.”

her own “You have little imagination if you do not think so,” Makepeace said. “Every time we attempted to discuss the matter at hand, it was right to acknowledge Shakespeare! A whole catalog of Shakespeare’s heroes judging the case and coming out on the wrong end of the stick.”

she said “It is a valid argument, I suppose,” Percival said.

“But it was not the argument posed for the evening,” Makepeace said. “Oh, and then, what did Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson have to say?”

Apparently, one is to wonder over every idea and claim it deserves a night’s thought. How can there be further thought when there has been no thought to begin with? I really wished to ask that question.”

“But you did not, I pray,” Percival said.

“I was the model of restraint,” Makepeace said, “though I was tempted to turn and march right out the door to express my displeasure, just as I noted Harveston did, that lucky sot.”

and I do

“That was not why he left,” Percival said.

This seemed to give his butler pause. “Why else would he leave?”

3. “Just” “He left because he was being petulant, ungentlemanly, and s  
o willy-which Lady Cordelia very forcefully pointed out to him. She wa  
insultedmarvelous.”

“Marvelous? That seems rather far-fetched. I do not suppose s  
anything particular to add to the actual debate.”

strange “She did, rather. She claimed that a man cannot be a good ju  
himself and would be well served to have a wife or sisters in the ho  
good counsel.”

“Didn’t she just. Well, if ever there were a heavier hint droppe  
sure I don’t know about it.”

glass of “Hint?”

“Surely, you did not fail to perceive that boulder of a bon mot dro  
becomeyour head? A lady of marriageable age hints that you ought to have a  
simplythe house?”

“Certainly not,” Percival said.

y were Lady Cordelia had not been hinting about his particular situation. /  
at bad.he did not think so.

she has No, definitely not.

Though, he could not escape the fact that it was an intriguing ic  
ce said.was mightily attracted to Lady Cordelia. There really was nobody j  
back toAnd then, what a mind!

air own He’d been so mistaken in the beginning; he saw that with all clari

Really, he thought he’d been, well as Lady Hightower had said, insuf

It certainly gave evidence to her ideas about the tone of a house.

ce said. Lady Cordelia perceived things other people, or him in particular,  
o add?perceive.

further But even if he considered a pursuit...well for one, he was no  
ught to certain he was interesting enough for Lady Cordelia. She was lookin

Corinthian and he could not be further from that. For another, thi

Darling character was living in her house, no doubt making himself a  
i pted toHe was probably a Corinthian. *He* was probably polishing his sw  
ventopstalking about boxing all the day long.

At least, he supposed that was what Lord Darling was doing.

For all he knew about it, an announcement of an engagement migl

the offering.

He would like to know more about this Lord Darling and his plans. spiteful, “Makepeace,” he said. “On the morrow, find me a private investigator who would like to know more about Lord Darling.”

“Who is Lord Darling?”

“That is exactly what I want to know. Is he some sort of a Cori-

What is he doing in Lady Cordelia’s house? What are his intentions? What is that fellow Chester too, for that matter. That rogue might spend his life for screaming, but what is he screaming about? What are *his* intentions? to get to the bottom of it all.”

Makepeace grabbed at a decanter from a passing tray and swigged it. “Why not? I have been dropped into a waking nightmare—no one shall live in it forever. Of course we must have an investigation in the lady’s household.”

Having set the ball rolling regarding a private investigator to get some answers, Percival sipped his wine.

He would have his answers.

At least, But then, what would he do with the answers he got?

What would he do if in fact this Lord Darling was a very great Coriand set on sweeping Lady Cordelia off her feet?

“Makepeace,” he said, eyeing his butler drinking straight from a decanter. “on the morrow, find me someone who can instruct me on sporting things.”

Makepeace’s arm suddenly went limp and the wine left in the decanter drained out of it. “Sporting things?” he whispered.

“Yes, sporting things,” Percival said. “By the by, you are ruining the carpet.”

did not



at all

For a TATTLETON EYED THE sleeping goat in the servants’ hall. Of course it was Lord exhausted after the energetic day it had.

When would that creature perceive that it was living in an earl’s lord and not on a steep mountainside?

Only this afternoon, he’d found it balancing on top of the mantelpiece in the drawing room. Quite predictably, everything that had been on that mantelpiece had been in

been scattered on the floor and broken.

How had it got up there?

gator. I “Yes, I know, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, “Lord Darling caused a bit of chaos today.”

“A bit, you say?”

nthian? “I do think he is getting of an age where he might do very well in the garden.”

is days “We are in whole-hearted agreement on that point,” Tattleton said.

I want “Perhaps we have Charlie take him out for an hour on the morrow?”

“Or even longer,” Tattleton said. “Or forever, if it please God.”

ed from “Now, I cannot think Lord Darling is the only thing that troubles you. I think I understand when you’ve something bothering you.”

“You know me too well, Mrs. Huffson,” Tattleton said, rather surprised that at least one person in the house perceived the weight on his shoulders.

“Out with it, then.”

“Did you know that Miss Mayton, Lady Cordelia, and Lady Juliet Lackington & Allen this afternoon?”

rinthian “That behemoth of a bookstore on Finsbury Square?”

“The very one,” Tattleton said. “Not only did they come back with a canter, of books, but they have befriended Mr. Lackington and arrangements.” correspond with that gentleman. I was told by Miss Mayton that the canter would be addressed to her.”

“Goodness, why?”

ng that “That is the question, is it not? What are they trying to learn that could not find in the earl’s library and why do they need to be in contact with Mr. Lackington? And why did they steal up the stairs when they were taking the books up to Lady Cordelia’s room with no mention of what they were? Not one word to the earl at dinner.”

ould be Mrs. Huffson’s brow wrinkled and she sipped her brandy.

“You see where I am going, Mrs. Huffson.”

s house The housekeeper nodded sadly. “Aye, if they buy a hair clip or a soap paper, they describe it in detail to the earl. It has always been so.”

l in the “All I know,” he said, “is that up until now, they have only been interested in those dreadful books Miss Mayton finds somewhere. No one has secret books and a correspondence nobody knows anything about.”

“Miss Mayton knows about it, at least,” Mrs. Huffson said hopeful  
Tattleton sighed. The housekeeper really was so dreadfully naïve.

ing has

l in the

”

ou, Mr.  
years, I

cheered  
lers.

went to

h a pile  
ged to  
e letters

at they  
act with  
eturned,  
at they

sheet of

y been  
w, they  
t.”

“Miss Mayton knows about it, at least,” Mrs. Huffson said hopefully.  
Tattleton sighed. The housekeeper really was so dreadfully naïve.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THOUGH PERCIVAL HAD ordered Makepeace to find him both an investigator and a sporting tutor, he had rethought the sporting idea.

It was not that he'd rethought his aim, but how to go about it.

An investigator could come from any walk of life, as long as he knew the business. A sportsman would be a different matter. He needed a man who could coach him on the pursuits of the *ton* and that would require that man to be a gentleman.

Once that notion had settled in his mind, it was easy enough to decide who he ought to seek out—Hamill.

He would not go to Jeffries. That fellow had loose lips and a propensity to turn everything into a joke. He would not go to the duke, as he was married to Lady Cordelia's sister. He did not wish for word of what he was doing to get round. He did not wish for anyone to know anything about it.

He'd much prefer that Lady Cordelia simply discovered he was doing something sporting as if he'd always been so—he just did not show off.

In any case, how difficult could it be? Simply master the various pieces of the game as he probably should have done long ago. He would not care for the consequences. Would he live his life dreaming of his next boxing match or carriage race? No, there was no harm in mastering such things.

The drawing room doors swung open. "Lord Hamill," Makepeace said.

"Excellent," Percival said. "Hamill, do you care for a brandy and claret?"

"Coffee if it is not too much trouble," Hamill said. "I am driving in to Brighton tomorrow morning and wish to keep my head clear, the least I can do is to have a good sleep."

Of course he would be racing to Brighton on the morrow. What would he be doing?

They spoke of pleasantries until Makepeace had brought in the coffee and then he departed the room.

Now, he must get to it. Though, he was finding it hard to actually started.

“Now what’s the lay of the land?” Hamill asked. “You seem dead as if you are a second to a duel I know nothing about.”

“A duel? Certainly not, I would never involve myself in such nonsense.”

“Not like Baderston, eh? Three duels on the same morning? Well, it came off in the end.”

stigator Percival nodded, as of course he and everybody else in England had heard of that situation. Baderston had wedded another of the Benningtons, and she’d stopped the duels in their tracks.

new his “Hamill,” he began, “it has occurred to me that a gentleman has a certain way of being well rounded. Naturally, a gentleman will have his own proclivities, and he will do those things he is naturally good at and wishes to pursue. But can that be enough? Is it not a responsibility to push oneself into gaining experience in those things that the gentleman is perhaps not as interested in?”

Hamill’s expression grew dark. “Have you somehow talked to my sister?” he asked. “Has she convinced you I should read all the books she keeps on my desk?”

loing to “Your sister? No, I do not know the lady. I did not even think she was out.”

as very “She is not. Who then? Who is complaining about me spending time out of doors rather than locked in a library? Who put you up to pursuing your own interests? I do not want or need a tutor.”

em, nor “No, it is entirely the opposite. It is I who require a tutor.”

ace, but Hamill laughed. “Gad, man, why on earth would you come to me?”

“Because I require a tutor on sporting sorts of things.”

said. “Well, that makes more sense. But why?”

y, port, “That is not the important point, I do not think. The important point is that we are both members of the YBC and, as such, we are in a position to help each other in another favor. Someday, you will require something from me and I will be obliged to oblige you.”

“It’s about a woman, isn’t it?”

at else “A woman? No, there is no woman,” Percival said hurriedly. Even on his own ears, he did not sound very convincing.

fee and “It’s always about a woman. I reckon it’s Lady Cordelia, you did get a little back up a bit when I named her a pretty little filly.”



ally get “As to that, I simply thought—”

“And, Miss Mayton claims the lady seeks a Corinthian! Now I see serious, wish to turn yourself into a sportsman.”

Percival pressed his lips together. It was very inconvenient that ense.” was turning out to be not as stupid as he’d thought.

ll, it all “I really do not think it matters why I have come to this concl

Percival said stiffly.

d heard “All right, never mind. How about you come along on our little : is after the morrow. We leave at sunrise driving our phaetons. The first one a

to the green at the Pavilion wins. If you can keep up, it might be sor duty to you could mention to her.”

vities— “That sounds intriguing, but I am afraid I cannot,” Percival sai it really aunt puts on her theatrical on the morrow, I have promised to be there.

rtise on He did not mention that he did not in fact own a phaeton. W wished to ride, he rode Pericles. When he wished for his carria sister?” coachman drove it. He supposed he would have to remedy that.

s piling “The theatrical is tomorrow is it? My father always does get a lau; it. Just last evening, he was telling my sister that this year was *Othello* he was laughed and laughed and claimed Desdemona was likely to live.”

Percival grimaced. Of course, Hamill was right. Desdemona wou all my At least, he thought so. He had not given any particular instruction re; being at the use of swords, one sportsmanlike skill that he had actually master aunt claimed they’d worked it out on their own—they had blocked o step and practiced with wooden swords until they could do it in their sl

” He was still hopeful that he could convince them to stick with swords and leave real swords alone.

“I should be back in Town on Tuesday—I’ll take you to Jackson it is we few go rounds, then we can walk over to Angelo’s for some swordplay

do one Percival nodded, though it sounded like quite a lot for one d l I will wonder Hamill never had time to read.

“Very much appreciated,” he said. “Now Hamill, I would ask t arrangement remain just between you and I.”

n to his “Mum’s the word, though it won’t go unnoticed that Lord Harves laid down his books and entered the ring.”

get your No it probably would not go unnoticed. If only the *ton* were not so reporting everything they see!

“We could always claim it’s for health reasons—doctor’s orders—youthat,” Hamill said helpfully.

“Yes, yes, that would make sense,” Percival said. It really was t Hamillanswer. He certainly could not say why he was really doing it.

He was not so sure he understood it himself.

clusion,”



race on

arrivingCORDELIA HAD BEEN very diligent with her studies and had rather su nethingherself with her enthusiasm. Mr. Lackington had been so very helpful!

The gentleman had found them wandering the aisles with dazed lo d. “Mytheir faces and immediately took them up the stairs to a charming re ” room overlooking the square. He’d ordered a pot of tea and biscu hen heasked them to explain precisely what they looked for. He was certa ge, hiswhatever it was, he could find it or order it.

Cordelia had explained that she was not, perhaps, as mindful gh overstudies as she should have been when she had tutors. Now, she was a r o. Theyof a literary society and would like to acquire a more well-rounded edu

Juliet had jumped in with the major caveat to the idea. They had lld live.for literary types who took five words and transformed them into fift gardinglooped-de-looped, backtracked, and went off on tangents for hund ed. Hispages.

ut each Dear Mr. Lackington had laughed heartily over it. He’d seemed t leep. precisely what Juliet meant by it. He’d questioned Cordelia abo r woodinterests and selected a variety of works that might engage her, all wi a straightforward style.

’s for a It turned out, when a subject was interesting to her she could read r. lot in a day. She’d just discovered that Shakespeare was unaccour ay. Nogoing on seven years. Certainly, he must have been somewhe historians could not confirm where.

hat this She theorized he must have been on the continent—how else co have set his plays in those foreign places? It was very interesting t ton hasabout.

Now, though, her books had been put away and all her thoughts ha o set onto her upcoming performance as Cassio. It was the night of Lady Ra

and allplay and while she was disappointed that she would not play Desdemona she was determined to triumph as Cassio.

he only She did think her costume was very good looking. She wore a tight coat with regimental braid and a skirt with braid running down the side to hint at trousers. Cordelia had thought it might be something more appropriate by this point in the play, Cassio had been dismissed from his position.

However, Lady Rawley said she did not wish for Cordelia to appear and one of the most charming things about rewriting Shakespeare was surprisedhe could take any liberty she felt like taking.

Miss Mayton was dressed in her usual widow's weeds, which looks onRawley thought would be a wonderful hint to the audience, as Emilia receivingend a widow after all.

As they approached Lady Rawley's house, she had one last look in that,invitation that had gone out.

*In this exciting new idea of Othello, renamed Othello Redux, this take a surprising turn. Iago has managed to convince Othello that Desdemona has taken Cassio as her lover. Will Desdemona die, or will she take fate into her own hands and live on? If so, how and with who? (He are spinning as Desdemona races toward the fate that the fates have set out for her!) All will become known in the most dramatic term a final revealing moment.*

*Cast: Desdemona played by the incomparable Lady Margaret Rawley  
Iago played by the indomitable Mrs. Jemima Robinson  
Othello played by the indubitable Lady Agatha Montfried  
Emilia played by the indispensable Miss Eloise Mayton  
Cassio played by the ineffable Lady Cordelia Bennington*

"I am indispensable and you are ineffable," Miss Mayton said as she could heopened the carriage door. "I feel we've done very well for ourselves."

"Goodness," Cordelia said, her nerves creeping up on her, "this is the first time I will have a real audience! People who are not a part of my family are rather thrilling."

Hoofbeats drew her attention and Cordelia turned.

Lord Harveston approached on his horse. He did sit a horse very

na, shedespite spending all his time reading books. It was a rather fine horse t

He swung himself down easily and handed the reins to a groom.  
t-fittingCordelia, Miss Mayton.”

les of it “Lord Harveston,” Cordelia said, “I did not realize you would  
lain, asearly.”

“My aunt requested it specifically,” Lord Harveston said. “She wis  
ar drabto examine the flowers and the sideboards, so that I might pick up tips  
was thatown entertaining.”

He said it in a sort of sighing voice and Cordelia knew very well v  
h Ladythought about it.

“I can only applaud your willingness to indulge your aunt,” she sai

“Oh yes,” Miss Mayton said, “as an aunt myself, I can confirm it  
k at themuch appreciated.”

Lord Harveston appeared gratified that they understood the real  
the thing. After all, there was nothing wrong with the sideboard  
presented so far. As for flowers, well, for a gentleman like himself, it  
really suit.

“May I escort you inside?” he asked, holding his arms out.

Cordelia took one side and her aunt the other.

He really was such a gentleman. Oh, of course, he’d not be  
pleasant, but then he did not have a sister in the house who coul  
straightened out his ideas.

Since then, though, he’d seemed to have straightened his ide  
himself.

“Lord Harveston,” she said, “did you know that historians lost t  
Shakespeare for seven years? They cannot account for where he was.”

“I believe I did read that somewhere.”

“I theorize that he was on an extended grand tour. That’s how he w  
to set his plays at such places.”

“It would seem to make sense.”

“Tonight, we go to Venice,” she said.

“So we do, Cassio.”

Cordelia felt pinpricks all over her arms. There was something inti  
him calling her Cassio. She did not know why exactly. It was not e  
name.

They had entered the drawing room where the play was to take pl

oo. Cordelia realized she was disappointed that their speculations  
“LadyShakespeare’s seven unaccounted for years must be cut short.

Lady Rawley came at them at a rush. “The remaining members  
d cometroupe have arrived!” She turned to Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robins  
said, “Come, let us gather together and reflect on what we are to acco  
shes methis night. My dear nephew, please feel free to examine the sideboard  
for mysure you will get ideas.”

Lady Rawley wore a billowing blue silk dress with a delicate fich  
what heLady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson were looking rather smashing i  
military garb, their hilts swinging jauntily at their sides.

d. Cordelia smiled as Lord Harveston made his way to Lady Ra  
is verymultiple sideboards that seemed to contain everything that had ev  
found in her kitchens. He made a very good show of looking at it a  
case ofpoured himself a large glass of wine.

ls he’d “My dear actors,” Lady Rawley said, “we prepare ourselves to tr  
did nothallowed boards, shining a beacon of light into our audiences’ imagin  
They shall be fascinated and engrossed and they will entirely forget th  
troubles as they invest themselves in Desdemona’s fate. I predict v  
have several people on the edge of their seats.”

gun so Lady Rawley had a dreamy expression and Cordelia coul  
ld haveappreciate that the lady loved the theater and acting as much as  
herself.

reas out “Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson have worked tirelessly on the  
scene,” Lady Rawley continued. “That moment when Shakespeare’s i  
rack oftopsy-turvy and Iago and Othello kill each other.”

Lord Harveston had looked up at the mention of the sword fight. ‘  
he said, “I do hope I was able to convince you to stick with the v  
was ableswords?”

Lady Rawley laughed. “My dear nephew, no audience would be  
by such a childish ruse! No, we must have veracity in all things. Ver  
what will move our audience to tears of joy.”

“But I really—”

mate in “Freddy,” Lady Rawley said to one of her footmen, thereby ignor  
ven hernephew, “bring the glasses. Ladies, in a time-honored tradition, w  
steady ourselves with a glass of the noble grape.”

ace and

about



Percival had been disturbed that his aunt was carrying on with the play on and real swords during the play. He thought the chances of an injury resulting from it was rather high.

He'd since slipped out to the hall and found Jones, the lady's butler. He requested Jones send word to Lady Rawley's doctor, explaining the violence of the play might upset some ladies' constitutions. He could not well say he worried about a lady being run through, as that would likely offend a magistrate too.

His aunt's physician lived in Mayfair, catering to ladies with pockets and deep admiration for their nerves. It would not take any time to get him here, and he would be directed to discreetly watch the proceedings from a doorway. Should things go awry, he would be on hand to tend to the patient.

That done, his mind kept drifting to his conversation with Lady Cordelia. How lovely she'd looked in a military coat. There was something about it.

Then, she'd mentioned she'd been wondering about Shakespear's unexplained seven-year disappearance.

No, that was not it—she'd theorized about it.

Since when did the lady theorize? Perhaps she'd had theories all her own and he'd just been too insufferable to notice?

The drawing room had filled and though Percival was irritated by his aunt still hinted that his sideboard was not up to snuff, he could not help but feel how popular her own seemed to be.

Each set of chairs round the stage had a small table in front of them where people were carrying plates piled high and full glasses to their seats.

Amidst the hubbub, Percival noted Lady Cordelia's extended family arriving in force. The earl, Darden, the duke and his duchess, and Barbara and her new bride.

Where was this Lord Darling character? Did they not take her anywhere? It did not seem so.

He would understand why Chester was forever left behind, as it was as if he had a vile temper, but where was Lord Darling?

Unless there was some reason to leave him behind too. Could the reason the man could not appear in polite society?

His investigator had written that he had “made strides” in gathering information. But the confounded fellow had not outlined what those were!

Percival was beginning to feel very impatient for answers.

Before he knew where his feet traveled, he was in front of the earl. Darden.

“Harveston,” Darden said jovially, “I did not expect to find you here.”

“Lady Rawley is my aunt,” he said by way of explanation. Though the explanation sounded rather weak, as Lady Rawley had been his aunt for other years that he had *not* attended.

“I do not usually come to such things, myself,” the earl said, “but my daughter and Miss Mayton have been so very keen on the whole thing.”

“Yes,” Percival said, “they are all exceedingly enthusiastic about it.”

“Well, I suppose we will be entertained in some manner,” the earl said genially. “And then, the sideboard looks very good. Very good indeed.”

Percival nodded. Perhaps his sideboard was not quite as good as it appeared to be after all.

He pushed that notion aside. He must find out about Lord Darling.

Boldly, he said, “Lord Darling does not attend? He does not care for entertainments?”

The earl and Darden both laughed heartily.

“That is very good, Lord Harveston,” the earl said. “Very good indeed.”

“I suppose,” Darden said, “Lord Darling would be delighted with the entertainment, and even more with the sideboard. What might he help me to, I wonder? The entire sideboard, and then Lady Rawley’s possessions, for good measure.”

“Gracious, that fellow is becoming the bane of my existence—I must get him out of the house!” the earl said jovially.

Percival was rather stunned by these revelations.

What was he to understand of this situation? Was Lord Darling so much of a freeloader who could not be shown the door?

Percival paused. Darden had said Lord Darling would go after “precious possessions.” What could be a more precious possession than a sister’s daughter!

Why did the earl and Darden just stand there laughing about it?  
Why did they not take action?

He could not question them more closely about it, even if he'd  
strides what question to ask without causing offense, as Lord Iverson was  
everyone to their seats.

As most in attendance had already claimed their spots by way of  
earl and plates and full glasses already on tables, the operation did not take as  
might be expected.

Percival reluctantly left the earl and Darden to find his own place.  
Iverson, forever admiring of Lady Rawley's productions, had long  
all the assigned the role of introducing each new play. Or each new... what  
was.

"My dear ladies, esteemed gentlemen," Lord Iverson said, "it is my  
each year to introduce the latest burst of originality leaping out of the  
mind of Lady Margaret Rawley."

A burst of originality was certainly a diplomatic way to put it.

"This year, she brings you *Othello Redux*," Iverson said with his  
particular brand of enthusiasm.

Lady Rawley and her acting troupe had arranged themselves on the  
but for Miss Mayton, who stood in the wings.

Lady Cordelia looked so well! What did she face at home though  
she have that diabolical Lord Darling trying to catch her in corners  
must she feel to have her brother and her father take so little care! Ar  
eed." of Miss Mayton? Would she not speak out against the rogue?

He glanced toward the door and saw Jones standing next to a late  
himself aged and rather portly gentleman. Lady Rawley's physician, no doubt.  
recious God he was not needed.

Percival sipped his wine as the play began. He gulped it when the  
cannotto the sword fight.

Desdemona lay on the ground, supposedly dead from drinking poi  
having winked at the audience to say she was not really dead. How sh  
me sort there had been filled with rushes from one end of the stage to a  
plaintive speeches proclaiming her innocence as she cradled the allege  
recious of poison, a final drinking of said poison, and a sudden collapse.

Miss Mayton had just rushed onstage, oddly cast as Iago's bride,  
dressed in widow's weeds, to deliver the message against her hi



hough? Desdemona had spoken the truth, she was innocent, and the vile p  
Iago's.

known "I will run you through!" Lady Agatha's Othello shouted.

calling "Not before I run *you* through!" Mrs. Robinson's Iago shouted bac  
Percival leaned forward. Here was the danger.

of filled The two ladies danced round each other and then thrust their sword  
long as They stopped and glanced down at themselves, noticing nothi  
happened. They had not managed to pierce whatever bags held his  
concoctions of blood—red paint mixed with a little flour to thicken it.

ig been They swung their swords again. This time, Lady Agatha hit her ma  
tever it audience gasped as a sickly red erupted through the material c  
Robinson's costume and dripped down in rivulets.

y honor Mrs. Robinson sank dramatically to the floor, seeming to have fo  
nimble that she and Lady Agatha were supposed to kill each other and *both* di  
Lady Agatha, through what Percival supposed was quick thinking,  
her sword on herself and stabbed her bag, then dropped to the floor.

his own "Everyone!" a voice from the doorway shouted, "stay calm and  
my directions!"

e stage, Percival turned and saw the portly physician hurrying fi  
"Gentlemen, I need towels and bandaging! Ladies, this sight is too ho  
sh? Did to witness—turn away!"

? What Percival put his head in his hands. Apparently, Jones had forgot to  
id what poor fellow about the bags of blood.

middle-  
. Please

y came

son but  
ie'd got  
mother,  
d bottle

though  
usband.

Desdemona had spoken the truth, she was innocent, and the vile plot was Iago's.

"I will run you through!" Lady Agatha's Othello shouted.

"Not before I run *you* through!" Mrs. Robinson's Iago shouted back.

Percival leaned forward. Here was the danger.

The two ladies danced round each other and then thrust their swords.

They stopped and glanced down at themselves, noticing nothing had happened. They had not managed to pierce whatever bags held his aunt's concoctions of blood—red paint mixed with a little flour to thicken it.

They swung their swords again. This time, Lady Agatha hit her mark. The audience gasped as a sickly red erupted through the material of Mrs. Robinson's costume and dripped down in rivulets.

Mrs. Robinson sank dramatically to the floor, seeming to have forgotten that she and Lady Agatha were supposed to kill each other and *both* die.

Lady Agatha, through what Percival supposed was quick thinking, turned her sword on herself and stabbed her bag, then dropped to the floor.

"Everyone!" a voice from the doorway shouted, "stay calm and follow my directions!"

Percival turned and saw the portly physician hurrying forward. "Gentlemen, I need towels and bandaging! Ladies, this sight is too horrifying to witness—turn away!"

Percival put his head in his hands. Apparently, Jones had forgot to tell the poor fellow about the bags of blood.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PERCIVAL LEANED BACK and observed the debacle before him. Lady Rawley and the doctor had rushed the stage.

As men were always ready to spring into action once one of them was sprung, it hardly mattered whether there was cause or not. Various characters had raced this way and that.

Mr. Hemmingshaw attempted to pull down a curtain, though Percival was certain that had there actually been a need for bandaging, there would have been better options. The poor fellow had raced past a foot-high stack of napkins that would have done very well.

Despite the physician warning the ladies to turn away from the grisly sight, the two women next to him were very determinedly staring at it.

One said, "It was bound to go wrong sooner or later."

The other nodded. "She took the thing too far."

Both Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson sat up.

"Do not move, ladies!" the physician cried. "You are gravely injured!"

Percival could not hear what Lady Rawley said from her location on the second floor, but her lips moved rapidly so she clearly had a lot to say to her doctor.

The poor fellow, seeming to finally understand the case of the doctor, stood and turned to the audience just as Mr. Hemmingshaw was dragging the curtain to the stage.

The doctor waved him away. "Well!" he said. "It seems that was the worst alarm of sorts. Now, to carry on, Lady Rawley informs me that both Iago and Othello are dead, and Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson are very much shocked."

The fellow hurried from the stage and the last Percival saw of him was gesticulating to the butler.

The play carried on to its happy ending, with Cassio and Desdemona strolling off the stage arm in arm, while Iago and Othello lay motionless. Apparently, nobody had told Miss Mayton what she was to be doing at that moment of the play, so she just turned and left.

It was certainly a night to remember.

The applause was hearty, as everyone had a delightful story to tell of drawing rooms on the morrow—poor Lady Rawley's physician had told Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson had stabbed one another.

The acting troupe had all curtsied and left the stage to receive congratulations.

Lady Cordelia was surrounded by her family and so he could not find a way to politely barge in.

His aunt seemed not at all shaken by the interruption to her play. She had just heard her say, "That is the skill of an acting troupe, Mrs. Renwick. They must stay in character regardless of what occurs. The stage is an unpredictable taskmaster."

Conbatten had just retrieved a glass of wine from the sideboard and stood next to him, admiring his wife as she congratulated Lady Cordelia.

"One of the things that has always charmed me about the Bennings is that they are all so approving of one another. If one does a thing, the rest pronounce it marvelous. Just this moment Cordelia will be compared to Sarah Siddons and found superior, though the only line was 'my dearest Desdemona, let us marry.'"

That might be so, in fact Percival was certain it was so. Enough had been said of the sisters' accomplishments to confirm the idea. Everybody knew the duchess' odd style of playing the pianoforte, which was likened to falling on the keys. And then it was said that Lady Viola had presented a wedding present for the couple that was so ghastly that Conbatten had a special room to keep it from public view. The youngest sister wrote of it in terms of trees and fences.

But how could they be so wonderful to one another if they allowed a false likeness of Lord Darling and Chester to lurk around their house?

"Your Grace, I am sure it is not my business, but if I might inquire if the earl does not do something about Lord Darling?"

Conbatten laughed. "It has always seemed to me that Lord Westmoreland is helpless against the doings of that house."

"But then, what of Darden?" Percival asked.

"Darden?" the duke said. "Darden is a particularly easygoing sort of man. I imagine he just views the whole thing amusing."

The duke wandered away.

Amusing? How could he view it amusing?

Percival was beginning to wonder if he'd ever known Darden as though he'd thought he had.

The circle round Lady Cordelia and Miss Mayton was not as tight as it had been. Darden had turned to talk to Mr. Reardon. The earl was congratulating Lady Agatha. The duke had retrieved his bride and did not see after the glass of wine. Lady Baderston and her husband had drifted to a corner, heads together as the newly-wedded couple that they were.

Percival set his wine down and strode over.

"Lady Cordelia, Miss Mayton," he said, "my congratulations."

Lady Cordelia nodded her acknowledgment, and Percival noted she was a little flushed. Miss Mayton said, "We've come through it, Lord Harveston, and stood the setbacks."

"Yes, well, my aunt will discover it sooner or later," he said. "I am not a doctor, but I am the author of the setback. I ordered the butler to have Lady Reardon's doctor on hand, as real swords would be used."

"Oh!" Lady Cordelia said, unable to hide her surprise.

"I simply did not wish anyone to be hurt, and if they were injured, I wished they received prompt medical attention."

"That was very kind," Lady Cordelia said.

Miss Mayton was nodding her head. "Ah well, sometimes a knight's quest to a cat goes awry, does it not? I do not suppose anybody was ever in a situation of danger."

Percival looked Lady Cordelia in the eye. "But if you were to do that to yourself in danger," he said, "you could call on me."

Lady Cordelia appeared taken aback by that statement. He was not surprised to see her taken aback herself.

Percival bowed. "Ladies," he said. He then quickly left the house.

—why



mont is

CORDELIA LAY AWAKE in the early morning hours, that time of day when the sun was not yet up but darkness had fled. She had not been able to think of man, all, so busy was her mind.

So busy was her heart too.

The play had taken a turn, what with Lady Rawley's doctor in well as that Lady Agatha and Mrs. Robinson were dying. Lady Rawley had complete professional, clearing up the matter speedily and encouraging it as it to carry on.

Lord was Cordelia had made the most of her one line. She'd worked on it brought which way and had finally decided to put the emphasis on two words into a dearest and marry. Desdemona *dearest*, let us *marry*. She'd carried it as she'd planned.

The audience had seemed very pleased with the play. Of course a wonderful family had heaped praise upon her. Rosalind had even said a faint Sarah Siddons would be envious of her performance. Despite

But then, Lord Harveston. *He* was what really was taking up her thoughts. That one sentence - a faint ever felt in danger, she ought to call on him.

Rawley's The look in his eyes when he'd said it! It had been the most impossibly romantic thing she'd ever heard of - imagined.

Injured I She had, of course, imagined all sorts of things a gentleman might do to her. Such things as her eyes penetrated the depths of his soul, or he was a silken balm to his heart, or her person inflicted deadly longings on him and he was considering doing a violence to himself.

Why real But that phrase, that had been...she was not certain what it had done. It felt as if that one sentence had moved her closer to him, though the distance between them had not changed.

It had almost felt like a kiss, or at least what she imagined a kiss to rather feel like. It had marked her out as someone particular to him. Some people were worried about.

She did not know why he should worry, but it was exceedingly gratifying that he did.

That was the thing that was on her mind. How gratified she was that she was worried about by Lord Harveston.

When the In the beginning, they'd got off on such the wrong foot! Now, there was something between them. She could feel it. She also noticed she was fast becoming less concerned about finding her Corinthian.

Though, if there was something between them, something that could lead to...

aging     Each time Cordelia got to that point in her thinking, her mind c  
been aover.

ig them     What was she to think of it? That it could be possible that somec

           Lord Harveston wished to pursue someone like herself? He v  
t everyintellectual, she was decidedly not.

ords—     Oh, she had proved her womanly judgment well enough, but h  
off justpiles and piles of facts she'd never even heard of.

           And then, what of herself? Could she really be satisfied w  
se, herdifferences between them? Would she always feel a bit outclassed?  
aid thatshe, sometime in the future, regret that she'd not married a Corinthian?

           Married.

           She'd thought it. The word her mind kept clouding over. There it w  
—if she     Cordelia did not know if he would ask. She did not know if sh  
           completely wrongheaded in even imagining it. But her womanly ju  
said that he very well might.

or even     If that was so, she must be prepared with an answer. When o  
           proposed to, one could accept or decline. She had not ever heard of  
t say to saying she did not know.

r voice     She must begin to know her own mind more clearly.

ig upon



been. It

distance“DO NOT GO out there, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, holding him l  
           the sleeve with one hand while her other hand held the door to the  
; wouldshut.

one he     Tattleton could not quite discern what had occurred, but he could  
           two things: one, something had happened in the garden, and two, Co  
atifyingdistraught over it.

           The fellow was head in hand, weeping and banging his fist  
o knowcounter, while Charlie patted him on the back to console him.

           “It’s the goat, isn’t it?” he asked.

though,     “Aye, I’m afraid so,” the housekeeper said.

ed that     “Is he dead?” Tattleton asked, a glimmer of hope in his voice.

           “Oh no, definitely not dead,” Mrs. Huffson said.

ild lead     There was a sudden pounding on the door, though there was no pe

clouded be seen through the glazed window.

“Was that the goat, Mrs. Huffson?” he asked gravely. “Is he have the temerity to bang on the door with his uncouth hoofs?”

“Um, yes, that would be him. Now, remember we did agree that we would kick him out in the garden this morning?”

“Step aside, Mrs. Huffson,” Tattleton said.

The housekeeper reluctantly stepped out of the way. Tattleton turned the latch and opened the door.

Lord Darling, or Lord Worst-goat-in-England as he would have been better named, trotted through the door with a bunch of peonies drooping from his mouth.

Tattleton looked out to the garden. Surveying the carnage that had been done there, he was no longer in doubt over what Cook was crying about. The whole place was torn up!

Flowerbeds lay demolished. If a flower had not been ripped up by its roots, then it had been trampled upon or its head was missing and a single stalk left waving in the breeze. The vegetable garden was no more—just a patch of dirt left in its stead. The charming, white-painted wood bench that had meant for quiet reflection in the midst of nature had been overturned and its arms chewed on. The fountain with the blue-tiled bottom meant to make the water seem as the sea now only halfheartedly dribbled what looked like mud that had come from a sediment filled canal.

“Now, Mr. Tattleton,” Charlie said in a soothing voice, “as I told you, the garden know it looks mighty terrible—”

“Mighty terrible? That would be one way to describe the wasteland I am currently viewing.”

“But I reckon it can be put to rights quick enough,” Charlie said.

“He reckons it,” Cook sobbed, “but I just don’t know!”

Though Tattleton would like to sob himself, there was no such luxury for a butler. He was the senior-most servant and if he collapsed, the whole household collapsed.

“And what, young Charlie,” he said, “would be your plan to put the garden to rights?”

“My uncle, he’s got a farm just outside of Town and he’s handy with a horse. A person today is long. I could write to him and offer to pay if he brings in vegetables and flowers, and all the herbs Cook needs. He could fix the place up.



'im, he'd have his cart hitched in a trice."

ing the "A trice?" Cook said, wiping at his eyes. "He really would come in and fix my garden?"

ve'd try "In a trice, sir," Charlie assured him.

Well, why not? That they had come to requiring somebody's u repair the desolation inflicted upon them by a goat they kept in the pushed should come as no surprise at this point.

Tattleton supposed he should anticipate that next season they would be a herd of horses in the house and then they could all seem surprised from every stick of furniture was kicked to pieces.

Maybe Charlie's uncle could help with that too!

ad been  
it.



by its PERCIVAL PACED HIS drawing room. The investigator, Mr. Rembric, forlorn come at two o'clock and he expected answers from the fellow. He'd just dug that he'd begun to make headway. Percival would demand the details that was headway. He wanted answers about this Lord Darling character.

and its Makepeace fussed with the coffee things. He'd brought out a service, which Percival presumed was his comment on having the clock as if it were Mr. Rembric in the drawing room.

"He was to be here at two," Percival said. "It must be two by now. Cook, I don't like it that he is late!"

"It is five minutes to the hour," Makepeace said, after having glanced at the clock on the mantel.

"I can read the time myself," Percival answered. "I just doubt it is so."

He stopped talking, as even to his own ears, he was beginning to sound like a lunatic. Makepeace only nodded and left the room.

Percival felt driven by a single-minded purpose. He must know where Lord Darling was.

He must know what Lord Darling was to Lady Cordelia.

Percival had been up half the night sorting through his thoughts, the more rash side of his temperament, which he rarely allowed any freedom. He wished to ride over to the earl's house and rescue his daughter from whatever untoward situation she was in.

I know

His more rational thoughts told him otherwise. For one, Lady Cordelia had not even hinted that she needed rescuing. For another, if she did, she had not indicated that he would be her chosen rescuer. And for another, if he enacted such a mad plan, he would have turned himself into a perilous danger, on top of the one already there.

Wherever his thoughts took him, they all included Lady Cordelia. What had it happened? He'd gone along keeping an eye out for her, but he would not have been intellectual, and now all he thought about was a lady quite the opposite of what he had been. Finally, as the clock struck two, whether it was right or behind time, he heard the door knocker.

Makepeace opened the drawing room doors. "Mr. Rembric, my lord," he said, looking askance at the fellow's ill-fitting coat.

His butler might well look askance—Rembric was a disheveled person. Nothing he wore seemed to fit, his hair looked as if it had been separated from the company of a comb for too long a time, his boots were scuffed, and his skin was rather pasty.

Nevertheless, Makepeace poured the coffee for them both, bowing and exiting with his usual aplomb.

"Let us get right to it, Rembric. You said you had made headway, my lord, in every direction."

Mr. Rembric had sat himself down before being invited, which he assumed must be common in his milieu. The fellow took a long sip of coffee and set down his cup.

"To say I made headway, Lord Harveston, is to paint the thing in a very different light. More like I bored through an Alp and rode my horse straight through the mountain. In my experience, it always comes down to a person who is not afraid of some tales. Findin' the tale-teller is my specialty, as it were."

Mr. Rembric looked entirely satisfied that he'd explained everything. Percival did not have the first idea of what he was talking about. What did he mean, he bored through an Alp?

"Lord Darling, Mr. Rembric. What have you found out about the lord in question?"

"Ah, yes, the lord in question. And that Chester you were interested in, too."

Lordelia “Yes, both of them,” Percival said, feeling his patience wane as she had especially Lord Darling.”

Mr. Rembric, if he “I don’t mind sayin’ it, the identity of that fellow took me back. I received see that coming in a thousand years.”

Identity? Was he some sort of fraud, merely posing as a lord? Did you know?  
a. How know?

Lord Darling “I done my usual operation, gettin’ acquainted with the lowliest of the staff through various means. Kitchen maids in particular are helpful. I mean, they don’t get paid much, they’re grateful for some extra, and they do like to give an opinion. Nobody ever asks a kitchen maid nothing, so when you ask for an opinion, they’re as accommodating as you please.”

Percival had a great urge to pull Rembric to his feet and shake him. It was a sort of point.

Lord Darling “Now then, my lord, I’m leadin’ up to the thing all slow-like as it was wer gonna be what you were expecting. I don’t know what you were expecting, but the course. But what it is, isn’t what you were expecting.”

Mr. Rembric, and “Mr. Rembric,” Percival nearly shouted.

“Aye, I see you’re gettin’ yourself anxious. Well, here it is, my lord. Tell me Darling, Marquess of Basingstoke, ain’t a real lord.”

“I knew it!”

Percival “He’s a goat that they got livin’ in the house. I could never discover if coffee he’s livin’ in the house, but there you have it. The youngest, Lady Cordelia named him Lord Darling, Marquess of Basingstoke as that’s where she found the little fella. Basingstoke.”

Lord Darling “That cannot be right,” he said quietly.

Mr. Rembric, “Oh, it’s right,” Mr. Rembric said. “I confirmed the thing backward and forward.”

“And Chester? The fellow who screams all the time?”

“A parrot they done left in the countryside. ‘Parently, the creature was murderin’ everybody. I shouldn’t like to live with that myself, havin’ to see it did heof murder all the time—’tis a bad business.”

Could it be true?

Lord Darling “It was true that there was a goat in the house—he’d seen it with his own eyes. But could that really be Lord Darling?”

Lord Darling “The various conversations about Lord Darling presented themselves to me. Lady Cordelia’s description of him—he had been met with a

e, “but travels. The earl claiming he could not get him out of the house. saying he would eat everything on Lady Rawley’s sideboard and then I didn’t her possessions.

My God. Lord Darling was the goat.

the earl Mr. Rembric rose. “All I know past what I told you, my lord, is that Darling has gone and destroyed the garden. The butler was verging on a sort of apoplectic fit over it, but then it was decided that Charlie’s plan—they would fix it up in a trice and they’re all countin’ on him.”

sharin’ The investigator bowed and wished him good day.  
do ask, Percival still sat, stunned by the realization that his superior intellectual mind had led him to think that a kid goat was somehow in the gentleman set on seducing Lady Cordelia.

Where had that wild imagination come from? He generally did not have a wild imagination. He left imagining to composers and authors—his world, of world of facts.

Makepeace came in and said, “I have shown Mr. Rembric out, before him pressing me to find out if we have any other mysteries that need solving.”

Percival nodded. “He told you about Lord Darling, then?”

“He did not. I presumed whatever you discovered, you would never whymarch that information directly to the earl.”

Juliet, Percival erupted in laughter. “No, not in this case. Lord Darling says they goat they have in the house.”

“The goat they were all chasing the night you wandered onto their property. They keep it in the house? Why? Why do they have a goat in the house?”  
“I do not know, really,” Percival said. “They are the Benning family. I suppose that is why. They are very charming and original people. Very charming indeed.”

shouts  
to think

his own

lives to  
on their

travels. The earl claiming he could not get him out of the house. Darden saying he would eat everything on Lady Rawley's sideboard and then destroy her possessions.

My God. Lord Darling was the goat.

Mr. Rembric rose. "All I know past what I told you, my lord, is that Lord Darling has gone and destroyed the garden. The butler was verging on some sort of apoplectic fit over it, but then it was decided that Charlie's uncle would fix it up in a trice and they're all countin' on him."

The investigator bowed and wished him good day.

Percival still sat, stunned by the realization that his supposedly intellectual mind had led him to think that a kid goat was some roguish gentleman set on seducing Lady Cordelia.

Where had that wild imagination come from? He generally did not have a wild imagination. He left imagining to composers and authors—his was a world of facts.

Makepeace came in and said, "I have shown Mr. Rembric out, but not before him pressing me to find out if we have any other mysteries that needed solving."

Percival nodded. "He told you about Lord Darling, then?"

"He did not. I presumed whatever you discovered, you would be marching that information directly to the earl."

Percival erupted in laughter. "No, not in this case. Lord Darling is the goat they have in the house."

"The goat they were all chasing the night you wandered onto their street? They keep it in the house? Why? Why do they have a goat in the house?"

"I do not know, really," Percival said. "They are the Benningtons, I suppose that is why. They are very charming and original people, very charming indeed."



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SEVERAL DAYS HAD passed since Cordelia's triumph as Cassio upon Rawley's stage. The lady had been so kind as to send both her an Mayton flowers, which had been lovely until Lord Darling had some to them.

Poor Tattleton was exceedingly distraught by Lord Darling's mis the garden and so they did not mention it to him and just quietly put a vases and mopped up the water on the floor.

Cordelia's father had also been rather distraught over the destruction the garden, or at least as distraught as he ever was outside of a house had been soothed by the idea that Charlie's uncle was to have it shortly.

Charlie's uncle, who refused to be called Mr. Hanson and would answer to Farmer Hanson, had since arrived. Tattleton had found him in a room somewhere and the fellow had set to work. Nobody was quite sure a trice amount of time would actually be, as Farmer Hanson had shaken his head gravely at the situation.

Lynette said he was not making himself popular with Tattleton as saying things like, "Ya can't never allow a goat into a garden like this. I'm still a-head scratchin' as to why ya got a goat in the house."

Everybody else liked him well enough though.

Despite the entertaining doings of the house, Cordelia's thoughts were running in the same direction. Lord Harveston.

Certainly, the fates must be trying very hard to tell her something. Certainly, a person did not think of another person night and day without meaning something particular?

That thing he'd said—if she were in any danger, she ought to call—would not leave her. She replayed it and replayed it.

And that was just one thing said! What else might he say?

She did not know, but she was certain she would see him this night.

night of Lady Bloomington's masque.

She and Miss Mayton had eaten a whole plate of biscuits before dressed, as they knew Lady Bloomington had some particular habit sort of thumbing of nose at the patronesses of Almack's and their offerings, Lady Bloomington offered the moon and the stars.

Trays of little bites she called entremets would come round before every dance. Following those trays would be trays of champagne, and on Lady guest had left Lady Bloomington's rather worse for wear on account of old Miss Van Doren had once been a victim of it and had managed to introduce a duke in the process. He'd been lucky to not find himself on a green trow got morning, answering the insult.

Miss Mayton's remedy was to go into the whole thing with a strategy well lined with biscuits.

Her aunt came into her bedchamber, looking as spectral as she had in other years. She would wear her widow's weeds but had added a long veil that completely covered her from head to toe. Having had experience in attempting to wrangle food and drink beneath the veil, she had since had a seamstress modify it to have armholes and a hole around her mouth and could only see the effect was no less eerie though.

Lynette was laying out her own costume, which was not what she had first thought it would be.

Miss Mayton examined it. "I think Darden did rather well," she said. "The headpiece is marvelous."

Cordelia nodded. She'd had her heart set on going to the masque as Desdemona, but then Darden had rightly pointed out that as Lady Rawley had just played Desdemona on the stage, she was likely to appear as that lady herself.

She would not for the world wish to step on Lady Rawley's toes.

Rather, Darden had found a very ghostly sort of costume, the appearance being the headpiece. It was shaped rather like an old nun's headdress without it then there was a thin veil covering the face. Cordelia had tried it on and it was fascinating—she could see out very well, but her face was blurred in the looking glass.

The entire costume was white, but for the black lace of the veil.

Juliet bounced into the room as Lynette was helping her into the carriage. "You shall look a pair," she said, "one ghost all in white, and another

black.”

getting “Just think, Jules,” Cordelia said, “next year you will go yourself.”  
s. As a Juliet hopped on the bed, despite Lynette’s warning scowl not to  
readfulanything. “Yes, but unlike anything happening here, I will come i  
season searching for my poet and I will go to the masque still looking  
etweenpoet. Or, I will have already located him and he will be waiting there f  
many a “I cannot help that I do not know what I look for,” Cordelia said.  
f it. “You do, though,” Juliet said. “It’s Harveston, is it not?”  
sult the Cordelia sighed. “Yes, I think it is, though how I ever arrived  
he nextcircumstance, I am sure I do not know.”

“Well, now,” Miss Mayton said, “Beatrice was rather flummoxed  
tomachhow she came to love Lord Van Doren.”

“We were *all* rather flummoxed,” Juliet said, “and some of us still  
had in “But look how happy they are together.”

g black “That is true,” Juliet said grudgingly. “For all Van Doren’s scolding  
eriencehe treats Beatrice as the best thing living. I give him credit for that  
e had aDo you suppose Harveston will treat you as the best thing living?”

cut out. Cordelia could feel her face set afire at the very thought of it. She  
do not yet know if he will treat me as anything at all.”

e had at “Well, I suppose at the heart of it,” Juliet said, “I wish you to be  
and so I’ll put up with whoever you bring home.”

ie said. Lynette had set Cordelia’s headdress on her head, adjusted the veils  
pinned it in place.

sque as “You are a very dear sister, Jules,” Cordelia said.

ley had Juliet hopped off the bed. “Don’t I know it. Now, once you are all  
ll-fatedthe house, I shall convince Tattleton and the footmen to play cards v  
and Lord Darling will act as our chaperone. Perhaps we will even bring  
farmer—he drives poor Tattleton wild with wondering why anybody  
eal of ita goat in the garden.”

ess, but She skipped from the room and Cordelia and Miss Mayton were n  
1 and itbehind her.

d in the It was time to depart. It was time to see Lord Harveston. It was  
see what he would say to her, and Cordelia knew what she would say to

e dress.  
er all in





PERCIVAL'S LOGICAL MIND had entirely lost the fight. It had attempted to list all the reasons why Lady Cordelia would not suit. She was not an intellectual and he had long planned to wed an intellectual. She might not view him as the slightest interest.

That was really all that was against it. As for what was for it, well, for my need do was think of her, which he did frequently. His heart had raised sword to his logical mind and slayed it.

Several times, over days of thinking, he would propose to forget about this Lady Cordelia. That idea had gone down in flames each time.

He realized that he had made some mistakes in how he'd chosen to lead over on with life. His early experiences, and seeing what had happened to them, had convinced him to live in a world of facts and figures. They had built armor round his heart, never allowing him to be destroyed as Dora had

Then had come Lady Cordelia.

He could not forget about her. How could he, there was nobody like her at least. Though, he could not forget that she'd outright said she was looking for a Corinthian.

He was not a Corinthian. He was not even a little sporting.

Percival was working to rectify that deficiency with Hamill's help. It was exhausting.

How many mornings would Hamill send a footman up to inquire if he was still abed and that he'd better get up as they had something to do.

Boxing, swordplay, carriage driving. There had even been one morning they had run through Hyde Park. Barefoot on the grass. Just running around. Hamill was of the opinion that simply running would increase speed. Privately, Percival thought one ought to only run around the grass barefoot if one was being chased by a murderer.

But run he had done.

Now, he'd entirely changed his costume for Lady Bloomington's request. He had planned on wearing a simple domino, as he always did. Instead

he had made peace search high and low for a costume Shakespeare would have worn in his day.

Lady Cordelia admired Shakespeare, and so he would go as Shakespeare.

He strode through Lady Bloomington's doors feeling that he was slightly ridiculous and shrugging off the feeling. Why should he care, as Lady Cordelia understood the compliment of it?

present He'd already spent a morning running around barefoot in the intellectual. Ridiculous was nothing to him.

him with He spotted Darden quick enough. He already knew that Darden and the other YBC members were going as the seven deadly sins. Darden, all hegluttony, was looking very round, and held something in his hands that resembled a felted turkey leg.

He hurried over. "Darden," he said.

ll about "Harveston!" Darden said. "I'd offer you a piece of this large turkey leg, but as I am gluttonous, I must keep it for myself."

to carry "Very well done costume. By the by, what costume does Lady Cordelia wear this night?"

een the "Ah, well she was to go as Desdemona, but then we thought maybe it wouldn't be. Rawley would come as that lady in celebration of her recent performance. Now, Cordelia has come as a ghostly figure. She's dressed all in white. Her headdress is shaped rather like a nun's would be. Perhaps a mother's wig for a—it's very distinct. Oh, and there is a veil too."

Percival nodded. "Enjoy your turkey leg," he said, and set off in search of his ghostly figure.

), and it He located Lady Cordelia in a moment. She was, for some reason, standing by the bishop, who had come in his regular bishop's attire.

why he He approached and bowed. "Bishop," he said.

get to. The bishop eyed him in what felt like a suspicious manner. He could account for it at all.

round. He turned to Lady Cordelia. "My lady, may I put myself down on your card?"

efoot if Lady Cordelia glanced at the bishop, who nodded solemnly. It was a little odd, almost as if she had sought approval from him. Was he a great friend of the family?

nasque. No matter, he had given his approval for whatever it was worth. Finally, he'd took the card and felt a great amount of relief that the last dance had finally been taken.

There was no proper supper at Lady Bloomington's masque, as she was busy sending round trays of food all evening, but there always were a few round tables of sideboards set up for the end of the night and people were expected to linger. That would give him the time to say everything he wished to say.

The bishop still stared at him. He did not at all understand why but

the park, the distinct feeling he should be off, having accomplished what he wished.

He bowed and moved away.

One of Lady Bloomington's footmen handed him a glass of champagne. He gladly took it and felt exceedingly satisfied with how the evening had progressed so far.

He supposed he ought to go round and add his name to other ladies' list, but he was not very inclined to it. Perhaps he would skip it altogether. It was simply his duty to escort any lady sitting out once the ball had started.

Hostesses always appreciated that sort of chivalric rescue and as for Cordelia, she did not really care who he danced with but for Lady Cordelia.

Percival spotted Hamill across the room, talking with a group of other ladies and sporting men. They were probably discussing some upcoming horse race. So how the betting would shape up. He supposed it would not hurt to know a little about it than he did.

He set off to join them in a very good frame of mind.

March of



For a moment, Cordelia really could not understand what was happening. Her cheeks were fast filling, and yet Lord Harveston had not yet approached.

In fact, he'd spent some minutes speaking with the bishop and his daughter, Miss Bretherton, and then made his way to Lord Hamill and the other gentlemen. There he'd been for the past quarter hour!

What was so interesting about Miss Bretherton? She had, according to Rosalind, who found it a very good laugh, come as Mary Magdalene.

It was a very bold sort of thing to do. Did she claim she was more of a friend of than anybody else?

Cordelia admitted to herself that while she did not know how filled up with faith Percival with piety Miss Bretherton was, she *did* know how filled up with faith she was not.

Had she been wrong about Lord Harveston? Had she allowed her imagination, her hopeful, wishful imagination, to take her place as a number never meant to go?

After all, he was an intellectual, and Miss Bretherton was too.

Gentlemen approached, they were all very pleasant, and then he got

hed to. themselves down on her card. None were Lord Harveston, however.

Lord Hamill had left the group and was very sensibly making the  
apagne. Lord Harveston remained right where he was, talking to other gentlemen  
evening She could hardly fail to take the hint.

If Cordelia had been in any doubt of her feelings before, now th  
s cards, she had considered seemed to vanish in a puff of smoke, she was no lo  
her and doubt.

She loved Lord Harveston, but he did not love her.  
himself, Lord Hamill approached. He bowed very gallantly and said,  
Cordelia, I believe, is under that veil?"

"Yes, Lord Hamill," she said, working to keep her tone very pleas  
ace and "May I?" he asked. He took her card and then he paused. "Th  
w more dance is still open?"

"Indeed yes," she said, hoping it did not sound like a sigh.

"Odd," Lord Hamill said. He put his name down for it.

That was it. Her card was filled. And, not one of the names was w  
wished for.

All those stories of heartbreak Miss Mayton had told she and her  
ard was made sense now. Where once she could only squint and imagine it, n  
felt it. Of course Hans had thrown himself off the side of a cliff, of  
and his Gregorio had run himself through. Who would wish to feel as she  
d some moment? Who could bear it?

Worse, she was very afraid it would be a permanent condition. Th  
ding to had drained from the world and it seemed very gray.

e pious



illed up PERCIVAL HAD MADE himself useful at Lady Bloomington's masque, l  
acts shean eye open for ladies sitting out who would rather not find themse  
such a situation.

red her He'd only needed to step in twice and so had occupied himse  
he was sporting talk with sporting gentlemen and perhaps a little too  
champagne.

He was restless; he wished to get to the final dance. He'd even g  
ey put to the balcony for nearly an hour, just to pass the time.

Finally, the moment had come. He searched the room, his eyes catching on another lady dressed as a ghostly figure, but that was not Cordelia. That lady had a black veil, where Lady Cordelia's was white.

There. There she was. He hurried over, barely cognizant that there was something hovering nearby. So strange, but he had little time to examine it.

"Lady Cordelia," he said, putting out his arm.

"Lady Cordelia?" a voice from under the veil asked.

Percival felt the blood in his veins grow cold. It was not the voice of Lady Cordelia. He was very afraid of whose it was.

He was an idiot! It was Miss Bretherton. That's why she seemed always to be standing next to the bishop. He was her father.

What had he done?

"Lord Harveston," Miss Bretherton said, "if there has been some error or confusion..."

"No, of course not," he said gallantly as the bishop eyed him. "Yes, that she of confusion, but a happy one, naturally. There are two of you dressed as ghostly figures."

"I am come as Mary Magdalene," she said.

"Oh, I see, yes, how stupid of me, my apologies."

As Percival spoke, it was as if somebody else spoke. That part of himself that had been trained as a gentleman thought of what to say in this moment.

His other self, his true self, wished to shout that it had all been a non-sense. He'd wasted his time hanging about Hamill and his friends, talking about bets, when he should have been looking for Lady Cordelia.

As he led Miss Bretherton to the ballroom floor, he searched the room for the real Lady Cordelia.

There she was, escorted by Hamill.

Hamill, the *real* Corinthian.

Did Hamill mean anything by it? He did not know, but if he had something out, he would dismiss the fellow as his sporting trainer. He would not have a viper in his very house!

Percival took a deep breath and told himself not to be stupid. This was not one out of a disaster that could not be got over.

The next time he could have a private conversation with Lady Cordelia, or even a not so private one, he would tell her what happened.

briefly It might even end as a funny story they might laugh about.  
of Lady Maybe.

. For now, he would lead Mary Magdalene through the changes w  
bishopbishop looked on.

of Lady

med to

mistake

es, a bit  
ssed as

um that  
ghastly

mistake.  
g about

om for

e found  
e would

was not

ordelia,

It might even end as a funny story they might laugh about.

Maybe.

For now, he would lead Mary Magdalene through the changes while the bishop looked on.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CORDELIA HAD GONE from one dance to another, smiling and making conversation. Whatever deficiencies had recently presented themselves regarding her education, a lack of manners had not been one of them.

She and all her sisters had been strictly schooled on the niceties, sometimes they chose to ignore a rule of two, making innocent gentlemen uncomfortable would never be one of them.

Lord Hamill had come to collect her for the final dance.

He was dressed as a proud peacock, as he was one of Darden's seven deadly sins.

"Lady Cordelia," he said genially.

"Lord Hamill," she said pleasantly. "As always, the YBC has a remarkable job with costumes."

She said it as a thing to say, as one rarely went wrong in delivering a compliment.

"Careful, Lady Cordelia," he said, "do not make the peacock proud, he already is."

She laughed, because she knew she should. It was a clever jest.

"By the by," Lord Hamill said as they waited for their turn at the card table. "did you notice that Lord Harveston comes as Shakespeare? I understand we particularly admire Shakespeare."

Why was he mentioning Lord Harveston? What could he mean by that?

"I cannot claim to be singular in that admiration," she said. "I suppose it would be more unusual to discover that a person did *not* come as Shakespeare."

"Perhaps," Lord Hamill said. "It is a strange thing I noticed this evening as he went on, 'your costume and Miss Bretherton's are so similar. I have just described your attire to me and, at first, I did think Miss Bretherton was you. I suppose I am not the only one to make that mistake.'"

What did he say? Did he mean that Lord Harveston engaged him?



Miss Bretherton for the last dance when he thought it was herself?

If it were a usual circumstance, Cordelia might think of a subtle inquire further. It was not usual though and, at this moment, she had patience for subtlety.

“Lord Hamill,” she said boldly, “do you claim that Lord Harveston to ask me for a dance and has mistakenly asked Miss Bretherton?”

Lord Hamill smiled. “That is my guess at what has happened.”

That was his guess at what happened! He did not know for certain did have reason to think that Lord Harveston would have preferred dancing with her right this minute.

That was something, was it not?

It could be true. Her and Miss Bretherton’s costumes were very but for the color of the veil and the shape of the headdress.

How had Lord Harveston even known what she wore? He’d probably gotten the information from another gentleman, and everybody knew they could be relied upon to describe clothes in any detail. For heaven’s sake, his brother, Darden, lumped together violet, lavender, lilac, and plum and called them all purple, as if they were the same.

Her spirits were buoyed by the idea.

It must be true that Lord Harveston had been confused by the color.

She would believe it true until somebody could prove to her that it was not true.



changes,

PERCIVAL SIPPED HIS coffee. What a night he had experienced the evening before. He’d had it all planned out—he would secure Lady Cordelia for the dance and he would ask the momentous question.

However, as Burns had so aptly pointed out, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

They had gone awry, alright.

He’d ended the night dancing with Miss Bretherton. Then, he’d tried to catch Darden but he could at least catch Lady Cordelia before she departed the ball. He would explain what had happened.

But no, the gods were against him on that idea too. As soon as the night was over, he found himself to

was over, the bishop had pulled him aside and interrogated him regarding his intentions.

And little It was pointed out to him that the bishop was aware that he had escorted Miss Bretherton home after Lady Hightower's musical evening. Now, it meant he had secured the last dance. What did the lord mean by it?

Then had ensued a remarkably uncomfortable quarter hour, as he tentatively expressed his lack of any designs on Miss Bretherton in the softest and most complimentary tones possible. The bishop was left satisfied that at least he could never be, as Lord Harveston had deemed himself unworthy of such a remarkable daughter.

By the time he'd extricated himself from that fiasco, Lady Cordelia's family had left.

If there had been any bright spot, it was that Hamill had questionably gotten about the evening, got the truth of it, claimed he had thought the very best and had told Lady Cordelia just that.

Her own He'd even said that Lady Cordelia had seemed pleased to hear it.

He called His valet, Jameston, came in carrying one of his coats. Percival glanced at it and said, "No, not that one. Get the blue one that just came in from the tailor's. I will be calling on the Benningtons this afternoon and wish to see a better coat."

It was not It was the Benningtons' at-home day and he would go. It would be a statement and, if the room were not too crowded, he might have a moment to say his piece.

In fact, even if the room was crowded, he would say what he wished to say.

Evening

of the last



of miceCORDELIA HAD WOKEN in very good spirits, now thoroughly convinced

Lord Harveston had meant to engage on her card, not Miss Bretherton's.

She had been disappointed that he had not sought her out before she had thought but on the other hand, it had seemed as if he wished to.

He would The bishop had cornered him and Cordelia could not help but notice while he talked to the gentleman, his eyes were nearly always on her.

He dance His eyes followed her as her father and Darden escorted her out.

ling his In the end, it was probably good luck that such a mix-up had occurred. It had worked to firmly cement her feelings. The world had seemed graceful to her, but she'd thought it was all to come to nothing, and then it was full of cold when she realized her mistake.

Now, she was in the breakfast room with Juliet and Miss Mayton, who had actfully having lingered over their tea.

nd most "It is odd, though," Juliet said, "that you seem so happy about the match when you did not speak to him at all."

of his Cordelia shrugged. She could not properly explain her feelings, the too on the move, riding up hills and flying down them again.

elia and The earl, who had left the room a half hour before, came back. Cordelia started. He held a letter in his hand and appeared almost ill.

ied him "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," he said.

y thing, "Papa! What is it? What has happened?"

Seeming to come to his senses, the earl took in a deep breath and said, "Beatrice writes that Lily has come down with a croup. The poor little girl has a high fever and Beatrice says the cough is quite terrible. They are so frightened out of their wits."

o have a Juliet jumped from her chair. "What are we waiting for? We must go now!"

make a "Yes, yes, of course we must go. Now, I did think about it. Cordelia may stay here with Miss Mayton. I should not like to drag you away from your season."

shed to "No, Papa!" Cordelia cried. "Beatrice needs us all there. If something were to happen..."

None of them could bear to say what the something was that Cordelia referred to.

Their dear Lily might die. It would not be unusual, many children died that way. It was just that it was their Lily. Nothing could happen to their little girl.

None of them would be able to bear it. Beatrice could not bear it.

she left, They were each up out of their chairs and running to find a valise. They must go in all haste.

ice that

NEVER IN THEIR lives had the Benningtons set off on a journey as quickly with as little fuss as they did that day.

irred. It The earl gave over all the arrangements to Tattleton, who moved y whenand earth to get them packed and rent an extra carriage and coachma or againwere only to take what was needed; the rest could be sent on by their b

The rest that would be sent on had, necessarily, included Lord I n, theyHowever, Tattleton swore he would take good care of him. He did n enthusiastic over the prospect, but Cordelia knew he would be as goo eveningword.

As the butler issued orders this way and that, the earl fired off le ey wereRosalind and Viola. Cordelia had no doubt the duke and Lord Ba would escort her sisters home. Darden had been called back from his c into it. They were off in two hours, speeding their way back to So Sandren had been given leave to make the journey as speedily as p changing horses at strategic stops. A basket had been packed in each c and there would be no stopping but for the horse changes.

rd said, The earl had been grim as he spoke to them before they set off. He le mite“This trip must be different. We are on a serious errand and cannot dal are allmoment.”

“Papa,” Juliet said, “if I leave my book behind somewhere, it st go toforever. If I wish to write an ode, then I will do so from what I see pas a window. There will be no stopping at all—we must fly to Beatr lia, youLily.”

ly from The earl nodded approvingly. “And Van Doren too.”

He stared at his youngest daughter until she finally whispered, “Y nethingVan Doren too.”

It had all happened so fast that Cordelia had not had a moment to t lordeliawhat she was leaving behind.

As the carriage raced along the road, leaving London in the d did die.Cordelia’s thoughts bounced back and forth—where she was going ar e niece.she was leaving.

“You are thinking about Lord Harveston,” Juliet said as Miss l e. Theysnored next to her.

“I am thinking of Beatrice and Lily, and then Lord Harveston, a Beatrice and Lily.”

kly and “If he loves you, if it is meant to be, he will wait. He will b waiting for you, next season.”

Cordelia hoped so. She hoped Miss Bretherton did not get her fac

heavenclaws into him somehow.

n. They “I know you imagined that you would be married by the end  
utler. season,” Juliet said, “but it is perfectly fine that you are not. You will l  
Darling, into my own and we will have a jolly time together.”

ot look Cordelia nodded. “As long as Lily comes through it.”

d as his “Yes, as long as Lily comes through it, else I cannot see how we w  
be jolly again.”

atters to

derston

lub.



merset. PERCIVAL HAD DONNED his best new coat and set off to the Bennington  
ossible, was it. He did not care how many people were crowding up her c  
arriageroom.

First, he would relay his ridiculous mistake of last evening. Th  
'd said, would very boldly request that he and Lady Cordelia step away for a  
ly for a moment, as he had something very particular to say.

Then, if she accepted, he would seek out the earl and lay out his ca  
is gone He planned on being exceedingly generous when it came to pin  
sing by and the jointure, beyond what would be expected from the amount  
ice and dowry. He would even settle a small estate in Hampshire on his ne  
that she might use as she saw fit. Nothing was entailed and he could c  
he liked. What he liked at this moment was to not give the earl one re  
es, and hesitate in condoning the match.

Though, first he must get Lady Cordelia to agree to it. He plan  
hink of outline his plans to become a Corinthian. Of course, he could not lay c  
the title at this moment, but he had made a beginning. He had taken ste  
istance, Painful steps that he did not particularly enjoy. But what w  
id what compared to Lady Cordelia's happiness?

Certainly, she would see that he was on his way to becom  
Mayton Corinthian. And in any case, was there not room in his life for b  
intellectual pursuits and a sporting life?

nd then Makepeace did not think so, he thought the whole idea a bit of m

He also was living in terror that Lady Cordelia's acting troupe w  
e there, arriving day and night and examining his sideboard if she agreed to l  
the mistress of his house.

ct-filled

Percival supposed he could not condemn Makepeace for his very different opinions. It was not usual that a butler would make comment on his employer's decisions, especially personal decisions, but then Makepeace had grown a friendship from the seeds of intellectual curiosity. And from the seeds of his own household.

Makepeace had seen what he had seen all those years ago. He'd been a footman at the time, forever slipping books out of his father's library. He had only spoken of it once years later, when he'd hired the investigator to attempt to track down Dora, but it had established an understanding between them. Makepeace would never countenance acting as butler for a man like his father, a man who would casually ruin a young girl and think no more of it. He was satisfied that Percival would never be that man.

Now, as he turned down Portland Place, he felt his stomach tighten. This was the moment that would set the course of his life, for good or ill. He was surprised to see a farmer's cart out front. Then he was even more surprised to see a farmer, escorted by a footman, leading Lord Darling's horse.

Could the Benningtons really have sold Lord Darling? It did not seem like money very like them.

The footman stopped short at the sight of him.

Percival reined in but instead of the boy coming to take the reins, he'd turned on his heel and raced back through the doors.

He could hear the footman calling for the butler from the front hall.

Percival walked his horse to the cart, just as the farmer picked up Lord Darling and placed him on the hay that padded the cart.

"Did you buy that goat," he asked.

"Buy 'im?" the farmer said, seeming very amused. "I'm to take the way to Somerset. This little lord is to get to his estate at Westmont. Don't you know."

Of course, he did not know, but it made sense. Keeping a goat in his house had finally worn the earl down and now it would go to the environment it had belonged in all along.

The butler, Tattleton, came rushing out as if his very hair was on fire. "Lord Harveston!"

The fellow appeared nearly in a panic. Had something happened to the goat going to the country?

"Mr. Tattleton, I understood this was the house's at-home occasion."

forward something amiss? I get the distinct feeling I arrive at an inconvenient time on his. The footman was just at this moment fanning the butler as T and himself mopped his brow.

curiosity. "Not so much inconvenient, my lord," he said. "You find us tops as the family has recently departed for Somerset."

been a They were gone? *She* was gone? Why? Why had they gone?

y. They "A family emergency has called them thither."

gator to "I see," he said, though his thoughts were jumbled. "I am sorry to between But Lady Cordelia, she is well?"

like his "Quite well, my lord."

e about "Everybody has gone? Darden too?"

"Yes, my lord, and we expect the duke and duchess and Lord and Baderston to be soon on their way. I have been left behind to clean the house."

in more Percival hardly knew what to say. He should not inquire further, to it. burned to know the cause. Whatever it was, it was grave indeed. It seemed extended family were rushing to the scene.

"Mr. Tattleton, it is not any of my business, but might I ask..."

He trailed off, knowing he had no right whatsoever to ask. It was just as if he really wished to know what Lady Cordelia was facing just now.

"Lord and Lady Van Doren's daughter, young Miss Lily, has come up with a croup," the butler said. "It seems to be serious and the family is making their way there to do what they can, whatever that may be."

The butler sighed and said quietly, "Another letter from Lady Beauchamp's father has just arrived. I dare not even contemplate what it says."

him all That *was* grave. If he understood it correctly, the child would not have reached two years. The diseases of childhood were cruel.

Percival had even heard of women in his village who would not consent to themselves to love a child until they were deemed hearty enough to confront the ever-present dangers.

What could he do about it though? He was helpless in the situation. He could not even write a letter to Lady Cordelia—it would be far too late

before being accepted and it would be graceless to send any communication without knowing the situation the lady faced. Lady

Doren's child might have passed even now. That was what Tattleton was afraid was in the letter that had missed the earl.

ime.” He could write to Darden though. Not this minute, not until time had passed and he understood whether condolences were in order.

What could he do now, though? He wished to do something now! Percival swung himself down from his horse. To the footman he said, “Take Pericles to the stables.” He turned to the butler. “Mr. Tattleton will have a thousand things to arrange, I am at your service.”

The butler seemed rather taken aback, though the footman heard and approved of the idea. He nodded vigorously as he took the reins.

“My lord,” Tattleton said, “we are busy indeed, but all of our tasks are well, they are to be done by servants!”

“Nonsense,” Percival said. “At a time like this, one man’s arms are needed as the next. Now, I imagine there are piles of things to be packed for the Earl of Darden. Mr. Tattleton rubbed his chin. “I should not like to find the earl disapprove, though.”

“He will have more weighty ideas on his mind,” Percival said. “Come, I will pack Darden’s things. He shan’t mind at all.”

“Lord Darden. You *are* in the same club...” Tattleton said, trailing off. “It’s settled. Direct me to his room and his trunks. As he mostly lives in the city, he will not want all his clothes—I can sort out what he will need and pack it up to send on.”

Yes, that was what he needed to do this minute. He needed to be sure he kept himself engaged. After he had assisted Tattleton in getting the household sorted out, he would redouble his efforts with Hamill.

God willing, Lady Van Doren’s child would come through it. All would end happily and then, by next season, Lady Cordelia would return a lot evenhandedly faced with an intellectual Corinthian.

He did not suppose the world had ever encountered an intellectual Corinthian. He would survive.

ion. He  
forward  
sort of  
ly Van  
on was



He could write to Darden though. Not this minute, not until time had passed and he understood whether condolences were in order.

What could he do now, though? He wished to do something now!

Percival swung himself down from his horse. To the footman he said, "Take Pericles to the stables." He turned to the butler. "Mr. Tattleton, you will have a thousand things to arrange, I am at your service."

The butler seemed rather taken aback, though the footman clearly approved of the idea. He nodded vigorously as he took the reins.

"My lord," Tattleton said, "we are busy indeed, but all of our tasks are, well, they are to be done by servants!"

"Nonsense," Percival said. "At a time like this, one man's arms are as strong as the next. Now, I imagine there are piles of things to be packed."

Mr. Tattleton rubbed his chin. "I should not like to find the earl did not approve, though."

"He will have more weighty ideas on his mind," Percival said firmly. "Come, I will pack Darden's things. He shan't mind at all."

"Lord Darden. You *are* in the same club..." Tattleton said, trailing off.

"It's settled. Direct me to his room and his trunks. As he mostly lives in Town, he will not want all his clothes—I can sort out what he will require and pack it up to send on."

Yes, that was what he needed to do this minute. He needed to be of use and keep himself engaged. After he had assisted Tattleton in getting the household sorted out, he would redouble his efforts with Hamill.

God willing, Lady Van Doren's child would come through it. All would end happily and then, by next season, Lady Cordelia would return and find herself faced with an intellectual Corinthian.

He did not suppose the world had ever encountered an intellectual Corinthian.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

CORDELIA GRIPPED JULIET'S hand. They had made the trip in two days. Considering their prior trips, neither of them had imagined it could be so quickly. However, they never stopped but to change horses and to use the facilities. Only once did they stop for a few hours for the coach to sleep. Sandren had been a man possessed and had driven the hired coach to keep up.

Now, they were going straight to Beatrice, straight to Faversham. Now, they would discover what they all faced. They would discover what poor Beatrice had already faced.

The carriage wheels thundered down the drive, Sandren determined to make the last mile with all speed.

He reined in, the carriage slowed to a stop, and there was a moment of silence, but for the heavy breathing of the horses. It felt as if nobody was to move.

Cordelia peered out the window as Darden helped their father from the second carriage.

"There is no hatchment," she said, examining the doors of Faversham Hall.

Those doors swung open and Van Doren's housekeeper stood looking exceedingly surprised.

"She wears no black ribbon on her cap!" Juliet whispered.

Before the housekeeper could say anything at all, the earl said, "I have just received word about Lily. What is the news?"

"Ah!" the housekeeper said, as if it had been cleared up sufficiently. "Why she was seeing the family on the drive. The little lady did very well for twenty-four hours, I can tell you it was a fright, but she turned a corner and she is as jolly as she ever was. We're still being careful, mind, but the doctor says she is firmly on the mend."

The earl nearly sank to the drive. Darden held him up.

“She’s all right!” Juliet cried.

They tumbled from the carriage and all of them surrounded their father. “She’s all right, Papa,” Juliet said, as if to be sure her father understood the matter.

“Let us get you indoors, Father,” Darden said, lending the earl his arm.

They headed toward the doors en masse just as Beatrice came down the stairs.

“You are all here!” she cried.

“Of course, we are here, my dear,” Miss Mayton said. “Where else would we be at such a moment?”

The sisters and their aunt threw themselves at one another as if to help. The footmen helped the earl to a chair in the drawing room and ordered the footman to fetch him some ale.

The next minutes were a flurry of news back and forth.

“I did write again,” Beatrice said. “After the first letter, I wrote a second that the danger seemed to have passed.”

“I suppose we missed it,” the earl said. “We set off not two hours after receiving the first.”

“You would never believe how fast we were off,” Juliet said. “They could do nothing like it.”

“And we came straight through,” Cordelia said. “We only stopped to change horses—no admiring vistas or ordering plates of ham or anything. I think Sandren rather enjoyed it.”

“Indeed,” Miss Mayton said, “we even ate our meals in the carriage that fellow barreled along. Quite the mess we made at it too.”

“Do not attempt to spread mustard on bread in a moving carriage,” the earl said sagely.

“I shouldn’t have written at all until I knew more,” Beatrice said. “It was so frightening, and I did think she might...you know. I could not talk about it with Van Doren, he just would not hear of the possibility. He kept coming by at all hours walking her back and forth as if his strength would keep her from going poorly.”

“Where is he, by the by?” the earl asked, looking a bit restored by the news but the earl.

“In bed with a cold,” Beatrice said with a smile. “He positively exhausted himself out. Naturally, he argued from here to Sunday about taking a

I convinced him to be abed by telling him my nerves could not hold up  
father.another dangerous situation.”

ood the “I’ll bet he’s a cranky patient,” Juliet said.

“The crankiest,” Beatrice said with a laugh.

arm. “Well, if he stayed up all the night long with Lily, I cannot fault  
own thecrankiness,” Juliet said begrudgingly.

“I have sent Genroy to bed as well,” Beatrice said, “as I do not th  
butler has properly slept in days.”

e would “Can we see her?” Cordelia asked. “Would the doctor say it’s all ri

“Oh, I think so,” Beatrice said. “He’s given me leave to bring her  
Dardendoors when the weather is fine and we no longer need isolate her from  
man topeople. Though, perhaps this is an awful lot of people at once.”

The earl said, “Beatrice, take the girls and Miss Mayton to the nu  
feel I must write to Tattleton before another moment has passed. He w  
ay laterbeen staring at that second letter and fearing the worst.”

“Poor Tattleton,” Juliet said. “His nerves were stretched enoug  
rs afterLord Darling.”

“Lord Darling?” Beatrice asked.

ere was “The goat,” Juliet said. “I did write that we’d adopted a goat.”

Beatrice laughed. “Indeed you did. I did not know you named hi  
oped toDarling.”

thing. I “Lord Darling, Marquess of Basingstoke,” Juliet said.

“That particular marquess is to be on his way here shortly,” the ea  
riage as“by way of somebody’s uncle.”

Before Beatrice could ask how somebody’s uncle had got invo  
” JulietLord Darling’s future, the earl said, “Darden and I will wait our turr

Lily and we will have a second glass of ale to restore ourselves, if on  
“But itfootmen will be so good.”

not talk “That is a fine notion, Father,” Darden said. “And I will write to  
was upabout club matters—I left some things up in the air on account of our  
leep herdeparture. In any case, far be it for us men to try to get ahead of a  
women when a baby is involved.”

a glass That was all the convincing anybody needed, though Cordelia p  
thought Darden dead wrong in his ideas. As far as she could see  
y woreDoren had been a veritable mother hen during Lily’s illness and sl  
rest butmuch approved of it.

p under     They had all leapt up and run up the stairs to the nursery.

Beatrice had been nesting in the months leading up to her confinement but it perhaps came as a surprise the exact extent of that nesting. They seen the piles of clothes embroidered and the stuffed toys made and him for been perfectly aware that she had grand plans for a nursery.

However, when they'd left for Town, Lily had been still in a small ink ourrooms next to Beatrice's bedchamber. Now, the nursery had been finished and the nurse and Lily had made their move there.

ght?"     It was entirely charming. There were soft colored forest scenes painted r out of the walls, filled with fairies peeking round leaves and an owl on n other branch overseeing it all. The crib was painted white and intricately with flowers and greenery. There were two large dressers to contain rsery. I embroidered clothing Beatrice had worked on. Felted animals to play w ill have in every corner and airy white crepe curtains let the sun through. Two chairs in pale blue velvet sat on either side of the fireplace.

gh over     It was a magical little place.

The nurse curtsied as they came in and stepped aside to reveal determinedly holding herself up on her feet by way of one of the chairs.

Her round chubby cheeks dimpled at seeing she had visitors. She m Lord took steps away from the chair, wobbled, and collapsed on the rug. She laughed and seemed delighted with herself.

Lily promptly got on hands and knees, as that was still her spirl said, mode of transportation, and got to a stuffed sheep. She gamely held show to everyone as if it were the crown jewels.

lved in     All was well. Though she'd known it from hearing it, Cordelia felt 1 to see she *really* knew it from seeing it.

e of the     Her niece was just as cheerful as she had been when last they'd seen Lily had come through.

Hamill     Beatrice picked up her daughter and her stuffed sheep. "Now, n speedy Lily, we shall like to hear all about Aunt Cordelia's season. It has b pile of short on account of your croup, but we will be interested to know w happened so far."

rivate ly     Nobody could be sure if Lily was in fact interested, but she did d it, Vansheep and clap her hands rather enthusiastically.

he very     A sound behind them made Cordelia turn.

"What are all of you doing here?"

There was Van Doren, looking as cranky as ever, and looking ridiculous in his nightdress and a bright red nose to go with it.

“They have come to check on Lily, my darling,” Beatrice said, laughing at the sight. “Back to bed with you before you come down with a fever!”

Van Doren sighed. “I was rather hoping this *was* a fever dream,” before setting off wandering back down the hall.

Everything was just as it ought to be. Lily was well, Van Doren was cranky, and Beatrice was delighted with him.

Only a few hours ago, Cordelia had feared such a happy outcome could never be.

“Let us all arrange ourselves on the carpet and admire Lily while we do all these things, Cordy.”

“You will not believe the everything, Bea,” Juliet said, throwing herself down.

Ah yes. The everything. Lord Harveston.

As Lily wobbled on her fat little legs, tipped over, bravely got up, Lily shoved her stuffed sheep into their faces, and used any chair she could steady herself, Cordelia told Beatrice all about Lord Harveston.

boldly  
ing. She



PERCIVAL HAD SEEN Tattleton and the rest of the Bennington household on their way back to Somerset. He’d convinced the butler to give him a key to the back garden gate and then brought his own gardener to Town to help as if what Lord Darling had put asunder.

After that, he’d waited impatiently for three days for Hamill to return from racing his carriage somewhere or other. The fellow was forever late with his carriage!

Finally, Hamill had turned up and Percival had acquainted him with the new cut ideas. Their work was to be redoubled. They would go at it night and day.

“You see what I say,” Percival said as Hamill sat on his sofa, looking bemused. “I’ll do whatever you ask—we’ll run round in our bare feet all day long, we could even swim the Serpentine, I’ll box until I’m unconscious on the ground. Nothing is out of bounds!”

“For you, maybe,” Hamill said, laughing. “By the by, Darden wrote

g quite—Lady Van Doren’s child has recovered.”

Percival sank into a chair. “Has she? That is good, very good. Wishingwonder, does the family return to Town now that the danger has passed?”

“No, they do not,” Hamill said. “Apparently, moving the Benham household from one place to the next is a bit of a palaver.”

“Yes, I can see how it would be,” Percival said thoughtfully. “Darden says the duke and Baderston have arrived to Somerset with their wives in tow and will stay for some months. They are a rather united family. I would think.”

Yes, they were united. It was part of their charm. If he were lucky, and turned himself into a credible Corinthian, he would find himself a part of it all.

It was strange to think about. He did not himself have much of an extended family. He was an only child, as was his mother. His father had a brother, but he’d died before marrying. Percival did of course have distant cousins. It was England, everybody had those. But they were not to be grabbed to one exchanged Christmas greetings with, little more.

A darker thought occurred to him. “Um, what sort of gentlemen are lurking round that neighborhood in Somerset? Do you happen to know any of them? The idea of some fop riding over to her house every day was, well, not to be borne.

“I do not happen to know, though Darden has never mentioned a name in particular.”

“Well now, good news all round. As to our plan, we’d best get started mapping out a schedule,” Percival said. “A tight schedule, mind you.”

Hamill had roared with laughter over the idea. “My friend,” he said, racing he could catch his breath, “you are coming at this like you are writing a paper for the Royal Society. The thing with various sports is, it is supposed to be with his fun, not work.”

“Fun?” Percival said, entirely unsuccessful at keeping the incredulous look from his voice. There had been nothing fun about his outings with Hamill all day.

“Yes. Fun. Amusement. Enjoyment of competition. A diversion,” Hamill said.

The last thing he would have called running round the park was diversion. “What do you advise then?” Percival asked. “As I cannot claim to be an expert, the fun in any of it.”

“Relax. That’s what I advise. Tomorrow morning, we will box u  
Now, Idrop. Other days, we will do other things. In a month, you can com  
d?” with me and continue on at my estate. My mother and father are j  
ningtonanything, we have a bowling green, tennis green, loads of trails to ride  
hiking, billiards, and we even have a lake and one-man sailboats. T  
course, the shooting.”

th their “Well, I do not know, I would not like to be an imposition to the du  
group, Iduchess.”

“They won’t see you as an imposition. Of course, my sister mig  
Theodora has always got her nose in a book and is complaining ab  
e mightnoise.”

Hamill paused. “I suppose the two of you will have a lot to talk ab  
of anconsiders herself quite the intellectual. We do not encourage her at it, i  
r had alt makes for tedious dinner conversation. Do any of us wish to kn  
e morereproductive habits of frogs? No, Theodora, we do not.”

the sort Percival laughed at the idea, though he also found himself  
embarrassed over it too. He did know the reproductive habits of frogs  
ien arebeen a Royal Society paper, and he would not mind discussing it.

?” He had bigger things to do though. By next season, he must be a se  
l it wasportsman. The frogs could manage themselves.

“I’d have to make arrangements with my steward,” he said  
nybody“though he is a reliable fellow—”

“It’s settled then,” Hamill said.  
started



d when  
a paperTHEY HAD BEEN at home in Somerset for a month and as the fear of  
d to beillness faded, the idea of Lord Harveston took over Cordelia’s thoughts

She had thought long and hard about him. Cordelia was near cert  
redulityhe felt something for her. Some sort of feeling that was stronger t  
nill. interest in intellectual matters. Some feeling that would cause him  
Hamillaside any ideas he may have had about choosing someone as deep in  
and information as he was.

verting. However, that might not hold through a lifetime.

yet see She would not take the chance that it would not hold.



until we e homehad been encouraged to take her education in hand. She wished to know jolly asthan she did. Dear Mr. Lackington had found her all sorts of interesting out on,—histories of Shakespeare, flora that could be found in her neighborhood, and a variety of books about the kings and queens of England.

After serious thought on the matter of her mind and the knowledge and currently stored, compared to Lord Harveston's mind, she realized that pleasant meanderings on subjects that interested her would not be sufficient, but She must turn herself into a proper intellectual. Cordelia was certain she could do it. All her tutors had said, one way or another, that she was capable of learning anything if she would just apply herself.

So, she would apply herself.

During the day, she very determinedly locked herself away in the study and read books and papers. Her mind was getting filled with all sorts of information.

Though, she did notice that it was far easier to remember words, it had information was when it was a subject she was interested in. Those subjects tended to have people involved in them. Some of the non-peopled facts seemed to make a brief stop in her mind, rather like a change of horses in an inn. There for a quarter hour and then speeding off into the distance, rarely to be seen again.

She admired her own discipline, though. It was no small thing to keep the laughter from the drawing room, or to see everyone marching to Faversham Hall or to a picnic.

Nevertheless, she was determined.

Not so determined that she would miss dinner though. The household of Lily's exceedingly lively with Conbatten, Rosalind, Viola, and Lord Baderston. and then Beatrice and Van Doren so often walking over from the Hall. In the main that then of course, there was Bess and her pup, who they'd since named Fanny after her father's name, and the cats—Cupcake, Mischief, The Duchess, and Pander. and then their dear parrot Chester, who would shout on shouting murder at anybody who passed his cage in the drawing room.

Lord Darling had arrived safe and sound, thanks to the good care of Charlie's uncle. He'd since been introduced to the dairy cows and had fallen off terrifically with them. Clara, a dear old thing, had taken him in her arms the same day he arrived. When Lord Darling got too energetic for the

on, sheliking, Clara would gently knock him on the head.

w more “How goes your studies, my dear?” the earl asked from his end  
g bookstable.

orhood, “Very well, Papa,” Cordelia said.

“I could not do it, Cordy,” Juliet said. “I should fall asleep with a l  
ledge itmy lap.”

at these “Dare I ask what it is you are studying?” Conbatten asked.

icient. “I am looking at a wide range of subjects,” Cordelia said. “For ex  
ain shetoday I read a Royal Society paper about volcanoes. A Scot ha  
capablestudying them and the Earl of Buchan has recommended him to the :

The gentleman hopes to provide information to people so they will  
killed in an eruption.”

library “As we do not have any volcanoes in England, may I ask what co  
sorts ofthis information is for?” Van Doren asked.

“To inform my mind, for my own edification,” Cordelia said, glar  
hat theher sisters and her aunt. They might know why she was spending all h  
subjects in the library, but nobody else did. She planned to keep it that way.

ts only “Some of us care about what happens to people living next to a m  
es at anthat might blow up at any moment,” Juliet said, narrowing her eyes  
ever toDoren.

“I will eat my boots for breakfast if you care about it,” Van Doren

gnore “Tell your cook to heat up a frying pan,” Juliet said in a rather frig  
; off to tone.

“I can’t think when was the last time I thought about volcanoes,”  
said. “Dashed inconvenient to live nearby one of them.”

ise was “I can tell you from firsthand experience,” Miss Mayton said, dab  
on in it, lips with her napkin, “when I was in Italy, I often feared some fellow  
ill. And throw himself into Mount Vesuvius over me. There *were* threats. Th  
Princess understand it would have been a long walk up, so that was  
onium comforting.”

carried “Well now, if Cordelia wishes to explore any suitable topic to enla  
om. mind,” the earl said jovially, “she has my full approval.”

care of “Thank you, Papa,” Cordelia said.

ad hit it “Yes, *thank you*, Papa,” Juliet said, staring at Van Doren.

and the Beatrice, looking vastly amused, said, “Dear Aunt, will you be rea  
e cows’ us this evening?”

She ignored her husband's groan over the idea.

"I do hope so, Miss Mayton," the earl said. "We are so close to denouement, and I cannot imagine what will happen."

"I will be positively bereft if I do not hear the denouement of this remarkable tale," Conbatten said, smiling at Van Doren.

Darden snorted. He was always very much amused when the duke visited Van Doren.

"Never fear, Your Grace," Miss Mayton said condescendingly, "I will catch you up to where we are so far before reading the shocking conclusion to this society." "Shocking!" the earl said, seeming delighted. "Now I am on tenterhooks not to be over it."

And so they'd gone merrily on and Miss Mayton did read the shocking conclusion to *The Dreadful Doings of Dembric Hall*.

Amidst Van Doren's shifting in his chair, pained sighs, and staring out the doors as if he wished he could go through them, Miss Mayton explained to the duke what had happened to that point.

Mr. Denbrow had been considering marrying his decidedly plain kitchen maid, though he was not the father and did not know who was that Vanmaid attempted to convince him that a son would nullify any arrangement he'd made with the duke, he could keep all the duke's money, and he would not be murdered by the villagers if they moved to sunny Spain.

The poor duke and Mr. Denbrow's daughter, now the duke's beloved duchess, remained poor as church mice in their ducal residence. The duke and Darden still chopping their own wood and living on raw eggs, as neither could cook, knew how to cook anything. They had made attempts, but they'd all gone up in smoke. A villager sometimes brought a piece of roasted meat and the couple were very careful to eat it bit by bit.

It would turn out that Mr. Denbrow could not face leaving for good without seeing his darling daughter once more. He arranged to stop at the duke's house very casually, without saying he was going anywhere.

The duke, being accustomed to acting the host extraordinaire in the past, gone by, would not countenance his father-in-law failing to be fed during his visit. He cracked a few raw eggs into a bowl. Then he gamely fetched the ham of the pork that Mrs. Willow had brought them three weeks prior, which had been stored in a cabinet in the drawing room.

The whole thing smelled like sulfur and death, but Mr. Denbrow at

of guilt.

to the He was dead not three days later.

At that very opportune moment, Chester had jumped round his cage and cried, "Murder! Murder!"

"Oh no," Miss Mayton had said to the parrot, "you see, it was just an accident. The duke was so used to entertaining properly and he had to make do with what he had."

"I will be rich, he was fondly missed, but not overly mourned. As it was an accident, and as Mr. Denbrow had seemed very miserably off, he was fondly missed, but not overly mourned.

The duke and his duchess were restored to their wealth and the duke spent the rest of his life dousing his lady with presents and jewels. The duchess, in her part, planned elaborate dinners of twelve courses—they would never eat raw eggs again.

The earl had been delighted with the story, exclaiming, "So Mr. Denbrow ruined himself in by the very hardships he'd forced on the duke and his daughter! If he hadn't taken the money, he wouldn't have been serving the regnant eggs and the pork that had gone off. Well, it just goes to show."

"I had hoped they'd all be dead thirty pages ago," Van Doren muttered. Conbatten had raised a brow. "For myself, I am rather cheered that the duke was restored to his fortune."

"If we ever find ourselves in such a situation, Conbatten," Rosalind replied, "I would sell off my jewels before I would allow you to eat raw eggs."

"You will do no such thing," her duke assured her. "I would hire you out as a laborer before one diamond departs your neck."

"What about you, Baderston?" Darden asked. "Are you to hire yourself out as a laborer in such straights?"

"I rather think I'd hire myself out as an accountant," Lord Baderston replied. "I'm very good with managing the account books and, in any case, I think I would prefer it."

Viola nodded. "He always does wish to know what I would prefer."

"What of you, Van Doren?" Juliet asked. "What will you be doing when your estate hits the rocks?"

"My estate will never hit the rocks, as you phrase it. I am very careful to protect me and mine, as everybody well knows."

Beatrice patted her husband's hand.

"Yes, yes," the earl said. "My daughters have all married well."

husbands, indeed. I am well pleased.”

Cordelia had gone to bed laughing over the improbable demise of Edgar and Denbrow and the even more improbable second careers of her brothers in law.

that the  
th what

rable to

re spent  
ess, for  
ever eat

enbrow  
his own  
red raw

ered.  
that the

rd said,

myself

yourself

on said.  
magine

”  
ig once

reful to

ry fine

husbands, indeed. I am well pleased.”

Cordelia had gone to bed laughing over the improbable demise of Mr. Denbrow and the even more improbable second careers of her brothers-in-law.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

THE MORNING FOUND Cordelia hard at work, ignoring Chester's shaming retort from the drawing room. It was a bit harder to ignore Tattleton's retort, which was along the lines of, "Do not tempt me, you heinous bi—" Tattleton himself knocked on the library door and entered. "Cordelia," he said, "a messenger has brought this for you and claims you must wait for an answer. It is very untoward, I think, to demand an answer. He would not be moved though and the earl is not in the house to give his opinion of it."

"Do give it over, Tattleton," Cordelia said laughing. She could not imagine who would have written requiring an answer right away, but Miss Anne Garrow, a neighborhood spinster who looked upon the scheduling of a sudden afternoon tea as a countywide emergency.

She tore it open. It was not from Miss Garrow.

It was from two people as yet unknown to her—the Duchess of Cambridge and her daughter, Lady Theodora Highbury.

Goodness, this was Lord Hamill's mother and his younger sister were due to come out next year.

Cordelia scanned the letter.

*Lady Cordelia Bennington—*

*I and my daughter, Lady Theodora, have been assured by my son-in-law, Lord Hamill, that we are not too forward in this invitation. We are planning a house party for the 14<sup>th</sup>, scheduled to run a fortnight, and Lord Hamill singled you out as a lady it would behoove Theodora to know.*

*Were you to be so gracious as to accept our invitation, we would quite naturally expect you to bring along someone of more mature years to supervise your visit, whether that be the earl or Lord Darlington, who I am both acquainted with, or Miss Eloise Mayton, who*

*understand is a very pleasant lady. Quite naturally, bring your maids and valets—we have ample accommodations for them.*

*We do hope you might condescend to attend us. We will have sorts of activities to entertain the ladies, while the gentlemen have plenty of sport to engage in. I will personally plan for the lady and the duke, my son, and his friend Lord Harveston will plan for the gentleman.*

outs of  
tleton's  
rd."

*We are not so very far from your estate, being at our summer estate in Devonshire, just north of Thorverton. We would send on our carriages and the trip could be done in a day.*

"Lady  
med he  
answer.  
ask his

*Respectfully, we have directed our groom to wait for your answer. Lady Theodora and I do hope we will see you in our house very soon.*

*Georgianna Castleton*

uld not  
but for  
eduling

Cordelia reread the letter. No, she did not reread it exactly. Rather, her eyes were glued to the one phrase—"my son and Lord Harveston."

"Goodness," she said to herself. "Lord Harveston is there."

astleton

"Is he still at the house, then?" Tattleton asked. "I did not think the garden would take as long as that."

"The garden?" Cordelia said, not having the first idea of what the butler was talking about.

who was

Tattleton nodded. "After the family departed Portland Place, he turned up for your at-home day. Certainly, Lord Harveston does not write directly?"

"No, of course not. But he was there? At Portland Place? Just a moment left?"

son,  
are  
and  
a to

Tattleton nodded. "After being apprised of the circumstances, he went to pack up Lord Darden's things, then insisted on having the key to the gate so he might bring in his own fellow to repair that goat's...modification. I was not so certain I ought to have given the key to him, but the earl would have done no harm in it when I told him of it.

uld  
ture  
den  
o I

Cordelia smiled. He'd fixed up the garden after Lord Darling's rather. That was a very singular thing to do.

"I have since had a letter from Mr. Bramwell," Tattleton went on. "The butler next door on the right. He says the garden is looking very well."



ids a fellow comes by once a week to do the weeding and pruning.”

She leapt up. “Where is Papa?”

all Tattleton seemed very taken aback by her swift reaction to hear  
will neighbor’s assessment of the garden. “My lord has gone to the south  
lies, check on how that goat is getting on with the cows,” Tattleton said.

the “Tell that messenger to wait, Tattleton. I must see Papa a  
mer permission to go to a house party. Do not allow him to leave. Give him  
e of biscuits, or...you will know best what to do with him, but do not  
leave!”

ver. On her way out the back doors that led to the fields, Cordelia sto  
the bottom of the staircase. “Aunt! Aunt, where are you?”

very Miss Mayton came hurrying to the top of the stairs. “Goodness  
am just up here, assisting Juliet in organizing her odes into a book.”

“Would you go to a house party with me?”

“A house party? Goodness, I’ve never been to a house party.”

er, her “You will go, though? Lord Harveston is there.”

“Ah! I see. Of course we must go then.”

Having that confirmation in her pocket, Cordelia fled the house in  
ink theof her father.

e butler



rned upPERCIVAL HAD SUPPOSED he had not known what tired really was before  
to you to Hamill’s house.

How could so many activities take place on one estate? Why w  
fter wefamily all so active?

The duke and duchess rarely sat down. They were always off ric  
helpedthey played lawn tennis, or bowled, or sailed. They had all looked po  
gardenfidgety the day it had rained so hard it really had been impossibl  
cations.anything out of doors. After grimly staring out the windows, they had  
saw nosettled on a billiards tournament.

He should not lump them all into one basket, of course. Hamill’s  
mpage.Theodora, was not at all like them. She could participate in whatev  
were up to well enough, but she only did so when she felt like it. Ver  
“He iswhat she felt like doing was closeting herself in the library.

ell and

There was no such repose for Percival. He'd told Hamill he n turned into a Corinthian and Hamill was doing his level best to accomp ing the There was no hiding from the truth, though—it was slow going. J field toafternoon, Hamill had taken him down to the lake and attempted to tea how to sail.

nd get Oh, he got the gist of it, he supposed. But it was a rather conf 1 ale, orthing. When one wished to go right, one must push the tiller left, a let himversa. If one wished to change direction, one had best consider the sv boom a deadly weapon. One was meant to be sailing close to the wi pped atthat also meant one was on the verge of tipping over.

Hamill had said that if he did tip over, he was to just hang on child, Ioverturned hull until somebody rowed out to get him. It usually was n than a half hour.

Percival had stuck his hand in the water, he knew how cold it wa was to be a long half hour!

It seemed he would not be bound for the Royal Navy anytime soon

If there was any rest to be had in Hamill's house, it was at dinne searchthis energetic family must sit down to accomplish it.

Blessedly, that was where he found himself this moment. The c always arranged a very fine repast that would go many courses.

As far as Percival was concerned, the more courses the better, a courses would all be had sitting down. He just hoped the duke was no comingbowling by candlelight afterward, as he had last evening. Every servar house had been out there, chasing balls with their lights.

ere the “Castleton,” the duchess said to her duke as the first course came “the house party is all arranged for the fourteenth.”

ling, or House party? Percival glanced at Hamill, who only nodded sitivelyTheodora sighed just the smallest sigh.

e to do “Excellent!” the duke said.

. finally “I will arrange for the ladies,” the duchess said, “and you will arra the gentlemen. As always, my dear, do not forget about us ladies. V s sister,wish to observe you at your sport from time to time. I myself would p er theybe a part of it, but we must accommodate the more staid activities that y often,lady will like to do.”

“Are we to spend our time in the library, then?” Theodora asked.

“Certainly not,” the duchess said. In a kinder tone, she said, “Now

must be a house party will not be one of your favored activities, but you are obliged to do it this season. You must become accustomed to meeting people and making just these connections. I have invited a very suitable young lady for you to know and to catch her eye. Percival examined his soup. Now he was to have an audience with the duke. He had attempted to make himself a sportsman?

The duke said, "I am ahead of you on the planning, my dear. I've been thinking it over for months and have the thing all worked out. We're having a regatta!"

"Wonderful!" the duchess said. "You really are so clever. How did you not think of it before?"

"We did not have enough boats for the thing," the duke said. "Not to worry. Plenty of boats to go round, plenty of sails. I've even got different flags so the onlookers can easily identify who is who as we round the bay. That I've put our crest on Hamill's."

Catching Percival's eye, Lady Theodora said quietly, "A regatta is a bit of a nuisance, but you can bring a book with you and read it under a tree—no bother. Even notice."

"What's that?" the duke said. "Do not imagine our Harveston's dukes stuck on the sidelines, Theo. No, he will be in it with the rest of us. He has already taken him down to the lake to show him what's what."

"A very brief introduction, I'm afraid," Percival said. "I could not set on the skill to participate in a race."

"No, of course not yet," the duke said jovially. "Hamill will take you down again on the morrow. You'll pick it up in no time at all and you'll be round, a full three days. You'll be a regular Francis Drake by the end of it."

"And you'll have the advantage of the other gentlemen," Hamill said. "They will not have been sailing in ages and will not be familiar with the lake or our boats."

Three days. Three days to turn himself into Sir Francis Drake. Sailing was not even all. There would be all sorts of sports played.

The only thing that would not be done was the only thing he was a little better at—sword play. There was a logical elegance to swords that had always interested him, and since he was interested he'd worked at it. Short of that, though, there was not much opportunity to show it off.

A sudden and awful thought came upon him. "There will not be a sword fight. I know will there?"

But next He prayed the answer was no. Each time he'd got into the ring in London, he'd been pounded out of his wits. Jackson, who really was a kind and thoughtful fellow, encouraged him no end. He was convinced that in time he should have a breakthrough any moment and really get the hang of it.

The duke had laughed heartily. "Boxing? Indeed, no," he said. "It has never been hardly a country sport. In any case, I do not imagine the ladies would like to have a black eye."

"Absolutely not," the duchess confirmed.

That was something, anyway. He would at least not be walking around with a black eye anytime soon.

"Mama," Lady Theodora said, "who is this paragon of a young man you will behoove me to know?"

"The Earl of Westmont's daughter—Lady Cordelia Bennington."

Percival's spoon clattered into his empty soup bowl. Hamill winked and nodded.

Lady Cordelia! She was coming here!

Of course, Hamill had arranged the thing. Good old Hamill!

"Is she likely to share my interests?" Lady Theodora asked, glancing at Percival's spoon come to rest in his bowl. "Please do not tell me she is like that silly creature who hasn't looked at a piece of literature lest it be *The Magazine*."

"I adore that magazine," the duchess said.

"She is a great admirer of Shakespeare," Percival said. "Othello, in particular."

"That is something, at least," Lady Theodora said.

"Lady Cordelia has attended my literary salons," he continued, "and she has made her mark there."

Lady Theodora laid down her spoon. "Now that is *really* something," she said. "Well done, Mama."

The duchess nodded graciously, if not a little confusedly.

Lady Cordelia was coming. She was coming to a house party where there would be no end of opportunities to display sportsmanlike skills.

Percival was bone-tired, but this was not the moment to slow down. In a duel, three days, he must appear the Corinthian. The *sailing* Corinthian, no less.

"Hamill, we should go down to the lake first thing," he said, "and then on with our lessons."

"The wind won't be up until the afternoon," Hamill said.

London, “Then we will do something else in the morning. The point is, we need to be doing something.”

Percival Hamill smiled. “Right you are.”

“Cordelia Bennington,” the duke said thoughtfully. “Is that, what I mean? That’s did not...one of the other sisters arrange her own...ah, never mind, like it.” the duchess now. But what about the one who...I do not know how to describe it...there were three proposed duels and then some round caravan...?”

The duchess nodded, seeming to understand perfectly well that the lady it alluded to the Duchess of Conbatten, née Lady Rosalind, arranging her kidnapping so the duke might rescue her and Lady Baderston, née Lady who had...well, Percival was not certain what that had been about. The next day a meeting on a green between Baderston and three other gentlemen, which had been his own cousin, and then the entire family fled to Scotland.

The duchess said, “All the old and great families have their own peculiarities, my love. Do not forget about Freddy.”

The duke nodded, seeming rather regretful to be reminded about the lady’s individual. He shook his head. “Nobody told him to drink himself silly and go into that cage!”

Percival looked at Hamill inquiringly. Hamill said, “A distant relative, you will know Lady Castlereagh keeps a tiger? *That* cage. It was all up, of course.”

The duke sighed. “Though people do continue to ask him what he has done with his hand and he tells the most ridiculous stories about it.”

“He was always too much of an optimist,” Lady Theodora said.

“The duke snorted. “Attempting to pet a tiger and imagining you will be able to do it with the body parts you came in with must be the height of optimism.”

“Poor Freddy,” the duchess said.

Poor Freddy indeed. Percival thought they must be talking about Frederick Germaine, who was forever drunk and forever telling people the truth. Napoleon himself had struck off his left hand. Percival did not think Frederick had ever set foot in France. He had presumed the missing hand had been lost in some careless accident.

Which, he supposed, had been entirely right.

Well,” the duke said, “I suppose the Benningtons could not be worse.”

ought Freddy.”

“The Benningtons are everything genial,” Percival said, attempting to keep the defensive tone from his voice. “I have grown to know the earl and have spent an at-home evening with the family—they are very close to her and she’s quite admired it.”

“Anybody can see that, Lord Harveston,” Theodora said in a low voice.

Percival did not answer. Really, he did not care a jot what anybody would see or not see. It was what Lady Cordelia would see in three days’ time that mattered, and what she must see was a Corinthian.

by Viola

ere was

one of



“Now, Mr. Tattleton,” Mrs. Huffson said, sipping her brandy, “you cannot have cause for alarm if the earl does not.”

“Oh, can’t I?” he said gravely. “The two of them, setting off to a county seat? A duke, mind you.”

“Lady Cordelia is equipped to encounter any family, whether a miller and grocer’s or a duke’s.”

Tattleton shook his head sadly. It forever amazed him that Mrs. Huffson never saw trouble coming. He, himself, could feel it in his bones. It was a particular gift, and his particular curse. He often could not identify the trouble that had taken flight and was winging its way in their direction and could feel it coming.

“I thought you’d find yourself in a very cheerful frame of mind these days,” Mrs. Huffson went on. “We are in the peace of the country and all leave Darling is out of the house and into the fields—he will trouble you no more.”

Tattleton glanced meaningfully at the shredded sofa, courtesy of the dog, and the muddy paw prints running across the floor, courtesy of the dog. He pointed his finger toward the ceiling to the far-off cries of murder from the parrot.

He noticed Mrs. Huffson had no retort to *that*.

“It is not Lady Cordelia I worry about,” he said, “at least, not if she is to be escorted by the earl or Lord Darden. It is Miss Mayton. Those ladies think of a terrible idea and then Miss Mayton says, ‘Give me a horse than’

moment, I am certain I can think of something worse.”

He could not know what worse than terrible idea Miss Mayton had thought up this time, but he did know that Lady Cordelia had been a very good knitter about her studies.

Tattleton had known those young ladies since they were born! Not that he teased them willingly found themselves in a library. They’d ventured in at their first literary salon and had not lasted a morning before they gave up. They’d very cheerfully informed him that they were casting aside their books and would rely on their own judgment.

With Lord Harveston being of an intellectual frame of mind and Lord Harveston fixing up their garden, and now Lord Harveston attending this country party...well, he could only assume the worst.

“I am very afraid, Mrs. Huffson, that Lady Cordelia is going to attempt to really pass herself off as a bookish lady and she is going to try it with Mayton’s help.”

Mrs. Huffson laughed at the notion. “Goodness, I suppose that would be the worst thing in the world.”

No. Not the worst thing in the world. Until Lord Harveston discovered the ruse. Until he discovered that Lady Cordelia Bennington had not only recently become acquainted with books on shelves.

He had a sneaking suspicion that Lady Cordelia was partial to the exact Harveston. Very partial. He could not account for what had happened, but he had the idea of finding herself a Corinthian, but there it was.

“If Lord Harveston breaks that young lady’s heart, or if he modifies her sudden entry into the world of attaining information, I will...well I don’t know what I will do, but it will be very awful.”

“Goodness. That was sudden turn, Mr. Tattleton.”

he cats,  
gs, then  
om the

re were  
: young  
e me a

moment, I am certain I can think of something worse.”

He could not know what worse than terrible idea Miss Mayton had thought up this time, but he did know that Lady Cordelia had been a veritable Hun about her studies.

Tattleton had known those young ladies since they were born! Not a one of them willingly found themselves in a library. They’d ventured in after that first literary salon and had not lasted a morning before they gave it up. They’d very cheerfully informed him that they were casting aside the earl’s books and would rely on their own judgment.

Couple that with Lord Harveston being of an intellectual frame of mind, and Lord Harveston fixing up their garden, and now Lord Harveston also attending this country party...well, he could only assume the worst.

“I am very afraid, Mrs. Huffson, that Lady Cordelia is going to attempt to pass herself off as a bookish lady and she is going to try it with Miss Mayton’s help.”

Mrs. Huffson laughed at the notion. “Goodness, I suppose that would not be the worst thing in the world.”

No. Not the worst thing in the world. Until Lord Harveston discovered the ruse. Until he discovered that Lady Cordelia Bennington had only very recently become acquainted with books on shelves.

He had a sneaking suspicion that Lady Cordelia was partial to Lord Harveston. Very partial. He could not account for what had happened to her idea of finding herself a Corinthian, but there it was.

“If Lord Harveston breaks that young lady’s heart, or if he mocks her sudden entry into the world of attaining information, I will...well I do not know what I will do, but it will be very awful.”

“Goodness. That was sudden turn, Mr. Tattleton.”





## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

CORDELIA HAD SO little time to prepare for departing for the Duke of Castleton's house party—primarily the question was, what she would wear. After informing the duchess' groom that she would attend with Mayton and a maid, that groom had handed over a list of suggested wardrobes.

She would need to be dressed for picnics, riding out, a trip to the village shops, lawn bowls, dinners, and a ball at the end of it, to name some of the activities listed.

Amidst sorting through her clothes, which Lynette referred to as a frenzied parade of mind changes, Cordelia did of course think of Lord Harveston.

She thought of Lady Theodora too. She thought of Lord Harveston describing his sister as an intellectual. Then she imagined Lady Theodora and Lord Harveston having an intellectual conversation.

Lady Theodora's penchant for knowledge had not seemed as if it carried much weight within the family. But how much weight would it carry with Lord Harveston?

How long had he been in that house, in close quarters with the knowledgeable Lady Theodora?

Lady Theodora was very terrible to think about. She had everything in an intellectual bent, the highest of connections, she must have an outstanding dowry, and there was every chance that she was pretty. Cordelia supposed she was amusing too!

It seemed very unfair that such a paragon should be just now connected with Lord Harveston.

Cordelia attempted to soothe herself by remembering that Lord Harveston had brought his personal gardener to Portland Place to repair their garden. Another point that buoyed her was thinking of all the studying she had done since she'd left London.

Did Lady Theodora know anything about the current work being regarding volcanoes? She rather wondered about that.

For all her fretting and frenzied packing, she, Miss Mayton, and had been got on their way. The duchess had sent two carriages—herself and Miss Mayton and the other for the luggage and Lynette.

They could not, of course, leave Lynette to fend for herself with hatboxes to keep her company, so she was relocated to their own carriage. Cordelia hoped she did not shock the duchess with such an arrangement; it would have been too cruel to abandon Lynette alone.

As they drew ever closer to their destination, a new worry presented to her thoughts.

“Aunt,” she said, “this must be a very great house. It is the duke’s local and I have never been inside of such a one. Well, except for Conbatten’s only course, but he is different—he is family.”

“I do not suppose anybody could out-duke Conbatten, dear, so as a Mayton said, not appearing the least flustered. “Will the Duke of Castle of Lord Bathing at precisely ninety-eight degrees with chilled champagne

Conbatten does? Will he have an absolute madman of a French valet Hamill always threatening to throw himself into the Thames? Will he have a special room for the gifts he receives from relatives, that nobody permitted to see?”

“I rather doubt it,” Cordelia said. “All those things seem peculiar with Conbatten.”

“Just so,” Miss Mayton said. “If we can manage Conbatten, and with then we can manage any other duke with ease. Simply depend upon good instincts.”

Cordelia was much reassured by these ideas.

“I hope I am not to be lorded over by lady’s maids who think themselves better than me, just because they serve a duchess and her daughter,” she said.

Lynette was forever worried about being lorded over. She probably had a good reason to chafe under the idea. Miss Mayton’s maid, Fleur, threw a French word that Lynette did not understand, even though there was a drop of French blood in the maid and her real name was Flora.

Fortunately for Lynette, Fleur/Flora was just this moment attending to her aunt and so must miss the trip. It was supposed that Lynette would manage

ing doneuse of the circumstance in future.

Cordelia said, "Lynette, I am certain you can hold your ground  
Lynettegiving offense."

one for "I never give offense," Lynette said, as if the idea was preposter  
just won't be lorded over by some who pretend they can speak French

th only The coachman made a turn and it was clear enough that they were  
arriage.duke's land. They stopped at a gatehouse and the coachman had  
ent, butconversation with the man who came out to meet them. This m

obviously been waiting for them. He tipped his cap, mounted his hor  
ed itselfset off at a gallop to alert the house to their imminent arrival.

The avenue was lined with old oaks and went on for what seem  
e's seattwo miles at least. On either side, green fields and apple orchards  
ten's ofrolled off into the distance. Finally, a colossus of a house came into v

was not so much long as it was tall. Grey stone built into four stor  
" Missgiant surveying its land.

eton be Beyond the house, Cordelia caught sight of a very large and brillia  
gne aslake.

who is "Goodness me," Miss Mayton said quietly.

built a The doors to the house were thrown open as the carriage came to  
else isA butler, housekeeper, and bevy of footmen hurried forward, followe  
elegant lady and her very pretty younger companion.

uliar to That must be Lady Theodora! Cordelia had nursed a private hope t  
would come with some defect—a humped back or squinty eyes wo  
re have,have been unwelcome.

on your But there she was and looking rather perfect.

They were helped down with quiet efficiency, Lynette coming  
and standing to the side.

hey are "Lady Cordelia, Miss Mayton," the duchess said, coming forward  
Lynettepleased we are that you have accepted our invitation."

Cordelia curtsied low and said, "Your Grace."

bly had "Goodness, we are in the countryside, let us not have that  
v roundformality, Duchess will do very well. Here is my daughter, Lady Theo

is not a "You are both very welcome," Lady Theodora said prettily.

Blast it. She was so charming!

g a sick "Now, I will not have you standing on the drive a moment long  
ake fineduchess said. "My housekeeper shall show you to your rooms where y

rest and change from your traveling clothes.”

without “Oh Mama,” Lady Theodora said, “do allow me to show them the do know the ins and outs of those rooms. Mrs. Blowton can show th rous. “Iwhat is your name?”

is all.” Lynette bobbed a curtsy and said, “Lynette, my lady.”

on the “Mrs. Blowton can show Lynette to the servants’ quarters,’ a briefTheodora said. “Mr. Graves has put aside two of our best spare rooms an haduse.”

se, and The duchess nodded her assent. Lynette appeared positively deligh rather reassured that she would not be lorded over. She was also pi ed likefiling this moment away for a future communication with Fleur.

gently Cordelia really wished Lady Theodora would stop being so view. Itcharming. She did not suppose it was every duchess’ daughter who reys—inquire into a maid’s name.

“We meet in the drawing room at seven,” the duchess said. “By th ant blueduke, my son, and Lord Harveston will have returned from their pursuits.”

“We are to be a small party, then?” Miss Mayton asked.

a stop. “For tonight,” the duchess said. “The rest of my guests will desce d by anpigeons to roost on the morrow. I did so wish to give Lady Cordelia daughter some time to become acquainted with one another beforehand that she This was rather marvelous. Not so much because Cordelia wi uld notbecome acquainted with Lady Theodora, she was already almost sick how charming the lady was, but because it would be a small party wi Harveston. She supposed there was every chance she would be seated out lasthim at dinner.

They were led into the house and Lady Theodora showed them . “Howstairs.

“As you might guess,” she said, “this is a very old house, full of.. would call them quirks, though others might call them odditi sort ofdeformities.”

dora.” Cordelia could see for herself that the house had passed down t many hands. The very staircase showed it. The dark wood had bee smooth, a testament to all those generations who’d run their hands alor

er,” the “You have probably also noticed that we have an excessive am you canfloors,” Lady Theodora said. “At a party such as this, one might exp

unmarried ladies to be in one wing and the gentleman in another. In any case, in this house, the ladies are on this floor and the gentleman on the next up.”

The maid, “They had come to a landing, and indeed Cordelia could see the servants running up another two floors. The servants would be at the very top and the climb must be a long climb for them.

’ Lady “Goodness, your servants must be run off their feet,” Miss Mayton said for herspeaking precisely what she had been thinking.

“It is a defect of the house, to be sure,” Lady Theodora said. “To solve the problem of the situation, each servant has two rooms—one on the top floor and probably the basement level. They move between them as they like and soon they do get the better of us. If it is very hot, they are cool in the basement and if it is very cold, all the heat of the house goes right up to the top. I would accommodate.”

“I applaud your care of your servants, Lady Theodora,” Cordelia said, she hardly able to imagine Lynette’s delight with the circumstance.

mainly Cordelia did not wish to applaud the lady, but what could she do?

“My father says that in a house like this everybody must all pull together—if people are unhappy, they will no more pull for you than a bad-tempered pony will pull a cart.”

and my “A man of good sense,” Miss Mayton said.

“They had come to the first room and Lady Theodora opened the door and showed them in. “These rooms are connected to one another, by the way, and they are connected by there.”

th Lord Miss Mayton bustled over to confirm the idea. Upon opening the door to the next she found a long dressing room with ample closets that led into a chamber, a sitting room and then on to another bedchamber.

up the “I chose this especially for you, as it does have that lovely little room and the view is of the lake.”

.well, I Cordelia went to the windows. The view was spectacular. It was indeed highly interesting. She could see two men just pulling their boats up the banks as a third looked on. Though it was at a distance, she would recognize Lord Harveston by his height anywhere.

n worn “Now, you are not to worry that the place is haunted by ghosts or anything. I were to suddenly hear voices coming from somewhere and seeming to come from a great distance. It is a quirk of the chimneys that carries the sound from one place to another. Anything you hear will come from above and will be no more than a quirk of the chimneys.”

In this ghostly than a valet informing his gentleman of what coat he is to wear  
“Goodness, I’m glad you said, I imagine that would be rather alarming  
Cordelia said.

Confidentially, Lady Theodora said, “One time, I heard from two  
up. Two maids were comforting each other over our housekeeper’s  
on said, words to them. I told them of it and now they only gossip in the bath  
where they cannot be overheard.”

As Miss Mayton went through the connecting doors to view her  
one on bedchamber, Lady Theodora came beside Cordelia.

“That is my father, my brother, and Lord Harveston at the lake,” the  
said. “They have been practicing like madmen for the regatta.”

“There is to be a regatta?” Cordelia said. What she really thought  
how interesting that Lord Harveston knew how to sail. She would not  
ia said, thought it.

“May I tell you a secret?” Lady Theodora said.

Cordelia’s heart sank. The only reason a lady wished to tell another  
secret was a gentleman. Was she poised to hear that there was something  
between Lady Theodora and Lord Harveston?

Her heart felt as if it were being squeezed by a fist.

“It was not my mother’s idea to invite you early,” Lady Theodora said  
and was my brother’s idea. He convinced Mama that it would be better  
at door two of us to have a quiet evening together before the other guests  
arrived.

But, I think he really meant that you and Lord Harveston should have  
the door, time together.”

Lady Theodora looked at her intently to see what she would say to  
him.

“Did he?” she said weakly. She was delighted that Lord Hamill  
was sitting have had such an idea, but she did not dare admit it.

“I am certain of it,” Lady Theodora said. “Lord Harveston dropped  
his spoon when he discovered you would come.”

“Dropped his spoon?”

“At dinner. It positively clattered. Then, he went to great lengths  
to praise your praises. Your family is a delight and you have made your marriage  
a joyous one.”

“Did he say that?”

“Indeed he did,” Lady Theodora said.

Cordelia was most gratified, but there was still this niggling idea

...” how charming Lady Theodora was.

...” “I suppose, though,” she said slowly, “that Lord Harveston must  
praise your praises too. After all, Lord Hamill has told me you are a ver-  
y floorsintellectual.”

’s stern “Has he?” Lady Theodora said, with peals of laughter. “Goodness  
ment, did I ever land in such a family? The truth is—I adore poetry and now  
read the occasional treatise on some subject or another. My brother  
er own anybody who steps foot into a library is bookish.”

“So then...you are not...” Cordelia hardly knew how to ask  
he lady question. She hardly knew because there was not a way to answer  
question.

ght was Nevertheless, Lady Theodora understood her meaning.

ot have “Not a jot,” she said. “My particular interest lays elsewhere. I  
neighbor and will come on the morrow. Do not say a word of it, though  
only a baron and my mother and father are determined I have a season  
r lady a will not say anything until I have gone through it. Then, they shall b  
ne thing awful truth.”

“The view is heavenly!” Miss Mayton called from the other room  
look, Cordelia, mark me that is Lord Harveston.”

said. “It Both ladies giggled. Lady Theodora said, “I will leave you on yo  
for thenow, your maid and your luggage should be up shortly. By the by, do  
arrived. Theo.”

re some “Call me Cordelia, or Cordy for short,” Cordelia said.

it.



should

PERCIVAL HAD WISHED to be on the drive when Lady Cordelia arriv-  
ped his Hamill had convinced him otherwise. For one, Hamill said he needed  
spare moment to prepare for the regatta. He understood the mechani-  
well enough, but he was so uninterested in the whole thing that his mi-  
to sing forever wandering, and then he’d make a mistake.

k at his He’d already run his boat into the shore, making a horrible s-  
sound and damaging the centerboard, almost knocked himself out wh-  
changed direction and nearly forgot to duck, and he’d come close to  
over twice.

a about

For another, Hamill said if they got their timing just right, Lady Cordelia might be able to spot him down at the lake, engaging in a sport.

Percival had gone along with it, as he really did need all the practice he could get. In any case, Hamill was to be trusted—he'd arranged for Cordelia and Miss Mayton to come a day early.

He would spend this evening acquainting her with this new, Cori-thinks-like figure he was turning himself into. Then, in the days that follow would show her the various strides he'd made. On the night of the such would ask for her hand.

Now, he hurried down the long flights of stairs from the second to the ground floor. It was his understanding that the ladies traveling with their husbands would be housed on the first floor.

As he reached the first-floor landing, the swish of silk caught his eye. Lady Cordelia.

She was escorted by Miss Mayton and she looked marvelous. Cordelia was in an elegant deep blue silk dress with no adornment but a sapphire necklace of the same hue.

1. "And He bowed. "Lady Cordelia, Miss Mayton. Very good to see you again." Lady Cordelia curtsied. Miss Mayton did too, then the matron said, "Gracious, I quite forgot, I was meant to...see somebody call me something or other."

She then squeezed by him and set off down the stairs at a record pace. It could not have been more awkwardly done and Percival found himself very fond of her for it.

"Lady Cordelia," he said, putting out his arm, "may I escort you down?" The lady nodded and laid her hand on his arm.

"I find my family must thank you, Lord Harveston," Lady Cordelia said. "Tattleton has made me aware of the efforts you have taken to restock the garden at Portland Place."

"It was nothing at all," Percival said, very gratified that Tattleton had fit to tell his secret.

"I do not think you can claim it as nothing," Lady Cordelia said. "The neighboring butler has made regular reports and says your man comes weekly to do the weeding and pruning."

"I hope Lord Darling has settled into country life?" Percival asked, more gratified that the nosy butler next door had been sending reports.



Lady Cordelia laughed. She had such a charming laugh.

“Lord Darling has been taken in hand by one of our oldest dairymaids. Her name is Clara and she follows her round very dedicated to her. When Lady becomes too rambunctious, she knocks him with her head.”

“I am glad to hear it,” Percival said, taking the steps very slowly. “I might prolong the conversation. “And Lady Van Doren’s child, I am glad, he Tattleton ought not have told me, but I did press him on it. I understand the ball, he well.”

“Lily is very well indeed. In fact, she was on the mend by the time she arrived home. Now she is getting places as fast as her chubby little legs without carrying her.”

Percival nodded. “I did think, even though the danger was past, the escape was very well done for the entire family to decamp to Lady Van Doren. Really very good.”

“What else can a family be counted on for, if not to rush to the aid of a friend?” Lady Cordelia asked quizzically. She seemed not to have considered that other families did not perhaps inconvenience themselves so much.

They had reached the ground floor and found the butler, Mr. Tattleton, suddenly ready to lead them into the drawing room.

“You will know everyone but for the duke, I think,” Percival said.

Lady Cordelia nodded.

“You will like him, he is a genial fellow.”

“By the by, Lord Harveston, have you been following the scientific discoveries regarding volcanoes?”

That caught Percival entirely off guard. “No, I have not. Have you?”

“Indeed, it is all very interesting. Gracious, I do worry about the people who live next to them. They must be terrified for their children.”

Percival smiled to himself. His intellectual cronies would be talking facts at him just about now, none of which would include the scientific interest in the people within range of an active volcano beyond figure amounts.

“Our It was very like Lady Cordelia to worry about them.

mes by

d, even

Lady Cordelia laughed. She had such a charming laugh.

“Lord Darling has been taken in hand by one of our oldest dairy cows. Her name is Clara and he follows her round very dedicated to her. When he becomes too rambunctious, she knocks him with her head.”

“I am glad to hear it,” Percival said, taking the steps very slowly so they might prolong the conversation. “And Lady Van Doren’s child, I am sure Tattleton ought not have told me, but I did press him on it. I understand she is well.”

“Lily is very well indeed. In fact, she was on the mend by the time we arrived home. Now she is getting places as fast as her chubby little legs can carry her.”

Percival nodded. “I did think, even though the danger was past, that it was very well done for the entire family to decamp to Lady Van Doren. Really very good.”

“What else can a family be counted on for, if not to rush to the one in need?” Lady Cordelia asked quizzically. She seemed not to have considered that other families did not perhaps inconvenience themselves so much.

They had reached the ground floor and found the butler, Mr. Graves, ready to lead them into the drawing room.

“You will know everyone but for the duke, I think,” Percival said.

Lady Cordelia nodded.

“You will like him, he is a genial fellow.”

“By the by, Lord Harveston, have you been following the scientific discoveries regarding volcanoes?”

That caught Percival entirely off guard. “No, I have not. Have *you*?”

“Indeed, it is all very interesting. Gracious, I do worry about the people who live next to them. They must be terrified for their children.”

Percival smiled to himself. His intellectual cronies would be throwing facts at him just about now, none of which would include the slightest interest in the people within range of an active volcano beyond figures and amounts.

It was very like Lady Cordelia to worry about them.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

CORDELIA WAS WELL-PLEASED with the evening so far. Really, it could have gone better. Lord Harveston had met her on the stairs, almost as if he had been waiting for her. She'd taken that opportunity to casually mention her interest in the current work being done about volcanoes.

All her hard work was showing—he'd seemed mightily impressed.

And, just as Lord Harveston had said, their host was a genial fellow who had at once pressed her to address him as duke. He was not at all prepossessing as Conbatten could be when he had a mind.

Now, at dinner, she was not, as she had hoped, sat next to Lord Harveston. However, they were a small party and he was just across from her.

He did keep looking at her when he thought she did not see. It was a little marked, she thought.

"Lady Cordelia," the duke said, "do you enjoy a regatta?"

"I have never had the pleasure of witnessing one, Duke," Cordelia said. "Though it sounds rather thrilling."

"There now," the duke said jovially, "you've hit the thing on the nose. It is sure to be a nailbiter. The men will be pulling in the sheets and close to the wind to round the buoys and make a mad dash to the finish line."

"Lady Cordelia," Lord Hamill said, "you are to know that Harveston picked the thing up in record time. You'd think he'd served in the navy."

"That is more than a step too far," Lord Harveston said.

Cordelia was rather surprised that he'd just learned the skill.

"Nonsense, Harveston," Hamill said. "It's been just like the boxing match Jackson said he'd never witnessed a fellow come so natural to the sport."

Now Lord Harveston was boxing? Lord Harveston?

Cordelia was entirely perplexed. About the last thing she would have expected Lord Harveston doing was boxing.

Lord Harveston looked embarrassed to be noted so. Goodness, he was so natural at boxing, and modest about it too.

“Ah well,” Lord Hamill said, “Harveston does not like to be singing about his various skills. I suppose he’s told nobody that we race phaetons on the way here and I was beaten handily.”

Now Lord Harveston was racing a phaeton? She would not have imagined the lord even owned a phaeton.

“I certainly did not tell anybody such a story,” Lord Harveston said, staring at Hamill.

“Modest as the day is long,” Hamill said, looking very satisfied if he’d done himself.

It occurred to Cordelia that Lord Hamill had noted all of this for her benefit. Yes, of course that must be it—Lady Theodora had said that by it. Hamill who had suggested she come early. He was attempting to prove himself a matchmaker.

It was a very nice thing for him to do. Though, she was still trying to reconcile the Lord Harveston she thought she understood to the Harveston that had just been described. Who was this person who was racing and sailing?

“If we might change the subject,” Lord Harveston said, “Lady Cordelia has informed me that she is looking into the current work being done regarding predicting volcanic eruptions.”

“Thank heavens we do not have them here,” the duchess said. “I do not want to be frightened out of my wits.”

“That is just what I thought,” Cordelia said. “It must be a constant sailing over one’s family.”

“But what is being done to stop them?” the duke asked.

“It is not so much what is being done to stop them,” Cordelia said. “It is to find out why they erupt so they might predict when next it might occur.”

Though Cordelia was certain on that particular point of the paper she had read, she realized that she was not at all certain about the rest of it. What, particularly, was being studied? Was it the soil round the volcano?

That sounded vaguely familiar, though there were no associations coming along with the idea.

She realized that though she’d read the Royal Society paper, once she had understood the gist of the problem, her mind had flown off to imagine what a terrible people faced with such a problem.

Cordelia had spent a deal of time thinking of one family in particu-

pled outmother, father, son, and daughter living very nearby a smoking volcano somewhere in the South Seas. But that family was not actually in the present.

“I always did worry about Vesuvius during my time in Italy, but I don’t have to,” Mayton said.

“Ah,” the duke said, “forever wondering when you were going to die?”

“Oh dear no,” Miss Mayton said. “It was the gentlemen I was acquainted with I worried about. Might one throw themselves into unrequited love? Several of my suitors made threats about it.”

“Chuckling themselves into a volcano over disappointed hopes?” the duke asked. Cordelia thought the duke, while exceedingly genial, was not particularly romantic in temperament.

Miss Mayton nodded. “Though, it was only Gregorio who was to die by tragic fate and he did it by dealing himself a deadly blow. In the end, it had nothing to do with a volcano—ironic, is it not?”

Cordelia could not tell if the duke saw the irony in worrying about a volcanic end and then getting an entirely different one.

The duke looked at his duchess and said, “We ought to introduce Mayton to Freddy. Lord Germaine, Miss Mayton, I think you might enjoy his company.”

“If you are not opposed to a missing hand,” the duchess said.

“A tiger took it,” the duke said, shaking his head. “One ought not to worry a tiger’s cage while the tiger is still in it.”

“Was it a case of unrequited love?” Miss Mayton asked, seemingly interested to hear more about Freddy.

“It was a case of *something*,” the duke said.

The dinner went on very well, with much spoken of regarding the subject, but Cordelia found herself relieved that the subject had been changed particularly to an individual and his mishap with a tiger.

She was not so relieved to find that she really recalled very little about the facts of volcanoes, so rapt had she been in considering the imaginary world that lived next to one.

It did shake her confidence in her studies. Especially when she was reading a treatise or other paper, then her mind would go flying off to the people involved in the situation—usually a frog in a pond and their life cycle, though she’d

volcanovaguely remembered the lifecycle and mostly remembered the little gi  
aper. pictured who'd sat by the pond and watched it all happen. The girl'  
" Misswas Penny and she'd named all the tadpoles. Then Penny had a ch  
conversation with her father about how the tadpoles were getting on.  
have to Cordelia had a sinking feeling that her mind was not equipped to l  
with Lord Harveston's mind.

of my *His* mind would not go gallivanting off to invent young Penny w  
it overthe tadpoles.

After dinner, Cordelia had thought they would retire to the drawing  
ie dukeShe supposed she would be asked to play. Perhaps there would be card  
ot of a She'd been very surprised to hear of lawn bowling by candlelight.

Though Lady Theodora had counseled against it, they all very soon  
suffer athemselves out of doors and the men engaged in a tournament.

, it was Cordelia could not say who had won. She could not see who had w  
Though, as they retired for the night, Lord Hamill made a great s  
about acclaiming that Lord Harveston had trounced them.

It seemed he was to be good at everything now.  
ie Miss Cordelia was not certain she could like that. Particularly when sh  
njoy hisdiscovered that she'd been fooling herself about the success of her stuc

He was to be good at everything and she was to be good at...im  
people who did not exist.

go into What a useless talent.

ig very



THE DUKE AND duchess' guests had arrived all morning. There were  
Freddy.few of them Percival knew, and a handful that were local to the neigh  
to thatthat he did not.

He'd wished to find a moment with Lady Cordelia. He'd tho  
out theinquire more into the people living nearby volcanoes that she worried a  
family It had occurred to him that her way of thinking was a thing he

likely never master. He'd spent far too long ignoring the human cond  
realizedfocus his attention on facts and lists.

her and Had he been reading the paper on volcanoes, he might not have  
on. thought to who lived nearby them.

he only

rl she'd It was a defect, he knew. A defect he probably would never be s name entirely remedy.

arming But was that not the beauty of Lady Cordelia's mind? That she di of such things very naturally?

keep up He did not have such a moment to speak to her, though. The du rounded up all the gentlemen to choose their boats, while the ladies v atching in carriages to shop in the local village.

The morning had been spent examining the boats, ensuring all equ g room was on board and in good order, listening to Lord Poppin's har ls. account of sailing in high seas off the coast, and endless conversation the nonexistent wind. Mr. Bedminster, in particular, seemed to think n foundlicked one's finger and held it up in the air, the wind would take the h pick up.

ron. Despite Bedminster's hints, the wind did not pick up until the aft how of after they'd been sent sandwiches and ale from the house that they at water's edge. Then, it was time to put all the talk to the test.

The palaver that had followed did not give Percival very much con e'd just concerning the upcoming regatta.

lies. Gentlemen, as they were always so prone to do, had confidently c agining their skill at the tiller, even when they had very little acquaintance wit any at all.

After what he'd witnessed, very few of them had ever sailed the never mind any high seas they'd mentioned.

Near misses, entanglements on buoy lines, run agrounds, sails flap the wind, and Lord Bertram capping the whole thing off by tipping ov quite at the scenes of the day.

orhood Hamill, the duke, and a baron who lived on a neighboring estate h hands full racing from one disaster to the next.

ught to The regatta was on the morrow and Percival was just hoping about. through it with nobody drowned.

ould Finally, the duke had called it a day and they were released to cha ition to dinner.

Percival had held on to very little hope that he'd be seated next t given a Cordelia, not with so many people arrived to the house, but Hamill hac him aside and said he'd arranged it with his duchess.

Hamill was really turning out to be a stand-up friend.

able to Percival paced the drawing room, saying hello to this person or that always with his eye on the doors.

and think Finally, Lady Cordelia entered.

She was entirely smashing. She wore a silk dress the color of claret like hadcream colored ostrich feather in her lovely hair was a picture of restraint. There were offlike some other ladies' feathers that reached for the sky and dangerously close to the candles in the chandeliers.

equipment He made an effort to not think too deeply about her companion. Growing Mayton. That lady was forever dressed in her widow's weeds, though she was about to go to the person who offered their condolences and heard her cry as if one husband who had never been.

quiet and He hurried to her side. "Lady Cordelia," he said with a bow.

"Lord Harveston, how did you get on with sailing today?" she asked. "We did see just the end of it from our windows," Miss Mayton said. "It was hard to make out where everybody was hoping to go. I do hope you did."

Bertram did not catch a chill. He seemed to be treading water for quite a while. "Bertram did not catch a chill. He seemed to be treading water for quite a while."

"Yes, there were some mishaps," he said, not wishing to outline the full scope of what had transpired. "I understand the ladies went shopping in the village?"

Both ladies nodded, and he said, "One hopes a sufficient amount of ribbons and bits and bobs were located?"

"Indeed," Lady Cordelia said, "we felt it a duty to put some money in the villagers' pockets, as we do at home."

Her tone was rather sharp, though he could not account for it. He asked about ribbons, after all.

"It was well we did," Miss Mayton said. "Were you aware that Macklethorpe has just lost her husband and now runs her shop alone?"

Percival, of course, had no way of knowing who the lady was or what situation might be.

"I am afraid I am not."

"Oh yes, Cordelia and I had a long talk with her," Miss Mayton said. "Very sad thing, really. She was fond of Mr. Macklethorpe."

How like Lady Cordelia to have a talk with a shopkeeper and discuss a woman's personal circumstances.

"Lady Cordelia," the duchess said, "Do meet Lord Poppin."



hat, but Lady Cordelia turned round to meet the said lord, who Percival was not aptly named. He'd have been better to be named Lord Popinjay, for in the morning he'd claimed to have mastered ten-foot seas off Brighton; but in the afternoon he was floundering on a lake.

nt—not Percival was left with Miss Mayton.

waved “Now mind,” Miss Mayton went on, “Mrs. Macklethorpe was a bit standoffish in the beginning, but Cordelia could see well enough that that was in some sort of straits. After the other ladies had left the shop, she said, ‘How pitiful,’ ‘I do believe that lady is near tears.’”

of the “Was she?” Percival asked.

“Oh yes, we got to the bottom of it quick enough. She was frightened over whether or not she was capable of running the shop on her own. I assured her she was and had a comfortable tea together until one of the duchess' footmen came to fetch us away. Cordelia bought the very best dress she wears tonight. It was overpriced, we both knew it, but in some circumstances...”

Percival found the tale strangely touching. He did not suppose any of the full duchess' other guests had noticed Mrs. Macklethorpe's sad demeanor. No, of course they would not have. *He* would not have. Only Cordelia would have comprehended the situation.

ount of “Oh goodness,” Miss Mayton said, “there is Theodora. She wishes to tell her more about Mount Vesuvius.”

ey into Miss Mayton hurried in Lady Theodora's direction. To Percival's surprise, Lady Theodora appeared delighted to note it.

'd only The world, at this moment, seemed topsy-turvy. What he'd thought was, it wasn't. At least, not entirely.

at Mrs. His rationality, his pursuit of knowledge, had only taken him so far. It had been like a dead-end road that went nowhere. All along, hiding behind that her facts and figures, there was this whole other world of people and feelings.

Again, Lady Hightower's words came back to haunt him—there were more types of intelligence than he'd been aware of.

He'd been a shell of a man and had not known it.

ver the All that would change, though. He would act the Corinthian and he would learn from Lady Cordelia.

Assuming she would accept him.

thought And assuming he could drag her away from Lord Popinjay, who v  
y. This now droning on about his harrowing ordeal at sea.

by the The duke's dinner gong sounded. Conversations quieted and ev  
began to organize themselves by rank to be ready to file into dinner.

The duchess stood at the doors and said, "We are a country pa  
s a bit need not be formal, so I will pair everybody off in some amusing fashi  
he lady And so the duchess did pair her guests off.

said to Lord Popinjay appeared disappointed to understand he would  
escorting Lady Cordelia in, but Hamill had been as good as his word.

Percival held his arm out to Lady Cordelia.

ghtened

vn. We

of the

feather CORDELIA HAD BEEN rather stung by Lord Harveston asking her if she'd  
in the sufficient bits and bobs from the village. It had struck her to mean t  
was a silly creature who would be entirely entertained by ribbo  
y of the feathers.

Worse, she generally *was* entertained by shopping for ribbo  
y Lady feathers.

The way he'd said it had felt a bit...condescending. As if her mir  
d me to not capable of more than choosing between a blue or green ribbon.

She was cognizant of the fact that she was particularly sensitive  
rcival's current moment, as she had so recently come to the realization that sh  
got nearly as far in her studies as she thought she had.

ought it Now, he'd taken her into dinner, which had been wholly unexpect  
guessed it must have been Lord Hamill's arrangement somehow.

It had "Miss Mayton relayed the rest of the story regarding Mrs. Macklet  
mind his Lord Harveston said.

id their "Poor lady," Cordelia said.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "And I think not many ladies would have  
re were it, as they would not have asked."

Cordelia nodded. "I did of course wonder if it were my place to inc

"No, no, that is not it," Lord Harveston said. He looked rather int  
e would his tone was insistent. "That is not it at all. Not many ladies would ha  
noticed something was amiss."



was just Cordelia wrinkled her brow just a little. "Anybody must have seen  
"No, I do not believe so. Furthermore, I do not think just anybody  
everyone have even looked. I am certain I would not have, and ashamed to do  
too."

erty and At the head of the table, the duchess turned, signaling all to turn  
on." other seatmate.

Lord Harveston looked almost stricken and reluctantly turned. C  
not returned as well to speak to Lord Poppin.

She did not really hear much of what the lord said. Something about  
the shore receded in the distance and a whale circled the ship and it  
all was lost.

She was far too busy attempting to unravel what Lord Harveston had  
said.

bought Cordelia could not entirely understand his intense interest in  
what she had said about Macklethorpe and her unfortunate loss, nor why he thought it was so  
singular that she and Miss Mayton had a conversation with the lady.

He did think it was something fine, though. That was clear enough.  
It cheered her to think so. And after all, just because her studies had  
been what she would wish up to this point, that could change. Could it  
and were Of course it could. Now that she knew her habit of allowing her  
to wander and invent people who did not exist, she could fix that part  
at the failing.

She'd not She could take in everything that had been done about the volcano  
and speak about it knowledgeably.

ed. She There really was not anything to prevent it but her own determination.

Further, should she not rise to the challenge? Lord Harveston was  
Macklethorpe," intellectual, and now apparently he was a sailor and a boxer and a  
racer.

If something were to come of whatever was between them, she should  
known measure up.

"And so," Lord Poppin said, "we barely made it out with our lives."  
"Goodness," Cordelia said, feeling that comment was almost  
entirely sufficient when a gentleman relayed some sort of derring-do.

ve even "What shall us men face on the morrow?" Lord Poppin mused.  
waves will not be as high as some I have faced, but the danger will be  
many boats near one another. Collisions, Lady Cordelia. Danger

it.” collisions.”

“Gracious,” Cordelia said, using the second preferred phrase to admit to a arsenal of supposed admiration. She hoped she would not be pressed on her third word, which was “heavens” because after that she had no more to say. Lord Poppin would be left adrift without further buoying up.

Privately, she was beginning to find Lord Poppin rather ridiculous. Cordelia was not at all certain the stories he told were true.

From the end of the table, the duke used a spoon to ding on his glass but how rose.

“My dear guests,” he said, “on the morrow, the gentlemen will go out on a regatta, wind willing. They will round two buoys set in a classic triangle just from the start line, the last leg being the downwind.”

“Danger will abound,” Lord Poppin whispered.

Mrs. Cordelia suppressed a giggle. “Heavens,” she said softly.

“The neighborhood has been invited to view the spectacle and there will be plentiful food and drink for those good people,” the duke said. “Our esteemed lady guests will have a special viewing area with chairs for their convenience, set apart from the milling crowd.”

“Ah, very good,” Lord Poppin said quietly. “There may be ruffian mischief in the crowd and I cannot be in two places at once.”

Ruffians from the village? What an idea.

“This is to be the start of a grand tradition,” the duke said. “I have already arranged for a plaque to be hung in the billiards room that will one day be covered with dozens of brass plates naming the winner of that season’s race. Will you be named on the first brass plate?”

“Undoubtedly,” Lord Poppin said to her right.

“Unlikely,” Lord Harveston said on her left.

“I raise my glass to the competitors,” the duke said, “and let the best sailor win.”

There were loud ‘hear hears’ from the gentlemen at table.

Cordelia was grateful to turn to Lord Harveston and leave Lord Poppin to always overwhelm his dinner companion with tales of high seas adventure.

“Why do you say it is unlikely you will prevail, Lord Harveston?” she asked.

“Because it is,” he said with a laugh. “Despite Hamill’s claim that I might be taken for a navy man, I would not be taken for a navy man.”

“I do not suppose any of the gentlemen competing would be taken in her,” Cordelia said. “At least, that is my impression.” Lord Harveston glanced over her shoulder at Lord Poppin’s face and said, “Some less than others, I imagine.”

Cordelia stifled a laugh, as Lord Harveston had seemed to right her to Lord Poppin’s measure.

“Now, Lady Cordelia, tell me more of Mrs. Macklethorpe,” the duchess said. “I understand from Miss Mayton that she is worried about running the shop on her own.”

And so they went on very genially discussing Mrs. Macklethorpe’s little business, Lord Harveston having the idea that it was keeping the books that troubled the lady. It was the sort of thing Mr. Macklethorpe had liked to do on his own.

If they had missed a cue to turn to their opposite seat mates and left the two persons adrift for a time, that could not be helped. Not when the duchess had such a thorny situation to unravel.

In any case, when she was forced to turn to Lord Poppin, all he could talk about were the various dangers surrounding them. Cordelia was used to being in a duke’s house; she thought it likely she had never been more safe in her life.

If Mr. Poppin had contributed to her happiness at all, it was that she already had such a delight to turn to Lord Harveston.

The dinner ended far too soon, and the duchess had risen to leave the ladies out while the men were left to their port. Cordelia was certain Lord Poppin was poised to recount his harrowing days at sea.

All was lost, indeed.

he best

ppin to

n?” she

I might

“I do not suppose any of the gentlemen competing would be taken so,” Cordelia said. “At least, that is my impression.”

Lord Harveston glanced over her shoulder at Lord Poppin’s profile. “Some less than others, I imagine.”

Cordelia stifled a laugh, as Lord Harveston had seemed to rightly take Lord Poppin’s measure.

“Now, Lady Cordelia, tell me more of Mrs. Macklethorpe,” Lord Harveston said. “I understand from Miss Mayton that she is worried about running the shop on her own.”

And so they went on very genially discussing Mrs. Macklethorpe’s case, Lord Harveston having the idea that it was keeping the books that likely troubled the lady. It was the sort of thing Mr. Macklethorpe had likely done on his own.

If they had missed a cue to turn to their opposite seat mates and left those two persons adrift for a time, that could not be helped. Not when Mrs. Macklethorpe had such a thorny situation to unravel.

In any case, when she was forced to turn to Lord Poppin, all he had to talk about were the various dangers surrounding them. Cordelia was staying in a duke’s house; she thought it likely she had never been more safe in her life.

If Mr. Poppin had contributed to her happiness at all, it was that it felt such a delight to turn to Lord Harveston.

The dinner ended far too soon, and the duchess had risen to lead the ladies out while the men were left to their port. Cordelia was certain Lord Poppin was poised to recount his harrowing days at sea.

All was lost, indeed.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IN THE DRAWING room, Cordelia and her aunt found a quiet corner. They relayed all that had transpired at dinner and how interested Lord Ha had been regarding Mrs. Macklethorpe.

“I wonder if he is not interested because *you* are interested,” Miss Mayton mused, “it would be very promising if that were the case.”

“I do think he likes me, I really do,” Cordelia said. “But Aunt, I recently realized that my intellectual studies were not perhaps as intense as they should have been.”

“Oh dear, I know so little about that sort of thing I hardly know how to counsel you on it. I have far too many feelings to make time for facts.”

Cordelia nodded vigorously. “It is all right, I know what I must do. I know that I know my own proclivity for mind wandering, I must just use discipline to stop it.”

“I see, yes, that does sound very good. You girls are always so clever.”

“I only wish I had more time to do it! I wish I had realized this when I began my studies.”

Miss Mayton tapped her chin. “It seems to me, now that you have chosen your course, you might rightly claim your destination. After all, you know where you are going, I see no reason you might not act as if you are there.”

Cordelia shrugged. “I believe that is what I have been doing. I mentioned the Royal Society paper on volcanoes. Thank goodness I was asked a slew of questions, as I remember little about the actual facts of it.”

“Yes, but there is one thing you have not considered,” Miss Mayton said. “You are an actress, Cordelia. In your heart and soul, you are a born actress. Take on the part, really throw yourself into it. *Be* the intellectual, as if you were treading the hallowed boards.”

Cordelia looked inquiringly at her aunt.

“As a beginning, perhaps you might stage a bit of a tableau for me.”

Harveston to view.”

“A tableau?” Cordelia asked.

“Oh yes,” Miss Mayton said, seeming as if she were bursting with an idea. “What if I were to go and get my reading glasses? You might put them on your nose. And then, there are several heavy tomes on that bookshelf over there, one of which must be suitably intellectual. You might casually view Lord Harveston’s view, glasses on nose and book in hand.”

“I see, Aunt. A tableau!”



Mayton

AS PERCIVAL LISTENED to Lord Poppin drone on about his alleged adventures in the sea, which now included a whale though no whale had been present in the version told earlier in the day, he could not be opposed to the fellow.

Was there any other gentleman at table who could have been preferred as Lady Cordelia’s other dinner companion?

No, Poppin had been perfect in his ludicrousness and could only hope to win Percival’s estimation in Lady Cordelia’s eyes.

What a conversation he and Lady Cordelia had! He thought he’d be able to understand how Lady Cordelia’s mind worked. At least, the overall framework of it.

He had thought it quite usual to carefully curate those let into his sphere using cautious consideration over time as a yardstick. His own sphere had been defended by a veritable moat, with murder holes manned by archers—always at the ready to pull up the drawbridge.

Lady Cordelia’s worldly sphere was very different. Her castle gates were thrown open and absolutely anybody might walk through them—we’d be friends until proven otherwise.

This, he supposed, was the real thing one gained from a family like the Benningtons. It was a blithe confidence in the good of the world.

When one was not so caught up with defending the castle, one could notice a person such as Mrs. Macklethorpe.

He’d already determined he would do something for the lady. He would send Jameston into the village and offer to pay the local schoolmaster to provide a service. If Mrs. Macklethorpe could be taught to manage her Lord



own books, she would proceed on firm footing.

“And so,” Lord Poppin said, downing his port, “we barely escaped with our lives.”

“Yes, a whale, they can be dastardly,” the duke said, rising. “Bookshelf gentlemen, we should not keep the ladies waiting longer. In any case, it will be an early night for our sailors—a regatta awaits.”

PERCIVAL HAD NOT needed to be told twice that port was at an end and the ladies were to be joined. He smiled as he thought that even the duke, as he was, had heard enough of Lord Poppin’s alarming sea voyage.

He entered the drawing room, searching it for Lady Cordelia. She was not at the pianoforte, nor did she sit with the cluster of ladies round a teapoy in the corner. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her.

She had just come from a bookshelf set to the side of the drawing room doors. The lady carried what looked to be an exceedingly heavy book, and had glasses perched on her nose.

He had not known she wore glasses, but then so many people were used to close reading he supposed he should not be surprised.

She looked rather charming in them. He could picture her wearing them by his fireside on a cold afternoon, curled up with a book or magazine.

As she made her way forward, Lord Poppin somehow came round her and said, “Ah! Lady Cordelia wishes to read.”

He grabbed at an ottoman and pulled it forward. “Allow me to assist you to a seat.”

Lady Cordelia looked vaguely in Lord Poppin’s direction, almost as if she were attempting to locate where his voice was coming from. Seeing her come home in on it, she smiled and said, “That is quite all right, Lord Poppin.”

Then she walked right into the ottoman.

Or over it, as the case really was.

She stumbled, then tumbled onto the ottoman, before rolling to the floor and coming to a stop.

Percival pushed Lord Poppin out of the way. “Lady Cordelia! Are you hurt?” he said, propping her up.

Naturally, when one tripped over an ottoman in a duke’s drawing room during a country party, every person in that room must gasp and

forward.

ed with “Stay back and give the lady air,” Percival said in a sharp voice.

Lady Cordelia looked somewhat dazed and her glasses rested as  
“Wellher nose.

it ought “Goodness, where did that piece of furniture come from?” she aske  
Nobody answered, least of all Lord Poppin, who was just now slip  
the back of the crowd.

and the “Allow me to help you to your feet, Lady Cordelia.”

, genial “Yes, do, thank you,” she said.

Percival lifted her up, freeing her from her encounter with the  
was not ottoman, and set her on her feet.

ot. As soon as her two feet landed on the floor, she cried out and pic  
one of them.

g room “I am afraid you have hurt your ankle,” he said.

ok and The duchess had pushed through with the duke close behind. “Gi  
you poor dear. I will send for the doctor this instant.”

did for “Oh no, I am sure it must be all right,” Lady Cordelia said.

“Can you put any weight on it?” the duke asked.

ig them Lady Cordelia gingerly put her foot down, but it was not more  
second before she pulled it up again. “I am afraid not.”

nd him “That’s settled,” the duke said. “Graves, send for Doctor Raythor  
him from his bed if necessary. Harveston, carry the lady to her room

sist you Mayton? Where are you, good lady?”

Miss Mayton pushed her way forward.

is if she “Miss Mayton, you will follow Harveston and see that Lady Cor  
ning to comfortably settled as we await the doctor. Raise the ankle with pillow  
l.” will send up a strong drink to assist with the pain.”

“I am not in that terrible a pain,” Lady Cordelia said.

“Nonsense, my lady,” the duke said, “you are as white as a sheet.”

e carpet It was true. Lady Cordelia was looking very pale. That idiot Lord l  
What was he about, dragging furniture in front of people?

Are you “Harveston?” the duke said.

Percival swept Lady Cordelia up in his arms while the duke clea  
g room path forward shouting, “Make way, we are coming through.”

l hurry As he made his way to the staircase with Miss Mayton fluttering  
him like a panicked bird, Lady Cordelia said, “Goodness, I do not

make so much trouble.”

“Nonsense, it was Popinjay’s fault. He might talk a good story and kill a few nonmurderous whale, but it is *he* who is the real menace.”

Lady Cordelia laughed at the idea, which he thought was a very good sign.

As he carried her up the stairs it began to dawn on him how perfect was for her to be in his arms.

He’d planned on her being so sometime very soon, but could not have imagined the current circumstance.

She gazed up at him as he traversed the stairs and Percival had a great wish to bend down and kiss her.

He would do no such thing of course, not until the question had been asked and answered. It would not do to put the lady in a compromising position and he did not yet know if the lady even wished to be compromised.

“Just here, Lord Harveston,” Miss Mayton said, running ahead of him and throwing open the door.

Percival carried her through it.

Good lord, now he was in her bedchamber. And carrying her to the

He was not certain when last he had to exert as much self-control as he did at that moment. He’d very much like to throw Miss Mayton out the window.

Lady Cordelia’s maid came hurrying in. “What has happened?” she asked, staring at him.

“Your lady has injured her ankle,” he said by way of explanation.

“I heard that part from the butler,” the maid said. “What I didn’t hear was that she was in a lord’s arms!”

The girl was rather saucy.

“You ought to put her down, the earl shan’t like it!” the maid said.

“Do be quiet, Lynette,” Lady Cordelia said. “I have injured my ankle and could not put weight on it.”

“Pull the bedcovers back,” Percival said, hoping his face had not turned red from saying it.

“What?” the maid cried.

Really, this Lynette was a bit of a hysterical sort of person.

“I cannot lay her down until you move the covers,” he pointed out.

“Go on, Lynette,” Miss Mayton said. “Do stop being such a boob and like to it.”

Lynette, seeming to realize the fastest way to get her mistress out of harm's way was to do as she was asked, hurried round him and pulled down the blankets.

Very good Percival laid her down gently, her head on the pillow. "Fetch me some other pillows," he said, pointing to the other side of the bed.

Personal it For once, Lynette followed a direction without shrieking about it.

"Now," he said, "I will lift Lady Cordelia's ankle, keeping it straight and steady, as you slide the pillows underneath. Do you understand? We don't yet know if it is broken—all care must be taken."

How very Lynette gulped and nodded. "Aye," she said.

Percival carefully and gingerly lifted Lady Cordelia's ankle, supporting it from underneath to keep it still.

Promising She winced just a little as he laid it down.

Dismissed. "Thank you, Lord Harveston," she said, looking up at him.

Hum and "Yes, thank you much, my lord," Lynette said, pulling him by the sleeve. "We will take things from here."

The maid was literally pushing him toward the door.

Out of bed. At least the outrageous behavior of her maid had brought a smile to Cordelia's face.

Out of the door. Lynette gave him one final push into the corridor. "Thanks much," she cried, and slammed the door in his face.

Percival sighed. That was the last of the lady he would see tonight. All he could do now was wait for the doctor to do his assessment and hear his report.

Please God let it only be a sprain. Else, Lord Popinjay might discover that Lord Harveston was the new murderous whale in his life.

Little and



Disappointed AFTER LYNETTE HAD thrown Lord Harveston from the room, Cordelia smiled ruefully at her aunt and said, "Not the tableau we were hoping for."

"That Lord Poppin is a confounding sort of creature," Miss Maytor said.

Indeed, he was very confounding. All would have gone smoothly had not Percival pushed that ottoman into her path. She had a book in her hand about eyeglasses on and was feeling very scholarly.

Though, her aunt's glasses were rather stronger than she'd in  
own the they'd be. They'd turned the whole room into something that looked  
were being viewed inside an aquarium. Everything had been blurry  
e those wavy.

Even so, she'd mapped out her marks, just as if she were on the sta  
had been poised to pass close by Lord Harveston so he might vi  
ght and tableau.

"I don't see why the housekeeper couldn't have carried you up,"  
said. "Or I could've done it."

"Do not be ridiculous, Lynette," Cordelia said. "There v  
orting it impropriety in Lord Harveston carrying me up and neither you no  
Blowton would have made it up two steps before dropping me."

Lynette shrugged, as she knew that was perfectly true.

And how lucky it was true. How interesting it had been to be car  
sleeve. Lord Harveston.

He had very strong arms, as it happened. She was not certain she  
have thought it, but he'd picked her up as if it were nothing at all.

It really had been rather glorious.

After a half hour of considering Lord Harveston's arms, there was  
h!" she rap on the door. Mrs. Blowton bustled in with an older gentleman fo  
her.

"We were in luck," Mrs. Blowton said. "Mr. Graves recalled that  
ear the Raythorn was to be at a card party at the Hendersons' not a half mil  
the road. Lady Cordelia, this is Doctor Raythorn."

The doctor came forward. "Let us see what has torn me away  
winning hand. It's the ankle, is it?"

Cordelia nodded and said, "I am very sorry to hear of that,  
Raythorn. I suppose you are a very good card player?"

This little bit of soothing seemed to go a long way in Doctor Ray  
lia had books. As he examined her ankle, feeling along the bones and then m  
for." this way and that, he said, "Well, there will be other card games, I sup  
1 said. "Is it broken?" Lynette whispered. "Will you have to set it while r  
ly if he screams?"

Doctor Raythorn knit his brows at Lynette. "I cannot tell if y  
horrified or interested in the idea. No matter, it is not a break. It is  
sprain, though."

imagined He turned back to Cordelia. "I am afraid it is bedrest for the next few days, at the very least. Keep it elevated as you have done."

ed and While Cordelia was grateful that there were no broken bones, she was less grateful over the idea of staying in bed. How was Lord Harveston going to declare anything he might be thinking of, when she was allowed to move? "Mrs. Blowton, I will leave you a poultice for the injured area. Bathe it in cold water, ice if you have it. Then the poultice."

Lynette The housekeeper nodded.

"For all that, Lady Cordelia, the only real cure is rest. Do not put yourself into thinking you can get on your feet for at least three days."

or Mrs. Three days!

"Oh dear," she said, "I shall miss the duke's regatta."

The doctor snorted. "If my sources told no tales, what you will miss is the great crashing of boats. I'm quite looking forward to it."

"But Doctor," Miss Mayton said, "certainly there would be no harm in Lady Cordelia watching the regatta from the window?"

The doctor considered the idea. "It could be done, but carefully. She would need to be helped there, hopping on the good foot, and then using that cane as a sharpover there to prop it up. Well, for a limited time, I suppose it could not be done."

"I will arrange it all," Miss Mayton said. "I will stay up here and attend to her company."

Doctor Cordelia sighed. Watching from the window would not be ideal, but at least she would be able to see Lord Harveston.

Perhaps he might see her too. She could wave to him.

from a In the meantime, she would direct her thoughts away from her

Though really, they did not need to be directed. Even as the doctor examined her, Cordelia could think of little beyond having found herself in Lord Harveston's arms.

With any luck, she would find herself there again sometime soon.

thorn's  
oving it  
pose."

ny lady

you are  
s a bad

He turned back to Cordelia. "I am afraid it is bedrest for the next few days, at the very least. Keep it elevated as you have done."

While Cordelia was grateful that there were no broken bones, she was less grateful over the idea of staying abed. How was Lord Harveston to say anything, to declare anything he might be thinking of, when she was abed?

"Mrs. Blowton, I will leave you a poultice for the injured area. First, bathe it in cold water, ice if you have it. Then the poultice."

The housekeeper nodded.

"For all that, Lady Cordelia, the only real cure is rest. Do not fool yourself into thinking you can get on your feet for at least three days."

Three days!

"Oh dear," she said, "I shall miss the duke's regatta."

The doctor snorted. "If my sources told no tales, what you will miss is the great crashing of boats. I'm quite looking forward to it."

"But Doctor," Miss Mayton said, "certainly there would be no harm if Lady Cordelia were to watch the regatta from the window?"

The doctor considered the idea. "It could be done, but carefully. If she were helped there, hopping on the good foot, and then using that ottoman over there to prop it up. Well, for a limited time, I suppose it could not hurt."

"I will arrange it all," Miss Mayton said. "I will stay up here and provide company."

Cordelia sighed. Watching from the window would not be ideal, but at least she would be able to see Lord Harveston.

Perhaps he might see her too. She could wave to him.

In the meantime, she would direct her thoughts away from her injury. Though really, they did not need to be directed. Even as the doctor spoke, Cordelia could think of little beyond having found herself in Lord Harveston's arms.

With any luck, she would find herself there again sometime soon.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

PERCIVAL HAD BEEN up early. He'd been dressed and sent Jameston village to see about a teacher for Mrs. Macklethorpe.

He understood from the doctor that Lady Cordelia's ankle was *sp* not broken. That was very good news.

On the not so good news front had been the doctor's orders that she be abed for at least three days.

As he sat in the drawing room with a book, he'd almost managed to forget about that blasted regatta. Though, he had been gratified to know Miss Mayton finding him there that Lady Cordelia would be watching the window.

Now, crowds of villagers had begun to gather on the edges of the lake, and the ladies were led to their viewing spot on a gently rising bank.

He turned to look up at the house, attempting to spot Lady Cordelia at the window.

The sun was against him and all he could see was a glare on the pane of glass.

It was no use, he wouldn't have a chance to spot her until the sun moved behind the trees or some of the fast-moving high clouds ran over it.

The duke had gathered all his sailors together. Behind him, Percival could hear Lord Popinjay come to the conclusion of his whale story. Or, he could say whales, as now there were *two* of the behemoths attempting to kill the

Percival turned and stared at him and the tale came to a rather abrupt

"My friends," the duke said, "we are poised to have a roaring regatta; you can see for yourselves, we are in for a real spot of luck—the weather is absolutely cracking today.

Unfortunately, the duke told no tales. The wind had been picking up since noon.

Percival could see small white caps on the lake, which he certainly had not seen on the other days.



Though the duke was delighted about it, Percival was not.

At least the rowers, those hardy fellows who would row out and pick up somebody who'd landed in the lake and eventually tow their boat to shore looked unconcerned with the state of things.

Percival suspected they were on the verge of a busy day.

The duke was helped onto a stage that had been hastily constructed to the water's edge. "People of the county," he said loudly, "welcome to the Castleton Regatta!"

There were the usual enthusiastic shouts from men who were harrassed, drained, drink the duke's ale for whatever reason.

"As you can see, we have marked out the course with the starting line at this end of the lake, going round the two buoys there, and then turning for a race to the finish! While I do not condone betting, I understand aged to Kretcher has got something going."

Percival watched in some amazement as the men of the neighborhood turned on mass and besieged Mr. Kretcher and his bet book. How could they know who to bet on?

"Gentlemen!" the duke cried, now looking rather red in the face. "Boats!"

Percival trudged toward his boat, which flew a purple flag just snapping in the wind. Other of the gentlemen raced ahead, but he did not know the point of it. Everyone would need to be sailing behind the start line if the duke would ring a cowbell as the start. He need not be sailing back and forth and dodging other boats for longer than was necessary.

After all, there might be whales out there. Lord Popinjay had explained the danger they could incur.

As men struggled to get the sails raised and centerboards pinned down, half up, Percival went through the task methodically. It really had been a half-hearted effort. He should have Hamill as a guide.

Hamill himself was first out into the lake and speeding along at a good pace. Others were not so fortunate.

Lord Bertram had managed to fall over the side of his boat and into the water already, but it was only a foot deep so he did not require rescue at the time.

Popinjay had pushed off and shouted victoriously, until he suddenly about and ended up beached again.

Lord Wosley could not work out why his centerboard would not go up and pick the slot, somehow failing to realize that he was attempting to push back to earth.

Percival did his best to ignore the chaos and just do what Hamill showed him to. His sail was up, he pushed off, and found the wind. At the moment he hit the deeper water, he released the centerboard from its place. The first God help him, he was sailing.

Worse, he was sailing far too fast for comfort. He let his sail out and luffed into the wind to slow himself down and was rather proud of himself that it actually worked.

Percival steered the tiller to keep himself out of the way of the other boats which were heading toward the starting line.

Boats were going this way and that, coming about at inopportune times and suddenly turning and luffing in the wind.

It was absolute chaos and Percival dearly wished the duke would run on earth with a cowbell already.

The duke shouted, "Come on, Bertram, get out there!" Percival looked to see what Lord Bertram was doing. He was heading himself back into his boat, so presumably he'd fallen in again.

Bertram gamely got behind his tiller and pushed off, heading for the start. The duke clanged on the cowbell, which only seemed to increase the confusion. It was as if everybody had forgot where the start actually was. Everyone except Hamill, who had shot off toward the first buoy.

Boats were going round in circles and tipping this way and that and already dove under their swinging booms and came up the other side.

Percival attempted to sail away from the confusion, gradually heading toward the start. The sun, whose glare was not helping the situation, dimmed by a grouping of clouds moving overhead.

Percival stood up and shaded his eyes, seeking out Lady Corbett's terrific window.

There she was! She was waving! He waved back.

Behind him, Popinjay shouted, "Out of the way!" His stern was struck, heaving his boat to the left. The boom swung and there came a sharp crack on the back of his head, and he saw no more.

o down  
it into



CORDELIA HAD HOPPED to the window with the assistance of Lynette and Hamill had Mayton and settled there, eager to view the regatta.

id. The Or eager to view Lord Harveston, as the case actually was.

eg. “Ah look, they are going to their boats,” Miss Mayton said.

“Yes, I see! Lord Harveston’s boat waves a purple flag, that’s how you will know him as he goes round the buoys,” Cordelia said.

nd was Lynette was engaged in straightening the room. She said, “I understand when a person goes a floatin’ on the water to get somewhere. Little bit of a person’s got to leave England. I’d never do it myself, but it’s understandable. I don’t understand this though.”

imes or “It is a race, Lynette,” Cordelia said.

“A race for what?”

ing that “For a brass plate that is to be in the billiards room,” Miss Mayton said as if that would explain all.

rolling seem worth it.”

Ignoring Lynette, Cordelia said, “Look, Lord Hamill is off the start already. Oh goodness, Lord Bertram just fell in.”

ase the “Told ya!” Lynette said.

as. “He’s perfectly fine,” Cordelia said. “Oh, there goes Lord Harveston. He is rather good, do not you think?”

as men “I wouldn’t know,” Lynette said with a sniff.

Of course, Cordelia was not asking Lynette in the first place, but she scolded her as her maid was still shaken to have found her in Lord Harveston’s arms.

Cordelia was rather shaken herself, but it was a more pleasant shaken than Lynette experienced.

“Good Gracious,” Miss Mayton said, “that Lord Poppin seems more of a menace on the water than he is in a drawing room.”

Her aunt was right. Lord Poppin was barreling through the other boats with near misses everywhere.

, he felt Even at this distance, they heard the duke clang the cowbell for the start. Cordelia leaned forward in her seat, her eyes firmly on the boat with the purple flag.

purple flag.

It was thrilling.

id Miss Suddenly, the sun raced behind clouds. Lord Harveston stood in his boat and waved.

He waved to her.

ow we Cordelia waved enthusiastically back, so he could be in no doubt she'd seen him.

“Oh dear,” Miss Mayton said. “What is Lord Poppin doing now?”

erstand Cordelia squinted against the sun that had reappeared.

re, if a “He’s heading right for Lord Harveston!” Cordelia waved wildly. “Get out of the way, Lord Harveston!”

Lord Harveston did not get out of the way. Lord Poppin’s boat crashed into his stern and his boat swung sideways.

on said, It seemed as if he’d almost had time to duck the swinging boom, but not enough time.

Lord Harveston dropped in his boat to be seen no more.

“Don’t Cordelia jumped to her feet and then immediately collapsed back into the boat from the pain in her ankle.

o banks Miss Mayton grabbed her arm. “Look, the rowers have seen it. Lord Harveston is racing to him. Don’t worry, my dear, they will see that he’s all right.”

ton! He Cordelia watched in both horror and anger as the rowers approached. Lord Harveston’s boat and Lord Poppin reset his course and crossed the starboard.

The rowers peered into the boat, but Cordelia could not see. What were they seeing? Was Lord Harveston dead?

did not One of the rowers signaled to another of the row boats and it moved toward Lord Harveston’s way over. They tied Lord Harveston’s boat to their sterns and towed it a short distance to shore.

sort of “Why are they not helping Lord Harveston?” she cried.

ore of a “I reckon they’ve got to get him on land first,” Miss Mayton said. “I’m sure he’s all right, he is young and strong and has just taken a bump on his head.”

o sailors “I knew it,” Lynette muttered. “I knew it from the start.”

re start. “If he is not all right,” Cordelia said, “if Lord Poppin has caused a mortal injury, I will, well I will...I will take one of Darden’s pistols and shoot him!”

“Here we go,” Lynette said with a sigh.

“Let us not get ahead of ourselves,” Miss Mayton said.

Though her aunt remained calm, Cordelia could see she was in a boat worried.

The boat reached shore. Two men ran to the rowers with a wooden stretcher between them and Lord Harveston was gently lifted from the boat and placed upon it. The lord did not move. At this distance, Cordelia could not see his face clearly, but she thought his eyes were closed. The men carried Lord Harveston up the bank and headed toward the house, pushing the stretcher through curious onlookers.

“Get up, Aunt,” Lynette said. “Aunt, you must go and find out his condition. And the doctor! I know he would be here, do be sure they have found him quickly. Oh, how I wish I had use of my own two feet just now!”

“Stay right where you are,” Miss Mayton said. “I will discover what happened and return as soon as I have news. Lynette will remain here to comfort you.”

“I knew it would go bad,” Lynette said, by way of comfort.

Miss Mayton hurried from the room. Cordelia was left to view the wreckage and the stupid Lord Poppin making a fool of himself. If there was any comfort at all to what she viewed, it was that he’d lost total control of the vessel and was just going round in circles.

From the corridor, she heard feet pounding up the stairs until they were over her very head.

Lord Harveston was up there somewhere. Please God, let him be all right.



made its  
end it the

PERCIVAL AWOKE IN a very confused condition. One minute he was sailing on that cursed regatta, and now he was in his bed.

“I’m not even more alarming,” Miss Mayton was in his bedchamber peering in on that him and the doctor had just pierced his finger with a needle.

He yanked his hand away.

“You felt that,” the doctor said. “Good, very good.”

The doctor then waved a candle in front of his eyes. “Pupils even and reactive, excellent. Not any permanent damage done that I can see.”

“Very well,” Percival said, attempting to rise.

“Oh no, you don’t, Lord Harveston,” the doctor said, gently pushing him just as back down. “You’ve had a commotion to the brain, thanks to Lord Po

The doctor sighed. “So many of those poor sots out there bet a hundred guineas on that fool to win after hearing his cockamamie story about whales attacking his boat off the coast of Brighton.”

“He did not win, please tell me he did not win,” Percival said.

The doctor went to the window. “Ah, he’s tipped his boat overboard shouting to the rowers.”

“Good.”

“Lord Harveston, you are to stay abed for at least three days, the doctor wished to assess your condition. You must take this very seriously to avoid any long-term effects. If I deem you fit in three days’ time, your recovery is not complete. You must proceed carefully. If you have ridden here, you must depart behind the carriage. Do nothing that would involve violent jostling or the risk of a blow to the head. Really, it would be best if you could stop here for a few weeks.”

“Weeks?” Percival asked.

“Weeks. Your brain has been shaken around and brains do not like to be shaken around. If you like, I can bleed you, though I do not think it will do anything for you.”

“A stupid practice,” Percival said.

“Indeed, in most cases,” the doctor averred.

“Now, Doctor,” Miss Mayton said, “if Lord Harveston was to be very careful, might he not descend to the drawing room of an evening?”

“Is Lady Cordelia to descend to the drawing room?” Percival asked.

“She is not and you are not,” the doctor said sternly. “You both have ailing in sort of injuries that are not life threatening, but if not treated properly they carry life-long effects. I do not suppose Lady Cordelia would give up a permanent limp and you should wish to be addled, all to hear the gossip? You would make a very fine pair.”

“Nobody said we were a pair,” Percival said.

“No? I had thought...”

“As had I,” Miss Mayton said, staring down at him.

“That is, nobody said we were *not* a pair either,” Percival said. “That has not been discussed.”

Miss Mayton looked very satisfied with that response. She re

ing him walked to the window. "Ah, Lord Hamill has seized the day, I thin  
opin." Lord Poppin is soaking wet."

week's She walked to the fireplace mantel and straightened a picture fram  
it three "Perhaps the whales capsized him."

This made Percival laugh despite himself.

The doctor rose. "My work is done here for now. Lord Harvestor  
and is leave your valet with tincture of laudanum to treat the headache that i  
to result from your adventure and will return in three days' time unl  
take a turn. Do follow my advice and do not venture out just because y  
n I will you can—your brain needs time to settle."

y long- The doctor bowed. Then he stared at Miss Mayton.

ended. She stared back at him.

art in a "Miss Mayton," he said, "I hesitate to leave you in a man's room?"

another Miss Mayton seemed to come to her senses. "Goodness, no, y  
r some better not."

Jameston took the vial from the doctor and showed them out.

What a day.

ce to be  
will do a

ie very,  
,"

l.

ave the  
ly may  
like a  
e latest

ie thing

se and

walked to the window. “Ah, Lord Hamill has seized the day, I think. And Lord Poppin is soaking wet.”

She walked to the fireplace mantel and straightened a picture frame on it. “Perhaps the whales capsized him.”

This made Percival laugh despite himself.

The doctor rose. “My work is done here for now. Lord Harveston, I will leave your valet with tincture of laudanum to treat the headache that is likely to result from your adventure and will return in three days’ time unless you take a turn. Do follow my advice and do not venture out just because you feel you can—your brain needs time to settle.”

The doctor bowed. Then he stared at Miss Mayton.

She stared back at him.

“Miss Mayton,” he said, “I hesitate to leave you in a man’s room?”

Miss Mayton seemed to come to her senses. “Goodness, no, you had better not.”

Jameston took the vial from the doctor and showed them out.

What a day.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CORDELIA HAD BEEN waiting anxiously and staring at the door. She had been determinedly ignoring Lynette's various comments on the day, but she tended toward not being surprised to find out somebody was dead.

She must know if Lord Harveston was unharmed.

There had been footsteps overhead, and muffled talking. But the clearer sound, she was certain she heard Miss Mayton say "the boat capsized him."

It made no sense whatsoever, but unless she was beginning to expect false delusions, she was very sure she'd heard it.

Lynette had been no help to confirm it, she'd been too busy muttering to herself.

Finally the door opened.

Her aunt hurried through it. "Lord Harveston only has a commotion in his brain and the doctor says if he will rest for a few days and be careful for a few weeks longer the commotion will subside and he will be right as rain."

Cordelia breathed a sigh of relief. He would be all right. They both would be.

Lynette looked a little annoyed to hear it and Cordelia supposed she had been counting on being right in her prediction of disaster.

"I'll go see what's to be done about your dinner, Lady Cordelia," her aunt said. "I'd like to hear what they're saying about all this in the servants' quarters."

Her maid closed the door behind her.

"Aunt," she said, "while you were above stairs, did you happen to hear anything about whales capsizing his boat?"

"Whales? Goodness, I suppose I did. Not his boat, though. Lord Harveston ended up in the lake and I joked that perhaps the whales he's always gone about put him there."

"I heard you say it," Cordelia said. "Lord Harveston's room must

above us.”

Miss Mayton tapped her chin. “Let us see, yes, three doors down from the landing. Yes it must be. But goodness, in an old house like this I am sure you can hear anything from above.”

“It is the fireplace,” Cordelia said. “Remember, Theodora told us that the sound traveling through the chimneys so we would not be alarmed if we heard something.”

“Oh I see,” Miss Mayton said. “Yes, indeed, I was standing by the fireplace when I mentioned the whales. Shall you talk to him through the chimney, then?”

Cordelia had been thinking that very thing, but it seemed an impossible thing to do. What on earth was she to do—just call into it?

“I do not know,” she said. “I would like to, but he might think I am forward. He might not like it. And then, what would I say? He likely does not even know I can hear anything. It might feel an invasion of privacy.”

Miss Mayton shrugged. “If anybody wanted their privacy invaded, it would be Lord Harveston just now. You saw how careful he was to keep you up the stairs last evening. I think he is...on the verge.”

“On the verge?” Cordelia whispered.

“On the very verge,” Miss Mayton said.

Cordelia’s aunt hopped up and went to the mantel. She bent down and said loudly, “Now Cordelia, this is a very pleasant spot just here next to the fireplace, away from the draft at the window. After Lynette has brought dinner, I will have to go down for my own and you will be quite alone for a few hours. Alone, at least a few hours starting at seven. I suggest you sit right by the fireplace, with that intellectual book you are reading.”

Miss Mayton rose and said, “That ought to do it, I think.”

“I would say so,” Cordelia said, laughing.

Now, if only Lord Harveston had heard, and would say something.

If only he really was on the very verge and would say something.

to say



Poppin

PERCIVAL HAD TAKEN the laudanum as, just as the doctor had predicted, his head had begun to pound.

be just

He lay back and tried to empty his mind of the various irritations from which he was currently suffering. He would like to throttle Poppin, who was surprised to find himself even now explaining that he was not at fault.

He would like to speak to Lady Cordelia. He *should* be speaking to her. But she, like Cordelia, had Poppin not tripped her with an ottoman and then run her head down in the lake.

Now they were both confined to their rooms and he had no chance of escape. The duke had been in and made light of the whole thing, but though he admitted he could not like Poppin. The fellow had injured two of his horses and he just could not like that at all. He'd also grown weary of hearing of the duke's indiscretions.

The duchess was in a right temper with the fellow and said she would like to see Lord Poppin to be popped right out of her house.

If it was any consolation, Lord Poppin would not be invited back.

Percival had supposed that was the only consolation he would get. I think then the duke had sent up a very good bottle of wine, a plate of excellent cheese, and a loaf of fresh-baked bread. That, combined with the laudanum, soothed a little.

But not entirely. All his plans had gone up in a puff of smoke. He would like to have a new plan, but when would the two of them be able to leave their rooms?

He still had time, he reminded himself. The house party had only just begun and was to go on for a fortnight.

As Jameston fiddled with this thing and that, he updated Percival on the Mrs. Macklethorpe situation, which he'd all but forgot about.

Jameston had located the local schoolmaster and made arrangements there, then went to visit Mrs. Macklethorpe and informed her of the arrangements.

Jameston said the lady was very grateful, but as much as he said that, since Harveston had made the arrangements, he was sorry to say the lady would not be giving Lady Cordelia all the credit.

Percival wasn't sorry for it—he'd done it on her behalf.

Quite suddenly, they both heard Miss Mayton talking as if she was in her room.

They looked at one another, Jameston raced to the door and peered out, then came back.

ons that Then they both stared at the chimney.  
he was “Away from the draft at the window,” he heard Miss Mayton say  
as if she were very nearby him.  
o Lady “After Lynette has brought your dinner,” Miss Mayton went on,  
his boathave to go down for my own and you will be quite alone for a few  
Alone, at least a few hours starting at seven. I suggest you sit here, r  
at all. the fireplace where I am speaking now, with that intellectual book  
ut thenreading.”  
; guests “She’s talking next to the chimney,” Jameston whispered.  
g about They heard no more after that. Nevertheless, at seven o’clock  
Cordelia would be seated near the chimney.  
uld like He was fairly certain Miss Mayton wished him to know it. Di  
Cordelia know about the chimney?  
“Jameston,” he said quietly, “I do not wish to be disturbed after sev  
get, but “But my lord, dinner has not yet been sent up. I really do not  
xcellentshould be skipped, in your condition I mean.”  
danum, “I have a bottle of wine, good cheese and excellent bread and I  
conversation in a chimney that needs to be had. That will do quite well  
le must  
ve their



ly justIF CORDELIA COULD pace her room, she certainly would be pacing.  
Her ankle would not allow it though.  
l on the After her dinner, Lynette and Miss Mayton had helped her to  
cushioned chair by the fireplace.  
gements Lynette could not understand the point of it. Why was she to sit t  
of theall places. If she did not wish to be abed, then why not sit by the wind  
watch the fireflies?  
id Lord Miss Mayton had hushed her questions and given her the night off.  
insisted Lynette said she did not want the night off.  
Miss Mayton ordered her to take the night off.  
Lynette had left deeply suspicious, but she had left.  
s in the Cordelia watched the clock strike seven. She held her breath.  
Not a moment later, she heard his voice.  
red out, “Lady Cordelia, I wonder if you can hear me? It is Lord Harveston

Cordelia bent closer to the hearth. "Yes," she said, "I can hear you as clearcourse I know it is Lord Harveston." She paused, then said, "I would recognize your voice."

"I will . . . " "Would you? Excellent, yes, good," he said. "This might see . . . hours.untoward, but I happened to hear from Miss Mayton, inadvertently t . . . ight bythe chimney you see, that you would be on your own. At seven."

you are . . . " "Yes," Cordelia said. "It is seven now. I am quite alone."

"Ah, yes it is seven. I also am alone. Now that it is seven."

Cordelia leaned forward. Her instincts told her that Miss Mayton, Ladyright—he was on the verge. She could hear it in his voice.

"I wonder, Lady Cordelia, if you have ever thought, that is, I am d Ladythat we got off to a rocky start, on the wrong foot, as it were. But . . . seems to me we have got on rather better footing since then."

ven." . . . "Very good footing, I think," Cordelia said.

think it . . . "Yes, very good footing indeed. And I have noticed things and . . . things that I did not know before. I have come to see that I wa . . . have anarrowminded in my thinking and, well, as Lady Hightower has point . . . l." . . . there are all sorts of intelligence."

It was a sort of a jumble of thoughts and Cordelia was not certain v . . . meant. But she suddenly realized she must be honest with Lord Har . . . He must know what she really was and not be fooled by any tablea . . . attempted.

"Lord Harveston," she said, "I have a confession to make. That p . . . a low,volcanoes I mentioned? I really do not remember much about it. I was . . . busy thinking about the family who might live nearby. It is a habit of r . . . here of . . . There. She'd said it. If he wished to go forward, he now knew t . . . ow andwas not the intellectual that he was.

"Yes, I know!" he said. "That is precisely it. That is what I did . . . before."

"But what I am saying is," Cordelia said slowly, "I am not n . . . probably will never be an intellectual."

Suddenly, she heard Lord Harveston laughing. He said, ". . . nonsense! You are an intellectual, and a far greater one than myself. I . . . an intellectual of books, but you are an intellectual of hearts."

. . . " "Am I?"

"Yes. And really, what are books to that?"

, and of “I hadn’t thought...”

always “And, you’ve touched my own heart. Deeply.” There was a pause  
he said, “It’s funny, I hadn’t really thought it could be touched.”

m very Cordelia clutched her robe tighter round herself. Say it, she thought,  
throughout, say it, say it.

“Now, I know you had hopes for a Corinthian sort of fellow—”

“No, I do not!” Cordelia shouted at the chimney.

“No?”

on was “No, absolutely not.”

“Because I am not. You must know that upfront.”

1 aware “You carried me up the stairs, Harveston,” Cordelia said, “that is  
then, it enough athletic prowess for me.”

“So do you say then...”

“I can say nothing until I’ve been asked something,” Cordelia said  
learned on her cheeks.

as very He’s on the verge, the verge, the very verge.

ted out, “Lady Cordelia Bennington, I am hopelessly in love with you—a  
never thought possible. I was right to think it, as it would not have  
what he possible had there not been Cordelia Bennington in the world.”

Harveston. He could not go back now. The verge had been reached.

u she’d “Lady Cordelia, would you consent to be my wife?”

It was said! He’d said it!

aper on “Yes!” she shouted at the chimney.

far too “Yes, you do say yes?”

nine.” “Yes, I said yes.”

hat she “I would have Popinjay run me down a hundred times over to hear  
an answer.”

not see “Yes, and he might push all the ottomans at me that he likes. But what  
we to do now, though?” Cordelia asked. “At such a moment, it seems  
ow and should...”

“Yes, we should. And yet we are confined.”

That is “I can hop,” Cordelia said.

may be “You can hop? Well I can walk slowly, as long as I do not jostle  
too much.”

“We can meet halfway,” Cordelia said. “On the stairs, I am sure  
both get there.”

“You are sure? Your ankle?”

se, then “I am sure, Harveston,” Cordelia said, laughing. “I am hopping now  
“I am coming.”

ght. Say



PERCIVAL WAS NOT certain if his head was spinning from his very recent commotion or from the idea that he’d just proposed to Lady Cordelia to be married at a chimney and been accepted.

She was on her way to the stairs and brain commotion or not, so was it quite He grabbed a candle from a side table and staggered out of the hallway, holding on to walls as he went.

Percival got to the landing and saw Lady Cordelia at the next door, handsdown. She hopped and he staggered to meet one another halfway.

She threw herself into his arms. He had not been ready for that and she fell back, with her atop him. He held the candle away so as not to set anything ablaze.

It should have been a shocking situation, but it felt entirely natural. He leaned down and kissed her.

Percival threw the candle away and held her tight.

“My perfect Lady Cordelia,” he whispered. He softly kissed her.

She nuzzled his neck and said, “I am not so perfect, but I hope your affection will make you blind to my faults.”

“You are perfectly perfect and I will not have the point argued,” Percival said. “You have made me join the land of the living again. Out of my grave and back into the world.”

“You are really very handsome, Harveston,” she said, tracing his cheek with her forefinger down his jaw.

He kissed that charming finger and said, “But I am no Corinthian,” she said with a laugh.

“I don’t know about that. After all, when I think of it, I was most grateful to go forward to my Corinthian carrying me up the stairs. You did that remarkably well.”

“Which I will happily do all of our lives.”

He kissed Lady Cordelia once more and the kiss went on for...how

He did not really know. It was as if all the world had very conveniently  
w.” away and they were just on their own. There was nothing but her and  
the stairs.

Somewhere outside of this lovely interlude, Percival vaguely  
smoke. It did not entirely penetrate his thoughts until he heard someone  
“Fire!”

at brain Cordelia’s head snapped up. So did his own, just in time to see a  
throughrunning toward a section of burning carpet just below them.

The footman doused the flames with a sand bucket.

as he. “Was that the candle you came with?” Cordelia said.

room, “I’m afraid so. I have a brain commotion, you know.”

Not a moment later, those people who had been in the dining room  
landingwas most of the people in the house, were upon the stairs in a crowd.

Percival sat up with Cordelia in his lap.

and fell “We are engaged, if that is at all helpful,” he said to the onlookers.  
er hair



al. She

THE DAYS THAT followed comprised perhaps the most unique engagement  
duke’s house had ever experienced.

Cordelia would be carried down to the drawing room, while  
Harveston’s valet would lead him down the stairs to avoid any jostling

There, they found their preferred corner, the view of its sofa blocked  
Percivalthe hulking pianoforte.

It turned out very convenient that the duke and duchess were such  
people. They nearly always had their guests engaged in some sort of  
ng herand the drawing room was theirs alone.

The couple would laugh and think of their good luck on the occasion,  
an,” he when some of the exhausted guests would stagger into the drawing  
looking for quiet refuge away from the storm of things to do.

They’d had to cover their mouths to stop their laughter when Lord  
arkablyLady Ledwellen had collapsed on chairs, entirely unaware of their presence.

Lady Ledwellen had said, “How many days left, Ledwellen. How  
days?”

Her lord had answered, “Six. Six more days. We must just survive



y faded we will return home and rest a month.”

him on “We should hide after dinner,” Lady Ledwellen said. “I positively  
to lawn bowl in the dark again.”

smelled Though it had at first seemed highly inconvenient that Corde  
ne yell, sprained her ankle and Harveston had jostled his brain, they were happ  
just where they were.

ootman Whether there was any jostling done in the drawing room...  
seemed there were no lasting ill-effects from it.

Though Lord Harveston would have, in any other circumstances,  
to the earl’s estate to ask for his daughter’s hand, it was not possible  
very moment.

, which Instead, he wrote a long letter outlining his case. Cordelia wrote h  
letter and enclosed it within. Her father was to know that it had recent  
pointed out to her that she was an intellectual of the heart.

The earl’s approval came a few days later, along with a note from  
that said she wished for her sister’s happiness and if it must be Harve  
be it.

They were married three weeks later, at the first opportunity th  
ient the injuries allowed.

For a wedding trip, Harveston told Cordelia nothing was out of  
e Lord Wherever she wished to go, they would go.

. Rather than setting off to Timbuktu or Bombay, Cordelia chose  
ked by cottage that the lord owned in the Cotswolds. He had described it  
during their long hours together in the duke’s drawing room and it  
1 active precisely where they should go.

activity And so it was.

Nestled in a pine forest and miles away from any other being  
casions thatched cottage that only had a caretaker come twice a month to keep

g room They hauled in everything they would need on a farmer’s cart and  
in for a month.

ord and Amidst the quiet of the forest, where even their footsteps were s  
sence. by a carpet of pine needles, Cordelia and Lord Harveston lolled in t  
v many had shockingly late breakfasts.

It turned out Lord Harveston could manage cooking eggs and cou  
it, then get bread toasted sometimes. The rest of the meals were more a rol  
dice and they had smoked themselves out of the cottage on more th

occasion. The lord admitted to thinking the duke and duchess of D  
7 refuseDale had been ridiculous in their inability to cook for themselves, but  
saw the veracity of the situation.

lia had When they were not busy nearly burning the cottage down  
oy to bewildered the pine forest and stopped by a favored stream and v  
quietly as the small forest animals went about their work. They rather  
well itforest animals themselves, as they roamed with Cordelia only in a sh  
the lord in just his breeches.

ridden They came to know each other in both mentionable and unment  
at thatways and came to know better who and what they were. There were lo  
languid conversations about histories and views.

er own Upon hearing of her lord's childhood household, Cordelia glim  
ly beenfrigid world she could never have imagined. What would she have be  
she been raised in such a house?

n Juliet Makepeace greatly grew in her estimation, when she was apprised  
ston, soopinion of the old baron and his treatment of poor Clara.

Percival, for his part, heard of Cordelia's household, full of chi  
at theirrunning feet and laughter and Miss Mayton surrounding ther  
unwavering approval.

reach. It was very difficult to imagine such a situation, but Percival had s  
result of it and was determined his own family would have just the san

a small Miss Mayton grew in his estimation, when he understood that she  
to herall of the Bennington sisters' bedrock of constancy. The lady was ecce  
seemedthe extreme, and likely a very great liar, but when one of her girls fel  
her hand reached out to pull them back up.

In the end, they concluded that Cordelia was not unintellectual. Ha  
s, sat awas not unemotional. They simply had different strengths.

it up. After their month in the pine forest, they made the obligatory visits

settled Lord Harveston's mother had been informed by letter that her s  
wed Lady Cordelia Bennington at the Duke of Castleton's residence  
silenceddowager had not had the first idea that a marriage had been in the wo  
wed andfact, she had been rather despairing of her son's marriage ever being  
works. She had not been able to understand why, until Cordelia explai  
ld evenmatter to her.

l of the The dowager and her husband had not provided a very comfor  
an oneloving home for their son, which the lady had at first been affronted

But, she had the good sense to not only face it, but to regret it. She had now been pushed into a marriage that had never suited and had allowed an inheritance to be the result. She rejoiced that the family Cordelia would have, they would be far different.

Cordelia's father, for his part, had long got over any surprise he felt like daughters might provide him. He took the whole thing in stride—his daughter had sought a Corinthian and then brought home an intellectual. It mattered very little to him. He respected Lord Harveston and had a reasonable confidence in the lord's care of his daughter, and that was quite enough and

OVER TIME, THE couple would come to some satisfactory arrangement regarding their particular strengths. Percival read to Cordelia about father and son, had he worked hard to make them interesting and ask her about what she thought of the people who might be affected by the topic.

Cordelia enacted her Desdemona final scene often – sometimes Desdemona would live and go off happily with Cassio, and sometimes she died very dramatically. Whatever her fate, Desdemona was generally taken up the stairs afterward.

Cordelia also educated her lord on when he might be feeling the effects of love, particularly if he felt as if his hair had been struck by lightning. which he invariably claimed it had burst into flames the moment he had been struck by her.

If a question arose whose answer might lie in a book, Percival found it down, a question arose that might be found in a heart, Cordelia provided guidance.

Makepeace, as might be imagined, was not over the moon to understand his mistress was coming into the house. Cordelia was able to soothe his feelings by assuring him that his sideboards were excellent and that they did not require an outrageous amount of flowers in the drawing room.

The literary society carried on, with Lady Harveston on hand to do the work. In heart to heart with one of its members when it was deemed necessary.

Surprisingly, it was often necessary.

The men, and eventually the women, of the society were made better of it.

Though Cordelia's season had ended abruptly, it had ended happily and she was glad to hear.

ad been The earl had one more daughter to go—the youngest, Lady Juli  
ce-coldwould arrive in London armed with the hundreds of odes she had writt  
l createshe would find her poet.

At least, that was the plan.

ses his  
aughter  
t really  
l every  
h.

The End

gements  
cts, but  
thought

netimes  
nes she  
carried

fects of  
uing, to  
e'd met

nd it. If  
led the

rstand a  
bruised  
she did

eliver a

atter for

7.

The earl had one more daughter to go—the youngest, Lady Juliet. She would arrive in London armed with the hundreds of odes she had written, and she would find her poet.

At least, that was the plan.

The End

## About the Author

By the time I was eleven, my Irish Nana and I had formed a book club. On a timetable only known to herself, Nana would grab her black walking stick and steam down to the local Woolworth's. There, she would buy the latest Barbara Cartland romance, hurry home to read it accompanied by viciously strong wine, (Wild Irish Rose, if you're wondering) and then pass the book on to me. Though I was not particularly interested in romance at yet, I was *very* interested in the gentlemen in those stories—daring, bold, and often enraging and unaccountable. After my Barbara Cartland phase, I moved on to Georgette Heyer, Jane Austen and so many other gifted authors with the ability to bring the Georgian and Regency eras to life.

I would like nothing more than to time travel back to the Regency era (or time travel back to my twenties as long as we're going somewhere) to see my chances at a ball. Who would take the first? Who would escort me to supper? What sort of meaningful looks would be exchanged? I would love having made the trip, to encounter a gentleman who would give me a hard time. He ought to be vexatious in the extreme, and *worth* the vexation, to make the journey worthwhile.

I most likely won't be able to work out the time travel gambit, so I'll content myself with writing stories of adventure and romance in my historical time period. There are lives to be created, marvelous gowns to wear, jewels to be won, instant attractions that inevitably come with a difficulty, and heartbreak before putting them back together again. In traditional Regency fashion, my stories are clean—the action happens in a drawing room rather than a bedroom.

As I muse over what will happen next to my H and h, and wish I were there with them, I will occasionally remind myself that it's also nice to have a microwave, Netflix, cheese popcorn, and steaming hot showers.

Come see me on Facebook! [@KateArcherAuthor](#)

club of  
ckthorn  
: would  
panied  
nd then  
al boys  
old, and  
I went  
blessed

cy (and  
to take  
me into  
d hope,  
a very  
i every

o I will  
beloved  
wels to  
earts to  
legency  
, rather

I were  
have a