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"In the planning stage of a book, don't plan the ending. It has to be earned by all that will go before it." Rose Tremain
Epilogue Four Months Later August 1810 It was a gamble, of course. Jack had never published a novel before. He was a vociferous consumer of the written word, and so when he had read this manuscript, he had been enthralled. By his own taste, he knew it was a worthwhile read.
The paper had been purchased for his printer at great expense. Peter, in his analytical way, had advocated for a thinner, cheaper supply of paper, but Jack knew that the ink would bleed and would make the book illegible. In establishing the publishing house, Jack had burned through a great majority of the capital that his father had le him. The gamble had been taken on a female author, which made his first run of seven hundred and fi y copies a great risk indeed. It was an unfortunate fact that many people frowned upon female authors, and it being Jack's first project, he was putting Borosford Bress at risk.
and it being Jack's first project, he was putting Beresford Press at risk before it had even begun. Whatever the sex of the writer, Jack paid no heed. It was the talent he cared for. Though, he did know that one day, years from now, he would tell his own daughter that the first book he ever published was written by a young woman, just like her. Jack had wanted a legacy, one of which he could bequeath, and in this act, he was forging one. If she wanted it, Beresford Press would one day be owned and operated by Jackie. "It is o icial," remarked Peter, as they watched the printers operate the machine. "We are in print."
Jack smiled, quite in disbelief that in a short while he would be holding the physical copy of a book that beared the Beresford Press name. His name. "Thank you for doing this with me, Peter," Jack said gratefully. Despite being only nineteen, Peter looked as though he had grown so much older in these four months they had been in London. He carried himself with pride and confidence, and he wore an expression of true happiness and contentment. Jack had not known Claire's younger brother very well before now, but he was consistently impressed by the cleverness of young Peter Denham. "Thank you for taking me on " replied Peter."
"Thank you for taking me on," replied Peter. Jim had been gracious in supporting Peter's decision to go to work for Jack. Mrs Denham had been the one to grieve the decision as she was losing Peter without even a wedding to show for it. The pain of the loss was eased slightly by the knowledge that he would be living with Jack and Claire and would not be le to wander the streets of London alone. "Jack?"
Both Jack and Peter's heads turned at the sound of someone calling his name. Jack recognised the voice instantly, before he saw the rosebud pink silk figure making her way across the printing floor. Susanna wove around the machine and the workers e ortlessly as she made her way to the stairs. She had walked this route many times this summer, and by the way she was striding with purpose, Jack would have wagered that their mother had pushed her one too many times today. Despite her advanced age in the world of debutantes, Susanna Beresford was still the jewel of the season, a trueprize. She was beautiful, accomplished, and fabulously wealthy with perhaps the best connections in all of London. She possessed the most soughtar er hand in the country and was never without an invitation.
Cecily was in her element as she meticulously commanded every ballroom she and Susanna entered. She was an expert manipulator in every social scene, and if she was to have her way, Susanna would be engaged in the next few weeks as the season ended. Susanna marched up the stairs and met Jack and Peter on the landing. Her blue eyes were wide with emotion, and her cheeks were reddened from exertion. She carried a parasol but was without a bonnet. "He proposed!" exclaimed Susanna.
Jack stared at Susanna, trying to discern whether or not she had come to tell him the good news, or whether she wanted him to be outraged. Either would be dificult as he had no idea of whomever this gentleman was. There were so many of them snifing around Susanna's skirts while dreaming of bank notes. "Congratulations?" bid Peter, as though he was asking a question. Susanna hu ed. Jack then realised that he ought to be outraged.
"The audacity of the man!" he cried. "Exactly!" agreed Susanna enthusiastically. "Lord Bertram has been an acquaintance for perhaps three weeks, and I use the word "acquaintance" generously. We have danced twice, and he has called thrice, though I have barely received him, and only at Mother's insistence. And this a ernoon he declared passionate love for me!" Susanna sco ed and shook her head, folding her arms impatiently across her chest. "This is not what it is supposed to be like," she added determinedly, "and I am not imagining anything. I've seen it. Twice. I know what one is supposed to feel, supposed to look like when they are bound to the person whom they shall marry."
Peter quietly excused himself from the conversation, and le Jack and Susanna to speak. Susanna was still quite in the dark about how Jack and Claire's relationship had begun, as was everyone besides Cecily, Adam and Grace. This did make Jack feel some guilt in how his sister was including his marriage as something to aspire to. While Jack knew that he had been fortunate as to have found love within his marriage, it had not begun that way, which was not to say
that Susanna mightn't have the same luck. But he knew that Susanna would never take such a chance. Susanna wanted what her elder brothers had found and would settle for nothing less, which Jack sincerely admired her for. Many a terrible and unhappy match was made during these seasons purely for financial gain. Jack wouldn't see Susanna unhappy. "What did you say to Lord Bertram?" asked Jack. "I hope you were gentle. Despite a lack of a ection, it still takes courage to propose to a woman." Susanna rolled her eyes. "Lord Bertram is not very bright," she informed him. "We were walking in the rear garden. Mother allowed it despite the fact that I informed her I believed I was coming down with
typhus." Jack couldn't help but laugh. "He asked me to marry him nearly as soon as we were alone, and I knew I needed to get away from him, so I pretended to faint. Unfortunately for me, Lord Bertram believed I swoonedfor him, and he took my reaction as an acceptance. I told him "no" emphatically, and he told me that he would give me some time to think it over as "women can be fickle with their decisions"." Susanna hissed angrily. "I then told him that I needed some fresh air, and so I le him to go to the front garden. He didn't seem to question it despite the fact that we were already outside. I fled then and climbed into a hackney and asked to be brought here." Amusement le Jack's face. "You took a hackney alone?"he scolded. Susanna frowned irritably. "Really, Jack, please see my dilemma," she appealed. "When Mama finds out that I have rejected yet another suitor, she will lose her already thin patience. The season is almost over. What if she forces me to marry Lord Bertram?" "You know Adam will never allow you to be forced into anything. And
neither shall I," Jack promised her. "Despite what Mother may think, Adam has the final say on any potential husband of yours." Susanna hu ed. "I know I ought to be happy that Adam can protect me from these sorts of men, but nothing makes me feel more powerless then knowing that I have no control over the man I will marry." Jack did not know what to say to that, because he knew that Susanna
was exactly right. She had no choice in her husband. She could not accept a man and marry him without Adam's permission. They both knew that their brother was not the sort of ogre who would refuse Susanna her happiness, but Jack realised his own position was so much easier because he was a man. "Are you coming to the faire on Friday?" Susanna then asked quietly. "I would appreciate a guard, and if you and Claire were to bring Jackie then I know that Mama would be considerably distracted." Jack had asked Cecily when Jackie was born whether or not she would treat his daughter the same as she treated Perrie and Lily. Cecily had declared that she would, and it was her interactions with Jackie that were really helping to mend the two-decade long fracture in Cecily and Jack's relationship. Cecily adoredJackie, and proudly showed her o to whomever would listen. "If it will help you, then yes," Jack confirmed. He had planned to
work, but Jack then supposed that Claire deserved a day out at the faire. He had not treated her to many of the sights this season owing to his e orts at the publishing house. Susanna smiled with relief. "Thank you," she said gratefully. "The season is nearly over." Susanna sent a note home to let Cecily know that she would be dining with Jack and Claire that evening and that Cecily was welcome
to join them. Jack and Peter ensured that the printing was working successfully on the paper before they decided to retire for the day. Jack would have had conniptions otherwise if the ink had bled through to the other side of the paper a er he had spent a fortune on it. The house that Jack had leased for his family in London felt very much like home already. Really, it was the first home of his own that he had ever had, and Claire thrived in running it.
Upon returning home, Peter and Susanna went into the drawing room while Jack ascended up the stairs to find Claire and Jackie in the nursery. It was in coming home to their nursery each day that Jack had discovered Claire had a beautiful singing voice. She o en sang to Jackie when she was alone, and Jack had enjoyed teasing her about her nightingale singing voice and its contrasting snoring of a nighttime. "Lavender's blue, dilly, dilly, lavender's green,
When I am king, dilly, dilly, you shall be my queen; Call up your men, dilly, dilly, set them to work, Some to the plough, dilly, dilly, some to the cart; Some to make hay dilly, dilly, some the thresh corn; Whilst you and I, dilly, dilly, keep ourselves warm." Jack smiled as he heard the song and pushed open the nursery door. Claire was rocking Jackie in a chair, and she smiled at Jack when she
Jack wondered if there would ever come a day when he would not stare at his wife, as she simply astounded him at some point every day. A glance, a smile, or a word, and he would be stunned by her beauty and utterly perplexed as to how he had been so fortunate. "Jackie learned a new trick today," Claire informed him excitedly. "She can sit up by herself."
Jack grinned as he leaned down and kissed Jackie's head. "My clever girl," he mused. Jackie was still awake, though she was settled in her mother's arms. Jack then li ed Claire's chin and pressed his lips to hers so ly, lingering for a moment, before he pulled away. As he did, he saw Claire's eyes darken ever so slightly as she lost her momentary composure, and Jack couldn't help but smile with satisfaction. Jack took the baby from Claire and li ed her into his arms to look upon her properly. She fussed a little at the movement, but soon
settled as she looked up at the familiar face of her father. Jackie's eyes were wide and inquisitive but were not the same blue as they had been when she was born. They had begun to change, and in some lights, Jack could have sworn they were green. Her hair was still wispy, still the same shade of white blonde, and just long enough for a tiny ribbon, which his mother liked to fix whenever she was tending to the child. To those who knew, there was a resemblance to Jackie's blood father. And perhaps that resemblance would continue to grow. Jack would
not deny that this very fact would have deeply a ected him at one point. But it didn't anymore. Not at all. Whether Jackie's eyes were green or purple, it made no dierence to Jack. This baby was his, and she would be his daughter always. Blood did not make a father, but love. Arthur had married. Perhaps a month a er their duel. Jack and Claire had read about the marriage in the newspaper over their breakfast. He had married and heiress and was on an extended honeymoon on the Continent. The latter information was not found in the newspaper, but in a letter from Grace who felt she ought to mourn for the poor wife in question. Claire had expressed similar sentiments, and Jack saw no evidence of grief in Claire whatsoever. Instead of wondering over it. Jack had
grief in Claire whatsoever. Instead of wondering over it, Jack had asked Claire, sharing his worry with her in keeping with his promise to be honest. "I have no reason to grieve," Claire had assured him, "for I have everything I could ever want." Jack and Claire had since lived happily in London as husband and wife properly, getting to know one another all over again as they learned how to be exactly what the other needed. It was the happiest Jack had ever been, and he o en thought every night, before he fell asleep with Claire in his arms, that he would endure it all again if it meant he would end up here with her. "Susanna is here for dinner, and so might Mother," Jack informed Claire as he knelt down on the floor, still holding Jackie. "Susanna is here without your mother presently?" clarified Claire as Jack nodded. "Oh, dear. What happened?"
"Aunt Susanna tried to fend o a marriage proposal from a man she dislikes," Jack said in a cooing voice as he sat Jackie up on the floor. "Are you going to show Papa your new talent?" Claire quickly knelt down on the floor beside him as Jack tentatively removed his hands from Jackie's body. Sure enough, she stayed sitting upright, staring up at her cooing, proud parents with a perplexed expression. "Poor Susanna," said Claire sympathetically. "I suppose she must be relieved she had made it through the season unattached."
"I don't think Susanna would mind being attached to someone she genuinely cared for," replied Jack. "But I truly wonder if our family could be so lucky a thirdtime," he mused, turning to Claire. A smile teased the corners of her lips. "I suppose we should consider ourselves lucky then." "Oh, I do," promised Jack. "Do not you worry about that."

Finished Reading

An Earnest Favour

THE END!!

please!

I hope you enjoyed the ride!! I loved telling Jack and Claire's story

and I hope you enjoy coming back to visit them whenever you

And I hope you join me for Susanna and *insert name here*'s

story coming very soon (hopefully tomorrow night but don't

wonder if the Beresfords can be so lucky again?

happy because that means I'll surprise you.

out over what I've written.

Sigh, I love torture.

Being evil is fun:)

knows.

Vote and comment!

count your chickens!) as I'm so pumped to bring them to life. I

A Simple Deception is the title of Susanna's story, and do with

Thank you so much for your ongoing support with this story. I

know it can be frustrating having to wait a week for the next

chapter but you guys are so patient! The level of engagement I've

seen on this story has been awesome, and it makes me so happy

to go through the comments and read how much you're freaking

But we've had a big week at my house. My poor cat Jesse was

very sick and had to go to the vet hospital for three days. He had a

urinary tract blockage which the vet said could have killed him in

another 24 hours had we not got him to the vet in time. He was on

all sorts of meds to flush his kidneys and clear the blockage and

They were worried because he was like catatonic in the cage and

wouldn't eat but the minute he got home he switched back to

baby just needed to be home. He's so loving with people he

normal, hoovered his food and was all over us with a ection. My

thankfully everything went back to normal.

Thank you again for all your support.

that what you will;) Nobody had guessed yet which makes me so