16. Unsuitable Suitors

"What is it that is wrong?" My little sister repeated with increasing desperation. "Why are you so deathly pale, my love?" "Because" Edmund's voice broke, and he had to start again. "Because I think Sir Philip Wilkins might"	å°
He shook his head, unable to complete the sentence. "Oh, I may be over-interpreting things. But Ella, love, you must tell me immediately if he should send you any more flowers." An actress would have given her right arm for the perfect expression of puzzled innocence on Ella's face at that moment. But the problem was: this expression wasn't fake.	a a a
"Flowers? Edmund, what can be so important about a few flowers?" "Just promise me, my love," he said with fervour. "If what I believe is correct – oh, I shudder to think of the possibility! If what I think is correct, then every single flower from Sir Philip Wilkins is an arrow straight to my heart." "Then I shall throw them away directly," Ella exclaimed, tears in her eyes again. "What are a few flowers to me?" "No! You must not do so. You must not do anything that would arouse suspicion." Bowing his head against the iron poles and closing his eyes, he murmured: "You were right. I am beneath you. If any suspicions were to enter your aunt's mind that you had given your heart to me, all would be over between us. Do not throw the flowers away. Do not do anything unusual. Act as though I didn't exist, and you were leading the easy, trouble-free life that	33° 33°
you ought to have." I shook my head. Dear me, this was getting a bit thick. Did all people act like this when they were in love, or was it just Edmund? "Act as if you didn't exist?" cried Ella. "Edmund, without you my life would be nothing! The sun would not rise and all food would turn to ashes in my mouth!"	a [™] a [™] a [™]
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Anxiously, my little sister looked over her shoulder. "I must go. Farewell, my love," she whispered. "Farewell, oh sweet Ella, light of my life." Edmund hesitated, then plunged on: "May I ask, something of you, before we depart?" Instantly, I was wide awake! I knew it! I knew now he was going to well, he was going to do whatever rakes do when they take advantage of innocent girls! I didn't quite know what that was, though from the insinuations I had read in the papers, it couldn't be anything good.	a 255 A61 A61 A61
to me?" What?That was all? I wasn't too versed in rakishness, but I had at least expected something improper. He didn't even demand a kiss? He had to be kidding! This fellow was too decent to be real. "Oh Edmund." Again, my sister had tears in her eyes, and I was amazed to see her shake her head. "How could I? You know what my dear aunt would say? How could I so lay myself open to her disapproval and that of all my family?" STORY CONTINUES BELOW	ark ark
"But she will not know." "But my heart and conscience will."	d ⁶
I tapped my foot against the ground, impatiently. Well now, I was all for morals and stu – a er all, you couldn't have people running around in the streets naked – but this was taking things a bit too far! Throw the fellow a bone, Ella! Then I realized what I had been thinking and scowled. What was up with me? I didn't want them to end up together. Did I? Didn't I? "Please, my love," Edmund breathed, leaning closer to the poles separating him from my sister. "Just the tips of your fingers, just once. I need to know that you are real, not some apparition from the realms of angels or fairies that has come to beguile me with its loveliness."	₹33° ₹3°
But apparently, Ella's hand and her mouth weren't quite in agreement about the matter: for while her lips denied him, her small ivory hand reached out, nearing the space between two of the iron poles. Edmund watched it, breathless, and I must admit I was pretty engrossed, too. This was better than the Opera. Who knew romance could be this interesting? Finally, Ella's fingers slipped between the iron poles, and Edmund's hands flew forward, taking hold of them.	13°K 257 253
"Just a swi touch, Edmund, you promised," she said, still tears in her eyes. "And I shall keep my word. One touch." He led her fingers to his chest, to the le side where his heart was beating, and pressed them to the cloth of his tailcoat. "Here. Feel it, Ella, for it is yours. Now and forever." She gave a shaky nod, not having the words to reply. He let go of her hand, and she withdrew it, turning towards the house and hurrying away like a frightened doe.	3 823 3 4 K 648 110
I wandered back into the house some time later, deep in thought. Well, well, well. My innocent little sister conducting a secret romance behind everybody's back. In retrospect I felt like slapping myself for not noticing it earlier. I remembered very well that odd stare Edmund Conway had given me last evening as we had met in the street: yet he hadn't really been looking at me, I realized now, but rather at Ella, who had been standing right behind me. And I had asked Ella what that had been about, and she had lied. Ella, lying! The little vixen! A grin spread over my face. I suppose I should have been upset about my own sister lying to me, but to be honest I was delighted to discover she had a share of deviousness. It meant we had something more	å°
in common than simply the same parents. Now that I thought about it, I remembered, too, that morning when I had first gone to work, and Ella had immediately jumped to the conclusion that I was going o to see some young man. The joy in her face back then – it was the joy of somebody who had his own personal attachment, who knew what it was to love a man and find joy in it. I shook my head. Some people really had strange tastes. Luckily, I wouldn't have to deal with any men seeking my hand any time soon.	443 337 337
The only man I would have to deal with again soon enough would be Mr Rikkard Ambrose, and for that particular relationship I would rather need my own pair of trousers and nerves like steel than flowery bouquets and compliments. That night, I went to bed with my head full of expectations and designs for the future, both mine and my sister's. I knew they would be very dierent futures, but as I looked over at the peacefully sleeping form of my little sister, I vowed that we would both be happy and successful, even if I had to twist the arm of fate to achieve it!	394 a
The next morning we were awakened by a vehement knock on the door. Before either Ella or me had the time to rub the sleep out of our eyes, much less call 'enter', the door was thrown open and a mountain of flowers stumbled in, which on closer inspection revealed itself to be our aunt, carrying a cartload of bouquets and trying to conceal a triumphant smile. She did not do a very good job of the latter. "There! There, you see, Ella?" she exclaimed, dumping her entire load at the	ā ^t
"Flowers from Sir Philip, of course. Get dressed, girls. It is time for breakfast." She rushed out and we did as she had ordered. However, I dressed with even	ਬੇ ^ĸ ਕੇ ਕੇਂ ਕੇਂ
less care than usual. It was rather superfluous, really. It was a weekday. Soon enough I would be exchanging my dress for a pair of trousers. I felt a slight tremor run through me at the thought of encountering himagain. Fear? No, it couldn't be fear. I was never afraid. We went down and sat down to breakfast. For a change, my aunt was not in a sour mood over my uncle's absence. Her mind was more pleasantly engaged. "Only look!" She proclaimed, pointing at a particular extravagant bouquet of large roses. She had ordered Leadfield to place them all around the room in	් ්ස්*
If she expected a reply to that, she was disappointed. Personally, I didn't think it boded well at all for Ella. Ella, for her part, didn't seem to think it boded anything at all. Gertrude never spoke unless she had something serious to say, and Anne, Maria and Lisbeth, the only ones probably disposed to agree with Aunt Brank, were too green with envy to open their mouths.	307 206
Not bothered by this lack of enthusiasm, my aunt happily prattled on about her expectations, while the rest of us consumed our porridge in silence, until finally somebody felt compelled to open her mouth. "To me," remarked Gertrude quietly, "the gentleman's behaviour is not so delightful, my dear aunt. There seems something too rash in his manner. A gentleman must somehow show a lady admiration, that is true, but it is not quite right to be lavishing such expensive attentions on Ella so soon a er showing interest in another." Her gaze strayed to Maria and Anne, not quite sure on which to settle. They both stared daggers at her.	ਰੰ° ਰਾ
"Nonsense," replied my aunt, who did not know the meaning of the words 'too rash' and who would happily have seen three or more of her nieces married to Sir Philip Wilkins if English law had but allowed it. "The more attentions the better. It makes it more likely that we will be able secure him." "Secure him?" inquired Ella. "For what, pray?" "Is it not time to end your play-acting?" hissed Anne. "You've gotten what you wanted, you can boast of it now." Ella blinked at her, dumbfounded.	311 314 323 323 328
Her aunt smiled at her sweetly. "That's right dear, you go on being modest. It very well becomes you. No need to be so indelicate as to openly discuss the state of a airs until Sir Philip has acted on his resolve." That, I was sure, was a big enough clue not even for Ella to overlook – but I was mistaken. My little sister looked just as nonplussed as before. With a shake of the head, I turned from her puzzled countenance and concentrated on my porridge. It was an interesting question how, considering she was so modest as to not be able to see why anybody would want to marry her, she had managed to acquire a lover.	á²
I would have to ask her that some time. Or maybe I would find out soon enough by listening. I had already chosen the book I wanted to read that evening, when I would go into the garden again. Maybe I wouldn't even need it, if the exchange at the fence turned out to be interesting enough. The doorbell rang. Leadfield went to answer it and returned with another bouquet, which my aunt indicated he should find a vase for. More flowers arrived for Ella during the course of breakfast. I was a liberal-minded person myself, but even I began to find this a bit excessive. Our House was in a fair way to be paved and wallpapered with	190 a
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But then, Ella, for all her loveliness and amiability, had never had much sense. It was my job to make up for that. And I would see her happy, or that tradesman's brat would rue the day he ever thought to play with my little sister's feelings! Still deep in thought, I didn't look up as Leadfield came in, wheezing under the weight of the latest flowery message that promised marriage bells, no doubt. "Another bouquet from Sir Philip Wilkins for Miss Ella," he breathed, as expected and then added: "And one from another gentleman, for you, Miss	2333 251
My dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, Having received quite a number of comments from you regarding the humor in this little story of mine from you, my fabulous fans (Thank you very much for the great feedback, incidentally!!) I have, a er quite some thought on the matter, decided to alter the main genre of this little story from "Adventure" to "Humor". Storm and Silence's storyline as well as	ark at at
any other important contentual features of the story won't be altered in any way. It's merely a small cosmetic change which, in my humble opinion, suits the general spirit of the story. I hope you approve of the alteration, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen?:-) And who do you think sent Lilly flowers?;-) Yours Truly Sir Rob	ේ ස් ස් ස්
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