30. I Make Lieutenant-Pancake

"... killed every last one of the savages with my own hands. They were fearsome enemies, but my superior fighting skills struck fear into their hearts which they could not overcome."

Lieutenant Ellingham thumped his chest theatrically.

"At last, only the big grey beast was le , and so I charged forward and stuck my sabre right into its belly! It collapsed, dead on the spot!"

The Lieutenant finished his narration with a flourish of the arm, simulating a sabre thrust.

"Marvellous! Simply Marvellous!" My aunt, Maria Anne and Lisbeth applauded enthusiastically, and even Ella moved her hands together a bit, though by no means so forcefully that it could actually be heard.

"What an impeccable display of courage," Anne proclaimed, fluttering her eyelashes at the Lieutenant. "To think that you all alone went up against a raiding party of twenty-one savages, and charged such a terrifying monster as an elephant! This is the kind of bravery that made the British Empire what it is today!"

"Yes, really amazing," I yawned.

The lieutenant raised an eyebrow. "Praise from you, Miss Linton? That is a rare gi indeed. Thank you very much. I am delighted to hear you appreciate my bravery in the face of danger."

I had to work hard to keep a smile o my face. "That's not really what I was talking about. I think it's amazing that you're sitting here alive?"

"Tut! Jadue to his bravery," Maria pointed out, which the lieutenant acknowledged with a graceful bow of the head.

"More to a miracle," I disagreed. "You stabbed the elephant into its belly? From below?"

"Yes!" The lieutenant's voice was suddenly cautious. I had to say that up to this point, the conversation had rather bored me. But now I was enjoying myself.

"You see, that's what I find so amazing," I mused. "The Elephant collapsed, and you were standing right underneath. Yet you are sitting here, alive on our couch, and are not flattened to some part of the Indian soil as lieutenant-pancake."

"Eh, well... the Elephant fell to the side!"

"To the side?" I asked sweetly. "Onto the savages that you were still busy fighting o ?"

"Yes."

"The ones you said you had already killed before the elephant attacked?"

"Eh..."

"Be silent, child," My aunt choked me. Then, turning to Lieutenant Ellingham, she continued: "You must excuse my niece, Sir. She has led a very sheltered life and knows little of the ways of the world. Certainly she is totally inexperienced in such manly activities as you have described."

He nodded, graciously. "That is no problem, Madam. Maybe," he said, throwing a suggestive glance in my direction, "I could show her a few manly activities?Ben she would not be so ignorant anymore."

I thought I was going to be sick.

"Which brings me to the point of my visit," Lieutenant Ellingham continued, rising and extending his hand to me. "Which is to inquire whether Miss Lillian Linton would wish to go for a walk with me. There is a beautiful park outside your house, and I am sure there are some things she has not seen before them."

There were various possible answers to that:

Oh yes, of course there are things I haven't seen yet in the park. I've only lived here for over a decade of my life.

Or:

Hey, you can talk to me directly you know! I'm right here in the room!

Or better yet:

Go for a walk with you? I'd rather go for a walk with a drunken French sailor!

But then I saw my aunt's face over the Lieutenant's shoulder, and decided on the more diplomatic:

"Um... I don't know. I think I know my way around the park pretty well already. But thanks for the o er."

"That is no matter," he said, waving my answer away. "It is not the park I wished to see when coming here, but you. It is not the lush green trees I wish to enjoy, but your company, Miss Linton."

Ugh! So much for diplomacy!

He extended his hand farther. Over his shoulder, my aunt glared at me, pronouncing death and destruction if I made the wrong choice now. Wasn't there any way to get out of this?

Then I thought: Come on, it's only a walk. It's not like he's asking you to marry him. Well, not yet anyway. What harm can a walk do?

Preferring not to think about the answer to that question, I took his hand and faked as believable a smile as possible.

"I would be delighted to take a walk through the park," I told him, neglecting to mention that the same wasn't true for having him along as company.

He took my hand. It felt moist and alien. Holding it was a repellent feeling, like having a bug crawl up your arm. But I smiled bravely as I let him lead me out of the room. At least this would keep my aunt happy.

As we le the room, I couldn't help a thought shooting through my head: how very, very di erent this hand felt from that of Mr Rikkard Ambrose.

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"...and I was standing there, you see? Two hundred feet away from the Indian, and even farther away from the young lady he was running towards, knife in hand. I knew I couldn't reach him or her in time. Yet I also knew that I was a crack shot."

Personally, I would have called him a crackpot rather than crack shot.

I was walking beside Lieutenant Ellingham through Green Park. His promise to show new spots in the park was long forgotten. He was far too busy entertaining me with stories of his supposed adventures in India. So far, he had killed about three hundred twenty-nine so-called "savages", thirteen elephants, five lions and one gira e. Quietly I wondered whether he actually thought me stupid enough to believe above one word in ten.

"I took out my rifle, aimed, and bammi He lay dead on the ground, shot through the heart. The medicine man of his tribe had never seen a gun shot before. So he and all the other Indians believed I was a God of some sort, and freed the young lady when I commanded it."

"Excuse me?" I interrupted. "Medicine man? Tribe? I thought you were talking about Indians that live in India, not the kind that lives in America. Only those have medicine men, or tribes."

"Oh, really?" The lieutenant shrugged. "Well, maybe he was on holiday in India. These savages are strange people, you know!"

"I can think of some that are even stranger," I muttered, but he either didn't hear it, or wasn't very well-versed in sarcasm.

A er that, he didn't start telling any adventure stories again. Well, he had talked for the last half hour pretty much non-stop. Maybe it was time I contributed something to the conversation. But what could I say, apart from "Yes my have a square-face and a whitewashed smile, but you are the most odious man I ever met. Get the hell away from me right now, because I never ever wish to see you again. And by the way, I don't like you, and you smell funny."

The face of doom, otherwise known as the face of my aunt, appeared in front of my inner eye, staring at me ferociously. Oh well, I guess I could at least make a try at not to be cold.

"Eh... you seem to have led a very exciting life so far. Rescuing ladies... shooting Indians... must be fun. I mean the rescuing of ladies, not the other part."

He sighed, like a wise, worldly man talking to a silly student.

"Actually, the shooting is the part that is more fun. The ladies get tresome over time. They are always so overwhelmed by thankfulness. So many ladies have shown interest in me that I have really grown tired of what is called the fair sex."

"Oh well, if that is so, you're probably very tired of my society." I jumped at the opportunity. "I should leave you immediately."

"On the contrary." Shaking his head, he turned to me with an arrogant grin on his face. "It is that fact that made me come to you."

What?

"You're so unlike the other ladies," he continued. "Other ladies sigh and whimper to get a man's attention. You are the other kind - you are feisty! You insult me and push me back - but I've figured you out! It's your way of saying you're attracted to a man."

What the...?

"It's no great surprise, I suppose." He took a step closer to me, his eyes gleaming with some dark emotion that made me afraid all over. I remembered my earlier thoughts about what could possibly happen on a walk in the park, and the unwelcome idea occurred to me that I might be about to find out first hand.

I didn't like the expression on his face, not at all. He no longer looked like the pleasant, if slightly arrogant young man of a few minutes ago. He now looked like a very, very nasty arrogant young man. And his eyes were fixed on me.

Desperately I looked around for anybody, but we were standing hidden behind a clump of trees. No help was in sight.

"You've had no proper upbringing, aren't even a proper lady," he was saying. "But that actually could make you quite fun, you know? Ladies are very restrained, but I'm sure you would be more open to... amusement."

Taking another step forward, he leaned towards me. I didn't even know where it came from. My hand just to seem to appear out of thin air and make contact with his cheek.

Slap!

"Don't you dare touch me!" I snarled.

I thought maybe he would be angry. Or he would back o . Instead, he laughed.

"That's what I'm talking about," he chuckled. His eyes dancing. "It's really been getting annoying, so many girls throwing themselves at me because of my good looks and my position as an o icer. You're di erent. A challenge."

"I'll give you a challenge if you don't back o !" I threatened, raising my hand again. Taking a leisurely step backwards, he cocked his head.

"Plus, you're from a good family. Most of those stuck-up mothers at Sir Philip's ball wouldn't have let a poor soldier like myself near one of their daughters. But your aunt... I think she'll be happy if she could convince a beggar to take you. If I made you mine, she'd be delighted - and so would I. Granted, you don't have money, and neither does your family, so the dowry wasn't be worth marrying for, but in the military a good name is more e ers of greater worth. You have that, so you'll suit me admirably. The only thing that remains is for me to make it o icial."

"O icial? What are you talking about?"

"Why, marrying you of course."

My eyeballs almost dropped out of my head. "Marriage? I'm not getting married to anybody! And most certainly not to you!"

He sneered. "What? You'd prefer a covert thing between us? I wondered whether that might be more your style."

Covert thing? What kind of covert thing? The glint in his eyes told he was talking about something dark, something far less innocent than my little sister's secret meetings in the back garden. I had no idea what exactly, and honestly, I didn't want to find out.

"But I'm afraid I can't help you there," he continued. "I'm a gentleman, and unfortunately have to behave as such. I shall have to wait until we are married before I can start tarring you."

"Go now," I said, making my voice icy in my best imitation of Rikkard Ambrose. "Right now! Or I will scream until the entire City of London comes running!"

He hesitated - then shrugged.

"Very well, just as you like." The bastard had the audacity to wink at me! "But I will get you, make no mistake. And you know you'll enjoy it when I do."

I wondered whether there were smaller, feminine versions of that handy cane-sword that Mr Ambrose had about the other day. If so, I was going to buy myself one, with my very first pay check. Occasions like this required a weapon more e ective than a parasol.

"Who do you think you are?" I hissed at him. "You can't just say such things to me! Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I?" He raised an arrogant eyebrow. "I am your suitor."

"My what?"

"Your suitor. I want you, and I'm going to get you one way or another."

"No you won't! Not when I tell my family what you dared to say to me!"

"Oh really?" His eyebrow wandered up another inch. "I have witnessed how very, um... dear you are to your aunt. Who do you think she will believe? Bright, brilliant young lieutenant Ellingham, or a niece who can't even properly behave herself at her first ball?"

He raised his hat to me and made a slight, mocking bow.

"Good day to you, Miss Linton. I look forward to seeing you again."

And he walked away.

My dear Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Please, give me your honest opinion - on scale from one to ten, how big a sex of a bastar - ahem, I mean of course son of a bachelor, is Lieutenant Ellingham? :)

I hope you are proud of how Lilly is holding up...

Yours Truly

Sir Rob

Continue reading next part