31. Prospects of Matrimonial

him! Or bitten him! Or All right. I admit it. The thoughts that ran through my head as I walked through the streets of London, back towards home, weren't	744 C
the most romantic ones for a girl to whom a man had just as good as proposed. But then, it hadn't been one of the most romantic quasi- proposal. In fact, even I, who was definitely not an expert on quasi- proposals, could say that it had been about as romantic as a bucket of vomit. Which, by the way, was also a very fitting description of my suitor. "Bloody bastard! Oh, the next time I see him, I'll I'll"	120 50 50 10 10 10 10 10
"Bloody bastard! Oh, the next time I see him, I'll I'll" I couldn't even find the words. Maybe I would have to sneak into the room where Mr Ambrose was holding Simmons, to get some inspiration on torture.	305 0
"Something spiky with wicked screws, maybe!" Only when I got home and saw my aunt's delighted harpy-smile as she looked at the latest flowers Lieutenant Ellingham had sent did I fully realize the son of a bachelor had been right. Bugger! She really expects me to marry him!	136 138 138 138
A shiver ran down my back when I also realized that I was not in a good position to do anything against it. I was still under age. My legal guardian could dispose of me however they wished – and my aunt was very e icient in the disposal of rags, hen droppings, penniless relatives and other garbage. Even were I already an adult, what could I do? I was dependent on	404
others to pay for the food I ate, the bed I slept in and the roof over my head. It was those people that ruled my life. I had no money of my own. Or at least the thought shot through my head, that was true until	203 0
very recently. "Thank the Lord!" I breathed. Never before had I been so glad that I had run into a certain, stone-	⁴ ບ ^ຈ ັບ
faced businessman that day on the way to the polling station. Never had I been so glad that I had taken the leap towards my own freedom. And never ever had I been so grateful towards Mr Ambrose. He could have turned me away. In fact, there had probably been nothing he wanted to do more. Yet instead he had kept his word and given me a chance. My fingers travelled into the folds of my petticoats, where the ring of	,326
keys was artfully concealed. More than that: he had given me his trust. And soon, hopefully, he would give me some money. I just had to hold out until then.	437 0 257
Head held high, I started up the porch stairs, passed my aunt, ignoring her chattering. Now that my harrowing encounter with the lieutenant was over, my exhaustion returned with renewed force. I needed to lie down, and quickly, or I would just keel over and take a nap on the floor.	a a
"No," I groaned into my pillow.	°a ™a ™a ∩a
There was a pause. Then: "Um this might be a silly question but is he the young man you went to meet the other day, is he? The one you have feelings for?" With a gargantuan e ort, I raised my head from my pillow and turned	a a a a a a
"Oh!" Ella's expression brightened.	າ ດ ຈາດ ຈາດ ສັດ •••
"Honestly, Ella, me and that creep? How could you possibly think I have any feelings for him whatsoever, apart from abject horror and disgust?" "He wasn't that bad," Ella tried to console me. "Although I must	4 3
admit I was very frightened by the way he treated those people and that poor grey animal. What did he call it again? An Elephont?" "Elephant," I corrected.	977 0 81
"Exactly." Ella shook her head sadly. "I mean, did he have to stab it? He could have tried talking to it, or petting it. Grandmother's chickens always let me pet them when I visit, and they're perfectly friendly if you show them some a ection." "Don't worry," I moaned and rolled over on my side to face her. "Do	1.2K
not let the poor elephant's plight torture your heart. There was no fight in India, ergo there was no Elephant and no stabbing in the belly." "What?" A frown appeared on Ella's lovely forehead. "But Lieutenant	168
Ellingham said" I gave a sigh. "I will tell you a great secret, Ella, if you promise not to tell anybody." "Oh of course!"	മ, മം
"Not everything a man says to a woman must necessarily be true." I sank deeper into my pillow, snuggling into the so-down feathers. I know it would take Ella a while to adjust to the concept of such a thing as a dishonourable or lying man – certainly enough time for me to get a nap. So I slowly dried o into the realm of Morpheus, where I happily chased thieves over roo ops, cut onions into slices, and didn't have to worry about catastrophes such as an impending engagement to the biggest bastard of London.	1_4K
~~**~* My eyes fluttered open. The first thing I saw was Ella, who was sitting beside me on the bed, staring down at her fingers in deep contemplation. When she noticed I was awake, she looked at me.	ຳ້ວ
"You mean you mean the Lieutenant was lying" I sneaked a glance at the old grandfather-clock in the corner of the room. Two hours and twenty-six minutes. Not bad. "Exactly. You've figured it out. Bravo!"	1,4K 656 191
"But that's horrible!" I shrugged. "Well, depends how you look at it. Lying can be quite useful sometimes, you know. For instance when there's something going on in your life you don't want anybody to know."	46 462
Ella's cheeks turned as red as a ripe tomato. I had been thinking of my new occupation when speaking, but it was clear that her thoughts were on something very dierent, or rather somebody. "Um I suppose so," she managed.	තී කී
 "And? Tell any good lies lately?" I inquired lightly, propping myself up on my elbows to get a better look at her. "No! I didn't. Definitely not!" "I see." As hard as I tried, I couldn't keep the grin o my face. Ella, who seemed desperate to change the subject, blurted out: 	දී සීත් තී
"But what will you do? I mean, if Lieutenant Ellingham isn't the young man you've been seeing, what will you do? If he continues to pay attention to you, Aunt Brank will expect you to marry him, you know." "Oh yes, I know. But then, that's no surprise since Aunt Brank would expect me to marry any willing creature in trousers who walked	
through the door downstairs, just to get me out of the house." I rolled my eyes. "What will you do?" Ella repeated, anxiously. "How will you reconcile yourself to having to say goodbye to your true love and marrying somebody else?"	249 241
Oh right! Ella was still convinced that every time I went to work, I was going on secret rendezvous with my mystery lover. Opening my mouth, I was about to explain to her that I didn't have and never would have a love in my life, when it occurred to me that this would raise a whole lot of questions regarding my frequent absence. So I just said:	142
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"No! You can bet your best silk parasol on that!" "But that would mean defying Aun ! " I clapped my hands. "Bravo! You didn't even need two hours to figure that one out."	43 579 639
"Tell me, my dear sister." Eagerly, Ella knelt down on the bed beside me and clasped my hands. "How would you do it? How would you bring yourself to walk up to her and say: 'No! I do not want to marry this man, for my heart belongs to another!'" "Err well, I would just do it."	198 101
Apart from the my-heart-belongs-to-another part. "Oh Lilly!" Ella embraced me with all the strength and sisterly a ection she was capable of. And while she didn't have much of the former, she had plenty of the latter. "You're so brave. How I wish I had your courage. And you will truly rebel? Set against yourself against this marriage with everything you have?"	482 0
"Yes," I said. "I will not marry Lieutenant Ellingham."	מי מי מי
"No, not him! About your young man! The one you see on your rendezvous! The one whose love inspires you to such bravery!" My mouth dropped open. Never in a million years had I expected that my brilliant excuse would backfire like this. What the hell could I tell her? I had absolutely no idea. I had absolutely no interest in men. What were women supposed to find attractive in men? Why would they lose their mind and fall in love with one?	,696 C
they lose their mind and fall in love with one? Dear Lord, I had to tell her something, but what? Who from my acquaintance could I pick as my supposed lover? The only men I'd known for more than a couple of moments were my father, who was dead for years, and my uncle Bu ord, both of which were, for obvious reasons, not good candidates. Should I pick one of the men from Sir Philip's ball? But to be honest, I couldn't remember a single one of them. Men just never seemed very important to me. They slipped my	đ
mind as soon as I le their company. Well, except perhaps for one. A face appeared in front of my eyes. "Um well" I began. "Come on," Ella urged. "Don't be shy."	166 674 7 7 7 335
"Err he's tall, with dark hair and dark, sea-coloured eyes, almost black." She clapped her hands eagerly, like an excited little girl. "Oh, that sounds so dreamy and mysterious." "You can say that again!" Too mysterious for my liking he still	70 194
"You can say that again!" Too mysterious for my liking he still hadn't breathed a word about the contents of that infernal file. Could there be something government-related in it? But if anything, Mr Ambrose struck me like the type who did what he wanted without reference to any government, his own or anybody else's. "Is he good-looking?" "W-what?" I resurfaced from my thoughts, Caught o guard, the words escaped me: "Yes, he is, definitely."	42 159 481
 words escaped me: "Yes, he is, definitely." Oh God! What have I just said? But if I was being honest, it was true. Blast! "He he has a chiselled face, and I mean literally chiselled: angular, and hard as stone. Maybe good-looking isn't even the best word to describe him. Beautiful would be better. A harsh beauty." The image of the face in front of my inner eye intensified, and an 	481 583 263 263
unwilling smile crept on my face. "As for the rest of him He has a figure like an antique statue, you know? A bit like Myron's Discus Thrower, though he would never dream of assuming such an undignified position." I giggled. "He walks around most of the time as if he has an iron rod up his behind. He's very serious, cool and distant, and about as free with his money	5 32
He's very serious, cool and distant, and about as free with his money as Uncle Brank. He always does what he wants, and nasty things happen to people who get in his way." Hmm Perhaps I wasn't doing a very good a job of portraying him as the fellow I was desperately in love with. Shouldn't a lovable man have onegood quality, at least? So I hurriedly added: "But I think he actually may have a good heart, very, very, very deep down."	4 ^K
 Who knew, it might actually be true. He had taken me on, a er all. But not as a gir,lsaid a nasty little voice in the back of my mind. I shook my head, trying to concentrate. "Oh Lilly!" Ella gripped both of my hands with hers. "I'm so happy for you! He sounds amazing, like a modern-day Mr Darcy." "Hardly," I muttered, smirking at the comparison. "Hewouldn't spend ten-thousand pounds on anybody, let alone me." 	
Ella's smile only widened. "It sounds like you're very fond of him." "Does it?" My eyebrows shot up. Apparently, I had done a better job than I'd thought. I had completely fooled her, and made her believe I was in love with Mr Ambrose. I had no idea my acting skills were this developed. It seemed that male impersonations weren't the only thing I did well in that regard.	516 95 70 70 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72 72
 "And his name?" Ella continued eagerly. "Tell me, who is he?" Oops My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, 	17K 501 501
My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, What do you think of our dear Lilly's description of Mr Ambrose? For a young lady who is most certainly not and never ever shall be in love and if she shall than most definitely not with himof all people, she's doing an excellent job of pretending, isn't she? As Shakespeare said, 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks' ;-)	27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 27 2
;-) Do you agree with Shakespeare, my noble readers? ;-) Yours Truly Your Victorian Scribbler Sir Rob	ਹੈ ਵਿੱਚ 10 10 10 10
P.S. I have included an image of Myron's Discus Thrower in this installment, the Ancient Greek marble sculpture to which Lilly compares Mr Ambrose.	ਯੂ ਯੂਪੂ ਯੂਪੂ
Myron's Discus Thrower: a famous Ancient Greek marble statue, which shows a (somewhat scantily dressed and impressively muscled) Olympian athlete in the middle of throwing a discus. The statue was made by one of the most well-known artists of Ancient Greece, named Myron. Myron's Discus Thrower, even today, is one of the most significant artworsk surviving from Ancient Greece, despite the tiny fact that, during its long and comlex history, one of the statue's arms was broken o and, later, missatached in the wrong position. If the marble discuss thrower	

a spectators. Mr Darcy: A reference to the hero of Jane Austen's famous novel 'Pride and Prejudice', which some see as the first modern romance novel. SPOILER ALERT: For those who haven't read it: The hero spends ten thousand pounds to save the heroine's sister from disgrace, although his love for her has been rejected. But no worries, they end up together in the end ;-) 251 d

across the arena, but right into the stands filled with eager

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