

36. Sisters' Battles

"Ah, Sir Philip!"	49
Both of them looked around as they heard the voice of the unexpected intruder—sweet little me. When Ella realized who it was, I saw startled relief on her face. When Wilkins realized who it was I saw startled startledness on his face. I marched over to the thin young man with the big ears, and more or less shoved my hand into his face, so he was obliged to press a kiss on it.	239
"Oh, err... Miss Linton?"	41
I nodded graciously, and then let him have it.	25
"Sir Philip, I'm so delighted to meet you again! I can't say how happy I am to be able to thank you in person for that wonderful ball you gave me the other night! The ballroom looked so beautiful, all those exotic potted plants, and the little table with the exquisite snacks! There was even solid chocolate! Did I tell you that I only had solid chocolate once before? It is one of my favourite things! As I was saying, it was simply wonderful – and I mean the ball, not the chocolate, although that was pretty nice too. Such wonderful decorations, and delightful music, and such incredibly mindless baboons for guests, and the chandeliers glittered so pretty, I thought I might faint!"	255
Sir Philip stared at me nonplussed. He was probably still trying to figure out how to fit the 'mindless baboons' into the long line of compliments. I wasn't going to give him enough time for that, though.	144
"And the music. It was simply so enchanting! But I already said that, didn't I? Dear me, my memory sometimes isn't the best one. You know, Sir Philip, I was particularly impressed with the architecture of your beautiful house. I have always had a passion for architecture," I lied smoothly. "Can you tell me who was responsible for such a monument to the modern science of building?"	25
"I believe a man called Bartley did the main design, Miss..."	26
"How wonderful! How interesting. How old is he? Has he designed any other buildings? Where does he live? Does he have any children? Did he design his own home? How long did it take him to build yours? It is so large and majestic, it must have taken him at least five years. I was so impressed by it."	491
"I... can see that."	192
Looking at me strangely, Sir Philip edged away from the window where he had been standing, towards the only empty seat beside Ella on the Sofa. Maybe he was thinking about protecting her from her seemingly deranged sister. Maybe he was thinking she could protect him. But I wasn't having any of that! Quickly, I slid into the seat beside Ella before he could, and smiled up at him.	272
"You must tell me all about him. Please, I have a ravenous desire for knowledge. Please oblige me."	27
A peer of the British Empire couldn't just ignore a plea from a lady, could he?	170
....*..*..*	23
Approximately three hours later, I, Ella and Sir Philip left the drawing room, the latter with a slightly dazed look on his face. My aunt was just coming down from my uncle's room, looking disgruntled. In all probability, she had just been refused money to buy sweetmeats for Sir Philip, after having discovered that we had no ingredients for proper snacks in the house.	25
Her face lit up instantly when she saw caught sight of the three of us standing in the hallway.	2
"Oh, my dear Sir Philip," she trilled. "Are you leaving already? I'm so sorry for that. I was just getting something ready..."	22
"Do not make the effort, Madam, I beg of you," he cut her off – and he actually sounded as if he were begging. "As you have noted, I am just about to leave. It has been a charming evening. Thank you so much for your hospitality. And thank you, Miss Ella, for your time."	140
"It was my pleasure," mumbled Ella.	2
"And, um... thank you, Miss Lillian, for that... um... very interesting talk."	247
"It was my pleasure," I said with a smile. So what if it was slightly sadistic?	251
While Wilkins hurried away to snatch his hat and overcoat on the hanger, my aunt sidled up to me. "And? Were you near enough to the door to hear something?" she asked in a low voice, not aware that I had been in the room the entire time. "What was the topic of conversation?"	44
"Height, beauty and proportions, mainly, I think," I said.	188
My aunt's eyes flicked to Ella, going up and down her figure proudly. "Oh! That is good, very good indeed! And what feature did he find particularly appealing? Her eyes? Her form?"	23
"I think the chandeliers and windows was what he found most beautiful."	163
"Chandeliers? Lilly, what are you talking...?"	20
Quickly, she cut off as Sir Philip stepped back towards us and performed another bow.	2
"I take my leave of you, Madam. But I hope soon to return for a tête-à-tête with your beautiful niece."	24
That remark wiped all annoyance from my aunt's face and plastered it on mine instead. Darn it! I would have thought my three-hour intensive treatment might be enough to put him off. Apparently not. It wouldn't be enough for Ella to have annoying relatives to chase him away. He would have to discover that she herself was deficient in some major way...	49
Doubtfully, I glanced at Ella's beautiful face and demure demeanour. That was going to take some work.	2
When the door had closed behind him, my aunt clapped her hands, my comment about chandeliers long forgotten.	2
"Girls!" She exclaimed. "We have him! Ella, this man will be your husband as sure as grass is green and the sky is blue!"	253
Ella paled, and grasped the wall to support herself. My aunt noticed neither.	22
"When it rains, the sky is grey," I pointed out. "And when it's hot in the summer, grass can grow brown."	255
"Oh, don't be a stick-in-the-mud, Lilly! The two of them will get their happy-end, I'm sure of it! Just as will you and Lieutenant Ellingham. Did I tell you that he's going to come around for a visit, too?"	477
"What?!" I turned to face her, horror written all over my face.	23
Of course, my aunt didn't take the trouble to read it. Or maybe she was an emotional illiterate.	20
"Yes, yes. Isn't it exciting?" She threw her arms up into the air. "My two favourite nieces, married in one go!"	134
I started to object to this, wanting to point out that firstly, I wasn't married yet, not even engaged, and secondly, I had never been her favourite niece, but she rushed off before I could say anything, probably to make some preparations for the arrival of Lieutenant Ellingham.	26
I didn't know what she did.	2
I didn't really care.	21
But I soon found out that she needn't have bothered.	21
The Lieutenant didn't arrive. We waited for an hour. Still, he didn't arrive. We waited for another hour. Still, there was no sign of him. At Aunt Brank's supreme command, I sat at the drawing room window, forced to look out for him. Only once did I actually see a flicker of movement out on the dark street—but when I looked, it wasn't the Lieutenant, but a rather large gentleman in turban, stooping over something on the ground. Funny... from this distance he looked almost a bit like Karim.	564
The lieutenant, however, never came. I would have been ready to leave for a long time, but my aunt insisted Ella and I stay in the drawing room to greet our guest. After three hours, even she finally gave up hope, and marched out of the room, muttering things under her breath that were definitely not ladylike.	154
Ella looked after her, uncertainly, then back at me.	2
"What do you think could have prevented him from coming?" She whispered, as if he was in the room with us and could hear her if she spoke too loud.	214
"I don't know," I said, the beginnings of a disbelieving grin on my face. "God's mercy? A miracle? A nice, bloody train accident?"	234
"Lilly! You shouldn't say such things!"	22
I grinned at her.	2
"Why? What's wrong with God's mercy?"	146
"You know what I mean. Stop teasing me."	27
"Why, when it's such tremendous fun?" I sprang up from my seat and did a little twirl around the room, more graceful than I had ever done in a ballroom. "Can it be that I am free? What joy is this, what wondrous joy?"	164
Ella let out a little laugh.	20
"Dear me, Lilly, I had no idea you were so poetic."	200
"I'm not. Not when I'm sane, at least. But tonight I feel a mad happiness coming over me! Is this just a dream, or is he really not here?"	43
"It's one-hundred per cent real."	21
"Really? You promise?"	191
"I do, Lilly, I do."	23
Quickly, I went to her and knelt in front of her, grasping her delicate hands. "Do you think he's gone for good? Do you think it's possible I might be free of him?"	146
She shrugged, still laughing. "How should I know?"	2
"Or maybe he's just been detained somewhere this once," I fretted. "Maybe he'll show up here tomorrow morning, just as obnoxious as ever!"	4
"Maybe," Ella admitted.	2
"You're not helping! You're supposed to soothe and encourage me! You're my sister, after all!"	24
"Or maybe not," she hurriedly added. "He's in the army, after all. Maybe he's been stationed in some colony. Gibraltar, maybe."	111
"Gibraltar? Why so near? Why not the Caribbean? Or better yet, India! Somewhere in the jungle where he can get eaten by tigers!"	154
We started to giggle like little girls. We couldn't help it.	198
"I don't know what has happened," Ella said, finally, when he had control of ourselves again. "But although I definitely wish him no harm, I wish he's out of your life forever." She encircled me in her slender arms and hugged me. "Then you can maybe find true love and happiness."	164
"Love? Me?"	194
"Of course! With that young man of yours you told me of."	22
"Oh... yes! Of course, with him! I had nearly forgotten how much I am in love, sorry."	498
That night, I went to bed, exhausted with happiness, still wondering what could possibly have happened to Lieutenant Ellingham. To some extent, I was also afraid. Was it unreasonable to hope he was gone for good? Would he return and try and catch me in the eternal trap of matrimony? And finally, the most intriguing question: Why had he vanished at all? Was it an accident? A miracle? Or had someone done this? What, or who, could have that much power?	104
After a while, I stopped my useless wondering, and as my mind drifted closer to sleep, the worries over Lieutenant Ellingham fell away, and unconscious thoughts drifted to the forefront of my mind. Thoughts of another man that had been there all along, hidden beneath the surface.	20
You are lovely.	124
He had said that, hadn't he? It hadn't just been my imagination?	22
My eyes fell closed, and I began to dream of showers. I had no idea bathroom appliances could be that interesting.	224
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My Dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,	21
I'm quite certain we all wish our dear heroine pleasant dreams, right? ;) I sincerely hope you're all impressed with her talents as a professional windbag in her attempt to distract Sir Philip Wilkins.	21
Yours Truly	21
Sir Rob	21
P.S: By the way, would you like to make a guess what (or who) could have prevented Lieutenant Ellingham from coming to pay our dear Lilly a visit...? ;-)	220