56. The Importance of Being Nice

"Please, Mr Linton." That broad smile still on his face, Mr Ambrose gestured for me to come in. "Please don't just stand there. Close the door behind you and sit down, please." A smile.	· ** 10 10
He had a smileon his face. Rikkard Ambrosehad a smileon his face. And he had said please I tried to remember whether he had ever said please to me before, and couldn't recall a single instance. And now he had said it three times in a row	
Maybe I was still asleep. Maybe this was dream and I wake up soon. "Won't you sit down, please?" He repeated, still displaying that dazzling smile. Don't be a fool, Lilly! A tiger smiles too-but that's no reason to sit	€ 10 10 10 10
down next to it! But Mr Ambrose's smile It transformed his whole face. Where previously there had only been harshness, there now was splendour and magnificence. It nearly took my breath away. If I had thought he was handsome before, that was nothing compared to the sight that was now in front of me.	472 608
He gestured to a chair, again inviting me to sit. Don't! Don't do it! I was about to take a step back-when Mr Ambrose stepped towards	a 11 299
me and, looking deep into my eyes, took my hand. At the feel of his touch, a shock shot up my arm. His touch wasn't harsh as I had expected, nor was it gentle. It was just right. My hand lay in his as if it had been made to be there. Listen to yourself! You sound like Ella!	1_4K 468
"Come," he ordered. Only it wasn't the kind of order he usually gave. Not a "Bring my file XYZ!" shouted in a voice like a sergeant major on mission in Antarctica. No, this time his voice was full of a darker, deeper meaning I couldn't hope to fathom. My feet started to move without consulting my brain.	Ťa °a
Oh well, if this was a dream, I might as well enjoy it while it lasted. A chance to sit down in the presence of his Mightiness Mr Ambrose the cold and terrible might not come so quickly again, even in a dream world. I let myself be led over to one of the empty chair in an outrageously unfeminist manner, unable to take my incredulous eyes o his smiling face. When I sat, he didn't immediately take a seat himself, but instead just stood there, holding my hand, gazing into my eyes. "Are are you quite well?" I asked, carefully. Maybe this was real a er	
all and he just had a touch of brain fever. "Yes, I'm very well, Mr Linton. Thank you very much for your concern."	450 1 12K
The fourth "thank you" in one morning! Something was clearly wrong with him!	~
"Are there no more files to go through?" Looking around, I saw that there was nothing on his desk. The door to my o ice, which yesterday had been open practically all day, was firmly closed. "No, Mr Linton, no files today."	179 0 534
He still hadn't let go of my hand. It felt as if it were smoldering. With his thumb, he started rubbing circles on my palm, heating the delicious burn to even higher temperatures.	з.9К С
"And" My voice sounded a little o for some reason. "And letters to write? Is there correspondence?"	đ
"No, Mr Linton. No letters, either." Now, his other fingers had joined the fun, caressing the back of my hand in a complex pattern that played havoc with the rhythm of my heart. This sort of thing surely wasn't part of my contract! What the hell was going on? I should wrench my hand out of his grasp and	44°
demand an apology! Yes! I definitely should! Only I didn't.	а 169
"I" That was all I managed. One syllable. That's how dry my mouth was.	් ක්
I cleared my throat. "I I don't" Yay! Two syllables!	a1 345
Again, I cleared my throat. "I don't understand." An entire sentence! Yes! I did it! Thank you, God!	a⁴ ≊°
Still smiling, he trailed his thumb up and down between my fingers, leaving flames in its wake. How could a man as cold as he set me on fire like this? It was unfair! And certainly unfeminist! I had go get my act together!	799
"Not understand, Mr Linton?"	230 235
"No, Sir." That was putting it mildly. My world was doing a handstand, everything was upside down. And Mr Ambrose was still smiling at me. His teeth were brilliantly white and even, flawless like the rest of his face that seemed to be hewn out of white stone by a master artist.	a a
"What don't you understand?" Letting go of my hand, he settled down comfortably in the chair beside me. Gasping with relief, I snatched my hand back and sat on it. Then, realizing that this might be construed as showing that he a ected me in some way - which of course he did not! - I quickly	
pulled it out again and folded both hands in my lap. "What don't you understand?"	283 116
A very good question. I could start with the furniture. The chairs we were sitting in hadn't been in this o ice the last time, and neither had the small table around which they were arranged, adjacent to one another. Whenever I had spoken to Mr Ambrose before, whether sitting or standing, I had been facing him head-on. Now I was sitting beside him.	176
And more importantly: we weren't having an argument. It felt weird. Extremely weird.	å
"What don't you understand?" "Well " I hesitated. "Why haven't we started to work yet? Why are we sitting here?"	รัซ ซื
And why the heck are you being so darn nice? He shrugged. "Well, I thought we should talk instead of work today."	a a² a²ĸ
"Talk?" I echoed. "Yes, talk." He sounded as if it were his favorite hobby, and there was	đ
nothing strange about us sitting down for a nice chat. "In any working relationship, it is important to establish a friendly, comfortable atmosphere. To work e iciently together, it is indispensable to get to know and trust one another." I wanted to say "So when did you reach that epiphany? Was it before	2.5K
or a er you hounded me like a slaverunner yesterday?' But before I could get the words out, he leaned forward and stroked	,627 Cl
one long, smooth finger down my cheek. Just one finger. "I want to get to know you, MissLinton. I want to get to know you much better." My heart stopped. I'm not joking. It literally stopped right then and	ца К
there. What was I going to say again? Something snarky, and not very nice. The words were suddenly gone from my mind. He called you Miss! He called you Miss! He practically admitted you female! And that finger on your cheek	ire
I cleared my throat. Somehow, it had gotten dry again already. "Well I suppose you're right." Cocking his head like a predator on the prowl, Mr Ambrose leaned closer, almost blinding me with the shine of his smile. I could feel his breath on my cheek, right next to my finger. I had never felt anything	1,2K
like this before in my life-mostly, because I had always stabbed a man in the gut with my parasol before he could get so close to me. But somehow, I didn't feel like doing this to Mr Ambrose.	,682 C
"So glad to hear you agree with me," he murmured into my ear. "Here, have one of these." Something white dright and into my line of sight A plate of hisquits. Mr	840 C
Something white dri ed into my line of sight. A plate of biscuits. Mr Ambrose was o ering me a tray of biscuits! And by the looks of them, not cheap ones either!	Ť
	355 d
This has to be a dream! But the biscuits looked tasty, and I never said no to a tasty morsel, especially if it was sweet. Never mind that I was only dreaming it. I	

"You mean you shouting at me a lot? Yes, I recall that."	13к 316
For a moment his smile seemed to flicker. But it was over so quickly that I wasn't sure. I had probably just imagined it. Li ing the rest of the biscuit to his mouth, he swallowed it whole, his eyes trained on me. "Ah" he sighed. "A tasty morsel."	.846 432 1.9K
I felt an involuntary shiver run down my back. His voice alone was more seductively sweet than all the biscuits in the world. And from the way he looked at me, he knew that. What was going on here? "I'm actually not referring to the day when you first came into my	1.9K 837
o ice and we had our first altercation, Miss Linton. I'm talking about our very first meeting in the street. Do you remember?" He sighed nostalgically. "You did me a singular service that day, Mr Linton - saving me from my own folly. And then you went into that building, and later were forced out of it by two policemen. Do you remember that, too?"	43 4
I took another bite of biscuit and nodded absent-mindedly. "It's not the kind of thing you're likely to forget."	đ
Before I could try to flee, before I could even tense or start to think, he had leaned forward and taken my hand again. His fingers were trailing over mine, reigniting the fire. "What kind of building was it again those cads dragged you away from? A polling station?"	454 470 530
"Y-yes, it was." "I see. Another biscuit, Miss Linton?" "No, I"	ບ "ເປົ້າ ແລ
Before I could finish my sentence, he had picked up one of the biscuits from the plate and was li ing it to my mouth. The sweet little thing tickled my lips, enticing them to open. They did.	злк
"And?" Mr Ambrose asked, his eyes boring into mine, his fingers still setting my body hand on fire. "Everything to your taste?" "Y-yes. Very much so, Sir. Thank you."	405 0 329
He li ed his hands in a depreciating gesture, and I quickly tucked my tingling hand away again. To hell with looking unfeminist, it was simple self-preservation! "No need to thank me." There was that smile again. "By the way why were you at the polling station? Are you interested in politics, Mr Linton?"	°°°
I couldn't suppress a smirk. "You could say that." Suddenly he clapped his hands together. "Of course! You were wearing the same attire then as you are wearing today, weren't you? Your masculine attire. And I remember the policemen saying something about what you had attempted. I didn't pay much attention at the time, because honestly, I was rather startled, but nov I understand! You were trying to vote, weren't you?"	a 70 70
"Yes, I was." My smirk grew into a full-blown grin - but then it abruptly turned into a grimace. "Didn't turn out that well, though." "Do not be disconsolate," he said, leaning forward, actually having a kind expression on his face. Kind? Mr Ambrose?This dream got weirder and weirder by the second. "In any fight, there's always	,393 C
another day. And from what I know of you, you have hardly given up.' "Well, you're right about that." "Is that issue something you feel passionately about? That women	351 27
should be allowed to vote?" I was touched. He really sounded interested, and his smile was so friendly Maybe he had finally gotten over his irrational aversion to having a lady working for him. Maybe he regretted his outburst of yesterday and wanted to make it up to me. Maybe this was real a er all.	1,2K
"I feel passionately about living my life as I wish to," I told him earnestly. "And I don't care for people telling me I cannot simply because I am a girl, and not a man."	a 135
He regarded me with shrewd eyes. "So your quest for free will and independence - it's not just political?" "Would I be sitting here if it were?"	ත් අ
"I suppose not." His shining smile faded a little, and his eyes became more questioning. "Why do you do it? Why did you come here and seek work?"	1° 254
Strangely, although his friendly smile was waning, he sounded even more interested than before. And so I answered: "I don't want to be dependent on anybody. I don't want to wear chains."	162 162
"You could marry," he suggested, touching my hand again and sending sparks all the way up my arm. "I'm sure that there would be many interested gentlemen." Not bothering to point out the unlikeness of that, I shook my head.	a* a
"Chains of gold are still chains, Mr Ambrose. I want to decide what to do with my life." I hesitated, and then enquired: "Why are you so interested?"	, 8 63
Suddenly, the beaming smile was back in full force.	316 21
"I am simply trying to get to know you a little better," he said, spreading his arms in a gesture of innocence. "I find that it is always much easier to achieve one's aims if one knows about people." I had to admit, some part of me was flattered. Suddenly, I couldn't really meet his eyes, but had to look down at the floor, abashed. He was being so nice. I knew how to shout at nasty Mr Ambrose. I didn't really know to say to nice Mr Ambrose who touched my hand	
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loud enough for the entire park to hear.

I shuddered. That image was followed by one of Flora regarding me with wide, fear-filled eyes. She wouldn't be able to sleep at night if she knew what I was up to during the day! I could tell Patsy, maybe, at some later point, but there was no way of tipping her o while the others were there.	ም መ
I made my decision. Squaring my shoulders, I started o again, and soon a er had reached our little bench by the pond where we always met. The others were already there, passing around several large cardboards and chattering excitingly. Eve spotted me first and started waving like mad. The others turned and beamed at me.	ส้
"Ah! Our general has arrived!" Patsy proclaimed. "Ready to inspect your troops before our attack on the chauvinists of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland?" "Well, yes but" "Look here," Patsy continued, interrupting me. "We made signs! This is mino."	ង្ហ ស រ
is mine." She held up a large cardboard sign on which she had painted in large, bold, red letters: VOTES FOR WOMEN NOW!!	ซี ซี ซี
"And this is Flora's," she said, holding up another sign. It read, in elegant cursive script: Please consider granting votes to women at the earliest opportunit Thank you. My lips twitched. "I think I would have been able to tell which of you made which.	ส์ _{y.} ส์
Patsy " I swallowed. Now was the time. There was no way around it. "Patsy, there's something I have to tell you all."	තී තී තී
"Yes, what is it?" "I I have to" I stopped, not knowing what to say. The smile slowly disappeared from her face.	່ສ ສິ ສ
"What's wrong? Has something happened to Ella? Has that fellow Wilkins" "No, no," I hastened to assure her. "It's nothing like that. Ella is fine." "What's the matter, then? You look strange."	ີ ຜູ
I swallowed again. Why did my throat have to be so darn dry? It wasn't like I was planning to commit a murder. Only, it was nearly as bad. They had all looked so happy a moment	a a
ago. Now they looked at me with anxious faces. My friends - the best friends in the world. The people I was going to have to disappoint. "Well not to beat around the bush to come straight to the point I can't come tomorrow." "I don't understand," Eve said, a puzzled frown on her face.	€ 10 10 10 10 10
"To the demonstration. I can't come to the demonstration at in Hyde Park tomorrow." "What? Patewhad a correct major's voice, and when she used it to full a set	a° a
Patsy had a sergeant major's voice, and when she used it to full e ect, the result was deafening. Wincing, I took an involuntary step back. "Look, it wasn't my choice. I didn't mean to" "You can't mean that, Lilly! You can't possibly mean that!"	a⁵ a² a
She advanced on me, hands on hips, a thunderous expression on her normally so cheerful face. With relief I noted that her parasol was leaning a few yards away against the bench. "A er all the preparation we did, all the planning we put into this?	tan
Now you want to draw in your tail and run?" "It's not like that, Patsy, really. I never" "And it was you who came up with the idea in the first place! I thought you were a rebel! I thought you despised oppression just as	a a
much as we do!" "Well," Flora dared to venture, "I don't exactly despise op" Patsy shot her a steely look. "Shut up! You'll despise oppression if I say you despise oppression, understand?"	*ื่อ *ื่อ *ื่อ *ื่อ
"Yes, Patsy. Of course, Patsy." "Look," I tried to reason with her. "It's not like the demonstration won't happen. I mean, you will all be there, right? Goal achieved."	æ° d⁵
"But youwon't." Eve's voice was much more quite than usual. She was looking at me, her eyes large, and if I wasn't mistaken I could see a bit of moisture shimmering in them. "It'll feel like a defeat if you aren't there!"	256 C
The words touched me - they more than touched me. They cut me to my very core, sharp and merciless. "I'm sorry," was the only thing I could think of saying. "I'm really sorry."	*ื่ รื
Seeing that I meant it, the moisture in Eve's eyes spilled over. "You can't do this!" Patsy stomped over to the bench. At first I thought she was going for	136 d
her parasol and retreated a few steps, but she picked up a piece of cardboard which had been leaning next to the parasol. "Here!" She held out the cardboard to me. "That's the sign we made for you!" My throat felt suddenly dry. The sign red in letters even bolder than hers:	প্য ক্ষ
VOTES FOR WOMEN, FELLOWS OR ELSE! I could hardly hold back my tears. How could I desert them at a time like this? But I couldn't do anything else.	а 11 ^к 27
"I'm terribly sorry," I repeated, feeling tears sting my eyes. One of them rolled down my cheeks and fell on the sign and smeared the paint. "But I can't. I simply can't be there." "Why? Is something the matter with Ella?" "No, not with Ella."	ນ. ນ <u>.</u>
"Then what is it?" Patsy demanded. "What is so terribly important that you would abandon us?" "I I can't tell you."	u a⁴ a²
It took me about two seconds to see that that had been the wrong answer. Patsy's eyes flashed. "Oh, of course. Of course you can't tell us Because we're only your best friends in the world. Why would we	a
deserve your honesty or your confidence?" "Patsy It's not like that. I" But it was no good. Patsy turned away from me, towards the others.	ඒ ඊ ඊ
"Come, girls," she said to them, her voice hard. "Let's go somewhere else, where there's no unpleasant company around." *~*~**~*	2ª™ 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
I cried myself to sleep that night. I, who never, ever cried. Stupid I told myself. This is not the first time people have been angr with you, or argued with you. Why start crying now when you never	<mark>Ъ²к</mark> ту
have before? I suppose it was that whatever trouble I had faced in the past, I always knew that I could count on my friends. Now I wasn't so sure. Maybe my friends weren't my friends anymore. Remembering the expression on Patsy's face as she turned away from me made my	ď⁴
heart ache. Sometime during the night, exhaustion must have overpowered me and pulled me into sleep, for I woke up the next morning, curled into a tight protective ball against the evils of the world. I had to force myself to get dressed and leave for work. If not for the fact that today was Mr Ambrose's special appointment, I doubt I would have gotten up at all.	311 To 156
Get a move on ordered my lazy limbs. If you don't go to work and show up at that appointment, the fight with Patsy will have been fo nothing!	
Somehow, I managed to drag myself to work. Through some merciful miracle, Mr Ambrose had retained his bright smile and easy manner of the previous day. He didn't put me through much work and didn't seem to notice my bad mood.	331 C
As the day progressed, thoughts of Patsy slowly retreated to the back of my mind and I began to feel hopeful. It really seemed that Mr Ambrose had turned over a new leaf. He was warm and friendly towards me in a manner I wouldn't have thought possible two days ago. I considered bringing up the matter of the search for the missing file again - I really wanted to help! But in the end I decided to wait until a er his special appointment. If it went well, maybe he would	
be in a good mood and listen to my arguments. "Mr Linton?" I looked up from the files I was sorting to see Mr Stone at the door of my o ice. He had a nervous look on his face, but since he looked	137 60 60
nervous pretty much all the time, I didn't pay too much attention to that. "Yes, Mr Stone? I know it's almost closing time. I'm just putting these away and then I'll be right out."	ซิ ซิ
"I know, I know. That's not why I'm here, Mr Linton. Mr Ambrose sent me to tell you that he has ordered a carriage and is awaiting you downstairs. He says the two of you are going to a special appointment this late in the day?"	đ
My face brightened. "Yes, that's right. I'll be on my way down right away." "Good. Good." Mr Stone didn't leave, but hovered in the doorway. I continued	สร สี
putting the files away. When I was closing the box and he still hadn't moved, I asked: "Is something else the matter, Mr Stone?" "How kind of you to ask, Mr Linton, very kind of you. Yes, there is something, indeed. I wanted to ask did you notice anything odd about Mr Ambrose lately?"	ង

about Mr Ambrose lately?" "Odd?"	æ a
"Yes. I couldn't help notice he has behaving a bit strange. I thought	
you might have noticed it too." "Can't say I have. In my opinion, he has been behaving like a perfectly amiable gentleman, recently."	10°
Mr Stone cleared his throat. "Um well that is kind of what I meant by 'strange'." His ears reddened, and I had to fight to conceal a smile. "Don't worry, Mr Stone. I'm sure he's perfectly fine."	506 246
"Good, good. That's very good to hear. You've put my mind at rest, Mr Linton, thank you."	
With a quick bow of his head, he hurried out of the room and I le a er him, crossing the hallway and starting down the stairs.	å
It was true, for Mr Ambrose, well-mannered and smiling was strange. But good manners hadn't hurt anybody - except for me getting arrested that time because I curtsied. So why not rejoice at the change? Some small part of me was beginning to hope that maybe, just maybe, Iwas the reason for the improvement. Maybe I had managed to get under his granite-hard skin. The thought made me	
feel hot and fiery inside, for some reason. "Ah, there you are," Mr Ambrose greeted me when I pushed open the doors of Empire house He was standing at the foot of the stairs, smiling at me. A coach stood behind him - not a cab or a chaise, but a large and maybe even luxurious carriage, such as many of the wealthy gentlemen of the city used to get around. I blinked in confusion. Again, I got the uncanny feeling that something was going an bare which I dida!t understand Mr Ambrose couldn't just have	755
on here which I didn't understand. Mr Ambrose couldn't just have turned so nice by accident, could he?	,664 Cl
"I have been eagerly awaiting your arrival," he told me with a small bow of his head as I came down the stairs, my steps cautious, as if approaching an unknown wild animal.	ď
"I'm sorry Sir if I took too long. I had a few files to put away and" "Don't apologize, don't apologize. A er today, all these petty matters	đ
of business won't seem like much to you, I assure you." What did he mean by that? That the rest of my employment would be one continuous tea party?	аз аз
My bewilderment grew as he opened the door and gestured for me to get in.	å
"Since when do gentlemen open doors for other gentlemen?" I asked, archly, gesturing to my male attire.	ď
"They do not, in general. But soon enough the perspective on what you are might shi ."	цек
His words le me reeling. Did he mean what I thought he meant? Was he really considering to accept me as a female employee, dress and all? I hardly managed to get into the coach, my head was so full of questions. Why this sudden turnaround? How was it possible? Why now? The day before yesterday, he had still been adamant about getting rid of me, adamant that I should not be involved in the investigation of the the , because this matter was too dangerous for a lady. And now Had he changed his mind?	565
Somehow though, although his words seemed to indicate a change of mind, the tone made me hesitant to rejoice. There was something	a
behind the words, some dark intent not yet revealed, that made me shiver. Nonsense!Shaking my head, I settled down at the right window of	a
the coach, facing the horses. You're imagining things! Stop, and enjo the moment!	9 259
Mr Ambrose took the seat beside me and tapped the roof of the carriage with his cane.	ŝ
"You know our destination, driver. Go!" Without a word in reply the coach started to move.	a a
We drove in silence. There were many things I wanted to say - questions I wanted to ask, thanks I wanted to give - but something held me back. He for his part was still smiling the same brilliant smile	
he had worn all day yesterday and today. For the first time I had leisure to study his smile in more detail and was surprised by what I found. It somehow looked unnatural.	٦ĸ
I remembered the small quarter-smile he had once deemed to give me, long ago. That had seemed much more natural, much more himself. This iridescent show of teeth If you studied it long enough it put you in mind of the smile a drowning man might see in the ocean, topped by a dorsal fin and approaching fast and hungrily.	a
Oh, don't be such an old worry-wart! You should have a more optimistic outlook on the future!	323 C
To distract myself I looked out of the window - and jerked upright in my seat! We were going down Oxford Street, the street that lead away from Leadenhall Street in a western direction. The direction of Hyde Park.	, Ъ1к
This had to be a strange coincidence. Surely, we would soon turn away to the le or to the right, to wherever this mysterious appointment of Mr Ambrose's was.	ď
No, we didn't. Instead we kept going straight down Oxford Street. I was no longer lost in thought anymore. I was hanging out of the window, gripping my uncle's old top hat with both hands to prevent it	t
from being blown o by the wind. "Something interesting to see, Mr Linton?" Mr Ambrose's voice came from within the coach. I didn't reply. There were indeed a great many	ä
things to be seen: the closer we got to Hyde Park, the more people were milling in the streets. Apparently, they were heading towards the park. A great event seemed about to take place. He calls you Mister again. Something is happening here.	196 639
Over the heads of the crowd, I could see the black iron of Cumberland Gate in the distance. The gate stood wide open, and loud voices	,639 C
dri ed from the Park in our direction. Naturally they did. This was the north-east corner of the Park, a er all: Speaker's Corner.	or Br
There were several people there, standing on wooden boxes or on the ground. But nearly all of them had given up trying to catch the	
crowd's attention. The focus was clearly on a group of important- looking men standing on a large podium right behind Cumberland Gate.	å
Then I saw the large banner suspended over the podium. 'MEETING OF THE ANTI-SUFRAGIST LEAGUE - UNITE IN THE	đ
STRUGGLE FOR THE NATURAL WORLD ORDER AND WOMAN'S GOD- GIVEN PLACE IN THE WORLD' My head whipped to the side to stare at Mr Ambrose - just in time to	2,5К С
see the smile drain from his face like wet paint from a wall in the middle of a hailstorm. And I realized that was all it had ever been: paint, over a perfect, cold, merciless granite statue.	888 G
The coach stopped. "Come, Mr Linton" he ordered, meeting my eyes with his icy gaze and	å
pushing open the door. "Or else we shall be late for this very important event."	5.3K
 My Dear Lords and Ladies, It's time for the big showdown! Are you already looking forward	ล ส
to the big battle of words? Who do you think shall emerge the victor? ;-) Yours Truly	a a
Sir Rob	đ⁵
P.S: A virtual cookie for anybody who can figure out what the title of this chapter refers to :-)	a ³
this chapter refers to ;-)	ੴ a
GLOSSARY: Sneaker's Corner in Hyde Park London is an area where for a	a a
Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London, is an area where, for a long time in English History, anybody has traditionally had the right to publicly speak and debate on important political and	
social issues. Many important events, meetings and demonstrations have taken place there, and the idea of a speaker's corner has been taken up by a lot of other countries and cities. I've added a picture of a demonstration at Speaker's Corner to this Chapter.	I aª

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