12. Practicing Impertinence

My eyes flew open, and I looked up to see an upright, elderly military gentleman with an enormous moustache standing before me. Not Mr Ambrose. Definitely not. It was Colonel Remington, one of the many captains and colonels Sir Philip had introduced me to.

And why the heck had I been thinking of Mr Ambrose? He wasn't even here!

The Colonel cleared his throat. Maybe he thought I hadn't heard him.

"Will you do me the honour of dancing with me, Miss Linton?" he repeated.

"Eer... no," I said.

He turned a bit red in the face, and went away, looking rather a rorted.

Hm... Perhaps that had not quite been according to etiquette? I racked my brains, trying to remember my aunt's lessons. Hadn't there been something about a lady never being allowed to refuse a dance unless she had already promised it to another gentleman? Well, if there was such a rule, it was complete bollocks. I should have the right to choose to dance or not dance with whomever I bloody well pleased!

Through a gap in the potted plants I could see Colonel Remington joining a few of his military friends – mostly younger o icers. He was particularizing quite energetically. No doubt he was conveying something he considered to be of some importance.

One of the young men laughed. "Maybe she just didn't like the looks of you," he teased the elder gentleman.

My mouth dropped open. They were talking about me. Mr Well, at least that would ensure that I wouldn't be bothered with any more invitations to dance for the rest of the night. I wondered if my aunt would succeed in the wildfire, and surely all those chauvinists would be revolted and shocked to the core. None of the men would even bother to give me a second glance a er that.

"I must have a look at that wench," the young o icer continued with a wink, and my mouth snapped shut a little faster. "Was she pretty?"

I couldn't hear the Colonel's more muted reply to this, but the young o icer laughed again. "Come on, old boy, she must have been! And known it, too – quite a conceited little madam, to turn down an o icer like that."

He winked at the other young men around him and strode o . I could hardly believe that he was going to do what I thought he was going to do.

Nevertheless, when the dance had ended and the next one was approaching, I saw him striding towards me with a gait so pompous you could have identified him as a young military o icer even if he had been missing his uniform, medals and sash entirely. He was accompanied by one of his friends who had already been introduced to me.

Both of them examined me not unlike one would examine a piece of meat on a butcher's counter. I ignored them with magnificent composure and took another glass of lemonade from the plate beside me.

"Miss Linton?" Mr Familiar Soldier made an extravagant bow, and Mr Unfamiliar Soldier followed suit.

"I don't know whether you remember me? I'm Major Rushworth. Sir Philip introduced us."

I did not deign to reply immediately – a er all, it was considered impolite to talk with your mouth full, wasn't it? Instead, I finished my chocolate, and then plastered a smile on my face.

"Sir Philip introduced me to a great many people," I replied sweetly. "Most of which my unreliable memory has already unintroduced again. You, I remember, are among them."

It was half-true. I had actually forgotten him. Nevertheless, my memory was usually very good – yet only for things I wanted to remember.

Major Rushworth blushed slightly, but didn't let that deter him.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

"Well, may I be permitted to introduce you to a friend of mine? To this gentleman here, Lieutenant Ellingham."

My eyes narrowed. I didn't know much about etiquette, but I did know that the inferior person was always introduced to the superior. By deciding to introduce me to his friend and not the other way around, he had put me on a level below him. And that was something, considering the complacent smile on the lieutenant's face, which I did not appreciate at all.

"No, you may not," I told him. "But you may introduce himto my if you like."

"Eer..."

Apparently, at first the major didn't quite know what to say to that. He gazed at me for a moment, then collected himself again, cleared his throat and went on: "Er... very well. Miss Linton, may I be allowed to introduce my friend Lieutenant Ellingham to your notice?"

"Yes, you may." The smile on my face was widened a bit and I nodded graciously. "Delighted to make your acquaintance, Lieutenant Ellingham," I lied.

"As am I," said the young man, whose arrogant smile had not in the least been reduced in radiance by my rebu .

"Well, I'll leave you to it then," the Major said, throwing me another odd glance and then quickly walking with an eye roll at his friend. I saw the message 'it's your funeral' clearly in those eyes.

And he was right. It was.

Lieutenant Ellingham seated himself beside me. Taking the bull by the horns, I turned to him. Best to get this over with.

"Well, what should we talk about, Lieutenant? The weather would be a good subject of discussion, if we were not inside and it was right."

"How about the society?" he asked, gesturing towards the people dancing everywhere in the grand room.

"That would be unwise. When you make conversation, it is generally considered best to use pleasant and polite things. And the present society would not furnish me with a lot of opportunities for that."

He blinked at me, no doubt wondering if he had heard right. In the end, he seemed to decide that he had not. I was a lady, a er all. Ladies didn't say impolite things. It was unheard of.

Instead of trying to find another topic, he cut right to the chase.

"I must admit, Miss Linton, that I had a particular reason for wishing an introduction with you."

"Did you, now?" I couldn't entirely keep the sarcasm out of my voice. But the young men's arrogance apparently made him immune to sarcasm from ladies as well as to impudence. He gave me a smile that he probably thought was charming.

It wasn't.

"Yes, I did. I have been admiring for some time from afar now. You have caught my eye, Miss Linton."

"Indeed?" I raised an eyebrow. "I can't remember you throwing it at me, to be honest. I don't have your eye on me, I promise. I never catch eyes. They are rather slippery and slimy things, not at all the kind of objects I would like to carry around in my pocket."

"Uhm..." he blinked, just as dumbfounded as his friend. Quickly, he leaned back, clearly lacking the brains to decipher my reply. For some unknown reason, I took pity on him.

"Were you going to ask me if I would dance with you?" I asked him.

"Yes! That is it, exactly. How did you know?"

"Let's just say I am a discerning person. Well, if it is a dance you want, that makes things very simple."

"Excellent." He got up, his arrogant grin back on his face, and held a hand out to me.

"No," I said, not looking up at him.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a look of confusion cross his face.

"Excuse me?"

"You want to dance with me – I have just given you my answer. No."

"Oh."

"Yes. Why don't you try that young lady over there? She looks to be in want of a partner, and unlike me, she actually wants one. Goodbye."

He stood rooted to the spot for a few more seconds, then let his hand drop and walked o . Picking another piece of chocolate o the plate, I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye. For some reason, he didn't appear very disheartened. If I had to choose a word to describe his facial expression, I think I would have chosen "intrigued", though I didn't see how the bloody hell that could be.

Through the potted plants, I saw him return to his friends, and they hooted and clapped him on the back, while he grinned some-faced. I was very pleased with myself. Now, finally, there would be an end of the matter. No more invitations to dance tonight.

A few minutes later, a couple distracted me, and I looked up only to be confronted with another o icer asking me to dance. I turned him down like a bedspread. And the one a er that. And the one a er the one a er that. And the other gentlemen who followed, from captains to colonels, from misters to majors. It was quite amusing. I didn't even mind being pacified, the more of seemed to pop up everywhere. You'd think that by now they would have gotten the message.

During a break in the assault of dance-addicted gentlemen, I took another peep through the foliage. Ella was again being whirled across the floor in the arms of Sir Philip Wilkins and looked about ready to faint from the attention. I grinned. Good job he'd been too out in society. Maybe she would get a little more confidence and experience.

But as I let my eyes wander farther over the assembled guests, I noticed something stranger: I couldn't see my aunt anywhere. That was very curious indeed. Ella, and Maria and Anne busy hunting for prospective husbands. Lizbeth was doing her best, and even Gertrude was dancing with a quiet, elderly gentleman.

My aunt would hardly leave the dance floor at such a moment, unless it would be to...

And then the voice of doom spoke behind me.

"Lilly – What in the name of the Lord is this I have been hearing, about you refusing to dance?"

Oh, blast!

My dear Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I humbly apologize for the technical difficulties that some of you might have recently experienced while trying to read the newest "Storm and Silence" chapter. I saw a few comments from a few of you regarding this matter, and I did everything in my power to make sure that the newest chapters are available to read, up to and including emailing the Wattpad support team and re-uploading the chapter on Wattpad, as well as posting a link directly to the newest chapter on my profile at my various social media networks so you can quite easily find your way to the latest installment of this story.

In order to always remain up-to-date and get the link to the latest installment, plus various teasers and other interesting things regarding my stories, you can follow me on my ff. event social media pages. I've got profile at both twitter & facebook (where you will find me under my username @TheSirRobb).

I truly hope that the technical difficulties that prevented me from posting the last installment are now in the past. If you're still experiencing some problems, do not hesitate to let me know via a private message on wattpad - or send me a little note through Mr Ambrose' pneumatic tubes, if you prefer :D :D

Now I also have to go back to scribbling and trying to decide whether Lilly will survive her aunt's wrath :D :D

Your Victorian storyteller

Sir Rob

GLOSSARY:

Bollocks: A British English term for nonsense. Much more expressive than the usual word, isn't it?

Continue reading next part