



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# Miss Katherine's Fan

Philippa Peters



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An 'Adult TV' E-BOOK

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# MISS KATHERINE'S FAN

by Philippa Peters

## I. LORD DOUGLAS' RIGHTFUL ANGER

Lord Douglas Moore was angry beyond words. A lifetime of repressing his feelings paid off for him now. "How is it, Mrs. Fairfax," he asked his housekeeper in his usual icy fashion, "that you know my ward is with child?"

In the dim light given out by the oil lamp, the thin-faced, older woman hugged the shawl tightly about her, a habit that had irritated Moore all the time he had employed her. "She, she has the morning sickness," the housekeeper whispered. A thin, white hand left off from clutching the shawl and worked at a grey strand of hair hanging loose from her nightcap.

"And the young man?" asked the aristocrat harshly. His naturally pale face was now quite livid, but the dimness in his study concealed most of the signs of his rage. Only his voice and the flare of thin nostrils gave away the depth of his emotion.

"P-Peregrine Grimond, sir," murmured Mrs. Fairfax. Her pale, watery eyes did not meet, could not meet, the black, unblinking eyes of the Lord of the Manor of Oakthorpe.

Lord Douglas Moore sat very still in his high-backed chair. The widow of his late father's valet would know, of course, with how much bitterness he regarded that carefree dilettante, heir to a neighboring estate. The silence became overpowering and Mrs. Fairfax began to fidget again with her shawl. She cast surreptitious glances at her stone-faced employer, so like the grand image of his father in the portrait mounted on the study wall above the fireplace.

"Where did this tryst with Miss Conley-Shore take place?" asked Lord Douglas at last, the words wheezing out of the nobleman's small, pursed lips like steam from the valve of one of the new railway engines.

"Here, so I believe, Your Lordship," whispered Mrs. Fairfax, unable to look into her employer's intent gaze. "At Oakthorpe Manor," she added unnecessarily.

There was a squeak from Moore's riding boots as he pushed himself to fuller attention in his hard chair. His black eyes glittered as he asked, "How could that be, madam? No Grimond has set foot in the Manor House since the duel!"

Mrs. Fairfax did not need to be reminded of the famous duel in which Horatio Grimond, Peregrine's late father, shot and killed the sixth Earl of Hutton, the father of William, the seventh Earl, and the then thirteen-year-old, Douglas.

"He, he was d-disguised, Your Lordship," Mrs. Fairfax muttered the words fearfully.

"Disguised! How?" asked the taut, fearsome noble, leaning over the oak desk, made from one of the famous denizens of Oakthorpe Woods.

Moore stood, moving into the light of the oil lamp under which the shivering housekeeper sat. Moore's closely cropped, black hair and deep brown eyes were a vivid contrast to his pale skin. He wasn't a handsome man but in the past he had always been stiffly polite and amiable in his way. Now he resembled a predatory hawk and Mrs. Fairfax was frightened that he was about to attack her while she had only the excuse that she was just a messenger.

Mrs. Fairfax squirmed on the padded high chair that His Lordship had insisted that she sit in for her comfort in her account of the doings at the Manor in his absence in London. Although she was supposed to know nothing of Moore's plan to marry Madeleine 'Maddie' Conley-Shore himself when she became of age within a year, Mrs. Fairfax was aware that the only person to whom the austere, young nobleman had ever paid any mark of affection was the flighty, younger heiress, his ward the last two years. She thought that she knew his intentions as well as he did himself.

How could she tell him of the role of the Manor's servants in the affair? They had enjoyed helping the young mistress outwit their arrogant employer. And she couldn't tell him that she had been as amused as the other servants had been. She had turned a blind eye to the whole matter until she had found the young girl with morning sickness for the third time in as many days.

"Mistress Conley-Shore," said the old woman, quaking under the still, emotionless gaze of her employer, "gave the young gentleman a bonnet, a shawl and an old frock from the upstairs maids' rooms. That was how he disguised himself."

"You mean," said Douglas Moore, shocked at the betrayal he now perceived as being more than that of just his ward, "that Mr Grimond has been skulking about my upper halls disguised as one of my maids!"

The simple use of the word 'my' showed again the pride that Lord Douglas Moore took in his possession of Oakthorpe Manor, wrested as part of his 'birthright' from his unwilling elder brother. It was clear to Mrs. Fairfax that he felt the invasion of his Manor as much of a personal affront as he felt the seduction of his ward.

The old housekeeper nodded and her shawl twitched as she found little she could add to the appalling list of facts. There was then a lengthy silence, broken only by the occasional crack from the dying embers of the fire.

"Someone," said Lord Douglas Moore, eyeing the woman he had known all his life. His voice was devoid of any emotion and more chilling because of it, Mrs. Fairfax decided. "Someone must answer for the invasion of my household by that...that upstart braggart."

"Yes, Your Lordship," murmured Mrs. Fairfax, praying fervently that it would not be her who was called to account for the deed she had reported.

"We shall need new servants," the Lord of the Manor said calmly, his eyes still boring in at her, while she shook in fear. "Mr. Kerrick," the estate's bailiff, and a most unpleasant man to the 'old biddies' of the Manor's kitchen staff, and to Mrs. Fairfax as well, "will find them for you. He will receive my personal instructions."

Mrs. Fairfax still waited fearfully. Did it mean that she was to be replaced, too, or not? Then, as His Lordship turned away, Mrs. Fairfax realized that Lord Douglas Moore was not about to tell her directly. He would keep her waiting for the next few weeks; she would not know if or when the blow would fall. Chagrined, she ventured to say, "Yes sir. And Miss Conley-Shore?"

"I will attend to that," Lord Douglas retorted sharply. His tone brooked no argument on that matter. Mrs. Fairfax could not know how Lord Douglas Moore had counted on that marriage to vault the younger brother far beyond the wealth of his elder brother and out of the forced family orbit that kept his elder brother ever superior to him as 'Head of the Family.'

Mrs. Fairfax looked up, thinking that she must at least try to protect the young woman from her guardian's wrath but Lord Moore motioned to her with a limp, white hand and she was dismissed.

## II. PEREGRINE GRIMOND'S LAST SKULKING

I smiled to myself as I waited anxiously for the lights to show in the second story windows. It was a rueful smile. Only for a girl as sweet as Maddie would I do this, I said to myself. I was, after all, Peregrine Austin de Vere Grimond, heir to an estate comprising seven wealthy tenant farms as well as the 'demesne' itself. Together, all the estates were known collectively as Grimondwood. In three years, for I had to wait longer than Maddie did to come into my inheritance, I would be one of the three or four richest landowners in the county.

I didn't know what was so important that had caused Maddie to summon me to the Manor in mid-week. I had checked. The haughty Lord Moore, the younger son of the Earls of Hutton, Maddie's guardian, was in residence and he was known to imbibe well with his cronies in local society of an evening.

Tonight, the local gentry were meeting in the Tory Club in Riddleton; Lord Douglas Moore, the Baron of Oakthorpe in his own right, would be there. Indeed, he was to be one of the leading speakers. If such a meeting went as it normally did, with heavy drinking following all the speeches, the first carriage would not leave until two in the morning. It was reasonably safe for me to then enter the house of someone many people considered my enemy.

The yellow light gleamed suddenly through the pitch-black of the night from the familiar second story window. I moved from the oak tree that had sheltered me from the light rain falling. The rain clouds had blotted out all signs of the moon and stars. But I knew the route from several months' experience.

Maddie had coyly pointed out to me how an ardent lover could approach her boudoir. I had said that, even if it was so, how could anyone know that the route was clear? She had said that a really ardent lover would have arranged a signal, with someone like her personal maid, Miriam, so that he would know when his attentions would be welcome to his beloved.

Bemused, I had played along, and, lo and behold, the light gleamed just as a blushing Miriam had said that it would for a really ardent lover. If I was caught, I didn't doubt that she would be claiming me as her lover and nightly visitor. But I was never caught; it was thrilling to enter the room Miriam directed me to, not knowing what kind of woman I would meet, night after night.

Maddie was addicted to the romances she read when Lord Douglas Moore wasn't around to direct her to the Classics. I could tell when she was reading a new novel as she became a strumpet, a governess, a maid, a queen or princess, depending on what she had been reading. Maddie was in love with romance; I tried as much as I could to be her dark and handsome lover, often taking her brutally and cruelly, as she wanted me to do.

I avoided the two deep potholes in the cobbled yard as I scurried up to the shelter of the scullery roof. The scullery door was open, the package waiting for me as usual, just inside the door. Miriam wasn't there to guide me, but no matter. Miriam had missed once or twice lately.

I gently closed the heavy door behind and slipped the greased bolts into place. I smiled as I thought how Maddie had remembered to have that done at least. I took off my heavy, wet topcoat and beaver hat, stowing them in the foot locker beside the grandfather clock on the south wall. From the package left for me, I took out the clothing Maddie insisted that I wore along the inner passages of the Manor itself.

"You could be caught," Maddie had told me. "Or you might be seen leaving. You have to disguise yourself. If you are seen, you will just be one of the servants."

So I did as she bid me, to amuse her, as I had never been stopped or seen, or so I thought. The grey frock went over my new, London-made waistcoat that Maddie was sure to admire and over my rain-spotted trousers. I smiled to myself as I tied on the frilly bonnet with its silk ribbons beneath my chin. I pulled out a few brown curls as an earnest Maddie had insisted I do to break up the harsh edge of the thing.

I wrapped the woollen shawl about myself and began a slow shuffle through the inner passageway to the back servants' stairs. I was starting to go up when I realized by the squeaking sound that I had forgotten my boots. With a muttered curse, I lifted up the wide skirt and pulled them off. Mud and water dirtied my hands as I carried the boots back to the locker and hid them beneath my cloak.

I avoided stepping the fifth step, the one that creaked so badly as I shuffled up the stairs, holding my skirts in front of me as ladies do when they go upstairs to avoid treading on a hemline. I had done it before, treading on the skirt of such a covering dress; it was

no fun to slip or trip over several steps of the steep stairs. It not only hurt when I slipped but it was noisy as well. Not as noisy as the rustle the skirts made but I didn't want to wake up Mrs. Fairfax, though Maddie said she slept very heavily when she went to bed. She was usually 'in her cups,' Maddie had said with a quick grin.

I found Maddie's room in the pitch dark without having made any excess noise. I wondered what character she would be playing for me tonight. I couldn't tell as Maddie was already abed when I tiptoed across the carpeted room. Her scent was everywhere, fragrant and arousing. I lay down quickly on the pillow beside her, thinking how it would amuse her to see me in the frilly bonnet. I took in a deep draught of her fragrance of last summer's roses.

"Now, what couldn't wait for the weekend when Douglas is back in London?" I asked her. My hand was on the outside of the coverlet as I touched the dark shape that lay beside me on the bed.

Even as I spoke the words, there was a sudden flare and the acrid smell of sulphur as a match was struck. The oil lamp beside her side of the bed suddenly glowed with a bright fierceness in the pitch dark I had grown accustomed to. The shape beside me sat up and turned. It wasn't Maddie. It was a tall, thin shape, with a head of black, close-cropped hair. The shape was dressed in a black suit with a high, white-collared, starched shirt and a black throat scarf.

Stunned, it took me a moment or so to realize that I was looking at Lord Douglas Moore himself. In his hand, the ugly, black muzzle of a cocked pistol was pointing at me, pointing right at my head.

"Welcome, Miss Grimond," said Moore, his voice so flat and matter-of-fact that it sent a shiver through me. I hardly understood at first what he said. I didn't even think that he was mocking my style of dress and me in it at first.

"We," Moore went on, indicating the thin-faced, sallow man seated in a hard chair by the door, "have been awaiting you for some time, Miss Grimond. How lovely it is to make your acquaintance under such auspicious circumstances."

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"It wasn't easy to get Sir John's consent," Moore said in his usual icy manner, "but I did finally manage to persuade him that our feud was dead and that Peregrine was still a ward himself, and so could not properly look out for your property, Miss Katherine. A man of the world, such as I am, is a more fitting guardian of your uncle's and father's estate than Mr Gough who has, after all, retired now, even from his law practice. The exemplary discharge of my duties will do much to put to rest the talk of a feud existing still between our two houses."

I knew that Lord Douglas Moore had found out about Maddie and me. I couldn't blame her but I didn't understand Moore. What was he talking about? Why was he calling me 'Miss Katherine'? Was he trying to mock me for the clothing I wore? And what was it about Sir John? Sir John Whiteley was our local magistrate and justice of the peace. He was my father's trustee, his only duty being to consign me my estates at the proper time.

I reached up from where I sat on the bed to untie the ridiculous bonnet about my head. The pistols in the hands of the men opposite me waved in annoyance at me as they told me to stop. I had to sit there before them in the silly, floppy bonnet of an upstairs maid that Maddie had left for me to wear.

A cold feeling went through me. No, Maddie would not have left such a bonnet for me. "You can't think that you are going to take over Grimondwood?" I spluttered at Lord Douglas Moore. I wouldn't let him. I would call him out. The coward would answer to me on the duelling field.

"I already have," said Lord Douglas Moore calmly. "And also of Peregrine Grimond. I promised Sir John that I intended to prevent Peregrine getting any more girls of this county into the kind of trouble you have brought to my other young ward."

My face must have blanched as I realized what he must be talking about. "She is with child?" I asked him hoarsely.

Moore nodded slowly, his long, thin face emotionless; only the tapping of one hand on the bed let me know that he was concealing volcanic feelings against me.

"I'll marry her," I told him, surprising myself at realizing that I actually meant what I said. Despite all the games Maddie liked to play, I did want to marry her. I was waiting for her to grow up before I would move to convince her that I liked her more than any of the other young ladies of our acquaintance who had bestowed favors on me.

"No," said Moore curtly, a grim smile at least bringing some emotion to his face. "Maddie is not for you," he added as I stared at him. "Not now, at least," he said simply, wiping away the smile. "She has already been dispatched to have her child in Italy. She will be leaving London as soon as her passage is booked."

"But ..." I began to argue. The sallow man stood up and came at me suddenly and quietly. A bony hand smashed into my face and I was knocked off my feet by the force of the blow. Maddie's bulky skirt swirled about me as I grabbed for the bed to pull myself back to my feet.

"You will only speak, Miss Katherine," a thin smile turned Lord Douglas Moore's face into a smirk, "when your betters give you permission to do so."

"Perhaps I should introduce you," Moore's voice had great irony in it. "This is a new manservant whom I have hired. He is Lubbock. His duty is simple. He is to safeguard Miss Katherine Grimond, a new ward I have taken into my home after her abominable treatment by her cousin, Peregrine."

I tried to stand but my knees shook and the folds of the long dress trapped me. Moore's words resounded through me like death knells. I looked at the two wildly.

Moore began to laugh, a nasty gargle filled with scorn and triumph. "Yes, Miss Katherine," he sneered at me. "You have skulked my hallways in your maidenly clothing for the last time. In the future, you shall glide down the main stairs openly in your ball gowns, tiaras and pretty slippers. Everyone who is anyone in the county will see you and admire how lovely you will become, even Maddie on her return. After all, she will want to see the fruits of this marvellous idea she had to deceive me. I'm sure that you will make a most handsome young lady."

### III. GEORGE LUBBOCK'S CLEVER WIFE

Many times after, I regretted that I hadn't chanced the pistols of George Lubbock and his employer. Perhaps anything, even death, would have been better than the rigors to which I was subjected by George Lubbock and that beautiful witch, his wife, Sarah. No matter what they said of me, I wouldn't have been there to hear it. Oh, how many times did I lie in my bed at night, shackled and bound, wishing that I were dead rather than the awful situation that I was in.

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Sarah Lubbock was already preparing the East Wing of Oakthorpe Manor for its new occupant even as Peregrine Grimond was being confronted by the pistols of Lord Douglas Moore and her husband.

From the third story windows of the East Wing bedrooms, the occupants of the rooms could look out over the nearby copses of young oak and birch, across the grassy, treeless Emmondwater Ridge to the Grimondwood itself, dark and brooding. Long lines of trees were planted as windbreaks and to improve pheasant and deer hunting by Horatio Grimond's grandfather.

To the south, the village of Far Ridley and, in the distance, Riddleton, could be seen, or rather the spires of their churches could be seen between the trees. Sarah Lubbock did not mind that her charge could see out of the dormered windows. They were nailed shut and barred. That was the first of her orders and instantly carried out, she was pleased to see. It was most appropriate, she decided, that the young man, no, she must not think of him that way. It was most appropriate that the young lady Sarah would create should look out at her former estate and weep at all that she had lost.

The bedroom Sarah was preparing was lined with mirrors so that Sarah could see herself wherever she was, as she later wished her charge to be able to see him-, no, Sarah caught herself again, as she wished her charge to see herself. She smiled and admired her own figure. One day, her charge would smile as she was and admire her own figure, as slim and womanly shaped as Sarah's.

Sarah noted that she retained a slight air of her own gentrified birth. Not even fifteen years with George Lubbock had knocked that out of her. Even now, she was still suffused with anger as she recalled the sneer of the handsome young lordling who had deflowered her and abandoned her in that awful Belgian spa.

Sarah Goulding had never been able to return home. She hadn't tried, knowing how she would have been greeted and tormented. Lubbock had been a good provider; it wasn't his fault that the child had died in the birth itself. It wasn't his fault that she had not conceived again. Lord knows, he had tried hard enough to make her pregnant but the drugs she purchased from her French connections did their work well. Sarah had not conceived again and had thus kept her thin, girlish figure while most women of her age were, in fact, rather stout.

George had done well with Sarah to push him but her life had been dominated by just one real motivation, the desire for revenge on the baronet who had ruined Sarah Goulding. That the lover she hated so greatly was dead in Greece she knew well. Her vengeance had thus been transferred to all the dilettantes, fops and roués, who had ruined girls like her.

Sarah had understood Lord Douglas Moore's need for revenge. Each terrible year she had endured without settling accounts with her long-dead paramour had left her aching for a revenge she could never obtain. When Moore had approached her husband for his assistance, and a perplexed George Lubbock had told her what the aristocrat had said he wanted George to do, Sarah had instantly told him to tell His Lordship a woman's touch was needed in such a plot. Oh what an exquisite revenge Lord Douglas Moore wanted and Sarah could make it happen!

All the talents that Sarah Lubbock had used to turn the lumps of farmers' daughters into fashionable London ladies could now be unleashed for the sweetest revenge of all on a dilettante cad like the man who had mistreated her.

Sarah had been the best in her demi-monde in making silk purses out of sows' ears. When Lord Douglas Moore had approached George about the use of their services for 'an act of vengeance,' Sarah had known that Moore's idea of revenge was the only thing she would live for in the year to come.

Sarah had told Lord Douglas Moore that he could count on her absolutely. Peregrine Grimond was about to understand fully the plight of the young heiress he had ruined and he would understand it by the direst means possible. Sarah promised Moore that she would make Grimond into a young girl 'completely' within the year.

Moore had looked at her in surprise, astounded at her vehemence. He didn't believe her. He was only thinking of shaming Peregrine Grimond before his friends. But Sarah told him that he could exact an even deeper, more satisfying revenge than that.

Sarah was surprised by how bulky the young man appeared when he was thrust, at pistol point, into the barred, secure bedroom in the third story of the East Wing. Then she realized that all the young man had done was to wear a frock over his outer clothing.

"Very well," Sarah said sweetly to the youth after Moore retreated and left Peregrine Grimond in the care of the Lubbocks. The key clanked as His Lordship locked the outer door as she had instructed him. "Let us help you out of that ridiculous clothing, Miss Grimond?"

Peregrine was only too glad to step out of the frock and get rid of the confounded bonnet. Without them, he relaxed in front of the Lubbocks, looking much more at ease than when he had been hustled into the bedroom. He began to look in his pockets, reaching into waistcoat pockets and removing a pouch of tobacco. He clearly intended to have a smoke while he was figuring out how to elude the clutches of Lord Douglas Moore.

"His Lordship," said Sarah sweetly while George roughly confiscated the tobacco from the indignant young man, "has told us so much about you, Miss Katherine." Sarah was very pleased to see the stiffening of the young man's body in rage. Oh, it was going to be such a pleasure to teach him the lessons he deserved. "He has told us how you like to wear pretty girl's clothing like those that you have just removed. So ..."

Sarah was interrupted by Grimond's outburst of curses. He berated her and Lord Moore, along with Moore's parents, until the heel of George's pistol mercifully brought the tirade to an end.

"Put him on the bed. Strip him. Shave off any body hair that he has," Sarah ordered her husband. She went to the chest of drawers and brought out the silk nightdress with the thin supports over the frilly shoulders. Short, frilly panties, so French, would cover his masculinity after George shaved him.

"We'll leave the wax until tomorrow," Sarah went on as she turned down the frilled bed and prepared the shackles at the top and base bedposts. Peregrine Grimond was not going to get away from her, nor from Lord Douglas' revenge, she vowed.

George grunted as he lifted the body onto the bed. "He's a young 'un," he said, trying on the fine waistcoat Grimond had worn and eyeing himself in the mirror on the windowless, west wall. He paused and looked at his wife who was arranging a wig, a mass of ringlets and curls on a bust, atop the dressing table.

George Lubbock growled at last, "You can't do it, you know." He jerked a thumb at the concussed Peregrine Grimond, breathing shallowly as he lay sprawled across the bed. "He's not one of your strange young men, you know, like that Alice in Warwick. He ain't confused about whether he is a boy or a girl."

Sarah glared angrily at her husband who instantly got back to work, undressing the young gentleman as she had directed him. "It makes no difference," Sarah hissed at her husband. "Moore'll pay us well if we succeed. He'll pay us even more to keep quiet if we don't. But I don't intend, anyway, to fail. This young gentleman," she would refer to him as that for the last time, "will know that he's really a girl when I've finished with him."

Not for the last time in the next few months, George Lubbock was scared by the strange, determined gleam in his wife's eyes. Not for the last time either, he felt sorry for the young man who was now securely in the clutches of Sarah Lubbock.

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I awoke in a daze. The room was extraordinarily light which must mean that Oldham had sent up one of the maids to awaken me by drawing the curtains. What the ...? My arms were pinned above my head and I couldn't move them. I heard someone moving past me and there was a click as metal shackles were removed from my arms. Some other person had thrown back the bed covers and was freeing me from the leg irons.

"Mary?" I asked uncertainly, as I yawned and reached for my shoulders to massage the aches away that I felt there. I felt so funny. I was covered by something thin and light and silky. Whatever had I gone to bed in that could feel so strange ...?

My hands massaged my shoulders and I felt the thin, silky straps of a girl's chemise. Panicked, I ran my hands down my body and felt the soft silk of a girl's nightdress over and beneath me.

Memories of the madness of the previous night flooded back into my mind. I felt so sick but my head still hurt so much. Oh, by the gods, I hadn't left Oakthorpe Manor at all!

I sat up, squinting as I forced my eyes open. There, looking at me solemnly, were the same strange woman and the same sallow-faced man with the pistol. He had hit me with it, I remembered, as I reeled and tried to focus on the pair.

The woman sat gracefully in a high-backed chair as if she was a nurse watching over a patient, waiting for me to come to consciousness. This really wasn't just a nightmare! Panic threatened me and I tried to jump up from the bed, but the night dress swirled against my bare legs and impeded me. Then I saw myself in the mirror and the pink, frilly, beribboned, nightie I wore as I clutched at the upper part, shaped to cover a woman of slim proportions.

The image in the mirror was ridiculous. The silent pair just looked at me as I touched the nightie; it felt so weird against me. I shivered as I moved and the skirt lifted up and showed me my thigh, only it wasn't my thigh. I touched my leg, watching my hand move as I did so. My legs had been shaved! I noticed my chest. I had been shaved all over! I was as smooth and hairless as a young girl! Even my armpits were devoid of hair!

That was when I became aware of the panties about me and the slightly itchy feeling there where I must have been shaved as well. I felt so very sick. Douglas Moore must be insane! To fight a duel with me was the right thing to do after what I had done. But one gentleman did not embarrass another in the way that Moore was obviously intent on embarrassing me. When I got out of the Manor ...

"Good morning, Miss Katherine," said the raven-haired woman regarding me sternly as if I was a small child and she my governess. "Normally, you would have breakfast in bed. But a girl in your physical condition?" She shook her head in lamentation.

I let loose with another volley of curses, many of them repetitions of what I had said to that witch the night before. I only ended again when George Lubbock made a swift and quiet advance on me. I cowered, waiting for another heavy blow. I was ready this time and, as the man's arm descended, I knocked it aside and fought back.

It didn't take long for Lubbock to teach me that we were very unevenly matched. The wiry Lubbock had twice the strength I had as well as many times the experience of fighting in close quarters.

Out of breath, aching and trembling after a hard knee in my stomach, the nightie billowing about me, I wasn't able to object when Lubbock, at his wife's direction, removed the nightie and revealed that, yes, I was hairless, and yes, I did have on pink, frilly panties, women's clothing, about my private parts.

With his knee on me, Lubbock put a hard, bony belt about me as I groaned in discomfort. I stretched over my stomach from my chest to my hips. Only as Sarah Lubbock began to lace me up did I realize that I was being placed in a woman's corset! I tried to fight back again in terror at what was being done to me. Another stunning kick from George Lubbock to my head had me babbling and reeling as Sarah secured the straps over my shoulders and the cups about my breasts. They were slightly padded but Sarah was lacing my waist, my sides and my lower chest even more tightly. I hurt and could scarcely breathe as she adjusted the strapping. When I looked at myself in the mirrors, it seemed that I did have a young girl's breasts and a womanish figure.

Sarah put other items of lingerie onto me. I resisted until George pinioned my arms on the bed and held my legs while his wife put silk stockings on my legs and fastened them to the corset with black straps called suspenders. She changed my pink panties for tight, black-lace ones that covered my male parts and then added long, silky, red, frilly bloomers.

Sarah tightened the corset even more as I groaned. George punched me in the ribs; that allowed her to tighten the corset so much that I thought I would faint through lack of air. Sarah smiled as she brought a woman's makeup tray to the bed where I groaned and moaned in my acute discomfort. I kicked it out of her hands as she approached and George hit me so hard, I think I went out of it completely.

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Sarah did not want Katherine to be a 'floozy,' not yet anyway, but makeup was definitely necessary for 'her,' along with the pruning of her eyebrows and the waxing away of 'her' almost non-existent beard. The depilatories Sarah had brought from France for her English 'mares,' as she thought of her other clients, worked well on Katherine. The lotions the new girl would use daily would soon have her skin as it should be, soft and gentle like an English rose.

The thin, curved eyebrows and the darkened eyelashes changed Katherine's face immediately. With a reddening of her lips, and rouge on her cheeks, the thin-faced, aristocratic, new girl took on a feminine look right away. Katherine was certainly an improvement on the stocky lumps that Sarah was used to working with.

Short, soft, women's leather boots, laced tightly, white with high heels, were placed on Katherine's feet by George; then Sarah could put her petticoats on Katherine. George had to help her with the six layers of petticoats as well as the soft, white dress that was cut squarely at the frilled neck, the slight puffiness at her breasts and shoulders drawing attention to her small, girlish bosom.

Sarah manicured and painted Katherine's nails and affixed dainty, dangling earrings to the girl's newly pierced ears. She had George supporting Katherine in a chair as she busily pinned the wig in place when Katherine regained her senses again.

#### **IV. KATHERINE GRIMOND'S APPEARANCE**

As Sarah moved away from me, I tried to spring to my feet but there were these strange shoe, no, they were boots, on my feet. There was a distinctive rustle as I wobbled and I had to cling to Sarah as I tried to stand. Petticoats of a dress—oh no, they had dressed me like a woman in layers of petticoats over stockings and high heels! The skirts swirled around me; I felt strange by the caress of the frillies that I had helped many a girl from but had never thought to be wearing myself.

Sarah held me, her black eyes gleaming at me. I would have fallen without her thin arms about me. I had aches and pains everywhere, my corseted figure being the worst. Then I caught sight of the attractive girl leaning on Sarah Lubbock in the mirrored wall.

The girl had soft, brown hair, a mass of curls and ringlets over her forehead and about her slim, white neck. A thin necklace pointed to her cleavage. Her shoulders were disguised with slight puffy epaulettes above her hairless arms, bracelets clasped above her painted fingernails. She looked to be in pain, as if she was as tightly corseted as I was.

A thought penetrated and she stared at me wildly as I was sure I was staring at her. Her dress was white as was mine. When I moved my head, I felt the earrings move against me, a chill going through me. I jerked again and her earrings swung wildly as mine did. Her eyes, so beautifully outlined, so attractive, eyed me with the same fear that I was eyeing her. Only when Sarah moved away and I was left there, wavering and swishing in my white dress, did I fully comprehend that the girl with such thin eyebrows and so luscious, painted lips was me.

"What have you done to me? Why?" I asked hoarsely, turning to stride after Sarah, but I couldn't. I wobbled and the petticoats swirled about me, my female underthings pulling at me most unnervingly. I felt nausea threatening me again.

"Why, Katherine darling," said the raven-haired woman to me. "George and I have just assisted you to become the maiden you clearly wished that you were. After the way that you looked as an upstairs maid, you should surely be thanking us. See!"

Sarah turned me, deliberately swishing my dress against me, knowing how I would feel, I am sure. I was angry at the game she was playing on me, knowing that she and Moore were going to present me to my friends in such a ridiculous getup, that I reached up to tear at the wig. The combination of pins and adhesive only caused me unnecessary pain until Sarah slapped my hands away.

Sarah gave an audible sigh as I shivered, looking at the two women in the mirror, the older having her arm affectionately about the younger one's waist. "Oh, you are a naughty girl," sighed Sarah in mock sadness. She nodded to George who came behind me, a birch switch in his hand.

"All right, George," Sarah said gently. "We must teach Katherine to be more ladylike and not to spoil her hair or her pretty dress."

I tried to fight again, I did, but the petticoats didn't allow me any leg movement. Soon I was in a most undignified position across George Lubbock's knee, earrings and curls dancing about my neck and face while his wife was lifting my skirts, caressing my legs as she did so. It felt so odd to have a woman touching me as she did, cosseting me as if she intended to arouse me as she was. Then, she lowered my bloomers gently. I cringed at what I was thinking as she ran her hand lightly over my bare thighs and the suspenders. She caressed my hairless bum and the tight panties about my male parts, deliberately stroking the frills against me.

I was screaming at her, writhing under the caresses, then the birch from her hand whacked my rounded bottom. George turned me and was smiling. My fanny was up in the air, my body wriggling as Sarah dispassionately hit me again and again. I tried not to but I was crying when Sarah finally left off, the whole of my posterior and upper thighs inflamed.

George pushed me into a chair but I had to get up right away. It hurt so much. Sarah guided me to a padded chair in front of a large mirror and I smoothed the petticoats beneath me as I sat gingerly, aware of how girlishly I was behaving.

"Well done, Katherine," Sarah mocked me, dabbing at the streaks on my cheeks, on the girl's cheeks, crying in front of me into her mirror. "You will repair your makeup as a young lady should. It may take you a while but you will learn, or Miss Birch will rejoin our lesson. You will learn to be a proper young lady for His Lordship." My heart sank as I realized then that this was not going to be just one day of humiliation after which I would be free.

"I've a number of lessons to teach you, Miss Katherine," said Sarah with a warm smile which made me feel more humiliated as I sat beside her on the padded chair. She gave me a brush; then I saw what she had done to my fingers and nails while I had been unconscious. "You will learn to walk more girlishly in your heels and petticoats, Katherine. And I will show you how to flirt with your fan at the balls we are planning for you. Yes," Sarah said to my astonished expression, "soon, Katherine Grimond will come out and make her debut in society. She will take her rightful place as a young lady while her cousin, Peregrine, runs wild, we hear, in continental cesspits."

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Lord Douglas Moore waited in his dim library as he had waited once before for Mrs. Fairfax's 'urgent' communication. This time the woman who tapped on his door was far from a typical servant. Sarah Lubbock had increased in her air of gentility in the fortnight since she had begun to work on Moore's 'act of vengeance.' She was dignified and aloof as she sat across the desk from him. In her mid-thirties, her face was quite unlined despite a life of 'grubbing,' as she called it, in the life she had led since Lord Alfred Dennett deserted her in Brussels.

"I saw your lesson today," said Moore, pouring sherry into two glasses. He reached over and placed one in front of her.

"You have a spyhole," said Sarah Lubbock, her black eyes glittering with indignation.

"Certainly," said Lord Douglas. He took a sip from the wine casked for his father in the year he died.

"You liked what you saw?" asked Sarah. When Moore continued to sip his excellent sherry and not answer her, she felt constrained to add, "Katherine is very pretty, don't you think? She is developing into a beautiful, young girl as rapidly as any other client I have ever tutored."

Moore's hand was a little unsteady, Sarah noted, as he put his glass down on the desk in front of him. He contemplated the vision of the 'girl' he had seen, dressed in a Spanish costume, her figure so delightfully feminine. Where could she have got such breasts, he had gasped as he studied her, 'Katherine Grimond,' being coached to dance in the Spanish way, lifting her dress to show her stockings and pretty, feminine underthings. That compelling, delightful vision stayed before his eyes.

Only when the girl had been forced to attempt female speech had Douglas Moore realized fully that the 'girl' was Maddie's disguised lover. He had been fascinated and repelled at the same time. Then he had been startled as Sarah Lubbock slapped Katherine's face hard and told her to speak properly. The girl had cowered before Sarah.

Sarah had caressed Katherine's face then and told her to whisper like the proper, little girl that she was. Katherine had tried and been more successful and Sarah had hugged her about her slim waist.

George had joined them then, dressed in Spanish attire and danced with Katherine. She smiled and played up to him as Sarah encouraged her. George threw the girl about then quite robustly, her dress flaring again about her. She ended up in George's arms as he held her tightly, his arm about her waist. Katherine had to kiss him on each cheek before he finally kissed her on the lips as he bent her over to his wife, who applauded, fanned and praised the flushing, young girl.

"I think that we have gone far enough," Lord Douglas Moore said in his calmest of tones. "We've given Mr. Grimond a salutary lesson he will never forget."

"A lesson?" asked Sarah Lubbock, her well-scrubbed face perturbed. "That wasn't what this action was all about, was it?" she asked stiffly. "Vengeance, you called it, my lord. Vengeance for the worst crime a man can commit upon a gentlewoman. Vengeance for a man's vile crime against the household of another."

Sarah's eyes flashed angrily in contrast to her softly spoken words. "Katherine has learned nothing yet of humility," she went on as Moore took up his sherry again, his hand shaking. "She is not remorseful. She has not yet done enough penance. She has learned nothing if you have watched us closely at all."

Moore shook his head. "Just the Spanish dance," he said, emptying his glass and reaching for the bottle. He topped up Sarah's drink before he poured himself another.

"Her best lesson so far," agreed Sarah Lubbock. "But she won't behave unless George or I force her to. She won't dress properly nor walk nor even talk in a proper womanly way without the birch to make her."

Moore settled uneasily back in his chair. "So you have failed," he said quickly. "But Peregrine will remember this humiliation always. He will be embarrassed enough to never speak of this to anyone. He wouldn't even dare to challenge me to a duel over this lest the details of the Spanish Dance become common knowledge."

"I have not failed," said Sarah Lubbock, her eyes downcast as she tried to keep a grip on her temper. "I have done a wonder in the time I have had Katherine. In another month, I shall have him so under my sway that we may present Miss Katherine Grimond for her debut at any ball in which you wish to have her presented. In a year, Katherine will be so much a girl that you may marry her yourself and no one will be any the wiser."

Marry Peregrine Grimond? Moore stared at Sarah Lubbock in disbelief. "The game is over, Mrs. Lubbock," he stated firmly, feeling the strangest of sensations inside him as Sarah made such an outrageous suggestion. "It is too hard to dwell on thoughts of revenge forever. There will be no marriages in Katherine's or Peregrine's future. All that matters is that Peregrine will never be permitted to marry Madeleine, my ward, Miss Conley-Shore."

Sarah Lubbock sat very stiffly in her chair, leaving the topped-up sherry untouched in front of her. "If you let Katherine go now," she said in a low tone that Moore could scarcely hear, "she will fly to her female lover in Italy, France, Spain, wherever you have secreted Miss Conley-Shore.

"Katherine has already said that she wishes to marry Maddie, your lordship, no matter her condition. It would be her act of revenge on you and me." She paused as Moore watched in riveted concentration. She organized her thoughts, then took a sip of the sherry at last.

"I wish to bring Katherine out in society," said Sarah, looking up in determination at her employer. "I particularly wish to bring her out with other young ladies, some who are like her, but she will not know that." Moore almost dropped his sherry glass as Sarah dropped that bombshell on him.

"Believe me," Sarah went on. "Katherine will hasten to conform to ladylike standards when detection means societal ruin for her. When she is confirmed in her role, she can be re-introduced to Miss Conley-Shore who will see family resemblances between the cousins but think nothing of them. She will think of Katherine as her sister. If Miss Madeleine does discover whom Katherine really is, imagine how she will feel then about her former lover. She will see Katherine in a new and strange light as she will her generous, loving guardian. That is what I call vengeance."

The words were spoken so reasonably and persuasively that Lord Douglas Moore quite believed Sarah Lubbock. He should let Peregrine go. But if Peregrine spoke to Sir John Whiteley... no, he could never do that, could he? No, but on some pretext or other, Peregrine Grimond, ravisher of women, would demand a duel. That was more like the Peregrine Grimond known to Lord Douglas Moore.

And he, Douglas Moore, was no hand with sword or pistol. He sighed aloud and re-filled both sherry glasses. There was little choice in this increasingly silly 'act of vengeance.' No, he couldn't turn his back on his original resolve to make Peregrine Grimond into a woman.

## **V. KATHERINE'S FIRST AT HOME**

"I'm not going!" shouted the young girl, her arms folded in a most unladylike fashion. She didn't seem to realize, however, how, despite her attempt not to cooperate, she had maintained the feminine tones that had become second nature now to her.

Katherine had objected to every garment that Sarah and George had put upon her but, still, she was dressed just as the Lubbocks wished. There were long, emerald earrings at her ears and her auburn hair, so much nicer than her natural color, was pushed behind her ears to show them off.

Across her forehead and around her powdered face, Katherine's own hair was curled tightly but delicately in the latest of female styles. The demi-wig, a mass of matching auburn ringlets was pinned to the back of her hair, pink ribbons woven skilfully by Sarah to make the girl's hair seem natural and all her own. Katherine had complained of the heat and heaviness of her wigs. Now, of course, she was complaining again.

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Lubbock grinned and held my arms against the chair while his wife pinned the tiny, flower-decorated bonnet to my hair, pulling the little veil down across my face so that it almost touched my shiny, red lips. I wanted to lash out at Sarah but when I stood, George held onto my arms. I knew that, if I tried, the recriminations would be swift and hurting.

The green-striped dress that I had to wear had a square-cut neckline, low enough to show off the supposed cleavage of a bosom I didn't have. The muscles of my chest were taped severely to give that illusion and the corset's breast cups were padded to make it appear that I had a real, female figure. White frills ran about the neckline of my dress, similar to the frills at the ends of the sleeves just below my elbows.

I had a thin, girl's bracelet about my hairless forearm and a locket on a chain about my neck. It would never be opened by me, not when it contained a little painting of me by Sarah Lubbock. No, not the real me. It was a painting of 'Katherine' Grimond, the name I was being forced to answer to. In the painting, I was laughing at the picture of Lord Douglas Moore, whose image smiled, as the man never did, back at me as a female.

I supposed, when this was all over, he would keep it as a memento of the trials he had put me through. Oh, when I escaped, and I would eventually, was I ever going to take my revenge on Lord Douglas! Of that, he could be sure!

The Lubbocks ignored my pouting and shouted refusal. Green, suede gloves, similar to my high-heeled boots, covered the femininity of my hands and fingernails. We had had to wait a few minutes while my red nail polish dried. Sarah had taken the time to tighten me even more at my waist and



then to secure me tightly with the large bow she tied and arranged over the wide, rustly petticoats that I wore everyday.

"Now, Katherine," Sarah said as I balked at going forward. I had panicked as George opened the door and the noise of conversation, female conversation, came surging through the door. Sarah frowned and re-arranged the curls about my face before smiling at the consternation that surely showed there.

I was not a girl. No matter how many times they called me 'Katherine,' and I had responded to that, I knew that I was not a girl. I could not entertain the women Sarah Lubbock had invited to call on me, call on me as Katherine Grimond. It was awful enough to be dressed day in and day out in girl's frillies but this had gone on too long. Surely, Moore must have sated his revenge on me by now.

I had figured it out that he must be spying on me. Maddie had said that Oakthorpe Manor was riddled with spy holes. I supposed that Moore must be laughing at the way that I was cooperating with Sarah and George of late. Well, I was. Sooner or later, they were going to slip up; dressed in my frillies and high heels if necessary, I was going to flee Oakthorpe Manor and return to being the man I was.

"There," said Sarah with a smile, turning me so that I could see the pretty girl I had become under her constant, daily attention. "Mmm, that French perfume the master brought you is exquisite, is it not? Don't be surprised if the young ladies remark upon it. It will give you a chance to compliment your benefactor and kind guardian.

"These young ladies, of course, are coming here only to meet you. Your guardian and I do wish you to come out into society, you know, as the lovely, young lady that you are. It will be so nice if you have some friends before you go to your debutante ball."

Sarah's arm on mine guided me out of the room I had been interred in for so long. I gasped in rage and fright at the idea Sarah had been constantly insinuating at me over the last month and more. I had thought that she had been saying it to intimidate me, to make me behave a little more femininely. But she was guiding my rustling, female figure to the stairs that led down to the female voices.

"I am not going to any ball!" I hissed at her, unable to contain myself and play along this time. "Not like this!"

"Oh, but darling Katherine," said Sarah, her face clouding as if my words had really hurt her. In front of us, George Lubbock glanced back at me, his eyes squinting. A muscle in his chin moved as it often did just before he smacked me with something, anything, he had in his hand. Now he banged a riding crop against his boot, something he'd taken to carrying of late and that my buttocks had felt many times.

"Lord Douglas says that you must be dressed like this, Katherine," said Sarah, guiding me down the stairs, making me hold up my skirts and petticoats like a proper young lady, chatting to me as if we were the best of friends. "He will not have you dressed any other way. And so I have told him that we must have a new dress for you, which means we must go up to London very soon."

I tried to stop in the middle of the stairs. On turning a corner, there they were, two older women, looking up at me most expectantly. "Here she is, ladies," said Sarah in a

cheerful voice, leading me down onto the marble floor where our heels immediately began to clack. I minced forward, my dress rustling, as I let my skirts go to caress my stockinged legs, my face aflame in embarrassment.

"I'd like to present to you and your charges, Miss Katherine Grimond," said Sarah with a smile, putting her hand on my slim, tightly corseted waist. I knew what I had to do. I had to curtsy to the women. I intended to be rude and not do it when suddenly George Lubbock appeared behind the women. He slapped his boot viciously with his crop, muttering about dratted flies.

Terrified, I curtsied as I had done to him for days on end in the rooms which they were using to train me to be the debutante girl that they seemed to intend I would become. Oh, what a triumph that would be for Moore. To have me, his rival, presented as a woman at court. That was a scandal I could never have lived down. I had to get away before I found such an indignity being forced upon me.

I felt the warmth of despair, the feeling of humiliation rose in me as I spread my skirts wide and curtsied to each of the women in turn. I could also feel the bondings about my chest and groin as well as the dainty, frilly, feminine undergarments I wore beneath my green, silk dress.

"Oh, but Mrs. Lubbock," said a pleasant faced, grey-haired lady who took my hand and inspected my rouged and scented cheeks. "You didn't tell us how beautiful Miss Grimond is. Why, she is as beautiful as her cousin is handsome. Do you not think so, Mrs. Pettigrew?"

Mrs. Pettigrew did think so. I reeled with the allusion to me, Peregrine, as if they didn't recognize me. Yet they seemed to know me, or they said that they did. "Oh, yes, indeed, Mrs. Smythe," the older, fat woman said. "She'll be the belle of the ball, mark my words, Mrs. Smythe, Mrs. Lubbock, belle of the ball."

I stood in front of them, terrified, as these older women appraised me and accepted me as a girl, as Miss Katherine Grimond. I wanted to howl at them and tell them how stupid they were not to recognize the real me.

"We shall see, we shall see," said Sarah. She led the women and me into a beautiful, airy drawing room with pictures of the Moore family on the walls, several miniatures of young women, and one I recognized right away as Maddie.

"Of course," Sarah went on gaily. "Katherine is the most beautiful girl I've had the pleasure of helping to come out. Katherine," she said, her hand about my trembling figure, steering me towards two smartly-dressed young girls who didn't look at all familiar to me. "I'd like to introduce you, Katherine, to the Misses Hancock. Hester and Madeleine, this is Lord Moore's ward, Miss Katherine Grimond."

I couldn't help the tremor that ran through me at the mention of the name, Madeleine. I hated Sarah Lubbock. I'm sure she had arranged this little humiliation of me in female clothing quite deliberately, including finding a girl named Madeleine to expose me to, as well.

"The Misses Hancock will be at the Earl of Hutton's ball where you will be coming out, Katherine," said Sarah in her sugary sweet tones. Both girls went 'Ooh' and wiggled with

the delight of it all. All I could do was try not to look at them. I felt that I was flushing all over, waiting for them to ask what a man like me was doing in their company.

The Misses Hancock, however, moved aside on the chesterfield so that I, Katherine, could sit between them. I held my skirts and smoothed them beneath me decorously, just as I had practiced a hundred times and more for my gaolers. A surge of anger rose up in me as Sarah smiled and nodded to me.

I had to cross my legs, the rustle of my petticoats and the feeling of the stockings being tugged on by my suspenders being something I was now used to. I sat properly, my stomach in and my bosom out. I was a little more advanced in that department, I noticed, than the other girls; my artificial cleavage made it look like I had real, womanly breasts.

"I'm Hester," the grey-eyed brunette with a serious look about her, said to me. The way she was studying me disturbed me greatly. I think she would be able to describe everything about me in immense detail to her friends. Oh, for goodness' sake, I hoped I didn't have a mole or some distinguishing mark she recognized or could describe to others. But if she saw the man in me, Hester didn't let on at all.

"Madeleine and I live over in Tarbuckley," said Hester. "We're neighbors of your cousin, Peregrine."

"Oh yes," said the blonde, younger sister, smiling at me, her mouth just a little too wide to be attractive to me. "You must introduce us to your cousin, Katherine," Madeleine said, lowering her voice and glancing surreptitiously at the older women who were engaged in their own conversation. "He likes women named Madeleine, we hear."

"Oh, Maddie, stop!" hissed her sister. She put her arm on mine as she leaned forward to reprimand her sister, who had lifted her fan, and was giggling behind it, as if the older women couldn't see what she was up to.

I felt so absurd to be seated there between such young, silly girls and supposed to be one of them as well.

"But Peregrine Grimond is such a handsome man, isn't he, Katherine?" asked Madeleine Hancock in a conspiratorial whisper. "Hasn't he ever mentioned riding through Tarbuckley to you?"

They waited on me for a reply. "I, I..." I stammered, my temperature rising as I felt my earrings swing at my neck. "I haven't seen that much of him lately," I confessed. A shudder passed through me as the girls moved closer to me.

"I told you he was out of the country," said Hester impatiently to her sister. "He is, isn't he?" she asked of me. "Maddie doesn't believe that he won't be at any ball here or in London any time soon."

"You, you know Peregrine," I asked her slowly. "You know where he is?"

"She doesn't know," said Maddie petulantly. "She's just making it up. Peregrine Grimond has never noticed her, not even at the Whiteley's summer fete."

"Well, he had eyes only for another Maddie, not you, either," retorted Hester. She was prettier than her younger sister but the downturned corners of her mouth told me too much about the temper the girl probably had. "Our Maddie saw him out with the Ridley

Foxhounds and he toasted all the maids at the tavern. She thinks he noticed her there, preparing the toddy, and now she thinks she's in love with him."

"He's the handsomest man I've ever seen," sighed Madeleine. "Don't you think so, Katherine?" She put her gloved hand on mine. "He's so strong, so masculine! Not at all like us weak little girls. How are you related to him, Katherine? Are you first cousins? Are you forbidden to marry him? Do tell us if you are."

"Oh yes," I said, feeling my ringlets move as I shook my head. "Peregrine Grimond would be the last man I would ever be able to marry."

I had meant to say that I would be the last man to marry anybody right now. But it didn't come out right.

"Oh, goodie," said a delighted Maddie Hancock. "Now we can be the best of friends since we're not rivals for your cousin's hands."

"Oh, yes," said Hester, raising her fan to her lips. "We can become bosom friends from now on."

"Oh, not fair, Hester, not fair," whimpered her sister. "Oh, Katherine, I wish that I'd been born with breasts as pretty and as big as yours. You watch, Hester, Katherine is going to be dancing with all the handsomest young men of our acquaintance as soon as she comes out."

"Which is why we must be best friends," said Hester with a smile and a nod behind her fan. "We will be quite content with your castoffs, Katherine. And this house will be so busy with all the calls made on you after your debut. With us about, you can keep lots of men here as well for company. It's so thrilling, isn't it, when young men flock around and provide entertainment for pretty girls like you. I hope you'll let us enjoy the pursuits they get up to, Miss Katherine."

I was speechless and shivering with strange feelings as the girls went on to talk of other things, as they said, but the other 'things' were just other men. I was whispered to about points of feminine decorum with men. It was soon obvious to me that these two young women were quite inexperienced in the ways of men.

"I do hope Peregrine is at the Earl of Hutton's ball," said Maddie as she wound down. I was thinking how incredible it was that I had sat and endured such silly talk about nothing at all, disguised as a girl and I had not been challenged, not once.

"It caused quite a stir when we heard that you, a Grimond, was to be a ward of Lord Douglas Moore's," said Hester thoughtfully, sipping on the tea I had been pressed on to serve to them and my older guests, which I had done as I had been taught by my iron-fisted gaoler. "The bad blood between the families is to be over, is it? Or did Sir John refuse to put Peregrine over you because of his reputation as a ladies' man. You would have been quite a temptation for him, Katherine."

Hester said that in such a serious fashion. I was indignant for myself, for the reputation these girls were giving me. I would have known exactly how to behave if I had been the guardian of a young woman like the person I had become. I glanced at my image in the drawing room mirror. I caught myself smiling at another of Madeleine Hancock's

impertinences and couldn't believe that the smiling girl was me. But Peregrine would have looked after girls as silly as the Hancocks well, I was certain. I was Peregrine, after all.

I tried to defend him, Peregrine, myself, gently, but the girls would have none of it. They liked their image of a lecherous, wild-living Peregrine Grimond, it seemed. They wanted him back. He was dangerous, said Hester, behind her fan.

"Just the way we like our men," murmured Madeleine Hancock behind hers.

"Then, I'm sure you'll see him again," I told them, smiling sweetly at Sarah who had turned to listen to the conversation we girls were having.

Sarah rang for a servant. My coat was brought and so we ladies went on a tour of the grounds at Oakthorpe Manor. The servants, none of whom I recognized doffing their hats to us, brought us fragrant blooms to appreciate. My perfume was praised and I had the women coming over to me and hugging me and telling me how sweetly, how femininely, I smelled, as if it was a compliment. And each time, my dress would swish so noisily and my stockings would remind me that I was dressed just like the other girls, even to my pretty corset and panties.

"Such a beautiful gown and hat you are wearing, Miss Katherine," said Mrs. Pettigrew. "Did you get them made for you in London?"

In London, I learned, I would be certain to find a husband. Indeed, all that the ladies and the Misses Hancock talked about was young men, who was eligible and who was not. They took it for granted that I had the same interests they had. Mrs. Smythe pressed me about the dress I would wear at the upcoming ball.

"Mrs. Lubbock," I told her as demurely as I could through my shivers, "buys all of my dresses. I just wear what I am told." There, I thought, looking at Sarah's amused face. I didn't tell a lie. I hadn't about Peregrine and I hadn't lied about the dresses I was forced to wear.

"Oh," said Hester, eyeing my auburn hair and my face critically. I thought that she was about to declare what she had figured out about me. "Mrs. Lubbock will have you married off in no time at all, then. Being a Grimond shouldn't hurt your prospects of finding a tall, dark man with dark sideburns ..."

"And a big nose," said Maddie, lifting her fan in front of her face.

That even amused the other ladies as their scolding of the Misses Hancock was in laughing tones. A carriage arrived and a new group of ladies arrived to inspect me. Some of them I knew as influential women about the county though I had paid them little heed as they were all considerably older than Peregrine, than me.

I was drawn away from the Misses Hancock but the same small talk dominated the conversation. The Honorable Mrs. Walters thought that I was 'lovely.' Mrs. Brotherton thought I was 'so beautifully dressed.' On our return to the drawing room, I had to pirouette for the five ladies, turning with an attempt at female grace which Sarah must have known demeaned the image I had of myself inside. I was 'exquisite,' 'wore such pretty earrings,' 'had such a pretty face,' 'and wherever did you get such a figure, dear?' 'you wear such gorgeous clothes' and the final compliment, 'she is so agreeably feminine, Mrs. Lubbock, you must permit me to introduce my Bertie to her.'

I knew Bertie Faversham and he was an ass. The thought of him dancing with me in the way I danced with George Lubbock raised my temperature as well. The thought made me want to vomit! To be held as if I was a woman and danced with by Bertie Faversham! I would hate it! And yet, I danced with George now every day. It was a welcome relief in the day when Mrs. Lubbock played on the piano or spinet and I curtsied to her husband. He swirled and twirled me through dances I now knew well from a female perspective.

When I get to be a man again, I kept telling myself, I will know so much about women. I would be such a lover, such a dancer, such a friend and such a fine companion. I shuddered and, for the first time, as the ladies chattered around me, the thought came to me that I might not ever be able to get back to being Peregrine again.

High tea was served. I was the server, naturally. All the ladies praised everything that I did so femininely and assured me that I was the perfect little lady, which made me squirm with frustration. The Earl's ball was being eagerly anticipated, I gathered, and I was assured that it was going to be a very gay affair. I was directed as to the men I should allow myself to dance with.

The talk then turned to other balls and to the conduct of my 'wild cousin,' Peregrine. Sarah deftly turned aside questions directed at me as to where he was. She told the other women, and me, that I was the daughter of Peregrine's uncle, Marcus, and a Scottish clergyman's daughter. The marriage wasn't widely known as my father had died in India and my mother had followed him soon after our return to the damp, English climate.

"Peregrine is Katherine's only living relative," said Sarah, stroking my hand as if she sympathized with me. "But he is far too wild to be a legal guardian to a young, innocent girl like Katherine. Lord Moore agreed to meet the legal requirements and has brought me in as the girl's governess until she inherits the small fortune her family has left her. Since she is just eighteen, that will mean she will be three years under my care," Sarah finished.

"How lucky for her!" gushed the Honorable Mrs. Walters. I seethed inside and wished that I was only brave enough to stand and declare who I was and what had been done to me by this witch of a woman the others were praising to the skies.

Sarah smiled triumphantly, her arm about my waist, as we waved the ladies goodbye. George came sauntering around the doorway. "It went well," Sarah said to her husband, putting my hand in his. "I feel like some romantic music with all the talk of balls and handsome men." She smiled at her husband and a sinking feeling overwhelmed me. "Those waltzes you learned in the French and Italian clubs, my husband, the ones where you hold the girl so tightly to you. Let's start with those tonight. I know Katherine will appreciate being held tightly and cuddled on the dance floor."

## VI. MADAME LECANNET'S DISCOVERY

"Where are we going?" I asked fearfully as Sarah dressed me again for going out several days later. I trembled inside as the door to my room was opened again and I was led forth along the hallways and down the stairs.

This time, however, a horse-carriage was drawn up outside the doors of Oakthorpe Manor's East Wing. I shivered as Sarah took me by the hand and escorted me towards

men I had never seen before, who came forward to assist me as if I was a young lady entering the carriage.

Apart from all the constrictions, it was so odd to feel the breeze whipping the skirts about my legs and my hair about my face. I wobbled on my high heels as I ascended into the carriage. A man's hand instantly steadied me as I rustled into the carriage and sat down as hastily as I could.

Sarah scolded me and made me stand and sit properly, smoothing my skirts like a proper, young lady. "And sit up straight," she told me firmly, a gleam in her eye. I knew why I had to do that. It was because my constrained, padded breasts showed themselves so clearly. "You have a lovely figure, Katherine Grimond," said my 'governess,' "and you must show it off to its best effect. I will not have you slouch, my girl."

The older coachman ignored our conversation while the younger man loaded suitcases and hatboxes into the carriage, all pretty women's cases, I noted with a sinking feeling.

"Please, Mrs. Lubbock," I asked in a whisper. "Where, where are we going?"

"Why, to London, of course," said Sarah Lubbock, waving to George, who was mounting on a grey that looked very familiar. It was familiar. I wanted to shout out loud and ask him what he was doing riding out on Far Connaught, my horse!

"George is so grand on a horse, don't you think, Katherine?" asked Mrs. Lubbock in a teasing voice. "He'll come with us to London, but not in to the ladies' dressmaker, of course. I sent along a dress dummy to Madame Lecannet but you need a fitting for the gown she has prepared for you for your coming out ball. Then, we have others that we must place on order as well. You cannot have just one ball gown, young lady, oh no. You will be invited to many balls in town as the season reaches its height. And then you are to be presented at court. Oh, it will be such an honor for a young girl like you. I wouldn't be at all surprised if one of the princes favored you with a dance."

I stared at my gaoler helplessly. "You wouldn't," I whimpered at her as the carriage lurched. We began to move across the familiar grounds where once I had skulked in impunity.

"Oh, but we will, Miss Grimond," Sarah Lubbock said to me, relaxing into the cushions of her seat in a manner not allowed to me. "Your cousin may treat women in a cavalier fashion but we shall not, Katherine. You may be sure that no young man will take advantage of you. Lord Douglas Moore, your kind guardian, is determined that you will be a virgin girl when placed before Their Highnesses in the place of his other young ward."

I looked at her in anguish. "Maddie," I whispered, wanting to tell her that I would treat her most honorably if only they would let me. I would marry her, I would, and I would apologize to Douglas Moore and not call him out to the field of honor. I would promise it if only they would let me out of these shaping corsets and female clothing. The aroma of flowers rose about me from my dress and from my skin. It was the smell of a young girl which I was becoming so accustomed to that I hated to dress in camisoles and bloomers that hadn't been scented for me.

"Look," said Sarah, sitting up then and smiling. "The young officers of the Thirtieth Foot. Smile, Katherine, but do not wave back. Use your fan as I have shown you. It is most fitting in a girl like you."

Sarah Lubbock herself waved cheerfully at several young men riding out along the Parkway. They tried to catch a glimpse of me, Sarah's companion, my flowery bonnet and matching gold cloak letting them know that I was a young girl. But I wasn't, I thought to myself in despair. The fan hid my blushes from the young men, the same age as me. I should be one of their number, I thought. My eyes were bright, accentuated by the darkened, curled eyelashes that I had spent so long making perfect for Mrs. Lubbock.

We were soon out on the turnpike, amid carriages of many different types. I was subjected to the ignominy of having to use the Ladies' Powder Room at the Inns at which we stopped, many occupied by other young ladies passing us or travelling with us on the road. I thought that I might try to escape but George Lubbock was always there when I left the powder room with Sarah.

I was soon manacled to a bed and so I didn't have to be a woman in the noisy, common dining rooms where the Lubbocks spent the early evenings. The few people that I met in the entrances to inns didn't scream at me. They didn't call out to me what they must think when they saw who it was dressed so earnestly as a female. I shuddered as they smiled at me and the soldiers asked me raucously for my room number.

It took us three days to arrive at our London lodgings, in time only to have our luggage removed into a great house, before I was whisked away by Sarah to the shop on Standard Street. The coachman jumped down from the box to help me descend in ladylike fashion; my gloved hand rested on his arm. I had to put up my tiny, fashionable parasol in my other hand, my purse hung from my wrist. I was used to being treated as a young lady and stepping lightly, making sure that my heel was secure before I moved. It made me move as if I was dancing, flowing in my skirts to the sidewalk.

I meant to thank the coachman but when I looked up at him, I was tongue-tied. I saw that he, the younger one, was looking at me with admiration in his eyes. His hand gripping mine tightened and I felt a real pang of fear as I flushed and averted my feminized face from him.

"That will be all, Ernest," Sarah snapped at the young man. He silently melted back behind the coach, into the gauntlet of coachmen whom I had to pass as daintily as I could and enter into a woman's shop which had a sign, 'Men are Not Allowed past this point' on both of its adjoining doors.

Sarah's dress swayed against mine. Her arm about my waist impelled me through the doorway. "Madame Lecannet," she said to me, "is the finest dressmaker in London. She has had your measurements for weeks."

But how could she? I wanted to ask, as we entered the foyer and were assaulted by women's fragrances of every type and description. Shopgirls, in black skirts and white blouses, ushered women from the waiting lines into the curtained areas beyond. It all reminded me of a hospital ward. As we were ushered along, young women in all states of undress went by me or stood in curtained alcoves. The dark-skirted assistants measured them against gowns of all colors of silk.

I wanted to run. My face was flaming as an assistant removed a girl's corset right in front of me and cupped the young woman's breasts before measuring both the young, brunette girl and the dress on the dressmaker's dummy in the curtained alcove.

"Sarah!" a woman called to my governess. The dark-haired woman left her charge to come over and take Sarah by the arm, hugging her and giving her fake kisses on both cheeks in the French manner.

An assistant pulled me then into a curtained alcove. "Take off your dress," she said to me. "Go on!" she added with a scowl as I retreated from her assisting hands. "Down to your bloomers and corset, Miss Grimond. Molly," she said to the girl's head that peeped in through the curtains. "Miss Katherine Grimond for a fitting. Bring in the black and silver you've been admiring so much the last week. This is the young lady we shall be fitting it to."

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"Esther McDowell," said Sarah to the older woman who had hugged her so warmly. "I didn't know that you were in London."

Sarah Lubbock looked over at the open curtains and the bare-breasted blonde looking out defiantly at her and Mrs. McDowell. "Well," Sarah went on pointedly with a smile. "I see that Madame continues to cater to just about anyone."

Esther McDowell was an older, grey-tinted version of Sarah Lubbock, or so she would have styled herself. But Esther was far more relaxed than Sarah, always had been. She wasn't as tense nor was she as driven by anxiety as Sarah. She laughed easily, taking away the sting of Sarah's remark.

"Madame," said Esther drolly, "will outfit anyone who has the money and you know that Mrs. McDowell's charges always have that." She eyed Sarah in speculation. "You're chaperoning yours to Lord Hutton's?"

Sarah nodded. "Well, it was nice to ..." she began, trying to move away.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry," Esther McDowell said, intrigued by the nervous, terrified girl she had seen with Sarah Lubbock. She knew Sarah's methods and didn't doubt that the woman and her odious husband, George, were enforcing Sarah's commands with their usual brutality. Never get repeat business that way, Esther had tried to warn the Lubbocks, but Sarah hadn't seemed to care. One thing about her was that she always did seem to end up with docile, pretty things who married well.

"Your girl seems upset by nakedness," said Esther with a smile. "It's as if she hasn't seen such a sight before as we see in here all the time. She must be right out of a convent. I should warn you that Madame Lecannet is busy and agitated today. She won't be in any mood to jolly along shrinking violets like your pretty, little thing. You could be here for hours yet."

Sarah gave the other woman a wintry look. "I'm sorry, Esther. I must go," she said forcefully. "Katherine and I have an appointment with Madame and she will see us pres-

ently. My debutante is important to her business. Excuse me while I prepare Katherine for Madame.”

Sarah fumed inwardly at having to be so polite to Mrs. Esther McDowell, proprietress of an infamous ‘house of ill-repute’ on Cleveland Street. Why was it that the woman still claimed an acquaintance with her, she wondered, letting go with a few nasty epithets that startled Katherine and the girl helping her get undressed.

Katherine looked frantically to Sarah for help as the woman and another assistant eased her long, travelling dress from her and began to loosen her petticoats. Sarah had to smile at the way Katherine stood. The girl didn’t know how her gestures were all feminine and demure as she was stripped down to her bloomers, her stockings and her tightly laced bodice. The thin straps of the bodice tumbled from Katherine’s thin shoulders as the girl’s pretty eyes—yes, Katherine was doing remarkably well now in making herself look feminine with her makeup pencils and brushes—appealed to Sarah to get her out of the room.

Katherine’s hands were crossed in front of her bloomers as a large, dark-haired woman bustled in; a thin-faced girl pushed in a stand on which was one of the most beautiful gowns Sarah had ever seen. Oh, how she envied Katherine who would have the opportunity to wear such a lovely dress.

“Go! Go!” said the large woman to all the girls who promptly scuttled away with fearful looks on their faces. “So, who is this, ma chere Madame Lubbock? Tell me whom it is I am lavishing my precious time upon, today of all days.”

“This is Miss Katherine Grimond,” said Sarah quickly. Katherine shook as Madame Lecannet seized her hands, stroked them, raised them and examined her manicured and painted nails carefully. She then ran her hands, with their warm, pudgy, bejewelled fingers up Katherine’s arms, resting them on her shoulders.

Madame’s dark eyes, painted with dark lines to make them appear larger, bored into Katherine’s femininely outlined eyes, so much like her own. Then her hands went onto Katherine’s neck as the girl squirmed under her touch. She went past the velvet bow and up to her hair, caressing the curls lightly. The girl trembled in front of her. Madame tweaked the earrings absent-mindedly.

“She likes the makeup on her face?” asked the amply built, dark-haired woman. Clearly she dyed her hair judging from the age lines showing on her face. “She doesn’t need it, ma cherie,” she went on. “She would be just as pretty without it. She has the peaches and cream. That is how you say it, isn’t it? Her complexion is so typically English of the girls from the country.”

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I stood there, swaying in my long dress. I was blushing as the woman went on and on, paying compliments to my femininity while Sarah looked like the cat who has eaten the cream. I think that is what must have alerted Madame Lecannet to what I really was.

She had come behind me and was running her hands over my body, over my corseted, tightly held ribs, my narrowed waist and wide, padded hips. I couldn’t help it that I shud-

dered at such a thing happening to me. It got even worse as Madame knelt and ran her pudgy, soft hands over my silk-covered thighs, finding and tracing the suspenders and stocking tops beneath the bloomers.

I wriggled, unable to withstand the feelings of horror engulfing me as the woman ran her hands up my front, complimenting Sarah on the way she was training my girlish shape. I flushed as she praised the way I had curled my lashes and painted them.

“Exquisite,” murmured Madame Lecannet, “And she does all such preparations herself?”

“Today she has,” agreed Mrs. Lubbock. “As I have taught her, of course.”

“Of course,” Madame Lecannet dryly agreed.

I bit my lower lip to stop the quivering. I don’t know why but I thought that I would cry at any moment. Madame sniffed at my shoulders and told Sarah how much she enjoyed lavender and lace on pretty girls and she understood that it was His Highness’s favorite as well.

I couldn’t look at the sly grin on Sarah’s face as the woman ran her hands all over me, seemingly checking my measurements with a string that had appeared between her fingers. Madame ran her hands over my breasts without warning. I squealed and clutched at my chest as she pressed the padding back against my firm nipples. Sarah had affixed tiny, clip-on earrings to me in that area to arouse me as I should be aroused she said when a young man accidentally brushed me in my bosom. George had spent a lot of time the last few days ‘accidentally’ brushing against me, making me feel tense.

George’s touch, however, was nothing like the caress that Madame gave me, intimate and arousing, as she measured me. She told Sarah I should probably be a little larger to be strictly in fashion this year; I could be padded a little more with some of her special undergarments, for women like me.

“Of course,” said Sarah sweetly. “It is for that reason that we came here to you. You have done wonders for other flat-chested girls of our acquaintance, Madame.”

Suddenly, a pudgy hand left my chest and came up quickly to grip my throat. For a moment, I thought that the woman was trying to strangle me, then I realized that she was feeling for something in my neck. Her fingers were tracing out my Adam’s apple. I choked and stepped back, unable to look the woman in the eye. All I could think was that the woman had found me out. My body tingled with shame as I expected her at any moment to call out. Her assistants would come running to usher me, a man in women’s underwear, out of her salon.

“So, that is why the poor darling has no breasts or hips,” Madame Lecannet said in that accented, dry tone to Sarah Lubbock. She stroked my arm; I gasped and couldn’t help the shudder passing through me. She put her hand on my chin and lifted it, so I was forced to look into the indescribable expression on her face.

I expected scorn, mockery, or even outright laughter but none of them were there. Madame’s face instead showed something like sympathy as she studied me. I felt my thighs constrict and my body go rigid as she pursed her painted lips and examined my face criti-

cally. I felt her interest in me growing and I had rarely felt so ashamed as I let her stroke my stiffly held body all over again.

"I told him that we couldn't fool you," Sarah lied to Madame. She had a smile on her face as she indicated me in my bloomers, high heels and corset, standing in front of the older dressmaker. "He does really want to wear one of your finest gowns, Madame. He has some notion of attending a ball as a young lady."

"And so she shall," murmured Madame Lecannet, releasing me then, and checking the measure of my leg in my high-heeled boots. She looked at Sarah and gave a short laugh that sent chills up and down my spine. "Nothing but the best for your little darling, Mrs. Lubbock, hein?"

Madame smiled at me, her hands reaching out to touch my auburn curls in admiration. "So what does this little darling call herself when she is not being a little girl?"

"He isn't anything else these days," said Sarah Lubbock with a smirk at me. "He doesn't answer to anything else but Katherine."

"Please," said Madame with a frown. "She," she stressed the word. I felt weird as she touched my arm as if in sympathy at some insult Sarah had directed at me. "She is definitely one of us," she said, forcing a smile at Sarah. Then she gave me a great hug, crushing me against her huge, soft, womanish frame. It was the first mark of affection I had received in so long; she held me and kissed my cheek. Sarah looked at us both in utter astonishment.

"Well, Miss Katherine Grimond," said Madame Lecannet, holding my arm and my hand in hers. "You have come to the right place in London. And I don't believe Sarah when she says you insisted on coming here. She knows that I outfit all the gentlemen who attend Mrs. McDowell's on Cleveland Street."

I must have looked perplexed. I had heard of the brothels on Cleveland Street. Who hasn't? The Prince's cousin, the Duke of Clarence, was supposed to frequent them. I guessed that Mrs. McDowell was some kind of high class madam, outfitting one of her girls in the very best if she entertained Royalty in her establishment.

"Ah, but you will be much prettier in my gowns than the gentlemen who wear them on Cleveland Street," said Madame Lecannet. I gasped in surprise as I got her meaning. She looked at me in amazement.

"She doesn't know about Mrs. McDowell's?" Madame asked Sarah in surprise. "Did I not see Mrs. McDowell here this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Sarah, "but she was here with one of her little, soiled doves."

"Oh no," said Madame, smiling broadly. "She has one of the same kind of darlings here as you have, my dear."

Sarah looked as surprised as I must have. "Well," she said. "Well."

"My girls will work overtime on the gowns you will wish to purchase for Miss Grimond," said Madame Lecannet, returning to a most business-like manner. "I guarantee that she will be the pick of the debutantes' ball. May I presume that she will be at the Earl of Hutton's ball, Mrs. Lubbock?"

Sarah nodded in forced agreement.

"Ah," said Madame Lecannet. "So many pretty girls will be there. We must ensure that Miss Grimond will be the pick of them all, the belle of the ball. And she will be. I guarantee it. Won't that be such a thrill?" she asked me. I felt my temperature rising.

"She needs new corsets as well, Mrs. Lubbock," said Madame. She had a frown on her face as she put her hands about my waist. "And new underclothes, I think. Any man who gets down to these will find them too hard, too binding. He is bound to think something is amiss, as I did."

Madame ran her hands over my padded breasts and smiled as I winced, humiliated beyond belief at what sort of man she thought I was. "We must make Katherine a new one, softer to the gentleman's touch, but firm enough to push up and shape the flesh," she said, her eyes gleaming with amusement at my discomfort. "It must be good to the touch, too. After all, it is the purpose of your new life, isn't it, Miss Katherine, to have men touch you like I am touching you?"

I couldn't bear it. I raised my head, my jaw clenched, to let the woman know that I was not there under my own volition. I tried to look her in her painted eyes and protest but Madame was already laughing at me. "The lady doth protest too much," she quoted while I spluttered and flushed at her caress across my cleavage.

"She really is a little darling," said Madame Lecannet. "Far superior to that little strumpet Mrs. McDowell is trying to raise from the gutter." She turned brusquely to Sarah, ignoring completely the 'See here' I tried to get out. "If you have any difficulty keeping her satisfied," she said, really stressing the 'her,' "well, I know a gentleman or two who really adore this type of girl. The parodies at Cleveland Street offend their sensibilities, as you can well imagine. My gentlemen friends would adore meeting Miss Grimond at a ball."

Sarah Lubbock smiled grimly and shook her head quickly. "My thanks, Madame," she said forcefully. "But after she comes out as a debutante, Miss Grimond has her eyes set on one young man in particular to be her favorite. We hope to be commissioning you very soon to make her wedding dress for her."

Madame Lecannet let loose a peal of hoarse laughter and swept away out of the curtained cubicle, leaving me a frightened, nervous wreck. I faced Sarah Lubbock and the import of her words began to sink in.

"How, how dare you ...?" I managed to get out, as anger and fear threatened to overcome me. The tirade I was about to let loose was broken, however, by the giggling, laughing entry of the young maids. They took down the pink, crinoline gown that had been on a stand in the corner and that took two of them to carry and set against me.

"I, I can't wear that," I gasped as the girls lay the dress down and tried to get me to step into it.

"Of course you will, Katherine," said Sarah, looking as if she was about to laugh at me again. I felt furious with her as the maid assistants began to pull the dress up me, slapping away my hands when I tried to stop them. They began to fasten and lace me into the gown while Sarah encouraged them.

"Your color is pink," said Sarah, knowing that her words would make me furious . They did. "Next time, you will have a silk underdress and a new corset from Madame. That will make you feel much more feminine. Now, stop acting up, Katherine, and let the girls do the work they are paid to do. Oh, that crinoline is so charming! I can see you now in Lord Douglas' arms, the belle of his brother's ball!"

## VII. MISS KATHERINE GRIMOND'S DEBUT

The preparations for the Earl of Hutton's Autumn Ball took much longer than a frustrated Sarah Lubbock had anticipated. Katherine tried to balk at every step, from her scented, rosewater bath onward. It was a struggle to prepare her hair which Sarah had decided should be put up in a circular braid so that a string of pearls could highlight the auburn curls and also support a lone, dangling pearl on the girl's clear forehead. Her hair was severely parted and curled to frame her face, giving her face an exotic, even Oriental, touch.

A dark rinse had made Katherine's hair gleam. Its auburn highlights were very attractive as the girl might have appreciated if she had really been the girl that clearly she should have been. Long earrings, infested with pearls, hung from the girl's ears. She didn't appreciate that she was wearing Peregrine's mother's jewellery, the silly girl, thought Sarah ironically.

Katherine had fought to displace the familiar pearls until George had to be called upon. His well-placed blows on the soft panties the girl was wearing finally convinced her to stop her sobbing and cooperate in Sarah's campaign to make her the belle of the ball.

The earrings were secured and Sarah did the girl's eyelashes herself. At the ball, all of the women would wear rouge, too much in most cases, and French perfume, as well as kohl on their eyes. Many would look like the girls of Cleveland Street, both the real and the unreal.

Sarah didn't skimp on Katherine's makeup, ignoring Madame Lecannet's advice to go lightly on Katherine's paint and powder. Madame Lecannet, of course, did not know how much the makeup and hair styling that Sarah used softened and distorted the young girl's looks. Someone who knew the family might say that she looked like a Grimond but not would say, "What is Peregrine doing dressed like a woman?"

The French perfume Sarah used liberally on Katherine's bosom and neck, behind her ears and at her wrists, was the most expensive she had ever heard of. Lord Douglas Moore hadn't turned a hair when she told him it was the best. He returned with it for Sarah to use; the older woman almost had a fit of jealousy when she looked at what her employer bought for the man who had ruined his ward.

Katherine sobbed when she had to bind up her private parts and secure the special, softly padded corset that Madame Lecannet had provided. As Madame had promised, Katherine's figure lost none of its girlish shape but her breasts moved slightly and might have been real, the way her chest muscles were taped at the sides and beneath, gripped into the cups of the corset that had some sort of heavy liquid insert, making Katherine seem real.

Katherine knew it as well, which made the evening delicious for Sarah. It mattered to her now not at all if the girl had a fit at the ball and revealed who she was and what had happened to her. It would only disgrace her for the rest of her life, gloated Sarah. On the other hand, if Katherine went along with the charade she had been so well prepared for, she would also be degraded, in a different way, certainly. But her place as a woman in society would have been secured. Single women of good fortune would be safe from Peregrine Grimond, thought Sarah contemptuously.

"There is liquid in here," Katherine said in horror as she touched her figure and her breasts moved. Her hands jumped away from touching herself. Sarah took her hands and slipped the silk underdress over her head. She had to smile as the girl ran her hands down the undergarment, pressing her shaking fingers against the softness encasing her. Katherine didn't seem to notice how her hips also gave a little under her supple fingers.

The slippers glittered with dark pink sequins as Sarah put them onto her stockinged feet. The girl murmured, "No, no, I mustn't," as Sarah stood her in them and swished the underdress against her. She noted how the girl shivered as she looked at the vision of girlish loveliness in the mirrors she had had brought into the dressing room of the Earl of Hutton's London house.

"You are so beautiful!" murmured Sarah maliciously as she manoeuvred the girl towards her pink crinoline. Katherine gave her a helpless look; Sarah stood her carefully, then drew the dress up her slender body, fitting it over her arms and her shoulders. Katherine looked in alarm at herself in the mirror.

Amazing how Katherine didn't fight that, thought Sarah in disgust, as the girl stared at herself, swaying her skirts, actually seeming to accept who she was. Sarah placed the purse and the fan over her gloved wrist. The girl swallowed hard as she saw the dance card Sarah had placed there.

"Tonight you are Katherine," Sarah whispered, nodding to George to open the door. The girl obediently picked up her skirts and wobbled through the doorway into the blast of noise, the mix of people's excited voices and the music so different from the quiet halls they had come through earlier.

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"I can't!" I muttered, stopping and trying to turn back. Sarah took one of my arms as I dropped my skirts and George took the other. I stood struggling with them when another couple came around the corner and headed eagerly to the top of the stairs, just in front of us.

"By Jove!" said the tall, thin man, who looked like a Moore relative, staring at me and stopping on the top step. The girl with him, in green and white silk, almost pouted as she looked at me.

"Come on, Geoffrey," she said hastily, tugging on his arm, expertly lifting her dress so she could dance down the staircase.

"That is the way you must do it," hissed Sarah at me. George's arm propelled me to the top of the stairs. I looked down on the frightening crowd of people down below me. Geoffrey and the woman were almost skipping down the staircase; it curved to the left, then emptied into a wide foyer where arriving guests were placing their outer garments, cloaks, furs and coats in the hands of a train of servants who carried them off into somewhere in the interior.

"I, I can't," I said to Sarah. She lifted my skirts and placed them in my hand so that I could negotiate the stairs in my high-heeled slippers. I had practiced on the staircases at Oakthorpe Manor several times a day, going up and down in long skirts. There had never been so many people looking up at me, watching me, waiting for me to disgrace myself so that they could all laugh at me and praise Lord Douglas Moore for the indignities he had piled on me.

"One step," murmured Sarah, holding my hand and forcing me to wobble down one step. My skirts swished on the carpeting behind me. I swayed as I recalled how I must move so that I wouldn't fall. The terrible thing was that my chest rose and fell and wobbled with me as I took another step. Pink fabric cupped my chest.

"You are Katherine," Sarah whispered at me. I held onto that, knowing that only that belief could possibly get me through the torture Lord Douglas Moore had planned for me that evening.

I couldn't stand the eyes as I started to move, swishing sounds accompanying me. My legs felt soft and smooth as the silk stroked me with every step. I tried to look down and there were my breasts, my breasts, leading me.

A footman slipped a hand under mine as I cleared the last step. I was conscious of so many eyes looking at me; some people were whispering in the vast noise echoing about the foyer. The footman walked me forward just as Sarah had said that he would and I was formally presented for the first time to the Earl of Hutton, the brother of Lord Douglas Moore.

"My lord, my lady," said the footman, letting me go. "I present Miss Katherine Grimond. Miss Grimond, the Earl and Countess of Hutton."

"My dear," said a tall woman, looking down on me. She glittered in diamonds. "So we meet Douglas' fabled ward at last. My goodness, you are a pretty thing, aren't you?"

A tall, thin man, so like Douglas Moore that I thought it was him at first, moved forward to take my hand. All I remembered was what Sarah had told me I must do and so I curtsayed to him right away.

"Oh, yes," said the Earl. "First Maddie, and now Katherine. I am so jealous of Duggie, my dear. I don't know how he manages to involve himself in the affairs of such pretty women."

The Earl and Countess each gave me a hug, which the Countess told me wasn't quite proper etiquette but, hang it all, I was going to be a member of the family soon, wasn't I? That sent shivers down me. Then the Earl did something that I didn't expect. He took the card from my wrist and signed it.

"Number eleven," the Earl smiled at me. "It will be a very sedate waltz, my dear, none of that stylish, Viennese stuff. Far too athletic, by Jove. I'll leave those for the young officers, like cousin Geoffrey or the Duke. He's here tonight, you know, along with his cousins. But here's Douglas, the man of the moment, come to claim his sweetie, we expect. I'll look forward to dancing with you later."

Lord Douglas Moore was indeed standing beside me, looking down on me, despite my high heels. "Let me escort you into the ballroom, Katherine," he said to me. I shivered at him looking at me, knowing who and what he was. He didn't gloat or make any silly remarks about my female beauty. He would have known they were untrue and I think I might have attacked him and revealed the scandal unfolding right before everyone at the grand Autumn Ball.

I tried to move in a composed, graceful way as I felt the eyes of many gorgeous women on me as well as those of so many military men. There were few whom I knew by sight, I realized. I was walked in to a group listening to Sir John Whiteley, my father's trustee, whom I hoped was looking after my Grimondwood estate.

"Miss Katherine Grimond," Sir John said as I curtseyed to him; he kissed the back of my hand most gallantly. "So we meet at last. I must say, Miss Grimond, that you look nothing at all like your scallywag of a cousin. Thank goodness."

"Oh and how is Miss Grimond so different from Peregrine?" asked the Honorable Charlotte Allenby, an older woman whom I had seen but mostly heard before at one of Sir John's long and boring soirees. "I would have said," she went on in the accented, seductive voice she affected, "that Peregrine



Grimond was a most comely man."

That caused all of the company to smile and laugh. "Oh, he was, my lady," said Sir John. "A fine figure of a man was young Peregrine. But his was a male handsomeness, madam, and one look at Katherine shows that she in every way exemplifies, if I may say so, all aspects of female beauty."

"Well," said another woman, her eyes sparkling as she raised her fan and looked at me. I felt a warm flood of emotions pass through me as several women tittered at the extravagant compliment paid to me.

"Katherine would thank you," cut in Lord Douglas Moore quite seriously, "if she knew, Sir John, that you were not using such flowery language to entice all the debutantes here this evening to admire your silver tongue."

Several of the men nodded in agreement with that. "Trying to cut us all out of Miss Grimond's favor," said an earnest young man, whom Lord Douglas Moore introduced me to as the Duke of Clarence.

"Your, your grace," I murmured, clutching at my dress as I curtsyed again, more gracefully than the last time, I hoped.

As I rose, the Duke smiled and slipped my dance card from my wrist. He wrote twice on my card. "There," he said gaily. "Two dances with me, Miss Grimond. I'm sorry that I cannot claim more but my cousin watches me like a hawk at these functions and reports back to my mother and my aunt about my habits. If I danced with you a third time, it would be a scandal by their reckoning. If I danced with you a fourth, we would be betrothed before nightfall of tomorrow. Still," his pencil hovered over the card, "I must marry some time, mustn't I?"

A chill went through me as the party laughed at me in my girlish distress. Lord Douglas Moore took my card from the Duke and returned it gravely to me. "Your Grace," he said reproachfully, "this is not the kind of talk a shy debutante should be subject to on the occasion of her debut in society."

"This is the first time you have ever been out?" asked the Duke in great surprise. Then, he amazed everyone and alarmed me so completely I could hear my heart thudding in my jewelled ears. The Duke of Clarence, cousin to the Royal princes, fell on his knee and abjectly begged my pardon for being so crass.

That attracted considerable attention about the room; I felt that almost everyone was looking at me and laughing at me. "I do wholeheartedly forgive you, Your Grace," I whispered. Many people were looking at us. "Please, please, get up."

The Duke did so with a huge smile on his face. "Well, Moore?" he asked, looking pleased with himself. I wished that the floor could open and absorb me, so ridiculous did I feel. The jewel on my forehead bounced and my dress swished about me.

"We accept your apology, Your Grace," said Lord Douglas Moore haughtily. "It has, however, only compounded the problem of the sort of attention any young debutante should receive. Your Grace, my ward and I will both bid your company adieu and seek further acquaintances for Miss Grimond to appreciate."

I agreed with him. With his arm under mine, I walked quite gracefully away from the laughing Duke. Then it hit me what I was doing. I was moving with my hated enemy as if I was a woman, a woman who seemed to be under his control, enjoying his company, a woman in pink crinoline and auburn curls, who rustled with every step she took and who didn't dare to look down at the womanly attributes that preceded her into another group of people.

I had to curtsey again to a man with a florid, handlebar mustache who was Sir George St John, the current chief commissioner of the new police force in and about London. He was older and he did an awful thing. He encouraged several of the young men with him to take my dance card and add their names to it.

"Young girls," he said in his distorted upper class accent, "ought to be dancing with young men, doncha know, Moore, not old fogies like you and me."

Lord Douglas seemed taken aback by that remark and the police commissioner made me smile by winking at me behind Douglas' back. I felt a little warm when he did that, which was weird. Sir George clearly admired me; when he signed my card before returning it to me, I actually felt quite pleased. But the thought of being pleased at a man selecting me for a dance made me feel embarrassed, no matter how femininely I was dressed.

"We must go to the dance floor, Miss Grimond," said Lord Douglas, so, my face scarlet, I went out on the dance floor, surrounded by a row of onlookers. I danced girlishly with my enemy, curtseying to him and letting him hold my dance card as we did a progression towards a large mirrored wall. I got to see myself bobbing in rhythm with all the other girls and women, extending my arms gracefully and swishing my skirts. The large bow was pretty down my back, from my thin waist over my padded posterior. Oh, I almost fainted as I saw myself and realized how much of a girl Sarah Lubbock had made me into.

"Congratulations, Katherine," said Lord Douglas as I curtseyed again to him to the last strains of the familiar music. He pointed to the mirror and I looked at the panting, flushed, attractive, young girl standing with a tall, disdainful man. "I have rarely enjoyed dancing more. And here is the Duke to claim the first of his two with the most beautiful girl at this year's ball."

That, of course, left all my nerves jangling. The Duke was all compliments and full of flowery language to describe me as a girl. I finished the dance with him, puffing a little again, fanning myself, when another man came across the floor and brusquely took my card from me.

"Now, Albert," said the Duke in annoyance. "I saw her first."

Albert looked down at me and smiled. I couldn't help it, I felt my knees buckle as I saw several girls whispering behind their fans. They looked at me with the two men about me. Another, one of St John's 'young men,' also hovered nearby, ready to dance a sprightly round with me.

"Georgie," said the older man, his air of authority very clear. "We all know how you are attracted to girls like this young lady and why. Now, introduce me properly, cousin, so that I may sign the young lady's card so she and her waiting swain may engage in a little badinage as well."

The Duke of Clarence looked very angry but the other man stared him down and that was how I was introduced to His Royal Highness, Prince Albert, an Admiral of the Fleet. I had said in jest to Maddie that if she had to marry any other man than me, it should be Prince Albert. There was a man among men, I had enthused, months ago. There was a man I would willingly serve under. I shook, never expecting such a man to be looking at me with such admiration in his eyes.

Then, those famous sea-grey eyes descended to my bosom and I began to feel more than a little sick.

"Come, Georgie," said the Prince. "Time for you and I to leave this young lady to her contracted partner. I am so looking forward to dancing with you, Miss Katherine Grimond. I hope you are looking forward to dancing with me in the Gay Gordons."

I couldn't get off the dance floor as each dance ended. My card was filled at an alarming rate by young men, soldiers and aristocrats, coming to me after each dance and claiming a dance with me. I was watched avidly by several young men. I couldn't have escaped even if I had wanted to.

There was the blare of a trumpet and I had to walk the length of the floor while all the other dancers spread to one side. A line of excited, chattering girls welcomed me as a fellow debutante and took me in, as Sarah said they would. I was paraded in a line of young, pretty girls around the dance floor, presented finally to the company that applauded us all. We joined London Society as young women and received small, diamond tiaras for our hair 'to wear in every ball we attended through the season,' according to the Earl of Hutton, who kissed us on each cheek as he gifted us with the tiaras.

Sarah appeared after we had lined up and led the assembly in to supper. The girl in the mirrors in front of me swayed femininely. Sarah arranged the tiara prettily in my hair as I shook and realized that I had actually fooled everyone. I was a girl for this night, I thought with a shudder. I couldn't help it. I actually smiled and thanked Sarah for her help. I was smiling inwardly as well at the girl I followed into the reception buffet. I admired how she moved until we passed a glass window. Then the reflections showed that I was moving exactly like her.

Well, I had to, didn't I? I nervously tried to excuse myself. I didn't want anyone to think that I was anyone else but Katherine Grimond. I quaked as I glanced at my card and saw that in the second dance after the intermission, I must dance with 'HRH,' as Albert had identified himself. My knees almost buckled as I thought about that. Me, dancing with a Royal? I got clammy all over. Not only did my chest hurt but my confined groin felt very sore as well.

## VIII. THE EARL OF HUTTON IS NOT AMUSED

"I heard him say so quite distinctly," said the Countess of Hutton as she breakfasted with her husband and her brother-in-law. "Not everyone did. But it went around the ball like wildfire after that. We are really going to have to watch over your girl, Douglas, or her reputation will be ruined."

The Countess did not say, "just like your other ward," thought Lord Douglas Moore in ironic amusement. Perhaps he should tell her the good news from Italy. No, he must savor that little titbit. He could just imagine how Peregrine Grimond would feel when he discovered that the girl he thought he ruined had married another man. Soon Maddie would be returning home and he would have to make the financial arrangements to have the new Countess of Saruzzi, and her husband and child, when it was born, made independent of the Moore family.

Moore smiled to himself as he thought of the interview he must have with 'Miss Katherine Grimond' soon to inform her that she had become a father, father to a child she would never see or have contact with.

"But what exactly did Albert say?" asked William in his usual pedantic manner. His manner was to insist on every minute detail of any story told to him.

"He told Edward," said Anne, the Countess of Hutton, rolling her eyes at her brother-in-law in familiar fashion, "that he was not to pay court to Miss Grimond, that the lady in question was unspoilt, and he could not abide Edward's determination to ruin the reputation of every exemplar of English beauty."

"My goodness," said the Earl. "And what did the Crown Prince have to say to that?"

The Countess frowned. She hated her husband referring to the future King by a title she regarded as un-English. "The elder Prince had just told his equerry to secure him a place on Miss Grimond's dance card," said the Countess with a sniff. "If necessary, he told Merrell that Lord Douglas would always be willing to give way to the heir to the throne. That's when the son of the Duke of Wessex said something about, if the Prince promised Douglas an earldom, he could have anything he liked from Lord Douglas Moore."

Douglas went cold inside as he heard the Countess relate the cruel viewpoint in which his ambitions were regarded by his so-called friends and acquaintances. Surely it was no sin to be ambitious, to want to stand in society on an equal footing with his fatuous brother.

"Then Prince Albert stepped across the circle of our acquaintances and stopped Merrell from leaving," said the Countess. "Then he said what he did in praise of Miss Grimond's beauty."

"Surely Edward answered him back," said Douglas icily. The Countess gave him a sharp look.

"Of course, Lord Douglas," she said so politely that it was an insult but not one he could complain about. "Edward told him then that the young lady was his, Albert's, and he should go to. That's what he said, 'Go to, Albert. Go to. I won't interfere though the lady is very comely and might have been pleased by my attentions.' That last part he said in a very low tone and only his cronies, and myself, heard it, I'm sure."

"But my brother didn't dance with Miss Grimond at the end of the ball," said the Earl of Hutton, frowning at his wife. "So he couldn't have given way to Edward."

The Countess looked meaningfully at Lord Douglas Moore.

"I was supposed to dance with Miss Grimond, the last waltz," Douglas admitted. The Countess smiled slyly at him while his brother looked at him in consternation. "The Prince asked me to give way to him and I acceded as any loyal subject of the throne would."

"You surrendered a dance with Miss Grimond to the Crown Prince?" asked the Earl of Hutton in confusion.

"No, William," said his wife crossly. "Your brother gave up his second dance with his ward so that Prince Albert could dance a second time with Miss Katherine Grimond. Everyone was talking about it when they were leaving. When have you ever known Albert to dance with any young lady, at any ball, more than once?"

"Oh my," said the Earl frowning. "But surely the Prince knows of Douglas' intentions. Oh, we must inform him of them right away."

"That will not be necessary," said Lord Douglas Moore coldly.

"Oh, right," said his brother, frowning again. "If the lady in question should reject you and all that. Oh, by Jove, has anyone given a thought to what the Prince's mother will be thinking? I doubt that she will be amused."

"You must make sure that Miss Grimond's conduct in future," said the Countess to her brother-in-law, "is beyond reproach. She must hide her smiles behind her fan and not show such pleasure at the Prince's attentions as she did at last night's ball. I will speak to the girl myself whenever you allow me to see her again, Douglas, and teach her how to keep unwanted suitors at bay."

"She will certainly listen to you, milady," Douglas said to his sister-in-law. "With her parents dead, she needs a mother figure to guide her through such contretemps."

"Steady on, Douglas," said the Countess with a flash of asperity. "I am not so old as to be considered a mother to a girl who is just out in society."

"No, you are not, my love," said the Earl of Hutton, always eager to take his wife's part against his younger brother. "Perhaps it would be best if you instructed her governess, Mrs. Lubbock, to manage the young lady more appropriately, Duggie. I thought Mrs. Lubbock was a model of decorum at the ball, even if her husband was not."

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"You will not sleep away all of the day, Miss Katherine," said Sarah as she awakened me. I didn't know where I was for the longest moment. I wasn't shackled to the bed for one thing. Secondly, the room was very narrow, the ceiling appeared to be quite high and the windows soared above me as well.

Then thoughts of the night before, my debutante ball, came flooding back. I buried my head in the pillows as I thought of all the embarrassing, absolutely humiliating things that had happened to me. Sarah tugged on the thin strap of my nightie and caressed the curls that had come loose from my nightcap.

"You certainly had a most sensational debut, Miss Katherine," Sarah said sharply to me. "You do know that the Princes themselves were fighting over who was to dance with you, don't you?"

"N-no," I shuddered, swinging my feet. My painted toenails peeped out below my night dress, to the carpet beside my bed. A new dress was draped over the chair in front of my dressing table mirror along with the lotions and cosmetics that Sarah made me use every day after my bath.

"I, I only danced with one prince," I stammered. And that was quite enough, I thought. Prince Albert had taken every advantage of me, swirling and twirling me and telling me to go ahead and smile and enjoy myself. I was so pretty and I was not to hide myself behind my fan, as so many other young ladies were doing.

"It's just false modesty," Albert had said, easing my hand down as I lifted the fan in front of my mouth, my lipstick lightly touching the colorful pattern on the back. "But I like to look on your beautiful face all of the time, Miss Grimond, even when you are dancing with other men."

"Your, your Highness," I had stammered. "You mustn't ..." Mustn't think of me as a woman, I had been going to say. I flushed as I thought what an interrogation that would lead me to.

"What you must do, Miss Grimond," said Albert, smiling at me, the scar on his cheek pulling his smile most raffishly to one side. I can remember thinking that I, Peregrine, would like a scar like that, just there, a fashionable scar, one that would impress all the young ladies I danced with.

"What you must do, Miss Grimond," said the smiling Prince, capturing my wandering attention again, "is to learn how to accept compliments from eligible men. Yes, we are out to impress you with our masculinity and male charm and you are right to reject unwelcome advances. But the advances of a Prince," he smiled most charmingly at me and I felt so weird as my dress and skirts moved about me, "such advances you should not ignore, Miss Grimond. Those you should accept most charmingly and most flirtatiously."

I flushed and looked down then, my moving breasts making me feel such a fraud. Prince Albert looked down at me as if he really did admire me as a woman and that was most disconcerting. I couldn't answer him and I couldn't look away, not when so many men, and so many women, were looking at me enviously as well.

"Accepting them demurely works well for me as well," said the Prince. When I looked up at him, with my curled and darkly painted eyelashes fluttering at him, I saw that he was laughing at me.

"Please don't laugh at me," I said to him then, forgetting to add the honorifics. I was certain that he must know all about me, about the secret that I was concealing from the partygoers at the Earl of Hutton's ball.

"My darling Katherine," Albert said then, and chills ran up and down my spine. I could do little then but stare up at him. "Yes, I hope to make that more true in the days ahead than it is right now. I am not laughing at you at all, not in the way that you are thinking. I laugh because I am happy to be dancing with the prettiest, most exquisitely fe-

male creature at this ball. I know that every man here is so envious of me and that pleases me no end."

I had to lift my fan then to hide my dismay at his words. Again, the Prince touched my arm; I had to shutter my fan and smile tentatively at him as we promenaded, our arms by our sides. My dress was swirling and my breasts were bouncing and enervating me in every step that I made.

I remember curtseying to the Prince and thinking, with relief, that I would not see him again on the dance floor. But I felt a pang of regret as the younger son of the Earl of Glenarchan claimed me for the dance my card said that I owed him. I missed dancing so intensely with the Prince. The young nobles that followed complimented me on my hair and my dress and my feminine figure, but I knew that it all meant nothing.

I was ready for Lord Douglas and to be frosty to him, promising myself to let him know that his revenge was over. I would walk out of his brother's house on the morrow as a man, as Peregrine Grimond again. If he tried to keep me prisoner and put me through another ball as a girl, I would embarrass him and all of his family, no matter the cost to myself.

But it wasn't Lord Douglas who claimed me for the last waltz, but Prince Albert again, smiling at me.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness," I told him, curtseying as he took my hand. "But I must tell you that I am spoken for in this dance."

"Would you give me the next one then, fair Katherine?" asked the Prince.

I thought that I was clever. "Oh, I would, Your Highness," I told him, even smiling at him. "I would, but, unfortunately, this is the last dance and I am promised elsewhere."

"It is such a pleasure to know that you would love to dance with me," said the Prince, laughing again as I looked up at him, mystified. "I can reward your desire to dance with me, Katherine. Lord Douglas has ceded to me the dance he required of you, the last waltz."

I stared at him in panic as the small orchestra began to play a slow, stately waltz. The Prince took my hands and began to circle me about the floor. "You shouldn't look at me like that," Albert teased me. "You will make me think that you did not tell me the truth when you said how much you loved dancing with me."

"I did not say that!" I said hotly. My cheeks were burning. I felt my ringlets on my neck as the Prince did a new step and whirled me much faster than the dancers around us before slowing again.

"Well done!" said the Prince. "My instructor, the Countess of Wrexham, was showing me that move in Mama's musical soiree only yesterday. You are a most beautiful dancer, Miss Grimond. I think you must practice a lot."

Oh yes, I practiced a lot. I had practiced enough with George, who was always trying to trip me up, that I sensed the change the Prince was going to make and reacted to him as I would have to George Lubbock.

"By your hesitation and the look in your eyes, I think that you do practice a lot but it isn't always pleasant," said Albert, giving me a rueful smile. "That is the way that it is for me as a prince also, I can tell you."

I had to smile at him then. I quivered as I thought how his upbringing could in no way be compared with what I was having to endure that evening.

The waltz ended and an equerry came hurrying forward to the prince. Royal coaches would always be the first in line at any great ball to leave. "Burton, tell my coachman to take the carriage once around the block and join the end of the line," ordered the Prince.

The equerry raised his eyebrows in surprise and glanced at me. "Yes, Your Highness," Burton said.

"Let me hold your fan," said the Prince with a smile. He took it from me, guiding me over to where a footman was providing the reluctant leavers with a last flute of champagne.

"Have you taken any tonight?" asked the Prince.

"No," I said, shaking my ringlets. I held up my skirt and rustled over the floor on the arm of the Prince. Almost everyone about us was staring at me as if I was doing something wrong. I shuddered and for the life of me, couldn't think what it was, unless my hair was unravelling or my dress, I thought in panic.

"Let me give you your very first glass of champagne then," said Albert. He took two flutes from the footman, and placed one in my gloved hand.

Albert couldn't know that I had drunk champagne many times as Peregrine before. As Katherine, I had been afraid to, for obvious reasons. I had been told by Sarah I would not be allowed to retire no matter how much pain I was in. Sarah didn't intend to miss one minute of the ball and dancing with so many rich and powerful men.

I sipped gingerly on the glass; Albert heartily approved of my womanly moderation. "Are you to appear at all the debutantes' balls of the season?" Albert then asked me.

I flushed. "I, I don't think so, Your Highness," I said to him in the voice I had practiced even more than dancing with George and Sarah Lubbock. He raised an eyebrow. "I, I have only six ball gowns," I said to him, not thinking how that would sound.

Albert spluttered over his wine. He was laughing and the people about me seemed to relax a little. "My charming girl," Albert said. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sarah sa-shaying through the crowd towards me. "I would not care if you wore no ball gown at all the next time that we met."

I recalled a time when I had said a line similar to that to Maddie. Then I thought about how I was talking to the Prince, how I was holding myself with his arm on mine, how I was sipping from my wine; my lipstick marked my glass, my earrings shook against me at each movement of my head. I even made a remark about ball gowns as if I was a genuine young lady. I mustn't do that again. I mustn't do anything, I thought, to make myself more girlish in his eyes. Then I felt my curls on my neck move as I turned my head to meet whoever was approaching us.

"Katherine," said Sarah Lubbock grimly, as she came and stood beside me. "It is time for you to retire, my girl. You are the last debutante still to be in company."

"Please introduce me, Katherine, to this good and conscientious woman," the Prince then said to me as several of the people closest to us withdrew. Footmen arrived with cloaks and coats for them, escorting the party out to carriages, I supposed.

"Your Royal Highness," I said as softly as I could, "may I present Mrs. Sarah Lubbock, my, my governess. Sarah, this is His Royal Highness, Prince Albert, Duke of, of ..."

I tried to recall all the titles that had been bestowed on the Prince but he cut me off with a laugh. "None of that folderol, Katherine," he said to me, "or we shall be here half the night and become a scandal. So pleasant to meet you, Mrs. Lubbock," he went on, putting out his hand to Sarah; she was forced to curtsy to him. "Your charge is a tribute to your stewardship over her. I hope I will have the pleasure of dancing with Katherine again at St James's later in the season. I would very much like to have Miss Grimond presented to my mother."

Sarah gaped at the Prince as his equerry appeared at the head of the hallway. Albert turned and smiled to me, my fan still in his hand.

"My fan, your Highness," I said to him. I deposited the last of the champagne on the tray of a young, eager footman, waiting for it. My dress swirled again as I moved to take it.

"Oh no, Katherine," said Albert, smiling as he touched my fan to his lips. "When I think how many times this fan has brushed your lips tonight," he said, "I shall find it hard to sleep when I taste such traces as you have left on this token I shall take with me. I may not be at Lord Bartley's, I have duties at sea, but I will be at St James's and at the Duke of Gordonshire's. I hope you will save me two dances at both of those affairs, Miss Grimond. But good night for now."

I curtsied to him then, not daring to look him at him. I was only able to say a whispered, "Good night," when Sarah poked me.

George Lubbock had been waiting for us outside the room Sarah hurried me to. He rose from his chair most unsteadily; my usual night cap awaited me. I didn't care that it was a sleeping draught. After the night I had had, with all the compliments at the ball on my gown and female attributes, I was glad to take the draught.

Oh, why, oh, why, did the Prince have to single me out? I thought in despair. When they found me out at last, that connection was going to make the scandal of what Lord Douglas Moore had done to me even greater. I would be the laughingstock of the whole kingdom, I sobbed. I buried myself in my nightie as deeply into the bed as I could, my head whirling as I welcomed the dark.

"You are quite the scandal as a debutante, are you not, Miss Katherine?" asked Sarah angrily. She scented the heated bathwater the upstairs maids had prepared for me in the little bathroom off my bedroom. I sat down in the warm water and my chest wobbled in front of me. All the pushing and constricting was making my chest take on a new shape, I saw in alarm. I was jiggling; when I tensed, my chest muscles seemed to want to form themselves into the breasts they had been shaped as for so long.

"Young ladies will not play with themselves in such a manner," said Sarah hotly. "Today, I must lace you into your new corset even more tightly, Katherine. You must, after all, be a proper young lady for your lesson with the Countess. "And a new hair style as well, something older, I think, something the Queen would approve of in a silly, little girl who has captured her son's attention."

I remembered then my resolve to confront Lord Douglas Moore and to leave this house. I gritted my teeth and stood, water pouring from me, as Sarah told me to sit down again. I was going to get out of there, I was. Then, the door opened and George Lubbock came in, a cudgel in his hand.

George wavered a little. He wasn't shaved and his eyes were quite bloodshot. "You idiot! Go back to bed and sleep it off!" snapped his wife as George leered at me, at my skinny, hairless body, the imprints of the corsets on me everywhere!

"Thought you'd need a hand with her today," George rasped, looking at my bare legs, and my long, crinkly, wet hair. "Or is she as sweet as she looked on the dance floor? Making eyes at all those fellows over her fan? Real courtesan she was, wasn't she?"

"Get out of here," said Sarah anxiously. "For goodness' sake, George, when the Earl hears about your conduct with his maids, he will not be amused. He will be outraged if he finds you in a young lady's boudoir."

"I'll be outside if you need me," George Lubbock said, tapping one hand with the cudgel he held in the other. "For a dancing lesson, maybe?" The look he gave me made me shiver and quiver. The thought of him waiting outside for me made me slide back into my bath and cooperate with my governess. I would have to wait for later to escape.

## IX. LORD DOUGLAS'S PROPOSAL

So began a whirlwind of activities at Acton Square, where the home of the Earl and Countess was located, where two maids were employed specifically to care for me. My dresses and underclothes were always pressed and cleaned. Colleen, an older woman, took over preparing my hair. She was there each night after my governess had put me in my night dress, to put my hair in rollers and pins and covers.

I had to take a sleeping draught every night so it was Sarah who was there to bathe and corset me before Colleen came in. I was in full blush at first as she saw me in my women's underclothes. She bustled about the room tidying away my dress and petticoats. In the morning, she showed she was very proficient at making my hair look just perfect whether it was up or down.

I had to wear a gown every evening and dine with the family. That meant dinner included the Huttons, their children, Lord Moore, various guests like the odious Geoffrey, and of course, me, whom the Countess seemed to think was her sister. Oh, the trivial things that woman could think to talk about!

I had to accompany her each day as well, sometimes with Sarah and sometimes without, to the Misses Hancock and to other 'friends' of the Countess, who all wanted to hear about the Prince and how it was he had chosen me to dance with. The story of him keeping my fan after I had the last dance with him sent the women into a twitter. I couldn't tell

them what he had said to me then about my lips having touched the fan and that his would as he slept and remembered dancing with me. I blushed when I thought of it.

Lady Brimley interrogated me like a Peeler after the truth in a criminal act. "Oh, Martha," said the Countess at last in my defence. "Don't badger the girl so. The Prince was just being kind to the debutante of our house. It is so long since we had a girl from the family come out at one of our balls. He was just being polite."

"Prince Albert," scoffed the sharp-featured Lady Brimley. Her daughters studied every curl and wave in my hair most avidly, making me uncomfortable in my cream and white dress. "Politeness and Albert do not belong in the same sentence. Do you know what he said to me on the promenade at Brighton?"

"Politeness it was," insisted the Countess. "And I shall be instructing the girl from now on in how to meet the advances of the many titled gentlemen who wish to make her acquaintance."

Instruction was part of every outing with the Countess; she had me demonstrate to her cronies all the things she taught me, such as how to flirt properly with my new fan.

It was the same even on the summery morning we walked home from the services at the Abbey. The Countess instructed me on how to walk like a proper young lady with a parasol after redoing my flowered bonnet and the ribbons that held it to my masses of curl and waves so that they were pinned properly. My hair seemed to have become so bouncy and fuller, even longer, since Colleen was attending to it every day.

Soirees were organized; I had to play cards and listen to Guards officers talking shop. I wished I could join in, but always I had to tell the company what the Countess and I had done that day, which she interrupted and augmented, telling the feminine lessons I had learned. I sat there, conscious of how much I was being studied by everyone.

"You are a Prince's favorite," said the Countess, telling me not to be quite so demure, always casting my eyes down as the officers looked me over. "And you will be dancing with him soon at Gordon House. We have accepted an invitation for you to attend the Duke's ball."

It was Lord Douglas Moore who took me to the ball; the two of us were seated in the carriage opposite the Earl and Countess. Sarah was very annoyed, I could tell, that she would not be going with me. I wondered if George Lubbock would be lurking outside the famous mansion in case I tried to bolt when I was dancing with Prince Albert.

I was tense as we entered the glittering hallway and I was presented in my dark green silk gown to the Duke and Duchess of Gordonshire. It was the Duchess who broke the bad news to the Moores and to their ward, me. Alas, Prince Albert could not come.

"He sends his most abject apologies," the Duchess told us. Her eyes were sparkling as she looked at me in my upswept hair, a cascade of ringlets tormenting my neck and shoulders with every move that I made. "But the Danes and the Germans."

"It's the Russians," murmured her husband.

"They're causing some kind of commotion in the Straits," she went on.

"In the Sound, dear," said the Duke, smiling broadly.

"But, anyway, the Prince has been ordered to sea with the Home Fleet. He says he is devastated that he cannot keep his promises to certain young ladies whom he promised to dance with. He asks me, most politically of him, to apologize to all the young ladies he met at the Huttons and to say that he hopes to be back in time for the Royal Outing at St James."

"Those invitations have not yet been issued," said the Countess, taking my arm and drawing me into the ballroom, leaving the men we had come with behind. "Don't look so glum, my dear," the Countess then told me. "He could hardly send a message directly to Acton Square without declaring his intentions towards you."

I almost froze solid at her words. What was I doing? What was all this dressing-up doing to me? I was beginning to think like a girl. I was actually disappointed that a man wasn't going to be at this dance to talk, to dance and to charm me. But I wasn't a girl. I shouldn't want to be charmed by any man. And the Countess, the way that she was talking to me, made me feel at times that I was the girl she was talking about, a girl whom everyone was talking about, a girl who had turned the Prince's head.

"My Lady," said a tall, grey-mustached man who stepped in front of our progress through the excited sets of young girls and their families all looking about eagerly at who was there, waiting for the dance to begin.

"Lord Merell," said the Countess. I had to curtsy to the man. "Miss Katherine Grimond, Douglas's ward."

"It is a pleasure, Miss Grimond," said the man, looking down on me. "It is not for myself that I ask but I note that Miss Grimond does not have a dance card tonight. I trust she is not totally engaged for every dance this evening?"

The Countess stared at the man while I looked on. I saw many brightly dressed girls about me and I knew that I was dressed and styled just like them.

"No, Miss Katherine is out now," said the Countess. "But she will attend to me in the matter of dancing at this ball. I do not intend her to be so indiscriminate as she was at our ball in which we indulged her over much. Dancing every dance is too much of a strain for a girl as young as Miss Grimond."

"Ah," said the Lord. "You will then, your ladyship, be able to find a time for this charming young lady to dance with His Royal Highness."

"The third and fourth dances in the second half," said the Countess grudgingly.

"I will inform His Highness of your answer," said the man suavely. "I am sure he will await the third and fourth dances after supper with the greatest of anticipation."

"But His Highness is not here," I said to the Countess. She took my dance card from her purse and marked the dances for me.

"Not Albert, no," said the Countess as her husband and Lord Douglas, as dark and serious as ever, joined us. "But Edward is here and he wishes to dance with you."

"The Crown Prince is here?" asked the Earl of Hutton, looking about. "He's not setting his cap for Miss Grimond as well, is he?" He poked his brother in the ribs. "You'd better start making your own intentions clear to this young lady, Douglas, and get her back to

the county. You know how Edward is when he sets his hat for any woman, married or not."

Lord Douglas stared at me then. I looked up at him quite boldly. He was the man who had done all of this to me, making me appear like a young woman in front of all the people I should have been meeting as Peregrine Grimond. I hoped he was enjoying his perverse triumph over me.

Oh, some day, Lord Douglas Moore would have to meet me on the duelling field, I thought, and I would not be constricted then by silks and lace and tight bonds about me. I would show him yet the sort of man he had meddled with. Maybe I would show up in my crinolines and best him anyway. What a scandal that would be!

Music began and Lord Douglas held out his hand to me. "Miss Grimond," he said, the first words he had spoken to me directly since the last ball. "May I have the pleasure of the first two dances with my beautiful ward?"

I would have liked to have hit him rather than to accompany him onto the dance floor, to curtsy to him and begin the progression.

"I have some news of Madeleine," said Lord Douglas. We circled warily but in time to the sprightly orchestra. Many people watched me, or so it seemed to me, as we danced as man and woman.

I gathered up my skirts as we did a graceful pavane and moved to a second set in the stately progression. I tried to smile at him while emotions swirled intensely through me. I shuddered as I realized he was talking about my beloved Madeleine, whom I had quite forgotten about.

"She is now married," said Lord Douglas. I felt a cold chill pass all over me. "She is now the Countess of Saruzzi and her husband has promised her that he will accept her child as his own. It is something of a tradition apparently for the bride to be pregnant on her wedding day in the family and community she is marrying into."

Maddie married. My heart sank.

"Then we are done," I grated to him bitterly. "Your revenge on me is complete."

"Oh, we are not done yet, Katherine," said Lord Douglas with a sly, calculating smile. "There is a question of the Conley-Shore estate that will no longer come to me. But then Grimondwood is greater by far, is it not?"

"And it belongs to Peregrine Grimond," I told him angrily. "Unless you are contemplating murder, my Lord, I will escape you, perhaps tonight, and you will have an implacable enemy against you in Grimondwood forever."

That was rash and stupid of me. I had to finish the dance, then waltz with Douglas again.

Lord Douglas put his arm through mine; I was held most familiarly by him as we strolled the length of the floor to meet again with the Countess. She suggested that I was flushed and should take refreshment, brushing off attempts by several young men to secure me as a dancing partner.

I did dance again but it was with older men and I had frequent breaks in which the Countess and her friends gossiped about the gowns of the girls on the floor. When I answered that Madame Lecannet had made my gowns for me, the Countess's friends were very impressed and told me how wonderful my dress was and what a wonderful dancer I was.

The dances with Prince Edward were almost anticlimactic. He was older than his brother and he was charming. By then, though, I had danced with many older men who had tried to charm me.

"I begin to believe," Edward said to me as we began the second dance, "that my charm is not having the effect upon you, Miss Grimond, as the charm of my brother, Albert."

"I, I would not say that, Your Highness," I babbled at him.

"I think it is true," said Edward, a smile on his bearded face. "Did you know that he has warned me to stay away from you?" I tried to think what a young girl in my position might say but could think of nothing. "When he hears that I have danced with you in his absence from the Gordon Ball, I think that he will be quite incensed. What do you think, Katherine?"

"Your Highness, I don't think that Prince Albert knows me well enough to feel anything at all about me, least of all to be angry with me for dancing with you."

"Oh, it won't be you, my beautiful one, that he will be angry with," said Prince Edward. "Albert will be furious with me and accuse me of all sorts of nefarious schemes involving you. But you see, Miss Grimond, the dance is ending and I am returning you, unsullied and unfulfilled in regard to my making of any unseemly proposals to you. I hope you will confirm that with my brother when he talks to you at St James' Palace."

I danced every dance then as girlishly as I could save for the last which was with Lord Douglas once more. "There is other news from the continent that I haven't informed you about, Miss Katherine Grimond," he told me as he moved me very slowly and sedately in the old-fashioned waltz. "It will be in all the London papers tomorrow. Peregrine Grimond is dead."

I stopped still on the floor in shock at his words. Lord Douglas Moore looked down on me then, in all my girlish clothing and corseting. He actually looked as if he was sympathizing with me. He led me from the floor. I went with him as I wanted explanations from him.

"Oh, my dear girl," said the Countess, the Earl a pace behind her. "We have only just heard! Douglas, you could have waited until we got back to Acton Square to tell her!"

I rustled into our carriage, one of the first in the line. The Countess insisted that I sit beside her so that she could console me. "Even The Times has an account," said the Earl gruffly to his brother. "Know that dashed river between Buda and Pest? Tricky even at this time of the year. It says they were drinking Hungarian wine. He and his friend are dead. What is going to happen to his estates now?"

"Oh, William!" said his wife. She kicked his panted leg, then took my hand and squeezed it as if I should have been grieving immensely at hearing that I had died. I could

do little more than stare at Lord Douglas Moore. I wondered how he had done it and what other dastardly scheme he had in mind for me, Miss Katherine Grimond.

"I hope the young man left a will," said the Earl of Hutton huffily.

Of course I had, I thought crossly, lifting one of my stockinged legs over the other, exposing a little of my ankle and high-heeled slipper to Lord Douglas.

"I don't believe so," said Lord Douglas, staring at me. "Mr Gough is, was, Peregrine's lawyer. Since he is now dead along with Peregrine, I doubt that we shall find any will. The property will fall to Miss Katherine, I am certain."

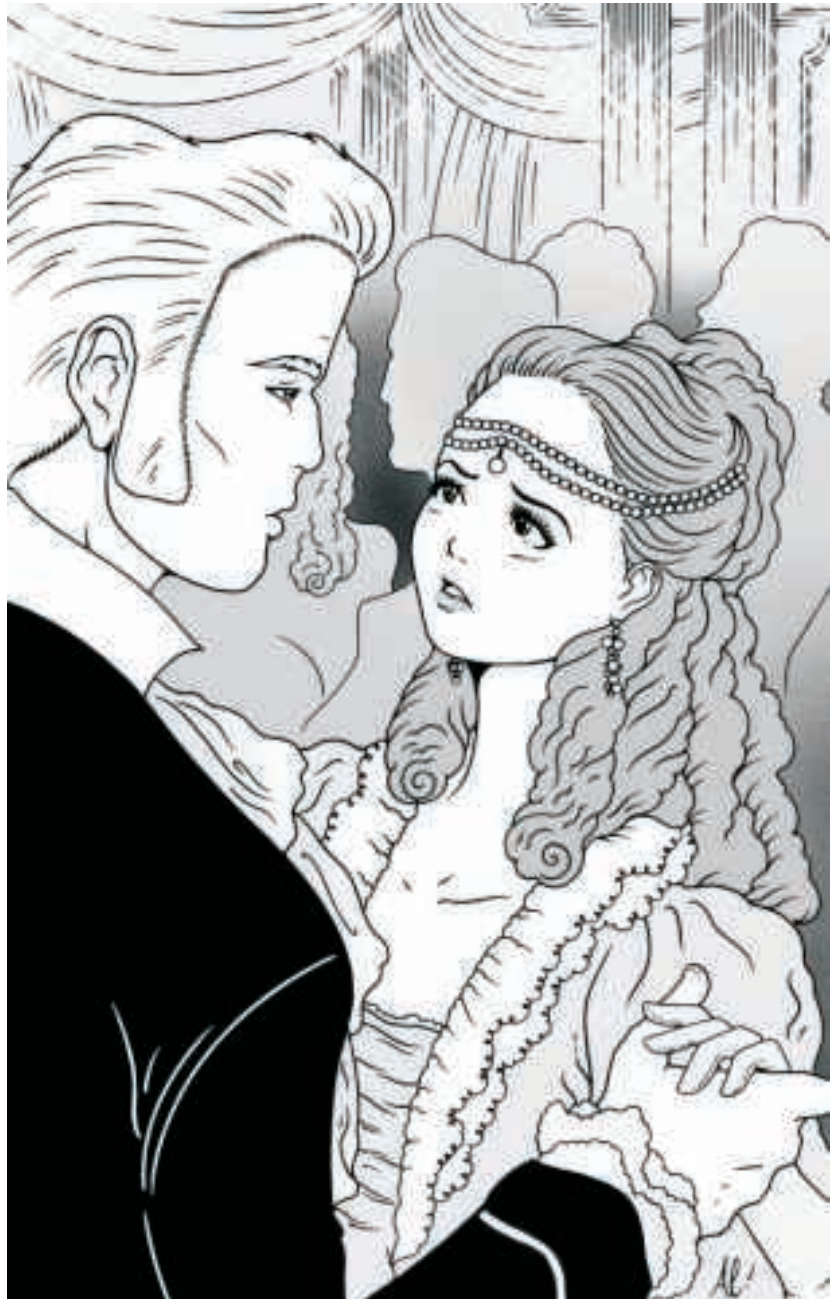
"Which will make her the richest heiress in the county," said the Earl of Hutton. He looked at me, then at his brother and smiled. I could say nothing. If I could, the words would have poured out of me. I would have told the Moores just what I thought of them for what they had done and were doing to me.

"Not for long," said Lord Douglas Moore, staring at me.

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"I have already ordered Madame Lecannet to prepare the wedding dress," said a smirking Sarah Lubbock. I sat beside Lord Douglas's desk in the study he maintained in the Acton Square house.

"You see, Katherine," said Lord Douglas, addressing me as if I was actually a girl. "With Grimondwood attached to my estate at Oakthorpe, I will be the greatest landowner in the county. I shall be richer than all but the Royals and some new industrialists. I could not marry Maddie, after Peregrine ruined her, but I can marry you, Katherine. You, I can be sure, will never become pregnant and betray me. I will



know that Peregrine Grimond can never again ruin a young woman of good fortune while you, Katherine, will learn to love being a faithful wife to me, your husband."

"You must be mad," I told him furiously.

"I could well be," said Lord Douglas, looking at me intently. "But have you seen yourself lately, Katherine. Stand up," he went on, getting up and coming round the table to me. "Stand up, Katherine. Have you seen what you have become?"

I got up unsteadily on my heels. Douglas put his arms about my waist and pulled me against him. I gasped and tried to push him away. He lowered his head and his mouth took possession of mine. I was outraged that a man would do such a thing to me. I tried to pull away but his hand held the back of my head and he forced me into kissing him.

"You, you bastard!" I screamed when Lord Douglas lifted his head. Then he twisted my arms easily behind me, holding me against him, his legs pinned my skirts as he kissed my neck, my face and my upper chest. I felt Sarah come behind me and take over holding my arms. I could not break free.

"Once, Peregrine was a great duellist," Lord Douglas Moore said as he put a hand on one of my breasts. I jerked and tried to get free but I couldn't. He took possession of my mouth again; his hands ran over my breasts and down my corseted shape to my hips and the tops of my legs.

"You will be my wife, sweet Katherine," said Lord Douglas. "Grimondwood will be mine. I shall be the Earl of Oakthorpe. You will be my Countess, Lady Katherine Moore."

"Never," I told him. My voice choked with outrage. George Lubbock stirred from his seat in the back of the room.

"Kiss me sweetly, Katherine," said Lord Douglas then. "Put your thin, spindly arms about my neck and kiss me as a woman should."

I leaned back against Sarah, glaring at him in horror. "Or George here will do to you what he has done many times to many young ladies." Douglas stroked my hips. I could feel his hands on my panties even though I was well padded. "I will give you to him and he will rape you, Katherine. He will take you to your bedroom and you will be his all night long. I promise you, that by morning, you will wish that you had just kissed me as a woman should kiss the man who has just promised to marry her."

Sarah held my arms behind me but I still refused. George moved in front, grinning down at me, his eyes on my provocative, feminized chest. "I've been looking forward to this," he croaked, reaching up to stroke my hair and my earrings.

I looked in horror at the naked lust in his eyes. "All right, all right," I gasped, looking to Lord Douglas as George's unshaven face scraped against mine.

Lord Douglas Moore stood in front of me, Sarah released my shivering hands and Lord Douglas waited. "Put your arms about my neck," Lord Douglas said. With cascades of emotion running through me, I did so tentatively. "Kiss me," he ordered.

It had to be better than being raped by George Lubbock. I didn't want to do it, though. I looked around wildly but there was no way out. Oh, Maddie, did Douglas ever have his revenge on me! I cried. I couldn't do anything else but kiss my hated enemy. I did so

slowly. His arms closed about me and he pressed my body against his while he kissed me gently. I felt silly to be doing that, standing there and kissing another man. What was so terrible was that he was letting me kiss him and accepting it as if I was really a woman.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it, Katherine?” asked my new betrothed. “In a short while, after a decent mourning time for Peregrine, we shall make our announcement. Then you will marry me, Katherine.”

Douglas kissed me more firmly; I didn’t dare take my face from his. Over my dead body, I thought grimly. Then what will you do for your money and your title, Douglas? But I was more humiliated then than at any time I had ever been in this weird escapade with Lord Douglas Moore.

## **X. KATHERINE GRIMOND’S PLOT**

Of course there was no way that I was going to ‘marry’ Lord Douglas Moore. I wasn’t Katherine Grimond. I was Peregrine, despite the notice in *The Times* that my guardian, Lord Douglas, posted about my death. My jailers must have sensed my rebellious mood because I was manacled to the bed again at night. At no time did George or Sarah ever leave me alone.

My defiance wasn’t going to get me anywhere, I could see that, and I decided that I had to come up with a new plan. The only thing I could think that I could do to lull my captors into a state where I could slip away from them was to pretend to comply willingly with all their requests. I would have to become the sweet-tempered, submissive, young girl they wanted me to be.

I stopped pouting and fighting with Sarah. I didn’t resist George’s advances on me in any way as we danced together. I smiled as he stroked my arms, even when Sarah snapped at him. I complimented him and told him how good a dancer he was, unlike the lumps I had to dance with at the balls I now attended willingly.

I sat quietly for my hair to be permed and curled. I cooperated with Sarah in breathing in deeply so that she could lace me even tighter into my corset, pushing my chest mounds even higher in front of me. When she told me that my figure was progressing satisfactorily and that my breasts were actually becoming quite rounded and feminine and that my hips were taking on an hour glass shape, I smiled and thanked her for all her efforts to make me the woman that I was. Inside I might have been cringing and crying, but on the outside I smiled and was as loving as I could be.

I eagerly entered the conversations about the dresses I was to wear. I chose the most girlish of hats and frilly parasols. I claimed that I loved my high heels and the long, straight skirts Sarah liked to see me in. I did my own makeup happily before Sarah had to tell me to do it and got ready for bed and put lotions on myself without having to be told. I brushed my hair when I had to until it shone.

Colleen told me that I was becoming a proper little lady. The Countess was pleased with me and the compliments I paid to other girls, telling them how I wished I could wear dresses as nice as theirs. I kissed them all lightly on their perfumed cheeks when we met

and succumbed to their returned affection, ignoring the heightened emotions that swept over me when I acted so femininely.

Lord Douglas Moore accompanied me to the soirees I had to attend in the evening. I smiled at him and held his arm as if he was my beau.

"I like this new Katherine," Douglas, the man who would have me raped, told me at the Earl of Fenton's coming out for the Fenton-Smythe daughters. "Is she as real as she seems?"

"I want to be real," I told him earnestly as I strolled on his arm through the card tables at the Fenton evening. I played Fish with the Fenton girls and giggled and squealed as they did when I won a prize. Of course, I gave the wine to Douglas right away and the girls laughed at me.

"I hope he drinks the whole bottle," said Mary, who had become quite attached to me. "He needs to be gayer, doesn't he?"

Yes, I had to agree. That was Lord Douglas Moore's problem. He just wasn't gay enough, not like everyone else I met in that season when I was a leading debutante. Everyone seemed to know me at the balls so I made it my duty to learn all the names of my frequent partners as well. At the places where I had to use a dance card, the large balls, mine was always the first to be filled up, the Countess told all her cronies proudly. I had to go through agonizing conversations about the dress that I planned to wear in whatever ball was ahead.

That pleased the Countess who told me that I was becoming a girl just like she had been and that I should consider myself her daughter. I had to run to her and hug her for that and kiss her papery skin while she told me how soft I was and what a lovely bride I was going to make the following spring. Over my dead body, I thought. I primly took the Countess's arm and let the maid pin my hat to my thick, ringleted hair and take me to tea with her friends and their daughters. It was embarrassing when girls like Lucy Webster, the general's daughter, asked me for some of my beauty secrets.

"My beauty secret is Mrs. Lubbock," I told her. That made Sarah very thoughtful. I don't think that she entirely bought the act I was putting on. I gushed with Lucy about all the things that Sarah had taught me. Lucy was so envious. She was a plain girl.

There, Sarah, I thought. I've set you up for further employment when Lord Douglas lets you go as he will when he finds out that I am delighted to be his bride. I went with you willingly to Madame Lecannet's and tried on my bridal dress. The masses of white lace and the long, gossamer-like veil totally emasculated me. I really did feel like a girl with all the assistants who came around and pinned me into the framework of the dress, excited for me that I was soon to be a bride.

Getting out of my lovely dress and returning to my straight skirt and fitted jacket made me feel disappointed. The assistants took away my lovely dress and Madame Lecannet actually winked at me, making me quake inside. How could she do it, make such a dress for me? I thought, as if she knew that I was really going to go into a church and marry another man? I couldn't do it, I thought fearfully. Then Sarah began to tell me how lovely I was in my dress. I had to play my part with eagerness and she seemed to be a little more content with me.

Sarah still made sure that I was manacled to the bed in the Earl's house in Acton Square. She was always the first person to be there each morning to awaken me and help me out of the night corset I was now wearing routinely. I hated it, particularly as I could sense what it was doing to my chest. I definitely was developing breasts. There were mounds of flesh that filled the cups on my chest. Sarah smirked at me when she examined me in the mornings and told me that I was coming along nicely. I smiled and said it was wonderful and that I hoped Lord Douglas loved what she was doing to me.

"Oh, he does," Sarah cooed at me in my scented bath water. "You have quite captivated the man, sweet Katherine. He looks forward to you being his dutiful, loving wife."

Sarah studied my reactions to that. Luckily, I had planned what to say. I hope she couldn't see my stomach roiling as I told her how I was looking forward to the day that I would become Lord Douglas's bride. I knew I would be just the wife he had always looked forward to marrying.

I kept up my feminine pursuits at all the balls and outings inflicted on me. It was amazing how many people now knew me and entertained me as if I was a sweet, young maiden, ready to blush at my forward admirers. Teddy Barclay wanted me to keep him all the Gay Gordons at each ball in the season; I promised him coyly that I would. Joseph Greenwood took me for a walk in the Maze at Lord and Lady Beauchamp's ball. He was a cavalry officer, though he never wore the uniform. He hoped to be in action soon, either in Russia or in Africa. He asked me if he could write to me if he went away and I asked him to put that question to me when he finally went overseas. Then I could tell him Yes or No, I whispered femininely, swinging from one high-heeled foot to the other. My black and blue silk dress rustled invitingly as Joseph linked his arm through mine and walked me through the rose gardens. Their smells were still delightful even though so many had closed up for the night.

I looked at all my partners and smiled girlishly. I giggled at the jokes The Honorable Walter Gladstone, a distant cousin of the famous man, told me. I gushed over the men at the ball with the Hancock sisters and received half of the debutantes of London at the Countess's home in Acton Square. Several Duke's daughters were calling me 'Kate' and were begging me to spend a week or two with them when I went down to the country.

I promised them I would ask my guardian and they all made faces when I mentioned Douglas. "I suppose he's rich enough," Fanny Colwyn-Beresford told me. "He's going to be made an Earl in the next Birthday List, Daddy tells me. I'd rather set my bonnet for Prince Albert if he hasn't already committed himself to a certain young lady."

It was a burning topic, I discovered. The Duchess of Gordonshire had not kept silent about the Prince's message and I was constantly asked if the Prince had made a commitment to me. "Just so long as he doesn't marry another German," said Lady Julia Russell at a soiree I had to attend with the Countess. "I know his mother wants him to, some ward of the Kaiser's he's eager to marry off."

Julia's outburst produced a very uncomfortable silence before the Countess successfully turned the subject to the next great event of the year, the hunting season and how many foxes her husband's hounds would catch in the season.

"Have you ever ridden to hounds, Katherine?" Emma Dainsbury asked me. She giggled as she added a crown of flowers to my hair just like she had done for the other girls.

I wanted to tell her that I had many times but the Countess and Mrs. Lubbock had joined us so I had to admit lamely that I hadn't. "But you do ride?" Emma persisted. "You must come and join us with the Kent County Foxhounds, Katherine. We always have such a good time, the Ladies of the Hunt."

I thought that the Countess would say 'No' for certain. I could see Sarah shaking her ringlets, so similar to mine, at me. "Kent County," said the Countess suddenly. "But, of course, my darling, you must go if you are invited."

"Of course Miss Grimond will be invited," said an excited Emma Dainsbury, the daughter of Sir Charles, the Master of Foxhounds in Kent. So, just like that, I was presented with an opportunity to escape.

The Countess appeared smug when she was approached by Sir Charles Dainsbury. "Of course, Miss Grimond will be allowed to ride out with your daughter," she said. "We would love to have Emma stay over as well at Acton Square."

Sir Charles hesitated a moment, then smiled at me before he spoke to the Countess again. "You do know that Prince Albert rides with Kent County when he is in town?" he asked the Countess. "I understand that the North Sea Fleet is back in home waters and so we have high hopes that he will also ride with us."

I blushed and looked down demurely as I knew now to do whenever I felt a blush come on. My curled and painted eyelashes were most feminine and my suitors were always telling me what pretty eyes I had. I glanced at the Countess and she was beaming at me.

You old bag, I thought, as I tried not to think of myself soaring away from a group of silly, young girls, getting my horse to jump the fences of a field or two. Then I would be free. The Countess, I could tell, had known that the Prince would be at the meet of Foxhounds. It was why she had said 'Yes' to me riding with them. She had a new story now to swap with her cronies about me and the Prince.

I would give her a good story, I thought, as the Countess made new arrangements for Emma to stay with me at Acton Square. "It will be no trouble, Mrs. Lubbock," the Countess said firmly to Sarah. "Emma can stay in Katherine's room. I dare say she will love to wear some of Katherine's dresses. I always used to enjoy sleepovers when I was a girl and I could pry into another girl's frillies. Emma and Katherine will get along famously."

Well, we did because the Countess was there to fuss over us almost all of the time. We hardly had any time to ourselves to be just girls together.

"I couldn't wear corsets as severe as you do," Emma confessed as we readied for bed. She released me before Mrs. Lubbock had come in. I clutched my camisole to me but Emma got a good look at my breasts as I did hers as she tossed her corset to one side and caressed herself.

"You said you weren't as large as me," said Emma with a smile. "But you're not as flat as Fanny Beresford or Pansy Cunningham. You're just right, you know. Mama was saying that to Father the other day. She said that a girl should have a small bosom as it is sure to

grow after she marries. She encourages me to bind mine a little flatter. That's why we look so similar, Kate, when we are out together."

Mrs. Lubbock tapped on the door and came in then, surprised to see us half-naked and getting ready for bed. She helped me on with my nightie as Emma did her own, scattering her underclothes all over the floor.

"The maids take care of them," Emma said with a laugh to me. "It gives them something to do."

"What a terrible attitude," said Sarah with a smile, making me sit in front of my mirror in my bloomers and nightie. She made me cream my face while she brushed my hair and tied it back with ribbons. Emma and she chattered on as Sarah assisted us both into bed. Sarah took away my bloomers. Suddenly, I felt Emma's leg beside mine in bed. She rubbed her nightie against mine and grinned at me.

"Time for prayers," Emma said. She winked at me as Mrs. Lubbock produced our nightly draught as I was sure that she would.

I wished that I could have stayed awake but Emma took hers right away and was asleep even before Sarah gave me mine. "Sleep well, my little princess," she said to me. I lay back with a girl sharing my bed, the first since Maddie, and I could do nothing about that as darkness flooded over me.

## XI. PRINCE ALBERT'S PROPOSAL

Emma must have been given an especially strong drink or else she was more susceptible to the sleeping draught than I was. I was awakened by Sarah, up first, dressed in a riding dress and habit. My corset was firm about me, my hair plaited and tied back with green and purple ribbons, the colors of the Kent County Foxhounds before Emma got out of bed.

Emma was groggy all through getting ready to leave at five in the morning to the assembly point for the meet on the edge of the City. She actually slept in the carriage that took the two of us and Sarah, who wouldn't ride, to the inn where breakfast was to be served to the assembled riders.

I had said that I could ride but only when I saw Lady Dainsbury canter up, riding side-saddle, did I realize what I had let myself in for. All the Ladies of the Hunt, I soon saw, were dressed just like me, in long dark skirts, high-heeled riding boots, and tight, shaped jackets.

"Miss Grimond!" shouted a familiar voice. The Duke of Clarence, in hunting pink, in other words a red coat, dashed forward to help me out of the carriage. The sky brightened enough at last to be able to see people across the yard of the inn. "I'm so pleased to see you again, even if it is at such an ungodly hour!"

Emma Dainsbury yawned in his face. "I don't know why I'm so tired," she said. I put out my arm and she gratefully used me to assist her to walk to the buffet being served.

The men didn't sit down. I never had before, either, but as a woman, I had to. I was served toddy and juices, sausages rolled in bacon and long, baked doughy buns that would 'fortify' us for the day ahead.

The Duke of Clarence clung to me. "I'm talking to you, my dear girl," he told me confidentially, "because I am not much of a rider. I wouldn't be here if Albert didn't make me come. Says I need some good, honest company." The Duke, I was to call him 'George' and not 'Your Grace,' said, "Truth is, I ride so badly that I usually end up with the Ladies. So, likely, I'll be in your company by mid-day, Kate. You will take pity on me and not show me up before all the high and the low of the county, won't you?"

"It's so long since I've been on a horse," I told him. "I've no doubt, Your Grace, that I'll be far to the rear of any man, even one who calls himself a poor rider."

When I saw the horse that had been provided for me, I thought I should revise my opinion downward even more. My horse looked as if it had been drugged. I glanced over at Sarah just as George Lubbock slid around the corner of the inn. He nodded to his wife and then went into the inn.

"Don't know what's the matter with Gilpin," the groom with the horse said to me. "He's always quiet, my lady, a proper lady's ride, but he's asleep this morning. I think he'll go once the galloping starts." He gave me a whip, however. I wished I had spurs or rowels like many of the male riders had.

It was most disconcerting to sit in a saddle that seemed to have been put wrongly on the horse. The back of the saddle seemed to run down the center. I wasn't used to the feel of my stockings and my dress against the side of the horse. Several of the Ladies dashed their horses off with ease as we moved out and assembled behind the excited hounds in an open field as they began to course in front of the actual huntsmen.

"We should swap horses," Emma said to me, yawning again. Her head had been on my shoulder throughout most of the breakfast. "Your horse looks how I feel." Behind her, I saw George Lubbock riding out on my big, grey horse.

I had to shake my mount several times just to keep up with the trot at the start of the hunt. George Lubbock was ahead of me in a crowd of rough riders when Emma suddenly hauled back and got down from her mare. "Here," she said to me. "Take Madonna. She gets excited and will give you a great ride. I'll take Gilpin back to the stables. I'm going to have a nap at the Dog," that was the inn we had started from, "before you're back for tea."

"I can't do that," I protested, feeling a little bad for what Sarah had done to her, a nice girl like her.

"The Prince is with the huntsmen," Emma said. Her eyes closed even as she smiled and yawned again. "You'll never get near enough to him to be noticed on Gilpin here. He looks like he needs a sleep as well."

I protested again but Emma's will prevailed. I was behind the field, trotting after the crowd of riders on a spirited horse. My bones were being rattled and I was frightened that I was about to make a fool of myself in front of others. Many walkers lined the field and some had telescopes to watch the progress of the hunt as it passed from the field into a wooded area. Then I heard a horn sounding.

Emma's horse pricked up her ears and broke into a canter and then into a gallop. I tried to hold her back, feeling insecure as I bounced the wrong way on the horse's back, my skirts swishing against me. In almost no time, I was back with the rest of the riders who always follow the hounds. Several of the men pointed me to ride on the left and I found myself cantering into the group of lady riders whom I had thought I had missed.

I didn't see George Lubbock and hoped that he didn't see me. I managed to get Madonna under firmer control as the hunt began to string out. We had to follow one behind the other but then we came out on a long, treeless, hill and the hunt became a gallop. Madonna loved to gallop. Emma must have been quite a rider as I was terrified as my horse overtook so many others, including Lady Dainsbury's. I was flying along with the real huntsmen, fighting my horse for her head.

We lost the fox and had to stop as the hounds started coursing again; all the riders bunched up. Madonna was ready to bolt again. I thought she would when one of the riders in a dark brown jacket reached over and took the rein of my horse.

"You'd think Emma Dainsbury would have broken her horse in by now," said Prince Albert. He grinned at me as he held the mare's head to one side and she settled, clearly recognizing a master's touch.

"I'm just not used to riding side saddle!" I told him. He and several of the men about him burst out laughing. I thought I would be challenged right away.

"It is different in India, isn't it?" said the Prince affably, smiling at me.

India? I thought. What has that got to do with anything? Then I remembered the stories Douglas Moore was telling about Katherine Grimond and where she, me, was supposed to come from.

When the View Halloo sounded again, Prince Albert caught my reins again. The mare wanted to run and he helped me to stay behind the red-coated huntsmen proper. We had a long gallop then which seemed to help my horse to come more under my command. I could let her run off with me, I thought, but I should point her away from the Hunt.

I had begun to put my plan into action as a fox was caught and some younger hunters were being blooded. I thought I was out of sight in a copse of trees and I let Madonna run. I thought I was free at last when suddenly I heard the sound of a horse coming after me. I was sure it was George Lubbock so I urged my horse to run on. I kept her on a path through the long woods, hoping the crashing behind me would stop. It didn't.

In the end, it was me who crashed. We came to a fence which Madonna wanted to jump and I didn't. We both got our way. She jumped it and I didn't.

The chasing horse slid to a stop beside me and Prince Albert jumped down beside me. "You could have broken your neck!" he yelled at me. I lay on the muddy ground, then I did something so embarrassing that I was ashamed for the rest of the year. I burst into tears.

Prince Albert immediately knelt beside me and helped me to sit up. "You're hurt!" he exclaimed. "You should lie back ..."

"Only my pride," I sobbed to him, not knowing which of my aches came from my tight corseting and binding and which from the bang on the soft earth.

Then, Prince Albert did something he shouldn't have. He bent his head over me and kissed me. I trembled in shock at his lips pressed to mine.

"Bloody little fool," he said to me as he lifted me to my feet. I stumbled as I tried to stand in my heels. My senses reeled at the thought that a man, a man like Prince Albert, had kissed me and I had felt the desire for me in his kiss.

I must have looked up at him wildly because he put his arms about me then, hugged me to him, muddy skirts and all, and kissed me again, most firmly. His kiss was filled with desire. I meekly parted my lips and let him have the enjoyment that he wanted.

"Kate, Kate, Katherine," the Prince said to me. He hugged me and crushed my rustling skirts to him as he swept them under me and carried me back into the grass where he lay me down.

"Emma's horse," I said, not knowing what to say as he lay beside me. His eyes were bright and fierce as he looked down at me, my hands pressed against his chest.

"Is fine. She's grazing in the field she jumped into," said Prince Albert, stroking my hair. He lowered his head. I knew he was going to kiss me again and I wanted him to. I met his kiss with my own eager lips. I loved the way he stroked my hair and held my body close against his as he kissed me. I put my arms about him and clung to him as well, my kisses as ardent as his.

"My darling Katherine," Albert murmured in my ear. I clung to him and wouldn't let him stop kissing me, so enthralled was I with the way his kissing made me feel. I wanted him to keep on doing it to me forever. I went on making a fool of myself for quite a while before I realized that he was just holding and caressing me and I was the only one doing any kissing.

Shame flooded over me. I pulled my lips away from his and buried my head in his shoulder. What an idiot I was. I was kissing a Prince of England, me, Peregrine Grimond. I was acting like a lovelorn maiden. I wasn't even a girl and I knew it. The Prince, such a nice man, hugged me and tried to reassure me, thinking that I was a girl and treating me as such.

"Oh, Katherine, Katherine," he whispered to me, getting to his feet and helping me to mine again. "I am such a fool to lead you on like this. I want you so much, my sweet darling, but I am such an idiot to lead you on like this. I should never have kissed you. Please forgive me."

Tears flowed from my eyes then. "But," I began shakily. I meant to tell him that it was all my fault, leading him on as I had, kissing him so ardently, wanting him to pleasure me. I trembled as I thought how I could say that I was just a silly girl who ought to have known better. Harriet Lowe had used that line on me and it had only made me, as Peregrine, want her more. She soon surrendered everything to me in a hayrick on a summer's night deep in the Grimondwood.

"It is all my fault," the Prince said huskily, holding me to him, his chin on my softer, wet cheek. "You will hear it very soon, Katherine, but my mother is determined that I marry Princess Sophia, the Kaiser's granddaughter. She is only fifteen and so it will be years ..."

His voice trailed off and he held me apart from him. "I understand," I said thickly. I felt as much relief as chagrin at what he was saying to me. "I should, shouldn't, shouldn't ever have thought ..."

"Yes, you should," he said fiercely then, hugging me to him, lightly kissing my cheek and my neck. "It is you I want, Katherine, yes, you. You are the woman I want to love. Edward... well, you can guess what Edward has told me to do."

I stared up at him and a shiver ran through me. I felt a ribbon blow across my cheek and knew that it had come loose. My hair must be all loose. If the Ladies of the Hunt were to see me now, with loose hair, in the arms of Prince Albert, pressed so close to him, I shuddered at what they would say about me. Then I wondered why I should care.

"Your silence does you so much credit," said Prince Albert shakily. "Edward says that I should make you my mistress and I would." He stared down into my face. Wild thoughts ran through me, pictures of he and I in my bed like I had been with Emma Dainsbury, me out of my corset for the first time in an age, my bosom free from all restraint, pushing softly into him as he kissed me as he did again at just that moment.

I clung to him. Albert kissed me even more powerfully than he had before, shifting his legs about me. As I moved my legs inside my skirt, they stroked his. I felt waves of female emotion passing through me, weakening me, making me want this moment in his arms as a girl never to stop.

There were shouts then in the wood. We could hear calls for 'Your Highness' and for 'Prince Albert.' Albert gave me one last, quick kiss as he disengaged his body from mine. "You would accept my proposal?" he whispered urgently.

"No," I told him. Tears came again and chills ran through me as he smiled.

"I told Edward that," Albert murmured. He turned from me and vaulted over the fence, then went across the meadow beyond the line of trees and caught Madonna for me. He rode her back and jumped the fence easily as I would have done if I had been Peregrine and not Katherine.

Albert grinned and got down gingerly from my saddle. "I can see why you came off," he said. He tightened the girth on the mare and whistled to his horse which trotted up the pathway to him right away.

It was Emma's father who found us. He beamed at the Prince, and heartily congratulated him on having made the finest kill of the day. He recognized Madonna of course and shook his head as the Prince helped me back into the saddle. I had had enough time to re-adjust my ribbon and tuck my hair into the little hat I had to wear. I had knocked most of the mud off from where I had fallen by the time Sir Charles rode up.

"Miss Grimond has some bruising," said the Prince. "I think her day of riding is over."

Sir Charles was all concern then as other riders came up, including the groom who had given me the sedate Gilpin. He put an extra lead rein on the horse and led me back along the pathway I had galloped along so precipitously. I heard Sir Charles saying something about that horse having run away with Emma several times before. He should probably sell the mare into a cavalry unit.

Back at the inn, there was Emma stretching and yawning and wanting to know why I was so muddled. She invited me into the room she had taken. I had to take my dress off and have it washed while I sat in my knickers and drank another hot toddy in front of a fireplace.

Emma wanted to examine me much more closely for bruises and so forth, saying again and again that it was all her fault. She should have known that Madonna would be too much for me.

"She wasn't too much," I told her angrily. "It was just the saddle."

"You really thought you would ride astride like a man?" asked an astonished Emma.

"In India," I began. I was trying to think of some anecdote I could tell that would prove that I was a better rider than she thought.

"Did Madonna really run away with you?" asked Emma seriously.

My hesitation answered her question. She grinned at me. "I did that myself with Teddy Barclay," she said. "I swooned in his arms when he came to pick me up, so I got to put my arms about his neck. If his groom hadn't come up so quickly, it would have been so much better. I'll bet the Prince didn't waste any time with you on the ground, helpless."

"Emma!" I said to her, blushing intently. "No, Madonna didn't run away with me. I thought someone was chasing me. I was just trying to clear the woods to find out who. I didn't expect there to be a fence. When I tried to pull Madonna along the path beside the fence, she couldn't stop. I would have stayed on if I had been astride."

"Oooh, that's a lovely story," said Emma. "And it was the Prince chasing you. I wonder what for." Her cheeks dimpled as she said that. I confirmed all her salacious thoughts by the way I flushed and blushed. I confirmed to her, she said, that I was just a girl like her, as she knew I was.

When my skirt was dry, we had to hire a coach, who charged us double, Emma said aggrievedly, to take us back up to Acton Square. I didn't know where Sarah or George were. I should have run away from Emma, I realized later, but, frankly, it never occurred to me. All my thoughts of escape from the girlhood I was living seemed to have been knocked out of me with my fall from the horse.

The Countess was aghast with concern for me as well as for Emma who didn't restrain herself in telling my story, and telling about how a man had chased me on horseback but had been driven off by the Prince. In her version of the story, the Prince was a hero and I was the beautiful maiden almost killed by an evil highwayman.

I bathed myself and discovered I was bruised along my side and my leg. I changed my undergarments and had a narrow escape as Emma came cheerfully into my room. I was trying to put on my corset which she did for me. Colleen came in then and did my hair. The other maids cheerfully cleaned up the bath for me as I put on a pretty, pink dress with white ruffles. Then I went down with my girl friend to meet with the family. Lord Moore was there to meet and greet me with a thin smile and an order for me to take care and not to ride again until after the ball at St James's.

## XII. LORD DOUGLAS MOORE'S ANNOUNCEMENT

We had a family evening of cards with the Countess' children. Emma was much more lively and gay than I was. The children enjoyed their card games more as Emma became like a child herself as she cheated and won and lost with great gusto.

A footman quietly asked me then to attend Lord Douglas Moore in his study; Douglas never played with his brother's children. I went, leaving Emma to thoroughly trounce the others in Fox and Hounds while the boys rolled on the floor, laughing, telling her that they all saw her cheating.

I was smiling when I sashayed into Douglas's office. There were Sarah and George Lubbock, tense and angry, sitting opposite Lord Douglas Moore. He stood as I rustled in and indicated the chair beside himself. I minced to it, smoothed my noisy skirts and sat beside him.

"So you see," Douglas went on dryly to Sarah. "While you and your husband were running about all over the countryside looking for Katherine, she was on her way back here. She dressed herself most pleasingly for this evening with the family and in every way has been a credit to the fair sex. She did not berate several innkeepers or members of the Hunt nor did she ride along surreptitiously with the Hunt. Nor was she observed doing several ill-mannered acts, opening gates the Hunt had maintained to keep closed and crossing land that was to be free of Hunt riders. She was not then told to clear off by the huntsmen and she did not curse them and threaten them that I would take action against them if they didn't help you to find Katherine right away."

"George was trying to find her," Sarah said in her husband's defence. "How could we know that she was in a sly meeting with the Prince and hiding from us?"

"The bruising both Colleen and Miss Dainsbury report hardly confirm that," said Lord Douglas as I sat primly beside him. He reached into a drawer of his desk and took out a wad of money, the bank seal still on the package it was in.

"Five thousand pounds," Lord Douglas Moore told Sarah and George as he tossed the money into her lap.

"Oh," Sarah gasped.

"You are no longer in my employ," said Lord Douglas. He reached over and took my hand. I felt a tremor go through me as I looked at Sarah and George, my captors for so long. "You understand why so much money?" He waited until they both nodded. They looked as stunned as I was. "The Webster family is looking for a governess for their daughter and I have recommended you, Sarah. You only have to apply to the Webster residence on Bascombe Street and the position is yours. They also have need of a groom and will consider George if he makes a suitable impression."

Sarah looked about to say something but George took the money from her lap and stood up, grinning and nodding to Lord Douglas, saluting him as he headed for the door. With a loud sniff, Sarah followed him. "You're going to have trouble with her," she said, nodding at me. "She changed her attitude too abruptly. And you are letting her bed the Dainsbury girl tonight for all you know."

Sarah stomped out. Douglas looked at me, squeezing my hands. "Do you intend to seduce Emma Dainsbury in my brother's house tonight?" Douglas asked me.

"Oh no," I said and I meant it. Emma was my friend and I didn't want anything to hurt that relationship.

"Good," said Lord Douglas. "Colleen will serve you your nightly tonic tonight. She won't know what is in Emma's but you make sure she drinks from the clear glass. It will take a few minutes but she will soon go to sleep, probably cuddled up to you as I hear you girls like to do. She goes home tomorrow and we shall have no more of these girl friend visits, I am sorry to tell you."

I looked up at him, startled. I hoped he had given the Countess the same message as she had been the one to arrange for Emma to share my bed with me.

"I intend to make the announcement to the family tonight," Lord Douglas Moore said, taking a long flat box and placing it in my hands. I opened it and gasped at the red jewels winking back at me. The necklace, the earrings and the ruby ring were all set in gold.

"Consider the ring your betrothal or engagement ring," said Lord Moore, taking it out and putting it on my shaking finger. The ruby matched the color on my long, shaped fingernails. "The other jewels you can wear with the red dress in which you are to be presented to the Queen in at St James'. We can make the formal announcement there as well. I trust these jewels will make you the envy of every debutante at the ball. When we marry in the Spring, you will be Countess of Oakthorpe, my darling Katherine. My last piece of news this evening is that I have been informed that I shall be invested as an Earl in the New Year."

I sat there in a daze as my enemy made an effort to treat me kindly even after all he had done to me. "I don't know what to say," I said at last, stretching out my finger with the great rock on my hand.

"Say that you will willingly marry me," said Lord Douglas Moore. "And say that you will most willingly be my wife."

I stared at him, at the calm, grey face watching me. All I could think of was the way he had told me that George Lubbock would rape me if I did not kiss him. That was just a month or more before. I knew that if I didn't say that I would become his wife, something worse than what was happening to me now, would happen to me later. Perhaps he would poison me that very night.

"I, I will most willingly marry you, Douglas," I whispered as he caressed my hand. "I, I am most willing to be your wife, your Countess."

"Marvellous," said Lord Douglas, standing and lifting me to my high-heeled feet. Douglas took me in his arms and kissed me. He had ordered me to kiss him before and I had hated it, hated the very thought of kissing him. But this time it was different.

It was different because that very day I had kissed a man most longingly and most adamantly and I had loved it. It was that feeling I sought as I most eagerly kissed Lord Douglas Moore, the man I was to marry. I could imagine myself in my wonderful wedding gown, made by Madame Lecannet, being paraded down the aisle in my long veil and train, to meet Douglas at the altar, to be united to him as his wife.

Only the man who met me at the altar and raised my veil and kissed me wouldn't be Douglas. It would be Albert who took me. My eagerness took Douglas by surprise, I'm sure. I kissed him fervently as he put his arms about me. I put my arms about his neck and pressed my body against him. I wanted to feel just the way I had earlier that day. But it wasn't the same.

It wasn't like kissing Albert. Kissing Douglas reminded me that I was a man; I felt like a man kissing another man. No matter that he became aroused because of the eagerness I had brought to our kissing. Douglas might have enjoyed it and thought more of me than I intended but, for me, it was nothing like kissing Albert.

The Earl and the Countess were delighted with Lord Douglas's announcement. Emma stared at me in total amazement. The Countess loved my ring and earrings, which I had also put on. She said that I would be the belle of the ball yet again. She hugged me and told me what incredible joy I had brought to the Earl of Hutton's household. I was to be a constant visitor in the future, now that she and I were truly to be sisters.

"Sister to Lady Hutton?" said Emma as we prepared for bed together, wiping our faces clean of makeup. "Can you really put up with that, Katherine? I can see you getting along with a dry stick like Douglas for gifts like your ring. I hope he won't be too jealous of you when you seek more lively male companionship elsewhere."

"Oh, Emma," I told her shakily. I was brushing out her hair as I stood behind her in my nightdress. "I'll never be that kind of woman." I'll never be any kind of woman, I thought with a gulp.

"Oh, you will, in time," said Emma. She took the brush from me and made me sit so that she could do my hair, nearly as long as hers. "My mother does and she's as strait-laced as they come. She told me how they do it at these weekend parties. The husbands go to certain rooms at night and certain men visit her till the morning comes. Lord Dawlish is her favorite, she told me. He is every woman's favorite, she says, and I should look out for him after I marry, especially if my husband is a bore."

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I gave Emma her drink and lay beside her. Her cold feet played with my nightdress as she went on again about Lord Douglas and told me not to settle for him. "Teddy Barclay is nice," she said as she cuddled up to me, her fragrance of fresh rose petals making me feel so aroused.

She yawned again and settled her fragrant hair against me. "I sleep so well in your bed, Katherine," she told me. "I really am content with you. I wish you would come and stay with me in Audley. I could introduce you to all the eligible men of the county. I'm certain that there are twenty men in Kent, and more, who would be far better husbands for you than Douglas Moore."

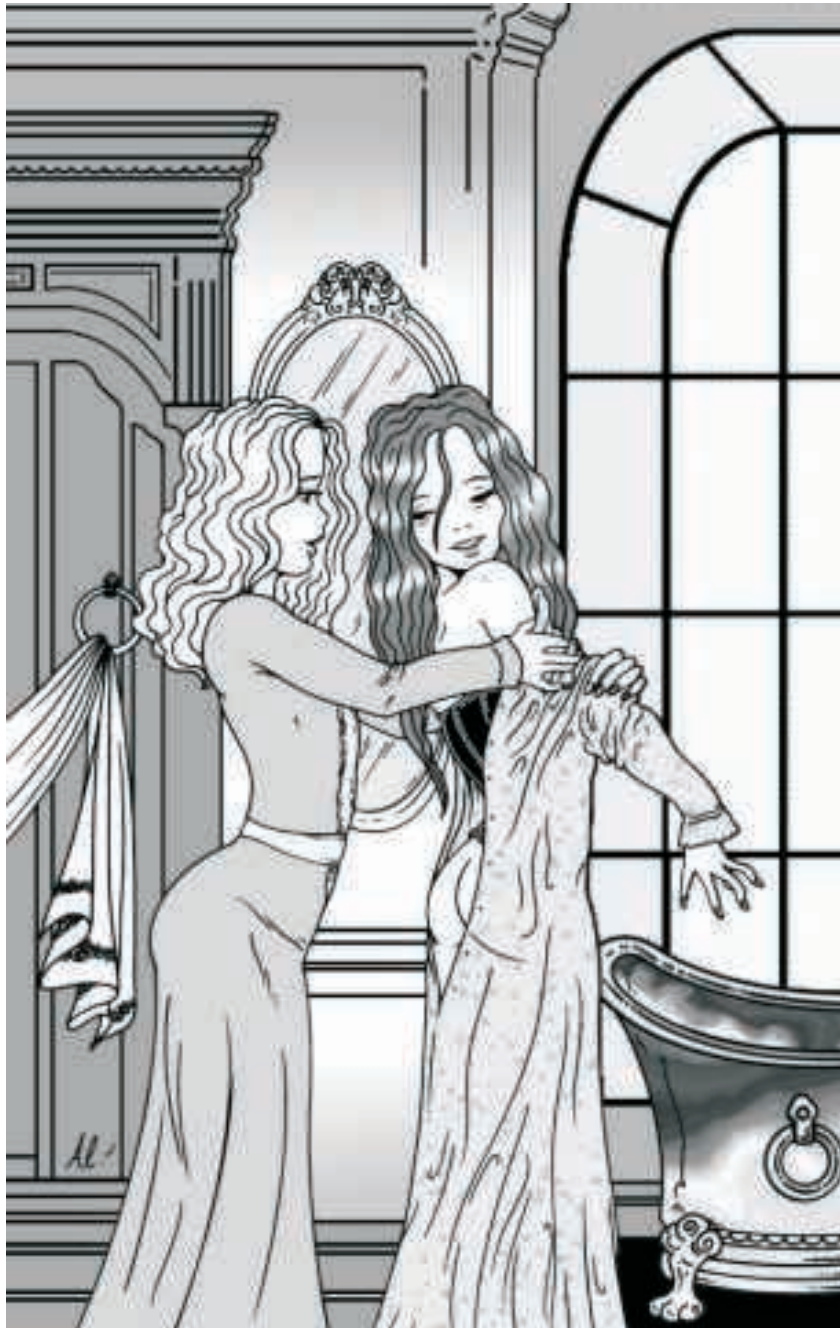
She soon slept. I had to move her from me but she snuggled back. I spent a restless night with Emma in my bed, aroused in a way that I hadn't been in a long time. Sarah had been so right in her warning to Lord Douglas Moore. If Emma had stayed awake and had

continued to cuddle me, with her breasts and her legs pushing against me, I would have been sorely tempted. I doubted that I could have kept up my silly disguise.

I bathed before Emma awoke, shooing away the maids who brought me hot water, not allowing any to stay. Colleen, the older woman, I only allowed in when I was completely in my corset and undergarments, bound up as Sarah had bound me before.

I woke Emma then and she had no inhibitions in entering the bath, naked as the day she was born, chattering away to me and to the maid she enlisted to help her.

“ ‘Tis a pity,” muttered Colleen to me as she assisted the other maid cleaning up after Emma, “that not all young ladies are as well-trained as yourself, Miss.”



I smiled as she brought me my white and grey linen dress and helped me into it. It was second nature to me now to have a woman assist me dress and to pay compliments to me. I lightly curled and brushed my eyelashes. I had to show Emma how to do hers as well and she was very pleased to learn how to do it.

“You must show my maid, Anna, how you do this,” Emma said. She took my arm then and walked me down to breakfast, leaving the bed and the lotions I had used for the maids to clear away after us.

I looked helplessly at Colleen who rolled her eyes and winked at me. “It will be my pleasure, Miss,” she said to me.

Of course, I didn’t eat breakfast. I scarcely ate at all these days. Mrs. Lubbock had conditioned me to eat only soups and those sparingly. It really helped when she was corseting me so tightly. I don’t have to do that any more, I told myself,

feeling how tightly I had had Colleen bind me, out of habit. I could go out in the afternoon, couldn't I, and never come back to this house again. Emma was leaving soon and the Countess was indisposed. The servants wouldn't stop me and Lord Douglas Moore always went to his study when he was in town to work.

Douglas was nice to me, nice to me as a woman that is. I played to him with smiles and curtseys and little touches on his arm as I had seen other women do to men they were attracted to. I thought of Maddie and how she had behaved with me and I tried to be the same to Douglas. Several times, I saw Emma shaking her head to me and I wondered if I was as transparent to Douglas as I was to her.

Emma went off, telling me how much she had enjoyed her visit and we must be together some of the time at the ball at the Palace of St James. We must pray for good weather, said Emma. She bade me good-bye and assured me she would be thinking of me until we met again at St James's.

"So now I have you, my love, all to myself," said Lord Douglas as the children were sent off to lie down and nap. Lord William was asleep on a chair in the main room. I smiled at my betrothed but we could do nothing together as a footman announced a Mr. Grew, a lawyer, to see Lord Douglas.

"I should call on Lucy Webster," I told Douglas as he put his arm about me affectionately. "But who is to accompany me now on my visits to our neighbors? Sarah was such a treasure in accompanying me everywhere, even to the dressmaker's. Oh," I thought of my wedding dress. "I'm supposed to go to Madame Lecannet's two days after the ball. You can't come with me, my Lord, or you will see me in my wedding dress."

"You should never suspend your pleasures on my account," said my betrothed, smiling lightly. "Yes, we must get you another lady's companion, mustn't we? I'm sure the Countess will have someone in mind. You'll be able to resume your visits to other young ladies like yourself tomorrow with the Countess, or in a few days after we hire someone new. Yes, we do need someone new who will see you for the beautiful young lady you have become."

His business was pressing and I returned to some needlework the Countess had been trying to interest me in. The work was interesting at times, particularly when a section was finished and a sense of satisfaction at a job well done overcame me. I was slow and butterfingerted in comparison to other young ladies who had been doing such work all of their lives, their fingers much more nimble than mine.

I waited until Lord Douglas was on his third visitor, then the tension inside me became unbearable. I went to my room, breathing so heavily that my chest was going up and down in front of me. I found the jewels Douglas had given me and put them in the pocket of my coat. I chose a brown one, similar to that which I had seen many young women wearing. I chose a brown bonnet as well and found the little purse of money I had hoarded from Sarah's leavings. She always insisted that I pay the bills wherever we went, so I had started to keep a little of the change back each time.

I thought about what I must do once I was out. I quaked as I thought of the shops that I must visit in my long skirts and bonnet. I must visit men's clothing stores and buy clothes for my 'brother.' I must have a shirt and a suit. I must have a coat and socks and boots. I

knew that I didn't have enough money in my little purse. I would have to pawn the jewels, including the engagement ring Douglas had given me. I rehearsed the story I might tell a pawnbroker. If I could get one to take the jewels, he would cheat me, I was sure of it. I could take it back to the jeweller who had made them for Lord Douglas and tell him I wanted the money for a different purchase, but that was too dangerous.

I would leave the house dressed as a woman but I really didn't have an idea how I could change my appearance successfully. I would need help. I put on my coat and told the Earl's butler that I was going out to visit Lucy Webster and would be back within two hours. The butler saw nothing unusual in a lady going out to visit in the neighborhood of Acton Square. Suddenly, I was out of the house and free.

I couldn't believe how easy it was. I walked out on the street and I was just one girl among others, most of them accompanied. I did walk towards Lucy Webster's, expecting at any moment that an arm would catch under my sleeve and I would be swung about to face an irate Lord Douglas Moore.

I walked the two streets over to the Websters'. My heels clicked heavily on the pavement beneath my feet. I walked as Sarah had made me, my heels coming down one in front of the other. It made me wiggle, Sarah told me, and girls walked like that all the time. Men liked to see us taking small steps and wiggling. Sarah would have been proud of me as I wiggled all the way to Lucy's. From across the street in a little park, I watched a carriage arrive at Lucy's. Several ladies got out, all of whom I recognized. I stayed in the dark shade of a statue and they didn't see me. I really was free.

I set out for the main thoroughfare. Another man raised his hat to me and preened his whiskers as if that was supposed to appeal to me. I looked at him haughtily and set out on my own, wondering if I should try to find lodgings first or a pawnbrokers'. I would have to head to the poorer part of London for that, I knew. I shivered as I thought of the men I might meet. They wouldn't be as polite as the men who raised their hats to me on Acton Street.

I hardly noticed the hackney cab that pulled alongside me. I paid little attention to the woman who got down from the cab until she put her arm on mine. Turning to tell her that she must have mistaken me for someone else, I looked into the familiar, determined face of Sarah Lubbock.

### **XIII. SARAH LUBBOCK'S ACT OF VENGEANCE**

"I knew that you would run for it as soon as I was gone," Sarah gloated over me as I sat beside her in her hackney cab, George Lubbock in the driver's post.

"I, I wasn't running away," I pleaded with her. "I, I was going to Lucy Webster's but the Baxter girls and Eleanor Romney were just arriving there and it would be too hard to talk to Lucy now."

"You were headed uptown," laughed Sarah at me. My fan she threw onto the street but all the money I had spirited away went into her pockets. She found my beautiful jewels in my coat pockets, even though I tried to keep them from her.

"How much did you expect to get for these?" Sarah sneered at me. "A few hundred pounds in a popshop? Oh, my lovely girl whom I created, we can do a lot better than that, George and me. We can get thousands for these." She indicated the necklace and earrings. "More, when we make them a matching set." She grabbed my hand and wrestled the engagement ring from my finger. She put it in her pocket. I thought of shouting out and getting help as I was being robbed.

"Stop it, Katherine," said Sarah, her voice as hard as her face. I blanched and shook when I saw what was in her hand, a small, two-barrelled pistol she must have taken from the same pocket she had put my ring in. "Call out and I put a pellet into you. You've endured living as a woman," she sneered while I trembled in fright. "If you want to go on living, you do just as I tell you to do, my little girl. I have big plans for you, much bigger plans than Lord Douglas Moore envisages. My plans will earn me his five thousand pound slap in the face many times over before I am finished with you.

"Mrs. McDowell's on Cleveland Street," she ordered her husband. Sarah smiled at me and I was scared out of my mind.

"That's a brothel," I blurted out at her and Sarah smiled.

"Precisely," she said. The gun was steady in her hand and aimed at my bosom. "You have had it so easy, Katherine. You have men at your fingertips, fawning all over you. You have empty-headed girl friends who are rapidly turning you into a girl just like them. But all that is going to change, my darling.

"A man who did what you did to a woman deserves a much different fate than becoming the pampered wife of a second-rate aristocrat. A man like you deserves the same fate as the woman he has ruined. He deserves social ruin as well. And I intend to see that Peregrine Grimond and Miss Katherine Grimond both get what they richly deserve."

\*\*\*\*\*end of part one of two\*\*\*\*\*