



*Otherwise
Engaged*

ANTOINE BALZAC

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By

Antoine Balzac



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Two further tales in the Otherwise Engaged trilogy of passionate historical romances by Antoine Balzac.

OTHERWISE ENGAGED - YET AGAIN

OH! TO BE OTHERWISE ENGAGED

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Prologue

Hillcrest Manor, Hampshire, England – November, 1859.

“**B**randy for you old chap?” Hamilton Fitzhugh, the Earl of Hillcrest shrugged at his old friend Admiral Guildthorpe, the Earl of Scarborough. The admiral was sitting in a red upholstered wing-backed chair in full dress uniform, with his long, cadaverously thin legs housed in shining black Hessians stretched towards the blazing fire in an effort to warm himself after the long trip. “That’s an excellent idea old chap. I’d just love one, what?” the admiral replied with a bit of a chuckle. “Damned nippy out there for this time of the season, eh?”

“I collect you would be pretty well spot on there, Admiral,” Hillcrest frowned at his friend, as he handed him a fairly generous tot of brandy, before taking a seat on the settee near the fire. Taking a long sip of brandy he pondered as to why Scarborough had braved such elements – which were pretty diabolical outside the library window, as swarms of inky black clouds blew in from the south – to suddenly turn up on his doorstep unexpectedly.

“I suppose you are wondering to yourself, just why I would brave the elements and just about freeze to death on the long trip down here totally unannounced, Hillcrest?” the admiral surprised his friend by almost reading his thoughts word for word.

"Yes Scarborough, it had crossed my mind."

"Well, I suppose I should start at the beginning, really? 'cos I don't know if you are aware of this, Hillcrest, but my dear wife passed away a short time back, leaving me in a bit of a pickle so to speak, with two eleven year old chits to care for," the admiral explained without emotion.

"No Admiral. I was not actually aware of that. So please accept mine and my family's belated condolences at your regrettable loss," Hillcrest returned with a certain amount of foreboding in his tone of voice, at the admiral's perceived lack of emotion.

"Thank you my friend, your condolences are much appreciated. But now that brings me to the bona-fide reason behind my sudden visit."

"Really, Scarborough?"

"Yes Hillcrest... I am afraid that I am here to call in the recompense for that outstanding boon you owe me from way back during the Napoleonic Wars."

"Truly?" Hillcrest shrugged, his mind flooding back to the poop-deck of the H.M.S Apollo when they were both trainee officer-cadets. In the midst of a fierce battle Scarborough had to rush on to the deck and drag him out of the way of a crashing mast-boom, thus saving his life.

"Yes. You see Hillcrest, m'self and my two eleven year old chits are set to leave good-old Blighty for the New-World, on Saturday evening's tide. I've bought m'self a damn horse stud in New South Wales, you know?" The admiral wasn't looking at him at this stage, but was fiddling with a length of white thread on the black breeches that made up part of his uniform, as he endeavoured to phrase his next set of words into a sentence with the least impact.

"The thing is, Hillcrest. I hear that your youngest is still on the shelf, and seeing that I am in the market for a wife for m'self and a mother for m'chits. Yes, well. You do the math."

"Really, Scarborough?" Hillcrest fired back at him with a certain amount of venom in his tone.

After all, the man was over sixty years old and Angelica was only just one-and-twenty.

"Yes, well, after all, she is one-and-twenty now and a bit of a bluestocking by all accounts. Let's face it Hillcrest, she's virtually just been rustivating here after being left at the altar, so to speak, after her first Season. And then to make matters worse, by foregoing a second and third season as the result of the untimely goings on in her first, is now far too old. Hell! Can't you see that I am offering to take her off your hands right here and now? Which will probably turn out to be your best, first, and last offer don't you think?" The admiral countered with quirked brow.

"Yes but Australia, Scarborough?" Hillcrest blurted out.

The admiral was taken aback by Hillcrest's negative attitude for a moment or two. "Hells bells Hillcrest! It's well past the middle of the eighteen hundreds. And, Australia is a great deal more civilized than it was in the late seventeen hundreds, you know?"

"Yes, but today is bloody Monday, Scarborough...?"

"Which means that we have a mere five days in which to arrange for a special marriage license to get ourselves wed, pack your daughter's worldly goods and get ourselves down to Portsmouth by Saturday afternoon. Just in time to get aboard me flagship, *The Princess Elizabeth*, due to leave port on its voyage to Australia on the evening tide.

"Oh yes, Hillcrest. And I will also be in need of six or seven of your prized thoroughbreds to race and improve me breeding line in the New World. Oh! And a good horse-man if you have one who is willing to make the trip," The admiral added with a grin, hoping that his latest call would add a little spice to his bargaining power.

The Earl of Hillcrest didn't reply straight away. His mind

was hurriedly doing the arithmetic as he weighed up the 'guinea' value of seven horses against his outstanding gaming debts. But before he could say anything, the admiral virtually sent him into shock.

"Oh yes, and just as a bit of incentive to help you to make your decision, Hillcrest. I am more than willing to instruct my man-of-affairs in London to redeem your current gaming vouchers from 'The Green Apple' and 'The Scarlet Plume'."

"So you know about those too, Scarborough?"

"It always pays to investigate one's foe before one heads into battle, Hillcrest." The admiral advised him with an eloquent frown. "That is why I am still alive after thirty-five years and many, many, sorties with the enemy in Her Majesty's navy."

The Earl of Hillcrest debated Scarborough's offer and found himself becoming excited. At last he had a way out of the damned mess he had got himself into since retrieving the dynasty reins from Harriet six months ago. And anyway, it was about time that Angelica did something useful for the family! Surely a wedding to Scarborough couldn't be that bad for her?

"Well, all-in-all you have left me with no other alternative, have you Scarborough, except to wish you congratulations on your recent betrothal. But! Be warned right now that you may have very well bitten off more than you can chew.

"Because I find myself somewhat compelled to issue you with a dire warning, Scarborough. My youngest chit, Angelica, has proved in the past, to be a really feisty mare that won't be easy to break," the Earl of Hillcrest warned his friend with a gracious frown as they shook hands to consummate the deal.

Chapter One

“**N**o!”
“Yes!”
“I said no, Papa!”
“And I said yes, Angelica!”

“But what the hell have I ever done to you, Papa?” Angelica shrieked back at him, stamping her feet in temper, raising her voice above the noise of the storm raging outside her window.

“Absolutely nothing, Angelica,” her father returned in a somewhat despondent tone this time.

“Then why, Papa? Bloody-hell! The Admiral’s older than you is he not?”

“He requires a wife for himself and a step-mother for his chits. And, he has requested that you fill the void with an offer that I cannot possibly refuse.”

“But why me, Papa? I collect that there are plenty of chits out there in the ton who would fall over backwards for the title of Countess of Scarborough and the wealth that goes with it?” she fired back at him with pained accents.

“That may be so, m’dear. But unfortunately, time is of the essence in this instance.”

“What time and what instance, Papa?” she fired back at him with a suspicious frown.

"The fact that you must be wed, packed and aboard 'The Princess Elizabeth' in Portsmouth harbour, bound for Australia by Saturday evening," he informed her with a guilty frown.

"Australia!" Angelica shrieked back at him.

"Yes Australia. And please don't take that attitude with me." The Earl of Hillcrest sat down on the edge of her bed and put his face in his hands, before continuing in a voice that was just laced with melancholia; "I have been a bloody idiot! Because since Harriet handed me back the reins six months ago I have virtually lost everything at two of the worst gaming-hells in London. And, as part of my agreement with Scarborough, is his pledge to instruct his man-of-affairs to redeem all of my vouchers from those said clubs. Thus allowing me the opportunity to help regain full control of the dynasty again and once more rescue all of us from dun territory."

As Hillcrest sat with his head in his hands, Angelica could see the dampness on his fingers that were caused by his tears, and although her heart skipped a beat or two at the love she felt for the broken man who sat on the end of her bed, she just could not control her temper.

"My God, Papa! What the hell in this world possessed you to risk everything you own on a bloody game of chance for the third time that I know of?"

"I cannot really say, Angelica. I am fully aware that there are no excuses. But after your beloved Mama was so suddenly and cruelly taken from us all those years ago, I just hit the skids. But after your Aunt Harriet thankfully rescued us a few years ago, I turned over a new leaf. But not long after I retrieved the reins again, I took to drinking too much I am afraid. Then whilst I was in my cups, I caught the old gambling bug and one thing led to another so to speak. Now, the only way to save the Hillcrest dynasty, *again*, is for you to wed

Scarborough. And wed him damn speedily I am afraid," her father explained to her with a pained expression on his face.

"So Papa, in your opinion this is definitely the only way left open to you to save the name and reputation of the Hillcrest dynasty?" Angelica was almost pleading with him, looking directly into his eyes with her hands on his shoulders.

"Yes my pet. This is the only way I am afraid."

"Then so be it," Angelica frowned, turning her back on her father to hide the tears that had suddenly started to form as the inevitability of her predicament engulfed her.

"But if it is any consolation to you my dear. Scarborough is more than willing for you to take Maggie with you – if she is so inclined that is," Hillsdale attempted to reassure his somewhat distressed daughter with a comforting tit-bit or two. "And of course, Avalanche would naturally be part of the consignment of thoroughbreds that will be accompanying you on the voyage, most ably cared for by Danny O'Hara, who has also agreed to start a new life in the New World as the Admiral's foreman."

"So Papa, when do I get to meet my betrothed and my instant family?" Angelica turned to ask her father, dabbing the final remnants of her tears away with a silk kerchief that she had rescued from the sleeve of her yellow morning gown.

"Friday morning my dear. Scarborough is on his way back to London as we speak to finalize his outstanding business dealings, obtain a special marriage license, and of course leave any un-finished problems in the hands of his man-of-affairs," her father explained to Angelica with a great deal more of a relieved attitude at this junction. "Then you will be wed – at a small family ceremony of course – on Friday afternoon. This will allow you and Scarborough at least one night's privacy in a marital bedchamber, before leaving after breakfast on Saturday morning for Portsmouth harbour and the good ship Princess Elizabeth.

“Of course, most of the heavy luggage and the thoroughbreds will be leaving here on Friday morning, so that they are in Portsmouth in plenty of time to board the ship,” he surmised with a smile, as he strolled across the bedchamber to leave his youngest daughter to her own thoughts.

* * *

After her Papa had left her alone again and feeling far too upset to join her family for dinner that evening – being loath to have to suffer the innuendos that were bound to follow from family and friends who were certain to visit after the announcement of her betrothal had done the rounds *on dit* – Angelica bid her maid Maggie to serve the evening meal in her bedchamber.

After her meal, she summoned Maggie to assist her to prepare for bed. When Maggie arrived, she was standing in front of her full-length mirror feeling rather pleased with the reflection of her long, black, silky, hair, as it cascaded over her yellow and white muslin clad shoulders. For Angelica was fairly short. Standing only five foot four inches tall, and would never ever be considered as a jewel of the first water by any would-be suitors. But with her alluring golden brown eyes that sparkled akin to droplets of elegantly polished topaz and illuminated her surroundings wherever she went, her facial features included a tiny turned up nose and delicate lips. Her petite, but flawlessly formed breasts, her slender waist and shapely derriere, formed the pinnacle of her longish, well-formed legs. She was considered by the elderly matrons of the *haute-monde* to be *pretty*. But not striking enough to halt the many dandies and fops that paraded around the *ton* in their tracks. Although they did firmly believe that she did have the sort of looks that could turn heads, if and when she put in the effort.

After her maid had removed her gown, she was standing

naked in her bedchamber near the blazing open fire, with her arms in the air, waiting for Maggie to slip her night-gown over her arms and head, when she decided to broach the subject of their up-coming voyage. "You do realize that I will be leaving here for good on Saturday morning, Maggie?"

"So the rumours is true then, Miss Angie?" Maggie cried out in absolute horror, dropping the night-gown to the carpet at her feet, slowly sinking to her knees with her head in her hands and sobbing un-controllably.

Maggie was only one month older than her mistress. And, she had started tending to Angelica when they were both twelve years old, after Maggie had been orphaned when an outbreak of botulism had spread through the village like wildfire. And although she was merely a servant, Angelica treated her more like a friend, so she had consequently grown to love her mistress like the sister she never had.

Maggie was pretty in her own way. She had ample breasts, an especially slim waist, and a reasonably substantial backside. But with her long, light blonde hair, her bright blue eyes and her ruby complexion, she was considered fairly good-looking by members of the opposite sex. But she only had eyes for Danny O'Hara, and although she had never done anything about it, she would allow no other male anywhere near her.

"But there is good news, my dear," Angelica said, kneeling down to put her arms on Maggie's shoulders in an attempt to comfort her sobbing maid. "The Earl of Scarborough, in his infinite wisdom, has agreed to you accompanying me on this voyage and beyond, if you are so willing?"

"What did you'se jus' say, Miss Angie?" Maggie blurted out as she suddenly stopped sobbing.

"I said that my betrothed indicated that you are welcome to come with me to Australia if you wish," Angelica repeated her invitation in more simple terms as her maid stood to her feet with the night-gown in her hand. "But beware Maggie..."

you could also be required to care for two eleven year old chits as well."

"As long as I's can stay's with you, Miss Angie. I's don't care what's I have ta do," Maggie beamed back at her as she indicated for her mistress to lift up her arms to enable her to slip the night-gown over her head.

"Then it is all settled, Maggie. And, it looks as if we are going to have our work cut out for the next few days packing all *our* worldly goods," Angelica beamed back at her.

"Yeah, Miss Angie, but it's sure gonna be worth it if I's can stay wid you an' look after you still, ain't it? 'Cos you'se an' me go back a long way, eh?" Maggie giggled out with a new sense of exhilaration in her manner.

"Then off you trot and start packing all your worldly wares. But bear in mind that when we leave here on Saturday, it is going to be many weeks and a voyage of sixteen thousand miles or more, before we will have a permanent roof over our heads again," Angelica warned her maid with an eloquent frown.

"Wow! Is it that's far, Miss Angie? 'Cos I's knows that's I's been ta London a coupla times with you'se, but that ain't sixteen thousand miles, eh?" Maggie beamed back, lifting the tray off the table and heading for the door. Bringing a feeling of great joy to Angelica's disturbed heart, at having brought a new found happiness to her maid's flagging spirit.

"Good-night then, Maggie. And if the weather is better on the morrow, I intend on going for a ride at dawn. So, would you be a dear and make the arrangements for me before you go to bed?" Angelica requested as she opened the door to the dingy hallway.

"Yes Miss Angie. So good-night and sleep tight," Maggie giggled her farewells as she slipped into the hallway and closed the door behind her.

* * *

For Angelica that night, any length of undisturbed sleep just would not come. With the storm still raging outside, she found herself tossing and turning all night long. Plagued by a series of eerie dreams that saw her being attacked by huge wallabies and enormous red kangaroos, or having to flee through the jungle astride Avalanche whilst being chased by giant hairy spiders, slimy snakes, and a whole series of strange looking wild animals with massive heads and sharp teeth.

Her dreams culminated with the Princess Elizabeth sinking during a storm where she found herself alone on a deserted island, surrounded by a group of cannibals, with their faces painted with bright yellow war-paint. She was just about to be lifted up and thrown into a huge cooking-pot full of boiling water, herbs and vegetables that was sitting on a gigantic open fire. When the feeling of a hand touching her arm caused her to suddenly sit up in bed and let go a yelp, yelling out in panic; "No! No! Please do not boil me alive!"

"Sorry Miss Angie... but you'se says you'se want to be up afore dawn so's that you'se could goes for a dawn ride," Maggie's calming voice broke into her somewhat disturbed state of mind.

"Oh! It is only you, Maggie? I am sorry to have upset you, but I was having a terrible nightmare I am afraid," Angelica apologized to her maid with a wry smile, truly thankful that it was only a dream.

"Tell me 'bout it, Miss Angie? All them's stories you'se read me when we's was holed up on rainy days up there's in the *ton* las' season 'bout cannibals, crocodiles, snakes, wild animals an' them strange insect type thingamajigs. Well... I's 'ad me all sorta bad dreams las' night, eh?" Maggie giggled at her. Her giggles turning out to be so contagious that they were both giggling out loud in next to no time.

Ten minutes later, Angelica was washed from head to toe and attired in a pair of tan, buckskin, men's riding breeches, the shiny black men's Hessians she had especially made for her, a white shirt, black scarf around her neck and a black riding jacket, with a silver fob-watch pinned to her lapel. A combination that she only ever wore when her father was away on business, because he always blew his top when he saw her attired that way. And, even though she knew he would be thoroughly annoyed with her if he happened to catch her out on this occasion what was he going to do - ground her for a week or two like last time - I doubt that very much?

Chapter Two

The sun was just peeking over the horizon as Angelica crossed the area that was once her mother's pride and joy which her father had now allowed the once magnificent rose bushes to become over-run with unsightly weeds. The lawns had not been cut for many, many months and the pergola that her mama had especially built for her garden parties was in dire need of repair.

As she followed the now muddy track towards the stables, with the birds singing all around her, she was suddenly overcome with an incredible sadness, when she realized that this probably would be one of the few remaining mornings left for her to take Avalanche for a dawn ride.

Danny O'Hara was in his mid-thirties and as Irish as they come and in one way or another, had been involved with horses since he was five years old. He actually looked more like a jockey than most jockeys, being short and thin with a mop of unruly red hair and a face full of freckles. Danny was just leading Avalanche over to the saddling area for Angelica to saddle her, when she strolled into the stables.

Danny and Angelica had always had an un-breakable bond between them. It started way back when she was only

ten years old, when she chose to spend most of her spare time in the stables, helping the stable-hands muck out the stalls or groom the horses. But the bond really intensified after Avalanche was born, when the complications brought about by the size of the baby mare and the fact that it was a breach-birth, led to the death of the mother horse.

Angelica was fifteen years old when Avalanche was born. Hell! She virtually fell in love with the tiny, snow white mare from the moment she escaped her mother's womb. After some heated discussion between the parties concerned, when her mother died just two hours following the birth, the decision was made that the most sensible and compassionate thing to do would be to put a bullet in the baby's skull, so that death would be instantaneous and the baby wouldn't suffer any more than it had to before its eventual demise.

But, when it came time for her father to do the dastardly deed, Angelica was laying in the stall cuddling the baby mare to her breast and refusing to move. Begging for the opportunity to at least attempt to save the snow white baby she had already named Avalanche.

The first five days of baby mare's life were pretty-well touch and go. But with Danny's expertise, hours and hours of loving care, nightly prayers to the Almighty, and a great deal of luck, Avalanche eventually made it through her first month and the rest was history.

"Your little girl is awaiting your pleasure, ma'am," Danny greeted her with a bow and a deft chuckle. Basically teasing Angelica, because she had not allowed anybody else to ride or even saddle Avalanche when she was at home, since the day she had broken her in.

"Thanks Danny," Angelica chuckled back at him.

"Anytime ma'am."

"So, I hear that you are joining my small group of world travellers on our journey halfway around the world?" Angelica

chatted with him as she saddled Avalanche for her upcoming ride.

"Yeah Miss Angie, dere woulda bin nuttin' left 'ere for me once all dah thoroughbreds 'ads gone wid you'se to dah New World, eh? So when 'is lordship offered me's a job. Well, I's jus' jumped at it, eh?" Danny returned with a shrug. But the sparkle that she had seen in his eyes whilst he answered her question, just didn't match his nonchalant mannerisms.

"Maggie's coming along too, you know? So, there will be at least two people on the ship that you are acquainted with," Angelica added as an afterthought, having finished her task and was in the process of leading Avalanche outside into the courtyard. Knowing full well that Maggie and Danny were really attracted to one another – but each had failed to mention it.

"Yeah, dat's good. 'Cos I like's your Maggie an' we's always gets on good togedder," Danny replied as he moved over to help her up into the saddle.

"It is now a few minutes past six o'clock, Danny," Angelica said to him after glancing down at her fob-watch once she was comfortable in the saddle. "I am heading up to say my farewells to the old Roman ruins. But I should return by eight o'clock."

"Right you are," Danny chuckled back his return with hearty wave, as Angelica steadied the reins, gently tapped Avalanche's ribs with the heels of her Hessians, and galloped up the grassy plain towards an expansive looking forest away in the distance; an expanse of forest that held together most of her childhood memories. Memories that would probably have to now last her for the rest of her life, for although New South Wales was only a mere twelve thousand miles away – as the crow flies that is. Twelve thousand miles was an awful long way away, yes?

And even more disturbing – was the fact that majority of it was water.

Chapter Three

Angelica directed Avalanche to slow from a gallop to an easy trot as they reached the trees, allowing her to gingerly weave her way – thanks to last night’s terrible storm – through the mountains of flotsam and jetsam that littered the wide track which meandered its way through the forest of closely matted trees.

The sun had been up for a little while at that stage and was just starting to shine through the gaps in the branches, spreading its warmth to the lower parts of the forest.

It could have been the early morning sun sparkling through the trees – her almost total lack of dreamless sleep last night – or mayhap even the peace and tranquillity of her surroundings. But all of a sudden Angelica’s mind drifted into a melancholic reverie, flowing way back to a series of events that took place two years earlier.

* * *

It was eight o’clock on that morning in early September. The sun was shining and the birds were singing on a day that was showing all the signs of being absolutely beautiful. After an early breakfast, Angelica and her Aunt Harriet had left

Hillcrest Manor in Harriet's bright new purple curricle, bound for the previously arranged picnic at the old Roman ruins which were situated amongst the group of hills ten or so miles south of the manor.

Everything appeared to be pretty normal until Harriet suddenly stopped the carriage a mile or so along the track that meandered its way through the forest.

"Why have we stopped, Aunt Harriet? Is there something wrong with the curricle?" Angelica inquired of her aunt with a quizzical frown.

"Not exactly, my dear," Aunt Harriet replied with an extremely guilty grin all over her face. "I am afraid that I have the most dreadful confession to make. You see my dear, Truscott and Will from Scarsdale Manor, are leaving Portsmouth on tomorrow's evening tide so that Will's rather eccentric client can liquidate his holdings in the cape.

"*And* because, as you are well aware by now, I have always held such a *tendre* for Will over the past few years. It is I am afraid, going to take the better part of today, for us to express our fond farewells – if you take my meaning?" she explained to her niece, blushing like a little girl.

"So, Aunt Harriet, does this mean that they will be accompanying us on our picnic trip to the old ruins this morning?" she teased her aunt, knowing full well that was not going to happen.

"Yes, well. Not really dear." Harriet replied shaking her head and still visibly blushing, "For Will and I have made plans to spend the day at The Wayfarer's Inn, so that we can enjoy a much more intimate farewell, if you know what I mean? Whilst you and Truscott enjoy a picnic at the old Roman ruins."

"Really Aunt Harriet!" Angelica giggled back at her, shaking her head with a cheeky grin on her face. "And you pretending to be a respectable widow..." her sentence was

stopped in mid-stream, as two riders came galloping towards them through the trees.

* * *

Ten minutes later, as Harriet's curricule was disappearing along the track in the direction of the Wayfarer's Inn, Angelica had given up attempting any form of modesty. For sitting astride a man's saddle on Will's stallion, wearing her canary yellow carriage gown, no matter what she tried to do, her half-boots and trim stocking clad calves remained exposed to Truscott's vision.

Angelica and Truscott - who had the bulging saddle-bag sitting on the saddle in front of him - trotted along the pathway towards the hills up ahead in complete silence. With Angelica having virtually ignored his presence since the moment he and his uncle had arrived on the scene.

Totally upset at being ignored in this manner. Truscott suddenly broke the status-quo with a huge sigh, before stating, with a remorseful grin on his face. "Is it mayhap something that I might have done that is the *raison d'être* for you not talking to me, Angel?"

'Angel' had been Truscott's pet name for her since her fifteenth birthday party. And, her heart had missed a beat every time he had called her by that name from that day forth. But now, with him having developed into a handsome and formidable young man over the past two years, with his shoulder length, honey-blond hair, his ice blue eyes, and the almost permanent cheeky grin that he constantly wore highlighting his muscular frame, her heart almost stopped altogether when she looked into his eyes. But, because she was still infuriated with him at that time, she chose to look elsewhere and mutter; "Not really, no."

"Then why are you treating me like a lecherous rakehell, lady?"

"Yes, well, how does stealing a sixteen year old maiden's innocence from her one day. *And then*, deliberately ignoring her for the following two years, seize your sensibilities, Mr Truscott bally Gresham?" Angelica fired back at him in a fairly precocious manner, leaving him no doubt as to exactly why she was still annoyed with him.

"If you are referring to that absolutely phenomenal kiss we happened to experience together in Avalanche's stable the last time we met, Angel. Well... you can hardly blame me for the bally aftermath that resulted from that little event, can you now?" he shot back at her with a quizzical frown on his face, shaking his head from side to side.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" she spat back at him, suddenly stopping her horse dead in its tracks.

Truscott immediately stopped his mount, turned it around, and came back to where Angelica was sitting astride her horse glaring daggers at him.

"Yes, well, Angel... *if* less than two hours after a young man had just enjoyed an absolutely phenomenal experience with a sixteen year old maiden in her mare's stable, *his* extremely irate Pater summons him to his library, practically threatening him with genital castration and much more if he should even accidentally lay his eyes on the maiden's personage ever again.

"Well... he invariably deducts that the said maiden has had second thoughts and was in fact considerably displeased with the said events. Immediately reporting the matter to her father, who in turn reported the same to the young man's Pater," Truscott explained his side of the story to her with an abundance of flaying hand movements and an extremely nervous grin.

"So, that is what actually took place. And I of course, firmly believing that you were in fact terribly displeased with my effort, placed the blame on myself," Angelica immediately

stopped glaring and smiled back at him. "Someone must have seen us and gone running to Papa," she added as an afterthought, at the same time bidding her mount to continue with their journey.

With her heart full-to-bursting again with her love for Truscott, she immediately accepted the offer to hold his outstretched hand. The pair completing the journey to the Roman ruins, holding hands, whilst laughing and giggling all the way.

The old Roman ruins had once been a primeval abbey. But all that it consisted of now, was a sphere of large boulders bounded by weeping willow trees on one section. It was situated ten or twelve yards from the banks of a large babbling brook that was being fed from a small but busy waterfall some ten to twenty yards up stream. And, with the late morning sun shining overhead in a practically cloudless sky that offered precious little natural shade, Angelica had decided to spread the picnic blanket under one of the willows.

Whilst Truscott went exploring, Angelica poured them both a glass of cordial, and was sitting on the blanket sipping her drink when he returned. Noticing that she had removed her bonnet, he immediately removed his Hessians, his brown riding jacket and his bright red cravat, laying them neatly over the closest boulder, before sitting down next to her on the blanket to enjoy his glass of cordial, saving the wine for luncheon.

"I really am going to miss this place when I'm travelling the world as uncle Will's assistant man-of-affairs for the next few years, Angel," he suddenly remarked, standing to his feet and slowly making his way over to the brook.

"Yes, so will I. Because I will be moving to London and into Alexander's townhouse after the wedding on Saturday," Angelica spoke to his back, as he sat down on the bank and dangled his feet in the cool clear water.

"My, the water is absolutely stupendous," Truscott observed, sitting sideways on for a moment to talk directly to her. "Mayhap you should just shed your half-boots and stockings and come and dip your feet in the water?"

"I do not think so, Truscott Gresham... It is hardly appropriate for a respectable maiden who is about to be wed in three days' time, to expose any parts of her anatomy in such a manner to a completely different gentlemen to whom she is to be wed," she fired back at him.

Hell! Angelica could not believe that she had just heard herself say that to Truscott. For not only had the sensation of her hand in his on the journey here brought memories of *that* incredible kiss flooding back, it also sent tingling sensations up her arm as far as her sensitive nipples, then down into her belly, causing her all sorts of problems with her breathing and her speech.

"My God Angel, it is not as if I haven't seen it all before. *Hell!* It was not so long ago that we used to swim in this brook here completely naked," he countered with a shrug and a wry smile.

"Yes, well, we were merely infants then," Angelica argued. Mind you that was only on the outside, because inside, her heart and her brain were caught up in a fight to the death. With her heart yearning for her to throw caution to the wind and join him; And her brain warning her that such brazen thoughts could only lead her to disaster.

"You will find it so much cooler with your feet dangling in the water, than sitting up there all warm and sticky, dolled up to the nines in your muslin and lace," He chuckled at her over his shoulder.

"Yes, but only warm on the outside. Because, the balmy sensations brought on from sitting here watching your sleek back and shoulder muscles rippling through a thin shirt, are leaving me breathless," she mumbled silently to herself, as her heart

suddenly gained dominance over her brain, and she found herself already removing her half-boots.

"Just keep your eyes to the front please, Gresham!" she giggled in his direction, as she spread her legs out in front of her to roll her stockings and her garters down.

Two minutes later, she made her way over to where Truscott was sitting on the banks of the stream, lifting her skirts to her knees before settling down next to him and dangling her legs into the cool clear water.

"So, how does it feel with only three day's freedom left before you find yourself shackled to old boof-head Alexander for the rest of your days?" Truscott laughed at her in a cheeky fashion as he splashed water on to Angelica's legs with his toes, whilst undoing his shirt buttons.

"I am sure that Alexander will treat me well and honour me with all the attentions I deserve," she countered with a short gasp as Truscott touched her leg with his, sending tingling quivers up and down her spine.

"I certainly hope so, Angel. Good old Alexander seems to be a bit of a dandy to me, 'cos a day does not pass without me spying him prancing up the road to White's for a game of chance."

"Really? But I shall wager that he could give you a few pointers on the latest fashion," she quipped, glancing up at him and silently gasping as the vista of his naked, muscular, hairy chest, caused the heat to pool deep down inside her.

But then, as he removed his shirt and turned his body around towards her, a blatant desire to bury her fingers in the tiny blonde forest on his chest, caused wildly erotic sensations to flow all through her system.

"And just where are you going now?" she stammered out as he stood to his feet, barely able to utter a word with her heart pounding so, as he stood gazing down at her whilst naked from the waist up.

"I am going for a swim, Angel," he let go a deft chuckle, as he ducked behind a nearby bush to remove his riding breeches, before diving into the deeper water closer to the waterfall. And even though she attempted to close her eyes and not watch him dive into the water. Her attempt failed miserably. The image of his fully naked body before it hit the water, tossing her senses into a breaking wave of longing.

"You just cannot do that. You... you...*coquin garcon*," Angelica giggled over at where he was splashing about in the water.

"I already have. So why don't you come in too? The water is bloody beautiful," he yelled over to her as he splashed around in the water.

"Because, I have not brought my swimming outfit with me, silly!"

"Nor have I." Truscott chuckled back, jumping up high out of the water and almost giving her heart-failure at the vision of his now wet and shimmering, naked body.

"But you are a man - *and*, not the man I am about to wed in three days' hence, are you now?" she returned with garbled speech, becoming a little faint at the strangely erotic thoughts that were bombarding her senses at that time.

"Hah! Excuses, excuses, when we both know it is because you are chicken!"

"Rubbish Truscott! I am not chicken at all. It is just that what you are asking me to do is not, I am afraid, the appropriate behaviour for a respectable young maiden who is to be wed in three days' time."

"Nah! It is 'cos you are a chicken!" he chuckled back after a moment's hesitation.

"No I am not."

"Oh yes you are."

"Hah! Then just think what you will, Truscott Gresham?" she pouted back at him. But things were in turmoil deep down

inside her. Because her heart was urging her to be thankful for the opportunity to surrender to her wildest dreams for at least one day. Whilst her brain on the other hand, was reminding her that she was an innocent, and that her future husband would expect her to be unblemished when he claimed his marital rights. For if she were to follow her heart, the chances of that status remaining as such, were diminishing by the second.

As she sat there in the sunshine on the banks of the brook, she listened very carefully to both sides of the argument, carefully weighing one side up against the other. Regrettably at that stage, with her protagonist bouncing and diving around in the cool clear water, thoroughly enjoying himself, it was too much for Angelica to abide. In a flash she found herself camped out behind a large bush near the deeper water, removing her attire before diving into the cool clear water – her heart winning the battle of her senses.

The water was simply beautiful as she swam towards the waterfall where Truscott was sitting in the middle of a huge rock under the flow with his eyes closed tight. He was still in the same spot when she reached him, thoroughly enjoying the sensations brought on by the torrent that crashed over his head and shoulders.

“So, you decided to cease being a chicken, did you?” Truscott raised his voice so that she could hear him over the sound of the waterfall, letting go a deft chuckle as he moved over a few feet on the rock, to allow her to sit next to him.

“And what’s more, it is all your fault Truscott Gresham. Because you just were not being very fair about it, were you now?” she giggled back at him, with her arms covering her breasts and her upper body, whilst fighting the urge to sit close enough to touch him.

“That is right. Why not just blame me for everything?” he laughed, as he pushed her off the rock and dunked her under

the water, before climbing on to her back and pushing her under again as she came to the surface.

But, the contact of her naked body next to his must have done something to his senses. For all of a sudden he stopped laughing, and with a fairly serious look on his face, backed away from her to swim over to the shallow water near the banks of the brook. There he kneeled on the pebbly bottom, gazing over at her with only his head and shoulders visible above the water.

"What is wrong with you now, Truscott? Do you not you want to swim with me anymore?" she asked him, treading water with an anxious look on her face as an involuntary wry smile abruptly replaced her giggles.

"Yes, of course I do, Angel. It is just that I had an unexpected urge to swim back to the shallow water again," he replied with a nonchalant shrug. But at the same time deeply conscious of her naivety and the fact that the vision of her naked body silhouetted in the cool clear water some ten yards away was causing him all sorts of problem below the surface.

"Alright then," she returned with a shrug, before diving under the water to swim over towards him, exposing her naked derriere to his gaze, making it necessary for him to quickly cover up his groin area before she reached him.

A moment or two later she was also kneeling a yard away from him on the highly visible, pebbly bottom of the brook, searching his eyes for the slightest hint of whatever was wrong.

"Something is wrong, Truscott. I can see it in your eyes," she reasoned with him, placing her hands on his shoulders, totally unaware that she had just exposed her breasts to his extremely anxious gaze.

Truscott did not reply straight away. Mainly because the sight of the perfect curves of her petit but shapely breasts just below the surface, was ostensibly the most alluring sight he

had ever seen in his life. And, the sexy little black triangle staring back at him from her mid-section as it shimmered in the water below her breasts, had virtually rendered him speechless for a moment, with the unashamed, wildly erotic, and totally un-mistakable desire swimming around in his head to immediately take possession of her body.

Without the benefit of a verbal reply, he was forced to act out his response. Instantly shuffling along the bottom of the brook towards her and locking her body to his in an iron-like grip.

"Truscott Gresh.....?" she started to yell at him. But her response was abruptly curtailed by Truscott's lips as he angled his head and kissed her with a weighty, challenging and escalating kiss that absorbed her very being and tossed her into a rising tide of longing and urgency. Very similar she recalled, to the same dizzy infusion of emotion that she experienced the first time he had kissed her in Avalanche's stable a few years ago.

But, of course, this time kneeling together completely naked and chest high in water, with one of his hands gently stroking her shapely buttocks, whilst the other hand delicately traced the outline of her back-bone with the nail of his index finger. The unfamiliar but unbelievably erotic sensations that were being broadcast from her brain at that time were also being returned from a series of diverse, previously uncharted and unidentifiable areas of her anatomy.

"My God Angel! For just about every moment of every day for the past few years I have been bodily aching to take you in my arms and kiss you once again. Just like that day in Avalanche's stable," Truscott confided to her, as he released his grip a little. Thus enabling him to take her in his arms, stand to his feet, and gently lay her on the grassy banks of the brook.

"Likewise," Angelica replied, not even attempting to

cover herself up as she watched Truscott climb out of the brook, lift her into his arms again and carry her over to the picnic rug. There he laid her on the rug, before laying the full length of his body next to hers.

"Now where were we, Angel?" Truscott enquired of her, as he pressed his lips to the glowing valley between her breasts. Her fully erect peaks just shimmering in the sunbeams being filtered through the branches and highlighting the perfection of those petit, ivory mounds.

"Yes, well, I do not know about you, Truscott Gresham. But I am about to re-attire myself," Angelica's brain took over from her heart again. "After all, am I not to be wed in three da...?"

Truscott did not give her a chance to finish, as he grabbed hold of a handful of her hair and covered her mouth again in a deeply absorbing kiss. And although her whole body felt hesitant for a moment, in little less than a heartbeat, her lips had softened beneath his own.

"Was that your heart or your brain speaking then, Angel?" Truscott whispered to Angelica a few moments later, as his lips dropped to caress her throat and her neck.

"My brain of course," her reply a tiny gasp, as she tingled all over at what his lips were doing.

"Really? And just what is your heart telling you now, Angel?"

"My heart is telling me that I love you, Truscott Gresham... and I always will," she sighed, grabbing a handful of hair and pulling his head down to hers this time. He immediately reacted by easing her lips apart and sinking his tongue into her welcoming mouth. After all, she was no longer capable of protest, finding herself hopelessly adrift in the pleasure he was giving her.

Even though Truscott was only twenty years old, his sexual experiences were limited to one extremely experienced

widow named Rivera del Rio, whom although only four-and-twenty, had proved herself to be an extremely competent sexual partner and tutor during the season he had spent in her bed whilst avoiding Angelica's haunts.

Now, he had convinced himself, was the time to put all that he had learned into practice as he delved into those angel-eyes that resembled fathomless pools of pure sparkling topaz. Eyes he perceived, that held the secrets of a young maiden's passions in tender submission.

Angelica, on the other hand, incapable of accepting his visual scrutiny without reprisals of her own, found herself unable to resist touching him. She stretched out both of her hands and skimmed her finger nails over the sleek, taught contours of his muscular body.

Truscott let out a soft sigh of satisfaction at the luxury he was being treated to, as he moved his lips from Angelica's cute little ear-lobes to caress her neck and her throat, before exploring the curvaceous valley between her breasts. But, when he took the first of her fully erect and tempting nipples between his lips and teased it with his tongue, she uttered a soft cry of delight, as the volcano deep inside her threatened to erupt, spilling wave after wave of molten pleasure throughout her body as she warmed to Truscott's attentions.

Continuing his exploration of her previously uncharted spheres with his lips, he leaped from one petit but perfectly curved breast to the other, before kissing every inch of her beautiful flat stomach and downwards to her apex of curls. Then, having detected the sound of her sucking in her breath at the first contact of his lips with her inner thigh – assuming this to be his invitation – he continued his voyage to locate the treasures hidden somewhere at the heart of her secret black forest. Giving forth a soft gasp of surprise when he parted her soft, honeyed flesh with his tongue and found that she was already hot and wet and invitingly eager.

“Truscott Gresham! What are you doing t...?” she cried out in panic, until his tongue finally located the tiny but fully erect secret to all her pleasures. The consequence of which had her involuntarily lifting herself closer to his mouth, as she ploughed her finger-nails into his taught, sleek, muscular back, finding herself no longer capable of protest. As bewilderment, surprise, amazed delight, curiosity and female conjecture, combined together to render her mute.

Hopelessly lost in the pleasure that he was providing her, she did not realize he had altered his position and was now lying between her partially open legs. Until, that is, she felt his fully erect manhood abrade her inner thigh. But it was the feel of his fore-finger slowly and tenderly probing her soft, honeyed flesh and gently dipping it in and out a number of times, that without her really realizing it she fully opened up to him.

As he lifted her legs up a little to allow himself better access, she found herself to be tensing a little, as she felt the tip of his fully erect member gently spreading the flesh to the entrance of her previously unexplored tunnel of love.

Sensing her trepidation, Truscott immediately halted his progress, whispering in her ear as he started to gently caress her little pleasure button with his index finger.

“Relax Angel. I will be as gentle as possible. I promise!”

Feeling her relax under him, he continued to ease his pulsating erection gingerly, deliberately, and extremely carefully into her tunnel of love, halting for a moment along the way, to allow her body to adjust to the sensations that this foreign body – that was now buried so deeply inside of her – was bringing forth. Then suddenly, relief soared through his system when he detected a tiny half-strangled gasp of pain that was quickly followed by a whimper of pleasure. So with his heart pounding and his head spinning in delirious elation, he found it all the more imperative that he affix his mouth to hers in a tender but triumphant kiss.

Unfortunately, Angelica did not immediately share her beau's exuberance. Because once the furore of that triumphant kiss had passed her by, she found herself slipping back into unfamiliar territory again as the anxiety returned. *After all, this was supposed to be the most memorable moment of her life? When she and Truscott Gresham – the man she had loved and adored for many years now – came together as one.*

And, even though her cousin had warned her about the minimum amount of pain she should expect, she was just not prepared for the feeling that, *'that certain part of her anatomy,'* was at present being filled and stretched to the very limit of its endurance.

"Something feels exceedingly amiss with all of this?" she quizzed him with a prickly frown, as she squirmed about underneath him in an attempt to evict her unwelcome visitor. "Either you are far too large for me, or you have accidentally entered the wrong chasm!"

"Angel! If you stop fussing and moving around for a moment or two and allow time for your body to adjust to mine. Everything *should* be alright," Truscott advised her in a gentle manner as he started to slowly withdraw.

"Ahhhhh!" was all that Angelica could manage. And, this was followed by a tiny gasp of delight from her, as he abruptly stopped his withdrawal and started sliding himself back in again, caressing her little sexual hub with his thumb, before gingerly repeating the process again and again and again.

By the time she had realized exactly what it was that was happening to her senses, Angelica suddenly came to comprehend that this really *was* turning into *'the most memorable moment of her life.'* And, because of the pleasures her beau was delighting her with at that moment, she decided not to fight it anymore, but to close her eyes and enjoy.

As the pleasure built up to its apex deep down inside her, Angelica knew that something was about to happen. But she

was still totally unaware of what it was that she desperately sought. She sensed that the magic was out there somewhere just waiting to be discovered, but what, where, and when, was way beyond her comprehension.

Then suddenly, as the dormant volcano that had been threatening to blow, abruptly erupted inside her, she screamed out, "My God! Oh my God!" As she crushed her lips to his, and flung her arms and legs around his back, locking him to her in a scissor-like grip. While surge after surge of molten joy, amazed delighted and intoxicated satisfaction flowed all the way through her being, as climax after climax wracked her body, leaving Truscott with little choice than to let out a husky groan of release as he pumped himself into her.

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