

## ***To Swoon and to Spar Deleted Scene***

*Note: This chapter originally appeared in the middle of what is chapter 3 in the final book. It is the morning of Penvale and Jane's wedding; if you have your copy of To Swoon and to Spar for reference, in the US print edition this scene would start at the top of page 40. It belongs, in other words, directly between the two scenes that exist in this chapter in the finished book. Happy reading!*

Many girls, Jane knew, awaited their wedding days with eager anticipation, dreaming of a lovely dress, a handsome groom. For her part, however, she awoke on the morning of her wedding feeling quite certain that she was going to be sick.

This impression was confirmed a couple of hours later when, in the midst of dressing, there was an imperious knock at her bedroom door, which was opened to admit the Marchioness of Willingham, along with two ladies Jane did not know.

"You look positively ill," was the marchioness's assessment, which did nothing to lift Jane's spirits, but which did make her want to take the other woman down a peg.

"And you look like a strawberry," she retorted sharply, eyeing the marchioness's ruby red gown and the emeralds at her throat and ears.

"Oh, I do like you," said one of the other ladies merrily; she was slender and of middling height, with dark hair and eyes, her curls piled rather elaborately atop her head. "If Diana won't do the introductions, allow me—I'm Lady James Audley, but you must feel free to call me Violet. My husband is one of Penvale's closest friends from his school days."

"You may call me Jane," said Jane, still a bit stiffly, casting a curious glance at the third lady in their party, who was tall and golden-haired and so luminously beautiful that it seemed a bit unfair to anyone who had to be seen in her company.

"This is Lady Julian Belfry," Violet said, seeing the direction of Jane's inquisitive gaze.

"Emily," corrected the other lady, with a kind smile. "My husband has known Penvale since university, and Diana and Violet are my closest friends."

Jane, for her part, could not help thinking that the marchioness's friends seemed a good deal more pleasant than she did. No sooner had this thought crossed her mind, however, than the marchioness came to stand where Jane was sitting at her dressing table, her hair half-done, and she extended a hand. Jane was so startled by this gesture that she found herself shaking the proffered hand before she quite knew what she was doing.

“Lady Willingham—”

“None of that,” the marchioness said briskly, dropping her hand and stepping back to survey Jane. “You’re marrying my brother, regardless of the fact that I think this entire scheme could have done with a bit more consideration, so you may as well call me Diana.” She crossed her arms as she regarded Jane, tapping her chin with her finger.

“You—what is your name?” she asked Jane’s maid.

“Hastey, my lady,” replied the maid, sounding a bit startled.

“Appropriate,” Diana murmured. Her eyes returned to Jane. “I don’t think that hairstyle suits Miss Spencer at all—why not something simpler?”

“Mr. Bourne wanted something elaborate—”

“Mr. Bourne is very shortly not going to be the person paying your wages—my brother will be,” Diana said sweetly. “She doesn’t need all those curls and feathers.” She paused expectantly. “Did you need more guidance than that?”

“Oh—no, my lady,” Hastey said, flustered, and set to her task. Jane, watching this undertaking in the mirror, reluctantly conceded that the coiffure Hastey settled on in the end—a braided knot high on Jane’s head with a few loose curls allowed to frame her face—was far more flattering than whatever she had been attempting before; behind her in the mirror, Jane saw Diana watching the proceedings like a general surveying his troops, while Violet and Emily appeared to be trying not to laugh.

“That will do—thank you, Hastey,” Diana said at last, and before Jane quite knew what was happening, her maid had curtseyed and departed, leaving Jane alone with the other three ladies.

She turned in her chair. “You might allow me to dismiss my own maid, you know,” she said, a bit of an edge to her voice. She felt rather intimidated, sitting here

under the regard of these three lovely, stylish ladies, who had all the polish of town. They were, Jane guessed, only a few years older than she was, but the gulf in their experience felt particularly wide at the moment.

Nervously, she smoothed her hands down her dress—a lavender satin gown that she thought made her eyes look especially vivid—and rose, not wishing to be seated before them. They were all three taller than her, but at least on her feet she did not feel so much like a child before them.

“Miss Spencer—”

“You may as well call me Jane, too, if we’re to be sisters,” Jane said impatiently.

“Jane,” Diana said with a nod. “I think we may have got off on the wrong foot.”

“You don’t say.”

Violet was unable to stifle a laugh at this, but Diana ignored her.

“My brother and I have been on our own since we were children,” she continued.

“Weren’t you raised by an aunt and uncle?” Jane asked, vaguely recalling the family history Mr. Bourne had relayed to her on the journey to London.

Diana waved a hand dismissively. “They barely counted—they certainly weren’t overjoyed to have us around. So Penvale and I stuck together—until he went off to school, of course, but even then we were together on school holidays, and then since I made my debut in London, we’ve seen quite a bit of each other.”

“And then you married his best friend,” Jane said, raising an eyebrow.

Diana smiled smugly. “He was less than thrilled about that, initially—convinced I was going to break Jeremy’s heart.”

Having seen Diana and her husband together, Jane didn’t think that Penvale had much to worry about on that front.

“In any case,” Diana continued, “he has been singularly fixated on reclaiming Trethwick Abbey for years; if marrying you is what is necessary for him to do so, I’m not surprised he’s willing. But—” At this juncture, Diana’s eyes narrowed, her gaze on Jane sharp. “—just because you are marrying more or less out of necessity does not mean that I do not expect you to treat my brother well.”

“Should I remind you that I am the person essentially being traded like a sack of flour in this arrangement?” Jane asked peevishly.

“You needn’t lecture me about the ghastly way our society treats women, as I assure you I am perfectly well aware.” Diana rolled her eyes heavenward. “I think this entire arrangement is appalling—but, from what I understand from my brother, you are quite desperate to be free of my uncle, for which I can hardly blame you, and I know that my brother will treat you well, so.”

“ . . . so?” Jane asked, still feeling a bit lost as to what, precisely, this conversation was about, other than Diana wishing to ensure that some grasping fortune hunter did not take advantage of her brother. And, from what Jane had observed of the viscount, he seemed perfectly able to take care of himself.

“So, I expect you to make my brother happy.”

“It seems to me that your brother will be happy as soon as he’s in possession of his ancestral home once again—anything I may or may not do seems unlikely to have much of an effect on him.”

Which was, in fact, a bit inconvenient—because Jane had, after all, agreed to this marriage because she had a plan. One that ideally would ensure that the viscount would not spend much time in Cornwall.

But that was for later—and, of course, nothing that Diana needed to know anything about.

“I am well aware that Penvale is dementedly fixated on that house, to the exclusion of all else,” Diana said, in the long-suffering tone of a weary sister. Jane, to her surprise, found herself suppressing a smile. “But eventually he’ll realize that he’s got himself leg-shackled for a pile of stones, and he might have cause to regret it. So, don’t.”

“Don’t . . .?”

Diana leaned towards Jane. “Don’t give him cause to regret it.”

“You are currently giving me cause to regret this,” Jane said, determinedly meeting Diana’s eyes, resisting her natural impulse to allow her gaze to skit away from that of someone she didn’t know well; she was not going to let this marchioness who

was entirely too full of herself intimidate her. “And if you’d ever like to see yourself invited to Trethwick Abbey to see your brother, I’d advise you to stop this at once.”

Rather than looking affronted, Diana nodded. “You’ll do, Jane.”

“I wasn’t asking for your approval,” Jane muttered grumpily, and Violet had to quickly raise a hand to her mouth to stifle her laughter. Jane started slightly; she’d almost forgotten the other two ladies were in the room.

“In any case,” Diana said, her manner more businesslike as she turned to her friends, “we’ve come here for a reason.”

“Beyond simply harassing you,” Violet said cheerfully to Jane.

“You did very well,” Emily said, giving Jane an encouraging smile. “I do love to see someone standing up to Diana—it doesn’t happen often enough.”

“That’s enough of that, Emily,” Diana said severely. “Smugness does not suit a lady in your condition.”

Emily blanched, turning to her friend. “I don’t—”

“You’ve not been eating cream with your scones this week,” Diana informed her.

“I don’t see how—”

“I do,” Diana interrupted.

“But I haven’t even—”

“You will.”

“Diana,” Violet said, seeming to attempt sternness and failing. “I believe you should allow Emily to discover for herself whether she is in a delicate condition.”

“I suppose,” Diana said with a sigh. She turned to Jane. “I’m not fond of babies,” she explained, “so I’ve been watching these two—” She jerked her head in the direction of her friends. “—like a hawk, so that I am able to give myself plenty of time to prepare for this inevitable change. But as it happens,” she continued, “that ties in nicely with the other reason we’ve paid you a visit this morning.”

“Does it?” Jane asked, a feeling of dark foreboding creeping over her.

“We were discussing it after dinner last night, and realized that, since you are lacking in any female relations, you won’t have had anyone to offer you a proper talk about the physical side of marriage.”

“Well, I did bribe a maid, a couple of years ago,” Jane informed her, pleased to have this trick up her sleeve. “And I have done a considerable amount of . . . reading.”

Violet brightened. “What sort of reading?”

“Novels,” Jane hedged.

Now Diana looked interested, too. “What sort of novels?”

“Romantic ones,” Jane said honestly. “And a few scandalous ones,” she added in a rush.

“My husband likes the lurid ones, too,” Emily confessed, her cheeks turning rosy, and Diana raised an approving eyebrow at her friend.

“I am pleased to learn this about Belfry,” she said. Turning back to Jane, she added, “I would be most interested in learning more about these lurid books of yours, Jane—”

“As would I,” Violet put in. She fished a scrap of paper and pencil from her reticule. “Do you have specific titles? I might like to purchase them for my library.”

“—but,” Diana interrupted, “now is not precisely the time.”

Violet lowered her pencil sadly.

“My point is,” Jane said, “I do not believe I am entirely ignorant. Besides, your brother and I do not intend to have that sort of marriage—not until it is time for us to produce an heir.”

A rather shocked silence fell at these words.

“Not . . . not at all?” Violet asked.

“I do not believe so, no,” Jane confirmed, watching their faces register something approaching horror. “This is simply a marriage of convenience, you see.”

“I had one of those, too,” Emily said, smiling in fond reminiscence as she took a seat on the bench at the end of Jane’s bed. “But if Diana’s suspicions are to be believed—well.” She blushed again. “You can see that this fact did not prevent matters from taking a turn for the—er—” She faltered.

“Carnal?” Diana suggested.

“Lustful?” Violet offered.

“Recreational,” Emily said primly.

“In any case,” Diana continued, “much as I shudder to contemplate the marital act in the context of my brother, the fact is that we cannot send you into marriage and then off to some cliff in Cornwall unprepared.”

“I don’t think—”

“But I do.” Diana’s tone brooked no disagreement. “Now, I don’t know what these books and this scullery maid may have taught you, but I can assure you that almost everything women are told about the marital act is nonsense.”

“It’s true,” Violet confirmed. “My wedding night was extremely educational.”

“My maid had an awful lot to say about how not to find oneself with child,” Jane said.

“Well, that won’t be a concern, at least, if you and Penvale are determined to have an heir,” Diana said. “And your books?”

“Well,” Jane said slowly, drawing the word out. “They made it seem very . . . pleasant.” Jane didn’t think this was quite the right word, but it was one she could say without embarrassing herself, at least.

“It is pleasant,” Diana said. “So long as you’re doing it with someone who knows what they’re doing.” She paused, a somewhat pained expression crossing her face. “The fact that we are discussing my brother is something I am going to try to ignore, as best I can.” She took a deep breath. “Penvale, loath as I am to admit it, is not a complete idiot, and I understand that . . . people—” Here she gave a vague wave of her hand. “—seem to find him somewhat attractive, so I expect he has sufficient experience to ensure that you more or less enjoy yourself. But if he does something you don’t like, you must tell him.”

She exhaled heavily, then fixed Jane with a stern look, as if daring her to question any of the advice that had just been provided.

Jane, however, refused to be cowed by Diana—and, furthermore, she had some questions.

“What is it that he might do that I wouldn’t like?”

“You understand the mechanics involved, correct?” Violet asked, considerably more gently than Diana likely would have done. “Well, there are a number of . . . er.” She paused, looking a bit flustered. “Of ways it might be done.”

“Oh,” Jane said, nodding in understanding as memories of some of the more memorable scenes in books she had read came flooding back to her. “Do you mean different locations?”

“Well,” Violet said, now looking as though she were trying not to laugh, “that wasn’t precisely what I meant—”

“But that is certainly one factor,” Diana said, her eyes taking on a faraway, nostalgic look. “Dining room tables—”

“Floor rugs,” Violet said, smiling fondly.

“Window seats,” they both said in unison, then eyed each other suspiciously.

“On a desk in an office of a busy theater, with the door unlocked, with a conversation being held in the hall by at least three people on the other side of that door the entire time,” Emily said, folding her hands neatly in her lap.

Diana, Violet, and Jane all stared at her.

“Did I say that aloud?” Emily asked, smiling serenely.

Diana, at last, seemed to have been rendered temporarily speechless, so Jane asked, “If that wasn’t exactly what you meant, then what is your concern?”

Diana shook her head as if to clear it, and wrenched her gaze away from Emily to refocus on Jane. “All I meant to tell you was that if Penvale attempts anything—a location or a position or anything at all—that you don’t enjoy, you must simply tell him so.”

“It’s just as important that you enjoy yourself as it is that he does,” Violet said firmly.

Jane thought back on some of the heroes of her novels—the pirate who kidnapped a genteel lady from her ship and made her his bride; the highwayman who kidnapped a woman from her carriage and led her away to live a life of infamy. She frowned; come to think of it, an awful lot of them had involved kidnapping. In any case, Penvale bore little resemblance to those heroes, who possessed both roguish charm and a certain disregard for the law that was undeniably a bit thrilling. Jane wasn’t at all certain that going to bed with Penvale for the purpose of dutifully producing an heir, would be anything like that, for all that she did find him handsome, albeit not terribly piratical.



She said none of this to the other ladies, however, and Diana seized upon her silence happily, seeming eager to bring this conversation to an end. “If you’ve no further questions, I’d like to pretend I never discussed my own brother’s bedroom skills, if you please, and we can carry on.” She rose to her feet, and the others followed suit. She turned to Jane and extended a hand. “Shall we get you married?”

And Jane, feeling as though she’d just weathered a brief but very intense storm, said, “Let’s.”