

**“Dangerous to Know: Jane Austen’s Rakes & Gentlemen Rogues” excerpt about:  
CAPTAIN FREDERICK TILNEY**

The heroic army officer and handsome, au courant heir to the Northanger estate, Frederick Tilney regularly entertained the casual liaison but with never any earnest commitment. Upon first acquaintance, even Catherine Morland might had thought him more handsome than his brother.

***“Then you do not suppose he ever really cared about her?”***

***“I am persuaded that he never did.”***

***“And only made believe to do so for mischief’s sake?”***

**—Catherine Morland to Henry Tilney, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter XXVII.**

FOR MISCHIEF’S SAKE

by Amy D’Orazio

***“No man is offended by another man’s admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment.”*** —Henry Tilney to Catherine Morland, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter IXX.

We arranged to fight our duel at that place where all the most elegant duels were fought: the secluded gardens near the Circus, accessed by the Gravel Walk. Naturally, the occasion was to be held at dawn. I had been in my chair, subject to the shavings and combings and clippings of old Morley until at last, I cried out, “’Tis enough man! I am not gone to my wedding day!”

Morley frowned at me, his dark eyes sharp with disapproval. “Your wedding day? That is not a day I shall likely live to see so I must keep at my art on these more *common* events.”

His meaning in emphasising common was not lost on me. He thought it a deplorable practice, young men having at each other to first blood or worse. But how else would a man’s honour be upheld? Was Wellington the object of such censure? Surely, he had spilt more blood than anyone, and what was a war but a duel commenced on a grand scale?

But Morley did not understand it; he never had, so to placate him, I simply settled myself back, mentioned something of a wayward curl in my hair, and let him have his way with me.

When he was satisfied, I gave myself a long look in the glass, ever fond of what I saw. The truth was often spake, in circles both low and high, and it was that none were as well favoured as Captain Tilney. Indeed, I congratulated myself for as much as I was ever well in looks, I was particularly so this fine morn. I daresay I did not fool myself when I thought that the impending danger to my person rendered it that much more agreeable.

I was soon off. My jaunty step and the tune I whistled earning me a scowl from Robard, my second, who met me at the gate. "A'nt nothing to be cheery about, man! A meeting with the grim reaper hi'self!"

"Perhaps so," I owned. "Then again, one cannot live forever, and what better cause to die for than the pleasures of a woman!"

"Women aplenty in Bath," he complained, "unattached to anyone, yet you favour the engaged. I shall never understand you."

"Pray do quit the attempt." I flicked my gaze in his direction for a moment. "Silence befits such occasions as these."

We went on with only the sounds of Bath at dawn to accompany us. It was a strange hour. The night coming to a reluctant close while the day sent furtive tendrils of light across the houses and roads and fields. The occasional snoring drunk, having failed to obtain his bed, obscured our path. Here and there maids were darting about, procuring milk or eggs or whatever might be needed in their houses.

Robard had not ceased whinging all the way and was quite ruining my pleasure in the morning so in vexed tones, I bade him stop. "How many have you seen me through now? Yet never have you had such a foul humour as this!"

"Too many." Robard spat on the ground near my feet. "Time and enough you settled your blood and began feathering your own nest 'stead of poaching on others."

"Pah!" I scoffed at the very notion. "I promise you this, sir, on my mother's own grave. I shall gladly prefer death over the slow demise of matrimony. There is not a woman alive worthy of being my beloved, and if I cannot love then I shall be ever watchful on behalf of gentlemen too beef-witted to avoid their own destruction."

Robard did not comprehend me, but he was as near an idiot as anyone whose society I would willingly bear. He had leg-shackled himself at an early age, but the girl had gone and died in childbed, taking his heart with her. Ever the fool, he had recently succumbed to a betrothal with another enchantress in muslin but at least he did not proclaim he loved her. I shook my head at him even as he stood agape considering my words.

We had arrived by then, so I turned my attention away from Robard to behold my challenger, Mr. Peter Carver. I had been at school with him from an early age, lads of only eight or nine, and we became fast friends after taking a whipping together for some bit of mischief I cannot now recall. Back then, I much admired him for his ability to take his stripes with nary a shout, nary a tear, no matter how hard our headmaster whipped his young rump. I was far more tender in those days and scarcely outlasted the first lick.

Alas, Carver was not as unaffected now as he was then. He had awaited me by stamping about, muttering and cursing and shaking. From his rumpled coat and unshaven cheeks, I surmised that he had not seen his bed the night prior. Gad! Did he wish to be killed then? A night of spirits and venting the spleen did nothing for success on the field of honour. I offered him a bow, but he only sneered contempt at me in return. Robard and Carver's second, a man called Langley, were far more civilised, bowing and nodding.

The surgeon was nervous, perspiring despite the morning chill. He stammered about, weakly insisting that an apology be offered. Naturally, I refused, which made my challenger scowl at me and mutter rude insults, defaming my character in an egregious and incorrect manner.

“Do you deny,” said Carver, “that you were the instrument of the ruination of an innocent soul?”

“I suppose that would depend on your idea of what ruination is,” I replied calmly.

His face became an alarming shade of purple, and he leant forward, attempting to give me a sharp poke in the chest. One step back was all that was needed to avoid his advance. He stumbled forward. “She was in your bed!”

“I cannot deny it.”

“She had not known a man before!”

“No.” I agreed. “That she had not.”

“You have stolen what was rightly mine,” he bellowed suddenly, his fetid morning breath, soured by drink, washing over my face. “You are the lowest of thieves, seducers, and rakes! I demand your sworn apology, else you must face the consequences.”

“Consequences it is then for I shall never apologise for my assistance to you.”

“Assistance?” he scoffed meanly. “Seems to me you assisted only one in this matter, and it was not me. The pistols then!”

The pistols were presented to us in their open case. Robard and my friend’s second both examined them carefully, and Robard observed they had been made by Manton. I admired the fine English walnut on the stocks, as well as the excellent balance, when I held one in my hand. Very fine indeed.

“Shall it be first blood, until one cannot stand, or death then?” I inquired in what I felt to be a very reasonable tone. I had no wish to kill the wretched fool—he was my friend after all—but it was to him to decide.

“Death!” he shot back immediately.

I stood regarding him with some impatience. He was my inferior with a pistol on the best of days. Certainly, on this day, lacking the advantages of rest, sobriety, and even temper, I would fell him immediately. I had no wish to do that but knew it as true.

“I should think first blood will answer.”

“Never,” he growled.

“Peter, you know you cannot win and I despise the notion of killing you.”

“It is on that point that we differ,” he said. “For I wish most ardently to kill you, and in as painful a way as possible.”

His arm jerked mightily, raising up; he seemed as surprised as I was to find himself pointing his gun at my chest. Robard and Langley gasped and lunged toward him. I held up my hand to forestall their intervention.

“That, sir, does not answer to the strictures of a gentlemanly duel,” I said softly. “To shoot me in that way is only murder. Put the gun down until the proper signal is given.”

Carver glared at me but did not do as I bid. “I knew you admired her.”

“She is a vastly handsome girl.”

“I should have strung you up by the ballocks when I saw you looking at her!”

“No man can be offended by another man’s admiration of the woman he loves,” I said in sedate tones. “It is only the woman who can make it a torment. See here old friend; it is not I who has offended you but she, the one who claimed to love you.”

“You too claimed to be my friend—since we were in short pants!”

“And I am your friend still.”

“No friend of mine would do such a thing.”

“I think once you know why I did it, you will thank me.”

His laugh, a sad, deranged cackle, filled the air. “Thank you? Never.”

“Not even if I saved you from your own grievous error?”

He stared at me, dumbfounded.

“No matter how I admired her, a simple refusal would have put me off. She did not refuse, Peter.”

“She said you forced her.”

“I have never forced a woman, nor would I. Not once did she say no. Not once did she indicate reluctance.”

Slowly, inch by inch, the gun moved down by his side.

“You should not have attempted to seduce her,” he said. “Women are weak creatures! They lack the fortitude to—”

My laughter shocked us both. “A lady is not brawny, that is true. They cannot run so fast nor walk so far as a man, nor can they lift or throw or heave; but, they have fortitude enough to break us, my man. That they surely do.”

He did not argue; indeed, he could not. I saw by his looks that he attempted to summon his rage but could not. Confusion and sorrow would overcome whatever shards of ire remained in him.

“I did not seduce her for my benefit,” I told him. “I shall never deny I had my pleasure in her—she is, indeed, a charming little piece and I regret you do not know it for yourself—but there are women in abundance in Bath and London and nearly everywhere else I go. I am a handsome fellow with a good figure and an ample fortune—I do not require your woman or anyone else’s, I assure you.”

I turned then, motioning to Robard who looked puzzled. He held the gun case, and I motioned him towards me. I opened the case and replaced my pistol within; then, I turned back to my friend, spreading my arms wide and presenting him with an easy shot at my chest.

“Shoot me if you like,” I declared. “But if you would rather know the favour I have done you, come let us go have some breakfast, and I shall tell you a little tale.”