



Spinster's Gambit

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Twenty-six year old Jacoline Holcombe believes herself quite firmly on the shelf. Faced with an unfulfilling silent life, she abandons all propriety, dresses in men's clothing, and goes fencing with her brother. There, due to terrible luck and even worse planning, "Jack" is introduced to - and tries to curtsy to - the reserved and unapproachable Duke of Aspen.

Aspen is scarred over most of his face and body. He is accustomed to fending off the advances of fortune hunters and their mothers and has never known a woman to want anything more from him. Self-conscious and cynical, he dislikes social occasions and avoids the company of women. Faced with an awkward and oddly effeminate young man, however, he goes out of his way to be kind.

Believing her a gentleman, Aspen shows Jacoline a man's life in Regency-era London and trusts her with his secrets. But as much as Jacoline comes to respect and love the Duke of Aspen, she is living a lie and the truth would ruin her. She does not know that her actions also risk exposing her brother's secret: an illegal male lover and a family hidden from the world. After Aspen discovers Jacoline's lies and the house of cards begins to fall, Jacoline must beg the man she secretly loves to save her brother...

Read the Beginning below!

"That animal is in desperate need of a shotgun," Daniel Holcombe commented, taking a sip of his brandy and glancing at the street cat meowing piteously at his study window.

"Come now," his sister scolded without looking up from her embroidery, "surely a pistol would suffice."

Daniel grinned and finished off his drink. Jacoline had always been the type of woman a man would need to fall in love with to marry. Too rich for the working classes and too witty by half for the fortune seekers and the domineering, she was left with only the tiny, quickly dwindling pool of actually decent men to choose from. And they'd all proven themselves too foolish to deserve her anyway; they'd never even seemed to notice her.

Daniel got up to refill his glass and the awkward silence settled back over the room. Over the years they'd both quietly come to accept that she would be staying in his household, but now Lord Candrow had begun courting her. An elderly, domineering spendthrift and daft to boot. Splendid.

"I suppose this means all of society knows I'm desperate," she said, leaning forward and reaching for his full glass. He handed it to her and poured himself another.

"You could marry him," Daniel said, returning to his chair. Jac shifted back in her seat, her mouth twisting. Daniel sighed, not liking the idea any more than she did. He would have trouble giving her away without punching the baron first, which would hardly be conducive to an elegant wedding. And she deserved one.

"You do have some chance at a better offer, yet," he lied, trying to console her. Jacoline snorted.

“Lord Candrow looks like the unfortunate offspring of a toad and an overstuffed loveseat. How much better, precisely, are you suggesting I aim for?”

And still she sat primly, like any other woman, holding an embroidery hoop in her thin fingers. If it weren't for her sharp tongue and her wit, she'd be married by now, he was sure of it.

“Someone deaf, perhaps,” Daniel offered. Jac smiled, her teeth flashing. She was not a beautiful woman, at the end of the day, though her dark hair combined with her luminous green eyes gave her a striking look. She was too thin, too sharp edged. She looked like she belonged in a finishing school with her hair pulled back taut, not laughing in a dance.

“Very well, perhaps not that, but then what are you going to do?” Daniel winced again as soon as the question left his lips. That hadn't been gracefully worded.

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