

Best Left Unsaid: ch.02-03

by Winnie Khaw

Chapter 2

In a public garden, James and Natalie stroll alongside each other, a discreet hand-holding distance apart. The Female Observer walks beside a tall, handsome, and very boring escort.

She notes, "From recent events, I've observed that courtship, with the secret--but decorous--glances and meaningful nods and shy smiles and endless dances, is a most irksome affair. The courtier bows in sniveling obsequiousness, with such intonations of good breeding, to my guardian, a man of some considerable position and salary corresponding in positive proportion to his long-standing incompetence." Glancing at the man beside her but receiving only blank silence, the Female Observer finishes with a bored sigh, "In which James, an almost-physician, professes to Natalie, nearly a feminist, his sincere love but insecure finances."

James takes a deep breath before beginning, "Natalie, I hope I have not been mistaken in presuming to believe you return my affections." He waits for an answer. Natalie busily sniffs a rose and does not reply.

James clears his throat and tries again. "You must know the high regard in which I hold you, notwithstanding the infernally yelping pups, by the names Edmund, Charles, and the like, nipping at both our heels. So long I have admired your brilliance of mind, soundness of character, beauty of face, figure and numerous other sterling qualities of which I cannot name all."

He waits for an answer. Natalie smiles absently at the clouds.

Uncertainly James continues, "I dream of happy and many days spent in the charming company of the woman I love, Natalie, and will even bear the presence of her younger brother--an annoyance to the good people in any society--in order to woo her, a sacrifice I would hesitate to make for any but you."

No response. He says dryly, "Today especially I borrowed articles of clothing that the mirror assured me appear most dashingly suited to my figure of manly proportions, but you have yet to notice. In addition, a gigantic dragon just flew over our heads and deposited a most unappealing scrambled egg on my head which you would see if you only looked this way--"

James sighs sadly, discouraged, and ends, "Anyway, the sad state of my finances in miserly apprenticeship to a full-fledged doctor, the few coins weeping for lack of companionship, does not allow me to even attempt--"

Natalie finally looks at him, and bursts out laughing. "Yes, James, I will marry you."

"--and so, I cannot dare make bold to ask for your hand in marriage ... what?" James stares.

His female companion smiles brightly at him. "I'm aware of the monetary situation, and feel we ought to plan at once for the future. Therefore ..." James and Natalie walk on hand-in-hand, Female Observer and Boring Escort slowly follow, in tedious silence.

"And so the happily affianced couple continue their walk, thinking never of prohibitions remembered only when a spouse became inconvenient and so conveniently became adulterous or accused or witchcraft with staunch evidence by witnesses duly paid," the Female Observer says contemptuously. "No, Natalie and James truly loved each other."

Chapter 3

A maid, also known as the Female Observer, sweeps the room. “At times the struggle to keep or regain a throne by divine right can be exhausting as well embarrassing to the king. Exhausting because he must try again and again, and embarrassing because he must enlist a foreign enemy power to invade his own country in order to recover his kingship. Needless to say, his former subjects do not appreciate the intrusion, save on occasions when they scour Europe's royal families for a suitable Protestant ruler and come up with princes and kings who cannot speak the language of their newly adopted nation. England has found herself in the midst of such turmoil on a few junctions, such as when James II was royally booted out for being too pro-French, pro-Catholic, and pro-absolute monarchy. The Glorious Revolution came about when William of Orange, King of the Netherlands, was invited to England through his marriage to James' daughter Mary. He promptly embroiled England in the Dutch people's war against France, which actually the British accepted rather well. After the death of Anne, Mary's sister and also James' daughter, the English crown went to the German Electress of Hanover Sophia's son George I. As king of at least two countries, George spent approximately 1/5 of his reigning time in Germany. As for James II, he tried to win back his throne, with no success. His son James Francis Edward, acknowledged by the king of France as the king of England, failed also. His son, Charles Edward Stuart, rose with the Jacobites one more time, but the movement was suppressed. Since then, no Jacobites have asserted James II's claim to the English scepter.”

Edmund enters, the Female Observer curtsies prettily—Edmund notices and appreciates the view—and she trips out, showing him another nice perspective of her abundant ... skirt. “... in which Edmund gives Charles a good talking to about life's romantic and financial prospects.”

Charles Faulkner, the room's original occupant, blearily looks up from his scribbles, mumbles an unenthusiastic greeting to the intruder, and forthwith resumes his profound meditations in the realm of napping.

Edmund begins, "I like my physician very well, but he is entirely too upright and honest, telling me the truth when I would prefer inflated lies. I like those very much. Therefore I determined to go to one who will offer that melody to my waiting ears." Miffed at being ignored, he comes to a self-important stop in beside Charles. "As you may have surmised, I just came from James's inspection. He pronounced me a picture of deteriorating health."

Yawning, Charles mutters, "I fear to ask what sort of human specimen would subject himself to the scrutiny of an eccentric scientist. Could it be an ailment? Shortness of breath, perhaps, or ... body part?"

Edmund raises his hands in bliss. "And a tuneless cacophony breaks upon my head." He peers at the masses of papers in front of Charles and waves one. "Reading the fine print of a contract with Lucifer? Whatever you do, don't sign anything. You can't redeem what you've sold, can never keep what you buy, and the rebates are terrible."

Charles snatches the sheet from Edmund and snaps, "I was hardly contemplating so amiable an agreement. If you must know, I submitted a manuscript of superb qualities to a publisher. And the response informed me in no uncertain terms--"

A Booming Voice trumpets suddenly, "Sir, we feel a need to impart to you our standards--" Edmund looks around with a bewildered expression, searching for the source of the voice. Charles merely sighs.

"God in Heaven--" Edmund cries in shock.

"---none. Sod off, the Biggerworth Publishing Company."

--what the bloody hell was that?" Edmund demands. Abruptly comprehension dawns on him. "Are you the Faulkner who writes for Biggerworth? The author who penned the latest article on how men and women are compatible only for sexual intercourse and minor social interaction? That grossly offensive work so dreadful that it borders on high treason?"

Charles preens, pleased at the compliment to his writing ability. "Yes, yes, and yes. This morning, I visited my editor, who told me in no uncertain terms that my latest manuscript was a horrific piece of work that deserved to be swallowed only for the pleasure of excretion."

"So you were the reason I ran about London waving like a madman with trousers down screaming that the heralds of the Apocalypse had come, renouncing pestilence, famine, war, and death simply for the sake of taking on the name of Faulkner. The result was the same."

Charles decides it is time to change to change the subject. "Damnation, Edmund, why do you have flowers stuck to your shirt?"

Edmund shrugs, negligently brushing off petals. As he opens his jacket for inspection, a fresh shower falls. "An aggravated mistress threw a parting gift from me at me."

Having heard enough of someone else's problems, Charles then resolves, "Let us return to the indefatigably important subject of myself. More importantly, I don't know how begin." He throws

down a pen in dejection. What's the quickest way to the hospital? I will shortly require a trip to the mental ward."

"Why, insult the queen's hair. Did you know, the queen has, in her full capacity as royal consort, demanded a portrait done by the finest painter in the country? That said painter's subjects usually are grass-masticating, road apple-defecating creatures does not deter her in the least. Her qualities resemble theirs closely enough for an easy transition," Edmund says with an entirely straight face.

Charles blinks inanely. "I comprehend the question, question my comprehension, then misunderstand. Thank you, Edmund, for that fascinating piece of useless trivia. You have not understood my question."

"I understood it entirely, but apparently you could not interpret the response," Edmund replies smoothly.

Suddenly, a thought slams into Charles's head as a brawny wrestler falling on a pathetically small observer of the match. "Are we friends?" He assumes a visage meant to appear sincere but in actuality only looks quite sincerely grotesque.

Edmund backs away, wary. "'Are we acquaintances?' may be the better question. Allow me to consult the dictionary." He proceeds to busily rummage through pockets containing various objects of dubious morality. Charles leans back in the chair, frankly amazed.

"I never suspected that you harbored such dangerously intellectual influences in your very pockets. Considering the potential contamination, I wonder that its infection has left you wholly unaffected as to its effects."

Edmund waves his found treasure victoriously in the air. "Ah, but this belongs to the Devil." He flips through the well-marked, dog-eared little book, the substance of which supply the majority of his remarkably frequent witty remarks, as purported solely by the prejudiced author. "Acquaintance, n.: A person whom we know well enough to borrow from, but not well enough to lend to."

Outfitted with an attractive aristocratic nose of which he is fully aware, Charles raises it in the air. "I am wholly capable of providing for myself, thank you--"

"How? Work?" The disgusted Edmund vomits the word.

"I was considering it, yes. It seemed a pleasant alternative to starvation and beggary. Can you see me as a clerk?"

Edmund shakes his head vigorously. "Not really. A sad mental case, maybe. A buffoon or politician, certainly--"

"Salutary recommendations--" Charles remarks dryly.

"--but a not a clerk!" He paces the room in agitation. "You're a gentleman, Charles! Not much of one---you have far too many morals to be rid of before you truly are---but nevertheless, dedicating yourself to honest labor would be most decidedly unbecoming."

Charles snorts, an exciting exercise as it involves his glorious nose. "And what would you suggest as a substitute for my own criminal proposal?"

"Your dilemma is easily solved, my friend," Edmund says airily. "Wed a wealthy heiress, preferably desperate, ugly, and about to die."

Charles stares at him in utter disbelief. "That is the vilest plot I have ever heard. And possibly ..." he admits grudgingly, "the most brilliant."

Edmund grins.

"But it is evil still," Charles admonished piously, "no matter the cleverness."

"Oh, don't be scrupulous now. Only the rich can afford to be that because it doesn't pay. And you, Charles, are not rich."

Thusly in a few moments, the equivalent of a prayer before bed, Charles capitulates. "I do plan my final destination to be Heaven, though I may embark on several detours and false leads on the way."

Edmund claps a hand on Charles's back and ushers him to the door, assuring him, "So do us all, so do us all."

