

PERIOD DRAMA - (EXCERPT)

SCENE FOUR.

The drawing room of a London townhouse. 1817.

Harriet, Nancy, and Fanny are seated - politely sipping tea.

HARRIET

And *then* what did you say?

NANCY

I told her she was a horrid beast, and that I was not surprised *at all* that she grew up in the countryside. She practically reeked of manure, despite having spent more than a month with her Aunt in Mayfair. I told her that the honourable thing to do would have been to have removed the offending accessory as soon as she saw me on the lawns.

FANNY

Quite right.

NANCY

We couldn't *both* be wearing pheasant feathers! And when it comes to '*beau monde*' I simply cannot be matched. She would have been ridiculed! I told her as much.

FANNY

Oh bravo, Nan. She really is the most frightful thing.

NANCY

I mean, who wears that much silk to a debutante ball anyway? Honestly.

HARRIET

Please tell me she conceded and removed it at once?

NANCY

If only! She tried to reason that there were enough pheasant feathers for us all!

FANNY

Well I hope you put her right. She took a ginormous leap over the point itself:

ALL THREE

There can only be *one* wearing pheasant!

NANCY

Well anyway, the ghastly waif could not be told. She proceeded to cause the most dreadful scene!

HARRIET

She never did!

NANCY

If I said she did, she did Harriet. And I'd thank you to not butt in.

HARRIET

Sorry, Nan.

NANCY

That's alright. Where was I? Ah yes, so *then* she only went and stamped on my foot! Of course she apologised afterward, but the damage was done. Her clumsy hoof left a mark on my ivory slipper!

Harriet and Fanny gasp.

FANNY

What did you do?

NANCY

Well I just *had* to get her off of me, so the only thing for it was a swift elbow into the ribs. She was mightily affronted, but as I explained to her - it was a reflex action! One can't avoid one's reflexes.

HARRIET

Indeed! Like the time Cousin Isaac tried to scoff the last of the sandwiches that time, so I had to eat it fast before he could get his grotty little fingers on it and I told him to GO PLAY IN A DITCH!

(SILENCE)

HARRIET

(Shrugging)

Reflexes.

FANNY

Darling Harriet, I'm not sure that's quite the same thing.

NANCY

No, it isn't.

Harriet folds her hands back into her lap and looks at them.

FANNY

Go on, Nancy. Then what?

NANCY

Well she wasn't having any of it, despite my protestations. She said: "Reflexes, my foot!". To which I replied: No, Miss Crawford-Smith, MINE!" And presented my smudged slipper. Then I don't really know what came over her. She sort of, inflated with rage.

FANNY

Truly?!

NANCY

Her eyes practically looked inward at each other. It was like she saw the devil! She just lunged at me, like a rabid animal that would have been shot in the woods. She plucked my lovely headdress from my very head, too! If you look carefully you'll see the spot from which she ripped my actual hair!

Harriet and Fanny immediately inspect it and then sit back down, disappointed.

HARRIET

Nothing.

NANCY

Oh. Well, it's there! Daisy had to style my locks in such a way so as to hide it, you see.

FANNY

She's done a very thorough job. I can't see a thing!

NANCY

Well it's there.

HARRIET

Did nobody come to your aid?

NANCY

That young Colin Medlock tried to intercede - but he couldn't get near in the end. She wrestled me like some vulgar oaf.

She gets lost in the memory.

NANCY

All I remember was a dot of saliva that had loosened itself and made a bid for freedom down her chin. It was like a twinkling rivulet as it caught the light of the chandelier. Delicate. A streak of silver through stone...

FANNY

Are you quite alright? You look rather flushed.

NANCY

Those cherry-blossom pink lips had stretched into a snarl, and her eyes possessed a sort of... wildness to them. It was as though she had just lost control of all her faculties and decent upbringing, and tossed them aside like a torn stocking. She could not be tamed.

FANNY

Nancy?

NANCY

A single curl shook itself loose and rested on her collarbone.

HARRIET

Nan.

NANCY

I almost thought she would kill me, right there and then. Stab me with the butter knife or wrap her hands around my throat and squeeze until I just... *wasn't*... anymore. Until I no longer existed. Just me, and her, and those small hands around my throat.

FANNY

I should fetch Miss Blakely...

NANCY

I ripped her sleeve in the scuffle. Tore it clean off her shoulder. Did you know she had a tiny freckle there?

HARRIET

Um. No.

Nancy snaps out of it.

NANCY

Listen to me, harping on about some petty squabble with a hideous nobody! It must be nearing my monthly, I often get melancholy and distracted during my courses.

She picks up the tea plate and holds it out.

NANCY

Did nobody want a jam scone?

FANNY

No, thank you.

Harriet resolutely shakes her head.

NANCY

Anyway, I managed to get ahold of her pheasant-feathered headdress in the end and I cast the thing into the fire. So that's the end of that.

She takes a scone, and lifts it to her mouth.

NANCY

I heard she was sent back to the countryside, so that's the last we'll see of her.

She takes a delicate bite of the edge.

NANCY

Goodbye and good riddance, I say.

She demolishes the rest.

Then licks her fingers.

BLACKOUT.