

How Thoughtful. How Discreet.

By Stories Through the Static

A ballroom story from the mansion

FICTION

Ten thousand candles lit the mirrored hall,
The grandest, most absurd machine of all.
The King held court beneath a crown of gold,
Where every smile was bartered, bought, and sold.

A glance was news. A careless touch was sin.
One whisper might unmake your house and kin.
The ladies watched behind their painted fans;
The gentlemen revised their little plans.

Two feet of pannier flared at either side;
I squeezed through doors and cursed the cost of pride.
I wore my rouge, one patch beside my eye—
La Passionnée: a dare to passersby.

Then you walked in and bowed too long, too low:
A perfect, mocking, calculated show.
You read my face; your ears went promptly red.
I knew you'd heard the things I hadn't said.

It was not memory that charged the place,
But instinct when your eyes first found my face.
Behind my fan, I fought a foolish grin.
The Queen looked out. The court came leaning in.
I should have turned my wayward gaze away.

I looked at you—and chose to let it stay.
A countess hissed, "Did you?" Her neighbor, "Twice."
A bishop muttered something grave of vice.
The King glanced up, amused above his wine.
Your wicked eyes were still entangled with mine.

Naturally, I let my fan fall—
The softest clap of thunder in the hall.
It struck the marble just beside your feet.
The court went still. How thoughtful. How discreet.

You bent to lift my fan from off the floor,
Then rose—and chose to offer something more.
“My lady.” Perfectly polite, you drew
My hand to your lips—in everybody’s view.
Your kiss brushed lightly where my wrist lay bare.
One heartbeat.

Two.

Then fire filled the air.

A dozen fans rose one inch higher still.
A marquis nearly perished from the thrill.
The King concealed his laughter with his wine.
The Queen’s left eyebrow rose to challenge mine.

You stepped away, as courtesy required,
And left the room discreetly catching fire.

The orchestra began its sugared tune.
The chandeliers became a borrowed moon.
The minuet was called for all to see;
Some fifty nobles watched with hungry glee.

Our names rang out; the music sweetly turned.
The court leaned in to see if we would burn.
Your hand obeyed each measure, rule, and guide.
My pulse rebelled at every step and slide.

“Everyone is watching,” I breathed low.

“The King is watching.”

You replied, “And so?”

I nearly laughed and quite mistimed the turn.

“You’ll have us banished.”

“Darling, let them learn.”

You turned me once. Ten thousand candles spun.
I lost the room and every watching one.

You spoke my name.

No title.

No “my lady.”

Nothing more.

I’d never heard it sound like that before.

My skirts swung wide. You caught me neatly there—

Then fate—or silk—or some design of mine—

let one small stockinged ankle briefly shine.

Your hand went still.

Your eyes forgot the dance.

I smiled.

All right—a smirk.

“What caught your eye?”

“Your shoe,” you said.

“My shoe? How sweet of you to lie.”

At that, His Majesty laughed aloud.

The scandal rippled outward through the crowd.

You laughed into my hand; I nearly died.

“They’ll say you watched my ankle.”

“They’ll say I tried.”

“They’ll say you kissed my wrist.”

“I did. That’s true.”

“They’ll say the King was watching.”

“So were you.”

“They’ll say I’m shameless.”

“You’re hopelessly mine.”

“Would that be a crime?”

“In seventeen provinces and the German line.”

“How fortunate,” I said, “to have such reach.”
“How dangerous,” you murmured, “when you teach.”
The music ended. Neither stepped away.
The whole court waited, starving, for the play.
The Queen looked on.
The King refilled his wine.
You held my hand one heartbeat past the line.
“Enough,” the King declared, though mirth ran bright.
“You two would give my court a tale tonight.”
I curtsied.
You bowed.
The court exhaled.
A hundred whispered versions were unveiled.
We passed a column.
Then another door.
Behind us, hungry eyes demanded more.
Ahead, the garden opened dark and sweet—
The moonlit gravel silver at our feet.
Past the orangerie, we stole away.
No court.
No crown.
No watching eyes to please.
The music faded somewhere through the trees.
You still possessed my fan.
I noticed that.
You noticed me observing where it sat.
“Return it,” I said.
“You dropped it at my feet.”

“An accident.”

“How thoughtful. How discreet.”

I laughed.

You kissed the corner of my smile.

The palace disappeared a little while.

“I knew you’d come,” I whispered.

“No, you didn’t.”

“I hoped.”

“Ah.”

“Don’t look so unbearably pleased.”

“I crossed a crowded ballroom when you sneezed.”

“I did not sneeze.”

“Your fan appeared distressed.”

“My fan has better judgment than the rest.”

“You dropped it.”

“You bowed too low.”

“You stared.”

“You wore *La Passionnée*.”

“You came prepared.”

“You kissed my wrist.”

“You offered me your hand.”

“You showed your ankle.”

“That was never planned.”

You raised one brow.

I narrowed both of mine.

“On that, beloved, all the court is right.”

You laughed then—not the careful courtly sound,
But something warm and foolish and unbound.

I sighed against you.

“They’ll eat us alive.”

You smiled.

“Then let them watch us survive.”

I gasped.

You kissed me once.

Then once again.

“Incorrigible.”

“Say it like my name.”

“Gross.”

“You were much sweeter moments ago.”

“You ruined it.”

“I know.”

“You always know.”

The garden held one faithful patch of shade.

We stepped inside.

The world became unmade.

No King.

No Queen.

No court demanding more.

By dawn they’d sell our tale from door to door.

You had my fan.

I had your hand.

No need for more.

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