

# The Virgin Betrothals

By

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# Chapter One

*England, 1860*

Prudence, the governess, walked through the top floor of the manor searching for Lillian. She became concerned, it should not take this long, the girls were only allowed in half a dozen of the rooms. She finally found the elusive young lady perched in the window seat of the upstairs parlor, supposedly working away on her sampler. But instead of stitching, Lillian sat staring out the window, her head no doubt full of romantic nonsense, as usual.

The girl was a beauty, even with her long dark hair in childish braids. Escaping strands curled about her face and neck, contrasting with her luminous white skin. Prudence paused, not looking forward to engaging the young woman in conversation. Lillian was frequently difficult so she decided to lead on the offensive.

“You naughty girl, there you are!” she scolded. Lillian turned her green eyes towards her, alarmed. “Your nanny has been calling for you, it is way past your nap time, you know.” Lillian’s only reply was a deep scowl. At the age of twenty-one, the girl was understandably not amused at having a nap time. At a time in her life when most of her peers were married and running their own households, Lillian was being kept as a child by her strict guardian.

“Come along now before you get into real trouble,” Prudence advised. She took Lillian by the hand and led her to the nursery.

Lillian reluctantly followed along behind her governess. Ever since she and her two younger sisters had gone to live with their “Uncle Edmund” they had been treated like children. But he wasn’t their uncle and they weren’t children. They were young ladies of age, why each of them were old enough to debut. But this had been put off for another year, at least. Lillian grimaced at the thought. At this rate, when she finally came out, she’d be the oldest girl at the cotillion. She was ready to be running her own home and instead she was dressed like a twelve-year-old and hidden away in Edmund’s musty old house. Her growing impatience put her frequently at odds with her nanny and governess, many a night she had cried herself to sleep while nursing a sore behind.

She reluctantly entered the nursery and flushed at the sight that awaited her. Both of her sisters were stripped naked and standing in line awaiting their daily rendezvous with their greased thermometers, which were lined up in a row on a table next to their nasty nanny. Lillian's sisters were miserably huddled in place, their hands covering their breasts and privates, both relieved to see that it was only Lillian and the governess entering the nursery. There was no lock on the nursery door and various people walked in and out all day without knocking.

"Prepare yourself, fraulein," Nanny Wapner called out. Lillian sighed, she should be used to suffering this indignity by now, but apparently not. Her hands began to shake as she removed her clothing while the nanny and governess watched. Only when she was stripped down to nothing but her bare skin and standing in line behind her sisters did the temperature-taking ritual begin.

As embarrassed as she was to be exposed in the middle of a room in the bright light of day, she was not suffering nearly as much as the sister born less than a year after her, the pious Evelyn. Evelyn was a very timid twenty-year-old who was quite content with being treated as a child, taking her classes, pleasing her governess and nanny. At five feet four inches, she was the tallest of the three of them, with long straight brown hair and dove grey, serious eyes. Evelyn was a devout young woman, frequently studying her bible late into the night. If they were papists, Lillian reflected, Evelyn might even have taken vows. She was an intensely modest young woman and never seemed to get used to being nude in front of others.

On the other hand, she did not need to worry as much about her littlest sister, Gwendolyn, who, while embarrassed, was coping well. The child was full of mischief, possessing the soul of an adventuress. She would state her intentions to anyone who would listen; to be a world traveler, and visit each of the seven continents before she was thirty. Where she got her ideas, Lillian had no idea, probably from all of those books in the library that she spent most of her time reading.

Gwendolyn was naïve as to what was possible given their current situation. Lillian lectured her often, insisting that she had to face reality. She was a young woman with no resources, living at the mercy of a man who was not actually even related to them. Gwendolyn would listen politely while assuming a serious expression, but minutes later she would be chatting merrily away to anyone who would listen about the adventures she planned to one day have, her face glowing with happiness.

Lillian, as the oldest, was acutely aware that none of them had any resources; they were living on the kindness of their Uncle Edmund. He wasn't really their uncle, but their father had always required that they call him that. When their parents had perished in the fire, it was Edmund who had come to their rescue, collecting them from the carriage house. He found the three traumatized young women shivering and crying after watching their castle burn to the ground, fearful that everything they knew and loved had gone up in smoke. He had wrapped them in blankets, loaded them in his carriage and brought them to his lavish estate.

She had heard people praise Edmund's generosity for taking in three homeless young ladies, but she wasn't certain that he'd been the best choice for the task. He didn't seem to have a clue as to how young women should be treated. First, he had hired a governess – a governess! They were all fully grown and of age. Their father had seen to their education, they did not require further studies. Two days later a nanny had arrived. Three adult women with a governess and a nanny, the situation was ludicrous. And they had been placed in the nursery when his great house had dozens of bedrooms, any one of them more suitable for an adult young lady. Instead of inhabiting Preston Manor as adults providing companionship to their guardian, they were corralled and treated as infants, sleeping in cots in a large room at the top of the stairs.

Since all had been lost in the fire, Edmund had decided on a uniform of sorts for the girls – plain, dark grey, too-short dresses with itchy warm underwear that they were required to wear year round. All three girls were small and now looked like children, their hair kept in two braids that fell to their waists. Lillian used to be the first one at the door when visitors arrived at Tudor Estates, but here at Preston Manor she stayed hidden, ashamed for anyone to see her dressed thusly.

As the daughters of the Duke and Duchess of Westchester, it was imperative that through marriage they be restored to their proper stations. Edmund Preston, the Earl of Newcastle, could sponsor their debuts so that they might find noble husbands. But whenever the subject of debuting into society came up, Edmund would harrumph and reach for the paper, announcing from behind it that doing so was out of the question with their dear parents gone for less than a year. The year of mourning was almost over but still they were kept in short skirts and there was no talk of the upcoming season quickly arriving.

Lillian shuddered at the thought, if she did not come out this April, she would be twenty-two when she debuted. No one would want a bride that old, not when they could choose any

eighteen-year-old in the room. Her guardian should be jumping at the opportunity to marry off the three of them. Whatever was he dragging his feet about?

The last time she'd brought the subject up, she had ended up over his knee being spanked on the bare. On the bare! It was so shameful, the thought of that chastisement still caused her cheeks to burn. A grown man—not her father, nor her husband—had unveiled her bottom and looked upon it; had with his hard hand applied dozens of times, turned it from snowy white to ruby red as he'd scolded her for having such thoughts with her parents so recently deceased. Then afterwards he had required that she display her scarlet cheeks to the room for what seemed like hours as various servants came and went. She had wept bitter tears as she stood in the corner, both sets of cheeks burning with shame.

So, now what? She was just supposed to sit around wondering when her future would begin? Would she ever be allowed out of this dank old house or would she forever wander its halls, her maidenhead dissolving and her fertility seeping away until she no longer had anything to offer a husband?

She watched as little Gwendolyn was led by the governess to Nanny Wapner. Even though the girls were each less than a year apart in age, Gwendolyn was always referred to as the little one. A short, voluptuous girl, she had wide set blue eyes and strawberry-blond curls. She whimpered as she was taken over her nanny's lap. First the large, solid nanny arranged Gwendolyn just so, her bottom right over her nanny's thighs, pointing towards the ceiling. Nanny parted Gwendolyn's cheeks doing a visual inspection of all that lay between. She then spread her nether lips, exposing her charms to the room, peering intently. Gwendolyn began to whimper and wiggle at being so exposed. Her nanny slapped one chubby cheek.

"Settle down, fraulein. You know you must show yourself to your nanny. How else can I inspect your hygiene?" Gwendolyn apparently did not pass inspection. Her nanny began to spank, first one cheek and then the other until she'd turned them both a bright pink.

"Go to your governess so zat she can complete your correction," she ordered the young lady, helping her to rise and giving her a swat on her bare bottom as she sent her scampering on her way.

Gwendolyn was crying as she quickly climbed over her governess's lap, trying to not show any more skin than necessary. The governess held Gwendolyn's waist in one arm and

began to spank. Gwendolyn shrieked, her bottom, already tenderized from almost daily corrections, ached horribly.

As Prudence spanked away, she scolded, "I don't know what you've done to earn this you naughty little thing, but you must learn to not displease your nanny."

Evelyn's temperature was being read by her nanny. She began to groan as she too was inspected between the legs. She gasped as her nanny spoke.

"Ach, you naughty girl! Have you been playink with yourself?"

"I don't...what?" she whispered, shocked beyond words.

"You are all red und irritated here."

Evelyn jerked as her nanny touched her in a particularly sensitive spot.

"You are a very bad girl, I tink. Touching yourself between the legs ven you are in bed and supposed to be sleepink."

Evelyn was crying tears of embarrassment by this time.

"I don't understand. I would never do such a thing," she sobbed, but her denial earned her nothing but a spanking of her own. She shrieked as her nanny produced her wicked tappet and swatted her repeatedly. Evelyn, at her wits end, kept trying to wriggle away.

Prudence, seeing Nanny struggling with the girl, sent Gwendolyn to stand in the corner and grabbed Evelyn by the ear. She led her over to the vanity and laid the naked girl across it. She took the strap hanging on the side and began to apply it vigorously to Evelyn's backside.

Lillian cringed as the strap gave a mighty crack each time it landed on her sister's buttocks, accompanied by a shriek from Evelyn.

"Onanism, a terrible crime, you dirty girl. I vow to single handedly drive that demon from you," Prudence announced as she swatted Evelyn dozens of times until Lillian lost count. Once a hysterical Evelyn was standing in place next to Gwendolyn facing the wall, it was Lillian's turn. She felt her cheeks parted as the lubricated thermometer was slid into its dark cavern. Lillian sighed. Because Evelyn was given to chilblains and frequently suffered from attacks of the vapors, they were all monitored as if they were delicate creatures, not big healthy girls.

As she lay there like a two-year-old having her temperature taken rectally over her nanny's lap, she heard the door open and footsteps approach her nanny's chair. This was her biggest objection to residing in a nursery; she had no control over who might enter. She gasped. It sounded like male footsteps. Was it one of the footmen? Instead the butler's voice came to her



as he stood right behind her. She knew she was fully exposed to his gaze. She froze, clenching her cheeks closed, trying to not let him see anymore than necessary as he spoke to Nanny.

“His lordship wishes to have the children join him for dinner this evening.”

“The children”, her uncle insisted on calling them. No wonder he wouldn’t discuss their debut, he thought of them as little girls. The butler certainly didn’t, not now after seeing Evelyn and Gwendolyn standing naked, facing the wall with their hands on top of their heads. From the angle he was standing, Lillian was sure he could see the curve of their breasts, as well as their reddened buttocks.

“First their naps, they will then join his lordship promptly at eight,” Nanny promised. While the butler was still standing there, she spread Lillian’s nether lips and began her inspection. Lillian cried out at this indignity. She tried to wriggle away, unwilling to show her most private charms to a male servant. This earned her a session with nanny’s tappet. She wasn’t certain when the butler left, she was too busy squirming over her elderly nanny’s large lap and screeching as the wicked strap connected repeatedly with her bottom.

Since her sisters had also been punished by the governess, she too was sent to lie over Prudence’s lap after the nanny had worn out her arm on her scarlet cheeks. Prudence used the same strap she had used on Evelyn which, on top of the tappet, was a horrible sentence. Lillian lost all dignity as she screeched her way through that terrible correction.

After the three naked, well-punished young women stood next to each other on display for the obligatory half hour, they were dressed in night lawns and put in their cots. Nanny tied Evelyn’s wrists to the iron headboard, announcing that she could no longer be trusted not to masturbate. Evelyn began to cry again, her cheeks burning with shame. Lillian grew angry at her gentle sister being treated thusly, but exhaustion overtook her and soon all three girls were sound asleep.

That night the three girls were led down to the table by their nanny and governess. Lillian flushed in embarrassment as they curtsied to their uncle. Even for formal dinners they were kept in their little uniforms; it was all the clothing they owned. She wanted to weep when she thought of their pretty, fashionable gowns that had gone up in flames never to be seen again and apparently, never to be replaced. It occurred to Lillian that perhaps this is why they weren’t being allowed to debut. All three girls would need extensive new wardrobes and that might be a strain to their guardian’s budget. She had no idea what Edmund’s financial situation was.

She looked around for clues as to the state of Edmund's finances, the house was not very well kept up. It appeared dusty and rundown, dark and gloomy. Just then the butler set the soup course in front of her, meeting her eyes most disrespectfully. Lillian flushed and dropped her gaze, staring at her plate. She knew she was probably overreacting to his having seen her most private charms in the nursery but, under the circumstances, how could she not?

She studied Edmund as they all sat politely eating their soup, the same soup they had eaten for the last three days. Lillian wondered how big a pot of it cook had made. Were they required to finish every last drop before a new soup would be made?

Although their guardian was very stern and currently had a rather sour expression on his face, she supposed he was reasonably good looking and always impeccably attired. Why wasn't he married? He had to have reached the age of forty. Lillian frowned at Edmund, he was just so odd, so cold, sitting there not meeting their eyes or making conversation while they ate.

She knew he wasn't really like that, she'd seen him merrily interact with her parents on several occasions. She recalled once spying on him years ago when she was no older than six or seven. He had been sitting with her father, telling him about some prank he had played at school. Relaxed and happy, he'd thrown back his head in laughter and she'd been surprised at how handsome he had appeared just then.

Lillian did some rapid calculating. He had been younger than her parents, serving as a page at their wedding. Her mother had delivered a stillborn son in the first year of marriage and had Lillian two years later. Why, if Edmund had been eight or so at their wedding, that would make him only in his thirties. He seemed much older than that, pompous and stodgy.

Lillian did not approve of his bachelor status. It was time for the man to take a wife, especially if he wished to have a family. Also, a wife would see to it that the level of housekeeping around Preston Manor improved and perhaps lighten her guardian's perennially somber mood. His being an earl would make him quite a catch on the marriage mart, it might even make up for his lack of a personality.

Lillian stopped, her spoon hovering over her bowl as she considered this. Perhaps that was why he didn't want them to debut. Perhaps he planned to be at the next season choosing a wife and didn't want three giggling nieces watching him.

Lillian sighed heavily and resumed eating, there were clearly factors at play that were beyond her knowledge and comprehension. She would just have to be patient. Then another

thought occurred to her, they might not debut at all. Perhaps Edmund would just arrange husbands for them. She shuddered at the thought, trying to imagine the kind of men he would choose. Suddenly she realized that all chatter had stopped and all eyes were upon her.

“Yes, Lillian?” her guardian asked.

“I’m sorry?” Lillian replied, embarrassed. Clearly she had not been focusing on the polite conversation going around the table, a social faux pas.

“You sighed. Did you have something on your mind?” Evelyn asked, rescuing her. Lillian blurted out exactly what was on her mind.

“I was just thinking, perhaps we shouldn’t debut. Perhaps you should just arrange marriages for us, Uncle Edmund.” Nobody replied to this, instead, a stony silence descended on the table. Lillian began speaking more rapidly, to Evelyn this time.

“Like you, dear sister, you would do very well with a man of the cloth, helping him to run his ministry. And you, Gwendolyn, you should marry a traveler, perhaps a foreign attaché.” Gwendolyn’s eyes sparkled at the idea. Evelyn, on the other hand, looked uncertain. She knew that Evelyn found the idea of getting to know someone new to be disquieting.

“Young ladies who have just lost their parents should not be concerning themselves with such trivial matters,” Prudence warned.

Lillian anxiously looked around the table at this reprimand. Edmund had shut down, his face an unreadable mask. Her German nanny looked confused and unhappy. English was not her first language but she sensed that her charge had said the wrong thing.

Lillian sat back, suddenly ashamed of herself. The governess was correct, her parents had died a horrible death in the fire less than a year ago and getting married was all she thought about. She looked down at her plate considering this, placing her hands on her lap. She felt something wet hit her hand and realized that she’d begun to cry. Suddenly she was overcome, she buried her face in her hands and wept with great shuddering sobs, finally grieving for her parents, something she had not allowed herself to do until this very moment. Her governess came to her, helping her to rise and escorted her out of the room.

Prudence took the crying young lady into the nursery and sat down beside her on her cot. She helped Lillian to lie on her side, taking the girl’s head upon her lap. Lillian curled herself into a ball, ashamed of the thoughtless young lady she’d become.

“There, there, child,” Prudence soothed, stroking the girl’s hair. “It’s all right. This is why people set aside a full year to recover from such a loss. It is enough just to get through these hard days.”

“I am so shallow, what’s wrong with me?” Lillian cried.

“Nothing at all, I suspect you’ve used the upcoming season to distract yourself from the loss of your parents. Everyone works through the grief in their own time and in their own way,” Prudence murmured. They stayed that way for awhile, Lillian softly crying, her governess providing comfort. Eventually she heard her sisters enter the nursery and looked up to see Evelyn standing at the foot of her bed, anxiously rubbing her hands together.

“You are to go see Uncle in his study, Lillian. You are to report there immediately.”

Lillian sat up, stricken. Everyone knew what it meant to be called to their guardian’s study after dinner. She was going to be disciplined. She looked from Evelyn to Gwendolyn, neither sister meeting her eyes. Her nanny, however, had no such qualms; she came over and yanked Lillian to her feet by her upper arm.

“Ja! Get going, mit yourself, fraulein. Your uncle said immediately,” she said, swatting Lillian on the bottom.

Prudence escorted her to Edmund’s study wanting to make sure that the girl did not dawdle on the way. It was a long walk to his door through many twisting corridors. Once they arrived, Lillian could not bring herself to knock, so Prudence did.