Lady Eleanor Fitzwilliam stares at the duke, her thoughts and feelings crystallising into icy, furious disdain.

‘Thank you for the honour of your proposals,’ she says, St Ives’ ring cold against her breast, ‘but I am afraid I cannot accept them.’

‘I will not despair, your ladyship,’ he assures her; ‘I know you must think me sadly inconstant, but I shall prove my affection to you.’

Though he has neither wealth nor an ancient name to recommend him, he is a duke, tall, dark and handsome, well-spoken and reasonably charming. They look at one another, his eyes alight and his lips curved in a confident smirk. She longs to slap it off his insolent, self-satisfied face; instead, she stands straight and tall and proud, as stern and inscrutable as her father’s statues.

‘Forgive me, your Grace,’ she replies, ‘but I pray you will not.’ And she turns away, calling a servant to get rid of him.

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