

A How to Beguile a Duke Valentine's Day Short Story

Ally Broadfield

Using the clues from her great-grandmother's journal, Catherine and Nick had been searching Walsley Manor for weeks, but the hidden tiara was simply nowhere to be found. Catherine needed a distraction, so Nick intended to surprise her with a special present for St. Valentine's Day, and it had to be something more than the usual poem. He hurried to the morning room where the ladies were gathered, hoping one of them might have a suggestion for him.

A quick glance revealed that, as he had anticipated, Catherine had already left for the library to search yet again. "Ladies, I require your assistance. I need a Valentine's gift for Catherine, preferably something that will distract her from her quest to locate the tiara."

Jane nodded in agreement. "I believe she was talking earlier about carving holes in the walls."

Nick closed his eyes and fought for calm. "Do you have any ideas as to how I might distract her?"

"Perhaps a new cutlass?"

"I don't believe arming her would be the best solution to our problem." He turned to his mother, whose flimsy attempt to hide her amusement did nothing to settle his frazzled nerves.

"Mother, have you any suggestions?"

"You know how easily she can become lost in a book. Perhaps you could go into the village and see if they have any new novels."

"That just might work. Thank you." He kissed her on the cheek and called for his horse to be saddled.

He made it to the village in record time and rushed into the book shop.

"Your Grace." The shopkeeper bowed. "How may I assist you?"

"Have you acquired any new novels recently?"

"If you'll follow me, Your Grace." The man led him to a shelf full of novels, but Nick could see immediately that there was nothing there that Catherine hadn't already read.

As he exited the store, the jeweler's sign caught his eye. Perhaps that was the answer.

He came to his senses somewhere around the third case of necklaces he had perused. Catherine already owned more jewelry than one woman could ever hope to wear.

Having exhausted all of his options, he moved slowly toward the door, weighed down by his failure. *Wait a minute.* A large diamond tiara sat on a table behind the counter. For one wild, desperate moment, he considered commissioning a replica of the tiara described in the journal. But of course that would never work. He could not deceive her, and she would likely cause him bodily harm if she ever discovered that he had.

During the ride back to Walsley, he came upon a peddler at the side of the road.

"Your Grace." She curtsied. "I'm afraid I've already sold all of the puppies."

The basket behind her began to wobble. "I thought you said you sold all of the puppies."

"Aye, I did, Your Grace. That one is deaf. I'll have me oldest take him down and drown him in the river."

A deaf puppy. He was the perfect distraction. "I'll take him."

"But, Your Grace..."

"Thank you," he called over his shoulder, tossing her a quid as he rushed off.

As soon as he reached Walsley, he hurried to the library, where he knew he would find Catherine.

"Darling, where have you been?" She leaned in to kiss him, but jumped back when the puppy moved under his coat.

"I've brought you a present. I had intended to write you a poem for St. Valentine's Day, but I found something better." He lifted the puppy out of his coat and placed him in Catherine's arms.

"Oh, a puppy." She snuggled him close.

"I'm afraid he's deaf, but the woman selling the puppies planned to drown him, and I knew you wouldn't like that, so—"

She stopped his words by pressing her lips to his. It was some time before she pulled away. "I can't believe the stern, proper Duke of Boulstridge rescued a deaf puppy. What will people think? Your reputation may not be salvageable."

He leaned his forehead against hers. "I'm willing to risk it if the puppy makes you happy."

“Darling, you couldn’t have found a more perfect present.” She placed the sleeping puppy upon a chair and led Nick over to the chaise longue. After removing his cravat and shirt, she pushed him onto his back and straddled him.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m giving you my St. Valentine’s present. I thought of something you’d appreciate more than a poem.”

“You know me so well.” He grinned and pulled her to him.

THE END

Read more about Nick and Catherine in [*How to Bequile a Duke*](#).