

EXCERPT OF
THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS
L. L. FIELD

EXCERPT #1:

Chapter Thirteen, page 186

After bidding her mother farewell, Sarah headed up High Street and on to the Surrey Hills where she had taken up wandering, much as she had at Waverly Manor. Though she did not carry her basket, she did carry a burden of a different sort now. She could not reflect on Mr. Camden's behaviour without reflecting upon her own passive acceptance of his, which she had thought of as toying and laughable. Had she realized he meant to have her hand by whatever means at his disposal, she would have deflected even his most innocuous displays of regard. Not wishing to give offense, nor publicly reject her father's favourite, she had all the appearance of welcoming his advances when she simply did not think of him at all. He was not even worthy of rejection, for the idea of marriage to Mr. Camden had never been entertained. And therein was the root of her shame: call it vanity, call it pride, call it arrogance if you will. She knew it had been nurtured in her long years alone; giving in to a feeling of superiority of mind

became a habit. She did not suffer fools gladly. Yet she realized now that she had ceased to feel much at all since her youth, when the promise of marriage with a like mind had come to naught.

And what of Edward? Could she again hold him in high esteem as she had at twenty? He seemed to wish her good opinion. He had offered his compliments at a time when they should, by rights, be withheld. He had even given his good name as protection to her father. Her cheeks burned as she pictured him when they parted as youths, torn apart by the wishes of his parents. Now with youth but a shadow, was there to be another courtship? Were not his intentions plainly writ? Higher and higher she climbed into the hills, until she was overlooking the distant burnt-orange commons dotted with leafless trees and green hedgerows stretching on forever, framed by the slate sky traced with cirrus clouds. She sank to her knees in the tall, yellowed grasses, pushed her hooded cape off her head, buried her face in her hands, and cried for all that she had lost, for all that she had suffered--but most of all for what she had become because of it. Mr. Camden, she thought, might have ruined her reputation, but perhaps he had saved her soul.

pp. 187-188

Excerpt No. 2

Lord Wortham rose and strode towards Lady Stoneleigh when she entered; he bowed and raised her hand to his lips. Surprised by his behaviour, the colour rose to her cheeks, nicely matching the damask rose of her wall covering, and she raised her other hand and waved him towards the settee by the fire.

“How nice of you to pay me a call, Lord Wortham. I had word that your visit was to comprise a fortnight at the Hall and to commence, dear me, today.” Placing her hand on her bosom, she asked, “Pray, are you just arrived? Am I to flatter myself that you have yet to put in an appearance at the Hall?”

With a hearty laugh that dislodged his powdered wig slightly, he replied, “You have, indeed, caught me out, my lady, I am just this moment in Wilton and thought to pay my respects to you before proceeding on to the Hall. I hope you do not find my visit untoward.”

Adjusting the lace trimming her sleeve, Lady Stoneleigh replied, smiling, “Good friends do not stand on ceremony, I dare say, my lord.”

Lord Wortham was prevented from replying with the arrival of tea, but he was somewhat disconcerted by the term “good friends.” What was her meaning? Had she meant to put him on his guard? His thoughts were momentarily swept away by the sight of tea and the most delicious-looking savories and sweets. He had not realized how hungry he was.

Consuming a warm fig scone restored his spirits enough to ask, “I trust you will be much involved in the plans at the Hall whilst I am here?”

She smiled broadly after swallowing an overlarge piece of apple tart, and her reply was garbled. “How you do flatter me, sir, with your polite attentions.”

She signaled to the footman to refresh the lord’s tea while she polished off another apple tart in two bites. Lord Wortham reached for yet another lovely scone and sighed with delight.

“What a lovely tea, ’tis truly fit for a king, I dare say.” Shortly after, he rose to go, drawing Lady Stoneleigh’s hand to his lips. “Until the morrow, then?” And he bowed his way out, ushered to his waiting carriage by Benton who had also seen to his servants’ refreshments. Lady Stoneleigh was all smiles and no commitments whatsoever. She knew

how to forward his suit with her smiles, yet enflame his doubts with her words. She wanted to keep him off guard until he would gladly tell her any thing she wanted to know.

pp. 193-194

Excerpt No. 3

Dear Edward,

How did you feel when you saw me at Brookfield Park last fall? Am I mistaken, or were you not aware that I was to be there that evening? Your look of surprise was quickly masked by the utmost attentions to myself and my family, yet I knew you were abashed and sought to hide it. To own the truth, I was at some pains to conceal my surprise in finding you entirely unaltered in looks, though I do think time favours gentlemen over ladies in this regard. When you entered with your party of friends from London, it seemed, at first, as if you were much in company with them, if I am not mistaken. And when Lady Helen took your arm to be escorted in to dinner, it was much remarked how well you looked together. I cannot help but ask, though I have no right to inquire, had you serious intentions towards her? For it was plain to me that she wished them. And would your father not have hoped for such an alliance with Lord Athword, after all?

In truth, Edward, I told myself that though your appearance was hardly altered, your want of any serious pursuits, especially in light of the friends you were with, clearly pointed to a great alteration of mind. And I was decidedly put off when you endeavoured to engage me in conversation on a more intimate footing than I could countenance after an absence of some seven years. It seemed impertinent and wholly of a nature used to gratification, so much so that you did not seem to doubt my ready

reception of a renewal of your attentions, though in the eyes of the present company, you were yet addressing Lady Helen, a more suitable choice.

I did not wish to credit you with any sensibility then. Edward, forgive me for judging you so harshly. I thought only of your past promise, and even without knowing Lady Helen, I was ready to condemn her. As when we first parted, I must admit I would rather deem you weak than own jealous feelings. It was not until you dined with us at Waverly Manor that I again caught glimpses of your former self. Had I not been so full of my right to censure you, I would have been more open then to a renewal of our acquaintance. Instead I allowed Mr. Camden to keep you at a distance. And to what purpose? I ask myself over and over. Such folly of my own entirely has been amply punished.

Forgive me, Edward.

pp. 246-248

