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I won't be the first to give up! And I amplified my gaze. Eva sighed, leaned back, and fished two knitting needles out of the bag. They were accompanied by a cross between cobwebs and patchwork blankets, but it was probably supposed to be a sock. Her fingers began to move faster than my eyes could watch, and the click of needles echoed in the courtroom. On my other side sat my friend Flora, her lips trembling and trying not to cry. And next to her, on the other hand, sat my best friend Patsy, who was busy throwing Flora a boisterous look, death threats and damnation if she let one tear slip. Patsy was firmly convinced that a girl should always behave with strength and dignity - especially when she had just been tried by a bunch of chauvinistic bastards! On the other hand, I was of the opinion that Flora desperately needed a hug. The dock really wouldn't allow it. That's when I leaned over and patted her on the shoulder. Don't worry. We'll be fine. See. 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Do we have single young ladies in the dock? I'm afraid so, my lord. Good God! Where does the world go? I don't know, my lord. Judge Hooknose sent us another look and asked in his dried-up voice: 'What are they accused of, please?' The bail examiner cleared his throat again. The defendant is accused of deliberately, deliberately and maliciously having it on February 9, 1840 - suddenly his eyes widened and he cut off and stared at the documents in front of him. He quickly showed them to the clerk next to him - who dropped the glasses he was just polishing and nearly fell off his chair. Ne? The judge asked impatiently. What are they accused of? The bail examiner whispered to the clerk of the court. The clerk of the court whispered to the bailiff. They both looked in horror at the who tilted her head and gave them a cool smile. Ne? The judge's voice didn't sound so dry anymore. In fact, you could say it sounded almost vivid. Almost. I... Nervously, the bail examiner looked around. I don't want to... in the open space... You have to forgive me, my lord, it's so shocking, I can't - 'What were they doing, man? Out with him! The bailiff took a deep breath. He resigned himself to his fate, face to face bravely, and sat down to recount his duty as the most fearsome. Cycling, my lord. Cycling? Yes, my lord. Women? Yes, my lord. In public? I'm afraid so, my lord. A senior court clerk, who was on the lookout for the magistrate, coughed for him. Forgive my interruption, my lord... but may I ask what bike ride it is? Sounds extremely risky to me. It is, Rogers. The judge trembled a little, as if someone had crossed his grave. This is a movement using certain means of transport commonly known as a bike, which seems to be hideously popular with young people these days. You may have heard of a fabrication under its original name, velocipede. The clerk of the court had his eyes wide. Isn't...? Yes. They moved on... Indeed. Do you use the pedals? I suppose so. And with their not mention, they spread? The judge closed his eyes in pain. Please don't make me think about it. Hey! Patsy called. They're called legs! We all have them, not just us girls, in case you haven't noticed! You can call them by their real name! Or poles, props or shank, I suggested. These are also perfectly acceptable. The two men gave us an offending look. Just listen to him talk! Pitiful, right? When I was young, under the old King George, such things could not happen. The girls knew what proper behavior was then. Patsy opened her mouth, presumably telling the two where they could hold their proper behavior, but I grabbed her hand. Shut up, okay? I whispered. Because of Flora. Patsy hesitated for a moment, but then closed her mouth again and muttered. Where did this indignation take place? the bailiff's judge demanded, and he was almost trembling with moral indignation. In the backyard? Garden? The bail examiner turned red, but bravely cleared his throat and replied: No, my lord. Green Park. 'In green P-! Are you telling me these women went out in public? Indeed, my Lord. With children present? It pains me to say that, but yes, my lord. 'And they witnessed these women moving around on their bikes, moving their unmissables and sitting on the saddle in a way that was absolutely... split? The bail examiner really nodded. Yes, my lord. The magistrate slowly covered his face with his hands. Good God! For a few moments, there was a bleak silence in the courtroom - except for the incessant clickety-clickety-click of Eve's knitting needles. In the end, the Municipality reduced Side. Hitting a wooden block, the hammer said in its driest, anaesthetous voice as a cemetery: 'I'm going to need some time to think about the sentence. This trial is adjourned for five minutes. No, on the other hand, ten minutes. These women should have some time to contemplate the seriousness of their crime. Officer, stay here and watch the criminals. I wouldn't say it's such a perverse, corrupt creature to try to escape the justice it deserves. Yes, my lord! My lord, I will! Moments later, the door closed behind the magistrate. Eve clickety-clickety-clickcarried on as if nothing had happened. I turned to Patsy and said, 'So, you twisted, corrupt creature, you have to admit, I won the duck pond race.' Patsy crossed her arms over her enough breasts. I won't admit anything like that! Eve? You were there, weren't you? Hm? Clickety-clickety-click. There, at our bike race! You saw who won, didn't you? 'Mhm.' Clickety-clickety clickety. Clickety-click-clack-click. Well? Who won? 'Hm-hm.' Clickety-clackety-click-clack. I sighed. Looks like I didn't get any answers from this quarter. When I turned around, I focused my gaze on Flora. You were there too! Who won? I knew who won, of course. Patsy just wouldn't admit it because she'd rather swallow her parosol on the side than admit that she's been beaten in something. Flora knew, too. And judging by the color of her face, she wasn't too happy with the idea of having to tell Patsy she was in second place. Um... Well, Patsy, you know... It's not always about winning... Yes, it is! Patsy contradicted her. Flora tried again. I mean, you two didn't mean it, you were just having fun... No, we weren't! Oh, um, I get it. Well, in any case, I'm afraid that - let's not forget that the light wasn't very good, and I wasn't looking closely - from where I was standing, it, um, looked like... like Lilly won. Patsy nailed her to the bench for a moment with the deadliest of deadly glances. Flora trembled, but did not take her eyes off, which I considered a great success. Admit it! My smile was wide enough to melt my face. You lost! There was a long moment of quiet, then: 'Fine! Yes! I lost! But only because the cop pulled me off my bike first. I conceded with a kind nod. I bet he wished he hadn't done it when you landed on him. Patsy laughed. Oh yes, he did! We fell into silence again, but this time it was completely sociable. Clickety-clickety-clicking knitting needles Eve still sounded in the background, and to my satisfaction I noticed that it was slowly driving the bailiff mad. Well, I was pondering. What do you think I'm going to get? Hey, we're not going to agree on a winner's prize! It was just for fun. I'm not talking about race, stupid! I'm talking about my sentence! Oh. You think we're all going to get the same thing? It's impossible! Patsy said. I have a much more impressive record than you! Whatever you get, I'll get at least twice as much. Flora's eyes widened. What do you mean, long? Sure, you don't think...?' Yes, patsy confirmed with a bleak taste. Yes. I'm sure they'll just give us a ticket. Are you kidding me? Patsy laughed. They must set an example for independent women like us, or their entire chauvinistic system will collapse! It's suffocating for us, ladies. At least a week. Maybe two. Flora almost fell off the bench. Even Eva stopped knitting and looked up. Two weeks? They're going to put us in jail for two weeks? Oh God! Flora covered her mouth with both hands and tried to disappear. When that didn't work, she curled up in as little ball as possible and hid her face behind her hands. I don't want to go to jail! It's going to be dirty and cold! And they've got villains, thieves and thugs everywhere! Really? Eva leaned forward and grabbed Patsy and me and drew us closer. You two were listening to what that musty cat with the hammer said! Are we really going to jail? Don't worry. When I saw the fear in Eva's eyes, I patted her at hand. I'm sure they don't put girls in the same cells as dangerous criminals. I'm not afraid of that. Eva waved dismissively to the mouse that she would be stuck in a cell with a rapist or a murderer. Don't you understand? If we get to prison, we won't be able to attend the royal wedding on Monday! I rolled my eyes. Oh, of course. A royal wedding. How could I forget? It was a legitimate question, given that Eva - and in fact most of the City of London - had been talking about nothing else for the past three months. Wedding - bah! Patsy snorted. It's disgraceful! For the first time in a hundred years, we have a woman at the head of the nation, and what will she do first after ascending the throne? She'll find a man! Pathetic! She looked at me for confirmation. Um, yes. Very pathetic, I assured her hastily. But judging by the suspicious glare that shot me, I think she could have said my heart wasn't in it. To tell you the truth, no matter how hard I tried to ignore the royal wedding of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, in some secret corner of my fiery feminist heart, I was looking forward to it. Maybe because Prince Albert was said to be a specimen of this extremely rare species known as nice men. Or maybe it was because he wasn't the one who proposed to Victoria - no, it was the other way around. She decided, an idea I found very appealing. I suppose there were advantages to being queen. That's not pathetic! For a moment, Eva looked offended, but it only took a few seconds for her eyes to start gleaming and shimmering. It's romantic! The most promissibly insanely romantic thing that has ever been in the history of England and the Empire! Prince Albert is so dreamy! I saw his picture in The Spectator, and he's just the prettiest man who ever lived! Mr. Darcy can't hold his candle! Besides, Mr. Darcy is just a fictional character, and Prince Albert is real. He's a handsome prince, real, and he'll get married in three days! And to you, Patsy helped in a dry tone. Eva threw her a dacha. Thank you so much for reminding me. You're welcome. Anyway, you understand why we can't go to jail for two weeks, right, Patsy? Oh, of course. I mean, it's a royal wedding, for God's sake! How often in our lives will we be able to attend a royal wedding? We just can't go to jail! Cannot! Absolutely not. I'm sure if we explain this to the judge, he'll let us walk away with a reased so we can go scream God save the Queen along with the rest of London. Eva looked suspiciously at Patsy. Are you kidding me? What did you think? They started bickering, and my attention began to wander. But I was looking out for them, and when Patsy reached for the parosol and Eva for her knitting needles (and not knit, this time) I felt it was time to intervene. 'Hey, hey, calm down, you two. A cold-blooded materialist! Eva hissed. Crazy fool! Patsy growled. I thought neither of them meant me. Relax, I told Eva. It won't matter if we're in jail on Monday or not. We'd never be able to get good wedding seats anyway. When I said that, I realized how true those words were. And I was surprised when I felt a sting of disappointment at it. It wasn't be in some big church, it's in the Royal Chapel at St. James's Palace. The crowds won't fit. To get in, you'd have to be members of the royal family, or outrageously rich and important. That's right. Eva pulled her face. Hell! Flora, who reappeared from behind her hands, held her finger to her lips. Take a look! He's back! We looked and saw his Lordship, Justice of the Peace Winston Montgomery Murgatroyd, enter the room, a grave expression on his face - so serious that you could practically read the letters on the tombstone. He sat behind the judge's desk, took a deep breath, tilted his wobbly chin into the most impressive pose, and said, 'I've thought about it for a long time and hard. It's not an easy decision to make. Given the defendant's young age, I considered leniency - Flora sat straight and her wide, open eyes shone with hope. '-but with morality slipping everywhere in our society, as an outrageous exhibition of misconduct as we witnessed today can't go unchaored.' The judge sent a dark stare in our direction, and Flora withered. 'So I decided on a suitably harsh punishment that will hopefully deter these evil individuals from violating the precious moral laws of the empire in the future.' It rose and fell with a deafening tone. For the felonies of indecent exposure and disturbing the Queen's peace, I hereby sentence you to a fine of five shillings. May God have love over your souls. Thieves! Raiders! Patsy vated her fist in court, moments before the door slammed into her face. Five shillings! Can you believe it? Five shillings! Well, now, Patsy, Flora dared to note, it's not that bad. Five shillings isn't that much. This earned her one of Patsy's looks. You know, the ones that could cause the sergeant to shake in his shoes? It's the principle of the matter! We didn't do anything wrong, so we shouldn't be punished if there's any justice for women in the world. Besides, five shillings may not be so much for you or me - our families are doing well! But what about poor Lilly? Her uncle has money, too. But he's as stingy as a Scotsman with a stick up his ass! For all intents and purposes, Lilly has no more money than a church mouse. And five shillings is five times more than most people in a month - if they have a job, which none of us do! It's all right, I started. I can say, 'That's just not fair!' Patsy continued without paying special attention to the fact that her best friend, me, was just trying to say something. 'Men can make money - why not us women? Of course it's okay if you're rich, but if you're poor, like Lilly-' 'Hey, girls,' I tried again. That's not a problem, I- 'What do you think happens when a bail examiner comes knocking on a pickup ticket? You really think her uncle's going to pay? Oh, no, it's prison time for our friend! And all because of the tyrannical, fat chauvinism of a small-minded London judge! I coughed. Patsy, I- 'You're right,' Flora agreed, and her eyes cast on me with warmth and kindness. I could practically feel her heart getting out of my way. That's reckless of me! We have to do something! We can't let Lilly go to jail with all those thieves and murderers, rakes and lechers! Actually, Eva pondered, the last two don't look so bad. Don't you think maybe - 'Eve! All right, all right! Eva sighed and put her hand in her purse and reached for a few coins. Here's my cut. I've got mine, too, here, somewhere, flora muttered and searched her pockets. Where I put my money... Girls! Girls, will you listen? Or not, don't listen, just look! And with these words, I pulled out of my pocket a shiny golden monarch. My friends froze and stared. Patsy's mouth opened. Where did you get that? she asked. From the same place I got this, I answered and pulled out two more coins to join the first one. Out of my pocket. The astonishment in Eva's gaze slowly turned into admiration. Lilly, you didn't rob the bank, did you? No! Of course not! Oh, Eva seemed a little disappointed. But then it brightened up again. But you had to do something terrible to get that kind of money. He pulled a smile out of the corner of my mouth. You have no idea. How? Patsy demanded it. How did you get that? A... now that I think of How did you get the bike money? Eve, Flora and I can afford ours, but you? And don't tell me your uncle suddenly developed a generous and giving away nature, because I'm not going to believe it! No, it's still the same stingy old sock as always. So what? I blinked. Let's just say that... There's another man in my life who slips up here and there. A round of scandalous sighs greeted my announcement. Lilly, you... Flora started, her face terrified. '... You little dragon! Eva finished, a broad smile spreading across her features. Tell us all! We want details, you understand? Details! Who is he? Where is he? What's behind it? How rich is he? Is he ugly, beautiful, tall, small, horrible, amazing, bearable? Is he under 60? Please tell me it's not some old man who-- oh, of course he's not! It's you we're talking about! You wouldn't give a about such a nasty bastard! Is he handsome? Please tell me he's handsome! And rich! And beautiful and kind and good and -' 'Sorry, girls.' Bouncing down the stairs, I threw my pride and joy: my new, shining, girlish velocipede. I've got a place to be! Stop! Patsy rushed forward, her face indignably on her face. You can't leave us like this! We just have to -' The rest of her sentence was lost in the whizzing of my wheels as I whizzed towards Leadenhall Street. Empire House, 322 Leadenhall Street, to be exact. I wasn't lying to my friends. I really had a man who developed on a regular basis. A beautiful, powerful, disgustingly chauvinistic man who looked like someone was ripping a tooth out of his brain every time he had no choice but to hand over his paycheck. I smiled. It's time to go to work. Nice surprise :You're late, Mr. Linton! The warm welcome of my dear employer immediately makes me feel at home. Its cool glare and the Arctic waves of dissent that radiate from it have added to a pleasant working atmosphere. Yes, I agreed cheerfully, dropped my briefcase on the table and jumped into the chair. One hour, fifteen minutes and... ' I quickly put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my own watch, which I bought from my first paycheck,... 32 seconds. I had my watch closed again, I hid it. It's admirable how accurately you watch the time of day, Mr. Linton. Thank you, sir, but it would be even more admirable,' he added with a dazzling look, stepping out of the shady door of his office, where he was standing, fully into mine, if you paid the same attention to the time you were to appear at work. Exactly! I fought to ignore the trembling that was on my back when our eyes met. Mr. Rikkard Ambrose was a slayer at all times, but if you had seen those eyes looking into yours, just inches away, if you could feel those long, elegant fingers that caught your face while his lips caught other parts. You... Let me put it this way: it gave a whole new meaning to the word powerful. Would that really be, sir? Why exactly are you late, Mr. Linton? I got arrested. For a while he stood there with his hands folded and his posture stiff as a stone statue. His eyes narrowed infinitely, but otherwise he showed no signs of emotion. The temperature in the room dropped 30 degrees. I'd usually be surprised, Mr. Linton. But not from you. What makes you think that's the case? Because you know I'm a little demon from hell? I designed cheerfully, and pulled out the drawer of the table. As I expected, I found the correspondence of the day Mr. Stone left me from the hall. I pulled him out and started diligently searching the envelopes. Relevant point, Mr. Linton. Thank you, sir, for your lost time to be deducted from your wages. Of course it will, sir. No, not even a break. Silence. The negative opposite of the noise that seemed to stretch, tickle my ears and send a cold trembling through me. No one can say anything like Mr. Ambrose. There was a question in the quiet. The question he wanted me to answer without wasting his words on asking him. Ha! Hardly. I opened one of the envelopes and grinned and hid my face behind the letter. Not a word crossed me. Silence. More quiet. And a modicum of more quiet, with a little restraint and calm thrown in. Finally, he forced himself to say, 'Well... Yes, sir? Why, Mr. Linton? My smile spread, and I kept the letter closer to my face, just in case the smile was so wide that it looked out at both ends. Why what, sir? Don't play dumb! Why did they arrest you? Oh... I pulled my ear thoughtfully. I don't remember exactly... Theft? Killing? Mine, mine, you think I'm rather tall, don't you, Mr. Ambrose, sir? Answer the question, Mr. Linton! Well, like I said, I don't remember exactly, but one of the charges violated the Queen's peace, I think. I heard a sigh from behind the letter. Oh, Well, that's not so ba-' Oh, and yes! I broke my fingers. 'The other one was rude. I heard a beer from behind the letter. Rude. Mr. Linton? Yes, sir? I managed to say without keeling over from a quiet laugh. Is something wrong? What have you done? I was just ripping the letters off the table, and now I'm looking at them like I do every morning. One from the Bank of England and one from - Mr Linton! Yes, Mr. Ambrose, sir? Are you cheding with me? I wouldn't dare, sir. What did you do to get accused of... something like that? I shrugged. Nothing special. I just climbed the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral and showed my naked ass to a passerby, that's all. The noise that was now coming from Mr. Ambrose's direction certainly could not be described as betting. Oh, no. Not if you don't want to, the adjective of the bee for grumping lion. Mr. Linton? Yes, sir, Mr. Ambrose, sir? Are you trying to make fun of me? I wouldn't dream of that, sir. I don't know what you might think, Mr. Ambrose, sir, of course not, Mr. Linton. There was another moment of silence - Mr. Ambrose's silence. Then his footsteps began to move away. I looked out from behind the letter and saw him opening the door to his office. Just before he disappeared into his hermitage, he paused. The sight of his tall, slender black figure against the fiery morning light that flows through the window did things deep inside me. When you're done with these letters, Mr. Linton, come to my office. I have a job for you. The door closed behind him. My dear office bully didn't promise too much. When I entered his office, an amazing surprise awaited me: checking the balance of all his accounts. All. In one day. He didn't seem to trust his accountants particularly - no big surprise, because he didn't trust God, the saints, himself, the Queen or Christmas - and was determined to find anyone who could cheat on him and smash them like mistakes. And guess what? I've been declared his assistant beetle. That's why, Miss Lilly Linton, I sat on a perfectly good Friday afternoon, going through the balance sheet. If I worked for a normal person, going through a few balance sheets might not be so bad. But I

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Do we have single young ladies in the dock? I'm afraid so, my lord. Good God! Where does the world go? I don't know, my lord. Judge Hooknose sent us another look and asked in his dried-up voice: 'What are they accused of, please?' The bail examiner cleared his throat again. The defendant is accused of deliberately, deliberately and maliciously having it on February 9, 1840 - suddenly his eyes widened and he cut off and stared at the documents in front of him. He quickly showed them to the clerk next to him - who dropped the glasses he was just polishing and nearly fell off his chair. Ne? The judge asked impatiently. What are they accused of? The bail examiner whispered to the clerk of the court. The clerk of the court whispered to the bailiff. They both looked in horror at the who tilted her head and gave them a cool smile. Ne? The judge's voice didn't sound so dry anymore. In fact, you could say it sounded almost vivid. Almost. I... Nervously, the bail examiner looked around. I don't want to... in the open space... You have to forgive me, my lord, it's so shocking, I can't - 'What were they doing, man? Out with him! The bailiff took a deep breath. He resigned himself to his fate, face to face bravely, and sat down to recount his duty as the most fearsome. Cycling, my lord. Cycling? Yes, my lord. Women? Yes, my lord. In public? I'm afraid so, my lord. A senior court clerk, who was on the lookout for the magistrate, coughed for him. Forgive my interruption, my lord... but may I ask what bike ride it is? Sounds extremely risky to me. It is, Rogers. The judge trembled a little, as if someone had crossed his grave. This is a movement using certain means of transport commonly known as a bike, which seems to be hideously popular with young people these days. You may have heard of a fabrication under its original name, velocipede. The clerk of the court had his eyes wide. Isn't...? Yes. They moved on... Indeed. Do you use the pedals? I suppose so. And with their not mention, they spread? The judge closed his eyes in pain. Please don't make me think about it. Hey! Patsy called. They're called legs! We all have them, not just us girls, in case you haven't noticed! You can call them by their real name! Or poles, props or shank, I suggested. These are also perfectly acceptable. The two men gave us an offending look. Just listen to him talk! Pitiful, right? When I was young, under the old King George, such things could not happen. The girls knew what proper behavior was then. Patsy opened her mouth, presumably telling the two where they could hold their proper behavior, but I grabbed her hand. Shut up, okay? I whispered. Because of Flora. Patsy hesitated for a moment, but then closed her mouth again and muttered. Where did this indignation take place? the bailiff's judge demanded, and he was almost trembling with moral indignation. In the backyard? Garden? The bail examiner turned red, but bravely cleared his throat and replied: No, my lord. Green Park. 'In green P-! Are you telling me these women went out in public? Indeed, my Lord. With children present? It pains me to say that, but yes, my lord. 'And they witnessed these women moving around on their bikes, moving their unmissables and sitting on the saddle in a way that was absolutely... split? The bail examiner really nodded. Yes, my lord. The magistrate slowly covered his face with his hands. Good God! For a few moments, there was a bleak silence in the courtroom - except for the incessant clickety-clickety-click of Eve's knitting needles. In the end, the Municipality reduced Side. Hitting a wooden block, the hammer said in its driest, anaesthetous voice as a cemetery: 'I'm going to need some time to think about the sentence. This trial is adjourned for five minutes. No, on the other hand, ten minutes. These women should have some time to contemplate the seriousness of their crime. Officer, stay here and watch the criminals. I wouldn't say it's such a perverse, corrupt creature to try to escape the justice it deserves. Yes, my lord! My lord, I will! Moments later, the door closed behind the magistrate. Eve clickety-clickety-clickcarried on as if nothing had happened. I turned to Patsy and said, 'So, you twisted, corrupt creature, you have to admit, I won the duck pond race.' Patsy crossed her arms over her enough breasts. I won't admit anything like that! Eve? You were there, weren't you? Hm? Clickety-clickety-click. There, at our bike race! You saw who won, didn't you? 'Mhm.' Clickety-clickety clickety. Clickety-click-clack-click. Well? Who won? 'Hm-hm.' Clickety-clackety-click-clack. I sighed. Looks like I didn't get any answers from this quarter. When I turned around, I focused my gaze on Flora. You were there too! Who won? I knew who won, of course. Patsy just wouldn't admit it because she'd rather swallow her parosol on the side than admit that she's been beaten in something. Flora knew, too. And judging by the color of her face, she wasn't too happy with the idea of having to tell Patsy she was in second place. Um... Well, Patsy, you know... It's not always about winning... Yes, it is! Patsy contradicted her. Flora tried again. I mean, you two didn't mean it, you were just having fun... No, we weren't! Oh, um, I get it. Well, in any case, I'm afraid that - let's not forget that the light wasn't very good, and I wasn't looking closely - from where I was standing, it, um, looked like... like Lilly won. Patsy nailed her to the bench for a moment with the deadliest of deadly glances. Flora trembled, but did not take her eyes off, which I considered a great success. Admit it! My smile was wide enough to melt my face. You lost! There was a long moment of quiet, then: 'Fine! Yes! I lost! But only because the cop pulled me off my bike first. I conceded with a kind nod. I bet he wished he hadn't done it when you landed on him. Patsy laughed. Oh yes, he did! We fell into silence again, but this time it was completely sociable. Clickety-clickety-clicking knitting needles Eve still sounded in the background, and to my satisfaction I noticed that it was slowly driving the bailiff mad. Well, I was pondering. What do you think I'm going to get? Hey, we're not going to agree on a winner's prize! It was just for fun. I'm not talking about race, stupid! I'm talking about my sentence! Oh. You think we're all going to get the same thing? It's impossible! Patsy said. I have a much more impressive record than you! Whatever you get, I'll get at least twice as much. Flora's eyes widened. What do you mean, long? Sure, you don't think...?' Yes, patsy confirmed with a bleak taste. Yes. I'm sure they'll just give us a ticket. Are you kidding me? Patsy laughed. They must set an example for independent women like us, or their entire chauvinistic system will collapse! It's suffocating for us, ladies. At least a week. Maybe two. Flora almost fell off the bench. Even Eva stopped knitting and looked up. Two weeks? They're going to put us in jail for two weeks? Oh God! Flora covered her mouth with both hands and tried to disappear. When that didn't work, she curled up in as little ball as possible and hid her face behind her hands. I don't want to go to jail! It's going to be dirty and cold! And they've got villains, thieves and thugs everywhere! Really? Eva leaned forward and grabbed Patsy and me and drew us closer. You two were listening to what that musty cat with the hammer said! Are we really going to jail? Don't worry. When I saw the fear in Eva's eyes, I patted her at hand. I'm sure they don't put girls in the same cells as dangerous criminals. I'm not afraid of that. Eva waved dismissively to the mouse that she would be stuck in a cell with a rapist or a murderer. Don't you understand? If we get to prison, we won't be able to attend the royal wedding on Monday! I rolled my eyes. Oh, of course. A royal wedding. How could I forget? It was a legitimate question, given that Eva - and in fact most of the City of London - had been talking about nothing else for the past three months. Wedding - bah! Patsy snorted. It's disgraceful! For the first time in a hundred years, we have a woman at the head of the nation, and what will she do first after ascending the throne? She'll find a man! Pathetic! She looked at me for confirmation. Um, yes. Very pathetic, I assured her hastily. But judging by the suspicious glare that shot me, I think she could have said my heart wasn't in it. To tell you the truth, no matter how hard I tried to ignore the royal wedding of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, in some secret corner of my fiery feminist heart, I was looking forward to it. Maybe because Prince Albert was said to be a specimen of this extremely rare species known as nice men. Or maybe it was because he wasn't the one who proposed to Victoria - no, it was the other way around. She decided, an idea I found very appealing. I suppose there were advantages to being queen. That's not pathetic! For a moment, Eva looked offended, but it only took a few seconds for her eyes to start gleaming and shimmering. It's romantic! The most promissibly insanely romantic thing that has ever been in the history of England and the Empire! Prince Albert is so dreamy! I saw his picture in The Spectator, and he's just the prettiest man who ever lived! Mr. Darcy can't hold his candle! Besides, Mr. Darcy is just a fictional character, and Prince Albert is real. He's a handsome prince, real, and he'll get married in three days! And to you, Patsy helped in a dry tone. Eva threw her a dacha. Thank you so much for reminding me. You're welcome. Anyway, you understand why we can't go to jail for two weeks, right, Patsy? Oh, of course. I mean, it's a royal wedding, for God's sake! How often in our lives will we be able to attend a royal wedding? We just can't go to jail! Cannot! Absolutely not. I'm sure if we explain this to the judge, he'll let us walk away with a reased so we can go scream God save the Queen along with the rest of London. Eva looked suspiciously at Patsy. Are you kidding me? What did you think? They started bickering, and my attention began to wander. But I was looking out for them, and when Patsy reached for the parosol and Eva for her knitting needles (and not knit, this time) I felt it was time to intervene. 'Hey, hey, calm down, you two. A cold-blooded materialist! Eva hissed. Crazy fool! Patsy growled. I thought neither of them meant me. Relax, I told Eva. It won't matter if we're in jail on Monday or not. We'd never be able to get good wedding seats anyway. When I said that, I realized how true those words were. And I was surprised when I felt a sting of disappointment at it. It wasn't be in some big church, it's in the Royal Chapel at St. James's Palace. The crowds won't fit. To get in, you'd have to be members of the royal family, or outrageously rich and important. That's right. Eva pulled her face. Hell! Flora, who reappeared from behind her hands, held her finger to her lips. Take a look! He's back! We looked and saw his Lordship, Justice of the Peace Winston Montgomery Murgatroyd, enter the room, a grave expression on his face - so serious that you could practically read the letters on the tombstone. He sat behind the judge's desk, took a deep breath, tilted his wobbly chin into the most impressive pose, and said, 'I've thought about it for a long time and hard. It's not an easy decision to make. Given the defendant's young age, I considered leniency - Flora sat straight and her wide, open eyes shone with hope. '-but with morality slipping everywhere in our society, as an outrageous exhibition of misconduct as we witnessed today can't go unchaored.' The judge sent a dark stare in our direction, and Flora withered. 'So I decided on a suitably harsh punishment that will hopefully deter these evil individuals from violating the precious moral laws of the empire in the future.' It rose and fell with a deafening tone. For the felonies of indecent exposure and disturbing the Queen's peace, I hereby sentence you to a fine of five shillings. May God have love over your souls. Thieves! Raiders! Patsy vated her fist in court, moments before the door slammed into her face. Five shillings! Can you believe it? Five shillings! Well, now, Patsy, Flora dared to note, it's not that bad. Five shillings isn't that much. This earned her one of Patsy's looks. You know, the ones that could cause the sergeant to shake in his shoes? It's the principle of the matter! We didn't do anything wrong, so we shouldn't be punished if there's any justice for women in the world. Besides, five shillings may not be so much for you or me - our families are doing well! But what about poor Lilly? Her uncle has money, too. But he's as stingy as a Scotsman with a stick up his ass! For all intents and purposes, Lilly has no more money than a church mouse. And five shillings is five times more than most people in a month - if they have a job, which none of us do! It's all right, I started. I can say, 'That's just not fair!' Patsy continued without paying special attention to the fact that her best friend, me, was just trying to say something. 'Men can make money - why not us women? Of course it's okay if you're rich, but if you're poor, like Lilly-' 'Hey, girls,' I tried again. That's not a problem, I- 'What do you think happens when a bail examiner comes knocking on a pickup ticket? You really think her uncle's going to pay? Oh, no, it's prison time for our friend! And all because of the tyrannical, fat chauvinism of a small-minded London judge! I coughed. Patsy, I- 'You're right,' Flora agreed, and her eyes cast on me with warmth and kindness. I could practically feel her heart getting out of my way. That's reckless of me! We have to do something! We can't let Lilly go to jail with all those thieves and murderers, rakes and lechers! Actually, Eva pondered, the last two don't look so bad. Don't you think maybe - 'Eve! All right, all right! Eva sighed and put her hand in her purse and reached for a few coins. Here's my cut. I've got mine, too, here, somewhere, flora muttered and searched her pockets. Where I put my money... Girls! Girls, will you listen? Or not, don't listen, just look! And with these words, I pulled out of my pocket a shiny golden monarch. My friends froze and stared. Patsy's mouth opened. Where did you get that? she asked. From the same place I got this, I answered and pulled out two more coins to join the first one. Out of my pocket. The astonishment in Eva's gaze slowly turned into admiration. Lilly, you didn't rob the bank, did you? No! Of course not! Oh, Eva seemed a little disappointed. But then it brightened up again. But you had to do something terrible to get that kind of money. He pulled a smile out of the corner of my mouth. You have no idea. How? Patsy demanded it. How did you get that? A... now that I think of How did you get the bike money? Eve, Flora and I can afford ours, but you? And don't tell me your uncle suddenly developed a generous and giving away nature, because I'm not going to believe it! No, it's still the same stingy old sock as always. So what? I blinked. Let's just say that... There's another man in my life who slips up here and there. A round of scandalous sighs greeted my announcement. Lilly, you... Flora started, her face terrified. '... You little dragon! Eva finished, a broad smile spreading across her features. Tell us all! We want details, you understand? Details! Who is he? Where is he? What's behind it? How rich is he? Is he ugly, beautiful, tall, small, horrible, amazing, bearable? Is he under 60? Please tell me it's not some old man who-- oh, of course he's not! It's you we're talking about! You wouldn't give a about such a nasty bastard! Is he handsome? Please tell me he's handsome! And rich! And beautiful and kind and good and -' 'Sorry, girls.' Bouncing down the stairs, I threw my pride and joy: my new, shining, girlish velocipede. I've got a place to be! Stop! Patsy rushed forward, her face indignably on her face. You can't leave us like this! We just have to -' The rest of her sentence was lost in the whizzing of my wheels as I whizzed towards Leadenhall Street. Empire House, 322 Leadenhall Street, to be exact. I wasn't lying to my friends. I really had a man who developed on a regular basis. A beautiful, powerful, disgustingly chauvinistic man who looked like someone was ripping a tooth out of his brain every time he had no choice but to hand over his paycheck. I smiled. It's time to go to work. Nice surprise :You're late, Mr. Linton! The warm welcome of my dear employer immediately makes me feel at home. Its cool glare and the Arctic waves of dissent that radiate from it have added to a pleasant working atmosphere. Yes, I agreed cheerfully, dropped my briefcase on the table and jumped into the chair. One hour, fifteen minutes and... ' I quickly put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my own watch, which I bought from my first paycheck,... 32 seconds. I had my watch closed again, I hid it. It's admirable how accurately you watch the time of day, Mr. Linton. Thank you, sir, but it would be even more admirable,' he added with a dazzling look, stepping out of the shady door of his office, where he was standing, fully into mine, if you paid the same attention to the time you were to appear at work. Exactly! I fought to ignore the trembling that was on my back when our eyes met. Mr. Rikkard Ambrose was a slayer at all times, but if you had seen those eyes looking into yours, just inches away, if you could feel those long, elegant fingers that caught your face while his lips caught other parts. You... Let me put it this way: it gave a whole new meaning to the word powerful. Would that really be, sir? Why exactly are you late, Mr. Linton? I got arrested. For a while he stood there with his hands folded and his posture stiff as a stone statue. His eyes narrowed infinitely, but otherwise he showed no signs of emotion. The temperature in the room dropped 30 degrees. I'd usually be surprised, Mr. Linton. But not from you. What makes you think that's the case? Because you know I'm a little demon from hell? I designed cheerfully, and pulled out the drawer of the table. As I expected, I found the correspondence of the day Mr. Stone left me from the hall. I pulled him out and started diligently searching the envelopes. Relevant point, Mr. Linton. Thank you, sir, for your lost time to be deducted from your wages. Of course it will, sir. No, not even a break. Silence. The negative opposite of the noise that seemed to stretch, tickle my ears and send a cold trembling through me. No one can say anything like Mr. Ambrose. There was a question in the quiet. The question he wanted me to answer without wasting his words on asking him. Ha! Hardly. I opened one of the envelopes and grinned and hid my face behind the letter. Not a word crossed me. Silence. More quiet. And a modicum of more quiet, with a little restraint and calm thrown in. Finally, he forced himself to say, 'Well... Yes, sir? Why, Mr. Linton? My smile spread, and I kept the letter closer to my face, just in case the smile was so wide that it looked out at both ends. Why what, sir? Don't play dumb! Why did they arrest you? Oh... I pulled my ear thoughtfully. I don't remember exactly... Theft? Killing? Mine, mine, you think I'm rather tall, don't you, Mr. Ambrose, sir? Answer the question, Mr. Linton! Well, like I said, I don't remember exactly, but one of the charges violated the Queen's peace, I think. I heard a sigh from behind the letter. Oh, Well, that's not so ba-' Oh, and yes! I broke my fingers. 'The other one was rude. I heard a beer from behind the letter

worked for Mr. Rikkard Ambrose, a man who had to constantly open new banks because the old ones were so fast full of money. The day went on and on. The numbers piled up in endless rows and columns, and soon my brain was a labyrinth of zeros, fives, and sevens. Where the rest of the numbers went, I had no idea. I wasn't a born mathematician. When the sun started to set, Mr. Ambrose threw away his ledger. That's not how it works. At this rate, we're never going to end up today. How far are you, Mr. Linton? 'Seven plus seven does... Hm... fifteen, minus twelve, does - 'Mr. Linton! Hm...? What? How far are you? Two-thirds of the way to Limbo, sir, 's bills, Mr. Linton! Oh. Um, well, I think about halfway through.' The noise Mr. Ambrose made in the back of his throat was pure disapproval. An old lady holding a cup of tea with her little finger protruding out couldn't have done better if the dog had wet her carpet. This isn't going to happen. We'll have to postpone the rest of the work until tomorrow. I sat down and my face brightened. We? Yes. We're going to have to work on something else tonight. A bright expression spilled out of my face. Oh. We will, okay? Yes! Get off my calendar. Quiet down my schedule for next week. Yes, sir. As you wish, sir, I dug the calendar out of my pocket and started flipping through it in search of the relevant page. 'Let's start Friday, Mr. Linton, and we'll work our way back through the week, you understand? Yes, sir. Friday at eight o'clock... He started rattling off the date at the pace of the machine gun, and I tried my best to keep all of them in the script I would later be able to decipher. But sooner rather than later, my eyes departed from the calendar in my hand to the window, behind which lay a magnificent view of the City of London, bathed in the fiery evening sunlight. I could do anything right now! Instead, I'm stuck in this office with a cold, stone-hearted tyrant who couldn't appreciate even subtle jokes about indecent exposure. I sighed. I could be riding my new bike right now! Or choosing a nice suit to wear to a royal wedding on Monday - or a dress when I was in a girl's mood. But no, what I said to Eva was true: none of us had the power or prestige needed to get good jobs, or even places. Mr. Linton! Hm? Mr. Linton, I'm not paying you to dream! What a shame. Pay attention! We were in the middle. Yes, sir. Of course, sir. Then I have to visit the Bank of England to talk to Mr Carson. Yes, sir. As you say, sir. Even if you may not want to risk cycling in Green Park so soon after being dragged before the judge, you can take a nice little walk, feed the bread to ducks and solid chocolate for yourself. There's no such thing as a bad time for solid chocolate. I have to visit my factory in Whitechapel on Wednesday. Production there has dropped below its maximum, and I have to fire a few people. Um... Surely you mean below the minimum, sir? Do I usually say things I don't mean, Mr. Linton? No, sir! How long will it take, sir? Or you could sit at home and fantasize with your little sister Ella about what it would be like to attend a real royal wedding. For once, there would be a topic that you and your favorite sibling could be excited about. Or you can just sit back and dream about what it would be like to be queen and be able to command men to do what you like. Two to three hours, depending on how many fools I have to fire. After that, we'll go back to the office and work on the balance sheets. How wonderful, sir. I'm really looking forward to it. But why not do it on Monday? Or you could spend the evening in front of the mirror, imagining what you'd wear to a royal wedding if you ever had the chance to go... Because I already have a meeting on Monday that's going to last all day. Yes, sir. maybe blue silk... or maybe... And I'm going to need you, Mr. Linton, to come an hour early and come in your best clothes. As a personal guest of the Queen, I don't need my secretary to embarrass me at Her Majesty's wedding. Yes, Si- Wait, what did you say? Big day 'No, no and not even here, damn it and blow it up! Where... oh - No! That's not it either! To hell with all this! Pants, shoes and cups flew through the air in a confusing cactus of clothing. And yes, stone, I knew it wasn't a real word! I didn't care right now! My sister Ella was standing next to me, looking wide open as I uneaten my wardrobe. I ignored her. I didn't have time for her right now. Explosion, explosion, explosion! Where is it? I know I've got him around! Um... Lill! Ella asked carefully. Right? No! Damn! That's too dark! That can't be it! 'er... Lill, what's going on? I was just wondering... Why do you have so many clothes in your closet? Where did I put it? I know I put it somewhere, just where? It's just, Lill, Uncle Buford only bought us two dresses, and now you open your closet and it's full of clothes and, um, well, I don't know how to put it gently, but most of them look awfully similar to menswear. Damn it and blast! It's not in the washing machine, is it? I pulled my head out of the closet, walked past Ella and was just about to open the door of the room we had shared since we were little when the realization hit me. No, he can't be in the washing machine. Aunt Branková would find him, and then hell would break loose. He's got to be here somewhere! Lill! Did you hear what I said? There's a men's dress in your closet! Maybe I put it in my chest, pondered, tugged at my ear, and got lost in my thoughts. 'Or I could have stuffed it in the dresser...' There's no man there, is there? Or maybe I folded it and put it in a box on the closet...' Oh God! Tell me there's no man there, Lill, please! Ella sneaked carefully into the closet and looked inside. All that greeted her was a tangled web of clothes. There were no lechers and rakes hiding in my closet, or if they did, they were hiding very, very well. But Elle was only partially relieved. She turned to me and pointed to the pants and hats scattered all over my bed. What is this? Why do you have them? Where are you? And most importantly, what are you doing with them? It's a men's dress, Lill! I noticed, muttered, walked back to the closet, and started digging again. In some part of my mind I realized Ella was asking me a few questions, but I didn't have the time or patience to answer right now. I was on a mission. Lill, did you hear me? Lilly, this is important! You have to answer me... A... Say... me ...' Ella's voice was slowly flowing when I pulled something out of the back of the closet and lifted it triumphantly. That's something I was looking for. Oh! I knew I had him here somewhere! Didn't I tell you? I knew it! For God's sake, that's for God's sake! Ella's eyes were wide, and they stared at the thing in my hands in amazement and amazement. Men's shirts, hats and even trousers have been forgotten. 'Where did you get this?' *-*-*-* I got out of the cab and handed the driver his money. 'Here Thank you, miss, he nodded and drove off. I stood and took care of him for a while. Normally, I wouldn't drive to work in a coach. I usually didn't waste money on such things when it wasn't far away, especially not if you're the proud owner of a brand new velocipede. But in this case... With a smile, I turned around and marched to the front door of the Empire House. It wasn't as easy to march in my current clothes as it usually was when I got to work, but I still managed to do it. Mr. Ambrose stood outside the front door, looking away from me. He seemed to be having a bold discussion with Karim, who was standing next to a poor little deckchair and an irritated grey horse, which was Mr Ambrose's preferred means of transport. '... And I'm telling you, Sahib, you can't do this, Karim just said when I came to hearsay. This is a Royals wedding! Kings and queens, and other people with long arms and short tempers! You can't go to a royals wedding in this carriage! And why not? Mr. Ambrose demanded. What's with the coach? It's... Karim started, and then he saw me. Her mouth opened. Here! See? Mr. Ambrose sounded as happy as possible. You can't think of a single argument. Sahib! There! She... she...' What do you mean, her? Queen? What about the Queen? No! Not the Queen, Sahib! She! He raised his trembling hand to point in my direction. Mr. Ambrose turned to me and froze. Another man could curse or jump. Mr. Ambrose didn't do either. He just froze. His face became worse than a stone, his eyes icy than ice. They were rummaging over me, taking me from head to toe, and not just me, but mostly what I was wearing. I turned and showed off all aspects of the swirling dress. It was wonderful when I said it myself. I have to say it myself, because Mr. Ambrose certainly didn't do it. The color in dark red and mocka, it perfectly complemented my chocolate brown hair and eyes. What, Mr. Ambrose asked, and his voice was as cold as the nose of a dead polar bear, is that it, Mr. Linton? You're going to have to refrain from telling me, sir, while I'm wearing this. I've advised him warmly. People might look at you strangely if they heard that. Answer my question! With a hard swipe of the hand he pointed to a masterpiece of haute couture that somehow actually managed to make it look as if I was halfway well-dosed at the top, and not so much at the back door. The wonders of modern fashion... What is this? I winked innocently at him. It's called a dress. Maybe you haven't heard of them, sir.

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