



EROLL LEIGHTON

ON HOW TO BE A DASHING COURTIER

GLAMOR IS ALL part of the job description if you're a member of Lael's royal court. And no one does it better than the dashing Eroll Leighton, Duke of Thyra. Today, he's a little more than fashionably late as he tromps into his plush sitting room in Glen Arden's reconstructed palace. His boots are muddy, and his dogs romp around his feet.

He catches sight of me, swirls his half-cloak onto a nearby chair, and approaches to kiss my hand without the least bit of abashment. Then he plops onto a settee, boots extended, heels propped up on his spurs, and spreads his arms across the back of the seat.

I sit down and try to look as much at ease as he seems to be.

Being a courtier is no picnic. How do you make it look so easy?

Oh, but it is easy. Especially when you've grown up with it, what? Never known the difference. And what's this about no picnics? There *are* picnics. Lots of picnics: white-gloved servers, sparkling crystal, lovely ladies under their parasols, all that delightful rot.

But you must put *some* effort into it?

[He rolls a thoughtful look at the ceiling, then shakes his head.] Can't say as I do. As to that, if it took all that much effort, wouldn't hardly be as fun, don't you know? No, I believe we'll just have to mark it up to natural talent, how about that?

Must be tough having all those women swooning at your feet.

Oh, well, that's nothing. [Tries to look modest, fails utterly, and dares to give me an entirely roguish wink.] Girls love a handsome face and a bit of wit, you know. And I can hardly help either of those.

Do you ever think you could put your time to better use than just hunting and dueling and dancing?

Now, now, don't discount my work here in court. Diplomacy and all that. I'm really quite good at it. People just naturally like to do what I like 'em to do, seems like. Except for Allara, of course. [Another wink, even more roguish.]

But don't discount hunting and dueling and dancing. Takes a good deal of work to be a fair hand at any of 'em, don't you know?

Confidentially, Allara told us you don't know how to take off your own boots. Is that true?

[Bursts out laughing.] She said that? Really? Well, you do have to look at that slight on my character in context. Look at these boots. [Extends leg to exhibit his muddy thigh-high boot.] It's not so easy to get in and out of a thing like that. Takes three small boys, no jesting about it. [His cheeky grin makes me doubt his lack of a jest.]

Okay, so this is what I really came here to ask you. Was your brother *really* named Phlin?

Surely. What of it?

[Snorts.] Never mind.

[He sits up straight, hands on his knees, obviously smelling some joke afoot.] No, really, tell me.

Sorry, can't. Might mess up the space/time continuum or something.

The what/what continuum?