

EDWARDIAN MARRIAGE SIMULATOR

A Visual Novel with RPG Elements

Concerning the Social Disgrace and Subsequent Marriage of Miss Lilian Montgomery-Price:
Her Suitors, Her Foibles, and Her Final Choice

PROLOGUE

['Preface' animation]

[Image: Three letters on a silver tray]

SCENE ONE

TIMES OF LONDON: Some time in the early afternoon, the day after that terrible, painful, never-ending evening, you receive three letters. They are stacked on a silver tray, placed on your bedside table by a white-gloved and invisible manservant.

There is one from Lady Ursula Montgomery-Price, Viscountess of Hereford, your mother.

There is another from Lord Ambrose Montgomery-Price, Viscount of Hereford, your father.

And finally, there is one from Lord Hugh Connelly, Earl of Carnfunnock, about whom the less said the better.

1. **Pick up Lady Ursula's letter.**
2. **Pick up Lord Ambrose's letter.**
3. **Pick up Lord Hugh Connelly's letter.**
4. [If mothers_letter_picked_up is 'True', and fathers_letter_picked_up is 'True', and lord_connellys_letter_picked_up is 'True'] **Proceed downstairs and speak to your aunt.**
 - a. **Jump after letters**

[If 1 is chosen]

[set mothers_letter_picked_up = 'True']

Your mother's note is written on thick letter-paper, the sort she lays out for visiting guests, headed with 'Montgomery Hall', the name of your ancestral home. It carries the faint scent of her perfume, ordered from Paris: *Après L'Ondée* by the House of Guerlain, with its notes of aniseed and powdered violet.

1. **Open the letter and read it.**

[set mothers_letter_read = 'True']

- a. **Place the letter back down on the tray.**

You place the letter back on the tray. The envelope looks up at you with your mother's eyes: high-strung and reproachful. The scent of dusty violets emanates from it, menacingly.

- b. **Crumple the letter in your hand.**

You crunch the stiff paper in your hands. It brings you a momentary joy, crushing your mother's neat, sloping handwriting, but the destructive action leaves you with an hollow feeling. Sometimes you wonder if your mother sees you as a person, or simply as A Daughter, a vehicle through which she might achieve a socially acceptable marriage.

2. Put the letter back down, without reading it.

Often, you find you cannot bear to read the letters your mother writes. She is hysterical; she is hectoring; you do not like how much of yourself you see in her.

[If 2 is chosen]

[set fathers_letter_picked_up = True]

Your father's note is written on a scrap of writing-paper, clearly taken from his study; you see some accounting scribbles in pencil on the back. The envelope carries the smell of cigar-ash and aged brandy, as if he had delayed over it in his study; the smell of wet dog and well-ridden horses lingers on the paper, as if he had stuffed it in his pocket while he was out with the hounds.

1. Open the letter and read it.

[set fathers_letter_read = True]

a. Place the letter back down on the tray.

Perhaps if you ignore the letter – if you act as if your father never said such terrible, unforgiveable things – the facts of the letter will not come to pass. You shudder at the thought of Newt Snodgringle: a distant cousin you remember only as a bloviating middle-aged man gone to seed, a cricket-honed physique now bloating out of his suits and onto the green baize of the House of Commons.

b. Throw the letter into the fireplace.

In a rush of emotion, you grab the letter and cast it into the fire. It is satisfying for a moment, watching the paper singe and curl and disintegrate into ashy nothing. But it has not dispelled the horrible image of Newt Snodgringle.

You shudder at the thought of him: a distant cousin you remember only as a bloviating middle-aged man gone to seed, a cricket-honed physique now bloating out of his suits and onto the green baize of the House of Commons.

2. Put the letter back down, without reading it.

There is no point in reading it. He will simply re-iterate the same arguments he has always made, and demand the same dull obedience. Right now, you do not need to need to feel as if you are being lectured in the nursery.

[If 3 is chosen]

[set lord_connellys_letter_picked_up = True]

Lord Connelly's note is written on paper taken from the Adelphi Hotel; he must have written it in the room that had been booked for the two of you to spend the night, before you embarked on your journey. There are ink-splatters all over the paper, as if he wrote it in a hurry; you catch the scent of his eau de cologne, with its rich notes of bergamot and oak.

1. Open the letter and read it.

[set lord_connellys_letter_read = True]

a. Tear the letter into tiny pieces.

You shred the paper in your hands. It starts off as one big rip, tearing right down the centre of his honeyed, deceptive words, and then you keep tearing, making smaller and smaller pieces, until the letter looks like confetti. You open out the palm of your hands, and let the scraps of paper drift to the floor like snow. It is oddly beautiful.

b. Throw the letter into the fire.

You scrunch the letter up into a ball, and then cast it into the fireplace. As it burns the fire flares, a sudden, momentary flash, and then it settles back to its usual crackle. He is gone; you have eradicated him. And yet there is still ash gathering in the fireplace; the faint scent of his cologne still hangs in the room.

c. Hide the letter in your underclothes.

[set letter_in_underclothes is True]

You fold the letter up tightly, and then slip it under your chemise, into your brassiere. You do not know why you do this: you ought to hate Lord Connelly, you ought to erase every trace of him from your life. But some part of you is still clinging on, as if he will burst back into your aunt's house and say there has all been some terrible mistake, and you can get married after all.

d. Place the letter back on the silver tray.

Calmly, you place the letter back in the envelope, and place it face-down on the tray. There is no need for you to get worked up about Lord Connelly; he no longer has any relevance to your life. He was a misstep; you must now correct yourself.

In the corner of your mind, a small hysterical voice declares that your life is over, and you're utterly ruined. But you quieten it down. There is no need to panic; at least, not yet.

2. Put the letter back down, without reading it.

Perhaps it is for the best that you do not know what Lord Connelly said. As you have already learnt, his words mean little enough.

Letters

From Lady Ursula Montgomery-Price, Viscountess of Devizes

Lilian,

Do you have any idea what you have done to me? Your father had to call a doctor, I was in a state of such hysteria. I had to be quite resuscitated over my breakfast kippers. I received a letter from your aunt, informing me that you had been apprehended – apprehended! A daughter of mine! – at midnight by a police officer, as you attempted to board the last train to Liverpool. I can barely believe this – it pains me even to write the words, to impute such disgrace to my own flesh and blood – but on questioning, you apparently claimed that you were there to meet Lord Connelly. An Irishman! A Catholic! A married man! Did I raise you so poorly? Did I truly fail you in this way?

You will return home at once. Your sojourn in London has come to an abrupt end; you clearly cannot be trusted to manage yourself, even under the stern eye of your aunt. You will come back to Wiltshire, where you will reflect on your behaviour in the peaceful solitude of the country. And since you are clearly so desperate to be married, you will consent to marry a suitor that I have approved for you – if I can scrape up anyone, given the depths of your disgrace.

Your poor, innocent, weeping mother.

From Lord Ambrose Montgomery-Price, Viscount of Devizes

My dear Lilian,

I am an indulgent man – too indulgent, as my brother has always said – but I will admit that even my indulgence has limits. This is not the sort of letter a father ever dreams of writing, but some things are not proper for a young lady, and cavorting with a married man is among them. I know how you will rail at me: Basil has been permitted to sow his wild oats, and we have kept you on too strict a leash.

To this, I have two arguments. First, society looks indulgently on men; Basil, by living a little dissolutely, is exercising his prerogative as the future Viscount of Hereford, while you must uphold your honour with ladylike deportment. Second, we sent you to stay with your aunt in London on the understanding that you would use your time in the season to find a husband – not to run away with a man already married.

I have telegraphed a friend that works at the Times; I hope that we shall keep this incident out of the papers. You must not upset your mother again. You will return home, and you will be an obedient child. And you will marry, or we will not consent to fund your lifestyle any longer. I have a cousin, a Member of Parliament by the name of Mr. Newt Snodgringle; he is searching for a wife, and he will provide you with a home that will be neither lavish nor penurious.

Your father.

From Lord Hugh Connelly, Earl of Carnfunnock

My darling Lilian,

I hope you do not think I am a coward. By the time you read this letter, I shall be on a ship – the ship on which we intended to embark – returning to Ireland. I am due to dock at Belfast tomorrow morning, where I will return (I shall admit they exist, though I may have concealed their existence to you before) to my wife and child. And yet somehow the sea still calls to me – America, that wild, unknown plain, where I might live free of this constraints of these damned isles. I dream of proceeding forth to New York, to Boston, to San Francisco; to all those glittering names, where men might make fortunes from dust.

Please do not think that I am not sorry for deceiving you. I feel wretched about the whole thing. I was so enchanted by your face, your voice, your presence – all that adds up to your very being – that I was unafraid to cast aside all veils of morality and good sense. I thought perhaps we could carve out a new sort of life. But at the final moment, as I hovered in front of your door, ready to abduct you to Liverpool, I looked at your aunt's grand house, at your suitcases carefully organized, as I thought of your piles of white lace and your neat little trinkets, and I thought – you would not be happy, with a cad such as I.

Yours,

Hugh.

after_letters

1. [No letters read]

[if fathers_letter_read is False, and mothers_letter_read is False, and lord_connellys_letter_read is False]

THE TIMES OF LONDON: It may be pleasant to be ignorant, but I am afraid such bliss will not last much longer.

[jump aunt_dialogue]

2. [Both parents' letters read]

[if fathers_letter_read is True, and mothers_letter_read is True, and lord_connellys_letter_read is False]

THE TIMES OF LONDON: The letters from your mother and father have painted rather a bleak picture. You could not bear to open the letter from Lord Connelly, but given that he did not appear last night, and left you to public disgrace at Euston Station, you can surmise it will not contain information you desire to read.

[jump aunt_dialogue]

3. [Only father's letter read]

[if fathers_letter_read is True, and mothers_letter_read is False, and lord_connellys_letter_read is False]

THE TIMES OF LONDON: Your father's letter was enough to shake your conscience; there can be nothing good in your mother's letter, with its urgent pen strokes and its frantic scent. You could not bear to open the letter from Lord Connelly, but given that he did not appear last night, and left you to public disgrace at Euston Station, you can surmise it will not contain information you desire to read.

[jump aunt_dialogue]

4. [Only mother's letter read]

[if fathers_letter_read is False, and mothers_letter_read is True, and lord_connellys_letter_read is False]

THE TIMES OF LONDON:

[jump aunt_dialogue]

5. [Only Lord Connelly's letter read]

THE TIMES OF LONDON:

[jump aunt_dialogue]

6. [All letters read]

THE TIMES OF LONDON:

[jump aunt_dialogue]

[label aunt_dialogue]

Now, you will go downstairs, and there you will encounter your aunt.

She will inform you that Lord Hugh Connelly has fled to Ireland, back to the wife and child of whom nobody in London had previously had knowledge; that she, your aunt, felt it her duty to inform your mother and father of the disgrace, feeling embarrassed, as she does, that you engaged in such depravity under her roof and supervision.

She will tell you that your mother had conniptions at the breakfast table, and she had to be given smelling salts to be roused from her kippers; that your father does not know whether to be disappointed or embarrassed; and that both have demanded your recall to Herefordshire at once.

In Wiltshire, your aunt says, after a period of social seclusion, you will be married. Your mother has deigned to give you some small amount of choice, but you have shown yourself untrustworthy; you must accept the guiding hand of a husband.

If you do not accept one of the suitors your parents have prepared, you will be handed over to your cousin, the Honourable Newt Snodgringle; your aunt makes it clear enough that this is not a desirable fate.

1. **Pack quickly; you are eager to escape London, embarrassed as you are at your disgrace.**
2. **Pack slowly; Herefordshire is a gaol, and your parents will be your gaolers.**

PROLOGUE

SCENE TWO

[Image: Exterior of Georgian house]

It is later that day, and you are being bundled into a carriage to take you back to Herefordshire. You gaze up your aunt's house: a Georgian house in Bedford Square, bought by her husband, the Earl of Norcaster, who died before he had any chance enjoy it. Here, you have spent the Season, and you have often been happy. The sun is setting; it covers the white marble exterior of the house with thick paint-strokes of pink and orange, like the Turner paintings you studied at the Royal Academy.

1. Remember the happy times.

You think of dressing for dancing parties, draping yourself in the jewels your parents had presented you for your first Season in London; you remember giggling with your girl-friends in the darkened rooms of those dancing parties, exhausted and discreetly sipping champagne you were pretending was lemonade. You remember riding at a break-neck pace in Hyde Park, early enough that no-one might see you. You remember an opening night at Covent Garden, when the whole of London seemed to be turned out like peacocks, and the whole auditorium seemed to be lined with silk and diamonds.

You remember those sweet, soft words Lord Connelly spoke, at the ball when you first met; you remember meeting his eyes across crowded room, giddy with the shared secret between you. You remember making your way to Euston, with your case in hand; Lord Connelly had not met you at your aunt's door, but you were so determined, and so dizzy with love, that you had walked a mile across London to meet him. How beautiful the city seemed, for that month; how even the most mundane things seemed to have a radiant halo!

2. Remember the sad times.

You had your first heartbreak, here; you sobbed into your pillow after the ball when the Duke of Marlborough's engagement to your school-day rival, Henrietta Crawley. You suffered indignities when you were snubbed for some socially inferior but aesthetically sparkling young lady; you were outraged when an Earl failed to pay you sufficient

attention at a luncheon, or when a Viscount did not keep his engagement to your aunt's afternoon tea.

And it was hither you were dragged from Euston Station, after an officer had stopped you and interrogated you about where such a put-together young lady was going, on her own, late at night; after the humiliating phone call to your aunt, her tinny recriminations down the crackling line while you looked desperately around the station, searching in vain for Lord Connelly.

3. Remember the mediocre times.

You were bored here, often enough. There are many things it is not proper for an unmarried young lady to do; you felt often that your life could not begin until you had found a husband. Those endless nights sipping lemonade at a reception given by the wife of some ambassador, scanning the room for any eligible young men; watching polo underneath the beating sun, conscious of keeping your embroidered white skirts off the grass; sitting straight-backed in your aunt's house while a procession of dull men and duller wives came tramping through, come to call.

And it was in this house that you spent that endless, terrible night, lying sleepless and gazing up at the ceiling, desperate to know where Lord Connelly was, why he had abandoned you, and visions of your total and utter disgrace flitting through your mind.

4. Look down at the carriage floor; you do not want to cause yourself more pain than necessary. (Move on).

You close your eyes; behind you, London retreats. You are bidding farewell to the city, to company, to civilisation – to life itself. Goodbye to balls, to concerts, to endless receptions at the Royal Drawing Rooms, to Covent Garden, to Ascot, to Private View at the Royal Academy, to attending the theatre with your fan fluttering demurely against your face, to showing off your new dress at a charity bazaar, to cricket parties, to riding in Hyde Park.

1. Continue to catastrophise in this vein.

Goodbye to all hope of happiness! Goodbye to friendship! Goodbye to love! You will be locked away in a rural hell; your only companions will be farmers chewing hay! You will have nothing to do but gaze at cows! You will be a prisoner among the wheat fields!

2. Take hold of yourself.

With some effort, you swallow down your disappointment. It is true that London offers the most diversion, but there will be entertainment, and perhaps even a social life in Herefordshire. One might ride in the forest; one might deign to visit the rural churches, and offer some charity to the inhabitants of those tragic little villages; perhaps there may even be a church fair, a jumble sale or even – glory of glories – a bazaar.

3. **[if letter_in_underclothes is True] Place your hand on the letter tucked into your undergarments.**

You place a hand on your chest, feeling underneath the layers of starched cotton and white muslin for the rustle of paper. Lord Connelly is gone; you are not fool enough to expect him to return. But the letter reminds you that someone claimed they could love you, once; you were wanted, even if it was all some great joke to the Earl; you had dreams, plans, ambitions.

But there is nothing you can do. The carriage – horse-drawn, for your aunt thinks that the newfangled invention of the motorcar is rather dangerous, suitable only for young men who wish to speed down country lanes, tooting their horn – rumbles on, while the suitcases stuffed with your dresses teeter precariously.

Continue.

PROLOGUE

SCENE THREE

[Image: Carriage animation]

The journey to Herefordshire takes several days. You stop at coaching-inns, kept away from the gaze of the common people by your aunt's ladies' maid, who is chaperoning you on the journey. As your journey proceeds, the roads grow narrower and dirtier; the hedges grow higher; the towns become fewer and far between. You pass through that smoggy blot on the landscape, the Midlands; as you grow closer, narrow valleys start to close in on either side.

Eventually, the carriage pauses at the top of a hill, and you gaze out over the familiar landscape. Hamlets, churches, and country-houses stud the wide plateau; you see a patchwork of farmland, undulating woods, ragged sandstone hills, rolling fields, and cutting through it all, the sinuous curves of the river Wye.

1. **Feel fond.**

It may not have the attractions of London, but it is your homeland. Here are the country roads nestled in valleys, where you first learnt to ride a horse; here are the river-side meadows where you picnicked as a child; here is the view on which you have gazed a thousand times, the hills on which you have projected countless moods, the fields where you have worn all those proliferous selves, tried them on and discarded them. You have lived here; that is still something.

2. **Feel disgusted.**

When you gaze out at this landscape, you see only emptiness. Cows chew cud dumbly; the river is lazy, with none of the verve and energy of the Thames.

The houses are full of country folk, old-fashioned and tedious; the villages are full of poor fools. There is no culture; no art; nothing that might make your spirit sing. There is only the endless carpet of gentle farmland, rolling out in front of you; it is enough to make a person sick.

3. Feel strange.

Go home.