Esmerelda’s Point of View

Esmerelda fidgeted with the capelet she was wearing. The breeze of a light summer night was making it fly every which way, and it was annoying her. Rightly so, as soon as she was inside, she took it off. She should have worn the lighter jacket over the summer capelet. She took her bonnet off, and then handed them to the gentleman attending to each guest as they entered the home.

Lady Beaumont always threw the best balls. Every woman had a full dance card, but there was always a surplus of men. That was the best part. There was always a man for every woman for each dance, and then some. Esmerelda had only been to a couple of her balls before, but she knew the stories. The ones she had been to previous had shown that most of the rumors about a Lady Beaumont ball were true. The only one that had yet to be proven true was that women here met their husbands at one of her balls because she loved to play matchmaker.

As she was announced at the door, Esmerelda looked around the floor. A dance card was placed in her hand. There was little she could do now but find someone she already knew. That was the hardest part of being new in town. She had to find people she knew, or that didn’t feel improper introducing themselves to her without a mutual friend there, so that she could be introduced to new people. She had been lucky enough to have a friend here before she came over from Spain.

“Esmerelda is that you?” Her friend walked over to her. She smiled.

“Oh, Betty, I thought you were otherwise engaged tonight.” She walked over to her friend. They air-kissed each other’s cheeks as they hugged. Betty laughed as she pulled away.

“My plans changed last minute, and I am rather glad they did.” Her friend smiled. “Oh, ‘tis great to see you. I don’t get out much anymore because of how much I sneeze when I go outside. How have you been?”

“I have been wonderful. Really, we must see each other more, Betty. We really must.” Esmerelda sat down at the little table Betty had grabbed. “Are you presently engaged with a man?”

“No. I have reserved the next dance with a young man, though. I thought it a good idea to give my feet a rest every few dances.” She smiled. “And you?”

“I only just got here.” She smiled a little. “I do believe I will be engaged with men for the rest of the night, so I wish to spend some time catching up with you.”

“Perhaps I can introduce you to some men that are on the sides while you’re here. Many men have a dance or two that they must sit out here at a Lady Beaumont ball, you know.” Betty pulled her fan out, starting to slowly fan herself to keep cool.

“Oh, I am aware of such.” She laughed a little. “You tell me that every time we come to one of these together.”

“I just wish you to be happy, Esme.” Her friend took her hand across the table at this point. “You have been in England for two months, but you have expressed a wish to go back to Spain. What could you miss in Spain when there is the British empire to enjoy?”

“The beautiful sights. My *bella Barcelona*, after all, is still in Spain, no matter how much I enjoy England.” She smiled a little. “Besides, English is not my language of choice. I would much prefer to speak in Spanish.” She sighed. “After all, what English man would choose to spend time with a Spanish woman?”

“’Twould surprise you how many men I have met would prefer to be with someone from the continent if they were interesting enough.” Betty waved her free hand softly. “Many would love to see the continent themselves.”

“Hmm.” Esmerelda didn’t believe her. “I do not believe many would chose to leave England if they love it as much as you have said many English love their empire.”

“Oh, poppycock, Esme. ‘Tis one thing to love your country, but ‘tis another thing entirely to have a love of traveling and seeing other countries. Many a man would die for a chance to see the entire British empire.” Betty put her fan away with a motion of finality.

“Is it true that the sun never sets on the British empire?” Esmerelda raised an eyebrow. The song was only halfway done; she had learned this dance by heart thanks to Betty, so she knew how long it typically ran. Judging by the number of couples on the floor, it had to be only half over or so.

“Oh, ‘tis true alright.” She smiled. “There is no place the British empire goes that isn’t lit by the sun at some point in the day or the night.” The way she said it began to sound like the typical “Britain is better” tone that came up in these conversations. “Now, I can tell you’re tired of hearing about Britain. Come, let’s get you introduced to some of these men standing out this dance.”

“Let’s.” Esmerelda stood up, and they walked towards some of the men on the sides of the room.

Betty was stopped by a man not more than three years her elder. She smiled, shaking his hand.

“Robert, what a pleasure to see you here tonight.” Esmerelda looked the man up and down as Betty spoke to him. Most of the conversation passed in bits and pieces to her. “May I introduce my friend, Esmerelda Aiza?” When her name was introduced into the conversation, she paid for attention.

“How do you do, Esmerelda?” The man smiled at her. “Sir Fitzwilliam II, at your service.” He gave a small bow.

“Nice to meet you.” She smiled, bowing her head softly. She had no title, so she hoped that was the right way to greet him. “How do you know Betty, if I may ask?”

“She’s my cousin.” He smiled a little. “We have known each other since we were young. How did you meet her?”

“I met her in a shop when she came to Spain last year. I came to England with her then, and I have been here since.” She smiled.

The conversation stalled as the music continued behind them.

“The dance is quite full tonight. I’m afraid I have only a few partners. Perhaps you would allow me to fill a dance or two on your card?” Sir Fitzwilliam picked it up with a dance request. Esmerelda looked at him. “May I have the next dance, Esmerelda?”

“Of course, Sir Fitzwilliam.” She smiled as wrote the name on her little dance card. Sir Fitzwilliam looked over her shoulder.

“Only one dance on your card?” He frowned.

“I only arrived here in the middle of this dance.” She smiled a little. “I had some trouble finding the address. ‘Tis so unusual for her to hold it outside her own home, is it not?”

“Very much so, but I find it rather impolite to comment on the venues of such balls. Lady Beaumont can do as she pleases when she throws such wonderful balls.” Sir Fitzwilliam smiled. “Mind if I take another dance, then? A surprise one?”

“I love a wonderful surprise.” She smiled. Then, she gave him the dance card. He wrote on it. Then, he handed it back.

He was now her partner for the next dance, as well as the last dance of the night. She wondered if he was always so bold. There wasn’t really a lot of reason for him to engage her for the last dance of the night like that unless he wanted to have more time to talk to her. The last dance of the night was often the longest of the night, simply because it was the last dance of the night. That much had been as true in Spain as it was here, she found.

“Thank you, Esmerelda.” He smiled at her. “I do hope I’m not your only partner tonight.”

“Oh, you shan’t be. I have plans to introduce her to others.” Betty interrupted softly. “She is still learning of people around here. You would not believe how hard ‘tis to get her out of the house.”

“’Tis not that hard, when I have the proper encouragement.” Esmerelda smiled. “Perhaps I may find more of such encouragement here.”

“With the proper company, anything is possible, Betty.” Sir Fitzwilliam cut in. “But, for now, I believe the dance will begin in a few moments. We should take our place.”

“I do not know if I have learned this dance yet, Sir Fitzwilliam.” Esmerelda frowned a little. He just laughed, holding his elbow out for her.

“Well, if not, I will do my best to help you. Most dances they play are mirrors for the parts.” He smiled. She took his elbow, and they took a place in the back of the line.

“Thank you, Sir.” She smiled a little wider as the music began. He took her hand gently, and they started to dance. It was a simple quadrille, one that was rather popular in Spain. As she danced, she noticed the Spanish frills were not done here. Despite this, she added said flairs. A kick of the heels as she shuffled up the room. Perhaps a dip of her upper body as she was spun halfway ‘round.

Sir Fitzwilliam corrected her, despite how natural it felt. As she was pulled closer to do a spin around the room, he leaned towards her ear.

“I fear you are adding some flair from Spain. I know this may be natural to you, but I am quite afraid you’re drawing some disapproving stares. You may want to learn to curb those moves, Esmerelda.” He let her pull away when he was done, as the dance dictated she was meant to.

As hard as she tried, she found herself adding her Spanish flairs, despite his warning. She caught glimpses of the disapproving stares. However, when her eyes found Betty, she found that her friend was simply smiling widely. She approved. That’s all she cared about. What was a Lady Beaumont ball if she wasn’t allowed to be herself when it came to dances she knew from Spain?

The dance ended, and Sir Fitzwilliam escorted her off the floor.

“’Twas quite something, Esme.” Betty smiled. “I didn’t know you could dance like that.”

“Oh, ‘tis quite natural to do so in Spain. We are all about the fluidity of the dance, you know.” She smiled. “Although, I get the feeling that ‘tis quite frowned upon here in England.”

“You did fine, Esme. I would suggest holding off on the lifting of your skirt though. ‘Tis what caught most people’s attention, and not in a good way.” Betty smiled. “I do have a partner for this dance, so I must leave you for a few minutes.”

“Oh, ‘tis alright.” Esmerelda smiled. “Thank you for the dance, Sir Fitzwilliam.”

“You’re quite welcome. ‘Twas quite something, and I am glad you danced with me.” He smiled. “If you’ll excuse me, I must go find my next partner.”

“Of course.” With that, Esmerelda was left all alone. She wove her way back to the table where she and Betty had first sat down.

She watched the waltz. It was not the most popular dance; many men and women remained on the sidelines, even though Betty and Sir Fitzwilliam were both dancing. She could see why. It took her flairs and built upon them. It was much worse for the Englishwoman than what she had been doing.

She laughed a little to herself. If they thought dancing so close and touching so much and looking at one person like that for so long was scandalous, no wonder they scoffed at people in the continent. This was normal, natural.

Sir Robert Fitzwilliam’s Point of View

Robert walked into Lady Beaumont’s reserved ballroom and shed his outercoat. He handed it to the waiter at the door. There weren’t many people here yet; he was early. He checked his pocket watch. He was about five minutes late.

Others were probably having problems finding the venue, as he had. It was odd; Lady Beaumont usually had these at her home. She had decided she had invited too many guests to hold it at her home this time. He didn’t mind much, but clearer instructions would have been helpful.

Regardless, Robert sat down at a small table off to the side. There was one lady so far, and he did not know her. So, he remained sitting at his little table. There was no use in going to introduce her unless one of his friends came over.

“Sir Fitzwilliam, what a pleasure.” Lady Beaumont came over to him. “Did you have trouble finding the venue, or did you find it alright today?”

“I did have some trouble, but I found it eventually.” He smiled. “In the future, clearer directions would be wonderful.”

“Oh, you are not the first person to say that to me today. I will do my best to give better directions to new venues in the future. Well, as you are here, have you a woman that you’re waiting for?” She smiled a little. The old lady had a way of giving away that she wanted him to meet someone tonight if he hadn’t brought a date.

“My cousin is coming, and I believe she has a friend coming.” He smiled. “I do appreciate that you asked, Lady Beaumont.” He extended his hand and kissed her knuckles.

“Oh, alright. I’ll leave you to be as you were.” With that, Lady Beaumont continued her round around the dance floor. As she did, more ladies were introduced at the top of the stairs. This ball was about to get going, and Robert couldn’t wait for that to happen. He was excited, and particularly because he knew Betty would most likely not be coming. He found it tedious to be introduced to various women. Everyone was hoping he would find a wife. After all, he had quite a fortune. If he didn’t marry, the fortune would go to his brother, a man named Edmund. He wasn’t a particularly money-smart man.

He recognized one of the young women that had just filtered in, and he got up to go talk to her.

“Lady Sophia, my dear, how are you?” He smiled at her. “There is something wonderful about seeing you here.”

“Oh, dear Sir Fitzwilliam, I didn’t think you would be here.” The young woman bowed softly to him. “How do you do?”

“I am quite well, thank you. I have not yet had the pleasure of dancing with someone. May I have the honor of having your next unclaimed dance?” He smiled at her. The way her dress fit to her, which highlighted her bosom, called attention to her figure. Slightly, anyway. Robert had always found that some girls were better suited with lower waists, but such was the time for fashion.

“I would love to.” She smiled and handed him the dance card she had gotten. He was in line for the third dance. He wrote his name in, and then handed the dance card back to her. “Thank you for asking me to dance, Sir Fitzwilliam.”

“Thank you for taking the invitation.” He smiled back to her. “If you’ll excuse me.” He gave her another soft smile before going to talk to another young woman he knew.

This round of hellos and introductions lasted until the first dance. He had managed to engage three women for the first three dances – one for each dance. As he danced with the first woman, a beautiful young woman named Eliza, he found that she was a dull young woman. She didn’t have any accomplishments, and she talked rather low of herself. The second trait was sweet in a young woman, but when she had a reason to do so, there was no cuteness or modesty to it. It was simply a fact.

The second woman, a young woman named Grace, had all the grace her name implied. She could dance well enough. She sang a little for him, and she had made her dress. This impressed him greatly, but there was not much else she could do. Considering that she was one and twenty already and she couldn’t play a piano, read, or do anything else rather interesting, he found her quite a letdown.

Lady Sophia was nice enough. He had known her for a few years, since he worked with her brother, but he didn’t think she was worth the trouble of an engagement or courting period. He found her interesting, but he had also set her up with another friend: Lord Joseph Mullens. He was the kind of man that needed an outgoing woman on his arm. He was supposed to come today.

“Did Lord Mullens join you today?” He asked Lady Sophia as he walked her back to the spot where he had picked her up.

“No. He said he had other things to do today. I did not ask what he was doing; I have a feeling he was trying to get out of being social. Again. I don’t think he will come easily to something like this.” She sighed. “I have thought of calling it off with him. He does not do a thing.”

“Oh, ‘tis not true, Lady Sophia. He simply needs to warm up to the idea that you want to take him places. He does not often court such an outgoing woman.” He smiled at her softly. “Just hang in there a little longer.”

“Thank you for the advice, Sir Fitzwilliam.” Lady Sophia smiled. “And thank you for the dance.”

“Of course, Lady Sophia. Of course.” He smiled, and he let her go back to the people she had come with.

“Sir Robert!” A new voice called his name. Few knew his first name, so he immediately knew it was family. He turned around and found that Betty had made it after all.

“Betty. I did not believe you would make it. After all, you did say you would not make it.” He smiled and kissed her hand. “What changed your mind?”

“My engagements cleared up. I found myself with some free time this evening and time enough to get ready. My friend was coming, and if I had time, I didn’t want to leave her here by herself. May I introduce my friend, Esmerelda Aiza?” Betty smiled. She turned to her friend, motioning to her. Robert turned his eyes to her.

She was dressed beautifully, and she had a lot of curls on her forehead. The little hairs that were too short had curled up and framed her face beautifully. He immediately knew that she wasn’t from England.

“How do you do? Sir Fitzwilliam II at your service.” He bowed to her gently.

“Nice to meet you.” She smiled, bowing her head softly. He figured that she had no title and little experience in the social setting. “How do you know Betty, if I may ask?”

“She’s my cousin.” He smiled a little. “We have known each other since we were young. How did you meet her?”

“I met her in a shop when she came to Spain last year. I came to England with her then, and I have been here since.” She smiled.

The conversation stalled as the music continued behind them.

“The dance is quite full tonight. I’m afraid I have only a few partners. Perhaps you would allow me to fill a dance or two on your card?” Sir Fitzwilliam picked it up with a dance request. Esmerelda looked at him. “May I have the next dance, Esmerelda?”

“Of course, Sir Fitzwilliam.” She smiled as wrote the name on her little dance card. Sir Fitzwilliam looked over her shoulder.

“Only one dance on your card?” He frowned.

“I only arrived here in the middle of this dance.” She smiled a little. “I had some trouble finding the address. ‘Tis so unusual for her to hold it outside her own home, is it not?” He had to give her that. A soft chuckle escaped his lips.

“Yes, ‘tis quite unusual.” He smiled. The music ended, and he held his hand out for her.

Immediately, he saw that she was not going to be able to dance the proper English quadrille. She flared her wrists, her hips, and dipped and flipped her hair. She was from the continent, as she had said, and boy did it show when he danced with her.

He warned her against it, thinking nothing of how she might take it. She nodded softly and continued to dance with him. With the flares. He found it rather suitable to her style. Even her dress had flair from the continent. It was a bright red, with white detailing and some beautiful embroidery. It was not something that would be sold here in England, though.

As he escorted her back to the side of the dance floor, he wondered if she would take interest in courting him. However, he knew it was bad taste to ask immediately after meeting someone. He knew that it was frowned upon here in England. In Spain, it might not be, but that didn’t help him.

“Thank you for the dance, Esmerelda.” He smiled at her. “I look forward to the second dance with you tonight.”

“And I with you.” She smiled at him, and then she went back to talking to Betty. With that, he left his cousin to talk to her friend.

He walked back around the floor. There were a couple more dances that he had managed to procure with the various people that were there tonight. However, he simply seemed to be going through the motions for them. No one had interesting stories after talking to Esmerelda. Even for only a few minutes, she had injected something of the Spanish flavor and the Spanish tide into the conversation. She loved her life, and she knew what she wanted from it.

The English women all wanted to get married. That was the main objective. All English women wanted the ring on their finger and a baby in the arms in less than a year and a half from marriage. It was too much pressure. With Esmerelda, there was a passion for the single life and the passion for what she wanted in life. There was a lot of it in her voice, in the way she moved. She loved it all.

After he returned his second partner after Esmerelda to the spot he picked her up at, he returned to his table. He didn’t want to dance with anyone else. He just wanted the night to hurry up so that he could dance with Esmerelda again. The way she danced, the way she moved, made him love life as much as she did. That kind of a passion was contagious in all the right kinds of ways.

“Sir Fitzwilliam.” Another man walked over to him. “My name is Lord Blackmore. Lady Beaumont is my aunt. She says you are in need of company for the night.” He held his hand out.

“Nice to meet you, Lord Blackmore.” He extended his hand, shaking Lord Blackmore’s hand.

“May I introduce my sister, Lady Ellen Blackmore?” He motioned to a young woman beside him just as the strings started for the next dance. It would be a social faux pas to ignore this kind of an introduce.

“My pleasure, Lady Blackmore, but please excuse me. I am engaged for the final dance of the night with someone else.” He smiled softly.

“May I ask who you are engaged to dance with?” She smiled softly. “I have had no dances tonight.” The way she said it made his choice harder. Dance with the passionate Esmerelda, or the woman he had just met?